Chapter 8. Conclusion and Discussion

8.1 Summary

This dissertation focused on real world cues, parliamentary documents and media coverage regarding the issue of immigration and integration of minorities, and anti-immigrant party support in the Netherlands during the period 1990-2004 and on how these four factors are interrelated. First, the question how the issue features in both parliamentary debates and media coverage is addressed. Second, it looked into the causal relationships between the four. In that way, it tries to describe and explain the changes in parliamentary and media attention and parliamentary and media framing. It assesses to what extent these changes are driven by levels of immigration and number of asylum seekers or rather by key-events, like 9/11. Furthermore, it seeks to account for the dramatic increases of anti-immigrant party support.

Attention and framing in parliament and media

The issue of immigration and integration of minorities has been heavily debated in both media and parliament during the period under study. Especially during the later years and mainly after 9/11 the issue received a lot of attention in both realms. Framing in media and parliament can be described using five issue-specific frames: multicultural, emancipation, restriction, victimization and Islam-as-threat. The analysis revealed incongruence in framing between the two arenas. Although the Islam-as-threat frame has dominated the media debate throughout most of the research period, this frame was rather marginal in the political realm before the events of 9/11. In the political realm, there is a larger diversity in the frames used, and different frames dominated over-time. Throughout the research period, the issue was largely framed in terms of emancipation and multiculturalism. Furthermore, not only absolute levels of framing use differed between media and parliament, there was also relatively little correlation over time, indicating the integration between the two realms. Only after 9/11, however, the framing in which Islam is perceived as a threat to Western society becomes dominant in both arenas. Media framing is far more selective, resulting in hegemonic rather than pluralist framing, though quality newspapers are slightly more plural than popular newspapers.

How real world cues, parliament, media and party support interact

Figure 8.1 presents an overview of the nature of the relationships that were assessed in the various studies. The next paragraphs will discuss the relationships in more detail. For each possible relation it displays (a) whether the relationship is found consistently or whether it depends on the elements of the two realms that are considered (e.g. attention or framing,
which real world development, which time-period) and (b) whether the influence can be regarded as relatively strong or weak.

**Figure 8.1 Summary of results**

![Diagram showing the relationship between real world developments, key events, public support for anti-immigrant populist parties, and media attention and framing of immigration and integration issue in parliament.]

**Note:**
- Weak effects inconsistently found
- Strong effects inconsistently found
- Weak effects consistently found
- Strong effects consistently found

**REAL WORLD AND PARLIAMENT**
The results on the impact of key-events on attention and framing in parliament confirm the notion of the parliamentary realm being more institutionalized than the media realm: it is less sensitive to events in the outside world. Changed composition of the parliament due to elections has little consequences for the use of various frames in this arena. High-impact international events like 9/11 and the war in Iraq, however, increase overall attention for the issue and result in more Islam-as-threat-framing. Additionally, the number of asylum applications has a limited and delayed impact on attention and framing in parliament. Regarding the latter, this impact is positive: the more asylum seekers, the more favorable the communication about immigrants is.

**REAL WORLD AND MEDIA**
Real world developments like monthly number of immigrants and asylum applications have limited or no direct influence on media attention while key-events significantly alter the media attention for the issue. International events like wars have a direct, but often temporarily effect, while most institutional, national events (e.g. parliamentary elections) influence media attention permanently, resulting in enduring higher or lower levels of issue
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attention. The effects of deliberative events, where prominent (political) actors try to gain media attention for their controversial claims, are ambiguous and differ from time to time. Furthermore, events that are related to the ‘international war on terrorism’ (like 9/11 and the assassination of Theo van Gogh) can shift media content permanently towards an Islam-as-threat framing. These results are in line with previous studies that have argued for large impacts of key-events in general (Brosius and Eps, 1995; Vasterman, 2005) and changes in the public debate due to 9/11 and related developments more specifically (Koopmans et al., 2005; Norris et al., 2003), but also give insight in the nature of the changes (size, delay, duration) caused by these events.

REAL WORLD AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT PARTY SUPPORT
In the literature on explanations of aggregate level anti-immigrant party support variables like immigration, unemployment and their interaction are deemed important (Golder, 2003b, 2003a). The analyses confirm recent findings that immigration increases anti-immigrant party support (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2001), while higher levels of unemployment result in decreases in this support (Knigge, 1998). High levels of immigration combined with high unemployment rates also result in more anti-immigrant party support (Golder, 2003b, 2003a). The number of asylum applicants, however, does not affect anti-immigrant party support. Key-events have no direct effect either, though they indirectly make a difference by strongly influencing media coverage that on its turn fosters anti-immigrant party support. This finding is contrary to the immediate “rally around the flag effect” that 9/11 and similar events had in the United States. These events led to considerable direct changes in support for the various political parties: presidential approval and support for the incumbent Republican party went up considerably, while the oppositional Democratic party lost support (Hetherington and Nelson, 2003).

PARLIAMENT AND MEDIA
Though the descriptive results revealed only limited overlap between media and parliamentary framing, this does not rule out any causal relationships between the two arenas. When looking at the attention for the issue, the results show that bi-directional causal relationships between media and parliament exist, though these relationships are weak. In the case of attention these relationships are mainly long-term and positive: increases in one arena result eventually in increases in the other arena. Some short-term influences are established as well. The results offer some support for the claim that in official policy documents politicians are more reluctant to follow media. When looking at more symbolic elements of the parliamentary realm, i.e. transcripts of parliamentary debates, results are different: here, short-term consequences from media attention on attention for the issue in parliamentary debates are established and the claim that politics follow media can be sustained.

Regarding framing in official policy documents and parliamentary questions on the one hand and newspapers on the other hand, an interesting pattern is found: increases in the
use of a certain frame in one arena leads to increases in the other arena, but almost exclusively for those frames that have already been used frequently in the latter arena. The press is reluctant to adopt parliamentary frames that have not previously been popular in the media and vice versa. When a less nuanced classification of frames is used based upon a distinction between favorable/non-favorable towards immigrants, these relationships disappear altogether.

These results are in line with previous research and confirm the ambiguous nature of the agenda setting relationship found in previous studies (see overview of agenda-building, Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006) and confirms media-effects on parliament when transcripts of parliamentary debates are considered. Van Noije (2007) finds similar results for several issues in the Netherlands, among which immigration. This dissertation distinguishes itself from previous research in that it moves beyond agenda building processes by looking at frame-building processes as well. The usefulness of this approach is demonstrated by the nuanced causal relationships found when regarding the frames separately.

PARLIAMENT AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT PARTY SUPPORT

Previous research has shown the direct impact of public opinion on politicians and policy makers, while little empirical evidence exists for the reversed relationship (Behr and Iyengar, 1985; Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg, 1995; Monroe, 1998). In this study, no impact from parliament on party support is found, but an interesting backlash effect from party support on issue attention in parliament is established: more anti-immigrant party support leads to less parliamentary attention for the issue of immigration and integration of minorities. Apparently, politicians prefer to respond to increased anti-immigrant party support by keeping quiet about the issue, rather than to start discussing it in a more elaborate manner. However, the way they discuss the issue, in terms of framing, remains unaffected.

MEDIA AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT PARTY SUPPORT

When trying to explain anti-immigrant party support, media coverage has until recently been a largely neglected factor. The impact of media attention on this party support is convincingly demonstrated. The analyses show that both the newspapers’ attention for immigration and integration of minorities and attention for economic news in an immigration frame during the period 1990-2002 have a significant and positive influence on party support even when controlling for other commonly offered explanations. More media attention leads to more party support. Also for the period between 1995 and 2004 a positive impact is found from attention for the immigration and integration issue on anti-immigrant party support. The size of this effect is considerable: in the long run media attention accounts for almost 30 percent of the variation in anti-immigrant support. These results provide evidence for the issue-voting hypothesis, as formulated by Walgrave and De Swert (2004). This effect is even stronger when considering the framing of the issue. More favorable coverage of immigrants leads to less support for these parties. Additionally, the
analyses reveal that the reverse relationship – though less strong and consistent - also exists: more anti-immigrant party support results in more attention for the issue and this attention tends to be less favorable for immigrants. Following the classical agenda setting hypothesis (McCombs and Shaw, 1972) the overwhelming majority of studies focuses on the effects from media on public opinion. This study demonstrates that the reversed relationship is worth taking into account as well. It seems to suggest that journalists are guided by the polls and regard the issues and framing of anti-immigration parties to be more relevant as soon as more people express an intention to vote for them. This way, the interaction between public support and media attention can lead to an upward spiral for anti-immigrant parties: more media attention leads to more support, while this support in turn reinforces media attention. This bandwagon effect is even stronger when it concerns coverage that is framed congruent with the parties’ frame use. Its presence is contingent upon the size of anti-immigrant party support: if it surpasses a certain threshold, journalists start to pay considerable more attention to the issue and thereby contribute to the successes of these parties.

8.2 Implications: where do we take it from here?

Enhancing our understanding of the political process

The findings of this dissertation can be interpreted in the larger context of how a democratic system in a polity works. As Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg (1995) suggest, the relationship between real world cues, politics, media and public can take several forms. First, the bottom-up democratic model is based on the notion that politicians respond to citizens’ preferences to maximize their electoral support (e.g. Schumpeter, 1954). Here, the public directly and indirectly via the media influences politics. Figure 8.2a presents the main relationships in this model. Second, the top-down model attributes a central role to the political realm (‘primacy of politics’) that is determining to a large extent the media agenda. The media on their turn exert a strong influence on the public (see Figure 8.2b). Kleinnijenhuis (2003) finds evidence for this model and claims that in the Netherlands: ‘the public follows the media that follow politics’. Third, in a mediocracy the media are central and assert influence on both politics and public and are in that way most powerful in shaping political decision-making processes and public opinion (Figure 8.2c).