Public opinion surveys indicate that most people in European countries harbor negative attitudes toward ethnic minorities and favor policy programs intended to restrict immigration (Zick, Küpper, and Hövermann 2011; Zick, Pettigrew, and Wagner 2008). For instance, a recent analysis of data from six rounds of the European Social Survey (covering the period between 2002 and 2012) demonstrates that anti-immigrant attitudes are a relatively stable phenomenon across European countries that has not significantly increased or decreased during this period (Hjerm and Bohman 2014). Moreover, the data show that the general level of racial attitudes differs between countries. Many Eastern-European countries (e.g., the Czech Republic or Hungary) exhibit a higher perceived ethnic threat while especially Scandinavian countries (e.g., Sweden or Norway) show less negative views on ethnic groups. The key factors that lead to these differences seem to be a lack of familiarity with foreigners and the fear of conflict over values and culture rather than social and economic competition between ethnic minorities and the majority population (Schneider 2008).

Communication research in Europe (Ruhrmann 2002; ter Wal 2002) and the US (Mastro 2009) indicates that these attitudes may be in part due to biased depictions of ethnic minorities in the media. This chapter provides an overview of how ethnic minorities are portrayed in the media in European countries. First, we give a short sketch of how immigration and integration in Europe has developed. Second, we provide a summary of findings on media representations of ethnic minorities in Europe. Here we focus on commonalities and differences between countries. In addition to cross-cultural variation in media representations of ethnic minorities, we show that there is considerable variation in the coverage of ethnic groups across media and news genres. We also consider the discourse that prevails among political elites, e.g., in parliamentary speeches. We conclude by pointing to extant gaps in research and possible avenues for future studies.

**Historical Developments**

In the present context, we use the term “ethnic minorities” when we mean people that migrate from one country to another with the intention to stay there. The term “race”—although widely used by scholars in the US—can rarely be found in a European context (Trebbe 2009: 24). It can be regarded as emphasizing biological differences between different
groups of human beings while “ethnicity” rather seems to refer to cultural commonalities (Spencer 2004). To European ears, “race” bears a somewhat negative connotation due to the racial ideology of the Nazi regime. Ethnic minorities can be considered as a social construct that only makes sense against the background of a majority population in a given nation-state.

The immigration streams into Europe after WWII differ considerably between countries. Most of these differences are due to different historical routes that European countries have taken (Geddes 2003). For instance, in France immigrants have mainly been entering from former colonies in Northern Africa, while in the UK, most immigrants came from Pakistan or Bangladesh. In Germany, immigrants are mainly guest workers from Turkey, Italy, or Portugal who were hired in the post-war era to re-build the country. In most European countries the balance of immigrants to emigrants is positive; only in some Eastern-European countries is it negative (Zick, Pettigrew, and Wagner 2008).

In recent years, immigration is widely discussed in three different contexts: First, after the end of the Cold War, countries from the former Soviet Republics entered the European Union (EU). Since the EU grants its inhabitants unrestricted mobility across countries, this has resulted in streams of immigration from Eastern to Western Europe (Favell 2008). Second, the recent crises in the Middle East and Northern Africa have led to an increase in the number of refugees and asylum seekers that try to find shelter in Europe (Hatton and Williamson 2006). So-called “boat people” who are smuggled on board ships over the Mediterranean Sea have especially caught broad public (and also media) attention (Pugh 2001). Third, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks Muslims have been the focus of the political and media debate in the US and in most European countries. Often, Muslims are depicted in a negative light in the context of this debate (Poole 2002; Saeed 2007). Public discourse often simultaneously deals with current immigrants or refugees from the Middle East and second- or third-generation immigrants from states such as Turkey, Pakistan, or from Northern Africa who have found a home in Europe for decades.

**Media Representations of Ethnic Minorities**

There is little comparative research on media representations of ethnic minorities across European countries (Bennett, ter Wal, Lipiński, Małgorzata, and Krzyżanowski 2011; Kolmer 2012; ter Wal 2002; ter Wal, D’Haenens, and Koeman 2005). Most of the studies are conducted in countries of which the immigration history dates back several decades, e.g., the UK, Germany, or the Netherlands. This history considerably stimulated academic research on intergroup relations and media coverage of ethnic groups. Systematic research is less common in European countries that lack a longer immigration history. The focus of most quantitative or qualitative studies is on the coverage of immigrants in the news. Less research deals with other media genres (but see Igartua, Barrios, Ortega, and Frutos 2014; Top 2000). In quantitative content analyses the range is from simple word counts (e.g., co-occurrence of ethnic group members and positive and negative words, Galliker, Herman, Imminger, and Weimer 1998) to the coding of topics, issues, and frames (Ruhrmann, Sommer, and Uhlemann 2006; Van Gorp 2005).

**Underrepresentation of Ethnic Minorities**

Despite differences in research traditions or methodology, there are general patterns that can be observed in nearly all European countries (for an overview, see ter Wal 2002).
First, ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the news compared to official statistics. For instance, a study in the Netherlands found that ethnic minorities are underrepresented as a social group in press photographs (Top 2000). A content analysis of Belgian television news indicates the near absence of ethnic groups as part of society (Saëys and Coppens 2002). Additional research found evidence of a gender gap: Among the few members of ethnic groups that receive media attention, men are clearly overrepresented (Krüger and Simon 2005). Thus, female members of ethnic groups obviously suffer from double discrimination.

However, there are signs of improvement of news representations of ethnic minorities over time. Specifically, a study of British television programs indicated an increase of representations of ethnic minorities (Statham 2002). This is especially true for public broadcasting stations that are obliged to normative standards of diversity (for the UK, see Law, Svennevig, and Morrison 1997; for Germany, see Ruhrmann et al. 2006). Despite this improvement, ethnic minorities are still overrepresented in news stories on crime and violence (Sommer and Ruhrmann 2010; ter Wal et al. 2005). Similar to representations of minorities in the U.S. media (Oliver 1994), European ethnic minorities are especially overrepresented as criminal suspects or perpetrators as compared to the majority group, e.g., in German newspapers (Müller 2005), Austrian tabloids (Arendt 2010), Italian regional newspapers (Di Nicola and Canepele 2004), Swiss quality newspapers (Galliker et al. 1998), and Spanish television news (Igartua et al. 2014).

Ethnic Minorities as Passive Agents

Even if ethnic minorities are in the news, they often do not function as active agents, information sources, or interview partners. Most of the time they remain silent and are passive agents who are marginalized. On German television, asylum seekers appear most of the time as passive objects that are dealt with and seldom treated as active subjects (Hömberg and Schlemmer 1995). A more recent study from Belgium corroborates the image of asylum seekers as passive actors that suffer from persecution and disasters (Van Gorp 2005). Diachronic studies provide evidence of an improvement in the representations of ethnic minorities, e.g., in the UK (Statham 2002) and Germany (Müller 2005). Accordingly, ethnic minorities receive more attention in the press and are seen more often as active agents. For instance, a German study found that the share of airtime devoted to immigration issues or immigrants was 10 percent of the overall airtime during an average day (Krüger and Simon 2005). Nevertheless, this representation seems to vary considerably between different groups. As Buchanan et al. (2004) pointed out, asylum seekers or refugees still receive very little attention in the media.

Negativity in Coverage of Ethnic Minorities

Overall, ethnic minorities are more often portrayed in an unfavorable light, e.g., as free-loaders, drug dealers, terrorists, or individuals who violate cultural values. In a study of news in the UK, negativity referred to (1) claims to reduce the rights of ethnic minorities, (2) statements that portrayed minorities as a burden to the welfare state, or (3) depictions of ethnic groups as being immoral, bogus refugees, or carriers of diseases, such as TB or AIDS (Law et al. 1997). In Swiss news coverage immigrants were more strongly associated with the issue of crime than any other issue (Galliker et al. 1998).
In Germany, more than one third of all television news items on ethnic minorities in 2003 dealt with terrorism (Ruhrmann et al. 2006). Another third of the broadcasts were related to crime. Findings from other European countries generally support the overall notion that ethnic minorities appear as a threat to the economy, security, and cultural values prevailing in European countries (ter Wal 2002; ter Wal et al. 2005).

A common pattern identified in European journalism is the association of ethnic minorities with metaphors. Specifically, immigrants or refugees are often portrayed using the language of natural disasters, such as flood, avalanche, or glut (Gardikiotis 2003; Ruhrmann 2002). In a similar vein, immigrants are depicted as “masses” that “pour” into or “swamp” European countries (Charteris-Black 2006). Through such metaphoric language, ethnic minorities are stigmatized as a social group that represents multiple threats to Europeans. Research in a discourse analytical tradition generally supports these findings (Bennett et al. 2011). This pattern of results is qualified by the finding that negativity in news reporting varies as a function of cultural distance. The more culturally distant and the less beneficial to the welfare state an ethnic group is, the higher the share of negativity (Lubbers, Scheepers, and Wester 1998; Ruhrmann 2002). Despite the negative representations of ethnic minorities that dominate European journalism, there are at least some that appear in a favorable light. Portrayals of foreign artists, athletes, or visiting guests are found to be generally positive (e.g., Ruhrmann 2002).

The image of ethnic minorities also varies between media genres and news outlets. Specifically, results from different European countries suggest that tabloid newspapers depict ethnic minorities in a more negative light as compared to up-market news (Lubbers et al. 1998; Statham 2002). Additionally, liberal newspapers exhibit more positive portrayals of ethnic minorities than conservative newspapers (Geißler 2000; Lubbers et al. 1998). A Dutch study demonstrates that the portrayals of ethnic minorities in television talk shows are more positive than in other genres, mainly due to the inclusion of ordinary people (ter Wal 2002). Studies from countries that have a longer research tradition suggest that the media image of ethnic minorities has improved over time. For instance, a study in the UK shows that concerns of minorities and contributions of immigrants to society receive more news attention (Law et al. 1997). Research from Germany (Müller 2005) and Switzerland (Galliker et al. 1998) also indicates that the number of negative portrayals of ethnic minorities has decreased over time. However, ethnic minorities that are perceived to cost more than they benefit the country still receive negative evaluations in the news (Ruhrmann 2002).

After 9/11 and the bombings in London and Madrid, Muslims received more attention as an ethnic group than other social groups (Sommer and Ruhrmann 2010). A recent content analysis in Germany showed that television news focused more on intergroup conflict than on intergroup dialogue. For instance, portrayals of the relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims emphasize conflict more frequently than dialogue between cultures. This was true for German television and Arab television broadcasts (Schurz et al. 2012). Another study found that German news coverage is more negative when it covered Muslims than other religious groups (Kolmer 2012). This research also showed that the image of Islam is more negative on U.S. and German television than on British, French, or Italian television news. In sum, there seems to be an ethnic hierarchy with some groups that are beneficial to a country receiving less negative news and more positive news coverage and with some groups ranging at the bottom that are stigmatized in the media (Lubbers et al. 1998).
Episodic Framing of Ethnic Minorities

Most of the news stories about ethnic groups are event-driven and episodic and follow “emergency” situations, e.g., riots, protests, or the implementation of new immigration policies (ter Wal 2002). Thematic coverage or background information on ethnic minorities is scarce. Put differently, the audience receives little information about the conditions of immigrants in their home countries, the circumstances and problems that immigrants face in receiving countries, or the social causes of the problems (Ruhrmann 2002). The focus of news stories is primarily on the problems associated with ethnic minorities, with the social, cultural, religious, or economic context largely neglected. Thus, the repeated depictions of unrelated events, such as crime stories, riots, or terrorist attacks authored by ethnic groups, result in individual attribution of blame for these events and make it difficult for the audience to figure out the societal or systemic causes that may have contributed to these acts (Iyengar 1991; Sommer and Ruhrmann 2010). These general patterns of media coverage of ethnic groups in Europe are similar to typical reporting practices in the US (Dixon and Linz 2000).

Representations of Ethnic Minorities in Political Discourse

In addition to the media, political authorities are important sources of information that can dominate the discourse about immigration or immigrants as social groups. How they deal with and talk about ethnic minorities in public can have a considerable influence on the general image of these groups—especially since politicians’ public statements are broadly distributed in society through mass media channels (ter Wal 2002). A longitudinal analysis in the Netherlands demonstrated that the immigration discourse in parliament and the news media was highly interrelated (Vliegenthart and Roggeband 2007). Specifically, frames, such as “restriction” or “Islam-as-a-threat,” often initially appear in the political arena. These frames are then adopted by journalists and used to contextualize a news story on a specific event or issue. This way, news media not only adopt political actors’ statements about immigrants in terms of direct quotes, but such statements also seem to influence the subsequent news coverage. This perpetuation of prejudicial framing makes it important to consider the discourse on ethnic minorities in the political arena.

In several European countries, negative portrayals of ethnic groups as threats to security and cultural values (e.g., Romanians in Austria, Albanians in Italy, Roma in France) have contributed to legitimizing restrictive immigration policy programs (Parker 2012; Wodak 1996; Zinn 1996). In election campaigns, political actors often intentionally play the “race card” to mobilize voters. Such strategies have not only been employed by right-wing political parties such as Front National in France, Die Republikaner in Germany, and the Belgian Vlaams Blok (Jagers and Walgrave 2007), but have also been found in the campaigns of mainstream conservative parties such as CDU/CSU in Germany, the British Tories, and the French Gaullists (Thränhardt 1995). The use of a similar rhetoric has been demonstrated in Germany (Butterwege and Häusler 2002), the UK (Saggar 1998), and Switzerland (Schemer 2012).

Of course, the fact that political actors use xenophobic notions as a strategic tool in election campaigns is not unproblematic. It can be argued that especially mainstream political actors are applying a xenophobic rhetoric in a more subtle way than politically
extreme parties do (Thränhardt 1995). At the same time, they possess a stronger degree of political authority, positive reputation, and general acceptance that comes with their governmental office. The expression of racial appeals by mainstream political actors may thus find resonance in a broad audience and can increase the acceptability of xenophobia in the public. Ultimately, political discourse might this way legitimate ethnic prejudice (van Dijk 2000, 2002).

**Conclusion**

The present summary of research on ethnicity and race clearly shows that ethnic groups are still marginalized and stigmatized in European media. They are often underrepresented, are seldom active agents, and overwhelmingly appear in negative roles. The event-driven character of news reporting on ethnicity is unlikely to improve the knowledge of audience members and change their attitudes toward ethnic groups. Although research on ethnicity in Europe has considerably increased in terms of quantity and quality, there are still blind spots that deserve further inquiry. First, there is a lack of systematic monitoring of media representations of ethnic minorities over time and across cultures (Statham 2002). Thus, it would be interesting to study whether ethnic hierarchies of minority groups are invariant in terms of culture. It is also important to investigate whether increasing commercialization of media systems in Europe diminishes differences in coverage of ethnic groups across countries. Finally, the monitoring of news coverage of ethnic groups over time is an important endeavor for upcoming research. There are some hints that the media image of some ethnic groups has improved and their marginalization has decreased over time. However, these findings may also be only outliers that do not follow a continuous trend to a more favorable image of ethnic groups in Europe.

A second gap in research is the lack of studies that deal with portrayals of ethnic minorities in fictional media content and entertainment media. Content analyses focus on news coverage, less on entertainment media. To date, we cannot reliably infer from these studies whether there is a difference between entertainment media and news coverage. Also lacking is research on online depictions of ethnic groups, e.g., in blogs, forums, or social media (Bennett et al. 2011). There is evidence that online communication is more extreme than offline communication and that the anonymity of blogs, forums, or social networking sites facilitates the expression of hate against ethnic minorities (Tynes, Giang, Williams, and Thompson 2008).

Third, compared to research on media representations of ethnic minorities, there are fewer studies on the effects of portrayals of ethnic groups on stereotypes or racial attitudes in the public. Systematic research on media effects of biased media portrayals of audience members can be found in some countries, such as Germany (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2009), Austria (Arendt 2010), Switzerland (Schemer 2014), the Netherlands (Boomgaarden and de Vreese 2007), and Spain (Igartua, Moral-Toranzo, and Fernández 2011). These studies clearly show that unfavorable depictions of ethnic minorities increase stereotypes, prejudice, and antipathy toward these groups. Some studies also suggest that news stories and media programming can be used to improve the image of ethnic minorities among the public (Müller 2009; Schemer 2014).

A fourth issue relates to the representation of ethnic minorities in media organizations (ter Wal 2002). If members of ethnic minorities take part in the production of media content, this might result in more balanced coverage. However, it has been noted that
ethnic diversity in European news organizations is significantly lower than in the overall labor markets of the respective countries (e.g., Deuze 2002). Scholars and practitioners alike argue that in addition to the production of ethnic minority programming, an increase in the share of journalists from ethnic minority groups would facilitate a more balanced and informed news selection and coverage about ethnic minorities (Ruhrmann 2002).

Fifth, ethnicity also plays a role in the context of the current European integration process: People from various ethnic backgrounds share a supranational political system, i.e., the EU Ethnic boundaries seem to be an obstacle to the integration process (Carey 2002). Several researchers have stressed the role that media coverage could play in overcoming them (de Vreese 2002; Trenz 2008). The fact that there is no common European media system but rather a variety of distinct national media systems exacerbates this political goal. Some scholars have argued that the national media outlets in Europe emphasize the uniqueness of their respective countries instead of accentuating an integrative perspective (Firmstone 2008). However, systematic research on the role of ethnicity and national identities in media coverage about European integration is still lacking. This seems even more relevant since it directly relates to the perception of ethnic minorities: A stronger identification with a supranational concept of Europe can also reduce prejudice toward ethnic groups from outside Europe (Curtis 2014).

References


EUROPE


Further Reading


ter Wal, J. (ed.) (2002) *Racism and Cultural Diversity in the Mass Media*. Vienna, Austria: European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations. (Synopsis of research reviews on the image of ethnic minorities in the media, representations of minorities in media institutions, and anti-racist activism in European countries.)