

Immigration waves, public moods, and policy responses: A comparative analysis of seven European countries.¹

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Abstract: Recent scholarship has documented an increase in the restrictive views that the public holds around immigration and the integration of immigrants in receiving European societies. In parallel, a growing body of research shows a certain convergence of the rhetoric and policy positions of political parties and elites towards more restrictive stances. There is, however, little comparative work that focuses on the interrelation between immigration flows, public opinion moods, and policy responses. This paper is a first attempt at examining this relationship empirically, using fresh data from a EU-funded project (*Support and Opposition to Migration*: <http://www.som-project.eu>). With longitudinal data from seven receiving societies in Europe (Austria, Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom), the paper examines to what extent trends in the public mood respond to real inflows of immigrants, and to what extent policy making responds to the latter two.

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Introduction

Immigration has become in the last decades one of the major issues on the political agenda in many European democracies. Citizens have in many countries become more preoccupied about immigration. Parties concentrating their message on immigration have risen in several countries, and have sometimes entered government. Immigration policies have occupied much time and energy of policy-makers at both national and European level. And the media have covered extensively events related to immigration. The most obvious expectation would be that these various elements are directly connected and perfectly coincide: Immigration flows have become larger in many countries, either gradually or suddenly. Therefore, the media have extended their coverage of the phenomenon (Boomgaarden and Vliegthart, 2009). As a consequence, the public has been more aware of the problematic, has paid more attention to the issue and has included it among the set of issues that they take into consideration when evaluating party platforms and governmental performance. Finally, politicians have reacted to these demands and have adopted new immigration policies, thus feeding back again into the opinion-policy loop.

This chain of events would perfectly fit the ideal setting of the chain of dynamic or thermostatic responsiveness in democratic systems (Stimson et al., 1995, Wlezien, 1995), but it does not hold in several countries. There are examples of countries where immigration has become a major issue although the demographic reality of immigration has not drastically changed (Hjerm, 2007). For example, in Central and Eastern Europe, or to some extent in Scandinavia, immigration trends have remained mostly stable with marginal increases in inflows, but immigration has come to the forefront of the political agenda, with populist parties gaining electoral support on the issue (Mudde, 2005). Another broken link is between public mood and the reaction of policy-makers. It has been shown that in most European countries, restrictive views about immigration are on the rise (see Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010), and political parties, even mainstream ones, have followed the trend by converging towards restrictive policy positions as a response to party competition from the extreme or populist right. Yet, in terms of actual policies on immigration, a uniform pattern of policy change towards restriction is not obvious. For example, the MIPEX reports show that, of 31 countries studied, half of them had enacted policy changes in a direction more favorable to immigrants and only four had shifted towards more restrictive policies (Bale, 2003, Bale et al., 2010, van Spanje, 2010).²

Yet, though most scholars working on immigration politics would agree on these observations, the literature does not provide so far much comparative work focusing specifically and systematically on the interrelation between immigration flows, public opinion moods, and policy responses (Huddleston et al., 2011: 10-25).

The first goal of this paper is precisely to fill in this gap by offering a more systematic analysis of the relation between the demographic reality of immigration, public attitudes on the issue, and the reaction of policy-makers. This is done for seven European countries in the last fifteen years (Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom). The choice of these seven countries is based on the general logic of dissimilar case selection that allows for a broad examination of relevant constellations between immigration, public opinion and policy responses as well as variation between intervening factors. The seven countries

² For a detailed description covering 1995 to 2010, see Cunningham et al. (2011).

have, first, a different immigration history. Some like Britain, Belgium, the Netherlands, and to some extent Switzerland and Austria, have a long history of immigration. Others, in particular Ireland and Spain, were traditional senders of migrants but have recently become new destinations for successive waves of immigration both from within the EU and from third countries. Secondly, the seven countries show a priori different levels of politicization regarding the issue of immigration. The study includes three countries where the issue of immigration has not yet, or hardly, become politicized (Spain, Ireland), three countries where new or established parties successfully mobilized support on the anti-immigration issue (Switzerland, Belgium (Flanders), and Austria), one country where the issue became strongly contested, yet without giving rise to successful nation-wide anti-immigration parties (Britain), and one country where such parties have been around for a long time, but only very recently with some electoral success (the Netherlands). Finally, they are different political systems in terms of their territorial state structures, the nature of their representative institutions and the configuration of their immigration regimes.

For these countries, the analysis will proceed in three steps. First, we look at the link between the demographics of immigration and citizens' views on the topic. In other words, do inflows of migrants in the country trigger a negative reaction among the public? Our results show that this is indeed the case. Citizens are not, as it is sometimes argued in the literature (Citrin and Sides, 2008, Nadeau et al., 1993), disconnected in their attitudes from the reality of immigration. Yet, we also observe that levels of immigration do not adequately explain how salient immigration is for citizens. The countries with the largest migrant populations are not necessarily the ones where immigration dominates the public agenda. We show that changes in the magnitude of the flows and waves of immigration seem to match better with variations in attitudes. Increases in immigration in a country tend to make the issue more salient among the public, and to make citizens become more negative towards it. In the seven countries, there is a general trend towards more restrictive views on immigration. Though it is hard to say that these opinions are *caused* by the evolution in the demographics of immigration, the two are clearly co-temporaneous.

In the second step of our empirical analysis, our focus turns to the connection between the attitudes among the public and the activity of policy-makers. Theories of responsiveness assume that (a) policy-makers are more active on topics the public care about, and more importantly (b) that they will legislate in the direction that is most supported among the citizenry. Our results tend to confirm previous research that point to the more liberal value orientation of the political elite (Sullivan et al. 1993). While increased immigration tends to drive the public towards more negative attitudes towards immigrants, this change in the public opinion mood does not automatically translate into more policy activity in legislative areas related to immigration. Only in the UK is such an association apparent. When it comes to the direction of immigration policies, in some countries (like Ireland, the UK, and more recently the Netherlands), negative attitudes among the public towards immigration seem to be somewhat associated with the adoption of more restrictive policies. But in the other countries covered here, such an association cannot be seen. In Spain and Austria, we even observe the adoption of more liberal immigration policies while public attitudes around immigration have become more negative. In these cases, the elite does not appear to be responsive to the citizens' preferences.

After these first two stages of empirical analysis that are mostly descriptive, we turn to a third section that is more analytical. The goal is to examine potential explanations for the differences in connection between public attitudes and policy change in our seven countries. Why do the directions of public attitudes and of policy-making go in parallel in some countries, are independent in others, and even go in the opposite direction in a third group of countries? Trying to address this puzzle is one of the main goals of this paper. More precisely, we explore possible explanations for the differences observed across countries. In particular, we believe that the role of social and political actors as mediators of politicization is central. We expect three types of actors to play a particularly predominant role: the media, civil society actors and political parties (established, as well as new parties).

The final section reflects on the findings, provides some (preliminary) conclusions and highlights future avenues for research to further address these important questions about the relationship between the opinions of the public and policy-making.

1. LINKING IMMIGRATION AND PUBLIC OPINION MOODS

Going back to the first link of the chain of responsiveness described in the previous section, this first section examines the link between the demographics of immigration and public attitudes on the issue. Our goal is to evaluate whether the two trends seem to evolve in parallel, or if they are unconnected.

The question of how immigration flows and stocks affect citizens' views on the issue has been very controversial. Previous work has tried to connect levels of immigration in several countries with the degree of concern for the issue, and with the emergence of negative attitudes toward immigrants (cf. Saggat, 2003, and Statham, 2003 on the British case). The theoretical argument is based upon Blumer's group threat theory (Blumer, 1958). The intuition is that the majority will feel threatened by the sudden arrival of an out-group. The nature of the threat could be economic, cultural or political (see Betz's (2004) losers of modernization). Other scholars have found that the impact of the size of the out-group is not straightforward (Schneider, 2008, Savelkoul et al., 2010, Hjerem, 2007). Instead, aspects such as the inclusiveness of prevailing views about national identities, and feelings of cultural threat seem to account better for the differences across countries (Rink et al., 2009, McLaren, 2003, McLaren and Johnson, 2007, Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010).

In this paper, we will adopt a slightly different perspective. First, our analysis is not based upon a comparison of countries at one moment in time. Rather we look at the link between the demographics of immigration and public moods on the topic over time, from 1995 to 2010. Second, our interest is not in levels of immigration or in immigration stocks. Instead, we pay attention to immigration flows, to variations in the number of immigrants in each country over 15 years. The expectation is that citizens are particularly sensitive to changes in the reality of a phenomenon: What matters is not that there are migrants but that their number is increasing, especially if suddenly.

Existing scholarship on the formation and evolution of public opinion – in general, not only on immigration – suggests that citizens constantly update their opinions. As the metaphor used by Wlezien (1995) in his thermostatic theory of public opinion well illustrates, citizens constantly adapt their views to the outside world. They are

obviously sensitive to actions undertaken by politicians, but also to exogenous factors, such as security concerns, economic conditions, etc. (Simon and Lynch, 1999, Sides and Citrin, 2007, Citrin and Sides, 2008). In the case of immigration, this would mean that citizens are sensitive to significant variations in immigration flows, rather than migrant stocks/levels (Hopkins, 2010). Therefore, the analysis in this paper does not compare how cross-country differences in attitudes towards immigrants and immigration are related to the number of migrants in the country. Rather, we study the variation over time within each country. In light of this body of literature, we expect immigration *flows* to be reflected in *changes* of the public opinion.

Another originality of our analysis is that we expect the demographics of immigration to affect citizens' attitudes in two dimensions. First, the attention to the issue of immigration is expected to change. The issue will become more salient when immigration flows increase. Second, in line with group threat theory, we expect attitudes towards immigration and immigrants to become more negative/restrictive when many migrants suddenly settle in the country. Put differently, changes in immigration flows are expected to be associated with salience and policy preferences.

Finally, several studies indicate that there may be some discrepancies between the reality of immigration and its perceptions by the public (Soroka and Wlezien, 2003: 28). In particular, it is argued that the demographics of immigration will only affect citizens' attitudes when the out-group is visible, meaning when the migrant population is perceived as different from the host society in terms of culture, religion or language spoken (Savelkoul et al., 2010, Morgan and Poynting, 2012). Accordingly, we expect the relation between immigration flows and public attitudes to be stronger where immigrants are more visible — in cultural, religious, or linguistic terms. Here again, the demographics of immigration are expected to affect both the salience of the issue, as well as the trends in the negative attitudes towards immigrants and immigration.

Data for the seven countries (Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Spain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and The United Kingdom) have been collected in the context of the project 'Support and Opposition to Migration (SOM)', which analyses the differential politicization of the immigration issue in Europe³. For the link between the demographics of immigration and citizens' attitudes on the issue, we rely upon secondary data from public opinion surveys and demographic statistics collected by the relevant governmental agencies in each of the seven countries. The period covered is 1995 to 2010 (Wagner et al., 2006, Pettigrew et al., 2010). Our indicator for the degree of attention of the public to the issue of immigration is measured by the proportion of respondents citing immigration as one of the three most important

³ In our analyses, Belgium and Switzerland will be treated as single cases. The main reason is that policy responses on immigration are in the two countries mostly organized by federal institutions, and not at subnational levels. Moreover, there are also reasons of data availability. MIPEX indicators of immigration related policies are measured at national level. Yet, when considering the dynamics at play behind public attitudes and policy changes, we will obviously take into consideration the federal nature of these two countries, as well as their linguistic and political heterogeneity. In Belgium in particular, the interplay between political parties, civil society actors and public attitudes mostly happen separately in the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking arenas. There is also evidence that the political and public opinion dynamics differ importantly in the German-speaking and French-speaking cantons of Switzerland.

political issues in public opinion surveys.⁴ Negative attitudes about immigration are measured by the proportion of respondents declaring that they do not think that immigration has been beneficial for the economic development of the host country. The trends for attitudes are considered in parallel, for each of the seven countries, to one indicator for the demographic of immigration — the percentage of foreign-born citizens in the total population of the country. But, as said above, our interest is not in stocks of migrants but in flows, in how the number of migrants evolves over time.

These indicators are presented in each of the seven countries in Figure 1. Before going into the country-by-country comparison it is worth mentioning that figures on the demographics of immigration confirm that, though the seven countries may differ strongly in the number of migrants, they have all experienced an increase in immigration since the early 1990s. The increase has been more marked for some countries — particularly Spain and Ireland — but is present everywhere.

Our interest does not lie in examining each indicator across the seven countries, but rather to see, how within each country, the demographics of immigration and public opinion on the topic develop over time.⁵ We first focus on the link between the demographic changes in immigration and public attention for the issue (Figure 1). Obviously, the two are not perfectly correlated — but that was not our expectation. Attention to immigration among the public can increase more in some countries than in others. And within countries, there can be the occasional peak, or sometimes a lag in public reaction to a rise in the arrival of migrants. Our interest lies to a greater extent in the examination of whether, as sometimes argued, citizens' views and the demographic reality are disconnected, and, clearly, this is not the case.

The two trends coincide, at least for most of the period covered. In Austria, Britain and the Netherlands, we observe since the mid-1990s a growing concern for immigration among citizens that parallels an increase in the number of migrants. The same picture can also be observed in Spain, Ireland and, to a lesser extent, Belgium but only until the late 2000s. At that moment, attention to immigration drops among the public, due to the greater public concern with the economic crisis in Ireland and Spain. In Belgium, the institutional crisis that started in 2007 is also probably part of the explanation. The only country where the two trends do not go in the same direction is Switzerland. While the trend in the demographics of immigration is increasing and almost linear over the period, attention to the topic among the public varies a great deal. One explanation, to which we will come back later in this paper, is the mobilizing role of anti-immigration parties like the SVP, as well as the catalyzing effect of referendums on issues related to immigration.

Beyond attention to the issue of immigration, we are also interested in the direction of public opinion on the topic. We measure this aspect with the proportion of respondents who declare that immigration has not been beneficial for the economic

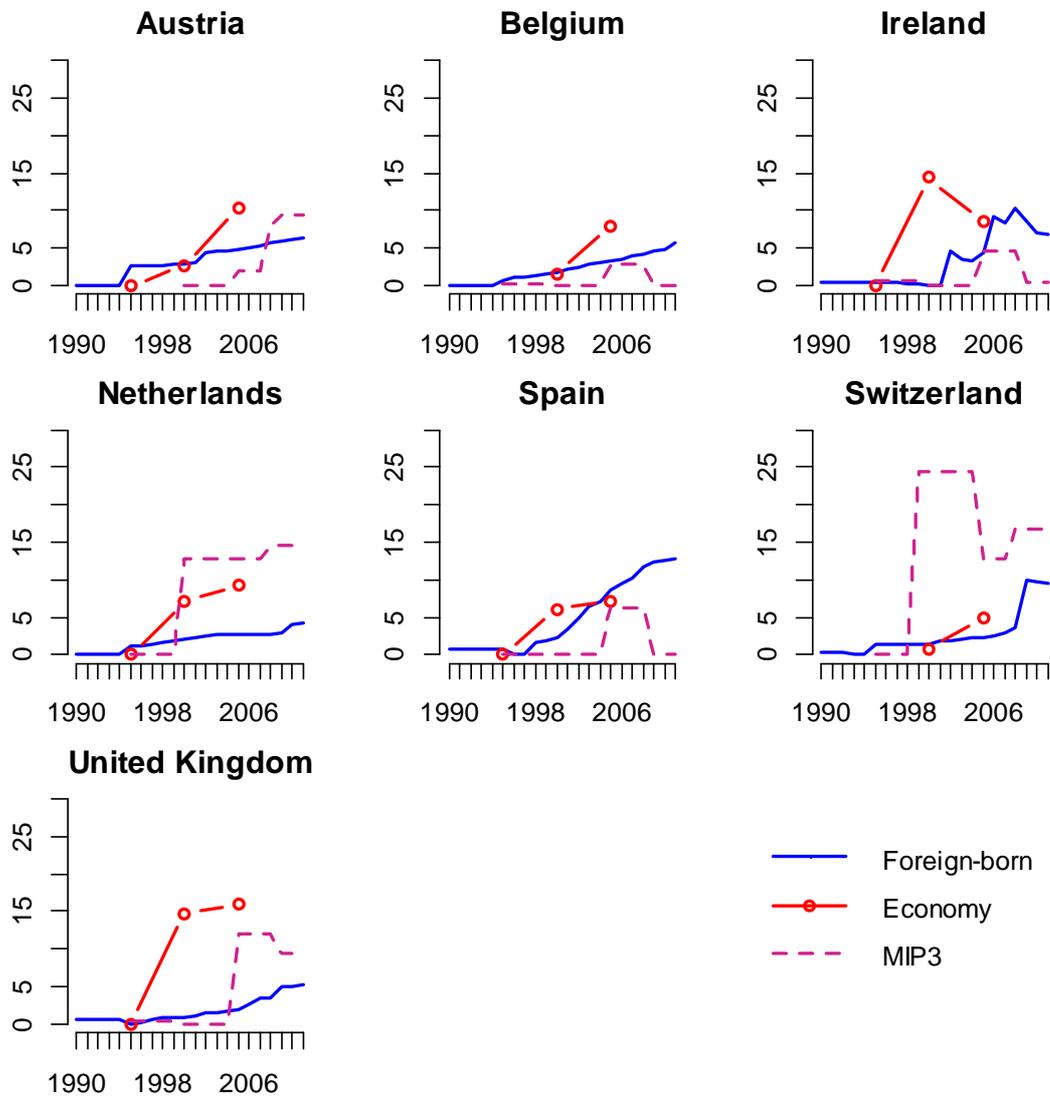
⁴ The surveys used were: for Austria, Election surveys (SW9409, SW9902, SW2006_01, AUTNES 2009); for Belgium, Belgian National Elections Studies 1991, 1995, 1999, 2003; for Ireland, IMS data extracted from the Irish Political Studies journal and the ISSDA at UCD; for the Netherlands, the Dutch Parliamentary Elections Study/NKO; for Spain, the CIS monthly barometer; for Switzerland, the Sorgenbarometer; and for the UK, the IPSOS-Mori Issues Index.

⁵ Accordingly, measurement invariance across countries is not a concern in this paper.

development of their country. And the same conclusions can be drawn than for salience of immigration among the public.⁶ In all of the countries, the general trend is towards more negative views on immigration among the public, especially until the mid-2000s, confirming existing research (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010). Secondly, in most of the countries we cover, this evolution is congruent with trends in the demographics of immigration. This is particularly the case in Austria, Britain, Ireland and Spain, and also in Belgium and the Netherlands until 2005. Again, Switzerland is an outlier.

⁶ In line with some authors who argue that citizens are particularly sensible to the most visible migrant groups, and in particular to the presence of Muslim migrants (e.g. Morgan and Poynting 2012), we have also looked at the evolutions in the number of migrants from (a) predominantly Muslim countries, and (b) from countries with a different national language than the host country. Neither of these two indicators changes the reported findings.

Figure 1: Demographics of immigration and citizens attitudes towards immigration



Notes: Patterns of changes in immigration-related demographics and changes in attitudes towards immigration in seven countries, 1990 to 2010. Given in each instance are: the proportion of foreign-born residents (straight blue line), views that immigrants are bad for the economy (red line and circles), and the proportion of respondents mentioning immigration among the three most important issues (MIP3, dash-dotted pink line). For the attitudinal variables, higher values denote views that are more negative. These variables have the minimum value set to zero to focus on changes; changes on the x-axis are nominally comparable across countries.

2. LINKING PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND POLICY-MAKING

Having shown that citizens' attention to the issue of immigration and their (negative) attitudes follow migration inflows into the country, we now turn to policy-making in areas related to immigration.

Here we can build on two subfields in the literature. First, research on agenda-setting and on how parties define their policy programmes examines how policy-makers are connected to the reality of societal changes. In particular, some scholars have tried to see how parties react and adapt to structural changes as well as to punctual crises in the elaboration of their policy platform as well as in their activity in power. The main conclusion is that, though political actors adapt their positions to what happens in the 'outside world', the connection is imperfect (Klingemann et al., 1994). Policy-makers tend first to resist external pressures and frictions, and when they eventually react, they tend to overreact (Baumgartner et al., 2009, Walgrave and Nuytemans, 2009).

Second, we also anchor our analysis in traditional theories of government responsiveness. In broad terms, well-established theories on the relation between public opinion moods and policy responsiveness suggest that political elites — and, more specifically, members of parliaments and governments — respond to the preferences and demands of the public by delineating policies that are consistent with public preferences (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010, Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005, Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2008). It follows that policy-makers will pay more attention to issues citizens care about, and they will try to follow the position most preferred by the public in the policy domain.

To date, these general theories have not frequently been applied to the issue of immigration. This is partly because often responsiveness is measured using budgetary expenditure (Page and Shapiro, 1983, Page et al., 1984, Bartels, 1991, Page and Shapiro, 1992, Page, 1994, Klingemann et al., 1994, Stimson et al., 1994, Stimson et al., 1995) and immigration is, for the most part, a regulatory policy area. Related work has indirectly focused on the responsiveness of political parties, by looking at party manifestos and the party political agenda-setting (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010), while paying attention to the trends in opinion moods. Yet, a systematic study of whether and how governments respond to the public's concerns when designing their policies on immigration is still lacking, and more comparative work is needed.

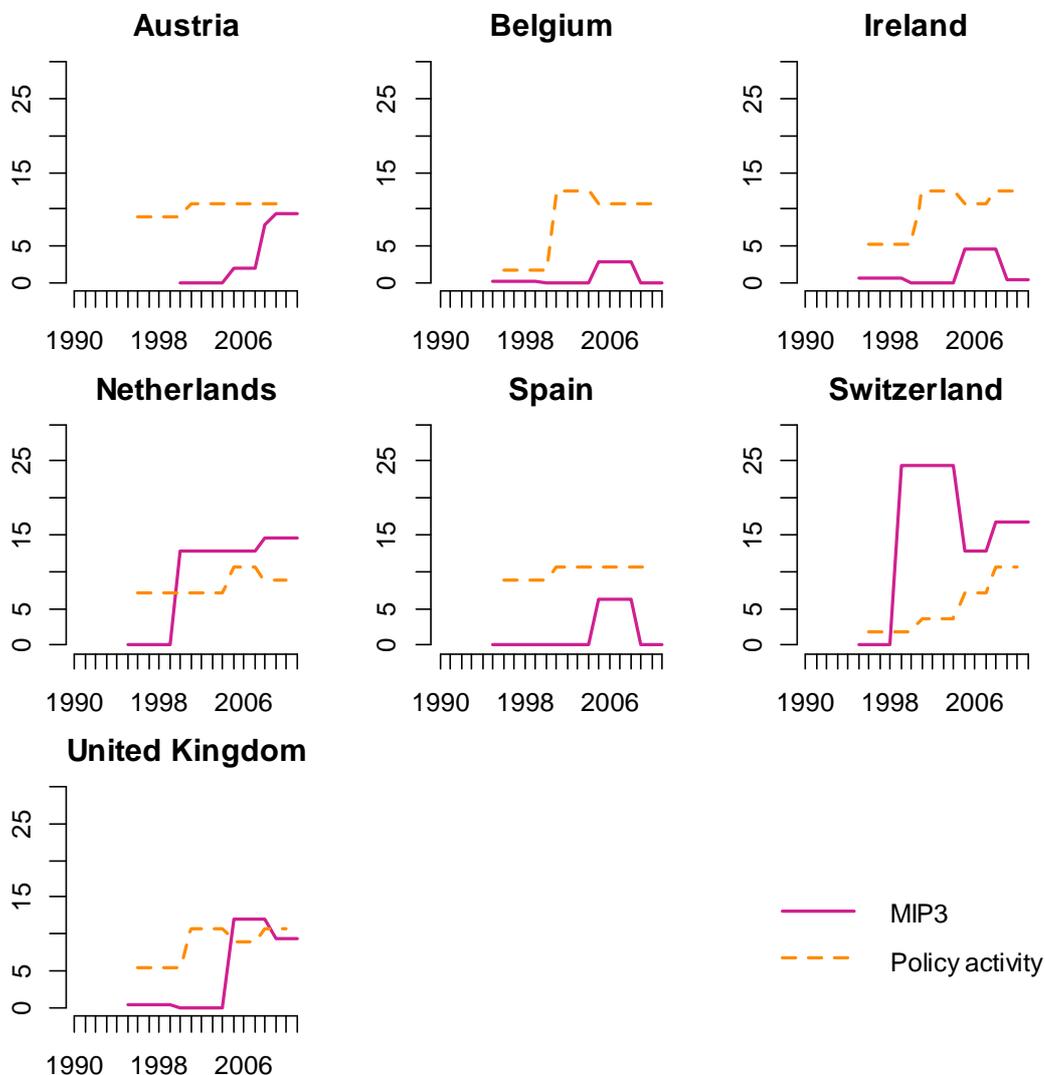
One of the few exceptions is Hobolt and Klemmensen's (2005) work, which has compared levels of responsiveness in Britain and Denmark, and show that governments are responsive to public opinion moods on immigration in Denmark but not in Britain (cf. also Ruedin, 2012 forthcoming). In addition to this work, a good deal of case studies are available and, overall, this body of literature suggests that immigration policies are in many cases disconnected from public preferences in such a way that public attitudes are almost invariably restrictive — or at the very best favoring the status quo — whereas legislation and policy making is more often expansive (Bale, 2003, Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008, Bale et al., 2010). Thomassen (2012) also confirms this by presenting immigration as the "blind corner of political representation".

In line with these studies, we now examine whether policy-making in areas related to immigration is or is not congruent with changes in the attitudes of the public on the

issue. Here again, we look both at the attention to the issue of immigration as well as at the direction of policy change.

For the attitudes of the public, we look at the same two dimensions than in the previous section: attention for the issue and negative attitudes towards immigration (see the Appendix for the indicators). Regarding policy-making, we look also at two dimensions: policy activity and direction of policy changes. For the first aspect, we are interested in the absolute number of changes in policies related to immigration. And for the second, we examine whether these changes translate into more or less favorable policies for immigration in four areas: access to labour market, family reunion, long-term residence and asylum (see Appendix for more details on the indicators). The indicators of public attitudes and of policy-making are juxtaposed in Figure 2 for each of the seven countries.

Figure 2: Attention to immigration among the public and level of policy activity on immigration



Notes: Patterns of changes in attitudes towards immigration and policy activity in seven countries, 1990 to 2010. Given in each instance are: the proportion of respondents mentioning immigration among the three most important issues (MIP3, straight pink line), and the number of MIPEX indicators changed as a measure of policy activity.

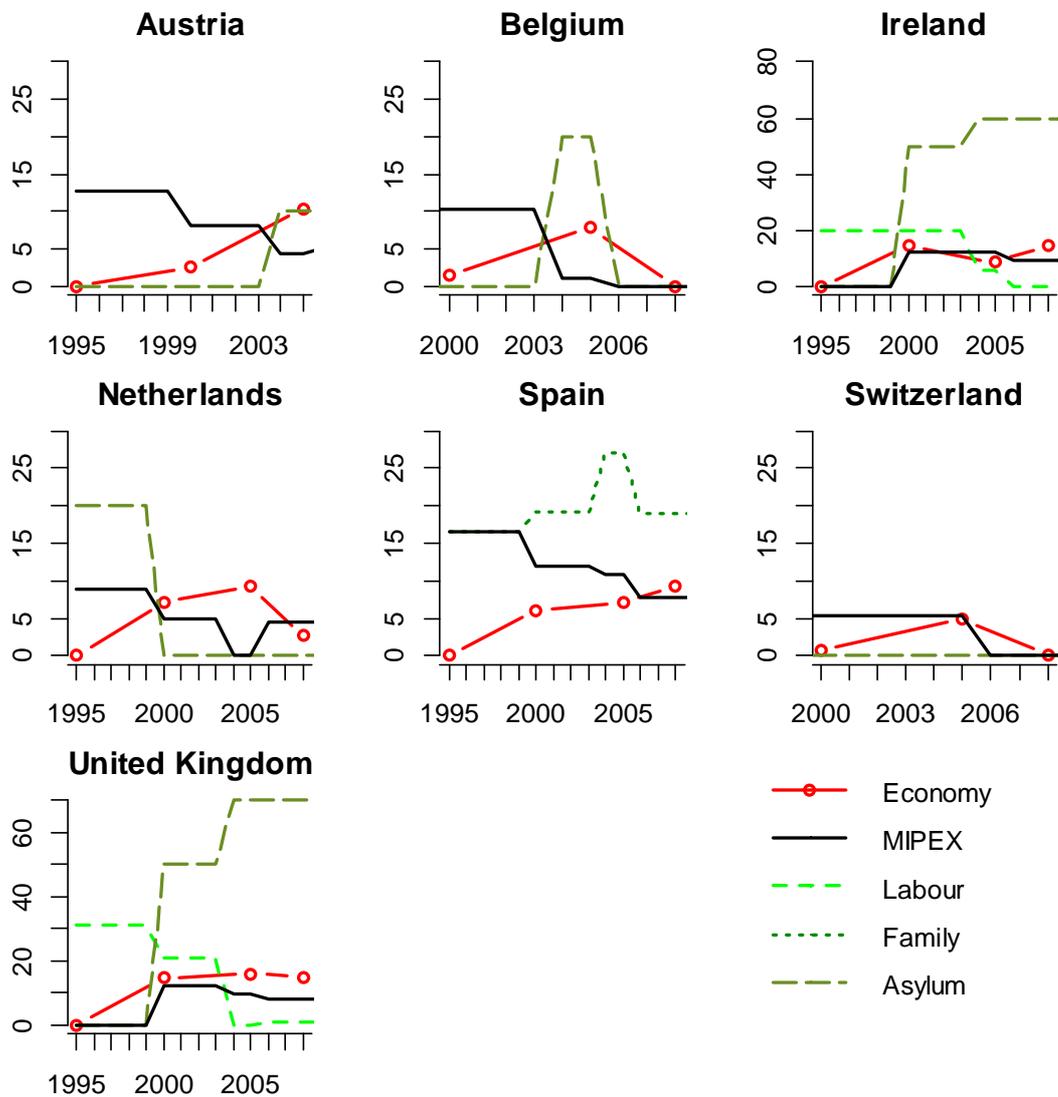
The first observation is that the two do not seem to go in parallel in all countries. In three countries (Austria, Spain and, to a lesser extent, the Netherlands), the level of policy activity remains flat and relatively low, though concerns for immigration among the public are on the rise. In Belgium, policy activity grew significantly since 2001, while concern for immigration remains stable and low. As mentioned above, in Switzerland, attention to the issue has moved up and down over the period, while policy activity rose almost linearly. Finally, in Ireland and the UK, policy-makers started legislating on immigration in the early 2000s, preceding the growing concern for immigration among the public that is observable from the mid-2000s.

These findings clearly show that, in terms of policy-activity on immigration, one cannot say that policy-makers are responding to growing concerns among the public. Actually, if there is a relation to be found, it is that the public is influenced by policy activity. In most of our cases — the UK, Ireland, Belgium, and to a lesser extent Austria and Spain — levels of policy activity have increased *before* changes in public opinion (see similar findings in Morales et al., 2012). Only in Switzerland, and maybe in the Netherlands, did policy activity rise after changes in public opinion. These findings go against the works of Baumgartner and colleagues (Baumgartner et al., 2009, Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) who, discussing policy responsiveness in general, argue that politicians are more often reacting with some delays to shifts in public opinion. Here, policy-making precedes and, perhaps, fuels concern for immigration among the public.

Yet, responsiveness is not only about adopting new policies on issues citizens are concerned about. What is more crucial is that the direction of policies is in line with public preferences and demands. Therefore, the next series of graphs (Figure 3) examines citizens attitudes around immigration and the direction in four dimensions of immigration policies: labour market access, family reunion, long term residence, political participation, access to nationality and anti-discrimination. In order for the graphs in Figure 3 to be easily readable, we have reversed the MIPEX score, so that when the policy line goes up, it means that the policy has become more restrictive, just as when the attitudinal line goes up (in red) it means that public attitudes about immigration are becoming more negative. Hence, there is congruence or responsiveness when both lines are going in the same direction.

The first thing that stands out is that there is no uniform trend towards more restrictive immigration policies, as one might have expected given the demographic trends and the structure and trends of the public opinion. First, within countries, MIPEX indicators show that in some policy domains the legislation has become more restrictive, while in others it has become more favorable to immigrants. A good example is the UK, where legislation on asylum has become much more restrictive while in areas related to labour market access, the legal rules are nowadays more favorable to immigrants than in 1995. The same discrepancy in the evolution of policies between policy domains is found in the seven countries, except perhaps in the Netherlands and Switzerland. In the two countries, the MIPEX scores have been more stable throughout the period. But when they have changed, like for labour market access in Switzerland and on asylum in the Netherlands, it is towards more favorable legislation for migrants.

Figure 3: Public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies



Notes: Patterns of changes in attitudes towards immigration and changes in immigrant policies in seven countries, 1990 to 2010. Given in each instance are: views that immigrants are bad for the economy (red line), and selected immigration-related policy domains (centered), namely the average MIPEX score (black), labour market access (light green dashed), family reunion (green fine dashed), and asylum (olive long-dashed). Specific policy domains are shown only where their pattern differs from the average MIPEX score.

The absence of a general convergence confirms the suggestions in the literature that — despite the increased opposition to immigration by the public — policies are not becoming uniformly restrictive in European nations (Koopmans et al., 2012). In some cases legal rules on immigration have even become more liberal, like for long-term residence in Spain or labour market access in the UK, Switzerland, Austria and Ireland. Yet, one can neither conclude that policy-makers are not at all in line with the attitudes of citizens. In each country, there are immigration-related policy dimensions on which regulations have become stricter, for example in the UK and Ireland on asylum, or in Belgium on labour market access.

3. EXPLAINING DIVERGENCES ACROSS COUNTRIES IN THE LINK BETWEEN PUBLIC ATTITUDES AND IMMIGRATION POLICIES

The previous section has shown that the link between the demographics of immigration, public attitudes and immigration policies is not straightforward in each of the seven countries, nor for the whole period covered (1995-2010). In particular, the unsystematic connection between public mood and immigration policies is very puzzling. New inflows of migrants lead to more attention being paid to the issue by citizens. And when they judge the issue as one of the most salient on the political agenda, citizens tend to hold negative views towards immigration and to call for more restrictive policies. Yet, these changes in the public mood are not directly translated into policy-making. First, there is no straightforward link between the salience of the issue in the public and the level of policy activity in the seven countries studied here. Second, and more importantly, when policy-makers do pay attention to immigration, the direction of these policies does not always follow the demands of citizens. In none of the seven countries have policies become more restrictive on all of the four dimensions that we have covered (labour access, family reunion, long-term residence and asylum). But more intriguingly, some countries show a dominant pattern of more restrictive policies (esp., recently, the Netherlands), while in others (Spain and Austria) the dominant pattern is towards more liberal policies.

The intention in this last empirical part of the paper is to try to make sense of these divergences across countries. How can we account for the disconnect between public attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, and immigration policies?

The ambition here is more exploratory than explanatory or causal. Though we provide a comparative study of seven European countries over fifteen years, data availability does not allow testing systematically each of these hypotheses with sophisticated statistical methods. Rather, we discuss each of these aspects on the basis of a careful consideration of each of the seven countries. The goal is to see which of these competing accounts appears to be the most promising to understand how well the chain of democratic responsiveness works for the issue of immigration.

Since it is not in all of the countries that we observe a trend towards more open immigration policies, we can rather easily exclude often-mentioned explanations relating to the process of European integration (Green, 2007). These accounts are based on the assumption of policy convergence that we do not observe here. Rather, we will follow authors like Vink (2005) or Guiraudon (2007) who argue that immigration policies are not nearly as determined by EU-level policies as many suggest, and that domestic factors are still the main driving force of policy-making in

this area. Within this perspective, a classical line of research in studies of policy congruence and of policy responsiveness is how institutions may be central in this respect (Golder and Stramski, 2010, Ezrow, 2007, Powell, 2000, Powell, 2004). But with only seven countries, any analysis of this kind cannot provide definitive findings.

Instead, the lines of explanation we propose to explore focus on three elements: (a) the role of the media, (b) the level of mobilization of social and political actors, and (c) the conditioning effect of the institutional structure of the country.

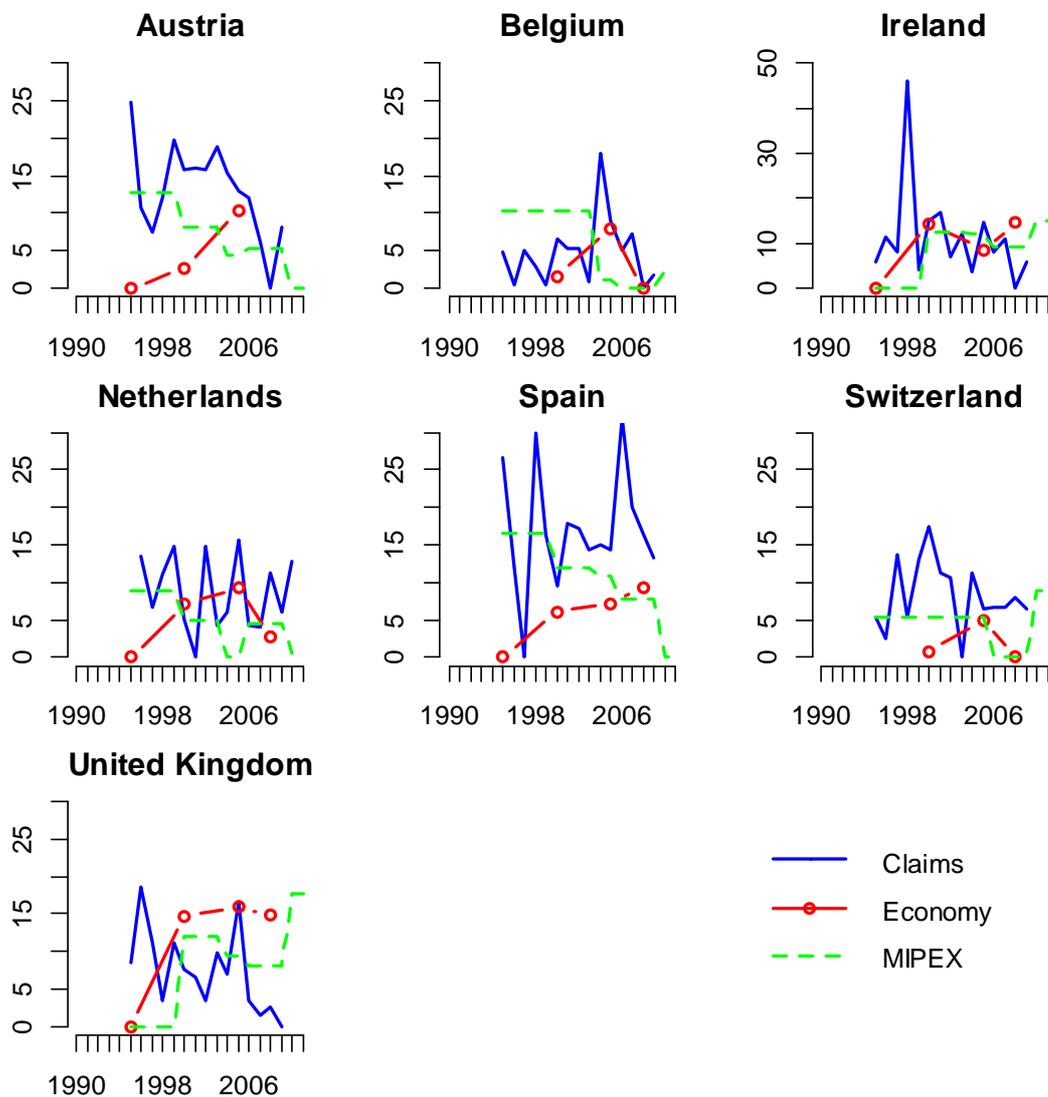
The first set of explanations refers to the role of the media. They are the ones reporting on external events and societal changes that are made public. And indeed, information is an essential component of the thermostat model of opinion and policy responsiveness (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010). For the public to notice what politicians do, they need to be informed at least of the broad lines of policy-making and policy outcomes. And for politicians to evaluate the public mood (and, therefore, the need to initiate legislative activity), they need to be informed of what issues are salient in society, and here again, the media are central. Obviously, with the growing use and sophistication of polling techniques, policy-makers have other good indicators of what the public think and want (Geer, 1996, Jacobs and Shapiro, 1996). Yet, the media have remained key actors in making citizens views public, in shaping them in the public debate and, even sometimes in forcing the debate to occur (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006). Therefore, one can expect that congruence between citizens' attitudes on immigration and immigration policies should be stronger when the media pay much attention to the issue.

Surprisingly, to date, the role of the media at that level has not been much studied for the issue of immigration. Previous scholarship has shown that media attention is central to understanding when the public reacts to increasing levels of immigration, and that increasing media saliency coupled with a negative rhetoric reinforces feelings of threat and negative views about immigration and immigrants (Schuck, 2007). But the role of media coverage in linking citizens and policy-makers on immigration has not been studied so much yet. We will provide a first attempt in this paper. And the expectation is that the more frequently the media report on immigration, be it about facts and figures, or about claims made by actors on the issue, the more congruence one can expect between public mood and policy-making.

In Figure 4 we report for each country the average number of claims per day in the media that are about immigration and immigrants, the attitudes of the public on the issue and the trends in immigration policies. The first observation is that in each of the seven countries, the media coverage of immigration varies a lot, despite averaging over a year. There is no clear pattern over time towards more or less coverage. And there is no single year either that stands out in each of the countries, as one could have expected of 2001 due to the 9/11 events. The other observation is that media coverage of immigration does not seem to be strongly correlated to public attitudes on the issue, nor to policy change. At best we can say that in some of the countries peaks in media coverage are followed by more negative attitudes among the public, and by a trend towards more restrictive policies. This is at least the case in Ireland and the UK where the peaks in claims in the media in the late 1990s are followed by more negative attitudes among the public and the beginning of a trend towards more restrictive policies. In the other countries, however, this association is less evident, to say the least. In Belgium, media coverage and public attitudes are somehow correlated. The peak of media coverage in the early 2000s corresponds to a rise in negative attitudes

about immigration among the public. But the direction of policies is not: immigration policies became less restrictive when the public was a bit more negative about immigration, and the media were reporting more claims on the topic. In Switzerland, Austria, Spain and the Netherlands, the picture of media coverage is so erratic that it is hardly possible to expect any clear correlation with the trends in immigration policies and public attitudes.

Figure 4: Media coverage, public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies



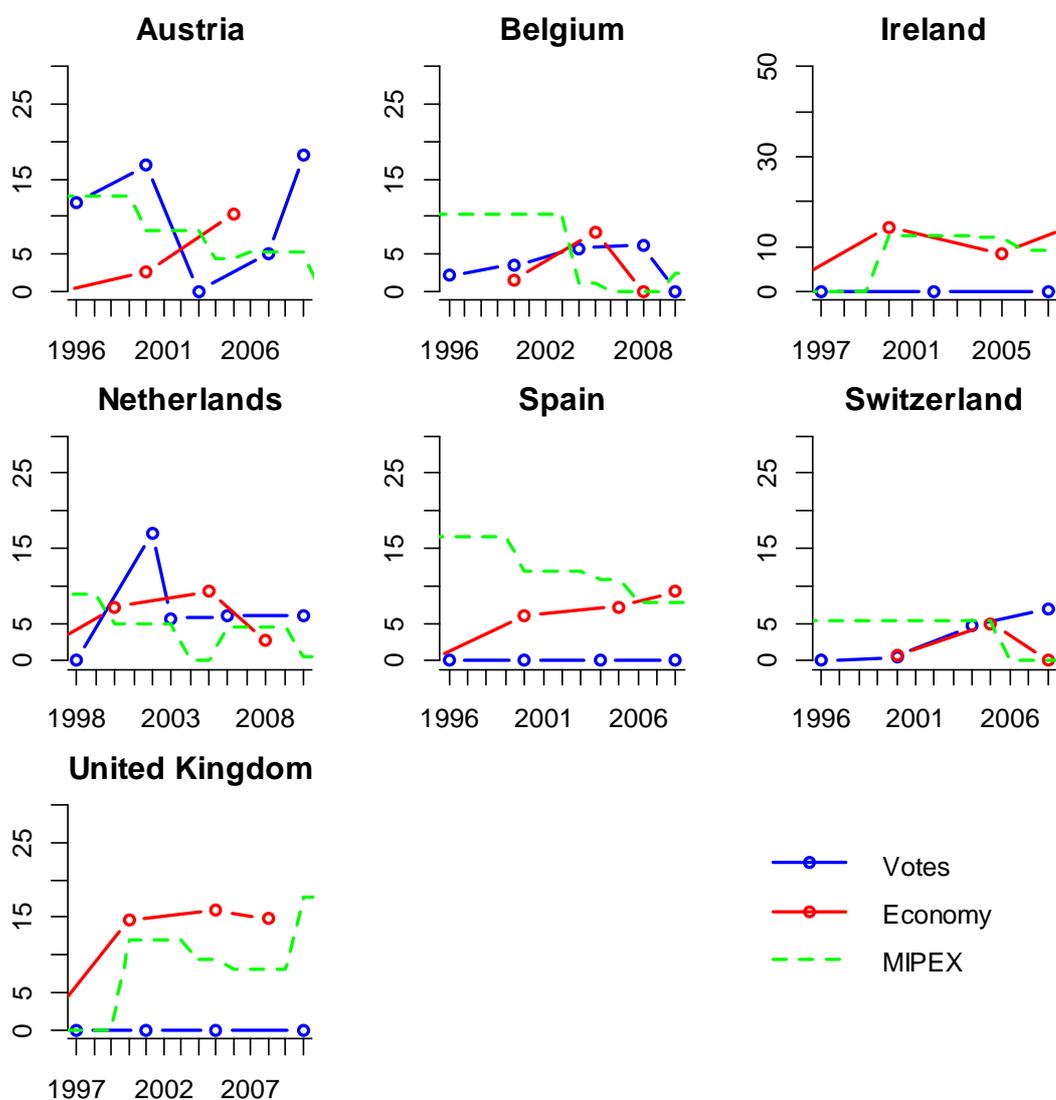
Notes: Patterns of claims about immigration in the media, changes in attitudes towards immigration and changes in immigrant policies in seven countries, 1990 to 2010. Given in each instance are: average number of claims per year about immigration in the media (straight blue) views that immigrants are bad for the economy (red line), and overall MIPEX score (dashed green).

The second set of explanations is related to the level of mobilization of social and political actors. First, political parties are obviously a central link between society and the state. It is one of their core functions in democracy (Sartori, 1976). Yet, a distinction has to be made between established parties and new parties. New parties will often alter political competition by focusing on a new issue, on an electoral niche, that has been ignored by mainstream parties. They will often make attitudes visible that were kept silent (Meguid, 2005) In reaction, governing parties and policy-makers will try to address the new issue and to adopt policies in line with the demands put forward by the new parties. In the case of immigration, these new parties are in most cases extreme right, populist and anti-immigration parties (Hopkins, 2010, Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009), (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008, van Spanje, 2010) In this regard, Howard (2010) argued that the liberalizing tendencies of immigration policies are constrained by the presence of a far-right party or movement. Therefore, our expectation is that the presence of anti-immigration parties, and their relative strength (in terms of votes but also in terms of influence over government) in the seven countries studied and over the period (1995-2010) can be key in understanding the different levels of congruence observed between public attitudes and policy-making on the issue of immigration.

Again, this line of explanation does not provide a satisfactory answer to our puzzle for most countries (see Figure 5). Actually, in none of the countries where anti-immigration parties have been successful, at least for some years, in the last 15 years (Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland) do we see that immigration policies have become more restrictive. It is even the contrary: in the four countries, the overall trend in immigration policies is towards more liberal policies, with no restrictive turn when anti-immigration parties were widening the electoral audience. More surprisingly, their electoral performance does not even appear to have any noticeable effect on immigration policies in countries like Austria, the Netherlands or Switzerland. This result is even more surprising since, in the three countries, radical right parties were not only successful electorally but have also been in power.

Regarding the association between public attitudes and the electoral performance of anti-immigration parties, we can observe some links for Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands and Switzerland. However, this is not straightforward, as the three other countries covered in this study (the UK, Ireland and Spain) show that there can be a rise in negative attitudes towards immigration that is not associated with a good electoral performance of anti-immigration parties.

Figure 5: Votes for anti-immigration parties, public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies



Notes: Patterns of changes in electoral success of anti-immigration parties, changes in attitudes towards immigration and changes in immigrant policies in seven countries, 1990 to 2010. Given in each instance are: electoral score of anti-immigration parties at national elections (straight blue line) views that immigrants are bad for the economy (red line), and overall MIPEX score (dashed green).

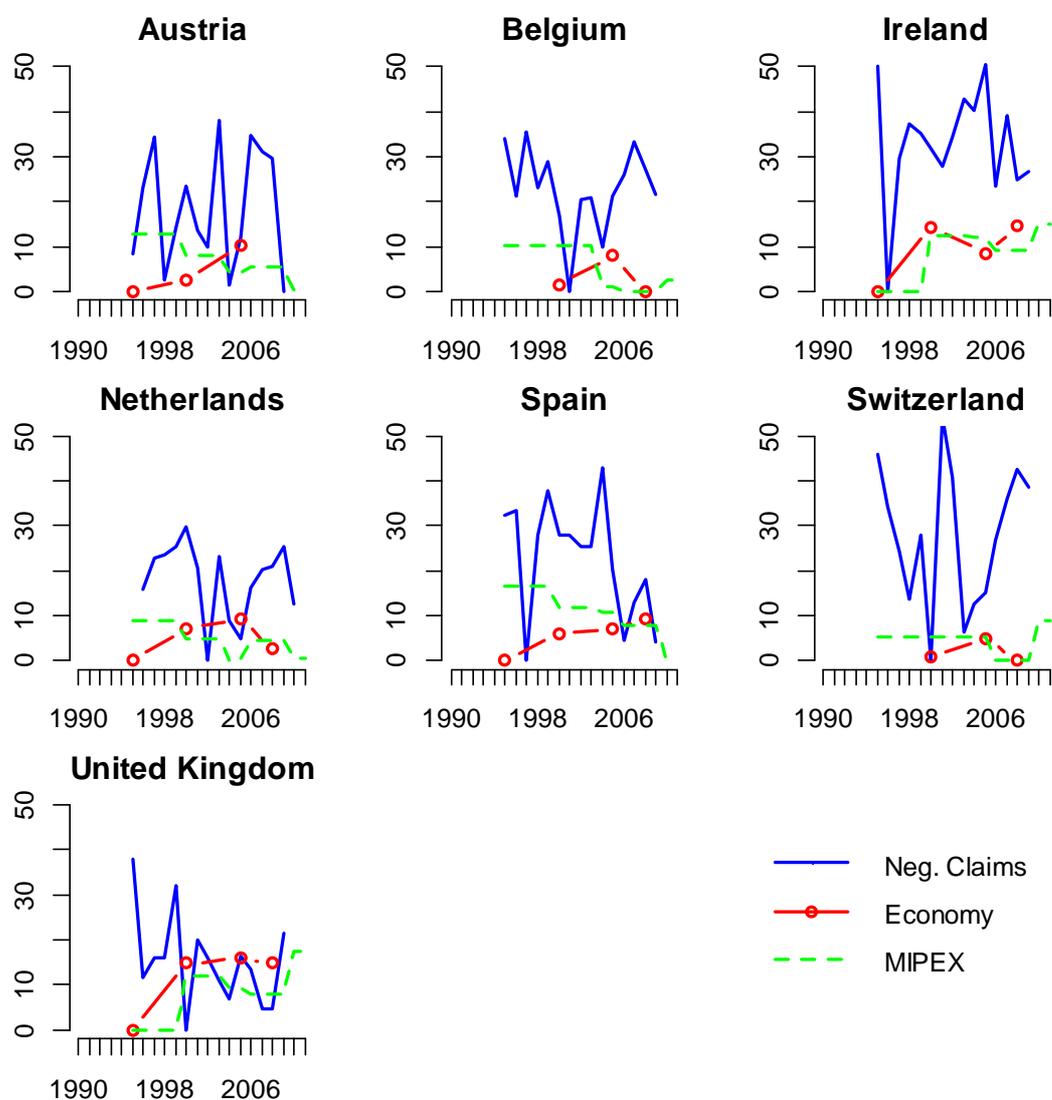
Finally, besides political parties, the role of civil society/non-governmental actors is also very important. Social movements are able to capture more rapidly new issues, like immigration, and to mobilize in order to put these new issues on the political agenda (Della Porta and Diani, 1999, Giugni and Passy, 2004). Civil society mobilization could be particularly important in those countries where parties are not discussing immigration to a great extent, and where the issue is not politicized within the parliamentary arena. In line with the previous section, we will look more specifically at the presence of anti-immigration groups. A strong presence of anti-immigration movements could be expected to push policy-makers to be more attentive

to the resistance towards immigration among the public. Their role would even be more central in countries where negative attitudes towards immigration are not politicized by the presence of a significant anti-immigration party.

Overall, like the previous ones, this line of explanation does not provide a general answer for the patterns we find in all of our seven cases. In figure 6, the yearly average numbers of claims per year by anti-immigration movements are depicted next to the trends in public attitudes on the issue, and to the evolution of immigration-related policies. We are unable to determine a clear pattern that could easily be linked with the shape of the two other trends.

However, this aspect seems to shed some light into the patterns for Ireland and the UK. As we have seen in Figure 5, in these two countries, there is no nation-wide anti-immigration party with parliamentary representation that can play a major role in the politicization of immigration. However, the results in Figure 6 suggest that this role could be taken up by anti-immigration movements. In Ireland, and to some extent in the UK, we can observe that the shift in the 1990s towards more negative attitudes about immigration among the public and towards more restrictive immigration policies is preceded by a higher number of negative claims on immigration in the media by non-party and non-state actors. Yet, the same pattern cannot be observed in the other country where there is no significant anti-immigration party (Spain) and where anti-immigration actors also have been quite visible, parallel to an increase in negative public attitudes towards immigration. However, in Spain these trends are not associated with a shift towards more restrictive immigration policies.

Figure 6: Anti-immigration claims by non-party and non-state actors, public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies



Notes: Patterns of claims by anti-immigration movements, changes in attitudes towards immigration and changes in immigrant policies in seven countries, 1990 to 2010. Given in each instance are: average number of negative claims per year by non-party and non-state actors (straight blue line), views that immigrants are bad for the economy (red line), and overall MIPEX score (dashed green).

Conclusion

In this paper, our goal was to look at what Thomassen (2012) has called the ‘blind corner of political representation’, that is, immigration policies and how responsive they are to the preferences of the public. Several studies have shown growing concern among the public about immigration, and a tendency towards increasingly negative

attitudes on the issue among citizens (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010). But the existing research in this area has not been able to link these changes in public attitudes with the demographic reality of immigration. Moreover, though the public is more and more in favor of more restrictive immigration policies, most of the literature has pointed to a trend towards more liberal rules and regulation (Huddleston et al., 2011).

In this paper, we have addressed these puzzles by examining the politicization of the issue of immigration in seven countries (Austria, Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, the UK, Spain and Switzerland) over a period of fifteen years (1995-2010). And what we observe is, first, that though it is confirmed that public attitudes are overall becoming more negative on immigration, it is not true that this evolution is disconnected from the demographic reality of the phenomenon. In each country, the issue of immigration becomes more salient and citizens hold more negative views when the immigration flows increase.

Our second aim was to examine the link between these public attitudes and immigration-related policies. In this respect, we can confirm previous observations by other scholars: there is a breach in the chain of democratic responsiveness. Policy-making does not reflect the change in public attitudes. It is true that some areas of legislation have changed towards more restrictive policies; but, at the same time, there are also areas of legislation that have become significantly less restrictive.

These findings confirm that responsiveness is far from straightforward when it comes to immigration policies. Yet, across our seven countries, we have also observed differences. In particular, it appears that policy-making and changes in public attitudes were less disconnected in some countries than in others. In Ireland and the UK, growing concern for immigration among the public has been followed by policy changes towards more restrictive policies. On the contrary, in Spain and Austria, policies have become much more favorable for migrants, even at a time when the share of the public holding negative views on the issue has been significantly on the rise.

Stemming from these observations, we have tried to explore possible explanations for these differences across countries in policy responsiveness on immigration. We have looked, in particular, at the role of mediators between the public and policy-makers: the media, new parties and civil society actors. The main conclusion of our examination is that there is no single factor that can clearly explain cross-national variations in responsiveness to the public's preferences on immigration. Rather, it seems that different combinations of factors may explain varying degrees of responsiveness in different countries. In Ireland and the UK, policy-makers seem to have reacted more to public attitudes when the media were very active in covering the immigration issue and when anti-immigration movements (but not parties) were active. In other countries, such as the Netherlands or Austria, the media have also been important but in connection to the mobilization of anti-immigration political parties.

Due to the limitations in the data, these conclusions are by necessity tentative, but they point at one important message regarding our methods for approaching the puzzle of responsiveness observed in relation to immigration policies: the logic of our inquiries should probably be inspired more by configurational approaches to causality than by univocal concepts of causality. From our results it is clear that multiple configurations of various social and political factors can lead to the same results: policy responsiveness or its absence thereof. And in this respect, future research

should rely on the use of configuration methods of analysis, be it through the use of fuzzy sets QCA or with a proper consideration of interaction hypotheses in standard statistical models.

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Appendix: List of variables

Figure 1: Demographics of immigration and citizens attitudes towards immigration

Variable ‘attention to immigration among the public’: proportion of respondents citing immigration as one of the three most important political issues

Variable ‘negative attitudes towards immigration’: proportion of respondents declaring that they do not think that immigration has been beneficial for the economic development of the host country

Variable ‘demographics of immigration’: percentage of foreign-born citizens in the total population of the country

Figure 2: Attention to immigration among the public and level of policy activity on immigration

Variable ‘attention to immigration among the public’: proportion of respondents citing immigration as one of the three most important political issues

Variable ‘negative attitudes towards immigration’: proportion of respondents declaring that they do not think that immigration has been beneficial for the economic development of the host country

Variable ‘policy activity’: absolute number of changes in policies related to immigration.

Note on the variable ‘policy activity’: the variable is based upon the MIPEX indicators of policy changes for 145 items that are linked to six immigration-related policy areas — labour market access, family reunion, long term residence, political participation, access to nationality and anti-discrimination. For each of the 145 items, MIPEX attributes a score. The variable ‘policy activity’ measures the absolute number of changes in the score for the 145 items between two waves (1995, 2000, 2006, 2010) The MIPEX projects has collected these information since 2006 (2009). Within the SOM project from which this article is derived, this coverage was expanded retrospectively for 1995 and 2000, and a dimension tapping into asylum policy was added for the whole period (Cunningham et al., 2011).

Figure 3: Public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies

Variable ‘attention to immigration among the public’: proportion of respondents citing immigration as one of the three most important political issues

Variable ‘negative attitudes towards immigration’: proportion of respondents declaring that they do not think that immigration has been beneficial for the economic development of the host country

Variables ‘direction of policy change ’: MIPEX scores on four policy areas: labour market access, family reunion, long-term residence and asylum.

Note on the variables ‘direction of policy change’: these variables are based upon the MIPEX indicators of policy changes for four immigration-related policy areas — labour market access, family reunion, long term residence and asylum. For each, MIPEX attributes a score on a scale from 0 to 100 that evaluate how close countries come to the highest, newest European standards, which are usually derived from EU directives or Council of Europe recommendations. The higher a country scores on these MIPEX indicators, the more liberal/open its legislation is for migrants. For the lines about attitudes and about policies to be congruent, we have reversed the MIPEX scores. More restrictive policies are denoted by a line going up. More negatives public attitudes are also denoted by a line going up.

The MIPEX projects has collected these information since 2006 for labour market access, family reunion, and long term residence (Niessen et al., 2007, Huddleston et al., 2011). Within the SOM project from which this article is derived, this coverage was expanded retrospectively for 1995 and 2000, and a dimension tapping into asylum policy was added for the whole period (Cunningham et al., 2011).

Figure 4: Media coverage, public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies

Variable ‘media coverage’: yearly average numbers of claims per day in the media about immigration

Variable ‘negative attitudes towards immigration’: proportion of respondents declaring that they do not think that immigration has been beneficial for the economic development of the host country

Variable ‘direction of policy change ’: overall MIPEX scores

Figure 5: Votes for anti-immigration parties, public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies

Variable ‘votes for anti-immigration parties’: pc of vote for anti-immigration parties in the last national elections (lower chamber)

Variable ‘negative attitudes towards immigration’: proportion of respondents declaring that they do not think that immigration has been beneficial for the economic development of the host country

Variable ‘direction of policy change ’: overall MIPEX scores

Figure 6: Anti-immigration claims by non-party and non-state actors, public attitudes on immigration and evolution of immigration-related policies

Variable ‘anti-immigration claims’: yearly average numbers of anti-immigration claims per day in the media excluding party actors, state institutions and editorials

Variable ‘negative attitudes towards immigration’: proportion of respondents declaring that they do not think that immigration has been beneficial for the economic development of the host country

Variable ‘direction of policy change ’: overall MIPEX scores