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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 more or less successfully mobilised around it, some parts of the media are similarly obsessed with it, and many voters feel just as strongly. 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 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 on their electoral radar screen, only to virtually disappear in 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, leaves a vacuum for the radical right to fill. Immigration becomes an ‘issue’ as anti-immigration parties are able to capitalise on the voters whose concerns about immigration are supposedly ignored by the parties they traditionally support, leaving them with no 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, either as a full-blown coalition partner or as some kind of support party. But although this may be true in some countries it cannot of course 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.

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 in responding 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, it may mean their ability to limit the numbers coming into the country – something that may not be wholly within the control of even the most resolutely restrictionist government.

The immigration 'issue' is of course ideologically loaded, but it can nonetheless be understood as a valance 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' (van der Brug, 2004; Petrocik, 1996) immigration 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 (Inglehart, 1997). However, a 'new' source of conflict emerged which related to 'post-material', or what Hooghe *et al* (2002) have labelled GAL/TAN, issues such as 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 immigration 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 precarious situation 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' 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 make these strains (re)emerge causing framing, positioning and campaigning dilemmas for the political mainstream. For the centre-right, it crystallises a tension between market liberal and culturally conservative wings. The former, predominantly present in Liberal Democratic 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. 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.

The centre-left struggles with a similar dilemma. For Social Democratic and reformed Left parties, limiting immigration can easily be seen as vital in order to retain collective power and good terms and conditions in the labour market. 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 either a ‘leftist’ (international solidarity/free market) or a ‘rightist’ (labour market protectionist/value-conservative) position 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 (re)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? We have also asked them to adopt the same analytical lens in order to not get 'trapped in context' (Bale *et al*, 2010: 412). Of particular concern has been to evaluate the explanatory potential of two competing frameworks. On the one hand, 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 pursued electoral strategies (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, 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 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.

However, this assumes that there is a stimulus-response relationship between immigration 'shocks' and restrictive repositioning – one that does not attribute parties much agency or agenda-setting power. Furthermore, if parties' responses to the presence of populist radical right challengers or various immigration and integration pressures really are so automatic, it is difficult to explain when, and why, immigration does *not* motivate parties 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, we 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. Parties are therefore expected to try to divert attention to issues which they are particularly trusted on if they cannot successfully negotiate, and manage, these opposing 'pulls'. 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 party behaviour to be like, the special issue proposes the following three hypotheses:

H1: 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. If not, not.

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

H3: 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

The cases included in this special issue are in some respects ‘the usual suspects’ when it comes to studying the politics of immigration in Western Europe (Belgium; Germany; the Netherlands and Sweden) but we have also included cases that are covered less frequently (Italy, Greece and Spain). The above countries do not only have a sizable migrant and/or ethnic minority population but they have also, with some exception for the latter three countries, 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’ cluster which is juxtaposed by Sweden, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain who, 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’ (Koopmans and Statham, 2000) and display varying degrees of ‘civic republicanism’ and ‘ethnic segregationist’-traits in their approaches to migrant integration. Finally, the way that the immigration ‘issue’ has figured 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 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 come with quite 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 crucial developments in the Netherlands. In addition, the Swedish parties have showed few signs of trying to accommodate the populist radical right or to incorporate their position.

Italy and Belgium are in comparison the odd cases out. In the former, there are difficulties involved in identifying ‘the mainstream’, especially so 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 opposition to immigration, ranging from Greece (strongest) to Belgium; Germany; the Netherlands; Italy; Spain and Sweden (lowest) (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, 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.

Finally, we have asked the contributors to focus on *both* the centre-right and the centre-left. While previous work tends to focus on how anti-immigration parties in Europe seek to influence policy-making, there is an increasing body of literature that acknowledges the role played by the political mainstream (see e.g. Perlmutter, 1996; Meguid, 2005; van der Brug and van Spanje, 2009). This literature also points to how the immigration 'issue' has often been associated with the centre-left and, especially, with Social Democratic and (reformed) Left Parties, predominantly due to the dominance of this party family in the post-war period and but also because of the particular patterns of immigration that Western Europe experienced from 1945 to 1973 and from 1973 onwards. In a majority of the countries covered in this special issue, centre-left constellations have had a persistent presence and were therefore able to shape immigration and integration policies for a number of years. Since labour migration constituted the main source of newcomers up to mid-1970s, this 'new' working class tended to gravitate leftwards (Ireland, 2004). The link between 'immigrants' and 'the Left' stems from how the former were considered to be part of the Left's core constituencies and where the latter's emphasis on 'equality' meant that immigrants became a key societal group to focus on (Breunig and Luedtke, 2008; see also Messina, 2007). In contrast, the centre-right has had a much more difficult time positioning themselves on the immigration 'issue' since there has not always been an obvious ideological lynchpin to hang their position on. Consequently, when immigration patterns shifted towards asylum and family reunification, the centre-left continued to claim these groups as 'theirs'. The centre-right struggled to come up with a suitable strategy since their inclination towards immigration – tightening border controls and limiting access to citizenship – often coincided with the position that parties further to the right adopted. Therefore, the centre-left has often been central for studies focussing on immigration and integration policies (Bale, 2008) with the implied suggestion that immigration preferences could be read along a Left (Pro) – Right (Anti) continuum. This selective tendency is notable since one can observe a, perhaps surprising, degree of continuity in the immigration policies pursued across Western Europe. Whether immigration policies became more restrictive, or integration policies more demanding, does not always map onto parties' ideological affiliation. 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 (Dummett, 2005; Hinnfors *et al*, 2011).

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

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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?

For the German parties agreeing on direction has been accompanied by 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 a two-fold challenge of how further ownership competition may result in an unwelcome opening for the populist radical right, as well as how the centre-left *and* centre-right struggled with agreeing on what type of issue the immigration ‘issue’ constituted. But equally, the intra-party struggles facing, particularly parts of centre-left, has meant an additional level of complexity when deciding on *which* segment of voters to pursue – the ‘new’ ethnic or the ‘old’ working-class vote? The centre-right has fared comparatively better when 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 however these tensions have rarely translated into any overt *electoral* conflict but have instead remained under the surface. The centre-left 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 the former category thereby avoiding any potential disunity arising from the latter.

In the Netherlands, and to a lesser extent in Flanders as well, all bets appear to be off. Regardless of whether issue positions converge or diverge, or the extent of 'pull' that parties experience, Super notes that 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 the party's position.

The Mediterranean cases provide an illuminating contrast but also a number of similarities to the above examples. Karamanidou's article, for example, highlights how ideological strains, and the overall directional consensus, have indeed come to affect the tactics of the Greek mainstream and how these factors, quite clearly, have pushed parties towards an ownership-style mode of competition. At the same time, however, the sudden (and arguably successful) rise of Golden Dawn has accentuated these strives rather than prompted parties to respond with a dismissive approach or to divert attention elsewhere. And despite converging around largely restrictive positions, Morales and her co-writers find that this has not necessarily translated into a higher frequency of ownership claims among the Spanish mainstream. Rather counterintuitively in fact, the attention paid to, and the degrees of ownership competition over, the immigration 'issue' appear to be out of synch since even the parties that exhibit relatively lower levels of trust emphasise it as much as parties that have higher levels of trust. The Spanish case also suggests a greater role for ideology in the political discourse around immigration but any similar strains to those identified in the other case countries appear, by and large, absent. Parties instead tend to stick to their long standing positions despite political conditions suggesting greater levels of 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 the intra-party *and* inter-coalition dynamics have effectively trumped any hesitation that the more mainstream centre-right parties have experienced when dealing with radical coalition partners such as the

Lega Nord. When the centre-left usually struggles to accommodate labour market protectionism with a focus on international solidarity, the Italian equivalent has been remarkably unaffected by this particular ‘pull’ due to the two-tier structure of the labour market. This situation has thus come to neutralise any destabilising tension between different party wings and factions.

Where does this leave party competition on one of the most ideologically ambiguous policy areas in Western Europe? For starters, the overall picture suggests parties to be cautious creatures that will take the safer *ownership* route rather than to pursue the more perilous *choice* option. A reasonable explanation for this behaviour would be that the choice on offer may very well border that of the mainstream’s more radical competitors. And should the former thus miscalculate and get the balance ‘wrong’, they might find themselves in a particularly unpleasant ideological bear-trap which may be very difficult to get out of (Bale, 2010).

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