

# **Changes in Policy Support After Reading About Refugees' Involvement in Transgressions**

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## **Abstract**

News media significantly influences public perceptions and political attitudes, with frequent reports of incidents involving refugees potentially altering existing views. Previous research indicates that negative framing of refugees in the news can reinforce negative attitudes towards immigration. This study aims to replicate and extend the study from Djaoedji (2024) by investigating how support for policies regarding refugees changed after exposure to an article of refugee involvement in transgressions. We first hypothesized that participants with a more right-wing political orientation will, after reading an article where the refugee is the perpetrator, increase their support for right-wing policies regarding refugees compared to participants with a more right-wing political orientation who read an article where the refugee is the victim. And then we hypothesized that participants with a more left-wing political orientation will, after reading an article where the refugee is the victim, increase their support for left-wing policies regarding refugees compared to participants with a more left-wing political orientation who read an article where the refugee is the perpetrator. Using moderation analysis, the study examined the influence of political orientation and article condition (refugee as perpetrator vs. citizen as perpetrator) on support for left and right-wing policies. The hypotheses were not supported. However, exploratory findings revealed a significant interaction between political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity on anger. Right-wing participants showed more anger after reading an article where refugees were the perpetrators and left-wing participants showed more anger after reading an article where refugees were the victims.

## **Changes in Policy Support After Reading About Refugees' Involvement in Transgressions**

News media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions and, consequently, political attitudes (Czymara and Dochow, 2018; Wigger et al., 2021). Reports of incidents involving refugees, whether as victims or perpetrators, are frequently published in the news. For example, on February 13, 2025, there was an incident in Munich, where a refugee drove a car into a crowd. Or the August 5, 2024, attack on a refugee residency in Tamworth following riots in England, illustrate this trend. These news reports may influence public opinion and potentially alter existing attitudes. Most of the time, people form their political views based on what they have seen or read in the news. When refugees are not positively framed in the news, the more negative cognitions people have about them (Wirz et al., 2018). And with more than forty million refugees and asylum seekers by the end of 2022, this could have negative consequences (UNHCR, 2023, as cited in Knausenberger et al., 2024).

Negative framing of refugees in the news has consequences for refugees, as these messages reinforce the negative attitudes about refugees and immigration (Brader et al., 2008; Czymara and Dochow, 2018; Wirz et al., 2018). Djaoedji (2024) investigated how citizens' attitudes toward refugees influence their emotional and behavioral responses when reading articles depicting refugees as either perpetrators or victims of transgressions. In the current study we aim to extend the study by Djaoedji (2024) and instead of looking at attitudes we will examine how political attitudes about refugees might change after being exposed to stories about refugees' involvement in transgressions. Specifically, we ask: Is support for more left-wing or right-wing policies regarding refugees influenced after reading about refugee involvement in transgressions, as either victims or perpetrators, dependent on citizens' political orientation?

## **Relationship Between Political Orientation and Attitudes on Refugees**

The study by Djaoedji (2024) revealed that both attitudes toward refugees and the perpetrator's identity significantly impact anger and behavioral intentions. When participants with a more positive attitude about refugees read an article where the refugee was the victim, they felt angrier and were more likely to show positive action intentions. Participants with a more negative attitude about refugees felt angrier and were less likely to show positive action intentions when the refugees were the perpetrators. People who consider themselves as right-wing politically oriented are more likely to have attitudes of refugees as a threat (Canetti et al., 2016; Esses et al., 2017), even if the refugees show interest in the host culture (Knausenberger et al., 2024). Individuals on the left of the political spectrum generally hold more welcoming attitudes towards refugees and immigration policies (Liebe et al., 2018). In contrast, those with a right-wing or less progressive political ideology tend to favor more restrictive approaches to these issues (Liebe et al., 2018). Individuals who have a more favorable attitude towards refugees tend to display higher levels of compassion, distress, and sadness, and are more likely to engage in positive actions towards refugees (Djaoedji, 2024; Van der Brug & Harteveld, 2021). So, because individuals with a more right-wing political orientation are more likely to perceive refugees as a threat and hold negative attitudes, they could be less inclined to show positive action intentions (Djaoedji, 2024; Liebe et al., 2018). And people with a more left-wing political orientation are more likely to hold welcoming attitudes toward refugees, thus are more likely to show positive action intentions (Djaoedji, 2024; Liebe et al., 2018; Van der Brug & Harteveld, 2021).

### **Impact of Media on Attitudes Towards Refugees**

Negative attitudes towards refugees and immigration are evoked by negative media attention in European countries (Czymara & Dochow, 2018; Wigger et al., 2021). Research has

shown that the more negative refugees and immigrant messages are visible in the media, the more negative the cognitions of the participants about refugees are (Wirz et al., 2018).

Confirmation bias, the tendency to interpret evidence in a manner consistent with existing beliefs (Nickerson, 1998), can influence how voters perceive information. People tend to favor and accept information more if it reinforces their preexisting attitudes (Nickerson, 1998). Pradel (2024) found that people who hold extreme-right political beliefs tend to become even more hostile toward refugees and supportive actions after they've been exposed to hate speech in the media about refugees. This suggests that voters are more likely to accept information aligning with their political orientation as truthful, potentially impacting their attitudes about refugees and policies regarding refugees.

### **Current research**

The current research is based on the findings of Djaoedji (2024). We aim to extend the findings by looking at political orientation and policy support instead of attitudes and action tendencies, specifically at the effect of the interaction between political orientation and the article on support for policies. We also explored the effects of political orientation and the perpetrator/victim condition on anger. We focused on the European population because in 2018 for 40% of Europeans, refugees and immigration was one of the most pressing concerns (Campomori et al., 2023). For individuals with a right-wing political orientation, exposure to information where refugees are portrayed as perpetrators is expected to confirm and reinforce their existing attitudes regarding refugees (Liebe et al., 2018; Nickerson, 1998). Conversely, this may introduce cognitive dissonance for left-wing participants, as it could conflict with their preexisting attitudes (Festinger, 1957; Liebe et al., 2018). When refugees are portrayed as victims, this may in turn reinforce the existing attitudes regarding refugees of left-wing people

but also introduce cognitive dissonance for right-wing participants (Festinger, 1957; Liebe et al., 2018; Nickerson, 1998). That is why we first hypothesize that participants with a more right-wing political orientation will, after reading an article where the refugee is the perpetrator, increase their support for right-wing policies regarding refugees compared to participants with a more right-wing political orientation who read an article where the refugee is the victim (hypothesis 1). And then hypothesize that participants with a more left-wing political orientation will, after reading an article where the refugee is the victim, increase their support for left-wing policies regarding refugees compared to participants with a more left-wing political orientation who read an article where the refugee is the perpetrator (hypothesis 2).

## **Methods<sup>1</sup>**

### **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), 10 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 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, 5 as non-binary/third

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<sup>1</sup>The method section was made in collaboration. It is the same section for the whole bachelor thesis group.

gender and 1 participant who preferred not to say. Based on Gpower, we needed 210 participants to test the predicted 2 way- interaction effects with a power of .95 ( $f=.25$ ). This suggests that the current sample size of 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–aggressor 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 *Citizen-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 (Zentner et al., 2008) was measured using the items unhappy and sad, ( $r = .621, p < .001, M = 3.96, SD = 1.22$ ), 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 behavioral 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 rightwing 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 rightwing 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 rightwing 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 rightwing policy statements were internally consistent, the reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha. Left- and rightwing policy agreement scales

showed high internal consistency among the items (Leftwing: Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.904$ ,  $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ; Rightwing:  $\alpha = 0.814$ ,  $M = 2.96$ ,  $SD = 1.53$ ).

## Results

### Preliminary Analyses

The inter-item correlations among the variables are presented in Table 1. There was a moderate negative relation between participants' self-reported political orientation and their support with left-wing policies, indicating that the more participants identified themselves as right-wing, the less they agreed with left-wing policy statements. Also, a moderate positive relation was found between self-reported political orientation and support with right-wing policies, indicating that participants who identified as more right-wing showed greater support with right-wing policy statements.

**Table 1**

*Correlations among the variables*

	Support for left-wing policies	Support for right-wing policies	Political orientation
Support for left-wing policies	1	*-.768	*-.499
Support for right-wing policies	*-.768	1	*.460
Political orientation	*-.499	*.460	1

*Note.* \* correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

### Manipulation Check

To check if participants understood what they read in the article, at the end of the questionnaire participants were asked who the aggressors in the article were. A frequency

analysis indicated that 92 % ( $n=206$ ) of the participants correctly identified the refugees as the perpetrator in the condition in which refugees were the perpetrator. Here, 94% ( $n=211$ ) of the participants correctly identified the local citizens as the perpetrator in the condition in which the citizens were the perpetrator. A second manipulation check was done to see if participants could correctly identify the victim. 94 % ( $n = 206$ ) correctly identified the local citizens as the victim in the condition where the citizens were the victim and 95% ( $n = 211$ ) correctly identified refugees as the victim in the condition where the refugees were the victim. This indicates that a big share of participants understood the article correctly.

## **Testing the Hypotheses**

### ***Right-wing Policy Support***

According to the first hypotheses, more right-wing participants will, after reading an article where the refugee is the perpetrator, increase their support for right-wing policies regarding refugees compared to participants with a more right-wing political orientation who read an article where the refugee is the victim. We tested the hypothesis using SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2022, Model 1), which performs a moderation analysis<sup>2</sup>. We used the moderation analysis to determine whether political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity (reading a news article where refugees are the perpetrator (and citizens the victim), coded as 1, or the citizens are the perpetrator (and refugees the victim), coded as 2) have an influence on support for right-wing policies about refugees.

The model is significant,  $F(3, 413) = 37.60, p < .001, R^2 = .21$ , 21% of the variance in support for right-wing policies can be explained. A main effect of political orientation was found ( $b = .50, SE = .05, t(413) = 10.43, p < .001, 95\% CI [.40, .59]$ ), suggesting that more right-wing participants are more supportive of right-wing policies. The main effect of perpetrator/victim

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<sup>2</sup> All assumptions for all the moderation analyses were met

identity was not significant ( $b = -.07$ ,  $SE = .13$ ,  $t(413) = -.55$ ,  $p = .58$ , 95%  $CI [-.18, .33]$ ).

Moreover, the predicted interaction was also not significant. The interaction between the perpetrator/victim identity and political orientation was not significant ( $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t(413) = 1.18$ ,  $p = 0.24$ , 95%  $CI [-.08, .30]$ ). Even though the interaction was not significant, we checked our specific hypothesis that more right-wing participants (+1SD) are more likely to support right-wing policies when refugees are the perpetrator rather than the victim (see hypothesis 1). However, when looking at this conditional effect of political orientation, we found no significant effect of perpetrator/victim identity on support for right-wing policies ( $b = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.189$ ,  $t(413) = 1.22$ ,  $p = 0.22$ , 95%  $CI [-.14, .60]$ ). Hence, when refugees are the perpetrator rather than the victim, right-wing participants are not more likely to support right-wing policies. There was also no significant effect of the perpetrator/victim identity for support for right-wing policies for left-wing participants ( $b = -.08$ ,  $SE = 0.189$ ,  $t(413) = -.45$ ,  $p = 0.66$ , 95%  $CI [-.46, .29]$ ).

### ***Left-wing policy support***

According to the second hypothesis, more left-wing participants will, after reading an article where the refugee is the victim increase their support for left-wing policies regarding refugees, compared to more left-wing participants who read an article where refugees are the perpetrator. We also tested this hypothesis using SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2022, Model 1). We used the moderation analysis to determine whether political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity have an influence on support for left-wing policies about refugees.

This model is also significant  $F(3, 413) = 46.29$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.25$ , 25% of the variance in support for left-wing policies can be explained. And also here a main effect of political orientation was found ( $b = -.59$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t(413) = -11.70$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%  $CI [-.69, -.49]$ ), suggesting that more left-wing participants are more supportive of left-wing policies. The main



effect of the perpetrator/victim identity was not significant ( $b = -.05$ ,  $SE = .14$ ,  $t(413) = -.33$ ,  $p = .74$ , 95%  $CI [-.23, .32]$ ). There is also not a significant interaction between the perpetrator/victim identity and political orientation for left-wing policies ( $b = -.11$ ,  $SE = .10$ ,  $t(413) = -1.13$ ,  $p = .26$ , 95%  $CI [-.31, .08]$ ). Also, here we looked at the conditional effects of political orientation. For more left-wing participants (-1 SD under the mean political orientation) there is no significant effect on policy outcome when accounting for the perpetrator/victim identity ( $b = 0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ,  $t(413) = 1.03$ ,  $p = 0.30$ , 95%  $CI [-.18, .60]$ ). This is also not in line with what was expected in hypothesis 2.

## **Exploratory findings**

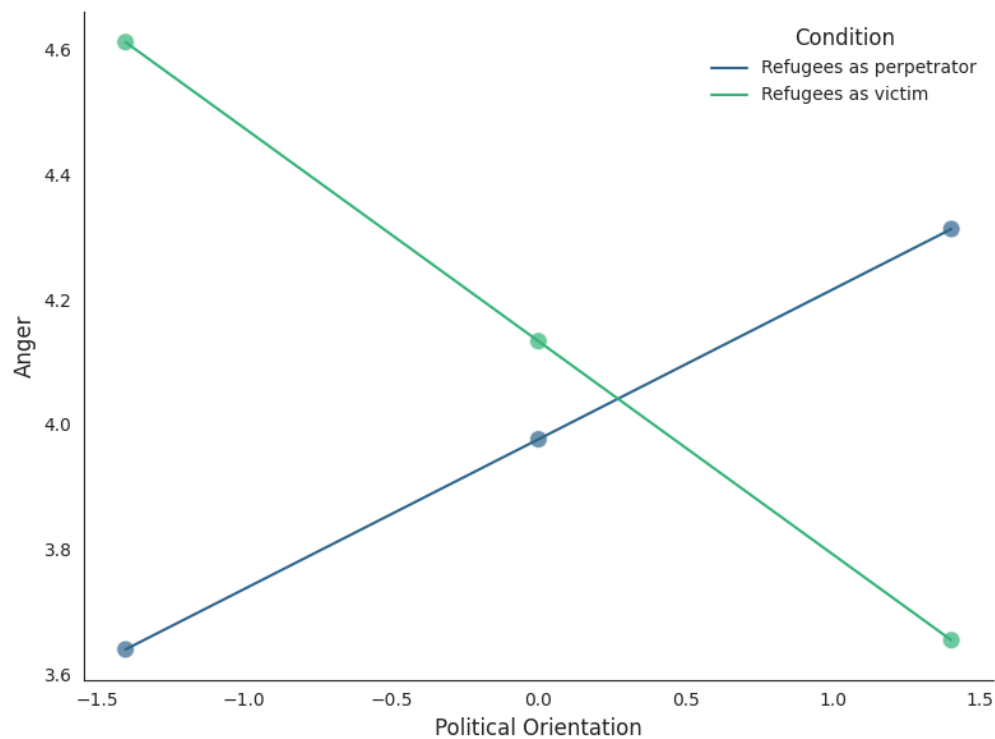
### ***The Influence of Political Orientation and the Perpetrator/victim Identity on Anger***

We did not find significant effects on support for policies in general, but we also looked at specific emotions after the condition. We were interested in whether political orientation and framing of the news article influence anger. That is why we explored the effect of interaction between political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity on anger. To test this, we used SPSS PROCESS (Hayes, 2022, Model 1), we used the moderation analysis to determine whether political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity have an influence on feeling anger. The model is significant  $F(3, 413) = 13.42$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.09$ . When we look at the conditional effects we found that for left-wing participants (-1 SD under the mean political orientation), the perpetrator/victim identity has a significant effect on anger ( $b = 0.97$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ,  $t(413) = 5.19$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95%  $CI [.60, 1.34]$ ). This means that people with a left-wing political orientation experience more anger when refugees are the victims than when citizens are the victims. And looking at right-wing participants (+1 SD above the mean political orientation), we do again see a significant effect of the perpetrator/victim identity on anger ( $b = -.66$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ,  $t(413) = -3.51$ ,

$p < .001$ , 95% CI [-1.03, -.29]). This means that people with a right-wing political orientation experience more anger when citizens are the victims than when refugees are the victims. This suggests that the effect of reading about refugees as either perpetrators or victims on anger significantly depends on a participants' political orientation. The results are visualized in figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*The interaction between political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity on anger*



## Discussion

In this study we aimed to follow up on a study by Djaoedji (2024) by examining the effect of news articles about refugees involved in transgressions, either as victims or as perpetrators, depending on citizens' political orientation. We did not find support for our hypotheses: Participants with a more right-wing political orientation did not, after reading an

article where the refugee is the perpetrator, increase their support for right-wing policies regarding refugees compared to participants with a more right-wing political orientation who read an article where the refugee is the victim. And participants with a more left-wing political orientation did not, after reading an article where the refugee is the victim, increase their support for left-wing policies regarding refugees compared to participants with a more left-wing political orientation who read an article where the refugee is the perpetrator. However, exploratory analyses found that immediate anger was influenced by political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity: We found that more left-wing individuals experience more anger when reading an article where refugees are portrayed as victims compared to when they are portrayed as perpetrators. On the other hand, more right-wing individuals experience less anger when reading an article where refugees are portrayed as victims compared to when they are portrayed as perpetrators.

### **Implications**

The results of this study show that political orientation moderately predicts support for policies. Previous studies found that people with a right-wing political orientation are more likely to view refugees as a threat (Canetti et al., 2016; Esses et al., 2017) and favor more restrictive approaches to refugee related policies (Liebe et al., 2018). Our study shows support for those findings; we found that people with a right-wing political orientation show less support for left-wing policies regarding refugees and an increase in support for right-wing policies regarding refugees. In addition, we also show support for the findings of previous studies that found that people with a left-wing political orientation hold more welcoming attitudes towards refugees and immigration policies (Liebe et al., 2018). We find that people with a left-wing political orientation show more support for left-wing policies regarding refugees and less support for

right-wing policies regarding refugees. The perpetrator/victim identity framing did not affect the support for policies which does not extend the findings by Djaoedji (2024) where the framing of the article did have an influence on action intentions. In our exploratory analysis we found that anger was influenced by political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity framing. We found that people with a right-wing political orientation reported more anger when reading about refugees as perpetrators than people with a left-wing political orientation. This aligns with the findings of Djaoedji (2024) where participants with a negative attitude towards refugees reported more anger after reading about refugees as victims than participants with a positive attitude towards refugees. In the refugees as victim condition, we find in our exploration that people with a left-wing political orientation reported more anger than the right-wing politically oriented participants. This also aligns with the findings of Djaoedji (2024) where participants with a positive attitude towards refugees reported more anger than those with a negative attitude.

The results suggest that different political orientations change the way participants perceive news about refugees and what feelings this causes. Individuals tend to favor and accept information that reinforces their existing viewpoints (Nickerson, 1998). For right-wing individuals, the article where refugees are the perpetrator might confirm existing negative stereotypes or attitudes, leading to an angry emotional response. The article where refugees are the victim, because it might be incongruent with their beliefs, leads to a less angry response. Similarly, for left-wing individuals the refugees as victim article might confirm their views, leading to an increase in anger, while a refugees as perpetrators article, does not show a strong anger response. While differences in anger were found, differences in support for policies were not found. Our results imply that exposing participants to a single article, even one that elicits strong anger reactions, may not be sufficient to change policy support.

## **Limitations and future directions**

This study, while shedding light on the influence of political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identity on policy support or anger, is not without its limitations, which offer important directions for future research. First, while the correlations between political orientation and support for left-wing policies and political orientation and support for right-wing policies, are significant, they are only moderate. So, drawing conclusions should be done with consideration.

Second, because migration is an actual topic, it could be that participants were not affected by the article because they already had strong, pre-existing attitudes about policies about refugees. Participants on one side of the political orientation spectrum could show the same results for support for policy, regardless of the condition they were assigned to. Adding to that, participants were only exposed to one article. They could be less susceptible to change after a single, brief media exposure. This could explain why the results were not significant. Future studies could try and expose participants to more articles to simulate a more real-world situation to news, which could influence the participants more or could try and manipulate participants with more articles so the participants think they can make a more founded opinion about policies regarding refugees.

Third, it could be that participants didn't identify with the article. We used a European news outlet and used European news context, this could have been too broad or felt too far away for participants. This could have led to diminished effects, because participants may not be as moved by the article. Future research could make an article that people can identify with more, for example using a news article and context that is highly relevant and local to the participants'

geographic and cultural background or change the article to fit in multiple countries or cultural contexts, using news outlets and articles specifically made for each region.

Fourth, because the study was part of a larger study containing multiple studies, there were a lot of variables in the questionnaire that were not relevant to the current study. The order of certain questions in the questionnaire might have influenced participants' responses. Because the measure concerning policy statements regarding refugees were at the end of the questionnaire, participants may have already formed or expressed their views on related topics through earlier items, potentially diminishing the strength of their reactions to the later statements. Future research could consider putting less items in the questionnaire or putting the items earlier.

A possible reason that we did find that anger was influenced but not policy support is that emotional responses might be a more immediate reaction, while policy attitudes might require more sustained or impactful interventions. Also, the anger item was almost directly after the condition which, as stated previously as well, may have an increased response. A limitation for this finding is that it is exploratory. We did not hypothesize this, so we need to be careful when interpreting the results. Future research could build on these findings, while anger was a significant finding, future research could explore the role of other emotions (e.g., empathy, fear, disgust, compassion) in influencing or mediating the relationship between news framing, political orientation, and policy support. Different emotions might lead to different outcomes.

### **Conclusion**

While this study did not find direct support for the hypothesized influence of political orientation and the perpetrator/victim identification on policy support, our exploratory analyses revealed a significant interaction effect on anger. We observed that left-wing individuals

experienced more anger when refugees were portrayed as victims, while right-wing individuals showed the opposite pattern. These findings align with confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998) and previous work by Djaoedji (2024). The absence of an effect on policy support suggests that a single article might not be enough to change preexisting attitudes, even if it elicits strong anger responses. More research should be done about political orientation, the framing of news articles, policy support and many different emotions, as these have an influence on how we consume media.

### **AI-Statement**

For some sections in the thesis, AI was used. The LLM Gemini was used for grammar and spelling errors. The LLM was also used for inspiration to write sentences differently. In addition, the LLM Chat GPT was used to write a fake news article. In Appendix D you can find some example prompts.

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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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto: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**

0. 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.

0. European: Are you European?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Prefer not to say
0. Age: What is your age?
0. Gender: Please indicate your gender.
  - Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary / third gender
  - Prefer not to say
0. Nationality: Are you European?
  - Yes, I am European
  - No
0. 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

0. 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***

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

#### ***Media Trust***

- 0. The media pays necessary attention to important topics.
- 0. The media provides all important facts on covered topics.
- 0. Please select six (attention check).
- 0. The information in the news is always truthful.
- 0. 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).

- 0. I feel shocked about the way things are going in society.
- 0. I feel concerned when I think about the future of society.
- 0. I am satisfied about society.
- 0. I am frustrated because society is not as it should be.
- 0. 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).

- 0. With respect to POOR people, I feel ...
- 0. With respect to HIGHLY EDUCATED people, I feel ...
- 0. With respect to REFUGEES, I feel ...
- 0. With respect to RICH people, I feel ...
- 0. With respect to LOWER EDUCATED people, I feel ...

### **Attention Check**

- 0. 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.

- 0. 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).

- 0. I see myself as an European
- 0. Being European is an important part of who I am.
- 0. I feel a strong sense of belonging to Europe.
- 0. I feel good about being part of Europe.
- 0. 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).

- 0. How often have you had a positive experience with refugees?
- 0. 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).

- 0. Outraged
- 0. Touched
- 0. Distressed
- 0. Unhappy
- 0. Moved
- 0. Angry
- 0. Indifferent
- 0. Concerned
- 0. Nothing
- 0. Sad
- 0. Guilty
- 0. 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).

- 0. I think that the victims in the article need to be compensated by receiving help and/or money.
- 0. I think that the perpetrators in the article need to be imprisoned.
- 0. I empathize with the victims in the article.
- 0. I can understand why the perpetrators in the article behaved in the way they did.
- 0. I think that the victims in the article are at least partly responsible for how they were treated.
- 0. I think that the perpetrators in the article need to pay the victims.
- 0. 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).

- 0. I feel compassion for refugees when I hear about their struggles.
- 0. When I see refugees suffering, I want to help them.
- 0. I can easily put myself in the shoes of a refugee.
- 0. Please select absolutely disagree (check)
- 0. I feel emotionally moved when I hear about the hardships refugees face.
- 0. 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).

- 0. I would like to demonstrate for rights for refugees.
- 0. I would like to protect my neighborhood from refugees.
- 0. I would like to help refugees by teaching the language of personal coaching.
- 0. I would like to avoid contact with refugees.
- 0. I would like to correct refugees firmly, even with violence, when they break the law.
- 0. I would like to donate money or clothes to refugees.
- 0. 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).

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

### **Manipulation Check**

- 0. Finally, please think back about the article that you just read. Who were the perpetrators in the article?
  - The refugees
  - The local citizens
- 0. 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**


0. 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](#)

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

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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**

### **Example Prompts**

- Could you check for typing errors in this section:
- Could you check for grammar mistakes in this sentence:
- Combine these two sentences into one:
- Rewrite this sentence in present time:
- Summarise what is in this section: