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Immigration and Electoral Change in Mainstream Political Space

Sergi Pardos-Prado · Bram Lancee · Iñaki Sagarzazu

Abstract Research on radical right politics shows that the immigration issue can reshape electoral alignments and patterns of political competition in favor of anti-immigrant parties. However, we know surprisingly little about the capacity of the immigration issue to generate electoral change in systems where radical parties are absent. On the basis of issue ownership theory, we show with longitudinal data that concerns over immigration strengthen the identification with the centre-right party owning the immigration issue, especially when primed by the media. Our results, obtained using the German Socioeconomic Panel and media content analysis, confirm strong priming effects among previous non-identifiers and among supporters of the issue owner, and weaker effects among former mainstream left-wing leaners. The findings suggest that the immigration issue is a relevant trigger of electoral change in mainstream political space, but is less likely to generate transfers of party loyalty. Our analyses refine the test of priming effects as a mechanism for issue ownership theory.

Keywords Issue ownership · Electoral change · Immigration · Priming · Longitudinal analysis · Content analysis

Introduction

The rise and stabilization of radical right parties in Western Europe has shown that immigration is an issue that changes patterns of party competition and electoral

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alignments. The literature has identified at least three processes of electoral change that are due to anti-immigrant concerns. First, mainstream left parties converged with centre-right parties around the centre of the classic left–right dimension of economic competition, and started to compete for liberal stances in new cosmopolitan–authoritarian issue dimensions. This ideological shift left traditional working class and lower educational strata without clear political representation and opened a new space for anti-immigrant parties (Ignazi 1992; Kitschelt 1995; Perrineau 2004; Knigge 1998; Taguieff 2004; Cole 2005; Rydgren 2005; Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2010; De Vries et al. 2013). Second, as opposed to the non-ideological character of protest voters, traditional right-wing electorates with authoritarian and conservative values are part of the most stable electoral base for radical right parties to be successful (Lubbers et al. 2002; Arzheimer 2009). Third, politically alienated individuals without specific party attachments and with high levels of perceived ethnic threat activated in favor of the populist and charismatic leadership of radical right parties (Mayer 2002; Van der Brug et al. 2000; Van der Brug and Fennema 2003).

While the reasons behind the success of extreme and anti-immigrant parties have been thoroughly analyzed, the effect of immigration concerns on mainstream party loyalties remain under researched. In response to the success of right-wing niche parties, mainstream parties have adapted a wide array of strategies, ranging from cooperative to highly confrontational (Meguid 2005; Adams et al. 2006; Van Spanje 2011). The effect of immigration on the electoral alignments of mainstream parties is particularly unknown in systems where radical right parties are not a feasible alternative at the national level, such as the UK, Germany, or Spain. In this article, we aim to fill this gap and assess whether mainstream parties can gain or lose electorates because of the immigration issue even in the absence of radical parties.

We build upon the work by Bale (2003, 2008) and hypothesize that the immigration issue can benefit centre-right parties, even in the absence of a significant radical right threat. More specifically, we rely on the issue ownership model of party competition, which stipulates that the outcome of an election is—to a large extent—determined by voters whose concerns are primed in that given context, and who will consequently vote for the party with a better reputation of handling those concerns (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Riker 1993; Van der Brug 2004; Green 2007; Green-Pedersen 2007; Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Green and Hobolt 2008; Green and Jennings 2012). In order to test this mechanism, we draw upon the German Socioeconomic Panel Survey (SOEP; 1999–2009) and media content data. This allows us to test whether individual concerns over immigration are associated with electoral alignments over time, especially when the immigration issue is salient in the public debate. We analyze three forms of electoral change: the conversion, mobilization and activation of individual voters.

The contribution of this article is twofold. First, immigration can be a powerful electoral issue, even in the absence of feasible radical right alternatives, mainly by attracting non-aligned voters and by mobilizing centre-right electoral constituencies. Our findings also show that the fear of mainstream left-wing parties to lose voters in favor of the right is justified. This implies that, also in the absence of

radical alternatives, keeping the immigration issue off the public agenda is a good strategy for the mainstream left, and a bad one for the mainstream right.

The second contribution is a test of priming effects as a mechanism for issue ownership theory. The use of longitudinal data and modeling both macro- and micro-issue saliency allows us to better test the priming mechanism that is central to issue ownership theory, and that is rarely tested in the literature. This test revisits the role of issues in the stability of electoral alignments with a new case. It suggests that issues can be relevant triggers of change among certain types of voters, but at the same time, are more unlikely to generate transfers of party loyalties across distinct ideological spaces (Neundorf et al. 2011; Adams and Neundorf 2012).

The Issue Ownership Hypothesis

Petrocik's influential work spells out the three main axioms of issue ownership theory (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et al. 2003). First, each party competing in a political spectrum is expected to have a distinct issue handling reputation. Each party is viewed as better qualified to handle the problems of their party constituency, and their reputation is partly affected by their past record as the incumbent. Second, parties are expected to focus their communication strategies on issues and problems that are advantageous to them. Instead of attempting to change opinions on issues, each candidate focuses on his respective party constituency issues. Third, a voter who is mostly concerned with a party's constituency issue will cast a vote for that party.

Issue ownership theory has expectations for both party and voter behavior; in this article, we focus on the latter. Citizens are expected not to think about policies, but about problems that concern them and that need to be resolved (Petrocik 1996, p. 830). Issue ownership theory has been developed and refined within the valence framework of political competition (Stokes 1963, 1992; Adams and Merrill 2009; Adams et al. 2010, 2011), and has been complemented by saliency theory (Robertson 1976; Budge and Farlie 1983; Budge 1987; Carmines and Stimson 1993), and the dominance/dispersion theory (Riker 1993) of issue competition.

The main causal mechanism that has been proposed to explain why issue saliency affects party choice is *priming* (Petrocik et al. 2003, pp. 603–604). Priming is the phenomenon that parties or candidates are judged by different criteria depending on the saliency of topics in the news (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Zaller 1992; Jacobs and Shapiro 1994; Dancey and Goren 2010). Priming does neither refer to the direct effect of media attention on party attachment, nor to the change of individual issue opinions due to exposure to the media. Rather, priming refers to the extent that media attention strengthens the electoral effect of the already existing issue considerations of individuals. As Van der Brug (2004, p. 211) puts it: "when policies regarding nuclear energy are at the top of the media agenda, voters will judge parties by their positions on nuclear energy and when crime is in the news voter will evaluate parties by their positions on crime".

In spite of the centrality for issue ownership theory, priming effects have rarely been tested in issue ownership studies (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010). Issue

ownership theory has predominantly been analyzed with aggregate election results and from the perspective of party behavior. Priming is particularly likely to occur for the immigration issue. As underlined by Bale (2008, p. 322), immigration is a very real and potentially threatening issue for millions of citizens. The direct and individual experience of ethnic threats defines immigration as what has been called an *easy* issue, according to the classical definition of Carmines and Stimson (1989). Previous works shows that the saliency of immigration issues in the media shapes attitudes towards immigration (Boomgarden and Vliegenthart 2009), and that immigration issues are attractive for the media (Brighton and Foy 2007).

The immigration issue is not only relevant for extreme right or anti-immigrant parties (Alonso and Fonseca 2012). Bale (2008, p. 319) discusses the reasons why centre-right parties and electorates are particularly likely to be affected by immigration and integration issues. Immigration catalyses the threats and topics defining core centre-right constituencies, like keeping taxes low, ensuring law and order, and protecting national security. Therefore, a discourse based on tightening borders and dealing with the alleged evils of multiculturalism has been a powerful strategy for the mainstream right, with or without radical parties competing for the same vote (Perlmutter 1996).

However, we know little about how immigration saliency among individuals and in the media reshapes electoral alignments in mainstream political spaces. When this has been done, individual issue concern has been tested in isolation from media saliency (Van der Brug 2004; Green and Hobolt 2008; Bélanger and Meguid 2008). Analyses that make use of individual-level panel data to test these conjectures are even scarcer.[1] Based on issue ownership theory, we hence formulate a general hypothesis:

- *H1* (*Priming Hypothesis*): the saliency of immigration in the media strengthens the effect of an individual's concern with immigration on the attachment to the issue owner.

Recent research has cast doubt on some findings on priming effects. In an influential article, Lenz (2009) shows that some media effects attributed to priming are masking a more rational learning process of voters. Lenz argues that exposing individuals to campaign and media messages informs them about the position of parties on an issue. Then, these newly informed individuals often adopt their party's or candidate's position as their own. Regrettably, the absence of a longitudinal measurement of perceived party positions does not allow us to directly test learning processes. However, without dismissing the possibility of learning among some voters, three reasons allow our research design to directly test priming mechanisms.

First, Lenz shows that learning only tends to occur among people who already have a preferred party. If our findings would only be caused by learning, we should only find an effect among individuals who already had some leaning towards the issue owner before our treatment (media saliency). However, our

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[1] For an example of work using aggregate time-series analyses in the valence framework, see Green and Jennings (2012).

results also hold for individuals who did had no particular party attachments at some point in the past, and for previous left-wing leaners. Second, Lenz rightfully argues that some priming studies only test issue opinions measured after the treatment. Luckily, we have individual measures of immigration concern included every year, and our estimates reflect the change of issue concern at time t compared to past values. Third, as Lenz acknowledges, priming may occur on issues where people have previously developed strong attitudes from their social experiences and that researchers have sometimes called "easy issues". Indeed, "some evidence on priming and racial predispositions supports these suggestions" (Lenz 2009, p. 834). Immigration is thus a very plausible candidate to respond to priming effects.

Issue Ownership and Electoral Change

The literature on electoral change has suggested three main potential sources of de- and re-alignment of party attachments: conversion, mobilization, and activation. As regards the *conversion* mechanism, both classic and modern works on electoral change point out the possibility of direct transfer of supporters from one party to the other due to a new dominant cleavage or issue replacing old interests and ideological tendencies (Sundquist 1973; Schattschneider 1975; Erikson and Tedin 1981; Mayhew 2002; Norpoth and Rusk 2007). This is precisely how the immigration issue is often understood in Europe. The emergence of a strong anti-immigrant discourse reshapes the political space whereby left-wing electorates, who feel increasingly unrepresented by a more liberal mainstream left, tend to move to the anti-immigrant right (Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005; Mudde 2007; Bornschier 2010; Kitschelt 1995; Kriesi et al. 2008; Krouwel 2012). Whether such electoral change also exists in the absence of radical right parties is an empirical question that we analyze below.

Mobilization refers to the vote coming from the parties' most natural electorate, whose already existing party affinity strengthens due to the presence of a significant issue concern (Franklin 2004; Franklin and Ladner 1995). It is well known that a vote cast as a function of perceived ethnic threat can follow an ideological motivation and go beyond a mere form of protest voting (Van der Brug et al. 2000; Van der Brug and Fennema 2003). If this is the case, the priming of immigration concerns can especially mobilize the most proximate electoral constituency of the party owning the immigration issue. From a radical right studies perspective, part of the core constituency of these parties is precisely composed of voters with traditional conservative and authoritarian values who get mobilized for a party that emerges as more clearly extreme right-wing.

Finally, we refer to *activation* when the swing does not come from partisans of competing parties, but from individuals with no specific previous party attachments. Protest voting can very plausibly fit into this form of electoral change. However, this mechanism involves any other form of activation of voters who did not feel represented by any party in the past, and who are able to link their strong immigration concerns with the immigration owner once the issue becomes salient in the public debate.

From an issue ownership perspective, there is no clear reason to expect differences in how issue concern affects conversion, mobilization, and activation. We therefore expect the priming mechanism to be present in all three outcomes, and test the empirical validity of the following propositions below:

The saliency of immigration in the media strengthens the effect of an individual's concern with immigration on the attachment to the issue owner,

- Among individuals with previously existing affinities towards a different party (*H1a*: *Conversion Hypothesis*).
- Among individuals with previously existing affinities towards the same party (*H1b*: *Mobilization Hypothesis*).
- Among individuals without previously existing party affinities (*H1c*: *Activation Hypothesis*).

While these hypotheses are relevant for the immigration debate, they also contribute to the analysis of issues as agents of change or stability in a given party system (Franklin et al. 1992; Green-Pedersen 2007; Bélanger and Meguid 2008). Although there is a vast literature about issues and electoral stability, few studies have tested the implications of issue ownership theory for processes of electoral change at the individual level over time (Adams and Neundorf 2012). Moreover, according to Petrocik et al. (2003, p. 830), "once the agenda of the election is settled, reinforced partisans, defectors, and swing voters tilt the outcome in favor of the candidate advantaged by the agenda". To the best of our knowledge, however, the reinforcement and swing of party attachment due to issue concerns has not been tested before.

Data and Method

Case Selection

Our analyses focus on Germany. Germany is one of the established European democracies where a feasible radical right alternative has not stabilized at the national level. Despite some exceptional and minority regional representation in Germany,[2] anti-immigrant parties never reached the 5 % threshold that is needed to be represented in the federal Parliament. The typical multiparty and proportional character of the German system allows us to further generalize issue ownership theory, which has been tested almost exclusively in bi-party and majoritarian systems such as the US and Britain.[3] Proportionality, multipartyism and the pivotal role of two mainstream center-left and center-right parties is comparable to other countries without established radical right parties like Spain or Portugal. However,

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[2] The Republicans were represented in the state of Baden-Württemberg until 2001. The National Democratic Party (NPD) is represented in Saxony and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The German People's Union, after entering a non-competition agreement with the NPD in 2004, also obtained representation in Brandemburg. The electoral appeal and threat of anti-immigrant parties in Germany at the federal level, however, is considered to be minor (Mudde 2007).

[3] For an exception in the Netherlands, see Van der Brug (2004).

the comparability with Britain may be more limited due to the majoritarian system of the latter and the increasing electoral success of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) to the right of the conservative party (Ford et al. 2012).

The immigration issue is relevant for the German case given the remarkable variation in saliency during the time span analyzed (Boomgarden and Vliegenthart 2009). Variation is due to the debate regarding an immigration policy change that was implemented in 2005, and due to events that were framed in immigration terms, like the terrorist attacks of 11 September in New York and 11 March in Madrid (Bauder 2008).

In the German case, it can be said that the party owning the issue of immigration is the centre-right Christian Democratic–Christian Social Union (CDU–CSU), which is the main conservative centre-right party in Germany. Based on data from the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2012), for instance, we can see that the CDU–CSU scores highest on the fraction of negative statements towards multiculturalism,[4] and lowest on the positive ones. Moreover, the differences in the attention towards positive and negative mentions of multiculturalism are large across parties. In the period of our analysis (1999–2009), the percentage of *positive* statements referring to multiculturalism is about 32 % in the CDU–CSU manifestos, while it is 50 % for the social-democratic party (SPD), 46 % for the liberals (FDP), 80 % for the Green, and 78 % for the left (Die Linke). The share of *negative* statements in the CDU–CSU manifestos is 58 %, while it constituted 12 % for SPD, 9 % for FDP, and none for the Green and Die Linke. These scores signal a clear preference by the conservatives to have a tougher language towards immigration in their party manifesto and in consequence their policies.[5] However, because ownership is given by the electorate's preferences, we also looked at that too. Using the German Pre-election Cross-section (GLES 2009) survey (Rattinger et al. 2011) we tabulated which party is the most able at handling the problem of immigration. The results point clearly in the direction of the right-wing CDU–CSU with 54.81 % of respondents preferring them as the most able.[6] Only 6.45 % of respondents considered SPD as the most able to deal with immigration, 9.68 % considered FDP, 3.23 % mentioned the Green, and 25.81 % mentioned Die Linke.

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[4] The item available in the CMP database that best resembles the immigration issue is: "cultural diversity, communalism, cultural plurality and pillarization; preservation of autonomy of religious, linguistic heritages within the country including special educational provisions".

[5] The CMP data on immigration issue ownership are consistent with the 2010 and 2006 Chapel Hill expert surveys, which contain an item on parties' saliency on immigration issues (from 0 to 10, where 10 means maximal saliency). According to the 2010 survey, CDU–CSU is the party insisting more on immigration issues (7.33). This score is above FDP (5.53), SPD (4.47), De Linke (5.07) and even the Green (7.07). As for the 2006 survey, CDU–CSU also shows a high intensity on immigration issues (7.43), above FDP (6.14), SPD (6.86) and De Linke (6.67). Only the Green have a slightly higher saliency score in 2006 (7.57), but on the liberal side of immigration policy and therefore far from competing for the ownership of negative concerns over immigration.

[6] For this estimation we used the questions asking about the respondent's perception of the first, second and third most important problem and the party most capable of handling each. We restricted ourselves to the following alternatives: 3411 "Auslaenderkriminalitaet speziell" (crime of foreigners); 3752 "Begrenzung Zuwanderung speziell" (limiting immigration); and 3753 "Auslaenderanteil in Deutschland" (the share of foreigners in Germany).

Data

Our individual level data is the SOEP Survey, a household based panel study with a yearly questionnaire since 1984 (Wagner et al. 1993). Our main independent variable, 'Being concerned about immigration to Germany', is available from 1999 onwards. Consequently, the analysis is restricted to the years 1999–2009. Our analytic sample consists of all people aged 18 and older who are born in Germany. As with all panels, the SOEP is subject to attrition. The main source of attrition was refusal. Special measures were taken to reduce attrition, such as contacting respondents again each year until all members of the household refused for two consecutive years (Haisken-DeNew and Frick 2005; Kroh and Spieß 2008). Missing values are replaced with information available at $t - 1$.[7]

Dependent Variables

Since our object of study is electoral change and durable party alignments, we focus on party attachment. Even if issue ownership theory is usually used to explain vote choice (which is not available in the SOEP), focusing on attitudes like party attachments is a conservative test for issue ownership theory. Attitudes are more stable and presumably more resistant to short-term influences than vote choice. Furthermore, testing the mechanisms of electoral change hypothesized above requires us to measure longitudinally whether individuals belong to one or another party constituency, both in terms of attachment as such, and the strength of party leaning. Classic vote recall questions do not allow us to do this, as the vote for a given party can only change from election to election every 4 years, and as vote recall indicators conflate both sporadic an permanent party supporters. Recent research also shows that issue concerns have a relevant impact on the formation of party attachments in Germany, and not the other way around (Adams and Neundorf 2012).

To assess party attachment, the SOEP includes the following survey items: "Many people in Germany lean towards one party in the long term, even if they occasionally vote for another party. Do you lean towards a particular party (Yes/No)?" This item is followed by: "Toward which party do you lean?" *Conversion* is measured with a dichotomous variable that has the value one when the respondent identifies with CDU–CSU and the value zero when the respondent identifies with another party. In order to test the *mobilization* hypothesis we measure the existing attachment towards a given party with the strength of leaning towards CDU–CSU. The exact formulation of the survey question is as follows: "Toward which party do you lean? And to what extent? (very weakly, weakly somewhat, rather strongly, very strongly)". All these categories are considered as party attachment and all of them are included in the analyses. In order to test the *activation* hypothesis, we construct a dichotomous variable that takes a value of one when a respondent identifies with CDU–CSU and the value zero when the respondent does not have any party attachment. The results regarding the attachment to parties other than CDU–CSU are commented in the text and reported in the "Appendix" section.

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[7] We estimated our models also without replacement; this did not substantially change the findings.

Independent Variable

Each survey year, respondents are asked what their main concerns are. The question is 'What is your attitude towards the following areas – are you concerned about them?' One of the areas is 'immigration to Germany' with the response categories 'very concerned' (chosen by 30.6 % of the sample), 'somewhat concerned' (45.0 %), 'not concerned at all' (24.4 %). Our independent variable at the individual level is thus concern over immigration. The word *concern* strictly follows the terminology used in previous works on issue ownership, and it is considered to capture individual-level issue saliency (Petrocik 1996; Petrocik et al. 2003; Lancee and Pardos-Prado 2013).[8] Bélanger and Meguid (2008, p. 489) show that the influence of issue ownership is conditional upon the perceived salience of the issue. According to these authors, failing to account for individual saliency like most aggregate analyses have done in this literature can lead to biased results. The word 'concern' is not ideologically neutral, however, and is likely to capture a negative conception of immigration as a *problem*, which is expected to favor the party with a clearer reputation of acknowledging and handling this problem (Van der Brug 2004).

Issue Saliency in the Media

Analyzing priming effects requires a measure of media saliency. Even if parties are the main actors trying to prime some issues over others, there are external events not controlled by parties, which also shape the agenda. Moreover, parties may find it in their own strategic interest to address issues that they do not own (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010, p. 667). In the US, it has been found that parties' prioritized issues do not necessarily coincide with the media's (Petrocik et al. 2003, p. 614), and that it is the latter to which voters pay attention. It is well-established that political communication largely takes place through the mass media (Green-Pedersen 2007, p. 624), and that a measure of issue saliency within the overall public debate is needed.

   Boomgarden and Vliegenthart (2009) show that news coverage of immigration issues relates to macro-level dynamics of anti-immigrant attitudes in Germany. Using the LexisNexis database, we employed the extensive search string developed by Boomgarden and Vliegenthart which identified articles on immigration and integration.[9] We looked at the number of newspaper articles published on a monthly

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[8] For comparison purposes, and given the tradition of measuring saliency via the most important problem question, we have checked the aggregate relationship between our concern measurement and the most important problem of Germans using the German Politbarometer series (Forschungsgruppe Wahlen 2013). Both series show a similar pattern and so we are confident that our measure is adequate.

[9] The search string was: (discrim! OR (hate OR enemy! OR aversion OR dislik! w/5 foreigner! OR immigr! OR refugee! OR alien!) OR integration! OR naturali! OR ((course! OR education) w/5 (language! OR integration! OR naturali! OR foreign! OR immigr! OR asyl)) OR language course! OR language class! OR language education! OR naturalization class OR family reunion OR sham marriage OR fake marriage OR forced marriage OR forced engagement OR immigr! OR foreign! OR multicult! OR (ghett! w/5 foreigner! OR immigr! OR refugee!) OR muslim! OR islam! OR asyl! OR immigrant visa! OR residence permit OR permanent residence OR citizenship! OR (asyl w/5 reject! OR refus!) OR (spouse w/5 foreign) OR refugee! OR honor killing! OR (hate speech! OR hate preach!) OR (terror w/5 fundament!) OR human traffick!). See Boomgarden and Vliegenthart (2009) for the German language version.

basis from 1999 to 2009. Specifically, we included the two German newspapers *Die Welt* and *Tageszeitung*, and at the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*. While it would have been preferable to analyze larger newspapers, such as *Bild*, or *Frankfurter Algemeine Zeitung*, these were not available in the LexisNexis database. However, the three media that we look at have different ideological orientations and give remarkably consistent and reassuring results in terms of attention to immigration issues. Like Boomgarden and Vliegenthart (2009), we do not correct for variations in monthly news coverage of the immigration issue. Using these measures of attention by each news source we generate a measure of issue saliency. We do so by performing a factor analysis of these three variables. The results of this analysis show the existence of one underlying factor capturing the dynamics of the immigration issue.[10] We therefore use this factor as our indicator of media attention to the issue of immigration and immigrant integration. We lag our saliency measure 1 month and we match it to the individual-level dataset using the month of the interview. This implies that, although respondents are only interviewed once a year, we measure the media saliency 1 month before the time of interview.

Control Variables

On the individual level, we control for socio-demographic characteristic like respondents' education (with the CASMIN scheme), labor market status, age, and household income (the natural logarithm of disposable and equivalized household income, at constant price levels). Since articulating a given party identification can also be a function of involvement in politics and resources (Anduiza 2002), we also control for interest in politics (measured on a 5-point scale) and general life satisfaction. Furthermore, party attachment is not determined by immigration issues only. Economic perceptions are important determinants of the vote (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2009; Evans and Pickup 2010). Moreover, these issues might correlate. To capture 'net' concern about immigration, we therefore also control for 'being concerned about the economy' (very concerned, somewhat concerned, not concerned at all). Since previous research shows that religiosity is still an important determinant in voting behavior in Europe, especially for Christian Democratic parties (Botterman and Hooghe 2012), we also control for the frequency of church attendance.

On the macro-level, changing economic conditions have received much attention, both with regard to attitudes towards immigration and party attachment. Previous studies find that attitudes toward immigration are affected by unemployment and immigration (Coenders and Scheepers 2008, Meuleman et al. 2009) as well as by regional variation in the size of the ethnic minority population (Schneider 2008). Previous work further shows that economic conditions (Van der Brug et al. 2007) and immigration rates (Lubbers et al. 2002) can affect party preference. We therefore control for the unemployment rate and the share of the foreign population, measured with (year- and federal state-specific) unemployment percentages (Bundesagentur für

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[10] The eigenvalue of this factor is 1.51. The factor loadings for *Die Welt*, *Der Spiegel* and *Tageszeitung* are 0.75, 0.71 and 0.67, respectively. The uniqueness values for each of these news sources are 0.44, 0.5, and 0.55, respectively.

Arbeit 2011) and the number of foreigners per 1,000 inhabitants (Statistisches Bundesamt Deutschland 2009).

Statistical Model

Our purpose is to analyze whether concerns over immigration are important for party attachment, and to assess whether this is especially the case when the immigration issue is more salient in the media. In order to use the longitudinal power of our dataset and to ensure unit homogeneity to the maximum possible extent, we use linear person specific fixed-effects (FEs) models for the continuous operationalization of our dependent variable:

$$y_{ikt} - \overline{y_{ik}} = \beta_1(x_{it} - \overline{x_i}) + \beta_2(z_{t-1} - \overline{z_{i-1}}) + \beta_3[(x_{it} - \overline{x_i})(z_{t-1} - \overline{z_{i-1}})] + \beta_4(g_{it} - \overline{g_i}) + \varepsilon_{it} - \overline{\varepsilon_i},$$

where y_{ikt} is the strength of party leaning of individual i towards party k at time t, x is the value of individual concern over immigration, z is the value of media attention towards immigration issues, g is the value of time-variant controls, β_k are vectors of FEs parameters, ε is the error term.

For the dichotomous version of our dependent variable, FE models are optimized through maximum likelihood estimation and using a logit transformation of the previous function.

The FE model suits our purpose very well. FE models estimate an intercept for each individual. The advantage of the FE model is that it controls for all differences between individuals, thereby eliminating all time-constant unobserved heterogeneity (Halaby 2004). FE models only use within-individual variation to estimate coefficients and are therefore particularly useful to analyze changes over time. We hence only analyze within-individual variance and estimate the effect of the change of a respondent's concern over immigration on a changing party attachment.

The disadvantage of FE models is that they use each variable's difference from its within-individual mean and hence can estimate only coefficients that have within-individual variation (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2008). Another disadvantage is that, in its logistic variant, individuals without variation on the dependent variable are excluded from the analysis since they do not provide information for the likelihood function. Strictly speaking, this is not a problem, since for an effect to be observed, one also needs to observe a change in the variable of interest (Halaby 2004). In any case, we replicated our models with multinomial random-effects (REs) models, which gave identical results.[11]

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[11] Multinomial models allow us to avoid ignoring any relevant alternative in case the options we analyze are inherently linked. We first estimated a random-effects (REs) multinomial model predicting a categorical variable where the value 1 (reference category) corresponds to "leaning to CDU-CSU", the value 2 corresponds to "not leaning to any party", and the value 3 corresponds to "leaning to any other party". We estimated a second model with the same dependent variable, except for a slight variation in the third value, which corresponds to leaning towards SPD. The results concerning the conversion and activation hypotheses are equivalent to those obtained with logit FE models and reported in Tables 1 and 2 below (results available upon request). Despite the consistency of our findings across modelling strategies, we only report FE models. The assumption in RE models is that the error term is uncorrelated with the covariates. However, this assumption is often violated and does not allow us to deal with the problem of unobserved heterogeneity.

Analysis

Figure 1 presents the descriptive aggregate trends of our main variables of interest. The left hand side *Y* axis presents the percentage of respondents that have a leaning towards the CDU–CSU or the SPD, as well as the percentage of respondents of SOEP who are concerned over immigration. The right-hand side *Y* axis shows the scale for the media saliency factor; lower values indicating less presence of the immigration issue in our media analysis. The attention of the media to immigration issues (represented in the long dash line) varies considerably with a general descending pattern and three peaks of attention. The first peak is around 2001, and corresponds to one of the periods of most intense discussion regarding a new immigration law in Germany. In 2001, the left–right divide over the immigration issue became particularly visible, given that CDU–CSU (at that time in opposition) announced its main immigration program, and that the conservatively governed states in the upper house of parliament opposed the law proposed by the Ministry of the Interior in the summer for being too liberal (Bauder 2008, p. 100). The terrorist attacks on 11 September in New York and the links that this issue had with immigration-related debates also took place that year. The second peak of attention is around 2004, when the new immigration law finally passed the lower and upper houses, and when the 11 March terror attacks in the railway system in Madrid took place (Bauder 2008, p. 100). The third peak of attention is around 2006, and is followed by a pronounced decrease in media attention.

The evolution of the aggregate concern over immigration in public opinion (represented by the dotted line) follows a similar increasing pattern to that of the media around the 2003–2005 period, when the immigration law was passed. Public concern, however, is not always linked to media attention before 2003, even if it follows again a similar descending pattern from 2006 onwards. This suggests that
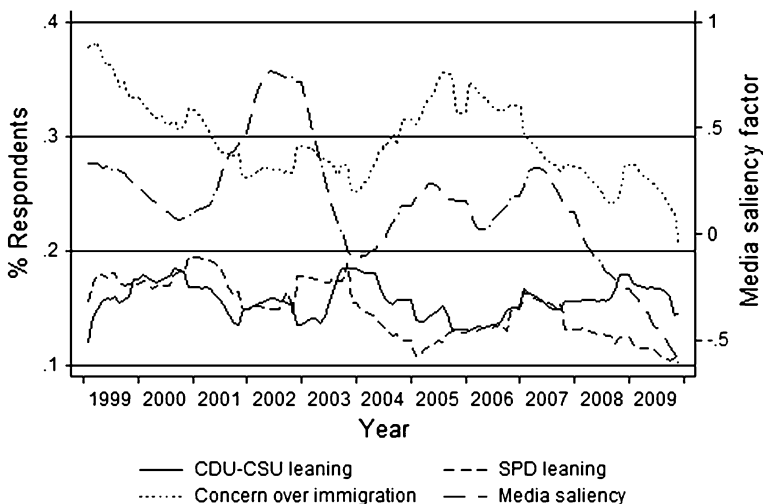
Fig. 1 Aggregate trends in immigration saliency, concern and party attachment

media attention and aggregate public concern are not tapping into the same measure (i.e. general saliency), and therefore it is reasonable to distinguish them and observe how they interact.[12] Moreover, the individual-level dynamics is possibly masked by these aggregate patterns (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). Finally, the trend in attachment to CDU–CSU (straight line) and SPD (small dash line) is not clearly connected to immigration saliency. It is important to note, however, that the attachment towards CDU–CSU leapfrogged that of SPD in 2002, which eventually led the conservative party to be the first party in the 2005 federal election, despite decreasing its vote share from the previous election. Thus, from an aggregate perspective, the ownership of immigration cannot explain the evolution of party attachment in Germany. However, these are aggregate trends. To test our hypotheses, we proceed with an individual-level and multivariate specification.

The models presented in Table 1 do so by estimating the main effects and the interaction between public opinion and media saliency at the individual level and over time. The two first models in Table 1 assess the conversion hypothesis using logistic FE regression.[13] According to the effect of the first covariate specified in model 1, individual concern increases the likelihood of switching party attachment in favor of CDU–CSU ($b = 0.109$; std. error [SE] $= 0.044$). In model 2, however, the interaction between individual and media saliency (saliency × concern) is not statistically significant ($b = -0.015$; SE $= 0.078$) thus rejecting H2a.

Models 3 and 4 test the mobilization hypothesis with linear FE regression. In model 3, individual concern over immigration significantly increases the strength of party identification towards CDU–CSU ($b = 0.034$; SE $= 0.007$). Thus, individuals who report an over time increasing concern with immigration, identify more strongly with the issue owner. The positive and significant multiplicative term in model 4 (saliency × concern) shows that this is especially the case when immigration is salient in the media ($b = 0.027$; SE $= 0.013$). This finding confirms priming effects amongst issue owner identifiers, and therefore supports the mobilization hypothesis. Despite being intuitive, validating the mobilization hypothesis is not necessarily an obvious outcome. The presence of priming effects among party identifiers suggests that stressing a favorable issue in the media can have an independent influence on a party's electoral performance beyond the already powerful effect of party identification. It would also be intuitive to expect party identifiers to always be equally likely to support their party no matter the dynamics of issue competition. However, our findings rather support the idea that issues can have an independent effect from party loyalty, and confirm recent evidence showing that the former can shape the latter (Adams and Neundorf 2012).

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[12] The correlation between negative mentions to multiculturalism by parties using CMP data and aggregate concern over immigration in public opinion is almost negligible. This suggests that party manifestoes have little impact on public opinion according to our data. Since the available time points in the CMP data are only 4, however, this finding does not allow us to draw firm conclusions regarding the impact of party discourse on public opinion.

[13] Note that the N across the models testing the conversion and the activation hypotheses change because the cases coded as 0 are different. While the value 0 corresponds to respondents identified with any party other than CDU–CSU when testing conversion, it corresponds to respondents without party attachment in those models testing activation. The models testing the mobilization hypothesis only include CDU–CSU identifiers.

Table 1 Fixed effects regression predicting attachment towards CDU–CSU: conversion, mobilization and activation

	Conversion		Mobilization		Activation	
	M1 b (SE)	M2 b (SE)	M3 b (SE)	M4 b (SE)	M5 b (SE)	M6 b (SE)
Concern over immigration	0.109* (0.044)	0.111* (0.045)	0.034*** (0.007)	0.030*** (0.007)	0.177*** (0.025)	0.158*** (0.026)
Saliency × concern		−0.015 (0.078)		0.027* (0.013)		0.152** (0.047)
Media saliency immigration	−0.188** (0.067)	−0.155 (0.181)	−0.037*** (0.010)	−0.096*** (0.029)	−0.291*** (0.039)	−0.619*** (0.109)
Unemployment rate	0.080*** (0.018)	0.080*** (0.018)	0.013*** (0.003)	0.013*** (0.003)	0.064*** (0.010)	0.064*** (0.010)
Share of foreigners	0.006 (0.003)	0.006 (0.003)	−0.000 (0.001)	−0.000 (0.001)	−0.001 (0.002)	−0.001 (0.002)
Concern with economy	0.005 (0.045)	0.005 (0.045)	0.022** (0.007)	0.021** (0.007)	0.124*** (0.027)	0.122*** (0.027)
Interested in politics	−0.300* (0.145)	−0.300* (0.145)	0.849*** (0.024)	0.850*** (0.024)	2.954*** (0.085)	2.958*** (0.085)
Church attendance	0.053 (0.125)	0.052 (0.125)	0.007 (0.018)	0.008 (0.018)	−0.288*** (0.072)	−0.286*** (0.072)
General life satisfaction	−0.008 (0.187)	−0.008 (0.187)	0.154*** (0.030)	0.153*** (0.030)	0.334** (0.107)	0.335** (0.107)
Adjusted household income	0.121 (0.085)	0.121 (0.085)	0.010 (0.014)	0.011 (0.014)	0.249*** (0.052)	0.249*** (0.052)
Age	−0.006 (0.011)	−0.006 (0.011)	−0.007*** (0.002)	−0.007*** (0.002)	−0.040*** (0.006)	−0.040*** (0.006)

Table 1 continued

	Conversion		Mobilization		Activation	
	M1 b(SE)	M2 b(SE)	M3 b(SE)	M4 b(SE)	M5 b(SE)	M6 b(SE)
Fulltime employed (ref.)						
Part-time employed	0.007	0.007	0.004	0.004	−0.125	−0.126
	(0.135)	(0.135)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.080)	(0.080)
Vocational training	0.131	0.132	0.048	0.047	−0.181	−0.189
	(0.243)	(0.243)	(0.050)	(0.050)	(0.136)	(0.136)
Irregular employment	0.021	0.021	0.015	0.015	0.041	0.042
	(0.144)	(0.144)	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.087)	(0.087)
Unemployed	−0.066	−0.066	0.043	0.044	−0.005	−0.004
	(0.164)	(0.164)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.093)	(0.093)
In education	0.174	0.174	−0.011	−0.011	−0.229	−0.231
	(0.215)	(0.215)	(0.038)	(0.038)	(0.130)	(0.130)
Inactive	−0.050	−0.050	0.013	0.013	−0.024	−0.021
	(0.120)	(0.120)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.071)	(0.071)
Inadequate/in school	−0.168	−0.169	−0.099	−0.097	−0.654*	−0.642*
	(0.500)	(0.500)	(0.090)	(0.090)	(0.283)	(0.283)
General elementary (ref.)						
Basic vocational	−0.236	−0.236	−0.027	−0.027	0.059	0.060
	(0.299)	(0.299)	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.159)	(0.159)
Intermediate general	0.467	0.468	−0.087	−0.087	0.071	0.070
	(0.414)	(0.414)	(0.066)	(0.066)	(0.215)	(0.215)
Intermediate vocational	0.027	0.027	−0.019	−0.017	−0.303	−0.296
	(0.461)	(0.461)	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.245)	(0.245)

Table 1 continued

	Conversion		Mobilization		Activation	
	M1 b(SE)	M2 b(SE)	M3 b(SE)	M4 b(SE)	M5 b(SE)	M6 b(SE)
Maturity	−0.288	−0.289	−0.091	−0.090	0.013	0.019
	(0.458)	(0.458)	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.259)	(0.259)
Tertiary	0.115	0.116	0.030	0.029	0.645*	0.638*
	(0.489)	(0.489)	(0.081)	(0.081)	(0.281)	(0.281)
Constant			3.835***	3.846***		
			(0.150)	(0.150)		
N observations	11663	11663	31991	31991	36610	36610
N subjects	2117	2117	8376	8376	5048	5048

Note: Fixed-effects linear regression for mobilization fixed-effects logit regression for activation and conversion

Source: SOEP (1999–2009)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed tests

Table 2 Fixed effects logit model predicting the likelihood to lean towards the CDU–CSU versus leaning to another party

	Leaning CDU–CSU versus SPD		Leaning CDU–CSU versus Green		Leaning CDU–CSU versus FDP		Leaning CDU–CSU versus Die Linke	
	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)	b (SE)
Concern over immigration	0.202** (0.063)	0.163* (0.066)	0.415* (0.169)	0.395* (0.172)	0.137 (0.080)	0.132 (0.081)	0.235 (0.241)	0.217 (0.246)
Saliency × concern		0.266* (0.117)		0.197 (0.318)		0.046 (0.136)		0.158 (0.437)
Media saliency immigration	-0.457*** (0.097)	-1.030*** (0.271)	0.588* (0.281)	0.238 (0.629)	-0.130 (0.127)	-0.223 (0.304)	0.278 (0.362)	-0.098 (1.098)
Unemployment rate	0.011 (0.027)	0.011 (0.027)	0.073 (0.069)	0.072 (0.069)	0.146*** (0.033)	0.146*** (0.033)	0.314*** (0.088)	0.313*** (0.088)
Share of foreigners	0.001 (0.006)	0.001 (0.006)	0.032 (0.020)	0.031 (0.020)	0.005 (0.006)	0.005 (0.006)	0.134* (0.066)	0.133* (0.066)
Concern with economy	0.090 (0.068)	0.090 (0.068)	-0.116 (0.170)	-0.120 (0.171)	-0.055 (0.079)	-0.056 (0.079)	-0.348 (0.246)	-0.343 (0.246)
Interested in politics	-0.495* (0.216)	-0.472* (0.216)	-0.922 (0.573)	-0.934 (0.575)	0.387 (0.269)	0.387 (0.269)	0.869 (0.777)	0.876 (0.776)
Age	0.109*** (0.015)	0.108*** (0.015)	0.069 (0.040)	0.068 (0.040)	-0.175*** (0.021)	-0.175*** (0.021)	-0.020 (0.064)	-0.021 (0.064)
Inadequate/in school	-0.755 (0.678)	-0.706 (0.677)	1.145 (2.032)	1.190 (2.036)	-2.058 (1.281)	-2.048 (1.282)	13.296 (1740.008)	13.335 (1734.836)
General elementary (ref.)								
Basic vocational	-0.568 (0.372)	-0.572 (0.373)	0.287 (1.438)	0.296 (1.441)	0.067 (0.924)	0.075 (0.925)	-0.049 (1.430)	-0.048 (1.436)

Table 2 continued

	Leaning CDU–CSU versus SPD		Leaning CDU–CSU versus Green		Leaning CDU–CSU versus FDP		Leaning CDU–CSU versus Die Linke	
	b(SE)	b(SE)	b(SE)	b(SE)	b(SE)	b(SE)	b(SE)	b(SE)
Intermediate general	−0.456	−0.464	2.438	2.446	−1.050	−1.042	0.797	0.776
	(0.533)	(0.532)	(1.923)	(1.925)	(1.050)	(1.050)	(1.914)	(1.919)
Intermediate vocational	−0.407	−0.386	1.169	1.133	−1.936	−1.937	−0.223	−0.274
	(0.629)	(0.628)	(2.210)	(2.212)	(1.187)	(1.186)	(2.706)	(2.714)
Maturity	−1.348*	−1.328*	2.038	2.099	−1.849	−1.841	−1.564	−1.578
	(0.641)	(0.641)	(1.917)	(1.922)	(1.217)	(1.217)	(2.617)	(2.621)
Tertiary	−1.075	−1.099	2.736	2.792	−1.742	−1.740	13.648	13.544
	(0.713)	(0.713)	(1.954)	(1.959)	(1.242)	(1.242)	(1441.982)	(1433.104)
N observations	5244	5244	823	823	3859	3859	437	437
N subjects	1070	1070	192	192	680	680	102	102

Note: Fixed-effects linear regression for mobilization fixed-effects logit regression for activation and conversion

Source: SOEP (1999–2009)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed tests

Finally, the two last models in Table 1 test the activation hypothesis using logit FE regression. Again, the average effect of individual concern over immigration specified without any interaction in model 5 increases the likelihood of leaning towards CDU–CSU ($b = 0.177$; SE $= 0.025$). Moreover, the positive and significant interaction between individual and media saliency in model 6 (saliency $\times$ concern) indicates that this is especially so when immigration is more present in the public debate ($b = 0.152$; SE $= 0.047$).

The lack of statistical significance of the interaction term in model 2 suggests that the conversion hypothesis is not valid, and this is indeed so on average. However, the reference category of the variable measuring conversion includes identification with *any* party other than CDU–CSU. It could be that this heterogeneous category masks significant transfers from specific parties. In Table 2, we report models equivalent to Table 1, but specifying each individual party as the reference category.[14] As shown in Table 2, the main term of individual concern over immigration is significantly associated with CDU–CSU leaning when compared to leaning towards SPD (first covariate in models 1 and 2) and Green (models 3 and 4), but not when compared to FDP (models 5 and 6) and Die Linke (models 7 and 8). More specifically, the priming effect (saliency $\times$ concern) is only significant and in the expected direction for people who previously identified with the SPD (second variable in model 2). This suggests that while conversion to CDU–CSU due to priming of immigration concerns is not significant on average, it exists for individuals who identified with the SPD in the past ($b = 0.266$; SE $= 0.117$).

Figure 2 shows the magnitude of the effects. For conversion and activation, we simulated the probability change for an average voter of identifying with CDU–CSU when going from not concerned at all to very concerned (Y axis) for all values of media attention (X axis). For mobilization, we simulated the difference in the expected value of CDU–CSU partisanship between high and low levels of individual concern (Y axis), again for all values of media attention (X axis). Following King et al. (2000), the effects have been simulated through 10,000 draws of the coefficients reported in the models in Table 1, together with their 95 % confidence intervals and setting all the covariates at their mean.

As shown in Fig. 2, the priming effect for conversion has an almost flat slope and with probability changes very close to 0. As for mobilization, the expected value difference in strength of attachment towards CDU–CSU can increase in almost 0.15 points when immigration is salient in the media.[15] Finally, priming effects are substantial for the activation mechanism, especially if one takes into account that party attachment is in general stable over time and that the analyses only model within-individual variation. When going from a minimal to a maximal individual

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[14] Since the swing of party attachment is a relatively infrequent phenomenon, analysing conversion to CDU–CSU party by party in fully specified models reduces the N considerably. In order to keep as much statistical power as possible for the simulations presented below, and to present the most reliable models, we present a reduced specification without some of the control variables. If the analyses are replicated with the full set of covariates as in Table 1, however, the results remain unchanged.

[15] It is important to note that the confidence intervals in the mobilization test are very narrow due to the linear specification of the model. While the expected probabilities derived from logistic transformations depend on the values of the different covariates, this is not the case in linear models.
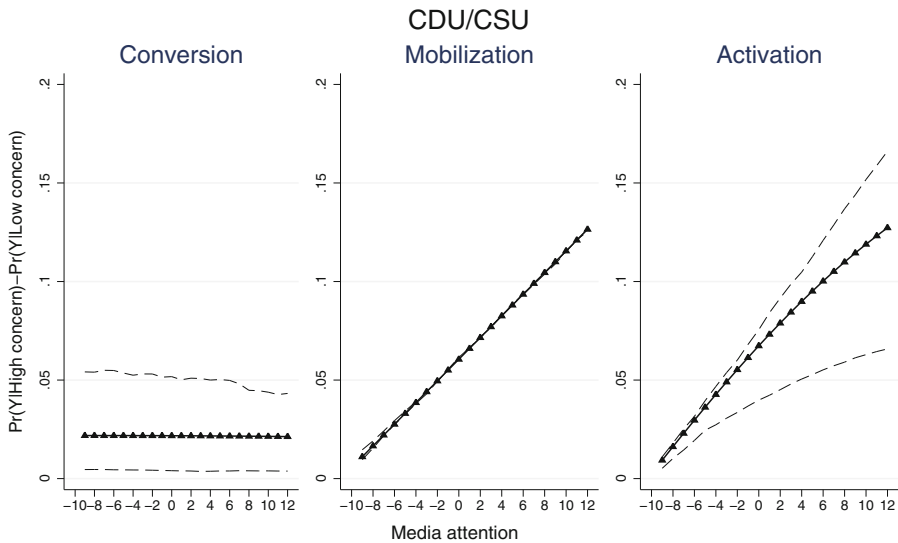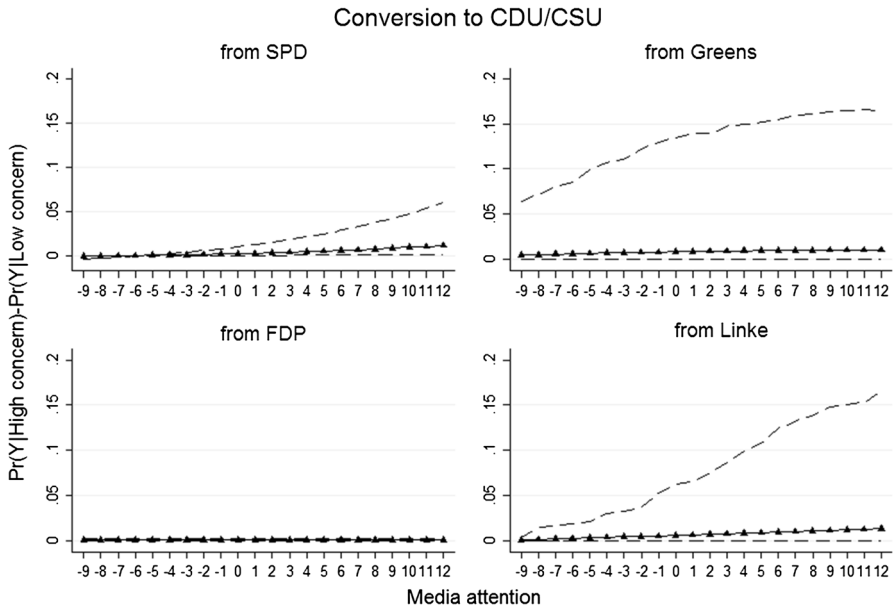
Fig. 2 Simulations for conversion, mobilization and activation to CDU–CSU

concern over immigration, the probability to switch to CDU–CSU for people without specific party leanings in the past can increase around 12 % when media attention is high. In contrast, the effect is almost 0 when the issue is not primed by the media.

As mentioned above, a fair test of the conversion hypothesis requires also analyzing transfers of loyalty from specific parties. Figure 3 presents the simulations of probability change across maximal and minimal values of individual concern based on the models in Table 2. As expected, the probability change to lean towards CDU–CSU from Green, FDP and Die Linke is almost flat and indistinguishable from 0. The limited statistical power of the models presented in Table 2 and the infrequent party swings result in large confidence intervals, indicating very high uncertainty regarding the estimation. By contrast, the probability to switch to CDU–CSU after having identified with SPD in the past is significantly higher when immigration concerns are primed. However, the magnitude of the probability change is very small (below 5 %) and it is associated with a high degree of uncertainty at high levels of media attention.

We replicated the analysis for all other relevant parties in Germany (see "Appendix" section). In general, neither the main effect of individual concern over immigration nor its interaction with media attention is statistically significant. This confirms issue ownership theory, in the sense that an issue is associated with the fortune of a single party that has the reputation to deal with it. Only for the Green, the main effect of immigration is negative and statistically significant when predicting conversion. This is consistent with recent research assessing the dynamics of issue saliency and party identification (Adams and Neundorf 2012), and shows that Green leaners are more pro-immigration than average. For the SPD, the interaction term between individual and media saliency becomes significant

Fig. 3 Simulations for conversion to CDU–CSU from individual parties

when assessing conversion. This confirms the intuition that mainstream left parties are more likely than other parties to be harmed by priming immigration concerns. However, as shown in the simulation presented in Fig. 3, the magnitude of this effect is small.

The results remain practically unchanged if we include dummy variables to account for the different federal governments (1999–2005, 2005–2008, and 2009). We did so to ensure that the ownership of the immigration issue by CDU–CSU is not affected by its status as an incumbent (2005–2009) or an opposition party (1999–2005). If the government dummy variables are included, the only difference is that the interaction between media saliency and individual concern predicting attachment strength to CDU–CSU becomes barely significant ($p = 0.07$).[16] This confirms that the activation hypothesis is the most clearly validated. However, even when controlling for government period dummies, individual concern with immigration is always associated with CDU–CSU attachment, confirming that the ownership of the issue is not dependent on this party being in government or in opposition. This has important implications for the accountability of CDU–CSU on the basis of immigration policy. According to our data, the fears of mainstream parties to promise more restrictive policies (due to an alleged increase of anti-immigrant concerns in public opinion) than those finally implemented seems to be unfounded (Joppke 1998). The association between immigration concerns and

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[16] Results available upon request. We opted for including period dummy variables rather than replicating the analyses in each period, given that our sample and the time points are dramatically reduced within each government period, especially the last one.

identification with CDU–CSU is not dependent on the performance of this party in office.

It is worth noting that the independent and additive effect of media saliency in the models reported in Tables 1 and 2 has a counter-intuitive negative effect on the likelihood to lean towards CDU–CSU. This proves Bélanger and Meguid (2008) right, in the sense that it is the individual concern over a given issue rather than the aggregate saliency of that issue in the public debate what increases the electoral prospects of the issue owner.

Conclusions

The capacity of the immigration issue to reshape durable political alignments and stabilize several populist radical right parties in Western Europe has attracted considerable scholarly attention. We know surprisingly little about de- and re-alignment in systems without established radical right alternatives. Based on issue ownership theory and using panel and media data for Germany (1999–2009), we provide evidence that individual concern over immigration increases party attachment towards the centre-right CDU–CSU, especially when immigration debates are primed in the media. Our longitudinal FEs regressions support the priming hypothesis, especially among individuals without prior party attachments (activation hypothesis) and with party attachments for the issue owner (mobilization hypothesis). The transfer of party loyalties of voters who feel ethnically threatened from the mainstream SPD to CDU–CSU is statistically significant (conversion hypothesis), but very limited in terms of magnitude.

Our findings have important implications for immigration-specific debates. First, we confirm the contested intuition that immigration is not an exclusive domain of radical right parties, and that the issue can strengthen durable patterns of realignment in favor of mainstream right parties (Bale 2003, 2008). This is applicable to systems with and without established radical right parties (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008; Jensen and Frølund Thomsen forthcoming). Second, we show that the same processes of electoral change implicitly or explicitly depicted in the radical right literature are also applicable to mainstream political spaces. This supports Mudde's (2010) hypothesis that the success of radical parties is just a product of a *pathological normalcy* of established Western values, which is at odds with other strands of the literature considering radical right values as something alien to mainstream electorates. Third, we confirm that fears of mainstream left political elites of losing ethnically threatened voters are founded, even if this process of electoral change is minor in comparison to the capacity of the immigration issue to activate non-aligned voters and to mobilize the centre-right constituency. Fourth, incorporating media data and testing priming effects allow us to infer the optimal strategies for parties in terms of immigration discourse. While cooperative or confrontational strategies of mainstream elites vis-à-vis radical parties are debated in the literature (Meguid 2005; Adams et al. 2006; Van Spanje 2011), our findings suggest that keeping immigration in the public debate can only

harm left-wing electoral fortunes and reinforce the right-wing ownership of the issue.

The proportionality, multipartyism and prominent role of two mainstream parties around the center of the ideological spectrum make Germany a highly comparable case to other prototypical countries without an established radical right, like Spain or Portugal. The findings are also consistent with previous analyses in the UK highlighting potential electoral losses of the Labor party to the mainstream right on the immigration issue (Bale 2008; Bale et al. 2013). However, the extension of our conclusions to the British case needs to be considered in future research. This is so due to the majoritarian character of the British electoral system and the electoral growth of UKIP, which is a credible owner of the immigration issue in the future. The UKIPs success has been considered to be due to middle-class Eurosceptic Conservative defectors, but also to economically marginalized and politically disaffected voters (Ford et al. 2012) who are more likely to vote Labor. The specificity of the British case and the threat posed by UKIP could also put into question our conclusion that keeping immigration in the public agenda benefits center-right parties. However, our conclusion is still consistent with the idea that convergent strategies (i.e. competing with the radical party on a salient and close issue position) is in any case more beneficial to mainstream parties than adversarial strategies (Meguid 2005). The historical stigma and constitutional amendments against anti-immigrant and radical right rhetoric also makes Germany's comparability with other European countries a subject to be developed in future research.

Our longitudinal approach, which is virtually absent in radical right and issue ownership studies, also allows us to contribute to the debate about the role of issues in the stability or change of electoral dynamics. Longitudinal analysis is not the ultimate solution to endogeneity, but controlling for time-constant unobserved heterogeneity is a powerful tool to ensure a high level of unit homogeneity. Although we find evidence for all three hypothesized processes of electoral change, the conversion of ideologically distant electorates through issue priming is much more limited in magnitude, and only confirmed for one party (SPD). This is consistent with bounded partisanship theories stating that issues tend not to trespass the limits of party identification (Neundorf et al. 2011). It is also consistent with the idea that, even if former left-wing electorates are seduced by anti-immigrant right-wing discourses, they might go through de-alignment before realigning again for a new party. Our findings suggest the need of the study of more nuanced relationships between issue concerns and partisanship (Adams and Neundorf 2012) and the inclusion of more issues in newer electoral contexts. A deeper analysis of the specific profile and motivations of non-aligned voters, who are the main drivers of the patterns of electoral change documented here, is also a promising line of future research.

Appendix

See Table 3.

Table 3 Fixed effects models predicting conversion, mobilization and activation for SPD, Green, FDP and Die Linke

	Conversion		Mobilization		Activation	
	M1 b (SE)	M2 b (SE)	M3 b (SE)	M4 b (SE)	M5 b (SE)	M6 b (SE)
SPD						
Concern over immigration	−0.031 (0.040)	−0.005 (0.042)	−0.006 (0.007)	−0.008 (0.008)	0.037 (0.024)	0.050* (0.025)
Saliency × concern		−0.188** (0.070)		0.015 (0.013)		−0.085 (0.044)
Media saliency immigration	0.265*** (0.061)	0.632*** (0.151)	0.030** (0.011)	0.001 (0.027)	−0.015 (0.036)	0.157 (0.095)
Including controls	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
N observations	13724	13724	29853	29853	40747	40747
N subjects	2475	2475	8405	8405	5635	5635
Green						
Concern over immigration	−0.262*** (0.062)	−0.266*** (0.064)	−0.032* (0.016)	−0.035* (0.017)	−0.082 (0.053)	−0.087 (0.054)
Saliency × concern		0.036 (0.115)		0.019 (0.032)		0.040 (0.103)
Media saliency immigration	−0.437*** (0.093)	−0.495* (0.205)	−0.077*** (0.023)	−0.104* (0.051)	−0.288*** (0.082)	−0.354 (0.185)
Including controls	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
N observations	6689	6689	7400	7400	8711	8711
N subjects	1122	1122	2377	2377	1399	1399

Table 3 continued

	Conversion		Mobilization		Activation	
	M1 b(SE)	M2 b(SE)	M3 b(SE)	M4 b(SE)	M5 b(SE)	M6 b(SE)
FDP						
Concern over immigration	−0.063	−0.067	0.013	0.012	0.036	0.047
	(0.070)	(0.070)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.063)	(0.064)
Saliency × concern		0.054		0.023		−0.121
		(0.122)		(0.040)		(0.113)
Media saliency immigration	0.056	−0.053	0.003	−0.038	−0.106	0.124
	(0.112)	(0.270)	(0.035)	(0.080)	(0.100)	(0.236)
Including controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N observations	5087	5087	3654	3654	5827	5827
N subjects	900	900	1493	1493	1000	1000
Die Linke						
Concern over immigration	0.002	−0.026	0.016	0.018	0.042	0.043
	(0.079)	(0.081)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.054)	(0.055)
Saliency × concern		0.243		−0.011		−0.010
		(0.129)		(0.029)		(0.093)
Media saliency immigration	0.362**	−0.134	0.027	0.048	0.141	0.162
	(0.119)	(0.289)	(0.027)	(0.062)	(0.084)	(0.210)
Including controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N observations	3973	3973	4571	4571	7482	7482
N subjects	700	700	1530	1530	1072	1072

Note: Fixed-effects linear regression for mobilization fixed-effects logit regression for activation and conversion

Source: SOEP (1999–2009)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, two-tailed tests

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