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# The determinants of migration policies

Does the political orientation of governments matter?

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DEMIG project paper 29

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## Abstract

This paper explores the link between the political orientation of governments and the restrictiveness of immigration policies. Although it is frequently assumed that left-wing governments are more pro-immigration than right-wing governments, this link is more complex in practice, partly because parties may favour and oppose the migration of different migrant categories and parties may be divided internally. Furthermore, political negotiating, the influence of (particularly business and trade union) lobbies, as well as the international diffusion of policy trends may water down parties' ideological preferences and lead to much more fuzzy policy outcomes at government level. Drawing on the DEMIG POLICY database tracking migration policy changes and two datasets on political institutions, we assess the effect of government party orientation on different dimensions of immigration policy in 21 European and traditional Anglo-Saxon immigration countries between 1975 and 2012. Results consistently indicate that there is no clear association between the political orientation of governments and the restrictiveness of migration policies. Instead, we find that the restrictiveness of migration policies is mainly driven by factors such as economic growth and unemployment, recent immigration levels and political system factors such as electoral systems or the level of federalism.

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# 1  Introduction

Since the 1990s, migration has been an important topic in the run-up to most European and North American elections. Competing parties both on the left and the right of the political spectrum have sought to win over voters – or at least not to alienate any of their traditional constituencies – typically through promising tougher border controls or stricter access for migrants to labour market or welfare provisions. Although parties across the political spectrum seem to have moved towards a more restrictive stance on migration in recent decades as a reaction to voter hostility on immigration and/or the rise of far-right populist parties (cf. Davis 2012), political parties continue to significantly differ in their discourse and positions on migration. For instance, while the conservative CDU in Germany opposed dual nationality and the granting of local political rights to foreigners in the run-up to the 2013 parliamentary election, the social democratic SPD, the Green party and also the liberal FDP supported such measures. Campaigning for the 2015 UK parliamentary elections, most parties promised to cap legal immigration, albeit to different degrees: Labour suggested to only cap the number of non-EU workers, the Conservatives announced it would keep annual net immigration to the tens of thousands, while the far-right UKIP suggested a cap of 50,000 highly-skilled workers per year together with a complete ban on low-skilled workers for a five-year period.

This often leaves the impression that right-wing parties are more restrictive towards migration than left-wing parties. Despite the fact that policy making in liberal democracies is always a compromise between multiple actors (Meyers 2000), it seems reasonable to expect that the positions and preferences of the ruling political party influence actual policy outcomes. Yet, notwithstanding diverging discourses and promises of political parties, the question remains whether the actual policies enacted under left- or right-wing dominated governments really differ significantly. To what extent is discourse reflected in policy outcomes? And, in what way do political parties matter? Do different parties prioritise specific migrant groups? Are they more lenient or restrictive in certain policy fields? And has there been a change over time in the way in which migration policies under right- and left-wing dominated governments vary?

Although some studies suggest that left-wing parties are pro-immigration and right-wing parties anti-immigration (Lahav 1997), there are good reasons to question this widespread assumption. For instance, in the 1950s and 1960s, right-wing and centrist parties often favoured labour ('guest-worker') immigration from Mediterranean countries to Western Europe under the influence of industry lobbies. Left-wing parties and trade unions were often more wary towards labour immigration, because this was seen as undermining the position of native workers. At the same time, left-wing parties seemed to play a more proactive role in defending the socioeconomic and citizenship rights of already-entered migrants, also to prevent their presence allegedly causing a downward pressure on wages and employment conditions of native workers (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). This shows that we cannot simply classify the left-wing as 'pro' and the right wing as 'anti' migration.

Most empirical studies indeed suggest that the migration issue does not neatly cut across the left–right spectrum, but divides political parties internally (Massey 1999: 313; Odmalm 2011: 1076–1077; Schain 2008: 468). According to Sciortino (2000: 225), migration divides each party between those close to the party's economic tradition and those close to its socio-cultural tradition. Substantiating these contradictions, Perlmutter (1996: 378) argued that liberal parties have to accommodate conflicts between unions who generally favour restrictive policies and liberal and ethnic groups who tend to favour more open policies; while conservative parties are divided between employers favouring immigration and cultural conservatives asking for immigration restrictions. In the same vein, Odmalm (2011: 1077) suggests that 'immigration subjects parties to certain ideological "pulls" – market liberalism vs. value conservatism (for the centre-right) and international solidarity vs. welfare state/labour market protectionism (for the centre-left) – that can have adverse electoral implications […] which parties will attempt to remedy by selectively emphasising particular issues'. Table 1 summarises these internal divisions.

**Table 1: Internal party divisions on migration**

|  |  | Left | Right |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Restrictive migration policy changes** | Dimension | Economic tradition | Sociocultural tradition |
|  | Ideology | Market protectionism | Value conservatism |
|  | Actor | Unions | Cultural conservatives |
| **Liberal migration policy changes** | Dimension | Sociocultural tradition | Economic tradition |
|  | Ideology | International solidarity | Market liberalism |
|  | Actor | Liberal and ethnic groups | Employers |

Several scholars have argued that because of such potential internal conflicts, mainstream parties have generally avoided public debate on these issues and instead entered into silent coalitions on migration policies (Perlmutter 1996; Triadafilopoulos and Zaslove 2006). This ties in with the earlier argument by Freeman (1995) that migration policies are often made through client politics in closed arenas, which can only be influenced by highly organised groups. He argued that immigration primarily benefits 'concentrated' organised groups of employers or civil and human rights organisations that steer public policy in a more liberal direction, while the costs of immigration are diffuse, which prevents the general public interest from becoming organised and influencing policymaking. This would partly explain why migration policies (both with regard to entry rules and post-entry rights such as permanent residence, family reunification and citizenship) over the past decades have generally moved into a less restrictive ('expansionist') direction despite frequent public opposition to immigration.

However, particularly since the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the demise of the perceived 'communist threat', the political salience of immigration has rapidly increased (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Freeman 2013; Geddes 2003; Sciortino and Colombo 2004; Van Der Valk 2003). Migration has been repeatedly represented by politicians and journalists as a (potential or real) threat to the labour market and welfare state, as well as more generally to the economic development, social cohesion and cultural integrity of destination societies (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Sciortino 2000: 215). Since the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon in the United States in 2001, migration has also been increasingly linked to terrorism and cast as an overall security threat, although some scholars have questioned the widespread assumption that there has been a 'securitisation' of migration policies since 9/11 (cf. Boswell 2007).

The concomitant emergence of far-right anti-immigration parties has apparently shifted migration out of client politics into public politics (Givens and Luedtke 2005: 7; Perlmutter 1996: 377–378; Triadafilopoulos and Zaslove 2006: 172). Research by Davis (2012) suggests that the political salience of migration increases with the relative strength of the populist and anti-immigration far-right. If the populist 'threat' falls away, mainstream parties tend to revert to their previous stances and try to depoliticise the migration issues. The rise of far-right parties may thus have diminished the influence of business lobbies and civil society groups (Peters 2015) and the concomitant politicization of migration may have increased the role of party politics on migration policy-making. As Bonjour (2011: 115) has argued in her analysis on Dutch family migration policies, 'material interests, related to the labor market, housing policies, social security, public order and social cohesion, of course play a crucial role' in migration policy making, 'but so do ideas, ideology and moral considerations'. According to Schain (2008), however, increased political salience affects right- and left-wing parties differently: While politicisation generally leads left-wing parties to enact less restrictive changes in order to mobilize their ethnic electorate, it usually weakens the impact of business lobbies on centre-right parties who would enact more restrictive policies in an attempt to instrumentalise the identity issue.

Yet it would be unrealistic to conceptualise migration policy making as an entirely internal, domestic affair. It is reasonable to assume that national migration policies are influenced by policy making in other countries, either as a reaction to the effects of these policies or through the diffusion of new policy ideas or international policy 'fashions'. We can hypothesise that the importance of supra-national policy making and the international diffusion of policy practices has increased through globalisation and political and economic integration of countries. Within the European Union for instance, the Europeanisation of family migration and asylum policies potentially undermines the autonomy of national political parties and governments in enacting migration policies, particularly because of the primacy of European law on national law and the role of supra-national courts (Block and Bonjour 2013; Lavenex 2001). Organizations like the EU and the OECD function as important platforms to exchange experiences with policy practices. Contemporary governments are closely monitoring policy developments in neighbouring or partner countries and in this way practices can rapidly spread, regardless of the party in power (Cornelius et al. 2004).

The politicisation of migration and the growing importance of international diffusion of migration policy practices suggest that parties' impact on policy may have changed over time, but the two trends seem to work in different directions. This begs the question: Do we see an increasing importance of parties over time because of the growing political salience of migration and the need of mainstream parties to position themselves more clearly on the political spectrum? Or do we rather observe the decline of party influences on migration policy making because of the growing importance of international practices and supra-national policy making?

To further complicate the picture, migration policies are not homogenous, but typically consist of a 'mixed bag' of policy measures targeting different migrant groups and policy categories in various ways. This means that migration policies can be contradictory and incoherent 'by design', because they are influenced by different ideologies and interests. Indeed, new evidence shows that, while legal entry and integration rights of most labour and family migrants have generally been expanded since 1945, border controls and policies targeting unauthorised migrants and asylum seekers have generally become more restrictive (de Haas, Natter and Vezzoli 2014b). In the same vein, Money (1999) argued that the position of political parties on migration varies according to the specific policy area. She found that immigration control (entry) and immigrant integration (post-entry) policies follow a different political logic, with integration splitting political parties neatly between the left (pro-integration) and the right (anti-integration), while pro- and anti-migration control forces exist both within the left and the right (Money 1999: 37).

This suggests that the position of political parties is likely to vary according to the type of policy (e.g., entry or integration), but also in terms of the migrant categories targeted by policy measures (e.g., high- and low-skilled labour migrants, family members, or asylum seekers). This raises another set of questions. For instance, do left-wing parties favour more open policies towards irregular migrants and refugees compared to right-wing parties because values such as international solidarity and human rights are central to their party ideology? Are right-wing parties more liberal towards low- and high-skilled workers and investors because of the influence of business lobbies? And are left-wing parties indeed pushing for stronger integration policies by giving rights to settled migrants, while right-wing parties oppose such policies to maintain a more malleable and 'flexible' immigrant workforce?

So far, there is still a lack of systematic empirical evidence that could give us an answer to these questions. An analysis of the impact of the political orientation of governments on migration policy restrictiveness should also build in other factors that are likely to influence migration policy making, such as economic growth, unemployment and previous levels of immigration. A myopic focus on party factors may easily lead to an overestimation of their importance. One could argue that during time of economic growth and high labour demand, governments tend to adopt more liberal immigration policies regardless of their political orientation, and vice versa (Massey 1999; Meyers 1995). For instance, the pro-immigration tendency of a particular governement may be reinforced under circumstances of high economic growth, but may be neutralised in times of economic adversity when public pressure to reduce migration may be higher. In fact,

business cycles may also impact the relative influence of pro- and anti-immigration camps within political parties on policy outcomes and thus reflect the changing relative strength of business and trade union lobbies.

Another possibility is that previous high levels of immigration may cause a public backlash against immigration and a push for more restrictive policies. This is based on the notion that migration policies are endogenous – with high levels of recent immigration allegedly leading to public calls for more restrictions (Massey 1999; Meyers 1995). If this then leads to lower levels of immigration, public concerns about high immigration may weaken again, suggesting the possible existence of a 'hog cycle' in migration policy making in relation to immigration levels. Finally, the political orientation of governments is only one variable feeding into national politics, and structural factors such as national election systems, the level of federalism or institutional polarisation are likely to play a significant role as well. For instance, one hypothesis could be that in first-past-the-post systems – where relatively small anti-immigration parties are less likely to gain parliamentary representation – immigration policy making tends toward a more liberal direction. Another hypothesis could be that both polarised and federal political systems are characterised by more liberal policies because of the need to negotiate laws at multiple levels, both at the horizontal level between the executive and the legislative powers and at the vertical level between national and federal levels.

Over the past decades, the political science literature has provided detailed insights into how party orientations influence specific migration policies within one (or a few) countries over relatively short time periods (for a review, see: Bale 2008; Meyers 2000: 1257–1261). However, results of such case studies yield mixed results. Partly because of the lack of pertinent data on the long-term evolution of migration policies, there is a general scarcity of systematic, quantitative comparisons of the effects of the political orientation of national governments on migration policy restrictiveness across longer time periods and a large number of countries. An exception is the study by Givens and Luedtke (2005), who studied immigration laws in France, Germany, and the UK in the 1990–2002 period. Performing an OLS regression on their dataset of immigration laws, they found that partisanship does not affect the restrictiveness of immigration control laws, but is a significant predictor for the restrictiveness of immigrant integration laws, with a governmental shift from left to right increasing the restrictiveness of integration laws by two points on the authors' five-point scale (Givens and Luedtke 2005: 16).

This paper expands this type of analysis to 21 European and traditional Anglo-Saxon immigration countries[1] over the 1975–2012 period to investigate the extent to which the political orientation of governments affects the restrictiveness of migration policies, specifying the types of policies (entry, integration, exit and border control) and the migrant groups (all migrants, workers, family members, high-skilled workers and students, asylum seekers, irregular migrants) that are targeted. By performing our analysis over three time periods (1975–1988, 1989–2000, 2001–2012), this paper will also investigate whether the relation between political orientation of governments and migration policy making has become more pronounced because of the frequently hypothesised (but rarely measured) increased politicisation of migration in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods. Finally, the analysis will simultaneously enable the study of the role of other factors such as economic growth, unemployment, recent levels of immigration and features of the national political system in determining the changes in migration policy restrictiveness.

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[1] Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America.

# 2 Data and methodology

To study the relationship between the political orientation of governments and changes in migration policy restrictiveness in 21 Western liberal democracies over the 1975–2012 period, this paper draws on the following three datasets: The DEMIG POLICY database tracking changes in migration policy; the Database of Political Institutions (DPI); and the Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS). The 1975-2012 period covers the entire era after the 1973/1974 guest worker recruitment halt in Western Europe, which signalled a structural break in the history of European migration policy making. Over this period, most European countries have (willingly or unwillingly) become countries of immigration, while migration to the traditional countries of European settlement (United States of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand) has become increasingly Latin American and Asian in character (Czaika and de Haas 2014). Although the DEMIG POLICY and the DPI databases also include countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa, we limited our analysis to countries that have been democratically ruled over this entire period.

DEMIG POLICY tracks over 6,500 changes in migration policies in 45 countries over the 1945–2014 period. It was compiled between 2010 and 2014 as part of the DEMIG project 'Determinants of International Migration: A Theoretical and Empirical Assessment of Policy, Origin and Destination Effects'. The database records 'policies on paper' and defines migration policies as the 'rules (i.e., laws, regulations and measures) that national states define and [enact] with the objective of affecting the volume, origin, direction, and internal composition of […] migration' (Czaika and de Haas 2013: 489). Because migration policies generally consist of different (and potentially contradictory) measures, DEMIG POLICY disaggregates policy reform packages into their different sub-measures. For the 21 countries included in this paper, over 2,300 migration policy changes were recorded. Each policy change was assigned four codes specifying the *policy area* (border and land control; legal entry and stay; integration and post-entry rights; and exit regulations); *policy tool* (e.g. work visas, recruitment programmes, regularisations, employer liabilities); *migrant category* (e.g. high-skilled workers, low-skilled workers, family members, irregular migrants, asylum seekers or international students); and *geographic origin* (all foreign nationalities, EU citizens, citizens or specific nationalities) targeted (for the definition of the codes used in this paper, see Table 6, Annex).

For each policy change, we also recorded whether it made the existing legal framework more or less restrictive, that is, whether it increased or decreased the rights granted to the migrant group targeted by that policy change. This variable codes a change towards more restriction +1, a change towards less restriction -1. This enabled the analysis of changes in migration policy restrictiveness across different policy areas and towards a specific group of migrants, such as family members, refugees, entrepreneurs, international students or low-skilled workers. For more information on the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of DEMIG POLICY see de Haas, Natter and Vezzoli (2014a).

In order to assess the robustness of the results, two datasets were used to provide information on the political orientation of governments: The Database of Political Institutions (DPI) compiled by the Development Research Group of the World Bank (Beck et al. 2001; Keefer 2012) provides yearly information on political systems and the party composition and political orientation of governments in 177 countries over the 1975–2012 period. Our analysis focused on the variable that assesses the political orientation of the largest governmental party, which is usually, but not necessarily, the largest party in parliament. The political orientation was coded either as right-wing (1), centre (2), or left-wing (3) according to the party's economic policy (i.e. preferences regarding more or less state control of the economy) based on the information available in Banks, Muller and Overstreet (2012) and other complementary sources.

The Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS) compiled by two research projects directed by Klaus Armingeon (Armingeon et al. 2014) provides political and institutional data for 23 democratic countries between 1960 and 2012. It provides an assessment of the cabinet composition in any given year on a five-point scale: (1) A hegemony of right-wing (and centre) parties in the government; (2) A dominance of right-wing

(and centre) parties; (3) A balance of power between left and right; (4) A dominance of social democratic and other left parties; or (5) A hegemony of social democratic and other left parties. The data has been compiled based on the Schmidt Index (Schmidt 1996; Schmidt and Beyer 1992), which measures the share of cabinet seats held by right- and left-wing parties. Political parties are classified according to party programmes, affiliation to larger political families, and policy orientations of the parties.

The two datasets have a correlation coefficient of 0.69. The difference between DPI and CPDS is mainly related to the coding of coalition governments: While the DPI coded coalition governments as either left or right (according to the main partner in the coalition), the CPDS provides more nuance by coding them as either dominated by right- or left-wing parties, or as centre if there is a balance of power between left and right. According to the DPI data, right- and left-wing parties have kept balance in the 21 countries over the 1975–2012 period, both dominating governments in 43 per cent of the country-year cases, while the CPDS suggests that governments were dominated by right-wing parties in 56 per cent of the country-year cases, by left-wing parties in 25 per cent of the cases and while in 20 per cent of the country-year cases left- and right-wing parties kept each other in balance within governments.

Despite these differences, both the DPI and CPDS databases show largely similar patterns and trends over time (Figures 6 and 7, Annex). Left-wing parties have been more prominent in governments from 1975 to 1980 and again between 1995 and 2002, while right-wing parties have dominated governments particularly at the beginning of the 1990s and in the mid-2000s. The data also show consistent differences across countries (Figures 8 and 9, Annex). For example, right-wing parties have dominated governments in Germany and France, left-wing parties in Finland, Spain or Sweden, and coalition governments have been particularly prevalent in Austria, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The empirical analysis is divided into descriptive and multivariate parts. The descriptive analysis will compare trends in migration policy restrictiveness under left- and right-wing governments, specified by the policy areas (entry, integration, exit, border controls) and migrant groups (labour migrants, family migrants, irregular migrants, refugees) targeted by the policy changes. This analysis will also investigate the extent to which parties' positions have changed over the past four decades. Second, logistic regression analyses using panel data will provide a more reliable estimate of the extent to which the restrictiveness of migration policy changes can be associated with the political orientation of governments by controlling for other theoretically plausible policy determinants, such as economic cycles and recent levels of immigration.

Our dependent variable is the change in restrictiveness introduced by a policy change enacted in a specific country during any given year. The main independent (predictor) variable is the right–left wing political orientation of the government. To check the robustness of empirical results, we have consistently run all model specifications using the two alternative measures of political orientation of governments provided by CPDS and DPI. The variables on the political orientation of governments are lagged by one year (a) to address the potential problem of reverse causality (if voters would punish incumbent parties for their previous migration policies), (b) to account for the usual delays between political decisions and the legal entry into force of policy measures, and (c) to account for the concomitant likely delays in the ways economic trends and variations in past migration result in migration policy change.

The first set of control variables are economic cycles. The hypothesis is that if economies grow fast and unemployment decreases, governments will be more lenient towards immigration, irrespective of the political orientation of governments. To control for such economic variables, we included the one-year lagged GDP per capita growth and one-year lagged change in unemployment rates in the analysis. To control for the potential influence of recent immigration levels on policy making, we also included immigration rates (immigration as percentage of total population) in the regression model, drawn from the DEMIG TOTAL database (DEMIG 2015).

Three other variables characterising the nature of political systems were included as control variables: First, we control for proportional representation. This variable assesses whether candidates are elected based

on the percentage of votes received by their party (coded 1) or through a winner-takes-it-all/first-past-the-post rule (coded 0). Second, we control for the political polarisation between the executive party and the main parties of the legislature. This variable is coded 0 if the chief executive's party has an absolute majority in the legislature, and 1 if the executive and legislative powers are entirely composed of opposite parties. Thirdly, we control for federalism (0 codes the absence of federalism, 1 weak federalism, 2 strong federalism) to account for the level of political bargaining between national and federal levels necessary to enact policy changes.

Finally, we included a series of country dummies (fixed effects) to account for unobserved heterogeneity of other national factors influencing migration policy making, as well as two time dummies to account for the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the 9/11 attacks of 2001. The latter serve to test the hypothesis that the differences in positioning of political parties have indeed been eroded over time or whether the post-Cold War and post-9/11 periods are characterised by an increased party polarisation because of the hypothesised politicisation of migration issues. This regression model is run for all policies taken together and over the entire 1975–2012 period, as well as for the three different time periods (1975–1988, 1989–2000, 2001–2012), the four policy areas (entry, integration, exit, border controls), and the six migrant groups (all migrants, labour migrants, family migrants, high-skilled workers and students, irregular migrants, refugees and asylum seekers) separately.

# 3 Four decades of migration policy: The importance of governments' political orientation

Figures 1 and 2 show the average direction of change in migration policy restrictiveness specified for left- and right-wing dominated goverments using policy data from the DPI and the CPDS, respectively. They show that while migration policies generally moved in a more liberal direction over the 1970s and 1980s, more and less restrictive policy changes have balanced each other out during the 1990s and 2000s. These trends are consistent irrespective of government party composition. This may suggest that the restrictiveness of migration policies is primarily determined by broader economic, geopolitic and social factors rather than by party politics per se, as well as indicate a broader trend towards comparatively more restrictive stances as a reaction to presumed increasing anti-immigration sentiments and the rise of far-right parties. However, although Figures 1 and 2 confirm that the proportion of restrictive changes has indeed increased compared to the past, there has not been a reversal of the liberalising trend of the 1970s and 1980s, as the proportion of more and less restrictive changes balance each other more or less out. This contradicts common perceptions of growing policy restrictiveness, which may be either explained by a considerable gap between discourse and policy practice, and/or the fact that restrictive policies tend to receive more attention in the media (Czaika and de Haas 2013; de Haas, Natter and Vezzoli 2014b).

**Figure 1: Average yearly change in migration policy restrictiveness of 21 countries, 1975–2012, by political orientation of largest governmental party (1-year lagged DPI variable)**
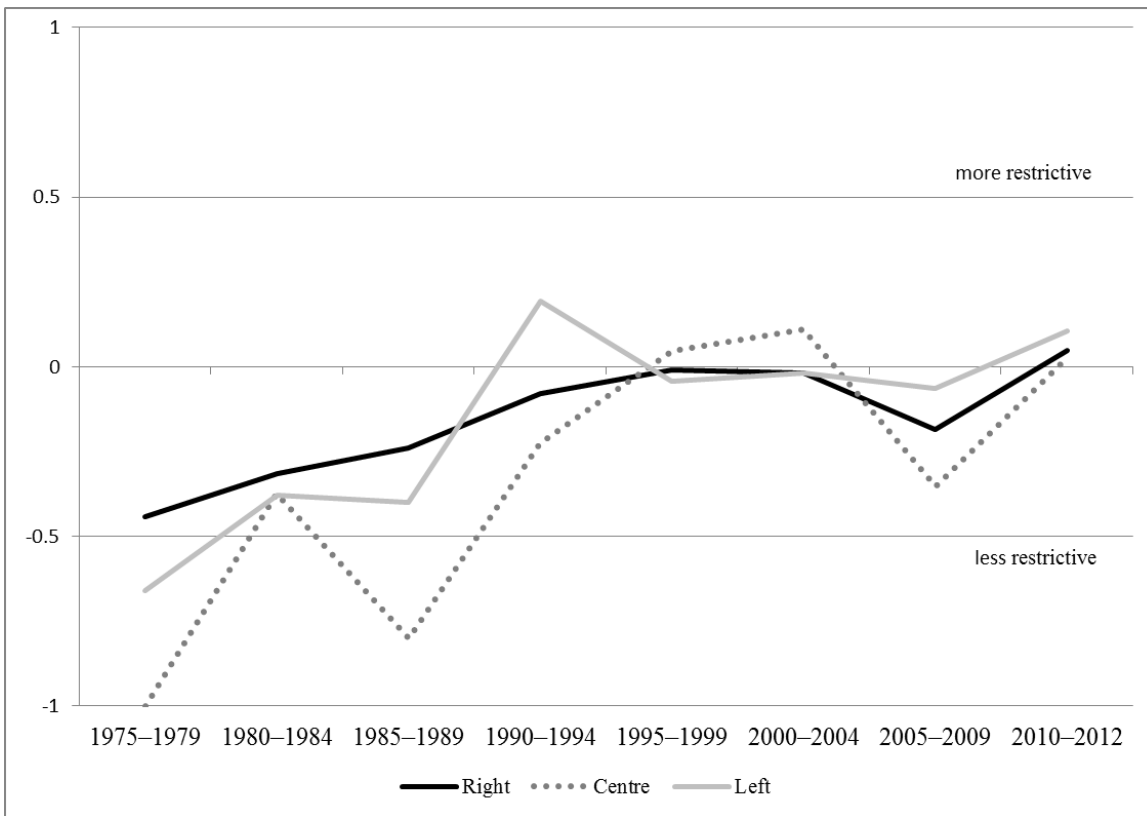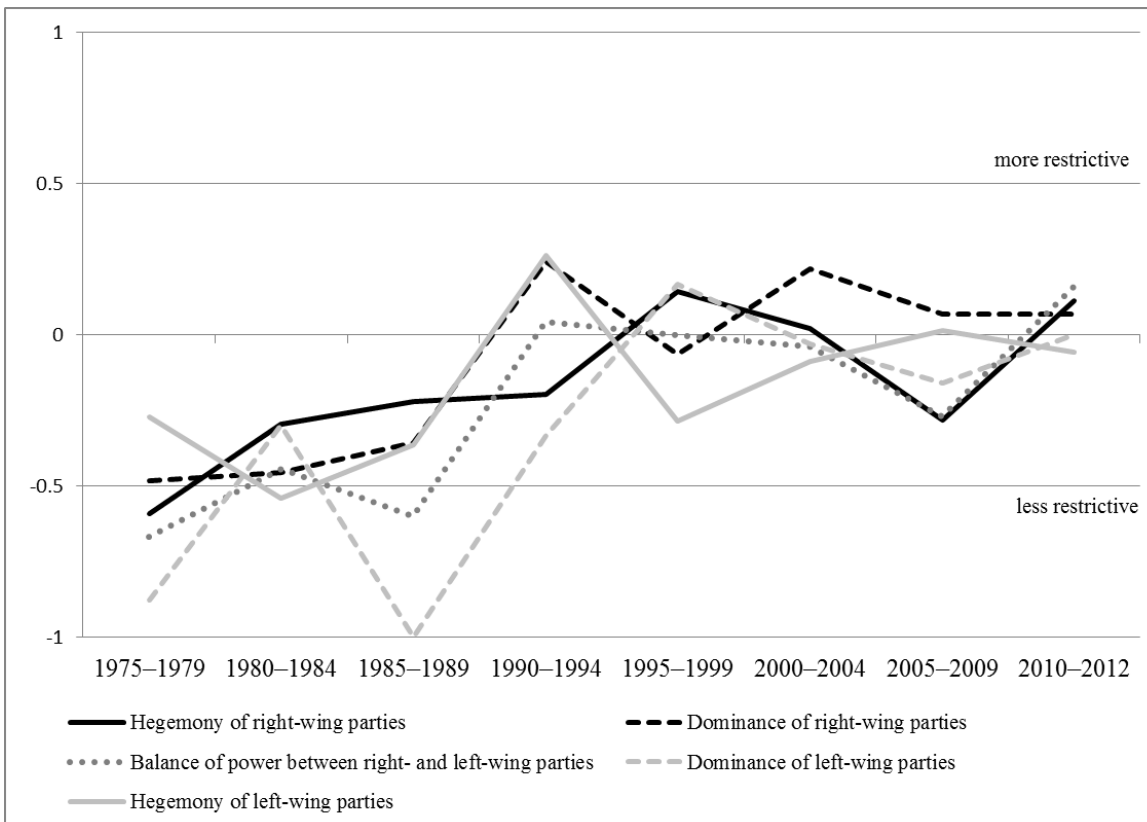


**Figure 2: Average yearly change in migration policy restrictiveness of 21 countries, 1975–2012, by political orientation of cabinet (1-year lagged CPDS variable)**

What these figures conceal is the considerable intensification of migration policy making over the past decades, which has happened across the political spectrum. Both left- and right-wing governments having nearly tripled the average number of migration-related laws they enact per year in government between the late 1980s and early 2000s. This seems to reflect the increasing political salience of migration since the end of the Cold War. Yet, the intensity of migration policy making has stabilised or even slightly decreased since the early 2000s. This challenges the idea that migration policy making has become further 'securitised' since 9/11, possibly indicating that securitization has mainly been reflected in discourses rather than actual migration policies. This may either indicate a decreasing political salience of migration possibly following the rise of other issues (such as 'terrorism'), or a certain level of saturation after a major wave of policy making innovation and international diffusion of new border control practices and skill-specific immigration policies since the end of the Cold War.

If we calculate the average direction of change in migration restrictiveness over the entire 1975–2012 period by type of government (see Figure 3), the DPI database interestingly suggests that centre governments have overall enacted the most liberal policies, while left-wing governments have enacted comparably more restrictive policies, although the average direction of changes remains consistently in a liberal direction. Using the CPDS values, we find a non-linear pattern, in which left-wing dominated governments have enacted the most liberal policies, surprisingly followed by right-wing only governments. Right-wing dominated governments seem to be comparatively most restrictive, as this is the only government composition where the number of liberal and restrictive changes is more or less in balance. Perhaps surprisingly, left wing-dominated parties come in second place in terms of relative restrictiveness. These patterns are difficult to explain. More generally, overall differences between different types of governments are very small (maximum 0.18 on a scale ranging from -1 to 1), and do not follow a clear left–right-wing pattern.

**Figure 3: Average change in migration policy restrictiveness of 21 countries, 1975–2012, by political orientation of government (1-year lagged DPI and CPDS variables)[2]**



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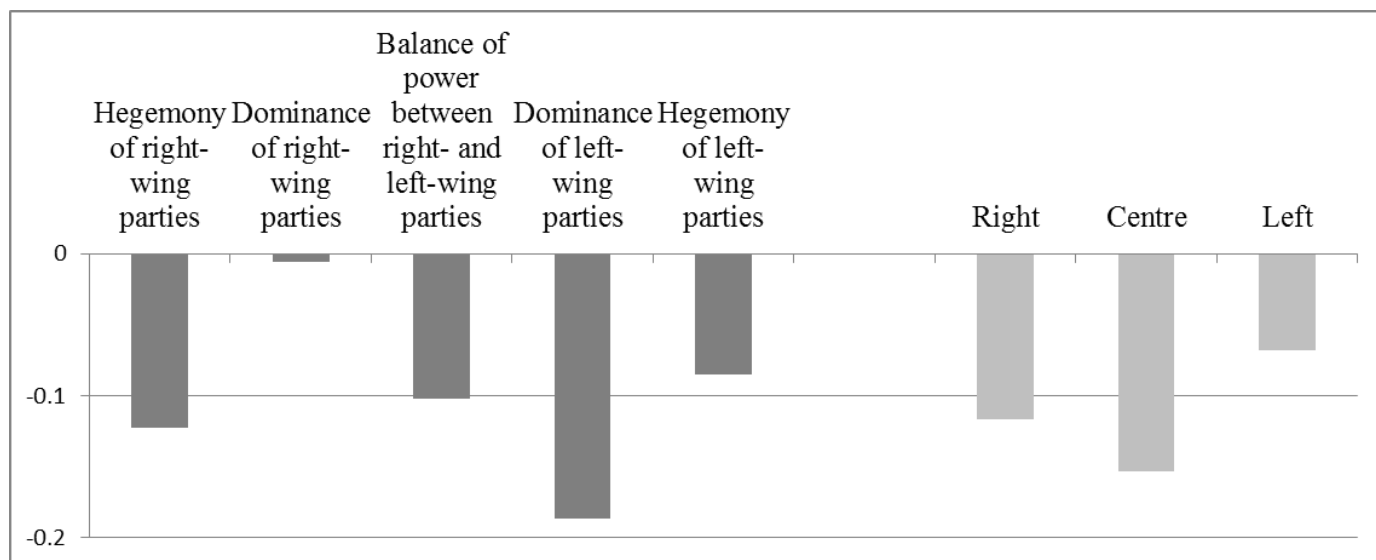
[2] Values below zero indicate that the overall direction of policy change has been consistently in a more liberal direction, implying that the number of liberal policy changes have consistently outnumbered the number of restrictive policy changes across all political orientations.

Because the political orientation of governments may be influenced by factors such as economic trends that may simultaneously also affect migration policies, it is necessary to conduct a multivariate analysis. This allows us to simultaneously control for various explanatory variables, and, hence, to provide more precise assessments of the relation between the political orientation of governments and migration policy outcomes. Table 2 presents the results of the first logistic regressions that pool all years and policy types. Overall, it does not show a very strong association between the political orientation of governments and the direction of migration policy restrictiveness, although some patterns seems to emerge. The full model using the DPI data (model 3), which indicates the political orientation of the largest governmental party, suggests that left-wing led governments tend to adopt significantly more restrictive (less liberal) migration policies than right-wing led governments. While centre-led governments tend to adopt less restrictive policies, this result is statistically not significant. The models using the CPDS data, which assesses the cabinet composition, show hardly any significant results. Looking at the signs of the regression coefficients, no clear pattern along a left–right-wing continuum emerges.

**Table 2: Determinants of migration policy change in 21 countries, 1975–2012, pooled model**

|  | MODEL 1 | MODEL 2 | MODEL 3 | MODEL 4 | MODEL 5 | MODEL 6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DPI - Right (reference category) | . | . | . |  |  |  |
| DPI - Centre | 0.0953 | -0.307 | -0.541 |  |  |  |
|  | (-0.41) | (-1.13) | (-1.48) |  |  |  |
| DPI - Left | 0.221* | 0.202 | 0.221* |  |  |  |
|  | (-2.25) | (-1.86) | (-1.98) |  |  |  |
| CPDS - Hegemony of right-wing parties (reference category) |  |  |  | . | . | . |
| CPDS - Dominance of right-wing parties |  |  |  | 0.375* | 0.175 | 0.138 |
|  |  |  |  | (-2.23) | (-0.9) | (-0.69) |
| CPDS - Balance between right- and left-wing parties |  |  |  | 0.0221 | -0.0226 | 0.0253 |
|  |  |  |  | (-0.14) | (-0.13) | (-0.15) |
| CPDS - Dominance of left-wing parties |  |  |  | -0.172 | -0.215 | -0.216 |
|  |  |  |  | (-0.85) | (-0.97) | (-0.96) |
| CPDS - Hegemony of left-wing parties |  |  |  | 0.156 | 0.225 | 0.159 |
|  |  |  |  | (-1.16) | (-1.47) | (-1.03) |
| One-year lagged real GDP per capita growth |  | -0.0948*** | -0.106*** |  | -0.0846*** | -0.102*** |
|  |  | (-4.22) | (-4.52) |  | (-3.87) | (-4.38) |
| One-year lagged unemployment rate |  | 0.0704** | 0.0712** |  | 0.0772*** | 0.0700** |
|  |  | (-3.17) | (-3.11) |  | (-3.59) | (-3.11) |
| One-year lagged immigration rate |  | 0.0380* | 0.0398* |  | 0.0422** | 0.0378* |
|  |  | (-2.45) | (-2.35) |  | (-2.84) | (-2.25) |
| No federalism (reference category) |  |  | . |  |  | . |
| Weak federalism |  |  | -2.139* |  |  | -2.080* |
|  |  |  | (-2.56) |  |  | (-2.46) |
| Strong federalism |  |  | 0.29 |  |  | 0.276 |
|  |  |  | (-0.65) |  |  | (-0.6) |
| Proportional representation (yes=1) |  |  | 1.508* |  |  | 1.392* |
|  |  |  | (-2.4) |  |  | (-2.23) |
| No polarisation of the political system (reference category) |  |  | . |  |  | . |
| Light polarisation of the political system |  |  | -0.0527 |  |  | -0.482 |
|  |  |  | (-0.15) |  |  | (-1.75) |
| Strong polarisation of the political system |  |  | -0.575*** |  |  | -0.549*** |
|  |  |  | (-3.85) |  |  | (-3.71) |
| Country dummies | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Constant | -0.440* | -1.201** | -0.306 | -0.486** | -1.369*** | -0.216 |
|  | (-2.42) | (-2.96) | (-0.59) | (-2.62) | (-3.53) | (-0.41) |
| Observations | 2261 | 1951 | 1876 | 2327 | 2005 | 1892 |

t statistics in parentheses: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Non-political factors seem more strongly associated with the restrictiveness of migration policy change. As expected, one-year lagged economic growth is strongly and significantly associated with the adoption of liberal (less restrictive) policy changes, while, conversely, one-year lagged unemployment and immigration levels are associated with more restrictive policies. Also political system variables seem to play an important role. As compared to non-federal systems, political systems with moderate levels of federalism tend to enact less restrictive changes, while political systems that are strongly polarised also tend towards lower levels of restrictionism. Less restrictive policy outcomes in federal and polarised political systems may be related to the multiplication of negotiation levels both at horizontal (among parties in the executive and legislative) and vertical levels (between national and regional levels). The resulting necessity for political compromises and 'bartering' may result in policies that are watered down versions of initial (more restrictive) ideological political positions. On average, electoral system that are based on proportional representation tend to adapt more restrictive policies. This perhaps accounts for the fact that small, anti-immigration parties (such as far-right parties) can more easily influence policy making either through compelling the whole political spectrum to adopt more restrictive policies or through direct participation in governments (Bale 2008).

There is, however, a danger in overinterpreting the initial results reported in Table 2, because the estimates may be biased by general geopolitical changes and a concomitent overall change in approaching migration. For instance, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, migration seems to have been increasingly politicised, with a growing negative political sentiment towards migration of particular groups, such as asylum seekers and low-skilled labour migrants and their families. De Haas, Natter and Vezzoli (2014b) indeed find that the period since 1989 has been characterised by a deceleration of the rapid migration policy liberalisation that occurred in post-WWII decades – with more and less restrictive policy changes holding each other more or less in balance. As another potentially significant event, the 9/11 attacks are often thought to have led to an increased securitisation of migration. Since the political orientation of governments may be corrrelated with such events and periods, Table 3 asssesses the determinants of migration policy change by using period dummies (models 1 and 5) as well as running the regressions separately for the three time periods 1975–1988, 1989–2000 and 2001–2012 (models 2–4 and 6–8).

First of all, the inclusion of the two time dummies (models 1 and 5) reveals that the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 is indeed significantly associated with a higher incidence of more restrictive policies. This may confirm the increasing political salience of migration in the public sphere, as well as the idea that, since the disappearance of the 'Communist threat', politicians have increasingly staged migration as an external threat. However, the analysis does not show an additional post-9/11 effect, which seems to further question the idea that the period since 2001 has been characterised by a further securitisation of migration and an additional increase in restrictionism. Models 1 and 5 further show that the inclusion of period dummies absorbs the effects of the political orientation of governments shown in table 2. Lagged GDP growth, unemployment and the political system variables of (weak) federalism and polarisation retain significant effects in the expected direction. However, the positive associations between electoral systems based on proportional representation and previous immigration levels with policy restrictionism are no longer significant.

**Table 3: Determinants of migration policy change in 21countries, 1975–2012, with period variables and by time periods**

| | MODEL 1 time dummies | MODEL 2 1975–1988 | MODEL 3 1989–2000 | MODEL 4 2001–2012 | MODEL 5 time dummies | MODEL 6 1975–1988 | MODEL 7 1989–2000 | MODEL 8 2001–2012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DPI - Right (reference category) | . | . | . | . | | | | |
| DPI - Centre | -0.53 | -1.192 | -0.637 | -0.163 | | | | |
| | (-1.44) | (-0.94) | (-0.76) | (-0.31) | | | | |
| DPI - Left | 0.204 | -0.416 | 0.669** | 0.217 | | | | |
| | (-1.81) | (-1.16) | (-2.69) | (-1.28) | | | | |
| CPDS - Hegemony of right-wing parties (reference category) | | | | | . | . | . | . |
| CPDS - Dominance of right-wing parties | | | | | 0.111 | -0.415 | 0.394 | 0.0163 |
| | | | | | (-0.56) | (-0.58) | (-0.82) | (-0.06) |
| CPDS - Balance between right- and left-wing parties | | | | | -0.0859 | -0.519 | -0.0934 | 0.0553 |
| | | | | | (-0.49) | (-0.93) | (-0.19) | (-0.21) |
| CPDS - Dominance of left-wing parties | | | | | -0.149 | -1.538 | -0.0754 | -0.345 |
| | | | | | (-0.66) | (-1.81) | (-0.13) | (-1.04) |
| CPDS - Hegemony of left-wing parties | | | | | 0.128 | -0.33 | 0.379 | 0.14 |
| | | | | | (-0.82) | (-0.70) | (-1.13) | (-0.54) |
| One-year lagged real GDP per capita growth | -0.0918*** | -0.0119 | -0.137* | -0.0894** | -0.0878*** | -0.00801 | -0.107 | -0.0918** |
| | (-3.76) | (-0.16) | (-2.43) | (-2.64) | (-3.60) | (-0.11) | (-1.93) | (-2.70) |
| One-year lagged unemployment rate | 0.0545* | 0.168* | 0.0717 | 0.0946 | 0.0514* | 0.158* | 0.0492 | 0.0879 |
| | (-2.22) | (-2.22) | (-1.25) | (-1.79) | (-2.13) | (-2.2) | (-0.82) | (-1.69) |
| One-year lagged immigration rate | -0.00295 | 0.279 | -0.0641 | -0.00462 | -0.0054 | 0.300* | -0.0897 | 0.00122 |
| | (-0.16) | (-1.83) | (-1.02) | (-0.16) | (-0.29) | (-2.05) | (-1.43) | (-0.04) |
| No federalism (reference category) | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Weak federalism | -1.647* | -3.311* | -0.216 | 0.536 | -1.534 | -3.187* | 0.63 | 0.387 |
| | (-1.96) | (-2.11) | (-0.12) | (-0.92) | (-1.81) | (-1.97) | (-0.32) | (-0.65) |
| Strong federalism | -0.187 | -0.078 | 0.912 | 0.0728 | -0.142 | -0.121 | 1.142 | 0.0918 |
| | (-0.40) | (-0.10) | (-1.05) | (-0.15) | (-0.30) | (-0.16) | (-1.23) | (-0.18) |
| Proportional representation (yes=1) | 1.015 | -0.868 | 2.025 | -1.328** | 0.921 | -1.021 | 1.421 | -1.306* |
| | (-1.62) | (-0.88) | (-1.59) | (-2.60) | (-1.49) | (-0.99) | (-1.01) | (-2.52) |
| No polarisation of the political system (reference category) | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Light polarisation of the political system | -0.0341 | 0.557 | 0.0918 | 0.625 | -0.426 | -0.175 | -0.564 | 0.652 |
| | (-0.10) | (-0.57) | (-0.09) | (-0.95) | (-1.50) | (-0.20) | (-0.58) | (-1) |
| Strong polarisation of the political system | -0.590*** | -0.498 | -0.552 | -0.590* | -0.556*** | -0.541 | -0.66 | -0.570* |
| | (-3.91) | (-0.93) | (-1.42) | (-2.30) | (-3.75) | (-1.04) | (-1.69) | (-2.26) |
| Berlin Wall dummy | 0.769*** | | | | 0.783*** | | | |
| | (-4.79) | | | | (-4.87) | | | |
| 9/11 dummy | 0.13 | | | | 0.097 | | | |
| | (-1.01) | | | | (-0.75) | | | |
| Country dummies | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Constant | -0.214 | -1.742 | -0.932 | 0.423 | -0.179 | -1.758 | -0.542 | 0.483 |
| | (-0.41) | (-1.58) | (-0.90) | (-0.73) | (-0.34) | (-1.65) | (-0.49) | (-0.8) |
| Observations | 1876 | 303 | 601 | 968 | 1892 | 319 | 601 | 968 |

t statistics in parentheses: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$

The period-specific analyses yield some additional insights. The results confirm that there is a very weak, and generally insignificant, association between the political orientation of governments and the level of migration policy restrictionism. The only significant effect is that, using the DPI data, left-dominated governments seem to have enacted more restrictive changes in the 1989–2000 period compared to right-dominated governments. Although all other estimates are statistically insignificant, looking at the sign of the effects, we cannot detect any clear left–right-wing gradient in which right-wing governments would be more inclined to adopt restrictive policies. Rather, and particularly for the post-1989 periods, both DPI and CPDS data seem to suggest that it is rather centre parties and government consisting of a mix of left- and right-wing parties that seem more on the liberal side, while left-only and right-only governments seem more inclined towards restrictive policies. Yet, because the associations are insignificant, the present analyses cannot confirm these hypotheses.

The economic variables of lagged GDP growth and unemployment rates generate coefficients in the expected direction, although these are not always signficant. Interestingly, while unemployment seems to lose significance over time, GDP growth seems to increase in significance. This could possibly indicate changing political-ideological mechanisms leading to migration policy change. For instance, the decreasing association between unemployment and migration policy restrictionism might be related to the waning influence of trade unions on political decision making, as well as the declining political salience of unemployment as an issue of public concern and governmental responsibility (cf. Gilbert 2002). Conversely, the increasing significance of economic growth might reflect the growing economic rationale underpinning migration policies as part of a general turn towards 'neoliberal' policies that value immigration primarily in economic terms, such as through the widespread adoption of demand-driven, skill-selective immigration or point systems. In such political constellations, high economic growth is likely to increase the lobbying power of the business sector to argue for less restrictive immigration policies. Yet, such explanations remain speculative and need further research to be evaluated.

Political system variables also show a differentiated pattern over time. While federalism seems to play a liberalising role in the pre-1989 period, the association turns insignificant in the post-1989 period. Conversely, the liberalising effect of proportional representation and the polarization of institutions on migration policy restrictiveness is only significant in the 2001–2012 period. Combined with the analyses of the governmental political orientation variables, this could point to a pattern in which the political compromising (as a consequence of ideological polarisation and/or the need to form coalition governments straddling the left–right-wing divide) is associated with less restrictive policy making. From this, we can hypothesise that in such processes of compromising, political parties 'barter' liberal policies towards their 'favourite' immigrant groups, for instance with right-wing parties negotiating more liberal policies for skilled labour migrants in exchange for more generous asylum policies favoured by the left-wing.

# 4 Disaggregating migration policies

The above analyses suggest that the political orientation of governments only has a small, and generally insignificant, effect on the restrictiveness of migration policy change. This defies the rather popular idea that left-wing governments would be more in favour of immigration than right-wing governments, and seems to lend support to the idea developed by the migration literature that voices in favour of more and less immigration are present across the political spectrum (see Table 1). Yet, before drawing any conclusions, it is necessary to analyse whether the political orientation of governments matters with regard to different migration policy areas and migrant categories. This is particularly important given that migration policies are simultaneously influenced by a multitude of actors, such as 'organized interest groups, courts, ethnic groups, trade unions, law and order bureaucracies, police and security agencies, local actors and street-level bureaucrats and private actors' (Lahav and Guiraudon 2006: 207; Meyers 2000). This leads to migration policies that are incoherent 'by design' because they are likely to restrict and liberalise different policy fields at the same time.

Figure 4 disaggregates the analysis between the main policy areas of entry, integration, border control, and exit distinguished in DEMIG POLICY. The descriptive analysis shows that restrictive measures mainly concern border control and exit policies and that these have moved in a more restrictive direction irrespective of the political orientation of governments. Perhaps surprisingly, policies with regards to legal entry and integration have consistently moved in a more liberal direction for both left- and right-wing dominated governments. The differences between the long-term averages in Figure 4 are small and do not suggest a clear left-right wing gradient of restrictiveness within these four policy fields.

**Figure 4: Average change in migration policy restrictiveness of 21 countries, 1975–2012, by political orientation of government (1-year lagged CPI and CPDS variables), disaggregated by policy area**
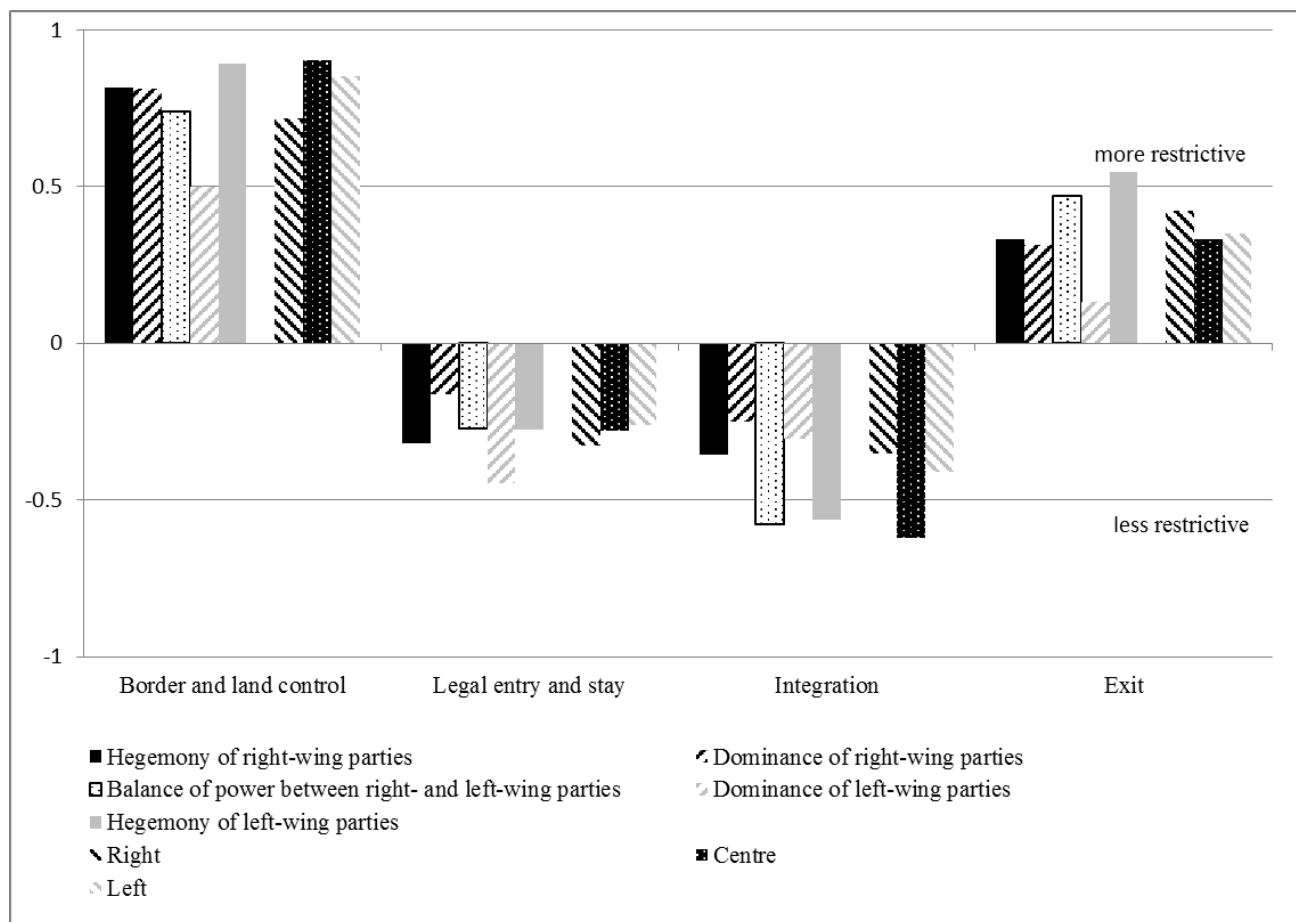


At first sight, this contradicts the findings of Givens and Luedtke (2005) and Money (1999) that integration policies significantly differ under left and right-wing governments, or that left-wing governments would support integration and right-wing governments would favour labour immigration policies. The multivariate analyses (Table 4) confirm that there is only a weak, and generally insignificant, association between the political orientation of governments and migration policy restrictiveness across different policy areas. The only signficant results reported use the CPDS variable, whereby governments dominated by left-wing parties show significantly more support for liberal border control measures measures compared to governments where there is a hegemony of right-wing parties, and governments with a balance between right- and left-wing parties are significantly more liberal on integration policy than the right-wing hegemony governments. Although insignificant, looking at the sign of the estimated effects, we do not see any evidence of a clear left–right-wing divide. The CPDS data rather suggest a non-linear pattern where, particularly with regards to border control and exit policies, governments at both extremes of the left–right continuum (i.e. hegemony of left- or right-wing parties) tend to more restrictive than governments that straddle the left–right-wing divide.

The analyses also show that the significant negative effect of lagged GDP growth on policy restrictiveness is mainly explained by its effect on entry policies, which is strongly significant in both model specifications (models 2 and 6). This is consistent with the established hypothesis that business cycles have a direct effect on the the relative power of business lobbies and the overall 'political appetite' for allowing more migrants into the country – irrespective of the political orientation of government. There is much less reason to expect a direct effect of GDP growth on other migration policy areas, which is negative, but insignificant except for integration policies using the DPI data (model 3). One-year lagged unemployment has the expected positive effect on entry policies in both model specifications, but is only significant in the first model specification (model 2) using the DPI data. This suggests a generally weaker connection of unemployment to entry policies compared to GDP growth. Although unemployment is correlated with GDP growth, the specialised and segmented nature of labour markets means that structural unemployment in particular sectors of the labour market may coincide with high GDP growth and labour shortages in other sectors. Finally, previous immigration rates are insignificant across all policy types, apparently defying the idea of a 'hog cycle' in migration policy making.

**Table 4: Determinants of migration policy change in 21 countries,1975–2012, by policy area**

| | MODEL 1 Border control | MODEL 2 Legal entry | MODEL 3 Integration | MODEL 4 Exit | MODEL 5 Border control | MODEL 6 Legal entry | MODEL 7 Integration | MODEL 8 Exit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| DPI - Right (reference category) | . | . | . | . | | | | |
| DPI - Centre | 2.829 | 0.00212 | -1.219 | -1.741 | | | | |
| | (-1.71) | (0,0) | (-1.45) | (-0.69) | | | | |
| DPI - Left | 0.511 | 0.301 | 0.0277 | 0.0595 | | | | |
| | (-0.77) | (-1.76) | (-0.1) | (-0.14) | | | | |
| CPDS - Hegemony of right-wing parties (reference category) | | | | | . | . | . | . |
| CPDS - Dominance of right-wing parties | | | | | -0.83 | 0.245 | 0.132 | -0.512 |
| | | | | | (-0.74) | (-0.76) | (-0.33) | (-0.61) |
| CPDS - Balance between right- and left-wing parties | | | | | -0.301 | 0.243 | -0.888* | -0.152 |
| | | | | | (-0.27) | (-0.88) | (-2.31) | (-0.27) |
| CPDS - Dominance of left-wing parties | | | | | -2.831* | -0.357 | 0.409 | -1.334 |
| | | | | | (-2.24) | (-0.86) | (-0.95) | (-1.62) |
| CPDS - Hegemony of left-wing parties | | | | | 1.676 | 0.169 | -0.802 | 1.196 |
| | | | | | (-1.81) | (-0.71) | (-1.82) | (-1.76) |
| One-year lagged real GDP per capita growth | -0.172 | -0.157*** | -0.109* | -0.0456 | -0.273 | -0.156*** | -0.0923 | -0.047 |
| | (-1.46) | (-4.11) | (-1.98) | (-0.51) | (-1.86) | (-4.09) | (-1.73) | (-0.49) |
| One-year lagged unemployment rate | -0.216 | 0.0833* | 0.00622 | 0.107 | -0.267 | 0.0778 | 0.024 | 0.0551 |
| | (-1.35) | (-2) | (-0.11) | (-1.3) | (-1.61) | (-1.88) | (-0.43) | (-0.68) |
| One-year lagged immigration rate | -0.0738 | -0.00712 | -0.0139 | -0.107 | -0.0415 | -0.00473 | -0.0333 | -0.129 |
| | (-0.66) | (-0.23) | (-0.28) | (-1.58) | (-0.35) | (-0.16) | (-0.64) | (-1.75) |
| No federalism (reference category) | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Weak federalism | 1.894 | -2.411 | -0.0804 | 3.005 | 2.931 | -2.494 | 0.143 | 2.696 |
| | (-1.17) | (-1.86) | (-0.04) | (-1.43) | (-1.61) | (-1.90) | (-0.07) | (-1.53) |
| Strong federalism | -14.81*** | -0.52 | -1.51 | -0.772 | -14.74 | -0.548 | -1.376 | -0.559 |
| | (-13.15) | (-0.57) | (-1.61) | (-0.64) | . | (-0.59) | (-1.52) | (-0.46) |
| Proportional representation (yes=1) | -17.28*** | 1.729* | -1.909 | -2.912 | -18.30*** | 1.681* | -1.68 | -2.753 |
| | (-7.31) | (-2.19) | (-1.03) | (-1.46) | (-8.83) | (-2.15) | (-1.06) | (-1.37) |
| No polarization of the political system (reference category) | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Light polarization of the political system | -3.375 | 0.0277 | -0.385 | 0.309 | -2.058 | -0.155 | -0.888 | -0.654 |
| | (-0.65) | (-0.05) | (-0.55) | (-0.12) | (-0.67) | (-0.33) | (-1.38) | (-0.50) |
| Strong polarization of the political system | 1.009 | -0.758*** | -0.148 | -0.128 | 0.734 | -0.773*** | -0.113 | -0.094 |
| | (-1.18) | (-3.42) | (-0.33) | (-0.16) | (-0.83) | (-3.53) | (-0.26) | (-0.13) |
| Berlin Wall dummy | 0.305 | 0.438 | 1.034** | 1.872*** | -0.637 | 0.376 | 1.407*** | 1.758** |
| | (-0.35) | (-1.82) | (-2.67) | (-3.38) | (-0.56) | (-1.58) | (-3.43) | (-3.16) |
| 9/11 dummy | 0.498 | -0.031 | 0.854* | 0.755 | 0.438 | -0.0601 | 0.727* | 0.792 |
| | (-0.7) | (-0.16) | (-2.4) | (-1.49) | (-0.56) | (-0.31) | (-2.07) | (-1.54) |
| Country dummies | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Constant | 18.95*** | -0.0286 | 1.029 | 0.725 | 20.50*** | 0.208 | 0.626 | 1.026 |
| | (-12.42) | (-0.03) | (-0.85) | (-0.37) | (-52.18) | (-0.21) | (-0.54) | (-0.54) |
| Observations | 199 | 902 | 485 | 220 | 199 | 910 | 492 | 221 |

t statistics in parentheses: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

The regressions also suggest that the negative (liberalising) effect of polarisation on restrictiveness in the pooled model works through entry policies. This could signal that the aforementioned policy 'bartering' is particularly relevant when it comes to the core of migration policies: migrants' entry into the country. In addition, the analysis shows that the negative associations between weak levels of federalism (compared to non-federal systems) and policy restrictiveness found in the pooled model (see Table 3) is explained by its effect on border control policies, although the effect is significant only in the model using DPI data (model 1). Interestigly, there is also a highly significant negative (liberalizing) effect of proportional represention on the restrictiveness of border control policies. This is difficult to explain, and requires further exploration. One hypothesis could be that in proportional systems, there may be a lower urge amongst coalition governments to show 'performance' on border controls compared to non-proportional systems, where the party and leader in charge may be compelled to be 'tough' on migration. However, this seems to be inconsistent with the idea that in representative systems the far right-wing tend to gain more force and would push governing mainstream parties to show toughness. At the same time, proportional representation has a signficantly restrictionist effet on entry policies, implying that first-past-the-post electoral systems yield on average more liberal entry policies. An example of this dual dynamic may include the US, where President Obama has stepped up border controls whilst at the same time attempting to liberalise entry policies. However, further research should investigate whether showing 'toughness' on border control is indeed used as a way to gain support for more liberal entry policies.

With regard to larger trends over time, the analysis shows that the restrictionist trend set in motion after the fall of the Berlin Wall has mainly worked through integration and exit policies. The post 9/11 dummy has generated significantly positive effects on integration policies only, while the effect on exit is positive but insignificant. Perhaps surprisingly, there is no significant effect of these variables on border controls and entry policies. We can provide only tentative explanations for these results, but it may be that while economic interests explain the continued liberalisation of entry policies, a certain 'backlash against multiculturalism' (cf. Vasta 2007) may explain the increasingly stringent conditions placed on gaining access to, for instance, citizenship through language, income and citizenship tests. This seems linked to the idea that the anti-immigration forces increasingly emphasised the notion that migrants are a potential threat to the social cohesion and cultural integrity of destination societies.

Analysing the restrictiveness of migration policy change according to migrant categories over the 1975–2012 period (see Figure 5), we again see considerable similarities between different types of governments. First, both right- and left-wing dominated governments tend to back policies that expand the rights of labour migrants, particularly high-skilled workers, and restrict rights for irregular migrants. The cross-party agreement on strict policies towards irregular migrants, which are strongly tied to border control policies, defies the idea that only right-wing parties push for stronger border controls. There seems to be more differentiation with regard to policies targeting family migrants and refugees and asylum seekers, with the left being on average more lenient towards those categories. However, the differences are small, and patterns not consistent, and we therefore need multivariate analyses to further verify whether there are any clear patterns.

**Figure 5: Average change in migration policy restrictiveness of 21 countries, 1975–2012, by political orientation of government (1-year lagged CPI and CPDS variables), disaggregated by migrant category**
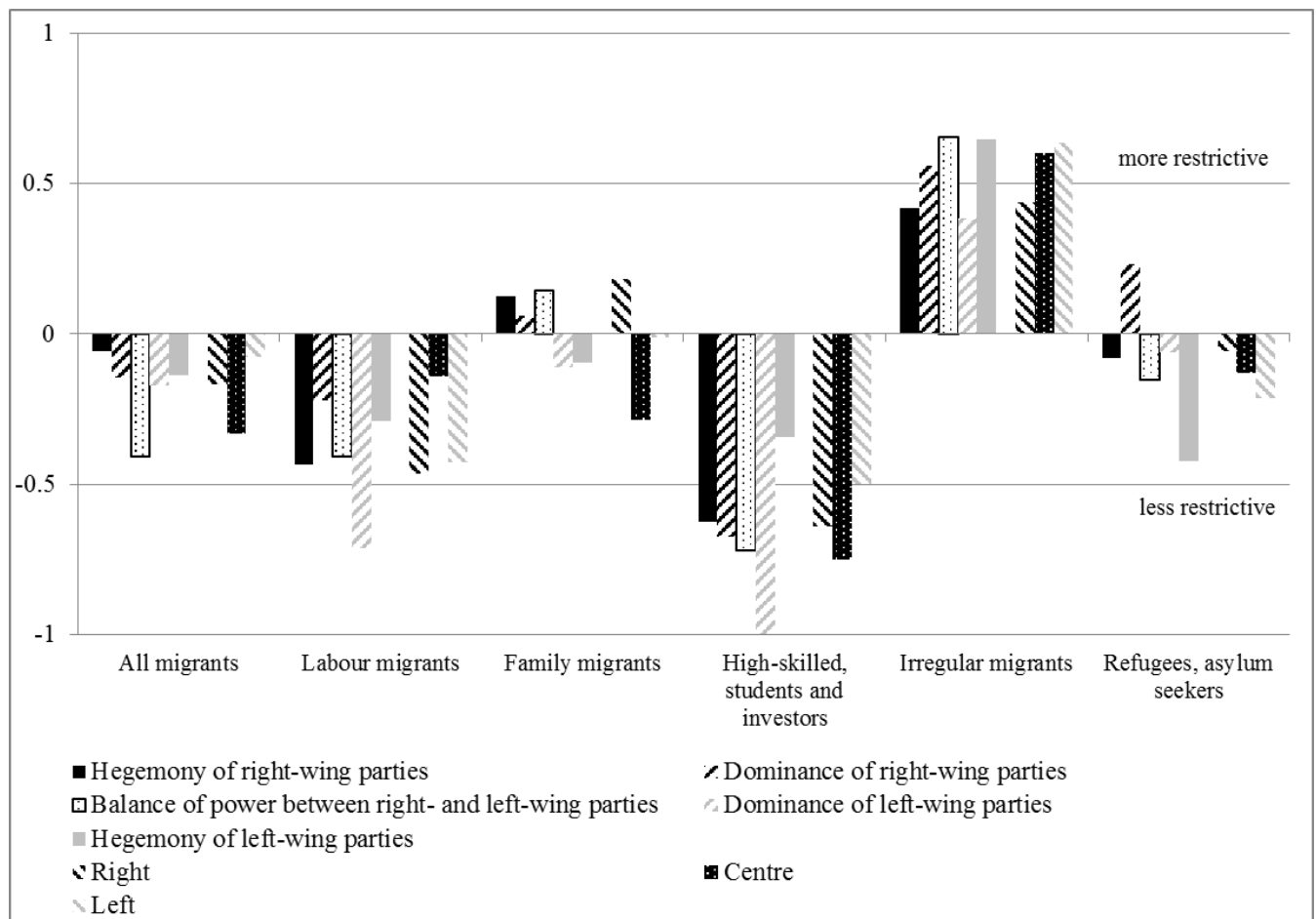


The regression analysis specified by migrant categories (see Table 5) is consistent with the other analyses in showing that party politics do not seem to have a significant effect on the restrictiveness of migrant-category specific policies, with two exceptions. First, DPI data suggest that centre-led governments are significantly favouring more liberal policies towards high-skilled migrants and students compared to right-wing led governments. Second, both DPI and CPDS data indicate that policies towards irregular migrants seem to be more restrictive under left-wing dominated governments. This replicates the results of the descriptive analyses. To some extent, this may be surprising as policies that aim to 'combat irregular migration' are commonly ascribed to the right- rather than the left-wing. Yet, a possible explanation for the observed pattern could be that left-wing parties and trade unions see the employment of undocumented migrants as undermining the position of 'native' workers. Furthermore, these results may be biased by period effects, because left-wing parties dominated many governments at the beginning of the 1990s when numerous restrictive policies were enacted.

**Table 5: Determinants of migration policy change in 21 countries, 1975–2012, by migrant category**

| | MODEL 1 | MODEL 2 | MODEL 3 | MODEL 4 | MODEL 5 | MODEL 6 | MODEL 7 | MODEL 8 | MODEL 9 | MODEL 10 | MODEL 11 | MODEL 12 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All migrants | Labour migrants | Family migrants | High-skilled, students | Irregular migrants | Refugees, asylum seekers | All migrants | Labour migrants | Family migrants | High-skilled, students | Irregular migrants | Refugees, asylum seekers |
| DPI - Right (reference category) | . | . | . | . | . | . | | | | | | |
| DPI - Centre | -0.161 | 1.297 | 0.145 | -16.60*** | -2.017 | -0.437 | | | | | | |
| | (-0.21) | (-1.34) | (-0.1) | (-9.66) | (-1.69) | (-0.37) | | | | | | |
| DPI - Left | 0.35 | 0.0413 | 0.603 | 0.844 | 1.003* | -0.0149 | | | | | | |
| | (-1.29) | (-0.11) | (-1.12) | (-1.71) | (-2.57) | (-0.06) | | | | | | |
| CPDS - Hegemony of right-wing parties (reference category) | | | | | | | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| CPDS - Dominance of right-wing parties | | | | | | | -0.183 | 0.338 | -0.439 | 0.0301 | -0.267 | 0.182 |
| | | | | | | | (-0.41) | (-0.64) | (-0.45) | (-0.03) | (-0.43) | (-0.32) |
| CPDS - Balance between right- and left-wing parties | | | | | | | -0.396 | -0.16 | -0.169 | 1.365 | 0.3 | 0.42 |
| | | | | | | | (-0.99) | (-0.27) | (-0.22) | (-1.47) | (-0.48) | (-0.95) |
| CPDS - Dominance of left-wing parties | | | | | | | -0.181 | -0.916 | 0.668 | . | -0.45 | 0.287 |
| | | | | | | | (-0.40) | (-1.24) | (-0.62) | | (-0.71) | (-0.55) |
| CPDS - Hegemony of left-wing parties | | | | | | | 0.177 | 0.52 | -0.118 | 1.031 | 1.253** | -0.7 |
| | | | | | | | (-0.49) | (-0.97) | (-0.12) | (-1.4) | (-2.7) | (-1.58) |
| One-year lagged real GDP per capita growth | -0.0762 | -0.152* | -0.122 | 0.0042 | 0.0578 | -0.150** | -0.0742 | -0.11 | -0.106 | -0.00477 | -0.00881 | -0.142* |
| | (-1.48) | (-2.01) | (-1.05) | (-0.04) | (-0.52) | (-2.61) | (-1.42) | (-1.43) | (-0.86) | (-0.04) | (-0.08) | (-2.46) |
| One-year lagged unemployment rate | -0.0429 | 0.0565 | 0.225 | 0.422* | 0.129 | -0.024 | -0.0377 | 0.0308 | 0.159 | 0.389* | 0.095 | -0.0223 |
| | (-0.77) | (-0.8) | (-1.86) | (-2.46) | (-1.73) | (-0.33) | (-0.70) | (-0.43) | (-1.41) | (-2.01) | (-1.33) | (-0.31) |
| One-year lagged immigration rate | -0.0744 | -0.0625 | 0.331** | 0.159 | 0.0956 | -0.0721 | -0.0722 | -0.0689 | 0.292** | 0.15 | 0.108 | -0.0919 |
| | (-1.56) | (-0.99) | (-2.97) | (-1.89) | (-1.4) | (-1.23) | (-1.51) | (-1.10) | (-2.88) | (-1.75) | (-1.54) | (-1.52) |
| No federalism (reference category) | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Weak federalism | -3.664 | 0.493 | -38.62*** | -34.44*** | -17.27*** | -13.13*** | -3.538 | 0.673 | -37.91*** | -38.18 | -16.43*** | -11.96*** |
| | (-1.90) | (-0.17) | (-11.03) | (-14.01) | (-7.33) | (-6.65) | (-1.85) | (-0.22) | (-11.69) | . | (-6.76) | (-5.40) |
| Strong federalism | -1.647 | -0.786 | -17.93*** | -33.64*** | -0.364 | 0.423 | -1.478 | -0.602 | -17.63*** | -36.84 | -0.603 | 0.345 |
| | (-1.47) | (-0.39) | (-11.47) | (-23.00) | (-0.29) | (-0.41) | (-1.32) | (-0.29) | (-10.53) | . | (-0.47) | (-0.33) |
| Proportional representation (yes=1) | 1.67 | -2.977 | 16.55*** | -1.695 | 16.30*** | 14.05*** | 1.614 | -3.22 | 16.65*** | -1.154 | 14.43*** | 13.30*** |
| | (-1.21) | (-1.96) | (-7.17) | (-0.79) | (-11.55) | (-9.29) | (-1.23) | (-1.87) | (-8.4) | (-0.56) | (-9.08) | (-7.66) |
| No polarisation of the political system (reference category) | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . | . |
| Light polarisation of the political system | -0.65 | -1.156 | -16.96*** | 16.84*** | 0.299 | 1.142 | -0.938 | -0.331 | -17.40*** | 18.06*** | -0.95 | 0.986 |
| | (-0.79) | (-1.10) | (-10.13) | (-11.15) | (-0.31) | (-0.89) | (-1.25) | (-0.44) | (-9.98) | (-12.22) | (-0.94) | (-1.05) |
| Strong polarisation of the political system | -0.431 | -0.173 | -2.260*** | 0.333 | -0.748 | -0.27 | -0.488 | -0.31 | -2.166*** | 0.187 | -0.62 | -0.201 |
| | (-1.14) | (-0.33) | (-3.84) | (-0.68) | (-1.59) | (-0.65) | (-1.29) | (-0.63) | (-3.37) | (-0.31) | (-1.39) | (-0.49) |
| Berlin Wall dummy | 0.760* | 0.543 | 1.241* | 15.55*** | 1.109* | 0.796* | 0.906** | 0.364 | 1.287* | 16.60*** | 1.199** | 0.824* |
| | (-2.21) | (-0.96) | (-1.97) | (-10.38) | (-2.53) | (-2.17) | (-2.6) | (-0.69) | (-1.97) | (-8.84) | (-2.64) | (-2.12) |
| 9/11 dummy | 1.237*** | 0.157 | -0.0527 | 0.83 | -0.122 | -0.112 | 1.108*** | 0.0897 | -0.151 | 0.743 | -0.191 | -0.015 |
| | (-3.94) | (-0.33) | (-0.10) | (-1.63) | (-0.25) | (-0.35) | (-3.55) | (-0.19) | (-0.27) | (-1.41) | (-0.37) | (-0.05) |
| Country dummies | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Constant | 2.168 | 1.406 | 16.44*** | 13.11*** | 0.221 | -0.22 | 2.086 | 1.548 | 16.71*** | 15.79 | 1.036 | -0.206 |
| | (-1.7) | (-0.63) | (-8.49) | (-5.32) | (-0.14) | (-0.18) | (-1.63) | (-0.67) | (-8.04) | . | (-0.68) | (-0.17) |
| Observations | 456 | 246 | 153 | 192 | 310 | 379 | 459 | 253 | 156 | 188 | 312 | 380 |

t statistics in parentheses: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

GDP growth per capita has a significant negative, liberalising effect on (low-skilled) labour immigration policies in the first model specification using the DPI data, and a negative, but insignificant effect in the second model specification using the CPDS data. Yet, interestingly, GDP growth also has a significant liberalising effect on policies towards refugees and asylum seekers in both model specifications. It is unclear what explains this effect, but it is possible that in times of economic growth, there may be less public pressure to contain immigration and, perhaps, a greater willingness to accept refugees. Furthermore, high unemployment rates increase the restrictiveness of policies towards high-skilled migrants and students in both model specificiations, but have no significant effect on policies targeting other migrants. Previous immigration levels have a strong and significant restrictive effect on family migration policies in both model specifications. Although it is unclear what mechanisms explain this effect, high recent migration levels possibly lead to a backlash in the rights towards family reunification in order to prevent 'chain migration'. These analyses highlight the complexity of the mechanisms through which economic and migration trends feed (back) into migration policies, as well as the necessity of focusing on specific migrant categories and policy areas seperately to dissect such trends.

Political system variables also play out differently according to the migrant category targeted by policies. Weakly federal systems (using non-federal states as a reference category) are significantly associated with less restrictive policies towards all groups except labour migrants. However, strong levels of federalism (again as compared to non-federal states) are only signficantly associated with more liberal policies towards family migrants in both model specifications. It is not clear what explains this non-linear association. Proportional representation systems are associated with more restrictive policies towards family migrants, irregular migrants and asylum seekers. This may suggest that these three policy fields are particularly subject to inter-party discussions influenced by small parties at the very right or left of the political spectrum that push policies in a more restrictive direction compared to countries with a first-past-the-post electoral rule. The effects of the polarisation of the political institutions, however, yields difficult-to-interpret results. While polarised systems are significantly associated to more liberal family migration polices, they are associated to significantly more restrictive policies towards the higher-skilled and students in both model specifications. However, in strongly polarised systems this association disappears for the higher skilled and students, and turns positive (more liberal) for family migrants. As with federalism, this association seems to be non-linear.

Finally, the analysis suggests that the post-1989 'period effect' towards a higher proportion of restrictive measures has affected most migrant categories, but that this effect has been particularly significant for high-skilled migrants and students, which is somehow surprising, as this category is often seen as a group that is more favoured in recent years. This result can, however, also be due to the low case load of high-skilled migration policies in the pre-1989 period. The post 9/11 dummy has no significant effect except for the category 'all migrants', which reflects the increasing number of restrictive border control measures that target all migrants irrespective of their characteristics. This once again confirms that the fall of the Berlin Wall has been a real game changer, heralding a slow-down of the post-WWII liberalisation of migration policies. At the same time, our findings are in line with (Boswell 2007) in that they do not show any effect of 9/11 in terms of the alleged 'securitisation' of migration policies, with the exception of generic border control policies geared towards all travellers.

# 5 Conclusion

This paper explored the link between the political orientation of governments and the restrictiveness of different dimensions of immigration policy in 21 European and North American countries between 1975 and 2012. The analyses in this paper strongly suggest that the political orientation of governments plays a relatively marginal role in determining migration policies. Only when it comes to border control and integration policies does the CPDS data provide evidence for the widespread assumption that left-wing governments are more favourable towards migration than right-wing governments. Beyond these two exceptions, our results are very robust in *not* finding any evidence of a left–right-wing gradient in which left-wing governments would be more pro-immigration and right-wing government more opposed to migration. DPI and CPDS data even suggest that, contrary to expectation, policies towards irregular migrants are more restrictive under left-wing dominated governments.

Our analyses thus lend robust support to the idea developed in migration literature that voices in favour of more and less immigration of particular migrant groups are present across the political spectrum. The data also suggest a certain non-linear pattern in which governments at both extremes of the left–right continuum (i.e. with a hegemony of left- or right-wing parties) tend to enact more restrictive policies than (coalition) governments that straddle the left–right-wing divide. Combined with the analyses of the political system factors, this could point to a pattern in which political compromising and 'bartering' as a consequence of ideological polarisation and/or the need to form coalition governments may result in policies that are watered down versions of initial political positions of parties. In this perspective, coalition governments would provide more opportunities for organised interest groups, unions and lobbies to influence migration policy making.

However, the findings of this paper are based on the pooling of a large variety of countries. Given that processes underlying migration policy making are incredibly complex, only detailed case studies of certain policy changes in a specific national and political environment will be able to bring this complexity to light. For instance, Bonjour (2011) shows that in the case of Dutch family migration policies, liberal policies were enacted mostly in times of the economic recession in the 1980s and the restrictive turn of the 1990s occurred under a government dominated by the social democratic party. Also, our analysis is based on migration 'policies on paper' and does therefore not take into account the large variation in implemented policy measures, which would be a valuable future contribution to the literature. Indeed, implementation leaves wide leverage to the individual (and often arbitrary) decision making power of bureaucrats (Eule 2014; Infantino 2010) and private actors (Gutekunst 2015 forthcoming).

What our paper shows is that although migration is subject to fierce debates in the public sphere and extensive political bargaining in the political sphere, the eventual policies enacted seem to be mainly driven by factors other than political orientation or party ideologies. One element strongly affecting policy making is the international diffusion of policy practices. This can account for the high degree of policy convergence across countries and the fact that similar policies are enacted regardless of the party in power. Furthermore, the restrictiveness of migration policies is determined by general economic factors such as economic growth and employment as well as political system factors. The analyses suggest that if economies grow fast and unemployment decreases, governments will be more lenient towards immigration, irrespective of the political orientation of governments. The liberalising effect of economic growth on migration policy is mainly explained through its effect on entry policies and policies targeting (low-skilled) workers, as well as refugees and asylum seekers. Immigration rates in previous years also have a signifncant restrictionist effect on policies, particularly towards family migrants. These analyses point to the complexity of mechanisms through which economic and

migration trends feed (back) into migration policies, as well as the necessity to focus on specific migrant categories and policy areas separately to understand the complex determinants of migration policies.

This paper has also revealed that, while party ideologies play a minor role, the overall features of a national political system are signficant determinants of migration policy restrictiveness. Thus, electoral system that are based on proportional representation tend to adopt more restrictive policies, particularly with regard to family migrants, irregular migrants and asylum seekers. This could provide evidence for the fact that small, anti-immigration parties can more easily influence policy making in those systems, and may suggest that particularly family, irregular and asylum migration are the core of those parties' attempts at pushing policies in a more restrictive direction. On the contrary, federal and polarised political systems lead to on average less restrictive policy outcomes. This may be related to the multiplication of negotiation levels both at horizontal (among parties in the executive and legislative) and vertical levels (between national and regional levels). This might suggest that 'bartering' between different actors or levels leads to overall less restrictive changes. This would be consistent with the finding that coalition governments enact on average less restrictive changes than governments comprising only left- or right-wing parties.

Finally, our paper provides robust evidence for a 'period effect' after 1989, in which the increasing political salience of migration since the end of the Cold War has led to a deceleration of the liberalisation of migration policies, although the overall direction of change has remained in a more liberal direction. As the analysis has shown, the growing propotion of restrictive policy measures has mainly worked through exit and integration polices. For exit policies, this might be linked to the multiplication of forced return measures implemented across European and traditional Anglo-Saxon immigration countries particularly since the 1990s. For integration policies, increasing immigration in past decades might have triggered a certain backlash against multiculturalism that materialised in more restrictive integration, social welfare and citizenship rules. However, our results also show that policy changes after 2001 do not portray an overall significant turn towards restrictiveness as has been suggested by the literature on the 'securitisation' of migration policies. The phenomenon on securitisation in the wake of the 'fight against terrorism' seems to only apply to policies targeting border control and travellers, but not to other types of migration policies and migrant categories. Yet, the most important finding of this paper remains that there is *no* clear association between the political orientation of governments and the restrictiveness of migration policies.

# 6 Annex

**Figure 6: Polical orientation of largest governmental party (DPI variable) over time in 21 countries**
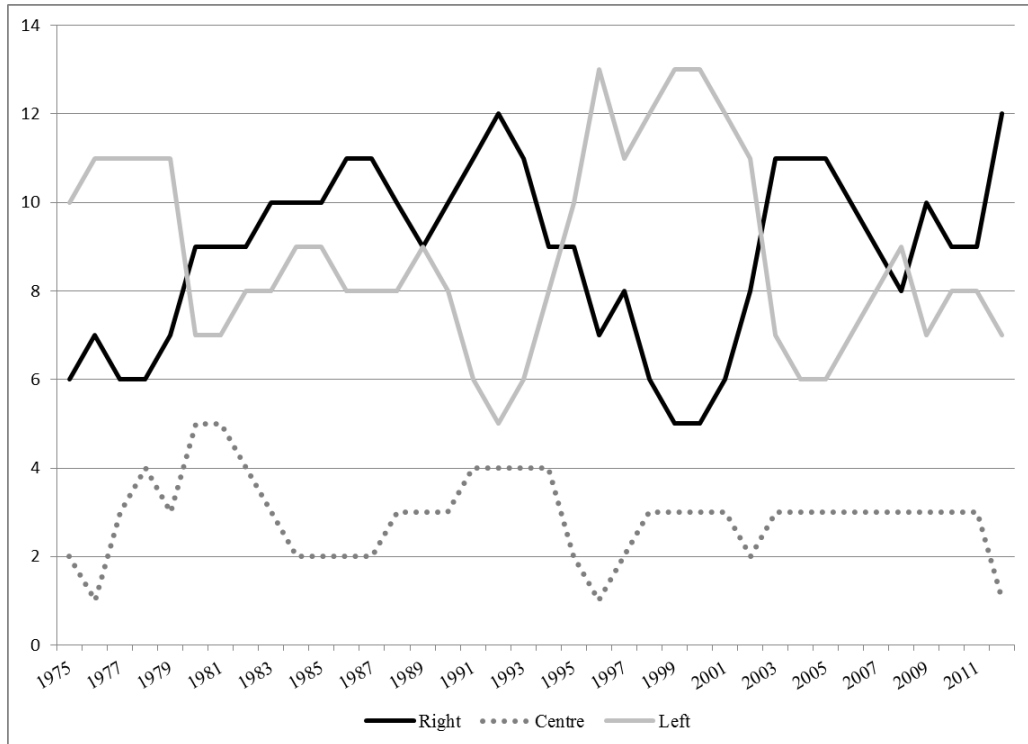


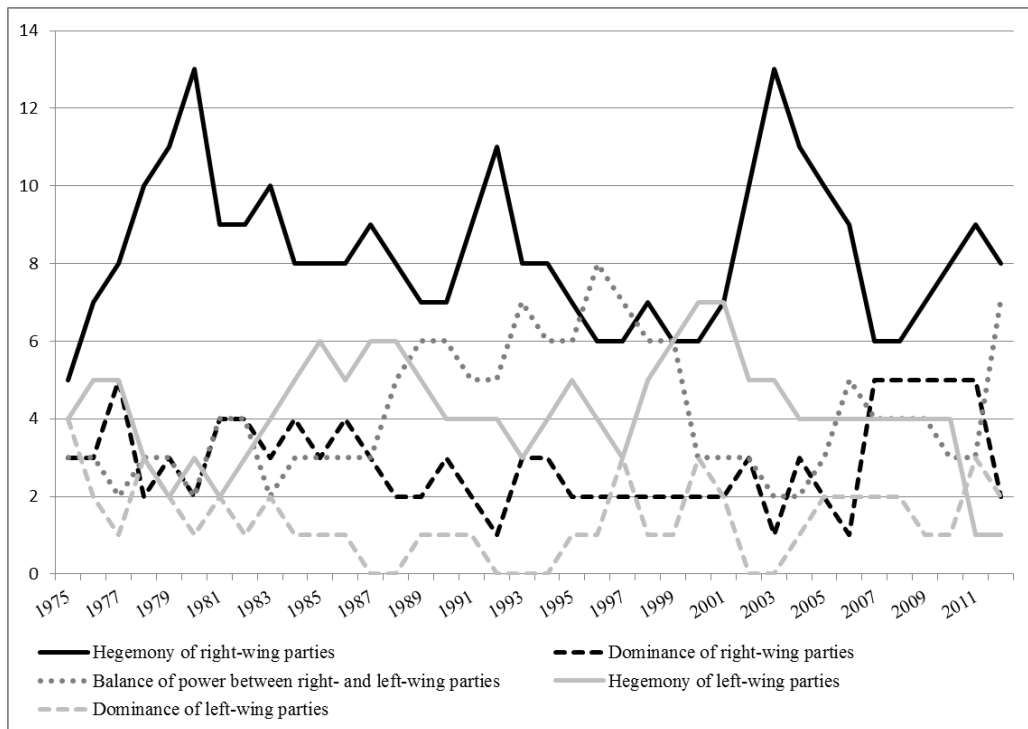**Figure 7: Polical orientation of cabinet parties (CPDS variable) over time in 21 countries**

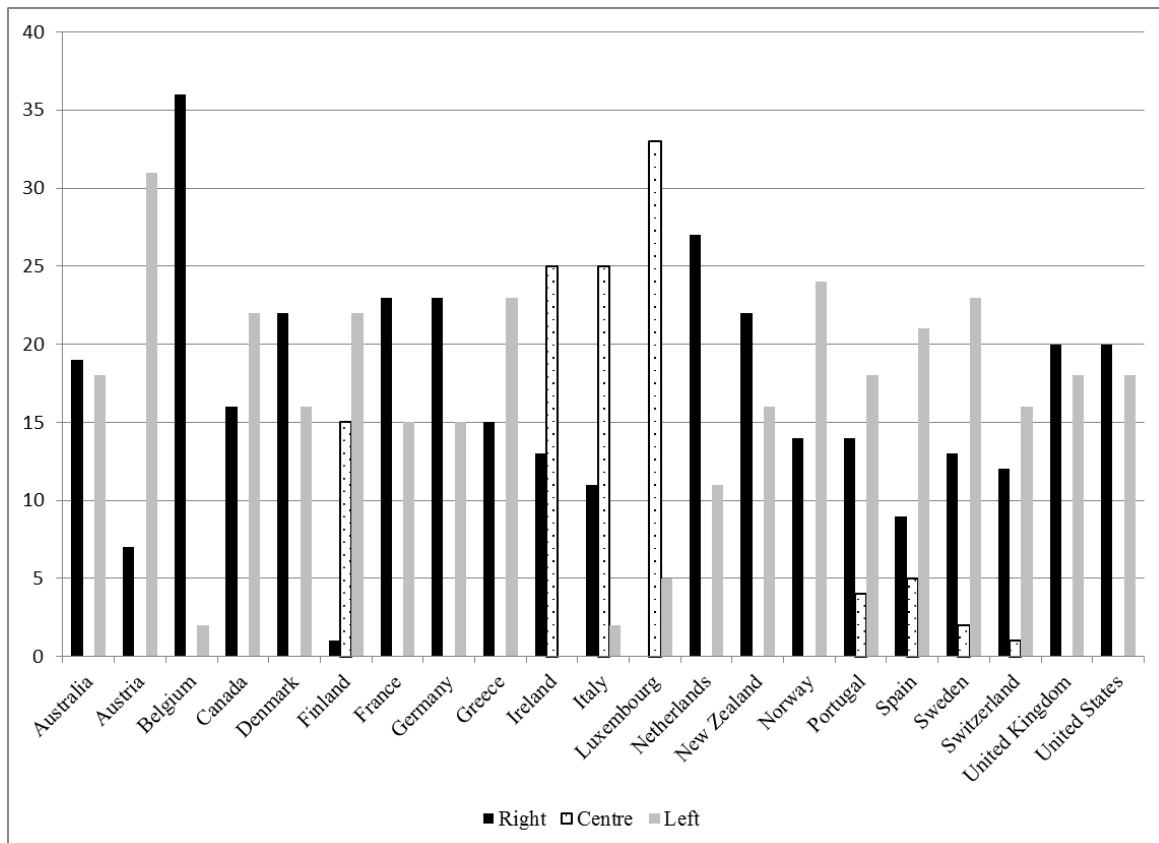**Figure 8: Polical orientation of largest governmental party (DPI variable), 1975–2012, by country**



■ Right   □ Centre   ■ Left

**Figure 9: Polical orientation of cabinet parties (CPDS variable), 1975–2012, by country**



■ Hegemony of right-wing parties          □ Dominance of right-wing parties
□ Balance of power between right- and left-wing parties   ■ Hegemony of left-wing parties
□ Dominance of left-wing parties
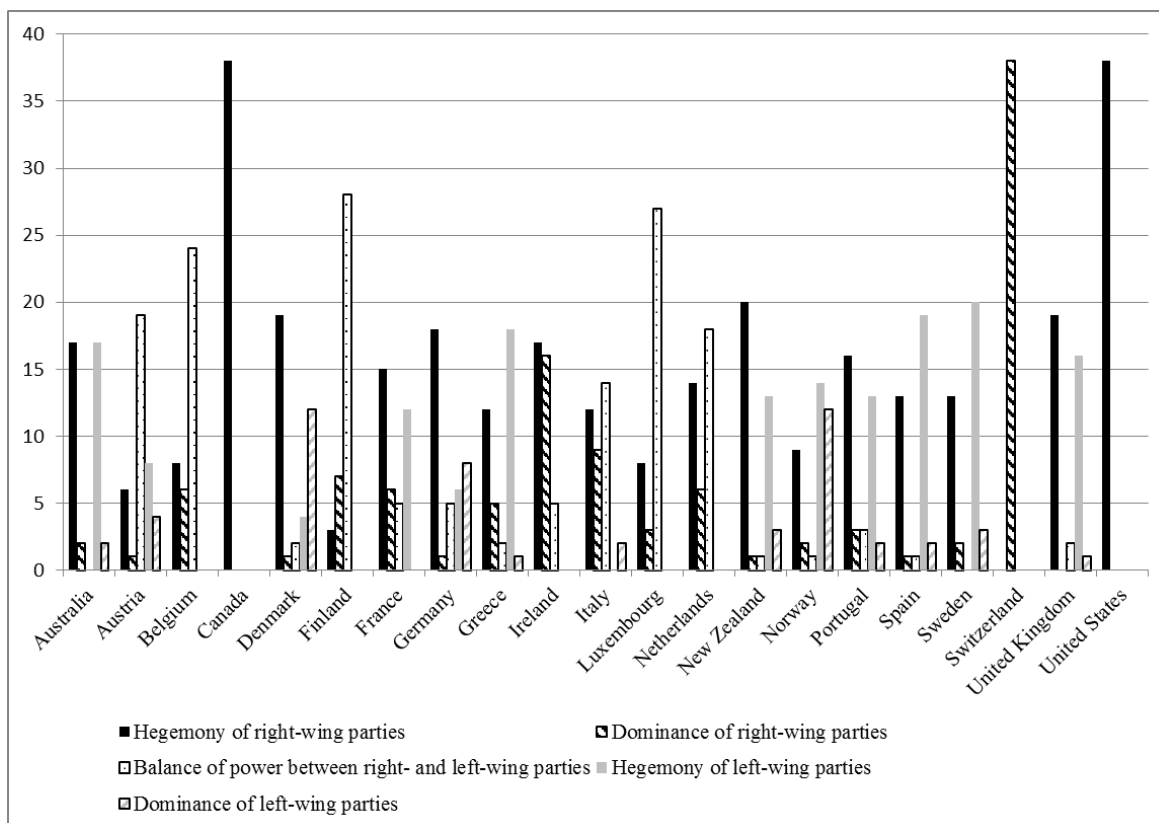
**Table 6: DEMIG POLICY codebook (excerpt)**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Border and land control** | Codes policy measures that regulate external and internal border controls aiming at securing the national territory. It is not limited to controls at the borders and includes issues of surveillance, detention and sanctions of fraudulent acts. |
| **Legal entry and stay** | Codes policy measures that regulate the legal entry to and stay in a territory of a migrant category. This includes all issues related to entry and stay permits, be they for travel or immigration purposes, as well as regularisations. Residency (except rules on permanent residency) is not dealt with separately, as it is often a corollary of the entry visa/permits. We do not distinguish between temporary and long-term permits, as their definitions vary considerably across countries. |
| **Integration** | Codes policy measures that regulate the post-entry rights or affect other aspects of integration of a migrant category. This also includes policy measures that aim at regulating the state's relations to its citizens living abroad, as well as their descendants. |
| **Exit** | Codes policy measures that regulate the (forced or voluntary) exit or return from a territory of a migrant category. |
| | |
| **All migrants** | Codes policy measures that target all migrants (either immigrants or emigrants), irrespective of their legal status or personal characteristics, as well as travellers, permanent residents or citizens. |
| **Labour migrants** | Codes policy measures that target all workers, irrespective of their skill level, as well as workers who are either explicitly labelled as low-skilled or who will work in occupations that do not require more than secondary education, such as seasonal workers, working holiday makers, domestic workers, or construction workers. |
| **Family migrants** | Codes policy measures that target children, spouses and/or other relatives of citizens and/or migrants, including those of high-skilled migrant workers, international students, irregular migrants or refugees and asylum seekers. |

| | |
|---|---|
| **High-skilled workers, students and investors** | Codes policy measures that target (a) workers who are either explicitly labelled as skilled/high-skilled or who will work in occupations that require more than secondary education, such as doctors, engineers, researchers, ICTs or workers with occupations listed on the respective national shortage list; (b) international students; or (c) people in occupations based on wealth and trade, such as investors or business people, including entrepreneurs. |
| **Irregular migrants** | Codes policy measures that target irregular migrants or undocumented individuals. This category can also include irregular workers. |
| **Refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable people** | Codes policy measures that target refugees, asylum seekers and/or other vulnerable people such as people seeking humanitarian protection, unaccompanied minors or victims of trafficking. This category can also include rejected asylum seekers. |

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