

Do Anti-immigration Voters Care More? Documenting the Issue Importance Asymmetry of Immigration Attitudes*

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Abstract

Why do politicians and policymakers not prioritize pro-immigration reforms even when public opinion on the issue is positive? This research note examines one previously overlooked explanation related to the systematically greater importance of immigration as a political issue among those who oppose it relative to those who support it. To provide a comprehensive empirical assessment of how personal immigration issue importance is related to policy preferences, I use the best available cross-national and longitudinal surveys from multiple immigrant-receiving contexts. I find that—compared to pro-immigration voters—anti-immigration voters feel stronger about the issue and much more likely to consider it as both personally and nationally important. This finding holds across virtually all observed countries, years, and alternative survey measures of immigration preferences and their importance. Overall, these results suggest that public attitudes toward immigration exhibit a substantial issue importance asymmetry that systematically advantages anti-immigration causes when the issue is more contextually salient.

Keywords: Immigration Policy, Public Opinion, Issue Salience, Issue Preferences

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Introduction

In the summer of 2020 Gallup reported that, for the first time since the organization started their polling on the issue in 1965, more Americans said they would prefer to see immigration increased rather than decreased (34% vs 28%).¹ Many news outlets have subsequently reported this finding which seemed to be especially hopeful in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic with foreign origin. Although these news reports were generally optimistic, many commentators also wondered why these positive public attitudes have not translated to increased pressure on the US government to enact a comprehensive immigration reform. Indeed, why do politicians and policymakers rarely prioritize pro-immigration appeals and policies even in the contexts where public opinion on the issue is seemingly positive?²

This research note empirically assesses one possible behavioral explanation of this puzzle related to the systematically greater perception of immigration as an important issue among those voters who oppose it (relative to those who support it). Although both anti-immigration and pro-immigration advocates can be extremely motivated by their cause (Kustov, 2021), it is striking that, while there have been many prominent *single-issue* political parties and politicians with an anti-immigration platform across the world, there have been none with a predominantly pro-immigration platform. But despite the fact that any account of immigration politics must make an assumption about whether immigration preferences are equally important to all voters, there has been so far no empirical evidence on this question.

To remedy this omission, I provide the first comprehensive empirical assessment of the relationship between *personal issue importance* (PII) of immigration to voters and their *preferences* on the issue across various high-income, immigrant-receiving democratic contexts.³

¹Younis, Mohamed. “Americans Want More, Not Less, Immigration for First Time.” Gallup, July 1 (2020). Available at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/313106/americans-not-less-immigration-first-time.aspx>.

²Of course, public opinion is only one possible source of policy change (e.g., Ford et al., 2015).

³I use the term *personal issue importance* as opposed to the related term *issue salience* throughout the text due to the greater ambiguity of the latter. While these terms are often used interchangeably at the individual level, some scholars rightly differentiate between them by defining salience as a broader function of (relatively stable) personal issue importance and (relatively volatile) political contexts which may or may not frame a certain issue as a political problem at the moment (see Miller et al., 2017; Moniz and Wlezien, 2021). To avoid confusion, I thus use the term *contextual issue salience* to denote an objective relative importance of

First, I use multiple cross-sectional samples of the American National Election Studies (ANES) and the British Election Study (BES) for the baseline test of a potential positive correlation between anti-immigration preferences and the perception of immigration as the most important national problem or issue. After establishing the expected issue importance asymmetry in the major US and UK election surveys, I utilize the Transatlantic Trends Survey (TTS) and show that this asymmetry similarly extends to other major immigrant-receiving countries. I then use the additional BES, Voter Study Group (VSG), Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics (ISCAP) and Eurobarometer data to establish that this asymmetry holds regardless of the particular survey instrument. Finally, I compare the relationship between PII and preferences in immigration to that of other political issues and political interest in general using the Cooperative Election Study (CCES), indicating that the ideological patterns of the revealed asymmetry are rather idiosyncratic to immigration. In sum, I find that—compared to those who support immigration—those who oppose immigration feel stronger about the issue and more likely to consider it as both personally and nationally important across virtually all observed countries, years, and alternative survey measures.

Overall, these results suggest that pro-immigration preferences as observed in public opinion surveys may often be not as strong as anti-immigration preferences in terms of people’s behavioral or cognitive engagement with the issue and their willingness to vote based on it. In other words, even when the public support of pro-immigration policies is seemingly greater than or similar to that of anti-immigration policies in the raw poll numbers, it is likely the case that the anti-immigration side is still more politically motivated and influential. While the exact causes and consequences of this phenomenon are beyond the scope of this research note, these results also imply that public attitudes toward immigration exhibit a substantial issue importance asymmetry that systematically advantages anti-immigration causes when the issue is more contextually salient in a particular country or time.

the issue as captured in the political discourse or media coverage of a particular country and time. In line with the previous literature, I also define *preferences* as any rankings derived from comparative evaluations of various policies; and use *attitudes* as an umbrella concept for personal preferences and issue importance.

Issue Importance Asymmetry of Immigration Attitudes

The literature on issue importance or salience is central to the understanding of any public attitudes toward government policies and their role in politics more generally. When individuals are said to attach personal importance to a certain policy issue, they are concerned or care about it as manifested by their cognitive and behavioral engagement with that issue. This includes thinking frequently and deeply about it, gathering information about it, and using the issue as a basis for making voting and other political decisions (Miller et al., 2017). Given that any engagement is costly for individuals in terms of their time and other limited resources, most scholars consider PII to be a relative (constant-sum) concept. Defined this way, many political outcomes, including those related to immigration, are significantly dependent on how much relative importance people attach to various issues (Dennison, 2019).

Unfortunately, until very recently, the literature on immigration attitudes has developed separately from this discussion. As a result, scholars have not seriously considered the theoretical implications and empirical reality concerning the interplay between immigration policy preferences and PII in determining electoral and other political outcomes. They have not identified when individuals are likely to develop their concerns about immigration issues and whether these concerns persist (independent of preferences). This is disconcerting given that any account of immigration politics that relates certain individual preferences or beliefs to other outcomes must make an assumption about the underlying (variation in) PII. After all, it is people for whom a particular policy issue is important are likely to place great weight on it when deciding how to vote or meaningfully express their views otherwise, whether by donating money to relevant organizations, volunteering, contacting public officials or even running for office themselves (Miller et al., 2017; Moniz and Wlezien, 2021).

How does PII (or preferences *across issues*) form and how is it different from the formation of comparative evaluations or policy preferences *within issues*? While the exploration of how individuals decide what issues to care about is still in its nascent stage, the literature usually single out three major systematic individual-level sources related to material self-

interest, group identity, and psychological predispositions (Miller et al., 2017). Notably, all of these factors are also used to explain policy preferences within issues. Consequently, although relative PII and preferences are both conceptually distinct components of individual attitudes, there may be more or less empirically related depending on the particular issue and political context (e.g., see Jennings and Wlezien, 2015).⁴

More recently, some scholars have tried to bring PII (and salience) to the center of the immigration politics research. Hatton (2021), for instance, extensively shows that immigration issue importance is a meaningful construct which has distinct correlates from preferences at both individual and country levels. At the same time, Dennison and Geddes (2019) show that, at least at the aggregate level, political preferences are highly stable, while PII is fairly stable and national issue importance is fairly volatile. Kustov et al. (2021) further confirm these patterns in the individual-level panel data, showing that many of the prominent exogenous shocks that have been often thought to impact immigration preferences in the electorate (such as economic and refugee crises) are more likely to be changing the PII of immigration to individuals. In line with these results, Dennison (2020) also shows that it is the increases in immigration issue importance (rather than preferences) that are positively related to populist voting at both aggregate and individual levels.

Due to the lack of the relevant data, however, the relationship between immigration PII and preferences has not been systematically explored yet. To that end, this short paper aims to identify the best available surveys and provide a comprehensive empirical assessment of this relationship across countries, years, and various PII measurements. Although the study does not stipulate a formal theoretically-informed hypothesis, given the relative failure of immigration advocates to enact significant pro-immigration reforms even in seemingly immigration-friendly electoral contexts, a reasonable prior expectation is that *those who are generally opposed to immigration should be more likely to consider it an important issue than those who are generally supportive of immigration.*

⁴Note that PII asymmetries should be by definition present in so-called “valence” issues like unemployment or economic growth (as opposed to “position” issues like immigration or abortion) in which the political disagreement is mostly about the importance of a certain issue for government policy (e.g., Green, 2007).

Data, Measurement, and Methods

Since an unambiguously effective survey measure of PII still remains elusive (Jennings and Wlezien, 2011; Moniz and Wlezien, 2021)⁵, my goal was to identify all publicly available (quasi-)representative survey datasets with the greatest diversity of relevant self-reported measures on immigration preferences and PII. To minimize measurement error, in selecting the data I gave a particular priority to higher-quality surveys with more valid items, larger or more numerous samples, and longitudinal as opposed to just cross-sectional designs. I also prioritized surveys with the items that specifically highlight *personal* issue importance (as opposed to just perceptions of “most important national problem”) and clearly defined immigration policy preferences (as opposed to just general feeling or beliefs about immigration and immigrants). Since, in order to examine the relationship between PII and preferences, I need to have some relevant variation in both attitude dimensions and sufficient statistical power, I only considered democratic survey contexts with at least 40 individuals (i.e., normally 4% of the sample) reporting that they consider immigration an important issue.

The overall data/measurement summary is given in Table A1. For the ease of interpretation, in the main text I mostly highlight the results based on the binary transformations of survey items—share of respondents who consider immigration an important issue among those who want to decrease/restrict and increase/ease immigration. All variables were standardized from 0 to 1 (so that 1 indicates either important or anti-immigration issue preferences).⁶

⁵The most common survey instrument to measure personal PII is the so-called “most important problem” (MIP) or the nearly identical “most important issue” (MII) question that asks respondents to self-report one or few important political issues they think their country is facing at the moment (usually in an open-ended form). These measures have received substantial criticism due to the common conflation of the *importance* of a certain issue with the degree to which it is currently a (negative) “problem” or an “issue” by respondents (Wlezien, 2005). Moreover, national MII and MIP items have also been shown to be better at revealing respondents’ guesses about what other people think is important in their country rather than measuring PII (Jennings and Wlezien, 2011). Still, however imperfect, these items can be used to measure voters’ issue attentiveness and their priorities for government action relative to all other issues (Jennings and Wlezien, 2015). A major alternative survey instrument to measure PII is a direct question that asks respondents to self-report whether, and to what extent, a certain policy issue is important to them personally. While this addresses the main limitation of MII/MIP items, it is less suited to measure *relative* importance since respondents can report that all issues are equally and highly important to them (Moniz and Wlezien, 2021).

⁶The results based on multiple-variable indices include a neutral category regarding immigration (a closed interval of 0.25-0.75). All results are also robust to the inclusion of basic control variables, including general political interest, age, gender, education, urban residence, immigration status, and ideology (not shown).

Analysis and Results

I start my baseline analysis with an examination of ANES which arguably provides the best quality survey data with consistent items on both immigration policy preferences (measured as preferred immigration levels) and issue importance (measured as somewhat imperfect national MIP). As can be seen from Figure 1, anti-immigration US voters are generally more likely to think of it as important and this pattern is especially apparent during the times of high contextual salience of immigration in the country. In the aftermath of Donald Trump's win in 2016, for instance, those who wanted to decrease immigration were much more likely to consider it the most important problem facing their country (27% vs 16%). At the same time, in 2012 when immigration was less salient nationally, the same asymmetry was 4% vs 2% (the difference was similar but not statistically significant in 2008). When one considers the subsequent post-election ANES survey in 2020—shortly after Gallup for the first time declared the net positivity of public attitudes—the comparable numbers were 17% vs 12%. In other words, despite the fact that more people now say they have pro-immigration preferences, they are relatively less engaged than those who have anti-immigration preferences.

Another way to look at it is to count the percentage of ANES respondents who support or oppose immigration *only among those who also consider it the most important national issue*, which arguably provides a better metric of the potential pro-immigration or anti-immigration pressure groups in the US public opinion. This way, even in 2020 United States—one of the most pro-immigration preference contexts recorded in polling history—there were possibly fewer *engaged* pro-immigration than anti-immigration voters ($34\% * 12\% \approx 4\%$ vs $28\% * 17\% \approx 5\%$ of all respondents). For comparison, during the time of high contextual salience of immigration in 2016, the numbers were approximately 2% vs 12% of all respondents indicating a very large public opinion skew in favor of the anti-immigration cause.

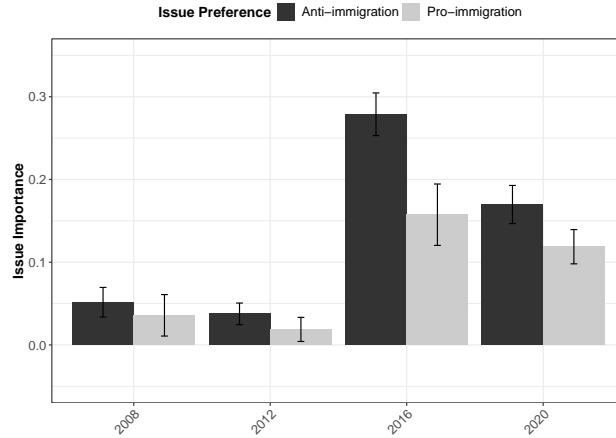
Importantly, however, these stark differences are not just about the 2016 election of Donald Trump. The contextual salience of immigration may come and go (and it may be hard to detect the asymmetry when only a few people mention immigration as an important issue).

Nonetheless, the relative asymmetry in the *explicitly personal* self-reported issue importance of immigration appears to have been stable throughout the last decade as captured using alternative measures in the US VSG or ISCAP data (see Figures A1 and A4).

I then move to the analysis of BES which consistently measures issue importance (as MII) and various immigration preferences (though as different items depending on a particular survey). Unlike the relatively immigration-friendly US context, the UK has exhibited the much higher degrees of negativity towards immigration and perhaps its highest contextual salience of any other country over the last two decades. For instance, in March 2015 or approximately one year before the Brexit Referendum, 73% of the British public wanted to decrease immigration while only 6% wanted to increase it. Meanwhile, the staggering 26% thought it was the single most important issue facing their country (in July 2015 this number rose to 35%). The question, however, is whether issue preferences and importance are empirically related to each other. As can be seen from Figure 2, they indeed very much are—those who oppose immigration are consistently much more likely to consider important than those who support it and these differences are even higher than in the US (from 27% vs 7% in 2005 to 48% vs 6% in 2015 and then back to 23% vs. 2% in 2017).

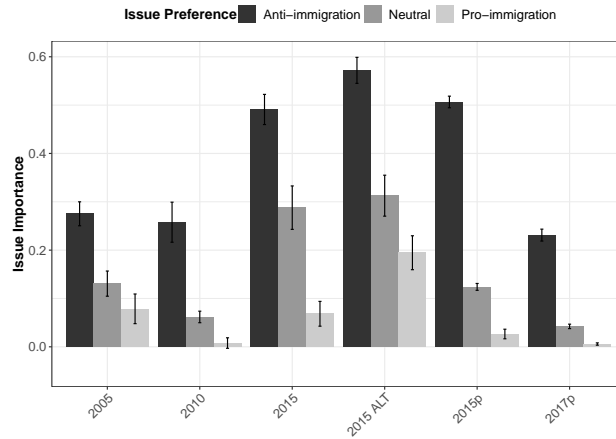
Given that the UK and especially the US are among the biggest and oldest immigrant destinations, it may also be important to consider some of the newer immigrant-receiving contexts. To that end, I use the cross-national TTS data from 2014 (also see the additional analysis of the Eurobarometer data from 2019 in Figure 4a below). According to Figure 3, the previously uncovered asymmetry is further evident in every other immigrant-receiving country in the dataset from France and Germany to Denmark and Sweden. The only possible exceptions are Hungary and Romania—the countries with very low immigration (at least until very recently)—where the differences in issue salience between pro-immigration and anti-immigration voters are not statistically significant.

Figure 1: Issue Importance of Immigration by Preferences Across Time (US, ANES)



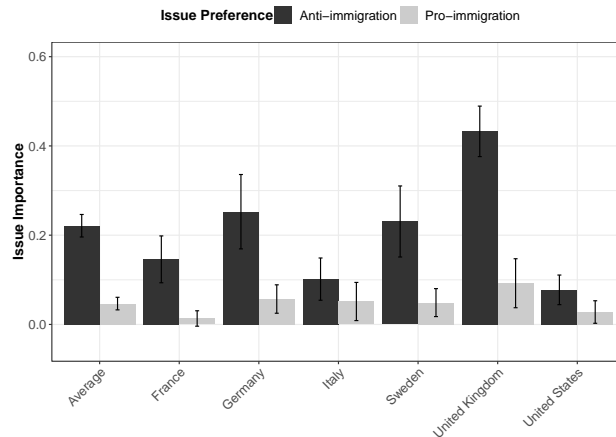
Based on the ANES data. The bars represent 95% CI. For variable descriptions, see Table A1.

Figure 2: Issue Importance of Immigration by Preferences Across Time (UK, BES)



Based on the BES data. The bars represent 95% CI. ALT stands for an alternative operationalization of personal issue importance; p stands for Internet Panel survey. For variable descriptions, see Table A1.

Figure 3: Issue Importance of Immigration by Preferences Across Countries (2014, TTS)



Based on the TTS data. The bars represent 95% CI. For variable descriptions, see Table A1.

Robustness to Alternative Measurements and Political Interest

In line with the prominent critique by Wlezien (2005), however, one may reasonably wonder whether this result is merely an artifact of the particular MII/MIP question. If these survey items indeed conflate importance and ‘problemness’ of immigration in the minds of many respondents, it is possible that the results above simply show that those who oppose immigration are more likely to think of it as a (negative) ‘problem’ which is nearly tautological.

Luckily, in addition to such MII/MIP items, BES and a few other surveys also provide alternative operationalizations of PII which arguably do not have this limitation, allowing for the direct comparison of various survey measurements. The BES 2015, for instance, also asked their respondents “how strongly do you feel about [immigration]” (see Figure 2). Quite similarly, the US Voter Study Group (VSG) asked “how important are the following issues [such as immigration] to you?” (see Figure A1). As can be seen from these graphs (comparing BES 2015 and BES 2015 ALT and VSG 2011 and VSG 2011 ALT), the same asymmetry of immigration attitudes is present regardless of the particular operationalization of PII. While the baseline rate of PII is understandably much higher in these alternative multiple-choice items (e.g., respondents could pick that all political issues are very important to them), those who oppose immigration are still much more likely to report that the issue is important to them and this basic finding holds across all samples in these datasets.⁷

As a compromise between these two imperfect operationalizations, Eurobarometer—one the major cross-national surveys in the European Union—also asks about the most important issues facing the country and the respondents personally. As Figure 4 shows, anti-immigration voters are on average 2-3 times more likely to think of it as both more nationally and personally important issue. Interestingly, perceived national concerns about immigration are on average much more pronounced than self-reported personal concerns across all

⁷As for more quasi-behavioral measures, the US ISCAP survey (2018)—which specifically asks people to report what issues are important to their vote—shows a similar asymmetric pattern (see Figure A4). At the same time, my original quasi-representative UK sample (available upon request) indicates that anti-immigration voters report a greater willingness to sign a petition to share their views with the Parliament (72% vs 63%).

countries.⁸ Overall, regardless of the particular operationalization, anti-immigration voters are on average more likely to say that immigration is among the most important issues.

One may also wonder whether this observed asymmetry is unique to immigration or also present in other issues. While the detailed examination of this question is beyond this note’s scope, the US Cooperative Election Study fruitfully asks their respondents about a number of issues and their importance. According to Figure A2, while PII asymmetries are present in some other “position” issues, the particular ideological patterns of this asymmetry are rather idiosyncratic to immigration where the more conservative, restrictive side reports higher PII. Abortion is perhaps the most similar issue to immigration in terms of the observed asymmetry and its ideological associations, though the gap between “pro-life” and “pro-choice” sides is much smaller than between anti-immigration and pro-immigration sides. At the same time, the more liberal supporters of (the fewer restrictions on) gay marriage or (the more restrictions on) guns, for instance, are more likely to think of the respective issues as important than their more conservative counterparts.⁹ Furthermore, unlike most other issues, immigration appears to be distinct in terms of the issue “moderates” reporting higher PII than the pro-immigration side (also see Figure 2).

Finally, a related question is whether the revealed PII differences between anti- and pro-immigration voters may stem from their more general differences in political interest. As shown in Figure A3, this is not the case—those who are interested in politics are more or less equally represented among both groups (as well as supporters and opponents of most other issues for that matter). In other words, compared to pro-immigration voters, anti-immigration voters care more about immigration in particular—not politics in general.¹⁰

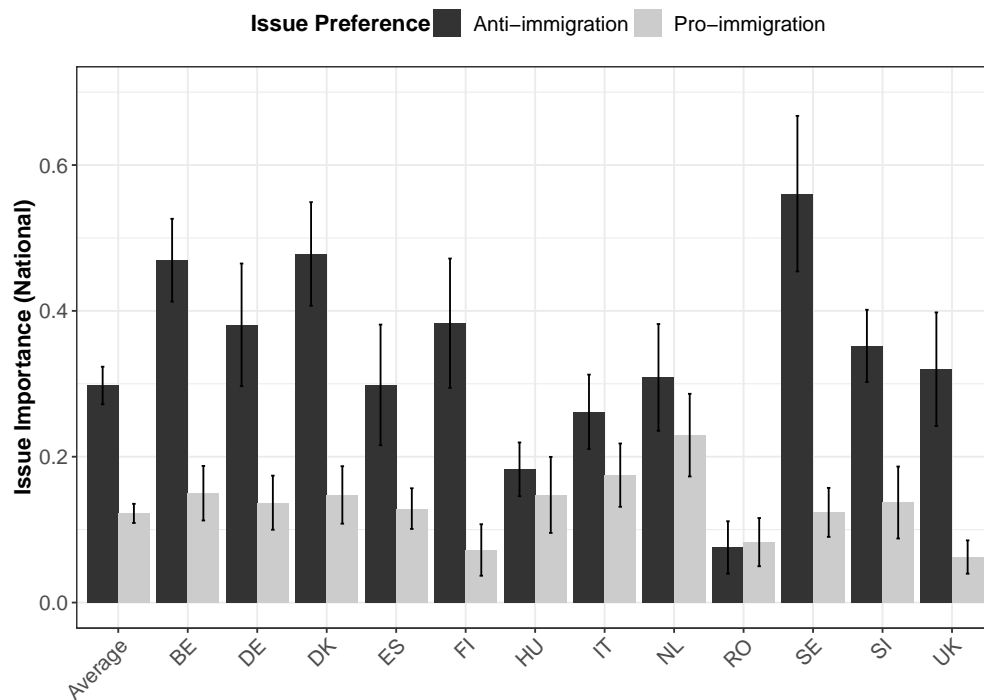
⁸This is in line with the idea that the national MII item is an imperfect function of PII combined with other factors such as people’s perceptions about what others consider important in a political context (Moniz and Wlezien, 2021). In particular, the individual-level correlation between the two Eurobarometer measures is 0.2-0.3 depending on a particular country such that the majorities of respondents who consider immigration personally important also report that they believe it is nationally important (but not vice versa).

⁹As can be expected (Footnote 4), the CCES data also indicate PII asymmetries in the case of more “valence-like” issues such as regulating the environment or punishing crime (not shown).

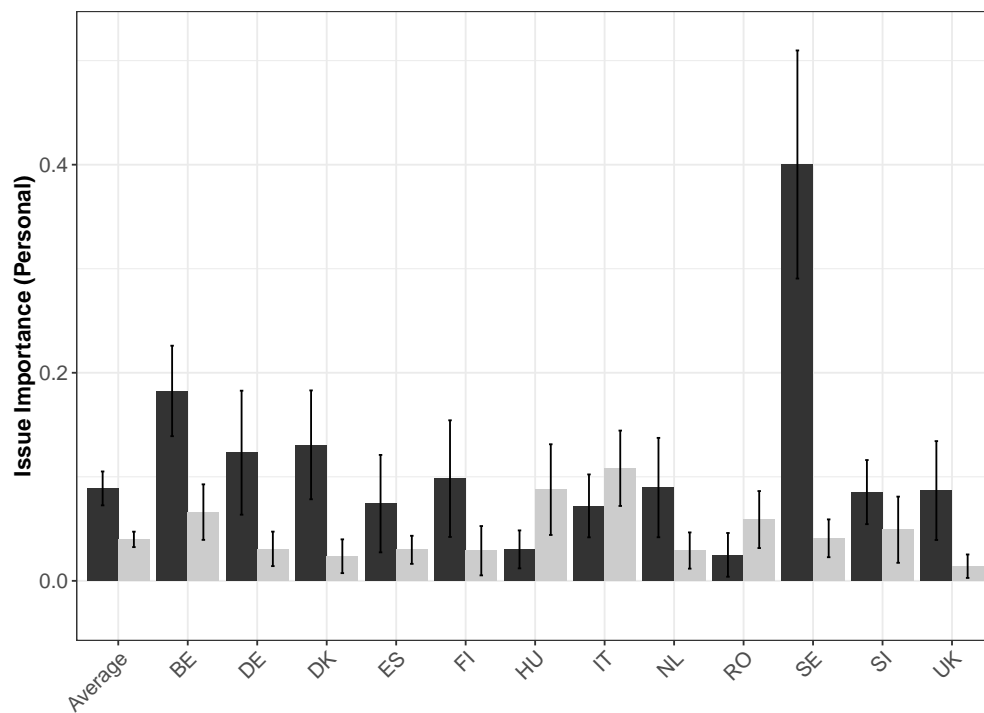
¹⁰Given that PII is relative concept, it must be the case those voters who happen to be pro-immigration care more about other non-immigration issues (the specifics of which likely depends on a particular context).

Figure 4: Issue Importance of Immigration by Preferences and Countries (Eurobarometer)

(a)



(b)



Based on the Eurobarometer 91.5 data (2019). The bars represent 95% CI. For variable descriptions, see Table A1.

Discussion

Despite the fact that the US and some other major immigrant-receiving Western countries have now been experiencing the most pro-immigration public opinion recorded in their history, lawmakers are still hesitant to enact significant pro-immigration reforms and politicians do not seem to be eager to make strong pro-immigration appeals. The institutional complications aside, this short paper documents an important yet largely overlooked behavioral reason why the positive public opinion on immigration has not translated to political changes—the fact that those who want less immigration generally care much more about the issue than those who want more immigration. But while this has been a long time complaint from pro-immigration activists that their anti-immigration counterparts are more numerous *and* engaged, there has been so far no systematic empirical evidence on this question.

It is a reasonable expectation that perceptions of issue importance and particular policy preferences held by an individual are both distinct and independent of each other. Indeed, in theory voters can be personally passionate about any particular political issue, whether it is conservative or liberal, whether it is something symbolic or material, or whether it is meant to uphold or change the status quo. As this paper extensively documents, however, in practice these two dimensions can be more or less overlapping with each other.

What are the implications of the documented issue importance asymmetry for immigration politics and public opinion? The first implication is that, when one takes personal issue importance into account, the United States and other other immigrant-receiving countries have likely experienced no discernible relative increase of people who want more immigration for whom this is an important issue. At the same time, given the rise of immigration contextual salience over the last decades, the absolute number of *engaged* people who want to decrease immigration may have actually increased. More generally, while there are many contexts where pluralities oppose immigration and consider it their main political priority, there is no known political context in which a plurality of voters wanted to increase immigration and thought it was more important than other issues.

The second, related implication is that, if immigration preferences and personal interests in the issue are rather stable, most political events that increase the contextual salience of the issue should be statistically more likely to engage those who oppose than those who support immigration—even when the former is a shrinking segment of the population. In turn, this helps explain why contextual salience of immigration has been associated with populist and anti-immigration vote (Dennison and Geddes, 2019).

In the end, this note suggests that people’s disagreements about the importance of immigration as a political issue may be as important as their disagreements about the merits of particular policies in determining which groups and political coalitions eventually get their way. Of course, it is important not to overstate the potential consequences of the immigration issue importance asymmetry for policy outcomes. As emphasized earlier, public opinion is only one policy input among many. As it can also be indicated by the contentious issue of gun control in the United States, for instance, higher issue salience among the proponents of a certain cause does not straightforwardly result in the related policy change.

This note is not without the limitations. First, while the descriptive finding of the asymmetry across high-income, immigrant-receiving democracies in the 21st century is uncontroversial, future research can explore the development of immigration attitudes and the causal mechanisms of the relationship in more detail. For example, do voters come to be interested in immigration first and then develop their preferences or vice versa? It is also important to provide (quasi-)experimental evidence of whether the *exogenous changes* in contextual immigration salience (e.g., due to unrelated political events of various valence) may have similar asymmetric effects in making voters care more or less about immigration.

Second, it is likely that the relationship between preferences and PII can vary depending on political (and even partisan) contexts which has not been explored here. For instance, is there something distinct about immigration that makes it inherently more of a ‘political issue’ among those who oppose it (e.g., due the role of widespread ethnocentric predispositions) or is it just a function of the studied context (e.g., outside of frontier and other regions where the major political challenge is in fact to attract more immigrants)?

Finally, future studies can examine the qualitative underpinnings of the attitudinal issue importance asymmetry, including its behavioral manifestations and the possible ‘sub-issue’ differences in the priorities *within the domain of immigration*. For instance, it is possible that, while pro-immigration actors are relatively more (behaviorally or cognitively) concerned with helping existing immigrants or “stocks,” anti-immigration groups and voters care more about preventing future immigration or “flows” (e.g., Margalit and Solodoch, 2021).

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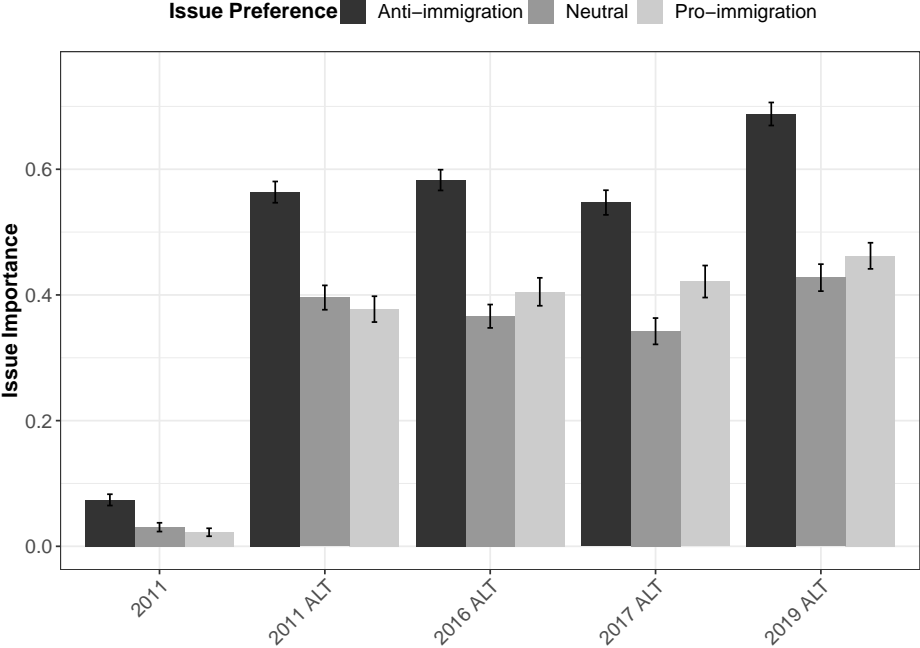
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Supplementary Material (Online Appendix)

Do Anti-immigration Voters Care More? Documenting the Issue
Importance Asymmetry of Immigration Attitudes

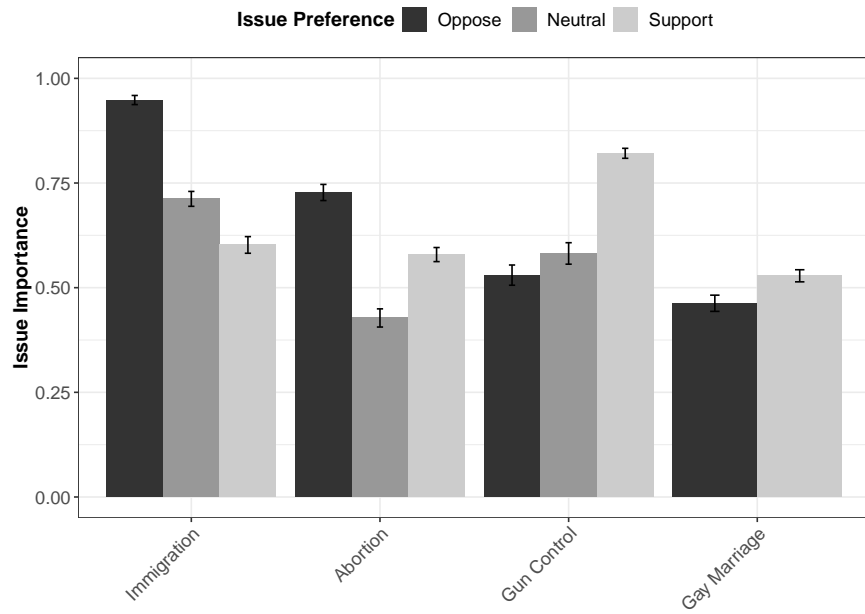
Tables and Figures

Figure A1: Personal Issue Importance of Immigration by Preferences in Longitudinal Data (US, VSG)



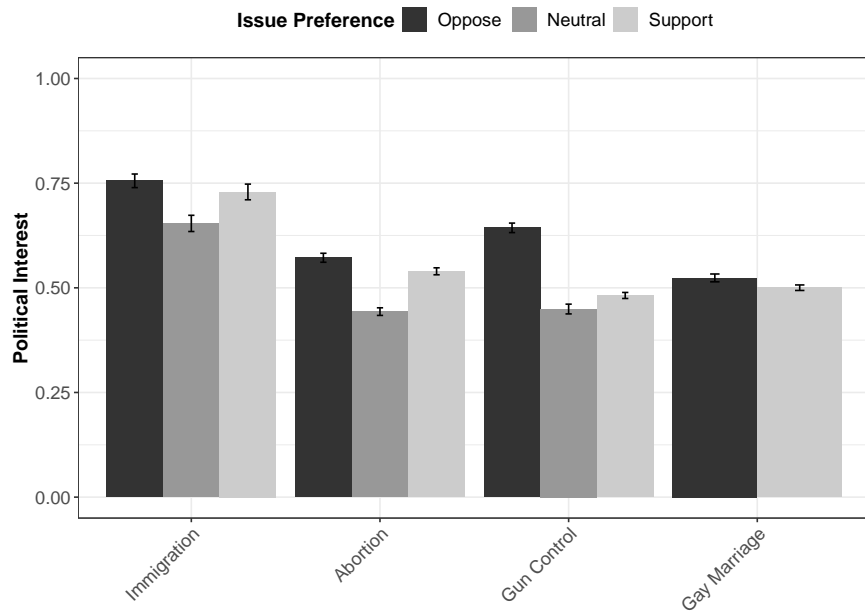
Based on the VSG data (2011-2019). The bars represent 95% CI. ALT stands for an alternative operationalization of personal issue importance. For variable descriptions, see Table A1.

Figure A2: Personal Issue Importance of Immigration by Preferences Compared to Other Issues (CCES)



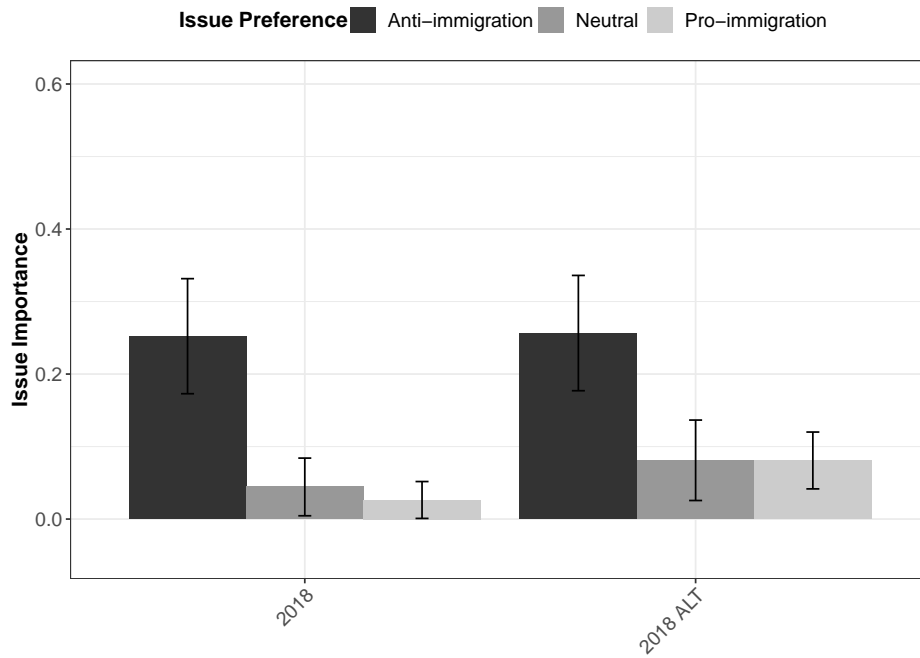
Based on the CCES data (2016). The bars represent 95% CI. For variable descriptions, see Table A1.

Figure A3: Political Interest by Preferences on Immigration and Other Issues (CCES)



Based on the CCES data (2016). The bars represent 95% CI. For variable descriptions, see Table A1. Political interest indicates the share of respondents who say that they “follow what’s going on in government and public affairs” most of the time.

Figure A4: Personal Issue Importance of Immigration for Voting by Preferences (US, ISCAP)



Based on the ISCAP data (2018). The bars represent 95% CI. ALT stands for an alternative operationalization of personal issue importance of immigration for voting which includes the mention of “racism.”^a For variable descriptions, see Table A1.

^aSome pro-immigration voters may arguably frame their immigration concerns in terms of the prevalence of racism (against immigrants) in the country. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

Table A1: Data Sources and Survey Items

Dataset	Issue Importance	Issue Preferences (and Beliefs)
American Election (ANES): N = 8,280 (US, 2012-2020)	National Study –“What do you think are the most important problems facing this country?”	–“Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United States to live should be increased a lot, increased a little, left the same as it is now, decreased a little, or decreased a lot?”
British Election Study (BES), post-election: N = 5,315 (UK, 2005-2015)	–“As far as you’re concerned, what is the single most important issue facing the country at the present time?” –“How strongly do you feel about [immigration]? (ALT, 2015 only)	–“Do you think that too many immigrants have been let into this country, or not?” (2015 only) –“Do you think that immigration undermines or enriches Britain’s cultural life?” –“Do you think immigration is good or bad for Britain’s economy?”
British Election Study (BES), internet panel: N = 47,363 (UK, 2015-2017)	–“As far as you’re concerned, what is the single most important issue facing the country at the present time?”	–“Do you think the number of immigrants from foreign countries who are permitted to come to the United Kingdom to live should be increased, decreased, or left the same as it is now?” (2015 only) “Some people think that the UK should allow *many more* immigrants to come to the UK to live and others think that the UK should allow *many fewer* immigrants. Where would you place yourself...on this scale?” (2017 only) –“Do you think that immigration undermines or enriches Britain’s cultural life?” –“Do you think immigration is good or bad for Britain’s economy?”
Transatlantic Trends Survey (TTS): N = 13,510 (Cross-national, 2014)	–“What do you think is the most important issue facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?”	–“Generally speaking, how do you feel about the number of people living in [COUNTRY] who were not born in that country? Are there too many, a lot but not too many, or not many?”
Voter Study Group (VSG): N = 2,576 (US, 2011-2019)	–“Which of these is the most important issue for you?” (2011 only) –“How important are the following issues to you? Immigration” (ALT)	–“Do you think it should be easier or harder for foreigners to immigrate to the US legally than it is currently?”
Eurobarometer: N = 32,524 (Cross-national, 2019)	–“What do you think are the two most important issues facing (OUR COUNTRY) at the moment?” –“And personally, what are the two most important issues you are facing at the moment?”	–“Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you. Immigration of people from other EU Member States” –“Please tell me whether each of the following statements evokes a positive or negative feeling for you. Immigration of people from other EU Member States” –“To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? Immigrants contribute a lot to (OUR COUNTRY)”
Cooperative Election Study (CCES): N = 64,600 (US, 2016)	–“How important are each of these issues to you? Immigration”	–“What do you think the U.S. government should do about immigration? Select all that apply (8 binary items)”
Institute for the Study of Citizens and Politics Panel (ISCAP): N = 1,024 (US, 2018)	–“Which of the following issues is the most important to you in terms of choosing which political candidates you will support in the upcoming election? Immigration” ... Immigration OR Racism (ALT)	–“On immigration, some people argue that U.S. policy should focus on returning illegal immigrants to their native countries. Other people argue that U.S. policy should focus on creating a pathway to U.S. citizenship for illegal immigrants. Still others are somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on this scale (1-7), or haven’t you thought much about this?” –“Please indicate whether you favor or oppose each of the following proposals addressing immigration: Increase border security by building a fence along part of the U.S. border with Mexico.”