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## Identity and Fear

The radical right's framing of immigration in the  
Brexit debates

Bachelor's project in Political Science with Teacher Education

Supervisor: Sina Özdemir

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## **Abstract**

When Britain voted to leave the EU on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016, it was a unique event. The historical Brexit vote has been continuously studied, and it continues to be relevant in order to understand some of the political turmoils that exist within Britain, within Europe, and within the world itself. The aim of this thesis is to study the Brexit vote and how it relates to the issue of immigration. It does this by employing the radical right-wing as an actor and examine their public speech discourse to understand how their framing of immigration had an impact on the Brexit vote. Discourse analysis is utilized as the method of choice because it allows for a direct analysis of specific words and utterances in the discourse during Brexit, which in effect says something about the immigration issue. The thesis finds that the radical right combined anti-immigration sentiments with Euroscepticism, and framed immigration using the subframes of fear and identity.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to my supervisor, Sina Özdemir, for all the helpful guidance and comments along the way. The knowledge and feedback you have given me has been truly valuable.

Thanks to my family, my boyfriend and my friends for the supportive words along the way, for healthy breaks from writing, and for cheering me on.

# Table of contents

- Abstract ..... i**
- Acknowledgements ..... ii**
- 1. Introduction ..... 1**
- 2. Literature review ..... 3**
  - 2.1 Euroscepticism ..... 3*
  - 2.2 Identity..... 4*
- 3. Theoretical framework ..... 6**
  - 3.1 The issue of identity..... 6*
  - 3.2 Populism and the radical right..... 7*
  - 3.3 Framing..... 9*
- 4. Methodology..... 10**
  - 4.1 Discourse analysis..... 10*
  - 4.2 Data selection..... 11*
  - 4.3 Sources ..... 14*
- 5. Empirical analysis ..... 15**
  - 5.1 Immigration and Euroscepticism ..... 15*
  - 5.2 “The others” in the Brexit discourse ..... 17*
  - 5.3 Who are the immigrants? ..... 19*
- 6. Discussion and conclusion ..... 20**
- Bibliography..... 23**

# 1. Introduction

On June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016, 52 percent of the British population voted in favour of a historical decision – the decision to leave the European Union (EU). It is this verdict that both colloquially and in academics has been given the nickname of “Brexit”. The vote took place 43 years after Britain, following two failed attempts, finally gained membership in the European Economic Community (EEC). What followed the Brexit vote was a tumultuous time. David Cameron had been confident that Britain’s long history of Euroscepticism was over as he called for a referendum in 2016, but this was far from the truth (Oliver, 2017). He resigned the day after the vote, while the oppositional party Labour dealt with their internal leadership quarrels, and the Scottish prime minister strongly expressed Scotland’s desire to still stay in the EU despite the vote (Hobolt, 2016). The Brexit decision in itself was a unique event. No other member country had ever chosen to leave, and as a result, there was little knowledge on how things should span out in the time after.

The referendum had been long-awaited by many, and several factors lead up to voting day. Other than the Euroscepticism that David Cameron gambled on, Oliver (2017) also mentions how the backlash by the “left behind” and the strong normative views of Britain’s values, identities and overall outlook affected the Leave-vote. Especially immigration and the idea of “Englishness” became a public issue, with the arrival of periodically high levels of immigration to the UK (Oliver, 2017). Several others have also emphasised the effect of immigration on the Brexit vote (Hobolt, 2016; Zappetini, 2019). This can in part be ascribed to the changing political landscape in Britain ahead of the vote. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) had already established itself as a Eurosceptic party years ahead. Their main goal was to leave the EU, and their support from the British people had an impact on the Conservatives’ decision to hold a referendum in an attempt to keep voters from straying (Hobolt, 2016).

One of UKIP’s toughest stances was their opposition to what they deemed as “uncontrolled immigration” from the EU, in which they only saw exiting the EU as a possible solution (Virdee & McGeever, 2018). Immigration was, in other words, made central to the question of whether Britons would stay or leave the EU, especially by UKIP. Furthermore, Hobolt (2016) identifies the main Leave narrative being to “regain control of British borders” and “Take back control”. The Remain side’s main focus was rather the economy, and on the issue of immigration, they referred to the Leave campaign’s message as “Project Hate” (Hobolt,



2016). This thesis will attempt to shed light on the discourse on immigration within a structure of radical right-wing politics, with Nigel Farage working as a front runner of these notions.

In this lies the assumption that Brexit was fought largely based on restricting immigration, which was associated by many politicians and voters as becoming an increasing problem and threat to the economy, culture and security of the British Isles. A 2015 survey from YouGov shows that the most important issue for respondents was “Greater control of our borders and immigration from the EU” when answering the question “When renegotiating Britain's relationship with the EU, in which if any of the following areas do you think David Cameron should seek to change our relationship with the EU?” (YouGov, 2015). This illustrates how immigration was important to many Britons and not only politicians. Consequently, it is interesting to observe how the issue has been used to mobilize voters in the Brexit debates.

I ask the question of: *How and to what extent did radical right-wing political actors frame immigration in the public discourse about Brexit?* The thesis will aim to examine how the radical right of British politics spoke about immigration in a specific manner to mobilize voters. My argument is two-folded. Firstly, I argue that the radical right played a big role in deciding the immigration discourse during Brexit, more so than centre- and left-wing parties. Second, the radical right-wing framed immigration within the subframes of fear and identity.

Right-wing politicians were dispersed in various ways in the Brexit vote, but politicians to the far-right tended to assemble on the Leave side. Nigel Farage was one of these politicians, recognized as the leader of populist radical right party UKIP. He was outspoken on the immigration issue, and even said that his goal was to make immigration the number one issue during the Brexit debates (Farage, 2016, June 10). Several scholars emphasise how populist parties usually base themselves on a hierarchical system where the leader is in focus, taking a prominent role in the public (Abertazzi and Macdonnell, 2008, as cited in Pappas, 2016; Jacob and Sperings, 2019). Due to this, I employ Nigel Farage as a representative for the radical right during the Brexit vote. As already mentioned, the Leave campaign’s main message was to close British borders and regain control of immigration (Hobolt, 2016). It therefore seems that issues of fear and identity was prominent in the Leave discourse of immigration, and that these were notions politicians took advantage of.

I make use of Facebook as a source of data on public speeches on immigration, due to the way it allows politicians to speak directly to voters. Facebook also displays how many times a post has been “Liked”, “Shared” or “Commented”, which gives a good indication of its salience. It seems that Farage, compared to other politicians, actively used Facebook to share

videos of his public speeches during the 2016 referendum debates. This was a specific element of the radical right, whereas other actors prioritized different platforms.

The thesis consists of six chapters. The literature review comes next, and reviews existing literature on Euroscepticism and identity in order to gain a better understanding of why they are important topics to consider for this thesis. Chapter three presents the theoretical framework, discussing the issues identity brings with it, what radical right-wing politics entail, and lastly the concept of framing. Following this, chapter four presents the methodological choices made for this thesis and argues why these specific choices were made. Chapter five presents the empirical analysis of the radical right's discourse on immigration, and chapter six discusses and summarises the findings, as well as concludes the whole thesis.

## **2. Literature review**

This section will review the existing literature on the Brexit discourse by examining the role of Euroscepticism and identity in the construction of the discourse. Euroscepticism is found to be continuously used to explain the Brexit vote, and recent scholars also connect this to anti-immigration sentiments. This is further connected to ideas of identity and “the left behind”. The assessed literature does not account for a specific in-depth study of how the populist radical right employed immigration in a specific way in their public speech discourse, and my thesis aims to fill this gap.

### **2.1 Euroscepticism**

One strand of literature seeks to explain the role of Euroscepticism in the Brexit decision to leave the EU. Rather than having Europe and the European Union as a primary source of identity, many Britons refer instead solely to a sense of British identity. Some scholars describe this lack of European identity as a source of Euroscepticism in Britain (Eaton, 2019; George, 2000; Davis, 2017). More specifically, they highlight the importance of the Commonwealth. Eaton (2019) offers insight into the Brexit discourse by examining how the metaphor of a Commonwealth “family of nations” has been used and internalized by politicians as an alternative to the EU. This metaphor can be seen as deeply rooted in popular culture and prejudices (George, 2000). This notion that Britain was part of three circles; The Commonwealth, the US and Europe, with a strong favouring of the Commonwealth, influenced leaders for years (Davis, 2017). Conservative politicians additionally used the “memory of an

Empire” to reposition the UK as a global actor and disentangle Britain from the rest of Europe (Eaton, 2019).

What Eaton, George and Davis all consider is how the Commonwealth has had a great importance for many Britons’ identity and has been the root to Euroscepticism in Britain. Eaton (2019) additionally demonstrates that the way politicians chose to frame the Commonwealth as prosperous and historically rooted was their way of influencing public opinion, establishing a framework that emphasises the importance of studying the way politicians frame issues.

Within the literature focusing on Euroscepticism, some scholars further connect the Eurosceptic discourse to anti-immigration sentiments. The understanding of immigration as a threat exists inside a bigger framework of the EU as an “Other” and as a threat to sovereignty (Graneng, 2017). This demonstrates a connection between immigration and Eurosceptic discourses, built on emphasising the differences between Britain and the EU. Additionally, the idea of the EU as an “Other” further accentuates the importance of identity in the discourse, by classifying something as contrastive.

Another view connecting Euroscepticism and immigration is that of European integration. Vasilopoulou (2016) argues that attitudes towards European integration affect the Brexit vote. Although her study is a prediction of the referendum vote, it nevertheless stresses the importance European integration might have. Membership in the EU limits Britain’s control of their immigration policy, further linking Euroscepticism and anti-immigration together (Graneng, 2017). Immigration into Britain has been increasingly determined by the EU since 2004, and the EU has pushed for even more integration throughout the years (Dennis & Geddes, 2018).

Within the Eurosceptic frame, British government has often had the role of defending national interest by avoiding further integration with the EU (Hawkins, 2012). Opposition to European integration has shaped British identity in a direction away from Europe. Dennis & Geddes (2018) argue that this, together with opposition to immigration throughout the years ultimately led to the victory of the Leave campaign in the EU referendum. These links between European integration and immigration help condition the Brexit discourse.

## **2.2 Identity**

As mentioned in relation to Euroscepticism, identity played a significant role in the Brexit discourse. Another strand of literature focuses on how the immigration discourse during Brexit was affected by a clash between competing notions of identity. Goodwin and Heath (2016)

recognize the importance of mobilizing those identifying as “the left behind” in the referendum. They argue that this group of people, although they did not alone determine the vote, used the referendum to voice their concerns about threats to their “national identity, values and way of life” (Goodwin & Heath, 2016, p. 331).

The force of “the left behind” during Brexit has been analysed by several scholars (Hobolt, 2016; Goodwin & Heath, 2016) and marks an emphasis on socio-demographic factors explaining the vote. Others have also looked at the importance of the general anti-immigrant discourse. Recent work by Zappettini (2019) recognizes how immigration, along with trade, was target for a new type of discourse during the EU referendum – a discourse embracing the idea that leaving the EU means “taking back control” and leaving “outsiders” out of any benefits Britain may have. This symbolizes a more radical discourse in Britain, fronted by actors on the radical right.

Cap (2017) acknowledges that the immigration discourse was structured on mechanisms featuring fear and threats. His study further displays the importance of evaluating notions of fear and threats linked to immigration. When talking about “refugees” and “Europe”, the discourse during Brexit commonly revolved around them being a threat, while immigration itself was spoken about as part of an ongoing “crisis” (Share, 2018, pp. 31-32). British opposition to immigration was thus built on a discourse structured from fear, threats, and a view of immigrants as part of a crisis (Cap, 2017; Share, 2018).

My thesis adds to the existing literature by reviewing specifically the more radical side of the Leave campaign, that is the radical right-wing. By employing the method of discourse analysis, I can analyse empirical subframes on immigration directly from the source.

I will examine how the Brexit discourse on immigration, in many ways, represents a more radical and distinct way of talking about migrants in Britain, with the idea of an “other” resonating with many voters. Discourse analysis as a method has been employed by others studying public issues (Cap, 2017; Graneng, 2017; Hawkins, 2012; Zappettini, 2019). It is useful to examine attitudes about a topic, how they arise, and who affects them. Immigration was a salient topic during Brexit, and conceptions of it are built on the discourse around it. My argument is that the discourse on immigration was largely built on Euroscepticism and identity, and that the radical right utilized these notions to promote an anti-immigration stance that resonated with many voters.

### **3. Theoretical framework**

UKIP was recognized as one of the major Eurosceptic parties both before and during Brexit, and additionally as a populist right-wing party (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Seymour, 2015). I suggest that the way they managed to combine Eurosceptic sentiments with immigration and identity in their public speeches during Brexit had great implications for the Leave campaign and was one of the reasons the Leave side won the referendum. The radical right framed immigration using the subframes of fear and identity. Below, I will elaborate on this and define the concepts that will be put to use in the thesis.

#### **3.1 The issue of identity**

British understanding of identity depends on several factors and involves concerns such as the colonial past of Britain, a history of Euroscepticism, and an anti-immigration narrative. These issues lie at the heart of many Britons' notions of identity. When we want to discuss the way radical-right actors have framed immigration, in part we want to assess how identity has been associated with immigration, and a divide between "us" and "them". British immigration discourse during Brexit was a discourse of growing anxiety, xenophobia, hatred, and an idea of immigrants as "the others" (Cap, 2017). This supports the idea that identity affected the discourse on immigration, as an awareness of one's identity has to be in place in order to make a divide between oneself and others.

Especially salient to the research question is the debate on national identity. Focusing on national identity sheds some light on how identity considerations shape support for the EU (De Vries & Edwards, 2009). Understanding this is useful to understand why and how radical right actors mobilize voters on immigration through the use of identity markers. When talking about identities within Europe particularly, the most important cleavage is "between those who exclusively identify with their nation-state, on the one hand, and those perceiving themselves as attached to both their nation-state and to Europe, on the other hand" (Risse, 2003, p. 489). This can be explained in that there are several ways to conceptualize the notion of identity, one of these being that identities can be nested. This implies individual hierarchies where people have various identities and varying loyalties to each (Risse, 2003).

Based on this, I argue that the issue of immigration during the referendum was important because it emphasised one identity above another, namely British identity above European identity. This is closely connected to the notion of Euroscepticism, as many Britons felt that

Britain was superior to the EU, and that this fed into their scepticism of the EU. The concept of nested identities is useful because it can help explain how some Britons emphasised their British identity before their European identity in the referendum, despite being citizens of a European Union. Furthermore, I argue that this emphasis on a British identity led to a stronger divide between “us” and “them” when referring to immigrants. Due to the sense of hierarchical identities possessed by many Britons, they view Britain on top, and the EU, as well as immigrants from the EU, as second-class “others”.

One of the ways Eurosceptic parties bring attention to the issue of the EU is by stressing the importance of identity. Extreme right parties take advantage of feelings of cultural insecurity to resist further integration with the EU (De Vries & Edwards, 2009). I argue that the radical right took advantage of cultural insecurities during Brexit, when they used identity to frame the immigration issue and mobilize support for leaving the EU. The cultural insecurities during Brexit were defined by a loss of British culture, language and traditions. This is related to the EU, because EU integration increases globalization, putting more emphasis on multilingualism and allowing for immigration. The EU is seen as “part of the problem rather than the solution” for many voters when it comes to protecting against the challenges of a more globalized and integrated world (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1260).

Euroscepticism can be seen as a continuum where parties are placed based on their stance on European integration (De Vries & Edwards, 2009, p. 11). This means parties can either be in complete opposition to integration or completely supportive of the idea of European integration. Furthermore, it explains why some radical right-wing actors can be identified as Eurosceptic, as they strongly oppose the EU. Radical right-wing actors saw immigration as detrimental to Britain and British identity. EU membership was displayed as the primary source for immigration into Britain, and their perception that immigration was a threat to British identity enabled them to portray EU membership as a threat to British identity.

### **3.2 Populism and the radical right**

A trend in more and more EU countries is the growing movement of radical right-wing parties. They have relocated away from the margins, and in many ways secured themselves as mainstream parties. This can be observed by a normalization of “nationalistic, xenophobic, racist and antisemitic rhetoric, which primarily works with ‘fear’ (...)” (Wodak, 2015, p. x).

The terms “radical right-wing” and “right-wing populist” will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. This is because when we talk about a radical right-wing party, we usually

talk about a party whose politics are right-wing *populistic*. The radical UKIP is considered a populist right-wing party (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Seymour, 2015).

Populism relies on appealing to the common population, rather than the elites of society (Wodak, 2015). UKIP's popularity stems from the fact that they are able to mobilize the groups of society who feel "left behind" (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). Left behind in a sense of economic and social factors, such as being part of a working-class lacking the education and skills to thrive in a modern world, and left behind because of the changing values in modern Britain, which clashes with their own values. Additionally, as a populist radical right-wing party, UKIP manages to connect traditional radical-right issues, such as immigration, identity and hostility to the elites, to the matter of Euroscepticism (Ford & Goodwin, 2014, p. 282). This further supports the notion of UKIP as a populist party, since all forms of populism include "some kind of appeal to 'the people' and a denunciation of 'the elite'" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 5).

Nigel Farage was the leader of UKIP during the EU referendum and it is therefore safe to say that his views are reflected in the party's values and vice versa. This is based on the belief that populist parties are commonly led by charismatic leaders, and the bond between leader and follower is central (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008, as cited in Pappas, 2016). There is accordingly an emphasis on strong leadership. The leader usually present themselves as "one of the people", something Farage did by, for instance, posing for the media while drinking beer in pubs (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 36). Farage expresses, on several occasions, his contempt for the political elite in Britain. For instance, he says the following during a radio interview with LBC, one of Britain's radio stations:

"We'll see it happen across country after country after country – and I really believe that Westminster, the intellectuals, the liberal elites, just don't get it. They still are trying to brush, under the carpet, the issue of immigration" (LBC, 2018, August 17).

This shows how Farage makes a clear distinction and singles out "the liberal elites" and "the intellectuals". The "left behind" that UKIP succeeded in mobilizing were very much the opposite of this: older, working-class voters lacking educational qualifications, with values that went against what the younger, more liberal and university-educated majority had (Ford &

Goodwin, 2014). Farage additionally mentions how these groups “just don’t get it”, an attempt to make a further separation between the political elite and the people.

Central to UKIP and Nigel Farage then, is their focus on Euroscepticism and immigration (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). Being a radical right-wing actor in the political landscape of Britain, they use the framework of right-wing populist parties all over the world: They refer to some groups in society as “the others” and quickly blame them for any trouble they argue that their nation is in (Wodak, 2015). As mentioned above, “the others” is often a liberal political elite. Not because they are different in culture, traditions and language but because they, due to their more central- and left-wing stances, tend to be more positive to international relations and migration. This leads to the next, bigger “threat” for the radical right-wing, namely immigration.

During the EU referendum, Nigel Farage and UKIP took a stance against the groups which they thought of as “the others”. I argue that this was first of all the liberal elite because they tended to be more in favour of the EU; the EU itself because it led to more immigration; and lastly, they rejected the immigrants arriving and living in Britain. This focus on immigration was distinctive of the radical right-wing, as I will demonstrate in the analysis. The left-wing, campaigning to continue EU membership, argued instead for the economic risks of leaving the EU (Hobolt, 2016). The more centred right-wing focused both on the economy and immigration, but nevertheless emphasised immigration less than the more radical right-wing.

### **3.3 Framing**

Frames are useful when assessing the public discourse on immigration, because they allow us to recognize how the discourse reinforces one or several specific images of immigration. A frame can determine problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgements and suggest remedies. When a text contains framing, this means there are certain images, keywords, sentences and information that reinforces a specific type of fact or judgement (Entman, 1993). When immigration is framed in various terms, what is happening is that some parts of immigration is elevated, and the salience of these parts are promoted. Salience is “making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences” (Entman, 1993, p. 53).

With regard to the research question, we additionally need to understand the term “sub-framing” (Graneng, 2017) when we talk about framing. Because immigration itself is a framing of the Brexit issue, as Graneng points out, various understandings of immigration are sub-frames. This thesis aims to look into how the radical right in Britain used sub-frames in the



discourse on immigration. As mentioned before, the sub-frames of identity and fear will be especially considered. In other words, I will delve into how and to what extent the immigration discourse by the radical right related to these two sub-frames.

Moreover, frames don't necessarily influence the audience if it disagrees with their already determined belief systems (Entman, 1993). And contrastingly, if the audience already shares the same belief system as what the text expresses, the text can be highly salient (Entman, 1993). This is important to keep in mind as it can ultimately affect how politicians speak about a subject. To make an issue more salient, politicians seek places where they already have support. Interestingly, although of minor importance to the research question, this might also lead to politicians choosing their words wisely based on what type of audience they have. Nevertheless, politicians know that the platform on which they express themselves is of great significance.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Discourse analysis**

A discourse analysis is a critical analysis of already established ways of speaking, thinking and writing, in addition to assumptions that often are taken for granted about how the world is or should be (Johannessen, Rafoss, & Rasmussen, 2018). Discourses can be described as collective understandings, and there can be several of them attached to one topic (Johannessen et al., 2018). This entails that a phenomenon can be associated with various meanings. Previous work by Graneng (2017) shows how discourse analysis is beneficial to use when we analyse a politician's speech because it gives insight into, not necessarily how many times a frame is mentioned, but rather how and when it is mentioned. This is described as identifying the existence of frames (Graneng, 2017).

Discourse analysis is a suitable choice of method due to several reasons. Discourses are useful to understand the social world that we live in and studying discourses is a way to grasp the formation of attitudes (Graneng, 2017, p. 19). Firstly, a discourse analysis is fitting because it allows me to analyse the importance of certain words, expressions and frames, and the way they are expressed. This is important to gain a wider understanding of how immigration was talked about, and how attitudes to immigration were shaped. Additionally, discourse analysis is a fitting method to identify frames in public speech, unlike other qualitative approaches such as thematic analysis or grounded theory. This is because it deals with the analysis of "talk". Discourse analysis is less common in qualitative analyses, but the methodological framework

Graneng (2017) presents in her Master's thesis gives ground to argue that it is in fact a very useful method. Her argument that it is not how many times a frame is mentioned that is important, but rather identifying the actual existence of frames, further demonstrates why discourse analysis is favourable instead of the more quantitative alternative content analysis (pp. 19-20).

#### **4.2 Data selection**

As stated in the introduction, I have chosen to focus on the immigration discourse made by the radical right represented by Nigel Farage, as opposed to politicians from other major parties, such as right-wing Conservative or left-wing Labour. There are several reasons why this is the case. Based on Loughborough University's table of politicians most covered in the media, David Cameron, Boris Johnson, George Osborne and Nigel Farage were the top four politicians who received the most coverage during the EU referendum (Loughborough University, 2016). Cameron, Johnson and Osborne are all members of the Conservative party, while Farage was, at the time of the referendum, the leader of UKIP. These four politicians are the most relevant to consider for this thesis because the fact that they were the most covered in the media implies that they had more speaking time in general. I will demonstrate why I chose to focus on Farage rather than other politicians.

When it comes to the left-wing, they strongly emphasised the economy instead of immigration in the EU referendum (Hobolt, 2016). Right-wing conservatives did talk about immigration, and additionally, several right wings were among the most covered politicians during the referendum (Loughborough University, 2016). Yet, a counting of the number of times each actor spoke about immigration in public speeches published to Facebook shows that it was still the *radical* right who predominantly spoke about immigration, and that conservatives spoke less about it.

Table 1 below depicts the number of times immigration was mentioned in the videos of David Cameron, Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage. Although George Osborne was one of the conservatives who received a lot of media coverage as well, he was not included because I cannot tell how salient he was in the public discourse on Facebook as he did not use this platform to publish speeches associated with Brexit. Any references to "immigrants", "migrants" and "borders" are included in the count, seeing as these words are central to the immigration discourse. Additionally, if there is a phrasing of a "them" or "others" in a manner that clearly refers to immigrants, it has been included.

**Table 1. A counting of references and mentions of immigration**

David Cameron	Boris Johnson	Nigel Farage
8	1	47

The table shows that Nigel Farage spoke more about immigration compared to politicians David Cameron and Boris Johnson. Cameron wanted to remain in the EU and advocated this in the time leading up to the referendum. The Remain campaign’s main focus in the debates was widely known to be the economy (Hobolt, 2016), and Cameron consequently approached the referendum from a mainly economic point of view. He does mention immigration with several references when he talks about his re-negotiation of the EU deal, as the renegotiation of immigration to Britain was part of the deal (Cameron, 2016, 20. February). But most of his videos on Brexit fail to mention immigration which can indicate how Cameron, and his supporters, focused attention to other issues. He did not publish videos discussing the issue of immigration because he rather advocated for the safety of the economy of Britain.

It becomes apparent from Boris Johnson’s Facebook page that he did not use this platform to a great extent during the referendum debates. Farage had a larger number of videos on his Facebook page in general, implying that he wished to influence and mobilize voters through this medium in particular. Boris Johnson tried to influence through other mediums, like for instance his opinion columns in The Telegraph. It is possible that Cameron and Johnson spoke about immigration in videos published to other archives than Facebook, but we don’t have a way of measuring the salience of these videos. This is due to the scope and focus of this thesis, which employs Facebook as an archive for looking at how actors might influence the public with their speech.

These results show that neither Cameron nor Johnson used Facebook to a great extent to influence the public with their speeches related to the referendum, and that neither of them spoke about immigration in speeches published to their Facebook page within the range that Farage did. It becomes evident that out of the three, Farage employed Facebook to bring attention to his public speeches to a much greater extent. This supports my claim that Nigel Farage, representing the radical right in Britain, is of interest to this thesis on immigration discourse, as opposed to right-wing politicians Cameron and Johnson.

The populist radical right was the main advocate for the immigration issue in the Brexit discourse. Focusing on the discourse of one actor alone has its limitations and gives less room to compare the discourse to other discourses on immigration. It leaves out the chance to include

and compare the right- and left-wing discourses, but instead allows me to take a deeper dive into the discourse of the radical right-wing alone.

Social media has become a platform of public discursive space. I argue that social media is one of the platforms where politicians have the advantage of reaching out to people who most likely already support them or what they stand for, as it often requires people to engage through “Likes”, “Shares” and “Comments”. Although not all, many of the people who view speeches by politicians on social media are already supporters of the same views the politician holds, and the salience in their speech is arguably rather high among these people. Due to the spread of internet, people can join groups with others who share the same values and views as oneself and, in other words, cut out the information that disagrees with their own beliefs (Sunstein, 2007, as cited in Bozdag & van den Hoven, 2015). Additionally, social mediums such as Facebook and Google can place users in a “filter bubble” based on earlier activity, removing information that is contrasting to their established views (Pariser, 2011, as cited in Bozdag & van den Hoven, 2015). As a result, social media can have the role of strengthening fixed attitudes, and be highly salient.

Internet videos have the ability to spread quickly as they are a multimediuum which involves both sound and video. It spreads easier than a written post because it generally has more entertainment value. This is why I have chosen to focus on videos from Facebook as data for the thesis. Facebook is arguably the largest social medium, and a platform where politicians can reach out to their audience in a matter of minutes. Populist parties willingly take advantage of any apparatus they can in order to level themselves with the people instead of the elites and using Facebook to spread their word is arguably one way of doing this.

So far, I have given ground as to why the thesis focuses on the immigration discourse of the populist radical right rather than the left- or right-wing. But furthermore, the selection of Nigel Farage as a representative, rather than other members of UKIP, needs to be justified. In relation to social media, a study by Jacobs and Spierings (2019) mention how populist parties have a hierarchical system – they depend on party centralization and leader focus. This means that due to Farage being the leader of UKIP in the time leading up to the referendum, he is also the most relevant actor of the radical right. In their study of populist actors use of Twitter, Jacob and Spierings (2019) find that other members within the populist party will refrain from being too active on social media, as this takes away attention from the party leader (p. 1685).

### 4.3 Sources

I have sampled videos from Nigel Farage's official Facebook page as this is generally where his supporters are located. It is very unusual to click "Like" on a Facebook page of something or someone you do not like nor support, which is why researching the videos posted to Facebook, to an audience who already are supportive, is relevant to understand how voters are mobilized on specific issues. It is safe to assume that most people who have clicked "Like" on Farage's Facebook page support him, and that his page is a gathering place for supporters of his beliefs. In this way, Facebook works as an echo chamber due to the fact that the public speeches Farage publishes on his page will work to reinforce the beliefs of his supporters. Facebook is where politicians can communicate directly with the voters and have full control over what is published. A Facebook post of any sort can, based on Entman's theory of salience, be highly relevant and influential to the people following the page.

Facebook allows us to see how many times a video or post has been "Liked", "Shared" and "Commented" and this can be a good indicator of how many people it has reached out to. The main criteria I used for the sampling was that the video had to relate to Brexit and immigration and be published within 6 months before the referendum. This means the although Brexit was and have been discussed for several years after the vote, videos published after the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June 2016 will not be included.

The videos differ in length. They are usually shorter, because they highlight a specific topic. Because the videos published on Facebook are mainly recorded tv- or radio-interviews, it is not possible to argue that the way Farage talks about immigration in the videos can be ascribed to the fact that his audience are already supporters of him. But it is possible to argue that, because he has control over his own Facebook page, he can choose the videos he wants to publish. An assumption then, is that he will only publish videos where his arguments are robust and by chance also very engaging. If the videos are engaging, they will gain more attention from his supporters and additionally, they might spread quicker overall.

I base my analysis on speeches where Farage speaks about immigration and I chose to divide this into two sub-frames: identity and fear. This relates to how Farage, as a representative for the radical right in Britain, connected the issue of immigration to feelings and concerns of identity and fear. As I mentioned above, this type of reasoning is common for populist radical right-wing actors. The combination of reviewing how Farage framed immigration in his public speeches, in addition to how he used Facebook as a platform to further spread this discourse, is useful to answer the research question of how and to what extent the radical right framed immigration in the Brexit issue.

## **5. Empirical analysis**

Immigration affected the EU referendum in three ways: Membership to the EU was renegotiated, among other things, on new migration policies; The pro-Leave campaigns emphasised immigration control, and this was especially the issue with populist party UKIP; Public debate during the referendum was largely about immigration (Dennis & Geddes, 2018, pp. 1146-1147). The importance of immigration as a dynamic force in the EU referendum must be stressed. The rise in populist anti-immigrant parties indicate how immigration is a topic with high significance in the formation of politic opinion (de Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2005). As mentioned initially, immigration was an issue of great importance to voters (YouGov, 2015).

The radical right shaped much of the discourse on immigration, and the following section will demonstrate how and to what extent they did this. Farage explicitly says that “Immigration is the number one issue in British politics, it has been for some years (...) This is the issue that will decide the referendum” (Farage, 2016, June 10). This illustrates the awareness of the radical right that they wanted to steer the referendum debates in the direction of immigration.

In the following sections, I demonstrate how the radical right framed immigration in the Brexit campaign by looking at public speeches published to Facebook by radical right actor Nigel Farage. I find that the radical right framed immigration with references to fear and identity and worked within a Eurosceptic framework to argue for stricter migration policies.

### **5.1 Immigration and Euroscepticism**

EU has been viewed by some politicians and voters as a problem that needs to be solved in order to fix the immigration issue. The radical right, in this instance the UKIP, has found a way to connect traditional right-wing issues such as immigration to the issue of EU membership (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). During the Brexit debates, there was a strong emphasis on detaching Britain from the EU by building upon old arguments of Euroscepticism related to safety, sovereignty, immigration and the economy.

The radical right combined anti-immigration sentiments and Euroscepticism (Ford & Goodwin, 2014). The “Take back control” slogan which many Leave-campaigners used, emphasises the “sovereignty” aspect Eurosceptics worry about. Using this highlights the fear that EU membership means giving up Britain’s sovereignty. Nigel Farage combines the conception of “take back control” with the issue of immigration when he, for instance, says the following:

“The free movement of people in Europe has meant the free movement of criminal traffickers; it has meant the free movement of Kalashnikov guns; it has meant the free movement of terrorists. And the first duty of our British government is to defend the realm, and to defend its people, and the most vital thing we could do to protect this country against this horrendous terrorist wave that we are seeing, is to take back control of our country, and its borders, and to make sure that the only people that come into Britain are the ones that we allow to come.” (Farage, 2016, April 5).

What he refers to is the policy in which the EU allows all EU residents to move freely among membership countries (European Commission, n.d.). This type of discourse enables a view that sees people coming to Britain, in this case citizens from other EU countries, as a danger. In his speech, Farage argues that the way to make sure Britain is protected from the “terrorist wave” is to leave the EU. By saying “terrorist wave”, Farage also employs a figurative language that connects immigration to a wave of terrorism, further associating immigration with a subframe of fear. A wave represents something consuming and uncontrollable, and talking about immigration in this manner supports the idea of seeing immigrants as a danger to Britain. Farage further presents leaving the EU as the best option Britons have to stop terrorism, and he connects leaving the EU to the notion of taking back control of Britain’s borders.

In relation to framing, the speech above clearly frames immigration based on the notion of fear. Membership in the EU means accepting the free movement of people, and Farage associates this with entirely harmful things: criminal traffickers, Kalashnikov guns – a weapon associated with terrorism, as many European terrorist attacks have been carried out using this gun (Laville, Burke, & Bogavac, 2015) – and terrorists. Membership in the EU is represented as the gateway for these to enter into Britain. Farage wants to restrict immigration into Britain, and in this case, he does it by advocating to leave the EU.

This is moreover apparent in one of Farage’s speeches at a UKIP conference when he says: “When Theresa May says that it is difficult to control immigration as a member of the European Union, she’s wrong. It isn’t difficult, it’s impossible” and “We have to, in this campaign, make people understand, that EU membership and uncontrolled immigration, are synonymous with each other” (Farage, 2016, April 26). The EU is thus seen as the reason why Britain is unable to control its immigration numbers. By referring to immigration as “uncontrolled”, Farage constructs additional negative associations to immigration. Depicting

immigration as uncontrollable feeds into a notion of disaster, with Britain facing a danger whilst being unable to control it.

Immigration is characterised as “uncontrollable” in many ways. Utterances such as “a continuing flood of people that is coming into this country” (Farage, 2016, June 3), and “we’re completely out of control when it comes to immigration” (Farage, 2016, May 12) sheds light on this. Immigration is out of control and too many people are coming to Britain, according to the radical right. Additionally, the wording “a continuing *flood* of people” refers to a metaphor of catastrophe, which once again places the issue of immigration within a subframe of fear. A flood relates to an idea of something that will submerge you, and in this case, submerge and overwhelm Britain.

It becomes apparent that the populist radical right also took advantage of feelings of cultural insecurity to argue why Britain should leave the EU. This is related to how immigrants from the EU were seen as a threat to British language, tradition and culture. The issue of hierarchical identities enabled many British citizens to view Britain as superior to the EU, and citizens from the EU along with it. Britons were inside the “us” boundaries, while immigrants from the EU were seen as “the others”. The resistance to immigration in combination with a belief of British identity as higher-ranking fed into Euroscepticism in Britain. Immigration could not be regulated while staying a member of the EU, something Farage continuously reminded the public of, when he for instance refers to uncontrolled immigration as synonymous with EU membership. This became part of the idea of the EU as “the other”, and due to the issue of hierarchical identities, leaving the EU was seen as the only right move in order to control immigration.

## **5.2 “The others” in the Brexit discourse**

Identity takes place in the Brexit discourse in several ways. As mentioned above, the EU was certainly viewed as an “other” in the Brexit discourse, which I will come back to later in this section. But during the referendum, a divide was made between “us” and “them”, and who “they” are varied. First of all, I find that “they” in the discourse of the populist radical right is the political elite. In a tv-interview, Farage explicitly states that “This campaign [regarding the EU question] will be the people against the politicians, and the more the politicians club together, perhaps the more the people will choose to vote against them” (Farage, 2016, January 17). Common for populist parties is the appeal to the people (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) and this is something Farage executes by referring to the politicians as “them”,



positioning himself with “the people” and not “the politicians”. He even says that “I’m pushing this referendum as being the people versus the politicians. So the more the Establishment club together, the better. This is about ordinary folks making up their mind” (Farage, 2016, April 20).

The choice of wording, such as the term “ordinary folks”, is more colloquial and seeks to elevate the importance of the people versus the elite in the referendum. It further suggests that politicians aren’t part of this group of “ordinary people”. This type of discourse draws attention to identity because it understands being a politician as an own identity, associated with a type of decision-making that is usually against the will of the people, symbolized by the term “versus” – the politicians *versus* the people. Farage further expresses distrust in the political elite during the referendum, especially David Cameron: “Frankly, I just don’t believe a single word this man says anymore. And increasingly, that’s how the British public feel” (Farage, 2016, June 2). This also displays how Farage connects his own views to that of the British public.

As already stated, another factor in the Brexit discourse that refers to identity is the divide between the EU and Britain. The EU is constructed as an “other” in the Brexit discourse based on its pressure for more integration, more immigration and more control over Britain’s sovereignty. When referring to the issue of EU sovereignty, Farage says “They can make almost any law they want, that can damage British business, damage our way of life, and we have nothing we can do” (Farage, 2016, March 15). This choice of words highlights the way the EU is viewed as sovereign, and able to make decisions on behalf of Britain, that possibly could “damage British business”. Being part of the EU is not seen as an advantage, but rather a disadvantage that can damage British citizen’s way of life. This is relevant especially when it comes to the immigration issue, as this illustrates how the desire to control immigration into Britain feeds into Euroscepticism due to an idea that the EU is making laws that damages the British “way of life”. Because the EU decides migration policies for Britain, those who want to restrict immigration view the EU as an “other”. This remark also presents the pessimistic belief that there is nothing Britain can do to stop the EU from interfering.

On the forefront of the Brexit discourse on EU, there is a desire to reclaim Britain from the EU. The EU is an “other” that limits Britain’s sovereignty. According to the radical right, the disadvantages of staying a member in the EU strongly outweighs any advantages. “Do you wish us to be a self-governing, democratic, independent nation, *or* part of a bigger political union in which at best we have an 8 percent say?” (Farage, 2016, April 25[my italics]) asks Farage in one of his speeches. This comparison is important because it represents two types of

identities for Britain; The first one being considerably better than the other. British identity is accentuated as independent and strong, while being part of the EU is associated with a European identity where Britain has little authority to decide.

This “other” identity within the EU is not represented as beneficial for Britain. British values are self-governance, democracy and independence, and according to the radical right, these are values not found in the EU. Part of the self-view presented by Farage is Britain as a modern, liberal state, visible when he says “We are gonna have to be very much more selective about who comes to Britain, if we wanna maintain our modern, liberal traditions” (Farage, 2016, April 26). This implies that modernity and liberalism are part of British identity, and that having open borders, letting anyone into Britain, will dilute these traditions. Additionally, if you want to be a “patriotic” British citizen, it means “believing we are good enough to run our own country and make our own laws” (Farage, 2016, May 9) according to Farage. This adds to the conception that people voting to remain in the EU don’t want what’s best for Britain.

The last conception of “The others” in the Brexit discourse are immigrants. Immigration is connected to the EU, because the EU is the sovereign ruler that allows immigrants to come into Britain. The following section will address who immigrants as “the others” are.

### **5.3 Who are the immigrants?**

In the videos analysed, immigrants are mostly referred to by the radical right as people from the EU coming to Britain through the free movement policy. This is demonstrated in a BBC interview published to Farage’s Facebook page, where he holds up his passport and says:

“Look, this is my British passport (...). The first two words on it are ‘European Union’. And that passport is now held by 500 million people. And we are not able to choose the numbers that come, or the type of people that come. Immigration can be good, but we shouldn’t have an open door to huge numbers of unskilled workers.” (Farage, 2016, February 22)

This refers to immigration from the European Union, and the fear that a huge amount of people have access to Britain’s border because of Britain’s membership in the EU. One of the concerns regarding immigrants is the economic burden they might pose, as Farage labels them “unskilled workers”. This concern differs from that shown in the excerpt in section 5.1, which was the fear of terrorism. The idea of opening the door to a huge number of unskilled workers is also

portrayed within a subframe of fear, but rather a fear of the economic consequences. Additionally, we understand that immigrants include citizens from *all* other European member states. People from certain countries are not favoured, although it is indicated that there might be a desire to “choose the type of people that come”. This desire to choose might not involve citizenship however, but rather skills in the working place.

In the immigration discourse of the radical right, there is also an emphasis on immigrants as religious people, and extremists specifically. For instance, when Farage discusses how he thinks remaining in the EU means preparing for Turkey to join, he argues that “a very large number of Turks will seek to come to Britain” (Farage, 2015, November 23). He continues in the same video by saying that “8% of [Turkey’s] 75 million support ISIS”, which poses a threat to the security of Britain. This accounts for immigrants as non-EU residents. Additionally, this framing of immigration accentuates fear in relation to immigration.

In reference to ISIS, Farage commonly refers to terrorist attacks that have happened in other countries as well as Britain. He legitimises his arguments of fear by showing examples of the worst-case scenarios done by immigrants. With regards to the “Cologne assaults” where several women were sexually assaulted in the German town of Cologne, Farage says: “If we allow unlimited numbers of young males to come into Europe, from countries where women are, at best second-class citizens, what on earth do we expect?” (Farage, 2016, March 17). Here, immigrants are non-European males who come into Europe from countries where women are seen as “second-class citizens”. The division between Britain and “the others” has changed, and Britain is mentioned as part of Europe and “the others” are young males from outside of Europe. This represents a new way of classifying who the immigrants are, different from the former assumption that immigrants are simply people coming to Britain from other EU countries.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

Identity, Euroscepticism and immigration were three topics that were closely related during the Brexit debates. This becomes evident in the radical right’s discourse on immigration. Immigration is linked to a Self-Other distinction and distrust in the EU system of handling things.

Concerning the subframe of fear, the radical right spoke about uncontrolled immigration and the dangers of it, using this to argue that Britain should leave the EU. They emphasised how membership in the EU and consequently a lack of British sovereignty was one of the main reasons for Britain’s immigration problem. Being a member in the EU meant giving up

sovereignty, and this was damaging to British values as it allowed the EU to open up to “uncontrolled” immigration which damaged the British “way of life”. By referring to this, Farage triggered feelings of cultural insecurity in many Britons. With this, the populist radical right placed anti-immigration sentiments within a discourse of Euroscepticism. Furthermore, on the matter of identity, the discourse demonstrates an emphasis on British identity instead of a European identity. This was done by classifying European citizens within a framework of “others” due to a notion of nested identities, where British identity prevails on top. Due to this lack of European identity, the immigration discourse was once again placed within a framework of British Euroscepticism.

The highlights of the immigration discourse by the radical right were the dangers and consequences of immigration into Britain. The argument that UKIP managed to combine Euroscepticism and anti-immigrant sentiments was demonstrated by Farage in his speeches during the referendum debates. The findings show, as assumed, that the discourse on immigration involves clear elements of Euroscepticism and identity. The radical right utilized these conceptions to further push their anti-immigration agenda. This was, for instance, apparent when Farage talked about the dangers of the free movement of people within the EU, and the possibility that remaining in the EU meant allowing Turkish citizens to come to Britain.

This thesis has aimed to answer the question of *how and to what extent did radical right-wing political actors frame immigration in the public discourse about Brexit?* It has done this by analysing public Facebook video speeches by Nigel Farage as a representative for the radical right. The findings show that the immigration frame involved several subframes, two of these being identity and fear, and additionally an unfavourable use of metaphors when referring to immigrants. The findings also demonstrate how the radical right took advantage of social media to spread their message, as Nigel Farage utilized Facebook to a much greater extent than David Cameron and Boris Johnson. By making the issue of immigration a central topic in the Brexit debates, the populist radical right managed to influence Britain into voting to leave the EU.

Although mentioning national identity, this thesis does not account for the national identities within Britain, such as English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern-Irish. I have looked at British identity as one defining identity, although reality is that Britain is divided, with each part having their own identity and opinion of immigration. A prediction of the vote by Henderson et al. (2016) sheds light on this, as they argue that the referendum needs to be analysed at the level of the nations that make up the UK. Results from the referendum additionally show that while

England had a majority of Leave votes with 53.4%, in Scotland this number was only 38% (BBC, n.d.). Due to the limited scope of this thesis, only British identity as a national identity has been included.

Additionally, another limit of this thesis is the general scope of the research question. This thesis has only looked at public speeches on one platform, being Facebook, and additionally only reviewed one actor. I looked at how the subframes of identity and fear were used, but a more in-depth study could show and compare how these subframes were employed on several different mediums. Future studies could therefore do a comparative study. Preferably, different politicians could also be included, and more subframes can be identified.

This thesis has given insight into the discourse by the British radical right-wing on the issue of immigration and thus given a clearer picture of how the radical right utilize various subframes in their discourse, as well as how they take advantage of social media to reach out to voters. The radical right was straightforward in that one of their goals were to make immigration salient in the debates, and they used frames in their discourse to reinforce a specific way of viewing immigration and immigrants as part of the EU problem. The thesis has contributed to a more extensive understanding of the populist radical right discourse during the EU referendum in 2016 and stressed the importance of discourse in shaping opinions and values in the British population.

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