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The politicization of immigration in Portugal between 1995-2014: a European exception?

Abstract

Immigration is envisaged as part of an ‘emergent cultural cleavage’ across Western Europe. Within this context, this article explores the politicization of immigration in Portugal between 1995 and 2014. Politicization is interpreted as being formed by two distinct dimensions: salience and polarization of the political claims found within news articles extracted from newspapers (Van der Brug et al., 2015). Notwithstanding the doubling of the foreign population settled in the country in the early 2000s, the diminished salience and the absence of significant political conflict suggest that immigration failed to become politicized in Portugal. Drawing on a comparative analysis with seven other European states between 1995 and 2009, Portugal observed the lowest rate of politicization. Rather than being related with socio-economic factors, the lack of politicization of immigration was associated with the strategies of the mainstream parties, which successfully prevented the emergence of this topic as a significant political cleavage.

Keywords: politicization, immigration control, immigrant integration, Portugal, political parties, political claims

Immigration is regarded as part of an emergent cultural cleavage that includes gender equality and minority rights (Dalton 2018). Accordingly, a political realignment of the positions of social groups on these issues has been observed in Europe, but its significance and its alignment at the national level are supposed to vary over time under the influence of the strategies adopted by political parties (Grande et al. 2018). Past comparative research on seven European countries in the late 1990s and 2000s highlighted an important degree of variation regarding the politicization of immigration at the national level (Van der Brug et al. 2015). Whereas the presence of immigrants (or, alternatively, the existence of a substantial Muslim community) was considered a necessary condition for the observation of politicization, this political process was more likely to be observed during periods of economic boom than during a crisis (Van der Brug et al. 2015; Berkhout & Ruedin 2017). Within this context, this article explores the extent to which immigration is inevitably part of an emergent political cleavage in Portugal between 1995 and 2014 and seeks to explain the identified level of politicization of this social phenomenon.

This investigation is supported by the research framework proposed to assess the politicization of immigration in Europe from 1995 to 2009 (Van der Brug et al. 2015). At the national level, that research highlighted the intense politicization of immigration in Austria, Britain and Switzerland, followed by an important level of salience in the Netherlands and in contrast to the lower salience observed in Belgium, Ireland and Spain. At the cross-national level, the political debate on immigration was mostly dominated by the government and legislative actors rather than by other collective actors. As was suggested by past studies (Schain, 2006; Helbling, 2014), the agency of those government and legislative actors was considered to play a central role *via-à-vis* the importance of this topic in the national political agenda of the selected European countries (Van der Brug et al. 2015). This article contributes to the literature in two ways. First, this research assesses the observation of a cultural cleavage regarding the levels of

political conflict over immigration in Portugal. Secondly, this investigation examines the extent to which the identified levels of politicization are driven by bottom-up processes like socio-economic factors or top-down political factors such as the agency of mainstream parties.

In a seminal study on the politics of international migration, Freeman (1995) suggested that the political patterns observed in new countries of immigration, such as the Southern European countries, would conform to the liberal democratic model observed in older countries of immigration. However, research conducted in the late 1990s on the Southern European countries asserted the existence of an exceptional model formed by intense tolerance towards irregular immigration and weak border controls (King et al., 2000; Peixoto et al. 2012). Since Portugal experienced large-scale immigration from the 1980s onwards, the expected convergence of this Iberian nation with its European counterparts will be assessed by comparing the levels of politicization of immigration in Portugal with those observed both in older and more recent countries of immigration between 1995 and 2009. This investigation will highlight the weak levels of political conflict over immigration in Portugal during the overall timeframe. This political trend seems exceptional in comparison with the other seven European countries throughout the 2000s, as the levels of politicization are even lower than the already low salience and polarization identified in Ireland and Spain.

Drawing on political claims' analysis, this research conceives politicization as being composed of two distinct dimensions: salience and polarization (Koopmans et al. 2005). The research privileges the claims made by political actors in newspapers (including a quality and a tabloid newspaper) in order to develop a longitudinal analysis of the levels of politicization, rather than focusing on party manifestos. Party manifestos sometimes have little resonance with public opinion and have a static character between elections, which hampers the development of longitudinal analyses (Carvalho, 2016). To overcome potential biases due to selection and descriptive bias across the media, two distinct daily newspapers were selected, providing a

more diverse analysis of the claims performed by political actors on immigration. Past studies argued that the selection of distinct media outlets enhanced the reliability and validity of the analysis (Koopmans & Statham 2010; Helbling 2014).

Explaining the politicization of immigration

According to past research, the potential explanations of the politicization of immigration can be distinguished according to four strands of causal factors derived from two dichotomies (Van der Brug et al. 2015, pp. 8-16). The first dichotomy concerns the interpretation of politicization as a political process driven by the bottom-up initiatives of organized citizens or by top-down factors like the actions of the authorities or legislative parties. The second dichotomy distinguishes between causal explanations that focus on the agency of political actors and approaches that highlight the influence of structural conditions (Hay 2002).

Structural bottom-up approaches emphasize the role of the political context or socio-economic factors, such as the dimension of immigration, the cultural characteristics of immigrants or the rate of unemployment, in order to understand the politicization of immigration (Betz, 1994; Grande et al. 2018). Drawing on a structural perspective, past research suggests that countries with a substantial Muslim minority were most likely to have a salient level of politicization, but this causal factor was insufficient to explain the intensity of this political process (Berkhout & Ruedin 2017). So the first hypothesis explores whether:

H1 - The levels of politicization of immigration are driven by socio-structural factors

Bottom-up approaches focusing on the agency of political actors explore the potential relationship between the politicization of immigration and the grievances of social groups like immigrant associations or the presence of anti-immigration parties. Thereby, the second hypothesis suggests that:

H2 – the levels of politicization of immigration are enhanced by the activities of collective actors that are outside mainstream political institutions

Parallel to this, top-down approaches that also focus on the agency of political actors examine the actions of national authorities with a special emphasis on the government and the political parties represented in the legislature. Political leaderships respond to the demands by the electorate, especially their constituencies, and translate the public's preferences into policy choices (Sartori, 2005). At the same time, political elites influence the public's perceptions, seeing as they hold direct responsibility for the way immigration is framed, the way the debate is shaped, and how this issue is placed on the political agenda (Helbling 2014; Morales et al. 2015). Thus, the third hypothesis examines the extent to which:

H3 – the levels of politicization of immigration are driven by the agency of mainstream political parties and national authorities

Lastly, structural top-down explanations associate the degrees of politicization of immigration with the political opportunity structure observed at the domestic level. This approach focuses on 'the dimensions of the political that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action' by influencing their perceptions of potential success or failure (Tarrow 1994, p.85). Therefore, the potential relationship between the openness of the political system and the dependent variable will also be explored in the fourth hypothesis:

H4 – the levels of politicization of immigration are enhanced by the open character of the structure of political opportunities

The next section contextualizes the development of immigration into Portugal.

The three waves of irregular immigration into Portugal

The first wave of immigration into Portugal developed through irregular means, from the 1980s onwards, consisting of citizens from the Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP). This inflow was supported by labour demand engendered by economic growth and the integration into the European project (Corkill & Eaton 1998). Inspired by the Fortress Europe paradigm, the centre-right government led by the Partido Social Democrata (PSD) approved the 1993 law on immigration control and adopted highly restrictive channels for labour immigration. However, this initiative was preceded by the deployment of the 1992/3 regularization programme that benefited 39,166 irregular immigrants¹ and included preferential treatment for foreign nationals from Lusophone countries (Baganha & Marques 2001). The asylum law was reformed in 1993 whilst the 1994 nationality law contained an assimilationist character, as it established preferential treatment which favoured foreign citizens origin in Lusophone countries to the detriment of those with other origins (Carvalho, 2019). In the mid-1990s, a centre-left government led by the Partido Socialista (PS) enacted a second regularization programme that restated the preferential treatment granted in the past, and 35,000 irregular immigrants, mostly from the PALOP, obtained a legal residence status.

This centre-left government liberalized the asylum law in 1998, which now included the granting of the right to work for refugees. Contrary to the case in Ireland (Cunningham, 2015), asylum seeking in Portugal has remained very low to this day despite the revision of the asylum law in 2008.² The integration of European directives into the 1998 immigration law was accompanied by the amendment of the exceptional regularization mechanism for irregular immigrants on grounds of national interest, adding humanitarian purposes. This action enhanced the continued regularization of immigrants settled with an irregular status according

¹ Most of these individuals were origin from Angola, Capo Verde and Guinea. A similar trend was observed at the 1996 regularization programme (Baganha & Marques, 2001).

² Portugal is among the European countries with the smallest number of asylum requests, as indicated by a peak of 507 requests received in 2013 (SEF 2014)

to labour market demand, without the employment of mass regularization programmes. However, this legislative mechanism, alongside the intense demand for unskilled workers, became a powerful magnet of inflows from unexpected origins like Ukraine and Moldova, as immigration was perceived as originating exclusively in Lusophone countries at the time (Baganha 2005).

By 2000, the re-elected PS government received 41,401 requests for the regularization of non-EU citizens, mostly originating in Ukraine and Moldova, under the exceptional regularization mechanism (Baganha et al. 2004). Economic growth and the dramatic expansion observed in the construction and public works sector (supported by public investments in infrastructure), coupled with an intense emigration rate among national unskilled workers, supported the development of the second wave of immigration into Portugal (Baganha 2005; Carvalho, 2018). Given the inbound migratory pressure, another mass regularization programme was included in 2001 immigration law, which granted short-term residence authorizations to irregular immigrants who provided proof of being economically active at the time. Between 2001 and 2002, 174,558 short-term residence authorizations³ were granted by the Portuguese state (Carvalho, 2018). The 2001 immigration law represented the adoption of a '*laissez-faire*' approach by the Socialist government, and the foreign population suddenly doubled, from 2.01% of the total population in 2000 to 3.94% in 2005 (Borrego 2016).

The third wave of irregular immigration into Portugal, consisting of Brazilian citizens, started in the early 2000s, but coincided with the start of the economic decline (Peixoto et al. 2009). These migratory flows from Brazil enhanced the overall stagnation of the size of the immigrant population in Portugal from 2004 onwards, given the departure of many Eastern European immigrants and the stabilization of the community of citizens from the PALOP (Borrego 2016).

³ The top three nationalities of regularized immigrants were Ukrainians, Brazilians, Moldovans (SEF, 2003).

Notwithstanding the establishment of an annual cap on labour immigration in the 2003 immigration law by a right-wing coalition formed by the PSD and the Centro Democrático Social – Partido Popular (CDS-PP), a reciprocal-contracting agreement between Portugal and Brazil was signed in 2003. This agreement allowed for the regularization of Brazilians residing in Portugal with irregular status and vice versa (Baganha 2005). Following pressure from immigrant associations criticizing the preferential treatment granted to Brazilian citizens, a 2004 decree-law enacted by the right-wing coalition government established another partial regularization programme.¹ However, the intense disagreements between the right-wing coalition partners over the signature of the bilateral agreement and the management of irregular inflows led to the low effectiveness of these two partial regularization programmes (Carvalho, 2018).

The new centre-left government elected in 2005 implemented an overt liberal reform of the legislation on immigration control and immigrant integration. Firstly, the centre-left government adopted a multicultural approach with the enactment of the 2006 nationality law and facilitated foreign citizens' access to Portuguese nationality, to the detriment of the past assimilationist model. Secondly, restrictions on freedom of movement imposed on the new A-8 EU member states⁴ were lifted by the centre-left government in 2006, although, in a context of economic stagnation, this policy option failed to attract a new wave of immigration in contrast with the trends observed in Ireland (Cunningham, 2015). Three years later, a similar entitlement was granted to Bulgaria and Romania (SEF 2014). Thirdly, the 2007 immigration law included several mechanisms for exceptional regularization of irregular immigrants, enabling the concession of 53,000 authorizations of residence⁵ by the end of 2009 (Público,

⁴ Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia

⁵ The top three nationalities of the regularized immigrants were Brazilians, Ukrainians and Capo-Verdeans (Público, 2009)

2009). Thereby, the Portuguese state continued to adopt a liberal approach to irregular immigration, albeit without mass regularization programmes.

The return of the PSD/CDS-PP coalition to the national government in the early 2010s produced few changes, as the main innovation involved the introduction in the 2012 immigration law of a residence authorization for investors referred to by the media as the ‘golden visa’. In the context of a deep economic crisis, a continuous decline of the foreign population settled in Portugal was observed as the number of immigrants residing in the country went from 454,191 to 388,731 individuals between 2009 and 2015 (Borrego 2016). By 2011, foreign citizens represented 3.7% of total residents, a small number in comparison to that of other European states (Delgado et al. 2014; Oliveira et al., 2014). Due to the intensity of irregular immigration, estimates highlighted that half of the foreign citizens settled with a legal status in 2006 had benefited from the implementation of regularization programmes (Peixoto et al., 2009). In short, the Portuguese immigration experience is marked by the deployment of successive regularization programmes to placate the domestic demand for unskilled workers, a pattern also observed in Spain (Ros and Morales, 2015).

Methodology

Supported by the theoretical framework proposed by Van der Brug et al. (2015), this investigation carried out a political claims analysis of articles from two distinct printed media sources: a quality newspaper (Público) and a tabloid/popular newspaper (Correio da Manhã) newspaper.⁶ Following the aforementioned research framework, the news articles were selected from a random sample of days ranging from January 1, 1995 to December 31, 2014.

⁶ Media analysis conducted in 2005 indicated that Correio da Manhã was the newspaper with the second highest audience with 10.2 per cent of the market share, followed by Público with 5.1 per cent. By 2011, the Correio da Manhã was the most read newspaper whilst Público remained in the third position (Obercom, 2011)

In total, 930 days were analysed for the 20-year period, which consists of 465 days for each newspaper.⁷ The comparative analysis with the seven other European countries is based on the shorter timeframe employed by Van der Brug et al. (2015), from 1995 to 2009, and a random sample of 700 days. Sampling was done manually by checking all articles in the selected newspapers. Broadly, a political claim is any kind of purposive political demand, proposal or comment made by a collective group in the public sphere that affects the interests of the claimant or another particular group (Koopmans & Statham 2010). Drawing on the content analysis method, claims were categorized according to the codebook proposed by Van der Brug et al. (2015).

The concept of politicization has two dimensions: salience and polarization (Koopmans et al. 2005). The first corresponds to the number of political claims concerning immigration control or immigrant integration found in each article, which can contain more than one claim each. Based on agenda-setting literature, the number of identified claims made by collective actors indicates the overall importance of immigration in the domestic political agenda (Koopmans & Statham 2010). Polarization refers to actors taking different political positions on immigration control and immigrant integration and is measured on a 5-point scale ranging from negative/restrictive to positive/expansive (Van der Brug et al. 2015). An issue is politicized when it is both salient and polarized (Koopmans et al. 2005). Additionally, this investigation disaggregates the collective actors who made the claims, which are also classified according to

⁷ Immigration-related articles found in *Correio da Manhã* were mainly short and almost purely descriptive; many of them deprived of collective actors' claims. Nevertheless, the headlines sought to appeal to emotions. For example, immigrants potentially involved in crimes were reported as: "Immigrants rob stores in Barcelos" (*Correio da Manhã*, 13 of March). On the other hand, immigration-related articles found in *Público* were more extensive in terms of journalistic investigation and tended to include different political actors' claims. In comparison to *Correio da Manhã*, the content and the formal aspects of the articles identified in *Público* were more neutral. Between 1995 and 2014, the research identified more immigration-related articles within *Correio da Manhã* (165) than in *Público* (130), but the number of political claims is higher in the latter newspaper (161) than in the former (133).

a threefold category of frames: instrumental (or pragmatic), identity (or ethical), and moral justifications (Helbling 2014). Lastly, this investigation also employs the descriptive statistics proposed by Van der Brug et al. (2015).

The degree of politicization

Figure 1 indicates the number of claims in the issues of the two daily newspapers published on the randomly selected days, whilst the moving average is better suited for describing long-term trends.

FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE

As Figure 1 suggests, the overall importance associated with immigration in Portugal was low during the selected period. The salience of this social phenomenon was higher throughout the 2000s than in the second half of the 1990s or in the early 2010s. The declining trend observed from the late 2000s onwards confirms the thesis that the salience of immigration fades from the public debate in periods of economic decline while the topic is most likely to be politicized in periods of economic prosperity (Van der Brug et al. 2015). The data highlights two distinct peaks in terms of the salience of immigration. The first surge between 2000 and 2003 can be associated with the development of the second wave of irregular inflows into Portugal mostly originating in Ukraine, Brazil and Moldova. The salience of immigration in 2003 coincided with the intense divergences observed within the PSD/CDS-PP coalition government over the management of irregular inflows. Whereas the leader of the CDS-PP demanded ‘work for the Portuguese, first’ at a party rally in the summer of 2003, the PSD members of government condemned this rhetoric as demagoguery (Carvalho, 2018). Under pressure from the major coalition partner, immigration was downgraded within the government’s and the CDS-PP’s political agenda.

The second peak, between 2006 and 2008, coincides with the stagnation and decline of the foreign population legally settled in the country. This surge reflected the legislative developments introduced by the PS government in the mid-2000s regarding immigration control and immigrant access to national citizenship. The salience of immigration dissipated from 2007 onwards and failed to attract moderate levels of importance thereafter. Considering the low salience of political claims on immigration in the selected timeframe, the lack of public concern with this social phenomenon between 2005 and 2014 is unsurprising (Ec.europa.eu. 2019). According to the Eurobarometer, an average of three per cent of respondents ranked immigration amongst the most important issues affecting their country between the summer of 2005 and the spring of 2007, but the proportion of respondents with a similar perception has declined since (Ec.europa.eu. 2019).

Figure 2 presents the analysis of polarization of political claims on immigration in Portugal throughout the selected timeframe, which is the extent to which the opinions on this social phenomenon vary according to their liberal-restrictive stances. As the data suggest, the overall levels of disagreement on immigration control and integration policy were low between 1995 and 2014 and substantially below the polarization threshold of 0.5 (Figure 2). Consequently, the levels of political conflict over immigration in Portuguese society were remarkably low as indicated by the diminished scope of political divergence identified among the political claims.

FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE

Three different peaks can be observed regarding the weak polarization of debate on immigration in Portugal. The first, observed in 1997, reflect the intense variation between the small number of identified political claims rather than the observation of divergent views. Unlike the first peak, the second increase in 2002 can be associated with the opposition of the CDS-PP to the *laissez-faire* approach towards irregular immigration employed in the early

2000s. The 2001 immigration law proposed by the minority PS government depended on the support of the right-wing party CDS-PP, which negotiated the imposition of an annual cap on labour immigration in the legislation (Carvalho, 2018). Nevertheless, the PS government failed to implement this legislative mechanism, which fostered much criticism from the CDS-PP.

Unlike the other first-order elections which took place during the selected timeframe, immigration also attracted a moderate level of importance before the 2002 general elections (Carvalho, 2018). Research on the political claims concerning immigration carried out during the electoral campaigns for the general elections between 1995 and 2014 suggests that 41 out of a total of 69 claims were made by the Portuguese mainstream parties in 2002. Effectively, immigration was ranked as an electoral priority by the CDS-PP, whose leader – Paulo Portas – characterized the centre-left’s approach to the second wave of immigration as the promotion of ‘the law of the jungle’ and demanded annual caps on inflows (Público 2002). The levels of polarization declined after the formation of a right-wing coalition government in 2002, which watered-down the liberal approach of the preceding centre-left executive and the CDS-PP’s rhetoric on this topic.

The third peak in the polarization of claims on immigration control and integration was observed in 2006, when the centre-left government reformed the legislation on immigrants’ access to national citizenship and on immigration control. Whereas the CDS-PP criticized the government’s proposal for lacking an imposition of integration tests on candidates for naturalization, the far-left Bloco de Esquerda (BE) demanded a more liberal approach. Yet, this legislation was approved by an oversized parliamentary majority including the PS, the PSD and the far-left coalition Coligação Democrática Unitária (CDU), whilst the CDS-PP and the BE abstained. Further political divergences were observed regarding the 2007 immigration law, which the CDS-PP voted against while the CDU and the BE abstained. A convergence between the governing parties was observed once again regarding parliamentary ratification of the 2007

immigration law, as the PSD members overtly recognized their party's aim of building an inter-party consensus to remove this issue from the political agenda (Carvalho, 2018). Hereafter, political disagreements over immigration declined substantially and the 2008 asylum law received unanimous parliamentary support, apart from the PSD's abstention.

The average tone of all political claims on immigration on an annual basis is indicated by the dashed line in the figure. When the average observed in a single year is above 0, it is an indication that the tone of a typical claim is more likely to be in favour of immigrants. By contrast, if the annual average is below 0, then the tone of a typical claim will more likely be characterised as anti-immigration discourse. As the data suggest (Figure 2), the tone of the debate concerning immigration in Portugal was largely pro-migrant, whilst negative views failed to attain a preponderant position at the public level. In general, only 6.5 per cent of the classified claims contained a negative tone towards immigration. In short, the data suggest that immigration was not an issue in the Portuguese political agenda. The next section presents the comparative dimension of this research.

Comparative dimension

Drawing on the study of politicization of immigration in another seven European countries between 1995 and 2009 (Van der Brug et al. 2015), this research suggests that Portugal constituted an exception within the wider European context. Figure 3 presents both salience and polarization of political claims on immigration control and immigrant integration. The data suggest that 2002 and 2006 were the years when immigration was moderately salient and marginally polarized. From a comparative perspective, the salience of political claims on immigration between 1995 and 2009 was below the mean position for Austria, Belgium, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Apart from 1997, a

similar trend can be observed at the cross-national level regarding the levels of divergent views within the political debate on immigration in Portugal.

FIGURE 3 NEAR HERE

From a single case perspective, Ireland was the country with the lowest levels of politicization of the seven selected countries (Cunningham, 2015) although it still presented a higher level than Portugal. The salience of immigration was around one claim per day throughout the 2000s while the levels of polarization oscillated around 0.3 points (Cunningham, 2015). A similar trend can be observed in comparison to the Spanish case study, wherein the salience of this social phenomenon exceeds more than one claim per day throughout most of the 2000s whilst polarization fluctuates around 0.5 points (Ros & Morales 2015).

Unlike the lack of politicization observed in the second half of the 2000s, this research suggests important variations regarding the levels of politicization among recent countries of immigration throughout the 2000s. More than two decades after the onset of the first wave of immigration into Portugal, this investigation casts doubt over the potential convergence concerning the levels of politicization of immigration with older countries of immigration which is expected in the literature (Freeman, 1995). From a general perspective, Portugal seems to be an exceptional case of lack of politicization of immigration.

Discussion

This final section explores the four types of explanations proposed to achieve an understanding of the levels of politicization of immigration in Portugal between 1995 and 2014.

Societal developments

The first set of explanations explores structural bottom-up approaches that focus on socio-structural factors. Supported by the development of three waves of irregular inflows,

immigration expanded steadily until the late 1990s and with acute intensity in the early 2000s, which was then followed by the stagnation and decline of the foreign population from the mid-2000s onwards. Nevertheless, these trends failed to generate grievances in the labour market, because immigrants performed unskilled jobs in the lowest segments of the labour market, jobs which were undesired by native workers (Carvalho, 2018). The first peak in the salience of immigration observed in the early 2000s coincides with the second wave of immigration, mostly originating in Ukraine and Moldova. By contrast, the lack of importance of immigration after the mid-2000s can be associated with the overall decline in the foreign population settled in Portugal. With respect to cultural differences, the origins of most of the foreign citizens in Portugal are former colonial territories that share a close resemblance with it in terms of linguistic, cultural and religious characteristics.

Immigrants from Lusophone countries accounted for 45 per cent of the total number of foreign residents in 2014, whilst the lowest share of 32 per cent was registered in 2002 (Borrego 2016). The lack of a sizeable Muslim community in Portugal (approximately 50,000 individuals in the 2000s; Tiesler 2005) seems to validate the thesis that countries deprived of substantial minorities are less likely to observe political claims regarding this ethnic group (Berkhout & Ruedin 2017). As previously mentioned, the data also confirm a relationship between the salience of immigration and the unemployment rate identified by past comparative research (Van der Brug et al. 2015). In short, the variable levels of politicization of immigration were positively associated with the intensity of inflows during the selected timeframe, whereas the lack of substantial cultural differences and absence of ethnic competition in the labour market help to explain the overall lack of politicization (H1).

Actions of specific groups

This section explores the relationship between the levels of politicization of immigration in Portugal and the agency of specific social actors, such as immigrant associations, anti-immigration parties, and the mainstream political parties (Van der Brug et al. 2015). As Figure 4 shows, the government was the most dominant actor between 1995 and 2014. However, from 2009 onwards, the executive's hegemony was surpassed by the prominence of civil society actors. The succession of economic crises and the decline in the immigrant population settled in the country helps to explain the reduction of the government's claims on this topic. Minority and religious groups were more prominent in the political debate in the late 1990s than throughout the 2000s. The relevant stakeholders, such as employers and trade unions, adopted a positive approach towards inflows (Peixoto et al., 2009). Overall, these three collective actors accounted for 84.4 per cent of the total political claims identified on immigration, whilst the legislative parties were responsible for a mere 10.2 per cent. Thus, the low profile of political parties with respect to immigration enhanced the relevance of collective actors outside mainstream political institutions.

FIGURE 4 NEAR HERE

Most of the claims associated with the mainstream parties were observed from the 2000s onwards and more than half of those were identified in the first half of that decade (Table 1). Thus, immigration was close to attaining moderate salience in the political agenda but this trend failed to persist thereafter. The small number of political claims associated with the mainstream parties between 2006 and 2008 also coincided with a second peak in terms of polarization. From a comparative perspective, the Portuguese parties made less claims (73 claims) throughout the selected 20 years period than its Irish (126 claims) and Spanish counterparts (236 claims) between 1995 and 2009 (Cunningham, 2015; Ros and Morales, 2015). This trend helps to explain the lack of importance of immigration in Portugal in comparison with the European counterparts during the 2000s.

At the party level, the governing parties' PS and PSD adopted a positive tone towards this social phenomenon between 1995 and 2014 whilst a similar interparty consensus was observed in Ireland (Cunningham, 2015). By contrast, the Spanish case study was characterised by significant political competition between the governing parties until 2009 (Ros and Morales, 2015). These trends help to explain the higher levels of politicization in Spain than in the other two new countries of immigration. Both the BE and the CDU employed a very liberal approach, whilst the CDS-PP was the only party to adopt a moderately negative tone. Thus, the convergence observed between the parliamentary parties, with the exception of the CDS-PP, helps explain the lack of politicization of immigration in Portugal.

TABLE 1 NEAR HERE

The research on the frames employed in the identified political claims made by collective actors between 1995 and 2014 (Figure 5) indicates the hegemony of universal principles. Thereby, immigration was mostly associated with political values such as equality, solidarity and fairness. The second most employed frame concerns instrumental considerations, which attained a peak during the early 2000s when the right-wing coalition was in power. This trend distinguishes political discourse in Portugal from that of Ireland and Spain, as the instrumental frame was overwhelmingly dominant in the latter two countries between 1995 and 2009 and immigration was mostly associated with the attainment of pragmatic objectives (Cunningham, 2015; Ros and Morales, 2015). Lastly, the national identity frame was marginally employed in the selected timeframe, as cultural differences were rarely emphasized in the public sphere. This trend is unsurprising since the xenophobic discourse had been dominated by an extreme-right party (Partido Nacional Renovador, PNR) that never exceeded the 0.5 per cent of the vote in general elections (Marchi, 2016). In short, the high proportion of political claims of non-institutional political actors alongside the consensus among legislative parties to frame this

topic positively and downgrade its salience help to explain the overall lack of politicization of immigration during the selected timeframe (H2).

FIGURE 5 NEAR HERE

Policies

Past studies suggested that reforms of the policy on immigration control or immigrant integration can influence the degree of politicization by expanding or minimizing it (Cunningham 2015). The policy of immigration control of the Portuguese state can be characterized as a two-pronged approach: at the discourse level, the national governments propose strict immigration control, whilst the policy level has been characterized by the recurrent implementation of programmes of regularization of irregular immigrants according to labour market demand (Peixoto et al.; 2009). The national governments could have set a policy of active recruitment of workers abroad, but this policy option could have stronger political costs in the context of high rates of emigration and unemployment. When the leader of right-wing parliamentary party CDS-PP sought to politicize immigration in the early 2000s, the PSD delegitimized its minor coalition partner's discourse as demagogic.

On the other hand, the management of inflows was also driven by geostrategic objectives that involved concession of preferential treatment to citizens from former colonial territories to enhance international ties beyond the European context (Baganha, 2005). This pattern makes it difficult to disentangle distinct approaches by the centre-left or centre-right governments regarding immigration control. An inter-party consensus between the governing parties PS and PSD can also be identified on the policy concerning immigrant integration, as evidenced by the oversized parliamentary majority that ratified the 2006 citizenship law. The favourable approach of Portuguese legislation towards immigrant integration also deters minority groups' public campaigns for enhanced access to civil and social rights, as Portugal ranks second on

the Migrant Integration Policy Index since 2007 (MIPEX, 2019). Thereby, the overall lack of politicization was closely associated with the agency of the Portuguese national governments and authorities (H3).

Political opportunity structure

The last set of explanations proposed by Van der Brug et al. (2015) focuses on the structural factors that can propel the politicization of immigration by influencing the actions of political actors focused on immigration and their rate of success in the public sphere. With respect to institutional characteristics, Portugal is a unitary country and a centralized country. These political traits prevent the development of several second-order elections beyond the local elections and the elections for the European Parliament, where the protest vote could be stronger and new issues can more easily become politicized. As a semi-presidential political system, the Presidential elections employs a two-round majority system, and the subsequent requirement to obtain an absolute majority encourages the election of centrist presidential candidates (Freire & Pinto 2010). Also, another electoral constraint in these elections consists of the requirement to present 7500 signatures in order to validate an application, which can pose as an important obstacle to minor parties, as was the case for the PNR leader – José Pinto Coelho (Marchi 2016).

In legislative elections, voters elect 230 members of parliament, who are distributed between 22 constituencies under a proportional electoral system based on the d'Hondt method, which is most favourable to large parties (Jalali, 2007). These elections lack a minimum election threshold, and the BE was able to gain seats in parliament with 2.44% and 2.81% of the votes in 1999 and 2002, respectively (Freire et al., 2008). Furthermore, the high disparity in the number of members elected by each constituency, whereby 47 members of parliament are elected in Lisbon compared to only 2 in Portalegre, provides distinct chances for the emergence

of minor parties. Thus, members of anti- or pro-immigration parties have a greater prospect of being elected in higher-magnitude constituencies like in Lisbon and Porto, which also hold the highest concentration of immigrant communities (Duarte, 2018). However, despite the moderate openness of the Portuguese electoral system, this structural factor has not enhanced the electoral breakthrough of a pro- or anti-immigration party.

Another institutional factor that could influence the politicization of immigration consists of the elections for the European Parliament (EP). Twenty-one Portuguese members of the EP are elected by a national plurinominal constituency and these elections are characterized by very low turnouts. These factors promote a favourable context for the emergence of protest parties or parties positioned on the side-lines of the party system. This was the case with the MPT – Partido da Terra, which elected two members to the European parliament with 7.15 per cent of the national vote in 2014. This party granted moderate salience to immigration but the political claims contained an overt liberal-positive tone towards immigration (Duarte, 2019). Thus, the emergent parties in second-order elections failed to enhance the politicization of immigration at the domestic level. Lastly, the legal recognition of foreign citizens' right to vote in local elections did not foster the emergence of an overt pro-immigration party. In short, the moderate openness of the structure of political opportunities observed in Portugal diverged from the lack of politicization of immigration in Portugal in the selected timeframe (H4).

Conclusion

The low levels of salience and polarization of political claims on immigration between 1995 and 2014 suggest that this topic was not an issue in the Portuguese political debate, except for during the early 2000s. Within this period, immigration was close to attaining moderate salience, but this pattern failed to persist henceforth as the media, the mainstream parties and the public did not attach great importance to the topic. The first peak in terms of salience was

associated with bottom-up factors related to the intensity of irregular inflows in the context of intense labour demand and cultural diversification (H1) while the second moderate peak observed in the mid-2000s was closely associated with legislative developments (H3) rather than with bottom-up factors. The overall lack of politicization of immigration in the selected timeframe is mostly associated with top-down factors related with the consensus between mainstream parties (except the CDS-PP) over the positive approach towards immigration, as well as with its low salience in their political strategies. This trend confirms past suggestions emphasizing the central role of the agency of political elites (H3) to explain the salience and tone of political conflict regarding immigration in the national political agenda.

The comparative dimension indicates that Portugal was the country with the lowest level of politicization of immigration compared with seven other European countries between 1995 and 2009 and constituted an exception. Therefore, substantial divergences were observed regarding the quantity (salience) and the quality (tone and employed frames) of the identified claims on immigration found in the public sphere until 2009. Thus, Portugal failed to converge with the patterns observed in older and new countries of immigration whilst the emergence of the cultural cleavage identified in other European nations by large N studies is yet to be observed. The emergence of the asylum crisis in 2015 at the European level is unlikely to reverse the lack of politicization observed in Portugal. Notwithstanding the Portuguese government proactive approach towards the resettlement programme set at the EU level, only 800 of the 1552 resettled refugees remained in the country by the early 2018 (Público, 2019). Consequently, asylum seeking in Portugal continues to have insignificant levels compared to European counterparts and fails to enhance the politicization of this social phenomenon.

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