

Shaping while not in government:

How Populist Radical-Right Parties Indirectly Change the External Dimension of Migration Policies

INTRODUCTION

Radical-right populism is on the rise: in the EU, 24/27 have populists in their parliament. Some are even in the government, restricting migration policies. However, the influence of radical-right populists outside the executive power has not been studied enough.

Aim: To look beyond the electoral results, analyzing the indirect impact of populist radical-right parties on migration policies.

Research questions: Can radical-right populists change migration policies from outside the government? Are center-right countries' changes more intense?

HYPOTHESES

- By politicizing migration, populist radical-right parties exert an indirect impact over parties in office, who consequently change the external dimension of migration policies.
- Center-right-oriented governments are more likely to be influenced by populists' politicization, leading to a higher level of intensity in their changes to the external dimension of migration policies.

METHODOLOGY

- Comparative Approach
- Literature Review
- Analysis of four populist radical-right parties, from the moment they enter parliament and during a previously defined legislature. Netherlands (PVV), Germany (AfD), Spain (VOX), and Portugal (Chega!)

- Collect data on the politicization of migration through public interviews, social media posts, and electoral campaigns.
- Assess if there has been a change in the external dimension of migration policies, and measure the intensity of that change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Core Definitions

Populism: An ideology dividing society into 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite,' to obtain the 'general will'. (Mudde, 2004)
Radical-right Populism: Combines populism with authoritarianism and nativism. Often racist and xenophobic. (Kaltwasser and Mudde, 2017)
The external dimension of migration policies: Regulating the movement of people across borders, either by restricting entry or facilitating it.

Concepts

The Politicization of Migration (Van der Brug et al., 2015)
Mostly by generating fear in the repeated discussion on migration.
The Study of Change (Hermann, 1990)
Domestic restructuring as the driver of policy change. Four levels of intensity of change: adaptation, adjustment, reorientation, and transformation.
The indirect impact (Akkerman, 2018)
Influence from within the parliament, but outside the executive power.
1. populist radical-right parties -not in government- politicize migration
2. they impact parties in office
3. the parties in office change the external dimension of migration policies

THE INIDRECT IMPACT

ruling party ideology: center-left

ruling party ideology: center-right

2019-2023

Spain, led by center-left PSOE

VOX

Effective politicization of migration: 'Own' the topic, link migrants to crime and violence, "illegal" migration

VOX

Influenced parties in office, who changed the external dimension of their migration policies

2013-2023

Netherlands, led by center-right VVD

PVV

Effective politicization of migration: "Islamic Invasion", migrants as "scum", set the agenda on migration

PVV

Influenced parties in office, who changed the external dimension of their migration policies

2019-2023

Portugal, led by center-left PS

Chega!

Effective politicization of migration: Promote fear of migrants, "Great Conspiracy Theory"

CHEGA

Influenced parties in office, who changed the external dimension of their migration policies

2017-2023

Germany, led by center-right CDU

AfD

Effective politicization of migration: Frame Islam and Muslims as a problem, use negative vocabulary

AfD

Influenced parties in office, who changed the external dimension of their migration policies

RESULTS

COUNTRY	POPULIST RADICAL-RIGHT PARTY	RULING PARTY IDEOLOGY	CHANGE IN EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF MIGRATION POLICIES	LEVEL OF INTENSITY
Netherlands	PVV	Center-right	Drastically reduced the inflow of asylum seekers	Reorientation
Germany	AfD	Center-right	Capped the number of refugees, Eased deportation	Adaptation
Spain	VOX	Center-left	Strengthened the border in Ceuta and Melilla	Adaptation
Portugal	Chega!	Center-left	Total reform of the SEF asylum authority	Adjustment

CONCLUSIONS

Across all four studied cases, populist radical-right parties **effectively politicized migration** from the opposition. They set the political agenda, converting migration into an "issue".

Parties in office consequently **changed** the external dimension of their migration policies.

However, the **degree of intensity** in the change of the external dimension of migration policies was not the same, it varied across each case. The degree of intensity adhered to an ideological pattern: center-right parties in government were more likely to implement more restrictive migration policies.



Populist-radical-right parties can exert influence from outside the government

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