

Media cues and citizen support for right-wing populist parties

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Abstract

Right-wing populist parties are thriving across Europe. Usual explanations for the success of these parties are based on notions related to economics, national identity or cultural alienation. Arguably the mass media also play a significant role, providing legitimizing publicity for these parties that often operate at the fringes of the political system. Whereas prior studies provide evidence of media effects drawing on macro-level data and/or qualitative accounts, there is little evidence about how mass media coverage may affect support for the populist right on the level of the individual voter. The current study adds to the existing literature on media and political populism by 1) its individual-level focus, 2) the use of an experimental design employing three different media cues: an immigrant cue, an anti-politics cue and a party cue, and 3) by drawing on explicit and implicit data for party support. We find effects of certain cues on both implicit and explicit support for right-wing populist parties, mediated through political cynicism. Interestingly, media cues have greater effects on higher-knowledge respondents, and operate differently for respondents on the left versus the right of the ideological spectrum.

RUNNING HEAD: Media cues and populist party support

Media cues and citizen support for right-wing populist parties

Right-wing populist parties are thriving across Europe, currently holding seats in national parliaments in most European countries. Usual explanations for the success of these parties are based on notions related to economics, national identity or cultural alienation (for a review see Mudde, 2007). Some authors, however, have shown that the mass media also play a significant role in promoting the success of the populist right (e.g. Walgrave & de Swert, 2004; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden & van Spanje, 2012; Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Ellinas, 2010). Whereas these studies provide evidence drawing on macro-level data resources and/or qualitative accounts, there is little systematic evidence about how mass media coverage may affect support for the populist right on the level of the individual voter. Two exceptions come from Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese (2011, 2013) who found that the effects of populist communication strategies are only present for the lower educated and the politically cynical: these groups are more likely to be persuaded by populism. Yet, these studies focused on the perception of populist leaders, and not populist parties more broadly. We extend this line of research with an experimental study, following the call for more systematic empirical evidence regarding the relationship between media and support for right-wing populism (van der Brug & Fennema, 2007).

Populism is usually defined with regard to two common features: anti-elitism and representation of the common people. The latter is often combined with strong national favoritism and hostility towards immigrants (Betz, 1994; Ignazi, 2002; Mudde, 2007; Zaslove, 2008). Our experimental design draws on these two aspects of populist politics. In addition, because prior investigations considered party cues to be important for the effects of media coverage on policy support in general (Kam, 2005; Mondak, 1993; for populist parties see also Vliegenthart et al. 2012), we explore whether simultaneous cueing of the party of

interest does matter. By doing so, we add an explicit micro level perspective to the study of media effects in this area of research. Finally, to our knowledge all prior studies of support for populist right-wing parties have drawn on explicit, self-reported measures of party support. We do also know, however, that survey measures of support for extreme right parties can considerably underestimate the amount of support for reasons of social desirability (e.g., Arzheimer, 2009). In this study we therefore employ two dependent variables to measure support for the populist right by means of both explicit and implicit measures. Whereas the former is a ‘propensity to vote (PTV) for party X’ measure (van der Eijk, 2002)¹ the latter draws on data collected through an adapted form of the Implicit Association Test (IAT; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998), allowing us to get at respondents’ uncontrolled, or automatic associations about the party.

In sum, the current study adds to the existing literature on media and political populism by 1) its individual-level focus, 2) the use of an experimental design employing multiple media cues, and 3) by drawing on explicit and implicit data for party support. In the following we first review the relevant literature on populist parties, potentially relevant media cues, and attitudes before turning to our methodology and results.

Populist, right-wing populist, anti-immigrant parties² and the media

Academic definitions of populism vary, but tend to agree on two core elements for populist parties: a central focus on ‘the people’ and an accompanying anti-elitism (Canovan,

¹ We use PTVs since these give sufficient analytical variance even for parties with small electoral support (e.g. van der Brug, Fennema, & Tillie, 2000).

² The literature remains unclear on the use of appropriate terminology. While some argue for a clear distinction between different parties falling under this category, other tend to use these terms rather interchangeably. While interesting, these debates are beyond our scope; we therefore use all three terms individually and also in conjunction with one another, but for precision’s sake focus on “right-wing populist parties.”

1999). ‘The people’ tends to mean a homogenous group of citizens, the virtuous ordinary people, the backbone of society (Zaslove, 2008). Populism proclaims to express their general will (Mudde, 2004) and to ensure their political representation. This is not a benign classification, however: “the ordinary people” are juxtaposed against “dangerous others” who pose a threat to their interests (Canovan, 1999, p. 3-5). In right-wing populism, such others are not just the “corrupt elite” (Mudde, 2004, p. 543) but also include immigrants and anyone else not belonging to an idealized, traditionalist vision of the ordinary citizen. This populism combines an anti-elitist rhetoric with in-group, typically nationalistic favoritism. With the latter often leading to harsh opposition to immigration, populist parties are mostly found on the extreme right of the political spectrum (Betz, 1994; Ignazi, 2002; Zaslove, 2008),³ and it is here that much European populism research has focused (e.g., Betz & Immerfall, 1998; Mudde, 2008).

Mass media are an indispensable tool for political populism. Media provide a stage for populists by spreading their message, but more importantly they provide mediated legitimacy by way of framing issues and actors as politically viable. By giving them media access (illustrated by e.g., Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003; Rydgren, 2004; Statham, 1996) the media “confer legitimacy and authority to political newcomers and (...) dispel voter doubts about their electoral viability” (Ellinas, 2010, p. 210). Indeed, empirical research has indicated that there are several ways in which the media can ‘make or break’ right-wing populist parties. Based on the issue ownership thesis, the salience of right-wing populist topics in the media such as immigration or integration, Islam, and crime can contribute to the electoral success of these parties (Walgrave & de Swert, 2004; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007). Moreover, Bos and colleagues found that the presence of populist communication

³ We acknowledge the existence and academic debate on left-wing populism (Dahrendorf, 2007; Decker, 2008; March & Mudde, 2005; March, 2007), but here choose to focus on the populist right-wing populist only.

styles in mass media predicted support for populist party leaders, among the lower educated and more politically cynical (2011, 2013). Finally, following literature on the importance of personalization in media coverage and of party visibility in the news (Hopmann, Vliegenthart, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2009), it has been shown that indeed the degree to which populist right-wing populist parties and their leaders are covered in the news is related to popular support (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden & van Spanje, 2012), though such visibility results are not uniform (Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2001; Muis, 2009).

The present study makes an attempt to translate these largely macro-level findings into an experimental design. The focus of our experimental manipulations is on two different, but both typically right-wing populist, cues: an immigrant cue and an anti-elitist cue. We also include a simple party cue as a manipulation. These three cues will be discussed respectively below.

Immigrant cues and right-wing populist party support

Immigrant cues—regardless whether in support of or against immigrants—can best be understood as group identity cues; that is, they isolate and reference one social group—an immigrant group—with implicit (or explicit) comparison to another—in this case, the national group. Tapping into these intergroup comparisons can be quite powerful; it touches deep-rooted psychological tendencies by individuals to classify others into groups to which they themselves belong (ingroups), or groups of which they are not a part (outgroups; Oakes & Turner, 1980). Such classifications have important ramifications for inter-group dynamics, because an individual's sense of self is linked to the ingroups to which that individual belongs (Tajfel, 1982; Brewer, 2001). This self-involvement in the group leads people to prefer those groups to which they belong (Tajfel, 1982; see also Dovidio, Gaertner, & Esses, 2008) and to feel more positively toward ingroup members (Otten & Moskowitz, 2000). The

converse is also true: people tend to be more negative toward outgroup members, and much less cooperative with them (Tajfel, 1982). Because individuals simultaneously belong to multiple social groups, it is the varying salience of any one social group at a time that elicits group-serving behavior and attitudes for one group in lieu of another.

Media cues, then, have the potential to make certain group categorizations salient. In the present case, an immigrant cue can prompt a non-immigrant reader to think in “my national group-versus-immigrants” terms. By making immigration salient, that categorization system should be the dominant one in a reader’s mind—even just for that moment. As noted, many right-wing populist parties promulgate a platform of anti-immigrant nationalism; likewise, the visibility in news of immigration as an issue has been correlated with the success of right-wing populist parties (e.g. Walgrave & de Swert, 2004, Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007). We expect that an immigrant cue would prompt more support for a right-wing populist party, through this group identity mechanism. That is, by making salient a national-versus-immigrant group categorization, readers should psychologically move toward a position that bolsters their ingroup identity—in this case, supporting a party that claims to value and protect national interests over immigrant influences. We therefore propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Participants who are presented with an immigrant cue (versus no cue) will express more support for a right-wing populist party.

Anti-politics cues and right-wing populist party support

As outlined above, critique towards a country’s political and economic elites is a defining feature of right-wing populism (Schedler, 1996). By distinguishing themselves from the political establishment, populist parties seek to attract voters who are equally dissatisfied. One way to do so is to emphasize anti-elite or “anti-politics” sentiments in their political

messages. Walgrave and de Swert (2004), for example, found that anti-politics themes were present in both party manifestos of the right-wing populist Flemish Bloc (VB) in Belgium and Belgian media coverage; further, they found that anti-politics issues were strong self-reported motives among VB voters—a finding corroborated in other studies of the anti-establishment and protest motivations of right-wing populist voters (Schumacher and Rooduijn, 2013; Knigge, 1998; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2001; Norris, 2005). Surprisingly, however, little is known about how such anti-politics cues would affect support for right-wing populist parties on the level of the individual citizen. We expect that by highlighting anti-politics considerations in a media text, this negativity towards the political establishment is made a salient aspect for voting and should lead to stronger support for a party that defines itself as a solution to the problem of “politics as usual.” Thus, our theorizing for the anti-politics cue is grounded more in the social context than in the individual psychology (unlike the immigrant cue); by cueing such contextual sentiments, we believe a message should effectively prime the audience to vote in an anti-establishment way. Our second hypothesis, then, is:

H2: Participants who are presented with an anti-politics cue (versus no cue) will express more support for a right-wing populist party.

Party cues and right-wing populist party support

There are various reasons to look into the role of simple party cues affecting attitudes towards parties. In general, party cues help voters to efficiently cope, structure, and make sense of the complex political world around them. By relying on partisan cues the rational voter minimizes information costs (Downs, 1957), “while still producing relatively well-grounded political opinions” (Mondak, 1993, p. 188). Party cues thus act as information shortcuts, especially in low information elections (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; Rahn, 1993); with

regard to right-wing populist parties in particular, it was shown that increasing visibility of the party in news coverage is related to stronger public support (Vliegenthart et al., 2012). However, there are two complications to this effect in the current case. First, most party cue research has been done in two-party contexts like the United States (but see Coan, Merolla, Stephenson, & Zechmeister, 2008), and with policy support or other attitudinal (versus intended behavioral) measures as outcomes; second, because we are presenting a single message to participants and asking them to carefully read it, the party cue may not function as a simple shortcut as it would during a real election. In order to explore these dynamics, we present a simple party cue in isolation and in conjunction with the two substantive cues discussed above. In the absence of a clear theoretical basis from which to form a prediction, we instead pose a research question:

RQ1: Does a party cue, in isolation or in combination with one of the other cues, prompt greater right-wing populist support?

Anti-immigrant attitudes and political cynicism as mediators

Consistent with previous literature (e.g., Lubbers & Scheepers, 2001), we expect two types of attitudes to mediate the effects of such cues on party support: anti-immigrant attitudes and political cynicism. Anti-immigrant attitudes have long been understood as a potential driver of right-wing populist support. In particular, social contexts of economic competition over scarce resources—i.e. from an influx of immigrants into a given area—tend to predict support for right-wing populist parties, largely from a group threat perspective (see Lubbers & Scheepers, 2001). Such competition gives rise to anti-immigrant sentiments, which then prompt right-wing populist voting as a means to alleviate the threat posed by such competition. Lubbers and Scheepers (2001) showed that anti-immigrant sentiments—in their case, the perception that immigrants and asylum-seekers were a problem—mediated the

effects of actual economic threat on right-wing populist support. If anti-immigrant attitudes can be perceived of as a main driver of right-wing populist voting, then we need to take into account the possibility that the effects of our media cues are also (at least partially) mediated through this variable. Thus, our third hypotheses:

H3: Anti-immigrant attitudes will mediate the effects of both cues on right-wing populist party support.

Political cynicism should also play a mediating role. Scholarship on right-wing populism has suggested that cynicism plays a crucial role in driving support for these parties; however, that role is sometimes specified as a moderator (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Bos et al., 2013), and sometimes as a mediator of media effects (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2001). We theorize here that it serves as a mediator for two reasons. One, because cynicism has also proven to be a primary driver of far-right populist party support; like anti-immigrant attitudes, then, we think its centrality in driving these attitudes suggests a mediating, rather than moderating role. And two, because our media cues specifically tap into both immigrant and cynicism-related sentiments, we expect them to have effects *on* those attitudes, which should then subsequently affect party support. Therefore:

H4: Cynicism will mediate the effects of both cues on right-wing populist party support.

The moderating roles of political knowledge and ideology

It is by now established that political communication media effects are by-and-large conditional upon relevant individual variations (e.g. McLeod, Kosicki & McLeod, 2002). In addition to the theorized mediations, we also expect these effects to be *moderated* in two ways: by political knowledge and by political ideology. In line with previous research, we expect some level of political knowledge to be a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for

respondents to experience the hypothesized effects of these cues. While some research favored the idea that the least knowledgeable are the most affected by media contents (e.g., Iyengar, Kinder, Peters, & Krosnick, 1984), including in the case of populist party messages (Bos et al., 2013), others argue that one must have at least some knowledge in order to understand and use a media cue in the formation of an attitude (Miller & Krosnick, 2000; see also Ha, 2011). In the present study, we are not examining persuasive messages (a context where greater knowledge can create resistance; Zaller, 1992); instead, we are examining the presence of *politically relevant* cues in the context of a news story that is otherwise held constant. Therefore, we expect political knowledge to aid in the effectiveness of the cues—at both stages of the hypothesized mediations (above). First, we argue that more knowledgeable respondents will be more likely to have their mediating attitudes affected by the cues, because they have the awareness to understand the *relevance* of the cues to those attitudes. Second, we expect more knowledgeable respondents mediating attitudes to have stronger effects on their right-wing populist party support: respondents need to have some base-line level of knowledge to understand that expressing support for the right-wing populist party would in fact address the concerns raised by anti-immigrant attitudes and political cynicism. Therefore, we posit:

H5: Political knowledge moderates the mediated effects of these cues, such that higher knowledge respondents will be more (indirectly) affected by the cues.

Political ideology, likewise, should moderate these effects. With the location of these parties typically on the far right side of the political spectrum (see footnote 3), and specifically in the case of the party in this study, the issues and accompanying political sentiments might be more palatable to voters who are also more ideologically right-leaning than left-leaning. Again, we expect this moderation to happen at both stages of the mediation—before it, because right-wing respondents should be more likely to respond to the cues with increased

anti-immigrant and cynical sentiments—and afterward, because right-wing respondents should be more likely to respond to these sentiments by endorsing a right-wing populist party.

H6: Political ideology moderates the mediated effects of these cues, such that right-leaning respondents will be more (indirectly) affected by the cues.

For aid in visualizing these expectations, we present them in Figure 1.

Explicit and implicit party support measures

As a final step, we also introduced implicit measures of our dependent variable, alongside the standard explicit, self-report measures. Most research on political attitudes treats attitudes as consciously held evaluations of political figures, issues, policies, etc. (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). However, scholarship has also demonstrated that political attitudes can be affected by unconscious processes and considerations, which explain additional variance beyond conscious measures (see Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009, for a review).⁴ That is, people may have unconscious, implicit attitudes that also affect their conscious attitude expressions and behavior.

In the political realm, scholarship has shown that implicit attitudes can explain additional variance in political preferences and intended behaviors—especially in socially sensitive domains. For example, Greenwald, Smith, Sriram, Bar-Anan, and Nosek (2009b) show that implicit anti-black racial attitudes predicted unique variance in a respondent's likelihood to vote for U.S. President Barack Obama back in 2008. Other scholars found that

⁴ Scholars disagree about the best terminology for the ways in which these attitudes are thought to operate—whether unconscious, implicit, or unaware. Further, scholars are unsettled on the degree to which these attitudes (versus the means by which we measure them) are fully outside awareness (see Fazio & Olson, 2003). These debates are important, but beyond the scope of the current study. We use the three terms interchangeably, and accept that the IAT is measuring something beyond explicit articulation by participants.

implicit associations of the 2008 presidential candidates with valued political traits also predicted unique variance in support for the candidates (Sheets, Domke & Greenwald, 2011). Generally, implicit attitudes tend to correlate with their explicit counterparts in situations of non-sensitive attitudes, including some political preferences and consumer attitudes (Greenwald et al., 2009a). But more sensitive attitudes, like interracial and other intergroup attitudes, are much less likely to correlate on implicit and explicit levels—it is within these socially sensitive topics that implicit measures tend to have much more predictive validity than standard self-report measures (Greenwald et al., 2009a). The domain at hand here is both political and socially sensitive—support for right-wing populist parties can be seen as controversial, and might therefore prompt less honest self-reporting among respondents (Arzheimer, 2009).⁵

Additionally, implicit attitudes seem rarely to be treated as dependent variables in research. A notable exception shows, though, that implicit racial attitudes can change depending on a presented stimulus (Dasgupta & Greenwald, 2001). We hope to expand work in this area by examining implicit attitude changes in response to the media cues highlighted here. Given the relatively under-developed nature of this case, though—implicit support for right-wing populist parties, as a dependent variable—we pose two research questions:

RQ2: To what extent is implicit support for right-wing populist parties boosted by the message cues in ways hypothesized for explicit support measures above?

RQ3: And to what extent are implicit and explicit right-wing populist support related?

⁵ There is vigorous debate among scholars (e.g., Blanton & Jaccard, 2008) about the appropriate way to interpret implicit attitudes and measures: do they reveal actual “prejudice” or not? Our concern here is not in making any assertions that respondents are implicitly prejudiced in one way or another; instead, we are interested in the potential of added variance that these implicit measures can afford in a socially sensitive topic domain like extreme-right voting.

Method

Context and sample. The hypotheses and research questions were investigated through an online survey-experiment with a representative sample of Dutch adults. The Netherlands is an optimal case for such research, because it is characterized by unprecedented levels of electoral volatility and remarkable electoral successes of populist right-wing populist parties. In the current political landscape it is the PVV (Partij voor de Vrijheid, or Freedom Party), organized around its leader Geert Wilders, that puts right-wing populism on the political agenda. The PVV can be characterized as a right-wing populist, anti-immigration party as it addresses nativism in its programs (Mudde, 2007) and has “resentment against migrants and the immigration policy of their governments” (Fennema, 1997, p. 474). Moreover, it can be regarded as anti-establishment, anti-party or anti-elitist (Dowling, 2010). It therefore represents a crystallization of the key cues at play in this study: immigrant cues and anti-politics cues.

The participants for the online experiment were recruited through the political research branch of the commercial polling company TNS NIPO. The company offers representative samples of the Dutch population that are drawn from an online panel into which people are also recruited offline, including some 50,000 members. For completion of a survey, respondents receive a small financial compensation. A total of 890 participants completed the questionnaire, representing a completion rate of 87%. After eliminating respondents who were not Dutch citizens, and those whose performance on the implicit task was unusable,⁶ we were left with 773 respondents. All respondents were distributed randomly

⁶ We followed Project Implicit’s standard procedure for eliminating respondents whose performance on the ST-IAT indicated that they did not follow directions well—for example, whose latencies were so fast that they indicated random guessing, or so slow that they were not reliable—and those whose responses were too error-ridden to yield a score. Project Implicit and the ST-IAT are described in further detail later in this section.

between conditions, with a remaining total (after deletion) of between 78 and 191 respondents per condition.⁷ Subsequent analysis showed that demographic variables like age, sex, education, and vote in 2012 did not differ significantly between conditions, suggesting that the random assignment was successful.

Procedure and measures. Participants first answered questions about political knowledge and ideology—the theorized moderators in this study. Political knowledge was assessed by use of six multiple-choice questions tapping into participants’ knowledge of Dutch national politics, and included questions about the system (such as the number of seats in parliament) and about various parties (such as which party is the most left-leaning, and which party held a particular policy position). Mokken scale analysis indicated that five of the items scaled together strongly ($H=.506$; Mokken, 1971); these five items were kept, and respondents were given a score of up to 5 correct answers. These scores were then converted to range from 0-1 ($M=.51$, $SD=.34$). Political ideology was measured via a self-report item where respondents indicated their self-placement on a 10-point scale from left to right ($M=5.24$, $SD=1.93$).

Next, participants were asked to read a news story, about which we would subsequently ask them several questions. The news story included one of the relevant cues: an immigrant cue, an anti-politics cue, a party cue, a combination of a substantive cue with a party cue (immigrant + PVV; anti-politics + PVV), or no cue (as control). Thus, there were 6 conditions in all. The manipulated newspaper article was about the issue of street crime by young delinquents in the Netherlands and the debate about installing closed circuit camera

⁷ We originally presented two separate immigrant cues, in separate conditions—Moroccan youth in one, and generalized “immigrants” in another. Cell sizes for these conditions (and their combinations with the party cue) ranged from 84 to 100. However, subsequent analysis showed that the two versions of the immigrant cue had similar effects among respondents, and regardless their combination with the party cue. Thus, these conditions were subsequently combined, yielding a greater cell number for the immigrant cue conditions.

(CCC) systems. The article was designed to look as though it had been excerpted from a real (online) newspaper. The headline, lead and second paragraph were manipulated to include the relevant cues. For instance, to include an immigrant cue, the article talked about street crime by either Moroccan youth or “immigrants” more generally, instead of youth in general. In the anti-politics conditions the sentiments were presented that government had “finally” agreed to tackle the problem, and that “people are fed up with” governmental inaction. The PVV was either mentioned or not. A graphic example of a manipulated article, and the texts of all manipulations are available in an online appendix. A manipulation check during a pilot version of the study revealed that respondents in each cue condition were significantly more likely to correctly recall which cues were included in their article.

After reading the news story, respondents were immediately sent to an external website—Project Implicit⁸—to complete a Single-Target Implicit Association Test (ST-IAT, Bluemke & Friese, 2008; see also Karpinski & Steinman, 2006; Greenwald, McGhee & Schwartz, 1998) assessing their implicit support for the right-wing populist party (the PVV). The ST-IAT measures individual differences in mental associations with a single concept, in this case the PVV political party, and evaluations (e.g., good or bad). Working in their internet browser, participants were asked to classify stimuli (words, pictures, or symbols) that represent the target concepts (PVV, good, and bad) into two categories, using distinct keystrokes and working as quickly as possible. In one round, participants were told to hit one key (e.g., the “I” key) if either “PVV” or “good” came up on the screen, and a different key (e.g., “E”) if a “bad” word came up. In a subsequent stage, participants hit the “I” key if either “PVV” or “bad” came up, and “E” if a “good” word came up. Relative association strengths were measured by examining the speed with which participants responded in the

⁸ <http://implicit.harvard.edu>; PI is a collaborative project between several universities and key researchers in the field of implicit attitudes.

contrasting conditions (PVV and good with the same key *versus* PVV and bad with the same key). In the words of Lane, Banaji, Nosek & Greenwald al. (2007), “the underlying assumption is that responses will be facilitated—and thus will be faster and more accurate—when categories that are closely associated share a response [keystroke], as compared to when they do not” (p. 62). That is, longer response times and more errors indicate weaker associations between concepts and evaluations, while shorter response times with fewer errors indicate stronger associations.

IAT scores generally can run from about -2 to +2, where negative numbers in this case mean negative attitudes toward the PVV, and positive numbers mean positive attitudes toward the PVV. A score of 0 indicates no relative preference for the PVV (equal reaction times between the PVV and “good” and the PVV and “bad”). Among our sample, ST-IAT scores ranged from -1.08 to 0.94. ($M=-.13$, $SD=.34$), showing a slight negative skew toward the PVV on an implicit level.

Subsequent to the ST-IAT, participant returned to the TNS NIPO survey interface to answer the final set of questions. Their explicit support for the PVV was measured via a question asking participants to assess the likelihood that they would vote for the PVV in the next election on a 7-point scale from very unlikely (1) to very likely (7) ($M=2.35$, $SD=2.01$). Anti-immigrant attitudes were assessed via 9 items (again on 7-point agree/disagree scales) related to the threats foreigners pose to Dutch culture and to immigration policy more generally, such as “foreigners make the Netherlands a worse place to live” and “immigrants should be required to adapt to Dutch culture” ($\alpha=.92$; $M=4.70$, $SD=1.28$). Political cynicism was assessed via 5 items related to external efficacy, on a 7-point agree/disagree scale, such as “politicians don’t care what people like me think” and “politicians are too focused on particular groups instead of the general good” ($\alpha=.84$; $M=4.98$, $SD=1.19$). Respondents ended the survey by answering a few key demographic items. After they finished,

participants were debriefed. The full text of all items (in Dutch) is available in an online appendix.

To assess the role of anti-immigrant sentiments and political cynicism as mediators, and test the moderation of these mediated effects in one model, we used the Hayes “process” macro in SPSS⁹. This macro uses bootstrapping to produce confidence intervals as a test for inference about indirect effects (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Results

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted main effects of both immigrant and anti-politics cues on far right support; as can be seen in Table 1, these effects were not found ($F(5,762)=.43, p=.83$; $F(5,767)=.44, p=.82$). The right-most two columns of Table 1 show that these effects did not depend on whether a PVV party cue was simultaneously present with either substantive cue. Thus, we reject the first two hypotheses.

Table 1 about here

Hypothesis 3 predicted that the effects of both cues would be mediated by anti-immigrant attitudes, meaning that the cues would boost anti-immigrant sentiment, which would then have a positive effect on support for the PVV. We dealt with each cue in turn, and tested it both in isolation and in conjunction with the party cue (re: RQ1). We found no such effect¹⁰, leading us to reject H3. In fact, anti-immigrant attitudes played a surprisingly limited

⁹ Information and documentation about the macro is available from Hayes’ website:

<http://afhayes.com/introduction-to-mediation-moderation-and-conditional-process-analysis.html>

¹⁰ Both the immigrant cue ($b=-0.0697, se=.1236$) and the anti-politics cue ($b=-0.0551, se=0.1394$), as well as the first ($b=0.3988, se=0.2489$) and the latter ($b=0.5112, sd=0.2801$) combined with the party cue, have no significant effect at the $p<0.05$ -level on anti-immigrant attitudes, which results in insignificant indirect effects on the dependent variables.

explanatory role, suggesting that contrary to some literature, these are not the primary driver of right-wing populist support in this case.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the effects of both cues would be mediated by political cynicism, meaning that the cues would increase political cynicism, which would then have a positive effect on support for the PVV. We again dealt with each cue in turn, and tested it both in isolation and in conjunction with the party cue (re: RQ1). This time the results proved more fruitful: as Figure 2 shows, respondents who received the immigrant cue had higher levels of political cynicism; that combination of predictors and mediator then predicted higher levels of both implicit ($R^2 = .0317, p < .001$) and explicit ($R^2 = .1611, p < .001$) support for the PVV. Explicit support for the PVV was also partially mediated through implicit support; without implicit support, the total indirect effect of the immigration cue on explicit support was .1350 (Boot SE¹¹ = .0566, Bias Corrected 90% Confidence Interval – BC 90% CI – of .0525 to .2424); with implicit support included, the additional indirect effect of the immigration cue on explicit support was .0230 (Boot SE = .0103, BC 90% CI of .0092 to .0426). As Figure 1 suggests, the immigrant cue alone produced these mediated effects; the PVV cue and combined immigrant + PVV cue did not have any effects on PVV support through cynicism.¹² Thus, for the case of the immigrant cue, we find support for H4.

Figure 2 about here

Regarding the anti-politics cue, we found similar effects. But in this case, only the combined anti-politics¹³ + PVV cue triggered (indirect) effects on PVV support. The anti-politics cue in isolation had no effect. As Figure 3 shows, respondents who received the anti-

¹¹ Bootstrap estimate of the standard error of the indirect effect, based on 1000 bootstrap samples.

¹² The effect of the PVV cue ($b = -0.2259, se = 0.1758$) and the combination of the immigrant cue and the PVV cue ($b = 0.0580, se = 0.0868$) were both not significant.

¹³ The effect of the anti-politics cue alone was insignificant ($b = 0.1524, se = 0.1206$).

politics + PVV cue had higher levels of political cynicism; that path then predicted higher levels of both implicit ($R^2 = .0318, p < .001$) and explicit ($R^2 = .1612, p < .001$) support for the PVV. Again, explicit support for the PVV was also partially mediated through implicit support; without implicit support, the total indirect effect of the anti-politics + PVV cue on explicit support was .1635 (Boot SE = .0903, BC 90% CI of .0276 to .3155); and with implicit support included, the additional indirect effect of the cue was .0278 (Boot SE = .0165, BC 90% CI of .0055 to .0604). We can therefore say that also for the case of the anti-politics cue, H4 finds empirical support in our data.

Figure 3 about here

Hypothesis 5 predicted that these effects would be moderated by political knowledge, with the expectation that the effects would be stronger among those with more political knowledge. In order to assess these effects, we computed the total indirect effect for respondents with different levels of political knowledge—as percentiles on the knowledge scale ranging from the bottom 10th percentile to the top 90th. In all cases—for both immigrant and anti-politics + PVV cues, and for both explicit and implicit attitudes, we found support for the hypothesis: the indirect effects were stronger—and in some cases only significant—for those with more political knowledge. The only exception to the clean pattern can be seen in the left half of the second panel in Table 2; the effects of the anti-politics + PVV cue on explicit attitudes were only significant for the lowest two, and highest levels of knowledge. Although not as robust, the pattern follows that of the other groups in the table. Thus, we can say that we found support for H5.

Table 2 about here

Finally, Hypothesis 6 predicted that these effects would be moderated by political ideology, with the expectation that the effects would be stronger among those on the political right. Following our analysis for H5, we computed the total indirect effect for respondents in

different groups of political ideology—again as percentiles on the ideology scale ranging from the bottom 10th percentile to the top 90th.¹⁴ As can be seen in the lower half of Table 2, we found that the effects on implicit and explicit attitudes diverged: whereas the indirect effects of the cues on explicit PVV support were stronger for those on the political right (as predicted), the same effects on *implicit* PVV support were stronger for those on the political *left*. Put differently, the cues implicitly affect more left-leaning respondents, but explicitly affect more right-leaning respondents—in both cases, prompting greater support for the PVV. Thus, in Table 2 we see the indirect effects growing in size in the explicit columns as ideology moves to the right, but a reverse pattern in the implicit columns, with the indirect effects shrinking. To aid in understanding these patterns, and despite different axis values, these patterns are represented visually in Figure 4. Here we can see clearly the differential moderation of ideology for the effects on explicit and implicit right-wing populist support. Recall that, per Figure 3, implicit support also predicts explicit support in this model; thus we see that for even left-leaning respondents, these cues can indirectly boost their support for the PVV. This is a particularly interesting finding to which we will return in the discussion. In sum, we can say that H6 was partly supported—only for explicit PVV support.

Figure 4 about here

In light of these results, we can turn briefly to our research questions. For RQ1, it seems that a party cue is necessary for the anti-politics cue to “work,” but irrelevant in the context of an immigrant cue. For RQ2, we see indeed that implicit support for the right-wing

¹⁴ The Hayes macro does not allow the breakdown by assigned values, but rather only by percentiles within group. However, the percentiles on this ideology scale fairly closely match reasonable indicators of different ideologies on a 1-10 scale (1=Left, 10=Right): 10th percentile falls at 3 on the scale; 25th at 4; 50th at 5; 75th at 7, and 90th at 8. Thus, although this is not a perfect approximation of ideology as it maps onto the scale, the percentiles fall quite close to the left, middle, and right of the scale values.

populist is also boosted by these cues, and, per RQ3, also predicts explicit support. We will reflect on these patterns in our discussion.

Discussion

With the success of right-wing populist, anti-immigrant populist parties in Europe, scholars need to assess the role the media play in either boosting or undermining support for these parties' platforms by cueing relevant political topics. Our study examines the effects, on an individual level, of two relevant media cues—an immigrant cue and an anti-politics cue—on explicit and implicit support for right-wing populist parties. We expected and found that the cues boosted both implicit and explicit support for right-wing populist parties, but only mediated through political cynicism. This is consistent with findings suggesting the crucial role of cynicism in driving right-wing populist support more generally (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2001; Bos et al., 2013; Schumacher and Rooduijn, 2013). But more importantly, our data show that simple media cues of immigrants or anti-politics sentiments can *alone* drive up political cynicism among respondents—and that such cynicism then has important consequences for electoral preferences. It should be noted here, however, that the context of the manipulated news story—street crime by delinquent youths—may very likely have played a role in helping the cues prompt cynicism. Although the control condition did not have effects on cynicism, it is possible that the combination of the negative story topic and the cues may have made the cues more effective. Future research should try to replicate these findings with a different, and if possible non-negative, story topic.

Surprisingly, these effects were not mediated by anti-immigrant attitudes. This contradicts previous research emphasizing the importance of such attitudes in driving right-wing populist support (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2001) and warrants further attention. It may be that there is something particular to the Dutch case that interrupts the predicted patterns. With

immigration playing a central role in political discourse in recent years (Entzinger, 2006; Vasta, 2007), and the PVV's particularly high profile on related topics, perhaps citizens' anti-immigrant attitudes have simply reached capacity, and are not as malleable as their political cynicism. Alternatively, perhaps they are now tied to larger issues like EU enlargement (Azrout, van Spanje, & de Vreese, 2013) than to party support, and thus extend beyond the capacity of the current study. These are possibilities worth examining in future research.

We also found that these effects require a threshold level of political knowledge to occur. This is in line with research suggesting that more knowledgeable voters are able to understand and contextualize political cues better than their lower knowledge counterparts (see Miller & Krosnick, 2000; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In our case, we suspect that more knowledgeable voters understood the link between these cues, political cynicism, and the right-wing populist party platform; therefore, only those voters' attitudes moved in the expected direction when presented with these cues. Combined with previous work showing that it is the lowest-educated voters who are more responsive to populist party rhetoric (Bos et al., 2013), this suggests that we should potentially be wary of the "power" of these discourses on all voters—regardless their knowledge level or educational background. Populism-relevant cues, it seems, can affect even the most educated and politically engaged voters.

Finally, in what was the most surprising finding, these effects differed depending on the political ideology of respondents—those on the right experienced stronger effects at the explicit, self-report level, whereas those on the left experienced stronger effects on the implicit, unconscious level. Although we had not hypothesized this effect originally, it does make sense to find such a pattern: left-leaning respondents would not consciously incorporate these cues as reasons to support a party they would otherwise not support. However, left-leaning respondents do appear to be affected at a level outside their conscious awareness; this

corroborates findings by other researchers showing that candidate perceptions that are more domain-relevant to the political right can still nonetheless have meaningful effects on left-leaning respondents (Sheets et al., 2011), just as other work on implicit attitudes shows that those who consciously espouse notions of racial and gender equality (and who behave accordingly) can nonetheless possess implicit biases (see Greenwald et al., 2009a for a review). What is important here, however, is that these implicit attitudes predicted variance in the explicit propensity-to-vote for the PVV measure, even for those left-leaning respondents. Thus, we see that the addition of non-explicit measures of right-wing populist support were not only interesting to include, but yielded important findings that would otherwise have been missed. And while more sophisticated analyses of the relationships between implicit and explicit right-wing populist support are beyond the scope of the current paper, our results do suggest that scholars working in this domain might benefit from including non-explicit/non-self-report measures in their analyses. It seems that just as with electoral dynamics in the United States, implicit attitudes can predict unique variance in a multi-party, extreme-right context. Future work should delve into these dynamics in more detail, and examine the predictive validity of these measures more broadly. The main point here seems to be that even those on the political left can, perhaps surprisingly, be affected by simple media cues about immigrants and anti-politics to actually increase their support for a right-wing populist party. Citizens, journalists, and politicians alike should take note of these patterns.

Future research should build upon this study in several ways. Beyond adjusting the story topic, as noted earlier, and in clarifying the role of immigrant attitudes, this work should be replicated in other contexts with other right-wing populist parties. We have little reason to suspect that these findings are unique to the Dutch context (except the lack of a role of anti-immigrant attitudes, as discussed above), but the electoral volatility in the Netherlands may play a role; thus, replication in a non-Dutch context is important. Further, additional implicit

measures, to increase and better explicate the validity of our new ST-IAT here should be developed. And finally, cross-validation with a greater number of explicit behavioral intention measures would certainly strengthen the research. As an attempt to fill several gaps in the literature, however, this study provides support for the notion that news media, by cueing relevant political topics, can—perhaps inadvertently—increase cynicism and support for right-wing populist parties among knowledgeable voters on both sides of the political spectrum. Journalists and other media practitioners should take caution, then, about the potential effects of immigrant and anti-politics discourse in the news.

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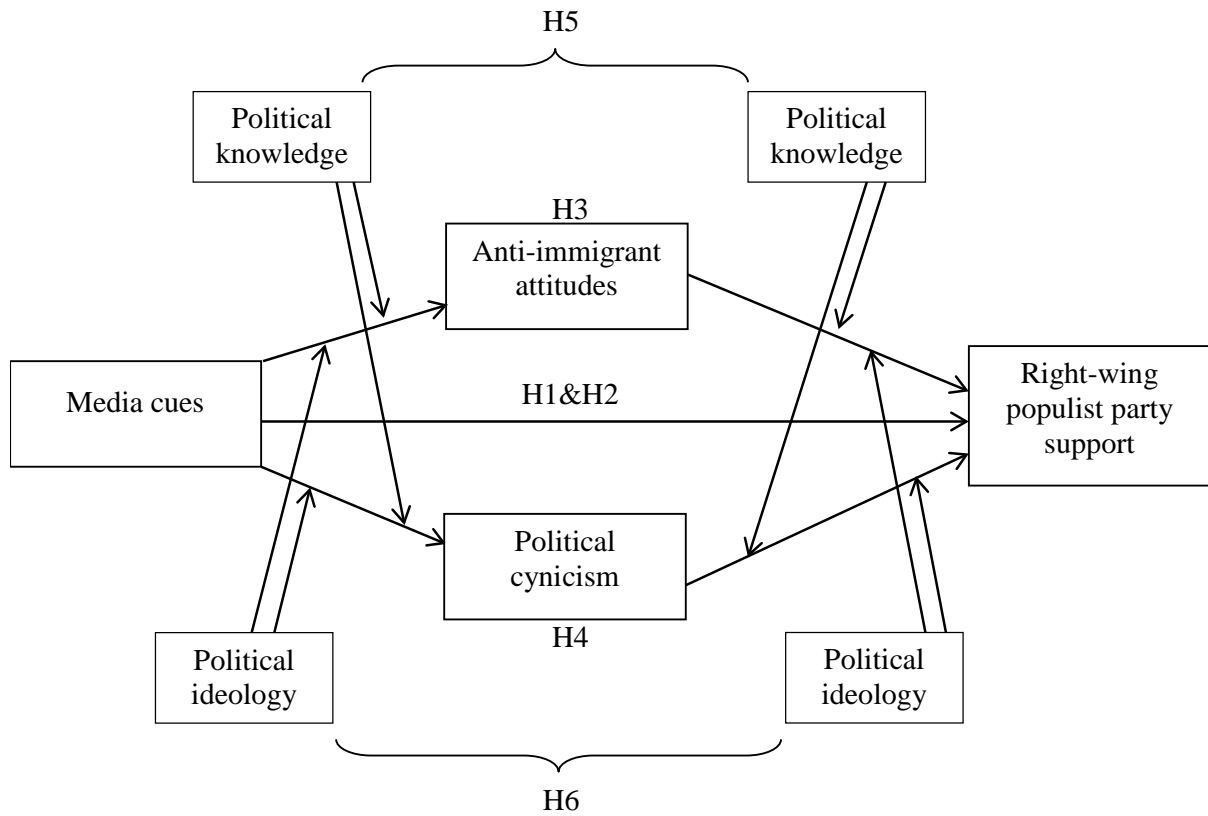


Figure 1 *Hypothesized moderated mediation model*

Table 1 *Mean scores in control and individual cue conditions on implicit and explicit pro-PVV attitudes*

	Control Condition (n=111)	Anti-Politics Cue (n=110)	Immigrant Cue (n=189)	PVV Cue (n=77)	Anti-politics + PVV cue (n=97)	Immigrant + PVV cue (n=184)
Implicit pro-PVV	-.113 (SD=.33)	-.129 (SD=.33)	-.125 (SD=.34)	-.106 (SD=.35)	-.120 (SD=.31)	-.159 (SD=.33)
Probability-to-vote PVV	2.26 (SD=1.98)	2.21 (SD=1.94)	2.45 (SD=2.04)	2.31 (SD=2.04)	2.54 (SD=2.01)	2.29 (SD=2.03)

Note. Mean differences between cue conditions and control are not significant.

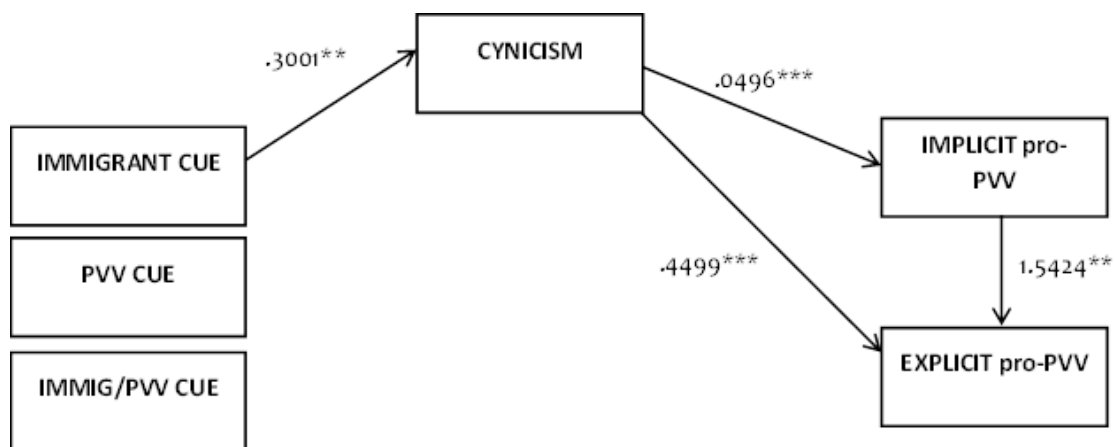


Figure 2 Immigrant cue mediated model

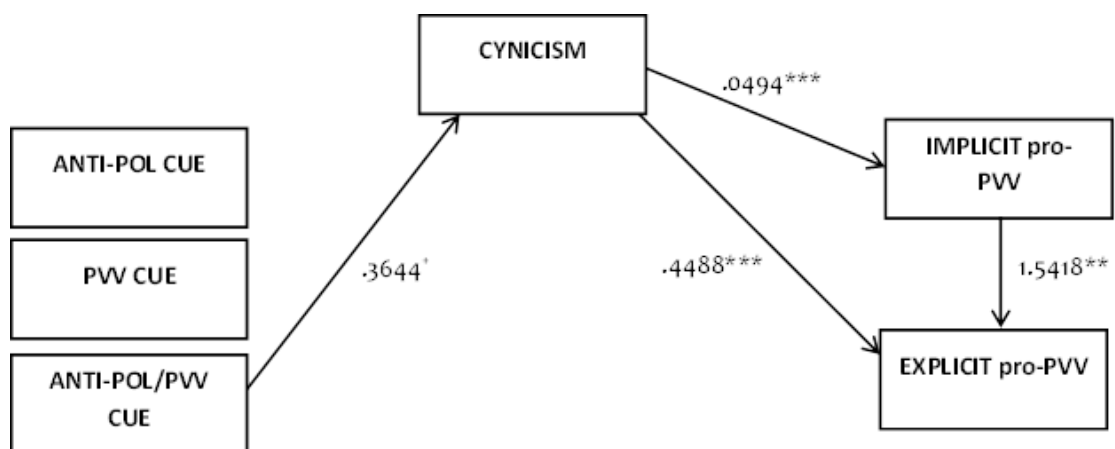


Figure 3 Anti-politics cue mediated model

Table 2 Indirect effects of immigrant & anti-politics + PVV cues on explicit and implicit PVV support, by knowledge level & ideology

<u>Knowledge Level</u>		<u>Immigrant cue</u>							
	<u>Explicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		<u>Implicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		
			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>	
Lowest	.0749	.0724	-.0388	.2644	.0133	.0079	.0014	.0330	
Moderate-low	.0905	.0568	-.0002	.2352	.0135	.0068	.0025	.0296	
Moderate	.1218	.0464	.0443	.2333	.0139	.0063	.0035	.0294	
Moderate-high	.1376	.0580	.0433	.2696	.0141	.0069	.0035	.0317	
Highest	.1534	.0786	.0302	.3325	.0143	.0080	.0027	.0363	

		<u>Anti-politics + PVV cue</u>							
	<u>Explicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		<u>Implicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		
			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>	
Lowest	.1341	.0911	.0097	.3952	.0161	.0117	.0006	.0517	
Moderate-low	.1343	.0836	.0009	.3350	.0163	.0106	.0012	.0455	
Moderate	.1348	.0764	-.0017	.3016	.0168	.0099	.0010	.0413	
Moderate-high	.1350	.0775	-.0001	.3060	.0171	.0105	.0009	.0450	
Highest	.1352	.0816	.0060	.3377	.0173	.0117	.0006	.0513	

<u>Ideology</u>		<u>Immigrant cue</u>							
	<u>Explicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		<u>Implicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		
			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>	
Left	.0991	.0416	.0350	.1972	.0148	.0072	.0044	.0334	
Mod.-left	.1172	.0444	.0437	.2167	.0146	.0066	.0045	.0313	
Moderate	.1353	.0499	.0517	.2424	.0144	.0063	.0046	.0305	
Mod.-right	.1715	.0661	.0652	.3293	.0139	.0069	.0040	.0327	
Right	.1896	.0758	.0706	.3594	.0137	.0077	.0027	.0345	

		<u>Anti-politics + PVV cue</u>							
	<u>Explicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		<u>Implicit</u>	<u>Boot SE</u>	<u>BC 95% CI</u>		
			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>			<u>Lower</u>	<u>Upper</u>	
Left	.0536	.0845	-.0946	.2545	.0179	.0111	.0018	.0474	
Mod.-left	.0917	.0835	-.0553	.2746	.0176	.0103	.0021	.0427	
Moderate	.1385	.0841	-.0133	.3155	.0174	.0098	.0017	.0415	
Mod.-right	.2582	.1137	.0455	.4995	.0168	.0100	.0018	.0424	
Right	.3312	.1500	.0535	.6542	.0165	.0107	.0013	.0448	

Note. Boot SE= Bootstrap estimate of the standard error of the indirect effect. Lower and Upper of 95% Bias Corrected confidence intervals are given. Estimates are based on 1000 bootstrap samples. Effects are significant when the confidence interval does not span 0.

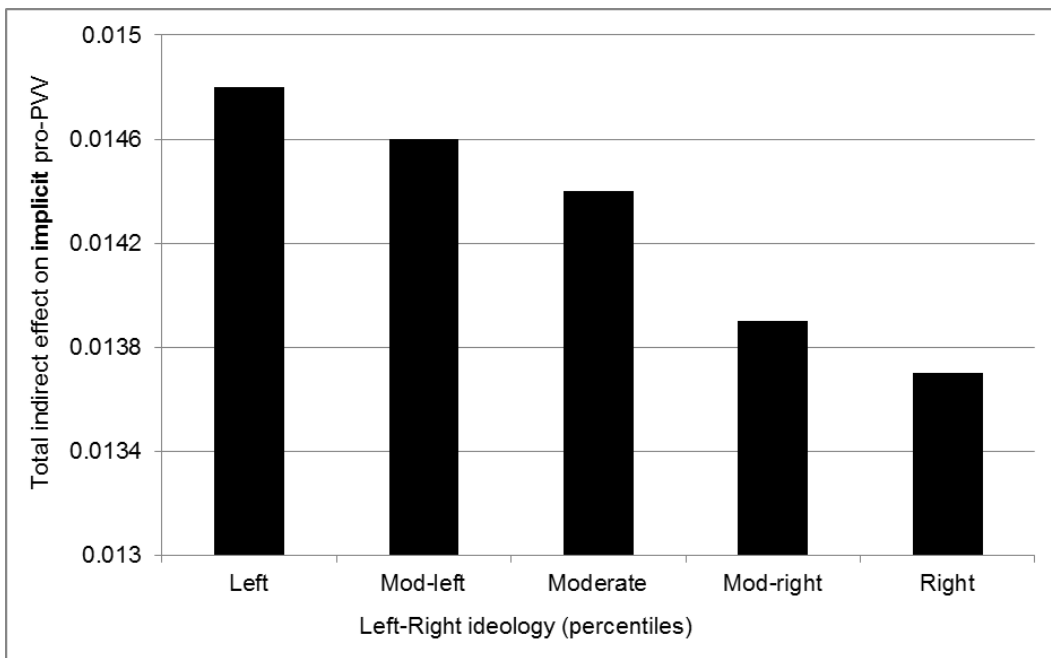
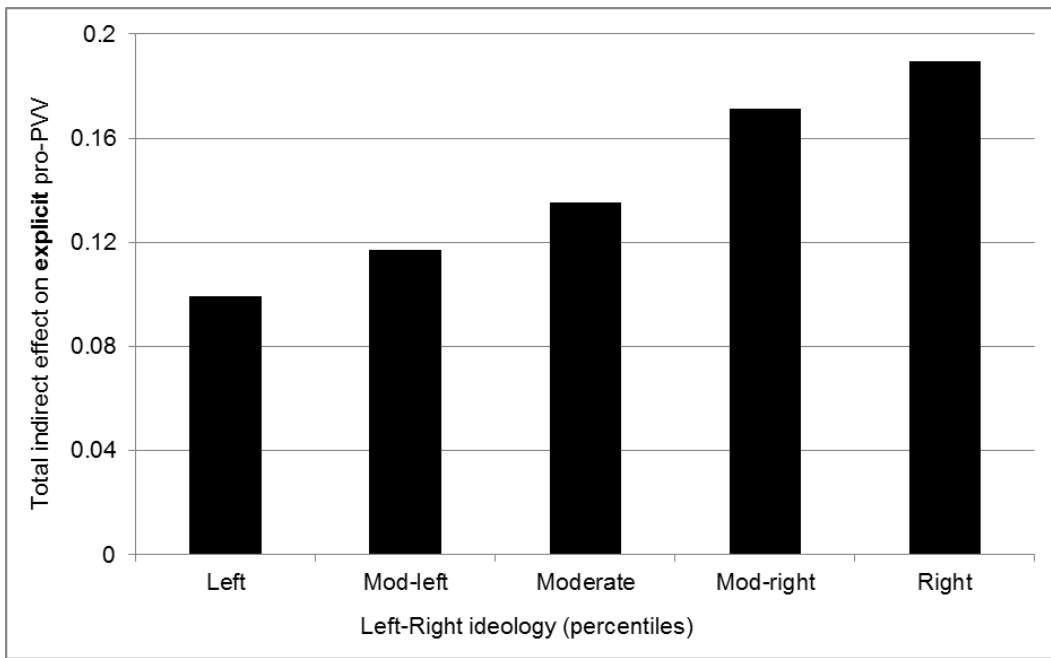


Figure 4 Moderated indirect effects of immigrant cue on explicit (top) & implicit (bottom) PVV support