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I. General Introduction

The first two decades of the twenty-first century have seen a persistent democratic backlash. In 2020, for the 15th consecutive year, the number of democracies in the world has declined (Repucci & Slipowitz, 2021). What is more, several developing and established democracies show signs of democratic backsliding (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). In the United States, an angry mob – fueled by lies about fraudulent elections and incited by a president who cracked down on immigrants and refused to denounce neo-Nazis – stormed the nation's center of democracy (Barry & Frenkel, 2021). In India, the nationalist ruling party pits the population against its Muslim minority (McDonnell & Cabrera, 2019), and in Europe some increasingly authoritarian regimes oppress the rights of immigrants, women and members of the LGBTQIA+-community (Nyyssönen, 2018). In each of these countries – and many more – democracy is under threat.

These threats are often attributed to three interconnected developments. Firstly, societies are increasingly polarized (Abramowitz, 2010; Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Kriesi et al., 2006; Lönnqvist et al., 2020; Pierson & Schickler, 2020; Reiljan, 2020), and political polarization is one of the greatest challenges to contemporary democracies. Political parties' ideologies have grown further apart across the US and Europe (Kriesi et al., 2006; Lönnqvist et al., 2020; Pierson & Schickler, 2020). Likewise, politically engaged citizens' attitudes have polarized on key issues (Abramowitz, 2010; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008), citizens have sorted into political camps (Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2015) and citizens increasingly dislike supporters of opposing political 'tribes' (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Reiljan, 2020). The danger in this development lies in its ability to obstruct democratic governance (e.g., Layman et al., 2006), create different realities for different parts of society (e.g., Bisgaard & Slothuus, 2018), and cause extremism and radicalization among parts of the public (e.g., Hetherington, 2009).

Secondly, political debates are increasingly centered around matters of identity (Fukuyama, 2018; Klandermans, 2014; Noury & Roland, 2020). Large grassroots

movements surrounding disadvantaged groups emerged, focusing on, for instance, police violence against black and colored people (i.e., the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement; Yang, 2016) and sexual violence against women (i.e., *#MeToo*; Kunst et al., 2019). Meanwhile, there has also been a steady rise of radical right-wing populist parties (RRPPs), that focus their politics on nationalism and anti-immigration (Mudde, 2007; Noury & Roland, 2020; Rooduijn et al., 2019). While inherently different – the former aiming for equality based on race or gender, the latter to sustain inequality to benefit natives and majority groups (Fukuyama, 2018) – they also have something in common. They both *explicitly* center their political goals and rhetoric around subgroups of the population surrounding a certain identity; that is, they practice *identity politics*. And identity politics is not exclusive to the political extremes. Gender identity is increasingly politicized, and the strongest increase is among the mainstream right (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021). Similarly, immigration has become a hot topic for all political parties, not just RRPPs (Green-Pedersen & Otjes, 2019). In short, identity politics is booming. And this means that, besides political ones, 'tribes' based on race, gender, or nationality are becoming increasingly important for contemporary politics.

Thirdly, the digitalization of the political information environment has eroded the foundation on which journalism was built. While news media traditionally held a firm hegemony as nearly the only source of citizens' political information and public debates (Bennett et al., 2004; Bennett & Entman, 2000; Ferree et al., 2002), the political information environment and citizens' news use have changed drastically through digitalization of the news and the emergence of social media (Van Aelst et al., 2017). While a vast majority of citizens still regularly use journalistically edited news content, this news is increasingly consumed through social media (Mitchell et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2020). This has led to an audience that has concentrated toward a small number of important news outlets, while most other news outlets struggle financially due to a largely fragmented audience (Hindman, 2009, pp. 133–134). What is more, digitalization of the political information environment has enabled the emergence of hyper-partisan news channels (Prior, 2007; Rae, 2021), that may further polarize already polarized citizens (Prior, 2013), and may even deliberately spread false journalistic content (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019).

These societal developments have instigated at least two crucial changes in the political information that citizens consume. For one, the digital political information environment

has changed journalistic routines and news values. News media have needed to change their business models, and digitalization has offered the new possibility to see and predict online behavior through *clicks* and *shares* on social media. Therefore, catering the news to citizens' online behavior has increasingly become part of journalistic routines (Lee et al., 2014; Tandoc, 2014). Moreover, journalists' ideas of newsworthiness has also been affected, as there is increasing attention to *audio-visuals*, *entertainment*, *bad news*, *conflict*, and *shareability* (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). In order to grab citizens' attention, this has led news media (1) to produce more sensationalistic news (Vettehen et al., 2005), (2) to produce more *soft news* (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017), and (3) to focus more strongly on negativity and conflict (Trussler & Soroka, 2014).

The second major change to the political information that citizens consume is that it increasingly engages citizens' identities. This is largely due to the general success of identity politics in the political arena, but news media have also *actively contributed* to the success of some major identity politics developments. RRPPs tend to use social media to circumvent critical journalists (Engesser et al., 2017). However, some scholars argue that news media may have contributed to the success of RRPPs nonetheless, as RRPPs might make use of news media's focus on charismatic party leaders and political scandals (Mazzoleni, 2008). News media find RRPPs inherently newsworthy (Krämer, 2014), as media prefer to cover extreme positions to moderate ones (Esser et al., 2016). There is also evidence that media tend to pay disproportional attention to populists in some European countries (Schmidt, 2020). In turn, media attention to RRPPs increases their support, especially among citizens with exclusionary attitudes (Berning et al., 2019). Similarly, even though the most successful left-wing identity politics movements were instigated on social media, the news has significantly contributed to their success. Attention in the news expanded and reinforced the *#MeToo* movement by following up on accusations of sexual misconduct on social media, by uncovering new cases of sexual misconduct – incorporating the hashtag in their journalism, and by maintaining and increasing the public's attention to the issue (Askanius & Hartley, 2019; De Benedictis et al., 2019). Moreover, the generally favorable coverage of the #BlackLivesMatter protests (Elmasry & el-Nawawy, 2017) might be responsible for the relatively widespread support of the movement (Kilgo & Mourão, 2021).

These changes to the political information environment require scholars to rethink the fundamentals of how we process the news. Research into news processing has found that

citizens often polarize after consuming the news. And by far, most research into this effect has focused on political identities. There are several theories of how news processing causes polarization (Han & Federico, 2018), but the dominant theory is *motivated reasoning* (Kunda, 1990). A plethora of research shows that citizens scrutinize news that is threatening to their political 'tribe' more strongly than news that bolsters it (Bolsen et al., 2014; Druckman & McGrath, 2019a; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Jain & Maheswaran, 2000; Kahan, 2013, 2016; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006). By ignoring, dismissing or counterarguing threatening news – but not bolstering news – existing opinions are reinforced. This inevitably leads to polarization between political 'tribes' such as left-wing and right-wing citizens, liberals and conservatives, or supporters of different political parties, even when they are exposed to counter-attitudinal political views (Bail et al., 2018; Hart & Nisbet, 2012).

Yet, political 'tribes' are not the only 'tribes' out there. And as the news increasingly relates to other parts of citizens' identities – such as their gender, race or nationality – these need to be considered as well, to understand the way citizens process the news in contemporary societies. Indeed, citizens identify with a multitude of groups, like their gender, nationality, race, profession, or their favorite football club (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). And just like their partisanship, these group identities may invite ingroup favoritism, and motivate citizens' reasoning (Mackie et al., 1992). Because identity politics relates to both partisan *and* other group identities, motivated reasoning can – in addition to polarization between left-wing and right-wing citizens – lead to social division between groups like men and women (Kahan et al., 2007, 2008), natives and citizens with an immigration background (Feldman & Huddy, 2018; Kahan et al., 2008; Shoda et al., 2014), and likely other politicized groups. However, until this date, much is still unclear about the psychological mechanics underlying this process of *identity-motivated reasoning* – i.e., motivated reasoning based on group identities beyond partisanship. To understand contemporary politics, it is imperative that we understand how citizens process news about identity politics. Therefore, the overarching research question in this dissertation is:

RQ: *How do citizens process news about identity politics?*

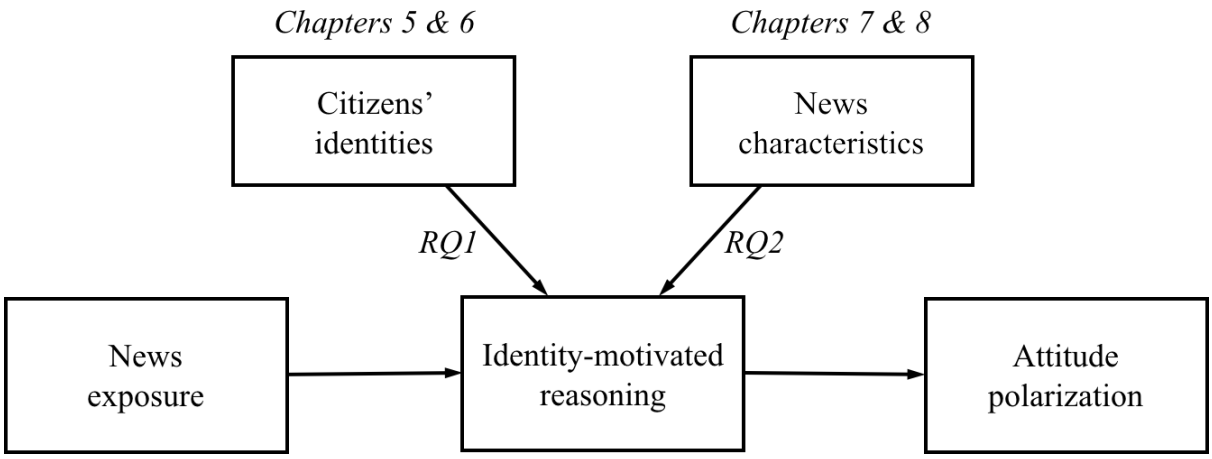


Figure 1. Schematic depiction of the specific research questions and empirical chapters.

To answer this overarching research question, the research in this dissertation is structured along two *specific* research questions, as schematically depicted in Figure 1. First, I first turn to citizens' identities. Research has shown that motivated reasoning can be guided by both political identities (Bolsen et al., 2014; Druckman & McGrath, 2019; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Jain & Maheswaran, 2000; Kahan, 2013, 2016; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006), as well as other group identities, such as gender (Kahan et al., 2007, 2008) or race (Feldman & Huddy, 2018; Kahan et al., 2008; Shoda et al., 2014). Identity politics, however, relates to both citizens' political identity as well as another. The question is therefore not whether a group identity will guide citizens' reasoning, but *which identity will motivate their reasoning*? To the best of my knowledge, there has been only one study into identity-based cross-pressures in motivated reasoning. This study did not, however, use news regarding identity politics, and focuses on one specific group – Catholic Republicans (Li et al., 2016). Therefore, much is still unexplored regarding cross-pressures in response to news about identity politics, which is arguably a crucial situation in which to study this psychological phenomenon. As such, the first specific research question in this dissertation is:

RQ1: *Which group identities motivate reasoning for whom?*

While the first specific research question focuses on citizens' identities, the second empirical part of this dissertation focuses on news characteristics (see Figure 1). Until now, motivated reasoning research has mostly (implicitly) conceptualized news as a passive transmitter of political information. However, there is good reason to suspect that the way the news is produced may increasingly affect the extent to which citizens engage in identity-motivated reasoning. For one, the news is increasingly sensationalist and negative (Soroka, 2012; Vettehen et al., 2005), and both these features cause arousal in news consumers (Soroka et al., 2019; Soroka & McAdams, 2015; Vettehen et al., 2008). As motivated reasoning costs cognitive energy (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000), this physical arousal may exacerbate identity-motivated reasoning. In contrast, as opposed to thematic frames, episodic frames might decrease identity-motivated reasoning through empathy (Gross, 2008), personalization (Iyengar et al., 2013), and compelling narratives (Wojcieszak & Kim, 2016). This means that journalism plays an important and active role in the extent to which citizens engage in motivated reasoning. What is more, the political information environment is undergoing extremely rapid changes, which makes it all the more important to address how changes in news production might affect identity-motivational news processing. This leads to the second specific research question:

RQ2: *Which types of news exacerbate or inhibit identity-motivated reasoning?*

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows. Chapter 2 will outline an extensive theoretical framework. There, I first discuss the different types of political polarization, extensively define identity politics, and elaborate on the digitalization of the political information environment. Then, I describe two changes these societal developments have caused in the political information that citizens consume: attention-grabbing and identity-related news. Finally, I describe how news processing divides political opinions through motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006), and relate this process to theories of social identification (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) to hypothesize how motivated reasoning should be affected by more than political groups. This leads to the definition of *identity-motivated reasoning*: reasoning as motivated by *any* group identity, rather than just partisanship. This chapter concludes

with the two gaps in current scientific knowledge that this dissertation addresses: (1) it investigates which identities motivate reasoning for whom, and (2) which types of news exacerbate or inhibit identity-motivated reasoning.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the methodological approach with which I address the research question in this dissertation. I elaborate on the advantages and disadvantages of using an experimental approach, as well as the way in which I address the challenges of this method for the research in this dissertation. Moreover, I extensively discuss the considerations taken in designing the tests and measurements of motivated reasoning, as well as Austria as the case used to answer the research question. In Chapter 4, I outline the different articles on which this cumulative dissertation is based, their progress in the publication process, as well as my individual contribution to each of them.

The empirical part of this dissertation can be divided into two parts that relate to each of the specific research questions (see Figure 1). In Chapters 5 and 6, the focus lies on citizens' identities (RQ1). Based on considerations outlined by Tajfel and Turner (1979) in Social Identity Theory, I expect that the group identities of involuntary lower-status groups – such as women, and ethnic or sexual minorities – will be salient in response to identity politics in the news (Chapter 5). In contrast, I expect that high-status groups, such as men, natives and other majority groups, will be more strongly motivated by their political 'tribes' (Chapter 6). In Chapters 7 and 8, I investigate the role of characteristics of the news itself in the processing of news about identity politics (RQ2). In Chapter 7, I argue that arousing news facilitates the active scrutiny of threatening news and therefore exacerbates identity-motivated reasoning. In contrast, in Chapter 8, I investigate the possibility that, by focusing on individuals rather than groups and by creating a narrative, episodic frames could inhibit identity-motivated reasoning. Finally, in Chapter 9, I will discuss the implications of the combined findings of this dissertation for the study of motivated news processing, for the role of journalism in our societies, as well as the consequences for democracy.

II. Theoretical Framework

In this dissertation, I investigate how groups may polarize in the face of news regarding identity politics, through a process called motivated reasoning. First, however, I will outline an extensive theoretical framework on which the empirical research in this dissertation is based. This theoretical framework has three analytical levels, that are inherently interrelated (Figure 2). On a macro level, it discusses the three societal developments that set the stage of this research – political polarization, identity politics, and the digitalization of the political information environment. On a meso-level, I deliberate on what these developments mean for the political messages that citizens are exposed to: changes in news values and journalistic routines have led to sensationalistic, soft, and negative news, and the rise of identity politics has arguably led to news that increasingly engages citizens' identities. Finally, on a micro level, I argue that these developments require us to reconceptualize existing models of news processing, where we consider motivational processes to be guided by a multitude of identities, rather than political identities predominantly.

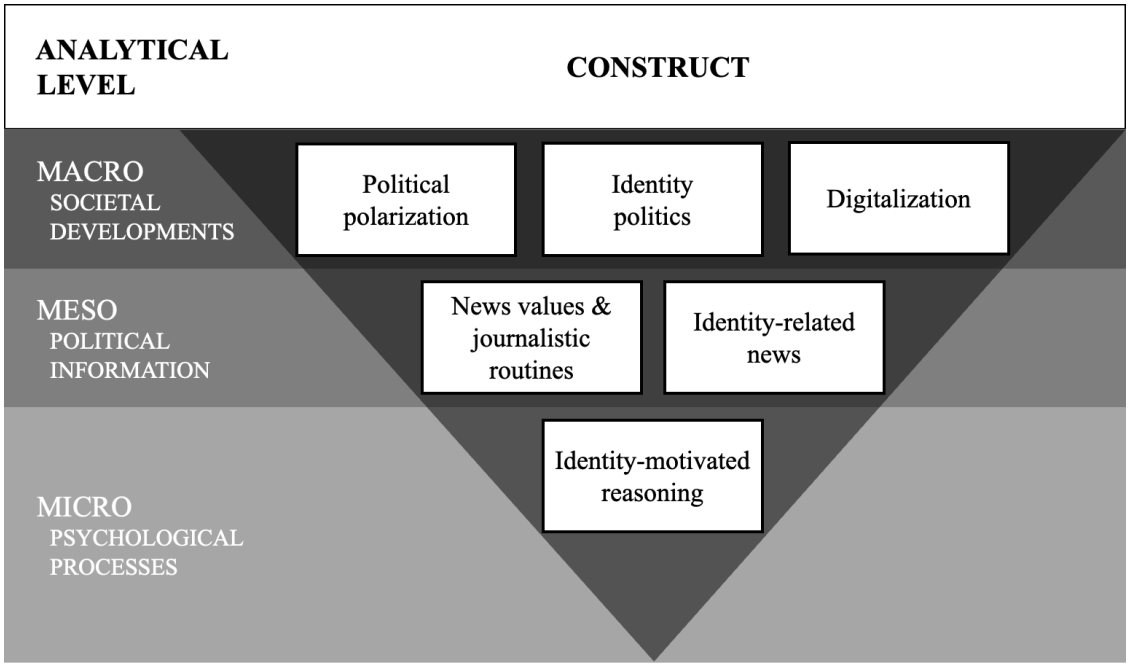


Figure 2. Schematic depiction of the theoretical framework

Specifically, I investigate a psychological process that may cause polarization through group identification with any politicized group: identity-motivated reasoning. The groups that this might affect span far beyond political identities and include citizens' gender, ethnicity, or any other group that is politicized for any specific person in any particular situation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While this is not a new thought – others have shown that this effect exists (Kahan et al., 2007; Mackie et al., 1992), I identify two main gaps in the literature. Firstly, while there are important differences between groups of people in our political reality, there is a serious lack of evidence on which (types of) identities guide news processing for whom. Secondly, while we know that journalistically edited content plays an important role in opinion formation, what types of news foster or inhibit identity-motivated reasoning is mostly unknown. Filling those gaps allows us to better understand the dynamics of contemporary democracies, and with it the problems they face.

1. Setting the Scene: Political Developments on a Macro Scale

This dissertation investigates a psychological process, rather than vast societal developments. However, humans are social beings and human psychology is always dependent on the social realities surrounding us. Therefore, in this first section of the theoretical framework, I discuss this social reality. More specifically, I examine some of the societal developments that are characteristic of contemporary politics and impact – or are impacted by – the psychological process under investigation. I discern three arguably connected developments that play an important part in contemporary politics: political polarization, identity politics, and the digitalization of the political information environment. With this discussion, I aim to embed the empirical work of this dissertation in a broader understanding of contemporary political communication.

1.1. Political Polarization in Contemporary Democracies

Political polarization can be defined as an increasing divide between political groups. It can occur at two levels: political parties may polarize, but the public may polarize too. Party polarization may itself be divided into two types as well. Firstly, party polarization

may happen because existing political parties' ideologies move away from the political center, as can be seen in the United States (Pierson & Schickler, 2020). This type of party polarization is often led by party elites and activists. However, party polarization may also emerge when new parties arise at the political fringes, which has happened in European multi-party systems (Kriesi et al., 2006; Lönnqvist et al., 2020). Such polarization is rather characterized by the emergence of new parties, and a challenge of the political elite. Party polarization offers citizens clearer party choices in terms of ideology (Levendusky, 2009) and ideological identity (Mason, 2015), and therefore strengthens citizens' partisanship (Lupu, 2015). But party polarization is also thought to inhibit political compromise and coalition-building (Layman et al., 2006).

Citizen political polarization can again be divided into two types: attitude polarization and affective polarization (Mason, 2015). Some scholars argue that citizens have not *de facto* polarized, as aggregate attitudes have remained relatively stable (Fiorina et al., 2005). Instead, partisans have 'sorted' themselves into increasingly homogeneous groups (Levendusky, 2009; Mason, 2018). Others find, however, that politically interested and engaged citizens' attitudes have certainly polarized (Abramowitz, 2010; Baldassarri & Gelman, 2008), albeit mostly on key issues like welfare redistribution, race and traditional family roles (Bafumi & Shapiro, 2009). What is more, one could argue that partisans 'sorted' into camps that are polarized on *all* societal issues is a particularly dangerous form of polarization, as it causes a severe cleavage in society (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). In addition to the polarization of attitudes, there is increasing disdain toward – and unwillingness to socialize with – supporters of opposing political parties, among citizens in the US (Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) and Europe (Reiljan, 2020). Focused on affect toward the outgroup rather than policy attitudes, this phenomenon is called *affective polarization*.

Political polarization thus describes not only a phenomenon in the political arena, but a divided society. Party polarization, attitude polarization and affective polarization are distinct but interrelated. For instance, party polarization can but does not always lead to attitude polarization (Down & Wilson, 2010), and affective polarization might be caused by partisan sorting (Mason, 2015). The precise nature of the relationships between different forms of political polarization is, however, not yet illuminated.

In certain respects, political polarization can be a positive development for democracies. After all, elections are worthless if they do not reflect a certain degree of choice or disagreement (Mouffe, 2005). As such, the partisanship and political participation that political polarization can facilitate is important for emerging democracies (Lupu, 2015). Most scholars agree, however, that political polarization is one of the most important challenges to contemporary democracy. Polarization is seen as one of the crucial developments in Europe in the running-up to World War II (Capoccia, 2005), and is also often related to democratic backsliding in modern times (Somer & McCoy, 2018; Vachudova, 2019). Others contend that political polarization creates political stalemates and hinders cooperation (Layman et al., 2006), and may radicalize citizens on the ideological extremes (Hetherington, 2009). While moderate polarization might be beneficial for certain democracies, severe polarization is dangerous and difficult to reverse (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). In extreme cases, such political cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), may even lead to civil war (Selway, 2011). It is therefore important to investigate societal divisions, including both their societal and psychological antecedents.

1.2. The Emergence of Identities as the Main Focus of Politics

Some scholars have looked to the emergence of *identity politics* as one of the drivers of political polarization (Fukuyama, 2018). However, identity politics is a contested term. It has been used to describe a wide variety of political goals, groups and movements, such as multiculturalism, social movements (e.g., the women's movement, civil rights movement, gay and lesbian movement), separatist movements (e.g., in Canada and Spain), violent ethnic and nationalistic conflict (e.g., in postcolonial Africa or Asia), as well as radical right-wing populist parties (RRPPs) in contemporary Europe (Bernstein, 2005; Noury & Roland, 2020). As such, definitions of identity politics are diverse.

Identity politics is most often understood as political activity that aims to secure recognition or an improved societal position of a marginalized social group (Heyes, 2020). Groups that practice such identity politics thus advocate for minority or lower-status groups, such as women, (descendants of) immigrants, people of color, members of the LGBTQIA+-community, or people with disabilities. These types of groups are often

'accused' of identity politics by the political right-wing, in which cases identity politics is regarded as something detrimental (Walters, 2018). According to definitions based on this categorization of identity politics, the feature that differentiates identity politics from other forms of politics, is that it advocates for the position of a specific marginalized social group. As such, identity politics is contrasted against movements that are based on universality, like class-based movements (e.g., labor and socialist movements) and value-based movements (e.g., environmental or peace movements), that advocate for equal rights based on *similarities*, rather than *diversity* (Bernstein, 2005).

Left-wing commentators often accuse identity politics of being primarily concerned with matters of recognition – which is considered 'cultural', rather than redistribution – which is considered 'political' (Bernstein, 2005; Heyes, 2020). However, this binary between the political and the cultural, as proposed in neo-Marxist and New Social Movement theory (Bernstein, 2005), has been repeatedly falsified by the numerous claims for economic redistribution and policy changes by identity politics movements, such as the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Heyes, 2020). Indeed, "[i]dentity politics aims to change culture and behavior in ways that have real material benefits for many people" (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 99). Identity politics thus reaches beyond matters of recognition and includes clearly political matters, such as the division of material goods and political rights between social groups.

In contrast to the definitions above, scholars have acknowledged that identity politics is not only employed by marginalized groups, but also by dominant groups (Walters, 2018). As such, identity politics can also aim to achieve the recognition – and defend the position – of high-status groups in society. Especially RRPPs have been said to employ the "new identity politics" (Noury & Roland, 2020; p. 423). RRPPs base their ideology in *nativism*, a mix of nationalism and xenophobia (Mudde, 2007), and thus focus their politics on issues of identity, such as immigration, European integration, or minority nationalism (Taggart, 2017). This form of identity politics is inherently exclusionary, and aims for recognition and protection of the native, white group in many European countries (Noury & Roland, 2020). As such, it is said to be the driving force behind many divisive issues in Europe, such as Brexit and Euroscepticism, hostility to immigration and immigrants, and the rejection of globalization (Fukuyama, 2018). Dominant social groups thus also employ identity politics.

Following these considerations, identity politics includes all political acts that aim to improve the position of one identity group over another. It includes claims for recognition of an identity group, as well as claims for redistribution of tangible goods. Moreover, it includes political action that benefits either dominant or marginalized groups. Some scholars even state that "identity politics has become a master concept that explains much of what is going on in global affairs" (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 92). Indeed, all kinds of politics benefit certain groups over others (Weeden & Kurzban, 2017). Therefore, in this definition, one could even argue that "all politics is identity politics" (Jung, 2006, p. 35). What separates identity politics from traditional politics is then not the political actions themselves, but rather the arguments surrounding it. While class-based action certainly aims to improve the position of immigrant workers, it usually poses arguments based on universality rather than ethnicity, claiming equal rights *regardless of income or race*. In contrast, identity politics demands recognition and rights of identity groups "*as* that identity, not in spite of it" (Walters, 2018, p. 482, emphasis in original). In this dissertation, I therefore consider identity politics all political actions that *explicitly* argue for or against the protection of a certain identity group, its interests, or its values. In this definition, class-based politics can also be identity politics, if it advocates explicitly for the protection, values or interests of the working class specifically, rather than equal rights for all.

Arguably, identity politics is on the rise in developed democracies. While the main focus of politics in the 20th century was on economic issues, the 21st century seems dominated by issues of identity (Fukuyama, 2018). Indeed, the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements have been the largest global movements to address minority rights since the American Civil Rights Movement and the feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Moreover, left-wing parties have increasingly focused on identity-based policies as well (Fukuyama, 2018). On the other end of the political spectrum, RRPPs have boomed since the turn of the century (Rooduijn et al., 2019). Importantly, these different shapes of identity politics – advocating for either marginalized or dominant groups – have been incorporated in existing political structures. While identity politics favoring marginalized groups has been a main focus of the political left, advocacy for dominant groups has been adopted by the right (Fukuyama, 2018). And along with the popularity of identity politics on the left-wing and right-wing extremes, identity politics has also become more mainstream. For example, gender identity is increasingly politicized, as indicated by

politicians' use of words related to feminism on Twitter (Abou-Chadi et al., 2021). Notably, while gender politicization increases among all parties, the strongest increase is among the mainstream right, rather than partiers at the political fringes. Likewise, immigration has become an increasingly important topic for *all* political parties in European countries, not just RRPPs (Green-Pedersen & Otjes, 2019). Following this trend, it is important to realize that, to understand the dynamics of politics today, one must understand the dynamics of identity politics.

1.3. The Digitalization of the Political Information Environment

A third development that has shaped contemporary societies is the digitalization of the political information environment. As most citizens never get to experience politics in person, news media were traditionally unrivaled as the main source of citizens' information about politics (Bennett & Entman, 2000). Moreover, public debates mostly took place through the news (Bennett et al., 2004; Ferree et al., 2002). As such, political parties have increasingly internalized a *media logic*: they think about and take into account ideas of newsworthiness throughout all areas and timeframes of politics (Strömbeck, 2008). However, political information environments consist of more than just news, including all ways citizens get exposed to political information, or create it themselves. And the political information environment has changed drastically, through digitalization of the news and the development of social media (Van Aelst et al., 2017). Increasingly, citizens find their news through social media, rather than navigating news websites or apps, watching the evening news on television, or reading newspapers (Mitchell et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2020). However, most citizens still consume journalistically edited news content on a very regular basis, with both television news and online news being consumed every week by around 70% of the population in most developed countries (Newman et al., 2020). News therefore still takes center stage in the political information environment.

However, while the news is still consumed a lot, digitalization has had transformational consequences for traditional journalism and the political information environment. As it became possible, easier and cheaper to create and maintain news channels with the development of cable television and later the internet, the number of news outlets has

increased exponentially. This has led to two seemingly opposing trends (Hindman, 2009, pp. 133–134). On the one hand, there is a concentration of news use toward a select number of popular news outlets. On the other hand, there is an increasing fragmentation of audiences among the less popular outlets. As a result, most citizens are exposed to ever fewer opinions through one of the dominant legacy news outlets, and most news outlets struggle to finance their news production routines and sustain their business models (Mitchell et al., 2016). Meanwhile, the decreasing barrier to create news outlets has enabled the emergence of increasingly partisan news outlets on cable television (Prior, 2007), and hyper-partisan news websites (Rae, 2021). In their most extreme forms, such websites may even spread false pseudo-journalistic content (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019), which happened abundantly during, for instance, the 2016 United States election campaign (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Bovet & Makse, 2019). While alternative political information is thus increasingly extreme, traditional news outlets have to make a great effort to keep or gain readership to survive in the digital political information environment.

2. The Meso Level: Contemporary Political Information

These macro developments have significantly changed the political information that citizens are exposed to. This information is crucial for democracies because it is, most of the time, citizens' only source to determine who to vote for, when to protest, which petitions to sign, as well as all other democratic choices they have. In other words, the political information environment is, by definition, what citizens base their democratic choices on (Van Aelst et al., 2017). For this reason, we must consider this meso-level of political information that citizens are exposed to, to understand the link between macro-level societal developments and the psychological processes from which public opinion originates. In this regard, political polarization, identity politics and the changing political information environment have led to two important changes in the way political information is produced: (1) it has led to changes in news values and journalistic routines and (2) it has increasingly created the necessity for journalists to engage with identity politics, as it becomes more important to the political realm. In turn, these developments have two crucial consequences for the political information that citizens are exposed to.

2.1. Changes to Journalistic Routines and News Values

While the digitalization of the political information environment put many news producers in a difficult spot, it has also increasingly enabled journalists, editors, and media businesses to track citizens' online news consumption behavior through clicks and responses on websites, apps, and social media. Even though editors have tried to resist this development (MacGregor, 2007), such indications of audiences' online behavior have increasingly been incorporated in journalistic routines (Lee et al., 2014; Tandoc, 2014). The reasons for this change of heart might be financial – in order to retain a certain level of advertisement income, news outlets need to increase their audiences. However, the reasons might also be more intrinsic. It is natural for newsrooms to want to maximize their readership for the sake of business, impact, or status. However, the possibility to cater to citizens' online behavior has arguably led to substantially different patterns in news content. In short, the news is increasingly tailored to what types of news grab citizens' attention.

In this battle for attention, what aspects of stories are considered newsworthy has changed over time. Journalism scholars have long argued for the existence of relatively universal *news values*, that determine which kinds of stories are considered newsworthy and have more chance to be represented in the news (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). They include for instance *the power elite* – a focus on elite people or nations, *surprise* – unexpectedness, or *relevance* – importance to the citizenry (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). But the changing media environment has not left news values unchanged. In a second revision of Galtung and Ruge's news values, integrating the digitalization of the political information environment, Harcup and O'Neill (2017) include the news consumer as an active gatekeeper of the public sphere through social media. As exemplified by their inclusion of a vague news value *shareability* – content that is likely to be shared on social media – the changes in the news landscape that Harcup and O'Neill witness are closely related to citizens' online engagement with the news. However, three trends are likely to influence news processing specifically.

Sensationalism

Firstly, increasing numbers of news media outlets has been associated with a trend of growing sensationalism in political news (Vettehen et al., 2005). Sensationalism, at the most basic level, entails news that appeals to emotion and human instinct (Slattery & Hakanen, 1994). That being said, sensationalism has been described in terms of both content and form (Grabe et al., 2001). A focus on sex and on scandals are the most common characteristics of sensationalistic content, while the form is often described as the use of "specific camera angles and maneuvers, audio techniques, and decorative effects" (Kilgo et al., 2018, p. 1499). These characteristics of form are aimed predominantly at televised news, and Kilgo et al. (2018) define sensationalism for the digital era as a style that intentionally evokes emotion, uses extreme circumstances to grab attention, simplifies and trivializes complex topics, promotes shock value, or present the news in a tabloid-like way. However, audio-visuals only seem to become a *more* important news value in the digital political information environment (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). While Otto et al. (2017) allow space in their definition of sensationalism for both textual and visual characteristics, they also confine their definition to elements of style, aimed at invoking emotion. Sensationalist news is considered enjoyable by citizens because it arouses them (Vettehen et al., 2005), rendering it a tempting way to reach a larger following.

Soft news

A related news value that remains important in Harcup and O'Neill's (2017) classification is *entertainment*. With entertainment, the authors mean "[s]oft stories concerning sex, showbusiness, sport, lighter human interest, animals, or offering opportunities for humorous treatment, witty headlines or lists" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). This definition relates it to another larger trend in journalistic political information: a tendency towards 'soft', rather than 'hard' news. Soft news is defined as "[c]overage of non-political topics in the context of political communication with rather personal than societal focus and/or non-detached style" (Otto et al., 2017, p. 140). The focus on soft news likely has its effect on journalistic routines, like the selection of certain news frames over others (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Episodic framing – the isolation of a narrative surrounding one particular

person or event, for example, is often classified as 'soft news' by both scholars (Reinemann et al., 2012) and journalists (Glogger & Otto, 2019). Soft news may be attractive to journalists, as it is able to capture an audience that is otherwise not as interested in politics and may serve as a low-barrier way to teach less-interested citizens about politics (Andersen, 2019; Baum, 2002). Other work, however, confirms that otherwise uninterested citizens enjoy and consume soft news, but show that the evidence for learning is mixed at best (Nguyen, 2012; Prior, 2003). Soft news may thus help news media increase their audience but might not benefit democracy.

Conflict and Negativity

Finally, the news value *bad news* became so prevalent in their revision, that Harcup and O'Neill (2017) decided to split it in two: conflict and negativity. Researchers have long noticed that journalism has a strong tendency to focus on negative stories (Patternson, 1993; Soroka, 2012), and there is good reason why. Citizens have a negativity bias, where they assign more weight to negative than positive news (Karmasin et al., 2011), they are aroused by negative news content (Soroka et al., 2019; Soroka & McAdams, 2015), and have tendency to select negative news rather than positive news (Trussler & Soroka, 2014). While initially including negativity and conflict in one dimension (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), Harcup and O'Neill (2017) decided that especially conflict deserved its own category in the digital age of political information. It is not new to journalism scholars that conflict is overly present in the news. Importantly, conflict in the news can even arise from conscious journalistic values, like opposing two or more groups to achieve "balanced reporting" (Entman, 1989; Gans, 1979). Furthermore, journalists are shown to actively construct conflict in news reporting (Bartholomé et al., 2015). In addition to sensationalism and soft news, negativity and conflict are thus increasingly important in political news.

2.2. Covering Identity Politics

The news has gotten increasingly related to citizens' identities. This could largely be driven by the rise of identity politics in the political arena, as described in Section 1.2. of

this chapter. Commentators on news media often accuse politicians and political groups of practicing identity politics (for a great overview in the wake of the 2016 Trump election in the US, see Walters, 2018). However, news media arguably also encourage identity politics groups and facilitate(d) their increasing importance (Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2004, 2007). In this regard, the rise of identity politics and the changing political information environment are inherently intertwined. For one, digitalization of the political information environment has enabled identity politics groups to access the public sphere, although through very different routes for right-wing and left-wing identity politics.

While RRPPs are well-known for their use of social media, for instance to circumvent traditional media and critical journalists (Engesser et al., 2017), they are also dependent on journalistic content for electoral success and behave as such. First and foremost, RRPPs are political parties and operate in the same political environment as other political parties. Accordingly, like other political parties, RRPPs largely adopt a *media logic* and continuously consider news values in the political process (Strömbeck, 2008). And they might be right, as attitudes toward immigration and the success of nativist parties are shaped more strongly by media coverage of immigration, than levels of immigration themselves (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Van Klingeren et al., 2015), and news attention to nativist parties significantly boosts their popularity among citizens that hold exclusionary beliefs on immigration and European integration (Berning et al., 2019). What is more, RRPPs are particularly good at garnering media attention through social media activity, and strategically ramp up their social media use when the news covers them less to stay at the center of attention (Wells et al., 2020).

However, the digital political information environment has also *actively contributed* to the success of RRPPs. First of all, the rise of hyper-partisan media has offered RRPPs a strong reach amongst their hyper-partisan support base (Rae, 2021). For instance, Breitbart fulfilled such a role for former US president Donald Trump. Importantly, these channels abundantly use an identity politics framework to describe the world, mirroring those of the populist parties they support. Even false pseudo-journalistic content seems to be created more in favor of RRPPs, as there was more false news supporting Trump than Clinton in the 2016 US elections (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). However, arguably, also the mainstream media have contributed greatly to the rise of RRPPs. Particularly the media's increasing focus on political scandals (sensationalism) has undoubtedly

contributed to the success or RRPPs, as they strategically use charismatic leaders and political scandals to grab the media's attention (Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2004, 2007). Moreover, news media give disproportionate attention to RRPPs in some countries (Schmidt, 2020), as they prefer to display extreme positions over moderate ones (Esser et al., 2016), and RRPPs are considered inherently newsworthy (Krämer, 2014). Ironically, RRPPs' access to the public sphere is therefore driven by elite gatekeepers, in a top-down process.

In contrast, certain left-wing identity politics groups gained access to the media through grassroots, bottom-up processes. Through social media, groups that are historically deprived of access to the public sphere may now find their way and challenge traditional power structures (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). While journalists are hesitant to use social media as a source in journalistic content, *phenomena on* social media are considered important ideas for news stories (Lecheler & Kruikemeier, 2016). Indeed, while the largest recent grass-roots identity politics movements – #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo – were initiated on social media, news attention has dramatically amplified their success. In general, coverage of the #MeToo movement mostly focused on individual cases and tended to ignore the structural societal issues that underlie those cases of sexual misconduct (Askanius & Hartley, 2019; De Benedictis et al., 2019). However, news media increased the reach of the movement in two ways: they amplified the reach of existing accusation made on social media and they uncovered and consolidated new stories of sexual misconduct (De Benedictis et al., 2019). This coverage did follow patterns of political ideology, where more attention was dedicated to the movement in left-leaning news outlets, as well as patterns of news values, where most attention went to misconduct by celebrities and powerful politicians (Ghosh et al., 2020). Likewise, the #BlackLivesMatter movement was covered mostly favorably in major news outlets (Elmasry & el-Nawawy, 2017), especially over time (Mourão et al., 2018), and after protest leaders were found not guilty in court (Kilgo et al., 2019). Crucially, coverage of the protest movement causes support or criticism (Kilgo & Mourão, 2021), so favorable news coverage might be related to the success of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. Both left-wing identity politics groups have therefore gotten increasing attention in the political information environment generally, but also in journalistically edited content specifically. While these are not the only examples of identity politics, they show how the information in the media in increasingly engaged with – and contributes to – identity politics.

In summary, political polarization, identity politics and the changing political information environment have led to political information that (1) uses sensationalism, soft news, conflict, and negativity to attract audiences, and (2) is filled with news that engages citizens' identities. While this is driven by macro-level societal developments, it arguably has essential consequences for the way that citizens process the news.

3. Processing the News in Times of Identity Politics: Group Identities in Motivated Reasoning and Opinion Formation

These developments have sparked worry of what kind of effects this changing political information might have on citizens. To investigate this, I discuss the micro-level, psychological effects surrounding the changes in political information that citizens are exposed to. One fear is that the increase in political news outlets might lead citizens to polarize merely by getting different information. Indeed, research shows that access to broadband internet leads to disdain of political outgroups (Lelkes et al., 2015), and hyper-partisan media further polarize citizens who are already at the political extremes (Prior, 2013). The general thought is that this might happen through *selective exposure*: citizens' tendency to select news that they agree with, and avoid news that challenges their beliefs (Klapper, 1960). By self-selecting news that they already agree with, citizens reinforce their beliefs and polarize (Stroud, 2011). Dangerously, selective exposure forms a reinforcing spiral (Slater, 2007): selecting congenial news causes polarization, but polarization also causes selective exposure (Stroud, 2010). Asymmetrical news selection is therefore one way in which citizens polarize. However, asymmetrical selection of – and exposure to – news is not the only psychological cause of polarization. The psychological mechanism that lies at the heart of this dissertation rather focuses on the asymmetrical *processing* of news messages.

3.1. Polarization Through News Processing: Motivated Reasoning

Under the name *motivated reasoning*, social psychologists have collected a number of reasoning strategies that citizens may use to dismiss, derogate or counterargue messages which they are motivated not to accept (Kunda, 1990). Using such reasoning strategies,

partisans are more critical of arguments of opposing political parties than arguments of their own party, leading to polarization between partisan groups (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Contrary to the logic of selective exposure, this asymmetrical processing of news can even lead to polarization when citizens are exposed to *counterattitudinal* news, because their attitudes are shaped by their own reasoning rather than the arguments in the news (Bail et al., 2018; Hart & Nisbet, 2012).

The motivations underlying motivated reasoning can be divided into two kinds, and which kind guides citizens' reasoning is dependent on the citizen and the situation (Kunda, 1990). The first type of motivation that citizens can hold is an accuracy motivation. Citizens with an accuracy motivation are motivated to reach a conclusion that is empirically true. Accuracy motivations could foster asymmetrical and inappropriate reasoning patterns – for instance if someone (wrongly) distrusts the truthfulness of sources of an opposing political group (Druckman & McGrath, 2019; Kunda, 1990). However, citizens with an accuracy motivation are generally expected (and also found) to be more open to news that challenges their beliefs (Bolsen et al., 2014; Redlawsk, 2002). Therefore, accuracy motivations are expected to reduce, or at least not foster, political polarization.

The second type of motivations are directional motivations (Kunda, 1990). Citizens with a directional motivation are motivated to reach a certain predetermined conclusion. This is a broad category of motivations and which type of directional motivation underlies the formation of polarized opinions is contested. Earlier motivated reasoning studies pointed to cognitive dissonance theory, and stated that directional motivations stem from a fundamental need to hold consistent (rather than true) beliefs (e.g., Taber & Lodge, 2006). Because partisans hold beliefs that are close to their partisan group, exposure to news that contradicts such information causes cognitive dissonance which sparks directional motivations to dismiss, derogate or counterargue the news. Because partisans vigorously scrutinize counterattitudinal news and uncritically assimilate attitudinally congruent news, their attitudes become more extreme over time, and citizens on the left and right side of the political spectrum polarize.

However, a second source of directional motivation has garnered increasing evidence. Later work on motivated reasoning poses that directional motivations are based in *identification* (for a great summary, see Kahan, 2010). According to this approach, news

of the opposing political group poses a threat to the esteem or the values of one's political ingroup, which sparks directional motivations to dismiss, derogate or counterargue the news. This view is supported by a number of findings. For instance, party identification is a stronger driver of persuasion than policy content (Cohen, 2003). Moreover, explicit party cues intensify asymmetrical reasoning (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010), and citizens increase support for a policy when an opposing party rejects it (Bolsen et al., 2014). Even false pseudo-journalistic content is subject to motivated reasoning, as false news attacking one's ingroup is much easier identified as false than false news attacking the opponent (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). As it seems to be driven by partisanship, rather than prior attitudes, this asymmetrical reasoning pattern is called *partisan-motivated reasoning*, and has been shown to contribute significantly to political polarization (e.g. Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010).

Importantly, not everyone is equally susceptible to motivated reasoning in every situation. How asymmetrical citizens' reasoning patterns are for a specific individual and situation is thought to depend on two main variables: motivation and ability (Taber & Lodge, 2006). When considering political news processing, motivation is mainly thought to be determined by partisanship (Bolsen et al., 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). The stronger one identifies with their political group (their party or their side of the political spectrum), the stronger their directional motivations should be. This has other implications as well. When political parties explicitly endorse an issue or when there is explicit conflict between political parties, partisan directional motivations grow stronger (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). Conversely, when there is no clear consensus within parties or cross-cutting support across parties, directional motivations are less important (Bolsen et al., 2014). Partisan directional motivations thus depend on political parties, political identities and political news.

Moreover, asymmetrical reasoning might be dependent on citizens having the *ability* to engage in effortful reasoning strategies (Taber & Lodge, 2006). It is much easier, and therefore more likely, to counterargue a political argument if you already possess knowledge about the issue, or even ready-to-use arguments that you can employ in your thought processes. Indeed, Taber and Lodge find that citizens with more political sophistication are more prone to asymmetrical reasoning than citizens with little political sophistication. In line with this theory, politicians seem to be determined motivated reasoners (Baekgaard et al., 2019). However, there are also studies that find no

moderating effect of political sophistication at all (Hartman & Newmark, 2012; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017; Redlawsk, 2002). There is thus only limited evidence that political sophistication promotes motivated reasoning.

While descriptions of motivated reasoning as a cognitive bias are still common in the literature, I do not use this terminology in this dissertation. The term *cognitive bias* refers to a deviation from rationality (Druckman & McGrath, 2019), and asymmetrical reasoning does not have to be irrational, for two reasons. The first reason is expertly laid out by Druckman and McGrath (2019). The main premise of much motivated reasoning research is that accuracy motivations lead to – rational – symmetrical reasoning and directional motivations to – biased – asymmetrical reasoning, and therefore to polarization. However, rational accuracy motivations might also lead to asymmetrical reasoning. If one is repeatedly disappointed by the arguments in an uncongenial news medium, it is rational to assume that their arguments will be suboptimal in the future too. Because motivated reasoning research scarcely *measures* motivations, one is unable to know whether asymmetrical reasoning stems from a rational or irrational reasoning strategy, and research findings are in most cases unable to show whether there was a cognitive bias or not.

The second reason contends that even directional motivations are not necessarily irrational (Kahan, 2016). Citizens form opinions based on their personal reality, rather than the political reality. For most citizens, assuming a factually correct opinion about political issues, like gun control or climate change, has no direct effect on whether these issues will (continue to) form a risk to them personally. It might, however, have very real and immediate effects on citizens' personal life: they might lose friends, cause conflict between family members or feel unwelcome in their neighborhood if they support the arguments of an opposing political party. On an individual level, it can therefore be perfectly rational to hold factually wrong opinions.

While the above might make it sound as if citizens consciously *choose* to polarize, nothing is further from the truth. Motivated reasoning is based on the "hot cognition" hypothesis: we store cognitive information in our mind, together with emotional evaluations about it (Abelson, 1963). When citizens consume a news message, this activates the emotional information together with the cognitive associations, which affects their emotional state (Redlawsk, 2002). The negative state that citizens form from

identity-threatening news evolves before conscious awareness (Marcus, 2013), and triggers the defensive reasoning patterns of motivated reasoning (Lodge & Taber, 2013). In this view, political opinions and the reasoning behind their formation are mere post-hoc rationalizations of the emotional process that caused it. Indeed, brain scans correlate motivated reasoning with implicit emotion regulation (Westen et al., 2006), and citizens with a stronger need to seek out emotions show more defensive reasoning (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2013). While theoretically motivated reasoning is associated with preconscious affective states (Lodge & Taber, 2013), most research links it to conscious feelings of anger (Marcus et al., 2000, 2011; Redlawsk et al., 2010; Suhay & Erisen, 2018; Weeks, 2015).

In sum, a bulk of research has shown that citizens unconsciously scrutinize news that threatens their political identity more strongly than news that bolsters their political identity, leading to polarization between political groups. This process is thought to be (mostly) driven by directional motivations based on partisanship and caused by preconscious emotional reactions to political news. This entire process is called partisan-motivated reasoning.

3.2. Motivational Cross-Pressures of Identity Politics in the News

As described in the previous section, motivated reasoning research has predominantly focused on partisanship, or in other words: political identities. Theories of how such group identities affect our thoughts and behavior is largely based on work regarding Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This work describes how, in certain situations, citizens can feel, think, and act as group members, rather than individuals. In the case of partisan-motivated reasoning, citizens act as partisans rather than individuals. Citizens do this because humans have a natural tendency to divide themselves and others in ingroups (groups that they are part of) and outgroups (groups that they are not part of). Groups that citizens consider themselves to be part of, are part of their self-conception and are therefore called *social identities* or *group identities*. And SIT explains intergroup behavior through attempts of citizens to experience a positive feeling through such group identities. To sustain a positive self-image, relative to others, citizens are motivated to overestimate their own group's value,

achievements, or position, or to derogate an outgroup (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). SIT lies at the core of partisan-motivated reasoning theory: as information threatens citizens' partisan group identities, they are motivated to counterargue this information more than information that bolsters their partisan group identities in order to maintain a positive sense of self (e.g. Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010).

However, citizens are not just voters, and they don't just identify with political groups. In fact, they identify with a large variety of groups, including their gender, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, profession, football club or any other group that they feel a part of (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). And such other parts of citizens' identities are often the groups that identity politics explicitly advocates for or against. While some scholars find that political identities are more important to citizens than all other group identities (Westwood et al., 2018), it is difficult to envision the current surge of identity politics without a dominant role of other group identities in citizens' political thought and behavior. My aim in this dissertation is not to deny the importance of partisanship for political news processing; indeed, I have argued in this very chapter that identity politics is adopted in the traditional left/right dimension. However, in sections 1.2. and 2.2., I have shown that, in addition to political identities, other group identities have become increasingly important through the rise of identity-related news in the political information environment. Therefore, while acknowledging that partisan identities will motivate reasoning, I claim that it is increasingly necessary to also include other group identities in the motivated reasoning framework. To expand the concept of partisan-motivated reasoning to include other group identities as sources of directional motivation, but simultaneously differentiate the hypothesis from motivated reasoning based on cognitive dissonance, I use the term *identity-motivated reasoning* in this dissertation.

There have already been some studies that indicate the relevance of identity-motivated reasoning. Students trust information more when it is presented by a student from their university than from another (Mackie et al., 1992). Likewise, citizens are less skeptical of counterattitudinal information if it is presented by a racial ingroup member than when it came from a member of a racial outgroup (Shoda et al., 2014). Moreover, white men are motivated to perceive low risk of guns, environmental issues and abortion, in order to maintain a positive self-image (Kahan, et al., 2007). And similarly, group identities that relate to such risk perceptions cause polarization between men and women, as well as

between white Americans and nonwhite Americans in their attitudes about nanotechnology (Kahan et al., 2008). Finally, racially motivated reasoning can lead white people to accept (fake) evidence for 'reverse discrimination', but not discrimination (Feldman & Huddy, 2018). Identity-motivated reasoning is thus a valuable way to examine political news processing, in this day and age.

The difficulty in predicting identity-motivated reasoning in response to news regarding identity politics is that identity politics addresses multiple identities at the same time. On the one hand, the defining feature of identity politics is that it explicitly argues for, or against, the values, interests, or self-esteem of an identity group. On the other hand, arguments regarding identity politics are strongly embedded in existing political structures, like the left/right or liberal/conservative dimension. The question is not whether a group identity will motivate citizens' reasoning in response to identity politics in the news, but rather *which of their identities will*. In some cases, multiple group identities might reinforce each other. This should generally be the case for native, white, right-wing men, or left-wing members of marginalized groups. However, in other cases, different group identities might elicit internal cross-pressures, and which identity prevails is a puzzle that has not yet been solved. Until this date, there is one study that aims to address identity-based cross-pressures in motivated reasoning. Li et al. (2016) show that after the Pope's acknowledgement of man-made climate change, US Republican Catholics rather devalued the Pope's expertise on climate change than go against the opinion of the Republican party. While this study indicated that political identities *can* guide motivated reasoning, it did not entail news regarding identity politics. The question which identities will motivate citizens' reasoning in response to news about identity politics therefore remains unsolved, and is therefore the focus of the first two empirical chapters in this dissertation.

In Chapter 5, I examine the question which identities are activated by identity politics in the news at all. I use Self-Categorization Theory, an extension of SIT, to argue that citizens need to be cognitively as well as affectively engaged with a particular identity when they consume news about it, for this identity to affect any thought processes (Turner et al., 1987). This theory also predicts that explicitly arguing in favor or against a group should increase the fit of the situation to the identity in citizens' minds and therefore activate it. However, drawing on the original SIT, I argue that for affective identification this effect will be most important for low-status group members of groups with relatively

non-permeable boundaries, in other words: groups from which it is not easy to leave (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In Chapter 6, I investigate for whom *political* identities are the main driver of motivated reasoning when citizens are exposed to identity politics. Building on Chapter 5, I argue that – as low-status group members are more likely to act as their low-status group – political identities should mostly guide motivated reasoning for high-status group members.

3.3. The Consequences of Changing Journalistic Practices

Even though the news remains the most important source of citizens' political information (Mitchell et al., 2016; Newman et al., 2020), there is surprisingly little research investigating the role of the news in motivated reasoning. In most motivated reasoning research, news seems to be regarded as a passive carrier of political information, rather than the product of an active creation process by news institutions, editors and individual journalists (Brüggemann, 2014). While there is no direct research into the role of this process in motivated reasoning, there are certain expectations that can be drawn from the literature about the news. Specifically, several news values are prone to promote motivated reasoning, and specifically some that are increasingly important in today's digital information environment.

In this sense, the digitalization of the political information environment has likely had consequences for identity-motivated reasoning. For instance, we know that the political information environment increasingly contains conflict, and both conflicting information and conflict in the news exacerbate motivated reasoning: contradicting information about health research increases motivated reasoning over its validity (Chang, 2015), and political conflict causes increased defensive reasoning and political polarization (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). As conflict is a driver of motivated reasoning in news processing, the increased focus on conflict in the digital political information environment likely exacerbates motivated reasoning. What other consequences changed news values and journalistic routines have for identity-motivated reasoning is still an open question in the academic literature, and the focus of the second pair of empirical chapters in this dissertation.

As I discussed in section 2.1 of this chapter, the changing news values and journalistic routines have profoundly reshaped the information that citizens base their political opinions on. News content has become more sensationalistic, has focused more on soft news, and became more negative. While, at first glance, these changes seem like three separate developments, they are inherently intertwined. For one, sensationalistic news and negative news both elicit arousal and this is likely why these forms of journalism are so appealing to citizens (Soroka et al., 2019; Soroka & McAdams, 2015; Vettehen, Nuijten, & Peeters, 2008). In this light, the increased ability of contemporary news to arouse citizens is one of the core developments in political news. Therefore, in Chapter 7, I investigate the role of arousal in identity-motivated reasoning. Based on a circumplex model of affect (Russell, 1980), I argue that identity threats cause arousal in addition to negative affect and that arousal is crucial for identity-motivated reasoning because it supplies citizens with the energy needed to engage in effortful reasoning strategies. *High-arousal negative affective states* should therefore be the strongest drivers of identity-motivated reasoning, and arousing news might exacerbate identity-motivated reasoning.

While topics that the news must cover may inherently be arousing, the way in which the news in framed can also have profound effects on citizens' attitudes (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Therefore, in Chapter 8, I focus on a popular news frame that seems likely relevant for identity-motivated reasoning: episodic frames. Episodic frames provide a narrative surrounding a specific case or individual, rather than thematic frames – that focus on statistics and embed the news in broad societal trends (Iyengar, 1991). As episodic news are considered *soft news* by both scholars (Reinemann et al., 2012) and journalists (Glogger & Otto, 2019), they are likely increasingly important in today's political information environment. While episodic frames are not popular among scholars of communication, their reduced focus on groups and their ability to elicit empathy might reduce group identity-based motivations (Gross, 2008; Iyengar et al., 2013; Sears, 1983), and their use of narrative might impede counterarguing (e.g. Green & Brock, 2000; Niederdeppe, Shapiro, & Porticella, 2011; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Springer & Harwood, 2015). Presenting news about identity politics in an episodic frame, rather than a thematic frame might thus inhibit identity-motivated reasoning.

While I do not pretend that the developments under investigation in these four chapters are the only ones that are of importance regarding identity-motivated reasoning, they engage with some of the most pronounced developments in today's political information

environment. Therefore, they are of direct influence on the formation of political opinions, and of crucial importance for society. Through the thorough scientific investigation in this dissertation, we might be able to come somewhat closer to answering the question of how citizens process the news and form political opinions in contemporary democracies. This may help us identify and evaluate the challenges that our democracies are faced with in this turbulent time.

III. Methodological Considerations

The data in this dissertation consist of four original experiments, conducted in Austria between August 2017 and September 2020. Three experiments are embedded in online surveys, collected through panel agencies (N = 750 / 1012 / 1019), and one is a laboratory experiment, making use of physiological measures (N = 191). Two experiments received additional funding through competitive grants. Specifically, Experiment 2 received funding through the PUMA Grant for Innovative and High-Quality Empirical Quantitative Social Research (PUMA), sponsored by a consortium of Austrian universities and the Austrian government statistics institute (Universities of Vienna, Linz, Innsbruck, Salzburg, Graz, and Statistics Austria). Experiment 3 was largely funded through a *Förderungsstipendium* (FS; Advancement Scholarship) of the University of Vienna. In Table 1, the four experiments are described in terms of the experiment specifics, the content of the experiment, and in which chapters the data is included. In the remainder of this chapter, I will reflect on the methodology of these experiments and the dissertation as a whole. As such, I will discuss (1) the considerations and challenges of an experimental approach to investigate the research question, (2) the approach to testing and measuring identity-motivated reasoning, and (3) Austria as the case for this research.

Table 1. Overview of the four experiments.

Experiment					Content		Chapter			
#	**Dates**	**N**	**Type**	**Funding**	**News**	**Groups**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**
1.	Aug 2017	750	Online, survey		Website	Gender, ethnicity, age, class, ideology, (supra-)nationality	X			
2.	Oct 2018	1012	Online, survey	PUMA	Website	Gender		X		X
3.	Oct-Nov 2019	191	Laboratory, physiology	FS	Television	Nationality			X	
4.	Aug-Sep 2020	1019	Online, survey		Website	Gender				X

1. An Experimental Research Approach

This dissertation relies on data obtained from randomized controlled trials. That is, respondents are randomly assigned to one of several experimental conditions. This random allocation ensures that the groups are probabilistically similar, except for the differences in experimental stimuli (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 13). Therefore, any differences between the groups can only have emerged from the experimental manipulations – i.e., the manufactured differences between the experimental stimulus in one condition versus another. This method comes with several benefits and challenges. In this section, I will discuss both, how they relate to the research in this dissertation, and how I choose to deal with the challenges.

1.1. Using Experiments to Study Identity-Motivated Reasoning

Answering how citizens process news about identity politics requires one to clearly distinguish the news that citizens are exposed to as the cause, and the reasoning patterns and attitudinal changes that citizens undergo as the result. Therefore, experimentation was selected as the research method: randomized controlled trials are the only method social scientists have, to truly test causal mechanisms (Morton & Williams, 2010, pp. 12-13). Here, I will outline which exact advantages of experiments make this the right method to answer the research questions of this dissertation.

Dealing with reciprocal media effects

As shortly mentioned above, experiments have the benefit of being able to truly determine causality (Morton & Williams, 2010, pp. 12-13). This is crucial in studying media effects, as exposure to news messages may cause changes in citizens, but citizens with different identities and attitudes will also consume different types of media (e.g., Appiah et al., 2013; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010; Stroud, 2011). The reciprocity of media effects, often called reinforcing spirals (Slater, 2007), makes it extremely difficult to study such effects in cross-sectional research, because one is never sure if media exposure caused attitude change or different attitudes led to differences in media exposure. In other

words, cross-sectional media effects research often has a problem with endogeneity. In the case of identity-motivated reasoning, one would not be able to distinguish if exposure to identity-relevant news led to group polarization, or whether citizens polarized along such group lines choose to consume identity-relevant news. Social scientists have two ways to deal with this issue: panel studies (e.g., Stroud, 2010), and experiments (Morton & Williams, 2010, pp. 12-13). However, only experiments allow media exposure to be truly exogenous to political attitudes and identities.

No omitted variable bias

A second benefit of experiments is that random allocation to one of the experimental conditions ensures that the groups under study are similar in terms of both known and unknown variables (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 13). The effects can thus only be caused by differences in the stimulus material. Looking again at identity-motivated reasoning, a cross-sectional approach may find that exposure to identity-related news is correlated with polarization along group lines. However, one cannot know whether there is a causal relationship because any unknown variable may have caused both news exposure *and* polarization (e.g., group identification). This problem is particularly likely to occur with short-lived effects that mostly take place inside citizens' minds, like reasoning patterns that may only exist shortly after exposure to a certain identity-related news message. Therefore, especially for the investigation of such a complex psychological phenomenon as identity-motivated reasoning, it is crucial to rule out as many alternative explanations as one possibly can. Such *omitted variable bias* is a crucial problem of both survey and panel data, but a problem that experiments can solve (Druckman et al., 2006, p. 633).

Pinpointing specific media characteristics

In addition to the experimental conditions consisting of similar groups of citizens, experiments offer researchers a high level of control (Bryman, 2008, p. 36). This offers them the opportunity to manipulate the characteristics of news messages that are expected to cause a particular effect, while keeping the rest of the stimulus material exactly the same. In any research procedure that takes place outside of an experimental setting,

consumption of certain types of media may be confounded with other media characteristics or may simply drown in the noise of other differences between news messages. Looking at identity-motivated reasoning, news that discusses more immigration could also be more sensationalistic, and this could be the driver of any effects that one might measure. In short, while many types of research allow researchers to compare groups that have been exposed to news messages that differ in a characteristic, only experimental manipulations ensure that these groups are exposed to news messages that *only* differ in that characteristic.

Notably, there is a rich history in media effects studies using experiments to test many of the most influential theories in the field, including framing (e.g., Price et al., 1997), agenda setting (e.g., Holbrook & Hill, 2005), cultivation (e.g., Schnell & Bilandzic, 2017), priming (e.g., Josephson, 1987), the Elaboration Likelihood Model (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1979), and selective exposure (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2010). Indeed, experimentation is one of the most important methods in communication science. As such, the field of communication science has structurally used various specific news characteristics that may impact identity-motivated reasoning, such as group cues (e.g., Valentino et al., 2002; investigated in Chapter 5), social identity threat (e.g., Long et al., 2019; investigated in Chapters 6, 7 and 8), and news frames (e.g., Aarøe, 2011, studied in Chapter 8). Especially with sensitive measures like physiological affect (Chapter 7) and reasoning patterns (Chapters 6, 7, and 8), effects may be obscured by confounders in cross-sectional research. An experimental setting is therefore the most appropriate way to study identity-motivated reasoning.

1.2. Dealing with the Challenges of an Experimental Approach

However, social science experiments also have disadvantages, the most prominent of which is suboptimal external validity, or in other words: the extent to which research findings can be generalized to outside the experimental setting. The "problem of generalization is to infer whether a causal relationship holds over variations in people, settings, treatments, and outcomes" (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 21). Here, I will discuss each of these challenges.

Generalizing to different people: Sampling

Experimental research often relies on a relatively small number of participants, and the generalizability to different people is a function of who is in your research sample and who one aims to generalize to: the *population* (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 23). In the case of identity-motivated reasoning, the effects are theoretically based on a preconscious process (Lodge & Taber, 2013), based on the fundamental need for positive self-esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and the basic human tendency to divide people into ingroups and outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). The assumption in these theories, albeit implicit, is that these are universal human phenomena. The population in that case is *adult humanity*. However, since it also expected that social reality will affect identity-motivated reasoning (see Chapter 2), the true population to which one may expect to generalize the findings in this dissertation is limited to western democracies, in which similar developments have occurred, regarding polarization, identity politics and the digitalization of the political information environment.

The sampling method used in the experiments in this dissertation varies. Experiments 1 and 4 are based on varied samples of Austrians, Experiment 2 is based on a descriptively representative sample of Austrians, and Experiment 3 is based on a mostly student sample (Table 1). Thus, none of the samples are based on the gold standard of a probability sample of Austrian residents, let alone residents of western democracies (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 23). However, in theory-driven experiments such as these, the goal is not to determine facts as they are in "real life", but rather to test a theory in the exact conditions derived from it (Druckman & Kam, 2011). The aim of the sampling method was therefore not to create a representation of the population, but rather to fulfil the conditions for identity-motivated reasoning. As such, the samples need to represent the social groups that relate to the identity politics in the stimulus material, from a population in which these groups are politicized (Huddy, 2001; Klandermans, 2014). This has largely succeeded in Experiments 2 and 4 (the sample contained both men and women, as well as left-wing and right-wing citizens), as well as in Experiment 3 (the sample consisted of Austrians). In Experiment 1, however, ethnic minorities were underrepresented, which may have an impact on the generalizability of the results regarding ethnicity. This is discussed in more detail in the Discussions section of Chapter 5.

One might even propose that generalizing the findings of the experiments in this dissertation to other contexts is more a question of theory than of sampling. External validity in this sense does not mean whether the same study will produce the same results in a different context, but rather whether *conceptually equivalent* circumstances will lead to similar results (Druckman & Kam, 2011). The findings regarding gender identity might not be generalizable to a context in which gender is hardly politicized but using another politicized group identity in another context should lead to the same results. How the case selection affects this type of generalizability is discussed in more detail in section 3 of this chapter.

Generalizing to different settings: Effects outside the experiment

Different settings, in this sense, refer to other circumstances under which the same tasks are performed (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 22). The worry is that findings produced in an experimental setting will not take place in the real world. For example, all of the experiments in this dissertation have been *forced exposure experiments*, which might overestimate effects compared to when participants are offered a choice in news consumption (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2008). However, research has shown that citizens do get incidentally exposed to news that they would not choose themselves (Tewksbury et al., 2001), rendering forced exposure experiments more likely to generalize to real life.

Another worry is whether effects from experiments will persist in the messier outside world, or whether they are overshadowed or watered down. However, as news is increasingly engaged with identity politics, citizens should be exposed to identity-relevant news relatively often. Therefore, effects might also be expected to accumulate, rather than diminish (Koch & Arendt, 2017). Moreover, other studies have shown that motivated reasoning effects exist outside the laboratory, using cross-sectional survey data (Feldman & Huddy, 2018), panel data (Fischle, 2000; Lebo & Cassino, 2007) or natural experiments (Schaffner & Roche, 2017). While the work in this dissertation may certainly benefit from conceptual replications using non-experimental data, this offers confidence that the effects under study might exist in the real world too.

Regardless, the methodologies of the experiments in this dissertation have attempted to promote generalizability to other settings by making the research settings as realistic as

possible. A useful distinction here is between *mundane realism* – whether the research setting resembles participants' real lives, and *experimental realism* – whether citizens are involved with the stimulus material, take the experiment seriously, and are impacted by the stimulus material (Druckman & Kam, 2011). Arguably, mundane realism is beneficial for the generalizability of the study, while experimental realism is crucial to make valid causal claims. Therefore, I have undergone multiple efforts to ensure both mundane and experimental realism.

Firstly, while famous studies in social psychology have established Social Identity Theory using so-called minimal group experiments, where scientists designed experiments in which participants were allocated to non-existing social groups (e.g., "blue team" and "red team") (Diehl, 1990), this dissertation only uses real-world politicized groups in its experiments, like gender, ethnicity, or nationality. While this eliminates the possibility to manipulate group memberships, the results are directly related to the political reality, increasing both mundane and experimental realism. Similarly, as the news increasingly covers identity politics, which is exactly what the experimental stimuli consist of, the research settings are arguably both mundanely and experimentally realistic.

Secondly, I did extensive research into the topics that I used for stimulus material, as well as media presentations thereof. All topics, arguments, and most wordings of both written and spoken text were not simply conceived for the sake of the experiment, but rather adjusted from legacy media sources. This way there is a larger chance that participants have been exposed to such news before, offering mundane and experimental realism.

Thirdly, the lay outs of the newspaper articles (Experiments 1, 2 and 4 in Table 1) were copied from the websites of Austrian and German local newspapers, excluding the logos and other identifiable information to avoid source effects. I used websites because the survey experiments in Experiments 1, 2 and 4 were administered online. This makes for strong mundane realism: like in real life (Newman et al., 2020), participants were at home, in a train or anywhere they wanted, reading news from a seemingly real website on their own devices. As these experiments were administered online, experimental realism is more in danger, as one cannot be sure of the level of attention of participants. However, manipulation checks ensured that participants had seen and engaged with the stimulus material.

The setting for Experiment 3 was less realistic. For this experiment, participants were attached to equipment to measure physiological reactions, which included the placement of electrodes on participants' face and hand. Therefore, the experiment took place in a laboratory on the premise of the University of Vienna. These physiological measurements are relatively invasive: participants were likely continuously aware of the electrodes on their bodies. They were also likely aware of the experimental setting, in which they watched the televised news item on a computer in a laboratory. Mundane realism in this study was therefore relatively low. Therefore, in this study, it was arguably even more important to create stimulus material that provides the mundane and experimental realism required. To achieve this, I hired a professional video editing agency as well as a professional voice actor to create a realistic manipulated news item, and I asked an editor of the Austrian public service broadcaster for advice on the content of the item. From the debriefings in the laboratory, it seemed as though participants experienced the stimulus material as realistic and were engaged with the news item.

Generalizing to different treatments: Stimulus and timing

Arguably, the selection of a specific treatment – a certain news article about a certain policy, regarding a certain identity, threatening a certain group – might have specific consequences for the results of an experiment, limiting its generalizability (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 21). Indeed, only Chapter 8 of this dissertation includes a replication study with a multiple-message design, and Chapters 5, 6 and 7 rely on single-shot experiments. Here, again, the purpose of an experimental approach should be considered. The goal of these studies is not to show that every news article might cause the described effects, but rather that those that fulfill the theoretical conditions do so (Druckman & Kam, 2011). That is, news articles that contain identity politics regarding a politicized group identity. The stimulus material is therefore not meant to be representative of all political news. Rather, it is meant to provide a typical case, as is appropriate for confirmatory research (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

Specifically, the effects under investigation could be unique to the specific group identity that was cued in the experiments, or the type of news that was used. However, experimental research should be judged on the replicability in the field, rather than one

experiment alone (Druckman & Kam, 2011). Therefore, I diversified the type of news across experiments: while three studies used news website content as stimulus material, Study 3 is based on television news. Moreover, Study 1 was designed to explicitly *investigate* the systematic differences between group identities and the remaining three studies are based on both gender and national identities, to ensure that the results are not based on one group alone.

Another matter relating to the generalizability across treatments regards the timing of the treatment compared to related experiences, or in other words: pretreatment effects (Druckman & Kam, 2011). Pretreatment is mostly related to non-effects in experiments in which participants have been exposed to similar information prior to the experiment (Druckman & Leeper, 2012). However, scholars have proposed that identity-motivated reasoning might actually be *more* prevalent for issues on which participants have already formed their opinions, because they will possess the knowledge and arguments to asymmetrically judge threatening and bolstering arguments (Han & Federico, 2018). General pretreatment with news regarding identity politics is therefore a relatively minor issue for motivated reasoning research. However, it is possible that certain groups of people may have been pretreated with this type of news more than others. For instance, low-status group members might have been more exposed to information about discrimination and have more crystallized opinions about identity politics than high-status group members. Indeed, as "[t]he nonexistence of an experimental effect may stem from a large number of individuals forming strong attitudes […] in response to earlier communications, prior to the experiment" (Druckman & Leeper, 2012, p. 889), this may potentially explain the lack of attitude change for women in Chapter 6, as discussed in the Discussions section of that chapter.

Generalizing to different outcomes: Selecting measures

Finally, while this is true for all kinds of social research, scholars need to take into account the extent to which research findings are generalizable to other measures (Shadish et al., 2002, p. 21). In other words, there are many ways to measure identity-motivated reasoning, and while one way leads to specific results, others might not. As discussed in more detail in section 2.2. of this chapter, this challenge is addressed by varying the

measure for identity-motivated reasoning between derogating arguments (e.g., Han & Federico, 2018), derogating credibility (e.g., Feldman & Huddy, 2018), and active counterarguing (e.g., Taber & Lodge, 2006). As such, the chances are decreased that effects are a product of measure selection, rather than true effects.

2. Investigating Identity-Motivated Reasoning

Chapters 6 through 8 entail direct tests of identity-motivated reasoning. However, motivated reasoning is not a straightforward concept to measure. Specifically, a test of motivated reasoning should demonstrate "that individuals are adjusting the weight assigned evidence conditional on its identity congruence" (Kahan, 2016, p. 10). This entails both the manipulation of identity congruence and a measure of the weight assigned to evidence through reasoning patterns. Moreover, there are considerable challenges to measuring the emotional underpinnings of identity-motivated reasoning, as well as the attitudinal outcomes.

2.1. Manipulating Identity (In)congruence

The first challenge in testing identity-motivated reasoning is to manipulate the extent to which a news product is congruent or incongruent with someone's group identity. In this dissertation, this is conceptualized as the extent to which political news poses a threat to citizens' group identity, or the extent to which it bolsters their group identity. Threatening news is considered news that supports policies that negatively affect a group's status, position, material benefits or distinction, relative to an outgroup. Moreover, news is considered threatening when it *opposes* policies that *positively* affect a group's status, position, material benefits or distinction, relative to an outgroup. Bolstering news is considered the opposite: news that supports policies that positively affects a group, or news that opposes policies that negative affect a group. In each of the identity-motivated reasoning experiments, I manipulate the level of threat that a news message poses to citizens' group identities. In Chapters 6 and 8, each news article is simultaneously threatening to men and bolstering to women, or the other way around. In Chapter 7, the group of participants is held homogeneous (they are all Austrians) and the level of threat

is manipulated by change the size of a group of immigrants that is accepted into the country. In each case, the higher the level of threat, the more incongruent the news message is to participants' group identities.

2.2. Measuring Reasoning Patterns

The next challenge, then, is how to measure the weight that citizens assign to each news item as evidence. Different scholars use different methods to do this. The most common method is to ask participants how strong and/or valid they find the arguments in a certain piece of information (e.g., Han & Federico, 2018; Taber & Lodge, 2006). The second way is to assess participants' perceptions of the credibility of a piece of information (e.g., Feldman & Huddy, 2018). Finally, scholars have used open-ended questions, which are coded afterwards, to assess how strong participants counterargue the information (e.g., Taber & Lodge, 2006). Implicitly, these studies show that such measurements represent different strategies to scrutinize incongruent news: derogation of the arguments, derogation of the source and active counterarguing, respectively. Each is an indicator that the evidence in the news is assigned less value. While all of them may be employed for one piece of information, this is not necessarily so. For instance, when the source of a news article is considered uncredible, there is no need to further engage with the arguments. Furthermore, there are additional strategies conceivable that citizens may use to counter identity-threatening news. For example, one might derogate the *form* of arguments (e.g., activists are often accused of using too uncivil ways to promote their cause). As such, citizens are likely too creative to ever grasp the full range of ways in which they may resist identity-threatening news. In this dissertation, I consider the measurement of each reasoning strategy as a valid indicator of identity-motivated reasoning. When measured in response to the same piece of information, these indicators may complement each other (e.g., in Experiment 2 in Table 1), but they form valid indicators individually as well (e.g., in Experiments 3 and 4 in Table 1).

2.3. Emotions in Identity-Motivated Reasoning

Chapter 7 deals with the emotional underpinnings of identity-motivated reasoning. Most research into this topic has been done using self-reported measures of distinct emotions (e.g., Redlawsk et al., 2010; Suhay & Erisen, 2018; Weeks, 2015). This is mostly fueled by the literature on Affective Intelligence Theory, which states that anxiety should lead to more open-minded reactions, while anger fuels defensive reasoning (Marcus et al., 2000, 2011). This is, however, in stark contrast with theorizing on motivated reasoning, which states that the emotions underlying asymmetrical reasoning are (1) preconscious and (2) structured in a dimensional way (Lodge & Taber, 2013). What is more, distinct emotions require conscious processing and are therefore *subject to* motivated reasoning (Brader, 2006), confounding any attempt of causality. Therefore, in Chapter 7, I elect to use physiological measures of affect – the preconscious part of emotion – to study the emotions underlying identity-motivated reasoning. These measures can be applied in a dimensional approach to emotion, and they happen before conscious awareness and uncontrollably (Potter & Bolls, 2012). Therefore, physiological measures of affect are a better fit to the theoretical basis of motivated reasoning theory.

2.4. Operationalization of Polarization

Ultimately, identity-motivated reasoning is thought to lead to attitude polarization between social groups. In this dissertation, I have used three approaches to polarization, depending on the number of groups under investigation. As the most direct measurement, in Chapter 8, I measure attitudes toward a policy that is threatening to one group (men) and bolstering to another (women). The measure of polarization is comprised of the positive attitudes toward the policy for women, and negative attitudes for men. The lower the scores, the closer men's and women's attitudes are together. The higher the scores, the further they are apart. This measure does, however, only work when an experiment measures polarization between two groups, not more or fewer. In Chapter 6, investigating identity-based cross-pressures, there are four groups based on both gender and political identities: left-wing men, right-wing men, left-wing women, and right-wing women. Therefore, in this chapter, I compare the untransformed attitudes toward a gender policy to infer polarization. Finally, in Chapter 7, I investigate only one group: Austrian citizens.

Therefore, one can technically not speak of a measure of polarization. As a measure of identity-defensive attitude formation, the assumption is that for the relevant outgroup, immigrants, identity-motivated reasoning might lead to attitudes in the opposite direction. All these measures have one common ground: identity-motivated reasoning is expected to lead to attitudes that are favorable for citizens' ingroups.

3. Case Selection: Processing the News in Austria

While this dissertation studies individual citizens' processing of news regarding identity politics, the social environment in which this takes place is pivotal to the psychological effects under study (see Chapter 2). Moreover, as discussed in section 1.2. of this chapter, the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other contexts is dependent on the theoretical conditions in Austria. Therefore, it is important to reflect on the selected case in this dissertation: Austria. In this section, I will elaborate on the context of the research findings in this dissertation through discussing Austria's state of polarization, identity politics as well as the media system and journalism.

3.1. Political polarization in Austria

Austria's post-war politics has been characterized by grand coalition governments of the social democrat party (SPÖ) and the liberal party (ÖVP), who have ruled together or alone for 58 of the last 76 years. This means that politics was driven by collaboration, rather than political animosity. Political polarization could therefore generally be regarded as relatively low for the first decades after the second world war. However, one might argue that there has always been some degree of party polarization, as Austria was the only country where a RRPP formed directly after the second world war (the *League of Independents*). This party transformed into the current Austrian RRPP, The Freedom Party (FPÖ) in 1956, and has been an important force in Austria ever since. As they were the only viable opposition to the grand coalition governments until the founding of the Green Party in 1986, the FPÖ benefited strongly from the grand coalition party structure (Rossell Hayes & Dudek, 2020). When they entered government in 1999, this led to domestic and international outrage, as 150.000 Austrians went to the streets to protest the

FPÖ's participation in government, and European Union partners issued diplomatic sanctions. However, the outrage was much less strong when they joined a coalition government with the ÖVP in 2017 (Eberl et al., 2020). After a corruption scandal and snap elections in 2019, the voter share of the FPÖ was diminished and a ÖVP/Greens government was installed.

In terms of polarization, the data in this dissertation is thus collected during two governments that included the most right-wing and left-wing parties in the country's parliament. What is more, the 2016 presidential elections were the first to exclude the traditional grand coalition partners and foster a choice between the same two parties at the extreme ends of the political spectrum (the Greens and FPÖ). Along with a decrease of popularity for the traditional grand coalition parties (especially SPÖ) and increased voter volatility, voters increasingly vote for parties that are further removed from the political center (Plasser, 2016). In other words, the decrease of traditional party affiliations may be accompanied with political polarization in the country.

While the increasing scholarly interest in motivated reasoning has led to some diversity in case selections (e.g., Petersen et al., 2013; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010), the most research has by far been conducted in the United States (e.g., Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2013; Feldman & Huddy, 2018; Kahan, 2013; Nir, 2011; Schaffner & Roche, 2017; Taber & Lodge, 2006; Westen et al., 2006). Because there are only two major political parties, the United States are a relatively straightforward case to investigate partisan-motivated reasoning. This means that a large share of politically engaged citizens can be included in research simply by comparing Democrats and Republicans. Clearly, this is more difficult in countries with a multi-party system, such as Austria. In general, citizens seem less attached to specific political parties in multi-party systems, as they are more volatile. However, this volatility is deceiving, as citizens predominantly switch parties within either the left-wing or the right-wing block of the political spectrum (van der Meer et al., 2015). Therefore, it seems as though citizens in European multi-party systems identify more strongly with their ideological side of the political spectrum than any specific party on that side. Motivated reasoning, as based on political identities, is therefore tested using participants' self-placement on a left-to-right scale in this dissertation (Chapter 6).

Considering the above, in terms of political polarization, Austria is a typical case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). There is a certain degree of political polarization, like in most western countries (Abramowitz, 2010; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Kriesi et al., 2006; Lönnqvist et al., 2020; Reiljan, 2020). With regard to polarization, it is thus an appropriate case to generalize to other western countries (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

3.2. Identity Politics in Austria

As noted, Austria has a long history with identity politics as the country is home to Europe's oldest and arguably most successful RRPP, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ). While the party had initially promoted a pan-German identity, their focus shifted toward a national Austrian identity in the 1980s, when they became a structural and defining part of the Austrian political landscape (Aichholzer et al., 2014). Notably, right before the data collection for this dissertation started in 2017, the FPÖ entered the Austrian government (Bodlos & Plescia, 2018). This was not a first for the FPÖ, and their participation in government was much less controversial than previous government periods (Eberl et al., 2020). Moreover, in the 2017 elections, all parties – and specifically the center-right ÖVP – focused dramatically more on immigration as the main topic of the campaign (Bodlos & Plescia, 2018). Indeed, like in most European countries, the elections had identity-related issues at its core and ended in a ÖVP/FPÖ right-wing government. After a series of scandals involving FPÖ leaders appearing to sell political influence for positive media attention, their popularity fell in the 2019 snap elections (Eberl et al., 2020). However, as the ÖVP – who remained popular by imitating identity-based standpoints of the FPÖ (Bodlos & Plescia, 2018) – came out as a clear winner of the elections, exclusionary identity politics based on nationality and anti-immigration seems to remain important in Austrian politics.

On the other side of the political spectrum, showing a more progressive side of identity politics, Austria became one of the frontrunners in state feminism in the 1990s (Sauer, 2007). By installing a Ministry of Women, it was ensured that women's movements' ideas and policy suggestions were voiced, and Austria instated a range of progressive policies that helped to individualize and protect women. The influence of this ministry, as well as funding for initiatives to improve the position of women in Austrian society

have been hindered, though, by the rise in power of the FPÖ in the early 2000s and have undergone several changes in institutionalization ever since (Sauer, 2007). In sum, while identity politics based on immigration and ethnicity has been relatively exclusionary in Austria, there have been more progressive state policies on gender issues. As both issues are used in the experiments in this dissertation, the possibility is excluded that an exclusionary or inclusive national culture on a given issue is the driver of the effects under study. Moreover, Austrian citizens, as participants in the experiments of this dissertation, are relatively used to public discussion of identity politics, offering mundane realism.

In terms of its history in identity politics, Austria can be considered a typical case, as there is – and has been, historically – an abundance of identity politics. However, as there is a strong history in both progressive identity politics (on the basis of gender) and exclusionary identity politics (on the basis of ethnicity), Austria also represents a diverse case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). This dissertation makes use of this diversity by including both gender identity (Chapters 5, 6, and 8) and ethnic or national identity (Chapters 5 and 7) in its empirical work, covering a wide range of identity politics through its case selection.

3.3. Digitalization and Fragmentation in Austria

Austria is considered to have a Democratic Corporatist media model – a model with relatively high newspaper circulation, a strong party press, and a strong public broadcaster (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This categorization can be questioned, though, considering the lack of institutionalized self-regulation of the media market and the lack of formal journalism education (Karmasin et al., 2011). These findings remain largely true. While newspaper readership is down significantly, the largest newspaper, tabloid newspaper *Kronen Zeitung*, is still read by almost 40% of the population every week (Newman et al., 2020). Moreover, while television news use is also down, public broadcaster *ÖRF* has managed to transfer its leading position to online news. The public seems to show an expected pattern of fragmentation, where a few outlets receive most of the attention (i.e., *ÖRF* and *Kronen Zeitung*) (Trilling & Schönbach, 2013). However, audience fragmentation in Austria is not so much based on partisanship, but rather seems based on

the region of residence in the country (Trilling & Schönbach, 2013), where local news have near monopolies (Karmasin et al., 2011).

This has several consequences for the research in this dissertation. Firstly, the strong political parallelism between parties and news outlets in Austria (Berkel, 2006), makes that the stimulus material of the experiments in this dissertation cannot contain source cues. If it would, this would prime participants about the content in the news messages and may distort the effects under investigation. Secondly, there are two opposing arguments to be made about the media system's role in producing news that is tailored to citizens' behavioral responses. On the one hand, Austria has a strong public broadcaster that is partly funded by the state. Therefore, many citizens are exposed to news that has less than average financial pressures to maximize advertisement income, and might be less sensationalistic, less negative and focus less on soft news than most outlets that are more financially dependent on advertisement income. On the other hand, the most popular newspapers are tabloid newspapers, which are *more* likely than other outlets to produce such news.

In terms of case selection on the basis of the media system, Austria again represents a typical case and a diverse case (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). It is a typical case in so far as digitalization has impacted journalism in Austria to a similar extent as other western countries. However, it is a diverse case as its media landscape includes both a strong public broadcaster – reducing the influence of financial pressures, as well as a strong tabloid media – in which trends like sensationalism, soft news and negativity are often strongly represented. Studying the differences between the effects of different types of news is therefore particularly important in the Austrian context, as they might reflect real differences between the effects of national news outlets on citizens' motivated news processing.

IV. Overview of Manuscripts

This cumulative dissertation consists of four research articles, which are presented in the following chapters (Table 2). Chapters 6 and 7 are published in peer-reviewed journals, namely *Political Studies*, and *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, respectively. Chapter 5 is under review at the *European Journal of Communication* (*EJoC*, submitted: 26 May 2021), and Chapter 8 is awaiting minor revisions at *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* (*JMCQ*, decision: 15 June 2021). Chapter 5 was written in collaboration with Sophie Lecheler and Chapters 6 and 8 are co-authored by Sophie Lecheler and Loes Aaldering. Chapter 7 is a single-authored article. The co-authors significantly contributed to Chapters 5, 6, and 8, but I was the main contributor in terms of theory, research design, and writing. The articles are presented exactly as published, except for the lay-out. Therefore, the numbering of the figures and tables in the following four chapters are not in the consecutive order of the rest of the dissertation.

Table 2. Overview of articles presented in this cumulative dissertation.

Chapter	Status	Citation
5	Under review at *EJoC*	Boyer, M.M., & Lecheler, S. (submitted). Social Mobility and Social Change Mindsets as Moderators of Identity-Related News Effects.
6	Published	Boyer, M.M., Aaldering, L., & Lecheler, S. (2020). Motivated Reasoning in Identity Politics: Group Status as a Moderator of Political Motivations. *Political Studies,* online first. doi:10.1177/0032321720964667.
7	Published	Boyer, M.M. (2021). Aroused Argumentation: How the News Exacerbates Motivated Reasoning. *The International Journal of Press/Politics,* online first. doi:10.1177/19401612211010577.
8	Minor revisions at *JMCQ*	Boyer, M.M., Lecheler, S., & Aaldering, L. (minor revisions). Don't Throw the Frame out with the Bathwater: How Episodic Frames Can Prevent Identity-Motivated Reasoning.

V. Social Mobility or Social Change? How Different Groups React to Identity-Related News

Boyer, M.M., & Lecheler, S. (under review at *European Journal of Communication*). Social Mobility and Social Change Mindsets as Moderators of Identity-Related News Effects.

Abstract

In a time of identity politics, journalists use group primes in the news to organize events and reduce their complexity. Because research has mostly focused on the effects of priming a single group on opinion formation and news selection, two aspects of identity and news have remained understudied: (1) whether group primes in news media have direct effects on group identification itself, and (2) how these effects differ between groups. This experiment (N=750) shows that priming different group identities in the news causes increased awareness of citizens' membership in these groups. However, citizens' perceived importance of such groups depends on which group is primed and its status in society: priming groups that likely have a *social change mindset* increases their perceived importance, while priming groups that likely have a *social mobility mindset* does not. These findings help news effects scholars understand how groups differ in their influence on news processing.

Keywords: News effects, group identification, group status, boundary permeability

1. Introduction

Throughout the last decades, identity politics has increasingly defined political debates. Largescale grassroots movements, such as #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, dominated news cycles around the world (Gallagher et al., 2018; Kunst et al., 2019). At the same time, right-wing populist parties speak to national and ethnic identities among the dominant group (Mudde, 2007). In both cases, identity politics primes group identities in order to politicize their groups (Klandermans, 2014). Simultaneously, journalists employ group primes in the news, in order to fulfil the journalistic norm of *balanced reporting* (Entman, 1989) and create conflict frames (Bartholomé et al., 2015). It is therefore important to understand the effect of appeals to groups in the news.

Such appeals can affect the selection of news (Appiah et al., 2013) and increase defensive partisanship (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010; Bolsen et al., 2014). They can affect a minorities' view of themselves (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017) and of the majority (Schmuck et al., 2017; Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019), or strengthen anti-immigrant attitudes (Brader et al., 2008; Seate & Mastro, 2016; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017). However, such research operates based on an untested assumption. We still do not know whether there is a *direct and robust effect* of group primes in the news on identification with the corresponding group, leading to these effects. Furthermore, there has not been a systematic investigation of how *different types* of group identities influence news effects. Depending on a group's status in society and the possibility to leave it for another, citizens may adopt a mindset aimed at leaving the group for a higher status one (a *social mobility mindset*) or a mindset aimed at improving the current group's status (a *social change mindset;* Tajfel & Turner, 1986). These mindsets should, in turn, hinder or promote identification, respectively.

This experiment tests the effects of priming seven different group identities (i.e. gender, age, ethnicity, social class, ideology, national and European identity) on citizens' cognitive and affective identification. The contribution of this survey experiment is twofold. Firstly, it offers an empirical test of the implied mechanism in numerous studies concerning group primes in the news. Secondly, it nuances our view on identity-related news effects by differentiating between different groups through the mindsets that they are likely to assume. As such, this study can function as an orientation to scholars who

study news effects of group primes and are interested in how group characteristics may influence their results.

2. The Effects of Group Primes in the News

Media are an important playing field in intergroup relations, as they allow groups to communicate group norms, mobilize political support and shape stereotypes of ingroups and outgroups (Harwood & Roy, 2005). In this context, journalists use group primes to structure political debates, as policies have diverse effects for different groups (Weeden & Kurzban, 2017). This is exacerbated as journalists tend to contrast representatives of groups with different opinions to achieve *balanced reporting* (Entman, 1989). Moreover, as journalists favor and actively create *conflict frames* (Bartholomé et al., 2015), group primes help news consumers choose the right 'team'.

Political actors may also actively prime groups in an effort to politicize the group identity (Klandermans, 2014). As such, largescale identity politics campaigns, like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo, managed to generate public debates about race and gender (Gallagher et al., 2018; Kunst et al., 2019). Moreover, radical right-wing populist parties and candidates have gotten increasingly popular (Rooduijn et al.., 2019), and actively use group primes in their rhetoric to politicize national, religious, and ethnic identities (Mudde, 2007). Yet, group politization requires identification (Klandermans, 2014), and direct evidence of the effect of group primes on identification is rare. Rather, scholars focus on the effects of group primes in the news on outcomes that follow identification (see Figure 1).

Firstly, scholars found an effect of group primes on asymmetrical selection and appreciation of news. Citizens favor positive news about ingroups and negative news about outgroups in terms of age, gender (Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006, 2010) and race (Appiah et al., 2013), and avoid negative news about their ethnic ingroup (Abrams & Giles, 2007). Moreover, news containing one's ingroup is more arousing, better remembered, and regarded more favorable than news containing outgroups (Fujioka, 2005).

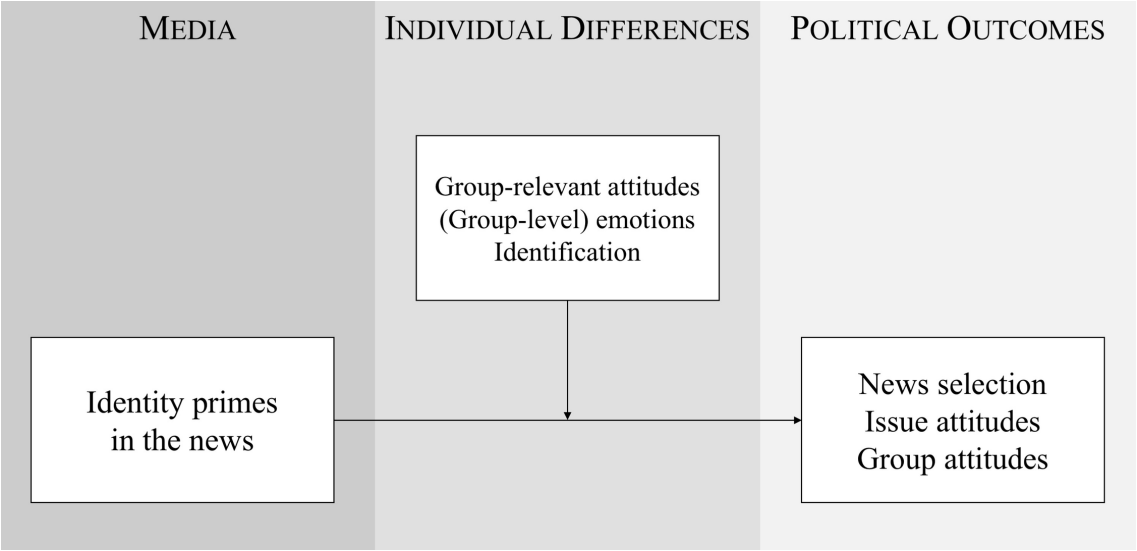


Figure 1. Conceptual model of existing research on news effects of group primes.

Secondly, group primes in the news impact issue attitudes. Party cues exacerbate defensive reasoning, causing issue polarization (Boudreau & Mackenzie, 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Similarly, gender groups polarize when gender identity is primed instead (Han & Federico, 2018) and negative depictions of religious outgroups promote support for policies that harm them (Saleem et al.., 2017).

Thirdly, group primes in the news affect citizens' attitudes towards outgroups. Immigration news causes more anti-immigration mobilization (Brader et al., 2008), feelings of contempt and harming behaviors towards immigrants (Seate & Mastro, 2017), as well as intergroup anxiety and negative attitudes towards immigrants' human rights (Seate & Mastro, 2016) when immigrants are depicted as racial out-groups. In contrast, positive outgroup depictions can decrease negative stereotypes and promote positive evaluations of ethnic outgroups (Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011).

Finally, and related to group identification, group primes in the news can change citizens' views on the ingroup. Ethnic media increase minorities' ethnic pride, while traditional media lead to lower self-esteem (Ramasubramanian et al., 2017). Similarly, negative depictions in the news cause lower self-esteem among Latino news consumers (Rivadeneyra et al., 2007). Negative depictions in populist advertisements increase Muslims' religious identification, while decreasing national identification (Schmuck et al., 2017), and negative depictions in the news decreases their desire to be accepted by

the majority and increases avoidance of the majority (Saleem & Ramasubramanian, 2019).

These results show how important group identification is for news effects. Yet, the theoretical underpinnings of these studies require testing an important assumption: does priming a group identity in the news actually increase identification with the corresponding group? According to Social Identity Theory, individuals make sense of the world by dividing people into ingroups or outgroups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Anyone's identity entails many ingroups (e.g., their gender, age, profession) and these group identities guide individuals' thoughts and behavior, motivated by a fundamental need for self-esteem, or a *positive social identity*. Most importantly for news effects, group identification depends on the relevance of a group for the situation and the possibility to experience positive social identity through this group. Identification with a certain group is considered a prerequisite of *any* group effect and should therefore underlie the effects of group primes in the news, discussed above.

Tajfel and Turner (1986) define a cognitive and affective dimension of identification. Scholars have proposed additional dimensions, like social ties with ingroup members, perceived ingroup homogeneity and self-stereotyping as group member, but a cognitive and affective dimension are fundamental parts in every definition of group identification (Ellemers et al., 1999; Cameron, 2004; Leach et al., 2008; Postmes et al., 2013). Cognitive identification, often called *identity salience*, is the awareness of one's group membership. This entails, for example, how often one thinks about the group. In contrast, affective identification refers to the *importance to the self*, or *group identity strength.* As one can, for instance, feel negatively about a group while being highly aware of it, cognitive and affective identification are two separate dimensions. And although both dimensions should be affected by group primes in the news, they can have different causes and consequences (Ellemers et al., 1999; Bettencourt et al., 2001). It is thus important to differentiate between cognitive and affective identification to fully understand the identification effects of group primes in the news.

In sum, group primes in the news affect important political and social outcomes. As these effects should be based on identification with the primed groups, we formulate two media effect hypotheses. All hypotheses are depicted schematically in Figure 2.

H1: Group primes in the news cause cognitive identification with the corresponding group.

H2: Group primes in the news cause affective identification with the corresponding group.

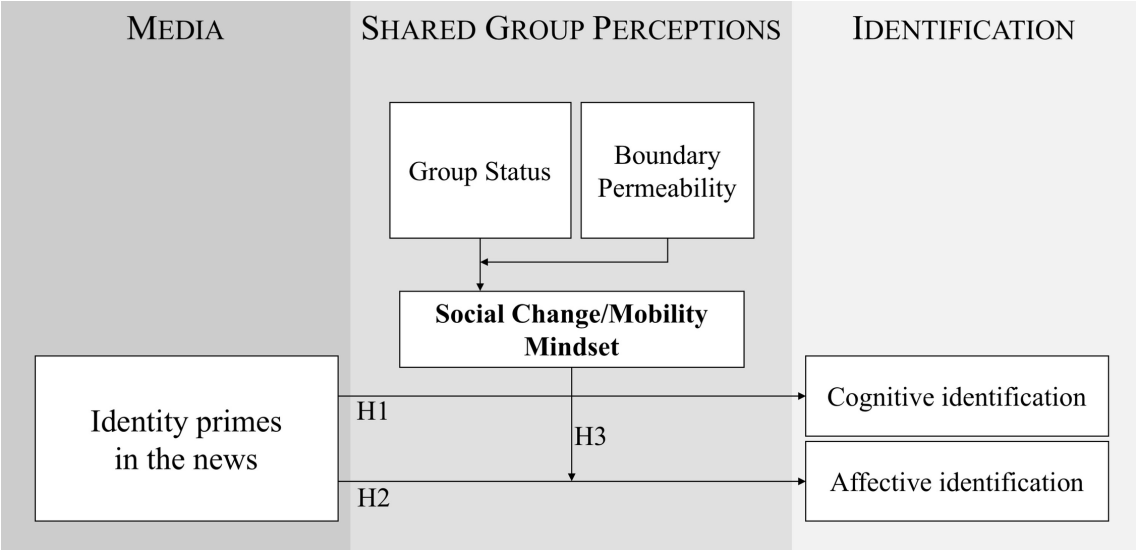


Figure 2. Conceptual model of the proposed hypotheses.

3. Group Differences: Social Mobility and Social Change Mindsets

News effects are not universal (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) and the effects group primes depend on specific moderators (see Figure 1). For instance, the effects depend on group-relevant attitudes, such as political sophistication for partisan groups (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006), positive racial attitudes in the context of immigration (Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011), or negative stereotypes about the outgroup (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Secondly, (group-level) emotions can influence the effects of group primes in the news, like intergroup anxiety (Fujioka, 2005; Brader et al., 2008; Huddy et al., 2015; Seate and Mastro, 2017). Finally, prior identification influences the effects of group primes in the news (Rivadeneyra et al., 2007; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010; Saleem et al., 2017; Seate & Mastro, 2017; Han & Federico, 2018).

Although these studies take important individual differences into account, Social Identity Theory posits that identification with a certain group should be primarily dependent on

the specific group involved (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). This entails, for instance, that individuals take on either a *social change mindset* (SCM) or a *social mobility mindset* (SMM). A SCM denotes the motivation to improve the relative status of citizens' group. This is what communicators of identity politics try to achieve, as a SCM increases citizens' identification with this group. In contrast, a SMM denotes the motivation to cognitively switch group membership to a group with more relative status. A SMM represses identification with low-status groups. Therefore, the mindsets that news consumers assume are crucial to predict identification with different groups.

Whether citizens take on a SCM or SMM depends on their perceptions of the ingroup and the relevant outgroup. These perceptions are individual differences, and so are citizens' mindsets. But these perceptions are also subject to shared group norms and often culturally defined (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). For example, national identification is associated with individualism in the U.S., but with collectivism in Indonesia (Jetten et al., 2002). We can therefore assume that, even though individual perceptions about groups cause citizens' mindsets, these perceptions are grounded in societal norms and stereotypes (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). In other words, shared perceptions of groups follow patterns in society and influence group behavior.

Whether citizens adopt a SCM or SMM depends on such shared norms of the status hierarchy between groups and the permeability of a group's boundaries[1]. Because the negative distinction of a low-status ingroup causes negative social identity, low-status group members are motivated to one of two options (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). They can identify with an alternative group – adopting a SMM – or they improve the current group's status – adopting a SCM. Tajfel and Turner (1986) expect that low-status group members will have a SMM if they perceive the group's boundaries as permeable: if they *can* adopt another group, they suppress their identification with the current low-status

[1] According to Social Identity Theory, identification also depends on the perceived legitimacy and stability of the status hierarchy (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Based on the idea of shared cultural norms, we assume that citizens in Western democracies – at least to some extent – disapprove of social imbalance and accept that regular change in power leads to inherent instability of status hierarchies. This should even more so be the case among low-status group members, since they would benefit from this situation.

group. If the group's boundaries are perceived as *impermeable*, low-status group members cannot move into another group and adopt a SCM – increasing identification.

A status hierarchy in this sense is the shared perception of the position the ingroup holds in relation to an outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It can refer to access to physical resources as well as power or privilege. Although status hierarchies are context dependent, one can assume several shared perceptions of status differences, such that women, citizens with a low socio-economic status, or an immigration background are considered to have less status than men, citizens with a high socio-economic status and native citizens. In terms of ideology, in a democracy, who is currently in power coincides with perceptions of group status (e.g. Huddy et al., 2015), and in the workplace, older employees have less status than younger ones (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008).

Likewise, ideas about the permeability of a group's boundaries follow shared social norms and patterns. Permeability refers to the possibility for a group member to cross group boundaries – to switch to another group. Again, social norms and shared perceptions dictate certain differences between groups. Gender, age, and ethnicity identities are subject to essentialist views, while social class and political groups are not (Haslam et al., 2000). You cannot change your age or the color of your skin, but meritocratic societal norms ensure that social class boundaries are perceived as more permeable. As are partisan group boundaries: citizens *choose* who to support.

In sum, we expect that group primes in the news cause citizens in SCM groups (low-status, low-permeability) to increase identification, while those in SMM groups (low-status, high-permeability) will not. Research has found that situational factors – in our case group primes in the news – impact both the cognitive and affective dimension of identification (Ellemers et al., 1999; Bettencourt et al., 2001). The same research has found that differences in status and group permeability only impact the affective dimension: citizens' mindset does not influence their *awareness* of their group membership, but only the *perceived importance* of this group. We therefore formulate only one shared group perceptions hypothesis.

> **H3:** Group primes in the news cause affective identification with the corresponding group for SCM citizens, but not for SMM citizens.

4. Method

We conducted a between-subjects online survey experiment, in which participants were randomly assigned to one of six mock newspaper articles with different group primes, or no article at all[2]. A varied sample of 750 Austrian citizens was recruited by a panel agency, with an average age of 43 (*SD* = 15.34) and 52% women. The six experimental conditions contained group primes, selected to vary in terms of group permeability, regarding citizens' (1) gender, (2) ethnicity, (3) social class, (4) age, (5) ideology, or (6) (supra-)nationality. The respondents in the control condition read no news article, to avoid unexpected activation of group identities through citizens' individual associations (Hogg and Abrams, 1998). After being introduced to a study about "thoughts and opinions about the news", participants answered questions about their group memberships (demographics). Then, they were exposed to the stimulus (in the experimental groups) and answered questions about cognitive and affective identification.

4.1. Stimulus Material

We used constructed news articles to guarantee commensurability across conditions but used an existing news article from a legacy newspaper as a template to ensure experimental realism. The topic of the articles was unemployment, which is relevant for many groups in society. Each article was structured as follows. The title indicated that unemployment affected one group more than another, containing the first set of group primes. This was followed by a lead paragraph explaining the unemployment rates and how they differ between the two groups, containing the second set of group primes. This was followed by two arguments of a representative of the low-status group and two arguments of a representative of the high-status group. The article applied the journalistic norm of 'balanced reporting' and used group-specific arguments for the different groups.

The context, arguments, and wording are held as constant as possible between the six conditions, as are the length and lay-out of the article. Importantly, both groups were primed an equal number of times, in all articles. The six conditions contained group primes regarding (1) gender (men vs. women), (2) ethnicity (Austrians vs. citizens with

[2] The original experiment consisted of 13 conditions, as the experimental conditions had a low and high conflict version. However, the conflict factor failed the manipulation check. All analyses were repeated for the low and high conflict conditions separately. Although some findings differed in significance, the direction of the effects are the same for all the main findings. There was no systematic effect of the conflict factor.

another ethnicity), (3) age (younger vs. older employees), (4) social class (working class vs. middle and upper class), (5) ideology (left-wing vs. right-wing), or (6) (supra-)nationality (national vs. European identities). The articles discussed the different effects of unemployment for the low-status and high-status groups. Because this is not directly possible for ideology and (supra-)nationality, the ideology condition discussed the effects of unemployment for the electoral support of left-wing and right-wing parties, and the (supra-)nationality condition discussed differences between Austria and the rest of the European Union. As the (supra-)national condition contained primes of two nested groups, seven group identities are primed in six conditions. An example of the stimulus news articles is attached in the online supplementary material.

4.2. Variables

SMM and SCM

The moderating effect of citizens' predicted mindset is approximated by interacting shared perceptions of relative group status and group permeability. Specifically, a SCM is predicted of low-status group members in relatively impermeable groups and a SMM is predicted of low-status group members in relatively permeable groups. Group status is context-dependent and is thus defined in the context of unemployment. As discussed in the theory section, low-status groups in this context are women (vs. men), older employees (45 through 65 years old; vs. younger citizens and citizens in their pension), working class citizens (vs. middle- and upper-class citizens), citizens with an immigration background (vs. native Austrians and other western Europeans), and right-wing citizens (vs. left-wing citizens, who then supplied the president and lead the government coalition). All respondents are both Austrian residents and EU citizens, so we don't differentiate between low or high-status groups in the (supra-)nationality condition. All low and high-status group members were represented in our sample, but the low-status group was underrepresented for ethnicity (Table 1).

Table 1. Group sizes according to group assignment and group status identification.

	Control		Experimental	
	Low	High	Low	High
Gender	25	24	51	68
Ethnicity	6	43	15	99
Social class	14	35	40	90
Age	17	32	46	77
Ideology	28	21	67	44
National / European	49		102	

The group identities in the different conditions are selected based on shared perceptions of group boundary permeability. As discussed in the theory section, we regard gender[3], age, and ethnicity as relatively impermeable group identities. In contrast, considering democratic norms of meritocracy and elections, we consider social class and ideology identity group boundaries to be more permeable.

Cognitive identification

Following McGuire et al., (1979), cognitive identification is measured unobtrusively as an open-ended question. Respondents are asked: "tell us about yourself". The reported self-descriptions are coded by two coders to include, or not, participants' group identity for each group[4]. Importantly, all questions regarding specific social groups were asked afterwards, to avoid

[3] Although individuals can change their sex, gender is considered an impermeable group identity because individuals generally change their sex to match their gender identity. Moreover, we recognize that gender is not binary, and one participant self-identified as transgender. Given the statistical analysis employed, this participant was not included in our sample.

[4] 13% of the responses were double-coded (N = 100). Some codings were rare and Krippendorff's alpha underestimates the reliability for rare success coding (Krippendorff, 2011). Therefore, we additionally tested the chance-corrected Standardized Lotus measure for intercoder reliability of rare phenomena, compared with the gold standard (Fretwurst, 2015). Krippendorff's alpha was excellent for five out of seven items, Krippendorff's alpha > .85, but not for social class, Krippendorff's alpha = .56, and European identity, Krippendorff's alpha = -.01, which are rarely coded (9% and 1%, respectively). The Standardized Lotus with Gold Standard was satisfactory for all items (lotus > .80), including social class (lotus = .84) and European identity (lotus = .94).

influencing the open-ended answers. Respondents mostly mentioned their gender and age (both 24%), followed by their social class (9%), ethnicity (6%), ideology (5%), nationality (4%), and Europe (1%).

Affective identification

To measure affective identification, respondents were asked to rate how important each of the groups are to them. Participants responded on scales from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (very important). The scale was recoded such that 0 equals weak and 1 equals strong affective identification. Respondents most strongly identified with their nationality (M = .71, SD = .29), ethnicity (M = .61, SD = .32), and gender (M = .59, SD = .32), followed by their age (M = .49, SD = .31), ideology (M = .47, SD = .31), social class (M = .45, SD = .31), and Europe (M = .44, SD = .33).

4.3. Manipulation check

In a multiple-choice question, respondents identified which groups were discussed in the article. They identified the primed groups more often correctly than incorrectly, $\chi^2 = 1600$, $p < .001$. In five out of six experimental conditions, at least 73% identified the correct groups (gender: 86%, ethnicity: 79%, social class: 77%, age: 73%, national/European: 75%). However, only 40% correctly identified the ideology condition. They also mentioned social class groups (25%), and Austria and the EU (18%). We treat the results in the ideology condition with caution.

5. Results

5.1. Group Primes in the News and Cognitive Identification (H1)

We predicted that group primes cause cognitive identification with the corresponding group (H1). As can be seen in Figure 3, the control condition resulted in strong cognitive identification with respondents' gender (35%, *SE* = .07), and age (18%, *SE* = .06), weak cognitive identification for ethnicity (2%, *SE* = .02), social class (4%, *SE* = .03) and nationality (2%, *SE* = .02), and no cognitive identification for ideology and European identity (0%). Testing H1, we conduct z-tests on the proportion of respondents who mentioned a group in their self-description, between the

control condition and the six experimental conditions (Table 2). Cognitive identification significantly increased for participants' ethnicity, (11%, *SE* = .03, *z* = 1.96, *p* = .025, *r* = .15), social class (15%, *SE* = .03, *z* = 1.95, *p* = .025, *r* = .15), age (32%, *SE* = .04, *z* = 1.76, *p* = .039, *r* = .13) and ideology (14%, *SE* = .03, *z* = 2.70, *p* = .003, *r* = .21), and a similar nonsignificant trend was visible for nationality (4%, *SE* = .02, *z* = .60, *p* = .273), and European identity (3%, *SE* = .02, *z* = 1.21, *p* = .113). For gender, we observe the opposite: cognitive identification with one's gender group decreased in the gender condition (19%, *SE* = .04, *z* = -2.15, *p* = .016, *r* = -.17).

Table 2. Z-tests on the proportion of cognitive identification with the different groups.

	Control		Group prime			
Group Identity	Pr (SE)		Pr (SE)		z	p
Gender	35%	(.07)	19%	(.04)	-2.15	< .05
Ethnicity	2%	(.02)	11%	(.03)	1.96	< .05
Social class	4%	(.03)	15%	(.03)	1.95	< .05
Age	18%	(.06)	32%	(.04)	1.76	< .05
Ideology	0%		14%	(.03)	2.70	< .01
National identity	2%	(.02)	4%	(.02)	.60	n.s.
European identity	0%		3%	(.02)	1.21	n.s.

Note: * $p < .1$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$; $N = 749$

To differentiate between the effects of the article and the effects of the group primes, we calculate a logistic regression model[5] for each group's cognitive identification (Table 3). For participants' gender, there were (marginally) significant negative effects for the conditions gender, *b* = -.81, *SE* = .38, *p* < .05, ethnicity, *b* = -.74, *SE* = .38, *p* < .10, and ideology, *b* = -.82, *SE* = .39, *p* < .05. In other words, the article also reduced gender identification with other group primes.

[5] Because certain group identities had too few cases per cell, following King and Zeng (2001), we use penalized logistic regression for those models.

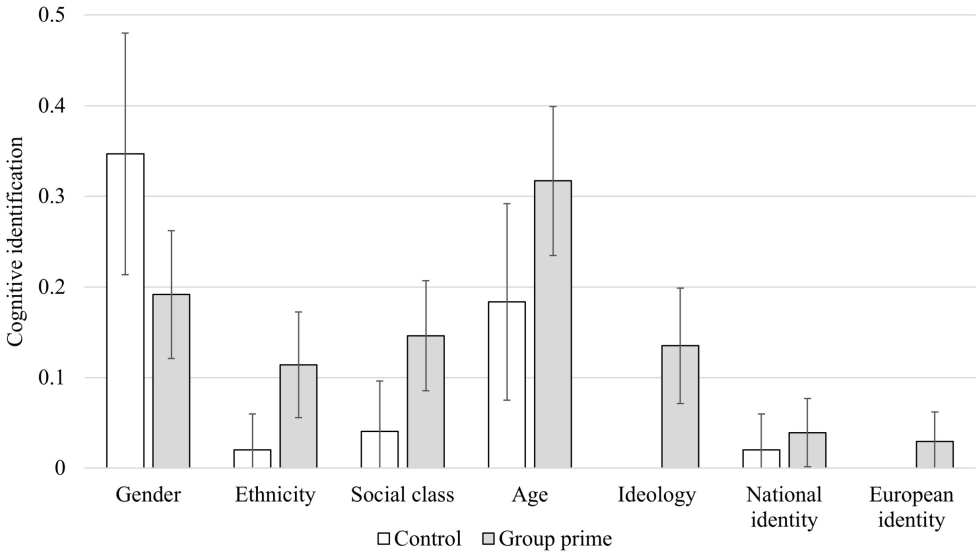


Figure 3. Cognitive identification with groups with and without exposure to corresponding group primes.

Table 3. Log odds and standard errors explaining the effects of identity primes in the news on cognitive identification.

	Cognitive identification						
Condition	Gender	Ethnicity	Social class	Age	Ideology[a]	National	European[a]
Gender	**-.81***	-.21	.64	.30	-.89	.21	.22
	(.38)	(1.24)	(.80)	(.43)	(2.01)	(1.17)	(1.64)
Ethnicity	**-.74**†	**1.82**†	1.02	.12	1.78	1.41	.27
	(.38)	**(1.05)**	(.78)	(.44)	(1.48)	(1.07)	(1.64)
Social class	-.45	1.27	**1.39**†	.33	1.47	.65	.66
	(.36)	(1.07)	**(.76)**	(.42)	(1.49)	(1.11)	(1.56)
Age	-.41	1.33	.62	**.72**†	1.70	.90	-.91
	(.36)	(1.07)	(.80)	**(.42)**	(1.48)	(1.09)	(2.01)
Ideology	**-.82***	1.17	.46	.63	**2.77**†	.82	.82
	(.39)	(1.08)	(.82)	(.42)	**(1.45)**	(1.11)	(1.56)
(Supra-)nationality	-.24	.67	.38	-.05	1.90	.67	1.25
	(.37)	(1.13)	(.84)	(.45)	(1.48)	(1.13)	(1.52)
Constant	**-.63*****	**-3.87*****	**-3.16*****	**-1.49*****	**-4.60*****	**-3.87*****	**-4.60*****
	(.30)	**(1.01)**	**(.72)**	**(.37)**	**(1.42)**	**(1.01)**	**(1.42)**

Note: † $p<.1$, * $p<.05$, ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$; $N = 749$; [a]penalized logistic regression

In contrast, the positive effect of the group primes on cognitive identification with the corresponding group is visible in the models of ethnicity, $b = 1.82$, $SE = 1.05$, $p = .084$, social class, $b = 1.39$, $SE = .76$, $p = .068$, age, $b = .72$, $SE = .42$, $p = .082$, and ideology, $b = 2.77$, $SE = 1.45$, $p = .056$. These effects were only found for the *corresponding* group primes. In conclusion, Hypothesis 1 is supported for four out of six conditions, and the same trend is also visible in the fifth condition. In contrast, the decrease in cognitive gender identification existed in several conditions, implying that the article itself caused the effect, rather than the gender group prime.

5.2. Group Primes in the News and Affective Identification (H2 & H3)

Participants in the control condition showed most affective identification with their gender ($M = .52$, $SD = .32$), ethnicity ($M = .54$, $SD = .35$) and nationality ($M = .66$, $SD = .31$), but less with their social class ($M = .39$, $SD = .31$), age ($M = .39$, $SD = .31$), ideology ($M = .36$, $SD = .32$), and Europe ($M = .37$, $SD = .32$; Figure 4). To test Hypothesis 2, affective identification with the seven groups is regressed on the experimental manipulation and group status (Table 4, main effects models). In the experimental conditions, affective identification increased slightly, but the difference was only marginally significant for age, $b = .09$, $SE = .05$, $t = 1.73$, $p = .086$, and European identity, $b = .11$, $SE = .06$, $t = 1.90$, $p = .059$, offering little support for Hypothesis 2.

Finally, in Hypothesis 3 we expected an interaction effect of the group primes with group status for gender, age, and ethnicity, but not for social class and ideology (Table 4, interaction models). In support, Figure 5 shows that the group primes in the article (marginally) increased affective identification with low-status group members' ethnicity, $b = -.31$, $SE = .16$, $t = -1.91$, $p = .058$, and age, $b = -.23$, $SE = .10$, $t = -2.24$, $p = .026$. As expected, there were no interaction effects found for the group identities with permeable boundaries, social class, $b = .01$, $SE = .11$, $t = .11$, $p = .913$, and ideology, $b = .09$, $SE = .11$, $t = .83$, $p = .405$. Contrary to our expectations, there was no interaction effect of the group prime and group status of gender identity, $b = .02$, $SE = .11$, $t = .15$, $p = .878$. In sum, we find that group primes in the news increased affective identification with the corresponding group for two out of three SCM groups, and not for SMM groups.

Table 4. OLS regression models explaining affective identification by the group primes and group status.

Group boundary	Impermeable						Permeable					
Group identity	Gender		Ethnicity		Age		Social class		Ideology		National	European
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Group prime	.02	.01	.05	**.32***	**.09***	**.23****	.03	.02	.04	-.01	.05	**.11**†
	(.05)	(.08)	(.05)	**(.15)**	**(.05)**	**(.08)**	(.05)	(.09)	(.05)	(.08)	(.05)	**(.06)**
Group status	.07	.05	-.11	.11	-.00	**.16**†	-.02	-.03	-.08	-.14		
	(.05)	(.09)	(.07)	(.14)	(.05)	**(.09)**	(.05)	(.09)	(.05)	(.09)		
Group prime * group status		.02		**-.31**†		**-.23***		.01		.09		
		(.11)		**(.16)**		**(.10)**		(.11)		(.11)		
Constant	**.49*****	**.49*****	**.64*****	**.44*****	**.39*****	**.28*****	**.41*****	**.42*****	**.40*****	**.44*****	**.66*****	**.37*****
	(.05)	**(.06)**	**(.08)**	**(.13)**	**(.05)**	**(.07)**	**(.05)**	**(.08)**	**(.05)**	**(.07)**	**(.04)**	**(.05)**
N	167	167	162	162	171	171	179	179	160	160	151	151
R^2	.01	.01	.02	.04	.02	.05	.00	.00	.02	.02	.01	.02

Note: (1) Main effects model, (2) Interaction effects model; † p<.1 * p<.05, ** p<.01, *** p<.001.

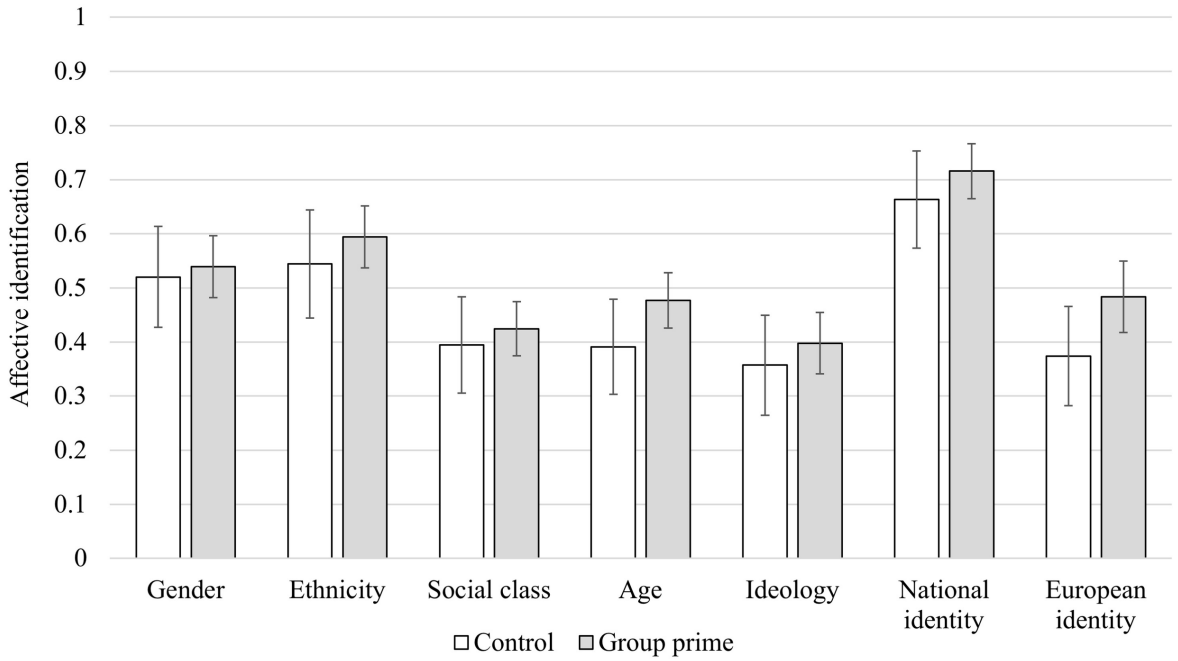


Figure 4. Affective identification with groups with and without exposure to corresponding group primes.

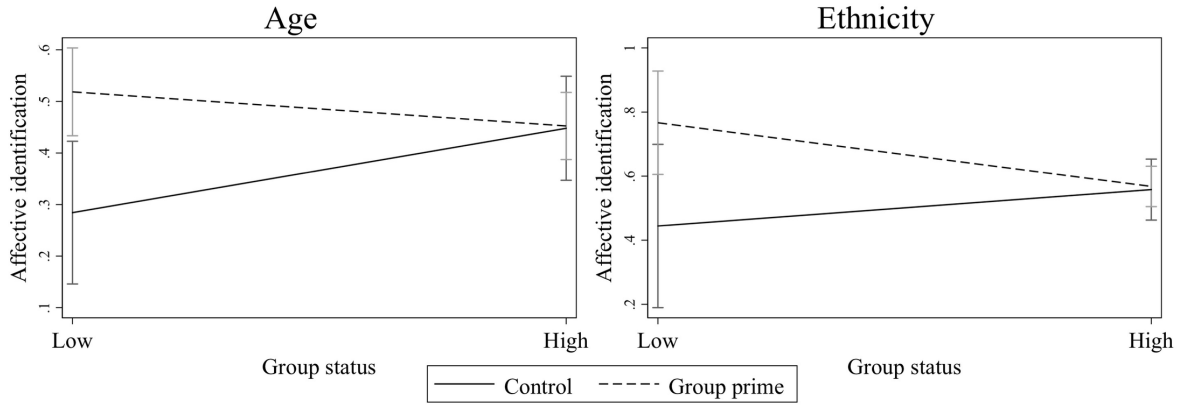


Figure 5. Interaction effect of group primes and group status on affective identification for groups with impermeable boundaries.

6. Discussion

This study set out to investigate to what extent group primes in the news lead to increased identification with the corresponding group, as well as how this effect differs between different groups. Except for gender identification, the results indicate that group primes in the news cause cognitive identification, but the effect on affective identification depends on shared group perceptions and their effects. Specifically, group primes in the news only increase affective identification for groups with a *social change mindset* – those in relatively low-status groups with relatively impermeable boundaries. In contrast, primes in the news do not influence affective identification for groups with a *social mobility mindset* – those in relatively low-status groups with relatively permeable boundaries.

These findings shed light on an important mechanism of social identification, while at the same time offering a new perspective on the way researchers can include group characteristics as a moderator. However, our results do not offer indisputable support for the hypotheses. Most notably, both cognitive and affective identification with participants' gender group after exposure to the stimulus material did not increase. Also, the effects did not reach the level of significance for (supra-)national identification. Finally, some of the groups in our experiment were relatively small, making the analyses somewhat unstable. Nevertheless, this study offers new insights into the mechanism behind the effects of group primes in the news and contributes to political communication theory in at least three ways.

Firstly, the findings confirm that group primes in the news can increase citizens' identification with corresponding groups. Citizens generally become more aware of their group membership after being primed in the news. However, we found two anomalies to this effect. Firstly, cognitive gender identification did not increase after exposure to an article with gender primes, but also not after articles containing other group primes. Consequently, the findings suggest that it was other aspects of the stimulus material, and not the gender group primes, that caused this effect. Perhaps, the topic of unemployment signaled a professional group identity that suppressed gender identification. Secondly, there was no significant effect on cognitive identification for citizens' national and European identity. As these nested groups were primed in the same news article, the lack of clear in- and outgroup might have impeded the effect. All things considered, we carefully suggest that cognitive identification is indeed directly affected by group primes in the news, although the effect can be overridden by incidental priming of other groups or a lack of distinctive power in the article.

Another crucial contribution of this study is that priming different groups does not necessarily lead to the same news effects. Citizens' affective identification tends to increase after being primed with *specific types of groups*. As would be expected from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), group primes in the news cause affective identification for groups with a social change mindset and not for those with a social mobility mindset. Thus, members of low-status groups with *impermeable* boundaries are more susceptible to group primes than members of low-status groups with *permeable* boundaries. The exception, again, is gender, for which affective identification was not influenced by the group primes at all. There are two possible explanations for this unexpected finding. There could be a fundamental difference between gender groups and the other groups under study. However, it seems unlikely that women are not perceived to have less status than men in professional contexts, or that gender groups are perceived as relatively permeable. More likely, this unexpected finding could be caused by the lack of cognitive identification, as discussed above. These are important findings that can guide communication scholars in their investigation of why certain effects occur only for specific groups and not others.

A third contribution to political communication theory concerns the level of the moderators that we use. Social Identity Theory hypothesizes intergroup effects from individual perceptions about status and permeability (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, we seem to be able to rely on shared norms and stereotypes about groups to predict the effects of group primes in the news. So, even though the mechanism depends on *individual* perceptions, societal effects can be derived from *shared* perceptions. In addition to individual moderators, we find moderation effects on the macro social-contextual level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). This serves as a reminder to keep considering the social environment in which news effects take place. A strong focus on the universal human mechanism is insightful for understanding the human brain, but studying the societal impact of psychological mechanisms requires paying attention to their context.

To conclude, our findings suggest that news about identity politics should be most effective at politicizing collective identities around low-status groups with impermeable boundaries, because members of such groups are most likely to adopt a social change mindset over a social mobility mindset. Historically this makes sense. Groups that have accumulated large-scale collective action for social change are exactly those groups. Examples might include the struggles for racial emancipation, LGBTQ+ rights protests, or the recent online #MeToo and

#BlackLivesMatter campaigns. Though, our findings also imply that, as historically dominant groups begin to lose relative status in society, their group identities might politicize more strongly too. This process might arguably explain phenomena such as the presidential election of Donald Trump and the European debate about immigration. However, as this study shows, the development of such group identification is partly dependent on the way that we construct the news, and journalists should appreciate their role in identity politics.

Chapter V

VI. Motivated Reasoning in Identity Politics: Group Status as a Moderator of Political Motivations

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Abstract

Western democracies are increasingly defined by identity politics, where politics appeals to both political and other social identities. Consequently, political information processing should depend not just on political identity, but also on other identities, such as gender, race, or sexuality. For any given issue, we argue that the extent to which reasoning is motivated by one's political identity depends on citizens' group status in other relevant identities, i.e. that political identity more strongly motivates high-status group members than low-status group members for issues of identity politics. A survey experiment (N = 1012) concerning a gender quota policy shows that political identity motivates men more strongly than women, leading to political polarization between left-wing and right-wing men, but not women. This suggests that political motivated reasoning should be addressed differently in situations of identity politics, and urges the consideration of group status as a conditional factor of motivated reasoning.

Keywords: Motivated Reasoning, Group Status, Polarization, Experimentation, Gender.

1. Introduction

With the rise of identity-based grass-roots movements (De Benedictis et al., 2019; Yang, 2016) and right-wing populism (Rooduijn et al., 2019), identity politics seems to have become increasingly important in many democracies. Yet, research on information processing and political attitude formation has had a strong focus on partisan or ideological identifications. Such research on 'motivated reasoning' has shown that partisan identification causes asymmetrical reasoning patterns and polarization between partisan groups (e.g., Kahan 2013; Slothuus & De Vreese 2010; Taber & Lodge 2006). However, we are not just partisans. In fact, our self-conceptions consist of multiple social identities that influence our thought and behavior (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). As such, other social groups, like gender, race, or religious groups, can cause similar motivated reasoning effects as political groups (e.g. Kahan et al., 2007; Landrum et al., 2017). The current surge of identity politics therefore undermines traditional understanding of political motivated reasoning: how important are political identities[6] in the processing of information *regarding identity politics*?

We argue that many political issues bear relevance for both political *and* alternative social identities and that they should be investigated as such (see also Feldman & Huddy 2018). In order to predict how strongly political identity motivates citizens' reasoning at a given time, we suggest to further investigate one component of Social Identity Theory that has not yet received much attention in the motivated reasoning literature: group status. Tajfel and Turner (1986) predicted that certain lower-status groups will adopt a "social change mindset" when threatened, in order to protect their groups' position. In other words, citizens of lower-status groups - like women or racial minorities - have a larger stake in protecting that identity group and are thus less strongly motivated by their political identity than high-status group members, for issues of identity politics.

We test this hypothesis for the case of a recently instated gender quota policy for corporate supervisory boards in Austria (N = 1021). Gender quotas are a gendered issue that is also strongly incorporated in the left/right ideological party structure (Terjesen et al., 2015). As there is a clear group status difference, where men enjoy more status and power in society than

[6] In this study, we use the term political identity to address those social identities that are most important in the relevant political context. In the U.S. and many other two-party systems these are often partisan identities, while in many European multi-party systems, identification with the political left or right is more important (van der Meer et al., 2015).

women, we expect that men will be more strongly motivated by their political identity than women. By exposing participants to a news article that argues either in favor or against the gender quota, compared to an unrelated control condition, we confirm this expectation. Thereby, we show that political motivated reasoning in response to identity politics is not universal, but rather depends on the societal status of the group that citizens belong to. This questions the way we think about the processing of political information that bears relevance for gender, race, and other social identities.

2. Social Identification in Motivated Reasoning Research

What motivates political reasoning? As reasoning seems to play a crucial role in the formation of political attitudes (Taber & Lodge, 2006), this question lies at the heart of political science. Besides the motivation to hold accurate beliefs, citizens also have *directional* motivations, or motivations to reach a certain predetermined belief. Directional motivations can stem from the desire to uphold prior attitudes (Taber & Lodge, 2006) or from the desire to keep a favorable view on the political party one identifies with (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). Congruently, citizens often process information in such a way that makes it possible to reach a predetermined outcome, which is often associated with an increase in political polarization (Taber & Lodge, 2006). According to Kunda (1990), such directional motivations can be "any wish, desire or preference that concerns the outcome of a given reasoning task" (p. 440). The question is, what are citizens' "wishes, desires or preferences" regarding the outcome of political reasoning?

Many scholars agree that the motivations that underlie asymmetric political reasoning are often based on social identification and have studied reasoning as motivated by political groups. Identifying with a group is a basic form of human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and party identification can drive persuasion more strongly than a policy's content (Cohen, 2003). Especially in the United States, identification with either the Democratic or the Republican party is one of the most important predictors of political attitudes (Goren, 2005). As such, *partisan-motivated reasoning* is thought to be caused by the directional motivation of reaffirming one's partisan group's values, ideas or position, instead of one's own prior attitudes (Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Petersen et al., 2013). Further support for this thesis includes the findings that asymmetric reasoning increases in the face of party cues (Slothuus & De Vreese,

2010), and an ingroup-outgroup dichotomy (Republican / Democratic) of social identification (Bolsen et al., 2014).

Evidence of partisan-motivated reasoning in multi-party systems is scarce. Apart from the methodological challenges that such an endeavor entails, this might also be caused by the self-structuring of political parties in the larger left/right spectrum (Van Der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009). In a Western European context, parties enjoy less continuing support from their electorate than in the U.S. However, European voters generally remain within their "block" of parties on either the left-wing or right-wing side of the spectrum (van der Meer et al., 2015). Their ideological identity thus seems more important than their party identity. For the aim of this study, it suffices to state that both identities are political identities, i.e. they signal membership in a group that exists predominantly of political considerations.

But citizens identify with more than just political groups. Since citizens' identities consist of many group affiliations, like their race, nationality or gender (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), scholars have also investigated motivated reasoning effects of such other groups. Citizens trust information sources more if they are part of their in-group (Mackie et al., 1992) and are more skeptical of counter-attitudinal information when it is put forward by a racial outgroup (Shoda et al., 2014). White men engage in motivated reasoning, upholding their group beliefs by perceiving fewer risks of guns, environmental issues and abortion (Kahan et al., 2007). Moreover, such risk perception values that relate to social identities cause the same information about nanotechnology to lead to polarization between men and women, as well as between white Americans and nonwhite Americans (Kahan et al., 2008). Finally, racially motivated reasoning can lead white people to accept of evidence for reverse discrimination, but not discrimination (Feldman & Huddy, 2018). In short, and similar to the effects of partisan identification, citizens are more critical toward information that threatens their social identity, which leads to the preservation or strengthening of group-consonant beliefs.

Because directional motivations can stem from each of the aforementioned identities (and others), the identities that play a role in the processing of a specific piece of political information are highly dependent on the issue at hand. Since parties adopt many issues in the unidimensional Liberal/Conservative or Left/Right divide (Van Der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009), political identities are likely to be activated for many who receive information about policies. It is then likely that citizens adopt the stance of their fellow group members, and that their political identity guides the processing of the information through motivated reasoning.

In this paper, we study news regarding a newly instated gender quota for supervisory boards in Austria. Gender quotas are associated with the left of the political spectrum (Terjesen et al., 2015). Therefore, we expect that right-wing citizens reason against news that is in favor of the quota more strongly than left-wing citizens do, and that left-wing citizens reason against news that is opposed to the quota more strongly than right-wing citizens do. As a consequence, we expect issue polarization between left-wing and right-wing citizens.

But policies nearly always benefit certain groups over others (Weeden & Kurzban, 2017). And therefore, there are often alternative social identities that might also cause motivated reasoning effects. Needless to say, gender quotas are a gender issue. Gender is a particularly influential social identity, as it is a social construct that socializes citizens into roles and expectations from birth onwards (Burns & Kinder, 2012). A gender quota for supervisory boards is meant to benefit women more than men. Therefore, we would expect that men reason against news that is in favor of the quota more strongly than women do, and that women reason against news that is opposed to the quota more strongly than men. Again, as a consequence, we expect issue polarization between men and women[7].

H1: Both (a) political identity and (b) gender cause asymmetric reasoning patterns in response to gender-relevant political information.

H2: This leads to polarization between (a) left-wing and right-wing individuals as well as between (b) men and women.

3. Group Status in Political Motivated Reasoning

Even though political identities increasingly overlap with other identities, such as gender and race (Mason, 2018), when two or more social identities determine citizens' directional motivations at the same time, some citizens might be faced with an internal conflict.

[7] Elsewhere, we used the same data to show that news about the gender quota leads to asymmetric reasoning patterns and subsequent polarization between men and women (Boyer et al., 2019). However, that article focuses on how journalism can use episodic framing to help to alleviate these patterns. The focus of the current paper is on the interplay between two social identities.

Concerning the gender quota policy in question, for left-wing women and right-wing men, the directional motivations of political identity and gender are the same. However, for right-wing women and left-wing men, the expected motivations contradict each other. In other words, in some cases, one social identity might have to guide information processing more strongly than the other. Looking back at Kunda's (1990) statement that motivations can be "any wish, desire or preference that concerns the outcome of a given reasoning task" (p. 440), predicting reasoning and attitude change from two social identifications boils down to which group affiliation guides each citizen in the processing of a piece of political information. Is it citizens' political identity or their alternative social identity that is activated by the same piece of information? Or both?

In a recent study, Westwood et al. (2018) find that party identification exceeds identification with other groups. If this is true, then political identity might dominate motivated reasoning altogether. However, Westwood et al. acknowledge that their measure of identity strength (i.e. willingness to derogate the outgroup) has a different meaning for voluntary groups (i.e. political identities) than for involuntary groups (e.g. race). In contrast, (*[anonymized for review]*, 2018) simply asked respondents to describe themselves. Without priming any social identity, citizens often mention their gender (35%) and age (18%), but not a single respondent mentioned a political party, ideology, or any reference to the political left or right. There might thus still be room for other social identities to guide citizens' reasoning.

What is more, there are signs that Western democracies are increasingly defined by identity politics, stressing all sorts of social identities in the political realm. First of all, recent times have seen multiple large-scale online movements that address issues of gender or racial inequality (De Benedictis et al., 2019; Yang, 2016). Moreover, a wave of right-wing populist parties emphasizes national or ethnic identification to garner electoral support (Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn et al., 2019). Social identities other than political identities are thus becoming more important in the political information environment, stressing the importance of investigating their interaction in information processing. There are few studies that investigate motivated reasoning of multiple social identities on a psychological level. As discussed above, Kahan et al. (2007, 2008) find motivated reasoning effects along multiple group lines, including gender, race and cultural orientation. On the other hand, Li et al. (2016) find that political identities tend to motivate reasoning under cross-pressures: when the Pope supports claims of human-induced climate change, conservative Catholics rather devaluate the Pope's credibility on

climate change, than change their conservative views. However, these studies assume that the influence of these social identities on citizens' directional motivations is universal.

Yet, Social Identity Theory has specific expectations of when a social identity influences thought and behavior, specifically among low-status group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Low-status group members in groups from which they might be able to leave (e.g., ideology, political groups) are more likely to employ a "social mobility mindset" and momentarily reduce the importance of their group to their self-concept in situations that threaten their group. In contrast, those in groups with relatively impermeable boundaries (e.g., race, gender[8]) will adopt a "social change mindset" and *increase* identification in order to protect their group's status. This has been found to impact identification with various groups after political news in which these groups are primed (Boyer & Lecheler, 2018).

Building upon the work in Social Identity Theory, we would therefore expect that those citizens who experience threat to their involuntary low-status group, are forced to adhere more importance to that social identity, compared to their political identity, than citizens who experience threat to their high-status group. Looking at gender and political identity in the case of a newly instated gender quota, women form the low-status group compared to men. Since gender groups have relatively impermeable boundaries[3], we would thus expect that women are less strongly motivated by their political identity than men.

> **H3:** In response to gender-relevant political information, men's reasoning is more strongly motivated by their political identity than women's reasoning.

[8] Even though individuals can change their sex, we regard gender to be a social construct. Sex changes, in this view, are usually performed to match individuals' sex to their gender identity. While someone's gender identity can change as well, this is most likely a slow and gradual process, underlining its relatively impermeable boundaries.

4. Method

4.1. Case Selection and Experimental Design

We test the proposed hypotheses in the context of Austria, where the national government has recently introduced a new gender quota policy for corporate supervisory boards. The policy entails that each empty seat in a supervisory board of a subset of the largest Austrian companies has to be filled with a woman until the board reaches a threshold of 30% female membership. Even though this measure was accepted in parliament without much resistance, it was both endorsed and opposed in the media and public opinion was divided.

In an online survey experiment, we expose participants to a news article, which either argues in favor of the gender quota, or against it[9]. A control condition received an article about the slowly growing Austrian economy and did not mention the quota, gender, or any partisan cues or issues. A varied sample of 1021 Austrian participants was collected by a panel agency on behalf of the Austrian Platform for Surveys, Methods and Empirical Analyses (PUMA) in October 2018. First, participants answered a battery of survey questions, among which were questions regarding their gender and their political identity. After exposure to one of the manipulated news articles, they participated in a thought-listing exercise and answered questions about the argument strength and credibility of the article as well as their attitudes toward the gender quota. The data used for this experiment is publicly available at the Open Science Framework repository.

To ensure commensurability between the conditions, the stimulus material was composed by the researchers. However, to ensure a certain amount of experimental realism, all arguments were based on those made in Austrian legacy media. The articles are comparable in lay-out[10]

[9] Both experimental articles had two versions. One that was framed in a thematic frame (discussing the issue in terms of groups), and the other in an episodic frame (discussing the article in terms of one exemplar case). Elsewhere, we report how journalists may use episodic framing to inhibit the motivation and the ability for identity-motivated reasoning (Boyer et al., 2019). All arguments and their wording are the same between the episodic and thematic frames. All stimulus material is available in Online Appendix A.

[10] The only difference in the lay-out between the thematic and episodic article was the picture, where the thematic frame showed a graph in which the number of female board members very slowly rose, and the episodic frame showed a picture of a woman and a man in business suits. These differences are identical between the pro-quota and contra-quota condition.

and length (400 ± 40 words). The pro-quota article argues that women are the victims of professional discrimination, and that the gender quota helps to reduce it. It describes how supervisory boards used to be filled by nepotism among men, and that it increases the quality of boards by forcing the installment of better qualified women. In contrast, the contra-quota article argues that men are the victims of professional discrimination, caused by the gender quota. It describes how the gender quota denies men positions on supervisory boards, even when they are more qualified, and how the quota decreases the quality of boards by denying companies to select the best candidate for the job.

4.2. Measures

Pretest

As is common in the European context, political identity is operationalized as self-placement on a left-to-right scale from 0 through 10, which was recoded to a scale from 0 through 1, on which higher scores mean more right-wing identification. On average, participants scored .49 (SD = .21). Gender is measured by asking respondents whether they identify as male or female. Representative of the Austrian population, 50.7% of the sample identified as female.

Motivated reasoning

The measure of motivated reasoning is comprised out of three indicators of *reasoning against the article* that a participant read. These indicators have frequently been used in previous studies concerning motivated reasoning: the perceived argument strength of the article (Taber & Lodge, 2006), the perceived credibility of the article (Feldman & Huddy, 2018), and a score on a thought-listing exercise (Taber & Lodge, 2006). The perceived argument strength and credibility of the article indicate the extent to which participants scrutinized the content and the source of the article, respectively, while the thought-listing exercise measures the amount of counterarguing a participant engages in. Participants rated how strong they found the argumentation of the article they read on a Likert scale from 1 (very weak) through 9 (very strong). The scale is recoded, such that a higher score means less perceived argument strength, and thus *more reasoning against the article* (M = 5.27, SD = 1.87).

Secondly, participants rated the article they read on credibility, using eight nine-point semantic differentials for understandability, bias, telling the whole story, believability, correctness, trustworthiness, fairness and timeliness. The items formed one factor (loadings > .56, eigenvalue = 4.26), and a highly reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = .90). The items are recoded and averaged, such that higher scores mean less perceived credibility, and thus *more reasoning against the article* (M = 4.73, SD = 1.37).

Thirdly, respondents listed up to ten thoughts that they had while reading, in an open-ended exercise. On average, they listed 2.35 thoughts (SD = 2.00) per participant, which amounts up to a total of 1915 thoughts in the experimental conditions. Two coders rated these thoughts on whether they argue along with (a part of) the argument in the article, argue against (a part of) the argument in the article, or be neutral/unrelated[11]. This led to a counterarguing scale from -10 (ten thoughts arguing along with the article) through +10 (ten counterarguments), on which participants scored an average of -.17 (SD = 1.94). A higher score thus indicates *more reasoning against the article.* All three indicators, although clearly distinct forms of reasoning, measure the same construct: reasoning against the article that one was exposed to. Therefore, we standardized the three indicators and use the mean score as a latent measure of *reasoning against the article*[12].

Attitudes toward the gender quota

Participants rated the gender quota on seven items, using a Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) through 9 (completely agree). The scale consisted of items like "In general, it is a good thing that the gender quota has been introduced", "The gender quota can force companies to hire less suitable candidates", and "The gender quota improves the quality of supervisory boards in Austria". The statements are formulated in favor as well as against the gender quota, and the order is randomized. An exploratory factor analysis indicated that the seven statements formed two factors: one for the positively formulated statements (loadings > .57, eigenvalue = 2.55), and one for the negatively formulated statements (loadings > .43, eigenvalue = .82).

[11] Intercoder reliability is satisfactory for the coding of open-ended responses, with a Krippendorff's alpha score of 0.62 and 74.6% agreement.

[12] All analyses with the separate indicators can be seen in Online Appendix C, and show no systematic differences between the indicators.

Altogether, the items formed a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = .77), which is coded in such a way that higher scores mean more positive attitudes toward the gender quota. Participants' average score on this variable is 4.93 (SD = 1.46). All items of this scale can be found in Online Appendix B.

Perceived male dominance

In the pretest questionnaire, we asked participants to rate to what extent one of two groups had more status in society than another. They rated on a nine-point semantic differential scale the status hierarchies between working class and middle-class people, people born in Austria and people with a migration background, younger and older employees, and between men and women. In this variable, a lower score means women enjoy more status than men, and a higher score means that men enjoy more status than women. A middle score (5) means that both groups enjoy equal status in society. On average, participants scored 5.85 (SD = 1.66).

5. Results

As our main premise is that political reasoning depends on group status differences, we first check whether men are actually perceived as having more status in society than women do. By testing the average score of the item for perceived male dominance against its middle score, we find that men are indeed perceived to have more status in society than women, $M = 5.85$, $z = 27.26$, $p < .001$. Regression analysis indicates that women perceive more male dominance than men, $b = .45$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$, and right-wing citizens perceive less male dominance than left-wing citizens, $b = -.86$, $SE = .25$, $p < .001$. However, even for men on the right-wing end of the political ideology scale, the predicted score for perceived male dominance stays above the middle score (5.19), signaling that Austrian citizens generally acknowledge that men enjoy more status in society than women do.

To test our hypotheses, we perform a series of OLS regression analyses in which we explain respondents' reasoning against the stimulus material and attitudes toward the gender quota with the experimental manipulation, as well as with participants' political identity and gender. In terms of citizens' reasoning patterns, we are only interested in the two experimental conditions

and contrast the contra-quota condition to the pro-quota condition (n = 815; see Table 1 for the full regression models). When we explain citizens' attitude change, we compare the pro-quota and contra-quota conditions to the control condition (n = 1021; see Table 2 for the full regression models). In all models with attitudes toward the gender quota as the dependent variable, the pro-quota condition and the contra-quota condition are contrasted to the control condition. The raw means of both variables for men and women with different political ideologies are depicted in Figure 1.

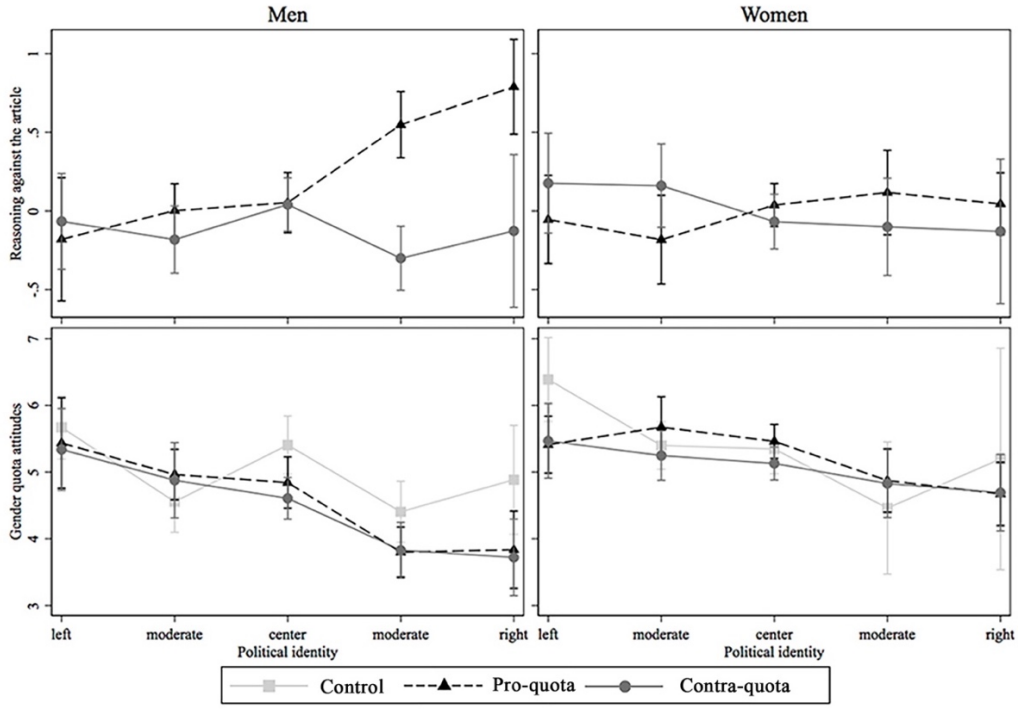


Figure 1. Raw means with 95% confidence intervals of the amount of reasoning against the articles and attitudes toward the gender quota for men and women with different political identities.

Our results show that, in general, the contra-quota article led to less reasoning against the article than the pro-quota article, b = -.17, SE = .06, p = .003 (Table 1 – model 1). In support of our hypothesis that political identity causes asymmetric reasoning in response to gender-relevant news (H1a), we find a two-way interaction effect of the experimental manipulation and political identity on reasoning against the article, b = -1.43, SE = .26, p < .001 (Table 1 – model

2). In other words, citizens more strongly reason against an article that threatens their political identity than an article that bolsters it. We also find support for Hypothesis 1b. Results show a significant interaction effect of the experimental manipulation and gender on reasoning against the article, b = .38, SE = .11, p = .001 (Table 1 – model 3). In addition to their political identity, citizens also reason more strongly against information that threatens their gender group than information that bolsters their gender group.

Table 1. OLS regression analyses explaining the amount of reasoning against the articles in the experimental conditions (n = 815).

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Contra-quota (vs. pro-quota) condition	-.17**	.54***	-.36***	.53*
	(.06)	(.14)	(.08)	(.21)
Political identity (right-wing)	.29*	1.00***	.29*	1.47***
	(.14)	(.19)	(.13)	(.25)
Gender (female)	-.04	-.04	-.22**	.38†
	(.06)	(.06)	(.08)	(.20)
Contra-quota * political identity		-1.43***		-1.70***
		(.26)		(.37)
Contra-quota * gender			.38**	-.13
			(.11)	(.29)
Political identity * gender				-1.15**
				(.37)
Contra-quota * political identity * gender				.88†
				(.53)
Constant	-.01	-.37**	.08	-.54***
	(.09)	(.11)	(.09)	(.14)
Adjusted R^2	.01	.05	.03	.06

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, † p < .1

Compared to the control condition, we find that, in general, participants' attitudes toward the gender quota became more negative after exposure to the pro-quota article, b = .23, SE = .12, p = .046, as well as after exposure to the contra-quota article, b = -.42, SE = .12, p < .001 (Table 2 – model 1). However, we find no significant interaction effect of the pro-quota article and political identity, b = -.78, SE = .55, p = .158, nor of the contra-quota article and political

identity, b. = -.59, SE = .56), p = .289 (Table 2 – model 2). Similarly, we find no significant differences between men and women in terms of attitude change after the pro-quota article, b = .37, SE = .23, p = .119, nor after the contra-quota article, b = .28, SE = .24, p = .227 (Table 2 – model 3). However, as can be seen in Online Appendix D, Figure A1 and A2, the marginal effects show that both right-wing citizens and men became more negative about the gender quota, in either experimental condition, while left-wing citizens and women did not. Even though the interaction effects are not statistically significant, we see trends of the hypothesized issue polarization between left-wing and right-wing citizens (H2a) as well as between men and women (H2b).

Finally, we find support for our expectation that political identity motivates men's reasoning more strongly than women's reasoning (H3). The three-way interaction effect between the experimental manipulation, political identity and gender on reasoning against the article shows one-sided statistical significance, b = .88, SE = .53, p = .098 (Table 1 – model 4). As depicted in the marginal effects in Figure 2, there is a statistically significant political motivated reasoning effect for both men and women. However, the difference in reasoning against the pro-quota and contra-quota is only significant for extremely left-wing women. In contrast, the effect seems stronger for men. Especially right-wing men reasoned against the contra-quota article much less than the pro-quota article. Under gender-based cross-pressures, men's political identity therefore seems to be a better predictor of motivated reasoning than women's political identity.

Table 2. OLS regression analyses explaining attitudes toward the gender quota (n = 1021).

Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Pro-quota (vs. control) condition	-.23*	.15	-.42*	.43
	(.12)	(.30)	(.17)	(.42)
Contra-quota (vs. control) condition	-.42***	-.13	-.56**	.16
	(.12)	(.30)	(.17)	(.43)
Political identity (right-wing)	-1.63***	-1.09*	-1.63***	-.81
	(.21)	(.45)	(.21)	(.59)
Gender (female)	.60***	.60***	.34†	.77
	(.09)	(.09)	(.19)	(.48)
Pro-quota * political identity		-.78		-1.63*
		(.55)		(.74)
Contra-quota * political identity		-.59		-1.38†
		(.56)		(.76)
Pro-quota * gender			.37	-.73
			(.23)	(.60)
Contra-quota * gender			.28	-.64
			(.24)	(.60)
Political identity * gender				-.82
				(.91)
Pro-quota * political identity * gender				2.15†
				(1.13)
Contra-quota * political identity * gender				1.82
				(1.13)
Constant	5.69***	5.42***	5.82***	5.40***
	(.15)	(.25)	(.17)	(.33)
Adjusted R^2	.12	.12	.12	.13

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, † p < .1

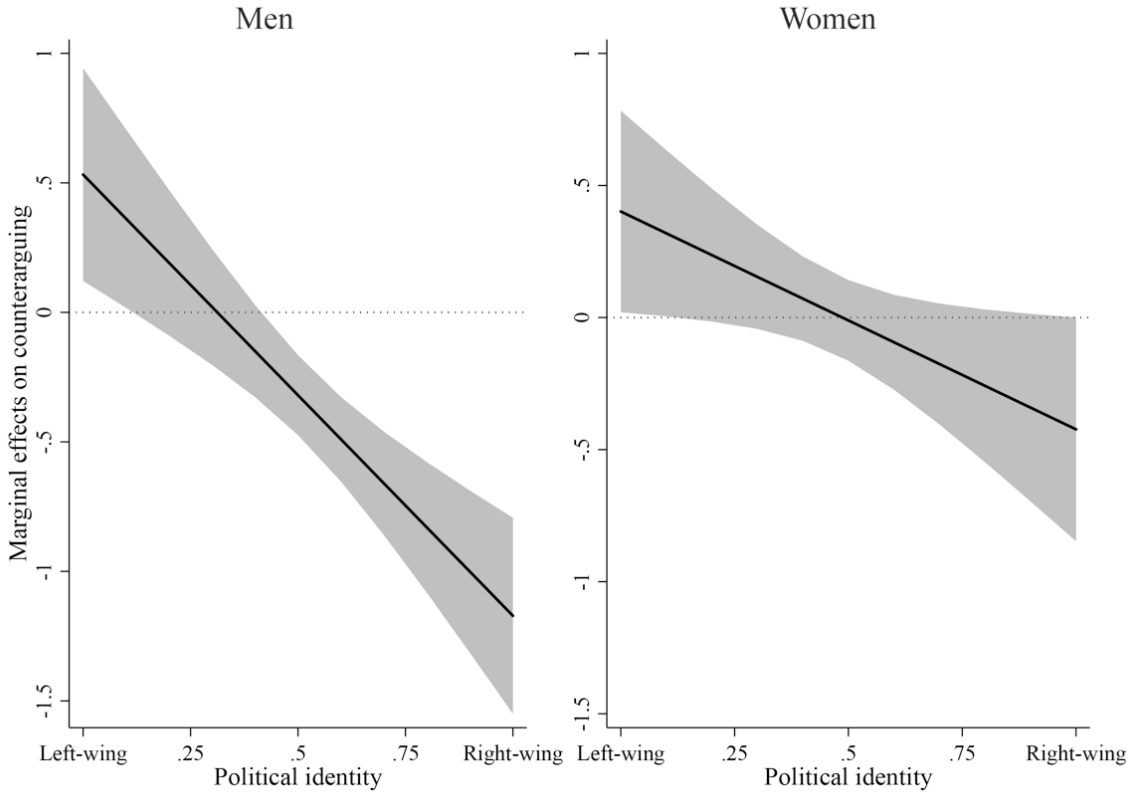


Figure 2. Marginal effects with 95% confidence intervals of the contra-quota condition (vs. the pro-quota condition) on reasoning against the article, for men and women with different political identities.

What is more, we find a marginally significant interaction effect of the pro-quota article, political identity and gender on attitudes toward the gender quota, b = 2.15, SE = 1.13, p = .056 (Table 2 – model 4). The corresponding three-way interaction for the contra-quota condition is not significant but is in the same direction, b = 1.82, SE = 1.13, p = .107. As depicted in the marginal effects in Figure 3, political identity seems a good predictor of men's attitude change, but not of women's attitude change. Right-wing men become more negative about the gender quota after reading either article, while women and left-wing men do not change their attitudes at all. In sum, we find support for the hypotheses that both political identity and citizens' gender motivate reasoning in response to gender-relevant news. More importantly, we find evidence that the political motivated reasoning effect is stronger for citizens in high-status groups than those in low-status groups.

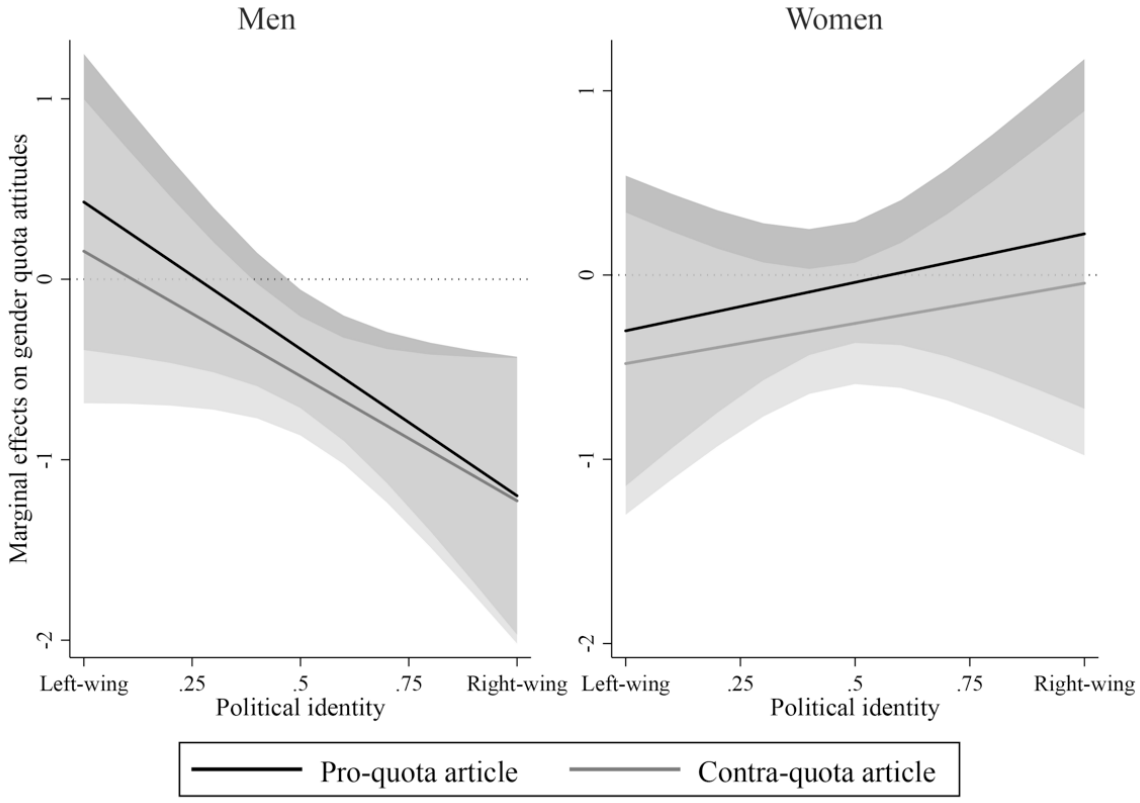


Figure 3. Marginal effects of the pro-quota and contra-quota conditions (vs. the control condition) on gender quota attitudes, for men and women with different political identities.

6. Discussion

This study set out to investigate how different social identities interact when citizens consume news that is relevant to both their political identity and another social identity. In the case of a new gender quota law, we show that political motivated reasoning effects can indeed differ between the high-status and low-status group, in response to the same information. More specifically, when they are exposed to news about emancipation, men seem to rely on their political identity more strongly than women to form their motivation in processing this information. These asymmetric reasoning patterns cause issue polarization between left-wing and right-wing men, but not between left-wing and right-wing women. This shows that identity politics has a different meaning to low-status group members than to high-status group members, where low-status group members are more likely to adopt a "social change mindset" referring to their involuntary and disadvantaged group, while high-status group members are

more free to reason from their voluntary political group. In the face of an increase in identity politics world-wide, these results have at least two important implications.

Firstly, these findings show that whether and how strongly citizens engage in political motivated reasoning is dependent on the relevance of the specific topic to other parts of their identity. Being part of a low-status group might increase the threat that one feels when issues regarding the group are discussed, which causes directional motivations in the interest of this group. In contrast, being in the relatively safe position of the dominant group, citizens have more freedom to argue in terms of the values of other, voluntary groups, like one's ideological or partisan group. When identity politics leads to cross-pressures between citizens' political identity and another identity, political motivated reasoning seems to be dependent on citizens' group status in that second identity. This should not be interpreted, though, as a lack of rationality of low-status group members. Instead, their reliance on their involuntary group should be seen as political reasoning, motivated by the collective grievances that low-status groups can hold (Huddy, 2018).

This finding has profound consequences for research on partisan or ideologically motivated reasoning, because the effect that one finds may be much stronger for one subset of the population than another. Especially in times of identity politics, political issues might more often bear relevance for more than just political groups. But one can also imagine that more common political issues bear such relevance. News about the economy may cause directional motivations based on social class groups, and information about gun control laws may trigger racially based directionally motivations. Without investigating the role of group status in the processing of such political information, we assume that political motivated reasoning is universal and underestimate it for dominant groups while overestimating it for low-status groups. This underlines the importance of research in which the intersection of political identities with other important social identities is systematically investigated.

However, while our findings clearly show that women reasoned less in line with their political identity than men did, they were not conclusive about whether women based their motivation on their gender identity. Instead, the results indicated that women hardly had a reasoning asymmetry and did not change their minds at all. As a possible explanation, women's attitudes about gender issues could simply be more crystallized than men's attitudes are. This also explains the net negative effect of the news about a gender quota on support for it: while right-wing men's attitudes became more negative about the gender quota, women were not affected

at all. Therefore, future research could focus more structurally on the mechanism behind the reduced political motivations of low-status group members.

Secondly, our results underline the importance of political identities in citizens' reasoning about politics (Westwood et al., 2018). Even though there were differences between men and women in their reasoning patterns, both groups showed patterns of motivated reasoning based on their political identity. However, the results do emphasize that this effect can be moderated by other relevant identities. Especially low-status group members might additionally be motivated by alternative social identifications. This is important for two reasons. First of all, alternative social identities may be especially important when issues are not (yet) fully integrated in partisan discourse or the Left/Right dichotomy. This may happen because they transcend partisan politics, as could happen with matters of national security, or because they are new and not yet adopted by the political establishment. Second of all, we live in a time when large-scale online movements address issues of gender or racial inequality (De Benedictis et al., 2019; Yang, 2016), and when a rising right-wing populist trend emphasizes national or ethnic identification (Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn et al., 2019). Identity-politics seems to become increasingly important in general, which means that social identities beyond political identities might become even more important in the processing of political information in the years to come.

This study has four important limitations. Firstly, the analyses in this study used one's perceived membership in a gender group as a measure of identification. Even though this is a prerequisite of citizens' identification with their gender, it does not mean that all citizens who accept their membership in a gender group also identify with this group equally strong. However, gender is arguably (one of) the most ubiquitous identities humans possess. As a social construct, gender roles and expectations are socialized from birth onwards through social interactions, popular culture and even everyday language (Burns & Kinder, 2012). What is more, gendered issues have gotten a lot of media attention through the #MeToo movement and other large-scale movements that have garnered large amounts of media attention (De Benedictis et al., 2019). In short, both the relative importance of gender to most citizens, as well as the contemporary information environment, make it likely that gender identities are easily activated by gender-relevant news, regardless of the individual strength of identification. Therefore, it is important that studies investigating the intersection between political and other

social identities in political attitude formation take the current information environment, as well as the properties of the specific social identity under study into account.

Relatedly, this study relied on a single shot experiment to investigate how different social identities interact to form directional motivations. Therefore, the fact that we find that women form gender-based directional motivations might not be transferrable to other situations, topics or countries. Let alone to other low-status groups like ethnic or sexual minorities. On the other hand, this study shows that political motivated reasoning *can* be moderated by group status in response to identity politics. The goal of this experiment was thus not to be generalized to all circumstances, but rather to demonstrate that the hypothesized effect takes place in certain circumstances (for more theory on generalizability of social science experiments, see Druckman and Kam, 2011).

Thirdly, as with much experimental work into political information processing, more research is necessary to conclusively test the mechanism behind the effects that we observe. It is important to note that accuracy motivations could lead to the same effects as directional motivations, if the perceptions of what is accurate information differs between groups as well (Druckman & McGrath, 2019). However, there is also evidence that prompting accuracy motivation leads to less asymmetrical reasoning (Bolsen et al., 2014; Redlawsk, 2002), which supports the idea of directional motivations being the main driver in asymmetrical reasoning processes.

Relatedly, we need additional research to conclusively determine whether the differences that we find between men and women exist because of group status differences, or whether they are a result of other differences between men and women, for instance the different levels of importance that group members adhere to their group membership. However, we found that both men and women acknowledged the status difference between their groups. In this societal context, group importance and group status are also inherently intertwined and often coexist. Therefore, it is important to note that we did determine that asymmetrical reasoning patterns can differ between groups of different status in the face of identity politics. However, to phase out the exact mechanism, future research could focus on social groups, for which group membership is more important for the members of the high-status group than for their low-status equivalents.

Finally, the concept of motivated reasoning is not uncontested in itself. Even though the mechanism has seen many replications, there has also been attention to factors that limit motivated reasoning, like repeated exposure to counter-attitudinal information (Redlawsk et al., 2010) or feelings of anxiousness, in contrast to anger (Vasilopoulos et al., 2018; Weeks, 2015). Furthermore research has found that political polarization can be caused by other mechanisms entirely, like self-stereotyping after in-group cues (e.g. Han & Federico 2018). Therefore, even though our results make a strong case for motivated reasoning, it is important to keep an open mind to other mechanisms that might lead to the same effects. However, the findings in this paper indicate that, at least in certain circumstances, reasoning on the basis of a political identity is more prevalent among high-status groups, while low-status group members tend to cognitively defend their marginalized social identity and give less importance to their political identities. In a time when identity politics seems to become increasingly important, political information processing might be more and more based on multiple social identity-related motivations. And understanding how and when we are motivated by different social identities is therefore an integral part of understanding political information processing.

VII. Aroused Argumentation: How the News Exacerbates Motivated Reasoning

Boyer, M.M. (2021). Aroused Argumentation: How the News Exacerbates Motivated Reasoning. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, online first. doi:10.1177/19401612211010577.

Abstract

There is increasing evidence that citizens consume the news because it arouses them. However, to explain the motivated processing of news messages, research usually focuses on negative discrete emotions or the valence dimension of affect. This means that the role of arousal is largely overlooked. In this experiment, conducted in 2019 in Austria, I exposed 191 citizens to a televised news item about immigration – varying the level of threat, while taking physiological measures of negative valence and arousal, followed by self-reported indicators of motivated reasoning. The results indicate that combining the valence and arousal dimensions of affect is the preferred way to understand citizens' reactions to political news. While negative affect predicted motivated reasoning, these effects were much more pronounced for those who experienced high arousal at the same time. Not only does this illuminate some of the black box behind motivated reasoning, the consequences for journalism are profound: the way that journalists cover the news might unwittingly drive citizens apart.

Keywords: Media effects, motivated reasoning, affective states, arousal, psychophysiology

1. Introduction

Citizens enjoy arousing news. They zoom out when they are no longer aroused (Lang et al., 2005), and they like sensationalist news *because* it arouses them (Vettehen et al. 2008). Negative news also elicits arousal (Soroka et al. 2019; Soroka & McAdams 2015), and is often preferred by consumers over neutral and positive news (Trussler & Soroka, 2014). Over time, the news has become increasingly negative (Patternson, 1994; Soroka, 2012) and sensationalist (Vettehen et al. 2005), and the ability of these types of news to elicit arousal, and therefore attract an audience, might be a reason that journalists report in this manner in the first place (Soroka & McAdams, 2015). Arousal thus seems inherent to modern-day news, but research into news processing has mostly focused on the role of negative emotions and the valence dimension of affect. However, if journalists purposefully elicit arousal in news consumers to attract an audience, it is imperative to incorporate arousal in existing theories of news processing.

One theory that has overlooked the role of arousal is motivated reasoning. According to motivated reasoning theory, citizens boost their scrutiny of news that threatens their prior beliefs (e.g., Taber & Lodge 2006) or social identity (e.g., Slothuus & De Vreese 2010), leading to policy attitudes and behavior that bolster their identity. While discrete emotions seem related to motivated reasoning (e.g., Marcus et al. 2011; Redlawsk et al. 2010), affective states – the preconscious, physiological part of emotion (Marcus, 2013) – are more likely to cause the process (Lodge & Taber, 2013). However, motivated reasoning theory has mostly focused on the valence dimension of affect: threatening news causes negative affect, which causes increased scrutiny (Lodge & Taber, 2013).

I argue that a circumplex model of affective states, combining negative valence and arousal (Russell, 1980), could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of motivated reasoning, and can illuminate the consequences of arousing news. As motivated reasoning is an active process, in which more cognitive effort is spent on counterarguing threatening news than bolstering news (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000; Taber & Lodge, 2006), mostly *high-arousal negative affective states* should lead to increased scrutiny and attitudinal backlashes. Journalists' inclination to produce arousing news might thus exacerbate motivated reasoning and cause societal cleavages.

To test this assumption, I conducted a randomized laboratory experiment in Austria (N = 191) where participants were exposed to televised news about immigration – varying levels of threat. I employ direct physiological measures of negative valence and arousal and relate them to self-reported measures of scrutiny, policy attitudes and behavioral intent. In doing so, I present evidence that news-induced arousal exacerbates motivated reasoning, offering a novel way to differentiate emotional responses to political news that precede cognitive biases, with important consequences for the role of journalism in democracy.

2. Emotions in News Processing

News media serve democracy by enabling citizens to make informed and rational decisions. However, scholars have increasingly found that, to a certain extent, citizens may be able to "believe what they want to believe because they want to believe it" (Kunda, 1990, p. 480). As such, partisans often continue to believe their party's stance – or even become more extreme in their beliefs – in the face of counterevidence (Bolsen et al., 2014; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Besides political attitudes, motivated reasoning can affect the application of stereotypes (Kunda & Sinclair, 1999), perceived public opinion (Nir, 2011), and legal decision-making (Braman & Nelson, 2007). This process of motivated reasoning inevitably divides partisan groups, and is considered an important cause for political polarization (e.g., Lebo and Cassino 2007). As political information is primarily consumed through news media, motivated reasoning is also considered a key factor for the minimal media effects that communication scholars often face (Cacciatore et al., 2016). Citizens are not as rational as theory presumes, but tend toward motivated reasoning when processing the news.

One explanation for motivated reasoning is that news that threatens citizens' *prior attitudes* invites more scrutiny than news that bolsters them (e.g., Druckman & McGrath, 2019; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Taber & Lodge, 2006). However, the current paper focuses on another prominent explanation. A number of studies have shown motivated reasoning as caused by social identification (Kahan, 2010). Social identification denotes the perceived membership in a social group, and can lead citizens to feel and act as a member of a group, rather than an individual (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). A social identity is more often relevant for those who identify with this group more strongly, but also in situations in which there are clear distinctions

between the ingroup and outgroup and when these groups are (presented as) acting according to expectations or stereotypes (Huddy, 2001; Turner et al., 1994). Social identities can cause ingroup favoritism, where citizens are motivated to favor the ingroup or derogate the outgroup to satisfy a fundamental need for self-esteem (Abrams & Hogg, 1988; Iacoviello et al., 2017).

Sometimes called *identity-defensive cognition*, the identity-as-motivation hypothesis is supported by the findings that party identification drives persuasion more strongly than ideology (Cohen, 2003), and that citizens show more support for a policy if their party explicitly supports it (Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010), or when an opposing party rejects it (Bolsen et al., 2014). In addition, this motivation also applies to non-partisan social identities such as race (Feldman & Huddy, 2018; Shoda et al., 2014), gender (Boyer et al., 2020), religion (Landrum et al., 2017), and cultural identities (Kahan et al., 2007, 2008). Citizens are motivated to evaluate identity-threatening arguments as weaker than identity-bolstering arguments, which causes more identity-defensive policy attitudes and more negative attitudes toward outgroups.

The mechanism of motivated reasoning relies heavily on emotional responses. Cognition is not based on "cold" rationality, but stored in the mind together with emotional evaluations about it (Abelson, 1963). This "hot cognition" hypothesis states that coming across information activates the associated emotional evaluations, which influences one's emotional state (Redlawsk, 2002). Because such states develop before conscious awareness (Marcus, 2013), they preconsciously determine someone's motivation to reason in a certain direction (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Any reasoning outcomes are, in this view, post-hoc rationalizations of emotional reactions, triggered by the emotional associations that are linked to any piece of information.

Accordingly, emotions are crucial for motivated reasoning. Motivated reasoning is associated with implicit emotion regulation (Westen et al., 2006), and more pronounced in citizens with a stronger need to seek out emotions (Arceneaux & Vander Wielen, 2013). Specifically, motivated reasoning seems related to anger (Marcus et al., 2000, 2011): anger is correlated with motivated reasoning in response to negative candidate information (Redlawsk et al., 2010), arguments about political policies (Suhay & Erisen, 2018), and misinformation in the news (Weeks, 2015). Similarly, a combination of anger and counterarguing best describes reactance – the state in which citizens resist persuasion (Rains, 2013). Similar to motivated reasoning, reactance is a combination of emotion and cognition. However, while motivated reasoning conceptualizes affect as preceding cognitive patterns (Lodge & Taber, 2013), reactance literature considers anger and counterarguing "intertwined to such a degree that their

effects on persuasion cannot be disentangled" (Dillard & Shen 2005, p. 147). In order to understand news processing, we should thus understand the emotions that underlie it.

While discrete emotions are important in news processing, they are only *part* of the larger concept of emotion. In contrast, *affect* denotes the preconscious, physiological experience of emotion (Keltner & Gross, 1999). Affective states precede discrete emotions, which are interpretations of such states. Conscious appraisals of emotion *can* align with affective states (Bradley et al., 2001), but this is not necessarily the case (LeDoux & Pine, 2016). In contrast to reactance (Dillard & Shen, 2005; Rains, 2013), motivated reasoning theorizes that reasoning is influenced by emotion *before conscious awareness* (Lodge & Taber, 2005, 2013; Redlawsk, 2002). Studying affect in addition to discrete emotions can therefore test the theory more accurately and simultaneously rule out reactance as an alternative mechanism.

Moreover, affective states are less susceptible to problems of causality than discrete emotions. Discrete emotions require conscious processing and can be dependent on citizens' political motivations (Brader, 2006). Therefore, any correlation between discrete emotions, counterarguing and attitudes could indicate either the hypothesized mediation through emotion, or simply another *result* of motivated reasoning. Because affect is a preconscious physiological experience (Marcus, 2013), affective states cannot be influenced by motivated reasoning and must precede measures of counterarguing, attitudes and behavioral intent.

Motivated reasoning theory has incorporated the valence of affect – whether the experience of affect is positive or negative: identity-threatening news leads to negative affective states, which lead to scrutiny, identity-defensive attitudes and identity-defensive behavior (Lodge & Taber, 2013). Accordingly, politically incongruent information leads to more negative affective states (Bakker et al., 2020). Moreover, research has shown that identity-threatening news leads to (1) worse evaluations of the strength of its arguments and (2) less support for policies that are advocated for (Taber & Lodge, 2006), as well as (3) more tendencies to harm outgroups (Seate & Mastro, 2017). This leads to the first two hypotheses.

H1: Political news that is more threatening to citizens' social identity causes more negative affective states.

H2: Negative affective states lead to (a) scrutiny of the news that caused them, (b) identity-defensive policy attitudes and (c) low willingness to help related outgroups.

3. News, Arousal and Motivated Reasoning

What role do news media play in this process of motivated reasoning? Over time, the news has become increasingly negative (Patternson, 1994; Soroka, 2012), and sensationalist (Vettehen et al., 2005). And both negativity and sensationalism of the news have similar effects on news citizens' affective states: they cause arousal (Soroka et al., 2019; Vettehen et al., 2008), although the effect of negativity might mostly be driven by men (Grabe & Kamhawi, 2006). What is more, news consumers actually prefer arousing news *because* it arouses them (Trussler & Soroka, 2014; Vettehen et al., 2008), and tune out when their arousal decreases (Lang et al., 2005). This might be a reason that journalists report in this manner in the first place (Soroka & McAdams, 2015). Arousal therefore seems inherent to modern-day news.

Since arousal is such an important affective response to political news, it is surprising that motivated reasoning theory has largely overlooked this dimension of affect. Moreover, a two-dimensional product of valence and arousal is a common conceptualization of affect (Russell, 1980). As depicted in Figure 1, this *circumplex model of affect* results in four quadrants, where the arousal dimension reflects how active (aroused) or inactive (sleepy) someone's affective state is. Positive and negative low arousal affective states are summarized as 'relaxation' and 'depression', respectively, while high arousal affective states can be called 'excitement' and 'distress'.

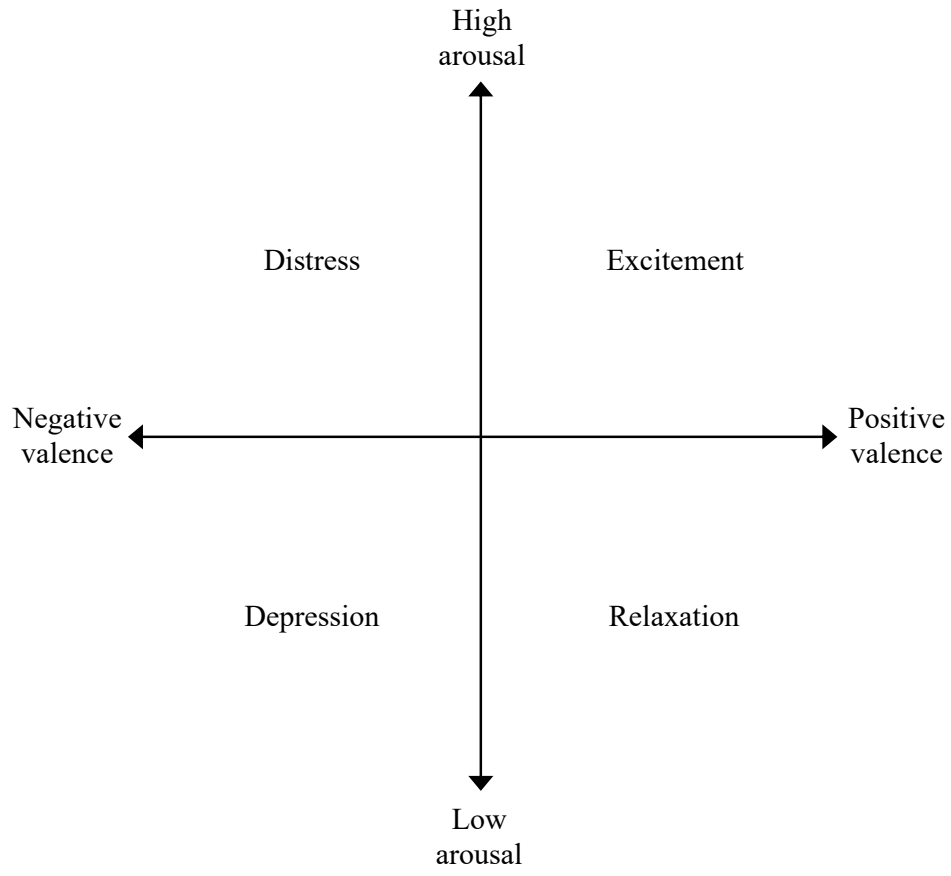


Figure 1. A circumplex model of affective states, figure slightly adapted from Russell (1980).

Fundamentally, arousal could play a crucial role in motivated reasoning. Arousal should not elicit a direct effect on motivated reasoning, because it can signal either positive emotion (excitement) or negative emotion (distress) (Russell, 1980). However, in combination with negative valence, arousal can play a crucial part in the processing of news. Motivated reasoning is an active process, in which citizens employ cognitive energy to scrutinize threatening information (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000). While low-arousal negative affective states could motivate citizens to reduce this state, their low level of activation would inhibit them to spend cognitive energy. In contrast, high-arousal negative affective states provide both the motivation *and* activation to scrutinize identity-threatening news, leading to the asymmetrical formation of attitudes and identity-defensive behavior.

It can therefore be expected that threatening news specifically leads to *high-arousal negative affective states*, which are exactly the affective states that cause motivated reasoning. This is in line with previous findings on emotion in motivated reasoning, as anger is considered a high-

arousal negative emotion (Russell, 1980). I thus expect an interaction between the valence and arousal dimensions, in which the link between negative affective states and motivated reasoning is stronger in combination with high arousal than with low arousal.

H3: Political news that is more threatening to citizens' social identity causes more *high-arousal negative affective states*.

H4: *High-arousal negative affective states* lead to (a) scrutiny of the news that caused them, (b) identity-defensive policy attitudes and (c) less willingness to help related outgroups.

4. Method

4.1. Design and sample

In a double-blind laboratory experiment, I randomly expose participants to one of two TV news items, varying the level of threat. The news item concerns a group of immigrants that differ from majority native citizens in terms of nationality, ethnicity and religion. Immigration serves as a fitting case for this study, as research has shown that news about immigration causes social identity threat to citizens' national identity (Mangum & Block, 2018), ethnic identity (Wright et al., 2012) and religious identity (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015). Immigration poses both an economic (real) threat and a symbolic threat (Brader et al., 2008; Esses et al., 2001; Sides & Citrin, 2007), and this threat is stronger when groups are more dissimilar to the native majority (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015; Brader et al., 2008). Social identity threat based on immigration leads to more support for aggressive policies against outgroups (Maoz & McCauley, 2008), and immigration news has effects on emotions, attitudes and intergroup behavior (Seate & Mastro, 2017). These effects are dependent on political knowledge (Schemer, 2012), which might indicate motivated reasoning effects.

During exposure to the stimulus material, I take physiological measures to gauge participants' affective states and after exposure, participants rate the strength of arguments in the news item, their attitude toward the proposed policy, and their intention to engage in helping or harming

behavior toward the immigrants in the news item. The sample consists of 191 participants at a large university in Austria[13]. As is to be expected, this student sample is skewed in some accounts. Women are overrepresented (68%) and the sample is relatively young (M = 23.41, SD = 5.02). In addition, the sample is skewed on ideological identification, as participants scored an average of 3.46 (SD = 1.71) on a scale from 0 (very left-wing) to 10 (very right-wing). Although this is not a representative sample, random assignment to the conditions ensures internal validity (Shapiro, 2002). Moreover, one could argue that young, left-wing college students are least likely to experience threat by immigration news and that I might therefore rather underestimate than overestimate effects.

4.2. Stimulus material and procedure

The stimulus material consists of two nearly identical constructed TV news items, which were created using a professional voice actor and video editing studio, and in consultation with an editor of the Austrian public service newscaster to ensure experimental realism[14]. Because physiological measures react to a wide range of stimuli, including storytelling (Schneider et al., 2004) and background music (Dillman et al., 2007), a control condition regarding a different topic would not be informative, and is not employed in this experiment.

The news items state that, in following of international agreements, (1) Austria has to take on an additional [50/5000] refugees from certain African countries, (2) this will cost the taxpayer [nothing extra / 150 million euro's] and (3) that these refugees will [not / likely] obtain Austrian citizenship. These manipulations are designed to pose both real threat (number of refugees, additional cost to the taxpayer) and symbolic threat (people with other ethnicities become Austrian citizens) (Brader et al., 2008). Both news items last 54 seconds, and are identical in

[13] Participants included mostly students of Communication Science, but also students of Chemistry and Information Science, as well as other interested citizens. All participants received a 5€ gift card to an online shop. Moreover, Communication Science students received minor extra credit for a course on basic research methods. Of 199 participants, eight were excluded from the analyses. One was a foreign exchange student, two had invalid physiological measures due to sneezing during the experiment, and with five participants there were technical problems with the measuring equipment.

[14] Please find the visual manipulation and the translated text of the narrator in Appendix A in the Supplementary Information file.

their footage, except for a manipulated graph depicting the number of refugees. The first 8 seconds of the news items are identical.

Upon arrival in the laboratory, participants are told that they are taking part in a study into "the way citizens react to the news". They are informed of the physiological measures and the electrodes that have to be placed on their finger and face – including make-up removal and skin preparation. After signing an informed consent form, participants answer a pretest questionnaire. When finished, their skin is prepared and the electrodes are placed. Participants watch a grey screen for 30 seconds in order to give the electrodes time to settle in and give reliable measures, followed by a 10-second countdown to avoid startling them when the stimulus material begins. After the news item, the post-test questionnaire is automatically displayed, and participants finish all remaining questions without researcher interference. Once finished, participants are detached from the equipment and thoroughly debriefed, before receiving their compensation. The procedure lasts under half an hour (see Figure 2).

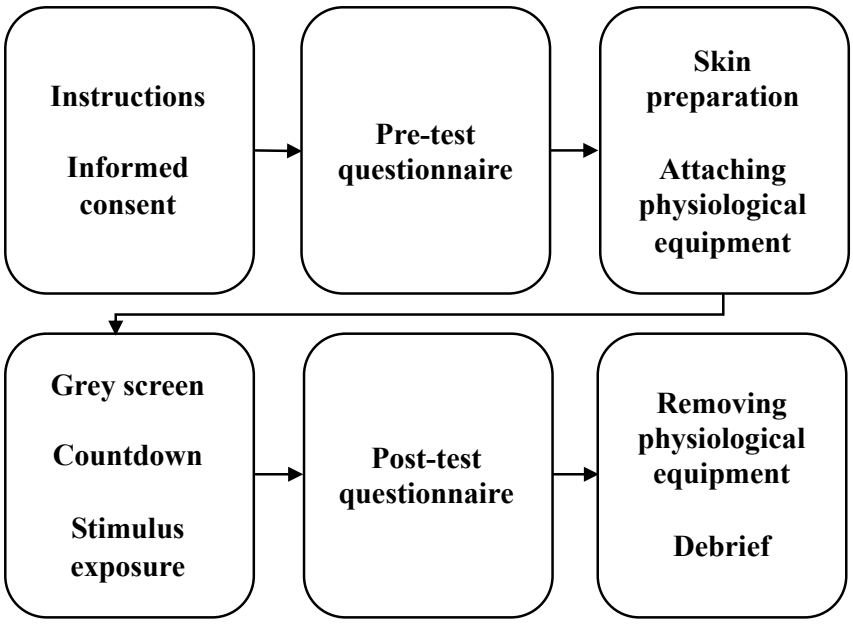


Figure 2. Experimental procedure.

To check whether participants took notice of the number of refugees in the stimulus material, they were asked to select one of four multiple choice categories: 50, 100, 5000 and 15000.

Participants largely identified the correct number (low-threat: 84%, high-threat: 89%), χ^2 (3) = 142.10, p < .001.

4.3. Physiological measures

I use physiological measures to approximate the valence and arousal dimensions of affective states (Potter & Bolls, 2012)[15]. As the first eight seconds of the stimulus material are identical between the two conditions, participants' average score in this period is used as the baseline on both the SCL and EMG measures. Comparing effects to the baseline measure ensures that different skin types and placement of electrodes do not influence the results. Using the first part of the stimulus for this baseline, I consider the differential effect of the increased threat, as opposed to the effect of immigration news as such.

Negative valence

As a measure of negative valence, I followed the guidelines of Van Boxtel (2010) and used EMG over the area surrounding the *Corrugator Supercilii* muscle, which is located at the medial side of the eyebrows and is used to frown. *Corrugator Supercilii* activity is correlated with the experience of negative affect (Cacioppo et al., 1986), and increases in response to negative words (Wexler et al., 1992), images (Cacioppo & Petty, 1979), specific negative affective cues (Hietanen et al., 1998). It increases in response to more complex emotional stimuli too, like negative radio advertisements (Bolls et al., 2001) and attitudinally incongruent political information (Bakker et al., 2020).

Arousal

As a measure of arousal, I use participants' skin conductance levels (SLCs) in the finger tips, following the procedure as described by Potter and Bolls (2012). Measuring arousal, SCL increases in response to negative information, like negative political advertisements (Bradley

[15] For technical specifics and definitions of the physiological measurement, please refer to Appendix B in the Supplementary Information file.

et al., 2007) and negative news (Soroka et al., 2019; Soroka & McAdams, 2015). Likewise, SCL correlates with positive stimuli, such as preferred political parties (Petersen et al., 2015), politicians (Wagner et al., 2015), and football teams (Potter & Keene, 2012).

4.4. Survey measures

Scrutiny of the news

Scrutiny is operationalized as the perceived argument strength of the news item, using two nine-point semantic differentials. This is a common measure in motivated reasoning research (e.g., Taber & Lodge, 2006). Participants are asked to rate the argumentation in the news item – specifically that Austria should accept the refugees "because of international agreements", on two different criteria: whether the argumentation is strong and whether it is valid. The first semantic differential ranged from 1 (very weak) to 9 (very strong), and the second ranged from 1 (completely invalid) to 9 (completely valid). I took the average of the items, such that a higher score means more perceived argument strength (M = 6.84, SD = 1.65, min. = 1, max. = 9, Cronbach's alpha = .78).

Policy attitudes

Attitudes toward the immigration policy are measured asking participants for their opinion, instead of the strength of the news item's argument. The scale consists of three statements on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 9 (completely agree), stating that "it is good that Austria accepts the refugees," "Austria should adhere to international agreements to take in legal refugees" and "Austria should have negotiated to take in fewer refugees" (reversely coded). These items formed a reliable scale, Cronbach's Alpha = .77, and the mean score was formed such that higher scores mean more agreement with the policy to accept refugees (M = 7.47, SD = 1.50, min. = 2.67, max. = 9).

Willingness to help

Willingness to help was measured using six items gauging the likelihood of participants engaging in behaviors that would harm or help the refugees in the stimulus material, on a scale from 1 (very unlikely) to 9 (very likely). The items concerning intent to harm the refugees were "join a demonstration against taking the refugees," "donating money to an anti-immigration group," and "convince others that it is not a good idea to accept the refugees," and were inverted such that a higher score means less intent to engage in this behavior. The items of intent to help the refugees were "volunteering in a refugee center," "donating money to a refugee supporter group" and "signing a petition for better living standards of refugees." The final score of willingness to help is the mean score of the six items (M = 6.69, SD = 1.30, min. = 1, max. = 9, Cronbach's Alpha = .67).

4.5. Data analysis and robustness checks

Because this experiment focuses on the interaction between SCL and EMG levels, I leave the data disaggregated per second, such that each unit of analysis is one second of one participant. This has the advantage that we consider whether participants experience negative valence and arousal *at the same time*. However, this poses some difficulties in the analyses. Firstly, SCL has a delayed response time of around one second (Dawson et al., 2000). Therefore, all analyses where SCL and EMG are combined, are conducted with a one-second lag on the EMG measure. Moreover, using multiple data points per participant requires certain correction in the analyses. To produce more accurate measures around individual-level indicators, all analyses use panel-corrected standard errors (PCSEs). In order to remove any trend from the data, all analyses are controlled for dummy variables for each second of the stimulus material. Finally, there is considerable autocorrelation in the physiological measures. However, in a highly controlled experiment, there is little chance of omitted variable bias. Moreover, all analyses include a time-invariant key independent or dependent variable, and using change scores would cause substantial loss of the interpretability of the results. Therefore, like in other seminal work using physiology in communication research (e.g., Soroka and McAdams, 2015), I opt to refrain from modeling the autocorrelation in the main analyses, and interpret the results with caution.

Instead, I run multiple robustness checks, which, unless explicitly mentioned in the main text, lead to the same results[16].

5. Results

Initial inspection of the physiological data reveals some interesting insights in the experiment. The average EMG levels remain fairly similar between the low-threat and high-threat condition for most of the news item, but EMG levels rise at the end of the news item in the low-threat condition (see Figure 3). Participants in the low-threat condition experienced negative valence at the moment of the symbolic threat, where the refugees are not eligible for Austrian citizenship. As is usual, average SCL slowly decreases over time. However, in the high-threat condition, the decrease is slower than in the low-threat condition and even rises around 35 seconds into the stimulus material.

[16] As robustness checks, in Appendix C in the Supplementary Information file, the analyses are repeated in the online supplementary material, with the most extreme values removed and without any transformations. To control for post-treatment bias, the analyses for the indicators of motivated reasoning are repeated, controlled for pretest immigration attitudes. For the analyses with physiological measures as dependent variable, the analyses are repeated using Prais-Winsten GLS models with a first order autocorrelation structure. These robustness checks generally lead to the same conclusions as the analyses reported in the results section. However, the analyses without extreme values, and the Prais-Winsten GLS models do not indicate a significant interaction effect of the threat manipulation and negative valence on arousal.

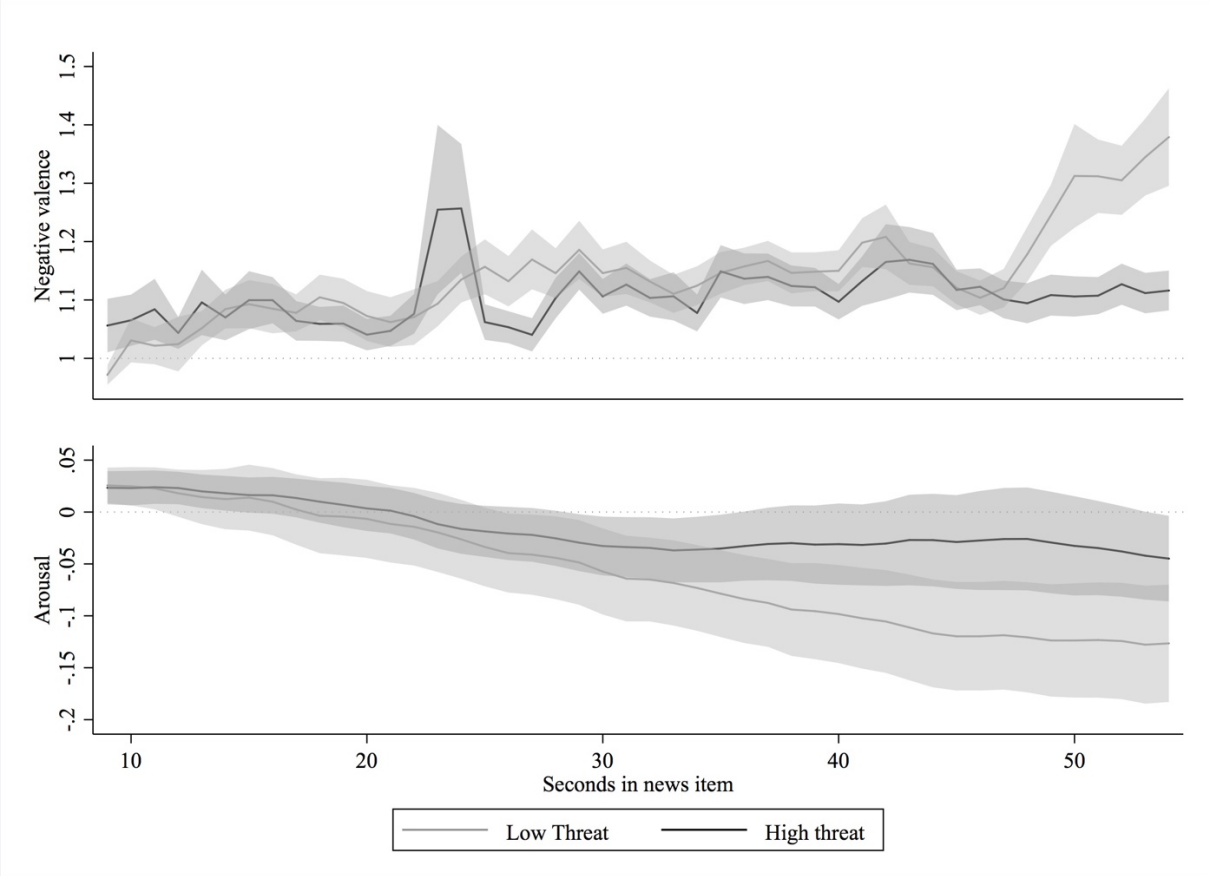


Figure 3. Mean scores and standard error margins of negative valence (EMG) and arousal (SCL) over the course of the news item.

5.1. Negative valence (H1 & H2)

In this section, I inspect the role of negative valence, regardless of levels of arousal. First, I look at the prevalence of negative valence in the low-threat and high-threat condition. As model 1 in Table 1 shows, there is a significant, negative effect of the high-threat condition on negative valence, b = -.04, PCSE = .01, p = .003. In other words, contradicting H1, the high-threat condition elicited less negative affective states than the low-threat condition.

Table 1. Regression models with panel-corrected standard errors, predicting participants' negative valence per second.

Dependent variable	Negative valence	Arousal	Arousal	Arousal
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
High (vs. low) threat	-.04**	.04***	.04***	-.02
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)	(.02)
Negative valence (t-1)			-.04***	-.08***
			(.01)	(.02)
Threat * negative valence (t-1)				.05**
				(.02)
Constant	1.04***	.00	.05***	.08***
	(.01)	(.00)	(.01)	(.02)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; time-dummy variables omitted; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

Next, I focus on the effect of negative valence on the three indicators of motivated reasoning[17]. As expected, there is a significant negative effect of negative valence on perceived argument strength, b = -.48, PCSE = .05, p < .001 (Table 2, model 1), and participants' attitude toward the immigration policy, b = -.29, PCSE = .05, p < .001 (Table 2, model 3). However, there was no effect of negative valence on participants' willingness to help the refugees, b = .01, PCSE = .04, p = .786 (Table 2, model 5). The experience of negative affect led to less perceived argument strength and support for the immigration policy, but not to less willingness to help refugees. The findings thus only partly support H2.

[17]As expected from the perpendicular modelling of negative affect and arousal, the effects of negative valence on the three indicators of motivated reasoning are not dependent on the inclusion of arousal in the regression models.

Table 2. Regression analyses with panel-corrected standard errors, predicting participants' perceived argument strength, attitudes toward the immigration policy and the intention to help refugees.

Dependent variable	Perceived argument strength		Attitude toward immigration policy		Intended helping behavior	
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Negative valence (t-1)	-.34***	-.38***	-.16***	-.17***	.00	-.01
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Arousal	-.04*	.92***	-.01	.25	-.06***	.25**
	(.02)	(.15)	(.01)	(.13)	(.01)	(.09)
Negative valence (t-1) * arousal		-.75***		-.20*		-.24**
		(.12)		(.10)		(.07)
Constant	7.18***	7.23***	7.64***	7.65***	6.69***	6.70***
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; time-dummy variables omitted; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

5.2. High-arousal negative affective states (H3 & H4)

In this section, I analyze the interaction between negative valence and arousal to gauge the role of *high-arousal negative affective states* in motivated reasoning. Firstly, model 2 in Table 1 shows that the high-threat condition elicited more arousal than the low-threat condition, b = .04, PCSE = .01, p < .001. Secondly, model 3 shows that there is a negative correlation between arousal and negative valence, b = -.04, PCSE = .01, p < .001. In other words, participants mostly experienced *low-arousal* negative affective states. H3 states that more threatening information will cause more *high-arousal* negative affective states. Therefore, I explain arousal with the interaction between the threat manipulation and negative valence. Model 4 in Table 1 shows that the negative correlation between arousal and negative valence is stronger in the low-threat condition than in the high-threat condition, b = .05, PCSE = .02, p = .001 (see Figure 4). In other words, even though the high-threat condition caused less negatively valanced affective states, it did lead to more *high-arousal* negative affective states. Conversely, negative valence in the low-threat condition consisted mostly of *low-arousal* negative affective states.

However, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as two of the robustness checks did not reproduce this finding (see Appendix C in the Supplementary Information file, Tables A1 & A6).

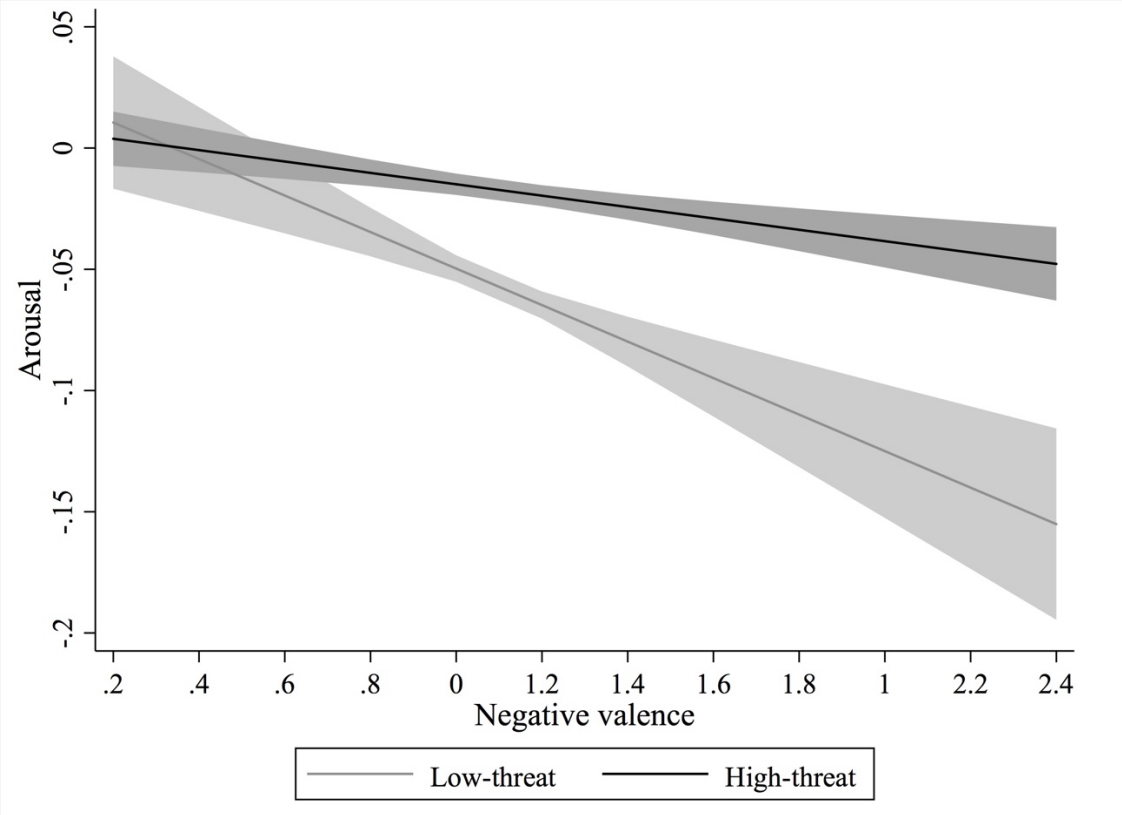


Figure 4. Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for arousal (SCL), as a function of negative valence (*Corrugator Superclii* activity) in the low-threat and high-threat conditions.

Finally, I expect that high-arousal negative affective states lead to (a) less perceived argument strength, (b) less support for the immigration policy and (c) less willingness to help the refugees (H4). Therefore, I model the interaction effect of negative valence and arousal on these indicators of motivated reasoning. Indeed, there is a significant interaction effect of negative valence and arousal on perceived argument strength, b = -.75, PCSE = .12, $p < .001$ (Table 2, model 2), attitudes toward the immigration policy, b = -.20, PCSE = .10, p = .045 (Table 2, model 4), and willingness to help the refugees, b = -.24, PCSE = .07, p = .001 (Table 2, model 6). As Figure 5 shows, the effect of negative valence on perceived argument strength and policy attitudes is stronger in combination with high arousal (M + SD) than in combination with low

arousal (M - SD). Moreover, as expected, Figure 5 shows that for high levels of arousal, negative valence leads to less willingness to help the refugees. In contrast, for low levels of arousal, negative valence leads to *more* willingness to help the refugees. Arousal thus seems to be an important catalyzer in the motivated reasoning process.

In conclusion, against my expectations, I find that threatening immigration news can lead to less negative affective states than less-threatening immigration news. However, negative valence might more often be accompanied by low levels of arousal for less-threatening news than threatening news. Moreover, I confirm the hypothesis that high-arousal negative affective states lead to less perceived argument strength, negative attitudes toward the immigration policy, and less willingness to help outgroups. *High-arousal negative affective states* seem to play a crucial part in motivated reasoning responses to political news.

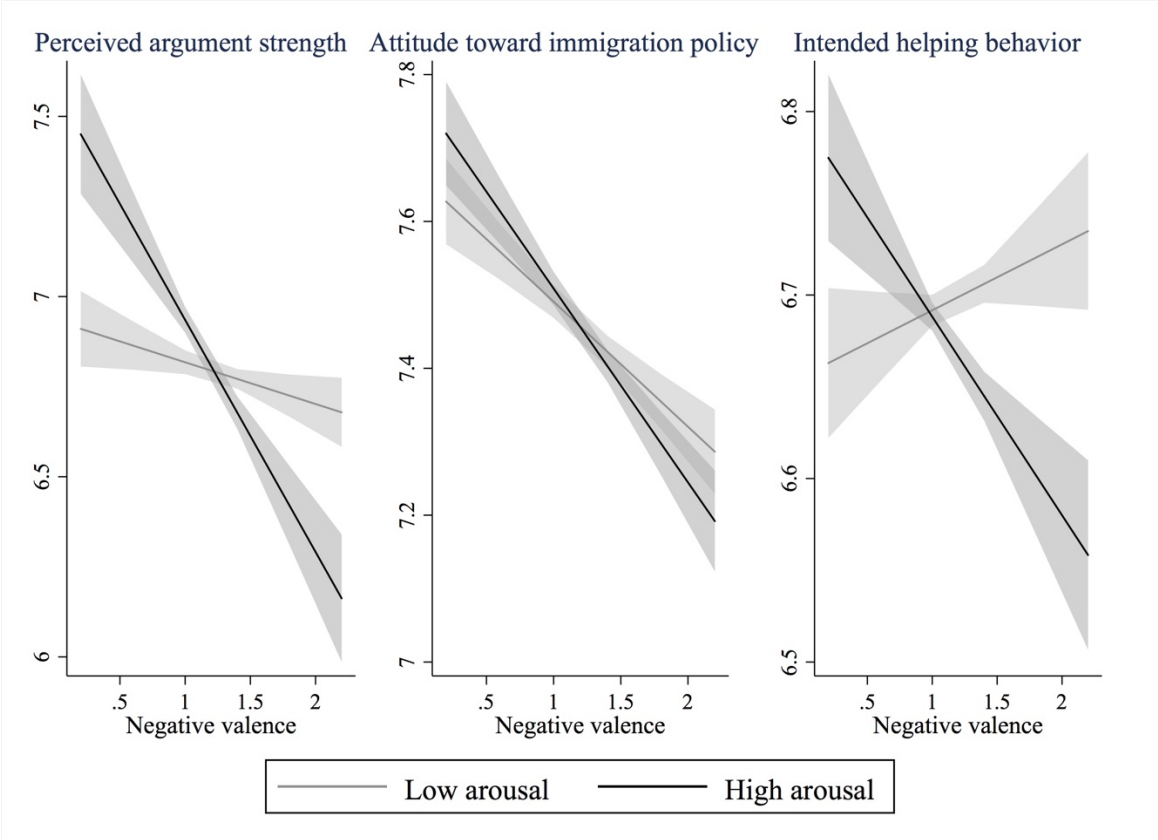


Figure 5. Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for counterarguing, attitudes toward the immigration policy and the intention to help refugees, as a function of negative valence (EMG), at low (M – SD) and high (M + SD) levels of arousal (SCL).

6. Discussion

This study set out to explore the consequences of news-induced arousal for the motivated processing of political news. Unexpectedly, the findings show that more threatening news about immigration leads to less negative affective states, among Austrian citizens. However, combining negative valence with arousal showed some initial evidence that citizens might experience *low-arousal* negative affective states in response to low-threat immigration news, but *high-arousal* negative affective states in response to threatening news. Subsequently, the results showed that, to some extent, negative valence led to counterarguing and opposition against accepting refugees, but not to less intent to help them. Again, combining valence and arousal showed that it was mostly high-arousal negative affective states that led to counterarguing, negative attitudes toward a pro-immigration policy and less intent to help refugees. In contrast, low-arousal negative affective states had much smaller effects on counterarguing and policy attitudes, and even a reverse effect on the willingness to help outgroup members. These findings can contribute to media effects and motivated reasoning research in at least four ways.

Firstly, the results add a new dimension to the literature on the impact of news use in information-rich societies. Increasingly, communication scholars have shown that news consumers like and select news that is arousing (Lang et al., 2005; Trussler & Soroka, 2014). This arousal may be grounded in negativity (Soroka et al., 2019; Soroka & McAdams, 2015), digitalization (Kruikemeier et al., 2017), or sensationalism (Vettehen et al., 2008). Accordingly, the news seems to become more sensationalist (Vettehen et al., 2005) and negative (Patternson, 1994; Soroka, 2012). The increasingly competitive news environment thus seems to encourage journalists to produce arousing news. However, the results of this study show that arousing news does not just have the potential to increase the size of a medium's audience. News-induced arousal also exacerbates motivated reasoning. Therefore, the arousal that negative and sensationalist news cause in their readers, may contribute to political polarization and societal cleavages. While citizens prefer arousing political content in the news, this type of content might not be what is best for democracy. This poses society with a crucial conundrum. What is the value of citizens using news media to inform themselves, if it only drives them towards polarization? While market pressures may encourage news media to reach larger audiences, they might also push news media to polarize and divide the electorate.

Secondly, this study shows that the valence dimension of affect might not fully describe the role of affective states in motivated reasoning. Applying a circumplex model of affect to motivated reasoning (Russel, 1980), shows that physiological arousal functions in combination with negative affect in specific ways. Importantly, this study cautiously shows initial evidence that threatening news does not just lead to more negative affect, but to more *high-arousal* negative affective states. However, this study is only the first step in this direction, as not all robustness checks validate this finding and future research is needed to confirm this effect. This study also shows that high-arousal negative affective states lead to the strongest motivated reasoning effects. Since anger is considered a high-arousal negative emotion (Russel, 1980), this is in line with previous findings that show that anger is the main driver of motivated reasoning (Marcus et al., 2011). However, this theoretical advancement has some important implications for motivated reasoning theory.

Because motivated reasoning is based on the active scrutiny of threatening information (Lodge & Taber, 2013), it makes sense that low-arousal affective states lead to less counterarguing of political information than high-arousal negative affective states. People with equivalent discrete emotions – who are sad or depressed – are better described as inactive and should be expected to ignore or zone out of threatening information instead of actively engaging with them. Arousal was even more important in the effect on the willingness to help refugees, since low-arousal negative affective states led to *more* willingness to help the outgroup. Possibly, participants in low-arousal negative affective states wanted to help the refugees because they felt sad for them. Indeed, the willingness to help others has long been thought to be motivated by negative-state relief too, albeit low-arousal negative affective states (Cialdini et al., 1987). Without incorporating discrete emotions, though, this is merely speculation, and future research should investigate the interplay between affective states and discrete emotions in motivated reasoning.

Notably, low-arousal negative affective states still caused some polarizing effects by, for instance, leading to *some* counterarguing and *somewhat* more negative attitudes toward the immigration policy. This finding seems crucial in the current debate of whether motivated reasoning is (always) the mechanism through which threats lead to polarization. Instead, citizens might also merely take on the expected stance of their group (Han & Federico, 2018). Perhaps the arousal dimension can explain such differential cognitive mechanisms. After all, processes like self-stereotyping cost less energy than motivated reasoning. Studying the

differential cognitive mechanisms caused by low-arousal and high-arousal negative affective states in political information processing would thus be a fruitful future endeavor.

Thirdly, this paper validates the causal path that is assumed in previous research about emotions in motivated reasoning. Several studies have found that anger mediates motivated reasoning effects, based on correlational evidence between self-report measures (Redlawsk et al., 2010; Suhay & Erisen, 2018; Weeks, 2015). Such studies assume that there is a causal direction in which emotions are experienced before counterarguing, attitudes and behavior. However, the expression of emotions is subject to motivation too (Brader, 2006). The use of physiological measures in the current study shows that *preconscious* experiences of emotion affect the reasoning patterns that we observe in other research. These results thus validate the causal path of studies that use self-reported measures of emotion in motivated reasoning research.

Finally, this paper shows how we can combine physiological measures to study a circumplex model of affect in motivated reasoning research. Research incorporating physiological measures in political science has usually focused on only one dimension – most commonly arousal (e.g., Soroka et al., 2019; Soroka & McAdams 2015), or analyzed arousal and valence as two separate entities (e.g., Bakker et al., 2020). Yet, the two dimensions are inherently connected. As the results in this paper underline, both positive and negative affective states are very different in combination with low or high arousal. And, conversely, arousal has very different effects for citizens in positive or negative affective states. Modeling the two dimensions together as interaction effects allows researchers to take all four quadrants of the circumplex model of affect into account (Russel, 1980). This is important because, as my results show for motivated reasoning, adding the arousal dimension to affective states can illuminate differential effects. This study may thus inspire researchers to move beyond simplified unidimensional models and analyses of affective states when studying political information processing, leading to more nuanced results.

Yet the results in this study are not without caveats. Firstly, the results showed that threatening news leads to less negative affective states. Some might say that this finding contradicts research showing that *Corrugator Supercilii* activity is caused by negative information (e.g., Bakker et al., 2020; Cacioppo & Petty, 1979; Hietanen et al., 1998; Wexler et al., 1992). The results in this study, however, suggest two explanations that are likely combined. The first is that only considering the valence dimension of affect is simply not enough. A closer

examination of the data reveals that the low-threat condition elicited more *low-arousal* negative affective states, but less *high-arousal* negative affective states. The second explanation is that the predominantly left-wing sample in this study felt bad for the refugees in the low-threat condition, because they would not get Austrian citizenship. This is supported by the finding that the difference in negative valence is driven by that part of the stimulus material. Because arousal did not increase in the low-threat condition, a combination of these explanations arguably makes most sense. The mostly left-wing sample experienced low-arousal negative affect when the news item announced that the refugees would not get citizenship. While this shows that using sensitive physiological measures in studying complex societal issues can be challenging, it also shows that incorporating a more comprehensive model of affective states can help understand citizens' emotional reactions better. Future research could use a more diverse sample to incorporate a moderation by ideology.

A second challenge posed by this experiment is how to interpret these results with regard to previous findings of discrete emotions in motivated reasoning. After all, a downside of physiological measures is that it is not always evident which emotions people relate to them. The question therefore remains, as what emotion(s) are the affective states in this experiment interpreted by those experiencing them and how does this interpretation affect information processing. The theory of affective intelligence states that anger leads to motivated reasoning, while anxiety leads to information seeking behavior (Marcus et al., 2011). As those are both high-arousal negative affective states (Russel, 1980), the results of this experiment cannot distinguish between these emotions. Yet, anger and anxiety also often exist simultaneously, and can have similar effects on immigration attitudes as well (Brader et al., 2008). The goal of the current experiment, though, was not to differentiate discrete emotions but to address the physiological process preceding them. As mentioned before, it would be fruitful for future research to investigate the interplay between affect and discrete emotions in motivated reasoning.

Thirdly, the manipulation check in this experiment measured whether participants noticed the number of immigrants in the news item. However, it did not explicitly measure the experienced social identity threat. Therefore, it is assumed that larger groups of immigrants cause more social identity threat. According to previous literature, this is a safe assumption. Salient immigrant groups cause perceived group competition for resources which causes opposition to immigration (Esses et al., 2001), and the perceived threat of immigration is even stronger for

dissimilar immigrant groups than for similar immigrant groups (Brader et al., 2008). However, it remains unsure which social identity is threatened exactly. Immigration can threaten ethnic/racial identity (Wright et al., 2012), religious identity (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015) and national identity (Mangum & Block, 2018). Even though these identities often overlap, it is important to note that we cannot distinguish between them in the current study.

Finally, the finding that the high-threat condition led to more high-arousal negative affective states should be interpreted with caution. As there is considerable autocorrelation in the physiological measures, the error terms of the regression coefficients might be biased. Even though the direction should be valid, this is only initial evidence that threatening political information leads to high-arousal negative affective states. In order to further confirm this finding, future research should use more diverse samples and compare different kinds of threats (e.g. real and symbolic social identity threats).

In conclusion, the evidence presented in this paper indicates that news-induced arousal exacerbates motivated reasoning effects. This is in line with theories of "hot cognition" (Redlawsk, 2002) and motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990; Lodge & Taber, 2013), and could be uncovered by combining physiological measures of negative affect and arousal in a circumplex model of affect (Russell, 1980). Even though this study was only conducted in Austria, motivated reasoning has been shown in a multitude of countries and contexts. These findings therefore improve our understanding of the role of emotion in news processing, as well as our understanding of the consequences of sensationalist and negative news for democracy.

VIII. Don't Throw the Frame Out with the Bathwater: How Episodic News Frames Can Prevent Identity-Motivated Reasoning

Boyer, M.M., Lecheler, S., & Aaldering, L. (minor revisions at *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*). Don't Throw the Frame out with the Bathwater: How Episodic Frames Can Prevent Identity-Motivated Reasoning.

Abstract

Framing research has predominantly shown detrimental effects of episodic news frames, like individualist blame attributions and political cynicism. However, they may also discourage group biases and impede motivated reasoning regarding identity politics. In two experiments (N = 815 / 1019), we test the effect of episodic frames, through identity-motivated reasoning, on group-consonant attitudes. The results indicate mixed results. Episodic frames might decrease gender-motivated reasoning for citizens with weak gender identities when news coverage threatens their identity. In certain situations, episodic frames may thus be essential to understand outgroup members in the news. Implications for journalism and democracy are discussed.

Keywords: Framing, Motivated Reasoning, Issue polarization, Experimentation.

1. Introduction

Politics in Western democracies is increasingly focused on group identities. Large-scale identity politics campaigns, like the #BlackLivesMatter movement, garnered substantial attention in the news (Mourão et al., 2018) and right-wing populists regularly address national and ethnic identities in election campaigns (Mudde, 2007). News regarding citizens' group identities can lead to motivated reasoning, and issue polarization between groups (Mackie et al., 1992). This effect has been found for various social groups, like citizens' political party (Bolsen et al., 2014), race (Feldman & Huddy, 2018), or religion (Landrum et al., 2017) and hinders societal consensus about social issues.

The extent to which identity-laden news causes polarization, depends on its content and the news consumer (Levendusky, 2017, 2018), but also on its form. This means that the journalistic frame chosen to cover a political event likely matters. *News framing* describes recurring patterns with which journalists highlight certain aspects of an issue over others (Entman, 1993). Here, we focus on a prominent example of news framing: episodic and thematic framing. As a counterpart to thematic framing – news stories in their societal context and in terms of (statistical) evidence, episodic framing isolates single events or individuals, offering an engaging narrative (Iyengar, 1991). Episodic frames are often classified as 'soft news' by scholars (Reinemann et al., 2012) and journalists (Glogger & Otto, 2019). They have been shown to conceal the societal factors of black-on-white crime (Holt & Major, 2010), stigmatize mental health issues (Zhang et al., 2015), and induce political cynicism (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015). This suggests that episodic frames can "undermine the potential policy relevance of news stories" (Ostfeld & Mutz, 2014, p. 54).

However, isolating a certain individual could also limit the salience of group identities (e.g. Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997) and negative stereotypes (e.g. Iyengar et al., 2013), and can elicit empathetic feelings (e.g. Gross, 2008). Moreover, narratives impede counterarguing through psychological absorption (e.g. Slater & Rouner, 2002). Episodic frames might therefore reduce identity-motivated reasoning and serve an important function for democracy: avoiding intergroup polarization. Using two experiments in Austria, we investigate this unexplored advantage of episodic framing. This way, we offer a novel view on episodic frames in democracy, emphasizing their ability to prevent citizens to cognitively defend their social group.

2. Identity-Motivated Reasoning Divides Citizens

Scholars have long found that citizens are not easily persuaded, but often change their attitudes the way they *want* to change them, despite counterevidence (Kunda, 1990). The consequences of this phenomenon are far-reaching to society: if citizens systematically resist threatening information but are persuaded by congenial information, societal cleavages grow. This process is called motivated reasoning. Citizens tend to have a *confirmation* bias, "such that when free to choose what information they will expose themselves to people will seek out confirming over disconfirming arguments" (Taber & Lodge, 2006, p. 757). When citizens *are* exposed to news, they often have a *disconfirmation* bias, such that they are more critical of information that disconfirms their priors (Taber & Lodge, 2006), or is threatening to their group identity (e.g., Mackie et al., 1992). Facing identity-threatening news, citizens rate its arguments as weaker (Taber & Lodge, 2006), its credibility as lower (Feldman & Huddy, 2018), and spend more cognitive energy counterarguing it (Jain & Maheswaran, 2000), than identity-bolstering news. Consequently, citizens' attitudes become more congruent with their group interests, dividing them along group lines.

The evidence for this phenomenon is most thoroughly developed for partisan identification (e.g., Bolsen et al., 2014; Leeper & Slothuus, 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010). However, political issues do not only address partisan identities. Large-scale identity politics campaigns, like the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements, generate public debates that relate to racial and gender identities (De Benedictis et al., 2019; Mourão et al., 2018). Meanwhile, increasingly popular right-wing populist parties and candidates (Rooduijn et al., 2019) address national or ethnic identities to garner electoral support (Mudde, 2007). Likewise, citizens are not just voters. They construct their identity from many different perceived group memberships, like their profession, favorite football club, or gender (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Accordingly, news containing different group cues can increase group identification with citizens' age, ethnicity, social class, or ideology (Boyer & Lecheler, 2018).

Even though motivated reasoning is not the only mechanism toward group polarization (Han & Federico, 2018), many group identities have been found to motivate citizens' reasoning. Scholars have found identity-motivated biases in the assimilation of attitudes towards welfare reform (Cohen, 2003), climate change (Kahan et al., 2012; Landrum et al., 2017), gun risks and abortion (Kahan et al., 2007), and standards for competence (Shoda et al., 2014). The group

identities that motivate reasoning in these studies contain race, gender, religion and cultural groups. Similar to partisan identification, such studies generally find that citizens treat news that is unfavorable to their group with more scrutiny than news that *is*. Consequently, citizens' attitudes change in the direction that is more favorable to their group: their attitudes become more *group-consonant*. This inevitably leads to issue polarization between groups that are opposed against each other in the news, like left-wing and right-wing citizens, natives and people with an immigration background, or men and women.

3. Can Episodic News Frames Prevent Identity-Motivated Reasoning?

Are public debates about social issues doomed to drive us apart, then? Not necessarily. Previous research shows that content (emphasizing a superordinate identity; Levendusky, 2017) and psychological states (partisan ambivalence; Levendusky, 2018) may reduce polarization for certain citizens. While these are important insights, it is imperative to investigate polarization within its societal context. Citizens primarily consume political messages through the news, which is to some extent constructed by journalists (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2019). News frames, or the recurring patterns that journalists actively use to highlight certain aspects of an issue over others (Entman, 1993), can therefore play an important role in the way citizens interpret political issues.

One popular type of generic news frame seems promising in inhibiting identity-motivated reasoning: the episodic frame. Iyengar (1991) distinguishes thematic frames, which offer societal context and provide statistical evidence, from episodic frames, which isolate a narrative about a single individual or event. In cases where episodic frames isolate an individual, they differ from thematic frames in two ways: they offer an isolated narrative rather than broad contextual evidence and they focus on an individual, rather than statistics or averages concerning groups of people. These are two different aspects, as narratives can also feature groups and evidence can concern an individual. Although the arguments used in episodic and thematic frames can be the same, individualization and narrative change the meaning of the arguments. Episodic frames, as compared to thematic frames, are thus a type of generic emphasis frame (De Vreese, 2002). They are often combined within the same news message (Wouters, 2015).

Communication scholars often argue that episodic news frames "undermine the potential policy relevance of news stories" (Ostfeld & Mutz, 2014, p. 54). Both scholars (Reinemann et al., 2012) and journalists (Glogger & Otto, 2019) consider episodic frames as a part of 'soft news'. Moreover, they have certain detrimental effects. For instance, episodic frames in crime reporting could contribute to violent stereotypes of African Americans (Holt & Major, 2010) and those in the coverage of mental health to its stigmatization (Zhang et al., 2015). Moreover, individualized news frames decrease support for welfare policies (Price et al., 1997) and episodic frames specifically decrease support for retirement planning policies (Springer & Harwood, 2015), and even cause political cynicism (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015).

In the context of identity politics, however, episodic frames may have a unique ability to inhibit identity-motivated reasoning, because they might impede both the motivation for ingroup bias and the ability to counterargue identity-threatening messages. They may do so because of two characteristics: individualization and narrative.

By definition, episodic frames put more emphasis on individuals, instead of groups, than thematic frames (Iyengar, 1991). Following Self-Categorization Theory (Turner et al., 1987), we argue that this individualization should lead to less 'salience' of these groups in citizens' minds (Turner et al., 1994). Indeed, individualized news frames seem to promote individualized thoughts (Price et al., 1997). On the one hand, ignoring relevant groups might sustain existing stereotypes. For instance, the overrepresentation of working-age black men in episodic coverage of poverty reinforces negative stereotypes about black men (Gilens, 1996). However, reduced group salience might *also* reduce perceived intergroup differences and ingroup favoritism (Turner et al., 1994). Episodic frames could thus lead to less identity-motivated reasoning in the processing of news about identity politics.

Relatedly, citizens tend to be more positive about a person of a group than the group itself. This *person-positivity bias* has been found for college professors (Sears, 1983) and several immigrant groups (Iyengar et al., 2013). One explanation is that the most accessible attributes of groups that are stored in the mind are often negative. In contrast, encounters with individuals are mostly positive, leading to positive evaluations until proven otherwise. In addition, exposure to individuated information leads to less reliance on stereotypes and more on individual attributes (Iyengar et al., 2013). Therefore, the individualized character of episodic frames could lead to more positive views of an outgroup (member), and in this manner reduce identity-motivated reasoning.

Thirdly, episodic frames are found to elicit empathetic emotions towards the subject of the narrative. Gross (2008) finds that episodic frames can be effective in persuading news consumers because they elicit feelings of pity and sympathy for the victims in the news story. As the victim in an episodic frame might be a member of the outgroup, we expect that episodic frames lead to more empathic feelings toward members of the outgroup than thematic frames. This should, in turn, also lead to less resistance against the message, as there is more understanding for outgroup members, and therefore less motivation for outgroup derogation.

Lastly, we expect episodic frames to inhibit the *ability* to counterargue news messages. Episodic frames feature a narrative: a story about a character with a chronological order. Narratives lead to psychological absorption, which impairs counterarguing against the arguments in it (e.g., Green & Brock, 2000; Niederdeppe, Shapiro, & Porticella, 2011; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Springer & Harwood, 2015). While evidence invites scrutiny, narratives invite "suspended disbelief" in which a story feels as true until it is over (Slater & Rouner, 2002). This impairs counterarguing and leads to persuasion. Applying this to intergroup relations, Wojcieszak and Kim (2016) find that empathetic narratives (as opposed to objective narratives and evidence) can shift attitudes about disliked groups, even after counter-attitudinal exposure. This is in line with research showing that episodic frames are more persuasive than thematic frames when news consumers experience strong emotions (Aarøe, 2011). Episodic frames should thus impair identity-motivated reasoning.

In sum, two important characteristics of episodic frames, individualization and narrative, may decrease both the motivation and the ability to scrutinize news with a bias toward citizens' in-group. Identity-motivated reasoning should thus be less prominent in response to episodic frames than thematic frames, leading to less group-consonant attitudes as a consequence. As depicted in Figure 1, this leads to our main hypothesis.

> **H1:** News about identity politics leads to less identity-motivated reasoning, and as a consequence to less group-consonant attitudes, in an episodic frame than in a thematic frame.

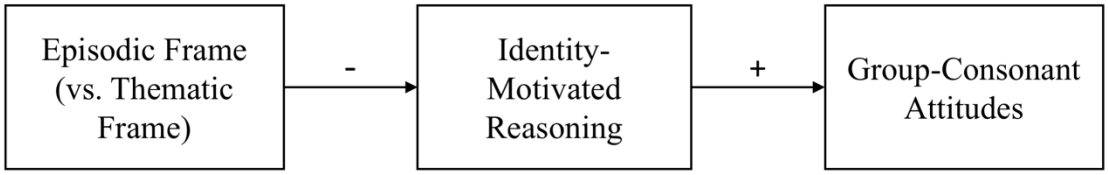


Figure 1. Hypothetical effect model.

4. Study 1

4.1. Design and Stimulus Material

In an online 2 (frame) x 2 (article valence) between-subjects experiment, we randomly exposed a sample of 815 Austrian participants to a news article about a new gender quota in Austria[18]. The bill was introduced in January 2018 and forms a real-world context to test our hypothesis. Gender identification is an appropriate case to show this effect, since gender, as a social construct, socializes citizens into specific roles and expectations from birth onwards, and is one of the most influential group identities in our lives (Burns & Kinder, 2012). The data were collected by panel agency MarketAgent, on behalf of the Austrian Platform for Surveys, Methods and Empirical Analyses in October 2018.

The stimulus material consists of two opposing opinionated news articles about the gender quota[19]. Following Feldman & Huddy (2018), we regard acknowledgement and denunciation of ingroup discrimination as identity-bolstering and acknowledgement of the ingroup's societal advantage as identity-threatening. Therefore, the article that supports the quota is regarded as identity-bolstering to women and identity-threatening to men, and the article that opposes it *vice versa*. For comparability, the articles are composed by the researchers. However, to ensure external validity, the arguments are based on published articles in legacy media. The articles

[18] The experiment consisted of a 2 (valence) x 2 (frame) + control design. Elsewhere, we discuss the effects of the valence of the article on men and women with different political identities (Boyer et al., 2020). The original sample consisted of 1021 participants, but for the analyses that are relevant for the current paper, we excluded the control group. This led to the final sample of 815 participants.

[19] See Appendix A and B in the online supplementary material for English translations and visual examples, respectively, of the stimulus material.

are comparable in length (400 ± 40 words) and lay-out and are pretested for credibility and argument strength.

There is a thematic and an episodic version of both articles. The thematic articles discuss the gender quota in terms of "its intended and unintended consequences for society". The arguments are made in terms of men and women in general, and their consequences for Austria's corporations. In addition, the thematic frame is supported by a statistical graph of the increasing number of women in supervisory boards. In contrast, the episodic frame introduces an exemplar man and woman who experience the consequences of the quota. The arguments are identical to the thematic frame, but are isolated from their context as they describe a specific case. As news is rarely purely episodic, the lead and final paragraph of the article reference the consequences of the gender quota for Austria. The episodic frame is supported by a picture of a businessman and businesswoman.

In a manipulation check, participants identified the pro-quota article as more positive to women, t (813) = 9.99, $p < .001$, and less positive to men, t (813) = -5.24, $p < .001$, than the contra-quota article. Moreover, they recognized that the thematic frame considered men and women in general more than the episodic frame, t (813) = 4.63, $p < .001$, and that the episodic frame considered one man and one woman more than the thematic frame, t (813) = -9.34, $p < .001$.

4.2. Measures

Identity-motivated reasoning

Identity-motivated reasoning is defined as reasoning against identity-threatening information, or along with identity-bolstering information. It is therefore dependent on participants' gender and the article they were exposed to, and is measured after exposure to the treatment. Motivated reasoning entails at least three dimensions (Taber & Lodge, 2006), and is therefore operationalized by three indicators: one directly indicating derogation of the arguments, one directly indicating derogation of the source, and one open-ended exercise in which participants were free to list any thoughts.

Following Taber and Lodge (2006), argument derogation is measured using a single item, in which respondents rated the strength of argumentation of the article on a scale from 1 (very weak) through 9 (very strong). The scale is recoded, such that a higher score means less perceived argument strength (*more* argument derogation) in an identity-threatening article, but more argument strength (*less* argument derogation) in an identity-bolstering article. In other words, a high score means more identity-motivated reasoning (M = 5.13, SD = 1.88). To measure source derogation, perceived article credibility is measured using eight items on a nine-point scale in which participants rated the article to be understandable, biased, telling the whole story, believable, correct, trustworthy, fair, and timely. Again, the scale is recoded for participants who were exposed to an identity-threatening article, such that higher scores mean more identity-motivated reasoning (M = 5.11, SD = 1.39, Cronbach's alpha = .89).

Lastly, again following Taber and Lodge (2006), respondents received a score for their answers in a thought-listing exercise. Directly after the treatment, respondents listed up to ten thoughts that they had while reading the article. An average of 2.35 thoughts (SD = 2.00) per participant, amounts to a total of 1915 thoughts. These were coded by two coders to argue along with or against (a part of) the article, or be neutral/unrelated (Krippendorff's Alpha = .62)[20]. The score on the thought-listing exercise subtracts the number of affirming thoughts from the number of counterargument thoughts, forming a scale from -10 through +10 in which a higher score means more counterarguing. The score is reversed for those who were exposed to an identity-bolstering article, such that higher scores indicate more identity-motivated reasoning (M = .21, SD = 1.93).

The three indicators for motivated reasoning represent three different cognitive strategies that citizens employ in the motivated reasoning process. When directionally motivated, they may use one or several of these strategies to scrutinize identity-threatening news. Even though the different strategies together form a process that we call 'motivated reasoning', they are not the same and should not be expected to correlate very strongly per se (indeed, Cronbach's alpha = .52). They are three different strategies. However, the mean score of the three indicators does measure the extent to which participants scrutinized the article at hand and is therefore a proper representation of how participants reason. What is more, by capturing multiple reasoning strategies, instead of one, we argue that the combined measure forms a more complete measure of motivated reasoning than each separately (i.e., better captures the concept of motivated

[20] The codebook can be found in Appendix C in the online supplementary material.

reasoning). Therefore, the three indicators are standardized and the average score of the three indicators is used as one latent measure of identity-motivated reasoning.

Group-consonant attitudes

Group-consonant attitudes are also measured post-treatment. Participants rated the gender quota policy on seven items, using a nine-point Likert scale[21]. In order to create a measure of *group-consonant attitudes*, attitudes were recoded such that more group-consonant attitudes are more positive about the quota for women, and more negative about the quota for men (M = 4.85, SD = 1.48, Cronbach's alpha = .78).

4.3. Results

The main hypothesis – episodically framed news leads to less identity-motivated reasoning, which leads to less group-consonant attitudes – is tested using model 4 of Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro in SPSS 26, with 10,000 bootstrapped samples. When reporting the indirect effects and model indices of this mediation model, we use bootstrapped standard errors and 95% confidence intervals[22].

For Study 1, we control for the valence of the article, as it is not relevant for the hypothesis, but was an experimental factor in the design (see Table 1). As hypothesized, the mediator equation shows that the episodic frame elicited significantly less identity-motivated reasoning than the thematic frame, b = -.10, SE = .05, p = .038 (Table 1, Study 1). The dependent variable equation indicates a strong correlation between identity-motivated reasoning and group-consonant attitudes, b = .76, SE = .07, p < .001. There is no direct effect of framing on group-

[21] See Appendix D in the online supplementary material for the full items of the group-consonant attitude scales.

[22] Because we are interested in the way that episodic framing impacts the *mechanism* of identity-motivated reasoning, rather than the overall polarizing result, we do not hypothesize a direct effect of episodic frames on group-consonant attitudes. Indeed, episodic framing might have other effects through other mechanisms. Therefore, we do not include analyses testing the main effect (Hayes, 2009), but for full transparency we have added them to Appendix E in the online supplementary material. We find no significant main effect of episodic framing on group-consonant attitudes.

consonant attitudes, $b = .06$, $SE = .09$, $p = .511$. Most importantly, there is a significant negative indirect effect of episodic framing, through identity-motivated reasoning, on group-consonant attitudes, $b = -.08$, $SE = .04$, CI [-.16, -.01]. As depicted in Figure 2, Study 1 supports the hypothesis that episodic framing leads to less identity-motivated reasoning, and therefore to less group-consonant attitudes than thematic framing.

Table 1. Mediation models, using 10.000 bootstrapped samples.

	Study 1		**Study 2**	
Mediator equation. DV: identity-motivated reasoning				
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Frame (episodic)	-.10*	(.05)	.01	(.30)
Valence (pro-male)	-.07	(.05)		
Constant	.26*	(.11)	.97**	(.21)
Dependent variable equation. DV: group-consonant attitudes				
Frame (episodic)	.06	(.09)	-.15	(.10)
Identity-motivated reasoning	.76**	(.07)	.20**	(.01)
Valence (pro-male)	.02	(.09)		
Constant	5.25**	(.20)	5.48**	(.07)
Indirect effect, DV: group-consonant attitudes				
	b	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*
Episodic frame, through identity-motivaed reasoning	-.08*	(.04)	.00	(.06)

** p<.01, * p<.05

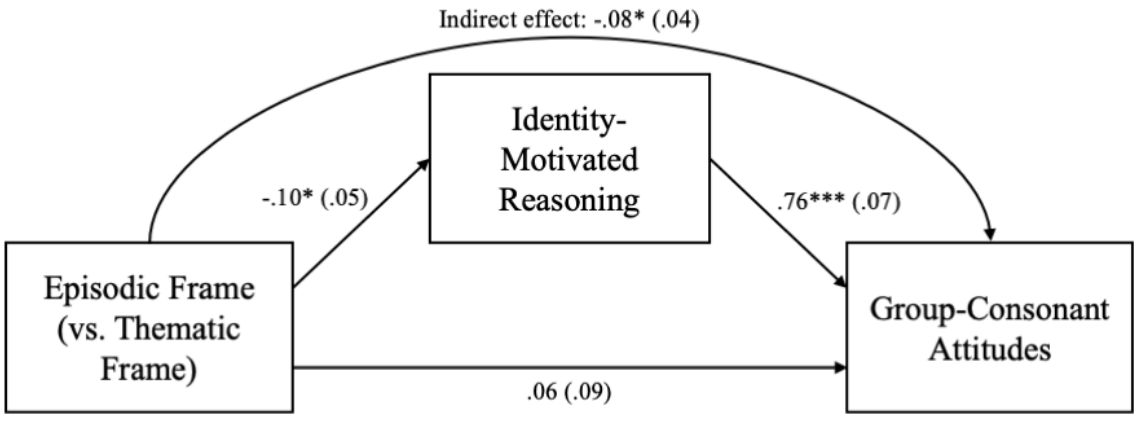


Figure 2. Results of Study 1, unstandardized effects with (bootstrapped) standard errors in brackets, *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05.

Robustness analyses

As described in more detail in Appendix F in the online supplementary material, we have also tested the hypothesis for the three standardized indicators of motivated reasoning separately. There is a significant indirect effect of episodic framing on group-consonant attitudes, through argument derogation, b = -.04, SE = .02, *CI* [-.10, -.01], and through source derogation, b = -.03, SE = .02, *CI* [-.07, .00]. The indirect effect through counterarguing is in the same direction, but not significant, b = -.01, SE = .02, [-.05, .03]. The findings thus seem relatively robust to this alternative operationalization.

5. Study 2

5.1. Design and stimulus material

A second, preregistered online experiment included a multiple-message design, in which we exposed each of 1019 Austrian participants to four news articles about gender discrimination in the workplace[23]. The data were collected by panel agency Dynata in September 2020. Each respondent read two articles that were identity-bolstering to men and identity-threatening to women, and two articles *vice versa*, in random order. Each of these four articles had a thematic frame and an episodic frame version, and the frame of the article was the only between-subject manipulation in this two-condition experiment. In the thematic frame condition, all four articles included the context of Austrian corporate culture or law, described trends in society, and used statistics to support their claims. The articles included a graph, depicting statistics about the issue. In the episodic frame condition, the articles isolated a single case that exemplified the issue, showed anecdotal evidence described by an exemplar, whose personal narrative was the focus of the article. They were accompanied by a picture of the protagonist. Like in Study 1, the frame differed between the conditions, but the arguments did not.

The four articles per condition differed in their specific topic, as well as whether they were identity-bolstering to women or men. Article 1 discussed how women in leadership positions are demoted after returning from maternity leave, and Article 2 described how criteria for promotions are often based on stereotypical male traits and can therefore be biased against

[23] The preregistration can be found under: www.doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/T7Z34.

women. Article 3 discussed how the abundance of programs to support women in science pushes men out of the field, and Article 4 discussed how the gender quota for supervisory boards is discriminating to men. Articles 1 and 2 are considered identity-bolstering to women and identity-threatening to men, and Articles 3 and 4 *vice versa*. The articles are equally long (280 ± 60 words; max. 25 words difference between episodic and thematic frame) and have the same lay-out.

In the manipulation check, participants recognized that the thematic framed articles discussed structures in Austrian society, t (1017) = 2.06, p = .020, used statistics, t (1017) = 12.54, p < .001, and embedded the news in a broad societal context, t (1017) = 2.74, p = .003, more than the episodic frames. Conversely, they recognized that the episodic frames described the experiences of a specific man or woman, t (1017) = 9.59, p < .001, and isolated a specific case, t (1017) = 7.93, p < .001, more than the thematic frame. However, they did not perceive a difference in the use of a narrative between the two frames, t (1017) = .08, p = .470.

5.2. Measures

Identity-motivated reasoning

Identity-motivated reasoning is again defined as reasoning against identity-threatening information, or along with identity-bolstering information. Here, participants rated the credibility of the information in the four articles directly after reading each, on a scale from 1 (not at all credible) through 9 (very credible). Note that, similar to Feldman and Huddy (2018), participants rate the credibility of the *information in the article*, in contrast to the composite scale for *source credibility* in Study1. Following Feldman and Huddy (2018), we subtract the credibility ratings of the identity-threatening articles from those of the identity-bolstering articles, which leads to a scale where higher scores mean more identity-motivated reasoning (M = .98, SD = 4.85).

Group-consonant attitudes

After reading all the articles and rating their credibility, participants rated five statements about gender equality in the workplace in Austria. Again, this scale was recoded to create a measure

of *group-consonant attitudes*, such that group-consonant attitudes for women are that gender equality in the workplace can improve, and for men *vice versa* (M = 5.60, SD = 1.88, Cronbach's alpha = .87).

5.3. Results

Conform the preregistration, we analyze the data of Study 2 similar to Study 1 (see Table 1, Study 2). However, we do not control for the valence of the article, as it is not an experimental factor in the design (see Table 1). The mediator equation indicates no difference in identity-motivated reasoning between the thematic and episodic frames, b = .01, SE = .30, p = .964. The dependent variable equation shows that there is a significant correlation between identity-motivated reasoning and group-consonant attitudes, b = .20, SE = .01, p < .001, and no direct effect of episodic framing on group-consonant attitudes, b = -.15, SE = .10, p = .147. There is no indirect effect of episodic framing, through identity-motivated reasoning on group-consonant attitudes, b = .00, SE = .10, CI [-.11, .12]. While we found the hypothesized inhibiting effect of episodic framing on identity-motivated reasoning and group-consonant attitudes in Study 1, there were no differences between the episodic and thematic frame in Study 2.

6. Exploratory Analyses

The results of the two experiments show that episodic framing *can* lead to reduced identity-motivated reasoning, but this is all but a universal effect. Therefore, we performed a series of exploratory analyses to help make sense of these contradictory findings. Because research shows that framing effects are dependent on individual differences and contextual factors (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), we include both in these analyses. Indeed, identity-motivated reasoning likely depends on the status of one's group – i.e. the relative societal position of a social group compared to another (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and the strength of the relevant group identity – i.e. the importance of each group identity to the self (Turner et al., 1987). Group identity strength does not delineate whether or not someone identifies as part of this group, but rather how important this group is to their self-image. Low-status group identities are more easily activated by media primes than high-status groups (Boyer & Lecheler, 2018),

and many political processes are dependent on group identity strength (Huddy, 2001). Therefore, both group status and group identity strength should be crucial factors in identity-motivated reasoning, and likely to influence the inhibiting effect of episodic framing.

Finally, extant research has shown that media effects are dependent on the political context in which they are consumed (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). For instance, framing effects strongly depend on the political information environment surrounding the issue at hand (Lecheler et al., 2009). Even the specific effects of episodic framing have been shown to be context-dependent, and vary between issues (Ciuk & Rottman, 2020). All in all, much is still unknown about how identity-based individual differences and contextual variables interact to inhibit or exacerbate framing effects on ingroup biases. Therefore, in these exploratory analyses, we investigate to what extent the inhibiting effect of episodic frames on identity-motivated reasoning depends on citizens' group status, strength of identification, and the topic of the news. In order to do so, we explore the hypothesized effect for each article that participants were exposed to in both experiments, moderated by both gender and gender identity strength.

6.1. Additional Measures

Gender and gender identity strength were measured as part of the pre-treatment question battery in both studies. Firstly, participants were asked with which gender group they identified the most (S1: 50.7% female; S2: 46.9% female). The measure for gender identity strength consisted of the four items of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Importance to Identity subscale on a nine-point Likert scale (S1: $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.46$, Cronbach's alpha = .62; S2: $M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.58$, Cronbach's alpha = .61)[24]. Using items like "Being a man/woman is an important reflection of who I am", this is a common measure for identity strength.

For Study 1, identity-motivated reasoning was measured identical to the formal hypothesis test. For Study 2, we separate the credibility scores for each article, rather than forming a composite scale of all four. In these measures, the original credibility score is used for identity-bolstering articles but the reversed score is used for identity-threatening articles. This leads to a scale for

[24] The preregistered scale included three additional, commonly used items for identification, but due to suboptimal internal consistency we decided to use the Importance to Identity subscale, which is validated by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992), as well as in German by Bohner and Sturm (1997). Please find the preregistered measurement and analyses in Appendix G in the online supplementary material.

each of the four articles, where higher scores mean more identity-motivated reasoning (M_1 = 5.21, SD_1 = 2.13; M_2 = 5.29, SD_2 = 2.05; M_3 = 5.26, SD_3 = 2.17; M_4 = 5.22, SD_4 = 2.17).

6.2. Results

In these exploratory analyses, we again depend on Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro with 10,000 bootstrapped samples, to perform mediation analyses with two moderators (model 11). The full moderated mediation models are described in Table 2. However, we will limit our discussion to the hypothesized indirect effect of episodic framing, through identity-motivated reasoning, on group-consonant attitudes, for the different subgroups and news articles.

Because Study 1 included the female-bolstering and male-bolstering articles as a between-subjects factor, we analyze the two articles separately. Therefore, we drop the valence of the article as a control variable. In the female-bolstering condition, we find a marginally significant negative indirect effect for men with a weak gender identity, b = -.22, SE = .13, CI [-.49, .03] (Table 2, Study 1). In contrast, in the male-bolstering condition the hypothesized effect is visible for women with weak gender identities, b = -.19, SE = .09, CI [-.42, -.04], as well as for women with moderate gender identities, b = -.12, SE = .06, CI [-.25, -.02]. It seems as though the effect in Study 1, where episodic framing inhibited identity-motivated reasoning, is mainly driven by citizens with relatively weak gender identities, who are exposed to identity-threatening news. For this subgroup, the episodic frame led to less identity-motivated reasoning and therefore to less group-consonant attitudes.

Because all participants were exposed to all four articles in Study 2, we run the moderated mediation analysis for the four articles parallel (see Table 2, Study 2). Looking at the indirect effects of episodic framing, through identity-motivated reasoning on group-consonant attitudes for the female-bolstering articles, there are very few effects. We only find a marginally significant positive indirect effect for the leadership article, for men with moderate gender identities, b = .07, SE = .04, CI [-.01, .15].

Table 2. Exploratory moderated mediation models, using 10.000 bootstrapped samples.

	Study 1				Study 2								
	Female-bolstering		Male-bolstering			Female-bolstering				Male-bolstering			
						Leadership		Assessment		Science		Quota	
Mediator equations. DV: identity-motivated reasoning													
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Frame (episodic)	-.39+	(.23)	.30	(.29)	Frame (episodic)	.64	(.56)	-.15	(.57)	.73	(.61)	.69	(.61)
Gender (female)	-.42	(.56)	.92	(.69)	Gender (female)	1.98**	(.59)	.85	(.60)	3.22**	(.63)	2.19**	(.64)
Gender identification	-.06	(.08)	.15	.11	Gender identification	.12	(.08)	.00	(.09)	.32**	(.09)	.33**	(.09)
Frame * gender	.69+	(.35)	-.97*	(.42)	Frame * gender	-.33	(.83)	.19	(.85)	-2.30*	(.90)	-2.13*	(.90)
Frame * gender identification	.07	(.05)	-.09	(.07)	Frame * gender identification	-.07	(.11)	.02	(.11)	-.11	(.12)	-.13	(.12)
Gender * gender identification	.22+	(.13)	-.33*	(.15)	Gender * gender identification	-.04	(.11)	.00	(.12)	-.45**	(.12)	-.35**	(.12)
Frame * gender * gender identification	-.15+	(.08)	.19*	(.09)	Frame * gender * gender identification	.03	(.16)	.02	(.16)	.33+	(.17)	.43*	(.17)
Constant	.16	(.36)	-.19	(.47)	Constant	3.69**	(.44)	4.82**	(.44)	3.25**	(.47)	3.32**	(.47)
Dependent variable equation. DV: group-consonant attitudes													
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*						
Frame (episodic)	.07	(.12)	.05	(.14)	Frame (episodic)	-.15	(.10)						
Identity-motivated reasoning	1.05**	(.09)	.52**	(.09)	Identity-motivated reasoning (leadership)	.23**	(.03)						
					Identity-motivated reasoning (assessment)	.16**	(.03)						
					Identity-motivated reasoning (science)	.20**	(.03)						
					Identity-motivated reasoning (quota)	.19**	(.03)						
Constant	5.26**	(.20)	5.31**	(.22)	Constant	1.60**	(.23)						
Conditional indirect effects of episodic frame, through identity-motivated reasoning on group-consonant attitudes													
Gender	*Gender identification*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*Gender*	*Gender identification*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*
Men	Weak	-.22+	(.13)	.03	(.07)	Men	Weak	.09	(.06)	-.01	(.04)	.07	(.06)	.05	(.06)
	Mean	-.10	(.09)	-.04	(.05)		Mean	.07+	(.04)	-.01	(.03)	.03	(.04)	.01	(.04)
	Strong	.01	(.13)	-.10	(.08)		Strong	.05	(.07)	.00	(.04)	.00	(.05)	-.03	(.05)
Women	Weak	.10	(.16)	-.19**	(.09)	Women	Weak	.04	(.06)	.03	(.04)	-.16**	(.07)	-.08	(.06)
	Mean	-.03	(.08)	-.12*	(.06)		Mean	.03	(.04)	.03	(.03)	-.09*	(.04)	.01	(.04)
	Strong	-.16	(.11)	-.04	(.07)		Strong	.01	(.06)	.04	(.04)	-.02	(.05)	.11+	(.06)
Indices of moderated mediation															
	Index	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*		*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*		
Men	.08	(.06)	-.05	(.04)	Men	-.02	(.03)	.00	(.02)	-.02	(.02)	-.02	(.02)		
Women	-.09	(.07)	.05	(.04)	Women	-.01	(.03)	.01	(.02)	.04+	(.03)	.06*	(.03)		
Index of moderated moderated mediation															
	Index	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*		*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*		
	-.16+	(.09)	.10*	(.06)		.01	(.04)	.00	(.03)	.07+	(.04)	.08*	(.04)		

** p<.01, * p<.05, + p< .10

Looking at the two male-bolstering articles, though, there are more significant effects. For the science article, there are no indirect effects for men at all. However, there are significant negative indirect effects for women with weak gender identities, *b* = -.16, *SE* = .07, *CI* [-.30, -.06], and for women with moderate gender identities, *b* = -.09, *SE* = .04, *CI* [-.18, -.02]. There is no indirect effect for women with strong gender identities, *b* = -.02, *SE* = .05, *CI* [-.15, .09]. For the gender quota article, there are again no indirect effects for men. Surprisingly, we find a marginally significant positive indirect effect for women with strong gender identities, *b* = .11, *SE* = .06, *CI* [.00, .23]. While there was no overall indirect effect of episodic frames on identity-motivated reasoning and group-consonant attitudes in Study 2, this hypothesized effect was again visible for women with weak gender identities in response to an identity-threatening news article. However, in response to another identity-threatening news article women with strong gender identities showed *more* identity-motivated reasoning and group-consonant attitudes.

In sum, we find that the inhibiting effect of episodic frames on identity-motivated reasoning seems to depend on citizens' strength of identification, and the news article they are exposed to. Firstly, we only find significant inhibiting effects of episodic frames for citizens with weak gender identities. Secondly, these effects only exist when they are exposed to news that threatens their gender identity. Finally, it seems as though citizens with a strong gender identity might sometimes also engage in *more* identity-motivated reasoning in response to episodic frames.

7. Discussion

This paper uses two online experiments about gender issues to explore how citizens process news about identity politics. Specifically, the aim is to explore the role of episodic framing in the extent to which news consumers cognitively defend their social group. The two experiments show mixed findings. In the first experiment, using a nationally representative sample and an elaborate measure for identity-motivated reasoning, we show that episodic frames can indeed reduce identity-motivated reasoning and, therefore, group-consonant attitudes. In other words, gender-based cognitive biases and polarization between men and women were reduced when news was presented in an episodic frame, instead of a thematic frame. However, in a second experiment, with a multiple-message design, we do not replicate this finding.

How can we explain the different findings in these two experiments? The most obvious explanation lies in the studies' different research designs. Study 1 used a single exposure design, which is relatively vulnerable to specific effects of the selected issue or arguments. However, the same issue was included in Study 2 and led to different results. Therefore, if the topic is most likely not the issue, perhaps the measures are. Study 1 used an elaborate measure of identity-motivated reasoning, taking into account various reasoning strategies to undermine identity-threatening news. In contrast, Study 2 used single-item measures for each article and may therefore have missed the reasoning strategy that most participants employed.

However, the differential findings might also be very real. The societal contexts in which the two experiments were conducted are very dissimilar. In contrast to Study 1, Study 2 was conducted amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. This actuality might have suppressed the importance that citizens adhere to other issues, such as identity politics, and the identity-motivated biases that accompany them. Even without the pandemic, different political contexts might affect the potential of episodic frames to inhibit identity-motivated reasoning. We have to conclude that this potential effect of episodic frames is all but universal.

This conclusion is supported by exploratory analyses, in which we take into account individual differences in identification, as well as contextual differences between the articles from both experiments. It seems like a possible inhibiting effect of episodic framing on identity-motivated reasoning would at least be limited to citizens with weak relevant identities, who are exposed to identity-threatening news. What is more, episodic frames might even exacerbate identity-motivated reasoning for those with strong identities. This is in line with research that shows how interventions to decrease partisan polarization are only effective for moderate partisans (M. S. Levendusky, 2018). However, more research is needed to confirm and validate these exploratory findings. Moreover, future work is needed to illuminate whether these findings are specific for gender groups, or whether they can be generalized to other social groups and other contexts of identity politics.

Until this has been solved, our findings have important consequences for the merit of episodic frames for democracy. Episodic frames have most often been linked to negative effects (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015; Holt & Major, 2010; Ostfeld & Mutz, 2014; Springer & Harwood, 2015; Zhang et al., 2015). In our view, however, episodic frames might still have an important potential for democracy. Whether because of a focus on individuals (Iyengar, 1991), empathetic feelings (Gross, 2008), a person-positivity bias (Iyengar et al., 2013), or

psychological absorption (Slater & Rouner, 2002), episodic frames can prevent certain citizens from cognitively protecting their group interests. As such, episodic frames do not serve to teach citizens about political issues. Instead, they serve the important function to help citizens understand the experiences of individuals of another social group. Even if our findings only exist for certain subgroups of the population, it is important that we expand our understanding of the democratic functions that news frames may have.

Additionally, our findings show that studying news frames in a framework of journalistic routines, norms and agency is important to understand media effects in a societal context. This is not the first study that finds that narratives impede counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000), or impact attitudes toward outgroups (Wojcieszak & Kim, 2016), and it is not the first that shows how individualization affects group biases (Iyengar et al., 2013). But journalists don't use narrative or individualization as such. Instead, they combine them in routinized ways of storytelling, i.e. news framing (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Such *emphasis frames* can combine characteristics to have a certain effect: episodic frames combine individualization and narrative to obstruct identity-motivated reasoning. While there have been increasing calls to narrow the framing concept to *equivalency frames* (Cacciatore et al., 2016), it seems crucial to investigate news frames in the manner that journalists create them. While we acknowledge the incoherence of *issue-specific* frames, we are of the opinion that *generic* news frames – frames that journalists use across a wide range of issues – require the sustained attention of communication scholars, if we are to understand the role that journalists play in democracy (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2019). Because such frames are used repeatedly in multiple contexts, they are less vulnerable to the arbitrary use of the term *framing*, and all the more important to investigate.

Relatedly, this study shows that the communication field needs a stronger integration of two levels of analysis: It is no longer enough to show that journalistic products do (or most often do not) cause effects (Valkenburg and Peter, 2013). Instead, it is imperative to integrate psychological theories that can explain *why* certain media products have effects, for which products and people they do, and in which contexts the effects are strongest. Conversely, isolating psychological mechanisms without considering the journalistic products that cause them, leads to findings that do not translate to reality and offer less value beyond the field of psychology. Instead, integrating journalists' perspective and decision-making with the

psychological mechanisms that media can trigger, leads to knowledge that is essential to the field of communication.

Of course, this study comes with certain limitations. Firstly, even though this paper includes 2 experiments and 6 news articles, they still investigate only one group identity: gender. Like most experimental research, more research is necessary to be able to generalize the results to other social groups, like groups based on race, sexuality or disabilities. Secondly, like other studies in the motivated reasoning field, our experiment only manipulated the first step in the mediation model. Therefore, although we have found a correlation between identity-motivated reasoning and group-consonant attitudes, we cannot undeniably state that there is also a causal mechanism[25]. In other words, while we theoretically expect motivated reasoning to influence the formation of attitudes, the causality could be reversed. Future experimental research might manipulate the possibility to counterargue information by limiting participants' time or manipulate the circumstances of news consumption in order to determine this causal link.

Finally, some of the measures in this study show low reliability. Most importantly, the coding of the open-ended thought-listing exercise did not reach the rule-of-thumb benchmark of intercoder reliability. However, the reliability was only marginally below this benchmark and the conclusions that we infer are not dependent on the inclusion of this measure. Moreover, we argue that the measure of identity-motivated reasoning benefits from including multiple reasoning strategies. Therefore, in our opinion, the benefit of including this indicator exceeds the risk of drawing invalid conclusions from it. Secondly, because the original measure of gender identity strength lacked reliability, we chose to use the validated Importance to Identity scale to measure gender identity strength (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Strangely, even this validated German translation (Bohner & Sturm, 1997), shows suboptimal reliability too.

On the other hand, this paper offers some methodological strengths. The studies employ relatively large samples and use real-world cases of identity politics to offer external validity. Furthermore, the three different indicators of counterarguing in Study 1 found very similar results as the latent counterarguing variable (see Appendix E in the online supplementary material), and the moderation analyses were very consistent between the two experiments. The effect sizes of the indirect effects in this study signal a 1-2% difference in group-consonant

[25] But see the sensitivity analyses in Appendix H in the online supplementary material

attitudes between weak-identifying women exposed to a thematic or episodic frame. While this may not seem like much, these are effects attributed to a single exposure to a single article, and may therefore accumulate over time (Koch & Arendt, 2017). We therefore conclude that the process of identity-motivated reasoning is likely able to shape political attitudes of certain citizens and that, by impeding this effect, episodic news frames might have the potential to contribute to a society in which groups are less polarized over social issues.

IX. Overall Summary and Discussion

The aim of this dissertation is to investigate how citizens process news regarding identity politics. Its starting point is that of motivated reasoning: A myriad of research studies have found that citizens tend to spend more cognitive energy to resist identity-threatening information than identity-bolstering information (e.g., Bolsen et al., 2014; Hart & Nisbet, 2012; Kahan, 2010; Kunda, 1990; Taber & Lodge, 2006). Although the vast majority of such research investigates the role of political identities in this process, some scholars have investigated identities such as race (Feldman & Huddy, 2018; Kahan et al., 2008; Shoda et al., 2014), or gender (Kahan et al., 2007, 2008). Moreover, characteristics of the news have been largely overlooked in this literature. As a cumulative thesis, four studies contribute to the scholarly knowledge of motivated news processing. These studies can be divided into two sections. The first pair of studies investigates which group identities motivate which citizens' reasoning in response to news regarding identity politics. The second pair investigates which types of news might exacerbate or inhibit such identity-motivated reasoning. Taken together, these four studies help us to understand how both citizens' identities *and* journalistic practices shape news processing in response to identity politics in the news.

In this final chapter, I will first summarize the findings of each study. Then, I will formulate three overall contributions to larger debates in communication science and political science that this dissertation relates to. Finally, I will discuss the most fruitful avenues for further research regarding this topic.

1. Overview of Results and Contributions

To elaborate on the contribution of this dissertation, it is important to have an overview of the findings and contributions of the separate studies. Therefore, this section lists the key findings and provides a summary of each study and their contributions.

- News regarding identity politics activates group identities, especially for citizens in low-status groups with impermeable boundaries. (Chapter 5)
- News regarding identity politics evokes *political* motivated reasoning only for those in high-status groups. (Chapter 6)
- Identity threats cause negative affect and physiological arousal, and identity-motivated reasoning is strongest for citizens in *high-arousal negative affective states*. (Chapter 7)
- Episodic framing might sometimes inhibit identity-motivated reasoning, in particular for those who have relatively weak group identities. (Chapter 8)

1.1. Summary and Contributions of Chapter 5

Chapter 5 (Boyer & Lecheler, unpublished) systematically investigated how different social groups process news about identity politics. It argues that, while individual perceptions about a group drive group identification effects (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), these perceptions are shaped by society – leading to structural differences between groups. Specifically, shared perceptions of (1) group status – the relative position of a group in society and (2) group boundary permeability – the possibility leave one group for another should be consequential. Participants read a news article about unemployment, which was manipulated to contain group cues of one of different groups, that differ in group boundary permeability and divide citizens into low-status and high-status groups. The results largely confirm that citizens become more aware of their group through news about identity politics and that perceived importance mostly increased for low-status groups with impermeable boundaries.

These findings have two main contributions to the current literature. First, while some research found that partisanship has become an all-encompassing identity in contemporary societies (Westwood et al., 2018), the findings from this study indicate that news about identity politics

can activate a variety of group identities, not just partisanship. Second, this research shows that effects of news regarding identity politics might differ strongly between social groups. This could explain the success of identity politics based on impermeable groups, like race or gender, relative to class-based political action, as the boundaries of class-based groups is deemed as relatively permeable (Haslam et al., 2000). However, it also means that dominant groups might increasingly politicize when they feel as if their societal status diminishes.

1.2.Summary and Contributions of Chapter 6

Chapter 6 (Boyer et al., 2020) investigates the role of political identities in motivated reasoning. As such, it aims to illuminate for whom political motivated reasoning dominates opinion formation in response to news about identity politics. Considering the results of Chapter 5 – in which identity politics activates mostly low-status group identities, the expectation is that political motivated reasoning is more important for high-status groups. This assumption is tested by exposing left-wing and right-wing men and women to a news article about gender identity politics, supporting or opposing a corporate gender quota policy.

In support of the hypothesis, political motivated reasoning was prevalent among men, but not among women. As politics is arguably increasingly engaged with identity-driven politics (Fukuyama, 2018), this means that previous research has likely underestimated political motivated reasoning for some (presumably high-status groups) – and overestimated it for others (presumably low-status group members). Moreover, the findings indicate that news regarding identity politics does not only polarize the opinions of left-wing and right-wing citizens, but also those of the identity groups that it speaks to – in this case men and women.

1.3. Summary and Contributions of Chapter 7

Having established which identities are more likely to motivate reasoning for whom, Chapter 7 (Boyer, 2021) argues that arousal plays a crucial but overlooked part in identity-motivated reasoning. This is important as news is increasingly – and purposefully – arousing (Soroka & McAdams, 2015; Vettehen et al., 2005). Chapter 7 argues that stronger identity threats lead to both negative affect *and* physiological arousal, and – because identity-motivated reasoning

costs cognitive energy – this combination elicits the strongest identity-motivated reasoning. This hypothesis is tested by exposing participants to a weakly- or strongly-threatening news item about immigration, while taking physiological measures of negative affect and arousal.

The findings indicate that identity-threatening news indeed elicits more *high-arousal negative affective states*, and that those states elicit the strongest identity-motivated reasoning effects. This is in itself an important theoretical contribution to the motivated reasoning literature, and should instruct communication scholars on their conceptualizations of emotion in news effects research. However, it also has far-reaching consequences for society. As the news becomes increasingly arousing, it might drive citizens apart.

1.4. Summary and Contributions of Chapter 8

Lastly, Chapter 8 (Boyer, Lecheler & Aaldering, unpublished) investigates how another journalistic trend affects identity-motivated reasoning. It is argued that, through decreased group activation (Iyengar et al., 2013), more empathy (Gross, 2008) and the use of narratives (Wojcieszak & Kim, 2016), episodic frames may inhibit identity-motivated reasoning. This is tested in two experiments, in which participants are exposed to news articles that frame an identity-political topic in either thematic terms – embedded in societal trends and based on statistics, or in episodic terms – based on a narrative surrounding one specific case.

The findings in this study are mixed: one experiment confirmed the hypothesized effect, but the second did not. Exploratory analyses of both experiments suggest that episodic frames might sometimes inhibit identity-motivated reasoning in response to identity-threatening news for those with relatively weak group identities. This is in line with research on reducing polarization that only succeeds for weakly identifying group members (e.g., Levendusky, 2018). While this study cannot provide certainty on the situations in which this occurs, it seems that journalists and journalistic institutions can use news framing to have a certain degree of agency in determining the how strongly citizens engage in identity-motivated reasoning in response to news about identity politics.

2. Answering of the Research Question and Overall Contribution

The overarching research question of this dissertation asks how citizens process news regarding identity politics. Because this should depend on both citizens' identities and the news, these two aspects of the phenomenon guided the empirical work in this thesis. While each of the studies in this dissertation has provided a partial answer to the research question, this section is meant to integrate these findings and discuss the contribution that the combined results of this dissertation make to scholarly debates. These are divided into three sections, which discuss (1) the need for news processing models that look beyond partisanship, (2) news as an active agent in identity-motivated reasoning, and (3) the consequences of identity-motivated reasoning for social cohesion and democracy.

2.1. Motivated Reasoning Beyond Partisan Logic

While research has shown a consistent relation between political identities and news processing (Bolsen et al., 2014; Lebo & Cassino, 2007; Taber & Lodge, 2006), the findings in this dissertation shows that news regarding identity politics relates to a second group identity as well. Citizens' processing of news regarding identity politics is therefore motivated by political identities for some, but by an alternative, relevant identity for others. This other group identity is particularly important for members of low-status groups with impermeable boundaries (Chapter 5), who are therefore not motivated by their political identities (Chapter 6). In contrast, high-status group members' identities are not affectively cued by identity politics in the news (Chapter 5), while their political identity dominates motivated reasoning (Chapter 6). While motivated reasoning of low-status high-permeability groups is not explicitly investigated, there was no alternative group identity activation in Chapter 5. Therefore, it might be expected that those citizens' motivated reasoning is routinely dominated by political motivations. Crucially, though, the fact that a certain identity *dominates* motivated reasoning does not mean that other groups might not also have a certain degree of influence over citizens' thoughts. For instance, high-status group identities can also motivate reasoning, as even left-wing men did not reason against their gender group's interest (Chapter 6), and threatening immigration news also motivated reasoning for native Austrians in Chapter 7, even if they were considerably left-wing. These findings sum up to a complex model of motivational news processing, which is summarized in Figure 3.

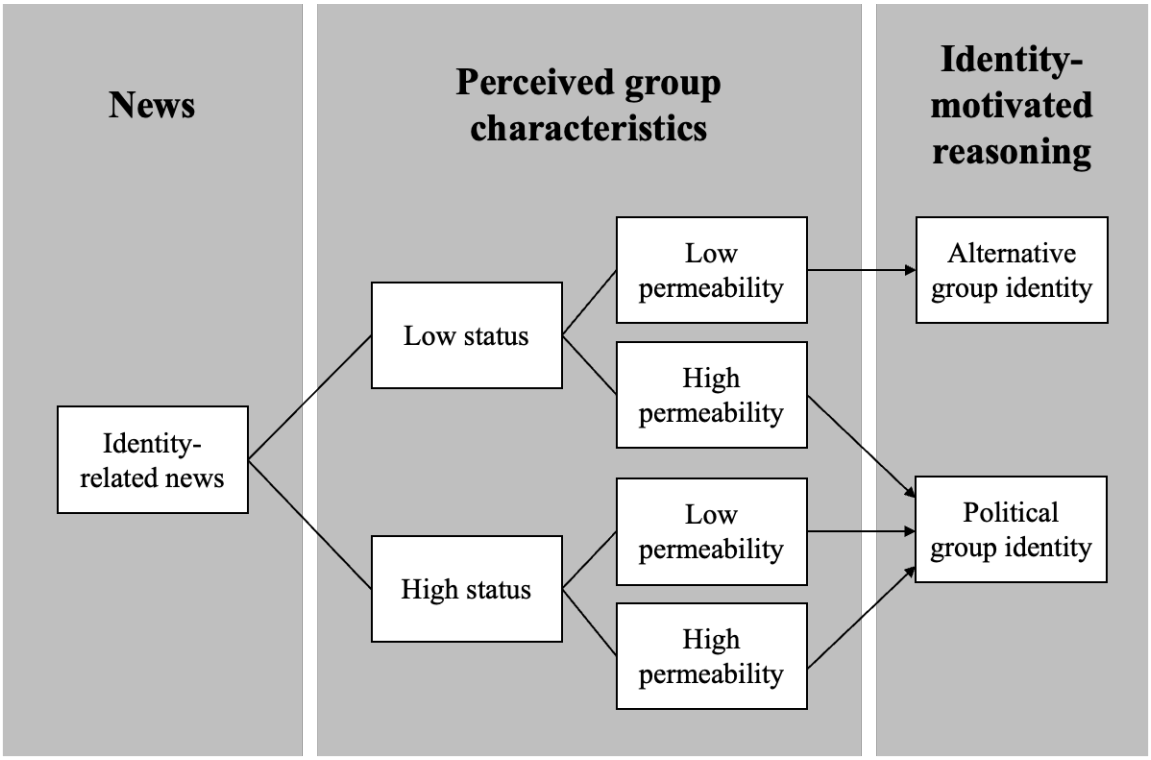


Figure 3. Schematic depiction of cross-pressured identity-motivated news processing.

These findings require us to reconceptualize the way we think about political news processing in times of identity politics. Motivated reasoning research has mostly relied on political identities to explain citizens' opinion formation (e.g., Bolsen, Druckman, & Cook, 2014; Slothuus & De Vreese, 2010; Taber & Lodge, 2006). In addition, a handful scholars have used other group identities to explain motivated information processing, like gender or race (e.g., Feldman & Huddy, 2018; Kahan et al., 2007). However, to my knowledge, this dissertation is one of the first attempts at integrating these types of reasoning into a model that explains which identity motivates reasoning for whom (for a notable exception, see Li et al., 2016). Looking at Figure 3, processing news regarding identity politics might lead to motivated reasoning based on either political or alternative (non-political) group identities. Clearly, this is not as binary as the figure suggests. In contrast, processing news regarding identity politics will generally be *somewhat* related to several of citizens' group identities. However, when two or more group identities cause cross-pressures, one might dominate citizens' reasoning patterns.

When citizens are exposed to news regarding identity politics, both a political identity and an alternative group identity come into play. As predicted in Social Identity Theory (Tajfel &

Turner, 1979), the alternative group's status and the permeability of its boundaries should impact which identity dominates motivated reasoning. Low status, low permeability group members are most likely to be motivated by this alternative group in their reasoning processes, as their group's status motivates them to improve their standing and their group's low permeability constraints the possibility to do that by leaving the group – i.e., they have a *social change mindset* (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In contrast, the three other categories should largely lead to routine politically motivated reasoning, as their alternative group identity is not under threat. Again, group status and boundary permeability are not binary and even differ between social environments or specific situations. What is more, while societal definitions may cause structural differences between groups, the outcomes should ultimately depend on citizens' *perceptions of* group status and boundary permeability. These perceptions might differ between citizens, even within social groups. The schematic depiction in Figure 3, should therefore be seen as a strong simplification of a complex process of identity-based cross-pressures in motivated news processing.

This model has some important consequences for news effects research. For one, identity politics is on the rise in most western democracies (Fukuyama, 2018; Noury & Roland, 2020). Therefore, group identities other than partisan or ideological identities are arguably increasingly salient in news coverage of political issues. The model in Figure 3, should be of increasing importance in political news processing. This means that citizens' reasoning and opinion formation might be increasingly motivated by alternative group identities, especially for members of low-status groups with impermeable boundaries. Therefore, news effects scholars should continuously ask themselves which identities might relate to a topic under study, and question whether a partisan approach to the topic will lead to a good representation of the reasoning patterns that citizens use.

Moreover, this model may explain differences in motivated reasoning across and within cultural settings due to different perceptions of group boundary permeability. Perceptions of permeability are dependent on individual differences but might also be dependent on cultural differences. Taking social class identity as an example, one might expect that its boundaries are perceived as less permeable in India's – where social mobility is existent but rare (Kumar et al., 2002), than in the United States – where social mobility is part of the national myth (Wyatt-nichol, 2011). Belief in social mobility is even stronger in the United States than in Europe (Alesina et al., 2018). Class identities might therefore be the least effective mobilizers

in United States. But even within a similar cultural context, perceptions of group boundary permeability may differ between citizens, as for instance liberals are much more negative about social mobility than conservatives (Chambers et al., 2015). Even in the United States, though, views on social class are less essentialist than views on gender, race or sexuality (Haslam et al., 2000), indicating that group boundaries of social class are perceived as more permeable. This might explain why left-wing politics in the west has increasingly focused on more impermeable identities such as ethnicity, gender or sexuality, rather than social class. As social class is perceived as a more permeable group, other groups with less permeable boundaries might simply be more effective mobilizers.

Similarly, this model implies that shared and perceived perceptions of group status are a crucial factor in the way political opinions are formed. When dominant group members are in a low-status position, a factually dominant group might still guide their reasoning. There is some evidence for such a phenomenon. For instance, racial bias is strongest among whites in poor and uneducated environments (Oliver & Mendelberg, 2000). This can be instrumentalized by dominant group activists, as dominant group identities might also guide news processing if they only *perceive* their group as marginalized. There are countless examples of men arguing their low status in society in attempts to politicize male identity (e.g., Coston & Kimmel, 2013). According to the findings in this dissertation, such strategies might be effective ways to spark reasoning motivated by group identities of factually dominant groups, instead of the politically motivated reasoning that would otherwise dominate their thought.

In sum, the results of this dissertation lead to a complex model of identity-motivated reasoning, in which citizens' perceptions of their own group's societal status and boundary permeability determine which group identity dominates the motivations that underlie citizens' reasoning and opinion formation. While I only present a starting point for this avenue of research, these first findings help us understand the role of news processing in contemporary (identity) politics.

2.2. Journalistic Agency in Identity-Motivated News Processing

Most research regarding motivated reasoning treats the news merely as a medium through which political information is transferred from the political arena to citizens. However, whether the media rather reports on what happens in the political arena, or actively drives political discourse is a question that has long troubled communication scholars. While some find that journalists actively select topics, sources, and frames (e.g., Strömbäck & Nord, 2006), others contend that the news rather follows and reports on politics (e.g., Bennett et al., 2007). The relationship between the political arena and the news can probably be best considered as interdependent (e.g., Van Aelst & Vliegenthart, 2014). We therefore do not know whether politics has become more focused on identity politics which affects the news, or whether journalism might be one of the main causes.

What is more, while the politics that should be covered in the news might be relatively constrained for journalists, journalists have been shown to ultimately have the power to frame these topics (Strömbäck & Nord, 2006). That is, while certain issues should be covered by every respectable news outlet, journalists have considerably more freedom in deciding the *form* of the news. And the form of the news matters for the extent to which citizens engage in identity-motivated reasoning. Evidence for this claim can be found in in Chapters 5, 7 and 8 of this dissertation. Specifically, Chapter 5 shows that which identity is emphasized in a news article partly determines with which group citizens identify while processing the news article. Moreover, Chapter 7 shows that arousing news might exacerbate identity-motivated reasoning, and Chapter 8 shows that the use of episodic news frames, rather than thematic news frames, might inhibit identity-motivated reasoning for certain citizens. Depending on the presentation of a particular event in the news, journalists can thus influence which identities motivate reasoning regarding the issue, as well as how strongly they do so. This has important consequences for society and research into identity-motivated reasoning.

Firstly, acknowledging that journalism has a degree of agency in this regard allows us to discuss the way in which journalism can positively contribute to democracy – or help counteract anti-democratic processes. It is generally agreed upon that democracies to a certain degree require an informed citizenry, and that journalism plays a key role in that regard (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). There is more discussion, however, about *how* citizens are informed, and what consequences the form of news may have for democratic societies. The findings in this dissertation suggest that some ways of covering identity politics may be more detrimental

to society than others. For one, Chapter 7 shows that defensive reasoning is strongest when citizens are in aroused physiological states and Chapter 8 shows that episodic framing can sometimes reduce identity-motivated reasoning. As both arousing news (as sensationalism and negativity) as well as episodic frames (as part of soft news) can be used by journalists to increase their audiences (Andersen, 2019; Nguyen, 2012; Trussler & Soroka, 2014), episodic framing therefore seems like a better option when journalists have to cover identity politics, as it might sometimes inhibit identity-motivated reasoning, rather than exacerbating it. Through this lens, it becomes clear that mere exposure of citizens to news should not be the only goal of journalism, because an informed, but divided citizenry can have negative consequences for society too.

Secondly, this means that journalists have a responsibility when covering issues related to marginalized groups. Chapter 7 shows that certain ways of reporting may contribute to identity-defensive reasoning among dominant groups too. This means that when journalists cover such marginalized groups like immigrants, sexual minorities or gender minorities, these types of reporting may instigate negative attitudes towards vulnerable people. Crucially, the digital political information environment allows members of the dominant group to also *voice* these opinions publicly, along with the news messages. This can cause severe damage to the mental health of members of marginalized groups, like decreased self-esteem, negative emotions or depressive symptoms (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020; Geschke et al., 2019; Obermaier et al., 2018), as well as negative attitudes toward marginalized groups among the general public (Hsueh et al., 2015; Soral et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2020). When journalists do not understand – or care about – the way citizens react to news regarding marginalized groups, this may cause a ripple effect in the political information environment and have severe consequences.

Unfortunately, the past decades have shown that journalists do not always elect to report the news in the way that is best for democracy. Rather, "media research from the 1960s onward have demonstrated, over and over again, how adherence to conventional news values can: propagate ill-founded stereotypes […]; project distorted impressions of social reality […]; generalise from exceptional specifics […]; and treat political ideas more as tokens in a political game than as ideas for consideration" (Blumler, 2010, pp. 243-244). Trends like increasing sensationalism (Vettehen et al., 2005) and negativity (Soroka, 2012) are therefore worrying and may lead to identity-defensive attitude formation. It is therefore important to address the causes of such reporting, like journalistic norms of cynicism toward politics

(Patternson, 1994), and competition driven by financial despair (Trussler & Soroka, 2014; Vettehen et al., 2005). Acknowledging that journalists have some degree of agency in evoking identity-motivated reasoning is the first step in this process.

2.3. Processing News About Identity Politics Leads to (New) Social Divides

Like news about other topics, news regarding identity politics polarizes the electorate. However, the dimension along which the electorate is polarized is more complex than previous models of news processing assumed. While most political communication research assumes that political news may only polarize citizens along partisan or ideological lines (for a notable exception see Han & Federico, 2018), this dissertation shows that news regarding identity politics may polarize citizens along other dimensions too. Chapter 5 shows that all kinds of identities may – to some extent – be activated by news regarding identity politics. Chapters 6 and 8 show that this may cause attitude polarization between men and women and Chapter 7 shows that it may cause more extreme attitudes toward immigrants among natives. It seems as though political news may cause polarization along the lines of any politicized group. As politics gets increasingly involved with issues of identity, it is important that political communication research investigates polarization between such identity groups as well.

The reason that this is so important, is that attitude polarization between different groups might pose a threat to a society's social cohesion. If social groups increasingly see each other as outgroups, social ties between members of different groups may weaken, citizens may become demotivated to be part of the overarching community, and conflicts may arise (Fonseca et al., 2019). This is all the more important as societies grow increasingly diverse (Putnam, 2007), and therefore the need for intergroup cooperation and collective action becomes one of the most important factors for a functioning and prosperous society (Habyarimana et al., 2009). Yet the willingness to engage in and support intergroup cooperation can be hard to establish (Enos & Gidron, 2018), and according to this dissertation, exposure to certain types of news coverage of identity politics may only make the problem worse.

In certain countries, like the United States, political polarization and polarization between other social groups might increasingly the be same thing. As social groups have increasingly sorted

into different parties (i.e., white, protestant, conservatives in the Republican Party and minority, secular liberals in the Democratic Party) (Mason & Wronski, 2018), the difference between polarization on the basis of partisan or other group identities can seem rather minimal in some societies. However, the results in this dissertation are imperative nonetheless, for two reasons. Firstly, *social sorting* differs greatly between countries and over time (Harteveld, 2021), and while the average number of cross-cutting identities might decline in some countries, there is always a large part of society for whom important politicized group identities do not overlap with their political identity. Moreover, new identities may politicize over time, adding the possibility of new cross-cutting cleavages. Secondly, the results of this dissertation indicate that identity-motivated reasoning might *contribute* to social sorting. If low-status groups are more often motivated by their non-political identities, their opinions will increasingly align with left-wing parties, effectively reducing the number of cross-cutting identities. This is dangerous, as it may lead to severe cleavages in society which could lead to conflict and even civil war (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Selway, 2011). Therefore, we should still consider the consequences of intergroup polarization between people with different ethnicities, gender identities or religions as important outcomes of political news consumption too.

Lastly, it is important to consider that polarization can be driven by both groups *or one group* moving away from the other. It is tempting to disregard the direction in which polarization is driven and the political content of what this entails. If one ignores this, polarization simply occurs when average group opinions grow wider apart. Here, though, I would like to argue that not all polarization is equal, especially when we consider polarization between dominant and marginalized social groups. While Figure […] expects that mostly marginalized groups would drive intergroup polarization, I do not present any direct evidence in this dissertation. Moreover, more rights for marginalized groups, including more recognition of their values or distinction, could often be considered a move in the direction of equality. As such, "[left-wing] identity politics has brought about welcome changes in cultural norms and has produced concrete public policies that have helped many people" (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 100). In contrast, I do find direct evidence that right-wing dominant group members' attitudes become more extreme, arguably mostly driven by political identification (Chapter 6). This means that there is not only net polarization between men and women in response to gender-based identity politics, but that this polarization is driven by the dominant group moving toward hostility toward a lower-status group, rather than a move toward equality. Indeed, commentators have also recognized this danger in identity politics based on race or ethnicity, arguing that "right-

wing identity politics […], at its most extreme, takes the form of explicitly racist white nationalism" (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 102). In this light, polarization driven by dominant group attitude change may pose a real danger to vulnerable people in democratic societies.

2.4. Summing Up: Processing the News in Times of Identity Politics

Politics is increasingly engaged with matters of identity, and news about identity politics is spread through an increasingly digitalized and fragmented political information environment. Because of these developments, the political information that citizens are exposed to relates to other group identities than citizens' political identities, and has become more arousing and personalized. This dissertation has shown evidence of the way citizens process this type of news. This evidence has led to a new model, introducing group identity-based cross-pressures into motivated reasoning theory. Moreover, this evidence has laid bare the importance of conceptualizing journalism as an active agent in exacerbating or inhibiting identity-motivated reasoning effects.

The consequences of these findings are profound. It requires scholars of political news processing to reevaluate (1) the motivations that guide news processing, (2) the not-so-passive role of journalism in motivated reasoning, and (3) the dangers of social polarization and decreasing social cohesion if these issues are not addressed. As is often the case, a particularly vulnerable role is identified for marginalized groups, that may face increased discrimination if identity-motivated reasoning by dominant groups cannot be kept to a minimum. A stronger consideration of the findings in this dissertation in science, journalism and politics may help to prevent these problems and care for united and cohesive democratic societies.

3. Avenues for Future Research

The findings in this dissertation open up a wide range of avenues for future research. First, because these findings rely on evidence based mostly on gender identity and national identity in Austria, the findings should be replicated in other political and cultural contexts, as well as for other group identities. Specifically, as most research on intergroup behavior and opinion

formation – as well as most research on news processing and motivated reasoning – is based in the United States and Europe, non-western evidence would be a valuable contribution to the findings in this dissertation. Particularly, because this dissertation focused on some of the most politicized group identities in Austria, and other contexts might also provide the possibility to study different groups. These might include, for instance, religious groups, groups based on sexuality, or groups based on disabilities. In other contexts, similar groups may have different meanings to citizens (Jetten et al., 2002), and therefore lead to different outcomes. Such research would surely benefit the generalizability of the findings in this dissertation.

A second avenue for future research would be the study of longitudinal and aggregate level evidence of the mechanisms found in this dissertation. The studies in this dissertation are based on experiments, and investigate short-term effects on individual citizens. Even though news effects can be relatively long-lasting (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2011), and repeated exposure may lead to persisting cumulative effects (Koch & Arendt, 2017), this dissertation did not provide direct evidence that the described effects last over time and accumulate. Therefore, it would be a fruitful avenue to (1) conduct similar experiments with a delayed dependent variable, and (2) run linkage analyses in which panel survey data is linked to content analyses of the media that citizens were exposed to between the waves. Such research could help uncover whether the psychological mechanism described in this dissertation leads to increasing and long-lasting cleavages in society.

Thirdly, this dissertation investigates news types that have likely become more important through the digitalization of the political information environment and the fragmentation of audiences. It did not, however, study another crucial part of the contemporary political information environment: content creation by citizens themselves. These days, news is increasingly found through social media (Newman et al., 2020), and most news on social media is accompanied by a plethora of citizen reactions. Besides motivating scrutiny and attitude change, identity-motivated reasoning might affect the motivation to post hateful comments along with news articles on social media. This is a crucial avenue for research, as hate speech comments are shown to cause decreased self-esteem, negative emotions and depressive symptoms in minorities (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020; Geschke et al., 2019; Obermaier et al., 2018), as well as increased prejudice and support for harsh treatment of minorities among majority groups (Hsueh et al., 2015; Soral et al., 2018; Weber et al., 2020). Considering citizens'

identity-based motivations might help scholars and social media platforms to reduce hate comments with political news.

Fourth, and relatedly, future work might incorporate insights of this dissertation in studying messages of certain specific users of social media: identity politics actors. This is especially important for studying identity politics, as both left-wing and right-wing identity politics actors depend on direct communication through social media much more than traditional political actors (Engesser et al., 2017; Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). Studying the effects of online social movements and RRPPs on citizens' opinion formation might uncover an entirely different online dynamic, characterized by interactivity, a lack of gatekeeping, and algorithmic recommendations.

Fifth, the results in this dissertation might inform researchers of intolerance, racism, or extremism. For one, it might offer a framework for the effects of certain types of news. Scholars have long studied the role of media and news in creating, sustaining or diminishing racism (Entman, 1990). Considering motivated reasoning as a framework of resisting changes to intergroup attitudes, may help to understand why certain types of communication exacerbate or reduce racist attitudes or other extremist attitudes, while arguing for the opposite. Arousing and group-centered communication approaches might, according to the results of this dissertation, not be helpful to reduce racism. The same goes for the content of such messages. Messages may attempt promoting white citizens' sense of being in a high-status group, to reduce identity-motivated reasoning on the basis of racial identities.

To conclude, this dissertation has shed some initial light on the psychological dynamics surrounding the processing of news in times of identity politics. However, by extending this research to different contexts, new levels of analysis and other areas of the political information environment, scholars could further illuminate the workings of (identity) politics in contemporary democracies.

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Appendix Chapter V

Online Supplementary Material: Example text of stimulus material

Unemployment: Women are affected more than men

Unemployment is falling throughout Europe. Only in Austria it is at a record high and has now reached the level of the 1950s. Politicians are therefore discussing possible solutions, such as the influence of the increasing daily commute to work and the opportunities for flexible employment contracts. But women are not as satisfied with the political debate on unemployment, as men are.

“Unfortunately, gender-specific factors are still too little part of the political debate," says Manuela Vollmann, managing director of the non-profit company for equality, abz*Austria. “Unemployment affects women much more severely, because they simply more often have contracts with a limited duration and part-time employment, which means that they receive less social assistance, and often find it very difficult to find a qualified job after maternity and parental leave. Men have less of this problem. There are policy measures, such as the expansion of permanent part-time positions or job application training for those affected, which could offset this effect."

Walter Ruck of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber takes a different view. “We should not force employers to employ someone they cannot or do not want to employ. Companies want qualified employees. In Austria, we invest a lot in education, and it has been proven that women have the same opportunities as men," says Ruck. “I am concerned that political equality policies put men at a short-term disadvantage. In this way, they lose their opportunities to less qualified women. Let's make a fair contest: the best gets the job."

Both agree on one thing: unemployment is a major problem for Austria and must be reduced urgently.

Note: Underlined text altered between conditions.

Appendix Chapter VI

Online Appendix A: Stimulus material

Underlined words and sentences indicate differences between the thematic and the episodic news frame conditions.

1) Pro-quota / thematic

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"Better quality of decisions and reduced masculine risk-seeking behavior."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What are its intended and unintended consequences for society? According to Mag. Julia Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, leading to a more equal business society.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, more women are now getting hired as member of a supervisory board in large Austrian companies. According to Müller, the gender quota eliminates structural discrimination against women and functions as a compensation for barriers and existing prejudices that prevent women to access high positions. "Before the new law, the male majority in Austrian supervisory boards chose new members from their personal and professional networks, who are often men too. Thus, underqualified men used to be hired based on nepotism, while qualified women were excluded. The new law ensures that talented and competent Austrian women will replace the less qualified men in boardrooms and other company ranks." Müller argues that these newly appointed women will exert their power to hire more women in influential positions throughout the company, leading to more gender equality in the whole corporation.

Another positive aspect of this new regulation is the signal companies send to their female employees. Müller states that newly appointed female supervisory board members can serve as a role model for other women who have ambition and business aspirations. "Through their presence on the Supervisory Board, younger employees will learn that anything is possible for them as well." In addition, Müller claims that more gender-equal boardrooms might improve the quality of boardroom decisions, and reduce typical masculine uncompromising, risk-seeking behavior.

"Thus," says Müller, "the gender quota seems to have a positive effect on Austria's businesses. It is a fair instrument to create gender equality and ensures that the best man or woman gets the job. We should even consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does."

2) Pro-quota / episodic

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"She improves the quality of decisions and reduces masculine risk-seeking behavior."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What's the situation in the boardroom today? According to Mag. Julia Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, leading to a more equal business society.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, one of Müller's respondents, Anna, was hired as a member of the supervisory board of a large Austrian company. According to Müller, the gender quota eliminates structural discrimination against Anna and functions as a compensation for barriers and existing prejudices that prevented Anna to access high positions. “Before the new law, the male majority in Austrian supervisory boards chose new members from their personal and professional networks, and they had already approached her competitor, Lukas. So Lukas was about to be hired based on nepotism, while Anna was excluded. The new law ensures that the talented and competent Anna will replace the less qualified Lukas in the supervisory board.” Müller argues that these newly appointed women will exert their power to hire more women in influential positions throughout the company, leading to more gender equality in the whole corporation.

Another positive aspect of Anna’s appointment is the signal the company sends to its female employees. Müller states that Anna can serve as a role model for other women who have ambition and business aspirations. “Through her presence on the supervisory board, younger employees will learn that anything is possible for them as well.” In addition, Müller claims that the appointment of Anna – and not Lukas – might improve the quality of boardroom decisions, and reduce typical masculine uncompromising, risk-seeking behavior.

“Thus,” says Müller, “the gender quota seems to have a positive effect on Austria’s businesses. It is a fair instrument to create gender equality and ensures that the best man or woman gets the job. We should even consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does.”

3) Contra-quota, thematic

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"Talented men leave the country, which harms Austrian businesses."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What are its consequences for society? According to Mag. Stefan Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, while men do not have the opportunity to reach such positions.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, hardly any men are appointed to supervisory boards of large Austrian companies today. According to Müller, this invasive gender quota forces companies to hire suboptimal candidates as supervisory board members, which leads to less efficient companies. "Before the new law there was already an increase in the number of female board members because companies understand the importance of a mixed board. But the gender quota forces companies to hire women, even if they are less qualified than a competing man." And because these women do not gain their position through merit, Müller says, they are taken less seriously by women and men alike. "This undermines not only the quality of supervisory boards, but also of the women who are appointed."

Another negative aspect of this new regulation is the signal companies send to their male employees. Müller states that men who have worked hard to achieve a successful career do not currently have the prospect of board membership, but women at exactly the same point in their career do have this opportunity. "This structural discrimination of men demotivates male employees in the company and tells them that their opportunities to grow in the ranks of the company are limited." According to Müller, this leads talented men to leave the country, which harms Austrian companies.

"Thus," says Müller, "the gender quota seems to have a negative effect on Austria's businesses. It is an unfair instrument that creates gender discrimination and prevents companies from hiring the best man or woman for the job. We should never consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does."

4) Contra-quota, episodic

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"He leaves the country, which harms this business."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What's the situation in the boardroom today? According to Mag. Stefan Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, while men do not have the opportunity to reach such positions.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, one of Müller's respondents, Lukas, could not be appointed to the supervisory board of a large Austrian company. According to Müller, this invasive gender quota forced the company to hire a suboptimal candidate as supervisory board member, which leads to a less efficient company. "Before the new law there was already an increase in the number of female board members because Lukas' company understands the importance of a mixed board. But the gender quota forced the company to hire Anna, even if she is less qualified than Lukas." And because Anna did not gain her position through merit, Müller says, she is taken less seriously by women and men alike. "This undermines not only the quality of the supervisory board, but also of Anna's credibility."

Another negative aspect of Anna's appointment is the signal the company sends to its male employees. Müller states that men like Lukas, who have worked hard to achieve a successful career do not currently have the prospect of board membership, but women like Anna at exactly the same point in their career do have this opportunity. "This structural discrimination of Lukas demotivates male employees in the company and tells them that their opportunities to grow in the ranks of the company are limited." According to Müller, this led Lukas to leave the country, which harms this company.

"Thus," says Müller, "the gender quota seems to have a negative effect on Austria's businesses. It is an unfair instrument that creates gender discrimination and prevents companies from hiring the best man or woman for the job. We should never consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does."

5) Control condition

Austria's economy has grown since the start of the year

In the first quarter, GDP rose by 0.8 per cent compared with the previous quarter.

In Austria, the economic recovery is continuing. Economic output again grew strongly in the first quarter, according to the monthly Wifo economic report. Employment is rising and is supporting private household consumption; investments have risen sharply, and exports are also contributing to growth. The outlook remains positive.

The Austrian GDP grew by 0.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2018 compared to the previous period, after plus 0.9 per cent in the third and fourth quarters of 2017, the Wifo announced on Monday. The picture of leading indicators, such as stock and commodity indices, has deteriorated somewhat in recent months, but remains positive. However, there are no signs of a renewed acceleration in the coming quarters.

Austria's exports grew somewhat weaker in the first quarter of 2018 than in the fourth quarter of 2017. The inflation rate (CPI) fell by 0.1 percentage points to 1.8 per cent in April (HICP plus 1.9 per cent). The costs of housing, water, energy, restaurants and hotels contributed most to the rise in prices. Between 2012 and 2016, gross rents in Austria rose by an average of 14.3 per cent - general inflation in this period was just under seven per cent. From 2015 to 2016 alone, rents including operating costs rose by 3.2 percent. This is shown by the figures presented on Tuesday from the micro census housing survey of Statistik Austria, for which 20,000 households are surveyed per quarter. In the private sector, rents including operating costs rose the most, by 15.7 percent. Municipal and cooperative housing became only 11.6 percent more expensive. The Austria-wide average rent including operating costs is currently 7.4 euros per square meter across all segments. Whereby there are large regional differences: Tenants in the west have to pay particularly much - in Salzburg 9 euros per square meter, in Tyrol and Vorarlberg 8.3 euros. The cheapest way to get out is to pay 5.5 euros in Burgenland. In Vienna, an average of 7.7 euros is paid.

The Austrian labor market is also developing favorably. According to preliminary estimates, the number of employees with active employment in May was 98,000 higher than in the previous year (plus 2.8 percent). The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate (national definition) remained at 7.7 per cent in May. Global economic growth is likely to have slowed slightly in the first quarter of 2018, but this is largely attributable to special events. The forces behind the global upswing are still intact, say the economic researchers.

6) Visual example episodic frame



Menü | Politik Meinung Wirtschaft Panorama Sport Kultur Netzwelt Wissenschaft mehr ▾

POLITIK

Schlagzeilen | Wetter | DAX 12.854,88 | TV-Programm | Abo

Nachrichten > Politik > Österreich > Frauenquote > Wirkung der österreichischen Frauenquote

„Er wandert ins Ausland ab, was diesem Unternehmen schadet."

Wie wirkt die österreichische Frauenquote?

Seit dem 1. Jänner dieses Jahres sind nicht nur Regierungsbehörden, sondern auch große Unternehmen dazu verpflichtet, 30% weibliche Mitglieder in ihren Aufsichtsräten zu haben. Fast ein halbes Jahr später ist es an der Zeit, die neue Verordnung zu bewerten. Wie sieht es heute im Sitzungssaal aus? Laut Mag. Stefan Müller, Leiter des Linzer Marktinstituts, der die Geschlechterquote in Österreich untersucht, ist die Zahl der Frauen im Aufsichtsrat bereits leicht angestiegen, während Männer derzeit nicht die Möglichkeit haben, diese Position zu erreichen.

Teilen Twittern E-Mail

Dienstag, **12.06.2018** 08:57 Uhr Drucken Nutzungsrechte Feedback

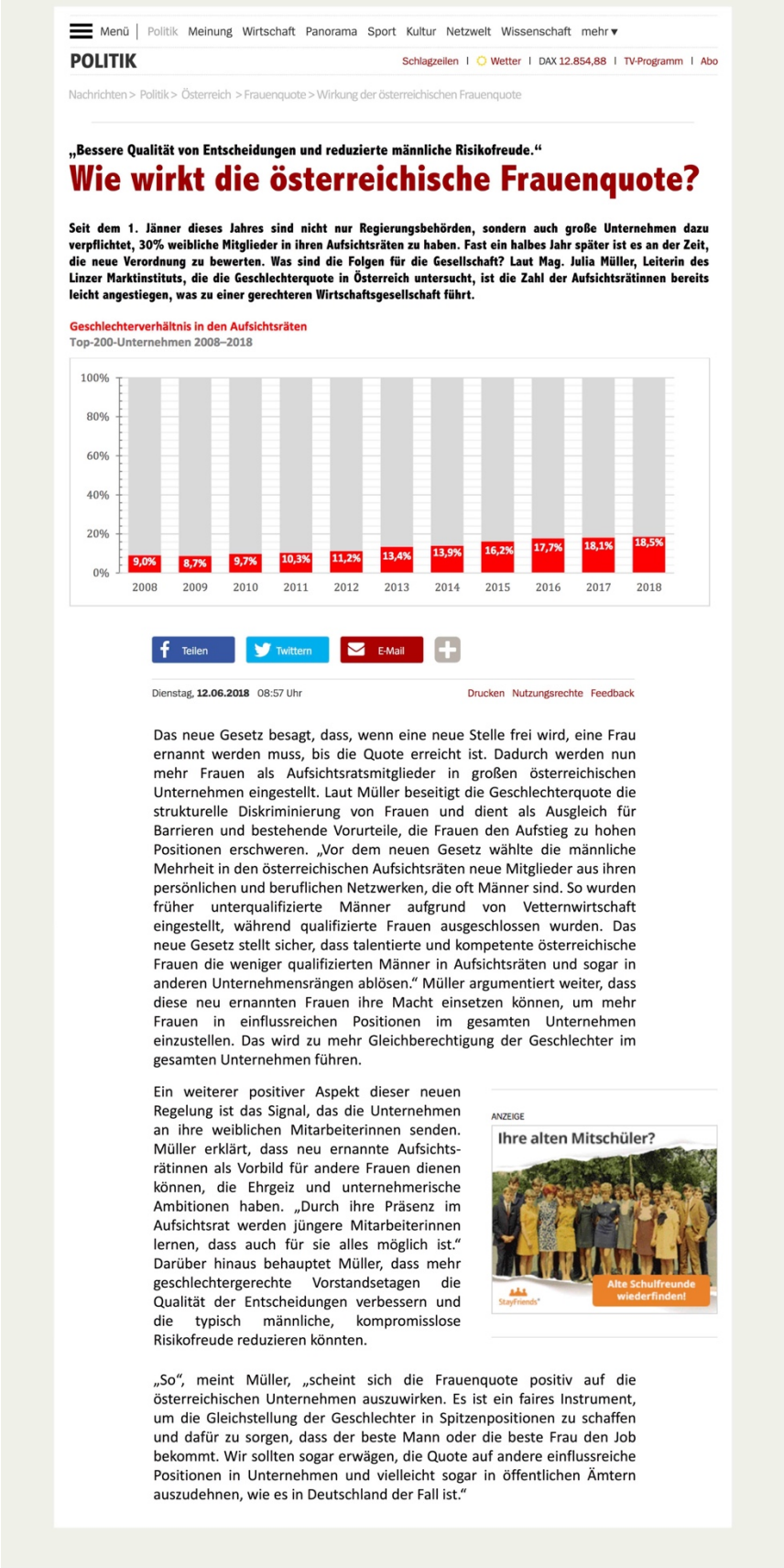
Das neue Gesetz besagt, dass, wenn eine neue Stelle frei wird, eine Frau ernannt werden muss, bis die Quote erreicht ist. So konnte einer von Müllers Befragten, Lukas, nicht als Aufsichtsratsmitglied in einem großen österreichischen Unternehmen eingestellt werden. Laut Müller zwang diese invasive Geschlechterquote das Unternehmen, einen suboptimalen Kandidaten als Aufsichtsratsmitglied einzustellen, was zu einem weniger effizienten Unternehmen führt. „Vor dem neuen Gesetz gab es bereits einen Anstieg der weiblichen Aufsichtsratsmitglieder, weil Lukas' Unternehmen die Bedeutung eines gemischten Rates versteht. Aber die Geschlechterquote zwang die Firma, Anna einzustellen, obwohl sie weniger qualifiziert ist als Lukas." Und weil Anna ihre Position nicht durch Verdienste erworben habe, werde sie von Frauen und Männern gleichermaßen weniger ernst genommen. „Das untergräbt nicht nur die Qualität des Aufsichtsrats, sondern auch Annas Glaubwürdigkeit."

Ein weiterer negativer Aspekt der Ernennung von Anna in den Aufsichtsrat anstatt Lukas ist das Signal, das das Unternehmen an seine männlichen Mitarbeiter sendet. Müller sagt, dass Männer wie Lukas, die hart gearbeitet haben, um eine erfolgreiche Karriere zu erreichen, derzeit nicht die Aussicht auf eine Aufsichtsratsmitgliedschaft haben, aber Frauen wie Anna an genau der gleichen Stelle in ihrer Karriere haben diese Möglichkeit. „Diese strukturelle Diskriminierung von Lukas demotiviert die männlichen Mitarbeiter im Unternehmen und sagt ihnen, dass ihre Möglichkeiten, in den Reihen des Unternehmens zu wachsen, begrenzt sind." Dies, so Müller, führe dazu, dass Lukas ins Ausland abwandert, was diesem Unternehmen schadet.

ANZEIGE
Ihre alten Mitschüler?
Alte Schulfreunde wiederfinden!
StayFriends

„So", meint Müller, „scheint sich die Geschlechterquote negativ auf die österreichischen Unternehmen auszuwirken. Es ist ein unfaires Instrument, das Geschlechterdiskriminierung schafft und Unternehmen daran hindert, den besten Mann oder die beste Frau für den Job einzustellen. Und wir sollten keinesfalls erwägen, die Quote auf andere einflussreiche Positionen in Unternehmen oder öffentlichen Ämtern auszudehnen, wie es in Deutschland der Fall ist."

7) Visual example thematic frame



Menü | Politik Meinung Wirtschaft Panorama Sport Kultur Netzwelt Wissenschaft mehr ▾

POLITIK

Schlagzeilen | Wetter | DAX 12.854,88 | TV-Programm | Abo

Nachrichten > Politik > Österreich > Frauenquote > Wirkung der österreichischen Frauenquote

„Bessere Qualität von Entscheidungen und reduzierte männliche Risikofreude."

Wie wirkt die österreichische Frauenquote?

Seit dem 1. Jänner dieses Jahres sind nicht nur Regierungsbehörden, sondern auch große Unternehmen dazu verpflichtet, 30% weibliche Mitglieder in ihren Aufsichtsräten zu haben. Fast ein halbes Jahr später ist es an der Zeit, die neue Verordnung zu bewerten. Was sind die Folgen für die Gesellschaft? Laut Mag. Julia Müller, Leiterin des Linzer Marktinstituts, die die Geschlechterquote in Österreich untersucht, ist die Zahl der Aufsichtsrätinnen bereits leicht angestiegen, was zu einer gerechteren Wirtschaftsgesellschaft führt.

Geschlechterverhältnis in den Aufsichtsräten
Top-200-Unternehmen 2008–2018

Teilen Twittern E-Mail

Dienstag, **12.06.2018** 08:57 Uhr Drucken Nutzungsrechte Feedback

Das neue Gesetz besagt, dass, wenn eine neue Stelle frei wird, eine Frau ernannt werden muss, bis die Quote erreicht ist. Dadurch werden nun mehr Frauen als Aufsichtsratsmitglieder in großen österreichischen Unternehmen eingestellt. Laut Müller beseitigt die Geschlechterquote die strukturelle Diskriminierung von Frauen und dient als Ausgleich für Barrieren und bestehende Vorurteile, die Frauen den Aufstieg zu hohen Positionen erschweren. „Vor dem neuen Gesetz wählte die männliche Mehrheit in den österreichischen Aufsichtsräten neue Mitglieder aus ihren persönlichen und beruflichen Netzwerken, die oft Männer sind. So wurden früher unterqualifizierte Männer aufgrund von Vetternwirtschaft eingestellt, während qualifizierte Frauen ausgeschlossen wurden. Das neue Gesetz stellt sicher, dass talentierte und kompetente österreichische Frauen die weniger qualifizierten Männer in Aufsichtsräten und sogar in anderen Unternehmensrängen ablösen." Müller argumentiert weiter, dass diese neu ernannten Frauen ihre Macht einsetzen können, um mehr Frauen in einflussreichen Positionen im gesamten Unternehmen einzustellen. Das wird zu mehr Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter im gesamten Unternehmen führen.

Ein weiterer positiver Aspekt dieser neuen Regelung ist das Signal, das die Unternehmen an ihre weiblichen Mitarbeiterinnen senden. Müller erklärt, dass neu ernannte Aufsichtsrätinnen als Vorbild für andere Frauen dienen können, die Ehrgeiz und unternehmerische Ambitionen haben. „Durch ihre Präsenz im Aufsichtsrat werden jüngere Mitarbeiterinnen lernen, dass auch für sie alles möglich ist." Darüber hinaus behauptet Müller, dass mehr geschlechtergerechte Vorstandsetagen die Qualität der Entscheidungen verbessern und die typisch männliche, kompromisslose Risikofreude reduzieren könnten.

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„So", meint Müller, „scheint sich die Frauenquote positiv auf die österreichischen Unternehmen auszuwirken. Es ist ein faires Instrument, um die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter in Spitzenpositionen zu schaffen und dafür zu sorgen, dass der beste Mann oder die beste Frau den Job bekommt. Wir sollten sogar erwägen, die Quote auf andere einflussreiche Positionen in Unternehmen und vielleicht sogar in öffentlichen Ämtern auszudehnen, wie es in Deutschland der Fall ist."

Appendix B: Full scale of attitudes toward the gender quota

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

1. In general, it is good that the gender quota has been implemented.
2. The gender quota reduces the structural discrimination of women in Austria.
3. The gender quota improves the quality of supervisory boards in Austria.
4. The gender quota reduces the number of underqualified men in Austrian supervisory boards.
5. The gender quota leads to the structural discrimination of men in Austria.*
6. The gender quota can force companies to hire suboptimal candidates.*
7. The gender quota causes women in supervisory boards to be taken less seriously.*

- Answer categories: *Strongly disagree (1) – Strongly agree (9)*
- The order of the items is randomized
- Items marked with an asterisk* are reverse coded.

Online Appendix C: Analyses with separate motivated reasoning indicators

The tables in this appendix show regression analyses in which the dependent variables are the separate indicators for motivated reasoning, instead of the latent variable for *reasoning against the article*. As such, Table A1 is comparable to Table 1 in the main text. The measurement of the variables in described in the main text of the manuscript. The abbreviations mean the following:

-PAS: Perceived argument strength

-PAC: Perceived article credibility

-TLE: Thought-listing exercise

Table A1

OLS regression analyses explaining the three indicators of motivated reasoning in the experimental conditions.

Model	(1)			(2)			(3)			(4)		
Motivated reasoning indicator	PAS	PAC	TLE	PAS	PAC	TLE	PAS	PAC	TLE	PAS	PAC	TLE
Contra-quota condition	-.14	.06	-.82***	1.00**	1.23***	.33	-.41*	-.17	-1.28***	1.18*	1.12**	.24
(vs. pro-quota)	(.13)	(.10)	(.13)	(.34)	(.24)	(.34)	(.19)	(.14)	(.19)	(.49)	(.36)	(.50)
Political identity	.34	.69**	.30	1.47**	1.86***	1.46**	.34	.70**	.31	2.87***	2.18***	2.19***
(right-wing)	(.32)	(.23)	(.32)	(.44)	(.32)	(.45)	(.32)	(.23)	(.32)	(.59)	(.43)	(.60)
Gender (female)	-.13	-.14	.10	-.13	-.14	.10	-.39*	-.36**	-.34†	1.29**	.10	.66
	(.13)	(.10)	(.13)	(.13)	(.09)	(.13)	(.19)	(.13)	(.19)	(.48)	(.35)	(.48)
Contra-quota				-2.28***	-2.35***	-2.32***				-3.03**	-2.47***	-2.90**
* political identity				(.62)	(.45)	(.63)				(.87)	(.64)	(.88)
Contra-quota							.54*	.46*	.89**	-.66	.06	-.14
* gender							(.26)	(.19)	(.26)	(.67)	(.49)	(.68)
Political identity										-3.27***	-.81	-1.91*
* gender										(.88)	(.64)	(.89)
Contra-quota										2.17†	.55	1.85
* political identity * gender										(1.25)	(.91)	(1.27)
Constant	5.23***	4.42***	.04	4.66***	3.84***	-.53*	5.36***	4.54***	.26	4.03***	3.76***	-.73*
	(.20)	(.15)	(.20)	(.25)	(.18)	(.26)	(.21)	(.15)	(.21)	(.34)	(.24)	(.34)
Adjusted R^2	.00	.01	.04	.02	.04	.06	.00	.02	.06	.03	.04	.07

Note. Standard errors in parentheses; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05, † p < .1

Online Appendix D: Additional figures

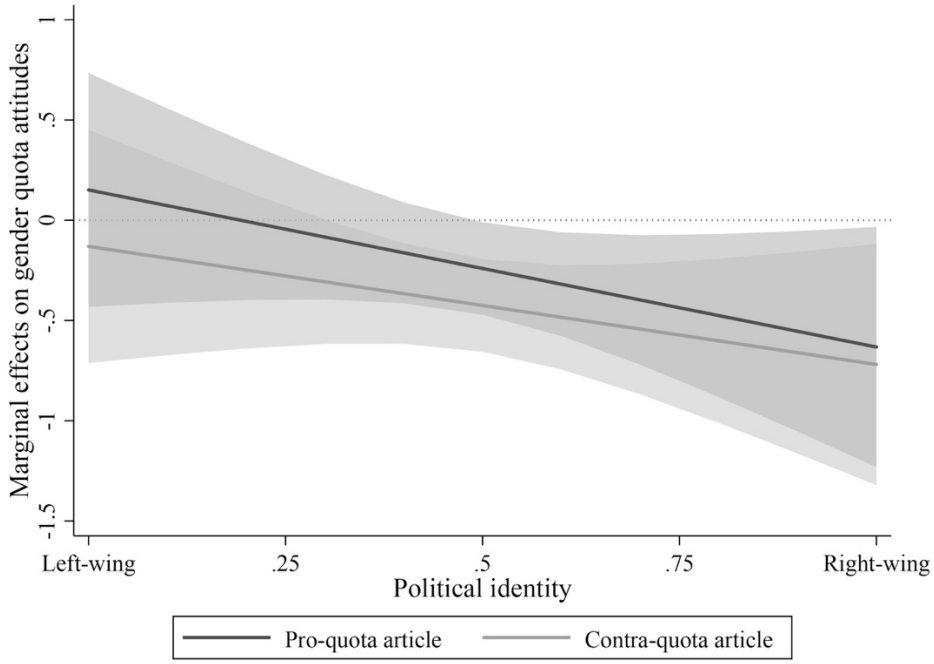


Figure A1 Marginal effects of the pro-quota and contra-quota article (vs. the control article) on attitudes toward the gender quota, by political identity.

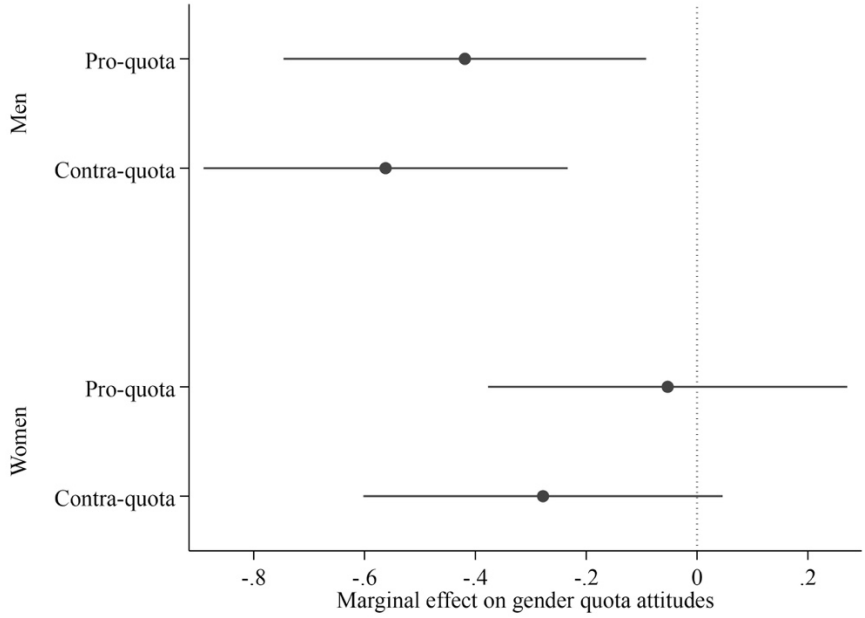


Figure A2 Marginal effects of the pro-quota and contra-quota article (vs. the control article) on attitudes toward the gender quota, by gender.

Appendix Chapter VII

Appendix A: Stimulus material

Visual manipulation in the stimulus material

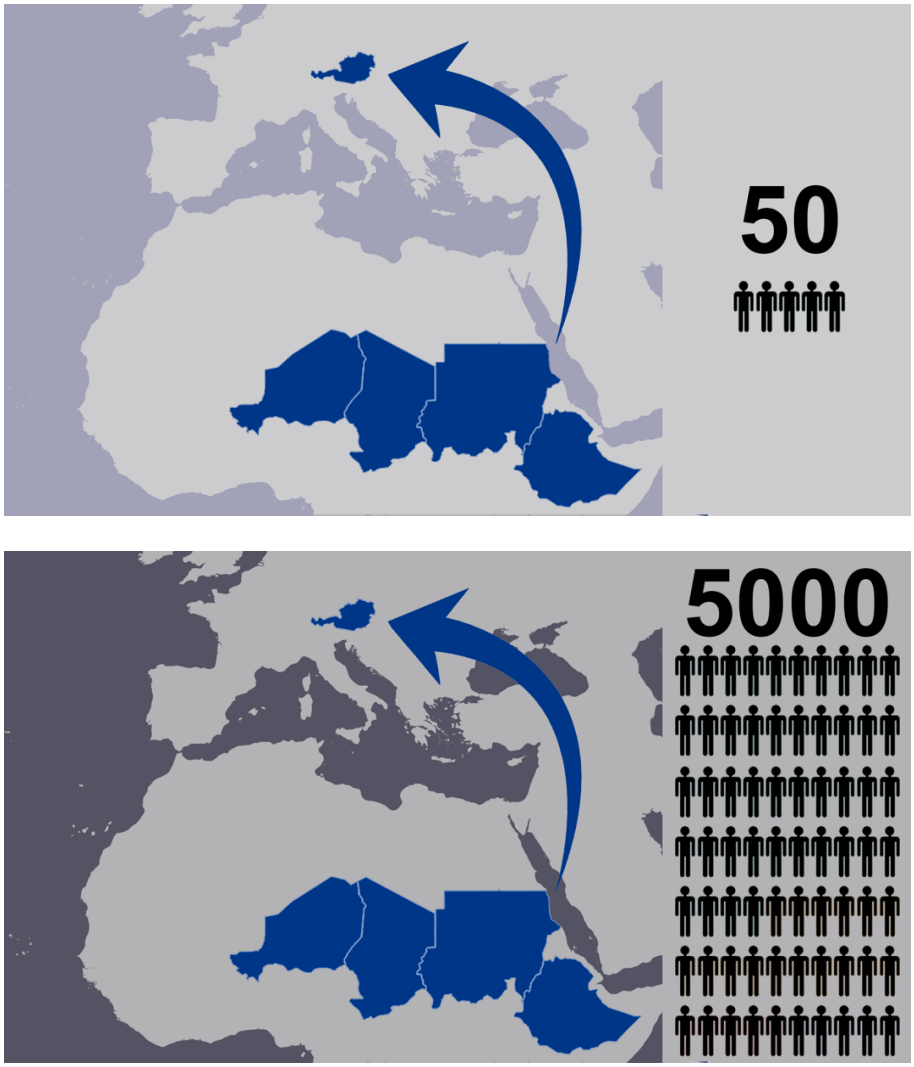


Figure A1 Screenshot of the dynamic graphics included in the low-threat (above) and high-threat (below) conditions.

Translated text of narration low-threat condition (manipulations underlined)

1) At the moment they are still in a refugee camp in Egypt, but soon these refugees will receive their asylum-seeker status in Austria.
2) Austria is obliged by international agreements to accept an additional 50 refugees from Africa in the next two years.
3) This means that the number of new refugees in Austria will only increase by 2% in the next two years and they can easily be accommodated within the current budget.
4) This is a small group of recognized refugees from Niger, Sudan, Chad and Ethiopia who can legally come to Europe.
5) Once the refugees have been granted asylum-seeker status, their numbers may increase to about 80 because of possible family reunification.
6) However, the group has no chance of becoming citizens, and therefore the Africans will not be new Austrians in the future.

Translated text of narration high-threat condition (manipulations underlined)

1) At the moment they are still in a refugee camp in Egypt, but soon these refugees will receive their asylum-seeker status in Austria.
2) Austria is obliged by international agreements to accept an additional 5,000 refugees from Africa in the next two years.
3) This means that the number of new refugees in Austria will increase by a full 200% in the next two years and will cost the state a previously unplanned additional sum of 150 million euros.
4) This is a large group of recognized refugees from Niger, Sudan, Chad and Ethiopia who can legally come to Europe.
5) Once the refugees have been granted asylum-seeker status, their numbers may increase to about 10,000 because of possible family reunification.
6) The group has a very good chance of becoming citizens, and therefore the Africans will most likely be new Austrians in the future.

Appendix B: Physiological measurement

The physiological measures are taken using a Schuhfried BioFeedBack 2000 system, which includes a signal amplifier and a wireless system of electrodes for each measure.

Negative valence

As a measure of the *negative valence* of an affective state, EMG measures electrical activity in areas surrounding specific facial muscles using electrodes on the surface of the face. These pulses measure activity in muscles that correlate with the experience of certain affective states. The area that is most important for the purpose of this study is that surrounding the *Corrugator Supercilii*, which is located at the medial side of the eyebrows and is used to frown. EMG over the area surrounding the *Corrugator Supercilii* is correlated with the experience of negative affect (Cacioppo et al. 1986), and increases in response to negative words (Wexler et al. 1992), images (Cacioppo and Petty 1979), specific negative affective cues (Hietanen et al. 1998). Moreover, *Corrugator Supercilii* activity has been shown to increase in response to more complex emotional stimuli too, like negative radio advertisements (Bolls et al. 2001) and attitudinally incongruent political information (Bakker et al. 2020).

Corrugator Supercilii activity was measured using three electrodes in the face of each participant. For the EMG procedure and analysis, I followed the guidelines of Van Boxtel (2010). The two measurement electrodes are placed above the medial side of the right-hand side eyebrow and the reference electrode is placed in the center of the forehead, just below participants' hair line. The frequency was filtered between the range of 20-500Hz. The Schuhfried system automatically rectified the signal to be ready for analysis and, before I averaged the signal per second. Following Van Boxtel (2010), in order to account for individual differences and electrode placement differences, I use the proportion of the EMG

signal as compared to the baseline (average EMG levels during the identical first seconds of the news item).

Arousal

As a measure of *arousal*, psychophysiologists often use the level of electrical conductance in the finger tips (Potter and Bolls 2012). This *skin conductance level* (SCL) is associated with sweat secretion in the eccrine sweat glands. As opposed to the apocrine sweat glands that produce sweat to cool down the body, the eccrine sweat glands are mostly found at palms of the hands and feet and increase the amount of grip in arousing situations. As one would expect of a measure of arousal, SCL has been shown to increase in response to negative information, like negative political advertisements (Bradley et al. 2007) and negative news (Soroka et al. 2019; Soroka and McAdams 2015). Likewise, SCL has been shown to correlate with positive affect, such as preferred political parties (Petersen et al. 2015), politicians (Wagner et al. 2015), and football teams (Potter and Keene 2012).

The SCL measurement took place with a single electrode on the index finger of the non-dominant hand, and the data is processed following the recommendations of Potter and Bolls (2012). The non-dominant hand is used because it usually has less scar tissue, which secrets less sweat. The average of the baseline measurement is detracted from each value to phase out individual differences and differences in the placement of the electrodes. Next, similar to the EMG measure, the time points are averaged per second for the remaining 46 seconds. Following Potter and Bolls (2012), artifacts are defined as when the signal increases (> 20% per second) decreases (> 5% per second) unnaturally fast. Those data points are replaced by linearly imputing values between the last previous valid value and the first following valid value. The analyses without this transformation lead to the same results and can be seen in Appendix C.

Appendix C: Robustness checks

Outliers imputed

To exclude the possibility that any effects are driven by a few very extreme cases, in this appendix, I treat three standard deviations from the mean as the maximum deviation and impute cases that exceed it with that value. All analyses are controlled for each second of the stimulus material through a dummy variable for each second except the first (the first second served as the reference category). These 53 dummy variables are not of interest for the research question, and in order to save space, they are omitted from the tables.

Table A1

Regression analyses predicting negative valence (EMG) and arousal (SCL) with the manipulated immigration threat, controlled for the time in seconds (omitted from the table). In these analyses, EMG and SCL measures have imputed extreme values.

Dependent variable	Negative valence	Arousal	Arousal	Arousal
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
High (vs. low) threat	-.03***	.02***	.02***	.00
	(.01)	(.00)	(.00)	(.02)
Negative valence (t-1)			-.04***	-.06***
			(.01)	(.01)
Threat * negative valence (t-1)				.02
				(.01)
Constant	1.02***	.01***	.06***	.07***
	(.00)	(.00)	(.01)	(.01)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; time-dummy variables omitted; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

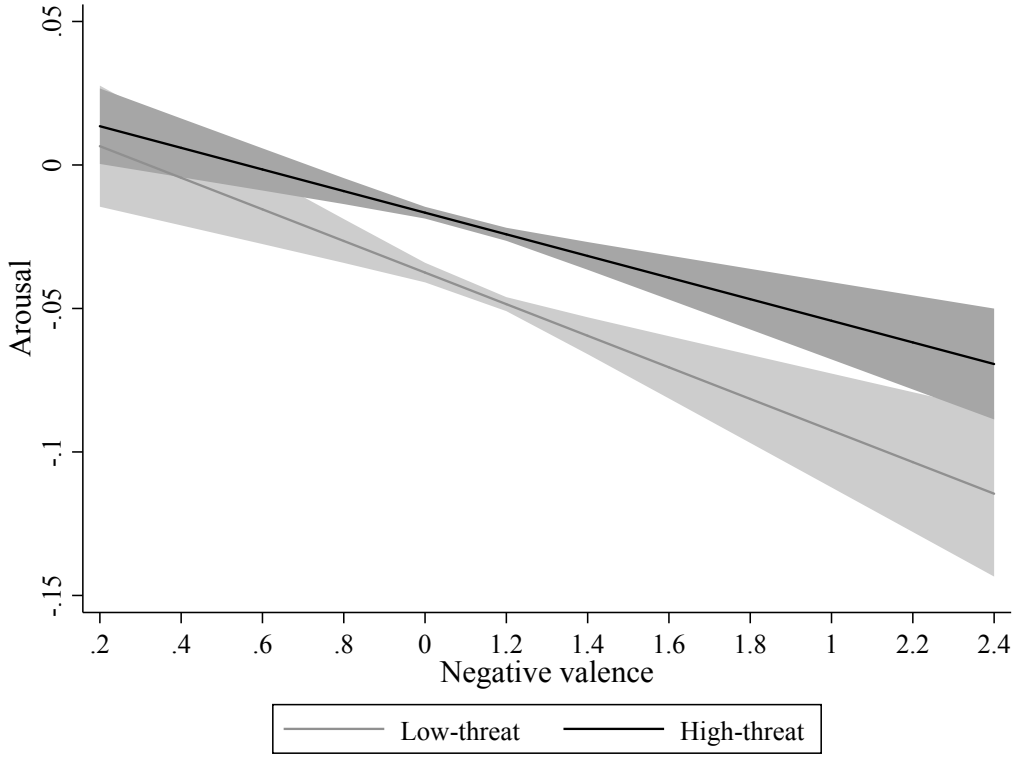


Figure A2 Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for arousal (SCL), as a function of negative valence (*Corrugator Superclii* activity) in the low-threat and high-threat conditions, using imputed outliers.

Table A2

Regression analyses predicting counterarguing, policy attitudes and the willingness to help refugees with negative valence (EMG) and arousal (SCL), controlled for the time in seconds (omitted from the table). In these analyses, EMG and SCL measures have imputed outliers.

Dependent variable	Perceived argument strength		Attitude toward immigration policy		Intended helping behavior	
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Negative valence (t-1)	-.48***	-.57***	-.29***	-.32***	.01	-.02
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Arousal	.05	1.85***	.05*	.55**	.04***	.59***
	(.03)	(.23)	(.03)	(.17)	(.01)	(.15)
Negative valence (t-1) * arousal		-1.51***		-.42**		-.46***
		(.19)		(.14)		(.12)
Constant	7.32***	7.41***	7.77***	7.79***	6.68***	6.70***
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; time-dummy variables omitted; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

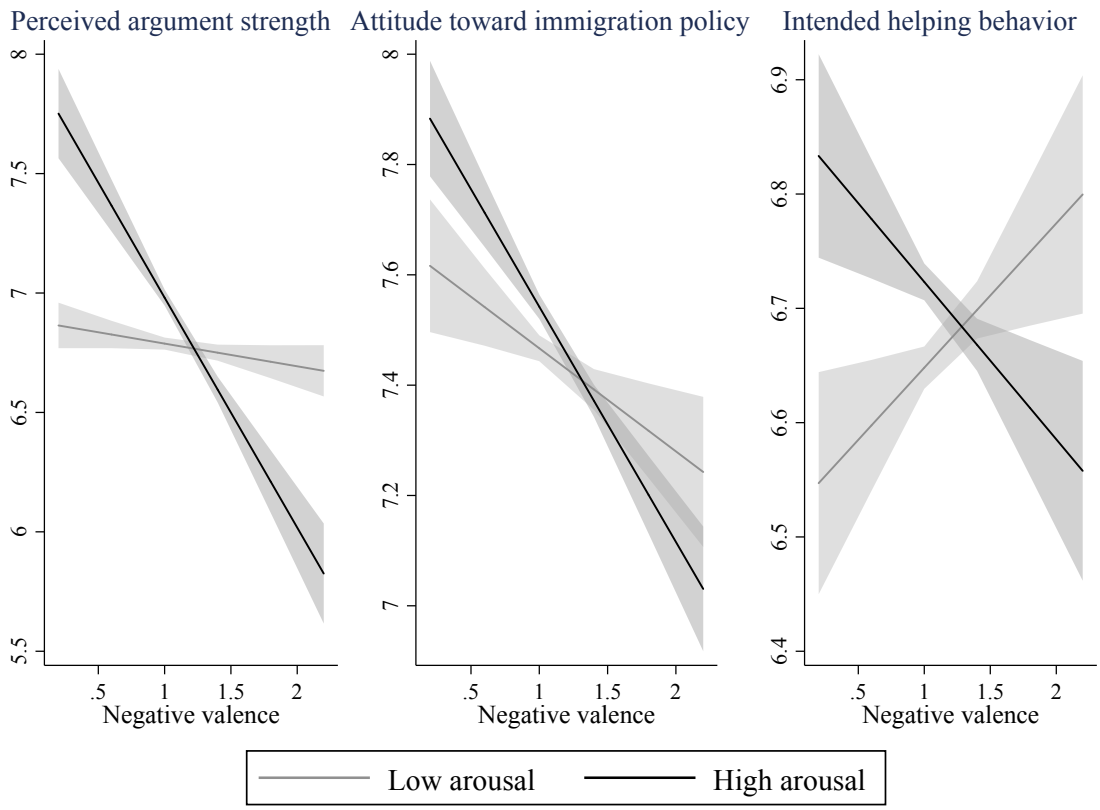


Figure A3 Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for counterarguing, attitudes toward the immigration policy and the intention to help refugees, as a function of negative valence (*Corrugator Superclii* activity), at low (M – SD) and high (M + SD) levels of arousal (SCL), using imputed outliers.

No transformations

To exclude the possibility that any effects are driven by the transformation of the SCL measure, in Table A3 and A4, I repeat the analyses without any transformations (apart from relating the measures to the baseline). That means that the SCL results are not smoothed when they increased faster than 25% per second or decrease faster than 5% per second. Again, all analyses are controlled for each second of the stimulus material through a dummy variable for each second except the first (the first second served as the reference category). These 53 dummy variables are not of interest for the research question, and in order to save space, they are omitted from the tables.

Table A3

Regression analyses predicting negative valence (EMG) and arousal (SCL) with the manipulated immigration threat, controlled for the time in seconds (omitted from the table) and using untransformed data.

Dependent variable	Negative valence	Arousal	Arousal	Arousal
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
High (vs. low) threat	-.04**	.04***	.04***	-.02
	(.01)	(.00)	(.01)	(.02)
Negative valence (t-1)			-.05***	-.08***
			(.01)	(.02)
Threat * negative valence (t-1)				.06***
				(.02)
Constant	1.04***	.01***	.05***	.09***
	(.01)	(.00)	(.01)	(.02)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; time-dummy variables omitted; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

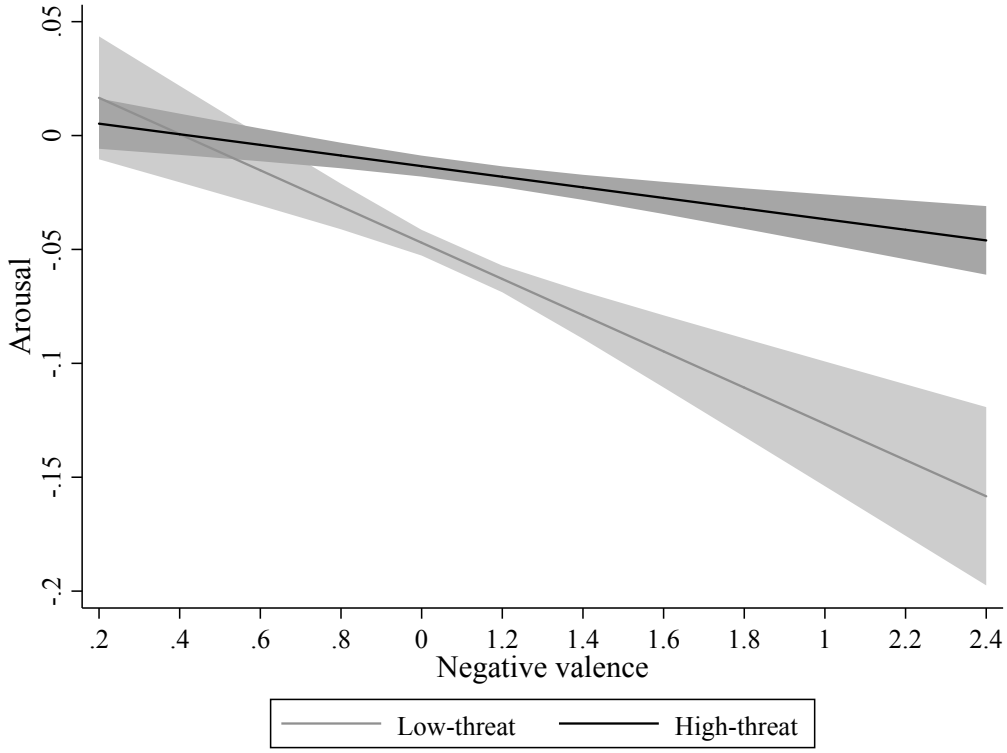


Figure A4 Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for arousal (SCL), as a function of negative valence (*Corrugator Superclii* activity) in the low-threat and high-threat conditions, using untransformed data.

Table A4

Regression analyses predicting counterarguing, policy attitudes and the willingness to help refugees with negative valence (EMG) and arousal (SCL) controlled for the time in seconds (omitted from the table) and using untransformed data.

Dependent variable	Perceived argument strength		Attitude toward immigration policy		Intended helping behavior	
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Negative valence (t-1)	-.34***	-.39***	-.16***	-.18***	-.00	-.02
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)	(.04)
Arousal	-.05**	.96***	-.02	.25	-.08***	.25**
	(.02)	(.15)	(.01)	(.14)	(.01)	(.09)
Negative valence (t-1) * arousal		-.79***		-.21*		-.25***
		(.12)		(.10)		(.07)
Constant	7.18***	7.23***	7.64***	7.65***	6.69***	6.71***
	(.05)	(.06)	(.05)	(.05)	(.04)	(.04)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; time-dummy variables omitted; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

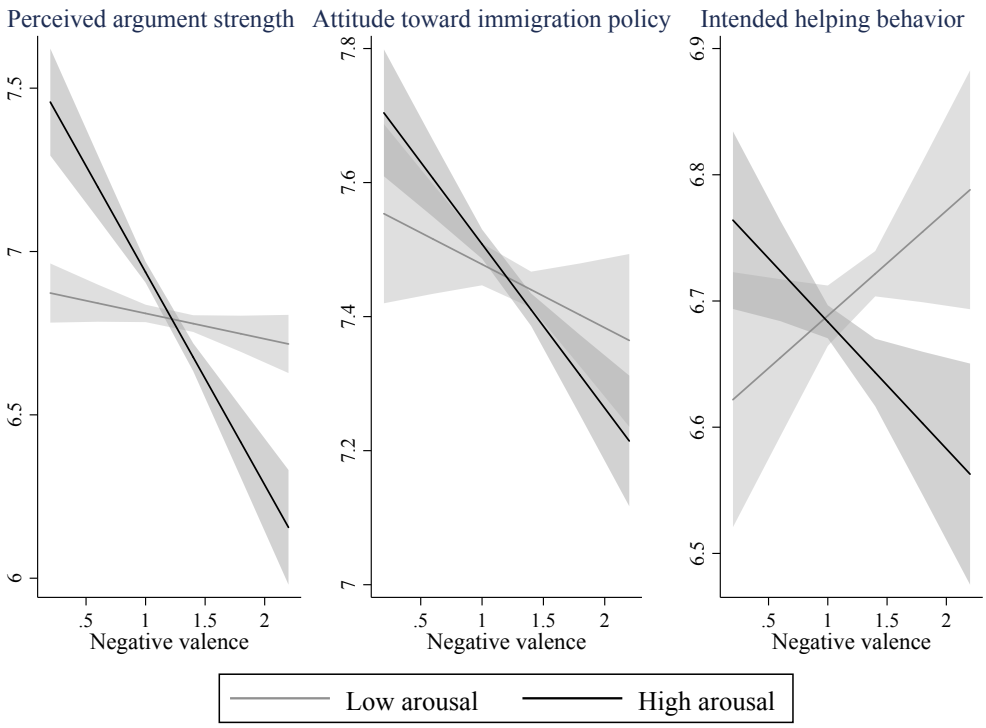


Figure A5 Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for counterarguing, attitudes toward the immigration policy and the intention to help refugees, as a function of negative valence (*Corrugator Superclii* activity), at low (M – SD) and high (M + SD) levels of arousal (SCL), using untransformed data.

Controlled for pretest immigration attitudes

To reduce the risk of post-treatment bias, I here repeat the regression models, controlled for pretest immigration attitudes. In the pretest of the experiment, participants were asked to rate their stance on ten political issues regarding among others socio-economic policy, gender issues, and immigration. The two items regarding immigration read "Austria should try to accept as few immigrants as possible" and "People who flee from violence should always be welcome in Austria". Participants could answer the questions on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) through 9 (completely agree). The items were recoded such that higher scores mean more positive attitudes toward immigration and averaged (Cronbach's alpha = .66, M = 7.41, SD = 1.54, min. = 2, max = 9). Again, all analyses also controlled for each second of the stimulus material through a dummy variable for each second except the first (the first second served as the reference category). These 53 dummy variables are not of interest for the research question, and in order to save space, they are omitted from the tables.

Table A5

Regression analyses predicting counterarguing, policy attitudes and the willingness to help refugees with negative valence (EMG) and arousal (SCL), controlled for pretest immigration attitudes and the time in seconds (omitted from the table).

Dependent variable	Perceived argument strength		Attitude toward immigration policy		Intended helping behavior	
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Negative valence (t-1)	-.04	.88***	-.01	.15*	-.06***	.19***
	(.02)	(.16)	(.02)	(.07)	(.01)	(.05)
Arousal	-.36***	-.41***	-.21***	-.22***	-.03	-.04*
	(.05)	(.06)	(.03)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)
Negative valence (t-1) * arousal		-.72***		-.13**		-.20***
		(.12)		(.05)		(.04)
Pretest immigration attitudes	.31***	.31***	.69***	.69***	.43***	.43***
	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)	(.00)
Constant	4.89***	4.93***	2.58***	2.59***	3.57***	3.58***
	(.05)	(.06)	(.03)	(.03)	(.02)	(.02)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; time-dummy variables omitted; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

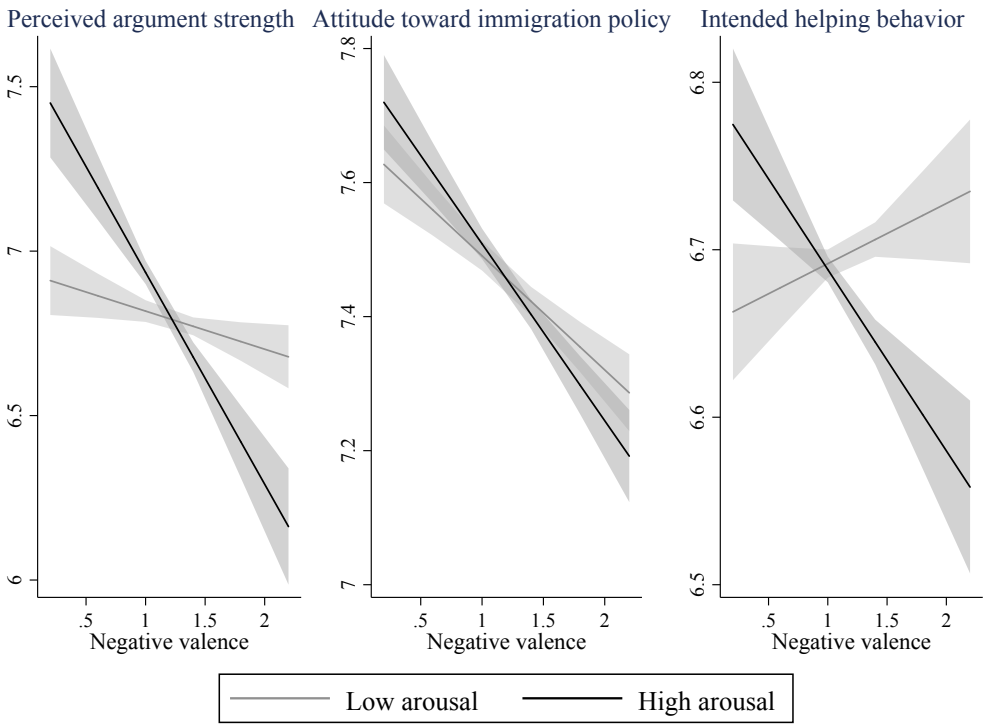


Figure A6 Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for counterarguing, attitudes toward the immigration policy and the intention to help refugees, as a function of negative valence (*Corrugator Superclii* activity), at low (M – SD) and high (M + SD) levels of arousal (SCL), controlled for pretest immigration attitudes.

Autocorrelation corrected

Table A6

Prais-Winsten regression analyses, with panel-corrected standard errors as well as a panel-specific AR(1) autocorrelation structure, predicting negative valence (EMG) and arousal (SCL) with the manipulated immigration threat.

Dependent variable	Negative valence	Arousal	Arousal	Arousal
Model	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
High (vs. low) threat	-.03	.03	.01	.01
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)
Negative valence (t-1)			-.00**	-.01*
			(.00)	(.00)
Threat * negative valence (t-1)				.00
				(.00)
Constant	1.14***	-.03	-.03*	-.03*
	(.01)	(.02)	(.02)	(.01)

Unstandardized coefficients; panel-corrected standard errors in parantheses; *** p < .001, ** p < .01, * p < .05

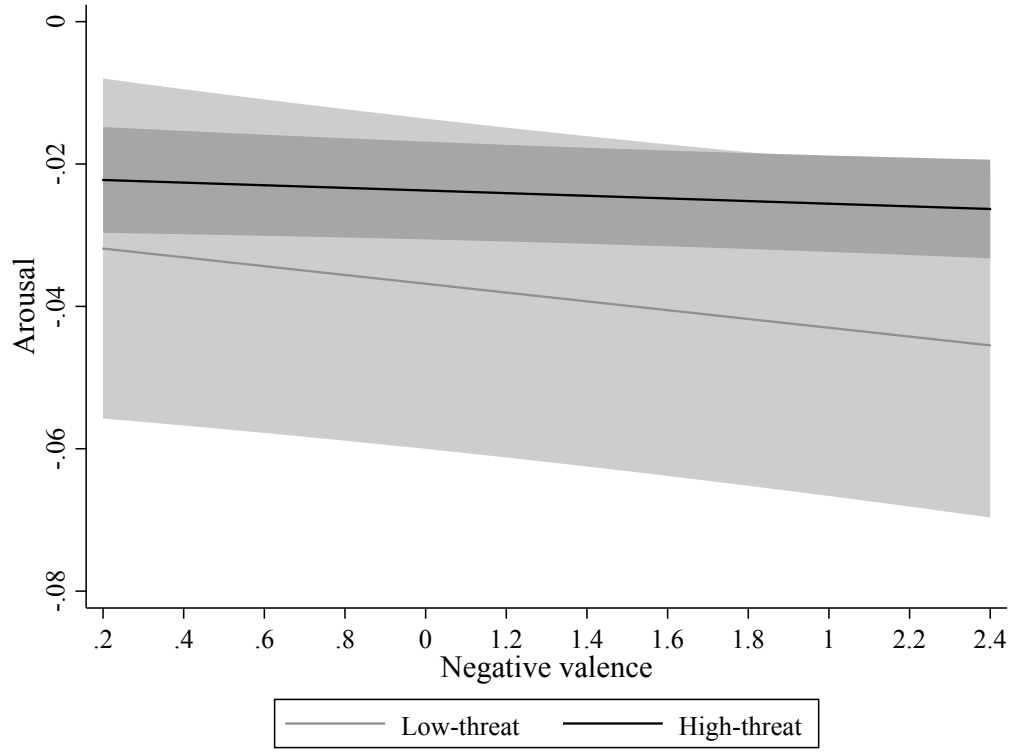


Figure A7 Predicted values and 95% confidence intervals for arousal (SCL), as a function of negative valence (*Corrugator Superclii* activity) in the low-threat and high-threat conditions, using Prais-Winsten regressions with panel-corrected standard errors, as well as a panel-specific AR(1) autocorrelation structure.

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Appendix Chapter VIII

Appendix A: English translations of the stimulus material

Underlined words and sentences indicate differences between the thematic and the episodic news frame conditions.

[Study 1: Female-bolstering / thematic]

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"Better quality of decisions and reduced masculine risk-seeking behavior."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What are its intended and unintended consequences for society? According to Mag. Julia Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, leading to a more equal business society.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, more women are now getting hired as member of a supervisory board in large Austrian companies. According to Müller, the gender quota eliminates structural discrimination against women and functions as a compensation for barriers and existing prejudices that prevent women to access high positions. "Before the new law, the male majority in Austrian supervisory boards chose new members from their personal and professional networks, who are often men too. Thus, underqualified men used to be hired based on nepotism, while qualified women were excluded. The new law ensures that talented and competent Austrian women will replace the less qualified men in boardrooms and other company ranks." Müller argues that these newly appointed women will exert their power to hire more women in influential positions throughout the company, leading to more gender equality in the whole corporation.

Another positive aspect of this new regulation is the signal companies send to their female employees. Müller states that newly appointed female supervisory board members can serve as a role model for other women who have ambition and business aspirations. "Through their presence on the Supervisory Board, younger employees will learn that anything is possible for them as well." In addition, Müller claims that more gender-equal boardrooms might improve the quality of boardroom decisions, and reduce typical masculine uncompromising, risk-seeking behavior.

"Thus," says Müller, "the gender quota seems to have a positive effect on Austria's businesses. It is a fair instrument to create gender equality and ensures that the best man or woman gets the job. We should even consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does."

[Study 1: Female-bolstering / episodic]

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"She improves the quality of decisions and reduces masculine risk-seeking behavior."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What's the situation in the boardroom today? According to Mag. Julia Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, leading to a more equal business society.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, one of Müller's respondents, Anna, was hired as a member of the supervisory board of a large Austrian company. According to Müller, the gender quota eliminates structural discrimination against Anna and functions as a compensation for barriers and existing prejudices that prevented Anna to access high positions. "Before the new law, the male majority in Austrian supervisory boards chose new members from their personal and professional networks, and they had already approached her competitor, Lukas. So Lukas was about to be hired based on nepotism, while Anna was excluded. The new law ensures that the talented and competent Anna will replace the less qualified Lukas in the supervisory board." Müller argues that these newly appointed women will exert their power to hire more women in influential positions throughout the company, leading to more gender equality in the whole corporation.

Another positive aspect of Anna's appointment is the signal the company sends to its female employees. Müller states that Anna can serve as a role model for other women who have ambition and business aspirations. "Through her presence on the supervisory board, younger employees will learn that anything is possible for them as well." In addition, Müller claims that the appointment of Anna – and not Lukas – might improve the quality of boardroom decisions, and reduce typical masculine uncompromising, risk-seeking behavior.

"Thus," says Müller, "the gender quota seems to have a positive effect on Austria's businesses. It is a fair instrument to create gender equality and ensures that the best man or woman gets the job. We should even consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does."

[Study 1: Male-bolstering, thematic]

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"Talented men leave the country, which harms Austrian businesses."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What are its consequences for society? According to Mag. Stefan Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, while men do not have the opportunity to reach such positions.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, hardly any men are appointed to supervisory boards of large Austrian companies today. According to Müller, this invasive gender quota forces companies to hire suboptimal candidates as supervisory board members, which leads to less efficient companies. "Before the new law there was already an increase in the number of female board members because companies understand the importance of a mixed board. But the gender quota forces companies to hire women, even if they are less qualified than a competing man." And because these women do not gain their position through merit, Müller says, they are taken less seriously by women and men alike. "This undermines not only the quality of supervisory boards, but also of the women who are appointed."

Another negative aspect of this new regulation is the signal companies send to their male employees. Müller states that men who have worked hard to achieve a successful career do not currently have the prospect of board membership, but women at exactly the same point in their career do have this opportunity. "This structural discrimination of men demotivates male employees in the company and tells them that their opportunities to grow in the ranks of the company are limited." According to Müller, this leads talented men to leave the country, which harms Austrian companies.

"Thus," says Müller, "the gender quota seems to have a negative effect on Austria's businesses. It is an unfair instrument that creates gender discrimination and prevents companies from hiring the best man or woman for the job. We should never consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does."

[Study 1: Male-bolstering, episodic]

Does the Austrian gender quota function?

"He leaves the country, which harms this business."

Since the first of January of this year, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members in their supervisory boards. Almost half a year later, it is time to evaluate the new regulation. What's the situation in the boardroom today? According to Mag. Stefan Müller, the head researcher of Linz Market Institute studying the gender quota in Austria, the number of female board members has risen slightly already, while men do not have the opportunity to reach such positions.

The new law states that, when a new position opens up, a female must be appointed until the quota is met. As a result, one of Müller's respondents, Lukas, could not be appointed to the supervisory board of a large Austrian company. According to Müller, this invasive gender quota forced the company to hire a suboptimal candidate as supervisory board member, which leads to a less efficient company. "Before the new law there was already an increase in the number of female board members because Lukas' company understands the importance of a mixed board. But the gender quota forced the company to hire Anna, even if she is less qualified than Lukas." And because Anna did not gain her position through merit, Müller says, she is taken less seriously by women and men alike. "This undermines not only the quality of the supervisory board, but also of Anna's credibility."

Another negative aspect of Anna's appointment is the signal the company sends to its male employees. Müller states that men like Lukas, who have worked hard to achieve a successful career do not currently have the prospect of board membership, but women like Anna at exactly the same point in their career do have this opportunity. "This structural discrimination of Lukas demotivates male employees in the company and tells them that their opportunities to grow in the ranks of the company are limited." According to Müller, this led Lukas to leave the country, which harms this company.

"Thus," says Müller, "the gender quota seems to have a negative effect on Austria's businesses. It is an unfair instrument that creates gender discrimination and prevents companies from hiring the best man or woman for the job. We should never consider expanding the quota to other influential positions in companies and maybe even public offices, like Germany does."

[Study 1: Control condition; not included in this paper]

Austrian economy grows since start of the year

In the first quarter, GDP rose by 0.8 per cent compared with the previous quarter.

In Austria, the economic upturn continues. Economic output again grew slightly in the first quarter, according to the monthly economic report of the Economic Forum. Employment is rising and is supporting private household consumption; investments have risen substantially, and exports are also contributing to growth. The outlook remains positive.

The Austrian GDP grew by 0.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2018 compared to the previous, after an increase of 0.9 per cent in the third and fourth quarters of 2017, the Economic Forum announced on Monday. Leading indicators, such as stock and commodity indices, have deteriorated somewhat in recent months, but remain positive. However, there are no signs of a renewed acceleration in the coming quarters.

Austria's exports grew slightly weaker in the first quarter of 2018 than in the fourth quarter of 2017. The inflation rate (CPI) fell by 0.1 percentage points to 1.8 per cent in April (HICP plus 1.9 per cent). The costs of housing, water, energy, restaurants and hotels contributed most to the rise in prices. Between 2012 and 2016, gross rents in Austria rose by an average of 14.3 per cent - general inflation in this period was just under seven per cent. From 2015 to 2016 alone, rents including operating costs rose by 3.2 percent. This is shown by the figures presented on Tuesday from the microcensus housing survey of Statistik Austria, for which 20,000 households are surveyed per quarter. In the private sector, rents, including operating costs, rose the most with 15.7 percent. Municipal and cooperative housing became only 11.6 percent more expensive. The Austria-wide average rent including operating costs is currently 7.4 euros per square metre across all segments. Though, there are large regional differences: Tenants in the west have to pay particularly much - in Salzburg 9 euros per square metre, in Tyrol and Vorarlberg 8.3 euros. The cheapest prices are 5.5 euros in Burgenland. In Vienna, an average of 7.7 euros is paid for rent.

The Austrian labor market is also developing favourably. According to preliminary estimates, the number of employees with active employment in May was 98,000 higher than in the previous year (plus 2.8 percent). The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate (national definition) remained at 7.7 per cent in May. Global economic growth is likely to have slowed slightly in the first quarter of 2018, but this is largely attributable to special effects. The forces behind the global upswing are still intact, economists say.

[Study 2: Article 1, female-bolstering, thematic]

The Price of Motherhood

Maternity leave puts mothers on the professional side line

After maternity leave, many women lose their leadership position.

According to a study by the Chamber of Labor, the return to work puts many mothers on the professional side line. In that respect, the decision to have children is often accompanied by occupational discrimination. Therefore, the Chamber of Labor demands a legal right to maternity leave even within smaller companies. To which, up to now, only employees of larger companies are entitled to.

According to Irene Holzbauer, labor law expert of the Vienna Chamber of Labor, 29% of the employed work in companies with less than 20 employees. Around 42% of new mothers experience this form of occupational discrimination at first hand. When a woman returns back to work after maternity leave and the birth of her child, she no longer has, in 34% of cases, her former leadership position, even only after an absence of five months. Employers are of the opinion that leadership positions can only be adequately exercised in the context of a full-time employment. Therefore, this form of discrimination is most frequently found among women in leadership positions. Their hard-earned leadership positions are off-handedly given to male colleagues who are available on a full-time basis. "From a legal point of view, there is no discrimination after pregnancy and maternity leave. In practice, however, it happens daily," says Holzbauer.

Ingrid Moritz, head of the Women and Family Department of the Chamber of Labor, believes that in this context, the main responsibility lies in the hands of the Austrian legislator. Those who transfer their employees to other positions after maternity leave should have to obtain judicial approval. Furthermore, an increase in maternity leave management is needed in companies. And fathers' participation should be promoted more strongly. "It is about a different corporate culture," said Moritz. She also demands a right to maternity leave in companies with up to 20 employees. Up to now, only employees of larger companies had that legal right.

[Study 2: Article 1, female-bolstering, episodic]

The Price of Motherhood

Maternity leave puts mother from Salzburg on the professional side line

After maternity leave, Irene Holzbauer lost her leadership position.

According to the Chamber of Labor, the return to her job put Irene Holzbauer on the professional side line. In that respect, the decision to have children was thus accompanied by occupational discrimination. Therefore, the Chamber of Labor demands a legal right to maternity leave even within smaller companies. To which, up to now, only employees of larger companies are entitled to.

Irene Holzbauer was the marketing chief of a small marketing agency in Salzburg with less than 20 employees. As a new mother, she experienced this form of occupational discrimination at first hand. "I returned back to work after maternity leave and the birth of my child. And that only after 5 months. But still, my former leadership position was taken from me." Her employer was of the opinion that leadership positions can only be adequately exercised in the context of a full-time employment. Therefore, this form of discrimination is most frequently found among women in leadership positions, such as Ms. Holzbauer's. Her hard-earned leadership position was off-handedly given to a male colleague who is available on a full-time basis. "From a legal point of view, there is no discrimination after pregnancy and maternity leave. In practice, however, it happens daily," says Holzbauer.

Ingrid Moritz, head of the Women and Family Department of the Chamber of Labor, believes that in this context, the main responsibility lies in the hands of the Austrian legislator. Those who transfer their employees to other positions after maternity leave should have to obtain judicial approval. Furthermore, an increase in maternity leave management is needed in companies. And fathers' participation should be promoted more strongly. "It is about a different corporate culture," said Moritz. She also demands a right to maternity leave in companies with up to 20 employees. Up to now, only employees of larger companies had that legal right.

[Study 2: Article 2, female-bolstering, thematic]

Women are being denied their leadership skills

Women are discriminated against in a seemingly gender-neutral application process.

In recent years, attorney Veronika Schmidt has recognized a steady increase in complaints about indirect discrimination in application procedures for leadership positions. On the face of it, women are confronted with gender-neutral application processes, which nonetheless give their male competitors an advantage.

When affected women ask their lawyer for advice, they are irritated: "Women work for many years as clerks and often even train new employees," reports Schmidt. "If a position for the deputy head of departmental is then internally advertised, they fulfill the requirement profile and apply. Often however, the internal selection process does not go well for women. In 42% of cases, relatively inexperienced and less qualified younger colleagues are preferred, sometimes even trained by the women themselves. The given reason for the final decision is that their male competitors allegedly did better in the selection process. Studies show that women are much more likely to be denied leadership qualities," says Schmidt with indignation. "The heads of departments often think that women cannot handle difficult cases because they are too emotional and in need of harmony. Therefore, only few women make it into the circle of managers in companies. In 83% of the departments, the heads of departments and their deputies are also men. Often managers are of the opinion that women lack assertiveness, for instance."

Application committees thus only seemingly apply gender-neutral measures. With a focus on stereotypically male character traits, such as assertiveness, self-confidence or dominance, men have a better chance of being hired. If application committees were to focus more on traits such as the ability to compromise, trustworthiness, or solely expertise, women would certainly have a better chance of being hired for leadership positions," says Schmidt.

[Study 2: Article 2, female-bolstering, episodic]

“My leadership skills have been denied”

Schmidt was discriminated against in a seemingly gender-neutral application process.

After experiencing it at firsthand, Veronika Schmidt recognized a steady increase in complaints about indirect discrimination in application procedures for leadership positions. On the face of it, women are confronted with gender-neutral application processes, which nonetheless give their male competitors an advantage.

Veronika Schmidt is one of these affected women. When she asked her lawyer for advice, she was irritated: "I have been working as a clerk in our sales department for 15 years and I also train new employees," she reports. "Recently, the position for the deputy head of department was internally advertised for my department. Since I meet the requirement profile, I have applied." However, the internal selection process did not go well for Ms. Schmidt. A relatively inexperienced and less qualified younger colleague, whom she had even trained herself three years before, was preferred over her. The given reason for the final decision is that her competitor allegedly did better in the selection process. "I was simply denied leadership qualities," says Veronika Schmidt outraged. "The head of department even told me once that he thought I couldn't handle difficult cases because I was too emotional and in need of harmony. Therefore, only a few women make it into the circle of managers in our company. The head of department and their previous deputies are also men. The management is of the opinion that women lack assertiveness.”

In the case of Ms. Schmidt, the application committee only seemingly applied gender-neutral measures. With a focus on stereotypically male character traits, such as assertiveness, self-confidence or dominance, men have a better chance of being hired. If the application committee were to focus more on traits such as the ability to compromise, trustworthiness, or solely expertise, women would certainly have a better chance of being hired for leadership positions," Schmidt says.

[Study 2: Article 3, male-bolstering, thematic]

Discrimination of men in the Austrian science?

"Men have to give up their passion for science and pursue a different career 32% more often"

Projections show discrimination against men in the Austrian science.

Austrian universities actively promote women through special support and study programs that give preference to women in the admissions process. In theory, this preference for women should only apply if they have the same qualifications as their male competitors. In practice, however, qualification characteristics are rarely the same and this procedure can lead to a discrimination against men in the academic work sphere.

Markus Brunner is a researcher at the Institute for Life Science at the Austrian Academy of Sciences and confirms that men are often not denied entry into the academic world on the basis of their qualifications, but rather on the basis of their gender. Since the 1990s, women in Austria even have an educational advantage. In addition, in the last 20 years more women than men have been employed as professors each year. Nonetheless, many men remain to be determined and receive excellent grades. After graduation, many female students receive grants as part of the advancement of women and take advantage of programs that support women in application procedures, according to Brunner. In Austrian universities there are also influential gender management teams which make it even more difficult to be hired as a man. As a result, men often receive rejection letters as a response to their applications because academic application committees do not want to bother defending why they chose a male candidate over a female candidate. ”Such application procedures can be unfair and discriminatory”, says Brunner. "In some academic fields there are already more women than men, and thus their chances of getting a job in science are even higher.” Ultimately, 32% more men than women decide to give up their passion for academia and pursue a different career. Brunner warns the Austrian academic community that current women's advancement programs could jeopardize the quality of research: "Talented men are discouraged because they are given the impression that it is extremely difficult for men to gain a foothold in the Austrian sciences.”

[Study 2: Article 3, male-bolstering, episodic]

Discrimination of men in the Austrian science?

"I had to give up my passion for science and pursue a different career"

Markus Brunner warns against the discrimination of men in the Austrian science.

Austrian universities actively promote women through special support and study programs that give preference to women in the admissions process. In theory, this preference for women should only apply if they have the same qualifications as their male competitors. In practice, however, qualification characteristics are rarely the same and this procedure can lead to a discrimination against men in the academic work sphere.

Markus Brunner is now a researcher at a private research institute. He was not denied entry into the academic world on the basis of his qualifications, but rather on the basis of his gender. Throughout his academic education, men have always been a minority in the classroom and among the teaching staff. Nonetheless, Markus Brunner remained determined and always received excellent grades. After graduation, his fellow female students received grants as part of the advancement of women and, for example, took advantage of programs that support women in application procedures, according to Brunner. There is also an influential gender management team at his university, which makes it even more difficult to be hired as a man. As a result, he often received rejection letters as a response to his applications because academic application committees do not bother defending why they chose a male candidate over a female candidate. “Such application procedures can be unfair and discriminatory”, says Brunner. "There are already more women than men in my field, and thus their chances of getting a job in academia are even higher.” He finally decided to give up his passion for academia and pursues a different career. Brunner warns the Austrian academic community that current women's advancement programs could jeopardize the quality of research: "Talented men are discouraged because they are given the impression that it is extremely difficult for men to gain a foothold in the Austrian sciences.”

[Study 2: Article 4, male-bolstering, thematic]

Brain Drain in the Tech Industry

Gender quota leads to male emigration of 15% in the Tech Industry

Male technology experts are emigrating because of the Austrian gender quota.

Since January 1, 2018, not only government agencies but also large companies have been required to have 30% female members on their supervisory boards. However, this new regulation does not affect all professional sectors equally. Especially in the field of technological research, there is a risk that this will lead to a "brain drain", says Stefan Müller, head of the Market Institute Linz, which studies the gender quota in Austria.

Müller explains that many men have always been fully committed to their professional careers and would also meet all the necessary qualifications to become members of the supervisory board. However, due to the current gender quota in Austria, they have no prospects for a position on the supervisory board. Women at exactly the same position in their professional career, however, would have this opportunity. "This structural discrimination against men is very demotivating for male employees and shows them that their opportunities for advancement are very limited in Austria." "This," says Müller, "leads to skilled men in technological professions emigrating abroad about 15% more often."

"Thus, the gender quota leads to a real "brain drain" in the tech industry. It is an unfair instrument that creates gender discrimination and prevents companies from hiring the best man or woman for the job," says Müller.

[Study 2: Article 4, male-bolstering, episodic]

Brain-Drain in the Tech Industry

Male technology expert (31) emigrates due to the gender quota

Stefan Müller emigrated because of the Austrian gender quota.

Since January 1, 2018, not only government agencies but also large companies are required to have 30% female members on their supervisory boards. However, this new regulation does not affect all professional sectors equally. Especially in the field of technological research, there is a risk that this will lead to a "brain drain", says Stefan Müller (31), who himself has moved abroad because of the gender quota.

In his new office, Müller explains that he has always been fully committed to his professional career and that he would also meet all the necessary qualifications to become a member of the supervisory board. However, due to the current gender quota in Austria, he has no prospects for a position on the supervisory board. His female colleagues at exactly the same position in their professional career, however, would have this opportunity. "This structural discrimination against men has been very demotivating for me and made me realize that my opportunities for advancement are very limited in Austria. This," says Müller, "has led me to emigrate abroad."

"Thus, the gender quota leads to a real "brain drain" in this company. It is an unfair instrument that creates gender discrimination and prevents companies from hiring the best man or woman for the job," says Müller.

Appendix B: Visual examples of stimulus material

[Study 1: Female-bolstering / thematic]

Menü | Politik Meinung Wirtschaft Panorama Sport Kultur Netzwelt Wissenschaft mehr ▾

POLITIK

Schlagzeilen | Wetter | DAX 12.854,88 | TV-Programm | Abo

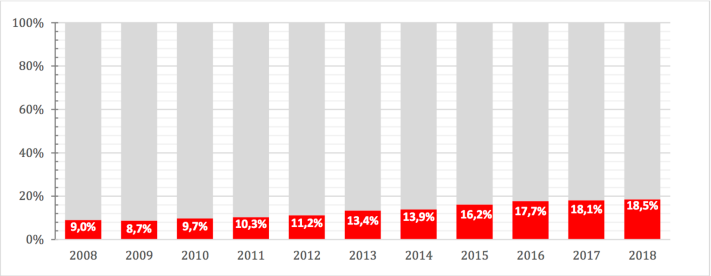
Nachrichten > Politik > Österreich > Frauenquote > Wirkung der österreichischen Frauenquote

„Bessere Qualität von Entscheidungen und reduzierte männliche Risikofreude."

Wie wirkt die österreichische Frauenquote?

Seit dem 1. Jänner dieses Jahres sind nicht nur Regierungsbehörden, sondern auch große Unternehmen dazu verpflichtet, 30% weibliche Mitglieder in ihren Aufsichtsräten zu haben. Fast ein halbes Jahr später ist es an der Zeit, die neue Verordnung zu bewerten. Was sind die Folgen für die Gesellschaft? Laut Mag. Julia Müller, Leiterin des Linzer Marktinstituts, die die Geschlechterquote in Österreich untersucht, ist die Zahl der Aufsichtsrätinnen bereits leicht angestiegen, was zu einer gerechteren Wirtschaftsgesellschaft führt.

Geschlechterverhältnis in den Aufsichtsräten
Top-200-Unternehmen 2008–2018



Teilen Twittern E-Mail

Dienstag, **12.06.2018** 08:57 Uhr Drucken Nutzungsrechte Feedback

Das neue Gesetz besagt, dass, wenn eine neue Stelle frei wird, eine Frau ernannt werden muss, bis die Quote erreicht ist. Dadurch werden nun mehr Frauen als Aufsichtsratsmitglieder in großen österreichischen Unternehmen eingestellt. Laut Müller beseitigt die Geschlechterquote die strukturelle Diskriminierung von Frauen und dient als Ausgleich für Barrieren und bestehende Vorurteile, die Frauen den Aufstieg zu hohen Positionen erschweren. „Vor dem neuen Gesetz wählte die männliche Mehrheit in den österreichischen Aufsichtsräten neue Mitglieder aus ihren persönlichen und beruflichen Netzwerken, die oft Männer sind. So wurden früher unterqualifizierte Männer aufgrund von Vetternwirtschaft eingestellt, während qualifizierte Frauen ausgeschlossen wurden. Das neue Gesetz stellt sicher, dass talentierte und kompetente österreichische Frauen die weniger qualifizierten Männer in Aufsichtsräten und sogar in anderen Unternehmensrängen ablösen." Müller argumentiert weiter, dass diese neu ernannten Frauen ihre Macht einsetzen können, um mehr Frauen in einflussreichen Positionen im gesamten Unternehmen einzustellen. Das wird zu mehr Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter im gesamten Unternehmen führen.

Ein weiterer positiver Aspekt dieser neuen Regelung ist das Signal, das die Unternehmen an ihre weiblichen Mitarbeiterinnen senden. Müller erklärt, dass neu ernannte Aufsichtsrätinnen als Vorbild für andere Frauen dienen können, die Ehrgeiz und unternehmerische Ambitionen haben. „Durch ihre Präsenz im Aufsichtsrat werden jüngere Mitarbeiterinnen lernen, dass auch für sie alles möglich ist." Darüber hinaus behauptet Müller, dass mehr geschlechtergerechte Vorstandsetagen die Qualität der Entscheidungen verbessern und die typisch männliche, kompromisslose Risikofreude reduzieren könnten.

ANZEIGE



„So", meint Müller, „scheint sich die Frauenquote positiv auf die österreichischen Unternehmen auszuwirken. Es ist ein faires Instrument, um die Gleichstellung der Geschlechter in Spitzenpositionen zu schaffen und dafür zu sorgen, dass der beste Mann oder die beste Frau den Job bekommt. Wir sollten sogar erwägen, die Quote auf andere einflussreiche Positionen in Unternehmen und vielleicht sogar in öffentlichen Ämtern auszudehnen, wie es in Deutschland der Fall ist."

[Study 1: Male-bolstering, episodic]

Menü | Politik Meinung Wirtschaft Panorama Sport Kultur Netzwelt Wissenschaft mehr ▾

POLITIK

Schlagzeilen | Wetter | DAX 12.854,88 | TV-Programm | Abo

Nachrichten > Politik > Österreich > Frauenquote > Wirkung der österreichischen Frauenquote

„Er wandert ins Ausland ab, was diesem Unternehmen schadet."

Wie wirkt die österreichische Frauenquote?

Seit dem 1. Jänner dieses Jahres sind nicht nur Regierungsbehörden, sondern auch große Unternehmen dazu verpflichtet, 30% weibliche Mitglieder in ihren Aufsichtsräten zu haben. Fast ein halbes Jahr später ist es an der Zeit, die neue Verordnung zu bewerten. Wie sieht es heute im Sitzungssaal aus? Laut Mag. Stefan Müller, Leiter des Linzer Marktinstituts, der die Geschlechterquote in Österreich untersucht, ist die Zahl der Frauen im Aufsichtsrat bereits leicht angestiegen, während Männer derzeit nicht die Möglichkeit haben, diese Position zu erreichen.



Teilen Twittern E-Mail

Dienstag, **12.06.2018** 08:57 Uhr Drucken Nutzungsrechte Feedback

Das neue Gesetz besagt, dass, wenn eine neue Stelle frei wird, eine Frau ernannt werden muss, bis die Quote erreicht ist. So konnte einer von Müllers Befragten, Lukas, nicht als Aufsichtsratsmitglied in einem großen österreichischen Unternehmen eingestellt werden. Laut Müller zwang diese invasive Geschlechterquote das Unternehmen, einen suboptimalen Kandidaten als Aufsichtsratsmitglied einzustellen, was zu einem weniger effizienten Unternehmen führt. „Vor dem neuen Gesetz gab es bereits einen Anstieg der weiblichen Aufsichtsratsmitglieder, weil Lukas' Unternehmen die Bedeutung eines gemischten Rates versteht. Aber die Geschlechterquote zwang die Firma, Anna einzustellen, obwohl sie weniger qualifiziert ist als Lukas." Und weil Anna ihre Position nicht durch Verdienste erworben habe, werde sie von Frauen und Männern gleichermaßen weniger ernst genommen. „Das untergräbt nicht nur die Qualität des Aufsichtsrats, sondern auch Annas Glaubwürdigkeit."

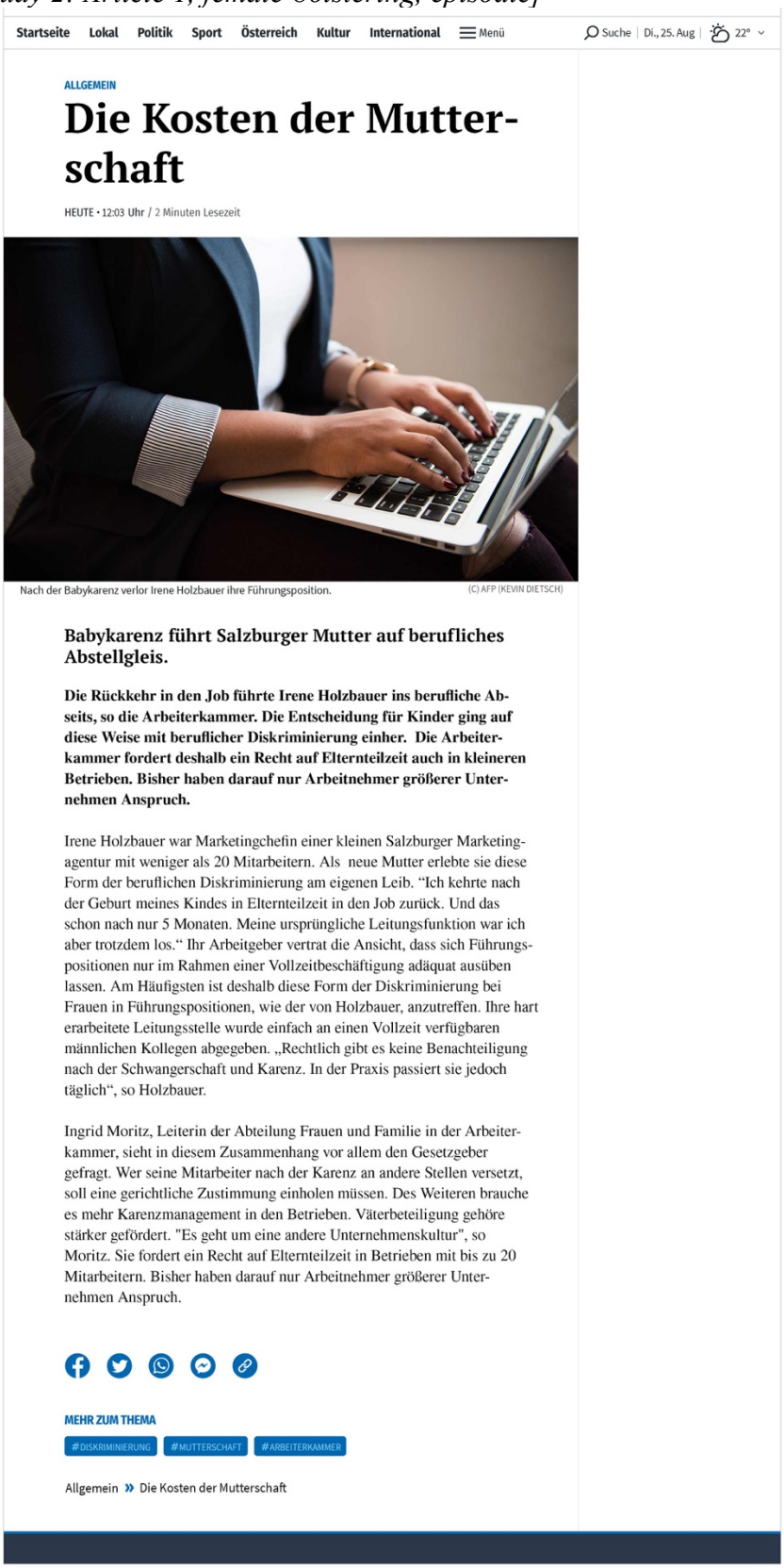
ANZEIGE



Ein weiterer negativer Aspekt der Ernennung von Anna in den Aufsichtsrat anstatt Lukas ist das Signal, das das Unternehmen an seine männlichen Mitarbeiter sendet. Müller sagt, dass Männer wie Lukas, die hart gearbeitet haben, um eine erfolgreiche Karriere zu erreichen, derzeit nicht die Aussicht auf eine Aufsichtsratsmitgliedschaft haben, aber Frauen wie Anna an genau der gleichen Stelle in ihrer Karriere haben diese Möglichkeit. „Diese strukturelle Diskriminierung von Lukas demotiviert die männlichen Mitarbeiter im Unternehmen und sagt ihnen, dass ihre Möglichkeiten, in den Reihen des Unternehmens zu wachsen, begrenzt sind." Dies, so Müller, führe dazu, dass Lukas ins Ausland abwandert, was diesem Unternehmen schadet.

„So", meint Müller, „scheint sich die Geschlechterquote negativ auf die österreichischen Unternehmen auszuwirken. Es ist ein unfaires Instrument, das Geschlechterdiskriminierung schafft und Unternehmen daran hindert, den besten Mann oder die beste Frau für den Job einzustellen. Und wir sollten keinesfalls erwägen, die Quote auf andere einflussreiche Positionen in Unternehmen oder öffentlichen Ämtern auszudehnen, wie es in Deutschland der Fall ist."

[Study 2: Article 1, female-bolstering, episodic]



Startseite Lokal Politik Sport Österreich Kultur International Menü Suche | Di., 25. Aug | 22°

ALLGEMEIN

Die Kosten der Mutterschaft

HEUTE • 12:03 Uhr / 2 Minuten Lesezeit

Nach der Babykarenz verlor Irene Holzbauer ihre Führungsposition. (C) AFP (KEVIN DIETSCH)

Babykarenz führt Salzburger Mutter auf berufliches Abstellgleis.

Die Rückkehr in den Job führte Irene Holzbauer ins berufliche Abseits, so die Arbeiterkammer. Die Entscheidung für Kinder ging auf diese Weise mit beruflicher Diskriminierung einher. Die Arbeiterkammer fordert deshalb ein Recht auf Elternteilzeit auch in kleineren Betrieben. Bisher haben darauf nur Arbeitnehmer größerer Unternehmen Anspruch.

Irene Holzbauer war Marketingchefin einer kleinen Salzburger Marketingagentur mit weniger als 20 Mitarbeitern. Als neue Mutter erlebte sie diese Form der beruflichen Diskriminierung am eigenen Leib. "Ich kehrte nach der Geburt meines Kindes in Elternteilzeit in den Job zurück. Und das schon nach nur 5 Monaten. Meine ursprüngliche Leitungsfunktion war ich aber trotzdem los." Ihr Arbeitgeber vertrat die Ansicht, dass sich Führungspositionen nur im Rahmen einer Vollzeitbeschäftigung adäquat ausüben lassen. Am Häufigsten ist deshalb diese Form der Diskriminierung bei Frauen in Führungspositionen, wie der von Holzbauer, anzutreffen. Ihre hart erarbeitete Leitungsstelle wurde einfach an einen Vollzeit verfügbaren männlichen Kollegen abgegeben. „Rechtlich gibt es keine Benachteiligung nach der Schwangerschaft und Karenz. In der Praxis passiert sie jedoch täglich", so Holzbauer.

Ingrid Moritz, Leiterin der Abteilung Frauen und Familie in der Arbeiterkammer, sieht in diesem Zusammenhang vor allem den Gesetzgeber gefragt. Wer seine Mitarbeiter nach der Karenz an andere Stellen versetzt, soll eine gerichtliche Zustimmung einholen müssen. Des Weiteren brauche es mehr Karenzmanagement in den Betrieben. Väterbeteiligung gehöre stärker gefördert. "Es geht um eine andere Unternehmenskultur", so Moritz. Sie fordert ein Recht auf Elternteilzeit in Betrieben mit bis zu 20 Mitarbeitern. Bisher haben darauf nur Arbeitnehmer größerer Unternehmen Anspruch.

MEHR ZUM THEMA

#DISKRIMINIERUNG #MUTTERSCHAFT #ARBEITERKAMMER

Allgemein » Die Kosten der Mutterschaft

[Study 2: Article 4, Male-bolstering, thematic]

ALLGEMEIN

Talentabwanderung in der Tech-Industrie

HEUTE • 10:11 Uhr / 2 Minuten Lesezeit



Männliche Technologie-Experten wandern wegen der Frauenquote ins Ausland ab. SYMBOLBILD (C) VALENTIN STOCKER

Durch die Frauenquote wandern männliche Technologie-Experte 15% häufiger ins Ausland ab

Seit dem 1. Jänner 2018 sind nicht nur Regierungsbehörden, sondern auch große Unternehmen dazu verpflichtet, 30% weibliche Mitglieder in ihren Aufsichtsräten zu verzeichnen. Diese neue Regelung wirkt sich jedoch nicht auf alle beruflichen Sparten gleichermaßen aus. Vor allem im Bereich der technologischen Forschung besteht die Gefahr, dass dies zu einem "brain-drain" führt, sagt Stefan Müller, Leiter des Linzer Marktinstituts, welches die Geschlechterquote in Österreich untersucht.

Müller erklärt, dass viele Männer stets mit vollem Einsatz für ihre berufliche Karriere gearbeitet haben und auch alle nötigen Qualifikationen erfüllen würden, um Aufsichtsratsmitglied zu werden. Durch die derzeitige Geschlechterquote in Österreich, haben sie aber keine Aussichten auf eine Stelle als Aufsichtsratsmitglied. Frauen an genau der gleichen Stelle in ihrer beruflichen Karriere hätten aber sehr wohl diese Möglichkeit. „Diese strukturelle Diskriminierung von Männern demotiviert männlichen Mitarbeiter sehr und führt ihnen vor Augen, dass ihre Möglichkeiten auf Aufstiegschancen in Österreich begrenzt sind. Dies", so Müller, "führe dazu, dass fachkundige Männer in technologischen Berufen um rund 15% häufiger ins Ausland abwandern."

„So führt die Frauenquote zu einem echten "brain-drain" in der Tech-Industrie. Es ist ein unfaires Instrument, das Geschlechterdiskriminierung schafft und Unternehmen daran hindert, den besten Mann oder die beste Frau für den Job einzustellen", meint Müller.

MEHR ZUM THEMA

#DISKRIMINIERUNG #ABWANDERUNG #TECH-INDUSTRIE

Allgemein » Talentabwanderung in der Tech-Industrie

Appendix C: Codebook counterarguing variable

In general, in your opinion, does the thought agree or go along with the (arguments in) the article? Or does the thought disagree with, go against, or counterargue against the (arguments in) the article?

- *Please compare the thought with the specific article that the respondent read.*
- *This question is relatively free to your interpretation.*
- *You are allowed to use the other thoughts of the respondent to interpret each thought.*
- *If the thought contains elements of both pro- and counter arguments, choose the dominant element.*
- *Only if there are no evaluative statements, or both are equally strong, choose "neutral".*
- *Below are examples of how thoughts can be pro- and counterarguments for or against both the pro-quota articles and the contra-quota articles. These are examples and there may be cases outside of the contents of this table. In the end, you decide and not the table.*
- *This is the key variable in the codebook, so please take your time to think, when in doubt.*

Answer options:

- Going along with the article
- Neutral
- Going against the article

Article:	**Pro-quota article**		**Contra-quota article**	
Choice:	**Going along**	**Going against**	**Going along**	**Going against**
Arguments	repeat/support arguments from the article	counter/discharge arguments from the article	repeat/support arguments from the article	counter/discharge arguments from the article
	offer new arguments that support the quota	offer new arguments that oppose the quota	offer new arguments that oppose the quota	offer new arguments that support the quota
Expressing	agreement with (parts of) the article or argumentation	disagreement with (parts of) the article or argumentation	agreement with (parts of) the article or argumentation	disagreement with (parts of) the article or argumentation
	support for women / women's rights	opposition to women / women's rights	opposition to women / women's rights	support for women / women's rights
	opposition to men's position	support for men's position	support for men's position	opposition to men's position
Evaluative statements	positive about the article / journalist / medium	negative about the article / journalist / medium	positive about the article / journalist / medium	negative about the article / journalist / medium
	positive undirected	negative undirected	positive undirected	negative undirected

Appendix D: Group-consonant attitude scales

Group-consonant attitudes (Study 1)
All items of the scale are visible in Table A1, and were shown to participants in random order. Participants rated the gender quota policy on seven items, using a Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) through 9 (completely agree). Items 5, 6 and 7 were recoded such that higher scores on all items mean more support of the gender quota policy. An exploratory factor analysis identified one factor for the positively formulated statements (loadings > .57, Eigenvalue = 2.59), and one for the negatively formulated statements (loadings > .40, Eigenvalue = .79), but the scale was reliable as a whole (Cronbach's alpha = .78).

Table A1
All items of the group-consonant attitudes scale of Study 1.

1	In general, it is good that the gender quota has been implemented.
2	The gender quota reduces the structural discrimination of women in Austria.
3	The gender quota improves the quality of supervisory boards in Austria.
4	The gender quota reduces the number of underqualified men in Austrian supervisory boards.
5	The gender quota leads to the structural discrimination of men in Austria.
6	The gender quota can force companies to hire suboptimal candidates.
7	The gender quota causes women in supervisory boards to be taken less seriously.

Group-consonant attitudes (Study 2)
All items of the scale are visible in Table A2, and were shown to participants in random order. Participants rated the state of gender equality in the workplace in Austria, using a Likert scale from 1 (completely disagree) through 9 (completely agree). Item 4 was recoded such that higher scores on all items mean more perceived gender equality in the workplace. An exploratory factor analysis identified one factor for the scale (loadings > .43, eigenvalue = 3.01), and the scale was reliable (Cronbach's alpha = .87).

Table A2
All items of the group-consonant attitudes scale of Study 2.

1	Gender equality in the workplace, i.e. the equal treatment of women and men, has come far enough.
2	All in all, gender equality in the workplace has been reached in Austria.
3	In Austria, women and men are treated equally in their professional lives.
4	We need more laws in Austria to ensure gender equality in the workplace.
5	In Austria, women and men have euqal opportunities in their professional development.

Appendix E: Main effect analyses

In this appendix, we test whether there is a main effect of news frames on group-consonant attitudes. Therefore, we regress group-consonant attitudes on the frame condition for both Study 1 and Study 2. For study 1, we control for the omitted factor in the design: the valence of the article. We do not find a main effect of framing on group-consonant attitudes. The results are reported in Table A3.

Table A3
Linear regressions predicting group-consonant attitudes, using only the frame of the article(s), controlled for the valence of the article in Study 1.

	Study 1		**Study 2**	
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Frame (episodic)	-.02	(.10)	-.15	(.12)
Valence (pro-male)	-.04	(.10)		
Constant	5.46**	(.22)	5.68**	(.08)
Adjusted R^2	.00		.00	

** p<.01, * p<.05

Appendix F: Analyses with separate indicators

Here, we repeat the main analyses of the article for the separate indicators of identity-motivated reasoning in Study 1. This means that we repeat the mediation analysis using the measures for argument derogation, source derogation and counterarguing. We add all three indicators to one parallel mediation analysis. For comparability, we use the standardized scales of each measure, the measurement of which are described in the methods section of the manuscript. The results are reported in Table A4.

Table A4
Parallel mediation model, using Hayes' (2013) PROCESS macro with 10.000 bootstrapped samples.

	Argument derogation		**Source derogation**		**Counter-arguing**	
Mediator equation. DV: identity-motivated reasoning indicators						
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*
Frame (episodic)	-.16*	(.07)	-.12†	(.07)	-.03	(.07)
Valence (pro-male)	-.07	(.07)	-.13†	(.07)	-.01	(.07)
Constant	.35**	(.15)	.37**	(.15)	.07**	(.15)
Dependent variable equation. DV: group-consonant attitudes						
Frame (episodic)			.06	(.09)		
Identity-motivated reasoning (argument derogation)			.27**	(.03)		
Identity-motivated reasoning (source derogation)			.23**	(.04)		
Identity-motivated reasoning (counterarguing)			.26**	(.01)		
Valence (pro-male)			.01	(.09)		
Constant			5.26**	(.20)		
Indirect effect, DV: group-consonant attitudes						
	b	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*
Episodic frame, through identity-motivaed reasoning	-.04*	(.02)	-.03*	(.02)	-.01	(.02)

** p<.01, * p<.05, † p<.10

Online Appendix G: Analyses using the preregistered scale for gender identification

Here, we repeat the exploratory analyses of the article, using the gender identity strength scale that was preregistered. A link to the preregistration can be found in the manuscript. First, we explain the measurement of the scale and present the translated items in Table A5, and then we present the results in Table A6.

Gender identification

The translated items for the gender identification scale are displayed in Table A5, and were shown to participants in random order. Participants rated their agreements with the items on a scale from 1 (completely disagree) through 9 (completely agree). Items 1 and 3 were recoded such that on all items, higher scores indicate stronger gender identification. For both studies, exploratory factor analysis indicated two factors: one for the items signaling stronger identification (Study 1: loadings > .44, Eigenvalue = 1.80; Study 2: loadings > .47, Eigenvalue = 1.74), and one for the items signaling weaker identification (Study 1: loadings > .61, Eigenvalue = .89; Study 2: loadings > .63, eigenvalue = .91). The items formed a reliable scale (Study 1: Cronbach's alpha = .69; Study 2: Cronbach's alpha = .66) and the average score is used as the final measure of gender identification (Study 1: M = 4.40, SD = 1.28; Study 2: M = 4.94, SD = 1.34).

Table A5
All items of the gender identification scale.

	Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) Importance to Identity subscale,
1	Overall, my gender has very little to do with how I feel about myself.
2	Being a [man/woman] is an important reflection of who I am.
3	Being a [man/woman] is unimportant to my sense of what kind of a person I am.
4	In general, being a [man/women] is an important part of my self image.
	Additional items
5	When I talk about [men/women], I often say 'we' instead of 'they'
6	When someone says something negative about [men/women], I often feel personally offended
7	I have strong ties with other [men/women]

Table A6

Exploratory moderated mediation models, using the preregistered measure for gender identity strength, using 10.000 bootstrapped samples.

	Study 1				Study 2									
	Female-bolstering		Male-bolstering		Female-bolstering				Male-bolstering					
					Leadership		Assessment		Science		Quota			
Mediator equations. DV: identity-motivated reasoning														
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*		
Frame (episodic)	-.39	(.27)	.56	(.34)	.60	(.63)	.20	(.64)	.75	(.68)	.59	(.69)		
Gender (female)	-.52	(.67)	1.38+	(.83)	1.12+	(.67)	-.08	(.68)	4.05**	(.72)	2.89**	(.73)		
Gender identification	-.06	(.10)	.23+	(.13)	.04	(.09)	-.04	(.10)	.47**	(.10)	.45**	(.10)		
Frame * gender	.70+	(.41)	-1.36**	(.51)	-.48	(.96)	.09	(1.00)	-3.03**	(1.03)	-2.44*	(1.03)		
Frame * gender identification	.07	(.06)	-.15+	(.08)	-.06	(.13)	-.05	(.13)	-.12	(.14)	-.11	(.14)		
Gender * gender identification	.23	(.15)	-.42*	(.18)	.13	(.13)	.19	(.13)	-.63**	(.14)	-.50**	(.14)		
Frame * gender * gender identification	-.15	(.09)	.27*	(.11)	.06	(.19)	.03	(.19)	.47*	(.20)	.48*	(.20)		
Constant	.13	(.43)	-.56	(.56)	4.07**	(.48)	5.06**	(.49)	2.59**	(.51)	2.82**	(.52)		
Dependent variable equation. DV: group-consonant attitudes														
	b	*SE*	*b*	*SE*	*b*	*SE*								
Frame (episodic)	.07	(.12)	.05	(.14)	-.15	(.10)								
Identity-motivated reasoning	1.05**	(.09)	.52**	(.09)	.23**	(.03)								
Identity-motivated reasoning (assessment)					.16**	(.03)								
Identity-motivated reasoning (science)					.20**	(.03)								
Identity-motivated reasoning (quota)					.19**	(.03)								
Constant	5.26**	(.20)	5.31**	(.22)	1.60**	(.23)								
Conditional indirect effects of episodic frame, through identity-motivated reasoning on group-consonant attitudes														
Gender	*Gender identification*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*Gender*	*Gender identification*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*	*b*	*Boot SE*
Men	Weak	-.19	(.13)	.04	(.07)	Men	Weak	.09	(.06)	.00	(.04)	.07	(.05)	.01	(.05)
	Mean	-.09	(.10)	-.05	(.05)		Mean	.07+	(.04)	-.01	(.03)	.04	(.04)	.01	(.04)
	Strong	.01	(.15)	-.14+	(.09)		Strong	.05	(.07)	-.02	(.04)	.00	(.05)	-.02	(.05)
Women	Weak	.08	(.17)	-.20**	(.10)	Women	Weak	.02	(.07)	.04	(.04)	-.20**	(.07)	-.10+	(.06)
	Mean	-.03	(.09)	-.12**	(.06)		Mean	.02	(.04)	.03	(.03)	-.10**	(.04)	.00	(.04)
	Strong	-.14	(.10)	-.05	(.07)		Strong	.02	(.05)	.03	(.04)	-.01	(.05)	.10*	(.05)
Indices of moderated mediation														
		Index	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*			*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*
Men		.07	(.08)	-.08+	(.05)	Men		-.01	(.03)	-.01	(.02)	-.02	(.03)	-.02	(.03)
Women		-.08	(.08)	.06	(.05)	Women		.00	(.03)	.00	(.02)	.07*	(.03)	.07*	(.03)
Index of moderated moderated mediation														
		Index	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*			*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*	*Index*	*Boot SE*
		-.15	(.11)	.14*	(.07)			.01	(.05)	.01	(.03)	.09*	(.04)	.09*	(.05)

** p<.01, * p<.05, + p<.10

Appendix H: Sensitivity analyses

In this appendix, we present sensitivity analyses, in order to test for the possible influence of a confounding variable, for the mediation analyses testing the main hypothesis. The sensitivity analysis for the hypothesis test of Study 1 shows that the error terms of the mediator and outcome models must have a strong correlation ($\rho < .37$) to render the indirect effect of episodic framing, through identity-motivated reasoning, on group-consonant attitudes equal to zero. As depicted in Figure A1, at around $\rho < .20$, the effect is not significantly different from 0. Another way to express this is through the amount of variance (R^2) that a possible confounder must explain in the remaining variance of the mediator and the dependent variable. The sensitivity analysis indicates that a confounding variable must explain 38% of the remaining variance in both counterarguing and the message-consistent attitudes (or another combination of which the product adds up to .14) for the indirect to be 0. The average causal mediation effect in Study 1 is thus relatively robust against violations of the sequential ignorability assumption.

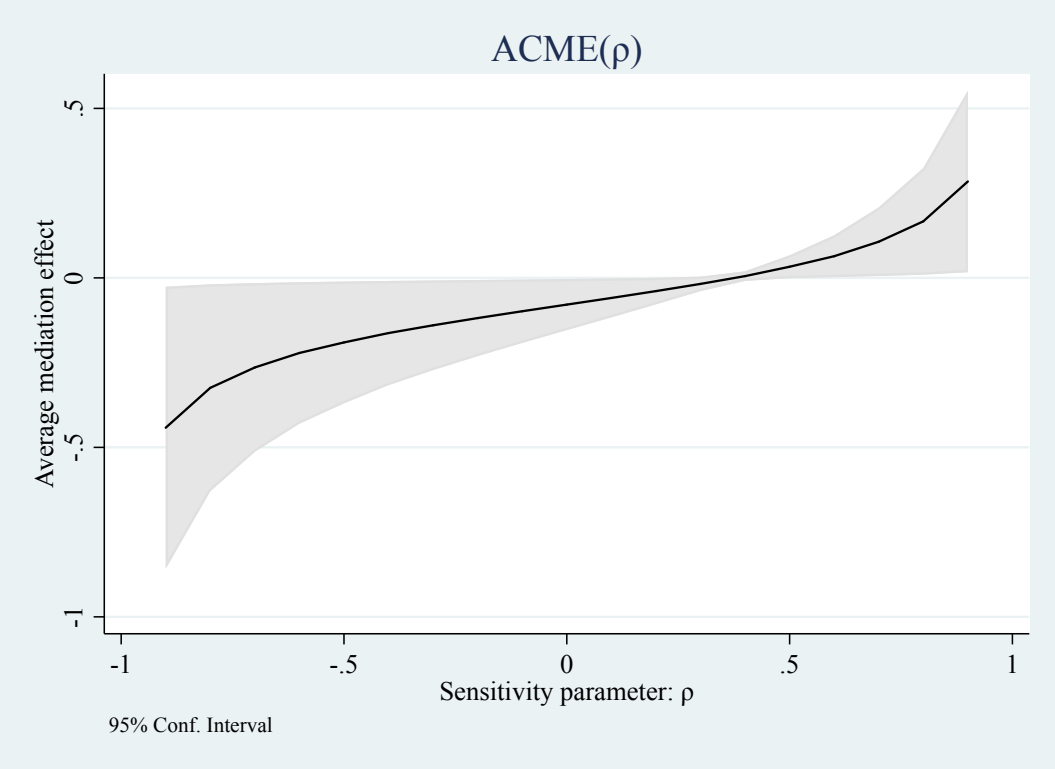


Figure A1 Average Causal Mediated Effect of Study 1, as a product of the influence of a confounding variable (rho) for the mediation model in Table 1 (model 1).

In Study 2, we find no indirect effects of the episodic frame, through identity-motivated reasoning on group-consonant attitudes. Therefore, a sensitivity analysis is not necessary. However, in the vein of full transparency, we also conducted the sensitivity analysis for Study 2. At $\rho < \sim .51$, the indirect effect changes its sign to a positive effect. However, as visible in Figure A2, there is no indirect effect significantly different than 0, regardless of any strength of an omitted confounding variable between the counterarguing and message-consistent attitudes. In sum, we can confirm the expected mechanism in Study 1, but not Study 2.

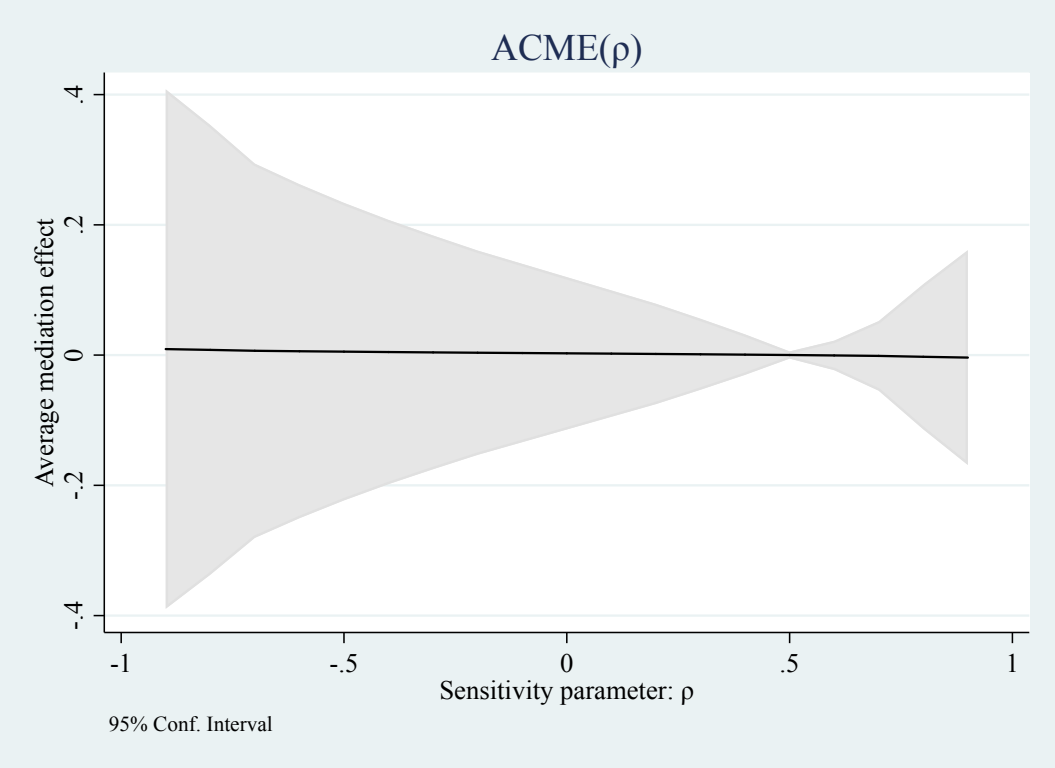


Figure A2 Average Causal Mediated Effect of Study 2, as a product of the influence of a confounding variable (rho) for the mediation model in Table 1 (model 2).

Abstract English

In contemporary democracies, the news has gotten increasingly occupied with identity politics. This dissertation systematically explores how citizens process such news. Previous models of news processing have strongly focused on partisanship: Citizens are motivated to scrutinize news that threatens their political 'tribe' more than news that bolsters it, leading to political polarization. Furthermore, research into such *partisan-motivated reasoning* has mostly treated the news as a passive transmitter of political messages. In contrast, this dissertation considers alternative group identities in news processing too – groups that identity politics explicitly engages, like gender or nationality. As such, it studies *identity-motivated reasoning*: reasoning motivated by *any* group identity. Moreover, this dissertation studies the role of increasingly popular news types in identity-motivated reasoning, putting the news back into news processing.

Four empirical research articles lead to the following key findings. Non-political group identities are most important in news processing if they have relatively low status and are difficult to leave from – like women or racial minorities. In contrast, political identities are more likely to motivate high-status group members' reasoning – like men or natives. Such identity-motivated reasoning is driven by news-induced arousal, making negative and sensationalist news likely to exacerbate it. On the other hand, episodic news framing – isolating a single case, rather than covering societal trends – might inhibit identity-motivated reasoning for certain citizens. Thus, different trends in news production might increase or decrease intergroup polarization.

These findings make three important contributions to the academic literature. Firstly, they suggest a model of identity-based cross-pressures in motivated reasoning, in which group status and the flexibility of group boundaries determine which identity dominates citizens' motivations. Therefore, scholars must look beyond partisanship to grasp contemporary news processing. Secondly, the findings indicate that the way in which the news is presented can strongly affect to what extent citizens engage in identity-defensive reasoning. It is thus important to regard the news, and the journalists that produce it, as active agents in creating or

closing social divides. And thirdly, political news can lead to polarization beyond partisan divides – between politicized groups based on, for instance, gender or ethnicity. As such, in times of identity politics, identity-motivated reasoning may be detrimental to social cohesion. As societies become increasingly diverse, preventing this may be vital to avoid conflict and help democracies flourish.

Abstract Deutsch

In zeitgenössischen Demokratien befassen sich die Nachrichten zunehmend mit identitätspolitischen Themen. Die vorliegende Dissertation untersucht systematisch, wie BürgerInnen solche Nachrichten verarbeiten. Bisherige Modelle der Nachrichtenverarbeitung haben sich stark auf die Parteilichkeit konzentriert: BürgerInnen sind motiviert, Nachrichten, die ihren politische Identität bedrohen, stärker zu hinterfragen als Nachrichten, die diese bestärken, was zu politischer Polarisierung führt. Darüber hinaus hat die Forschung zu diesem partisan-motivated reasoning („politisch-motiviertes Denken“) die Nachrichten meist als passiven Übermittler von politischen Botschaften betrachtet. Im Gegensatz dazu berücksichtigt diese Dissertation auch alternative Gruppenidentitäten in der Nachrichtenverarbeitung – Gruppen, die von der Identitätspolitik explizit angesprochen werden, wie Geschlecht oder Nationalität. In diesem Sinne untersucht sie identity-motivated reasoning (“identitätsmotiviertes Denken“): Denken, das durch alle Gruppenidentitäten (nicht nur politische) motiviert werden kann. Darüber hinaus wird die Rolle von zunehmend populären Nachrichtenarten in identity-motivated reasoning erforscht, wodurch die Nachrichten zurück in den Fokus der Nachrichtenverarbeitungs-Forschung gebracht werden.

Vier empirische Forschungsartikel führen zu den folgenden zentralen Erkenntnissen. Nicht-politische Gruppenidentitäten sind bei der Nachrichtenverarbeitung am wichtigsten, wenn sie einen relativ niedrigen Status haben und schwer zu verlassen sind – wie Frauen oder rassische Minderheiten. Im Gegensatz dazu motivieren politische Identitäten eher die Denkweise von Gruppenmitgliedern mit hohem Status – wie Männer oder Einheimische. Solches identitätsmotiviertes Denken wird durch nachrichteninduzierte Erregung angetrieben, so dass negative und sensationslüsterne Nachrichten es wahrscheinlich noch verstärken. Andererseits kann episodic news framing („episodisches Nachrichtenframing“) – das einen Einzelfall isoliert, anstatt gesellschaftliche Trends abzudecken – das identity-motivated reasoning für bestimmte BürgerInnen hemmen. Somit könnten unterschiedliche Trends in der Nachrichtenproduktion die Polarisierung zwischen den Gruppen verstärken oder verringern.

Diese Ergebnisse liefern drei wichtige Erkenntnisse für die wissenschaftliche Fachliteratur. Erstens schlagen sie ein Modell des identity-based cross pressures in motivated reasoning (identitätsbasierten Konflikt im motivierten Denken) vor, in dem der Gruppenstatus und die Flexibilität der Gruppengrenzen bestimmen, welche Identität die Motivationen der Bürger dominiert. Daher müssen WissenschaftlerInnen über die Parteizugehörigkeit hinausblicken, um die zeitgenössische Nachrichtenverarbeitung zu erfassen. Zweitens deuten die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass die Art und Weise, wie die Nachrichten präsentiert werden, einen starken Einfluss darauf haben kann, inwieweit BürgerInnen sich auf identitätsdefensive Argumentation einlassen. Es ist daher wichtig, die Nachrichten und die JournalistInnen, die sie produzieren, als aktive AkteurInnen bei der Erzeugung oder Auflösung sozialer Spaltungen zu betrachten. Und drittens können politische Nachrichten zu einer Polarisierung jenseits von Parteigrenzen führen – zwischen politisierten Gruppen, die z.B. auf Geschlecht oder ethnischer Zugehörigkeit basieren.

In Zeiten der Identitätspolitik kann identity-motivated reasoning den sozialen Zusammenhalt schaden. Da Gesellschaften immer vielfältiger werden, kann es von entscheidender Bedeutung sein, dies zu verhindern, um Konflikte zu vermeiden und das Wohlergehen von Demokratien zu fördern..