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Impact of Public Attitudes to migration on the political environment in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

First chapter: Europe



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Executive Summary

This is the first of three chapters for the report entitled 'Impact of Public Attitudes to migration on the political environment in the Euro-Mediterranean Region'. The report forms part of the *Phase III Euromed Migration Communications Study*. This report follows *Phase II Euromed Migration Communications Study*, entitled "Public attitudes on migration: rethinking how people perceive migration", which demonstrated that attitudes to migration in the EuroMed region seem to have remained fairly constant over time, while the importance of the issue to individuals has changed. This chapter of the subsequent study considers how and why these dramatic changes in the importance of the issue, or salience of immigration, occurred in European politics. Salience is defined as the relative importance and significance that voters ascribe to an issue, in this case, migration and, more specifically for the purpose of this chapter, immigration.

This chapter combines findings from various scientific sources to produce a theoretical framework that explains how salience affects electoral outcomes, both in terms of turnout and results, and ultimately public policy via emotional activation, exposure to information and evaluation of politicians. Furthermore it provides an overview of changes in the salience of immigration in Europe from 2005 to 2018, showing clear trends according to geography, politics and economics. A second explanatory framework is presented which explains trends in salience. It is based on existing scientific literature, and specifies the respective roles of public policy, 'real-world' migration events and trends, media and politicians.

The key findings are:

- The more immigration is important in the public debate, the more seats far-right parties tend to win. In other words, the number of seats won by radical right parties in a country closely follows the salience of immigration when measured as the percentage of people saying it is one of the most important issues affecting their country.
- Reporting tends to follow consumer preferences, rather than vice versa (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010), the effects of media reporting on political attitudes tend to be non-durable. However, media reporting is likely to affect what is on the political agenda.
- Individuals are only likely to re-consider their political behaviour if their emotions are engaged by that issue. Only salient issues engage emotions. On the other hand, issues that individuals do not consider to be salient, or important, will not cause them to change their attitudes and behaviour because they do not become emotionally engaged with them.
- Based on the models developed in this report, it is likely that radical right parties are likely to win in excess of 21% of European Parliament seats in 2019, slightly more than the 18% of seats they won in 2014.

Finally, this chapter presents the following recommendations for policy-makers and researchers of migration, public opinion and European politics:

1. There is a need for more detailed data on migration issue salience—not just the salience of ‘immigration’ but also particular aspects such as irregular immigration.
2. Be aware that the changes to Europe’s party systems, and their level of representation in legislatures in recent years are likely to be primarily a result of changing issue salience, not changes in attitudes.
3. Higher salience causes activation of one’s emotional systems and interest in the issue by citizens. Emotions activated via higher salience include anger, sadness, disgust, pride, hope, happiness, fear and sympathy. It is this emotional activation which may be why individuals base their political behaviour on certain issues, including immigration in recent years, as opposed to others.
4. Voter apathy, on the other hand is a result of a lack of emotional engagement. This is the case even when the individual votes have a clear attitude towards an issue.
5. It should be understood that as salience increases, both emotion and knowledge of the issue increase. Journalism that is *well-informed*, *value-balanced* and *evidence-based* is crucial to informing the public and creating an environment in which negative feedback loops are avoided.
6. Emotional engagement is how media framing is likely to have the most influence on issue salience, and subsequent political behaviour. Polarisation results from individuals selectively choosing which information they are exposed to following emotional activation. This seems to be a self-reinforcing cycle.
7. More research on salience and emotional activation, specifically regarding what causes emotional activation, is necessary. Regarding the causes of salience — further studies should include cohort surveys over time, and subsequent analysis of the impact of changes in migration issue salience on political behaviour, including voter participation.
8. The media and politicians are not solely responsible for setting the agenda on migration, nor the relative importance of immigration. The root causes tend to be the reality of migration itself, though this is of course filtered through perceptions by individuals of the phenomenon, which media and politicians influence, but do not control.
9. If European policymakers wish to reduce polarisation on the issue of migration, as well as anti-immigrant political mobilisation, the clear way to do so is to reduce the salience of the issue.

Introduction

In this chapter we consider how and why the dramatic changes in the salience of immigration in recent years have changed European politics. We first combine findings from the literature to produce an original theoretical framework of how salience affects electoral outcomes and ultimately public policy via emotional activation and exposure to information. We then overview variation in the salience of immigration in Europe from 2005 to 2018, showing clear trends according to geography, politics and economics. Next, we produce a further comprehensive theoretical framework to explain these trends in salience, based on the literature, that specifies the respective and interactive roles of public policy, 'real-world' migration events and trends, media and politicians, before adducing evidence that supports this framework. Finally, we consider how salience—both in terms of the perceived most important issues affecting one's country and the EU—has affected past European Parliamentary elections, in terms of the percentage of seats won by radical right parties, and what this tells us about future electoral results. Finally, having developed two theoretical frameworks, we offer next steps for policy-makers and researchers of migration, public opinion and European politics.

What is the 'salience' of migration and what are its effects?

In this section, the following definition of salience is applied:

'the relative importance and significance that an actor ascribes to a given issue on the political agenda' (Opperman, 2010: 3).

We begin by outlining the various labels, definitions, and inferred properties of public issue salience and the methods that have been used to measure it. The key findings that explain how public issue salience affects electoral outcomes are then outlined, building on the work of Dennison (2019a). From these, a theoretical model, combining previous scientific findings, is offered, to show how changes in salience are likely to affect electoral outcomes. This is shown in Figure 1.

Labels, definitions and properties

As Miller *et al* (2017: 125) state, 'despite its frequent use in the literature, policy issue salience has more often been a vague metaphor than a precisely defined scientific concept with an accepted operationalization.' Political scientists have used multiple terms to refer to the concept that this report calls 'issue salience', both on the supply-side (i.e. political actors) and the demand-side (i.e. the public). These include 'policy attitude importance' (Krosnick, 1990), 'issue importance' (Fournier *et al.*, 2003); 'policy issue salience' (Miller *et al.*, 2017) and, in earlier works, alluded to with terms like 'importance', 'centrality', 'ego involvement' and, indeed, 'salience' (for overview of early works, see Krosnick, 1988).

In his seminal series of earlier works, Krosnick (1990: 60) defined salience as 'the degree to which a person is passionately concerned about and personally invested in an attitude.' Boninger *et al* (1995: 62) continued this line of reasoning, defining 'attitude importance' as 'an individual's subjective sense of the concern, caring, and significance he or she attaches to an attitude.' More recently, Opperman (2010: 3) defined issue salience as 'the relative importance and significance that an actor ascribes to a given issue on the political agenda.'

A number of effects of issue salience have been proposed, which start from the supposition that, rather than individuals being largely unaware of the concept, 'There is nothing subtle about attitude importance, particularly at its highest levels: People know very well when they are deeply concerned about an attitude, and they know just as well when they have no special concern about one' (Boninger *et al.*, 1995: 62).

The primary causal mechanism explaining salience's effects on behaviour is that 'attaching importance to an issue may activate and engage a person's emotion systems' (Miller et al, 2017: 131). Studies (*ibid*; Lazarus & Smith, 1988; Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993) have shown that individuals are only likely to re-consider their political behaviour according to a political issue if their emotions are engaged by that issue, and that only salient issues engage emotions and therefore elicit emotional states such as anger, sadness, disgust, pride, hope, happiness, fear and sympathy. By contrast, issues that individuals do not consider to be important—even those that the individual has clear attitudes towards—fail to engage their emotional systems and therefore do not cause a change in behaviour. In short, for an individual to change their political behaviour, they have to not only have an opinion on an issue, but also for their emotional state to be changed by it, and this *only* happens if the individuals see the issue as important.

Aside from party choice at the ballot box (discussed below), observed resulting behaviours have included additional and selective exposure to information about an issue (e.g. Boninger et al, 1995) and greater consideration of information about that issue and related party positions (Walgrave and Lefevere, 2013; Krosnick, 1990; Fournier et al., 2003) because of greater attitudinal accessibility, certainty, stability, and influence on less salient attitudes (Miller et al, 2017; Lavine et al, 1996, Boninger et al, 1995, Visser et al, 2003, Krosnick, 1988, 1991). Notably, Boninger et al (1995) argue that these effects are only observable at the highest level of salience. Comprehensively, Weaver (1991: 68) shows that increased salience of an issue is 'accompanied by increased knowledge of its possible causes and solutions, stronger opinions, less likelihood of taking a neutral position, and more likelihood of participating in politics through such behavior as signing petitions, voting, attending meetings, and writing letters.' Fox (1989) made similar findings regarding protesting. Political attitudes affected by voter issue salience have been shown to include the extent to which one approves of a policymaker (i.e. believing that they are or are not doing/have done a

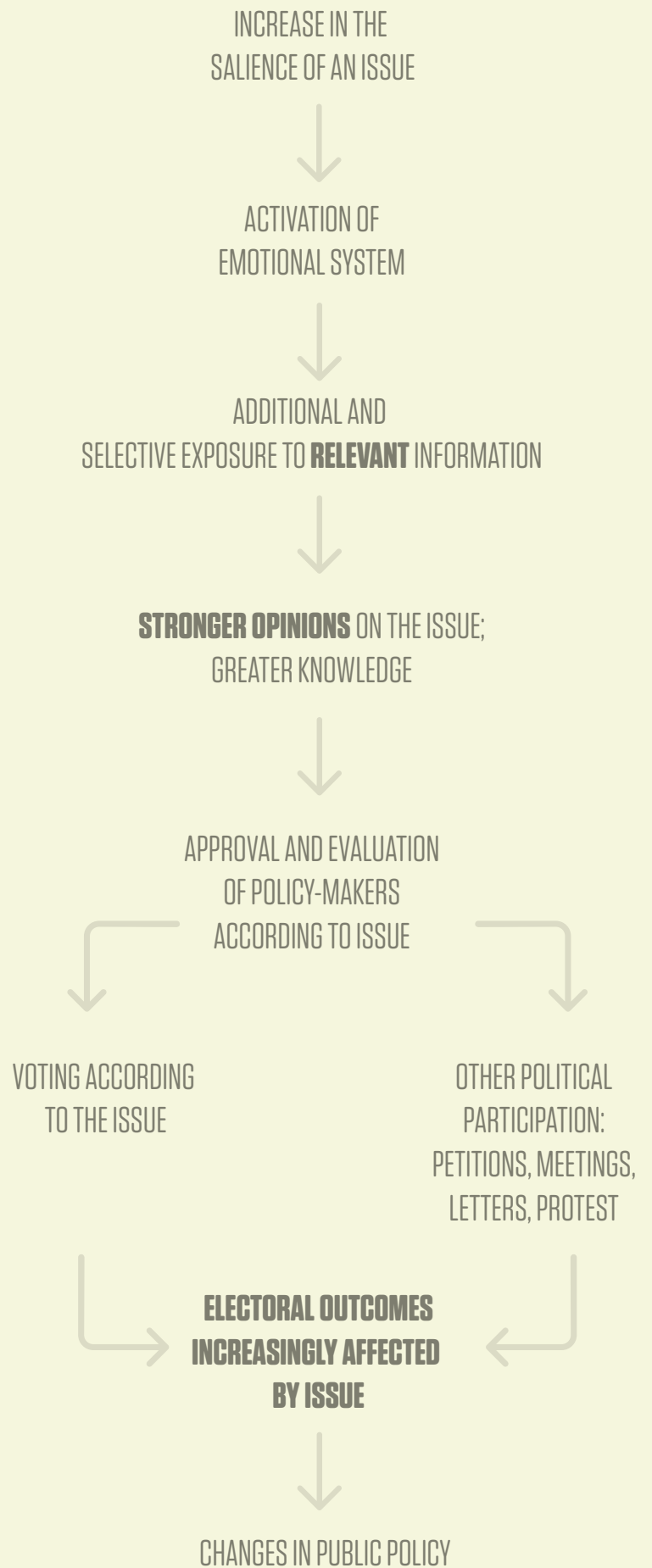


Figure 1. Theoretical model: how salience affects polarisation and electoral outcomes

good job') (Edwards et al, 1995; though Grynawski and Corrigan, 2006, find more mixed evidence), and party support (Neundorf and Adams, 2018).

Scholars have also found that public issue salience affects policy outcomes (e.g. Franklin and Wlezien, 1997; Lazarus, 2013; though Wlezien, 2005, found no evidence for this regarding defence). Givens and Luedtke (2005) show that the restrictiveness of immigration policy is positively affected by the salience of immigration. Policymakers are more likely to adopt restrictive immigration policies when the public see immigration as an important issue. As such, we are likely to see public policies and public attitudes align more closely when the issue that that policy deals with is considered important by the public because policymakers are aware that their future electoral chances are contingent on following the public on that issue. By contrast, when an issue is of low salience—such as European integration prior to the 1990s—we often see a 'permissive consensus' from the public, whereby voters essentially give policymakers freedom to pursue whatever policies that the policymakers believe are best, whether or not the public agree with them. Indeed, Opperman and Henrike (2008) showed that higher salience of 'Europe' in the UK than in Germany restricted British governmental manoeuvre in European institutions. Finally, Spendzharova and Versluis (2013) find that salience has a positive effect on the transposition of EU directives, while Weissert (1991) showed that legislators who introduce bills related to more salient issues see their personal ratings increase.

Until recently one of the key assumed properties of salience was its supposed stability within individuals over time. To Krosnick (1990: 85-86) the distribution of the salience of various issues was expected to be deep-seated within individuals, resistant to change and, possibly, distal in the causal process that leads to behaviour and even spatial attitudes—'Reductions in the importance of a policy attitude are probably unusual.' Boninger et al (1995: 61) similarly state 'A large body of evidence indicates that attitudes people consider personally important are firmly crystallized and exert especially strong influence on social perception and behavior ... important attitudes are unusually resistant to change ... and stable over time'.

However, Miller et al (2017: 150) argue that issue salience with regard to one's personal life is likely to be more stable than issue salience with regard to politics. Hatton (2016:1) finds that 'at the national level these two dimensions [policy attitudes and salience] of public opinion move differently over time and in response to different macro-level variables.' Both of these latter arguments seem to be well borne out in recent years in Europe—with political attitudes being highly stable, personal salience being fairly stable and salience regarding one's country and Europe showing high volatility (see Eurobarometer, 2018). Moreover, *Phase II European Migration Communications Study* (Dennison and Dražanová, 2018) already showed that with regard to immigration, salience is highly unstable.

All of these findings—the effects of public issue salience on, in order, emotion, exposure to information, opinion and polarisation, evaluation of policy makers and non-electoral political behaviour, electoral outcomes and, finally, policy—are shown in the Figure 1.

Measurement

Issue salience is most often measured in surveys by asking individuals what they consider to be the most important issue(s) (MII) or most important problem(s) (MIP) affecting themselves or their country (or less commonly some other social unit such as community, family or Europe). The ordinal nature of the question—asking for one, two or three most important issues—necessarily means that issue salience is typically

reported in *relative*, ordinal terms (see Wlezien, 2005). However, individuals are less commonly asked to measure their perceived salience of specific issues (e.g. Arceneaux and Kolodny, 2009; Yang, 2016) according to some metric. In spite of the obvious arbitrariness of any such metric, this approach has the advantage of relaying information on the relative salience of all issues, avoiding a cut off.

Furthermore, the referent object in the question has been shown to have significant effects on how salience predicts evaluations of politicians, voting, policy preferences and social participation, leading Miller et al (2017: 127) to conclude that the ways in which salience is measured 'should not be done arbitrarily, because different measures produce very different results.' Some surveys, such as the Eurobarometer, have to some extent resolved this issue by including multiple questions that ask respondents what they believe are the most important issues affecting various "units", (1) themselves personally, (2) their country and (3) Europe. The results of this survey alone show the very wide discrepancy between the issues that individuals report as important to the various referent units. Less significant seems to be the wording choice between 'issue' and 'problem', with the two producing highly similar results in surveys (Jennings and Wlezien, 2011).

Survey measures of salience were until recently, less uniform. Boninger et al (1995: 162) note that they, in previous studies, had 'relied on three principal sorts of questions: asking people how important an attitude object is to them personally, how deeply they care about it, and how concerned they are about it.' Furthermore, as Bartle and Laycock (2012: 682) point out, the most important issue question is sometimes worded directly with respect to the election (e.g. As far you're concerned, what is the single most important issue in the general election?). This and other differences in 'most important issue' questions, such as the phrasing of 'issues and problems', adjoining phrases like 'as far as you're concerned', and the number of issues that are requested by the survey should be considered in comparative studies.

A key debate in the literature during the twentieth century was over the relative merits of close- and open-ended MII questions, with the former supposed by some to be more accurate by 'properly' offering parameters of what is meant by salience, and that latter supposed by others to offer more authentic answers. Geer (1991) offered an overview of this debate before using an experiment to show that open-ended questions lead to a genuine expression of salience. Bartle and Laycock (2012; see also Wlezien, 2005; Johns, 2010) argue that individuals are sufficiently bad at knowing themselves that they cannot be relied upon to accurately report salience so that, when responding to MII questions, individuals are actually reporting what they believe the rest of the electorate believe to be important, making MII responses useful only at the aggregate-level (for methodological and empirical criticism, see Kurella, 2014).

Finally, internet search data—notably the form of Google's N-Gram or other search engine results—have been intermittently used, though Mellon (2013; 2014; see also Scharcox and Vogelgasang, 2011; Hayes and Bishin, 2012) compared these findings to those of Gallup's MIP question, finding congruence in the US only, and lower congruence across the board elsewhere. An early work in this vein (Roberts et al, 2002) used online message board mentions as a metric of salience and, later, Vergeer and Franses (2016) measured salience with twitter mentions.

Salience as a predictor of electoral behaviour

As recently as 2003, Fournier et al. (51) could state that issue salience 'has received little attention since the publication of Krosnick's studies' and that it 'is rarely integrated into models of political decision.' Four areas in which issue salience is used in electoral studies are identified.

Weight in spatial models

Early electoral studies scholars assumed that voters would not only vote for parties with policies that were most congruent to their own, but also that they would weigh this congruence. Downs (1957: 141) stated 'people with an intense interest in some policy are more likely to base their votes upon it alone.' Similarly, Stokes (1963: 372) argued that 'different weights should be given different dimensions at different times.' Krosnick (1988, 206) showed that—at US presidential elections between 1968 and 1984—'more important policy attitudes are more potent determinants of candidate evaluations and voting behaviour', contradicting earlier findings by Niemi and Bartels (1985) and others, whose findings Krosnick claimed were the result of methodological failings. Other studies that have shown that salience acts as a weight on policy preferences in the vote calculus include Aldrich and McKelvey (1977), Fournier et al (2003) and Visser et al (2003). This could lead to voters for instance voting for a party with which they disagree on a majority of issues, if they agree with the party on their most salient issue.

Issue voting theory

Perhaps the most theoretically developed strand of literature that utilises the concept of issue salience is issue voting, which assumes that individuals vote for whichever party they consider to be most effective, competent or sometimes simply associated with salient issues. According to this theory, parties endeavour not to change public attitudes—which tend to be stable (see *Phase II Euromed Migration Communications Study*, Dennison and Dražanová, 2018, for evidence of this regarding immigration) already showed that with regard to immigration, this was not the case—but to increase the salience of the issues that they 'own' (e.g. Riker, 1993). Building on a developed literature (e.g. Green and Hobolt, 2008; Bélanger and Meguid, 2008), Clarke et al (2012) find evidence to support the theory in the 2012 USA House of Representatives elections. However, Walgrave et al (2015) argue that the validity of these findings is undermined by the measures of party competence and association which are confounded with attitudinal positions and general party evaluations. In spite of this, Budge (2015: 770) summarises the evidence on issue ownership theory as 'the prominence of 'your' issues on the agenda does indeed increase votes.'

Interaction and direct effects

Issue salience has been used in a large number of theoretically disparate (and often underdeveloped) studies as a weight on predictors of party choice aside from policy positions; or as a predictor of other predictors of party choice; or as a weight on predictors of predictors of party choice. Ostrom and Simon (1985) found that salience determined the extent to which foreign and economic policy evaluations affected presidential approval, with Edwards et al (1995), Blais et al (1998) and Fournier et al (2003) providing similar findings on broader government evaluations.

Repass (1971; see also Kiouisis et al, 2015) found that salience had almost as much direct effect on party

choice as party identification, while Kwon (2008) used dynamic modelling to show that finding the issue of unemployment to be salient increased the probability of voting for a left-wing party. Finally, as Bartle and Laycock (2012: 680) point out responses to the MII and BPI [best party] questions have become important components in most descriptive, narrative accounts of aggregate election outcomes.

As explained in Dennison (2019b), issue salience has been utilised in some explanations for populist radical right party success. Arzheimer (2009, see also Arzheimer and Carter, 2006) use the prominence—or salience—of immigration in the manifestos of *all* mainstream parties to show that salience has a positive impact on populist radical right success. In other words the fact that all major parties are addressing immigration as an issue benefits radical right wing parties at the polls. More recently, Dennison and Geddes (2018a) show that the *public* salience of immigration—using Eurobarometer data—is strongly positively correlated with populist radical right party support over time in most Western European countries.

Dennison (2019b) takes this further using panel data models to show that the salience of only immigration has a positive effect at the national level, while the salience of crime, the economy, terrorism and unemployment have no positive effect. He also shows at the individual-level in the UK that seeing Europe, as well as immigration, as salient increases one's chances of voting for UKIP. However, like other studies of the populist radical right, these fail to consider those country cases where there is no populist radical right presence.

Voter Participation

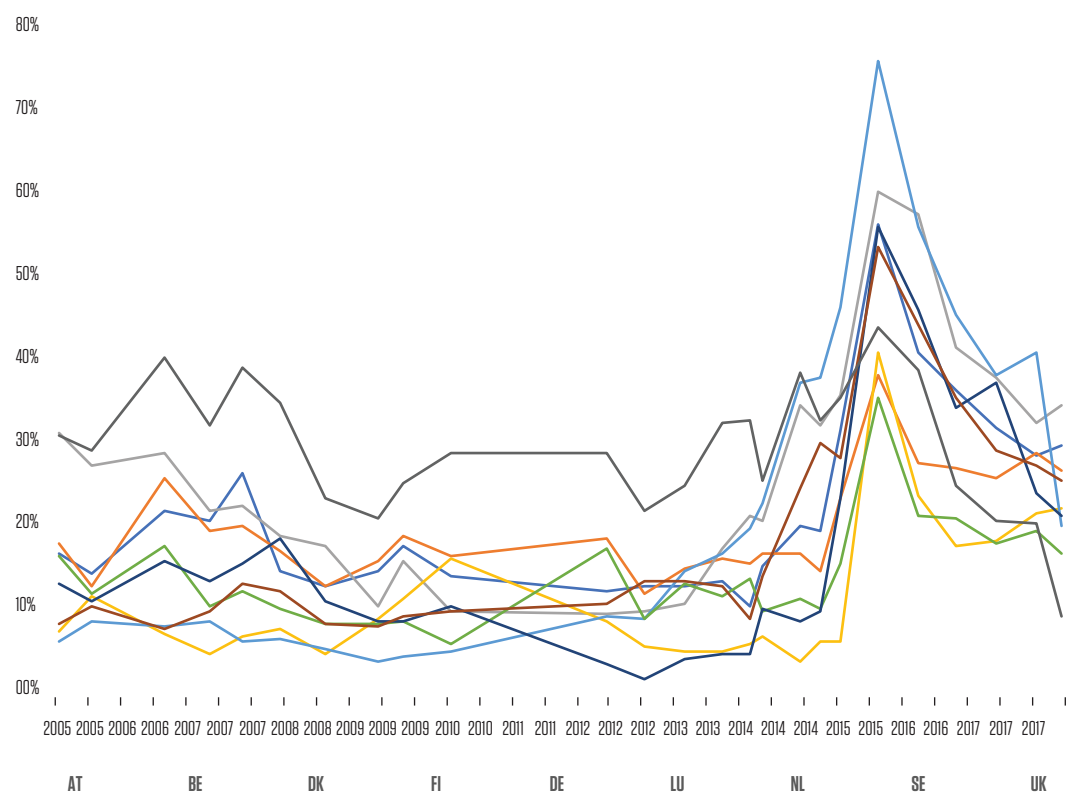
Finally, issue salience has also been shown to have effects on voter participation. Furthermore, Clark (2014) found that the low salience of issues under the jurisdiction of the EU explains low turnout in European elections. Weaver (1991) showed that issue salience affects voter participation positively. We can expect that when an individual finds fewer issues important, there is less emotional activation, they then take less interest in political issues in general, and are less likely to have strong opinions on policy and politicians, all of which decrease their likelihood of voting.

How is the salience of immigration changing in Europe and how has this affected electoral outcomes?

In this section that manner in which salience of immigration is changing in Europe over time, is examined. Measures of issue salience are taken from the pan-EU Eurobarometer survey (Standard Eurobarometer, 89.1). The standard Eurobarometer was established in 1973. Each survey consists of approximately 1000 face-to-face interviews per Member State (except Germany: 1500, Luxembourg: 500, United Kingdom 1300 including 300 in Northern Ireland), with the surveying done over the course of a month. The sample design applied in all member states 'is a multi-stage, random (probability) one. In each country, a number of sampling points was drawn with probability proportional to population size (for a total coverage of the country) and to population density (Eurobarometer, 89.1, see online Technical Specification for full sampling details).' Since 2005 this survey has asked respondents in each EU member state 'what do you think are the two most important issues affecting your country?' as a close-ended 14-choice (with occasional variation) variable.

The countries are grouped into four separate categories in the graphs below according to geography, politics and economics— that lead to similar trajectories in the salience of immigration. We start with nine countries from north-western Europe—Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, UK.

Figure 2. Percentage responding 'immigration' to the question 'What do you think are the two most important issues facing our country at the moment?' Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, UK. May 2005-March 2018.



lands, Sweden, and the UK. We can see a relatively common trajectory. In the period 2005-2014, immigration was considered a somewhat important issue in all of the countries. The main exception during this period was the UK, in which immigration was clearly considered a more important issue with between 20% and 40% of citizens reporting it as one of the top two most important issues they considered to be affecting their country. Elsewhere, the figure was typically stable at between 10% and 20%. After that, every country saw a very sharp peak, so that immigration was seen as one of the most important issues affecting their country—the lowest was 35% in Luxembourg and the highest was 76% in Germany. Thereafter, the salience of immigration declined again, but still remains higher in every country than the period prior to 2014 (with the exception of the UK) with Luxembourg the lowest at 16% and Denmark the highest at 34%.

The second group—Cyprus, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain—largely covers southern Europe, though Ireland is also included due to its somewhat similar economic crisis. Compared to the north-western countries, these countries have almost all seen immigration as a less salient issue historically. To Kitschelt (1995, 2007), this would be unsurprising due to—with the exception of France—those countries’ insufficient levels of ‘post-industrialisation’, less generous welfare states and resulting lack of post-industrial values, though Mendes and Dennison (2019) question the accuracy of this claim. Prior to 2015, most countries reported immigration as not very salient, with between 1% and 13% of citizens offering it as one of their most important issues. The two exceptions to this are Malta, where immigration has clearly long been extremely salient, and Spain, where for a period during 2006 and the so-called Cayucos crisis of irregular migration from mainland Africa to the Canary Islands, immigration was highly salient, before declining to the second lowest of the eight countries, ahead of just Portugal. Following 2014, Italy was the only country to see a very strong uptick in the salience of immigration, which has continued to rise longer than in north-western Europe, to around 35% in March 2018. Greece and France also saw less significant upticks. In most countries there has also not been a significant downturn in salience since 2015, unlike in north-western Europe.

We now move on to eight states from Central and Eastern Europe, the four ‘Visegrad’ countries, the three Baltic countries and the only 2004 former Yugoslav accession country: Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Prior to 2015, immigration was not considered a salient issue in any of the eight countries, never being above 10% and often being around 0%. During 2015, all of the countries saw an uptick, although in Lithuania, which had reported the highest levels of salience, this was lower. The upticks were particularly high in Czechia, Estonia and Hungary and Slovenia, where salience reached 48%, similar to levels in north-western Europe. Like in north-western Europe, these countries saw a downturn in the salience of immigration after 2015.

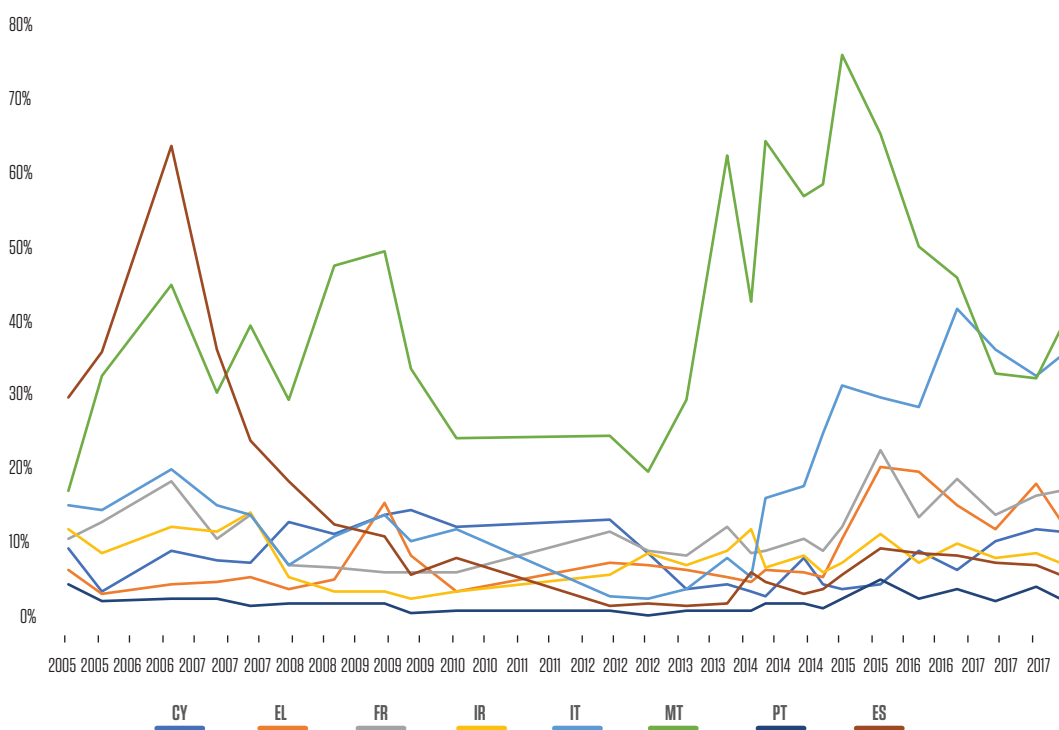
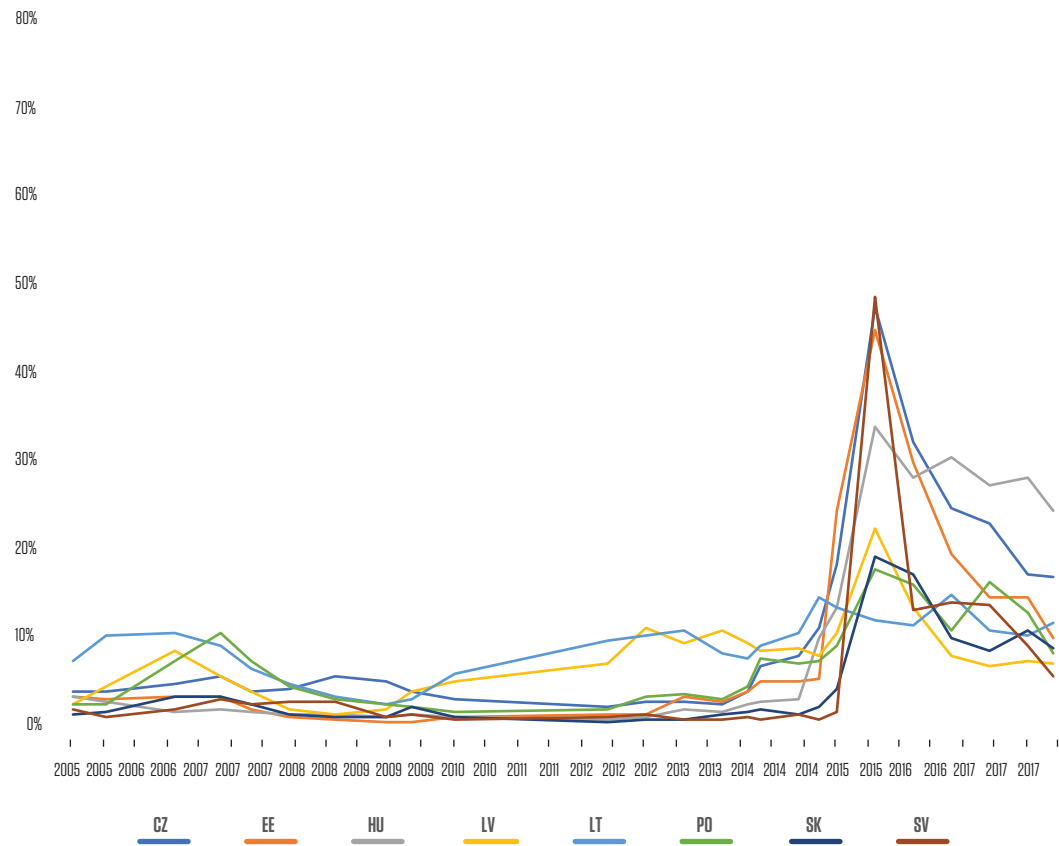


Figure 3. Percentage responding ‘immigration’ to the question ‘What do you think are the two most important issues facing our country at the moment?’ Cyprus, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain. May 2005-March 2018

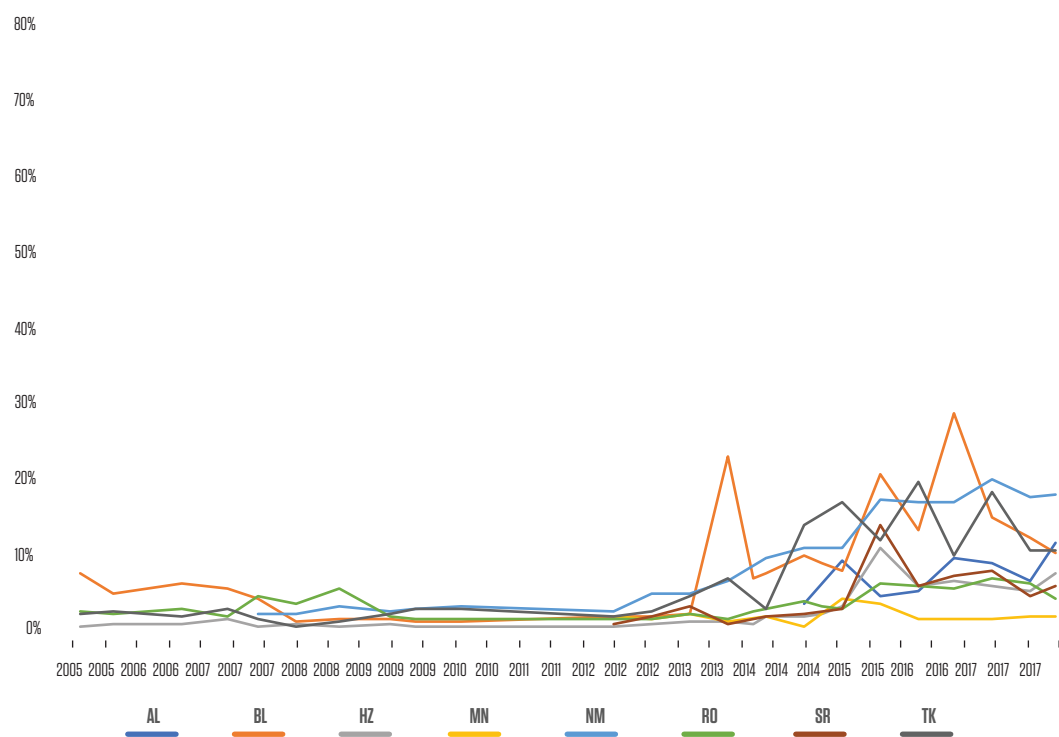
The final group of countries—largely covering the Balkan region—includes EU member states from the 2007 and 2013 enlargements and candidate members: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. In these countries, immigration has long been a non-salient issue. Since 2013, the issue has sporadically been deemed important in Turkey and, particularly, Bulgaria, peaking at 28% in late 2016. North Macedonia is the only country to see a consistent increase, up to 18% today.

Figure 4. Percentage responding 'immigration' to the question 'What do you think are the two most important issues facing our country at the moment?' Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia. May 2005-March 2018



Romania, Serbia and Turkey. In these countries, immigration has long been a non-salient issue. Since 2013, the issue has sporadically been deemed important in Turkey and, particularly, Bulgaria, peaking at 28% in late 2016. North Macedonia is the only country to see a consistent increase, up to 18% today.

Figure 5. Percentage responding 'immigration' to the question 'What do you think are the two most important issues facing our country at the moment?' Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. May 2005-March 2018



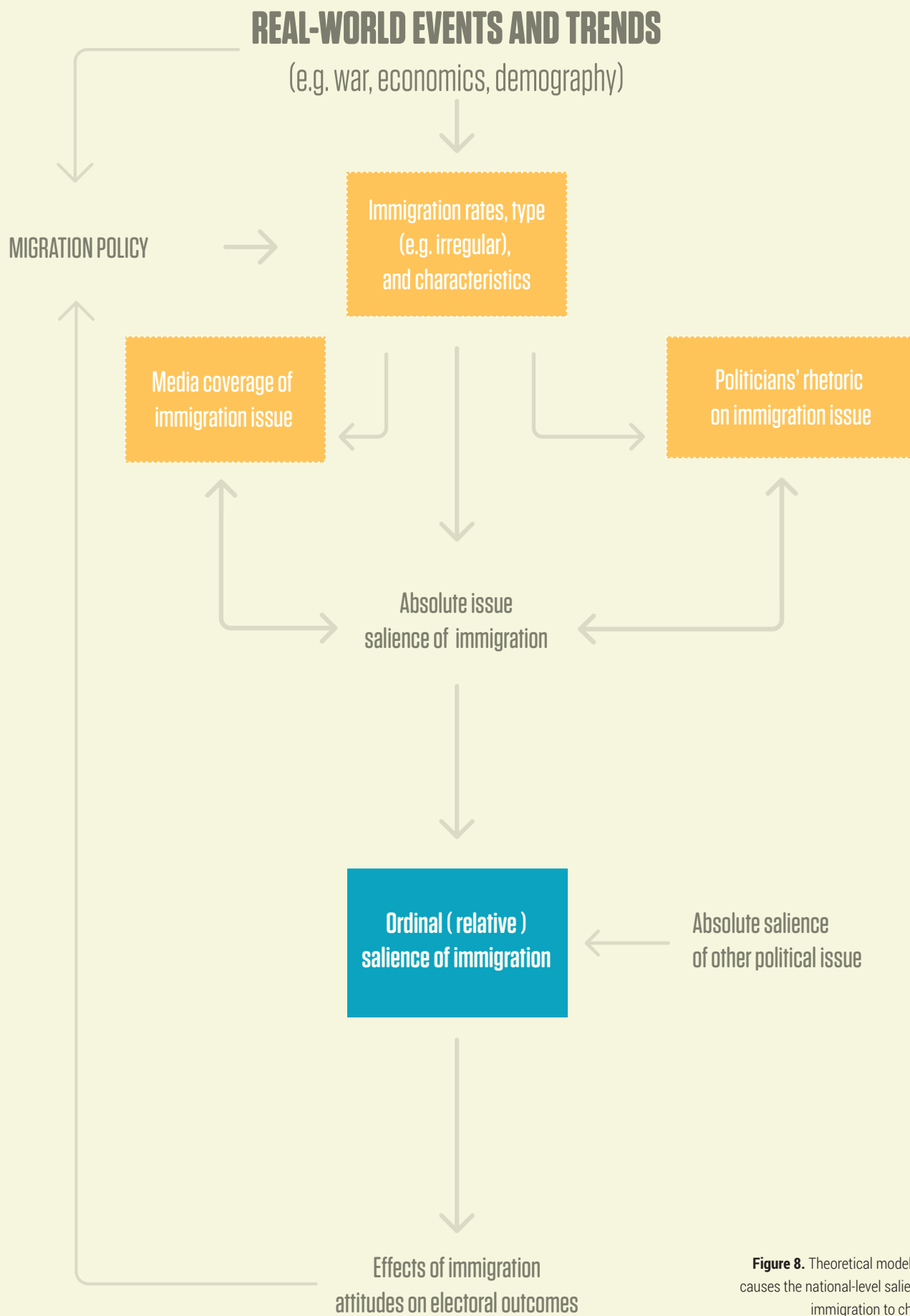


Figure 8. Theoretical model: what causes the national-level salience of immigration to change?

What causes the salience of immigration to change?

In this section, what causes the salience of immigration to change is considered. The scientific literature is overviewed, combining the findings to produce a single theoretical model, as shown Figure 8.

Despite its multiple uses in the election studies literature, the causes of variation in issue salience remain fairly undertheorised and are rarely tested, as argued by Dennison (2019a). Krosnick (1990: 74) argued that salience varies between individuals according to three factors: self-interest, social identification and values, whereas it varies across time according to 'prominent events or problems' that 'focus national attention.' Evidence of the predictive power of each the three between-individual factors was found in five separate studies by Boninger et al (1995). Neundorf and Adams (2018) also showed that individual-level salience was a function of party support.

The main exception to the lack of attention given to the causes of variation in issue salience, is that of the agenda setting literature. As Fournier et al (2003: 52) state 'agenda setting concerns the influence of factors—most notably, but not exclusively, media coverage—on the issues that individuals consider important and unimportant (Behr & Iyengar, 1985; Salwen, 1988).' Literature has also considered when and why agenda setting works, first in terms of memory accessibility, and secondly with reference to the type of news content shown to arouse levels of emotions that determine salience (Miller, 2007). Supporting this body of work on agenda setting is the finding of Einsiedel et al (1984) that exposure to crime news is a better predictor of salience of crime than is personal experience with crime. Aside from the media as an agenda-setter, Dellis (2009; see also Glazer and Lohmann, 1999) shows that salience is a function of policy-makers' decisions, which are strategically made to influence salience for electoral reasons, though Hayes (2008) shows that politician cues only have an effect via an interaction with media cues. Finally, Bonnie Meguid's (2010) work on niche parties argues that their support is subject to the manipulation of the salience of issues on which they campaign (e.g. environmentalism) by the approach of mainstream parties to those issues.

However, attitudinally, panel data studies have shown that media preferences tend to follow consumer preferences, rather than vice versa (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2010) while experimental studies have shown that the effects of media reporting on issues and framing on political attitudes tend to be non-durable (Chong and Druckman, 2007). Moreover, scholars have criticised agenda setting literature as exaggerating the role of media (and politicians), in their ability to affect salience (Erbring et al, 1980; Feld et al, 2014). Ansolabehere and Puy (2018: 105) criticise the assumption that 'the weight given to an issue is entirely a function of media attention to the issue, and not of some underlying preferences of voters' by academics who 'use campaign strategies to estimate the emphasis on each political issue.'

Perhaps the most consistent finding regarding the causes of cross-time variation is that issue salience responds to actual events and their gravity. Behr & Iyengar (1985; see also Iyengar, 1979) show that 'real-world

cues' affect issue salience both via the positive effect they have on news coverage and directly, with Erbring et al (1980) reporting similar findings for 'real world conditions' (see also Wlezien, 2005). For example, Carey et al (2014) find that social protests increased Latino's salience of immigration.

From these findings on the effects of real-world events, media coverage and politicians' coverage, the below theoretical model is produced to explain national-level variation in the salience of the issue of immigration. This suggests that the only truly exogenous factor are 'real-world events and trends' (e.g. of war, economics and demography), which, together with a country's migration policy, affect immigration rates, types (such as regular and irregular) and characteristics (potentially the demographics of the migrants—for example, it has been shown that Britons are more concerned by 'immigration' from other EU member states than other EU nationals are). This collectively can be deemed the 'reality of immigration', which affects both media and politicians' coverage of immigration issues, with all three then directly affecting the *absolute* salience of immigration—i.e. how important citizens deem immigration to be in the abstract. Of note, it is posited that this salience also has an effect on media and politicians' coverage of immigration issues, making these relationships two-directional, creating a feedback loop, as suggested by the literature more critical of agenda-setting theory. Citizens then use their assessments about the *absolute* salience of immigration, along with their assessments about the *absolute* salience of other political issues, to judge the *ordinal* or *relative* salience of immigration, i.e. is immigration one of the *most* important issues? This is based on the findings of the salience literature that only the most salient issues affect electoral behaviour. This electoral behaviour then affects migration policy, so completing the loop.

Evidence of each of these proposed causal mechanisms is now considered in turn. First, to consider 'immigration rates, types (e.g. irregular), and characteristics', We first consider total immigration and statistics to indicate irregular immigration rates to Europe, as shown in Figure 9. We can see that total immigration rates reached a local peak in 2007 at nearly 4 million persons before declining to around 3 million persons in

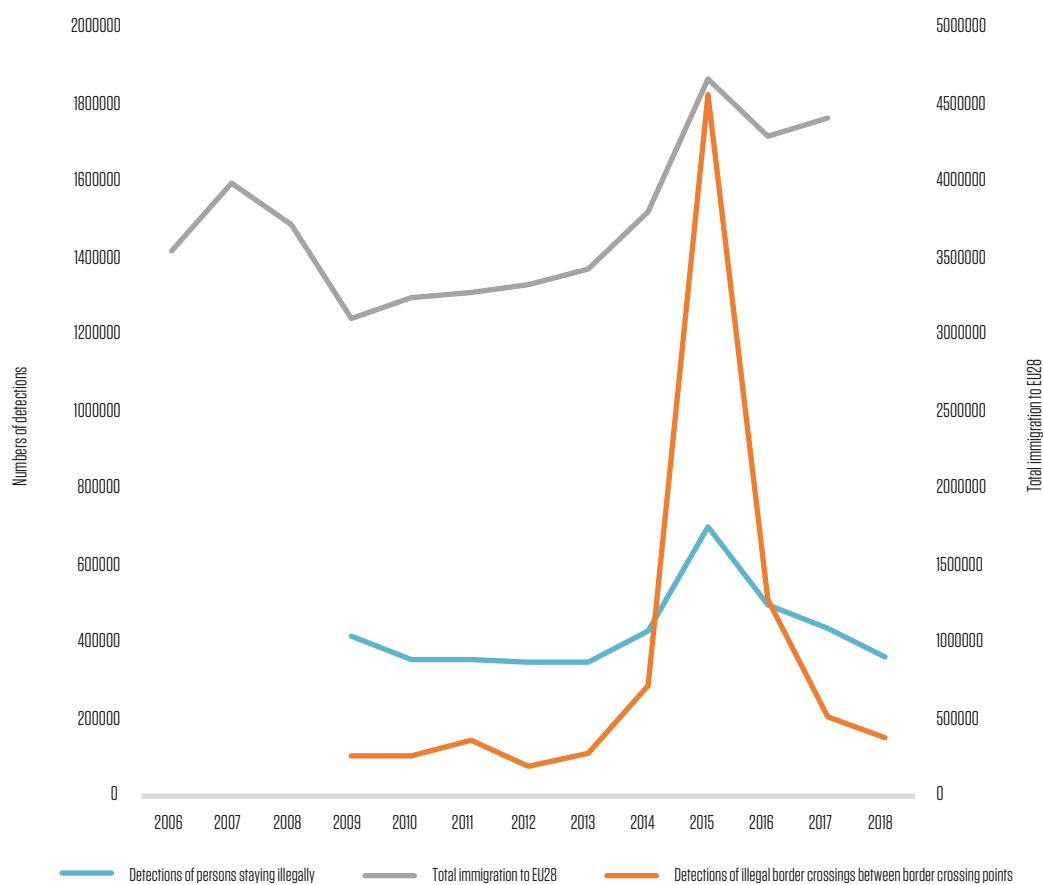


Figure 9. Total and irregular immigration rates to Europe, 2006-2018

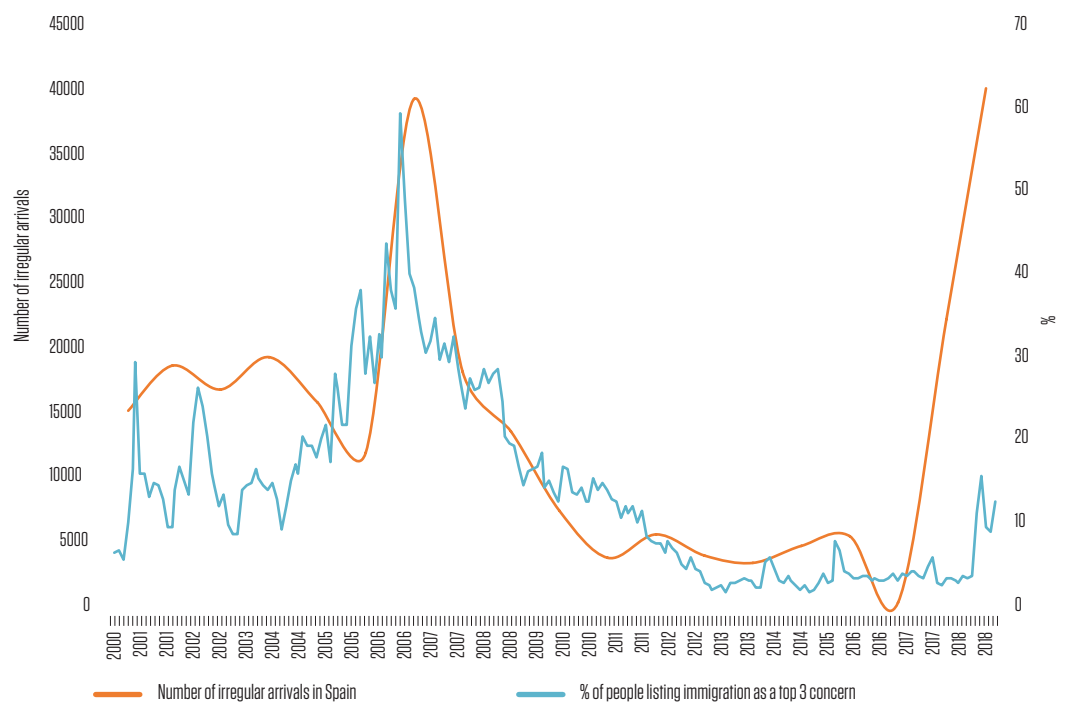
Notes: Detections data taken from Frontex's annual Risk Analyses; Total immigration taken from Eurostat

2009. This figure then rose, at first gradually until 2013 and then more rapidly until 2015, reaching a peak of over 4.5 million, from which it has only marginally declined. Far more dramatic have been the changes in irregular immigration rates. Detections of persons staying illegally had been level at around 40,000 prior to 2014. From this point onward they rose to 70,000 in 2015, since when they have again returned to their prior level. Overwhelmingly more dramatic than either of the two previous trends has been the changing rate of detections of illegal border crossings into the EU. This had been steady at around 100,000 per year prior to 2014. After nearly trebling that year, it then shot up again in 2015 to over 4.5 million persons in 2015, after which it again declined to its previous figures. This peak largely fits the timing of the rapid increase in salience of immigration in many European countries in 2015, as already outlined.

In order to further validate the claim that immigration salience in Europe is partially driven by levels of irregular immigration, we look at the Spanish case. This is done for three reasons. First, Spain is unique in Europe in that it had an earlier 'migration crisis' in 2006, which, as already mentioned, saw large numbers of irregular migrants crossing from mainland Africa to the Canary Islands. If this time period, entirely separate from the 2015 peak, also saw a rapid increase in the salience of immigration, we can move closer to claiming causality. Second, Spain produces a separate metric of issue salience from the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, asking respondents about their top *three* most important issues, adding validity to my use so far of the Eurobarometer. The Spanish Ministry of the Interior also produces its own data on irregular arrivals arriving by coast. As we can see in Figure 10, indeed, the number of irregular immigrants correlates very well with the salience of the issue of immigration. However, the very sharp uptick in irregular arrivals after 2017 was followed by only a modest uptick in the salience of immigration—primarily because, unlike in 2006, Spain also had other highly salient issues to deal with in terms of unemployment, the economy, the Catalan independence referendum 'crisis' and corruption, underscoring the important difference between *absolute* and *relative* salience.

Figure 10. Number of irregular arrivals (reaching Spain via coast) and the salience of immigration in Spain

Notes: Salience measures taken from monthly Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas barometer's question 'What is, in your opinion, the most important problem in Spain today? And the second? And the third?'; Irregular arrivals statistics taken from the Spanish Ministry of the Interior



Having established that immigration rates, and particularly irregular immigration rates, are a likely cause of variation in levels of the salience of immigration, we now move on to politician's coverage of immigration issues. In the above theoretical framework, it is suggested that such coverage both affects and is affected by

the salience of immigration. In Figure 11, we see the emphasis each European party family group gives to the topic of immigration, as measured by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, which uses 100s of academic experts to measure the issue positions and emphasis of each issue that 100s of European parties have. These are grouped according to party family—radical right, conservative, liberal, Christian democrat, social democrat, radical left and Green. We can see that in two of the three years under question, there was very little change in any party family and that all party families devoted a similar amount of coverage to the issue of immigration, with all of them treating the issue as moderately important with three outliers. Radical left and Green parties discussed immigration slightly more than the others, while the radical right treated the issue as far more important—8 on a 0-10 scale of importance. By 2017, there had been notable changes in the importance that parties gave to immigration in their public stances. All parties, except the radical left and Greens, discussed immigration more. The largest increase was among conservative parties, though liberal, social democrat and radical right parties also increased the amount with which they made immigration a part of their policy and rhetorical offer. The increase was more minor for Christian Democrat parties.

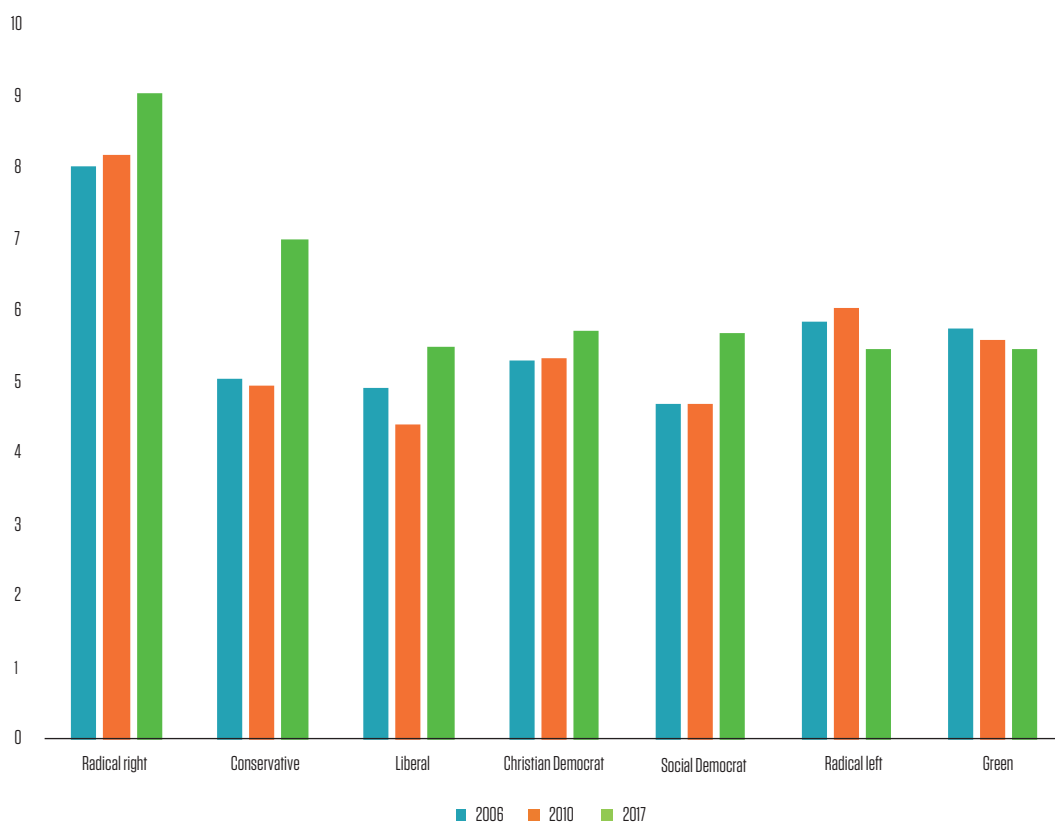


Figure 11. Party emphasis of the topic of immigration by party family, 2006-2017

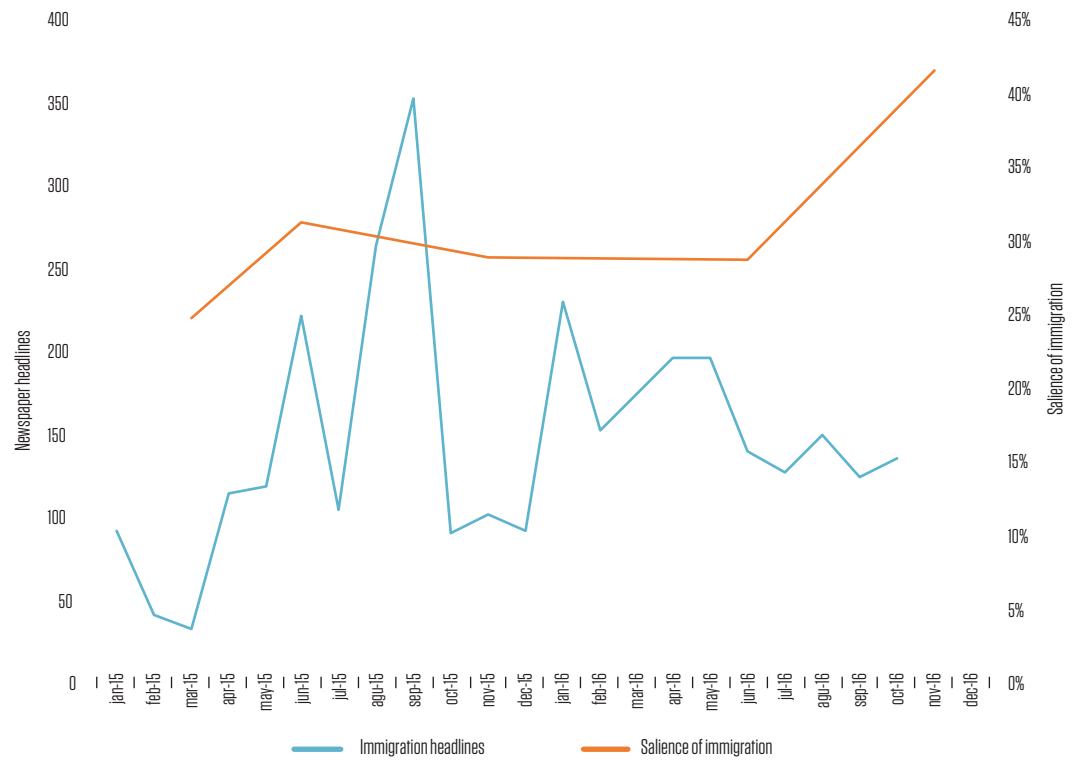
Notes: Chapel Hill Expert Survey. Salience of immigration in party stance ‘Importance of immigration policy for each of the following parties. 0 (not important at all) – 10 (extremely important).’ 2006: 227 national parties, 29 countries; 2010: 237 parties, 28 countries; 2017: 132 political parties, 14 countries.

Overall, it seems indeed plausible that the increase in emphasis that European parties have put on immigration has increased its salience, although as mentioned above, this relationship is likely to work in both direction and, further, it should be noted that the increases have not been overwhelming, with the possible exception of conservative parties.

We now move on to considering the effect of media coverage of immigration issues. In Figure 12, we see the number of Italian newspaper front pages that included a story on immigration every month over 2015 and 2016. We see large peaks in late 2015 and again in early 2016. This trend partially fits pan-European trends, though we should note is only a partial fit for the salience of immigration during the period in Italy, which actually has continued to rise at a fairly regular pace from 2014 right up to 2018 as shown above in Figure 12. From this, the idea that the amount of media attention given to immigration affects the salience of immigration is only partially supported.

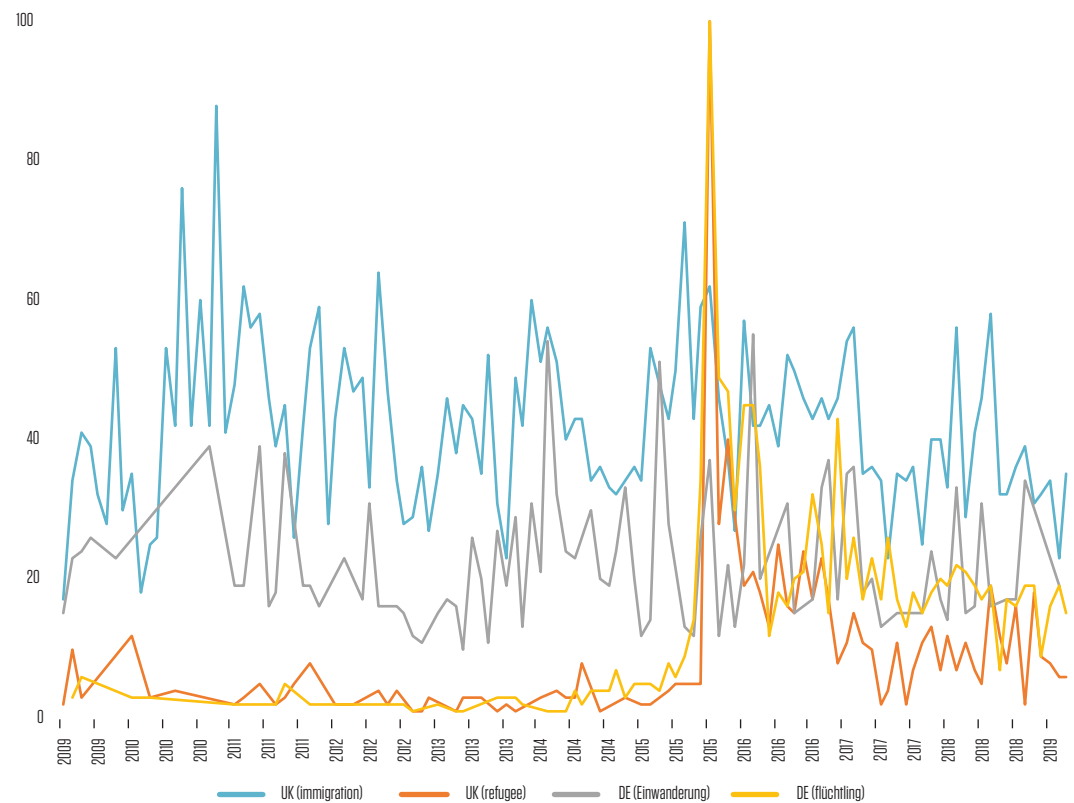
Figure 12. Immigration headlines on the front pages of Italian newspapers and the salience of immigration, 2015 to 2016

Notes: immigration headlines taken from EuroMed migration report I (here: https://www.icmpd.org/fileadmin/2017/Media_Migration_17_country_chapters.pdf)



To test the effects of media coverage further, we can look into the number of searches for news on immigration, allowing us to consider not only the output of media, but also how much of it is likely to be read. Given the theory and findings above, we consider both 'immigration' *in toto* and 'refugees' specifically to determine the salience of immigration. We consider Google searches for news in two large countries—Germany and the UK—to allow for more reliable testing over a ten year period. First, we can see that in both countries news searches for 'immigration' ('einwanderung' in Germany, though the English term 'immigration'

Figure 13. Google news searches for 'immigration' and 'refugee' in Germany and the UK, 2009 to 2019.



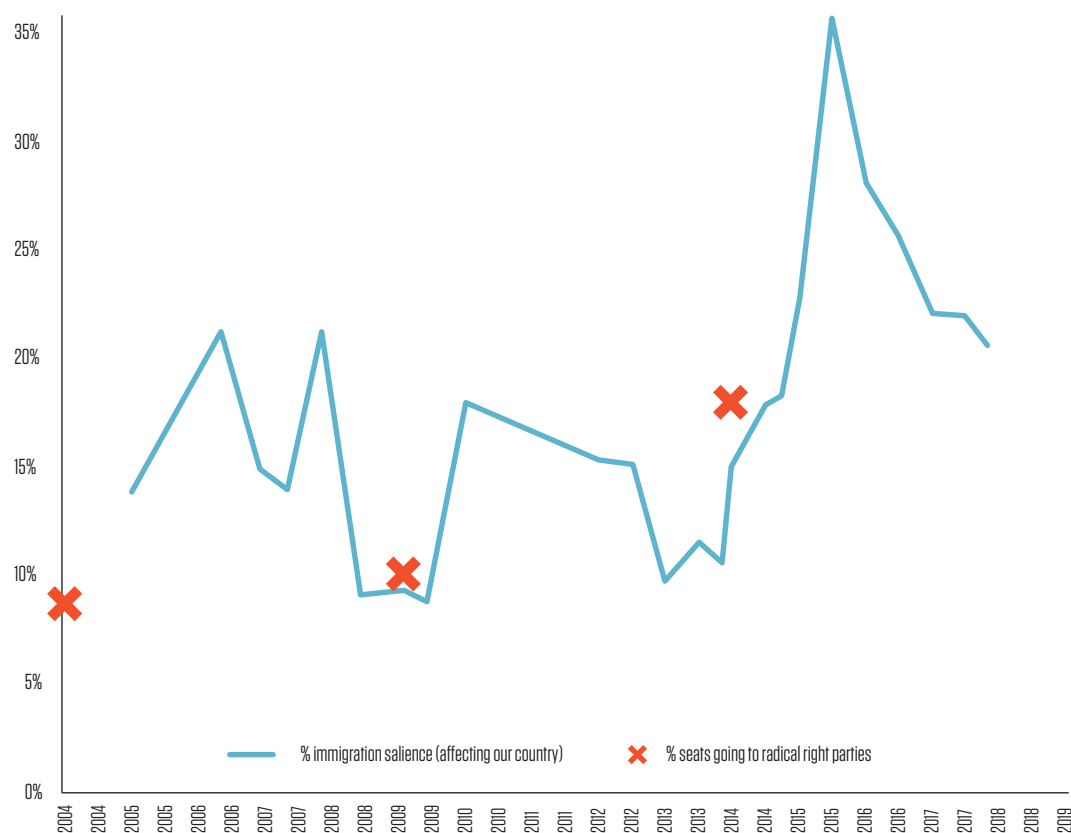
also follows a similar trend) have been relatively stable, with such searches more common in the UK, although declining there over time. Searches for news on refugees have, however, followed a far more erratic trend, suddenly peaking to a top Google trends score of 100 out of 100 in late 2015, before declining, particularly rapidly in the UK, before stabilising at a level considerably higher than the pre-2015 low. This suggests that media coverage of—and demand for—the ‘refugee crisis’ had a stronger association with the salience of immigration than media coverage of immigration *in toto*, underlining the need to separate the two in analysis. We may therefore expect that reporting on refugees—including both stories and images—has been associated with more emotional activation and political polarisation. On the other hand, reporting on immigration has not been associated with this process to the same degree.

Case study: How is the salience of immigration likely to affect the 2019 European Parliamentary elections?

Figure 14. % responding 'immigration' to 'What do you think are the two most important issues affecting our country at the moment?' and % of seats going to radical right parties in European parliamentary elections in the last three European parliamentary elections

It is established that the salience of immigration amongst voters has been a strong predictor of voting for the radical right in western European countries' national elections. It has also been shown that the reality of migration, as well as media and political coverage, cause variation in the salience of migration amongst electorates. These findings, along with the contemporary importance of migration policy in EU politics, makes it seem opportune to consider how the salience of immigration may affect the forthcoming 2019 European parliamentary elections. To do so, we can first consider the relationship between the salience of immigration and the number of seats won by radical right parties in previous European elections. This relationship is shown in Figure 14, below. We can see that the percentage of seats won by such parties seems to be well correlated with the salience of immigration, with the former having tended to be slightly higher than the latter in the last three European parliamentary elections. As such, we can predict that the radical right will likely win just over 21% of seats in the forthcoming 2019 elections, slightly more than the 18% of seats they won in 2014.

Notes: Salience data from Eurobarometer survey, May 2005-March 2018. Approximately 1000 face-to-face respondents per country per survey (i.e. 28,000 in EU28 per survey). Close-ended responses to 'What do you think are the two most important issues affecting our country at the moment?' % seats going to radical right parties: 2014: 135 of 751 seats (member parties of EFDD and NPD, FN, DUP, LN, KNP, PVV, VB, XA, Jobbik, FPO, AFD, PiS, ANEL, VMRO, PS, DF, HSP-AS, NA); 2009: 74 of 736 seats (member parties of UEN and ID and FPO, VB, LDD, Attack, PS, FN, Jobbik, MDF, PVV, PiS, PRM, SNS, LS-HZDS, BNP, DUP); 2004: 64 of 732 seats (member parties of ID and UEN and FPO, VB, FN, SA, MSFT, SRR, L'S-HZDS, UKIP, DUP).



However, given that we are analysing the European Parliamentary elections, we can also consider a different measure of salience; namely, the percentage who respond that immigration is one of the top two issues affecting the EU rather than their country. This, along with the data from the previous graph, is displayed in Figure 15. We can see that, since the Eurobarometer started to measure it in 2010, the salience of immigration as affecting the EU has been far higher than that as affecting one's country. This remains the case up until the present, with around 40% of individuals in Europe responding that immigration is one of the most important issues affecting the EU, compared to just 21% for their country. As such, if Europeans express their issue salience as it relates to EU relevant issues rather than national issues in 2019, something that we know that they have not done in the past (see Reif and Schmitt, 1980 and subsequent work on 'second-order elections'), we should—somewhat ironically—expect the radical right to win far more than 21% of the European Parliament's seats.

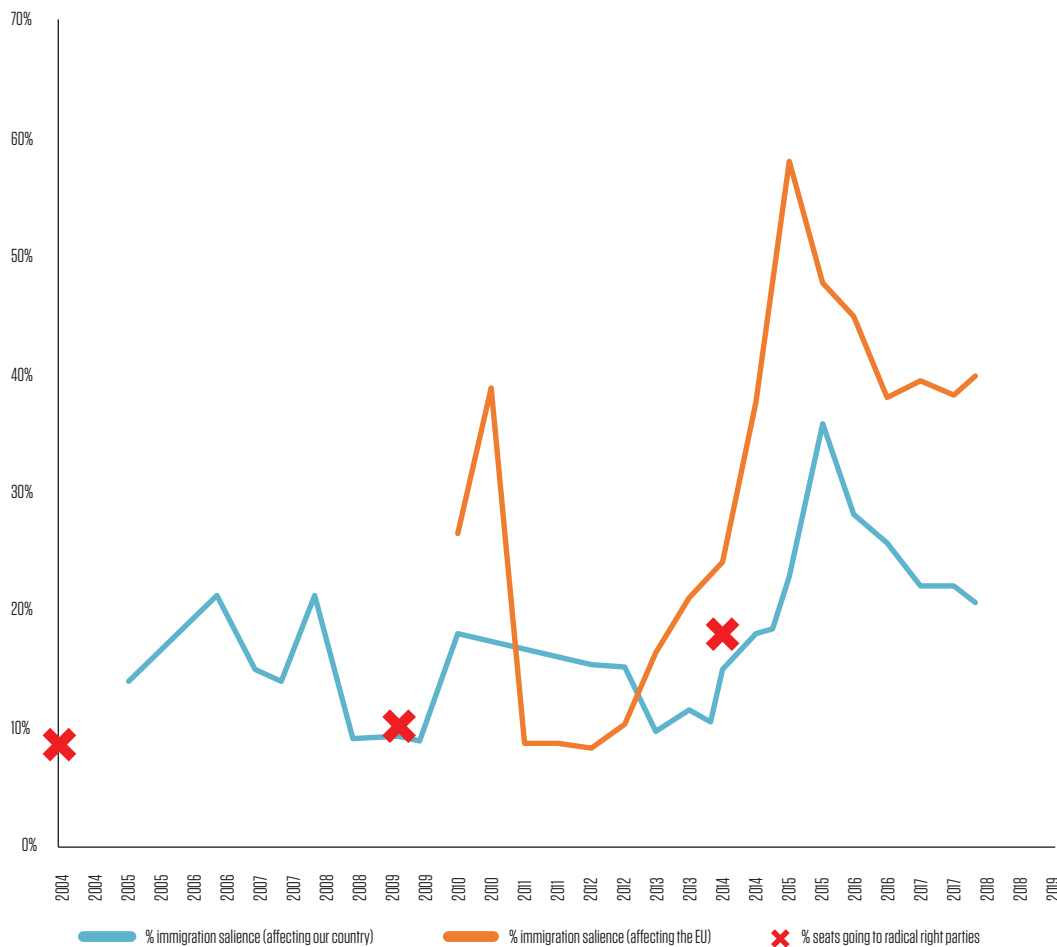


Figure 15. % responding 'immigration' to 'What do you think are the two most important issues affecting the EU at the moment?' and to 'What do you think are the two most important issues affecting our country at the moment?' and % of seats going to radical right parties in European parliamentary elections in the last three European parliamentary elections

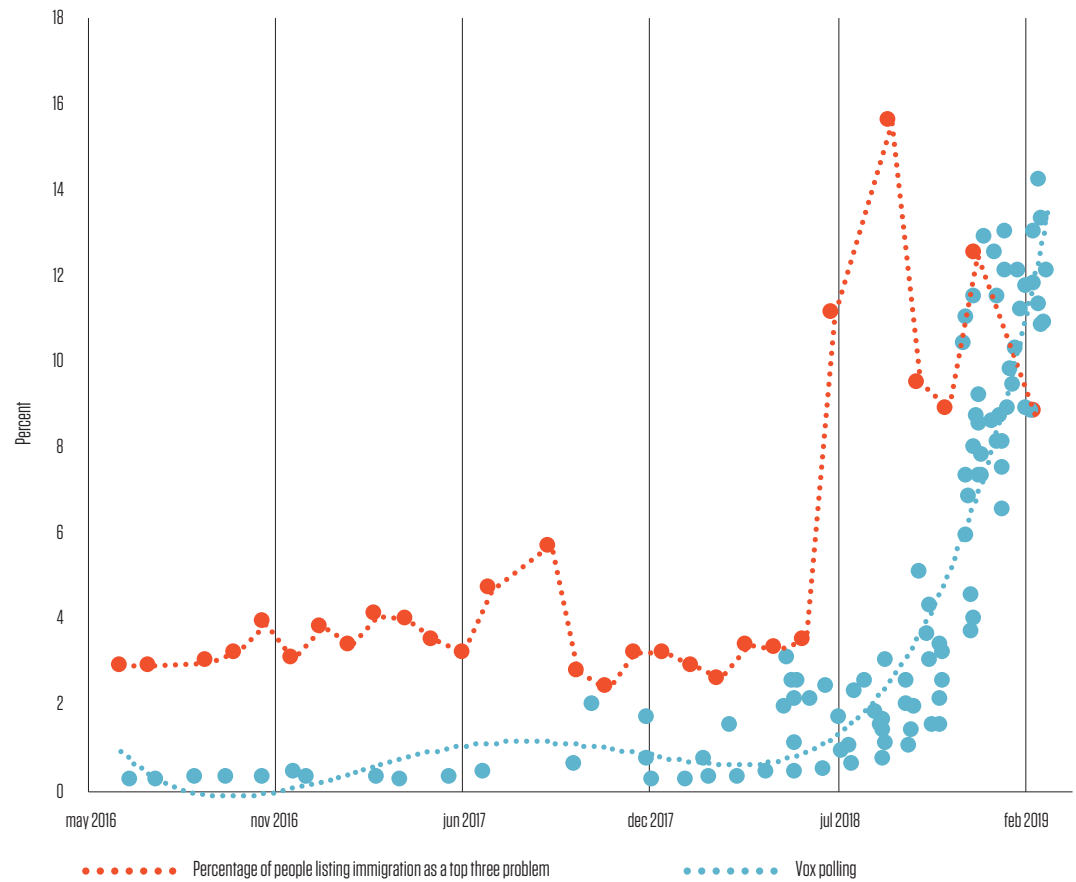
Notes: Salience data from Eurobarometer survey, May 2005-March 2018. Approximately 1000 face-to-face respondents per country per survey (i.e. 28,000 in EU28 per survey). Close-ended responses to 'What do you think are the two most important issues affecting our country/the EU at the moment?' % seats going to radical right parties: 2014: 135 of 751 seats (member parties of EFDD and NPD, FN, DUP, LN, KNP, PVV, VB, XA, Jobbik, FPO, AFD, PIS, ANEL, VMRO, PS, DF, HSP-AS, NA); 2009: 74 of 736 seats (member parties of UEN and ID and FPO, VB, LDD, Attack, PS, FN, Jobbik, MDF, PVV, PIS, PRM, SNS, LS-HZDS, BNP, DUP); 2004: 64 of 732 seats (member parties of ID and UEN and FPO, VB, FN, SA, MSFT, SRR, L'S-HZDS, UKIP, DUP).

Recent national case studies: Spain and Hungary

Since the publication of *Public attitudes on migration: rethinking how people perceive migration* (Dennison and Dražanová, 2019), in which it was shown that the salience of the issue of immigration correlates well with polling for radical right parties in western Europe, a new radical right party has emerged in Spain. Eurobarometer data is not up to date enough to consider whether the salience of immigration may have been the result of this. However, data from the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* is and, as shown in Figure 16, yet again supports this theory.

Figure 16. Issue salience of immigration and polling for Vox in Spain

Notes: Salience measures taken from monthly Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas barometer's question 'What is, in your opinion, the most important problem in Spain today? And the second? And the third?' Polling taken from Wikipedia's aggregation of all polling for the 2019 Spanish elections. May 2016-March 2019.



If we consider parties beyond western Europe, for example Jobbik in Hungary, we see a similar trend, as shown in Figure 17.

Elsewhere, both outside and inside of the EU, we see similar trends. For example, the radical right increased their seats in the Serbian parliament from zero in both 2012 and 2014 to 29 in 2016 (*Dveri* and the Serbian

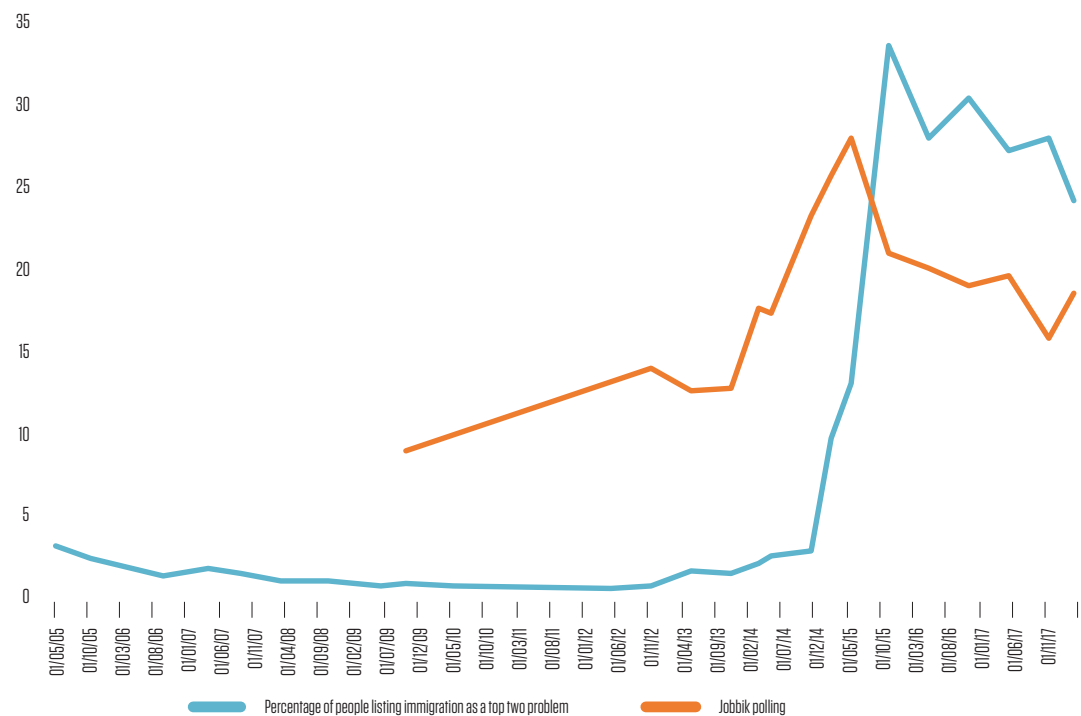


Figure 17. Issue salience of immigration and polling for Jobbik in Hungary

Radical Party combined) and, the *Alternative für Deutschland* entering the German parliament in the 2017 federal election with 94 seats. Both of these followed sharp upticks in the salience of immigration, as already outlined in this report.

Recommendations

From the above work, we can offer a list of recommendations for policy-makers, communicators and migration professionals.

1. There is a need for more detailed data on migration issue salience—not just the salience of ‘immigration’ but also particular aspects such as irregular immigration.
2. Be aware that the changes to Europe’s party systems, and their level of representation in legislatures in recent years are likely to be primarily a result of changing issue salience, not changes in attitudes.
3. Higher salience causes activation of one’s emotional systems and interest in the issue by citizens. Emotions activated via higher salience include anger, sadness, disgust, pride, hope, happiness, fear and sympathy. It is this emotional activation which may be why individuals base their political behaviour on certain issues, this seems to be the case for immigration.
4. Voter apathy, on the other hand is a result of a lack of emotional engagement. This is the case even when the individual votes have a clear attitude towards an issue.
5. It should be understood that as salience increases, both emotion and knowledge of the issue increase. Journalism that is well-informed, value-balanced and evidence-based is crucial to informing the public and creating an environment in which negative feedback loops are avoided.
6. Emotional engagement is how media framing is likely to have the most influence on issue salience, and subsequent political behaviour. Polarisation results from individuals selectively choosing which information they are exposed to following emotional activation. This seems to be a self-reinforcing cycle.
7. More research on salience and emotional activation. Regarding emotional activation - what specifically causes it, is necessary, in order to understand how it affects individuals political behaviour. Regarding the causes of salience — further studies should include cohort surveys over time, and subsequent analysis of the impact of changes in migration issue salience on political behaviour, including voter participation.
8. The media and politicians are not solely responsible for setting the agenda on migration, nor the relative importance of immigration. The root causes tend to be the reality of migration itself, though this is of course filtered through perceptions of individuals of the phenomenon, which media and politicians influence, but do not control.

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