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General Discussion
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In this dissertation, I studied how figurative frames in public discourse can affect political opinion. This dissertation consists of two main parts: (1) creating an overview of the current state of research on figurative-framing effects in political discourse, (2) experimentally testing different theoretical models that explain how figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion. The dissertation opened with an introduction of two theoretical models that explain figurative-framing effects. The first is a direct-effects model of figurative framing, implicitly assumed by many scholars who study figurative-framing effects (e.g., Charteris-Black, 2006; Musolff, 2017a; Santa Ana, 1999; Thibodeau, 2016). This model predicts that figurative frames affect recipients in a direct and unconditional way. Some figurative framing scholars, however, argue in favor of adopting a more complex theoretical model of figurative-framing effects (e.g., Hartman, 2012; Landau, Keefer & Rotschild, 2014; Reuchamps, Dodeigne & Perrez, 2018). This second model of figurative-framing effects is an indirect-effects model, which predicts that figurative frames work under certain boundary conditions and affect recipients in indirect and subtle ways. In this final chapter of my dissertation, I present an overview of the main findings of the different studies and answer the project’s overarching research question how figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion. Furthermore, I discuss which of the two theoretical models (direct-effects model vs. indirect-effects model) best explains how figurative frames affect political opinion and propose a new theoretical model of figurative-framing effects: the impact of figurative frames model (IFF Model).
OVERVIEW OF THE RESULTS

PART 1: THE CURRENT STATE OF RESEARCH ON FIGURATIVE-FRAMING EFFECTS

Chapter 2 forms the first part of this dissertation. This chapter presents a systematic literature review of available research on persuasive effects of figurative frames in political discourse. The effects of figurative frames in political discourse have been studied from a variety of research backgrounds, which I have classified under two main research perspectives: a critical-discourse approach (CDA) and a response-elicitation approach (REA). Proponents of these different approaches are highly critical towards each other’s research paradigms and methods: CDA and REA scholars question the reliability and validity of each other’s findings (Casasanto, 2010; Van Dijk, 1993). The systematic literature review compared the effects reported in CDA and REA studies and compared the figurative frames that were studied in order to reveal whether the two approaches are in agreement or disagreement about the persuasive impact of metaphorical frames.

Results showed that CDA and REA studies report diverging effects. Reported effects differed in terms of effect presence, directionality, and strength. All figurative frames that were subject to CDA studies established direct and typically strong effects, whereas 33.4% of all frames studied from an REA approach did not find any direct effect. These findings indicate that not all figurative frames directly affect political opinion, and suggest that a direct-effects model of figurative framing might not sufficiently explain when and how figurative frames affect political opinion (or not). Thus, results from Chapter 2 plead in favor of an exploration of a more complex model of figurative-framing effects.

It might be that differences in reported effects by CDA and REA scholars can be (partly) explained by differences in the figurative frames
that are studied: frames used in CDA studies were typically negative, nonfictional, and extreme, compared to frames used in REA studies, which were sometimes positive, typically (partly) fictional and of typically of low intensity. My analysis of the characteristics of figurative frames suggests that the nature of a figurative frame can be made extreme in (at least) two ways: by framing high intensity issues or by combining metaphor and hyperbole. Frames that comprise both metaphor and hyperbole are more typical of CDA studies than for REA studies. These differences in frame characteristics can possibly explain why strong and direct effects have been attributed to CDA frames and not to REA frames.

To test whether differences in figurative-framing effects can indeed account for differences in figurative-framing effects, the experimental studies presented in the second part of this dissertation all used language stimuli that resemble CDA frames: all stimuli were based on actual (i.e., non-fictional) political discourse and had a negative valence. Moreover, the stimuli used in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 combined metaphor and hyperbole in order to experimentally test how relatively more extreme figurative frames affect political opinion.

**PART 2: TESTING DIFFERENT MODELS THAT EXPLAIN FIGURATIVE-FRAMING EFFECTS**

Part 2 of this dissertation comprised four experimental studies that each tested for direct and indirect effects of figurative frames on issue viewpoint (Chapter 3) and political opinion (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). Each experimental study tested two variants of the basic theoretical models of figurative-framing effects: (1) a variant of the direct-effects model of figurative framing, and (2) a variant of the indirect-effects model of figurative framing.

Chapter 3 reported an experiment that compared the persuasive impact of conventional and novel metaphors. The experiment tested for direct effects of these metaphorical frames on beliefs about the issue presented
and attitude towards it, and for indirect effects on beliefs and attitudes via cognitive and affective text perception. No direct effects were found on beliefs about and attitudes towards the issue. Therefore, these data did not support the direct-effects model of figurative framing. Nor did we find indirect effects on issue viewpoint via affective and cognitive text perception. However, metaphors did affect perceived novelty and aptness. Novel metaphors were perceived as more novel and less apt than conventional metaphors. Via perceived novelty and aptness, both metaphors indirectly influenced cognitive and affective text perception. Perceived novelty had a positive effect on both dimensions of text perception. For cognitive text perception, this positive effect was countered by a negative effect of perceived aptness. This shows that metaphors work through different mechanisms evoked by two different types of metaphor perception: perceived novelty and perceived aptness. These findings support the notion that figurative-framing effects work in a subtle and indirect way. Thus, Chapter 3 argues in favor of an indirect-effects model over a direct-effects model of figurative framing.

Chapter 4 presented two experiments with a 2 (metaphor: present, absent) x 2 (hyperbole: present, absent) between-subjects design that investigated the direct and indirect effects (via emotions and perceived message intensity) of figuratively framed right-wing populist statements on political opinion. Political affiliation was addressed as a potential moderator of figurative-framing effects. In experiment 1, hyperbole directly affected political opinion, while in experiment 2, metaphor had a direct effect on political opinion. However, while a direct-effects model of figurative framing expects figurative frames to steer political opinion more in line with figurative frames, the metaphors and hyperboles led to boomerang effects: they pushed the political opinion of the general voter further away from the statements. Figuratively framed statements also generated indirect boomerang effects via emotions and perceived message intensity. Political affiliation did not moderate figurative-framing effects,
however, voters who indicated to support a Dutch right-wing populist party responded differently to figuratively framed statements than the general voter; figuratively framed populist statements did not affect their political opinion. Since figurative frames did not steer recipients’ opinion more in line with the statements, Chapter 4 does not provide support for a direct-effects model of figurative framing. Because recipient characteristics and recipient perceptions influenced the impact of figurative frames on political opinion, this chapter argues in favor of an indirect-effects model of figurative framing.

Chapter 5 reported an experiment that replicates the second experiment presented in Chapter 4. This experiment used a unique sample of Dutch right-wing populist voters and examined how these supportive voters respond to figuratively framed right-wing populist rhetoric. The experiment presented in Chapter 5 tested for the direct effects of figuratively framed statements on political opinion, for the mediation role of emotions and perceived message intensity, and for the moderating influence of party-identification strength. Results demonstrated that figuratively framed right-wing populist statements did not directly affect political opinion. However, indirect effects were discovered: metaphorical frames had a negative indirect effect on political opinion via recipients’ perceptions of extremity, intensity, aptness and novelty, and hyperbolic frames had a negative indirect effect on political opinion via perceived novelty. Thus, against expectations, figurative frames also generated boomerang effects among this group of supportive voters. These indirect boomerang effects mainly held for voters who weakly identified with their favorite right-wing populist party. The results of this experiment thereby do not support a direct-effects model of figurative framing. Rather, findings support the indirect-effects model of figurative-framing effects, which takes into account that recipient characteristics and recipient perceptions can influence figurative-framing effects.
THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS: FURTHER SPECIFYING THE INDIRECT-EFFECTS MODEL

The results of the empirical studies of this dissertation univocally argue in favor of an indirect-effects model of figurative framing over a direct-effects model of figurative framing. Results clearly indicate that we should move away from the idea that figurative frames work as magic wands with which politicians and other public actors can wave to steer people’s minds and influence political reality, towards a more complex model of figurative-framing effects. The experimental studies presented in this dissertation show that figuratively framed persuasive statements do not affect every recipient in a similar way. Rather, different factors, such as recipient characteristics and recipient perceptions determine whether persuasive effects occur (or not). In this discussion chapter, the indirect-effects model of figurative framing that has been proposed in the general introduction of this dissertation, is further specified based on the results of the different experimental studies in this dissertation. In the following paragraphs, I discuss how the findings of this dissertation can help in creating an updated model of figurative-framing effects. Moreover, I address several additional issues that this model should take into account.

Characteristics of figurative frames

An updated model of figurative-framing effects should take into account that different types of figurative frames can affect political opinion in different ways. Differences between figurative frames can be studied at different levels: (1) the level of their linguistic form, (2) the level of their conceptual structure, (3) the level of their communicative function (Burgers & Steen, 2017; Steen 2008, 2017). First, differences between figurative frames can be studied at the level of their linguistic form. The linguistic form of a figurative frame can affect recipient perceptions and political persuasion. At the linguistic level, metaphors and hyperboles can differ in
terms of novelty. Novel metaphors are generally considered to be persuasive because of their ability to make a text more enjoyable and lively (Gibbs & Colston, 2012; Mio, 1997; Sopory & Dillard, 2002). A meta-analysis that included 29 studies on the persuasive impact of metaphors concluded that novel metaphors are more persuasive than conventional metaphors (Sopory & Dillard, 2002). Results from Chapter 3, however, in which the persuasive impact of novel and conventional metaphors has been compared, do not support this hypothesis; both novel and conventional metaphors did not affect issue viewpoint. However, Chapter 3 showed that novel and conventional metaphors work through two different mechanisms, evoked by two different types of metaphor perception: perceived novelty and perceived aptness. When novel metaphors were perceived as novel, this positively influenced affective text perception and cognitive text perception, but for cognitive text perception this positive effect was countered by a negative indirect effect of aptness.

Like metaphors, linguistic hyperboles can be either novel or conventional. When hyperboles become conventional, they may not be perceived as a purposeful exaggeration, which might change their persuasive impact (McCarthy & Carter, 2004). To the best of my knowledge, research has not yet experimentally tested whether novel hyperboles affect political opinion in a similar or different way than conventional hyperboles. Therefore, I argue that a further specified indirect-effects model of figurative framing should take into account that both linguistic metaphors and hyperboles can differ in terms of their novelty. Such differences in novelty might affect how these linguistic figurations affect political opinion.

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25 In this dissertation, I used the terms ‘novel’ and ‘conventional’ to refer to variations at the linguistic level of figurative frames. However, it would be more precise to use the commonly employed terms ‘unfamiliar’ and ‘familiar’ (Bowdle & Gentner, 2005; Giora & Fein, 1999; Katz & Pexman, 1997).
Another variation in the linguistic form of figurative frames has to do with combinatory figurative frames (e.g., frames that combine linguistic metaphor and linguistic hyperbole). Since none of the experimental studies described in this dissertation revealed any interaction effects between linguistic metaphor and hyperbole, I cannot provide support for the hypothesis that combinatory figurative frames are more impactful than frames that solely comprise metaphor or hyperbole (Burgers, Konijn & Steen, 2016). Nevertheless, I argue that an indirect-effects model of figurative-framing effects should consider that frames that differ in their figurative composition might work differently. The experimental studies described in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 of this dissertation were, to the best of my knowledge, the first to compare the effects of combinatory figurative frames to the effects of frames that are solely metaphorical or hyperbolic. My experiments all tested for the impact of anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles. For the general voter (Chapter 4), the strong individual effects of these extremely negative populist anti-immigration metaphors and hyperboles possibly explain why combinatory figurative frames were not more impactful than frames that solely comprise metaphor or hyperbole. For right-wing populist voters (Chapter 5), the high average scores on political persuasion across experimental conditions indicate the possibility of ceiling effects. Therefore, it might be that testing for the impact of combinatory figurative frames that address a different, more abstract, or less debated political issue would reveal different results. Research on the persuasive impact of combinatory figurative frames is still in its infancy, and to further increase our knowledge on how these figurative frames ‘work’, a further specified theoretical model of figurative-framing effects should include differences between frames that differ in their figurative composition.

Second, an updated model of figurative-framing effects can address frame characteristics at the level of the conceptual structure of the figurative frame (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Steen, 2008, 2017). For
metaphors, different conceptual metaphors (e.g., THE NATION IS A STRICT FATHER versus THE NATION IS A NURTURING PARENT) are expected to have differential effects on recipients and society because they can activate different cognitive structures (Lakoff, 2002). Moreover, conceptual metaphors can differ in terms of novelty, some conceptual metaphors might be more deeply rooted in the cognitive systems of recipients than others, which might influence how linguistic metaphors that are derived from these different conceptual metaphors are processed (Steen, 2008), and hence how political opinion is influenced.

At the conceptual level, hyperboles can be roughly divided into two categories of exaggeration: (1) hyperboles that exaggerate in terms of quantity, and (2) hyperboles that exaggerate in terms of quality (Burgers, Brugman, Renardel de Lavalette & Steen, 2016). A hyperbole of quantity contains exaggerated quantitative information, while a hyperbole of quality includes a qualitative scale on which the literal statement is more extreme than the intended statement (Burgers, Brugman et al., 2016). When President Trump claimed that he had ‘the largest inauguration crowd in history’ (NBC News, 2017), he stretched reality in terms of quantity, and when he claimed that current US immigration laws are ‘ridiculous’ (Washington Post, 2018), he exaggerated in terms of quality. Thus far, it has not been tested how these different types of hyperbole affect recipients, and whether they affect political opinion in a similar or different way. To further increase our knowledge on the persuasive impact of figurative frames, a further specified indirect-effects model should take into account that variations between figurative frames at the conceptual level might influence how these frames are processed and hence how they may affect political opinion.

Third, an updated model of figurative-framing effects could address frame characteristics at the level of their communicative function. Figurative language can be deliberately used to shift or confirm a certain perspective on a topic (Burgers & Steen, 2017, Steen, 2015). For metaphor,
this means that the linguistic form of a deliberate metaphor “signals that
the recipient has to move away their attention momentarily from the target
domain of the utterance or even phrase to the source domain that evoked
by the metaphor-related expression” (Steen, 2015, p. 68). Thereby, a
deliberate metaphor is likely processed in a different way than a non-
deliberate metaphor, which might result in differential figurative-framing
effects (Steen, 2008, 2015). The same might be true for hyperbole: while
some hyperboles are deliberately used with the communicative goal to
shift or confirm an issue perspective (Burgers et al., 2016; McCarthy &
Carter, 2004), others have become the normal way of discussing an issue
(McCarthy & Carter, 2004). It could very well be that these deliberate and
non-deliberate hyperboles are processed differently, and hence have
differential effects on political persuasion. Therefore, I argue that an
updated model of figurative-framing effects should consider that both
metaphorical and hyperbolic frames can differ in their communicative
function.

To conclude, I argue that an updated model of figurative-framing
effects should address frame characteristics, both at the linguistic (novel
versus conventional, combinatory versus solely metaphorical or
hyperbolic), conceptual (novel versus conventional), and communicative
(deliberate versus non-deliberate) level. These frame characteristics might
influence figurative-framing effects. Moreover, to avoid comparing apples
and oranges, scholars who study the impact of figurative frames in political
discourse should make explicit what types of figurative frames are being
studied.

Characteristics of recipients

The experimental studies presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 tested the
hypothesis that recipient characteristics (i.e., political affiliation, party-
identification strength) can influence figurative-framing effects. Chapter 4
showed that recipients’ general political position on a left-right spectrum
did not moderate figurative-framing effects. However, recipients with a different political party preference responded differently to figuratively framed right-wing populist anti-immigration statements: among the general voter, figuratively framed statements evoked boomerang effects, while the opinion of recipients who indicated to support a right-wing populist party remained unaffected. Based on these findings, I argue that an updated model of figurative-framing effects should consider that political affiliation, including political party preference, can influence how figurative frames affect political opinion.

Another recipient characteristic that should be addressed in an updated model of figurative-framing effects is party-identification strength. Chapter 5 showed that party-identification strength moderated the indirect effect of figuratively framed anti-immigration statements on political opinion, via perceived extremity, novelty and aptness. When statements were perceived as extreme, novel or not apt, the political opinion of right-wing populist voters was pushed further away from the advocated policy. These indirect effects mainly held for voters who mildly supported a right-wing populist party; voters who strongly identified with a right-wing populist party, seemed more immune to figuratively framed right-wing populist rhetoric. Such moderated-mediation effects were not included in the indirect-effects model of figurative framing. However, these findings indicate that an updated model of figurative-framing effects should consider that recipient characteristics, such as party-identification strength, can strengthen or weaken the indirect relations between figurative frames and political persuasion.

Boomerang effects

Findings from Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 suggest that a model of figurative-framing effects should allow for the possibility that figurative frames can establish boomerang effects. From a communication-scientific perspective, it is generally acknowledged that communicated messages constructed
with a persuasive goal can backfire and push recipients’ opinion further away from the advocated statement (Byrne & Hart, 2016). However, within the current literature on figurative-framing effects, boomerang effects are hardly addressed. The systematic literature review (Chapter 2) does not include any study that reports boomerang effects of figurative frames in political discourse. A few studies that were not included in the systematic review because they did not specifically concern political discourse (Burgers & de Graaf, 2013), or were published after the systematic literature review had been conducted (Clementson, Pascual-Ferrá & Beatty, 2016), have attributed negative effects (i.e., effects that conflict with the sender’s position) to high-intensity language, for example on attitude towards the message (Burgers & de Graaf, 2007), or evaluation scores of politicians (Clementson et al., 2016). For metaphors, however, boomerang effects seem not to be discussed in the context of political persuasion. In fact, it has been argued that metaphors could be used in political speeches to circumvent boomerang effects because of their ability to keep the emotional intensity of a statement high without evoking a negative reaction in the receiver (Bowers & Osborn, 1966). The experimental studies presented in this dissertation show that figuratively framed political statements, like other persuasive messages (Byrne & Hart, 2016), can evoke boomerang effects among recipients. Therefore, a model that explains figurative-framing effects should move away from the generally held assumption that figurative language would generally work in favor of its sender. Politicians and other public actors who use figurative language to frame their statements should be aware that waving their presumed magic wand involves the risk of backfiring spells.

The risk of backfiring spells can be assessed by looking at recipients’ attitudes (Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif, Sherif & Nebergall, 1965). Social Judgment Theory (SJT) proposes that all attitudes exist on a continuum that can be clustered into three categories: (1) the latitude of rejection, which includes a range of attitudes that an individual clearly rejects, (2) the
latitude of non-commitment, which includes attitudes that are neither clearly rejected nor accepted, and (3) the latitude of acceptance, which includes all attitudes someone endorses (Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Sherif et al., 1965). When a frame advocates a political stance that falls within a recipient’s latitude of non-commitment, this frame might steer political opinion more in line with the proposed ideology (Sherif et al., 1965; Smith, Atkin, Martell, Allen & Hembroff, 2006). However, when the advocated stance falls within the latitude of rejection, the statement is likely perceived as being further away from the recipient’s position. When this happens, the frame will likely evoke reactance, which might result in boomerang effects. When a frame falls within someone’s latitude of acceptance, assimilation effects might occur, whereby statements are seen as being closer to one’s own position than they really are. When an advocated stance already closely resembles one’s own position, this statement will unlikely be persuasive (Sherif et al., 1965; Smith et al., 2006).

SJT can hence help predict whether figurative frames in political discourse can be persuasive or will be likelier to lead to no or even boomerang effects. Considering the findings of this dissertation, it seems likely that, for the general voter, the figurative anti-immigration frames from Chapter 4 fell into the latitude of rejection which can explain their boomerang effects. Moreover, the absence of direct effects of figurative anti-immigration statements among right-wing populist voters (Chapter 5) might be a result of a close resemblance of the advocated political ideology and the recipient’s own political ideas. Future research should further explore how recipients’ issue position influences figurative-framing effects. When doing so, scholars should be aware that pretesting recipients’ attitude towards a certain political issue might influence how they will respond to later questions about this issue, thereby confounding experimental results (Babbie, 2007). To avoid priming effects, scholars could measure extant attitudes by including questions about multiple political issues (see for example Lecheler, de Vreese & Slothuus, 2009). In
summary, I argue that the variable of attitude dimension (with the categories: latitude of rejection, latitude of non-commitment, latitude of acceptance) needs to be included as a potential moderator of figurative-framing effects in an updated theoretical model of figurative-framing effects.

Underlying mechanisms of figurative-framing effects

The four experimental studies in this dissertation all support the hypothesis that different recipient perceptions serve as underlying mechanisms for figurative-framing effects. A model that explains figurative-framing effects should definitely address indirect effects via perceived novelty and aptness of figurative language. Novelty is generally considered to be a characteristic of metaphor that increases its persuasive impact (Gibbs & Colston, 2012; Mio, 1997; Sopory & Dillard, 2002), while aptness has been proposed as a prerequisite for the persuasive impact of figurative language (Steen, 2011a; Thibodeau & Durgin, 2011). In the experimental studies in this dissertation, recipients were asked to what extent they perceived the figuratively framed statement they were exposed to as novel and apt. In all experimental studies (Chapters 3, 4 and 5), perceived novelty and aptness were negatively correlated (i.e., when perceived novelty increased, perceived aptness decreased). For hyperbole, similar correlations between perceived novelty and aptness were found (Chapters 4 and 5).

The experimental studies presented in this dissertation show that, both perceived novelty and perceived aptness can influence the persuasiveness of figurative frames. Results from Chapter 3 showed that positive indirect effects of metaphors on cognitive text perception, via perceived novelty, were countered by negative indirect effects via perceived aptness. Results from the experiments in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 showed that metaphors and hyperboles that were perceived as not apt, negatively affected recipient’s political opinion. This indicates that novel metaphors and
hyperboles are at risk of being perceived as not apt and hence are at risk of leading to boomerang effects. Because this dissertation shows that perceived novelty and perceived aptness can affect the relations between figurative frames and variables of persuasion, I propose that both perceived novelty and perceived aptness should be addressed as potential mediators in an updated model of figurative-framing effects.

Moreover, as expected, message intensity and different emotions mediated the impact of figurative frames on political opinion. Unexpectedly, considering literature on the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse (see Chapter 2 for an overview), these indirect effects were negative. Rather than increasing persuasiveness, messages that evoked negative emotions like anger and fear led to boomerang effects. The experimental studies that tested for indirect persuasive effects, via message intensity and emotions, all focused on figuratively framed anti-immigrations rhetoric. It could be that, in a different context, figurative frames would evoke different emotions, and hence establish different persuasive effects. Figurative language can spark positive emotions as well (Giora, Fein, Kronrod, Elnatan, Shuval & Zur, 2004), and it might be that figuratively framed political statements with a more positive character will evoke more positive emotions. These positive emotions might mediate figurative-framing effects in different ways (Lecheler, Bos & Vliegenthart, 2015). Therefore, I argue that an updated model of figurative-framing effects should address the role of perceived message intensity and emotions, and should allow for the possibility of both negative and positive indirect effects via these recipient perceptions, which might differ per context and/or recipient.
A MODEL OF FIGURATIVE-FRAMING EFFECTS: THE IMPACT OF FIGURATIVE FRAMES MODEL

In light of the main findings of this dissertation, I argue that research on figurative-framing effects in political discourse should move away from a direct-effects model. In this general discussion, I propose a new theoretical model of figurative-framing effects: the impact of figurative frames model (IFF model). The IFF model is a further specification of the indirect-effects model of figurative framing, presented in the introduction of this dissertation. Figure 1 presents the IFF model, which includes several variables that have been put forward by the empirical chapters of this dissertation. Moreover, it considers that recipient characteristics can influence the indirect relations between figurative frames and political persuasion.

This model serves as a first step towards a thorough understanding of how figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion. The variables that have been addressed in this dissertation are presented in white rectangles. The variables that have not been studied in this dissertation but are important to address in future research are placed in grey rectangles. The variables in grey that have not been discussed yet, will be further explained in this general discussion under the heading ‘Caveats and Directions for Future Research’.
Figure 1. Impact of Figurative Frames Model (IFF Model)
CAVEATS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The research reported in this dissertation provides new insights into the effects of figurative frames in political discourse. However, like all research, the studies presented in this dissertation have a number of caveats. In this section, I discuss the most important caveats and suggest how the addressed issues can be resolved in future research. The results of this dissertation also open up new directions for future research that can help to better understand the dynamics of figurative-framing effects and to further improve the impact of figurative frames model (IFF model). This section therefore concludes with several directions for future research on figurative-framing effects.

CAVEATS OF THIS DISSERTATION

A first caveat to address is that all experimental studies used a forced-exposure procedure. Although all research stimuli were based on actual political discourse, which increases the external validity of the research, this does not mean that the experiments resemble people’s actual media consumption habits (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). In real life, people might avoid reading the statements that they are forced to read in an experimental setting. When offered the choice, most people may choose to expose themselves to political discourse that matches their political opinion, as opposed to discourse that contradicts their ideas (Hameleers, Bos & de Vreese, 2018; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009, 2011). Therefore, to be able to provide more insight into the actual societal impact of figurative frames in political discourse, the notion of selective exposure, that is, the selection of media content that matches people’s prior beliefs and predispositions (Stroud, 2008; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009, 2011), should be addressed in future research.

Second, in the experimental studies of this dissertation, I measured the responses of participants after a single-exposure to a figuratively framed
political statement. Even though the straight-forward design and set-up of these single-exposure experiments in this dissertation allow to attribute causal effects to figurative frames, this set-up does not take into account that, in reality, framing does not take place in a vacuum; in real life, it is more likely that people are repeatedly exposed to the same figurative frame over time (de Vreese, 2012). Current research is divided on the impact of such repetitive framing. Some studies have not attributed additional effects on opinion formation to repetitive framing (Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013), while other studies have shown that frame repetition leads to stronger and more persistent framing effects (Lecheler, Keer, Schuck & Hänngli, 2015). Zooming in on the impact of repetitive figurative framing, it should be noted that, to the best of my knowledge, no research has studied this phenomenon in an experimental setting. However, several scholars who work from a critical-discourse approach argue that figurative frames are especially powerful, i.e., able to affect society, because of their repeated use (Musolff, 2017b; O’Brien, 2003; Santa Ana, 1999). These scholars argue that when people are repeatedly exposed to figurative frames, they start to accept the implications that are made by these frames, which eventually creates legitimacy for, sometimes extreme, political measures (Musolff, 2017b; O’Brien 2003; Santa Ana, 1999). Based on these observations, it can be expected that figurative-frame repetition would lead to stronger and more persistent persuasive effects. Future research should test this hypothesis in an experimental setting. Therefore, the impact of figurative frames model (IFF model) should consider that frame repetition might increase the persuasiveness of figurative frames in political discourse.

A third caveat to address is that all experiments in this dissertation used self-reported measures and asked participants to report their opinion towards a certain issue, political policy or politician. The exact same measures were used for three out of four experiments (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). These measures were created to measure political persuasion
across issues, which allows to compare the results of different studies and hereby increases the generalizability of findings. While this data provided interesting new insights, future research could further increase our knowledge on the underlying mechanisms of figurative-framing effects by including physiological measures, such as neural responses, heart rate, and facial expressions (Bakker & Rooduijn, 2018; Falk, Berkman, Mann, Harrison & Lieberman, 2010). This could help assess affective responses to figurative frames and to reduce reliance on self-reports (Schuck & Feinholt, 2015).

For example, by measuring activity in certain parts of the brain that are related to persuasion induced behavior change, scholars can predict changes in behavior that cannot be predicted from self-reported attitudes and behavioral intentions alone (Falk et al., 2010). Measuring skin conductance can be used to measure emotional activation by political statements, and changes in recipients’ heart rate can serve as an indicator of attentiveness to presented stimuli (Daignault, Soroka, Giasson, 2013). A disadvantage of using physiological responses to measure the impact of figurative frames could be that the artificial character of the experimental set-up (e.g., exposing recipients to stimuli when they are in an fMRI scanner), might possibly influence recipients’ responses (e.g., the noise from the fMRI can evoke responses that mask stimulus-driven responses; Gaab, Gabrieli & Glover, 2007). However, a major advantage would be that it allows to record responses to these stimuli in the moment the actual persuasion occurs (Daignault et al., 2013; Falk et al., 2010). Therefore, I argue that future research should explore how measuring physiological responses can broaden our understanding of the underlying mechanisms through which figuratively framed political statements affect political opinion. Note that I do not suggest that we should move away from self-report measures, but rather, self-report measures and physiological measures could be combined in order to improve our knowledge on the underlying mechanisms and processing of figurative-framing effects.
DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this dissertation, I investigated how figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion. The findings of this dissertation have provided important insights into the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse, which serve as a first step towards a better understanding of the dynamics of figurative-framing effects. However, the findings of this dissertation also raise several questions that should be addressed in future research. In this section, I provide some suggestions for future research and discuss how future research can help to test, improve and extend the impact of figurative frames model (IFF model, Figure 1).

First, for future research, it is important to address the context of the figurative frame. Context cannot be considered a frame characteristic, but rather, a frame-related characteristic; it refers to all sorts of relevant information outside the frame that is involved in the framing event (e.g., who is the sender of the frame, who is the receiver, what medium is used to transfer the frame, etcetera; Steen, 2011b). Context likely influences effects of figurative language (Steen, 2015). For instance, a figuratively framed political statement broadcasted by a political party itself might have a different impact on recipients than a statement broadcasted by an established news agency, and an extreme figuratively framed anti-immigration statement might be perceived differently when it comes from a mainstream political leader known for their politically correct discourse than when it comes from a right-wing populist leader who is known for their extreme statements. In the experimental studies presented in this dissertation, I controlled for the influence of context. However, future research could address how context can influence the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse. Context is therefore included in the IFF model.

Second, in this dissertation, I addressed two recipient characteristics that can influence the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political
discourse: political affiliation and party-identification strength. Future research should take into account that, especially in Western-European countries with a multi-party system, identifying a party’s political position might be more complex than is oftentimes assumed. Political affiliation is generally expressed in left-right terms. However, several political scholars argue that, for multiple reasons, a unidimensional division does not comply to the complexity of Western-European modern-world politics (Bakker, Jolly & Polk, 2012; Bakker et al., 2015; De Vries, Hakhverdian & Lancee, 2013). First, there are different left-right dimensions on which a political party’s position, and thereby a voter’s political affiliation, can be identified: a general left-right dimension, an economic left-right dimension (i.e., classification based on a party’s stance on economic issues), and a social left-right dimension (i.e. classification based on a party’s view on democratic freedoms and rights; Bakker et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2015). Parties and voters may take a left stance on one matter and a right stance on another (Bakker et al., 2012; Bakker et al., 2015; De Vries et al., 2013). For instance, opposition to the European Union can be found on both the left-wing and right-wing poles of the political spectrum (Bakker et al., 2015). Indeed, in the Netherlands, the two Dutch political parties that take the strongest anti-EU stance are political parties that can be classified as far-left (Socialist Party, SP) and far-right (Freedom Party, PVV; Otjes & Louwerse, 2015).

Moreover, voters’ self-identification on a general left-right dimension is dynamic in nature and responds to changes in the political agenda of politicians. This means that while at a certain moment in time, economic attitudes can drive one’s position on the left-right scale, over time, anti-immigration attitudes can become the most important indicator for one’s self-indicated left-right position (De Vries et al., 2013). In the Netherlands, over the years, voters’ self-indicated position on a general left-right scale has become more strongly linked to anti-immigration sentiments, while economic attitudes became of less importance (De Vries et al., 2013). In this
dissertation, the influence of political affiliation on the persuasive impact of figuratively framed political statements was tested among Dutch voters, using anti-immigration statements. In this context, measuring political affiliation on a general left-right scale (as was done in these experiments) has been an adequate measurement strategy. However, when studying how political affiliation influences figurative-framing effects, future research should determine, for each specific research situation, what would be the most appropriate measure of political affiliation, hereby taking into account which issue is addressed, the political system of the country in which the research takes place, and the general political attitudes that are the major drivers of voters’ ideological identification.

Besides addressing political affiliation and party-identification strength, future research could explore the influence of other recipient characteristics on figurative-framing effects. Political knowledge has been reported as a moderator of both general framing effects (Schuck & de Vreese, 2006; Nelson, Clawson & Oxley, 1997) and metaphorical framing effects (Hartman, 2012; Reuchamps et al., 2018). General framing research is divided on the influence of political knowledge: some scholars have found less knowledgeable recipients to be more susceptible to framing effects (e.g., Schuck & de Vreese, 2006), while others have found the opposite (e.g., Nelson et al., 1997). Moreover, while some scholars measure how general political knowledge influences framing effects (Hartman, 2012), others examine the moderating role of issue-specific political knowledge (Reuchamps et al., 2018; Schuck & de Vreese, 2006). Metaphorical frames were shown to be especially effective among recipients with low general political knowledge (Hartman, 2012), and little issue-specific political knowledge (Reuchamps et al., 2018). More insight into the moderating role of this recipient characteristic on figurative-framing effects is needed, and therefore the impact of figurative frames model (IFF model) should include political knowledge and its different dimensions (general and specific political knowledge).
To conclude, I discussed some important caveats of the empirical studies of this dissertation and suggested how future research can improve research on figurative-framing effects in political discourse. This has put forward several concepts that I have included in the updated theoretical model of figurative-framing effects: the impact of figurative frames model (IFF model, Figure 1). These concepts, which are presented in grey rectangles, need to be addressed by future research to further explore their role in explaining the persuasive impact of figurative frames in political discourse.

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Time and again, the debate about the persuasive impact of figuratively framed political statements makes it way from the scientific field to the public sphere. In the Netherlands, right-wing populist politician Geert Wilders has made several controversial public statements (e.g., ‘we are facing a tsunami of Islamization’; van Leeuwen, 2015), which evoked a nation-wide debate about the tone of voice of the Dutch immigration debate, and about the possible negative societal consequences such statements could have (van Spanje & de Vreese, 2015). Another societal debate about the potential danger of figurative frames arose after the Dutch newspaper De Telegraaf published the following headline: ‘Prospectless asylum plague moves on undisturbedly.’ The headline was the start of an article about economic refugees who apply for asylum in different European Union member states (De Telegraaf, 2017) and resulted in a public call for an advertisement boycott against De Telegraaf. Critics argued that the figuratively framed rhetoric dehumanizes immigrants and incites hatred and discrimination (Trouw, 2017; van Spanje & de Vreese, 2015).

26 Original Dutch headline: Kansloze asielplaag ongehinderd verder
The empirical studies presented in this dissertation did not find figurative frames in political discourse to steer recipients’ opinion more in line with figuratively framed (anti-immigration) statements. However, this does not mean that figuratively framed political statements are harmless and without societal consequences. Rather, the negative impact of figuratively framed political statements on individuals and society seems to be more subtle and indirect than is oftentimes assumed. By pushing the political opinion of voters with opposing political ideas further away from the advocated policy, politicians who use figurative frames might broaden the gap between supportive and opposing voters, which might indirectly benefit their success (Chapter 4 of this dissertation; Krämer, 2014; Müller et al., 2017). Voters who perceive a greater polarization between their in-group and the out-group of other voters are more likely to express themselves against ‘the others’ and to engage in all sorts of political action, including voting for the party they support (Miller & Johnston Conover, 2015; Westfall, van Boven, Chambers & Judd, 2015). This might eventually put in motion further polarization of our society.

Thus, although the findings of this dissertation do not support the hypothesis that figurative frames can convince recipients to adopt the political stance of the sender, results indicate that these frames might indirectly have a large impact on society. At first, this impact might seem subtle. However, small indirect effects of figuratively framed political statements might lead to the induction of a self-propelled system that reinforces polarization and further divides society. Therefore, both political actors who use figurative frames to convey their political stance and journalists who communicate these frames to a larger audience, and recipients who are exposed to these frames must be aware of the potential consequences of figurative language use.
Figurative framing in political discourse: concluding remarks

Figurative language has often been considered an important persuasive tool for politicians and other social actors. The main objective of this dissertation was to further our knowledge on how figurative frames in political discourse affect political opinion. The studies presented in this dissertation showed that figurative language in political discourse does not work as a magic wand. Rather than being persuasive for everyone, figurative frames affect political opinion in a complex, oftentimes indirect way, and under specific boundary conditions. The experimental studies in this dissertation were the first to show that figurative language in political discourse involves a risk for its sender; rather than steering all opinions in line with the advocated stance, figurative frames can backfire and result in a decrease in political support. This indicates that research should move away from the idea that politicians and other social actors can put thoughts in people’s minds, just by using the right frame.

Based on the findings of this dissertation, I introduced a theoretical model that explains how figurative frames can affect political opinion: the impact of figurative frames model (IFF model). This model takes into account that different factors, such as characteristics of figurative frames and recipients’ perceptions can influence figurative-framing effects. Rather than being easy targets, people seem resilient and will not simply go along with ideas they do not support, not even when these ideas are framed with metaphors and hyperboles. This does not mean that the figurative words of politicians are harmless. By broadening the gap between opposing voters’ figurative frames in political discourse might induce further polarization of our society.
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