

*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 work that focuses on the interrelations between immigration flows, public opinion moods, and policy responses. This paper is a first attempt at examining this relationship empirically, using fresh data from an ongoing 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 will analyse to what extent differences in policymaking and the public mood respond to real inflows of immigrants, and to what extent policy responses are a result of the latter two.

¹ The research leading to these results was carried out as part of the project SOM (Support and Opposition to Migration). The project has received funding from the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 225522.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration is a highly contested issue on the public agenda of many European democracies, partly as a result of increasing migration in-flows to several European societies in the last three decades. Countries of long-standing reception of immigration have continued to receive considerable waves of immigration. For example since the 1950s and 1960s, countries such as Britain, Belgium, France, the Netherlands or Switzerland have experienced new waves of immigration, even after discontinuing their guest-workers programmes. This continued immigration came mostly from within Europe and from areas affected by humanitarian and violent conflicts. In parallel, countries that were traditional senders of migrants — e.g. Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain or Portugal — have recently become new destinations for successive waves of migration both from within the EU and from third countries, in some cases receiving very large numbers of migrants in little more than a decade (Herm, 2008). Elsewhere in Europe (notably Central and Eastern Europe, or Scandinavia), immigration trends have remained mostly stable with marginal increases in inflows.

In parallel, a large number of studies are providing evidence of a growing anti-immigrant sentiment among the European public (Semyonov et al., 2006, Meuleman et al., 2009, Coenders et al., 2008), increasing support to anti-immigrant parties (Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010), and a convergence of mainstream political parties into restrictive policy positions as a response to party competition from the extreme or populist right (Bale, 2003, Bale et al., 2010, van Spanje, 2010). These trends seem to be widespread and common to most European countries, regardless of the magnitude and speed of inflows in each particular society (Sides and Citrin, 2007). For example, several studies document very high anti-immigrant sentiments in Central and Eastern European countries, where immigration is still at comparatively very low levels (e.g. Mudde, 2005).

As a consequence, we are confronted with at least two theoretical puzzles. On the one hand, restrictive views about immigration are on the rise almost everywhere even if immigration flows vary from one country to another (Citrin and Sides, 2008). On the other, studies of trends in policy-making around immigration do not point to a uniform pattern of policy change towards restriction, despite the rise of restrictive attitudes towards migrants in all European societies. For example, the MIPEX reports show that, of 31 countries studied, half of them had enacted policy changes in a direction more favourable to immigrants and only four had shifted towards more restrictive policies (Huddleston et al., 2011: 10-25, Koopmans et al., 2012).

These two puzzles remain unanswered because the literature so far provides little comparative work focusing specifically and systematically on the interrelations between immigration flows, public opinion moods, and policy responses (cf. Saggar, 2003, and Statham, 2003 on the British case). There are divergent views in relation to whether there is a link between immigration flows (and stocks) and the public's attitudes towards immigration. Some argue that competition and feelings of threat provide such a link (Blumer, 1958, Scheepers et al., 2002), whereas others argue that it is perceptions that matter most (Lahav, 2004). Contradicting these two views intergroup contact theory contends that the presence of immigrants may have a positive impact on attitudes towards them and in relation to immigration because of

the higher chances of engaging in inter-ethnic contacts and relations, thus reducing hostility between groups (Allport, 1954, Semyonov and Glikman, 2009, Savelkoul et al., 2010). Trying to make sense of these divergent views about the link between immigration flows and public attitudes some scholars have made a strong case about the role of politicization and media saliency of the immigration issue in activating negative attitudes in the public (Hopkins, 2010, Hopkins, 2011).

Similarly, there is disagreement as to whether governments react to changes in public moods by enacting congruent policies in relation to immigration. Studies of governmental responsiveness have demonstrated that politicians, in fact, respond to the public's preferences (Adams et al., 2004, Ezrow, 2007), but others argue that politicians don't always pander to citizens wishes (Jacobs and Shapiro, 2000), and there is some suggestion that immigration policy is precisely an area of policy-making where governments are less keen to respond to public preferences and will pursue their own interests as members of an elite (Freeman, 1995). The result is a problematic disconnection between the public's views and policy direction (Glazer, 2007), specifically on an issue domain many voters may care about a great deal. Given that politicians will seek re-election, how much they pander or not to citizens' preferences will partly depend on how important any given issue is to the electorate when making their voting choices.

This paper makes a novel contribution to this literature by analysing this chain of relationships in a comparative way. With data from seven European countries, we first analyse whether immigration flows shape public attitudes towards immigration; second, we examine whether trends in public moods trigger immigration policy changes.

IMMIGRATION, OPINION MOODS AND POLICY RESPONSIVENESS

The link between immigration flows and public opinion moods

There is no unified theory of what drives public opinion that can help us predict how the public will react to changing immigration flows, in what direction and with what magnitude opinion moods will shift. Some scholars have argued that levels of immigration and economic conditions are of little relevance to explain cross-national variations in attitudes towards immigration and immigrants (Simon and Lynch, 1999, Sides and Citrin, 2007, Citrin and Sides, 2008). Instead, aspects like the inclusiveness of prevailing views about national identities, and feelings of cultural threat seem to account better for the differences across countries.

Yet, the fact that ‘real’ immigration figures are not helpful to explain differences in levels of anti-immigrant feelings across countries at any given point does not mean that patterns and trends of immigration will be irrelevant to understand the dynamics of public opinion around immigration. In fact, existing scholarship on the formation and evolution of public opinion suggests that immigration flows should be quite important in this regard, given that the public have meaningful preferences that relate to ‘real world’ events and it has been shown that they update their preferences consistently with the information they receive (Zaller, 1992, Page and Shapiro, 1992).

In particular, the thermostat theory of public opinion (Wlezien, 1995, Soroka and Wlezien, 2010) posits that both the public and politicians react to each other in a constant feedback loop much like the way in which thermostats and heating/conditioning devices operate. When citizens want more of a given policy, politicians react by yielding (at least partially) to those desires. As policies change, citizens adjust their views accordingly, and politicians react to this adjustment in turn. In this dynamic view of public opinion change, there is no strict causal order—say politicians shaping the opinions of the public—because influence in both directions is explicitly acknowledged. In addition to being influenced by policies, the public is sensitive to other exogenous factors, such as security concerns, economic conditions, etc. (Soroka and Wlezien, 2003: 28).² Consequently, under this model of public opinion dynamics, citizens should be sensitive to immigration flows for two main reasons: first, because they are sensitive to exogenous events, and second because they are sensitive to the policies that governments and legislatures enact. In the case of immigration and respective policies, neither of these factors is constant over time and across countries, which is why changes in public opinion can be expected. Given that immigration flows are a function of both exogenous pressures and the openness (or restrictiveness) of immigration policies, it can be expected that citizens are not blind to patterns and trends of immigration.

However, the existing scholarship on the contextual drivers of individual opinion about immigration and immigrants, suggests that the link between ‘real world’ immigration and opinions is imperfect. Several studies indicate that perceptions of immigration flows and stocks are more important than the actual statistics (Wagner et

² Soroka and Wlezien express this as a parameter that captures the effect of these exogenous factors (W) in the following expression of the public’s relative preference for policy (R): $R_t = a + \beta_1 P_t + \beta_2 W_t + e_t$.

al., 2006, Pettigrew et al., 2010) — partly because higher numbers of immigrants increases inter-group contact, which in turn reduces prejudice. Others even argue that there is no connection between immigration trends and anti-immigrant sentiments (Hjerm, 2007). Even the studies that find some support for threat and ethnic competition theories (Rink et al., 2009, McLaren, 2003, McLaren and Johnson, 2007, Schlueter and Scheepers, 2010) suggest that the relation between immigration figures and opinions are mediated by other aspects, such as contact with immigrants, in such a way that the relation between levels of immigration and anti-immigrant sentiments is often curvilinear (Schneider, 2008).

In light of this body of literature, hence, we extract the following expectations (see Chart 1):

H1: Changes in the immigration flows will be reflected in changes in the public opinion. In particular, we expect an increase in immigration flows to be associated with a change of public opinion toward more negative views, and a decrease of immigration flows to be associated with more positive views.

→ H1a: This association between immigration flows and public opinion will be stronger where immigrants are more visible — in cultural, religious or linguistic terms.

→ H1b: This association will also be stronger where the proportion of immigrants increased suddenly.

The link between public opinion moods and policy direction

The second part of our argument draws on traditional theories of government responsiveness. In broad terms, well-established theories on the relation between the opinion moods of the public 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 the former preferences (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). Thomassen (2012) suggests that government responsiveness exists in issues that are constrained by left-right positions, and not for all issue positions. In Western Europe, positions on immigration tend to align with left-right positions, and we can therefore expect policies to be responsive to changes in public opinion.

Although in general terms, politicians and governments respond to public opinion moods in anticipation of electoral sanctions (cf. also Jacobs, 1992, Baumgartner et al., 2006, Baumgartner et al., 2009, Soroka and Wlezien, 2010), how sensitive politicians are to the changes in the public moods will depend on how salient the policy issue at hand is, as well as on institutional and policy-making constraints (Soroka and Wlezien, 2003). Hence, the greater the saliency of a given issue the more one can expect politicians to be responsive. In fact, previous studies have shown different degrees of responsiveness to opinion moods around the immigration issue across countries (Binzer Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005). Binzer Hobolt and Klemmensen find that governments are responsive to opinion moods on immigration in Denmark

but not in Britain. Surprisingly, however, the existing scholarship on public opinion and responsiveness has rarely focused on the immigration issue, partly because often the responsiveness is measured using budgetary expenditure (Soroka and Wlezien, 2010) 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 (Bale, 2003, Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008, Bale et al., 2010), while paying attention to the trends in opinion moods. Yet, a systematic and comparative study of whether and how governments respond to the public's concerns when designing their policies on immigration is still lacking.

Nevertheless, a considerable body of research focusing on individual case studies 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 favouring the status quo — whereas legislation and policy making is more often expansive (Schuck, 2007).³ Several explanations have been advanced for this disconnect. Freeman (1995) argued that the disconnect was motivated by the fact that political and economic elites are in control of these policies and they shape them in such a way to match their economic interests. Schuck's (2007) arguments are also in this line but somewhat more nuanced: the disconnect (at least in the US) is the result of a policy process that gives considerable weight to political lobbies and legal scholars, and almost invariably all lobbies and legal professional organizations actively engaged in the immigration policy process are expansionist.⁴ In a variant of this line of argumentation, Fetzer (2000: 149) contends that this disconnect might partly be due to the more pro-migrant attitude of the highly educated, who fill the ranks of the political elite, and who support immigration because they believe is 'good for the country' while dismissing restrictive views as misinformed or ill-informed. In this regard, Howard (Howard, 2009) makes an interesting case of the 'by-default' liberalizing tendencies of immigration policy: unless the (usually restrictive) stance of the public is activated by a far-right party or movement, liberal or expansive policies will prevail. Thus, the disconnect is conditional on the absence of active politicisation of the restrictive views of the public in the public arena. McLaren (2012), however, finds that the far-right has much less impact on attitudes than is commonly thought.

There are also other reasons why policies might not respond to opinion moods. First, in some countries, political institutions and the policy-making process is designed in such a way that it will 'check' against majoritarian tendencies and, hence, pandering to the electorate (Breunig and Luedtke, 2008). Second, what politicians and political parties do depends on the nature of the structure of party competition and sometimes the competitive dynamics around the immigration issue does not favour the responsiveness of parties and governments to public opinion demands (Green-

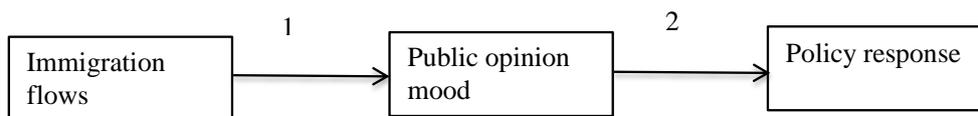
³ How much immigration policy has actually been 'expansive' in Europe is subject to debate. Hansen (2007) argues that the official policy (and the common practice) in several high-immigration countries — notably, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Britain — was a zero-immigration one between the 1970s and the late 1990s. Yet, he coincides in depicting immigration policies since the early 2000s across most of Europe as expansive. By contrast, Koopmans et al. (2012) identify a clear trend toward more inclusive policies from the beginning of their coverage in 1980 until the early 2000s.

⁴ In the same volume, Smith (2007) makes a similar argument but adds that many of those most affected adversely by increasing immigration have much less electoral clout than the employers and the ethnic advocacy groups.

Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008, van Spanje, 2010). Finally, one further reason why the representation of citizens' preferences in relation to immigration policy might not be as fluid as one would expect is because there is a certain policy convergence in Europe in many policy areas — among which, immigration — due to EU integration processes and the need to adapt legislation to EU directives (Green, 2007). The degree and nature of this convergence is subject to dispute and academic debate. Geddes (2000, 2003) has argued that there has been a gradual, albeit slow, trend towards the 'communitarization' of immigration policies in the EU whereby nation-states have reluctantly empowered the supra-national institutions of the EU in some areas related to immigration in view of the pressures of internal market dynamics and the limitations of their own individual capacities and domestic constraints to control immigration. However, one key element of the debate is that this 'Europeanization' of policies has been uneven in the multiple areas of policy-making that relates to immigration and immigrant integration (e.g. anti-discrimination policy, border control, free movement and residence permits, nationality, etc.). For example, Vink (2005) argues 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; and Howard (2009) actually shows that there is no real convergence among EU countries in what regards citizenship acquisition policies (see also Koopmans et al., 2012). And even in areas such as anti-discrimination policy, where the transposition of EU directives is a clear driver of convergence, the results are mixed, given that implementation — both in terms of its extent and nature — widely varies across member states (Guiraudon, 2007).⁵

Accordingly, as expressed in Chart 1 we expect that:
H2: Policy-making will respond to significant shifts in public opinion, such that whenever the public mood becomes considerably more negative, policies will become more restrictive (with a certain time lag), and when the opinion is ambivalent or favouring the status quo, policies will remain unaltered.

Chart 1. The Model: Immigration flows, public opinion moods and policy responses.



In the next section we describe the seven European cases that we will compare to assess the above model, as well as the context of immigration politics and the data used.

CASES, CONTEXT AND DATA

In this paper we analyse data from seven European countries that have been studied in

⁵ Lavenex (2007) also questions that asylum policies can be described meaningfully as Europeanized.

the context of the project ‘Support and Opposition to Migration (SOM)’, which analyses the differential politicisation of the immigration issue in Europe. The study includes two countries where the issue of immigration has been less politicized (Spain and Ireland), three countries where new or established parties successfully mobilized support on the anti-immigration issue (Switzerland, Flanders in Belgium and Austria), one country where the issue became strongly contested, yet without giving rise to anti-immigration parties successful in national elections (Britain), and one country where such parties have been around for a long time, but only very recently with some electoral success (the Netherlands).

These seven cases provide us with an interesting range of countries in terms of the extent to which immigration has been a contested issue in the public debate, and in how it has been contested. For example, Britain has seen many violent outbreaks of extreme right-wing groupings, whereas in other countries such as Switzerland, Austria and Belgium opposition to immigration was mobilized mostly by political parties. In this regard, radical-right/right-wing populist parties have had different levels of presence and success in these countries. Whereas they have been relatively strong in Austria (the FPÖ), in Switzerland (the SVP), and in Belgium (the Vlaams Blok — now called Vlaams Belang for legal reasons); in the Netherlands electoral success has been restricted to anti-immigrant parties or lists that are not commonly regarded as radical-right parties (the List Pim Fortuyn and the PVV of Geert Wilders). In Great Britain and Spain, radical right-wing parties have never had much electoral support at the national level (even if they have had some success in certain local areas), and in Ireland no real radical right-wing party has yet been formed.

The data we use is a combination of secondary data from public opinion surveys and demographic statistics, and of primary data coded from policy documents and legislation. All these data were compiled as part of the SOM project by teams of country experts (see Morales et al., 2010, Cunningham et al., 2011), and in the case of the policy and legislative indicators, the data for 2006 and 2010 were taken from the MIPEX datasets (Niessen et al., 2007, Huddleston et al., 2011).

Trends in Immigration

All of the countries studied have experienced an increase in immigration since the early 1990s (see Chart 2). However, the increase has been sharper for some countries — particularly Spain and Ireland — and there are still substantial differences in the percentages of immigrants that these countries host. By far, the largest immigrant populations in absolute numbers reside in Spain and the UK, but in proportional terms it is Switzerland, with around 20 per cent, that hosts the largest immigrant population. Austria, Belgium, Ireland and Spain hold nowadays a very similar share of immigrants (with around 14-15 per cent), but while this percentage has built up gradually in the cases of Austria and Belgium, it entails a very sharp increase from virtually no immigration in the cases of Ireland and Spain.

In terms of the type of immigrants these countries receive, most of them are labour migrants, even if the asylum seeking inflow is considerable in some of them (see Chart 2.D). In Switzerland and Belgium the number of asylum seekers has been relatively high compared to other countries. In most of these seven countries — with

the notable exception of Spain, which has never really attracted a large number of asylum seekers — we see a common trend of increase in the number of asylum requests followed by a decline. In Austria, however, the decline has been very small and is more similar to a stabilisation of asylum entries.

Focusing on one of the ‘visible’ characteristics of the immigrants that might facilitate integration in the receiving country (language), we see that there are two distinct groups of receiving countries (Chart 2.C). On the one hand, Belgium, Switzerland and the UK have regularly had a stock of around half of their immigrants who were not native speakers of the national language(s). On the other hand, Austria and the Netherlands host a population of immigrants that are, for the most part, non-native speakers of the national language. Spain is the only country for which we see a clear change in this regard: from being in a situation similar to Austria and the Netherlands, the increasing inflow of Latin Americans has placed the country in a position similar to that of Belgium, Switzerland and the UK in terms of the linguistic composition of its immigrants.

Chart 2. Trends in Immigration in Seven European Countries, 1990-2011

Chart 2.A Total number of foreign-born residents

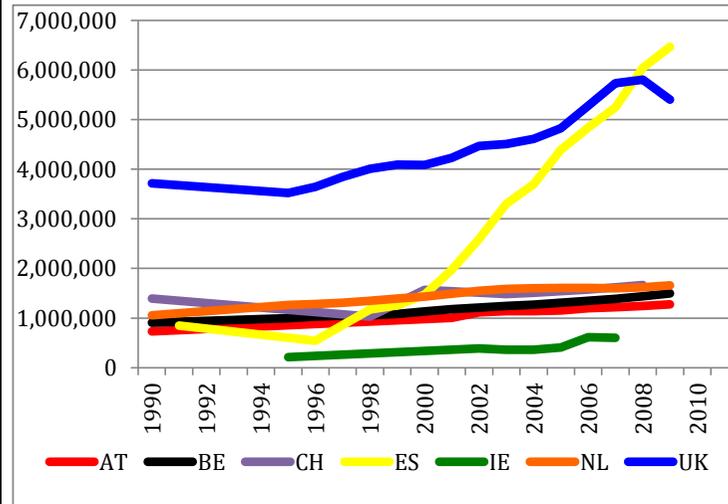


Chart 2.B Percentage of foreign-born residents

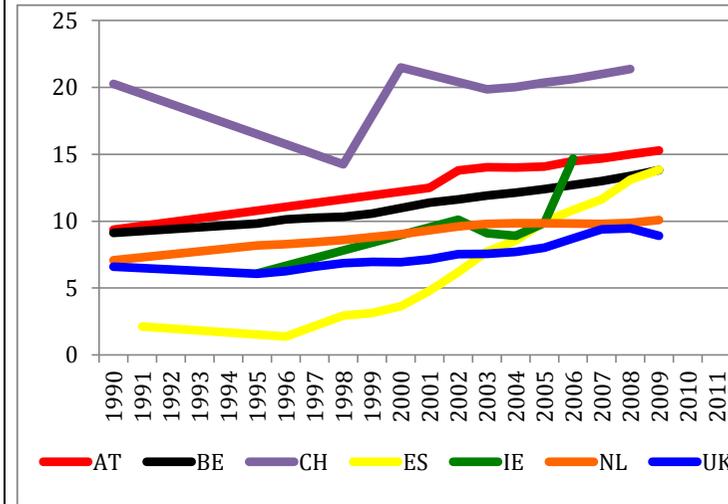


Chart 2.C Percentage of foreign-born who are not native speakers of country language

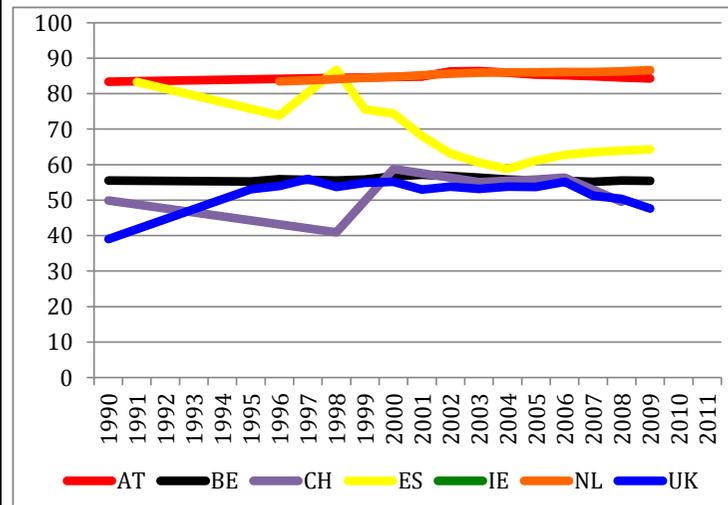
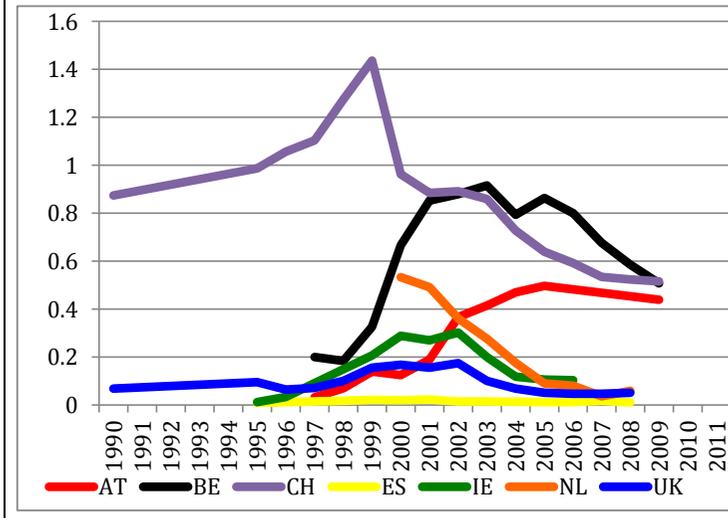


Chart 2.D Asylum seekers as percentage of total resident population

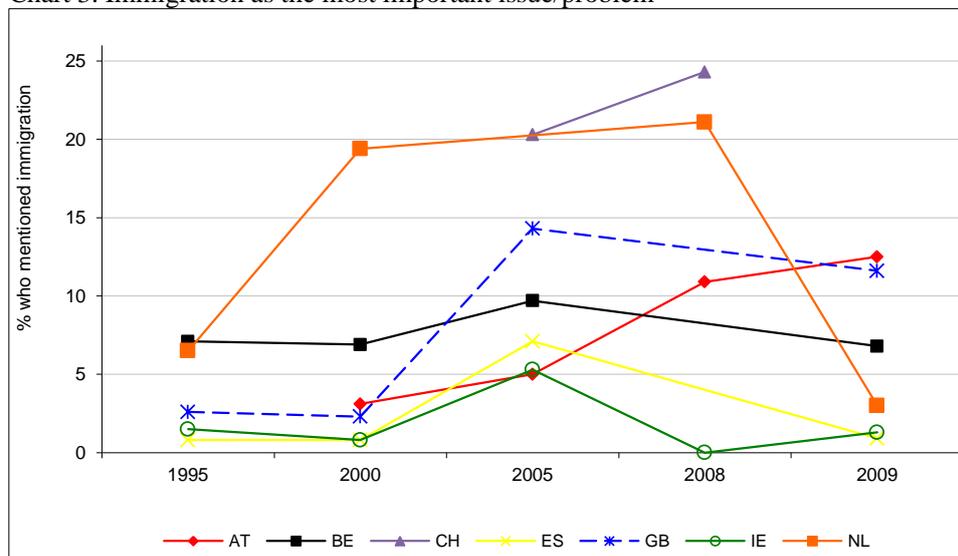


Sources: see Morales et al. (2010)

Trends in Public Opinion

Some of the cross-national differences shown in Chart 1 in relation to the demographic trends in immigration are reflected in the cross-national trends in public opinion around the issue of immigration. Comparable time series of the most important issue or problem are scarce, as very few international surveys ask respondents about the main issues or problems facing the country. Still, some of the existing data from international electoral surveys allow us to gain some indicative insights into the situation across these seven countries. Chart 3 shows the percentage of respondents who mentioned immigration (or other immigration-related answers) as the first most important problem for their country. Respondents in the Netherlands and Switzerland seemed to be the most concerned about immigration, though the saliency of the issue seems to have notably fluctuated in the former. In Belgium, Ireland, Spain and the UK, there seems to have been a peak in the concern about immigration in the mid-2000s that has receded in the end of the decade, presumably due to the shift of concern towards economic issues. Still, levels of concern about immigration have remained high in the UK, whereas they have remained comparatively much lower in Ireland and Spain despite the very sharp increases in immigration inflows in these two countries during the 2000s. Austria stands out as the only country where concern for immigration has gradually and continuously increased throughout the period.

Chart 3. Immigration as the most important issue/problem

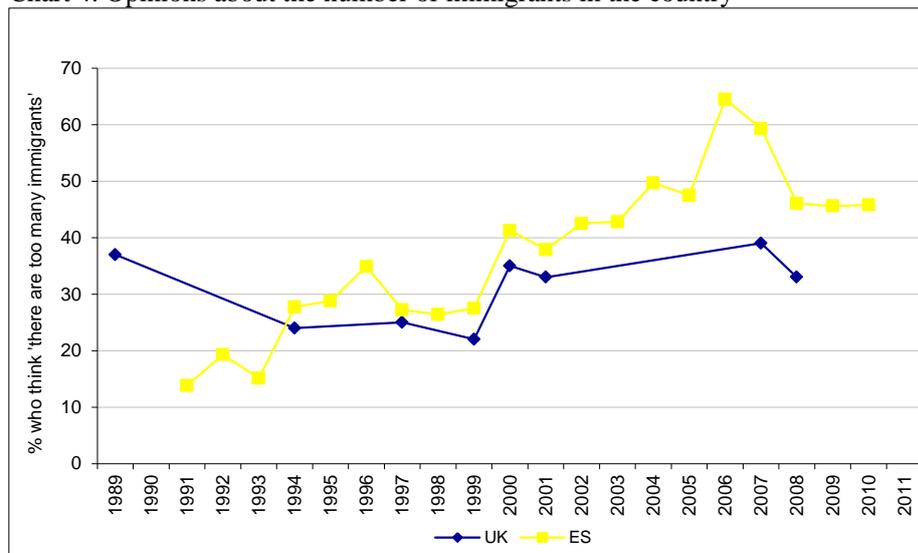


Sources: Eurobarometer 41.1, European Elections Studies 1999, 2004, 2009, CSES module 3.

The differential saliency of the immigration issue across countries masks a more similar opinion structure about the number of immigrants that the country should accept. For example, even if the British public seems to give much more priority to

immigration as a ‘problem’ than the Spanish public does, this does not necessarily reflect their opinions about the number of immigrants in the country (Chart 4). In fact, both the British and the Spanish hold nowadays very similar views about the number of immigrants in their respective countries, as around 40 per cent think there are ‘too many’ immigrants. And the sharp increase in Spain from around 14 per cent in the early 1990s to around 50 per cent (with a peak over 60 per cent) who hold that view in the 2000s matches the parallel sharp growth in immigration in that country.

Chart 4. Opinions about the number of immigrants in the country

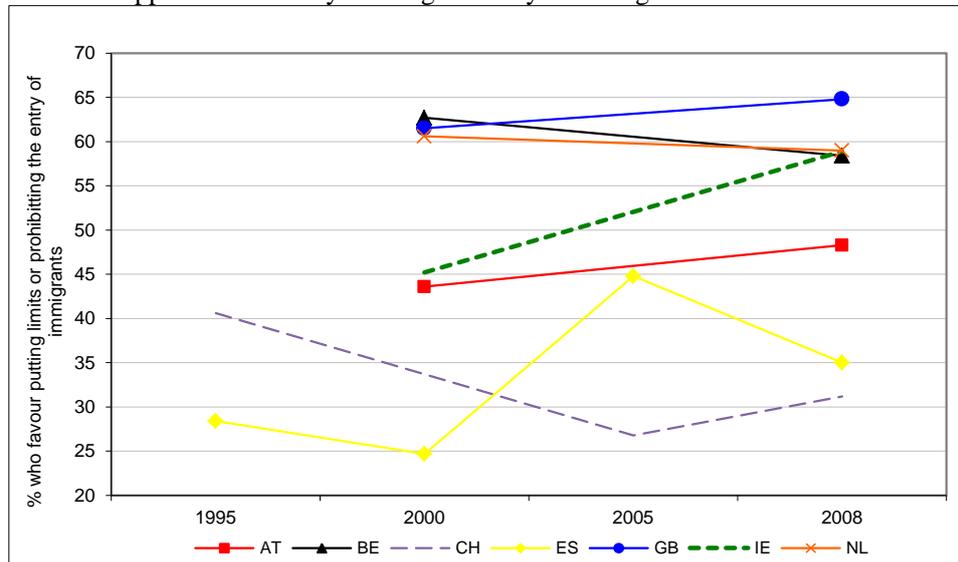


Sources: For Britain, Ipsos-MORI (Race relations & Immigration trends); for Spain, ASEP (Attitudes towards immigration collection).

However, concern about immigration and evaluations of the current number of immigrants in the country does not necessarily lead to the same policy ‘prescriptions’ by the public (see Chart 5). Whereas in Belgium, Britain and the Netherlands there is a massive and relatively stable support for restrictive policies that put a rein on entries, we find much more moderate views than would be expected from the Swiss respondents (given their high levels of concern about immigration). There is also a considerable difference in how restrictive the views of the Irish and Spanish publics are given the similar demographic changes both countries have experienced.

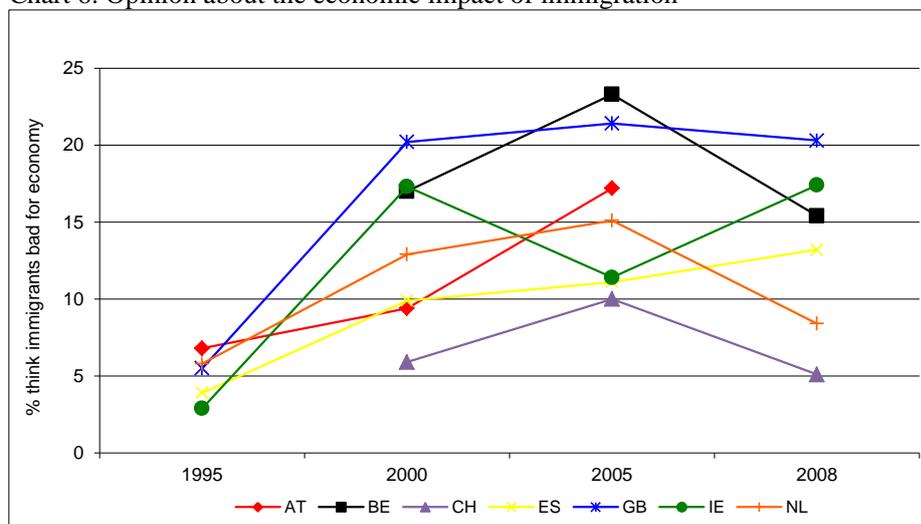
These less restrictive views by the Swiss and the Spanish are, partly, reflecting recognition by the public that immigration is good for the economy. Chart 6 shows the percentage of respondents who think that immigrants are bad for the economy of their country, and the trend is also one of increasingly critical views about immigration in most countries. The British public stands out as very critical in relation to the economic impact of immigration throughout the whole 2000s decade. And it is interesting to note that there seems to be a certain mismatch between the restrictive views of the Dutch in relation to the immigration entry policies and their evaluations about the impact of immigration for the economy, which are much less negative.

Chart 5. Support for seriously limiting the entry of immigrants



Source: World Values Surveys and European Values Surveys.

Chart 6. Opinion about the economic impact of immigration



Trends in Immigration Policies

In order to capture changes in immigration policies, we have extended backwards the Migrant Integration Policy Index Project (MIPEX) indicators of immigration policies and legislation (Niessen et al., 2007, Huddleston et al., 2011) to have data for five points in time: 1995, 2000, 2004, 2006 and 2010. The index is a measurement of how

close countries come to the highest, newest European standards, which are usually derived from EU directives or Council of Europe policy recommendations. As member states must pass European directives into their national legislation, they have the freedom to decide the exact form and methods of the law (as long as it clearly meets the aims of the law). The indicators do not intend to monitor the transposition itself, but the implementation of the highest standards within relevant directives.

We used MIPEX II's set of 140 indicators as the basis for our data collection for the previous time points. MIPEX II identifies six strands of policy areas related to immigration that are evaluated by country experts: labour market access, family reunion, long-term residence, acquisition of nationality, political participation and anti-discrimination. Each strand is organised around four dimensions of policies and legislation — usually, eligibility, integration measures, security of status, and rights associated with status (or other subdimensions of equivalent importance) — and each of the dimensions contains several indicators for which countries receive a 1 to 3 score depending on whether their policies/legislation approaches the highest standards or not. Scores are averaged within each strand and transformed into a 0-100 range, where 0 indicates policies/legislation that are most unfavourable for immigrants' (integration), and 100 indicates those that are deemed most favourable.

We have also collected, for the same points in time, our own indicators for asylum policies, partly inspired by Thielemann's (2003) indicators. These indicators cover aspects such as access control, determination procedures, freedom of movement of asylum seekers, form in which welfare benefits are provided (cash vs vouchers), and right to work. The scores also have been designed to have a 0-100 range with the same interpretation than for MIPEX scores.

Chart 7 shows the results for the four aspects of immigration policies that are most closely related to entry and stay controls: labour market access, family reunion, long-term residence and asylum policies. The first thing that stands out from the data collected 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. In fact, for labour market access policies a trend towards more favourable policies is the norm, for family reunion policies stability prevails — with the opposing trends for Spain and Ireland —, and for long-term residence favourable policies are more common — with the exception of Britain. In fact, only for asylum policies can we find a clear trend towards more restrictive policies in several countries, though not in all.

In general terms, thus, our results confirm the suggestions in the literature that — despite the increased opposition to immigration by the public — policies are not becoming uniformly restrictive in European nations. In the next section we analyse in more detail, and in a country-by-country manner, the link between demographic changes and public opinion trends, on the one hand, and the link between public opinion trends and policy changes, on the other.

Chart 7. Trends in Immigration Policies in Seven European Countries, 1995-2010

Chart 7. A Labour market status

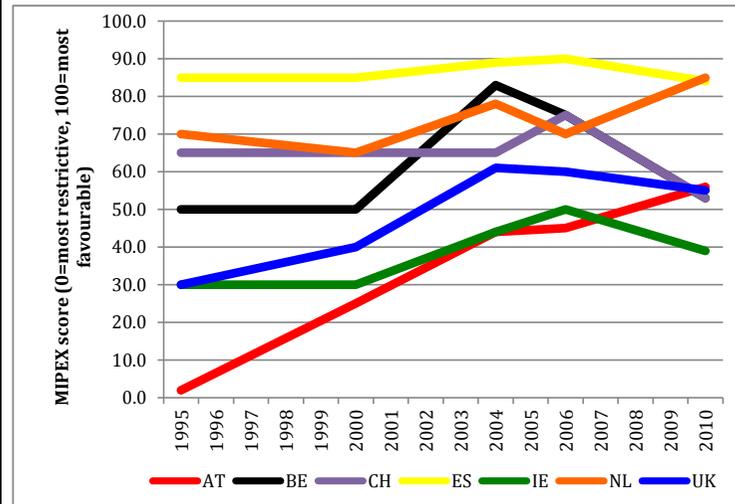


Chart 7. B Family reunion

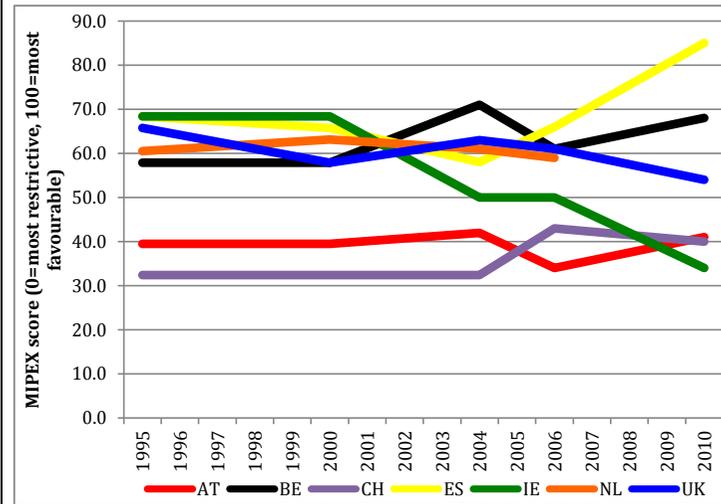


Chart 7. C Long-term residence

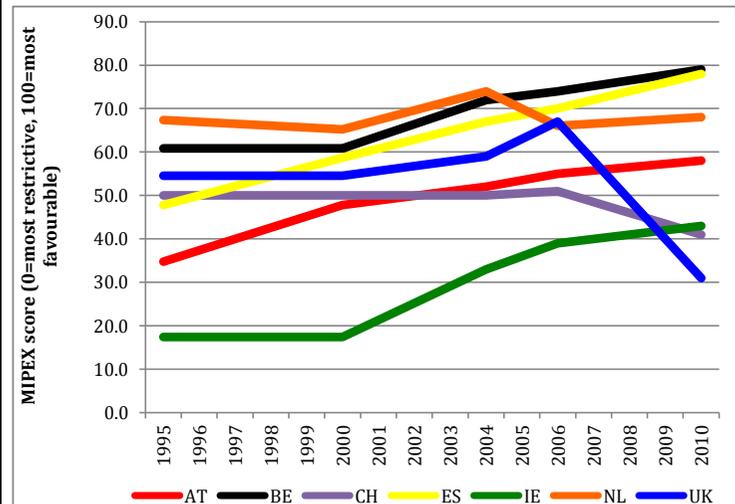
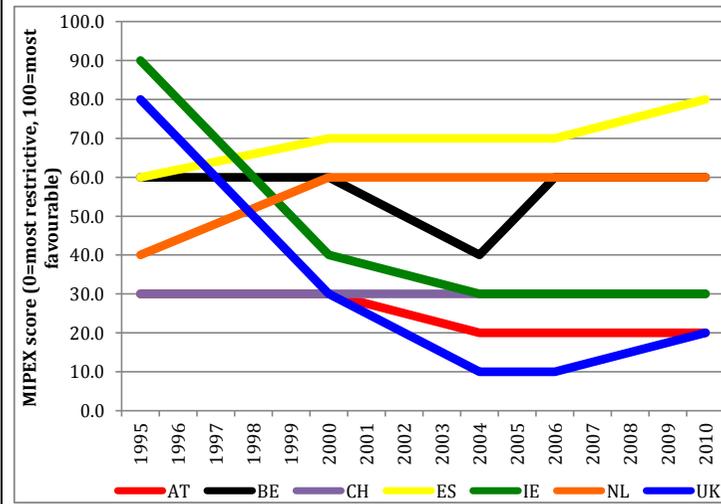


Chart 7. D Asylum



Sources: see Cunningham et al. (2011).

(PRELIMINARY) RESULTS

The link between immigration trends and public opinion trends

When it comes to analysing the congruence between immigration trends and public opinion dynamics, we find that in most cases there is, indeed some congruence between these two aspects (Chart 8). As immigration increases (% of foreign-born), in most countries, so does the perception of immigration as a problem (% immigration among 3-5 MIPs) and the number of people who hold restrictive views towards the number of immigrants that should be admitted into the country.

There are, however, some interesting variations across countries. In Austria and the UK, the dynamics of public opinion are fully congruent with the trends in immigration. Thus, as immigration flows have increased in these countries, so have the concern and restrictive views about immigration numbers, which — as we have seen in previous pages — are also quite high in comparative terms.

We also find cases of partial congruence between immigration flows and the dynamics of public opinion. In Ireland and the Netherlands, as immigration increases so does the restrictive views of the public in relation to how much immigration should be limited or stopped altogether. However, in both countries the trends in relation to concerns about immigration are not of constant growth. In Ireland after a small increase in the percentage of the public who identified immigration as one of the main problems facing the public, this concern decreased again. The same seems to be the case in the Netherlands. In both of these cases, the decrease in concern precedes the economic crisis, so the reasons for this need to be sought elsewhere. Finally, in Spain, we find that both concerns about immigration as a problem and the prevalence of restrictive views increase gradually and steadily until the economic crises implodes. Since 2008, immigration has faded away from the most pressing problems that Spaniards perceive and the restrictive views about immigration have also been moderated, even if immigration still continued to increase moderately. Hence, the Spanish case is one of partial congruence until the economy became the primary focus of attention.

Finally, we find two interesting cases of lack of congruence between immigration flows and the opinions of the public. In Belgium we find that restrictive views about immigration have remained stable — albeit in very high magnitude — despite the increase in immigration. In Switzerland, concerns about immigration have fluctuated cyclically but the trend is stationary around high values of approximately 60 per cent of the Swiss identifying immigration as one of the most important problems facing the country. Even more interestingly, as we discussed before, the Swiss have become slightly less restrictive in their views about entry policies, despite the steady increase in immigration over the past few decades.

In general terms, however, congruence is what prevails and our data do not support past claims in the literature that the views around immigration of the public are not connected with ‘real’ immigration trends and levels.

Comment [LM1]: MIP data pending.

The link between public opinion and policies

Turning now our attention to how policies respond to the structure of the public opinion, our findings in relation to the connection between public concern about immigration and policy direction suggest that the latter are congruent in a number of countries and not so in a few others. Chart 9 shows the results for all countries, but the reader should bear in mind that higher scores in the MIPEX indicators mean less restrictive immigration policies, which are deemed more favourable to immigrants' interests and integration. Hence, if policies respond to increasing concern from the public about immigration, the MIPEX indicators should show a decreasing trend towards greater restriction. For these analyses, we select the two main MIPEX indicators related to flow management: family reunion policies and long-term residence policies.

The policy direction seems fully consistent with public concerns in Britain, the Netherlands and Switzerland. While in Britain, growing preoccupation with immigration as a problem has been followed by more restrictive policies in the areas of family reunion and long-term residence, in the Netherlands and Switzerland the stability or stationary trend of the concerns about immigration have been followed by very little change. In this regard, the behaviour of governments in these countries seems to follow the thermostatic model of opinion and policy responsiveness.

Ireland seems to be a particular case of mixed policies and mixed responses to the public. Whereas Irish policies on family reunion have become more restrictive since the early 2000s, thus anticipating the increasing concerns and critical views of the Irish public, long-term residence policies have become more open and favourable to immigrants, hence allowing the stabilisation of immigrants already in the country. Thus, these results suggest that Irish political elites have been somewhat selective in how to respond to the increasing concern about immigration of their public.

Finally, Austria and Spain provide two very interesting contrasting cases of lack of thermostatic responsiveness to the views of the public. All the existing data suggest that the Austrian public has become increasingly concerned about immigration and increasingly restrictive in their views about immigration. Yet, Austrian policies of family reunion have, on balance, remained stable and have not become clearly more restrictive, and policies around long-term residence have become more favourable to immigrants. In the case of Spain, the lack of congruence is even more evident, as concern about immigration rocketed until the mid-2000s but policies have gradually become more favourable to immigrants. These two cases are quite interesting, as they constitute examples of opposing cases in terms of the relevance of radical right and anti-immigrant political parties: in Austria the FPÖ is a powerful political actor, whereas in Spain there is no nation-wide relevant radical right party.

Chart 8. The congruence between immigration flows and public opinion

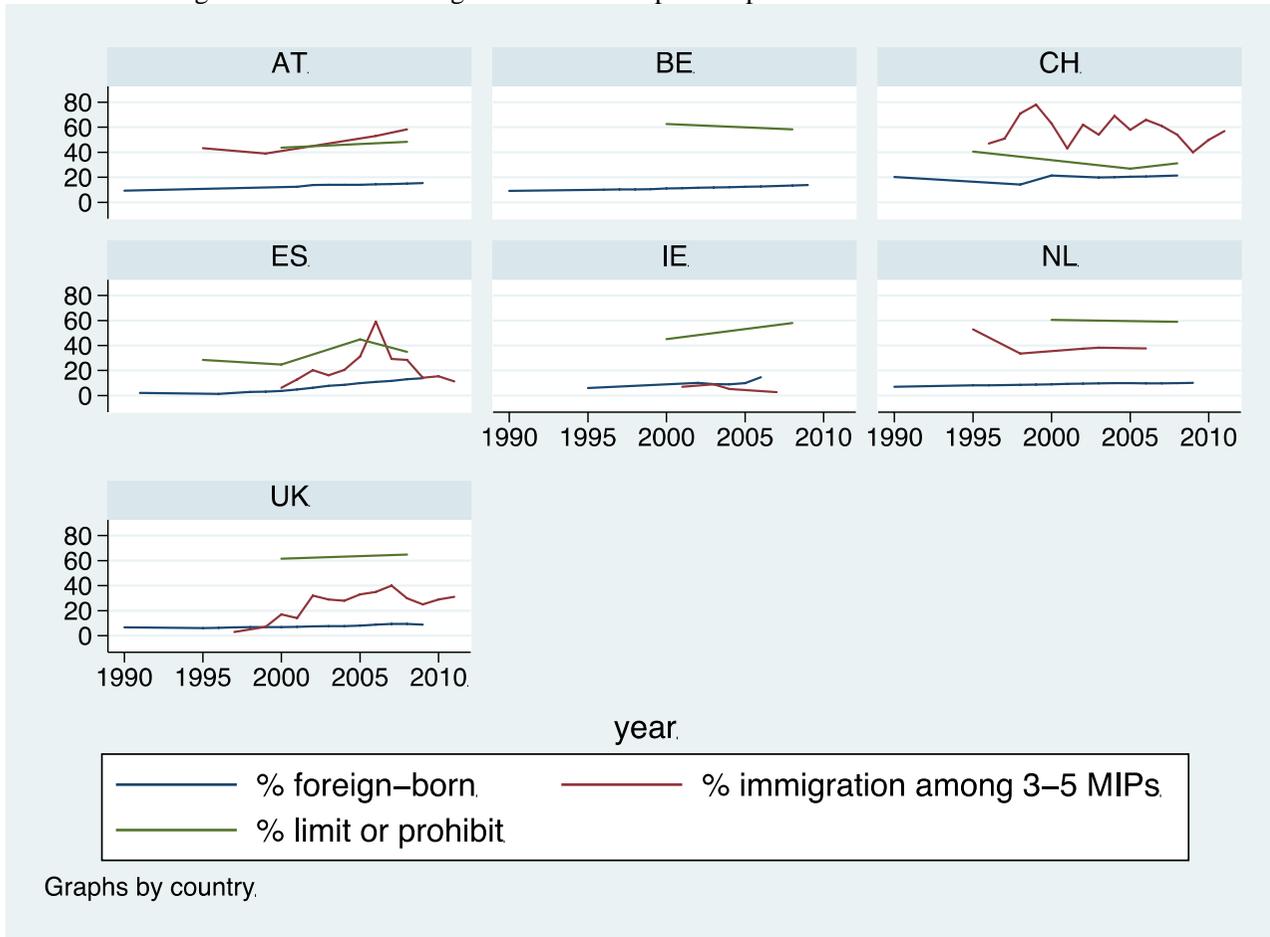
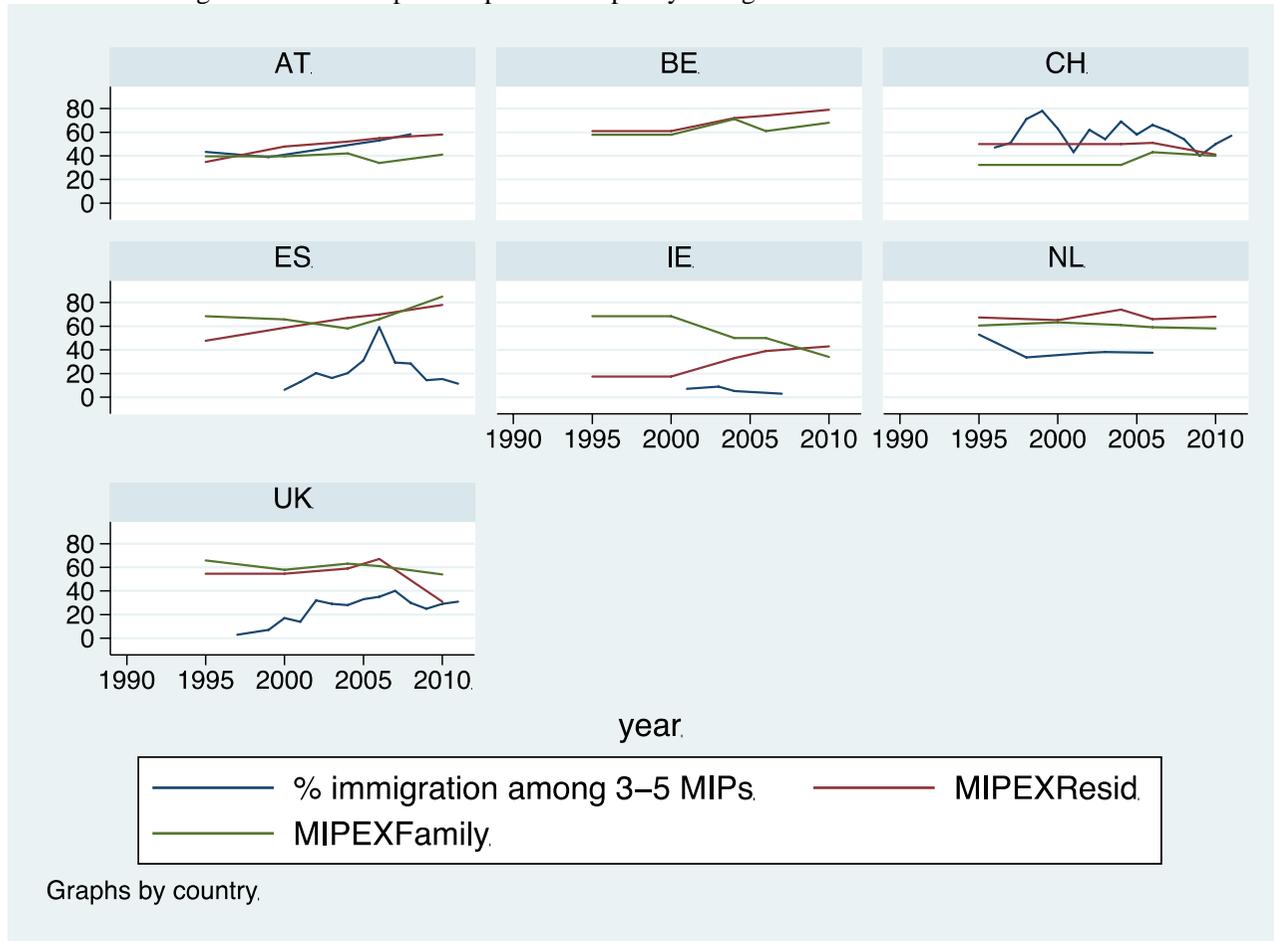


Chart 9. The congruence between public opinion and policy changes



(PRELIMINARY) CONCLUSIONS

The data analysed in this paper provide only partial support to our original hypotheses:

H1: Changes (increases/reductions) in the immigration flows will be reflected in changes in the public opinion (more/less restrictive/negative views).

Our results suggest that, indeed, the changes in the opinions of the public are consistent with the changes in immigration flows in most countries. However, there is some suggestion that this congruence depends on other factors, as the economic crisis seems to intervene in public perceptions for Spain, and the Irish and Dutch have stopped being as concerned as they were with immigration as a problem even before the crisis began.

There is no clear support for the hypothesis that the association between immigration flows and public opinion will be stronger where immigrants are more visible — e.g. in linguistic terms — as H1a suggested, as congruence varies across countries in ways that are not consistent with the linguistic composition of the immigrant population. Moreover, we also find only limited support for the hypothesis that the association between demographic changes and public opinion dynamics will also be stronger where the proportion of immigrants increased suddenly. Immigration has increased most sharply in Ireland and Spain, and yet these are both cases of only partial congruence between demographic trends and the opinions of the public.

Our data also support only partially our second main hypothesis:

H2: Policy-making will respond to significant shifts in public opinion, such that whenever the public mood becomes considerably more negative, policies will become more restrictive (with a certain time lag), and when the opinion is ambivalent or favouring the status quo, policies will remain unaltered.

As we have seen, policies have become more restrictive in the UK and, to some extent, in Ireland, where the public has become considerably critical of immigration, and in the British case, considerably concerned about it. Also, in line with the hypothesis, policies have remained unaltered in the Netherlands and Switzerland, two countries where the opinion dynamics have been ambivalent. However, the cases of Austria and Spain contradict our hypothesis, given that there is absolutely no ambivalence in the opinions of the Austrian people, who have consistently become critical of immigration and increasingly concerned about it and yet policies have remained mostly stable or have become slightly less restrictive. Equally unresponsive have been the policies enacted in Spain, where the public has shown a sharply increasing concern towards immigration and a certain restrictive mood, while policies have only become gradually less restrictive for immigrants.

In conclusion, our results suggest that while the chain of responsiveness and representation seems to work as expected overall, there are a number of cases that contradict the expectations and we need further research to clarify the exceptions that we find.

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