The Politicization of Asylum Seekers and Other Immigrant Groups in a Comparative Perspective

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Introduction: The Politicization of Asylum Seekers and Other Immigrant Groups

Immigrants have been subject to discussion and politicization in the media and in political debates in Western Europe since long before the onset of the recent 'Migration Crisis'. In many European countries, immigration and asylum are highly salient topics, featuring prominently in public and political discussions.[2] The narratives in these debates have linked the growing number and the diversity of immigrants with many topics, including unwanted competition in the labor market, pressures on the welfare state, a decline in social capital and general trust, or as challenges to national identity and core Western values.[3]

Although asylum seekers and other immigrant groups have a legal or structural foundation, when they are politicized they are simultaneously also discursively constructed. Differences between in-groups and out-groups are produced and maintained, not only concerning the boundaries between immigrants and non-immigrants, but also between different kinds of immigrant categories.[4] Boundaries and demarcations are constructed on the basis of legal, ethnic, racial, national, and religious difference, and these boundaries are reflected in political claims on the distribution of rights and goods. These claims, in turn, follow competing definitions of citizenship, membership, and belonging within culturally diversified but territorially bounded societies. This means that immigrant groups are not only referred to by their legal status but also frequently constituted within the claims-making process. In the realm of politics, however, not all immigrant groups are treated in the same way: The presence, rights, and identities of some immigrant groups are highly contested, while others are virtually absent from the political agenda. Empirical studies have identified significant differences in politicization across different times and countries.[5]

Analytically, the term politicization refers to the process through which an issue becomes relevant for public debate and political contestation. De Wilde identified three stages in that process: a polarization of opinions (conflicting ideas), intensified public debate (increased salience), and public resonance (political answers).[6]

This chapter uses an extensive media analysis to demonstrate how asylum seekers and other immigrants are politicized in Austria and six other Western European countries – Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. It is based on a longitudinal (1995–

2   Sarah Meyer and Sieglinde Rosenberger, "Just a Shadow? The Role of Radical Right Parties in the Politicization of Immigration, 1995–2009", *Politics and Governance*, Vol. 3, no. 2, 2015, 1–17.

3   Lauren McLaren, *Immigration and Perceptions of National Political Systems in Europe.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Ian Goldin, Geoffrey Cameron, and Meera Balarajan, *Exceptional People: How Migration Shaped Our World and Will Define Our Future.* Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011.

4   Rogers Brubaker, "Categories of Analysis and Categories of Practice: A Note on the Study of Muslims in European Countries of Immigration." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 36, no. 1, 2013, 1–8. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2012.729674. On boundary-making see Andreas Wimmer, "Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making." *Ethnic and Racial Studies,* Vol. 31, no. 6, 2008, 1025–1055. DOI: 10.1080/01419870801905612.

5   Ruud Koopmans, Paul Statham, Marco Giugni, and Florence Passy, *Contested Citizenship: Immigration and Cultural Diversity in Europe.* Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2005. Wouter van der Brug, Gianni D'Amato, Joost Berkhout, and Didier Ruedin, eds., *The Politicisation of Migration.* Abingdon: Routledge, 2015.

6   Peter De Wilde, "No polity for old politics? A framework for analyzing the politicization of European integration", *Journal of European Integration,* Vol. 33, no. 5, 2011, 559–575.

2009), cross-national analysis of claims-making in the media. This data source differs from many other studies which focused on campaign material or parliamentary discourse, in that it highlights patterns of similarities and differences across countries, and notably the various ways in which different actor types have systematically politicized immigrant groups.[7] Two positions in particular are identified: On the one hand, government actors, political parties, and the media make both positive and negative claims about asylum seekers and other immigrant groups; on the other hand, civil society actors make mostly positive claims about immigrants and in particular about asylum seekers.

Immigration Flows and the Politicization of Immigrant Groups

Conceptually, this chapter is based on the idea that immigrant groups are actively politicized in claims-making. Political actors and the media alike make public statements as to how immigration policy should be changed (or not). Thereby, they invariably refer to immigrant groups in a particular way, for instance in terms of their residence status, their country of origin, their (inferred) religion, their race/ethnicity, or in undifferentiated terms such as being immigrants more generally. Immigrant groups are thus identified and marked within political debates. Such political claims can be positive, neutral, or negative, and often include a justification as to why policies should be changed. The combination of how groups are referred to in claims, the tone of the message, and the justification used leads to an active constitution of immigrant groups by political actors. Ultimately, immigrants are not only marked as belonging to a certain group, their labelling is also filled with different meanings, both positive and negative.[8]

Academic literature has identified several contexts, actors, and factors which may impact on the politicization of immigrant groups. One often-cited approach is that the electoral strength of anti-immigrant parties influences the salience, extent, and tone of politicization, with anti-immigrant parties moreover being viewed as owners of the immigrant issue in a given political context.[9] Another strand of studies has argued that politicization occurs in the context of changing immigrant numbers. Following this approach, we present changes in immigrant populations to elucidate the context in which the politicization of the immigrant groups considered in this chapter takes place. Within the period under investigation here (1993–2009), like in other Western European countries, Austria experienced a gradual increase in its immigrant population, irrespective of whether of foreign nationality but locally born, or foreign-born, is taken as the identifying factor. In some countries considered in this chapter, notably Ireland and particularly Spain, the increase was more pronounced after 2000. Spain is now one of the countries with the highest share of foreign-born residents in Europe. In all the countries examined in this chapter, immigration from 'old' EU member states plays a significant role, especially in Belgium and Switzerland. Both these countries have a comparatively high share of foreign nationals, yet more than half of the foreign nationals in each of these countries originate from EU-15 member states. In the other countries, the share of EU-15 nationals ranges from about one fifth to about one third of the immigrant population. In Austria, the proportion of immigrants from EU-15 countries has increased over the years; in Switzerland, it has increased more sharply since 2008, when quotas for EU-15 immigrants were removed.[10] By contrast, in the other countries under consideration we notice a small decline in the proportion of immigrants from EU-15 countries. These trends indicate a growing importance of other immigrant

7   Oliver Gruber, *Campaigning in Radical Right Heartland. The politicization of immigration and ethnic relations in Austrian general elections, 1971–2013.* Berlin: Lit-Verlag, Studien zur politischen Kommunikation, Band 11, 2014.

8   Sieglinde Rosenberger and Iris Stöckl, "The politics of categorization – political representatives with immigrant background between 'the other' and 'standing for'", *Politics, Groups, and Identities,* 2016, 1-20. DOI: 10.1080/21565503.2016.1194764.

9   Meyer and Rosenberger (n. 2).

10   Didier Ruedin, Camilla Alberti, and Gianni D'Amato, "Immigration and Integration Policy in Switzerland, 1848 to 2014", *Swiss Political Science Review*, Vol. 21, no. 1, 2015, 5–22. DOI: 10.1111/spsr.12144.

groups, both from EU-27 member states and from non-EU/EFTA countries, among whom asylum seekers are a highly visible and politicized group.[11]

Measuring Politicization Using the Media

This chapter uses data from a recent large-scale media analysis, covering newspapers in Austria and six other European countries from 1995 to 2009. The data were collected from countries, such as Spain and Ireland, with traditionally few immigrants but which have recently attracted unprecedented numbers of immigrants, as well as from countries, notably the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, where immigration has a longer tradition because of colonialism, or because of guest-workers, such as Austria and Switzerland. The seven countries under investigation each witnessed somewhat similar demographic changes and challenges resulting from international immigration and mobility in recent decades.[12] We sampled all articles on immigration and integration in two national newspapers from a random selection of days, resulting in over 7,000 articles from both broadsheet and tabloid newspapers.[13] We then counted instances where the groups, claimants, and frames were within the realm of politics. Specifically, we analyzed every recorded instance in which a political actor made a statement that suggested that some aspect of policy was changed, however operationalizing the notion of political actors in a broad manner to include members of civil society or public statements by celebrities when these had a political content. The patterns of claims-making reported here are based on aggregate statistics of theses data.

In this chapter, we approach politicization as salience – the second stage in De Wilde's description of the politicization process as three stages – that is politicization as an intensified public debate: the more claims there are, the more politicized immigration is expected to be. As will become apparent in the remainder of the chapter, polarization occurs to some extent in all the countries under investigation, so De Wilde's description fully applies.[14] With reference to immigrant groups, a particular immigrant group is considered salient – and thus politicized – in political debate when there are many claims about this group. In general, the study focuses on relative salience: the proportion of all claims on immigration and integration that refer to a specific group. We approach politicization through competitive claims-making in the media by all sorts of political and collective actors. These political claims make reference to particular immigrant groups, and we also pay attention to the meaning claims are given in newspapers: so-called frames. For instance, an anti-immigrant actor may oppose immigrant groups because of unwelcome competition in the labor market. In this case, the justification given is evaluated as economic and refers to an instrumental frame. A civil society organization, by contrast, may highlight human rights when discussing asylum seekers from a politically unstable country. In this case, we speak about normative principles being invoked.[15]

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11 EFTA: European Free Trade Association: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland; countries very closely associated with the European Union.

12 Van der Brug et al. (n. 5).

13 The following newspapers were analysed. Austria: Der Standard, Neue Kronen Zeitung; Belgium: De Standaard, Le Soir, Het Laatste Nieuws, La Dernière Heure; Ireland: The Irish Times, Irish Daily Star; Netherlands: Volkskrant, Telegraaf; Spain: El Pais, La Vanguardia; Switzerland: Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Le Temps/Tribune de Genève, Blick, Le Matin; United Kingdom: The Guardian, Daily Mail. In Belgium and Switzerland, the two dominant language areas were covered separately: in Switzerland, the Tribune de Genève was treated as the predecessor of Le Temps. In Spain, La Vanguardia is not a tabloid in the same sense as in the other countries. For a detailed description of the study, see Van der Brug et al. (n. 5).

14 For a detailed description of the patterns of politicization in these countries, see Van der Brug et al. (n. 5). For an analysis of the gap between public opinion on immigration and policy reactions – the third step in De Wilde's description – see Laura Morales, Jean-Benoit Pilet, and Didier Ruedin, "The Gap between Public Preferences and Policies on Immigration: A Comparative Examination of the Effect of Politicisation on Policy Congruence", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies,* Vol. 41, no. 9, 2015, 1495–1516. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2015.1021598.

15 For a similar classification, see Marc Helbling, "Framing Immigration in Western Europe", *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* Vol. 40, no. 1, 2014, 21–41. DOI: 10.1080/1369183X.2013.830888.

The methodological framework employed here implies that groups are constructed and maintained by claims in news reports. This means that political claims, rather than public discourse, are seen as constituting group boundaries and demarcations. Political actors may refer to immigrant groups based on their legal status, for example that of non-EU nationals or seasonal workers, or they may highlight the immigrants' religion. This is a process of social categorization in which the political claims produce different groups with different meanings.[16] This is not to say that discourses are irrelevant to the segmentation of society into different categories, and it is conceivable that discourses can disagree or cut across immigrant groups based on regulation. This chapter caters to this difference to some degree by paying attention to the frames used in the claims made, that is how a claim is justified in discourse.

Salience of Asylum Seekers and Different Immigrant Groups

On the basis of the code book developed and used in the SOM-project,[17] immigrant groups were in this study identified according to their legal status, their race or ethnicity, their religious denomination, or their country of origin. Table 1 outlines the percentage of claims in each country that referred to immigrants in one of these categories. Evidently, categories of legal status were most common in all countries: immigrants were referred to as immigrants as a generic group, as asylum seekers, as labor immigrants, in the context of family reunion, as immigrants from EU countries, and so on. The percentages, however, differ significantly across countries, as do the percentages for the other three categories. The relatively high number of claims about religious groups in Belgium and Switzerland and the many references to race and ethnicity in the United Kingdom are particularly noteworthy. The importance of race and ethnicity has been noted by Koopmans et al.,[18] although the proportion of claims in this category has declined over time.[19]

Table 1. Analytical Categorization of Immigrant Groups

	All	AT	BE	IE	NL	ES	CH	UK
Legal Status	84%	91%	81%	98%	80%	95%	81%	61%
Ethnic/Racial Groups	4%	1%	2%	1%	1%	2%	1%	25%
Religious Groups	9%	7%	15%	0%	10%	0%	17%	13%
Country of Origin	3%	1%	2%	1%	9%	3%	1%	1%

Notes: Percentage of claims concerning different immigrant groups in each country according to type, 100 percent refers to all claims about immigrants in a country. Combined data from 1995 to 2009. Adapted from Berkhout and Ruedin.

To look closer at how immigrant groups were referred to in the claims, we used more differentiated categories in Table 2. The most common way to refer to immigrants in claims reported in the news was in the generic sense, that is simply as immigrants, as foreigners or foreign citizens without further qualification. This can be interpreted as the politicization of immigrants as non-citizens, highlighting existing or ascribed differences between national citizens and others. Of the groups mentioned specifically, asylum seekers were referred to most, followed by irregular immigrants and Muslims (Muslims accounted for almost all claims made about religious groups). Common across all countries is that there were many claims about immigrants as a generic group, and asylum seekers were politicized in all countries. Despite these commonalities, there were also

16   Koopmans et al. (n. 5).

17   http://www.som-project.eu; Van der Brug et al. (n. 5).

18   Koopmans et al. (n. 5).

19   Joost Berkhout, and Didier Ruedin, "Why Religion? Immigrant Groups as Objects of Political Claims on Immigration and Civic Integration in Western Europe, 1995–2009", *Acta Politica,* 2016. DOI: 10.1057/ap.2016.1.

considerable differences between countries. These differences concern not only the choice of which specific groups were politicized, but crucially also the proportion of claims about the categories of immigrants and asylum seekers. Whereas in Spain nearly half of the claims were about immigrants in the generic sense, only 11 percent of claims in the United Kingdom fell into this category.

Table 2. Most Politicized Groups by Country

	Most Claims	%	Second- Most	%	Third-Most	%
Austria	Immigrants	28	Asylum Seekers	24	Refugees	10
Belgium	Immigrants	25	Irregular Immigrants	14	Asylum Seekers	11
Switzerland	Immigrants	23	Asylum Seekers	20	Muslims	11
Spain	Immigrants	48	Irregular Immigrants	27	Labor Migrants	4
Ireland	Asylum Seekers	37	Immigrants	23	Labor Migrants	10
Netherlands	Immigrants	24	Asylum Seekers	17	Irregular Immigrants	9
United Kingdom	Asylum Seekers	17	Immigrants	11	Ethnic/Racial Minorities	11

Notes: Percentage of claims about the three largest groups (by the number of claims) in each country. All years are combined. The category of ethnic/racial minorities combines all references to specific ethnic or racial groups.

When considering the immigrant population in the various countries, it becomes apparent that the politicization of different immigrant groups was unrelated to the size of these immigrant groups. This is particularly apparent when considering asylum seekers, a group of immigrants legally well-defined and therefore clearly enumerated. During the period of study, the share of asylum seekers in the general population was below 1 percent in all the countries under study. In 2005, the share of asylum seekers was highest in Belgium (0.9 per cent), and lowest in Spain (0.01 per cent). The many claims about asylum seekers in Ireland (37 per cent of all claims) in no way correspond to the share of asylum seekers in the population (0.1 per cent).[20]

In Table 3, we focus exclusively on asylum seekers, an immigrant group without a formal voice in politics that is legally and structurally marginalized in society, for instance possessing only few rights to enter the labor market or educational institutions. The table depicts the proportion of claims concerning asylum seekers in each country and traces changes over time. The first column combines all years, while the other columns distinguish five periods of three years each to outline developments over time. We note significant differences across countries and time. In fact, when looking at all countries jointly, in the late 1990s asylum seekers were the group about which most claims were made. Particularly after 2004, however, the proportion of claims about asylum seekers declined. Around the same time, the number of claims that made references to 'refugees' started to fall drastically, but the changes were not merely one of vocabulary, as is apparent in the table.

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20 Laura Morales, Virgina Ros, Laura Sudulich, Joost Berkhout, Kevin Cunningham, Teresa Peintinger, Didier Ruedin, Guido Vangoidsenhoven, and Daniel Wunderlich, *Comparative Data Set of Immigration-Related Statistics 1995-2009 [Data File]*. IQSS Dataverse, 2012. http://hdl.handle.net/1902.1/17963.

Table 3. Claims about Asylum Seekers

Country	All	1995–1997	1998–2000	2001–2003	2004–2006	2007–2009
Austria	23%	14%	16%	22%	26%	27%
Belgium	9%	12%	12%	11%	4%	9%
Switzerland	19%	11%	19%	27%	33%	9%
Spain	1%	13%	1%	1%	0.3%	1%
Ireland	36%	41%	52%	40%	20%	27%
Netherlands	13%	18%	17%	13%	12%	7%
United Kingdom	14%	19%	16%	27%	10%	2%

Notes: Percentage of all claims about asylum seekers in each country. Percentages are given for all years combined and for periods of three years.

The opposite trend can be observed for Muslims, as they became more visible in political claims in the early 2000s.[21] This increasing politicization of Muslims can be observed in four of the countries, most notably in Switzerland. By contrast, in Spain and Ireland the number of claims about Muslims was consistently low; in the Netherlands the occurrence of claims concerning Muslims remained stable at a relatively low level.[22] The proportion of claims concerning labor immigrants and new immigration from EU/EFTA countries was generally relatively low. Even in Ireland, where there were more claims about labor immigrants than in the other countries, only 10 percent of claims were about this particular group. Similarly, given their numerical importance, it is indeed remarkable to observe that immigration from the EU-15 countries did not appear to be politicized – although the time frame of the study ended in 2009. The same is true for immigration from EU-27 member states. Most strikingly, there was a relative absence of claims concerning family reunion, despite the fact that this status constituted, in terms of size, one of the most significant immigrant groups. Along the same line, the politicization of labor migrants clearly did not reflect the numerical reality.

How Different Actors Politicize Asylum Seekers and Other Immigrant Groups

In this section, we examine how different actors politicized asylum seekers and other immigrants groups. In particular, we highlight the tone of a claim – positive or negative for the immigrant group affected – and its frame or justification why immigration policies should be changed.

Tone of Claim: Positive or Negative?

A claim – were it to become reality – affects an immigrant group in various ways. Here, we distinguish between claims with a positive, neutral or negative effect for the immigrant group in question. Positive claims consist of claims that are open towards immigrants, progressive, or multi-cultural; negative claims consist of claims that are restrictive to immigrants, conservative, indicate preference for national citizens, or are mono-cultural. Figure 1 presents this relationship in a diagram, with frequency distribution. In some cases, there were few or no recorded claims, indicating that a particular actor tended not to make claims about a particular group of immigrants.

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21   See also Brubaker (n. 4).

22   Berkhout and Ruedin (n. 19).

Figure 1. Tone/Effect of Claims by Immigrant Group and Actor
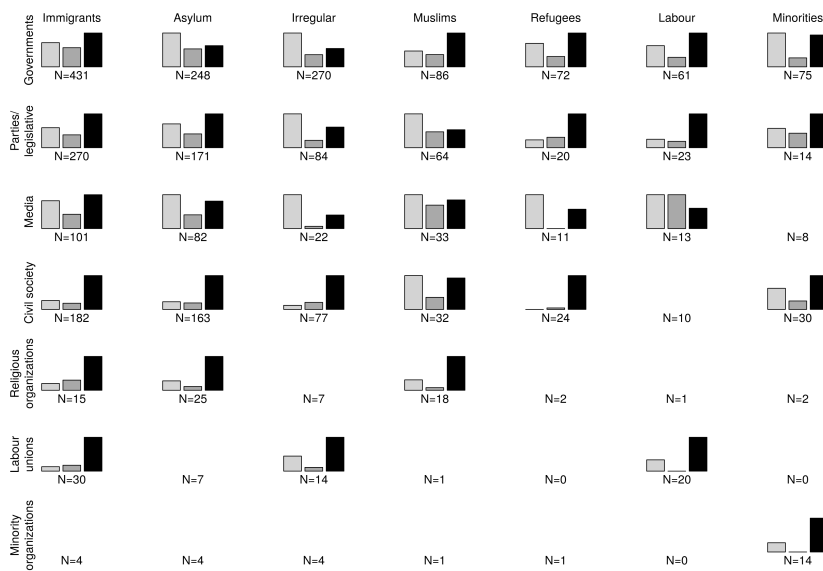
Notes: This figure depicts the frequency distribution of the effect of claims, divided by the actor making the claim (down) and immigrant group (across). In each histogram, negative claims are on the left (light gray), neutral claims in the center (dark gray), and positive claims on the right (black). The number in each cell indicates the number of claims recorded. No histograms were drawn for cells with fewer than 10 observations.

In the many relationships apparent in Figure 1, there are a number of interesting contrasts. Of particular interest was that government actors, political parties, and the media made both positive and negative claims about asylum seekers and other immigrant groups, while civil society actors made mostly positive claims about immigrants and in particular about asylum seekers.

We note many positive claims about immigrants in general, but also that actors differed significantly in this regard. Governments and the media included all kinds of claims, while positive claims by the political parties seemed to find slightly more resonance in the media. Across all countries, government actors made positive claims about Muslims but were negative about irregular immigrants. Political parties seemed to take clearer stances on irregular immigrants (negative), Muslims (negative), refugees (positive), and labor immigrants (positive).

Surprisingly, the media appeared as an important claims-maker in the sense that journalists raised many claims. At the aggregate level, however, it was an actor without a clear profile. It is worth highlighting that the media did not appear to be merely a platform for disseminating claims, with journalists moreover being actively involved in claims-making activities. The lack of an overall profile stems from the fact that multiple positions were covered in all papers, tabloids and broadsheets alike. We did not observe strong tendencies towards polarization in the media – neutral claims were commonplace. On the whole, there is convergence across countries when it comes to the effects of claims concerning immigrant groups. On the one hand, there are governments, party politics and the media; on the other hand, there are civil society and religious organizations. Government actors, parties, and the media covered the entire range of positions, which means that they were the origin of *negative* claims about immigrants. Civil society and religious organizations have a much clearer profile and were supportive of most immigrant groups. Muslims constitute an exception about which civil society organizations were divided.

With regard to asylum seekers, we note that when claims referred to 'asylum seekers', they were somewhat more negative than when they referred to 'refugees', even though in political debates the two terms tend to be used interchangeably and refer to asylum seekers in legal terms.

Frames in Claims: What Justifications Are Used?

The politicization of immigrant groups not only entails the (relative) number of claims made about a particular group, but also the meaning claims are given, that is the frames used in claims concerning immigrant groups. Similar to Helbling, we differentiate between instrumental frames, identity-based frames, and frames drawing on normative principles.[23] Instrumental frames refer to cost-benefit analyses such as the economic benefit of immigrants; identity-based frames justify action with reference to national identity and customs; while normative principles refer to universal rights such as human rights and other principles. In each case, a number of sub-frames can be identified.

Across countries, instrumental frames tend to be most common. If all countries are regarded jointly, the most common instrumental sub-frames are (in order of occurrence): general or public interest, questions of state efficiency and cost, domestic crime and security, and economic interests. Table 4 outlines the most common sub-frames by country. Of the normative frames, the most common sub-frames identified are notions of equal treatment, as well as human rights. Identity-based frames appeared less frequently.[24] There are no apparent trends over time. The dominant frames in a given year or period differ significantly from other years or periods, with no apparent connection between years or periods and countries. We were unable to determine an obvious covariate to explain the predominance of certain frames in any period.

Table 4. The Three Most Commonly Used Sub-Frames in Each Country

Country	Most common	%	Second- Most	%	Third-Most	%
Austria	Human rights	19	Instrumental	17	Security	12
Belgium	Human rights	24	Normative principles	14	Public interest	14
Switzerland	Human rights	19	Public interest	18	Normative principles	15
Spain	Instrumental	23	Security	13	Human rights	9
Ireland	Instrumental	15	Human rights	13	Normative principles	12
Netherlands	Security	14	Efficiency	13	Human rights	11
UK	Human rights	16	Normative principles	10	Social security	10
All countries	Human rights	16	Instrumental	11	Economic	10

Notes: The three most common sub-frames used in claims (in order) in each country. All years are combined. Instrumental frames and normative principles refer to frames where it is difficult to determine a specific sub-frame.

Looking more closely at the group of asylum seekers, we note differences in the frames used to address this particular immigrant group. In Table 5, we focused on all claims invoking normative principles, irrespective of the sub-frame used. These could refer to ideas of equality, human rights, or solidarity, to name just three possibilities. The frames drawing on normative principles (such as human rights) are contrasted with instrumental frames (referring for example to economic purposes) and identity frames (referring for example to cultural values). In all countries, instrumental frames dominated, but the extent to which normative principles were invoked in claims concerning asylum seekers varied noticeably. These ranged from 20 percent in the Netherlands to 50 percent in Austria. In Ireland and the United Kingdom we observed significant changes over time.

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23 Helbling (n. 15).

24 For a similar study, see Marc Helbling,, Dominic Höglinger, and Bruno Wüest, "How Political Parties Frame European Integration", *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 49, no. 4, 2010, 495–521. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.01908.x.

In sum, no clear trends in frames were apparent across countries; on the contrary, country differences remained dominant.

Table 5. Claims about Asylum Seekers Invoking Normative Principles

Country	All years	1995–1997	1998-2000	2001–2003	2004–2006	2007–2009
Austria	51%	71%	31%	62%	40%	53%
Belgium	43%	64%	35%	46%	33%	37%
Switzerland	35%	38%	38%	18%	44%	30%
Spain	(75%)					
Ireland	39%	50%	37%	42%	33%	39%
Netherlands	20%	22%	16%	27%	19%	10%
United Kingdom	34%	63%	22%	29%	39%	60%

Notes: Proportion of all claims in each country that concern asylum seekers and use normative principles as justification. No detailed numbers are given for Spain because of the small number of claims about asylum seekers for which a frame was recorded (N=12).

Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, we provided a systematic, long-term picture of which immigrant groups were put on the political agenda in what way in the period 1995–2009. The data highlight that the size of immigrant groups is generally unrelated to the number of claims in newspapers, indicating that politicization is not simply a reflection of influx and diverse population. Indeed, large increases in immigrants from other Western European countries seem to have had little impact on the debate on immigration and integration. This was also the case in the United Kingdom, even before the campaign on remaining in or leaving the European Union that highlighted the considerable immigration from other EU countries among others.

Interestingly, however, in contexts where the number of immigrants was higher, such as in Belgium, there were relatively fewer claims about asylum seekers, while in contexts with few other immigrants – notably in Ireland – there were relatively more claims about asylum seekers. This indicates that the group 'asylum seekers' may be politicized more in debates where the presence of other non-European immigrant groups is weaker. This could indicate that the group 'asylum seekers' are discursively marginalized in some contexts, while in other contexts this role is played by non-European immigrants, particularly by Muslims. Further research is necessary to test this pattern of politicization specifically.

The frames or justifications used highlight that concerns over human rights are more common for asylum seekers, reflecting the sympathies Coenders et al. identified.[25] At the same time, however, asylum seekers groups are often politicized in negative terms, in particular by governments and political parties.

In conclusion, despite their relatively small number, asylum seekers protected by international and national law were highly politicized in all the countries under study. They are a politically constructed group. In the face of persistent media coverage of the asylum movement to Europe in

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25   Marcel Coenders, Marcel Lubbers, and Peer Scheepers, "Resistance to Immigrants and Asylum Seekers in the European Union: Cross-National Comparisons of Public Opinion", in: Gary P. Freeman, Randall Hansen, and David L. Leal, eds., *Immigration and Public Opinion in Liberal Democracies*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013, Part I, 21.

2015, it is safe to say that the intensity of politicization has probably not only increased, but the frames have also changed towards more negative positions such as endangered identities and values. However, for systematic evidence on this statement, further research is needed to study how reactions to different immigrant groups and asylum seekers in particular have developed since the end of the present study.