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CARIN' about migrants through news? Linking migrant deservingness to traditional and digital media consumption

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Abstract

In recent years, public discourse and political actors have increasingly used a deservingness rhetoric to refer to the arrival and permanent settlement of migrant groups. However, scholars have drawn on the concept of deservingness without developing a clear theoretical framework for it. Following our recent work on the migrant deservingness framework, in the present study we use the CARIN criteria (Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity, Need) to establish the extent to which host nationals in eight nations impose conditions towards accepting permanent settlement among migrants. Specifically, we examine the links of these deservingness perceptions with news media consumption in seven European countries and Colombia using online survey panel data ($N = 12{,}142$). Our findings indicate that consuming news via commercial television and in popular newspapers, in particular, is linked to greater conditionality regarding migrant settlement. Consuming public television or quality news sources is only weakly linked to (reduced) conditionality. We discuss these findings using the migrant deservingness framework.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, politicians and news media have tried to cast doubt on the legitimacy of certain migrant groups' claims of protection (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; De Coninck & Matthijs, 2020). This effort often involves framing asylum seekers as economic migrants exploiting social welfare provisions. Such emphasis on the validity of particular types of migrants based on criteria like religion, ethnicity and reason for migration may result in views of (un)deservingness concerning those migrants (Lawlor & Paquet, 2022). News media consumption significantly shapes views on migration and migrants. Although numerous studies establish a connection between news media consumption and public opinion towards migrants at large (Blinder & Jeannet, 2018; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; De Coninck, 2020; Lecheler et al., 2015), these studies often lack nuances in two key areas: (a) discerning differences between and among migrant groups and (b) considering the influence of specific media outlets (e.g. only gauging overall consumption of television or newspapers). Our study aims to bridge these gaps in the existing literature. Additionally, since different news outlets emphasize different frames in their portrayal of migrants (Eberl et al., 2018; Yaylacı & Karakuş, 2015), it is possible that consuming different types of news media cultivates diverging preferences for migrant settlement. For instance, experimental studies underscore the potency of negative frames in moulding public opinions about immigrants. However, evidence also indicates that positive frames wield significant influence over attitudes towards immigrants (Lecheler et al., 2015).

The concept of deservingness, a foundational notion in social perception and judgement, holds significant implications for understanding human interactions and societal dynamics (Correia et al., 2012; Lerner, 1975). Deservingness refers to individuals' perceived worthiness of individuals to receive support, aid, or resources based on a range of criteria, including attributes, circumstances and societal norms (Meuleman et al., 2020). In the context of migration, deservingness assumes particular importance as it shapes how both individuals and societies identify the rightful beneficiaries of assistance, especially in the case of migrants seeking refuge or increased opportunities. Examining how deservingness operates within the intricate landscape of migration discourse yields insight into the complex interplay between social attitudes, cultural affiliations and socioeconomic contexts (De Coninck, Duque, et al., 2022). Notably, Europeans have demonstrated varying receptivity to refugees based on their countries of origin. For instance, there was a more favourable response to Ukrainian refugees following Russia's invasion, in contrast to a more favourable response to Afghan and Syrian refugees (De Coninck, 2023). Similarly, Colombians' reception of refugees from Venezuela has been characterized by negativity, due to factors like migrants' lower education, economic challenges and a rapid influx of arrivals (Rozo & Vargas, 2021; Salas-Wright et al., 2021; Selee & Bolter, 2022; Zanoni & Diaz, 2023).

In migration studies, recent efforts have been undertaken to develop a migrant deservingness framework focusing primarily on differential support among the public for different types of migrants based on the CARIN criteria: *control*, *attitude*, *reciprocity*, *identity* and *need* (De Coninck, Duque, et al., 2022; Jensen & Pedersen, 2016; van Oorschot, 2000, 2006). These criteria represent different principles or criteria that the public uses to distinguish between deserving and undeserving individuals and groups who wish to settle in a given destination country (Jensen & Pedersen, 2016). The deservingness framework thus provides experts and policymakers with tools with which to study complex public judgements about migrants through evaluating different migrant characteristics (e.g. religion, ethnicity and reason for migration) and answering the question of which 'types' of migrants deserve to settle in a country (De Coninck, Duque, et al., 2022). This insight enables the customization of migration-integration policies to directly tackle these perceptions and concerns, thereby fostering a greater sense of social cohesion and inclusivity. Consequently, policies can be strategically designed to better accommodate and integrate specific migrant groups, perhaps aligning with the values and expectations of the destination country's population. In this way, the deservingness framework provides policymakers with the capability to narrow the gap between public opinion and policy formulation, ultimately contributing to more successful and harmonious migration and integration outcomes.

Using 2021 online survey data from adults in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden) and Colombia, we test the link between news media consumption and CARIN deservingness perceptions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of deservingness is rooted in theories of justice. Lerner (1975) states in his just world theory that individuals perceive the world as a place where people get what they deserve, such that individuals can confidently live their lives with the belief that no undeserving or unjust events will befall them (Correia et al., 2012; Lerner, 1975). A specific application of the just world hypothesis can be found in the migrant deservingness framework (De Coninck, Duque, et al., 2022). Within this framework, scholars examine public support for the settlement of different groups of migrants in their country or region. The deservingness framework highlights how the public uses specific principles or criteria to distinguish deserving from non-deserving migrants (De Coninck & Matthijs, 2020). Based on earlier research (Cook, 1979; de Swaan, 1988) van Oorschot (2000, 2006) developed five basic criteria that individuals use to distinguish between and among groups in terms of who is more versus less deserving: *Control*, *Attitude*, *Reciprocity*, *Identity* and *Need*—also known as the CARIN criteria.

Regarding *control*, various studies underscore distinct empathetic responses towards certain migrants based on factors such as perceived motives for migration (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018; De Coninck, 2020; Findor et al., 2021). Legal differentiation between refugees and other migrants, rooted in forced versus voluntary migration, contribute to this sentiment (Douglas et al., 2019; Ertanir et al., 2023; Vos et al., 2021). In line with the *attitude* criterion, positive attributes such as gratitude, conformity and likeability heighten deservingness perceptions (van Oorschot, 2006), extending to migrants whose expressions of appreciation for the support they receive are likely to elevate their perceived deservingness in the eyes of host nationals (Huschke, 2014). *Reciprocity* also shapes host national perceptions, with contributors in return for the aid they receive are often deemed more deserving (Meuleman et al., 2020). Even civic engagement triggers a sense of reciprocity (Heins & Unrau, 2018). This aligns with Reeskens and van Oorschot's (2012) findings that attitudes towards immigrant deservingness are often linked to reciprocity and tied to labour market participation. Proximity, as part of the *identity* criterion, further influences judgements: cultural proximity to the host national population enhances perceived deservingness (Meuleman et al., 2020). Ingroup identification fosters a sense of belonging to the nation (Haslam, 2001; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), involving considerations of ingroup versus outgroup origins, ethnicity and religious background (De Coninck, 2020; Mangum & Block Jr., 2018). Notably, migrants with lower perceived cultural distance from the host population are more likely seen as deserving (Correia et al., 2012; De Coninck, 2020). Lastly, migrants' level of *need* significantly impacts host nationals' deservingness perceptions. Forced migrants, who are often fleeing crises, are generally viewed as having a greater need for aid compared to voluntary migrants (Bansak et al., 2016, 2023), particularly highlighted during recent migration crises involving refugees from Syria, Venezuela, Afghanistan and Ukraine (De Coninck, 2023; Vos et al., 2021). These individuals' pressing needs, often involving a lack of material resources, contribute to their perceived deservingness (Menjívar & Perreira, 2019).

Linking migrant deservingness to news media consumption

While not explicitly framed within a deservingness perspective and the CARIN criteria, Various studies have identified connections between news media consumption and underlying dynamics of deservingness. However, the existing literature lacks a comprehensive framework that integrates these various perspectives. Our study was designed to fill this gap. For example, De Coninck (2020) found that, among host nationals in migrant-receiving societies, their differences in perceptions towards immigrants and refugees—that is, those who can and

cannot *control* their decision to migrate and the conditions under which migrant occurs—are associated with news media consumption. More concretely, heavy consumption of news via commercial television and tabloids was linked to a greater preference for immigrants (versus refugees) to settle in the country. Regarding migrants' *attitude* (gratitude for the support received) no studies so far have liked media consumption to perceptions about this trait. One Turkish study on the framing of Syrian refugees (Yaylacı & Karakuş, 2015) did find that different frames are used by different newspapers, with some specifically emphasizing Syrians' gratitude towards Turkey. In Yaylacı and Karakuş (2015), newspaper content was not linked to public opinion. In terms of feelings of *reciprocity* (notion of migrant's having earned support from the destination society), previous studies have reported that news media use activates fears among host nationals regarding migrants' adverse impact on the national economy, individuals' personal finances or individuals' labour market position (Héricourt & Spielvogel, 2014). In line with the *identity* criterion (cultural similarity, or lack thereof, between migrants and host nationals), a study on the link between media use and anti-Muslim prejudice demonstrated that Western news media use was associated with greater anti-Muslim prejudice (Ahmed, 2017). More recently, prejudice against Asian migrant individuals with was also linked with news media use during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahmed et al., 2021). These studies suggest that news media consumption is linked to preferences vis-à-vis migrants of different ethnic and/or religious backgrounds.

It is important to recognize that news media do not universally portray migrants or migration in the same manner. These different framing practices underscore the need for more thorough insights regarding the effects of media consumption on outgroup perceptions. Various studies have highlighted the distinct ways in which different media types portray displaced persons: public service networks and quality newspapers generally emphasize victimization and humanitarian frames, with a rather positive tone in their coverage of migrants and migration. Commercial networks and popular newspapers, on the other hand, tend to utilize sensationalist frames that particularly trigger those high in authoritarian attitudes, that is, by highlighting the potential economic and security threats that migrants pose to the host society—and thus, tend to be more negative in their coverage (De Coninck, Van Assche, & d'Haenens, 2022; Eberl et al., 2018; Jacobs et al., 2016). To further contextualize this difference in media types and framing, frames that emphasize greater labour market competition and extensive welfare expenditures for migrants are frequently used by popular newspapers. However, educational frames that emphasize migrants' added economic and cultural value are often more salient in quality newspapers (Eberl et al., 2018). In their literature review on news media effects on threat perceptions towards migrants in the European Union, Meltzer et al. (2017, p. 14) conclude that news media coverage is 'essential in the judgment formation of EU citizens' regarding mobility and migration'. Particularly when the media present threatening views of immigrants, coverage tends to have a significant impact on audiences' perceptions. In Flanders, Belgium, where public media have been found to be more positive in their coverage of immigrants than commercial media are, consumers of news on predominantly public service networks media feel less threatened by migrants than are those who consume news on commercial television (Jacobs et al., 2016).

The present study

In the present study, we aim to capture whether individuals' news media consumption—of different television, newspaper and digital news outlets—is associated with their evaluations of the CARIN criteria (see Figure 1 for an overview of the theoretical model guiding the present study). The deservingness framework presents a novel and straightforward approach to understanding the public's complex evaluations of different groups or 'types' of migrants, based on specific characteristics of these groups. Following the development of an instrument—the Migrant Deservingness Scale (MDS; De Coninck, Duque, et al., 2022)—which assesses the five CARIN criteria, we are able to obtain more fine-grained interpretations of the origins of public support for the settlement of different types and profiles of migrants.

News media consumption
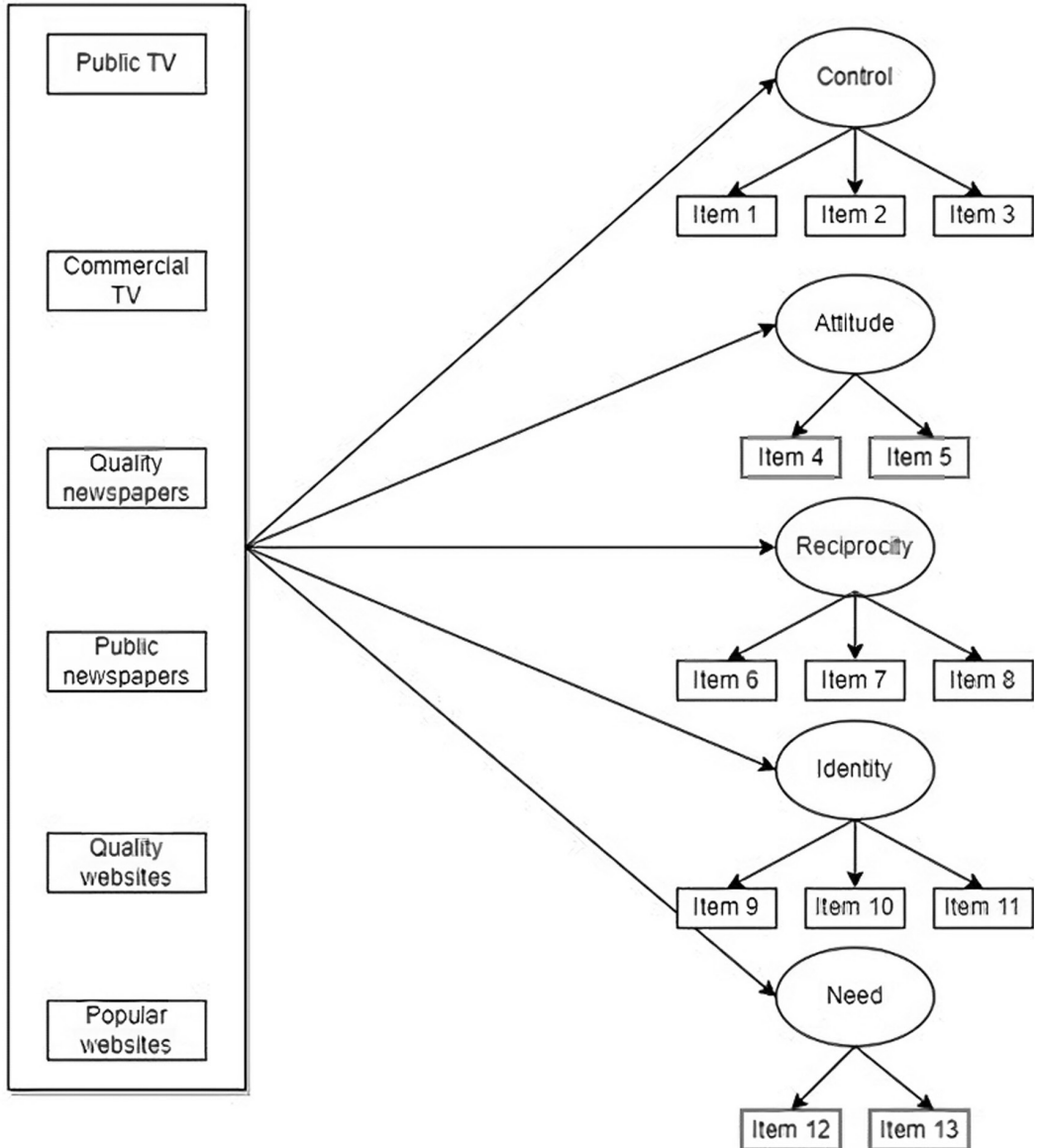
Deservingness criteria

FIGURE 1 Schematic overview of the link between news media consumption and the CARIN criteria.

In the present study, we link deservingness perceptions to news media consumption using survey data from seven European countries and Colombia. Initially, we formulated a hypothesis establishing a direct connection between evaluations of the CARIN criteria and news consumption patterns through various media outlets. Specifically, we anticipated that individuals who engaged with news sources presenting more sensationalized and threatening perspectives on migrants, such as commercial media and popular newspapers, would attribute greater importance to factors such as *control* (De Coninck, 2020), *reciprocity* (Héricourt & Spielvogel, 2014) and *identity* (Ahmed, 2017) in their deservingness assessments (H1). However, due to the limited existing research in this area, understanding the relationship between news consumption and other CARIN criteria evaluations is challenging.

Hence, we adopted an exploratory approach to gain a foundational understanding of the broader association between news media consumption and the entire set of CARIN criteria.

In a subsequent analytical step, we extended our analysis by adopting van Oorschot's (2008) methodology, which involves not only examining individual criteria or migrant groups but also developing a comprehensive view of acceptance across all five CARIN criteria. To achieve this, we calculated the cumulative sum of scores across the five deservingness criteria. This cumulative score acts as an indicator of the extent to which individuals exhibit 'conditional' perspectives—favouring the permanent settlement of migrants based on the CARIN criteria and, conversely, withholding support for those who do not meet these criteria. Using this cumulative indicator, we explored the correlation between news media consumption patterns and the degree of CARIN acceptance conditionality among our study participants.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

An online questionnaire was fielded among adults aged 25–65 in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and Sweden), and to adults aged 18–65 in Colombia. The survey was distributed in May and June 2021, when a sample of 12,142 respondents was recruited. We selected these countries to represent a diversity of national characteristics, such as 'coastal and non-coastal border countries, large and small economies, countries with major and minor political influence, and countries with varying degrees of popularity as asylum-seeker destinations' (Bansak et al., 2016). Although immigration numbers into Europe had declined in recent years prior to 2021, this had not been the case in Hungary (Gessler et al., 2022) and Colombia (Selee & Bolter, 2022), which have both received millions of asylum seekers since 2015. For example, as of December 2021, about 6 million Venezuelans had emigrated in one of the fastest-growing displacement scenarios worldwide (Freier & Doña-Reveco, 2022). As a neighbouring country, Colombia received the largest share of these migrants which now exceeds 2.9 million (Zanoni & Diaz, 2023), prompting intense debates on how the country should deal with this large influx of newcomers (Freier & Doña-Reveco, 2022). Not surprisingly, issues of mass migration have represented a highly salient topic throughout Europe and in Colombia. Research by Enos (2014) examines how the slightest changes in demographic composition may lead to intergroup hostility in immigrant-receiving societies. The rise in animosity against migrants is likely to be more pronounced when large influx of newcomers arrive over a short period of time as natives may perceive the presence of newcomers as a threat to the social, economic, or cultural fabric of their society (Schwartz et al., 2018). Colombia and Hungary stand as instances of societies with no prior tradition of being immigrant-receiving societies but now face the sociopolitical and economic challenges posed by the presence of a large number of immigrants over a short period of time (Gessler et al., 2022; Rozo & Vargas, 2021). In turn, the consequent integration of these (many) newcomers remains a societal challenge, prominently featured in public and political debates (Selee & Bolter, 2022). Indeed, the Ukraine war has again brought mass migration to the forefront of many policy agendas (De Coninck, 2023).

A professional polling agency drew a quota sample out of their available panels in each country with heterogeneity in terms of age and gender. These panels consisted of 30,000 to 250,000 members per country. Participation rates ranged from 12% to 31%. The final sample from each country was representative of that country's adult population in terms of age, gender and educational attainment. Respondents were contacted through e-mail with a request to take part in the study. The survey was distributed via the polling agency's survey tool and in the official language of the country or region where respondents resided. The survey was developed in English and translated into each language by professional translators, ensuring that respondents would view the terminology used in the questions as 'everyday language'. For more information on the dataset, see De Coninck et al. (2021). Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the KU Leuven Social and Societal Ethics Committee (case number G-2020-2590).

Measures

Migrant deservingness scale

We used a 13-item scale, internationally validated by De Coninck, Duque, et al. (2022) and intended to capture the extent to which people endorse the five CARIN criteria (*control*, *attitude*, *reciprocity*, *identity* and *need*). Items were responded to using a five-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). The *control* principle was measured using three statements referring to whether individuals who are personally responsible for their needy situation—because they either chose or were forced to migrate—should be entitled to remain in the country (Cronbach's alpha=0.75); sample item: 'Refugees who are fleeing from armed conflicts in their home country should be allowed to stay in *country*'. *Attitude* was operationalized via two statements that migrants should be grateful and have no right to complain about their situation (Cronbach's alpha=0.63); sample item: 'Migrants who are allowed to remain in *country* should be grateful for that'. *Reciprocity* was measured using three statements that settlement in the country should depend on (potential) contributions to the national economy, labour market, or culture (Cronbach's alpha=0.79); sample item: 'Only migrants who have a job and pay taxes should be allowed to stay in *country*'. *Identity* was assessed using three items indexing the idea that permanent settlement in the country should be reserved primarily for migrants who are more like the ingroup in terms of cultural, religious, or ethnic background (Cronbach's alpha=0.88); sample item: 'Only migrants with a similar ethnic background as the *country*'s population are allowed to stay'. Finally, we measured the *need* criterion using two items stating that permanent settlement should be reserved for those migrants living in (extreme) poverty or with dependent young children (Cronbach's alpha=0.77); sample item: 'Only poor migrants with dependent young children are allowed to stay in *country*'.

Traditional and digital news media consumption

Traditional and digital news media consumption was measured by asking respondents about their consumption of different types of news media over the past month, with answer categories ranging from 1=never to 7=every day. Television news consumption was split into two groups: public and commercial networks. For newspaper and digital news consumption, the most commonly read newspapers and commonly visited news webpages in each country were included separately (about 10 per country). To aggregate this information per type of newspaper and website, we calculated the mean score of the included quality newspapers/websites and the mean score of popular newspapers/websites. We drew these options from expert analyses of Media Landscapes[i] to assess which news sources were considered quality versus popular news.

Controls

Respondents were asked to indicate their gender (0=male, 1=female); birth year (used to compute age); religious denomination (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, agnostic/atheist and other); full-time employment (0=not employed full-time, 1=employed full-time); educational attainment (no or primary education, lower secondary, higher secondary, tertiary—undergraduate level and tertiary—graduate level) and self-reported political ideology (0=far left, 10=far right). An overview of the total sample and the samples per country can be found in Table A1 in Appendix 1, and an overview of partial correlations among key study variables can be found in Table A2 in Appendix 1.

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Analytic strategy

To answer our research questions, we conducted two sets of analyses. First, we estimated a structural equation model mirroring Figure 1 to assess the link between consumption of different news media types and the five CARIN criteria. This analysis was conducted on the full sample; the separate analyses per country are available from the authors on request. In a second step, we calculated the sum of the five CARIN criterion subscales (minimum conditionality score of 5, maximum conditionality score of 20). Here, the aim was to establish not how news media use was linked to each criterion (RQ1), but rather to what extent overall conditionality, regardless of the specific CARIN criterion under consideration, was linked with news media use. We used linear regression analysis to establish this link. Finally, we also conducted a robustness check. In their validation of the Migrant Deservingness Scale, De Coninck, Duque, et al. (2022) demonstrated that migrant deservingness perceptions were negatively associated with perceived migrant threat and positively linked with general outgroup attitudes. Given the link between migrant deservingness and outgroup views among host nationals, we believe it is essential to test the robustness of our results by including one of the most widely-used indicators of intergroup attitudes: direct intergroup contact. Controlling for direct intergroup contact becomes even more important when considering that news media consumption has previously also been conceptualized as a type of 'parasocial' intergroup contact[ii] (De Coninck, Van Assche, & d'Haenens, 2022). As such, it is important to check whether possible news media use effects remain intact when direct intergroup contact is included in the analysis. To do so, we re-conducted the linear regression analysis with three direct intergroup contact indicators: two regarding the frequency of contact [incidental exposure on the street and migrant friendships (1 = low contact, 5 = high contact)], and one measure of the valence of intergroup contact (1 = negative evaluation of contact; 5 = positive evaluation of contact). In all of our analyses, we controlled for age, gender, political ideology, educational attainment (continuous), work status (dummy-coded) and religious denomination (dummy-coded variables with 'Christian' as the reference group). Country fixed effects were added through dummy variables because the limited number of countries prevented us from using multilevel modelling (Maas & Hox, 2005; Snijders & Bosker, 2011). Analyses were conducted in SAS Version 9.4 and SPSS version 26. All variables were z-standardized prior to analysis.

RESULTS

The model in Table 1 presented an excellent fit to the data, with a Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA; 0.035) value below the cut-off value of 0.06, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR; 0.019) value below the cut-off value of 0.08, and Comparative Fit Index (CFI; 0.974) and Goodness-of-Fit (GFI; 0.984) values both above 0.95 (see Kline, 2012, for further discussion of acceptable fit for structural equation models). Because of the large size of the sample, we focus on findings with p-values < 0.001. The full findings, including sociodemographic characteristics and country-fixed effects, can be found in Table A3 in Appendix 1.

Findings indicate that media consumption was linked with deservingness perceptions in various ways. Our primary hypothesis was that consuming news media portraying threatening and sensationalized views towards migrants (e.g. commercial media and popular newspapers) would be linked to greater importance attributed to *control*, *reciprocity* and *identity*. Our results support this hypothesis. In particular, commercial television consumption was strongly linked with stricter evaluations for all criteria except *need*. Higher consumption of popular newspapers yielded similar results, with the exception of the *attitude* and *reciprocity* criteria. Popular digital news consumption was linked to stricter views regarding only *control* and *need*.

Conversely, the consumption of public and quality media outlets was less strongly linked with deservingness perceptions. For public television, we found a strong negative link only with the *attitude* criterion; those who reported high public television consumption considered migrants' gratitude as a less important criterion for permanent settlement than did those reporting lower public television consumption. A similar story emerged for quality

TABLE 1   Structural equation model for CARIN criteria on news media consumption.

	Control	**Attitude**	**Reciprocity**	**Identity**	**Need**
News media consumption					
Public television	0.03	−0.07***	−0.02	−0.03**	0.01
Commercial television	0.09***	0.07***	0.08***	0.06***	0.03**
Quality newspapers	−0.04*	−0.03*	0.00	0.06***	0.08***
Popular newspapers	0.08***	0.04*	0.05***	0.11***	0.10***
Quality digital news	−0.11***	−0.16***	−0.02	−0.05***	−0.00
Popular digital news	0.07***	−0.01	0.04*	0.04**	0.06***
Sociodemographic controls	Yes				
Country fixed effects	Yes				
Model fit: RMSEA = 0.035; SRMR = 0.019; GFI = 0.984; CFI = 0.974; χ^2 = 2489.97					

Note: Standardized results reported.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

TABLE 2   Linear regression results for overall degree of conditionality on news media consumption.

	Overall conditionality
News media consumption	
Public television	−0.03**
Commercial television	0.09***
Quality newspapers	0.02
Popular newspapers	0.10***
Quality digital news	−0.09***
Popular digital news	0.06***
Sociodemographic controls	Yes
Country fixed effects	Yes
R^2	0.20

Note: Standardized results reported.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

digital news consumption: high digital quality news consumption was linked with lower importance attributed to *control*, *attitude* and—to a lesser extent—*identity*. Quality newspaper consumption, despite being known for framing migrants slightly more positively than popular newspapers, was linked to greater ascribed importance of the *identity* and *need* criteria for permanent settlement.

When aggregating these deservingness perceptions and linking news media consumption with overall conditionality, a clear picture emerged (Table 2; full results in Table A4 in Appendix 1). Trends emerging from the SEM results became more pronounced: heavy consumers of commercial television news (β = 0.09, p < 0.001), popular newspapers (β = 0.10, p < 0.001) and popular news sites (β = 0.06, p < 0.001) tend to be highly conditional. Conversely, the use of quality news websites appeared to be particularly linked with lower conditionality (β = −0.09, p < 0.001), and a small negative link emerged vis-à-vis public television consumption (β = −0.03, p < 0.05). This pattern of results indicates that taken together, consuming media that emphasize threatening frames and sensationalized stories regarding migrants appears to be most influential vis-à-vis host nationals' views on the criteria required for migrants to settle permanently.

Robustness check

We conducted a robustness check (Table A5 in Appendix 1) to control if the news media consumption effects found in the previous analysis remained intact upon the inclusion of direct intergroup contact indicators (two indicators of contact frequency: exposure and friendships, and one indicator of valence). When compared to the frequency of encounters with migrants, our findings indicate that having a greater number of friends and acquaintances with a migration background was linked to greater conditionality ($\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.001$), whereas a positive evaluation of intergroup contact was strongly linked to reduced conditionality ($\beta = -0.26$, $p < 0.001$). Regarding news media effects, the check indicates that the—already weak—effect of public television consumption disappeared but existing effects of commercial television and (digital) popular news remained intact.

DISCUSSION

Migrant deservingness perceptions are becoming increasingly important in contemporary migration studies (De Coninck & Matthijs, 2020; Lawlor & Paquet, 2022; Ratzmann & Sahraoui, 2021). The deservingness concept reconceptualizes our understanding of public perceptions towards migrants. Rather than focusing on general preferences towards a large (homogeneous) group of migrants, the measure used in this study allows participants to indicate how important they consider certain characteristics (or conditions) as requirements for migrants to be allowed to settle permanently in their country of residence. Aside from growing academic relevance, deservingness has also found its way into public and political discourse on migration in recent years (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Despite the growing relevance of migrant deservingness, few studies in this area have utilized a clearly articulated theoretical perspective (Lawlor & Paquet, 2022). Here, we address this limitation of prior work by conceptualizing migrant deservingness using five criteria (Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity, Need) representing principles that the public uses to distinguish between deserving and undeserving individuals and groups vis-à-vis settling in the destination country (Jensen & Pedersen, 2016).

Media consumption and migrant deservingness

This study is the first to consider the link between these deservingness criteria and news media consumption. Our findings demonstrate that commercial television news consumption is more extensively associated with deservingness perceptions compared to public television news consumption. Consuming news via commercial television is associated with higher conditionality in terms of Control, Attitude, Reciprocity and Identity criteria, and Need to a weaker extent. Previous studies have found that commercial television media tend to frame migrants more negatively than public broadcasters, particularly in recent years, by emphasizing the (supposed) economic and cultural threats they pose to host societies (Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019). Commercial networks also utilize more interviews with or quotes from politicians in their news coverage than public networks do (Beckers & Van Aelst, 2019). Given that the deservingness rhetoric was likely particularly salient among (right-wing) politicians in election cycles during the European refugee crisis or during the Venezuelan refugee crisis in Colombia, consuming messages that carry undertones of migrant (un)deservingness could stimulate greater conditionality across all five criteria. This pattern stands in contrast to that emerging for public television consumption, which was linked to lower conditionality only vis-à-vis the Attitude criterion. Attitude (i.e. the importance of migrants' gratitude for aid they receive) is particularly important: Table A1 in Appendix 1 indicates that for 10 out of 12 countries included in the current dataset, attitude is considered the most salient criterion for determining the extent to which a migrant 'deserves' to settle permanently in the country. Public television's framing practices of migrants using a humanitarian and victimized perspective likely contribute to this reduced conditionality.

Somewhat surprisingly, consumption of both quality and popular newspapers was linked with greater conditionality vis-à-vis migrant deservingness. Popular newspaper consumption was linked with greater conditionality with regards to Control, Identity and Need in particular, and Attitude and Reciprocity to a lesser extent. Quality newspaper consumption was linked with greater conditionality in terms of Identity and Need. The similar direction of the effects of both newspaper types is unexpected, given consistent previous findings that popular newspapers (also known as tabloids in some countries) utilize similar framing practices as commercial television networks (i.e. highly sensational and focus on migrants as threats), whereas quality newspapers are characterized by more nuanced reporting (Eberl et al., 2018). Another novel finding is that the same criteria—Identity and Need—emerge as most important for both newspaper types. Despite the quality and popular digital news media largely consisting of the digital versions of 'traditional' newspapers, their consumption effects present a very different pattern than traditional newspapers do. Popular digital news consumption was linked with greater conditionality, particularly for Control and Need, whereas quality digital news was linked with reduced conditionality in terms of Control and Attitude.

Overall, we observed interesting trends with considerable implications for understanding media effects. Consuming news on (particularly commercial) television and digital news outlets was linked with conditionality based on highly valued criteria such as Attitude and Control, whereas consuming traditional newspapers was strongly associated with conditionality based on 'lower-ranked' criteria such as Identity and Need. Why might this be the case? In recent decades, especially since the growing popularity of digital news outlets, readership of print newspapers has been declining (Newman et al., 2020, 2021). At the same time, television news remains an important source of information for the public and digital news consumption continues to grow globally (Eurostat, 2022; Newman et al., 2020, 2021). Our data suggest such a pattern as well: indicators in nearly all countries point to greater consumption of television and digital news outlets than of either quality or popular newspapers. Many media effects studies have shown that stories of salient topics produce a greater effect on public perceptions than less salient topics do, but we highlight a new angle: stories from more frequently used media may have a different effect on public perceptions—in this case about migration—than may messages from less frequently used media.

Deservingness differences across population groups

In terms of demographic differences across all seven countries, the most notorious distinctions concerned Colombia, Spain and Hungary. Colombia ranked lowest in conditionality associated with Identity while Spain and Hungary's scored very low in conditionality associated with Control. This set of results is somewhat expected, especially for Colombia given the large share of historical and cultural similarities between Venezuela and Colombia. Whereas, score levels in Spain and Hungary suggest that news media consumption has very low effects on acceptance conditionality when refugees are portrayed as being personally responsible (or in control) for their need to migrate.

In relation to political ideology, all CARIN criteria scored particularly high in conditionality associated with right-wing ideology, with Need being the only contrasting exception. The association between right-wing ideology and higher conditionality in deservingness perceptions aligns with broader ideological perspectives that can influence how individuals perceive and interpret social issues, including migration (De Coninck, Duque, et al., 2022). Right-wing ideologies often emphasize notions of national identity, cultural preservation and perceived threats from outsiders. These ideological stances may contribute to the perception that migrants should meet specific criteria to be considered deserving of settling in the host country (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018). Consequently, in future research utilizing the deservingness framework, it is important to integrate this finding. This involves recognizing the clear differentiation between individuals with right-wing and left-wing orientations and those more moderate in relation to deservingness perceptions regarding migrant settlement, thereby considering its practical implications.

Limitations

Despite these new insights, our results should be interpreted in light of some limitations. Specifically, the items that were developed target specific migrant characteristics, but other migrant characteristics that were not captured within the items might also play a role (e.g. migrants' age, gender, etc.). For conceptual clarity, although previous work (De Coninck, 2020) has suggested that attitudes may differ based on migrants' countries of origin, in the present study we chose not to distinguish among migrants' regions of origin. Additionally, we cannot make any claims regarding causality between deservingness criteria and news media consumption due to the cross-sectional nature of the current dataset.

Implications

By providing a structured approach, the CARIN criteria framework encourages informed public dialogue, enabling constructive discussions about migration. Overall, the potential practical applications below have the potential to create more cohesive and integrated societies by addressing public perceptions, fostering positive attitudes and guiding policies that recognize the diverse characteristics and contributions of migrants.

By applying this framework, governments can make informed decisions about resource allocation and design integration programs that align with or contribute to changes in the perceived deservingness of different migrant characteristics. Tailoring public awareness campaigns to emphasize migrants' positive contributions and gratitude may help to engender more positive attitudes. Media representation can counter stereotypes by highlighting migrants' contributions and needs, perhaps fostering more accurate perceptions.

Educational initiatives that promote cultural awareness can reduce perceived cultural differences and enhance migrants' sense of belonging. Community engagement through events that facilitate interactions between migrants and the host national population can promote inclusivity and belonging (Schiappa et al., 2005). Advocacy groups can use research findings to inform evidence-based advocacy efforts to challenge misconceptions and promote mutual understanding between host nationals and current or prospective migrants. The framework can also aid in conflict resolution and mediation within migrant communities.

CONCLUSION

In contemporary migration studies, the concept of migrant deservingness has gained significant prominence. This framework offers a novel viewpoint on public attitudes towards migrants, moving beyond general preferences towards a heterogeneous group and instead focusing on the importance of specific characteristics or conditions for migrants to settle permanently in a destination country. The current study addresses a gap in the existing literature by comprehensively exploring the link between news media consumption and perceptions of migrant deservingness through the integration of a well-defined theoretical framework based on CARIN criteria (Control, Attitude, Reciprocity, Identity, Need). Based on online survey data in six European countries, our findings underscore the complex interplay between news media and deservingness perceptions. Different forms of media framing practices significantly impact the public's outlook on migrant deservingness. We found associations of commercial television consumption with greater conditionality across multiple deservingness criteria, likely due to its emphasis on perceived economic and security threats posed by migrants. In contrast, public television consumption was linked to reduced conditionality on the Attitude criterion, possibly due to its more humanitarian framing. Unexpectedly, the consumption of both quality and popular newspapers correlated with greater conditionality, suggesting that nuanced and sensationalist framing practices can both contribute to certain deservingness perceptions.

Our results highlight the importance of media literacy education as part of broader efforts to foster inclusive societies. Governments, media outlets and educational institutions should invest in programs that enhance critical

thinking skills among citizens, enabling them to decipher and analyse media content more effectively. This could lead to a public that is better equipped to distinguish between sensationalist narratives and balanced reporting, thus contributing to a more nuanced understanding of migration issues. Furthermore, our emphasis on the impact of media frequency implies that media outlets should be cognizant of their role as opinion shapers. This could encourage media organizations to take on a more proactive role in promoting positive narratives about migrants and their contributions to society. Additionally, policymakers could collaborate with media platforms to ensure that accurate and balanced portrayals of migrants are disseminated widely, potentially leading to more favourable public perceptions and integration outcomes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

PEER REVIEW

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in De Coninck et al. (2021).

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ENDNOTES

[i] "Media Landscapes (https://medialandscapes.org/) involves close to 40 expert writers who have mapped the entire journalism ecosystem of over 30 countries. Print, broadcast, and digital outlets are covered" (Media Landscapes, 2021, para. 3).

[ii] Parasocial intergroup contact can be described as the mass mediated alternative to 'real-life' intergroup contact (Schiappa et al., 2005).

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APPENDIX 1

TABLE A1 Descriptive overview of the sample (N = 12,142).

	Austria	Belgium	Colombia	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Sweden	Total
In %									
Gender									
Male	50.6	48.1	43.3	49.0	46.5	48.8	50.5	50.3	48.8
Female	49.4	51.9	56.7	51.0	53.5	51.2	49.5	49.7	51.2
Age									
Under 30 years	12.2	9.0	33.8	9.7	8.9	6.6	8.7	10.1	12.5
Between 30 and 45 years	42.1	39.0	41.3	41.2	45.8	40.6	44.6	41.9	42.2
Between 45 and 60 years	35.7	40.4	19.8	38.4	34.4	42.2	37.2	38.7	34.3
Over 60 years	10.0	11.6	5.1	10.7	10.9	10.6	9.5	9.4	11.0
Religious denomination									
Christian	63.6	47.4	69.7	55.1	55.2	73.4	52.9	33.9	56.7
Muslim	2.5	1.3	0.4	2.0	0.2	0.7	0.4	3.8	6.6
Jewish	0.5	0.4	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.2	1.9
Agnostic/Atheist	25.7	46.5	4.9	36.8	24.9	20.1	39.2	51.5	28.9
Other	7.7	4.5	24.0	5.6	19.2	5.6	7.1	10.7	5.0
Full-time job	56.8	63.5	45.9	58.6	65.6	55.5	62.2	63.7	59.0
Mean scores (standard error in brackets)									
Educational attainment	3.37 (0.85)	3.81 (1.01)	3.09 (1.15)	3.24 (1.05)	3.52 (0.76)	3.53 (1.00)	3.56 (1.12)	3.53 (0.84)	3.46 (1.06)
Political ideology	4.79 (2.11)	5.32 (2.21)	5.10 (1.81)	4.77 (1.97)	5.39 (2.35)	5.21 (2.53)	4.47 (2.24)	5.37 (2.59)	5.05 (2.38)
CARIN criteria									
Control	2.92 (1.03)	2.94 (0.99)	2.96 (0.89)	2.86 (0.99)	3.11 (1.01)	2.72 (0.97)	3.21 (0.87)	2.97 (1.04)	2.96 (0.98)

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

	Austria	Belgium	Colombia	Germany	Hungary	Italy	Spain	Sweden	Total
Attitude	3.57 (1.03)	3.40 (0.97)	3.18 (0.93)	3.46 (0.98)	3.21 (1.00)	3.29 (0.97)	2.97 (0.90)	3.46 (1.04)	3.32 (0.99)
Reciprocity	3.18 (1.02)	3.06 (0.97)	3.09 (1.00)	3.08 (1.01)	3.25 (0.99)	3.14 (0.93)	2.91 (1.04)	3.14 (1.07)	3.11 (1.01)
Identity	2.71 (1.11)	2.50 (1.04)	1.99 (0.89)	2.55 (1.08)	2.76 (1.04)	2.57 (0.98)	2.08 (0.98)	2.54 (1.12)	2.46 (1.07)
Need	2.50 (0.98)	2.24 (0.91)	2.47 (1.04)	2.38 (0.96)	2.37 (0.90)	2.61 (0.98)	2.34 (0.99)	2.28 (1.00)	2.40 (0.98)
News media consumption									
Public television	3.96 (2.20)	4.46 (2.13)	4.53 (2.14)	4.47 (2.09)	3.01 (2.06)	4.51 (2.03)	4.49 (2.15)	4.11 (2.01)	4.19 (2.16)
Commercial television	3.89 (1.94)	3.83 (2.17)	4.65 (2.30)	3.88 (2.05)	3.93 (2.15)	4.38 (2.03)	4.94 (2.03)	4.13 (1.97)	4.20 (2.12)
Quality newspapers	2.16 (1.37)	2.09 (1.42)	2.58 (1.50)	1.82 (2.05)	1.64 (1.11)	2.37 (1.46)	2.05 (1.39)	2.15 (1.39)	2.11 (1.40)
Popular newspapers	2.43 (1.32)	2.22 (1.25)	2.37 (1.39)	1.70 (1.17)	1.79 (1.18)	2.04 (1.60)	2.38 (1.42)	3.37 (1.93)	2.29 (1.51)
Quality digital news	2.35 (1.38)	2.59 (1.53)	2.68 (1.55)	2.23 (1.38)	2.75 (1.52)	2.59 (1.52)	1.80 (1.17)	2.72 (1.51)	2.47 (1.48)
Popular digital news	2.00 (1.23)	2.47 (1.36)	3.31 (1.82)	2.18 (1.51)	2.74 (1.39)	2.80 (1.59)	1.92 (1.37)	3.69 (1.95)	2.64 (1.65)
N	1520	1505	1543	1521	1514	1510	1512	1517	12,142
Cooperation rate (in %)	23	22	19	22	31	19	16	12	20

TABLE A2 Partial correlations between key study variables, controlling for country of residence.

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
1. Control	1										
2. Attitude	0.23**	1									
3. Reciprocity	0.15**	0.55**	1								
4. Identity	0.16**	0.47**	0.58**	1							
5. Need	−0.27**	0.16**	0.32**	0.39**	1						
6. Public television	−0.07**	0.04**	0.02	−0.02	0.04**	1					
7. Commercial television	0.07**	0.11**	0.11**	0.08**	0.08**	0.38**	1				
8. Quality newspapers	−0.11**	−0.03**	0.04**	0.07**	0.16**	0.18**	0.13**	1			
9. Popular newspapers	−0.01	0.08**	0.09**	0.14**	0.15**	0.14**	0.21**	0.59**	1		
10. Quality digital news	−0.17**	−0.04**	0.03**	0.06**	0.11**	0.18**	0.10**	0.68**	0.45**	1	
11. Popular digital news	−0.05**	0.07**	0.10**	0.11**	0.14**	0.13**	0.24**	0.46**	0.61**	0.56**	1

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

TABLE A3 Full results for SEM model of CARIN criteria on news media consumption.

	Control	Attitude	Reciprocity	Identity	Need
News media consumption					
Public television	0.03	−0.07***	−0.02	−0.03**	0.01
Commercial television	0.09***	0.07***	0.08***	0.06***	0.03**
Quality newspapers	−0.04*	−0.03*	0.00	0.06***	0.08***
Popular newspapers	0.08***	0.04*	0.05***	0.11***	0.10***
Quality digital news	−0.11***	−0.16***	−0.02	−0.05***	−0.00
Popular digital news	0.07***	−0.01	0.04*	0.04**	0.06***
Gender					
Female	−0.04***	−0.04***	−0.00	−0.04***	0.01
Age	0.04**	0.07***	0.04***	0.04***	−0.05***
Religious denomination					
Muslim	−0.03*	−0.03**	−0.02	−0.03***	0.03**
Jewish	−0.03**	0.00	−0.03**	−0.02	0.01
Agnostic/Atheist	−0.05***	0.02*	−0.06***	−0.11***	−0.15***
Other	−0.02	−0.01	−0.02	−0.01	0.01
Full-time job	0.02	0.03*	0.04**	0.00	0.01
Educational attainment	−0.08***	−0.08***	−0.03**	−0.07***	−0.12***
Political ideology	0.33***	0.37***	0.26***	0.24***	−0.00
Country fixed effects					
Belgium	−0.07***	−0.00	−0.05***	−0.06***	−0.06***
Colombia	−0.21***	0.03*	−0.06***	−0.27***	−0.07***
Germany	−0.04**	−0.02	−0.03*	−0.03*	−0.01
Hungary	−0.16***	0.04**	0.00	0.02	−0.02
Italy	−0.13***	−0.08***	−0.05**	−0.07***	0.05**
Spain	−0.25***	0.09***	−0.10***	−0.19***	−0.03*
Sweden	−0.09***	−0.01	−0.05**	−0.09***	−0.10***
Model fit: RMSEA = 0.035; SRMR = 0.019; GFI = 0.984; CFI = 0.974; χ^2 = 2489.97					

Note: Standardized results reported. Reference category for gender: male. Reference category for religious denomination: Christian. Reference category for country: Austria.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

TABLE A4 Full results for linear regression model of overall conditionality on news media consumption.

	Overall conditionality
News media consumption	
Public television	−0.03**
Commercial television	0.09***
Quality newspapers	0.02
Popular newspapers	0.10***
Quality digital news	−0.09***
Popular digital news	0.06***
Gender	
Female	−0.03***
Age	0.04***
Religious denomination	
Muslim	−0.02*
Jewish	−0.02*
Agnostic/Atheist	−0.09***
Other	0.01
Full-time job	0.02**
Educational attainment	−0.10***
Political ideology	0.32***
Country fixed effects	
Belgium	−0.07***
Colombia	−0.16***
Germany	−0.04**
Hungary	−0.03**
Italy	−0.08***
Spain	−0.13***
Sweden	−0.09***
R^2	0.20

Note: Standardized results reported. Reference category for gender: male. Reference category for religious denomination: Christian. Reference category for country: Austria.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.

TABLE A5 Robustness check of overall conditionality on news media consumption, controlling for intergroup contact.

	Overall conditionality
News media consumption	
Public television	−0.02
Commercial television	0.08***
Quality newspapers	0.01
Popular newspapers	0.09***
Quality digital news	−0.07***
Popular digital news	0.06***
Intergroup contact	
Exposure	0.01
Friendships	0.06***
Contact quality	−0.26***
Gender	
Female	−0.03**
Age	0.04***
Religious denomination	
Muslim	−0.02*
Jewish	−0.02*
Agnostic/Atheist	−0.09***
Other	0.01
Full-time job	0.02*
Educational attainment	−0.08***
Political ideology	0.26***
Country fixed effects	
Belgium	−0.06***
Colombia	−0.13***
Germany	−0.03**
Hungary	−0.05***
Italy	−0.07***
Spain	−0.10***
Sweden	−0.08***
R^2	0.25

Note: Standardized results reported. Reference category for gender: male. Reference category for religious denomination: Christian. Reference category for country: Austria.

*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001.