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Special Issue Introductory Chapter

Immigration into the Mainstream: Conflicting Ideological Streams, Strategic Reasoning and Party Competition

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Immigration is one of the key issues of contestation in contemporary European politics (Boswell, 2003). The populist radical right has mobilised around it, some parts of the media are similarly obsessed with it, and many voters feel just as strongly about it. Yet the extent to which immigration plays a part in electoral competition in individual states varies considerably, especially when it comes to the use made of the issue by those parties generally considered mainstream rather than extreme. In some countries, the centre-right *and* the centre-left have made immigration central to their electoral campaigns. In others, the issue registers temporarily on their electoral radar screen, only to drop off it at subsequent elections (see e.g. Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup, 2008; Pellikann *et al*, 2007; Cornelius *et al*, 1994; Thränhardt, 1995).

This variance constitutes a puzzle for the study of electoral politics. Studies that try to explain it sometimes start with the *supply* side, namely the electoral significance of anti-immigration parties (see e.g. Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Betz, 1994, Mudde, 2004). The mainstream, the argument runs, shies away from immigration, effectively creating a vacuum that the radical right rushes in to fill. Immigration becomes an 'issue' as anti-immigration parties are able to capitalise on those voters whose concerns about immigration are supposedly ignored by the parties they traditionally support, leaving them with little alternative but the extremist or radical option. In order to remedy this electoral 'theft', mainstream parties react by sharpening their own stances, breaking taboos, and doing deals, either to exclude the

radical right from government or to give it a share of the spoils of office, possibly as a full-blown coalition partner or else as some kind of support party. None of this, however, can satisfactorily explain why immigration is picked up, and picked over, in countries where the electoral and/or parliamentary presence of the radical right is, if not absent, then far too small to present a serious threat – an important reminder that mainstream parties (and not necessarily only those on the right) do not always need prompting by 'niche' competitors in order to talk about or act upon the issue, often in pretty populist terms (Alonso and da Fonseca, 2012; see also Bale, 2013 and Carvalho, 2014).

Conversely, a focus on the *demand* side - on voters - faces problems too. Simply knowing what the electorate thinks about immigration does not allow us to fully account for either the positions that parties adopt or for when the issue is (or is not) emphasised by parties during electoral campaigns. Whatever spatial theory (Downs, 1957) suggests, party positions on immigration are often uncoordinated with the electorate's views, not least because there is no guarantee of congruence between elite and public priorities and because, owing perhaps to 'issue diversity' (Hobolt *et al*, 2008) and 'agenda friction' (Schattschneider, 1960), parties can be slow to respond to voter preferences – especially when the electoral situation they face does not appear to be unduly critical (Adams *et al*, 2004; Budge, 1994). In any case, in an era of *valence* (as opposed to *position*) politics, voters' ideological preferences may matter less than their judgements about the ability of parties to deliver competently (see e.g. Stokes, 1963; Riker, 1996; Green, 2007). In the immigration context, this may well come down to their ability to limit the numbers coming into the country – something that may not be wholly within the control of even the most resolute government: as a recent study of a country whose governments frequently find it difficult to live up to their promises to voters on this score notes, 'restrictive reform is constrained by international and European law, global economic trends and organised interests' (Ford *et al*., 2014).

The immigration 'issue' is of course ideologically loaded, but it can nonetheless be understood as a valence question since mainstream parties, with some exceptions, now seem to agree on the *direction* that policy should take, namely to

achieve both control and cultural and economic integration. That said, a party that 'owns' immigration (Odmalm, 2014; 2012; 2011, van der Brug, 2004; Petrocik, 1996) is thus likely to emphasise the issue whereas a party that does not and/or performs relatively worse will downplay or ignore it. Green and Hobolt (2008) identify a link between issue ownership and how parties strive to raise the salience level of that particular issue. However, these efforts primarily tend to pay off when they also coincide with voters' own perceptions of the importance of the issue, which are never simply a function of party mobilisation (Belanger and Meguid, 2008). This raises the possibility of a mismatch between party approaches and the electorate's responses or priorities. Why, then, do parties get this calculation 'wrong'?

For one thing, political parties operate within a space that has at least two-dimensional dimensions (Kriesi *et al*, 2006; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995). On the one hand, there is a Left-Right axis referring to the appropriate level of state involvement in the economy. As such, parties are classified along a spectrum ranging from 'socialist' to 'neo-liberal' (Evans *at al*, 1996; Kriesi *et al*, 2006). This 'old' politics dimension concerned, among other issues, labour market regulation, public/private ownership and level of taxation, and characterised a majority of the West European democracies from the mid-20th century to the early 1970s. Divisions between parties were often sharp with voter preferences mapping onto social class. From the 1970s onwards, however, conflict regarding the state's involvement in the economy became less polarised and contestation, when present, tended to revolve around, say, the scope of publicly provided welfare or the speed of privatisation However, a 'new' source of conflict emerged which related to 'post-material' (Inglehart, 1997), or what Hooghe *et al* (2002) have labelled, GAL/TAN issues (Green/Alternative/Libertarian - Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist), and which concerned e.g. environmental protection, nationalism, personal freedoms, and questions of ethnicity and culture.

As Hooghe *et al.* also note, attitudes towards further EU integration constitute a particularly difficult issue for parties to assimilate into either an economic or a socio-cultural (GAL/TAN) Left-Right dimension. Immigration gives rise to a similar dilemma since it cuts across several, sometimes disparate, policy fields. It not only

has economic effects, whether 'positive' (e.g. meeting supply shortages or keeping wage inflation low) or 'negative' (e.g. sparking labour market chauvinism, creating a new, 'ethnic' underclass or removing the incentives for firms and governments to train and educate the native-born working class), but also impacts on notions of national identity, social cohesion, language, welfare provision, law and order, terrorism and security, and cultural practices. This puts the political mainstream in a continual quandary since these effects tap into prevailing ideological tensions that exist within, and between, parties. The shift from uni- to multi-dimensional contestation not only adds further complexity to party classification (Benoit and Laver, 2007; Klingemann *et al*, 2006), but, rather more importantly, also means that these tensions can crystallise thus subjecting parties to a set of conflicting ideological 'pulls' (Odmalm, 2011; 2014) on a whole series of issues. Most obviously, the right's traditional emphasis on 'less state' in the economy is counterpointed by a pull towards 'more state' influence on individual lifestyle choices and the preservation of national identity, while the left's traditional concern to limit the role of the market, through extensive state action, provides a contrast with ideas of localised democracy, international solidarity and increased personal freedom that arguably call for *less* state influence. The introduction of a new, and increasingly non-economic, cleavage allowed new parties to form and be (occasionally) successful – in particular Green parties - and, as such, these ideological tensions have often been neutralised (Jahn, 1993; Müller-Rommel, 1989).

However, competing on the immigration 'issue' can trigger the (re)emergence of these strains, prompting dilemmas of framing, positioning and campaigning for the political mainstream. For the centre-right, immigration crystallises a tension between market liberal and culturally conservative wings (see the various contributions to Bale, 2008). The former, predominantly present in liberal and conservative parties, often pushes for immigration policies to be liberalised and for the private sector to have greater powers in deciding the appropriate levels of, especially, labour migration (see Spehar *et al.*, 2013). The latter, often present in Christian Democratic and conservative parties, will be hesitant about handing over such a key area of sovereignty to non-state actors, fearing the loss of control of national borders and

culture. Both wings also tend to experience conflicting attitudes towards asylum and family reunification migration. Since the former category is usually legally prevented from economic participation, and the latter's entry into the labour market can be delayed due to linguistic, cultural and/or educational reasons, it will make the benefits of these types of migrants less obvious which in turn will make it difficult for market liberals to justify why policies should be liberalised. While asylum migration, and subsequent family reunification, may also bring individuals who emphasise the family unit and traditional lifestyles, their perceptions of the 'family' and 'traditional lifestyles' may run contrary to what the culturally conservative wing has in mind. Further problems may arise if these 'new' values and lifestyles clash with particular 'Western' values that stress e.g. equality, especially between the sexes, or emancipation.

Immigration poses just as many dilemmas for the centre-left (see Bale *et al*., 2010 and 2012). For Social Democratic and reformed Left parties, limiting it can easily be seen as vital in order to retain collective power and good terms and conditions in the labour market (see Hinnfors *et al*. 2011). Giving up the right to decide on entry would run the risk of undermining the collectively bargained agreements and allow wages to be undercut. And in the long run, 'uncontrolled' immigration could potentially create not new recruits to the cause (Ireland, 2004; Breunig and Luedtke, 2008, see also Messina, 2007) but rather a new − *ethnic* - underclass and accordingly, split the indigenous working class (Givens and Luedtke, 2004). At the same time, the centre-left has been influenced by 'new' post-material ideas. Green and reformed Left parties often view immigration as a fundamental *human* right and taking on workers and, especially, refugees would thus be an important aspect of showing one's credentials of international solidarity (Jahn, 1993; Müller-Rommel, 1989).

These tensions will have an affect on party behaviour and competition. Adopting a position that links immigration with international solidarity or the free market, or with labour market protectionism or value-conservatism is associated with particular risks and emphasising either position will have important electoral and organisational implications. If parties get the emphasis wrong, it may alienate their

natural voters and jeopardise governing potential. As such, the immigration 'issue' can cause ideological splits and intra-party fragmentation, which further hinders the chances of winning elections. Little wonder, then, that it often makes strategic sense to downplay or ignore immigration as an electoral priority. Yet parties have to be sensitive to shifts in public opinion and if immigration moves up the agenda, they must respond to voters' concerns. On the other hand, emphasising the issue too much gives the populist radical right unwanted attention and may further destabilise the political arena. Parties must therefore perform a difficult balancing act. They must engage with the immigration 'issue' in a way that avoids highlighting these tensions, thereby shifting the electoral focus away from parties' key areas of policy strength and electoral priorities. At the same time, they have somehow to improve their capacity to handle a matter of acute public concern while not opening themselves up to criticism, which, in turn, gives the populist radical right unwarranted attention.

In the light of all this, we ask the contributors to this special issue to address when, why, and how do mainstream parties decide whether or not to emphasise immigration during their election campaigns? Of particular concern has been to evaluate the explanatory potential of two competing frameworks.

On the one hand, there is a more structurally orientated approach which addresses the extent to which parties react to a set of immigration 'shocks', and then assesses the importance of these for the type of party responses, (re)positioning and electoral strategies pursued (Norris, 1995; van Spanje, 2010; Mudde, 2004, see also Rabinowitz and MacDonald, 1989; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Betz, 1994). These shocks are not just limited to the emergence, and subsequent electoral success, of the populist radical right but are also contingent upon an additional set of indigenous and exogenous factors. These include, but are not limited to the following: increased immigration and asylum pressures; the perceived economic and/or cultural 'cost' of immigration/integration and changing levels of media and public attention paid to the immigration 'issue'. None of these factors exist independently of each other and more often than not they will create a feedback loop in the political discourse. But immigration will impact on countries in different ways and responses have subsequently tended to vary. Parties therefore tend to behave selectively and may

emphasise particular aspect(s) of the immigration 'issue' in their campaigns. Additionally, certain events, such as increased terrorist activities or threats, often manage to cut across the immigration/integration divide. It would thus seem reasonable to assume that the above factors lead parties to respond by sharpening their stances on the immigration 'issue'. That is, one might anticipate finding a degree of fit between immigration developing in a 'negative' direction and parties taking up more restrictive positions and discourses.

There is, however, a second approach. The first assumes that there is a stimulus-response relationship between immigration 'shocks' and restrictive repositioning. This does not attribute parties much agency or agenda-setting power. It also leaves us wondering how it is, if parties' responses to the presence of populist radical right challengers or various immigration and integration pressures really are so automatic, they often 'fail' to campaign on, or emphasise, a restrictive agenda.

The special issue, then, will also consider how much agency parties exercise and how much leeway they actually have or give themselves (van der Brug, 2004; Petrocik, 1996). While migratory pressures and populist radical right challenges are obviously still relevant in explaining party actions, contributors also consider parties' ability to handle the conflicting ideological strains described above. Since immigration has been described as being an important contributor to the transformation of established cleavages (Kriesi *et al*, 2006; 2008) as well as an issue associated with the demise of ideology (Lahav, 1997), parties are likely to find it difficult to come up with a new 'master frame' (Rydgren, 2005) around the issue while simultaneously experiencing intra-organisational strains due to competing factions and issue orientations. If they cannot successfully negotiate, and manage, these opposing 'pulls', parties might therefore try to divert attention to issues on which they are particularly trusted . This focus will thus allow us to examine and explain instances where parties do not behave as expected.

Based on these conditions and what the literature suggests about party behaviour, we propose the following three hypotheses:

H1: Mainstream parties will emphasise their ability to deal with the immigration 'issue' if there is significant inter-party agreement over the direction of

immigration/integration policies. Where there is no such agreement, they will not do so.

H2: Mainstream parties will downplay/ignore the immigration 'issue' if voters' trust in them on the issue is lower than it is for the other party/other parties.

H3: Mainstream parties will divert attention toward areas of greater competence if they are unable to resolve any ideological tensions stemming from the immigration 'issue'.

Case selection

Some of the cases included in this special issue (namely, Belgium; Germany; the Netherlands and Sweden) would feature in any line of 'the usual suspects' when it comes to studying the politics of immigration in Western Europe. However, we have also included cases that are covered less frequently (namely, Italy, Greece and Spain). All our countries not only have a sizable migrant and/or ethnic minority population but they have also, with the partial exception of the latter three, received substantial attention in the literature (see e.g. Boswell, 2006; Castles and Miller. 2003; Hammar, 2006; Messina, 2007). The cases are of further interest since they also offer a high degree of variation in terms of the sources of newcomers, approaches to integration, and the degree of contestation that the immigration 'issue' endures during elections.

Belgium and the Netherlands form a 'post-colonial' pairing which is juxtaposed by Sweden, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain which, conversely, have had higher numbers of asylum seekers and, especially for the latter three, undocumented migrants. Similarly, the countries differ in terms of their conceptions of citizenship (Bauböck *et al,* 2006) and in their approaches to migrant integration (Koopmans *et al* 2006; Koopmans and Statham, 2000). Finally, the way that the immigration 'issue' has appeared on parties' electoral radar screens shows ample variation but also some crucial similarities. While the Dutch parties have come to

adopt an increasingly confrontational approach, immigration has rarely been a source of contestation in Sweden, even though both countries share similar institutional surroundings and (traditionally anyway) similar approaches to integration. On the other hand, Germany and Sweden display some surprising similarities in the way that the immigration 'issue' has played out in electoral politics even though these cases have very different institutional conditions and ways of dealing with immigration and integration. Some of the cases have also experienced the sudden rise of populist radical right challengers but this rise has prompted markedly different mainstream party responses. Although some of the Swedish parties have hinted at a more restrictive line on immigration, they have not abandoned key stances on asylum, anti-discrimination and cultural differences which, in contrast, have been modified and in some cases completely abandoned in the Netherlands. In addition, the Swedish parties have showed few signs of trying to accommodate the populist radical right or incorporating its issue positions.

Italy and Belgium are, in comparison, the odd cases out. In the former, there are difficulties involved in identifying 'the mainstream', especially if the mainstream parties are defined according to ideological distance and electoral success. Such a definition would place the populist radical right very much at the heart of the Italian centre-right family thus blurring the distinction between 'mainstream' and 'radical'/'extremist' parties. In the latter, Belgium provides an anomaly in terms of immigration's level of contestation. While a majority of the countries covered in this issue exhibit some degree of polarisation between parties that want to pursue a more liberal vs. a more restrictive approach, the Belgian parties have tended to find consensus around a 'doctrine of zero-immigration' (Martiniello, 2003:225) where the main emphasis has been to reduce, prevent and reverse migration flows as much as possible. Greece, on the other hand, provides an extreme example of the state of 'flux' (Mair, 1989) that West European party systems are in politically as well economically.

In order to test the relevance of the special issue's thesis regarding 'conflicting ideological pulls', the case selection includes countries with varying degrees of public opposition to immigration, ranging from Greece (strongest) through the Netherlands,

Belgium, Spain, Germany, Italy and (lowest) Sweden (Sides and Citrin, 2007). We have also included countries where the populist radical right has a parliamentary presence (Belgium, Greece, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Italy) and where it does not (Germany and Spain). The countries will thus shed light on the extent to which immigration, as a party-politically relevant issue, is dependent on, or largely independent of, these externalities. While we anticipate that the above conditions will have some effect on immigration's level of politicisation, our main emphasis is placed on parties' abilities to handle and negotiate these ideological 'pulls' and issue priorities. As such, we argue that it is the dynamics of party competition that is the key explanatory factor for when and why immigration becomes an electoral issue. Accordingly, we ask contributors to focus on *both* the centre-right and the centre-left. Despite the common wisdom that *preferences* can be read along a left (pro) – right (anti) continuum, the extent to which *immigration* policies became more or less restrictive, or *integration* policies more or less demanding, does not always map onto parties' ideological affiliations. That is, the centre-left is just as likely as the centre-right to introduce changes regarding immigration controls, citizenship policies or access to welfare benefits (Hinnfors *et al*, 2011).

Finally, when analysing their respective cases, we ask our contributors to address the following questions.

1) How divided are parties over the direction of immigration and/or integration policies?
2) Are some parties more trusted than others on the immigration 'issue'? If so, how have these differences played out in party competition?
3) Has the immigration 'issue' brought the ideological tensions to the fore? If so, how have the mainstream parties handled these strains?

Conclusion

What, then, do our cases, beginning with Germany, tell us? For the German parties, agreeing on the general direction of policy has seen an increased emphasis on competence yet this has often been reluctantly, rather than enthusiastically, pursued. As Schmidtke's contribution suggests, this hesitation is linked to multiple uncertainties: first, there is concern that competition over ownership may result in an unwelcome opening for the populist radical right; second, centre-left *and* centre-right parties have struggled to agree on what type of issue the immigration 'issue' constituted in the first place; and thirdly, there is doubt and debate within parties as to *which* segment of voters to pursue – in the case of the centre-left, for instance, should it be the 'new' ethnic or the 'old' working-class vote? The centre-right has perhaps fared better by merging the immigration 'issue' with policy areas associated with high levels of public trust.

The conflicting ideological 'pulls' have also been present in the Swedish case. But, as Widfeldt points out, these tensions have rarely translated into any overt *electoral* conflict but have instead remained under the surface. The centre-left, at least as a bloc, has been more prone to such strains given the clear tension on labour and asylum migration between the 'old' and 'new' left parties, whereas the centre-right has managed to steer the political conversation towards labour migration thereby avoiding any potential disunity arising from the more ideologically ambiguous refugee category.

In the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent in Flanders as well, all bets appear to be off. Super notes that, regardless of whether issue positions converge or diverge, or the extent of 'pull' that parties experience, the mainstream has increasingly opted for an ownership approach. Yet this has also been coupled with a more cautious 'Goldilocks' tactic that attempts to straddle the 'liberal'/'restrictionist' divide without drawing too much attention to precise policy positions.

The Mediterranean cases provide an illuminating contrast but also a number of similarities. Karamanidou, for example, highlights how ideological strains, and the overall directional consensus, have indeed come to affect the strategies of the Greek

mainstream and how these factors have quite clearly pushed parties towards an ownership-style mode of competition. At the same time, however, the sudden rise of Golden Dawn has accentuated these efforts rather than prompted parties to respond with a dismissive approach or to divert attention elsewhere. And in Spain, Morales *et al* find that mainstream parties converging around largely restrictive positions has not necessarily translated into more claims of issue ownership on their part. Rather counterintuitively in fact, the attention paid to, and the degrees of ownership competition over, the immigration 'issue' appears to be out of sync: parties that exhibit relatively low levels of trust on immigration emphasise it just as much as parties that enjoy higher levels of trust. The Spanish case also suggests a greater role for ideology in the political discourse around immigration but, somewhat surprising perhaps, fewer internal strains than are evident in other countries. Parties instead tend to stick to their long-standing positions despite political conditions which might have been expected to prompt positional, tactical and saliency shifts. This is possibly because of the novelty that the immigration 'issue' presents and how the Spanish parties have yet to agree on an appropriate frame and problem formulation of the 'issue'. This leaves the rather paradoxical case of Italy. Massetti finds that intra-party *and* inter-coalition dynamics have effectively trumped any hesitation that an ostensibly conservative party like *Forza Italia* might have been expected to display when dealing with a radical right coalition partner like the *Lega Nord*. And, whereas the centre-left in other countries often struggles to accommodate labour market protectionism with a focus on international solidarity, the Italian equivalent has been remarkably unaffected by this particular conflict due to the two-tier structure of the labour market. All this has come to neutralise any destabilising tension between different party wings and factions.

Where, then, does this leave party competition on one of the most ideologically loaded policy areas in Western Europe? The overall picture suggests that parties are cautious creatures who tend to stick with *ownership* rather than striking out and offering *choices*, regardless of whether those choices involve liberalising or restricting entry regulations or involve pushing for more or less demanding modes of integration. One explanation for their seemingly natural caution

(some might call it inertia) is that the choices they might consider may very well see them straying into or even stranded on the territory of their more radical competitors, be they radical right-wing populists or left-liberals or invite criticism for not being feasible.

So how do our hypotheses stand up in the light of the contributions to this special issue? First, the immigration 'issue' does indeed appear to give rise to a directional consensus and, as such, is better placed in the realm of valance rather than positional competition (H1). Yet what the contributions also highlight is that parties often disagree about what *type* of 'issue' immigration constitutes, particularly if there is an internal party struggle over dimensional fit and societal impact. And while, secondly, it does indeed seem as if trust and competence are important for whether or not parties choose to campaign on immigration (H2) -related questions, a more pertinent query is, perhaps, the extent to which parties are able to merge their stances on immigration with issues where they enjoy *higher* competence ratings (H2). Thirdly, the immigration 'issue' has also more obviously crystallised internal ideological tensions the further North one looks, whereas in the South a much more complex relationship between ideology, the inter-party dynamics and immigration emerges (H3).

Overall, then, we find stronger evidence for the first and second than for the last of our three hypotheses. This is in itself interesting. It raises a number of questions about the state of flux that party systems are said to be in but also about the shift that is taking place in the role of political parties. More ideological tension would suggest that ideas and visions continue to be important in contemporary European politics but the turn – or perhaps reversion - towards ownership competition is not so much a sign of ideology's death as an indication of its continued importance. Since a majority of the parties covered here have struggled to accommodate their 'issue' position with their 'ideological' orientation, the shift towards emphasising and evidencing competence is a convenient (and safe) way to bypass these ideological tensions. Our case selection, and the subsequent findings do, in a sense, suggest that something more is going on here than merely the demise of ideology and parties responding (either pro- or reactively) to various external 'shocks'. The processes

internal to parties themselves appear to be just as important for understanding why the political mainstream tends to *not* make a big deal out of the immigration 'issue'. The analytical framework we propose and the questions we ask thus invite further comparisons to be made.

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