

**Shifting views on irregular migration during a time of  
socio-political change: A critical analysis of press and  
social media discourses in the UK, 2015 - 2018**

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## Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CL	Corpus Linguistics
DHA	Discourse-historical approach
E.g.	Exempli gratia/for example
EU	European Union
FRA	European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
FT	Financial Times
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
I.e.	Id est/that is
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MEP	Member of the European Parliament
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NHS	National Health Service
ONS	Office for National Statistics
RASIM	Refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants
RC	Reference corpus
SC	Study corpus
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SRT	Social Representation Theory
UK	United Kingdom
UKIP	United Kingdom Independent Party
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
US	United States

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## Abstract

The cross-border movement of people repeatedly leads to political controversy in countries across the world. In Europe, migration became a paramount public concern after the arrival of the unprecedented number of 1.2 million migrants in 2015. Most of these individuals were labelled ‘irregular’ due to their lack of valid travel documents. European states have various policy measures in place to combat irregular migration. In particular, the United Kingdom has a long-standing tradition of restrictive policies since the mid-1960s. However, little knowledge exists on public views towards irregular migrants and how people regard the state’s responses, with most previous research limited to newspaper analyses. These studies emphasised a widespread negative portrayal of migrants as cultural and security threats. Social media presents an additional rich source to traditional media, but its potential to unveil the public discourse on irregular migration remains largely untapped.

This research examines the online press and social media discourse on irregular migration between 2015 and 2018 in the British context. This time period is significant as it covers the heightened public interest in migration following the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in Europe. Moreover, migration was a crucial factor influencing the outcome of the British EU referendum in 2016. Both events are expected to have caused an increasing interest in migration among the online press and social media users. The study is based on an analysis of 244 online newspaper articles and 22,967 corresponding social media comments. Using Social Identity Theory and Social Representation Theory, this thesis explores the discursive organisation of group-thinking dynamics and shared social identity of three key social groups - migrants, nationals and government of migrants’ destination country - and asks how they are depicted by ingroup and outgroup representations.

The key contributions of this thesis are twofold. First, this study is among the first to analyse both press representations and people’s views expressed about irregular migration on a social media platform over a long time span. By employing this approach, this study highlighted that the press and social media discourse on irregular migration was highly volatile, shifting with the changing socio-political events between 2015 and 2018. Second, in-depth analysis of social media comments revealed that strong opposition to irregular migrants was shown to be primarily used as a vehicle for commenters to express their dissatisfaction and lack of trust in the political handling of irregular migration and of the citizens’ concerns. These ingroup and outgroup dynamics highlight a paradox in which British policymakers have created a hostile image of irregular migrants but fail to understand the respective doubts and expectations of the British public. Political elites should reassess the way they represent and address irregular migration in light of these findings.

# 1 Introduction: understanding irregular migration

Migration lies at the heart of our societies and is one of the most contested social phenomena in our age. Its importance is particularly obvious in the way it shapes and re-shapes the way we perceive ourselves and others among us. The diversity and complexity associated with migration are evident in the sharp divisions and emotions they evoke between those who welcome migrants and those who oppose them (King, 2012; Pantti, 2016; Connor and Passel, 2019). The myriad of facets of migration are well reflected in the public discourse around its effects on society, culture and politics. In contemporary UK, migration-related issues are one of the top concerns for the British media and the public (Isentyeva, 2021).

Especially in 2015, the issue of irregular migration became a paramount public concern after an increased number of asylum seekers arrived in Europe, commonly referred to as the ‘migration crisis’. This event was accompanied by far-reaching anti-migration developments, such as the rise of right-wing, populist parties, and coincided with the British referendum on leaving the European Union (EU) in 2016. Even though the majority of foreigners who arrived in 2015 lawfully applied for asylum after their unauthorised entry into Europe, their unlawful migratory journey was widely regarded as a political and societal problem (Rea *et al.*, 2019). Bommes and Sciortino (2011) argue that the existence of irregular non-nationals in a country is negatively viewed by governments and citizens in relation to the host state’s sovereignty, suggesting deficient and crisis-ridden governance that is unable to combat irregular migration. It is therefore not surprising that the presence of these non-nationals prompted considerable public attention during the ‘crisis’ through media reportage and on social media (Nelimarkka, Laaksonen and Semaan, 2018; Fazekas and Füge, 2019).

European states have various restrictive policy measures in place to combat irregular migration (Andersson, 2016; Desmond, 2016; Miller and Chtouris, 2017), yet little knowledge exists on the media and public views towards irregular migrants and how people regard the state’s responses. Previous work found a widespread negative portrayal of migrants as cultural and security threats (Huysmans, 2000; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). However, despite the fact that social media platforms are

frequently used as a news source by various individuals and groups, social media discourses on migrants are still poorly understood (Tornberg and Wahlstrom, 2018; Ekman, 2019; Ahmed *et al.*, 2021). To date, most studies investigating the portrayal of migrants have relied on the analyses of traditional media, such as newspapers, or opinion polls. The increasing prevalence of ‘new media’, such as social media platforms, in the formation and discourse of opinions provides a largely untapped source of knowledge that can enhance the understanding of this discourse. This thesis aims to address this gap and connect findings from both traditional and new media by a comprehensive study of online British press coverage and corresponding public opinion on irregular migration. In order to examine possible changes of media and public views towards irregular migration, particular emphasis is placed around three politically migration-relevant events between 2015 and 2018, that are the above mentioned ‘European migration crisis’, the British EU referendum and the so-called ‘Windrush scandal’.

## **1.1 Thesis structure**

This study begins with defining legal types of irregular migration by providing insight into the circumstances under which individuals might be motivated to opt for irregular migratory movement. The political importance of irregular migration can only be fully understood by taking into account the international context in which it first emerged and by assessing nation states’ responses. On the one hand, this sections explains how irregular migratory movements are linked to concerns over rising numbers of asylum applications. On the other hand, it elaborates on why this phenomenon evokes national concerns over a European ‘endangered community’ derived from linking migration to security fears with a view to protecting Western European societies from third-country nationals constructed as criminals. In this chapter, the focus is then placed on the British so-called ‘hostile environment policy’ and traces the transformation of irregular migration from an undesired border-problem into a security issue for the British society overall.

The subsequent chapter 2 provides a literature review of key findings from studies which analysed the media representations and discourses on different migrant groups, with a particular focus on European media as this study is primarily concerned with the British and to a lesser degree European context. This chapter highlights the polarised nature of the media coverage which predominantly either represents migrants as a law-and-order issue or victims who are in need of protection by Western societies. This section also provides a detailed overview of the previous British media coverage on migration and the general media representation of irregular migrants. Overall, the media shows a binary focus of attention and either depicts (irregular) migration along a securitisation or humanitarian discourse. Studies on social media discourses related to irregular migration are limited. However, previous findings indicate that views were mostly hostile towards both politicians and migrants. Lastly, the chapter examines public opinion on migration in the British context, showing that British people desire a reduction of the number of migrants in the UK for many years and oppose low-skilled migrants.

Chapter 3 looks at the theoretical framework chosen for this study. By using Social Identity Theory and Social Representation Theory, this research seeks to highlight how the formation of social identity and group categories can be understood in a certain time period by drawing on group-thinking considerations and symbolic ideas about collective knowledge production. Social Representation Theory is useful to explain how specific social groups are represented in the discourse on irregular migration, whereas Social Identity Theory provides insights into why and how social actors identify with some groups and demarcate themselves from others. As part of the latter theory, special focus is placed on the populist framework which helps to bring to light into binary discursive patterns and blame attributions that underpin exclusionary narratives on migration.

The analytical methods used to answer the research questions of this study are outlined in chapter 4. First, the chapter discusses the philosophical assumptions and positions by explaining the ontological and epistemological considerations of this research. Second, the section provides a brief overview of the data collection methods and how online articles of the ten chosen newspapers and respective comments were systematically retrieved. After addressing ethical considerations, the

chapter explains the key features of Manual Content Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Corpus Linguistics Analysis and discusses their suitability and advantages for this study. A mixed methods approach is chosen to enable both in-depth and quantitative analyses of the two different datasets and gain a broader picture of the findings. This study makes use of a ‘hybrid approach’ that assumes that quantitative approaches can be complemented by qualitative analytical elements and vice versa.

In chapter 5, the thesis takes a closer look at the socio-political context of irregular migration in the UK based on a genealogy of migration-relevant events. There is evidence that opposition to this type of migration has been long standing in British politics and is also partly echoed in public opinion. In particular, the selected time span between 2015 and 2018 reveals several issues in relation to migration that concerned British society. This genealogy aims at identifying key political and social changes and aspects during the selected time interval that can serve as factors to interpret and explain the more detailed linguistic patterns and narratives from the CDA and Corpus Linguistics analyses.

Chapter 6 gives a first broad overview of the trends and dynamics of the British press coverage on irregular migration by identifying specific narrative elements based on Manual Content Analysis. The findings indicate that the press narrative of irregular migration saw dramatic changes over the four years under examination. This narrative fluctuation clearly correlates with socio-political changes in the UK and Europe over this period.

The findings of the CDA and Corpus Linguistics analyses are elaborated and interpreted in the ensuing chapters 7 and 8, starting with the analysis of the newspaper articles based on CDA and moving on to the Corpus Linguistics Analysis of the social media comments. Chapter 7 further discusses the qualitative CDA of news articles and identifies distinct shifts of the news narratives about irregular migrants, whereas the press representation of the government remains consistently negative over the four years. Especially the right-wing newspapers reveal populist elements in their discursive strategies that indicate a public mistrust towards the British government’s handling of irregular migration.

Chapter 8 has its focus on the analysis of the social media comments that responded to the news articles. The results demonstrate that commenters were adversarial towards both irregular migrants and the British government. However, whilst social media users distinguished between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants, their critique of the government was consistent over the selected period focussing on the lack of political competence to curb irregular migration effectively.

Chapter 9 represents the special news coverage and corresponding social media comments on the political ‘Windrush scandal’ in 2018 concerning issues regarding the legal status of the ‘Windrush migrants’ in the UK.

The discussion, chapter 10, elaborates on the findings from both datasets in light of Social Identity Theory and Social Representation Theory by comparing the linguistic features and discursive strategies employed by the British press and the commenters. This section aims to ascertain the degree to which the British newspapers and their online readers resemble or differ in their discursive elements. Although there is a high degree of similarity between the press coverage and the responding comments, social media users are generally more negative and point-blank in their views on irregular migrants and their critique of the political elites. Commenters’ opposition to irregular migration bring social media users’ actual dissatisfaction with policymakers’ unfulfilled policy promises to light such as the reduction of the number of net migration in the UK. Lastly, this chapter also identifies and proposes areas for future research.

## **1.2 The phenomenon of ‘irregular migration’**

This chapter first examines various types of irregular migration, namely unauthorised entry, residence and employment in order to demarcate the intended research group of this study. The emergence of irregular migration is then contextualised in light of rising numbers of asylum applications and labour migration after World War II. These developments went hand in hand with the political construction of migration in general as a security-related concern and led to the implementation of various



restrictive migration policies in host societies. It is shown that this phenomenon was linked to a broader discourse of ‘belonging’ in West Europe which amplified political and public opposition to migration in general and irregular migration in particular. Finally, this section examines motivations for migrating in an irregular manner and discusses restrictive measures by governments in Europe and particularly in the UK to address irregular migration.

### **1.2.1 Definition and types of irregular migration**

Irregular migratory status of non-nationals in a third country can be manifold. In general terms, ‘migrants’ is the umbrella term for non-nationals who move temporarily or permanently to a country other than their country of origin. Thus, irregular migrants can be considered as a subgroup of migrants. However, it must be noted that migration in its own right represents a large-scale, intricate social phenomenon which lacks coherent understanding in public perceptions (Blinder, 2015).

There is no clear definition of what constitutes an ‘irregular migrant’ given that there is still a lack of research about the demographics of this group of migrants (Vollmer, 2014; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). Employment and immigration laws are complex and consequently the threshold between legality and illegality can blur and create grey zones of irregularity (Düvell, 2008; Vollmer, 2014). Furthermore, immigration status is not static but may be changed quickly through newly introduced legislation. With the enlargement of the EU in 2004, for example, the number of migrants who worked without residence permits declined as they became EU citizens (Engbersen and Broeders, 2009; Düvell, 2011a, 2014; Błus, 2013).

Three forms of migration are considered to be illegal (Düvell, 2011a; Morehouse and Blomfield, 2011; FRA, 2014; Vollmer, 2014):

#### ***Clandestine entry***

- by not possessing legal documents required by the destination country or providing forged documents. A few of these migrants subsequently apply for asylum and by doing so regularise their status. It is worth noting here that

those who intend to apply for asylum cannot have done it elsewhere such as Syrians in their country of origin. In other countries such as Sudan, investigations found multiple issues with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) resettlement programmes where people posed as UNHCR officials and sold successful applications and identities of refugees (UNHCR, 2019).

### ***Irregular residence***

- by overstaying a visa or due to loss or withdrawal of status, for example because of non-renewal of time-limited residence permit. Most migrants' status becomes irregular under this condition.
- due to birth into irregularity since children of irregular migrants inherit the irregular status of their parents.
- due to refused asylum or disappearance during asylum processing. The group of refused asylum seekers often cannot be expelled for various reasons, such as lack of travel documents.

### ***Unauthorised employment***

- due to active engagement in employment in breach of immigration regulations. Unauthorised employment usually takes place in the informal economy in which workers are not monitored by the state and their economic activities are not taxed.
- due to ceased work authorisation where employment was originally authorised.

The motivations for people to migrate irregularly can be complex and depend on a variety of factors (Mcauliffe and Koser, 2017). Given that an individual's citizenship determines their residence and travel options, there is an imbalance of mobility across the globe (Henley and Partners, 2018). The opportunity of choosing the country of employment and residence is seen as a privilege that primarily citizens of Western countries have (Düvell, 2008). This is particularly true for EU nationals, for example, who enjoy a free-movement labour market within the EU (Pérez-Paredes, Jiménez and Hernández, 2017). With visa requirements imposed by Schengen states on most third countries, individuals who wish to migrate to Europe do so frequently

via irregular channels and with the assistance of smugglers. It is therefore no surprise that the main reason for migrants to enter the European territory illegally and find themselves in breach of immigration law is the lack of legal migratory routes (Kynsilehto, 2017). In addition, highly complicated visa application processes and difficult-to-gain work permits are further incentives for irregular migration (Düvell, 2011b).

Both push and pull factors can influence the decision to migrate and the preference for a specific destination country (Mcauliffe and Koser, 2017). Push factors refer to the country of departure and involve persecution, political conflict or other kinds of violence. Moreover, economic circumstances and outlook such as lack of desirable job opportunities can motivate people to look for better living conditions elsewhere. Pull factors can encompass perceptions about the economy and migration or asylum policies in preferred destination states. The existence of social networks in the form of diaspora populations or family members who can provide resources to enable migration or give support upon arrival can further constitute important pull factors. A preference for Germany as a destination country was particularly prevalent among Syrians who already had family members living there and hoped it would be easier for them to secure a residence status in this host country (Crawley and Hagen-Zanker, 2019).

Individuals can become irregular when they move beyond the first safe country, but the decision on safety is made by countries further on the migration route, not by migrants. The choice for unlawful migration can result from a person's fear that their asylum application will be refused in the first safe country. For example, Schuster (2011) found that many Afghan asylum seekers who arrived in Paris already travelled through other EU states such as Greece or Hungary where they had their fingerprints registered.<sup>1</sup> Since these migrants were neither allowed to apply for asylum in France or elsewhere in Europe according to the European Dublin Regulation, many of them were pushed to continue their journey in an irregular manner. Another study illustrated the complex and difficult situation of Syrian refugees living in Turkey who were not granted asylum and had limited access to

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<sup>1</sup> This is a practice part of the 'Eurodac' which is a European database that stores the fingerprints of asylum seekers.

work permits, basic services and livelihood opportunities (Crawley and Skleparis, 2018). As a consequence, they frequently found themselves working illegally in the informal economy. Safety-related issues were also found among Eritreans who fled to Sudan and decided to move to Europe as they feared ties between Sudanese officials and the Eritrean government. These examples highlight that various migrant groups did not perceive their first host society as safe due to specific national policies and thus decided to continue their journey.

Irregular migrants usually live on the margins of society seeking to remain undetected (Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). Specifically, irregular migrants do not possess formal rights and are systematically excluded from mainstream systems such as welfare and social services. They are highly dependent on social networks and informal markets in order to find employment and housing. This dependency entails the risk of exploitation and other forms of mistreatment, putting them in a precarious situation without access to civil rights (Benhabib, 2004). From a human rights perspective, such treatment is criticised in terms of the detrimental consequences for the individual. As Düvell put it: “Irregular migration illustrates some of the shortcomings of our society, and the exclusion of certain mobile populations represents a major injustice at the beginning of the 21st century” (2014: 1). Studies pointed out that the key reasons for these migrants to remain in an irregular existence was the fear of detention, deportation or rejection of asylum (Grove and Zwi, 2006).

### **1.2.2 Increasing political opposition to migration in the international and European context**

The attempts by industrialised states to restrict the number of migrants and particularly irregular migrants entering their countries must be considered in the context of migration in the aftermath of World War II. In the 1950s and 1960s immigrants were primarily an extra workforce in most western European countries and therefore were welcomed by these societies as needed labour migrants (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002). Migratory movements within Europe after the war were primarily from South to North based on bilateral agreements and employment recruitment schemes that originally encouraged migration from other countries.

While the sending states were in Southern Europe, developing countries and former colonised regions in Asia or Africa, the receiving states were in Northern or Western Europe, for example Germany and the UK (Triandafyllidou, 2012).

However, European labour migration programmes were terminated in 1973 due to the global oil crisis which increased unemployment rates because of successive economic recessions. Although economic immigration discontinued, immediate family members of temporary so-called ‘guest workers’ were able to join them on the basis of family reunion in several countries such as Germany or France (Huysmans, 2000; Castles, 2006). As a result of this, the number of these ‘guest workers’ and their relatives who increasingly became permanent settlers rose in Western European host societies. Both the increased number of this group of migrants and the scarcity of social services such as housing or unemployment benefits following the global economic downturn in the 1970s negatively affected political and public views on economic migrants. The latter were viewed in political discourses more and more as illegitimate recipients of social goods who destabilise the public order in host societies (Huysmans, 2000). To address this issue, restrictive policies were introduced in the following years to protect the social and economic rights of national workers. In light of these political restrictions, public concerns increased over the growing immigrant population that was perceived as competitors for welfare provisions and in the labour market.

The heightened political concern for irregular migration in Europe needs to be further understood in the broader context in which migratory movements in general were associated with national security concerns. Huysmans strongly argued that the securitisation of migration in Western European states since the 1980s must be particularly seen as part of the European integration process (Huysmans, 2000). This securitisation process of migration entailed that migrants were politically constructed as potential terrorists or criminals coupled with the broader politicisation of belonging to Western European states. The latter was reflected in the development of an EU-wide joint migration policy which was embedded in a wider political and societal network of an ‘endangered society’ (Huysmans, 2000). More specifically, migration was linked to danger for the European identity, labour market and public order.

The political framing of migrants as a security problem went hand in hand with the abolition of the internal border control among EU states (Huysmans, 2000). The internal market that was driven by economic and social rights privileged citizens of the Member States in terms of moving freely within the EU and access to social services such as health provision. Huysmans (2000) stressed that the changes in the labour market policies including the free movement for the EU workforce encouraged restrictive policy measures against non-EU citizens in order to protect the welfare and economic rights of EU citizens. Therefore, the Europeanisation of migration policy is based on a specific political strategy that is designed to classify certain individuals as a danger and hence excludes them from the above-mentioned privileges of the internal market. This negative construction of migrants at a European level reflects a political approach that aims at generating fears and uneasiness around migration among EU citizens (Martins, 2021).

Overall, third-country nationals experienced a restrictive regulation of their migratory movements as part of a wider process of monitoring and controlling migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (Huysmans, 2000). These restrictive migration policies contributed to the public notion that citizens of EU Member States need to be protected from third-country nationals. This political and social identification as a European community was reinforced through security policy that conveys a sense of belonging. The identification of an external essential threat to the own group membership maintains the conditions for ingroup belonging and political integration. Put differently, when security practices take place, the identification with the European community and its lifestyle on the political and social level evolve in reaction to an existential danger from outside. Migrants were blamed in public accusations for taking away jobs from citizens, abusing the welfare system or posing a danger to the identity of the host states (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002).

The securitisation of migration led to the crucial consequence that irregular migrants and asylum seekers were increasingly mixed up in public discourses and the differences between these groups weakened over time (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002). This serves as an explanation for the connection between asylum and irregular migration in political discourses. Since the 1980s, migration saw a growing politicisation with the focus on asylum in which irregular migration was identified in

political debates as a multifaceted problem in connection with asylum seeking individuals (Huysmans, 2000; Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002; Düvell, 2014; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). International migration became politically important with growing concerns among Western states that especially asylum seekers would stay in their countries permanently and the governments would face enormous obligations and costs. These countries experienced a sharp rise in the number of asylum applications from the 1980s until the beginning of the 1990s (Gibney and Hansen, 2005). Gibney and Hansen (2003) outlined the following crucial causes known to have triggered this increase:

1. A Protocol which concerned the status of refugees was added to the UN Refugee Convention in 1967; as a result, more people were protected under the Convention, notably citizens of non-European countries who became refugees due to events after 1951.
2. Political turmoil in the global South from the 1970s and the Balkan unrest after 1989 produced a large number of forced migrants.
3. A smuggling and trafficking industry developed that made it possible for more asylum seekers to circumvent immigration controls at the borders of Western states.
4. Technological developments in communication and in transportation facilitated better information flows and enabled easier, faster and cheaper mass mobility at a global scale.

Therefore, asylum in particular became a subject of political controversy with Western states viewing the increased number of asylum applications as undesirable. Scholars emphasise that from the 1980s the public image of asylum seekers saw a turning point in Europe and the US (Huysmans, 2000; Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002). Migrants claiming asylum were increasingly viewed as a destabilising phenomenon and referred to as a social problem regarding their integration and possible harm for the public order. Moreover, asylum and migration were confused in policy debates in the sense that asylum was increasingly represented as an alternative way for economic migrants to enter European territory. Consequently, the European restrictive migration policy was a response and served as an instrument to protect the internal markets and its domestic society against the ‘threatening invasion’ that asylum seekers and potential irregular migrants seemed to pose.

More specifically, policymakers enacted a range of asylum legislation with the intent to prevent, deter and reduce asylum claims as well as restrict the stay of asylum seekers in their territories. Since then, legislative measures had been gradually produced by increasing numbers of United Nations (UN) Member States to address and control migratory movements (Vollmer, 2014). In 1976, only 7% of these states had restrictive anti-immigration policies in place, whilst in 2002, 40% developed legislative restrictions on immigration. As a result of these political developments, more migration categories were defined as unlawful and thus fell under the concept of ‘illegal’ or irregular (Vollmer, 2014). Some scholars underline that irregular migration is a social, political, and legal product of the formation of the modern nation state in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Vollmer, 2010; Düvell, 2014). Immigration policies of states precisely define the circumstances under which migrants are permitted and when the status of non-nationals becomes illegal. As a consequence, irregular migrants have become the chief target of these restrictive immigration policies in the European context (Parkin, 2013).

### **1.2.3 The British context of irregular migration: the ‘hostile environment policy’**

Political opposition to irregular migration in the British context is evident in legislation directed at this group of migrants and in policy discourses about irregular migrants in the UK. 1973 marks a decisive year for irregular migrants in the UK. Even though legal provisions of the Immigration Act 1971 addressed irregular migration, a newly developed policy agenda in 1973 started to focus on ‘unwanted’ immigration by particularly addressing irregular migrants as a policy problem (Vollmer, 2014: 18). Since this year, the British government started targeting irregular migration by primarily restricting and controlling the scale of immigration flows. This unease over the numbers of immigration and the respective policies arose following the economic decline experienced by the UK for decades after World War II. Concerns associated with immigration were mostly directed at migrants from British colonies and the Commonwealth.



Irregular migration was increasingly discussed by policy makers as a threat to national interests and fear of migration became a normalised policy narrative (Vollmer, 2014). Vollmer's analysis of policy discourses on irregular migration in the British parliament from 1973 until 1999 highlights the discursive focus on the development of irregular migrants as the 'enemy' of the nation state. During this policy-making process, a political understanding unfolded that constituted irregular migrants eventually as a security issue for British society at large. As a consequence, the British government successively designed and invested in restrictive policy measures with the particular aim of controlling this type of unwanted migration and to reduce its number. Since the 1990s, restrictive legislations were successively adopted to reduce the number of 'unwanted' population movements into the UK by gradually changing the political focus from border control instruments to internal enforcement (Vollmer, 2014; Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018). Among other things, illegal working became a 'crime', punishable by the application of civil penalties against employers and the powers of immigration officers were strengthened by being granted the right to arrest migrants.

This change in policy was in response to the growing awareness among authorities that irregular migration had shifted from unauthorised entry to predominantly visa overstaying (Cherti, 2014). The migration policy agenda increasingly focused incrementally on the differentiation between 'good' and 'bad' migrants with a view to reducing the number of unwanted migrants such as low-skilled workers (Arif, 2018; Bennett, 2018). In sum, it can be noted that irregular migration has increasingly become politicised from an unwanted border-issue into an internal security problem that needs to be tackled in everyday situations.

Upon taking office, the immigration policy agenda of the Conservative-led coalition government<sup>2</sup> since it took office in 2010 rested on the following objectives: bringing down the overall number of immigrants to the UK and concurrently attracting highly-skilled migrants, preventing the abuse of migration routes and fostering temporary migration (Cherti, 2014; Cangiano, 2016). Central to this political agenda was the 'hostile environment' policy introduced in 2012 (Wardle and Obermuller,

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<sup>2</sup> The Coalition government was formed by the Conservative party led by David Cameron and the Liberal Democrats party led by Nick Clegg between 2010 and 2015.

2019). This policy approach was publicly coined by Theresa May as Home Secretary in order to implement the primary objective of reducing the net migration rate in the UK from estimated several hundred thousands of migrants to tens of thousands in the forthcoming years. The political promises connected with this policy approach was to make the living conditions for irregular migrants residing in the UK as difficult as possible. The aim was to make them leave the UK but also to deter future irregular migrants who intend to come to the UK. A prominent example of this strategy is the widely contested 'Go Home' vans campaign in 2013, which was initiated by the Home Office in order to urge irregular migrants to leave British territory.

This hostile approach further found its translation in recent policies that introduced borders into everyday life by making members of the public carry out immigration controls (Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018). Professionals working in the areas of banking, driving, schooling, healthcare and other service providers are obliged to check the immigration status of the individuals they deal with and deny service or access to those who fail to provide any evidence of their status. Service providers who fail to perform can face sanctions such as imprisonment.

In general, it should be emphasised that immigration rules in the UK have seen multiple changes since 2004 with six Immigration Acts overall that restrict immigration and asylum rights (Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018; Isentyeva, 2021). Additionally, the positions of those people in charge also saw high fluctuation with six Home Secretaries and eight Immigration Ministers over the last decade. The numerous changes to British migration policy demonstrate that migration and irregular migration in particular are versatile, multifaceted phenomena that present and remain a challenging issue for the UK government.

## 2 Media discourses on migrants

Migration is a recurring, popular topic in the European media and the British media in particular drew considerable attention to the topic of immigration over the past decade (Allen, 2016; Islentyeva, 2021). In contrast to the public discourse on migration in general, studies on the public debate on irregular migrants concentrate on the topics produced and disseminated by politicians and media as main actors. Therefore, the next section takes a closer look at the academic analysis of the representation of migrants and irregular migrants in the media and the role of the media as regards public attitudes towards immigration. It also discusses the importance of migration-related issues for Leave voters in the British EU referendum. Understanding media representations and public opinions of various migrant groups is important as specific representations are often linked with calls for both special public attention and the need for certain political action.

### 2.1 The polarised news coverage of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants

The media is an essential part of the public discourse in democratic societies. Both media and political discourses bear a great responsibility for framing issues in the context of migration and highly influence the time such narratives arrive on the public and political spectrum (Haynes *et al.*, 2016). There is a large body of literature on the Western media representation of refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants and migrants (for reasons of economy, henceforth RASIM) (Maneri, 2011; Philo, Briant and Donald, 2013; Allen, 2016; Bruno, 2016; Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti, 2016; Brouwer, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2017; Greussing and Boomgaarden, 2017; Pérez-Paredes, Jiménez and Hernández, 2017; Gray and Franck, 2019; Blinder and Richards, 2020). This body of research focusing particularly on the European media landscape appears to be patchy as it spreads across various countries and different time periods.

These media studies are primarily located in the research fields of linguistics, political communication and migration studies. Despite their disciplinary differences, the parameters of these studies are remarkably similar regarding their focus on the perspective of the country of destination in Europe, the coverage of national newspapers on RASIM, and their reliance on qualitative methods. Only some studies employ quantitative analytical approaches or mixed methods (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008; KhosraviNik, 2009; Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery, 2013; Blinder and Allen, 2016; Vollmer, 2017; Vollmer and Karakayali, 2017).

The following discussion shows that most of these studies criticised the media for being disproportionately biased and portraying RASIM mainly as a law-and-order problem by focusing on the image of an ‘undeserving’ migrant. The British press in particular was found to be one of the most negative and polarised towards migrants compared to other European countries (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). On the other hand, the notion of a ‘deserving migrant’ who is regarded as a legitimate claimant of support is a recurring theme in the European media representations of migrants. The group of refugees from Syria were especially differentiated from the ‘undeserving migrants’ and in contrast were widely viewed by the media as civil war victims who should be met with compassion by the host society (Isentyeva, 2021).

### **2.1.1 The ‘undeserving’ migrants - migration as a law-and-order problem**

The media across Europe tends to portray migration primarily as a distorted law-and-order problem (Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). Particularly the vocabulary used by the media and politicians to describe RASIM often results from specific migration policies, such as control practices, that have always placed special focus on migration since it emerged in the public discourse (Maneri, 2011). This contributes to the reproduction of the different legal categories of migrants as a whole (Provera, 2015). By analysing the language used by the media and political elites to describe RASIM, scholars concluded that different groups of migrants were predominantly framed by stereotyping, scapegoating and criminalising discursive constructions (Philo, Briant and Donald, 2013; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015).

The emerging undesirable and hence undeserving figure of the migrant was created by the media by systematically employing discursive techniques such as impersonalisation, collectivisation and quantification to reinforce the notion of migrants as burden and threat (Islentyeva, 2021). Islentyeva emphasised that negative patterns of media representations were especially applied to low-skilled migrants and promoted by right-wing newspapers.

Notably in 2015, negative media representations of migrants depicted a scene of crisis and emergency in which foreigners seemed to overrun European states (Andersson, 2016; Ansems de Vries, Carrera and Guild, 2016). Consequently, this social representation emphasised the urgent need of ‘crisis-led policy making’ centred on advanced border policies as a common solution among European states. Some countries appeared to have been put to an extreme test given that border controls of the Schengen area were temporarily reinstated and bridges blocked, for example between Austria and Germany (Roberts, Murphy and McKee, 2016).

The repeated depiction of migrants as ‘undeserving economic migrants’ in the public had severe implications across Europe (Vollmer and Karakayali, 2017). This portrayal allowed right-wing parties to use this category in favour of their anti-immigration ideology. Vollmer and Karakayali expressed concerns that a large number of forced migrants could possibly fall under the label ‘economic migrant’ which leads to another form of exclusion and demonisation of more and more people who were forced to leave their country of origin due to severe economic drivers. Some scholars even spoke of “(...) a vacuum that xenophobic, racist, and neo-fascist politicians can occupy” (Roberts, Murphy and McKee, 2016: 4) that was created in Europe by not taking effective action against the root causes prevalent in the migrant-producing countries.

In fact, research found that far-right bloggers and right-wing political activists used anti-immigrant cartoons in a number of European countries to support the anti-immigrant discourse (Doerr, 2017). By using non-verbal and visual communication strategies to spread and forge a racist discourse across countries and languages, Doerr demonstrated how different right-wing sympathisers drew on the same visual motive which criminalises migrants and fosters a discourse of national solidarity.

The influence of mass media on people's attitudes towards immigration and the impact of specific media representation of migrants on specific perceptions is disputed (Burscher, van Spanje and de Vreese, 2015; Van Hootegeem and Meuleman, 2019).

Nevertheless, a number of studies indicate that news media visibility can have a significant impact on the success of anti-immigration, right-wing parties. A study by Burscher, van Spanje and de Vreese (2015) looked at the effects of media reportage about immigration- and crime-related topics and people's electoral behaviour across eleven European countries. A key finding from this study is that there is a positive relationship between exposure to immigration-related news and the likelihood of an individual to vote for an anti-immigration party. Similarly, there is evidence for the importance of media content explaining the success of anti-immigrant populist parties (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007). This study highlighted that the prominence of newspaper reports on immigration-related issues increased people's vote intention for right-wing parties in the Dutch context. Relatedly, research found that visibility of anti-immigration parties and party leaders in the media also had a strong impact on anti-immigration parties' success (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden and van Spanje, 2012). Specifically, the findings emphasised a clear relationship between media presence of these parties and their public support in five of the six parties under investigation.

### **2.1.2 British media coverage on migration**

Over the last four decades, Smith and Deacon (2018) found that the attention of the British media on immigration fluctuated over this period but the overall coverage was consistently negative towards migrants. This dominance of negative representations primarily focusing on hostility and prejudice was a persistent feature in the British media reportage on migrants. Smith and Deacon identified key areas in which this negativity manifested in the immigration discourses: first, the British news coverage was dominated by official sources and there was a continuing exclusion of migrants' voices and perspectives. This one-dimensional coverage disguised complex understandings and context of migration by primarily focusing on

borders. Migrants were constructed as issues associated with the scale of immigration and policies whilst the consequences for themselves were neglected and hence appeared irrelevant (KhosraviNik, 2014a; Allen and Blinder, 2018).

Frames of quantities were found to have increased in the British press in the last years with more than one out of three newspapers referring to net, mass or uncontrolled movement of foreigners (Allen and Blinder, 2018). The silencing of migrant voices through the British media discourse further contributed to the ‘othering’ of migrants and promoted the categorisation of ‘unworthy’ migrants (Arif, 2018). The portrayal of migrants as an economic burden and culturally incompatible with British culture made it difficult for the public to sympathise with the migrants and implicitly justified restrictive policy measures in the UK.

In the British news media landscape, migration policies had a crucial impact on discourses and public perceptions about migrants and irregular migrants by adhering to certain depictions of this group. Between 1997 and 2010, the British government introduced a number of policies to control the number of unwanted migrants (Balch and Balabanova, 2011). Coinciding with this period of intensified political attention for migration issues in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Moore (2013) found that the instances of news coverage on migration-related issues increased and media narratives predominantly referred to asylum seekers and refugees as a ‘problem’ and an emerging ‘crisis’ for British society.

The British media tended to concentrate on the increasing migration population in the UK and on the issue of unlawful travel means to enter British territory (Cohen, 2006). This type of news coverage reflected a ‘culture of disbelief’ during the European ‘migration crisis’ in 2015/2016 in which asylum seeking migrants were frequently termed by the British right-wing newspapers as ‘bogus asylum seekers’ implying that they did not have genuine reasons for receiving protection in a host country (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). In this way, the disfavoured media image served as a way to justify restrictive migration policies. The British immigration system and British society overall were constructed by the press as being abused and manipulated by asylum seekers and irregular migrants who were potential criminals and terrorists.

Studies found that the majority of the British press (and television) were hostile and evoked fears about asylum seekers and refugees in their coverage in 2006 and 2011 (Philo, Briant and Donald, 2013). This portrayal of migrants in an unfavourable light further legitimised negative governmental and public responses against migrants. Eurosceptic parties often strategically mobilised concerns among the population about potential threats of European integration, globalisation and mass immigration (Hobolt, 2016). Public fears about migrants were particularly fuelled by nationalist parties which claim that the domestically high number of migrants was related to EU membership (Devine, 2015).

Second, in terms of the interpretative immigration coverage framework, the British news media was limited to specific concerns (Smith and Deacon, 2018). Perceived problems with immigration referred to mainly integration aspects such as housing, employment, benefits and criminal behaviour (Van Dijk, 1993). Evidence further indicates that newspapers used different tones and frames to report on immigration, but they mainly showed consensus over the issues in their coverage of immigration by either constructing them as actively negative individuals or passively neutral (KhosraviNik, 2014b). For example, negative frameworks of discussion concentrated on themes surrounding the control of immigration in relation to fears about cultural differences and mass arrivals of non-European migrants.

In a study on the British media, Vollmer found that migration was still discussed as a high policy concern with the concept of the border strongly surrounding the public discourse on migration (Vollmer, 2017). Furthermore, research emphasised that the British press increasingly paid attention to the scale of net migration by referring to public statistics produced by government agencies (Allen and Blinder, 2018). By analysing British newspaper articles published during the beginning of the European ‘migration’ crisis, Gray and Franck (2019) also found that the general securitisation of migration was inextricably linked with media portrayals of a racialized, gendered threat and vulnerability. Whilst Muslim men were particularly associated with fear and danger for public safety of women in host societies, Muslim women were primarily conceived as suppressed victims of their societies of origin.



This kind of rhetoric especially evolved with mass assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve in 2015 and following terrorist incidents in Paris in the same year. This perspective was expected to support opinions that regard refugees and asylum seekers as potential criminals and individuals with indecent intentions (Van Hootegeem and Meuleman, 2019). Such common public representations of migrants are often coupled with public demands for more restrictive migration policies and tighter border controls to curb the security risks that migrants pose.

Third, British newspapers tended to conflate different categories of migrants (Smith and Deacon, 2018). Research shows that the British right-wing newspapers tended to equate refugees with migrants by associating them with negative aspects such as unemployment and exploitation of British social benefits (Islentyeva, 2021). This blurring of discursive categorisations led to the substitution of the term 'refugee' with 'migrants' which resulted in a negative representation of refugees in general. They were generalised as a dishonest group of foreigners who were not in need of protection but only came to the UK in order to deliberately claim welfare benefits. Gabrielatos and Baker (2008) highlighted this issue of overlapping use of distinct migrant groups in their study by examining the discursive construction of refugees and asylum seekers in the British press between 1996 and 2005. For example, they stressed that the group of asylum seekers were confused with migrants and led to negatively biased representations whereby migrants were viewed as dishonest individuals who falsely applied for asylum.

Such media confluences can reinforce public perceptions about migrants and influence people's expectations of policy responses (Blinder, 2015; Allen and Blinder, 2018). For example, the British government promised to reduce net migration - the difference between immigration and emigration per year - in the UK that did not match actual public preferences. Blinder pointed out that previous studies on British public attitudes towards migrants measured perceptions of foreigners in general but hardly differentiated among various migrants groups such as asylum seekers and refugees (Blinder, 2015). This conflation was confirmed in previous research of ethnocentrism which found that anti-immigration hostility can be grounded in a generalised predisposition toward outgroups where foreigners are perceived in an undifferentiated way (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). In other

words, people with anti-immigration attitudes hardly differentiate between various non-national groups.

Studies on the British media coverage in the 2010s found that changes in the media coverage over this period were correlated with varying dynamics of migration and political events (Allen, 2016). For example, the volume of media coverage on migration saw clear spikes during the election of the Conservative-led coalition government in 2010 and particularly when the government passed restrictive policies in the following two years. Controlling migration, especially mass migration and ‘illegal migrants’ were dominant topics in the British press from 2010 to 2018 (Allen, 2016; Islentyeva, 2021).

Previous studies further highlighted that the British news coverage tended to be divided between securitisation and humanitarian themes in which media views on migrants including refugees and asylum seekers were polarised (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015; Islentyeva, 2021). Berry et. al’s study found that left-wing newspapers predominantly discussed migrants’ plight in humanitarian terms but did not cover positive migrant stories from their perspectives or proactively make a case for liberal migration policies. Share (2018) also emphasised that British liberal broadsheets failed to raise awareness about factual issues and how anti-immigration media coverage continues to dominate the British press. Islentyeva (2021) highlighted the recurring topic of ‘social responsibility’ among left-wing newspapers which expected the British society to assist refugees who fled wars and other atrocities in their countries of origin.

By contrast, the British right-wing press was found to be remarkably aggressive towards refugees and migrants in comparison with other European media outlets, such as Germany or Spain (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). These British newspapers expressed strong opposition to migrants by referring to them as a cultural threat or a national security risk and regarded them as invaders, criminals or terrorists (Islentyeva, 2021).

What distinguished the right-wing UK press from other European newspapers was the dominant use of negative frames in their campaigning against migrants by

frequently supporting policy solutions from a ‘Fortress Europe’ perspective (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). For instance, British right-wing newspapers mainly suggested militarised policy solutions such as the use of naval blockades or the destruction of boats to reduce the number of migrants arriving on European shores. The right-wing populist United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) was an important source for all these newspapers. In general, the UK press was found to be more likely to use negative press frames than its European counterparts by associating refugees and migrants with crimes in the UK and viewing them as a threat to the national healthcare and welfare system. The press strongly suggested that social benefits were an incentive for migrants to enter the UK and hence should be restricted to deter further arrivals of migrants. A further noticeable finding in this study was the tendency of the British press to link the ‘migration crisis’ to the result of inefficient border controls. This aspect was hardly problematised in the other European countries investigated.

In terms of the language used to report on immigration, Smith and Deacon (2018) stressed that there was a frequent use of pejorative language strategies to characterise migrants. Musolff’s analysis of the British mainstream press coverage on migration revealed a strong use of dehumanising metaphors by referring to migrants as “parasites, leeches, or bloodsuckers” (Musolff, 2017: 41). One in five news articles, for example, depicted migrants as scroungers or welfare tourists who drain the British host society or exploit the National Health System (NHS).

The focus of the media discussion moved away from the legal status of migrants to the number and pace of migration since 2009 (Allen, 2016). Newspaper stories using the term ‘illegal’ in the context of migration in fact declined. Nevertheless, Balch’s analysis comparing the British news coverage on immigration between 2006 and 2013 showed that the tone of reporting clearly became more dehumanising and was focused on negative aspects of migrants (Balch, 2015).

Blinder and Allen (2016) found that the British newsprint media, especially broadsheets and tabloids, from 2010 to 2012 primarily focused on negative portrayals of failed asylum seekers and irregular migrants. They argued that this

trend corresponded with public attitudes that equally opposed irregular immigration and asylum seekers.

### **2.1.3 Media coverage on irregular migrants**

The analysis of the news coverage of the group of irregular migrants identified similar media strategies that tended to disparage these migrants and referred to them as an ‘unwanted’ social group. However, some studies also found more neutral or personalised media reportage on irregular migration in which the media considered the perspective of the migrants which allowed a news narrative from their viewpoint (Burroughs, 2015; Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). Only a few scholars explicitly examined news reportage or public opinion on irregular migrants (Merolla, Ramakrishnan and Haynes, 2013; Beyer and Matthes, 2015). Therefore, the scope of this research is relatively limited and most studies pertain to the US context. This research body will be discussed in the next section in more detail.

In the scholarship of media analysis, only a few studies explicitly explored the portrayal of irregular migrants in Western and European media (Burroughs, 2015; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Blinder and Allen, 2016; Brouwer, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2017). All these studies focused on print media by analysing newspaper articles on RASIM. However, no study exists that particularly examined the British press coverage on groups of irregular migrants. As noted above, the media analysis on RASIM was mainly qualitative and so is the study on media coverage on irregular migrants. Compared to the research on media coverage on migration in general, the amount of this research body on irregular migrants is much smaller. Despite this fact, the findings are of a similar nature.

Scholars commonly argue that the language used by European media and political circles to describe or report on irregular migrants was framed by security concerns and negative narratives (Maneri, 2011; Vollmer, 2011, 2014; Parkin, 2013): The lawful citizen is juxtaposed with the unlawful alien. The ‘illegal immigrant’ is frequently depicted by the media as ‘the other’, i.e. as part of a homogenous group of lawbreakers while ignoring their individual circumstances and the drivers of irregular

migration (Beyer and Matthes, 2015; Burroughs, 2015). This discursive strategy of telling only one version of the truth and treating the individual background of the migrant as secondary further gives elites the space to manage migration in their interest and keep possible resistance from society on a low level.

Previous studies pointed to the controversial terminology prevalent in public to describe migrants who find themselves in breach of immigration law (Błuś, 2013). Among the commonly used are ‘undocumented’, ‘unauthorised’, ‘clandestine’, ‘*sans papier*’, ‘unlawful’, ‘paralegal’, ‘non-legal’ or ‘illegal’. This law-breaking aspect is further reflected in the term ‘crimmigration’. For example, specific political debates on the ‘crimmigration’ process, that is to criminalise illegal stay in the Netherlands, fuelled the media attention for irregular migrants (Brouwer, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2017). ‘Crimmigration’ became a popular term that emerged in the public discourse when criminal law and immigration law converged. The term was criticised for being too legal-oriented and too focused on crime and migration control. Brouwer et al. proposed a widening of the term so that it can be used in other areas of research such as discourses and framings. They introduced a broadened definition and suggested that ‘crimmigration’ accurately describes the problematic nexus between criminality/immigration where immigrants are frequently associated with criminal activities in the public discourse.

Moreover, the expression ‘illegal immigrant’, for example, is repeatedly used to blame irregular migrants for breaking the law and those ‘non-genuine’ asylum seekers who are in reality economic migrants (Philo, Briant and Donald, 2013). Additionally, Burroughs found that confusion in the Irish media existed about migration types and terminology, such as asylum seekers being called ‘illegal immigrants’ (Burroughs, 2015). It must be noted that the term ‘illegal’ has been the subject of controversial debate since it frames the migrant as an ‘illegal human being’ and signifies criminality (Vollmer, 2014). This criminalising label blurs the boundaries between asylum and economic immigration and undermines the right of an individual to request asylum (Burroughs, 2015). Brouwer et al. (2017) argued that although the migratory act itself could be regarded as illegal, the human beings themselves could not. Moreover, scholars pointed out that the portrayal of the migrant as an ‘illegal human being’ is the result of their unauthorised stay produced

by national borders and reinforced through language and public discourse (Anderson, Sharma and Wright, 2009; Morehouse and Blomfield, 2011; Brouwer, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2017).

Despite the predominant hostile media discourses outline above surrounding RASIM and irregular migrants in European countries and notably in the UK, humanitarian concerns are also a recurring topic in the media debate (Bauder, 2008). As opposed to the negative media narratives on irregular migration, another strain of scholarship identified more neutral and to a greater extent pro-immigration news coverage (Aalberg and Beyer, 2015; Benson and Wood, 2015; Beyer and Matthes, 2015; Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud, 2015; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). These studies engaged with media frames and framing theories, which explain mass communication, and were based on a collaboration of researchers focusing on Norway, France and the United States.

Benson and Wood (2015), for example, found that the most prominent sources quoted in news coverage on irregular migration between 2011 and 2012 were governmental actors which were closely followed by pro-immigration associations. On the other hand, anti-immigration groups were relatively unpopular sources. Their results indicated that “most quotes were ‘frameless’ and therefore do not contain any substantial arguments addressing the problems, causes, or solutions associated with immigration” (Benson and Wood, 2015: 802). This study highlighted that the coverage on irregular migration is not merely dominated by anti-immigration arguments and groups as many former studies suggested but that pro-immigration views also exist.

Furthermore, other scholars examined the ‘human interest frame’ and concluded that half of the articles under their analysis brought an emotional angle to the stories (Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). They demonstrated the existence of personalised media coverage that allowed for a more complex storytelling from the perspective of the individual migrants which is usually unknown to the public. By giving a voice to migrants and letting them tell their side of the story, such immigration media coverage also provided new insights into the phenomenon of migration in general. The scholars suggested that these results stand in contrast to

findings from existing literature and contest the controversial role of the media in the report on immigration. In this case, the media instead provides a mouthpiece for the individuals that are by nature “excluded from most arenas of influence and participation in the countries where they reside” (Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud, 2015: 796).

#### **2.1.4 The ‘deserving’ migrants - refugees in need of help**

Images of migrants dangerously crossing the Mediterranean and the deaths of thousands of individuals attracted the most media attention during the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in 2015 and 2016. Such portrayals are illustrative of the above mentioned European ‘migration crisis’ which clearly increased the public attention towards the presence of migrants and especially asylum seekers in Western societies. During this event, research found that the media debate around asylum seekers and refugees was not only characterised by public expressions of xenophobia but also of solidarity with those suffering during their migratory movements (Pantti, 2016). As a result, there were both positive and negative social representations of different migrant groups.

The political categorizations of ‘refugee’ and ‘economic migrants’ lead to different moral associations among the European public but also determine specific rights for migrants (Rea *et al.*, 2019). More positive or empathetic press representations of migrants usually report on the group of ‘refugees’. This group is usually associated with individuals who are forced to leave their country for humanitarian reasons such as war in Syria or Iraq and are therefore viewed more favourably by public opinion. Haynes *et al.* (2016) drew attention to the fact that the migrant group of Syrian refugees were predominant in the European media since September 2015. What followed was a contemporary humanitarian political response to the plight of Syrian refugees in the West reinforced by a major public empathy towards them (Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti, 2016).

With respect to the British press, humanitarian and empathetic reporting that highlighted the suffering of refugees during their escape from repressive

governments was mostly featured by left-wing newspapers (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). Furthermore, humanitarian media narratives included reports about the death and survival of migrants as well as demands from human rights organisations that promote the protection for refugees. Humanitarian themes also included appeals to the civil society to show compassion and support for refugees as a shared obligation.

However, this distinct social representation of refugees evoked a public ‘discursive battle’ that divided migrants into the ‘deserving’ refugee and the ‘undeserving’ economic migrant (Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti, 2016). Both categories were often viewed as opposed to one another. The ‘economic migrant’ was more frequently regarded as an ‘irregular’ migrant in search of better life and job opportunities. For example, a study on the representations of refugees in the German media and political discourse during this ‘crisis’ demonstrated that economic migrants, in contrast to refugees, were frequently discussed as the ‘less deserving’ group of non-nationals (Holmes and Castañeda, 2016). This demarcation was found to contribute to the fears surrounding differences pertaining to culture, religion and ethnicity.

However, Smith and Deacon (2018: 8) pointed out that humanitarian press coverage are the exception and are not unproblematic as they only represent a deviation from the common patterns and narratives of coverage: “Such exceptions may thereby simply reflect and compound the inverse logic of more typical representational patterns (e.g., by portraying “good migrants” as “exceptions to the rule,” the employment of “humanitarian” frames that rely on a paternalistic logic, or the celebration of the “genuine refugee” that presupposes a “bogus refugee”)”.

## **2.2 Social media discourse on migrants**

As opposed to traditional media such as newspapers, new media, especially social media, offer various ways of both mass and interpersonal communication tools to the public (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). These options allow users to have multi-directional, participatory forms of self-expression and interactive public discussions.



Bouvier (2015) argued that social media platforms provide users with an open, less restricted communication realm that allow for more direct polarised attitudes and opinionated rhetoric. Such growing bottom-up communication enabled a shift in roles for ordinary people from text consumers to producers by weakening the unidirectional flow of mass media content and inviting a variety of voices (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016).

The new communication practices generate high volumes of data and come in various formats, such as photos, videos, posts, likes, etc. and allow public discussions of individuals from all corners of the world who otherwise might not come across each other in their offline world. KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) argued that the power of mass traditional media has been decentralised through the power of digital participatory communication and a growing number of voices from mass audiences appear in new media.

The following section discusses findings from studies that examined public views about different migrant groups expressed on social media. Only a few studies examined media and public opinion on migrants in digital media and in fact research on online public views expressed about the group of irregular migrants in the UK is absent. Scholarship on attitudes expressed online towards immigration, such as social media, focused predominantly on opposition to immigration. Most of the existing literature about the polarisation of citizens disagrees about the effects of social media with regard to whether it decreases or increases polarization (Goldzweig *et al.*, 2018; Müller and Schwarz, 2020). A study by Müller and Schwarz, for example, showed a high correlation between anti-refugee sentiments on Facebook and real-life hate crimes against refugees in Germany. They argued that social media play a significant role in propagating existing tensions and can be a push factor for potential perpetrators to carry out violent acts against immigrants. Social media per se were argued not to cause hate crimes but to be one of many propagating factors for affecting anti-refugee sentiments. Ultimately, such exposure to hate can increase the occurrence of real-life attacks.

Others found that widely spread images of anti-asylum hostility online were met with explicit critiques of racism via emotions of disgust and contempt (Pantti, 2016).

However, at the same time this language was used to compare anti-asylum demonstrators with asylum seekers both in a negative way. By doing so, these online discussions primarily served to reinforce lines between ‘us’ and ‘others’ and hardly allowed for solidarity with asylum seekers’ suffering.

Awan provided evidence for how various Facebook pages were used by various groups to ignite racial and religious hate speech against Muslims (Awan, 2016). By expressing negative attitudes including stereotypes, physical threats and online harassment, Muslim communities were frequently demonised.

Some scholars argue that the internet and social media can be further seen as global drivers of hate speech, for example in racist discourse (Assimakopoulos, Baider and Millar, 2017). Despite the lack of universal definition, ‘hate speech’ can be understood as discriminatory hatred expressed and directed at individuals or groups due to, for example, their race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin. Discriminatory hatred can also include incitement to hostility or violence. In online comments to news reports on migrants, previous research found that categorisation and defence mechanisms were central in the Italian context to defend and maintain one’s own as well as the national identity in the light of a perceived threat presented by migrants (Russo and Tempesta, 2017).

In relation to xenophobia, refugee-related hatred among text producers and commenters could be shown to go hand in hand with dynamics of ‘patriotism’ in the Polish online press (Kopytowska, Woźniak and Łukasz, 2017). By invoking collective identity, prevalent stereotypes and national values, negative feelings towards outgroups were promoted and equally ingroup feelings were reaffirmed. Similarly, the use of xenophobic metaphors was found in the case of migrants in Cyprus. Insults, proverbs and irony were employed with a view to negatively construct the non-nationals on social media in discriminatory discourse (Baider, Constantinou and Petrou, 2017).

In the context of Malta, implicit and indirect strategies were frequently used online to express discriminatory attitudes towards minority groups, such as immigrants in Malta (Muskat and Assimakopoulos, 2017). The tendency to save one’s face and avoiding appearing intolerant towards minority groups were key motives among

commenters who expressed their unfavourable attitudes towards these groups in an implicit way. Indirect strategies in xenophobic and homophobic discourse was further identified in Denmark (Millar *et al.*, 2017). The scholars showed how online fictive dialogues and interactions were used in order to perpetuate stereotypes and legitimise hate speech.

Other scholars looked at data from the platform Twitter to examine conversations about immigration-related topics and pointed out that users on Twitter were hardly hostile towards migration given that the majority of analysed Tweets appeared to be neutral (Bartlett and Norrie, 2015). Tweepsters appeared to refrain from expressing their views about negative or positive aspects of immigration and instead frequently challenged or ridiculed press claims. Whilst primarily using Twitter to critique or complain about elites, people often held opposing positions to views of politicians about immigration and were generally hostile towards media and politicians.

Another Europe-wide study of online discussions on migrants identified that social media users in fact utilised migration issues as a channel to make their unresolved issues more important and serious (Fazekas and Füge, 2019). More specifically, the expressed opinions were clearly emotion-laden and connected to local existential problems for citizens such as fears around economy and cultural identity that they feel were not resolved by their government. Although online public views on migrants seem to be divergent, both studies highlighted that digital media users were overall critical of political elites as regards migration-related issues. For the British online public context, a study showed that users on blog pages and fora describe migrants in a defamatory manner and perceived them as a social group that scrounges from British society and therefore migrants needed to be met with restrictive policy measures (Musolff, 2015).

### 2.3 Public views on migrants in the UK

It is important to note that “British newspapers operate within a competitive marketplace” with the consequence that public interest in migration-related topics can partly drive the media reporting (Allen and Blinder, 2018: 219). In fact, immigration has been a highly salient and consistent issue in British public opinion (Allen and Blinder, 2018; Blinder, 2020). Particularly since the beginning of 2000, opposition to migrants was a longstanding public stance with migration being one of the top three concerns for Britons. According to the 2008 and 2013 British Social Attitudes surveys, around 75% of the population in both years responded that they desired a reduction of immigration in Britain (Blinder and Richards, 2020).

In recent times, anti-immigration views among members of the British public strongly came to light with the referendum on withdrawal from the EU, colloquially known as ‘Brexit’. Many in the Leave campaign put forward the predominant narrative that the UK’s exit from the EU would enable a democratic opportunity for the country to regain control over its borders and hence better control migration from other parts of Europe to the UK (Wadsworth *et al.*, 2016; Share, 2018).

Although migration was not the only concern for prospective voters in this referendum, the figure of the migrant was effectively mobilised by the British media and political discourses to “affix an identity of a struggling political body to the EU, or simply to highlight flaws in the wider media coverage” (Share, 2018: 41). Share’s study highlighted that anti-immigration rhetoric and discursive practices intensified during the EU referendum and migration remained a problematic topic in the British press with different migrant groups such as asylum seekers and EU economic migrants being generalised. In debates about the EU referendum, migration was actively constructed as a ‘common-sense’ reality mainly based on statistics whilst remaining silent about positive outcomes of economic migration. This media strategy and the absence of migrants’ voices employed by the British media prevented the public from engaging with broader aspects about migration such as knowledge about the root causes of human displacement. Share (2018) stressed that despite the high attention devoted to migrants, the British press clearly demarcated them from the British electorate and thus excluded them from participation.

A survey conducted by Ipsos MORI one week before the referendum took place, found that one in three British voters saw immigration as the most important issue that the UK was facing at that time (Ipsos MORI, 2016b). But there were clear differences between Leave and Remain voters - 52% who were likely to vote leave saw immigration as an issue, whilst only 14% of those likely to vote to remain regarded immigration as the biggest issue. Against this background, immigration played a key factor particularly for those British citizens who voted in favour of the UK leaving the EU.

In the same vein, the British Social Attitudes report also found that immigration was at the heart of the EU referendum and reflected particularly immigration-related concerns of the older and conservative voting population (National Centre for Social Research, 2017b). Specifically, in the years before the referendum the economic impact of immigration appeared to be increasingly the most socially divisive factor in the UK. Data from 2016 show that younger graduates think that immigration will influence the economy in a positive way. On the other hand, only one third of those less educated and aged over 70 share the same opinion. This attitudinal divide on immigration appears to be one of the most noticeable compared to other European countries. Similarly, Hobolt's (2016) analysis of the Brexit referendum campaign and survey data revealed that Brexit Leave voters tended to share the following properties: low education level, higher age, vulnerable position in the labour market and anti-immigration feelings.

Anti-immigration attitudes were clearly incited around the referendum: sharp anti-immigration rhetoric was repeatedly used during the Brexit campaign period by the UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, and the number of race-related hate crimes in the UK increased following the Brexit vote (Bennett, 2018). Leave campaigners primarily argued that migrants were a burden for the nation (Arif, 2018). Research further confirmed that before and after the EU referendum, the British media overwhelmingly focused on migration from the EU which engendered concerns about mass migration in general and loss of British national sovereignty in particular (Islentyeva, 2021).

There are divergent explanations for the importance of immigration-related concerns in relation to the EU referendum. Research suggested that many Britons feared that migration adversely affected their salary, jobs and living standard (Wadsworth, 2015). Others argued that many British people, the ‘somewheres’, found the number of the immigrant population too high over a period of several years and felt discomfort over the speed with which ethnic changes occurred across the UK (Goodhart, 2017). This group of British citizens were described as people who are rooted in their hometown and tend to place high importance on familiarity and thus view quick change unsettling. In contrast, the ‘anywheres’ are in Goodhart’s view well educated, more mobile and open to foreigners and change and are focused on achievements. In addition, while liberalisation processes such as the creation of an open economy and the encouragement of liberal attitudes towards race, gender and sexuality took place, the above mentioned concerns of the public in relation to mass immigration was either ignored or labelled as xenophobic.

Other studies pointed out that there was an overall political dissatisfaction based on the notion of a ‘broken system’ associated with nativist sentiment (Anderson, 2017; Duffy *et al.*, 2017). People felt a lack of political accountability and being left behind by mainstream politicians who in their view were disengaged with people’s everyday concerns and experts did not understand their lives and they felt rigged by the economy. The reasons for this discontent are long-standing and attitudes to immigration are an illustration of this sort of nativist sentiment.

Anderson (2017) further argued that Brexit was, from the beginning, a Conservative endeavour that intended to re-establish national sovereignty. The motives for Leave voters were based on a ‘complex and cross-cutting mix of calculations, emotions and cues’ (Goodwin, 2017: 15). Calculations referred to costs and benefits that EU-membership entails. Risk applies to terrorism, to eroded sovereignty and identity-related issues exemplified by immigration such as possible harm to British cultural life. Goodwin further found that those people who had negative attitudes toward immigration also worried about a loss of control to Brussels, felt left behind economically and were much more likely to vote for Brexit.

Despite the overall negative public attitude towards non-nationals in general and irregular migrants in particular, a number of polls suggested a slightly more positive stance towards migrants, particularly after the EU referendum date (Ipsos MORI, 2017b; Heath and Richards, 2019). But with regard to specific migration types, the British public appeared to differentiate between migrant groups and tended to disfavour especially low-skilled migrants who were believed to include most irregular migrants. Data from YouGov (2018) revealed, for example, that seven in ten Britons clearly opposed irregular migrants by supporting the previously mentioned British ‘hostile environment’ policy.

## **2.4 Summary of literature review and impetus for present research**

Within migration studies, newspaper coverage and public opinion on non-nationals are relatively well researched areas. As shown above, European media representations of different migrant groups are polarised. On the one hand, the group of refugees is often met with empathy and are depicted as the ‘desired migrant’ who is in genuine need of support. On the other hand, press representation of asylum seekers and economic migrants employ a narrative of an ‘underserving migrant’ who is believed to pose a law-and-order threat to the culture and security of migrant receiving countries. As outlined above, a vast amount of this research tends to be concerned with the objectivity and accuracy of information provided by the media which does not enable the public to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena of migration and irregular migration. The group of irregular migrants was predominantly depicted by the European media as dangerous ‘lawbreakers’ who are potential criminals and terrorists. The right-wing British press is particularly adversarial towards migrants and advocates for a stronger ‘European Fortress’ compared to newspapers in other European countries.

Widespread negative views on migration are also widely reflected on public views expressed on social media. However, it is notable that social media users are not only adversarial towards migrants but frequently criticise politicians for unresolved issues in relation to migration. The British media coverage and public opinion were found to be one of the most polarised and negative towards migrants compared to other European countries.

The UK provides a unique context for looking at news and public opinion on irregular migration. National polls highlight that despite the decrease of negative attitudes towards migrants after the EU referendum date, British people still oppose irregular migration and particularly support the hostile environment policy. In view of the saliency of irregular migration in British policy and public attitudes, it is notable that the specific group of irregular migrants has received much less scholarly attention compared to migration in general. Therefore, there is little knowledge on how the media and the public understand and view irregular migrants, especially



when it comes to publicly available online media (Bleich, Bloemraad and de Graauw, 2015).

In order to address these gaps, this study examines the public understanding of irregular migrants by analysing British newspaper coverage and people's responding views on social media. More specifically, this research explores how migrants, nationals and government are discursively represented and whether the opinions changed in light of newspapers' political leaning and socio-political events. This project is among the first to analyse people's opinions and news representations expressed about irregular migrants on a social media platform over a long time span.

### ***Research aim and questions***

In order to address the knowledge gaps identified, this study examines the public understanding of irregular migrants by analysing British newspaper coverage and people's responding views as expressed on social media. It aims to shed light on how the online press presents irregular migrants to the general public and to highlight the key themes of social media comments in response to these news reports. The analysis is based on 244 online articles from ten British newspapers posted on the social media platform Facebook between 2015 and 2018, and 22,967 comments responding to these articles. This study examined whether there is a correlation between the press and the comments in their stance on irregular migration such as the extent to which the comments mirror or contradict newspaper statements.

Furthermore, this study analyses the discursive dynamics of ingroup and outgroup identification and representation by taking a closer look at the interrelationships between three key social groups identified in the social media discourse on irregular migrants: migrants, nationals and government. More specifically, this thesis explores the following research questions:

- What is the nature of the coverage on irregular migration in British newspapers, and how has it changed over time?

- Do the discursive representations of the three social groups change in light of newspapers' political leaning and socio-political events?
- How do social media commenters respond to the news coverage of irregular migration and discursively represent migrants, nationals and government?

These questions are explored through the lenses of Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Social Representation Theory (SRT). These theoretical lenses highlight how people express identity in discourses coupled with their perception of outsiders in order to maintain positive identity of their ingroup. SIT and SRT inform the hypothesis that both media and commenters' communication on irregular migration will tend to focus on positive ingroup and negative outgroup representations along redefined social identity lines and portray irregular migrants as undesirable strangers, therefore supporting exclusionary measures against them. From this viewpoint, this research explores the discursive organisation of group-thinking and shared social identity in the social media discourse on irregular migration. In particular, the study investigates how the above mentioned three social groups are represented along ingroup and outgroup representations. British newspapers and social media commenters mostly represent the perspective of the host society and thus give insights into the views of the ingroup of nationals on irregular migrants and the political elites.

### 3 Social Representation and Social Identity Theory: group thinking and demarcation

In order to shed light on media and public attitudes on irregular migration, this study is framed by two related theories, Social Representation Theory (SRT) and Social Identity Theory (SIT), which complement each other in crucial aspects. They are apt for enhancing the online media and public discourses studied in this research as both approaches concentrate on how people make sense of themselves and their social environment in discursive practices based on collective thinking and sense of belonging to a social group. Whilst SRT recognises the dynamic nature of social representations in the development of commonly shared beliefs and ideas, the SIT perspective makes it possible to comprehend self-concepts by which individuals view themselves as group members based on their demarcation from other social groups. The theories are mutually compatible because they both provide productive frameworks for this study to capture the multiple and complex facets of people's realities that are socially constructed through online and media discourses.

The first section of this chapter takes a closer look at the Social Representation Theory which provides a lens for understanding the formation of cultural knowledge and common sense thinking in modern societies. This perspective is valuable for guiding the discourse analyses of this study as SRT maintains that social representations result from concerted discursive practices and explains how group-related thinking among members of social groups can be linked to questions such as who gets excluded or included in society. The social representational approach further illuminates how collective representations result in specific social identities that amplify group coherence and belonging.

The second section explains the key concepts of the social identity framework and shows its relations to the Social Representation Theory. SIT focuses on how individuals construct their identities by categorising the world into social groups and identifying with some of them and comparing themselves with others. The development of a social identity is the result of group membership. Group-related norms inform and shape people's behaviour and preferences and are therefore

socially constructed. Populism in discourses is also discussed as one crucial aspect of the social identity framework as it illustrates the relationship between people's politicised self-concept and blame attribution. This perspective sheds light on citizens' attitudes towards non-nationals and their political representatives.

### **3.1 Social Representation Theory**

Social Representation Theory was first introduced by the French social psychologist Serge Moscovici who links the notion of social representation to Durkheim's concept of 'collective representations' dealing with the common ways of understanding and assessing social reality (Wagner *et al.*, 1999). This theory consists of a connection between cognitive components and societal symbolic relations. Its symbolic dimension of social representations is chiefly concerned with how people express identity, develop specific behavioural patterns and engage with outsiders. This approach focuses on how ideas, values and cultural knowledge are disseminated in modern societies and internalised by people.

Research applying SRT initially studied the process of how scientific knowledge became popularised into lay knowledge and integrated into everyday discourses (Wagner, 1998). Research in social sciences examined a range of particular discourse functions including the development of social cohesion and realities or defining factors for social movements and political changes (Jodelet, 2008).

Other studies looked at positions of various groups in society and highlighted social phenomena such as education, health/illness, gendered and racialised identities and representations to understand group interactions and how people represent everyday life objects (Joffe, 2002; Howarth, 2006; Campos and Lima, 2017). The relevance of social representation in the construction of identities was shown in relation to developing positive self-esteem, for example, among white teenagers compared to black teenagers (Howarth, 2002). In the area of the psychology of health and illness, SRT contributed to the understanding of how ordinary individuals attribute meaning to aspects of health and diseases. Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, this theory

provided useful tools to show how HIV/AIDS as a new disease emerged in the public and was integrated by people as a group-based symbolic understanding in their thoughts and actions (Joffe, 2002).

As this approach provides a framework for understanding social communication and how common-sense knowledge arises, circulates and changes at the collective level, it makes the theory particularly germane to guide analysis of this thesis in order to shed light on the social representation of certain groups and knowledge associated with irregular migrants in the online news articles and the comments made on them. The relationship between the social phenomena and the people can be studied via conversation which serves as a frame of description. Triandafyllidou (2000) showed that the SRT approach is valuable for the explanation of discourses on migrants in relation to nation states as this theory goes beyond cognitive elements and examines how societies are structured symbolically.

Images and specific terminology about migrants tend to originate in the public discourse in the West, distributed among ordinary people by the mass media. SRT provides a useful framework to demonstrate how media-based ideas about migrants become lay thinking and a perceived reality for ordinary people who accept these ideas. The social representation perspective has the potential to highlight how the media strives for public mass attention by simplifying and sensationalising specialist knowledge for mass audiences by focusing on blame and responsibility, for instance (Joffe, 2002). This focus on blame introduces a moral dimension to circulating public knowledge where the question of who is viewed as acceptable or unacceptable is regulated leading to societies differentiating 'us' from 'them'.

### 3.1.1 Social constructivism and discourse

SRT is based on a social constructivist and discourse-related epistemology (Wagner, 1998). The theory addresses contents of lay and everyday knowledge by providing a conceptual framework to better understand real life social phenomena in modern societies through the observation of talk and action that relate to the social objects of interest (Wagner *et al.*, 1999; Joffe, 2002).

Ontologically, SRT maintains that the representation 'is' the object it represents. In the social sphere consisting of representation and construction, objects are no longer 'something in the world' (Wagner, 1996: 108) but are transformed into certain objects through the processes of being communicated about or interacted with by a person or social groups. Furthermore, these 'somethings' are designated with certain features and values that are important for the existing social context and group's system. By bearing the specific name of the 'something' in a social context, the representation becomes socially meaningful and hence real for certain societies. In other words, societies give certain names to important objects in their social world such as 'democracy' or 'justice' and by means of these constructive processes integrate them into one's world in a way that is socially meaningful. From this perspective, social representations reflect everyday ideas that evolve and are disseminated in a society and become common sense.

According to Moscovici, social representations are a network of differently intertwined concepts and images deriving from the interconnection of individuals (Moscovici, 1988; Joffe, 2002). A social representation always represents a belief or knowledge from the perspective of a person or group who are part of a local world (Wagner, 1996). On the one hand, representations are social because they are concerned with the same phenomenon (Moscovici, 1988). On the other hand, the social character of representations refers to the specific autonomy in the form of a highly valuable, popular knowledge/know-how in society. Moscovici argues that common sense is existent in all humans and serves as a basis for community life (Moscovici, 2011). Common-sense thinking means ascribing specific characteristics to a thing or person. The common-sense ontology underlying SRT assumes that people interact intentionally with an object by recognising, evaluating, talking or

acting towards this object (Wagner, 1996). According to this ontological model of social cognition, when people see and think of an object, it becomes present in their minds through remembering or judging it.

SRT further proposes that people gain knowledge and beliefs from lived social experience (Wagner, 1998). The reality of a social group or culture is constructed via the thoughts and interactions of the society's members. The concept of interaction within the social representation approach focuses on the formation and transformation of diverse shapes of knowledge (Markova, 2011). Social representations and hence people's ideas and images are shaped by language in the form of discourse or communication as a result of ways of collective world-making or meaning-making (Moscovici, 1988; Wagner, 1995; Triandafyllidou, 2000; Höijer, 2017). Discursive processes generate social bonds among societies and other groups and individuals draw meaning from such knowledge in order to comprehend their social reality.

Such discursive processes help people to position themselves with regard to particular phenomena, events or subjects of discussion that are meaningful to them. The ontological presupposition of SRT is that in discourses "(...) people in groups come to calibrate their minds" by using legitimate evidence sources about historical experience to develop their cultural beliefs (Wagner, 1998: 305). Moreover, people create a dynamic order in human interactions, for example, via group polarisation, which induce new ways of thinking and ultimately can lead to new knowledge and beliefs (Markova, 2011). Through this lens, communication is seen as inherently asymmetrical, that is a dynamic and heterogenous form of interaction in which people use language to argue, negotiate or transmit messages.

Social groups inhabit domesticated local worlds that are constructed and consist of objects with certain assigned values and characteristics (Campos, 1998). This implies that any social representation and construction must be considered in its situatedness, particularly in relation to availability of communication tools. The outcome of any social construction serves as evidence for 'truth' that is intrinsic to a certain world view at a specific time in a group's history.

This historical perspective assumes that the existing social phenomenon under consideration has been influenced by past events. This means that the study of social representation takes into account the broader situation, that is the historical, cultural and macrosocial circumstances of the characteristics surrounding the studied phenomena (Markova, 2011). Accordingly, this study is cognisant of the recent political history of how migration has evolved, and how different governments and different publics have responded by looking at the online discourse within the political context and the trajectory of migration (see corresponding genealogy in chapter 5).

From this perspective, social representations are based on a specific history and available means of communication which define the form and pace at which social representations disseminate in society (Campos, 1998; Wagner, 1998). Representations can evolve over a longer period and result in well-established cultural beliefs, e.g. astrology. In contrast, more recent, short-lived social representations such as the popular image of the Princess of Wales as ‘Diana, queen of hearts’ were produced with greater media attention and public discourse. The sphere of influence and features of discourses rely on the available communication tools at specific historical times and thus differ over time.

Mass media influence the content, composition and pace by which representations are disseminated in social groups. The media is classified as one of the arenas in which its professionals are believed to produce social representations and distribute them in the form of a certain knowledge (Moscovici, 1988; Joffe, 2002). Scientific knowledge is transformed into lay ideas through communication. Media professionals are likened to myth makers from pre-modern societies. However, in the modern world, representations replace myths and the collective knowledge appears in a different context. Lay people tend to draw on these representations for developing representations of social issues such as criminality or deviance (Joffe and Staerkle, 2007). Mass-mediated communication is believed to play a key role in constructing common sense and in disseminating collective representations, such as about migrants. Overrepresentation of specific social phenomena, for example, people with mental illness in connection to criminality in the British media, is prone to be constructed along aspects of responsibility and blame. Such representations that



link particular social groups to certain societal issues evoke questions of the nature and impact of these groups to the extent that they are deemed threatening and hence should be avoided.

Furthermore, it is important to note that social construction can derive from distinct communication, especially in political communication (Wagner, 1998). Politics of representation creates representations of non-national groups, for example migrants, in a specific way with the intention to create living conditions that comply with the assumed desires and needs of an electorate.

### **3.1.2 Discourse and symbolic coping**

The identity formed by members of a group is based on their common understanding of the world as a whole and its various social phenomena (Wagner *et al.*, 1999: 97). Such shared understanding is distinct for each group and distinguishes them from other groups. Group members constitute social phenomena by representation, i.e. in discourses. Any social group can experience and be affected by unexpected or disruptive events such as the encounter with other groups or natural events. These events can entail changes in relation to the natural and social setting of the social group. Such threatening or novel events or objects to the group's identity instigate symbolic collective coping and ultimately leads to the emergence of a social representation. 'Symbolic coping' is therefore a key feature of this theory.

The beginning of the process of symbolic coping is labelled 'anchoring' in which an unfamiliar phenomenon is named and attributed familiar properties (Wagner, 1998; Wagner *et al.*, 1999). In other words, the new idea is being anchored to a familiar, pre-existing cultural anchor or knowledge by using acquainted terms or being discerned as dangerous for people's ways of life. For example, the majority group seeks to express its goals and actions in its relations to the minority group by communicating their own past and traditions, i.e. familiar old meanings, to others. A further essential part of anchoring is that images and ideas of one network will be transferred to another to function as a model. Human beings have the desire to transform strange objects into familiar ones which then lead to the emergence of

social representations. This initial phase provides the space for the phenomenon to become a topic of communication and talk in order to arrive at a basic understanding among group members. In this way, the media frequently represent foreigners as a risk to social stability and as a threat against which their own citizens need to be protected (Maneri, 2011; Miller and Chtouris, 2017).

This resembles the mechanism of categorisation by which familiar, existing representations are being re-used for the naming and understanding of this new object. It is argued that the media is one of the key actors that maintain discourses accompanying collective symbolic coping. Personal conversations do so too, but to a lesser degree. Grove and Zwi (2006: 1934) state, for example, that the repeated and constant positioning of non-nationals as being unlawful leads to a shift “from protection *of* the refugee, to protection *from* the refugee”.

The notion of migrants as a threat underlines the aspect of SRT which postulates that every social representation has a ‘figurative kernel’ that serves as a central reference point for specific images or judgements which has been developed by a group/society over time (Moscovici, 2011). Moscovici argues in relation to minorities that the differentiating characteristic which sets them apart from the majority society is the figurative kernel of its social representation. In the political realm, a prominent example would be the right/left themata.

### **3.1.3 Objectification**

A process akin to the notion of confirmation bias is called ‘homogamic communication’ in SRT. This describes the tendency and preference of people to exchange views with like-minded individuals and to engage with news sources of similar views. Researchers show, for instance, that those individuals who adopt the humanitarian perspective, that is, respecting human rights and emphasising the values of refugees and asylum seekers, are more likely to encourage generous immigration measures. On the other hand, people who primarily perceive migrants as cultural, economic and security threats tend to support more restrictive policies (Van Hootehem and Meuleman, 2019).

There is a high probability that such communicatively closed groups interpret their own understanding and assimilate specific knowledge of threatening objects that were imparted to them, for example, by the mass media. This process is called ‘objectification’ in which through further discourse and elaboration social representations are objectified, i.e. a form of a developed metaphor or image, which is then compared with or stands for the unfamiliar phenomenon. (...) “An objectification captures the essence of the phenomenon, makes it intelligible for people and weaves it into the fabric of the group’s common sense” (Wagner *et al.*, 1999: 99).

In such communication processes, various elements such as terms, images or clichés substitute unfamiliar concepts and are repeated, exchanged and ultimately combined into one new and cohesive appearance which represents a social representation. The objectified images and concepts have been turned into self-evident and self-contained things. Put differently, objects or concepts that appear to be more alien or abstract are transformed into a more precise and tangible entity for better comprehension (Joffe and Staerke, 2007). There is a close relationship between social representations and attitudes since the former are the precondition of the latter (Wagner *et al.*, 1999). Having a certain attitude to something assumes that humans have assessed it in other ways.

The resulting symbols or images manifest intentional choice based on group members’ characteristics of the specific social circumstances, i.e. historical, cultural, educational, etc. where social representation emerges. These group-specific conditions are believed to impact the choice of certain kinds of images for the objectification process that represents the phenomenon in a recognisable way.

“Certain words have a way of concentrating images and meanings that galvanise conversation and thinking. Others, though rather empty themselves, act as a bridge between one universe and another and enable us to communicate about what we do not understand” (Moscovici, 1988: 240).

From this perspective, the language of representation is based on either pure symbols such as ‘AIDS’ or quasi-metaphors, e.g. ‘genetic code’ and combinations of these representation types.

According to the social representation framework, the collective symbolic coping outcomes are neither right/logical nor wrong/illogical in a scientific or moral sense (Wagner *et al.*, 1999). Veracity of a social representation essentially depends on the group that agrees and ascribes to this representation in discourses. This discursive property of truth is realised through the formation of social representations that are constructed and altered in and by members of the public. Consequently, what is regarded as truth is based on the trust that people attach to information and assessments when they communicate with other individuals (Wagner, 1996; Wagner *et al.*, 1999).

In other words, truth is achieved via discursive elaboration and conceived by group members as commonly accepted knowledge and specific rationalisations. Group members behave in a way that assumes that the object in fact possesses the attributed characteristics which leads to commonly shared representations that are expressive of specific identities, interests, history and culture (Wagner *et al.*, 1999). Wagner argues that such truth formation is particularly important in periods of social transformation in which conceptions of the world such as metaphors or ideologies are questioned alongside the emergence of new social representations. These social changes take place in the ‘marketplace of discourse’ (Wagner, 1996: 105) where representations are formed by discursive processes on a collective level where new world views and their representations reach collective consensus. This process is equally regarded as a trial of strength and power in terms of the corresponding data origins and proof.

The social representation framework has received some criticism. One critical claim refers to its limited conceptualization of the relationship between social representations and power structures as well as social practices (Howarth, 2006). This involves questions regarding the extent to which social representations actually affect how people act within a recognised constructed social world. In terms of defining ‘social representations’, Moscovici has been criticised for providing an ambiguous and over-elaborate definition which may make it difficult for researchers

to grasp its entirety. This resulted in critics assessing the broad definition as lacking consistency and clarity which led to studies being too divergent at times.

However, Moscovici (1988) stressed that his imprecise definition of social representations does not deprive the theory of significance arguing that well-defined notions are not necessarily more meaningful and beneficial for researchers to shed new light on the studied phenomena. SRT with its broader definition of social representation instead has been found to give researchers the leeway to elaborate the term where needed (Jodelet, 2008). Moreover, the framework has proven to be a useful lens to highlight, for example, the interconnectedness of social representations and language. Daily discourses were found to be driving factors in building social objects and influencing interactions with the aim to sustain and recreate certain social circumstances for people. The social representation approach further has the potential to bring out prevalent and institutionalised representations of specific social groups, particularly derogated groups, and highlight the effects of these representations on individuals in relation to their experienced realities and ways to resist such representations (see Howarth, 2006).

Furthermore, SRT takes into account the contextual aspect of social representations by considering the pre-existing social order and cultural constructions as well as broader ideological patterns that are available to individuals who draw on them when producing their own social representations (Joffe and Staerke, 2007). The social representation approach is, therefore, useful to study social groups with respect to how they are construed as dangerous or threatening to the present social conditions. It serves as a sensitising concept that guides researchers in empirical inquiries and can provide direction for theoretical interpretation.

### **3.1.4 Social representations of migrants and irregular migrants in public and political discourses**

Ceyhan and Tsoukala (2002) argue that the public discourse on migrants in Western societies changed through the securitisation process of migration in the 1980s which linked migration to security concerns and denoted a transformation of the control logic and the monitoring of foreigners who enter and live in a country. This far-reaching process enabled a change of the political and public social representation of the migrant from a familiar and needed labour force to an increasingly more negative depiction of non-nationals as the ‘other’. The latter has been frequently used to explain negative public attitudes towards foreigners and to unpack issues of accuracy of public views (Grove and Zwi, 2006; Huot *et al.*, 2016; Pantti, 2016). This understanding is useful to elucidate how people determine their own identity by distancing themselves from foreigners. The differences between oneself and the non-national is vital to the othering process: while the other person is stigmatised, the ‘normality’ of the own group is reinforced.

For example, the juxtaposition of the law-abiding citizens and the law-breaking foreigners is commonly used in public discourses. The process of securitisation was especially marked by the introduction of new public securitarian discourse tactics (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002). During this newly emerging discourse, human mobility increasingly became a concern of public discourse predominantly based on the idea that migration poses a security risk for liberal societies (Huysmans, 2000; Ibrahim, 2005). The migrant-as-threat discourse is seen as a broadening of the concept of security by connecting migrants to the narrative of threat. The notion of threat can be seen as the ‘figurative kernel’ that became the point of reference for the emerging image of the unwanted migrant.

This securitisation of migration marks the shift in the discourse on migration by which the focus was directed from ‘normal’ issues to security-related aspects: “due to the assertions of international organizations, states, academics and journalists, migration has become synonymous with a new risk to the liberal world” (Ibrahim, 2005: 163). Ibrahim underlines that this public debate on migration normalised the understanding of migrants as a security threat. Central to the securitarian discourse

are three aspects: the notion of fear in relation to decline in national sovereignty, the rise of crime in host societies and the loss of control over borders.

Ceyhan and Tsoukala stress that in political discourses migrants are demonised as “criminals, troublemakers, economic and social defrauders, terrorists, drug traffickers, unassimilable persons, and so forth” and therefore need to be controlled (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002: 22). Moreover, the notion of the border in these securitised discourses reflect symbolic power by representing sovereignty and protecting the national identity from foreign threats. These fear-based discourses convey a powerful narrative which on the one hand downplay how the government itself actually enabled and allowed unauthorised border crossings. At the same time, this narrative overstates the government’s ability to protect its borders in the past.

The securitisation of discourses about migrants is further based on the idea that cultural differences will lead to social breakdown (Ibrahim, 2005). The notion of cultural difference is used as a ranking system in which such difference is seen as an essential criterion for the marginalisation of specific social groups such as non-nationals. They are viewed as disruptive forces that unbalance a nation’s unity and its cultural traditions by introducing their own cultures. Central to this culture-led discourse is the idea that other cultures are different from one’s own and thus multiculturalism and other cultures are identified as threatening to the domestic way of life (Huysmans, 2000; Van Hootegeem and Meuleman, 2019). The subsequent anti-immigration attitude and exclusion of people of different cultures in order to protect one’s own culture is viewed as rational behaviour among members of the host society (Ibrahim, 2005). This association of cultural difference with threat ultimately rejects multiculturalism and the coexistence of different cultures and culminates in prejudice towards migrants. In line with SRT, these symbolic narratives of strong borders and the clash of cultures are not necessarily based on facts, but they are widely accepted in Western societies.

In the context of British and German policy discourses, Vollmer showed that this shift of discourse on irregular migration was reflected in the re-categorisation of ‘the irregular migrant’ from the ‘invisible stranger’ to a new social representation of ‘the enemy’ who then became a normalised societal security/threat concept for these

societies (Vollmer, 2014). Against this background, it is not surprising that one common media argumentation around irregular migration is the control of this phenomenon. In light of this, Burroughs found that the Irish media discourse on irregular migrants is concentrated predominantly around the restriction of 'illegal immigration' (Burroughs, 2015). She showed that this policy is connected with broader rationalities of national identity.

The social representation of the irregular migrant as a threat allows for legitimising a state's controlling and exclusionary measures (Beyer and Matthes, 2015). In this context, Maneri (2011) emphasised that the media adopted and translated this political discourse with its state-related priorities into a 'public language' that seems to be reflected in our daily lives today. For example, it appears that the media is an essential actor in criminalising immigration in favour of the objectified, self-evident image of 'Fortress Europe' that tries to close its borders against strangers. In the same vein, Düvell underscores that there is a fearful and fantasising representation of irregular migration in the public discourse which he defined as "a social construct specific to the late 20th century" which has a fixed place in our political, social, cultural and social-psychological world (Düvell, 2008: 493).

The ambivalent and paradoxical nature of these public discourses stem from the political focus on the need to curb irregular migration at all costs (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002: 22). The contradiction of such discourses is mostly apparent in light of ongoing publicly expressed concerns over the effectiveness of border controls and the number of irregular migrants in Western societies. Recent research for example confirms that the British media tends to describe irregular migrants by stating their exact number or quantify their presence based on vague nouns such as millions (Islentyeva, 2021).

By over-simplifying and homogenising the experiences of migrants, a distorted picture of these individuals is created in the public sphere. This kind of social representation does not reflect the complexity of their social realities and structural characteristics in order to understand migration as a phenomenon (Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). Furthermore, these securitarian discourses can be misleading as they neither discuss the limited efficiency of border-control measures to tackle irregular



migration nor do they point out that irregular migration is often an issue of visa overstay and not only unauthorised entry (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002).

Overall, the social representational approach is useful to highlight dominant threat-based social representations in anti-immigration discourses that seem to prevail in Western societies. Feelings of unease among nationals towards the unknown foreigner and negative reactions produced against a perceived enemy in the form of an 'other' are recurring commonly shared images of 'the migrant'. The idea of a sovereign state that is fully capable of protecting its borders and territory is seen as a myth that serves the need to please public views which see migrants as a safety and identity problem (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002: 22).

However, SRT does not explain the intragroup dynamics in Western societies that resulted in collective classification and exclusion of migrants as cultural aliens. The social identity theoretical framework complements the social representation framework by looking at group identities and explores how they are formed based on feelings of belonging to social groups. SIT is particularly relevant for understanding ingroup-outgroup relations and identification processes in discourses which underlie the preference for own group members and discrimination and negative assessment of other groups.

## 3.2 Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory<sup>3</sup> looks at the interplay of forces that lead to the development of intragroup cohesion and relations between groups in Western modern societies (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979; Mangum and Block, 2018). This theory complements SRT as both approaches seek to understand how members of social groups make sense of their social environment through group belonging and shared knowledge. SIT is concerned with group identities in terms of how individuals see themselves in their ingroup, i.e. members of a group/category, and compared to outgroups, i.e. another category, and what the effects of such categorisation are (Sets and Burke, 2010). This theory is therefore useful to explain how dynamics of social identity are at play when perceptions, behaviour and conflicts between groups occur, such as nationals of a state and their relations to non-nationals.

Scholars have used this theory to shed light on public views on immigration and how these opinions can be understood in relation to people's social identity (Triandafyllidou, 2000; Etchegaray and Correa, 2015; Van Klingeren *et al.*, 2015; Mangum and Block, 2018; Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). Immigration is seen as one among other issues that encourage group thinking, particularly as individuals are likely to base their decision to either support or oppose immigration by assessing the importance of their affiliation to a social group (Mangum and Block, 2018). This theoretical approach is also seen as a 'theory of social change' as it focuses on people's ability to question their status quo and acknowledges that social groups can possess various hierarchical levels of status and power (Hornsey, 2008: 207). The key mental processes which generate and maintain individuals' social identity comprise social categorisation, social identification and social comparison.

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<sup>3</sup> This theory is also known as 'social identity approach' (Hornsey 2008).

### 3.2.1 Social categorisation, social identification and comparison

According to the Social Identity Theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), a natural feature of human beings is to form their identity resting on the knowledge that individuals belong to a social group (Sets and Burke, 2010). From this perspective, personal identity is understood as one's self-image, namely the way people see themselves in relation to their opinions, feelings, behaviours and memories (Hornsey, 2008). These aspects define individuals and distinguish them from others. Identity is defined in individualistic terms whereupon individuals seek a pleasing image of themselves and construct their own self-concept by choosing to position themselves in society. On the other hand, SIT maintains that there is also an intergroup dimension on the other end of the identity spectrum which leads to shifts in the way people perceive others and themselves depending on their position. For example, the distinction between 'us' and 'them' as mentioned in the SRT framework, makes people see other groups differently.

With respect to the facet of intergroup identity, the key prerequisite for making alliances with a social group is that individuals classify themselves as members of a particular social group or category called the 'ingroup' (us), whilst those who are not regarded as similar to the self are labelled as 'outgroup' (them) (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979; Burnazoglu, 2017). The ingroup serves as a self-definition based on specific features of this social group.

Social groups are understood as cognitive tools for people to make sense of the social environment and guide people to perform various social actions as they "provide a system of orientation for *self*-reference: they create and define the individual's place in society" (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979: 40). This mental step is referred to as *self- or social categorization* which involves the thinking of oneself as being in the category of a social group with respect to other groups. In other words, seeing the world in social groups or categories and identifying with a multitude of groups whilst rejecting others provides a basis for the way people evaluate things in their social world and form their identity (Jackson and Sherriff, 2013; Burnazoglu, 2017). People's self-concept is understood as a combination of various social identities derived from people's efforts and investment to ingroup affiliation.

The second mental process is *social identification* which denotes the adoption of the group's social identity (Burnazoglu, 2017). Having a certain social identity means sharing the same identity with those who are regarded as belonging to the ingroup and viewing things from the perspective of the corresponding group with norms functioning as reference points for attitudes and behaviour among the members (Sets and Burke, 2010). This means that the communal spirit within a group is determined by a particular degree of uniformity resulting in like-mindedness, similar behaviour and sharing a collective point of view among group members. Regardless of people's ingroup attachment, there is some sort of bond with the group during the social identification process, for example an emotional connection that can be linked to their self-esteem. Group-based identity is believed to be one of the crucial factors for people to take part in social movements or refers to a person's informal attachment to a specific group such as an affinity for a political party.

By adhering to and embodying the group values, attitudes and behaviours, individuals generally contribute to maximising the influence of their ingroup (Hornsey, 2008). Hornsey stresses that "influence is the basis of power, and power leads to control over resources" (2008: 211). This suggests that strong social group categories can be driving forces for power and influence of some groups over others. As mentioned above, when people identify with other ingroup members, they view themselves and the members in comparable ways, and have similar opinions which differentiates them from outgroup members (Burnazoglu, 2017). This leads to group members' comparing their own group to other groups whilst identifying distinct differences to the important outgroup. SIT maintains that intergroup relations are marked by the ubiquitous characteristic that individuals distance themselves from or discriminate against those they deem members of the outgroup (Sets and Burke, 2010).

More specifically, the identifications of social groups are mostly based on relational and comparative criteria, whereupon people are defined in comparison to members of other groups such as their similarity or dissimilarity to other group members along the lines of 'better' or 'worse' (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979). One defining prediction of this theory is that there is an ingroup favourability. The evaluation of

the own group's image derives from the comparison with certain outgroups based on value-oriented features. Individuals' self-image relies to a large extent on their social categories due to the following underlying theoretical assumptions and principles: human beings endeavour to obtain or uphold a positive and secure distinctiveness and hence desire to increase their self-concept; and their positive social identity is realised through the perception of social groups and their members, i.e. both ingroups and important outgroups, along favourable or adverse associations. Put differently, there is a strong tendency for people to value their ingroup more and regard the outgroup as a rival, a process that generates a discrepancy in favour of the ingroup and disfavours the outgroup. This indicates that people naturally tend to think in positive terms of their own group members and build a favourable self-understanding while associating outgroups more frequently with negative features.

The main hypothesis is that the comparisons of the ingroup and the outgroup encourage individuals to evaluate the ingroup as positive which has the further effect that groups strive to accentuate their differences from other social groups (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979). In sum, favouritism towards the ingroup denotes the propensity to favour members of their own group over other groups when it comes to behaviour or attitudes (Tajfel and Turner, 2001).

Analysis of the political discourse on immigration in the European context demonstrated that discursive dynamics along the identity of ingroup and outgroup show ingroup-favouring bias whilst discriminating against migrants (Triandafyllidou, 2000). However, this tendency varies depending on the nation's historical context, specific characteristics of national identity and present circumstances. For example, in the Italian case, Triandafyllidou found that Italian policymakers do not appear united but an internal diversity was expressed in the form of a triangular discourse. According to this, both migrants and the Italian policymakers are seen as 'the other' in contrast to the Italian people. The government is attributed negative features such as failing "(...) to meet the needs of Our society and deal with the matter" (Triandafyllidou, 2000: 378).

The underlying assumption is that ingroups will more likely express outgroup-disfavouring biases in the form of attributions or memories, for example, when the

social position of the latter in terms of hierarchy and power is regarded as illegitimate (Hornsey, 2008). This ingroup bias means that perceived similarities between ingroup members and perceived differences with the outgroup are underlined (Sets and Burke, 2010). Bias is understood as a manifestation of “(...) social and realistic competition or antagonistic relations between groups (...)” (Tajfel and Turner, 2001: 191). For instance, ingroup members often support policies that produce positive effects for the ingroup and oppose policies that are beneficial for the outgroup (Sets and Burke, 2010). Ingroup bias is driven by the natural motivation to attain and increase one’s self-esteem and self-image (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979; Etchegaray and Correa, 2015).

By building a model of social identity of the American society and using it to measure public views on migrants, Mangum and Block (2018) highlight specific identity dimensions which caused public resistance to legal migration and nationals’ desire for more state expenditure to tackle irregular migration. Their findings, for example, emphasise that the highest priority for people was based on the American identity, that is whether migrants prove to be ‘good Americans’. Those respondents who appear to have an American identity and at the same time think that migrants do not share this identity were likely to view the non-nationals as incompatible with the ingroup identity as they were primarily perceived as members of a rival outgroup. Irregular migrants were particularly regarded as the “wrong kind of people” as they break the law and lack American identity or were very unlikely to naturalise (Mangum and Block, 2018: 7).

The objective of intergroup differentiation and comparison is to gain superiority over an outgroup and therefore is of a competitive nature (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979; Tajfel and Turner, 2001). This comparison process is shaped by three factors: first, the ingroup members must themselves identify with the relevant social group and this group membership must be acknowledged by others outside the group. As part of this there must be some degree of comparability between the groups. Second, the differences in terms of the evaluated relational attributes between the groups must be important for the specific social situation. For instance, language is a specific salient attribute when comparing aspects of identity in the context of French-speaking Belgium and French-Canada, whilst skin colour is more of a differentiating

variable in the context of the United States. Third, social groups tend to compare themselves with outgroups that they deem as relevant, for example, proximity of the outgroup that enables the latter to compete with essential resources such as jobs or housing.

By focusing on the integration of migrants in host societies, Burnazoglu (2017) argues that mechanisms of social identity are crucial for the migrants' integration process as they have already inherited various social identities from their life before migration which is crucial when they attempt to match with the existing social systems and respective social rules in the host society. In order to understand factors that contribute to the success and failure of migrants' economic integration, Burnazoglu emphasises that the social identity framework is useful to understand that institutional and social forces of the host society make it challenging for migrants to enter certain social groups.

Tajfel and Turner emphasise that the mere awareness of the membership of an ingroup and consequently existence of an outgroup can elicit competitive or discriminatory attitudes and behaviour among ingroup members against outgroup members (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979). Measuring media exposure to migrants, another study stresses for the Dutch context that increased reportage on migrants appears to trigger people to remember their own identities in contrast to outgroups and cause negative associations with migrants, particularly emotions of competition and threat (Van Klingereren *et al.*, 2015). In other words, a higher presence of migrants in the Dutch media led to more anti-immigration views, especially influenced by the tone of the news messages.

People are naturally inclined to positive group-based self-identification "to the extent that their group memberships contribute to their individual identity" (Triandafyllidou, 2000: 375). This emerges when in relevant intergroup situations an individual does not act as an individual based on their personal characteristics, but first and foremost behaves according to the group norms<sup>4</sup> (Turner, Brown and Tajfel, 1979; Sets and Burke, 2010). This process is believed to be central to group-related

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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed discussion on the belief system of interpersonal and intergroup behaviour see Turner, Brown and Tajfel 1979.

phenomena, for example, emotional contagion, collective behaviour or social stereotyping of members of their own and other groups. From the SIT vantage point, stereotypes are not only people's static mental pictures but fulfil a social function for individuals (Hornsey, 2008; Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). They can help individuals to comprehend the diversity of their social environment and justify the ingroup's present and past actions whilst considering the sociohistorical context.

Stereotypes of outgroups are often negative and are likely to be activated and perpetuated cumulatively in news media in which outgroups such as elites are held responsible for increasing numbers of migrants. From the perspective of the outgroup, Etchegaray and Correa (2015) looked at the influence of media consumption on migrants' own perceptions of media-created stereotypes in the Latin American context. The study stresses that migrants, when consuming host society media, reported higher perceptions of adverse media reportage. In contrast, when migrants consumed media from their home country, their perceptions of negative media coverage was lower. The findings further point out that the media of the host society in contrast to the media of the country of origin was more likely to use stereotypes and simplification to report on other Latin American migrants. Additionally they argue that the media of the host society tends to report on these groups in a more biased and stereotypical way due to the media's lack of identification with minorities. This is seen as one key reason why the media of a country that hosts migrants will be generally more likely to frame stories about migrants in an unfavourable way than about the citizens of this country.

### **3.2.2 Social identity and populist communication**

Populist messages tie in with Social Identity Theory as populist messages result in the binary framing of socially and politically important issues by frequently dividing between the 'good' citizens versus the 'evil' outgroups (Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). In populist communication the strong group distinction, proposed by SIT, between the positive ingroup and the negative outgroup is emphasised via the perpetuation of stereotypes of certain outgroups. Populist discourses, particularly involving migrants, are an illustration of the social comparison mechanisms that depict non-nationals as



less favourable than nationals and exemplify anti-immigration discourses portraying migration as a threat to Western host societies.

Populism can be understood as a discursive social identity frame with regard to populist blame attribution (Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). Populist ideas are consistent with self-concepts by attributing blame to the ‘corrupt’ elites for the struggles of ordinary people and by promoting a politicized self-concept of citizens who feel that the government is unwilling and consequently fails to represent their interests (Reinemann *et al.*, 2019). Among right-wing populists, for example, the self-image of deprived citizens is prominent and often triggers a national understanding of ordinary citizens who view foreign or ethnic minorities as threatening in light of competition over social and cultural resources. This boundary marking of the ‘us’ and ‘them’ reflects the social comparison process within SIT which seeks to enhance the ingroup’s self-esteem. In populist communication, this juxtaposition tends to create a blameless ingroup and a culprit outgroup. In terms of the outgroup a distinction is made between individuals on a vertical level such as political elites and on a horizontal level, for example, migrants.

Key rhetorical elements used by anti-immigration politicians are often based on the identity-related notion of a nation’s territory as ‘private property’ with their citizens being victims of an alien invasion. In an interview with the *Guardian*, the first Nigerian-born senator, Toni Iwobi, of the anti-immigration Italian Lega Nord party vehemently stressed that his party is not against immigration but against ‘illegal immigration’ (The *Guardian*, 2018). He emphasised that immigrants are desired in Italy as long as they abide by the law and contribute to the country. This kind of argument could also be observed in a study that deals with the perception of migrants with a focus on their economic potential (Huot *et al.*, 2016). Economically skilled, productive migrants are portrayed as desirable while unskilled individuals are less prioritised. With regard to the latter, they are often blamed for competing for limited local resources.

For those who use a populist style, the construction of a breakdown and crisis situation is a driving force for their success (Moffitt, 2016; Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). Such social construction entails homogenising processes of the ingroup by which the national community is viewed as deprived and understood as victims of the

outgroups. Examples are high numbers of arriving migrants in Europe, austerity measures with a negative impact on ordinary citizens' living standards or the lack of representation by political elites.

Populist messages are repeatedly criticised for oversimplifying complex issues and hence misleading the public's understanding of the problem (KhosraviNik, 2017). The critique has been associated with the conflation of the terms 'immigration' and 'refugees' by using them interchangeably in public (Rea *et al.*, 2019). Such conflation is problematic as it can lead to less public sympathy towards vulnerable migrant groups and can obfuscate crucial facts (Arif, 2018). For example, regardless of their EU membership, the UK still has the same obligations towards asylum seekers and refugees that arrive on their soil according to international law (Devine, 2015).

Some scholars express concerns that migrants are a vulnerable target for scapegoating particularly in times of multiple crises such as economic hardship and already existing negative views on immigration will intensify negative views (Rea *et al.*, 2019). The public and political representation of migration as a security issue is a key feature in populist communication. The securitisation of migration explained above by the social representation theory is very much in line with populist communication and SIT on migration. Zunes (2017) notes that the framing of a 'refugee crisis' in combination with several recent terrorist attacks across European cities resulted in increasing xenophobic, Eurosceptic and islamophobic public sentiments. These developments were particularly manifested in the electoral gains of right-wing parties such as the Alternative for Germany, the National Front in France or the Lega Nord Party in Italy that advocate anti-immigration agendas across Europe.

Relatedly, scholars argue that extremist nationalist parties spread rhetoric by focusing on protecting the borders of their country and expressing discriminatory opinions associated with anti-immigration, Islamophobia, chauvinism or homophobia (Lähdesmäki and Saresma, 2016). These populist right-wing parties have in common that they perceive immigration as a key concern to their societies. They typically emphasise that immigration policies are too liberal and criticise the

development of multiculturalism which in their view threatens traditional values. In other words, these expressed fears relate to the social identity of the host society which aims at maintaining and protecting its ingroup's way of life.

In this vein, Rama and Santana (2020) pointed out that the scholarship on populism tends to associate the rise of populist right-wing parties with an electorate that is against mass migration and multiculturalism whilst viewing foreigners as a threat to their livelihoods. Those voters and politicians who have more conservative views on migrants' rights, tend to be more 'right-authoritarian' and place high importance on social and cultural values by preferring political measures that are more control-oriented towards migrant communities and their social integration (Hix and Noury, 2007).

The dramatization of migration as a threat is then linked to the demand for policy makers to take prompt actions (Moffitt, 2016). The notion of crisis in populist communication is repeatedly linked to the breakdown between nationals and their political leaders as well as concerns over the control of migration. In other words, the representation of migration along the discourses of threat, crisis, and breakdown suggest a broader distrust of governance and politics in contemporary societies that are often complicated and slow. Compared with this, populist communicators frequently instrumentalise politics by putting forward short-term and fast responses.

The position of left-wing political parties appears to be less clear-cut. Individuals with pro-immigration attitudes are believed to be more likely to vote for left-wing political parties as these are likely to be more liberal towards migration (Rama and Santana, 2020). These voters and political parties are seen as the 'left-libertarian' in their orientations who promote the rights of migrant communities as well as permissive, liberal migration policies based on equal opportunities and treatment (Hix and Noury, 2007).

Nevertheless, studies showed that the notion of 'nationalism' and anti-immigration views are features that both radical right and radical left voters can share (Rama and Santana, 2020). In other words, voters from these two ideological blocks show similar attitudes towards migration with negative views on migrants' cultural and

economic impact. Scholars rightly emphasised that the process of securitising migration is not only specific to a few extreme right political parties, but a range of actors including government representatives, and the media perpetuate these practices (Huysmans, 2000; Ibrahim, 2005).

A further central element in populist communication is the framework of causal responsibility attribution with the assignment of blame being the essential characteristic of populist strategies (Corbu *et al.*, 2019). Blame frames are black-and-white discourses articulating a simplified solution to people's issues. Culpable elites or other outgroups are held responsible for issues faced by individual citizens' or the threats posed to them, such as unemployment or feelings of injustice. This type of framing of outgroups as explicit culprits for societal and political problems insinuate that these social groups are the origin of all people's social misery. In line with Social Identity Theory and the notion of maintenance of positive image of the self and positive attribution to the ingroup, populist messages use external causes for the crisis that threaten citizens and shift responsibility from the 'good' ordinary people to the 'bad' others. As a result, blame attributions to outgroups are more salient in populist messages. Moffitt emphasises that populists appeal to 'the people' by not only targeting those in power but also specific 'others' (Moffitt, 2016) such as migrants and asylum seekers. The 'other' is commonly labelled as enemies of the nationals and usually linked back by populists to 'the elite'.

One recurring argument is that 'liberal elites' allowed the rise of migrants who are seen by people as a threat to their lives. As Moffitt illustrates: "In such cases, it is 'the elite' or 'the Establishment' that is the source of crisis, breakdown, corruption or dysfunctionality, as opposed to 'the people' who in turn have been 'let down', 'ripped off', 'fleeced', rendered powerless, or badly governed." (Moffitt, 2016: 44). Put differently, populist ideas emphasise that the people themselves are not responsible for any issues or crises that they face but mainly the elites or similar political signifiers known as 'the system' or 'the Establishment' are held accountable and should be punished for their failures and actions.

Measuring the effects of news framing on blame attributions, Corbu *et al.* (2019) found for the European context that the typical right-wing strategy of blaming both

migrants and politicians overall did not automatically translate into readers showing adverse cognitive reactions to these groups. In contrast, as for the UK, a negative effect was observed when British readers were exposed to anti-migrant and - politician news blame. In other words, blame attributions on these two social groups led to more pronounced blaming and enhanced stereotyping of migrants and politicians after people read the news articles. The authors suggest that the high population of foreigners in the UK coupled with the latest success of British populist parties might explain this effect. This study also stresses that, for example, blaming only migrants in media messages on an economic issue - in comparison with blaming other groups or no one at all - led to people adopting this blame frame by holding migrants responsible for the respective economic problem. In contrast, news stories that exclusively blamed politicians for economic problems did not cause people to blame this group in any European country studied. One explanation is that the blaming of politicians and their negative public reputations were already very common across Europe such that media blaming strategies against them did not lead to additional negative effects (Reinemann *et al.*, 2019).

It is further argued that this processing bias helps ordinary people to make intricate political issues comprehensible by stating ‘who did it’ and “(...) helps citizens to make sense of political and societal developments by using this attractive ‘us versus them’ framing of societal issues, which makes attributions of responsibility easier and consequent emotions of anger more likely” (Hameleers *et al.*, 2019: 153). Another related study found that information on responsibility appears to be a guiding factor in citizens’ political views (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014). If the national government is credited for the deprivation and disadvantage of hardworking citizens, the likelihood increases that people are adversarial towards their state.

This framework of blame attribution gives insights into the effects of populist communication on behavioural, attitudinal and emotional responses (Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). Such blame attributions send signals in terms of who deserves punishment and who should be rewarded, for example when it comes to gaining political votes. Populist messages suggest the removal of elites and promote a solution centred on the restoration of welfare and the national attachment of people if they vote for the populist political parties. Populist parties tend to present themselves as insightful

listeners and speak on behalf of the ‘ordinary, decent people’ who feel left behind by the political establishment (Hobolt, 2016).

A number of studies indicated that news media visibility can have a significant impact on the success of anti-immigration, right-wing parties. A study by Burscher et al. looked at the effects of media salience on immigration as well as crime on party choice across eleven European countries (Burscher, van Spanje and de Vreese, 2015). A key finding from this study suggested a positive relationship between sole exposure to immigration-related news and the likelihood of an individual to vote for an anti-immigration party.

Similarly, another study also provided evidence for the importance of media content explaining the success of anti-immigrant populist parties (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007). This study highlighted that the prominence of newspaper reports on immigration-related issues increases people’s intention to vote for right-wing parties in the Dutch context. Furthermore, researchers also found that visibility of anti-immigration parties and party leaders in the media has a strong impact on anti-immigration parties’ success (Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden and van Spanje, 2012). Specifically, it emphasised a strong relationship between media presence of these parties and their public support in five of the six parties under investigation.

### **3.2.3 Conceptual and analytical approaches to populism**

The present scholarly literature on populism reveals a disparity in its approaches to understanding this phenomenon. Populist politics inter alia plays a vital role in political polarisation and reorganisation processes where binary moral classifications of ‘us’ and ‘them’ come to light (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2014). Moffitt identifies four key schools of thought on populism that gained importance over the last twenty years (Moffitt, 2016: 11): “populism as ideology, strategy, discourse and political logic”. Despite the lack of academic consensus over a precise definition of populism, the majority of these analytical concepts share the common denominator that populism is marked by a divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ or a so-called ‘other’ such as migrants (Moffitt, 2016).

The notion of populism as an ideology is the leading conceptual idea in the current literature for the last fifteen years (Moffitt, 2016). From the ideological perspective, populism refers to the division of society into two opposing groups, that is the people who are regarded as 'pure' and the elite that are delineated as 'corrupt'. This concise conceptualisation assumes that populism does not appear in a 'pure' form but always co-exists with other 'thicker' ideologies. The ideological definition is useful for comparative analysis to qualify, for example, if a politician or political party can be deemed populist or not.

Ernesto Laclau is the key scholar who regards populism as a political logic moving beyond his original conceptualisation of populism as a discourse (Moffitt, 2016: 10). According to this model, populism is 'the' leading political logic that underlies any political endeavour and politics are based on two opposing groups such as 'us/them' or 'the people/the elite'. In other words, all kinds of politics entails populism as people always demand some sort of radical change in a society. From this perspective, public demand and populist logic are universal and continually articulated via a leader in the form of linguistic and non-linguistic elements. This view provides a more nuanced idea of populism that is not seen as inherently dangerous but rather as an omnipresent characteristic of political practices in general.

Nevertheless, this approach is criticised for its claim that populism is an ubiquitous logic across political practices (Moffitt, 2016). Social movements, such as the alter-globalisation movement, do not necessarily articulate their demands through a specific leader and demonstrate alternative, non-populist ways of political practices. The approach that views populism primarily as a political strategy focuses on the position of the political leader and her/his direct relationship with the group of followers where the leader exercises government power over their supporters (Moffitt, 2016). This approach is also based on a minimal definition of populism. It is problematised that this strategic approach encompasses a range of political strategies and classifies them as 'populist', such as religious movements, but at the same time neglects the ideational core aspects of populism.

The discursive approach to populism sees it as a discursive style which gained popularity particularly in the European and Latin American context (Hawkins, 2009; de la Torre, 2010). From the discourse perspective, populism is regarded as a specific political expression by left- and right-wing political actors in the form of text-based materials or speech acts aimed at encouraging ‘the people’ to turn against the ruling ‘elites’ (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2014). Hawkins stresses that this dualistic notion associates ‘the people’ as ‘good’ based on a unified will, whilst ‘the elite’ is identified as ‘evil’ as they allegedly undermine the people’s will (Hawkins, 2009).

Understanding populism as a discursive concept sees it less as a fixed identity of parties or politicians but rather as dynamic (political) practices that reflect more or less populist features. In contrast to the strategic and ideological conceptualisation, this approach does not tend to support the binary stance by classifying political actors as populist or non-populist (Moffitt, 2016). The discursive view postulates that politicians’ populist attitude can change over time according to whether or how they utilise populist discourses. For the Latin American context, de la Torre stresses that populism is not a phenomenon that only emerges in periods of crisis but is also a repeating political practice in non-critical times (de la Torre, 2010). By measuring the degree of populism in specific written text or spoken discourse, scholars show that those actors who are commonly viewed as populist did not explicitly adopt a populist discourse and other allegedly non-populist actors surprisingly adopted populist discourse very often (Hawkins, 2009; Pauwels, 2011). Questionable aspects of these analyses can derive from issues with their confinement to linguistic elements and do not include visual or performative aspects that go beyond what is recorded in the text.

Moffitt proposes a more productive and nuanced definition of populism, viewing it as a ‘political style’ used by political leaders across the ideological spectrum to varying degrees (Moffitt, 2016: 1). He argues that populism is a unique political style with specific features that takes into account discursive features (i.e. argumentation or tone of spoken and written language) and additionally performative and aesthetic elements (i.e. images, fashion or body language). This approach postulates that there is an interconnection between style and content where style can influence and create content in multifaceted ways.



Theoretical assumptions pertaining to populist communication are useful for this study in order to further explain how binary and stereotypical discourses of ‘corrupt elites’ and ‘bad migrants’ versus ‘good nationals’ can contribute to an overall anti-immigration discourse in the media that might prime online readers to think of irregular migrants in predominantly negative terms.

Previous research highlighted that the contemporary British mass media constructed identities of certain migrant groups as undesirable social groups and turned migration to the UK into an issue of moral panic. Especially the right-wing press was able to play a key role in the rise of right-wing populist parties during the European ‘migration crisis’ and particularly before the British EU referendum (Isentyeva, 2021: 282): “Apart from a series of economic and political motivations, the UK’s decision to leave the EU was likely also the result of a steady flow of anti-European media discourse that was prevalent in and propagated by the right-wing press”.

This research examines media discourses in a similar time frame surrounding the EU referendum and the ‘migration crisis’ and seeks to show if and/or how populist ideas are promoted by the online British press on irregular migration and are salient in people’s comments to express their concerns.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

The combined use of the social representational and social identity approaches has significant rewards for the study of online media and public discourses on irregular migration. SRT provides a suitable framework to explore the construction of commonly shared ideas, beliefs and metaphors about irregular migrants and how these representations are systematically used by the media and social media users to construct a specific narrative and discursive image of the ‘irregular migrant’.

On the other hand, the social identity approach is compatible with SRT as it provides useful theoretical concepts to explain how social media users see themselves as

nationals but also how they position other key social groups in the discourse about irregular migration, namely migrants and political elites.

SIT shows how identity construction takes place in close conjunction with the development and comparison with these important social groups. By incorporating populism in discourses into SIT, the identification of people with blameless ingroups and culprit outgroups highlights that nationals not only feel negative towards migrants, but also dissociate from political elites who they blame for failing to represent their interests. The populist framework particularly helps to understand binary framings such as ‘us versus them’ and highlights processes of blame attributions in discourses where citizens tend to express their personal concerns and hold political elites responsible for their everyday struggles.

These theories help to account for people’s real-life identities and the complexities of their social realities that are constructed in discursive practices by taking into account the broader historical and socio-political context of the studied phenomenon. As the present study examines particular online media and public discourses which are embedded in a specific set of media-political systems, it is important to highlight the situatedness and limits of social representations and identity constructions. Migration is believed to be a key threatening factor for people’s social identities and collective representations. People in fast-paced modern societies are constantly pressured to assess and re-evaluate the various identities that they hold in light of unstable representations surrounding them (Howarth, 2002). Understanding social identity and representation processes and dynamics in public and press discourses is crucial to make sense of why human mobility has been and remains a challenging phenomenon for societies.

## 4 Methodology

This chapter looks at the analytical methods used to address the research questions. This study involved a triangular approach combining quantitative corpus linguistics techniques and qualitative critical discourse methods. Baker et al. (2008; 2013) found this combination more fruitful when conducting Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) than only carrying out qualitative methods.

On the one hand, the corpus method was able to uncover various lexical patterns across the large amount of comments and elicit dominant discourses around salient topics based on frequency of certain terms. This method enabled the researcher to approach the textual data in a relatively objective way given that the software used automatically sorts linguistic patterns in the data by applying specific algorithms. A key weakness of corpus linguistics is a possible disregard of context by not considering links between linguistic themes and its wider context (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery, 2013). To balance this drawback, the findings from the text-based analyses could be framed in the wider context by using qualitative CDA. This method allowed for gaining in-depth insights into the online press dataset and helped to elicit key discourses that were linguistically tailored in a more intricate fashion such as implicit representations (Baker and Levon, 2015).

First, the chapter clarifies the ontological and epistemological considerations of this research. Second, it discusses the relevance of social media data in public discourses and the key considerations for choosing online data for this study. Then, details are provided in terms of how the data, namely newspaper articles and corresponding comments, were chosen and collected on the Facebook website. Ethical considerations specific to this study are further addressed, particularly in relation to the use of online data. The final section explains and points out the suitability of the mixed methods approach chosen for this study, that is Manual Content Analysis, CDA and Corpus Linguistics.

## 4.1 Research philosophy

This section addresses the philosophical assumptions and positions of this study by discussing the ontological and epistemological considerations of combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. The key ontological assumption of this research is that language and society are related in the sense that discourse constitutes society and is situated in a specific social and historical context (Regmi, 2017). From an interpretivist perspective, this study assumes that the world is socially and discursively conditioned and hence knowledge is a compilation of human-made constructions.

In terms of epistemology, this viewpoint aligns with the interpretivism/constructivism research philosophy by arguing that knowledge is discursively laden and the production of knowledge is impossible without interpretation. In order to analyse the discourse obtained from online newspaper articles and responding comments of social media users, this study uses CDA (as outlined below in 4.3.2) which is an interpretive and explanatory analytical approach that explores the relationship between discourse and reality in a particular context (Regmi, 2017). CDA assumes that power relations operate and are perpetuated in a tacit way in society and can be investigated through the analysis of different forms of discourses.

Modern mass media play a key role in constructing discourses and encouraging certain ideologies by focusing on certain issues and mediating primary information, such as governmental reports, to the general public (Islentyeva, 2021). The mediated information and discourses promoted by the mass media are used by the public as a knowledge source that can influence how they perceive and evaluate events in the world. In particular, events and issues concerning migration can evoke strong feelings and personal concerns among the general public. This is especially true for the British context and the pro-Brexit vote which was based on political anxieties orchestrated around migration in which migrants have been instrumentalised for years and made responsible for lack of work, low salaries and miserable public services faced by British citizens (Anderson, 2017). Based on this view the author of this study adopts an interpretivist viewpoint in the qualitative analyses of the social media comments and the newspaper articles surrounding irregular migration. This

point of view helps to take into account the subjective elements of individual comments and how expressed opinions are linked with the broader socio-political environment (Regmi, 2017).

Furthermore, this study also acknowledges the importance of including observable data to acquire knowledge about the phenomenon of irregular migration. In this undertaking, the researcher gears towards a more positivist perspective by incorporating data and facts in the form of migration-relevant statistics and by systematically analysing numerical patterns in the news coverage and comments. In terms of the latter, this study uses quantitative analytical methods located in Corpus Linguistics and quantitative visualisation tools which serve to strengthen the legitimacy of the research and to complement the qualitative methods.

Following Dieronitou (2014), this research overall adopts a ‘hybrid approach’, suggesting that quantitative approaches can be substantiated by qualitative considerations and vice versa. On the one hand, qualitative (concordance) analysis was undertaken for data that was generated by Corpus Linguistics to interpret and illustrate how specific terms are used in their actual context. This process is inductive and aligns with interpretivism. On the other hand, data derived from the Manual Content Analysis were quantified to show changes of news narrative elements over the selected period. This technique postulates a more deductive approach and hence has positivist underpinnings. These examples show that the combined use of Corpus Linguistic techniques and discourse-analytical methods do not have to contradict one another’s philosophical underpinnings. Instead, deployed jointly, they can offer efficient ways to uncover dominant language patterns in large text data, while providing sufficient access to documents that allow the researcher to interpret these patterns and contribute to critical research of media discourses (Allen and Blinder, 2018; Islentyeva, 2021).

## **4.2 Keyword-based online data collection**

### **4.2.1 Online articles of ten British newspapers**

Social media data was selected as the focus for this study for a number of reasons. The online press coverage and the social media comments in response provide insight into the public discourse on irregular migrants in the UK. As other scholars have recognised, social media are an integral part of public opinion and people participate in the public discourse by sharing, liking or re-posting and thus is vital for contemporary discourse research such as this present study (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2015; Vollmer and Karakayali, 2017). Analysing social media data allows insights into the beliefs and opinions of members of the public as well as how they are formed, shared and communicated (Lai and To, 2015). In this context, one promising aspect of social media data relates to the fact that people do not suspect that they may be observed. This provides an arguably more genuine perspective than interviews as social media users behave more naturally compared to study participants who might tailor their responses in interviews, for example, as they know that they are being studied for research purposes (Salganik, 2018).

However, a critical aspect of online interaction is that people can be less engaged and do not need to stand by what they say given that they are able to leave the social media website at any time, for any reason and do not have to instantly deal with the effects of their expressed views (Bouvier, 2015). This study acknowledges that commenters might not be completely honest in their expressed views, but in presenting these opinions publicly, they shape the public discourse and hence provide a credible focus for analysis. The omnipresent use of social media in the everyday lives of Western people is undisputed and therefore makes social media a “valid way to study impressions of and attitudes towards migrants from particular groups” (Reips and Buffardi, 2012: 1413).

Additionally, social media platforms are widely used sources of news and tools for multimodal discursive strategies by diverse individuals and groups (Helfrich and Rueda, 2016; Nielsen, 2017). With the rise of technology across the world, British

citizens increasingly make use of the digital world and choose easily accessible information to find their news. In the UK alone, 92% of the population in 2016 can access the internet. A survey conducted in 2016 by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford asked people in the UK about their most widely used source of news (Nielsen, 2017). After television, British citizens primarily turn to digital media such as social media, apps, search engines or websites as the main source of information about politics and public affairs. This is especially true for people under 45 in the UK.

It must be noted, however, that there are still differences in news usage between age groups, so people in the age group 45 and older turn to television for news rather than consume online news. Studies show that people in the UK increasingly use social media for other matters in their daily lives in general, so they equally do this for news consumption by getting news from posts on social media (Nielsen, 2017; Jigsaw Research, 2019). 28% of respondents of the Reuters study reported that they get their news from Facebook (Nielsen, 2017). Only BBC online was more popular, with 51% of respondents saying that they use it as the main source of news in the same year.

Facebook is one of the most popular online social media platforms with regard to news and information consumption in general (Housley *et al.*, 2014; Ernst *et al.*, 2017). This social media platform is predominantly regarded as a social networking service that allows posts and comments up to a maximum of 5000 or 8000 characters respectively, with users sending 9 million messages per hour in total. In the UK, Facebook ranks first as the most popular social media website in 2019, with over 35 million users. Given that the UK's population is an estimated 66 million, it can be concluded that more than half of British citizens have a Facebook account.

Despite the fact that the British media landscape is changing in the face of the aforementioned rise of digital developments, the mainstream newspapers still occupies a leading position in public debate and policy narratives (Allen, 2016; Allen and Blinder, 2018). Others further argue that newspapers provide narratives and representations that are usually referred to as integral aspects of the public discourse and continue to influence the nature of public debates (Balch and Balabanova, 2017;

Vollmer and Karakayali, 2017). Therefore, in recognition of the importance of traditional newspapers, this study has chosen to embrace the intersection of online and print media by incorporating the digital version of news articles published by British newspapers on their social media accounts.

Following Allen (2016), the ten newspapers as shown in **Table 4.1** were selected that represent a range of different types of publication (broadsheets, tabloids and midmarket papers), of political affiliation (left-wing, centre and right-wing) of the British press and all have a wide circulation. Although British newspapers are not explicitly affiliated with a political party, they are tilted to various ideological orientations (Allen and Blinder, 2018). Furthermore, Allen (2016) highlighted in his study that the ten chosen newspapers used the term ‘illegal’ most often from 2006 to 2015 to characterise immigrants. Considering this high level of attention to the ‘illegality’ of immigrants among the British press, this thesis takes a closer look at this type of migration prevalent in the British press coverage by analysing UK online news articles on irregular migration.

**Table 4.1**      *The ten British national newspapers chosen for the analysis of this study*

Left-wing	The Daily Mirror The Guardian The Independent
Centre	The Financial Times
Right-wing	The Express The Daily Mail The Daily Star The Sun The Telegraph The Times

This research obtained 244 online newspaper articles (see appendix B) and 22,967 corresponding comments in total. These two datasets were selected to acquire a rounded view of the interrelationship between newspapers’ media coverage of irregular migration and public opinion. Press data and publicly available reactions



expressed by members of the public represented for this study a relevant part of the online public discourse on irregular migrants. Both datasets were systematically sampled and checked for appropriateness to make sure that they fulfil the criteria of interest for this study, that is a reference to irregular migration in the British and European context published between 2015 and 2018. This type of sampling ensured the relevance of the data in light of the research questions and allowed analytical comparison between the articles and comments in terms of context, format and content.

This research is embedded in an analysis of key political events and changes that influence public perceptions of migration between 2015 and 2018. This period has been chosen because it covers the so-called ‘European migration crisis’ as well as the pre- and post-Brexit-announcement time span. The 2016 referendum on the UK’s membership of the EU has been identified as a divisive event during the chosen period as it emphasised how concerns about immigration divided Leave and Remain voters (Hobolt, 2016). The genealogy of the migration-relevant socio-political events is set out in chapter 5. However, this thesis does not seek to ascertain whether the online press and social media discourse on irregular migration changed in the wake of the EU referendum or any specific socio-political event. It offers a broad perspective on how the 4-year socio-political dynamics surrounding specific migration issues in the British context can play an integral role in the construction of certain discourses and the promotion of political agendas. Thus, this thesis aims to analyse how the discourse on irregular migration is constructed in the contemporary British press during a time of several socio-political changes affecting public and media discourses.

This approach allows insights into the online public debate on irregular migration on a popular social media platform and possible discursive changes over time. Articles about irregular migration in other countries, such as the United States of America, were not considered due to the different societal and political migration context. Sampling adequacy and saturation are verification strategies that were used in this thesis to ensure comprehensiveness and quality of the data (Morse *et al.*, 2002). Saturation of data means that the researcher reaches a point where no new data or information can be obtained and sufficient data is collected about the studied

phenomenon. Sampling adequacy is evidenced by saturation and denotes that the chosen sample consists of data or participants that best represent or are knowledgeable about the topic under investigation.

In order to reach the largest amount of available data and obtain data saturation, the keywords ‘illegal immigration’ and 48 combinations of synonyms of these terms were used (see appendix A). These words were chosen as they represent those most widely used by the public to describe irregular migrants. Relevant online newspaper articles were identified and collected using specific search terms on the social media platform. The Facebook account of each newspaper was examined and the reports on irregular migration were searched using the available search engine on the account’s page. This action is an essential part of examining social media data as it reflects talk that is basically available and searchable (Zappavigna, 2012).

The Facebook account-specific search engine allows the user only to look for keyword-related content within the account, but does not offer any in-depth search functions such as specific time spans. Consequently, the results displayed were largely not in chronological order and manual screening of the posted newspaper articles was required to select articles published within the selected time span and coverage on irregular migrants in the UK or in Europe. This data collection process has some limitations. The data gathered relies on the search results and archiving made available by Facebook. It is possible that Facebook did not provide all available newspaper articles because of its opaque algorithms that control which content is made visible to the public.

All identified articles were subsequently searched by their headline and downloaded from the Lexis-Nexis database ([www.lexisnexis.co.uk](http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk)). Lexis-Nexis was chosen as the downloaded version of the newspaper articles contain important metadata such as date of publication, the name of the newspaper and author’s name. It must be noted that the day of publication refers to the date when the article was last updated. This applies to a few articles that were amended by the journalist or newspaper at a later time. As some posts were not traceable on Lexis-Nexis, these articles were downloaded directly from the newspapers’ websites. Every downloaded file was

given a unique and clearly attributable ‘article ID’ in the format of:

‘<publication\_date>\_<newspaper>’, e.g. 20160205\_DailyMail

In accordance with the research aim, that is, to explore public opinion about irregular migrants, this study considered additional methods such as interviews with a number of public stakeholders to understand views on this group of migrants. However, this method was deemed less suitable as it did not allow a broad insight into the public discourse on irregular migration like the analysis of online press and responding social media comments.

Furthermore, following a small pilot project at the beginning of the study based on data from the social networking service Twitter Inc. ([www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com)), a comparison of data from this website and the social media platform Facebook Inc. ([www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)) was discarded as both platforms revealed little comparable data characteristics due to various communication features. For example, Facebook and Twitter have different original objectives. Twitter primarily constitutes an information network where messages called ‘tweets’ are restricted to 280 characters for almost all languages. In contrast, Facebook is predominantly regarded as a social networking service that allows posts and comments up to 5000 or 8000, respectively, characters maximum. Research finds that the profile of the average Twitter user is characterised by a lower age, higher education, more urbanisation and higher socio-economic situation compared to the average population (Ernst *et al.*, 2017). In contrast, Facebook is known for higher popularity and users of more mixed social backgrounds. Considering these differences in terms of analysing and comparing the interactions within and between the platforms, the comparison between Twitter and Facebook was deemed inappropriate because of the demographic differences.

Facebook was ultimately considered as most suitable for this research as it provides a coherent data set in terms of comparability and sufficiency. Investigator responsiveness (Morse *et al.*, 2002), whereupon the researcher demonstrated sensitivity and flexibility by being open to changing sampling plans over the course of the study, was crucial for this study to establish research rigour, and continually assess credibility of findings. This iterative approach was adopted by moving back

and forth between data and design to attain congruence in relation to research questions, existing literature, data collection methods and analytical framework.

#### **4.2.2 Comments on newspaper articles**

Facebook allows users to comment on every post being made. Such web-based public commentary options in which various Facebook users usually express their views on the content of the post appear in a list below the post. In terms of retrieving all comments which respond to the selected online newspaper articles, an automated method with the Facebook graph explorer ([www.developers.facebook.com/tools/explorer/](http://www.developers.facebook.com/tools/explorer/)) was used. This type of data retrieval allows the download of all publicly available comments of a specific post and saves them in a uniform manner in a table. The procedure was carried out for every online article in order to retrieve all available associated comments. This sampling method ensured completeness and comprehension of data.

It must be noted, however, that Facebook restricted the use of the Facebook graph explorer to retrieve specific comments from July 2018. In this year, online data access and sharing sparked a global outcry with Facebook's unprecedented data sharing that allowed the exploitation of the data of 50 million users. Following this so-called 'Facebook Cambridge Analytica data scandal', the website limited the automated collection of its data for individuals and researchers and introduced a new permission system with stricter terms under which all apps would have to submit to a review (Rieder, 2018). As a result, it has become considerably more difficult for researchers and individuals to access Facebook data. To adapt to these new challenges, missing newspaper articles and respective comments for the period 01.07.2018 until 31.12.2018 were acquired manually.

One frequently discussed property of social media - and big datasets in general - is the 'bigness' regarding the size of the data collected and analysed (Salganik, 2018). Large-scale data, if used correctly, can decrease random error and lead to powerful insights such as the study of rare events. However, high data volumes can also increase systematic error. Neglecting systematic errors could mean that researchers risk using high quantities of data to get concrete estimates of an insignificant

quantity. This is linked to the fact that big data sources are often ‘dirty’ which means that they contain data such as automated bots or intentional spam which are not of interest to researchers. Whilst in the analogue age most of the data used for research were crafted for the purpose for research, the use of big data for research in the digital age requires repurposing as the data were created and collected by companies or governments for non-research purposes such as profit making (Salganik, 2018). Social media platforms, for example, do not sample users or provide comparability over time. Considering these issues and in order to ensure the quality of the data, all social media comments in this research were ‘cleaned’. This process was carried out by removing ‘dirty’ elements to get the data to a point where the actual data of interest, that is social media users’ reactions to the newspaper articles could be analysed. ‘Negative cases’ such as non-verbal expressions in form of ‘emotion icons’ or any form of advertisements, for example, of car sales were deleted. This type of sampling was used to avoid irrelevant data and to ensure that all data acquired contained only views of social media users on the news.

It also must be noted that migration data visualisations such as images accompanying news articles were not analysed in this thesis due to the limited scope of this study. Although visual representations can be crucial to communicating information and understandings about migrants (Allen 2021), such analysis requires an additional coding scheme to interpret the results. In addition, this thesis employs a multi-layered comparative analysis by examining both online news and social media comments through qualitative and quantitative methods. The use of images would have required a different data retrieval method than the one used with the Facebook graph explorer. In light of the above mentioned access issue with collecting Facebook comments for the second half of 2018, the analysis of images would not have been feasible in the given study time.

This study does not claim out-of-sample generalisations of the conclusions for all public online discourse on irregular migration. Instead, following Salganik (2018), it argues that the strength of the collected data in this research lies in its ability to allow for data and results comparisons within the sample. The selected online newspaper articles and responding comments share the same characteristics in terms of format and content reference and are therefore well suited for within-sample comparisons.

### **4.3 Ethical considerations**

As the digital environment is still a relatively new area of study in social sciences, there is inconsistency and vagueness in ethical guidelines, laws and norms in the digital social research community (Salganik, 2018). There are ongoing international and interdisciplinary debates on the ethical norms and standards that might be required for research on the internet (Reips and Buffardi, 2012). Social research in the digital environment has different properties than in the analogue age and thus involves new ethical uncertainties and challenges resulting from the new sources of data (Salganik, 2018). Key areas of ethical concern within social media research pertain to the nature of the data (public/private) (1), the need for informed consent (2) and anonymity (3) (Larsson, 2015; Townsend and Wallace, 2016). This thesis addresses these central areas as outlined in the discussion below.

Ethical issues could arise in relation to data abuse and risks of ownership, access and disclosure (Elliott and Purdam, 2015; Salganik, 2018). For instance, there is still a lack of consensus among researchers, policy makers and activists over the notion of privacy of digital data. Despite the existence of terms and conditions on privacy and content, ethical issues in relation to data protection and copyright when people's lives are being scrutinised persist (Reips and Buffardi, 2012). A key aspect of ethical considerations associated with this thesis regards the question whether the used social media data can be considered private or public. This study works with textual data in the form of online available newspaper articles and publicly observable Facebook comments that are both visible to the public. In contrast to private Facebook groups, newspapers target a public audience and therefore this study argues that corresponding social media commenters should expect their reactions to be visible to the online world.

One key ethical aspect refers to the fact that researchers using digital data can be in a more powerful position compared to the past as they are able to observe and research individuals' behaviour without people's informed consent or awareness and remain anonymous themselves. To avoid this issue, no specific Facebook users and profile owner identifiers were of analytical interest for this study as it deals with existing text data in the form of comments. Therefore, this research did not require the active

participation of individuals and consent forms were not needed for the data collection and analysis.

In terms of concerns over anonymity or identity breaches that can lead to potential harm of research subjects (Townsend and Wallace, 2016), uncertainty exists over the extent to which social media data, such as individuals' profile information, can be used for study and publication. The key concern arises from the fact that today's technological possibilities enable someone equipped with the necessary knowledge to identify any individual person who leaves a trail of online activity. Even anonymised data is potentially identifiable via search engines or by other means given that anonymisation of social media is still an under-studied field.<sup>5</sup> For Facebook, it must be noted that the quotation or re-publication of comments generally constitutes the potential risk of identifying individual users. In order to maintain best possible anonymity of social media users in this study and avoid any possible harm to them, the identification risk was minimised through anonymisation of the data by removing the date of posting and obviously personal identifiers such as Facebook account names as mentioned above. In addition, details about the comments used such as publication date or location of post are not included in this thesis to protect the identity of the commenters (see comments displayed in chapter 8).

As a general principle, scholars suggest that accepted fundamental ethical standards should continue to be used in online social media research, that is not to harm research participants and conduct research that improves the body of knowledge (Reips and Buffardi, 2012). This thesis adhered to these principles and more general ethical tenets codified in international declarations<sup>6</sup> which are basic to any research project to ensure confidentiality of possible participants. These policies include the ethical principles of fundamental rights of human dignity, autonomy, protection, safety, maximization of benefits, minimisation of harm, respect for persons, beneficence, justice and respect for law and public interest. Access to the collected

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<sup>5</sup> See Salganik (2018) for a detailed overview on ethical issues associated with social research in the digital age.

<sup>6</sup> Including the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the Nuremberg Code, the Declaration of Helsinki and the Belmont Report.

data of this research was restricted to the author of this thesis and was available for review by the supervisory team. Furthermore, the data was anonymised and stored on computers and in the digital file storage services by Google Drive and Dropbox with password protection.

#### **4.4 Analytical tools: combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics**

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this study to analyse both online newspaper articles and corresponding comments. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative approaches has the advantage of enabling a more comprehensive analysis and increases validity of the study results by introducing quantitative analysis that is easier to replicate (Roberts, Dowell and Nie, 2019). Methodological coherence (Morse *et al.*, 2002) was employed as a verification strategy to ensure that the research questions and the analytical methods used were congruent. The main research question of this study is concerned with the public view of irregular migrants as expressed on social media and how people regard the state's responses. The analysis of the interrogated data underwent constant comparison by using the same analytical categories throughout the study.



#### 4.4.1 Manual Content Analysis

The newspaper data was systematised by means of a codebook to (see appendix C) identify key narrative elements in the newspaper articles as part of the qualitative Manual Content Analysis. This type of analysis was informed by prior research (Allen, 2016) to create a codebook consisting of narrative categories that serve as an analytical guide. The narrative elements included:

- *Type of migration*  
Does the article refer to irregular entry, work, residence or migration in general?
- *Rationale of argument*  
What reasons are given to support the overall argument of the article?
- *Presence of justification*  
How does the article justify its position on irregular migration?
- *Characters responsible for problem*  
Who is claimed to be responsible for this problem?
- *Main messenger*  
Who is primarily saying that the problem/success matters?
- *Content focus*  
Does the article discuss individuals, laws, government action or facts about irregular migration?

The codebook used for this study served as an additional analytical tool which contributed to the consistency of analytical categories (Roberts, Dowell and Nie, 2019). It describes the codes and topics based on detailed descriptions in terms of what a code consists of including examples of the codes. A code is usually a single term or a brief sentence that captures the gist or assigns an attribute to parts of the data. The decision to use a codebook for the analysis of the newspaper articles was considered suitable as news articles include specific narrative features and present information in a certain way. The narrative elements and respective questions asked in the codebook helped to demonstrate rigour within the analysis complemented by subsequent quantitative data systematisation and interpretation. This enabled evidence-based consistency when identifying narrative elements and enhanced the validity of the research.

Following Allen (2016), codes were summarised by defining a 'section identifier', describing the query and the specific codes. The codebook was developed in accordance with the research questions and the early literature review. Each newspaper article was analysed with the codebook manually. Through constant comparison of news articles, narrative elements were iteratively checked with the codebook as a guide for analytical consistency. Once the manual coding was completed, quantitative analysis was carried out to visualise the top answers of every analytical category.

It must be noted that inter-coder testing to prove the consistency of each code and to test analytical instruments between researchers (Roberts, Dowell and Nie, 2019) was not carried out in this study due to limited resources and restricted capacity.

Although the use of multiple coders in a study can increase the reliability of the research processes, inter-coder testing also has its weaknesses. Morse (2006) points out that the use of multiple coders often entails the issue of them being too close to the text and less analytical resulting from lack of shared knowledge among coders.

In terms of issues associated with bias in analysis and interpretation by a single analyst, Becker convincingly argues that any researcher will unavoidably take personal and political sides (Becker, 1967). Sociological research, in particular, is always biased as social phenomena have to be examined from someone's perspective. This individual viewpoint is influenced by the attitudes and arguments of the study object that the researcher interrogates. However, Becker stresses that the essential question is whether taking certain points of view does in fact distort the research and render it useless or invalid. He proposes that the best way to address this issue is to fulfil the standards and principles of valid scientific work to avoid errors that can lead to a distortion of results. In this vein, this study established the above-mentioned impartial verification techniques and acknowledged the limitations of this study by highlighting the limits of the scope of application of the findings and carefully recognising the impact of study conclusions. In line with Becker, this study addressed bias-related concerns by inspecting the study thoroughly and ensuring that the theories and techniques were applied impartially enough. By thoroughly applying the theories and analytical techniques, the researcher critically examined and discussed any matter even those that might refute her personal views.

#### **4.4.2 Critical Discourse Analysis**

This section describes Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) which was chosen for this study because of its various analytical categories that were deemed useful to analyse discourses especially about minority groups and to investigate the online newspaper articles and selected samples of social media comments. A number of analytical categories were pertinent to this study and assisted the researcher to explore how certain social groups are represented in the online discourse. In particular, discriminatory discourse strategies were useful to identify positive presentation of the ingroup and negative portrayal of the outgroup. These analytical tools provided by CDA helped this study to highlight the cohesion of the group of nationals, but more importantly the opposition to the political elites and irregular migrants.

This type of analysis complemented the theoretical framework of this research. It was informed by Social Identity Theory and Social Representation Theory which provide frameworks to explain ingroup and outgroup representations. CDA is a suitable analytical approach to explore the discursive organisation of group-thinking relations and social identity dynamics. The CDA specific three-level text analysis proved to be most useful to examine the discursive group dynamics and representations of the three key social groups of this study - migrants, nationals and government - based on questions about actors, their actions and argumentations prevalent in the discourses. Having said this, CDA provided suitable analytical tools to shed light on the interrelationship dynamics dominating the newspaper articles and responding comments.

Discourse analysis was developed by linguists but its analytical lens has been applied by various disciplines in different ways such as political discourses in the context of inter-group re-definition (Triandafyllidou, 2000) or multicultural discourses concerning the relationship between identities in the online and offline world (Bouvier, 2015). From a theoretical perspective, discourse analysis generally strives to understand the relationship between discourse and power (Pedersen, 2009). For the purpose of this study, the term ‘discourse’ is defined as text, talk or “language in use”, that is, statements made by individuals or groups to represent aspects of the

world they inhabit (Wetherell, Taylor and Yates, 2001; Fairclough, 2004). More specifically, this thesis is in line with the constructivist approach (Pederson, 2009) and assumes that individuals and groups construct ideas about their identities as well as the historical, social and cultural environment they live in. These ideas are (re)produced through discourses in the form of written or spoken communication.

Specifically, this thesis understands discourse as a universal type of social action in which people categorise their world through statements and speech acts that eventually produce collective knowledge and taken-for-granted ideas, beliefs or feelings. Dunn and Neumann (2016: 2) argue that “societies construct and attach meanings and values to the material world around us. They do so through the construction of discourses.” In this way, this thesis argues that discourses represent different perspectives on the world such as the different relationships people have to other social groups. According to this, discourse participants in the public sphere, such as the online press or social media users, use narratives to frame and name problems of political and societal importance. The analysis of discourses can show how specific phenomena in society are taken for granted and the impact of such reality construction. This thesis follows this standpoint and assumes that discourse in the form of speech acts serves as a tool to understand social, political and cultural phenomena such as irregular migration.

CDA provides analytical tools to carefully examine representations of one’s own and other groups in various types of discourses, particularly in mass media discourses (Wodak, 2001; KhosraviNik, 2010). In such CDA, emphasis is usually given to the notion that mainstream media are a mass communication apparatus and thus a powerful platform in which media producers exercise discursive power over media consumers in order to produce and define collective social realities (Wodak, 2001). Illustrative of this would be CDA scrutiny of how the media use systematic communication practices and language in order to represent distinctiveness and differences between nationals and foreigners.

The representation of ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ in mass political and media discourses has been a prominent research subject among CDA studies. In particular, the works of van Dijk and Wodak look at hegemonic relations of self and other representations

(KhosraviNik, 2010). Van Dijk focuses on discursive qualities of xenophobic/racist discourses about ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and migrants overall, whilst Wodak's studies are concentrated on ideologies associated with xenophobia, race or antisemitism. These studies developed numerous analytical categories which were revised by other studies (Teo, 2000; Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002) that created new relevant categories for different social groups.

CDA has been used by various disciplines to shed light on disputed societal and political matters. It is chiefly concerned with intricate social phenomena and not a certain 'linguistic unit per se' (Unger, Wodak and KhosraviNik, 2016: 2). CDA is problem-oriented and seeks to explain issues of power, representation and discrimination by employing a social and linguistic interpretation of discourse. CDA scholars widely used discourse analysis to expose the implicit relationship between discourse, power and ideology and challenge social and political practices that they regard as undesirable.

Unger et al. (2016) and Van Dijk (2000) argued that discourses can contribute to creating unequal power relations between ethnic majorities and minorities via communication practices that represent and position people in a certain way. For example, Van Dijk (2000) highlighted that CDA of British parliamentary debates about migrants and other ethnic minorities revealed how politicians talk about these groups, what social representations they indirectly promote about foreigners and the potential impact of such political debates in relation to shaping public opinion and legislation. Such an intra-group discourse approach is especially useful for this study in order to examine how certain social representations, discourse structures or categorisation of migrants contribute to the understanding of re-produced prejudices against them or their marginalization in host societies.

The core aim of CDA is to deconstruct social power relations and ideologies by systematically analysing textual features of semiotic data at the micro level in order to demonstrate how language-in-use reinforces power hierarchies. Semiotic data refers to any "written, spoken, visual or other meaningful forms and practices" (Unger, Wodak and KhosraviNik, 2016: 2). In Critical Discourse Studies, the term 'discourse' is usually defined as oral or written language-in-use with specific

linguistic manifestations with language being viewed as a ‘social practice’ (Wodak, 2001; KhosraviNik, 2010). This definition assumes that the specific discursive event under investigation is in a reciprocal relationship with its surrounding situation, institution and social structure that shape but are also being shaped by the event.

The term ‘critical’ or ‘critique’ denotes the CDA approach to uncover the interrelatedness of causes and effects of things and to defy taken-for-granted textual meanings. ‘Critical’ more generally also calls on the researcher to keep some distance from the data and to be self-reflective. Jäger (2001) draws attention to the fact that CDA researchers are very much part of the discourse she or he is critiquing and any values/norms are results of discourses in the past and represent a certain position. Bearing this in mind is essential for the analysis and for defending her/his own position.

At the core of the analysis are textual practices and how they create meaning and hence construct certain understandings in terms of social, political and cultural realities in society. Particularly, discourses of collective identity constructs and the representation of social groups with regard to class, gender or nation were predominant topics for researchers carrying out CDA (KhosraviNik, 2010). Furthermore, it is fundamental to CDA to not only focus on textual analysis but also to be context-sensitive, i.e. critically examine the context of the communication practices by critiquing selected access and distribution of texts through broader social and political macro-structural analysis. Such context analysis is crucial as it allows an understanding of why certain individuals or groups, and not others, have access to these data and what that means for them (Hamrita, 2016). The context level analysis was important for this research to understand its findings in light of the fact that social media platforms, such as Facebook, operate in a specific environment driven by algorithms that aim to attract users’ attention. Any online communication must be understood as an integral part of a wider physical-world context (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016).

Particularly, data from social media sites exist in various contexts, i.e. socio-political and media contexts, and this study follows the approach proposed by KhosraviNik and Unger by not regarding digital data as part of the online world separated from

the real world, but instead takes into consideration the circumstances under which the digitally mediated texts are created. Comments on newspapers' social media sites, such as the ones chosen for this study, were viewed and analysed as 'relatively static organizationally controlled texts' which emerge in an interactive context (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016: 6).

### ***Concepts of power and ideology***

Critical Discourse Studies maintain that ideologies and discourses are connected in the way that they constitute one another. Ideologies are understood as collective, coherent value and belief systems that are seen as essential to people's daily lives (Unger, Wodak and KhosraviNik, 2016). It is argued that these joint sense making systems are realised in discourses and other language-based affordances through the process of transcribing an ideology into discourse. The presence of specific discourse topics has a pivotal role for strategically controlling and manipulating the implementation of ideology. The topics have a reciprocal relationship with the ideology and hence represent major analytical categories.

Other scholars emphasise the notion of power in discourses and see them as forms of communication in which power relations in societies are reflected, re-produced and challenged (Balch and Balabanova, 2017). Wodak stresses that most CDA scholars support Jürgen Habermas' proposition that language can be seen as a means for domination as it legitimises relations of organised power (Habermas, 1977; Wodak, 2001). Others further assert that there is a power-knowledge nexus assuming that any relations of power in society can only be exercised and implemented through the production and functionality of a discourse (Jäger, 2001; Ibrahim, 2005; KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). This means that discourse represents the sum of all societal knowledge and is a form of consolidated speech that exercises power through the creation of knowledge and truth. Perceived valid truths that are achieved in discourses are usually presented as rational and reasonable. The securitisation of migration, for example, is regarded as a discursive process in which power is being exercised (Ibrahim, 2005).

The production and reproduction of social domination through discourses in which one group exercises power over another is of great interest for CDA. Those who are subject to exercises of power may show resistance to such practice or contend for power in discursive practices. This ‘power over discourse’ has also been classified as inclusion and exclusion mechanisms (Unger, Wodak and KhosraviNik, 2016). Particularly mainstream and mass media are regarded as powerful discursive platforms for the construction of social realities (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). There has been a power imbalance between media producers and ordinary consumers, with the first holding symbolic power over the latter by constructing social reality in a specific way through intentional media presentation. The management and deliberate choice or omission of discourse topics by major gatekeepers, such as news editors of mass media institutions, is a process in which control over available texts are exercised by those in positions of influence. This is linked with the insight that every discourse is organised by dominance and finds itself associated with a specific time and space in which it is produced and interpreted. The ideologies of those in power, be they individuals or groups, legitimise these dominant structures and make unequal power relationships seem as ‘normal’ and consolidate them by viewing them as social conventions.

However, in light of the new media environment with interactive and participatory communicative modes offered by the internet, social communication and discursive practices of non-mainstream identities increasingly take place online in various formats. KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) argue that the surfacing of ordinary voices and the intermixing of producers and consumers can be viewed as a democratisation of information and decentralisation of mass media power. The new media landscape is characterised as a multifaceted system based on multi-directional flows of content and allowing for the expression of ideas by a range of voices. These bottom-up social discourses are believed to have the potential to manifest social attitudes. Related to this is the argument that this new media communication might have also affected the notion of power behind discourse by compromising the power of media texts overall. However, as previously explained, the political economy and institutional power of the new media technologies which employ some sort of ‘soft gate-keeping’ should not be overlooked. This is true, for example, for social media platforms and their advertising activities.



### ***Descriptive level: three-level text analysis framework***

CDA consists of two analytical components: first, the *descriptive* level engages with the texts and their linguistic features. Second, the *explanatory* analysis deals with the results of the first analysis by contextualising and explaining them drawing on social theories. These two major analytical parts require the researcher to “move back and forth between critical textual, topics and macro-structural analyses and attempt to establish how (micro) linguistic mechanisms at the textual analysis feed into (or fit into) a prejudiced macro-structure while explicating the effects of the control over the topics” (KhosraviNik, 2010: 62).

Following KhosraviNik, this study used some common CDA analytical categories proposed by the discourse-historical approach (DHA) based on a three level analytical framework: actors (1), action (2) and argumentation (3). DHA draws on analytical categories, methodologies and aspects that are relevant in the analysis of social representations of certain social actor(s) in discourse, e.g. immigrants, based on works of Wodak and van Dijk in positive Self and negative Other presentation (KhosraviNik, 2014a). According to DHA, there are certain methodological strategies, which are used with different weightings, in the analysis of “prejudiced discourses against the minority out-groups” (KhosraviNik: 57). The framework developed by KhosraviNik asks two key ‘what’ and ‘how’ questions on each of the three levels. These questions are broadly in line with the DHA’s referential, predication and argumentative strategies. The ‘what’ questions identify and examine what is and is not represented in the text. In other words, they ask what linguistic content is identifiable. The ‘how’ questions are interested in how the linguistic content is depicted and therefore critically analyses the strategic linguistic mechanisms that are employed about what is present in the text. By focusing on representation of actors, actions and arguments involved in a discourse, the overall analysis seeks to understand why they are presented in that certain way and in what combinations as well as thematic categorisations (KhosraviNik and Zia, 2015).

Throughout all three analytical steps, an additional analytical ‘perspectivisation’ technique was used to assess the perspective from which certain textual elements are being made “against all the choices available in that context” (KhosraviNik, 2010:

64). In other words, the presence of certain linguistic elements means the absence of others. CDA consequently needs to understand the lack of elements and why they were left out. In CDA, linguistic foregrounding and backgrounding tools are techniques of selection and salience. Perspectivisation reflects a set of linguistic choices or processes incorporated in the representation of specific ideas or groups by text producers. Perspectivisation is prevalent in text sections where text producers make their point of view in the discourse explicit. The subordinate question pertaining to this analytical framework asks from what perspectives the groups, ideas or arguments are expressed. This ‘perspectivization strategy’ is geared towards the possible reinforcement of ideologies via specific strategic linguistic choices made by the text producers. Furthermore, *intensification* and *mitigation* are frequently used DHA strategies which can manifest at all three levels of analysis. They highlight (*intensification*) or weaken (*mitigation*) a specific point of view. Examples include if the text shows the use of implicit or explicit tone or if points are overtly mentioned or alternatively discussed through allusions, or certain aspects are being exaggerated or downplayed.

**First level - actors:** the first level of analysis is similar to the DHA’s referential strategy and is concerned with the presence of social actors in the text asking what individuals are present and which are not. This level asks how social actors, things, events and processes are referred to in linguistic terms. It also looks at the qualities of their presence. The reasons for such presence also need to be explained and the linguistic processes that perspectivise this presence examined. As for perspectivisation, key analytical categories are, for example

- Naming - the names used to refer to specific actors
- Functionalisation - if the actors are designated by their functions
- Aggregation - if the actors are named in relation to a collective entity
- Positioning of us/them - the use of pronouns to indicate this distinction

**Second level - actions:** this analytical level is comparable to the DHA’s predication strategy and determines what actions are associated with the social actors and which are not as well as the qualities of the social actions. The main question of this level is centred on the question of what characteristics are assigned to persons, objects, phenomena and processes. The connection between actor/action

will also be assessed, that is how the actions are linked to the actors and what contextual impact this might have. Through the perspectivisation process, certain linguistic elements can foster the manipulation and realisation of a specific ideology in the text. For instance, actions can be weakened (*mitigation*) via verbal choices or exaggerated (*hyperbole*); *indirectionalisation* and quotation patterns can be used to generate a (non) factual tone.

**Third level - argumentation:** the analysis of this level critically evaluates the presence and qualities of strategies that are used for the arguments for or against specific social actors. First, what arguments exist in the texts needs to be identified in light of other possible arguments that could be made in this context. This level is interested in the arguments that are used in the respective discourse. Possible reasons why other arguments were not mentioned also requires consideration here. Second, an analysis of the present arguments with respect to how they are formulated regarding the researched social group(s) will reveal the perspectivisation of arguments and how they are used for specific ideological manipulation. Linguistic processes that can influence the qualities of an argument are, e.g. *metaphors*, *illusions*, *fallacies* or *paradoxes*. *Implicit vs explicit* as well as *induced vs blatant* argumentation is about overtly or covertly made arguments for different motivations. *Inductiveness vs deductiveness* of arguments refer to how an argument is presented and the level of *factuality* present in the argumentation.

As part of this three-level CDA analysis, the following set of analytical categories are relevant to this study with their focus on how social groups are discursively represented, particularly accounting for positive us-presentation and negative them-presentation. The below list of analytical categories involve to a great extent discriminatory discourse strategies but also consider more general analytical tools with a view to highlight the opposition to the minority groups and cohesion of the majority group (Teo, 2000; Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002; KhosraviNik, 2010; Scheel and Ratfisch, 2014; Baider, Constantinou and Petrou, 2017).

### ***Generalization***

Ascription and extension of certain qualities, predominantly negative ones, to entire groups without giving details, typically a minority group. The increasing dissemination of negative 'other' presentation on a collective level can result in stereotypes by which the impression is created that certain characteristics of a group are synonymous with specific features, e.g. crime. Social exclusion of the outgroup might be the end result.

### ***Scare tactics***

An increased attention to perceived threats posed by minority groups to the majority group's safety and public order by pointing to statistics and excessive numbers. In this way a sense of panic or crisis can be generated within the society of the majority group and can lead to the hostile views and discrediting of minority groups.

### ***Delegitimation***

Regarding and presenting the outgroup in question or certain aspects as a problem, e.g. cultural issues. This could delegitimize minority groups as violators of laws or elementary social norms and can be used as a strategy to regard them as illegitimate and outlaw them.

### ***Blaming the victim***

Assigning responsibility to the minority group for causing problems or other issues. This is regarded as a form of scapegoating by which all the responsibility is assigned to the outgroup and can reinforce and justify anti-minority stances of the majority group.

### ***Denial of minority voice***

A clear dominance of the mainly white majority community and overwhelming lack of voice of the minority group. This is seen as a denial of minority voices signifying their disempowerment by certain groups of the majority, e.g. experts or officials.

### ***Self-justification***

The outgroup is blamed for constituting a social strain to the majority society. This argument is used as a justification for unfavourable actions or opinions of the ingroup towards the minority group.

### ***Intensification***

Emphasising or attaching great relevance to negative actions of the outgroup, for example, by excessively using quantifying adjectives.

### ***Extensivization***

Describing actions and situations of social actors in depth and with incidental details. A number of aspects of the events in question are taken into consideration.

### ***Metaphors***

A rhetorical device referring to the minority group stating them as another thing and by doing so the majority group gives access to various negative assumptions about the 'typical' characteristics of minority groups.

### ***Problematization***

Considering aspects and issues concerning the minority groups such as unlawful entry of migrants as a problem that requires a solution.

### ***Victimisation***

Reducing minority groups to powerless individuals and passive recipients of help.

### ***Explanatory level: contextual analysis***

This part of the analysis examines the macro socio-political context and seeks to explain how discourses in society are being produced and interpreted. This also includes the consideration of the nature of the data, possible features about the audience, the genre of communication and particularities of the language. Moreover, the analysis strives for making the interests of text producers explicit by providing text- and context-based evidence.

As mentioned above, one essential analytical aspect of CDA is the contextual analysis which explicates the descriptive findings by relating the discourses to the important contexts. At this additional level, the findings are connected to relevant linguistic and four different socio-political levels through contextualisation and explication processes. The first context-related level is the intra-textual level in which the actors, actions and argumentation within the text are being examined. Further to this, this level attempts to explain the effects of linguistic strategies and choices on the interpretation of textual elements. Next, the inter-textual context level evaluates discursive elements between texts and between discourses and explains the results of text analyses among texts, genres and discourses. The third level is called ‘extra-linguistic’ and refers to the context or situation, i.e. explicates the historical development of specific discursive topics as well as certain “public memories on specific areas” (KhosraviNik, 2010: 66-67). The fourth and equally largest level is the socio-political context that surrounds the discourse topics in which they emerge. This level of the analysis seeks to shed light on connections between the existing discourse and the society’s public collective ‘old knowledge’.

The software programme NVivo was used to assist the CDA process through systematic coding (Roberts, Dowell and Nie, 2019). By constructing analytical coding, the coding process consisted of attaching labels to segments of the data and by doing so, describing what is happening in each segment and developing subcategories for further understanding. NVivo allows the researcher to gather the data about a certain theme into a ‘node’ (QSR International, 2018). The node simply represents a file that is named after the code, i.e. attitudes, and where all references can be saved in one place. The advantage of this method is that all the coded

references can be systematically displayed which facilitates further analysis in terms of comparing texts with the same code. This continual comparison of data and proper documentation contribute to the validity of the CDA approach.

### ***Limitations of Critical Discourse Analysis***

The affordances of data types in the new media environment bring about change and new challenges in communication norms and dynamics (KhosraviNik and Unger, 2016). Online platforms that allow for collective communicative acts can foster existing or create new power relations in societies. Thus far CDA has primarily been applied to traditionally mediated texts such as newspaper articles; its application to digitally mediated communication and context is still emerging. As such, this study contributes to the expansion of CDA to emerging forms of communication. The previously taken for granted notion of power held by media producers for decades seems to become brittle given that new technologies opened up a multi-directional flow of content and consequently broke the one-directional flow of information and text production of one-to-many communications. Digital communication options have been an empowering tool for ordinary media consumers as they offer them the possibility to partake in both text production and distribution.

#### **4.4.3 Corpus Linguistics**

##### ***Automated analysis of language patterns and trends***

This part of the chapter outlines how the comments were organised, processed and analysed using the specialist software ‘Sketch Engine’<sup>7</sup> (Allen and Blinder, 2018). The computer-assisted text analysis tool was chosen due to its suitable analytical features which allow the analysis of large amounts of textual data and hence helped to understand the online attitudes and reactions to news coverage on irregular migrants. Prior studies used this software to create and find word patterns and

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sketchengine.eu>

frequency information in text corpora in order to discover prevalent discourses based on frequent occurrence of terms around a certain theme (Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery, 2013; Pérez-Paredes, Jiménez and Hernández, 2017; Vollmer, 2017; Allen and Blinder, 2018). This tool particularly facilitates the analysis of very large amounts of texts by uncovering frequency and saliency of linguistic patterns and is useful to reduce possible human error (Fotopoulos and Kaimaklioti, 2016). Furthermore, it can aid the analysis by categorising, comparing and quantifying texts and can identify diachronic developments (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008).

Corpus Linguistics can complement qualitative discourse analysis by identifying broader linguistic patterns that an analyst would not be able to quickly and easily recognise based on manual analysis. It is further argued that such automated analysis is more comprehensive than selective and has the advantage of reducing subjectivity, enabling a reasonably high objectivity on the part of the researcher. This approach enables statistical textual analyses and allows a relatively high degree of internal validity of a project given that the analyst can look for linguistic patterns and use corpus-based processes on the data free from personal pre-existing views on the subject under investigation (Brouwer, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2017). In terms of the alleged higher objectivity when using corpus linguistics, Baker et al. (2008), however, point out that researchers always have a subjective input in all stages of analysis, for example by their choice of dataset and what types of analysis are intended to be undertaken. Moreover, the corpus assisted discourse analysis requires the researcher to make sense of the patterns identified and to link them with theoretical frameworks. It must also be noted that such large-scale analysis is limited in what it can reveal as word frequencies cannot identify how language is used, for example, in relation to the tone or rationale of an argument (Allen, 2016).

For this study, the analytical tools provided by Corpus Linguistics and the Sketch Engine software proved to be useful to highlight the key and most frequently used words and hence to identify key discourse themes in the comments' dataset. Quantitative analytical methods strengthen the credibility of the study findings by ensuring the precise replication of research instruments and tools (Noble and Smith, 2015).



The current study used the four analytical features: frequency, ‘keyness’, collocates and concordances. The frequency of words was established with the ‘Wordlist’ feature that creates a list of words based on their absolute frequency. It allows for the generation of all words but can also produce specific wordlists such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. Frequency shows the most frequently appearing terms in a corpus and is able to show statistically significantly more frequent words in different datasets (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008). To investigate the most prevalent opinions expressed in the dataset, the ‘n-grams’ feature is used to identify the most frequent word combinations. N-grams consist of words which appear next to each other.<sup>8</sup> In this case, two word items were chosen to gain a more detailed overview of the multiword expressions used. A list of most frequent n-grams is useful to identify particular discourse markers which might be overlooked when using other features. The frequency analysis is useful to show the saliency of specified terms in a certain corpus (Allen and Blinder, 2018).

The analysis of ‘keyness’ is useful for comparing two datasets and to determine the words that appear more often in one of the two sets with statistical significance. The extracted words are typical of the focus corpus and define its content. “Keywords, which are known to provide a useful way to characterize a text, are usually calculated using two word lists, one from the study corpus (SC) and the other from the reference corpus (RC)” (Goh, 2011: 239). The RC chosen here is the English Web 2013 corpus<sup>9</sup> which is a default corpus in Sketch Engine that represents the biggest available corpus specifically in the general English language with 19,685,733,337 words in total. The keywords feature allows two types of calculation: single-words and multi-words frequency. Generating a keyword list is geared towards highlighting the ‘aboutness’, that is the central topics in a dataset (Baker *et al.*, 2008).

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<sup>8</sup> Words inside n-grams may not necessarily have a relation between them even though they are next to each other.

<sup>9</sup> “The English Web Corpus (enTenTen) is an English corpus made up of texts collected from the Internet. The corpus belongs to the TenTen corpus family. Sketch Engine currently provides access to TenTen corpora in more than 30 languages. The corpora are built using technology specialised in collecting only linguistically valuable web content” (Sketch Engine 2019).

The notion of collocates means words that occur close to another word more often than expected by chance (Brouwer, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2017). The statistical significance of collocates can be tested by looking at their co-occurrence, how often they appear in the corpus and with regard to the overall size of the corpus. Collocational analysis makes it possible to ascertain the most obvious lexical patterns around a subject from where more discourses can be derived. Furthermore, collocates can point towards the meaning of a word under investigation. Sketch Engine's *concordance* feature analyses how a specified word is exactly used in actual context. The data that are then shown can be manually viewed, read and qualitatively interpreted and cross-checked with the quantitative findings. Concordance analysis can supplement all other methodological tools as the researcher usually manually analyses several hundred lines of concordances with the purpose to find wider themes in the dataset that are not identifiable via the other analytical features. In this way, concordance analysis is useful to sort data, to detect ambiguous words and qualitatively examine how certain collocates operate (Allen and Blinder, 2018).

These different analytical tools provided by Sketch engine allow a more sophisticated picture of the overall 'aboutness' of the dataset under examination by looking at both frequency-based word patterns but also focused analysis of specific lexical patterns.

### ***Qualitative analysis of selected sample***

Corpus linguistics can further localise areas of interest for additional analysis (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008). Studies that employ both quantitative and qualitative analysis often also apply the 'downsizing' method through which a sub-corpus is built for further qualitative analysis (Baker *et al.*, 2008; KhosraviNik, 2009; Baker and Levon, 2015). In doing so, the most representative texts can be selected. This down-sampling process can be arbitrary or informed by quantitative analysis, for example, by periods of remarkably high frequency of comments on a certain theme or by focusing on comments that precisely pertain to the three social groups, namely migrants, nationals and government.

This method is conceivable for the present study: first, qualitative concordance analysis was carried out on those comments which contained synonyms of one of the three groups. A word frequency list of all nouns across all years was created and revealed that overall social media users used 3853 nouns. Nouns were chosen to determine which groups social media users most often referred to in their comments. Those nouns were labelled as synonyms that impersonate any individual or entity that is closely related to the three social groups in terms of particular qualities. For example, ‘citizen’ was coded as a synonym for ‘national’ as both categories refer to individuals who belong to a specific nation state and have certain rights such as the right to vote in their country. In a further step, through subsequent manual examination of the four lists those nouns that represented either the group of migrants, nationals or government were coded as respective synonyms. Based on the following criteria, synonyms for the three essential players were identified:

- Migrants: public known nouns that have been used for irregular migrants including legally incorrect terms such as ‘refugees’
- Government representatives: politicians, political parties and policies that can be attributed to British policy making
- Nationals: individuals or groups that lawfully reside in a country and possess legal rights and responsibilities such as paying taxes or entitlement to social benefits

The combination of both analytical approaches is regarded as highly useful as the two analysis strands allow comparability of the findings. Furthermore, the sample for qualitative analysis can illustrate the results of the main corpus by presenting single examples.

## ***Limitations of Corpus Linguistics***

Analysis using Corpus Linguistics (CL) techniques can be limited by the size of the text corpus. A large-scale dataset consisting of millions of words, for example, could lead to analytical interpretations that neglect the broader social, historical and political context if based on automated analysis solely. Consequently, the analysis of the language patterns can appear to be of a descriptive nature lacking explanation or critical analysis given that the language patterns derived from word frequencies are not specific to a theory (Baker *et al.*, 2008; Baker and Levon, 2015). In case of a high number of collocates and only limited in-depth careful reading of concordance analysis, this could lead to misleading interpretations and conclusions. This weakness is linked to the further drawback of CL which is its inability to identify more complex communication strategies such as irony or sarcasm where words and collocates might be used in unexpected ways. This also applies to complex text structures where authors use implicit strategies for communication that CL cannot uncover. On the other hand, issues associated with small corpora that do not take into account other textual information might show too low frequency of word patterns and could lack reliability in terms of statistical significance.

However, this study combines both quantitative CL and qualitative CDA as starting points, so that findings can be triangulated and inform one another leading to clear advantages (Baker *et al.*, 2008). CL analyses the data in a more general and quantitative fashion by revealing general data patterns in terms of saliency and frequency. These quantifiable findings then inform the more detailed CDA analysis by pointing towards certain periods for text selection.

As mentioned earlier, CDA situates the data in a broader social and textual context and complements the interpretation of the data by close qualitative reading. CDA analysis is able to identify specific terms or language uses, such as ‘bogus asylum seekers’, which may be unexpected but meaningful and can be examined along quantifiable aspects in further CL analysis. In other words, the qualitative approach has the strength to give a broader and more detailed picture of the ways certain discursive representations are actually used in the dataset by identifying more subtle language patterns and to interpret these findings in a multi-level, broader context. By

uncovering both well-established and alternative representations, CDA contributes to the understanding of discourses that organise certain representations of social groups and how they are systematically used. Furthermore, CDA can unpack representations that are implicitly stated. The CDA approach in general focuses on less frequent findings and sheds light on outlying aspects that are not necessarily prevalent in the CL corpus. This CDA approach helps to understand certain representations in a more general fashion.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative analyses increases the robustness of the methodology by making use of the strengths of CDA of newspaper articles, qualitative concordance analysis of social media comments, as well as the quantitative identification of broader linguistic patterns in both datasets. Likewise, this approach balances the weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively, in isolation.

## 5 A genealogy of migration-relevant socio-political events

This chapter provides a genealogy of political and social elements that are relevant to the discourse on migration, such as the European ‘migration crisis’ and the domestic policy and economy in the British and, to a lesser degree, European context. Media coverage can be shaped by multiple factors, such as external events, public interest in a subject, or statements of high-ranking politicians (Allen and Blinder, 2018).

Several socio-political changes and key events may have influenced public perceptions and media discourses of (irregular) migration between 2015 and 2018. Therefore, this genealogy of the socio-political context seeks to highlight broader public and political discourses and representations that shaped discourses on outgroups in the UK. Findings from this chapter help to further explain and interpret discourse topics and patterns that are identified in the CDA and Corpus Linguistics analyses by linking broader existing discourses to more detailed linguistic analyses.

### 5.1 Failure in the government’s handling of migration

There is a widespread notion among liberal democracies that the concept of ‘migration’ signals problematic human mobility which constitutes a policy issue and requires scrutiny as well as control (Anderson, 2017). British governments frequently expressed the desire to tackle migration in anti-immigration agendas that fuelled fears of being swamped by migrants of different cultures (Bennett, 2018). As outlined in chapter 1.2.3, the British Conservative party promised in 2010 to reduce the number of net migration to ten thousands by 2015, when the then Home Secretary Theresa May introduced the so-called ‘hostile environment policy’ (Allen and Blinder, 2018). A new British Immigration Bill was enacted in 2015 with the aim to make illegal working a new offence and to allow the confiscation of wages paid to individuals working illegally (Baston, 2016). Further policy measures, notably the 2015 Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Home Office and the Department of Education requested schools to pass on details of school children and their parents to the Home Office in order to identify children of irregular migrants.

In 2016, another Act was passed imposing penalties on landlords for letting property to individuals without legal residence or a work permit. Furthermore, it introduced new sanctions on unauthorised working, further prevention of irregular migrants from accessing services and new instruments for immigration law enforcement and deportation. An additional Memorandum of Understanding in 2017 created a collaboration between the Home Office and the NHS's General Practitioners which included the passing-on of patients' non-clinical information for immigration enforcement purposes such as identifying immigration offenders (Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018: 12). In the same year, NHS hospitals began checking the identity documents of overseas patients and those unable to prove their legal status had been frequently denied services. This controversial agreement was terminated in 2018 following public pressure from doctors, charities and ministers.

In accordance with these immigration policy developments in the UK, the British population had wanted to see the number of migrants reduced for many years. A global survey of public perceptions of migration by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) drew data from Gallup World Poll from 2012 to 2014 and found that the majority of British people would like to see levels of immigration decrease (IOM, 2015). Here, the UK appears to be exceptional in contrast to almost all Northern European countries in which people are more in favour of migration than against. This finding is consistent with the results by Blinder and Richard (2020) who contended that in 2013 more people in Britain than in other comparable countries were worried about immigration. For the same year, he further highlighted that twice as many were more concerned about irregular immigration.

However, despite the above mentioned restrictive measures that clearly aimed at tackling irregular migration in the UK, the above mentioned self-imposed target to reduce migration was not achieved. The net migration rate in fact increased to a record level of 336,000 reported migrants in the UK in 2015 compared to 154,000 in 2012 (Office for National Statistics, 2018). By the end of September 2017, the net migration in the UK was comparable to the level seen in 2014. But the number of migrants still increased overall given that 244,000 more people entered the UK than left. In light of the failed political promise to reduce net migration in the UK, it is not surprising that the British public lost confidence in the Conservative party between

2010 and 2015 (Allen and Blinder, 2018). Whilst in 2010, almost one in three Britons stated that the Conservatives promoted the best policy to address migration in the UK, five years later only 17% of the public shared this view.

Public concerns over migration further rose in the wake of migratory movements in 2015, which became known as the ‘long summer of migration’ or the ‘migration crisis’ (Casas-Cortes *et al.*, 2015; Rea *et al.*, 2019). In light of the escalated war in Syria and conflicts in Iraq and Libya, there was an unprecedented surge in migration of forcibly displaced individuals into Europe with hundreds of thousands of people travelling via Turkey, Greece and the Balkans. This movement was characterised not only by the number of migrants heading for Europe, but also by the media attention around it. This further led to political tensions and disagreement among EU Member States in terms of the processing of the migrants, particularly relating to the Dublin Regulation which governs the movement of asylum seekers within the EU (Menon and Salter, 2015). The majority of the migrants who reached and travelled through Europe did not possess authorised travel documents. Therefore, European countries chiefly focused on unlawful cross-border entry peaking at 1.8 million in 2015. The notion of a European ‘migration crisis’ was stirred up by varying figures regarding irregular migrant arrivals. Frontex<sup>10</sup>, for example, was criticised for publishing misleading numbers of illegal border crossings within the EU in the first nine months of 2015, as their figures were based on double counting the border crossings of the same individuals, which suggested a higher rate (Rea *et al.*, 2019).

In the first half of 2015, the public focused on migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa entering mainly Southern Europe (Rogers, 2016). Public consciousness began to grow with the death of around 1,200 migrants whose boats capsized off the Libyan coast enroute to Italy. In April, EU leaders agreed to increase the budget of Operation Triton<sup>11</sup> and also to combat the smugglers’ networks operating in this region. The second half of the year was concentrated on refugees from Syria and Iraq heading for South-East and later Northern Europe. Following Angela Merkel’s

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<sup>10</sup> Frontex is the common name for the European Border and Coast Guard Agency which is responsible for the EU border management by safeguarding and improving the external borders of the EU Member States (Frontex 2021).

<sup>11</sup> According to Frontex, Operation Triton is a joint border security operation focusing search and rescue operation of migrants by bringing together European border guard authorities (Frontex 2021).



announcement that all Syrian asylum seekers would receive full asylum status upon arrival, political and societal opposition to her ‘open door’ immigration policy began to grow within Germany.

In 2015, at the EU level, the Visegrad Group<sup>12</sup> was able to block a proposed mandatory European-wide quota system in the form of a compulsory resettlement of an agreed number of asylum seekers (Baston, 2016). This system would have led to a modification of the Dublin Regulation and allowed the reallocation of migrants to other EU Member States in order to reduce the burden of the European border states (Italy, Spain, Greece). The UK, among other European countries, agreed to take in thousands of migrants. In July 2015, then Prime Minister David Cameron announced that the UK would increase its acceptance of Syrian refugees from 5,000 to 20,000 in order to prevent further perilous migratory journeys. As a consequence, the UK saw a record of 5,000 asylum claims per month by the end of 2015, compared to over 1.2 million applications overall in European states (Eurostat, 2016). Statistics by the Home Office show that the number of asylum claims in the UK steadily increased from 19,865 in 2011 over the following years and peaked at 32,733 in 2015. However, asylum applications then decreased in 2016 (30,747) and 2017 (26,547) before rising in 2018 (29,504).

Although the majority of those migrants who arrived on European territory from 2015 claimed asylum in a European country, most of them were falsely labelled as ‘illegal immigrants’ in media and political discourses (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015; Rea *et al.*, 2019). This classification is highly problematic as crossing international borders without valid travel documents but with the aim to apply for asylum is not an illegal act itself.

Despite the British government’s promise to reduce net migration in the UK by focusing on tackling irregular migration, the above mentioned events indicate that the immigration population in the UK and other European countries most likely increased. The so-called European ‘migration crisis’ in 2015 resulted in contrary

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<sup>12</sup> Alliance of four central European countries, namely the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, for political and cultural purposes.

media and political responses to these migratory movements. Nevertheless, anti-immigration views were strongly concerned about the group of ‘illegal immigrants’ who crossed several European national borders without valid travel documents. These socio-political events can be influential factors in terms of how members of the public and media outlets perceived migrants in the year 2015 with the primary focus on migrant’s border crossings and increasing number of foreigners who apply for asylum across Europe. Previous research found that when it comes to media and political discourses as well as policy approaches, there is an increasingly observable divide (Castells, 2017; Triandafyllidou, 2018). Van Hootegeem and Meuleman (2019) suggest that different policy preferences among the European public could be shaped by disparate prevailing media and political discourses.

On the EU level, several agreements with various states were achieved aiming at tackling migration to the European continent. An EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF for Africa) was established in 2015 in order to address the causes of irregular migration by providing better support in the Sahel and Lake Chad area, the Horn of Africa and North Africa (European Commission, 2020). An EU-Turkey agreement which was concluded in May 2016 can be seen as a key factor for the reduced number of migrants entering Greece from Turkey (Salter, 2017). The agreement was a mechanism of outsourcing migration control and aimed to close the transit routes in Greece and the eastern Mediterranean. The deal requires the return of individuals from Greece to Turkey who arrived in Greece irregularly. The EU agreed to readmit one refugee from Turkey in the form of a one-to-one resettlement exchange. More importantly, as part of this ‘cash-for-migrants’ deal the EU promised financial support of three billion euros to Turkey for the provision of humanitarian aid for refugees in Turkey, offered visa facilitation for Turkish citizens with European travel plans and assured the possibility of European membership despite its improbability given vetoes from certain countries such as France (Share, 2018). This political deal was the subject of controversial media interpretation with particularly the British media using this as an opportunity to promote anti-immigration discourses as well as criticising the EU’s mishandling of the perceived ‘migration crisis’.

In order to further consolidate its migration policy measures, in mid-2016 the EU established the Migration Partnership Framework which formalised cooperation with a number of African states identified as origin or transit states for migrants based on a number of ‘compacts’ (Salter, 2018). The aim was to reduce the number of migrants taking dangerous journeys along the prominent migration routes. Strong focus was placed on ‘assisted voluntary return’ by which African states, for example, were assisted in taking back repatriated irregular migrants. Additional policy measures adopted by the EU in 2016, such as the strengthening of capacities of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and of the European Asylum Support Office, were believed to be effective.

Compared to the two previous years, the number of migrant and refugee flows from the Middle East and North Africa via both sea (Mediterranean) and land routes (Greece and Western Balkans) towards Europe decreased sharply in 2017 to around 700,000 asylum applications in Europe (Rea *et al.*, 2019). This reduction is mainly seen as a consequence of the above mentioned agreement between the EU and Turkey. Despite this political deal, the wars in Iraq and Syria continued to escalate as well as conflicts in North Africa generating further forcibly displaced people. Migrants began to use alternative routes especially via Spain, whilst large numbers of migrants also were stuck in transit countries such as Libya and Morocco. In light of the agreements between EU states and migration transit countries and the subsequent effect on the number of migrants arriving on European territory, this thesis expected that media attention and general public concerns about irregular migratory movements would decline from 2016.

Despite some progress in the supranational political responses in the areas of migration, there was still an inconsistent level of readiness among EU Member States to take in asylum seekers and refugees and provide sustainable aid to migrants already present in their countries (Salter 2019). This also caused tensions within Member States and led to frustration among citizens. Over the selected period, the seemingly coherent efforts discussed above were continually overshadowed by discord among the Member States with regard to their institutional and legislative measures. The EU still lacked a coherent and collective response to the migration situation with individual Member States continuing to implement their own

measures. In Hungary, for example, by continuing its official anti-immigration efforts, legislation was passed by which any support to migrants, including legal assistance constituted a criminal offence. This legislation particularly affected NGOs working in solidarity with migrants as they were prohibited to approach the Hungarian border within 8 km and to assist people with asylum applications. This lack of harmonisation and coordination in the European migration policy will potentially impact how members of the public and the press view the political handling of the ‘migration crisis’.

The mediatisation and politicisation of migratory movements entailed both outright positive and negative reactions among European citizens and EU governments. In particular, the growing presence of right-wing parties across Europe by the end of 2018 was partly a result of the rising unease of citizens across Europe over the rate of arriving migrants. A stark divide in terms of hospitality and hostility has been found among European states, most notably between Germany and initially Austria and Sweden versus anti-immigration attitudes demanding the closure of borders most prevalent in East European states such as Hungary, or Poland (Boros *et al.*, 2019). According to data from the Eurobarometer, in 2015 and 2016, immigration (followed by terrorism and economic concerns) represented the top concern for European citizens, individuals polled in Eastern European countries showed the highest degree of hostility (European Commission, 2016).

In contrast, research found for 2016 that the majority of the population across various European countries were neither extremely negative nor negative towards their national asylum policies (Van Hootegeem and Meuleman, 2019). A further important finding concerns the correlation between the number of asylum applications and negative sentiments towards immigrants or asylum seekers: those countries with the higher level of received migrants do not necessarily show the most anti-immigration attitudes. Compared to 2012, European public opinion toward asylum seekers was more positive in 2016. The reason for this might lie in the positive political reactions and media frames at the beginning of the ‘migration crisis’ which tended to focus on the needs of migrants rather than their negative impact on host societies (Tartakovsky and Walsh, 2016). Van Hootgen et al. further argue: “Our most important conclusion is that the context of a double crisis -the joint impact of the

economic and the ‘migration crisis’ - did not lead to an overall trend towards a more negative public opinion climate regarding immigration, asylum and refugees” (Van Hootegem and Meuleman, 2019: 53).

As for the UK, the political and public opinion appeared divided. On the one hand, there was a sense of shock over the deaths of migrants; the drowned Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi attracted considerable media attention in 2015 (Jones *et al.*, 2017). In fact, a survey found that almost half of the British population had also become more positive about immigration in 2015 particularly in comparison with the year 2011 (Ipsos MORI, 2016a). These attitudes agree that immigration has had a good impact on the country’s economy and made the UK a more interesting place to live. In addition, considering the specific group of refugees, more than half of Britons (54%) sympathised with them during the so-called ‘migration crisis’ in autumn 2015. The ‘European migration crisis’ which emerged in 2015 was an event that brought public perspectives and policy responses to the forefront of debate. Concerns over the arrival of non-nationals divided European societies in both empathetic and dismissive camps.

## **5.2 Terrorism associated with irregular migration**

After a series of suicide bombing attacks on the London transport system in 2005, the political discourse on migration started focusing on integration, British identity and Islam (Bennett, 2018). This focus already occurred in 2001 when British Asian and White British youths caused riots in the Northern English, poor post-industrial towns Burnley and Oldham. The Labour Party’s counter-terrorism Prevent strategy was taken over and extended by the Conservatives, particularly in the light of the ‘Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’ (ISIS) and its recruitment of British citizens to fight in Syria. Reluctance to accept more migrants was also expressed among the British public in association with foreigners being a potential ‘threat’ to the host society. In 2016, public views on refugees grew more negative: Ipsos MORI observed that 63% of respondents thought that terrorists pretend to be refugees and 51% believed that refugees are in fact economic migrants (Ipsos MORI, 2016a).

Furthermore, during the period between 2015 and 2018, perceptions of migration became interconnected with the threat of terrorism and Islamist extremism, heightened by a series of terror attacks in Europe. For example, the Paris attacks in 2015, as results from a poll show, led to a decrease of British public support for the acceptance of Syrian refugees (Ipsos MORI, 2015b). The perceived link between migration and terrorism made migration an increasingly contentious subject based on anti-immigration sentiment.

In particular in 2015, amid the political attempts to address the migration situation in Europe, there was an overall high number of casualties (151, see Europol 2016) arising from 211 attacks in six European countries. British citizens were among the casualties and injured. In light of these terrorist attacks, the European public reacted with increasing hostility towards migrants along with public perception that Europe was ‘swamped’ by migrants (Casas-Cortes *et al.*, 2015; Rea *et al.*, 2019). 2016 saw a decrease in attacks, with 142 completed, unsuccessful and successful terrorist attacks in eight EU countries with the majority of them (76) carried out in the UK (Europol, 2017). Despite the downward trend in 2016, there was an increase in 2017 with 205 failed, unsuccessful or completed attacks in nine states of the EU (Europol, 2018). The UK once again experienced most of the attacks with 107 in total. The number of victims died in such attacks stood at 68 in 2017. In 2018, the number plummeted, with nine EU countries recording a total number of 129 foiled, failed or successfully carried out attacks (Europol, 2019).

Furthermore, Gray and Franck (2019) argued that these incidents further changed public opinion in Europe, resulting in growing fears over migrants with Muslim identities who were associated with terrorism and rape. In other words, the fear of immigration was firmly linked to the perceived threat from extremist Islam. The security theme was adopted and exploited by nationalist and right-wing parties as a key issue and is believed to have fuelled support for UKIP and contributed to the success of the UK referendum on EU membership (Baston, 2017).

Due to the number of terror attacks across Europe, including the UK, over the selected four years, and the further rise of populist right-wing parties, especially in Eastern Europe, this study expects that criminalisation of migrants will be a relevant

media topic. The association of migration with terrorist attacks has also the potential of increasing negative views on irregular migration among members of the public, particularly between 2015 and 2017 when the number of completed terrorist attacks was relatively high.

### **5.3 The ‘Windrush scandal’**

One outstanding migrant-related event during the selected four-year period surrounded the so-called ‘Windrush scandal’. In spring 2018, the *Guardian* journalist, Amelia Gentleman, broke the ‘Windrush scandal’ highlighting the treatment of people who came to the UK during the period of unrestricted immigration from Commonwealth countries and former colonies between 1940s and 1970s (Vollmer, 2014; Baston, 2019). The British government recruited migrant workers due to post-war labour shortages with the intention to rebuild Britain after World War II (Bennett, 2018: 141ff). In this context, flows of immigrants to the UK in the post-war period started in 1948 with Caribbean immigrants arriving on the steamship ‘Empire Windrush’ (Vollmer, 2014). Their migration lasted until 1976 with 500,000 arrivals in total. They became known as the so-called ‘Windrush migrants’. The legality of the residence of these migrants had not been questioned for decades.

In 2010, the Home Office began making demands on people suspected of being in the country illegally. These steadily increased demands were championed by the then Home Secretary Theresa May with her hostile environment policy. Migrants from the Windrush community who were long-term residents in Britain were asked to confirm their legal status providing respective documentation (Hewitt, 2020). It became evident that many of these people have never been naturalised and struggled to provide the required identity documents. As a consequence, many became destitute due to being denied access to essential services such as healthcare, benefits or housing.

The media coverage emphasised that these individuals were falsely caught up in the hostile environment immigration policy and experienced the full force of its

legislation including detention and deportation. It is estimated that over 60 Windrush migrants had been deported in the course of this policy measure (BBC, 2019). These events were later declared by the UK government and then Prime Minister Theresa May as a mistake made by law enforcement and the hostile approach was renamed by the former Minister for Immigration Brandon Lewis as ‘compliant environment’ (Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018; Hewitt, 2020). As a result, the migrants concerned were later granted immediate amnesty.

This scandal revealed the inherent failure of the hostile environment approach which is believed to have primarily contributed to the ‘Windrush scandal’ and attracted great media and public attention as well as concern in 2018. The state’s handling of ‘Windrush migrants’ showed that the this hostile approach not only targeted irregular migrants but in practice was broadly applied to any individual who was believed to have entered the UK by any illegal means despite of countervailing evidence (Boyle, 2020). The Human Rights Select Committee which examined the Windrush case concluded later that the treatment of ‘Windrush migrants’ manifested a lack of knowledge of Home Office staff about specific immigration laws and rules based on a more general culture of inhumanity and disrespect in dealing with migrants which seems to be characteristic of the hostile environment policy. The then Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, resigned on 29 April 2018 due to mismanagement and was replaced by Sajid Javid. The handling of this group of migrants triggered a controversial public and news debate about the competence and appropriateness of the Home Office in dealing with migrants in a respectful and humane way. Against this backdrop, this study expects that the media and its readers expressed empathy with the group of ‘Windrush migrants’.



## **5.4 The EU referendum and its promise to regain control over national borders**

When David Cameron became Prime Minister in 2010, demands became louder for an EU referendum (Salter, 2017). Since 2013, the Conservative policy intended to renegotiate the terms of the UK's EU membership given that European integration was a polarised issue within the Conservative Party. This was also the year in which Cameron promised in case of his re-election in 2015 he would make the political move towards a new settlement. After his re-election in 2015, Cameron and the Conservative party finally guaranteed the British public a referendum on the country's EU membership (Islentyeva, 2021). In relation to this promise, issues concerning "national sovereignty, freedom of movement, immigration within Europe, and security and border control were hotly debated issues in the UK at the time" (Islentyeva, 2021: 169).

In 2015, the anti-immigration UKIP also achieved the highest vote share (12%) in its history and compared to the three traditional established parties. In order to not lose voters to UKIP, the EU referendum was a means for the Conservative party to preserve voter confidence (Hobolt, 2016). Leave voters were mainly driven by worries about not economically benefiting from a broader globalised economy and free trade agreements based on EU membership. Concerns about migration are not surprising given that the Leave campaign mobilised fears about foreigners which was called 'Project Hate' by Remain campaigners. Moreover, Hobolt (2016) found that those nationals who voted in favour of Brexit felt that migrants, multiculturalism and the EU threatened their cultural and national identity. Martins (Martins, 2021: 7) provides further evidence that the Leave campaign echoed public perceptions which associated especially migrants with crime and resulted in socially accepted notions of an overall criminal migrant 'other'. European migration was found to be used by the British news media as an umbrella term to refer to whole 'suspect communities' which need to be socially controlled despite the fact that migrants were falsely constructed as a threat to society.

The overall dissatisfaction with the government's handling of migration issues is believed to have contributed to the further rise of right-wing parties. The perceived migration threat underpinned the populist campaign which depicted the referendum as the only possibility to regain sovereignty regarding British legislation and reduce migration to the UK. 2016 was the historic year of the EU referendum which rested on the 'promise' of new independence, national renewal and global free trade (Baston, 2017). UKIP and the Democratic Unionist Party were the major parties along with a minority of right-wing Conservatives who committed to the Leave campaign. The referendum results revealed a country deeply divided between presumably 'metropolitan elitists' and 'ignorant racists'. The Remainers' key argument against Brexit dealt with its economic aftermath, whilst the Leavers first focused on the costs of being an EU member and the issue of sovereignty and later added immigration-related issues.

A media study on the Brexit campaign highlights that the news reportage was driven by the specific agendas of the Leave and Remain camps by focusing on issues related to the economy and immigration (Hobolt, 2016). Although economy-related issues dominated the British news reportage in the first weeks of the campaign and might have given advantage to the Remain voters, the media was chiefly concerned with immigration-related aspects in the last weeks preceding the EU referendum which possibly contributed to the success of Brexit vote. Findings suggest that older people tend to be more worried than younger ones. Concerns about the number of migrants remained strong: a survey found that in 2016 around half of the people in the UK were uncomfortable with the level of immigration and thought that there were too many immigrants in the country (Ipsos MORI, 2016a). Most people therefore still wanted to see the number of immigrants reduced. This desire was more prevalent among Brexit Leave voters of which 77% were in favour of reduced immigrant numbers, compared to Remain voters (38%) (Ipsos MORI, 2018).

The analysis of survey data by Hobolt (2016) further reveals that migration was the key argument in favour of a Brexit vote used by the Leave voters, whilst Remain voters centred on the danger of an unstable British economy. British nationals who were less educated and economically more vulnerable in particular expressed fears related to the presence of migrants. In contrast, Remain voters showed higher levels

of education, were younger and seemed to gain more economic benefits from globalisation.

In addition, around half of the British population expressed dissatisfaction with the way the government dealt with immigration in 2015, 2016 and 2018 (Ipsos MORI, 2015a, 2018). 2017 and 2018 were dominated by Brexit negotiations. In general, the Brexit process continued to be complex and fractious with numerous legal and parliamentary obstacles including three Cabinet resignations. In the wake of David Cameron's resignation following the EU referendum defeat, Theresa May was elected Conservative party leader in July 2016 (Islentyeva, 2021). Another general election took place in 2017, in which Theresa May sought for a public personal mandate in her role as Prime Minister and for the implementation of Brexit. Contrary to the Conservatives expectation, they lost votes in this election whilst the Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn became popular during the election campaign (Baston, 2017). Against this background, public opinions continued to show strong divisions over the EU referendum.

In terms of the British media coverage in 2016, this study expects a heightened negative reportage on migration-related issues before the EU referendum given the fact that populist campaigners and Leave voters strongly linked UK's exit from the EU to a decrease of arriving migrants to the UK by regaining control over its national borders.

## **5.5 Economy: ongoing challenges for the British public**

Anderson draws attention to the fact that the EU referendum should not be simply seen an expression of political failure which allowed too many migrants into the UK: "It was not the migration policy failure that lay behind Brexit, but the long-term political success of scapegoating migrants" (Anderson 2017: 1533). This scapegoating of migrants must be understood within the ramifications of massive government austerity programmes which followed the financial crash of 2007/2008. Tax increases and a number of major cuts in public services were fundamental consequences of the economic crisis and led to an overall lower standard of living in

the UK including job insecurity, affecting especially public sector jobs and wage stagnations (Cherti 2014: 2). One major measure was directed at benefit recipients of working age: policies were introduced to bring down the levels of support for this group and new ways of assessments were adopted to determine people's need for support (National Centre for Social Research, 2017a).

Furthermore, wages in the UK had seen a strong decline between 2008 and 2014 (Tilford, 2016). This affected mostly those in receipt of minimum wages. Tilford argues that even though there is no evidence that this economic development was linked to immigration, in the public this causal relationship was still very prevalent. The shortage of housing is another crucial issue for the UK, given that house construction has been below requirement for 35 years. As a result, people, especially on low wages, do not live in satisfactory accommodation. Compared to European countries, Britain has the smallest new homes in terms of size. Underfunded National Health Service and education system with waiting lists for school attendance and medical appointments are further drivers of anti-immigration attitudes. IOM's (2015) report further emphasises that perceptions about immigration are related to people's views on their country's economic situation. This has been found for almost all global regions, including the UK, where people who deem the economic conditions in their country 'fair', 'poor' or 'getting worse' are twice as likely to have a negative outlook on migration than those with positive perceptions of their country's economy. Similarly, those people who believe that the economic conditions are getting worse are almost twice as likely to favour a decrease in immigration to their countries than those who state that the conditions are 'good', 'excellent' or 'getting better'. Balch finds this communitarian argument also reflected in the British media performance in 2013, where narratives of migrants were almost exclusively about potentially negative consequences of their existence such as pressure on public services and abuse of the welfare system (Balch, 2015). Concerns about these developments were then directed at migrants who were blamed for taking away the already threatened jobs from British people.

Another factor that fuels anti-immigration sentiments is the decreasing social status of white British people from the working class (Tilford, 2016). Especially in terms of education, Tilford emphasises that children from immigrant families are better

educated and more likely to attain a university degree than those of white working class households.

Tilford concludes that all the above-mentioned issues are the result of public policy failures arising from cuts in public spending and welfare: “Immigrants, in turn, have become an easy scapegoat for politicians of nearly all persuasions. It is easier to blame them than address the chronic policy failures driving the rise in anti-immigrant sentiment” (Tilford, 2016: 2). In his view, the government has diverted from their own responsibility and drawn attention to immigrants by linking them with internal problems. In the same spirit, Anderson (2017) argues that migration has become a subject of contemporary UK public discourse obsession in which the figure ‘migrant’ has been turned into a placeholder for issues associated with globalisation and democratic accountability but at the same time separated from other significant policy areas that caused international migration flows in the first place.

The time period under consideration corresponds with the political attempt to bring the age of austerity to an end. Although growth was still below the long-term average, the economy continued to grow and there were tangible benefits for the population. Unemployment declined during this period, from 5.4% in 2015 to 4.1%<sup>13</sup> in 2018 (Office for National Statistics, 2021). The latter, in fact, represents the lowest rate reported since 1974 (3.7%). In addition, strikes remained rare and interest rates were extremely low in 2015. Furthermore, there were a number of economic policies manifested to a certain degree in people’s everyday lives: increases in minimum wage, overall earnings, national living wage and state pensions.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that British society had seen a multiannual economic recession between 2008 and 2013 from which it was only beginning to recover. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the global financial crisis had been experienced by the British population through an increased unemployment rate, with a surge between 2008 (5.7%) and 2012 (7.6%) before dropping in the following years (Office for National Statistics, 2021). In addition, there were other economic

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<sup>13</sup> Rate of unemployment individuals was 4.9% in 2016 and 4.7% in 2017 (ONS 2019).

setbacks including various funding and benefit cuts with severe reductions in income to particularly poorly paid families.

Austerity measures continued in 2016, for example, 86 courts were closed and the fees for uncontested divorce increased. In 2017, the UK's economy showed the poorest performance compared to other major economies (Smith, 2018). While the EU's economy registered the highest growth rate in 10 years (2.3%) since 2009, the UK experienced the weakest economic growth since 2012. On top of the fall of average living standards in the UK, there were also indications of a slowdown in business investment and relocation of some investment towards the EU in light of the Brexit vote. As for 2018, there was no termination of austerity in the local governments as they continued to suffer cuts in central government support. These economic challenges have the potential to influence media and public perceptions towards migrants, perceiving them as competitors for job and other economic opportunities.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The genealogy of the socio-political context provided in this chapter shed light on the broader political background and discourses that surrounded migration in the UK before and during the selected study period from 2015 to 2018. Various events suggest that political discourses on migration were shaped by anti-immigration agendas such as the British government's promise to reduce net migration as part of its hostile environment policy and the various Immigration Acts that strengthened the detection of irregular migration. Opinions of the British public indicate a similar picture with the majority of people wanting to see the number of migrants reduced for many years.

Moreover, the British public appeared to be more concerned about (irregular) migration compared to people of Northern European countries. In addition, it was shown that anti-immigration public views in the UK must be understood as part of the political scapegoating of migrants during the time of economic austerity

measures of several years in which migrants were repeatedly regarded as competitors for economic and other resources of the British society. In this light, this study expects an overall negative media reportage and public views expressed towards irregular migrants especially in 2015 at the beginning of the European ‘migration crisis’. Considering the number of terror attacks across Europe and the UK between 2015 and 2017, this study further hypothesises that migrants will be associated with terrorism and regarded as a threat to host societies.

In 2016, when the EU referendum took place it is expected that the British press coverage will reflect the heightened anti-immigration agenda proposed by UKIP and Leave voters before the Brexit date. This is supported by the fact that in 2015 one in five British people believed that the Conservative party did not have the best policy to tackle migration in the UK. Given that the EU referendum was decided in the interest of Leave voters and considering numerous international agreements to tackle migration, this research expects that media attention and general public concerns about irregular migration will decline from 2016.

Overall, in light of the unfulfilled political promise of reducing net migration in the UK and persistent public opposition to migrants, this study expects a general adversarial stances towards the British government and their handling of migration-related issues. With regard to the group of ‘Windrush migrants’, this study assumes that the British press and its readers would express empathy with this migrant group and further criticise the British authorities for their wrongdoing.

Findings from this chapter are useful to contextualise discourse topics that emerged and are discussed in the CDA and Corpus Linguistics analyses and to illuminate how these analyses can be interpreted in light of the broader socio-political environment.

## 6 Dynamics of press coverage

This chapter gives a general overview of the dynamics and trends of the British press reporting over the selected time span. Following Allen (2016), the identification of narrative elements in press discourse was based on counts of narrative categories derived from Manual Content Analysis (see chapter 4 for more detailed explanation). The first part of this chapter examines the distribution of published newspaper articles between 2015 and 2018 categorised by name and political leaning. Second, the analysis looks at the following categories: reasons put forward for the overall argument, reference to a type of irregular migration, responsible actors, justification of specific positions on irregular migration, main messengers and content focus. The analysis also considered how the identified narrative components relate to the genealogy of the socio-political context outlined in the previous chapter. The main goal of the following analysis is to provide broader trends of the news coverage in terms of the general direction and saliency of narrative categories.

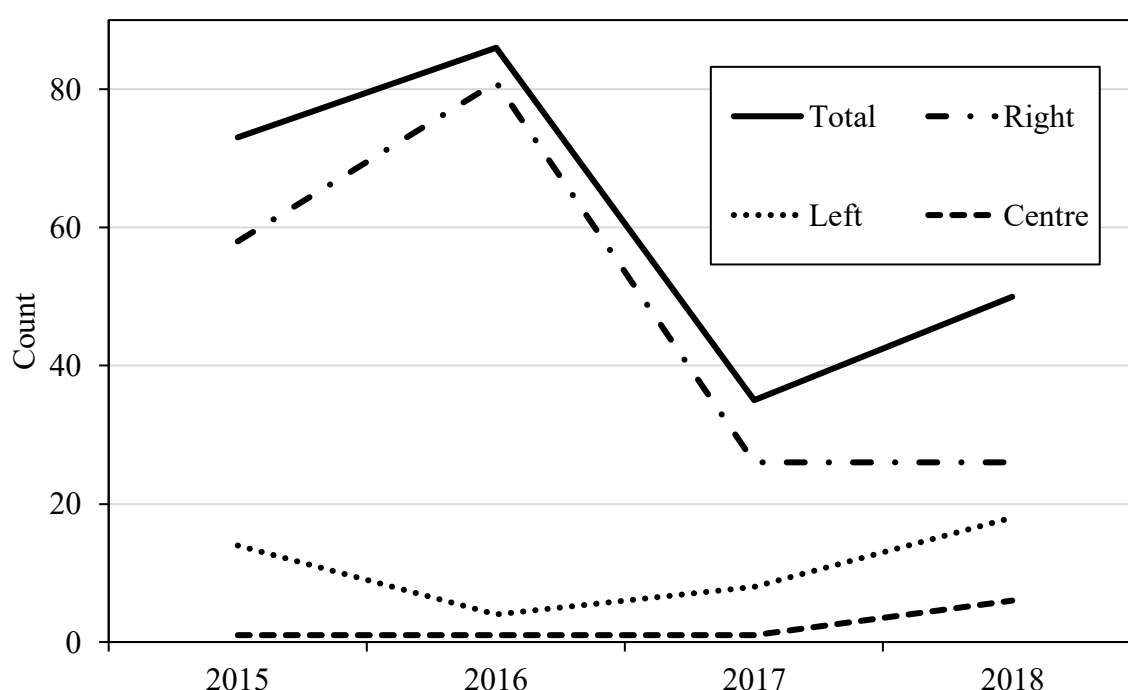
The coverage of irregular migration fluctuated considerably over the study period as illustrated in **Figure 6.1**. This figure not only shows the absolute number of published newspaper articles categorised by political leaning but also highlights the evolution of the total number of published newspaper articles across all political leanings during the selected time span. Starting from over 70 articles in 2015 and having reached a peak in 2016 with over 80 articles, the coverage drastically decreased in 2017 to only 35 articles, and finally recuperated with 50 articles in 2018.

The differentiation of the newspapers by political leaning reveals strongly contrasting trends between the left-wing and right-wing press. Right-wing newspapers dominated the online news discourse in the years 2015 and 2016, both in total number of articles published across all newspapers (**Figure 6.1**) and average number of articles per newspaper (**Figure 6.2**). The right-wing press reportage peaked in 2016, whereas the left-wing media showed the lowest number of published articles in that year across the study period. In the following years, the articles published by the right-wing media plummeted to less than one third of the previous

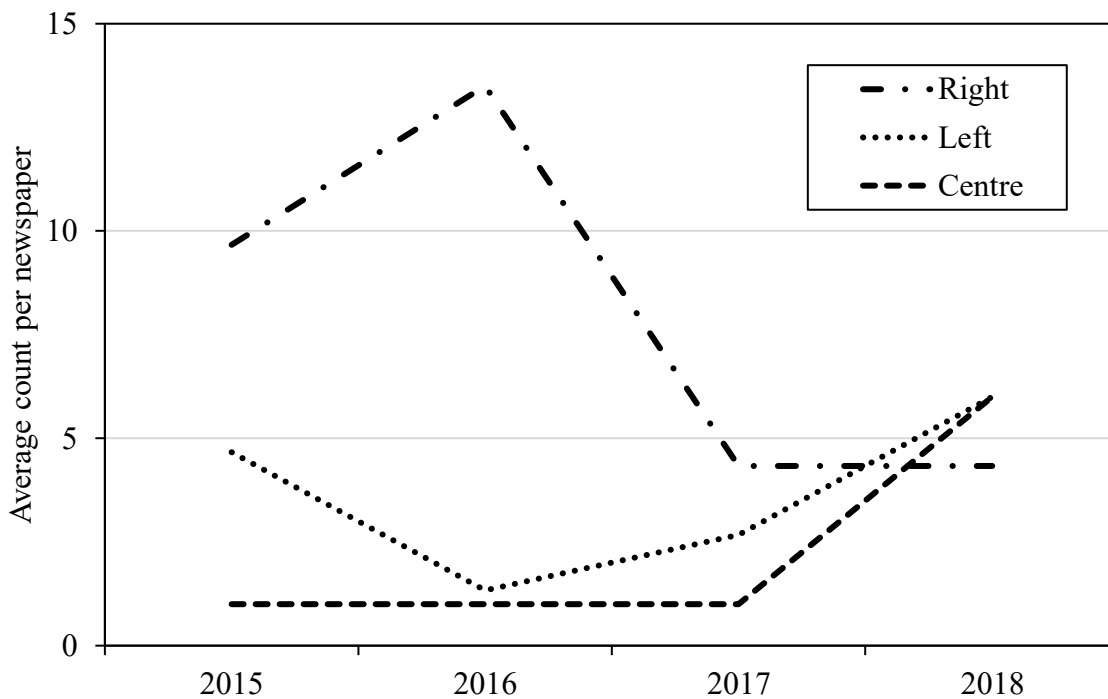


number. The only centre newspaper, the *Financial Times* (FT), showed an insignificant rate of published articles from 2015 to 2017 and only contributed to the discourse in 2018 with more than one article. 2018 was the first and only year where the average number of articles per newspaper was lower for right-wing press than for left-wing newspapers (**Figure 6.3**).

Notably, the fluctuations of published news articles did not correlate with the number of asylum applications in the UK over the selected time span (see chapter 5). Whilst the media attention increased from 2015 to 2016 and again in 2018, the number of asylum applications gradually decreased from 2016 before slowly increasing in 2018. Instead, the number of published newspaper articles per year appear to be linked to key political and societal events, such as the peaking migration crisis and EU referendum in 2016 - boosting coverage in right-wing newspapers - or the ‘Windrush scandal’ in 2018 about long-term migrants from the Caribbean which had been wrongly classified as ‘illegal immigrants’, leading to heightened attention from the left-wing and centre press.



**Figure 6.1** *Number of published newspaper articles categorised by political leaning and total number across all political leanings from 2015 to 2018.*

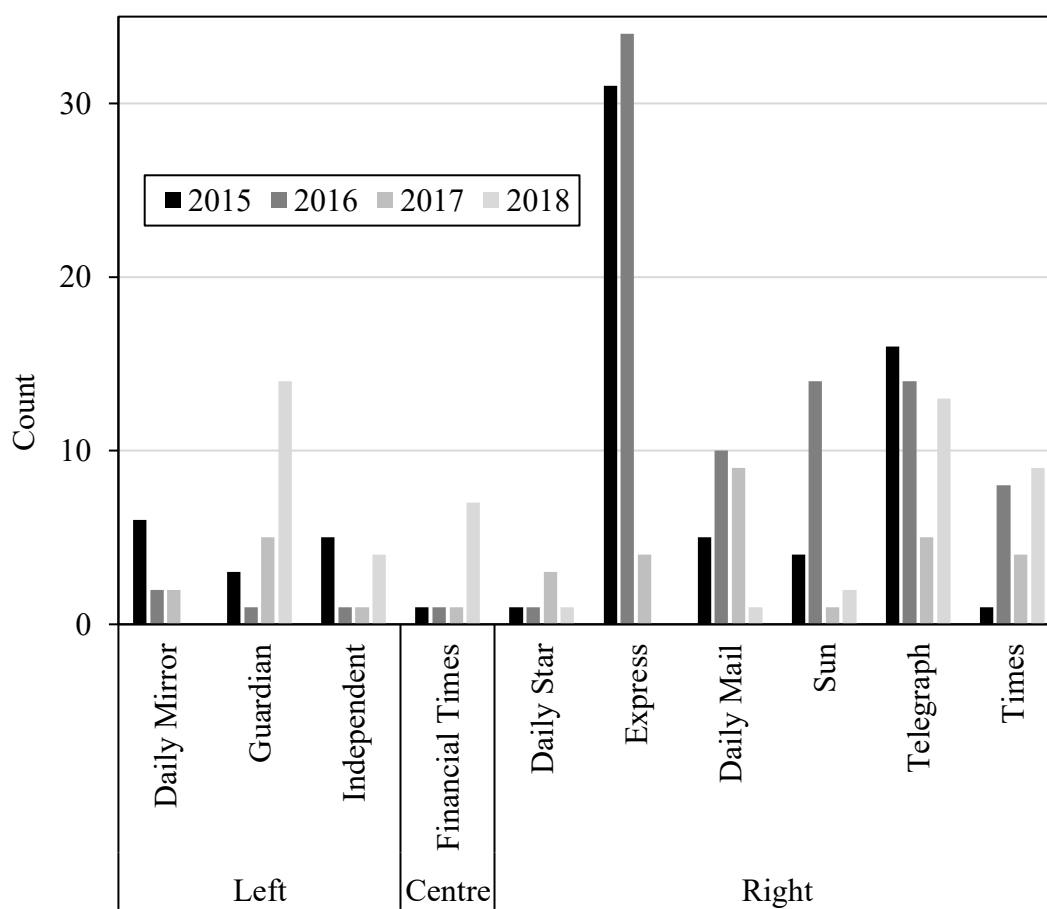


**Figure 6.2** Average number of articles published per newspaper by political leaning from 2015 to 2018.

Similar to the overall number of articles published per year, the different newspapers' coverage strongly fluctuated over the selected period. In 2015, the right-wing newspapers the *Express* and the *Telegraph* clearly dominated the online press coverage on irregular migration (**Figure 6.3**). In the following year, it is notable that more right-wing newspapers (*Daily Mail*, *Sun*, *Times*) added to the overall increase of news coverage whereas the left-wing press stood out by its near absence. This is in line with previous research (see Isentyeva 2021) suggesting that that British right-wing press reaches a larger readership than its left-wing counterparts, giving the right-wing press a predominant position to shape and disseminate news discourses on (irregular) migration.

As noted above, 2017 strongly differed from the other years under examination as there was a general low news reportage in total (**Figure 6.1**). The year 2018 reflects a new rise of media attention particularly dominated by the left-wing newspaper the

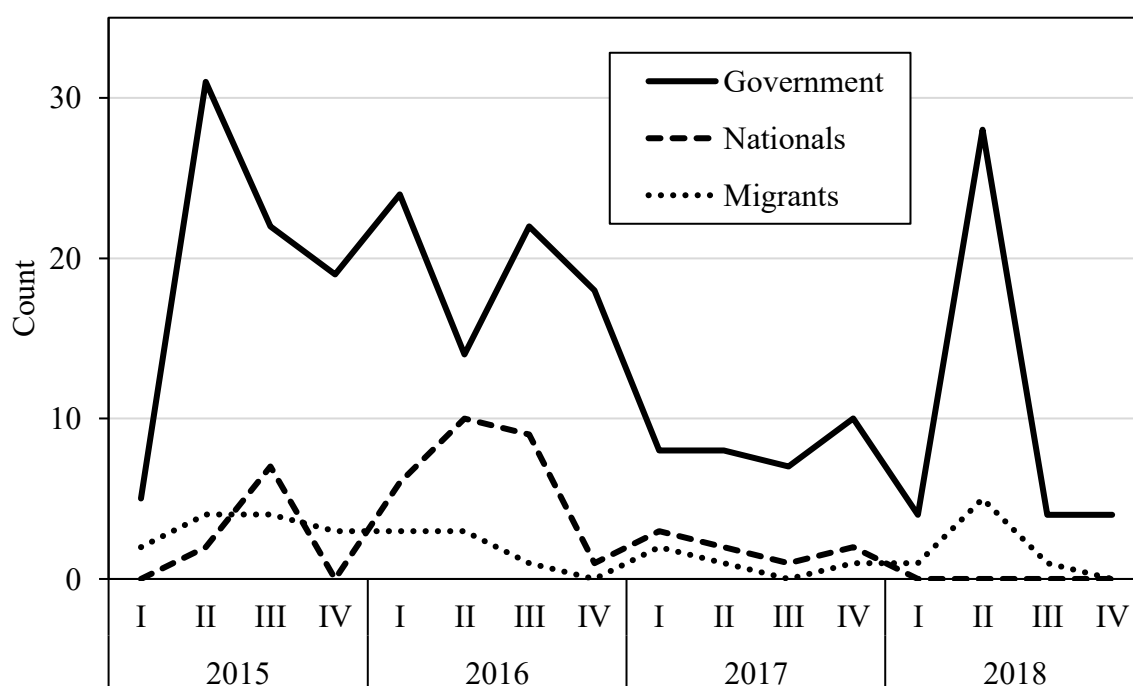
*Guardian*, followed by central *Financial Times* and the right-wing newspapers the *Telegraph* and *Times*.



**Figure 6.3**      *Number of articles by newspaper and political leaning from 2015 to 2018.*

## 6.1 Messenger

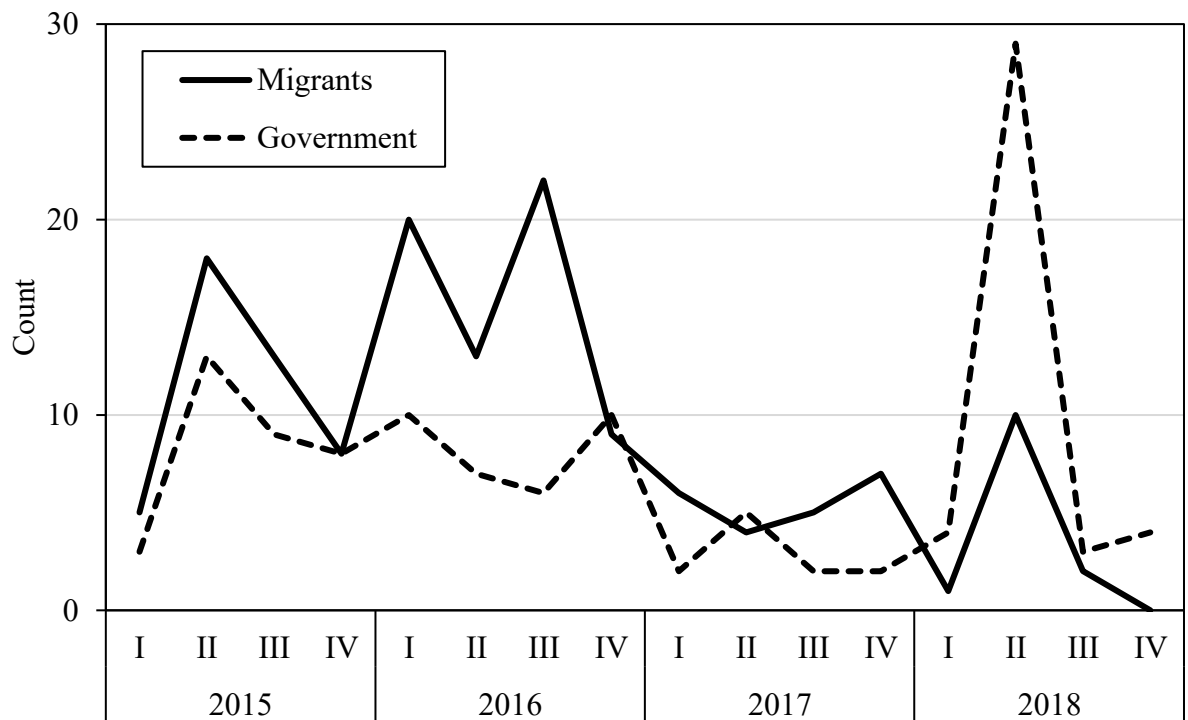
Across all years, government representatives dominated the voices represented by the newspapers, although the number of articles featuring government views showed a strongly declining trend from the peak in early 2015 until the end of 2017 (**Figure 6.4**). In 2018, reportage of government views reached a second sharp peak when many government representatives were cited either to defend decisions made on the ‘Windrush migrants’ or views of politicians of opposition parties were used to criticise the Home Office and the implementation of the hostile environment policy. Nationals’ voices were mostly used by the media in 2016, and lost significance in 2017 and 2018. The higher presence of nationals’ voices in the British press in 2016 could be explained in light of the EU referendum and public expectations to solve the ‘migration crisis’ as well as reduce the overall migration rate in the UK. Notably, the views of migrants were least cited over the whole period. This underrepresentation of irregular migrants can potentially be explained by the media discursive strategy ‘denial of minority voice’ which further empowers the status of the powerful such as political elites (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002).



**Figure 6.4**     *Number of articles representing the views of the migrants, nationals and government from 2015 to 2018.*

## 6.2 Content focus

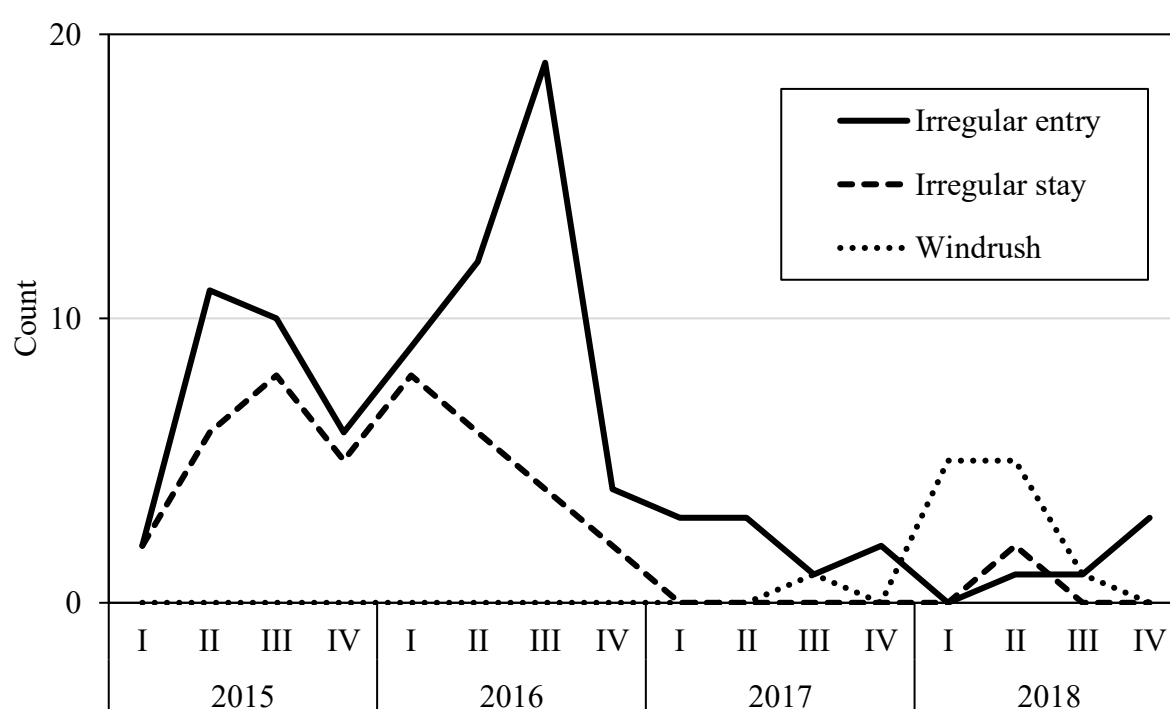
Over the study period, the content focus of the analysed newspapers showed a remarkable shift from migrants to the government (**Figure 6.5**). Migrants were the key subject of media focus in 2015 and 2016, which about twice as many articles focusing on them compared to the government in 2016. This can be explained by the large number of migrants arriving in Europe in 2015 and 2016. In comparison, the British press' focus on government representatives showed a decreasing trend from mid 2015 but sharply peaked in early 2018. As outlined below, the 2018 peak must be understood in context of the 'Windrush scandal', which brought the British hostile environment policy into focus.



**Figure 6.5**      *Number of articles focusing on migrants and government, respectively, from 2015 to 2018.*

### 6.3 Type of migration

The main types of irregular migration that British newspapers referred to across all years were irregular entry, irregular stay and ‘Windrush migrants’ (**Figure 6.6**). Irregular entry dominated the years from 2015 to 2017, with a sharp peak in 2016 and a clear drop by the end of the same year. This reflects the fact that the number of migrants arriving in Europe sharply fell in 2017 (Connor and Passel, 2019; Rea *et al.*, 2019). Irregular stay was an important topic from the second half of 2015 to the beginning of 2016 but received almost no attention in the following years. The coverage on ‘Windrush’ migrants, reached the highest media attention across all migration types in 2018. The political treatment of the ‘Windrush migrants’ only became a serious concern among British politicians in 2018 (Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018).



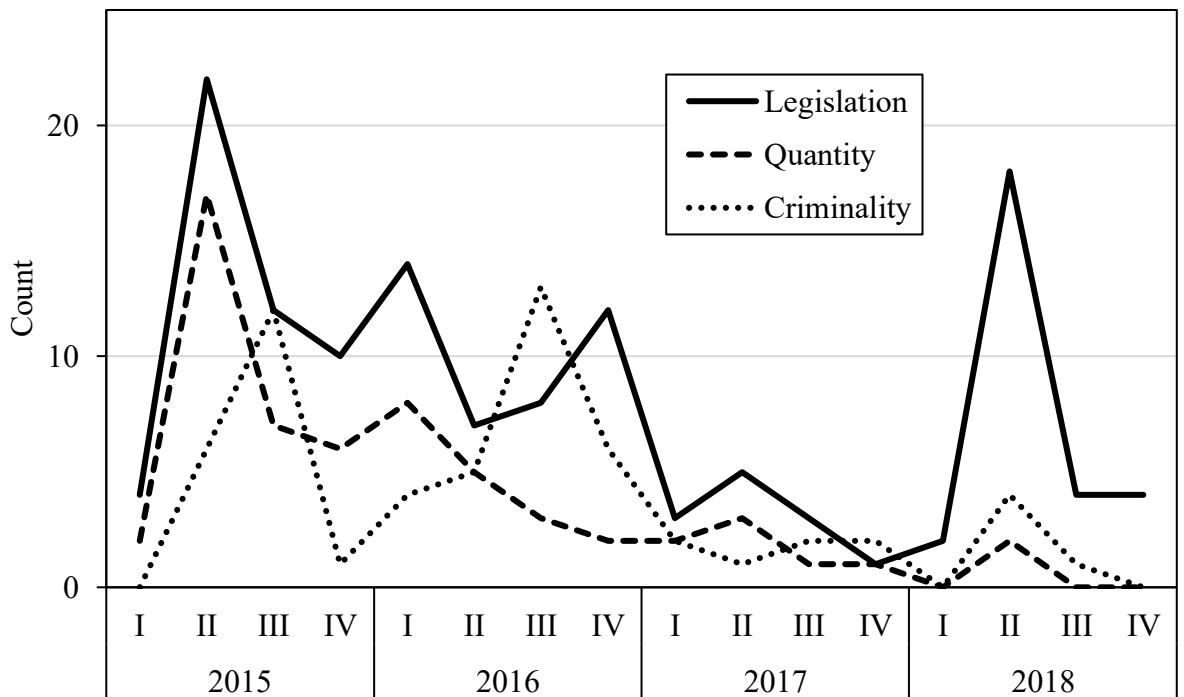
**Figure 6.6** *Number of articles referring to different types of irregular migration, including the incorrectly illegalised ‘Windrush’ migrants, from 2015 to 2018.*

## 6.4 Rationale of argument

An examination of the rationale of arguments used by the British press shows that the newspapers focused mainly on issues regarding legislation (**Figure 6.7**). Given the lack of a unified EU migration policy to respond to the migration situation especially at the beginning of the ‘migration crisis’ (see chapter 5 for more details), public desire for effective legislation was an ongoing concern. Furthermore, the ‘Windrush scandal’ in 2018 raised issues concerning the UK hostile environment policy.

The quantity of migrants was a further key argument which saw a peak in 2015 and then clearly and continuously decreased over time. With the perceived mass arrival of migrants in 2015 in Europe (Rea *et al.*, 2019), it is not surprising that the British media’s rationale of argument was concerned with the quantity of migrants.

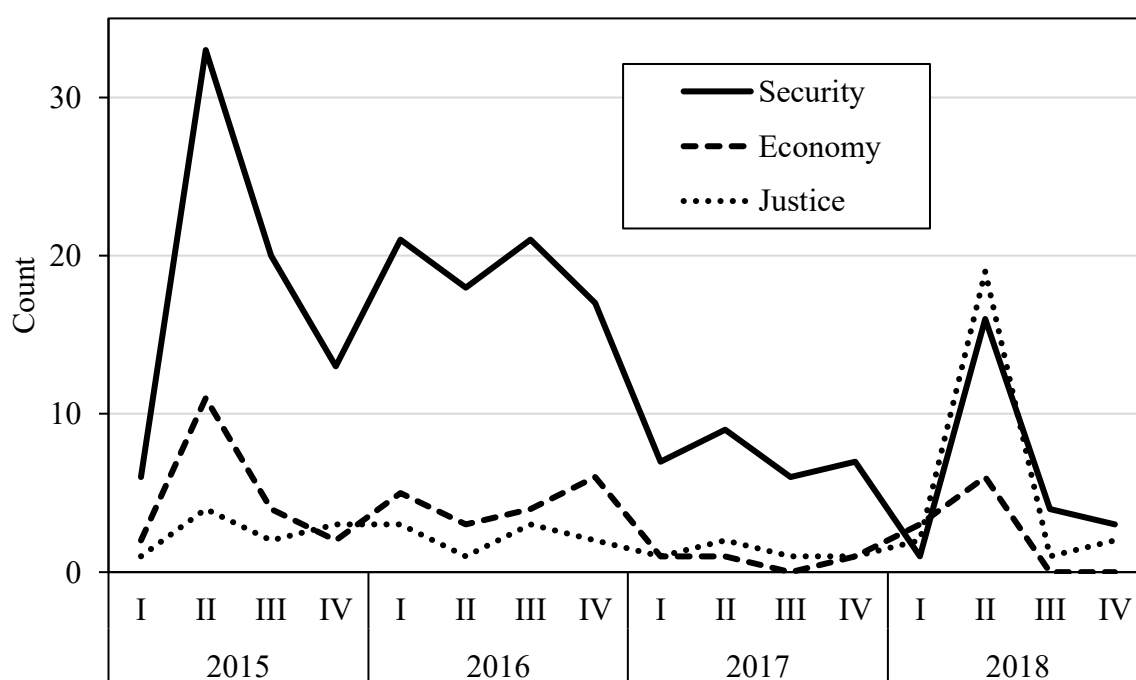
In comparison, arguments centred around crimes associated with irregular migrants were prevalent in the first two years and then faded away. One possible interpretation is that the press coverage perceived irregular migration primarily as a problem when it could be linked to broader migration-related issues on the political agenda such as the ‘migration crisis’.



**Figure 6.7** Number of articles basing their rationales on legislation, quantity and criminality from 2015 to 2018.

## 6.5 Justification

The British media justified arguments against irregular migration based on security-related aspects mostly in 2015 (see **Figure 6.8**). Security concerns peaked in early 2015, remained at a high level in 2016 and regained attention in 2018 after a dip in 2017. Due to security concerns over the alleged ‘mass arrival’ of migrants in Europe, some EU states such as Hungary or Austria re-erected national borders or reintroduced border controls at internal borders in 2015. Economic concerns were present at a low level throughout all years except 2017. Human rights issues only became a strong media concern in early 2018, the year in which social justice was a leading media and political justification in the ‘Windrush scandal’.



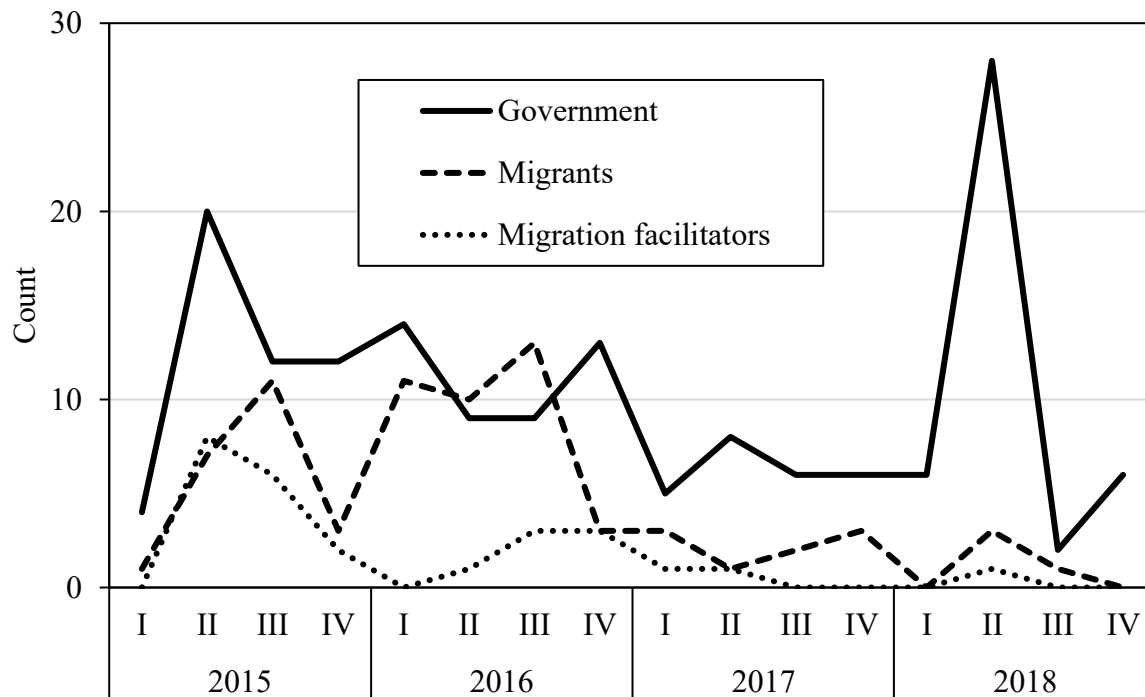
**Figure 6.8** *Number of articles relying on security, economy or justice to justify an argument from 2015 to 2018.*



## 6.6 Attribution of responsibility

This part of the analysis asked who were held responsible for issues related to irregular migration, for example unauthorised entry. Interestingly, government representatives such as politicians were seen as mainly responsible across all years (**Figure 6.9**). This view showed a general decline from early 2015 to the end of 2017 but saw a sharp peak in early 2018. The group of migrants reached similar levels of attribution of responsibility as the government in 2016, but were not held responsible in the following years. Migration facilitators - referred to by the media as 'smugglers' and 'traffickers', were mostly held responsible in 2015 but of low significance in the discourse on responsibility in the following years.

The decreasing attribution of responsibility to the government during the period of 2015 and 2016 may be explained by the gradually introduction of international agreements by European governments in these years, e.g. the EU-Turkey deal (see chapter 5), that slowly demonstrated effectiveness to reduce the number of migrants to Europe. In addition, Leave voters and campaigners repeatedly linked an EU referendum in the UK to the British government's ability to regain control of its perceived 'unprotected national borders'. The success of this referendum might have increased the media's trust in the political ability to control migration to the UK. The 2018 peak likely reflects the 'Windrush scandal', whereby the British Home Office was held accountable for wrong decisions made in their actions against 'Windrush migrants'.



**Figure 6.9** *Number of articles that attributed responsibility for issues in relation to irregular migration to government, migrants, and migration facilitators from 2015 to 2018.*

## 6.7 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted that the narrative of irregular migration in the British press underwent dramatic changes through the study period. This can be understood in the context of changing socio-political circumstances in the UK and Europe. 2015 and 2016 were the dominant years in which migrants' illegal entry as well as aspects concerning their potential criminality and security of the host society prevailed in the British press. Unauthorised entry, the quantity and residence of migrants were of high media importance in 2015, whilst entry became a key concern in 2016.

However, these concerns continuously attracted less attention in the subsequent years. In particular, the right-wing newspapers dominated the news coverage in the first two years, in which both migrants and the government were held responsible for the above mentioned issues associated with irregular migration. In contrast, the year 2017 was remarkably quiet with a sharp decrease in the number of published newspaper articles. In 2018, the 'Windrush scandal' caught much of the British

media attention which was strongly associated with a shift of focus and accountability in the press' narrative from migrants to the government. Newspapers further showed a change in their justification strategy from security-related concerns to issues of social justice. This type of news coverage was dominated by left-wing newspapers, which in 2018 for the first time published more articles than the right-wing newspapers.

## 7 Discursive press representations of irregular migration

This chapter investigates the nature of the online British press representation of irregular migration in the context of the changing socio-political environment between 2015 and 2018, that is the European ‘migration crisis’ and the British EU referendum. Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA) is used to uncover discursive techniques employed by the left- and right-wing newspapers in order to highlight their distinct ideological and linguistic strategies to represent the three social actors in the media discourse, that is migrants, nationals and government. The findings are discussed in relation to the aforementioned questions based on the CDA-specific discourse-historical approach (for more details see chapter 4.4.2). Each newspaper article is analysed in more detail by addressing the following sub-questions:

- How are events presented?
- What are the relevant topics?
- What discourses frame the topics?
- Which position does the speaker occupy?
- Who benefits from shaping this information?
- Does the article respond to a major event?

Within the framework of the three-level CDA analysis, certain analytical categories are employed to uncover the discursive ingroup- and outgroup-representations in the press coverage. This is expanded by a contextual analysis which not only evaluates the discursive elements within one newspaper article, but also between articles and further explicates linguistic patterns in connection with existing public understanding of certain topics (KhosraviNik, 2010). More specifically, the analysis takes into account the relevant socio-political events outlined in chapter 5 that might have shaped discourses on irregular migration during the selected period.

## **7.1 The ‘migration crisis’ and the ‘invaders’**

Both irregular migrants and government representatives were at the centre of the British online press coverage on irregular migration, especially between 2015 and 2017. The CDA of the news representation highlights that the UK government was held accountable for creating a ‘double crisis’ for the British people, that is the ‘migration crisis’ and the perennial economic recession following the financial crisis in 2007 and 2008. Scare tactics and extensivization were discursive strategies mostly used by right-wing newspapers to illustrate the perceived extent of irregular migration in terms of quantity and disruption for the host society. The discursive news representation of migrants as a mass phenomenon serves as a means of stressing an undesired increase of the number of non-nationals and to underline their presence as a serious problem.

The continuous attempt of irregular migrants to reach the UK in 2015/2016 was represented as a persistent difficult challenge for British authorities who seemed unable to prevent the uncontrolled entry of these migrants. Whilst legislative restrictions against the perceived ‘invasion’ of migrants were mostly welcomed by the British press, the UK government was criticised for misappropriating taxpayers’ money by providing social support services for irregular migrants. In this regard, nationals were frequently characterised as unsympathetic to political elites. Although right-wing newspapers mainly adopted unfavourable representations of both migrants and government, more empathic accounts were also expressed towards vulnerable migrant groups such as children and women.

### **7.1.1 Chaos and crisis**

The majority of the migrants who reached and travelled through Europe during the European ‘migration crisis’ did not possess authorised travel documents. It is therefore not surprising that European countries chiefly focused in their political responses on unlawful cross-border entry peaking at 1.8 million in 2015 (Rea *et al.*, 2019). Both media attention and political responses across Europe depicted the

arrival of these migrants as a ‘crisis’ situation in 2015 and therefore in essence represented this event as a time of intense difficulty for European societies (Dines, Montagna and Vacchelli, 2018).

In particular, the absence of a coordinated migration policy at EU level was expressed in a media perception of political ‘chaos’ which primarily painted a picture of an uncontrollable group of irregular migrants who attempted to enter the UK at all costs. Against this background, the notion of a political ‘crisis’ was further amplified by the fact that the number of asylum seekers in the UK peaked by the end of the same year (see chapter 5.1). The general macro-structure of the British news reportage of irregular migration reflected this socio-political context and predominantly featured the discourse of ‘chaos’ and ‘crisis’ in 2015. In this light, it is noticeable that the online British press paid special attention to the entry of irregular migrants into the UK by focusing on the topics of ‘smuggling’ and ‘trafficking’. Issues around the trafficking and smuggling industry were particularly raised in tandem with allegedly rising numbers of migrants. It is noteworthy that newspapers were vague regarding the terms trafficking and smuggling as these were used interchangeably.

The right-wing newspapers were the main media outlets that adopted the crisis- and chaos-related discourse by overwhelmingly representing irregular migrants as a group of ‘invaders’ who were viewed as undesirable in the UK. The *Telegraph* and the *Express* were the key newspapers that focused on the two outgroups ‘migrants as invaders’ and ‘smugglers’. This generalisation strategy aimed at inciting fears among the readership and represented irregular migrants as a collective threat to the public order and wellbeing of the people in the UK. By focusing on the negative impact of migrants on the British society’s stability, the government’s position was reinforced.

Thus border control was represented by the press as the key measure to prevent illegal entry of migrants. This finding is in line with previous research in which immigration control was identified as the main discourse in the Irish news coverage of irregular migrants (Burroughs, 2015). The loss of border control was frequently constructed by newspapers using the metaphor of ‘chaos’ linked to the issue of clandestine entry of migrants. The right-wing newspapers manipulated this

metaphorical tactic to stir up public panic towards an unmanageable ‘influx’ of irregular migrants and in this way created a sense of a situation of intense difficulty for the British host society. By using negatively connotated metaphors such as ‘influx’, the newspapers suggested that a high number of migrants would significantly and negatively affect the British community (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002):

*This year the border police have stopped migrants desperate to reach the UK more than 18,000 times. The number is already double the total for 2014 as Britain faces an influx of arrivals from north Africa.<sup>14</sup>*  
(Express, 3 June 2015)

Central to this discourse theme was the association with a ‘migration crisis’ in the French asylum camp in Calais. Asylum seekers living in this port town frequently tried to enter the UK via the Channel Tunnel (Islentyeva, 2021). The *Telegraph* and other right-wing newspapers commonly used scare tactics as a discursive strategy to report on the Calais situation and viewed it as a cause for the supposed heightened number of unauthorised entries detected in the UK. In line with previous research, scare tactics as a discursive strategy are based on creating fear among the dominant group by constructing a notion of an unrestricted and increasing intrusion of migrants who are part of a larger organised crime network threatening the lives and privileges of citizens in the host society (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002).

Further serving to dramatize the situation in Calais, the right-wing press used intensification to negatively portray migrants as a group of undesired individuals by giving various details about the alleged chaos in this camp. The *Telegraph* particularly incited public resentment against the migrants in Calais by claiming that they were able to smuggle themselves on lorries bound for the UK almost without any disruption. Similarly, the *Express* employed the ‘blaming the victim’ discursive tactic whereby migrants were claimed to be members of ‘smuggling gangs’ who were described as determined to smuggle themselves into the UK:

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<sup>14</sup> All selected excerpts from the news articles are presented as they appeared in the original news item.

*THIS is the shocking moment that a gang of suspected illegal immigrants climbed out of the luxury CARS they had apparently used to smuggle themselves into Britain.*

(Express, 12 August 2015)

Within this discourse, ample references were made by the press pointing to statistics about migrants residing in Calais and increasing numbers of migrants who unlawfully attempted to reach the UK:

*Last week - before the Calais crisis had even emerged - Bedfordshire detained 36 illegal immigrants in a two-day period, indicating that the situation in northern France had begun to deteriorate even before ferry workers blocked roads. In comparison, last year the force detained an average of just 23 illegal immigrants a month.*

(Telegraph, 25 June 2015)

The focus on the number of irregular migrants was found in previous research which stressed the significance and the role of numbers in policy discourses whereby many European states tended to give estimates on numbers of migrants breaching their law (Vollmer, 2011). The use of these scare tactics is a way to encourage fears among the readers painting a picture of irregular migrants who ‘invade’ the UK and might become an unbearable financial and social burden for the British society (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002).

This representation of migrants as an intruding outgroup was further enhanced by creating a metaphor of an alleged armed mafia ring that operates in Calais in order to facilitate illegal entries into the UK. To amplify the magnitude of a possible spill over effect from the migration situation in Calais to the UK, the account of a UKIP politician was given who claimed that migrants in Calais told him personally that they were armed and intended to come to the UK:

*The migrant was said to have shouted: "We need to get to England, this is our problem." Mike Hookem, defence spokesman for Ukip and MEP<sup>15</sup> for Yorkshire, said the migrant also told him that the gang leader had "multiple guns and big knives".*

(Express, 12 August 2015)

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<sup>15</sup> ‘MEP’ stands for Member of the European Parliament



By directing readers' attention to the supposed negative traits of irregular migrants, the newspapers reinforced potentially hostile attitudes of readers towards this group of migrants or sustained an existing biased image against irregular migrants. This representation of migrants fixated on a forceful entry into the host country portrays them as 'secret invaders' with hostile intention. Such definitional conflation reflects a form of scapegoating of irregular migrants, a tactic used to blame them for participating in supposed criminal activities (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002). This blaming tactic projects the irregular migrants as the actual criminals and diverts attention from their humanitarian issues involved in irregular border crossing. This representation clearly neglects the broader socio-political context and the fact that there are only very limited legal possibilities for migrants to enter the UK.

The argumentative strategy of constructing a 'them' discourse was further achieved via delegitimation tactics by which an organised industry of 'smuggling gangs' were problematised arguing that these gangs cooperate with officials, such as Italian authorities who were frequently informed about arriving boats of migrants and awaited them. In this context, conflicting views about the effect of rescue teams in terms of encouraging risky sea crossings of migrants were regarded as controversial and partly blamed for fostering the smuggling industry. The employment of delegitimation tactics serves here to outcast both the irregular migrants who are alleged members of 'gangs' and Italian officials who are represented as illegitimate groups who violated laws of the host society. In this way, these discursive tactics reinforce public opposition to the legitimacy of irregular migrants entering and residing in the UK.

The 'smuggling' topic also included other possible actors such as lorry drivers who might be involved in the smuggling of migrants. The *Telegraph*, for example, adopted the perspective that the smuggling of migrants via lorry drivers was a rising industry and pointed out the number of lorry drivers who received punishments for secretly transporting migrants:

*However, many of the drivers tend to get caught when they return for a second or third trip and have been receiving jail terms of between six months and two years.*

(Telegraph, 23 June 2015)

In addition, extensivization was used by giving information about the way lorry drivers operated. The newspaper further provided details about the amount of money foreign drivers charged migrants for their smuggling service and illustrated how the procedure worked. In particular, British citizens were victimised by the *right-wing* press arguing that those with financial issues were targeted by smugglers due to their lower suspicion. Both the *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* pointed to the concerns of British lorry drivers in connection with the immigration situation in Calais. By drawing on problematization strategy, one prevalent argument stated that migrants in Calais repeatedly tried to get on lorries bound for the UK and therefore the drivers feared they might unintentionally transport migrants in their vehicles:

*Trucker Steve Hanney said five migrants jumped on top his lorry and cut a hole through the roof to get inside. He said when police arrived they found the men were armed with 'huge machetes'.*

(Daily Mail, 2 August 2015)

From the viewpoint of British lorry drivers, these right-wing newspapers further argued that many refused to ride on this route altogether as they were worried they might face sanctions due to suspicion of smuggling. The *Telegraph* problematised concerns over British citizens who were potentially approached by smugglers and asked to secretly smuggle migrants into the UK. An example was given where British lorry drivers were approached and asked to act as smugglers for migrants. The realisation of the problematisation strategy here serves to highlight the illegitimate activities associated with irregular migrants and points to specific problems or consequences related to them (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002).

This depiction was further highlighted using scare tactics providing statistics about the number of British smugglers who were jailed. The use of scare tactics played an important role in justifying the negative stance of the British press and public on irregular migration. This discursive strategy further reinforced the belief that British

nationals would be adversely affected by the attempts of migrants to enter the UK and hence these migrants and those who supported them should be held responsible. The overall situation was portrayed as a crisis with the narrative emphasis put on British lorry drivers and their personal concerns. The perspective of officials was also given strong weight by including their voices which confirm the rise in this industry.

To further paint a threatening picture of an uncontrolled situation in Calais, a number of critiques were expressed towards the British government by stressing the incapability of the Home Office to further monitor the detected irregular migrants from France. Representing the perspective of a politician, the press argued that this perceived crisis goes beyond Calais and was a consequence of EU migration law. There was an overall demand for new measures to tackle the issue of illegal entry and EU countries most hit by the migrant crisis. A number of right-wing newspapers focused on European states by criticising the lack of success of anti-immigration efforts of the EU as a whole or of single European countries. The *Telegraph* and the *Express*, for instance, reported on the planned policy measures to stop illegal entry into the UK from France. Using extensivization, David Cameron's then five-point-plan to tackle the crisis in Calais was described in detail. The British government's plan to increase border security by building a fence was welcomed as a good measure to stop illegal entry from France to the UK. The detailed description of the political plan helps to underscore the importance of the interests of the own group, that is to prevent irregular migrants reaching the UK, and to restore public faith in the government's handling of irregular migration.

The analysis of this section revealed that the lack of protection of British borders and the issue of unlawful entry as a mass phenomenon were key themes of the discourse 'chaos and crisis'. News stories about migrants entering the UK illegally were especially prevalent in 2015. In light of the so-called migration 'crisis' and the aforementioned increase in the number of asylum applications in the UK in the same year, it is not surprising that the news coverage during this time strongly focused on public concerns about the number of new arrivals. Particularly from 2015 to 2017, the threat-based negative reportage of migrants was most prevalent among right-wing newspapers which dealt to a great extent with the secret arrivals of migrants in

high numbers whilst further raising issues of their smuggling methods and their intention for coming to the UK. This is in line with previous research which found that uncontrolled entry of non-nationals into the UK has been a dominant focus of the British media coverage since the end of 1990s (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015). Overall, the right-wing newspapers constructed an image of an uncontrolled crisis situation associated with the arrival of irregular migrants in the UK. The overarching argument against irregular migrants rests on the mostly implicitly expressed view that this outgroup violates British law and therefore should not be allowed into the country.

### 7.1.2 Unexpected encounters

A number of right-wing newspaper articles frequently reported on various methods used by non-nationals to enter the UK without undergoing border checks leading to unexpected encounters with British nationals. The only left-wing newspaper, namely the *Daily Mirror*, featured this theme whilst the reporting in this area was dictated by all right-wing newspapers. A recurring linguistic feature was the use of emotionally loaded adjectives or verbs referring to ‘shocking’ footage of migrants who ‘sneak’ into or out of lorries bound for the UK, used by the *Sun* for example:

*WAITING migrants desperate to sneak into Britain storm on to a lorry in footage taken by a trucker in Calais.*  
(Sun, 26 May 2015)

This sensationalist tactic aims at provoking readers’ interest and inflates the unlawful and unexpected entry of migrants into a very important issue for immigration authorities. Additionally, this representation indicates a sense of audacity on the part of the migrants. The newspapers also repeatedly used graphic language by giving vividly explicit details to describe the concrete methods migrants used in their attempt to enter the UK. By employing intensification, newspapers to varying degrees gave detailed descriptions about how migrants succeed in hiding in vehicles. Across all right-wing newspapers, nationals’ views were frequently represented by emphasising their high degree of inconceivability in the form of bewilderment about

the unexpected and unusual entry of migrants into a country. British citizens in particular were portrayed as witnesses or bystanders of scenarios in which migrants were found entering the UK allegedly unlawfully. Numerous accounts of nationals were provided with detailed descriptions of how irregular migrants were detected by authorities whilst hiding, for example, in the back of lorries or by nationals themselves in their vehicle:

*A BRITISH couple unwittingly brought an illegal stowaway into the UK after they returned from a holiday in France with a migrant hidden in their CAMPER VAN. (...) Terrified Christine, 75, and Geoffrey Seward, 86, were driving home when they heard a noise behind them and saw a stranger emerge from the bathroom.*  
(Express, 2 July 2015)

The effect of mediating the voices of British nationals is to emphasise the unpreparedness of the encounter between nationals and migrants in a personal manner which creates uneasiness among concerned readers. Likewise, one prevalent strategy in discriminatory discourse is the denial of the outgroup voice to enhance the status of the ingroup (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002). Within the problem-oriented representation of irregular migrants, the outgroup of migrants appears to be nearly voiceless as their views were hardly expressed in the news coverage studied in this research. This is in line with previous research that found that voices of irregular migrants are usually absent from the public (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013). Whilst the voices of irregular migrants were mostly absent in the right-wing newspaper articles, numerous accounts of nationals were used to stress citizens' empathy towards migrants and the potential dangers associated with their journey conditions.

The *Express*, for instance, reported about the case of a man who was hiding in a British couple's vehicle and later escaped. The couple expressed compassion for him, but ultimately insisted that migrants should come to the UK through legal channels. In this context the generalization strategy was deployed which portrays citizens as the law-abiding ingroup, whilst migrants were viewed as illegitimate strangers due to their secret arrival in the UK and assumed infringement of immigration law. The homogenisation of irregular migrants as 'lawbreakers' is a form of stereotyping through which people tend to see outgroup members as less complex than themselves and simplify their individual characteristics (Teo, 2000).

Hence, this way of stereotyping serves to perpetuate the mentality that disfavors irregular migrants as troublemakers and favors nationals as peaceful citizens.

### 7.1.3 Deceptive criminals

The media strategy of positive ingroup and negative outgroup representation serves to highlight the moral values of the ingroup members and to emphasise the negative characteristics of the outgroup members (KhosraviNik, 2009). The *Daily Mirror* featured the story of a woman who was, according to her account, deceived by an irregular migrant as he abandoned her despite their planned wedding and her support with his immigration paperwork. Using individualisation strategies many details about the evolution of this relationship and the way the migrant abandoned her before their wedding were presented which provided the impression that she acted selflessly throughout whilst he appeared to be untrustworthy and duplicitous. The following account of the woman illustrates her perspective:

*"We were so excited, but soon Jass started telling me that I had better have the cheapest wedding possible and that I could just wear a second hand dress and use plastic flowers. (...) It all started to cause strain on our relationship, and made me really suspicious."*  
(Daily Mirror, 21 September 2021)

From the viewpoint of the British woman she appeared to be the victim in this romance narrative by emphasising her characteristics of being a trustful, generous woman who was in search of a loving partner. This polarised representation of the 'bad', untrustworthy migrant as a member of the outgroup and the 'good' British woman who belonged to the ingroup confirmed the tendency of two distinct groups, the 'bad migrants' and 'the good nationals'.

The theme of migrants being 'deceptive criminals' was further reflected in the right-wing press coverage that used generalisation tactics to depict migrants as a collective threat. In light of several terror attacks across Europe between 2015 and 2018, such as in France, with British casualties, public fears were associated with the potential uncontrolled entry of terrorists into the UK. The online press reportage in the year

before the EU referendum clearly reflected these concerns and responded to various terror attacks in Europe by referring to the fear that terrorists could hide among irregular migrants. By using scare tactics, the *Telegraph* claimed that terrorists used the same routes as migrants and if their access to a country was not checked, then terrorists could be among them, leaving the British public in danger of terrorist attacks. This fear was amplified by public concerns over uncontrolled migration where authorities did not seem to know the identity of people who entered the UK.

The perceived link between migration and terrorism made migration an increasingly contentious subject based on anti-immigration sentiment which is believed to have fuelled support for UKIP. The analysis here shows that the British national press further raised fears over terrorism using generalisation, for example, by explicitly naming irregular migrants along with terrorists and criminals in planned British legislation which aimed at depriving them of human rights:

*Terrorists, criminals and illegal immigrants will be prevented from hiding behind human rights to avoid deportation under plans being drawn up by the Conservatives for the election.*  
(Telegraph, 20 January 2015)

Clear approval of this law was expressed by the use of emotionally loaded verbs whilst announcing that these individuals will 'be stripped of human rights'. Furthermore, by stereotyping these groups and refraining from giving further details, migrants equally appeared as individuals with criminal intentions. This argumentation was based on the assumption that all these groups were dangerous for the host society and they would hide behind human rights to avoid deportation. The generalisation of the outgroup as potential criminals has the purpose to evoke condemnation and encourages the reader to form an antipathetic attitude towards the migrants. The use of generalisation reflects a vilification of migrants here and has a pejorative effect by denying this outgroup the same rights as for the ingroup members such as entitlement to human rights (Russo and Tempesta, 2017).

Similarly, the *Express* reported on a barrister who criticised a British judge for considering the human rights of terrorists and irregular migrants. The newspaper argued that the judge, by following rulings of the European Court of Human Rights,

jeopardised the life of British citizens and denied them their democratic rights to safety. The critique directed at this judge was concerned with the claim that he cared more about the few members of the outgroup than the majority of the ingroup, their own citizens. The alleged solidarity of the judge with migrants puts both in the outgroup category. Emotional terminology was used, for example ‘spineless’ to describe the government which was seen as weakening the battle against terrorism in general:

*POLITICALLY-correct judges and spineless governments are weakening the UK’s battle against terrorism and illegal immigration by caving in to European human rights rulings, a leading barrister has said.*  
(Express, 20 March 2015)

The juxtaposition of the ‘irregular migrant’ against the ‘terrorist’ forms in the readers’ mind the image of a dangerous criminal who threatens the social stability of the British people. The association of migrants with crimes has the effect of dehumanising this group and suggests that the figure of the irregular migrant is synonymous with danger and crime. The discursive strategy of generalisation was employed by the right-wing press not only to reinforce the antipathetic stereotyping of irregular migrants but also to deliberately ‘other’ those, including ingroup members, who support them.

In cases where government representatives or members of British society acted in the interest of irregular migrants, they were referred to by right-wing newspapers at times as treacherous and regarded as outgroup members with different principles. For example, the vulnerability of migrants that are minors was not always treated by newspapers as a priority. The *Express* employed delegitimation tactics to discredit judges’ decisions that protect the rights of minor irregular migrants. The newspaper expressed outrage over a court’s decision which instructed the Home Office to bring a non-British family back to the UK following health concerns of the deported child:

*A court ruled that the government must find the woman and her five-year-old son by tomorrow or they will face contempt of court proceedings.*



*The move casts doubt over plans by Home Secretary Theresa May to deport illegal immigrants before they have a chance to launch protracted appeals.*  
(Express, 22 April, 2015)

The argumentation further drew on scare tactics by stressing that one million irregular migrants were already in the UK, indirectly suggesting that these migrants already put a great burden on the resources of British society. The reference to a figure had the effect to delegitimise the right to adequate health care of the migrant child and was used to outlaw foreigners more generally.

In a similar fashion, the *Express* problematised the behaviour of certain members of the ingroup as controversial and their loyalty to the group was questioned in cases where British nationals showed their support for irregular migrants. The coverage on British protestors who attempted to prevent the deportation of migrants by gluing themselves to a gate serves as an example:

*Protesters GLUE themselves to GATE in bid to stop illegal immigrants being deported.*  
(Express, 25 November 2015)

This representation serves to reiterate the Us-versus-Them mentality and clearly distances irregular migrants and those who act in their favour from the mainstream society.

#### **7.1.4 Compassion for migrants**

As highlighted by findings of a previous survey, the British public seemed to be divided in their attitudes towards migrants and over half of all Britons expressed more compassion for refugees during the ‘migration crisis’ (Ipsos MORI, 2016a). The case of the drowned Syrian toddler Alan Kurdi led to a remarkable compassionate media reportage in the UK and across Europe (see chapter 5). In this context, left-wing British newspapers also adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards the group of irregular migrants by focusing on their vulnerability.

The *Guardian* is the main left-wing newspaper that reported about the plight of irregular migrants as a direct consequence of the UK's anti-immigration policy. One article fiercely criticised the rationale behind this policy arguing that it deliberately made irregular migrants destitute with the intention to deter future migrants:

*These are our ghost people, invisible and disappeared. Thousands of refused asylum seekers are alone and adrift with nothing at all, nowhere to live and banned from working. They are not accidental victims, but deliberately made destitute to starve them back to lands to which they cannot return. Their suffering is designed by successive governments as a public deterrence to would-be arrivals.*

(Guardian, 18 December 2015)

This representation created a sense of destitution on the part of the outgroup reflecting the hardship migrants could face as a result of restrictive British policy measures. Extensivization was used here to provide detailed information about the services offered by the Red Cross to migrants who were homeless and were unable to return to their country of origin. By introducing the voice of the outgroup, individual stories of a few destitute migrants shed further light on their plight from their personal perspective. The use of extensivization by including locations, direct quotations of migrants or concrete living conditions helps to create sympathy towards outgroups among readers (KhosraviNik, 2009). In doing so, the left-wing newspaper the *Independent* reported on another strand of the discourse which dealt with the individual plight of migrants living in detention centres. For example, the inhumane living conditions of migrants residing in the centre in Amygdaleza in Greece were strongly criticised from the perspective of the migrants and NGO personnel:

*But life in Greece, he said, has been "worse". He says he watched many inmates die from illnesses because of neglect and the lack of any healthcare at Amygdaleza. "The [camp] was very dirty. If anyone got sick, no one cared - we'd get beaten up when we asked for a doctor," he tells The Independent. Other migrants also talk of widespread physical abuse in Greece's detention centres. For years, Athens has repeatedly been condemned for the treatment of migrants by the European Court of Human Rights.*

(Independent, 6 April 2015)

The emphasis on the minority voice and adopting extensivization by providing numerous and graphic details about their living circumstances worked to create a high degree of compassion for the outgroup among readers.

More surprisingly, the right-wing press also expressed some degree of empathy towards irregular migrants. A coverage of the right-wing newspaper *Daily Star* criticised a Conservative politician for discrediting irregular migrants. Using extensivization, he was portrayed as inappropriate and lacking in morality after he shared offensive photos staging a migrant boat with half-naked models in which he made fun of the plight of irregular migrants who risked dangerous journeys to reach their desired destination country:

*The councillor admitted making a number of 'offensive' postings on a Facebook page, which have now been removed. Among the postings included a dog with a towel on his head and a sexually explicit cartoon, both posted on the Facebook page of the Peoples Front of Egham, which is currently unavailable. He also posted an image on July 24 showing a boat full of 14 naked women, with a caption reading 'If Carlsberg did illegal immigrants'.* (Daily Star, 31 August 2015)

Further details were given about the motive and investigation regarding his offensive behaviour. This kind of representation in which a right-wing newspaper seemed to protect the interests of migrants was not common indicating that this behaviour was regarded as particularly improper given the high political profile of the politician.

The harsh conditions migrants face during their migratory movement were repeatedly featured by the right-wing press. Most right-wing newspapers took into account the perspective of migrants, by implicitly drawing attention to the dangers associated with the unlawful entry of migrants and the risk of death resulting from various smuggling methods. Recent and current numbers of migrants who died or made it to Europe were discussed through denial of the minority's voice and reliance on legitimised sources. These discursive strategies fulfil a gatekeeping effect which only admits the perspectives of those in powerful positions and enhances their status (Teo, 2000). At the same time, the powerless population such as the group of irregular migrants were systematically silenced by the media leading to their further

disempowerment by alienating them from the dominant population and underlining their low status.

Without directly including the voice of the migrants, attention was repeatedly drawn to the suffering of vulnerable migrant groups by focusing on children or women whose despair and vulnerability were emphasised. This finding is in line with previous studies that pointed to specific media representation of migrant women based on racialised, feminised vulnerability, whilst male foreigners were primarily portrayed as undeserving and dangerous groups (Gray and Franck, 2019). In using the discursive strategy of only seeking the views of the British nationals, the media creates the impression that irregular migrants do not have anything valuable to say about their situation from their perspective (Teo, 2000).

Additionally, the *Daily Mail* illustrated the despair and helplessness of irregular migrants who were already residing in the UK, for instance those who lived in cramped conditions in a London area. By describing the poor conditions of the multiple places irregular migrants inhabited, the newspaper drew a picture of inhuman living conditions which raised empathy for this outgroup and questioned the legitimacy of restrictive migration policies.

### **7.1.5 The incapable government**

Within the representation of an ineffective migration security system, a number of right-wing newspapers showed indignation over the British governments' actions by using scare tactics. Overall, a metaphor of a faulty immigration system was created which reflected the state's loss of control, particularly over its borders. The use of this metaphor is important in claiming that this failure led to the UK facing the 'migration crisis'. These discursive strategies colour the perception of the reader by questioning the public faith in the government handling of irregular migration and by suggesting that it acts irresponsibly towards its own citizens. In order to amplify a crisis scenario, scare tactics was used detailing comprehensive figures regarding the amount spent on border control and repeatedly naming statistics on arrested irregular migrants.

A further recurring topic which underlines the mediated notion of ‘crisis/chaos’ concerns the number of irregular migrants in the UK and the inability of the British government to reduce it. As discussed earlier, 2015 was the target year by which the British Conservative party promised to significantly reduce the number of net migration as part of its ‘hostile environment policy’ (Allen and Blinder, 2018). Since this promise remained unfulfilled in 2015 and the following three years, it is not surprising that the media coverage frequently reported on a perceived high number of irregular migrants. The right-wing newspapers, for example, used legitimised voices that are critical of migrants (Flowerdew, Li and Tran, 2002). By mediating the viewpoint of politicians, the *Express* quoted a UKIP leader who criticised the then Prime Minister David Cameron's unattained migration target to reduce the numbers of migrants to thousands and stressed the lack of government knowledge about migration-related statistics in the UK:

*But the headline figure - which has made a mockery of David Cameron and his failed 'no ifs no buts' policy - does not even take into account the 1.1million illegal immigrants estimated to be living and working in the UK in secret. Steven Woolfe, UKIP migration spokesman said: "Our public services cope with more than a million illegal migrants who have disappeared into the black economy."*  
(Express, 28 August 2015)

Furthermore, by using scare tactics and drawing attention to the high number of migrants from non-EU countries who arrived in Europe, this right-right newspaper argued that this figure revealed the chaos ‘gripping’ the government's immigration policy. A statement by David Cameron was singled out and referred to as questionable in which he stressed that the EU's free movement policy was the actual reason why the government did not reach the planned migration target. The use of official voices and in this case of an anti-immigration politician serves to once again challenge the migration policy of the government and evoke public concerns about the competence of political elites. This strategy intends to distance the public from policymakers such as the Prime Minister by regarding them as incompetent outgroup members who fail to protect the interests of the ingroup.

Moreover, the *Telegraph* used scare tactics by stressing that thousands of failed asylum seekers were not chased by the British government and the Home Office relied on the voluntary return of irregular migrants to reduce their number:

*Immigration officers have given up trying to find more than 10,000 asylum seekers who are missing in Britain, a watchdog has revealed. Staff are not even checking last known addresses because it is "not a priority" and a "drain on resources", the chief inspector of borders and immigration found.*

(Telegraph, 17 December 2021)

The key argument of this article was based on the assumption that this specific outgroup was not a priority but rather a drain on resources for immigration officers. It also criticised the lack of power of British police to arrest migrants without work permits in police raids. Overall the metaphor of a powerless but also too lenient government was employed that serves to create an image of a shady, clever migrant who knows how to bypass the law.

The theme ‘wasted taxpayers’ money’ is a further dominant issue that was covered by the right-wing press in relation to the government’s incapability to combat irregular migration. The *Express*, for example, claimed that seemingly massive amounts of taxpayers' money was wasted on a dysfunctional system. The use of these tactics draws attention to various derogatory characteristics of the British government and depicts it as an outgroup that failed to invest citizens’ money in a sensible and effective way. This has the effect of alienating the readers from the political elites that supposedly failed them. The topic of ‘public misuse of taxpayers’ money was strongly driven by the *Express* and the *Telegraph*. The newspapers drew on emotionally loaded language to illustrate various problems associated with migration such as abuse and inappropriate amount of benefits granted to the outgroup and rising number of migrants.

Outrage language was used to complain about millions spent on the deportation of irregular migrants due to the lack of available scheduled flights. In this context, numerous statistics were given in relation to expenses for the deportation of irregular migrants on charter flights. For example, the *Telegraph* used emotional language to

express outrage by emphasising that 500 million pounds of British taxpayers' money was spent to pay for the return of irregular migrants, imprisonment of migrants and rejected asylum seekers. The newspaper argued that this was the result of the lack of robust policies to prevent irregular migration in the first place:

*Britain to spend £500 MILLION sending illegal immigrants home – and YOU'RE paying. BRITAIN is being forced to spend a staggering £500million in taxpayers' cash to send thousands of illegal immigrants and failed asylum seekers back home.*

(Telegraph, 27 August 2015)

Conflicting views about the state's deportation of irregular migrants prevailed. On the one hand, deportation of irregular migrants was desired in order to reduce their number. On the other hand, where deportations could take place the right-wing press criticised the costs of implementation, arguing that these were too high. This implicitly lamented the high sums of taxpayers' money spent for deportation.

By singling out an individual case, the *Express* also showed lack of understanding for the decision of a British judge:

*A CONVICTED rapist and illegal migrant from Iran has been given extra taxpayers' cash to visit his son – because his benefits money is spent on cigarettes. (...) A judge ruled the failed asylum seeker is entitled to claim travel expenses for the fortnightly visits so his human rights are not breached* (Express, 7 November 2015)

The main argument criticised that British taxpayers would pay for a migrant's living costs whose human rights were wrongly prioritised over his criminal activities. The judge was regarded as an outgroup member as his decision was seen as supporting primarily the rights of migrants rather than the interest of British taxpayers.

Furthermore, prolonged cases were discussed where taxpayers continued to pay benefits for migrants and for those who received benefits but refused to integrate into British society, for example, by not making an effort to learn English. All these benefits were also seen as an incentive for future migrants who embark on perilous journeys. These instances of government representatives allegedly siding with the

outgroup of migrants gives the impression that the government not only is unable to reduce the number of irregular migrants, but also seems to ‘betray’ its own people.

These findings must be understood in the context of a double crisis which is the ‘migration crisis’ and existing economic challenges in the UK that contributed to the growth of anti-immigration sentiments. As outlined in chapter 5, the British public experienced a number of cuts in public spending and a decrease in wages between 2008 and 2014 (Tilford, 2016). Furthermore, a multiannual economic recession before 2015 caused a deterioration of living standards in the UK and one of the lowest economic growth rates across Europe. Despite the lack of evidence that these negative economic developments were caused by immigration, both the British public and media tended to blame migrants for competing with jobs and healthcare in the UK (Balch, 2015).

Interestingly, some newspaper articles also expressed empathy for certain government representatives. Understanding was expressed towards those who implemented the laws, for instance, the border guards who were not regarded as responsible for the failed border controls. The *Telegraph*, for example, showed understanding towards British border guards who were depicted as hard-working and committed to their profession. They were also referred to as helpless with the equipment they have to protect the borders:

*Chris Hobbs, a former Metropolitan Police Special Branch officer who worked in border control, warned resources had been redeployed to cover the security threat facing major airports leaving coastal defences "almost non-existent".*

(Telegraph, 11 September 2016)

The purpose here is to clearly assign responsibility to policymakers and not those who implement legislation. Overall, right-wing newspapers frequently criticised British authorities for ‘wasting’ taxpayers’ money and political decisions or measures were often socially represented as contrary to the interest of British society.



### 7.1.6 Legislative restrictions

In 2015, a number of both left- and right-wing newspapers featured new or planned legislation on irregular migrants in European countries, but particularly in the UK. Within a continued negative perspectivisation of migrants, the British government was deemed as a member of the ingroup again in discourses of legislation that restrict the rights of the outgroup. High approval was expressed of a planned law that would restrict non-nationals' right for judicial review. By using ample extensivization, many details about the law's nature were given in order to underline how the outgroup will be disempowered and to stress the social identification of a British community that is being threatened by irregular migrants:

*The plans - which will be introduced by the Conservatives if they win the election - will stop thousands of immigrants from exploiting the court system to prolong their stays in Britain. It is hoped that the crackdown will slash legal costs for lengthy appeal processes, saving taxpayers money. (...) The only exception would be for asylum seekers or foreigners who would face "irreversible" harm if sent back home to a dangerous country.*  
(Express, 27 March 2015)

Opposition to irregular migrants was highlighted by stressing that those who had entered the UK illegally or overstayed their visa would see their right to appeal curtailed. From the perspective of British taxpayers, this law was seen as promising in reducing the number of prolonged cases and consequently save a lot of money for the taxpaying ingroup. This favourable us-representation tactic is effective in accentuating the interests and powerful status of the ingroup.

In the same year, the news coverage of another new British law that restricted irregular migration in the UK was covered by mainly right-wing but also left-wing newspapers. There were two approaches to feature this planned law, whilst both used extensivization giving details its aims and nature. This law concerned landlords in the UK who were obliged to check the legal status of their tenants and those who fail to do so could be sentenced up to five years. The legal consequences for tenants and migrants were portrayed as desirable. The *Express* and the *Sun* approved of this new legislation with a strong negative representation of irregular migrants stressing that this law intended to make life harder for foreigners. Strong language was used in

reference to the unwanted foreigners such as that they ‘need to be kicked out’ by the landlords:

*LANDLORDS who fail to kick out illegal immigrants and rejected asylum seekers face up to five years in jail under tough new laws.*  
(Express, 3 August 2015)

The use of negative them-representation here serves to delegitimise the presence of irregular migrants and enhances the privileges of the mainstream group. However, the *Telegraph* criticised this new law as being controversial and ineffective as it enabled landlords to evict irregular migrants whilst authorities are not mandated to monitor these migrants’ subsequent whereabouts.:

*Again and again, Mr Humphrys asked why the Communities Secretary wanted to give powers for landlords simply to evict illegal immigrants rather than use that information to send round "the boys in blue" and arrest those tenants, take them into custody and then deport them. And again and again, Mr Clark<sup>16</sup> had no answer. Mr Clark even admitted that, despite an apparently successful pilot programme for this policy, he had no figures for the number of deportations made as a result of all this success.*  
(Telegraph, 3 August 2015)

In this regard, using anger-related language and scare tactics, outrage was expressed about the decreased number of deportations of irregular migrants under the European Dublin Regulation<sup>17</sup>:

*Outrage as number of illegal immigrants deported under EU law HALVES in five years. BRITAIN has deported 50% fewer illegal immigrants under a key EU law in five years, new figures have revealed. Just 750 migrants were kicked out under the Dublin Convention – compared to 1,545 in 2010, when David Cameron came to power.*  
(Express, 25 June 2015)

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<sup>16</sup> Gregory David Clark is a British Conservative Party politician and served as a MP since 2005.

<sup>17</sup> The European Dublin Regulation is also known as the ‘Dublin Convention’.

These discursive tactics aim at promoting a sense of hostility towards policymakers in general and EU law in particular that was held responsible for this undesired development. It is striking that the right-wing newspapers not only adopted a critical stance towards British policymakers but also British landlords by arguing that this law also aimed at cracking down on rogue landlords. The latter were regarded as an outgroup as they were believed to exploit vulnerable migrants by profiting from their situation. The following news excerpt illustrates the critical attitude towards British landlords:

*A new Immigration Bill, which will be outlined in next week's Queen's Speech, will include tougher powers for councils to tackle unscrupulous landlords and to help honest landlords evict illegal migrants quicker.*  
(Daily Mail, 22 May 2015)

This argumentation is in line with left-wing newspapers' reportage which expressed disapproval of unwelcome consequences of this new law for migrants. By incorporating the voices of lawyers, charities and the British National Landlord Association the left-wing press stressed that this new policy will drive migrants into the hands of even more exploitative landlords. The use of negative attributions for British landlords direct readers' attention to form a critical view of the own ingroup by suggesting that landlords were biased and tend to prefer white tenants. In order to further promote an unpopular image against British policymakers, the law was further criticised by arguing that it forced landlords to take over border policing tasks which might result in the restriction of housing to foreign tenants overall. In other words, the law could lead to controversial consequences such as the general discrimination of foreign tenants or legal conflicts between landlords and tenants.

Legislative restrictions were also planned in the area of illegal work in the UK. The *Financial Times* and the *Telegraph* used extensivization by giving a lot of details about the content of an expected speech by former British Prime Minister David Cameron. The newspapers stressed that Cameron intended to highlight a new bill against illegal work in the UK which aimed at reducing migration overall including EU migration by restricting access to benefits for EU migrants. The *Independent* and *Financial Times* further provided detailed characteristics of this law and emphasised how it rendered illegal work a criminal offence in its own right. Using scare tactics, the number of irregular migrants in the UK was underlined and seen as 'stubbornly' high:

*Mr Cameron's speech will immediately follow the publication of new statistics which are expected to show a continuation of the stubbornly high levels of immigration to the UK. While the Conservatives pledged before the 2010 election to bring net migration down to the "tens of thousands", the figure rose to just under 300,000 by the end of the coalition's term in office. (Financial Times, 21 May 2015)*

This law was depicted as a desirable policy measure to reduce the number of migration in the UK. The media's fixation on numbers in these media instances plays an important role in justifying restrictive policies against irregular migration. The *Guardian* also gave many statistics about the scope and development of various migrants groups in the UK and was critical about the government's unattained aim to reduce the number of irregular migrants to thousands. It questioned whether the new bill would in fact reduce the overall number of migrants. This narrative stood in contrast to previous arguments as it focused on different reasons and various migrant groups for the British government's failure to reduce the number of migrants overall.

## **7.2 The EU referendum and the fixation on 'the enemy'**

In 2016, the key political event in the British context was the outcome of the EU referendum which determined the UK's exit from the EU. Observers stress that Brexit advocates, towards the second part of their campaign, began to focus on issues of immigration and demanded to take back control in this area of policy where they feel the EU had failed them (Baston, 2017). In terms of immigration control, most Britons thought that the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, would not fulfil her commitment and reduce the net migration rate to tens of thousands in the following five years (Ipsos MORI, 2017a). Ipsos MORI argue that the EU referendum partly reflected the loss of patience among the public in relation to unachieved immigration targets. In addition, in light of the ongoing 'migration crisis' in Europe, migration remained a prominent public topic which provoked a variety of emotions such as compassion or disapproval (Kopytowska, Grabowski and Woźniak, 2017).

In line with this macro-structure at work, it was not surprising that the right-wing press dominated the news coverage of this year and tended to represent migrants in connection with their unlawful entry into the UK as a problem, by considering the

broader network behind such migratory movements. Overall, the news coverage continued to be unsympathetic towards irregular migrants by drawing on reports about migrants already residing in the UK and problematising crime-related issues. Despite the mostly negative representation of migrants, a few news articles adopted a humanitarian discourse in their coverage on uncontrolled entries of migrants.

### **7.2.1 Uncontrolled borders**

In 2016, right-wing newspapers clearly dominated the online news coverage on irregular migration. The *Sun* and the *Daily Star*, for instance, used discrimination strategy to continue viewing migrants as an uninvited outgroup arguing that their illegal entry constitutes a disturbance to the everyday lives of people in the host society. Perceived in this way, the media arouses a sense of political urgency to protect the wellbeing of the ingroup (Kopytowska, Grabowski and Woźniak, 2017). Similar to 2015, the metaphor of ‘immigration chaos’ was strengthened by a special focus on migrants in Calais who were described by almost all right-wing newspapers as very determined in their intention to get into the UK by any means. The *Daily Mail*, *Express* and *Telegraph* referred to the migrants from this camp as violent and pugnacious in order to get on lorries bound for the UK. By using generalisation, violent migrants were depicted as fighting with each other in an attempt to secure a place on the lorries. These verbal negative attributions directed at the migrants contributed to the notion of irregular migrants as a threat to the British people and was used as a justification to demand the reduction of the flow of migrants in general.

Using alarmist statistics helped to reinforce a sense of loss of political control. This was especially illustrated by the right-wing media’s depiction of a chaos situation at the Euro Channel by using scare tactics and mentioning that around 1000 migrants attempted to enter trucks. Border-related issues were also perpetuated by naming the amount spent for border control at the French-British border whilst lamenting that there was a lack of investment for border control on the French side. This issue was picked up right-wing newspapers, for example, by drawing on statistics regarding the amount of money spent for enhancing border security at the French-British border

following increased numbers of migrants in Calais. The news coverage of the Calais situation overall presented the presence of migrants in Calais as an imminent danger and appealed to the need to protect the British society and prevent these migrants from entering the UK:

*UK SUPERMARKETS could soon run short of essential goods because asylum seekers trying to force their way onto lorries at Calais have brought Britain's food supply chain to the brink of collapse.*  
(Express, 2 June 2016)

The notion of ‘uncontrolled borders’ was strengthened by featuring left-wing activists who were referred to as encouraging migrants to come to the UK by giving out leaflets with information about its welfare system:

*The figures come just hours after Express.co.uk revealed British anarchists are telling migrants in Calais how to claim benefits in the UK. Hundreds of leaflets about Britain's generous welfare system have been handed out by hard-left activists in recent weeks.*  
(Express, 16 March 2016)

Overall, a metaphor of deficient and ineffective border control in the UK was employed by the right-wing press that functions as a means of holding political elites responsible for the alleged continuing arrival of irregular migrants. The theme of ‘uncontrolled borders’ was further featured by the *Telegraph* that pointed towards the consequence of the neglected and therefore vulnerable east coast border. By representing the voices of British police officers, the police complained about the issue of vulnerable coastal defences resulting from the fact that the central focus of border guards lies in major ports such as Calais and neglects smaller ports. This problem was highlighted by the *Telegraph* by using scare tactics focusing on numbers of porous border controls along the coastline and emphasising that the numbers of illegal entrants into the UK doubled in three years.

In the same vein, the perspective of far-right parties was represented by the *Express* who criticised the ineffectiveness of British border controls and a loss of control of migration in the UK at large. A UKIP politician was quoted stating that the police in Dover did the best they could and the actual problem was the poor equipment of the British border police. The content of what is said plays on the prevalent critique that the government failed to provide proper equipment to these guards and weak border security at small ports such as the east coast allows for smuggling of people and goods. The inclusion of the voice of a UKIP politician is a significant choice made by the media here. As mentioned in chapter 5.4, UKIP gained the largest number of votes in 2015 and was the key political party that promoted anti-immigration sentiments. The concerns expressed by this politician in this instance most likely resonates with Leave voters and readers who felt that migration represents a threat to their community.

The problem in relation to weak borders was reinforced by an insider whistleblower who gave numerous details about the UK's weak border control due to deficient security equipment and staff shortage:

*"Now we have officers in fixed sites, in terms of numbers less than we had in the past, we don't have the intelligence officers in the ground, we don't have the same sort of mobility, we don't have the direct connection with operators at small port. The east coast is more open than it was, much more open than it was, much more vulnerable."*  
(Telegraph, 12 January 2016)

This representation of an intragroup conflict serves to evoke mistrust in British policymakers by highlighting the government representatives' critique of ineffective border controls. Thus, policymakers and border guards were portrayed in opposite ways. While the latter were regarded as ingroup members who appeared to be concerned about the borders that they were supposed to protect, the former were seen as an outgroup who failed to equip British border guards properly so that they could protect the borders effectively. The *Telegraph* used direct speech by calling on the government to deploy more rigorous security checks at small ports in the UK. In this way, the newspaper promoted a high severity and urgency of the border situation in the UK which requires an immediate solution.

The issue of border control considered only the perspectives of politicians and citizens who were quoted arguing that smugglers and gangs took advantage of loose border controls and deliberately exploited the small British coasts. In this regard, the general issue of people trafficking was raised and accentuated along with the increasing numbers of illegal entry in the last few years. Furthermore, the *Express* drew attention to a report by the British National Crime Agency which stressed that organised gangs were very adaptive and succeeded in their illegal-cross border activities to smuggle goods, i.e. arms and people including potential terrorists. This was illustrated by referring to a list of smuggled people and goods that were detected by British authorities. The claim was also made that migrants were highly organised and always a few steps ahead. The accumulative use of voices of ingroup members who ascribe negative attributes to irregular migration helps to sustain a strong demarcation between the government and migrants indicating that the migrant was the perpetrator chased by law enforcers. Despite the fact that the EU was able to achieve a migration-related agreement with Turkey in 2016 with the intention to reduce the number of irregular arrivals in Europe (see chapter 5 for more details), the concerns raised in the news coverage outlined above clearly reflect a continued mistrust in the political handling of unlawful migratory movements to the UK.

### **7.2.2 Ineffective policy measures**

The issue of ‘uncontrolled borders’ outlined in the previous section was closely linked to other policy measures that the British press viewed as ineffective in combating irregular migration. One key criticism of the government concerned its measures to decrease the number of irregular migrants by depicting them as ineffective. Only right-wing newspapers exclusively covered this discourse theme. The *Times* underlined that the UK's immigration policy did not reduce the number of irregular migrants and the Home Office did not know the actual number of this group of migrants:



*The Home Office does not know how many migrants are working illegally in the UK and previous estimates vary considerably. In 2009 the London School of Economics put the figure at between 373,000 and 719,000, while Migration Watch UK suggested that it was more than 1.1 million.*  
(Times, 3 August 2016)

The British government was further described as dishonest and incompetent, particularly by singling out the former Prime Minister Theresa May who was held accountable for failing to reduce the amount of net migration in Britain. The failure of the British government to tackle immigration was featured by the *Express* by using scare tactics providing various statistics about increasing numbers around irregular migration.

Another issue raised was the ineffectiveness of the British detention system. The *Sun* used scare tactics similarly by referring to statistics concerning the number of irregular migrants who were kept in detention for many years whilst emphasising the millions that taxpayers pay for them:

*TAXPAYERS have forked out £1million to keep 13 long-stay suspected illegal immigrants in Britain. It is costing £90 a day to hold the group before adding legal costs run up as they fight deportation, we can reveal. The bill so far would have paid for 45 nurses for a year. Home Office figures show the group have been held at immigration detention centres for a combined total of 32 years.*  
(Sun, 10 July 2016)

The press emphasised that this money could have been spent for British citizens in need. The victim blaming strategy was further used to portray a powerless British government where the Home Office, for instance, holds migrants accountable for their ineffective removal. The newspaper argued that failed asylum seekers often refuse to reveal their nationality and hence cannot be deported. Politicians were cited who argue that the government was too soft on immigration and existing policy measures were too weak. For example, one critique referred to the number of deportees lamenting that it was lower than 10 years ago. This suggests that the government not only failed to attain its goals but in fact performed poorer than expected.

### 7.2.3 Self-protection of nationals

Another issue regarding ineffective migration policy measures was the remarkable social representation of nationals in 2016 in which nationals across Europe were depicted as homogenous groups who decided to defend themselves from potentially harmful migrants due to a perceived lack of national border controls. This theme of 'self-protection' featured nationals who appeared to feel impelled to act as border guards to prevent migrants from entering their country uncontrolled. In this context, the impact of the presence of irregular migrants on the lives of nationals was assessed by the press as serious and significant. In 2016, almost all articles that included a representation of nationals were from right-wing newspapers. The *Express*, for instance, by employing self-justification defended nationals concerns' about a perceived loss of border guards' control. In this way, some citizens felt that the government was not able to protect their country's borders and hence saw the need to take things into their own hands by carrying out border controls themselves. These nationals were described as determined to take their own actions to protect themselves from the arriving migrants. Consequently, the action and anti-immigration attitudes of those who voluntarily decided to protect their borders were characterised as reasonable and understandable:

*Vigilante 'migrant hunter' who patrols borders arrested INSTEAD of illegal immigrants.*  
(Express, 6 April 2016)

By taking a collective perspective across the group of nationals, the *Express*, sided with the citizens by showing outrage about their arrest as a result of their self-protection. Negative outgroup identity was constructed as a means by which migrants were seen as the actual 'lawbreakers' who were not arrested instead.

Self-justification strategy was further used to legitimise some British truck drivers' possession of weapons to protect themselves from irregular migrants and to stress that the illegal possession of weapons for self-defence should not be condemned. This builds up on concerns reported by right-wing newspapers in 2015 by using the argumentation that British truck drivers feared irregular migrants hiding in their lorries and for this reason deemed it necessary to protect themselves. It is noteworthy

that no details were provided in relation to the kind of fears that the ingroup members have, but only their general negative stance towards irregular migrants was underlined. More specifically, the media expressed outrage about British judges that punished nationals for protecting themselves. This was illustrated by singling out an individual case of one British lorry driver who received a suspended sentence for carrying a weapon to protect himself from the undefined dangers of migrants:

*Migrants swarm over lorries trying to get into them or on to them. "I'm scared of no man - same as all the drivers - but when you see a mob right in front you, it controls everything. I've seen police with tear gas step backwards" he said.*

(Express, 24 February 2016)

Issues in relation to the security of nationals were further raised regarding the contact of irregular migrants with children. For example, the *Telegraph* reported the case where a male migrant was found hiding in a school bus bound for the UK from France. Using intensification to dramatize this incident, many details about how the migrant was found were given. The perceived uneasiness of the physical proximity between the migrant and the children was underlined by incorporating the perspective of the children's parents who expressed anger over the fact that they were not informed by the school earlier about this incident. As in previous right-wing reportage, the mere fact that this migrant entered a country illegally was categorically generalised as something unfavourable or even dangerous although no concrete details about the nature of the assumed danger were given. This implies that the figure of the irregular migrant was represented as per se hostile to the British society.

In contrast to the unspecified fears on the part of the nationals, other news articles drew attention to more concrete dangers allegedly posed by migrants. For instance, some newspapers argued that irregular migrants could carry infectious diseases and pass them on to nationals. The *Sun* used extensivization to report on the progression of events at a British police station that was shut down after a group of migrants were found in a lorry and showed headache and vomiting symptoms. The emphasis of the news coverage was placed on the considerable efforts of the police to ensure a lockdown of the police station and on the risk of possible infection of the police

officers. These concerns were proven to be false as migrants suffered carbon monoxide poisoning from the lorry fumes they had inhaled. With the use of self-justification, a police officer was quoted stating that such an incident illustrated the drain on national resources that irregular migrants presented with their presence in the UK:

*Luton Custody Sergeant Darren Turney tells the programme makers: "The whole immigration thing is such a big issue. "It drains our resources. Police officers are down the hospital, it takes all our cell space up and it's nothing to do with us."*

(Sun, 19 May 2016)

#### **7.2.4 Crimes associated with irregular migrants**

Unlawful entry was no longer the top illicit act associated with irregular migrants in 2016, but a number of concrete crimes with consequences for nationals were related to the outgroup. In line with previous research findings (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015; Islentyeva, 2021), this study found that irregular migrants were repeatedly associated by the right-wing British media with various criminal activities and therefore were depicted as a threat and danger to the host society. This finding is in line with results from an Ipsos MORI poll that highlighted that more than half of the British people were less empathetic towards refugees and thought that terrorists disguise as refugees (Ipsos MORI, 2016a). By employing scare tactics, the *Daily Mail* viewed the perceived high presence of irregular migrants as a severe problem by stressing that it was impossible to monitor their movements or to deport them. In this context, the use of scare tactics once again created a sense of panic among the readers mentioning several attacks in Europe. For example, the lorry attack in Berlin in December 2016 was featured by the *Times* in which a man smashed a lorry into a Christmas market killing 12 people and injuring at least 48. The threat from the attacker who was an asylum seeker was highlighted by the newspaper by giving details about the people behind the lorry attack:

*An 18-year-old nephew of Amri named as Fedi said on Saturday that his uncle was the leader of a terrorist cell called the Abu al-Walaa brigade, after a radical Islamic preacher who is under arrest in Germany.*  
(Times, 26 December 2016)

In addition, the Berlin attack came to be interlinked to previous attacks in Paris. Information about the terror suspect who was believed to have links to the Paris attacks in 2015 and circumstances of his death were provided by both the *Express* and the *Telegraph*. The Paris attacks happened in November 2015 where several public places in Paris such as a concert hall, restaurants and a stadium were attacked simultaneously with 130 casualties and several hundred injured. All the terrorists named in the news articles were believed to be irregular migrants at some point during their residence in Europe. To illustrate this issue, an incident with an asylum seeker was described who was shot dead by police when he entered the police station exclaiming “Allahu Akbar<sup>18</sup>”. Given that between 2015 and 2017 the number of terrorist attacks was relatively high in Europe and the UK (see chapter 5 for more details), it is not surprising that the association of irregular migration with terrorist attacks received more attention in the British press coverage in 2016 than in the previous year.

The right-wing press also focused particularly on cases of sexual assault associated with irregular migrants by frequently incorporating individualization to incite hostility among readers against the outgroup. This linguistic tactic focuses on individual characters including providing a lot of personal information (KhosraviNik, 2009). This highlights that newspapers employed the strategy of allowing the voices of migrants to be heard only in order to highlight their negative traits or to question their morality. For example, antipathetic single stories were repeatedly used to provide narratives about irregular migrants in which they were referred to as a real danger particularly for women in host societies. The *Daily Mail*, for example, featured the case of a murdered woman:

*The arrest also meant that prosecutors confirmed that they believe Mann was murdered. Initially they had said they were waiting for toxicology tests after an autopsy found the nanny and part-time student had been suffocated.*

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<sup>18</sup> This phrase is derived from Arabic and means "God is the greatest"

*One theory they had been revealed to have considered is whether the death was a 'sex game' gone wrong - which was angrily rejected by her family.*  
(Daily Mail, 5 February 2016)

In the face of an ongoing investigation it should be noted that the newspaper made numerous speculations, for example concerning the different motives of the victim and the migrant in terms of their encounter. The newspaper without providing evidence claimed that the woman accommodated the migrant in order to prevent his deportation. This type of reportage evidently presents an interpretation of the happenings by incriminating the migrants and biases the reader into one particular reading. This strategy leaves little room for the reader to challenge the interpretation and think of alternative interpretations of the story. The woman was implicitly referred to as an altruistic person, whilst the migrant was regarded as unscrupulous and exploitative. In this coverage, it is notable that only the perspective of the woman's family and friends were represented. This depiction demarcates clearly the ingroup and outgroup by implicitly underlining that nationals should not be regarded in the same way as migrants.

The *Sun* further used extensivization by providing a number of details about the suspected progression of this news story claiming that both the woman and the migrant were probably not lucid. Personal information about both victim and migrant were also given. It is conspicuous that the voice of the migrant was also given in the reportage in which he explained that he pushed the woman leading to her accidental death after she insulted him. The vivid details about this event provided by the media seems to give the impression that personal encounters between the ingroup and outgroup can cause unforeseen problems and lead to adverse consequences for the ingroup.

A further specific impact of migrants on nationals was the fear that nationals could fall victim to crimes committed by the outgroup. Part of the news coverage of migrants referred to them as sex offenders with the victims being predominantly white nationals who were characterised as good-natured individuals whose trust towards particularly male migrants was exploited for vile intentions. On the other

hand, members of the ingroup were depicted as defenceless victims of brutal crimes committed by irregular migrants.

One specific crime associated with irregular migrants was sexual assault of women. Several European cities, in particular Cologne, reported mass sexual harassment and theft against female nationals on New Year's Eve in 2015 (Gray and Franck, 2019). News reports assumed that between several hundred and 1000 men celebrated the New Year in the city centre of Cologne before starting to grope and mug women in groups of around 30. The *Daily Mirror* was the only left-wing newspaper that reported on the mass sexual assault in Cologne on New Year's Eve in 2015. What is conspicuous is that the newspaper stressed that the majority of the suspects were asylum seekers or irregular migrants:

*Cologne sex attack investigation focused on asylum seekers or illegal migrants from north Africa; Around 40 percent of the 379 total criminal complaints were about sexual offences, including two rapes.*  
(Daily Mirror, 10 January 2016)

Furthermore, the *Daily Mail* and *Express* featured the same case of the rape committed by an irregular migrant who was described as brutal and bad overall. Using intensification, myriad details about the progression of the rape and hostage of the pregnant woman by her ex-boyfriend were given. These news reports inevitably colour the readers' perception of this event by suggesting that sexual assault may be a defining behaviour of male irregular migrants.

The second type of crime that was also connected with irregular migrants in this year was burglary. The *Express* and the *Sun* used almost the exact same wording and employed intensification to give a detailed report about the progression of a burglary in the UK. Only the voice of the responsible judge was represented in which he dismissed the claim of the lawyer of the migrant arguing that he did not plan the burglary thoroughly. The frontal positioning of the British judge enhances his opinion and credibility by assessing the question of guilt in this crime:

*Jailing Puka, Judge Johnson told him: "Those who break into others' houses in this country go to prison. You were with a confederate, there was a certain amount of planning and there were two offences. You have not been in this*

*country for a long amount of time and are, according to the probation officer, an illegal immigrant. I don't have the power to deport you, but if I did have the power to deport you I would."*  
(Sun, 16 February 2016)

As shown above, various fears of the British public about becoming victims of migrants with malicious intent were frequently depicted by the right-wing press. Although personalised narratives in which the perspective of the individual migrant is considered were rare, the discursive strategy of individualization was frequently used by right-wing newspapers to only illustrate bad characteristics and intentions of these migrants by drawing on personal stories. Assigning negative traits to individual migrants can have a generalizing effect and serves as an alleged representative example for all migrants.

### **7.2.5 Unfairness towards taxpayers**

In contrast to 2015, the potential abuse of UK's healthcare by irregular migrants and other foreigners was the subject of media coverage in 2016. Outrage was expressed in a news report by the *Sun* about allegedly free healthcare for migrants. By particularly pointing to the issue of British hospitals, the newspapers argued that they repeatedly failed to reclaim expenses from those migrants who received medical treatment. Similarly, the *Telegraph* used scare tactics by singling out large sums of money of different cases to illustrate that irregular migrants among other outgroups of foreigners used NHS treatment but were never asked to pay the money back. It is interesting to note that members of both ingroup and outgroup were held responsible for this issue; whilst the hospitals were seen as incompetent in their duty to reclaim the expenses, the migrants were represented as exploitative. Using further scare tactics in relation to the sustainability of the NHS as a whole, the perspective of a cancer specialist was represented stressing that no healthcare system could sustain in the long term if migrants and other foreigners continue to receive free treatment from the NHS:



*'NHS spent £181,000 treating just one illegal immigrant'; Leading cancer specialist claims migrants are putting "unsustainable" strain on NHS*  
(Telegraph, 21 March 2016)

To dramatize this perceived urgent problem, additional cuts that had been made to public services in the UK were highlighted in the news coverage. Self-justification strategy was further used by the newspaper to stress that large cities such as London experienced an unsustainable level of strain on public services and resources according to statistics about past and future immigration. Based on scare tactics, Brexit campaigners and UKIP members were represented who claimed that the real numbers were even believed to be higher. This negative outgroup portrayal by these groups was coupled with a concrete call for leaving the EU in order for the British state to be able to control its borders again.

Within a continued hostile representation, the *Express* referred to statistics given by the anti-immigration think-tank MigrationWatch UK about the rise in the number regarding unsuccessful removals of foreigners from the UK and respective costs for British taxpayers. In this light, irregular migrants along with other groups of foreigners were categorically generalized as welfare fraudsters. A further pressing issue was singled out in terms of the potential abuse of student visas by non-EU individuals who were believed to very likely overstay their visa and become irregular. Controversy was further expressed by the right-wing press by singling out the case of the British Criminal Cases Review Commission.

The *Express*, for example, equated illegal entry of migrants with a criminal offence and expressed outrage arguing that this government institution supported asylum seekers to challenge convictions for their illegal entry. By using scare tactics, the newspaper emphasised that one third of the clients of the Criminal Cases Review Commission were asylum seekers who represented competitors to British service users. The newspaper assumed that this state body serves the wrong client group and should be primarily offered to British citizens who experienced injustice. By incorporating reactions of Members of Parliament (MPs), the support for the outgroup was deemed counterproductive and was considered an incentive for more unlawful entry:

*The startling revelation sparked outrage from furious MPs who said it "undermines deterrence" and could lead to thousands more arrivals. Conservative MP Peter Bone described the move as "fundamentally wrong". He said: "This is Alice in Wonderland. If you do this, you will undermine deterrence and encourage more and more people to come in by illegal routes."*  
(Express, 10 January 2016)

Another discourse was centred around the contested use of taxpayers' money for the assisted return of migrants and its controversial effects. The *Daily Mail* and *Express*, for example, drew on individualisation strategy by featuring an individual case in which a British judge's decision to spare jail for a migrant mother of three was criticised. The fact that this migrant falsely claimed tens of thousands British pounds worth of benefits for the second time and was able to work with fraudulent documents was regarded by the newspapers as a criminal offence that should be punished. The newspapers emphasised that the judge was too lenient towards this migrant. Using extensivization, details of the judge's view were given in which he stressed that the migrant would be forced to abandon her children in the case of imprisonment and he believed that she will not commit such a crime again. The sense of unfairness on the state's side was enhanced by drawing on the argumentation that this migrant should not have been in the UK in the first place.

### 7.2.6 Irregular migrants versus EU migrants

It is surprising that the EU referendum in spite of its focus on migration and the strengthening of UK borders appears to be a marginal topic that was only mostly covered by the *Express*. One argument referred to changes that Brexit entails for European migrants who resided in the UK. An EU migrant was singled out who blamed irregular migrants for giving European migrant groups a negative reputation:

*Mr Marcar said he has been dismayed by the negative tone of much of the debate about immigration, particularly from eastern Europe. He feels hard-working, productive people are being unfairly stigmatised because of a minority who are not like that. He said: "I think there are a lot of people who are here illegally. For me that's the real problem, not the people who are working here, paying taxes, having a normal life."*  
(Express, 22 June 2016)

This representation of outgroups in competition and demarcation to one another was quite rare and indicated that irregular overseas migrants were generalised as inferior and not welcomed in host societies compared to European foreigners.

### 7.2.7 Several risks for migrants

Despite the concerns over increasing numbers of migrants as discussed above, right-wing newspapers continued drawing attention to the dangers migrants faced during their illegal entry. According to UNHCR (2016), 2016 in fact saw the highest recorded global number of casualties ever per year with a minimum of 5,000 individuals having lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea.

A recurring news story was the risk of migrants suffering from hypothermia or suffocation, particularly when smuggled via refrigerated lorries. By using extensivization, a number of detailed reports focused on how different groups of migrants were found in freezer lorries including vulnerable individuals such as infants, children, teenagers or women. These discourse strands also mentioned other actors at the scene, such as witnesses who observed events unfolding and stressed that it took several hours and the assistance of professionals including ambulances

and paramedics to treat migrants who inhaled lorry fumes. Concerns about the migrants' health issues were also discussed, mentioning that they had to be taken to hospital for medical checks. Further issues faced were raised by the *Times* concerning the disastrous conditions for migrants who were held in detention centres in terms of the length of detention, for example, in Libya. Using extensivization, personal narratives from detained migrants accounting for the inhumane living circumstances in the Gweea detention centre<sup>19</sup> were given whilst emphasising their fear of deportation:

*"I'm terrified they will deport me home, where I'm wanted by the regime," the former policemen said. He paid smugglers \$1,000 (£700) to cross to Tripoli before he was picked up with no papers at a militia checkpoint. Behind him, a 17-year-old boy who was arrested trying to make it to Europe described living on biscuits when his boat ran into trouble. The dinghy circled Libyan waters for two days because the appointed captain - a migrant from Senegal - didn't know how to use a compass. The teenager had paid \$800 for his seat. (Times, 29 March 2016)*

The high smuggling fees that migrants had to pay were also mentioned which further illustrated their plight and despair. Such discourses of victimisation were found by previous research predominantly in media representations of refugees but rarely on irregular migrants (KhosraviNik, 2009).

### **7.2.8 Unfair treatment of irregular migrants**

A further area in which irregular migrants were both seen as potential competitors of citizens was schooling. Whilst left-wing newspapers appeared to be reticent in their coverage and attitude on irregular migration in 2015, the *Guardian* expressed strong opposition in the discourse on vulnerable migration groups such as children. The newspaper directly addressed its readers to boycott a planned school census whilst providing details about this census, the rationale behind it and reasons why it should not be supported:

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<sup>19</sup> Gweea is located in the east of Tripoli and accommodated around 380 migrants by that time.

*Don't help the state bully migrants – boycott the school census. (...) Today brought confirmation of what we at the Against Borders for Children campaign have suspected for months: the government is trying to make schools part of its agenda to create a "hostile environment" for migrants accused of entering the country illegally.*  
(Guardian, 1 December 2016)

The British government was criticised for its plans to block children of irregular migrants from schooling in the UK as a result of this census. This discourse strand strongly criticised the British immigration system for disempowering the basic rights claimed by the group of irregular children. By emphasising the international right for children to education, the question of British values regarding the treatment of children of irregular foreigners was problematised and the British government and its core values in terms of the rights of children were challenged.

In a similar vein, the former Prime Minister Theresa May was condemned for her now discontinued plan to prioritise British children over children of irregular migrants in the issue of schooling. Contrary to its general negative stance towards migrants, the *Express* used extensivization and provided a lot of details about May's leaked school proposal in which she prioritised British schoolchildren over children of irregular migrants. By employing delegitimation, Theresa May was discredited and viewed as the member of an outgroup who appeared to be unfair in her bid for schooling of children. Using generalisation, a picture of a ruthless Conservative's immigration policy was painted that does not consider the special needs of migrant children and acts in conflict with core British values:

*She [Angela Rayner<sup>20</sup>] told the BBC Radio 4 Today programme: "It shows that actually Theresa May was not just considering it, her department was pushing it, and I'm deeply concerned about it. "I think it's a terrible idea. Denying innocent children because of the circumstances of their parents the right to a good education is disgusting, it's not a British value that we have."*  
(Express, 1 December 2016)

Similarly, the former French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen demanded that children of irregular migrants should not be allowed to attend schools in France. The

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<sup>20</sup> The then Shadow Secretary of State for Education.

coverage of the *Times* on this issue opposed her proposal arguing in the interest of migrants' children by pointing out the international right for children to attend school.

### **7.3 Post-EU referendum and the 'insignificant strangers'**

2017 and 2018 are jointly referred to as the 'post-EU referendum' period as the news coverage primarily represented irregular migrants as 'insignificant strangers' during this time. As previously discussed (see chapter 5), the year 2017 saw a stark decrease in the number of migrants entering the EU resulting from its political agreement with Turkey. This decline is reflected in the significantly lower number of published newspaper articles in this year indicating that the media interest in irregular migration diminished accordingly. In addition, it must be noted that at both EU and British level political attention for the 'migration crisis' abated and survey findings confirmed that migration was no longer the top concern for the British public. Given that the *Guardian* dominated the news coverage on irregular migrants in 2018, the remaining news reports were covered by right-wing papers which continued to predominantly feature anti-immigration topics and to a lesser degree the plight of migrants.

One key finding of the analysis of this section is that a number of themes that were already prevalent in the British press in 2015 and 2016, continued to attract media attention in 2017. These include crimes associated with irregular migrants, unlawful entry, weak border controls and plight of migrants. In the news coverage on crimes, migrants were portrayed as offenders by the right-wing press based on news stories of individual migrants. As outlined in the previous two sections, the use of extensivization focused on attention to details in order to strengthen anti-immigration sentiments and to sustain a negative stance towards the outgroup. The press also continued to use scare tactics to create a sense of urgency for policymakers to prevent irregular migrants from entering the UK and to stop spending British taxpayers' money for granting irregular migrants benefits.

However, the news coverage in 2017 was overall more critical of specific ingroup members such as the former Prime Minister Theresa May and her hostile policy. The news articles in this year also showed a stronger focus on migrants who already resided in the UK suggesting that unlawful entry is no longer the top concern when it comes to irregular migration. The international agreements to reduce irregular migration such as the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa and the fact that migrants were stranded in North African countries (see chapter 5 for more details) seemed to have helped to reduce the media attention on illegal entry.

Within a persistent antipathetic representation of migrants and a macro-argument of ‘illegal entries require a robust state response’, the right-wing press continued employing scare tactics to view irregular migrants as an ongoing threat to the majority group. However, it must be noted that the statistics given by the newspapers were not as alarmist as in news discourses in previous years. The press instead raised the issue that two border force vessels were redeployed from abroad to help guard the British coastal borders to handle the arrival of 200 migrants. In the absence of any relevant socio-political event pertaining to irregular migration in the British and European context, it seems as if the right-wing media attempted to remind its readership that irregular migration is still a serious matter for the British society. Using scare tactics, the *Telegraph* reported on the negative implications of the existence of irregular migrants for the British people and represents the view of the government stressing the effectiveness of a new law to restrict irregular migrants in having a bank account:

*Millions of bank and building society accounts will be subjected to checks to ensure services are not being provided to illegal migrants, it is reported. (...) Financial institutions will be tasked with checking the details of account holders against a list of illegal migrants who are liable for removal or deportation.*

(Telegraph, 22 September 2017)

Against this background, the following analysis shows that the British press overall directed less demands towards political elites to tackle irregular migration and was generally more sympathetic towards migrants compared to the last two years.

### 7.3.1 Migrants' suffering

The topic of migrants' suffering was featured by both left-wing and right-wing newspapers by mostly drawing attention to migrants already living in the UK. The *Guardian* discussed hatred and violence against migrants mostly from the viewpoint of the migrants themselves. By using individualisation strategies, the newspaper humanised the experience of the outgroup and evoked sympathy for them. For example, one article focused on details about the hideous living conditions of individual asylum seekers and refugees and pointed to examples of physical violence they experienced from British nationals:

*Two weeks ago a teenager was almost killed for the apparent crime of seeking safety in this country. Reker Ahmed was waiting at a bus stop in south London, when passersby asked where he was from. "They established he was an asylum seeker," say the police; the 17-year-old was then kicked and punched, his face was smashed in, an eye socket was cracked and his spine was fractured. The mob swelled to 20 or more. Some joined in, others watched.*

(Guardian, 4 November 2017)

In this way, the nationals were referred to as hostile indicating that the reader should distance herself/himself from such violent actions. The left-wing newspaper showed a stark polarised representation of both ingroups and outgroups by victimising the non-nationals and demonising violent nationals and policymakers with anti-immigration stances. Both groups were referred to in a black-and-white narrative and one group was portrayed merely as the 'vulnerable' ones and the other as the 'discriminatory'. The argumentation used here held the former Prime Minister Theresa May and her hostile environment policy accountable for these attacks. By providing details about this policy, the *Guardian* argued that this policy created a permissible anti-immigration environment in the UK and contributed to incidents of hatred and violence experienced by asylum seekers and refugees in their everyday lives. The media's negative evaluation of May's migration policy is not surprising considering that she did not receive a strong personal mandate from the public during the national election in 2017. More generally, this critique reflects a more general lack of confidence in the government's handling of migration issues.



The *Guardian* further featured individual difficulties of an existential nature that migrants face in their everyday life. Based on the account of lawyers, for example, the newspaper expressed empathy for Grenfell Tower residents who did not possess legal status in the UK:

*"Some of the people feel they can't seek help because they are terrified they will be carted off to immigration detention. It's a big problem. We are trying to get the word out to get them to come and see us. We can give them advice on the basis of client/lawyer confidentiality."*

(Guardian, 20 June 2017)

The Grenfell Tower was a residential tower block in West London in which a fire broke out in June 2017 causing 72 deaths and left at least as many injured. By using extensivization, the newspaper stressed that some irregular migrants who had lived in the Grenfell Tower and survived the incident afterwards faced individual existential problems in the light of loss of all their documents, homelessness or avoidance of seeking help as they feared deportation. The outgroup and their specific hardship in this incident were represented in collective terms and generalised issues that irregular migrants can experience anywhere. This anonymised and generalised coverage of migrants' plight serves to perpetuate the image of 'faceless' and 'voiceless' irregular migrants as strangers.

Another striking finding is that the right-wing newspapers frequently depicted nationals as empathic and understanding towards irregular migrants, characterising the outgroup as scared and desperate. Several other news articles featured the plight of migrants by providing details about the nature of the trafficking/smuggling industry in relation to what groups are involved, what methods migrants use for hiding and the harsh travel conditions in lorries. Furthermore, acting in the interest of migrants, the *Express* featured accounts of NGOs and officials who blamed the British government for jeopardising the safety of minor migrants in Calais based on the argumentation that the British government changed a law which made it impossible for these migrants to be accepted as refugees in the UK:

*But some unaccompanied minors have returned to Calais, which is just 33km from Britain, after learning they would not be allowed to enter the UK under a change to immigration law which permits the country to take in vulnerable unaccompanied child refugees.*  
(Express, 6 January 2017)

In this way, a sense of urgency to protect the outgroup's rights was generated by using hyperbole tactics claiming that the British government's move represented a failure to protect 'a handful' of minor migrants. The right-wing press emphasised that these children were at high risk of falling into the hands of traffickers. This negative ingroup representation clearly reflects a mistrust towards the British government and its values on the rights of minors.

In a continued empathetic representation of migrants, the left-wing press criticised the Home Office and other institutions that cooperate with it to identify irregular migrants. For example, a homeless charity and the Home Office worked together aiming at identifying irregular migrants among rough sleepers who then would be handed over to authorities for deportation. By using extensivization, the nature of this cooperation was explained by emphasising numerous concerns about which organisations can be trusted in the protection of irregular migrants. In particular, the charity's controversial actions were questioned; that is instead of supporting vulnerable people they jeopardized their lives. The significance of this problematic cooperation was underlined by pointing out that the mayor of London suspended cooperation with the Home Office due to this issue. This depicted both the Home Office and the charity as unscrupulous suggesting that policy measures against irregular migrants are immoral. The rightfulness of this cooperation was mitigated by stressing that this practice was seen as unlawful in some cases.

### **7.3.2 Irregular migrant as hero**

It is striking that the remaining news coverage in 2018 was based on a sympathetic representation of migrants. The *Times* drew attention to the exceptional case of an irregular migrant who was reported to be celebrated as a hero by the French public and politicians after rescuing a French child. By using extensivization, noble

characteristics were assigned to this individual by describing his courage and selflessness during the rescue in detail and emphasising the risks involved. Further attention was given to his noble human traits by representing his voice and naming the motives for his action, namely that he liked children and simply wanted to save the boy's life, something he would do again at any time:

*"I like children a lot and I wouldn't have wanted something to happen to him in front of my eyes," said Mr Gassama, who has been nicknamed Spiderman by French internet users.*

*"I didn't think about the storeys, I didn't think about the risk. Of course I would do it again," he added.*

(Times, 28 May 2018)

This heroic narrative was echoed in political support. The mayor of Paris expressed his willingness to help this migrant to obtain a visa and the French president Macron eventually granted this migrant French citizenship. Strong confirmation was further expressed by the French far-right party which also approved of Macron's decision. The extraordinary acknowledgement and approval of high-ranking politicians and an anti-immigration party showed that this positive representation of a migrant who belongs to the outgroup was viewed as an exception. This overly positive portrayal suggests that this migrant's behaviour and personality was viewed as unparalleled and therefore did not represent the outgroup of migrants as a whole.

### **7.3.3 Persistent mistrust towards government**

Unlike the news reportage in 2015 and 2016, the trend of emphasis on large numbers did not always work towards a negative presentation of irregular migrants in the British media in 2017. The employment of statistics was instead used to raise controversy over the accuracy of numbers given by officials. In this regard, the left-wing paper *Independent* raised this issue with a critical representation of a UKIP politician by questioning her credibility when she used supposedly factual information in relation to irregular migration. The newspaper criticised her for providing an inaccurate account of the assumed high numbers of irregular migrants arriving weekly in the UK:

*A Ukip MEP has been compared to Donald Trump after she cited a police statement to claim hundreds of illegal immigrants are arriving in the UK every week, only for the police force in question to say the statement does not appear to exist.*

(Independent, 18 February 2017)

The questioning of the authenticity of the information given by a legitimised source, in this case the UKIP politician, serves to disempower political elites and casts doubts on their knowledge about issues related to irregular migration.

Further doubts on government-produced statistics were raised concerning the target groups of the hostile environment policy. The centre-leaning newspaper *Financial Times* was fairly reticent in its coverage on irregular migration in 2015 and 2016. In this year, by using extensivization, a detailed account was given in terms of how the number of student visa abusers was wrongly counted and turned out to be ten times higher than real numbers. The accuracy of the number of student visa abusers was questioned and believed to be much lower at around 1% of the official estimate:

*But universities have long questioned the accuracy of the figures, and a report in the Times last year claimed that new exit check data collected by the Home Office showed the "true figure" for student overstayers was about 1 per cent of the official estimate, at 1,500 a year.*

(Financial Times, 27 July 2017)

The government was once more criticised and portrayed as incompetent by stressing that this distorted number led to hundreds of colleges losing their licence for international students. A direct call to the government was made to remove students from the net migration target demanding that policymaking should be based on accurate figures.

Although the right-wing newspapers no longer dominated the news coverage, they continued to hold the British government accountable for the ineffectiveness of migration measures. The *Daily Mail*, for example, painted a picture of an incompetent Home Office that appeared to have lost control over the number and identity of non-nationals who reside in the UK. Details of the hostile environment policy were given whilst employing scare tactics to highlight decreasing numbers of deportation in the UK. The state was also accused of denial and dishonesty as

regards the number of irregular migrants already present in the UK. A former Home Office chief was quoted who admits that the number of irregular migrants was estimated at over a million and further stresses that it was generally difficult to determine the real number of irregular migrants and deport them. By the incorporation of a legitimised source that questioned the competence of the own government, further distrust was incited among readers towards political elites and their ability to control irregular migration.

The news discourse on controversial migration policies was also reflected regarding new planned laws. The *Telegraph* featured a new law that concerned banks in the UK. Extensivization was used to show its desirable intention to tackle irregular migration by stressing that banks were required to check the migration status of every existing customer. The newspaper argued that the policy dynamics behind it aimed to create a British immigration system that was fair to legal migrants and firm with irregular migrants. However, the law was also depicted as controversial in the light of possible errors and aims as it could also adversely affect EU migrants after Brexit comes into effect.

Furthermore, the *Telegraph* disapproved of the former MP Boris Johnson's suggestion to grant irregular migrants amnesty in the light of the Windrush issue (see chapter 5.3). The politician was represented as an ally of the outgroup by stressing that this move would further encourage irregular migration and hence promote trafficking. Using a generalisation strategy to demarcate the 'good migrants' from the 'bad migrants', the article further argued that migrants with legal status would feel less respected as they made efforts to live in the UK lawfully compared to their irregular counterparts.

### 7.3.4 Potential danger for nationals

One key observation for 2018 is that right-wing newspapers did not report on actual but potential dangers that irregular migrants could pose to nationals based on individual stories. The *Sun*, for example, featured the online sexual grooming of a child by a male migrant but did not specify the risks that child might have faced:

*Ali, from Cheetham Hill, Manchester was sentenced to ten months jail after pleading guilty to an offence of arranging to meet a child after sexual grooming. The court heard it is likely he will be deported back to his native Pakistan following his release - although his lawyer warned he might face "repercussions" in his home country on his return.*  
(Sun, 30 January 2018)

The newspaper only implicitly suggested by using generalisation strategies that migrants like him posed a threat to the wellbeing of one of the most vulnerable groups of the ingroup, namely children who were in need of protection from adults. The *Sun* referred to this notion of undefined adverse impact on nationals by once again using individualisation strategy indicating that a migrant disguised as a doctor could have treated patients and therefore threatened their health and life. Generalization strategy was used to evoke fears among the public by suggesting that nationals faced an invisible constant risk if irregular migrants could easily pretend to be a member of the ingroup.

The ingroup of nationals was victimised in a news reportage that raised health-related concerns for the public in connection with the agreement between the NHS and the Home Office to track down irregular migrants by sharing foreigners' personal data. The right-wing press argued that this law could be counterproductive leading to irregular migrants not seeking NHS treatment and thus creating the potential for them to infect nationals. This argument implicitly suggested that the secret presence of irregular migrants in the UK could have considerable consequences for the nationals.

### 7.3.5 Europeans - potential irregular migrants after Brexit

The notion of the outgroup took a complete turn in the coverage of ingroup members who could possibly become irregular migrants with the coming into force of British EU referendum. This discourse strand was outstanding as it exclusively dealt with European nationals and their concern of becoming undesired outgroup members in their country of residence. It is noticeable that only right-wing newspapers covered this topic in which the interest of the nationals was the chief matter. The *Daily Star*, for instance, problematised and compared the situation of British expatriates in Spain with that of EU migrants in the UK after Brexit. By emphasising the concerns of the British nationals, the newspaper argued that they feared eviction from Spain in case of a hard Brexit deal:

*ANXIOUS Brit expats living the EU feel trapped in Brexit limbo and "betrayed" by the UK government over fears they could become "illegal immigrants" overnight. Brexit has thrown the lives of around 1.2 million Brits living in the EU into chaos as Prime Minister Theresa May seeks to hammer out a migration deal with the European Union.*  
(Daily Star, 9 July 2017)

Extensivization was employed to illustrate the fears of the ingroup members by voicing the perspective of charities in Spain who supported elderly and impoverished British expatriates. The latter were quoted saying that they felt let down by the British government and its diplomatic representatives abroad that seemed not to care about the future of the expatriates. The ingroup was referred to as the most vulnerable individuals who will be affected by Brexit. The level of possible adverse impact on them was underscored by stressing that some were already worried to the degree that they were unable to sleep at night.

Brexit-related concerns were also covered by the *Times* which raised public worries over a no-deal Brexit whilst naming numerous issues that could occur in such cases such as the government's inability to tackle irregular migration in case of a no-deal Brexit. Using scare tactics, details and statistics were given about how the UK had been collaborating and sharing security-related information with the EU to curb organised crimes, terrorism and irregular migration:

*Police would not have access to the Second Information II (SIS II) system, which allows for the exchange of information on wanted or missing persons, objects such as firearms and of criminal records. The SIS II system allows for real-time alerts to be made to the UK border to detect serious criminals and terrorists. In 2017 the UK checked SIS II more than 500 million times in relation to searches for people and objects wanted for law enforcement purposes. Last year the UK sent and received more than 163,000 requests and notifications for criminal records, or more than 3,000 a week. (Times, 28 November 2018)*

This article implicitly argued that the British government lacked responsibility towards its own population in case it does not reach an agreement with the EU.



## 7.4 Summary

Based on a CDA approach, this chapter examined the online British press coverage on irregular migration by analysing dominant themes and salient discursive patterns used by the newspapers to represent migrants, nationals and government in distinct ways. The analysis further interpreted the findings by considering the changing socio-political circumstances during the selected period which was notably influenced by the European ‘migration crisis’ in 2015/2016 and the British EU referendum as set out in chapter 5. The chapter demonstrated that these socio-political events were a strong driver for how and why the newspapers reported about irregular migration. In 2015, the year preceding the British EU referendum which equally marked the beginning of the European ‘migration crisis’, the British news coverage chiefly used a variety of discriminatory discursive strategies that can be categorised into the following three central themes as shown below in **Table 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3**: 1) illegalise arriving migrants in the UK and Europe, 2) create mistrust in the British government’s ability to tackle irregular migration and 3) prioritise the nationals’ desire for political recognition of their needs.

It is noticeable that the right-wing newspapers used a larger variety of discursive strategies than the left-wing press to refer to the group of irregular migrants. These strategies can be categorised as comprised processes of illegalisation, criminalisation and marginalisation of the outgroup. Particularly the use of scare tactics and metaphor of crisis served to show the unlawfulness of migrants’ continuous attempt to enter the UK in 2015 creating the image of an ‘invader’. The press systematically linked this perceived mass illegal entry to public concerns over the arrival of potential criminals. By mainly using generalisation and extensivization, the press stirred up fears among online readers suggesting that the presence of irregular migrants would have a long-term negative impact on the British host society.

In 2016, the right-wing media took the 2015 narrative of the irregular migrant as an ‘invader’ to the next level by popularising an image of a ‘significant enemy’ threatening the British people. The press not only continued to discredit the arrival of migrants as illegal, but it also consistently criminalised and marginalised the outgroup with the effect of inciting fear among nationals. Perceived in this way, the

figure of the irregular migrant became a more tangible and concrete imminence for the ingroup. In light of the Brexit vote which took place in 2016, this hostile media image of irregular migrants clearly worked in favour of anti-immigration campaigners and Leave voters.

It must be noted that the right-wing newspapers dominated the news reportage in 2015 and 2016, indicating that they dictated the media narrative on irregular migration whilst the left-wing press hardly counterbalanced this dominance. Although both left- and right-wing press employed ample humanising accounts to evoke empathy for the plight of migrants throughout all years, the image of the outgroup being a collective threat prevailed. However, it is important to stress that this enemy-image was realised by the British media in close conjunction with the construction of a metaphor of an incapable government that relied on ineffective policy measures to tackle irregular migration.

The incited mistrust in the British government's competence produced a sense of hostility towards political elites in general. This finding provides evidence for a mediated polarisation within the British society and supports populist views about a widening gap between political elites and the people they serve (Moffitt, 2016; also see chapter 3.2.2). Right-wing newspapers almost exclusively prioritised the interests and voices of the nationals with few exceptions. Migration-related concerns of British people were represented by the right-wing press in 2015 and 2016 which further helped to highlight the political urgency to tackle irregular migration in the face of the perceived migration crisis and 'fearful' nationals. In this manner, the right-wing newspapers acted as a mouthpiece of British nationals by creating a strong image of peaceful and concerned nationals who desired a more effective political response against irregular migration and its impact on the British people.

The analysis further pointed out the shift in media construction from the irregular migrant representing a 'significant enemy' to an 'insignificant stranger' in 2017 and 2018. With the number of asylum applications clearly decreasing and considering that the British public even became more positive towards migration during this time (Eurostat, 2016; Ipsos MORI, 2017b, 2018), the analysis shows that the absence of migration-relevant political factors coincided with a reduced media attention for

irregular migration. The news coverage in 2018 was unusual compared to the previous years as the right-wing press only devoted a few articles to the topic 'irregular migration', indicating that the media interest in the themes of illegality and criminality of irregular migrants in the UK faded into the background. The distinctly positive representation of an irregular migrant both in left and right-wing newspapers who saved the life of a child is in line with this observation.

Whereas the representation of irregular migrants was highly dynamic throughout the study period, the government was continuously represented by all newspapers from across the political spectrum in a negative fashion by mostly using extensivization. Even though with different foci, the left- and right-wing newspapers voiced strong criticisms about the migration policy and overall handling of migration-related issues by the British government. The government's management of issues associated with irregular migration was strongly criticised, in particular the lack of prevention of illegal entry and the perceived unjust treatment of nationals. Although some articles also aimed to re-establish public confidence in the government's ability to tackle irregular migration, all newspapers held the government accountable for failing to gain control over irregular migration into the UK.

Overall, the CDA outlined in this chapter highlighted three shifts of focus in the news coverage about irregular migrants turning from an invader to a serious enemy and then ultimately fading into a peripheral stranger. Whilst the group of nationals and their concerns received most media attention in 2015 and 2016 compared to later years, the government and its handling of migration-related issues was criticised consistently throughout the whole selected period.

**Table 7.1** *Newspapers' employed discursive strategies with corresponding themes and effects for the social group of migrants.*

			2015			2016			2017			2018		
Theme	Discursive strategy	Effect	L	C	R	L	C	R	L	C	R	L	C	R
Illegalisation	Scare tactics negative	Evoke fear			x			x						x
	Metaphor of crisis	Incite image of 'influx'			x			x						
	Intensification	Dramatize situation			x			x						
	Emotional language	Stress migrants' audacity	x		x									
	Problematisation	Create image of migrants as lawbreakers			x									
Criminalisation	Generalisation negative	Create image of migrants as collective threat			x			x						x
	Extensivization negative	Create image of migrants as offenders			x			x			x			
	Individualisation negative	Create image of migrants being criminals	x					x						x
	Blaming the victim	Blame migrants for crimes			x			x						
	Delegitimation	Outcast migrants			x									
Marginalisation	Denial of migrants' voice	Discredit migrants			x			x						
	Negative them-representation	Delegitimise migrants' presence						x						
Humanisation	Scare tactics positive	Evoke empathy	x		x			x			x			x
	Voice of legitimised sources	Evoke sympathy with migrants who risk their lives			x									
	Individualisation positive	Promote empathy for poor migrants	x					x	x					x
	Generalisation positive	Incite compassion for migrant children			x	x			x					x
Solidarisation	Victimisation	Create refusal of violence against migrants						x						
	Voice of the ingroup	Evoke empathy for migrants' despair						x						
	Extensivization positive	Create compassion for vulnerable migrants	x		x			x			x	x		

Notes: The 'social group' denotes the main subject of the news coverage. The capital letters suggest the political leaning of the analysed newspaper, i.e. 'L' stands for left-wing, 'C' for centre and 'R' for right-wing.

**Table 7.2** *Newspapers' employed discursive strategies with corresponding themes and effects for the social group of nationals*

			2015			2016			2017			2018		
Theme	Discursive strategy	Effect	L	C	R	L	C	R	L	C	R	L	C	R
Self-analysis	Negative us-representation	Create bad image of nationals who exploit migrants	x		x				x					
	Generalisation negative	Discredit nationals who support migrants			x									
Prioritisation	Metaphor of crisis	Create image of negative long-term impact on nationals			x			x						
	Metaphor of organised illegal entry	Evoke fear that irregular migration is hard to tackle			x									
	Victimisation	Evoke fear that nationals may become victims			x			x	x					x
	Scare tactics	Incite fear among British lorry drivers			x			x						
	Voice of the nationals	Create uneasiness among vulnerable nationals			x			x			x			
	Denial of migrants' voice	Enhance nationals' status			x									
	Extensivization	Enhance concerns of British expatriates			x									x
	Positive us-representation	Enhance nationals' desire to be protected by the government			x									
	Generalisation positive	Create image of law-abiding nationals			x									
	Self-justification	Create urgency to protect nationals' wellbeing						x						
	Problematisation	Create Us-versus-Them mentality			x									

Notes: The 'social group' denotes the main subject of the news coverage. The capital letters suggest the political leaning of the analysed newspaper, i.e. 'L' stands for left-wing, 'C' for centre and 'R' for right-wing.

**Table 7.3** *Newspapers' employed discursive strategies with corresponding themes and effects for the social group of government*

			2015			2016			2017			2018		
Theme	Discursive strategy	Effect	L	C	R	L	C	R	L	C	R	L	C	R
Accountability	Metaphor of crisis	Create image of loss of control over migration			x			x			x			
	Extensivization negative	Incite mistrust in government's competence		x	x					x	x	x		
	Scare tactics	Discredit government as incapable	x		x			x	x		x			x
Withdrawal of confidence	Hyperbole tactics	Create mistrust in government's values									x			
	Legitimised voices	Evoke public concern about political competence			x			x	x		x			
	Emotional language	Create hostility towards government			x									
	Delegitimation	Discredit policies that protect migrants			x	x								
	Individualisation	Discredit government representatives who support migrants			x			x						
Restoration of confidence	Extensivization positive	Restore faith in government's ability to tackle irregular migration			x									

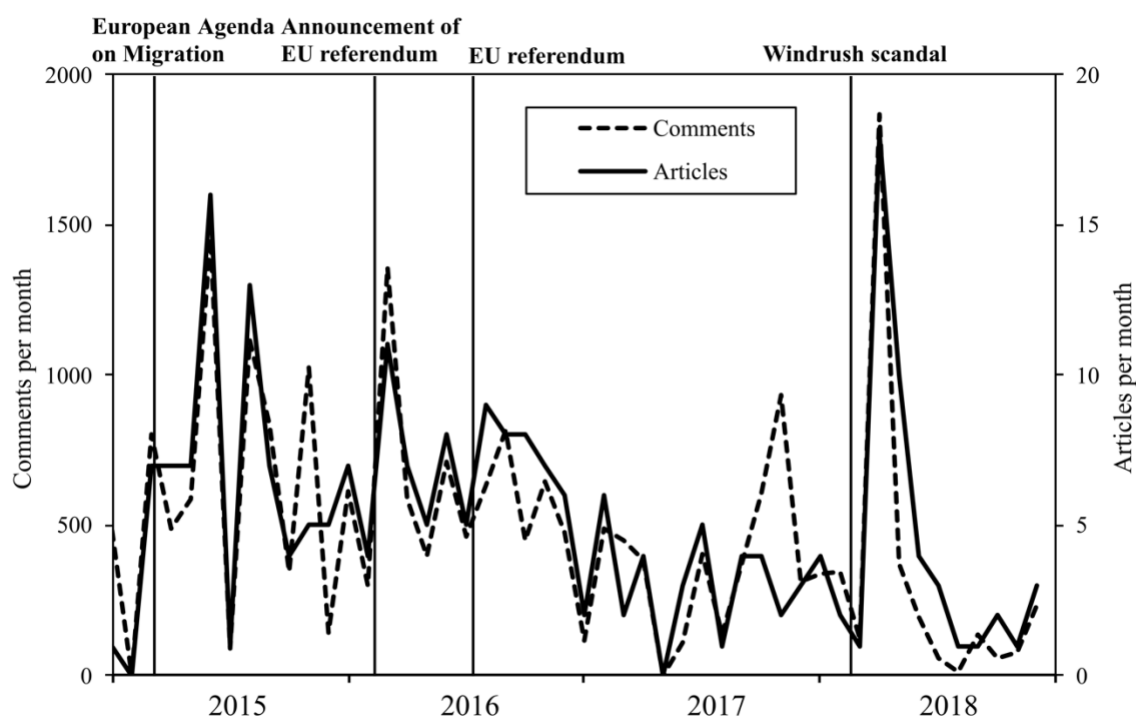
Notes: The 'social group' denotes the main subject of the news coverage. The capital letters suggest the political leaning of the analysed newspaper, i.e. 'L' stands for left-wing, 'C' for centre and 'R' for right-wing.

## 8 The mediated irregular migrant and the failed government in online comments

The following chapter investigates how social media users responded to the online press coverage on irregular migration using a Corpus Linguistics Analysis. It builds on the Critical Discourse Analysis of online newspaper articles (chapter 7) and aims to enrich these findings by revealing a picture of people's opinions towards irregular migration in the British context and in light of the changing socio-political environment. First, the relationship between the number of newspaper articles and corresponding social media comments is discussed under consideration of key socio-political events. Second, a Corpus Linguistics Analysis of various linguistic features is employed to investigate main thematic categories and overall attitudes that social media users hold towards the three social groups under examination, that is migrants, nationals and government. Third, qualitative concordance analysis of selected comments that specifically referred to these three groups highlights the key topics that social media users were chiefly concerned with for each group.

### 8.1 Relationship of articles and comments in the light of socio-political events

The number of published articles and social media comments over the selected timespan were strongly correlated (**Figure 8.1**), highlighting the close link between articles and responding comments. The number of comments was in general around 100 times as high as the number of articles. In two cases in November 2015 and November 2017, the number of comments was disproportionate, reflecting very strong reactions to a case of murder allegedly committed by an irregular migrant and a case of a long-term migrant from the Commonwealth who was falsely classified as 'illegal' by the Home Office.



**Figure 8.1** *Development of the number of newspaper articles and respective comments over the period between 2015 and 2018*

It is notable that the major peaks in the number of both articles and comments occurred after socio-political events that received much media attention in the UK context, such as the European Agenda on Migration, the announcement of the EU referendum, the date of the EU referendum, and the so-called political ‘Windrush scandal’ (**Figure 8.1**; also see chapter 5). The news coverage on irregular migrants arrived at its first peak at the beginning of April 2015. This was also the time when the so-called ‘migration crisis’ started to evolve with the highest number of asylum applications (over 1.2 Million) in Europe. A special meeting of the European Council in April 2015 and the resulting report called ‘The European Agenda on Migration’ addressed the mass arrival of migrants on European territory since mid-2016 (Triandafyllidou and Ricard-Guay, 2019). This report is seen as the first united commitment at EU level that acknowledged migration as a pressing political priority and put forward policy tools and steps to be taken in the coming years. In light of this so-called ‘migration crisis’, it is not surprising that the British press and Facebook users show greater interest in irregular migration at this specific time.

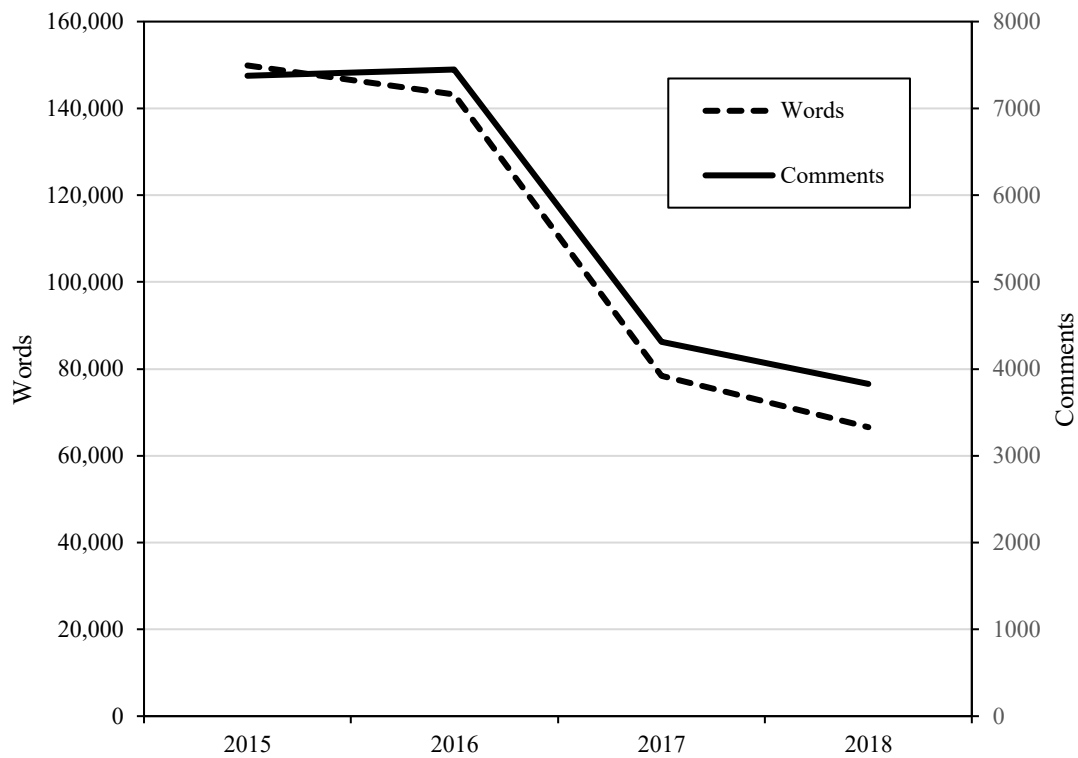


The second and third increase of the newspapers' and people's attention for irregular migrants evolved around the announcement and date of the EU referendum in the UK. The referendum was announced in February 2016 and took place in June of the same year. Coinciding with this political event, the number of articles and respective comments all clearly rise. Leave advocates prominently put immigration among other things at the forefront of their campaign (Hobolt, 2016). Particularly, the demand to take back control of borders and to reduce the number of migrants entering the UK was a dominant and recurring narrative.

The fourth event was concerned with the Home Office's treatment of 'Windrush migrants' and the political ramifications of this event in spring 2018. It is notable that the emergence of the 'Windrush scandal' in the public debate saw the highest number of both articles and comments compared to the other events, suggesting that both the press and Facebook users placed high importance on this issue.

## **8.2 Analysis of linguistic features of social media comments**

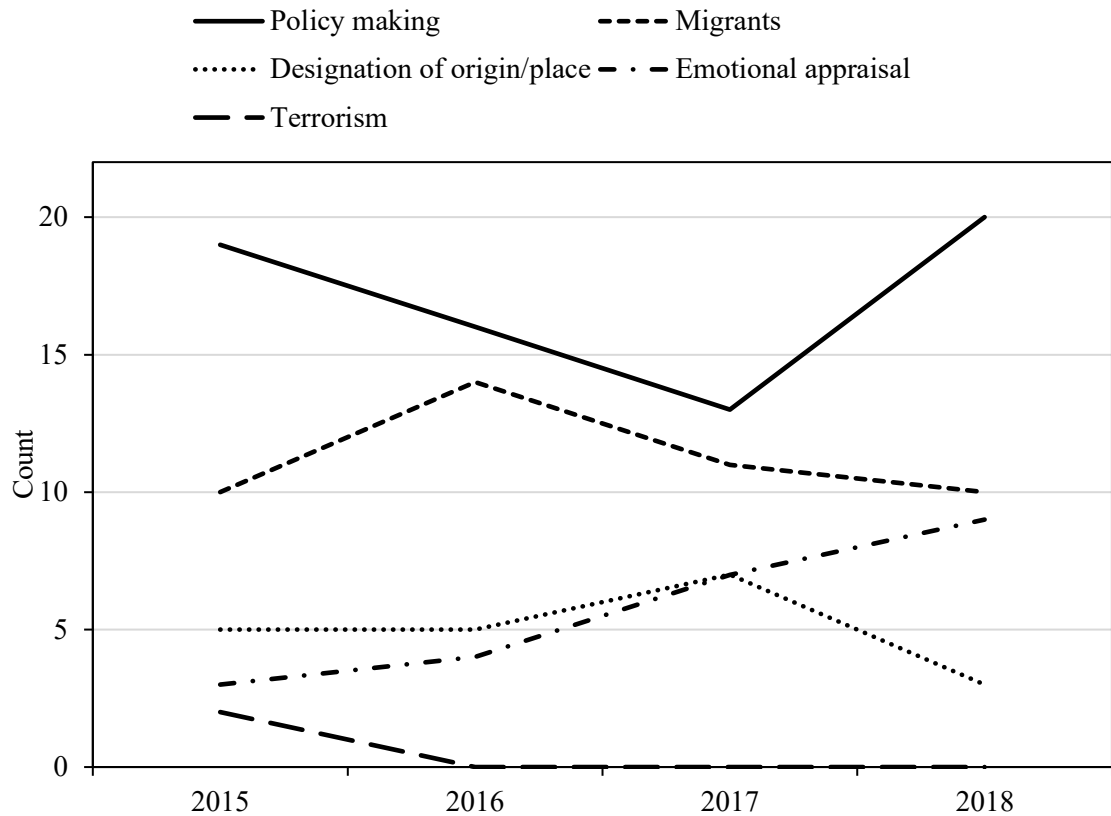
In line with the number of newspaper articles (**Figure 5.1**), the number of comments and total number of words was considerably higher in 2015 and 2016 than in the two following years (**Figure 8.2**). Interestingly, social media users tended to use more words in their comments in 2015 compared to the remaining period, in which a comment consisted of 19 words on average. This indicates that social media commenters expressed more detailed opinions in 2015, and more generally hints at an increased interest in irregular migration in that year.



**Figure 8.2** *Number of Facebook comments and respective words in response to British press articles on irregular migration between 2015 and 2018.*

### 8.2.1 Mood barometer for the comments' main topics

**Figure 8.3** draws data from the keywords lists and the respective main thematic categories of the single years. Based on the top 20 of both single words and word combinations of each year, the graph serves as a mood barometer giving insights into how the thematic foci that dominated the comments evolved over time.

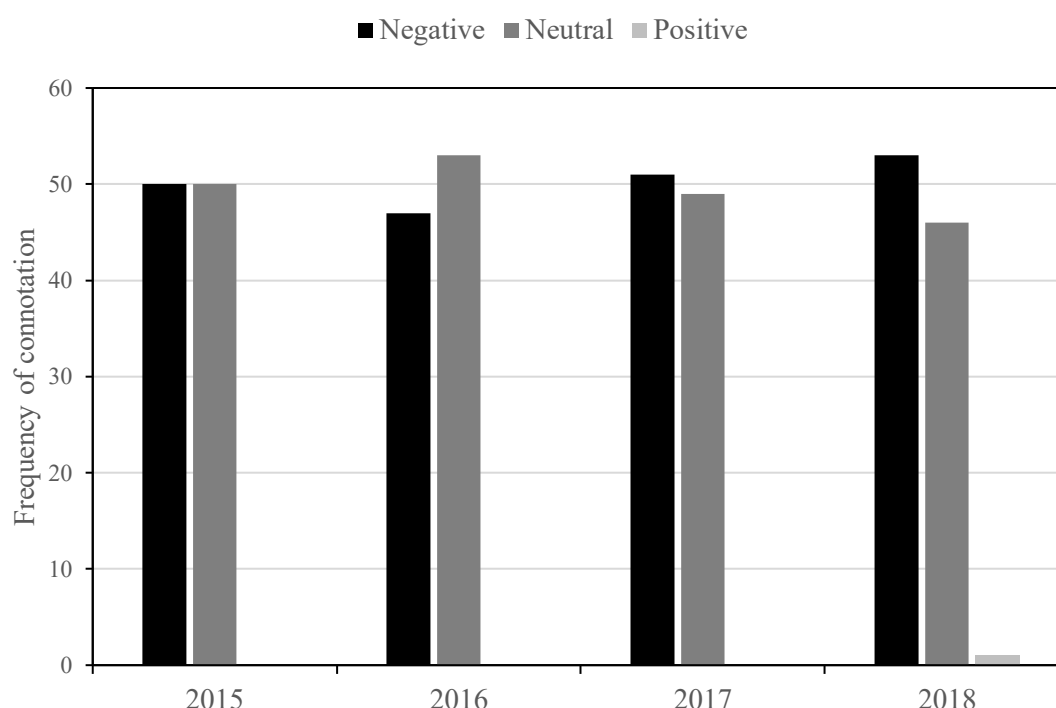


**Figure 8.3** *Development of the comments’ main topics over the period between 2015 and 2018.*

Overall, social media users were mostly concerned about policymaking and migrants and expressed strong emotions about irregular migration. As with the newspaper articles (see **Figure 7.7** and **7.9**), the key discourse was centred around politicians and policy measures in all four years, with the largest numbers in 2015 and 2018. This indicates that political responsibility around irregular migration was perceived as particularly important in these two years. After policymaking, migrants were the second top area of interest over the selected period, with 2016 showing a peak of interest in migrants and their illegal entry compared to the other years. Comments that predominantly expressed emotional appraisal constantly increased and became almost as important as aspects about migrants themselves in 2018. This not only indicates that the online debate was less informed and more based on emotions, but also suggests that people might have become more disapproving of irregular migrants over the chosen time span. Comments on the origin of migrants remained

consistently low over the selected period with a minor peak in 2017. Finally, terrorism was only thematised in 2015, the year which showed a surge in terror attacks across Europe and particularly the UK (see chapter 5).

Manually assigned connotations (positive, neutral, negative) of the top 100 keywords per year allow insights into the general stance of social media commenters regarding irregular migrants. Whereas neutral and negative connotations were overall balanced across all years, the almost complete absence of positive connotations is striking (**Figure 8.4**).



**Figure 8.4** Connotation of the comments' 100 top keywords from 2015 to 2018.

Negatively connotated terms were associated with anti-immigration aspects ('deport', 'illegal'), insults ('scumbag'), malign moral assessment ('disgraceful'), or even terrorism ('ISIS'). Neutral-connotated terms included names of locations ('Melilla') or politicians ('Trump'), group classifications ('refugee') or objects ('passport'). Across all years, only one single keyword ('amnesty') was positively connotated. A closer analysis of the relationship between neutral and negative keywords shows a perfect balance in 2015, slight predominance of more neutral terms in 2016, and increasingly negative connotations in 2017 and 2018.

Overall, these results show that social media commenters connotated irregular migration either neutrally or negatively, but almost never positively. The level of consistency in relation to the neutral and negative connotation of words used in the comments – and especially the absence of positive connotations – is perhaps surprising. Whilst topic foci shifted considerably over the study period (**Figure 8.3**), the way social media users talked about these topics hardly changed overall. These findings are an important basis for subsequent analyses in this study as they indicate an overall neutral-negative nature of the social media discourse on irregular migration.

### 8.2.2 Key themes of social media comments

In order to identify the ‘aboutness’ of the social media comments, that is to identify salient words that are specific for this dataset, keywords were identified from all comments across all years (see chapter 4.4.3 and appendix D) and categorised by social group (migrants or government) and theme (**Table 8.1**).

**Table 8.1** *Thematic categories of keywords identified from all social media comments across all years.*

Group	Theme	Keywords
Migrants	Migration general	immigrant, immigration, migrant, Windrush
	Illegality	illegal, illegally, illegal immigrant
	Transport	lorry
	Location	Calais, Gibraltar, own country
	Protection	asylum, safe country
	Terrorism	ISIS
	Emotional disapproval	scum, scumbag, disgusting, disgraceful
Government	Law enforcement	Deport, deportation, border control
	Political event	Brexit
	Political group	UKIP, Tory/Tories, EU
	Politician	Rudd, Theresa, Merkel, Trump
	Emotional disapproval	disgusting, disgraceful

Main themes regarding migrants were related to illegality, migratory origins, movements and destinations, safeguarding, and risks (terrorism). Themes regarding the government were mainly concerned with law enforcement and political entities (such as politicians or parties) and political events.

### **8.2.3 Concordance analysis of keywords**

To reveal the deeper context in which these keywords were used, manual concordance analysis was conducted for the social group of migrants and government. It must be noted that the selected comments below are presented as they appeared in the original posts and thus might include spelling, grammatical or other phrasing errors.

#### ***Migrants***

Social media comments related to migrants were chiefly concerned with the outgroup's country of origin, their unlawful entry, as well as their potential criminality. These themes give an indication of an overall adversarial tone among commenters towards irregular migrants.

Several keywords are neutral terms that directly refer to migrants (immigrant, migrant, immigration, Windrush). Others engage with the illegality of their movement (lorry, illegal, illegally, illegal immigrant). One striking observation here is that 'lorry' is commonly used for two arguments. On the one hand the term 'lorry'-related comments express empathy with lorry drivers who fear they might transport migrants unknowingly in their vehicles. On the other hand, the drivers are being blamed for facilitating the unlawful entry of migrants. The most used adjectives and adverbs 'illegal' and 'illegally' to emphasise the irregularity of migrants are known to carry negative connotations as they imply criminality and primarily focus on state control. Concordance examples illustrate this observation as follows:

*1.2 million illegal immigrants coming to Britain soon!*

*As migrants they are illegal if they enter another country's borders illegally.*

The keywords further refer to a specific country or city (*Calais, Gibraltar*) or to country as a clearly defined territory overall (*safe country, own country*). The asylum encampment in Calais, also known as the 'Calais Jungle', gained considerable media attention during the so-called 'European migration crisis' due to the rapidly growing number of migrants in this camp during this period. The spatial focus on Calais is particularly important for the UK given its proximity to the British border and the potential migrants bound for the UK as exemplified in the comment below. Referrals to 'own country' mainly point to the belonging of migrants to their national countries based on the demand to send them back there or see it as the migrants' duties to stay in their country of origin for various reasons.

*I do believe the more we see all that lot in Calais trying to get into our little island.*

*"They must be sent straight back, otherwise they will keep coming. Absolute joke as far as security is concerned. Look at all those fit young Men !!" They must be sent straight back, to their own country would be best." They must be stopped coming in the first place.*

In contrast, the expression 'safe country' refers predominantly to the political concept of 'first safe countries' in connection with the demand that migrants should be the responsibility of these countries and not migrate further to the UK. Relatedly, the keyword 'asylum' represents mainly questions and opinions about the criteria and implications of migrants claiming asylum in host countries.

*France, they are in your Country...the first safe Country they arrived at...they are your responsibility....*

The derogatory expressions 'scum' and 'scumbag' are insults directed at irregular migrants and can be regarded as hate speech as they denigrate irregular migrants due to their irregularity. 'Disgusting' was used in most cases to disapprove of criminal offences committed by migrants.

*Deport the Parasite Deport the scum. Deport the scum - immediately! disgracefull, this really should bring down the goverment its utterly appaling. Disgusted but its going to get a lot worst .. Thanks to our government for letting it happen ..and has for that vermin deport him back. don't need these monsters here disgusted by gang active crime illegal immigrant so sick!! be deport back africa shame it Disgusting Disgusting Disgusting (...)*

Finally, 'ISIS' refers to the terror organisation Islamic state and is linked in most cases with the widespread fear that uncontrolled immigration allows for the entry of not only migrants but also potential terrorists who represent a danger for the host society. A few voices, in contrast, disagree with this view by expressing empathy for migrants, for example.

*Will she now admit how wrong to was/is to allow uncontrolled migration, even with the threat from ISIS they would infiltrate the refugees and use them as a cover fortheir infiltration to commit these atrocities.*

*Now these poor immigrants that you destroyed their countries are suddenly ISIS.*

### **Government**

Commenters generally evaluated the government's handling of irregular migration in a negative manner. Deportation and border control were desired policy measures among the online readership. Regarding the question of political accountability, the Conservative government and the EU referendum were key factors in the comments. Keywords in this group relate on the one hand to the specific policy measures 'deportation' and 'border control', which are the most salient keywords overall (see appendix D). In most cases, the verb 'deport' appeared in the form of a demand by voices who wanted to see migrants being expelled from the host country. Similarly, collocates of the term 'deportation' reveal approval of expulsion of migrants as a desired policy measure. Also, 'border control' mainly criticised the ineffectiveness of this policy action.



*All illegal Imigrants should be deported end of story. ALL illegal immigrants should be deported immediately, no messing about with them!*

*The only way to reverse the tide is make it a pointless journey - instant deportation for any illegal entry.*

*The Cameron government are doing absolutely nothing to increase border control staff to protect us.*

On the other hand, this category comprises names of state leaders and politicians (Cameron, Rudd, May, Merkel, Trump), but also includes political parties (UKIP, Tory/Tories) and the EU referendum in the United Kingdom (Brexit). The frequent mention of those parties and politicians with leading power or in charge of immigration matters indicate that their political responsibility for migration matters is being discussed and criticised in these comments. Supporters of Brexit and UKIP are both known to have stark anti-immigration sentiments and the utterances referring to UKIP or Leave voters mostly with only a few exceptions support this party or the referendum.

*Theresa May pretends to care about people, but her policies prove that she is just a typical Tory, typical politician.*

*Only UKIP would tell France to sort out their problem, this is what happens when you become politically aligned with another country with different values and approach to mass illegal immigration.*

Eventually, the keywords ‘disgraceful’ and ‘disgusting’, which were also used to denounce migrants (see above), sometimes referred to the controversial treatment of ‘Windrush migrants’ by the Home Office.

*Absolutely disgraceful and disgusting treatment Absolutely disgraceful way to treat someone who has positively contributed to society; shame on the politicians and more so the civil servants for not challenging this; shocking; enquiry needed now: Absolutely disgraceful.*

In summary, the analysis of the keywords of all comments followed by detailed concordance analysis highlights the general tone and distinctive features of the dataset. By categorising the keywords, it could be shown that the comments were

driven by emotions and that social media users not only revealed a hostile attitude towards irregular migrants, but also voiced opposition to the British government.

### **8.3 Concordance analysis of the three social groups**

Concordance analysis of a downsized sample (see chapter 4.4.3) was carried out to highlight the discursive definition of the three social groups of migrants, nationals and government by analysing the immediate contexts in which these groups were embedded (Gabrielatos and Baker, 2008; Baker and Levon, 2015). First, synonyms of the three social groups were determined. Second, collocate lists of all adjectives of these synonyms were generated (see chapter 4.4.3) and categorised into specific themes. Finally, concordances of the adjective collocates were analysed by close reading of the contexts.

For example, concordance analysis of the collocates ‘legal’ and ‘genuine’ related to migrants revealed that commenters referred to law-abiding migrants such as foreigners who entered the UK based on a successful visa application. These specific collocates were found to contribute towards similar representations of the ‘legal desired migrants’, who were assigned to the same theme ‘legal migrants’. The set of words ‘many’ and ‘more’, in contrast, mostly referenced the discourse of ‘unwanted migrants’ who entered the UK unauthorised and hence all concordances germane to this theme were grouped together under the same findings section.

#### **8.3.1 Collocates**

Across all years, the majority of collocates concerning government representatives referred to the names of politicians or parties (**Table 8.2**). In contrast, collocates related to migrants mostly focused on their legality (‘illegal’, ‘legal’, ‘genuine’), but were related to their economic impact or situation (‘economic’) and quantity (‘more’, ‘many’). The top collocates of nationals (‘British’, ‘UK’) show that the social media discourse had a clear focus on the British context.

**Table 8.2**      *Adjective collocates of migrants, nationals and government with at least 20 occurrences from 2015 to 2018.*

<b>Migrants</b>		<b>Government</b>		<b>Nationals</b>	
Collocate	Count	Collocate	Count	Collocate	Count
illegal	757	Theresa/Teresa	104	British	69
economic	56	UK/Uk	33	UK	20
asylum	63	Mr <sup>21</sup>	37		
more	41	home	48		
many	41	Amber	28		
legal	34	Tory	40		
genuine	22	David	29		
		immigration	26		
		prime	22		

The analysis of collocates linked to the group of migrants reveals that the numbers of migrants and the question of ‘legal’ and ‘illegal’ migrants were key considerations expressed by social media users especially between 2015 and 2017. References to migrants as lawful or unlawful, namely as economic migrants and asylum seekers, dominated the comments content in which migrants were mentioned directly. The collocates for 2018 were much more diverse compared to the previous years and indicate a stronger focus on the Windrush generation and the political ‘scandal’ around this group (see chapter 5.3). Furthermore, questions were posed as regards to who were ‘genuine’ regular migrants contrasted with perceived lawbreaking foreigners.

The analysis of government-related collocates shows that they were used mostly to describe British politicians or government representatives. More specifically, British former Prime Ministers, individual politicians and the Home Office were chiefly addressed by social media users. Whilst from 2015 to 2017 the comments revealed a strong focus on British Prime Ministers, in 2018 the Home Office and the Conservative party in general became central figures of the comments when users referred to political elites. Theresa May was the politician who was most frequently

<sup>21</sup> Commenters used this term to refer to ‘Mr (David) Cameron’

mentioned by social media users. Given that she was the British Prime Minister from mid 2016 to mid 2019, which overlaps to a large extent with the selected period of this study, it is not surprising that she appears to be a key figure in the comments concerning political responses to irregular migration in the UK.

In terms of the group of nationals, the identified collocates are fairly homogenous with the top collocate being 'British' followed by 'UK' across all years. This finding mainly points out that social media users referred to British citizens when speaking about the perspective of the host society.

### **8.3.2 Legality and vulnerability of migrants**

A closer analysis of the concordances related to legality ('illegal', 'legal', 'genuine') revealed that commenters made clear distinctions between 'legal' and 'illegal' migrants by ascribing specific traits to these social groups. Whilst irregular migrants were overwhelmingly collocated with illegality (**Table 8.2**) and categorised into various negative group identities, social media commenters also appreciated perceived 'good' legal migrants and highlighted the vulnerability of these migrants. Overall, the analysis shows that the presence of irregular migrants encouraged strong group thinking and social comparison. By differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' migrants, commenters distinguished two outgroup identities along the lines of legitimate and illegitimate foreigners (see chapter 3).

#### ***The 'illegal' migrants: economic migrants and lawbreakers***

The concordance analysis of the collocates 'economic' and 'illegal' shows that commenters did not have one distinct picture of the figure of the irregular migrant but generally divided irregular migrants into several categories: economic migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and lawbreakers (**Table 8.3**). These migrant types were generally viewed as unwanted strangers and several negative properties were assigned to them. For example, commenters depicted irregular migrants as a

dishonest group of economic migrants who were not in need of protection but disguised themselves as asylum seekers in order to receive benefits. These concerns were linked to the overall voiced fear that the outgroup was so determined to reach the UK and high in number that they could outnumber the national population. Presumed and potential adverse effects of irregular migration on the host society were a further key discourse theme in the social media comments.

The commenters not only perceived the undesired irregular migrant as culturally incompatible with the British culture, but also criticised them as illegitimate recipients of benefits and hence disapproved of their presence. The ‘depravity’ of irregular migrants culminated in the commenters’ depiction of them as criminals with malicious intent who allegedly represent a serious threat to the host society. The many-faceted social identification of the ‘bad’ irregular migrant among social media users suggests that the public image of irregular migrants is not clear-cut but rather serves existing anti-immigration sentiments. Notably, commenters frequently used the terms ‘economic migrants’, ‘asylum seekers’ and ‘refugees’ interchangeably, showing that social media commenters had limited knowledge about what rights and obligations these legal categorisations contain.

**Table 8.3**      *Different categories of the ‘illegal’ migrant based on key characteristics attributed by social media commenters.*

Category	Characteristics
Dishonest asylum seekers/refugees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Passed first safe country</li> <li>- Misuse human rights</li> <li>- Driven by economic interests</li> </ul>
Invaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Forcefully attempt to enter UK</li> <li>- Overrun host societies</li> <li>- Will soon outnumber nationals</li> </ul>
Cultural foreigners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uncivilised</li> <li>- Disrespectful of women’s rights</li> <li>- Betrayed own country</li> </ul>
Competitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Compete with nationals over resources</li> <li>- Illegitimate recipient of benefits</li> <li>- Prioritised by government</li> </ul>
Criminals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have hidden agendas</li> <li>- Possible terrorists and murderers</li> <li>- Violent against women</li> </ul>

In the following, a detailed interpretation of these different categories of the ‘illegal’ migrant is given.

### ***Dishonest asylum seekers/refugees***

In contrast to the group of legal migrants, commenters who used the expression ‘economic migrants’ clearly equated them as the ‘bad’ and hence undesired type of irregular migrants. Social media users repeatedly expressed the conviction that the majority of irregular migrants were ‘illegal economic migrants’. Based on this depiction, some social media users equated irregular migrants with dishonest asylum seekers or ‘fake refugees’ who were blamed for falsely claiming asylum, deceiving authorities and bribing them during asylum interviews and hence generally misusing human rights.

Refugees particularly from Calais were characterised as individuals who desired to come to the UK stressing that the UK faced serious issues with migrants. Single men were referred to as ‘bearded children’ or ‘child refugees who look like grown men’, claiming that they also looked too healthy to assume that they had been mistreated. One prevalent argument concerned the notion of ‘first safe country’ whereby commenters implicitly assumed that irregular migrants must have passed safe countries before coming to the UK. Commenters argued that if asylum seekers were in real need of protection, then they would have stayed in the first safe country. Social media users claimed that those migrants who did not apply for asylum in the first safe country were not in need of protection and hence non-genuine refugees. Furthermore, commenters expected that those safe countries that asylum seekers travelled through should take care of them and not the UK.

In addition, there was also the notion of asylum seekers who could not be deported arguing that one in four deported migrants in the UK was a failed asylum seeker. This was linked to the assumption that these migrants did not have genuine reasons to claim protection and thus should not be in the UK. This perspective was also linked to the view that the UK was able to accept genuine asylum seekers but would not be willing to tolerate migrants who should have stayed and requested asylum in

the first safe country. Commenters expressed concerns that these migrants would bring their extended families and come to the UK in order to receive social benefits.

*Well it's the same with the refugee crisis we all know the vast majority are economic migrants as a result many genuine refugees get overlooked....*

### ***Competition and abuse of taxpayers' money***

This section takes a closer look at the above-mentioned resource-related concerns among commenters. Irregular migrants were not only defined by commenters as economic migrants disguised as asylum seekers, but they were described more broadly as illegitimate individuals who are typically evaluated as competitors over limited national resources. Some referred to them as 'illegal economic and opportunistic migrants' who did not pay taxes and abused the British benefit system. Reference to the ingroup of nationals was made arguing that it did not have the resources to support the outgroup.

Furthermore, the popular belief that migrants posed a threat to the British workers by taking away jobs from nationals was prominent. The outgroup was primarily regarded as cheap workers who take jobs from nationals and was accused of driving down wages in the UK due to their willingness to work for lower wages.

*There are 500,000 people (86,000 on the streets) between 16-24 struggling to get their lives started and each economic migrant that slides into our country makes it harder for them to get social housing, entry level jobs, and chase their dreams.*

The outgroup was further differentiated from 'hardworking British people', highlighting that nationals had to work for years to earn an income that equalled the benefits that irregular migrants received. The position of irregular migrants in the UK was delegitimised by stressing that British citizens should always come first and the outgroup generally did not have a right to be in the UK. More generally, social media users criticised the British government for misappropriating taxpayers' money for own purposes.

*Our country is a joke it's about time all our British people were put first above anything else we've worked hard all our lives what for crappy pension we can't save as we don't earn enough fat cats getting richer us lot don't matter we are just surviving. Our Country is being flooded with economic migrants who, whilst despising us, our culture and our religion, are drawn toward our benefit system and women. Idea of 'they are given everything'.*

The perceived abuse of taxpayers' money was a recurring theme among the comments on the previous social groups. On the one hand, the government and its officials were insulted ('idiots') and blamed for spending taxpayers' money wastefully arguing that they acted in this way as it was not their money. Some referred to the elite and those at the top as criminals stressing that they only protect themselves based on laws making this possible. For instance, the decision of a British judge who did not deport a migrant who was found to work with forged documents was viewed as unfair for British taxpayers.

On the other hand, irregular migrants were primarily seen as a burden for the British taxpayer stating that the latter pay for free public services for all residents in the UK including irregular migrants. This was linked to the notion that irregular migrants automatically received support from British authorities in terms of filling out forms for benefits, and receiving cash and houses that were held back from British taxpayers.

*Tax payers like me don't want to feed him deport this leech Deport this lot no appeals they are illegal no asylum they have already broke our laws send them straight back deport this scum back tow them back out to sea we don't wont anymore they are all bums Deport this scum keep us all safe from the non genuine immigrants like this piece of crap he's prob only here for our money!*

Migrants were, for example, referred to as 'freeloaders' who the British people could not afford to have. Outrage was also prevalent in relation to European taxpayers in general and why the European community should pay for irregular migrants who were called 'scroungers' and 'economic migrant-freeloaders' and referred to as foreigners who entered Europe illegally.



The main argument put forward by social media users was that the UK as a host society only had limited resources, particularly when it comes to housing, healthcare and job opportunities and therefore the ingroup of nationals deserved to have exclusive access to these resources. There was an overall metaphor of a prevailing 'benefits culture' in the UK. Irregular migrants were defined as non-deserving and commenters demanded that public money should not be spent on them. Some social media users also referred to refugees as irregular migrants and rejected the acceptance of this particular outgroup. For instance, they demanded that borders should be closed to refugees or they should be deported whilst children of British taxpayers should be prioritised over children of irregular migrants. There was the general recurring argument that foreigners were not the responsibility of the host society and that the latter should not pay for other countries' nationals.

*Forcibly remove them back to where they came they are not our problem*

Concern was also expressed in terms of housing claiming that more irregular migrants live in the UK than there were houses whilst former British soldiers, homeless or disabled people were not prioritised for housing.

*Who makes rules where people who pay into a system don't always get the help they need yet illegal immigrants milk the country and get away with everything.*

The key discourse that dominated the social media comments in this section was concerned with the theme that migrants were more valued by the British authorities than British nationals. Direct social comparison between migrants and nationals were frequently employed by commenters to point to a perceived sense of injustice concerning the treatment by British government. Such accounts provided for a positive self-conception and emphasised the distinction between Us and Them by accentuating that hardworking taxpaying nationals feel they were forced to financially care for irregular migrants who broke the law and were unwanted 'invaders'. The impact of migrants on ingroup members was illustrated by referring to British lorry drivers who would face fines of several hundreds of thousands pounds or job restrictions if they were caught with irregular migrants in their vehicle.

*100,000 pounds fine charged to any company's drivers caught with One Illegal Immigrant the driver banned for life on the long haul employment jobs.*

One dominant argument among commenters was that migrants received a disproportionate amount of benefits. One key argument was that British people felt it was taken for granted that they pay for irregular migrants such as accommodation, living and NHS costs. Some argued that they paid expensive hotel rooms for migrants and ironically referred to themselves as 'great British taxpayers'. There was also the notion that migrants always brought their families including numerous children to the UK for whom British taxpayers also had to take care of financially. Moreover, users strongly referred to the UK as the most generous country that was too soft on asylum seekers and immigrants. The main argument made here is that British society already gave sufficient support to other countries whilst British people in need were neglected.

*Asylum seekers....while we see the rise of food banks, cuts to local services, an NHS reaching crisis point in funding and staff, Police numbers rapidly reaching an all time low, Armed Forces facing cuts to personel, our elderly are faced with eat or heat because of their pensions not rising sufficiently to cope, youngsters can't get jobs because immigrants work for lower wages, towns and cities are becoming unrecognisable due to immigrant numbers and English is hardly heard in some parts.*

### ***Cultural disparities***

With respect to the outgroup's cultural background, the host societies were regarded as civilised, whilst claims were made that irregular migrants come from 'barbaric', 'backward' and 'uncivilised' cultures. Several instances depicted irregular migrants as untrustworthy and dangerous. For instance, non-genuine asylum seekers were defamed as tribal and misogynist who would kill their women and rape women in host societies. The claim was made that thousands of migrants were rapists and stressed the particular issue of male irregular migrants and the danger they pose for especially vulnerable ingroup members such as women.

*10,000 illegal immigrant will rape your daughter or your mother etc can not bring to the justice so disgusted because illegal immigrant want for free everything no thanks!! we do not trust them!*

In these instances, they were depicted as ‘the enemy of any Western society’ frequently based on the notion of predominantly male, young, Muslim foreigners. This image was also linked to the notion of weak and irresponsible young men who endanger their own children by embarking on unlawful migratory journeys or left their family behind and deserted their own country instead of fighting for it:

*Most are young male economic migrants who are too scared to stay at home and fight for their country as they are cowards and leave their women and children at home to fight for them.*

In this way, social media users claimed superiority over foreigners by telling them what they were supposed to do for their country of origin. Commenters further stated that they did not respect the ingroup’s culture by referring to ‘our values and way of life’.

A review of an extensive number of around 100 studies on immigration attitudes conducted over two decades in Western Europe and North America, highlights that attitudes of native-born majority groups toward immigrants are strongly correlated with impacts of immigration on the culture and national identity (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). One powerful driver of mass immigration attitudes are immigrants’ effects on salient social groups based on ethnicity. In other words, “attitudes on immigration are about groups of people and about challenges to group boundaries”, in terms of how they culturally pose a threat to the entire national population, particularly in relation to their assimilation and language (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014: 242). In a similar vein, others emphasise that in survey research, cultural considerations, that is, immigrants’ impact on a nation’s culture, frequently appears to be the strongest influential factor for anti-immigration attitudes (McLaren, Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2018). This has also been found in the British context.

It was also a common opinion among commenters that other countries were better suited to accept irregular migrants. On the one hand, social media users argued that there are other European countries which are greater in size than the UK implying that they have more capacity to accept migrants. In particular emphasis was placed on the argument that countries which have cultural ties with the outgroup should accept them. For example, affluent countries with large Muslim communities such as Saudi Arabia or Bahrain should take in asylum seekers of the Islam faith. From this perspective, irregular migrants were defined as alien to British society due to lack of cultural affinity and their integration into British society was assessed as difficult. Some commenters also voiced preferences by favouring foreigners whose culture was seen as similar to the British way of life, for example based on the argument that Australians would transition more easily.

*We should definitely put British kids before illegals why should they get any precedence, stupid do gooders go back to living your detached life from reality. We should do this here We should have a 100 percent target and no compassion in the removal of illegal immigrants ...they are a criminals... legal immigrants should integrate...and w should take Europeans and Australasian s and us citizens and our overseas terror tries over those coming from other parts of the globe as they have similar cultures and have an easier transition into the British way of life ..which is more compassionate for them and less costly for the uk .... And in the meantime every person invited to the uk to work should be given proper papers and be treated equally to the rest of us...*

In line with that, a perceptual ethnic ranking has been observed among the majority of Britons who consistently prefer white immigrants and those of cultural proximity (Blinder, 2015). One user voiced insistence on protecting the term 'British' arguing that it should be reserved for 'indigenous' British people and foreigners with British citizenship should not be addressed this way. By the same token, other commenters emphasised that the fact that just because some irregular migrants had been living in the UK for a long period does not make them a British citizen even if they worked and paid taxes.

*Those who are British citizens should called as such, but the term "British" needs to be reserved for indigenous British people and not foreigners with citizenship.*

According to some commenters, British citizenship forms the legitimate criterion for deciding who should stay and who should leave the UK. In this regard, demands were made by commenters that irregular migrants should be deported as they were not British citizens and as British tax money was wasted on them which should have been used for the nationals. In one account, the conflation of irregular migrants with British nationals was pointed out, arguing that this was one of the reasons why terrorists were protected in the UK. However, commenters demanded that those British citizens who were found to be terrorists, should be prosecuted and regarded as traitors of the country.

*I hope they all get deported do not need people like that here I hope they are "AL" being sent back to their own countries the British public are sick of these spongers, they're not wanted or welcome here. I hope they are all sent back.... it is time that these queue jumpers were treated harshly.... with all the genuine people trying to escape REAL tyranny and suffering waiting and following the rules...*

Similarly, the former Blair government was accused of an open door policy that allowed mass migration to the UK. This policy was seen as responsible for creating incentives for more migrants heading for the UK and this was seen as the reason why British citizens were unable to receive important medical treatment. Thus, commenters stressed that the British society would not be able to accept millions of more people arriving in the country. Other commenters expressed concern over potential health issues and general danger that irregular migrants pose for British citizens.

*Well for once I'm speechless what about our health and the danger these illegals may be to British citizens.*

### ***Perceived invaders: rising numbers of irregular migrants***

The metaphor of an invasion by irregular migrants who forced their way through the Euro Tunnel to reach the UK was repeatedly used by commenters. A close reading of the concordances containing the collocates ‘illegal’, ‘many’ and ‘more’ showed that the commenters created an image of irregular migrants as ‘invaders’ who overrun other countries.

Social media users strongly stressed that no more of these migrants were wanted and should be stopped at Dover.

*Many illegals trying to enter our civilised countries!*

Particularly a perceived high number of irregular migrants was frequently disapproved of by social media users and the UK was believed to be the ‘land of milk and honey’ for migrants. Therefore, commenters feared that migrants would invade the country. This view was especially expressed in light of the European ‘migrant crisis’ in 2015/2016. In several instances, social media users expressed outrage with some claiming that thousands of hundreds or several million migrants were already on British territory. Several accounts demanded to send these migrants back to their countries of origin or to prevent them from entering the UK in the first place. These accounts reflect an overall sense of fear that migrants could outweigh the number of British people arguing that there were too many unauthorised migrants living in the UK. The use of the first person ‘we’ was prevalent, indicating a strong ingroup identity.

*Any missed taken straight back to the country they first landed in ! I'm sick of hearing about these people, many are not genuine asylum seekers, they just want to come here because it is described as the land of milk and honey, I've heard it said a few times by immigrants who have claimed asylum. Britain is a soft touch and so are some other EU countries ! We will regret it in the future. And I'm not racist I'm just realistic.*

The analysis further shows that in relation to unlawful entry, irregular migrants were regarded as very determined in their attempts to reach the UK by spending hours looking for a chance to get on trucks or walking along the motorway towards the

docks used by British lorry drivers in France. There was also the argument that there was an industry and network behind irregular migration that seeks financial gain. Linked to this view was the notion that with increasing numbers of irregular migrants, British nationals would have to care for them as well as their relatives. Commenters demanded that the British public should no longer be deceived by the government and that public money should be used to strengthen defences against this perceived 'mass forced invasion'.

The British government was criticised for manipulating its citizens and made them focus on the poorest people in the world who needed help from the host society whilst the richest citizens earned billions in the own country. There was also the argument that if the UKIP party was in power, then British borders would be better controlled and there would not be any issues of irregular migration and over-crowded housing in the UK. Commenters associated the EU referendum as a means to regain political autonomy and thus prompted the government to leave the EU in order to stop irregular migration. There was a repeated demand to vote in favour of Brexit based on the hope that this would lead to the UK closing its borders to irregular migrants and strengthen its asylum policy in the face of leaving the EU. This was linked to the demand that the government should get its priorities right.

*Here here jan "Here we go again, welcome to Britain, let's find them houses and schools., and Drs and lots of benefits send for the relatives, and so it goes on, the next Lorry will be arriving soon and more illegal immigrants for us to care for. We must vote OUT and close our borders" Here we go spending more of our money on others Here's the answer, get the army down. to dover, and for every 5 illegal immigrants each search team finds they get 3 days extra leave.....guarantee every lorry would be searched with good results. Hero!*

However, some questioned the effectiveness of the EU referendum and argued that David Cameron would give British people a referendum only after the UK allowed migrants in and paid lots of money to the EU. In this regard he was criticised for lumping together irregular and regular migrants and by doing so raised tensions about benefits. For example EU migrants were regarded as legal migrants who hardly claim any benefits in the UK.

***Potential criminals: murderers and terrorists***

The analysis of the collocate ‘illegal’ revealed a central theme concerning the national security of the UK and the fear that irregular migrants could be potential criminals. Perceived in this way, the presence of irregular migrants was linked to a nation-wide fear with millions of nationals being scared of these foreigners.

A persistent concern among social media users related to the claim that many irregular migrants were murderers or other serious criminals such as gang-related crimes. More specifically, the UK was referred to as an ‘open arm country for criminals’ and the competence of the immigration authority was questioned, arguing that British law protected these perceived criminals. Linked to this was the argumentation that this resulted in a serious lack of safety in some areas.

*Who is to be blamed in that case ? Not only the murderer but also the law ; the Government and the Immigration authorities. UK an open arm country for criminals because the law over here protects them. Call it free movement. Who knew who knows what filthy deseases they are bringing here probably deloberatly infected then sent here Who let them in?*

Some commenters appeared clearly aggressive and expressed some form of hate by demanding that those irregular migrants who committed a crime should be met with violence. Other commenters expressed their disapproval of irregular migrants by insulting them based on the argument that irregular migrants were criminals by definition.

*Burn em off Burn him alive Burn him alive he's nowt but vermin Burn him then send his remains home Burn it Burn the car, burn the driver and that's all to solve the problem because a illegal immigrants mean someone whose hearts are to brave to challenge any authority, and can cause maximum destruction to any state they sneak into, regardless their genuine fictions, but an illegal immigrants are criminals by definition.*

Some social media users expressed their fears about potential terrorists among ‘illegal immigrants’ and asked why it would be wrong to assist the voluntary return of this outgroup. Overall, there was the idea that Britain generally felt compassionate



for refugees but that this should not be confused with an open door attitude for potential terrorists.

*Yes I agree but I feel so sorry for the genuine refugees who critically need help but may be victimized due to the evil horrendous actions of those evil monsters who carry out radicalized attacks around the world.*

Although empathy was expressed for refugees who escaped from war zones, commenters repeatedly argued that it was not possible to distinguish genuine refugees from potential terrorists. A predominant argument was that British migration laws were unable to identify terrorists and granted some terrorists human rights. Furthermore, astonishment was expressed about the British government granting benefits and other forms of support to some terrorists and wondered if they should enjoy the same rights like those they killed. Social media users emphasised that people knew that half of irregular migrants were disguised ISIS terrorists and claimed that the British government received a video from ISIS in which they stated they would send thousands of ISIS fighters disguised as refugees to the UK. The notion of the violent, dangerous terrorist strengthens the image of the needy refugee who is met with empathy.

The concordance analysis of the adjective ‘illegal’ further reveals a dominant attitude among social media users that was based on the view that these migrants were ‘by default illegal’. Irregular migrants were viewed as a group of individuals who did not possess identity documents that could prove their nationality. Hence fear was expressed that too many of these unknown ‘hostile combatants’ live in the UK with many having hidden agendas.

This viewpoint was linked to the notion that there were ‘illegal radicalised immigrants’ who were frequently able to get a free ride into the UK. The link was made between an ‘influx’ of foreigners and senseless murders arguing that nationals were tired of such incidents. Some users complained that they were called racists due to their opposition to irregular migrants whilst stressing that they explicitly cared about the lives of those who were killed by irregular migrants.

Within this narrative, the UK was thought to be on high red terror alert and thus social media users demanded that the Euro tunnel should be closed to prevent more irregular migrants from entering the UK. The outgroup was often equated as a social group of criminals and depicted as selfish individuals who do not care for other people.

Irregular migrants were often referred to as ‘lawbreakers’ who did not believe in law and deliberately enter a country without authorisation. Social media users argued that those who entered a foreign country without authorisation or permission to remain fall under the legal category of ‘illegal immigrants’ who have no right to be in the UK. Commenters insisted that outgroup members should adhere to the given rules.

*Illegal immigrants are criminals and deserve the same hostility as criminals.*

### ***The ‘legal’ migrants***

The issue of fairness for legal migrants was frequently raised by referring to both British nationals and ‘legal’ migrants who were regarded as unfairly treated by the government. Legal migrants were generally referred to as ‘good’ and desired individuals who made the effort to travel to the UK in a lawful way. This group was further defined by one commenter as individuals who had to pay for high visa fees, wait for years to receive a right to remain in the UK and were associated with those who were in real need of asylum. This was juxtaposed with the fact that those who would like to migrate lawfully were often unable due to a lack of economic means.

Comments further created a sense of social solidarity by uniting genuine refugees and European citizens, arguing that both social groups suffered due to the irresponsible decision of British politicians to allow irregular migrants into the country with no concern for consequences. Irregular migrants were blamed for making the efforts of ‘regular’ migrants appear worthless, arguing that irregular migrants were better off than ‘regular’ migrants. One social media user argued that foreign people who contributed to British society and carried out jobs that British

people did not want to do should have the right to stay in the UK as they worked very hard, paid taxes and contributed to the NHS.

Some social media users emphasised that they were not racist or did not intend to spread hatred. Instead they argued that irregular migration was a nationwide problem for British society and that everyone's needs should be acknowledged.

*They are running from the same enemy as we are facing.*

*Illegal migrants make all law abiding immigrants seem stupid.*

Others raised the concern that the hostile environment policy in the UK inadvertently also affected legal migrants in a negative way whereby the latter were even treated as criminals at times.

In several instances, social media users represented the view of these migrants by criticising unjust treatment by British officials. They argued that legal migrants were met with hostility by the UK Border agency (UKBA) officials for no obvious reason through visa delays. There was also the concern that new legislation affecting banks in the UK would make things more difficult for legal migrants but not irregular migrants. The fear was expressed that legal migrants such as EU migrants would see their bank accounts become frozen and hence their lives disrupted. Relatedly, social media users gave personal examples such as being legal non-EU migrants themselves who experienced more hostility in the UK since Brexit.

*I'm pretty sure that in the process of creating a hostile environment for illegal immigrants you are inadvertently creating a pretty hostile environment for legal immigrants too, as if post-Brexit Britain weren't already hostile enough.*

### ***The valuable and vulnerable migrants***

Concordance analysis revealed that commenters were not only concerned about the (il)legality of irregular migrants, but also acknowledged their vulnerability. The more compassionate comments suggest that a generally more nuanced formation of opinion was observable among social media users. The analysis shows that the

commenters were also empathetic towards the outgroup. Although the number of these comments was lower than those against irregular migration, they contributed to the public attitudes towards this group of migrants. From the perspective of migrants, social media users acknowledged them as hard-working human beings who had basic needs, too. Therefore, commenters raised the issue of collective generalisation used by other commenters and criticised the latter for being racist or far-right and not considering migrants' vulnerability as well as the fact that other nationals frequently exploit their situation. Also newspapers were blamed for misleading readers into believing that all irregular migrants are potential criminals and hence a threat for the whole British society. Overall, this analysis revealed that there was also a counterbalance of comments that challenged the dominance of anti-immigration comments and predominantly negative online press (see chapter 7) coverage by emphasising the human aspects and motivation of those who are in search of better lives.

### ***A shared social identity***

In contrast to the negative portrayal of migrants, some social media users stressed that they did not view them as less human. One user, for example, acknowledged that there were too many irregular migrants in the country but also expressed sympathy for them by acknowledging that irregular migrants were hard-working people. For example, the high level of integration of refugees in the UK in terms of existing English language skills and having full-time jobs was stressed. Several comments appeared to argue in defence of or from the perspective of migrants by focusing on their contribution to host societies and advocating basic values such as humanity. This view reinforced the interdependent relationship between migrants and host countries with a common interest in a functioning economy that needs both nationals and foreigners:

*It needs more and more immigrants to keep their societies alive. Without migration, European societies and economies would bleed to death.*

### *The broader socio-economic context*

Users referred to the British colonial past and argued that the immigration policy of this government enslaved vulnerable and needy foreigners. For example, one claim was that irregular migrants were the cheap labourer of those who financially support the Conservative party. The party was also accused of 'dirty politics' and falsely accusing migrants for taking local jobs.

Empathy was expressed towards irregular migrants who were regarded as forcibly displaced individuals. For example, commenters stressed that they fled from countries that did not respect human rights and thus they should be given a life chance in a better country. Vulnerable groups such as homeless migrants were viewed as 'helpless' individuals including children from war torn countries and therefore offering help to them was not regarded as something wrong. One user stressed that children of irregular migrants were not illegal themselves.

*For many idiots is very funny shooting an illegal immigrant ... but for the "illegal" is an attempt to start a new life ... escape violence and hunger.*

The arrival of asylum seekers in Western countries was also linked back to the broader political involvement of these countries, namely the UK and US, in migrants' countries of origin. The repeated argument was made that the Western military involvement in these regions contributed to the fact that people were forced to leave their country of origin in the first place. Furthermore, commenters argued that the natural resources of migrants' countries were exploited by multinational corporations which further endangered or destroyed people's livelihoods. From this perspective, the escape of migrants to other countries was regarded as an inevitable effect. In this regard, one user pointed out that the notion of mainly 'Muslim' migrants applying for asylum in 'white' countries was justified by the broader socio-economic context.

Particularly in the UK context, some commenters stressed that very few irregular migrants lived in Britain compared to other European countries and thus implicitly pointed out that this phenomenon should not be a major issue for the British society.

British people were criticised for their disproportionate rejection of irregular migrants and for failing to consider the implications of the actions of the British government's involvement in other countries.

*The more Muslim countries are attacked, the more you can expect more asylum seekers to come to white countries.*

On a broader level, issues of moral responsibility were raised in relation to the UK's colonial past and the question of how foreigners should be treated in a host society. There was repeated reference to the colonial history of the UK arguing that Native Americans, for example, did not treat the Western foreigners badly when the latter invaded the American continent. This negative evaluation of the Western colonisation was further criticised by stressing that these colonisers took over one third of the world and ruled these regions for centuries.

*She did not come here illegally There are no bigger illegal immigrants than the British who stole countries from people living there and claimed them as their own.*

### ***Unpleasant environment for various migrant groups***

A number of comments criticised a perceived hostile and unwelcoming environment for various migrant groups. Regarding the group of economic migrants, reference to the law was made stressing that non-European economic migrants have no recourse to public funds and have to pay for their health care themselves. British immigration laws were generally criticised for their restrictive nature and thus were viewed as not valuing economic migrants in the UK. Additionally, others stressed that refugees were badly treated across European countries in general.

*Many refugees are subjected to maltreatment, insults and contempt in European countries.*

Social media users also appeared to speak on behalf of the general group of irregular migrants by arguing against a number of (presumed) amenities and rights that

irregular migrants were believed to have. For example, irregular migrants were seen as unable to access taxpayer funded homes in the UK given that they did not possess a work permit which was a requirement for such accommodation. Others argued that irregular migrants were unlikely to receive any benefits or have bank accounts due to the conditions and documents that are required such as a national insurance number.

Besides those commenters who made the case for the lack of entitlement of irregular migrants to benefits, other users frequently posed questions and expressed astonishment about how irregular migrants were able to open bank accounts, rent accommodation and receive benefits. This finding reflects a sense of lack of knowledge among users about the rights that irregular migrants possess in host societies, particularly in relation to benefits. There was also a degree of general incomprehension by other users about the reasons why some users expressed opposition to irregular migration.

In a number of comments, the UK's EU referendum and its impact on migration in the UK was a central point of discussion by mainly focusing on the negative consequences of the referendum for lawful migrants in the UK. On the one hand, the British hostile environment policy directed at irregular migrants was criticised as it was believed to have inadvertently also created a negative environment for 'legal' migrants in the UK. In particular, social media users argued that Brexit would primarily affect European migrants and their ability to enter the UK legally and would not reduce the number of irregular migrants. These developments were regarded as part of an overall increasingly anti-migration environment in the UK whilst stressing that the post-Brexit UK was already hostile towards non-nationals.

*Brexit will have no impact on this either, brexit is about stopping decent capable Europeans from entering British by legal means.....so the migrant hating brexshitters miss the point that illegal immigrants including those also from outside the EU from middle eastern countries etc aren't being stopped by brexit.*

Another user noted that the amount of news coverage which focused on the apprehension of irregular migrants saw a clear increase around the Brexit period

whilst implicitly stating that such anti-immigration reportage was in the interest of Brexit.

*Illegal labour immigrants Isn't it so convenient how these illegal immigrants are being intercepted so near to the Brexit.... didn't read about many being intercepted trough the rest of the year.*

### ***Issue of generalisation***

The issue of generalisation and stereotyping irregular migrants was raised by some commenters who criticised general statements by other social media users about irregular migrants and assigning specific properties to the whole social group without differentiation. The stereotypical notion was questioned whereby children were automatically depicted as ‘refugees’ and others who try to enter a country secretly were labelled as ‘illegal immigrants’.

A number of comments criticised the collective representation of irregular migrants as terrorists or other groups of criminals. One social media user, for example, implicitly stressed that it seems unlikely and misleading that only irregular migrants commit murders and hence deprecated such views. The *Daily Mail* was particularly criticised for making it seem that only irregular migrants commit severe crimes against women in the UK.

*And nobody but illegal immigrants commit murders..... sensationalism!*

In this regard, irregular migrants were described as decent individuals who would be willing to pay taxes or already do and consequently contribute to the host society. The popular belief that irregular migrants would receive benefits and expensive accommodation was rebutted by arguing that their irregularity does not permit any social entitlements.

Similarly, education was defended as an essential right for all children regardless of their legal status and argued that those migrants who have applied for asylum should be entitled to an available school place.



*Why are illegal immigrants in the same category as criminals and terrorists? absolutely makes me sick, a lot of them come over here risking their lives because their lives are in danger in their own countries! and contrary to popular belief they do not get benefits and million pound houses because they are here ILLEGALLY.*

Other social media users were defined as immoral or destructive for equating irregular migrants with terrorists and other suspected criminals. One particular area of criticism surrounded the argument that migrants were collectively identified as guilty without evidence disapproving of the fact that the outgroup was not assigned the legal principle of ‘innocent until proven guilty’.

Others gave a more nuanced picture by stressing the difference between actually counted terrorists and families who escaped from war. Misleading information was criticised for depicting irregular migrants as bad people in general. One social media user criticised the media attention given to the reportage on irregular migrants who committed crimes asking if a British citizen would have received the same attention in the news in case s/he committed the same crime. Moreover, misleading newspaper reporting on a handful of irregular migrants was criticised for showing a picture of thousands of individuals. This critique was shared by other social media users who emphasised that there were not millions of irregular migrants in the UK but only some thousands. Linked to this argument was the view that not every refugee had the means to come to the UK or to leave their country of origin due to travel restrictions imposed by their own governments.

*Not everyone is a terrorist and not all genuine refugees have the money to come here legally.*

Another commenter criticised the use of the label ‘irregular migrant’ for focusing on this group of individuals when it comes to the safety of the host society arguing that people of all walks of life commit crimes and readers should focus on the ‘real’ criminals.

*Concentrate on people who actually commit crimes, regardless of origin, nationality, etc. Illegal immigrant?! again the double-faced media trying to*

*direct the European ideology against whoever is categorized as an immigrant! A new hypocrite post everyone, keep scrolling!*

Other social media users argued that some social media users deliberately used emotive language such as 'nest of illegal immigrants' only to try to appeal to like-minded commenters but without evidence for the claim. The social representation of the unlawful mass arrival of migrants was criticised for being misleading without any proof about the people's legal status. One commenter also referred to irregular migrants as vulnerable individuals by claiming that they could be a grandmother who overstayed her visa. By the same token, other commenters showed empathy for an irregular woman who was able to work using fraudulent documents in order to support her sister. Some readers demanded to create a counterbalance to the negative group representation of irregular migrants and that every time an irregular migrant did a good deed it should also be reported in the news.

A user expressed frustration about a perceived thoughtless world and criticised the public social representation of migrants for being too loose. Some criticised other social media users for using the terms irregular and 'foreigners' interchangeably. Commenters argued that there is not such a thing as an 'illegal person' and hence an 'illegal immigrant' does not exist. One commenter stressed that those migrants who were genuine and wanted to settle in the UK should be supported pointing out existing discrimination and stereotyping on the part of far-right nationalists.

*Having said that, we must do more to help genuine migrants that wish to settle here free from the terrible discrimination and stereotyping from the far-right nationalists.*

### ***Negative ingroup representation***

Other social media users were called 'racist' for their anti-immigration views and counter-arguments were given with reference to their own experiences. For example, some users referred to those irregular migrants they knew personally as the hardest working individuals. The outgroup was socially compared with the ingroup of British nationals who were regarded as less hard working and commenters pointed out that

there are many English benefit fraudsters whilst they were many irregular migrants who want to return to their country of origin but are unable to do so.

*The average Illegal immigrant will be working a lot harder & more productive for their money than the average indigneous Brit.*

Some arguments adopted the perspective of irregular migrants by accusing British citizens and companies of exploiting irregular migrants and stressing that the Conservative government did not have measures in place to stop this exploitation. Opposition was especially expressed towards British landlords who were depicted by a commenter as ‘worse than the worst criminals’. Migrants were repeatedly perceived as vulnerable human beings who struggled to survive and did not deserve to be taken advantage of. However, some commenters, although opposing irregular migration, also pointed out that the outgroup still had the right to the fulfilment of basic needs and rejected the term being used to devalue other social groups, for example black people. Empathy was frequently expressed for those they deemed in search of a better life.

*I don't agree with illegal immigrants but I do believe everyone has the right to live somewhere safe with food, water and shelter!*

Some commenters also argued that those British citizens who defrauded the system themselves tended to complain about how negative the UK was but did not realise the fact that it was owed to luck that they were born in a fortunate location. Relatedly, one user argued that British citizens were a larger financial burden for European countries than European visitors for the NHS. Furthermore, reference was made to the broader socio-political context as regards Europe’s historical past by stressing that many European refugees including British nationals were accepted in other countries across the world and implicitly arguing that this should be considered in the current situation.

*It also must be remembered that north Africa, the middle east and America took in lots of Europeans during the Second World War: French Jews, Slavs, Poles, Balkan refugees and, yes, British nationals.*

### 8.3.3 Political failure to reduce irregular migration

Concordance analysis of collocates related to the social group of the government unveiled a strong sense of public distrust and disappointment with the political handling of irregular migration. In general, social media users strongly disapproved of the Conservative government's tackling of irregular migration and attributed responsibility to individual government representatives. Several policy measures were criticised, and a number of harsher ones proposed in order to address the above mentioned perceived 'invasion' of irregular migrants. More specifically, the former British Prime Ministers David Cameron and Theresa May as well as the Conservative party in general were particularly referred to as incompetent, unable to act in the interest of the British society and protect its people. These perceived political failures were closely linked to demands that those political elites and government representatives should be treated as culprits and punished accordingly. Commenters also expressed the desire for harsher policy measures such as deportation to reduce the number of irregular migrants.

Overall, three central themes were identified in relation to political failure to combat irregular migration in the UK. First a perceived open door policy which allowed irregular migrants entering the UK in the first place, second a general distrust in the competence of the Conservative party to tackle migration, and third a notable hostility towards former Prime Ministers and their migration policies. These themes are discussed in detail below.

#### ***Open door migration policy and public mistrust of Conservative party's competence***

In general, the effectiveness of the immigration policy was repeatedly criticised by commenters who argued that irregular migrants 'waltzed in' and 'took over' Britain. Commenters repeatedly posed the question as regards how so many irregular migrants were able to enter the UK, primarily suggesting issues with migration control on the part of government. Anger and astonishment were expressed arguing that the British government was not able to keep out irregular migrants despite

modern technology. Other users frequently asked why the British government was unable to prevent irregular migrants from entering the UK in the first place and then make efforts to find them. For instance, one critique accused the British government for acting too slow in light of the arrival of irregular migrants and hence it is now paying the price.

*Why are these illegal immigrants still managing to get into the UK is the back of lorries, why are all vehicles not being searched before being allowed to proceed, surely these illegals can be stopped or are the government doing this on purpose, because they don't seem to be trying to stop these people every week they're are always people managing to smuggle themselves into the UK.*

Social media users referred to the so-called 'open door policy' as one crucial cause for the presence of irregular migrants in the UK and other European countries and therefore clearly opposed it. The German chancellor Angela Merkel was criticised for her open door policy which was perceived as an invitation to refugees to enter Europe and allowed the arrival of one million individuals in 2015. This political measure was implicitly condemned by stressing that the German people saw this as a severe insult. The desire to cease this open door policy was collectively expressed among social media users.

In terms of British policymaking, the open door migration policy was seen as harmful for British society. One leading concern was that the British authorities lost sight of the number of irregular arriving migrants and those already living in the UK. The analysis further shows that the commenters more generally voiced mistrust of the Conservative party and its migration policy. There was a key notion among social media users that the UK government was not in control over irregular migration and even reduced immigration police and border staff. The metaphor of a 'sleeping British government' was repeatedly employed by social media users arguing that the political elites in charge did not perform their duties and fulfilled their responsibility to combat irregular migration effectively. This dissatisfaction was reflected in insults and anger directed at the UK government by commenters based on the argumentation that it failed to protect its borders and citizens from potentially harmful irregular migrants.

Furthermore, repeated incomprehension and lack of understanding were shown about the reasons why irregular migrants still remained in the UK and were not arrested or deported. Moreover, anger over seemingly weak British border controls was expressed, demanding that British citizens should know why irregular migrants could not be sent back to their countries of origin.

*Why can't we have iris/finger print recognition as the USA - it's not INTRUSIVE - it should be a BORDER STANDARD Why can't we just shoot them? why cant our coppers take them down a back lane and kill them. why cant they be sent back, what excuse has the government of stupid PC idiots come up with now. we need to know as british citizens. why cant they go back?*

There was a tendency to point out that the British government was too soft towards irregular migrants compared to other countries. The border force was viewed responsible for not doing their job properly. Therefore, demands were made that they and other government representatives should be fined for not detecting these foreigners into the UK.

*Finally how is it good that we are swamped by an endless stream of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and we can't control our own borders?*

Furthermore, disapproval was expressed about immigration officials who were thought to interview migrants and then grant them benefits and accommodation. More specifically, the issue of corruption among British officials was raised arguing that the latter abused their power by providing National Insurance Numbers to irregular migrants in exchange of money. Furthermore, the government was blamed for providing houses and food for all migrants regardless of their lack of identity papers whilst thousands of citizens were in need of state benefits. The notion of an irrationally acting government was further amplified by a statement stressing that the British government intends to release all foreign detainees from British prisons.

*RIP GB. The uk government under this vile women are guilty of disgusting treatment of all the UK citizens it seems unless of course they have ripped millions or preferably billions out of the fabric of the nation for their own personal accounts.*

In this regard, commenters repeatedly demanded to see a harsh response on the part of the British government. It is conspicuous that commenters strongly desired deportation as an effective political measure to deal with irregular migrants. Therefore, commenters called for detention and subsequent deportation of irregular migrants to their country of origin or last safe country to be top political priorities in the UK. Especially in case of the migrants in the above mentioned French camp in Calais (see chapter 6), social media users believed that a lack of punishment was an incentive for these migrants to attempt to come to the UK until they succeeded. The construction of more prisons to detain irregular migrants was therefore a desired policy measure. Migrants were also directly called upon by the commenters to apply for residence through legal channels in order to reach the UK.

*If they aren't claiming asylum, then they are economic migrants and should be deported.*

Furthermore, commenters demanded the British government to 'wake up' and close the Euro tunnel until the British government was capable of controlling its borders and setting up an efficient immigration policy. One suggestion was that there should be agreements between the British government and migration sending countries with the latter admitting irregular migrants in their territories.

The Conservative government was accused of not caring for and protecting its nationals. The party was repeatedly criticised by social media users for several years of austerity cuts which in commenters' views were resulting in growing poverty and inequality in the UK. This discourse was predominantly driven by the argument that members of this political party did not lead the UK responsibly but only had interests in benefitting themselves, the tax evading big companies and the banks. Commenters pointed out that Conservative MPs frequently failed to give any answer or appeared clueless in interviews when it came to solving problems affecting all nationals. They were further accused of deceiving nationals and making them believe that major issues such as wars were solved although this was not the case.

Moreover, Conservative politicians were assessed as incompetent and incapable as they presumably tended to focus on plans that were not well thought through or

debated in parliament. By referring to the Conservative party as ‘the Tory/Tories’, their members were described in negative terms or even insulted ‘scum’, fascist, corrupt, or nasty. In terms of the party’s general agenda, commenters expressed concerns that the EU referendum divided and did not unite people. In this regard, the party was also compared to the then US president, Donald Trump, who was criticised for his polarising and racist policy. Others stated that the Tory party would become more far-right like the UKIP party with increasingly more UKIP members joining the Tories.

### ***David Cameron’s failure to control migration***

The analysis of the collocates relating to government representatives shows that there was a small number of comments that expressed support and appreciation for the former British Prime Minister David Cameron stressing that he followed a sensible and morally decent policy. Nevertheless, it is conspicuous that numerous comments were particularly directed at David Cameron, who served as the British Prime Minister from 2010 to 2016. A sense of anger was prevalent among social media users, who accused Cameron for not fulfilling his promise to control immigration and reduce the number of irregular migration as he promised in the Conservative party’s manifesto in 2010. A number of insults were directed at him, such as ‘moron’, ‘evil’, ‘vile’, ‘spineless whimp’, ‘liar’ or ‘traitor’.

More specifically, social media users questioned if David Cameron knew the number and location of those irregular migrants who were already in the UK. He was accused of not paying attention to what was happening in the UK and anger was expressed over why irregular migrants can still be present in the UK. A lot of anger was expressed towards him by pointing to the arrival of irregular migrants in the UK arguing that migration appeared to be out of control. Social media users argued that Cameron lacked leadership as he was unable to close the borders to these migrants but simultaneously the British border forces experienced cutbacks. Relatedly, he was blamed for acting too late arguing that the UK was ‘overflowing’ with migrants.



In this context, commenters addressed Cameron by calling for a number of desired policy measures such as increased border controls to stop irregular migrants entering the UK. Moreover, social media users demanded that Cameron should tell EU officials not to interfere in UK politics. Linked to that was the hope that the EU referendum would be realised as soon as possible and consequently lead to the British government providing more security forces to combat irregular migration.

Overall, a sense of disappointment was prevalent among commenters whereby Cameron was accused for not caring for British citizens who were perceived as hardworking taxpayers. This argumentation was part of a repeated notion of British nationals not recognising their country anymore as they felt that there was no reason to provide migrants with benefits whilst the British government introduced cut benefits for thousands of vulnerable British people. Social media users referred to British social and justice system as a ‘joke’ and demanded Cameron to make the courts work in the interest of British people and not against them. In light of this general opposition to Cameron, some commenters called for his resignation or a vote of no confidence. As the comment below illustrates, he was also viewed as the weakest leaders of the UK given the number of migrants in the country.

*David Cameron is the weakest leader this country has EVER had by a country mile..... this needs to be explained ??? This needs to be fixed. This needs to stop now, this money needs to be spent in the UK .....we are full up!!!*

### ***Theresa May’s failure to control migration***

The comments explicitly referring to the then Prime Minister Theresa May were similar in their assessment and tone to those relating to David Cameron. Except for one commenter who regarded May as a competent Prime Minister, social media users generally showed strong opposition to her political performance regarding the management of irregular migration and representing the collective interests of British nationals.

In terms of border control, she was repeatedly accused of cutting funding for police and border forces despite the fact that migrants were entering the UK unauthorised. This reflects that users fiercely criticised the government's cutbacks particularly in connection with the arrival of irregular migrants. They viewed this as a political mistake. One commenter argued that she would 'commit treason' if she allowed irregular migrants staying in the UK. Thus, some commenters addressed her directly and called upon her to tell irregular migrants to return to their country of origin. Social media users repeatedly accused May for allowing irregular migrants entering the country using the metaphor that she brought the UK to its knees.

*Congratulations mrs may for controlling the immigration problem.  
Congratulations, UK, millions of your residents, including those in the  
country legally, get to live in fear just like people in the US in similar  
circumstances.*

In terms of non-nationals, disapproval was also expressed about May's hostile stance towards foreigners in light of capitalism and free markets.

*Theresa May is hostile to foreign people It's laughable that a party that  
encourages rampant capitalism and free marketeers - then complains about  
\_immigration.*

The analysis further reveals that the commenters' expressed frustration over May's migration policy was commonly coupled with a number of political consequences that were demanded from her. In order to express mistrust in the government, the comments characterised her in various negative ways in her role as Prime Minister in general.

In some instances, she was referred to as 'very unpleasant, selfish, fascist individual' and repeatedly compared with Trump. For instance, she was accused of bullying and threatening vulnerable people in the UK. Claims were made that she and her government were more concerned about their own financial gain and votes than British citizens. Anger was expressed by one user stating that the UK was led by 'idiots' where things were out of control as nationals saw themselves having become second class citizens.

One commenter described the UK being ‘stuck’ with Theresa May as Prime Minister who was believed to focus on matters that were trivial to the UK and did not deal with issues that affect the UK directly. Within this discourse, she was criticised as a weak leader in the Brexit negotiations that took too long and generally as ‘incompetent’ or ‘bungling’ and her behaviour as shameful. Some called upon May to resign as a Prime Minister whilst others demanded even harsher policy measures and called for May to be sentenced with life imprisonment for misfeasance.

*(...) can someone send all the comments on this article to Teresa May so she knows exactly how we all feel.*

#### **8.3.4 Criticising supporters of irregular migrants**

The analysis of comments pertaining to the group of nationals further shows that commenters did not simply blame the government for the presence of irregular migrants but also made ingroup members responsible for creating incentives for migrants to live in the UK. Among those commenters who voiced anti-immigration views, some also showed a certain degree of internal group diversity by collectively opposing ingroup members who stood in solidarity with irregular migrants or created economic incentives for migrants. Especially individuals or groups affiliated with the political left were criticised for actively inviting migrants and hence exacerbating the perceived problems for the host society.

##### ***Businesses and individuals incentivising irregular migration***

A number of individuals and professionals were charged for facilitating irregular migration or attracting irregular migrants to come living in the UK. There was the general argument that those who help irregular migrants should be punished themselves. Foreign and British lorry drivers were thought to gain money from smuggling irregular migrants into the UK and were viewed as problematic. Additional arguments proposed that companies that employed irregular migrants should be charged with high fines. Economic demand in the UK was regarded as a

crucial reason that attracts irregular migrants and those who employ them were responsible for lowering the overall wages in the host societies. Restaurant owners and farmers were blamed by social media users for hiring these migrants and should thus be punished too. Some social media users appeared very hostile towards employers in the UK and demanded, for example, their murder for hiring these foreigners. Furthermore, British council staff members were described as corrupt and were blamed for helping thousands of irregular migrants moving to the UK. British lawyers were also accused of ripping off the British public by defending migrants with several appeals which were believed to be not promising. These British citizens were regarded as shameful for defending migrants.

*Action must be taken against the restaurant owners for employing an illegal immigrant.*

*Kick out not just the Illegals but those people Who are quite clearly Illegally employing them depriving Brits from all our communities of much needed Employment. Make the punishment deportation of the people who are employing illegals and I'll bet they start employing Brits and people who have legally entered the UK with the right to work get the Jobs being stolen by illegals.*

### ***Left-wing and pro-migration acts***

Anti-immigrant comments frequently blamed left-wing individuals or groups for supporting irregular migrants. This was linked to a discourse on political correctness which was seen as exacerbating the issue of irregular migration arguing that simply naming irregular migration differently does not make the problem disappear. Furthermore, some expressed anger that left-wing nationals support migrants or welcome economic migrants and hence contribute to the problem. For example, the readership of the newspaper the *Guardian* were blamed for inviting migrants to the UK despite the fact that the UK was seen as 'overcrowded'. Finally, there was also the demand that those nationals who wished to accept irregular migrants should care for the outgroup themselves, arguing that this experience would quickly show them the limit of support they could offer.

*If they like the ILLEGAL immigrants so much they should be deported with them Looney Left!!!*

*No\_really\_ Something sensible people have always wanted, unlike the pinko liberal luvvies who want more illegal immigrants!*

## **8.4 Conclusion**

The analysis of linguistic features over the entire period from 2015 to 2018 shows that the comments generally appeared to be negative both towards irregular migrants themselves and the government. However, commenters' views on the group of migrants revealed a discursive distinction between the 'good legal migrant/refugee' and 'bad illegal/economic migrant'.

### ***Negative representation***

Negative other-representation was particularly evident in the discourse theme concerning the impact of irregular migration on British nationals. Irregular migrants were collectively compared to the ingroup as unwanted competitors when it comes to access to accommodation, healthcare services and jobs. Migrants were discussed in relation to their negative impact on taxpayers in the country they resided whilst a number of commenters used hate speech by directing insults at migrants. These negative attributions comply with popular public opinions that view migrants as an existential threat to host societies (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002). These instances tend to regard nationals of the host society as superior to irregular migrants by drawing on rights-based argumentations. British nationals were represented as the rightful claimant to the above mentioned necessities whilst irregular migrants were defined as social welfare fraudsters or outgroup members without legal entitlement to any of these benefits.

Irregular migrants including refugees were demarcated as outgroup members with the intention to exploit the British welfare system as they did not contribute to it. Negative outgroup representation was generally expressed by referring to irregular migrants as beneficiaries of the British welfare system whilst British ingroup

members were referred to as vulnerable British citizens. Perceived in this way, a multitude of comments presented negative representations of irregular migrants by positioning the ingroup as vulnerable citizens whilst irregular migrants were portrayed as troublemakers.

This discourse theme was linked to the contested issue of treatment by the state whereby social media users de-legitimised the perceived better treatment and appreciation of migrants compared to nationals. Linked to this notion was the generalisation that all hardworking people in the UK were demoralised about the fact that they pay taxes used to support irregular migrants. Using social comparison strategies, commenters frequently emphasised that irregular migrants ‘are not our responsibility’. The ingroup-favouring bias and strong distinction from the outgroup accentuated the demand for superiority of the nationals who feel unfairly treated by their government. Such accounts showed clear internal diversity by accusing government representatives of abusing taxpayers’ money and spending it on the outgroup. The argumentation put forward here is that irregular migrants supposedly had no entitlement to British benefits. Therefore, British nationals felt unfairly treated by the authorities, arguing that public money was not spent on those ingroup members in need but wrongly given to outgroup members who are ‘illegal’ as they violated British laws.

Common discursive ways for commenters to express their disapproval of the outgroup was to make personal exclamations or to refer to the quantity of migrants. The perceived rise in the number of irregular migrants to the UK was seen as worrying and linked to the notion that ‘we are full’. Us and Them as identity categories were frequently constructed to emphasise the inability of British society to accept more migrants arguing that too many were already in the country. Negative outgroup representation on the grounds of high quantity of the ‘other’ is a typical feature of public discourses on irregular migrants in order to represent them as an uncontrollable and undesirable social group (Moffitt, 2016).

Irregular migrants were further contrasted as potential criminals in the form of rapists or terrorists who are able to move around freely and jeopardise the lives of nationals. The comments revealed a strong sense of urgency to protect the ingroup - frequently

referred to as ‘our’ society which was seen as more important than safeguarding the human rights of irregular migrants.

Furthermore, the argument prevailed among commenters that migrants were accepted if they came through legal routes. This group of migrants was defined by commenters as superior to the group of unlawful migrants who were charged for circumventing immigration laws and disparaging the efforts of ‘legal migrants’. The notion of the ‘bad illegal migrant’ was strongly associated with economic migrants who were attributed negative features and intentions. Commenters mainly argued that most irregular migrants were economic migrants who were not in need of asylum as they did not remain in the so-called ‘first safe country’.

In addition, varying definitions and levels of approval of refugees and asylum seekers were identified in this thesis. The analysis shows that social media users tended to associate irregular migrants with not only one specific migrant group but various migrant groups such as asylum seekers or refugees. There was the overall demand that those who did not qualify as refugees or did not apply for asylum needed to be deported from the UK. Overall, there was the argument that no country in the world would accept lawbreaking foreigners and hence they should be met with restrictions. A pejorative depiction of the outgroup was prevalent in those comments that referred to irregular migrants in general by drawing on the image of a ‘cultural other’ that represented the migrants’ culture as inferior to the ingroup’s.

Anti-immigration views were further expressed by social media users who criticised advocates or facilitators of irregular migrants. These comments once more showed internal diversity whereby various members of the British society were accused of attracting or enabling irregular migration and therefore exacerbated the issue of increasing numbers of the outgroup in the UK. This reflects some degree of recognition among commenters that irregular migration is a complex phenomenon that is intertwined with economic and social factors in the host society.

### *Positive representation*

It also notable that commenters also expressed empathy for the outgroup and held critical views on ingroup members due to their anti-immigration views. The analysis of the downsized sample shows that social media users held critical views about irregular migrants but that the overall opinion on the group of migrants was relatively balanced. The discourse theme which was concerned with the bad treatment of migrants indicates that irregular migrants, and those migrant groups associated with them, were not exclusively defined as alien or identified with negative collective identities.

Social constructions of irregular migrants as the ‘other’ are primarily based on demarcation processes from the ingroup (Triandafyllidou, 2000). The analysis of the social media discourse shows that the comments do not simply reflect Us-and-Them categories, but disclose more complex discursive dynamics in which a sense of diversity within the ingroup was manifested. A number of negative representations of their own ingroup were salient which criticise anti-migration attitudes of other commenters and demonstrating solidarity with the group of migrants. In these accounts, migrants were defined as desirable outgroup members along positive representations and fellow nationals were met with criticism and attributed with negative qualities. Social media users who expressed anti-immigration comments were refuted by mirroring arguments in which they were accused of being narrow-minded and having immoral motives by exploiting the British social system for example.

The discourse theme surrounding issues of generalisation reveals that social media users also frequently used negative ingroup representation in order to question popular beliefs and group identities which ingroup members held about non-nationals. This is reflected in a number of comments that criticised the social representation of migrants as criminals, arguing that not all irregular migrants were criminals. Some commenters drew upon personal experience and underlined positive characteristics of migrants. Several social media users contradicted negative social identification processes of irregular migrants arguing that such statements were unsupported and claiming that they rather aimed at attracting similar views.



Generalising social representations of migrants as ‘illegal’ were condemned, insinuating that illegality was a fixed characteristic of this outgroup. Commenters further criticised that social media users defined irregular migrants too loosely or conflate dissimilar terms. This stereotyping rhetoric was also seen as problematic as it feeds into discriminatory and anti-immigration communication of far-right nationalists.

Solidarity with the outgroup was further expressed by social media users by criticising the limited support various migrant groups such as asylum seekers or economic migrants receive in host societies. There was also a notion of ‘acceptable’ migrants, that is those who were willing to properly settle in the UK, who should be supported by the British host society. Solidarity and empathy were further evident identifying dimensions in which migrants were predominantly viewed as vulnerable or self-sacrificing human beings who violate the law, for example, in order to care for relatives in need of help.

The internal diversity within the ingroup was further expressed in accounts in which British employers and landlords were frequently designated as greedy and perceived as wealthy nationals who were believed to exploit irregular migrants for financial gain. The ingroup of national newspapers were also criticised for their negative coverage on irregular migrants. Such accounts reflect further internal diversity between the ingroup of the national public and media outlets whereby the social representation of migrants put forward by the newspapers was questioned in terms of adequacy and factual assessment. Negative ingroup representations were mainly employed by commenters to rebut negative representations of the outgroup claiming that these are often unsupported or delusive.

Moreover, general positive aspects and benefits of the presence of migrants for European host societies were pointed out through the use of favourable other-representations. Within this discourse, a shared social identity was emphasised arguing that increasingly more migrants are needed in European societies. Particularly in relation to the European economy, commenters thought that it was highly reliant on migrant labour in order to function and sustain. Positive other-conception was employed to underline desirable characteristics of migrant groups

such as refugees and their successful integration in the British society. Such assertions of positive outgroup representations were also accompanied by the appeal to other commenters to check official statistics that provide respective evidence. Based on the issue of the UK's colonial history and the related ill-treatment of colonised populations, some social media users were referred to as 'illegal immigrants' by other commenters assuming that they were the offspring of former British colonisers.

### ***Commenters' frustration and hostility towards the British government***

The comments that pertain to government representatives and political elites predominantly reflect a high degree of internal opposition to these ingroups. Personal dissatisfaction in the form of complaint and critique regarding how authorities deal with issues associated with irregular migration is a recurring pattern and has been observed for other social media platforms (Bartlett and Norrie, 2015). In line with the latter, the Facebook comments in this study also mostly tended to show hostility towards politicians. Many social media users criticised the failed implementation of policies, particularly regarding porous border controls and the perceived unlawful entry of migrants, for example, aided by lorry drivers. This was linked with concerns over the arrival of potential terrorists among the migrants.

Many other commenters demanded the deportation of irregular migrants which implicitly suggests that people were not content with the respective policy measures. Relatedly, calls were made demanding the government to care for and protect its own citizens first whilst arguing that those states where migrants entered European territory first should accept them. Among them were also comments that criticised the EU and its influence on British policies. Such critique was also linked to the demand to vote in favour of the British EU referendum. In light of Brexit and the importance of the respective political promises to regain control over immigration in the UK, it is not surprising that Facebook users held the government to account in terms of their poor handling of irregular migration.

In summary, the expressed voices in the comments manifested strong anti-government attitudes across all years by complaining about the current government's competence, whereas the views on migrants were more balanced overall.

## 9 The ‘Windrush scandal’: a political defamation of integrated migrants?

This chapter focuses on the special case of the ‘Windrush migrants’ that received considerable media interest in 2018 (see chapter 5.3 for more detailed background information). It is noteworthy that the vast majority of articles were published by the left-wing newspaper, the *Guardian*, which also for the first time dominated the news discourse over the selected period. The analysis featured in this chapter examines the ways in which the British press discursively constructed these migrants and how commenters evaluated this news coverage. As outlined in the previous two chapters, CDA was employed to explore the newspaper articles, whereas concordance analysis of the collocates ‘genuine’ and ‘legal’ and the keyword ‘Windrush’ was carried out to examine discursive patterns in the social media comments. The analysis of the two datasets is organised around two broad topics: migrants’ individual suffering and critique of the political treatment of this group. The first section addresses the analysis of the representation of the migrants and reveals a strong solidarization discourse among both the media and public towards the ‘Windrush migrants’. Second, the chapter highlights that the government’s maltreatment of this group of migrants was assessed as incompetent by the media and condemned by the commenters. The analysis of this chapter reveals that ingroup and outgroup dynamics are not straightforward but are re-defined to the changing context leading to outgroups becoming ingroups and vice versa (see Triandafyllidou, 2000).

### 9.1 Empathy with ‘Windrush migrants’ plight

The newspaper articles covering the experiences of the ‘Windrush migrants’ have a number of discursive strategies in common. There was a strong representation of the extent of the plight faced by migrants by predominantly incorporating their voices and directly reflecting their views. The accentuation of the migrants’ voices serves to evoke sympathy with the plight of these migrants and to strengthen the perspectives primarily of those who suffered from the state’s treatment. By using extensivization, the individual experiences were described as emotionally onerous and the affected

migrants were depicted to be in a state of shock as the British government did not send out prior warning or changed any law when questioning the legal status of these migrants. This discursive strategy further underlines migrants' personal suffering and the controversial treatment by the Home Office. One key argument put forward by the media surrounded the suddenness of the request made by British authorities demanding migrants to produce proof of their right to stay in the UK.

The personal circumstances of the 'Windrush migrants' were frequently reported in an overall sympathetic way by particularly taking into account the migrants' vulnerability regarding their advanced age and/or bad health conditions. Detailed aspects of migrants' physical and mental destitution were given and viewed by the media as an urgent problem with the support of the statements of several British politicians. The incorporation of legitimised voices such as political figures aims at raising public concerns of the far-reaching impact of this policy. To dramatize the situation, the *Guardian* singled out a case arguing that even after being formally recognised as a British citizen, the migrant faced difficulty in finding new work and accommodation. Apart from the migrants' vulnerability, they were commonly portrayed by the newspapers as tax-paying and law-abiding people. The use of this generalisation strategy enhanced the ingroup identity of the 'Windrush migrants' and acknowledged them as nationals of British society.

The analysis of the comments reveals that social media users clearly replicated the media's empathy with the 'Windrush migrants'. There was a prevalent notion that this group of migrants arrived in the UK as legitimate individuals as they were initially invited by the British government to work in the UK and therefore should be treated equally like other ingroup members of the British society. In other words, these individuals were defined by most commenters as full ingroup members who were deemed as entitled to be in the UK.

Overall, the examination of the comments surrounding the discourse on the plight of the 'Windrush migrants' shows that social media users viewed this group of migrants primarily as fellow citizens and the controversial political treatment evoked a sense of defence of their rights among commenters. It seems that the online readers picked up the compassion discourse prevalent in the British news coverage and ultimately

turned this empathy into a strong critique of the government's actions as shown below.

## **9.2 Critique of the hostile environment policy**

The way in which Home Office staff treated 'Windrush migrants' was generally regarded by the press as a result of condescension and lack of professionalism. One central critique referred to the incomprehension at the fact that these migrants' permanent right to remain in the UK was called into question. By pointing to historical and political circumstances, the left-wing media saw it as an irrefutable fact that these migrants arrived as minors before 1973 and consequently enjoyed a long-term right to live in the UK. Against this backdrop, the actions of the Home Office were deemed unjustified.

The comments about the group of 'Windrush migrants' revealed further aspects of ingroup diversity. Tense ingroup dynamics were prevalent in comments that criticised the contested political treatment of 'Windrush migrants'. The British migration policy, particularly the hostile environment approach, was met with a clear negative ingroup bias that identified various political actors and entities including the then British Prime Minister, Theresa May, the Home Office and Conservative party as incompetent and driven by self-interest.

The Conservative party and its hostile environment policy were strongly criticised by commenters for mistreating the group of 'Windrush migrants' and not keeping their promise of allowing these migrants to stay in the UK. More specifically, other commenters stressed that British colonisers departed from the British Empire which invaded the countries of these migrants in the first place. In this light, Conservative politicians were referred to as 'disgusting' and 'shameful' for making these 'legal' migrants live in fear and persecution. In particular, the former Home Secretary Amber Rudd and then Prime Minister Theresa May were accused of designing racist laws with the intention to deport British citizens of the Windrush generation.

Amber Rudd was the Home Secretary during the period when the ‘Windrush scandal’ occurred. In terms of the political treatment of these migrants, concern was raised about how many of these British citizens were deported illegally by the British government under Rudd’s leadership. One commenter stressed that British people still expected a proper explanation for the deportation and maltreatment of these ‘Windrush citizens’.

*Yet we are still waiting for a proper explanation as to why and how British citizens can be deported against their will and are subjected to such terrorism.*

In general, commenters regarded it as worrying that those who work for the Home Office and at detention centres carried out their orders without moral concern or questioning. The critique and negative ingroup representation disclosed a specific form of identity formation in which the ‘Windrush migrants’ were equated as fellow citizens, whilst government representatives were outcast and condemned for their actions. ‘Windrush migrants’ were described as ‘obviously’ the most decent British citizens who contributed to the UK and were thus viewed as ‘useful’ members of society. What came to the fore was a deep mistrust in single politicians and the overall migration policy in the UK. Issues of morality and equality were raised by social media users whilst referring to the ‘Windrush migrants’ as vulnerable ingroup members who were unfairly treated by British authorities - another ingroup member. A number of negative characteristics were attributed to the latter to accentuate anger towards their perceived incompetence and mismanagement. Whilst the ingroup of ‘Windrush migrants’ was demarcated as vulnerable and legitimate, there was a common view that the ingroup of government representatives were driven by evil intent and were dishonest.

It is conspicuous that the notion of the ‘unfairly treated migrant’ caused commenters to socially compare them with other social groups. For example, one commenter referred to their own situation emphasising that the hostile environment policy already existed thirty years ago and adversely affected not only migrants who arrived from the Caribbean but also Commonwealth British nationals. Another commenter expressed outrage over the British government and highlighted their own situation which had similarities with the Windrush group given that s/he lived in the UK for

30 years, was married to a British citizen and had UK-born children. Other social media users drew comparisons with other groups of individuals who held British citizenship. In one instance, the case of Hong Kong residents was illustrated stressing that some used to possess British passports but their citizenship was removed from them before Hong Kong was given back to the Chinese authority.

Similar to the left-wing British newspapers, the commenters associated the ‘Windrush scandal’ with a more general notion of an incompetent and irresponsible British government. Politicians were regarded as selfish and believed to only act in their self-interest. The authorities’ behaviour around the ‘Windrush migrants’ was further seen by the commenters as an evidence that politicians too often make mistakes and deny any wrongdoing.

*Like all politicians she is NOT interested in what is really happening or the consequences, she like most politicians are about saving their own asses and another ass that should be on the block is Mrs May who was in the same office before Amber Rudd and the person who implimented these changes that have had such terrible consequences for the Windrush generation and it is unforgivable...and before anybody comments lets not forget in one way or another we are all targets of this dreadful government!!*

The seriousness of this issue was further solidified in the media discourse by quoting several politicians who reminded those in charge that these migrants had been invited to come to the UK in the first place in order to rebuild the country after the second World War. In their accounts they further expressed concerns over the migrants’ suffering and deemed their denied access to healthcare and other essential services as outrageous and unlawful. Politicians also demanded the government to acknowledge the error in this matter and to act respectfully in light of the significant contributions that Commonwealth citizens made to the British society. The use of legitimised sources once again served to underscore the controversy of the Home Office actions and to question its general competence. Specifically, the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, was called upon to solve the situation.

Further urgency of this case was raised with the press advising affected migrants to contact their MPs and ask for support. Disagreement with this policy was further amplified by public anger. For example, the editor of a British magazine was



represented as he launched a petition to stop this policy. The accumulation of various legitimised voices in support of the ‘Windrush migrants’ enhanced the status of this group and further legitimised their call for justice.

The analysis of the comments shows a different focus in its critique of the government compared to the press reportage. Whilst the media was not chiefly concerned with the former Prime Minister Theresa May and her role as former Home Secretary, social media users frequently attributed specific responsibility to her in connection with the ‘Windrush scandal’. Some commenters saw May as the key person responsible for this political debacle arguing that the British hostile environment policy derived from a harsh anti-immigration approach promoted by her as the former incumbent. In other words, her leadership at the Home Office was believed to have ‘sown the seeds’ for this scandal. In particular, comments remembered the Go-Home campaign in 2013 led by May in which irregular migrants were called on to leave the UK by means of posters attached to vans. In this light, she was referred to as immoral and viewed as one of the worst or *the* worst Home Secretary of the UK.

In terms of the political handling of the ‘Windrush migrants’, a further critique concerned her time as Home Secretary where an unofficial change of rules took place whereby the arrival records of ‘Windrush migrants’ were destroyed. This was believed to have contributed to the scandal as some migrants were unable to give evidence regarding their legal arrival in the UK. Theresa May was further accused of being complicit by backing the then Home Secretary Amber Rudd and overlooking her dishonesty about the migration target policy driven by the Home Office. Some commenters demanded her to face the public and answer their questions about the treatment of ‘Windrush migrants’. Anger was further expressed about May arguing that she did not feel guilty for her actions and called upon her to resign before Rudd.

Overall both May’s and Rudd’s behaviour over the ‘Windrush scandal’ were strongly condemned by the commenters and seen by some as ‘characteristic’ of the Conservative party. Both politicians were frequently referred to as incompetent or even ‘treasonous’ in their roles as Home Secretaries who let their citizens down. These accounts shared the view that the British government failed to reduce irregular

migration to the UK for various reasons and therefore was primarily held responsible for the related problems of nationals in their everyday lives. A sense of disappointment and disbelief was notable among commenters who frequently felt that the policy measures in place were not effective to reduce the number of ‘actual’ irregular migrants.

On the one hand, social media users charged Amber Rudd for mistreating vulnerable people and for misleading the British parliament by not telling the truth and using excuses for her actions. Others claimed she was undermining May when she issued a public apology. One user defended Rudd by referring to Theresa May as ‘nasty and arguing that Rudd inherited May’s political ‘mess’. Commenters assumed that May created the migration policy targets and mentored Rudd who acted as her shield. However, commenters also called upon Rudd to resign, to be deported to another country or to be arrested for her political negligence.

The hostile attitude towards migrants in general was another criticism of the Home Office. A recurring critique by the press was expressed in form of insistence that structural issues within the Home office created a more dehumanised approach to migrants. At the same time staff members were allegedly pressured to clear backlogs and transfer decision making processes from senior to junior staff. New or young Home Office staff were portrayed in the media as aggressive towards migrants and less knowledgeable compared to their older, more experienced colleagues. A former Home Office whistleblower was quoted claiming that new tighter immigration policies created a negative climate within the British immigration system and led to Home Office staff almost ‘enjoying’ detecting undocumented residents from the Commonwealth. Illustrative of this environment was an account of a migrant who described the way the Home Office treated her as degrading using emotional language by underlining that they made her ‘feel like dirt’. The employment of legitimised voices served to incite further distrust in the government and its handling of migration-related issues. The inclusion of migrant’s voice further helped to fuel anti-government sentiments.

In addition, details of an inspection report revealed by the *Guardian* confirmed that the Home Office pursued concrete numeric targets suggesting that ‘Windrush

migrants' may have been caught up in this strategy. The *Telegraph* provided some evidence of the existence of removal targets. Another aspect of the government's controversy referred to the contradictory information given by different Home Office staff about the importance of destroyed landing cards of 'Windrush migrants' for the identification of their legal status in the UK. The government's wrongdoing was emphasised by legitimised voices such as a former whistleblower who underlined the high importance of these cards for the Home Office's decision making concerning the rights of residence for 'Windrush migrants'.

A further recurring criticism of the Home Office referred to the high requirements in terms of the documents that were accepted as a proof of legal status. The media criticised the Home Office staff for threatening the migrants with deportation or detention in case of failure to provide the demanded documents. Overall, the media frequently generalised the Home Office staff as incompetent and created a picture of a dysfunctional British immigration system.

In a similar fashion but more driven by emotions, the comments painted a picture of an overall dysfunctional Home Office with staff being frequently referred to as 'nasty' or 'lunatics'. Some commenters echoed the newspapers' argument by agreeing that Amber Rudd actually inherited existing problems from the last two decades that were already present in the Home Office. Authorities were also held accountable for their actions and mistakes and they were accused of deliberately mistreating 'Windrush migrants' with the aim to remove a greater number of foreigners in general. The Home Office was further accused of not carrying out proper examinations of foreigners but instead only focused on targets. Some commenters expressed outrage by claiming that a racist agenda was the driver of the 'Windrush scandal'. British immigration policy was seen as deeply restrictive arguing that not even animals would be treated this way.

*What the hell is wrong with these home office officials, they are not examining people properly, they are looking for easy targets to make their figures look good, nasty nasty people. What the hell man?*

One specific discourse was only notable in the comments dataset which was centred around the Conservative party. The latter was frequently defined as overall

incompetent, dishonest and racist based on the assumption that they primarily pursue their own interests. More specifically, commenters particularly referred to the Conservative party as ‘Tory’ or ‘Tories’ and viewed them as the actual problem suggesting that they supported Theresa May by using Amber Rudd as a scapegoat. A number of sanctions were suggested such as taking legal actions against party members or cease their wages or to remove the Tory government overall. The removal of migrants was also seen among social media users as an obvious intention of the Home Office driven by the Conservative government and its Brexit programme.

More specifically, the government’s migration target policy was partly associated with the Brexit vote which was seen as the Tory’s party intention. Linked to that was the image of May being the ‘Brexit PM’ who was described as ‘racist and xenophobic’, particularly for creating a hostile environment for irregular migrants. This policy was described by strong adjectives such as ‘aggressive’ as it was believed to cause more human suffering whilst failing to reduce the number of ‘actual’ irregular migrants. By drawing on a study of Oxford University, the government was blamed for always refusing to evaluate the real impact of its policy. A call for a new immigration approach was expressed.

The analysis of the comments highlights that people’s opposition to the British government were particularly dominant in comments regarding the treatment of ‘Windrush migrants’. The argumentation of commenters shows high similarity to the newspaper articles. A metaphor of a deeply dysfunctional immigration system was created by arguing that the ‘Windrush migrants’ were falsely caught up in May’s hostile environment policy.

### **9.3 Distinction between Windrush and ‘real illegal migrants’**

The right-wing newspaper the *Telegraph* whilst stressing the issue of wrongly implemented targets experienced by ‘Windrush migrants’, also clearly acknowledged the link between the ‘Windrush scandal’ and the hostile environment policy. With a

clear anti-immigration stance, however, it emphasised that the Home Secretary should not be too lenient and abandon targets due to the importance of tackling irregular migration. The newspaper argued robustly in favour of a hostile environment.

Similarly, some social media users emphasised that the Home Secretary in fact should tackle irregular migrants through increased deportation. It was notable that the empathy for 'Windrush migrants' appeared to have provoked some social media users to reinforce sentiments against the so-called 'real irregular migrants'.

These instances vehemently depicted irregular migrants as an enemy to the host society and emphasised the right of countries to protect their national territories from unwanted outgroups such as irregular migrants. One user stressed that s/he agreed with the deportation of irregular migrants, but also expressed horror over extreme anti-migration attitudes and comments. Relatedly, other commenters stated that Rudd should not resign arguing that migration targets in fact should exist for irregular migrants.

One commenter expressed outrage that Theresa May did not implement the migration target policy when she was Home Secretary. Although the 'Windrush migrants' were deemed as wrongly caught up within the target policy, commenters underscored that the Home Secretary should be held accountable for every irregular migrant who arrives in the UK. In this regard, the Home Office was described as 'drunken hooligan' who has lost control over irregular migration. The Home Secretary and Home Office were blamed for completely disregarding the law and not being fit for the purpose to tackle irregular migration. Other politicians such as the shadow Home Secretary and opposition leaders were also blamed for not treating irregular migration as a major political issue.

*The Home Office and the contemptuous Home Secretary have shown a complete disregard for the law and are not fit for purpose.*

'Windrush migrants' were clearly distinguished from the 'real irregular migrants' arguing that they were never unlawfully in the UK. 'Windrush migrants' were pitied

and regarded as ‘poor’ individuals who were disgracefully and uncompassionately treated by the government that seemed to have lost perspective. Against this background, commenters disapproved the hostile environment policy.

*And I would expect that Mrs May & her Brexaster Gang were fully aware & supportive of kicking more foreigners out.*

In contrast, irregular migrants were referred to as economic migrants and ‘bogus refugees’ who were defined as ‘bad’ as they continue entering the UK compared the ‘Windrush migrants’.

On the other hand, other commenters did not adopt an internal diversity but instead positioned the ingroup of government representatives as appropriate arguing that every nation has their right to want to control immigration.

*I am confused what is the proplem with having targets on deporting  
ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS?*

*I am still waiting for an explanation from someone (anyone!?) as to what  
exactly is wrong with creating a hostile environment for illegal immigrants.*

By showing understanding for the government, the *Times* represented the British government in a more favourable light as understanding and capable of learning. It used extensivization to incite understanding for the government by providing details about the then new Home Secretary's (Sajid Javid) plans to change the British immigration system after the unjust treatment of ‘Windrush migrants’. His disapproval of the ‘hostile environment policy’ was underscored with his intention to re-name it into a ‘compliant policy’. However, it was noteworthy that he still defended the removal of irregular migrants.

This section shows that the ‘Windrush migrants’ turned from outgroup members to acknowledged ingroup members due to their high level of integration and unquestioned legal status. The solidarity with this group appeared to have turned into a more distinctive demarcation between the notion of a ‘desired migrant’, that is the ‘Windrush migrant’, the ‘undesired migrant’, that is the irregular migrant.

## 9.4 Conclusion

The ‘Windrush scandal’ was dominated by left-wing newspapers that exclusively covered stories about the ‘Windrush migrants’. The analysis of this chapter finds that the British hostile environment policy in connection with its implications for the ‘Windrush migrants’ was of high interest for the British press and their readership. More specifically, the criticism of the online press against the British government appeared in a new light by highlighting the responsibility issues and implementation problems of the hostile environment policy. The discourse surrounding the ‘Windrush scandal’ either focused on criticising the Home Office’s treatment of the ‘Windrush migrants’ or illustrating the plight of individuals.

This discourse differs strongly from the previous representation of migrants as an undesired outgroup because the ‘Windrush migrants’ were treated as ‘integrated citizens’ rather than enemies or strangers by focusing on their personal plight and the wrongdoing on the part of government representatives. Focusing on detailed facets of the personal struggles faced by a number of migrants, the majority of the news articles predominantly referred to the unjust treatment of the ‘Windrush migrants’ by British authorities. In terms of national identity, it must be noted that all newspaper articles represented ‘Windrush migrants’ as ingroup members and referred to them as nationals despite the fact that their legal status was questioned by the Home Office during this period.

Regarding the narrative perspective, the news coverage consisted of a wide range of migrants’ direct accounts about the personal difficulties they experienced as a result of having been classified as irregular migrants by the Home Office after decades living in the UK. Both migrants from Commonwealth countries and the majority particularly from the Caribbean were subject to this policy. Overall, the ‘Windrush scandal’ encompassed a political mistake based on the fact that a number of the aforementioned so-called ‘Windrush migrants/generation’ were falsely classified as irregular migrants by Home Office staff. Due to a series of severe humanitarian consequences that individuals experienced as a result of this misconduct, this turned into a political scandal with the British media strongly arguing that these migrants were caught up in Theresa May's hostile environment policy.

The analysis of the reacting comments revealed that the previous outgroup of migrants can become ingroup members based on strong social identification with them by feeling ashamed of the government actions. These present dynamics of social identity equally demonstrated that government representatives such as Home Office staff can be treated as outgroup members through condemnation based on ideas of social justice and British values. The comments disclosed a high degree of solidarization with the 'Windrush migrants' whereby commenters did not tolerate the lack of humanity and gratitude towards this group of migrants.



## 10 Discussion

In the last four decades, international migration has increasingly become a pressing issue for European societies and governments. In view of the high numbers of migrants having arrived on European soil in 2015 and during a period of various national elections, migration has become once again a top priority issue for both policy agendas and the media in Europe (Vollmer, 2011, 2014; Parkin, 2013; Andersson, 2016). The chosen period of this study from 2015 to 2018 is a key time interval for the understanding of the discourse of irregular migration because it comprises several important European and British socio-political events, such as the ‘migration crisis’, the EU referendum, and the so-called ‘Windrush scandal’.

Media and politicians repeatedly expressed their concerns over migrants who entered their national territory unobserved and/or unauthorised. Accordingly, the attention on unlawful migration has risen to greater public prominence (Morehouse and Blomfield, 2011). Irregular migration only relates to a small proportion of the overall migrant population (Düvell, 2011a, 2014). From a normative perspective, however, it is often depicted as an important social problem in policy discourses. Preventing and combating irregular migration are widely favoured goals of the common European migration policy (FRA, 2014; Parisciani, 2015; Andersson, 2016). In order to tackle unlawful migration, EU Member States have made massive investments and built an ‘illegality industry’ consisting of many different mechanics and economies of border protection (Andersson, 2016). Therefore, it is not surprising that there is a rich literature on the securitisation process that evolved and gained prominence among European authorities to curb irregular migration (Benhabib, 2004; Bagaric and Morss, 2005; Düvell, 2008, 2011a; Engbersen and Broeders, 2009; Morehouse and Blomfield, 2011; Vollmer, 2011; Maneri, 2011; Parkin, 2013; Błus, 2013; Provera, 2015; Andersson, 2016; Brouwer, van der Woude and van der Leun, 2017; Miller and Chtouris, 2017).

In the British context, the UK government began to combat irregular migration five decades ago in order to meet media and political demands by making irregular migration an offence (Slaven and Boswell, 2019). The hostile environment policy is

specifically directed at irregular migrants and aims to reduce their number in the UK. A survey from 2018 found that the British public continued to support this policy and while doing so expressed their disapproval of irregular migration (YouGov, 2018). However, despite the prevalence of irregular migration in British politics and public, media and people's views on this group of migrants are still under-researched. Studies on migration in general in the media are widespread and particularly the right-wing press in the UK has been shown to report more negatively on migration-related issues than other European newspapers (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015; Allen, 2016; Islentyeva, 2021). However, news coverage and public views on irregular migration published online are still poorly investigated areas.

In this study, these gaps were addressed by 1) conducting comprehensive analyses of online newspaper articles on irregular migration, and 2) examining the corresponding social media discourse in reaction to the articles. The findings of this research were contextualised within the Social Representation Theory and Social Identity Theory and the changing socio-political environment of the UK over the selected period. More specifically, this research shed light on how key social groups, namely migrants, nationals and government were discursively represented by the press and social media users.

The following discussion first looks at how the press and social media discourses underwent distinct variation in the wake of political and social changes during the chosen period. Then the chapter compares the press and comments' dominant narratives and linguistic features in the two identified key discourses, humanitarian and securitisation, showing that these online discourses focused on specific issues and defocused other aspects during different time periods. This comparative analysis aims to trace the similarities and differences between the news coverage and comments in terms of the social representations and discursive patterns of the three social actors.

The commenters clearly replicated the media's discursive representations but at times were even more critical of the government and migrants. It is further shown that both the right-wing press and to a lesser degree the left-wing newspapers tended to employ populist elements in their reportage on irregular migration. Finally, the

chapter provides concluding thoughts that summarise the key study achievements and emphasise their relevance for research on media and public opinion on irregular migration.

## **10.1 Shifting discourses in light of changing socio-political events**

This study finds that the socio-political context played a pivotal role in the news coverage on irregular migration and the responding online comments. Contrary to popular opinion (YouGov, 2018), the British media reportage and readers' respective evaluations were not entirely negative towards irregular migration, but more nuanced and consistently stood and fell with the changing socio-political environment over the selected time span. Increases in the amount of online articles and corresponding comments notably correlated with the perceived European 'migration crisis', the announcement and date of the British EU referendum and the Windrush-related events in the UK (see **Figure 6.1**).

Between 2015 and 2018, the numbers of newspaper articles and comments evolved to the largest extent proportionally (see **Figure 8.1**). This means that there was a simultaneous occurrence of the number of newspaper articles and concomitant comments with an average of around 100 comments per article throughout the selected period. In addition, the numbers of both articles and comments surged and fell mostly at the same points in time. It must be noted that the British right-wing press dominated the online media discourse on irregular migration in the UK through most of the study period.

In 2015 and 2016, the right-wing British newspapers clearly focused on the quantity of irregular migrants and them allegedly posing a security threat to the British people. This is not surprising in light of the 'migration crisis' and EU referendum in these years where the topic of migration appeared to have polarised public views and brought about migration-related fears among nationals across Europe and the UK. In the subsequent years, concerns surrounding irregular migration along with the notion of the ingroup as potential victims continuously decreased in British online newspapers. This correlates with the decreasing number of migrants arriving on

European territory in 2017 (Rea *et al.*, 2019). With the ‘Windrush scandal’ emerging in the public discourse in 2018, the British media reporting clearly changed, with the left-wing newspapers now dominating the news landscape and the news’ narrative focus mainly holding the British government responsible and demanding social justice for the ‘Windrush migrants’. Whilst in 2018 the ‘Windrush scandal’ raised issues regarding the UK hostile environment policy, media and public concerns about the ‘real’ irregular migrants remained a peripheral topic.

In general, two opposing discourses were identified in the press representation of irregular migrants. The British news coverage was divided between securitisation and humanitarian themes in which irregular migrants were either depicted as a threat to the destination society or as victims of dangerous journeys or restrictive migration policies. This finding is in line with previous research which highlighted polarised British media narratives on migrants including refugees and asylum seekers (Berry, Garcia-Blanco and Moore, 2015).

## **10.2 Humanitarian discourse: plight of migrants**

The humanitarian discourse covered a number of hardships experienced by irregular migrants ranging from life-threatening journeys, difficult living conditions to unjust treatment by government representatives. As anticipated in this study, left-wing newspapers predominantly focused on reporting on the vulnerability of irregular migrants by primarily criticising the failure of British political elites and restrictive migration laws and their direct impact on individuals. The key argument used by these newspapers was that existing policy measures were too strict, leading to a harsh treatment of these non-nationals. Especially vulnerable groups such as children or homeless migrants were socially represented as destitute and details about their living circumstances were highlighted to create a high degree of compassion for the outgroup. Furthermore, left-wing newspapers, particularly the *Guardian*, discussed hatred and violence against migrants from the viewpoint of the migrants themselves. The argumentation used here held the former Prime Minister Theresa May and her hostile environment policy accountable for such attacks by providing details about

this policy and arguing that it created a permissible climate for violent attacks against various migrant groups in the UK.

Overall, the left-wing newspapers showed a stark polarised representation of both ingroups and outgroups by victimising the non-nationals and demonising violent nationals and policymakers with anti-immigration stances. Both groups were referred to in an unequivocal narrative and portrayed the ingroups as merely the ‘vulnerable’ ones and the outgroups as ‘discriminatory’. In other words, the typical social representation patterns were reversed with the focus on low moral standards on the part of ingroup members and positive outgroup representation.

A number of reacting comments to the humanitarian news discourse showed a sense of solidarity with the outgroup, for example, by employing positive outgroup representation and emphasising the vital contribution of migrants to Europe’s economy. Furthermore, negative ingroup representation was used by commenters to criticise other social media users for stereotyping all migrants as criminals or to condemn British employers for exploiting these non-nationals by paying them low wages.

However, contrary to the generally negative stance of right-wing newspapers towards irregular migrants, most right-wing news reportage also took into account the plight of migrants and were centred around the risk resulting from various smuggling methods by implicitly drawing attention to the dangers associated with their unlawful entry such as suffocation in lorries. Such coverage underlined the despair of these individuals and their willingness to go to great lengths to reach the desired destination country. Without directly including the voice of the migrants, attention was repeatedly drawn to the suffering of vulnerable groups by focusing on children or women whose despair and vulnerability were emphasised. This finding is in accordance with previous studies that pointed to specific British media representations of migrant women based on racialized, feminized vulnerability, whilst male foreigners were primarily portrayed as undeserving and dangerous (Gray and Franck, 2019). These authors emphasised that the press’ narrative strategy of depicting women and children as a homogenous group of victims was underpinned by a paternalistic attitude. The overarching assumption among the British

newspapers was that women and children were innately vulnerable and needed to be protected by the Western governments of Europe.

Whilst the voice of irregular migrants was mostly absent in the right-wing newspaper articles, numerous accounts of nationals were used to stress their empathy towards these migrants and the potential dangers associated with the conditions of their travel. Represented in a victimising fashion, British citizens depicted in the news coverage generally appeared to feel sorry for the migrants and expressed understanding for the outgroup coming to the UK.

However, such sympathetic accounts tended to be more a side aspect of the overall news coverage that concentrated on the social representation of irregular migrants as invaders, criminals or enemies of the British people. The sense of empathy expressed by the nationals mentioned in the news articles was partly used to reinforce the disapproval of any clandestine entry via lorries or private vehicles. Social media users in particular frequently demanded more restrictive measures to prevent this kind of travel and called upon migrants to use legal means of entry. In other words, the portrayal of compassionate nationals who expressed concerns over the wellbeing of migrants was largely centred around the issue that those policies in place were ineffective and migrants should use other legal entry options. The perspective of the migrant who might have chosen irregular entry as a last resort was hardly considered by the press or the commenters.

### **10.3 Securitisation and populist discourse: illegal entry and negative impact of migration**

The securitisation discourse concentrated on various issues in relation to migrants' unlawful entry with one third of the news coverage explicitly reporting on illegal entry into the UK (see **Figure 5.6**) by focusing on the quantity and physical proximity of irregular migrants. Particularly in 2015 and 2016, i.e. those years in which the topic irregular migration was most salient in the news compared to the following two years, the British press orchestrated irregular migration as a pressing

security-related concern. This was also a crucial time in which migration in general was a top political issue surrounding the European ‘migration crisis’ as well as the EU membership referendum in the UK. The British newspapers’ notion of migrants as ‘invaders’ was most prevalent in 2015 and linked to social representations of the outgroup causing chaos and crisis for nationals in Europe and the UK resulting from their uncontrolled movement into and within the European continent. Considering the socio-political context in 2015, the media’s focus on migrants’ arrival clearly correlated with the fact that the 1.2 million migrants who entered EU territory in that year were considered irregular migrants given their lack of valid travel documents (Rea *et al.*, 2019).

The migrants’ camp in Calais took centre stage in the press discourse of unlawful entry as it was represented as the main point of departure for migrants heading for the UK. References to the quantity of migrants in Calais were systematically used by the British press to reinforce a sense of crisis that threatened to spill over to the UK. The negative social representation of migrants was reinforced by referring to them as a homogenous group of individuals who were determined to enter the UK at any cost. More specifically, migrants hiding in lorries was the means of border crossing that received the highest attention in the British news which frequently produced a distinct social representation of the ‘lorry’ that became symbolic for the uncontrolled entry of migrants into the UK.

The comments show a similar picture in which unlawful entry via lorries was a central theme in the social media comments (see chapter 8.2.3). The negative press depiction of migrants was clearly adopted by the responding social media users with an overall focus on the discourse of the foreigners’ unlawful entry. Hence, unlawful entry was the top type of migration that both newspapers and social media commenters were concerned about.

The right-wing media’s discursive construction of a nationwide ‘crisis’ scenario especially with respect to the Calais camp reflects a populist discursive style that emphasises a homogenised collective understanding of deprived nationals that are (potential) victims of the migrants (Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). Especially security-focused media representations are central to populist communication. The focus of

the British press on security-related issues by depicting irregular migrants as a national security threat reflects this populist exclusionary narrative. Migrants became synonymous with potential terrorists and criminals who could secretly enter the UK among other migrant groups. Various discourse strategies were used by the right-wing press to denote migrants as possible criminals. By employing scare tactics and generalization strategies, the ingroup concerns were amplified by references to terror attacks in neighbouring countries such as France with possible spillover effects to the UK. These terror- and crime-related fears expressed in the news coverage mainly painted hypothetical scenarios but the use of the generalization strategy implicitly assumed that irregular migrants had similar intentions to these groups. The media's framing of irregular migrants as potential terrorists combined with the 'crisis' discourse reveal populist ideas that perceive irregular migration as a paramount to the host society (see Zunes, 2017).

Similar to the right-wing newspapers, security concerns were also raised by commenters particularly in terms of fears related to the arrival of potential terrorists among irregular migrants. However, commenters appeared to be more precise when expressing fears about potential dangers and implications associated with uncontrolled migration than the newspapers by concretely referring to the terrorist group ISIS, for example.

Anti-immigration discourses were dominated by the right-wing British newspapers which frequently utilised populist messages in their articles by perpetuating binary discourses of 'bad migrants and failed government' versus 'good nationals'. This divide that distinguishes between 'the people' from 'the elite' as well as the 'other' (non-national) is typical for populist communication (Moffitt, 2016). These populist discourses prevalent in the British right-wing media primed readers to think about the negative implications of irregular migration on themselves (see Share, 2018). The physical proximity of irregular migrants to British society through their secret arrival in the UK was used by the right-wing press to argue that irregular migrants were a potential threat to the British people. In terms of justification of arguments, 70% of newspaper articles justified that public order including the security of the potential host state was at risk by the presence of activities associated with irregular migration (see **Figure 5.5**).



The ingroup of nationals was depicted by the press as homogenous by emphasising that all nationals who encountered migrants regarded their secret entry into the UK as unlawful. Linked to this attitude is the notion of intrusive foreigners who were able to disturb the presumed peace and daily routine of nationals. Across all years, the social group of nationals was predominantly represented by the online press as a fearful group who see themselves as potential victims of migrants who were presumably deceptive and behave immorally. The right-wing newspapers especially appeared to identify with the nationals and expressed understanding towards individual stories of ingroup members who claimed to be fearful of migrants. Nationals' expressed fears especially concerning female nationals who were portrayed as vulnerable to potentially exploitative and fraudulent male migrants.

Furthermore, male British lorry drivers were socially identified as helpless, particularly when migrants attempted to hide in their lorries bound for the UK. This perceived danger faced by the ingroup of nationals was presented primarily by the right-wing newspapers that discursively depicted the ingroup's interests as superior to the plight of migrants. Individual stories about migrants who potentially committed crimes and did not have a residence permit were used as discourse strategies to illustrate and emphasise nationals' threats associated with irregular migrants. This type of discourse is in line with populist argumentation based on favourable ingroup and adverse outgroup stereotypes (Hameleers, Andreadis and Rein, 2019). More specifically, it justifies exclusionary behaviour towards the outgroup and de-legitimises their presence in the destination country through the dimension of legality that distinguishes the outgroup from the ingroup.

In contrast to the press, however, social media users were more unanimous and revealed stronger opposition to irregular migrants by not only focusing on the perceived unlawful entry but also frequently demanding the deportation of irregular migrants. This finding suggests that the social media commenters were also strongly concerned about those irregular migrants who were already present in the UK. Commonly used words by commenters such as 'deport' and 'scum' revealed a more pejorative attitude towards irregular migrants and a preference for stricter policy measures (see **Table 8.1**).

By dramatizing irregular migration as a threat-related phenomenon, the commenters employed populist communication and demanded politicians to find fast solutions such as the immediate deportation of irregular migrants (Moffitt, 2016). It is striking that the commenters readily adopted the newspapers' implicit assumption that allegedly irregular migrants must be unlawfully in the UK and are therefore punishable by law. It is notable that online social representations of irregular migrants were frequently linked to a more general distrust of the government. More than half of all newspaper articles focused on the government's responsibility (see **Figure 5.9**) and mainly criticised migration legislation and its implementation in the UK. This could be interpreted as a desire of the British society for effective political measures to curb irregular migration, especially at the beginning of the European 'migration crisis' when there was a lack of national and international policies to manage the arriving migrants (see chapter 5.1). The notion of crisis reflects a populist discursive style that indicates a breakdown between nationals and the political elites and a broader public distrust towards the political handling of migration (Moffitt, 2016).

Whilst British citizens were predominantly referred to as the 'good' and vulnerable ingroup, both migrants and government were depicted as culprits who undermined the will of the nationals (Hawkins, 2009). Such populist ideas were particularly evident in news accounts that constructed a self-concept of nationals who accused political elites for being 'corrupt' and failing to present British people's interests. Both social media users and newspapers made political elites and government representatives primarily responsible for issues related with irregular migration. Only one third of the news articles held migrants accountable for unlawful behaviour regarding irregular migration (see **Figure 5.9**). This result is surprising as it contradicts findings by Allen (2016) who found that migrants themselves were blamed by British newspapers for the scale of irregular migration in the UK. Such attributions of blame promoted by the press work in the populist preferred narrative that offer the public a way to hold political elites accountable for neglecting nationals' fears and indicate who should be punished and who deserves protection (Hameleers *et al.*, 2019).

Frustration with and blaming of the government's handling of irregular migration in the UK were central narratives both in newspaper articles and social media comments, particularly in 2015 and 2018. This lack of trust was not only an important feature to the right-wing but also the left-wing press discourse as their line of argumentation was chiefly based on the critique of the effectiveness of migration policies and credibility of politicians. In general, the newspapers represented the perspectives of politicians from the ruling party, judges and police officers/border guards. The frustration of nationals was mirrored in their representation of the political elite as irresponsible and incompetent towards its citizens and repeated calls on the government to curb irregular migration more effectively.

Government representatives were referred to on the one hand as too lenient towards irregular migrants, particularly by not being able to deport them to their country of origin, but also too weak against the EU by adhering to European migration policies. For example, several right-wing newspapers drew attention to the lack of effectiveness in reducing the number of new arrivals on the European level. The EU Dublin Convention was criticised for a decrease in the number of asylum seekers who were deported under this regulation to the EU country in which they first arrived. Although accounts were given of British politicians who emphasised the government's determination to combat irregular migration, overall the British government was regarded as incompetent, particularly in comparison to other European countries.

The argument of poorly implemented or weak migration laws was also prevalent in the responding comments whereby social media users called for stricter control or addressed the lack of effective policy measures. These comments mainly expressed their desire for more restrictive policy measures with the consequence of reducing the number of migrants. Among the social media comments, repeated calls were made demanding the government to care for and protect its own citizens first whilst arguing that those states where migrants entered European territory first should have accepted them. In line with the content of the newspaper articles, a considerable number of comments were concerned with the control of irregular migration and the failure to fulfil this task. Commenters repeatedly criticised ineffective British border controls and the perceived high number of migrants arriving in the UK.

It is notable that social media users were generally more direct and specific than newspapers in their demands for political action such as calls for voting for the right-wing party UKIP which is overtly against immigration to the UK. One key finding here is that most comments strongly criticised political elites such as previous British Prime Ministers and the Conservative party in general for failing to tackle irregular migration. A perceived mismatch was at the centre of attention among commenters who strongly questioned the inability of British authorities to effectively reduce the number of irregular migrants given the political assertiveness to do so.

This study further shows that social media users also viewed themselves as ingroup members who were mostly defined as ‘good’. Both migrants and political elites were explicitly constructed as outgroup members by commenters. The former were distinguished from the ingroup in terms of their lack of legal status, whilst government representatives were criticised for being too lenient towards irregular migrants and too irresponsible towards their own citizens. In line with populist communication, political elites were mainly referred to by the commenters as incompetent and the British nationals felt they were badly governed and let down by the British government (Moffitt, 2016).

Those in power were regarded as an outgroup assuming that they provided more support for arriving migrants than their own citizens who in turn felt neglected by their state. In particular, the social representation of the government treating its citizens unfairly by spending taxpayers money not in the interest of the nationals was consistent across all years. Migration-related failures were often associated with issues in people’s daily lives. For example, commenters disapproved of the fact that British taxpayers’ money was used by authorities to accommodate newly arrived migrants. The key argumentation here was organised along ingroup and outgroup definitions underlining that British nationals felt unfairly treated given that they were entitled to benefits compared to lawbreaking groups such as irregular migrants. In other words, social media users demanded that law-abiding ingroup members should be prioritised over non-nationals in relation to government benefits and resistance against state support of lawbreaking foreigners was manifested.

The key reference point of the newspapers' social representation of the government referred to the failure of the latter to fulfil its duty to represent the interests of its citizens. One recurring critique among right-wing newspapers against British judges was a perceived lenience in terms of their judicial decision towards migrants. Emphasis was further given to the lack of fairness towards ingroup members based on the argument that irregular migrants did not possess the right to reside in the host state but seemed to receive better treatment from the host government compared to nationals.

This type of discourse on migrants and political elites is a key element in populist messages and ties in with the social identity binary framing of the 'good ingroup' (nationals) versus the 'bad outgroup' (migrants and political elites). Both ingroups, the press and the social media commenters, showed consistent ingroup favourability and did not place the blame on themselves when it comes to the host society's everyday problems. In contrast, political elites were viewed as a culprit outgroup that is not interested in people's concerns and is unwilling to address their fears. As a result, an image of deprived citizens victimized by the threat of irregular migrants and disappointed by the state during the perceived 'migration crisis' and the Brexit period was constructed. This distinct social representation of two outgroups in the form of migrants and political elites served to highlight the concerns and fears expressed by the citizens and to maintain their positive ingroup identity.

Previous research confirms the link between irregular migration and poor governance, arguing that the presence of irregular migrants in a host society indicates that the existing government is criticised by the public for their inability to tackle irregular migration (Bommes and Sciortino, 2011). Accordingly, the findings of this study illustrate these negative views. Particularly from the perspective of the nationals, the British government appears to be incapable of tackling the 'hostile irregular migrant'.

The British parliament gradually demonised and publicly labelled the until then 'invisible strangers' as public 'enemies' between the 1970s and 90s (Vollmer, 2014). In other words, the government in the UK seems to have constructed a lose/lose scenario for themselves in these political discourses that created an image of

irregular migrants as an undesirable outgroup. Among the right-wing newspapers and the reacting comments, irregular migrants were replicated as a hostile foreigner whose presence reflects the failure of the government to prevent the outgroup's unauthorised entry at the national border. Commenters seemed to have adopted the political construction of a foreign enemy but they did not trust the political efforts to curb irregular migration. This study reveals that the negative attitude towards irregular migrants appears to be a placeholder for social media users' actual discontent with policymakers' unfulfilled promises. This is particularly the case when it comes to the hostile environment policy and the not yet achieved net migration target. As Allen and Blinder (2018: 214) rightly point out: "(...) the language of net migration and the scale frame, previously so politically useful to the Conservatives, began to work against them as the target became unattainable". The opposition to irregular migrants appeared to be primarily used as a vessel for commenters to express their dissatisfaction with the political elites' handling of this type of migration and of the citizens' concerns. These ingroup and outgroup dynamics reveal a paradox in which the policymakers seem to have created such a hostile image of irregular migrants that they in fact cannot defeat in face of the complex global and socio-economic realities of irregular migration.

Even though the British immigration enforcement efforts still aim at disrupting the lives of irregular migrants, there is little evidence that these measures are successful in identifying them or reducing their number (Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018). In the same spirit, scholars doubt the effectiveness of restrictive policy measures in general, especially given the fact that the number of individuals settling in European countries has not decreased despite the adoption of more restrictive immigration policies across Europe since the 1970s (Castles, 2004).

Andersson draws comparisons with states' efforts against drug trafficking and argues that "Europe's 'fight against illegal migration' here seems to mirror the global 'war on drugs', which is now widely perceived as a costly failure in financial, human and political terms" (Andersson, 2016: 1059). From this standpoint, the political strategy of combat is believed to be counterproductive and ultimately nourishes irregular migration that it initially intended to reduce. In accordance with this, others

emphasise that irregular migration will not decrease but remain an essential policy target (Triandafyllidou, 2012; Provera, 2015; Kynsilehto, 2017).

On the one hand, this is attributed to the states' failure to address the actual complex dynamics underlying migration, that are notably increasing global disparities and the demand for legal and illegal migrant work in developed countries. De Genova emphasises that irregular migrants are actively and deliberately 'imported' and encouraged by prospective employers across countries (2016). In his view, the constructed 'border spectacle' with militarised and securitised borders based on high technology and techniques around the world must be understood as political tactics that conceal the actual call for irregular migrants. In the same vein, Anderson argues that anti-migrant policies are exclusively based on the notion that migrants represent foreigners who seek a good life and better jobs (Anderson, 2017). According to this understanding, Western policy makers disavow the fact that the living standards and national welfare state in their countries rely on the exploitation of workers in less developed countries. Their search for better life opportunities in more affluent countries is a direct result of this reliance. Western states are usually silent about these global connections that include the impoverishment and disenfranchisement of millions of people in sending countries caused by the resource extraction, outsourcing and massive exploitation by developed countries.

Furthermore, the logic behind such policy seems to assume that those who adopt irregular methods of travel are less likely to be in real need of protection. This understanding runs the risk of obfuscating the detrimental effects of strict border controls, namely that migrants continue to migrate but under more dangerous conditions which in turn makes them reliant on smugglers and traffickers (IOM, 2013; Huot *et al.*, 2016). As a result, vulnerable individuals in urgent need of protection, such as children and women, continue to be subject to potential exploitation and violence (Castles, 2004; Aliverti, 2012). In line with that, some scholars note that the call for policing borders and punishment primarily strengthens the nation state at the expense of irregular migrants (Doezema, 2001; Long, 2004). Overall, studies highlight the distinct policies of exclusion surrounding irregular migrants: external exclusion at the border, internal exclusion from civic rights and access to state services and exclusion from the territory in the form of deportation

(Engbersen and Broeders, 2009; Błuś, 2013; FRA, 2014; Provera, 2015). A study by Düvell et al., for example, finds that the UK government's hostility approach jeopardises the living conditions of irregular migrants in several respects and by doing so creates an underclass of non-citizens (Düvell, Cherti and Lapshyna, 2018). As IOM correctly states, there is a risk that migration policies are often based on emotions such as fears about migration rather than evidence and might be translated into growing discrimination against migrants (IOM, 2015: 7).

#### **10.4 Brexit - the political promise to regain power**

As this study hypothesised, there was an increased negative news coverage of issues related to irregular migration in pro-Brexit media given the salience of migration among potential Brexit voters. Migration played a vital role in the EU referendum that took place in 2016. Hobolt (2016) found that those who voted in favour of Brexit showed anti-establishment sentiments and were worried about the impact of immigration and multi-culturalism in the UK. A survey confirms that immigration was a key issue for Leave voters who feared that the UK would be 'flooded' by migrants and the UK's cultural identity was undermined by migrants and the EU (Hobolt, 2016: 1263).

Similarly, previous research stressed that UK's membership in the EU was blamed by the British newspapers for enabling irregular migration (Tong and Zuo, 2019). The Leave vote was therefore associated with the goals of restricting migration and more sovereignty in relation to protecting British borders and legislation. Whilst the Leave campaign's main message was to curb migration to the UK by being able to protect its borders and law-making again, the Remain campaign was centred around the negative economic impact of UK's exit from the EU. More specifically, the majority (84%) of those who supported Brexit held the view that a Leave vote would mean a decrease of migration into the UK (YouGov, 2016). The concerns of Leave voters about migration-related issues and the political promises made to curb migration following the UK's exit from the EU seemed to have made British nationals and the press more positive about the government. In fact, in 2016 the British government was portrayed by the press in a less critical fashion compared to



all other years with mostly right-wing newspapers reporting on desirable policy promises and welcoming new restrictions on irregular migration.

In contrast to the newspapers in which Brexit was rather a peripheral subject of discussion, social media users explicitly expressed preference for the UK leaving the EU, a decision which they seemed to associate with a decrease in the number of irregular migrants. In light of Brexit and the importance of the respective political promise to regain control over immigration in the UK, it is not surprising that social media users held the government to account in terms of their poor handling of irregular migration and the failure of the hostile environment policy overall. Commenters also focused more on the impact of irregular migration in relation to nationals' own prosperity. Benefits for migrants funded by taxpayers, i.e. housing, were regarded as controversial, and commenters demanded more restrictive actions from political elites to curb irregular migration in the UK. Newspapers also raised aspects of economy and domestic prosperity, which was found to be the second top reason to justify arguments against irregular migration (see **Figure 5.8**).

To conclude, the securitisation discourse prevalent in the online newspapers focused on the topics 'illegal entry' and 'negative impact of migration'. Newspapers frequently reproduced negative stereotypes of migrants as benefit frauds or criminals. This finding reflects an overall picture of an illegitimate outgroup that incited outrage and resentment among the readers against the migrants based on the argument that the British government failed to prevent their unauthorised entry and then appeared to 'reward' the outgroup after they claimed asylum. These discourses reflected populist anti-immigration elements whereby fears were expressed that the nationals' livelihoods were not properly protected by the government (Rama and Santana, 2020). These blame frames were adopted by the online readers who frequently shared experiences of injustice by holding the British government responsible for their everyday problems (Corbu *et al.*, 2019). Populist communication was also prevalent among comments that put forward short-term solutions such as deportation of irregular migrants who already resided in the UK.

The analysis of social media comments revealed that finding a 'culprit', in this case the government that was charged for the misery faced by hardworking nationals, led

to their negative attitude towards the state and incited feelings of anger among social media users (Hobolt and Tilley, 2014; Hameleers *et al.*, 2019). But the online discourse also showed that the populist messages were effective in their ‘us versus them’ framing not only by targeting those in powerful positions, but also the specific group of migrants who were referred to as enemies of the host society (Moffitt, 2016).

In particular, the press coverage between 2015 and 2017 corresponded mostly to this negative depiction in which irregular migrants were discursively represented as the ‘other’ based on the metaphor of an ‘invader’. 2016 stood out among the other years with a consistent negative social representation of irregular migrants by right-wing newspapers. The social representation of migrants as enemies of British society and thus clearly as an unwanted outgroup dominated the year’s news coverage. These newspaper reports used emotionally charged language predominantly in reports about migrants who committed criminal offences by providing numerous details about the progression of the crimes. Graphic language and metaphors were regularly used to illustrate bad characteristics of individual migrants. The leading argument was that migrants engaged in any kind of unlawful behaviour should face criminal sanctions by the British authorities. The pejorative social representation of irregular migrants in the news was strongly mirrored by the reactions of social media users. The most noticeable way social media users referred to migrants was similarly discriminatory in the form of strong disapproval by insulting migrants or supporting their deportation.

## 10.5 ‘Windrush migrants’

Overall, the securitisation discourse of irregular migrants strongly decreased from 2017 onwards and only re-appeared in 2018 in the form of a ‘reactive’ discourse in which irregular migrants were demarcated from the ‘good’ accepted ‘Windrush migrants’ and reiterated as the ‘bad’ migrants. This study further found that in 2018, the news coverage unexpectedly changed with the left-wing newspapers outnumbering the right-wing press and becoming the main messenger on irregular migration. The focus of reportage reflected the then-current political salience around the so-called ‘Windrush migrants’, who were wrongly classified by the British Home Office as irregular migrants. The analysis of the special case of ‘Windrush migrants’ revealed that newspapers and commenters also held specific politicians responsible for the treatment of this group of migrants and questioned the competency of the Home Office overall. The discourse on the ‘Windrush migrants’ also reflected populist elements given that the readers were repeatedly encouraged to challenge the ruling British government (Gidron and Bonikowski, 2014).

The perspective of ‘Windrush migrants’ was strongly represented with the left-wing press concentrating on individual stories and including the perspective of their lawyers. Based on the account of several migrants, they were presented as being taken by total surprise, insisting that they had never seen a reason to question their right to remain as citizens of the UK and therefore never naturalised. The notion of migrants’ unpreparedness was contrasted by the newspapers with the Home Office’s demands and the threat of far-reaching punishment, such as deportation in case of failure to provide the required documents. The left-wing newspapers showed a strong recognition of the migrants’ social rights and by doing so reinforced their legitimisation as a full member of British society.

This kind of discourse allows for alternative social identity categories where ingroup and outgroup divisions are transcended and diverse identities can co-exist (Triandafyllidou, 2000). Although the left-wing press and their readers placed high importance on the rights and equal treatment of the ‘Windrush migrants’ (Hix and Noury, 2007), the left-wing British newspapers did not take sufficient responsibility

to counter the flood of the anti-immigration articles published by the right-wing press especially in 2015 and 2016.

In terms of the social media comments, people's dissatisfaction with the government's handling of irregular migration was further echoed in the case of 'Windrush migrants'. Given that this social group was mostly viewed by social media users as legitimate members of British society, their treatment by Home Office authorities was condemned as a complete failure. Comments on the news coverage on the 'Windrush migrants' were organised around two themes: condemnation of the Conservative party and politicians on the one hand, and empathy with the 'Windrush migrants' on the other. First, it was repeatedly argued that this group of migrants was wrongly classified as irregular migrants and thus punished for infringements of the law that they did not commit. Second, the government representatives responsible for this incident were regarded as incompetent as they appeared to be unable to identify the 'real irregular migrants'. This suggests that there might be systemic issues among government representatives to reduce the number of irregular migrants in the UK.

It is notable that the social media users clearly sided with the press by expressing great empathy for this group of migrants and identifying with them. 'Windrush migrants' were perceived by nationals as a category of 'integrated citizens' based on the dominating argument that they were originally invited by the British state to help rebuild the ingroup's country. Several accounts stressed the imagined 'bond' that commenters felt they shared with these migrants by referring to themselves as 'being ashamed' for how the government treated the Windrush community. This normative discourse was moderated by the principle of morality that viewed British society as fair and humane and therefore did not identify with a government that wronged members of its own community. Moreover, as mentioned above, the comments were highly critical of the government's handling of the Windrush events by particularly referring to the hostile environment policy of the ruling government and assessing the behaviour of those politicians in charge as malicious and incompetent.

Government representatives were particularly blamed for misusing this policy and falsely targeting members of the ingroup. The latter was based on the prevailing

argumentation that these migrants were wrongly classified by government officials as ‘irregular’. At the same time, their acceptance as citizens within British society was amplified by both the press and social media users.

Interestingly, in 2018 the right-wing newspapers only reported on the ‘real irregular migrants’ by directly referring to the left-wing news coverage on the ‘Windrush migrants’. Those few articles clearly indicated that irregular migrants were different from the Windrush group whilst stressing that the British government should continue tackling the ‘real irregular migrants’ by emphasising the difference between the ‘wrong’ and ‘real’ lawbreaking individuals. The prevailing argument emphasised that the latter group was strongly viewed as enemies of British society and that political categorical delimitation was necessary for authorities to continue their efforts to restrict the number of these ‘unwanted migrants’. Therefore, most of the views expressed called for the maintenance of restrictive policy measures. In other words, this unusual case led to a strong comparison between the group of ‘regular’ and ‘irregular’ migrants by amplifying adversarial views towards the latter.

Different reactions to these two social groups were primarily based on the degree of social identification among commenters with each group. The figure of the ‘Windrush migrant’ was met by commenters with a distinct sense of solidarity connected with the notion of a ‘desired migrant’ who follows the rules and contributes to the host country. Their acceptance was legitimised by their successful integration into the British society and lawful residence since they arrived in the UK. In addition, the analysis of the downsized comments further revealed group-related definitions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrants. For instance, social media users tended to side with ‘genuine’ asylum seekers who were praised for their efforts to enter the UK via legal routes. Against this backdrop, the acceptance of irregular migrants was interpreted as an affront to all those migrants who abided by the law. In contrast, irregular migrants were referred to as ‘undesired foreigners’ who were never welcomed or invited by the British government and therefore were primarily seen as a group of non-nationals who disrespect British laws driven by self-interest.

Commenters especially disapproved the group of ‘economic migrants’ by drawing on the image of a male, young foreigner who is a potential rapist, terrorist or welfare

scrounger. Overall, commenters assumed that irregular migrants are defined by breaking immigration law and by default were not in need of help or asylum.

In conclusion, the key finding here is that the left-wing press and social media users strongly identified with the ‘Windrush migrants’ and simultaneously expressed internal opposition to the political elites and their handling of this matter. In other words, the British press and social media commenters identified ‘Windrush migrants’ as ingroup members whilst viewing the British state as a second ‘other’ who is incompetent and does not respect the rights of all British nationals. This type of discourse in which nationals and their state are not united was also found by Triandafyllidou (2000) in the context of political discourses in Italy.

The main factor of intergroup social comparability that was identified in this study relates to the groups’ legal status. Nationals including ‘Windrush migrants’ were viewed as the ‘law-abiding’ new ingroup members and irregular migrants as the ‘lawbreaking’ outgroup. The notion of solidarity but also nationality were the main identity dimensions that linked the ingroup and this specific migrant community. The reflection on who is ‘British’ in this discourse brings about the interesting aspect of nationality where ‘Windrush migrants’ were recognised and defended by the press and social media commenters as full members of British society despite the very fact that they did not possess a British passport.

## **10.6 Limitations of social media data**

One key finding of this research is that the social media discourse was strongly influenced by the socio-political events during the selected time span, indicating that the discourse irregular migration is a mediated phenomenon fuelled by media and socio-political events. Whereas this finding was highly robust irrespective of analysed data sources or deployed methodologies, caution must be applied when generalising these results to different geographical or temporal contexts.

Furthermore, some cautionary comments need to be made regarding social media data. Considering the political economy of social media, it becomes clear that social

media websites are motivated by profit making (Bouvier, 2015). Built-in algorithms continuously memorise and process contacts and relationships in our online network as well as use activity patterns and preferences in order to provide information in accordance with the users' interests (van Dijck, 2013). Powerful major platforms, in particular, such as Google or Facebook, seek to shape users' networking behaviour towards desired activities of consumption. By filtering out and presenting only specific comments, pictures, ideas or stories, "algorithms themselves become realisers of discourse, of forms of social relations, signalling up what your user community values, and signalling what kinds of ideas and attitudes are common across the section of connectivity" (Bouvier, 2015: 153).

KhosraviNik further draws attention to the fact that the new technologies of social media communication create distorted perceptions of the real world (KhosraviNik, 2017: 67): "Social Media do not show you the world out there, they construct a world to your liking and as such they are a breeding ground for echo chambers, and constructions of filter bubbles where all like-minded people get together and reinforce their own perception of the realities and priorities rather than engaging with other views". The phenomena of 'filter bubbles' and 'echo chambers' refer to the algorithmic process of ensuring that like-minded users are being grouped together and exposed predominantly to similar news, arguments and sources (KhosraviNik, 2017; Goldzweig *et al.*, 2018). These dynamics cause views to move toward more extreme directions and then lead to the creation of echo chambers. Thereby, critical engagement among groups or contradicting arguments are usually being kept out by the guiding logic of social media algorithms.

The overarching consequence of echo chambers is confirmation bias. This phenomenon refers to the tendency of people to engage with new information in a manner which reinforces and confirms beliefs, values and world views that they already support (Goldzweig *et al.*, 2018). The overall high similarity between press and social media discourses found in this study indicates that social media comments indeed largely echoed themes and opinions of newspaper articles.

Studies found that mis- and disinformation seem to occur among those segments of the population which have the general tendency towards confirmation bias

(KhosraviNik, 2017; Goldzweig *et al.*, 2018). KhosraviNik (2017) also emphasises that social media platforms might not necessarily have the intention to deliberately encourage unbalanced argumentations and beliefs, but the commercial design of these platforms create echo chambers as a natural side effect. This is because all activities on social media are manipulated in a way that help to gain importance for that content and increase its exposure.

## **10.7 Advantages of analytical methods**

Different methods were used to analyse the online press and social media discourse on irregular migration. CDA is generally preferred for systematic qualitative analysis of text and talk but Corpus Linguistics is commonly used for identifying and quantifying linguistic patterns in large datasets. In this study, Corpus Linguistics proved to be useful to highlight that negative views on migrants and government dominated the comments.

However, only the qualitative analysis of a downsized sample was able to reveal that commenters also voiced empathy towards migrants and hence were more nuanced in their opinions than the quantitative results suggested. This shows that the use of quantitative analysis alone would not have been fruitful to grasp the whole spectrum of views expressed among the social media users. The employment of CDA provided detailed insights into the media's discursive representation of the three social groups. Whilst this method was useful to highlight the tone and different strategic agendas of the left- and right-wing press, the Manual Content Analysis gave a similar picture focusing on the overall dynamics of the press reportage.

The combination of these three approaches did not lead to contrasting findings, but they helped to bring forward a broader picture of the online discourse and more detailed aspects that would have been overlooked otherwise. The fact that the separate analyses of newspaper articles and comments using different methods yielded overall similar outcomes, albeit with different nuances, indicates that the results are likely to be robust to selection of data source or methodology. This has important implications, as already a single (qualitative or quantitative) analysis



would allow to reach a vague but overall correct picture of the public discourse on irregular migration. However, it also has to be emphasised that the comprehensive picture of the discourse on irregular migration in this study could only be reached through the investigation of the research subject from different angles.

## **10.8 Concluding thoughts**

Over the last 20 years, the research on irregular migration has seen rapid growth. However, media representation and public discourse on irregular migration remain poorly understood. The present study addresses this knowledge gap by analysing how irregular migration is covered in UK online newspaper articles and on social media focussing on a highly relevant spatial and temporal context: the British online press and social media discourse across the years 2015 to 2018, which span events of particular interest to migration research, such as the European ‘migration crisis’, the British EU referendum, and the ‘Windrush scandal’. Given the complexity of the findings presented in this study, the author constrains herself to highlight two key contributions that are relevant for understanding how irregular migration is discursively represented in the British press and on social media and why these online representations matter politically:

### **Unparalleled insights into the online UK press and social media discourse on irregular migration**

First, this project is among the first to analyse people’s opinions and news representations expressed about irregular migration on a social media platform over a long time span. Hence, this study contributes to the emerging area of digital migration studies (Leurs and Smets, 2018) to reveal how online news and social media discourses on irregular migration speak to broader and varied socio-political events in the UK and Europe that gained widespread public attention at different times.

This study shows that the news coverage concerning irregular migration correlates with certain politically relevant migration themes suggesting that socio-political events during this period were key drivers of the media coverage. Over the four

years, the number of new migrants arriving in the UK and EU continuously declined, and political and public attention shifted away from migration. This emphasises that the politicisation and mediatisation of several events associated with the migration crisis in 2015 and 2016 led to turning points in the discourse on migration in general and irregular migration in particular (Triandafyllidou, 2018). Closely related to these events, this study highlights that the discursive representation of irregular migration in online press and social media comments becomes less negative over the selected period by turning the portrayal of irregular migrants as an ominous enemy into an invisible unwanted foreigner.

Therefore, this suggests that the press reportage on irregular migration, particularly negative representations promoted by right-wing British newspapers, was mainly event-driven by focusing on the real-world event environment and relying on conditions to create compelling news narratives and attract attention (Esser et al., 2019). While the left-wing press frequently sided with irregular migrants by speaking on their behalf or representing vulnerable individuals, it did not evenly counterbalance the discriminatory discourse on irregular migration dominated by the right-wing press. Thus, this study argues that the online British press contributes to the cycle of problematisation by normalising and authorising hostility towards irregular migrants as reflected in both the British right-wing press and corresponding social media comments.

### **New views on Social Identity Theory and Social Representation Theory in the social media context**

Second, this study extended Social Identity Theory and Social Representation Theory by applying them to the domain of online news and social media discourses on irregular migration. The thesis argues that social media data can be accessed by a large group of audiences and hence can represent a relevant source of information that people use when thinking or forming their views on irregular migration (Allen, 2021). Online news published on social media platforms therefore has the potential to influence people's opinions and preferences about irregular migration, rendering social media data relevant for understanding public perceptions and concerns.

By conducting a systematic analysis of hundreds of online news articles and thousands of social media comments, this study provides novel insights into the triangular relationship between migrants, nationals and political elites in the online discourse on irregular migration. This evidence base is crucial for making claims about how the group of irregular migrants is an important social group with which nationals compare themselves as orientation for self-reference regarding their social identity. Nationals demarcated themselves in online discourses not only from the migrants, but notably also from political elites. By analysing the social representation and identity of the groups of nationals, political elites and migrants, the troubled relationship between the nationals and government over issues associated with irregular migration could be shown. This study highlights that online discourses on irregular migration are based on positive ingroup bias and exclusionary attitudes towards those who are deemed as the ‘other’ in the form of the British political elites and irregular migrants. Interestingly, the migrants appeared to be the ‘minor outgroup’ compared to the elites in power who were consistently held responsible for most of the nationals’ social misery and therefore were represented as the ‘more significant outgroup’. In fact, the press and the commenters were more hostile towards the government than the migrants, revealing a consistent dissatisfaction with the political handling of irregular migration across the study period.

More specifically, the study reveals the prevalence of populist ideas in the online British press coverage on irregular migration and in people’s comments when expressing their concerns. The British press strongly employed the populist notion of crisis and fear by representing irregular migrants as the enemy of the British people (Moffit, 2016). Particularly the right-wing newspapers encouraged their online readers to align themselves as ‘good citizens’ and disidentify themselves from the allegedly ‘undeserving migrants’. This divide is characteristic in populist communication that tends to refer to those in power as failing the ordinary people and describing non-nationals as the unwanted outgroup.

## **Key findings and implications: social media discourses on irregular migration - narratives of personal anxieties and political failure**

This study claims that concerns over irregular migration are primarily used as a proxy for social media commenters to express their dissatisfaction and lack of trust in the political elites' handling of irregular migration and of the citizens' concerns. In line with previous research that identified that social media users in Europe tend to express anxieties in migration narratives (Fazekas and Füge, 2019), the expressed opposition to irregular migration prevalent in this thesis similarly represents a larger set of anxieties and insecurities that social media commenters have. The data further indicates that social media users regard the British government as powerless to address both people's concerns and to manage the consequences of irregular migration for British society (Ashcroft, 2013). Specifically, issues related to irregular migration raised in the comments reflected a number of personal daily difficulties social media commenters faced that were not sufficiently addressed by the British government.

Taken together, these ingroup and outgroup dynamics revealed a paradox in which British policymakers seem to have inadvertently created a figure of an unwanted irregular migrant that could be impossible to defeat in the face of people's expectations. Thus, the data provided by this thesis empirically underpins what Vollmer (2020: 8) describes as a 'paradox of borders' in the UK context in which border politics aim to securitise the mobility of people such as irregular migrants but eventually result in an increased sense of insecurity among British civil society. Hence, this study argues that the study of online press and social media discourses sheds light on how irregular migration has been politically constructed as a threat to the UK's territorial borders. In doing so, British policymakers generated a self-inflicted pressure to control and limit irregular mobility whereby migrants are simply viewed as objects that need to be governed (Grappi and Lucarelli, 2021).

In light of these findings, political elites should reassess this ambiguity and the way they represent and address irregular migration considering current migration policies such as the Nationality and Borders Bill which was introduced to the House of Commons in 2021 and further criminalises the irregular entry of migrants (UK

Parliament, 2021). Specifically, this thesis proposes that policymakers in the UK need to address people's anxieties and polarisation over irregular migration and migration in general that have been fuelled by populist parties and groups. This includes that the policy of overpromising and under delivering based on fear and hostility should be replaced by addressing the complex conditions surrounding migration and engage in a more informed, realistic debate.

Furthermore, the British press needs to be made accountable for migration-related journalism and should be encouraged to counterbalance the dominance of populist news stories and online public opinions about irregular migration. This entails that more progressive news producers need to amplify the voices of (irregular) migrants and enlarge the diversity of different perspectives in their coverage to prevent the emphasis on reporting about irregular migrants via populist frames. Both the online British press and social media platforms play an integral role in shaping public views on migration (Blumell et al., 2019). Hence, independent positive representations of irregular migration and more balanced (counter) narratives should be expanded in both online British news and social media platforms.

### **Directions for future research**

Despite the advances made here, public online discourses on irregular migration require further research. Considering the temporal and geographical focus of this study as well as the particular data sources and research methodologies employed, deeper insights could be gained through comparative studies in other countries and time intervals. For example, the time period could be extended by looking at the press coverage and social media discourse before 2015 and after 2018 to gain a better understanding of how the discourse dynamics changed beyond the study period, particularly after the UK exited the EU in 2021. In addition, it would be interesting to compare if or to what extent the press and the social media discourse on irregular migration also reflects a wider public dissatisfaction with the political accountability to tackle irregular migration in other national contexts. For instance, looking at the same period and considering the national socio-political context: what are the

similarities and/or differences in the press and social media discourse on irregular migration in other European countries compared to the UK?

Finally, additional studies on online communication are necessary to complement traditional opinion research and present a more complete picture by examining public opinions in the online public domain and to help to understand sentiments and stances that people have in relation to irregular migration. Analysis of images or non-verbal data such as emojis accompanying online news or other migration digital data would be useful to understand how such visualisations may shape public attitudes about irregular migrants and broader migration politics. Moreover, this thesis argues that more research is required to understand how consuming online news coverage shapes public perceptions of irregular migrants. It is crucial that the persistence of negative news stories about irregular migration needs to be monitored for possible harmful effects in the offline world such as acts of hostility towards migrants (Müller and Schwarz, 2020). Given that news stories are often the only exposure many readers have to irregular migrants, the impact of these representations on public opinion and policy making is relevant (Harraway and Wong, 2021).

Irregular migratory movements and the desire of human beings for better lives will remain vital across the world considering the impact of contemporary global challenges such as climate-related calamities and pandemics. The emerging social and political awareness of these global phenomena will likely also affect the public perception of irregular migration and may create new discursive dynamics and focal points. Future research will need to keep pace with these worldwide changes in order to provide an accurate understanding of the public discourse on irregular migration and catalyse the search for solutions that enable the peaceful cohabitation of both host societies and migrants.

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## Appendix A: Keywords used for data collection

1. Illegal im/migration
2. Illegal im/migrant\*
3. Illegal alien
4. Illegal foreigner
5. Irregular im/migration
6. Irregular im/migrant\*
7. Irregular foreigner
8. Irregular alien
9. Undocumented im/migration
10. Undocumented im/migrant\*
11. Undocumented foreigner
12. Undocumented alien
13. Unlawful im/migration
14. Unlawful im/migrant\*
15. Unlawful foreigner
16. Unlawful alien
17. Unauthorised im/migration
18. Unauthorised im/migrant\*
19. Unauthorised foreigner
20. Unauthorised alien
21. Clandestine im/migration
22. Clandestine im/migrant\*
23. Clandestine foreigner
24. Clandestine alien
25. Sans papiers im/migration
26. Sans papiers im/migrant\*
27. Sans papiers foreigner
28. Sans papiers alien
29. Non-legal im/migration
30. Non-legal im/migrant\*
31. Non-legal foreigner
32. Non-legal alien
33. Bogus im/migration
34. Bogus im/migrant\*
35. Bogus alien
36. Bogus foreigner
37. Extralegal im/migration
38. Extralegal immigrant\*
39. Extralegal foreigner
40. Extralegal alien
41. Illicit im/migration
42. Illicit immigrant\*
43. Illicit foreigner
44. Illicit alien
45. Unwanted im/migration
46. Unwanted immigrant\*
47. Unwanted foreigner
48. Unwanted alien

## Appendix B: List of newspaper articles

The following newspaper articles are ordered by political leaning of newspapers (see **Table 3.1**), newspaper name and date of publication.

### LEFT-WING

#### *The Daily Mirror*

27 March 2015, the Daily Mirror

*Two illegal immigrants died in desperate bid to swim to Essex shore; Artur Doda, 24, and Leonard Isufaj, 27, both from Albania, triggered a massive search operation after jumping from a ferry off the coast of Harwich*

11 June 2015, the Daily Mirror

*Pictured: Police find illegal immigrant curled up inside a CAR BONNET; Officers opened up the battered car's bonnet to find the 23-year-old squeezed next to the hot engine*

29 August 2015, the Daily Mirror

*Almost 30 'illegal immigrants' found in refrigerated lorry at motorway service station; Police were alerted when people at Cobham services on the M25 in Surrey became suspicious about activity around the truck*

23 September 2015, the Daily Mirror

*Watch moment police find THIRTEEN illegal immigrants - including children - hiding in back of lorry at service station; Stunned motorists watched as officers opened the articulated lorry at Gaydon Service Station off the M40 in Warwickshire and a large group climbed out*

29 September 2015, the Daily Mirror

*Heartbroken mum jilted by illegal immigrant boyfriend as he goes on the run DAYS before they are due to marry; STACEY Holmes, 24, was meant to marry Davinder Kaler today - but was left in the lurch by the 21-year-old Indian.*

19 December 2015, the Daily Mirror

*Shocking pictures show illegal immigrants crammed sideways into false CAR BUMPERs; These shocking pictures show the extent illegal immigrants and their "human traffickers" will go to in their bid for a new life in Europe*

10 January 2016, the Daily Mirror

*Cologne sex attack investigation focused on asylum seekers or illegal migrants from north Africa; Around 40 percent of the 379 total criminal complaints were about sexual offences, including two rapes*

8 October 2016, the Daily Mirror

*15 migrants rescued from back of -25C freezer truck; Driver called cops after hearing bangs*

25 April 2017, the Daily Mirror

*Brave woman snatched picture of vile attacker as she screamed 'get the f\*\*\* off me, help!' during horrific sex attack; Single image of illegal immigrant Ashraf Miah was enough to bring him to justice after a judge hears screams of victim in 90 second clip which will 'live with him for a long time'*

3 December 2017, the Daily Mirror

*Firefighters forced to cut free 11 'illegal immigrants' SUPERGLUED into back of lorry full of Belgian chocolate; Migrants - including six children - had been eating 'very expensive chocolate' and were only discovered when the lorry pulled into a lay-by and people in a nearby cafe heard 'shouting'*

## ***The Guardian***

29 April 2015, the Guardian

*Hungary PM: bring back death penalty and build work camps for immigrants; Rightwing nationalist Viktor Orban threatens to defy EU law and launches anti-immigration manifesto calling for internment camps for illegal immigrants*

21 May 2015, the Guardian

*Figures show immigration surge as Cameron unveils illegal working bill; Net migration to UK reached 318,000 in 2014, just below all-time peak in 2005, with immigration from outside Europe rising strongly*

18 December 2015, the Guardian

*'Ghost people': the refugees surviving on £10 a week from the Red Cross; Britain's immigration policy traps people in a no man's land from which there is no escape. The Red Cross helps keep them alive. [Click here to donate to our charity appeal](#)*

1 December 2016, the Guardian

*Don't help the state bully migrants – boycott the school census*

3 April 2017, the Guardian

*The absurd history of British-Spanish rivalry, from Henry VIII to Gibraltar*

11 April 2017, the Guardian

*If Theresa May really wants to protect refugees why does she fuel such hatred?; The politicians lining up to condemn the Croydon attack created the current climate of intolerance*

20 June 2017, the Guardian

*Some Grenfell Tower victims may never be identified, lawyer says; 'Irregular tenancies' complicating effort to identify victims while some survivors fear being detained over immigration status*

21 September 2017, the Guardian

*UK banks to check 70m bank accounts in search for illegal immigrants; Exclusive: From January banks will be enrolled in Theresa May's plans to create 'hostile environment' for illegal migrants*

28 November 2017, the Guardian

*I can't eat or sleep': the grandmother threatened with deportation after 50 years in Britain; Paulette Wilson moved to the UK in 1968, and worked and raised her daughter here. So why was she suddenly taken to Yarl's Wood detention centre and almost forced on to a plane to Jamaica?*

5 February 2018, the Guardian

*Berlusconi pledges to deport 600,000 illegal immigrants from Italy; Former PM warns of 'social bomb ready to explode' in election run-up after weekend shooting*

5 March 2018, the Guardian

*Homeless charity aided deportation patrols in search for rough sleepers. St Mungo's cooperated with Home Office patrols looking for migrant rough sleepers deemed to be in UK illegally*

9 April 2018, the Guardian

*Man living in UK for 56 years loses job over immigration papers; Michael Braithwaite, a special needs assistant, was told he could not be employed at school as he did not have biometric card. How the Guardian broke this story*

16 April 2018, the Guardian

*Martin Rowson on the U/turn over Windrush British citizens 7 cartoon*

16 April 2018, the Guardian

*MPs urge May to resolve immigration status of Windrush children; No 10 rejected meeting on Commonwealth-born UK residents wrongly identified as illegal immigrants. 'I'm here legally, but they're asking me to prove I'm British'*

18 April 2018, the Guardian

*Mother of Windrush citizen blames passport problems for his death; Sentina Bristol, whose son Dexter died suddenly after being sacked for having no passport, says May should resign*

18 April 2018, the Guardian

*Whistleblowers contradict No 10 over destroyed Windrush landing cards; Exclusive: Claims by Home Office and Downing Street that cards' destruction had no impact undermined by fresh evidence*

20 April 2018, the Guardian

*Amber Rudd boasted of harsher immigration strategy, leak reveals; Exclusive: home secretary told PM she would give officials more 'teeth' to deport migrants*

24 April 2018, the Guardian

*I felt like dirt': disabled Canadian woman told to leave UK after 44 years*

26 April 2018, the Guardian

*Rudd faces questions over immigrant removal targets. 2015 report reveals target for 12,000 departures, after home secretary said no removal targets existed"*

26 April 2018, the Guardian

*Amber Rudd urged to resign over immigrant removal targets; Labour calls on home secretary to quit after she admits existence of targets, having previously said her department did not set them*Σ *Analysis: Rudd makes a staggering admission over immigration targets*

11 May 2018, the Guardian

*It's destroyed my life': Windrush victim recognised as legal citizen after 13 years; In a rare insight into the workings of Lunar House immigration HQ, Hubert Howard recounts how he lost his job and was denied benefits after the Home Office said he was an illegal migrant*

19 June 2018, the Guardian

*When it comes to Germany, there's method in Trump's madness; The president's opportunistic tweets have raised hackles, but no one can deny that Merkel's coalition is in trouble*

18 September 2018, the Guardian

*Windrush victim and campaigner Sarah O'Connor dies aged 57*

2 October 2018, the Guardian

*Pro-refugee Italian mayor arrested for 'aiding illegal migration'*

## ***The Independent***

6 April 2015, the Independent

*Greece plan to release 3,500 immigrants from asylum centres sets it on a collision course with Europe; About 3,500 detainees who will be released from the camps if Greece's new anti-austerity rulers make good on their promises - to the consternation of both Greeks and the EU*

21 May 2015, the Independent

*Illegal immigrants' pay will be seized, pledges David Cameron; In a bid to deter immigration, Cameron will also announce moves to prosecute firms which only advertise abroad for staff*

3 August 2015, the Independent

*Landlords renting properties to illegal immigrants to face up to five years in prison; The move is part of a drive to make it harder for migrants to live in the UK when they have no right to be in the country*

24 September 2015, the Independent

*This is the man who wanted to be deported from Manchester. He's explained why*

14 October 2015, the Independent

*A woman who has lived in Britain for 50 years has been told she is an illegal immigrant*

1 December 2016, the Independent

*Theresa May's leaked ideas about the children of illegal immigrants show what she really always stood for; There's a very simple reason why it's not patriotic or reasonable to ghettoise immigrant children in certain failing schools*

18 February 2017, the Independent

*Ukip MEP compared to Donald Trump after citing non-existent police statement on illegal immigration; Jane Collins claims 'hundreds' of illegal immigrants arrive in UK each week*

22 February 2018, the Independent

*"Jo Marney: ex-UKIP leader's girlfriend doesn't regret calling Grenfell Tower 'nest of illegal immigrants'; 'Who can realistically say they have never said anything offensive in private?'"*

29 April 2018, the Independent

*Amber Rudd had 'ambition' to increase deportations by 10% but it was not a target, Tory minister Brandon Lewis claims; Conservative chairman says home secretary was 'right' to say she was unaware of targets - despite admitting she knew of 'overall ambition'*

30 April 2018, the Independent

*Theresa May reveals she did know about deportation targets - hours after Cabinet member suggests she didn't; Prime minister under pressure to explain why she did not point out that Amber Rudd - when denying the targets existed - had misled parliament*

19 October 2018, the Independent

*Hostile environment failing to deter illegal immigration and pushing people into exploitation, report finds*

## CENTRE

### *The Financial Times*

21 May 2015, the Financial Times

*David Cameron to announce crackdown on illegal immigrant labour*

3 November 2016, the Financial Times

*Austrian foreign minister Sebastian Kurz on migrants and far right*

27 July 2017, the Financial Times

*UK universities. Student immigration data are 'potentially misleading'.  
Watchdog says abuse of visas likely to be lower than previously thought*

5 July 2018, the Financial Times

*Austria's Sebastian Kurz: The EU needs to speed up plans for more border  
guards*

30 April 2018, the Financial Times

*UK immigration. Amber Rudd resigns as home secretary after immigration  
Scandal. New evidence that department had operational targets for  
deporting illegal migrants*

4 June 2018, the Financial Times

*Italian ministers threaten Europe over deportations and Pensions. Di Maio  
and Salvini step up pressure on action against migrants and retirement  
reform*

5 July 2018, the Financial Times

*Austria's Sebastian Kurz urges EU to bolster border forces quickly*

13 July 2018, the Financial Times

*Brussels pushes ahead with migrant centres outside Europe*

20 July 2018, the Financial Times

*Hungary toughens migrants stance with 'propaganda' tax*

3 December 2018, the Financial Times

*Far-right party Vox wins first regional seats in Spanish election*

## RIGHT-WING

### *The Express*

20 March 2015, the Express

*Illegal immigrants smuggled OUT of Britain... So they can return after claiming EU asylum*

20 March 2015, the Express

*Judges weakening Britain's battle against terrorism by caving in to European human rights*

27 March 2015, the Express

*Illegal immigrants will be kicked out of Britain BEFORE they can appeal under new plans*

27 March 2015, the Express

*Illegal immigrant sliced to death by propeller after leaping from ship deporting him*

16 April 2015, the Express

*Trafficking gangs 'conspiring with officials to smuggle illegal immigrants into EU'*

22 April 2015, the Express

*Britain forced to let deported illegal immigrant family BACK IN after human rights ruling*

24 April 2015, the Express

*Defiant smugglers say NOTHING will stop them from bringing illegal migrants to EU*

2 June 2015, the Express

*UK food shortages predicted as drivers refuse to ship goods past 'violent' Calais migrants. UK SUPERMARKETS could soon run short of essential goods because asylum seekers trying to force their way onto lorries at Calais have brought Britain's food supply chain to the brink of collapse.*

3 June 2015, the Express

*French border police stop 130 migrants a day – but how many MORE sneak into Britain?*

13 June 2015, the Express

*Judge rules scheme used to deport asylum rejects ILLEGAL – opening flood gates for payouts. A FAST-TRACK system used to deport failed asylum seekers has been declared unlawful – opening the floodgates for thousands of payout claims.*



- 16 June 2015, the Express  
*Italy sparks Calais fears with threat to 'wound' EU by handing travel permits to migrants*
- 22 June 2015, the Express  
*Fury as Britain hands out £66 MILLION to asylum seekers and illegal immigrants*
- 25 June 2015, the Express  
*Outrage as number of illegal immigrants deported under EU law HALVES in five years*
- 26 June 2015, the Express  
*Three 'illegal immigrants' walk into Holiday Inn and try to claim asylum*  
26 June 2015, the Express
- 29 June 2015, the Express  
*Britain to build TWO MILE fence to control flood of illegal immigrants from France*
- 2 July 2015, the Express  
*He was hiding in wardrobe: Migrant sneaks into couple's camper van on return from France*
- 3 August 2015, the Express  
*Landlords who fail to kick out illegal immigrants and rejected asylum seekers face jail*
- 4 August 2015, the Express  
*EXCLUSIVE: Immigrants will 'clog UK courts with human rights cases to avoid eviction'*
- 5 August 2015, the Express  
*Calais migrant crisis: Number of truckers fined for stowaways triples in three years*
- 10 August 2015, the Express  
*Now immigrants boast about how EASY it is to sneak into Britain through Channel Tunnel*
- 12 August 2015, the Express  
*WATCH: Moment 'illegal immigrants' emerge from CARS after being smuggled into Britain*
- 27 August 2015, the Express  
*Britain to spend £500 MILLION sending illegal immigrants home – and YOU'RE paying*

- 28 August 2015, the Express  
*EXCLUSIVE: Cameron's migration figures don't include UK's 1.1 MILLION illegal immigrants*
- 16 September 2015, the Express  
*Iraqi man becomes first migrant to be deported by Hungary under tough new laws*
- 16 October 2015, the Express  
*Officials spend £14m on PRIVATE JETS to send illegal immigrants home – and YOU'RE paying*
- 17 October 2015, the Express  
*UK border FARCE: More than 20,000 illegals arrested after sneaking into Britain*
- 31 October 2015, the Express  
*From Eritrea to London: Refugee's 3,500 mile journey MAPPED but he expected 'MORE from UK'*
- 7 November 2015, the Express  
*Human Rights farce: Rapist battling deportation wins EXTRA cash as benefits spent on fags*
- 25 November 2015, the Express  
*Protesters GLUE themselves to GATE in bid to stop illegal immigrants being deported*
- 3 December 2015, the Express  
*UK vulnerable to attack as terrorist database used in border checks breaks TWICE A WEEK*
- 23 December 2015, the Express  
*Almost 100,000 migrants on course to be stopped at UK border as shock figures DOUBLE*
- 7 January 2016, the Express  
*Illegal immigrant dwarf to be deported after losing human rights battle with Theresa May*
- 10 January 2016, the Express  
*Fury as Government body HELPS immigrants QUASH CONVICTIONS for illegal entry to Britain*
- 5 February 2016, the Express  
*Illegal immigrant is arrested over murder of American nanny in Austria after she took him in to stop him being deported - and is revealed to have raped underage girl*

- 16 February 2016, the Express  
*Immigrant jailed and set for deportation after savvy homeowner watched break-in live*
- 24 February 2016, the Express  
*Brit truckers carry stun-guns to repel violent illegal immigrants: guess who gets arrested*
- 4 March 2016, the Express  
*Don't come to Europe, it's not worth the money' EU President tells economic migrants*
- 6 March 2016, the Express  
*Britain is POWERLESS to boot out illegal immigrants because they 'have no place to go'*
- 16 March 2016, the Express  
*'10,000 deportees will be released onto Britain's streets' following new ruling*
- 16 March 2016, the Express  
*EXCLUSIVE: Dover police admit just FIVE illegal immigrants arrested in a WHOLE YEAR*
- 16 March 2016, the Express  
*Terror in Brussels: Gunman shot in Paris attacks raid was illegal migrant with ISIS flag*
- 6 April 2016, the Express  
*Vigilante 'migrant hunter' who patrols borders arrested INSTEAD of illegal immigrants*
- 17 April 2016, the Express  
*Watch: Vigilante pirates go 'migrant hunting' as they are sick of coastguards failures*
- 30 April 2016, the Express  
*REVEALED: The one piece of technology helping stop illegal immigrants cross through Europe*
- 28 May 2016, the Express  
*REVEALED: The quiet ports where illegal immigrants and terrorists are slipping into the UK*
- 3 June 2016, the Express  
*Why was female fraudster not sent straight to jail?*
- 22 June 2016, the Express  
*'A lot of people are here illegally' UK-based Europeans speak out on eve of Brexit vote*

- 28 July 2016, the Express  
*Nick Ferrari hits out at Byron Burger over illegal immigrants 'trap' in deportation raid*
- 8 August 2016, the Express  
*Hungary blasts EU open borders as minister says 'link between immigration and terrorism'*
- 15 August 2016, the Express  
*REVEALED: Thousands of illegal immigrants only claim asylum AFTER overstaying their visas*
- 8 September 2016, the Express  
*Illegal immigrants' held after walking along M2 motorway in Kent in broad daylight*
- 11 September 2016, the Express  
*Suspected illegal immigrants on the run after being smuggled into UK 'in A YACHT'*
- 18 September 2016, the Express  
*MIGRANT HORROR: Teen tied up and gagged after three men gang rape her at Eiffel Tower*
- 21 September 2016, the Express  
*Fury as UK Government forks out £80million on security guards at CALAIS... and YOU pay*
- 22 September 2016, the Express  
*Illegal immigrants' arrested as they tried to escape refrigerated lorry on M1*
- 8 October 2016, the Express  
*BORDER CRACKDOWN: Britain now able to STOP Eurostar trains to nab illegal immigrants*
- 10 October 2016, the Express  
*Merkel visits Africa in desperate bid to end illegal immigration and repair reputation*
- 21 October 2016, the Express  
*PICTURED: The queue at the London immigrant centre where £2000 of FREE cash is up for grabs*
- 24 October 2016, the Express  
*EXCLUSIVE: Three ILLEGAL immigrants caught every hour trying to enter Britain*

24 October 2016, the Express

*No one wants a repeat of that' Merkel's migrant crisis regret as illegals to be deported*

1 November 2016, the Express

*Police swarm on coaches in central London in huge anti-immigration raid*

9 November 2016, the Express

*EXPOSED: 'Fixer' caught selling fake IDs for £600 each to illegal immigrants*

23 November 2016, the Express

*Migrants wash up in FOLKSTONE: Seven 'illegal immigrants' found on boat near Kent coast*

1 December 2016, the Express

*Bid to put British kids BEFORE illegal migrants in school places wrecked by hand-wringers*

23 December 2016, the Express

*Illegal immigrant who savagely beat his daughter to DEATH for being 'too Western' deported*

6 January 2017, the Express

*Britain has FAILED to protect migrants and FUELS human trafficking, French official claims*

6 February 2017, the Express

*Pregnant mum raped in horror 15-hour ordeal by grenade-wielding illegal immigrant*

13 March 2017, the Express

*Crooked illegal migrant who preyed on British public for 17 YEARS awarded £40,000 by judge*

1 April, 2017, the Express

*Let's stop Brussels!' Hungary revolts against EU for 'forcing illegal immigration'*

### ***The Daily Mail***

22 May 2015, the Daily Mail

*20,000 living in rabbit-hutch rooms in just one borough! Number in multiple occupation is SEVENTY times official estimate*

16 June 2015, the Daily Mail

*Extraordinary moment 'illegal immigrants' cut their way out of a lorry as it waited at traffic lights on a quiet Cotswolds road*

2 August 2015, the Daily Mail

*Foreign lorry drivers are 'taking £1,200 bungs to give illegal immigrants a lift through the Chunnel'*

14 September 2015, the Daily Mail

*Europe shuts up shop: Hungary blocks main crossing point from Serbia used by migrants as Austria, Slovakia and Netherlands ALL follow Germany's lead to impose border controls*

8 November 2015, the Daily Mail

*African countries to be offered CASH if they take back illegal immigrants who have reached Europe*

5 February 2016, the Daily Mail

*Illegal immigrant is arrested over murder of American nanny in Austria after she took him in to stop him being deported - and is revealed to have raped underage girl*

5 April 2016, the Daily Mail

*We are hostage to illegal immigrants': Locals furious after 100 Somali protesters bring Sardinian port of Cagliari to a standstill as they demand to be allowed to leave*

3 June 2016, the Daily Mail

*Nigerian illegal immigrant benefits cheat is spared jail for her SECOND fraud conviction and says the £50,000 she falsely claimed was to pay off people smugglers who got her into Britain*

13 July 2016, the Daily Mail

*Why was a Somali rapist set free to prey on schoolchildren? Illegal immigrant faces jail after trying to kidnap girls while posing as a policeman weeks after early release*

4 August 2016, the Daily Mail

*Oi, where are you going?' Suspected illegal immigrant cuts himself free from a Polish lorry in the middle of London... and runs off as stunned witnesses shout at him*

4 August 2016, the Daily Mail

*Migrants seized on Sussex beach: Five held after crossing the Channel in a rubber dinghy*

23 August 2016, the Daily Mail

*How to flush out illegal immigrants: RICHARD LITTLEJOHN says monitoring sewage from homes could help officers target their raids*

12 September 2016, the Daily Mail

*Pub CCTV shows six suspected illegal immigrants jumping out of a black Range Rover after they were smuggled into the country in a private yacht*

8 November 2016, the Daily Mail

*Exposed: The 'fixer' who makes thousands selling fake IDs to illegal immigrants for £600 a time*

23 November 2016, the Daily Mail

*The laughing migrants: First arrivals since the closure of Calais jungle cross the Channel in dinghy with a broken oar... then phone 999 to be rescued*

5 February 2017, the Daily Mail

*Woman reveals how she was held hostage when she was PREGNANT by a grenade-wielding illegal immigrant she had met online who raped her in a violent 15-hour ordeal*

23 February 2017, the Daily Mail

*Moment two builders grabbed and pinned down suspected Iraqi illegal immigrants as they jumped from the back of a lorry*

26 March 2017, the Daily Mail

*Moment police discover three 'illegal' immigrants from Eritrea in the back of a lorry after the worried driver rang 999 after fearing people were inside*

10 July 2017, the Daily Mail

*Sikh gang 'helped nearly 70 Afghan illegal immigrants wearing turbans sneak into the UK using passports that were stolen or borrowed from family members in a £600,000 scam'*

2 October 2017, the Daily Mail

*Pictured: The two female cousins stabbed to death by North African man shouting 'Allahu Akbar' in Marseille after he was arrested and released on Friday*

4 October 2017, the Daily Mail

*Illegal Somali immigrant is convicted of killing a man in the street before trying to activate the deportation order he had dodged four years before in the hope he would be flown home*

12 October 2017, the Daily Mail

*Over one million illegal immigrants are in Britain: Former Home Office chief admits huge numbers live in the UK 'under the radar' and many will never be sent home*

14 November 2017, the Daily Mail

*Pictured on the prowl: Illegal Kuwaiti immigrant who claimed to be 'Saddam Hussein' and savagely raped stranger after watching 'outdoor' porn is pictured moments after attack on the CCTV that caught him*

3 December 2017, the Daily Mail

*'Illegal' immigrants from Iraq and Afghanistan are SUPERGLUED into back of lorry by traffickers and eat expensive Belgian chocolates to survive before being freed by firefighters*

## ***The Daily Star***

31 August 2015, the Daily Star

*Tory councillor apologises after posting a Facebook photo of 14 naked women in a boat captioned 'If Carlsberg did illegal immigrants'*

5 July 2016, the Daily Star

*WATCH: Cops find 6ft illegal immigrant stuffed inside suitcase trying to get to Britain*

11 January 2017, the Daily Star

*Two arrested as illegal immigrant found in car bonnet*

19 February 2017, the Daily Star

*Illegal immigrant dad threatened to KILL his children unless he got more benefits*

9 July 2017, the Daily Star

*1.2 MILLION Brit expats in EU could become 'illegal immigrants overnight' thanks to Brexit*

30 August 2018, the Daily Star

*Illegal immigrant caught posing as DOCTOR strutting around NHS hospital's A&E*

## ***The Sun***

26 May 2015, the Sun

*Calais illegal immigrants' trailer dash. Shocking pictures of crowds leaping on lorries bound for UK*

21 June 2015, the Sun

*Farminator nabs 50 illegals in a month; IMMIGRATION CRISIS ; FARMER'S BATTLE.. IN HEART OF UK*

23 September 2015, the Sun

*Illegal immigrant 'fed up' with Manchester demands to be deported*

6 November 2015, the Sun

*Landlords to face £3k fines if they have illegal immigrants as tenants*

15 January 2016, the Sun

*'You've treated me like a dog': Illegal immigrant's blast before he 'punched and strangled artist to death after drug-fuelled romp'*

16 February 2016, the Sun

*Illegal immigrant caught burgling house by its owner...as he watched webcam live from holiday in France*



13 April 2016, the Sun

*"Hidden wildlife camera catches moment illegal immigrants escape from the back of a lorry after sneaking into Britain. Video camera set up to film otters captures migrants fleeing from cops through woods"*

18 April 2016, the Sun

*23 illegal immigrants found freezing in refrigerated lorry almost 200 miles from channel ports are rushed to hospital. Group were given thermal blankets after being found in Chippenham, Wilts*

19 April 2016, the Sun

*National Handout Service: Migrants owe millions for care as system struggles to cope. EXCLUSIVE: Health cash scandal as one illegal migrant caused £181k bill*

19 May 2016, the Sun

*Illegal immigrant rapist jailed after trying to claim sex attacks weren't his fault because of 'cultural differences'*

19 May 2016, the Sun

*Police station placed on lockdown after group of illegal immigrants suddenly fell ill with mystery illness. — 'Major incident' declared after Iraqis complained of headaches and began vomiting — It later emerged they had suffered carbon monoxide poisoning from lorry fumes*

26 June 2016, the Sun

*"KILLER CAGED Illegal immigrant who used THREE knives to stab his wife to death because she wanted a divorce is jailed for 20 years. Somali Abdirashid Khadar, 22, told cops, 'I've got something to show you' after carrying out the brutal killing"*

27 June 2016, the Sun

*SHORE-SHANK REDEMPTION A floating jail created to hold illegal immigrants is now a HOTEL – where Londoners can stay for £110 a night*

6 July 2016, the Sun

*BAGGED TO RIGHTS: Watch moment cops and illegal immigrant stuffed inside a to Britain SUITCASE while trying to get. Eritrean man pokes head out of suitcase and tries to unzip it before guard helps him*

10 July 2016, the Sun

*MIGRANT MAYHEMUK taxpayers fork out £1million — to keep 13 suspected illegal immigrants in Britain. Costs of £90 a day to hold group who have been held at immigration centres for combined total of 32 years*

4 August 2016, the Sun

*HE JUST LEGGED IT' Shocking moment suspected illegal immigrant cuts himself free from the back of a lorry in London traffic before running off. The man used a Stanley knife-style blade to slash open a hole*

29 September 2016, the Sun

*TRAIN SEX ATTACK: Illegal immigrant cleaner groped woman's vagina and grinded against her during rush hour journey*

24 September 2017, the Sun

*ASYLUM SNEAKER: Stunned holidaymaker discovers a stowaway Ethiopian migrant hid in the BOOT of his Nissan all the way from Calais to Wales*

30 January 2018, the Sun

*BURGER STING Illegal immigrant caught by paedo vigilantes trying to lure schoolgirl, 12, with a burger faces deportation*

23 June 2018, the Sun

*Extraordinary lengths illegal immigrants go to make it through UK airports – from fake fainting to throwing their passports in the loo*

## ***The Telegraph***

20 January 2015, the Telegraph

*Terror suspects and criminals to be stripped of human rights;  
The draft bill, to replace the Human Rights Act, would allow British judges to ignore the European Court of Human Rights*

5 March 2015, the Telegraph

*Illegal immigrant caught working at Westminster is spared jail, avoids deportation and is praised by a judge for supporting her Ebola-hit family;  
Judge says Adeyemi Zubairu acted honourably by supporting her family in Sierra Leone - despite using a fake passport to get a job in Westminster*

7 March 2015, the Telegraph

*Immigration: 576% rise in poorest Europeans registering for work;  
Official figures show 187,370 Romanians and Bulgarians were given National Insurance numbers over the course of 2014 after immigration rules were relaxed, up from 27,700 during the previous year*

6 April 2015, the Telegraph

*Forty illegal immigrants a day arrested in Britain; Enforcement squads swoop on Indian and Chinese restaurants, petrol stations and car washes, boosting number of arrests*

20 May 2015, the Telegraph

*Suspected illegal immigrants found hiding in Maseratis*

21 May 2015, the Telegraph

*Illegal migrant workers will have wages seized, vows David Cameron;  
Radical new plan unveiled by the Prime Minister will also see illegal migrant workers deported without appeal*

10 June 2015, the Telegraph

*Nine 'illegal immigrants' escape from lorry in Cotswold village*

23 June 2015, the Telegraph

*Illegal immigrants caught at UK border more than doubled last year, says 'British FBI'; National Crime Agency report says numbers are likely to continue a sharp increase, highlighting a 300 per cent rise last year in illegal immigration from North Africa to Italy*

23 June 2015, the Telegraph

*British students groomed to smuggle illegal immigrants from Calais, French prosecutor claims; Students, bar owners and shopkeepers targeted by gang masters to smuggle people into UK as French officials reveal 100 Britons jailed in last year*

24 June 2015, the Telegraph

*Calais crisis: Fears Isil may use migrant chaos to slip jihadists in to UK; Returning fanatics may try and hide among the thousands of refugees who have massed at the port to sneak in to Britain*

25 June 2015, the Telegraph

*Calais crisis: Police report new wave of illegal migrants in Britain; Police forces say arrests of suspected illegal immigrants have spiked, as Government stages emergency Cobra meeting to discuss response to Calais situation*

3 August 2015, the Telegraph

*Our Government seems unable to deport illegal immigrants - even if it knows where they are; Ministers want to force landlords to immediately evict illegal immigrants, but have no answers about what happens to them after that*

9 August 2015, the Telegraph

*Polish lorry driver arrested as 18 'illegal immigrants' found in back of HGV on M1; Hertfordshire Police arrest 40-year-old as large group of suspected illegal immigrants discovered stowed away in lorry on motorway near Luton*

23 September 2015, the Telegraph

*Illegal immigrant hands himself over to police because he has 'had enough of Manchester'*

15 November 2015, the Telegraph

*Paris attacks 'change everything' on migrant crisis, warns senior German politician; Bavarian finance minister hits out at Angela Merkel's open-door policy, says uncontrolled immigration can't go on and Germany must protect own borders if EU can't*

17 December 2015, the Telegraph

*Immigration officers give up hunting 10,000 missing asylum seekers;  
Missing asylum seekers not a priority as second report reveals farcical  
rules on illegal worker raids*

12 January 2016, the Telegraph

*Illegal immigrants 'use small boats to breach Britain's border controls';  
Whistleblower who worked for the Border Force says east coast of Britain  
is particularly vulnerable to illegal immigrants*

20 January 2016, the Telegraph

*It's time to bring back national ID cards; At a time of terrorist plots, illegal  
immigration, and what it means to be 'British', isn't it time to look again at  
this hastily abandoned idea?*

21 March 2016, the Telegraph

*NHS spent £181,000 treating just one illegal immigrant'; Leading cancer  
specialist claims migrants are putting "unsustainable" strain on NHS*

23 March 2016, the Telegraph

*Don't call them 'illegal immigrants', says Europe human rights commissioner*

24 March 2016, the Telegraph

*Suspected illegal immigrants found inside lorry near the Dartford Crossing;  
Footage shows police near Dartford Crossing, Kent, where 26 suspected  
illegal immigrants from Iran and Iraq were found in the back of a lorry*

21 May 2016, the Telegraph

*28 suspected illegal immigrants found in the back of a lorry in Portsmouth*

10 June 2016, the Telegraph

*Chef at top restaurant in hot water after illegal immigrant found hiding in  
her boot*

24 June 2016, the Telegraph

*Calais crisis: Migrants exploit strike chaos as port and tunnel closed;  
Illegal immigrants pose threat to Channel Tunnel - forcing all services to  
stop - as French ferry workers' strike shuts Calais port*

4 August 2016, the Telegraph

*Illegal immigrant' filmed cutting himself free from back of Polish lorry in  
rush-hour London traffic*

7 August 2016, the Telegraph

*Schoolchildren on trip to France find migrant stowed away inside coach*

11 September 2016, the Telegraph

*'Illegal immigrants' on run after sailing into sleepy Suffolk town*

- 7 October 2016, the Telegraph  
*Child among 15 'illegal immigrants' found in freezer lorry on M25 after driver hears banging from inside*
- 9 October 2016, the Telegraph  
*Britain to strengthen post-Brexit border controls at Ireland's ports and airports*
- 30 November 2016, the Telegraph  
*Boris Johnson calls for illegal immigrants to be granted amnesty after Brexit*
- 12 July 2017, the Telegraph  
*Illegal immigrants able to enter Britain unchallenged because there are no checks at half of small ports*
- 24 August 2017, the Telegraph  
*Illegal immigrant murdered man in Hyde Park after Home Office repeatedly failed to deport him*
- 22 September 2017, the Telegraph  
*Banks to 'check immigration status of 70 million accounts' to identify failed asylum seekers*
- 13 October 2017, the Telegraph  
*Meet the 31-year-old Austrian on course to become the world's youngest leader - after vowing to end illegal immigration*
- 16 December 2017, the Telegraph  
*Austria's far-right to enter government after coalition deal*
- 12 January 2018, the Telegraph  
*This government is making it harder than ever for illegal immigrants to live and work in Britain*
- 12 January 2018, the Telegraph  
*Banks handed secret list of illegal immigrants and ordered to close their accounts in Government crackdown*
- 18 April 2018, the Telegraph  
*Home Office incompetence on Windrush is no reason to end the hostile environment against illegal migrants*
- 25 April 2018, the Telegraph  
*Boris Johnson's amnesty would be an insult to legal immigrants and a bonanza for traffickers*
- 25 April 2018, the Telegraph  
*Cabinet split as Boris Johnson calls for illegal immigrant amnesty*

26 April 2018, the Telegraph

*Home Office did set migrant removal targets, report reveals, as pressure mounts on Amber Rudd to quit*

30 April 2018, the Telegraph

*Sajid Javid, Britain's first Asian Home Secretary, believes there is 'nothing racist about managed migration'*

30 April 2018, the Telegraph

*Read Amber Rudd's resignation letter and Theresa May's response in full*

2 May 2018, the Telegraph

*Sajid Javid must not lose sight of immigration targets*

17 May 2018, the Telegraph

*Labour plans to close immigration detention centres and scrap 'hostile environment' policy*

4 June 2018, the Telegraph

*Italy can no longer serve as 'Europe's refugee camp' says Matteo Salvini, as he pledges to push EU for stricter controls*

30 December 2018, the Telegraph

*It is important for MPs to have holidays, migrant 'crisis' or not*

31 December 2018, the Telegraph

*Illegal immigrants intercepted by Border Force on New Year's Eve*

## ***The Times***

29 June 2015, the Times

*Britain sends a barrier to keep out Calais migrants*

25 March 2016, the Times

*Lorry x-rays are banned to protect stowaways' health*

25 March 2016, the Times

*40% of migrant removals stopped*

29 March 2016, the Times

*Libya threatens to open migrant floodgates into Europe*

8 June 2016, the Times

*You cannot jail illegal immigrants, court says*

3 August 2016, the Times

*One million' migrants in UK illegally; Workers slip under the radar after visas expire*

- 8 October 2016, the Times  
*Police find 15 migrants in back of a fridge lorry*
- 9 December 2016, the Times  
*Le Pen: no school for illegal migrants*
- 26 December 2016, the Times  
*We must expel 500,000 illegal says Grillo; Italy*
- 16 June 2017, the Times  
*Illegal migrant tally hits 250,000 a year*
- 30 June 2017, the Times  
*Why I've come round to the idea of ID cards; Fears about illegal immigration which drove many to vote for Brexit would be answered by a national identity scheme*
- 1 September 2017, the Times  
*Britain pledges £7m to curb Nigerian people-trafficking*
- 13 July 2017, the Times  
*Migrants get three tries at entering UK*
- 5 January 2018, the Times  
*Ukip leader's girlfriend in Grenfell slur*
- 5 April 2018, the Times  
*Home Office man falsified records for hundreds of illegal immigrants*
- 1 May 2018, the Times  
*Javid to end hostile era for illegal immigrants; New home secretary promises policy overhaul Cabinet's Brexit balance maintained*
- 3 May 2018, the Times  
*Labour could get a nasty shock in local elections, warns expert*
- 9 May 2018, the Times  
*India rejects illegal migrants deal amid fears of mass deportations*
- 10 May 2018, the Times  
*Use of NHS files to track migrants will be stopped*
- 28 May 2018, the Times  
*Spiderman' rescues boy from balcony*
- 29 May 2018, the Times  
*Macron grants migrant hero right to be a French citizen*
- 28 November 2018, the Times  
*No-deal Brexit: Britain will be locked out of Europe's crimefighting database*

## Appendix C: Codebook

Following Allen (2016) the following coding scheme was used for the Manual Content Analysis of newspaper articles:

Section identifier	Description of codes
1. Main messenger	<p>This section asks the researcher to determine who is primarily saying that perceived or actual issues associated with irregular migration matter. Individuals should also be coded for their organisation or social group in cases where they speak in the behalf of that institution or group.</p> <p>Pre-set codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unspecified. This is to be used if no sources are explicitly identified.</li> <li>– Migrants. This relates to non-British/-European individuals who enter, stay or work in the receiving society, e.g. asylum seekers</li> <li>– Nationals. This relates to members of the general British/European public who have the right to enter, stay or work in the respective host society, e.g. British citizens</li> <li>– Members of government. This relates to individuals of groups who work for a governmental agency, e.g. MPs of the British parliament</li> <li>– NGO. This relates to organisations that are independent of government involvement, e.g. the British Red Cross</li> <li>– Author. This relates to the author of the newspaper article.</li> <li>– Other. This code is to be used if the mentioned source does not appear among the above codes, e.g. think tanks, private sector members, etc.</li> </ul>
2. Content focus	<p>This section aims to identify what the main focus of the newspaper article is. This can be a topic that is represented by author of the news item, or by another individual/group quoted in the article.</p> <p>Pre-set codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Migrant individuals or groups. Use same codes as in section 1 and additionally consider specific characteristics discussed in relation to irregular migrants, e.g. intentions</li> <li>– Migration facilitators. This relates to individuals or groups that facilitate the illegal transportation of migrants into a country in exchange for payment.</li> <li>– Government. This relates to views or implications of actions by the government, e.g. new policy measures, decisions made by single politicians, etc.</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Quantity of migrants. This relates to the perceived or actual number of people entering a receiving society and the consequences of their presence on the receiving community, e.g. pressure on public services, housing, healthcare, etc.</li> <li>– Other. This code is to be used if the mentioned focus does not appear among the above codes, e.g. statement of a politician's partner</li> </ul>
3. Type of migration	<p>This section relates to specific types of migration explicitly discussed in the news item.</p> <p>Pre-set codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unspecified. This is to be used if no specific migration type is explicitly named.</li> <li>– Irregular entry. This relates to people entering the UK or another European country in an uncontrolled fashion.</li> <li>– Irregular stay. This relates to migrants who are already living in a receiving society without residence permit.</li> <li>– Irregular work. This relates to migrants who are working in a receiving society without work permit.</li> <li>– Repatriated migrants. This relates to migrants who were deported from the destination country to their country of origin.</li> <li>– 'Windrush migrants'. This relates to those migrants who entered the UK between 1948 and 1976 and are publicly referred as 'Windrush' migrants.</li> <li>– Other. This code is to be used if the mentioned source does not appear among the above codes, e.g. trafficked people</li> </ul>
4. Rationale of argument	<p>This section asks the researcher to characterise the key rationale that is prevalent in the news article to support the overall argument of that article.</p> <p>Pre-set codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– None provided. Use this code if there does not appear to be an implicit or explicit main rationale in the article item.</li> <li>– Legislation. This relates government rules, laws or procedures that are too strict/weak or effectively/poorly enforced by the government to achieve their stated objectives.</li> <li>– Quantity of migrants. This relates to the numbers, perceived or actual, of migrants entering or already residing in the receiving society and the perceived or actual impact on the people of the host society, e.g. in relation to the economic labour market, healthcare system, etc.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unlawful behaviour around irregular migration. This relates to activities which are particularly associated with irregular migration and hence regarded as unlawful/criminal, e.g. violation of immigration law regarding unauthorised entry into a receiving country</li> <li>– Suffering of migrants. This relates to perceptions or realities of migrants who are mistreated or experience personal suffering in a physical, emotional, social, economic or political way.</li> <li>– Other. This code is to be used if the main rationale is not described by one of the above.</li> </ul>
5. Presence of justification	<p>This section asks the researcher to determine how the news article justifies its position (pro/against) on irregular migration.</p> <p>Pre-set codes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unspecified. Use this code if there is no implicit or explicit justification given in the article item.</li> <li>– Security. This relates to actions that should maintain the public order and sovereignty of the host society. This means that the laws and rules of the host society are respected and implemented as well as the safety of the public is preserved.</li> <li>– Economy. This relates to the domestic prosperity of the receiving country whereby actions should enable the best possible economic, social, and/or welfare outcomes for citizens of the receiving society</li> <li>– Justice. This relates to actions that should maintain and promote concepts of social justice and human rights for all groups including minority groups in the host country</li> <li>– Other. Use this code if a justification does not appear to be captured by the above.</li> </ul>
6. Characters responsible for problem	<p>This section is concerned with the identification of individuals, groups or institutes that are claimed to be responsible for perceived or actual issues associated with irregular migration. Individuals should be coded for their institution or social group if they are speaking on its behalf.</p> <p>Pre-set codes (see code 1):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Unspecified. This is to be used if no characters are explicitly identified.</li> <li>– Migrants. This relates to non-British/-European individuals who enter, stay or work in the receiving society, e.g. asylum seekers</li> <li>– Migration facilitator. This relates to individuals or groups that facilitate the illegal transportation of migrants into a country in exchange for payment.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Nationals. This relates to members of the general British/European public who have the right to enter, stay or work in the respective host society, e.g. British citizens</li> <li>– Members of government. This relates to individuals of groups who work for a governmental agency, e.g. politicians</li> <li>– NGO. This relates to organisations that are independent of government involvement, e.g. the British Red Cross</li> <li>– Other. This code is to be used if the mentioned character does not appear among the above codes, e.g. think tanks, private sector members, etc.</li> </ul>
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## Appendix D: Lists of single and multiple keywords of comments

The lists of keywords below were generated by Sketch Engine and reveal the ‘aboutness’ of the social media comments discussed in chapter 8.2.2:

### *Single keywords*

Term	Score	Frequency	RC <sup>22</sup> frequency
1. deport	668.06	1099	51217
2. lorry	253.71	318	33675
3. Deport	250.12	128	355
4. Brexit	249.31	126	70
5. scum	200.23	240	31237
6. immigrant	147.42	1458	421793
7. migrant	139.03	507	141273
8. Windrush	128.04	67	960
9. UKIP	122.23	130	25242
10. Calais	120.54	97	13616
11. illegal	111.75	1914	746998
12. scumbag	111.01	82	10664
13. illegally	90.09	265	109686
14. Tory	89.82	242	98571
15. Disgusting	89.2	47	1201
16. eu	87.79	82	19498
17. ISIS	82.49	47	3147
18. disgraceful	82.07	78	20250
19. asylum	80.38	223	102197
20. Rudd	77.93	107	39249

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<sup>22</sup> As outlined in chapter 3.4.3, RC refers to the ‘reference corpus’ which represents a standard corpus that is compared with the own corpus to show if word frequencies are unusually high compared to some norm.

### ***Multiple keywords***

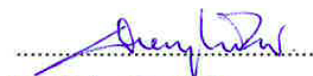
<b>Term</b>	<b>Score</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>RC frequency</b>
1. illegal immigrant	239.88	153	63
2. border control	101.36	60	43
3. safe country	96.23	51	14
4. own country	87.11	132	477
5. illegal immigration	71.88	64	184
6. hostile environment	53.01	35	77
7. repeat process	50.92	26	7
8. soft touch	47.39	28	45
9. first safe country	44.49	22	0
10. poor woman	44.07	26	45
11. lorry driver	43.92	23	14
12. daily mail	42.69	22	10
13. home office	40.24	63	504
14. id card	38.57	41	268
15. laughing stock	37.87	23	54
16. tax payer	36.23	29	145
17. free house	33.89	17	5
18. mass immigration	33.62	19	35
19. free housing	31.09	17	27
20. council house	30.96	16	13

## Appendix E: Declaration of Originality

Students are reminded that the work that they submit for assessment must be their own. Please read the following statements and sign and date at the bottom of this form to show that you have complied:

1. This thesis and the work to which it refers are the results of your own efforts. Any ideas, data or text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work and attributed to the originator in the text, bibliography or footnotes.
2. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other academic degree or professional qualification at this or any other institution.
3. Any chapters that describe the outcomes of joint research should be clearly identified as such with a statement inserted as a footnote on the first page and contributors named. Significant data, images or text resulting from the input of other researchers should be identified as such and attributed to the persons concerned by means of a footnote within the chapter.
4. It is usual to acknowledge the help and guidance of others who have assisted you during your research and preparation of your thesis. Such acknowledgements do not replace or obviate the need for individual attribution as discussed in points 1 and 3.
5. The University reserves the right to submit electronic versions of your draft documents for assessment of plagiarism using electronic detection software such as 'turnitin'. In addition, whether or not drafts have been so assessed, the University reserves the right to require an electronic version of the final document (as submitted) for assessment.

SIGNED:



PRINT NAME: Thi-Diem-Tu Tran

DATE: July 2021