Public Opinion Diffusion on Migration and the Role of Elections

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We argue that public opinion on migration diffuses from country to country when anti-immigration parties perform well in national elections abroad. Our empirical results present additional evidence that the media influences this diffusion of public attitudes via anti-immigration parties' electoral success. The findings are based on the application of a spatial approach to European Social Survey data on immigration. The study holds direct implications for our understanding of public attitudes towards migration, and more generally for how changes in public opinion occur.

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

Understanding public attitudes towards immigration is a salient issue for academics and practitioners alike, especially when considering the recent "European refugee and migration crisis" (for overviews, see Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Valentino et al. 2019). Numerous studies have sought to understand public attitudes towards migration, and these have identified important factors including socio-economic status (e.g., Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Haubert and Fussell 2006), ideology (e.g., Pardos-Prado 2011), or psychological differences (e.g., Dinesen, Klemmensen, and Nørgaard 2016; Bello 2017). Additional research has emphasized economic and political characteristics at the country-level (e.g., Mayda 2006) and, along similar lines, the size of the foreign-born population (Sides and Citrin 2007). Moreover, Bischof and Wagner (2019) and Feddersen and Adams (2019; see also Bishin et al. 2015) have shown that public attitudes are affected by political parties in general and, especially, when radical right parties gain entry into parliament.[1]

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 previous works have identified – transnational factors also exist in shaping attitudes: specifically, we identify the *cross-border diffusion of migration attitudes* in combination with *foreign election results* to put forward the new argument that migration

[1] Bischof and Wagner (2019) evaluate how public opinion responds to radical right parties' entry into parliament. They also examine 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 (but see Bohman and Hjerm 2016). Feddersen and Adams (2019) report findings that parties can (weakly) persuade their supporters on the immigration issue. However, party positions also generate 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 highlighting these backlash effects suggest that anti-immigration party success polarizes public opinion.

attitudes diffuse more strongly from state to state when anti-immigration parties perform well in their elections abroad.

Diffusion 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 of diffusion (see Gilardi 2010, 2012). Existing research has also observed that parties abroad influence parties' positions at home (e.g., Böhmelt et al. 2016), and that public opinion similarly diffuses (Czaika and Di Lillo 2018). Delis, Matakos, and Xefteris (2019) point to diffusion at the election-level with election outcomes in one country influencing election outcomes abroad. Here, we analyze the diffusion of *public opinion* on migration across borders in the context of election outcomes for anti-immigration parties.

By adopting the perspective that the electoral context matters for public opinion diffusion, we argue that citizen attitudes are shaped by views on migration abroad in part by foreign election results. The expectation arises from several influential studies that argue that citizens respond to election outcomes at the regional, national, and European levels. Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) argue that when political parties form governing coalitions after an election, it shapes citizen perceptions of these parties' policy positions. Others claim that elections influence citizens' voting behavior. For example, a political party that performs well (or poorly) in one set of elections will influence its electoral prospects for another. For example, Dinas and Riera (2018) have shown that European Parliament election outcomes can influence outcomes at the national level (see also Bolleyer and Bytzek 2013 for the influence of regional elections). We extend these authors' claims to argue that foreign national election results are an important vehicle through which public opinion on migration diffuses from state to state. To test

this argument, we use all rounds of the European Social Survey (ESS)[2] in 2002-2016 and estimate multi-level models with spatial variables that capture diffusion effects from foreign public attitudes to "home" views via election results. The hierarchical models combine macro and micro-level information. Our empirical results support the finding that skeptical migration views travel across borders if anti-immigration parties performed well across national elections abroad. We present additional evidence that the media influences the diffusion of public attitudes by showing that the effects are stronger for citizens that pay more attention to it.

Significance of Migration Attitude Diffusion

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 responds to government policy: when 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 European Union (EU). For the United Kingdom (UK), Bartle et al. (2011) arrive at similar conclusions. Stevenson (2001; see also Durr 1993) examines the role of the economy and reports that when economies perform well, demand for public spending increases. Eventually, strong economies move public opinion to the left. Kelly and Enns (2010) focus on the effect of economic inequality on policy mood and find that inequality reduces demand for government. We contribute to these works by raising the

[2] Available at: http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/.

possibility that *foreign public opinion* influences public opinion at home via election results in "source countries."

Second there are important implications for policymaking. Studies of democracy suggest that governments may be hesitant to adopt policies that are not popular because they do not want to lose office and, hence, policymaking will be influenced by what the public wants (Anderson et al. 2017) – when focusing on migration policies, research has found similar patterns (e.g., Helbling and Kalkum 2018). By showing that public attitudes on migration diffuse across borders, we highlight a pathway of influence of public opinion in one country on migration attitudes in other countries, which subsequently informs policymaking in the issue area.

Third, 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; Sides and Citrin 2007; Dustmann and Preston 2007; McLaren and Johnson 2007; see also Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007; Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Valentino et al. 2019). Bohman and Hjerm (2016) analyze the influence of domestic parties on public opinion and do not find much evidence that radical-right parties affect opposition towards immigration.[3] We contribute to these works by showing that immigration attitudes are also affected by international influences that travel across borders and then shape migration attitudes at home, which thus far has been treated as an exclusively domestic-level phenomenon.

Finally, our results are important for the literature on transnational diffusion in general (e.g., Most and Starr 1990; Elkins and Simmons 2005; Simmons, Dobbin, and Garrett 2003;

[3] We also return to this issue in the appendix where we control for the impact of domestic right-wing parties and, indeed, find similar results as Bohman and Hjerm (2016).

Franzese and Hays 2007, 2008; Gilardi 2010, 2012), which has traditionally focused on government-to-government policy diffusion. More recently, the literature increasingly looks at party-to-party diffusion, and Delis, Matakos, and Xefteris (2019) added a compelling case study of election-to-election diffusion. Czaika and Di Lillo (2018) report how public opinion diffuses across regions. We combine perspectives from the latter two studies on diffusion of election results and public opinion to show how foreign election results provide a crucial context for the diffusion of migration attitudes. In doing so, we highlight that *level-to-level* diffusion results do not occur in a vacuum. Instead, important insights arise when *cross-level* diffusion channels are considered. To this end, for example, our work suggests that Czaika and Di Lillo's (2018) findings can partly be explained by election results of anti-immigration parties influencing public opinion diffusion.

Why Elections Influence Public Opinion Diffusion

We argue that citizens rely on heuristics when forming their political attitudes, and that they will respond to foreign publics' views when 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 (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, more recently, a "coalition" heuristic has been shown to affect how voters infer parties' policy positions (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Spoon and Klüver 2017). While complications or potentially misleading inferences may arise when using such cognitive

"shortcuts" (Lau and Redlawsk 2001; Dancey and Sheagley 2013; Kahneman and Frederick 2002; Boudreau and MacKenzie 2014), political psychology and political behavior studies suggest that citizens (nevertheless) employ heuristics to cope with the complexity of making informed choices in a democracy.

With respect to migration attitudes, we argue that citizens will be influenced by public attitudes on migration abroad when foreign anti-immigration parties perform well elections: the electoral success of political parties in other countries can operate as a heuristic for citizens. There are several studies that report that are consistent with this view, and that citizens respond to election results. The prominent study of Anderson and Guillory (1997) demonstrates how election outcomes influence citizens' evaluations of "satisfaction with democracy."[4] When citizens update their perceptions of parties' policy positions, based on coalition participation, this represents another example of how citizens utilize election outcomes to politically inform themselves. Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) claim that voters perceive the policies of governing parties as moving toward each other more than their stated party positions would suggest. Other scholars have shown that citizens respond to regional and European elections. According to Bolleyer and Bytzek (2013), parties that perform well in regional elections are more likely to do well in national elections. Dinas and Riera (2018; see also Franklin 2017; van der Brug and de Vreese 2016) have shown that elections to the European Parliament (EP) influence national parliamentary elections, arguing that small parties benefit in national elections due to their participation in elections to the EP. Schulte-Cloos (2018) has similarly written that EP elections

[4] 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."

promote the success of challenger parties.[5] We derive from these and related works that citizens are influenced in various ways by national, regional, and EP election results that take place in their countries.[6]

With national elections, citizens usually have to wait approximately three or four years in between each election. In the absence of frequent national elections, *citizens pay attention to elections that take place abroad*, which in turn influences how public opinion diffuses cross-nationally.[7] For example, in 2017, the German media covered quite extensively national elections both in the Netherlands and in France.[8] In both cases, the narrative was about strong, highly competitive challenger parties campaigning on anti-immigration platforms, and the German media reported on these platforms to the wider German public.[9] For example, the most prominent television news program in Germany (*Tagesschau*) covered the Dutch and French elections as the main news story on their election days as well as the day after each election

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

[6] Related, Bischof and Wagner (2019) develop a "legitimization" expectation that extreme party success enables their supporters to, correspondingly, adopt more extreme positions – facilitated by social desirability effects that have been identified in the social psychology literature (e.g., Tankard and Paluck 2016). However, we employ data at the individual level and differentiating between social desirability versus a real change in attitude requires an experimental design.

[7] A complementary factor is that political party elites integrate the policies of foreign-incumbent parties into their own party manifestos. 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 the media, as we argue, pay attention and have incentives to make information on foreign elections accessible to citizens.

[8] A search for the major anti-immigration candidates' last names in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* archive in the month prior to the elections produces striking results. Marine Le Pen, the leader of the National Front in France, was mentioned in 77 articles on politics; her competitor, Emmanuel Macron who went on to win the election, was mentioned in 56 articles only.

[9] Needless to say, many news outlets also commented critically on these arguments. The relevant point here is that foreign anti-immigration messages were nevertheless made available to the German public.

(Tagesschau 2017a, b, c, d). The German news coverage of the French and Dutch elections, combined with the electoral success of the anti-immigration parties, led to greater exposure to anti-immigration arguments to the wider German public. In this way, the diffusion of public attitudes from France and the Netherlands to Germany unfolded.

Another reason why election results matter for public opinion diffusion is that when anti-immigrant parties gain more votes, this provides them with a wider public forum to express anti-immigrant views. These parties have more time to speak in parliament (due to larger shares of seats), and they attract more extensive media coverage. The increased media attention reaches foreign countries, because mass media are more likely to cover election results that produced unexpected results, i.e., when peripheral parties, including right-wing populists, perform well (Knigge 1998; Bos et al. 2010; Lubbers and Scheepers 2001; see also Koopmans and Vliegenthart 2010). Elections across Europe receive media attention especially when anti-immigration parties perform well, and this facilitates the diffusion of migration attitudes.[10] In addition, anti-immigration party success provides these parties with a platform in parliament to communicate these views more widely through the media. In sum, this discussion leads to the following hypothesis:

Anti-Immigration Hypothesis: Anti-immigration attitudes diffuse from countries in which anti-immigration parties perform well in national elections.

[10] It is assumed that there is sufficient news coverage and that the public indeed pays attention to this. The former assumption is reasonable given our focus on European elections, and we examine the former assumption about individuals' media attention below and in the Supporting Information. These empirical analyses support the finding that migration attitude diffusion occurs more strongly for individuals that pay more attention to the media.

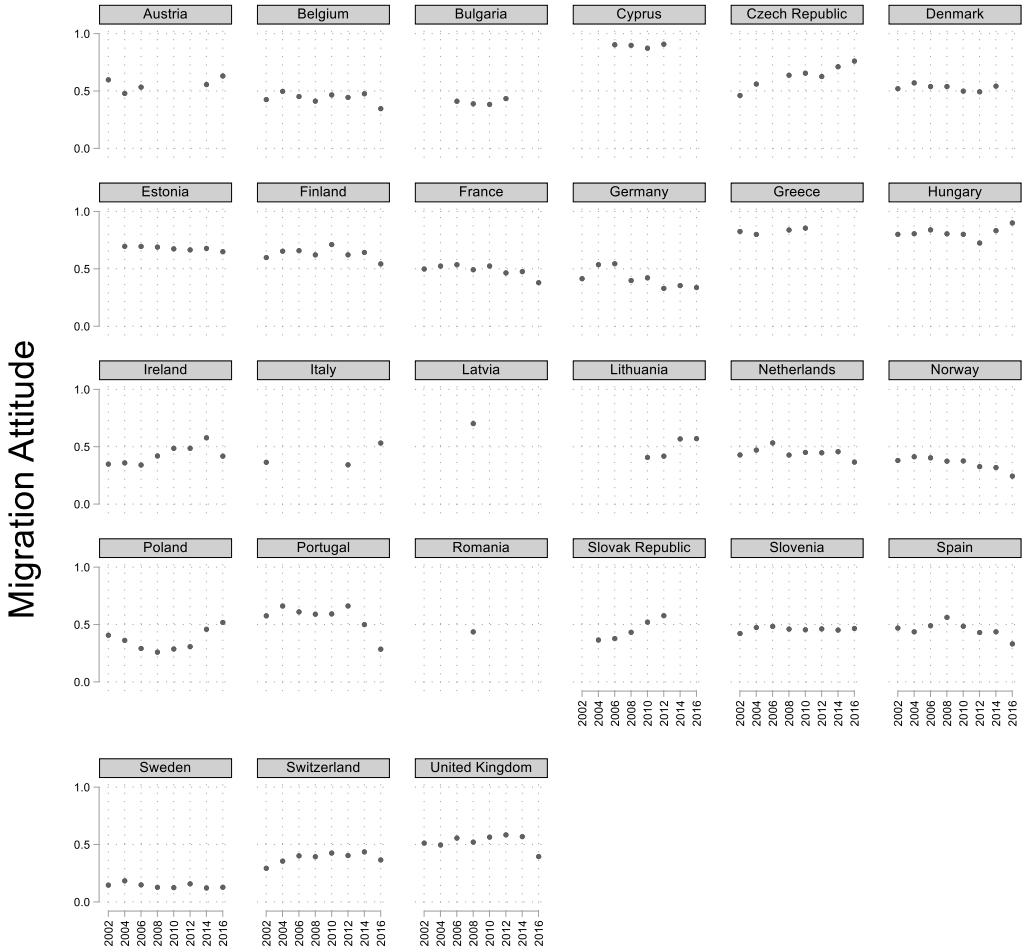
Research Design

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 with harmonized survey practices (for a discussion, see De Vries 2017). Our final sample comprises individual-level data from 27 established European democracies including non-EU states such as Switzerland and Norway. While the ESS also comprises countries like Albania, Ukraine, Kosovo, and Turkey, we omit these from our analysis in order to increase homogeneity among cases. The sample thus focuses on European states that are rather similar in several aspects at the macro level, which may affect individuals' migration attitudes, e.g., the economy, geographic proximity, or the form of government. Only analyzing the 27 states outlined in Figure 1 ensures that our sample represents the population we wish to describe. Our sample is driven by the country-time coverage of our core variables of interest, most crucially the ESS is only available as of 2002. The individual per ESS round is the unit of analysis and, despite the focus on individual-level data, we also incorporate aggregated macro-level data such as economic indicators, which are exogenous to the data at the individual level.[11]

[11] We also examined diffusion at the country level and modeled how the proportion of individuals with anti-immigrant attitudes in one country affects the proportion of individuals that hold anti-immigrant attitudes in other countries. The results are qualitatively identical to what we present below.

Figure 1. Migration Attitudes – Mean Values per Country and ESS Round



We first merged all integrated data files of all rounds of the ESS covering 2002-2016 (including ESS round 8, edition 2.0), leading to a data set that has information on more than 200,000 individuals. The dependent variable is based on the ESS survey question: "[t]o what extent do you think that your country should allow immigrants from poorer countries outside Europe?"[12] The possible answers include "allow many to come and live here," "allow some," "allow a few," and "allow none." We dropped individuals from the sample who expressed no opinion or have not responded to this question. Afterwards, we created a dichotomous item on

[12] There is no item that is not linked to poverty level of migrants' home states in the ESS.

attitudes *against* outside migration (1) or not (0); we combine the "allow many" and "allow some" categories as the value 0, while the "allow a few" and "allow none" categories are assigned the value of 1. A value of 1 of our dependent variable thus indicates that an individual perceived migration from outside Europe as less favorable. The final item has a mean value of 0.510 (standard deviation of 0.500). Figure 1 plots the average values of our dependent variable aggregated to the country-level for all states in our sample per ESS round.

Given the hierarchical nature of our data, i.e., individuals are nested in countries and years, we use random-intercept models (Steenbergen and Jones 2002) and fit three levels (individuals, countries, survey years). We specify a country-level as well as a year-level intercept to this end, i.e., "the intercept term depends on random characteristics" of the state and survey year "to which a respondent belongs" (Fairbrother and Martin 2013: 353).[13] Unobserved heterogeneity at the respective levels of our pooled data are thus controlled for (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal 2009; Gelman and Hill 2006). Some of our models include country fixed effects to control for time-invariant unit-level influences, while all models comprise a sample weight that combines population size and a post-stratification weight.

Explanatory Variables

Recall that the theoretical argument established the expectation that individuals' views on migration are affected by other people's attitudes abroad if anti-immigration parties did well in the last general election of the "sender." In this context, public opinion on migration of individuals at home is modeled as a function of public opinion abroad if the respective countries

[13] We also explored three-level models where individuals (level 1) are nested in survey year (level 2), which are nested in countries (level 3) (see Fairbrother and Martin 2013; Schmidt-Catran and Fairbrother 2016). The results are generally robust, mirroring those reported below.

that individuals are nested in are connected to each other by a strong link that we operationalize as the electoral success of anti-migration parties in national elections. This latter aspect constitutes our spatial component, also echoing Beck et al. (2006) that "space is more than geography." In more detail, using a weighting matrix, we model states' linkages as conditional on whether anti-migration parties have done well in the "source" state's last election. We multiply this connectivity matrix with a transformed version of our dependent variable. On one hand, the information of the dependent variable is now aggregated to the country-year-level as this is the level at which we can specify links among units.[14] On the other hand, we transform this item to capture changes in public mood from one ESS round to another rather than levels of public opinion: changes in citizens' views, especially rapid and significant ones, are more visible to the public abroad (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; True et al. 2007; see also Baumgartner 2006), thus facilitating public opinion diffusion. Our main explanatory variable thus captures the public mood on immigration abroad as weighted by the electoral success of anti-migration parties.

Each element of the underlying connectivity matrix for our spatial variable ($\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$) receives 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.[15] We rely on data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), and a party is coded as anti-migration if its mean expert placement

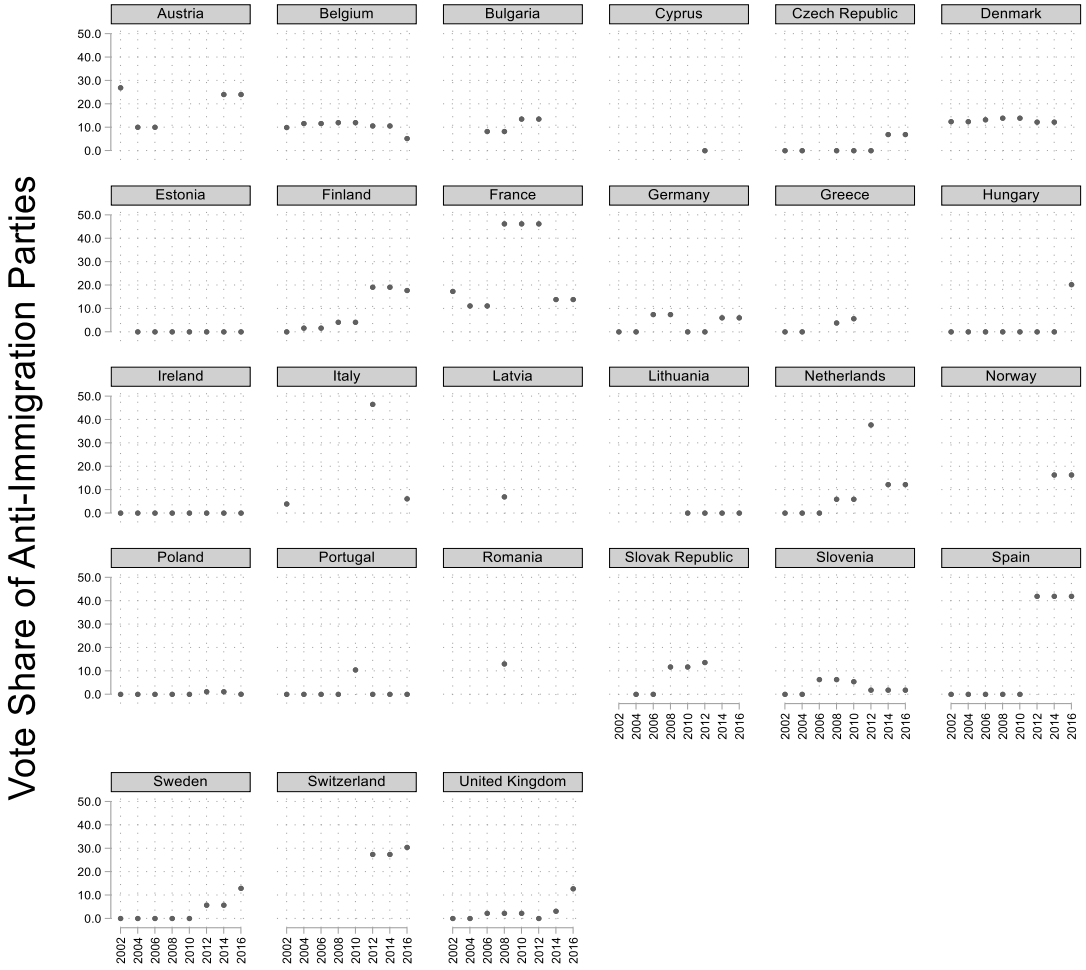
[14] We cannot specify ties linking individuals across countries due to the lack of data. Therefore, we move to the country level, where we can specify links among states in light of the electoral success of anti-migration parties in national elections.

[15] We implement a 5 percent threshold, following common electoral thresholds in European democracies. Note that some states, e.g., Italy (3 percent) or Austria (4 percent), require a lower share of the vote for a party to gain legislative representation. Thus, the threshold we choose is more conservative as we may omit some parties then that are below 5 percent in the vote share, but nonetheless make it into parliament.

on the 0-10 anti-immigration scale is larger than 8 in the CHES data.[16] Figure 2 summarizes the vote share of anti-immigration parties of our sample states, and it is clear from this figure that several parties gained more than five percent of the votes in general elections and that there is sufficient variation in the data. For the cases that 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 provides information on the legislative term a party was coded, and we use their anti-immigration party coding for all of the years of that term. 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 similarly reported in the CHES, but we were able to rely on the Döring and Manow (2012) for the few instances in which the CHES did not report vote shares. The elements of the 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.

[16] In the Supporting Information, we alter the threshold for coding anti-migration parties to 7 and 9, respectively.

Figure 2. Vote Share of Anti-Immigration Parties



We opted for this parsimonious, dichotomous operationalization for the matrix weights to facilitate interpretation of the spatial variable and its coefficient.[17] The spatial variable's weighting matrix is not row-standardized. Williams (2015: 150; also see Williams, Seki, and Whitten 2016) argues that row-standardization is not appropriate here, because this would

[17] Replacing the dichotomous operationalization by vote-share weights, i.e., the vote share of anti-immigration parties in sending countries dictates the value of the matrix weights, produces qualitatively similar results compared to those discussed below, but these findings are more difficult to interpret.

assume that the total weight given to other parties' positions will be the same regardless of the number of parties to which an individual pays attention (see Plümper and Neumayer 2010: 430). Following Böhmelt et al. (2016: 404), while the marginal value of additional information likely decreases as more parties can be followed, "efficiency implies searching an additional source so long as expected gains exceed the cost; so total attention could go up." As a result, we do not row-standardize the connectivity matrix underlying our spatial variable. The spatial variable ranges between -0.393 and 0.242 with a mean value of -0.044 (standard deviation of 0.179). Finally, note that we do not incorporate geographic proximity in the matrix. We already have a geographically narrow focus with only European states and information is widely available to all individuals across this context. Hence, the success of an anti-immigration party in Austria is likely to have the same impact on, e.g., the Belgian public as an electoral victory for anti-immigration parties in the Netherlands.

In an effort to ensure that we identify a genuine diffusion effect (Buhaug and Gleditsch 2008), we also control for a series of other variables as these capture alternative influences behind migration attitudes (primarily at the individual level), and these items are all taken from the ESS. Specifically, to exclude the possibility of mere clustering rather than diffusion, i.e., that migration attitudes cluster in space due to unit-level influences rather than cross-national determinants, we must control for a comprehensive set of relevant alternative influences, i.e., "exogenous-external conditions or common shocks and spatially correlated unit level factors" (Franzese and Hays 2007: 142). To this end, we present models with country-fixed effects and specify hierarchical models that comprise random intercepts for countries and years (to capture common trends) next to a series of control variables that may also shape individuals' views on migration. With this approach, we confidently exclude the possibility of "common exposure"

causing the empirical patterns that we observe, and instead we can conclude that a genuine diffusion effect exists. First, the general left-right voter position can be a predictor of attitudes toward migration. The further to the "right" an individual is, the less likely she will be 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?" In our sample, this variable has a mean value of 5.144 and a standard deviation of 2.238.

In addition, we control for the age and sex of a respondent. Female individuals likely have different attitudes than men toward migration (about 54 percent in our sample are female), while older respondents could be more conservative. People below the age of 18 and those who indicated to be older than 105are excluded from our sample. The average age in our sample is about 49 years. We capture the economic status of a respondent via their education level, unemployment, and household income. First, *Education* captures the highest level of education an individual has achieved. It receives the value of 1 for any education level of upper secondary (level 3 according to the 1997 International Standard Classification of Education) and above, and it is assigned 0 otherwise. In our sample, 59.4 percent have at least upper-secondary education. The variable *Unemployed* is also dichotomous with a value of 1 unless a respondent indicates that s/he is (self-) employed or working for a family business. Finally, the ESS categories for household income in the ESS are transformed into the binary *Income* item that scores a value of 1 for all respondents above the 5^{th} decile (0 otherwise), which corresponds to about 20 percent in our sample.

Moreover, there is an ESS item to measure an individual's religiosity that ranges between 0 (not religious at all) and 10 (very religious), and it has a mean value of 4.748 and a standard

deviation of 3.022. Curtis (2014: 524f) argues in addition that people's security concerns and their place of birth can shape migration attitudes, and there are two EES items available to measure these characteristics. The ESS has a binary item that asks whether a respondent was born in the country they live in (about 90.5 percent of our sample respondents) or not. On the other hand, the ESS has an ordinal variable that measures whether respondents see it as very much important to live in secure and safe surroundings (1) or not at all (6). This item has a mean value of 2.304 (standard deviation of 1.207) and we expect it to be negatively signed.

Using the World Bank Development Indicators, we further include five variables at the country level. First, migration attitudes are strongly linked to an individual's personal situation and, by extension, the economic development of the country. A respondent's personal circumstances are captured via the ESS variables introduced above, and we employ 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. The variable is log-transformed and ranges between 8.415 and 11.528 in our sample (average value of 10.332, standard deviation of 0.626). Moreover, we rely on a country's midyear total population that includes residents regardless of legal status or citizenship (except refugees). This variable is also log-transformed, ranges in [13.860; 18.230], and has a mean value of 16.260 (standard deviation of 1.178).

Third, next to individuals' personal employment situation, we control for unemployment at the country level, as measured by the logged total number of unemployed individuals as a share of the total labor force (average value of 1.989, standard deviation of 0.429). Unemployment refers to the share of the labor force that is without work but available for and seeking

employment. Finally, there is the total population size (or stock) of transnational 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." Hence, the entire population of foreign-born individuals in a state is captured here. As migration attitudes might differ depending on where refugees and migrants come from, we distinguish between foreign-born individuals from within the EU (average value of 12.666) and outside the Union (average value of 13.151). All these variables are temporally lagged by one year.

The last control addresses any remaining differences in states' forms of government. Although all countries in the sample are democracies, their score slightly varies along the *polity2* item of the Polity IV data set (Marshall, Gurr, and Jaggers 2017). The variable ranges between 8 and 10 in our sample and has a mean value of 9.76.

Empirical Results

Table 1 summarizes our main results. Model 1 comprises the key explanatory variable only as some of the other predictors may induce post-treatment bias. For example, if the success of anti-immigration parties disinhibits xenophobia via attitude diffusion, left-right ideology more generally may also be affected. By omitting the controls, we address this issue. Model 2 replaces the random intercepts by country-level dummy variables to address influences stemming from time-invariant macro-level factors in an alternative way.[18] Model 3 is our preferred model for which we include all individual-level variables discussed in the previous section next to the core

[18] Hence, instead of specifying parameters of the distribution of the intercepts, Model 2 fits each country-level one with its own parameter.

item on attitudes toward migration. Finally, Model 4 comprises all right-hand side variables discussed above, at both the individual level and the macro (country) level. The substantive quantities of interest in the form of predicted probabilities of anti-migration attitudes are displayed in Figure 3. Most importantly, in light of our argument, $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ is positive in all models and statistically significant. This implies that public opinion on migration abroad affects people's attitudes if anti-immigration parties abroad did well in the last election.

The coefficient of $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ in Table 1 suggests that the likelihood of an individual having less favorable migration attitudes increases by 7.8 percentage points (Model 3) and 13.2 percentage points (Model 2) 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. As shown in the appendix, quite a few countries have anti-immigration parties with more than 5 percent of the vote in a series of country-years. These are substantively large effects, which become even more evident when examining the predicted probabilities of *Migration Attitudes* being 1 (i.e., not favoring migration) for all values of $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$. The effects for the most parsimonious specification (Model 1) and our preferred model (Model 3) are depicted in Figure 3. The interpretation of these effects is that public opinion in other countries significantly and substantively shapes people's anti-migration views at home if anti-migration parties abroad performed well in their last election. Again, these are substantively large effects. Adding or dropping specific variables does not change the findings. The theory and our mechanism apply, in principle, in the same way across all sample countries. However, the country-fixed effects in Model 2 highlight that some differences across states do exist. For example, taking the UK as the baseline, the attitudes in Hungary and Cyprus are generally less favorable than in the reference

state by 32 and 41 percentage points. Conversely, people view migration much more favorably in the Scandinavian countries, especially in Sweden (36 percentage points more favorable than in the UK) and Norway (19 percentage points more favorable than in the UK), while the public sees migration only slightly more positively than in Britain in the Netherlands (4.7 percentage points), Germany (8.6 percentage points), or Ireland (7.8 percentage points). 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 public opinion diffusion on migration.

To further explore the conditions under which public opinion on migration diffuses via the electoral success of anti-migration parties, we consider three conditioning factors that are based on the theoretical explanation, i.e., the media as a vehicle for transporting information about attitudes and electoral success to the audience at home. First, there is the influence of the recent European refugee and migration crisis. It is plausible to assume that this "shock" has hardened individuals' views on migration. An almost unprecedented number of refugees entered the European Union beginning in late 2014 and early 2015, and may have affected people's views on migration. The literature argues in this context that public attitudes toward migration must somehow be first "activated" (Howard 2010; Money 2010; Abou-Chadi 2016), and the increased salience of an issue is an indicator of this occurring. To this end, we examine whether the European migration crisis conditions the impact of our spatial variable. We employ a binary variable, which receives a value of 1 for the ESS survey rounds in 2014 and 2016, and then interact it with $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$.

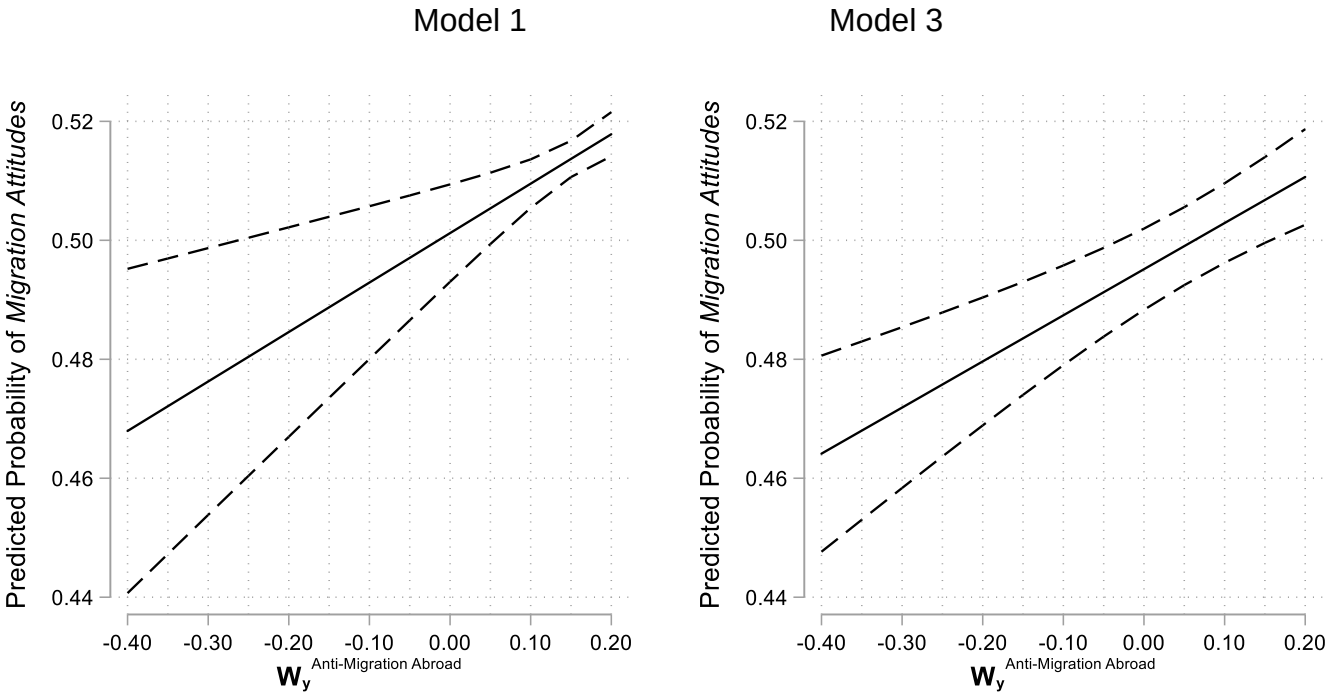
Table 1. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.083***	0.132***	0.078***	0.105***
	(0.030)	(0.010)	(0.020)	(0.035)
Left-Right Self-Placement			0.031***	0.032***
			(0.002)	(0.002)
Age			0.003***	0.003***
			(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender			-0.003	-0.002
			(0.003)	(0.003)
Education			-0.111***	-0.112***
			(0.007)	(0.007)
Unemployed			0.133***	0.106***
			(0.005)	(0.026)
Income			-0.046***	-0.045***
			(0.003)	(0.002)
Religiosity			-0.007***	-0.008***
			(0.001)	(0.001)
Native			0.091***	0.089***
			(0.011)	(0.012)
Secure Environment			-0.032***	-0.032***
			(0.002)	(0.002)
GDP per capita (ln)				-0.001
				(0.029)
Population (ln)				0.047
				(0.041)
Unemployment (ln)				-0.023
				(0.031)
Foreign Population EU				0.005
				(0.012)
Foreign Population – Outside EU				-0.064***
				(0.023)
Democracy – Polity2				0.004
				(0.016)
Constant	0.501***	0.503***	0.306***	0.316
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.021)	(0.689)
Obs.	223,199	223,199	188,543	172,141
Log Pseudolikelihood	-141,189.76	-142,972.46	-117,294.08	-113,462.70
Country Random Intercept	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Year Random Intercept	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Country Fixed Effects	No	Yes	No	No

Table entries are coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses; the dependent variable is *Migration Attitudes;* sample weight applied in all estimations; * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Figure 3. Substantive Effects on *Migration Attitudes*



Notes. The dashed lines are 90 percent confidence intervals.

Second, our arguments about the media suggest that political interest conditions the public opinion diffusion effects on migration that are observed. The news media covers the public mood abroad and, more specifically, electoral performances and campaigns of parties in other countries. Without this coverage and, by implication, without people having an interest in foreign news and paying attention to it, cross-country diffusion of public opinion on migration is less likely to materialize. To evaluate these components of our theoretical mechanism more thoroughly, we made use of yet two additional variables in the ESS. One of these is a survey

item that asks respondents whether they are interested in politics. We recoded this variable into a binary one that receives a value of 1 if at least some interest was reported (0 if people answered "not at all interested" in politics). The ESS also contains a question that asks respondents about their media consumption of news, politics, and current affairs. The original variable has an ordinal scale with several categories, which we recoded into a dichotomous variable that distinguishes between respondents that spend more than 1.5 hours per week (1) consuming the media, or less than that (0). Similar to the refugee crisis variable introduced above, we interact either *Political Interest* or *Media Consumption* with our spatial variable.

Table 2 summarizes the results, which are all based on Model 3 in Table 1 after adding the interaction terms. The coefficients on the interaction variables in Table 2 further support the main result, namely, that public views on migration abroad affect anti-migration attitudes at home if anti-migration parties in other states were electorally successful. The item $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ is positively signed and statistically significant across Models 5-7, which applies to circumstances when the conditional variable is set to 0. However, the situations that address media effects come to light when these items are set to 1, and then the multiplicative term informs us about the corresponding effect.

Starting with the European migration crisis, the effect on its own (i.e., when setting $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ to 0) is statistically insignificant. The multiplicative term, importantly, is positively signed and the magnitude of the coefficient is greater than the coefficient on $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ on its own. With the onset of the European migration crisis, the impact of the spatial variable is 7 percentage points in more skeptical migration attitudes of individuals, compared to 3 percentage points before 2014. Furthermore, the results suggest that the trends of increased salience and less favorable attitudes may continue at this rapid post-2014 pace, especially if

European citizens continue to regard immigration as one of the most important issues as they did in, for example, 2016.[19]

Table 2. The Diffusion of Anti-Migration Public Opinion – Interaction Models

	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
$\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.030**	0.041*	0.047***
	(0.014)	(0.023)	(0.010)
Left-Right Self-Placement	0.031***	0.031***	0.031***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age	0.003***	0.003***	0.003***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Gender	-0.003	-0.008***	-0.004
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Education	-0.111***	-0.099***	-0.110***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Unemployed	0.140***	0.130***	0.143***
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Income	-0.046***	-0.042***	-0.046***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Religiosity	-0.007***	-0.007***	-0.007***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Native	0.091***	0.092***	0.088***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Secure Environment	-0.032***	-0.031***	-0.031***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
EU Crisis	-0.003		
	(0.009)		
EU Crisis ^{x} $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$	0.070***		
	(0.023)		
Political Interest		-0.093***	
		(0.002)	
Political Interest ^{x} $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$		0.042***	
		(0.013)	
Media Consumption			-0.012*
			(0.007)
Media Consumption ^{x} $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$			0.069***
			(0.022)
Constant	0.308***	0.370***	0.311***
	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.022)
Obs.	188,543	188,202	182,977
Log Pseudolikelihood	-117,293.97	-116,715.33	-113,944.50
Country Random Intercept	Yes	Yes	Yes

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

Year Random Intercept	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country Fixed Effects	No	No	No

Table entries are coefficients; robust standard errors in parentheses; the dependent variable is *Migration Attitudes;* sample weight applied in all estimations; * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

The results for *Political Interest* (Model 6) or *Media Consumption* (Model 7) also corroborate our theory. Only when individuals are interested in politics and consume news about politics and current affairs on a regular basis does the effect of $\mathbf{W}y^{\text{Anti-Migration Abroad}}$ on anti-migration attitudes emerge. When discarding any influence from our spatial variable, both *Political Interest* and *Media Consumption* are actually negatively signed. This suggests that more politically interested individuals are actually more in favor of migration if anti-migration views abroad cannot diffuse via the electoral success of anti-migration parties. Without anti-immigration party success, diffusion of public opinion across borders does not occur.

With respect to the control variables, the estimates are generally in line with previous work. First, the more right-wing an individual according to the left-right self-placement, the higher the likelihood that s/he is more skeptical of migration. A one-unit increase on the left-right ideological self-placement scale leads to an increase of about 3 percentage points to self-report as anti-migration. Second, older and unemployed individuals are also more likely to be against migration. While the substantive effect of *Age* is similar to *Left-Right Self-Placement*, the impact of *Unemployed* is more strongly pronounced in that the likelihood to be less in favor of migration is higher by consistently more than 10 percentage points. Individuals who are wealthier and more educated are less likely to be anti-migration. Both *Education* and *Income* are negatively signed across the models and significant at conventional levels. The substantive impact of the former variable is stronger than the effect of the latter. Not surprisingly, people born in a respective country are more skeptical of migration, and individuals not assigning much

importance to a safe and secure environment are less so. This is shown by the positive coefficient estimate of *Native* and the negative estimate for *Secure Environment*, respectively. And we find that more religious individuals are less likely to be against migration, although the substantive impact for this item is very small. The influence stemming from the gender variable and essentially any macro, country-level item is not statistically significant. The only exception is *Foreign Population – Outside EU*. This not only demonstrates that people evaluate migrants differently depending on their country of origin, but also – perhaps unexpectedly – that the larger the inflow of migrants and refugees from outside the EU, the less likely it is that people are more skeptical of migration. This result, however, is consistent with some of the arguments of contact theory. Contact with "out-group members," and foreign populations from outside the EU do qualify as such, and this contact can foster more positive migration attitudes (Gaertner and Dovidio 2014; Allport 1954; Pettigrew 1998; Curtis 2014).

Conclusion

Our study extends earlier research on public opinion and policy diffusion. The arguments and empirical analyses support the finding 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 how public attitudes towards migration diffuse, which also highlights that public opinion can change due to international trends that occur outside of domestic politics (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Soroka and Wlezien 2010).

Several questions remain to explore in future research. These will identify additional conditions under which elections influence the diffusion of public opinion on migration. We have addressed some of these with the analyses of the European migration crisis, political

interest, and news media consumption, but others worth studying certainly do exist. For example, economic conditions at the country-level or ties with other states in the form of trade might all influence the effects we have identified. Additional analyses will also evaluate whether clear election victories/losses for political parties that compete 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. Indeed, current research suggests that US citizens' attitudes toward immigration influence their views on the welfare state (Garand, Xu, and Davis 2017), and there is evidence that the success of the green movement and parties in other countries may have given rise to pro-environmental views across borders (Dunlap 2012; Marquart-Pyatt 2016, 2018; Jorgensen and Givens 2014). It is plausible, based on Garand, Xu, and Davis's (2017) research, that anti-immigration party success facilitates – through its effect on migration attitudes – the diffusion of negative views toward the welfare state. It is also possible that the pattern we identified for migration attitude diffusion via parties applies to still other issue areas such as the environment if Green parties perform well in elections across Europe. On the other hand, our research suggests that the media pay a disproportionate amount of attention to anti-immigration parties compared to other parties, which implies that the effects we have reported may not be as strong for environmental attitudes. Finally, political institutions may also facilitate the transmission of cross-border effects. For example, anti-immigration parties may perform better under proportional electoral systems, because these systems feature lower electoral thresholds to gain representation in parliament. If anti-immigration parties perform better in proportional systems, the implication is that these systems will influence migration attitude diffusion more than disproportional systems.

Our theoretical arguments and empirical support for the *Anti-Immigration Hypothesis* are relevant to understanding attitudes towards immigration (e.g., Ceobanu and Escandell 2010; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014; Valentino et al. 2019; 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, prominent studies of political representation have shown that policy outputs are influenced by public opinion or the median voter (Kang and Powell 2012; see also McDonald and Budge 2005; Budge et al. 2012). Our research emphasizes that broad policy diffusion may occur in part when *election results* influence levels of public opinion diffusion on migration.

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