

Online Appendix

Much Ado About Nothing? The (Non-) Politicisation of the European Union in Social Media Debates on Migration

Detailed dataset description

Our dataset includes Facebook posts by the 81 local and regional newspapers with the largest quarterly print runs in mid-2016 that also have a Facebook page and the user comments that were posted underneath these. Although the noun ‘post’ is often used differently in everyday speech, on Facebook it indicates content that is posted by an account. Newspapers typically post articles and sometimes related content such as photo galleries or polls. We only focus on articles.

From the 81 Facebook pages of local and regional newspapers, we downloaded all 32,702 posts containing at least one word from a list of migration and asylum-related keywords.¹ This yielded a dataset covering comments from 2010 to April 2017 and containing 622,621 comments. We refer to it as the ‘full sample’ in the article. These information and further descriptive statistics of the sample are summarised in Table A1 below. Data were accessed through Facebook’s ‘Graph API’ (Application Programming Interface), which allows anyone short-term access to pre-specified Facebook pages and comments on these sites. To download the data, we used code programmed in Python.

¹ The choice of keywords is relatively broad in order to maximise the probability of detection (sensitivity) of relevant articles without creating a dataset with many irrelevant ones. The list of keywords was designed using a pretest with several iterations.

We then filtered articles and kept only those that contained any of the specified keywords (see List A1). From these a random sample of 500 posts was drawn without replacement.² Based on a pre-defined codebook, four research assistants were extensively trained in several multi-hour sessions to code Facebook posts and the comments underneath these. After the end of the final training session, the 500 Facebook posts were randomly allocated to two of four research assistants. Articles or comments were coded by them as complete units, i.e. not taking a Facebook comment apart into separate comments on different subjects if more than one argument or reference was made. In this case, the comment or article got multiple labels. Our results are thus robust to different forms of aggregation. The working sample that we analyse is formed by all 412 posts that were classified as relevant by the coders. We then downloaded all first-level comments (i.e. responding to the post, not to other comments) for each of these posts and drew a random sample of comments, which in total resulted in 5040 comments from 69 newspapers' Facebook sites (see List A2 below). These 5040 comments make up approximately 50% of the comments for these posts.³ We drew comments based on articles to avoid a sample that is dominated by those topics or articles that received the largest number of comments. Thus, our analyses benefit from lower standard errors across time and across topics. These comments were again coded by two randomly selected annotators each. Random assignment of two coders from a group of four coders who have received the same training reduces the influence of coder-specific effects on results and was therefore preferred to double coding in fixed pairs. Agreement between coders was always above 77% for the governance levels used in this article and over 97% for the category 'Europe'. The random coder assignment allows rigorous tests of coding quality by calculating individual coder effects for each variable.⁴

² This was done in November 2016. While these data were manually coded and analyzed, we later resampled the period until April 2017 to update the full sample.

³ The size of this sample was determined by considering expected asymptotic properties of the comment sample that was based on experiences during pre-testing.

⁴ This is done with a logistic regression of the form $y_i = \alpha + \beta C + \epsilon_i$, where y_i is the coded outcome, α the intercept, C a vector consisting of dummy variables for each coder and ϵ_i the error term. None of the coder specific effects β_1 to β_4 is

These analyses show no statistically significant coder specific effects for any of the items used in this article. We also did not find evidence for variation in coding behaviour over time.

As the first step during the coding, the relevance of a comment with respect to the topic of migration and asylum was checked to rule out irrelevant posts such as spam. In fact, this mostly led to the exclusion of those comments that consisted of mere hyperlinks to Facebook friends' profiles, which is a way of making them aware of these news without commenting explicitly. The remaining comments were then coded based on the codebook and form our working dataset. On average, these comments are 172 characters long.⁵ The shortest comments often indicate agreement or disagreement with issues mentioned in newspapers' posts while longer comments tend to bring up arguments that go beyond the articles.

For each article and each comment, references to governance levels in the form of geographical references were coded. The 'local' level for example captures references in a specific locality or experience from a commenter's neighbourhood.⁶ Comments are coded as referring to a 'regional' level if, for example, particular parts of the country such as federal states or large areas (e.g. Ruhr area) are mentioned. This can also include references to state-level policies. The 'national' level refers to the German federal level or texts mentioning 'Germany' as a whole. 'Europe' has initially been coded in a broad sense covering all comments or articles

statistically significant for any of our items. Neither are they significant when introducing, for example, article fixed effects. As a robustness check we furthermore searched for structural breaks or other variation in coder behavior by testing for any significant effects in a regression of the form $y_i = \alpha + \beta C + \gamma C t + \tau t + \epsilon_i$, where t is a time dummy that splits the sample in pre (0) and post (1) periods. Different key dates in the sample have been tested as cutoffs. In none of these cases we found statistically significant elements of vector γ , indicating that individual coders did not change their behavior over time.

⁵ An example for a comment of this length is: 'The example shows how overwhelmed a totally overcrowded city is with taking in asylum seekers. The distribution key (authors note: formula used to allocate asylum seekers across the country) urgently needs to be changed.' (authors' translation). [Original German text: "Das Beispiel zeigt wie überfordert eine Stadt, die aus allen Nähten platzt, mit der Aufnahme von Asylbewerbern ist. Der Vergabeschlüssel muss dringend geändert werden."] (comment posted on the Facebook page of Hamburger Abendblatt on 26.07.2014 below the article „Die Wahrheit über den Bau eines Flüchtlingsheims“)

⁶ An example for a comment coded as local is: "Why should it be different in Hamburg? In Sumte, some 100 locals live next to 1000 refugees or in Groß Werden, 60 locals live next to 1500 refugees! Maybe, one could ask how this is going to play out" (authors' translation). [Original German text: "Warum sollte es in Hamburg anders sein? In Sumte kommen auf 100 Einwohner 1000 Flüchtlinge oder in Groß Werden 60 Einwohner und 1500 Flüchtlinge! Vielleicht sollte man sich mal wirklich Gedanken machen, ob das gut geht"] (comment posted on the Facebook page of Hamburger Morgenpost on 25.10.2015 below the article „Nein zur Politik, ja zur Hilfe! Hunderte Neugraben-Fischbecker haben heute gegen eine geplante Massenunterkunft für Flüchtlinge in ihrer Nachbarschaft demonstriert.“)

about the European Union, Europe as a continent, ‘European identity’, as well as coverage of politicians from or developments in other European countries.⁷ All comments that do not refer to at least one of these levels are included in a baseline category. Each level was assigned a binary outcome.

Hence, it is theoretically possible that a comment refers, for example, to both the national and European level. The aggregation of these levels affects whether we over- or underestimate the politicization of Europe. For the results included in the main article, we created a variable that only covers the highest geographical level of each post or comment that has been coded by at least one coder. A comment which refers to national and European levels will be labelled European by this variable. We report two robustness checks with alternative coding rules below which leave our central results unaltered. In total, only 24.8% (56 out of 226) of comments labelled as ‘European’ by this variable are not also coded as referring to a geographical level below this level, i.e. local, regional, or national level at the same time. Comments that refer to the European level are on average 290 characters long and comments become shorter and considerably less detailed when referring to lower reference levels with an average of 130 characters for local comments.

⁷ A comment coded as European is, for example: ‘...why would all refugees like to come to Germany...if I remember correctly, EU rules do not state that refugees are supposed to be passed on or given pocket money so that they make it to Germany.’ (authors’ translation) [Original German text: ‘...warum wollen alle Flüchtlinge nach Deutschland...ich erinnere mich an die EU Regeln, da steht nix drin davon das Flüchtlinge weitergereicht werden dürfen oder mit Taschengeld ausgestattet ab nach Deutschland.’] (Passauer Neue Presse, 14.3.2014, „Asylbewerber streiken in #Dingolfing.“)

Appendix Tables and Figures

Table A1: Summary table

Articles (full sample)		
	Number	Share
Total	32702	100%
Containing term 'europ' or 'Europ'	772	2.4%
Containing term 'EU' or 'eu'	639	2.0%
Articles (coded sample)		
	Number	Share
Total sampled	500	100%
Total relevant	412	82.4%
Coded as relevant, with non-zero number of comments sampled <u>and</u> referring to		
local level	169	54.3%
regional level	43	13.8%
national level	18	5.8%
European level or EU	27	8.7%
other or none	54	17.4%
Comments (full sample)		
	Number	Share
Total	662383	100.0%
Containing 'europ' or 'Europ'	7238	1.1%
Containing 'EU'	6327	1.0%
Comments (coded sample)		
	Number	Share
Total sample	5040	0.8%
Of which containing real content	4442	88.1%
Of which replying to posts referring to European level	231	5.2%
<i>Comments referring to</i>		
local level	2452	48.7%
regional level	543	10.8%
national level	1662	33.0%
European level or EU	226	4.5%
<i>Distribution of comments after coding only highest reference level</i>		
None or other	621	12.3%
local level	1661	33.0%
regional level	388	7.7%
national level	1546	30.7%
European level or EU	226	4.5%

List A1: List of German keywords for online search of Facebook comments

Keywords (in German)	Keywords (in German)
flüchtling	islam
duldung	balkan-route
dublin-verfahren	rückführung
schengen	zuwander
flucht	einwander
frontex	bamf
migration	schengen
willkommenskultur	visa
obergrenze	grenze
genfer konvention	schlepper
integration	türkei-deal
asyl	silvesternacht
abschiebung	sexuelle übergriffe
ausländer	syrer
migrant	ausländisch
wir schaffen das	

List A2: List of Facebook sites of newspapers included in the coded sample

Original name (in German)		Original name (in German)	
1	Hamburger Abendblatt	36	Mitteldeutsche Zeitung
2	Augsburger Allgemeine	37	Neue Osnabrücker Zeitung
3	B.Z. Berlin	38	Neue Presse
4	Badische Zeitung	39	Neue Westfälische
5	Bergedorfer Zeitung	40	Nordseezeitung
6	Berliner Zeitung	41	Nürnberger Nachrichten Online
7	Berliner Kurier	42	Onetz.de
8	Braunschweiger Zeitung	43	Ostseezeitung
9	Donaukurier	44	Passauer Neue Presse
10	Echo Online	45	Pirmasenser Zeitung
11	Express	46	Rheinpfalz.de
12	Frankenpost	47	RP Online
13	Frankfurter Neue Presse	48	Ruhr Nachrichten
14	Freie Presse	49	Könische Rundschau
15	General Anzeiger Online	50	Saarbruecker Zeitung
16	Hamburger Morgenpost	51	Schwäbische Zeitung
17	Hannoversche Allgemeine	52	Schwarzwälder Bote
18	Harz Kurier	53	SHZ Online
19	idowa	54	Stuttgarter Nachrichten
20	inFranken.de	55	Stuttgarter Zeitung
21	Kieler Nachrichten	56	Südkurier News
22	Kreiszeitung.de	57	Südwestpresse
23	Kölner Stadtanzeiger	58	SVZ Online
24	Lausitzer Rundschau	59	Tagesspiegel
25	Lübecker Nachrichten Online	60	Thüringer Allgemeine
26	Leipziger Volkszeitung	61	TZ Muenchen
27	Mainecho	62	Volksfreund
28	Mainpost	63	Waldeckische Landeszeitung
29	Mannheimer Morgen	64	Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung
30	Märkische Allgemeine	65	Weser Kurier
31	Mittelbayerische	66	Westfälischer Anzeiger
32	Morgenpost	67	Westfalenblatt
33	Märkische Oderzeitung	68	Wiesbadener Kurier
34	Münchner Merkur	69	Westdeutsche Zeitung
35	Münsterland Zeitung		

Table A3.1: Robustness check: Actor expansion by lowest reference level, over time

	(1)	(2)
	Number of unique commenters under post	Number of comments under post
Local	5.972 (9.555)	13.54 (12.84)
Regional	-5.833 (9.170)	-5.567 (10.48)
National	4.387 (11.41)	4.816 (12.13)
Europe	-12.23 (7.420)	-14.92* (8.159)
Trend	2.005** (0.813)	1.780* (0.910)
Local * Trend	1.608 (2.412)	0.291 (2.999)
Regional * Trend	2.312 (3.132)	2.581 (3.370)
National * Trend	3.436 (2.825)	3.507 (2.972)
Europe * Trend	2.121 (2.223)	2.720 (2.421)
Constant	4.345 (2.729)	5.920* (3.280)
Observations	422	422
R-squared	0.059	0.053

Notes: Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors in parentheses, *** indicates $p < 0.01$. Regional levels are indicator variables taking the values 0 or 1. The baseline outcome relates to comments without or with another geographical reference. The coding scheme is exactly opposite to that of Table 3, prioritizing the local level instead of the European. The trend variable is 0 in the year 2011 and increases by 1 per year. Based on the coded sample of 5040 comments.

Table A3.2: Robustness check: Actor expansion by highest reference level if full coder agreement, over time

	(1)	(2)
	Number of unique commenters under post	Number of comments under post
Local	9.865 (11.80)	16.82 (16.64)
Regional	-74.50 (86.73)	-81.15 (93.73)
Europe	-6.249 (5.215)	-9.463 (6.113)
Trend	3.155*** (1.091)	2.749** (1.261)
Local * Trend	-1.069 (2.739)	-2.451 (3.635)
Regional * Trend	18.67 (21.15)	20.25 (22.86)
National * Trend	2.103 (2.491)	1.838 (2.569)
Europe * Trend	-1.124 (1.704)	-0.687 (1.833)
Constant	4.967 (3.844)	8.150* (4.940)
Observations	422	422
R-squared	0.030	0.023

Notes: Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors in parentheses, *** indicates $p < 0.01$. Regional levels are indicator variables taken the values 0 or 1. The baseline outcome relates to comments without or with another geographical reference. The highest level is only counted if coders are in full agreement. No coefficient for “national” in first year, because its estimated coefficient is exactly 0 and it is thus automatically dropped from the regression. The trend variable is 0 in the year 2011 and increases by 1 per year. Based on the coded sample of 5 040 comments.

Figure A4.1: Marginal effects plot for effect of post-level Europe on the number of comments under post corresponding to Table A3.1

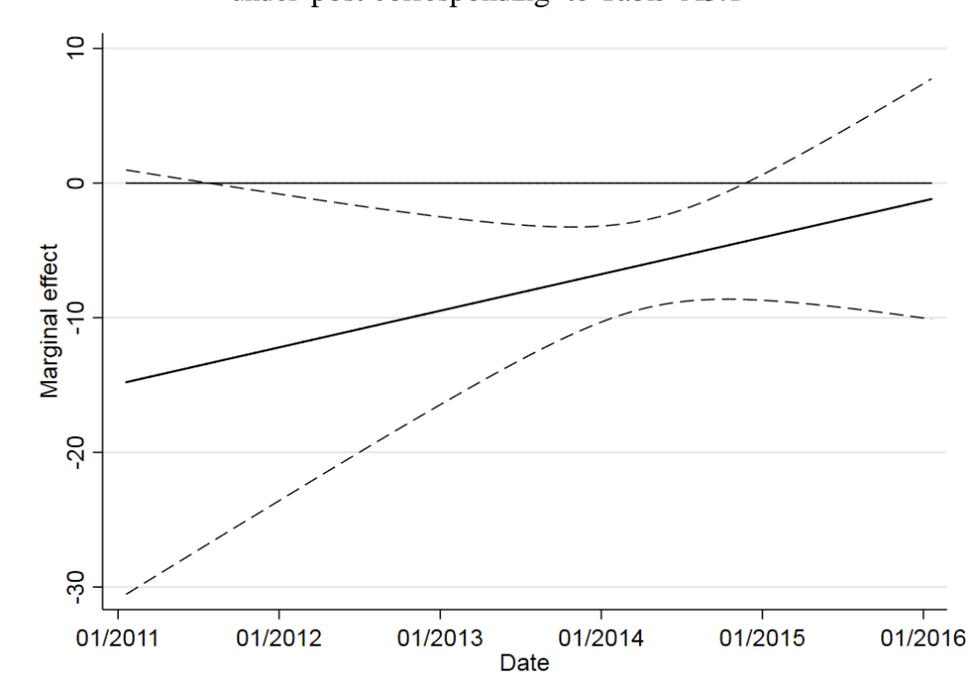


Figure A4.2: Marginal effects plot for effect of post-level Europe on the number of comments under post corresponding to Table A3.2

