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**Shaping While Not in Government:
How Populist Radical-Right Parties Indirectly Change
the External Dimension of Migration Policies**

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Bachelor's Thesis
International Relations

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1. Introduction

Right-wing populism is on the rise. As of mid-2023, the largest populist radical-right parties in most European states had acquired representation in their national parliaments; out of the 27 countries within the EU, 24 had at least one seat occupied by a radical-right populist. Some of these parties have even joined government coalitions, while others have gone further by assuming leadership roles, such as Italy's right-wing Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni (The PopuList, 2023). All things considered; populism has become a primary topic on the agenda of many political debates, which has led to an increase in the study of this phenomenon.

Radical-right populists in Western Europe are characterized by their emphasis on the demographic and cultural shifts currently unfolding across the continent. They politicize migration by instilling fear around migrants, perpetuating a climate of hostility (Van der Brug et al., 2015), specifically targeting migrants with Islamic backgrounds, and often expressing racist and xenophobic sentiments towards them (Berntzen, 2019). So, it comes as no surprise that once populist radical-right parties make it to the executive power, they restrict their respective migration policies. While there are some academic studies on the direct impact of right-wing populists on migration policies, many authors point out that their influence outside formal governmental structures remains a topic requiring deeper exploration (Akkerman, 2018; Bergmann et al., 2021; Destradi et al., 2022; Kaya, 2023; Van Beijsterveldt 2018).

The main aim of this study is to look beyond the electoral results, analyzing precisely the indirect impact of populist radical-right parties on migration policies. The research questions follow, can populist radical-right parties change the external dimension of migration policies from outside the executive power? And, if so, are center-right governments more likely to change their migration policies to a higher degree of intensity?

Based on previous investigation, this paper puts forward two hypotheses: 1) By politicizing migration, populist radical-right parties exert an indirect impact over parties in office, who consequently change the external dimension of migration policies. And 2) 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.

After examining the politicization of migration and the intensity of changes in migration policy, this paper's findings can be summarized as follows. Using a comparative approach, the study has analyzed four populist radical-right parties and their corresponding governments in Western Europe: the PVV in the Netherlands and AfD in Germany, led by center-right governments, and VOX in Spain and Chega! in Portugal, led by center-left governments. While all cases feature prominent populist radical-right parties in their national parliaments, none have yet held executive power.

Across all four studied cases, populist radical-right parties have effectively politicized migration, exerting indirect influence on parties in office. However, the intensity of the change in the external dimension of migration policies varies across each case. The research reveals that the degree of intensity does adhere to an ideological pattern; center-right parties in government are more likely to implement more restrictive migration policies.

The first part of the study introduces a theoretical framework, displaying the scholarly definitions of populism, radical-right populism, and the external dimension of foreign policy. Subsequently, it explores the concepts of the politicization of migration, the study of change in foreign policy, and the indirect impact. The second part examines the four case studies individually. First, the analysis presents data on the politicization of migration by each country's populist radical-right party, supported by examples from public interviews, social media posts, and electoral campaigns. Then, the paper assesses whether there have been any alterations in the external dimension of migration policies -from the moment populists gain electoral recognition. Finally, the paper evaluates the intensity of that

policy change. The conclusions highlight how parties in office, characterized by their varying ideologies, have been influenced by populist radical-right parties and have subsequently adjusted migration policies in diverse intensities.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Core Definitions

2.1.1 Populism

The conceptualization of populism remains a subject of intense debate within academia, lacking a definitive consensus among scholars. For instance, certain scholars view populism merely as a political tactic (Barr, 2009), while others perceive it as an increasingly prevalent political phenomenon, characterized by a distinct political style (Moffitt, 2016). As in numerous other academic articles, this research paper relies on Mudde's definition, where populism is described as a thin-centered ideology that can coexist with other thick-centered ones, like socialism. Mudde adds "[populism is] an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the '*volonté générale*' (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004: 543).

Within populist studies, three recurring concepts emerge: the people, the elite, and the general will. The term 'people' is notably ambiguous, inviting extensive debate. Populists perceive the people as the sovereign collective, representing the nation. The 'elite' carries a moral connotation, referring to mainstream politicians and their associates, often depicted as corrupt and power-hungry. The general will encompasses society's shared interests (Mudde, 2007). Common traits are observed among most populists: successful populist movements typically feature charismatic leaders, who are capable of mobilizing the masses and amplifying the *vox populi* (Kaltwasser and Mudde, 2017:62-78).

2.1.2 Radical-right Populism

This research is centered only around one specific type of populism: radical-right populism. What sets apart populist radical-right parties is their fusion of populism with two other ideologies: authoritarianism and nativism. In Kaltwasser and Mudde's words, "whereas authoritarianism refers to the belief in a strictly ordered society, and is expressed in an emphasis on "law and order" issues, nativism alludes to the notion that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that non-native ("alien") elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state" (Kaltwasser and Mudde, 2017:103).

Populist radical-right parties' racist and xenophobic discourse comes from a perception of the nation that defines 'the people' in ethnic terms, explicitly excluding immigrants (Kaya, 2023). To further understand why radical-right populist parties' discourse is so often centered around migrants, specifically those from Islamic backgrounds, it is interesting to acknowledge the following. Populists' core questions and concerns lie on deep-rooted fears; they consider that the new era is destroying their way of life. In addition, populist voters feel so neglected by mainstream politicians that they resort to populist parties (Eatwell and Goodwin, 2018:111).

2.1.3 The external dimension of migration policies

In the field of Social Sciences, there exists a tendency to primarily emphasize the domestic policies and aspects of migration (Duncan, 2021). However, within the framework of International Relations, this research directs its attention to the external dimension of migration. This approach is particularly relevant considering that contemporary migration policies are directly interconnected with relations between states. Some scholars further argue that in today's global landscape, foreign policy formulation extends beyond sovereign states, involving a multitude of actors, both national and international (Verbeek & Zaslove, 2017: 445).

Building upon the preceding discussion, within the context of International Relations, it is essential to define the concepts of foreign policy and migration policy. The most widely accepted definition of foreign policy is described as "a set of goals, directives, or intentions formulated by individuals in official or authoritative positions, aimed at influencing actors or conditions beyond the confines of the sovereign nation-state to achieve the desired outcome" (Cohen and Harris, 1975). Duncan provides a definition of migration policy, stating that fundamentally, it serves the dual purpose of regulating the movement of people across borders, either by restricting entry or facilitating it, with these objectives not being mutually exclusive (Duncan, 2021).

2.2 Politicization of Migration

The following section aims to explore the dynamic between populist rhetoric and migration policy. Politicization has become a pivotal force in shaping political agendas: populists set the political narrative in a strategy where no elections are needed (Wright, 1988). Populist radical-right parties, while traditionally absent, are now increasingly participating in foreign policy contestation, especially provoking a rethink of migration policies; they direct their focus toward migration for strategic purposes (Grande et al., 2019).

The first step is to conceptualize politicization. This research builds on the widely accepted definition by Zürn, "Politicization, in the most general terms, means the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the sphere of politics making previously unpolitical matters political" (Zürn, 2019: 977-978), and Wilde "[politicization is] increasing salience, polarization of opinion and the expansion of actors and audiences" (Wilde, 2016: 3).

In the context of the book "The Politicization of Migration," politicization is defined by having two main characteristics: salience and polarization. The first refers to the degree of importance or prominence that migration issues hold in political discourse or public attention. When migration becomes a salient issue, it means that it is receiving significant focus and consideration from both society and

policymakers. The latter, on the other hand, refers to the divergence of viewpoints, attitudes, or stances concerning migration-related issues. Within the migration context, polarization can manifest as differing perspectives on immigration policies, refugee acceptance, border control, and other related topics (Van der Brug et al., 2015).

Populist parties politicize foreign policy issues in different degrees and different ways. The intensity of the politicization depends mainly on the intensity of populist discourse (Hawkings et al., 2019). In the paper's case, right-wing parties have a tendency to politicize migration issues by generating fear in their discussion on migration. The fear that migrants will take the natives' jobs, that Islamic influences lead to a degradation of democratic institutions, and the fear of Islam, Islamophobia, are very recurrent in right-wing populists' discourses (Berntzen, 2019).

It is also important to mention how "specific understandings of the 'people' and the 'elite' lead to different ways of politicizing foreign policy" (Destradi et al., 2022: 480). Because this paper's concern is specifically around populist radical-right politicization, any demand or issue necessarily includes the opposition of 'the virtuous people' and 'the corrupt elite' together with 'the natives' versus 'the non-natives'. In that sense, when populist radical-right leaders resort to politicizing the topic of immigration by creating awareness, mobilization, and contestation in foreign policy, they do so by highlighting their supremacy towards migrants.

2.3 The Study of Change

Given the research aims to uncover whether center-right and center-left governments have made changes to migration policies on the external dimension, this section explores both the possible drivers and intensity of these changes.

According to Charles Hermann, "change occurs when the existing government elects to move in a different policy direction" (Hermann, 1990: 5). In the author's proposed model, four different drivers or agents of change are appointed: leader-driven, bureaucratic advocacy, domestic restructuring, and

external shock (Hermann, 1990: 11-13). Other authors propose different drivers. Kingdon talks about the policy entrepreneur, who from either outside or inside the government is strongly committed to achieving a special foreign policy reform (Kingdon, 1984).

Hermann's analysis suggests the idea of domestic restructuring, where internal changes can prompt a government to reassess its foreign policy objectives and strategies, to better align with the new domestic realities. The author refers to domestic restructuring as a process within a country where significant changes occur in the political, economic, or social realms, entailing alterations in public opinion and societal transformations (Hermann, 1990). By politicizing migration, right-wing populist parties have introduced a general fear of migrants into society. In short, through the framing of migrants as a threat to national identity, security, and general economic well-being, they have shifted public opinion (Berntzen, 2019). The domestic restructuring theory entails that once this new idea and perception of migration is generalized, governments feel the urge to shift course - they change migration policies to align them with their national reality.

Considering how populists (negatively) perceive the demographic and cultural change Europe is going under, the 2015 refugee crisis qualifies as an external shock for right-wing populists. It has heightened immigration concerns and has framed the topic as a threat to national identity and sovereignty (Berntzen, 2019). This idea aligns with Gustavsson's framework: it underscores the need for policymakers to continuously reassess and refine their foreign policy approaches to effectively address evolving global realities (Gustavsson, 1999). Mudde adds "The populist heartland becomes active only when there are special circumstances: most notably, the combination of persisting political resentment, a (perceived) serious challenge to 'our way of life', and the presence of an attractive populist leader" (Mudde, 2004: 547).

To later evaluate how migration policies have changed under different political orientations, the paper uses an analytical framework proposed by Hermann. He outlines four levels of foreign policy change, namely adaptation,

adjustment, reorientation, and transformation. Adaptation involves superficial adjustments to address immediate challenges or public perceptions; adjustment denotes more substantial modifications to strategic priorities or legislative frameworks in response to changing dynamics; reorientation signifies a fundamental reassessment of national interests or values driven by significant domestic political shifts; and transformation represents a radical change of fundamental beliefs or identity, often in response to existential crises, leading to dramatic policy departures (Hermann, 1990).

By categorizing the changes into one of the four levels, the study determines the extent to which migration policies have been affected by domestic political dynamics in center-right (Netherlands, Germany) and center-left (Spain, Portugal) governments. Specifically, it seeks to explain the intensity of the observed changes -whether they represent mere adaptation or adjustment to prevailing circumstances, or if they indicate a more profound reorientation or transformation.

2.4 The Indirect Impact

At the core of this research still lies the argument that “populist radical-right parties change the external dimension of migration policies through ‘indirect’ impact”. So, this final section is fully dedicated to analyzing and measuring the indirect influence. All within the idea that “you do not need to be in a power position to have a lot of influence”, as Dutch radical-right populist leader, Geert Wilders, openly declared (NOS, 2014).

First, a distinction must be made between the direct and the indirect impact. Akkerman finds direct impact to have two dimensions, “it is direct in relation to its object, that is policy output in its final and decisive stage. It is also direct in relation to the actor, in the sense that this influence is not enacted through an intermediate actor or a chain of actors” (Akkerman, 2012: 514). In short, the author refers to direct influence when a party acts from within the government.

Indirect impact, on the other hand, considers the influence parties can have from within the parliament, but outside the executive power. The rise of populist

parties in parliaments has increased pressure on mainstream parties to reassess their policy priorities regarding migration; a topic that radical right-wing parties have effectively brought into the political spotlight. By framing the existing topic differently, right-wing populists have pushed governments to modify their position and their policies on migration (Bergmann et al., 2020; Mudde, 2013; van Spanje, 2010). Some academics also specifically point out how ideologically centered mainstream parties have shifted towards a righter stance on immigration (Akkerman, 2018; Van Beijsterveldt, 2018).

All in all, this part shows the link between the politicization of a topic and the final change that is produced in migration policy. The events occur in the following order, 1) populist radical-right parties in parliament (but not in government) politicize migration 2) they impact the policy agenda of parties in office and 3) the parties in office consequently change the external dimension of migration policies (Van Beijsterveldt, 2018). The applicability of the theory to real-life cases will be explored in the section that follows.

3. Exploring Western European Populist Radical-Right Parties' Indirect Impact through a Comparative Analysis

Through a comparative analysis, this section aims to determine if the four studied cases—under center-right and center-left governments—have altered the external dimension of migration policies in response to the politicization of migration by populist radical-right parties. Additionally, it will assess the level of intensity of these changes.

The limitation of the timeframe is influenced by two factors. Firstly, the analysis of each case begins from the moment populist radical-right parties secured their first seat in their national parliament. Secondly, the study focuses exclusively on predefined governmental legislatures. During the period under examination in the Netherlands and Germany, both countries were governed by center-right administrations. In contrast, Spain and Portugal had center-left leaders (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

3.1 Center-Right Governments

3.1.1 *PVV, The Netherlands (2013- 2023)*

The Netherlands's PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*, Party for Freedom), was founded in 2006 and has had seats in the *States General* (Dutch parliament) since its creation. Mudde himself describes the PVV as “a standard populist radical-right party, combining nativism, authoritarianism, and populism” (Mudde, 2016). While the party's leader, Geert Wilders, started his political career as a mainstream conservative politician, his ideology has significantly evolved. Wilders is essentially known and characterized by his focal point on opposition to Islam and Muslims (Mudde, 2016).

Even though the PVV entered the Dutch government as a semi-coalition partner in 2012, that period was too short and limited for the populist party to exert direct influence from within the executive (Akkerman, 2018:9-10). So, the research studies the PVV and its impact only after 2012. Since its creation, the Party for Freedom has been gaining more direct supporters; during the last Dutch elections in 2023, the PVV obtained 23,6% of the votes, making it the most-voted party in the Netherlands (Politico, n.d). Despite that, Geert Wilders did not make it to the executive power. Instead, Mark Rutte continued serving as Prime Minister, as he has been doing since 2010, leading the center-right People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

Existing studies have analyzed how the PVV has politicized the topic of migration in the past, especially within the context of the 2015 refugee crisis (Akkerman, 2018:13; Grande et al., 2019). Dutch political science professor Tjitske Akkerman finds that “[The PVV] has since [2012] wielded significant indirect influence on mainstream parties, and thus helped set the agenda on immigration and integration issues” (Akkerman, 2018:12). Other studies also point out a remarkable amount of evidence of politicization of migration during electoral campaigns, with end results concluding that “new non-governing challenger parties can also dominate election debates on immigration” (Grande et al., 2019: 1459).

The following instances display Geert Wilders' consistent use of discourse to underscore the significance of migration within Dutch society, framing it as a central issue and concern while advocating for his party's anti-migration agenda. In 2015, he addressed the parliament comparing the refugee crisis to an “Islamic Invasion” (Bahceli, 2015). On other occasions, he has talked about migrants from Moroccan backgrounds, referring to them as “Scum” (Goldman, 2017). More examples of times Geert Wilders politicized migration referring to migrants (mostly with Islamic backgrounds) as enemies to the Dutch, include: “The Qur’an is the Mein Kampf of a religion that aims to eliminate others ... Ban that dreadful book just as Mein Kampf is banned.” As well as “Islam is not a religion; it’s an ideology, the ideology of a retarded culture.” And “I ask you: do you want, in this city and in the Netherlands, more or fewer Moroccans?” (Boztas, 2023).

Lastly, radical-right populists often resort to Twitter -the social media platform serves as a propaganda mechanism where issues can easily be framed (Rivas-de-Roca et al., 2022). Geert Wilders is not uninfluenced by this populist trend. Over the years his Twitter account has become well-known among scholars that analyze populism, tweeting sentences such as “Stop Islam. Stop #Ramadan” or claiming that "45% Moroccans are fundamentalists" (Wilders, 2021; Wilders, 2017). In short, “[The PVV] has since [2012] wielded significant indirect influence on mainstream parties, and thus helped set the agenda on immigration and integration issues” (Akkerman, 2018:12)

Influenced by the PVV and its politicization strategies, Mark Rutte and his center-right cabinet have increasingly restricted the external dimension of its migration policies during the over 10 years of his legislature (Van Beijsterveldt, 2018). Some authors claim: “The Netherlands already has one of Europe's toughest immigration policies, but under the pressure of right-wing parties, Rutte had for months been trying to seek ways to further reduce the inflow of asylum seekers” (Meijer and Deutsch, 2023).

Even against European directives, the Dutch government announced that asylum seekers with a residence permit will not reunite with their families until

suitable housing is secured, aiming to restrict newcomer arrivals (if after 15 months no housing has been found, these family members will however still be granted visas) (Coello, 2022). In 2013, the government introduced a mandatory Dutch test for immigrants seeking family reunification, aimed to ensure effective societal integration. A Civic Integration Declaration and a Civic Integration Exam were also introduced for immigrants seeking long-term residency or citizenship, with failure to comply leading to the rejection of the requests (Government of the Netherlands, n.d.).

The effective politicization of migration by the PVV has set the topic at the top of the political agenda in the Netherlands and thus impacted the governing cabinet. Since 2012, Prime Minister Rutte has increasingly changed Dutch migration policies, making these increasingly restrictive. The magnitude of these changes indicates a departure from previous policies and a rethink of the country's stance on migration. This paper finds that the level of intensity in the Netherlands' migration policies qualifies as 'reorientation' in Hermann's model of foreign policy change.

3.1.2 AfD, Germany (2017-2023)

AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*, Alternative for Germany), is Germany's populist radical-right party, born in 2013. That same year Germany held national elections, and even though AfD obtained 4,7% of the votes, the party did not get any seat in the *Bundestag* (German Parliament), as it didn't surpass the threshold of 5% (Decker, 2022). Four years later, Alternative for Germany first entered the Bundestag, by obtaining 12,6% of the votes and thus holding 94 seats. Angela Merkel -in power from 2005 to 2021- was elected Chancellor again, leading the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Germany's conservative center-right party (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024). The following section analyzes primarily the timeframe in which two conditions are given: first, AfD held seats inside of the Bundestag, and, second, CDU was in office.

Alternative for Germany “began by mobilizing on the economic dimension”, and has slowly shifted its objectives to a point where “opposition to Islam and Muslims is the core issue” (Berntzen, 2019:88). So, it comes with no surprise that AfD is strategically getting the topic of migration to the political agenda (Klein and Springer, 2020). The AfD's arguments rely heavily on mere claims and assertions; during that process of politicization, refugees and migrants are referred to as criminals, and consequently often perceived as such. In addition, the party repeatedly uses a special or unique vocabulary to describe migrants. Referring to them as “knife men”, for example, creates a specific (negative) image of a migrant, that voters attribute to the ‘enemy’ or in populist words ‘the others’ (Rochnia et al., 2021).

AfD’s framing of migration can be seen in many different circumstances, the most evident being during their electoral campaigns. For the 2017 general election, some regional factions of Alternative for Germany created posters that aimed to tackle migration, as they claimed themselves with “humor”. Different posters showed women in swimwear with the slogan “Burkas? We prefer bikinis” or a pregnant woman saying “New Germans? Let’s make them ourselves” (Kamann, 2017). The AfD 2021 election program for Baden-Württemberg, a region in southern Germany, had an entire section tackling migrants interlinked with words such as “insecurity” and “criminality”. Other areas included phrasings like “Combat cross-border crime, relieve the burden on the police – consistently deport foreign criminals, take the threat of political Islam seriously – no full veils and no muezzin calls “ (AfD Baden-Württemberg, 2021).

Once migration is effectively politicized and migrants are primarily perceived by many as a ‘problem’, AfD’s concerns on migration become socially legitimized (Riese and Müller, 2024). Parties in office can no longer ignore the matter. While there may not have been a significant turn in German migration policy since 2017, there have been several changes and adjustments, including minor reforms and shifts in the state’s approach (Niu et al., 2023).

Some authors directly attribute these smaller changes in migration policy to the AfD. Journalist Michaela Wiegel displays how “The far-right, anti-immigration AfD's historic breakthrough, granting it seats in the Bundestag, has been a challenge to Angela Merkel's migration policy for the last few years: on October 8, 2017, she agreed for the first time to cap at 200,000 the number of refugees entering German territory annually” (Institut Montaigne, 2017). Another example is how in 2019, the law on expulsion was revised to make it easier to deport people who have been convicted (Deutscher Bundestag, 2019).

However, with a change in government has also come a potential big shift towards Germany's migration policy. Olaf Scholz, Germany's Chancellor and leader of the center-left party -in power since 2021- announced major news in a widespread issue of *The Spiegel* magazine published in late 2023. Amongst other ideas, the main takes were to make asylum in the country harder, a bigger protection of the external borders, and faster deportations (Hickmann et al., 2023).

During the period when the center-right CDU held power in Germany, AfD strongly politicized the issue of migration; the party influenced public opinion and political narratives surrounding migration topics. While Germany has made adjustments to its migration policies in response to domestic and international pressures, these changes have not led to a fundamental reassessment of national interests or values. Instead, they have primarily involved modifications to existing policies to address immediate challenges or public perceptions. This paper draws to the conclusion that, the level of intensity in Germany's migration policies aligns more closely with ‘adaptation’.

Looking ahead, the possibility of more drastic changes being made to Germany's external dimension of migration policies exists, especially considering the new government has already felt compelled to address the concerns raised by AfD. Whether or not Scholz will carry through with his declarations given for *Spiegel* magazine changing Germany's migration policy path, is to be analyzed in future studies.

3.2 Center-Left Governments

3.2.1 VOX, Spain (2019-2023)

For a long time, Spain was one of the few countries within the EU that, although having a significant number of migrants, had not experienced the surge of a populist radical-right party. That is until Vox appeared in the Spanish political landscape. Vox, whose name stems from the term ‘voice’ in Latin, is the country’s main populist-radical right party, with Santiago Abascal as its leader (Van der Wilden, 2020). Created by ex-members of the conservative and Christian-democratic political party (PP), Vox first entered the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados* (Congress) in 2019, with 10,26% of the votes (Politico, n.d). In those same elections, Pedro Sánchez was appointed as President, leading the socialist workers' center-left party (PSOE) (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

Throughout its existence, studies have revealed how Vox “has come to ‘own’ certain issues”, such as the “rising salience of immigration” (Van der Wilden, 2020: 111). By repeatedly speaking about “illegal” migration, when referring to those who have come to the country through irregular means, the populist party is politicizing migration in Spain (Cheddadi, 2020:69).

Some clear examples of that politicization are the following. In the 2021 campaign for the elections in Madrid, Vox hung up posters that read “A *MENA* 4700 euros per month, your grandmother 426 euros of pension per month”. While PSOE reported the incident as an alleged hate crime against *MENAs* (unaccompanied foreign minors), the judge cataloged it as a legitimate form of expression (Guindal, 2021). In other instances, Santiago Abascal has compared migration to an invasion, when addressing the topic (El Debate, 2022). For the general election campaign in 2019, Vox presented a document titled “100 Measures for the Alive Spain”. In the document, the party repeatedly talked about migrants, claiming all illegal migrants should be deported back to their home country. The section destined for "Defense, Security, and Borders" was also often addressed to migrants, intrinsically linking them to crime and violence (Vox, 2018: 5-8).

Spain hasn't seen any drastic change in its external dimension of migration policies. Some minor foreign policy changes have been more restrictive towards migrants: right after being elected, Sánchez gave orders to make the wall that separates Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco bigger (El País, 2020), while other policies have been more migrant-friendly. Spain has conducted some reforms that aim to facilitate migration, like the one on Immigration Regulation conducted in early 2024. With the idea of reforming the "State reception network", the idea was to help migrants who arrive in the Canary Islands, fairly distributing them around the peninsula (Ministerio de Inclusión, Seguridad Social y Migraciones, 2023).

While in the opposition, Pedro Sánchez consistently opposed the governing party's migration approach, advocating for reform and endorsing more left-leaning policies. He had committed to avoiding "falling into the far right's xenophobia" (Asunción, 2023). However, upon winning the elections in 2019 and assuming the presidency concurrently with Vox's entry into parliament, Sánchez encountered challenges in fulfilling his promises. Vox's persistent pressure for more restrictive policies and active politicization of migration hindered Sánchez's ability to implement reforms. Consequently, his policies aligned closely with those of the previous center-right administration, prioritizing cooperation with countries of origin and transit regarding irregular immigration (Aires and Gabrielli, 2021).

Even though Vox has actively politicized migration, the government coalition led by Pedro Sánchez has only made small changes to the external dimension of migration policies. These changes reflect a more pragmatic and incremental approach to managing migration issues, while at the same time maintaining continuity with existing policy objectives. Hence, the level of intensity in Spain's migration policies can be understood as 'adaptation'.

3.2.2 *Chega!, Portugal (2019-2023)*

The case of Portugal's populist radical-right party, Chega! (enough!), has some similitudes with Spain's Vox: both have risen in popularity in a short amount of time. Led by André Ventura, Chega was created in 2019, the same year it won its

first (and only) seat in the *Assembleia da República* (Assembly of the Republic). In 2022, Chega ended up winning 12 seats in the parliament, and in the general elections in early 2024, the populist party obtained 1/3 of the total votes, becoming Portugal's third-largest political force. During the populists' rise, Portugal has been led by the center-left Socialist Party (PS), with Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa as President (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024).

With the slogan “God, country, family and work”, Chega's André Ventura aims to shift Portugal's policies and has “advocated for a harsher immigration policy, including establishing “quotas” for the entry of foreigners, and for stricter criminal penalties and the reintroduction of the death penalty and life sentences “ (Politico, 2021).

While Chega hasn't been in Portugal's landscape for long, there are already studies that have analyzed the populist radical-right party's politicization of migration, revealing “a predominance role of immigration and security as topics to shape the populist agenda”, and that “promoting a fear of immigration plays a key role in the communication practices“ (Rivas-de-Roca, 2022: 31). That same study also exposed how ¼ of Chega's analyzed tweets referenced immigration and security (Rivas-de-Roca, 2022: 30). In addition, André Ventura has also publicly shared his theory that migrants are going to replace the native Portuguese in Portugal, known as “the great replacement conspiracy theory” (Euronews, 2023).

Inside the parliament, Ventura talks about migration often. His proposed plans to tackle the issue include legislation that: prioritizes immigrants arriving for employment purposes while restricting entry for those seeking benefits, highlighting the party's goal to prevent the entry of individuals aiming to exploit benefits or culturally transform Portugal, particularly referencing concerns regarding Islamic fundamentalism (The Portugal News, 2022).

The biggest shift in Portugal's external dimension of migration policy can be seen in the president's desire to fully restructure Portugal's asylum authority, the SEF (Foreigners and Borders Service). This restructuring involves several

significant changes, with the aim of enhancing efficiency when strengthening border control and security, as well as it wants to improve the management of immigration and asylum processes in Portugal. It also transfers responsibilities to different bodies including the GNR and PSP police forces, who will be responsible for controlling the borders, with the capacity to expel foreign citizens arriving in Portugal irregularly (Portuguese Refugee Council, 2023) (The Portugal News, 2023).

Despite its only recent entry into parliament, Chega's influence is becoming increasingly evident, primarily due to its politicization of migration. This has influenced the center-left's approach to the issue, prompting some shifts and new policy considerations. As Chega continues to gain popularity, its presence in parliament could further shape the discourse around migration, potentially influencing the policies and priorities of the center-left to a more restrictive dimension. Portugal's changes reflect a more incremental and pragmatic approach to addressing emerging issues while maintaining continuity with existing policy objectives; Portugal's migration policies' level of intensity aligns with the concept of 'adjustment'.

Table 1. The level of intensity of change in migration policy in each case.

Country	Populist radical-right party	Government ideology	Change in the external dimension of migration policies	Intensity of the change
Netherlands	PVV	Center-right	Drastically reduce the inflow of asylum seekers	Reorientation
Germany	AfD	Center-right	Cap the number of refugees, Ease deportation	Adaptation
Spain	VOX	Center-left	Strengthen the border in Ceuta and Melilla	Adaptation
Portugal	Chega!	Center-left	Total reform of the SEF -asylum authority, Strengthening of border control	Adjustment

4. Conclusion

In the pursuit of understanding the influence populist radical-right parties wield even when they are outside of formal government, this study has obtained the following findings. Across the four studied cases, all populist radical-right parties effectively politicized migration, exerting influence on incumbent parties. However, the intensity of changes in migration policy varied, with an ideological pattern emerging: center-right parties in government implemented more restrictive policies. The conclusions aim to explore each aspect more comprehensively.

The first hypothesis posited, “By politicizing migration, populist radical-right parties exert an indirect impact over parties in office, who consequently change the external dimension of migration policies”.

The research has revealed that all the examined parties - the PVV, AfD, VOX, and Chega! - have effectively politicized migration upon entering parliament. A common trait among them is the use of inflammatory language regarding migrants, such as Geert Wilders' references to an "Islamic Invasion" and Andre Ventura's discourse on "The Great Replacement Conspiracy Theory". This politicization has not only shaped political discourse but also set the agenda for mainstream parties in each country, compelling them to address these concerns. Additionally, the paper identifies domestic restructuring as a catalyst for policy change, as shifts in domestic perceptions of migration have prompted governments to reassess their foreign policy goals and strategies to better align with evolving domestic realities.

The paper has evaluated whether the governments in the studied cases changed the external dimension of migration policies within the specified timeframe. The findings indicate that while the Netherlands government, led by Rutte, underwent significant changes in its migration policy - including measures to restrict asylum seekers and adopting one of Europe's strictest migration policies - the other three cases experienced more subtle alterations. Table 1 elucidates the varying degrees of intensity in foreign policy change among each government: the Netherlands underwent a 'reorientation' change; Portugal's change level was 'adaptation'; Spain and Germany saw minor adjustments, suggesting a perceived but relatively discreet 'adaptation'.

The second hypothesis stated, "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."

Upon studying the two cases led by center-right administrations - the Netherlands and Germany - and contrasting them with those governed by center-left parties - Spain and Portugal - the findings are the following. All four countries were affected by populist discourse, despite any preconceived notions about which political orientation might be more resistant to such influences -center-left parties were not immune to radical-right politicization. However, a significant difference emerged in the intensity of migration policy change. Notably, center-right

administrations, exemplified by the Netherlands, experienced the most pronounced shifts in migration policies, resulting in a significant foreign policy reorientation. In contrast, Portugal and Spain experienced a lower level of intensity. So, the research has observed that center-right governments exhibited a higher level of intensity in the change of migration policies.

The paper aimed to challenge the widespread misconception that political parties wield influence exclusively while in governmental roles. Instead, it illustrates the capacity of populist radical-right parties to shape policy agendas and discourse even from outside the governmental sphere. This acknowledgment underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing the potential impact of populist radical-right ideologies on policymaking and societal norms, regardless of their formal political power.

The results of this research contribute to the ongoing debates surrounding populism and politicization. One notable addition to the study is the consideration of the level of intensity of change, shedding new light on the subject matter. To strengthen the findings of the conclusions, it is suggested that future research explores the following. Firstly, investigating cases of populists outside of parliament, which is becoming extremely rare within the EU, with a diminishing trend observed over time. Secondly, conducting interviews to gather additional information. This approach is particularly pertinent given the reliance on recent and sometimes limited academic sources, thereby enhancing the comprehensiveness of the study. In essence, this research wanted to modestly contribute to the exploration of the indirect impact of populism on migration policies. The conclusions drawn underscore the potential for further investigation in this area, as it holds promise for advancing our understanding of contemporary political dynamics.

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