

What Motivates the Gatekeepers? Explaining Governing Party Preferences on Immigration

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Most scholarship on immigration politics is made up of isolated case studies or cross-disciplinary work that does not build on existing political science theory. This study attempts to remedy this shortcoming in three ways: (1) we derive theories from the growing body of immigration literature, to hypothesize about why political parties would be more or less open to immigration; (2) we link these theories to the broader political science literature on parties and institutions; and (3) we construct a data set on the determinants of immigration politics, covering 18 developed countries from 1987 to 1999. Our primary hypothesis is that political institutions shape immigration politics by facilitating or constraining majoritarian sentiment (which is generally opposed to liberalizing immigration). Our analysis finds that in political systems where majoritarianism is constrained by institutional "checks," governing parties support immigration more strongly, even when controlling for a broad range of alternative explanations.

Human migration has become perhaps the most pressing political problem of the twenty-first century. In many developed countries, publics and elites alike consistently rank immigration as one of the most important political problems facing the nation (Lahav 1997). Not only does immigration reshape politics in its own right, it also intersects with other pressing issues of the era: security, terrorism, and globalization. Globalization concerns not only flows of capital, goods, and services across borders, but also human flows. And in an insecure world, states and publics tend to view these flows as threats, despite the huge gains in economic prosperity generated by immigration (Huysmans 2005; Rudolph 2003; Simon 1989; Weiner 1995).

Despite a long-term trend of possible convergence in the developed world's immigration policies, important policy differences still exist across countries and across time (Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield 1994; Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005). Some developed countries, such as Ireland and Spain, have only recently become *destinations* for migrants.

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These countries are still adjusting to the political realities caused by foreign-looking faces on the streets. Other countries are attempting to chart a unique course vis-à-vis immigration, for example, Japan's insistence on ethnic purity, the United States' green card "lottery," or Canada's points system, awarding special status to immigrants who can invest money or provide much-needed skills.

Immigration has become more and more politicized in recent decades, and political parties are staking out divergent preferences on how to deal with immigration (Lahav 2004; Layton-Henry 1992; McLaren 2001; Messina 1989; Schain 1985). What can explain these divergent preferences? As the literature cited in the next section demonstrates, many factors have been proposed as potential causes of immigration-policy preferences. National history and identity may uniquely shape partisan preferences in each country. Structural factors, such as economics and inward migration pressures, induce policy preferences regardless of national particularities or party politics. Political ideology may push policymakers on the Left to seek out immigrants as potential voters, or cause parties of the Right to appeal to anti-immigrant sentiment. Alternatively, all "mainstream" parties may seek to avert challenges from far-Right parties by restricting immigration as much as possible. Many variants of these arguments have been empirically tested, but usually in only one country or region, or brief time period. Such studies are helpful in that they illuminate the particular dynamics of important cases and trace the processes by which immigration shapes politics.

However, generalizing about the political dynamics of immigration policy issues is now possible, thanks to the work others have done. Given that immigration has been steadily growing in political salience for more than a decade, and given the amount of literature that now exists, we propose that a macro-level study can usefully pull together these insights and test their arguments against each other. It is time for scholars of immigration politics to take a bird's-eye view of the situation, looking back over recent history (as immigration flows have increased across the globe in the past several decades), and looking across developed countries in *all* regions. Because much of the existing literature treats certain countries, cultures, or groups as having a unique role in immigration politics, the question one must address is whether the policy preferences of ruling parties vis-à-vis immigration respond to the same pressures across time and countries. Is there a general political dynamic that holds? Does this dynamic have relevance for the study of politics overall? Can immigration politics expand our understanding of political party behavior or political institutions? This study takes arguments drawn from the multitude of existing case studies, and the few macro-level studies already existing, and tests them against actual policy positions of political parties. Only by doing so can we assess the relative causal weight of factors such as political ideology, political institutions, macroeconomics, immigration inflows, and national histories.

The study of immigration can be conducted within comparative politics research programs, thereby improving understanding of the politics of this issue and also providing a more informed understanding of contemporary politics, especially of the relation between public opinion and partisan political divides. It is time that scholars of immigration politics begin to position themselves within the broader discipline, testing theories derived from politics in general, and seeing if they hold in an area that some deem idiosyncratic. This study explicitly connects immigration politics with the vast literature on party behavior and the potential impact of institutional factors like checks and veto points.

The next section lays out a theory of how political institutions condition the preferences of political actors vis-à-vis immigration. Specifically, we seek to understand the immigration preferences of governing parties (the “gatekeepers”). We propose that the institutional matrix within which parties compete for office shapes the gatekeeper’s preference profile. While we also test whether factors such as ideology and economics play a role, the institutional focus is valuable for linking our study with the broader discipline, given that past studies of immigration have ignored the impact of political institutions across countries and time periods. The central argument of the article, to be elaborated on later, attempts to solve the well-known puzzle that the median voter in developed countries tends to prefer restrictive immigration policy, yet some countries have policies that are a great deal more liberal than public opinion would appear to tolerate (Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield 1994). Our answer to this puzzle is that *institutional* factors in a given polity determine the degree to which anti-immigration political actors can actually gain a voice, and can direct policy preferences toward restriction. Some systems give majoritarian (anti-immigrant) sentiment a voice, while other systems check this sentiment and allow proimmigration political forces to capture party preferences. After laying out the logic of this theory, this article uses existing literature to derive three other broad sets of explanations for *governing parties’ preferences on immigration* (henceforth, GPPI): ideological, structural, and national-historical. All four explanations are then tested empirically, using a comprehensive database spanning 18 developed countries over more than a decade (1987–1999). After conducting a time-series cross-sectional (TSCS) analysis, the conclusion reflects on the specific empirical findings and offers some final remarks about the study’s relevance outside the realm of immigration.

An Institutional Theory of Immigration Policy Preferences

Several key insights from the political party literature can inform the analysis of what motivates parties on the issue of immigration. The “mandate thesis” understands political parties as organizations that link voter preferences with political outcomes (Klingemann, Hofferbert, and Budge 1994). Political parties compete in a political marketplace, and

governments deliver public policies in exchange for political support (i.e., votes). Based on this definition, one would expect that immigration will induce party competition. In general, three mechanisms influence how political parties take up new issues. First, parties may respond to new issues by assimilating them into existing cleavages (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002). Second, parties may position themselves on the immigration issue by responding to the policy preferences of their constituency (Milner and Judkins 2004; Schmidt 1996). Third, political parties may strategically select new issues in order to alter the dimensions of party competition (Budge 1994). Some political parties may ignore or even suppress immigration issues in order to preserve the status quo, whereas others introduce immigration as an issue that promises electoral returns.

This assumed linkage between voters and political parties is contingent upon two underlying requirements. First, voters' preferences must be easily translatable into partisan support at the electoral level. This may be problematic for three reasons: voters are not well informed about issues (Downs 1957), voters' issue attitudes are not well developed (Converse 1964), and voters face the problem of multidimensionality (Arrow 1963). Second, policy choices mandated by voters need to be converted into public policy at the legislative level. This is not an easy task for political parties because institutional rules intervene. Instead of the simple mandate theory, this second requirement signifies that institutions structure the strategic choices of partisan competition. Institutions, as a "structure of political opportunities," present a unique set of incentives in different national settings. Consequently, the institutional environment may constrain preferences and bias the party's behavior (Müller and Strøm 2004; Schlesinger 1991).

Applying these criticisms to the immigration issue, the incentives of the "gatekeepers" and constraints on their immigration policy preferences need to be understood as multifaceted. Based on a wealth of empirical findings showing that anti-immigration public *sentiment* prevails across the developed world,¹ this study argues that *institutional* factors in a given polity determine the degree to which anti-immigration political actors can actually gain a voice, and direct policy preferences toward restriction. Political institutions affect the preferences of political parties (Cox 1997; Lijphart 1994; North 1990; Rae 1971). Parties are entrepreneurial, and competition with other parties shapes policy preferences, whether by calculation on the part of leaders or by internal factionalism (Adams and Merrill 1999; Budge and Farlie 1983; Feigl-Heihs 2004; Volkens and Klingemann 2002). This competition is conditioned by political institutions, because institutions favor some strategies over others. Some political systems tend toward fractionalization, or polarization, whereas others produce centrism (Kirchheimer 1966; Lijphart 1994; Sartori 1976).

Therefore, the ways in which the public's anti-immigration sentiment manifests itself in the preferences of political parties are likely to be con-

ditioned by political institutions (Hollifield 1992). Previous scholarship concurs that public opinion regarding immigration tends to be relatively restrictionist (Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield 1994; Fetzer 2000; Guiraudon 2000; Hansen 2000; Kessler and Freeman 2005; Simon and Alexander 1993). Although opinion can be driven by differential demographic, economic, identity-based, and ideological factors, a general trend of majoritarian anti-immigration sentiment is common in the developed world (Kessler and Freeman 2005). In a recent review article, Cornelius and Rosenblum (2005, 104) summarize the existing evidence by stating that a “substantial body of political science literature examines general public responses to immigration, which are characterized throughout the industrialized world by opposition to existing immigration levels and negative feelings about the most recent cohort of migrants.”

And yet the ways in which this anti-immigration sentiment is reflected in the preferences of political parties will vary according to political institutions (Hollifield 1992). The following hypothesis can explain this variation: the more that national political institutions restrain and check majority sentiment, the less anti-immigration ruling party preferences will be. What is the logic of such a hypothesis? If we assume that a majority of the public holds anti-immigration views, then the most anti-immigration *ruling parties* would be found in countries where preferences are freely transmitted from publics to political outcomes (and where extreme anti-immigration parties are allowed to compete in the political arena). In turn, extreme pressure would be placed on mainstream parties, placing immigration higher on the political agenda. One would expect such countries to have *PR systems* (because extreme parties would find it easier to gain representation), to have low or nonexistent *electoral thresholds* (because extreme parties would again find it easier to gain representation), to have an absence of significant *judicial review* (because courts tend to defend minority rights against majoritarian sentiment), to have a paucity of *checks* on parliamentary power (because veto players restrain majoritarianism), to be highly *polarized* (because a more extreme faction could tap anti-immigrant sentiment), and to be highly *fractionalized* (because a plethora of small parties could use immigration as an issue on which to compete).

This study tests whether overall “checks” on government power, measured as the number of veto players, can have a significant impact on policy preferences. Not all checks reside in the electoral system. Some of these checks include the ability of courts to scrutinize and overturn government policy. Although judicial review does not affect party competition directly, it can exert a positive effect on GPPI. This is because political parties can obviously anticipate judicial blockages of their legislation, and might shift their preferences in order to deliver on tenable manifesto promises. At the legislative level, coalition bargaining and agenda control, which stem from a party’s electoral fortunes and ideology alike, are important influences on partisan policy positions (Müller and Strøm 2004). A political system with more veto players offers more lobbying

opportunities for interest groups, such as proimmigrant nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and businesses that favor immigration as a cheap labor source. On the other hand, a lack of institutional constraints can force parties to be more majoritarian and more entrepreneurial, catering to “raw” public opinion rather than powerful groups (such as business lobbies) with an interest in liberal immigration policies (Freeman 2002).

Thus, the hypothesis is:

The fewer the institutional constraints, the less positive is GPPI.²

An Ideological Theory of Immigration Policy Preferences

How relevant is the Left–Right divide to the desired immigration policy outcomes of a given political actor? Some scholars have found that partisan preferences are determined by partisan cleavages (Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002; Milner and Judkins 2004). On the immigration issue, one might expect that politicians of the Left are inherently proimmigrant, while politicians of the Right are inherently anti-immigrant, irrespective of political institutions, structural factors, or national history (Ireland 2004). One likely justification for this argument revolves around political capital. Parties of the Left normally see immigrants as potential “core” constituencies, and are thus more likely to perceive gains from an expanding immigrant population. This explanation becomes questionable, however, when one considers that not all immigrants actually vote. Not only are political participation rates generally lower for immigrants, but immigrants have difficulty obtaining citizenship (and thus voting rights) in many countries. In Germany, before the citizenship law was reformed, most (non-EU) foreigners with legal residence could only vote in local elections, if at all. A similar situation still exists in Japan and other countries with restrictive naturalization policies. In short, the political capital argument would hold that Left parties are more likely to prefer proimmigrant *integration* policies (such as legislation prohibiting discrimination, or making it easier for immigrants to acquire citizenship). However, parties of the Left cannot afford to be more generous in terms of immigration *control* policies (regulating the borders and admissions of new immigrants), because short-term public backlashes offset any future gains from an expanded immigrant electorate (Givens and Luedtke 2005).

But not all ideological explanations revolve around political capital. Ideology in and of itself is hypothesized to be a “pure” motivator, given that Left parties tend to favor society’s disadvantaged elements. Lahav’s work shows that “partisans of the left are more likely to endeavor to amend social inequalities and to extend immigrant rights . . . and to be open to increased immigration than their colleagues on the right” (2004, 133). But even if Left parties are more liberal only in *some* areas, and are equally restrictive to Right parties in other policy areas, we would still expect to see a pattern. That is, we would still expect to see Left parties systematically advocating policy preferences that are more proimmigrant

in nature (Ireland 2004). In sum, the following hypothesis can be put forward. This hypothesis builds on literature that immigration, just like most other policy issues, may be subsumed under a Left–Right ideological scale (Huber and Inglehart 1995; Poole and Rosenthal 1997). As Downs (1957) noted, placing issues on a single dimension is the most useful arrangement for rationally ignorant voters and effective parties.

The more ideologically Rightist governing parties are, the less positive is GPPI.

A Structural Theory of Immigration Policy Preferences

Research on the determinants of international migration points to two types of structural factors that may influence partisan preferences: economic and demographic. First, based on the assumption of rational actors, immigration might be motivated by economic conditions. Most immigration, whether legal or illegal, is for the purposes of employment and economic opportunity (Freeman 2002; Simon 1989). Even in the cases of family reunification and asylum-seeking, the basic choice to emigrate (as well as the choice of destination) can be made with economic opportunity in mind. The degree to which immigrants will trigger public opposition, and thus potentially shift party preferences, will depend at least partially upon the economy's capacity to absorb another worker and/or consumer. Indeed, political economy scholars propose a straightforward relationship between macroeconomic factors and immigration preferences. Freeman (2002), for instance, argues that the interests of business are a vital factor in shaping immigration policy. Pure neoclassical trade theory, when applied to immigration, implies that economic expansion stimulates demand for immigrant labor (Simon 1989). Thus, policy preferences would be expected to become more liberal if gross domestic product (GDP) growth rises, or if unemployment goes down. In a liberal state, this relationship might be based on client politics (Freeman 2002); on straightforward, self-interest, "pocketbook" voting (Kinder, Adams, and Gronke 1989); or on public evaluation of the economy at large (Sears and Citrin 1982).

Second, instead of economic conditions, social and political structures may contribute to migration. Indeed, political asylum and family reunification have become the dominant immigration categories in countries with restrictive policy preferences, as a result of these countries' obligations under international and domestic laws. Although immigrants certainly seek economic opportunity, research has shown that immigration flows are not always "rational," in that they may not directly respond to objective economic incentives (Hollifield 1992). Thus, immigration policy preferences might respond to the actual societal presence of immigrants, more than responding to indirect pressures such as economics, ideology, or political institutions (Givens and Luedtke 2005). Some authors have found evidence that the presence of immigrants in society might directly increase support for anti-immigration political movements, which could then be expected to force policy in a more restrictive direction (Givens

2005; Lewis-Beck and Mitchell 1993; Mayer 2002). In general, then, there are two kinds of structural pressures on GPPI: economic factors and numbers of immigrants previously entering the country. The following hypothesis captures this influence:

As unemployment and/or the number of foreigners entering a country goes up, or as GDP growth goes down, GPPI is less positive.

A National Path Dependence Theory of Immigration-Policy Preferences

Particularities of national historical experience undoubtedly condition immigration-policy preferences. This is especially the case because immigration resonates so deeply with issues of national identity, membership, and belonging. Because immigration can define *who* the nation is, the national identity and experience in a given country are likely to be predictors of the desired type of immigration policy. One example is Japan. Despite Japan's high levels of economic growth and its relatively liberal political institutions, Japan has not experienced large-scale immigration to the same degree as Europe, North America, Australia, or New Zealand. This development can be located in the particular national identity and national experience of Japan (Weiner 1995).

Two important factors of national-historical experience, which might be expected to condition immigration preferences in predictable ways, are histories of colonialism and/or being settled *by* immigrants in recent history. In the former category, many colonial powers accepted a "special" relationship with their overseas colonial populations, even after independence. While not always welcomed with open arms, these colonial populations certainly received preferential treatment in many cases. Hansen (2002) shows how large Algerian and Asian populations held French and British citizenship, respectively, because of the path dependence set in motion by colonial policies. Granted, colonial populations often triggered restrictionist backlashes. However, these backlashes failed to eliminate all of the rights and privileges held by colonial populations. Additionally, colonial nation-states in general were often forced to deal with "diversity" much earlier than their noncolonial counterparts, as a result of factors such as the education of colonial elites in the *metropole*, mixed marriages, and increased interactions with other cultures (however imperialist and exploitative in nature). This experience could arguably result in more tolerant preferences in modern times.

In the category of settler nations, countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which were largely built by immigrants in recent centuries, are said to have a unique relationship with immigration. Regardless of economics or political ideology, nations that were settled by immigrants should be more comfortable with the presence of "outsiders," and political parties in these nations would be more likely to employ a national immigration mythology, rather than calling for

“purity.” Even though settler nations went through periods of blatantly exclusionary and racist policy, one might expect to see a slightly more tolerant pattern in modern times, drawing upon discourses and myths of immigration. These nations are also said to have high levels of social mobility, which may lend itself to increased tolerance of immigration (Meissner 1992).

The following hypothesis tests for these effects:

If countries have histories as a colonial power and/or as a settler nation, GPPI is more positive.

Data and Methodology

In order to test these competing hypotheses regarding GPPI, the analysis examines 18 OECD countries for the time period between 1987 and 1999.³ A great advantage of this setup is the ability to assess the variation of GPPI across time and space. By reaching back to the mid-1980s, the study can evaluate changes in GPPI for more than a decade. This time period includes the dramatic rise of immigration on the political agenda, and also covers countries’ periods of transition toward becoming migration destinations.⁴

To our knowledge, this is the first data set that incorporates partisan preferences on immigration, as well as political ideology and institutional and structural constraints. The yearly data for the empirical explanations of GPPI are drawn together from four main sources. First, Cusack and Engelhardt (2002) collected data that entails information on the ideology and strength of parties, governments, and legislatures. Second, Beck et al. (2001) provide a data set on political institutions that includes information on veto players, political polarization, legislative fractionalization, electoral thresholds, and the presence of proportional representation. Third, the presence of judicial review is provided by Huber, Ragin, and Stephens (1997). Finally, the OECD collects data on several structural variables, including inflows of foreigners, unemployment rates, and economic growth.⁵ These diverse sources provide the data for 18 countries for the 1987–1999 time periods. A summary of the variables, their sources, and the basic descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1.

The theoretical concepts introduced earlier are operationalized in the following fashion. GPPI—the dependent variable of this research—is defined as positive-policy position statements toward minorities in party manifestos of governing parties. This measure is based on coding of party manifestos by the Comparative Manifesto Project (Budge et al. 2002). The response of each individual governing party is then weighted by decimal share of their seats. The variable ranges from 0% positive mentions—which occur in several countries including Japan—to 5.6% by the Canadian government in the early 1990s.

The measure’s broad focus on “minorities” raises obvious reliability and/or validity concerns. However, one can expect that this measure

TABLE 1
Description of Variables and Their Sources

Variable Name	Median	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	Description	Source
<i>Govprefim</i>	0.80	1.32	1.39	0	5.6	<i>Governing parties' preference on immigration (GPP)</i> . The measure expresses the percent of positive policy statements about minorities in each governing party's manifesto. The percentage is then weighted by the decimal vote share of each governing party.	Computed by the authors from data provided by (1)
<i>Checks</i>	4	4.59	1.87	2	16	<i>Number of checks and balances</i> . The variable is based on a formula that first counts the number of veto players, based on whether the executive and legislative chamber(s) are controlled by different parties in presidential systems and on the number of parties in the government coalition for parliamentary systems. Then the formula is adjusted for the fact that certain electoral rules affect the cohesiveness of governing coalitions. For a more detailed description see Beck et al. (2001).	Provided by the database of political institutions assembled by (2)
<i>Polariz</i>	2	1.43	0.85	0	2	<i>Legislative polarization</i> . The variable assesses the maximum polarization between the executive party and the four principal parties of the legislature on a Left–Right ideology scale.	Assembled by (2) and updated by the authors
<i>Judrev</i>	1	0.73	0.44	0	1	<i>Judicial review</i> . An indicator for whether a political system has judicial review (coded as 1) or not (coded as 0).	Initially collected by (3) and updated by the authors
<i>Frac</i>	0.72	0.70	0.11	0.41	0.88	<i>Fractionalization</i> . The probability that two deputies picked at random from the legislature will be of different parties.	Provided by (2)
<i>Majority</i>	52.91	55.19	13.14	33.46	87.99	<i>Size of the majority</i> . The number of government seats in both the lower and—where applicable—the upper house divided by the total number of seats.	Computed from data provided by (1)

TABLE 1
Continued

Variable Name	Median	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	Description	Source
<i>Citeocg</i>	-1.55	-0.15	16.00	-37.23	33.60	<i>Ideology of government.</i> The measure is based on the cabinet's center of political gravity, which takes into account the governing parties' ideological positions based on expert judgment and the decimal vote share of each party. Theoretically, the measure ranges from -100 (far Left) to +100 (far Right).	The variable <i>citeocg</i> based on <i>rile</i> in the data set by (1)
<i>Ideo</i>	-0.66	-0.51	9.39	-30.60	24.45	<i>Ideology of legislature.</i> The average of the center of political gravity in the lower and the upper houses. The center of political gravity weights ideological preferences by decimal vote shares. Ideological preferences on Left (-100) to Right (+100) are based on expert judgment.	Computed by the authors based on variables provided by (1)
<i>Thresh</i>	0	1.03	1.89	0	5	<i>Electoral threshold.</i> The percent needed to obtain a seat in the legislature.	Assembled by (2)
<i>Pr</i>	1	0.83	0.38	0	1	<i>Proportional representation.</i> A dichotomous variable that indicates whether (coded as 1) or no (coded as 0) a political system uses proportional representation.	Assembled by (2)
<i>Unemp</i>	6.39	6.48	3.31	0.44	16.62	<i>Unemployment rate.</i>	Collected by (4)
<i>Egrowt</i>	2.70	2.81	2.68	-7.10	18.30	<i>Economic growth rate.</i> Real gross domestic product, percent change on year earlier, adjusted for inflation.	Collected by (4)
<i>Foinfl</i>	4.55	6.88	6.84	0.37	38.58	<i>Inflow of foreigners per thousand of total population.</i>	Collected by (4) and adjusted by the authors for population size
<i>Colo</i>	0	0.38	0.49	0	1	<i>Colonizing country.</i>	Assembled by the authors
<i>Sett</i>	0	0.20	0.40	0	1	<i>Settler country.</i>	Assembled by the authors

Note: The sources are: (1) Cusack and Engelhardt (2002), *Parties, Governments and Legislatures Data Set*; (2) Beck et al. (2001), "New Tools in Comparative Political Economy: The Database of Political Institutions," *World Bank Economic Review* 15:1; (3) Evelyn Huber, Charles Ragin and John D. Stephens (1997), *Comparative Welfare State Data Set*; and (4) Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (various years), *OECD Economic Outlook* (various years) and *Trends in International Migration: SOPEMI*.

tracks immigration preferences quite well. First, the coding of “minorities” was limited to only non-“economic” and non-“demographic” minorities. Thus, the coding was fairly narrow, explicitly covering immigrants and refugees, while *excluding* women, the elderly, youth, linguistic minorities, and any other “special demographic interest group” (Budge et al. 2002). Thus, for example, the *Quebecois* in Canada or the Basques in Spain were *not* included in the “minorities” measure. Secondly, the only other minority groups significantly covered by the coding (handicapped and homosexuals) exist in all countries and time periods. Thus, the non-immigrant share of “minorities” will not significantly vary across countries or time periods, giving a relatively reliable and valid indicator vis-à-vis immigration.

To test this assertion, let us measure some of the coding against what we know from the literature. Taking the extreme cases, it makes sense that Japan would score zero, because their immigration policy is the most restrictive in the developed world. It also makes sense that Canada would score highly, given that Canada’s immigration policy is considered a liberal outlier. What about other important cases, both in government and opposition parties? The coding for France gives the National Front a zero in every instance, while the Communists receive the highest score. In Italy, *Forza Italia*, the National Alliance, and the Northern League (not surprisingly), all get zeroes. In the most recent German sample, the CDU-CSU score a measly 0.47, while the Greens get a near-Canadian 4.5. In Austria, the Freedom Party gets zeroes while the Social Democrat score is consistently positive. In the 1992 UK election, the Labour score is double that of the Conservatives (1.6 vs. 0.8). American Democrats inevitably score higher than Republicans. All of these findings match what we already know about comparative differences. Therefore, the dependent variable, GPPI, can be taken as an indicator of partisan preferences toward immigrants, particularly if the analysis finds correlations with the independent variables (because many of these variables would make no obvious impact on sentiment toward homosexuals or the handicapped).

The two independent variables that measure ideology are created in a similar fashion as GPPI. A government’s ideological position on the Left–Right continuum is based on Cusack and Engelhardt’s (2002) “cabinet’s center of political gravity” score, which weighs a party’s ideological position by seat share. The legislature’s ideological position is the average of the center of political gravity of the lower house, and where applicable, the average of the center of political gravity of the upper house. In the Cusack and Engelhardt data set, the ideological position of each party is based on the ideology index that combines information by Castles and Mair (1984), Huber and Inglehart (1995), and Laver and Hunt (1992). Values range from –100 (far Left) to +100 (far Right). In the sample, the overall ideological scores are on average centrist, that is, the overall mean is close to zero. The cabinets’ ideological range stretches from the second

Reagan administration (score of roughly 34) to the Finnish government led by the Social Democrats in the late 1980s (about -37) and the legislatures' scores fluctuate between 24 (Austria in 1998 and 1999) and -31 (Finland in the late 1980s).

In addition to ideological positions, the collected data allow for a test of the impact of specific institutional constraints, as well as a composite of these constraints. First, the hypothesis purports that electoral rules influence GPPI. Two pertinent aspects of electoral rules are incorporated in the model. The analysis identifies whether a country utilizes proportional representation as a tool to translate votes into seats, and the minimum vote share a party must receive in order to gain representation in the legislature, that is, threshold.

A second facet of institutional constraints arises out of the makeup of the legislative body. The analysis incorporates three measures to capture legislative features: (1) the *fractionalization* of political parties within the legislature, that is, probability that two deputies picked at random from the legislature will be of different parties; (2) the fraction of seats in the legislatures held by the governing parties, that is, the size of the *majority*; and (3) a measure of *polarization* between the executive and the four principal legislative parties with regard to political ideology.

The third institutional constraint comprises the checks and balances of a political system, which limit the discretion of governing parties. This relies on a Beck et al.'s count of the number of veto players in a political system in order to measure a country's overall institutional constraints. This measure accounts for "whether the veto players are independent of each other, as determined by the level of electoral competitiveness in a system, their respective party affiliations, and the electoral rules" (Beck et al. 2001). The measure is flexible enough to encompass the number of veto points, partisan preferences, and preference heterogeneity for both presidential and parliamentary systems. The peculiarities of the French political system result in a high amount of checks (e.g., nine for the Socialist-led government of the early 1990s), while Portugal's PSD (single party) government faced merely two institutional checks during the same period. Finally, the analysis accounts for the presence or absence of judicial review within a political system.

Three straightforward measures that capture the structural constraints on GPPI are also included in the empirical model. First, the impact of macroeconomics on preferences is operationalized as unemployment rates and GDP growth. Second, because scholarly works indicate that the inflow of foreigners in itself may trigger shifts in policy preferences and outcomes, the analysis uses a measure of the number of foreigners entering a country per thousand of total population based on OECD data. Given that policymakers and political parties rely on past information in order to develop current policy positions, the three structural variables are lagged by a year. In order to assess arguments of national path dependency, two dichotomous variables indicate whether a country is a settler nation

(Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) and/or a colonial power (Belgium, France, Japan, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States).

Determinants of GPPI

In order to test the four sets of hypotheses regarding the determinants of GPPI, the study uses a TSCS data set for 18 countries for the time period from 1987 to 1999. Given the TSCS nature of the data set, problems of heteroskedasticity and contemporaneous correlation across panels need to be considered. The analysis follows Beck's advice and estimates the models using an ordinary least squares regression with panel-corrected standard errors (Beck 2001; Beck and Katz 1995). Employing panel-corrected standard errors allows one to simultaneously take into account spatial and temporal concerns within those data. Furthermore, both a Lagrange multiplier test as well as Wooldridge's test for autocorrelation in panel data indicate the presence of first-order serial correlation (Wooldridge 2002). In order to remove serial correlation from the data, a one-period lagged dependent variable is included in all models. In the following, each of the four hypothesized constraints on GPPI are first tested individually and then jointly. Table 2 displays the regression analysis of these models. Regression diagnostics were conducted. These confirmed the results, and therefore are not shown here. As a result of a few missing values in the data set, 190 cases are used for all estimation.

The first model tests only the impact of institutional constraints on GPPI (*govprefim*). The most important result from the first model is that none of the *individual* institutional constraints have a meaningful impact on GPPI; only an increase in the *overall* number of checks and balances in the political system (*checks*) leads to a more positive GPPI. The regression results indicate that (as hypothesized) the effect of *checks* is positive within the 95% confidence interval. For the variables that operationalize three individual aspects of institutional constraints—judicial review, electoral rules, and legislative makeup—the sign of the regression coefficient points mostly in the hypothesized direction: an increase in judicial review (*judrev*), fractionalization (*frac*), the size of the governing majority (*majority*), and/or threshold (*thresh*) appears to lead to a more positive GPPI. The impact of proportional representation (*pr*) and a higher level of polarization of the legislature (*polariz*) appears to be negative *ceteris paribus*. However, none of the individual institutional constraints are significantly different from zero (at least with 95% confidence).

The second model, examining ideological constraints, casts doubt on the hypothesis that ideological predilections on the Left–Right continuum determine GPPI. The regression analysis shows that neither the effect of the ideology of the government (*cideocg*) nor the effect of the ideology of the legislature (*ideo*) is significant.

TABLE 2
**Determinants of Governing Parties' Preferences on Immigration. OLS
 Regression with Panel-Corrected Standard Errors for 18 Countries from 1987
 to 1999**

Independent Variables	Model 1: Institutional Constraints	Model 2: Ideological Constraints	Model 3: Structural Constraints	Model 4: National-Historical Constraints	Model 5: All Constraints
<i>Govprefim</i> _{<i>t</i>-1}	0.823 (0.64)	0.856 (0.68)	0.855 (0.72)	0.848 (0.66)	0.778** (0.73)
<i>Checks</i>	0.79* (0.39)				0.86* (0.46)
<i>Polariz</i>	-0.32 (0.62)				-0.66 (0.69)
<i>Judrev</i>	0.84 (0.258)				-0.44 (0.281)
<i>Frac</i>	0.538 (1.298)				1.668 (1.761)
<i>Majority</i>	0.05 (0.06)				0.02 (0.07)
<i>Thresh</i>	0.15 (0.26)				0.72* (0.40)
<i>Pr</i>	-0.337 (0.314)				-0.454 (0.320)
<i>Cideocg</i>		0.02 (0.05)			-0.03 (0.06)
<i>Ideo</i>		-0.07 (0.09)			-0.13 (0.09)
<i>Unemp</i> _{<i>t</i>-1}			-0.05 (0.14)		-0.18 (0.18)
<i>Egrowt</i> _{<i>t</i>-1}			0.05 (0.16)		0.11 (0.17)
<i>Foinfl</i> _{<i>t</i>-1}			0.04 (0.14)		0.09 (0.17)
<i>Colo</i>				0.70 (0.105)	0.168 (0.168)
<i>Sett</i>				0.119 (0.181)	0.499* (0.243)
<i>Constant</i>					-1.091 (1.136)
R ²	0.718	0.706	0.706	0.706	0.732
Wald χ^2 (df)	339.43** (8)	207.79** (3)	169.56** (3)	185.74** (3)	561.18** (14)
N	190	190	190	190	190

Note: Standard errors in parentheses.

*Significant at $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. All tests are one-tailed.

The third model analyzes the hypothesized structural theories. Specifically, it tests the independent effects of (one-year-lagged) unemployment rates (*unemp*), economic growth rates (*egrowt*), and the inflow of foreigners (*foinfl*) on GPPI. The sign of the regression coefficients for *egrowt* and *unemp*—but not for *foinfl*—are in the hypothesized direction. However, none of the structural variables' coefficients is statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level.

Model 4 tests the hypothesized national-historical variables. The sign of the regression results indicate that having been a colonizing power (*colo*) or a settler nation (*sett*) leads to a more positive GPPI, as hypothesized. Neither of the two national-historical variables are statistically significant at the 5% level.

The final model in Table 2 simultaneously tests the four alternative theories. As can be seen, the key findings from the four models are confirmed. As in all the previous models, the lagged dependent variable (*govprefim*) has a positive sign and is statistically significant at least at $p < 0.01$ and is positive. A theoretically more interesting result is that the number of checks and balances within a political system (*checks*) has a still positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) impact on GPPI *ceteris paribus*. The robustness of this result to the inclusion of other variables lends further support for the argument that the overall number of checks and balances makes a larger impact than any *individual* institutional factor. Of all other individual institutional constraints, such as judicial review or legislative makeup, only the threshold of the electoral system influences GPPI. The sign of the threshold variable is in the hypothesized direction. An increase in the percent of the threshold leads to a more positive policy statement on immigration by ruling parties.

Interestingly, when all constraints of policy positions on immigration by ruling parties are considered, the coefficient for the settler nation variable becomes significant at the 0.05 level. As hypothesized, ruling parties in settler nations, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, display, on average, a higher level of proimmigration policy positions than their nonsettler counterparts. Additionally, two remarkable null findings of the all-inclusive model are that neither the ideology of government and parliament, nor the past year's inflow of foreigners, have a statistically significant effect on GPPI. In short, the number of *checks and balances* placed upon governing parties is a primary determinant of their policy position on immigration.

In order to assess the strength of the theoretically interesting and statistically significant variables, Table 3 displays the impact of various parameters. GPPI is predicted by using the regression estimates of the full model and holding all variables except the specific variable of interest at their median. The predicted GPPI is then computed by letting the specific variable of interest take on values between its empirical minimum and maximum. Table 3 adds further support for the importance of veto points (*checks*) on GPPI. When *checks* moves from its minimum empirical value of 2 to its maximum of 16, the predicted GPPI increases by about 1.2 (i.e., nearly a quarter of GPPI's range). In comparison, when the electoral threshold increases by 5 percent, the predicted value of GPPI increases only about 0.4 when holding all other variables constant. Finally, being a settler nation raises the predicted GPPI by about 0.50. Taking both the statistical significance and the impact of all the various variables into account, it can be concluded that the composite institutional constraints,

TABLE 3
Interpretation of the Regression Results

Number of Checks and Balances (<i>checks</i>)	Predicted GPPI (<i>govprefim</i>)	Electoral Threshold (<i>thres</i>)	Predicted GPPI (<i>govprefim</i>)	Historical and International Constraints	Predicted GPPI (<i>govprefim</i>)
2	0.35	0	0.52	None	0.52
4	0.52	1	0.60	Colonizer	0.69
6	0.69	2	0.67	Settler nation	1.02
8	0.87	3	0.74	Colonizer and settler nation	1.19
10	1.04	4	0.81		
12	1.21	5	0.88		
14	1.38				
16	1.55				

Note: This table illustrates the estimated effect of a particular independent variable when holding all other variables at their median. Each counterfactual is based on assessing a variable across its empirical range. The median values are displayed in Table 1. GPPI, governing parties' preference on immigration.

measured here as the number of checks and balances, is apparently a major determinant of ruling parties' policy stances on immigration.

Conclusion

This study is the first empirical analysis of governing-party preferences on immigration to test multiple competing theories across a wide range of countries and years. Given that past immigration studies have been narrow in scope and have not engaged in dialogue with theories on political parties or institutions, our study attempted to test theory derived from political science literature across 18 developed countries from the period 1987–1999. While one may lose process-tracing focus by conducting such a macro-level study, it can enhance previous micro-level research by finding broad patterns, and testing whether previous hypotheses hold up in diverse cases.

This article tested four broad clusters of explanations for GPPI, assessing the causal predictors of the extent to which the platform of a governing party is pro or anti-immigrant. It was hypothesized that political-institutional factors are likely to have a large impact on GPPI, because public opinion tends to be anti-immigrant; yet previous research shows that elite preferences do not match this restrictive sentiment. The puzzle lies in the well-documented gap between public opinion and party preferences (Fetzer 2000; Freeman 1995). The institutional hypothesis is that the degree to which political institutions constrain majoritarianism will affect party preferences. In strongly majoritarian systems with few checks, party preferences are likely to match public opinion. In systems with

multiple veto players, however, party preferences are likely to move in a proimmigrant direction because political parties are shielded from negative public sentiments and are free to appease business and NGO lobbies (Freeman 2002). In response to this hypothesized logic, one might argue that parties facing multiple veto players would be free to take harsher views on immigration, knowing that their proposals would never be implemented. However, the literature supporting the view that parties are policy-seeking (as opposed to merely office/vote-seeking) holds that parties actually attempt to implement their platform promises (Müller and Strøm 2004; Strøm 1990).

This explanation is tested against competing hypotheses on a comprehensive data set, using TSCS analysis. Many immigration analyses have focused only on a single country or on multiple countries within Europe. Broad patterns of immigration policy preferences across all advanced industrial countries may exist, and thus a comparative focus on different types of cases could be useful to discern patterns (or the lack thereof). The chosen time period is also theoretically interesting, in that many countries experienced changes in the numbers and kinds of immigration during this period. These countries also experienced changes in their political party systems, economic factors, and levels of immigration. The inclusion of multiple variables for each theory allowed the study to measure and to assess diverse indicators for many of the key concepts found in the literature.

The analysis found strong validation for the institutional hypothesis in the variable *checks*. In both the institutional model and the final, all-encompassing model, the number of checks (veto points) in a political system in a given year had a strong impact upon GPPI. As the number of veto points increases, GPPI becomes more positive, while controlling for all other variables. When the substantive impact is examined, an increase across the entire range of checks leads to an increase in GPPI across a quarter of that variable's range. Thus, institutional checks have a substantial, independent impact on partisan preferences regarding immigration.

That being said, most of the other institutional variables were not significant predictors of GPPI. Only electoral threshold was significant at the 0.05 level, having a small positive effect upon GPPI. This provides some confirmation that high thresholds exclude anti-immigrant political parties, possibly resulting in less pressure on the preferences of mainstream parties. However, the more interesting finding is that neither judicial review, fractionalization, polarization, PR, nor size of governing majority are significant predictors in any of the models. While this would appear to cast doubt upon some variants of the institutional argument, the number of checks and balances (*checks*) provides a useful test of this argument in a broader sense. The *checks* variable aggregates many possible veto points in a system, including institutional rules like PR, as well as institutionally biased outcomes like fractionalization, polarization, and size of majority. Further, *checks* takes into account the party composition of various

branches of government, reflecting whether governmental branches are ideologically divided or unified. Thus, the advantage of this composite institutional variable is that it not only encompasses the institutional matrix, but also considers who occupies those institutions. This measure illustrates the political dynamics that were discussed in the theory section: a lack of institutional constraints can force parties to be more majoritarian and more entrepreneurial, catering to “raw” public opinion rather than to powerful groups (such as business lobbies) with an interest in liberal immigration policies (Freeman 2002).

Of all the other theoretical models (ideology, structure, and national-historical), validation was only found for one of the proposed hypotheses. Although having a colonial past was not significant, path-dependency arguments were confirmed by the impact of being a settler nation. Simply having a history as a settler nation (e.g., Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States) led to an increase in GPPI, even when controlling for all of the other factors in the model.

The regression analysis also reveals two noteworthy null findings. First, it was hypothesized that ruling parties’ preferences on immigration may be influenced by party ideology and/or the ideological orientation of the entire legislative branch. However, neither the individual tests nor the full model detected a statistically significant impact for either variable. This provides strong validation for theories arguing that immigration is orthogonal to the Left–Right continuum,⁶ and seems, by proxy, to lend confirmation to arguments privileging the institutional context. The other surprising null finding is that the actual numbers of immigrants entering a country (lagged by one year) have no significant impact on GPPI. This casts doubt on literature that links concentrations of immigrants and anti-immigrant party platforms, although a disaggregation to the regional or local level might be useful here (Golder 2003; Martin 1996; Mayer and Perrineau 1989; Mudde 1999). Why do numbers of foreigners entering the country in the previous year, relative to native population, fail to affect GPPI? It might be that institutions condition immigration politics to such a large degree that variations in number of foreigners have no significant effect. The key variable, again, is party competition. If parties are not positioned to capture benefits from anti-immigrant preferences, they will never openly proclaim these preferences, even under conditions of large immigration flows.

This article poses the following question: what motivates the gatekeepers? In other words, how can we explain the preferences of governing political parties vis-à-vis immigration? This is a crucial question for contemporary politics, given the high salience of immigration. Publics and elites alike consistently rank immigration as a pressing problem; however little is known about why party preferences take divergent shapes across countries, regions, and time.

It is hoped that the broad-ranging nature of this data set, which combines institutional, partisan, socioeconomic, and historical measures,

moves the study of immigration politics into fruitful new terrain. Scholars need a macro-level analysis in order to complement and organize past case studies, and also in order to suggest avenues for future case studies.

As a caveat, the reader should recall that this study explains party preferences, and not policy *outcomes*. A focus on party preferences is useful in and of itself because it illuminates how parties use the immigration issue for purposes of interparty competition (Giddens 1998). Because the primary argument is about institutional effects, it follows that parties will use the immigration issue differently in different institutional settings. Some might argue that parties will not be “honest” in their platforms regarding immigration, but if this were true, we would not see the kind of strong variation found across the cases. Party preferences on immigration clearly do vary, and this analysis shows that they vary significantly across different institutional settings.

To make effective use of the findings in this study, future research might extend the analysis to new countries or new time periods. Also, scholars might find ways to operationalize and test *other* possible causes, such as public opinion, media coverage, or social psychology. Another fruitful line of analysis might be to connect party preferences (this study’s dependent variable) with some measure of actual policy outcomes in order to assess the likelihood of implementation. In other words, how would GPPI itself affect actual immigration policy, across cases? This article’s results also raise the potential for useful case studies or process-tracing studies to illuminate some of the more puzzling findings.

Scholars have long suggested that political institutions condition the success of radical anti-immigrant parties, which then put pressure on mainstream parties. This macro-level study provides validation for this claim. Not only do political checks constrain majority opinion, which tends to be anti-immigrant, but they also force political parties to be more entrepreneurial. With fewer checks, opportunities abound for more political parties to enter the fray. Some of these parties will undoubtedly be “outsider” parties who have little or no established links to proimmigration interest groups, such as employers’ associations. Institutions condition the success of such outsider parties. In doing so, they powerfully motivate the developed world’s “gatekeepers.”

Our conclusions are not only relevant to those interested in immigration. The central insight of this study, that political institutions constrain majoritarianism to the benefit of lobby groups who stand to gain concentrated benefits, could be extended to any controversial policy area where majoritarian sentiment is disconnected from past policy outcomes. Some examples might be foreign policy (e.g., free trade, foreign intervention), the environment, or human rights. Scholars could usefully test the impact of political institutions on these policy outcomes, to determine if there are differences across different systems in the degree to which policy (or preferences of governing parties) match the majority sentiment. If it is true that institutions provide a crucial mediating force between parties and the

public on these controversial topics, with a varying degree of “match” depending on the number of veto points in a system, then the implications for democracy are powerful indeed.

Notes

1. See, for example, Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield (1994), Fetzer (2000), Freeman (1995), and Kessler and Freeman (2005). For broader empirical evidence that restrictionist sentiment prevails across the developed world, see also the World Values Survey (various years).
2. Although it would have been desirable to test negative as well as positive statements about immigrants, the coding of the data unfortunately tracks only positive statements.
3. The 18 countries include Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States. Although it would have been preferable to use more years (both pre-1987 and post-1999), doing so would have forced the loss of data, because some of our variables are not measured beyond these time periods.
4. Unfortunately, the data do not allow for distinction between preferences towards different types of immigration. For instance, it might be the case that preferences toward immigration vary according to whether incoming foreign workers are highly skilled or not. Also, the data unfortunately cannot make the distinction first posed by Hammar (1985, 1990), between preferences toward inflows of new immigrants (“immigration” policy) as opposed to policies toward already-resident immigrants (“immigrant” policy). Future studies might usefully disaggregate party preferences toward various types of immigration (skilled labor, unskilled labor, asylum-seeking, and/or family reunification) and also between “immigration” and “immigrant” policies, if these differences can be operationalized with new data.
5. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. *OECD Economic Outlook* (various years) and *Trends in International Migration: SOPEMI* (various years).
6. This study can only speculate about why the immigration issue does not fit the Left–Right continuum. Potential alternatives warranting future research may be cleavage (Lipset and Rokkan 1967), salience (Budge 1994), or heres-thetics (Riker 1984). Alternatively, Left–Right orientations might continue to play a role “through the back door,” in terms of the nature of the interest groups that lobby political parties to be more liberal (We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out). For Left parties, these groups are expected to be labor unions and (especially) immigrant-advocacy NGOs such as human rights groups, while for Right parties, the business lobby is expected to play a predominant role. However, because the impact of both groups is positive, this Left–Right effect would not reveal itself in terms of a pattern of obvious differences in party preferences.

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