



REMINDER

ROLE OF EUROPEAN MOBILITY AND ITS IMPACTS
IN NARRATIVES, DEBATES AND EU REFORMS

Political Migration Discourses on Social Media Across Countries and Over Time

WORKING PAPER

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Executive Summary

This deliverable aims to complement existing understandings of public discourse about European migration. We investigate the Facebook status posts of 1,590 political actors in Spain, the UK, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Poland from 2015 to 2017, and provide insights on migration-related messages this essential source of political information. Applying innovative, automated procedures to a large scale corpus, this study focuses on the visibility and sentiment of the migration topic but also on interactions between users – a function specific to Social Network Sites (SNS).

As political discourses on SNS are largely neglected in recent literature on public migration discourses, this approach will enable us to sketch such discourses in a comparative European setting by revealing dynamics over the course of three years, including during a highly relevant external event, the so-called European refugee crisis. This deliverable thus shows how the visibility, sentiment and interactivity of migration-related messages changed from January 1 2015 to December 31 2017.

The main findings reveal that, similar to the migration discourse in traditional media, dynamics might coincide with external events such as migration movements or national elections. Countries with higher net-immigration during 2015 (Germany, Austria and Sweden) unveil distinctly higher visibility of the topic, although the UK – due to its involvement in the Brexit process – constitutes a special case. No consistent pattern regarding sentiment and ideology can be found. Regarding interactions with posts, we can see that migration is a driver of user engagement that increases the reach of political actors on the platform.



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Introduction

In the European context, migration processes have varying and complex historical backgrounds. In Germany, for example, the topic was for a long time closely connected to immigrating "Gastarbeiter" from Turkey (e.g., Ruhrmann et al. 2006). How migration is debated in the Netherlands is impacted by the comparatively early strengthening of the far-right and of the party leader Pim Fortuyn (see also Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007). However, more recent events led to migration becoming a dominant socio-political topic across all of Europe, with the topic being lifted from a national to a common European level. During the so-called European refugee crisis,¹ increased migration into the EU led to increasing public attention paid to migration processes, heated political debate with the growing success of right-wing parties in many countries, and strong divisions between European governments in EU politics. Migration became one of the most salient topics in Europe, ubiquitous on the agendas of media and in political discourses (Eberl et al. 2018). As the visibility of a topic and how it is depicted may impact perceptions and public opinion (e.g., Aalberg, Iyengar, and Messing 2012; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009; Vrânceanu and Lachat 2018), publicly available information and the variation of a topic over time is of particular interest for communication and political research (for an overview see Eberl et al. 2018).

Existing research considering media content or political communication in relation to migration frequently examines content from traditional media sources (e.g., print or TV), across short time spans (e.g., less than a year), or in single country contexts (e.g., Igartua, Barrios, and Ortega 2012). Conversely, studies considering unmediated party communication (i.e. communication coming from political actors directly), examining longer time periods, or comparing different country settings, are scarce (Eberl et al. 2018). The present study seeks to fill this gap by considering political discourses about migration – very generally – on social media accounts of political actors in different countries and across several years.

¹ Note that from now on, we refer to this as refugee crisis.



Media offer filtered, edited or commented-upon information about politics and political actors. Social Network Sites (SNS) by contrast provide a platform for political actors to spread opinion and information directly to people who actively choose to receive such information. Citizens increasingly use SNS (Newman et al. 2017), where the retrieving of information from political actors is fairly easy. With the Reuters Digital News Report (ibid.) revealing that up to 42 percent of the population in Europe follow at least one politician on social media, and other researchers recording increased use of SNS by politicians (Bruns et al. 2015), it is important to examine how a highly 'mediatized' topic (Bennett 2016) such as migration-related party discourses functions on SNS.

Understanding the activities and role of SNS party communications requires examination of how such communication varies over time and between countries. In particular, in times in which the realities of migration have fundamentally changed (i.e. the European refugee crisis), such a dynamic and cross-national approach helps to explain how different political actors react to such realities, and how political discourses change. Furthermore, studies examining media content or political communication over shorter time spans merely produce sectional information on discourses, as such discourses might not vary significantly during a few months or a single year. Studying variations across time, however, might offer meaningful insights on how discourses change (Vliegenthart and Roggeband 2007), especially during and in the aftermath of the refugee crisis, indicating how such an event may impact upon public opinion regarding migration. In addition, considering the supposedly supranational nature of discourses following the refugee crisis, analysis of related debates demands the use of comparative approaches. While some research already meets these needs and contrasts discourses in different countries (e.g., Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore 2016), studies often do not go beyond the comparison of two or three (sometimes very similar) countries (e.g., Caviedes 2015), and hence are less likely to grasp similarities and differences across common European migration discourses (although see e.g., Berry, Garcia-Blanco, and Moore 2016).

Considering the ongoing societal and political importance of the migration topic, the massive influence of SNS on public and political discourses, and the growing adoption of SNS communication by political actors, we investigate migration-related party communication



on SNS in a comparative perspective. Based on earlier work within the REMINDER project that gives a broad overview of migration discourses in European news media (see Eberl et al. 2018 and Eberl et al. 2019), the present paper is thus intended to complement the bigger picture of public European migration discourses and to add, with SNS party communication, a very different piece to the picture. Investigating Facebook status posts of political actors across Europe, we therefore ask the following general research question:

How did the refugee crisis impact European migration discourses on Facebook?

Reflecting the specifics of European migration discourses as set out above, this deliverable investigates the three years from 2015 to 2017, a period which includes a short pre-phase of the refugee crisis in 2015, the height of the crisis, and its aftermath. Applying automated content analyses, we examine $n = 1,590$ Facebook accounts of political actors in six European countries (Spain, UK, Germany, Sweden, Austria and Poland).



Public Migration Discourses

As research on migration discourses has shown, multiple factors shape media debates and have significant influence on audiences, and hence on public opinion. In the following subsections, we introduce *saliency* and *sentiment* as key concepts, and focus on variation across time to point out the importance of longitudinal studies. Moreover, we emphasize country-specific differences (as this research approaches the topic in a comparative manner) and variation at the party level, within the sub sections.

Most of the studies presented here provide insights into the effects and contents of traditional media or traditional channels of political communication. Acknowledging the interdependence of old and new media in hybrid media systems (Chadwick 2017), however, we would tentatively expect that SNS may be similarly effective. Furthermore, a study by Vliegenthart and Roggeband (2007) shows that the content of traditional media coverage and party communication may interact. Still, we propose to consider SNS as a distinct media environment worth studying in more detail (Kim, Chen, and De Zúñiga 2013) as users process information from different sources – like traditional media and political actors – at once.

Visibility

Based on *agenda-setting* theory, predicting the transfer of topics from the media agenda to the audience agenda (McCombs 2005), *visibility* here describes attention spent on the topic of migration. Usually operationalized as the volume (e.g., Akkerman 2011) or intensity (e.g., Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009) of migration-related communication, topic visibility has been shown to affect associated perceptions (Jacobs and Hooghe 2015), attitudes (van Klingeren et al. 2015), or even behavior (Koopmans 1996).

Visibility is known to be bound to external events (see subsection *Across time* below) and is therefore, on the country level, dependent on national or supranational events or developments (e.g., Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009). Moreover, right-wing parties are known to command issue ownership of the topic. Typically favouring restrictive migration policies (Walgrave and De Swert 2004), right-wing parties have a strong interest in high



visibility of the issue in public discourses. This is supported by findings from Stier and colleagues (2017) showing that, in the German context, the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) strongly emphasized migration-related topics in their Facebook communication.

Sentiment

In addition to the quantitative measure of visibility, sentiment allows for a more in-depth examination of the content of communication by considering the character of a message. Capturing how migration is talked about, the sentiment (i.e. tonality) evaluates the positivity, neutrality or negativity of a message that addresses the topic. Frequently assessed with automated approaches, scholars label entire messages, single paragraphs, sentences or words with a sentiment score (e.g., Lawlor 2015). Known to simplify complex circumstances, sentiment loaded communication may affect attitudes or even voting behaviour (e.g., Valentino, Buhr, and Beckmann 2001). Studies show that especially negative sentiment is prone to influence decisions (Soroka, Young, and Balmas 2015). With regard to the topic of migration, Schemer (2014) finds that an overall negative tone towards refugees or immigrants increases racial attitudes.

A multitude of studies reveal that public discourses clearly emphasize negative aspects of migration discourses more than positive ones (e.g., Jacobs 2017; Philo, Briant, and Donald 2013). In fact, it is among the most negative topics in political news coverage, as scholars show in a comparative study across 16 Western countries (Esser, Engesser, and Matthes 2017). This holds true for the depiction of migrants in traditional mass media (e.g., Strömbäck, Andersson, and Nedlund 2017), but also when it comes to communications by political actors (Klocker and Dunn 2003). Moreover, migration-related topics and actors are frequently described using a particularly negative language, for example referring to natural disasters (e.g., Charteris-Black 2005).

Actors associated with the political right in particular employ negative rhetoric when addressing migration. Schemer (2012), for example, finds that the populist right in Switzerland depicts migrants using metaphors. This is furthermore supported by a study



revealing that the Belgian party "Vlaams Blok" systematically employs communication that excludes, stigmatizes and blames immigrants (Jagers and Walgrave 2007).

Across time

Moreover, as shown in Deliverable 8.3 of the REMINDER project (Eberl et al. 2019), public migration discourses are shaped by national and supranational events and are sensitive to incidents during and after the refugee crisis. A variety of studies further underpins the importance of longitudinal analyses, revealing the dependence of migration discourses on real-world events and developments. Boomgaarden and Vliegthart (2009), for example, show that the terror attacks in late 2001 caused a distinct peak in immigration news. In another paper, both authors furthermore find that, while international events have a direct but rather temporary effect, national events tend to influence the migration discourse in news coverage more permanently (Vliegthart and Boomgaarden 2007). Elections may also be seen as an external event that may have an impact on migration discourses. Allen (2016) finds that migration-related news coverage increased after a Conservative-led coalition was elected in the UK in 2010. However, findings on whether public migration discourses are influenced by external events are not consistently coherent. In contrast to the studies mentioned, Jacobs and colleagues (2018) reveal that the relationship between migration news coverage and external inputs is rather limited. Journalists focus more on single events than on continuous trends. Considering the importance of the visibility and sentiment of the topic as well as the variation of discourses over time, we formulate the following sub research questions:

SRQ1: How does the visibility of migration-related status posts in European countries vary across parties and over time?

SRQ2: What are the differences concerning the visibility between the investigated countries and over time?

SRQ3: How does the sentiment of migration-related status posts in European countries vary across parties and over time?

SRQ4: *What are the differences concerning the sentiment between the investigated countries and over time?*

Party Communication on Social Network Sites

The undeniable impact of SNS around the world both during periods of political campaigning (Dimitrova and Matthes 2018) and in routine periods (Metz, Kruikemeier, and Lecheler 2019) makes platforms like Facebook important channels for political communication, and hence vital sources for research in political and communication science. As political actors use SNS to reach citizens in an easy and unmediated way to convey information and opinion, and these sites have taken a key role not only when it comes to political information, but also participation (Heiss, Schmuck & Matthes 2019). Existing research demonstrates the relevance of political communication and party communication in particular on SNS. Studies investigating political SNS discourses with a focus on content analyses, for example, find that debates may mirror public sentiment, and hence emphasize social media monitoring as a possible means of observing dynamics forming or shifting public opinion (Anstead and O'Loughlin 2014). During election campaigns, SNS discourses might even give indication on voter preferences and could presumably be used to predict poll outcomes (Tumasjan et al. 2010; Ceron, Curini, Iacus and Porro 2014).

Compared to more traditional forms of political communication (e.g., speeches or interviews), political actors use SNS for more interactive and personalized (Kruikemeier 2014) forms of communication. As they are comparatively cheap to use, lesser-known actors with smaller budgets are also able to embrace the possibility to present themselves (Nulty et al. 2016). The extent and content of this communication, however, might be affected by multiple factors such as upcoming elections (Bene 2017), political affiliation or extremism (Jungherr 2014; Engesser et al. 2017), or the actors' status within a political party or system (Nulty et al. 2016).



As political information is communicated to citizens, recipients' knowledge concerning a topic might increase (e.g., Valenzuela 2013). Political communication on SNS furthermore has an effect on the evaluation of candidate images (Dimitrova and Bystrom 2013) and increases political awareness (Vitak et al. 2011). In addition, research suggests that political SNS communication is able to eventually shape political decision making (Kushin & Yamamoto, 2010).

Moreover, SNS, with their interactive elements (see next subsection) hold the potential to increase political participation. Research has shown a positive effect of SNS use on political participation (Boulianne 2015). However, this effect might be limited to specific forms of participation (ibid.), as well as to certain premises such as the extent of SNS use (Knoll, Matthes, and Heiss 2018).

Interactivity of political SNS discourses

SNS commonly provide features to get audiences involved. While the basic principles of such interaction stay the same across different platforms, they do vary in terms of specific characteristics or wording. Therefore, we limit the explanatory paragraphs within this section to the features of the SNS Facebook, as content from this platform the subject of this working paper.

Studies show that political actors often use SNS like Facebook mainly for one-way communication to broadcast their political messages (Gerodimos & Justinussen 2015). Nonetheless, the reactions of the users do not remain absent. Thus, interactions can be seen as important factors in the realm of SNS communication, as research indicates that analysis of responses to political actors SNS communication may allow insights into a prevalent opinion climate (Porten-Che e, Ha ler, Jost, Eilders, and Maurer 2018). Frequently defined as the simple presence of responsiveness, an interaction is present on Facebook when a user shares, comments,² or reacts (i.e., responds with one of the emoji-like reactions named "Like", "Love", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad", "Angry"³) to a status post (Heiss,

² A comment presents a particularity as it is the only interactive element a user can use multiple times as a response to a single status post.

³ Note that prior to February 24, 2016, the only possible interaction in addition to sharing or commenting on a status post was to react with a "Like" ("Thumbs up").



Schmuck & Matthes 2019). As the (inter-)active use of SNS might have a positive impact on preferential votes for a candidate (Kruikemeier 2014), there is reason to assume that political actors pursue a publication strategy on SNS that is likely to maximize received responses. Studies show that the amount of interactions is tied to source and content characteristics (e.g., Knoll et al. 2018; Bene 2017). Hence, this might be achieved best by posting controversial statements (Hayes, Carr, & Wohn, 2016) and/or emotionalized content (Brandtzaeg & Haugstveit, 2014) – two factors frequently occurring when migration-related aspects are addressed in political communication or media coverage (e.g., Walgrave and de Swert 2004; Schemer 2012).

Political migration discourses on SNS

However, we still know relatively little about migration-related party communication on SNS and associated interactions. Bennett (2016) investigates migration policy discourses in the UK and finds that, depending on the party, discourses shift throughout the examined time period. Moreover, the study presents evidence that the discourse involved populist and racist elements. Relying on a similar discursive approach, Boukala and Dimitrakopouloub (2018) note that political leaders in Greece steadily dispute European solidarity on Twitter due to the refugee crisis. Other studies touching upon political migration discourses on SNS employ similar qualitative approaches to investigate Facebook communication of the "PEGIDA" movement (Holt and Haller 2017), or mixed methods to examine the impact of SNS during the refugee crisis on social movements in Hungary (Dessewffy and Nagy 2016). As demonstrated in this section, existing literature on public migration discourses lacks a comprehensive analysis of political SNS discourses and neglects interactive peculiarities of such platforms (see Eberl et al. 2018). The few existing studies address this topic in a rather qualitative manner. However, as discourses on SNS usually consist of massive amounts of data, we argue that a quantitative approach involving automated procedures would satisfy the needs of large-scale data arising from a comparative perspective of European migration discourses on SNS. We elaborate upon this in the following section on data and methods. Hence we raise the last sub-research question:

SRQ5: What are the differences concerning the interactions of migration-related and non-migration-related discourses across Europe and over time?



Data and Methods

Addressing the research questions established above, we draw on a dataset comprising Facebook status posts of political actors holding a seat in national parliaments (MPs) in Spain, the UK, Germany, Sweden, Austria, or Poland as of November 2017. The country selection enables this working paper to examine a cross-section of European migration discourses on Facebook, as the analysis covers a Southern European country; Western, Northern and Central European countries with increased numbers of arrived refugees in 2015; and an Eastern European country. In addition, the UK can be seen as a special case (Pfetsch 2008), where the Brexit debate, driven by anti-immigration claims (Hobolt 2016), possibly shaped migration discourses on Facebook.

In order to obtain a comprehensive dataset, lists with names of parliamentary members were scraped from official websites. In a semi-automated process, these names were subsequently screened for a respective Facebook account. This process involved human verification checks for every account to ensure no wrong or fake accounts ended up in the dataset. This procedure led to a total of $n = 1,590$ correctly identified Facebook profiles (see Table 1).

Table 1. Facebook accounts.

Country	Members of parliament	Correctly identified Facebook accounts	Share in %
Spain	349	118	34%
UK	650	496	76%
Germany	709	537	76%
Austria	183	93	51%
Sweden	349	117	34%
Poland	460	229	50%
Total	2,700	1,590	59%

All status posts between 1st of January 2015 and 31st of December 2017 from the identified Facebook accounts were downloaded using a Python script and the Facebook Graph API (application programming interface). The chosen timespan, enables this working paper to investigate different stages of Facebook party communication across Europe, including different stages of the refugee crisis: a short phase before the height of refugee arrivals in the summer of 2015, a phase of increased immigration from approximately June 2015 on, and an "aftermath" stage, from approximately mid-2016. Aligning the analyses around the refugee crisis, we are not only able to investigate recent developments in migration discourses, but also examine how this particular event shaped discourses in the countries under investigation. The eventual dataset contains party level data and a variable for the country where the post stems from. In addition to the political actors and their party affiliation, we assigned scores to illustrate the parties' political ideology according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Polk et al. 2017).⁴ Moreover, on the level of the individual status post, the data contains only textual data as well as meta-data (date and time, comment, vote and reactions count). We furthermore removed all parties with fewer than 40 migration-related posts during the three-year time span.⁵ The final dataset contains $n = 822,344$ status posts, including $n = 35,203$ that are migration-related.

Measurement: Visibility of the Migration Topic

To measure the visibility of the migration topic within the overall Facebook communication, we used country- and language-specific search strings. The search strings were constructed from existing search strings used by studies that successfully identified migration-related messages in public communication (e.g., Lawlor 2015; Vliegenthart and Boomgaarden 2007) and further adapted to our needs. Importantly, those search strings were refined, extended and eventually validated with the help of native speakers in the respective languages (as outlined in REMINDER Deliverable 8.3 [Eberl et al. 2019]). This ensures that we picked up both country-specific and European-level discourses, and didn't miss out on synonyms or

⁴ Note that we could not match all parties in our sample with a score from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Polk et al. 2017). Hence, we excluded the "Liste Pilz" in Austria, the "Democratic Unionist Party" in the UK, and the "German Minority" as well as the non-affiliated politician Longin Komolowski in Poland.

⁵ Excluded parties are Asturias Forum (migration related status posts = 1), Catalan Republican Left (5), Basque Nationalist Party (5), Canarian Coalition (16), and the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (18) in Spain; Liberal People's Party (39) in Sweden; and Plaid Cymru (17) and Sinn Fein (16) in the UK.



additional migration-related terms in any country that might not exist in other languages (see Table 2 for all search strings in respective languages). The validation procedure of the search strings resulted in satisfactory levels of *Recall* ($\underline{R} = 0.81$) and *Precision* ($\underline{P} = 0.85$).

Table 2. Search Strings.

Country	Language	Search String
Spain	Spanish	asilo* OR inmigra* OR refugiad* OR migrante* OR migratori* OR "sin papeles" OR "campo de desplazados" OR patera* OR emigra* OR "libre circulación" OR "fuga de cerebros"
UK	English	asyl* OR immigrant* OR immigrat* OR migrant* OR migrat* OR refugee* OR foreigner* OR "undocumented worker*" OR "guest worker*" OR "foreign worker*" OR emigrat* OR "freedom of movement" OR "free movement"
Germany and Austria	German	asyl* OR immigrant* OR immigriert* OR immigrat* OR migrant* OR migrat* OR flüchtling* OR ausländer* OR zuwander* OR zugewander* OR einwander* OR eingewander* OR gastarbeiter* OR "ausländische arbeitnehmer*" OR emigr* OR auswander* OR ausgewander* OR personenfreizügigkeit* OR arbeitnehmerfreizügigkeit* OR "freier personenverkehr*"
Sweden	Swedish	asyl* OR invandr* OR migrat* OR migrant* OR flykting* OR utlänning* OR immigrant* OR ensamkommande* OR EU-migrant* OR "utländsk bakgrund" OR gästarbetar* OR "utländsk* arbet*" OR papperslös* OR emigr* OR utvandr* OR "fri rörlighet"
Poland	Polish	azyl* OR migr* OR imigr* OR uchodźca OR uchodźcy OR uchodźcę OR uchodźcą OR uchodźco OR uchodźców OR uchodźcom OR uchodźcami OR uchodźcach OR cudzoziem* OR obcokrajow* OR "robotni* z zagranicy" OR "pracowni* z zagranicy" OR gastarbeiter* OR "nielegaln* pracowni*" OR emigr* OR "swobodny przepływ"

Using Python and regular expressions, the search strings were applied to the dataset to identify migration-related status posts, searching all available textual contents for hits.⁶ An additional variable marked status posts as non-migration-related (0) or migration-related (1), revealing that $n = 35,203$ status posts are associated with the topic (see Table 3 for detailed overview per country and year). A visibility score was subsequently calculated by

⁶ Note that status posts that contain a single term included in the search strings are tagged as migration-related, as search strings are validated accordingly.

contrasting the number of migration-related status posts with the overall number status posts on a daily basis.

Table 3. Number of Migration-related Status Posts per Country and Year (row percentages in parentheses)

Country	2015	2016	2017	Total
Spain	139 (21)	249 (38)	260 (40)	648 (100)
UK	1,317 (29)	1,728 (38)	1,491 (33)	4,536 (100)
Germany	9,240 (41)	7,738 (34)	5,672 (25)	22,650 (100)
Austria	1,181 (31)	1,478 (39)	1,134 (30)	3,793 (100)
Sweden	774 (37)	755 (37)	536 (26)	2,065 (100)
Poland	562 (37)	479 (32)	470 (26)	1,511 (100)
Total	13,213	12,427	9,563	35,203 (100)

Measurement: Sentiment of the Migration Topic

Relying on a dictionary approach, we measured sentiment by counting valenced terms to eventually calculate a sentiment score. However, considering the scarcity of multilingual sentiment dictionaries that would make a sentiment analysis comparable across different languages, we decided to machine translate all migration-related status posts. As most validated dictionaries suitable for this purpose are in English, the whole corpus was translated into this target language to subsequently apply an English, single-language dictionary (e.g., Balahur and Turchi 2014; Benoit, Schwarz, and Traber 2012). As studies show, social science research can benefit from machine translation of multilingual text corpora (e.g., de Vries, Schoonvelde, and Schumacher 2018). The importance of grammatical structure vanishes, as we employ a bag of words approach, considering the frequency (of sentiment bearing) words but not necessarily their order (although we consider negations; Lucas et al. 2015). We thus translated all migration-related status posts ($n = 35,203$; see Table 4 for translation examples for every country).



Table 4. Translation Examples.

Country	Source text	Translation
Spain	La nefasta gestión de la crisis de los refugiados en toda Europa no solo supone una violación de los DDHH, es una irresponsabilidad histórica.	The disastrous management of the refugee crisis throughout Europe is not only a violation of human rights, it is a historical irresponsibility.
UK	You can follow the local campaign to help refugees in Calais here. They are aiming to help the refugees with tents, food and water. A great local cause and a fantastic example of how communities can effect change.	
Germany	Zwei Schiffe der deutschen Marine sind seit einigen Tagen im Einsatz im Mittelmeer, um humanitäre Hilfe zu leisten. Heute Vormittag hat die Fregatte Hessen rund 250 Flüchtlinge von einem nicht seetüchtigen Boot in Sicherheit gebracht. Die Bundesregierung hat mit ihrer schnellen Entscheidung, die Schiffe zu entsenden, Leben gerettet. Neben der Nothilfe dürfen wir die Bekämpfung der Ursachen nicht vernachlässigen.	Two ships of the German Navy have been deployed in the Mediterranean for several days to provide humanitarian aid. This morning, the frigate Hessen has brought about 250 refugees from a not seaworthy boat to safety. The Federal Government has saved lives with its swift decision to send the ships. In addition to emergency aid, we must not neglect the fight against the causes.
Austria	Tragisch, dass sich Frauen hierzulande schon abends auf der Straße fürchten müssen.... Wenn es keine Polizistin gewesen wäre, wäre wahrscheinlich sogar mehr passiert. Der Angreifer ist übrigens Asylwerber aus Somalien....	Tragic that women in this country have to fear in the evening on the street If it had not been a policewoman, probably more would have happened. Incidentally, the attacker is asylum seeker from Somalia
Sweden	Städa upp bland subventioner och regleringar och inför istället en tydlig lärlingsmodell som ger plats för unga och flyktingar på arbetsmarknaden. Deltog i dag på fastighetsdagarna om kompetens- och integrationsutmaningen.	Clean up among subsidies and regulations and instead introduce a clear apprenticeship model that provides space for young people and refugees in the labor market. Attended the Real Estate Days today on the skills and integration challenge.
Poland	Jestem imigrantem. Jestem muzułmaninem. Jestem Polakiem. Boję się, że nienawiść z sieci wyjdzie na ulice	I'm an immigrant. I am a Muslim. I'm Polish. I am afraid that the hatred from the network will come out onto the streets

Note: URLs excluded.

After machine translation of the migration-related status posts, we applied the Lexicoder sentiment dictionary, developed by Young and Soroka (2012). It is an appropriate tool to measure the sentiment of political migration-related Facebook status posts, since it was developed on a corpus of texts dealing with political topics and is internally and externally



validated. Although we considered other dictionaries that seemed suitable, such as the LIWC or SentiStrength,⁷ we decided for Lexicoder as it outperforms other dictionaries (ibid.) and is identified as most appropriate for dealing with sentiment analysis of political texts on SNS (Yue et al. 2019). Furthermore, Lexicoder was applied in various empirical studies in political communication (e.g., Balmas 2017; Wlezien and Soroka 2018), migration-related texts (Lawlor 2015; Lawlor and Tolley 2017), or messages from political actors from SNS (Murthy et al. 2015).

For the application of the dictionary that contains 4,567 positive and negative sentiment loaded words, the status posts were pre-processed in a multi-step procedure to ensure all sentiment bearing words could be properly identified and correctly labelled with a corresponding score. This involves the removal of some punctuation (e.g., abbreviations) or certain characters (e.g., square or curly brackets). Subsequently, the analysis was carried out using R, an environment for statistical computing, and the text analysis package *quanteda*, developed by Benoit and colleagues (2018). In order to calculate a final sentiment score for a status posts, all scores from words with a positive sentiment (P_i) according to dictionary were summed up. From this, we subtracted the accumulated scores of words bearing a negative sentiment (N_i). To standardize the score by the length of the status posts, we furthermore divided by the number of words (W_i) to calculate the score of the whole status post (S_i), revealing the final sentiment (see the following equation).

$$S_i = \frac{\sum P_i - \sum N_i}{\sum W_i}$$

Interactions

As we are also interested in how much users interact with migration-related content compared to non-migration-related status posts, we generated a variable, that sums up all reactions ("Like", "Love", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad", "Angry") and added how many times a

⁷ Note that although SentiStrength was developed for the sentiment analysis of SNS texts, we suppose that the Lexicoder dictionary is more suitable for the data at hand as SentiStrength was not constructed and validated on the basis of political texts but MySpace comments. Moreover, we take Facebook status posts as a hybrid text form that, although posted on a SNS, does not feature common characteristics of SNS communication (e.g., slang words or increased typos) as it is published by political actors and hence consider a tool developed for political communication as more suitable.



status post got shared ("share count"). We only focused on interactions that can only be made once per user, so that interactions from "extreme posters" wouldn't be over emphasized. For this reason, we did not analyse comments.

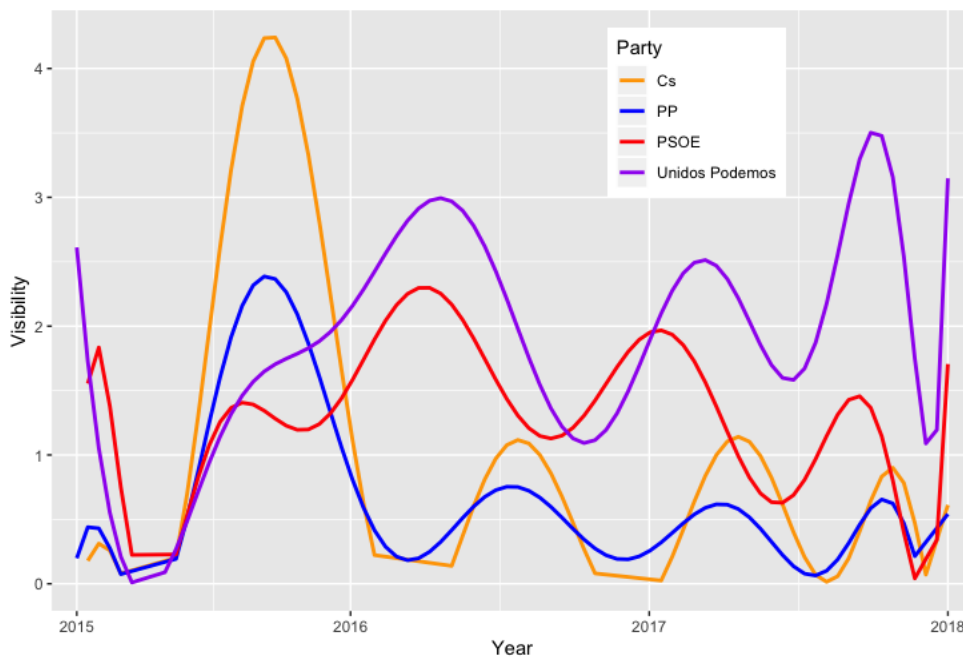
Analyses

In the following, we present descriptive evidence revealing the dynamics of visibility, sentiment and interactions of migration-related status posts from political actors across Europe for the years 2015 to 2017. Starting with the analyses within single countries, we first present findings on Spain, the UK, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Poland, with the exception of a detailed over-time analysis of the sentiment in Spain as we do not have sufficient data (see Table 3). After this more fine-grained reflection of discourses in every country in our sample, we show descriptive findings regarding cross country comparisons. Results are furthermore interpreted and discussed in the final section of this deliverable.

Spain

The visibility of the migration topic varies strongly between the four Spanish parties in our sample during the investigated time period (see Figure 1). While all parties follow the same pattern of increased visibility in the second half of 2015, the centre-right party Citizens (Cs; left-right score $LR = 5.56$ according to the chapel hill expert survey; Polk et al. 2017) emerges as the party emphasizing migration the most during the height of the refugee crisis in 2015. However, their focus shifts and aligns with the visibility of the topic across the People's Party (*PP*; $LR = 7.30$). In turn, the Spanish Socialist Worker's Party (*PSOE*; $LR = 3.80$), especially in the first half of 2016, and the Podemos movement ($LR = 1.67$), are increasingly addressing migration in their Facebook status posts, with a particularly higher visibility than the other parties following 2015. Distinct peaks might coincide with the migration crisis (summer 2015) and campaigning for the national elections (June 2016).

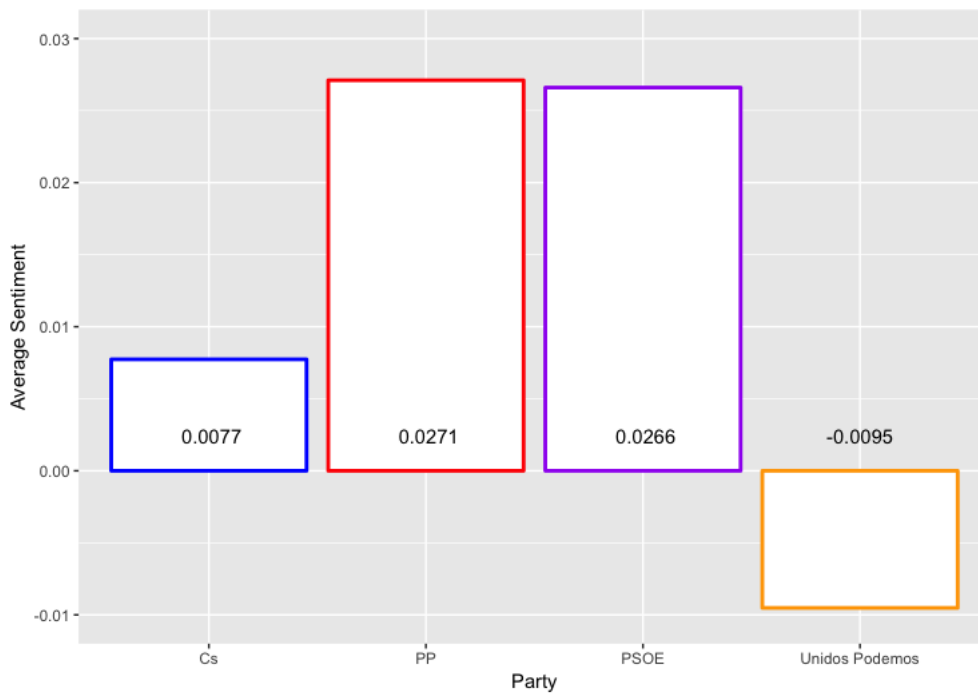
Figure 1. Relative Visibility of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Spain from 2015 to 2017 (in percent).



Notes: Visibility is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Because we fear that the rather thin data on migration-related status posts from Spanish politicians for the individual months within the three years could yield skewed results, we decided to limit the analysis of sentiment in Spain to a broad overview without considering the over-time component. In Figure 2 we see that especially the left-leaning Unidos Podemos addresses the topic in a distinctly more negative way than the other three parties under investigation. In turn, the right-leaning PP and the center-left party PSOE are the most positive in status posts related to migration, whereas the center-right Cs are a little less positive.

Figure 2. Sentiment of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Spain from 2015 to 2017.

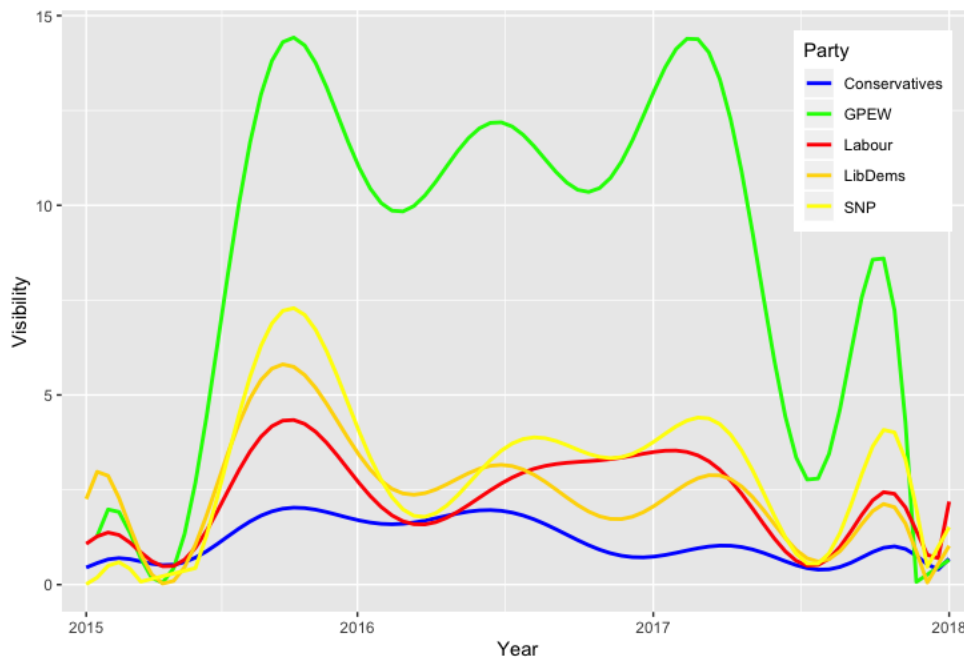


Notes: Sentiment is aggregated on party level. Number of postings $N = 648$.

UK

The visibility of the migration topic is overall rather low in the UK's political Facebook discourses (see Figure 3). However, the Green Party of England and Wales (GPEW; $LR = 1.86$) clearly stands out. While all parties address migration a bit more during and after the height of the refugee crisis, GPEW's Facebook communication continues to focus strongly on the topic throughout the following two years with, peaks in summer 2016 and early 2017, until their focus declines in the first half of 2017. Although the Conservative Party ($LR = 7.00$), Labour Party ($LR = 3.57$), Liberal Democrats ($LR = 4.86$) and Scottish National Party ($LR = 3.00$) follow a similar pattern of slightly increased visibility during the same time spans, they obviously focus less on migration in their Facebook status posts.

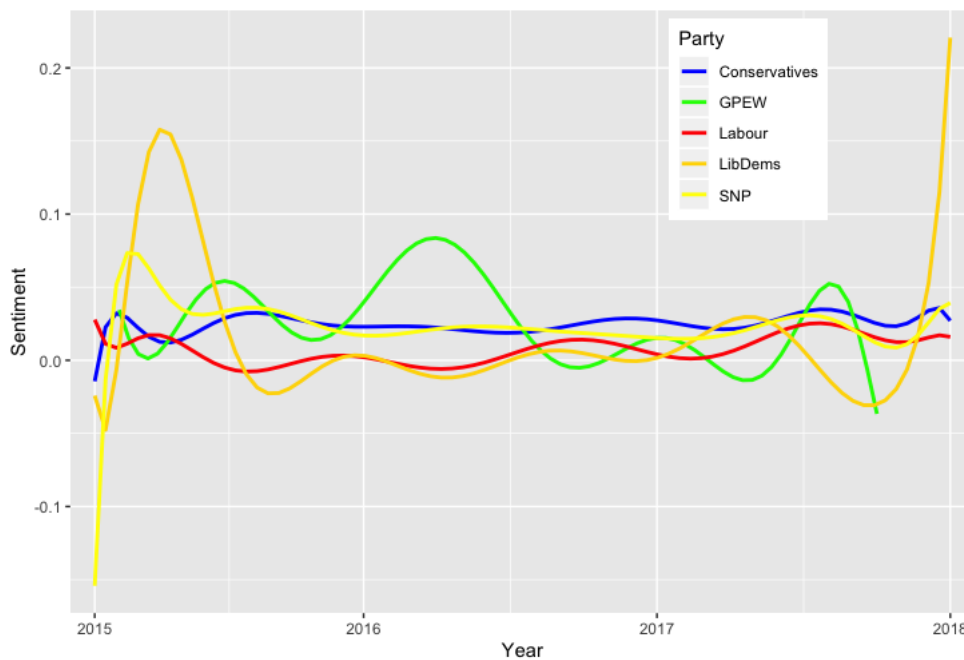
Figure 3. Relative Visibility of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in the UK from 2015 to 2017 (in percent).



Notes: Visibility is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Considering the sentiment of migration-related Facebook status posts in the UK, very few dynamics can be observed (see Figure 4). While Conservatives and the Labour Party address migration with a constant sentiment, the GPEW, the Lib Dems and the SNP exhibit several peaks. The Lib Dems talk more positively about migration in the pre-phase of the refugee crisis, as well as at the end of 2015, and the SNP is distinctly more negative at the beginning of 2015 – periods with lowered visibility (see Figure 3) and hence possibly shaped by very few status posts. The GPEW, in turn, reveals a peak in sentiment in early 2016, a phase just after the Brexit referendum and of heightened visibility.

Figure 4. Sentiment of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in the UK from 2015 to 2017.

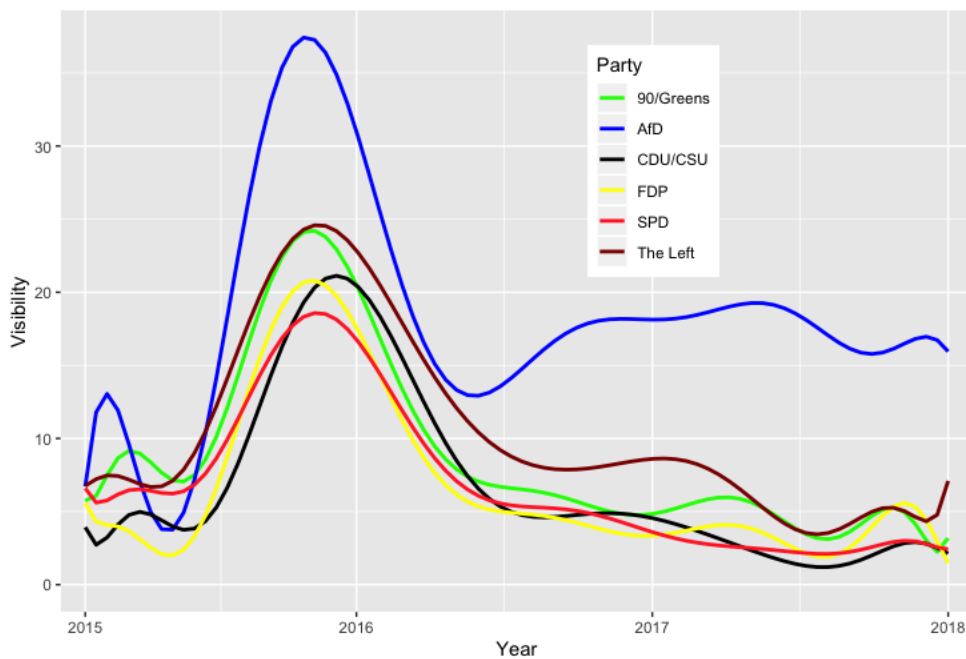


Notes: Sentiment is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Germany

In Germany, the visibility follows a clear pattern of heightened attention during the refugee crisis and other slight increases (see Figure 5). Higher attention in the second half of 2016 could be tied to negotiations between the EU and Turkey regarding the receiving of refugees. While all parties exhibit this pattern, the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD; $LR = 8.92$) focused distinctly stronger on migration in their Facebook status posts in the second half of 2015 and also while campaigning for the 2017 national elections. Moreover, it is noticeable that, following the refugee crisis, The Left's ($LR = 1.23$) attention for the topic remained on a higher level than the visibility of the other four parties.

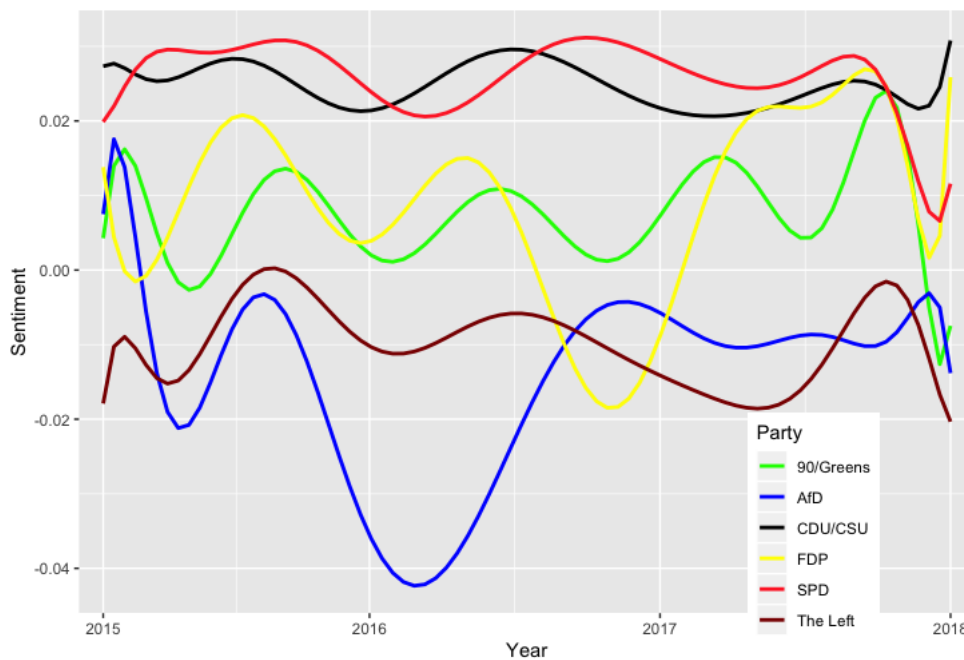
Figure 5. Relative Visibility of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Germany from 2015 to 2017 (in percent).



Notes: Visibility is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

While variation is overall small (see Figure 6), it seems that the sentiment of the Christian Democratic/Social Union of Germany (CDU/CSU; $LR = 5.92$) and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD; $LR = 3.77$), traditionally major parties and in government since 2013, is constant and the most positive among all parties. Most negative, in turn, is the far-right AfD, with a trough in the first half of 2016 coinciding with Landtag elections in three different states. Moreover, and akin to the pattern of visibility, The Left addresses migration distinctly more negatively in their Facebook status posts than most of the other parties, similar to the AfD.

Figure 6. Sentiment of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Germany from 2015 to 2017.

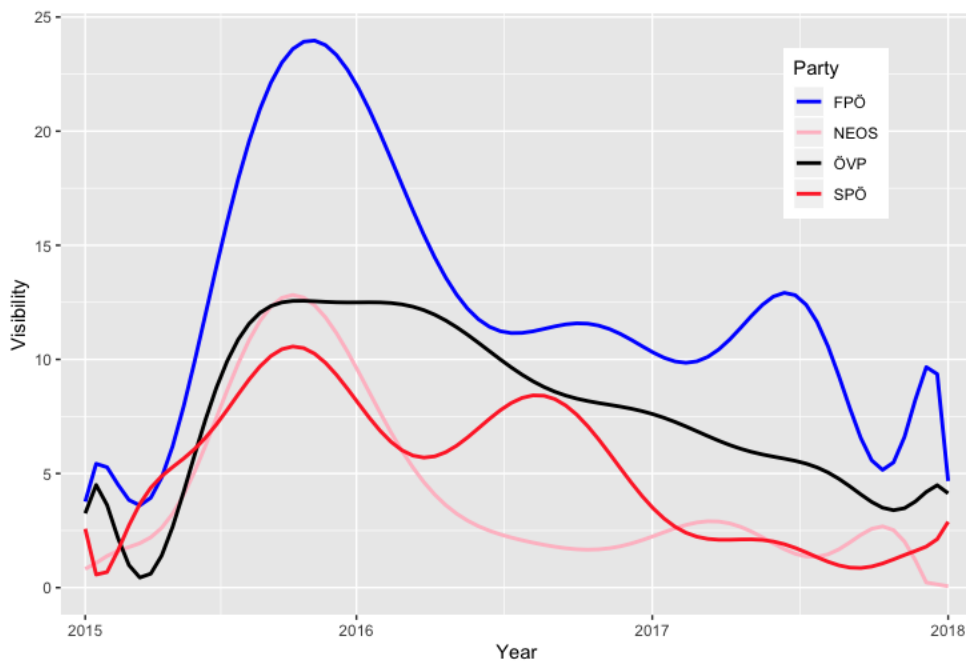


Notes: Sentiment is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Austria

The right-wing party Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ; $LR = 8.70$) emphasizes migration more strongly than any other party (see Figure 7). While for all parties the visibility is increased during the refugee crisis, patterns vary. The visibility across status posts of the conservative Austrian People's Party (ÖVP; $LR = 6.10$) and the liberal party The New Austria (NEOS; $LR = 6.00$) decreases in the course of the following two and a half years. The Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ; $LR = 3.90$) reveals an additional strong increase of attention in the second half of 2016, coinciding with the negotiation between the EU and Turkey regarding a deal to keep refugees in Turkey. Finally, the SPÖ as well as the ÖVP exhibit a smaller increase, while the FPÖ exhibits a strong increase in salience in 2017, coinciding with the campaign for the national elections on October 15th.

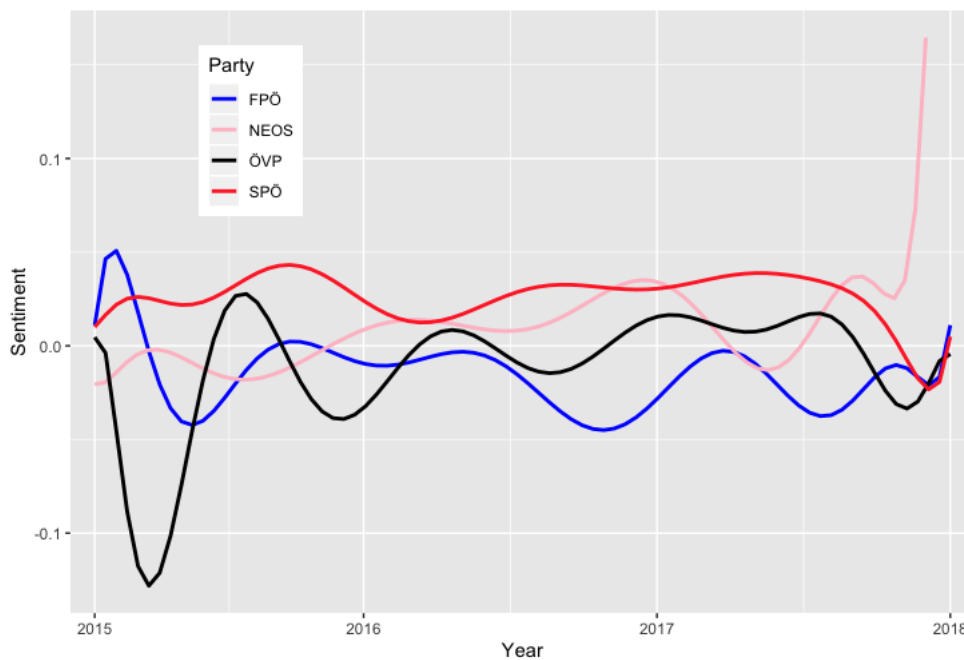
Figure 7. Relative Visibility of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Austria from 2015 to 2017 (in percent)



Notes: Visibility is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

While the center-left SPÖ is, overall, the most positive party, it is difficult to unveil distinct patterns regarding the sentiment of migration-related Facebook status posts in Austria (see Figure 8). However, considering 2015 and 2016, it is observable that – overall – the FPÖ and the ÖVP, the two parties leaning more to the right, employ a common strategy of addressing migration on Facebook in a more negative way than the other two parties.

Figure 8. Sentiment of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Austria from 2015 to 2017.



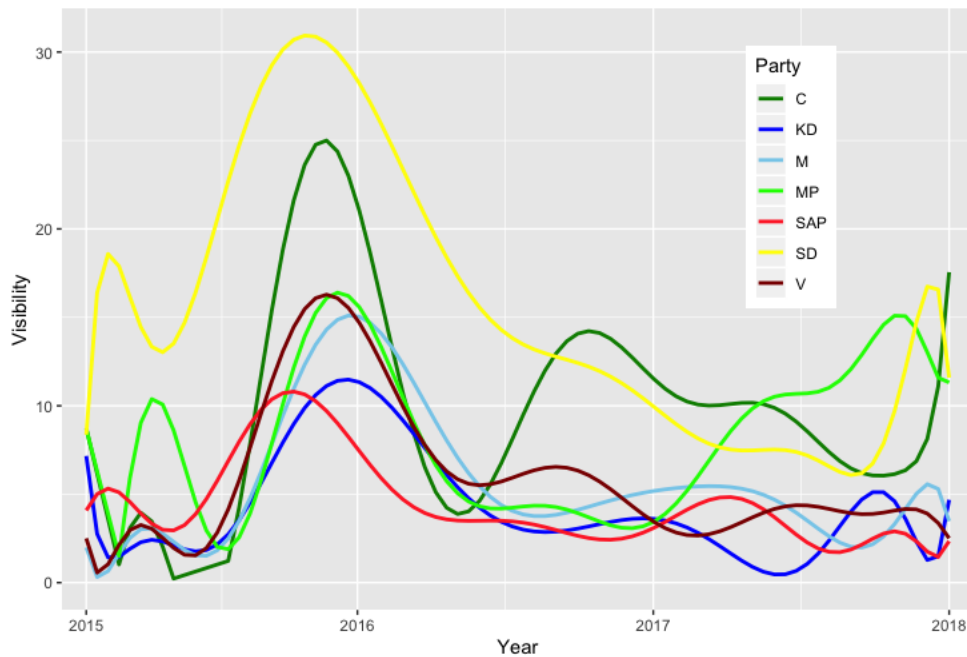
Notes: Sentiment is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Sweden

Similar to the social media discourse in previously shown countries, the Swedish political migration discourse on Facebook reveals a distinct pattern of heightened attention during the refugee crisis and a slow decrease of visibility throughout the following two years across most parties (see Figure 9). Two parties, however, clearly stand out and focus on the topic on Facebook in a different way than the others. First, the right-wing Sweden Democrats (SD; $LR = 7.76$) particularly emphasize the topic more strongly than the other parties, especially during the height of the refugee crisis. While their attention spend on the topic declines in the following, visibility remains within the top three of all parties during all times. Moreover, regarding the likewise right-leaning Centre Party (C; $LR = 7.24$), there is a peak in visibility during the height of the refugee crisis in 2015 that is distinctly higher than most of the other parties. They furthermore emphasized the topic strongly in the second half of 2016, the year when a change in the law led to doubled granted asylum applications. Increased visibility for

almost all parties towards the end of 2017 could be tied to the beginning of an election year in 2018.

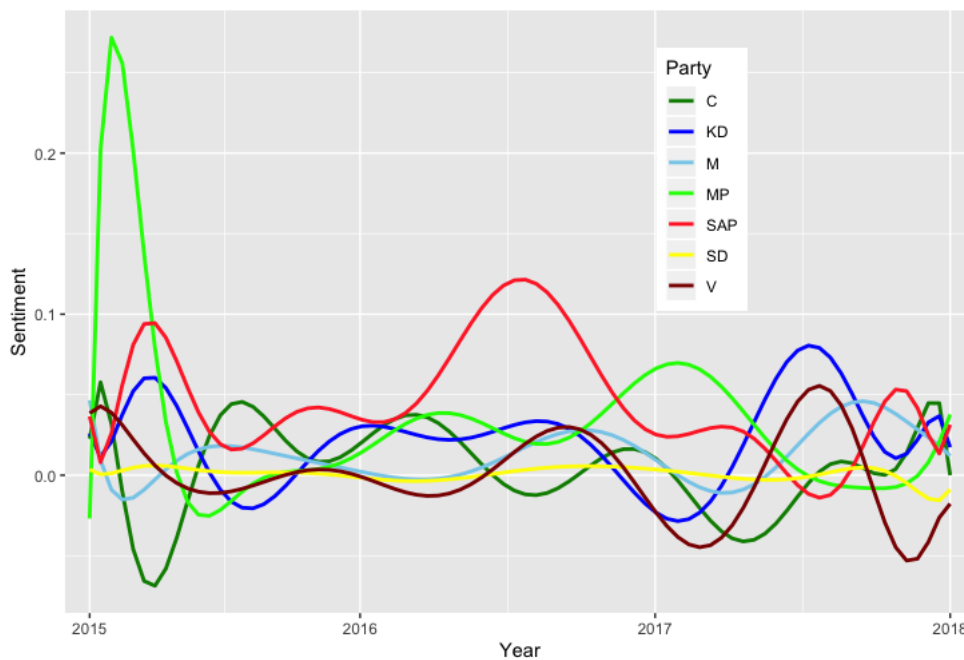
Figure 9. Relative Visibility of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Sweden from 2015 to 2017 (in percent).



Notes: Visibility is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Sentiment of migration-related Facebook status posts in Sweden does not reveal any distinct pattern (see Figure 10). However, it is observable that the center-left party Social Democratic Labour Party (SAP; $LR = 3.76$) and the Green Ecology Party (MP; $LR = 3.29$) are more positive than the other parties during most of the time, with distinct upticks in the first half of 2015 and in 2016.

Figure 10. Sentiment of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Sweden from 2015 to 2017.

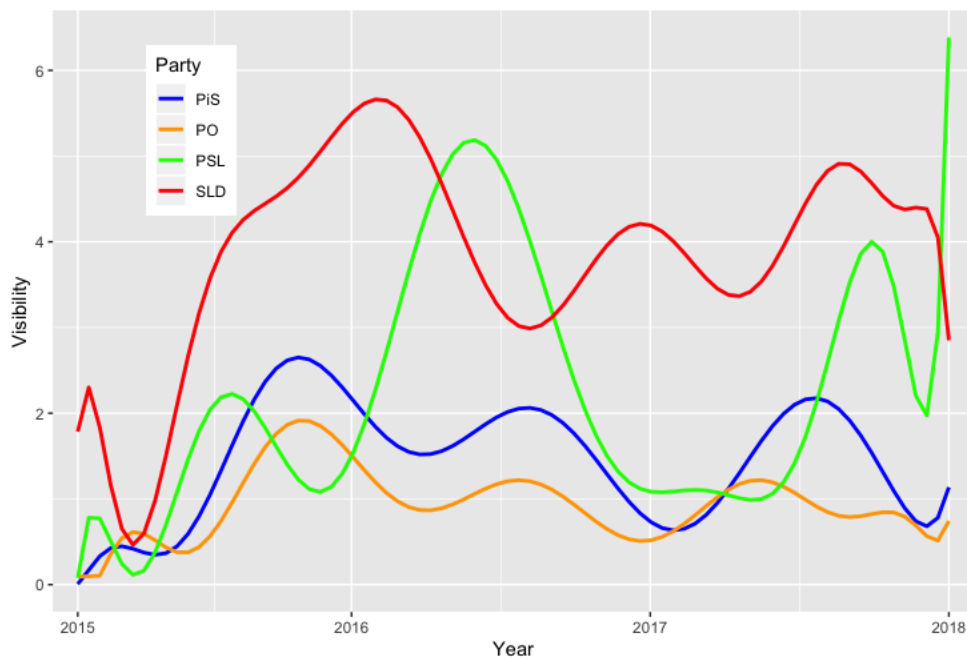


Notes: Sentiment is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Poland

Migration is – overall – not very visible in the Facebook status posts of politicians in Poland (see Figure 11). However, the political migration discourse increases in salience during the refugee crisis in 2015, as well as in 2016, when negotiations about the EU-Turkey deal were ongoing. The impact of the crisis in 2015 is, however, much less pronounced than in other countries.

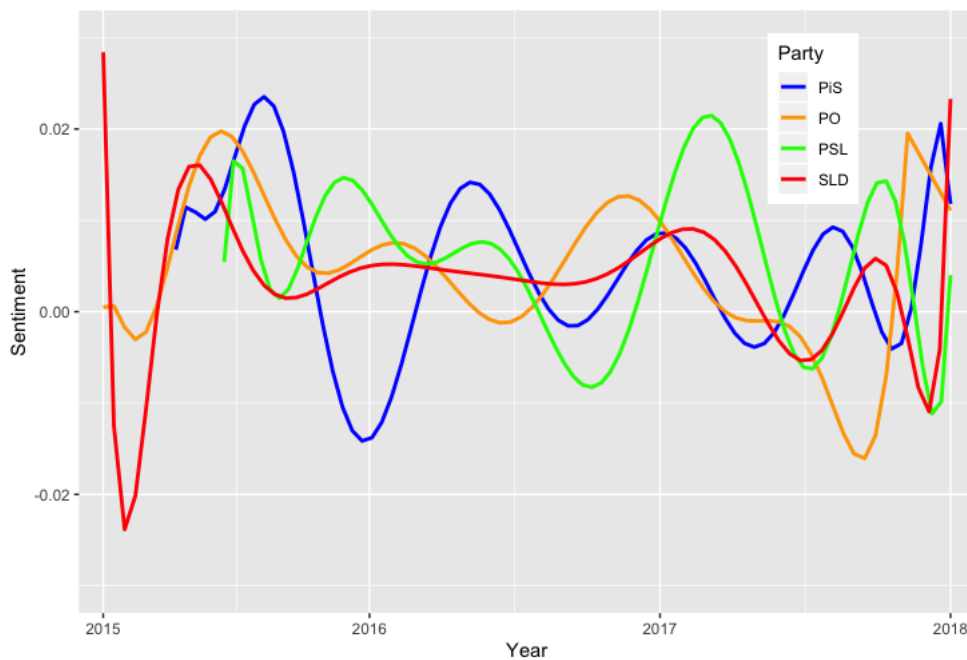
Figure 11. Relative Visibility of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Poland from 2015 to 2017 (in percent).



Notes: Visibility is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

As for sentiment, there is some slight variation between the parties (see Figure 12). Distinct negative peaks can be observed across all parties, revealing no consistent pattern.

Figure 12. Sentiment of Migration on Facebook Across Parties in Poland from 2015 to 2017.

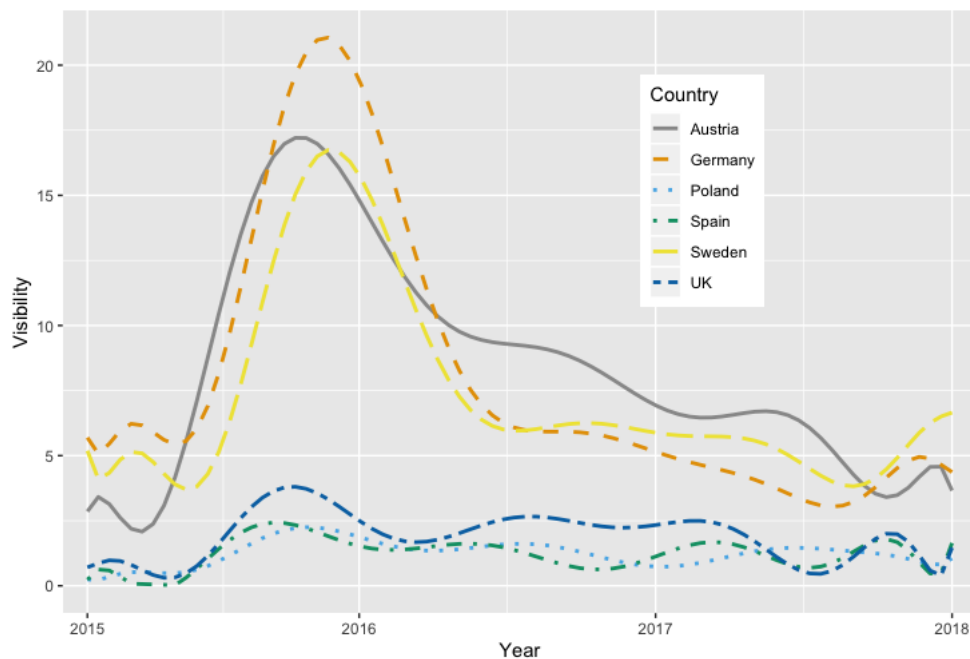


Notes: Sentiment is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Cross-Country Comparisons

Summing up the discourses in the six countries under investigation, our data reveals that visibility follows similar patterns across all countries (see Figure 13). While peaks might be more protracted in some countries, politicians in all countries focus on migration more strongly during the height of the refugee crisis in 2015. Moreover, it appears that Austria, Germany and Sweden could be grouped into a common pattern, with strongly increased visibility during the refugee crisis and an ongoing decrease afterwards. In turn, the topic is overall not as much visible in Spain and also only rarely existent in Poland. The UK is somewhere in between, with slightly higher visibility during the height of the crisis, but also showing patterns similar to Poland and Spain.

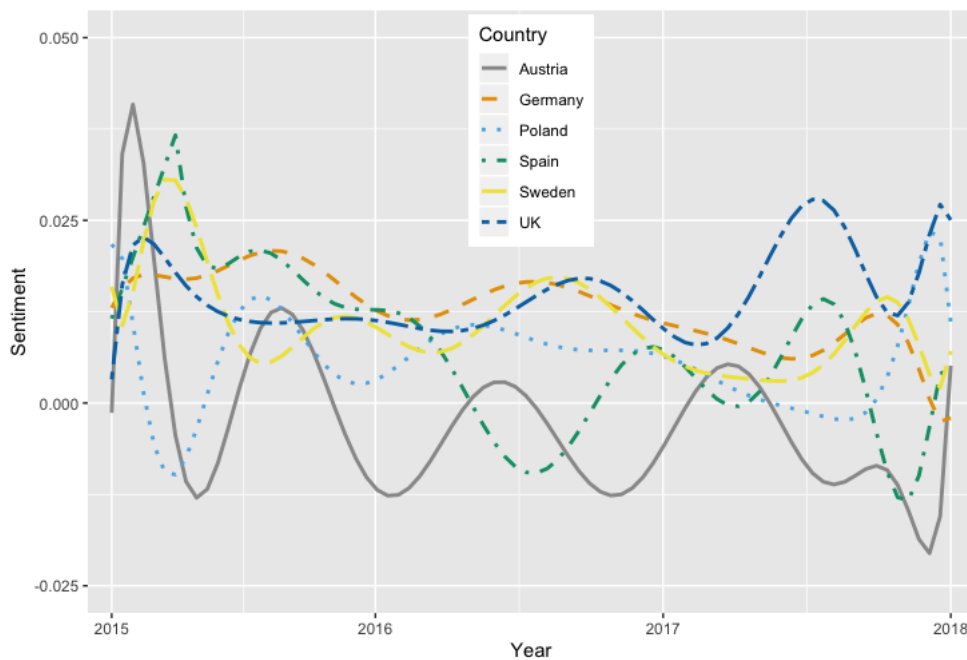
Figure 13. Relative Visibility of Migration on Facebook Across Countries from 2015 to 2017 (in percent).



Notes: Visibility is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

The sentiment of migration-related Facebook status posts across political actors in the six European countries reveals a more consistent picture of a slight downward trend (see Figure 14). This overall negative trend in sentiment is accentuated by stronger decreases in Spain and Poland, but mainly driven by the sentiment in Austria. The tonality in Germany, Sweden and the UK, in turn, remains quite stable, with slight decreases in Germany and Sweden but an uptick towards the end of 2018 in the UK.

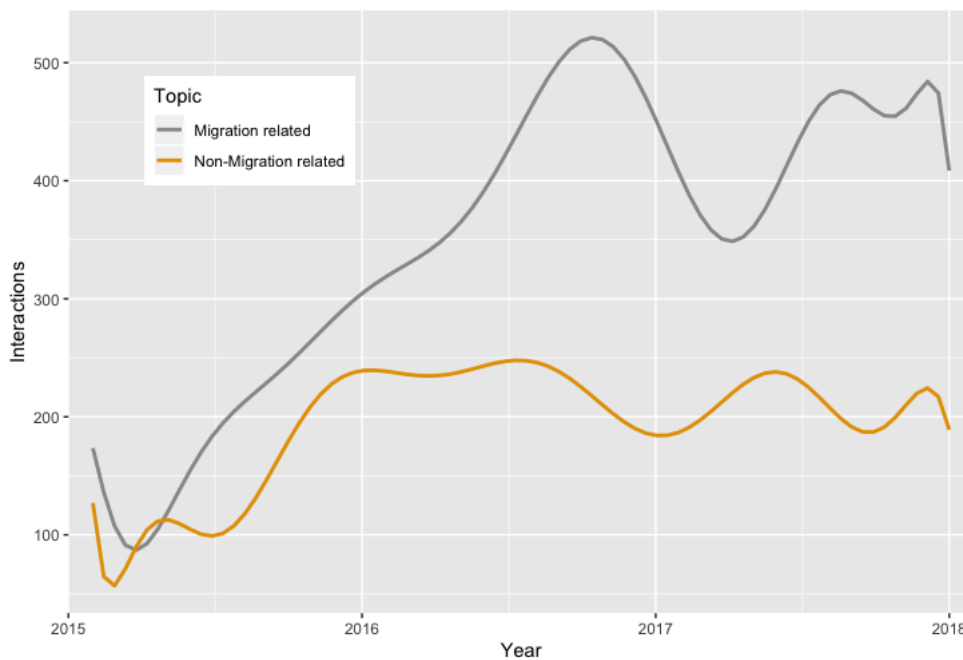
Figure 14. Sentiment of Migration on Facebook Across Countries from 2015 to 2017.



Notes: Sentiment is aggregated on a monthly basis. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Furthermore, as Graph 15 shows, migration-related status posts on Facebook receive distinctly more interactions than when their posts are without any relation to migration. The sharp increase from the first half of 2015 until the beginning of 2016, however, might be tied to the introduction of the Facebook reactions pallet, allowing users to express more nuanced emotions (e.g., anger or love) as a response to a status post (in combination with applied smoothing). From 2016 on, nevertheless, the slopes reveal a huge gap in the number of average interactions a status post receives depending on the content. Moreover, the provided over-time comparison shows that the average interactions for migration-related status posts continuously increase until the second half of 2016, whereas interactions for non-migration-related status posts stagnate. Although average interactions for migration-related status decrease in the second half of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, they start to increase soon after. The downward trend towards the end of the three years could furthermore be tied to the proximity to the date of data gathering.

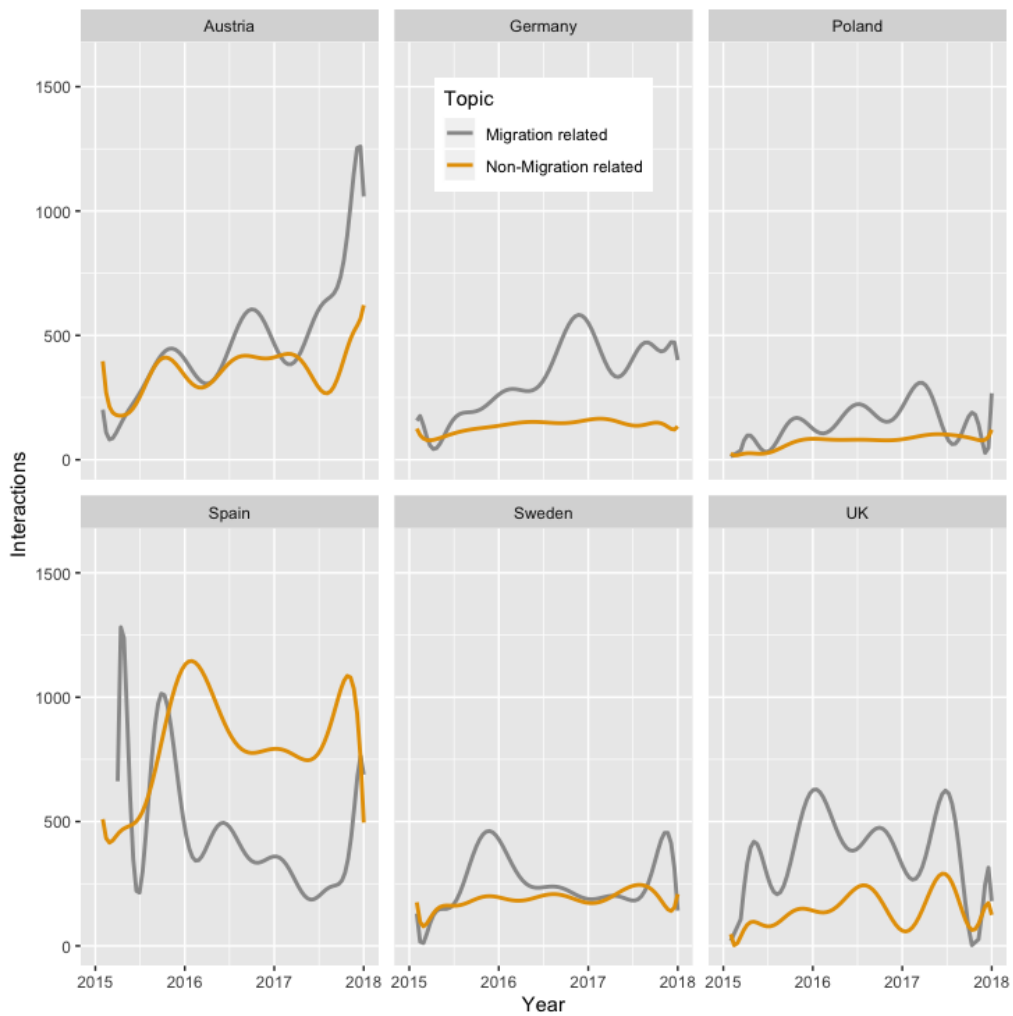
Figure 15. Interactions of migration-related Facebook Status Posts from 2015 to 2017.



Notes: Mean interactions per month. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Considering interactions in the single countries in our sample, we can see that, for all countries, migration-related status posts receive more interactions (see Figure 16). However, patterns deviate between countries. In Germany, Poland, Sweden and the UK, migration-related status posts receive more interactions almost all the time. In Austria and Spain, however, non-migration-related content gets more interactions during some periods. In Austria, users interact with migration-related content as much as with non-related content until the middle of 2016. Afterwards, migration-related status posts receive, with the exception of a short time-span in the beginning of 2017, more interactions, with a sharp increase towards the second half of 2017. Spain, furthermore, reveals a completely different pattern, wherein migration-related content receives more interactions during most times in 2015 but distinctly fewer interactions between 2016 and the end of 2017.

Figure 16. Interactions of migration-related Facebook Status Posts across Countries from 2015 to 2017.



Notes: Mean interactions per month. Lines are smoothed using polynomial regression. Number of months $N = 36$.

Conclusions

This working paper aimed to add to European migration research by exploring the nearly undiscovered field of political migration discourses on Social Network Sites. Findings of this report can be seen as complementary pieces explaining public European migration discourses, as they reveal patterns of visibility, sentiment and interactions of political migration discourses in the six European countries – Spain, the UK, Germany, Austria, Sweden, and Poland – over the course of three years following the refugee crisis in 2015. Applying automated content analyses, this study has been able to analyze data on a large scale, examining 822,344 status posts to unveil shared dynamics supporting the assumption that the migration issue shifted from a national- to a European-level topic.

As known from the literature (e.g., Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009), the visibility of migration-related Facebook status posts across the European countries under investigation is shaped by external events. We could observe that the refugee crisis in particular distinctly impacted political Facebook discourses, with increased visibility in all countries. Other events such as national elections or the EU-Turkey deal negotiations coincided with further peaks in the visibility, and indicate such a connection between activity on Facebook and external events. Interestingly, in line with findings on migration-related media content (e.g., Stier, Posch, Bleier, and Strohmaier 2017), in some countries more right-leaning parties emphasize migration in their Facebook status posts more than other parties (Germany and Austria), whereas in other countries this is not the case. In Spain and the UK, it is the left-leaning parties that focus more strongly on the topic. Comparisons between countries unveil that Germany, Austria and Sweden share a pattern of higher visibility of the migration topic during the refugee crisis. While these countries were among the top destinations of arriving refugees, Poland and Spain, as countries that were not impacted that much by migration movements in 2015, show overall low levels of visibility. In the case of the UK, however, the pattern deviates. Although a receiving country, the migration topic did not receive as much attention as in Germany, Austria or Sweden in party discourses on Facebook during the refugee crisis (e.g., Pfetsch, 2008). As the upcoming Brexit referendum took up a lot of space in public discourses, other topics related to Brexit might have gained more attention from political actors on Facebook.



Since variation in the sentiment across parties, countries and time was rather small, analyses of tonality of migration-related Facebook party discourses did not reveal tremendous differences. Except for a few cases (e.g., Germany, Austria), no distinct pattern of positive or negative sentiment across ideology could be found. This is somewhat surprising, as existing studies suggest that discourses across right-leaning actors should be more critical about immigration (e.g., Schemer 2012). However, a slight negative trend across all countries could be observed, indicating that migration is a topic that is addressed more, and more negatively, in status posts of political actors on Facebook.

Our analyses show that migration-related status posts receive distinctly more interactions. While non-migration-related status posts received approximately the same amount of average interactions during two years after the introduction of the reactions, interactions for migration-related status posts almost continuously increased during the same time span. This finding suggests that migration might be a powerful topic for political actors on Facebook across Europe, as it maximizes interactions and hence may increase a post's reach on the platform. This seems particularly true for Germany, Austria and in some parts Sweden and the UK. However, posting migration-related status posts stopped eliciting distinctly more interactions during some time-spans, especially in the UK and Poland, indicating that other topics might have driven party discourses and therefore received more interactions. Spain emerges as a special case where, most of the time, non-migration-related topics get more interactions. Moreover, one could suggest a connection between the down-trending sentiment and increased interactions, as negative expressions are known to have a stronger effect on user engagement than positive ones (Heiss, Schmuck, and Matthes 2018).

While we included all data available, we still have to address some limitations of this working paper. As the sampling procedure was set out to be as comparable as possible across countries, the data misses out on very few parties that might have played an important role in a country's migration-related party discourses on Facebook from 2015 to 2017. However, in trying to determine certain parameters to ensure the same spectrum of actors is included across all countries, choices had to be made. Nevertheless, we are



confident that the data used in this analysis enables us to draw meaningful comparisons of migration-related party discourses on Facebook across countries.

This paper has drawn rough outlines of migration-related party discourses on Facebook, applying innovative methods and complementing the bigger picture of European migration discourses. We learned that migration-related party discourses on Facebook across Europe are sometimes tied to external events and that the sentiment is slightly, but steadily, decreasing. A more practical implication reveals that the topic of migration appears to be a useful tool for political actors on Facebook, for example during election campaigns, as it increases interactions and therefore the reach of political actors' messages on the platform.



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REMINDER

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The REMINDER project is exploring the economic, social, institutional and policy factors that have shaped the impacts of free movement in the EU and public debates about it.

The project is coordinated from COMPAS and includes participation from 12 consortium partners in 8 countries across Europe



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