

**Erasmus  
University  
Rotterdam**



# From Awareness to Action

*Assessing the impact of issue salience on the strictness  
and inclusiveness of national migration policies in Europe*

MSc. International Public Management and Policy

<b>Author</b>	Max Ellens, 457644
<b>First Reader</b>	Prof. Dr. Markus Haverland
<b>Second Reader</b>	Dr. Pieter Tuytens
<b>Date</b>	28/06/2024
<b>Word Count</b>	11758

# Abstract

The interest surrounding the topic of migration has seen a steep increase over the last decade. Event like the refugee crisis of 2015 made the issue more salient among both citizens and political parties. Right-wing parties, often issue owners of the topic, have benefitted from this and have slowly grown in size and relevance. These parties usually opt for stricter and less inclusive migration laws by framing migration as a security issue and a threat to national identity. But how straightforward is this link? To investigate this, this paper tries to answer the following research question: *“What are the effects of issue salience of migration on the strictness and quality of the policies thereof?”*. By utilising a fixed-effects model to more recent datasets this paper finds that increased levels of public salience among citizens lead to overall stricter and more inclusive migration policies. Additionally, this paper finds that increased levels of attention political parties give to migration do not affect strictness and have a positive effect on the inclusiveness of migration policies.

# Acknowledgement

First and foremost I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Haverland. The valuable feedback and the critical views on my thesis were always useful and without them, this paper would not be the same. Also, special thanks goes out to my fellow students who provided feedback during the thesis circles.

Secondly, I want to thank my sister who, even though she lives in Melbourne, is always ready to provide me with help and feedback whenever I am lost. And finally, I want to thank my parents, who have always supported me and made me always get the best out of myself.

# Table of Contents

Abstract .....	1
Acknowledgement.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Academic relevance .....	5
Societal Relevance.....	6
Literature review .....	6
Theoretical Framework .....	9
National Migration Policies in Europe .....	9
Issue Salience .....	10
Citizens (Demand Side).....	11
Parties (Supply Side).....	11
Methods and Research Design.....	12
Measuring National Migration Policies .....	12
Measuring Issue Salience .....	14
Operationalisation of the dependent variable.....	16
Operationalisation of the independent variable.....	17
Control variables .....	18
Regression .....	19
Results .....	20
Descriptive analysis .....	21
Assumption Checks .....	22
Analysis of the Hypotheses .....	23
Robustness Check.....	26
Discussion, Conclusion and Limitations .....	27
Limitations .....	28
Policy Recommendation and Future Research .....	29
Bibliography.....	30
Appendix: .....	35
Appendix A: Bivariate Correlation Table .....	35
Appendix B: Assumption Checks .....	36
Appendix C: Regression Results for the Hypotheses with Time Dummies .....	37

# Introduction

During the European Parliament Elections of 2024 “a sharp right turn” was expected (Cunningham, 2024). A big reason for that was the presence of migration as an important election topic. Migration has been one of the most relevant and salient political themes in Europe over the last decades (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2013), definitely after the steep incline of refugees during the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015. This led to a rise in popularity among right-wing parties with more strict ideas on migration policies.

This trend was also visible in some of the European member states. In 2023, the Dutch government collapsed when they could not agree on migration-related topics. Afterwards, during the next elections the right-wing Freedom Party (PVV), a topic-owner of migration, recorded a massive victory. Other member states like Sweden and Italy also saw huge victories for right-wing parties in the 2020s. Polls in these years in member states like Germany and France also showed a steep rise in popularity for parties with these same ideologies. According to Davis (2012), the relatively growing strength of populist right-wing parties increases the political salience of migration.

Besides the joint efforts by the European Union (EU), the policy area of migration is still an area over which the member states want to have a certain amount of sovereign control, resulting in migration policies in member states ranging from fairly liberal and inclusive to quite restrictive and less inclusive to migrants.

During the peak of the refugee crisis in 2015, Germany implemented an open-door policy towards refugees from conflict zones in the Middle East. These measurements are mostly remembered by the famous word “*Wir Schaffen Das*” from German Chancellor Angela Merkel with which she tried to ensure that her country was able to deal with all the arriving migrants.

Around the same time, specialised administrative courts had been established by the French government as measures to streamline the operations for asylum. Integration programs have also been initiated in the country to promote social and economic integration of migrants and refugees. Additionally, measures aimed at discouraging illegal migration were implemented, such as increased border protection and dismantling of migrant camps like the one in Calais.

In the EU, Hungary is one of the countries that pushes most dominantly for stricter policies on migration. The Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán’s administration has put in place various measures to prevent and discourage unauthorised entry into his country through irregular means including locking its borders with Serbia and Croatia with barriers. Additionally, Hungary has made it a crime to aid any undocumented migrants. Moreover, the country has strongly stood against the issuance of quotas for relocation suggested by the European Union.

So, all countries in the EU take different measures to deal with migration. Some implement policies that can be described as liberal, where helping immigrants and making them integrate in society is seen as important. On the other hand, there are countries which take a much stricter stance on migration, posing it as a problem to national identity and security. What drives the strictness and inclusiveness of these national migration policies can be a tough question to answer. One possibility is that the growing importance of the topic to many citizens and political parties, fueled by the fear of increased levels of migration, has led to stricter and less inclusive policies. But is that the case? Has the increased salience of migration had any effect on the policies thereof, and if so, what are these effects? These questions lead to the following research question:

*“What are the effects of issue salience of migration on the strictness and inclusiveness of the policies thereof?”*

This research question will be answered by taking a quantitative approach. More specifically, this will be done by performing statistical regressions with data on national policies of member states of the European Union.

### ***Academic relevance***

Political scientists have long accepted the importance of issue salience in influencing policy outcomes. The degree to which migration is politically salient varies and depends on various factors such as economic conditions, security concerns, and cultural shifts. An understanding of how changes in issue salience affect the strictness and inclusiveness of migration policies can provide insights into the operation of policy-making processes. Additionally, researching how issue salience possibly affects migration policies, can contribute to either a better or different understanding of political science literature. In this regard, it will be interesting to explore how public perceptions towards migration influence media coverage and policies, as well as other aspects like how political discourses concerning the integration of migrants are shaped by those involved in that discourse. While many determinants of migration policy have been researched rather recently, issue salience is not one that has seen much attention. With more recent datasets available, this paper can contribute to the development of new insights into the possible dynamics of issue salience on migration policies. These insights can be valuable to the bigger academic debate of what influences migration policies.

## ***Societal Relevance***

Migration policies touch millions of lives worldwide. It is essential to understand what drives these policies. Exploration of issue salience offers new insights into how public and political attention, and talk about migration shape the choices policymakers make. An insight into this dynamic can shed light on what drives policy decisions and, in turn, present us with opportunities where evidence-based policymaking can be used. Bridging the gap between issue salience and migration policies is just as instrumental in understanding societal attitudes toward migrants in society. Public discourse coupled with media coverage largely shapes people's perception of migration which in turn influences policy outcomes. Misinformation, stereotypes, and biases that may inform policy decisions on migration can be identified and challenged by examining the effects of issue salience.

## **Literature review**

This section delves into existing literature on migration policies and their determinants, aiming to identify established factors and potential gaps in research.

Berry et al. (2016) talked about the research on the drivers of migration policy becoming more important in recent times due to the increasing number of migrants coming to Europe. Between the member states there is not much agreement on how to deal with the issue. The lack of good cooperation makes this ambiguity worse (Berry et al., 2016). Polls show that EU citizens are in agreement that more cooperation between member states is needed to solve the issue, but on what fields specifically there seems to be much discussion. These polls also showed that the overall view of EU citizens on migrants has been rather negative, with higher levels of immigration being linked to higher feelings of insecurity (Beutin et al, 2006). This is likely, not unexpected, considering that populist anti-immigration parties and unfavourable media coverage have dominated public discourse on migration in several member states in recent years. According to research conducted by the European Commission, governments negatively affect immigrants' ability to integrate into society, and greater cooperation among EU member states is necessary to manage migration and refugee flows (European Commission, 2022).

Besides the growing interest in questions surrounding migration, systematically comparing policies over a larger period and across countries still seems like a difficult task, thus resulting in most studies focussing on one country specifically (Bjerre et al., 2015). Most efforts failed because they did not address the three major challenges of index building (measurement, conceptualisation, and aggregation) adequately enough and limited the studies to one specific policy field or a short time frame (Bjerre et al., 2015). Besides these difficulties, researchers have tried to find drivers of migration policies. Many of them have opted for qualitative methods like

content analysis (e.g. Gianfreda, 2017), but with the growing amounts of existing data surrounding migration and its policies, quantitative methods are also often used.

One example is the research done by De Haas and Natter (2015) where they sought to find a possible link between the strictness of migration policies and the political orientation of governments. They dismiss the frequently assumed claim that the right-wing governments are more anti-immigration than their left-wing counterparts. They state that this link is more complex, partly because there are many different migrant categories, which gather different levels of support from each party. Besides that, parties can be divided internally, and the influence of political lobbies, like businesses and trade unions can make ideological party preferences more blurry, resulting in more ambiguous policy outcomes at the government level (De Haas & Natter, 2015). Other factors, like economic growth, recent immigration levels, and the electoral system of countries are found to be better indicators.

A paper by Hix and Noury (2007) also tried to look at the determinants of EU migration policies. Instead of the DPD, however, they used sixty-one roll-call votes by Members of the European Parliament (MEP) on six passages of legislation on migration and immigration. With these votes, they created a migration score for all MEPs and they then used regression analysis to investigate these determinants. They found the left-right preferences of the MEPs as the strongest determinant of policy outcomes. Their results thus conflict with the one from De Haas & Natter (2015). Economic preferences of national parties and political preferences of the member states were found weaker determinants.

Another paper by Givens and Luedtke (2005) looked at the effects of political partisanship and issue salience on the restrictiveness of immigration laws in Germany, France, and the UK. They hypothesize that client politics, which can be described as *the exchange of goods and services for political support*, dominates immigration policy-making in liberal states. This keeps restrictiveness towards immigrant rights to a minimum, but when the issue becomes more salient and media coverage increases, the policies become more restrictive. Their second hypothesis states that right-wing parties are more restrictive than their left-wing counterpart when it comes to policies regarding the integration of already-resident immigrants into society. They statistically test these two hypotheses. Big databases or statistics on the strictness of migration policies were however not yet widely available back then. So to measure this, they coded the migration policies themselves and ended up giving each country a score for the timeframe they picked. They measure the salience of an issue by looking at the number of times prominent newspapers talk about migration in the given timeframe. Their analysis confirms both the claim that issue salience has an effect on the restrictiveness of migration policies and that partisanship plays a role in policies regarding the integration of already citizen-migrants (Givens & Luedtke, 2005).

An interesting paper by Abou-Chadi (2016) looked at how the interaction of preferences of parties, electoral competition and political institutions affects the liberalisation of migration policies. It differs from other research by mainly focusing on domestic factors in shaping migration policies. By adding two new elements to the analysis, Abou-Chadi (2016) is able to present a new framework regarding liberal change in the domain of immigration politics. The first one is the addition of "institutional veto points", which represent points during the legislative process where policy can be vetoed. If there are no open veto points, the parties drafting the legislation can safely implement their policies, without the fear of it being rejected during any step of the process. This usually means that this party holds a majority in all the different chambers the legislation has to go through. For this study, Abou-Chadi (2016) used institutional veto points to research the ability of more left-wing parties to change policies to meet their preferences. Secondly, he looks at the amount of electoral competition and how much the immigration issue is politicised. Both of these factors could affect how receptive political parties are to public anti-immigrant attitudes (Abou-Chadi, 2016). Through an analysis of 11 countries between 1980 and 2006, he finds that governments that are oriented left of the centre are more likely to pass liberal migration reforms, with the condition that they do not face an open veto point. Furthermore, higher levels of electoral competition combined with the immigration issue being more politicised reduces the chances that liberal reforms are implemented (Abou-Chadi, 2016).

Another cross-national study by Koopmans et al. (2012) investigated the attribution of rights to immigrants by European countries. The paper looks at different drivers like the role of the judiciary, EU membership, the pressure applied by anti-immigrant parties, the current party in power and the size of the electorate consisting of immigrants. Using regression on data from 10 European countries between 1980-2009, it finds no evidence for cross-national convergence (Koopmans et al., 2012). Immigrant rights tended to become more inclusive up until 2002, but they then stalled. These trends are driven by electoral changes: a growing immigrant population led to expansion, but counterreaction by right-wing parties reversed these liberalisations (Koopmans et al., 2012). Long-standing policy traditions also influence these electoral processes, which results in strong path dependencies and the reproduction of preexisting cross-national differences (Koopmans et al., 2012).

Besides migration policy, some papers looked at the effects of issue salience on other policies. An interesting one is by Bromley-Trujillo and Poe (2018) who looked at how the salience of environmental issues affects climate policy adoption in different states of the United States. One of the interesting ways they measure issue salience is by looking at the number of times citizens of the United States searched for climate-related issues. This data is easily accessible via Google Trends and provides accurate measures of citizens' interest and concern about certain topics.

They find that states where climate change is viewed as more of an issue and where the topic receives a lot of attention implement more relevant climate policies. (Bromley-Trujillo & Poe, 2018).

To conclude, quantitative migration studies are not new. While some statistically tried to find determinants of migration policies, others focussed more on the migrants themselves. The effects of issue salience, however, have recently not been researched much, and not with the more advanced data available. This paper tries to fill this gap by combining work done by previous researchers and using recent databases to gain new insights.

## Theoretical Framework

This part will present the theoretical structure to analyse the effects of issue salience on migration policies. It will first give a brief history of the development of national migration policies in Europe. Afterwards, it will focus on salience and explain the differences between demand side and supply side issue salience. After explaining each of these differences, it will introduce the hypotheses that will be investigated in this paper.

### ***National Migration Policies in Europe***

Migration has been around for centuries, which means that migration policies have also been. To get an idea of what drives current migration policies it is useful to understand what historically drove national European migration policies and to see how much they fluctuated.

After World War II, labour shortages were experienced by many European countries. Therefore, to deal with the problem, most of them advocated for labour migration. However, the oil crisis of the 1970s and subsequent economic downturns increased unemployment rates and hence enhanced concern for social cohesiveness. As a result, various countries found it necessary to pursue more restrictive migration policies (Doomernik & Bruquetas-Callejo, 2016).

The biggest turning point in European migration policy was the Schengen Agreement of 1985 whose objective was to create an area without internal boundaries among member states. In order to restrict migratory flows, it became essential to tighten controls at external borders while simultaneously enhancing freedom of movement within the Schengen Area. Later events such as the end of the Iron Curtain and wars in the Balkans further changed migration dynamics and responses by European states (Doomernik & Bruquetas-Callejo, 2016).

The beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed a surge in migration from outside the EU, which was attributed to globalization, rising conflicts and climate change. Following increased concerns about terrorist acts and an increase in populist and nationalist sentiments, there was a growing security concern. In response to these trends and concerns countries felt the need to

implement tougher asylum laws, stricter border controls and measures to discourage irregular migration (Doomernik & Bruquetas-Callejo, 2016).

In the 2010s, member states of the European Union had engaged in a polarising debate with some advocating for additional humanitarian measures while others demanded more stricter laws. The then ongoing migrant crisis worsened by wars in the Middle East and North Africa had underscored the difficulty of regulating migration and respecting human rights and international agreements. Still, the changing political climates and international dynamics are shaping historical trends for immigration policies as EU member states struggle with their problems (Doomernik & Bruquetas-Callejo, 2016).

### ***Issue Salience***

Following the Oxford Dictionary, a salient issue can be defined as: *“an issue with the quality of being particularly noticeable or important”*. In academic literature, however, the term is surrounded with wide ambiguity, best described by Miller et al. (2016): *“Despite its frequent use in the literature, issue salience has more often been a vague metaphor than a precisely defined scientific concept with an accepted operationalization”*. Both on the demand side (i.e. citizens) and the supply side (i.e. politics) a wide variety of terms are used to describe the same topic. Besides these same definitions, Dennison (2019a) found one consequential divergence in how issue salience is defined. Some defined it in psychological terms, meaning how important someone believes an issue to be. Others described it solely in behavioural terms as the weight someone gives to an issue when making (typically electoral) choices (Dennison, 2019a). Still, these two definitions are closely connected. The people who assume that issue salience is psychologically exogenous to behaviour, state that the main mechanism that explains the effect salience has on one's behaviour is the possibility that the attachment of importance to an issue may activate someone's emotional system (Miller et al., 2017). The behaviour observed as a result includes increased and more targeted exposure to specific topics and deeper consideration of party stances on particular issues (Ciuk & Yost, 2015) due to more accessible, stable, and influential attitudes about less salient issues. Additionally, Weaver (1991) found that when an issue becomes more salient, people are likely to become increasingly involved in politics and increase their knowledge of the possible causes and solutions of the specific issue.

So, issue salience can be defined in slightly different ways with different implications for every definition. However, at its core, all of these definitions agree that issues are considered salient when they are considered prominent and important to a larger part of the public.

### ***Citizens (Demand Side)***

Issue salience is an important dimension of democratic politics and public opinion (Paul & Fitzgerald, 2021). Addressing the issues that the public considers important is necessary for a responsive democratic government. In that sense, when there is deep concern among citizens about particular issues, they can shape agendas, political debates, and even policy outcomes (Paul & Fitzgerald, 2021). Personal salience of issues, this means the importance that people give to problems that personally affect them, is mostly stable over time. This phenomenon is referred to by Krosnick (1988) as “*attitude importance*”. This contrasts with salience on a national scale. The importance people assign to issues facing their country as a whole tends to fluctuate significantly more. Previous research has emphasised the importance of public opinion and issue salience in the explanation of the volatility of migration policies. Mostly, because relatively big parts of the electorate all across industrialised democracies view migrants rather differently (Sides & Citrin, 2007). Most citizens vote in terms of what they see as the best interests of the country, thus what issues are most pressing, as well as in self-interest (Wang, 2017). Public issue salience is mostly determined by trends and exogenous events and in that sense independent from cues by media or politics (e.g. McAllister & Oslan, 2021). However, the media can slightly moderate the effects of exogenous social trends, but is restricted in what issues to cover and so is limited in their influence (Dennison & Kriesi, 2022). In democracies, the people have the power, which means that agreement by a majority of the population could lead to policy changes through popular vote. Dennison (2019b) showed that the increasing salience of migration led to the rise of populist right-wing parties in Western Europe. These parties are usually issue owners of immigration and share beliefs of a strong and safe nation-state. They see immigration as a big threat to these beliefs and thus opt for stricter migration policies. Additionally, these parties tend to be less favourable to integration policies that make society more inclusive to migrants; like the granting of citizen-, labour-, and welfare rights to them (Natter et al., 2020). This all taken together leads to the first set of hypotheses:

*H1a: Increasing demand-side salience of migration leads to stricter migration laws.*

*H1b: Increasing demand-side salience of migration leads to less inclusive migration laws.*

### ***Parties (Supply Side)***

For political parties, it is more difficult to steer the salience of certain issues and set agendas. For the most part, they are forced to follow the interest of the voters, but voters do not necessarily respond to parties (Klüver & Spoon, 2014). It does not mean that parties have zero control over public issue salience (e.g. Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010), but more, that this control is restricted by external elements and the need to properly respond to them (Dennison & Kriesi,

2022). Besides the lack of influence on “what” issues become salient, parties do have an influence on who becomes the issue owner, so which party is seen as most competent in dealing with the most pressing issues currently at play. If certain parties prioritise certain issues for longer periods, this can lead to an association with an issue from which parties with radical left, radical right or green ideals mostly profit (Walgrave et al., 2015). The perceived incompetence of several established parties on salient issues has frequently preceded recent political shifts in Europe. This is generally followed by the emergence of new challenger parties, which have the advantage of seeming internally cohesive on these issues (Dennison & Kriesi, 2022). Migration is a good example of an issue where this became clear. When higher levels of immigrants came to Europe in the mid-2010s, many European citizens viewed the mainstream parties in their national governments as incompetent in dealing with this problem. This led some voters to shift their votes to more right-winged parties that had addressed this issue for longer periods and thus felt more capable of dealing with the issue (Dennison, 2019b). These parties mostly suggested stricter migration laws to get a “tighter grip on migration”. This also included a harsher stand on migrant integration laws which these parties saw as a threat to the identity of their nation. To regain voters lost to these parties, the mainstream parties tended to also take a more strict and less inclusive stance on migration, which can be seen in their party manifestos (MARPOR, 2024). In that way, the growing political salience can lead to stricter and less inclusive migration laws, which leads to the second set of hypotheses:

*H2a: Increasing supply-side salience of migration leads to stricter migration laws.*

*H2b: Increasing supply-side salience of migration leads to less inclusive migration laws.*

## Methods and Research Design

This chapter will introduce the methods and variables used to test the hypothesis. It will start by explaining how the strictness of national migration policies and issue salience can be measured. It will then state the operationalisation of the dependent and independent variables and it will introduce the control variables used in the regression

### ***Measuring National Migration Policies***

One of the biggest challenges regarding the cross-country comparison of migration policies has been to quantify complex migration policies. Because such fabricated indicators by which migration policy could be measured still do not exist, comparing the migration policies of different countries is difficult (Hatton, 2014). Additionally, not much is known about how countries set their migration policies and to what extent these policies have shaped migration

patterns worldwide (Rayp et al., 2017). The lack of complete and comparable data on migration policies mostly illustrates this lack of knowledge (Rayp et al., 2017).

Czaika and De Haas (2013a) stated that because migration policies are qualitative in nature, it has been challenging to provide a systematic approach for comparing and assessing them across countries and periods. The main reason is that most countries allow for several entry tracks depending on a variety of factors rather than establishing their migration policies uniformly through general quotas (Czaika & De Haas, 2013a). A limited number of data collection initiatives have created indexes that make cross-country comparisons over time possible. The main problem is that most of them tend to focus on a specific aspect of migration policy, such as integration or citizenship policies alone, thus ignoring potential interaction or compensation effects. Additionally, their time coverage and included countries can be quite limited, thus minimising the possibilities with these indexes (Czaika & De Haas, 2013a). A good additional insight is given by Bjerre et al. (2015), who pointed out that of the three stages of index building (conceptualisation, measurement and aggregation), none of the efforts to quantify policy up to now have included all three. Questions regarding aggregation, for instance, how to combine qualitative and quantitative data and how to deal with measurement errors, have gotten much less attention. Still, without being perfect, this paper is going to use two statistics for the measurement of immigration policies.

The first measurement is the DEMIG POLICY Database (DPD) (DEMIG, 2015). This database consists of 45 countries and it tracks over 6500 changes in migration policies between 1945 and 2020. The database keeps track of all the policies that were implemented and it defines these as *“rules (i.e., laws, regulations, and measures) that national states define and [enact] with the objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of [...] migration”* (Czaika & de Haas 2013b). The database makes a distinction between the magnitude of change in each policy (fine-tuning, mid-level or major) and also highlights in which policy area the legislation falls (border and land control, exit, legal entry and stay, and integration). To illustrate these differences, some Dutch legislation is highlighted below

In 2006 the Netherlands adopted a policy that made the granting of entry visas for family members of immigrants conditional upon them passing a civic integration exam in the country of origin. It was the first nation in the world to impose such integration conditions for the entry of foreign family members. The DPD therefore labelled this as a major policy change in the area of legal entry and stay which made the existing legal framework more restrictive. In comparison, in 2007 the Dutch government adopted a policy that extended the job search period for just-graduated foreign students with one year. The DPD labelled this as a fine-tuning policy in the integration area which made the overall legal framework less restrictive.

Unlike many of the other metrics that exist, this dataset does not take the policy stance of a country into account but solely looks at the implemented policies, and whether they made the overall legal framework stricter or less strict. De Haas et al. (2015) state that the dataset is not meant for use in cross-country comparisons, but it can be a valuable tool for researching the determinants of migration policy. This makes the DPD a useful tool for this paper.

The second tool for measuring migration policy is the MIPEX, which is short for the Migration Integration Policy Index (Niessen & Huddleston, 2009). The index outlines the political tendencies toward migrant integration in ten OECD countries and all EU members. Currently, the MIPEX includes metrics that fall into eight fundamental categories related to migration policy: anti-discrimination, family reunion, length of stay, political engagement (representation), national acceptability, labour market access, access to health services and access to education (McLaren, 2015). The index is a helpful tool for comparing and evaluating the measures taken by the governments of all nations that were examined to encourage migrant integration (Maksimović & Milosavljević, 2022).

While both indexes measure migration policies there are two differences between them. First, the DPD tracks all policies that have to do with migration while the MIPEX only covers policies that have to do with the integration of migrants into a country. Secondly, the DPD tries to label all the policies as objectively as possible into different categories, without making any value judgements about them. The MIPEX, on the other hand, measures all the integration policies and, with the help of self-created policy indicators, ranks each country on a scale of 0 to 100 in each policy area. This makes cross-country comparison possible while this is not the case when using data from the DPD. Thus for this research, the DPD will be used as an indicator of the strictness of migration policy and the MIPEX as a measure of its inclusiveness of migration policy.

### ***Measuring Issue Salience***

Measuring the salience of an issue can be quite complex, which is reflected by the different ways researchers have chosen to measure it. Some decided to use the number of times an issue is mentioned by the media (e.g. Givens & Luedtke, 2005; Roby et al., 2018), whilst others used the attention to a certain issue in party manifestos as a measure of salience (e.g. Abou-Chadi, 2016; Costello et al., 2020). Another commonly used measure is the amount of worry citizens express about a topic (e.g. De Vries, 2018; Dennison, 2019; Crawley et al., 2021). The idea is that when large numbers of citizens are deeply concerned about something, the salience of an issue can be considered high.

Specifically, finding migration an “issue” usually resonates with negative feelings about it, like it posing a fear to national security or identity (Bigo, 2016). It usually does not mean something like seeing it is an issue that migrants are not helped enough. Stricter and less

inclusive migration policies like limiting the number of immigrants entering the country, stricter border controls or higher entry barriers for entering the labour market are all suggested solutions to these fears. In that sense expressing concerns about migration links to the wish for stricter and less inclusive migration policies.

Citizen concern is usually found through first or secondary survey data by asking them what the most important issues (MIIs) or most important problems (MIPs) their country or themselves are currently facing are (Dennison, 2019b). Because these questions are usually ordinal in nature, which means respondents are asked to name two or three MIPs, it means that the salience of these issues is typically relative to other issues (Wlezien, 2005). There are some examples of citizens being asked about their perceived salience on certain issues according to a metric (e.g. Yang, 2015). While the choice of a certain metric can be quite random, the upside of this approach is that there is no cut-off, because the respondents are asked their attribution of salience to all issues of interest. Additionally, salience's ability to predict the favourability of politicians, voting intentions, policy preferences, and social involvement is significantly influenced by the referent object of the survey question, such as personal or national salience (Miller et al., 2016). A survey that somewhat accounts for this is the Eurobarometer, which asks respondents what they believe are the MIIs affecting themselves, their country or Europe as a whole. In these results, a wide variation can be found between issues that respondents found personally important to the various referent units (Dennison, 2019a).

During the last century, one of the key debates among researchers was about the relative quality of open- and close-ended MII questions. The former was supposed by some to provide more authentic answers, while the latter was assumed to be more accurate by providing precise parameters of what is meant by salience (Dennison, 2019a). A widely accepted view on this debate was given by Geer (1991), who used an experiment to show that open-ended questions result in a true representation of salience rather than just tapping into surface-level issues. Measuring issue salience with data provided by surveys using open-ended questions therefore became the more common way.

Recently, better measures have increased the quality of surveys. While this makes the measuring of issue salience via survey data increasingly better, some issues remain. In addition to the effect of the salient object, the number of questions posed in surveys has not yet been properly researched (Dennison, 2019a). Moreover, isolating the specific causes and effects of certain salient issues remains difficult because of the relative nature of ordinal measurements. More future research comparing studies using absolute and ordinal measurements of salience has to be done to better understand these differences.

One notable contribution to the difference between salience as a behavioural or psychological concept was given by Kioussis et al. (2015). They state that citizens can find an issue salient

without necessarily being of any importance for how they make decisions or vote. To account for this potential flaw, surveys can ask what the MIIs were that directly affected their vote choice instead of just asking citizens about the MIIs.

Salience expressed by citizens translates rather easily to political salience. When certain issues make it onto the public agenda it is important for parties to systematically address these issues. While many of these issues come and go onto the public agenda, some eventually make it to the party system agenda, which means that established parties have picked up the issue. Because these issues will influence party competition regarding them, they can be seen as politicised (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2010). A common way to measure the party system agenda is by taking the average issue attention of all governmental parties (Green-Pedersen & Mortensen, 2014). This is mostly done by looking at the party manifestos, as this is a place where parties highlight which issues they see as salient and possibly internalised. While some researchers use the share of certain words in manifestos as an indicator for the political salience of an issue (e.g. Alonso & Da Fonseca, 2011), others go a step further by using these shares in more advanced mathematical methods to calculate indicators of political issue salience (e.g. Costello et al., 2020). Either way, party manifestos are the most common way to measure issue salience amongst political parties.

### ***Operationalisation of the dependent variable***

The next two parts will talk about how both dependent and independent variables were measured and operationalised.

In the DPD, all newly adopted migration policies of a country each year are labelled as “less restrictive”, “more restrictive” or “not available”. In the database, the label *not available* also includes policies that did not change the overall restrictiveness of the legal framework. These policies were removed as they were not relevant to this research. All policies that were labelled as being less restrictive were coded with -1 and all policies labelled more restrictive were coded with +1. For every year the average of all these was taken. This gave every country a yearly score between -1 and 1, indicating how much less- or more restrictive their overall migration policy in that year had gotten. This paper will refer to this yearly country score as *Strictness of Migration Policy (SoMP)*.

The MIPEX rates migration policies on a scale between 0 and 100. Because the index measures policies which cover the level of integration of migrants, the overall score can be seen as the level of inclusiveness of the overall migration framework. A score of zero indicates a non-inclusive framework whereas 100 resembles a framework which is fully inclusive for migrant integration. From now on in this paper, the MIPEX score will be referred to as *Inclusiveness of Migration Policy (IoMP)*. For the indicators of migrants’ accessibility to healthcare and education,

scores before 2010 were only available for some countries. Therefore, the overall score without healthcare and education is used, to cover a larger timeframe. The MIPEX has available data from 2007 thus making this the start year of the analysis. Furthermore, MIPEX data for Croatia is only available from 2010, thus excluding the country from this research.

### ***Operationalisation of the independent variable***

To measure the amount of concern that European citizens express about migration this paper uses the results from the Eurobarometer (European Union, 2024). This Survey is conducted twice a year by the European Commission and asks a wide range of questions to a representative sample of citizens from all EU member states. Some questions are more personal, like ones asking about life satisfaction, while others are more broad like questions on the amount of trust people have in the European Union. There has been some scepticism of the European Commission their role as a director, but besides that, the Eurobarometer remains one of the most reliable sources when it comes to large-scale European survey data (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016).

One of the questions states: *“What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?”*. A wide range of issues like *‘crime’, ‘unemployment’* or *‘housing’* are then shown as a percentage of the total number of people who answered that specific issue. In the included rounds *“immigration”* is an answer given by at least some, which makes the Eurobarometer a useful measure to track the differences in concern about immigration over time. So, for every year there are two numbers between 0 and 100 which tell how much of the population of a European country finds immigration to be one of the two most pressing issues facing their country at that time. Because the Eurobarometer score expresses the amount of concern the *public* has about migration, the score will be referred to as *Public Attention*.

To measure the amount of focus political parties lay on migration this paper uses the data from the Manifesto Project Database (MPD). This is a database compiled by the Manifesto Research on Political Representation (MARPOR) project which gives a *“quantitative content analyses of parties’ election programmes from more than 50 countries covering all free, democratic elections since 1945.”* (MARPOR, 2024). To measure the salience of the immigration issue in these party manifestos the operationalisation suggested by Alonso and da Fonesca (2011) will be used. The final year where manifesto data is available for most EU countries is 2018, thus capping the researched period of this paper at this year. Additionally, manifesto data for Luxembourg and Malta was fairly limited and covered only a couple of years, which is why they were excluded from this research.

In the MPD dataset, every sentence of a manifesto is coded into one of 56 issue categories. So, it is possible to calculate the percentage of each issue to the overall number of sentences in the

manifesto as it includes the total number of sentences each manifesto devotes to each category. This makes the salience score simply the rate of mentions the issue receives in a specific manifesto. None of the categories in the database specifically state immigration, but Alonso and da Fonesca (2011) found five categories that correspond to either a positive or a negative framing of immigration. These five categories are *'multiculturalism negative'*, *'national way of life: positive'*, *'underprivileged minority groups'*, *'multiculturalism: positive'* and *'law and order'*. By adding up these five percentages you get the total percentage that a party manifesto talks about migration issues. Between 2007 and 2018 an average national party manifesto of European countries dedicated 9.39 per cent of its words to migration. This percentage expresses the amount of attention *political parties* give to migration, so further on this percentage will be referred to as *Political Attention*

Of these five, the *'law and order'* category seems the most broad. Whilst the other four feel more closely linked to migration, law and order is much wider. Alonso and da Fonesca (2011) acknowledge this as well, by stating that some of the things that this category covers have nothing to do with migration. This possibly inflates the relevance of migration in some manifestos, but excluding it could mean the absence of a fundamental frame used by some parties. Other studies (e.g. Arzheimer, 2008; Arzheimer & Carter, 2006) have also chosen to include the law and order frame, which strengthens the decision to include the category in this research as well.

### ***Control variables***

There are possibly many other effects that influence the strictness and inclusiveness of migration policies. To control for these this paper introduces some control variables. An important note, however, is made by Achen (2005), who criticises many social scientists for using more control variables than necessary. He states that: *"Many social scientists believe that dumping long lists of explanatory variables into linear regression, probit, logit, and other statistical equations will successfully "control" for the effects of auxiliary factors."* As a consequence of doing this, these regression models are likely to be inaccurate.

On the other hand, omitted variable bias is one of the primary statistical challenges in nonexperimental design. Failing to control for variables that have a strong correlation with the dependent or independent variable makes the error term correlated with the independent variable, thus leading to biased coefficient estimates. (DeMaris, 2014). It is therefore important to ensure a theoretical underpinning for the control variables used in this regression. To make sure no unnecessary variables are used, all of them are based on previous research by De Haas and Natter (2015).

The first set of control variables are related to economic cycles. Regardless of how salient migration is, the idea is that when unemployment decreases and the economy grows, governments are more willing to persuade liberal and more inclusive migration policies (De Haas & Natter, 2015). Therefore, the regression includes a one-year-lagged change in unemployment rates and a one-year-lagged GDP per capita growth to control for these effects. The data for both variables is drawn from the Database of the World Bank (2024).

Finally, the orientation of a government (left-wing, centre, or right-wing) possibly affects the strictness of national migration policies. It is widely believed that left-wing governments tend to be more lenient towards liberal and inclusive migration policies and the opposite is true for right-winged governments. Alonso and da Fonesca (2011) however, showed it is not as black and white as many think and that different forms of migration can get different levels of support. For example, left-wing parties are usually more concerned with protecting labour rights in their respective countries. This means they are usually less liberal towards labour migration and integration of migrants into the labour market than right-wing parties. De Haas and Natter (2015) did find some effects of the political orientation of a government on the strictness of migration policies. While these were not strong, controlling for them is necessary.

To control for these effects a variable is added that showcases the political orientation of governments. The data is drawn from the Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS), which provides annual institutional and political data for 36 countries between 1960 and 2021 (Armingeon et al. 2022). It provides info in any given year on which share of the government consisted of right-wing, centre and left-wing parties.

### ***Regression***

The collected data contains observations about different cross-sections across time, which makes it panel data. The problem is rather static which makes a dynamic model not ideal. To estimate panel data, several methods can be used. One option is to pool all the data and apply Ordinary Least Squares (OLS). However, an important assumption when using pooled OLS is that all entities in the dataset are believed to have the same characteristics and that there are no unobservable entity-specific effects. (Balgati et al., 2008). This assumption is highly unlikely when the characteristics of countries can highly differ. Therefore, it is rather plausible that pooled OLS will yield inconsistent results.

Another option is the use of a fixed-effects model. As stated earlier, omitted variable bias can be an issue when conducting a non-experimental design. Besides properly selecting control variables, using a fixed-effect model for analysing panel data can help address the issue of omitted variable bias (Fox, 2008). The reasoning is that when standard statistical approaches estimate variation between units, the potential for omitted variable bias and heterogeneity is

maximised (Hill et al., 2019). When utilising a fixed-effects model, the variation is contained within units. This minimises the potential for omitted variable bias and heterogeneity (Hill et al., 2019). The underlying assumption is that more variation is present between units than within units. Variation on its own gives a challenge while it must be controlled either statistically or by design when the variation is associated with dependent and independent variables (Hill et al., 2019). Using each individual unit as its own control variable, the fixed-effects model removes all features from the estimating equation that are constant within groups, whether measured or not (Hill et al., 2019).

For this research, it means that the fixed-effects model makes it possible to draw conclusions regarding the population as a whole, while still controlling for all country-specific effects. To do this, the fixed-effects model creates dummy variables for each country. These dummies were then treated as fixed effects in all the regressions. Hill et al. (2019) highlight some possible limitations, like a lack of statistical power or time invariance. However, in this research, most of these limitations are countered by the relatively large period and the wide variability in variables over time (Hill et al., 2019)

For these regressions, dummies are only included to control for country-specific effects, not time-specific ones. The reasoning behind this is that one should never control for mediating variables (Hayes, 2018). Big events like the financial crisis of 2008 and the refugee crisis of 2015 could be seen as important sources to either make migration an MIP for citizens or to shift their focus away from it. So, these events affect concerns among citizens and affect political attention to the problem, thus influencing the variables used in the regressions. Therefore, controlling for time takes away valuable information.

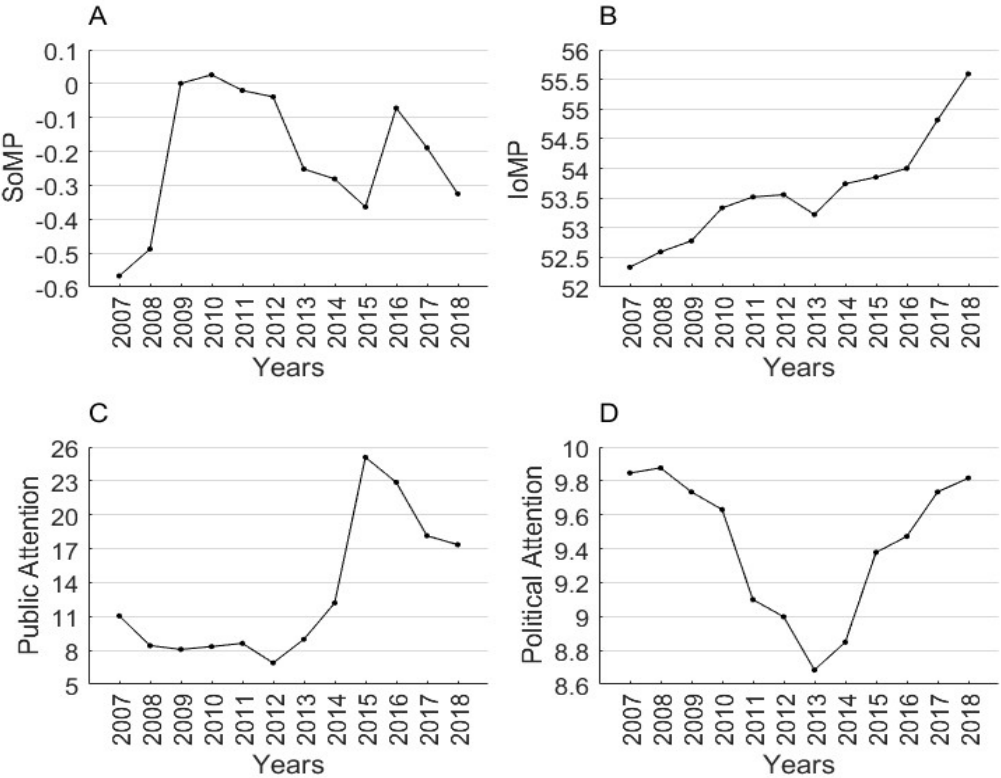
Four models are made, each having either the SoMP or the IoMP as the dependent variable and the two measurements of issue salience as the independent variables. These four models are then estimated using Matlab (version 9.14.0 (2024a), The MathWorks Inc., Natick Massachusetts). Additionally, Matlab is used to check for possible significant correlations between the different variables used in the model and to run a variety of tests to check for the validity of the results.

## Results

This section will discuss the results found from the data. It will start with some descriptive statistics that look at the raw data. With the help of graphs, some trends in the data will become clear which will give a better understanding of it. Then, some tests will be conducted to check for some of the assumptions underlying the regression (Stockemer, 2019). Afterwards, the

hypotheses will be discussed with the help of the results and finally, a robustness check will be conducted to strengthen the reliability of the results.

**Figure 1**  
*Dependent and Independent Variables Over Time*



**Descriptive analysis**

To get a better insight into the different trends of the independent and dependent variables, the averages of all the countries per year are plotted between 2007 and 2018 in Figure 1. Regarding migration in Europe, these years were rather interesting, mainly because of the refugee crisis in 2015.

Firstly, the line in Figure 1A (SoMP) fluctuates between -0.6 and 0.1, indicating that less restrictive laws were adopted more frequently each year than the stricter ones. This graph clearly shows two spikes after 2008 and 2015 where the overall migration policy became noticeably stricter than the year before. These two years correspond with two significant events in Europe. The financial crisis in 2008 and the refugee crisis in 2015. While it is evident how the latter could have affected the SoMP, for the former it is not as clear. It could be that when countries were faced with rising public expenditure on welfare and social services as a result of the financial crisis, they encouraged tighter immigration controls to reduce perceived economic burdens

Unsurprisingly, the line in Figure 1B shows much less variation. The reasoning is simple; it is rather unlikely that a country will drastically change its migration policy in a year, resulting in big changes in the IoMP between years.

The line in Figure 1C only saw a big jump in 2015, which makes sense, because the refugee crisis made the topic of migration rise on many people's agendas and made the issue much more salient in a short period. Interestingly, this does not hold for all European countries, because country-specific graphs of Public Attention show that some southern European countries like Italy and Spain or countries not on the mainland like the UK had much higher levels of Public Attention already before 2015.

Figure 1D shows that from 2007 onwards the interest of parties slowly drifted away from migration, but this quickly changed in 2015 when the line moved swiftly upwards, thus again seeing the effects of the refugee crisis. The only difference between this and the other graphs is that the line keeps going upward, which means that in the years after 2015, parties kept giving more attention to migration-related topics in their manifestos. This is probably because countries do not hold elections every single year. This means that in consecutive years after 2015, parties were still able to use the events in 2015 for the first time, thus devoting more space in their manifestos to migration than before.

All taken together, these four graphs can give a good first insight into the data and the different trends regarding citizens' concerns about migration and how parties and governments responded to those.

### ***Assumption Checks***

To get a sense of how the different variables relate to each other when not controlled for other variables, this paper deployed a correlation analysis, which can be found in Appendix A. It is important to note that both independent variables should measure different concepts for the model to work properly. The Variance Inflation factors (VIFs) of both independent variables indicate that there are no signs of multicollinearity issues present in the models (Stockemer, 2019). Besides the multicollinearity assumptions, there are a few other assumptions that should be met to ensure the proper working of the model so that conclusions can be drawn safely and results can be interpreted (Stockemer, 2019). The data was checked for the standard regression assumptions of homoskedasticity and independence using a Durbin-Watson test and probability plots respectively, both assumptions were met. For more information regarding these assumption checks, see Appendix B.

Besides these assumptions, the fixed effects model requires one additional assumption. The model assumes that there is variability in both the independent and dependent variables over time (Stockemer, 2019). Put more simply, the values of these variables must change over the

studied period. If this is not the case, it makes no sense to include these variables because there is nothing to be analysed and studied. Looking at the graphs in Figure 1, all four variables show some variation over time. This means that none of the dependent and independent variables are constant, thus meeting this assumption.

### ***Analysis of the Hypotheses***

So, with all the assumptions of the regression met, the results for the four different models are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
*Regression Results for the Hypotheses*

<i>Dependent variables &amp; Independent/Control Variables</i>	<i>Model 1: Strictness of Migration Policy</i>	<i>Model 2: Strictness of Migration Policy</i>	<i>Model 3: Inclusiveness of Migration Policy</i>	<i>Model 4: Inclusiveness of Migration Policy</i>
<i>Public Attention</i>	0.076 (0.003) **	-	0.382 (0.048) **	-
<i>Political Attention</i>	-	0.0103 (0.0152)	-	1.803 (0.148) **
<i>One year lagged Unemployment Rate</i>	0.016 (0.009) *	0.0154 (0.010) *	0.638 (0.141) **	0.538 (0.123) **
<i>One year lagged GDP per Capita Growth</i>	-0.022 (0.008) **	-0.016 (0.008) *	0.474 (0.127) **	0.307 (0.102) **
<i>Orientation of Government</i>	-0.227 (0.054) **	-0.209 (0.055) **	2.225 (0.161) **	1.772 (0.704) **
<i>Intercept</i>	-0.180 (0.176) *	-0.0642 (0.213)	36.466 (1.027) **	38.233 (1.221) **
<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.149 **	0.144 **	0.198 **	0.223 **
<i>Country Dummies</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

*\*p<.05 \*\*p<0.01*

The Adjuster R-squared of the first model is 0.149, which means that the model is able to explain 14.9% of the variance in Public Attention. With the low number of control variables, this low value is still reasonable (Cohen et al., 2013). This model finds that Public Attention has a

significant and slightly positive effect on the strictness of the migration policy of a country. In other words, if citizens of a country express increasing amounts of worry about migration this will lead to stricter policies in the country. Quantifiably, if the percentage of European citizens expressing immigration as one of the two most pressing issues faced by their country increases by 1, the strictness of immigration policies will increase by 0.076. This significant relation thus confirms hypothesis 1a. The effect is small, but this was as expected, while policymaking and the drafting of legislation is a long and complex process, not often met with big unexpected changes. Still, it is interesting to see that the worry of citizens significantly influences this process in some way. The data, however, does not provide clear-cut answers to how this increased worry leads to stricter policies. A possible explanation, as also stated briefly in the theoretical framework, is that in order to stay in power in democracies, one has to win elections. Not adhering to the will and needs of the voters could lead to devastating electoral losses later on. The people in power, thus the ones deciding over new legislation, therefore respond to the increased worry about migration. This worry is usually expressed by a fear of safety or the loss of national identity, to which stricter migration laws could be a possible solution. By adopting stricter migration laws, the people in charge hope to satisfy the voters to remain in power.

All three control variables are also significant and their effect is as expected. Higher unemployment rates lead to stricter migration laws while a growing GDP per capita has the opposite effect. Finally, the more right-wing a national government is, the stricter its country's migration laws will be. The effect of the unemployment rate and GDP per capita growth is quite small, definitely in comparison to the effect of the orientation of the government. This suggests that economic events have a lesser impact on the strictness of migration policy than the orientation of the government. A reason for this could be that more right-wing governments already tend to be less lenient towards liberal migration policies, regardless of how the economy is doing. When unemployment rises and GDP per capita decreases, it depends on the type of government whether they see stricter migration policies as a possible solution to these trends, thus making the direct effect of these economic cycles weaker to the overall strictness of migration policies.

The second regression has an R-squared of 0.144, thus the model is able to explain 14.4% of the variance in Political Attention. Besides the three control variables being significant and showing the same relation with the dependent variable as the first model, the independent variable is not significant. This means that there does not seem to be any indication that the amount of words parties dedicate to migration in their manifestos has any effect on the strictness of that country's migration policies. That these results are solely true for this specific model is rather unlikely. The non-significant correlation between the two variables in Appendix A strengthens the case that attention in party manifestos does not seem to affect the strictness of

migration policies, thus rejecting hypothesis 2a. Reasoning for this might be found in which parties increase the focus in their manifestos to migration-related topics. Because Political Attention is an average of all parties during an election, a high score could already be achieved if only some parties significantly increase their party manifesto focus to migration. As stated earlier, these are mostly more extreme right-wing or populist parties which often do not enter the government, thus not giving them the power to change policies. In that way, overall attention to migration by parties during elections could increase without directly affecting the policy thereof.

The overall bigger coefficients in the third and fourth models compared to the first two merely come because the value of the SoMP is between -1 and 1 while the value of the IoMP is between 0 and 100. Thus an increase in one of the variables will lead to a much bigger change in the IoMP than in the SoMP score.

The third model has an adjusted R-squared of 0.198, thus this model can explain 19.8% of the variance of Public Attention, which is slightly more than the first model. This model finds a significant positive relation between Public Attention and the IoMP. If the percentage of European citizens stating that immigration is a pressing issue for their country increases by one, this leads to a rise in a country's IoMP of 0.382. This would suggest that an increased amount of worry by citizens about immigration will lead policymakers to draft bills that eventually increase the inclusiveness of migration policies of their country in general, thus rejecting hypothesis 1b. It is difficult to say precisely what causes this relation, but one possibility can be found in the way a government might tackle the concerns of citizens regarding migration. Namely, seeing increasing integration of migrants into the labour market and society as a possible solution. This makes migrants feel more like part of their country and less of a separate group. This in turn could alter the view of the general public by seeing migrants and migration less as an issue. One country that has utilised labour market integration of migrants as a way to address public concerns about migration is Sweden (Sandberg et al., 2022).

The three control variables also give some interesting results. It is to be expected that a higher GDP per capita leads to increased quality of migration policies. However, that an increased unemployment rate has an ever bigger positive effect is a bit more unexpected. A possible explanation could be the fact that migrants are also part of the unemployed. One of the indicators of the IoMP is labour market mobility. In attempts to solve the rising unemployment rates, countries might also possibly do a better job in supporting migrants in finding jobs, thus leading to an overall increase in the IoMP in this area. Non-surprisingly, the final control variable states that the more left-wing a government is, the more inclusive the migration policies will be.

The final model gives some rather interesting results. This regression has an R-squared of 0.223, thus the model can explain 22.3% of the variance in Political Attention. The effect that

Political Attention has on the IoMP is significant. Additionally, the coefficient is much bigger than the one from Public Attention in the third model. Namely, an increase of Public Attention by one leads to an increase of 1.8 on a country's IoMP. This might be a bit unexpected, as increased mentioning of migration in manifestos is usually thought to be mostly dedicated to ideas of a "tighter grip" on migration, including the stricter ideas proposed with these visions. The significant positive correlation between the SoMP and the IoMP in Appendix A, however, suggests that these stricter migration policies will lead to an increase in the inclusiveness of these policies. So at first glance, the positive impact of the Political Attention on the IoMP score seems illogical. By closely looking at the data though, the relationship makes more sense.

Another explanation for the positive relation could be found by looking at the composition of Political Attention, which is a combination of five categories that highlight both positive and negative frames about migration. An increase in Political Attention could therefore also arise when parties that opt for more inclusive migration policies increase their manifesto focus on migration topics. All three control variables yield no new insights, as they all have roughly the same significant effect as in the third model.

### ***Robustness Check***

To ensure the reliability of the findings, running the regression in a slightly different way is valuable. This will help verify that the results are not sensitive to specific model specifications or assumptions and hold true under diverse conditions.

As previously explained, the economic crisis of 2008 and the refugee crisis of 2015 both affected public and political attention towards migration, which makes time an important mediating factor in this analysis. Controlling for it would thus weaken or even remove the effect of independent and control variables on the dependent variables. To see if the decision to not control for time-specific effects was justified, an additional analysis was run where time-specific dummies were added, the results of which can be found in Appendix C.

As expected, for all four different regressions all the coefficients of the independent variables become insignificant. The same holds true for both the lagged GDP per capita growth and the lagged unemployment rate, for which time is also an important factor regarding their effect on the dependent variables. Unsurprisingly, the only variable that remains significant is the orientation of the government, for which time is not as valuable to properly affect both the strictness and the inclusiveness of migration policies. These results strengthen the choice to not control for time-specific effects and therefore strengthen the reliability of our model and results.

## Discussion, Conclusion and Limitations

Recently, migration has become a hot topic in the political arena. During the 2010s, it has been an important theme during many national elections in Europe. Right-wing parties, often issue owners of the topic, have benefitted from this and have slowly grown in size and relevance. These parties usually opt for stricter and less inclusive migration laws by framing migration as a security issue and a threat to the identity of a nation. But how straightforward is the link between the increased salience of migration and the strictness and inclusiveness of the policy thereof? To investigate this relationship this paper tried to answer the following research question: *“What are the effects of issue salience of migration on the strictness and quality of the policies thereof?”*.

On the demand side of issue salience, which in this paper is defined as the amount of worry citizens express about migration, a positive effect on both the strictness and the inclusiveness of migration policy was found. So the more citizens see migration as an important issue faced by their country, the stricter their country’s migration laws will become. This will, however, also lead to more inclusive migration policies. While this might seem a bit contradictory at first, a positive correlation between the strictness of migration laws and the inclusiveness thereof helps to explain this. It could solely be that stricter migration policies yield better inclusiveness to migrants overall, but that does not seem plausible. A possible explanation for this positive correlation can be found in the way the governments might want to tackle migration issues.

On the supply side of issue salience, which this paper defined as the percentage of party manifestos dedicated to migration, this paper finds no effect on the strictness of migration policies and a positive effect on the inclusiveness of migration policies. So the more parties mention migration during elections, the better the overall inclusiveness of a country’s migration policy will be. The absence of a relationship between Political Attention and the SoMP could be explained by the fact that heightened concern about migration mostly comes from parties that eventually do not take place in the government, thus not affecting the policies. The presence of a positive effect on the IoMP could be a bit surprising, but the fact that this effect is rather large is more unexpected. The positive relation between the SoMP and the IoMP gives one possible explanation for this. Another explanation for this could be found by looking at the fact that Political Attention consists of both positive and negative categories about migration, meaning that heightened Political Attention could also mostly consist of positive attention.

The three control variables lead to less surprising results. A growing GDP per capita leads to less strict migration laws with an overall higher quality. A growing unemployment rate has the opposite effect on strictness but surprisingly it has a positive effect on the quality of a country’s

migration policies. Additionally, the more right-wing a government is, the stricter the country's migration laws will be, where it is the other way around for the inclusiveness of the policies.

These results add to the academic debate on the drivers of migration policies. Givens and Luedtke (2005) already found the existence of a significant relationship between issue salience and the strictness of migration policy. However, their research only covered three countries. The findings of this paper make these claims more broadly applicable to EU countries in general. Previous research on the drivers of the inclusiveness of migration policies looked mostly at political factors or the orientation of the government (e.g. Koopmans et al., 2012). The results in this paper add issue salience, by political parties specifically, to possible drivers of the inclusiveness of migration policies. In the future, this means that policymakers and researchers can not ignore the attention political parties attribute to migration issues when covering the inclusiveness of migration policies.

### ***Limitations***

This research also had its limitations. The first one of this research was the exclusion of one possible control variable; the immigration rate of a country (which is immigration as a percentage of the total population). It was left out of the regression due to too much missing data. The possible influence of this variable on the strictness of migration policy was suggested by De Haas and Natter (2015). For many countries, the data was either incomplete or absent. Common sources like EUROSTAT only had data available from 2011 while other sources like the DPD only had rates available until 2011. Combining multiple sources was not an option because all sources measured immigration in slightly different ways.

Secondly, the supply-side salience was measured by using party manifestos. However, no country holds elections every year, thus the MDP Dataset is missing consistent yearly data. Moreover, the inclusion of "*Law and Order*" as one of the five-issue categories to measure the percentage of a manifesto dedicated to migration is questionable and more prone to subjectivity. This category covers a broad range of topics, including some migration-related ones. Therefore, if excluded, the analysis will miss an important frame used by parties to cover migration. However, the inclusion of this category also meant that the significant correlations of Political Attention and the two dependent variables might partly be explained by other law and order categories than the migration-related ones.

Finally, due to the lack of manifesto data from Malta and Luxembourg and the lack of Croatian data from the MIPEX, these countries were excluded from the analysis. This makes the results less generalisable for the EU as a whole.

### ***Policy Recommendation and Future Research***

The results of this paper lead to a certain recommendation for policymakers. The results indicate that policymakers take two different routes when addressing the increasing saliency of migration. They either draft stricter or more inclusive legislation. For a democracy to properly function, it is important to respond to citizens' concerns accordingly. Therefore it would be valuable for policymakers to more clearly understand what citizens want when they express increased amounts of concern about migration. One idea is for countries to organise citizens' assemblies about migration, where a group of citizens is drawn together from a country to deliberate on the issue. The membership is drawn in such a way that it reflects the structure of the population, ensuring that it is a diversified and representative sample. This approach brings together different perspectives and experiences in addressing complex problems in a democratic and inclusive manner (Fournier et al., 2011). Successful examples include an Irish assembly on abortion (De Londras & Markicevic, 2018) and a French assembly on climate legislation (Labrador & Zografos, 2023).

The results also lead to certain recommendations for future research. First, this research could be extended beyond European borders. Demographic differences could lead to different effects of issue salience on strictness and inclusiveness of migration policies. Future research could also investigate whether issue salience has effects on other kinds of policies. Migration policy is surely not the only policy area affected by the increased salience of the issues associated with it. Finally, the regressions gave some interesting relationships which would need further investigation to be explained. The first one is the positive relationship between the strictness and inclusiveness of migration policy. While one would think that stricter migration policies would lead to less inclusive policies, the data proved the opposite to be true. The lack of a significant effect of Political Attention on the strictness of migration policy also spawned some questions. Future research could use the MDP dataset more extensively to make a distinction between political attention from parties in the government and opposition parties to see if these show significant differences. If this is the case, this could possibly explain the lack of a significant relationship between Political Attention and the inclusiveness of migration policies.

# Bibliography

- Abou-Chadi, T. (2016). Political and institutional determinants of immigration policies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(13), 2087–2110.
- Achen, C. H. (2005). Let's put Garbage-Can regressions and Garbage-Can probits where they belong. *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, 22(4), 327–339.
- Alonso, S., & Da Fonseca, S. C. (2011). Immigration, left and right. *Party Politics*, 18(6), 865–884.
- Armingeon, K. Knöpfel, L., Weisstanner, D. and Engler, S. (2022) 'Comparative Political Data Set I 1960–2021', edited by University of Berne Institute of Political Science. Bern.
- Arzheimer, K. (2009). Contextual Factors and the Extreme Right vote in Western Europe, 1980–2002. *American Journal of Political Science*, 53(2), 259–275.
- Arzheimer, K., & Carter, E. (2006). Political opportunity structures and right-wing extremist party success. *European Journal of Political Research*, 45(3), 419–443.
- Baltagi, B. H., Bresson, G., & Piroette, A. (2008). To pool or not to pool?. In *The econometrics of panel data: Fundamentals and recent developments in theory and practice* (pp. 517-546).
- Berry, M., Garcia-Blanco, I., & Moore, K. (2016). Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: a content analysis of five European countries. United Nations High Commission for Refugees. <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/87078/1/UNHCR-%20FINAL%20REPORT.pdf>
- Beutin, R., Canoy, M., Horvath, A., Hubert, A., Lerais, F., Smith, P., et al. (2006). Migration and public perception. European Commission: Bureau of European Policy Advisers (BEPA), European Commission. <https://briguglio.asgi.it/immigrazione-e-asilo/2006/ottobre/bepa-migr-percez-pubbl.pdf>
- Bigo, D. (2016). Frontiers of fear: immigration and insecurity in the United States and Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 42(4), 689–693.
- Bjerre, L., Helbling, M., Römer, F., & Zobel, M. (2015). Conceptualizing and Measuring Immigration Policies: A Comparative Perspective. *the International Migration Review/International Migration Review*, 49(3), 555–600.
- Bromley-Trujillo, R., & Poe, J. (2018). The importance of salience: public opinion and state policy action on climate change. *Journal of Public Policy*, 40(2), 280–304.
- Castles, S., De Haas, H., & Miller, M. J. (2013). *The age of migration: International population movements in the modern world*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Ciuk, D. J., & Yost, B. A. (2015). The effects of issue salience, elite influence, and policy content on public opinion. *Political Communication*, 33(2), 328–345.
- Cohen, J., Cohen, P., West, S. G., & Aiken, L. S. (2013). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Routledge.

- Costello, R., Toshkov, D., Bos, B., & Krouwel, A. (2020). Congruence between voters and parties: The role of party-level issue salience. *European Journal of Political Research*, *60*(1), 92–113.
- Crawley, S., Coffé, H., & Chapman, R. (2021). Climate Belief and Issue Salience: Comparing two dimensions of public opinion on climate change in the EU. *Social Indicators Research*, *162*(1), 307–325.
- Cunningham, K. (2024). A sharp right turn: A forecast for the 2024 European Parliament elections. ECFR. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/>
- Czaika, M., & De Haas, H. (2013a). The effectiveness of immigration policies. *Population and Development Review*, *39*(3), 487–508.
- Czaika, M., & De Haas, H. (2013b). The Globalisation of Migration: Has the world really become more migratory? International Migration Institute.
- Davis, A. (2012). The Impact of Anti-Immigration Parties on Mainstream Parties' Immigration Positions in the Netherlands, Flanders and the UK 1987-2010: Divided electorates, left-right politics and the pull towards restrictionism. European University Institute.
- De Haas, H., & Natter, K. (2015). The determinants of migration policies. Does the political orientation of governments matter. IMI Working Paper 117. <https://imi.socsci.ox.ac.uk/publications/the-determinants-of-migration-policies-does-the-political-orientation-of-governments-matter>
- De Haas, H., Natter, K., & Vezzoli, S. (2015). Conceptualizing and measuring migration policy change. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *3*(1). 1-21
- De Londras, F., & Markicevic, M. (2018). Reforming abortion law in Ireland: Reflections on the public submissions to the Citizens' Assembly. *Women's Studies International Forum*, *70*, 89–98.
- DeMaris, A. (2014). Combating unmeasured confounding in cross-sectional studies: Evaluating instrumental-variable and Heckman selection models. *Psychological Methods*, *19*(3), 380–397.
- DEMIG (2015). DEMIG POLICY, version 1.3, Online Edition. Oxford: International Migration Institute, University of Oxford. [www.migrationdeterminants.eu](http://www.migrationdeterminants.eu)
- Dennison, J. (2019a). A review of Public Issue Salience: Concepts, Determinants and Effects on Voting. *Political Studies Review*, *17*(4), 436–446.
- Dennison, J. (2019b). How Issue Salience explains the rise of the populist right in Western Europe. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *32*(3), 397–420.
- Dennison, J., & Kriesi, H. (2022). Real-World trends, public issue salience, and electoral results in Europe. Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.
- De Vries, C. E. (2018). *Euroscepticism and the future of European integration*. Oxford University Press

- Doomernik, J., & Bruquetas-Callejo, M. (2016). National immigration and integration policies in Europe since 1973. In *Integration processes and policies in Europe: Contexts, levels and actors* (pp. 57–76).
- European Commission. (2022). Eurobarometer Qualitative Study - Integration of Immigrants in the European Union. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2276>
- European Union (2024). Eurobarometer. Retrieved from <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home>
- Fournier, P., Van Der Kolk, H., Carty, R. K., Blais, A., & Rose, J. (2011). *When Citizens Decide: Lessons from Citizen Assemblies on Electoral Reform*. Oxford University Press.
- Fox, J. (2008). *Applied regression analysis and generalized linear models*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Geer, J. G. (1991). Do Open-Ended Questions measure “Salient” issues? *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 55(3), 360.
- Green-Pedersen, C., & Mortensen, P. B. (2010). Who sets the agenda and who responds to it in the Danish parliament? A new model of issue competition and agenda-setting. *European Journal of Political Research*, 49(2), 257–281.
- Green-Pedersen, C., & Mortensen, P. B. (2014). Avoidance and engagement: Issue competition in multiparty systems. *Political Studies*, 63(4), 747–764.
- Gianfreda, S. (2017). Politicization of the refugee crisis?: a content analysis of parliamentary debates in Italy, the UK, and the EU. *Italian Political Science Review / Rivista Italiana Di Scienza Politica*, 48(1), 85–108.
- Givens, T. E., & Luedtke, A. (2005). European Immigration policies in comparative perspective: issue salience, partisanship and immigrant rights. *Comparative European Politics*, 3(1), 1–22.
- Hatton, T. J. (2014). The economics of international migration: A short history of the debate. *Labour Economics*, 30, 43–50.
- Hayes, A. F. (2018). Causal Steps, Confounding, and Causal Order. In *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis: A Regression-Based Approach* (pp. 132–139).
- Hill, T. D., Davis, A. P., Roos, J. M., & French, M. (2019). Limitations of Fixed-Effects models for panel data. *Sociological Perspectives*, 63(3), 357–369.
- Hix, S., & Noury, A. (2007). Politics, not economic interests: Determinants of migration policies in the European Union. *International Migration Review*, 41(1), 182–205.
- Hobolt, S. B., & De Vries, C. E. (2016). Turning against the Union? The impact of the crisis on the Eurosceptic vote in the 2014 European Parliament elections. *Electoral Studies*, 44, 504–514.
- Kiousis, S., Strömbäck, J., & McDevitt, M. A. (2015). Influence of Issue Decision Salience on Vote Choice: Linking Agenda Setting, Priming, and Issue Ownership. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 3347–3368.

- Klüver, H., & Spoon, J. (2014). Who responds? Voters, parties and issue attention. *British Journal of Political Science*, 46(3), 633–654.
- Koopmans, R., Michalowski, I., & Waibel, S. (2012). Citizenship Rights for Immigrants: National Political Processes and Cross-National Convergence in Western Europe, 1980–2008. *American Journal of Sociology*, 117(4), 1202–1245.
- Krosnick, J. A. (1988). Attitude importance and attitude change. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 24(3), 240–255.
- Labrador, A. G., & Zografos, C. (2023). Empowerment and disempowerment in climate assemblies: The French citizens' convention on climate. *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 1-13.
- Maksimović, A., & Milosavljević, Z. (2022). Liberal vs restrictive concept of the EU immigration policies. *Serbian Journal of Management*, 17(2), 439–450.
- MARPOR (2024). Manifesto Project. Retrieved from <https://manifesto-project.wzb.eu/information/documents/information>
- McLaren, L. M. (2015). *Immigration and perceptions of national political systems in Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- McAllister, J. H., & Oslan, A. B. (2021). Issue ownership and salience shocks: The electoral impact of Australian bushfires. *Electoral Studies*, 74, 102389.
- Miller, J., Krosnick, J. A., & Fabrigar, L. R. (2016). The origins of policy issue salience: Personal and national importance impact on behavioural, cognitive, and emotional issue engagement In *Political psychology* (pp. 139-185). Psychology Press.
- Natter, K., Czaika, M., & De Haas, H. (2020). Political party ideology and immigration policy reform: an empirical enquiry. *Political Research Exchange*, 2(1), 1735255.
- Niessen, J., Huddleston, T. (2009). *Legal Frameworks for the Integration of the Third Country Nationals*. Brill.
- Paul, H., & Fitzgerald, J. (2021). The dynamics of issue salience: immigration and public opinion. *Polity*, 53(3), 370–393.
- Rayp, G., Ruysen, I., & Standaert, S. (2017). Measuring and explaining Cross-Country immigration policies. *World Development*, 95, 141–163.
- Roby, N., Gonzales, P., Quesnel, K. J., & Ajami, N. K. (2018). A novel search algorithm for quantifying news media coverage as a measure of environmental issue salience. *Environmental Modelling & Software*, 101, 249–255.
- Sandberg, J., Fredholm, A., & Frödin, O. (2022). Immigrant organizations and labor market integration: The case of Sweden. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 24(3), 1357–1380.

- Sides, J., & Citrin, J. (2007). European opinion about immigration: the role of identities, interests and information. *British Journal of Political Science*, 37(3), 477–504.
- Stockemer, D. (2019). *Multivariate Regression Analysis. In Quantitative Methods for the Social Sciences: A practical introduction with examples in SPSS and STATA* (pp. 163–174).
- The World Bank (2024). World Development Indicators. Retrieved from <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>
- Vaughan-Williams, N., (2015) Europe's Border Crisis: *Biopolitical Security and Beyond*. Oxford University Press.
- Walgrave, S., Tresch, A., & Lefevere, J. (2015). The conceptualisation and measurement of issue ownership. *West European Politics*, 38(4), 778–796.
- Wang, A. H. (2017). Patience as the rational foundation of sociotropic voting. *Electoral Studies*, 50, 15–25.
- Weaver, D. (1991). Issue Saliency and Public Opinion: Are There Consequences of Agenda-Setting? *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 3(1), 53–68.
- Wlezien, C. (2005). On the saliency of political issues: The problem with 'most important problem.' *Electoral Studies*, 24(4), 555–579.
- Yang, J. Z. (2015). Altruism during Ebola: risk perception, issue saliency, cultural cognition, and information processing. *Risk Analysis*, 36(6), 1079–1089.

# Appendix:

## *Appendix A: Bivariate Correlation Table*

<i>Variables</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<i>1. Strictness of Migration Policy</i>	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>2. Inclusiveness of Migration Policy</i>	0.137 *	1	-	-	-	-	-
<i>3. Public Attention</i>	0.217*	0.149*	1	-	-	-	-
<i>4. Political Attention</i>	-0.317	-0.278*	0.140*	1	-	-	-
<i>5. Unemployment Rate</i>	0.054	-0.053	-0.230*	-0.113*	1	-	-
<i>6. GDP per Capita Growth</i>	-0.177*	-0.123*	0.059	-0.048	-0.197*	1	-
<i>7. Orientation of Government</i>	-0.102*	0.075	0.094	-0.137*	0.059*	-0.029	1

\* $p < 0.05$

## ***Appendix B: Assumption Checks***

A proper working of the model requires an absence of multicollinearity, which means that both independent variables need to measure different concepts (Stockemer, 2019). The more correlation there is between two variables, the more explanatory power they will take from each other. If relevant variables are too highly correlated with other relevant variables, they can become insignificant in the model, which is problematic (Stockemer, 2019). By looking at Appendix A, both of the independent variables are not so highly correlated that they might influence the working of the model, thus leading to biased results. This means that there are no signs of multicollinearity issues being present in our models (Stockemer, 2019). These findings are strengthened by the low Variance Inflation factors (VIFs) of both independent variables, with scores of 1.11 and 1.13 for public attention and political attention respectively.

It is also important that the two standard regression assumptions of independence and homoscedasticity are met (Stockemer, 2019). The former indicates that all of the model's cases are independent of each other. To check for this assumption a Durbin-Watson test can be used, which tests for autocorrelation in the residuals of a regression. With Durbin-Watson values of all four models being between 1.45 and 1.75, there seems to be no sign of autocorrelation, thus confirming independence. Homoskedasticity implies that the variance of all different variables is assumed to be equal. This assumption can be checked by looking at the probability plots of the regressions. These show that the residuals of all four models roughly follow a normal distribution, which confirms the assumption of homoskedasticity (Stockemer, 2019).

### **Appendix C: Regression Results for the Hypotheses with Time Dummies**

<i>Dependent variables &amp; Independent/Control Variables</i>	<i>Model 1: Strictness of Migration Policy</i>	<i>Model 2: Strictness of Migration Policy</i>	<i>Model 3: Inclusiveness of Migration Policy</i>	<i>Model 4: Inclusiveness of Migration Policy</i>
<i>Public Attention</i>	0.014 (0.004)	-	0.013 (0.026)	-
<i>Political Attention</i>	-	0.017 (0.016)	-	-0.130 (0.173)
<i>One year lagged Unemployment Rate</i>	0.009 (0.011)	0.002 (0.011)	0.076 (0.071)	0.059 (0.073)
<i>One year lagged GDP per Capita Growth</i>	-0.004 (0.011)	-0.012 (0.012)	-0.044 (0.064)	-0.043 (0.067)
<i>Orientation of Government</i>	-0.201 (0.054) **	-0.194 (0.055) **	1.310 (0.324) **	1.449 (0.328) **
<i>Intercept</i>	-0.114 (0.209)	0.111 (0.239)	36.052 (1.195) **	37.525 (1.391) **
<i>Adjusted R-squared</i>	0.195 **	0.174 **	0.221 **	0.254 **
<i>Country &amp; Time Dummies</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

\* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < 0.01$