

Protest Against the Deportation of Rejected Asylum Seekers in the Local and National Press in Switzerland

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Objective: Examine whether a focus on national newspapers biases the coverage of protest against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers. **Methods:** Articles on the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the local press were analysed in the same manner as articles in the national press. Descriptive statistics are used to compare the coverage of protest. **Results:** There is a clear tendency for the local press to report more protest from the geographical area they are based in. The characteristics of these protests, however, are comparable to those reported in the national press. **Conclusions:** A focus on national newspapers seems to undercount the volume of protest taking place, but not introduce large biases in the *kind* of protest covered.

Keywords: Protest, deportation, newspaper, bias, exploratory

Introduction

Political claims analysis generally relies on articles in newspapers to capture protest and contestation (e.g. Koopmans & Statham 1999, Koopmans et al. 2005, or Bleich et al. 2015a for an example focusing on headlines). Previous work has ascertained that the reliance on written news does not greatly bias coverage compared to other media, and it has been argued that only protests appearing in the news are relevant in the sense that other protests are unlikely to have the necessary resonance to influence politics and public discourse – after all, people usually learn about protest through the media (see Bleich et al. 2015b on the media).

Given that manual coding is still dominant in this kind of analysis, usually only a number of newspapers are used as the empirical basis. Often, newspapers of record – national newspapers – are drawn upon, but some studies include popular or tabloid newspapers alongside quality or broadsheet newspapers (Van der Brug 2015). By including different *kinds* of newspapers, it is acknowledged that the kind or debate and the kind of protest covered in specific newspapers may be particular to the newspaper.

In this exploratory analysis, I examine to what extent the locality of the newspaper influences the protests reported. The analysis complements analysis carried out in the [Taking Sides](#) project on protests against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Here, I examine the situation in Switzerland (see Ruedin & D’Amato 2015 and Ruedin et al. 2016 for background on the Swiss case), and the focus is on individual articles rather than protest events as such – multiple articles may refer to the same protest event.

Data and Methods

For the ‘national’ press, I primarily searched articles in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* (NZZ). While this newspaper is based in Zürich, it is widely read across the country, particularly across the German-speaking part of Switzerland. Moreover, I used articles from the tabloid *Blick*, alongside articles from the weekly *Weltwoche*, but there were few articles on deportations in either newspaper, and their inclusion does not influence the substantive results presented. Both the *Blick* and *Weltwoche* are national in their coverage, but neither of them can be considered a newspaper of record. For the ‘local’ press, I searched articles in the *Aargauer*

Zeitung, Basler Zeitung, Südostschweiz, Tages-Anzeiger, and Zofinger Tagblatt. These are widely read local newspaper and were partly chosen because they were included in the **Factiva** database.

In a first step, I selected articles about deportation using keywords in the **Factiva** database.¹ In a second step, I selected articles on protest. The search string was slightly different from that used in the main analysis of the Taking Sides project, with the aim to have fewer false positives.² This procedure leads to 1265 articles, of which 381 were relevant.

To make this comparison between the local and national press manageable, I used an abbreviated version of the Taking Sides codebook (the abbreviated version is included as an appendix). All articles in this analysis were coded with the same codebook, including the articles also coded for the main analysis of the Taking Sides project.

Findings

Choice of Newspaper Affects the Volume of Protest Reported

The choice of newspaper affects the volume of protest reported. In a first step, the volume of protest in the local and national press is compared over time. Figure 1 needs to be interpreted very carefully since the temporal coverage of local newspapers does not match that of the NZZ. The coverage of Aargauer Zeitung and Südostschweiz begins four respectively eight years after the other local newspapers, but in terms of number of articles on protest against deportation these newspaper generally contribute fewer articles.

While the number of protests covered in the national newspapers is relatively stable over time, it has peaked in the local newspapers. The differential temporal coverage explains only part of the increase, and none of the subsequent decrease: the same patterns can be observed when the Aargauer Zeitung and Südostschweiz are excluded.

¹Keywords used (as stems): deportation, deported, right to stay. Actual search string in German: abschiebung*, abschiebe*, abgeschoben*, ausschaffung*, ausschaffen*, ausgeschafft*, bleiberecht*. The article selection was deliberately inclusive and corresponds to the one used elsewhere in the Taking Sides project.

²These steps were carried out in **AmCat**. Search string: (protest* demonstr* kundgebung* mobilis* "petition (unterschrift* OR unterschreib*)" ~30 "brief (unterschrift* OR unterschreib*)" ~30 "initiativ* (unterschrift* OR unterschreib*)" ~30 "besetz* (Kirch* OR Münster* OR Zentrum)" ~30 "Unterschl* (Kirch* OR Münster* OR Zentrum)" ~30 "offen* brief*" Aktivist* militant* sympathisant* Teilnehmer* Banner* Hungerstreik* "zivil* ungehors*" Augenauf) AND (asyl* "sans papier*" illegal* Flüchtling* Migrant* Immigrant* Zugewandert* immigration* Fremdenpolizei* Herkunfts* Bleiberecht* Härtefall* Härtefall*) AND (Abschieb* Ausschaff* Wegweis* abgeschob* ausgeschaff* weggewiesen*)

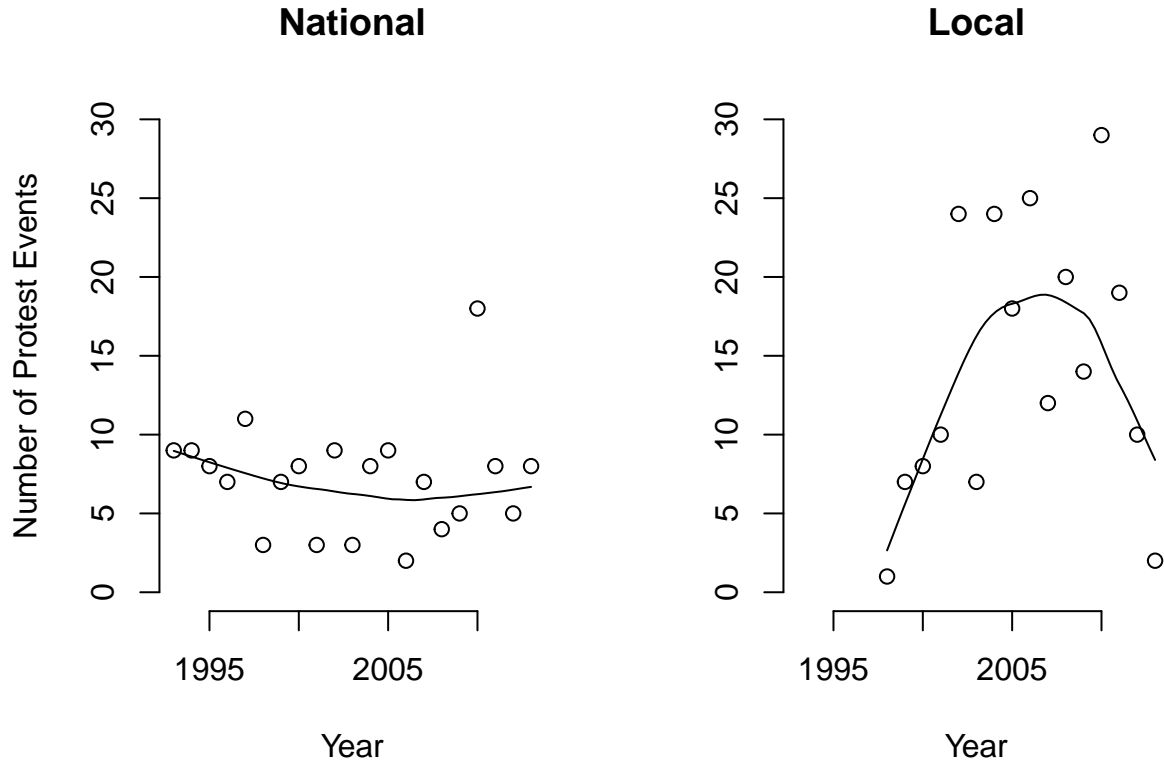


Figure 1. Number of articles on protest against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the national and local press (1995–2013). The smoothed trend lines are LOESS.

National Press Does Not Cover All Protests

Simply from browsing through the articles, I noticed that there are ‘local’ events that are not covered in the national newspaper. This is relevant in that the ‘national’ newspaper (NZZ) is based in Zürich. As a consequence, if the NZZ is used to estimate the geographical distribution of protest nationally, it will overestimate protests in Zürich.

	AG	AI	BE	BL	BS	GE	GL	GR	LU	NE	SG	SO	TI	VD	ZG	ZH
National Press	3	0	59	0	2	4	0	2	1	1	1	0	2	6	1	67
Local Press	5	1	48	15	51	2	1	17	0	0	0	4	1	20	0	65

Table 1. Number of articles on protest against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the local and national press (down) and canton in which the protest took place (across).

A focus on the national press will *under*-report the incidence of protest. Both the national and local press report many protests from the canton of Bern (column ‘BE’ in Table 1) – where the Swiss capital city is located. It can be assumed that this relative frequency in newspaper reports reflects a relative importance of protest in the capital city. Taken together, however, the local press covers a much wider spectrum: more protest is reported. These additional protests are missed when only the national press is analysed.

Local Press Reports More on Local Protests

There is a clear bias in ‘local’ newspapers to report on protests in the regions in which the newspapers are based. The number of articles on protest against deportations may hide important differences in the kind of

protest covered by local newspapers. In the following, maps are drawn to highlight the relative number of articles by the locality of the protest and underscore geographical patterns not readily apparent in the tables.

	AG	AI	BE	BL	BS	GE	GL	GR	LU	NE	SG	SO	TI	VD	ZG	ZH
Aargauer Zeitung	3	0	5	1	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	13
Basler Zeitung	0	1	15	14	42	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1	7	0	6
Blick	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	3
Die Südostschweiz	0	0	11	0	0	1	1	12	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Die Weltwoche	3	0	7	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9
NZZ	0	0	49	0	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	6	0	55
Tages Anzeiger	0	0	17	0	1	1	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	41
Zofinger Tagblatt	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 2. Number of articles on protest against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers by newspaper (down) and canton in which the protest took place (across).

As its name suggests, the *Basler Zeitung* is based in Basel. The area highlighted in red in Figure 1 is the canton of Basel City, while the adjacent area in orange is the canton of Basel Country. The large area in orange is the canton of Bern where the national capital is located. Overall, there is a clear concentration on protest in the Basel area.

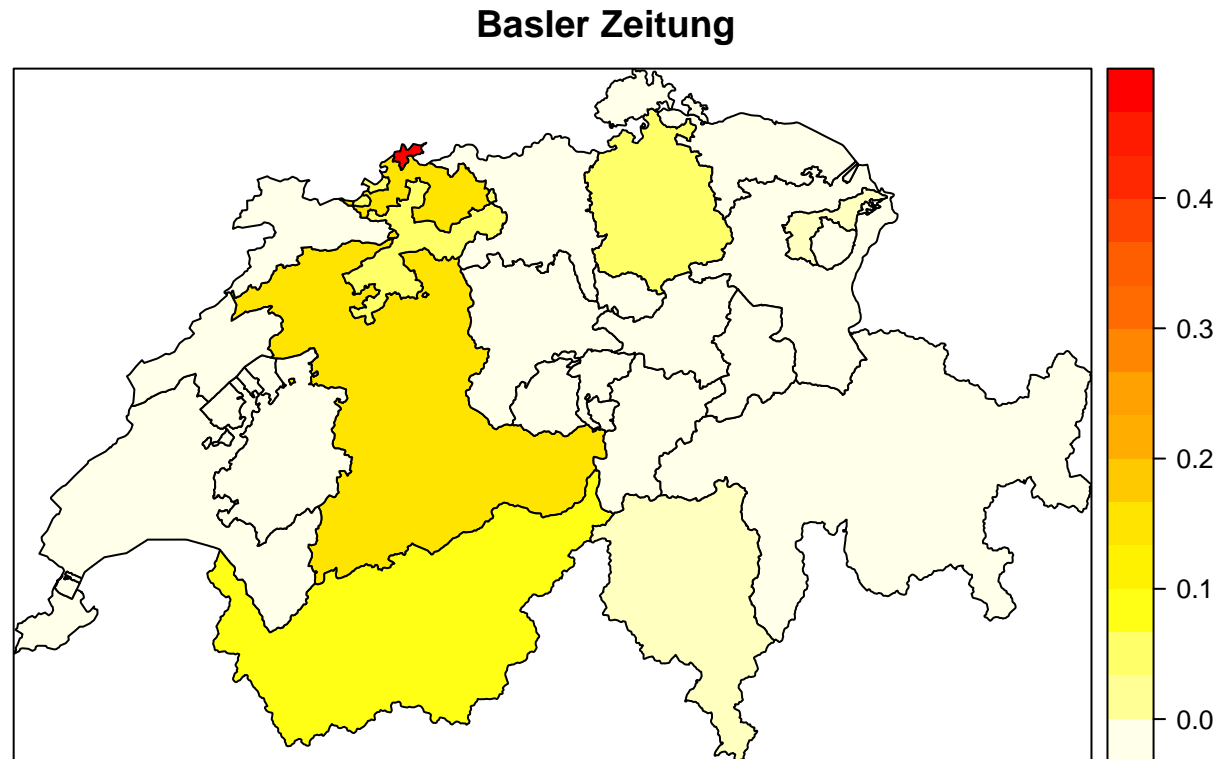


Figure 2. Relative share of reported protests against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the Basler Zeitung by canton

The *Aargauer Zeitung* is also aptly named and based in the canton of Aargau. Contrary to the other local newspapers examined here, however, the most common locality is not the canton of Aargau, but the adjacent canton of Zürich (highlighted in red) where the biggest city of Switzerland is located. None of the protests

reported in the Aargauer Zeitung that took place in the canton of Aargau, however, are covered by the 'national' Neue Zürcher Zeitung, highlighting that a focus on the national press clearly undercounts the incidence of protest.

Aargauer Zeitung

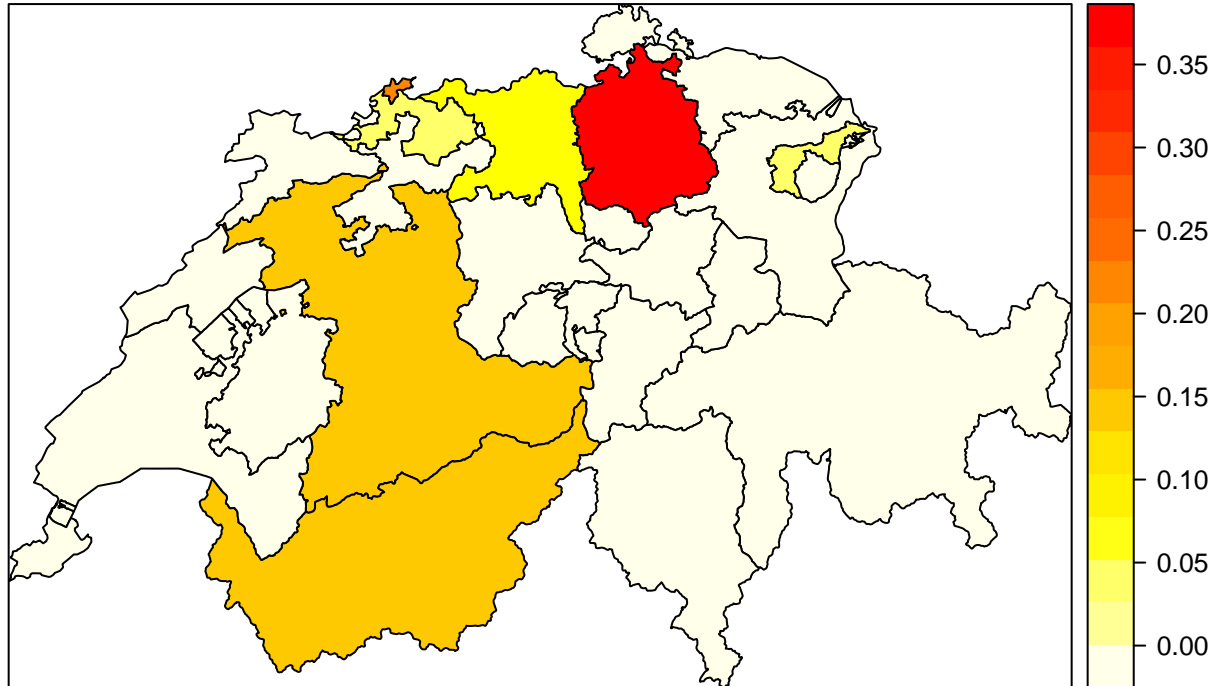


Figure 3. Relative share of reported protests against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the Aargauer Zeitung by canton

The *Südostschweiz* is based in the canton of Grisons in the south-east of Switzerland, namely its capital Chur. Here we observe reports on protest in the canton the newspaper is based in, as well as protests in the canton of the Swiss capital: Bern. The newspaper is the only one to pick up a protest in the canton of Glarus, adjacent to the canton of Grisons.

Südostschweiz

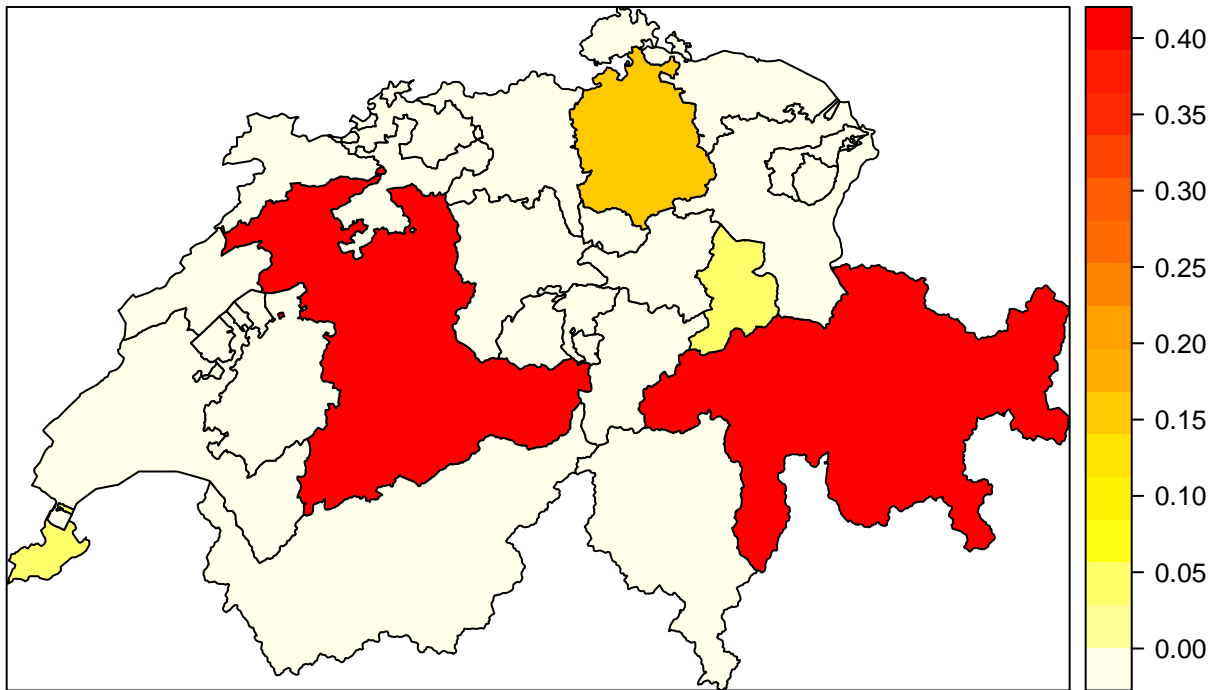


Figure 4. Relative share of reported protests against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the Südostschweiz by canton

Like the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the *Tages-Anzeiger* is based in Zürich, but it is more focused on local affairs. This focus is reflected in the protests covered, with protests from the canton of Zürich being reported more frequently than protests from other areas of Switzerland.

Tages-Anzeiger

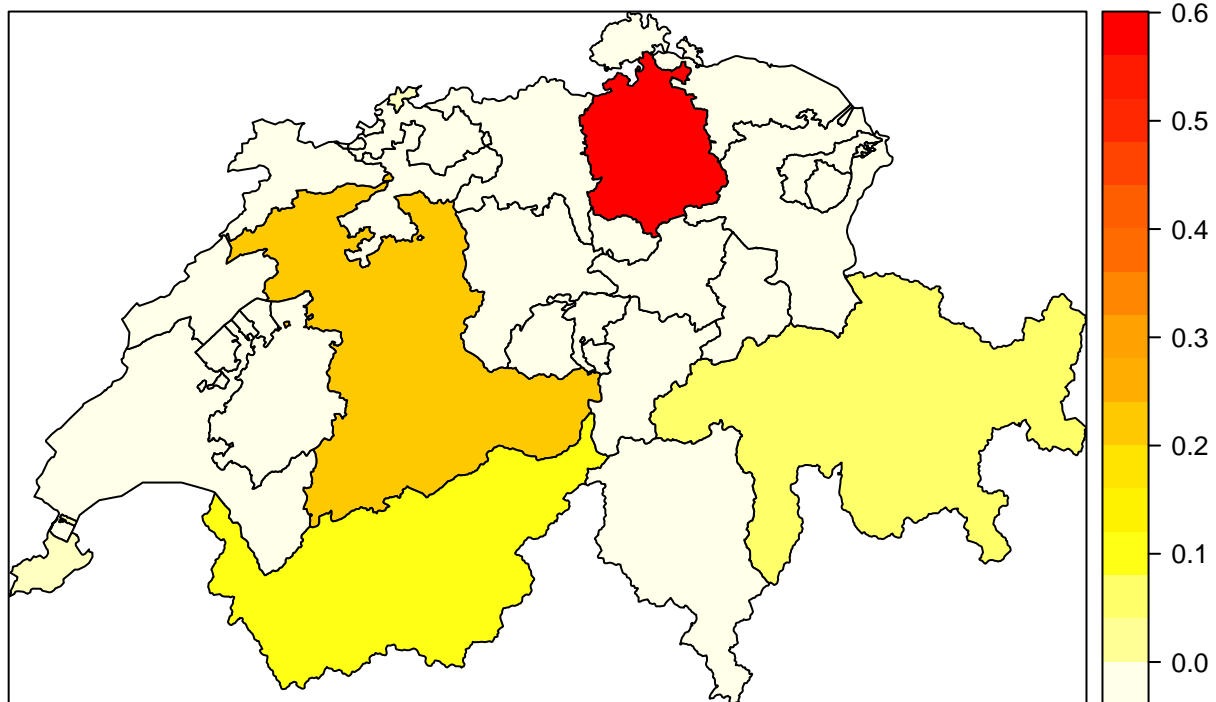


Figure 5. Relative share of reported protests against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the Tages-Anzeiger by canton

The coverage in the ‘national’ *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* differs from that of the Tages-Anzeiger by a higher proportion of protest in the canton of Bern where the national capital is located. However, the map makes it apparent that the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* does not record nearly as many protests as could be observed when the various outlets from the local press are combined (see also Table 1). At the same time, it appears that protests in the canton of Zürich are relatively more likely to be reported than what a truly national newspaper would be expected to report – judging by the coverage in the ‘local’ newspapers.

It should be highlighted that the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* does not claim to be a national newspaper, but is commonly perceived that way and certainly used this way by researchers. This analysis highlights that research focusing on a single newspaper is likely to be biased in the geographical spread of protest, even when this single newspaper is ‘national’ in outlook. The fact that the NZZ is a quasi newspaper of record does not mean it covers protests from across Switzerland to the same extent. With the number of protests covered, however, the NZZ comes closer to recording ‘all’ protest than any other newspaper examined individually.

In a similar vein, it should be noted that none of the newspapers published in German examined here reports much about protests in the French-speaking areas, notably protests in the cantons of Geneva and Vaud where significant protests against the deportation of asylum seekers known to the Taking Sides project remain unreported.

Neue Zürcher Zeitung

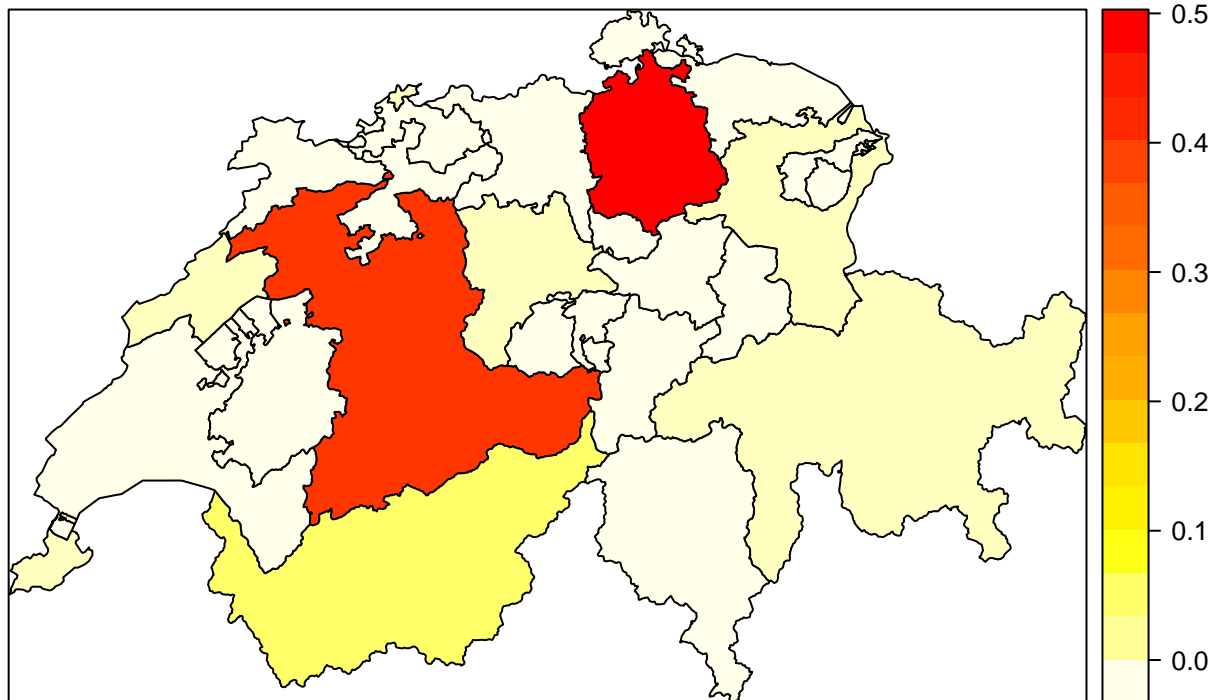


Figure 6. Relative share of reported protests against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers in the Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ) by canton

Actor Types Mentioned Are Similar

Generally, it is the same actor types that are common in the local and national press. Table 3 presents the frequency at which different actor types are mentioned in the newspaper articles. The proportion is calculated separately for the local and national press. While similarities dominate, there appear to be some subtle differences, like political parties (particularly of the right) being mentioned more frequently in the national press. By contrast, in the local press experts and individuals without strong ties to the potential deportee are mentioned more frequently.

	Other	Tie	No Tie	Experts	NGO	P:other	P:left	P:centre	P:right	Gov	Self
National Press	2.0	3.3	10.6	12.6	21.9	0.7	7.3	2.6	12.6	5.3	21.2
Local Press	0.4	4.3	16.1	17.8	22.6	0.4	5.2	1.7	7.0	3.0	21.3

Table 3. Protest actors mentioned in the local and national press. Given is the percentage of articles mentioning a particular type of actor as the main actor. ‘Tie’ refers to individuals and members of grass-root organizations with strong ties to the potential deportee; ‘No Tie’ refers to individuals and grass-root organizations without such strong ties. Church actors are included under ‘NGO’. ‘P:’ refer to parties of different ideologies (refer to Ruedin 2013 for a classification of Swiss parties on immigration).

Forms of Protest Reported Are Similar

The form of protest used (as reported in the newspapers) is largely similar across the local and national press. Demonstrations are the most common form to protest against the deportation of rejected asylum seekers. At the same time, there are some differences, like the more frequent use of interviews in local newspapers – related to their drawing on experts more often –, or court cases being reported more often in the national press. Protest marches and supporting events are reported more often in the local media, while press releases are mentioned more often in the national press.

	Oth.	Int.	Vio.	Occ.	Demo	Court	Hunger	Chr.	Letter	Event	March	Press	Harm
National Press	2.0	6.0	3.3	4.0	26.5	22.5	11.3	0.7	7.3	1.3	0.0	15.2	0.0
Local Press	2.6	13.9	2.2	3.9	25.7	17.4	7.0	3.0	4.8	5.2	5.2	7.4	1.7

Table 4. Protest forms mentioned in the local and national press. Given is the percentage of articles mentioning a particular form of protest. ‘Oth.’ refers to other forms, ‘Int.’ to interviews, ‘Vio.’ to acts of violence, ‘Occ.’ to occupations, ‘Demo’ to demonstrations, ‘Court’ to court cases and questions asked in legislative bodies, ‘Hunger’ to hunger-strikes, ‘Chr.’ to church asylum, ‘Letter’ to letters to the editor in newspapers and open letters, ‘Event’ to supporting events, ‘March’ to protest marches, ‘Press’ to press releases, and ‘Harm’ to self-harm.

Policy Change Is the Main Focus of Protest

Both the local and national press report protest targeting policy change rather than individual deportations. A look at the articles suggests that in these cases often a specific deportation is used as the occasion, but the protest – as reported in the newspaper – focuses on changing deportation policies. Where the local and national press seem to differ to some degree is the focus on families: protests reported in the local press are more likely to be about families about to be deported than protests reported in the national press.

	Single	Family	Group	Policy
National Press	16.6	4.6	21.9	55
Local Press	15.2	14.8	22.2	47

Table 5. Potential deportees mentioned in the local and national press. Given is the percentage of articles mentioning a particular kind of potential deportee. ‘Policy’ refers to protest where policy reform is in the foreground.

Women and children are more likely to be mentioned in local newspapers than in national newspapers. Such explicit mentions of women and children, however, are rare in both the local and national press.

	Not mentioned	Women mentioned
National Press	97.4	2.6
Local Press	91.7	8.3

Table 6. Explicit mention of women as potential deportees in the local and national press. Given are percentages.

	Not mentioned	Children mentioned
National Press	96.0	4.0
Local Press	85.7	14.3

Table 7. Explicit mention of children as potential deportees in the local and national press. Given are percentages.

Reported Participant Number Is Similar

When the number of participants is mentioned in the newspaper articles, the local and national press report similar participant numbers. It is not the case that the national press would report on larger protests with the local press picking up smaller events: The mean number of participants is slightly larger for protests reported in the local press, while the median number of participants is slightly larger for protests reported in the national press.

	Participants (Mean)
National Press	1281
Local Press	1853

Table 8. Mean number of protest participants reported in the local and national press.

	Participants (Median)
National Press	145
Local Press	100

Table 9. Median number of protest participants reported in the local and national press.

Frames Used Are Similar

The distribution of the different frames is largely the same in the local and national press. As elsewhere, only frames as reported in the newspaper articles can be covered. A subtle difference is the somewhat more frequent use of the integration frame in the local press, with instrumental frames employed somewhat more often in the national press. This focus on integration and deservingness is in line with the more frequent focus on families and the explicit mention of women and children. In this sense, most differences in the aspects of protest reported seem to be related, and the similarities seem to dominate.

	Other	Anti-Racist	No Border	Instrumental	Integration	Human Rights	Solidarity
National Press	6.0	0.0	12.6	15.9	9.9	30.5	8.6
Local Press	5.2	0.4	11.3	10.0	14.8	27.0	9.1

Table 10. Protest frames reported in the local and national press. ‘No border’ frames include all frames related to freedom of movement, generic rights to stay, or “no one is illegal”; ‘integration’ frames include deservingness. Given are percentages.

Conclusion

There is a clear tendency for newspapers to report more protest from the locality in which they are based. This is the case for the local press as well as for the national press. Research drawing on a single source will clearly under-report the incidence of protest and likely bias the geographical distribution of actual protests.

The characteristics of the protests reported in the local and national press, however, are similar in many respects. The articles mention the same types of actors to roughly the same extent; the protest forms reported as comparable, as are the frames used. While the similarities seem to dominate, local newspaper report more on families, and mention women and children explicitly more often. In this context, arguments of integration and deservingness are more common. Without a detailed analysis of individual cases, we do not know whether the protest events reported in the local press *are* substantially different, or whether the local press reports in a different way on the same events. What is shown here, however, is that while the local and national press report on different protest events, generally the characteristics of these protests are the same. It seems reasonable to conclude that that a focus on the national press leads to under-reporting of the incidence of protest and may misrepresent its distribution, but to characterize the *kind* of protest, the reliance on the national press does not appear problematic.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: Codebook

The full data are available from <http://dx.doi.org/10.7910/DVN/NJNV64>

Variable	Description
Article ID	Article ID (shared with the Taking Sides project where applicable)
Medium	Newspaper name
Date	Date of news article
Zeitpunkt	Additional information regarding the timing of the protest ³
Ortschaft	Place where protest took place ⁴
Kanton	Canton of place where protest took place (abbreviated ⁵)
Protest nach ...	“Protest nach engerer Definition?” check variable regarding the definition of protest ⁶
Wer protestiert	Main actor in protest ⁷
Wie protestiert?	Form of protest ⁸
Wer ist betroffen	unknown, other, politics, group, family, single person

³e.g. if the article refers to an earlier protest; this variable is not analysed here

⁴this variable is not analysed here

⁵refer to https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data_codes_for_Switzerland#Cantons

⁶articles coded as TRUE use the same definition as the Taking Sides project more generally; other articles use a more inclusive definition. The definition of protest is the same for all articles examined here (=the more inclusive one).

⁷other (German: ‘andere’); experts and adhoc groups (‘Experten/Ad-Hoc Gruppen’); individuals without ties (‘Einzelpersonen ohne Bezug’); government and administration (‘Regierung/Verwaltung’); church and NGO (‘Kirchen/NGO’); individuals with ties (‘Einzelpersonen mit Bezug’); affected person (‘Selbst Betroffene’ = potential deportee); (Political parties:) other (‘Partei: andere’), right (‘Partei: rechts’), centre (‘Partei: mitte’), left (‘Partei: links’)

⁸legal action, court case, question in legislative (‘Gerichtliche Klage/Vorstoss’); Demonstration; violence (‘Ausschreitungen’); other (‘andere’); statement or interview (‘Aussage/Interview’); press conference or press release (‘Pressekonferenz’); letter to the editor, open letter (‘Leserbrief/Offener Brief’); hunger-strike (‘Hungerstreik’); self-harm (‘Selbstverletzung’); church asylum (‘Kirchenasyl’); flyers (‘Flugblatt/Dokumentation’); occupation (‘Besetzung’); vigil and supporting events (‘Mahnwache/Events’); protest march (‘Marsch’)

Variable	Description
Frau	Are women explicitly mentioned? ⁹ yes/no ¹⁰
Kinder	Are children explicitly mentioned? ¹¹ yes/no ¹²
Teilnehmerzahl	Number of participants mentioned
Mobilisierungsraum	Local/regional; national/capital city; transnational
Frames	integration ¹³ ; human rights; no borders ¹⁴ ; solidarity ¹⁵ ; anti-racist; instrumental; other
Emotives	Positive emotions; negative emotions (blank if no emotions identified) ¹⁶

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⁹among the potential deportees

¹⁰TRUE if mentioned, otherwise blank

¹¹among the potential deportees

¹²TRUE if mentioned, otherwise blank

¹³integration, deservingness

¹⁴freedom to move, right to stay, "no one is illegal"

¹⁵solidarity, charity

¹⁶this variable is not analysed here