







Ideology and Immigration Patterns in European Union (1988–2015)

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ABSTRACT Introduction: The theory points out to the existence of likely links between party ideology and migratory policies, stating that, in principle, values associated with the right, based on nationalism, tend to, restrict immigration dynamics more than those linked to the axiology of the left, anchored in universalism. Does party ideology affect immigration patterns in the European Union? This paper tests the hypothesis that the greater the values in ideology (right-wing governments), the smaller the number of migrants to that specific country. **Materials and Methods:** The research design replicates secondary data from both a parliament and government database (ParlGov) and the Comparative Manifesto Project. We also use data from the Global Bilateral Migration Database and Bilateral Migration Matrix. Besides the descriptive statistics, we examine the relationship between ideology and migration flows. We estimated two regression models to deal with the following dependent variables: net migration and refugee population by country or territory of asylum. **Results:** Using data from ParlGov, Manifesto, and QoG, descriptive statistics has stressed a very heterogeneous cartography of political features, ideology, and migration in European Union countries. The first regression analysis using aggregate data suggests that the greater the values of ideology per country (right-wing oriented), the lower the number of people entering that country. However, the findings from our disaggregated statistical analysis, particularly Model 1, indicate no effect of cabinet ideology on net migration. As for the refugee category for immigrants, our results suggest that right-oriented national governments are less receptive to refugees. Model 2 stated that a one-point increase in ideology is associated with a 13% average reduction in the number of refugees entering the country. **Discussion:** This study advances our current understanding about the relationship between party ideology and immigration patterns. Nonetheless, the results of the regression analysis show limited evidence in favor of our hypothesis that the more to the right of the ideological spectrum governments are, the lower the number of refugees they will accept. However, this analysis is only meant to show a relationship between ideology and migration. Causal claims should be interpreted with caution.

KEYWORDS: European Union; government; ideology; migration; political parties.

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I. Introduction¹

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The permeability of borders has increased with the process of globalization (Kogut 1991; Aman 1994; Simmons & Piché 2002). Goods, capital, and individuals circulate with greater ease, demanding the transformation of the political, social, and economic standards of governance (Munck 2008). However, this transformation elicits different ideological paths. Even if the classic polarization between the right and the left has been attenuated, both approaching after the fall of the Berlin Wall, significant nuances still mark them regarding their conceptions of the functions of the State (Bobbio 1994).

The literature suggests a correlation between party ideology and immigration (Fitzgerald, Leblang & Teets 2014). For example, after studying right-wing

parties in Scandinavia, Anderson (1996, p.505) concludes that migratory pressure matters in voters' choices for these parties. Similarly, Arzheimer (2009) argues that the systems that offer minimal benefits and low unemployment and immigration rates are those that predict the lowest levels of extreme right support. Fisher (2009, p.465) highlights that some elements such as conservatism, liberalism, Christian democracy, nationalism, and libertarianism have been included on the right-wing ideological and philosophical spectrum. Still, Schweisguth (2001, p.203) indicates three possible cleavages: (i) state interventionism / economic liberalism; (ii) religious traditionalism / profane liberalism; (iii) universalistic humanism / rigorist nationalism.

The theory points to the existence of possible links between party ideology and migratory public policies, stating that, in principle, values associated with the right tend to, based on nationalism, restrict immigration dynamics more than those linked to the axiology of the left, anchored in universalism.

Does party ideology affect immigration patterns in the European Union? This paper tests the hypothesis that the greater the values in ideology (right-wing governments), the smaller the number of migrants to that specific country. The research design replicates data from a parliament and government database (ParlGov) and the Comparative Manifesto Project. We also use secondary data from the Global Bilateral Migration Database and Bilateral Migration Matrix.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on immigration and party ideology in Europe. We are particularly interested in the theoretical framework linking ideology and migration flow. Section 3 describes the main features of our research design - data and methods - in order to increase transparency and reproducibility (King 1995; Janz 2016). Section 4 summarizes the descriptive statistics for three secondary datasets and proposes a regression analysis. Section five concludes this work with some final remarks.

II. Immigration and Party Ideology in Europe

² Dataset considering the number of asylum applications. Source: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat>.

According to official data², from mid-2014 to 2015 about 1.7 million immigrants have arrived in Europe. Most of the immigrants crossed the border from Africa and Middle East through Mediterranean Sea motivated by civil wars in their countries of origin, and this is especially true for the Syrian Civil war. This involuntary migration flow has brought the continent new challenges in terms of governance and public policy.

Vice-President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini has characterized the problem as the greatest structural phenomenon of modern times, stressing the need for European institutions to act with precision to raise efforts to address the problem which, according to her, should not be perceived by the continent as a temporary emergency. The creation in 2016 of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, named as Frontex, is the most recent action taken by the European Council to improve border control and the cooperation with national governments close to Mediterranean Sea³.

³ For more information on Frontex, see: <https://frontex.europa.eu/about-frontex/origin-tasks/>

Since the creation of Frontext, the number of irregular immigrants crossing in EU has decreased in 80%. The high number of deaths in the border crossing attempts as well as the strengthening of border control and of the deportation policies are considered possible causes for the recent numbers. In addition, the recent overall raise of the right-wing coalitions in several European countries also might reflect an increase in the intolerance levels to the presence of immigrants⁴. Italian government is the main example of a right-wing coalition which established stricter rules for rescue and acceptance of irregular immigrants in

⁴ For a more specific discussion on intolerance

toward immigrants and other minority groups in Europe, see Candeias (2006).

⁵ Source:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46764500>, accessed on February 20, 2020.

the Mediterranean Sea⁵. Such a context has encouraged academics and managers to raise assumptions about possible political relations around the issue.

According to Franchino (2009), several approaches have tried to explain the migration flows, whether through systemic factors, such as economic stability and post-war transhumance or domestic variables, national policies, and cultural conflicts, for example. However, when a complex decision-making arrangement such as the European Union is added to the analysis, it is not possible to discard completely any of those variables. In fact, the European Union is submitted to a supplementary level of power - Brussels - which makes all decision-making processes much more intricate.

The level of tolerance of national citizens towards immigrants is also portrayed in the literature as an important variable explaining public opinion in policy formulation. Garand, Xu & Davis (2017) assert that previous studies have identified that an increase in migration flows decreases support for a stronger welfare state, which could mean the rejection of leftist parties in elections, since they are often associated with robust states. This occurs because of the increase in racial and ethnic heterogeneity of the community, which also might be correlated to a lower sense of national identity and solidarity (Garand, Xu & Davis 2017, p.7). Following Garand, Joppke (2003) suggests that citizenship legislation matters for the migration issue. He, however, associates the making of such legislation with the political choice of the State and not with its national or cultural specificities. That is, for Joppke:

“center-left governments will make citizenship more inclusive, center-right governments will make it more restrictive for immigrants, and right-wing governments will be more concerned with the citizenship of expatriates” (Sredanovic 2016, p. 440).

The authors identify race as a crucial variable in the United States - unlike Europe - since U.S. citizens perceive immigrants and their descendants, especially those of African origin, as the main beneficiaries of a stronger welfare state. In sum, stereotypes of immigrants, misperception of their professional skills and of their economic situation, and racism are important criteria for understanding American’s conception of how the State and its institutions should function⁶.

As said above, this discussion is even more complex when we turn to a regional context. Markaki & Longhi (2012) investigate how local characteristics impact attitudes towards immigration. For example, why does the level of tolerance toward immigrants vary so much between countries under the European Union governance system regardless of migration flows? The authors propose a new cross-country methodology combining individual and aggregate data sets to explain the anti-immigrant attitudes⁷. Instead of using countries as main cases, Markaki & Longui (2012) use two different data sets that sort the cases by regional characteristics, not only by individual and domestic, but also by anti-immigrant perception.

Despite the confirmation that older and less educated individuals hold stronger anti-immigration attitudes, especially when it concerns immigrants outside the EU, the authors found that: “people living in big cities are less likely to view immigration as harmful, whereas respondents living in rural areas are more prone to express feelings of threat” (Markaki & Longui 2012, p.15).

But this context is only true if the immigrants are working and if there are opportunities to promote inter-group contact, decreasing cultural conflicts.

The results of Markaki & Longui (2012) also suggest that it is not only economic growth and unemployment rates that influence the identification of immigrants as a threat, but also a native’s misperception of the overall situation of

⁶ Garand, Xu & Davis (2017) uses regression models to test support of welfare state spending, including support for specific social programs and their perception of immigrants. They use a survey data set from Cumulative American National Election Studies, from 1992 to 2012.

⁷ Markaki & Longui (2012) use the European Social Survey and EU Labor Force Survey for the years 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008.

the immigrant (their professional skills, their origins, and even their migration flow). Finally, regarding the recent increase in international migration flows, the authors suggest future research should analyze the local conditions for natives to support immigration separately to EU and non-EU immigrants. According to Markaki and Longui (2012), attitudes toward immigration seem to diverge depending on the origin of the migrant.

The literature has also tried to identify how national policies of immigration control might be influenced by migration flows. Based on the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) dataset, Franchino (2009) identified, using a factor analysis, two main immigration trends among European countries since the 1960s. The first trend, which includes Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Sweden, and Switzerland, presents a discontinuous rate of immigration, with peaks and troughs in the period; the second trend, which includes Ireland, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and Norway, has experienced reversed flows; whereas they had high-emigration flows, especially before the European expansion, recently they have become a destination for immigrants. One possible reason for those different trends in immigration rates, especially for the first group, is the implementation of more restricted immigration policies (Franchino 2009, p.405)⁸.

⁸ The United Kingdom and the Netherlands are considered outlier cases. Franchino (2009) points out that these two cases began to increase the immigration control already in the 1960s, hence their immigration rates.

Therefore, the author discusses if and how those policies can be effective in controlling the migration flows. Despite the literature's assertion that mechanisms to restrict the migration flows can only be imperfect Messina (2007, *apud* Franchino 2009) affirms that research focusing on domestic institutions such as (i) the legislative and executive branches, (ii) agenda-setting and veto powers, and (iii) the whole decision-making process could better explain how and when immigration policy control might vary over time, between countries, and even within government coalitions. For instance, some ministers and legislators might set up immigration restriction laws based on a particular country of origin and professional skills, while trying to attract skilled migrants from other countries (Franchino 2009, p.410).

Regarding previous studies, it is possible to assert that the characteristics of both the natives and the immigrants matter for how citizens reacts to the increase in immigration flux. As Markaki & Longui (2012) affirm, the country of origin and status of the immigrant are important variables for identifying the effects of immigration in both national and international arenas. When the immigrant has a refugee status, specific asylum policies need to be discussed and applied to address the problem. According to the authors, this aspect also might impact on citizens' electoral behavior. Dummet (2001) affirms that illegal immigrants have similar characteristics: they are poor, and they are usually fleeing serious problems in their countries of origin, i.e. economic crisis and violence derived from civil wars. For most of them, the costs of waiting for the asylum process to be successfully concluded are too high.

Indeed, refugee status, forged by the 1951 Geneva Convention (as amended by the 1967 Protocol) is very restrictive and reflects concerns rooted in the Cold War. As Peter Burnell stresses:

“the majority of involuntary migrations have arisen in the Third World, following war, civil war, or general civil disorder, often producing an indiscriminate deprivation of basic human rights and economic destruction” (Bunell 2009, p.454)

Petiteville (2012, p.350) stresses that three-quarters of asylum seekers are not granted refugee status. As a matter of fact, they are denied the right to asylum and become *de facto* persons in an irregular situation in the country where they have applied for refugee status.

