A Time to Hate?

A Time-Series Analysis of Contextual-Level Effects on Hate Crime in The Netherlands

Laura Jacobs and Joost van Spanje, Amsterdam School for Communication Research (ASCoR), University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Nowadays, registered hate crimes are on the rise in many Western societies. What explains temporal variation in the incidence of hate crimes? Combining insights from the grievance model and the opportunity model, we study the role of three types of contextual factors: security (terrorism), media (news about terrorism and immigration), and political factors (speech by anti-immigration actors, hate speech prosecution, and high-profile anti-immigration victories). We apply time-series analysis to our original dataset of registered hate crimes in the Netherlands, 2015–2017 (N = 7,219). Findings indicate that terrorist attacks, (both print and online) news on refugees, immigration, and terrorism boost nonviolent hate crime. Similarly, news of the hate speech prosecution of Freedom Party leader Geert Wilders increases nonviolent crime as well. Tentative evidence points to a contagion effect of speech by anti-immigration actors. With regard to violent hate crime, only terrorist attacks had an effect. This effect was modest and only found in one of our models. Hence, the grievance and the opportunities model each partially explain nonviolent hate crime, although the security and media context seem most influential. Our findings help to identify the contextual factors contributing to a climate for hate and suggest that perceived threats play a key role.

Introduction

Many findings in intergroup relations literature testify to the hardening of the political climate. In several liberal democracies the political debate about diversity is characterized by rising polarization (Castanho Silva 2017). Immigration has evolved into a salient political issue and prejudice toward outgroups is high (Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Schneider 2008). This parallels the long-term
trend that hate crimes, defined as “criminal acts that have been motivated by prejudice” tend to be highly common in various Western European societies (OSCE 2018). Hate crimes can be considered as a behavioral component of prejudice and as a sign of intergroup conflict. Here, we only focus on race and religion-based hate crimes.

Hate crimes are increasingly recognized as a social problem (Craig 2002; Disha, Cavendish and King 2011). Psychological traits play a role in explaining why people commit hate crimes (Walters 2011). However, research into the contextual-level factors driving hate crimes is scant and evidence about their origin from a broad societal perspective remains largely anecdotal. Longitudinal data about hate crimes is often not readily available. Therefore, scrutiny of the contextual factors that may explain over-time variation in hate crime has not attracted much scholarly attention yet. Many studies focus on the regional or subnational level rather than on the country as a whole. The few studies of the role of context for hate crime are often narrow in scope, primarily assessing terror attacks as catalysts for acts of violence and focusing on one particular target group (Muslims), largely neglecting other outgroups (Deloughery, King and Asal 2012; Hanes and Machin 2014; Mills, Freilich and Chermak 2017).

Some recent studies have examined other contextual variables: a 2018 study by Devine adopts a longitudinal angle via assessing effects of the 2016 referendum on EU membership (“Brexit”) as a trigger for hate crime in the UK, along with hate speech. Two German studies focusing on antirefugee crime assess effects of key events, refugee crime and political discourse stigmatizing refugees (Jäckle and König 2017, 2018).

We build on these prior studies and introduce various innovations. First, we simultaneously address developments in society relating to the media, security and legal/political context as potential triggers of hate crime. We study not only effects of hate speech by politicians, but also of criminal proceedings initiated against politicians for (alleged) hate speech. Second, we supplement individual-level studies tapping motives to commit hate crimes (which are less suited to explain temporal variation in hate crime), with a study at the aggregate level. Prior studies have qualitatively studied underlying motivations of hate crime, adding insight into microreasons and pinpointing psychological motives (Blee, 2005). We supplement this with a macrolevel approach, allowing us to identify short-term, immediate effects of contextual elements as we make use of a daily-level dataset. Third, we study both violent and nonviolent hate crime. Fourth, we build on prior literature by assessing to what extent grievances and opportunities clarify the incidence of hate crime (Koopmans 1996). Both models offer theoretical arguments on how macrolevel areas of society could affect hate crime and have been applied to racist violence before. Both models stress the importance of context, making them particularly suitable for aggregate-level analyses. In terms of grievances, we expand the scope via studying not only effects of real-life events (e.g., terrorist attacks), but also effects of news content, because the news environment may be a powerful source in articulating grievances in society. News often covers immigration in a threatening way (Van der Linden and Jacobs 2016), creating a predominantly negative information environment
which could affect perceptions on which citizens act (Van Klinger, Boom-Gaarden, Vliegenthart and De Vreese 2015). Similarly, the focus of terrorism news on specific outgroups may create moral panics and facilitate stigmatization (Matthes, Sikorski and Materne 2018), which may affect hate crimes. Regarding the opportunity structure, we assess three factors that indicate the limits of tolerance regarding the presence of outgroups in society: (1) speech by anti-immigration actors, (2) the extent to which hate speech is tolerated, and (3) high-profile anti-immigration victories. Hate speech by anti-immigration political actors targeting outgroups may elicit hate crimes, as it could be perceived by some as a legitimization of racial hatred (Devine 2018). The prosecution of political actors for hate speech may, by contrast, demarcate the borders of what is being tolerated in society by the elite, possibly discouraging acts of hate crime. Finally, we compare print and online news.

All in all, we aim to advance our understanding of how contextual factors shape hate crime. We use an extensive, daily-level dataset including all hate crimes registered by the Dutch National Police for the period 2015–2017 and aggregate-level variables on news media coverage, real-world developments, (alleged) hate speech by political actors and news about prosecutions of politicians for hate speech. This strategy allows us to identify the aggregate-level factors that may be responsible for stimulating a climate for hate.

**Theoretical Framework**

**Contextual-Level Causes of Hate Crime: Grievances Versus Opportunities**

Extant research has studied hate crime incidence from a social movement perspective via advancing two contrasting models as relevant frameworks to study racist social movements and the occurrence of discriminatory expressions: the grievance model and the opportunities model (Koopmans 1996; Koopmans, Statham, Giugni and Passi 2005). Although both models have been originally developed and applied to study protest behavior and social movements, sociologists have used these models to study racist violence (Koopmans 1996) and hate crime (Devine 2018). The “grievance model” points to real-world developments or certain situations as a source for grievances or intense feelings of discontent which can mobilize people (Davies 1971; Kornhauser 1959). These grievances can cause deeply seated feelings of frustration and deprivation which may translate in prejudiced acts directed at groups that are perceived to be responsible (Gurr 1970). These grievances can go hand in hand with perceived threats. The “opportunities” model, by contrast, contends that opportunity structures in a given societal context matter (Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak and Giugni 1995): success of aspiring a certain objective partially depends upon a favorable political opportunity structure. A political opportunity structure in relation to hate crime has been referred to as “the availability of channels to express grievances, the legitimacy of grievances within public and political discourse, and the likelihood of prevention or punishment of hate-
motivated crimes” (Green, Mc Falls, and Smith 2001, p. 488). This theory posits that success or failure of social movements or the extent to which groups make use of alternative strategies such as hate crime is driven by political opportunities in society. It predicts that resonation of a specific goal amongst the country’s elite facilitates its realization, whereas elite opposition may jeopardize it. The extent to which groups organize and the strategies they use are said to be partly contingent on this political opportunity structure. More specifically, if certain social norms (e.g., on hate crime and prejudice, see Blinder, Ford and Ivarsflaten 2013) are reinforced, this may lead groups to refrain from strategies that go against these norms. Koopmans states (1996) that the opportunity model may clarify not only which issues will likely develop into societal problems, but also the conditions which predict whether and why situations escalate. We structure the theoretical framework on contextual-level effects around both types of models. Similarly, we do this while integrating both perspectives with a framework focusing on threats. We consider different types of contexts, i.e. the media, security and legal/political context.

The Grievance Model

Terror attacks are real-world events that may trigger negative feelings and elicit hate crime, especially if they occur at a large scale and cause many fatalities; they are an aspect of the security context. The 9/11 attacks introduced the beginning of a new era of research about the effects of terrorism on society, ranging from the economy to intergroup relations and political life. Similarly, the impact of terrorist attacks on hate crime has been assessed, mostly in the US context (Deloughery et al. 2012; Disha et al. 2011; Mills et al. 2017). Although most prior evidence has been anecdotal and descriptive in nature (Hanes and Machin 2014), a short-term effect of key terror attacks on race and religion-based hate crimes has been observed. Terror attacks resulting in multiple casualties are major incidents creating shockwaves, as their goal is to spread fear across the population. Hence, terror acts may affect citizens’ evaluations of outgroups that are blamed for terrorism and radicalization (Matthes et al. 2018). Studies on outgroup derogation assert that some ingroup members tend to ascribe unfavorable traits to all outgroup members alike, generalizing and ignoring within-group diversity (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick and Esses 2010). Similarly, terror acts could give rise to perceived threats posed by certain outgroups which strengthens grievances; threat perceptions are a key driver of prejudicial acts, as is underlined by Intergroup Threat Theory (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006; Schlueter & Scheepers, 2010). Exposure to a terror attack committed by a Muslim extremist, for instance, may via the well-documented tendency to generalize extend to attitudes toward other outgroup members, leading some citizens to think that certain groups in society are disproportionally involved in terrorism. This belief may translate translate into threat perceptions, give rise to grievances, and possibly elicit hate crimes (Legewie, 2013). In the wake of Islamist terror in the past more hate crimes targeting Muslims have been documented (Blinder and Allen 2016; Disha et al. 2011; Hanes and Machin 2014); some have underlined
that hate crimes originate from threat perceptions and are acts of retaliation to punish stigmatized outgroups (Deloughery et al. 2012; Devine 2018). Not only terror attacks taking place in the country are expected to affect hate crime: large-scale terrorist attacks in neighboring countries may have a similar outcome by giving rise to threats and grievances, resulting in hate crime (Jäckle and König 2018):

H1: Terrorism has a positive effect on the incidence of hate crime.

Other grievances and threat perceptions may arise from public debates on outgroups. Citizens’ perceptions of social reality are partly shaped by the mass media. As the grievance model attributes great importance to the socially constructed nature of problems, it follows that sources with the power to shape perceptions warrant close scrutiny. We therefore also study news coverage of immigration, refugees, and terrorism, as they may give rise to threats and grievances. Most citizens are not aware of the exact number of immigrants or refugees present in society; nor are many citizens aware of crime rates, economic indicators or terror attacks—which can all be major sources of grievances—if they did not experience it at first hand (Alba, Rumbaut and Marotz 2005). Citizens heavily rely on news as an information source for unobtrusive, hard-to-observe issues (Jacobs, Damstra, Boukes and De Swert 2018). Studies comparing effects of immigration figures and immigration news have found, for instance, that news has a stronger effect on anti-immigration attitudes than the former, (re)activating grievances and threats for some (Van Klingen et al., Boomgaarden, Vliegenthart and De Vreese 2015). On top of studying real-world figures on immigration, hence, one should study news of immigration and refugees. News often distorts reality: immigrants and refugees tend to be depicted negatively in the news and the amount of coverage is usually not in proportion with real-life statistics (Jacobs et al. 2018; Van Klingen et al. 2015). Indeed, news often portrays immigrants and refugees as a threat and exposure to threatening news narratives have been found to (re)activate prejudice and, hence, can be considered a source of grievances (Van der Linden and Jacobs 2016). News about immigration and refugees may convince citizens of a certain reality, reinforce grievances, which may subsequently result in behavior and incite hate crimes (Devine 2018). Studies in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis have found that tendencies to portray refugees as a threat has even intensified (Greussing & Boomgaarden, 2017). The same holds for terrorism news. News often reports about terrorism in a sensational way, because terror acts meet news values of negativity, disaster, and conflict: this adds to its threatening nature (Harcup and O’Neill 2017). Terrorism news has been found to often lack a nuanced presentation of facts, at times equating terrorists to Muslims with limited background information (Matthes et al. 2018; Powell, 2011). Hence, terrorism news may contribute to a climate of fear and anger, construct threats, and fuel outgroup hostility in the victimized society, which can in turn intensify grievances as a fertile ground for hate crime (Obaidi, Kunst, Kteily, Sidanius and Thomsen 2018; Shoshani and Slone 2008).

H2: News on immigration and refugees has a positive effect on the incidence of hate crime.
H₃: Terrorism news has a positive effect on the incidence of hate crime.

**The Opportunity Model: The Legal/Political Context**

Various leaders of anti-immigration parties in Europe have been accused of cultivating a political discourse in which outgroup members are consistently targeted, i.e. (alleged) *hate speech* (Bos and Brants 2014). Elite rhetoric is part of a “discursive opportunity structure,” defining the opportunities and constraints that shape how elites frame certain political issues. More in particular, discursive opportunities refer to the aspects of the public rhetoric that drive the success rate of a message in the public sphere and, hence, are part of a wider opportunity structure in society (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004). The rhetoric by some right-wing political actors includes elements of scapegoating, can be described as “populist” (Hameleers, Bos and De Vreese 2017), and can amplify the resonance of hateful rhetoric, creating a discursive environment in which outgroups are systematically stigmatized. Many anti-immigration party leaders adopt a “we” versus “them” discourse in which outgroups, such as immigrants and refugees, are blamed for what goes wrong in society. Several European leaders of anti-immigration parties have been prosecuted for hate speech, such as leader of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) Geert Wilders and former French Front National (FN) leader Jean-Marie Le Pen (Van Spanje and De Vreese 2015). Antioutgroup rhetoric by political elites could signal that expressions of hate are condoned or even encouraged, which could for some legitimize hate crime (Devine 2018). Politicians are public figures: their statements may influence (parts of) the electorate, because they are picked up by the news and reach a large audience, thereby shaping “discursive opportunities.” Some voters may be sensitive to hate rhetoric (Schmuck and Matthes 2017). Such a “contagion effect” identifies hateful rhetoric by elites as a trigger for hate crime (Hall, Corb, Giannasi and Grieve 2014). Indeed, a recent study examining antirefugee violence has found that political rhetoric portraying refugees in an unfavorable way boosted violence (Jäckle and König 2017, 2018). We hypothesize that:

H₄: Speech by an anti-immigration party leader has a positive effect on the incidence of hate crime.

The extent to which speech by political actors is allowed by the legal system may play a role too and is also an aspect of the discursive opportunity structure (Koopmans & Olzak, 2004). The *prosecution* of political actors for hate speech may affect the incidence of hate crime for reasons that trace back to the opportunity model. The legal prosecution of a political leader for alleged hate speech demarcates the boundaries of what is being tolerated in society and what is not. It conditions the level of repression and institutional access for anti-immigration actors (Giugni, Koopmans, Passy and Statham 2005; Kriesi et al. 1995). Legal actions against hate speech can be interpreted as a signal that negative beliefs about outgroups and criticism of multiculturalism are not tolerated by the country elite, providing a legal basis for curtailing (alleged) hate speech by politicians. This can be seen as a form of discursive opportunity structures, where acts by anti-immigration political leaders are delegitimized via legal actions (Koopmans, 2005; Minkenberg, 2006). Criminal proceedings
against politicians for alleged hate speech, hence, may be seen as an indication that certain viewpoints are not granted a forum via the mainstream circuits of political representation. This collective condemnation of hate speech by a political actor could negatively affects the incidence of hate crime by spreading the message to individuals agreeing with this politician that this type of rhetoric and behavior is being punished (Blinder et al. 2013). A trial against a politician for hate speech could in this way be a confirmation by the legal system of a social norm that hateful messages are not tolerated. Of course, there is a possibility that prosecution of politicians for hate speech may backfire and instead lead to more hate crimes amongst its supporters. Still, the theoretical considerations we refer to above suggest suggests that the role of opportunity structures in creating social norms should not be underestimated. Thus, we hypothesize:

$H_5$: News about the legal prosecution of an anti-immigration party leader for hate speech has a negative effect on the incidence of hate crime.

Political key events and developments can also trigger hate crime, especially when connected to anti-immigration sentiments. Prior research has shown that radical political events can become a fertile ground for hate crime (Borell 2015; Disha et al. 2011; King and Sutton 2013) and that the strength of radical right parties is linked to antirefugee violence (Jäckle and König 2017). Moreover, a recent study has hinted that the UK referendum on EU membership has boosted hate crime (Devine 2018). The context in which the referendum took place was dominated by debates about the direction of EU migration policy and the (perceived) loss of sovereignty of EU member states in this domain, following the refugee crisis that burst out in 2015 (Walter 2019). There are other high-profile political events, both domestic and foreign, linked to immigration that could be relevant when studying hate crime, such as national elections where anti-immigration parties have performed well (Devine 2018; King and Sutton 2013). Hence, we expect high-profile political events signaling an anti-immigration shift to resonate and to affect hate crime:

$H_6$: High-profile anti-immigration victories have a positive effect on the incidence of hate crime.

**Violent Versus Nonviolent Hate Crimes**

Hate crimes come in various grades of severity and in multiple forms. They vary from acts of vandalism, to verbal expressions (insults, threats, and racist statements) to acts that involve physical violence. Prior studies have almost exclusively focused on violent acts, although these are rare and represent the most extreme forms (Borell 2015). Although all forms of hate crime have the potential to disrupt society, actual physical violence arguably has a more detrimental impact on intergroup relations in society than nonviolent hate crimes (Hall et al. 2014). There are reasons to assume that the triggers of violent versus nonviolent hate crimes differ (Craig 2002). Although situational and external events have been found to affect hate crime, it is unclear whether all contextual-level factors affect violent and nonviolent hate crimes similarly. News, for instance, has been found to affect attitudes, whereas its effects on behavior are less often documented. Arguably, the threshold to engage in physical violence
is higher than the threshold to engage in verbal insults, racist expressions, or threats (Craig 2002; Messner, McHugh and Felson 2004). Prior evidence shows, for instance, that one of the most effective ways to trigger violence is being directly exposed to violence; this does not necessarily have to be exposure as a victim, being a spectator is sufficient (Braun and Vliegenthart 2008; Deloughery, King, and Asal 2012). Building on this line of reasoning, it seems plausible that especially contextual-level factors that are violent and threatening in nature (i.e., terrorist acts) are more likely to trigger violent crimes:

- **H7**: Terrorist attacks will have a stronger effect on the incidence of violent hate crime than all other contextual-level factors mentioned.

Theoretical expectations are displayed in Figure 1.

**Data and Methods**

**Dependent Variables**

Detailed data on hate crime were collected in cooperation with the Dutch National Police in the Netherlands from 2015 to 2017. Since 2015, the Dutch National Police has developed a uniform registration system for hate crime in which data on all criminal proceedings linked to antidiscrimination legislation are centralized, making that hate crimes recording has been substantially improved. Before 2015, the registration was fragmented over various regions that all used different definitions, making that the data were not comparable. These data stem directly from recorded charges by the Dutch National Police based on their operational definition which we have aggregated on the daily level. Daily-level data allow for fine-grained analyses to test short-term, immediate effects of key contextual variables, limiting the influence of other variables. Since we are dealing with hate crime, the possibility to assess immediate consequences (i.e., short-term effects, a small number of lags) seems germane. Of course, these data refer to reported hate crimes; it could be that many hate crimes stay under the
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radar. Vice versa, it has been argued that hate crime is overreported. Moreover, underreporting or overreporting may have gradually increased or decreased over time. In our case, the Dutch new registration system has progressively improved since 2015. Still, since we assess only 3 years and focus on the interplay between context and hate crime, we think that these issues are less pertinent in our case. The database also includes a description and the type of hate crime. We only include hate crimes with race or religion-based motivations, excluding hate crimes due to gender, sexual orientation, and disability. We differentiate between violent and nonviolent hate crime as dependent variables. Violent hate crimes are operationalized by the police as crimes occurring in conjunction with an infringement of victims’ physical integrity (e.g., assaults of persons due to their color of skin). Nonviolent hate crimes include verbal expressions, insults, and threats without violence (e.g., insults via socially unacceptable swear words, persons being denied access to venues due to their origin, Jewish graves daubed with swastikas).

Independent Variables

Terrorism

We use the terrorism definition of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD): “Threatened or actual use of illegal force and violence by a non-state actor to attain a political, economic, religious, or social goal through fear, coercion or intimidation.” We include dummies for terror acts that occurred in North–West Europe with at least five fatalities, thereby selecting the most severe attacks. Lethal and geographically close attacks are more likely to elicit responses due to feelings of proximity and severity. The following major attacks received a score of 1 in a dummy variable Paris (7 January, 2015, 13 November 2015), Brussels (22 March 2016), Nice (14 July 2016), Berlin (19 December 2016), London (22 March, 3 June 2017), Stockholm (7 April 2017), Manchester (22 May 2017). We test the joint effect of one variable grasping all terror attacks as we aim to obtain insight in the joint effect of terrorist attacks rather than comparing between terror attacks; all attacks occurred abroad in geographically close countries.

News on Immigration, Refugees and Terrorism

We applied a dictionary-based content analysis to collect news of immigration, refugees, and terrorism. We analyzed effects of online and print news. We developed a search string of key words and conducted an advanced power search in Nexis Uni (newspapers) and Coosto (online). Both are reliable, academic databases that are accessible for research purposes. All available Dutch national newspapers were selected, ensuring a mix of left-wing and right-wing and popular and quality newspapers: Metro, Trouw, NRC Handelsblad, NRC Next, Algemeen Dagblad, Volkskrant, Telegraaf, Nederlands Dagblad, and Reformatorisch Dagblad. They reach the majority of the Dutch population.
Newspapers operate as opinion leaders, are perceived reliable, and are shown to have great agenda-setting power (Golan 2006). In-depth analysis of newspapers—especially when combined with an online analysis—remains effective to gain insight into key issues and core narratives (Vliegenthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden and De Vreese 2008). Only headline news was included. For online news, we included the four most popular Dutch news websites: NOS.nl, volkskrant.nl, nu.nl, and telegraaf.nl. Here we included not only headlines, but all news content. Analysis of newspapers and online news permits to assess the robustness of results (search string and descriptive data are included in the online supplementary files). This approach follows standard procedures by including count data of articles containing a key word in the headline (newspapers) or full article (online) (Van Klingeren et al. 2015). Although ideally one would include content measures of news on immigration and refugees (in terms of framing, valence), a meta-analysis demonstrates that news of immigration, refugees, and terrorism is skewed to the negative (Eberl et al. 2018). A recent large-scale study of Dutch news stories revealed that immigration and refugees are generally covered negatively, with multiple references to threats in terms of crime, economic costs and terrorism (Jacobs et al. 2018). Hence, we explicitly also focus on refugees, as our observation period runs parallel to the “refugee crisis” that burst out in 2015. Also news on terrorism is most often negative in nature. A summary was taken of all news coverage on immigration, refugees, and terrorism (for the selected print media and online news outlets) at the daily level. This approach is motivated by our perception of the totality of news coverage as an information environment.

Speech by an Anti-Immigration Politician

We included a variable grasping statements directed at immigrants by a Dutch politician. In the Netherlands, the dominant anti-immigration political actor in the period 2015–2017 is the Party for Freedom (PVV) led by Geert Wilders. Wilders has made several remarks about Islam and Moroccans for which he has been prosecuted (Jacobs & van Spanje, Forthcoming; Wichgers, Jacobs, & van Spanje, Forthcoming). We selected all statements by Wilders and other PVV politicians in the selected mainstream news media about immigrants and refugees (Search string in online supplementary file).

News About Prosecution of Anti-Immigration Political Actors for Hate Speech

After an investigation concluding that Wilders’ comments about Moroccans in March 2014 might have violated the antidiscrimination law, the Public Prosecutor announced in December 2014 that Wilders would be prosecuted. After a turbulent, mediatized trial, Wilders was convicted on December 9 2016 for incitement to discrimination and defamation, but he was acquitted for incitement to hatred. Wilders appealed against this decision and the trial still
drags on. We collected daily news coverage of Wilders’ trial for hate speech for our observation period.

**High-Profile Anti-Immigration Victories**

Four high-profile anti-immigration victories were included as dummy variables. These refer to historical events that were highly mediatised, salient and politically relevant in the Netherlands and that mark an anti-immigration shift, clearly linked to a discussion on immigration and/or the refugee crisis. First, we included a dummy for the Dutch national parliamentary elections on March 15 2017, in which anti-immigration parties did well. The PVV obtained 20 seats, up from 15 seats in 2012. The Forum for Democracy burst onto the political scene, winning two seats as a brand-new anti-immigration party. Second, on April 6 2016 a national referendum was held about the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the European Union (EU). This major event dominated Dutch political debates for weeks, sparking fierce discussions about national sovereignty, and the perceived democratic deficit of the EU decision-making process. Anti-immigration groups mobilized against this agreement, fearing it would facilitate Ukraine’s EU accession and migration. Third, a dummy for Brexit was included: an EU member state voting to leave the EU is unique since its foundation; the (geo)political and economic consequences of Brexit for the Netherlands and other (EU) countries are anticipated to be massive. Devine (2018) has shown that Brexit has sparked a wave of hate crime in the UK. The Brexit campaign took place in the heart of the 2015 refugee “crisis,” and the leave camp mobilized by arguing that the UK keep its sovereignty in the field of migration policy (Walter 2019). Possibly Brexit may have yielded similar effects on Dutch citizens. Fourth, Donald Trump’s election as US President on November 8 2016 may affect hate crime. In the US Trump’s election was associated with a significant rise in reported hate crimes, even when alternative explanations were controlled for (Edwards and Rushin 2018). His campaign was grounded on a populist discourse in which he targeted multiple minority groups, such as Latinxs, immigrants, and Muslims. The Trump vote has been partly explained by grievances about immigration and symbolic threat (Mutz 2018). The election of Trump could in this regard legitimize a climate of hate. In sum, all four events can be classified as high-profile anti-immigration victories; we only include high-level events as we expect that events need to be sufficiently salient in order to be picked up by citizens. Of course, it could be that other events could have played a role, but we think these four events for the Netherlands were the most salient and relevant ones to consider.

**Control Variables**

Finally, as a control and to account for the context of the refugee crisis, we have included dummies for Merkel’s “Wir schaffen das” statement on August 31 and of the events in Cologne on New Year’s Eve 2015–2016, when young girls were sexually assaulted, allegedly by immigrants; these events affected hate crime in other contexts (Frey, Forthcoming; Jäckle & König, 2018).
Method

We combine various quantitative statistical techniques. First, we report descriptive data on hate crime in the Netherlands, 2015–2017. Second, to assess our hypotheses regarding the contextual-level explanations for hate crime we employ ARIMA or time-series analysis. This technique allows to study aggregate-level phenomena via accounting for the influence of the dependent variable’s own past before adding explanatory variables to the equation, while simultaneously substantiating causal claims by assessing the effects of lagged independent variables (Vliegenthart 2014).3

Analysis and Results

Between January 1 2015 and December 31 2017, 14,440 hate crimes were registered by the Dutch National Police, an average of approximately 13 hate crimes a day. About 49.9% (7,219 cases) were categorized as hate crimes based on religious or racial motives. We restrict our analyses to these cases. Most of these hate crimes (77.5%, 590) were nonviolent, referring to verbal insults, threats, bullying, or other criminal offences without violence. About 21.7% of these hate crimes (1,567) occurred in combination with physical violence.4 Figures reveal a declining trend. In 2017, significantly fewer crimes based on ethnic, racial, or religious grounds (1,715) were recorded compared to 2016 (2,678) and 2015 (2,826). This corresponds to data of other European countries showing that in 2015 and 2016 (i.e., aftermath of the refugee crisis) more hate crimes were reported (Jäckle and König 2018) (see Figure 2).

Next, we make use of ARIMA modeling. For this purpose, we matched the hate crime data with the independent variables via creating a daily-level dataset. We run four ARIMA models: a model with nonviolent and violent hate crime with ethnic, racial, or religious motives, either with online or print news stories (and the other independent variables). A first step comes down to ascertaining
that the dependent variables are stationary and do not display structural time trends. The Augmented Dickey-Fuller test indicates that the dependent variables are stationary, meaning that the variables do not require transformation. The next step is to correct for the dependent variables’ own past in order to exclude spurious effects, i.e., effects wrongly attributed to independent variables that are in reality explained by the predictive power of the series’ own past. We correct for lagged values of the dependent variables via including autoregressive (AR, prior values of the series on the current value) and/or moving average (MA, influence of residuals from prior values on the current value) terms (Vliegenthart 2014). Inspection of the Autocorrelation (ACF) and Partial Autocorrelation (PACF) Function of our dependent variables (see online supplementary file) combined with model fit indicators (AIC, Akaike information criterion) suggest the following models: a model with one AR term (at lag t-1) and one MA (at lag t-1) for the model with newspapers for both dependent variables. For the models with online news, we included one AR term (lag t-1) and one MA (lag t-1) for nonviolent hate crime, and three MA terms (t-1, t-2, t-5) and one AR term (t-1) for the violent hate crime model. After including these AR and MA terms in the models, the Ljung-Box’s Q test statistics shows that the residuals and squared residuals resemble white noise. Lastly, we add independent variables to the model. To select the number of lags for the independent variables, we cross-correlated the residuals of each independent variable with the residuals of the dependent variables. The choice of lags is both a theoretical and empirical choice, inspired by the data at hand (Vliegenthart, 2014). Theoretically, we expect short-term, immediate effects that become evident after a few days. Tables 1 and 2 specify which lags of the independent variables were included based on the cross-correlation function (CCF). These all refer to short-term effects, ranging from 1 to 3 days prior to the hate crime, as these were the strongest according to the data. Hence, our theoretical expectations about the lag structure are backed up by the empirical evidence.

We start by interpreting effects of contextual factors on nonviolent hate crime (Table 1, Model 1). Terror acts are positively related to nonviolent hate crime: if a terror attack occurred, more nonviolent hate crimes were reported two days later. Immigration and terrorism news have a positive effect on nonviolent hate crime too: the more newspaper stories on terrorism and immigration were published, the more nonviolent hate crimes were reported a few days later. Contrary to expectations, news about the hate speech prosecution of PVV leader Wilders positively affects nonviolent hate crime. Finally, none of the high-profile anti-immigration victories have a significant impact on nonviolent hate crime, while the Cologne New Year’s Eve dummy was borderline significant. Next, we interpret the effects on violent hate crime (Model 2). Findings reveal a different picture compared to the analysis of nonviolent hate crime. Only terrorist attacks have a positive effect on violent hate crimes; a terror attack results in a rise of violent hate crimes with 0.54. All other independent variables are not statistically significant.

Second, we interpret Table 2 which repeats Model 1 and 2, including online news instead of newspaper articles. Model 3 focuses on nonviolent hate crime.
Table 1. Contextual-Level Factors of Hate Crime in the Netherlands (Newspapers)

|                                  | Model 1: nonviolent hate crime |          | Model 2: violent hate crime |          |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------|----------------------------|----------|
|                                  | B (SE)                        | p        | B (SE)                     | p        |
| **Grievance model: security and media context** |                                |          |                            |          |
| Terrorist acts (t-2)             | 1.44(0.52)**                  | 0.006    | Terrorist acts (t-1)       | 0.54(0.26)* | 0.041 |
| Newspaper coverage terrorism (t-1) | 0.04(0.02)†                   | 0.051    | Newspaper coverage terrorism (t-1) | 0.00(0.01) | 0.751 |
| Newspaper coverage of immigration (t-3) | 0.05(0.02)*                  | 0.029    | Newspaper coverage immigration (t-1) | 0.01(0.01) | 0.521 |
| **Opportunity model: political context** |                                |          |                            |          |
| Speech by Freedom Party politicians (t-4) | −0.05(0.04)                   | 0.226    | Speech Freedom Party politicians (t-1) | −0.02(0.02) | 0.321 |
| News about hate speech prosecution (t-3) | 0.16(0.08)*                  | 0.041    | News about hate speech prosecution (t-1) | 0.00(0.03) | 0.923 |
| Ukraine Referendum in March 2016 (t-1) | 0.24(19.1)                    | 0.991    | Ukraine Referendum in March 2016 (t-1) | 1.64(8.00) | 0.852 |
| Elections in March 2017 (t-1)    | −0.52(17.7)                   | 0.977    | Elections in March 2017 (t-1) | −0.06(12.2) | 0.996 |
| Election of Trump in November 2016 (t-1) | −3.93(19.0)                  | 0.837    | Election of Trump in November 2016 (t-1) | 0.46(6.22) | 0.941 |

Continued
Table 1. Continued

|                                | Model 1: nonviolent hate crime | Model 2: violent hate crime |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                                | B (SE) | p    | B (SE) | p    |
| Brexit vote in June 2016 (t-1) | 0.06(8.56) | 0.994 | 2.12(6.95) | 0.760 |
| "Wir schaffen das" Merkel     | 1.44(13.8) | 0.917 | -1.51(9.92) | 0.879 |
| August 31 2015 (t-1)          |        |      |        |      |
| Assaults New Year's Eve        | 16.1(8.74) † | 0.066 | 4.04(8.93) | 0.651 |
| Cologne 2015–2016 (t-1)       |        |      |        |      |
| Constant                       | 4.44(0.99) *** | 0.000 | 1.29(0.30) *** | 0.000 |
| AR (t-1)                       | 0.99(0.01) *** | 0.000 | 0.99(0.01) *** | 0.000 |
| MA (t-1)                       | -0.92(0.02) *** | 0.000 | -0.95(0.02) *** | 0.000 |
| N                              | 936    |      | 936    |      |
| AIC                            | 4402.1 |      | 3004.1 |      |
| Ljung Box Q                    | 28.6   |      | 27.0   |      |

Notes. Reported are unstandardized coefficients, standard errors and p values from an ARIMA analysis (Stata 14). † p < .10, * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001.
Table 2. Contextual-Level Factors of Hate Crime in the Netherlands (Online News)

|                        | Model 3: nonviolent hate crime | Model 4: violent hate crime |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
|                        | B (SE)            | p            | B (SE)            | p            |
| **Grievance model:**  |                    |               |                    |               |
| Security and media context |                    |               |                    |               |
| Terrorist acts (t-1)  | 1.48(0.616)**     | 0.016        | 0.41(0.30)        | 0.173        |
| Online terrorism news (t-2) | 0.01(0.00)***     | 0.000        | 0.00(0.00)        | 0.124        |
| Online immigration news (t-3) | 0.01(0.00)*     | 0.005        | 0.00(0.00)        | 0.339        |
| **Opportunity model:** |                    |               |                    |               |
| political context     |                    |               |                    |               |
| Speech by Freedom Party politicians (t-2) | 0.03(0.01)*     | 0.028        | 0.00(0.01)        | 0.541        |
| News about hate speech prosecution (t-1) | 0.05(0.02)**     | 0.001        | 0.01(0.01)        | 0.223        |
| Ukraine Referendum in March 2016 (t-1)  | 0.04(15.8)       | 0.998        | 1.51(8.22)        | 0.855        |
| Elections in March 2017 (t-1)  | −0.63(23.3)      | 0.978        | −0.31(11.2)       | 0.978        |
| Election of Trump in November 2016 (t-1) | −3.95(16.6)     | 0.812        | 0.58(5.31)        | 0.914        |
| Brexit vote in June 2016 (t-1)  | −0.48(7.73)      | 0.950        | 1.97(6.09)        | 0.746        |
| “Wir schaffen das” by Merkel in August 2015 | 0.74(8.76)      | 0.932        | −1.25(0.36)       | 0.918        |
| Assaults New Year’s Eve Cologne 2015–2016 | 15.4(11.9)      | 0.196        | 4.11(8.39)        | 0.625        |
| Constant               | 4.08(1.10)***    | 0.000        | 1.25(0.36)***     | 0.000        |
| AR (t-1)               | 0.99(0.00)***    | 0.000        | 0.99(0.01)***     | 0.000        |
| MA (t-1)               | −0.93(0.01)***   | 0.000        | −0.92(0.02)***    | 0.000        |
| MA (t-2)               | −0.06(0.03)*     | 0.044        |                    |               |
| MA (t-5)               | 0.03(0.02)       | 0.064        |                    |               |
| N                      | 1093             |              | 1093              |               |
| AIC                    | 5164.5           |              | 3656.8            |               |
| Ljung Box Q            | 14.2             |              | 24.4              |               |
Results are almost identical to the model with newspapers, except that online speech by anti-immigration politicians is positively related to nonviolent hate crime as well. The positive and significant effects of terror acts, news on terrorism and immigration, and the prosecution of anti-immigration politicians for hate speech are confirmed, but the effects are somewhat smaller in size. The dummies for the high-profile anti-immigration victories are not significant. Finally, in Model 4, we consider violent hate crime. None of the variables are significant (although the effect of terror attacks is going in the hypothesized direction in line with Model 1).

Most immediate short-term effects of the contextual-level variables only pertain to nonviolent hate crime (summary in Table 3). $H_1$ (terror attacks) is confirmed for nonviolent hate crime and for the violent hate crime model with newspapers. Support for $H_2$ (refugee and immigration news) and $H_3$ (terror news) is found only for nonviolent hate crime. Support for $H_4$ (speech by anti-immigration actors) is less uniform, and is only found in the model on nonviolent hate crime with online news. $H_5$ is rejected for violent and supported for nonviolent hate crime: news on hate speech prosecution boosts nonviolent hate crime, while no effect on violent hate crime was found. $H_6$ about high-profile anti-immigration victories is rejected in all analyses. Finally, $H_7$ is confirmed for the model with online news, as terror attacks where the only factor found to affect violent hate crime. All effects are rather modest in size and only lead to a small—but significant—rise in the incidence of nonviolent (and violent) hate crime. Still, most effects on nonviolent hate crime are robust across distinct models. Since we are studying behavior, these small effects are still meaningful.

**Discussion**

We aimed to empirically test a comprehensive framework of contextual-level determinants of hate crime. We made use of an aggregate-level dataset of police registered hate crimes in the Netherlands. Based on a theoretical framework differentiating between the grievances and the opportunity model, we studied what explained over-time variation in hate crime. We also adopted a threats perspective. We explicitly aimed to contribute to a pertinent debate on intergroup conflict via assessing which factors play a role in stimulating a climate of hate.

The most consistent effect is that of terror attacks. Terror attacks have a strong bearing on nonviolent hate crime. Confrontation with terrorism seems to (re)activate grievances about particular outgroups, translating into actual behavior. They are also the only factor boosting violent hate crime, although this effect was only found in the newspaper model. The modest effect size for violent hate crime may not be surprising, as all included terror attacks occurred abroad. These findings confirm prior conclusions (Deloughery et al. 2012; Disha et al. 2011; Hanes and Machin 2014; Mills et al. 2017). Terrorism news did not yield similar effects on violent hate crime as actual terror attacks, which may be because terrorism news also reports on the aftermath of attacks, offering background analyses, and discussing terrorism as a political issue. Our analysis
### Table 3. Summary of Findings

| Hypothesis                              | Nonviolent hate crime | Violent hate crime |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
|                                         | Model excluding Sundays (newspaper data) | Model including Sundays (online data) | Model excluding Sundays (newspaper data) | Model including Sundays (online data) |
| H1: terrorism                           | ✓                     | ✓                 | ✓                 | ×                 |
| H2: immigration news                    | ✓                     | ✓                 | ×                 | ×                 |
| H3: terrorism news                      | ✓                     | ✓                 | ×                 | ×                 |
| H4: speech by anti-immigration politician | ×                     | ✓                 | ×                 | ×                 |
| H5: news about prosecution of hate speech by anti-immigration politician | ✓ (opposite effect) | ✓ (opposite effect) | ×                 | ×                 |
| H6: high-profile anti-immigration victories | ×                     | ×                 | ×                 | ×                 |
reveals that terror attacks yield consequences a few days later, implying that violent hate crimes can be impulsive reactions with a clear trigger; they may be acts of retaliation where stigmatized outgroups are victimized (Deloughery et al. 2012; Jäckle and König 2018). Real-world developments in the form of exposure to terror acts, as predicted by the grievance model, hence partly contribute to racist violence (Ravndal 2018).

All other effects were only found for nonviolent hate crime. Grievances and threats (as portrayed by news) play a role, although effects are small. Exposure to threatening news about immigration and terrorism leads to some citizens giving vent to their frustrations. News media, often adopting a sensationalist outlook with limited room for a nuanced discussion when covering immigration, refugees, and terrorism, does not only affect prejudice (Van der Linden and Jacobs 2016), but also seems to incite verbal acts of discrimination of outgroups. Hence, for some, visibility of immigration, refugees, and terrorism creates a threatening news environment conducive to nonviolent hate crime; this corroborates prior studies which stress the role of threatening events (Jäckle and König 2018).

There are indications that the opportunity structure matters too. Online speech by political actors has ramifications for behavior. An online political discourse targeting refugees and immigrants has a disruptive effect on intergroup relations (Jäckle and König 2017, 2018). Some individuals may be susceptible to this rhetoric which can help to reinforce threat and prejudicial acts (Schmuck and Matthes 2017). This cautiously points to a “contagion” effect, in which political elite discourse triggers hate crime (Hall et al. 2014). Findings at least imply that, next to subjective grievances stemming from real-world developments, features of the political context matter (Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Koopmans 1996): politicians engaging in antioutgroup rhetoric may contribute to a climate that is favorable for expressions of hate. The potential detrimental effect of perceived legitimization of acts of hate by elites should thus not be disregarded, although future replication is warranted. Importantly, this finding corroborates conclusions of a German study on antirefugee violence (Jäckle and König 2018). We add that not only online speech as such matters, but also news on the prosecution of political actors engaging in hateful messages. Contrary to what the opportunity model would predict, news of Wilders’ hate speech prosecution boosted nonviolent hate crime. Possibly, legal prosecution is seen as a signal that critical views of multiculturalism are delegitimized in society, possibly creating a “backlash” effect and encouraging some to take matters in their own hands. So indeed, repression of the radical right may be a catalyst due to increasing polarization and radicalization (Ravndal, 2018). Criminal proceedings against hate speech may be perceived by some as a validation that society is becoming more multicultural, which could intensify a propensity to engage in hate crime as they feel that some values (e.g., free speech) are under threat. Wilders’ prosecution may appear as an attack on their personal beliefs, giving the impression that the window of opportunity is closing, necessitating retaliatory action and inspiring alternative acts (such as hate crime). Hence, the opportunity structure may operate differently here. This underlines the role of
threats in explaining this “backlash” effect. Another explanation for this finding may lie in how the Wilders’ trial developed and was perceived. In several respects, Wilders could be considered as a “winner”: whereas victim organizations left a bad impression, Wilders had plenty of opportunity to convey his message, he was allowed to interrogate several adversaries, including a judge, and he did not receive any sentence.

Overall, although the grievances and the political opportunity model matter and the results show that some aspects are important, their importance should be qualified: effects sizes are modest and for one hypothesis the results contradict both theoretical perspectives. The evidence corroborates that (perceived) threats are a catalyst for hate crime (Jäckle & König, 2018); hence, future accounts may want to better integrate this threats perspective. Still, to some extent, these theories are reconcilable with a threats perspective.

Finally, Brexit and the election of Trump were not significantly correlated with hate crime whereas for the UK and the US such an effect has been documented (Devine 2018, Edwards and Rushin 2018). Of course, both were foreign events and, arguably, more “distant” and less directly relevant to Dutch citizens, limiting their impact. Still, the events in Cologne were weakly related to nonviolent hate crime (in the newspaper model), in line with German studies documenting that these sexual assaults, allegedly by immigrants, were a threatening event dramatically increasing violence (Frey, 2020; Jäckle & König, 2018). The Dutch elections and the Ukraine referendum did not impact hate crime, possibly because these electoral outcomes had been anticipated.

Some limitations should be noted. First, we rely on registered hate crimes. Many hate crimes are not reported or stay under the radar (Pezzella, Fetzer, and Keller, Forthcoming). Likewise, some reports may be false. In any case, our figures should thus be qualified and likely deviate from real incidence of hate crime in society. Still, as patterns in reporting are likely to be close to nonsystematic, the figures are useful as an indication of change in the incidence of hate crime over time, which is our primary goal. This makes concerns that violent hate crimes may be more reliably reported than nonviolent ones less pertinent as we compare over time within the same dependent variable. Currently, police data are the only available source on hate crimes in the Netherlands; the 2015 uniform registration system has improved data quality. Second, nonavailability of other contextual variables on a daily basis (e.g., extreme right party vote share, immigration figures, numbers on crimes committed by immigrants/refugees, general crime rates) made that these factors could not be assessed. Future studies may want to adopt an even broader scope. We mainly focused on variables that fluctuate on a daily basis to scrutinize short-term effects, making other contextual-level variables evolving more gradually (e.g., economic indicators, legislation) beyond our study’s scope. Third, we compared newspaper and online coverage, which for some variables yielded distinct conclusions (although the trends are similar). This may be attributed to the collection method, since we were not able to include headline news in the online news dataset. Excluding Sundays for the newspaper data could explain these minor differences. Fourth, we included four main events signaling an anti-immigration shift (Brexit, Trump’s election, Dutch elections,
Ukraine referendum). This is not an exhaustive list; other contextual events may matter, which future studies should examine. Finally, we focused on the national level, providing an analysis into temporal variation which may be complemented in the future with neighborhood-level analyses to disentangle spatial dynamics.

All in all, elements of both the grievance and opportunity model seem relevant to explain hate crime, whereas threats should not be underestimated. Real-world events seem sufficiently threatening to yield effects, whereas perceptions created by news media are relevant too. Still, elements of the political context should not be overlooked as speech by anti-immigration actors and the boundaries for hate speech within society affect hate crime too.

Notes

1. We test two models, one including online news and one including newspaper articles. Since no newspapers are circulated on Sundays in the Netherlands, the latter model excludes Sundays. Using the Stata business calendar function allows to analyze the data without time gaps.

2. We combine news on immigration and refugees, as Dutch journalists are shown to use the terms “immigrants” and “refugees” interchangeably in news on immigration (Van Klingeren et al., 2014). This is validated by a reliability test, affirming that in the Netherlands news referring to immigration is highly correlated ($r = .69$) with news referring to refugees (for a month of news in February 2017).

3. Prior to these ARIMA analyses, VAR analyses with granger causality tests were conducted to assess the direction of causality as a robustness check. Granger causality tests reveal effects of news and real-world developments on violent and nonviolent hate crime, while there is less empirical support for effects of hate crimes on news and real-world developments, making the reversed relationship less likely. Full results are available from authors upon request.

4. These percentages do not add up to 100%: a small part of these hate crimes could not be categorized, or referred to acts of vandalism (a category containing so few cases that it has been excluded).

5. For Model 4, the residuals resemble white noise, but the squared residuals do not, suggesting minor heteroskedasticity issues. Running the same model with a log transformation of the dependent variables (as commonly prescribed as a solution) results in nearly identical results. Hence, we report a model without log-transformed dependent variables, since transformation renders interpretation more difficult. Including more AR and MA terms at different lag lengths yields similar findings without substantially improving the model fit; following recommendations, we reported the most parsimonious models.

6. Correlations between lags (up until t-3) of all independent variables were assessed to assess multicollinearity. Correlations between various lags of
terrorism news and terrorist acts are positive and significant; the highest is 0.44, not too high to cause multicollinearity issues.

7. Controlling for lags of independent variable prior to the lags included (e.g., not only including lag t-3, but also t-1 and t-2) does not alter the results (and these other lags are insignificant). For parsimony reasons, we therefore excluded these.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material is available at Social Forces online.

About the authors

Laura Jacobs (PhD) is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam and a member of the Department of Political Communication and Journalism at the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR). She investigates the role of hate speech prosecution of anti-immigration party leaders on electoral support in an NWO Vidi project led by Prof. Joost van Spanje. Moreover, her research interests include anti-immigration party support, media effects, intergroup relations, and experiments. She has published 16 SSCI-ranked journal articles in high-quality journals in the field of media studies and political science.

Joost van Spanje (PhD) is professor of Politics in the University of London, and associate professor of Political Communication in the University of Amsterdam. In recent years Joost has won the Annual Political Science Award, an NWO Veni grant, an NWO Vidi grant, and an ERC Consolidator grant. His London team investigates if and how the news media cover new parties, and electoral effects of such coverage in 19 countries since 1950. His Amsterdam team studies effects of legal action against anti-immigration parties on public opinion in 21 countries since 1965. Joost has published 39 SSCI-ranked journal articles as well as the 2018 monograph “Controlling the Electoral Marketplace”.

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