Migration Attitude Diffusion:

The Influence of Election Outcomes

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How does public opinion change? We contribute to earlier work on this core question of democratic theorists by suggesting that transnational influences, i.e., factors abroad that cross national borders may crucially influence the public's views at home. Focusing on anti-immigration public attitudes, we contend that these diffuse more strongly across borders when anti-immigration parties perform well in national elections of the countries abroad. The findings are based on spatial-econometric analyses of public opinion data on immigration using all rounds of the European Social Survey. Our results have important implications for our understanding of the effects of elections on public attitudes, for how public opinion emerges, and there are significant implications for policymaking.

Keywords: Anti-Immigration Parties; Diffusion; Migration Attitudes; Public Opinion

Public attitudes toward immigration have become increasingly salient in the aftermath of the 2015 "European refugee and migration crisis." Understanding these attitudes has become an urgent task for academics and practitioners (see Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Dinesen, Klemmensen, and Nørgaard 2016; Bello 2017). It is shown, for instance, that factors such as socio-economic status, left-right ideology, psychological differences and country-level economic and political characteristics, including the size of the foreign-born population, influence public opinion on migration. We extend this literature on migration attitudes, and the broader literatures on public opinion formation, policy diffusion, and policymaking, by arguing that – in addition to the domestic factors raised above – a transnational factor also exists, which implies that migration attitudes diffuse cross-nationally.

Diffusion, in general, refers to when "policies in one unit (country, state, city, etc.) are influenced by the policies of other units" (Gilardi and Wasserfallen 2019: 1). Cross-unit policy diffusion can be observed in multiple arenas. Most prominently, there is the government-to-government level (see Gilardi 2010, 2012) of diffusion. However, previous research has also observed that parties abroad influence parties' positions at home (Böhmelt et al. 2016, 2017), and that there is public opinion-to-public opinion diffusion (Czaika and Di Lillo 2018). A forthcoming study demonstrates diffusion at the election-level in that an election outcome in one country influences election outcomes abroad (Delis, Matakos, and Xefteris forthcoming).

In this research, we combine diffusion processes at the latter two levels – namely, the public opinion and election-levels – as we model how *election* results in one country contribute to the diffusion of *public opinion* on migration across borders. We contend that citizen attitudes are influenced by foreign election results. There are a number of studies that support citizens responding to regional, national, and European elections in their home country, and we claim

that citizens are also influenced by foreign election results (e.g. Bolleyer and Bytzek 2013; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Dinas and Riera 2018). Bischof and Wagner (forthcoming) argue that anti-immigration party success "legitimizes" more restrictive public attitudes towards migration at home, and we argue that this also facilitates that more restrictive public attitudes towards migration diffuse across states. To test our argument, we estimate spatial-econometric models that capture diffusion effects from foreign public attitudes to "home" public attitudes via election results. Our empirical results support the finding that skeptical migration views travel across borders if anti-immigration parties performed well in their recent national elections abroad.

Identifying how public opinion at home responds to public opinion abroad, in light of foreign election results, contributes to our understanding of democratic politics from a number of angles. First, there is an extensive literature on how public opinion or the "policy mood" changes in the electorate over time (e.g., Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; see also Soroka and Wlezien 2010). In this context, the "thermostatic" model by Wlezien (1995, 1996; Soroka and Wlezien 2010) suggests that public opinion changes in response to government policy: when government policy outcomes are to the left, the demand for rightward policies increases in the electorate. Franklin and Wlezien (1997) apply this model to explain attitudes toward the EU. For the UK, Bartle et al. (2011) report similar conclusions that are consistent with the thermostatic model. Stevenson (2001; see also Durr 1993) examines the role of the economy and reports that when economies perform well, demand for public spending increases – strong economies move public opinion to the left. Kelly and Enns (2010) focus on the effect of economic inequality on policy mood, finding that inequality reduces demand for government. We contribute to these works by raising the possibility that foreign public opinion influences public opinion at home via

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election results in "source countries." In addition, in democracies, national governments are particularly unwilling to adopt unpopular policies not to lose office and power and, thus, policymaking is crucially influenced by what the public wants (Anderson et al. 2017). Migration and its corresponding policies are not an exception here (e.g., Helbling and Kalkum 2018). By showing that public attitudes on migration are influenced by migration views abroad, we also point to an indirect influence of public opinion on migration in other states on migration policymaking at home.

Second, there are numerous studies on public attitudes toward immigration. As pointed out above, this literature suggests that immigration attitudes are affected by a several, predominantly domestic-level factors (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Mayda 2006; Dustmann and Preston 2007; McLaren and Johnson 2007; see also Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007; for overviews, see Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014). We contribute to this literature by showing that immigration attitudes are also affected by a transnational diffusion process, i.e., international influences that travel across borders and then shape migration attitudes at home, which strictly speaking is a domestic-level phenomenon.

Third, there is an emerging literature on "challenger parties" that focuses on the set of political parties that do not have experience in government (De Vries and Hobolt 2019). These parties generally compete on issues that are not on the traditional left-right dimension, e.g., the environment, European integration, or, notably, immigration. De Vries and Hobolt (2019) demonstrate that challenger parties are important, in part, because they gain popularity at the expense of longstanding mainstream parties and as they change the nature of party competition in European democracies. Our results suggest that when challenger parties perform well on their issues, this may influence the diffusion of public attitudes on those issues to other states.

Finally, our results are important for the literature on transnational diffusion (e.g., Most and Starr 1990; Elkins and Simmons 2005; Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2003; Franzese and Hays 2007, 2008; Gilardi 2010, 2012), which has traditionally focused on government-to-government policy diffusion. More recently, Böhmelt et al. (2016, 2017) have looked at party-to-party diffusion, and Delis, Matakos, and Xefteris (forthcoming) have added a compelling case study of election-to-election diffusion. Czaika and Di Lillo (2018) report how public opinion diffuses across regions. From the latter two studies, we combine the election and public opinion perspectives on diffusion to show how foreign election results can influence the diffusion of migration attitudes. We thus extend the latter two levels and highlight that causal mechanisms underlying *level-to-level* diffusion results can be uncovered, in part, through *cross-level* diffusion.[1]

Why Elections Influence Public Opinion Diffusion

We argue that citizens rely on heuristics when forming their views. To this end, domestic factors matter, including those we stressed in the previous section, but they also respond to foreign policy moods if specific parties perform well in elections abroad. Scholars of public opinion argue that citizens, to cope with the complexity of gaining full information to make political choices, rely on heuristics or "shortcuts" (Campbell et al. 1960; Popkin 1991). They may use partisan cues or the attitudes of others in their social group (Campbell et al. 1960). Most prominently, the performance of the economy is employed as a heuristic for rewarding or punishing incumbents (Duch and Stevenson 2008; Powell and Whitten 1993) and the coalition-

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[1] For example, our results suggest that Czaika and Di Lillo (2018) can partly be explained by the election results of anti-immigration parties influencing public opinion diffusion.

heuristic affects how voters infer parties' policy positions (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Adams et al. 2016; Spoon and Klüver 2017). While several studies have commented on the complications or potentially misleading inferences that may arise when using heuristics (Kahneman and Frederick 2002; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014; Dancey and Sheagley 2013; Lau and Redlawsk 2001; see also Adams et al. 2016), political-psychology and political-behavior studies suggest that citizens (nevertheless) employ shortcuts to cope with the complexity of making informed choices in a democracy.

We argue in light of this that citizens are more open to public attitudes abroad, learn from and respond to these if foreign elections have produced certain results. In other words, the electoral success of political parties in other countries can be a heuristic the electorate relies on, thus facilitating that public opinion diffuses across countries. Anderson and Guillory (1997) demonstrate how election results influence citizens' evaluations of "satisfaction with democracy."[2] How citizens update their perceptions of parties, based on coalition participation, represents another example of how citizens utilize election outcomes to politically inform themselves. Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) argue that voters perceive governing parties' policies to converge more than their stated party positions suggest. There is also evidence that citizens respond to regional and European elections. Bolleyer and Bytzek (2013) present theoretical and empirical arguments that parties that perform well in regional elections are more likely to do the same in national elections. Eventually, we derive from these and related works that citizens are influenced by election results in their own countries. Dinas and Riera (2018; see

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[2] Specifically, citizens who voted for one of the winning parties that ultimately participated in the government in the previous election ("winners") are more satisfied with democracy than citizens of the "political minority."

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also Franklin 2017; van der Brug and de Vreese 2016) have shown that elections to the European Parliament (EP) influence national parliamentary elections and suggest that small parties benefit in national elections, from the existence of EP electoral competition. Schulte-Cloos (2018) has similarly written that EP elections promote the success of (previously mentioned) challenger parties.[3] In total, citizens are influenced by election results in their *own countries*: they respond to previous national elections, regional elections, and European Parliament elections.

With respect to national elections, citizens usually have to wait approximately three or four years until the next national election is scheduled. In the absence of frequent national elections, we claim that citizens pay attention to elections that take place abroad, and that this in turn allows for the possibility that public opinion diffuses cross-nationally. Political party elites integrate the policies of foreign-incumbent parties into their own party manifestos (Böhmelt et al. 2016, 2017; Senninger et al. 2019). In this way, incumbent parties influence party competition in foreign countries. Though citizens are not politicians – and they do not have the same incentives to follow foreign election results, – other actors such as parties and the media do pay attention and do have incentives to make information on foreign elections accessible to citizens.

For example, when the National Front does better in an election, German citizens who learn of this outcome may feel that it is more socially acceptable to express their own anti-immigrant opinions, opinions that they already held but were previously reluctant to express. That is, we know that there are "social desirability" effects in survey responses whereby citizens

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[3] Somer-Topcu and Zar (2014) analyze survey data in fourteen EU members to show that opposition parties respond very clearly to EP election results. They show that the magnitude of party shifts varies with their EP vote loss: greater losses in the EP elections lead to greater shifts in opposition party policy positions.

are reluctant to give responses that they fear may be socially unacceptable (Phillips and Clancy 1972). Correspondingly, Bischof and Wagner (forthcoming) develop a similar "legitimization" expectation that extreme-party success leads their supporters to adopt more extreme positions – because the social-desirability effects identified in the social-psychology literature decreased (e.g., Tankard and Paluck 2016). If citizens learn that a political party associated with their own views is more popular, even if in a foreign country, these citizens may feel emboldened to express their own views more freely, and these views may also shift towards more restrictive positions towards migration.

Finally, when anti-immigrant parties win more votes in elections, this gives them a wider public "forum" to communicate the rationale for their anti-immigrant views, including more extensive media coverage. Some of this increased attention is likely to spill over into neighboring countries, whose publics are exposed to the anti-immigrant parties' arguments. As Murphy and Devine (2019: 2), among others, emphasize, mass media coverage is "the primary channel through which the electorate receives information about politicians and parties." In fact, the mechanism we argue for is intensified by the news media, given that media are more likely to report on election results in countries closer to their audience and that produced somewhat unexpected results such as non-mainstream parties, including right-wing populists, performing well (Oegema and Kleinnijenhuis 2009; Knigge 1998; Bos et al. 2010; Lubbers and Scheepers 2001; Vliegenthart and Boomgaarden 2010; see also Koopmans and Vliegenthart 2010): as one example, consider Rooduijn (2014) who reports that the degree of populism in the media is influenced by populist parties doing well in national elections. And Deacon and Wring (2016) analyze media coverage of the anti-EU, anti-immigration United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), suggesting that media attention of UKIP is directly influenced by the party's strong

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political standing. While European elections are covered thorough media attention across the globe, they will be reported more extensively in Europe as such, thus generating more facilitative conditions for migration-attitude diffusion as individuals become more receptive as a result of strong and extensive news media coverage.[4]

Therefore, we should observe a more elevated concern with migration within Europe when parties that adopt anti-immigration platforms perform well in elections, because these outcomes reduce "socially desirable" responses and/or it leads respondents to adopt more restrictive attitudes towards migration. Furthermore, anti-immigration party success ultimately gives these parties a platform via mass-media coverage to communicate these views more widely, making it possible that anti-immigration views travel from one country to another. In sum, this discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

Anti-Immigration Hypothesis: Anti-immigration attitudes diffuse more strongly across countries with anti-immigration parties performing well in national elections abroad.

Research Design

Data, Dependent Variable, and Methodology

The data set for our empirical analysis is based on all eight rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS), which cover the period from 2002 to 2016. The ESS is one of the most methodologically rigorous cross-national survey projects. While similar to other European

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[4] For the theoretical mechanisms, we assume that the public pays attention to the news and that there is sufficient news coverage. While the latter is positively related to our European focus, we examine the first component in the supporting information's section.

surveys such as the Eurobarometer, the ESS's key advantage is that survey practices are harmonized to reduce the likelihood of different results between countries being driven by alterations in how the survey is conducted in each state. To this end, the ESS has developed guidelines for consistent methods of fieldwork, including contacting, coding, and the sampling implementation. These practices require, among others, a random sampling design of residents 15 years and older (no quota sampling), one hour face-to-face interviews, a target response rate of 70 percent, and a minimum of 2,000 respondents per country. These characteristics make the ESS particularly useful for our purposes (for a discussion, see De Vries 2017). As we rely on the ESS as the main data frame, our sample comprises a set of 27 established European democracies including non-EU states such as Switzerland and Norway. The ESS also includes Ukraine or Israel, but we omit these from our analysis with a view towards increasing case homogeneity. The sample's country-time coverage is driven by data availability of the core variables of interest, most crucially public opinion as the ESS is only available as of 2002. The country-year is the unit of analysis in this time-series cross-sectional data set.

For the dependent variable, we use the ESS survey question "[t]o what extent do you think that your country should allow immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe."[5] Possible answers include "allow many to come and live here," "allow some," "allow a few," and "allow none." We first deleted all individuals who have not responded to this question or expressed no opinion ("do not know") before transforming this item into a binary variable capturing attitudes against outside migration (1) or not (0); the "allow many" and "allow some" categories are merged into a single value of 0, while the "allow a few" and "allow none"

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[5] A question not linked to the degree of wealth/poverty of immigrants' home countries does not exist in the ESS.

categories pertain to the value of 1 of the new dichotomous item. Afterwards, we aggregated this individual-level variable to the country level by averaging across respondents, which theoretically ranges in [0; 1] and higher values indicate that a larger share of respondents perceives migration from outside Europe as less favorable. Our final variable captures annual changes in public mood between 2002 and 2016, as (rapid and significant) changes more visible to the public abroad (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; True et al. 2007; see also Baumgartner 2006). The variable theoretically ranges in [-1; 1] and Figure 1 plots the dependent variable across all country-years in our sample.

Considering the scale of this dependent variable, we employ OLS regression models[6] with panel-corrected standard errors, a lagged dependent variable, a time trend, and year fixed effects. The temporally lagged dependent variable controls for changes in a state's public opinion towards outside migration in the previous year and thereby allows for the potential influence of the public's past opinion on current attitude changes. Country fixed effects capture time-invariant unit-level influences; in addition, since errors in the data will vary by country, we employ panel-level heteroskedastic errors. The temporal trend controls for the fact that public opinion became less supportive of migration over time, particularly in the recent past.

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[6] We also examine the robustness of our findings when using the maximum-likelihood estimator of Franzese and Hays (2007, 2008).

Figure 1. ΔMigration Attitudes
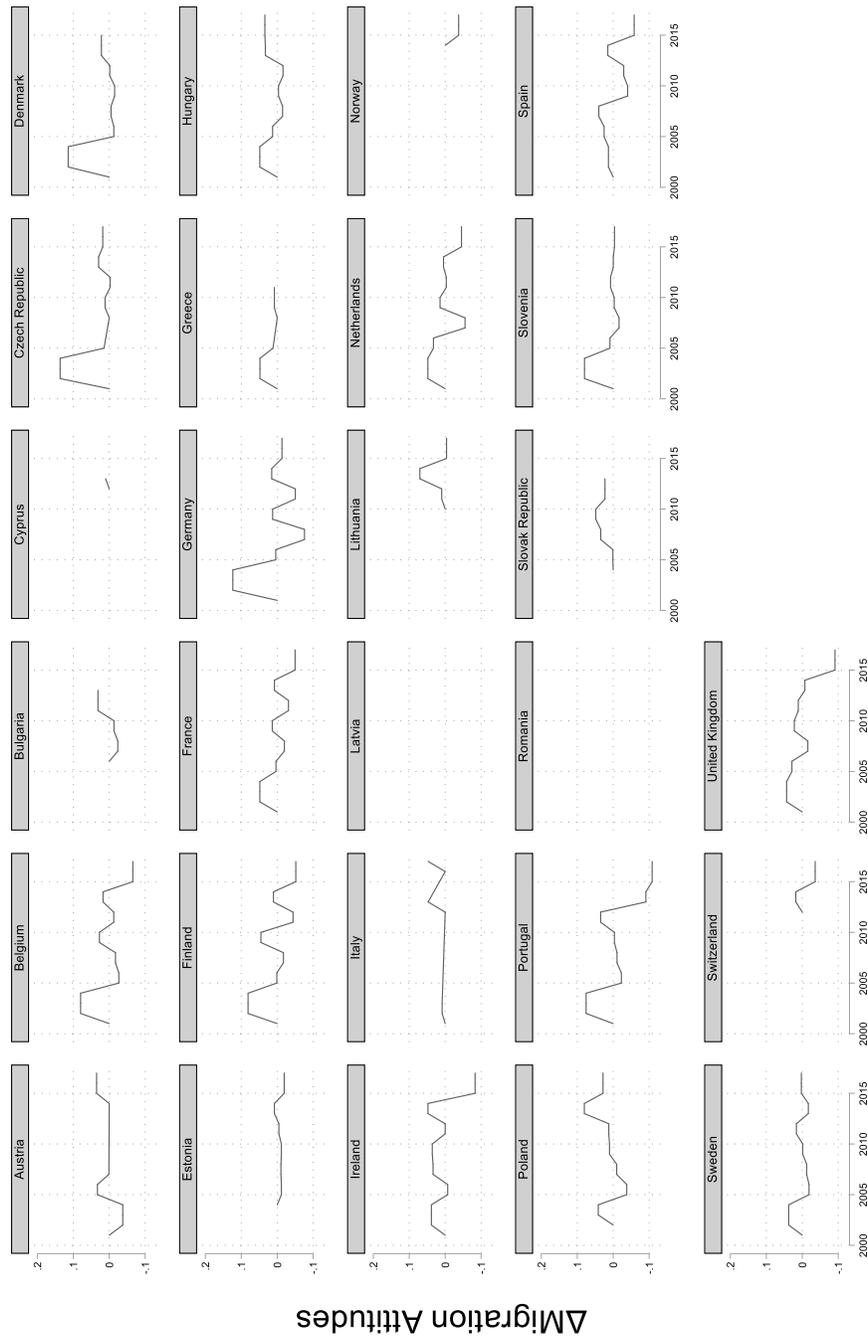
Explanatory Variables

The theoretical argument contends that a state's public opinion on migration is affected

by other countries' attitudes if anti-immigration parties did well in the last general election of the

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"sender" (see Franzese and Hays 2007, 2008). In this context, a state's public opinion on migration is modeled as a function of other countries' public opinion if the countries are connected to each other by a strong link that we operationalize by the electoral success of anti-migration parties in national elections. Using a weighting matrix, we thus model states' linkages as conditional on whether anti-migration parties have done well in the "source state's" last election. Accordingly, our models are defined as,

$$y = \phi y_{t-1} + \beta X + \rho Wy + \varepsilon, \tag{1}$$

where y_t is the dependent variable, y_{t-1} signifies the (one year) temporally lagged dependent variable, X is a matrix of explanatory variables (described below), and ε is the error term. Wy stands for the product of a connectivity matrix (W) and the dependent variable (y), i.e., Wy is a spatial lag and ρ the corresponding coefficient.

To this end, we specify each element $w_{i,j}$ of the underlying connectivity matrix for our spatial lag ($\mathbf{Wy}^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$) as a value of 1 if parties with an anti-migration position achieved at least 5 percent of the popular vote in the sending state's last election. We use expert survey data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) and several other expert surveys as coded in van Spanje (2011). A party is coded as anti-migration if its mean expert placement on the 0-10 anti-immigration scale is larger than 8 in the CHES data. Figure 2 summarizes the vote share of anti-immigration parties of our sample states in 2002-2016, underlying that several of those parties gained more than 5 percent of the votes in general elections and that there is sufficient variation in the data. In case CHES data were not available, we rely on van Spanje's (2011) coding who applies the same cut-off (after adjusting the scales from different surveys to 0-10). CHES lists in what legislative term a party was coded. We use this coding for all that term's years. If no CHES data for a given election are available, but there are data within four

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years prior or past a given year, we use the closest future or past value. The data on election dates and vote shares are taken from the CHES, while we also rely on the Döring and Manow (2012) if vote shares were not available from the former. The elements $w_{i,j}$ of the underlying connectivity matrix are coded as 0 if two country-year observations are not in the same year, if anti-migration parties did not secure at least 5 percent of the electoral vote, or if there were no anti-immigration parties.

We opted for this parsimonious, dichotomous operationalization for the matrix weights to facilitate interpretation of the spatial lag and its coefficient. By the same token, we row-standardize this spatial variable (Plümper and Neumayer 2010: 428f) as this generates spatial lags that are a weighted average of the values of the dependent variable. However, in the appendix, we increase the complexity of this spatial variable and show that our results do not depend on a specific vote-share threshold, not on the specification of anti-immigration parties, not on the time elapsed since the sending state's last election, or the row-standardization.

We also control for a series of other variables as these capture alternative influences behind migration attitudes, primarily at the country level, which ensures that we identify a genuine diffusion effect (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008). First, the general left-right mean (or median) voter position can be a predictor of attitudes toward migration. The more "conservative" or "right" the general public is, the less likely it will be that it is in favor of migration. The ESS provides the following survey item to measure individuals' left-right self-placement: "people sometimes talk of 'left' and 'right.' Using this card, where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?" We averaged values across respondents of each state and year to proxy the left-right mean-voter position in each country-year.

Figure 2. Vote Share of Anti-Immigration Parties

Vote Share of Anti-Immigration Parties

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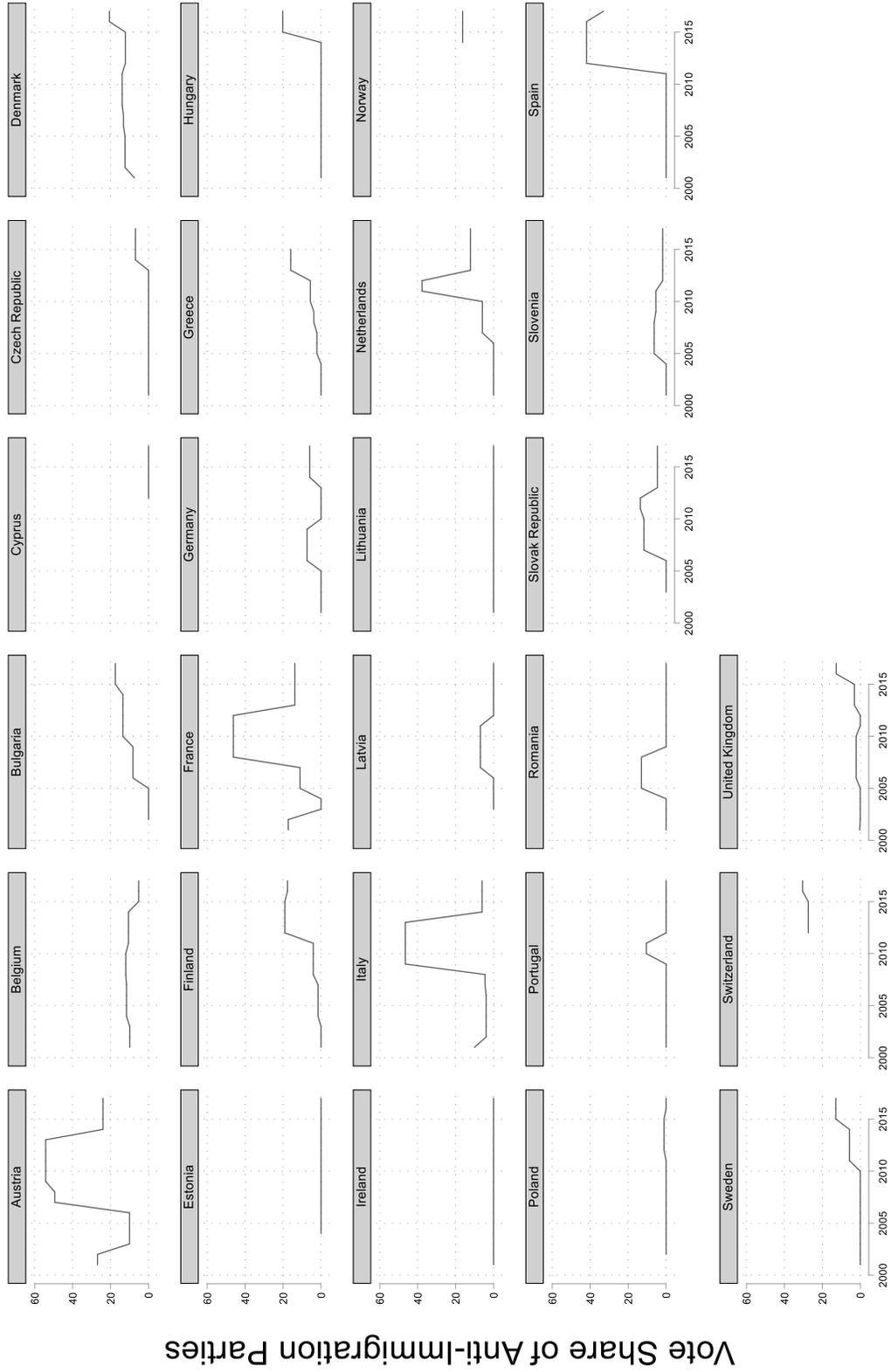
We further include four variables that are all taken from the World Bank Development Indicators, which we log-transform and temporally lag by one year as well. First, it is frequently argued that countries' migration attitudes are strongly linked to their economic development. We use GDP per capita (in current US Dollars), which is defined as the gross domestic product divided by midyear population. GDP is the sum of gross value added by all resident producers in the economy plus any product taxes and minus any subsidies not included in the value of the products. Moreover, population size is likely to be linked to the degree of preference heterogeneity in a society. We rely on a country's midyear total population, which counts all residents regardless of legal status or citizenship (except for refugees not permanently settled). Third, we consider the influence from unemployment, as measured by the logged total number of unemployed as a share of the total labor force. Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking employment. Finally, we control for the total population size (or stock) of international migrants and refugees in a country. The World Bank defines the international migrant and refugee stock as "the number of people born in a country other than that in which they live. It also includes refugees." The data underlying this item were originally obtained from national population censuses as well as states' statistics on foreign-born (people who have residence in one country, but were born in another country) or foreign populations (people who are citizens of a country other than the country in which they reside). Hence, this variable captures the entire population of foreign-born individuals in a state.

Table 1 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the variables we have discussed in the research design.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Obs.	Mean	SD	Min	Max
ΔMigration Attitudes	311	0.008	0.040	-0.108	0.137
ΔMigration Attitudes$_{t-1}$	311	0.009	0.037	-0.108	0.137
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	311	0.007	0.024	-0.030	0.097
Migrant and Refugee Population	311	13.717	1.333	11.068	16.308
Mean Voter	311	5.089	0.363	4.261	5.973
Population (ln)	311	16.268	1.141	13.942	18.230
GDP per capita (ln)	311	10.202	0.623	8.415	11.483
Unemployment (ln)	311	2.052	0.422	0.751	3.262

Table 2. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
ΔMigration Attitudes$_{t-1}$	0.388***	0.451***	0.337***
	(0.054)	(0.063)	(0.056)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.650***		0.758***
	(0.089)		(0.097)
Migrant and Refugee Population$_{t-1}$		-0.013	-0.029
		(0.023)	(0.022)
Mean Voter		0.015	0.023**
		(0.011)	(0.010)
Population (ln)		-0.004	0.160
		(0.127)	(0.122)
GDP per capita (ln)		-0.006	0.001
		(0.012)	(0.011)
Unemployment (ln)		0.002	-0.017**
		(0.008)	(0.008)
Constant	0.700	3.690	-2.765
	(0.940)	(2.234)	(2.294)
Obs.	331	311	311
R^2	0.472	0.367	0.458
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes	Yes
Temporal Trend	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table entries are coefficients; standard errors clustered on country in parentheses; Model 1 based on sample 2002-2017 (interpolated values for 2017) and, thus, has a somewhat larger sample size. The dependent variable is ΔMigration Attitudes. * p < 0.10, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

Empirical Results

Table 2 summarizes our main results. Model 1 comprises the main explanatory variables only next to the temporally lagged dependent variable, the country fixed effects, and the year trend. Model 2 merely focuses on the controls, while Model 3 is our full estimation as we include all variables discussed in the previous section. Note that due to the inclusion of a temporally lagged dependent variable, our coefficient estimates of the spatial lag (and all other explanatory variables) only reflect the short-term effect, i.e., the impact in a current year. In order to estimate the asymptotic long-term influence of a spatial lag, we incorporate the coefficient of the temporally lagged dependent variable according to Plümper, Troeger, and Manow (2005: 336).

Figure 3. Short-Term and Asymptotic Long-Term Spatial Effects of Spatial Lag
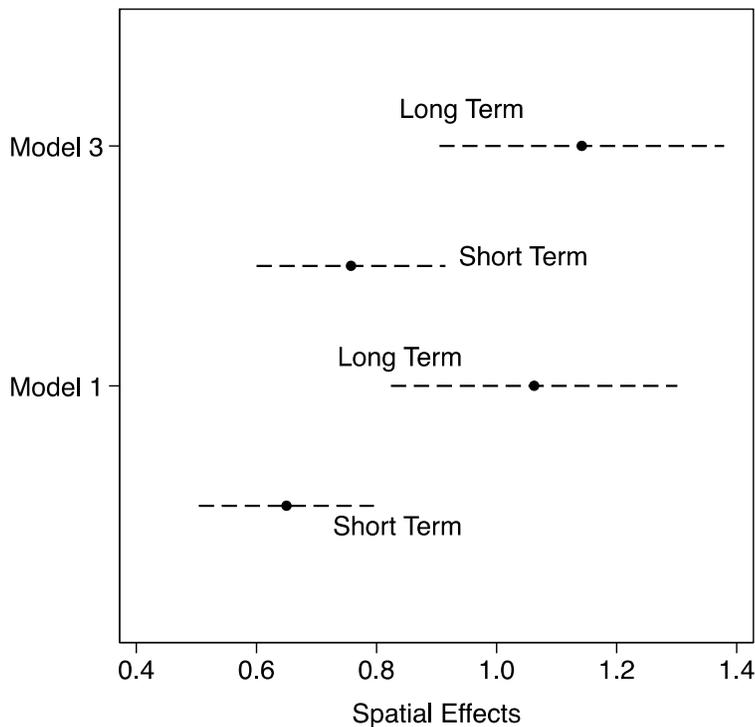
Notes. The horizontal bars are 90 percent confidence intervals.

Starting with our main explanatory variable, $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ is positively signed in all models and statistically significant. This implies that changes in public opinion on migration

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diffuse across countries if anti-immigration parties did well in the last election. The coefficient in

Table 2 can be interpreted directly as the short-term marginal effect and it suggests that public

opinion change becomes less favorable of migration by 0.65 (Model 1) and 0.76 (Model 3) units

in the current year (short run) if public opinion change in *all* neighboring countries, i.e., those

where anti-migration parties secured at least 5 percent of the popular vote in the last election,

became more skeptical of migration by one unit.[7] As shown in the appendix, quite a few

countries have anti-immigration parties with more than 5 percent of the votes in a series of

country-years. In addition, considering that the dependent variable ranges in [-1; 1] further

underlines that these are quite substantive effects. The asymptotic long-term effect is more

substantive in that we estimate point estimates of 1.063 (Model 1) and 1.142 (Model 3). Both

short-term and long-term effects are depicted in Figure 3. Recall that short-term effects in Figure

3 pertain to the impact of the spatial variable in the current year, while long-term effects stand

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[7] Bischof and Wagner (forthcoming) evaluate how public opinion responds to radical right

parties' entry into parliament. They also report interesting effects on public opinion polarizing in

response to radical-right parties' electoral success, i.e., there may not be a clear directional

change but a change in the variance of public opinion. Feddersen and Adams (2019) find that

parties can (weakly) persuade their supporters on the immigration issue, but that party positions

generate very strong backlash effects, whereby citizens who support parties that are ideologically

hostile to the focal party shift their positions away from the focal party's announced position (see

also Bishin et al. 2015). The studies above that highlight backlash effects among people who

support less restrictive policies suggest that anti-immigration party success would polarize

publics' opinions. Empirical tests of the diffusion of polarized-public attitudes due to anti-

immigration party success that we conducted were inconclusive.

for the asymptotic influence, i.e., when t goes toward infinity (Plümper, Troeger, and Manow

2005, 336; Plümper and Neumayer 2010: 425). To this end, the interpretation of the long-term

effects is that the impact of public opinion abroad in year t strengthens over time. If attitudes

cement over time rather than dissipate, a quasi-permanent shift in the political landscape may

emerge whereby migration overtakes other issues in terms of policy salience. This seems to be in

line with anecdotal evidence suggesting that European citizens regarded immigration as the

primary public issue in 2016.[8] However, there may clearly be different mechanisms and

influences emerging over the years that will drive this result – our asymptotic estimate is based

on the covariate values observed until the end of the sample period. The substance of these

effects is nevertheless considerable, clearly showing that an important effect does exist. Both

short-term and long-term effects are depicted in Figure 3, and adding or dropping specific

variables does not change the findings qualitatively.

We thus obtain strong and robust support for our theoretical expectations. The electoral

success of parties that oppose migration is also taken into account abroad – and the public adjusts

accordingly as this facilitates that public opinion on migration travels across borders. Public

opinion on migration is thus not only shaped by domestic-level events and phenomena, but also

transnational diffusion processes. This pattern, by implication, can also shed light on the series of

electoral successes of anti-migration, populist parties across Europe in the recent past. When

public opinion at home changes in light of public opinion abroad and becomes less favorable

toward migration, the public will vote accordingly.

Coming to the control variables, only our variables for the average voter and

unemployment are significant at conventional levels in Model 3. As expected, the public

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[8] See online at: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-4493_en.htm.

becomes more skeptical of migration when more citizens report left-right attitudes that are to the "right." On first glance, the result for *Unemployment (ln)* might seem surprising because higher unemployment rates are associated with less restrictive attitudes toward migration. One potential explanation is that Bello (2017: 27), among others, argues that "unemployed are not more prejudiced against immigrants than are the employed" (see also Lahav 2004: 1168; Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010). Although this is one possible explanation for the effect we report, the parameter estimates on *Unemployment (ln)* require further exploration.

Conclusion

Our study extends earlier research on public opinion and policy diffusion. The arguments and empirical analyses support our hypothesis that migration attitudes travel across borders when political parties that promote anti-immigration policies perform well in elections. This finding contributes to our understanding of public attitudes towards migration and for how public opinion changes over time (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

There are several interesting questions to explore in future research. These will identify *conditions* under which elections influence the diffusion of public opinion on migration. For example, citizens may be less likely to support migration when foreign anti-immigration parties perform well, and when economic conditions deteriorate. Although economic conditions are controlled for in the empirical analyses, estimates of diffusion are not conditioned on them.

Additional analyses will evaluate whether clear election victories/losses on *other dimensions* of political contestation such as the left-right, or, more specific issues like the environment and European integration exert a similar effect on the diffusion of public opinion as in the case of migration attitudes. Indeed current research suggests that American citizens'

attitudes towards immigration influences their attitudes towards the welfare state (Garand, Xu, and Davis 2017). It is plausible, based on these scholars' research, that anti-immigration party success could ultimately facilitate – through the effect on migration attitudes -- the diffusion of negative views towards the welfare state.

Political institutions may also facilitate the transmission of cross-border effects. Böhmelt et al. (2017) report that diffusion effects might be stronger under dominant or "big-party" governments. Our study similarly suggests that political institutions matter, but in a different way. It is plausible that anti-immigration parties perform better in political systems with electoral systems that are characterized as proportional. These countries may influence foreign opinion on immigration by choosing whether to support their anti-immigration parties more than countries with disproportional electoral systems in which citizens support newer and smaller parties less often.

Our theoretical arguments and empirical support for the *Anti-Immigration Hypothesis* are relevant to understanding attitudes towards immigration (e.g., Czaika and Di Lillo 2018), because they imply that citizens are influenced by public opinion in other states when specific parties do well in elections there. Our findings are also relevant for scholars of diffusion (e.g., Elkins and Simmons 2005; Gilardi 2010, 2012). While several of these works focus on government-to-government policy diffusion, several prominent studies of political representation have shown that public policy outputs are influenced by public opinion or the median voter position (Kang and Powell 2012; see also McDonald and Budge 2005; Budge et al. 2012). Our research hence suggests that policy diffusion occurs, at least in part, *through election results* and how these facilitate the diffusion of public attitudes.

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Migration Attitude Diffusion: The Influence of Election Outcomes

Supporting Information (SI)

A.1: Alternative Specifications of Anti-Immigration Parties

For the weights of the connectivity matrix used in the main text's analyses, we focus on the electoral success of anti-immigration parties. We use data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Bakker et al. 2015) and several other expert surveys as coded in van Spanje (2011). Due to simplicity, a party is coded as anti-migration if its mean expert placement on the 0-10 anti-immigration scale is larger than 8 in the CHES data. In other words, we concentrate on the anti-immigrant position and then employ a threshold of at least 5 percent of the votes to create binary weights.

Table A.1. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion

	Model A1 (Extended Party Definition)	Model A2 (Non-Binary Weights)
ΔMigration Attitudes$_{t-1}$	0.320***	0.341***
	(0.056)	(0.058)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.769***	0.685***
	(0.098)	(0.094)
Migrant and Refugee Population$_{t-1}$	-0.028	-0.026
	(0.022)	(0.021)
Mean Voter	0.024**	0.023**
	(0.010)	(0.010)
Population (ln)	0.166	0.124
	(0.123)	(0.121)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.008	-0.011
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Unemployment (ln)	-0.014*	-0.015*
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Constant	-2.099	-2.363
	(2.287)	(2.257)
Obs.	311	311
R^2	0.459	0.445
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Temporal Trend	Yes	Yes

Table entries are coefficients; standard errors clustered on country in parentheses; Model 1 based on sample 2002-2017 (interpolated values for 2017) and, thus, has a somewhat larger sample size. The dependent variable is ΔMigration Attitudes. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

On one hand, however, according to van Spanje (2011), anti-immigration parties are usually characterized by two features: a radical anti-immigration position and, secondly, high saliency of that issue. To this end, we have coded the vote share at the most recent election for all parties that meet both criteria. Hence, the first criterion regarding the mean expert placement on the 0-10 anti-immigration scale must be met. For the second criterion, we focus on a party's saliency or most important issue as coded by the CHES. In case CHES data are not available, we rely on van Spanje's (2011) coding who applies the same cut-off (after adjusting the scales from different surveys to 0-10). CHES lists in what legislative term a party was coded. We use this coding for all that term's years. If no CHES data for a given election are available, but there are data within four years prior or past a given year, we use the closest future or past value. The data on election dates and vote shares are taken from CHES, while we also rely on Döring and Manow (2012) if vote shares were not available there. All other model specifications remain unaltered. On the other

hand, we discard the idea of binary weights and merely use the actual vote share of all anti-migration parties (as defined in the main text) to specify the connectivity matrix.

Table A.1 summarizes our results. Although we modified the specification of the spatial lag, allowing for another aspect to define anti-immigration parties and non-binary weights, the findings are virtually identical to what is discussed in the main text: migration attitudes diffuse across countries, and the success of anti-migration parties in the source state crucially facilitates this.

A.2: Maximum Likelihood

We replaced the estimator in the main text by the maximum-likelihood estimator introduced in Franzese and Hays (2007; 2008), which "does not assume a temporally lagged spatial lag and addresses simultaneity bias head on" (Ward and Cao 2012:1084; see also Elhorst 2010). Table A.2 presents our results and highlights that altering the estimation procedure does not affect the substance of our findings.

Table A.2. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion

	Model A3 (Maximum Likelihood)
ΔMigration Attitudes$_{t-1}$	0.455***
	(0.047)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.539***
	(0.067)
Migrant and Refugee Population$_{t-1}$	0.024
	(0.020)
Mean Voter	-0.020*
	(0.011)
Population (ln)	-0.123
	(0.102)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.004
	(0.010)
Unemployment (ln)	0.012*
	(0.007)
Constant	1.390
	(1.962)
Obs.	311
RMSE	0.027
Country Fixed Effects	Yes
Temporal Trend	Yes

Table entries are coefficients; standard errors clustered on country in parentheses; Model 1 based on sample 2002-2017 (interpolated values for 2017) and, thus, has a somewhat larger sample size. The dependent variable is ΔMigration Attitudes. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

A.3: Influence of Neighboring States Only

The connectivity matrix we employ in the main text is merely based on the (dichotomized) vote share of anti-immigration parties. We also examined the robustness of our results when limiting the influence to neighboring states only. That is, using the Correlates of War Direct Contiguity Data (Douglas et al. 2002), the elements in the connectivity matrix now also have to capture the contiguity of country

i and country *j* as defined by a land/river border or the two are separated by up to 400 miles (643.74 km) of water (value of 1 in the matrix). If there is no such border between countries *i* and *j* or elements refer to two different years in the matrix, we assign a value of 0 (and also $w_{i,i}$=0). To this end, the spatial lag then captures the dichotomized vote share of anti-immigration parties only in neighboring states.

As shown in Table A.3, however, the core result remains robust. If anything, the coefficient's impact of the spatial lag becomes weaker, suggesting that geographical proximity may matter less. This may not come across surprising as our sample comprises European states only. Interestingly, though, a larger migration population in the country lowers skeptical migration attitudes, which may mirror, e.g., the contact thesis in that more contact with actual migrants and refugees leads to more favorable attitudes (see Curtis 2014).

Table A.3. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion

	Model A4 (Neighboring States)
ΔMigration Attitudes$_{t-1}$	0.373***
	(0.061)
$\mathbf{Wy}^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.351***
	(0.056)
Migrant and Refugee Population$_{t-1}$	-0.046*
	(0.023)
Mean Voter	0.022*
	(0.012)
Population (ln)	0.199
	(0.130)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.002
	(0.012)
Unemployment (ln)	-0.006
	(0.008)
Constant	-0.715
	(2.263)
Obs.	311
R^2	0.404
Country Fixed Effects	Yes
Temporal Trend	Yes

Table entries are coefficients; standard errors clustered on country in parentheses; Model 1 based on sample 2002-2017 (interpolated values for 2017) and, thus, has a somewhat larger sample size. The dependent variable is ΔMigration Attitudes. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

A.4: Moderating Effect of Countries' Population Size and Economic Power

We also considered the possibility that the size of a country matters. For example, the influence of public opinion from other countries via the electoral success of anti-immigration parties may be more or less strongly pronounced given the economic power or population size of the focal state. To this end, we consider two interactions of the spatial lag: one with population and a second one with GDP per capita. Using

this information from the World Bank Development Indicators, we multiplied the spatial lag with either variable and re-estimated the models again. Table A.4 discusses the corresponding results.

Table A.4. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion

	Model A5 (GDP per capita)	Model A6 (GDP per capita)
ΔMigration Attitudes$_{t-1}$	0.337***	0.331***
	(0.057)	(0.056)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	1.691	-1.046
	(1.203)	(0.056)
Migrant and Refugee Population$_{t-1}$	-0.030	-0.028
	(0.022)	(0.022)
Mean Voter	0.024**	0.025**
	(0.010)	(0.010)
Population (ln)	0.145	0.164
	(0.125)	(0.123)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}} *$ Population (ln)		0.111*
		(0.059)
GDP per capita (ln)	0.003	-0.001
	(0.011)	(0.011)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}} *$ GDP per capita (ln)	-0.092	
	(0.121)	
Unemployment (ln)	-0.017**	-0.018**
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Constant	-2.594	-2.987
	(2.305)	(2.304)
Obs.	311	311
R^2	0.458	0.461
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Temporal Trend	Yes	Yes

Table entries are coefficients; standard errors clustered on country in parentheses; Model 1 based on sample 2002-2017 (interpolated values for 2017) and, thus, has a somewhat larger sample size. The dependent variable is ΔMigration Attitudes. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Model A5 focuses on the interaction with income, but the results are inconclusive. Model A6 incorporates the interaction with population. According to the multiplicative specification there, it seems that public opinion on migration diffuses across countries via the electoral success of anti-immigration parties in particular when "target" countries are larger. The interaction term is positively signed and significant. Hence, although our core result remains robust, it seems that specific scope conditions might affect the actual influence of the spatial variable.

A.5: News Media Consumption

For the theoretical mechanisms, we assume that the public pays attention to the news and that there is sufficient news coverage. While we claim that the latter is positively related to proximity and general given in a geographical region as dense as Europe, we do not fully cover the first component. To address

this, we considered compiling data on news media consumption. We merged all integrated data files of all rounds of the ESS covering 2002-2016 (including ESS round 8, edition 2.0). We focus on the ESS survey question "how much of your time watching television is spent watching news or program about politics and current affairs?" Respondents could answer on a 0-7 scale with 0 standing for "no time at all" and 7 "more than three hours."[1] We first deleted all individuals who have not responded to this question or expressed no opinion ("do not know") before aggregating this individual-level variable to the country level by averaging across respondents. We thus end up with a variable measuring average news media consumption in each country-year between 2002 and 2016, while country-years not covered by the ESS are linearly interpolated.

Figure A.1. News Media Consumption
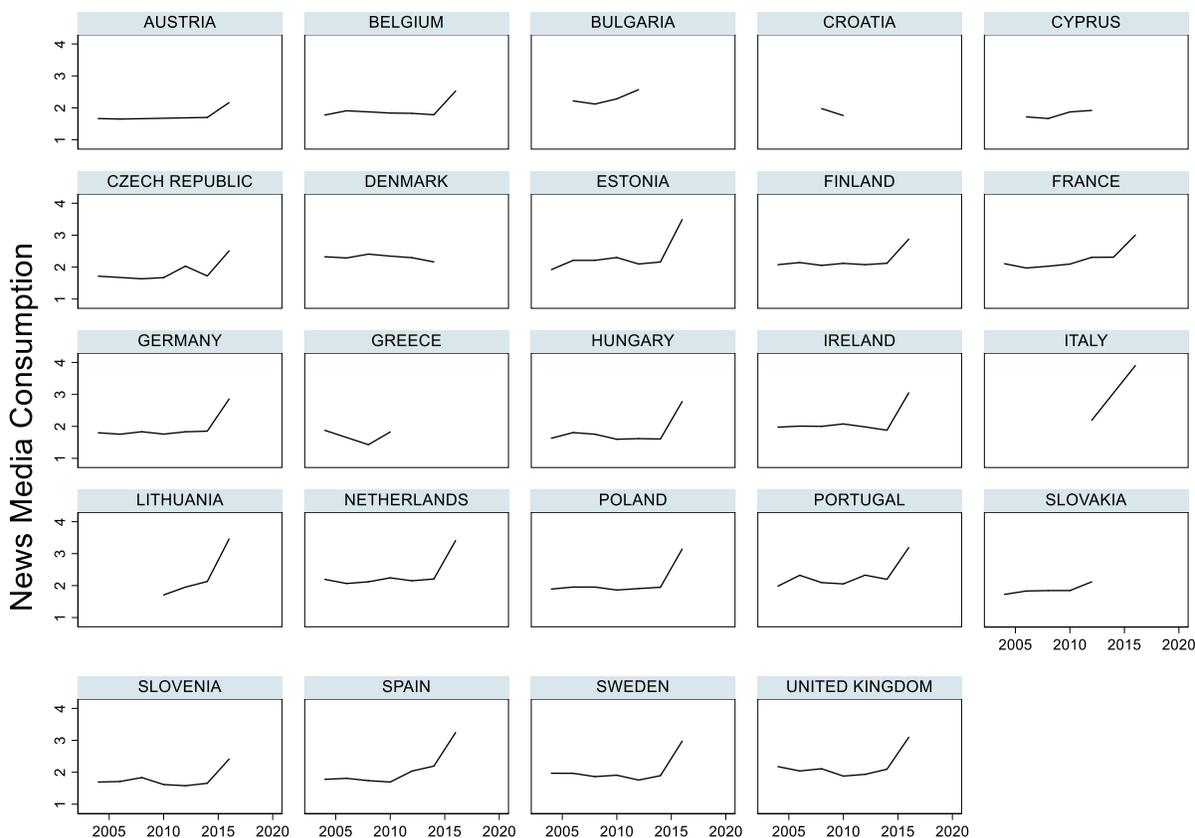
To assess the requirement that the public pays attention to the news, we look at the item's descriptive statistics. According to our calculations, the variable has a mean value of 2.0925, which basically translates into an average weekday consumption of programs about politics and current affairs of 30 minutes to one hour. The patterns of this variable across countries and over time are plotted in Figure A.1. We believe that this supports our assumption that the public does indeed follow the news on a regular and thorough basis.

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[1] 2016 is an exception as the question is reformulated into "[o]n a typical day, about how much time do you spend watching, reading or listening to news about politics and current affairs?" We thus divided the variable first into seven equally sized quantiles to make the coding consistent with previous ESS rounds.

A.6: Time Since Last Election and Non-Row Standardization

We modified the spatial variable in two additional aspects. First, next to the binary information on anti-migration parties' vote share, we add the time elapsed since the last election in the source state to the weights in the connectivity matrix. General elections usually take place every three to four years, but more recent elections abroad are likely to have a stronger, more imminent effect due to larger media coverage. Hence, more recent elections should further facilitate that public opinion travels across borders. Using information from the CHES (Bakker et al. 2015) and Döring and Manow (2012) we calculate the time elapsed since the last general election in the sending country and multiplied the inverse of this with the dichotomized vote-share information. Model A7 summarizes our findings. Second, we row-standardize the matrix, but more due to a facilitated empirical interpretation than on theoretical grounds. To examine the robustness of this, we estimated a model with a non-row-standardized weighting matrix, which is summarized in Model A8.

Table A.1. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion

	Model A7 (Time Since Last Election)	Model A8 (Non-Row-Standardization)
ΔMigration Attitudes$_{t-1}$	0.342***	0.401***
	(0.058)	(0.058)
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.712***	0.103***
	(0.101)	(0.013)
Migrant and Refugee Population$_{t-1}$	-0.026	-0.027
	(0.021)	(0.021)
Mean Voter	0.024**	0.023**
	(0.010)	(0.010)
Population (ln)	0.124	0.148
	(0.121)	(0.119)
GDP per capita (ln)	-0.009	-0.018
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Unemployment (ln)	-0.014*	-0.023***
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Constant	-2.212	-3.169
	(2.275)	(2.246)
Obs.	311	311
R^2	0.439	0.454
Country Fixed Effects	Yes	Yes
Temporal Trend	Yes	Yes

Table entries are coefficients; standard errors clustered on country in parentheses; Model 1 based on sample 2002-2017 (interpolated values for 2017) and, thus, has a somewhat larger sample size. The dependent variable is ΔMigration Attitudes. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Model A8, which is based on the non-row-standardized weighting matrix produces results that are virtually identical to what is discussed in the main text. Hence, row-standardization does not matter for the substance of our conclusions, although all other models are based on row-standardized matrices as they allow for a direct interpretation. Model A7 also supports our main conclusion as $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ remains positively signed and significant.

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Country	Party	Vote Share of Anti-Immigration Parties (in Percent) by Year																
		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Albania																		
Austria	BZO							4	4	11	11	11	11	11	4	4	4	4
	FPO	27	27	10	10	10	10	11	11	18	18	18	18	18	21	21	21	21
	OVP							34	34	26	26	26	26	26				
Belgium	FN											1	1	1	1			
	LDD											2	2	2	2			
	PP															2	2	2
	VB	10	10	10	12	12	12	12	12	12	12	8	8	8	8	4	4	4
Bulgaria	ATAKA															5	5	5
	BBT															6	6	6
	NFSB															4	4	4
	NOA						8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	9			
	RZS										4	4	4	4	4			
	VMRO-BND															3	3	3
Croatia	HSP												3	3	3	3	3	3
	HSP-AS												1	1	1	1	1	1
Cyprus																		
Czech Republic	USVIT														7	7	7	7
Denmark	DF	7	12	12	12	12	13	13	14	14	14	14	12	12	12	12	21	21
Estonia																		
Finland	PS	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	4	4	4	4	19	19	19	19	18	18
France	FN	15	15	11	11	11	11	11	5	5	5	5	5	14	14	14	14	14
	MPF								1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
	RPF	2	2															
	UMP								40	40	40	40	40					
Germany	AfD														5	5	5	5
	CSU						7	7	7	7								
	NPD														1	1	1	1

Country	Party																	
Greece	ANEL												8	8	8		
	LAOS				2	2	2	4	4	6	6	6	2	2	2		
	XA												7	7	7		
Hungary	JOBBIK													20	20	20	
Ireland																	
Italy	Fdl													2	2	2	2
	LN	10	4	4	4	4	5	5	8	8	8	8	8	4	4	4	4
	PDL								38	38	38	38	38				
Kosovo																	
Latvia	TB-LNNK						7	7	7	7	7						
Lithuania																	
Luxembourg																	
Netherlands	PVV						6	6	6	6	16	16	10	10	10	10	10
	SGP											2	2	2	2	2	2
	VVD										21	21					
Norway	FrP													16	16	16	16
Poland	KNP											1	1	1	1	0	0
Portugal	CDS-PP										10	10					
Romania	PRM				13	13	13	13									
Slovak Republic	KDH										9	9					
	SNS						12	12	12	12	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Slovenia	SNS				6	6	6	6	5	5	5	2	2	2	2	2	2
Spain	PP											42	42	42	42	42	33
Sweden	SD										6	6	6	6	13	13	13
Switzerland	LdT											1	1	1	1	1	1
	SVP/UDC											27	27	27	27	29	29
Turkey																	
Ukraine																	
United Kingdom	UKIP	0				2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	3	13	13

Note: Definition of anti-immigration parties based on specifications in the main article.