

# Political parties' position and public opinion on immigration

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To Cătălin.



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## Abstract

This PhD dissertation is interested in the mass-elite linkages in the context of the immigration issue. It examines, on the one hand, factors likely to influence party responsiveness to public opinion (bottom-up connection) and, on the other hand, the impact of party stances and policies on public preferences in this policy area (top-down connection). Two chapters are dedicated to analysing the bottom-up process. Here, I examine to what extent party characteristics and party system features influence the responsiveness of parties to public opinion on immigration. The third chapter analyses the degree to which individual attitudes toward immigration are influenced by party positions and by immigration policies and policy outcomes (top-down process). The results indicate that parties do not track changes over time in the preferences of their party supporters. There is weak evidence that mainstream parties and parties with low distinctiveness in their immigration-emphasis profile are more sensitive to temporal changes in the mean voter's preferences. In addition, mainstream parties tend to be more responsive to changes in public opinion and in the objective migration context when they face a strong radical right party. Finally, there is evidence of weak but predictable impacts of party positions and immigration policies on individual attitudes toward immigration.

## Resumen

Esta tesis doctoral se centra en la conexión entre ciudadanos y elites en el tema de la inmigración. Esa examina, por un lado, factores que pueden influir en la receptividad de los partidos políticos hacia la opinión pública sobre el tema de la inmigración (conexión bottom-up) y, por otro lado, el impacto de los posicionamientos de los partidos políticos y de las políticas en materia de inmigración sobre las preferencias de los ciudadanos en esta área (conexión top-down). Dos capítulos de la tesis se dedican al análisis del proceso bottom-up. Aquí, examino la medida en que las características de los partidos y de los sistemas de partidos influyen en la receptividad de los partidos políticos hacia la opinión pública sobre la inmigración. El tercer capítulo analiza la medida en que las actitudes individuales hacia la inmigración están influenciadas por los posicionamientos de los partidos políticos y por las políticas en temas de inmigración y sus resultados. Los

resultados de los análisis empíricos sugieren que los partidos no son receptivos hacia los cambios a lo largo del tiempo en las preferencias de sus simpatizantes. Hay alguna evidencia, aunque débil, que los partidos ‘mainstream’ y los que tienen baja especificidad en términos de énfasis sobre temas de inmigración son más sensibles a los cambios temporales en las preferencias del votante mediano. Asimismo, los partidos ‘mainstream’ son más receptivos hacia los cambios en la opinión pública y en el contexto migratorio cuando compiten en contra de un partido fuerte de derecha radical. Finalmente, hay evidencia de impactos débiles pero predictibles de los posicionamientos de los partidos políticos y de las políticas en temas de inmigración sobre las actitudes de los ciudadanos hacia la inmigración.



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## 1. Introduction

In the past decades, the political and electoral landscape in Europe has been fundamentally altered by mobilisation on immigration and other cultural issues (de Vries et al., 2013; Kriesi et al., 2006). Citizens' political views are increasingly structured by two dimensions of political competition, a socio-economic and a cultural one (Van Der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). At the same time, parties have increasingly attempted to mobilise voters on the cultural dimension (Kriesi et al., 2006). Also, electorally successful radical right parties have impacted policy development on the immigration issue (Schain, 2006) and rival parties' stances (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Bale, 2003). This raises questions about the relationship between political parties' stances on immigration and citizens' views in this policy domain. To what extent do political parties represent and respond to public preferences about immigration? Is party responsiveness conditional on party and party system features? Also, under which conditions do parties shape public views about immigration?

Political representation is a key element of democratic functioning. The definition of democracy itself refers to "government by and for the people", that is, in accordance with citizens' preferences (Lijphart, 2012: 1). At its core stands the idea that the voters have the power to control or at least to influence their elected representatives, which then need to act in accordance with voters' preferences (Achen, 1978: 479; Powell, 2000). Central to political representation is therefore the idea that citizens' preferences find echo in parties' platforms and eventually policymaking (Adams et al., 2011).

An equally compelling vision linking voters and parties is that of political elites influencing the public opinion. By contrast to the bottom-up vision underlying the political representation process, this top-down approach conceives elites and parties as sources of information which provide cues to help citizens form opinions on political issues (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Zaller, 1992). Citizens take cues not only from political elites' messages, but also from policies understood in a broad sense. This view is emphasized by the scholarly work on the thermostat model of opinion-policy

connection (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995; Wlezien and Soroka, 2012; see also Erikson et al., 2002) which points to a dynamic relationship between citizens' preferences and policy.

The lines of research mentioned above have led to a burgeoning body of work on political representation and responsiveness, public opinion formation, and the mass-elite linkages in general. In broad terms, this research takes on the task of analysing who influences who and under which conditions. Do political actors shape citizens' views in different policy fields? Or, does public opinion influence party behaviour and party position-taking? More generally, which conditions are conducive to one or the other process (see, for instance, Hakhverdian, 2012; Steenbergen et al., 2007). There is an extensive body of work on democratic responsiveness. Scholars have focused on the responsiveness of governments (Hagemann et al., 2017; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008), of political parties in general (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011), or of policy (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010) to public opinion. Much of the literature on party responsiveness has focused on the extent to which parties adapt their left-right stances in response to changes in public opinion (Adams et al., 2006, 2009; Ezrow et al., 2011), but increasing attention is being dedicated to single issues such as the European integration (Arnold et al., 2012; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Williams and Spoon, 2015). However, scant attention has been dedicated to party responsiveness on the immigration issue (but see Dalton, 2017). Likewise, few studies exploring the elite influence on public opinion have focused on the immigration issue (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Hellwig and Kweon, 2016), and, to my knowledge, the scholarly attention to policy influence on attitudes toward immigration is scarce.

I argue that focusing on the immigration issue is both theoretically and socially relevant. First, the literature points to the existence of two dimensions of political competition: an economic and a socio-cultural one (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi et al., 2006). The immigration issue has become in the past decades a dominant issue on the second, non-economic dimension (Kriesi et al., 2006). The increasing politicization of the immigration issue, that has occurred in many Western European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, or Switzerland, has produced an even-closer association between voters'

attitudes toward immigration and their general left-right identification which is then likely to have implications for political and voting behavior (de Vries et al., 2013). Understanding the linkage between voters and parties on this policy issue is therefore increasingly important to understand the evolution of the political and electoral landscape in Europe. For instance, the immigration issue dominated the campaign preceding the Brexit referendum held in 2016 in the United Kingdom to decide on the country's membership in the European Union. In that context, concerns about immigration were associated to a higher probability to vote in favour of leaving the EU (Hobolt, 2016). Similarly, immigration has been one of the main issues marking recent national elections in the Netherlands, France, Germany or Austria.

Second, exploring the elite-voter nexus on the immigration issue should offer the potential to better grasp some of the causes behind the recent rise of populist parties in Europe and beyond. Populism, defined as a “thin-centred ideology” that conceives elites and the people as two antagonistic groups in a society (Mudde, 2004: 543–4), has witnessed a remarkable rise in the last decades. It has been nurtured by parties on both extremes of the political spectrum. But, in the case of the radical right, parties have combined populist appeals with the defense of national identity and cultural protectionism, mainly through a focus on the immigration issue (Kriesi, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2006). Right-wing challenger parties mobilise mainly on cultural issues and their appeal has been amplified by the recent Europe-wide economic crisis (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016). Analysing the voter-party nexus with a focus on the immigration issue, therefore, also speaks to research on populism.

In this dissertation, I am interested in the mass-elite linkage pertaining to the immigration issue. I explore thus the relationship between political parties' stances and citizens' views on this issue. The point of departure is the assumption that parties respond to and influence public preferences (Adams et al., 2006; Zaller, 1992). Therefore, in line with other studies, I consider that both top-down and bottom-up processes are likely to be at play (Steenbergen et al., 2007). Building on that, this PhD dissertation explores the factors that are susceptible of affecting the top-down and the bottom-up connections (see also

Steenbergen et al., 2007 for an argument on the conditional nature of the top-down and bottom-up processes in the context of the European integration issue).

First, I look at elements that are likely to influence the responsiveness of political parties to public preferences on immigration (bottom-up process). Responsiveness has been defined as a process whereby “decision makers are attentive to citizens’ demands, respond to them, and consider these demands in policy formulation”(Müller and Strøm, 1999: 308). Parties represent the linkage mechanism between public opinion and policymaking, performing a key role in representing public views (Dalton, 1985). Both party and party-system factors can potentially influence the extent to which parties adapt their stances in response to changes in public preferences about immigration.

I address the potential mediating role of party and party system features in two different chapters of this dissertation. To begin with, I explore to what extent party characteristics have the potential to moderate party responsiveness to public opinion on immigration. In particular, I examine the degree to which the responsiveness to public preferences depends on whether parties are mainstream or niche (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Meguid, 2005). This party feature lumps together under the ‘niche’ heading different party families, that have varying interests in mobilising on the immigration issue (take the communist versus the radical right parties, for example). This is why, building on recent literature about niche parties, I also explore to what extent party responsiveness depends on a party’s degree of distinctiveness in its immigration-emphasis profile. The notion of distinctiveness draws on the concept of nicheness (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015), but focuses on a specific issue, which, in this dissertation, is the immigration issue. I argue that this party characteristic presents the advantage of tapping into emphasis on issues that are relevant for a party’s identity and that this factor should matter when analysing party responsiveness to public opinion.

Importantly, Adams et al. (2006) and Ezrow et al. (2011) suggest that parties have different incentives to respond to distinct voter constituencies. I build on this and examine to what extent parties are more likely to respond to mass public preferences rather than the views of their partisan constituencies (or vice-versa). In this framework, I also explore

the potential moderating role of issue salience, since party attention to public opinion is likely to be higher with regard to issues that voters themselves evaluate as important (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010).

In terms of party system characteristics, I consider in particular the presence and strength of radical right parties. Parties face different sources of influence such as public preferences, the economic context, or the party organization (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014; Schumacher et al., 2013). When it comes to immigration, two factors are especially relevant for party positions: the public opinion on immigration and the migration context. Since the strength of radical right parties is in this case considered to be a potential predictor of party stances, I focus on the immigration-related position of mainstream parties. This dissertation then explores to what extent the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the above-mentioned two sources of influence, that is, the mean voter preferences (Ezrow et al., 2011) and the objective migration context (see, for instance, Abou-Chadi, 2016), is affected by the presence and strength of a radical right competitor. By way of example of the expected dynamics, the data employed in this dissertation indicates, for instance, that in Austria the weight of the radical right has increased from about 10% vote share at the 2002 national election (i.e. the percentage of votes won by the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)) to 15.1% in 2006 (representing the sum of the vote shares obtained in that election by FPÖ (11%) and the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ – 4.1%)). Hence, the radical right was rather strong and increasingly successful in 2006. In the next election, we note that the Austrian Social Democratic Party (SPÖ, mainstream left) moves towards a more anti-immigrant position (a score of -0.75 in 2008 compared -0.62 in 2006) as the public opinion becomes more anti-immigrant (a score of -0.19 prior to the 2008 election as compared to -0.11 prior to the 2006 election). Likewise, in Sweden, following the radical right's performance in 2006 (i.e. the Sweden Democrats obtain 2.9% of votes in 2006 compared to 1.4% in 2002) we note that several parties move in line with shifts in public opinion. For instance, both the conservative Moderate Coalition Party (MSP) and the Christian Democrats (Kd) become less anti-immigrant as the public opinion becomes more pro-immigrant (moving from 0.59 prior to the 2006 election to 0.73 prior to the 2010 election). Indeed, MSP's

position becomes less anti-immigrant, moving from -0.46 in 2006 to -0.25 in 2010, while Kd moves from -0.60 in 2006 to -0.33 in 2010).

Second, I explore the top-down process by investigating the influence of political actors on public attitudes toward immigration. In an article co-authored with Romain Lachat (corresponding to Chapter 4), we adopt an innovative approach by looking at the joint effects of party positions and immigration policies on individual attitudes toward immigration. By looking at the concurrent effects of these two contextual influences on public opinion we bring together research on party cueing (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Kam, 2005) and the scholarly work on the thermostat model of public opinion-policy connection and dynamic responsiveness (Erikson et al., 2002; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995). In terms of policy, we focus on both the policy regime, that is country specific regulations on immigration, and a policy outcome, that is the stocks of migrants living in European countries. This chapter thus sheds light on how citizens use communications from parties they voted for, on the one hand, and the wider regulatory and policy framework, on the other hand, to make statements and form opinions about the immigration issue.

### 1.1. Data, cases and methods

The empirical analyses draw on data from a number of sources. Data from the Comparative Manifesto Project/Manifesto Project Group<sup>1</sup> (hereafter the CMP) has been retrieved to measure parties' positions on immigration in European countries. The use of CMP to estimate party positions has received its fair share of criticisms (see e.g. Gemenis, 2013). However, using it allows me not only to cover larger periods of time than what would be possible with other data sources (e.g. Chapel Hill Expert Survey), but also to relate this dissertation to previous studies exploring party positions on immigration (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012).

Regarding the public opinion on immigration, it has been argued that public attitudes toward immigrants and those toward immigration represent two different theoretical

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<sup>1</sup> Data available at: <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>.



constructs, given that one refers to attitudes toward people, while the other relates to feelings about a phenomenon (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010: 313). Yet, immigrant and immigration related attitudes are closely linked, for the attitudes toward immigration as a phenomenon are fundamentally connected to attitudes about ethnic and racial groups (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014: 234). In addition, aspects related to both the immigration rules and the immigrant integration policies are often linked in the political debates and in the public opinion (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). When referring to public opinion on immigration I refer thus throughout this dissertation to opinion about both immigrants and immigration. For public opinion data, I rely on the European Social Survey (ESS)<sup>2</sup>. The ESS represents an excellent data source for public attitudes toward immigration since it has included in each wave (with rounds being fielded every two years) a battery of six items that offers a consistent image of the evolution over time in the public opinion about immigration<sup>3</sup>.

Depending on the specific variables included in each study, data also comes from Eurobarometer surveys (which are used to compute the public salience measure for the immigration issue), the ParlGov database (which gives information on the vote shares obtained by radical right parties), the OECD's International Migration Database and Eurostat (which provide indicators for inflows of migrants and migrant stocks), the IMPIC database (which contains data on immigration policies) and other OECD databases (for GDP per capita and social expenditure data).

The chapters of this dissertation focusing on party responsiveness to public preferences use time-series cross-sectional data consisting of repeated measures of party positions in a host of European countries, on the one hand, and of aggregate public preferences, on the other hand (where the aggregation is either at the overall electorate level or at party level depending on the specific theoretical focus). The main analyses reported therein mostly rely on multilevel models, taking advantage of the hierarchical structure of the data. Both the dependent and the independent variables have been operationalised in terms of levels rather than changes. The aim is to ensure a larger number of observations.

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<sup>2</sup> Data available at: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>

<sup>3</sup> The use of a different number of ESS waves and of different CMP dataset versions in the chapters of this dissertation reflects the availability of data at the moment of finalizing that given chapter.

This approach is in line with several studies on voters' influence on party stances and responsiveness (for instance, Arnold et al., 2012; Hellström, 2008; Steenbergen et al., 2007, see also Achen, 1978).

The chapter on top-down effects is based on a similar data structure, with the notable differences that: (1) the dependent variable changes, in that public preferences are now the dependent variable rather than a predictor, and (2) the public preferences are considered at individual level, rather than aggregate level as in the preceding chapters. The analysis in this part of the dissertation leverages the use of fixed effects to explore within country over time effects of party positions and policy on voters' immigration attitudes. Robustness checks are reported, where appropriate, to validate the strength of the findings from the main models.

## 1.2. The structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is structured as follows. In Chapter 2, I explore to what extent party-related factors influence the responsiveness of parties to the preferences on immigration of different voter constituencies, that is, the overall electorate and the party support base. More specifically, this chapter assesses the degree to which parties' responsiveness to the overall electorate, on the one hand, and the partisan constituency, on the other hand, depends on party characteristics. As discussed, in terms of party characteristics, I focus on two features that are theoretically relevant. First, I consider whether parties are classified as mainstream or niche. Second, based on the concept of nicheness (Meyer and Miller, 2015), I present the notion of party distinctiveness to capture how distinct a party's profile is in terms of emphasis on the immigration issue. As mentioned, I also consider in this chapter whether issue salience can have a moderating impact on the bottom-up connection between voters and parties.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to examining the potential influence of party system factors, that is, the presence and strength of radical right competitors, on the responsiveness of mainstream parties to two sources of influence: public preferences and the objective migration context. In particular, I consider the possibility that the presence of strong

radical right parties may alter party responsiveness to mean voter preferences and to the migration context (operationalised as migrant inflows).

Chapter 4 focuses on contextual influences on the public opinion on immigration, analysing the potential effects of party positions, on the one hand, and immigration policies and policy outcomes, on other hand, on citizens' views in this domain. By modelling together these two top-down influences, this chapter brings together two major strands of literature on public opinion formation and change, that is, the scholarship on party cueing and the research on the thermostatic model of the opinion-policy nexus (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010).

Chapter 5 concludes with a general overview of the main findings, a brief discussion of the limitations that this dissertation presents and suggestions for future research.

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## 2. Party responsiveness on immigration: the role of party characteristics and of issue salience

### **Abstract**

During the past decades, the immigration phenomenon has affected most European countries, becoming more and more politicised across the continent. This raises questions about the relationship between public preferences and parties' stances on this policy issue. Whereas mass-elite linkages have been extensively treated in previous research, less is known about the dynamics pertaining to the immigration issue. This paper examines to what extent and under which conditions political parties respond to the public opinion on immigration. In particular, it explores the potential role of party characteristics and issue salience in moderating party responsiveness to public attitudes. In terms of party characteristics, this study focuses on whether parties are niche or mainstream, and also builds on recent literature on parties' nicheness. It investigates to what extent these parties adjust their positions in response to different constituencies in the electorate while accounting for issue salience. To this end, a multilevel analysis is done using data from the European Social Survey, the Comparative Manifesto Project and the Eurobarometer, for twenty-four European countries during the period 2003-2017. The findings indicate that parties mostly reflect the preferences of their own party constituencies. This is regardless of party characteristics or issue salience. Parties do not appear to respond to changes over time in their supporters' preferences. There is weak evidence that parties with low distinctiveness (and possibly mainstream parties too) may respond to shifts over time in the mean voter position.

### **Keywords**

Responsiveness, political parties, public opinion, immigration, issue salience.

## 2.1. Introduction

During the last decades, most European countries have been affected by the immigration phenomenon, a phenomenon fuelled by increasing globalization, further European integration, and conflicts that have generated an important number of refugees and asylum seekers. In some countries this has coincided with an anti-immigrant sentiment within parts of the population (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). At the same time, the immigration issue has acquired increasing importance in the national political agendas (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008) and became a central component of the cultural dimension underlying the political space (see de Vries et al., 2013; Kriesi et al., 2006).

This study is interested in the mass-elite linkage pertaining to the immigration issue. It examines to what extent and under which conditions political parties respond to public attitudes toward immigration. Party characteristics and the salience of the immigration issue are likely to be relevant factors moderating parties' responsiveness to public opinion. In terms of party characteristics, I focus on whether parties are niche or mainstream (Meguid, 2005). Niche parties have emerged in many European countries in the past decades (Jensen and Spoon, 2010). Focusing on this party feature is particularly relevant since past research shows that mainstream and niche parties not only differ in their responsiveness to the mean voter, but that they also respond to different parts of the electorate (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011).

Recently, scholars have proposed a re-conceptualisation of this party characteristic and suggested instead a continuous measure of nicheness to capture time-variant and more fine-grained issue emphasis profiles (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015). Originally, the concept of nicheness covers several policy dimensions. I build on that and propose a theoretical concept that applies the nicheness notion to a specific issue. This notion, that I call *distinctiveness*, is issue specific and captures how distinct parties are in their immigration emphasis profiles. Building on this notion, I analyse to what extent parties' distinctiveness on immigration may condition responsiveness to public attitudes toward immigration.

Issue salience is also likely to matter. Elites tend to pay more attention to voters' preferences on issues that voters themselves care about and consider important (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). Also, it is in elites' interest to emphasise issues that are important to voters since research shows that mass-elite congruence in policy priorities contributes to higher satisfaction with democracy among citizens (Reher, 2015, 2016). In addition, if parties also align their *stances* to respond to the public's views on important topics for the latter, public satisfaction with democracy should be further enhanced. This study therefore brings together these two factors, i.e., party characteristics and the issue salience, to understand the mechanisms linking parties' stances and voters' preferences on the immigration issue and, in particular, the conditions under which parties accommodate citizens' viewpoints.

The relationship between public preferences and parties' policy preferences has important implications for political representation in contemporary societies. Representation indeed implies that the elected representatives are responsive to the mean preferences of citizens (Achen, 1978). Congruence between citizens and parties is thus an indicator of the quality of the representation process (Adams et al., 2011; Hellström, 2008). The contribution of this study to the general literature on party responsiveness is twofold. First of all, this study focuses on a new issue, immigration, that has been to a large extent neglected in studies of party responsiveness. Past research has mainly focused on the left-right ideological dimension (Adams et al., 2006, 2009; Ezrow et al., 2011; Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014; Schumacher et al., 2013) or, to some extent, on specific issues such as European integration (Arnold et al., 2012; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Williams and Spoon, 2015). Focusing on the immigration topic is theoretically relevant for two reasons. First, immigration represents a core issue of the cultural dimension of political competition, and mobilization on this and other cultural issues has changed the patterns of political competition in Western Europe (de Vries et al., 2013; Kriesi et al., 2006). Its crucial role in the Brexit referendum (Hobolt, 2016) and its importance in the 2017 national elections in Austria, France, Germany or the Netherlands provide further evidence of the fact that the immigration issue is ever more important to understand the political and electoral dynamics in European countries. Second, studying party responsiveness on the immigration issue also speaks to studies on the rise of new populist parties. Kriesi et al.

(2006) suggest that, by adopting a program that responded to the concerns of the losers of globalization, populist parties, both on the left and on the right side of the political spectrum, became the drivers of the transformation of party systems in Western Europe. Right-wing populist parties did that by favouring cultural protectionism and mobilising on opposition to immigration and the alleged threat it poses to national identity (Kriesi, 2014; Kriesi et al., 2006). Their messages have become increasingly appealing during the recent economic crisis (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016). Considering that the mobilization on the immigration issue by the populist radical right explains to a large extent the success enjoyed by this party family (Ivarsflaten, 2008), exploring parties' responsiveness on this issue has the potential to theoretically inform the research on populism as well.

The second contribution of this study is that it adds to the existing body of work on niche parties. Not only does this paper focus on the dichotomous distinction between mainstream and niche parties (Meguid, 2005), but it also draws on recent studies arguing in favour of a continuous measure of nicheness instead of the dichotomous one (Bischof and Wagner, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015). While the niche characteristic is based on party family classification, being captured by a time-invariant binary indicator (niche vs mainstream), nicheness refers to the distinctiveness of a party's issue emphasis profile in relation to its competitors and is represented through a time-variant continuous indicator. This study brings together the two perspectives but takes a step further. It applies the nicheness framework to a single issue, that is, immigration. It proposes, in this way, a new measure tapping into the distinctiveness of the immigration-emphasis profile of parties. To the extent that parties with higher distinctiveness (that is, parties emphasising the immigration issue to a different and plausibly larger extent than the competitors) respond to public views on immigration when this issue is among the top concerns of the public, this has additional implications for voters' satisfaction with democracy. This is because in this way parties not only show that they adopt stances in accordance to citizens' views, but they also show that they do that on issues important for the voters (Reher, 2015, 2016).

I argue that the niche characteristic and the measure of distinctiveness of the immigration-emphasis profile of parties, while partially overlapping, tap into different party features.

In Meguid's (2005) seminal study, niche parties are defined, among others, by their appeal on a limited number of issues. Hence, both the niche characteristic and the distinctiveness of the issue emphasis profile share the underlying idea that parties focus on a narrow number of issues (see also Bischof, 2017). However, in the niche framework, the issues of interest are not the same for all niche parties but vary, for instance, between the Greens (environment) and the radical right parties (immigration). By contrast, in the case of the distinctiveness measure used in this study the immigration-emphasis profile of parties represents a common denominator for all the parties in a party system (in other words, for each party-election a score on immigration-emphasis distinctiveness is computed). By employing both measures, that is, the classic mainstream vs niche dichotomization and the continuous distinctiveness characteristic, this article delves into the extent to which they capture (potentially overlapping) party characteristics capable of influencing responsiveness to public opinion.

The findings indicate that parties mostly reflect in their platforms the preferences of their own party constituencies. This is regardless of party characteristics or issue salience. However, this study does not provide evidence to support the claim that parties respond to shifts over-time in the preferences of their party supporters. There is nonetheless weak evidence that parties with low distinctiveness and, to some extent, mainstream parties are more responsive to shifts over time in the mean voter preferences. The chapter is structured as follows: first, I review the current literature on party responsiveness. I present thereafter the data and the methods employed in this study. In the following section I discuss the empirical analysis and the results. The paper concludes with a discussion of the main results and suggestions for further research.

## 2.2. Literature on political representation and party responsiveness

In the tradition of spatial models of party competition, citizens rationally vote for those parties that are expected to provide more utility, i.e., more policy benefits, choosing thus the parties that are closer to their individual preferences (Downs, 1957). The lack of convergence between the perceived position of politicians and voters' preferences tends to be punished at the elections, notably if the competitors are perceived by voters as more

in step with the latter's preferences (Hollibaugh et al., 2013). Parties have therefore an interest in grasping voters' policy preferences and will tend to place themselves in a given issue space in such a way as to win as many votes as possible (van der Eijk and Franklin, 2009: 161–166).

Research has shown that parties have the incentives to respond to shifts in the left-right preferences of the median voter (Ezrow and Hellwig 2014; Downs 1957). At the same time, politicians also pay attention to the public opinion on more specific issues, notably if these issues are important for citizens (Achen, 1978; Druckman and Jacobs, 2006). Soroka and Wlezien (2010), for instance, focus their analysis on defence, social domains and other domestic issues, and find that, conditional on issue salience and types of institutions, there is dynamic responsiveness to public opinion inasmuch politicians accommodate the changes in citizens' preferences when proposing policies. Hobolt and Klemmensen (2008) focus on government responsiveness and distinguish between rhetorical and effective responsiveness. Conditional on institutional factors, the authors find evidence of government responsiveness to public opinion on issues such as defense, law and order, health, education or social services.

Prior studies show that the way in which parties respond to public opinion is influenced by party characteristics. Small parties tend to be policy-oriented (Jensen and Spoon, 2010: 178–179) and exhibit lower responsiveness to changes in the mean voter position (Adams et al., 2006). Larger parties tend to be more responsive to aggregate level preferences (see Williams and Spoon, 2015 on the European integration issue).

Similarly, whether parties are niche or mainstream matters for party responsiveness (Adams et al., 2006). In a seminal study, Meguid (2005) defined niche political parties as parties that: (1) politicise new topics which do not match the traditional dimensions of party competition, (2) appeal to groups located across party alignments, and (3) compete on a limited number of issues (e.g. environment, immigration), being usually perceived as single-issue parties. They compete on niche segments (i.e., ecological, agrarian, ethnic-regional, nationalist or Eurosceptic) and contend for a narrow range of these issues (Bischof, 2017). This party characteristic has been found to influence party competition

strategies (Meguid, 2005), party responsiveness to particular constituencies (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011), or voting behavior in the European Parliament (Jensen and Spoon, 2010). Adams et al. (2006) suggest that mainstream parties do track changes in the mass public preferences, but niche parties are less responsive in their left-right stances to shifts in the mean voter position. Related to that, Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries (2007) note, in a study focusing on the European integration issue, a disconnect between the mainstream political elites and their party supporters' views on European integration. These findings are complemented by the study of Ezrow et al. (2011) who show that, unlike mainstream parties (which follow changes in the mean voter position), niche parties tend to respond to changes in the ideological position of their partisan constituency. This resonates with Bischof and Wagner's (2017) observation that niche parties owe their reputation and electoral success to distinctive emphasis and clear positions on their core issues, rather than proximity to the median voter, which gives them little incentive to respond to the latter.

Ezrow et al. (2011) suggest different mechanisms to explain the differential responsiveness of mainstream and niche parties to citizens' views. Regarding mainstream parties, the authors indicate that these parties tend to pursue vote-maximizing and catch-all policy strategies. By attempting to attract as many voters as possible, these parties tend to become centre-oriented and, as a consequence, less responsive to the preferences of their own partisan constituencies. Ezrow et al. (2011) suggest that the vote-maximising strategy also serves office- and policy-related objectives as it strengthens parties' positions in the post-election negotiations leading to a government coalition and, afterwards, their ability to pull policy in their direction.

On the other hand, a long-term electoral horizon and party organization considerations make niche parties more prone to follow changes in the preferences of their own party supporters (Ezrow et al., 2011). Since these parties have long-term objectives, they have few incentives to track short-term changes in the mean voter, but tend instead to behave in such a way as to maintain the support of their own base. Accordingly, they are also less willing to compromise by moderating their issue positions in response to the mean voter position, as this is likely to bring them electoral penalties and criticisms among

supporters. Ezrow et al. (2011) also suggest that the party organization, which in the case of niche parties tends to be smaller and horizontal and to give more weight to members and activists, encourages a more direct linkage between party elites and the base. This gives members and activists more influence over the policy direction of the party. Not least, the authors point to informational considerations to explain why mainstream and niche parties attempt to mobilise different constituencies. While the centre-oriented mainstream parties may encounter difficulties in precisely identifying their own supporters from those of other mainstream parties, which makes them employ the mean voter position as a proxy, niche parties have policy positions and voters that are “distinctly non-centrist” (Ezrow et al., 2011: 279) which facilitates responsiveness to party supporters.

Considering the immigration issue in particular, niche parties tend to adopt distinct issue positions. For instance, radical right parties typically mobilise on the immigration issue (Ivarsflaten, 2008) and adopt tough positions on it. By contrast, on the cultural dimension, Green parties have adopted positions in contrast with the radical right, clearly rejecting restrictive immigration policies (Kriesi et al., 2006). For these parties, adopting stances that do not reflect the view of core constituencies may put at risk the allegiance of party supporters and be costly from an electoral viewpoint (Ezrow et al., 2011). As a consequence, they should be less likely to compromise their immigration-related positions by responding to the mean voter and should be, instead, more responsive to the preferences of their party supporters. Conversely, mainstream parties are typically located around the centre of the political spectrum. Responding to the mean voter will allow them to maximise vote share, as well as to overcome potential difficulties in clearly distinguishing their own partisan constituency from those of other mainstream parties (Ezrow et al., 2011). Hence, in line with Adams et al. (2006) and Ezrow et al. (2011), I expect that mainstream parties should be more likely to accommodate the mean voter preferences in the overall electorate. This results in the following hypotheses:

H<sub>1</sub>: Mainstream parties tend to be more responsive than niche parties to the overall public opinion on immigration (mean voter position).



H2: Niche parties tend to be more responsive than mainstream parties to the immigration-related preferences of their party constituency (mean party supporter position).

The attention of parties and politicians to voters' preferences tends to be higher in relation to salient issues (Burstein, 2003; Canes-Wrone, 2015; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; but see Steenbergen et al., 2007). Parties are more likely to collect information about voters' preferences on issues that voters themselves care about. In addition, they are also more likely to accommodate public preferences on such issues, notably at the time of elections, to avoid being punished by the electorate. Combined with the first two hypotheses this implies that, when immigration is a salient issue, mainstream parties will be more responsive to the overall public opinion, whereas niche parties will be more responsive to the opinion of the party support base.

H3: High salience of the immigration issue will enhance the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the overall public opinion (mean voter position).

H4: High issue salience will enhance the responsiveness of niche parties to the preferences of their partisan constituency (mean party supporter position).

In prior research parties have typically been classified into niche or mainstream based on the party families they were considered to belong to. However, to a certain extent there is a lack of agreement on exactly which party families are associated with the niche family. For some authors, niche parties include the Greens or radical right parties (Meguid, 2005), whereas for others they comprise the communist, green and nationalist parties (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011) or green, radical-right, regionalist and anti-EU parties (Jensen and Spoon, 2010). This classification, which points to a fixed, time-invariant party characteristic, has been recently challenged by researchers. It is argued that this dichotomous classification misses the fact that parties vary across time in their electoral platforms and policy proposals, as well as across countries within party families (Bischof, 2017; Meyer and Miller, 2015). Meyer and Miller (2015) suggest that there is a continuum between being mainstream and being niche and propose a new

concept of nicheness to better capture this. The index they propose to measure the degree of nicheness covers several policy dimensions and captures “party nicheness as a relative concept of ‘being distinct’ from the competitors’ issue emphasis” (Meyer and Miller, 2015: 262).

The concept of nicheness covers several policy dimensions. When applied to a single issue, in this case immigration, the measure proposed by Meyer and Miller (2015) becomes a measure of an issue-specific degree of nicheness, capturing the extent to which parties emphasize the immigration issue while it is neglected by other competitors. In other words, it captures the distinctiveness of a party’s emphasis on immigration, compared to its competitors. I draw on these recent studies and specifically build on the measure proposed by Meyer and Miller (2015)<sup>1</sup> to propose therefore a new theoretical concept of distinctiveness that is issue specific and captures how distinct parties are in their immigration emphasis profiles. Whereas the niche concept covers parties from different party families, including hence parties that mobilise on different issues, the distinctiveness feature points to the idea of parties emphasizing the immigration issue to a different (and possibly, though not necessarily, larger) extent than their rivals. Based on this concept, I assess, in addition to the first four hypotheses, to what extent and under which conditions the distinctiveness of a party’s immigration emphasis profile moderates its responsiveness to public preferences in that domain. Notice that parties could have a more distinct emphasis profile on immigration regardless of whether they would have been classified as niche or mainstream based on party families. Also, the measure of distinctiveness is linked to the salience parties attach to the immigration issue and it is, at least conceptually, independent of parties’ positions. This prompts the expectation that parties with a more distinctive issue emphasis profile could adjust their positions either in response to the mean voter or in response to the mean party supporter.

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<sup>1</sup> While for Meyer and Miller (2015) the defining element for the identification of niche parties is represented by the extent to which parties emphasize issues ignored by their competitors, Bischof (2017) introduces an additional criterion consisting of the narrowness of issue appeals. Since this study focuses on a single issue, the additional criterion proposed by Bischof (2017) is satisfied. Also, Bischof and Wagner (2017) suggest that nicheness (i.e. focusing on issues ignored by competitors) matters more than specialization (the number of issues) in explaining responsiveness to the mean party supporter, which warrants focusing on the former.

On the other hand, Rovny (2012) suggests that parties which emphasise certain issues tend to adopt outlying, that is, more extreme, positions on those issues (as opposed to parties that de-emphasise and blur their stances). Typically, these issues are key to a party's identity (Rovny, 2012). Since my issue-specific measure of nicheness captures the extent to which parties emphasise the immigration issue compared to their competitors, Rovny's (2012) argument would imply that parties that have a distinctive immigration-emphasis profile would tend to adopt more outlying positions on immigration. From this perspective, it would seem reasonable to expect that, by adopting such outlying positions, they are more likely to respond to their party supporters' preferences<sup>2</sup>. However, since, as already mentioned, conceptually this measure is independent of the party position, this question will await empirical validation.

H<sub>5</sub>: Parties with a more distinctive emphasis profile on immigration tend to be more responsive to the mean preferences of their supporters.

As discussed, an increase within the electorate of the salience of the immigration issue is likely to make parties more attentive to this topic. Since distinctiveness is based on party emphasis relative to that of its competitors, an increase in issue salience at the level of the electorate and the subsequent increase in party attention to this issue can affect the distinctiveness of parties themselves. Parties that would have had a more distinctive profile under a low-salience scenario could become more mainstream under a high-salience scenario if the rival parties start dedicating more attention to the immigration issue. In principle, this should not affect the groups that parties are more likely to respond to. That is, parties with a more distinctive immigration-emphasis profile should continue to be more responsive to their partisans, as expected under hypothesis 5, under both scenarios of low and high issue salience. However, since distinctiveness of the immigration-emphasis profile, as defined above, is conceptually independent of the party

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<sup>2</sup> Although Rovny (2012) suggests that position blurring takes place as a result of a divided party constituency over the issue in question (and vice versa), he finds that on the non-economic dimension there is no statistically significant difference in the dispersion of voters' preferences between parties that blur their positions and parties that do not. This means that, on this dimension, a (non-)divided party constituency is not necessarily helpful in explaining position-taking strategies. However, I argue that a priori this does not preclude responsiveness to the mean party supporter position. It only tells us that the dispersion of party supporters preferences is not informative when we focus on the non-economic dimension.

position, assessing to which parts of the electorates parties will respond as immigration becomes more salient will be relegated to the empirical analysis.

### 2.3. Data and methods

The data used in the empirical analysis comes from several data sources: the European Social Survey (ESS, waves 1 to 8)<sup>3</sup>, the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP)<sup>4</sup>, and the Eurobarometer<sup>5</sup>. The sample includes 137 parties and 65 elections in 24 European countries<sup>6</sup> during the period 2003 – 2017.

#### *Dependent variable*

The *party position on immigration* represents the party's stance on immigration and integration issues as expressed through party manifestos at the national election time. The data to measure parties' stances on immigration comes from the CMP, which contains information on party positions resulting from content analysis and coding of party manifestos (Volkens et al., 2017). Considering that the electoral platforms are the result of intensive discussions within parties, the CMP data should provide reliable indications of parties' policy views (Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014: 819). To operationalize the party position on immigration I use, following the approach of Alonso and da Fonseca (2012) and Abou-Chadi (2016), the following CMP categories: per607 (Multiculturalism: positive), per608 (Multiculturalism: negative), per705 (Underprivileged minority groups), per601 (National way of life: positive), per605 (Law and order: positive). The party position is computed as indicated in the following equation<sup>7</sup>:

$$\text{Party position on immigration} = \frac{(\text{per607} + \text{per705} - \text{per608} - \text{per601} - \text{per605})}{(\text{per607} + \text{per705} + \text{per608} + \text{per601} + \text{per605})} \quad (1)$$

<sup>3</sup> Data available at: <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>.

<sup>4</sup> CMP Version 2017b. Data available at: <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>.

<sup>5</sup> Accessed from <http://zcat.gesis.org/webview/>. The following Eurobarometer surveys have been used: 57.2, 59.1, 60.1, 61, 62.0, 63.4, 64.2, 65.2, 65.3, 66.1, 66.3, 67.2, 68.1, 69.2, 71.1, 71.3, 72.4, 73.4, 74.2, 75.3, 76.3, 77.3, 78.1, 79.3, 80.1, 81.4, 82.3, 83.1, 84.3, 86.2, and 87.3.

<sup>6</sup> Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom.

<sup>7</sup> Abou-Chadi (2016) used this operationalization in a robustness check, except that it is oppositely signed.

The dependent variable takes values from -1 to +1, with lower values corresponding to more restrictive stances on immigration. Table A1 in the Appendix displays the summary statistics for the variables used in the empirical analysis.

### *Key independent variables*

The *overall public opinion* is operationalised as the mean voter preferences and computed per country per election. The *opinion of the party support base* is operationalised as the mean party supporter's preferences and computed per country, per election and per party<sup>8</sup>. For this analysis, the two public opinion variables are always measured at the most recent time-point prior to the relevant election. Six ESS questionnaire items are used to measure respondents' preferences on immigration. Three of them tap into attitudes regarding the admission of migrants, based on their race or ethnic group and country of origin, and the remaining three measure individual perceptions about the economic and cultural impact of immigrants on the host country<sup>9</sup>. A factor analysis shows that there is one single factor (latent dimension) that underlies the answers to the six items (see the Appendix, Tables A2 and A3). I use this factor (see Pardos-Prado et al., 2014: 856) to build the measures of overall public opinion and the opinion of the party support base as indicated above. In both cases lower values indicate a more anti-immigrant sentiment. In order to identify the party support base, I rely on party identification. The party identification has been obtained with the following ESS question "*Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?*". Participants that answered positively were asked to indicate which one.

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<sup>8</sup> In order to have more reliable indications of the opinion of the party support base, I only retain parties that have at least 10 supporters in the ESS datasets.

<sup>9</sup> The following ESS question items are used: (1) allow many/few immigrants of same race/ethnic group as majority, (2) allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority, (3) allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe, (4) immigration bad or good for country's economy, (5) country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants, and (6) immigrants make country worse or better place to live. The first three items have four-points answer categories going from "allow none" to "allow many". The answers to the remaining items are on a 0-10 scale, where 0 corresponds to immigration being seen as bad for country's economy, respectively undermining the country's cultural life and making the country a worse place to live.

The operationalisation of the dependent and the above-mentioned independent variables in terms of levels rather than changes between two consecutive elections is mainly intended to ensure a sufficiently large sample size, notably if we consider that the models include double and triple interactions. Computing the public opinion variables in terms of change instead of levels would reduce the sample size by about 44% because of the reduced number of time-points present in the data (see the Appendix, Tables A10-A12, for robustness checks with the variables computed as the change between two consecutive elections). This empirical approach is also in line with other studies on party responsiveness to public opinion (Arnold et al.; 2012; Hellström, 2008; Sanders and Toka, 2013; Steenbergen et al., 2007, see also Achen, 1978).

Furthermore, the *immigration issue salience* has been computed on the basis of Eurobarometer data. Like the public opinion variables, it is measured at the most recent time-point prior to the corresponding election<sup>10</sup>. For this variable, I relied on the following ‘most important issue’ question contained in the Eurobarometer survey: “What do you think are the two most important issues facing (our country) at the moment?”. The salience of the immigration issue has been calculated for each election as the mean across all survey respondents, which corresponds to the percentage of respondents indicating immigration as one of the two most important issues for the country.

Regarding the niche vs. mainstream distinction, I follow the approach adopted in earlier research and classify parties belonging to the Social-Democratic, Liberal, Christian-Democratic and Conservative party families as mainstream parties (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011). I categorise as niche the environmental, radical right – nationalist parties and the communist parties (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Meguid, 2005), as well as the ethnic-regional and special issue parties (Meyer and Miller, 2015)<sup>11</sup>. The assignation of parties into party families is directly provided by the CMP. A dummy variable takes the value 0 for mainstream and 1 for niche parties.

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<sup>10</sup> It was ensured that for each election the salience data came from a Eurobarometer survey whose fieldwork did not coincide with the election date or a period of one month before, corresponding roughly to the electoral campaign.

<sup>11</sup> The analysis performed by Meyer and Miller (2015), although based on the concept of nicheness, confirms that green, special-issue, ethnic-regionalist and nationalist parties have a strong niche profile. Around 42% of parties in the sample are classified as niche parties (see Table A1 in the Appendix). The

In addition, following the most recent developments in the literature on niche parties (Meyer and Miller, 2015), I constructed the party distinctiveness variable, which captures the nicheness of parties on the specific issue of immigration (Meyer and Miller, 2015). While it draws on Meyer and Miller (2015), this measure differs from their approach in that the two authors consider in their index several policy dimensions whereas the measure used in this study focuses on nicheness on a single issue, immigration. This new measure captures thus the nicheness of the immigration-emphasis profile of a party, that is, how different a party's profile is in terms of emphasis on immigration when compared to other parties. In a first step, the party emphasis on immigration was generated, adding up the five CMP categories employed to generate the party position. Afterwards, the distinctiveness measure was constructed by, first, computing for each election the weighted average system emphasis excluding the party in question (where the weights are parties' vote shares) and then taking the difference between the party's emphasis and the weighted average system emphasis. This is expressed formally in equation (2), which is a simplified version of the equation in Meyer and Miller (2015: 262).

$$Distinctiveness_p = \sqrt{(x_p - \bar{X}_{-p})^2} \quad (2)$$

where

$x_p$  denotes the emphasis on immigration of party  $p$ , computed as the sum of the five CMP categories used to compute the party positions, and

$\bar{X}_{-p}$  denotes the average party system emphasis, computed excluding the focal party  $p$  and weighting party emphasis by the party vote share.

Finally, this score was transformed by computing the distance between a party's distinctiveness and the weighted average system distinctiveness (which was computed in

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number may appear high, but note that, compared to other studies (e.g. Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011), this chapter also classifies as niche, as already mentioned, ethnic-regional and special issue parties. Removing these two party families would have brought the percentage of niche parties to about 35% and would have implied removing from our sample parties such as the Belgian Flemish Interest (VB) or the Alternative for Germany (AfD), which have mobilised on the immigration issue. Given the above-mentioned study considering the two party families as niche, they have been kept as such throughout the analysis. Note also that a threshold has been already applied, by keeping in the sample parties with at least 10 ESS supporters (see note 8). This filtering has affected small parties, and to a larger extent niche parties.

a similar way as the weighted average system emphasis). Using this transformed measure, along the lines of a standardized measure of niche-ness in Meyer and Miller's (2015) terms, is more meaningful when focusing on differences between parties within party systems rather than across party systems (Meyer and Miller, 2015: 262). This is expressed formally in equation (3) as follows (Meyer and Miller, 2015: 263):

$$\overline{Distinctiveness}_p = Distinctiveness_p - \mu_{-p} \quad (3)$$

where

$\mu_{-p}$  denotes the weighted average party system distinctiveness, weighted by party vote shares, excluding focal party  $p$ .

As opposed to the dichotomous distinction between niche and mainstream parties, which refers to a general and time-invariant trait of parties, the distinctiveness variable is time-variant as it was calculated for each party-election combination. Higher values on this variable correspond to parties with a more distinct immigration-emphasis profile, whereas lower values correspond to parties with a more mainstream profile<sup>12</sup>.

As *control variables*, I include the distance, in months, between the date of election and the median month of the corresponding ESS interviews.

Given the structure of the data, I estimate a multilevel model with two levels, that is, observations nested in parties. To account for potential correlation of party positions in the same election, I include robust standard errors (for a similar technique, see e.g. Greene, 2016: 816). In line with previous literature I also include the lagged dependent variable (Adams et al., 2006, 2009; Ezrow et al., 2011; Spoon and Klüver, 2014). Controlling for the lagged party position and ensuring at the same time that public preferences and issue salience are measured prior to the election date helps to lessen endogeneity concerns whereby party positions actually influence public preferences and issue salience. Note also that, although the inclusion of the lagged dependent variable

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<sup>12</sup> Unlike Meyer and Miller (2015), parties whose vote share was lower than 5% were equally considered. Parties classified as agrarian under CMP were not kept in the sample to ensure the same number of observations throughout the analyses.



points implicitly to modelling the effect of the independent variables on *change* in party positions, the purpose is actually to evaluate to what extent the remaining variation in the party position (that is, after having accounted for lagged values) is due to the other variables in the model (for a similar argument, see Hartevelt et al., 2017). The model for testing hypotheses 1 and 2, respectively 5, has the following specification:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Party position}_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Public opinion}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Party base opinion}_{ij} + & (4) \\
 & \beta_3 \text{Niche}_j + \beta_4 \text{Niche}_j \times \text{Public opinion}_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_5 \text{Niche}_j \times \text{Party base opinion}_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_6 \text{Lagged party position}_{ij} + \zeta_j + e_{ij}
 \end{aligned}$$

where

$\zeta_j$  represents the random effect at party level, and  $e_{ij}$  is a residual error term.

To test hypothesis 5, the dummy variable *niche* is replaced in equations (4) and (5) by the continuous variable *distinctiveness*, computed as shown in equation (3).

The model for testing hypotheses 3 and 4 has the following specification:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Party position}_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Public opinion}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Party base opinion}_{ij} + & (5) \\
 & \beta_3 \text{Niche}_j + \beta_4 \text{Immigration salience}_{ij} + \beta_5 \text{Niche}_j \times \\
 & \text{Public opinion}_{ij} + \beta_6 \text{Niche}_j \times \text{Party base opinion}_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_7 \text{Immigration salience}_{ij} \times \text{Public opinion}_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_8 \text{Immigration salience}_{ij} \times \text{Party base opinion}_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_9 \text{Niche}_j \times \text{Immigration salience}_{ij} + \beta_{10} \text{Niche}_j \times \\
 & \text{Immigration salience}_{ij} \times \text{Public opinion}_{ij} + \beta_{11} \text{Niche}_j \times \\
 & \text{Immigration salience}_{ij} \times \text{Party base opinion}_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_{12} \text{Lagged party position}_{ij} + \zeta_j + e_{ij} .
 \end{aligned}$$

## 2.4. Results

The dynamics at play are a combination of cross-party (and cross-country) dynamics, on the one hand, and within party over time dynamics, on the other hand. The focus of this

study is on the second component, that is, the within-party changes in positions and the extent to which they depend on changes over time in public preferences and issue salience, accounting at the same time for the mediating role of party characteristics.

For this reason, the cross-sectional and the longitudinal relationships between party positions and the predictors of interest need to be demarcated. Hence, I differentiate the within (longitudinal) and the between (cross-section) components by computing for the overall public opinion and for issue salience a country mean and deviations from the country mean, and for the partisan constituency opinion a party mean and deviations from the party mean (see Fairbrother, 2014). This allows distinguishing the cross-sectional from the longitudinal associations between party positions, on the one hand, and public preferences and issue salience, on the other hand (Fairbrother, 2014: 124). Therefore, the first element taps into enduring cross-party, respectively cross-country, influences of the three independent variables of interest on party positions on immigration. The second element captures how variations over time in these variables affect parties' immigration stances.

Model 1 tests hypotheses 1 and 2. It includes as covariates the two public opinion variables (decomposed as explained above), the 'niche' dummy variable, issue salience (decomposed as explained above), the lagged dependent variable and the control variables. In addition, it includes two interaction terms between the 'niche' dummy variable and the terms capturing the variation over time in the two public opinion variables. The cross-sectional and the longitudinal components of the public opinion and the issue salience variables are included together in the models since both could potentially affect the party positions. Model 2 incorporates, in addition, interaction terms between the variations over time in the two public opinion variables, the 'niche' dummy and the variation over time in issue salience, in order to test hypotheses 3 and 4.

The results are reported in Table 1. In model 1, the coefficient of the country-mean component of the overall public opinion is negative and statistically significant at  $p < 0.1$ . This suggests that variation across party systems in the mean voter preferences is negatively associated with differences in the party positions on immigration. More

specifically, in party systems with a more pro-immigrant public, parties tend to adopt more restrictive positions on immigration. Notice that, because of this study's focus on the effects of the over-time variations in citizens' preferences on party positions and how they may be conditional on party characteristics, the model does not include interaction terms between the country-mean components of public opinion and the 'niche' dummy. Therefore, this effect is regardless of party characteristics. On the other hand, the coefficient of the variable corresponding to the variation over time in the overall public opinion and that of the interaction term between this variable and the 'niche' dummy are not statistically significant. To facilitate the interpretation of the interaction terms and the fully specified effects, Figure 1 (left-hand side plot) graphically displays the average marginal effects of the changes over time in the overall public opinion by party type (point estimates with 90 per cent confidence intervals). Although the marginal effects are positive in the case of mainstream parties, and slightly below zero in the case of niche parties, they are not statistically significant. Figure 2 shows the predictive margins based on model 1 in Table 1. It shows that a shift over time of two standard deviations in the overall public opinion has no effect on the position of niche parties, but it appears to have a slightly positive effect on mainstream parties so that they display more pro-immigrant stances when the overall public becomes more positive over time. However, as Figure 1 indicates, this is not statistically significant.

Regarding the effect of the preferences of the party support base, the results suggest that cross-party differences in the mean party supporters' preferences do explain differences in parties' immigration stances. Parties that have a more liberal party support base tend to adopt more pro-immigrant positions. However, in terms of variations over time, parties do not appear to respond to changes in the preferences of their party support base, as indicated by the lack of statistical significance displayed by the term corresponding to the variation over time in the partisan constituency preferences and by the interaction term with the 'niche' dummy.

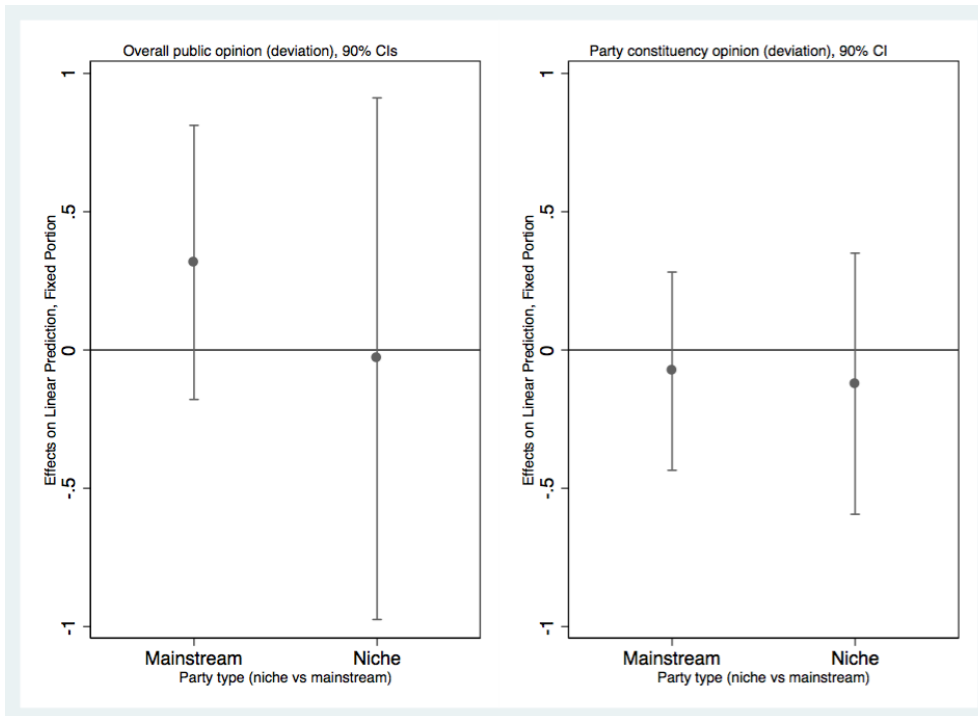
**Table 1.** Party responsiveness to overall public opinion and party constituency opinion

	Model 1		Model 2	
Overall public opinion (mean)	-0.19+	(0.10)	-0.19+	(0.10)
Overall public opinion (dev)	0.32	(0.30)	0.24	(0.32)
Party constituency opinion (mean)	0.38***	(0.06)	0.38***	(0.06)
Party constituency opinion (dev)	-0.08	(0.22)	-0.06	(0.22)
Niche	0.16***	(0.04)	0.15**	(0.05)
Niche x Overall public opinion (dev)	-0.35	(0.63)	-0.21	(0.70)
Niche x Party constituency opinion (dev)	-0.05	(0.36)	-0.12	(0.40)
Lagged party position	0.43***	(0.07)	0.42***	(0.07)
Saliency (mean)	0.83*	(0.33)	0.84*	(0.34)
Saliency (dev)	-0.83*	(0.40)	-0.44	(0.58)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)
Niche x Saliency (dev)			-0.93	(0.92)
Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			0.23	(3.40)
Niche x Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			5.34	(7.89)
Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-5.35	(3.47)
Niche x Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			3.40	(7.87)
Constant	-0.33***	(0.07)	-0.34***	(0.07)
<i>Random effects parameters</i>				
Party (sd)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Residual (sd)	0.38***	(0.02)	0.38***	(0.02)
N	310		310	
N clusters	137		137	
AIC	314.41		321.37	
BIC	366.72		392.37	
ll	-143.20		-141.69	

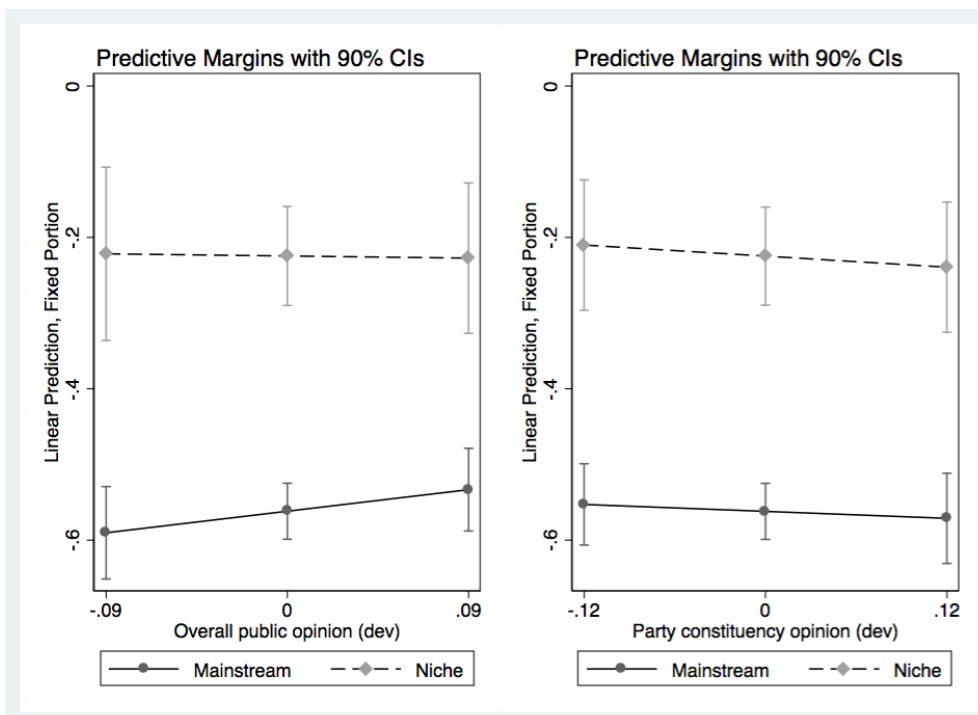
Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. AIC: Akaike's information criterion, BIC: Bayesian information criterion, ll: Log pseudolikelihood. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Overall public opinion and saliency variables: centred on country. Party constituency opinion: centred on party.

To ease the interpretation of the fully specified effects, Figure 1 (right-hand side plot) displays the average marginal effects of the changes over time in the partisan constituency opinion by party type. Although the marginal effects are negative for both mainstream and niche parties, they are not statistically significant. Unsurprisingly, both components of the salience variable are statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$ . Parties tend to adopt more pro-immigration positions in countries where the immigration issue is typically more salient. However, in terms of variations over time, parties tend to become more sceptical of immigration when issue salience increases over time. To sum-up, both niche and mainstream parties appear to be unresponsive to changes over time in party supporters' preferences (see also Figure 2, the right-hand side plot, which shows the predictive margins as a function of a shift of two standard deviations in the party support base opinion). In addition, parties, notably those under the 'niche' heading, fail to respond to shifts over time in the mean voter preferences. In the case of mainstream parties, the effect of the changes over time in the mean voter preferences is positive (which is in line with Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011), but it is rather small in magnitude and not statistically significant. More than anything, parties appear to match via their immigration stances the stable cross-party differences in the preferences of their partisan constituencies.

Model 2 tests hypotheses 3 and 4. The coefficient of cross-country differences in salience and the overall public opinion, as well as the cross-party differences in party supporters' preferences are statistically significant at conventional levels and maintain the sign as in model 1. However, neither the main effects of the variables of interest (that is, the variations over time in mean voter and mean party supporter preferences), nor the interaction terms with the 'niche' dummy and the variation over time in issue salience are statistically significant. Figure 3 shows the predicted party positions when the longitudinal variation in the mean voter preferences is set at one standard deviation below the mean, respectively above the mean, in a scenario of low salience (longitudinal component set at one standard deviation below the mean), and high salience respectively (one standard deviation above the mean).



**Figure 1.** Average marginal effects of changes over time in the overall public opinion (left-hand side) and the party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type, based on Model 1 in Table 1 (point estimates with 90% confidence intervals)

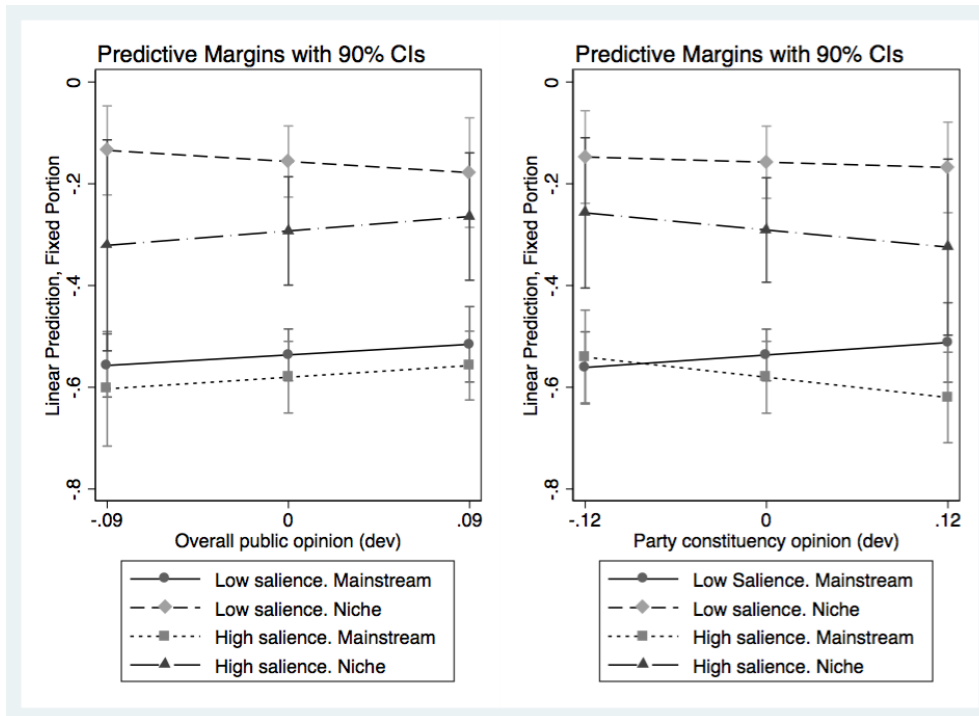


**Figure 2.** Predictive margins (with 90% confidence intervals) of party positions as a function of changes over time in the overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side), by party type, based on Model 1 in Table 1

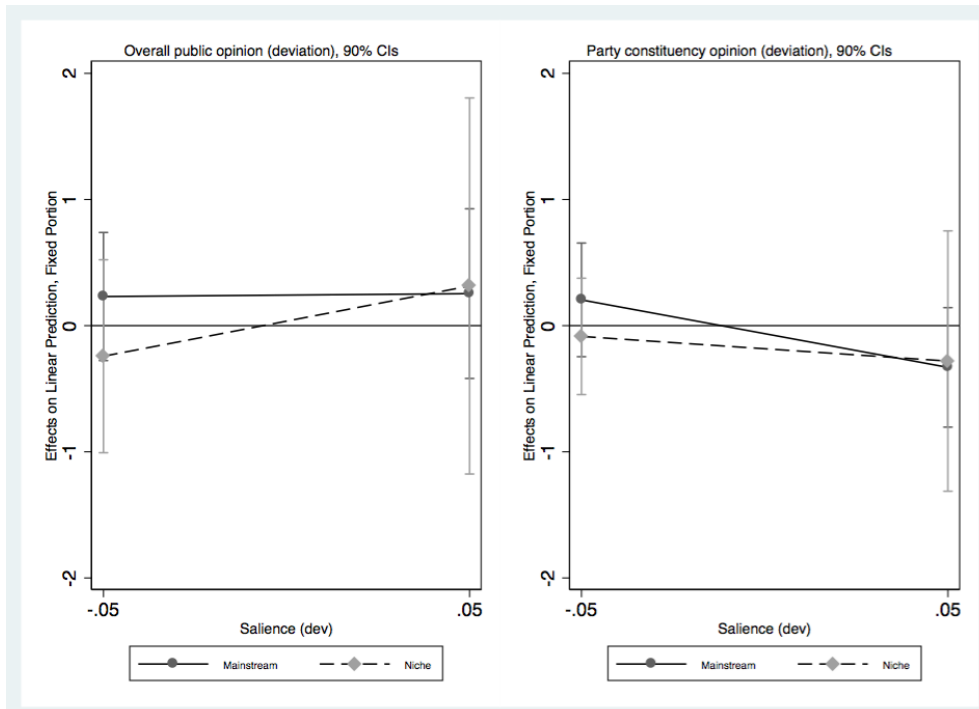
Regardless of salience levels, mainstream parties appear to move slightly in a positive direction when the overall public opinion moves in a positive direction, similarly to the dynamics in Figure 2. So do niche parties in a context of high salience, but they appear to move in the opposite direction under a scenario of low salience. However, all these shifts are very small in magnitude. On the other hand, the only parties that appear to slightly track changes in the preferences of their supporters are the mainstream parties under a scenario of low salience (see the right-hand side graph in Figure 3). To better grasp the full effects, Figure 4 graphs the average marginal effects of the changes over time in mean voter and mean party supporter preferences by party type and levels of salience as described above. None of the marginal effects are statistically significant, which suggests that issue salience does not have a robust moderating role.

The coefficient of the lagged party position is positive and statistically significant in both models, as is the coefficient of the niche dummy variable. The previous party position and being a niche party appear to matter when parties adopt the current position on the immigration issue. The statistical significance of the niche dummy implies that, in our sample, niche parties tend to adopt more liberal positions on immigration than mainstream parties. This is a consequence of including together in the niche category different party families as, for instance, the communists, the Greens or radical right parties.

Turning to the models with the distinctiveness measure which are reported in Table 2, the main difference compared to model 1 in Table 1 is that the cross-country differences in the overall public opinion are not statistically significant anymore, although the coefficient maintains its sign. The effect of the cross-party differences in mean party supporters' preferences continues to be positive and statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ . This confirms the results from models with the 'niche' dummy, indicating that parties appear to adopt more liberal positions on immigration where their party support base is more pro-immigrant. Similarly to the findings from Table 1, neither the main effects of the longitudinal variation in mean voter and mean party supporter preferences, nor the interaction terms with the distinctiveness variable are statistically significant at conventional levels.



**Figure 3.** Predictive margins of party positions with 90% confidence intervals as a function of changes over time in the overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side), by party type, and at issue salience (longitudinal component) values of one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on Model 2 in Table 1



**Figure 4.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in the overall public opinion (left-hand side) and the party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type, at issue salience (longitudinal component) set at one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on Model 2 in Table 1



Figure 5 displays the average marginal effects (with 90 per cent confidence intervals) exerted by the variation over time in the mean voter and the mean party supporter preferences on the positions of parties with low distinctiveness (corresponding to a score of -4.3, that is, one standard deviation below the mean), respectively high distinctiveness (corresponding to a score of 4.4, that is, one standard deviation above the mean). The results are almost identical with those in Figure 1 and mirror the findings from models with the niche measure. Although the marginal effect falls short of reaching statistical significance ( $p = 0.109$ ), there are weak signs that parties with low distinctiveness (that is, parties with a more mainstream emphasis profile on the immigration issue) may be more responsive to changes over time in the mean voter preferences.

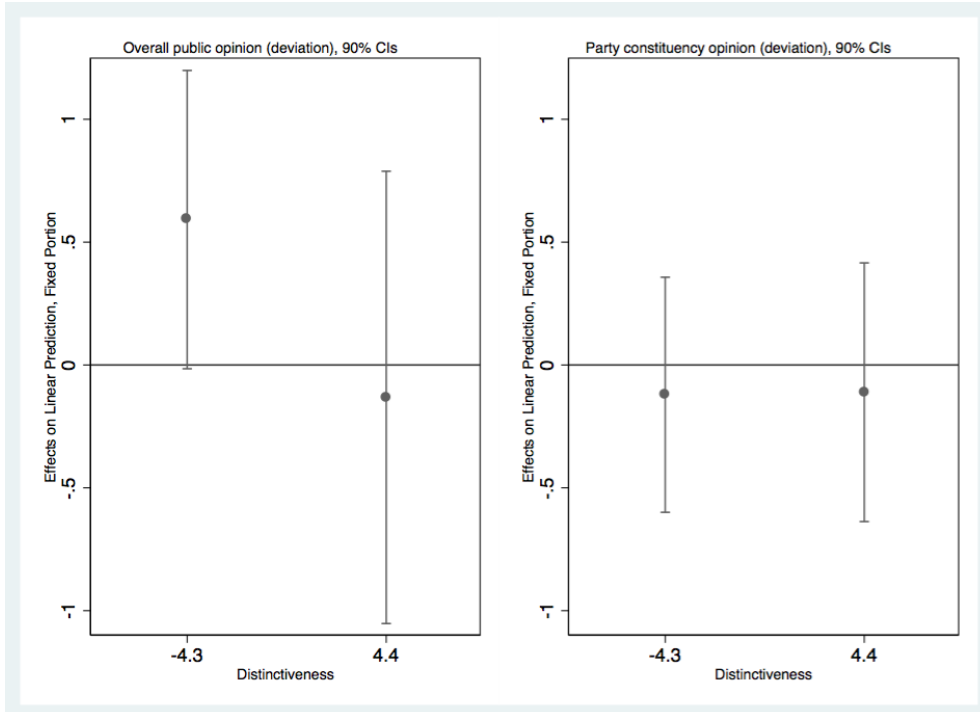
Figure 6 presents the predictive margins of party positions as a function of changes over time in the two public opinion variables of interest, for parties with low, respectively high distinctiveness, based on model 1 in Table 2. It suggests that parties with low distinctiveness (that is, a more mainstream issue emphasis profile) are more sensitive to changes over time in the overall public opinion, shifting in a more liberal direction when the general public moves towards the more pro-immigrant end. The opposite occurs in the case of parties with large distinctiveness, although the shift is very small in magnitude. However, as already shown in Figure 5, the effects are not significant at conventional levels. By contrast, parties do not respond to shifts over time in the preferences of their party supporters, nor are there major differences between niche and mainstream parties.

To sum-up, there is no evidence that parties respond to changes over time in the preferences of their party supporters. There is however strong evidence that parties represent enduring preferences of their party support base (as shown by the statistically significant coefficient of the party-mean component of partisan supporters' preferences). There are also, though weak, signs that parties with low distinctiveness may respond to changes over time in the general public preferences.

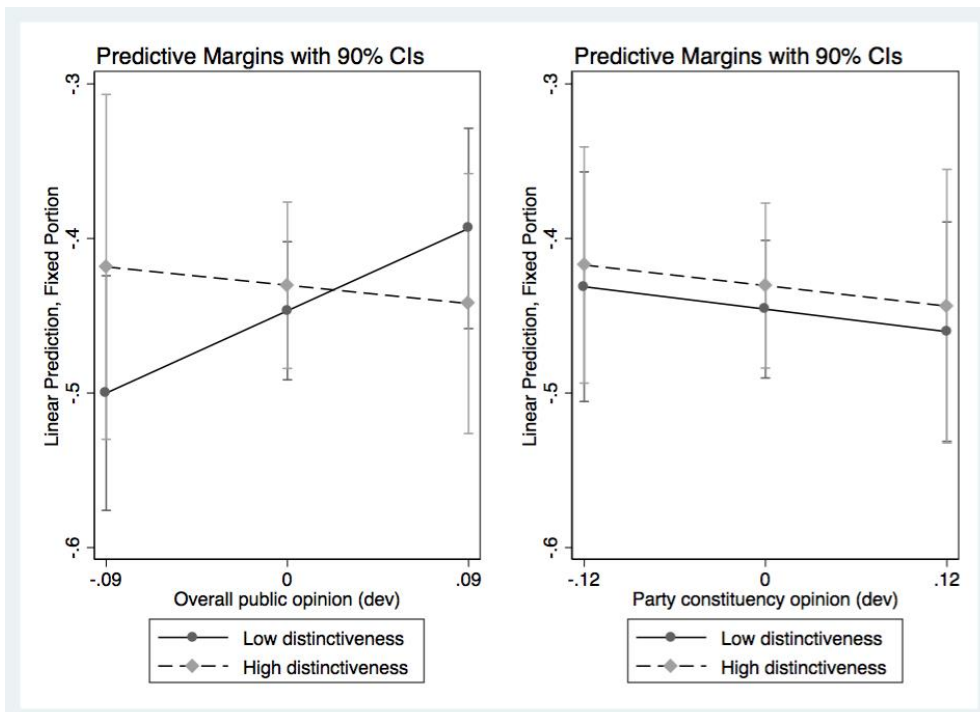
**Table 2.** Party responsiveness to overall public opinion and party constituency opinion

	Model 1		Model 2	
Overall public opinion (mean)	-0.16	(0.10)	-0.16	(0.10)
Overall public opinion (dev)	0.23	(0.30)	0.23	(0.30)
Party constituency opinion (mean)	0.35***	(0.07)	0.35***	(0.07)
Party constituency opinion (dev)	-0.12	(0.18)	-0.08	(0.19)
Distinctiveness	0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Distinctiveness x Overall public opinion (dev)	-0.08	(0.08)	-0.10	(0.09)
Distinctiveness x Party constituency opinion (dev)	0.00	(0.06)	0.01	(0.07)
Lagged party position	0.48***	(0.07)	0.48***	(0.07)
Saliency (mean)	0.75*	(0.36)	0.79*	(0.37)
Saliency (dev)	-0.78+	(0.42)	-0.67	(0.47)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	-0.01***	(0.00)	-0.01***	(0.00)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev)			0.01	(0.13)
Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			4.15	(4.58)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			-0.71	(1.31)
Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-5.98	(4.21)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			1.56	(1.18)
Constant	-0.24***	(0.07)	-0.25***	(0.07)
<i>Random effects parameters</i>				
Party (sd)	0.00	(0.00)	0.00	(0.00)
Residual (sd)	0.39***	(0.02)	0.39***	(0.02)
N	310		310	
N clusters	137		137	
AIC	323.68		330.69	
BIC	376.00		401.68	
ll	-147.84		-146.34	

Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . AIC: Akaike's information criterion, BIC: Bayesian information criterion, ll: Log pseudolikelihood. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Overall public opinion and saliency variables: centred on country mean. Party constituency opinion: centred on party



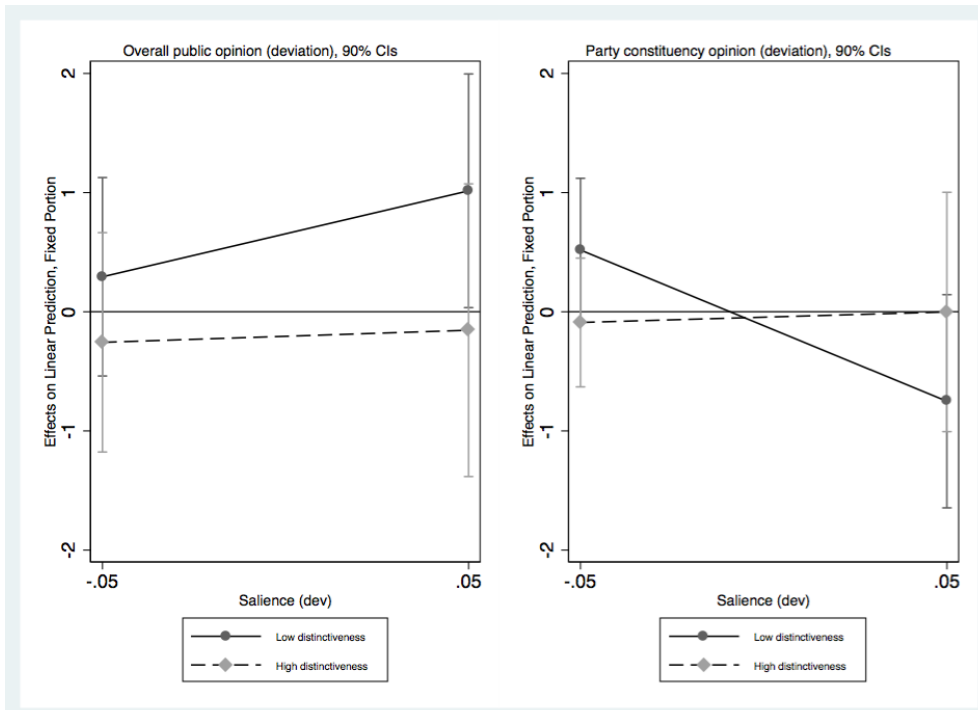
**Figure 5.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party distinctiveness (low distinctiveness: one standard deviation below the mean, -4.3; high distinctiveness: one standard deviation above the mean, 4.4), based on Model 1 in Table 2



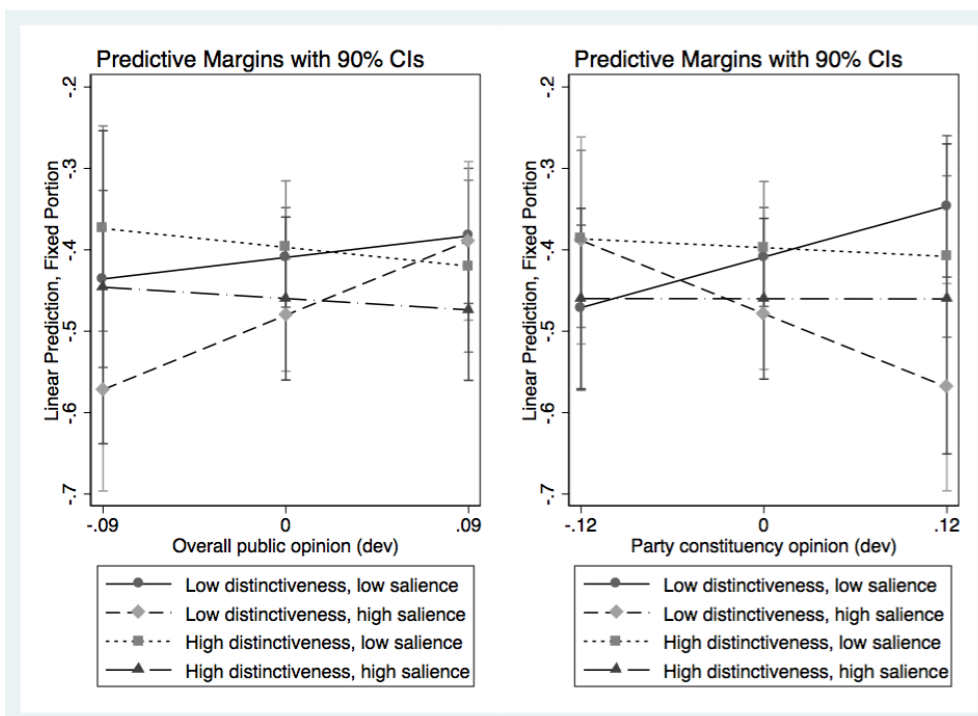
**Figure 6.** Predictive margins with 90% confidence intervals as a function of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party (low distinctiveness: -4.3; high distinctiveness: 4.4), based on Model 1 in Table 2

In model 2 of Table 2, which includes the interaction terms with issue salience, the main effects of the cross-party differences in the mean party supporter preferences maintain the sign and the significance displayed in model 1. As in the corresponding model in Table 1, the effects of the variations over time in the mean voter preferences, salience and the mean party supporter preferences are not statistically significant. Also, the interaction terms introduced here are not statistically significant. In order to better grasp the full effects, Figure 7 reports the average marginal effects of the changes over time in the overall public opinion and partisan constituency opinion for two types of parties (low and high distinctiveness) and two levels of salience (low and high salience, that is, values of the variation over time in salience set at one standard deviation below, respectively above the mean). The overall public opinion exerts a small but positive effect (although not significant) on the position of parties with low distinctiveness. The effect increases and becomes statistically significant at  $p < 0.1$  in the case of high salience. The effect of the overall public opinion on the position of parties with high distinctiveness is negative, regardless of salience levels, but not statically significant. On the other hand, the marginal effects of the shifts in party supporters' preferences are negative, except for parties with low distinctiveness in a context of low salience, but they are not significant at conventional levels.

Figure 8 presents the predictive margins of the dependent variable as a function of changes over time in the two public opinion variables of interest, considering different scenarios (party distinctiveness: low and high, salience: low and high). Parties with low distinctiveness appear to track changes over time in the overall public opinion notably when salience increases. Parties with high distinctiveness appear to move opposite to the mean voter preferences regardless of salience levels, although the movements are very small in magnitude. As to the effects of changes over time in the mean party supporters' preferences, parties appear to move opposite under most scenarios, except for the parties with low distinctiveness in a scenario of low salience. As shown in Figure 7, these changes in party positions are significant only for parties with low distinctiveness in a context of high salience and in response to shifts in the mean voter preferences.



**Figure 7.** Average marginal effects (with 90% confidence intervals) of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (low vs high distinctiveness), at issue salience values set at one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on Model 2 in Table 2



**Figure 8.** Predictive margins with 90% confidence intervals as a function of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party distinctiveness (low distinctiveness: -4.3, high distinctiveness: 4.4), and at issue salience values of one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and one standard deviation above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on Model 2 in Table 2

As robustness check, the analyses have been replicated using two alternative measures of party positions. The first one is based on Alonso and da Fonseca (2012) and is computed by using the five CMP categories employed in the main measure and subtracting negative categories about immigration from the positive ones. Higher scores indicate more pro-immigrant positions. The results using the ‘niche’ dummy confirm that parties mirror in their positions the enduring differences between their partisan supporters’ preferences (see the Appendix, Table A4). Also, in line with findings from Table 1, they appear to adopt stances in contrast with the mean voter position, the point estimate for the country mean of the overall public opinion being negative and significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Marginal effects computed on the basis of models with the interaction terms between the niche dummy and the variation over time in the two public opinion variables replicate findings based on the corresponding model from Table 1, with one main exception (see Figure A1 in the Appendix). The negative effect of the shift over time in party supporters’ preferences on the position of mainstream parties is significant at  $p < 0.01$ , notably when issue salience is high ( $p < 0.001$ , see Figure A2 in the Appendix). Overall, this robustness check does not provide evidence to substantiate the responsiveness of parties to changes over time in the overall public opinion or the party supporters’ opinion, nor does it provide robust evidence of a moderating role of issue salience. The evidence is clearer in the case of mainstream parties, where high issue salience decreases responsiveness to their base. In fact, the effect is negative and significant at  $p < 0.001$ .

Moving on to the models with the distinctiveness measure, the results point to similar dynamics (see the Appendix, Table A5). Compared to the set of analyses including this alternative party position and the niche dummy, the results from these models bear two main differences. When including the distinctiveness measure the negative effect of the variation over time in the mean party supporter preferences on parties with low distinctiveness falls short of reaching statistical significance ( $p = 0.101$ ). In addition, the same occurs in the more exhaustive model including issue salience, where the same effect lacks statistical at all levels of salience (see the Appendix, Figures A3 and A4 right-hand graph). In this model, the negative effect of the shifts in mean voter preferences on parties with high distinctiveness is significant at  $p < 0.1$  (see left-hand graph in Figure A4).

The second alternative measure is based on the main operationalization of party position employed in the study of Abou-Chadi (2016). It is similar to the measure used in the main empirical analysis in this study but relies on two CMP categories only: per607 (positive mentions about multiculturalism) and per608 (negative mentions about multiculturalism). In this case, higher scores indicate more restrictive party positions. The results are to some extent different from those with the measure based on Alonso and da Fonseca (2012) in that the evidence that niche parties move opposite to shifts in their supporters' preferences is stronger ( $p = 0.05$ ), notably when the issue salience is low ( $p = 0.01$ , see Table A6 and the right-hand graph in Figures A5 and A6 in the Appendix). However, these analyses do confirm that parties respond to enduring differences between the mean preferences of partisan constituencies. Similar results are obtained in the models with the distinctiveness variable, with one main exception. The marginal effect of the variation over time in party supporters' mean preferences lacks statistical significance for both parties with low and high distinctiveness (see the Appendix, Table A7 and Figure A7, right-hand graph). However, it becomes again significant at  $p = 0.096$  for parties with high distinctiveness when issue salience is low (see Figure A8 in the Appendix). Overall, these results do not point to party responsiveness to changes in public opinion or party supporters' preferences. Parties do reflect cross-party differences in their partisan constituencies' views.

Additionally, I ran an ordinary least squares regression with party fixed effects. This allows focusing on within-party dynamics. To control for the fact that errors may be correlated between parties that competed in a given election, robust standard errors clustered by election have been included (Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014). The lagged dependent variable was also included to account for potential serial correlation in party positions and for the fact that the electoral manifestos typically build upon the manifestos in the previous election. Due to the inclusion of the party fixed effects, the models focusing on the 'niche' dummy were performed separately for mainstream and for niche parties. In these models (see Table A8 in the Appendix), neither the overall public opinion nor the partisan constituency opinion reach statistical significance. Marginal effects plots (see Appendix, Figure A9) do not show responsiveness to the public opinion variables nor do they point to robust differences in responsiveness between niche and mainstream

parties or by salience levels. Moving on to the distinctiveness characteristic (see Table A9 and Figure A10 in the Appendix), the results indicate that the overall public opinion has a positive and statistically significant effect on parties with low distinctiveness ( $p = 0.089$ ), notably when issue salience is low ( $p = 0.049$ , see Figure A11, left-hand side graph). This mirrors the conclusion from the studies of Adams et al. (2006) and Ezrow et al. (2011) who found that mainstream parties cater to the mean voter preferences. However, the effect diminishes and lacks statistical significance as issue salience increases. It is thus different from the finding in the main analysis which shows that parties with low distinctiveness respond to the mean voter when issue salience is high. An increase in issue salience prompts however a negative effect of the mean party supporter preferences on the position of parties with high distinctiveness ( $p = 0.075$ , see Figure A11, right-hand side graph).

Finally, I ran models whereby the dependent and the main independent variables are operationalised as change between two consecutive elections, instead of levels (see the Appendix, Tables A10-A12). Here, the models focusing on the niche vs mainstream characteristic have treated the two types of parties separately, starting with bivariate relationships and then extending the models to attend to hypotheses H1 to H4 (see Tables A10 and A11). By contrast, the models focusing on the distinctiveness feature start by including both the change in the overall public opinion and that in the party constituency opinion, and then they are extended to include the party characteristic and change in issue salience. They are all estimated using OLS with party fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered by election. The results confirm the lack of responsiveness of niche parties to changes in the preferences of their own party supporters. They also suggest a lack of a statistically significant influence of the change in the overall public opinion on mainstream parties, although in most instances the sign is positive, as expected. Hypothesis H5 is not confirmed either, since the data does not suggest that parties with high distinctiveness are more responsive to changes in the preferences of their supporters (in fact, the coefficients in models 1 and 3 in Table A12 are negative and significant at  $p < 0.1$ ). These results should however be interpreted with caution, because of the low  $N$  for models that also include interaction terms.



## 2.5. Discussion and conclusions

To the best of my knowledge, no major attempt has been previously made to explain under which conditions parties respond to the public opinion on immigration. Existing research addressing the mass-elite linkage focuses for instance on the left-right dimension (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Schumacher et al., 2013) or more specific issues such as the European integration (Arnold et al., 2012; Steenbergen et al., 2007). However, scarce attention has been dedicated to the immigration issue (Dalton, 2017). Since immigration represents a core issue of the cultural dimension of political competition and mobilization on this issue has become increasingly relevant for the political and electoral competition in Europe in the past decades (de Vries et al., 2013; Kriesi et al., 2006), studying this mass-elite linkage is both theoretically and socially relevant.

This study adds to the existing body of work on representation and party responsiveness by exploring whether parties are responsive to the public preferences on immigration, to which parts of the public they are more likely to respond, and the extent to which this depends on party characteristics and issue salience. In terms of party characteristics, this study has focused on the dichotomous classification of parties into niche and mainstream. Building on the concept of nicheness (Meyer and Miller, 2015), it has also proposed a new concept of party distinctiveness. This notion captures how distinct a party's immigration-emphasis profile is, compared to rival parties. Despite similarities, there are also differences between the niche and the distinctiveness feature. The niche characteristic lumps together both parties with little interest in mobilizing on the immigration issue (e.g. communist parties) and parties with a clear interest in this issue (e.g. radical right parties). By contrast, distinctiveness is related to party attention to issues that are at the core of a party's identity, which prompts parties to emphasise the issue and clearly communicate to voters their policy views. The second characteristic has therefore clear advantages when studying party responsiveness to public preferences on a specific issue.

The results from the main analyses suggest that parties take account of the preferences of their party support base since cross-party differences in immigration stances reflect the

differences across partisan constituencies in the attitudes toward immigration. However, parties do not appear to respond to variation over time in their supporters' views. There is weak evidence that parties with low distinctiveness, and potentially the mainstream parties, may respond to shifts over time in mean voter preferences, which is in line with findings from Adams et al. (2006) and Ezrow et al. (2011).

The lack of niche party responsiveness to public preferences revealed in this study raises the possibility that this finding is due to the fact that niche parties actually influence public views rather than responding to them. This would be in line with evidence that niche parties, such as radical right and Green parties, cue their supporters who then adopt views on immigration and multiculturalism that are in line with those of their preferred parties. Such cueing effect is weaker in the case of mainstream parties (Harteveld et al., 2017). The evidence is not sufficiently robust to substantiate the predicted moderating role of issue salience. In terms of future research, upcoming studies should investigate the implications of these findings for citizens' satisfaction with democracy (Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011; Reher, 2015, 2016).

In a recent article, Dalton (2017) suggests, based on data for party positions and voters' views at the 2014 European Parliament elections, that on cultural issues, such as immigration, parties respond to the preferences of their supporters. My study goes beyond by exploring not only EP elections in a cross-sectional study, but national elections in a cross-country and longitudinal perspective. It also goes beyond by exploring not only whether parties respond to their voters but also the extent to which they respond to the mean voter preferences and the degree to which this may be influenced by party characteristics and issue salience. The results to which this study points confirm that parties reflect the preferences of their support base, as Dalton (2017) finds. However, in addition, this study explicitly models party responsiveness to changes over time in public preferences.

Of course, this study also presents limitations. First, it cannot be excluded that parties actually influence the overall public opinion and the preferences of their supporters, or the salience of the immigration issue. It has been attempted in this study to address

endogeneity and reverse causality issues by making sure that the independent variables are always measured before the party positions. Also, the introduction of the lagged dependent variable had the objective to alleviate these concerns and potential omitted variables bias (Wlezien and Soroka, 2012: 1419). Second, this study has not considered additional party features likely to have an impact on party responsiveness, such as the party organization (Schumacher et al., 2013). Future research will benefit from extending the analyses to incorporate these additional factors.

These findings have major importance, as they show that going beyond the traditional left-right dimension and focusing on specific issues has the potential to bring new insights into the research on party responsiveness. Future studies could go beyond the usage of party manifestos and include policies, parliamentary questions, speeches and media statements of party leaders and others to uncover the dynamics unfolding in the inter-elections periods.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Summary statistics

	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	N
Immigration position	-0.44	0.55	-1	1	310
Public opinion (constituency)	0.12	0.50	-1.38	1.43	310
Party mean	0.12	0.49	-1.13	1.25	310
Party deviation	-0.00	0.12	-0.42	0.37	310
Distinctiveness	0.03	4.37	-12.83	27.37	310
<i>Election-level variables</i>					
Public opinion (overall)	-0.04	0.36	-0.96	0.74	65
Country mean	-0.04	0.35	-0.85	0.69	65
Country deviation	-0.00	0.09	-0.33	0.23	65
Saliency	0.10	0.09	0.00	0.39	65
Country mean	0.10	0.07	0.00	0.29	65
Country deviation	-0.00	0.05	-0.11	0.23	65
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	12	7.59	1	39	65
<i>Party-level variables</i>					
Party type (niche vs mainstream)	0.42	0.50	0	1	137



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**Table A2.** Factor analysis/correlation (method: principal-component factors)

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Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion of explained variance
Factor1	3.84	0.64
Factor2	0.92	0.15
Factor3	0.39	0.06
Factor4	0.36	0.06
Factor5	0.31	0.05
Factor6	0.19	0.03

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*Number of obs. = 292720*

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Note: factor analysis done on ESS (waves 1-8) observations.

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**Table A3.** Factor loadings

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Variable	Factor1
Allow many/few immigrants of same race/ethnic group as majority	0.78
Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority	0.86
Allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe	0.82
Immigration bad or good for country's economy	0.77
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	0.78
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0.79

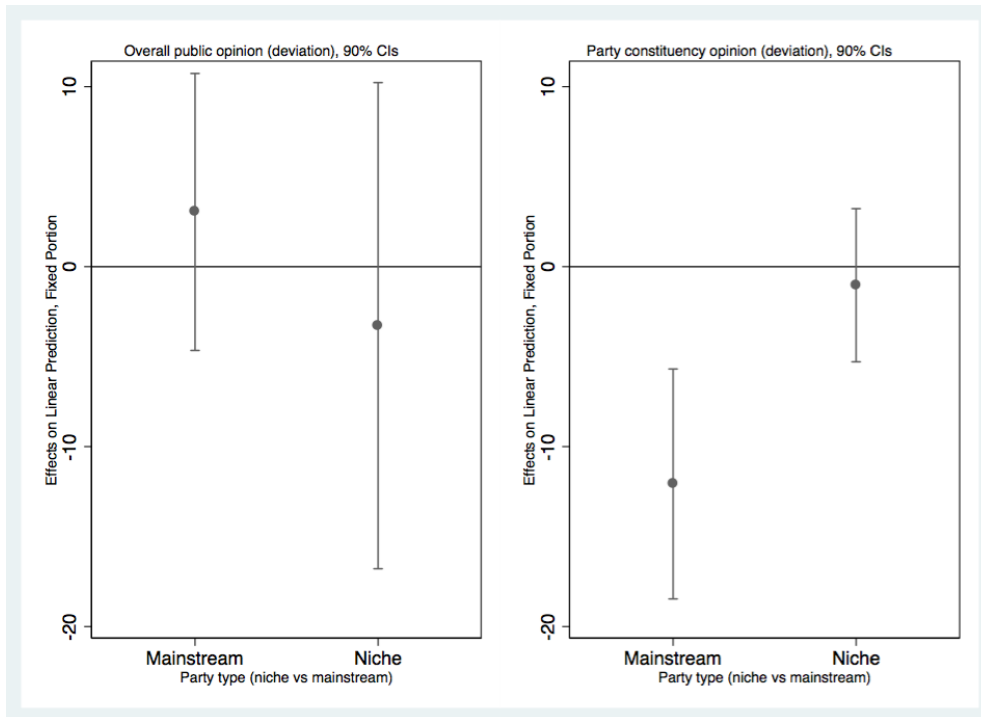
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Note: Since the scale of the first three variables and that of the remaining three variables are in opposite direction, the direction of the scale for the first three variables has been reversed.

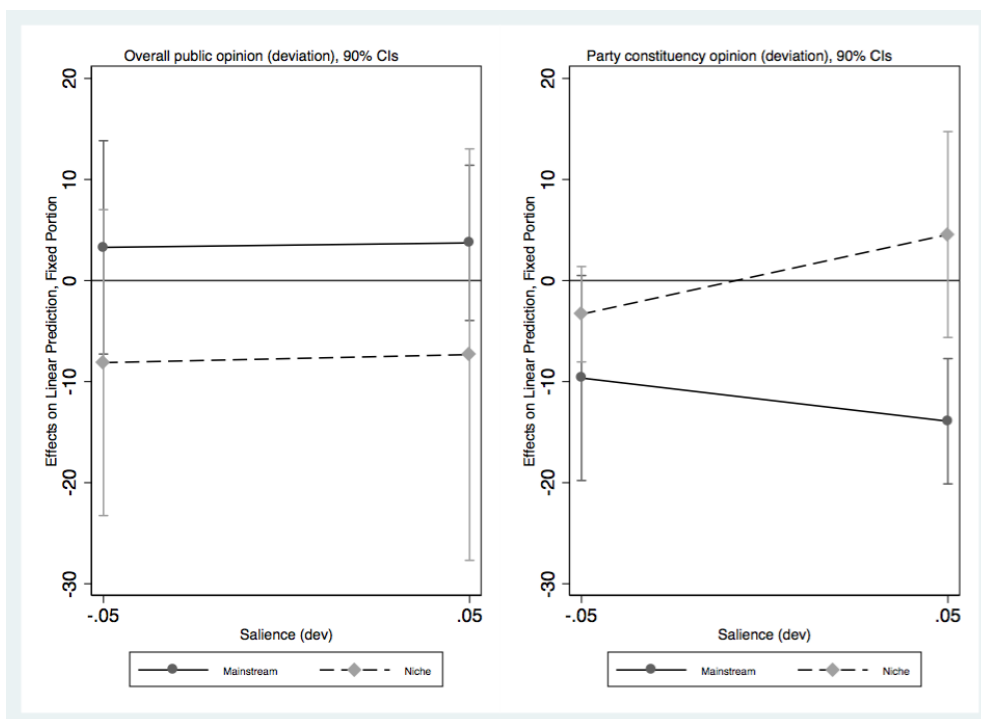
**Table A4.** Party responsiveness with alternative operationalisation of party position (Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Overall public opinion (mean)	-5.56**	(1.78)	-5.55**	(1.75)
Overall public opinion (dev)	3.04	(4.68)	3.51	(4.94)
Party constituency opinion (mean)	7.57***	(1.53)	7.60***	(1.52)
Party constituency opinion (dev)	-12.08**	(3.88)	-11.78**	(4.16)
Niche	-0.29	(0.82)	-0.39	(0.83)
Niche x Overall public opinion (dev)	-6.32	(9.34)	-11.23	(11.55)
Niche x Party constituency opinion (dev)	11.04*	(4.73)	12.39*	(5.68)
Lagged party position	0.47***	(0.09)	0.48***	(0.09)
Saliency (mean)	0.76	(5.60)	0.56	(5.55)
Saliency (dev)	-10.16*	(4.17)	-8.50	(7.33)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	-0.11*	(0.05)	-0.11*	(0.05)
Niche x Saliency (dev)			-8.44	(9.94)
Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			4.47	(53.40)
Niche x Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			3.48	(87.84)
Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-42.78	(59.41)
Niche x Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			121.61	(82.88)
Constant	-1.65	(1.05)	-1.60	(1.05)
<i>Random effects parameters</i>				
Party (sd)	1.56	(2.05)	1.39	(3.07)
Residual (sd)	3.88***	(0.84)	3.91***	(1.09)
N	173		173	
N clusters	93		93	
AIC	1012.35		1020.41	
BIC	1056.50		1080.32	
ll	-492.18		-491.20	

Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . AIC: Akaike's information criterion, BIC: Bayesian information criterion, ll: Log pseudolikelihood. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Overall public opinion and saliency variables: centred on country mean. Party constituency opinion: centred on party



**Figure A1.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type, based on model 1 in Table A4

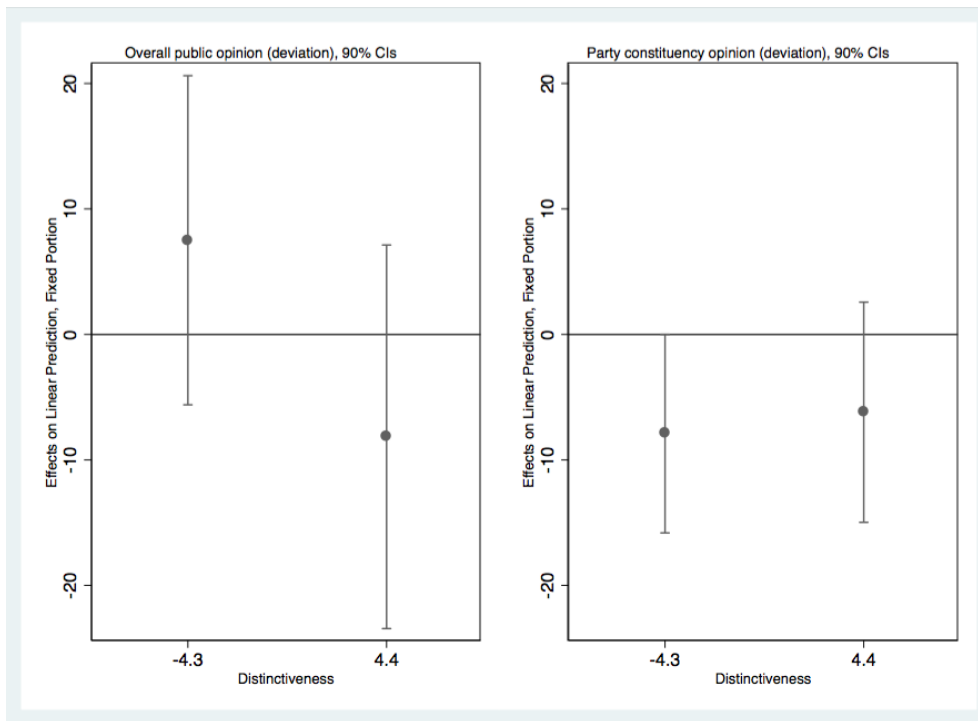


**Figure A2.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type and issue salience set at one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on model 2 in Table A4

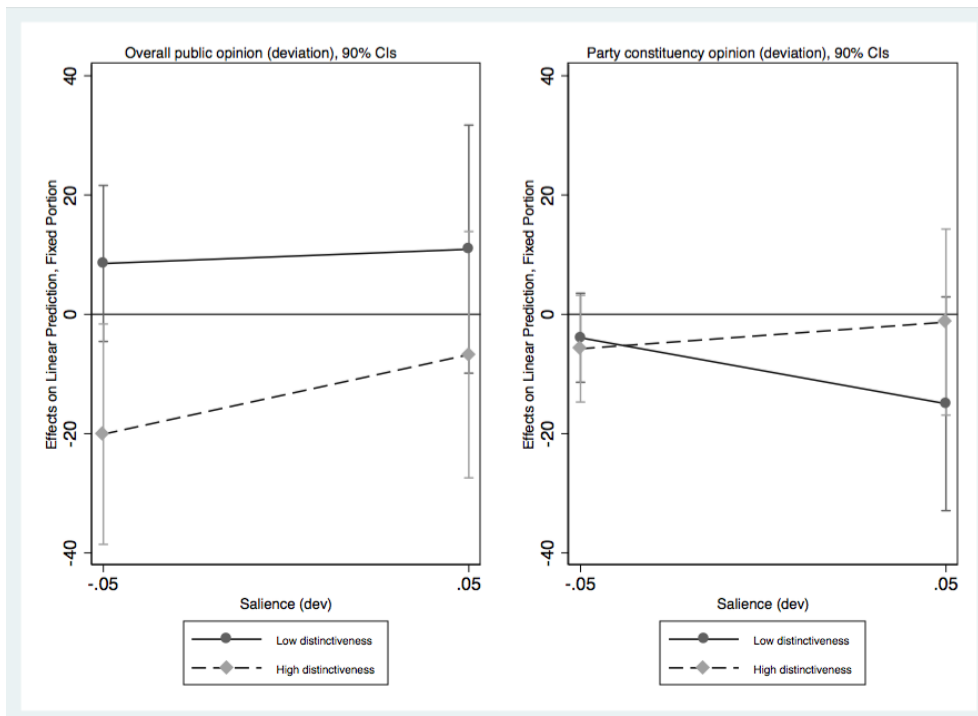
**Table A5.** Party responsiveness with alternative operationalisation of party position (Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Overall public opinion (mean)	-5.18**	(1.62)	-5.81***	(1.74)
Overall public opinion (dev)	-0.24	(4.11)	-1.72	(4.27)
Party constituency opinion (mean)	6.95***	(1.33)	7.51***	(1.40)
Party constituency opinion (dev)	-7.06**	(2.58)	-6.53**	(2.40)
Distinctiveness	-0.07	(0.13)	-0.08	(0.13)
Distinctiveness x Overall public opinion (dev)	-1.80	(1.75)	-2.66	(2.02)
Distinctiveness x Party constituency opinion (dev)	0.20	(1.01)	0.68	(1.31)
Lagged party position	0.48***	(0.08)	0.41***	(0.09)
Saliency (mean)	1.32	(5.22)	2.07	(5.52)
Saliency (dev)	-10.62*	(4.61)	-12.28*	(4.97)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	-0.12*	(0.05)	-0.12*	(0.05)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev)			-1.56	(1.68)
Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			77.96*	(34.92)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			12.56	(24.41)
Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-33.93	(38.66)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			17.84	(21.90)
Constant	-1.64	(1.04)	-2.21*	(1.08)
<i>Random effects parameters</i>				
Party (sd)	0.97	(2.29)	1.78	(1.93)
Residual (sd)	4.04***	(0.68)	3.75***	(0.88)
N	173		173	
N clusters	93		93	
AIC	1011.74		1018.36	
BIC	1055.89		1078.27	
ll	-491.87		-490.18	

Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . AIC: Akaike's information criterion, BIC: Bayesian information criterion, ll: Log pseudolikelihood. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Overall public opinion and saliency variables: centred on country. Party constituency opinion: centred on party



**Figure A3.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (low vs high distinctiveness), based on model 1 in Table A5

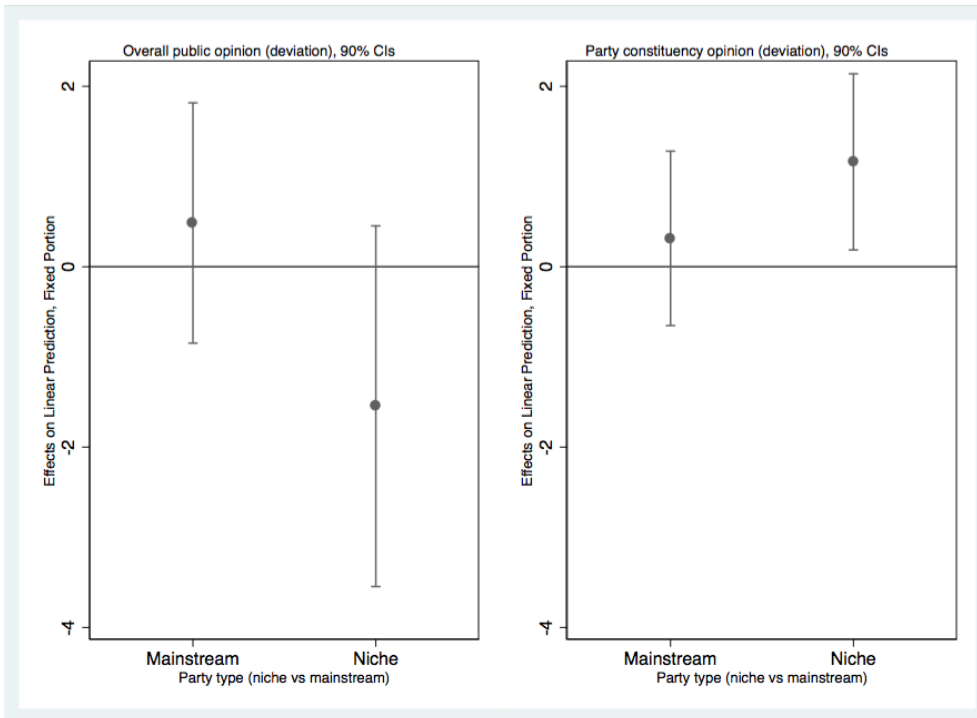


**Figure A4.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (low vs high distinctiveness) and issue salience set at one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on model 2 in Table A5

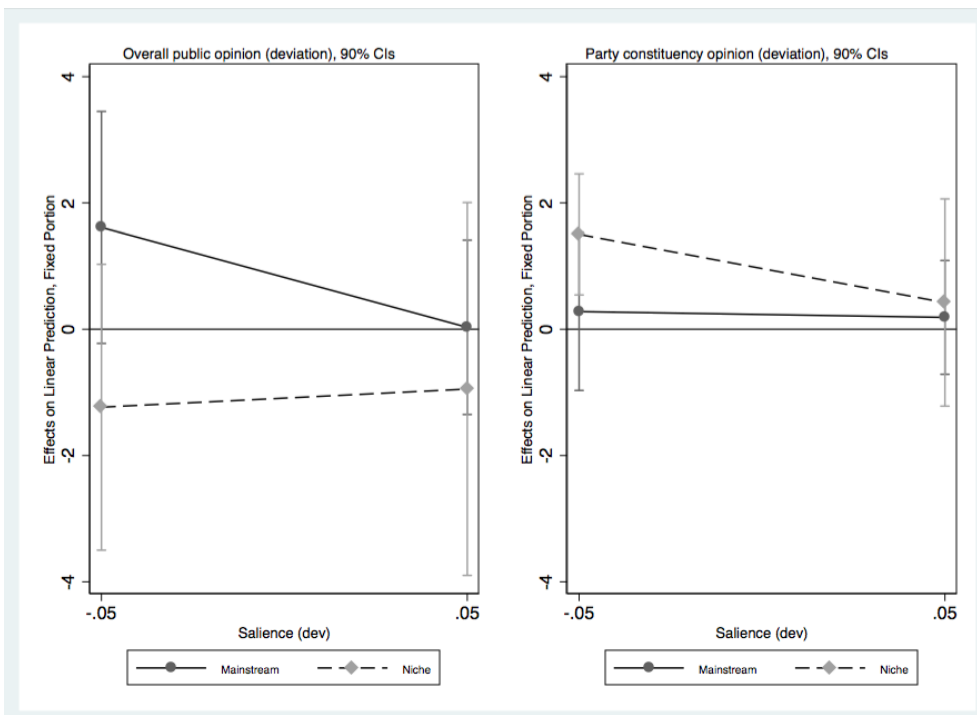
**Table A6.** Party responsiveness with alternative operationalisation of party position (Abou-Chadi, 2016)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Overall public opinion (mean)	0.46*	(0.23)	0.49*	(0.24)
Overall public opinion (dev)	0.48	(0.81)	0.82	(0.86)
Party constituency opinion (mean)	-0.70***	(0.11)	-0.68***	(0.11)
Party constituency opinion (dev)	0.31	(0.59)	0.23	(0.61)
Niche	0.10	(0.10)	0.11	(0.10)
Niche x Overall public opinion (dev)	-2.03	(1.40)	-1.91	(1.70)
Niche x Party constituency opinion (dev)	0.85	(0.85)	0.73	(0.91)
Lagged party position	0.34***	(0.08)	0.38***	(0.08)
Saliency (mean)	2.49***	(0.72)	2.47***	(0.70)
Saliency (dev)	-0.07	(0.44)	1.12	(1.44)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	0.01*	(0.01)	0.01*	(0.01)
Niche x Saliency (dev)			-0.37	(1.61)
Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			-15.82+	(9.61)
Niche x Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			18.70	(14.75)
Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-0.93	(5.32)
Niche x Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-9.86	(11.12)
Constant	-0.64***	(0.14)	-0.65***	(0.14)
<i>Random effects parameters</i>				
Party (sd)	0.19	(0.38)	0.11	(0.97)
Residual (sd)	0.45*	(0.16)	0.47	(0.24)
N	136		136	
N clusters	82		82	
AIC	219.50		225.47	
BIC	260.28		280.81	
ll	-95.75		-93.74	

Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . AIC: Akaike's information criterion, BIC: Bayesian information criterion, ll: Log pseudolikelihood. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Overall public opinion and saliency variables: centred on country. Party constituency opinion: centred on party



**Figure A5.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type, based on model 1 in Table A6



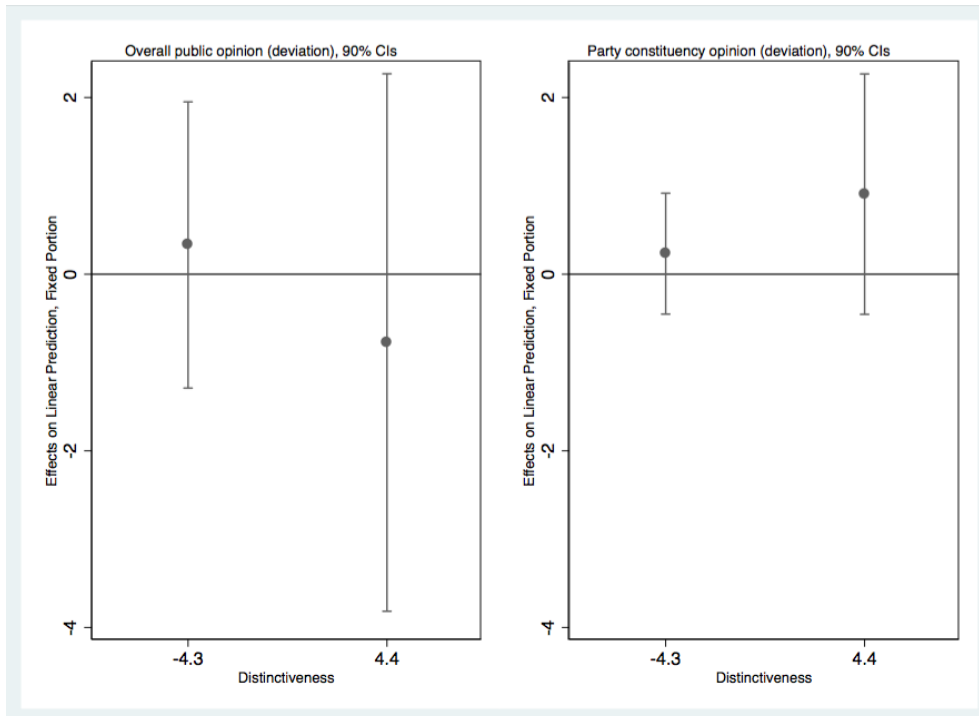
**Figure A6.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type and issue salience set at one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on model 2 in Table A6

**Table A7.** Party responsiveness with alternative operationalisation of party position (Abou-Chadi, 2016)

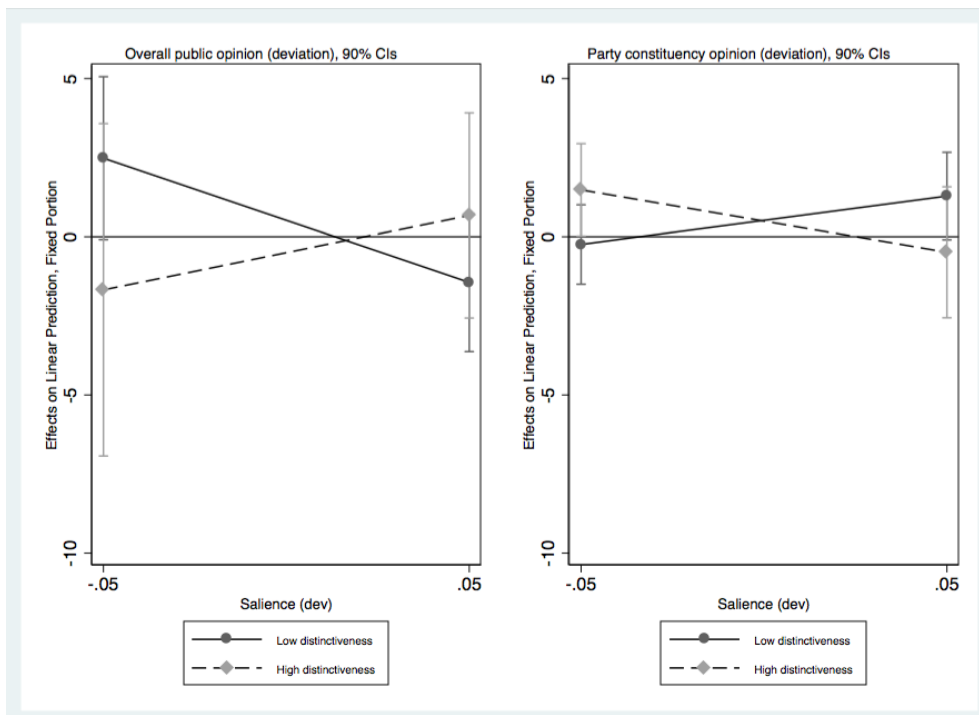
	Model 1		Model 2	
Overall public opinion (mean)	0.45+	(0.24)	0.44+	(0.26)
Overall public opinion (dev)	-0.22	(0.78)	0.02	(0.87)
Party constituency opinion (mean)	-0.65***	(0.12)	-0.64***	(0.12)
Party constituency opinion (dev)	0.56	(0.44)	0.51	(0.44)
Distinctiveness	0.01	(0.01)	0.01	(0.01)
Distinctiveness x Overall public opinion (dev)	-0.13	(0.29)	-0.12	(0.34)
Distinctiveness x Party constituency opinion (dev)	0.08	(0.11)	-0.00	(0.13)
Lagged party position	0.37***	(0.08)	0.35***	(0.08)
Saliency (mean)	2.40***	(0.70)	2.47***	(0.73)
Saliency (dev)	-0.16	(0.46)	0.51	(0.97)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	0.01+	(0.01)	0.01+	(0.01)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev)			-0.44	(0.32)
Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			-8.24	(8.92)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev) x Overall public opinion (dev)			7.21	(5.37)
Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-2.01	(4.90)
Distinctiveness x Saliency (dev) x Party constituency opinion (dev)			-4.02	(2.72)
Constant	-0.58***	(0.14)	-0.59***	(0.14)
<i>Random effects parameters</i>				
Party (sd)	0.13	(0.63)	0.16	(0.65)
Residual (sd)	0.48+	(0.19)	0.45	(0.22)
N	136		136	
N clusters	82		82	
AIC	221.63		224.47	
BIC	262.41		279.81	
ll	-96.81		-93.24	

Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . AIC: Akaike's information criterion, BIC: Bayesian information criterion, ll: Log pseudolikelihood. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Overall public opinion and saliency variables: centred on country. Party constituency opinion: centred on party





**Figure A7.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (low vs high distinctiveness), based on model 1 in Table A7

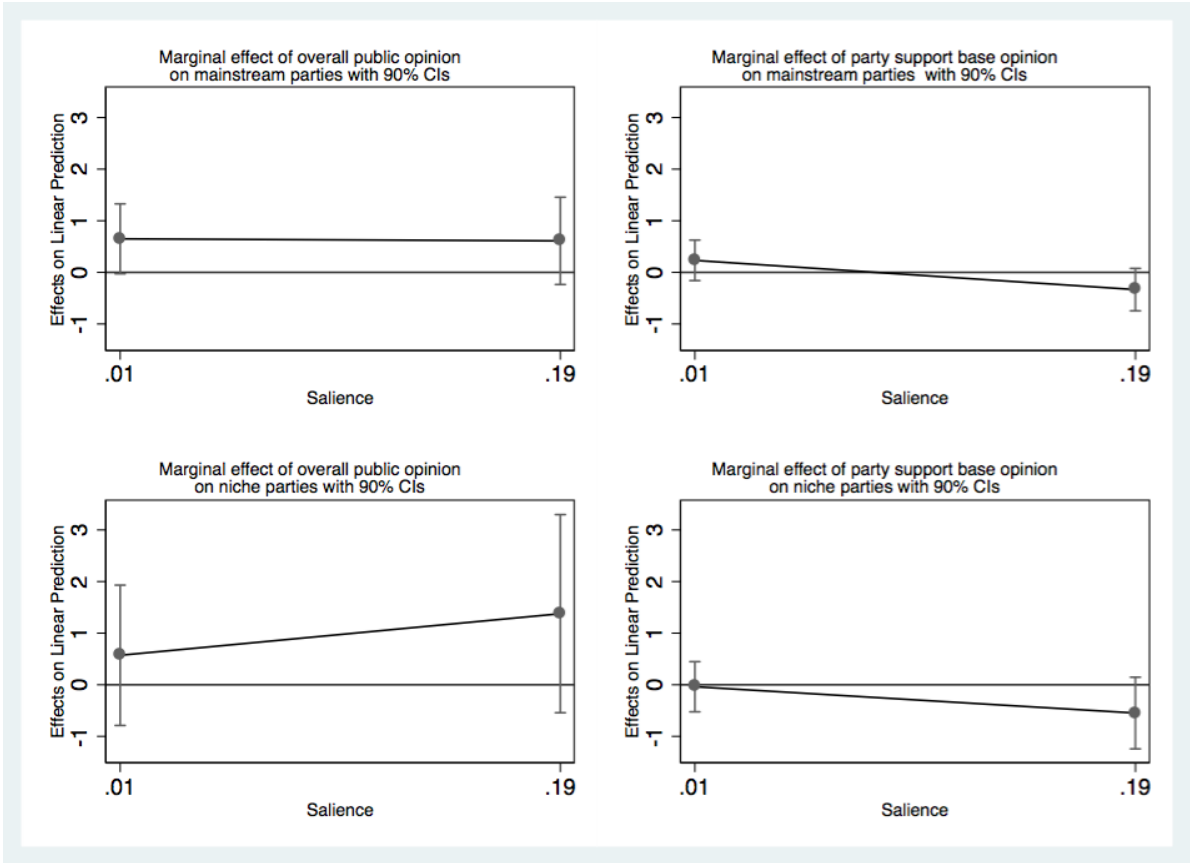


**Figure A8.** Average marginal effects with 90% CIs of changes over time in overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (low vs high distinctiveness) and issue salience set at one standard deviation below the mean (low salience: -0.05) and above the mean (high salience: 0.05), based on model 2 in Table A7

**Table A8.** Party responsiveness to overall public opinion and party constituency opinion (OLS) for mainstream, respectively niche parties

	Mainstream		Niche		Mainstream		Niche	
	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
Public opinion (overall)	0.59	(0.43)	0.94	(0.82)	0.65	(0.41)	0.53	(0.82)
Public opinion (constituency)	-0.03	(0.24)	-0.31	(0.33)	0.26	(0.24)	-0.01	(0.29)
Lagged party position	-0.35*	(0.15)	0.05	(0.26)	-0.33*	(0.14)	0.03	(0.25)
Saliency	-0.80	(0.73)	-1.44+	(0.82)	0.24	(0.93)	-0.62	(0.93)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	0.00	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)	-0.00	(0.01)
Saliency x Public opinion (overall)					-0.22	(2.24)	4.48	(5.40)
Saliency x Public opinion (constituency)					-3.15*	(1.30)	-2.83+	(1.58)
Constant	-0.90**	(0.32)	-0.41	(0.63)	-1.04**	(0.32)	-0.54	(0.66)
N	196		114		196		114	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.71		0.80		0.72		0.81	

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. OLS with party fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered by election (in parentheses), separately for mainstream and niche parties. Party fixed effects included but not reported in the table.

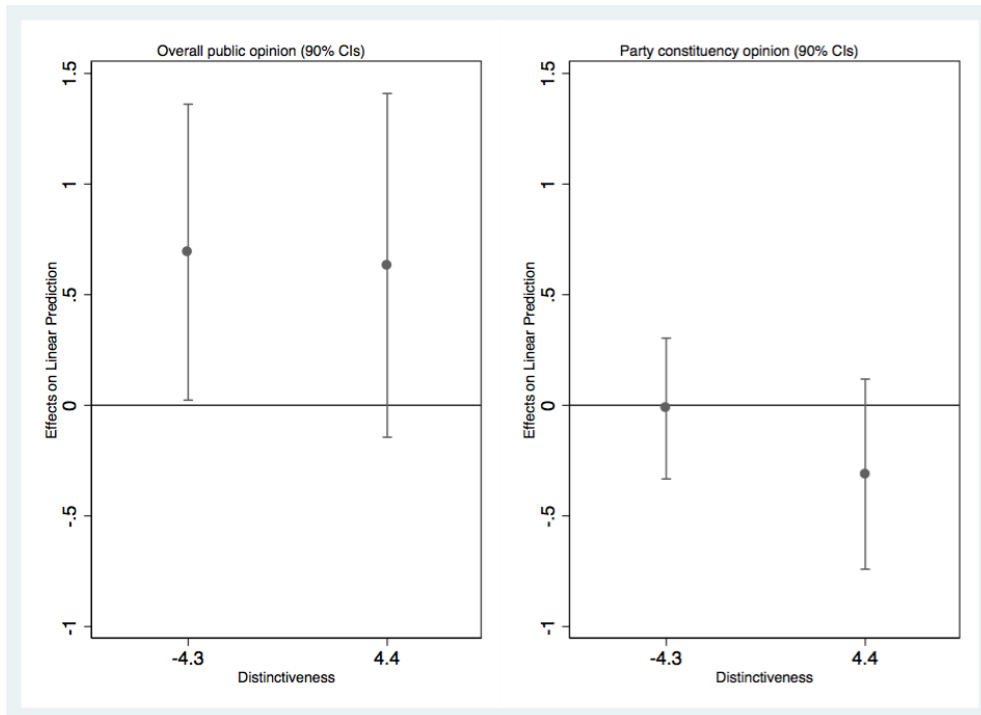


**Figure A9.** Average marginal effects with 90% confidence intervals of the overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (mainstream vs niche) and issue salience set at one standard deviation below the mean (low salience = 0.01) and above the mean (high salience = 0.19), based on models 3 and 4 in Table A8

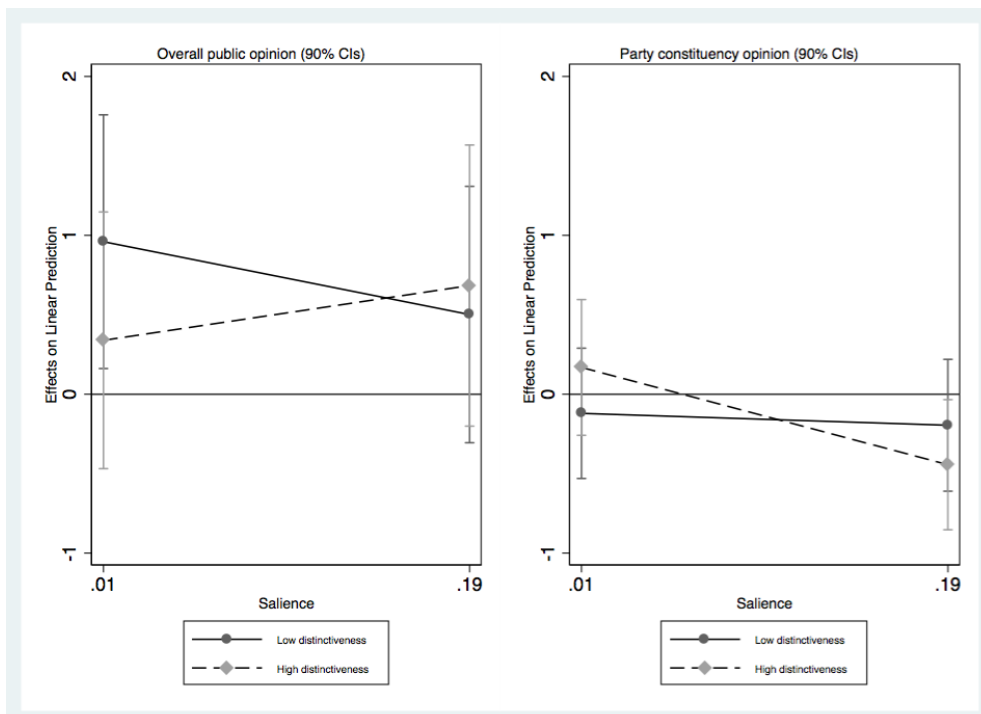
**Table A9.** Party responsiveness to overall public opinion and party constituency opinion (OLS)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Public opinion (overall)	0.66	(0.40)	0.66	(0.44)
Public opinion (constituency)	-0.16	(0.19)	0.04	(0.22)
Distinctiveness	-0.00	(0.01)	0.02*	(0.01)
Distinctiveness x Public opinion (overall)	-0.01	(0.04)	-0.08	(0.05)
Distinctiveness x Public opinion (constituency)	-0.03	(0.03)	0.04	(0.03)
Saliency	-1.02+	(0.55)	-0.32	(0.75)
Lagged party position	-0.18	(0.14)	-0.19	(0.14)
Distance (months) between election and public opinion	-0.00	(0.01)	0.00	(0.01)
Distinctiveness x Saliency			-0.26**	(0.09)
Saliency x Public opinion (overall)			-0.34	(1.83)
Distinctiveness x Saliency x Public opinion (overall)			0.51	(0.35)
Saliency x Public opinion (constituency)			-1.89+	(1.07)
Distinctiveness x Saliency x Public opinion (constituency)			-0.34**	(0.10)
Constant	-0.80*	(0.35)	-0.76*	(0.34)
N	310		310	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.78		0.80	

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. OLS with party fixed effects (not shown in the table) and robust standard errors clustered by election (in parentheses)



**Figure A10.** Average marginal effects (with 90% confidence intervals) of overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (low distinctiveness = -4.3 and high distinctiveness = 4.4) based on model 1 in Table A9



**Figure A11.** Average marginal effects (with 90% confidence intervals) of overall public opinion (left-hand side) and party constituency opinion (right-hand side) by party type (low distinctiveness = -4.3 and high distinctiveness = 4.4) and issue salience (low salience: 0.01, high salience: 0.19), based on model 2 in Table A9

**Table A10.** Change in party positions in response to changes in overall public opinion, respectively party constituency opinion (OLS) for mainstream, respectively niche parties

	Mainstream	Niche	Mainstream	Niche
Change in public opinion	0.42 (0.85)		0.40 (0.81)	
Change in party constituency opinion		-0.43 (0.41)		-0.49 (0.75)
Change in salience			-0.24 (1.32)	-0.54 (2.75)
Change in public opinion x Change in salience			-6.41 (9.90)	
Change in party constituency opinion x Change in salience				1.93 (16.78)
Constant	-0.39 (0.48)	-0.09 (0.15)	-0.38 (0.48)	-0.05 (0.14)
N	117	56	117	56
R <sup>2</sup>	0.32	0.52	0.33	0.52

Note: OLS with party fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered by election (in parentheses), separately for mainstream and niche parties.

Party fixed effects included but not reported in the table.

+ p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**Table A11.** Change in party positions in response to changes in overall public opinion, respectively party constituency opinion (OLS) for mainstream, respectively niche parties

	Mainstream	Niche	Mainstream	Niche
Change in public opinion	0.95 (0.95)	1.50 (1.81)	1.02 (0.94)	2.05 (1.90)
Change in party constituency opinion	-0.52 (0.43)	-0.48 (0.40)	-0.68 (0.41)	-1.11 (0.67)
Change in salience			-0.36 (1.22)	1.58 (3.11)
Change in public opinion x Change in salience			-13.99 (9.04)	63.11 (49.53)
Change in party constituency opinion x Change in salience			6.37 (5.27)	-20.92 (19.64)
Constant	-0.40 (0.50)	-0.09 (0.15)	-0.38 (0.51)	-0.72 (0.50)
N	117	56	117	56
R <sup>2</sup>	0.34	0.54	0.36	0.65

Note: OLS with party fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered by election (in parentheses), separately for mainstream and niche parties.

Party fixed effects included but not reported in the table.

+ p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001

**Table A12.** Change in party positions in response to changes in overall public opinion, respectively party constituency opinion (OLS)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Distinctiveness	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
Change in public opinion	1.10 (1.03)	1.13 (1.03)	1.10 (1.04)	1.08 (1.03)
Change in party constituency opinion	-0.54+ (0.32)	-0.55+ (0.32)	-0.54+ (0.32)	-0.47 (0.49)
Change in public opinion x Distinctiveness		0.03 (0.14)		-0.11 (0.10)
Change in party constituency opinion x Distinctiveness		0.03 (0.05)		0.07 (0.07)
Change in salience			-0.18 (1.36)	-0.18 (1.70)
Distinctiveness x Change in salience				0.30 (0.32)
Change in salience x Change in public opinion				-3.45 (15.57)
Distinctiveness x Change in salience x Change in public opinion				-0.22 (3.45)
Change in salience x Change in party constituency opinion				2.76 (9.74)
Distinctiveness x Change in salience x Change in party constituency opinion				-2.23 (2.74)
Constant	-0.13 (0.20)	-0.24 (0.28)	-0.12 (0.24)	0.13 (0.36)
N	173	173	173	173
R <sup>2</sup>	0.43	0.44	0.43	0.45

Note: OLS with party fixed effects and robust standard errors clustered by election (in parentheses). Party fixed effects included but not reported in the table.  
+ p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.00



The next chapter contains a published article:

Vrânceanu A (forthcoming). The impact of contextual factors on party responsiveness regarding immigration issues. *Party Politics*. Doi: 10.1177/1354068817728215. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817728215>.



### 3. The impact of contextual factors on party responsiveness regarding immigration issues<sup>\*</sup>

#### **Abstract**

During the last decades, the immigration phenomenon has gained increasing relevance in the European political space. This paper examines to what extent the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the public opinion on immigration and to the objective migration context is affected by the party system configuration. The empirical analysis relies on data from the Comparative Manifesto Project, the European Social Survey, ParlGov database and OECD annual indicators on migration inflows, covering 17 European countries over the period 2003-2013. Based on cross-classified multilevel models, the results suggest that the presence of strong radical right parties enhances the responsiveness of mainstream parties to public preferences and the migration context.

#### **Keywords**

Immigration, political parties, political representation, public opinion, responsiveness

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<sup>\*</sup> Forthcoming in *Party Politics*: Vrânceanu A (forthcoming). The impact of contextual factors on party responsiveness regarding immigration issues. *Party Politics*. Doi: 10.1177/1354068817728215.

### 3.1. Introduction

The political representation process has been the object of numerous studies (for a review, see Powell, 2004). Its analysis has been approached from different perspectives, focusing either on the institutional factors that connect voters and representatives (e.g. the election rules) or on the responsiveness of parties and representatives to citizens' preferences (Arnold and Franklin, 2012; Powell, 2004). Political parties perform a major role in articulating and aggregating the interests of voters (Dalton et al., 2011). They also represent key actors in transferring the preferences of the electorate to parliament and government (Klingemann et al., 2006: 51). There is large evidence that the party behaviour on both the left-right dimension and specific policy issues is affected by shifts in public opinion (Adams et al., 2006, 2009; Arnold et al., 2012; Erikson et al., 2002; Hagemann et al., 2017; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). Party responsiveness and, by the same token, dynamic representation occur when parties alter their policy stances to satisfy changes in public preferences (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011).

This paper is interested in the responsiveness of mainstream parties to two sources of influence: the public opinion on immigration and the objective migration context and in the extent to which it is conditioned by party system characteristics. There is a wealth of studies exploring the dynamics of parties' responsiveness to public preferences (Adams et al., 2006; Arnold et al., 2012; Ezrow et al., 2011; Williams and Spoon, 2015), whereas others also focus on the responsiveness to the objective context (see, for instance, Adams et al., 2009 analysis on parties' responsiveness to global economic conditions). This article builds on this literature and takes it further in two important ways. First, it goes beyond most studies that focus on the broad left-right divide, by paying attention to a specific issue that has received less attention until now in the literature on party responsiveness: the immigration issue. Studies since early 1960s have argued that the responsiveness of elected representatives to the domestic audience differs across issues (Miller and Stokes, 1963). In line with that, recent research has explored the responsiveness of parties to the general electorate or to party supporters' preferences on particular issues like the European integration (Arnold et al., 2012; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Williams and Spoon, 2015). The immigration topic has acquired during the last

decades increasing importance in the political arena of most European countries (Kriesi et al., 2006; Rosset et al., 2017), to the extent that it has become a “mainstream campaign topic” (Meguid, 2005: 357) and a key factor in voter and party system realignment (Schain, 2006). This has coincided with the emergence of radical right parties in the 1980s-1990s, which often plead for the protection of traditional values and a national way of life (Meguid, 2005) and whose rise has been linked to a negative public sentiment towards immigrants (Costello et al., 2012: 1226). These developments raise the question of whether mainstream parties are responsive to the public sentiment about immigration and, if so, under which conditions.

The second contribution of this study is to account for two types of contextual effects on party positions and party responsiveness. First, it considers the impact of the issue-specific context by exploring the role of the yearly inflows of migrants in shaping parties’ stances. Second, this article considers the role of the party system by examining to what extent the presence and strength of a radical right party influence mainstream parties’ responsiveness to both public opinion and the migration context. Prior research has extensively examined the features of the radical right parties’ electorate (Golder, 2016; Rydgren, 2008; Werts et al., 2013), the conditions favouring their electoral success (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Dahlström and Sundell, 2012; Meguid, 2005; Van Der Brug et al., 2005) and the impact they exert on policy development and their competitors’ stances in domains like immigration, multiculturalism or welfare (Han, 2015; Schain, 2006; Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016; van Spanje, 2010). Nevertheless, to my knowledge, these parties’ effect on how mainstream parties respond to both the public preferences about immigration and the migration context has not received wide attention. The focus on mainstream parties is motivated by the fact that these parties are key governmental actors (Meguid, 2005: 352). Consequently, their responsiveness on various policy issues has implications for the policy-making process.

The empirical evidence presented in this study suggests that the party system configuration does have an impact on the linkage between mainstream elites and citizens. The presence of electorally threatening radical right parties heightens the responsiveness of mainstream parties to citizens’ preferences on immigration. Likewise, there is some

evidence that it also boosts the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the migration context.

The remaining of the paper is structured as follows: the next section presents an overview of the literature on party responsiveness and introduces the theoretical expectations underlying this study. The subsequent sections outline the data and methods employed in the empirical analyses, as well as the results. Finally, the last section offers remarks about the implications of these findings for the quality of political representation in current European democracies.

### 3.2. Literature on party responsiveness

Previous research has underlined the role of public preferences for party behaviour, understood either as position-taking on different issues or as actual policy outputs and outcomes (Adams et al., 2006; Erikson et al., 2002; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). Several scholars have analysed how parties responded to public opinion by adjusting their policy positions to shifts in public preferences. These studies mainly focused on the left-right divide and uncovered the importance of party characteristics (such as being niche rather than mainstream, or left-wing rather than right-wing) in moderating the impact of public preferences on party stances (Adams et al., 2006, 2009; Ezrow et al., 2011). Yet, several analyses have also paid attention to the responsiveness of political parties over specific issues, such as European integration (Steenbergen et al., 2007; Williams and Spoon, 2015). Steenbergen et al. (2007) found that the bottom-up connection between party supporters and their parties is influenced by the electoral system, the degree of party dissent and inter-party disagreement or by the presence of opinion leaders, whereas Williams and Spoon (2015) showed that larger parties are more responsive than the smaller ones to Euroscepticism in the public opinion.

The topic of party responsiveness on the immigration issue has not received much attention until now. In a 2012 study focusing on the European Parliament elections, Costello et al. (2012) showed that the policy congruence between voters and parties on the cultural dimension, which comprised the immigration issue, is rather low. Likewise,

Van der Brug and van Spanje (2009) found that the preferences of left-wing anti-immigration voters are not accommodated by the parties they usually vote for, since parties tend to be either left-wing and pro-immigration or right-wing and anti-immigration (but see Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012). Hence, the responsiveness of parties to at least part of their voters appears to be rather low.

Political parties on the right-wing side of the political spectrum are considered to own the immigration issue (Bale et al., 2010: 412). Radical right parties typically compete and mobilise on this issue (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Meguid, 2005). Moreover, both radical right and mainstream right parties share, albeit to a different degree, anti-immigration stances and a preference for law and order (Bale, 2003). By contrast, mainstream left parties face an “ideological and strategic dilemma” (Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012: 868), which stems in part from the fact that they face the challenge of a mixed electorate composed, on the one hand, of highly educated and high-income groups with egalitarian and libertarian values and, on the other hand, of working-class voters who feel threatened by immigrants (Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012).

In the party competition literature several studies have found that radical right parties, through their anti-immigration and welfare chauvinistic stances, have exerted a contagion effect on their mainstream (both left- and right-wing) competitors, forcing them to adopt more restrictive positions on immigration and multiculturalism (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016; van Spanje, 2010). According to Alonso and da Fonseca (2012), radical right parties are particularly challenging for mainstream left parties because of their cross-class appeal and their increasing focus on welfare chauvinism. The challenge also comes from the fact that radical right parties compete on issues on which the Left is not perceived as competent and they may either provide support to the formation of governments led by centre-right parties or formally become coalition partners in such governments (Bale et al., 2010). However, we know less about the effect of radical right parties on mainstream parties’ responsiveness to public preferences on immigration and the objective migration context. Han’s (2015) study indirectly touches upon this question, as it examines the effect of electorally successful radical right parties on the multiculturalism position of mainstream parties. The author

finds that, when confronted with successful radical right parties, mainstream-right parties become more restrictive on multiculturalism, whereas mainstream-left parties make such moves only when their supporters become less favourable about multiculturalism or when they suffered losses in the previous elections (Han, 2015).

Focusing on the impact of public opinion on party stances on the left-right dimension, Adams et al. (2006) and Ezrow et al. (2011) found that mainstream parties in Western Europe tend to respond to the general public preferences (i.e. the mean or median voter), rather than the preferences of their core party supporters<sup>1</sup>. On the immigration issue, the mean voter should be a moderate one, that is, a voter with preferences in the middle of the pro- vs. anti-immigration spectrum<sup>2</sup>. When confronted with a radical right challenger, mainstream parties could either ignore the issues politicised by the former, diverge from the issue position of the radical right party, or converge with it (Meguid, 2005). In practice, as we have seen, parties on both the left and right side of the political spectrum have adopted more restrictive positions on immigration when confronted with the electoral success of radical right competitors (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016; van Spanje, 2010)<sup>3</sup>. In these circumstances, it is likely that, by adopting more restrictive stances on immigration in the presence of a strong radical right competitor, mainstream parties move away from the more moderate mean voter, showing thus lower responsiveness to the overall public preferences.

**H1a:** Mainstream parties should be more responsive to public opinion in party systems with either no radical right party or with a weak one, and less responsive in party systems with a strong radical right party.

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<sup>1</sup> This appears to be the case in fragmented party systems too. Indeed, there is evidence that also in countries like Finland or the Netherlands mainstream parties tend to respond to shifts in the mean voter position rather than to shifts in their party supporters position (see Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011).

<sup>2</sup> The data suggest that on average the public opinion is rather moderate and more moderate than parties. As shown in Table 1, the mean party position is -0.41, ranging from a minimum of -1 to a maximum of +1, whereas the mean public opinion is -0.01, ranging from a minimum of -1 to a maximum of 0.73.

<sup>3</sup> Note that in the sample, the correlation between the variables public opinion and vote share of radical right parties is about 0.2, which is rather low. In several countries, the public opinion has gradually become more pro-immigrant despite a rather strong radical right (see, for instance, Sweden, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, France in Figure A1), although there is quite some variation.



Yet, some arguments also speak for the opposite hypothesis. When confronted with a radical right party, mainstream parties risk losing voters. This should be the case for the mainstream right, as centre-right voters have defected to radical right parties on various occasions (Bale, 2003; Schain, 2006). This should also be the case for mainstream left parties which have ideological incentives to adopt liberal stances on immigration (Bale et al., 2010) but in this way risk losing those supporters that hold anti-immigration views (Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012; Bale, 2003; Van Der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). In this case, mainstream parties will have stronger incentives to anticipate the public preferences to avoid potential electoral losses (Erikson et al., 2002; Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016). Hence, they should feel pressured to align their issue position to the public view to avoid electoral penalties. In addition, the immigration issue is at the core of radical right parties' platforms (Bale et al., 2010). Their presence should increase the salience of this issue on the public agenda and foster party responsiveness to public preferences (Burstein, 2003; Hagemann et al., 2017; Page and Shapiro, 1983). Hence, I expect that mainstream parties will, contrary to the previous hypothesis, be more responsive to the public opinion in party systems with a strong radical right party than in contexts where such party is absent or weak.

**H1b:** Mainstream parties should be more responsive to public opinion in party systems with an electorally strong radical right party than in party systems where such party is either absent or weak.

Political parties not only face the pressure of the electorate and of their party competitors, but also act in a volatile context where immigration flows fluctuate and where the arrivals of new immigrants often spark debates in the media and force parties to position themselves on the matter. There is evidence that mainstream parties are indeed affected by the objective migration context (Abou-Chadi, 2016). However, in this article, I explore to what extent the responsiveness of mainstream parties to this factor might be altered by the presence of a strong radical right party. In general, I expect parties should respond to the migration context and adopt less liberal stances on immigration in contexts characterised by higher inflows of migrants (Abou-Chadi, 2016). Nonetheless, mainstream parties' responsiveness to the objective migration context might decrease

when they face radical right parties that benefit of large electoral support. This would be due to the fact that, as we have noted, when a strong radical right party is present, the salience of the immigration issue is likely to increase, which should make parties more attentive to the public sentiment (Burstein, 2003; Page and Shapiro, 1983). In other words, the importance of public preferences towards immigration, relative to that of other sources of influence on party positions such as the migration context, should increase. At the same time, earlier studies have shown that the public in most European countries overestimates the size of the foreign-born population (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Sides and Citrin, 2007) and it is reasonable to assume that it also overestimates other migration indicators like the migrant inflows. Also, there is evidence that the amount of public opposition to immigration is largely unrelated to the size of the immigrant population (Sides and Citrin, 2007). If the public does not track in an accurate way the changes in the objective migration context and forms opinions to some extent independently of the objective demographic situation, the presence of a strong radical right party should affect the calculus of mainstream parties as to whether they should prioritise responding to context or responding to the public sentiment. For electoral purposes, mainstream parties should have more incentives to adapt to the public opinion to avoid being penalised at the polls even when that entails being less responsive to the objective migration context. The question that arises is to what extent this decline in the relative importance of the migration context also means that this variable matters less for party positions in party systems with a strong radical right than in systems where the radical right is weak or absent. Although the expectation proposed here is weaker, since it depends on how exactly the public opinion and the migration context relate to one another, this article suggests that the migration context may matter less for mainstream parties facing a strong radical right party than for those not facing such threat. This is because, if there is a disconnect between the public opinion and the migration context, mainstream parties have few incentives to respond to the later when facing the threat of a radical right competitor. This leads to my final and exploratory hypothesis:

**H2:** Mainstream parties are less likely to respond to the migration context in party systems with a strong radical right party than in party systems with no radical right party or with a weak one.

### 3.3. Data and methods

To test these hypotheses, I compare party positions between countries and over time. The analytical sample consists of 66<sup>4</sup> mainstream parties from 17 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom) and 42 national elections covering the period 2003-2013<sup>5</sup>.

Radical right parties mobilise through “a programme stressing, at the very least, more law and order and an end to the supposedly over-generous treatment of foreign (or perhaps non-Western European) immigrants” (Bale, 2003: 87). Their ideology consists of nationalism, xenophobia, welfare chauvinism and law and order (Mudde, 1999). Ever since the seminal study of Meguid (2005), these parties have been conceptualised as niche parties. For the purposes of this study, the criterion for identifying radical right parties is their established anti-immigration stance (Meguid, 2005; Rydgren, 2008; Van Der Brug et al., 2005). The list of radical right parties, adapted from Abou-Chadi (2016), can be found in the Appendix, Table A1. To identify mainstream parties, I rely on the party family categorization provided by the Manifesto Research Group/Comparative Manifesto Project dataset, hereafter referred to as CMP (Volkens et al., 2016b). In line with previous research (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Ezrow et al., 2011; Steenbergen et al., 2007), mainstream parties are parties belonging to the Social Democratic, Liberal, Christian Democratic and Conservative party families.

The dependent variable is the party position on immigration as expressed in the context of national elections. Party positions are derived from the CMP dataset (Volkens et al., 2016a), which provides information on the salience of issues in party manifestos (Klingemann et al., 2006). Being the result of long discussions within parties, manifestos should accurately reflect parties’ policy preferences (Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014). The CMP dataset does not directly provide the parties’ stances on immigration. In line with

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<sup>4</sup> The initial sample contained 67 mainstream parties, but one party that competed in two consecutive elections was excluded because of missing data for the second election.

<sup>5</sup> The public opinion data corresponds to elections starting from 2003 (except for Greece, where the relevant observations start from 2007). The analytical sample also contains party positions in elections prior to 2003, as they capture the lagged positions corresponding to the first elections of the 2003-2013 period.

Abou-Chadi (2016) and Alonso and da Fonseca (2012), I used the following CMP categories to construct the measure of party position on immigration: Multiculturalism: positive (per607), Multiculturalism: negative (per608), Underprivileged minority groups (per705), National way of life: positive (per601), and Law and order: positive (per605). The variable was computed as follows:

$$\text{Party position} = \frac{(\text{per607} + \text{per705} - \text{per608} - \text{per601} - \text{per605})}{(\text{per607} + \text{per705} + \text{per608} + \text{per601} + \text{per605})}$$

The values taken by the dependent variable range from -1 to +1, with a mean of -0.4<sup>6</sup>. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study. Higher scores indicate more liberal stances towards immigration. Alternative measures of party position on immigration have been used for robustness checks<sup>7</sup>.

The first main independent variable is the public opinion on immigration, which is operationalised as the mean voter position on immigration in a given election. Six items from the European Social Survey have been used to construct it (European Social Survey Cumulative File, ESS 1-6, 2014). Three of them tap the respondents' preferences regarding the admission of migrants, while the other three measure the individual perceptions about the economic and cultural consequences of immigration. A factor analysis shows that these six items are structured by a single latent dimension (see the Appendix, Tables A2 and A3). The resulting individual factors have been used to calculate the public opinion scores by computing the mean<sup>8</sup> across respondents corresponding to a given country-election combination (see Pardos-Prado et al., 2014: 855–856). The public opinion variable has been computed at the most recent time-point

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<sup>6</sup> This measure corresponds to one used by Abou-Chadi (2016) in a robustness check except that it is oppositely signed.

<sup>7</sup> Two alternative approaches have been used. Alonso and da Fonseca (2012) use the above-mentioned CMP categories and build the party position by subtracting negative categories about immigration from the positive ones. Abou-Chadi (2016) uses, in the main analysis, only two CMP categories, that is, per607 and per608, and computes the party position by subtracting positive references to multiculturalism from the negative ones and dividing the result by their sum.

<sup>8</sup> In the sample, the average distance between the public opinion constructed as mean voter and that constructed as median voter is -0.04, which is extremely low. Considering that the standard approach in the relevant literature on party responsiveness (Adams et al., 2006; Arnold et al., 2012; Ezrow et al., 2011; Han, 2015) is to operationalise the public opinion as the mean voter, I follow the same approach in the empirical analysis.

prior to the relevant election<sup>9</sup>. Higher values correspond to a more pro-immigration position. Figure A1 in the Appendix displays the public opinion scores by election years.

The second main independent variable is the objective migration context. This variable is operationalized as the inflows of migrants arriving in a country in the year prior to the election. It was calculated as percentage of the country population in the same year. The data have been retrieved from OECD's International Migration Database and OECD's population statistics<sup>10</sup>. Figure A2 in the Appendix shows the distribution of this variable by election years.

The vote share of the radical right party is a continuous variable capturing the percentage of votes obtained in the previous election. This variable is set to zero in those party systems where such party is absent. Where several radical right parties competed in a given election, their vote shares were added (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Meguid, 2005)<sup>11</sup>. Data for this variable come from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow, 2015)<sup>12</sup>.

I also include in the models a dummy variable that takes the value 1 for mainstream left parties (i.e. Social-Democratic)<sup>13</sup>. Finally, I control for the distance (in months) between the election date and the period when the public opinion was measured<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Where applicable, the respondents interviewed in the weeks immediately preceding an election were not included to avoid interviews during electoral campaigns because answers may be influenced by the campaign topics. The mean distance, in months, between the election date and the median month of the interviews matched with a given election is 11 months, ranging from a minimum of one month to a maximum of 31 months. For the 2006 Italian election, the respondents interviewed in the months of February and March 2006 were included in the computation of the public opinion score to cover a higher number of respondents.

<sup>10</sup> OECD.Stat, <http://stats.oecd.org>.

<sup>11</sup> Additional analyses were performed by taking the vote share of the strongest radical right party instead of the sum. Any difference in results is reported in the 'Robustness checks' section.

<sup>12</sup> As the vote shares obtained in 2001 by the two Italian radical right parties (i.e. the National Alliance and the Northern League) were missing in the ParlGov database, these data were retrieved from the CMP.

<sup>13</sup> The addition of this dummy variable helps controlling for the fact that mainstream left and mainstream right parties tend to differ in their immigration stances. Indeed, in our data, mainstream left parties tend to have on average slightly more liberal positions than mainstream right parties, although they are still on the negative side (i.e. in the sample, the mean average position of mainstream left parties is approximately -3, and that of mainstream right parties is approximately -5).

<sup>14</sup> The aim is to account for variation in the data as to the distance between the election date and the moment when the public opinion was measured, rather than analysing whether public opinion measured more recently in time has a larger weight on party positions. Therefore, an additional interaction term was not considered.

**Table 1.** Summary statistics

Variable	N	Mean	Std dev	Min	Max
Party position on immigration	150	-0.41	0.46	-1	1
Public opinion	42	-0.01	0.35	-1	0.73
Inflows (% of total population, previous year)	42	0.81	0.56	0.19	2.78
Vote share RRP (previous election)	42	7.75	8.43	0	29.4
Mainstream left (dummy)	66	0.32	0.47	0	1
Distance election - public opinion (months)	42	10.86	6.88	1	31

RRP: radical right party.

As the observations are nested in both parties and elections, I estimate a cross-classified multilevel model via the maximum likelihood procedure. The model specification<sup>15</sup> is the following:

*Party position*<sub>ij</sub>

$$\begin{aligned}
&= \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times \text{Public opinion}_j + \beta_2 \times \text{Inflows}_j + \beta_3 \times \text{Vote share RRP}_j \\
&+ \beta_4 \times \text{Vote share RRP}_j \times \text{Public opinion}_j \\
&+ \beta_5 \times \text{Vote share RRP}_j \times \text{Inflows}_j + \beta_6 \times \text{Lagged party position}_{ij} + X_k \gamma \\
&+ \zeta_{1i} + \zeta_{2j} + \epsilon_{ij}
\end{aligned}$$

where *i* is the party subscript, *j* represents the election subscript and  $X_k$  is a vector of control variables.  $\zeta_{1i}$  and  $\zeta_{2j}$  represent the random intercepts for parties *i* and elections *j*, whereas  $\epsilon_{ij}$  is a residual error term (see Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal 2012).

### 3.4. Results

To test the three hypotheses, I have estimated a series of multilevel cross-classified models. Model 1 is an empty model, whereas Model 2 includes the predictors. Model 3

<sup>15</sup> In the sample, the correlations between the three independent variables of interest are not particularly high (see also note 3). The correlation between inflows and the vote share of the radical right is less than 0.2 (0.18 in the whole sample, respectively, 0.17 when restricting to relevant observations only), whereas the correlation between public opinion and the inflows of migrants is about 0.4.

adds two interaction terms between the vote share obtained by the radical right parties in the previous election and the public opinion, respectively, the inflows of migrants<sup>16</sup>. Models 2 and 3 also include the lagged dependent variable. First, the party position in the previous election is part of the theoretical model of party responsiveness whereby parties are responsive when they modify their positions to accommodate shifts in public preferences or changes in the objective issue-context (Adams et al., 2006, 2009; Ezrow et al., 2011). Secondly, including the lagged dependent variable helps to account for auto-correlation in the data (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Meguid, 2005; Spoon and Klüver, 2015).

The results are reported in Table 2. First, the lagged party position is positive in both Models 2 and 3, but not statistically significant. This is rather surprising as it suggests that the position adopted in the previous election does not matter for the position in the current election. However, this is because the cross-classified models do not distinguish between within-party and between-party effects, more precisely between the impact of the public opinion in a given election on all the parties competing in that election (a cross-sectional effect) and the impact of public opinion measured in different consecutive elections on a given party that competed in all those elections (a longitudinal effect). Further tests integrating party fixed effects and focusing hence on within-party over time dynamics show that the coefficient of the lagged dependent variable is negative and statistically significant<sup>17</sup> (see Tables A4 and A5 in the Appendix). The *type of mainstream party* dummy is positive but not statistically significant at  $p < 0.05$  level in any of the models<sup>18</sup>.

Regarding the effect of public opinion, the coefficient is positive and statistically significant in Model 2, which suggests that on average public preferences do have an effect on mainstream parties' positions on immigration. In Model 3, it loses statistical

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<sup>16</sup> In the empty model, the intraclass correlation (ICC) is 0.58 at the party level and 0.21 at the election level, which shows that there is significant clustering due to both variables. The addition of the explanatory variables in model 2 leads to a slight increase of ICC election to 0.26 and a reduction of ICC party to 0.48. ICC election in model 3 decreases back to 0.21, whereas ICC party increases to 0.54.

<sup>17</sup> This suggests that parties tend to revert to the centre of the scale, that is, a move in a more liberal direction tends to be followed by a change in the opposite direction at the subsequent election.

<sup>18</sup> Additional analyses (see the Appendix, Tables A9-A11 and Figures A13-A22) suggest that both mainstream right and mainstream left parties respond to the two sources of influence: public opinion and the objective migration context (although the evidence regarding the responsiveness of the mainstream left to the former is mixed).

significance but the coefficient of the interaction term between this variable and the vote share of the radical right party is positive and statistically significant. Since in models with interactions the interpretation of the coefficients is not entirely straightforward, marginal effects need to be computed (Brambor et al., 2006). Figure 1 illustrates the average marginal effect of the public opinion, conditional on the strength of the radical right party. When the vote share of the radical right party is very low, the effect of public opinion on mainstream parties' position is not statistically significant. However, as the vote share of the radical right party increases above approximately 3%, the effect of the public opinion becomes larger and statistically significant. In other words, in the absence of a sizeable radical right party, a change in public opinion toward immigration does not have a significant effect on mainstream party positions. In contrast, when a radical right party has a 16% vote share (which is one standard deviation above the mean), a typical shift in public opinion (by a value of 0.35, i.e. one standard deviation) leads to a change in party positions by approximately 0.5 points, a value that is larger than the standard deviation of the dependent variable. Overall, these results confirm that as the radical right party becomes more electorally threatening, mainstream parties become more responsive to the public preferences, as expected under hypothesis 1b<sup>19</sup>. The absence of a statistically significant effect in party systems with a weak radical right diverges to a certain extent from findings obtained in studies focusing on the left-right dimension (Ezrow et al., 2011) in that it shows that a thorough consideration of the party system configuration helps to uncover more nuanced patterns of party responsiveness, at least when focusing on specific issues.

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<sup>19</sup> One could raise an endogeneity concern that the success of radical right parties is a consequence of mainstream parties' behaviour. Indeed, according to Meguid (2005), if mainstream parties position themselves on the immigration issue, rather than dismissing it, this will increase the issue salience. However, whether this benefits the radical right should depend on the specific strategies of the mainstream competitors. Meguid (2005) indicates that the electoral success of niche parties is likely to be enhanced if adversarial strategies dominate mainstream parties' response, whereas the adoption of accommodative strategies should benefit the mainstream itself. Yet, other studies suggest that, on the contrary, the adoption by mainstream parties of an accommodative behaviour may benefit the radical right as it is likely to prime voters about the immigration issue and legitimise the stances of the latter (Arzheimer and Carter, 2006; Bale, 2003; Dahlström and Sundell, 2012). To diminish the possibility that under specific scenarios the electoral success of radical right parties may be the result of mainstream parties' positions, the vote share of the radical right is lagged by one election in the empirical models, which should reduce the risk of reverse causality.



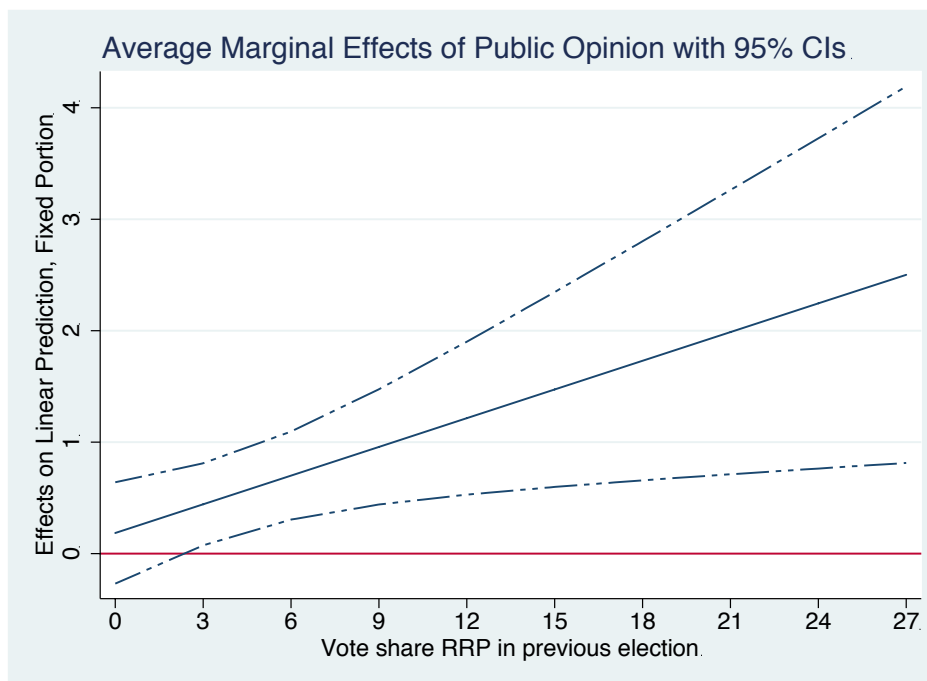
**Table 2.** The effect of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' positions regarding immigration

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Public opinion		0.497** (0.193)	0.184 (0.232)
Inflows (year prior to election)		0.002 (0.097)	0.143 (0.104)
Vote share RRP		-0.002 (0.006)	0.034* (0.015)
Type of mainstream party (1 = mainstream left, 0 = mainstream right)		0.151 (0.093)	0.168+ (0.094)
Lagged party position		0.059 (0.076)	0.010 (0.075)
Distance election – public opinion		-0.006 (0.007)	-0.006 (0.006)
Public opinion x Vote share RRP			0.086* (0.036)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP			-0.043** (0.015)
Constant	-0.420*** (0.059)	-0.386** (0.146)	-0.582*** (0.162)
<i>Random components</i>			
var(Election)	0.046*** (0.016)	0.048*** (0.016)	0.037*** (0.013)
var(Party)	0.128*** (0.028)	0.088*** (0.029)	0.093*** (0.027)
var(Residual)	0.047*** (0.009)	0.046*** (0.011)	0.044*** (0.009)
N	150	148	148
AIC	144.793	136.631	132.551
BIC	156.835	166.603	168.517
Log likelihood	-68.396	-58.315	-54.275

RRP: radical right party; AIC: Akaike's information criterion; BIC: Bayesian information criterion.

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

+ p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001.



**Figure 1.** Average marginal effects (with 95% confidence intervals) of public opinion on mainstream parties' position on immigration, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right competitor (based on estimates from model 3 in Table 2)

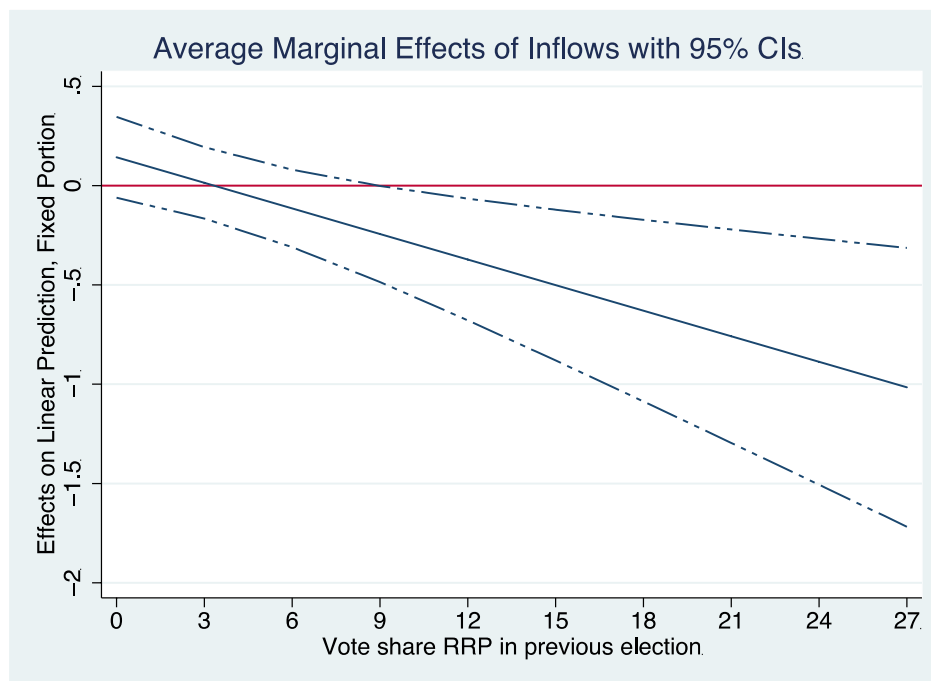
Turning to the effect of the migration context, the coefficient of the variable *inflows* is positive in Model 2, contrary to our expectations, but it is not significant, which suggests that the immigration position of mainstream parties is not affected by this indicator. It is also positive but not significant in Model 3. However, the interaction term between this variable and the vote share of the radical right party is negative and statistically significant. Figure 2 charts the average marginal effect of the inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' position, conditional on the vote share of the radical right competitor. The inflows of migrants have a negative effect on mainstream parties (except when the radical right party obtained around 3% or less in the previous election, in which case the effect appears to be slightly positive although not statistically significant) and this effect becomes larger as radical right parties become stronger. However, the effect is statistically significant at the 0.05 level only when the vote share of the radical right party is at least 9%. So, in the presence of a weaker radical right party, a change in migrant inflows does not have a significant effect on the mainstream party position. By contrast, when a radical right party has a 16% vote share (one standard deviation above the mean), a typical shift in inflows (by a value of 0.56) leads to a change in the party position of

approximately -0.3 points. These findings contradict hypothesis 2 and indicate that mainstream parties are more likely to respond to the migration context in party systems with a strong radical right party than in party systems with no radical right party or with a weak one. Hence, the presence of such parties actually enhances the responsiveness of the mainstream to the migration context.

### 3.5. Robustness checks

An alternative way to consider the structure of the dataset is to see it as a hierarchical structure, with observations nested in elections. As robustness check, I have thus estimated multilevel mixed effects linear models in which the observations are nested in country-elections. Party fixed effects have been introduced to account for the fact that the observations belonging to the same party are likely to be correlated. This means that the mainstream left dummy could not be included. The results confirm the role of the radical right competitor in enhancing the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the public opinion and the migration context (see the Appendix, Table A4, Figures A3 and A4). In addition, an ordinary least squares regression with party fixed effects and with robust standard errors clustered by country-election, to account for the clustered nature of the data, has been performed. The results point to the same substantive results as those detailed above (see the Appendix, Table A5, Figures A5 and A6).

The analyses were also replicated with a different operationalization of the variable capturing the strength of the radical right. In cases where more than one radical right party competed in the previous election, only the vote share of the strongest one was used (instead of the sum of the individual vote shares). The results confirm the findings from the previous models (see Table A6 and Figures A7 and A8 in the Appendix).



**Figure 2.** Average marginal effects (with 95% confidence intervals) of inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' position on immigration, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right competitor (based on estimates from model 3 in Table 2)

Finally, two robustness checks have been done with different operationalisations of the dependent variable using the CMP codes and another one using CHES data. The first one uses the multiculturalism position of Abou-Chadi (2016)<sup>20</sup>. Although the two interaction terms are not statistically significant (see Table A7 in the Appendix), the average marginal effects indicate that mainstream parties are affected by the public opinion when the vote share of the radical right competitor is around 3% or larger (for vote shares larger than approximately 20% the average marginal effects are significant at  $p < 0.1$  only). No effect is found when the radical right competitor is very weak or absent. However, these analyses do not confirm the results regarding the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the migration context. Although the sign of the effect is the expected one, it is not statistically significant at conventional levels (see Figures A9 and A10 in the Appendix).

<sup>20</sup> Note that higher scores indicated less liberal positions on multiculturalism.

The second one uses the measure originally proposed by Alonso and da Fonseca in their 2012 study (see the results in Table A8 in the Appendix). The average marginal effects confirm that mainstream parties are affected by the public opinion on immigration when the vote share of the radical right competitor is around 6% or larger (see Figure A11 in the Appendix). The effect of the inflows of migrants goes in the expected direction but it is not statistically significant (see Figure A12 in the Appendix).

A replication of the main analysis (cross-classified multilevel models) using the 1999-2014 CHES trend file<sup>21</sup> point to similar findings which indicate that parties do respond to the public but not to the migration context when they face a strong radical right party (see Table A12 and Figures A23 and A24 in the Appendix).

### 3.6. Discussion and conclusions

This article has examined whether and, if so, under which conditions, mainstream parties respond to the public opinion on immigration and to the migration context. The main theoretical expectation was that the party system configuration is likely to alter the patterns of party responsiveness. More specifically, this article has explored, on the one hand, to what extent the presence of a strong radical right party might decrease the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the migration context. On the other hand, these parties' impact on mainstream parties' responsiveness to the public sentiment was less clear. Based on theoretical grounds, both an enhancing and a curbing effect were plausible.

The hypotheses were tested with data from the Comparative Manifesto Project, the European Social Survey, ParlGov database and OECD annual indicators on migrant inflows and country populations. The dominant pattern that emerged from the analyses supports the theoretical expectation that radical right parties alter the dynamics of party responsiveness. The results from the main analysis confirm that both the public opinion

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<sup>21</sup> CHES data (available at <http://chesdata.eu/>) only allow covering 13 countries (note that the party family for the Spanish party UPyD has been manually re-coded into liberals to have consistency across years). Although CMP and CHES data are not perfectly comparable in terms of type of data and timing, I find it encouraging that the results point to similar findings. These results should be interpreted with care because N is rather low, notably considering that the models include two interaction terms.

and the inflows of migrants have a significant effect on mainstream parties' positions on immigration when the latter face an electorally threatening radical right party. Such effect is not detected in party systems where the radical right is weak or absent. The findings regarding the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the public opinion are robust regardless of the exact operationalization of the dependent variable, of the vote share of the radical right party, or the statistical method employed. They all show that the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the public preferences increases as radical right parties become more electorally successful. The results regarding the responsiveness of mainstream parties to the migrant inflows fail to be confirmed in two of the robustness checks (i.e. those relying on different operationalisations of the dependent variable using CMP codes) as the coefficients do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. However, these coefficients do display the expected sign which is encouraging. Also, the analyses with CHES data fail to find a statistically significant impact of the migration rates. Further investigation, ideally drawing on a larger N, should address this matter.

This article helps therefore advancing our understanding of democratic representation in Europe. The presence of strong radical right parties appears to benefit the political representation process in Western European countries as it pushes mainstream parties to pay greater attention to citizens' preferences on immigration and to act upon them by adjusting their issue position. Steenbergen, Edwards and de Vries (2007) had already uncovered that higher inter-party disagreement on the European integration issue strengthened the capacity of party supporters to influence their parties' positions. A similar mechanism could be at play in our case too, as the rise of radical right parties might amplify the party system polarization and bolster the influence of the overall electorate on mainstream parties' stances. However, this is only one possible mechanism, which has not been explicitly tested in this article. Further research should investigate if that is indeed the case.

Compared to a previous study (Han, 2015), the contribution brought by this study is two-fold. First, by focusing directly on mainstream parties' responsiveness to public preferences, it also considers the possibility that parties may become more positive about immigration when the public opinion becomes more pro-immigrant, a scenario not

explicitly considered before. Second, this paper finds that the public opinion (mean voter) does affect mainstream parties under specific conditions, that is, when they face a strong radical right party. This has implications for the larger discussion on mainstream party responsiveness to the mean voter (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011). These findings also speak to the literature on populism and how it impacts democracy (see Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012).

This study has focused on a single policy issue, namely immigration. Future studies should examine whether the dynamics found in this study apply to other issues or other party-issue combinations, like the Greens and the environmental issue.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** List of radical right parties (adapted from Abou-Chadi 2016 and others)

Country	Party
Austria	Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ)
Belgium	Front National (FN) Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang (VB)
Denmark	Danish People's Party (DF) Progress Party (FrP)
Finland	True Finns (SP-P)
France	Front National (FN)
Germany	The Republicans (Die Republikaner – Rep) National Democratic Party (NDP)
Great Britain	
Greece	Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS)
Ireland	
Italy	National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale – AN) Northern League (Lega Nord – LN)
Luxembourg	
Netherlands	List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) Party for Freedom (PVV)
Norway	Progress Party (Fr)
Portugal	
Spain	
Sweden	Sweden Democrats (SD)
Switzerland	Freedom Party of Switzerland (FPS) Swiss Democrats (SD) Swiss People's Party (SVP)

Note: Whereas this paper builds on the definition of radical right parties suggested by Bale (2003), the author of that paper only analyses seven countries. Abou-Chadi (2016) expands this list to include additional countries and parties. In addition, I include in the list the Greek Popular Orthodox Rally – LAOS (Werts et al., 2013).

**Table A2.** Factor analysis/correlation (method: principal-component factors)

Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion of explained variance
Factor1	3.86	0.64
Factor2	0.93	0.16
Factor3	0.39	0.07
Factor4	0.33	0.06
Factor5	0.31	0.05
Factor6	0.17	0.03

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*Number of obs.* = 163136

Note: factor analysis done on observations from 17 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom) from the ESS cumulative dataset, waves 1–6.

**Table A3.** Factor loadings

Variable	Factor 1
Allow many/few immigrants of same race/ethnic group as majority	0.78
Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority	0.87
Allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe	0.83
Immigration bad or good for country's economy	0.76
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	0.77
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0.79

Note: The prediction of the factor scores took into account the fact that the scales of first three variables are in the opposition direction (i.e. higher scores indicate preferences for less migrants) compared to the last three variables. Therefore, the first three variables were first multiplied by -1. Then, the factor analysis (loadings reported above) and the orthogonal rotation were performed to compute the individual factor scores. Factor analysis done on observations from 17 European countries from the ESS cumulative dataset, waves 1–6.

**Table A4.** Effects of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' positions on immigration. Multilevel models with observations nested in elections and party fixed effects (not shown)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Lagged party position			-0.259*** (0.064)	-0.272*** (0.065)	-0.289*** (0.063)
Public opinion				0.819+ (0.444)	0.073 (0.419)
Vote share RRP				-0.000 (0.014)	0.046* (0.019)
Inflows (year prior to election)				-0.048 (0.147)	0.014 (0.126)
Distance election – public opinion				-0.002 (0.006)	-0.010+ (0.006)
Public opinion x Vote share RRP					0.215*** (0.051)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP					-0.058*** (0.017)
Constant	-0.424*** (0.044)	-0.737*** (0.169)	-0.774*** (0.166)	-0.886*** (0.228)	-0.717*** (0.210)
<i>Random components</i>					
var(_cons)	0.029*** (0.020)	0.031*** (0.009)	0.034*** (0.009)	0.030*** (0.008)	0.019*** (0.006)
var(Residual)	0.186*** (0.026)	0.026*** (0.004)	0.021*** (0.003)	0.021*** (0.003)	0.020*** (0.003)
N	150	150	148	148	148
N groups	42	42	42	42	42

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AIC	197.732	82.527	62.415	66.223	54.117
BIC	206.764	287.250	269.222	285.019	278.908
LL	-95.866	26.737	37.793	39.889	47.942
ICC	0.14	0.55	0.63	0.60	0.49

Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Standard errors in parentheses. Party dummies are included in models 2-5 but have been suppressed in the table. Model 1 is an empty model without party fixed effects. Model 2 is an empty model with party fixed effects. Model 3 includes the lagged party position. Model 4 introduces the election level variables and Model 5 adds the relevant interaction terms.

**Table A5.** Effects of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' position on immigration. OLS with party fixed effects (not shown) and robust standard errors clustered by country-election

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Lagged party position			-0.292+ (0.148)	-0.359* (0.164)	-0.370* (0.152)
Public opinion				0.848 (0.551)	0.136 (0.617)
Vote share RRP				0.000 (0.017)	0.043 (0.026)
Inflows (year prior to election)				-0.053 (0.120)	0.009 (0.131)
Distance election – public opinion				0.001 (0.008)	-0.007 (0.006)
Public opinion x Vote share RRP					0.213*** (0.047)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP					-0.059** (0.017)
Constant	-0.415*** (0.044)	-0.212** (0.067)	-0.327** (0.114)	-0.890** (0.316)	-0.605+ (0.308)
N	150	150	148	148	148
R <sup>2</sup>	0.000	0.741	0.747	0.767	0.810

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Robust standard errors in parentheses. Party fixed effects have been included in models 2-5 but have been suppressed in the table. Model 1: empty model. Model 2: empty model plus party fixed effects. Model 3: includes the lagged dependent variable. Model 4: includes the remaining independent variables. Model 5: includes the relevant interactions.



**Table A6.** Effects of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' position on immigration, using an alternative measure for the strength of the radical right party

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Public opinion		0.499**	0.157
		(0.193)	(0.237)
Inflows (year prior to election)		0.002	0.142
		(0.097)	(0.103)
Vote share RRP (alternative)		-0.003	0.034*
		(0.007)	(0.015)
Type of mainstream party (1 = mainstream left, 0 = mainstream right)		0.150	0.165+
		(0.093)	(0.094)
Lagged party position		0.060	0.013
		(0.076)	(0.075)
Distance election – public opinion		-0.006	-0.006
		(0.007)	(0.006)
Public opinion x Vote share RRP (alternative)			0.098*
			(0.041)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP (alternative)			-0.045**
			(0.015)
Constant	-0.420***	-0.385**	-0.567***
	(0.059)	(0.146)	(0.161)
<i>Random components</i>			
var(R.election_year)	0.046***	0.048***	0.036***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.013)
var(_cons)	0.128***	0.088***	0.093***
	(0.028)	(0.029)	(0.028)
var(Residual)	0.047***	0.046***	0.044***
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.009)

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N	150	148	148
AIC	144.793	136.612	132.275
BIC	156.835	166.585	168.242
LL	-68.396	-58.306	-54.138

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Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

**Table A7.** Effects of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties. Party position = (per608 - per607) / (per608 + per607) (Abou-Chadi 2016)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Public opinion		-0.908** (0.351)	-0.533 (0.427)
Inflows (year prior to election)		0.036 (0.145)	0.031 (0.169)
Vote share RRP		0.028** (0.010)	0.032 (0.025)
Type of mainstream party (1 = mainstream left, 0 = mainstream right)		-0.189 (0.183)	-0.173 (0.172)
Lagged DV		0.058 (0.086)	0.140 (0.090)
Distance election – public opinion		0.000 (0.010)	0.002 (0.010)
Public opinion x Vote share RRP			-0.082 (0.065)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP			0.008 (0.026)
Constant	-0.171+ (0.093)	-0.289 (0.216)	-0.326 (0.256)
<i>Random components</i>			
var(R.election_year)	0.084*** (0.052)	0.021 (0.067)	0.027+ (0.055)
var(_cons)	0.252*** (0.082)	0.247* (0.169)	0.192* (0.137)
var(Residual)	0.263*** (0.050)	0.262*** (0.060)	0.278*** (0.068)

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N	132	116	116
AIC	293.600	257.573	259.579
BIC	305.132	285.109	292.622
LL	-142.800	-118.787	-117.790

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Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

**Table A8.** Effects of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties. Party position = per607 + per705 - per608 - per601 - per605 (Alonso and da Fonseca 2012)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Public opinion		2.777 (2.068)	-0.632 (2.694)
Inflows (year prior to election)		-0.393 (1.091)	0.356 (1.234)
Vote share RRP		-0.038 (0.068)	0.113 (0.173)
Type of mainstream party (1 = mainstream left, 0 = mainstream right)		1.739+ (1.040)	1.960+ (1.106)
Lagged DV		0.228** (0.077)	0.146+ (0.076)
Distance election – public opinion		-0.030 (0.076)	-0.031 (0.075)
Public opinion x Vote share RRP			0.893* (0.424)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP			-0.254 (0.167)
Constant	-4.259*** (0.692)	-2.899+ (1.633)	-3.895* (1.876)
<i>Random components</i>			
var(R.election_year)	5.378*** (2.008)	5.084*** (2.010)	4.390*** (1.780)
var(_cons)	17.610*** (4.075)	8.629** (6.880)	11.095*** (5.743)
var(Residual)	9.138*** (1.634)	11.943*** (3.820)	10.643*** (2.754)

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N	153	153	153
AIC	922.481	926.986	926.850
BIC	934.602	957.290	963.215
LL	-457.240	-453.493	-451.425

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Note: +  $p < 0.10$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

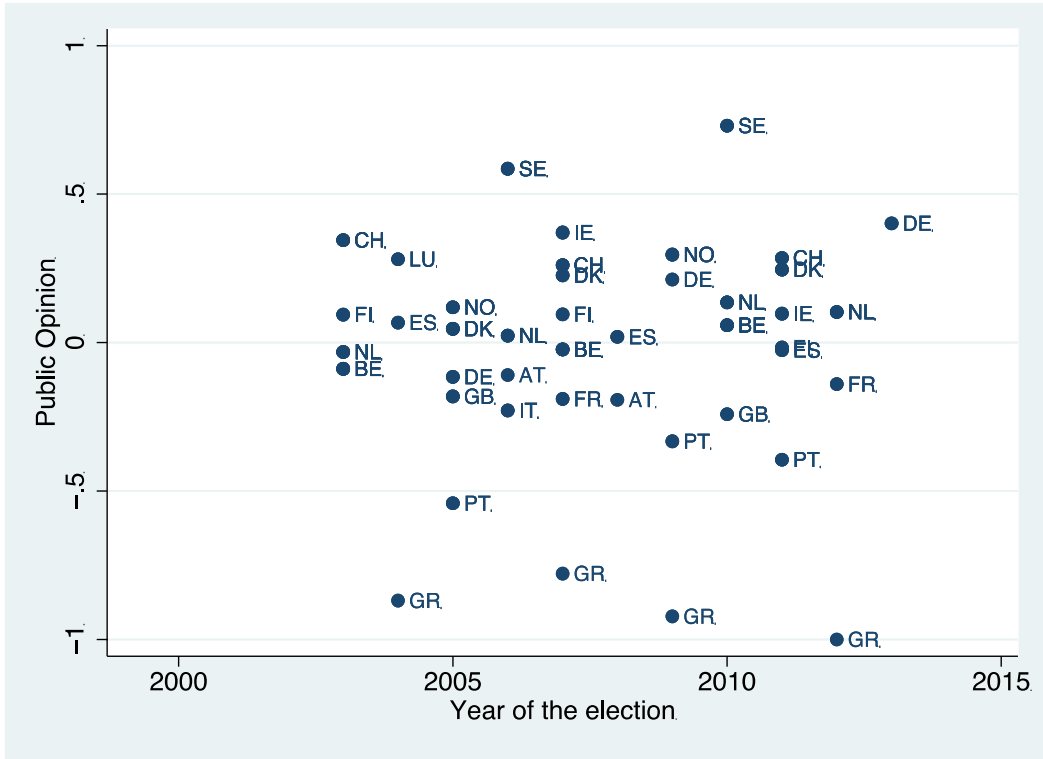


Figure A1. Scatterplot of public opinion by election year

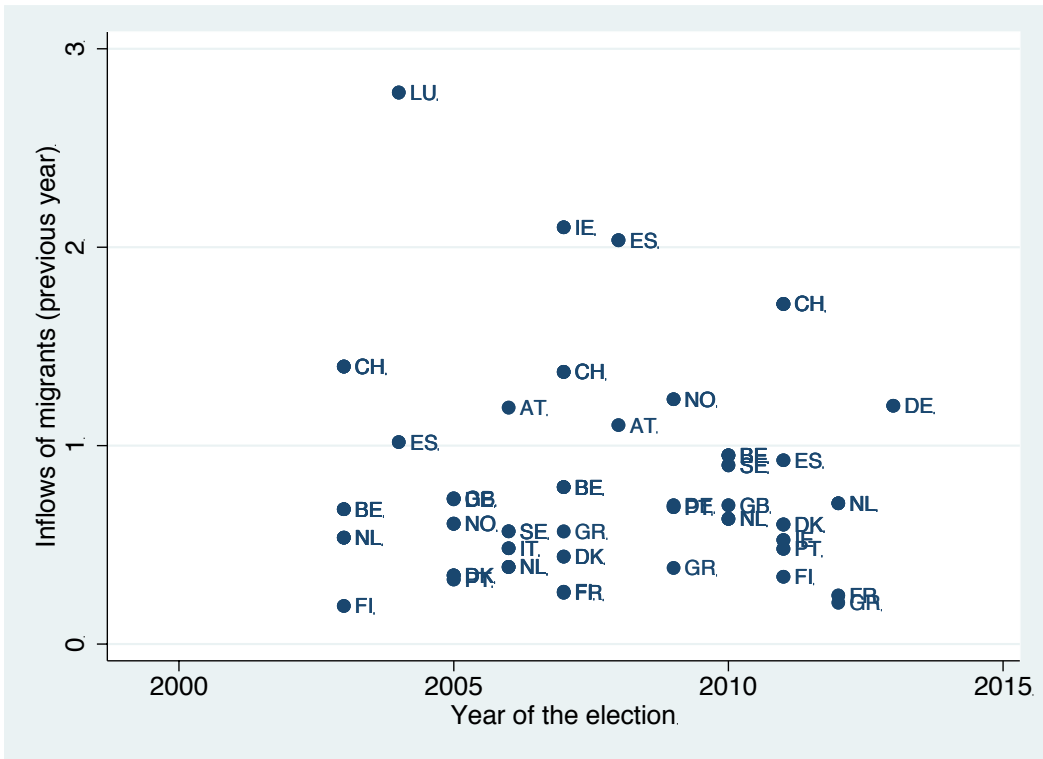
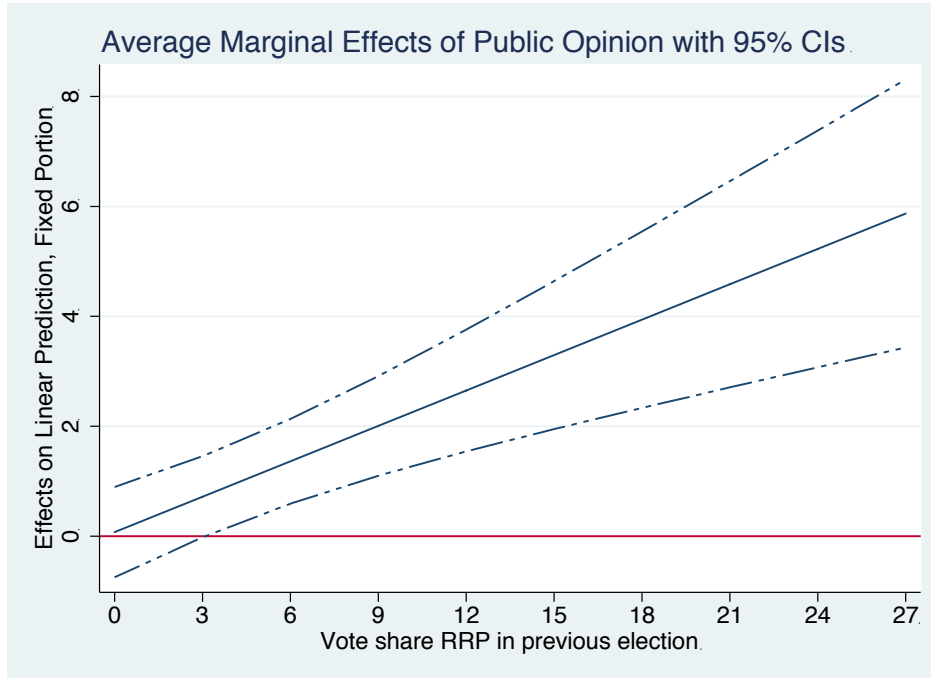
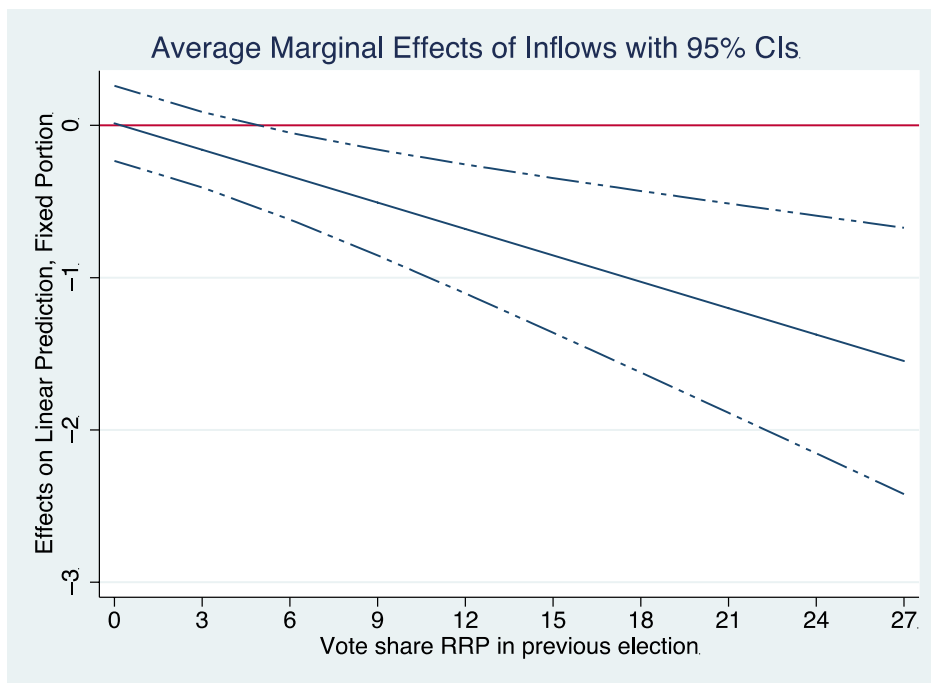


Figure A2. Scatterplot of inflows of migrants (as percentage of total population, in the year prior to the election) by election year

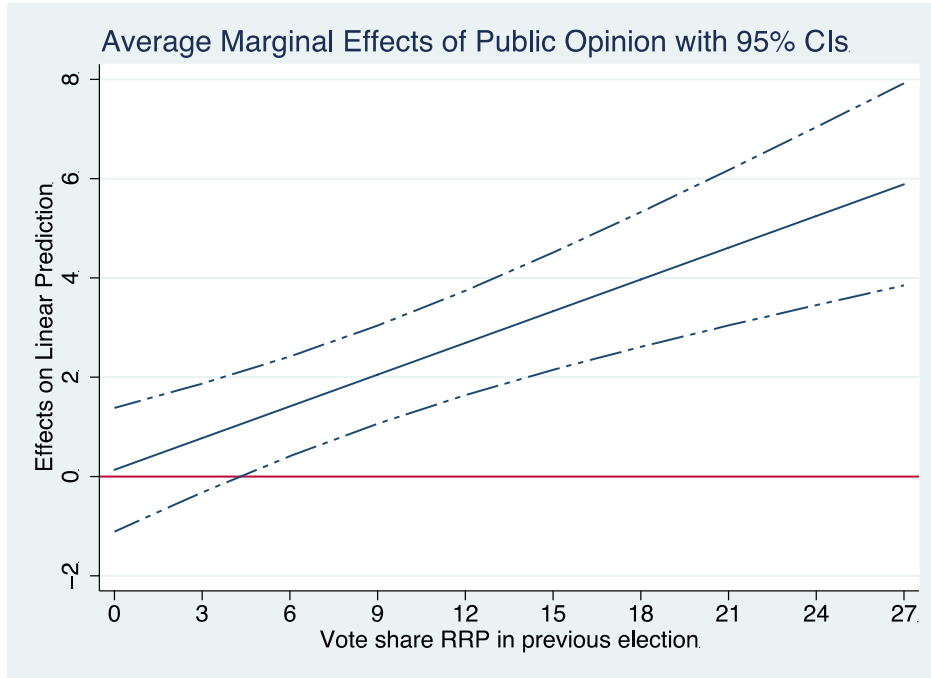


**Figure A3.** Average marginal effects (with 95% confidence intervals) of public opinion, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 5 in Table A4 in the Appendix)

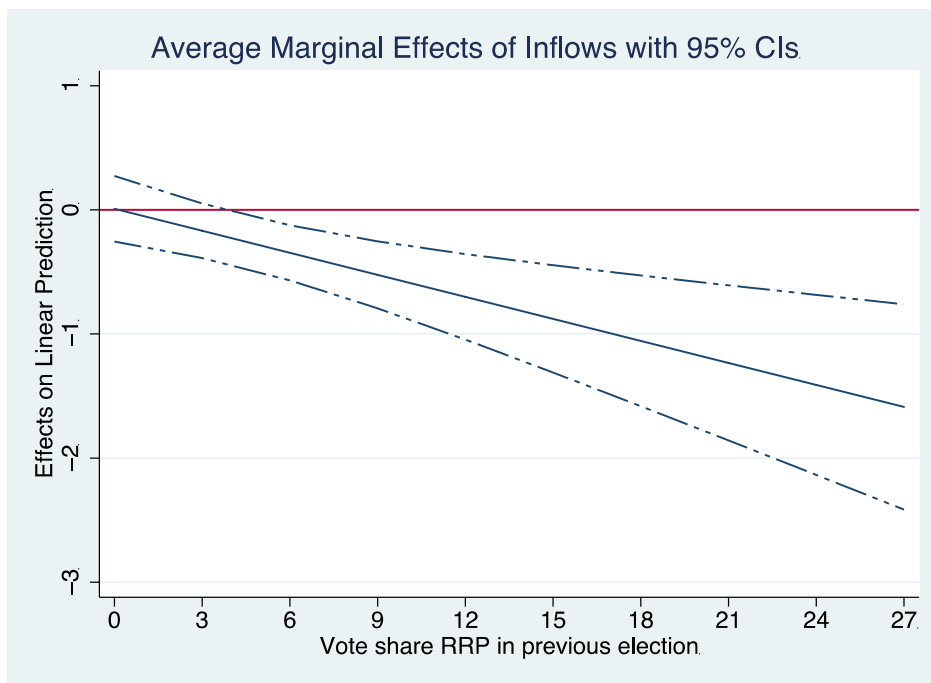


**Figure A4.** Average marginal effects (with 95% CIs) of the *inflows* variable, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 5 in Table A4 in the Appendix)

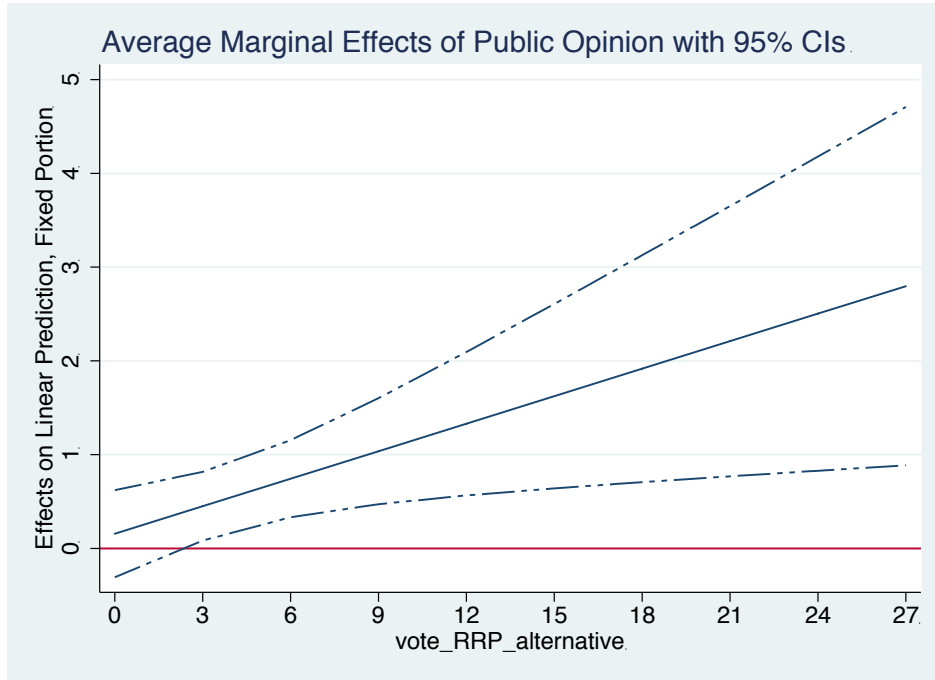




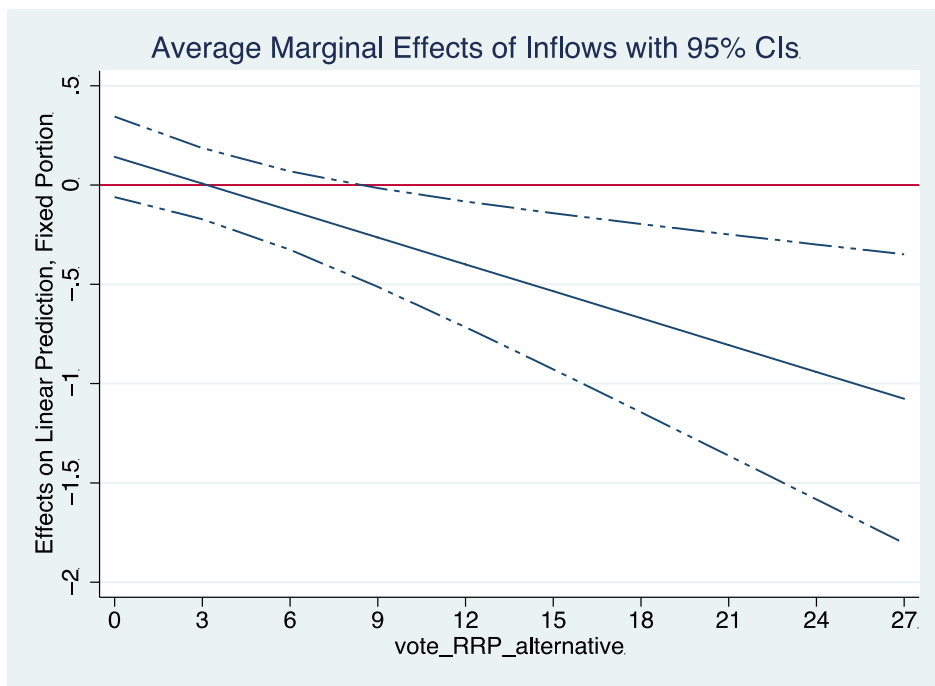
**Figure A5.** Average marginal effects (with 95% confidence intervals) of public opinion, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 5 in Table A5 in the Appendix)



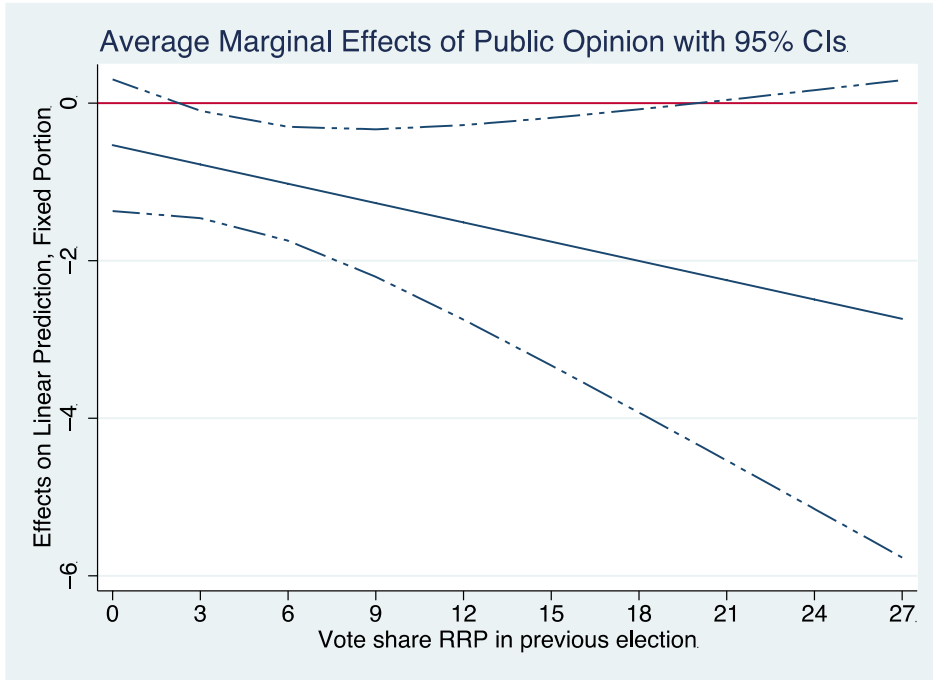
**Figure A6.** Average marginal effects (with 95% CIs) of the *inflows* variable, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 5 in Table A5 in the Appendix)



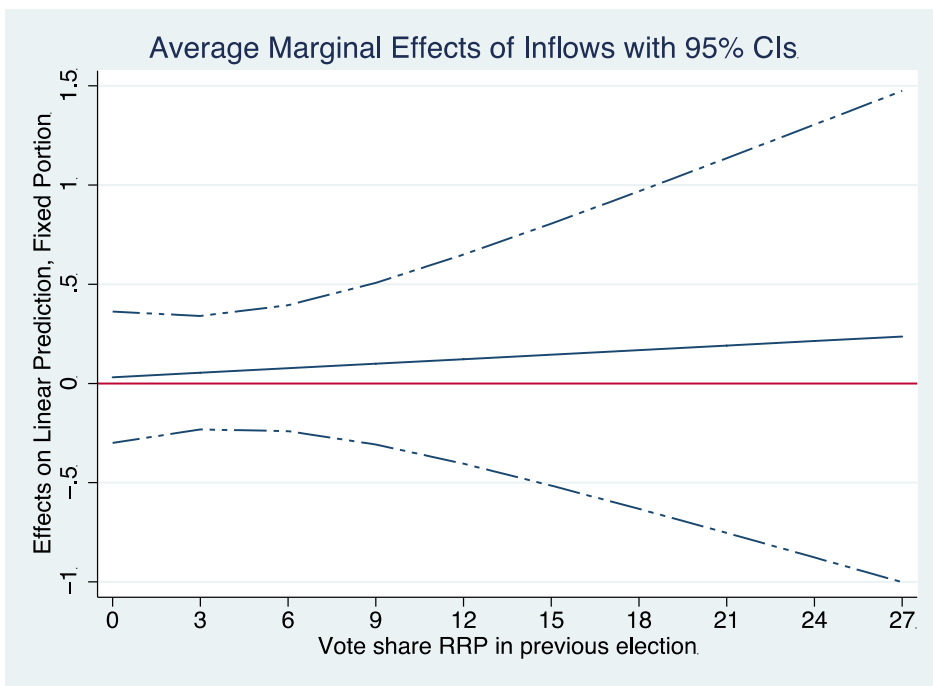
**Figure A7.** Average marginal effects of public opinion conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the strongest radical right party (based on Model 3 in Table A6)



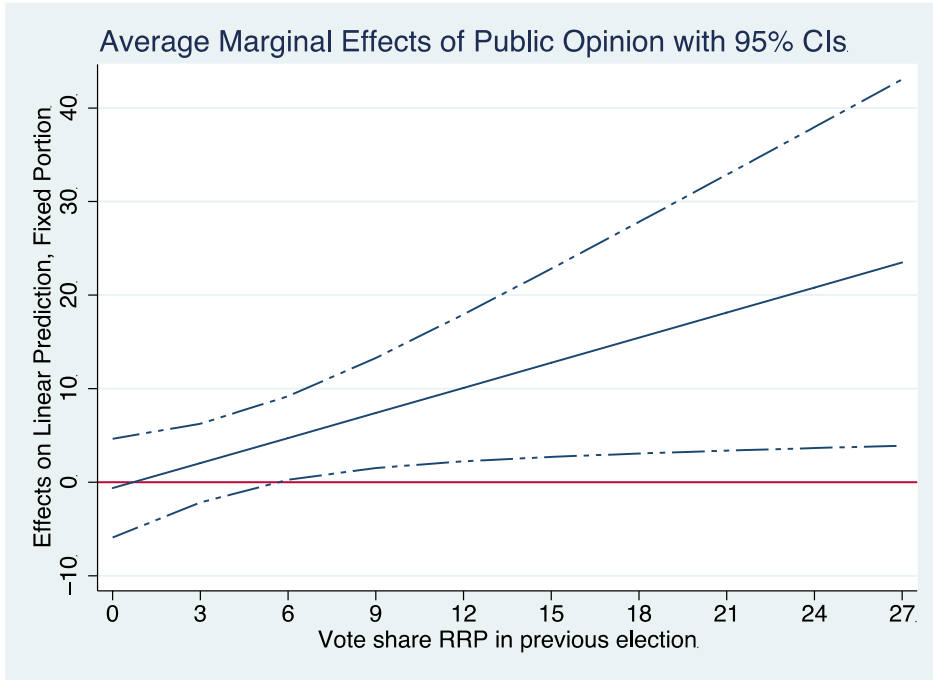
**Figure A8.** Average marginal effects of the inflows of migrants conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the strongest radical right party (based on Model 3 in Table A6)



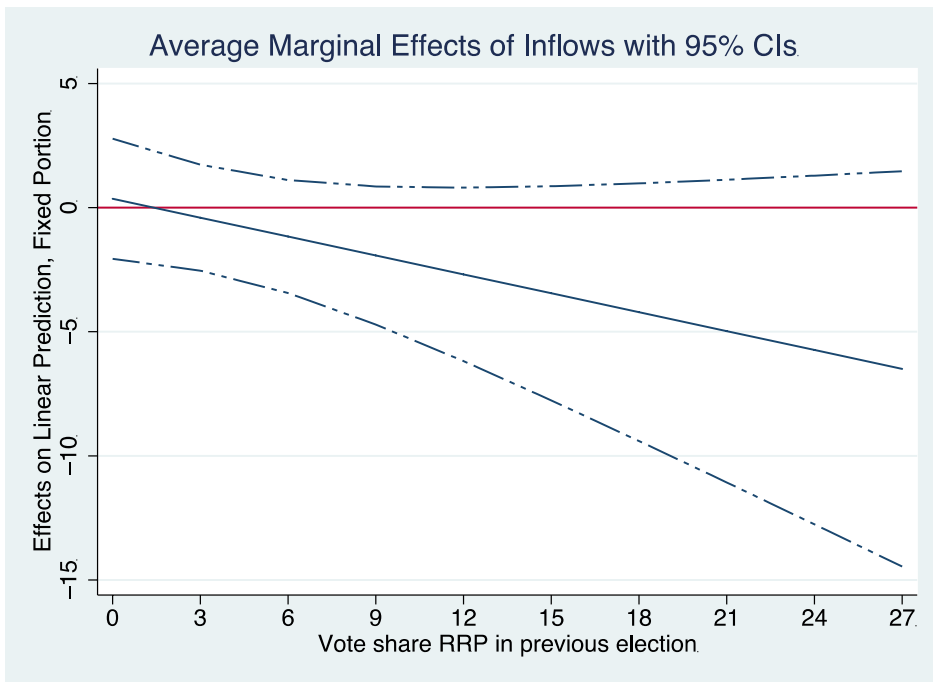
**Figure A9.** Average marginal effects (with 95% confidence intervals) of public opinion, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 3 in Table A7 in the Appendix)



**Figure A10.** Average marginal effects (with 95% CIs) of the *inflows* variable, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 3 in Table A7 in the Appendix)



**Figure A11.** Average marginal effects (with 95% confidence intervals) of public opinion, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 3 in Table A8 in the Appendix)

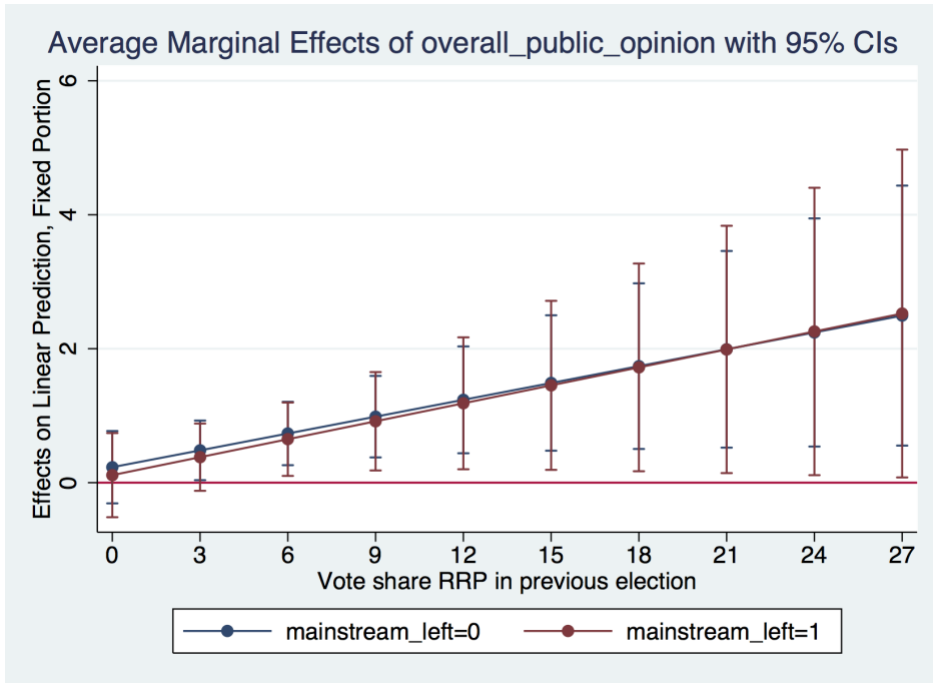


**Figure A12.** Average marginal effects (with 95% CIs) of the *inflows* variable, conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Model 3 in Table A8 in the Appendix)

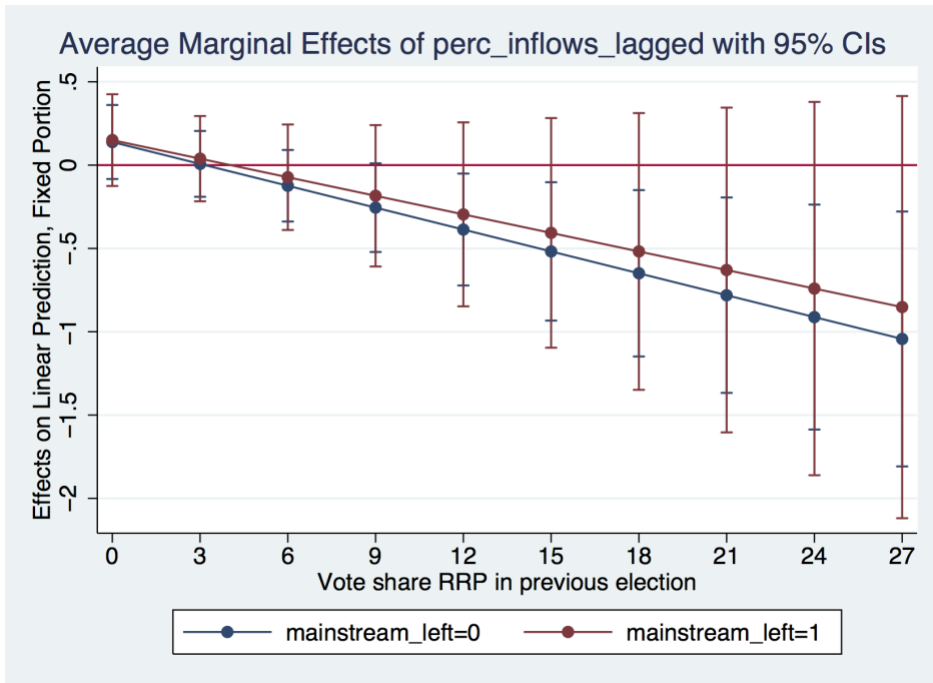
**Table A9.** The effect of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' positions regarding immigration. Cross-classified models with triple interaction.

	Party position on immigration
Public Opinion	0.231 (0.276)
Vote share RRP	0.035* (0.016)
Public opinion x Vote share RRP	0.084* (0.042)
Mainstream left	0.149 (0.174)
Mainstream left x Public Opinion	-0.119 (0.363)
Mainstream left x Vote share RRP	-0.004 (0.024)
Mainstream left x Public Opinion x Vote share RRP	0.006 (0.058)
Inflows (year prior to election)	0.139 (0.113)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP	-0.044** (0.016)
Mainstream left x Inflows (year prior to election)	0.011 (0.139)
Mainstream left x Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP	0.007 (0.027)
Lagged party position	0.003 (0.075)
Distance election – public opinion	-0.006 (0.006)
Constant	-0.581*** (0.170)
<i>Random components</i>	
var(R.election_year)	0.037*** (0.013)
var(_cons)	0.095*** (0.030)
var(Residual)	0.043*** (0.010)
N	148
AIC	142.159
BIC	193.112
LL	-54.080

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.



**Figure A13.** Average marginal effects of public opinion conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party, by type of mainstream party (based on estimates of Table A9)

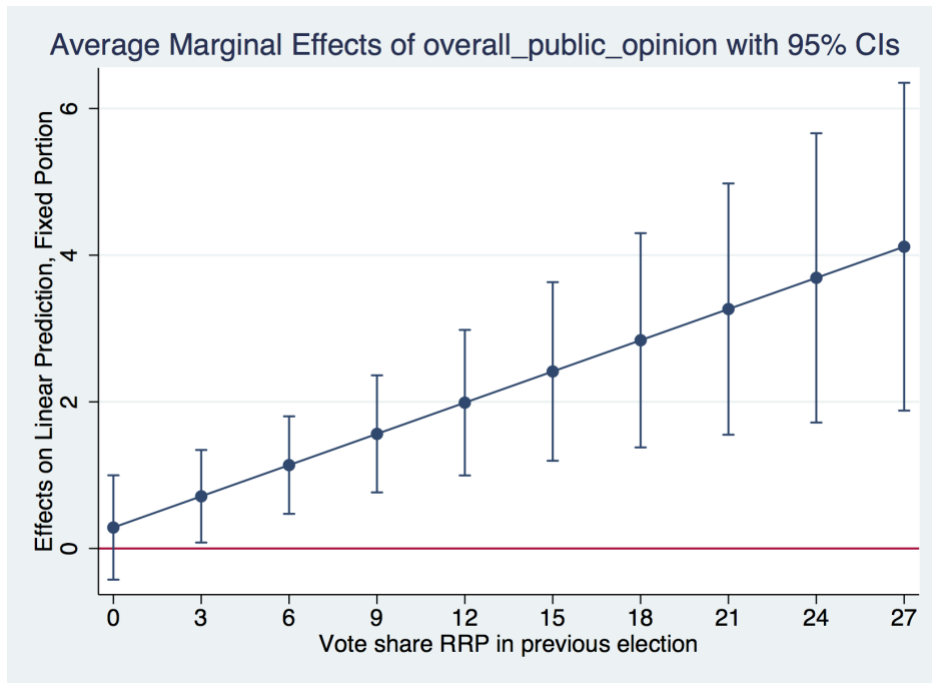


**Figure A14.** Average marginal effects of migrant inflows conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party, by type of mainstream party (based on estimates of Table A9)

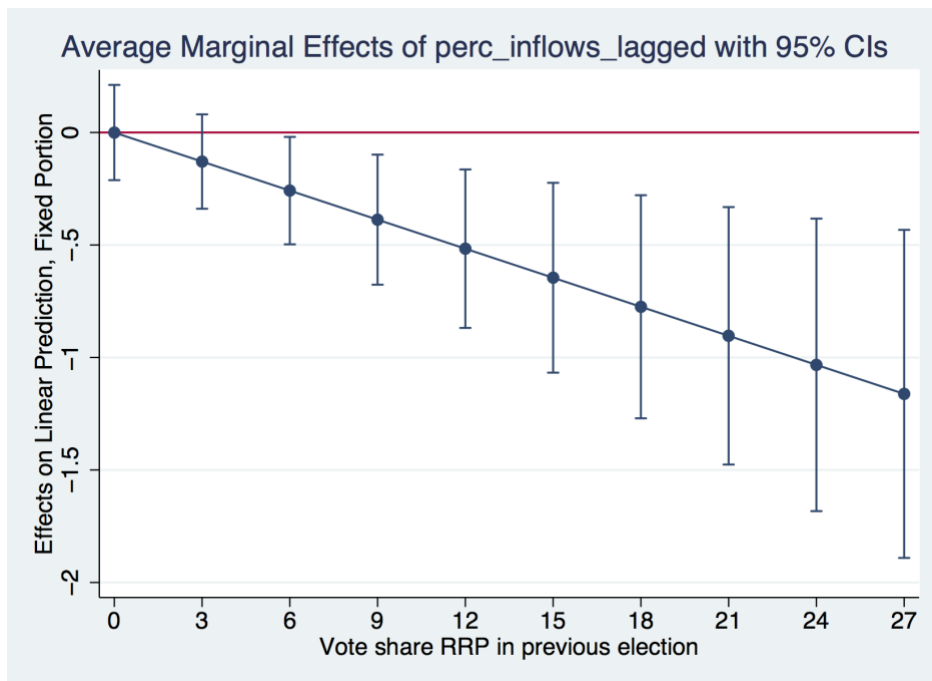
**Table A10.** The effect of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' positions regarding immigration. Multilevel model on split sample (by mainstream right and left parties)

	Mainstream right	Mainstream left
Public Opinion	0.287 (0.363)	-0.098 (0.613)
Vote share RRP	0.033* (0.016)	0.115** (0.038)
Public Opinion x Vote share RRP	0.142** (0.047)	0.393*** (0.088)
Inflows (year prior to election)	-0.000 (0.108)	-0.074 (0.185)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP	-0.043** (0.014)	-0.133*** (0.040)
Lagged party position	-0.110 (0.083)	-0.505*** (0.109)
Distance election – public opinion	-0.011* (0.006)	-0.008 (0.008)
Constant	-0.790** (0.257)	-0.729+ (0.396)
<i>Random components</i>		
var(_cons)	0.012*** (0.004)	0.045*** (0.013)
var(Residual)	0.015*** (0.003)	0.010*** (0.005)
N	98	50
AIC	14.674	47.649
BIC	154.263	105.009
LL	46.663	6.176

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses. Multilevel model with observations nested in country-election and with party fixed effects. The party fixed effects have been suppressed from the table.

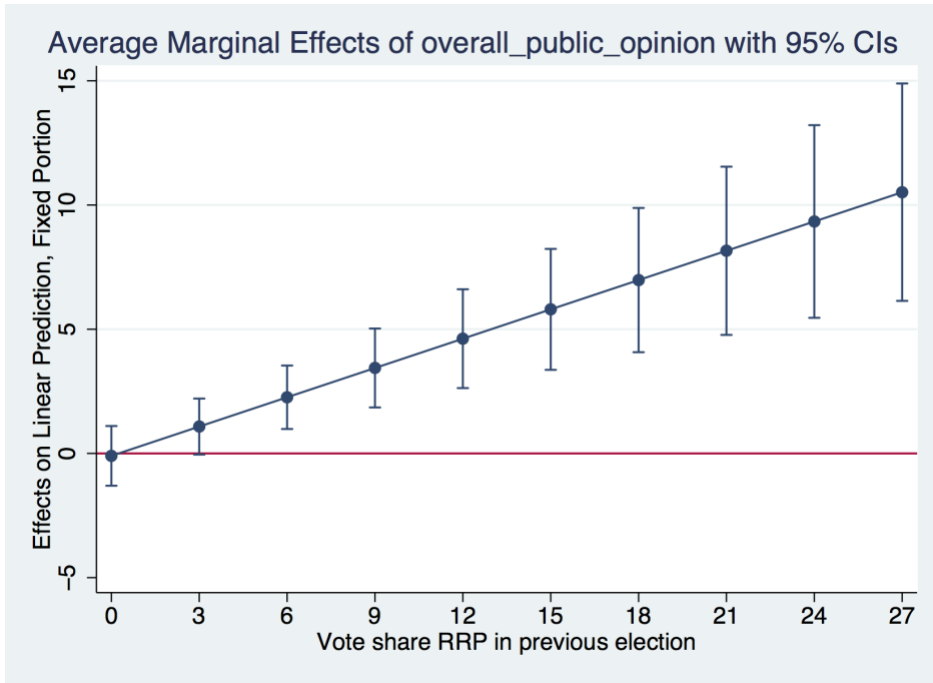


**Figure A15.** Average marginal effects of public opinion on the position of mainstream right-wing parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A10, model “Mainstream right”)

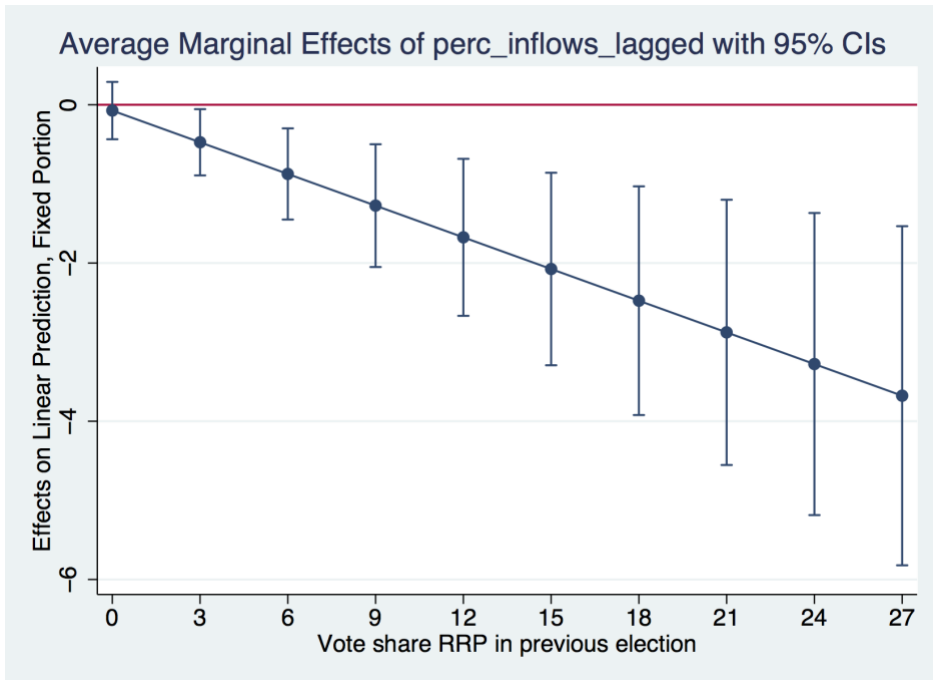


**Figure A16.** Average marginal effects of migrant inflows on the position of mainstream right-wing parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A10, model “Mainstream right”)





**Figure A17.** Average marginal effects of public opinion on the position of mainstream left-wing parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A10, model “Mainstream left”)

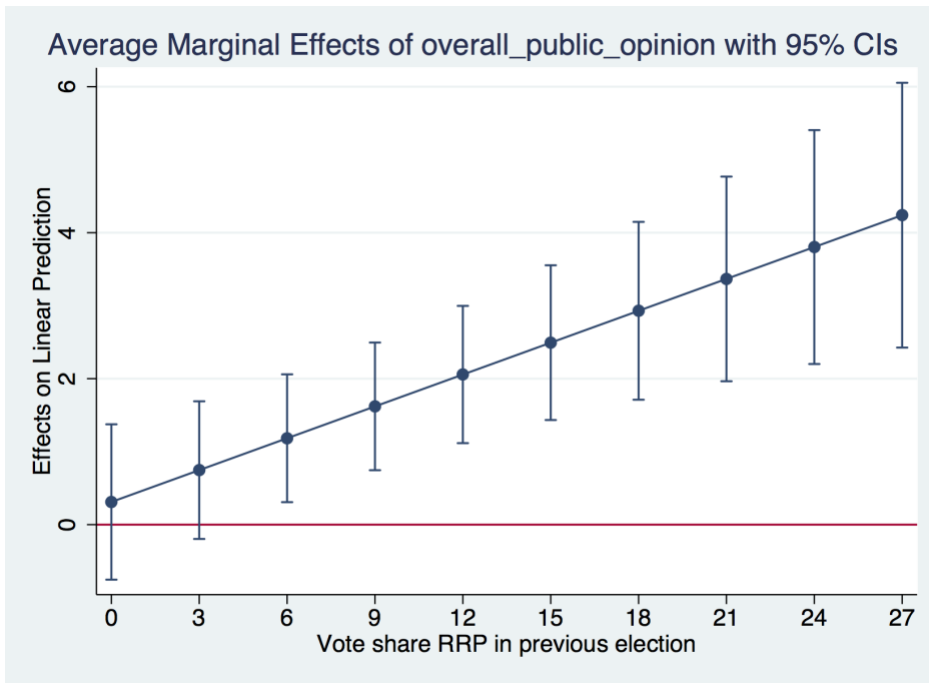


**Figure A18.** Average marginal effects of migrant inflows on the position of mainstream left-wing parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A10, model “Mainstream left”)

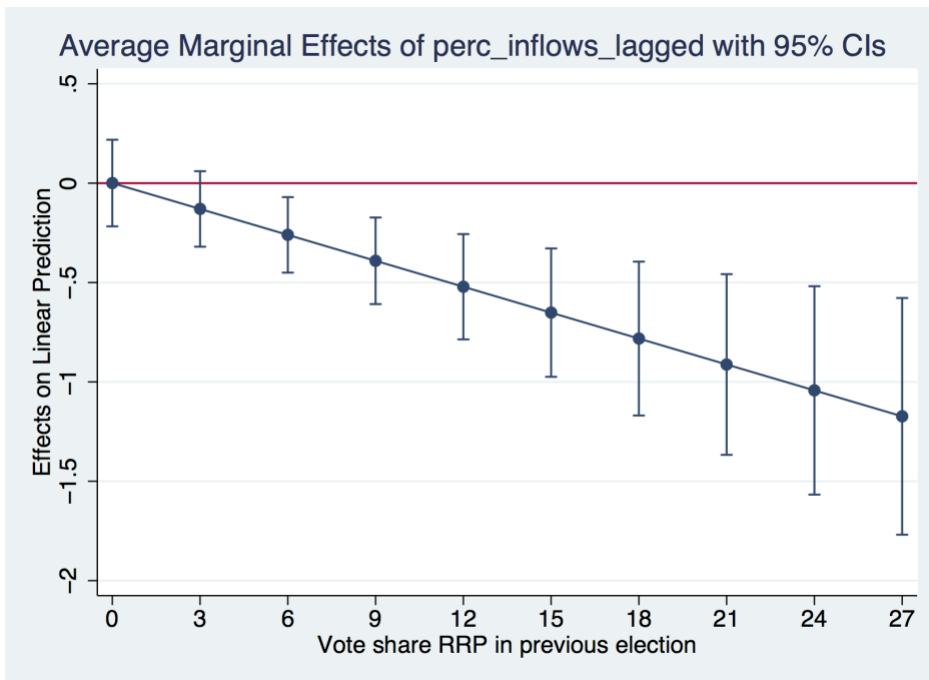
**Table A11.** The effect of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' positions regarding immigration. OLS with robust standard errors clustered by country-election and party fixed effects on split sample (by mainstream left and right parties)

	Mainstream Right	Mainstream Left
Public Opinion	0.311 (0.526)	-0.031 (0.921)
Vote share RRP	0.031 (0.026)	0.096* (0.044)
Public Opinion x Vote share RRP	0.146*** (0.040)	0.380*** (0.098)
Inflows (year prior to election)	0.001 (0.108)	-0.080 (0.202)
Inflows (year prior to election) x Vote share RRP	-0.043** (0.012)	-0.123* (0.046)
Lagged party position	-0.140 (0.177)	-0.537* (0.250)
Distance election – public opinion	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.007 (0.008)
Constant	-0.832* (0.376)	-0.747 (0.467)
N	98	50
R <sup>2</sup>	0.875	0.732

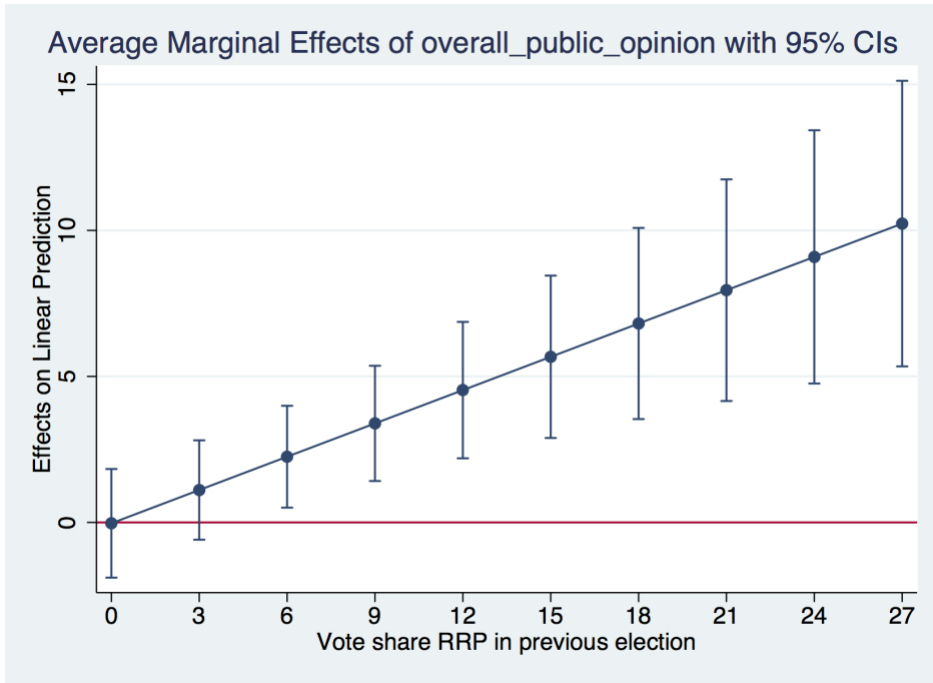
Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Robust standard errors in parentheses. The party fixed effects have been suppressed from the table.



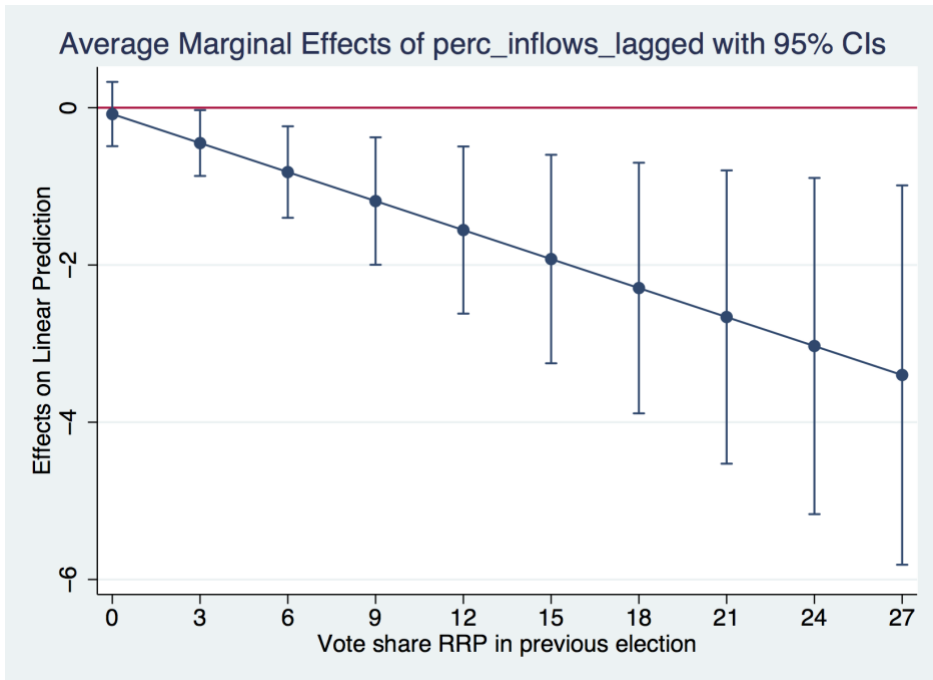
**Figure A19.** Average marginal effects of public opinion on the position of mainstream right-wing parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A11, model “Mainstream Right”)



**Figure A20.** Average marginal effects of inflows on the position of mainstream right-wing parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A11, model “Mainstream Right”)



**Figure A21.** Average marginal effects of public opinion on the position of mainstream left parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A11, model “Mainstream Left”)

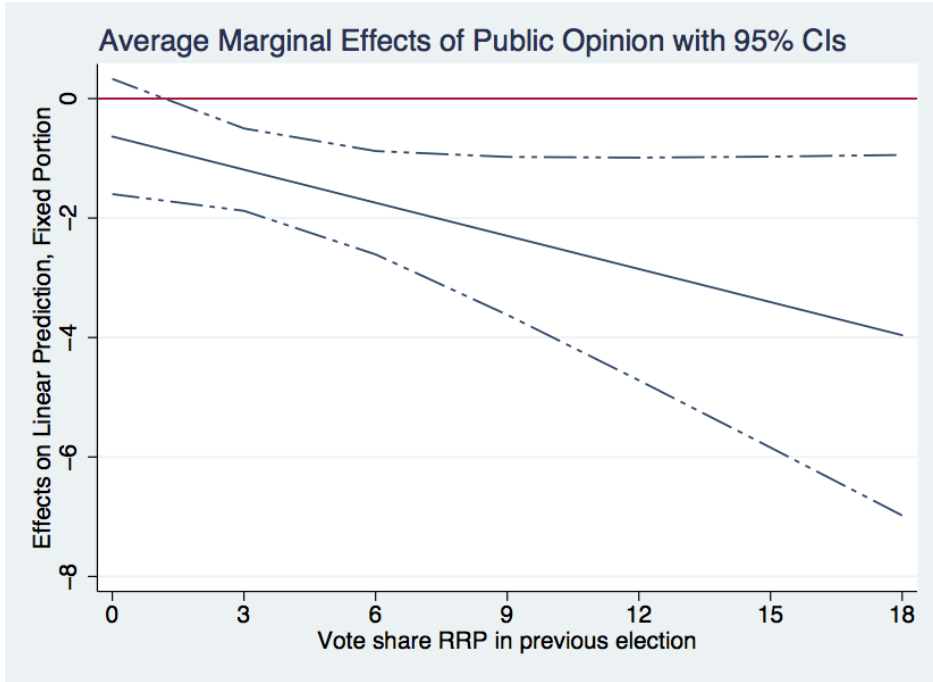


**Figure A22.** Average marginal effects of migrant inflows on the position of mainstream left parties conditional on the vote share obtained in the previous election by the radical right party (based on estimates from Table A11, model “Mainstream Left”)

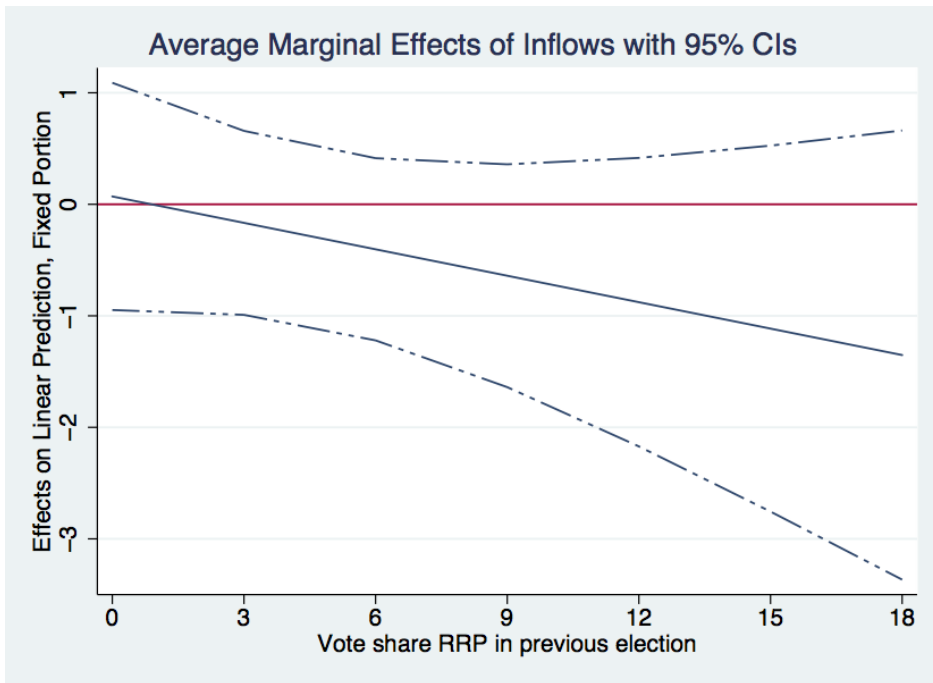
**Table A12.** The effect of public opinion and inflows of migrants on mainstream parties' positions regarding immigration (cross-classified models with CHES data)

	Party position	Party position	Party position
Public Opinion		-1.180** (0.393)	-0.635 (0.492)
Inflows		-0.267 (0.460)	0.071 (0.520)
Vote share RRP		0.006 (0.021)	0.077 (0.047)
Mainstream left		-0.233 (0.169)	-0.242 (0.170)
Lagged party position		0.933*** (0.049)	0.931*** (0.049)
Distance CHES wave – public opinion		-0.091** (0.034)	-0.065* (0.032)
Public Opinion x Vote share RRP			-0.185+ (0.103)
Inflows x Vote share RRP			-0.079 (0.071)
Constant	5.258*** (0.266)	1.674** (0.608)	1.132+ (0.604)
<i>Random components</i>			
var(R.expert_year)	0.236** (0.114)	0.141*** (0.078)	0.086*** (0.062)
var(_cons)	2.921*** (0.628)	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)
var(Residual)	0.213*** (0.055)	0.383*** (0.071)	0.384*** (0.071)
N	92	81	81
AIC	310.092	191.074	189.502
BIC	320.179	215.018	218.235
LL	-151.046	-85.537	-82.751

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Standard errors in parentheses.



**Figure A23.** Average marginal effects of public opinion on the position of mainstream parties conditional on radical right strength, based on estimates from Table A12, Model 3



**Figure A24.** Average marginal effects of migrant inflows on the position of mainstream parties conditional on radical right strength, based on estimates from Table A12, Model 3

## 4. Do parties influence public opinion on immigration? Evidence from Europe\*

### **Abstract**

Despite a rich literature on the factors influencing the public opinion on immigration, less is known about the top-down effects of political parties and policies on the public's preferences in this domain. We analyse in this paper the impact of political parties' positions and of immigration policies on citizens' attitudes toward immigration. We are interested in the effects of public policy understood both in terms of policy regime, that is country specific regulations on immigration, and policy outcomes, such as the stocks of immigrant population. Based on data covering twenty-three European countries during the period 2002-2011, we estimate longitudinal effects. The results point to the existence of top-down influences on citizens' immigration attitudes.

### **Keywords**

Public opinion; Immigration; Policies; Party positions; Thermostatic model

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\* Paper co-authored with Romain Lachat (Cevipof, Sciences Po, Paris).

## 4.1. Introduction

In the scholarly literature, there has been an increasing interest in the factors explaining citizens' immigration attitudes. Much of this literature has investigated the socio-economic, cultural and psychological drivers of these views (for a recent review see Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). However, it has remained largely silent on the potential of political parties to influence the public opinion on this issue (but see Brader and Tucker, 2012; Hellwig and Kweon, 2016). Indeed, in a recent review of the causes of public attitudes toward immigration, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014: 227) cautioned that 'scholarship on immigration attitudes has too often treated immigration attitudes as isolated from partisanship and political ideology, leaving important questions about the role of party cues in immigration attitudes unanswered'.

We analyse in this study to what extent top-down influences shape voters' immigration preferences. The study of top-down effects on public opinion has been approached in the literature from two main perspectives. First, previous studies have looked into the impact of political elites' messages and policy-positions on public attitudes (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Bullock, 2011; Kam, 2005; Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010; Zaller, 1992). Second, scholars have also acknowledged the connection between government policies and public opinion (Erikson et al., 2002; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995).

In this paper, we borrow from both of these research streams and investigate, in addition to individual-level characteristics, the relative impact of parties' positions and of policies on public preferences on immigration. By exploring the joint role of party positions and policies in influencing public opinion on the immigration issue, this study provides a more comprehensive account of the factors that drive the public sentiment about immigration in current European democracies. Not only does it allow evaluating the relative importance of individual vs. contextual factors, but it also shows which type of context-level cues contribute more strongly to shaping citizens' immigration attitudes.

Regarding the impact of political parties' stances, there is extensive evidence that parties cue voters and influence their opinions (Brader et al., 2013; Steenbergen et al., 2007;



Zaller, 1992). This is because voters often rely on political elites as sources of information to form opinions on political issues (Lupia and McCubbins, 1998; Zaller, 1992). Many studies have analysed the influence that parties exert on their own supporters (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Bullock, 2011; Steenbergen et al., 2007). Focusing specifically on attitudes toward immigration and refugees, Hellwig and Kweon (2016) show that citizens' views are influenced by the positions of the parties they support, an effect that appears to be stronger among the more educated citizens.

Furthermore, this expected effect of partisan cues on citizens' attitudes is likely to vary in strength between contexts in which the immigration issue is more or less salient. When immigration is high on the political agenda, parties should communicate more intensively on this topic. This, in turn, should increase the probability that a large share of citizens are exposed to such messages, and make it more likely to observe attitudinal changes (Zaller, 1992). In line with that, studies focusing on the European integration issue confirmed that high issue salience reinforces the top-down relationship between parties and their voters (Steenbergen et al., 2007). Therefore, we also explore in this study to what extent the attention dedicated by parties to the immigration issue might moderate the relationship between the party positions and public attitudes.

Regarding changes in policies, we expect to observe effects similar to the ones described by the thermostatic model of the public opinion-policy connection (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995; Wlezien and Soroka, 2012). This model posits that policies in a specific domain negatively affect citizens' relative preferences for more or less policy in that domain. In other words, where policies move in a certain direction, citizens' support for policy moving in that direction should decrease. Issue salience plays again an important role as higher salience enhances citizens' responsiveness to changes in policies (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). We therefore explore to what extent there is a dynamic relationship between immigration policies and public attitudes, and whether this is moderated by the salience of the immigration issue.

Even if we would expect citizens to react to immigration policies, there may be different ways to capture policy changes, focusing for instance on policies, outputs, or outcomes.

Previous studies suggest that citizens are more responsive to policy outputs (e.g. actual spending) and that they only tend to respond to policy decisions (e.g. budgetary decisions) when the policy-domain is salient (Soroka and Wlezién, 2010; see also Jennings, 2009 on public responsiveness to government outputs). However, measures of public spending, which are frequently used to capture policy changes in studies of the thermostatic model, should not reflect variation in how restrictive immigration policies are. As a consequence, our study will focus instead on two other aspects of policies: the policy regime (conceived as regulations on immigration) and policy outcomes (more specifically the size of the immigrant stocks).

Addressing these questions requires data on citizens' immigration preferences, party positions and issue salience, as well as immigration policies and policy outcomes. Furthermore, in order to estimate how party positions and policies impact on citizens' immigration attitudes, the former need to precede the latter, which makes a longitudinal design essential. Our individual-level data come from modules 1 to 5 of European Social Survey (ESS). We will combine these with data on party positions, immigration policy, number of migrants, and immigration salience. All of these context-level predictors or moderators will be measured in the year preceding the relevant ESS round.

Our analysis covers twenty-three countries during the period 2002 - 2011. The results point to the existence of top-down effects on the immigration attitudes of citizens in European countries. Parties do influence, through the stances they adopt on the immigration issue, the attitudes of voters in their countries. There is also evidence of a thermostatic relationship between policy and public opinion on this issue, as the public tends to become more sceptical of immigration where the immigration policy becomes more liberal over time or when the number of foreign residents increases. The remaining of the paper is structured as follows. First, we review the relevant literature and develop the theoretical expectations. Then, we present our data and methods and we discuss the results we obtain. We conclude by considering the implications of our findings.

## 4.2. Literature review

### 4.2.1. Literature on attitudes toward immigrants and immigration

While this paper's key hypotheses will focus on the effect of partisan and policy-related cues, we know from a rich literature on attitudes toward immigrants and immigration that individual-level characteristics are also central explanatory factors. It is thus important to take these into account, and we start by reviewing this research, which has mainly focused on approaches drawing from political economy and socio-psychology (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Researchers have attempted to explain such attitudes either from an interest-based or from an identity-based perspective, depending on whether the threat perceived by natives was grounded in 'objective social and economic conditions or in cultural and psychological predispositions' (Sides and Citrin, 2007: 478).

Scholarship drawing on political economy theories has focused on labour market competition and the fiscal burden brought by immigrants and immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). In this line of research the emphasis lies on material self-interest and competition over scarce resources as natives perceive immigrants to threaten their jobs and wages and to increase the costs supported by the welfare systems (Sides and Citrin, 2007). Earlier studies focusing on the skill-set composition of native and immigration populations found that labour market competition mechanisms drive individuals' immigration attitudes beyond the effect of non-economic factors (Mayda, 2006). However, the labour market competition claims have recently come under scrutiny because studies focusing on this mechanism do not accurately match the skills of natives and immigrants. Also, most of these studies use education as a proxy for skills, which is problematic since education is also associated with non-economic factors, such as cultural tolerance (Malhotra et al., 2013). Sides and Citrin (2007), for instance, do not find any effect of income on the individual immigration views. Focusing on specific industries and precisely matching natives' and migrants' skills offers evidence of an impact of the labour market competition on immigration preferences, but this is conditional on the economic threat being actually present and corresponds to an upper limit of the effect (Malhotra et al., 2013).

Regarding the role of economic factors, Sides and Citrin (2007) suggest that objective indicators of personal economic circumstances (such as income or being unemployed) are less related to immigration attitudes. Their study indicates that egotropic economic evaluations are to some extent related to these attitudes but their impact is exceeded by the sociotropic economic evaluations (see also Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014 for a review on the impact of sociotropic effects). By contrast, in an experimental study, Sniderman *et al.* (2004) find that perceptions of economic threat at both the individual and national level help explaining, to some extent, sentiments of hostility toward immigrant minorities. On the other hand, there is consensus among scholars that cultural concerns, that is concerns about the effect of immigration on national identity and traditions, outweigh the economic ones in explaining the immigration views of natives (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; Malhotra *et al.*, 2013; Sides and Citrin, 2007; Sniderman *et al.*, 2004).

Several studies exploring the drivers of immigration attitudes have also accounted for respondents' party identification (Malhotra *et al.*, 2013), whereas others have considered the role of political ideology. Sides and Citrin (2007) find that more conservative individuals tend to have more negative immigration attitudes, an effect that increases among those with higher levels of political awareness. However, Pardos-Prado (2011) shows that the relationship between ideology and attitudes toward immigrants and immigration only holds in those cases where citizens do not experience the direct threat of immigration. In other words, where natives compete with immigrants over scarce resources their opinion formation process does not rely on ideological cues. By contrast, where such threat is absent (due to higher occupational and socio-economic status at individual level, or higher GDP or lower unemployment at national level), individuals use their political predispositions to form opinions and articulate preferences regarding immigration (Pardos-Prado, 2011).

The relation between citizens' ideological preferences and their views about immigration is central in studies that focus on the nature of the main dimensions structuring citizens' attitudes and electoral competition. It is usual to distinguish between two main dimensions of competition: economic and sociocultural (Kitschelt, 1994; Kriesi *et al.*,

2008; Van Der Brug and Van Spanje, 2009). The second dimension has been labelled in different ways, such as a conflict between libertarian and authoritarian preferences (Kitschelt, 1994), a New Politics dimension (Knutson and Kumlin, 2005), or a ‘GAL-TAN’ dimension (Hooghe et al., 2002), standing for Green-Alternative-Libertarian vs. Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (see also De Vries, 2017 for a recent discussion on the cosmopolitan-parochial divide structuring party competition beyond the economic dimension). Beyond these different denominations for the non-economic dimension of electoral competition, most authors agree that attitudes towards immigration represent a key aspect of this political conflict (e.g. Dalton, 2010). Individual characteristics that are relevant to explain citizens’ orientation towards this more general dimension are thus also central to understand the more specific preferences on the issue of immigration.

In that respect, social class and education seem to be particularly important variables. Education is one of the key factors that explain attitudes towards cultural liberalism and immigration (Enyedi, 2008; Lachat, 2017; Stubager, 2008, 2009, 2013). Citizens with a higher level of education tend to have more liberal values, more cosmopolitan preferences, and to be more tolerant of other cultures. Also, individuals with a lower level of education often tend to be in a more direct competition with migrants on the job market (Kriesi et al., 2008). This leads to a large education gap in terms of citizens’ orientation toward the socio-cultural dimension of electoral competition and toward immigration in particular (Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007; Malhotra et al., 2013; Sides and Citrin, 2007). Systematic differences should also be present between social classes. Kitschelt (1994) and Oesch (2006, 2008), among others, have emphasised the impact of one’s market position and type of occupation on political attitudes. The debate on immigration is often framed in terms of opening borders, linked to globalization and European integration. Social classes which have most to lose from this process, in particular unskilled workers and the petty bourgeoisie, tend to display more authoritarian attitudes and more restrictive preferences on the immigration issue.

#### 4.2.2. Top-down effects on the public opinion on immigration

One of the most solid findings in the literature on public opinion formation and change is that political elites influence the views of the public (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Hellström,

2008; Sanders and Toka, 2013; Zaller, 1992). We explore in this article two main sources of top-down effects on immigration preferences. First, we consider the impact of parties' positions on that issue. Immigration is a polarizing issue, and parties in a given country can take strongly diverging stances. Citizens may thus face very different cues, depending on which party they are close to. Furthermore, the salience of the immigration issue also varies between both countries and elections. The attention that parties dedicate to this issue is likely to influence their capacity to shape public opinion. The second source of contextual influence relates to the immigration policy. When considering the impact of policy on public opinion, we will not only account for the immigration policy regime, that is, the degree to which immigration policies are restrictive or permissive, but also for policy outcomes, as captured by the size of the foreign population. Below, we develop our theoretical expectations regarding the effects of these contextual characteristics.

Regarding first party positions, a key contribution is offered by Zaller (1992). In one of the seminal works in the public opinion literature, he argues that individual opinions are shaped by the interaction between three main factors: the elites' discourse, citizens' level of political awareness, and their political values or predispositions. Cues coming from political parties serve as heuristics that help citizens form political views (Brader et al., 2013). While some research has shown that the average party position may be an influential factor (Sanders and Toka, 2013), most scholars expect individuals to take cues mostly from the parties they identify with (Brader and Tucker, 2012; Hellwig and Kweon, 2016; Steenbergen et al., 2007). The capacity of political parties to produce change in the public opinion also depends on message intensity and the public's degree of familiarity with the various political issues (Zaller, 1992). Regarding the latter, we argue that immigration is a relatively familiar issue in most European countries, which means that linking elites' messages to one's predispositions should be more straightforward. This should facilitate cueing by the political elites, including among those that are less attentive to politics. Based on these considerations, we expect parties' immigration positions to have a positive impact on the immigration attitudes of their supporters (*Hypothesis 1*). In addition, we explore to what extent this effect is mediated by issue salience. As indicated above, the more elites talk about a given issue, the stronger their capacity to influence the public on that issue should be (Zaller, 1992). Hence, we expect that the capacity of parties

to influence citizens' immigration views should become stronger when the elites place a greater emphasis on the immigration issue (*Hypothesis 2*).

In addition to the role of party positions, we also examine whether there is a link between citizens' immigration attitudes and immigration policies, in line with the thermostatic model (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995). According to this model, there should be a negative relation between policies and public preferences. Policy change in a given direction should lead to a decrease in public support for policies moving in that direction. At the same time, public preferences positively affect policies conditional on the type of party in government (see also Erikson et al., 2002).

We are more interested in one side of the process, that is, the extent to which policies adopted in the immigration domain affect public preferences on immigration. This impact can be examined by considering policy either in terms of domain-specific laws and regulations, or in terms of policy outputs or outcomes (Erikson et al., 2002; Jennings, 2009; Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). We employ in this study two measures of policy: an index capturing the restrictiveness of the immigration policy regime, and an outcome-based measure, namely the size of the migrant stocks.

The measure of public preferences that we use (see below) does not perfectly correspond to the logic of the thermostatic model since it does not directly capture preferences for more as opposed to less immigration, but rather a more general pro- versus anti-immigrant public sentiment. Yet, if we consider that restrictive immigration attitudes are a proxy for wanting less immigration and that positive immigration attitudes are a proxy for wanting more (or in any case not necessarily less) immigration, we would expect that the effect of policy on public preferences should be negative (*Hypothesis 3*). More specifically, we expect the public opinion to move towards the anti-immigrant pole when immigration policies move in a more liberal direction (i.e., toward less restrictive immigration rules), as well as when the stock of migrants increases. In addition, the thermostatic model posits that the influence of policies on public opinion increases with issue salience (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). We therefore expect that the impact of policy and policy outcomes on immigration attitudes will grow larger when the immigration issue becomes more salient

at the political elite level (*Hypothesis 4*). In addition to disentangling the separate effects of these sources of influence, this analysis will also help us learn more about the *relative* impact of party positions and policy on the public opinion on immigration.

### 4.3. Data and methods

To examine these top-down effects, we rely on data from several data sources. We analyse twenty-three European countries during the period 2002-2011.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Dependent variable*

Our measure of immigration attitudes comes from the ESS.<sup>2</sup> We use six items that measure respondents' preferences about the admission of distinct groups of immigrants,<sup>3</sup> as well as their evaluations of the impact of immigration.<sup>4</sup> We perform a principal-component factor analysis based on the six items (see the Appendix, Tables A2 and A3 for detailed results), which points to the existence of a single latent dimension, and use the resulting individual factor scores as our measure of immigration attitudes. Higher scores on this variable correspond to more positive attitudes towards immigrants and immigration. Summary statistics for this and all other variables are presented in Appendix Table A1.

#### *Contextual variables*

Central for this paper's hypotheses are the effects of party positions, immigration salience, policies, and of a country's number of migrants. For all of these variables, and for other controls at the country level, we take the value in the year before the

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<sup>1</sup> The twenty-three countries are: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

<sup>2</sup> Data are available from the website of the project, at <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org>

<sup>3</sup> The ESS items refer to: (1) people of the same race or ethnic group as most people in the host country, (2) people of a different race or ethnic group than most people in the host country, and (3) people coming from poorer countries outside Europe. The answer categories are on a four-point scale, ranging from 'Allow many to come and live here' to 'Allow none'. Before performing the principal-component factor analysis these items' scale has been reversed so that higher values correspond to more tolerant positions about allowing immigrants to settle.

<sup>4</sup> The respondents are asked to indicate, on a scale from 0 to 10, whether immigration: (1) is bad or good for the country's economy, (2) undermines or enriches the country's cultural life, and (3) makes the host country a worse or a better place to live.



corresponding ESS round,<sup>5</sup> so that our independent variables at the contextual level are always measured before the dependent variable. The first predictor of interest is the position of the party supported by each respondent. For party support, we rely on the vote choice variable from the ESS. Based on this variable we match each respondent with the party she voted for in the previous election and with the corresponding party position. In the main specification of our model, these party positions are coded on the basis of the Manifesto Project Dataset/Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP).<sup>6</sup> This dataset gives information about the issues parties pay attention to in their manifestos, by assigning each manifesto quasi-sentence to one of 56 categories. The CMP does not directly provide parties' stances on immigration. For this reason, in line with previous literature, we rely on several CMP categories to build a measure of parties' immigration position (Abou-Chadi, 2016; Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012). These CMP categories are: per601 (National way of life: positive), per605 (Law and order: positive), per607 (Multiculturalism: positive), per608 (Multiculturalism: negative) and per705 (Underprivileged minority groups). Based on these indicators, our main measure of a party's immigration position is defined as follows:<sup>7</sup>

$$\text{Party position} = (\text{per607} + \text{per705} - \text{per608} - \text{per601} - \text{per605}) / (\text{per607} + \text{per705} + \text{per608} + \text{per601} + \text{per605})$$

The variable ranges from -1 to +1, where higher values represent more pro-immigrant positions. Results from robustness checks performed with alternative operationalisations of party positions based on the CMP dataset, as well as using the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) are discussed below.

Still using CMP data, we compute the *saliency* of the immigration issue. It is measured at the elite level and corresponds to the average saliency of that issue in party manifestos at the time of the previous national election. For each party, we measure saliency as the

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<sup>5</sup> We determine the year in which the ESS interviews were conducted on the basis of the specific dates of the fieldwork in each country. Note also that information on party positions and issue saliency are based on party programs. In that case, we measure these variables at the time of the previous national election.

<sup>6</sup> We rely on the dataset's version 2016b, available at <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu>.

<sup>7</sup> This measure is the same as the one used by Abou-Chadi (2016) in a robustness check, except that it oppositely signed.

sum of the five CMP categories mentioned above, and we compute a weighted party-system average, weighting each party salience measure by the party's vote share.

The *immigration policy index* comes from the IMPIC database (Helbling et al., 2017),<sup>8</sup> which covers OECD countries during the period 1980-2010. It captures the multi-dimensionality of the immigration issue by including distinct policy fields. As such, the index represents an aggregation of restrictiveness scores in the policy fields of labour migration, asylum and refugees, family reunification, and the admission of co-ethnics. It covers not only regulations but also control mechanisms related to the entry of foreigners into the host country, the legal duration of stay and the rights to work associated to each status (for more details on how the index was constructed, see Helbling et al., 2017). As for other contextual predictors, we lag this variable by one year. The immigration policy index takes values from 0 to 1 and it has been re-scaled so that higher scores correspond to more liberal policy regimes.

Data on the *stocks of immigrants* comes from Eurostat's online database. It represents the percentage of foreign population out of the total country population.<sup>9</sup> The distributions by country and over time of the migrant stocks are graphed in the Appendix, Figure A1. Our models also control for some additional contextual characteristics, which have been included in previous studies of the determinants of immigration attitudes. These are the unemployment rate, GDP per capita (in thousands 2010 US dollars), and social expenditure as a percentage of GDP<sup>10</sup> (see, for instance, Dancygier and Donnelly, 2013; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007; Sides and Citrin, 2007).

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<sup>8</sup> Data can be downloaded from <http://www.impic-project.eu/data/>.

<sup>9</sup> Data available from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/>. The value for the stock of foreign population in Poland in 2002 was missing. We have replaced it with the average of the 2001 and 2003 values.

<sup>10</sup> The unemployment rate was retrieved from EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) of Eurostat (<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>). Data on GDP per capita (US dollars (thousand), constant prices, fixed PPPs, OECD reference year 2010, seasonally adjusted) comes from OECD's Quarterly National Accounts available online at <https://stats.oecd.org/>. Data on social expenditure as percentage of GDP comes from OECD's Social expenditure database available at: <https://stats.oecd.org/>.

### *Individual-level variables*

We also include the most important individual-level characteristics, which have been shown to be related to immigration attitudes: education level, age, gender, unemployment status, social class, and left-right orientations. Education is measured on a five-point scale ranging from 0 (less than lower secondary education) to 4 (tertiary education). Gender is a dummy variable taking the value 1 for female respondents and 0 for male respondents. The unemployment status is captured by a dummy variable taking the value 1 for unemployed respondents and 0 for others. For social class, we rely on the schema developed by Oesch (2006), here in the eight-group version.<sup>11</sup> It distinguishes between self-employed professionals and large employers, small business owners, technical professionals, production workers, associate managers, clerks, socio-cultural professionals and service workers. We add to this variable a ninth category representing non-labour force participants, which is labelled ‘Others’. Left-right self-placement, finally, is measured on a 0 to 10 scale.

For the empirical analysis, we conduct an OLS regression. Given that we pool together data from twenty-three countries over ten years, the data structure needs to be appropriately addressed in our modelling strategy. First, we include country fixed effects. This allows us to account for unobserved time-invariant factors at country level and to reduce the risk of omitted variable bias (Mummolo and Peterson, 2018). In addition, it allows us to focus on the relevant variation for our study, that is, the within-country over time variation in the independent variables and the corresponding effects on the dependent variable (see e.g. Mummolo and Peterson, 2018). By including country fixed effects, we can confidently assert that we are capturing the longitudinal effects of party positions and policy on citizens’ immigration attitudes. Second, to address potential year-level factors that could have an impact on all respondents interviewed in that year, such as economic shocks, and lead to correlated errors between individuals, we include robust standard errors clustered by year (see e.g. Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014). Our model specification is the following:

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<sup>11</sup> The class schema has been constructed relying on the syntax files provided by Daniel Oesch, available at <http://people.unil.ch/danieloesch/scripts/>.

$$y_{itj} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{party position}_{itj} + \beta_2 \text{policy}_{tj} + \beta_3 \text{stocks of migrants}_{tj} + \beta_4 \gamma_{itj} + \beta_5 \delta_{tj} + \alpha_j + \epsilon_{itj} ,$$

where:

$\gamma_{itj}$  is a vector of predictors at individual level and  $\beta_4$  is a vector of the corresponding coefficients,

$\delta_{tj}$  is a vector of additional time-variant control variables at country level,

$\alpha_j$  are parameters for country fixed effects (country dummies), and

$\epsilon_{itj}$  represents the residual error term.

Our hypotheses 1 and 3 are supported if the coefficients  $\beta_1$ ,  $\beta_2$  and  $\beta_3$  are statistically significant and  $\beta_1 > 0$ ,  $\beta_2 < 0$  and  $\beta_3 < 0$ , respectively.

To test hypotheses 2 and 4, which focus on how salience moderates the impact of other contextual predictors, we rely on the following model specification:

$$y_{itj} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{party position}_{itj} + \beta_2 \text{policy}_{tj} + \beta_3 \text{stocks of migrants}_{tj} + \beta_4 \text{party position}_{itj} \times \text{salience}_{tj} + \beta_5 \text{policy}_{tj} \times \text{salience}_{tj} + \beta_6 \text{stocks of migrants}_{tj} \times \text{salience}_{tj} + \beta_7 \gamma_{itj} + \beta_8 \delta_{tj} + \alpha_j + \epsilon_{itj} .$$

#### 4.4. Results

The results are presented in Table 1. Model 1 tests for the direct effects of the contextual factors of interest, whereas Model 2 also explores whether these effects are moderated by issue salience. The estimates reported in Model 1 suggest that citizens' attitudes are influenced by party positions, immigration policies and policy outcomes. The point estimate for party position is positive and statistically significant at  $p < 0.001$ . This means that citizens adopt more pro-immigrant attitudes where the parties they support adopt more liberal positions on immigration. In addition, the effects of policy and of the migrant stock are negative and also statistically significant, in line with our theoretical expectations. Hence, these results are in line with hypotheses 1 and 3.

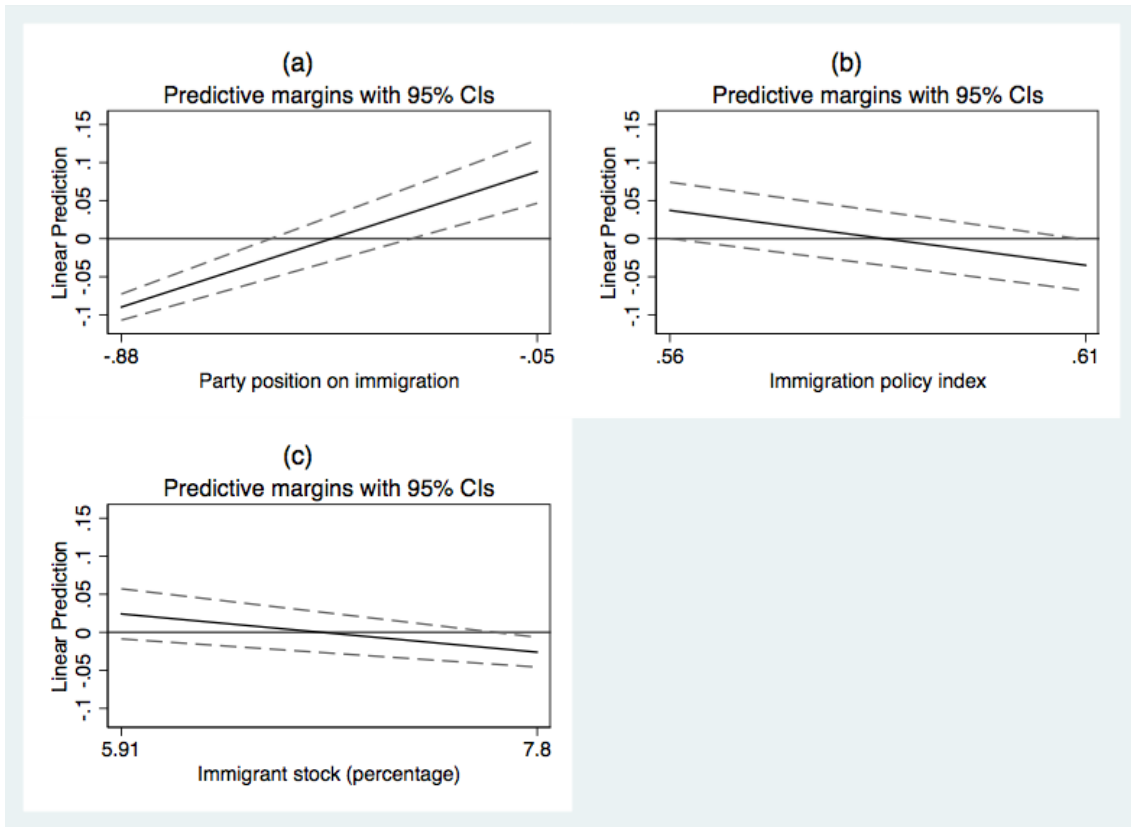
**Table 1.** Effects of party positions, immigration policy and policy outcomes on immigration attitudes

	Model 1		Model 2	
Education	0.137***	(0.00)	0.137***	(0.00)
Social class (ref.: self-employed professionals and large employers)				
Small business owners	-0.252***	(0.02)	-0.252***	(0.02)
Technical (semi-)professionals	-0.166***	(0.02)	-0.167***	(0.02)
Production workers	-0.415***	(0.02)	-0.415***	(0.02)
(Associate) managers	-0.098***	(0.02)	-0.098***	(0.02)
Clerks	-0.196***	(0.02)	-0.197***	(0.02)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	-0.022	(0.02)	-0.023	(0.02)
Service workers	-0.313***	(0.02)	-0.314***	(0.02)
Others	-0.228***	(0.03)	-0.226***	(0.02)
Left-right orientations	-0.048***	(0.00)	-0.048***	(0.00)
Unemployed	-0.090**	(0.02)	-0.091**	(0.02)
Age of respondent, calculated	-0.006***	(0.00)	-0.006***	(0.00)
Gender	-0.073***	(0.01)	-0.073***	(0.01)
Party position on immigration	0.215***	(0.03)	0.149**	(0.03)
Immigration policy index	-1.442*	(0.52)	-0.900+	(0.49)
Immigrant stock (percentage)	-0.027*	(0.01)	-0.023*	(0.01)
Unemployment rate	0.007	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)
GDP per capita (thousand US dollars)	0.015**	(0.00)	0.012**	(0.00)
Social expenditure as percentage of GDP	-2.136*	(0.90)	-2.209*	(0.94)
Saliency	0.000	(0.00)	0.052	(0.03)
Party position on immigration x Saliency			0.007**	(0.00)
Immigration policy index x Saliency			-0.076	(0.05)
Immigrant stock (percentage) x Saliency			-0.000	(0.00)
Constant	1.485*	(0.48)	1.217*	(0.46)
N	88838		88838	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.236		0.236	

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Country fixed effects omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by year in parentheses

The coefficients reported in Table 1 indicate the predicted shift in the dependent variable for a one-unit change in the independent variable. To express the magnitude of these effects, we need to translate these into a predicted change for a typical shift (one standard deviation) in the corresponding predictor. It is important to stress that our focus is on within-country variation in our variables, which is the variation actually used during estimation as we include country fixed effects. This variation is typically less than the overall variation in our data (Mummolo and Peterson, 2018). To compute these typical within-country shifts in our independent variables, we regressed each of the three variables of interest (party positions, immigration policy index, immigrant stocks) on country dummies, and then took the standard deviation of the residuals. Using these typical changes, we present in Figure 1 the predicted immigration attitudes for citizens in different contexts. Each panel lets the value of one contextual predictor vary by one (within-country) standard deviation around the mean. Panel (a) shows that as party positions move from a typically anti-immigration to a typically pro-immigration position, citizens' attitudes move in the same direction. The magnitude of the effect is about 0.2. The effect is not negligible, but its size is rather limited, showing that citizens are not strongly swayed by changes in parties' stances.

Panel (b) in Figure 1 illustrates the effect of the within-country variation in the immigration policy regime. This corresponds to a relatively small change in policies (i.e., a value of 0.04 on the immigration policy index), as these policies were quite stable in most countries during the time span on which we focus. A move toward more permissive immigration rules leads to a slight change toward more restrictive immigration attitudes, by a value of about 0.06. However, when focusing on countries in which immigration policies have changed more markedly, we can see that the potential effect on citizens' attitudes is much more substantial. The largest over-time shift present in the data is in the case of Ireland, where policy shifted between 2006 and 2009 by 0.15 points. Such a shift would correspond to a change in immigration attitudes of 0.22 points in the direction of more restrictive policy views. The magnitude is as large as that of the typical effect of party positions.



**Figure 1.** Predictive margins for immigration attitudes as a function of the position of a respondent’s party (panel a), of the policy regime (panel b), and of the percentage of migrants (panel c). All graphs show the predictions of Model 1 in Table 1 over a range of values corresponding to the average value of the corresponding contextual factor minus or plus one (within-country) standard deviation.

Moving on the effect of the stocks of immigrants, the patterns are very similar to those uncovered for the effect of immigration policy on individual attitudes. The typical within-country variation illustrated in panel (c) of Figure 1 corresponds to a change of 1.9 points in the percentage of migrants. Such an increase would lead to a change of 0.05 in citizens’ views in the direction of more restrictive attitudes. The largest shift over time present in the data appears again in the case of Ireland where the stocks of migrants shifted between 2006 and 2009 by 2.62 points. Such a change in the migrant stocks would lead to a change in immigration preferences that is larger, i.e. a shift of 0.07 points in the more anti-immigrant direction.

Regarding the other contextual variables introduced in the model, GDP per capita (in 2010 US dollars) has a positive effect on public opinion about immigration, but the social expenditure (as percentage of GDP) has a negative impact. In substantive terms, a typical shift over time in GDP per capita produces a shift of 0.03 in the dependent variable in the direction of more pro-immigrant attitudes. At the same time, a typical shift over time in social expenditure has a negative effect on the dependent variable prompting a roughly equal change of 0.03 in the opposite direction. Based on the data at hand, this suggests that citizens living in richer countries tend to be more pro-immigrant while those that live in countries where the welfare system becomes more generous over time tend to be more sceptical of immigrants. But, the magnitude of these effects is quite limited.

As far as the individual-level variables are concerned, all estimated effects are in the expected direction. We observe that respondents with a higher education level have more liberal attitudes. The effect is sizeable: the difference between the highest and lowest categories corresponds to more than half of the standard deviation of the dependent variable. Therefore, education strongly conditions public views on immigration. In terms of classes, self-employed (the reference category) and socio-cultural professionals have the most liberal attitudes, while production workers are the most conservative, followed by service workers and small business owners. This contrast reflects the expected gap between the social classes that belong most closely to the ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ of globalization (Kriesi et al., 2008). We also observe that older respondents and the unemployed ones have more restrictive attitudes. Finally, respondents with right-wing views on the left-right dimension tend to adopt more restrictive attitudes toward immigration.

Moving on to hypotheses 2 and 4, we conducted a second analysis in which we interacted party positions, policy and migrant stocks with salience. The results are reported in Model 2 in Table 1. Regarding party positions, the interaction term with salience is positive and statically significant at conventional levels. To have a better sense of the moderating role of salience in substantive terms we contrast scenarios of low and high salience (that is, salience is set at the overall mean value and we subtract or add one typical shift in salience over time). A change from low salience to high salience leads to an increase of about 15%



in the effect of party positions on immigration attitudes. In that case, thus, we do find support for our hypothesis. As expected, the cueing effect of parties becomes stronger when immigration is a more salient topic. The same occurs with policy. Although the interaction term between policy and salience is not statistically significant at conventional levels, average marginal effects suggest that the negative influence of policy on immigration attitudes is larger in magnitude as immigration becomes more salient over time. Moving from low to high salience increases the effect of policy by about 23%. As far as the number of migrants is concerned, the corresponding interaction is not significant. The strength of the effect of the proportion of migrants is not significantly related to over-time variation in the salience of the immigration issue.

### ***Robustness checks***

To assess the validity of our results under different operationalisations of party positions, we first performed robustness checks with two alternative constructions of party position employing CMP categories. The first one follows Alonso and da Fonseca (2012) and consists of using the five CMP categories used to build the main measure of party position and subtracting negative categories about immigration from the positive ones. In this case too, higher scores indicate more liberal party stances. The second one follows the main operationalisation of Abou-Chadi (2016) and uses only two CMP categories: per607 (positive mentions about multiculturalism) and per608 (negative mentions about multiculturalism).<sup>12</sup>

When using the measure based on Alonso and da Fonseca (2012), the results from the model without interactions with salience point to very similar findings. However, when introducing these interaction terms, none of them is statistically significant at conventional levels (see Table A4 in the Appendix). Marginal effects confirm that a shift from low to high salience has a moderating effect for policy. In this case, moving from low to high salience increases the magnitude of the effect of immigration policy on

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<sup>12</sup> In this case, positive mentions about multiculturalism are subtracted from the negative ones and the result is divided by the sum of the two categories. Higher scores indicate more restrictive positions.

immigration attitudes. Note that the effect of policy is already in itself very small in magnitude, as also shown by the main analyses.

Turning to the second alternative measure of party position, i.e. the one based on Abou-Chadi (2016), the coefficients of the variables migrant stocks and social expenditure (as percentage of GDP) are not statistically significant anymore in the model without interaction terms, although they continue having the negative sign (see Table A5 in the Appendix). However, the effects of party positions and policy retain their statistical significance and display the expected sign. This robustness check uses a slightly different measure for salience. The new measure of salience is the sum of the two CMP categories used to build the alternative party position employed in this robustness check. In the model with the interactions with salience, the point estimate for party position and the interaction with salience are both statistically significant. On the other hand, the coefficients for policy and migrant stocks are not statistically significant anymore, but their interaction terms with salience are significant at  $p < 0.1$ , respectively  $p < 0.05$ . Marginal effects suggest that moving from low to high salience increases the magnitude of the effect of party positions, respectively policy, on immigration attitudes. However, it very slightly decreases the already small effect of migrant stocks.

We also repeated these analyses using CHES<sup>13</sup> instead of CMP data for measuring party positions (see Table A6 in the Appendix). When using CHES data, the number of countries is reduced to eighteen covering the period 2006-2011. The results from the models without interactions with salience indicate that the effects of party positions and policy are statistically significant and have the expected sign. However, the effect of migrant stocks, although it has the expected sign, is not statistically significant. In the models with the interaction terms, the main effect of party positions is not statistically significant anymore but the interaction term with salience is statistically significant. The opposite occurs in the case of policy. Overall, the results indicate that party positions positively influence immigration attitudes, whereas immigration policies have a negative effect. Moving from low salience to high salience slightly decreases the effect of policy

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<sup>13</sup> Trend file available at: <http://chesdata.eu>. Note that larger scores indicate more restrictive party positions on immigration.

but it very slightly increases the effect of party positions. The migrant stocks do not significantly affect citizens' immigration views in this robustness check.

A final robustness check comes to address the fact that, by focusing on the effect of the position of the party supported in the previous election, we dropped from the initial sample an important number of respondents that had not declared voting for any given party. We re-estimated the effects of policy and migrant stocks on the entire sample, by assigning the average party system position on immigration to those respondents with missing information for party choice. Note that we do not focus here on the re-estimated effect of party positions, since we cannot strongly claim that the new respondents take cues from the overall elite position, but we focus specifically on the effect of policy and the policy outcome on the dependent variable. The results confirm that the immigration policy has a negative impact on immigration attitudes, which increases as the immigration issue becomes more salient over time (see the Appendix, Table A7). The stock of migrants has a very small effect when issue salience is low, which becomes not significant as immigration becomes more salient over time.

#### 4.5. Discussion

This article has analysed the top-down effects of party positions and policies on the immigration attitudes of European citizens. Previous studies examining the sources of such attitudes have mainly focused on socio-economic and cultural factors. By contrast, drawing on the public opinion literature, this article has suggested that both parties and policies are susceptible of influencing citizens' attitudes towards immigration. More specifically, we expected that individual attitudes toward immigration would be positively influenced by the positions of supported parties and that the impact should be larger with growing issue salience. Also, we posited that there is a link between public attitudes on immigration and the immigration policy, in line with the thermostatic model of public opinion, and that the impact of policy is heightened when the immigration issue is salient (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995). For the impact of policy, we have considered both the immigration policy regime, by using an index measuring policy restrictiveness, and a policy outcome, that is the size of the foreign population.

These hypotheses were tested with data from the European Social Survey for the immigration attitudes, the Comparative Manifesto Project for party positions and issue salience, the IMPIC database for the immigration policy index, and Eurostat for the size of the migrant stocks. This data encompasses twenty-three European countries over the period 2002-2011.

The results from the main analysis suggest that top-down effects are effectively at play. Our findings suggest that party positions and policy do have an effect on citizens' attitudes, since changes over time in these contextual factors exert significant albeit small effects. First, as expected, citizens tend to become more liberal when party positions move in a more liberal direction. Our results are robust to the use of alternative measures of party positions on immigration employing CMP categories and another data source, i.e., the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. A note of caution is in order. It cannot be excluded that parties actually adapt their positions to appeal to their supporters rather than influencing them (see, for instance, Steenbergen et al., 2007). The empirical strategy employed in this chapter has attempted to circumvent reverse causality by exploiting the longitudinal dimension present in our data and drawing on the appropriate temporal ordering. Since party positions are measured at the national election preceding the year of interview in the ESS survey, we can be more confident that they shape, rather than being shaped by, the supporters' views, which are measured later in time.

Second, in terms of policy effects, citizens become more sceptical of immigration when policies move in a liberal direction. Also, they tend to become more anti-immigrant when the stocks of migrants increase over time, although this effect is not confirmed in several robustness checks. The implication would be that, where the stocks of migrants increase over time, citizens should tend to adopt more anti-immigrant views (although, as shown in Figure A1 in the Appendix, the stocks of migrants tend to remain quite stable over time, despite stronger variations in some instances). This study has not looked into policy responsiveness to changes in public opinion (or the immigration context). Yet, if the thermostatic model works fully, changes in public opinion toward the more anti-immigrant end should affect the immigration policies (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). And, as the thermostatic model predicts and this chapter shows, changes in policies should

affect public opinion in a feedback process. Also, changes in immigration policies could affect migrant stocks as well. The reciprocal influences between public opinion on immigration, immigration policies and the immigration context represent an important avenue for future research.

Issue salience has a slight moderating role as it enhances the effects of party position and policy. However, in general, it does not moderate the effect of the migrant stocks on citizens' attitudes. Overall, the variables at individual level have a stronger effect on immigration attitudes than the contextual variables. However, the latter also matter. Elites can influence public opinion through the positions and policies they adopt in the immigration policy area.

Although our analyses are not a direct test of the thermostatic model because the ESS items that we use do not capture preferences for 'more' or 'less' immigration, the findings we obtain are indicative of a dynamic relationship between public opinion and policies. These models may appear quite demanding in terms of citizens' attentiveness and responsiveness to changes in public policy. However, as Soroka and Wlezien (2010) argue, the thermostatic model does not require attention to politics from each and every citizen. The model is satisfied if a sufficiently large share of the public is sufficiently aware of their policy preferences, of the actual policy level and the connection between the two. Also, the citizens do not need to know the exact policy level. Having a rough idea of whether policy has changed, whether it has moved in a more or less liberal direction, and whether this change has been of a small or of a rather large magnitude (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010: 19) should be sufficient for the thermostatic connection to work.

A final point deserves to be made on the potential role of media in shaping public attitudes on immigration. Studies show that media attention to immigration contributes to increasing public support for anti-immigrant parties, whereas the tone used in the news has a strong effect on public attitudes towards immigration (Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2007, 2009). However, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent the tone in the media has a direct and separate effect on citizens rather than merely reflecting elites'

stances<sup>14</sup>. On the one hand, a recent study looking at the agenda-setting relationship between parties and media uncovers reciprocal influences whereby parties impact media attention to issues and, to a larger extent, media shapes parties' issue-attention (Vliegthart et al., 2016). This study focuses on parliamentary questions. Whether similar dynamics are at play when focusing on party manifestos, which typically receive a wider media and citizen attention, remains an empirical issue. On the other hand, a previous study shows that the extent to which the immigration issue acquires importance on the political agenda hinges not so much on media attention but more on parties' strategies and interests in picking up this issue and politicising it (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). The interplay between parties' and media's effects on public attitudes on immigration should be addressed in future research, drawing ideally on a large-N setting. Future studies should also examine the role of institutional factors, such as the degree of federalism or the electoral rules (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Steenbergen et al., 2007), in possibly moderating top-down effects of political elites and policies on public opinion.

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<sup>14</sup> Only one of these studies controls for party (system) characteristics. To assess the impact of media issue-attention on public support for anti-immigrant parties, Boomgaarden and Vliegthart (2007) control for the position of the mainstream right party and the convergence between mainstream parties. They do not find significant effects of the two variables, possibly due to limited variation over time in the country under study (Boomgaarden and Vliegthart, 2007: 412).

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Summary statistics

	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.	N
<i>Individual-level variables</i>					
Immigration attitudes	0.00	1.00	-2.69	2.31	88'838
Education	2.27	1.34	0	4	88'838
Social class (ref: self-employed and large employers)					
Small business owners	0.11	0.31	0	1	88'838
Technical professionals	0.07	0.25	0	1	88'838
Production workers	0.19	0.39	0	1	88'838
Managers	0.16	0.37	0	1	88'838
Clerks	0.10	0.30	0	1	88'838
Socio-cultural professionals	0.13	0.33	0	1	88'838
Service workers	0.17	0.37	0	1	88'838
Others	0.06	0.24	0	1	88'838
Age	50.15	16.65	14	101	88'838
Gender	0.51	0.50	0	1	88'838
Unemployment status	0.04	0.21	0	1	88'838
Party position	-0.46	0.46	-1	1	88'838
<i>Contextual variables</i>					
Immigration policy	0.59	0.08	0.30	0.70	92
Saliency	9.70	4.09	1.77	25.13	92
Stock of migrants	7.16	6.91	0.11	39.04	92
Unemployment rate	7.51	3.87	2.1	19.9	92
GDP per capita (thousand 2010 US dollars)	36.54	12.22	14.52	79.63	92
Social expenditure as % of GDP	0.22	0.04	0.13	0.31	92

**Table A2.** Factor analysis/correlation (method: principal-component factors)

Factor	Eigenvalue	Proportion of explained variance
Factor1	3.75350	0.6256
Factor2	0.94998	0.1583
Factor3	0.41482	0.0691
Factor4	0.36902	0.0615
Factor5	0.33132	0.0552
Factor6	0.18135	0.0302

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*Number of obs.* = 88,838

**Table A3.** Factor loadings

Variable	Factor 1
Allow many/few immigrants of same race/ethnic group as majority	0.7639
Allow many/few immigrants of different race/ethnic group from majority	0.8581
Allow many/few immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe	0.8240
Immigration bad or good for country's economy	0.7515
Country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants	0.7634
Immigrants make country worse or better place to live	0.7792

*Note:* Given that the scale of the first three variables and that of the remaining ones are in opposite direction, the direction of the scale for the first three variables has been reversed.

**Table A4.** Effects of party positions, immigration policy and policy outcomes on immigration attitudes (alternative party position, based on Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Education	0.136***	(0.00)	0.136***	(0.00)
Social class (ref.: self-employed professionals and large employers)				
Small business owners	-0.254***	(0.02)	-0.254***	(0.02)
Technical (semi-)professionals	-0.167***	(0.02)	-0.167***	(0.02)
Production workers	-0.414***	(0.02)	-0.413***	(0.02)
(Associate) managers	-0.100***	(0.02)	-0.099***	(0.02)
Clerks	-0.198***	(0.02)	-0.198***	(0.02)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	-0.026	(0.02)	-0.026	(0.01)
Service workers	-0.313***	(0.02)	-0.313***	(0.02)
Others	-0.234***	(0.03)	-0.229***	(0.02)
Left-right orientations	-0.046***	(0.00)	-0.045***	(0.00)
Unemployed	-0.091***	(0.02)	-0.091***	(0.02)
Age of respondent, calculated	-0.006***	(0.00)	-0.006***	(0.00)
Gender	-0.074***	(0.01)	-0.074***	(0.01)
Party position	0.019***	(0.00)	0.023**	(0.01)
Immigration policy index	-1.567*	(0.54)	-0.958+	(0.49)
Immigrant stock (percentage)	-0.030**	(0.01)	-0.025*	(0.01)
Unemployment rate	0.007	(0.01)	0.006	(0.00)
GDP per capita (thousand US dollars)	0.014**	(0.00)	0.012**	(0.00)
Social expenditure as percentage of GDP	-2.072+	(0.95)	-2.105+	(0.97)
Saliency	0.011*	(0.00)	0.061+	(0.03)
Party position x Saliency			-0.000	(0.00)
Immigration policy index x Saliency			-0.083	(0.05)
Immigrant stock (percentage) x Saliency			-0.000	(0.00)
Constant	1.507*	(0.53)	1.205*	(0.49)
N	88838		88838	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.239		0.239	

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Country fixed effects omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by year in parentheses

**Table A5.** Effects of party positions, immigration policy and policy outcomes on immigration attitudes (alternative party position, based on Abou-Chadi (2016))

	Model 1		Model 2	
Education	0.138***	(0.00)	0.137***	(0.00)
Social class (ref.: self-employed professionals and large employers)				
Small business owners	-0.259***	(0.02)	-0.259***	(0.02)
Technical (semi-)professionals	-0.164***	(0.02)	-0.165***	(0.02)
Production workers	-0.420***	(0.02)	-0.419***	(0.02)
(Associate) managers	-0.094**	(0.02)	-0.094**	(0.02)
Clerks	-0.194***	(0.02)	-0.196***	(0.02)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	-0.022	(0.02)	-0.026	(0.02)
Service workers	-0.313***	(0.02)	-0.313***	(0.02)
Others	-0.217***	(0.03)	-0.215***	(0.03)
Left-right orientations	-0.062***	(0.00)	-0.061***	(0.00)
Unemployed	-0.101***	(0.02)	-0.101***	(0.02)
Age of respondent, calculated	-0.005***	(0.00)	-0.005***	(0.00)
Gender	-0.074***	(0.01)	-0.074***	(0.01)
Party position	-0.123***	(0.01)	-0.038*	(0.02)
Immigration policy index	-1.621**	(0.47)	-1.111	(0.64)
Immigrant stock (percentage)	-0.029	(0.02)	-0.028	(0.02)
Unemployment rate	0.002	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)
GDP per capita (thousand US dollars)	0.025*	(0.01)	0.020+	(0.01)
Social expenditure as percentage of GDP	-0.950	(0.67)	-1.142	(0.65)
Saliency	-0.006	(0.01)	0.133	(0.08)
Party position x Saliency			-0.048***	(0.01)
Immigration policy index x Saliency			-0.287+	(0.15)
Immigrant stock (percentage) x Saliency			0.003*	(0.00)
Constant	0.892+	(0.47)	0.834	(0.55)
N	72998		72998	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.229		0.231	

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Country fixed effects omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by year in parentheses

**Table A6.** Effects of party positions, immigration policy and policy outcomes on immigration attitudes (CHES data)

	Model 1		Model 2	
Education	0.132***	(0.00)	0.132***	(0.00)
Social class (ref.: self-employed professionals and large employers)				
Small business owners	-0.261***	(0.03)	-0.262***	(0.03)
Technical (semi-)professionals	-0.184***	(0.03)	-0.184***	(0.03)
Production workers	-0.434***	(0.03)	-0.435***	(0.02)
(Associate) managers	-0.127**	(0.03)	-0.126**	(0.03)
Clerks	-0.225**	(0.03)	-0.225**	(0.03)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	-0.068*	(0.02)	-0.070*	(0.02)
Service workers	-0.349***	(0.02)	-0.349***	(0.02)
Others	-0.236**	(0.05)	-0.237**	(0.04)
Left-right orientations	-0.024**	(0.01)	-0.024**	(0.01)
Unemployed	-0.115**	(0.02)	-0.115**	(0.02)
Age of respondent, calculated	-0.005***	(0.00)	-0.005***	(0.00)
Gender	-0.092**	(0.02)	-0.092**	(0.02)
Position of supported party, CHES	-0.092***	(0.00)	-0.006	(0.02)
Immigration policy index	-1.220***	(0.15)	-2.745*	(0.96)
Immigrant stock (percentage)	-0.021	(0.01)	-0.042	(0.04)
Unemployment rate	0.014	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)
GDP per capita (thousand US dollars)	0.022+	(0.01)	0.021+	(0.01)
Social expenditure as percentage of GDP	-1.699	(1.06)	-1.534	(0.87)
Saliency (CHES)	-0.044+	(0.02)	-0.177	(0.10)
Position of supported party, CHES x Saliency (CHES)			-0.014**	(0.00)
Immigration policy index x Saliency (CHES)			0.302	(0.19)
Immigrant stock (percentage) x Saliency (CHES)			0.004	(0.01)
Constant	1.508**	(0.36)	2.031**	(0.47)
N	49856		49856	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.264		0.265	

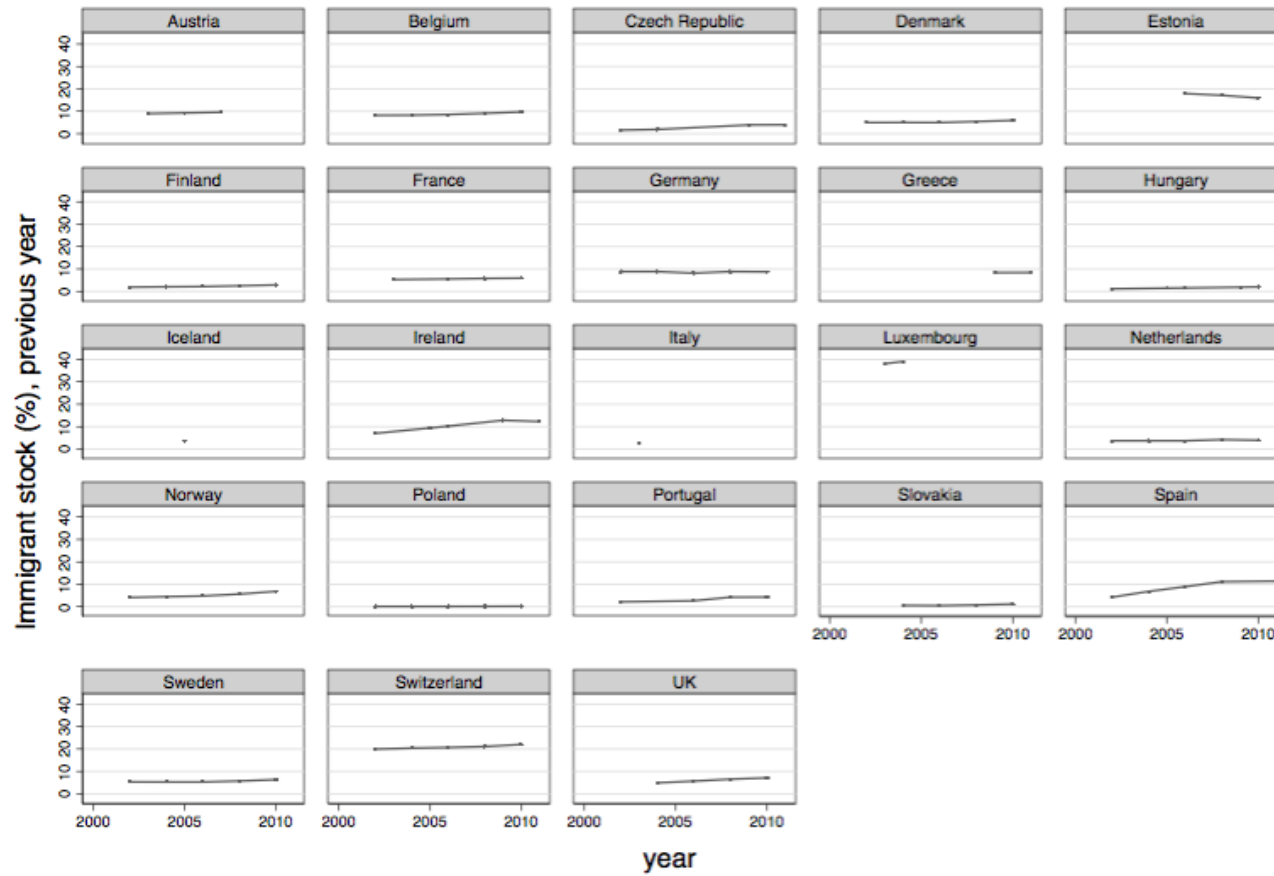
Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Country fixed effects omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by year in parentheses

**Table A7.** Effects of party positions, immigration policy and policy outcomes on immigration attitudes

	Model 1		Model 2	
Education	0.134***	(0.00)	0.134***	(0.00)
Social class (ref.: self-employed professionals and large employers)				
Small business owners	-0.260***	(0.01)	-0.260***	(0.01)
Technical (semi-)professionals	-0.166***	(0.02)	-0.166***	(0.02)
Production workers	-0.417***	(0.01)	-0.417***	(0.01)
(Associate) managers	-0.110***	(0.01)	-0.110***	(0.01)
Clerks	-0.217***	(0.02)	-0.217***	(0.02)
Socio-cultural (semi-)professionals	-0.033*	(0.01)	-0.033*	(0.01)
Service workers	-0.299***	(0.01)	-0.299***	(0.02)
Others	-0.179***	(0.02)	-0.176***	(0.02)
Left-right orientations	-0.049***	(0.00)	-0.049***	(0.00)
Unemployed	-0.100***	(0.01)	-0.100***	(0.01)
Age of respondent, calculated	-0.006***	(0.00)	-0.006***	(0.00)
Gender	-0.070***	(0.01)	-0.070***	(0.01)
Party position on immigration	0.208***	(0.03)	0.148**	(0.04)
Immigration policy index	-1.296*	(0.53)	-0.660	(0.43)
Immigrant stock (percentage)	-0.017+	(0.01)	-0.011+	(0.01)
Unemployment rate	0.005	(0.01)	0.004	(0.00)
GDP per capita (thousand US dollars)	0.013**	(0.00)	0.011**	(0.00)
Social expenditure as percentage of GDP	-2.096*	(0.80)	-2.081*	(0.86)
Saliency	0.001	(0.00)	0.062	(0.03)
Party position on immigration x Saliency			0.006*	(0.00)
Immigration policy index x Saliency			-0.088	(0.05)
Immigrant stock (percentage) x Saliency			-0.001	(0.00)
Constant	1.399*	(0.46)	1.049*	(0.42)
N	135754		135754	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.213		0.213	

Note: + p<0.10, \* p<0.05, \*\* p<0.01, \*\*\* p<0.001. Country fixed effects omitted from the table. Robust standard errors clustered by year in parentheses





Graphs by country

**Figure A1.** Stocks of migrants (expressed as percentage of total country population) per country over years. The values correspond to the prior year since the variable has been lagged by one year in the models (that is, the value displayed for instance for the year 2005 represents the stocks of migrants in 2004)



## 5. Conclusions

In the past decades, the political competition in Western European countries has been fundamentally changed by the mobilization of cultural issues, notably immigration (de Vries et al., 2013). Considering the key importance of the immigration issue for political and electoral competition on the cultural dimension of the political space (Kriesi et al., 2006), this dissertation has explored the mass-elite linkage on this specific issue and the factors that are likely to influence the connection between parties and citizens. In order to do that, this thesis has attempted to answer several inter-related research questions. First, to what extent is party responsiveness to the immigration preferences of different voter constituencies moderated by party characteristics? Second, to what extent does mainstream party responsiveness to public opinion on immigration depend on the party system configuration, and in particular the presence and strength of radical right parties? Finally, are voters' attitudes toward immigration influenced by parties' stances on this issue and by the immigration policies?

By addressing these questions, this dissertation brings together and contributes to two major strands of literature. First, it adds to the existing body of work on political representation and party responsiveness. Second, it contributes to the existing literature on public opinion formation and change, and the scholarship on the thermostatic model of the policy-opinion nexus. The picture emerging from the studies gathered in this dissertation is that of a complex interaction between parties and citizens. Chapter 2 of this dissertation takes on the task of examining not only if parties respond to the public opinion on immigration, but also whether responsiveness depends on party characteristics, issue salience and voter constituency. The results suggest that parties respond to citizens' preferences, but in a specific way. First, parties reflect in their electoral platforms the views of their party supporters. Second, the match that we observe between parties and their supporters is across parties rather than over time. In other words, parties tend to reflect in their platforms enduring differences between their partisan constituencies. However, they do not appear to respond to changes over time in their supporters' preferences. This is to a large extent regardless of party characteristics and

the salience of the immigration issue. This dissertation confirms thus the existence of a linkage between parties and their partisan supporters (Dalton, 1985, 2017). However, these findings do not fully resonate with results obtained by Adams et al. (2006) and Ezrow et al. (2011), because the empirical analysis in Chapter 2 does not provide evidence that niche parties respond to shifts over time in their party supporters' preferences. By contrast, there is some evidence that parties with low distinctiveness respond to shifts over time in the mean voter preferences. Hence, parties with a mainstream issue-emphasis profile appear to behave in line with the theoretical expectations advanced in this study. Analyses focusing on niche vs. mainstream parties suggest the existence of similar dynamics in the case of mainstream parties, since the coefficients bear the corresponding positive sign, but they fall short of reaching statistical significance. Hence, by focusing on a single issue, this study qualifies findings from previous studies which point at differential responsiveness to distinct voter constituencies and shows that this issue-specific focus can bring new insights into the responsiveness processes.

The results from this dissertation (see Chapter 3) also suggest that radical right parties, which typically adopt tough positions of immigration, act as a catalyst and force mainstream parties to become more responsive to the mean voter preferences. Therefore, the presence of radical right parties seems to benefit the political representation in Western Europe. These findings speak to existing work on representation and party responsiveness, underlining the importance of considering party system factors when analysing the mass-elite linkage (Steenbergen et al., 2007). In addition, it also speaks to research that explores whether populism acts as a threat or as a corrective for democracy by suggesting that the presence of populist radical right parties may benefit representation and ultimately democratic functioning (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). Strong radical right parties also force mainstream parties to focus to a larger extent on the objective migration context (which is in line, for instance, with Abou-Chadi, 2016), although this finding is not confirmed in some of the robustness checks.

Finally, the study reported in Chapter 4 analyses the top-down effects of party positions and immigration policies on the immigration attitudes of citizens in European countries. Regarding policy, it considers the effect of both the immigration policy regime and of

policy outcomes, which are operationalised as the stocks of immigrants (see also Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). The findings indicate that the citizens are positively influenced by the stances on immigration of the parties they support. In other words, if parties adopt pro-immigration positions, their supporters follow suit and shift towards more pro-immigrant attitudes. This complements studies confirming that citizens' views on immigration are positively influenced by the stances of the parties they identify with (Harteveld et al., 2017; Hellwig and Kweon, 2016). In addition, it also shows that higher issue salience has the potential to enhance the influence of party cues on voters' viewpoints.

In line with the thermostatic model of the opinion-policy nexus (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995; see also Erikson et al., 2002), there is also evidence of a negative effect of the immigration policy on public preferences. This is confirmed when focusing on both the policy regime (that is, the immigration regulatory and policy framework) and a policy outcome (that is, the stocks of migrants living in the European countries covered by the analysis in Chapter 4). Citizens appear to become more sceptical of immigration when the immigration policy regime becomes more liberal or when policy outputs point to the presence of a large stock of migrants in the country (but see some of the robustness checks). Also, the effect of the immigration policy regime on voters' attitudes is strengthened in contexts of high issue salience. Although the effects we uncover are not large, this study mirrors the theoretical expectations stemming from the literature on opinion formation and the thermostatic model of the opinion-policy connection.

This dissertation contributes to the existing literature in a number of ways. First, it focuses on an issue that has been to a large extent ignored in past studies. The immigration topic is a core issue of the cultural dimension of the political space. This dissertation adds therefore to the current understanding of the political and electoral competition in European countries by providing insights into the bottom-up and the top-down processes linking parties and voters in the context of the immigration issue. Second, building on the concept of nicheness (Meyer and Miller, 2015), this dissertation proposes to focus on a party characteristic, i.e., party distinctiveness, that taps into the distinctiveness of a party's immigration-emphasis profile. Subsequently, it tests whether this party feature conditions

party responsiveness to public opinion. In doing that, it goes beyond scholarship focusing on the distinction between niche and mainstream parties (Adams et al., 2006; Ezrow et al., 2011; Meguid, 2005) and offers a more nuanced view of the way in which party characteristics influence the interaction between political actors and citizens. Third, this dissertation adds to the existing literature on party competition and studies pointing to a contagion effect exerted by radical right parties on the immigration stances of other parties in the party system. It does that by showing that the mean voter position represents a factor to be explicitly modelled in these studies since mainstream parties tend to accommodate to a larger extent the preferences of the overall electorate when they face a strong radical right party. Last, this dissertation tests simultaneously for the effects of party positions and policies on individual attitudes toward immigration. It shows that both play a role in shaping public sentiment regarding the immigration issue. In doing that, it bridges the literature on public opinion formation and party cueing and that on the thermostatic model, and provides a more complete picture of the drivers of the public opinion about immigration in current European democracies.

### 5.1. Limitations and future lines of research

This dissertation also presents limitations and leaves a number of substantive questions untouched. For one, the mass-elites linkages are manifold and may refer to connections between parties and their own partisan supporters, between parties and the median voter, or between government policies and voters' policy views (Steenbergen et al., 2007: 30). While the first two aspects, that is, the connection between parties and the mean voter, on the one hand, and that between parties and the mean party supporter, on the other hand, are addressed in this dissertation, the link between government policies and voters' views on immigration has been addressed only partially. Indeed, while this dissertation speaks to the thermostatic model of opinion-policy connection (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010; Wlezien, 1995; Wlezien and Soroka, 2012), it only focuses on one side of this process – the policy influence on citizens' preferences –, and it does not look into policy responsiveness to public opinion on immigration (see e.g. Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). Future research will benefit from studying this aspect as well.

This dissertation also has methodological and data limitations. First, the assumption underlying this study is that there are reciprocal influences between party positions and public preferences (see Steenbergen et al., 2007). This, of course, implies that both the bottom-up and the top-down processes are endogenous in nature. Since the point of departure of this dissertation, based on existing literature, was that parties respond to and influence public opinion (Adams et al. 2006; Zaller, 1992) and therefore both top-down and bottom-up processes are likely to be at play, the two dynamics were considered separately. This has allowed me to carefully explore the factors that influence party responsiveness, party cueing and policy influence on public opinion.

Nonetheless, given the reciprocal influences between masses and elites, the research designs and the modelling techniques employed in this dissertation have attempted to lessen endogeneity and reverse causality concerns. It is, however, impossible to assert that these concerns have been completely eliminated with the data at hand. One element employed in the empirical part to address endogeneity and reverse causality was to leverage the longitudinal nature of the data and to lag the independent variables so that they precede, from a temporal ordering perspective, the dependent variable. Making sure that the independent variables precede in time the dependent variable allows me to be more confident that I am capturing the causal relationships that I am interested in. For instance, in the chapters exploring party responsiveness it has been made sure that the public opinion is measured prior to the corresponding election. Party stances at a given moment in time cannot influence public preferences expressed earlier in time and the inclusion of the lagged dependent variable, in addition to addressing potential omitted variable bias (see e.g. Wlezien and Soroka, 2012: 1419), is intended to also lessen lingering reverse causality issues. Similarly, in Chapter 4, the party position has been measured at the election preceding the corresponding ESS survey, whereas policy was measured the year before. Of course, this does not solve all the problems. Taking as example the study of elite influence on public opinion, it has been argued elsewhere that political actors can anticipate changes in public preferences rather than influencing such changes (see, for instance, Gabel and Scheve, 2007). Fully addressing this possibility remains a difficult task based on the data used in Chapter 4.

Second, this dissertation has relied on the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) to estimate party positions on immigration. The use of CMP to estimate party positions has been criticized by several scholars (see e.g. Gemenis, 2013). While using the CMP data offers several advantages, including the coverage of longer periods of time, future research should delve into new approaches to estimating party positions on immigration by using either party manifestos but developing new categories (for instance, based on CMP's Manifesto Corpus, see Lehmann and Zobel, 2018; Merz et al., 2016) or by using other text sources such as legislative speeches or press declarations. Recent advances in quantitative text analysis are likely to allow proceeding in this direction.

Third, the empirical analyses comprising this thesis rely mainly either on publicly available survey data or other sources of information such as manifesto data. While this observational data allows us to address the hypotheses proposed in each empirical chapter, the possibility of unobserved confounders cannot be completely eliminated. Future studies using different methodological approaches (such as survey experiments) will hopefully complement and further validate the results from this dissertation.

This dissertation presents the potential to ramify into additional lines of future research. Chapters 2 and 3 examine party responsiveness to public preferences on immigration. Party positions are mainly measured based on electoral manifestos. Future studies could go beyond that and focus on the inter-elections periods, by looking at party stances as expressed through parliamentary questions and speeches, or media statements. Furthermore, this dissertation has not considered the potential role of other factors, such as party organization characteristics or institutions (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008; Powell, 2000; Schumacher et al., 2013), in moderating the responsiveness of parties to public preferences about immigration. Likewise, it does not take into account the role of institutions, like electoral rules or division of powers (Wlezien and Soroka, 2012), in conditioning policy influence on public opinion. These are important questions to be addressed in future studies in order to have a better understanding of mass-elite linkages on the immigration issue.



The findings from Chapter 3 also raise questions regarding the ensuing electoral impact, as well as in relation to the importance of electoral rules. Regarding the former, future studies should uncover whether increased responsiveness by mainstream parties to the mean voter will benefit them electorally. To the extent that responsiveness to the mean voter implies policy moderation, this should be electorally beneficial for the mainstream parties (see Adams et al., 2006; Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). At the same time, other research suggests that the extent to which policy shifts lead to electoral gains depends on whether the shifts happen on principled or pragmatic issues (Tavits, 2007). While *a priori* responsiveness is likely to electorally benefit parties that prove to be responsive, explicitly addressing this matter in empirical studies remains a task for future research.

The finding that mainstream parties tend to be more responsive to the mean voter when they face a strong radical right party also presents theoretically interesting implications regarding the role of the electoral rules. The viability and the electoral success of radical right and of other small parties depends, among others, on the electoral rules. Permissive electoral systems, such as those featuring proportional representation rules, tend to enable multiparty systems “so long as social factors warrant them” (Clark and Golder, 2006: 681), making it easier for parties such as radical right parties to enter and strive in the electoral arena. This implies that proportional representation systems would better enable the success of radical right parties which then tends to have a positive impact on mainstream responsiveness to the mean voter’s preferences. Future studies should explicitly attend to the potentially moderating role of electoral rules in the process linking parties’ and voters’ viewpoints on the immigration issue.

Also, while Chapter 4 brings an innovative approach to the study of top-down influences by modelling the joint effect of party positions and policy, it leaves other questions unanswered. For instance, it does not delve into more precise dynamics of elite influence on more specific groups of voters. That is, it does not look, for example, into how cross-pressured voters form opinions about immigration, and how this might depend on contextual factors such as party polarization. Studies of public opinion show that voters take cues from the parties they identify with (Hellwig and Kweon, 2016; Zaller, 1992), which is confirmed by results presented in this dissertation. Other studies point to the

increasing importance of an education cleavage separating voters with cosmopolitan views from those with authoritarian preferences (Stubager, 2008). However, what is less studied is the way in which cross-pressured voters, that is voters receiving party cues that conflict with the values stemming from their education levels, form attitudes toward immigration<sup>1</sup>. For instance, part of those citizens with lower levels of education, which should express more anti-immigrant views, may vote for or identify with leftist parties that tend to adopt less restrictive stances on immigration than their (radical) right-wing competitors (see Gingrich and Häusermann, 2015 for an analysis of shifting electoral bases of parties). Also, existing research shows that higher party polarization makes values and orientations more relevant for voters (Knutsen and Kumlin, 2005). Which aspects are likely to become more relevant for citizens' immigration attitudes when party polarization increases? Will increasing party polarization make voters express attitudes in line with the cues of the parties they support, or will they stick to the values emanating from their education?

Also, the focus of Chapter 4 has not permitted to address institutional factors that may affect citizens' attitudes and the potential polarization of these attitudes. Future research should examine the polarization of the electorates in European countries over the immigration issue and the extent to which it may be influenced by party-system factors (such as party polarization), institutional factors (like the welfare state), and the possible interaction between these factors. Research suggests that citizens in countries with more universalistic welfare arrangements tend to be more pro-immigrant since this type of welfare system tends to reduce the divide between insiders and outsiders (Crepaz and Damron, 2009). In contrast, means-tested welfare policies render other-regarding considerations, such as deservingness, more salient (Muñoz and Pardo-Prado, 2017). Findings from this dissertation also suggest that, in countries that spend increasingly more in social benefits, citizens are likely to display an increasingly anti-immigrant sentiment. Which considerations become more salient in different contexts may depend on elite polarization, which may in turn generate voter polarization across partisan lines (Zaller, 1992).

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<sup>1</sup> Recently, research interested in how citizens react to cross-pressures pertaining to the multiple facets of the immigration issue, linked to security, economic and cultural aspects, suggest that party cues have a stronger effect on highly educated citizens (Hellwig and Kweon, 2016).

Last but not least, this chapter has focused on the microlevel dynamics of public opinion change, exploring to what extent individual attitudes are influenced by party and policy variables. In future research, it will be theoretically interesting to shift the focus toward the macrolevel and analyse the party and policy influence on *aggregate* public opinion (see e.g. Wlezien and Soroka, 2012).

Finally, having separately analysed the conditions enabling, on the one hand, party responsiveness to public opinion about immigration and, on the other hand, party and policy influence on individual attitudes, examining the reciprocal influences between masses and elites in a comprehensive study represents the logical next step. This will enable a clearer test of who is cueing whom on immigration (see e.g. Steenbergen et al., 2007) and which of the two process (bottom-up or top-down) has a stronger influence on the mass-elites linkages in this policy area. This could be done, for instance, through cross-lagged structural equation models (Harteveld et al., 2017).

This dissertation provides important elements to grasp the bottom-up and top-down processes linking parties' policy stances and citizens' views about immigration. It is the author's hope that future scholarship will further enrich our understanding of the mass-elite linkage on this important issue.

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