

**Does Media Trust Moderate the Relation Between Attitudes and Action Tendencies
Towards Refugees When Reading About Transgressions?**

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PSB3E-BT15: Bachelor Thesis

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June 27th, 2025

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Abstract

This study examined whether media trust affects the relationship between people's attitudes towards refugees and their action tendencies towards refugees when exposed to news articles about refugee-related transgressions. The aim was to explore how individual differences in media trust and framing of refugees affect behavioural intentions towards refugees. A sample consisting of European participants ($n = 417$) was randomly assigned to read a fictional news article that framed refugees and local citizens as victims or perpetrators of a transgression. Before and after reading the article, participants completed measures assessing a variety of variables. We tested whether media trust moderated the relationship between refugee attitudes, refugee framing, and both pro- and anti-action tendencies. Findings included that pre-existing attitudes were strong predictors of action tendencies. Specifically, individuals with low media trust and negative attitudes were more likely to report anti-refugee action tendencies. This suggests that there is a relationship between the level of media trust and the influence of pre-existing attitudes on action tendencies towards refugees. The framing condition did not significantly affect outcomes, nor did it interact with media trust. This suggests that media trust has more effect than framing in shaping public responses to refugee-related media coverage.

Keywords: Refugee Attitudes, Action Tendencies, Media Trust, Framing, Transgression

Does Media Trust Moderate the Relation Between Attitudes and Action Tendencies Towards Refugees When Reading About Transgressions?

In recent years, refugees have been a frequent topic in media and public debate, often linked to discussions on security and integration. Worldwide there are currently 122.6 million people who have been forced to leave their home country due to persecution, war or maltreatment, with 13.2 million refugees seeking safety and asylum in Europe (UNHCR, 2024). As refugees settle in host countries, public attitudes towards them have a crucial influence on their integration by shaping policy decisions in host countries and influencing community support and civic engagement.

In the formation of public opinion, media coverage significantly impacts how refugees are perceived (Lippmann, 1922). News framing can portray refugees either as victims in need of help or as threats to society. An important example of this media influence can be found in coverage on the European refugee crisis that started in 2013. News coverage on this crisis differs between media outlets. Some outlets portray refugees as war victims, while others describe them as potential criminals (Joris et al., 2018; Van Gorp, 2005). These portrayals shape public responses, ranging from humanitarian aid initiatives to groups that advocate for stricter immigration policies. Research by Djaoedji (2024) found that media frames interact with people's pre-existing attitudes: individuals' responses to refugee-related transgressions are affected by how refugees are portrayed in the media and by individuals' underlying attitudes towards them. Together, these factors predict action tendencies towards refugees.

However, not everyone responds to media coverage in the same way. How people interpret and react to media content depends on the extent to which they trust the media (Lecheler et al., 2015). The level of media trust may influence whether people accept or reject the framing of refugees in news coverage. Individuals with low media trust may reject the refugee portrayal, while those with high media trust may be more receptive to the framing

used in the media coverage, because they are more prone to believe that information in the media is true.

Therefore, this current study investigates how attitudes towards refugees relate to action tendencies when reading about refugee-related transgressions, with media trust as a moderator. We used the following research question: *To what extent does media trust affect the relationship between refugee attitudes and action tendencies towards refugees, depending on how refugees are framed in the media?* Understanding this relationship is crucial, as media narratives influence public behaviour, policy making, and intergroup dynamics (Lippmann, 1922). By introducing media trust as a moderating factor, this study builds on research done by Djaoedji (2024) and contributes to a deeper understanding of how media trust affects social attitudes and actions.

Attitudes Towards Refugees and Their Effects on Action Tendencies

To be able to answer this research question, it is important to understand the key factors that shape action tendencies towards refugees. Gootjes et al. (2021) found that attitudes from civilians towards refugees are a strong determinant of action tendencies. Individuals who consider refugees to be an enrichment to society, are more likely to have pro-refugee action tendencies, e.g. raising money for a charity that supports refugees. Vice versa, individuals who consider refugees as a threat are more likely to show anti-refugee action tendencies, e.g. protesting the building of new refugee asylums (Gootjes et al., 2021).

As action tendencies towards refugees depend on the attitudes towards them, these attitudes need to be further understood. Attitudes serve as overall judgements based on beliefs, emotions and past experiences (Steg et al., 2017). In the case of attitudes towards refugees, there are two concepts that guide the formation of an individual's judgement: (1) out-group attitude and (2) perceived intergroup threat.

The first concept of out-group attitude refers to the attitude that an individual possesses towards groups who are considered different from their own (Brown, 2011). Research from Turner et al. (2013) found that individuals with a positive out-group attitude are more willing to seek intergroup contact, compared to those with a negative out-group attitude, who are in turn more likely to protest against an out-group. The possession of a negative- or positive out-group attitude is determined by the perceived intergroup threat that people experience, which is also the second contributor to the formation of attitudes towards refugees.

An intergroup threat is experienced when a group perceives that another group can cause them harm (Stephan et al., 2009). The Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2013) discusses that migration (e.g. refugees) can be perceived as two types of threat: symbolic and realistic threat. Symbolic threat refers to concerns about cultural differences and realistic threat focuses on concerns about negative outcomes of migration, e.g. less available housing options. Individuals differ in the amount and type of threat they experience from refugees. Together these types of threats form the perceived inter-group threat and contribute to the formation of people's attitudes towards refugees (Gootjes et al., 2021).

Refugee Framing and its Role in Shaping Attitudes

Apart from out-group attitude and perceived intergroup threat, the media portrayal of refugees is another key factor in the formation of attitudes towards refugees leading to action tendencies (Gootjes et al., 2021). This concept of media portrayal is called 'framing' and references to a tool that is often used by journalists to organise and structure reality for an audience. This process of framing involves emphasizing certain elements while ignoring others (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984), which is called 'selective emphasis' (Valkenburg et al., 1999). The use of framing often happens unconsciously, because journalistic frames are based on biases from the journalists who write the article (D'Angelo & Shaw, 2018).

Journalistic frames can be categorised as issue-specific frames and generic frames. Issue-specific frames are employed in the coverage of specific issue or topic, whereas generic frames are commonly applied in a wide range of topics (D'Angelo & Shaw, 2018). The framing of refugees fits into the issue-specific framing. Research on the framing of refugees shows that media coverage on the topic of refugees tends to be sporadic. During mass arrivals in a country or international conflicts surrounding the stay of refugees in hosting countries, there tends to be more media coverage (Lawlor & Tolley, 2017).

Two commonly used issue-specific frames in the coverage of refugees are the 'intruder frame' and the 'victim frame' (Joris et al., 2018; Van Gorp, 2005). The intruder frame contains dehumanisation of refugees. Journalists implement this frame by highlighting potential threats to the host country. Portrayals in this frame include assumptions that immigrants spread diseases, steal jobs, and that terrorists try to enter Europe disguised as refugees (Esses et al., 2013). Coverage containing the victim frame emphasises the vulnerability of refugees and highlights the fact that they need help and a safe place (Van Gorp, 2005).

These media frames help to shape public opinions (Entman, 1993), or in this case attitudes towards refugees. By using selective emphasis, such as highlighting vulnerability or threat, media outlets can influence how refugees are evaluated on moral, emotional, and social level (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Entman, 1993). When refugees are portrayed as victims, a sentimental perspective is brought into the discussion (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). An audience reading texts with the victim-frame may experience feelings of empathy or compassion, which can contribute to more positive attitudes towards refugees. Whereas repeated exposure to the intruder frame can lead to feelings of fear, prejudice, and scepticism, potentially leading to a more negative attitude (Esses et al., 2013).

Djaoedji (2024) demonstrates how framing and refugee attitudes jointly shape action tendencies. Results show that the interaction between pre-existing attitudes and framing of a transgression involving a refugee, significantly predicted action tendencies towards refugees. Specifically when refugees were framed as victims, people with positive attitudes towards refugees responded with stronger pro-refugee action tendencies. Conversely, individuals with negative refugee attitudes responded with stronger anti-refugee action tendencies when the refugee was framed as the perpetrator. These findings highlight that framing alone does not determine public reactions, but that the interaction between media framing and individual attitudes shape action tendencies towards refugees.

Media Trust

While framing plays an important role in shaping public attitudes (Lippmann, 1922), not all individuals are equally influenced by how information is framed. The amount of impact that framing has on individuals is moderated by the amount of trust that they have in the media (Koivula et al., 2024). There is no universal definition of media trust, because many components play a role in the determination and formation of trust in media (Fisher, 2018). For this research we will define it as: the degree of confidence that individuals have in media and its reporting. Media trust is related to selectivity emphasis, accuracy of depictions and journalistic assessment (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

Media trust shapes how individuals process information. Earlier research on media trust shows that low media trust reduces the persuasive power of news framing (Tsfati & Ariely, 2013). This is because people with low media trust tend to process information heuristically, e.g. using shortcuts and relying on pre-existing beliefs (Park, 2024). On the contrary, individuals with high level of media trust tend to engage more deeply with journalistic content and are more likely to evaluate media coverage critically and systematically (Park, 2024). This dynamic affects not only what information is considered to

be true but also affects people's choice of media sources and their engagement with news (Fletcher & Park, 2017).

In the context of refugee-related framing, it may be assumed that individuals with high media trust will be more responsive to the way refugees are portrayed. Their action tendencies towards refugees might align with the framing, regardless of their pre-existing attitudes. On the other hand, people with low media trust may reject the portrayals altogether and rely on their pre-existing attitudes, regardless of the fact if these are positive or negative.

Current Research

The current research builds on findings by Djaoedji (2024) and aims to further investigate the relationship between refugee attitudes and action tendencies. This current study examines whether media trust moderates the relationship between attitudes towards refugees and action tendencies in civilians, depending on how refugees are framed in the media. Public attitudes are known to influence behavioural tendencies, including pro- or anti-refugee behaviour (Gootjes et al., 2021). However, whether these tendencies shift in response to media portrayals, may depend on an individual's level of media trust. To explore this relationship, the current study surveyed European participants and focused specifically on perceptions of refugees within the European context.

Based on literature and previous research, we expect that individuals with low media trust will rely more on their pre-existing attitudes towards refugees, making attitudes a stronger predictor of action tendencies than the media frame. People with positive attitudes towards refugees and low media trust are expected to show pro-refugee behaviour, regardless of the framing in the article (Hypothesis 1a). Simultaneously, it is expected that people with negative attitudes towards refugees and low media trust will show anti-refugee behaviour, regardless of the framing in the article (Hypothesis 1b).

In contrast, individuals with high media trust are expected to be more influenced by the framing of refugees in the article, meaning that the frame is a better predictor of action tendencies than pre-existing attitudes towards refugees. Individuals who have high media trust and that are exposed to a refugee-victim frame, are expected to show a more pro-refugee behaviour, regardless of their pre-existing attitudes towards refugees (Hypothesis 2a). Individuals with high media trust who are exposed to a local-victim frame are expected to show more anti-refugee behaviour, regardless of their pre-existing attitudes towards refugees (Hypothesis 2b).

Currently, there is a limited amount of research on the influence of media trust on attitudes, specifically towards refugees. For that reason, the current research will try to expand our knowledge in this underdeveloped area of research.

Methods¹

Participants and Research Design

427 European participants who were students were recruited through two sources: the University of Groningen's SONA system and the online platform Prolific. SONA is a university-based participant pool primarily consisting of students, while Prolific is a British online research platform that offers diverse participant recruitment. The participants recruited via Prolific were rewarded £1.20 pounds as a monetary compensation after completing the questionnaire. The participants from SONA were compensated with credits required to pass a bachelor psychology course after completing the questionnaire.

Based on pre-registered criteria (AsPredicted)², ten participants who failed to complete at least 50% of the dependent measures, more than one attention check, who completed the survey in less than 120 seconds and/or who showed flatlining were excluded from the

¹ The method section was made in collaboration. The section was written by the whole bachelor thesis group and included in each individual paper.

² See <https://aspredicted.org/xnkd-9gmh.pdf>

analysis. The final sample included 417 participants ($n = 111$ (26%) SONA, $n = 306$ (74%) Prolific), aged between 17 and 65 years, with $n = 202$ identifying as female, $n = 209$ as male, $n = 5$ as non-binary/third gender and $n = 1$ participant who preferred not to say. Based on Gpower, we needed 210 participants to test the predicted two-way interaction effects with a power of .95 ($f = .25$). This suggests that the current sample size of $n = 417$ participants provides sufficient power to test the expected interaction effects, as well as to explore additional moderation and mediation models.

This study employed an experimental design to investigate the effects of group identity on responses to an intergroup transgression. Participants were randomly assigned to read a fabricated news article, styled after EuroNews, that described a conflict between a group of local citizens and a group of refugees, with the victim–perpetrator roles manipulated across conditions.

Our primary predictor variables were attitudes towards refugees and personal experiences with refugees. In addition, societal discontent, governmental trust, media trust and European identity were included as potential moderators. Our dependent variables were pro-refugee action tendencies, anti-refugee action tendencies, emotions (e.g. anger, compassion, etc.), empathy with the victims, support for the victims, empathy with refugees, punishment of the perpetrators, and policy support.

The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Groningen. Participants were provided with informed consent prior to participation, and data were collected anonymously. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study, and participants were debriefed at the end of the procedure.

Procedure and Independent Variables

The study was conducted, using an online questionnaire (see Appendix A-C) in English. After reading information about the study and providing informed consent,

participants completed demographic questions about age, gender and political orientation (e.g. ‘What is your age?’, and ‘Please indicate your gender’).

Governmental Trust

The first part of the survey included five items assessing trust in government adapted from Awwad and Awwad (2023). They were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Absolutely disagree) to 7 (Absolutely agree). Two example items are: ‘The government is truthful in its dealings with me’, and ‘If I needed help, the government would do its best to help me’ (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$, $M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.25$).

Media Trust

Next, media trust was measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree) by using four items based on research from Kohring and Matthes (2007). Two example items: ‘The media provides all important faces on covered topics’, and ‘The media pays necessary attention to important topics’ (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .828$; $M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.17$).

Societal Discontent

Following this, participants completed a measure of societal discontent, adapted from Gootjes et al. (2022). Items included statements such as ‘I feel concerned when I think about the future of society’ and ‘I am satisfied about society’. (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .846$, $M = 5.06$, $SD = .567$). These items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree)

Prejudice

Then, a single item of the prejudice scale by Lin et al. (2004) ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.36$) was used to measure the attitude of participants towards refugees, (e.g., ‘With respect to refugees, I feel...’). The item was answered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1

(Absolutely negative) to 6 (Absolutely positive). This item was mixed with filler items asking about people's feelings concerning several groups.

European Identification

Next, we measured participants' identification with Europe (Leach et al., 2008) using items such as 'Being European is an important part of who I am' and 'I feel a strong sense of belonging in Europe' (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.872$, $M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.23$). These items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree).

Personal Experience

After this, personal experience with refugees was measured with two items assessing the frequency of positive and negative interactions with refugees, rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Frequently). Positive experience was measured with the following item: 'How often have you had a positive experience with refugees?' ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.08$). Negative experience was measured with the item: 'How often have you had a negative experience with refugees?' ($M = 2.32$, $SD = 1.06$).

Manipulation

After these measures, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions in which they read a fictional EuroNews article describing a violent incident involving either refugees or local citizens as the victims. In the condition where refugees were the victims in the article, the perpetrators were local citizens. Conversely, when local citizens were the victims, the perpetrators were refugees in the transgression. Both articles were constructed to be equal in length, tone, and structure. For example, in the *Refugee-victim condition*, the article included the quote: " 'We were just going about our day, and then we were attacked without warning,' recounted Ahmed S., a refugee recovering in the hospital from stab wounds." In the *Local-victim condition*, the quote was identical except for the identity of the

speaker: “‘We were just going about our day, and then we were attacked without warning,’ recounted Lukas M., a local citizen recovering in the hospital from stab wounds.”

After this, dependent measures were taken. Further, at the end of the questionnaire, participants answered two manipulation check questions to verify their understanding of the scenario: ‘Who were the perpetrators in the article you just read?’ and ‘who were the victims in the article?’. This was measured to make sure the participants understand the identity of the victim and the aggressor in the article. We also included three attention checks (e.g., ‘To check if you are still there, can you solve this calculation: three plus three is?’) in the questionnaire to assess whether participants were paying attention. At the conclusion of the study, participants received a debriefing statement that explained the fictitious nature of the article and the purpose of the research, after which they were thanked for their participation.

Dependent Measures

Emotions

Participants were asked to report their emotional responses after reading the fictional EuroNews article. The prompt read: “After reading the EuroNews article about the people who were attacked, I felt...”. Responses for each emotion were rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not at all) to 6 (Very strongly).

Anger was assessed using two items: anger and outraged), with ($r = .791, p < .001, M = 4.05, SD = 1.30$), the scale was based on research from Batson et al. (2007).

Compassion was measured using the items moved and touched, ($r = .764, p < .001, M = 3.44, SD = 1.29$), the scale was based on research from Batson et al. (2007).

Distress was assessed with the items concerned and distressed), ($r = .647, p < .001, M = 4.00, SD = 1.15$), the scale was based on research from Batson et al. (2007).

Sadness was measured using the items unhappy and sad, ($r = .621, p < .001, M = 3.96, SD = 1.22$), the scale was based on research from Zentner et al. (2008).

Indifference was assessed with two items: indifferent and nothing ($r = .569, p < .001, M = 2.36, SD = 1.22$), adapted from Djaoedji (2024).

Empathy With the Victims

Empathy was assessed with one item “I empathise with the victims in the article” on 7-point Likert-scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree) ($M = 5.52, SD = 1.36$).

Support for the Victims

Support for the victims was assessed with two items: ‘I think that the victims in the article should receive an apology’ and ‘I think that the victims in the article need to be compensated by receiving help and/or money’, on 7-point Likert-scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree) ($r = .357, p < .001, M = 5.37, SD = 1.21$).

Punishment of the Perpetrators

Punishment of the perpetrators was also measured with two items: ‘I think the perpetrators need to be imprisoned’ and ‘I think that the perpetrators in the article need to pay the victims’. Both items were measured on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree) ($r = .506, p < .001, M = 5.03, SD = 1.44$).

Empathy with Refugees

Empathy with refugees was measured with six items (e.g. ‘When I see refugees suffering, I want to help them’ and ‘I often imagine how difficult it must be to flee one’s home country’) on a 7-point Likert-scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree), with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .913; M = 4.71, SD = .61$.

Action Intentions Towards Refugees

To distinguish between different types of behavioural intentions, we used items developed by Gootjes et al. (2021), reflecting divergent aims. Anti-refugee intentions were assessed using four items (e.g., ‘After reading the article, to what extent do you want to avoid contact with refugees’ and ‘After reading the article, to what extent do you want to protest

against refugees’) with Cronbach’s $\alpha = .85$; $M = 2.68$, $SD = 1.55$. Pro-refugee intentions were measured with three items (e.g., ‘After reading the article, to what extent do you want to donate money or clothes to refugees’ and ‘After reading the article, to what extent do you want to help refugees by teaching the language or personal coaching’) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$; $M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.63$). All action intention items were rated on the same 7-point Likert scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree).

Policy Support

To see if support for left- or right-wing policy statements increased after reading the article. For the statements we chose statements regarding refugees from a VoteMatch (StemWijzer | Europees Parlementsverkiezing 2024, 2024), after that the items were categorised as left- or right-wing by looking if the party that agrees or disagrees is left- or rightwing (Links en Rechts, z.d.) Agreement on leftwing policies was measured with three items (e.g. ‘European countries should respect and accommodate the cultural diversity of incoming refugees’ and ‘Europe should create welcoming environments for refugees’). Agreement on right-wing policies was also measured with three items (e.g. Refugees arriving in Europe should not receive governmental support, such as housing and integration programs’ and ‘Refugees who come to Europe should discard their own culture and adopt European culture’). All items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 - Absolutely disagree, 7 - Absolutely agree). To check if the items intended to measure agreement with leftwing and right-wing policy statements were internally consistent, the reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. Left- and right-wing policy agreement scales showed high internal consistency among the items (Leftwing: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.904$, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.65$; Rightwing: Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.814$, $M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.53$).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

A preliminary analysis was conducted to examine inter-item correlations among all variables, which can be found in Table 1. The inter-item correlations revealed a few patterns. Participants who trust the media more, were more likely to have positive attitudes towards refugees and pro-refugee action tendencies. A similar pattern was found with refugee attitudes. Participants with positive refugee attitudes were more likely to show pro-refugee action tendencies. Conversely, participants with negative action tendencies were more likely to show anti-refugee action tendencies. Lastly, participants with pro-refugee action tendencies were less likely to possess anti-refugee action tendencies, and vice versa.

Table 1

Correlations Among Variables.

	Media Trust	Refugee Attitudes	Pro-Action Tendencies	Anti-Action Tendencies
Media Trust	1			
Refugee Attitudes	.114*	1		
Pro-Action Tendencies	.137**	.575**	1	
Anti-Action Tendencies	-.031	-.537**	-.536**	1

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Manipulation Check

To evaluate whether participants understood the fabricated news article correctly, we asked them who the victim and perpetrator were in the article they read. A frequency analysis of the condition where refugees were the victim showed a correct score on manipulation checks of the victim of 94.3% ($n = 199$) and perpetrator of 94.2% ($n = 194$). In the condition where refugees were the perpetrators of the transgression, 91.7% ($n = 194$) showed a correct score on perpetrator recognition and correct score of 94.3% ($n = 199$) in victim recognition.

Testing of Hypotheses

We tested the four hypotheses using SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2022; Model 1). Four separate Model 1 analyses were used to test all hypotheses³. In all analyses action tendencies were used as the dependent variables (DV). In testing Hypotheses 1a and 1b, framing (local/refugee as victim) was included as a covariate, with media trust acting as the moderating variable and refugee attitudes being the independent variable (IV). This model was called the *Attitude-Trust Model*. For the testing of Hypotheses 2A and 2B, refugee attitudes acted as the covariate, with framing manipulation moving to the IV spot. Again, media trust acted as the moderator. This model was called the *Framing-Trust Model*.

Hypothesis 1a and 1b

According to Hypotheses 1a and 1b, we expected that individuals with low media trust would rely on their pre-existing attitudes towards refugees, regardless of type of framing used in the article. Individuals with positive refugee attitudes would show more pro-refugee behaviour (Hypothesis 1a) and individuals with negative refugee attitudes would show more anti-refugee behaviour (Hypothesis 1b). Two separate SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2022; Model 1) analyses were conducted to test the *Attitude-Trust Model*. One with pro-refugee action tendencies as the dependent variable, to test Hypothesis 1a. The other one with anti-refugee action tendencies as the dependent variable, to test Hypothesis 1b.

Hypothesis 1a. With respect to pro-refugee action tendencies, the model was significant, $F(4,412) = 52.67, p < .001$, and has an $R^2 = 0.34$, indicating that approximately 34% of the variance in pro-refugee action tendencies is explained by this model. A significant main effect from refugee attitudes on pro-refugee action tendencies was revealed, $b = .67, SE = .05, t(412) = 13.66, p < .001, 95\% CI [.58, .77]$, indicating that individuals with more positive attitudes towards refugees were more likely to show pro-refugee action tendencies.

³ All relevant linear regression assumptions were tested and found not to be violated for the current analyses. Initial diagnostics indicated some multicollinearity among independent variables, which was addressed by mean-centring continuous predictors involved in interaction terms. Due to theoretical considerations, no variables were excluded.

There was no main effect from media trust on pro-refugee action tendencies, $b = .11$, $SE = .06$, $t(412) = 1.88$, $p = .06$, 95% $CI [-.005, .22]$, indicating that the level of media trust had no direct relationship to pro-refugee action tendencies. As for the covariate, no significant main effect was found from framing on pro-refugee action tendencies, $b = -.10$, $SE = .13$, $t(412) = -.74$, $p = .46$, 95% $CI [-.35, .16]$, indicating that exposure to either framing of refugees (victim or perpetrator) did not differ the likelihood to engage in pro-refugee behaviour. Lastly, no two-way interaction between media trust and refugee attitudes was found, $b = -.03$, $SE = .04$, $t(412) = -.87$, $p = .38$, 95% $CI [-.111, .043]$. This result indicates no clear support for Hypothesis 1a as at all the levels of media trust (thus including high trust) attitudes predicted pro-refugee action tendencies.

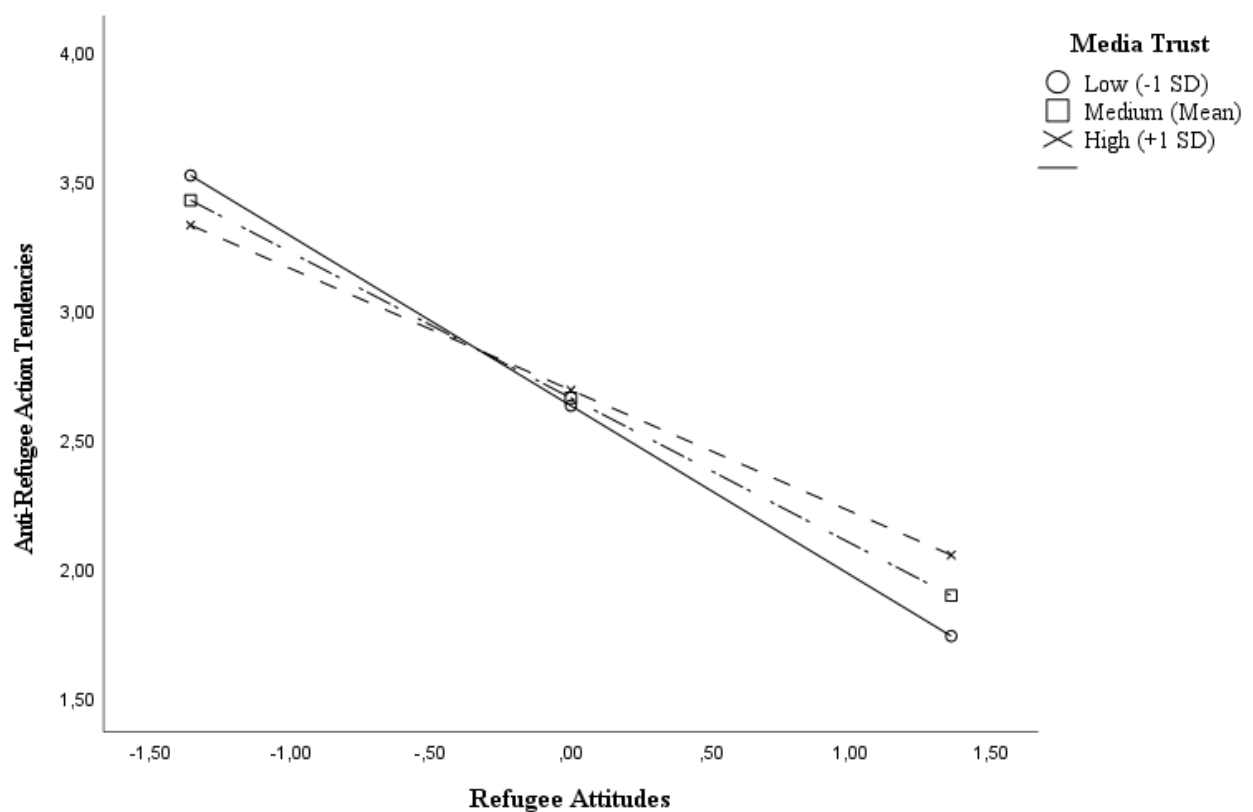
Hypothesis 1b. Regarding the anti-refugee action tendencies, the model was also significant, $F(4,412) = 54.58$, $p < .001$, and has an $R^2 = 0.30$, indicating that approximately 30% of the variance in anti-refugee action tendencies is explained by this model. A significant main effect of refugee attitudes on anti-refugee action tendencies was found, $b = -.56$, $SE = .05$, $t(412) = -12.4$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [-.65, -.47]$, indicating that individuals with more negative attitudes towards refugees are more likely to show anti-refugee action tendencies. No main effect was found from media trust on action tendencies, $b = -.02$, $SE = .05$, $t(412) = .49$, $p = .6241$, 95% $CI [-.08, .13]$. Again, no main effect was found from the framing condition on the anti-refugee action tendencies, $b = -.075$, $SE = .12$, $t(412) = -.62$, $p = .535$, 95% $CI [-.31, .16]$. This indicates that participants' exposure to neither refugee framing in the article affected the level of anti-refugee action tendencies.

However, a significant interaction effect between refugee attitudes and media trust was found in the anti-refugee tendencies model, $b = .08$, $SE = .04$, $t(412) = 2.2$, $p = .028$, 95% $CI [.009, .15]$, see Figure 1. To further explore the interaction between refugee attitudes and media trust, conditional effects were examined at low, medium, and high levels of media trust

(-1 SD, M, +1 SD). At all three levels, refugee attitudes significantly predicted anti-refugee action tendencies. However, the strength of this relationship varied depending on media trust. When media trust was low (-1 SD), the negative effect from refugee attitudes on anti-refugee action tendencies was strongest, $b = -.66$, $SE = .06$, $t(412) = -11.69$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.77, -.55]$. At the mean level of media trust the effect was slightly weaker, $b = -.57$, $SE = .05$, $t(412) = -12.4$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.65, -.48]$. At high media trust (+1 SD) the effect was again noticeably weaker, $b = -.47$, $SE = .07$, $t(412) = -6.99$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.60, -.34]$. These findings support Hypothesis 1b, suggesting that individuals with negative attitudes towards refugees are more likely to show anti-refugee behaviour, particularly when their media trust is low, while also controlling for framing. See Figure 1.

Figure 1

Anti-Refugee Action Tendencies as a Function of Refugee Attitudes and Media Trust.



Hypothesis 2a and 2b

According to Hypotheses 2a and 2b, we expected that high media trust individuals would show an effect from framing. Meaning those who are exposed to a refugee-victim frame (transgression where the refugee is the victim) would show more pro-refugee action tendencies, regardless of their pre-existing attitudes towards refugees (Hypothesis 2a). Conversely, we expected that high media trust individuals exposed to the local-victim (transgression where the refugee is the perpetrator) would show more anti-refugee action tendencies, regardless of their pre-existing attitudes (Hypothesis 2b).

Two separate SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2022; Model 1) analyses were conducted, using the *Framing-Trust Model*. One with pro-refugee action tendencies as the DV, to test Hypothesis 2a. The other, with anti-refugee action tendencies as the DV, to test Hypothesis 2b. Both models tested significant. Regarding the pro-refugee action, $F(4,412) = 52.86, p < .001$, the model had an $R^2 = 0.34$, indicating that approximately 34% of the variance in pro-refugee action tendencies is explained by this model. Focussing on the model with anti-refugee action tendencies, $F(4,412) = 42.18, p < .001$, the model had an $R^2 = 0.29$, indicating that around 29% of the variance in anti-refugee action tendencies was explained by this model.

A significant main effect from refugee attitudes on action tendencies was found in both models. The model containing pro-refugee action tendencies showed a main effect of $b = -.68, SE = .05, t(412) = 14.04, p < .001, 95\% CI [.58, .78]$, and the anti-refugee model showed a main effect of $b = -.58, SE = .05, t(412) = -12.9, p < .001, 95\% CI [-.67, -.49]$. No significant main or interaction effects were found in either model for framing or media trust in prediction of action tendencies. In the pro-refugee attitude model, neither the main effect of framing ($b = -.10, SE = .13, t(412) = -.75, p = .455, 95\% CI [-.35, .16]$) nor its interaction with media trust ($b = .12, SE = .11, t(412) = 1.12, p = .262, 95\% CI [-.09, .34]$) were statistically significant. Similarly, in the anti-refugee attitude model, the main effect of framing ($b = -.07, SE = .12, t$

(412) = $-.59$, $p = .553$, 95% CI $[-.31, .17]$) and its interaction with media trust ($b = .08$, $SE = .10$, $t(412) = -.74$, $p = .459$, 95% CI $[-.28, .13]$) were not significant.

Conditional effects analysis further confirmed these patterns, showing that the effect of media trust on action tendencies did not differ significantly across low, medium (mean), and high levels (-1 SD, M , $+1$ SD). These results indicate that the refugee framing in the article (victim or intruder) did not significantly predict action tendencies, even among participants who reported high media trust, while controlling for their attitudes. Therefore, Hypotheses 2a and 2b were not supported by the findings.

Exploratory Analysis

To further explore the relationship between attitudes and behavioural responses to refugees, two additional SPSS PROCESS analyses (Hayes, 2022; Model 3) were conducted. Both analyses examined whether media trust and framing condition moderated the relationship between refugee attitudes and two different outcome variables: (1) emotional anger in response to the transgression and (2) support for the victim of the transgression (either the refugee or local civilian, depending on the random assigned condition).⁴

Anger

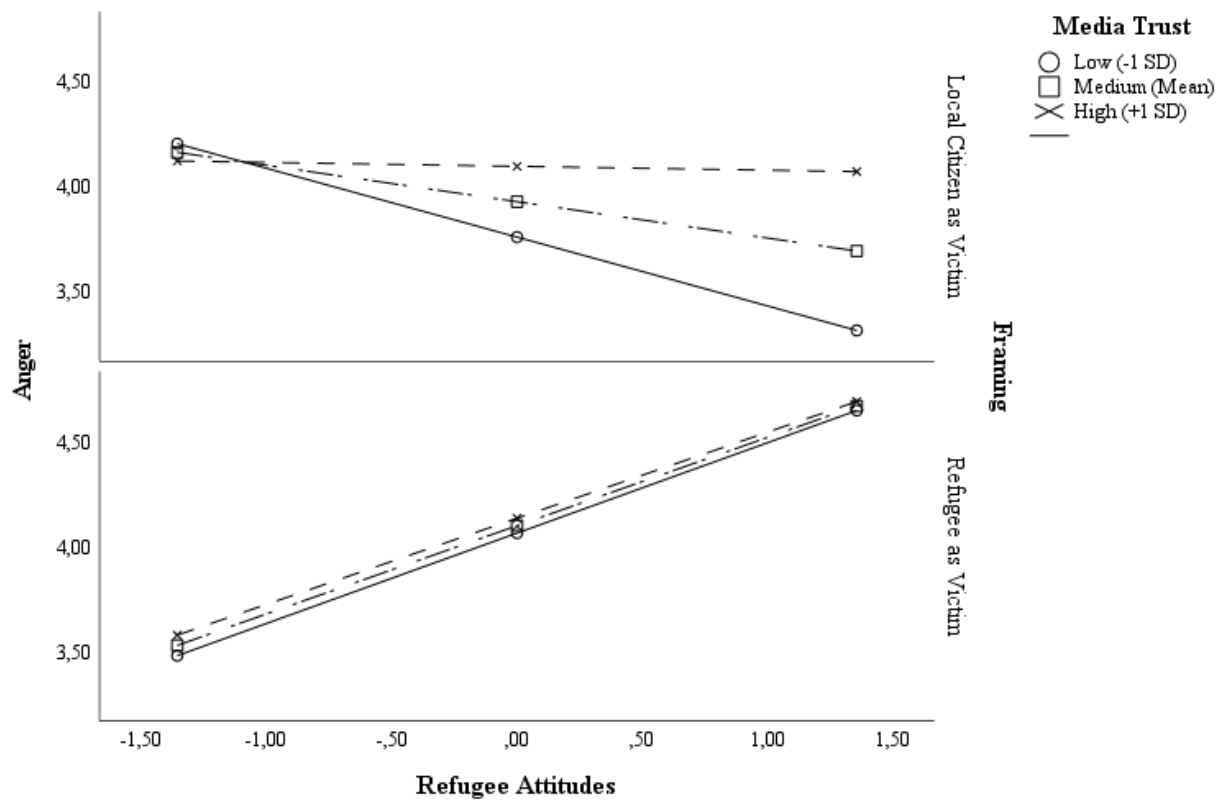
The first analysis tested the effect the relationship between refugee attitudes and anger in response to the transgression, with both media trust and framing acting as moderators. The overall model was significant, $F(7,409) = 8.68$, $p < .001$. The model had an $R^2 = 0.13$, indicating that approximately 13% of the variance in anger is explained by this model. A significant main effect from refugee attitudes on anger was found, $b = -.77$, $SE = .156$, $t(412) = -4.91$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-1.07, -.46]$, indicating that people with more negative refugee attitudes generally reported greater anger after reading the article. Both media trust and

⁴ All relevant linear regression assumptions were tested and found not to be violated for the current analyses. Initial diagnostics indicated some multicollinearity among independent variables, which was addressed by mean-centring continuous predictors involved in interaction terms. Due to exploratory interests, no variables were excluded.

framing did not have a significant main effect on anger (media trust: $b = .26$, $SE = .180$, $t(412) = 1.43$, $p < .153$, 95% $CI [-.10, .62]$, framing: $b = .17$, $SE = .13$, $t(412) = 1.3$, $p < .192$, 95% $CI [-.09, .43]$). Neither did a three-way interaction between all IVs emerged, $b = -.14$, $SE = .08$, $t(412) = -1.81$, $p = .071$, 95% $CI [-.29, .01]$.

However, two significant two-way interactions were found. The first one was between refugee attitudes and media trust, $b = .27$, $SE = .12$, $t(412) = 2.26$, $p = .024$, 95% $CI [.04, .51]$, suggesting that the level of media trust affected how refugee attitudes translate into anger responses. A second significant two-way interaction emerged between refugee attitudes and framing, $b = .59$, $SE = .098$, $t(412) = 6.06$, $p < .001$, 95% $CI [.40, .79]$, indicating that the way refugees were framed in the article affected the relationship between refugee attitudes and anger.

A conditional analysis provided deeper insights into the found significant two-way interactions. When the refugees were framed as the perpetrators (and the locals as victims), the relationship between negative refugee attitudes and anger was strongest at low levels of media trust, $b = -.33$, $p < .001$. This relationship became weaker as media trust increased, disappearing entirely in the high trust individuals, $b = -.02$, $p = .85$. When the refugees were portrayed as victims, refugee attitudes were associated with greater anger when negative attitudes were high, especially when media trust was low, $b = .43$, $p < .001$. Even at high media trust, this effect remained significant, $b = .41$, $p < .001$. See Figure 2.

Figure 2*Anger as a Function of Refugee Attitudes, Framing, and Media Trust****Support for the Victim***

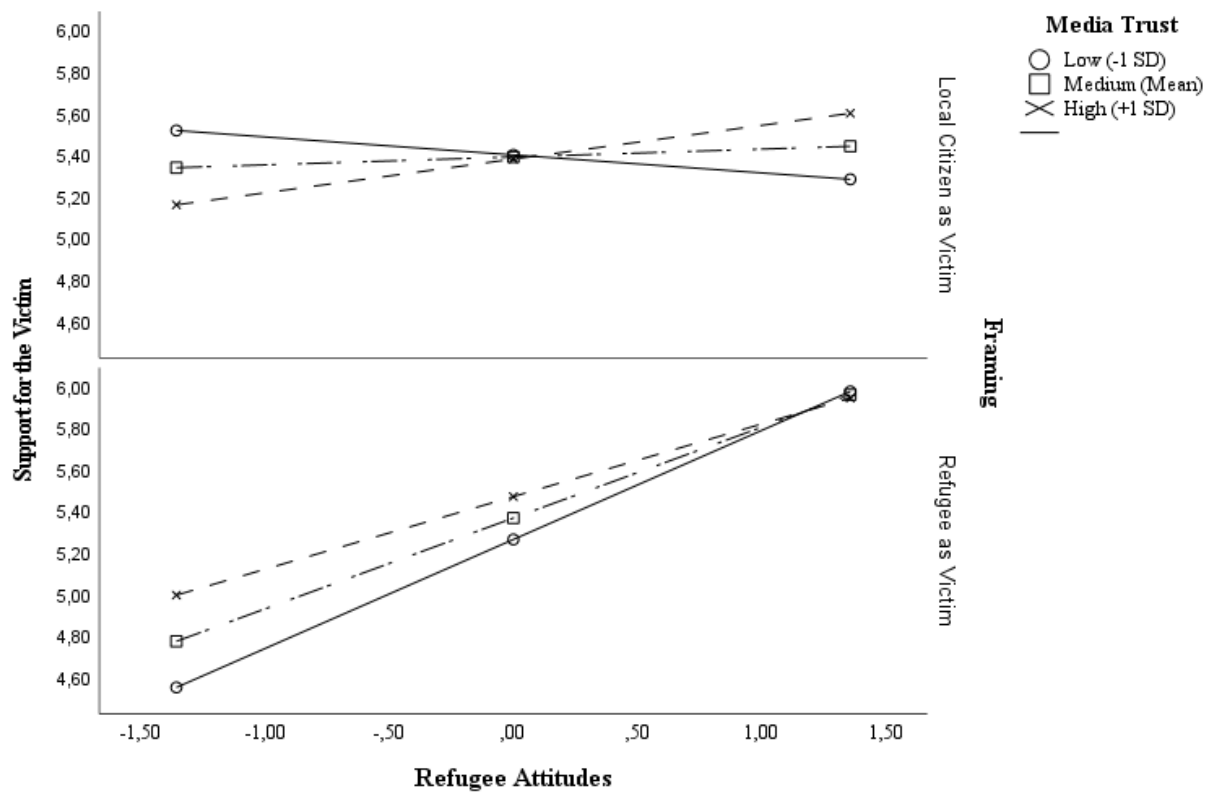
In the second exploratory analysis, we examined the relationship between refugee attitudes and support of the victim of a transgression, with both media trust and framing acting as moderators. The overall model was again significant, $F(7,409) = 11.35, p < .001$, and had an $R^2 = 0.163$, indicating that approximately 16% of the variance in support for the victim of the transgression is explained by this model. A significant main effect from refugee attitudes on support for the victim surfaced, $b = -.36, SE = .13, t(412) = -2.73, p = .006, 95\% CI [-.62, -.10]$, suggesting that people with more positive refugee attitudes generally reported less anger after reading the article. Both media trust and framing did not have a significant main effect on support for the victim (media trust: $b = -.11, SE = .153, t(412) = -.69, p < .490, 95\% CI [-.41, .20]$, framing: $b = -.02, SE = .11, t(412) = -.21, p < .832, 95\% CI [-.24, .19]$).

Multiple significant interactions were observed. Both two-way interactions observed between refugee attitudes and media trust ($b = .29, SE = .10, t(412) = 2.81, p = .005, 95\% CI [.09, .49]$) and refugee attitudes and framing ($b = .40, SE = .08, t(412) = 4.82, p < .001, 95\% CI [.24, .56]$) were found to be significant. Notably, the three-way interaction between refugee attitudes, media trust, and framing was found to be significant, $b = -.18, SE = .07, t(412) = -2.75, p = .006, 95\% CI [-.31, -.05]$. These interaction effects suggest that the relationship between refugee attitudes and support for the victim is affected by both media trust and framing.

A conditional analysis provided more information on this relationship and the ways that media trust and framing affect it. In the manipulation where the refugees were the victims, negative refugee attitudes were positively associated with support for the victim, particularly among individuals with lower media trust, $b = .52, p < .001$. The effect weakened at high media trust, but stayed significant, $b = .35, p < .001$. When the refugees were the perpetrators, there was no significant relationship between refugee attitudes and support for the victim at any level of media trust, $b [-.09 - .16], all p > .05$. See Figure 3.

Figure 3

Support for the Victim as a Function of Refugee Attitudes, Framing, and Media Trust



Discussion

In this research, we aimed to explore how media trust influences the relationship between attitudes towards refugees and action tendencies. Particularly when refugees are framed either as victims or perpetrators in media. Building on findings from Djaoedji (2024), we tried to gain deeper knowledge of this relationship, using the following research question: *To what extent does media trust affect the relationship between refugee attitudes and action tendencies towards refugees, depending on how refugees are framed in the media?*

We hypothesised that individuals with low media trust would rely more on their pre-existing attitudes towards refugees to determine their action tendencies. Whereas individuals with high media trust would be more influenced by the way refugees were framed (as victims or perpetrators). Hypothesis 1a states that people with positive attitudes towards refugees and low media trust are expected to show pro-refugee behaviour, regardless of the framing in the

article. However, we found no support for Hypothesis 1a, as not only people with low trust, but also people with high trust showed that positive attitudes show more pro-refugee action tendencies, irrespective of the framing of refugees as victims or perpetrators. These findings align with the Integrated Threat Theory from Stephan and Stephan (2023), which explains that perceived intergroup threat often triggers defensive behaviour against an out-group. Positive action tendencies (e.g. support or altruism) may be less affected by context and more deeply rooted in stable pro-social values. Findings from Carlsson et al. (2014) support this idea in their research, by proving that social behaviour is stable over a long time, and that it cannot be easily affected by triggers or threats.

Secondly, Hypothesis 1b states that people with negative attitudes towards refugees and low media trust will show anti-refugee behaviour, regardless of the framing in the article. We did find support for this hypothesis. Individuals with lower media trust demonstrated a stronger link between negative attitudes and anti-refugee action tendencies, compared to those with high media trust, regardless of framing. These findings align with work from Lecheler et al. (2015) and Tsfaty and Ariely (2013), who found that media trust shapes how individuals engage with news content: low-trust individuals are more likely to reject framed information and rely instead on belief systems.

Finally, we did not find any support regarding Hypotheses 2a and 2b, which predicted that framing would affect action tendencies among individuals with high media trust. Neither framing alone, nor the interaction between media trust and framing significantly predicted action tendencies towards refugees. These findings contradict earlier research and findings on framing effects (Entman, 1993; Esses et al., 2013; Van Gorp, 2005), which suggest that portraying refugees as victims or perpetrators shapes public opinion and behaviour. One possible explanation for these findings might be that the issue-specific frame (D'Angelo & Shaw, 2018) used in the testing conditions has not been clear enough to affect action

tendencies in participants. This means that the pre-existing attitudes, which are strong predictors of action tendencies (Gootjes et al., 2021; Turner et al., 2013), may have reduced the effects from the experimental framing manipulation. This challenges the assumption that selective emphasis in news framing always affects public opinions and behaviour (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984; Valkenburg et al., 1999). It may be that framing effects depend on more factors, e.g. emotions, media format, perceptibility, or issue familiarity.

Exploratory Analysis

To broaden the understanding of the effects of refugee attitudes, media trust, and framing on behavioural responses, we researched anger and support for the victim of the transgressions as two new DVs. We selected these variables because prior research connects these two concepts to behaviour. Feelings of anger and outrage can motivate behaviour (van Zomeren et al., 2008). Victim support is connected to ingroup images or outgroup solidarity, when the perpetrators are from ones ingroup and the victims from the out-group (Çakmak et al., 2025).

As refugee attitudes became more positive, there was an anger increase in the refugee-victim framing for all levels of media trust. This supports earlier research on refugee framing suggesting that when refugees are portrayed as victims a sentimental perspective is highlighted (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) causing a possible increase in anger. Prior research on the victimisation of refugees frequently shows empathy as a response, instead of anger (Blavatsky, 2022; Xu et al., 2020). Angry feelings in participants might have been in response to the transgression instead of the victimisation. Anger is a common emotional response to transgression, but the intensity of the anger can be affected by the identity of the victim (Dubreuil, 2014). We found a decrease in anger as refugee attitudes became more positive in the local-victim framing. This can be explained by research from Soter et al. (2025) which shows that people who perceive refugees as vulnerable are more likely to view

transgressions against refugees as more morally wrong than transgression targeting their fellow citizens. This may cause stronger anger in response to the transgression in the refugee-victim frame.

We also researched support for the victim as a behavioural response. We found that participants' support varied depending on the framing condition and levels of media trust. Participants with low media trust and positive refugee attitudes showed more support for the victim when it was refugees who were the victims, compared to when the refugees were the perpetrators. This interaction reinforces earlier findings by Djaoedji (2024), which showed that attitudes and framing jointly shape behavioural intentions and extends them by showing that this pattern also applies to the evaluation of the victim. Apart from that, the support for the victim increased in the refugee-victim framing as refugee attitudes became more positive, for all levels of media trust. This finding suggests that the people's perceptibility to framing does not depend on media trust for the support of refugee victims of a transgression. This challenges findings from Koivula et al. (2024) that show media trust affects influence from framing.

Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research

This study contributes valuable insights into how media trust and framing moderate the relationship between refugee attitudes and action tendencies, particularly showing that individuals with low media trust rely more strongly on their pre-existing attitudes. However, several limitations of our research must be acknowledged.

First, we examined action tendencies rather actual behaviour. While intentions often predict behaviour, research shows that there is a gap between the two (Sheeran & Webb, 2016). Future research could incorporate behavioural measures to close this gap, e.g. willingness to donate or petition signing, Second, our media framing manipulation may not have been strong or engaging enough to evoke an effect. While framing effects can be

persistent, the duration of the effect is person specific (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2011). Future studies should use stronger or repeated framing, like videos or real-time news simulations, to ensure greater impact. Lastly, we treated refugees as a homogenous group, without distinguishing between nationalities, ethnicities, or other subgroup characteristics. Future research should explore how refugees' background affect action tendencies towards refugees in any way, as prior research show that origin significantly affects public attitudes towards refugees (Getmansky et al., 2024; Jelić & Uzelac, 2024; Steele & Abdelaaty, 2018).

Conclusion

The main goal of the current study was to examine the extent to which media trust moderates the relationship between refugee attitudes and action tendencies, depending on framing and media trust. Our findings provided an answer: media trust does affect this relationship, but only in the case of anti-refugee action tendencies. Individuals with low media trust were more likely to show anti-refugee actions, especially when they already had negative refugee attitudes. Those with higher media trust showed a weaker link between negative attitudes and anti-refugee actions tendencies. In our case, framing of the refugees (as victim or perpetrator) did not affect action tendencies, nor did it interact meaningfully with media trust. With this information, this study contributes to the growing understanding of how media trust can affect public attitudes, especially regarding refugees.

AI-Statement

Artificial intelligence (AI), such as ChatGPT, was used at several stages of this research. ChatGPT served as a tool to help generate initial ideas and inspiration for the text of a fabricated news article in the style of EURONEWS. While ChatGPT provided a draft in appropriate journalistic style, we edited and refined the details ourselves to produce the final version. In addition, ChatGPT was used as a spelling, grammar and APA checker throughout the writing process. For some example prompts, please see Appendix D.

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Appendix A

Questionnaire Used in Experiment

Informed Consent

“VIEWS ON SOCIETAL ISSUES”

Why do I receive this information?

- You are being invited to participate in this study, because we are looking for Europeans to answer this questionnaire about how people in Europe think about societal issues. You will be asked about different political and societal issues, such as trust in government and media and the position of refugees in Europe.
- This research is part of the Bachelor's thesis project by S. Akbari, T. Dumas, S.W. Hoogcarspel, Y. Lippold, M.C. Osterwald and S.F. Willegers, from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, and is supervised by E. Gordijn. Contact information: Y.lippold@student.rug.nl
- The start date of the research will be April 3 2025 and the end date of the research will be June 20 2025.

Do I have to participate in this research?

- Participation in the research is voluntary. However, your consent is needed. Therefore, please read this information carefully. You can withdraw from participation at every moment without explanation, and there will be no negative consequences for you. You have this right at all times, also after you have given consent for participation.

Why this research?

- In this research, we want to study how people from different backgrounds in Europe think and feel about societal and political issues in Europe. For this research, we are looking for participants who are at least 16 years old and who are European.

What do we ask of you during the research?

- First, we will ask you for your consent to participate.
- When you agree to participate, you will be guided to the online questionnaire. In the questionnaire, you first answer some demographic questions, namely your age and gender. Moreover, we will ask you about your political orientation. Next, you will be asked several questions concerning issues in Europe. Furthermore you will read a short news article regarding refugees in Europe, and we will ask several questions about that article.
- If you decided to withdraw from the study but would like to receive more information, you can always ask for this by sending an email to y.lippold@student.rug.nl.
- The questionnaire will take approximately 9 minutes to complete.
- You will receive compensation for your participation.

What are the consequences of participation?

- With our research, we hope to gain more understanding of how European citizens react to societal and political issues. Your participation will also help Bachelor students with their thesis.
- We believe that there are no major risks associated with participating in this study. Please remember that you may always withdraw from the study and/or skip questions you may not wish to answer, which does not have any negative consequences for you.

How will we treat your data?

- The data consists of your responses to the questions which will be collected using an online questionnaire. We collect this data for scientific purposes.
- Your data will be used to write a Bachelor's thesis, and possibly to write an empirical article in a scientific peer-reviewed journal.
- Your data is confidential. Some information may act as identifiers when combined (i.e., gender, age range, and political orientation). Only the researchers of this study will have access to it. Also, Prolific ID codes can be deemed as identifiers. We use them only to compensate for your participation. Once we compensate you, we will delete them.
- If the data is published, we will remove information that could be used to identify individual participants.
- Data processing takes place in Europe.
- When the study is finished, the data will be stored at a safe University of Groningen server and will be stored for 10 years, which is in line with the university's data storage protocol.

What else do you need to know?

- You may always ask questions about the research: now, during the research, and after the end of the research. You can do so by sending an e-mail to the researchers via Prolific.
- Do you have questions/concerns about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of the research? You may also contact the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural and Social Sciences of the University of Groningen: ec-bss@rug.nl.
- Do you have questions or concerns regarding the handling of your personal data? You may also contact the University of Groningen Data Protection Officer: privacy@rug.nl.
- As a research participant, you have the right to a copy of this research information.

By consenting to participate in this study you understand the following:

1. I have the right to receive a copy of this informed consent form by taking a screenshot of this page or asking the researcher for a copy (send an email to y.lippold@student.rug.nl)

2. My participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw from this study at any moment without having to give a reason and without any negative consequences.
3. I am allowed to refuse to answer any questions that I do not wish to answer. I do not have to provide any reason for this, and this does not have any negative consequences.
4. My responses are confidential and will not be shared with anyone besides the research team.
5. All my responses will be securely stored and are only accessible to the researchers.
6. After completing the questionnaire, I will receive more information on the purpose of this research.
7. I approve that researchers can handle my personal data.

Participation

1. Do you agree to participate in this study (if you don't want to participate, click no and you will leave the questionnaire)?
 - Yes, I want to participate.
 - No

Data Collection

2. Do you give permission for your data to be collected during your participation in this study, to be analyzed and used for the purposes of the study outlined above (if you do not consent, click no and you will leave the questionnaire)?
 - Yes, I consent to the processing of my data as mentioned in the study information.
 - No, I do not consent to participate.

Demographics

First, we ask you to provide some demographic information below before starting the main survey.

3. European: Are you European?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
4. Age: What is your age?
5. Gender: Please indicate your gender.
 - Male
 - Female
 - Non-binary / third gender
 - Prefer not to say

6. Nationality: Are you European?
 - Yes, I am European
 - No

7. Ethnicity: Which of these best describes your ethnic background? Please select one answer.
 - Asian or Asian British
 - Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
 - Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
 - White
 - Other ethnic group

8. Political orientation: Please indicate where on the scale you see yourself regarding your own political orientation.
 - Extremely left
 - Left
 - Slightly left
 - Moderate
 - Slightly right
 - Right
 - Extremely right

Perception Institution

Next, we would like to know how you perceive institutions such as the government and the media. To what extent do you agree with each statement (1= absolutely disagree; 7 = absolutely agree)?

Governmental Trust

9. If I needed help, the government would do its best to help me.
10. I believe that the government would act in my best interest.
11. The government is interested in my well-being, not just its own.
12. The government is truthful in its dealings with me.
13. I would describe the government as honest.

Media Trust

14. The media pays necessary attention to important topics.
15. The media provides all important facts on covered topics.
16. Please select six (attention check).
17. The information in the news is always truthful.
18. Journalists express fair and reasonable opinions.

Societal Discontent

How do you feel about and perceive society? Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements (1= absolutely disagree; 7 = absolutely agree).

- 19. I feel shocked about the way things are going in society.
- 20. I feel concerned when I think about the future of society.
- 21. I am satisfied about society.
- 22. I am frustrated because society is not as it should be.
- 23. I am afraid that things will go wrong in society.

Prejudice

How do you feel about the following groups of people in society? Please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements (1= absolutely disagree; 6 = absolutely agree).

- 24. With respect to POOR people, I feel ...
- 25. With respect to HIGHLY EDUCATED people, I feel ...
- 26. With respect to REFUGEES, I feel ...
- 27. With respect to RICH people, I feel ...
- 28. With respect to LOWER EDUCATED people, I feel ...

Attention Check

- 29. To check if you are still there, can you solve this calculation: $3 + 3 = ?$

Refugees in Europe

In this part of the questionnaire we want to focus on refugees in Europe. We first want to know more about how you feel about being European.

- 30. Are you European?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Prefer not to say
 - Other, namely.....

European Identity

To what extent do you agree with the following statements about being European (1= absolutely disagree; 7 = absolutely agree).

- 31. I see myself as an European
- 32. Being European is an important part of who I am.
- 33. I feel a strong sense of belonging to Europe.
- 34. I feel good about being part of Europe.
- 35. In my current daily life, I often think about being European.

Personal Contact With Refugees

We now would like to know to what extent you have had positive or negative experiences with refugees (1 = never; 5 = frequently).

36. How often have you had a positive experience with refugees?
 37. How often have you had a negative experience with refugees?

Manipulation (See Appendix B and C)

For the second part of the questionnaire we would like you to read an article that was published a while ago. Please read it carefully as we will ask some questions about it.

Emotions

How do you feel about the situation described in the article? Please answer this for each item.

After reading the article about the people who were attacked, I felt ... (1 = not at all; 6 = very strongly).

- 38. Outraged
- 39. Touched
- 40. Distressed
- 41. Unhappy
- 42. Moved
- 43. Angry
- 44. Indifferent
- 45. Concerned
- 46. Nothing
- 47. Sad
- 48. Guilty
- 49. Ashamed

Victims and Perpetrators

Next, we would like to know how you think about the victims and the perpetrators of the article. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (1= absolutely disagree; 7 = absolutely agree).

- 50. I think that the victims in the article need to be compensated by receiving help and/or money.
- 51. I think that the perpetrators in the article need to be imprisoned.
- 52. I empathize with the victims in the article.
- 53. I can understand why the perpetrators in the article behaved in the way they did.
- 54. I think that the victims in the article are at least partly responsible for how they were treated.
- 55. I think that the perpetrators in the article need to pay the victims.
- 56. I think that the victims in the article should receive an apology.

Empathy With the Refugees

Now we would like to know how you feel, think and want to behave with respect to refugees

in general. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (1= absolutely disagree; 7 = absolutely agree).

- 57. I feel compassion for refugees when I hear about their struggles.
- 58. When I see refugees suffering, I want to help them.
- 59. I can easily put myself in the shoes of a refugee.
- 60. Please select absolutely disagree (check)
- 61. I feel emotionally moved when I hear about the hardships refugees face.
- 62. I often imagine how difficult it must be to flee one's home country.

Action Tendencies Towards Refugees

Now we would like to know how you feel, think and want to behave with respect to refugees in general. To what extent do you agree with the following statements (1= absolutely disagree; 7 = absolutely agree).

- 63. I would like to demonstrate for rights for refugees.
- 64. I would like to protect my neighbourhood from refugees.
- 65. I would like to help refugees by teaching the language of personal coaching.
- 66. I would like to avoid contact with refugees.
- 67. I would like to correct refugees firmly, even with violence, when they break the law.
- 68. I would like to donate money or clothes to refugees.
- 69. I would like to protest against refugees.

Policy Support

Next, we would like to know how you think Europe should deal with refugees. To what extent do you agree with the following measures (1= absolutely disagree; 7 = absolutely agree).

- 70. Europe should create welcoming environments for refugees.
- 71. Refugees arriving in Europe should not receive government support, such as housing and integration programs.
- 72. European countries should respect and accommodate the cultural diversity of incoming refugees.
- 73. Refugees who come to Europe should discard their own culture and adopt European culture.
- 74. The government should aid refugees that come into Europe, for example with housing or other initiatives.
- 75. All refugees should be refused at the borders of Europe.

Manipulation Check

- 76. Finally, please think back about the article that you just read. Who were the perpetrators in the article?
 - The refugees
 - The local citizens

77. Who were the victims in the article?

- The refugees
- The local citizens

Feedback

You are about to come to the end of the study. We would like to hear your thoughts and feedback about the study. If any, please report them in the box below.

Debrief

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

Please read the following information about this study carefully; We have withheld some information about the study.

At the beginning, you were informed that this research was focused on people's perception about societal issues in Europe. To investigate this, you were asked several questions about how you perceive yourself and others in society, and your response about a EuroNews article about refugees.

However, the actual aim was to investigate whether a newspaper article describing a transgression involving refugees and local citizens influences how people perceive and act towards refugees. Depending on the condition you were assigned to, you either read an article about refugees being the victims or refugees being the perpetrator of a transgression. This is why you were asked about your emotions and action tendencies towards refugees.

However, please note that the EuroNews article you read was fictional and created by the researchers. The article was not based on any specific real-world events or situations. Study participants were shown a hypothetical article in which either refugees or local citizens were the perpetrators of a transgression involving both groups. It was designed as an experiment to explore the attitudes and actions that people might take in response to such a scenario.

We want to emphasize that the article was not real and did not appear on the EuroNews website. The transgression and crime scene described in the article were created solely for the purpose of this research, all the statements in the article are fictional.

We understand that the article may have elicited negative emotions. However, we believe it is important to examine these types of situations, as news stories about similar events are often published, and it is crucial to investigate how people respond to them.

We want to emphasize that this study was purely academic in nature, and your responses will be kept strictly confidential. Your participation was completely voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Thank you once again for your valuable participation, we appreciate your help in furthering our understanding on these important issues.

Renewed consent

78. Now that you have read all the information about the purposes of the study, do you still agree with the use and processing of your data?


- Yes, I consent to the use and processing of my personal data.
- No, I do not consent to the use and processing of my data, and my personal data should be permanently deleted.

Thanks

Thank you for your time. If you click on the red arrow you will return to Prolific to get compensated for your participation.

Appendix B


Fake Euronews Article Used: Refugees are the Perpetrators; Locals are the Victims


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By [Romane Armangau](#)
Published on 17/03/2025 - 11:03 GMT+1

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Local citizens left afraid after being caught by surprise with a violent attack by a group of refugees

Graz, Austria – March 17 2025

A disturbing incident unfolded this morning in the city center of Graz, Austria. A group of refugees viciously attacked a group of local residents near a tram station. The unprovoked assault left several civilians injured and traumatized, deepening concerns among citizens about public safety.


Witnesses described the attack as chaotic and terrifying. "I heard shouting, and then suddenly one of them pulled out a knife," recalled Marie Hoffner, a witness who was standing nearby. "At first, it seemed like an argument, but then it turned violent very quickly. There was panic—people screamed and ran in different directions."

According to reports, several of the attacked local citizens sustained injuries before bystanders and police intervened. "We were just going about our day, and then we were attacked without warning," recounted Lukas M., a local citizen recovering in the hospital from stab wounds. "I don't understand why this happened." Several other victims suffered cuts and bruises. Emergency services provided immediate medical attention at the scene.

Police arrived swiftly, detaining multiple individuals involved in the fight. Some of those arrested reportedly showed signs of erratic behavior. Authorities have not yet disclosed a motive for the altercation and are continuing their investigation.

Similar violent incidents between refugees and civilians have been reported across European cities in recent months. The attacks have reignited debates over migration policies, with many locals expressing growing frustration over security concerns. "We need to do more to protect our citizens from violence and hate", we can't allow this kind of behavior," said a local community leader.

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Appendix C


Fake Euronews Article Used: Refugees are the Victims; Locals are the Perpetrators


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According to reports, several of the attacked refugees sustained injuries before bystanders and police intervened. "We were just going about our day, and then we were attacked without warning," recounted Ahmed S., a refugee recovering in the hospital from stab wounds. "I don't understand why this happened." Several other victims suffered cuts and bruises. Emergency services provided immediate medical attention at the scene.

Police arrived swiftly, detaining multiple individuals involved in the assault. Some of those arrested reportedly showed signs of erratic behavior. Authorities have not yet disclosed a motive for the attack and are continuing their investigation.

Similar violent incidents between civilians and refugees have been reported across European cities in recent months. These attacks have reignited debates over the treatment of refugees in Europe with many locals expressing frustration. "We need to do more to protect refugees from violence and hate, we can't allow this kind of behavior to continue," said a local community leader.

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Appendix D

Examples of Chat-GPT Prompts

Fabrication of Fake Euronews Article

1. We are conducting research and we need to write a fake news article about a transgression happening between a refugee and a civilian. Could you please come up with some inspiration for a first version of this article?
2. I think in this version it is not clear enough which group is the aggressor and which the victim. Could you alter that?

Spelling, Grammar, and APA Check

1. Could you please check this piece of text from my discussion section on English grammar and spelling?
2. Do you have any grammar feedback on my theoretical framework?
3. In APA-7, nouns with how many letters should be capitalised in headings?