



BETWEEN THE LINES AND BEYOND THE FRAMES

The effect of text and image frames in right-wing populist campaign posters
and the mediating role of emotion

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

The steep rise of right-wing populism (RWP) in recent years is evident in the success of conservative, right-wing policies across Europe and the United States. Political communication - and in particular the textual and visual cues designed to carry the message of that communication - is at the heart of successful campaigns. However, there is a lack in the research of these elements in combination in the context of RWP. With superfluous amounts of information slung around during political campaigns, it is often just a slogan and image that are at the forefront of the public's memory about a certain party. Recently, RWP parties seem to perform fairly well. The study at hand, therefore, takes visual and textual elements of some of those campaigns and examines the effect different frames of these elements have on the people, thereby aiming to shed some light on the reasons for their success. The study frames images and texts in a 'Gains' and 'Losses' opposition, examining the effects and interactions of those frames on people's attitudes about a given political party and on their intended voting behavior. It also adds the element of emotion, assessing whether the emotions of hope, compassion, fear and anger function as mediators of the framing effects. The experiment finds that text frames have a stronger effect on both attitude and behavioral intentions, while images play an enhancing role to those frames, and that hope and anger play key roles in mediating those effects. The contribution of images, therefore, should be examined more closely in the research and practice of political communication. The results also underline the discrete negative and positive emotions these texts and images elicit, exposing the personal nature of RWP campaigns and their targeting of human emotions as campaign tactics.

Keywords

Gains and losses, image-frame, text-frame, populism, emotions.

1. Introduction

At first glance, one of the posters used in the 2017 German election by the right-wing populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* seems quite peaceful and calm: a woman lies in the grass, possibly in a park somewhere, smiling and cradling her pregnant belly. It could be a snapshot taken right out of a young family's photo album. It is a bright image, both in its visual and emotive construct, exuding happiness and hope for a future that is as dazzling as the sunlight beaming down on the scene. There is also some text, a political slogan of sorts, accompanying the photo. It reads: "New Germans? We'll make them ourselves".

This campaign poster is an example of the contemporary right-wing populist (RWP) campaigning that has seen a rising tide of success in recent years. It takes a moment for the combination of the image and the text on the poster to sink in. Separately, the text and image seem to cast the message in two different lights: a positive visual significance, containing beauty and the value of life, sits alongside a verbal warning about a putative threat to these ideals. The study at hand will take a closer look at precisely this juxtaposition of text and images within political campaign posters and how their frames impact the people confronted by them. What is it about these campaigns that resonates with the public and motivates them to vote for the RWP party?

One thing we know is that every good campaign can be summarized by a strong slogan. Obama preached that "Yes, we can!" and Trump promised to "Make America Great Again". The framing of these slogans is no accident. Texts, and their frames, are shown to have a powerful effect on people's opinions, defining complex political issues and public controversies (Entman, 1993, 2004; Gitlin, 1980; Scheufele, 2000), and

interpreting, for the people, what the campaigners want these messages to mean. In political campaigns, with their prevailing over-abundance of information, a swift interpretation of a simple message may be all that certain people base their votes on. The societal consequences of the possibility that these frames can shift perceptions of political messages (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981), influence voting behavior and mobilize the electorate makes framing theory a useful and important starting point for the exploration of the effects of right-wing populist (RWP) political communication campaigns.

But it is not merely what these campaigns have to *say*, but also what they *show* that is of particular interest here. The importance of visuals in political communications is becoming increasingly evident, as images can help create and enhance frames (Nelson, Reed & Walling, 1976; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015; Vliegenthart, 2011). The study at hand, therefore, also aims to examine these trends of RWP campaigning, with a nuanced look at the textual and visual framing of ‘Gains’ and ‘Losses’ (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). While the impact of image and text frames in terms of ‘Gains’ and ‘Losses’ has been examined before (Powell, Boomgaarden, De Swert, & de Vreese, 2015; Nelson, Oxley & Clawson, 1997), the focus of these previous studies has been largely on the context of news media. This has not yet been applied within the context of RWP literature. If political campaigning happens on two levels, addressing the people’s needs on the one hand, and the campaign strategies on the other (Van der Brug & Fennema, 2007), examining the latter element is crucial for understanding why some strategies succeed, and others don’t. Rectifying this oversight within populist literature is especially vital because visuals in those campaigns have been coupled with increasingly negative

slogans to reflect the core of populism, driving a wedge between the 'good' in-group and the 'bad' out-group (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017).

What, then, do these combinations of frames in images and texts mean in the context of RWP campaigns and elections? With RWP parties positioning themselves at the forefront of the battle to defend the 'us' against what seems to be a largely Muslim 'them', gaining significant media – and hence public – attention, this question contains not only a sense of importance but also urgency. The principle research question is:

RQ: What effects do the textual and visual framing of 'Gains' and 'Losses' in RWP campaign posters have on citizens' attitudes and behavior?

The effects in question may not be direct, since other variables may mediate the relationship. Emotions, especially discrete positive and negative emotions, have been shown to influence both opinion formation and voting behavior (e.g. Brader, 2005; Kühne & Schemer, 2013; Lecheler, Bos, & Vliegenthart, 2015; Lecheler, Schuck, & de Vreese, 2013). Due to the nature of RWP political communication as a direct appeal to the people, proliferating a divisive 'us vs. them' message, this study also isolates the emotions these multi-modal messages within RWP campaigning elicit.

My experimental design includes the visual and textual elements of RWP campaigning in a 2 x 2 factorial design that manipulates the framing and congruence of both images and text. The embedded survey assesses the participants' responses to the advertisements, their attitudes towards the party and their behavioral intentions across the four conditions. This design allows us to isolate the combined effects of different image and text-frames, as well as the effects of their congruity.

Theoretical Framework

a. Contemporary Populist Rhetoric

While there are various views on and definitions of populism, RWP, in this study, is defined as an ideology that casts the 'good' against the 'bad' and that considers “society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups” (Mudde, 2004, p.543)– these groups consisting of the pure people and the ‘others’ (Mudde, 2004). These “corrupt others” are expressed as either the corrupt elite (Mudde, 2004), as in the vertical conception of populism, or can take the form of the “dangerous others” (Rooduijn, 2013, p.7) that come from within society and pose a threat that exists on the same level as the people, in a horizontal conception of populism. Immigrants are often targeted and excluded from the ‘pure people’ group in this horizontal notion of populism, as they provide a discernible out-group, an easy manifestation of a 'them' in contrast to 'us'.

Scholars have acknowledged the impact of populism on European electorates (for example, Hameleers, Bos & De Vreese, 2013; Wodak, Mral & Khrosravinik, 2013). With high numbers of immigrants looking for refuge at the gates of the EU, the divisive and anti-immigrant – or anti-'them', whomever 'they' are defined as – refrain has for some time now been used by politicians across the European and international electoral landscape. Since these same politicians invariably claim to be a voice for ‘the people’, this naturally raises the issue of who these 'people' may be. Speaking for 'the people' is a concept central to the idea and mechanism of RWP, and yet there is a certain vagueness surrounding who these people are and what exact demographics or characteristics they

possess. It is clear, however, that it is an imagined community, resembling the “nation of the nationalists” (Mudde, 2004, p. 544).

Some research that sets the foundation for this experiment has looked at communication strategies focussed on party leaders (Bos, van Der Brug & De Vreese, 2013; Vliegenthart, 2012), showing that many populist communication strategies put most of their emphasis on divorcing themselves from perceived elites and the establishment. Others examine the issues that have become central to the political parties of the far right, most notably immigration and the Muslim (and Islamist) threat to a European identity (Betz, 2013; Bos et al., 2013). Elsewhere, research has focussed on the effect of these communication strategies, finding that RWP communication strategies are more effective with those more cynical and less educated (Bos et al., 2013). The authors recognize these issues, as well as an outspoken anti-immigrant stance, as part of the right-wing rhetoric of the populist spectrum.

While the rich literature on RWP communication and campaigns covers a multitude of angles, it fails to consider the effect of alternative framings for some of RWP's key issues, such as immigration. The nature of RWP campaigns seems a rather intimate one: an appeal to the people to protect their own and beware of the threat of the 'others' (Rooduijn, 2013). Academic consideration of the frame of these messages, as well as the role that emotions play in the processing of these campaigns, is clearly overdue. If attitudes towards immigrants are shown to be influenced by the frame of news stories (Bos, Lecheler, Mewafi & Vliegenthart, 2016), it is worth considering whether this is true for frames of the political communication output of RWP parties.

b. Framing Gains and Losses

Posters, with their potential for viral spread, form a key part of populist campaigning. Given that posters contain both visual and textual elements, examining the framing of these elements is crucial for reaching a deeper understanding of the effects these posters can have on those who see them. Framing, by its definition, entails the selecting of certain aspects of a message and altering them in a communication context, in order to highlight a problem or provide an interpretation for the viewer (Entman, 1993). These frames can manipulate different elements of the message, even the subject of the communication itself, controlling the distinction of the message (Entman, 1993). They shape the messages to represent a certain aspect of reality that is to be emphasized and act as organizers of the information (Gitlin, 1980). However, frames not only condense issues into cognitive shortcuts but also allocate moral value to them, even suggesting action (Entman, 1993). This function serves to reduce the complexity of the message (Geise & Baden, 2015), and advocates in favor of certain attitudes and political judgments (Bos et al., 2016; Chong & Duckman, 2007). Controlling the way viewers interpret and evaluate the presented issues, therefore becomes a question of framing.

This is particularly interesting in the context of RWP communication. Because, as stated above, RWP parties tend to blur the lines between the nation and the people, issues that lie at the heart of nationalism often lend themselves easily to RWP campaigns. Given this, it is no surprise that the issue of immigration makes frequent appearances in RWP campaigns. Immigration is not only presented as a national issue, but, at times, as a national crisis (Taggart, 2000). Taggart defines populism as a “powerful reaction to a sense of extreme crisis” (2000, p.2), which creates a sense of national urgency and an

overriding need to act, and to vote, sooner rather than later. Provoking a sense of crisis, as those behind the recent resurgence of (frequently nativist) populism doubtless know, is a time-honored tool for achieving political success by pitting people against a common danger, creating a unified 'us' and an opposing 'them', an 'in' group and an 'out' group, creating the need for leadership that will supposedly provide powerful and radical answers to the allegedly imminent danger that 'they' pose (Moffitt, 2015). In a national crisis concerning immigration, for example, a campaign framing 'Losses' would warn about immigrants taking already scarce jobs. A 'Gains' frame, on the other hand, would highlight what should be preserved, advertising existing communities and values, leaving as an afterthought the threat that immigrants pose to those values.

Slogans recently used by RWP parties across Europe include: “More safety for our wives and daughters” (AfD), “Vienna must not become Istanbul” (Austrian Freedom Party), and the leading slogan of the AfD: “Burkas? No thanks. We prefer Bikinis”. As discussed above, the frames here fall into the categories of ‘Gains’ and ‘Losses’. In other words, they encourage the voter to assess the information they are given based on the probability of it causing either *positive* impacts (gains) or *negative* impacts (losses) (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). ‘Gains’ framing uses the values that voters are familiar with and want to preserve (e.g., bikinis stand for the open-mindedness and ‘Westernness’ of the culture) and ‘Losses’ framing outlines what could be lost (namely, Western culture being subsumed by 'Islamization'). This ‘carrot and stick’ approach outlines the easily graspable rewards or punishments that a vote for or against the party will bring.

We know that, when making decisions, people tend to practice risk aversion, making choices that minimize any perceived risks and increase the probability of

potential gains (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). Crucially, this is as true for political behavior as it is for everyday life, because the evaluation of risk has been shown to have a mediating effect on voter actions and mobilization (Loewenstein, Weber, Hsee, & Welch, 2001). If framing effects have the power to persuade us to interpret a political message as containing warnings about a potential threat, then they could be having a profound effect on voting behavior. That is, protecting ourselves from a perceived risk acts as an incentive for action (Schuck and de Vreese, 2009). This is in line with a 'Losses' frame, since it poses a threat. Opposing the so that we can then conclude that:

H1: A 'Losses' text-frame in RWP campaign posters will have a stronger positive effect on the participants' voting intention than a 'Gains' text-frame.

As framing theory has shown, it is not only decision-making that is affected by the frames, but also the formation of opinions. This study builds on research about attitudes towards issues, such as immigration (Bos et al., 2016), and attitudes towards political leadership figures (Funk, 1999), and examines attitudes towards the political party itself. This is an interesting angle because there seem to be differences within image and text frames in relation to attitude formation and voting behavior (see Powell et al., 2015; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). When tested for support for EU enlargement, for example, participants in the opportunity frame condition showed significantly higher levels of support compared to participants in the risk condition (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). For news framing, positive framing was also shown to contribute to higher levels of support for political issues tested (Lecheler et al., 2013). I therefore hypothesize that:

H2: A 'Gains' text-frame has a more positive effect on attitudes about the political party than a 'Losses' text-frame.

c. Congruent and incongruent framing

The unique angle this study provides is to analyze issues framed both visually and textually, shifting the focus that previous studies have placed on the news media, the candidate and specific political issues away from these subjects and onto the communication strategies of RWP parties. The power of visuals has already been proven to lead opinion formation and behavior (see Chaiken, 1980; Domke et al., 2002; Funk, 1999; Powell et al., 2015), but since this paper analyzes both the visual *and* textual frames of the same issue, we can thereby assess whether these previous theories can be supported when taking into account the bifurcated nature of message communication inherent in political campaign posters. Since, as outlined above, the power of framing is such that it can alter opinions and behavior, the effects of political communications strategies – specifically within RWP campaigns - have been the subjects of empirical research for quite some time (Albertazzi, 2007; Arendt et al., 2015; Breibur et al., 2014; Richardson & Wodak, 2009). There still exists, however, the opportunity to introduce a visual element to this existing research. If we consider the way people experience campaigns, it is mostly through television, newspapers, or, especially in the European context, the campaign posters that line the streets during election season. In central Europe, in particular, we have seen certain graphic campaign posters achieve a viral-like effect and spread far beyond the borders of their country of origin. This arguably originated with the Swiss People’s Party anti-minaret campaign, which has been shown to have influenced the strategies of other parties across the continent (Betz, 2013).

But campaign posters do not portray images in isolation. The reality of campaign posters is that they are presented in combination with texts. Some contemporary political

communication theories do take this into account and examine the way visuals and texts interact, though this interaction remains understudied, even though research on the congruence of image-text pairs in news visuals highlights the importance of these multimodal framing effects (Powell et al., 2015). Images and text have different framing effects: when shown in combination, the *text* shows stronger effect on attitudes, regardless of the image frame, while, in contrast, *images* carry a stronger effect on *behavioral intentions*, irrespective of the text frame.

Based on these results, I propose the following hypotheses:

H3a: Image-frames have a stronger predictive effect of voting behavior than text-frames.

H3b: In incongruent image-text pairs, the frame of the text will show a stronger effect on attitudes towards the party.

H3c: In incongruent image-text pairs of RWP campaign posters, the frame of the image will show a stronger effect on behavioral intention than the text.

With the addition of images, which are experienced immediately, the information is processed at once, arousing emotion long before the conscious assessment of risk or opportunity. However, images do mold our interpretations in a choreographed manner with texts: textual captions can guide the process of interpretation, while visuals can emphasize the focus of text and provide a context for interpretation (Geise & Baden, 2015). If both text and image display the same frame, we can assume that this frame is amplified and more effective than it would be in incongruent pairs. With respect to risk-framing in news, it has already been shown that text and image congruence strongly guides the formation of anti-immigrant attitudes (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). Campaign

posters utilizing a visual and textual framing of loss, then, can increase the perceived risk significantly and be more influential than merely textual cues. We can then predict that:

H4a: ‘Losses’ framing in congruent image-text pairs will result in more negative attitudes towards the party than in incongruent pairs.

H4b: ‘Gains’ framing in congruent image-text pairs will result in more positive attitudes towards the party than in incongruent pairs.

d. Emotions as Mediators

Several cognitive processes involved in the mechanisms and perceptions of framing have previously been studied (Iyengar, 1991; Nelson, et al., 1997). These processes act as mediators of the perceived frame, strengthening or weakening it (Nelson & Willey, 2001). One of these processes is the emotional reaction that is evoked by certain frames, which, in turn, can influence the formation of attitudes and opinions (Holm, 2012). This is particularly interesting in light of the emotionally charged topics of many RWP communication strategies.

Research has confirmed that including visuals *and* text in communication indeed causes stronger emotions and an increased perception of risk (Nelson et al., 1976; Xie, Wnag, Zhang, Li, & Yu, 2011). With regard to attitudes, frames depicting ‘Gains’ seem to serve as a predictor. In simple terms, we would assume that positively framed messages would elicit positive emotions, e.g. hope and compassion, while negatively framed messages would cause the observers to feel negative emotions, e.g. fear and anger (Lecheler, Schuck & de Vreese, 2013). Just like frames, images produce less complex messages than texts, highlighting specific, relevant information that the sender intends to communicate. This is particularly interesting when considering that images are frequently

more effective than texts in eliciting an emotional response to guide information processing (Iyer, Webster, Hornsey, & Vanman, 2014), yet they often are less explicit in their ability to relay meaning compared to the syntactic structure of a written text (Messaris & Abrahams, 2001). But when working together, images and text can increase the depth of emotional processing (Nelson et al., 1976).

The picture superiority effect suggests that images increase the strength of the textual frame on a psychological and emotional level (Geise & Baden, 2015). Having a frame that is present in both image and text will facilitate the strongest effect (Geise & Baden, 2015; Nelson et al., 1976). Taking the example of news stories that reflect poorly on immigrants, image-text congruency means that both frames are processed on a deeper level of psychological awareness, resulting in more negative attitudes towards immigrants (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017). In addition, visual information is processed differently from text. Images are seen as direct representations of the real world, rather than abstract symbols of it, as is the case with texts, causing stronger real-world emotional responses (Geise & Baden, 2015).

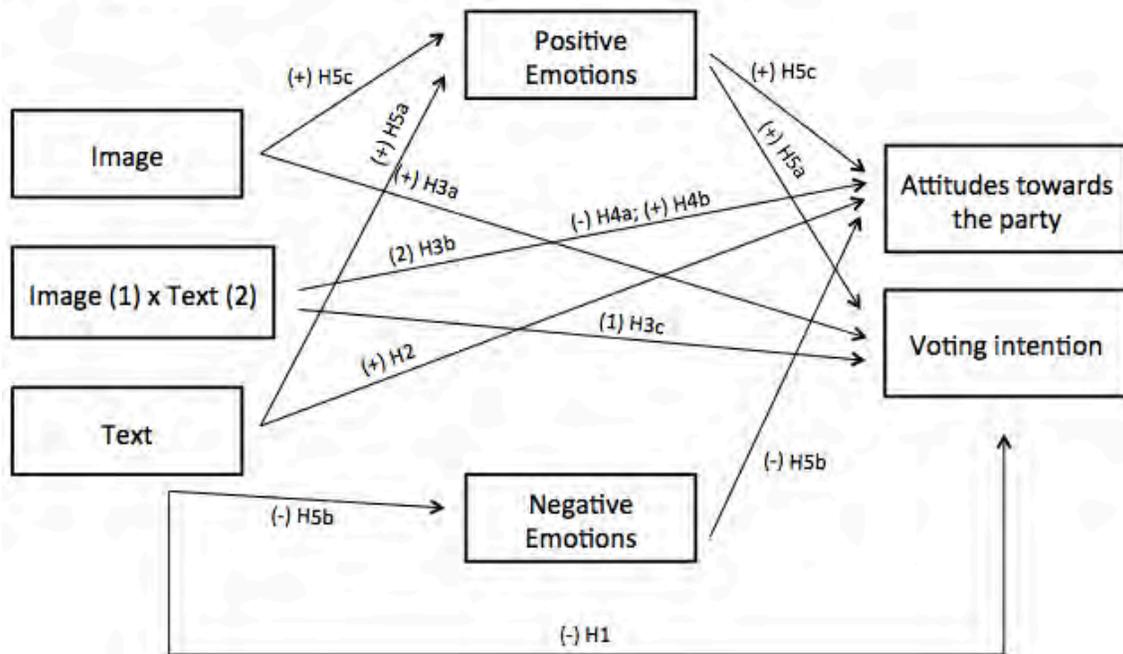
Building on the theory that visual frames lead behaviour, while textual frames lead attitudes, I hypothesise that:

H5a: The impact of the 'Gains' text-frame on attitudes towards the party is mediated by positive emotions (e.g. hope and compassion).

H5b: The impact of the 'Losses' text-frame on attitudes towards the party is mediated by negative emotions (e.g. fear and anger).

H5c: The impact of visual 'Gains' frames on voting intention is mediated by positive emotions (e.g. hope and compassion).

Figure 1:
Conceptual Model



Methods

a. Design

To test my hypotheses, an online survey-embedded experiment was conducted between the dates of 10 December 2017 and 03 January 2018. Participants were randomly assigned in a 2x2 factorial design. The 2 (Image frame: Losses and Gains) x 2 (Text frame: ‘Losses’ and ‘Gains’) factorial design allowed for the pairing of congruent and incongruent image and text pairs within political campaign posters that were devised by the researcher to fit the conditions of the design. The manipulations of frames were present in both text and image: each image and text represented an either ‘Gains’ or ‘Losses’ frame. The topic of the campaign posters reflected a current issue that is under heavy debate by RWP movement: immigration. This resulted in four conditions: two

congruent conditions with both image and text frame reflecting either Gains or Losses, and two incongruent conditions with the image and text frame reflecting different frames.

b. Stimuli

Each condition included three different posters to control for specific single image (or text) effects: presenting three posters reflecting the same frame ensured that the responses were based on the frame, rather than elements of a single poster or slogan. In order to test my hypotheses about campaign posters, these posters were created using existing images and slogans about immigration from European campaigns of the past five years¹. The posters that were repurposed for this study were used in the (at the time of the study) most recent RWP campaigns in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Great Britain. Images were taken from the Brexit campaign, for example, and paired with texts used in German anti-immigration posters. All posters related to anti-immigration messages, as these are frequently issues owned by RWP parties and utilized in their communication strategies (Breibur et al., 2015). Comparable images for the counter-condition were selected to reflect the messages of the texts. This was done to ensure that the basis for the messages came from credible, real-life parties, and was politically relevant in contemporary debates around campaigning and political communication.

Once the final images and texts were chosen and manipulated to represent the ‘Gains vs. Losses’ dichotomy, six pairs of texts and images were presented to a panel of peers, as this was a convenient sample for the pilot study. They were asked to rate the images (visuals only, with a blank placeholder where the text would later be added) on a scale from -5 (Losses) to 5 (Gains), with a neutral point in the middle. The same scale

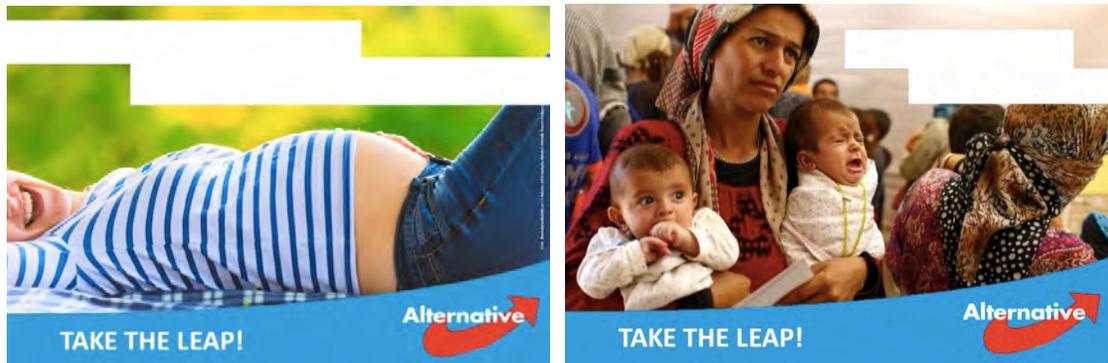
¹ The inspiration for the images was mainly taken from the German right-wing party “Alternative für Deutschland”, the Brexit campaign, and the Swiss party “Schweizerische

was used to measure the frame of the text. In order to gain an initial insight into what range of emotions these images might evoke, one question asked respondents to indicate their reaction to the image on a scale from “Extremely Displeased” (1) to “Extremely pleased” (7). This pilot test allowed me to isolate the stimuli that were shown to most strongly convey the desired frames. The selected images in the ‘Gains’ frame evoked positive emotions ($M_{Poster1} = 4.6$, $SD_{Poster1} = 1.4$; $M_{Poster2} = 5.05$, $SD_{Poster2} = .97$; $M_{Poster3} = 4.8$, $SD_{Poster3} = .97$)² and Gains framing ($M_{Poster1} = 2.6$, $SD_{Poster1} = 1.57$; $M_{Poster2} = 3.0$, $SD_{Poster2} = 1.3$; $M_{Poster3} = 2.95$, $SD_{Poster3} = 1.4$). The images selected for the ‘Losses’ conditions conveyed the anticipated opposite effects, proving to be less pleasing ($M_{Poster1} = 2.58$, $SD_{Poster1} = 1.1$; $M_{Poster2} = 2.8$, $SD_{Poster2} = .89$; $M_{Poster3} = 2.3$, $SD_{Poster3} = .88$)³ and reflecting the desired framing of Losses ($M_{Poster1} = -1.7$, $SD_{Poster1} = 2.4$; $M_{Poster2} = -1.31$, $SD_{Poster2} = 1.6$; $M_{Poster3} = -2.89$, $SD_{Poster3} = 1.69$). The three selected pairs were also tested for perceived credibility as campaign posters (1= “not credible at all”; 7 = “extremely credible”). The ‘Gains’ framed posters were evaluated as fairly credible ($M_{Poster1} = 1.89$, $SD_{Poster1} = 1.41$; $M_{Poster2} = 4.47$, $SD_{Poster2} = 1.02$; $M_{Poster3} = 5.58$, $SD_{Poster3} = 1.07$). Although the first poster was rated the least credible, this was the only image taken from an actual campaign and was therefore kept as a stimulus. The ‘Losses’ framed images presented comparable values across images ($M_{Poster1} = 2.89$, $SD_{Poster1} = 1.79$; $M_{Poster2} = 4.37$, $SD_{Poster2} = 1.21$; $M_{Poster3} = 4.26$, $SD_{Poster3} = 1.62$). The framing of the posters, to illustrate with an example, took the following form: keeping with the issue of immigration, one poster highlighted the future generations of Americas. The ‘Gains’ frame, as described in

² The values reflect the posters in the following order: Bikinis, Pregnant Woman, Workers.

³ The values reflect the posters in the following order: Burkas, Immigrant Mother, Immigrant Line.

the introductory chapter, shows a pregnant, white woman in the park. The ‘Losses’ counterpart for this image is an immigrant mother holding her two infant children, looking desperate as one of the infants cries. The image itself does not show much more, but it is apparent that they are in a crowded place, surrounded by other immigrants, possibly in a refugee center of some sort.



As shown in the posters above, the images also had white bars as placeholders for the texts. The texts also reflected the intended frames of Gains ($M_{Text1} = -.63$, $SD = 2.89$; $M_{Text2} = 1.32$, $SD_{Text2} = 2.62$; $M_{Text3} = 2.10$, $SD_{Text3} = 2.23$). The first text was adjusted to reflect a more positive, ‘Gains’ message, with the rest of the texts falling above the mid-point. The ‘Losses’ text-frames were rated well below the mid-point ($M_{Text1} = -2.57$, $SD = 2.57$; $M_{Text2} = 2.47$, $SD_{Text2} = 2.14$; $M_{Text3} = 2.89$, $SD_{Text3} = 1.97$), confirming the intended frame of the texts. Using the example above, the text on the posters read:



In this example, I have paired the image and text frame to illustrate congruent pairs: both image and text in the individual posters above reflect the same frame (‘Gains’ in the first poster, ‘Losses’ in the latter). For incongruent pairs, the text was swapped, leaving the image and the text of one poster to reflect different frames. This looks as follows:



In this way, the pre-test served as a manipulation check, ensuring that the frame that participants in the final survey received was perceived as the researcher intended. The final stimuli that were presented to the participants consisted of three image-text pairs, each of those pairs reflecting the same frame-pairings, but illustrating those in three different posters/contexts. A congruent positive condition, for example, where both image and text reflect a ‘Gains’ frame, would have presented the participant with the following three stimuli:



c. Participants

Participants were recruited in the U.S. across multiple states. This was done to avoid as far as possible any familiarity with the original European campaign posters that

were used as the basis for the stimuli. The participants were recruited through academic and personal contacts of the researcher. The Communication, Immunology, and Political Science departments of the University of Saint Louis were contacted and agreed to forward the survey to several employees and students. To gain a broader range of participants, the researcher also encouraged her personal contacts to forward the survey to family, friends, and co-workers living outside of the state of Missouri. In total, 325 participants were recruited. The participants made up a diverse sample across many features. The final sample included American adults between the ages of 18-79 ($M=42.08$) residing in 37 states (with 57% residing in Missouri and 8.3% in Illinois).

Participants came from a range of economic and political backgrounds: on a scale from 1 (Less than \$10,000) to 12 (More than \$150,000), the mean value for income was 6.44 ($SD= 3.68$). Participants also represented various educational levels, with 12.5% indicating that they completed “some college”, 29.9% holding four-year degrees, and 25.9% with a professional degree. On the political placement scale (1=Liberal, 6=Neutral, 11=Conservative), there was a bias towards the Liberal side ($M= 3.4$, $SD= 2.0$), with a total of 83% of respondents placing themselves between the Liberal and Neutral mark. This left-wing bias was confirmed when only 10.7% of the participants declared themselves to be Republican, with 31.7% saying they considered themselves as Independents and the remaining 46.6% as self-declared Democrats. This is likely the result of the sample being based on the researcher’s personal network and their willingness to reach out to their friends and family. The sample also seemed to be politically aware and interested: on a scale of 1 (not at all interested) to 7 (a great deal interested) 72.8% of participants placed themselves on or above the middle value ($M=$

4.98, $SD= 1.69$).

d. Procedure

The survey was distributed online. Participants were first asked standard, demographic questions. Participants then answered questions about their political interest and about their own political alignment and loyalties. The survey then proceeded to questions about immigration, as this was the topic used in the posters. Through a series of questions, participants were asked to indicate their opinions on the effect of immigration on a country as a whole, as well as on them, personally. The experimental block was presented last, after an attention check to make sure that participants would be focused on the stimuli. Only a small number of participants did not pass the attention check ($n= 23$). These participants were controlled for in the final analysis.

The participants were then informed of a new political party that is making some noise in rural America (Wisconsin). They were told that this party is lobbying to be heard by big city politicians and has created some promotional posters to illustrate their main points on one of the current hot topics in politics: immigration. Each participant was then randomly exposed to one of the experimental conditions, which were on screen for a minimum of 20 seconds. Participants were asked to take a close look at the posters, all three of which were presented at once. They were then able to move on to questions assessing how they felt about the party and their stance on the issue. Finally, participants were also given the opportunity to send an electronic letter of support for the party to their state representative. This was a bogus prompt and the participants were informed of the fictional nature of the party, the posters and the electronic letter of support in a debrief at the end of the survey.

e. Measures

In order to test main ‘Gains’ and ‘Losses’ effects for texts and images, a dummy variable, *texts*, was created for text frames (1= ‘Gains’; 0= ‘Losses’), and a dummy variable *visuals* was created to reflect the frame of the image (1= ‘Gains’; 0= ‘Losses’).

Opinions about the importance of the issue of immigration were also measured on a 7-point scale (1= “not at all important”, 7= “extremely important”) ($M= 5.45$, $SD= 1.48$). Participants’ perception of the effect of immigrants on a country’s economy, culture, crime rate and quality of life was measured on a 11-point scale (0= *makes it worse*, 10= *makes it better*) ($M= 7.62$, $SD= 2.05$). Because these questions about the effect of immigrants are hard to assess and most people do not think in scales, the default position of the sliders was placed at the 5-point mark, as to encourage participants to either move it up or down. This way, the results reflected, at the very least, whether participants felt they needed to move it below or above the indicated average.

After the stimuli were presented, participants were asked to indicate to what extent they felt four discrete emotions on a 7-point scale (1= “not at all”, 7= “a great deal”): hope ($M= 1.96$, $SD= 1.44$), compassion ($M= 2.48$, $SD= 1.85$) anger ($M= 4.59$, $SD= 2.19$) and fear ($M= 3.65$, $SD= 2.22$). These emotions are tested as they are shown to have strong mediating effect of political attitudes and participation (Lecheler et al., 2013), especially within anti-immigrant frames posed by RWP communication and rhetoric (Lecheler et al., 2015). Participants were also asked where they would place the party on a Liberal (0) to Conservative (11) spectrum ($M= 8.94$, $SD= 2.74$).

Attitudes about the party were assessed on a 7-point scale, measuring the perceived empathy, integrity and the leadership effectiveness of the party (Funk, 1999).

To measure these attitudes about the party, multiple items were combined into one factor. First, items measuring compassion, the perceived care for the American people and how much the party seems to be in touch with the citizens were run through a factor analysis. They all loaded on one factor (Eigenvalue = 2.2; Cronbach's α = .82; M =5.5; SD =1.4). After the original scale of the items (1= "a great deal"; 7= "not at all") was recoded to reflect the direction of the other scales of the survey (1= "not at all"; 7= "a great deal"), a new variable was computed using the mean scores of the three items and labeled *empathy*. Three items addressing the extent to which the party seemed moral, credible and honest were also tested with a factor analysis, with all three of those loading on one factor as well (Eigenvalue = 2.5; Cronbach's α = .88; M =5.79; SD =1.5). Again, a new variable, *integrity*, was computed using the mean scores of the items. These items were also recoded to reflect the new scale (1= "not at all"; 7= "a great deal"). This process was done a third time, running a factor analysis on three items that measured to what extent the party seemed to command respect, provide strong leadership and get things done. These three items loaded on one factor (Eigenvalue = 2.4; Cronbach's α = .88; M =5.68; SD =1.43), for which a new variable, *leadership effectiveness*, was computed using the mean scores and recoded variable scale (1= "not at all"; 7= "a great deal"). The newly computed variables (*empathy*, *integrity* and *leadership effectiveness*) reflected the scale of 1 ("not at all") to 7 ("a great deal"). The three second order factors, in turn also loaded on a common factor (Eigenvalue = 2.44, Cronbach's α = .89; M =5.61; SD =1.31), for which a new variable, *attitude towards the party*, was computed. This variable (*attitude towards the party*) was used as a main DV for the analyses.

The last element of the experiment aimed to measure support for the party.

Participants were asked how likely it was that they would vote for this party (0= “not at all”, 11= “very probable”), should they achieve national prominence ($M= 1.29$, $SD= 2.48$).

In order to answer the hypotheses, I will run ANOVAs with the experimental condition as the IV, and the variable for *voting intention* and the newly created variable *attitude towards the party* as the DV. I will also run a regression analysis with the dummy variables *text* and *visuals* as the IV and the same DVs to test for main framing effects of images and texts. A PROCESS mediation analysis with the dummy variables *text* and *visuals*, using the mediators of hope, compassion, fear and anger will be used to test for mediating effect of these discrete emotions on the effects of ‘Gains’ and ‘Losses’ frames of images and texts.

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that ‘Losses’ text-framing in RWP campaign posters would have a stronger positive effect on the participants’ behavior than ‘Gains’ framing, while the second hypothesis predicted the opposite for attitudes, namely, that ‘Gains’ text-frames would have a stronger effect than a ‘Losses’ frame in the formation of attitudes towards the party. To test H1 and H2, a regression with text frames as the IV and voting behavior and attitudes as the DVs was run to assess the main effects of textual and visual frames.

Text frames proved to be significant predictors of both attitudes and voting behavior: ‘Gains’ frames, as compared to ‘Losses’ frames in texts, turned out to be highly indicative for attitudes towards the party ($b= .27$; $SE= .16$, $p= .00$), as well as for voting

behavior ($b = .16$, $SE = .31$, $p = .01$).

The results of the regression analysis and ANOVA provide a clear conclusion for H1, which predicted that a ‘Losses’ text-frame in RWP campaign posters would have a stronger positive effect on the participants’ behavior than a ‘Gains’ frame. Contrary to the expectation, there is no support for this hypothesis, as ‘Losses’ framing in RWP campaign posters did not have a stronger positive effect on the participants’ behavior than Gains framing. Participants viewing the posters with both image and text representing a Gains frame were shown to be those most likely to vote for the party.

The second hypothesis predicted different outcomes for attitudes: ‘Gains’ framing of texts, according to H2, has a more positive effect on attitudes about the political party than a ‘Losses’ text-frame. Participants, in fact, showed similar results in attitudes towards the party, as they did with voting behavior. The regression analysis, with the text-frame variable as the IV and the newly computed variable reflecting attitudes towards the party as the DV, shows that ‘Gains’ framing does have significant predictive value for the attitudes towards the party ($b = .69$, $SE = 1.26$, $p = .00$).

In the regression analysis and ANOVA output, the strongest positive attitudes were evident for the congruent Gains conditions of the posters ($F = 6.44$; $p = .00$; $M = 1.8$; $SD = 1.31$). Between the incongruent conditions, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups, with participants showing more positive attitudes after viewing the poster containing a Gains text-frame and a Loss image-frame ($p = .01$; $MD = .73$; $SE = .22$) than the other way around. The biggest difference in attitudes was observed between the congruent Gains-frame poster and the incongruent combination of a Gains image-frame and a Loss text-frame ($p = .00$; $MD = .86$; $SE = .22$) (see Table I).

a. Framing ‘Gains’ and ‘Losses’

The third hypothesis addressed the different text and image frames, anticipating the dominance of one over another. H3a predicted that Image-frames would have a stronger predictive effect of voting behavior than text frames. A regression analysis with text and image frames as the IVs and voting intention as the DV showed, however, that text-frames were a stronger indicator of voting behavior ($b = .16$; $SE = 2.46$; $p = .01$) than images ($b = -.017$; $SE = 2.46$; $p = .79$). Image-frames, in fact, were not a significant predictor of voting behavior at all. This effect was supported by the ANOVA results, using the experimental conditions (Stimuli) as the independent variables for the same dependent variables used in the regression (see Table I).

Table I: Means for attitudes towards the party and voting intention per experimental condition

	<u>Congruent</u>		<u>Incongruent</u>	
	Gains	Losses	Image Losses Text Gains	Image Gains Text Losses
Attitudes	1.8a (1.29)	1.15bc (1.16)	.95cd (1.05)	1.67ab (1.52)
Voting Intention	1.89a (2.67)	1.18ab (2.76)	.62b (1.6853)	1.46ab (2.68)
	N=66	N=65	N=58	N=66

Note: Different subscripts denote significant mean differences by row if they do not share the same letter.

The results show that participants indicated the strongest intention to vote for the party, if they were successful in reaching national elections, after being presented with the congruent Gains-frame poster ($M = 1.9$; $df = 3$; $F = 3.1$; $p = .03$; $SD = 2.67$), where both image and text reflect a ‘Gains’ frame as compared to incongruent image-text frames and congruent ‘Losses’ frames. In a post-hoc test of interaction, a statistically significant

difference could be observed between the congruent ‘Gains’ ($M= 1.89$, $SD= 2.67$) and the incongruent image-text combination ($M= 1.47$, $SD= 2.68$), featuring a ‘Gains’ image-frame and ‘Losses’ text-frame ($p = .02$; $MD =1.3$; $SE =.43$). There was no significant difference between any other combination (see Table I).

H3b predicted a text-superiority effect, meaning that in incongruent image-text pairs, the frame of the text will show a stronger effect on attitudes towards the party. Testing participants’ attitudes across the four conditions, the results confirm H3a. For the incongruent image-text pairs, a text-superiority effect was found, resulting in the frame of the text guiding the attitudes of the participants. This means that the combination with Loss text-frames yielded the lowest scores for attitudes ($MD =-.78$; $SE =.21$) (see Table I). This supports H3b, showing that in incongruent image-text pairs, the frame of the text will show a stronger effect on attitudes towards the party. When testing for the effect of the image and text frames used in the posters on voting behavior, hypothesis 3c could not be supported: H3c expected that in incongruent image-text pairs of RWP campaign posters, the frame of the image would show a stronger effect on behavioral intention than the text (see Table I). Although there was an observable difference between the incongruent pairs ($MD = .54$, $SE =.33$) for voting behavior, this difference was not statistically significant ($p =.34$). There was also no statistically significant difference between the congruent ‘Losses’ image-text pair and the other three conditions, leading to the conclusion that it cannot be established that ‘Losses’ framing in congruent image-text pairs will have a stronger effect on the participants’ behavioral intentions than other conditions.

Participants showed similar results in attitudes towards the party as they did with

voting behavior. The strongest positive attitudes were evident for the congruent Gains conditions of the posters ($F = 6.44$; $p = .00$; $M = 1.8$; $SD = 1.31$). Between the incongruent conditions, there was a statistically significant difference between the groups, with participants showing more positive attitudes after viewing the poster containing a Gains text-frame and a Loss image-frame ($p = .01$; $MD = .73$; $SE = .22$) than the other way around. The biggest difference in attitudes was observed between the congruent Gains-frame poster and the incongruent combination of a Gains image-frame and a Loss text-frame ($p = .00$; $MD = .86$; $SE = .22$). No statistically significant difference was found between the congruent Loss-frame and either of the incongruent pairs.

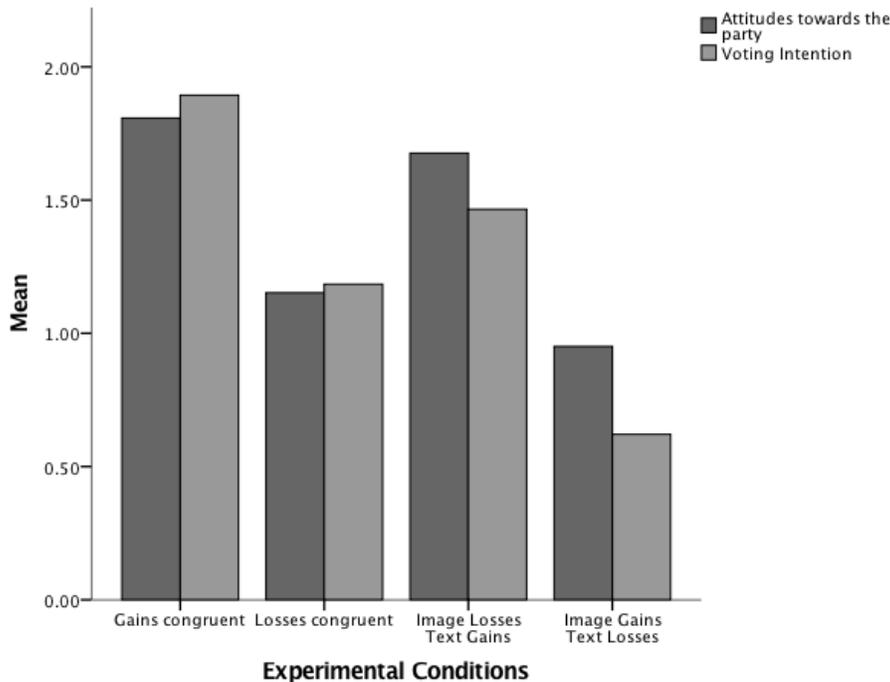


Figure 2: Means for attitudes towards the party and voting intention per experimental condition

This is contrary to hypothesis H4a, which predicted that a ‘Losses’ frame in congruent image-text pairs would result in more negative attitudes than in incongruent pairs. The

results do, however, support H4b, which indicated that ‘Gains’ framing in congruent image-text pairs would result in more positive attitudes than in incongruent pairs. However, when controlling for those participants who did not pass the attention check, there is also a statistically significant difference between the congruent ‘Losses’ frame pair and the congruent ‘Gains’ frame pair ($p = .00$; $MD = -.78$; $SE = .21$).

b. Emotions as mediators

In order to test whether emotions play a mediating role in visual and textual framing effects, a PROCESS mediation analysis was run using four emotions, measured immediately after the stimuli were presented. The measured emotions were: hope, compassion, fear and anger. Dummy variables for text-frame and image-frame were created (0=Loss, 1=Gains), and the results reflected the text-superiority ANOVA outcomes and, indeed, confirmed some mediation effects of emotions.

i. Text frames: voting intentions

Results indicated that the Gains frame of the text was a significant predictor of the participants’ levels of hope ($b = .48$; $SE = .18$; $p = .01$;) (see Table III) and that hope was a significant predictor of voting intention ($b = .87$; $SE = .09$; $p = .00$). These results support the mediation hypothesis. The text-frame was no longer a significant predictor of voting intention after the addition of the mediator ($b = .37$; $SE = .27$; $p = .17$), consistent with full mediation. The bootstrap results indicate that the indirect effect is positive and significant since the confidence interval does not contain 0 ($b = .42$; $SE = .18$; $CI = .10$; $.79$), making the mediation significant. In other words, we can conclude that there the text-frame has an indirect effect on voting, mediated fully through the emotion of hope.

When anger was tested for mediating effects, comparable results were found: the

frame of the text was found to be a significant predictor of anger ($b = -.63$; $SE = .27$; $p = .02$), indicating that a Loss frame raises levels of anger. Anger was shown to be a highly significant predictor of voting intentions ($b = -.42$; $SE = .06$; $p = .00$), suggesting that anger decreases the likelihood to vote. When controlling for the mediator of anger, the direct relationship between the textual frame and voting intention was no longer significant ($b = .52$; $SE = .28$; $p = .7$) and there was a positive, significant indirect effect ($b = .26$; $SE = .13$; $CI = .04, .55$). It can therefore be concluded that the effect of text frames on voting behavior is fully mediated by the levels of anger.

Table III: Indirect effects of visual and textual frames on attitudes towards the party and voting intention as mediated by emotions

		BC 1000 BOOT				c (total)	c' (direct)	Indirect effect	R ²
		b	SE	LL95	UL95				
Text Frame	<i>Voting Intention</i>								
	Hope	.42	.18	.1004	.7973	.79	.37	.42	.03
	Anger	.26	.13	.0395	.5544	.79	.53	.26	.03
	<i>Attitudes</i>								
	Hope	.24	.10	.0603	.4646	.70	.45	.25	.07
	Anger	.14	.07	.0197	.3022	.70	.55	.15	.07
Visual Frame	<i>Voting Intention</i>								
	Compassion	-.24	.11	-.4925	-.0406	-.6	.18	-.24	.00
	<i>Attitudes</i>								
	Compassion	-.12	.06	-.2419	-.0166	-.02	.10	-.12	.00

These results suggest that, since the beta coefficient of the text frame is positive, the Gains frame of the text increases hope, which increases the likelihood of voting. With the beta coefficient negative for the text frame in the model predicting anger, the Loss frame of the text increases anger, decreasing the likelihood of voting. When tested in the same

model, hope seems to have a stronger mediating effect ($b = .36$) than anger ($b = .18$), indicating that the strongest mediating effect of emotions on voting behavior is through hope. Since both coefficients are positive, this also means that ‘Gains’ framing has a stronger effect on voting intentions, as the framing evoked mainly positive emotions.

ii. Text frames: attitudes towards the party

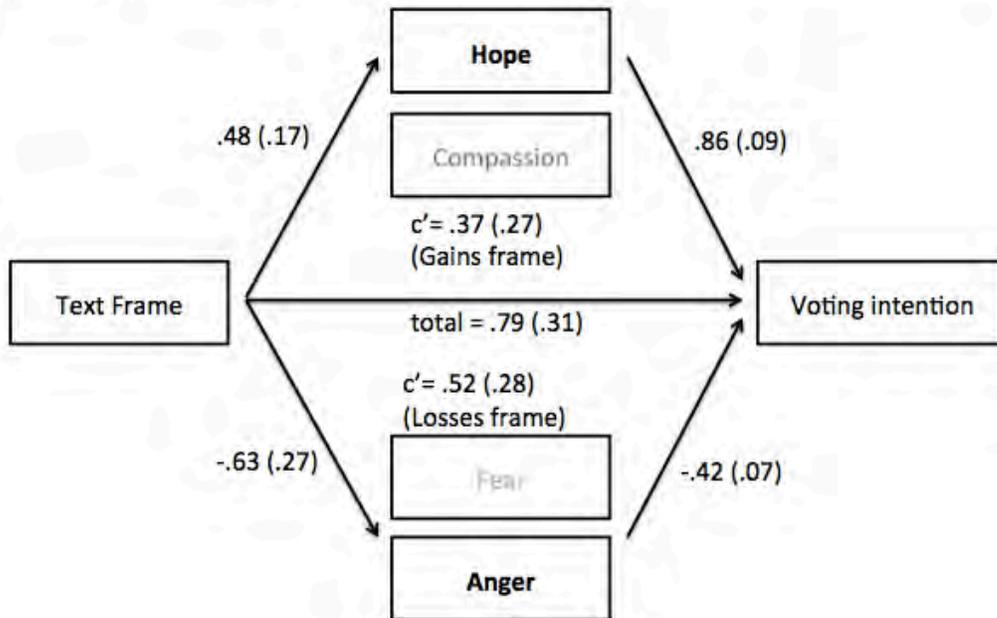
Similar results can be observed for the relationship of text-frames and attitudes towards the party. With text frames as a significant predictor of levels of hope (see above), hope was also shown to be a significant predictor of attitudes ($b = .52$; $SE = .05$; $p = .00$). The mediation with regards to attitudes was weaker, because the direct effect on the text-frame on participants’ attitudes towards the party remained significant ($b = .44$; $SE = .13$; $p = .00$). The results for the indirect effects still indicated a positive, significant ($b = .24$; $SE = .1$; $CI = .06, .46$) effect, suggesting that, even though there is not a full mediation, the effects of the text-frame on attitudes towards the party are mediated somewhat by the emotion of hope.

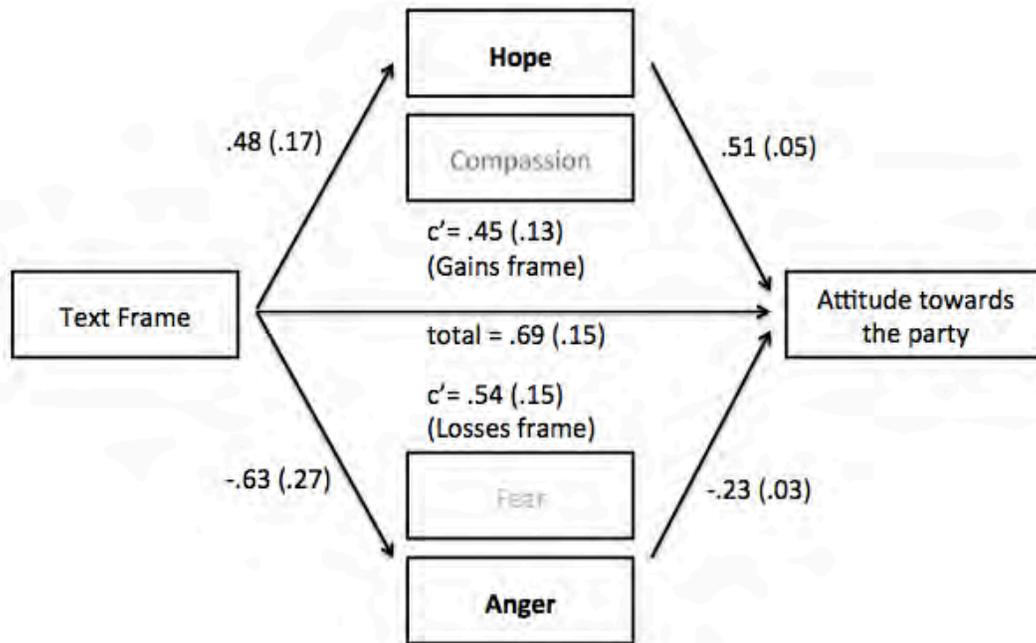
Testing for anger as a mediator of textual framing effects on attitude presented slightly different results. The regression showed that the frame of the text was a significant predictor for the levels of anger, and that anger, in turn, was a significant predictor for attitudes about the party ($b = -.23$; $SE = .03$; $p = .00$). Both beta coefficients are negative, suggesting that a Loss frame leads to higher levels of anger, and that anger leads to lower values for attitudes. Again, there was no full mediation effect, since the direct relationship between text-frames and attitudes remained significant ($b = .54$; $SE = .14$; $p = .00$), but there was a significant indirect effect ($b = .14$; $SE = .14$; $CI = .2, .3$).

The regression for the effect of text frames on attitudes, therefore, echoes some

results of the effects of these frames on voting behavior. Similarly to the effects on voting, the effect of the Gains frames on attitudes was mediated, albeit in a weaker form, by hope. This confirms H5a, which predicted that the impact of the ‘Gains’ text-frame on attitudes toward the party is mediated by positive emotions. Levels of anger were, similarly, affected by the ‘Losses’ frame of the text and resulted in lower voting intention, and, consequently, had a negative effect on the participants’ attitudes towards the party. This is in line with H5b, which predicted that the impact of the ‘Losses’ text-frame on attitudes towards the party is mediated by negative emotions.

Figure 3: Mediation models illustrating emotions mediating the relationships between Text-frames and voting intention and attitudes towards the party. All coefficients are standardized and were significant at the $p < .01$ level. Number in parenthesis indicates coefficient standard error. The c' path is the direct effect of the predictor on the dependent variable. The total effect includes the mediator.





iii. Image frame: voting behavior

With regard to voting behavior, no significant effects were found between image-frames and participants' intention to vote. Interestingly, with the addition of only one of the emotional mediators, a significant relationship through full mediation was established. Even though there was no significant direct effect of visuals on voting intentions ($b = .18$; $SE = .29$; $p = .54$), visual frames were shown to be a significant predictor of compassion ($b = -.54$; $SE = .23$; $p = .019$) and compassion proved to be a significant predictor of voting behavior ($b = .44$; $SE = .08$; $p = .00$). As a result, the indirect effect of visual frames on voting intentions was also significant ($b = -.24$; $SE = .11$; $CI = -.49, -.04$). As the beta values for the effect of the image frame on compassion, as well as for the indirect effect, are negative, the 'Losses' frame of the images, consequently, positively affects voting intentions only through the channel of compassion. No other

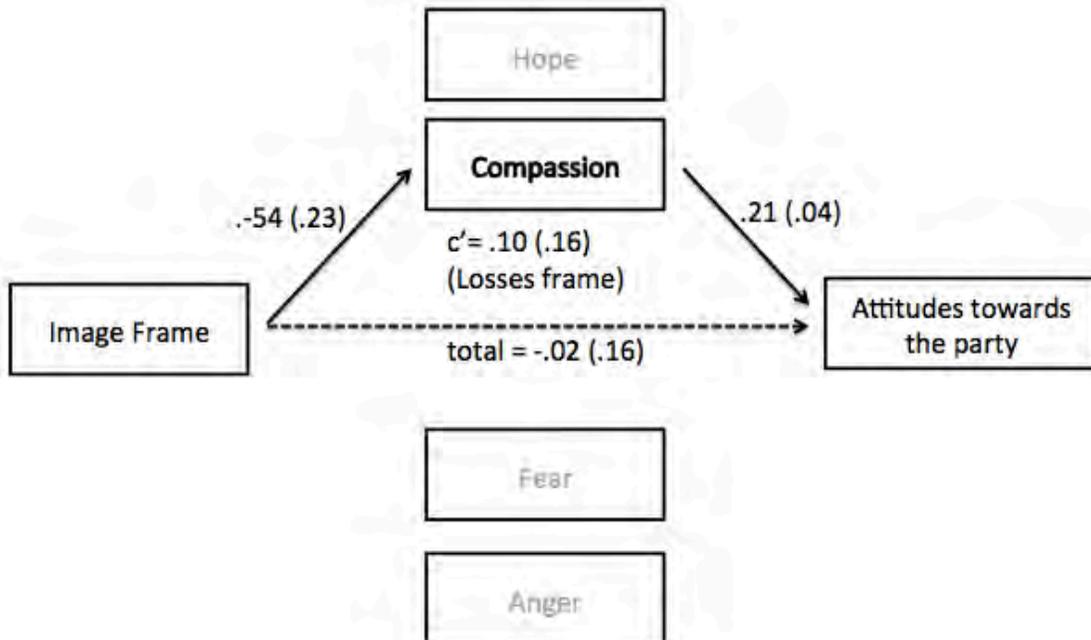
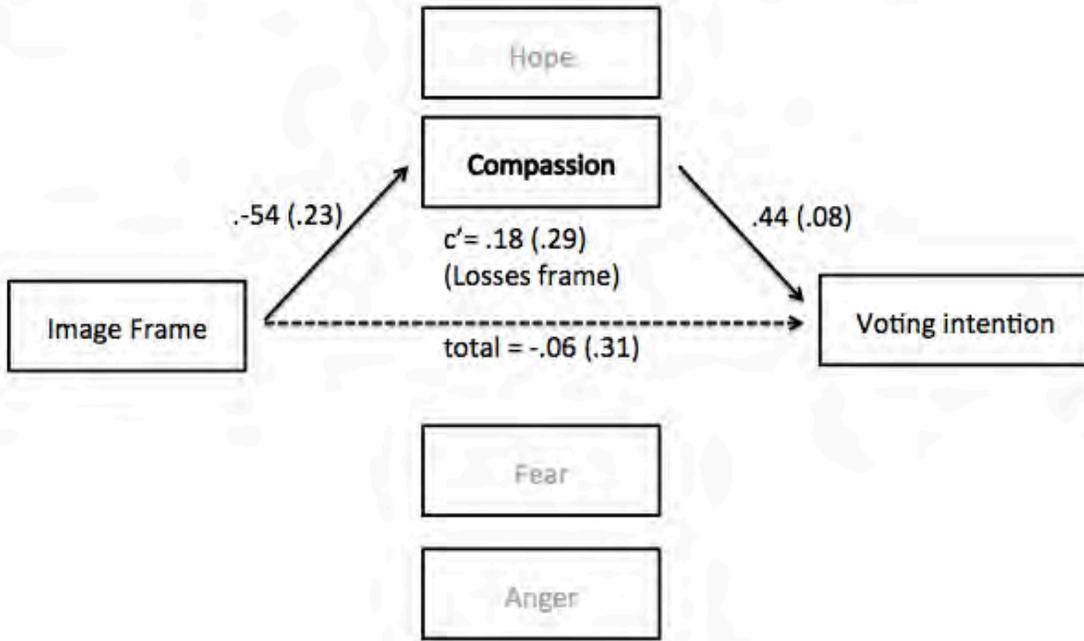
emotion was shown to create a significant relationship between visual frames and voting behavior. These results are contrary to H5c, which predicted that a visual ‘Gains’ frame on voting intention would be mediated by positive emotions.

iv. Image frame: attitudes towards the party

When examining the effects of visual frames on attitudes, a similar result can be observed. There is no significant direct effect of visual frames on participants’ attitudes towards the party. However, with a significant relationship between visual frames and compassion (as shown above), compassion also has a significant effect on attitudes ($b = .21$; $SE = .04$; $p = .00$). As with voting behavior, the indirect effect of image frames on attitudes is also significant ($b = -.12$; $SE = .05$; $CI = -.24, -.12$). Image frames, therefore, only affected participants’ attitudes towards the party through the emotional component of compassion. Results for all other mediation analyses indicated that visual frames were only a significant predictor for compassion, no other emotion, eliminating the possibility of any other mediation effects.

The results of the mediation analyses support the prediction that the impact of the ‘Losses’ frames on attitudes towards a party is mediated by emotions. Interestingly, the results show that this is not only true for textual framing effects and the emotion of anger, but also for visual framing and the emotion of compassion, since the results show a weak mediation between the variables: ‘Losses’ image-frames lead to higher levels of compassion, which, in turn, also increases voting intention.

Figure 4: Mediation model illustrating emotions mediating the relationships between Image-frames and voting intention/ attitudes towards the party. All coefficients are standardized and were significant at the $p < .01$ level. Number in parenthesis indicates coefficient standard error. The c' path is the direct effect of the predictor on the dependent variable. The total effect includes the mediator.



Conclusion and Discussion

There is a large body of literature on framing and its effects on people's opinions, emotions, attitudes and even behavioral intentions (Entman, 2004; Geise & Baden, 2015; Messaris & Abraham, 2001; Powell et al., 2015; Lecheler et al., 2015; Loewenstein et al., 2001), as well as on contemporary right-wing populist political communications and campaigns (Arendt et al., 2015; Bertz, 2007; Berbuir et al., 2015; Bos et al., 2013; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015, 2017). In this study, which examines an area heretofore overlooked in the body of populist and framing literature, these two concepts are intertwined. The impact of 'Gains' and 'Losses' framing of texts and images in RWP political campaigns on people's attitudes towards the party and their behavioral intention is studied. In addition, I integrated emotions into a framing experiment, testing how influential emotions are in this process.

The results show that textual frames do, in fact, have a significant effect on the attitudes people form about a party. Text-frames turned out to be a significant predictor of attitudes about the party, as well as of voting behavior. These effects were only positive (i.e. increased the levels of positive attitudes and voting intention) when participants were presented with a 'Gains' text-frame. This is somewhat contrary to the RWP literature, in that it does not reflect the notion of people feeling the need to act in a sense of crisis and hence mobilizing to vote (Taggart, 2000). With the 'Losses' frames reflecting the RWP rhetoric of immigrants representing the imminent danger of 'them' (Moffit, 2015), I would have expected these posters to create a sense of urgency to act. This, however, was not the case.

The analyses also show that those 'Gains' frames are most effective when

presented in visual and textual form together, i.e. in congruent image and text -frame posters, while the most negative attitudes and lowest values for the intention to vote could be observed in the negative congruent poster. While these results are contrary to the RWP literature, they do confirm some theories on visual and textual framing, illustrating that images enhance text-frames (Nelson, Reed & Walling, 1976; Schmuck & Matthes, 2015; Vliegenthart, 2011).

Adding the mediating role of emotion provided an interesting level of nuance to these results. Positive as well as negative emotions played an important role in mediating the effect between (mainly text-) frames and both attitudes towards the party and voting behavior, confirming research about the mediating role of emotions in framing effects within news media (Lecheler et al., 2013, Lecheler et al., 2015). The effects of text-frames were fully mediated by anger and hope. A ‘Gains’ text-frame was shown to evoke hope, fully mediating the effect on the likelihood to vote. Anger, in turn, fully mediated the effect of a ‘Losses’ frame on voting intention, decreasing the likelihood to vote. For RWP communication and campaigning, this means that ‘Gains’ text-frames have the highest predictive value for the likelihood of people to vote, while ‘Losses’ frames seem to discourage voting behavior. While it is already established that this goes against the mobilization theories of ‘Losses’ frames, these full mediations also show the power that emotions have over the formation of people’s attitudes and opinions (Holm, 2012).

This is especially evident in the results of the image-frames. An effect of visual frames on either attitudes towards the party or voting intention was present only if facilitated by a ‘Losses’ image-frame evoking the emotion of compassion. This is interesting, not only because it defies previous findings of visual framing effects on

voting behavior and attitudes (Powell et al., 2015), but also because a new emotion proves significant within the image-only condition, only: compassion. It was only through compassion that higher levels of positive attitudes towards the party, as well as a higher likelihood to vote were observable. This does echo previous research about victimization frames and the compassion these frames evoke (Lecheler et al., 2015). A reason for this result appearing in my study may have been the inclusion of an image of a struggling migrant mother, which is likely to provoke compassion in viewers of the posters.

The reason for the contradiction between this study and the extant literature that predicts image-frames (Powell et al., 2015) or ‘Losses’ frames (Lecheler, 2013; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006) influencing behavior may be that the different context within which RWP communications are often made, i.e. in a manufactured crisis communication that is evident in many contemporary RWP campaigns (Moffitt, 2015; Taggart, 2000). Given the ‘We must act now’ mentality of much populist communication, text may have the advantage of penetrating the consciousness more quickly, interpreting the message for the reader and demanding action more clearly than visuals. Visuals, though, act as an amplifier for these effects, making the message sound/look more radical, eliciting a stronger response in the viewer.

This study does have a number of limitations. Firstly, the sample, albeit large, was heavily skewed towards the liberal side. This is likely to be the result of the participants being recruited primarily through the researcher’s personal contacts and their willingness to share the survey amongst their family and friends. The left-leaning sample may account for the overall negative attitudes towards the party and voting intentions.

However, it is not to be dismissed that, despite this left wing bias, significant results were obtained.

Another limitation of the study lies in its generalizability to real-life campaigns. It goes without saying that persuasive campaign messages aren't experienced in isolation: the public neither experiences them as an isolated stimulus nor has to form opinions about them in isolation from others' opinions. We experience campaigns over time and as a society. Therefore, the external validity of the study is compromised, rendering it difficult to translate the findings to the real-life effects of political communication of RWP parties in general. The study does, however, exhibit high internal validity, showing a causal link between frames and attitudes/voting intention. Another limitation is that the study did not account for possible variations of issues in the stimuli. All three posters reflected the desired ('Gains' vs. 'Losses') frames in the context of immigration. While this is an issue largely owned by RWP parties, these effects – especially in the 'Losses' frame – may be affected by different threat appeals, with people reacting differently to economic and cultural threats (Schmuck & Matthes, 2017), for example. The study at hand also did not account for moderators that have been shown to influence the effects of RWP advertisements, such as the level of education or socio-economic status (Schmuck & Matthes, 2015). While these considerations were outside of the framework of this study, it would be important to address these concerns in future research.

Before concluding, some implications of the study need to be considered. The study highlights the role that images play in this mechanism, showing that, while their effects do not exceed those of their textual counterparts, they do enhance textual frames. The contribution of images, therefore, should not merely be the focus of media studies

but should be examined more closely in the research and practice of political communication. What these (full) mediations of effects by emotion teach us about RWP communication, is that it is not only aimed at relaying information to viewers in the most direct way, but that these campaigns aim to create a false sense of crisis (Taggart, 2000), enraging the public about a superficial threat and eliciting hope from a starting point of false desperation. This leads to decision-making and attitude formation that is highly emotional, causing people to vote, for example, out of anger. In a healthy electoral system, however, opinions about parties and decisions about complex issues should not be based (solely) on an emotional response. Nevertheless, this manner of communication has proved to be most effective for RWP political parties, so much so that some participants went as far as actually voting for the ‘fake’ party presented in the study, as shown by final element added to the survey to measure actual voting behavior. The element in question was a bogus prompt where respondents could send an anonymous letter of support to their local representative by selecting either “*Yes, please send a copy to my representative*” or “*No, I am not interested in this*”. This last question aimed to isolate those participants who were most convinced by the message of the party and were mobilized to action. Sixteen respondents chose to send a letter of support for the bogus RWP party to their local representatives. While this is a relatively low number for the sample, it still demands consideration when placed in the context of the liberal nature of the sample and their low overall low scores for the party. Although those 16 participants were fairly equally distributed across frames and conditions, the posters managed to convince them to vote even though ten of the 16 were self-declared Democrats and all of the 16 participants indicated a left self-placement on the political spectrum. What *did*

differentiate these 16 from the rest is that they reported significantly higher levels of emotions (across all four emotion options) than the rest of the sample. Although no other differences in mediation could be found, this is a powerful argument for the use of emotion in RWP political communication.

To conclude, this study provides a closer look at the supply and demand side of political communication (Moffitt, 2015), examining how campaigns – and specifically their visual and textual frames - are processed and how these cues contribute to attitude formation and voting intention. It sheds light on the role that these strategies played in the uses of political communication by, and the successes of, the rising RWP parties. The demonstrated effect of the image and text frames on participants' emotional responses and the resulting shift in attitudes and voting intentions is sufficient to consider the implementation of more political- and media-literacy programs. These can create an open dialogue about the mechanisms used in political communication to persuade voters, facilitating a more transparent, balanced and fair campaign (and election) process.

Appendix I: Stimuli

Condition 1: *Text* = gains frame, *Image* = gains frame



Condition 2: *Text* = gains frame, *Image* = loss frame



Condition 3: *Text* = loss frame, *Image* = gains frame



Condition 4: *Text* = loss frame, *Image* = loss frame



Appendix II: Survey Questions

Block1: Intro

Dear Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short survey on Political Communication. This survey should only take about 10 minutes to complete.

In this study, you will be shown a selection of campaign posters. You will then be asked a series of questions about those posters - and the political party behind them.

It is important to keep in mind that all answers will be kept in the strictest confidentiality. Your anonymity will be safeguarded and your personal information will not be passed on to third parties under any conditions.

For more information about the research, please feel free to contact the project leader Edina Strikovic (estrikovic@gmail.com) at any time.

Thank you in advance for your assistance with this research. We greatly appreciate it.

Block 2: Demographics

The following few questions are simply about your demographic information. Please fill these out as accurately as possible.

1. How old are you?
(blank space)

2. What gender do you identify with?
 - Male
 - Female
 - Other

3. What best describes your current status of employment?
 - Employed: full time
 - Employed: part-time
 - Unemployed: looking for work
 - Unemployed: not looking for work
 - Retired
 - Student
 - Disabled
 - Other

4. What income bracket fits closest to your individual annual income?
 - Less than \$10.000
 - \$10.000 - \$19.999
 - \$20.000 - \$29.999
 - ...
 - \$100.000 - \$149.999
 - More than \$150.000

5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
 - Less than High School
 - High School Graduate
 - Some College
 - 2 year degree
 - 4 year degree
 - Professional drgree
 - Doctorate

6. What best describes the area where you currently live?
 - Rural area
 - Small town
 - Suburb of a city
 - City
 - Other

7. What best describes the area where you grew up?
 - Rural area
 - Small town
 - Suburb of a city
 - City
 - Other

Block 3: Political Opinions

Next, we would like to know more about your interest in politics. There are no right or wrong answers. Most important is that you answer according to your own habits and opinions.

1. Generally speaking, how interested would you say you are in politics?
 - (1) Not at all
 - ...
 - (7) A great deal

2. In politics, people often identify as 'liberal' or 'conservative'. Please slide the indicator below to where your own political identification would fall.

- (0) Liberal
 - ...
 - (6) Neutral
 - ...
 - (11) Conservative
3. Would you consider yourself a...
- Democrat
 - Republican
 - Independent
4. Generally speaking, how much do you think we can trust the politicians in Washington to make the best choices for the American people?
- (1) Not at all
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat
 - ...
 - (7) A great deal
5. Generally speaking, how much do you think we can trust local politicians to make the best choices for the people?
- (1) Not at all
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat
 - ...
 - (7) A great deal
6. How much do you think politicians in the U.S. listen to what is important to the American people?
- (1) Not at all
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat
 - ...
 - (7) A great deal
7. How honest do you think current politicians in this country are?
- (1) Far below average
 - ...
 - (4) Average
 - ...
 - (7) Far above average

Block 4: Political Engagement

1. If you are registered to vote, in which state are you registered?
(Drop-down menu of states)

2. Since the time you were eligible to vote, how frequently did you vote in national elections?
 - Never
 - Sometimes
 - About half the time
 - Most of the time
 - Always
 - I am not eligible to vote

8. How important do you think it is to vote in Presidential elections (Q9: Local elections)?
 - (1) Not at all important
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat important
 - ...
 - (7) Extremely important

Block 5: Opinions on immigration

1. How important to you think is the issue of immigration for this country as a whole?
 - (1) Not important at all
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat important
 - ...
 - (7) Extremely important

2. How important to you think is the issue of immigration to you personally?
 - (1) Not important at all
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat important
 - ...
 - (7) Extremely important

3. Would you say it is generally bad or good for America that people come to live here from other countries? Tell us what you think, in terms of the country's economy, crime, culture and quality of life. Do immigrants make there better or worse? [Four sliders for each component: economy, crime, culture, quality of life]
 - (0) Worse
 - ...
 - (10) Better

Block 6: Attention Check

To help us understand how people make decisions, we are interested in whether they actually take the time to read the directions; if not, some results may not tell us very much about decision making in the real world.

To show that you have read the instructions, please ignore the question below about how you are feeling and instead check only the "none of the above" option as your answer. Thank you very much.

Please check all words that describe how you are currently feeling.

- Extremely happy
- Somewhat happy
- Neither happy nor unhappy
- Somewhat unhappy
- Extremely unhappy
- None of the above

Block 7: Stimuli

Recently, new political parties and movements have emerged all across the world. One of these movements is a small community party from rural Wisconsin, who feel that politics is ignoring the needs of the people they serve. This small party is fighting to have their voices heard by the “big city” politicians.

Their major standpoint is that they claim to provide a voice for the people, bringing on issues in a way the “real” Americans see them. One of these issues is immigration and is central in their lobbying materials. They are calling for citizens to "Take the Leap!" and support their party as an alternative to the limited political choices currently available.

For lobbying purposes, this party has released promotional posters to illustrate their take on current issues. With these posters, they are hoping to gain support from citizens nation-wide.

Block 7: Experiment

1. To what extent do you feel the following, after viewing these posters? [Four sliders: Hope, Compassion, Fear, Anger]
 - (1) A great deal
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat
 - ...
 - (7) Not at all

2. Where do you think this party should be placed on the liberal/conservative scale?
 - (0) Liberal
 - ...
 - (11) Conservative

3. To what extent do you think this party... [three sliders: “commands respect”, “provides strong leadership”, “gets things done”]
 - (1) A great deal
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat
 - ...
 - (7) Not at all

4. To what extent do you think this party is... [three sliders: “moral”, “honest”, “credible”]
 - (1) A great deal
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat
 - ...
 - (7) Not at all

5. To what extent do you think this party... [three sliders: “shows compassion”, “cares about the American people”, “is in touch with the American people”]
 - (1) A great deal
 - ...
 - (4) Somewhat
 - ...
 - (7) Not at all

6. If this party succeeds in getting the attention of the “big city politicians”, how probably is it that you would ever vote for them?
 - (0) Not probable at all
 - ...
 - (11) Very probable

7. In order to gain political momentum, the party is asking for support from citizens across the country so that they can present this at the higher levels of politics, they have drafted a statement of support that is available to the public. If interested, citizens can anonymously send this statement of support to their local representative.

The statement reads: "I support this party in getting recognition at the national level of government".

If you would like, you can anonymously send a draft yourself, by clicking below.

- Yes, please send a copy to my representative.
- No, I am not interested in this.

Block 8: Debrief

In order to properly test our hypothesis, we could not provide you with all of these details prior to your participation. This ensures that your reactions in this study were spontaneous and not influenced by prior knowledge about the purpose of the study.

We would like to inform you that the campaign posters you viewed were created by the researchers and are not tied to any party. In order to test "real life" responses, we presented them as real posters.

There is also no statement letter that will be sent to a representative, as the political party we used for this study is also not real.

All other information about the confidentiality of your data, of course, remains correct.

We thank you for helping us gain important insights into the effects of political campaign posters on citizens attitudes and voting behavior. Your time is greatly appreciated.

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