

Does Immigration Matter? Claiming Ownership, Priming Salience: Far-Right Electoral Success in Western Europe

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Author's Declaration

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Kocha Changelia

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Abstract

Over the past two decades, the resurgence of far-right parties in Western Europe has sparked extensive scholarly inquiry, particularly around immigration's role in shaping electoral outcomes. While much of the literature has emphasized anti-immigration sentiment as a key driver, empirical evidence remains mixed. This study investigates far-right success in Austria and Germany through a combined lens of issue salience, issue ownership, and policy convergence. Using a mixed-methods approach that draws on the Eurobarometer, AUTNES, GLES, and the Comparative Manifesto Project, it examines how the interaction between immigration salience and perceived party competence influences individual-level vote choice. The study also introduces a novel measurement of immigration policy convergence to assess how mainstream parties' positioning affects far-right gains. Findings show that immigration salience alone does not account for far-right support; rather, electoral success is conditional upon perceived ownership of the issue. Voters are significantly more likely to support far-right parties when immigration is both salient to them and viewed as an issue that these parties “own.” In parallel, while policy convergence by mainstream parties can sometimes reduce far-right appeal, it may also enhance its legitimacy when convergence appears insincere or fails to shift ownership. These results underscore the importance of integrating salience and ownership dynamics into models of political behavior and party competition. The study contributes to the existing literature by providing an empirically grounded explanation for far-right success that moves beyond static measures of public sentiment.

Keywords: immigration, far-right, issue salience, issue ownership, policy convergence

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I dedicate this thesis to my mother and my brother.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past two decades, research on the resurgence of far-right has expanded significantly. In Western Europe, the association of far-right movements with Nazi atrocities and their puppet regimes led to their political marginalization earlier (Rydgren 2005). However, beginning in the 1980s, right-wing extremist parties have gained influence (Arzheimer 2009). Given the centrality of immigration in their discourse, many studies have examined immigration-related factors to explain their emergence and electoral success (Rydgren 2008). Some scholars have identified a correlation between mass immigration and the electoral gains of far-right parties (Golder 2003; Knigge 1998; Jackman and Volpert 1996; Coffé et al. 2007), while others have challenged these findings, arguing that such a link is not empirically substantiated (Chapin 1992; Van der Brug et al. 2005). In fact, there is limited evidence to suggest a widespread rise in anti-immigration sentiments across Europe. On the contrary, positive attitudes toward immigration, both within and outside the European Union, have increased since the 2015 “migration crisis” (Dennison and Geddes 2019). Despite this complexity, anti-immigration rhetoric remains central to radical right-wing parties’ political platforms and significantly shapes voter perceptions (Mudde 1999; Rydgren 2008).

This study addresses two questions, it looks into (i) why individuals vote for far-right parties despite stagnant anti-immigration sentiment, and (ii) how mainstream party convergence on immigration policy shapes voter behavior. To explain the first puzzle, this study investigates *issue salience* (immigration’s perceived importance) and *issue ownership’s* (far-right competence on immigration) impact on far-right success. While far-right parties “own” immigration, their success

likely depends on salience rather than sentiment alone (Dennison and Geddes 2019), consistent with issue voting theory (Downs 1957; Sanders et al. 2011). The second question engages with the debate on policy convergence. Mainstream parties often adopt stricter immigration policies to counter far-right challenges, yet such shifts yield mixed outcomes. While convergence may reduce far-right support, it risks legitimizing anti-immigration narratives or alienating progressive voters (Bale et al. 2010; Van Spanje 2010; Han 2015). By analyzing these dynamics, the study clarifies how policy convergence interacts with issue salience and ownership to reshape electoral outcomes.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Economic Insecurity and Cultural Backlash Theories

If anti-immigration sentiment alone does not fully explain far-right voting, what alternative mechanisms drive support? This question anchors a debate in political science, where scholars generally divide explanations into two competing frameworks, “economic insecurity” and “cultural backlash” theories. Political economy distinguishes between different forms of economic insecurities. One significant source of these emerging insecurities is considered to be globalization (Garrett, 1998; Blossfeld et al., 2007; Milberg & Winkler, 2010), which entails an increase in the mobility of goods, services, and labor. However, mobility is not limited to capital; it also encapsulates the migration of labor into the international market, thereby allowing lower-wage workers to compete in domestic markets. This heightened mobility, in turn, exposes the workforce to greater market volatility and stiffer competition (Scheve & Slaughter, 2004). Therefore, a country’s integration into the global market may intensify perceptions of socio-economic insecurity (Standing, 2008; Koster, 2010). The literature further argues that globalization inevitably entails a process of migration, and thus the presence of foreigners in a country (Mau et al., 2012). As Mau & Burkhardt (2009) suggest, these groups may be perceived as a potential threat due to their disproportionate reliance on public support and competition in the labor market. Hence, a high share of immigrants among “natives” has a negative impact on perceptions of socio-economic insecurity (Mau et al., 2012). In behavioral terms, the economic insecurity thesis posits that far-right voting stems from real or perceived grievances against “out-groups” blamed for resource competition or declining living standards (Bolet, 2020). For example, Pettigrew (2002) links rising far-right support in Europe to economic stagnation and unemployment, arguing that voters scapegoat immigrants as threats to jobs and welfare systems. Similarly, Arzheimer (2009)

demonstrates that regions experiencing deindustrialization or wage stagnation show higher support for far-right parties, reinforcing the role of material deprivation.

In contrast, the cultural backlash theory frames far-right parties as a reaction to progressive social movements, particularly the New Left of the 1970s, which sought to dismantle structural barriers tied to race, nationality, gender, and sexuality (Ignazi, 1992). Inglehart (1977) foresaw this major transformation early and spent four decades tracking the progression of cultural value changes. Norris and Inglehart (2019) further elaborate on the phenomena by confirming the move toward libertarian values and suggesting that such a large-scale societal change is susceptible to counter-reaction. Or, as they argue, similar to Newton's third law of motion, the movement toward "post-materialism" and progressive policies has inevitably caused a reaction from "social conservatives" (p. 44). While the "silent revolution" (Schäfer, 2021), on average, provides for societies to become more culturally progressive, not everyone favors this change. This factor especially applies when those holding conservative views start feeling cast away or becoming "strangers in their own land" (Hochschild, 2016). Nevertheless, considering the incremental nature of such change, once-dominant groups only feel threatened when, from a majority, they turn into a minority (Schäfer, 2021). This, as argued by Norris and Inglehart (2019), is a "tipping point" wherein threats to people with conservative values trigger authoritarian tendencies, which, in turn, manifest in votes and seats for far-right parties.

According to Schäfer (2021), three processes that constitute value change are the expansion of education, urbanization, and ethnic diversity. The share of people attaining a college degree has grown exponentially, more significant for women. Furthermore, urbanization continues to accelerate; affinity for moving to larger cities is more pronounced among people with higher education, constituting distinct skill clusters (pp. 1979 - 1980). Most importantly, Western

democratic societies have experienced substantial growth in ethnic heterogeneity (even countries like Germany, which held the status of “Einwanderungsland” or claimed not to be an “immigration country”, have experienced significant immigration inflows). All in all, these three transformative changes promote a “cultural backlash”, or a mobilization rooted in conservative and religious ideologies advocating for traditional values, coupled with an authoritarian backlash against perceived foreign influences, which is intensified by economic insecurity and rising social inequality (Baro & Todal Jenssen, 2025; Norris & Inglehart 2019, pp. 45 - 46). Unlike economic theories, cultural backlash emphasizes value conflicts over material interests. Weeks and Allen (2022), for instance, show that far-right voters often oppose multiculturalism and gender equality reforms, viewing them as threats to national identity and traditional hierarchies. This distinction is critical because economic theories focus on tangible losses, while cultural theories highlight symbolic struggles over societal norms.

2.2 Voting Theory

These competing explanations for far-right support intersect with broader shifts in political behavior. Research on political participation highlights a transition from group-based partisan allegiances, historically rooted in class or religious identity, toward individualized voter decision-making (Nie et al. 1999; Dalton et al. 1984). The transition reflects the decline of traditional cleavages (labor vs. capital) and the rise of the “issue voter,” who prioritizes specific concerns, such as immigration, climate change, or security, over long-term party loyalty (Ignazi 1992). The spatial theory of electoral choice first was introduced by Downs (1957) and then formalized over the decades (Davis & Hinich 1966; Davis et al., 1970, Hinich & Pollard 1982). The key ideas that the spatial model encapsulates are (i) voters can be mapped as points in an idealized space, where

their location reflects their ideal policy preferences; (ii) candidates are similarly positioned in this space based on their policy platforms; and (iii) voters select the candidate whose position is closest to their own, reflecting a proximity-based choice (Rabinowitz, & Macdonald, 1989). However, based on empirical analysis of preference spaces Rabinowitz (1978) argues that the conventional spatial paradigm of issue impact was incorrect, he instead suggests that issues operate in a “dispositional” or “diffusive” way. Rabinowitz and Macdonald (1989) further elaborate that “issue voters” are driven by directional intensity, in other words, they support candidates who advocate strongly for a policy stance rather than those who merely proximate to their views (proximity-based vs directional intensity, e.g. “stricter immigration”).

In more practical terms, Ignazi (1992) traces the success of far-right parties in the 1980s to their ability to capitalize on rising anti-immigration sentiment among voters disillusioned with mainstream parties’ handling of globalization. Another strand of research suggests that some voters cast a “pure protest vote,” strategically supporting radical right parties to pressure mainstream right-wing parties into adopting stricter immigration policies, even if they do not fully endorse far-right ideologies (Arzheimer 2018). This behavior is particularly prevalent in proportional representation systems, where protest votes are less likely to “waste” electoral influence. Studies indicate that both left- and right-leaning mainstream parties adjust their strategies in response to far-right challenges. For instance, Bale et al. (2010) show that mainstream parties in Scandinavia shifted rightward on immigration in the 2000s to recapture voters lost to the far right. However, policy convergence depends on factors such as previous electoral outcomes, internal party cohesion, and the salience of immigration in public discourse (Van Spanje 2010; Han 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016). This dynamic underscore the interplay between party strategies and voter behavior, complicating simple narratives of far-right success

2.3 Issue Salience

Dennison and Geddes (2019) caution against attributing far-right support solely to anti-immigration sentiment, arguing that this oversimplifies voter behavior. They emphasize instead the salience of immigration, its perceived importance relative to other issues, as a driver of political choices. This critique highlights a gap in the literature; in other words, the conflation of salience (how much voters care about immigration) and sentiment (their stance on immigration). For instance, a voter may oppose immigration but prioritize economic issues, leading them to support a centrist party. Conversely, a voter with moderate views on immigration might still back a far-right party if immigration dominates their concerns. This distinction aligns with issue voting theory, which posits that voters do not simply support parties whose policies align with their views. Instead, they weigh this consistency alongside the salience of the issue (Downs, 1957; Butler & Stokes, 1974; Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Sanders et al., 2011). Despite its frequent use in behavioral studies, there is little consensus over what policy issue salience constitutes (Miller et al., 2017). The concept has been defined and operationalized in different ways. These definitions include “policy attitude importance” (Krosnick, 1990), “issue importance” (Fournier et al., 2003), “policy issue salience” (Miller et al., 2017), and “issue salience” (Niemi & Bartels, 1985; RePass, 1971). As Dennison (2018) argues, the variety of definitions of issue salience diverge in at least one consequential aspect: if defined in psychological terms, it is how important an individual considers an issue to be, while in behavioral terms, it is the weight assigned to an issue by the individual when making electoral choices (p. 437). For instance, Opperman (2010) defines issue salience as the “relative importance” and “significance” an individual assigns to a certain issue on a political agenda (p. 3). While Bernstein (1995), in line with behavioral thought, argues that issue salience is “the weight” each actor attributes to the “perceived distance from each candidate on

each issue” (p. 488). Similarly, Ansolabehere and Puy (2018) define issue salience in terms of the weight one assigns to an issue, with one distinction, in their definition, the party positions are constant on those issues (p. 104). In brief, within the scope of this thesis issue salience is the weight voter assigns to immigration relative to other issues while casting a ballot.

Despite its significance, issue salience remains understudied and is rarely integrated into ownership-based voting behavior studies as an independent variable (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008). This omission reflects a broader methodological limitation or the tendency to treat salience as a static or secondary factor rather than a dynamic moderator of voter preferences. One reason for this gap is the limited theorization of cross-time variation in salience. Dennison (2019) suggests that agenda-setting literature helps explain these variations, particularly the role of media in shaping public priorities. For example, during the 2015 European refugee crisis, media coverage amplified immigration’s salience, correlating with spikes in far-right support (Dennison 2019). However, panel data and experimental studies indicate that media preferences often reflect consumer demand, and the effects of media messaging tend to be short-lived (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010; Chong and Druckman 2007). This creates a paradox in that while media can temporarily elevate salience, its influence is constrained by preexisting voter priorities. In contrast, Behr and Iyengar (1985) argue that “real-life cues”, such as demographic changes, economic shocks, or terrorist attacks, primarily shape salience. For instance, Carey et al. (2014) link social protests to their impact on issue salience in Latin America, while Dannevig and Hovelsrud (2016) show that environmental crises in Norway heightened the salience of climate-related migration. These findings suggest that external events, rather than media alone, drive sustained shifts in salience, though the mechanisms remain contested.

2.4 Issue Ownership

Expanding the discussion on far-right success, Givens and Luedtke (2005) pose a crucial question: Beyond issue salience and partisanship, what other factors influence immigration policy restrictiveness? Contrary to the spatial and directional models of issue voting, issue-based vote choice assumes that parties are more than a set of policy preferences; instead, parties have a reputation vis-à-vis specific issue. Initially, this reputation is based on a party's policy stance and its target electorate; however, it is finally shaped by the party's performance once in office (Petrocik, 1996, p. 828). In other words, in the UK, the Labour Party is perceived as the most competent in dealing with education and healthcare policies, while the Conservatives are usually associated with crime, defense, and taxes (Budge and Farlie, 1983). Similarly, in the United States, the Republican Party is historically associated with managing national defense, foreign affairs, and crime. The Democratic Party, on the other hand, is seen as the party most competent to deal with issues of welfare, civil rights, and education (Petrocik, 1996).

These observations regarding specific issue associations in the UK and the United States led Budge and Farlie (1983) and Petrocik (1996) to develop issue ownership theory. The theory envisages two objectives (supply and demand sides): The first is to explain party behavior, as parties place greater emphasis on the issues, they “own.” As argued by Alesina (1988), parties emphasize issues they “own” to come across as competent to voters. This means the issues being promoted by the party must align with the party's long-standing trajectory. Nevertheless, other studies have found issue ownership to be fluid rather than static. That is to say, parties do not only claim ownership over the issues they have been historically associated with but also compete for new issues (Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen, 2004). Furthermore, parties may attempt to “steal” issues and establish ownership by reframing them (Holian, 2004). Walgrave et al. (2012) demonstrate

that parties gain electoral advantages when they emphasize owned issues, as voters perceive them as more competent. Similarly, Budge (2015) contends that “the prominence of “your” issues on the agenda does indeed increase votes” (p. 770).

The second objective of the issue ownership theory is to provide explanations regarding voter behavior. In simpler terms, individuals cast their ballot by considering the competence of the party in administering a specific issue (Bélanger & Meguid, 2008). While some scholars argue that issue ownership only indirectly affects voter choices (van der Brug, 2004), others find evidence for the direct impact of issue ownership on individual vote choice (Aalberg and Jenssen, 2007; Bellucci, 2006; Clarke et al., 2013; Nadeau et al., 2001). For example, Bellucci (2006) found that party competence does have a direct impact on voter choices in Italy. The same goes for Nadeau et al. (2001), who investigated the competence of the Liberal Party of Canada in managing issues and found that relative competence significantly increased their electoral support. The findings of these studies provide support for the claim that voters do consider the competence of the party on a certain issue in casting their ballot. However, the public agenda is rarely dictated by a single party and is shaped by external forces beyond its control, such as crises, social movements, or economic trends. This tension between party agency and external factors complicates issue ownership strategies, particularly for smaller parties like the far right.

2.5 Research Question and Hypotheses

The significant rise of anti-immigration parties (hereafter far-right parties), despite stable aggregate levels of anti-immigration sentiment (see Appendix 1), constitutes an empirical puzzle that existing theories only partially explain. In Germany, for instance, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) secured parliamentary representation in 2017 despite no change in anti-immigration attitudes

(Dennison and Geddes 2019). Similarly, Sweden Democrats doubled their electoral support between 2014 and 2018 despite unchanged public attitudes toward immigration. Unlike established scholarship, this study argues for re-examining key theoretical frameworks, issue salience and ownership, that have been predominantly analyzed in isolation or through aggregate electoral models (Walgrave et al. 2012; Budge 2015; Bélanger and Meguid 2008) in a joint model, recognizing the importance of their interdependence.

Previous studies miss the important link between salience and ownership. Ansolabehere and Puy (2018) operationalize issue salience spatially, modeling voter-party proximity on salient issues to predict electoral outcomes. This directly contrasts with Rabinowitz and Macdonald's (1989) directional theory, which prioritizes the intensity of voter-party alignment over proximity. Meanwhile, Walgrave et al. (2012) focus on "associative issue ownership," integrating salience into aggregate analyses without disentangling its interaction with ownership. Dennison and Geddes (2019), though identifying immigration salience as a driver of far-right success, rely on correlational evidence that cannot establish causality.

More importantly, these studies treat salience and ownership as separate constructs or subsume them within broader models, neglecting their conditional interdependence. As Petrocik (1996) theorizes, ownership likely mediates salience's electoral impact, in other words, parties gain votes on salient issues only if they "own" them. Bélanger and Meguid (2008) partially address this by proposing a salience-ownership interaction term ($S \times O$), yet their model conflates multiple issues, obscuring the mechanisms behind single-issue voting. This omission highlights the need for a unified framework isolating salience and ownership dynamics to advance and apply the same analysis to the explanations of far-right party success.

To address this gap, this study hypothesizes that (i) voting for far-right parties is contingent on issue salience, meaning that issue ownership influences electoral decisions only among individuals who perceive immigration as a salient concern. For example, a voter who considers immigration salient is more likely to support a far-right party if they perceive it as competent on the issue (ownership), whereas a voter who prioritizes healthcare may ignore ownership cues on immigration. Additionally, the study argues that (ii) when mainstream parties adopt stricter immigration policies, far-right support decreases if new positions of the mainstream parties are seen as credible but increases if they lack credibility. In other words, if salience moderates ownership's impact, mainstream parties could counter far-right gains by reducing immigration's salience (e.g., emphasizing economic issues) or contesting ownership (e.g., adopting stricter policies)

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methods

3.1 Research Design and Case Selection

Case selection in the case study research design mirrors the objective of random sampling in that it targets the cases that are (i) representative and (ii) exhibit meaningful variation across theoretical dimensions (Gerring & McDermott, 2007). Due to the confirmatory nature of the study, this thesis examines the issue of salience and issue ownership of immigration within typical cases. The typical case research design investigates a case that exhibits a stable cross-case relationship. Therefore, by definition, a typical case is representative of the broader set of cases (population) (Hersen & Barlow, 1984, p.24). Statistical reasoning that should further guide such selection is that (i) the population of the inference should be substantial, (ii) relevant data must be available on the key variables of the interests, and (iii) the study should carefully consider all the standard assumptions of statistical research (Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

Much of what constitutes a typical case within this study depends on how we conceptualize a far-right party. For the party to be considered extreme-far-right (ERP) it should meet (i) spatial, (ii) historic-ideological, and (iii) attitudinal-systemic criteria (Ignazi, 1992, p. 7). In other words, parties more on the right, should either fit the historic-ideological fascist criterion or demonstrate the delegitimizing impact that undermines the legitimacy of the system. However, parties have evolved since WWII; while they may no longer display fascist historic-ideological attributes, they can still possess an antisystem character. Therefore, parties that fit the historic-ideological criterion can be categorized as the “old right,” whereas those exhibiting an antisystem profile fall under the “new right” (Ignazi, 1992, pp.12-13). This classification provided by Ignazi (1992) is important as it allows for setting a distinction between ERP and conservative parties. Although terminological

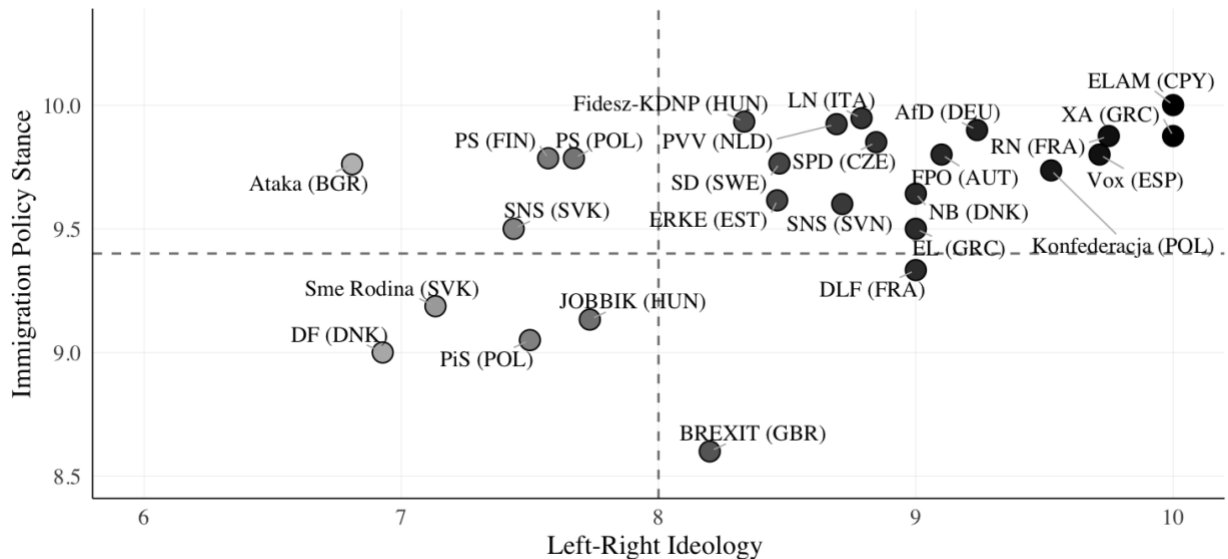
and idiosyncratic differences exist, a broad consensus has emerged regarding the grouping of these parties into a single-party family (Arzheimer, 2009). This party family is arguably more heterogeneous than any other (Mudde 1996), yet its members stand apart from the mainstream by defining their own “right” and sharing common ideological traits. One of the most prominent among these is their focus on immigration, which quickly became the most salient issue for these parties (van der Brug and Fennema, 2003). For the purposes of this thesis, I consider extreme-far-right to be characterized by extreme-far-right ideology and restrictive immigration policy.

Finally, to formalize the selection criteria for typical cases (i) country should feature a dominant far-right party that has consistently secured parliamentary representation or influenced national policy agendas; (ii) it should be European Union member state, ensuring compatibility with Eurobarometer survey data; and (iii) there should be longitudinal data availability from 2014 to 2024 that allows for analysis of both historical and emerging trends, including the post-2015 refugee crises, post-2020 rise of anti-immigration rhetoric in response to pandemic border closures and the 2022–2024 European energy crisis.

This conceptualization of the extreme-far-right yields Figure 1, where parties are mapped on a 1 to 10 scale of both immigration policy stances and ideology. A 1 represents the absence of the attributes, hence non-membership of either restrictive immigration policy stances or extreme-far-right ideology. 5 represents full fuzziness or point of ambiguity, these parties are neither inside the set nor outside. While 10 signifies full membership in either set. In the best-case scenario ELAM (Cyprus), XA (Greece), RN (France), Vox (Spain), and Konfederacja (Poland) would be ideal for the study as they are the “most typical cases” according to the study definition (upper-right quadrat represents typical cases). Yet none of these parties have remained influential or managed to gain

more than 10% (except for France, RN¹). This leaves us with, Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (the Austrian Freedom Party, FPÖ) and Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD).

Figure 1. Conceptual Mapping of Extreme-Far-Right Parties.



Note: Author's own computations using data from 2024 Chapel Hill expert survey.

Austria could be considered a convenient case for the study because of the simplicity of its party system and ideological divisions (Müller 1997). More importantly, it has one of the most prominent far-right parties in Europe FPÖ. FPÖ has maintained its electoral success since 1986, on average receiving 15 percent of the votes in parliamentary elections and consistently remaining higher than the 9.7% figure from 1986 (Aichholzer et al., 2014). Furthermore, it belongs to the small number of far-right parties that managed to participate in government (de Lange 2012; Zaslove 2012).

¹ Exclusion of the RN (France) from the analysis, though RN formally satisfies the selection criteria, its substantial ideological moderation over the past decade makes it a less typical representative of the extreme-far-right party family as conceptualized in this study. Especially due to the politics of *dédiabolisation* process (see Almeida 2013; Paxton & Peace, 2020; Surel, 2021).

Germany, like Austria, conforms to the requirements for a typical case; however, it is still new to the far-right family. AfD was initially established in 2013 as a Eurosceptic party objecting to financial aid plans for Eurozone countries struggling with debt after the global financial crisis (Schmitt-Beck 2017). Despite failing to surpass the five percent electoral threshold in the 2013 federal elections, it secured seats in the European Parliament in 2014 with 7.1 percent of the vote. After internal struggles, the AfD adopted a more far-right ideological profile, centering its rhetoric on immigration, Islam, and refugees as core agenda items (Arzheimer & Berning 2019; Schmitt-Beck et al. 2017). The former transformation allowed the party to secure 12.6 percent at the 2017 federal elections, entering parliament as the third strongest party (Faas & Klingelhöfer, 2019; Poguntke & Kinski, 2018), therefore putting an end to “German exceptionalism” of containing far-right parties.

While a vast literature is dedicated to defining the far-right, much less attention has been paid to mainstream parties. Yet, a clear definition of what constitutes “mainstream” is crucial for this study. Conceptualizations mainly derive from the party’s perceived potential to govern or its ideological position on the spectrum. A party is mainstream if it relies on moderate, established ideologies, not the leader’s personality or extremist rhetoric, and fits within the typical left-right spectrum of Western democracies (Pop-Eleches, 2010). Another definition hinges on a party’s ability to achieve electoral dominance, that is, mainstream parties are the dominant electoral forces in the center-left, center, and center-right of the political spectrum (Meguid, 2005). Sartori (1976) on the other hand, gives scant attention to the ideological spectrum, instead, he stresses the importance of the party’s ability to form a coalition with other “mainstream parties” or potential to govern. Abedi (2004) adds to the criterion by suggesting that mainstream parties are those that

have governed, are seen as viable coalition partners, or cooperate with ruling parties in forming governments.

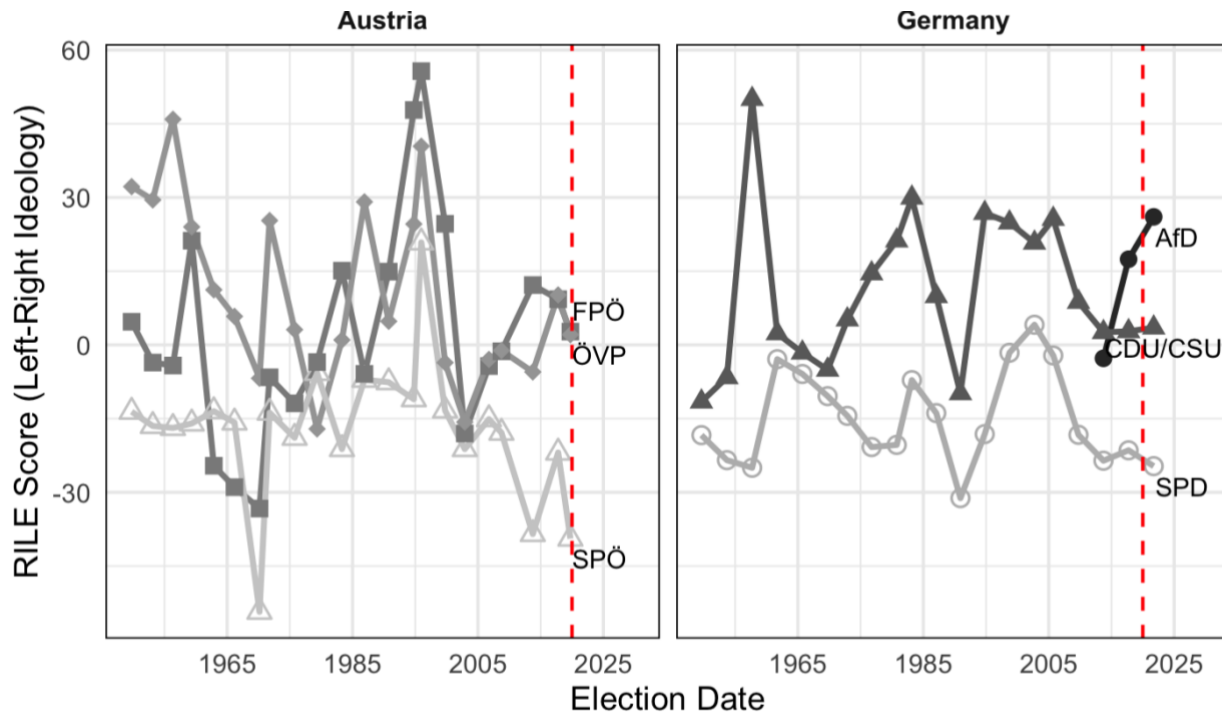
Moffitt (2021) summarizes and reconceptualizes “mainstream” by taking a binary set up between mainstream and “pariah parties”. According to the former conceptualization, the mainstream party is an electorally dominant actor within the center-left, center, or center-right of the political spectrum, whose legitimacy and “mainstreaming” are constructed through processes of acceptance by other political actors, media framing, and ideological moderation. Most importantly mainstream party’s status is not fixed but contingent on ongoing negotiation and contextual factors, including its perceived governability and alignment with established democratic norms.

These distinctions allow to set clear criteria for the mainstream party family. Mainstream parties must (i) occupy an ideologically moderate position within the center-left, center, or center-right of the political spectrum, rejecting extremist rhetoric and aligning with established democratic norms. It should (ii) demonstrate electoral dominance or governing relevance, either through sustained electoral success, participation in government, or have been accepted as a coalition partner by other mainstream parties. Finally, it should (iii) achieve legitimacy through dynamic processes of negotiation, including (a) acceptance by other political actors, and (b) positive or neutral media framing as a "normal" or legitimate actor. (c) ideological moderation to align with shifting societal and political thresholds of acceptability (Moffitt, 2021).

Figure 2 provides ideological position mapping of the center-right and center-left mainstream parties in Austria and Germany (RILE). In Austria, the center-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) and center-left Social Democratic Party (SPÖ) both meet the above outlined requirements for mainstream party status. The ÖVP has exhibited sustained electoral dominance and governing

relevance through frequent participation in government including with both SPÖ and the radical-right FPÖ (Heinisch & Werner, 2021). Even though ÖVP's ideological moderation and active coalitions with other parties suggest mainstream party status, its strategic shifts toward FPÖ's anti-immigration rhetoric in 2017 led to questioning its commitment to democratic norms and values. The SPÖ, on the other hand, as a traditional center-left party, has maintained its mainstream status through consistent electoral performance and participation in coalitions, nevertheless its declining vote shares since 2017 present challenges to its continued dominance (Bodlos & Plescia, 2018).

Figure 2. Ideological Positioning of Mainstream and Far-Right Parties in Austria and Germany (1960-2024)



Note: The graph is based on the Comparative Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al. 2024). Positive values indicate right-leaning positions of the parties in Austria and Germany, while negative values indicate left-leaning positions. In line with the far-right and mainstream party conceptualizations, the figure focuses on the major center-right and center-left parties vis-à-vis far-right.

In Germany, the Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) bloc represents the mainstream center-right as it complies with the conceptualized mainstream party criteria, which

has dominated post-war German politics while maintaining a firm “cordon sanitaire” against the AfD (Arzheimer, 2019). Despite internal tensions regarding the immigration policy stance following the 2015 refugee crisis, the CDU/CSU's refusal to cooperate with the AfD has solidified its democratic stance. The Social Democratic Party (SPD), on the other hand, is Germany's traditional center-left party, that has maintained its mainstream status through governing participation, but its electoral decline since 2005 and unpopular coalition with the CDU/CSU in 2017 have weakened its position relative to parties like the Greens (Poguntke & Kinski, 2018). While acknowledging other parties in both countries, the study only focuses on FPÖ, ÖVP and SPÖ in Austria and AfD, CDU/CSU, SPD in Germany.

3.2 Data and Methods

The study probes the relationship between immigration salience, issue ownership, and far-right electoral success on one hand and policy convergence on the other by employing a mixed-methods approach drawing from individual-level survey data, quantitative content analysis, and electoral outcome data. It is broadly accepted that combining qualitative and quantitative methods yields a more complete insight into the studied phenomena (Beck 2014; Collins et al. 2006; Newman et al. 2006). Therefore, combining quantitative and qualitative methods offers a more comprehensive insight into research issues than employing either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011). Despite inherent ontological and epistemological differences between quantitative and qualitative methods, such integration can be considered of remedial function (Goertz & Mahoney, 2012). The mixed-methods design employed in this study facilitates data triangulation which is the integration of different types of data (numerical and textual) and corresponding analytical approaches (statistical and thematic) (Ivankova & Creswell, 2009).

As conceptualized in this thesis, issue salience refers to the weight voters assigns to the issue, which is measured through Most Important Issue (MII) and Most Important Problem (MIP) questions (See Dennison, 2019). To mitigate the issues linked to the “most important problem” question (see also RePass, 1971; Wlezien, 2005), the survey should employ a close-ended format, requiring respondents to choose from a predetermined list of issues instead of offering open-ended answers. This study draws the issue salience measure from Eurobarometer; The Pan-EU survey asks respondents “*What do you think are the most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) in the moment?*” as a close-ended 14-choice variable². Surveys are conducted face-to-face and yearly, administered over the course of a month.

Issue ownership of immigration, or in other words, which party is considered competent in dealing with the issue of immigration is established through the Austrian National Election Study (AUTNES) and German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) databases. One way to establish issue ownership is to examine which issues parties emphasize. Parties highlight owned issues because doing so provides electoral advantages, as voters perceive them as more competent in those policy areas (Budge, 2015, p. 770; Walgrave et al., 2012). While parties strategically emphasize issues they own to capitalize on perceived competence, true issue ownership ultimately depends on public recognition. Therefore, unlike previous studies (Junqueira, 2023; Thesen et al., 2016; Holland & Nichele, 2016) to fully establish ownership, we must examine both party

² In the newer editions of the Eurobarometer (only part of the samples) respondents also were given following choices in addition to the original 14 variables: the environment, climate and energy issues (starting with EB 77.3; except EU issues) Government debt (EB 74.2 ff.; country issue only; EB 74.2, 75.3 and 76.3 asked to one half of the samples (SPLIT) only; not in EB 83.3) Energy related issues (energy prices, energy shortages, etc.) [starting with Eurobarometer 65.3]

emphasis and voter perceptions, particularly which party the public views as most competent to deal with immigration. AUTNES and GLES both provide for public perception of competent parties to deal with immigration. AUTNES asks respondents *“And which party is, in your view, most competent on the following issues?”*, a five-item choice format that includes immigration. GLES measures issue ownership with the question: *“In your opinion, which party is best able to handle the problem of immigration?”* offering respondents a choice among eight political parties in Germany.

Since the Eurobarometer does not include a vote-choice variable, the study resorts to the party affiliation imputation by linking respondents to a source that has vote information. In practice, such an imputation is performed through “hot-deck” statistical matching, wherein each Eurobarometer respondent is taken and matched with similar individuals in a national election survey based on shared demographics, such as age, gender, education, social class, and urban/rural residence. This nearest-neighbor donor imputation is well-grounded in the survey literature (Beretta & Santaniello, 2016; Paradowski & Flynn, 2017). In practice, each matched party label comes from an actual voter in the election study, in other words, the imputed values are realistic observed categories and not model-generated predictions, therefore the joint distributions of variables are mainly preserved (Yang & Kim, 2018). Furthermore, the K-Nearest Neighbor Matching (KNN) is fully nonparametric, that is it requires no strong model for vote choice and therefore avoids misspecification biases. In brief, KNN matching “borrows” real party responses from demographically similar donors, leading to a plausible imputation and retaining the original data structure. This missing data imputation method has proven to be superior to other alternatives. For example, recent simulation studies by Li et al. (2024) suggest that KNN often outperforms regression or multiple-imputation methods in accuracy. What is more important is that it fits

naturally into survey-fusion frameworks for mass-imputation of missing party ID (Paradowski & Flynn, 2017; Rivers, 2007)

Party convergence is primarily measured through the Comparative Manifesto Project. Initially, the study intended to measure convergence through the “Parties’ Immigration and Integration Positions Dataset (PIImPo)”, however, immigration and integration positions and saliency of different political parties are only available until 2013. Therefore, this study instead adopts an approach based on manifestos coded by the CMP. To identify immigration-related content, the analysis draws on updated CMP categories (CMP 2024a) that provide disaggregated distinctions between different dimensions of immigration discourse. Specifically, the analysis includes per601 National Way of Life Positive, per 602 National Way of Life Negative, per607 Multiculturalism: Positive and per608 Multiculturalism: Negative. These categories align with those used in prior studies (see Feddersen, 2019; Meijers & Zaslove, 2021) and reflect the ideological dimension of party stances on immigration. Earlier scholarship also included categories related to the national way of life and multiculturalism, as well as per705, which captures favorable statements toward underprivileged minorities more broadly. However, as Green-Pedersen (2019) notes in his comparison between CMP and the Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), including the per705 in the analysis it captures non-immigration-related information. Therefore, following this insight, per705 is excluded from the analysis to ensure that the immigration saliency measure does not conflate unrelated issues (such as references to the disabled, LGBTQ+ individuals, or Indigenous populations covered by per705, for detailed description of each variable also see Appendix 3).

The study operationalizes issue saliency³ as the share of quasi-sentences devoted to the four specified immigration-related categories within each party's manifesto:

$$Saliency_{p,t} = \frac{CMP_{per601} + CMP_{per602} + CMP_{per607} + CMP_{per608}}{100}$$

Here, each *per* variable represents the proportion of quasi-sentences coded into that category for party *p* in election year *t*, which are already normalized over the total number of quasi-sentences. Party position on immigration is further calculated as the net balance between pro-and anti-immigration statements. Where a positive value indicates a pro-immigration position and a negative value indicates an anti-immigration stance:

$$Position_{p,t} = \frac{(CMP_{per602} + CMP_{per607}) - (CMP_{per601} + CMP_{per608})}{CMP_{per602} + CMP_{per607} + CMP_{per601} + CMP_{per608}}$$

To measure the convergence not only in the direction of positions but also discourse, the study then weights both issue emphasis and ideological direction:

$$\text{Weighted Position}_{p,t} = \text{Saliency}_{p,t} \times \text{Position}_{p,t}$$

And finally, the policy convergence is calculated by taking the absolute difference between the mainstream party's weighted position and the far-right party's weighted position:

$$\text{Convergence}_{p,t} = \text{Weighted Position}_{mainstream,t} - \text{Weighted Position}_{far-right,t}$$

Since CMP percentages are normalized over the total number of quasi-sentences (Volken et al. 2013), no further normalization is necessary. The study incorporates both position and saliency

³ Previous studies (Abou-Chadi, 2006; Meguid 2005; Dancygier & Margalit, 2020) when determining the positions of the different mainstream parties on the certain issue, have introduced the terms saliency and position. Saliency refers to the emphasis or importance the party assign to the issue.

because convergence toward the far right is not only a matter of adopting similar policy stances but also of emphasizing immigration as a central political issue. Measuring both allows the study to capture shifts in issue prioritization alongside ideological repositioning, in line with party competition theories (see also Benoit and Laver 2007; Green-Pedersen, 2019; Volkens et al. 2013).

3.3 Model Estimation

One of the primary objectives of the study is to introduce the issue salience (immigration) as an independent variable for predicting the far-right success in Austria and Germany. Researchers use statistical modeling with greater frequency to study and understand political behavior (Robinson et al., 2018). In recent years, scholars have debated whether modeling approaches should embrace complexity ((Desmarais & Cranmer, 2017) or maintain simplicity (Little & Pepinsky, 2016). This divergence is driven not only by methodological preferences but also by the intended purpose of the model (Cioffi-Revilla, 2009; Cranmer & Desmarais, 2017). In other words, the complexity of the model depends on whether the objective of the study is to explain phenomena by developing them, testing theories, or predicting outcomes based on the available data (Edmonds, 2017; Prysby & Books 1987).

This thesis employs logistic regression models, given the binary nature of the outcome, vote or no vote. Following the lead of Bélanger and Meguid (2008), this study introduces the interaction term of interest as *issue salience (S) x (O) issue ownership*. In statistical learning interaction terms are understood to be the joint influence of two or more variables on an outcome that goes beyond what their separate effects would predict (Shiroshita et al., 2024). In other words, an interaction effect indicates that the impact of one independent variable on the dependent variable varies according to

the level of another independent variable (Rimpler et al., 2025). This concept challenges the assumption of purely additive effects by accounting for potential synergy or interference between predictors. Formally, the model is expressed as:

$$\text{Far – Right Vote} = \frac{1}{1 + e - (\beta_0 + \beta_1 S + \beta_2 O + \beta_3 (S \times O) + X + \mu_c + \lambda_t)}$$

Here, both S (issue salience) and O (issue ownership) are binary indicators. Each is coded as 1 when immigration is salient or clearly “owned” by the far-right party, and 0 otherwise. The logistic functional form transforms the linear predictor

$$\eta = \beta_0 + \beta_1 S + \beta_2 O + \beta_3 (S \times O) + \chi' \gamma + \mu_c + \lambda_t$$

into a probability bounded between 0 and 1 through the inverse-logit link:

$$\text{Pr(Far-Right Vote} = 1) = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-\eta}}$$

In the model, β_1 captures the change in log odds of far-right support when immigration is salient (holding immigration ownership at 0), while β_2 represents the change when the far-right is seen as issue owner (holding immigration salience at 0), and β_3 quantifies their interaction, or the extent to which the joint presence of salience and ownership multiplies the electoral gain of far-right beyond the sum of their separate effects. Control covariates χ adjust for individual-level and contextual confounders, while μ_c and λ_t are country and year-fixed effects that soak up unobserved heterogeneity across national environments and temporal shocks. By estimating marginal effects and predicted probabilities at each combination of S and O , the model tests the hypothesis that far-

right vote propensity is highest when immigration is both salient and credibly “owned” by the far-right party.

Interpreting interaction effects in nonlinear models requires caution, as the marginal effect of S on far-right voting depends on both the value of O and the baseline probability of the outcome (Norton et al., 2004). To address this, average marginal effects (AMEs) are calculated across observed values of O , and interaction plots are generated to visualize conditional effects (Brambor et al., 2006) or substantive interpretation, predicted probabilities are computed at theoretically meaningful levels of S and O (e.g., low vs. high salience, weak vs. strong issue ownership).

Chapter 4: Immigration and Public Opinion

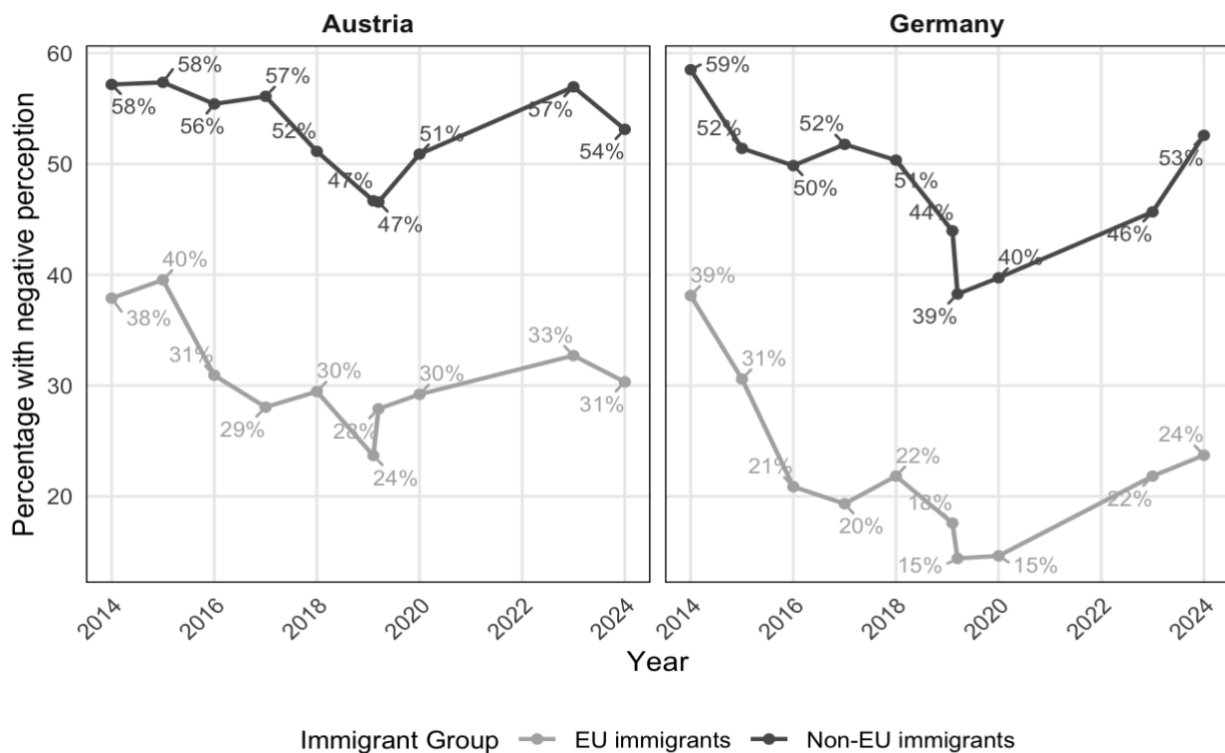
4.1 Immigration and Public Opinion in Context

Given the centrality of immigration in the far-right's discourse, many scholars have examined immigration-related factors to explain the emergence and electoral success of such parties (Rydgren 2008). Some scholars have identified a correlation between mass immigration and the electoral gains of far-right parties (Golder 2003; Knigge 1998; Jackman and Volpert 1996; Coffé et al. 2007), while others have challenged these findings, arguing that such a link is not empirically substantiated (Chapin 1992; Van der Brug et al. 2005). In fact, there is limited evidence to suggest a widespread rise in anti-immigration sentiments across Europe. On the contrary, positive attitudes toward immigration, both within and outside the European Union, have increased since the 2015 “migration crisis” (Dennison and Geddes 2019). Despite this complexity, anti-immigration rhetoric remains central to radical right-wing parties' political platforms and significantly shapes voter perceptions (Mudde 1999; Rydgren 2008).

Building on the centrality of immigration in far-right discourse, Figure 3 provides detailed insights into how public sentiment toward different immigrant groups has evolved in both Austria and Germany since 2014. In Austria, negative sentiment toward non-EU immigrants peaked at 58% in 2014, declined to 47% in 2019, nevertheless support rose again to 54% by 2024. Germany, on the other hand, saw a steeper decline from 59% in 2014 to 39% in 2019, with a significant rise to 53% by 2024. It is important to note that the rise in negative sentiments in Germany occurs pre- 2015 immigration crisis, while in Austria it remained the same throughout. Additionally, Austria's persistently higher indicators of immigration sentiment, from 2014 to 2019, align with the electoral gains of far-right parties like the FPÖ. Germany's lower negative sentiment, despite similar

external pressures (the 2020 pandemic and energy crises), on the other hand, may reflect stronger centrist political narratives. Nevertheless, even after this uptick, the prevalence of negative sentiment in 2024 remains below its 2014 baseline in both Austria and Germany. At one glance, these descriptive statistics lend support to previous studies (Golder 2003; Knigge 1998; Jackman and Volpert 1996; Coffé et al. 2007) that have established an association between the negative sentiment and the far-right success or the fact that success of these parties per se drives the former sentiment. However, as we shift our attention from the negative sentiment to immigrant contributions, the whole picture becomes a somewhat vaguer.

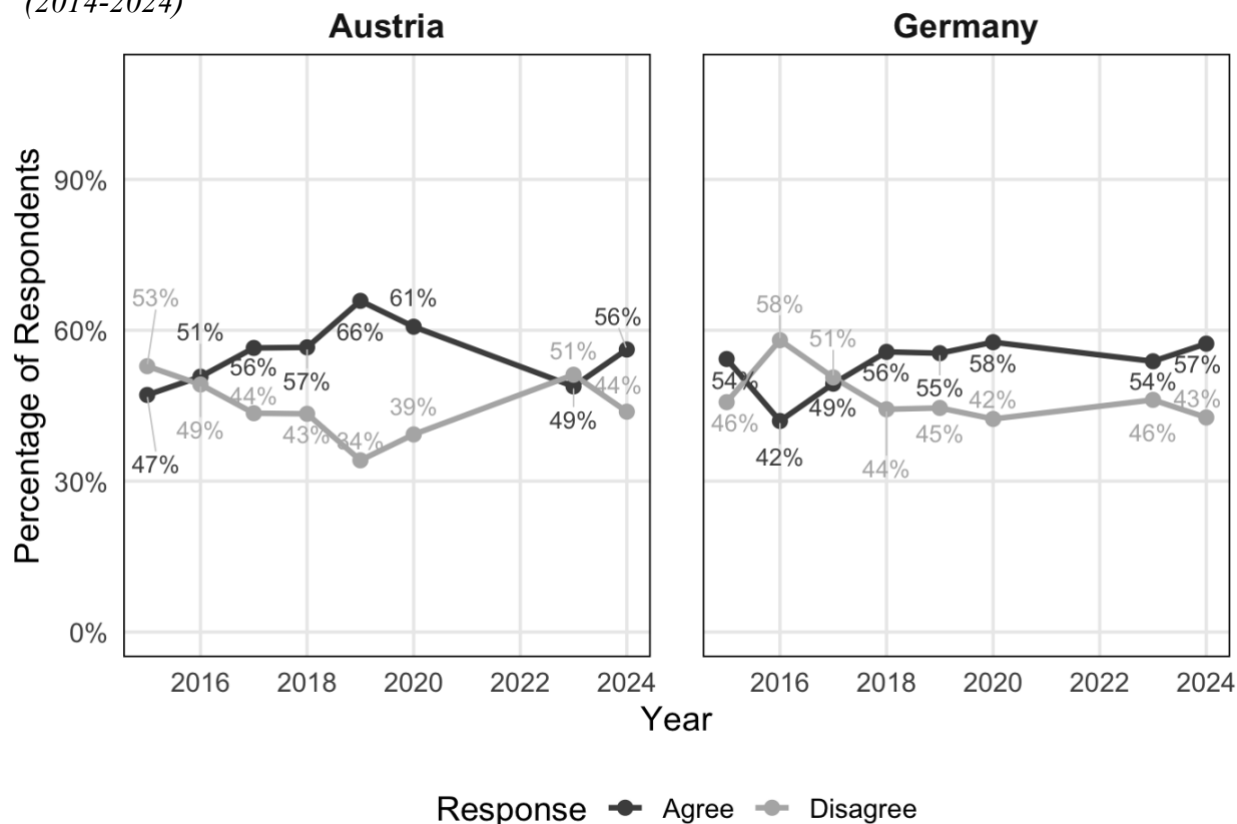
Figure 3. Public Perceptions of EU and Non-EU Immigrant in Austria and Germany (2014-2024)



Note: The graph shows the percentage of positive and negative feelings toward two types of immigration: from other EU Member States and from outside the EU, based on Eurobarometer data from 2014 to 2024. Responses to the question "Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or a negative feeling for you" were aggregated as follows: "Very positive" and "Fairly positive" are combined as positive feelings. "Fairly negative" and "Very negative" are combined as negative feelings. All values are presented as percentages.

Figure 4 further nuances this picture by isolating perceptions of immigrants' contributions to Austria and Germany. The same respondents are asked to agree or disagree with the statement "Immigrants contribute a lot to our country". In Austria, positive assessments have risen considerably from 44% in 2016 to nearly three-quarters by 2019, after a slight decline in 2023, it continued to raise upward into 2024, while general negative sentiment toward immigration fluctuated. German respondents, meanwhile, maintained a stable majority at 56–58% after 2017, affirming immigrants' contributions throughout the period, with modest fluctuations around the mid-fifties to high-fifties percentiles. This trend persisted despite the negative sentiment towards immigration. While the intuitive interpretation of the statement "Immigrants contribute a lot to our

Figure 4. Public Perceptions of Immigrants' Contribution to Society in Austria and Germany (2014-2024)



Note: The graph depicts the percentage of positive and negative attitudes toward the statement "Immigrants contribute a lot to our country," based on Eurobarometer surveys from 2014 to 2024. Responses have been grouped as follows: "Totally agree" and "Tend to agree" are aggregated as positive attitudes, while "Tend to disagree" and "Totally disagree" are aggregated as negative attitudes. All values are reported as percentages.

country” is economic, Eurobarometer does not specify the form of contribution, therefore it is only right to assume that it envisages both economic and cultural contributions. Previous studies have argued that this bifurcation aligns with Ivarsflaten’s (2008) thesis that far-right success hinges not on blanket anti-immigration sentiment but on framing immigrants as culturally threatening. However, the former only holds true under the assumption that the statement is perceived as carrying economic connotations.

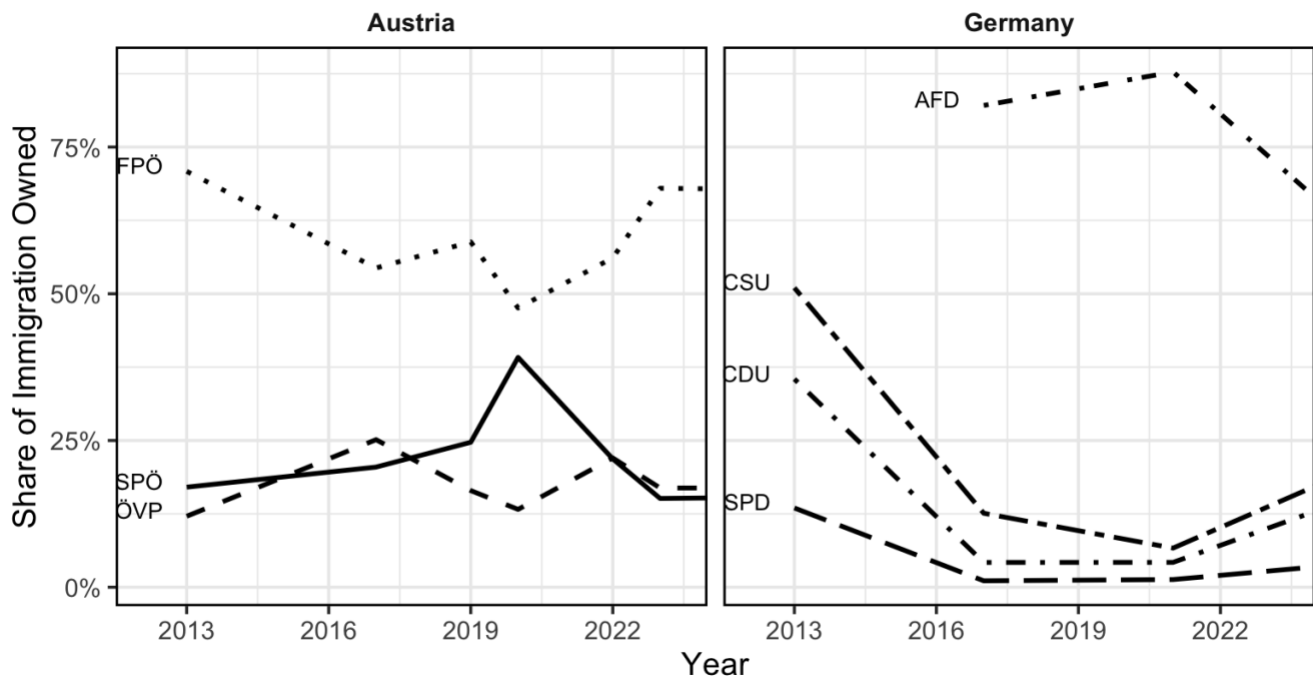
Another possible explanation for this divergence between negative sentiment toward immigration and positive affirmation of immigrants’ contribution to the country is that voters may distinguish between “desirable” labor migrants and “threatening” asylum seekers, a dichotomy exploited by far-right rhetoric (Rydgren 2008). Nevertheless, the bifurcation displayed in Figures 3 and 4, challenges the claim of a uniform “rise” in anti-immigration sentiment post-2015. Instead, it underscores how different national political ecosystems mediate public attitudes. Therefore, arguing that negative immigration sentiments directly translate into the far-right vote would not only be an overstatement but at the same time a too simple depiction of the voting behavior.

4.2 Who “Owns” Immigration?

As previously outlined, issue ownership refers to the party’s competence to deal with a specific issue. Literature mainly establishes issue ownership through media framing (Junqueira, 2023; Thesen et al., 2016), party manifesto analysis (Holland & Nichele, 2016), or surveys (Walgrave et al. 2012). However, the problem with such an approach is that framing the issue as salient does not translate into its ownership. Political parties might emphasize different issues, or argue their competence over them, however, what ultimately matters is the public perception of their competence and ability to handle the particular issue. Figure 5 provides a comparative analysis of

immigration ownership in Austria and Germany. In Austria, the AUTNESS Online Panel Study asks respondents “Which party is, in your view, most competent on the issue of immigration?”. While in Germany, the GLES Cross-Section study inquires “In your opinion, which party is best able to handle the problem of immigration?”.

Figure 5. Immigration Issue Ownership Across Parties in Austria and Germany (2013-2024)



Note: The figure presents data from Austria based on the AUTNES Online Panel Study (2013–2015, 2017–2024). Respondents were asked: “Which party is, in your view, most competent on the following issues?” For immigration, they were asked to select the party they consider most competent on the issue. Data for Germany is drawn from the GLES Cross-Section and GLES Panel Studies (2013–2024). Respondents were asked: “In your opinion, which party is best able to handle the problem of immigration?”

In Austria, the most competent party to deal with the issue of immigration is considered to be FPÖ. While FPÖ demonstrates a lack of consistency in its ownership, with noticeable fluctuations, it still remains above the other parties throughout the period. It is worth noting that the difference between FPÖ and SPÖ diminished considerably in 2020. The decline in FPÖ’s competence over

immigration might be attributed to the “Ibiza scandal”⁴ of 2019 and the collapse of the coalition with the ÖVP. Nevertheless, from that point onward, FPÖ regained momentum and reestablished a clear ownership. ÖVP on the other hand, significantly fluctuates over time, remaining marginally above the SPÖ from 2022 onward. In Germany on the other hand, until 2017 CSU, CDU, and SPD exhibited parallel trends, with CSU being perceived as the most competent to deal with the issue of immigration. However, with the establishment of the AfD in 2017, AfD quickly became the best-equipped party to manage immigration policy. From 2021 to 2024 public perception of the AfD as the most competent party on immigration has dropped sharply, resulting in reverse pattern for CSU, CDU and SPD – though still much below AfD.

Patterns exhibited in both Austria and Germany suggest only one thing that parties do not only claim ownership over the issues they have been historically associated with but also compete for new issues (Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen, 2004). This impacts public perception translating into the fluctuations over the “ownership” of immigration. Furthermore, parties may attempt to “steal” issues and establish ownership by reframing them (Holian, 2004). However, an attempt to “steal” by reframing the issue does not guarantee consolidation of ownership over immigration policy. For example, despite ÖVP’s conservative ideology depicted in Figure 2 and its rhetoric on harsh immigration measures, public perception indicates that the ÖVP is not perceived as the most competent party to handle immigration. Instead, public perception of the competence matters, or how competent these parties come across to the voters.

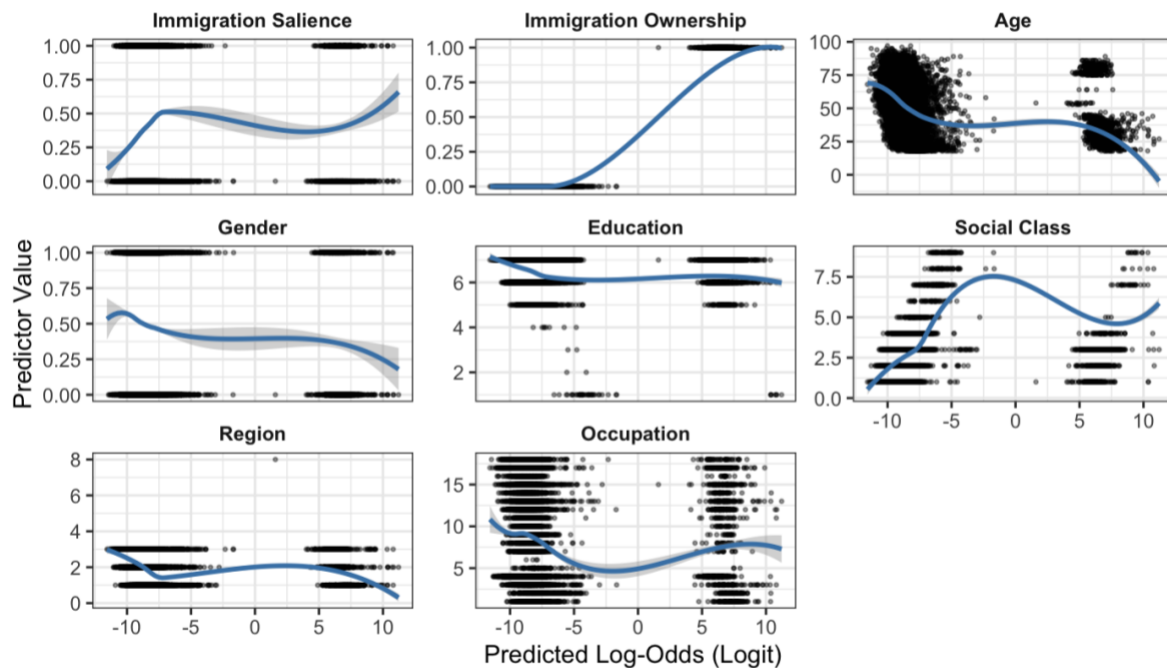
⁴ The Ibiza scandal is also referred to as the biggest government crisis in the history of the Second Republic of Austria. The video, filmed in July 2017, was published on the 17th of May 2019, by two German newspapers, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (SZ) and *Der Spiegel*. The video depicts a meeting between Heinz-Christian Strache (chairman of the FPÖ), Johann Gudenus (FPÖ’s parliamentary faction), and a woman who poses as a relative of Russian oligarch Igor Makarov. During the conversation, Heinz-Christian Strache suggested that if Russian businessmen bought the influential Austrian newspaper *Kronen Zeitung* and then used it to promote the FPÖ, they would be granted access to public contracts (Miecznikowska, 2019).

Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

5.1 Issue Ownership, Issue Salience and Far-Right

An initial objective of the study was to investigate why individuals vote for far-right parties despite stagnant anti-immigration sentiment. The results show a logistic regression analysis examining the role of issue salience and issue ownership in predicting far-right support. Control variables included age, gender, education, social class, and urban–rural residence to account for individual-level and contextual confounders. The model also incorporated country and year fixed effects to absorb heterogeneity across national contexts and temporal shocks in Austria and Germany. Figure 6 provides insights into the partial relationship between each variable and the model’s predicted log odds of voting for the far-right. In order to visualize the influence of each covariate on the logit while holding all other constant, smoothed local regressions (LOESS) were applied to the plot. At

Figure 6. Partial Relationship Between Predictors and Logit



Note: Predictions were generated using a bias-reduced logistic regression model (brglmFit) trained on 80% of the dataset. Logit values represent the linear predictor from the model, with other variables held constant at their observed values. LOESS smoothing was used to highlight potential nonlinear relationships.

first glance, the most recognizable pattern is the strong, nonlinear, and positive association between immigration issue ownership and predicted support. In other words, as voters perceive the far-right to own the issue of immigration, their probability of supporting the party increases significantly. In contrast to immigration issue ownership, immigration salience exhibits a nonlinear and weak pattern, suggesting that the salience alone may not have a consistent and directional impact on far-right support. Among control variables, on the other hand, occupation and social class show more structured relationships, unlike gender, region, and education which appear mainly flat or inconsistent. Which is consistent with the literature that argues that education is negatively associated with the probability of voting far-right, while working class is more likely to vote for far-right motivated by economic insecurity.

Building on the visual patterns presented above, Table 1 shows the average marginal effects (AMEs) of the predicted values. We use AMEs because they are preferred in logistic regression as they translate coefficients from the log-odds to the probability scale, making the results easier to interpret and the inferences more intuitive (for model summary see also Appendix 4). Statistically, AMEs also address the model's nonlinearity by averaging effects over the observed covariate distribution, allowing for more robust and representative comparisons across models and samples. The results confirm that immigration issue ownership is the strongest predictor of the far right with $AME = 0.0073$ and $p < 0.001$, while immigration issue salience shows no statistically or substantively meaningful effect with $AME = 0.0001$ and $p = 0.88$. The strong and positive effect of immigration ownership on far-right success aligns with theoretical expectations derived from the issue ownership theory, suggesting that parties gain electoral support when they emphasize issues they are perceived to “own”. These findings confirm the thesis hypothesis that immigration issue salience alone does not drive far-right support. Instead, voters are more influenced by party

framing and their perceived competence. The statistical insignificance of issue salience, though counterintuitive, further supports the point that voters do not prioritize issues based solely on their weighted importance but respond to how competently parties are believed to handle them.

Table 1. Average Marginal Effects (AMEs)

Factor	AME	SE	z-statistic	p-value	Lower	Upper
Age	-0.0000	0.0000	-1.2786	0.2010	-0.0000	0.0000
Country Germany	-0.0002	0.0004	-0.5703	0.5685	-0.0009	0.0005
Education	-0.0004	0.0002	-2.4248	0.0153	-0.0007	-0.0001
Gender	0.0000	0.0003	0.0304	0.9758	-0.0007	0.0007
Immigration issue	0.0001	0.0004	0.1451	0.8846	-0.0007	0.0008
Issue ownership	0.0073	0.0020	3.5871	0.0003	0.0033	0.0114
Occupation	-0.0000	0.0000	-0.5402	0.5891	-0.0001	0.0000
Region	-0.0002	0.0002	-1.2666	0.2053	-0.0006	0.0001
Social class	0.0003	0.0001	2.1116	0.0347	0.0000	0.0005

NOTE: AMEs were calculated using the margins package in R. They represent the average change in the predicted probability of voting for a far-right party for a one-unit change in each predictor, holding other variables constant. Standard errors are robust and based on delta-method approximations. Results are based on a matched dataset including 1,800 far-right respondents out of a 22,000-person Eurobarometer sample.

Control variables, on the other hand, education, and social class still retain significance, however, their effects are substantively modest. These findings go back to the cultural backlash and economic insecurity theories and confirm their relevance within far-right studies. Education's significance and negative effect on voting far-right can be attributed to the exponential growth in attaining college degrees, consistent with the cultural backlash theory (Schäfer, 2021)., higher levels of education are associated with a lower likelihood of supporting far-right parties. The significance of the social class supports the economic insecurity thesis, which suggests that immigrants are perceived as a potential threat due to their disproportionate reliance on public

support and competition in the labor market. Furthermore, in behavioral terms, the economic insecurity thesis posits that far-right voting stems from real or perceived grievances against “out-groups” blamed for resource competition or declining living standards (Bolet, 2020). Or as Pettigrew (2002) observed rising far-right support in Europe is linked to economic stagnation and unemployment, arguing that voters scapegoat immigrants as threats to jobs and welfare systems.

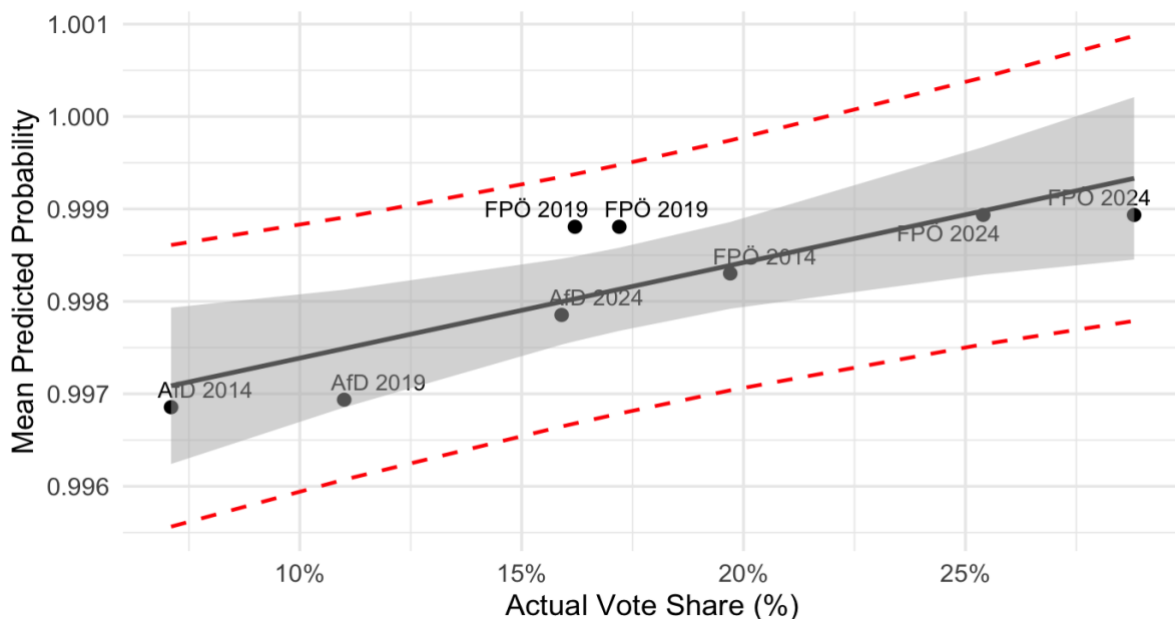
Despite the fact that the model exhibits near-perfect separation and low residual deviance, model performance and fit diagnostics (RMSE across training and test sets) confirm that this is not due to overfitting. The Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE) of the training set is 0.0026, while on the test set, it is 0.0038, suggesting a minimal increase in error when the model is applied to new, unseen data. To put it simply, the model is not simply memorizing patterns in training data but instead is generalizing well, even when incorporating strong predictors such as issue ownership. Generalized Variance Inflation Factors show no multicollinearity as all the variables are well below the 2-cutoff point (see the Appendix 5). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the KNN matching, which was used to impute party affiliation from the AUTNESS and GLES datasets, led to a final sample where AfD and FPÖ comprised 1872 out of 22365 observations. The former might have concentrated the immigration ownership effect and reduced immigration salience variation within the far-right subsample, therefore reducing its marginal effects and making the interaction term between salience and ownership insignificant⁵.

Finally, Figure 6 displays the model’s real-world application by comparing its predicted support for the far-right parties to actual election results from FPÖ and AfD during the 2014–2024 period. Mean predicted probabilities were aggregated by party year and regressed against actual vote share

⁵ The interaction term found to be insignificant, do see the attached loess adjusted graph in appendix 6, it shows the interaction term and salience fluctuation with it.

in both national and EU elections. The regression line is complemented by both a 95% confidence interval which is a shaded grey area and a 95% prediction interval, the red dashed line around the regression. The data points align with the regression line and all fall within the prediction interval. The prediction points that fall out of the confidence interval yet remain within the prediction interval are FPÖ 2019 election results, which as demonstrated before might be attributed to the “Ibiza” scandal, which led to the resignation of FPÖ leader Heinz-Christian Strache and the collapse of Austria's governing coalition. Nevertheless, FPÖ still managed to secure 16.2% of the vote in the 2019 legislative election, down from 26% in 2017. On the other hand, unlike FPÖ, AfD’s predicted and real-world election results remain close to the regression line, confirming that immigration salience drives far-right support. Former findings suggest that the model does not only

Figure 7. Comparison of predicted versus actual vote share for far-right parties (FPÖ and AfD) in the 2014–2024 elections.



Note: predicted probabilities were aggregated by country, year, and party, and regressed on actual vote shares. The black line shows the linear fit, the grey shaded area represents the 95% confidence interval, and the red dashed lines indicate the 95% prediction interval. Model performance diagnostics output a training RMSE of 0.0026 and a test RMSE of 0.0038, confirming strong generalizability. The regression analysis includes both national and EU elections.

fit statistically but at the same time provides plausible forecasts for actual electoral outcomes when framed within immigration salience and ownership.

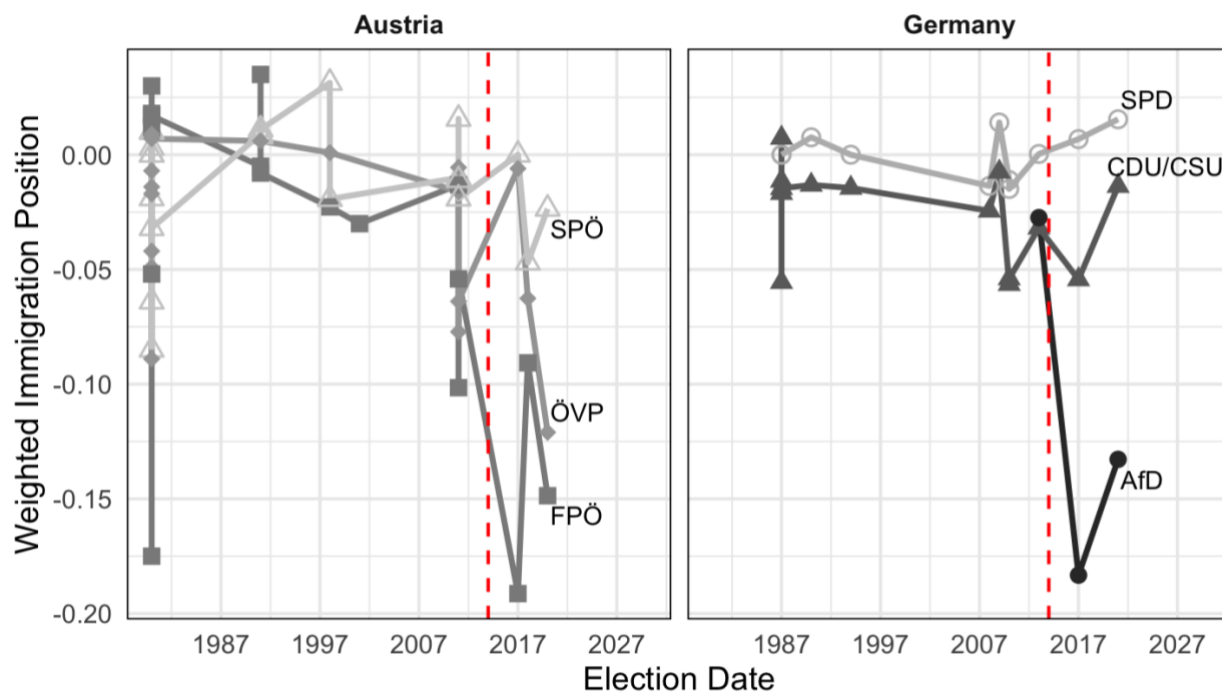
5.2 Policy Convergence

To address the second research question the study introduces policy convergence measurement based on Comparative Manifesto Project. The CMP data is based on quantitative content analysis of party manifestos, which are typically updated prior to elections, usually every four years. Although the convergence measurement is expressed numerically, as the absolute difference between weighted policy positions, it ultimately captures a qualitative shift in ideological orientation, indicating whether parties have moved in a more liberal or more restrictive direction. This is a form of data triangulation, where different forms of data (quantitative indicators and textual content) and their respective analytical approaches (statistical analysis and thematic interpretation) are integrated at the stage of interpretation to contextualize the meaning of policy convergence.

The measurement results are illustrated in Figure 7, which portrays the evolution of parties' immigration positions in Austria and Germany and how party positions have shifted in recent electoral cycles. The red dashed line in the graph denotes the pre-immigration crisis period (2014). Negative values indicate a shift toward more restrictive immigration positions, while positive values reflect a move toward more liberal stances. In Austria, despite some fluctuations, a clear shift toward more restrictive positions is obvious, especially after 2014. Among three major parties, FPÖ maintains the most restrictive immigration position throughout the period. Another evident pattern is ÖVP's alignment with FPÖ's position, implying strategic convergence with the far-right.

Furthermore, even SPÖ, which is considered to be more centrist or left leaning, shows noticeable decline in positive immigration stance, indicating shift from liberal stance on immigration. Germany, on the other hand, contrary to Austria shows better stability. While AfD is positioned as the most anti-immigration party, SPD and CDU/CSU remain more centrist on the issue. Even more, despite small fluctuations since 2014, their framing of immigration became much more relaxed and positive, indicating slight liberalization.

Figure 8. Party Immigration Policy Convergence



Note: The graph is based on the CMP data. it shows immigration policy convergence of the mainstream parties vis-à-vis far-right in Austria and Germany. The policy convergence is calculated as the absolute difference between mainstream and far-right weighted positions, positive change indicating liberal shift, negative changes depicting restrictive position.

Building on Figure 7, the numerical data in Table 2 provides more detailed insights into the trends observed in the graph. In Austria, the ÖVP shows a strong shift toward a far-right position between

2017 and 2020, with both post-2017 changes registering as substantial rightward moves with delta of -0.0549 and -0.0333. The FPÖ fluctuates, nevertheless consistently remains below -0.09, reaffirming its established far-right positions. Interestingly, the SPÖ initially moved toward a more restrictive position in 2018 ($\Delta = -0.0340$) before moderating slightly by 2020. The findings illustrate how parties compete for issue ownership in an effort to win back voters, a form of chain reaction wherein extreme policy convergence of the far-right stimulates mainstream parties to shift their positions toward more restrictive policy rhetoric to attract parts of the same electoral base. For instance, the FPÖ's brief liberal shift in 2018 coincided with its significant electoral decline in 2019, which could have been further augmented by the Ibiza scandal of 2019 (from 26% of votes in 2017 to 16.2%). However, after readopting a more restrictive position on immigration in 2020, the party went on to win a historic election in 2024, suggesting that FPÖ's restrictive immigration position led to increase in voter base.

The ÖVP's shift towards a more restrictive immigration policy in 2018, on the other hand, took place at the same time as its electoral gains in 2019 (from 31.5% to 37.5%), however it should again be noted that these electoral gains coincided with the Ibiza scandal. Nevertheless, though it maintained the same position, the party experienced a decline in 2024, which could be attributed to the FPÖ's stronger positioning on immigration issues or recuperating itself from the scandal. An intriguing observation is that even though SPÖ moderately shifted toward restrictive immigration rhetoric in 2018 it did not prevent its electoral losses in 2019. Neither did its reverse policy, as a more liberal position by 2020 did not significantly impact its electoral gains in 2024. All these dynamics align with Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen's (2004) argument that parties do not only claim ownership over the issues they have been historically associated with but also compete for new issues. Furthermore, parties may attempt to "steal" issues and establish ownership by

reframing them (Holian, 2004). While “the prominence of “your” issues on the agenda does indeed increase votes” (Budge, 2015, p.770) as exemplified by SPÖ and public opinion in chapter 3, reframing and closing in on ownership does not establish competence, as immigration position changes over time could denote electoral strategies rather than pure ideological convergences.

Table2. Party Immigration Policy Convergence

Country	Party	Year	Position	Change	Direction
Austria	FPÖ	2017	-0.191	NC	no change
Austria	FPÖ	2018	-0.0907	0.101	more liberal
Austria	FPÖ	2020	-0.149	-0.0579	more far-right
Austria	SPÖ	2017	0.00138	NC	no change
Austria	SPÖ	2018	-0.0327	-0.0340	more far-right
Austria	SPÖ	2020	-0.00733	0.0253	more liberal
Austria	ÖVP	2017	-0.00774	NC	no change
Austria	ÖVP	2018	-0.0626	-0.0549	more far-right
Austria	ÖVP	2020	-0.0960	-0.0333	more far-right
Germany	AfD	2017	-0.183	NC	no change
Germany	AfD	2021	-0.133	0.0505	more liberal
Germany	CDU/CSU	2017	-0.0544	NC	no change
Germany	CDU/CSU	2021	-0.0137	0.0407	more liberal
Germany	SPD	2017	0.00681	NC	no change
Germany	SPD	2021	0.0155	0.00865	more liberal

Note: The magnitude and direction of policy convergence are interpreted as follows: > +0.05 – Strong shift toward pro-immigration emphasis; +0.01 to +0.05 – Moderate liberalization; 0 – No change; –0.01 to –0.05 – Moderate shift toward far-right positioning; < –0.05 – Strong convergence with far-right rhetoric. NC indicates no change compared to the prior party manifesto.

Contrary to Austria, in Germany, the table shows small and consistent liberalizing movements across mainstream parties. The CDU/CSU shifted from -0.0544 in 2017 to -0.0137 in 2021 ($\Delta = +0.0407$), and the SPD moved slightly further into liberal framing of immigration ($\Delta = +0.00865$). Even the AfD, though still highly restrictive, recorded a modest shift toward moderation (+0.0505). It can be inferred from the data that German parties, rather than converging toward far-right

rhetoric, have either maintained or slightly softened their positions, particularly among the mainstream. These findings provide further support for the statement that when mainstream parties adopt stricter immigration policies, far-right support decreases if new positions of the mainstream parties are seen as credible but increase if they lack credibility. To provide a more detailed analysis of the policy shift, the AfD's modest shift in 2021 concurred with a decline in electoral support. However, by 2025 it managed to achieve its best results yet, indicating that a return to more restrictive immigration policy rhetoric appealed to its electorate. CDU/CSU's liberal shift in 2021, on the other hand, was accompanied by a considerable electoral decline (from 32.9% of votes in 2017 to 24.1%). Nevertheless, by 2025 party managed to regain its position as the largest party and secure 28.5% of votes. The SPD's moderate shifts toward less restrictive immigration policy were associated with electoral gains which declined in 2025. However, the electoral gains discussed above are relative to far-right and should be inferred as such. While the study acknowledges that electoral outcomes could and are contingent on a range of factors, comprehensive analysis of these determinants falls beyond the scope of this thesis. The inferences made here are purely guided by existing literature, which identifies immigration as the main agenda item of far-right parties.

To assess the efficiency of the refined model, the study compared estimates derived from a core model including National Way of Life both Positive (Per601) and Negative (per602), Multiculturalism: Positive (per607) and Negative (per608) variables and an expanded model with two additional variables Underprivileged Minority Groups (per705) and Protectionism: Positive (per406). When comparing "Parties' Immigration and Integration Positions Dataset (PIImPo)" and "Comparative Agendas Project" (CAP) Green-Pedersen (2019) noted that including the per705 into the analysis captures non-immigration related information. Following this insight the core model excludes per705 from the analysis as well as per 406 that was employed by Meyer & Miller

(2015) in their analysis. This former measurement specifications are guided by the fact that while per705 and per406 might include immigration related sentiments, they are quite broad and therefore their inclusion skews the measurement.

The results displayed in Table 3 indicate the degree of convergence in party immigration positions under both core and extended models. In order to enhance comparability and inference, model estimates were standardized on a 0–1 scale. For Austria, the difference between the two models is -0.029 , which is statistically significant, suggesting that the inclusion of additional variables modestly shifts the estimated policy position. While in Germany, the difference is smaller (-0.011) and not statistically significant, indicating greater model stability across both model specifications. Consistency between models is further demonstrated by the high correlation between coefficients ($r = 0.9895$ for Austria and $r = 0.9996$ for Germany). These findings suggest that while both models provide largely similar estimates, the expanded model reduces the policy convergence magnitude in Austria.

To interpret these differences statistically, one must consider the relative weight and distribution of the added variables across national contexts. The original model includes restrictive variables, therefore adding per705 into the model, which is a positive attitude toward minorities, pulls scores toward a more liberal position as it reduces the net restrictiveness of the immigration policy position. Per 406, on the other hand, while can relate to immigration stances, mainly captures economic protectionism, not necessarily cultural or identity protectionism. Therefore, the variable might also appear in left-leaning parties' manifestos rooted in social-democratic economic policy preferences, that is adds noise not related to cultural threat or immigration. For the reasons mentioned above, the mean score decreases, and the differences shrink, adding per705 and per406 moves some parties' positions away from convergence or blurs the ideological line. Even though

smaller mean intuitively suggests better measurement or precision, in fact it reflects change in weighted position formula, where per705 reduces the restrictive immigration rhetoric of a party. In simple terms, the ideological clarity of what the score represent is weakened , because the number now mixes different issue dimensions such as minority rights and economic protectionism with immigration

Table 3. Immigration Policy Convergence Model Estimation

Country	Core Mean (0–1)	Expanded Mean (0–1)	Difference	SE	Correlation (r)	Manifestos (n)
Austria	0.589	0.560	–0.029*	0.0155	0.9895	9
Germany	0.639	0.628	–0.011	0.0086	0.9996	6

Note: The table provides a comparative analysis of the immigration policy convergence, the core indicating 4 variable model, while the expanded indicating 6 variable model. The results were standardized between 0 and 1 for readability. * sign denotes statistically significant difference based on standard error thresholds.

Conclusion

This thesis set out the objective to answer two questions, first why individuals vote for far-right parties despite stable or even declining levels of anti-immigration sentiment, and second how mainstream party convergence on immigration policy influences voter behavior. Based on the original models built from Eurobarometer, AUTNES, GLES, and CMP data sets, the study has demonstrated that far-right electoral success is less a function of absolute sentiment and more dependent on issue salience and perceived ownership. More specifically, the results indicate that perceived issue ownership emerges as a statistically significant predictor of Far-right support, while salience is not. Voters are more likely to support far-right parties when they believe that those parties are the most competent to handle immigration. Contrary to intuitive expectations, issue salience alone did not have a significant effect and the interaction term between issue salience and ownership also failed to reach statistical significance. In other words, far-right electoral success is contingent upon issue ownership and resulting issue priming rather than its salience. Aligning with findings of Budge (2015) and Walgrave (2012) who argued that parties gain electoral advantages when they emphasize owned issues, as voters perceive them as more competent.

Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted with caution. The analysis relied on K-Nearest Neighbor (KNN) matching to impute vote choice in the Eurobarometer dataset, through demographic variables. This led to a final sample where AfD and FPÖ comprised 1872 out of 22365 observations. The former might have concentrated the immigration ownership effect and reduced immigration salience variation within the far-right subsample, therefore reducing its marginal effects and making the interaction term between salience and ownership insignificant. Therefore, the statistical insignificance of salience and the interaction term may partly reflect data limitations rather than theoretical irrelevance. Nevertheless, the study applied robustness tests to

ensure the validity of the finding. Generalized Variance Inflation Factors showed no multicollinearity as all the variables were below the 2-cutoff point, in other words no predictor variables were significantly correlated. Model performance was evaluated using Root Mean Squared Error (RMSE), which was 0.0026 for the training set and 0.0038 for the test set, suggesting a minimal increase in error when the model is applied to new, unseen data. While potential endogeneity between issue salience and vote choice cannot entirely be ruled out, the application of exogenous sociodemographic covariates in the KNN imputation and consistency of results across multiple models (with and without interaction term) reduces concerns for serious endogeneity bias.

With respect to the second research question, whether party convergence can change things, the thesis found that while immigration policy convergence can reduce far-right support under certain conditions, it can also backfire as attempts to adapt positions closer or wider might be constrained by how these shifts are perceived by voters. For instance, in Austria, the ÖVP's adoption of the more restrictive immigration policy initially allowed for electoral gains but later enabled the FPÖ to reassert ownership and outperform its mainstream rival. In Germany, on the other hand, mainstream parties maintained more centrist immigration positions which was associated with a degree of electoral containment of the far right, at least until 2024. These diverging patterns reinforce the idea that policy convergence is not inherently effective as its success is contingent on credibility, timing, and underlying political opportunity. Therefore, "stealing" an issue by reframing it does not directly translate into its ownership as demonstrated by the issue ownership perception in Austria and Germany.

Despite data limitations, this thesis offers several contributions. It advances the empirical study of issue ownership and salience by modeling them jointly at the individual level. It also proposes a novel measurement of policy convergence and links rhetorical shifts in party manifestos to real-

world election outcomes. More importantly, it also questions prevailing narratives that far-right success is determined simply by rising xenophobia. Instead, it demonstrates that reputational authority or issue ownership over key issues conditions voting behavior. Future research should further investigate the mechanisms through which issue ownership is gained, maintained, or lost, especially in contexts where far-right parties remain electorally marginal but ideologically influential. Additional studies could also explore alternative imputation methods or leverage panel data with observed vote choice to test the robustness of the current findings.

The thesis shows that immigration matters in electoral terms, not because it dominates public discourse, but because it defines party competence. Based on the thesis findings, who “owns” the issue of immigration, not just how salient it is, shapes electoral outcomes. It may further be hypothesized that parties’ emphasis on issues they “own” contributes to elevating the salience of immigration itself; however, empirical verification of this causal link remains a task for future research. It is also worth noting that, parties may compete over issues or even attempt to “steal” them by reframing these, however, when mainstream parties seek to compete on issues they do not credibly own, they may inadvertently reinforce the very challengers they aim to displace. In doing so, these parties may also shift the broader political spectrum, either by mainstreaming radical positions or by triggering a defensive convergence toward the center, a process increasingly described as a “complex contagion”.

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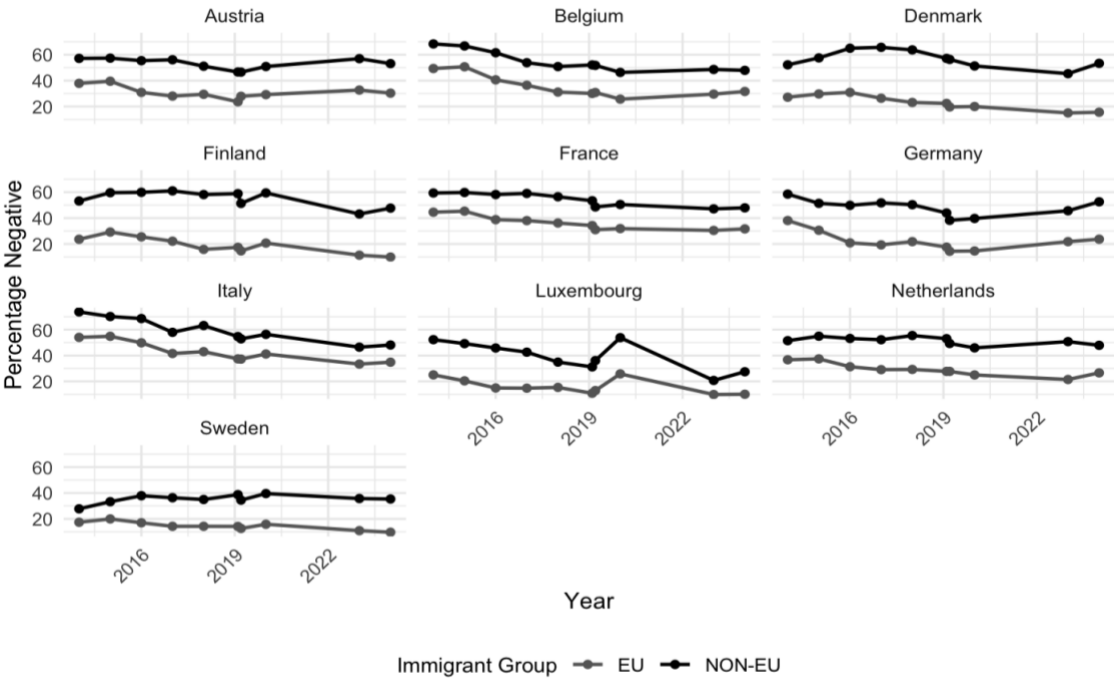
Source Attribution and Data Availability

The final and cleaned data and R scripts used for the logistic regression analysis are available at [online repository](#). The individual datasets used in this project are subject to the Creative Commons licenses, which impose certain restrictions on their reuse. While the final dataset along the R scripts is provided to ensure transparency and replicability, users intending to replicate or build upon this research are strongly encouraged to consult the original data sources and review their respective licensing conditions prior to use.

The AUTNESS data was retrieved from the [Austrian Social Science Data Archive \(AUSSDA\)](#). GLES datasets were accessed through [GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences](#). Eurobarometer data packages are available at [Eurobarometer Data Service](#) provided by GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences. Comparative Manifesto Project version 2024a was leveraged from [Manifesto Project Database](#).

Appendices

Appendix 1. Share of Population Reporting Negative Attitudes Toward EU and Non-EU Immigrants in Selected EU member States, 2014-2024



Note: Source: Eurobarometer. "Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or a negative feeling for you. i. Immigration of people from other EU Member States. ii. Immigration of people from non-EU countries." (Eurobarometer 86, 2014)

Appendix 2. Eurobarometer Immigration Variables, Survey Waves, and Coding

Eurobarometer	Immigrant (EU)	Immigrant (non-EU)	Most Important Issue (Immigration)	Immigrants Contribute a Lot
E2014	Qa11_1	Qa11_2	Qa5_9	
E2015	Qa10_1	Qa10_2	Qa5_9	Qd9_3
E2016	Qb4_1	Qb4_2	Qa5_9	Qd4_2
E2017	Qb4_1	Qb4_2	Qa5_9	Qd9_1
E2018	Qb1_1	Qb1_2	Qa5_9	Qd9_1
E2019	Qb3_1	Qb3_2	Qa5.9	Qd9_1
E2020	Qb7_1	Qb7_2	Qa5.9	Qb8_1
E2023	Qb10_1	Qb10_2	Qa5.9	Qb11_1
E2024	Qb8_1	Qb8_2	Qa5.9	Qb9_1

Note: the table presents immigration related variables in the Eurobarometer survey. These variables vary in different editions of the Eurobarometer, while demographic variables are labeled in the csv file and easily accessible.

Appendix 3. Comparative Manifesto Variable Coding and Description

Variable	Description
Per601: National Way of Life: Positive	Favorable mentions of the manifesto country's nation, history, and general appeals. May include - Support for established national ideas; General appeals to pride of citizenship; Appeals to patriotism; Appeals to nationalism; and Suspension of some freedoms to protect the state against subversion.
Per602: National Way of Life: Negative	Unfavorable mentions of the manifesto country's nation and history. May include - Opposition to patriotism; Opposition to nationalism; Opposition to the existing national state, national pride, and national ideas.
Per607: Multiculturalism: Positive	Favorable mentions of cultural diversity and cultural plurality within domestic societies. May include the preservation of autonomy of religious, linguistic heritages within the country including special educational provisions.
Prr608: Multiculturalism: Negative	The enforcement or encouragement of cultural integration. Appeals for cultural homogeneity in society.
Per705: Underprivileged Minority Groups	Very general favorable references to underprivileged minorities who are defined neither in economic nor in demographic terms (e.g. the handicapped, homosexuals, immigrants, indigenous). Only includes favorable statements that cannot be classified in other categories
Per 406: Protectionism: Positive	Favorable mentions of extending or maintaining the protection of internal markets (by the manifesto or other countries). Measures may include - Tariffs; Quota restrictions; Export subsidies.

Appendix 4 . Logistic Regression Coefficients (Model Summary)

Variable	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr (> z)
(Intercept)	-2.27323	2.37486	-0.957	0.33846
Immigration salience	0.61323	0.88468	0.693	0.48821
Issue ownership	15.085	1.0965	13.757	< 2e-16***
Age	-0.02583	0.01847	-1.399	0.16193
Gender	0.02047	0.67405	0.03	0.97578
Education	-0.79714	0.21326	-3.738	0.00019***
Social class	0.50268	0.17749	2.832	0.00462**
Region	-0.45253	0.32863	-1.377	0.16851
Occupation	-0.03498	0.06379	-0.548	0.5835
factor(country)DE	-0.41454	0.71389	-0.581	0.56145
factor(year)2015	-0.01423	1.52852	-0.009	0.99257
factor(year)2016	-0.02991	1.50153	-0.02	0.98411
factor(year)2017	-0.04255	1.53007	-0.028	0.97782
factor(year)2018	-0.01996	1.5177	-0.013	0.98951
factor(year)2019	0.20205	1.45558	0.139	0.8896
factor(year)2020	-0.17428	1.45358	-0.12	0.90457
factor(year)2023	-0.12641	1.47624	-0.086	0.93176
factor(year)2024	0.37303	1.52175	0.245	0.80636
<i>S x O</i>	-1.30222	1.39972	-0.93	0.3522

Note: This table reports the results of a logistic regression model estimating the likelihood of voting for far-right parties as a function of issue salience, perceived issue ownership, and relevant socio-demographic covariates. The model includes country and year fixed effects. Standard errors are robust. The interaction term between issue salience and issue ownership is included to test for conditional effects. Significance levels are denoted as follows: ***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05. The model was estimated using bias-reducing adjusted score equations (AS_{mixed}). Model fit statistics (AIC, deviance) and iteration count are reported at the bottom of the table.

Appendix 5 . Generalized Variance Inflation Factors (GVIF)

Variable	GVIF	Df	GVIF ^{1/2Df}
Immigration salience	1.771	1	1.331
Immigration ownership	2.597	1	1.612
Age	1.225	1	1.107
Gender	1.031	1	1.016
Education	1.241	1	1.114
Social class	1.355	1	1.164
Region	1.213	1	1.101
Occupation	1.180	1	1.086
factor(country)	1.153	1	1.074
factor(year)	1.375	8	1.020
immigration issue × issue ownership	2.696	1	1.642

Appendix 6. Conditional Effect of Immigration Salience on Predicted Lod-Odds

