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Abstract

The party politics of immigration is one of the fastest growing bodies of research within the study of West European politics. Within this literature, an underlying assumption is that immigration has become one of the most salient issues. However, this is rarely documented, let alone explained. Drawing on a new coding of party manifestos in seven West European countries, this article shows that party attention to immigration has grown in all countries since 1980 but only in Denmark has the issue become one of the most salient issues of party politics. We find that the general increase in attention reflects the rising number of immigrants and rise of radical right-wing parties. In terms of the issue becoming a top issue of party politics, a comparative analysis of the politicization of immigration in Denmark and the Netherlands shows that the interest of mainstream right-wing parties and coalition dynamics are the crucial factors.

Keywords

coalition dynamics, immigration, issue competition, politicization, Western Europe

Studying the politics of immigration¹ is a fast-growing body of research within political science.² One crucial aspect of the politics of immigration is party politics, that is, how political parties have addressed the issue of immigration. This question has also been subject to an extensive literature that has often focused on whether established political parties have changed their positions on immigration, not least as a reaction to the emergence of radical right-wing parties (e.g. Abou-Schadi, 2016a; Akkerman, 2012; Alonso and Fonseca, 2012).

What has received surprisingly little attention is the saliency of immigration for political parties. The question of whether parties have changed position on immigration presupposes that the issue has become salient for them. Why should we expect them to change position if they ignore the issue? Thus, despite considerable research interest in the party politics of immigration, we still lack systematic knowledge about whether immigration has become one of the most salient topics of party politics in Western Europe, the extent to which this varies cross-nationally and what explains such variation.

Drawing on a systematic analysis of party manifestos from seven West European countries (Belgium, the

Netherlands, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden and Denmark) coded according to the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP) coding scheme (Bevan, 2014), this article shows that attention to immigration has grown in all countries since 1980. Today, it has become an issue that all parties address, but only in Denmark has the issue become one of the most salient ('top') issues of party politics. We argue that the increasing attention to immigration across all countries can be explained by the rising number of immigrants and the growing strength of radical right-wing parties. However, these two factors are not sufficient for the issue to become a top issue. We argue that coalition incentives can make it attractive for the centre-right to focus on immigration and turn it into a top issue. Such coalition incentives have existed in Denmark.

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To demonstrate these claims empirically, we proceed in three steps. First, we provide a descriptive overview to show the general rise in attention to immigration as well as the much more significant growth in Denmark. Second, we conduct a regression analysis of party attention to immigration to show the importance of the rising immigrant share of the population and the growing strength of radical right-wing parties. Third, we conduct a comparative case study of Denmark and the Netherlands to show the role of coalition incentives for the centre-right.

From the outset, two points are worth highlighting. First, the difference between an issue that all parties address and a top issue of party politics is important. For instance, the development of immigration into becoming a top issue in Denmark was followed by what, from a comparative perspective, stands out as a series of very restricted changes to immigration policy (Akkerman, 2012: 518–520).

Second, the article focuses on *party* political attention to immigration, not the broader public or societal attention. The reason is not that these broader aspects of political attention are unimportant, but political parties are very relevant in their own right; first, because they are the main actors in terms of immigration policy and, second, because the emergence of radical right parties is one of the most striking developments when it comes to the politics of immigration. Their impact is hard to evaluate without focusing on party politics. Exactly the question of the impact on other parties of the emergence of radical right-wing parties has been central in existing studies of the party politics of immigration. Our findings suggest that even though the growing strength of radical right-wing parties generates more party attention to immigration from other parties, it is not a sufficient factor for the issue to become a top issue of party politics. Coalition incentives of the centre-right, however, are such a factor.

Studying the party politics of immigration

Following the societal interest in immigration, academic interest in the politics of immigration has grown considerably. So has the literature that focuses on the *party politics* of immigration. This more focused literature is characterized, first, by a strong focus on the *positions* on the issue taken by political parties. Thus, a central question has been whether mainstream parties adjust their policy position in response to the radical right (Abou-Schadi, 2016a; Akkerman, 2012; Schain, 2006). The question of the saliency of immigration is not neglected but rarely the main focus. For instance, Abou-Chadi (2016b) shows how the effect of electoral competitiveness on political parties' likelihood of implementing liberal immigration policies depends on the saliency of immigration. But saliency is not the dependent variable. Further, when this aspect of the issue is approached (Abou-Chadi 2016a; Van der Brug et al. 2015), immigration is studied without direct comparison

to other policy issues. However, the question of saliency cannot be studied by showing that attention to immigration has risen. It requires comparison of attention to immigration with other issues.

A second characteristic of the literature on the party politics of immigration is a strong focus on radical right-wing parties. This involves questions such as: How do mainstream parties react to the emergence of radical right-wing parties, not just in terms of their positions, but also in terms of broader strategies (Bale, 2008; De Lange, 2012; Meguid, 2005)? Or how does the growth of the radical right lead to changes at the party system level (Bale, 2003; Otjes, 2011)? This focus on radical right-wing parties is of course justified as the consequences of the emergence of the radical right are important to study in their own right. However, as argued by, for instance, Mudde (2013) and Van Herden et al. (2013), many developments ascribed to the emergence of radical right-wing parties may have other causes. The exact role of radical right-wing parties can only be studied by comparing countries with and without significant radical right-wing parties (see Odmalm and Bale, 2015; Van der Brug et al., 2015).

This characteristic is closely linked to a final characteristic of the literature on the party politics of immigration, namely the lack of a clear cross-national perspective. Even though studies such as Van der Brug et al. (2015) and Odmalm and Bale (2015) cover the politics of immigration in a number of West European countries, they do not have a strong focus on mapping cross-national variation in party politics.

To sum up, what remains unclear from the literature on the party politics of immigration is to what extent immigration has actually become a salient issue of party politics when compared to other issues. Further, cross-national variation also remains an unexplained phenomenon even though the strong focus on radical right-wing parties would seem to suggest that their presence is a key factor for the saliency of the issue within party politics (Abou-Chadi, 2016a).

When do political parties pay attention to immigration?

To answer the question of the saliency of immigration and investigate the factors driving cross-national variation in it, we first draw on two ideas from what is known as the policy agenda-setting approach (Green-Pedersen and Walgrave, 2014). First, the question must be approached from a relative perspective; that is, more attention to one issue implies less attention to another. This may seem a trivial point, but it implies that one can only study party political attention to immigration by at the same studying attention to other issues. Further, this also means that it is important to analyse not just factors that may generate more attention to an issue, but also the factors that can turn an issue into a top

issue of party politics, meaning that the issue is prioritized above most other issues. For instance, political parties can be expected to pay much more attention to public attitudes on a top issue compared to an issue that only attracts some party attention, which many issues actually do.

Second, attention to a policy issue always has specific policy content. Attention to immigration is about some substantial problem, such as the number of immigrants or the problems around civic integration, and a central aspect of an issue is thus the type of policy information that it offers (Baumgartner and Jones, 2015). Statistical indicators relating to immigration, such as the number of asylum seekers or labour immigrants, are published regularly. This does not mean that such figures are not disputable, but they are relatively easily available for news media and others. Immigration thus offers political parties plenty of opportunities to pay attention to the issue, and one should expect a relatively close connection between the flow of information on 'policy problems' and party political attention to the issue. This leads to our first hypothesis:

1. *The Immigrant Share Hypothesis:* The larger the share of the population with an immigrant background, the more attention parties will devote to immigration.

Not all political parties can be expected to be equally interested in the issue. Radical right-wing parties are actors with an obvious interest in immigration, but in many countries, centre-right parties also hold ownership of the issue, at least compared to the centre-left (Odmalm and Bale, 2015; Seeborg, 2017). Issue ownership thus provides the centre-right with a potential interest in taking advantage of public attention with regard to immigration. However, the centre-right has other issues that are potentially just as electorally attractive for them, so especially two other considerations are important for them.

The first type relates to internal agreement. As argued by Odmalm and Bale 2015, immigration is an issue that may cause potential internal disagreement within the centre-right. One centre-right position would be a business-friendly, liberal immigration policy focused on how immigration is beneficial for the supply of labour, whereas a value-conservative, nationalistic approach would be another. The latter would lead in the direction of a restrictive immigration policy. Such internal disagreement will make the centre-right reluctant to focus on the issue.

The second type of considerations is coalition considerations. Unlike niche parties, mainstream parties wish to have government power and may even be willing to sacrifice votes to achieve this. In many West European countries, winning government power implies coalition building. The growth of radical right-wing parties may even form an advantage for the centre-right because of

appeals to constituencies that generally do not vote for the centre-right, especially working-class voters (Ivarsflaten, 2005). This makes it even more attractive for the centre-right to focus on the issue and seek cooperation with the radical right (Bale, 2003). However, to win government power, the centre-right may also need the support of centre parties, which are typically not attracted by the extreme position of the radical right on the issue. Keeping such parties on board can lead the centre-right to avoid the issue (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). Thus, whether or not the centre-right does in fact chose to focus on the issue will depend on coalition considerations. The question for the centre-right is to identify the most realistic strategy for winning government power. Is a majority with the radical right the only solution? If so, it is attractive to focus on immigration in order to foster cooperation with the radical right? However, if a majority not including more immigration friendly centre parties is unrealistic, the centre-right will stay away from the issue.

Whereas a rising number of immigrants and the emergence of a radical right-wing party are factors that are expected to lead to an increase in attention to immigration, we do not expect these factors to be sufficient for the issue to reach a top status of party politics. Only when one of the major parties that define the structure of party competition focuses on an issue can the issue develop into a top issue (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015). With regard to the issue of immigration, it will thus depend on the coalition incentives facing the centre-right. In addition, even if the emergence of radical right-wing parties is expected to have a direct effect on how much attention parties will pay to immigration, the effect of radical right-wing parties should also be studied by focusing on how the presence and size of such parties will affect the coalition considerations of the centre-right parties (Bale, 2003). These considerations can be summarized in our second and third hypotheses:

1. *The Radical Right-Wing Party Hypothesis:* The stronger the radical right-wing parties become, the more attention all parties will devote to immigration.
2. *The Coalition Hypothesis:* Immigration becomes a top issue if centre-right parties can win government power with radical right-wing parties only, that is, without centrist parties.

With regard to hypothesis 3, we thus argue that coalition incentives of the centre-right is a sufficient cause for the issue to reach top status.³

Data

The Comparative Manifestos Project (CMP) dataset is the most common-use dataset for studying party competition around immigration (Volkens et al., 2013). However, this

dataset has two drawbacks from the perspective of this article. The first drawback is that the coding scheme does not contain categories directly measuring immigration but rather categories referring to ‘national way of life’ (601 and 602) and multiculturalism (607 and 608). These categories are clearly related to immigration, but it is unclear whether aspects related to, for instance, asylum seekers are in fact covered by these categories. Thus, studies using the CMP dataset to study immigration often include other categories as well, but the categories vary (Abou-Chadi, 2016a; Alonso and Fonseca, 2012; Meguid, 2005). The second drawback of the CMP categorization scheme is that it is difficult to compare the relative attention to immigration to other issues, simply because the coding scheme is only partly issue-based.

Instead, this article draws on an alternative coding of party manifestos based on the CAP coding system. Manifesto data coded based on the CAP coding system have been included for seven countries: the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium.⁴ Taken together, these seven countries provide a broad coverage of party politics in Western Europe, which allows us to identify broad trends in the party politics of immigration. At the same time, they vary in terms of the presence of a significant radical right-wing party in the party system. This allows us to evaluate the effect of this factor for the salience of immigration. The same goes for coalition dynamics, where the country selection contains countries where the centre-right has had an incentive to cooperate with the radical right, countries where they have needed to cooperate with centre parties, and countries where they have governed on their own, see below. Finally, the countries included cover countries that are historically immigrant countries, such as the UK, and countries where immigration mainly began in the 1980s, such as Denmark.

For all countries, all relevant parties at a given election have been included in the dataset. Relevant parties are parties that either won representation in the election before or at this election.⁵ In terms of time period, the data cover all elections from 1980 to 2013, however, only until 2007 in Belgium.

Unlike the CMP coding system, the CAP coding system is based on policy issues divided into main topics (e.g. macro-economic policy) and sub-topics (e.g. inflation or taxation within the category of macro-economic policy). The coding system was originally developed by Baumgartner and Jones and contained 19 main topics and more than 200 subtopics. Later, national versions of the codebooks were developed by modifying the American codebook. Cross-national comparison was afterwards secured through a cross-walk system (Bevan, 2014).⁶ With regard to immigration, all the national codebooks are based on the same definition of immigration as an issue including all questions in relation to refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants as well as questions about integration of

immigrants into society.⁷ For some countries, this is simply one subtopic. In other countries, it is divided into a few subtopics (see Online Appendix 1). In both cases, one main topic of immigration was generated.⁸

For the analysis, 23 comparable main topics were generated, immigration being one of them (see Online Appendix 1 for an overview). One should be aware that coding immigration as part of the total agenda implies that statements are only coded as related to immigration when this is their main policy content. A statement referring to, for instance, social problems in areas of social housing in general will be coded as related to social housing even though it may also relate to immigrants. If the statement refers mainly to immigrants, such as the concentration of immigrants in social housing, it will be coded under immigration.

The datasets were established independently for each country and later merged into one dataset. Online Appendix 1 presents details about the coding for each country. In all countries, the coding was done by trained human coders using natural sentences, quasi-sentences and in the case of the Netherlands paragraphs as coding units.

Immigration on the agenda

A first step in the empirical analysis is to identify cross-national variation in party attention to immigration. In order to do so, we draw on the concept of the party system agenda of Green-Pedersen and Mortensen (2010). This refers to the hierarchy of issues that all political parties find important to different degrees. More specifically, we look at the average attention to immigration across all parties at a given election.⁹ As other studies (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015; Steenbergen and Scott, 2004), we have weighted the parties equally because we wish to capture their common perceptions of which issues are important and not build in assumptions about certain parties being more influential than others.¹⁰

In all seven countries, immigration was a minor issue in party competition in the early 1980s. Since then, attention has increased somewhat in all countries, and immigration has moved from being almost a non-issue to being an issue that receives some party attention.¹¹ However, Figure 1 also reveals a strong contrast between Denmark and the other six countries. In Denmark, the saliency of immigration, that is, its share of the total agenda, among political parties has risen above 10%.

However, Figure 1 does not tell us much about attention to immigration compared to other issues. Therefore, Table 1 instead looks at whether or not immigration has been among the top 5 out of the 23 main topics on the party system agenda at any election in any of the 7 countries.

The findings of Table 1 confirm the difference between Denmark and the other countries. Looking across all the elections in all the countries covered in the period, the

Figure 1. The average share of all election manifestos devoted to immigration.

Table 1. Elections with immigration among the top five issues on the party system agenda.

	Rank of immigration
Denmark 1998	5
Denmark 2001	2
Denmark 2005	4
Denmark 2007	1
Denmark 2011	4
Netherlands 2003	4

Netherlands in 2003 is the only non-Danish example in which immigration has made it to top five of the party system agenda. In Denmark, immigration has been a top five issue on the party system agenda since 1998 and has even made it to the top three in 2001 and 2007. Still, simply looking at the top five issues may be problematic because the degree to which parties concentrate their attention on a few issues varies over time and countries. To take this into account, we identified cases where attention to immigration on the party system agenda was one standard deviation higher than the mean.¹² The only cases meeting this criterion are the Danish elections from 2001 to 2011. This confirms that Denmark is the only case where the issue has become a top issue in party competition.¹³

However, both Figure 1 and Table 1 look at the average attention to immigration across parties. This raises the concern that the findings are driven by attention from individual parties. One special concern would be that the high level of attention in Denmark reflects the activities of the Danish People's Party. Table 2 therefore shows how the Danish People's Party has paid above average attention to immigration in all years. However, Table 2 also shows that the two major mainstream parties in Denmark, the Social

Democrats and the Liberals, also began to focus very much on the issue during the 1990s, the Liberals more than the Social Democrats.

To sum up, these descriptive findings indicate that since the early 1980s, immigration has developed from a minor issue of party competition in Western Europe into an issue that all parties pay some attention to. This is a general development irrespective of whether a radical right-wing party has established itself in the party system, as in Belgium, or not, as in Germany or the UK. However, only in Denmark has the issue become a top issue of party politics.

What drives party attention to immigration?

To investigate the hypotheses derived above, we first construct a number of statistical models with the share of the total attention given to immigration *per party per election* as the dependent variable. The models are multilevel OLS regressions with random intercepts at the party and country levels. The aim of this first part of the analysis is to investigate our two first hypotheses.

1. With regard to 'information' about immigration, we focus on the share of foreign-born population. We drew these data from OECD (2015a). Alternatively, one could also focus on the number of new immigrants coming to the country (Abou-Chadi, 2016a). However, the former is a preferable measure as we focus on medium-term attention to immigration. The number of immigrants coming in a given year is likely to be volatile and influenced by conflicts such as the war in Ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s.¹⁴
2. To capture the strength of radical right-wing parties, we include the lagged share of votes of radical right-

Table 2. Party attention to immigration in Denmark.

Year	Average party attention	Average party attention (weighed by party size)	Danish People's Party attention	Social Democratic attention	Liberal attention	Average party attention without the Danish People's Party	Standard deviation	N
1990	1.6	1.6	—	0	0	1.6	1.0	8
1994	4.9	4.6	—	0	7.6	4.9	2.2	9
1998	8.1	12.6	13.1	14.2	20.4	7.8	2.1	10
2001	12.1	12.4	33.3	7.4	8.2	9.4	3.1	9
2005	10.1	12.0	15.4	12.5	16.3	9.3	2.2	8
2007	16.6	16.3	20.0	15.1	25.9	16.2	4.8	8
2011	9.9	10.5	14.5	3.8	15.6	9.2	2.7	8

wing parties in so far as they are present in the system (Döring and Manow, 2012).¹⁵

3. We also added the left-right placement of the parties based on expert surveys (Bakker et al., 2015; Castles and Mair, 1984; Huber and Inglehart, 1995). Based on the discussion above, we expect that the more right-wing the parties are, the more attention they pay to immigration.

Beyond these variables that capture our main theoretical focus, we also include a number of control variables.

1. Other studies of the issue attention of political parties have found considerable continuity in the issue that parties focus on (Abou-Chadi, 2016a; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2015), and we therefore added a lagged dependent variable. The expectation is that attention at $t-1$ to immigration has a positive effect on attention to immigration at t .
2. Other studies of attention to immigration (Van der Brug et al., 2015: 180–183) also include the level of unemployment. Increasing unemployment may crowd out attention to immigration because political parties focus on the issue of the economy instead. We drew the data from UN (2015) with additions from ILO (2015).

Model 1 presented in Table 3 contains the foreign-born share of the population and the control variables. In Model 2, we add the lagged vote share of radical right-wing parties. In line with our immigrant share hypothesis, the share of foreign-born population has a positive and significant effect on attention to immigration in both models. In both models, the left-right position of parties has a positive and significant impact: The more right-wing a party is, the more attention it pays to immigration. The lagged dependent variable also has a positive and significant effect, showing the expected continuity in party attention to immigration. Finally, higher levels of unemployment are related to lower attention to immigration, which is in line with the crowding effect found in other studies.

Table 3. Models explaining attention to immigration per election, per party.

Variable	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)
Unemployment (standardized)	−0.11*** (0.02)	−0.09*** (0.02)
Foreign-born population (standardized)	0.11*** (0.04)	0.09*** (0.03)
Party left-right position (standardized)	0.05** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)
Lagged attention	0.33*** (0.05)	0.30*** (0.05)
Lagged RRP votes	—	0.07*** (0.02)
Random effects party (intercept)	0.00 (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)
Random effects country (intercept)	0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.03)
Residual	0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)
REML	−591	−594
R-squared ^a	0.45	0.47
N (observations)	322	322
N (party)	56	56
N (country)	7	7

^aBased on the penalized residual sum of squares.

0.1 > * > 0.05 > ** > 0.01 > ***.

To test the Radical Right-Wing Party Hypothesis, the lagged vote share of radical right-wing populist parties is included in Model 2. As in previous studies, it has a positive and significant effect (Abou-Chadi, 2016a). At the same time, entering this variable into the model decreases the effect of the share of foreign-born population, which we interpret as a sign that part of the effect of this variable is indirect as countries with a larger share of foreign-born population also have higher support for radical right-wing parties.

To test the robustness of the estimations, we re-ran the model under different specifications: first, with country-fixed effects and, second, with party fixed effects (see Online Appendix 4). Adding country-fixed effects made the effect of the share of foreign-born population somewhat stronger. As could be expected, adding party-fixed effects removed the effects of left-right position. To further test the

Table 4. Characteristics of Denmark and the Netherlands.

Variable	Denmark	The Netherlands	Average all 7 (standard deviation)
Average size of RRP 1980–2013	9.2%	5.3%	5.6% (5.8%)
Average unemployment 1983–2014	6.1%	6.4%	7.4% (2.3%)
Share of foreign-born population 1980–2014	4.2%	4.4%	5.8% (2.0%)
Average effective number of parliamentary parties 1980–2012	5.2	4.9	4.5 (1.8)

robustness of the model, we re-ran the models excluding each of the seven countries one by one (see Online Appendix 4). In all models, all effects are significant, except for the model without Denmark and the model without Belgium, where the party-left right position is no longer significant. Out of all the predictors that we included, left-right ideology is the least robust.

To sum up, the development of party attention to immigration over time seems to follow a relatively predictable pattern according to which parties respond to an increasing number of foreign born in the population and the growth of radical right-wing parties with more attention to immigration.

In the second part of our argument, we claim that immigration will become a top issue if the coalition incentives facing the centre-right make it attractive for the centre-right to focus on the issue. More precisely, it depends whether focusing on immigration and cooperating with the radical right is the most realistic way for the centre-right to win government power or whether they must stay away from the issue in order to secure the support of the centre parties. To analyse this claim, we need to focus on entire party systems, which reduces the number of cases to the seven countries included. This makes a case study approach appropriate.

The role of coalition considerations in Denmark and the Netherlands

As will be shown below, after 1993, the centre-right in Denmark has had a clear incentive to focus on immigration, and we therefore focus on Denmark in the following. However, to show the effect of the coalition incentives facing the centre-right, we need to compare Denmark with a case where the centre-right has not had the incentives to focus on the immigration issue, even when a radical right-wing challenger has emerged. This implies that the UK, France and Germany are not suitable, because radical right-wing parties do not have (substantial) parliamentary strength. Belgian coalition formation has a peculiar complexity because of the language conflict, which makes it unsuitable for a comparative analysis (see below). The main choice is to compare Denmark with either the Netherlands or Sweden. We choose to focus on the Netherlands because the radical right has gained strength earlier in the Netherlands (the 2002 election), whereas the Sweden Democrats did not

gain representation until the 2010 election. However, we will return to both countries at the end of this section.

Denmark and the Netherlands are comparable on a number of key variables, see Table 4, but differ in terms of the coalition incentives of the centre-right. This makes our comparison a most-similar-systems design. Both have below-average shares of foreign-born populations. Both have lower levels of unemployment than the average. While Denmark has a radical right-wing party whose vote share is higher than the average, the Dutch radical right populist parties are below average for the entire three-decade spanning period. After 2002, however, the Netherlands has had a substantial radical right-wing populist party. Relevant for our party system perspective is the fact that both countries have a fractionalized multiparty system. Both countries have an above-average effective number of parliamentary parties. Therefore, they have multiparty coalitions. The two party systems mainly differ in one respect, namely in terms of the mechanics of their cabinet formation. Denmark is governed by either left- or right-wing governments based on a bloc majority. The Netherlands are typically governed by broad coalitions often covering both the centre-left and the centre-right parties. This means that the coalition considerations of the centre-right are fundamentally different in the two cases, as will be spelled out below.

As can be seen from Figure 1, party attention to immigration in Denmark was limited before the early 1990s. As can be seen from Table 2, the major mainstream party in Denmark, the Liberals, only began to focus on the issue after losing government power in 1993. This loss of power changed their coalition incentives radically. The centre-right, including the Liberals, had governed Denmark from 1982 to 1993 based on support from the Social Liberals, which is a relatively immigration-friendly centre party. However, in 1993, the Social Liberals changed bloc and joined a government with the Social Democrats. Until 1993, immigration was an unattractive issue to focus on for the right-wing bloc because of the liberal position of the Social Liberals. After 1993, the position of the Social Liberals was no longer a problem for the centre-right. Their focus turned towards how to gain government power back without the Social Liberals.

This required both electoral gains and a closer cooperation with the radical right. For both purposes, immigration was the perfect issue. The centre-right parties had issue

ownership over immigration compared to the centre-left, which implied potential electoral gains from the increased attention (Green-Pedersen, 2012: 84–92). Further, immigration was the main issue for the Danish People's Party, which emerged as a splinter party from the Progress Party in 1995. Thus, both the Liberals and the Danish People's Party focused on the issue. By raising the saliency of the issue, the two parties managed to force all other parties to address it, including the Social Democrats (see Table 2). This process of increasing party competition was one of the central reasons for the major defeat of the Social Democrat-led government in the 2001 election. A new centre-right government headed by the Liberals was supported by the Danish People's Party (Andersen, 2003). This government introduced significant changes in the legislation around immigration, all in a more restrictive direction (Akkerman, 2012: 519). When in opposition, after considerable internal debate (Bale et al., 2010: 414–415), the Social Democrats moved their policies closer to the restrictive position that the governing coalition had.

To sum up, the change of strategy of the Liberals after having given away power in 1993 seems the decisive moment in terms of turning immigration into a central issue of Danish party competition. However, it is important to understand the conditions that made this strategy both attractive and successful. The fact that the Liberals hold issue ownership makes immigration a potential issue to focus on, but other concerns decide whether the party will in fact focus on the issue. After 1993, all these considerations reinforced the basic attractiveness of the issue. Cooperating with the radical right was the only realistic way to win government power. However, a central question that cannot be answered by looking at the Danish case alone is whether the reaction of the Liberals is simply the result of the emergence of the Danish People's Party.¹⁶ To analyse this, we need to compare with the Dutch case.

As can be seen from Figure 1, immigration also rose as a political issue in the Netherlands from the 1990s, but without becoming one of the top issues of party politics (Van Heerden et al., 2013). As argued by Van Kersbergen and Krouwel (2008), the key actor in terms of understanding party competition around immigration is the Liberal Party (VVD) because attention to immigration is typically electorally advantageous to the party, as is also the case with the Liberals in Denmark. However, the Dutch VVD has generally not focused on immigration as a central issue in its attempt to win government power. Two concerns have made the issue less attractive for the VVD. First, the issue has constantly been a source of internal disagreement (Van Kersbergen and Krouwel, 2008). Ideologically, the party is rooted in economic liberalism and has a business orientation, which points more in the direction of a liberal approach to immigration. Second, coalition considerations have pointed the VVD in the direction of a more centrist orientation because winning government power has always

required co-operation with either the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) or the Labour Party (PvdA). From 1994 to 2002, the VVD governed in coalition with the PvdA and the social liberal D66.

With the breakthrough of the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in 2002, Dutch party politics was shortly in flux. In 2002, the LPF won 17% of the vote focusing on immigration and entered into government with the CDA and VVD. The coalition then broke down not least due to internal instability in the LPF. At the 2003 election, the VVD spent 7.7 of its manifesto on immigration and the issue became a top five issue on the party system agenda, see Table 1. However, coalition incentives had not made it attractive for the VVD to focus on immigration as government participation was still dependent on the CDA.

After the 2003 election, where LPF lost most of its support, Dutch coalition politics returned to normalcy. The VVD then entered into government with the CDA and D66. In the following years, immigration was a source of internal disagreement both within the coalition and within VVD, and the party found itself in opposition again after the 2006 election. Geert Wilders, who was expelled from the VVD, founded the PVV, which took over the LPF's position as the parliamentary representation of anti-immigration politics. After the 2010 election, the VVD returned to government, leading a coalition with the CDA supported by PVV. However, for the VVD, winning government power still implies cooperation with either CDA or PvdA, as was the case after the 2012 election. Thus, unlike Denmark, the emergence of a radical right-wing party has not changed the coalition incentive of the VVD. Therefore, and because of its internal disagreements, the VVD has not, except for the 2003 election, attempted to turn immigration into one of the top issues in party competition as in Denmark.

If we then briefly turn to the other cases, we can see that similar considerations as in the Dutch case are likely to explain the lower level of attention to immigration compared to Denmark. First, in the Swedish case, coalition considerations have also kept the Conservatives from focusing on immigration (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008). The Conservatives are part of the Alliance together with the three centre parties (Centre Party, People's Party and the Christian Democrats). This coalition was in power between 2006 and 2014, and the need to keep this alliance together has made immigration an unattractive issue for the Conservatives to focus on. Following the argument above, the entrance of the Swedish Democrats into parliament will only change this if it becomes possible for the Conservatives to win government power based on only the support of the Swedish Democrats instead of the three other Alliance parties. Second, in Belgium, the formal and informal rules concerning coalition formation discourages the centre-right from focusing on immigration despite the growing strength of the radical right-wing Flemish Interest (Vlaamse

Belang). Even if the Flemish-speaking centre-right would be willing to do so, they would have no support from the French-speaking parties as the Flemish Interest also favours Flemish independence. All parties thus adhere to a 'cordon sanitaire', which means that they have committed to not make any deals with the Flemish Interest. This explains the lower level of attention to immigration (Vangoidsenhoven and Pilet, 2015).

Third, in France and in the UK, radical right-wing populist parties have practically no parliamentary representation (because of the majoritarian election system) and therefore no coalition potential. In these two cases, electoral considerations may play a stronger role. By emphasising immigration, the centre-right may hope to continue to keep radical right-wing populist representation in parliament small. However, our analysis did not indicate that the parties of the centre-right have made immigration a top issue in these countries. Finally, in Germany, the long-term absence of a substantial radical right-wing party implies no coalition incentives for the centre-right to focus on immigration.

Conclusion

The growing literature on the party politics of immigration has paid relatively little attention to the question of how salient the issue of immigration has actually become for political parties. This article showed that the question of the saliency of immigration is a two-sided story. On the one hand, it has become an issue that all parties address. On the other hand, Denmark is the only one of the seven countries analysed where immigration has become a top issue of party politics.

In line with our first two hypotheses, the rise in attention can be explained by an increase in the number of foreign-born residents in a country and the growth of radical right-wing parties. However, these two factors are not sufficient to explain why the issue becomes a top issue, as in Denmark. The share of foreign-born citizens is not particularly high in Denmark, and other countries have seen successful radical right-wing parties. The key to understanding how an issue becomes a top issue is to focus on the incentives of the centre-right. We argue that coalition incentives can make centre-right parties focus on the immigration issue and turn it into a top-issue as it happened in Denmark after 1993. The question then is if coalition incentives of the centre-right are not only a sufficient cause, but also a necessary one? In other words, could other incentives lead the centre-right to focus on the issue? Could they, for instance, start focusing on the issue in countries with no strong radical-right-wing parties and thus no coalition incentives? In light of the typical issue-ownership of the centre-right, this is not unrealistic, especially if the number of immigrants continues to rise. Until now, however, it has not happened in the cases included in this study.

This has important implications for how we understand the importance of the radical right. The empirical analysis above would suggest that the emergence of a radical right-wing party is a necessary condition for the issue to become a top issue. We are yet to see a case where the mainstream right pushes hard to move the issue to the top of the party system agenda without the presence of a radical right-wing party.

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Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. When we talk about the issue of immigration, this should be understood in a broad sense, including policy questions relating to both refugees and immigrants and questions relating to entrance, integration and citizenship.
2. The authors would like to thank Tarik Abou-Chadi, Carsten Jensen, Henrik Seeberg, Kees van Kersbergen and Joost Berkhout for helpful comments.
3. Whether it is a necessary cause will be taken up in the concluding section.
4. These are the seven countries for which comparable data are available.
5. For the United Kingdom, only the three major parties (Labour, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats) have been included. See Online Appendix 1 for a list of all parties included.
6. <http://sbevan.com/cap-master-codebook.html>.
7. Questions relating to temporary and seasonal workers are not included.
8. The subtopic (201) on discrimination of ethnic minorities and racial groups, which exist in all countries, is also included.
9. Manifestos vary in length. Therefore agenda is first calculated for each party at each election. Then an average across all parties at each election has been calculated.
10. However, weighting by vote share produces more or less the same comparative picture as will be presented below. For illustration, the Danish figures are also presented weighted by vote share in Table 2 and a weighted version of Figure 1 can be found in Online Appendix 2.
11. This development of the issue is also shown by the fact that whereas 32% of the manifestos in the 1980s did not pay any

attention to the issue at all, this was only the case in 2% of the manifestos in the 2000s.

12. The mean share of attention is 4.35 for the 23 main topics. The standard deviation varies between 2.11 (Netherlands 1986) and 6.35 (Denmark 1984). At almost all elections, three to five issues fulfil the criterion of attention being more than one standard deviation above the mean (See Online Appendix 3 for the issue agendas for the six elections).
13. As a way of validating this, attention to immigration in the CMP dataset – based on the four categories mentioned above – has also been analysed parallel to Figure 1 and Table 1. Also here, Denmark comes out as a clear outlier. Switzerland is the only other country that has a period (2000s) when attention almost reaches Danish levels.
14. Note that, for France, immigration data is only available for two elections (2007 and 2012).
15. We counted the votes of the New Democrats (*Nya Demokraterna*, ND) and Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) in Sweden, the National Front (*Front National*) in France, the Centre Party (*Centrumpartij*, CP), Centre Democrats (*Centrum Democraten*, CD), List Pim Fortuyn (*Lijst Pim Fortuyn*, LPF) and the Freedom Party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) in the Netherlands, the Progress Party (*Fremskridtspartiet*, FrP) and the Danish People's Party (*Dansk Folkeparti*) in Denmark, The Republicans (*Die Republikaner*) and the National-Democratic Party of Germany (*Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, NPD) in Germany and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the British National Party (BNP) in the United Kingdom. To model the linguistic divide in Belgium, we include the votes of the Flemish Bloc/Flemish Interest (*Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang*, VB) relative to the other Dutch-speaking parties for the Dutch-speaking parties and the votes of the National Front relative to the other French-speaking parties for the French-speaking parties.
16. The Progress Party, from which the Danish People's Party is a splinter party, already focused on immigration in the last part of the 1980s but was ignored by the centre-right, including the Liberals (Green-Pedersen, 2012: 87). This supports the importance of the change in coalition incentives in 1993.

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