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Master's Thesis

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Party Competition on Cultural Issues in Central and Eastern Europe: Examining Patterns in Issue Salience and Content

Master's Thesis

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Abstract

While extensive research has focused on positional competition between parties in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), few studies have investigated issue salience, despite its significant implications for voting behavior and policy outcomes. This thesis contributes to the literature on postcommunist politics through a comparative study of the salience of cultural issues, a theoretically crucial area of contemporary politics. The exploratory study relies on Manifesto Project (MARPOR) data from eleven CEE countries in the period from 1990 to 2020, complemented by a case study of Czech parliamentary debates. It examines 1) how the overall salience of cultural issues varies over time and across countries, 2) whether and to what extent parties' ideological backgrounds and specific electoral dynamics structure their salience strategies, and 3) to what extent so-called new cultural issues, such as immigration or LGBTQ rights, have become more salient over time. The results show that parties consistently emphasize economic issues more than cultural issues in their manifestos, suggesting that the oft-observed shift in the content of party politics from redistributive questions to cultural issues should not be overstated. The thesis also demonstrates that long-term country characteristics, such as ethnic structure or communist legacies, are only weakly associated with the salience of cultural issues, which suggests that more proximate factors, such as public opinion, may better explain the variation. At the party level, the radical right systematically emphasizes the issue area of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities more than other party families. However, contrary to findings from Western Europe, the results do not indicate that the electoral success of radical-right parties leads other parties to adjust their emphasis on cultural issues. The Czech case study further finds that the issues of immigration, LGBTQ, and gender rights are becoming more salient over time, demonstrating that parties' issue strategies in the parliamentary arena differ compared to manifestos. The thesis thus advances the literature on postcommunist politics by bringing a series of novel empirical findings about parties' salience strategies. In doing so, it shifts the focus to this relatively neglected aspect of CEE party competition, highlighting several avenues for further inquiry.

Abstrakt

Ačkoliv se již řada studií věnovala poziční soutěži politických stran ve střední a východní Evropě, o důležitosti jednotlivých témat (issue salience) v ideologických profilech stran v tomto regionu toho zatím víme poměrně málo, a to i přestože má salience důležité dopady například na volební chování či politická rozhodnutí. Tato diplomová práce si klade za cíl přispět k výzkumu postkomunistické politiky prostřednictvím komparativní studie salience kulturních témat. Jedná se o explorační studii, která využívá data z Manifesto Project (MARPOR) pro jedenáct zemí střední a východní Evropy v období 1990–2020. Komparativní analýza dat z volebních programů je doplněna případovou studií parlamentních debat v České republice. Práce se zaměřuje na tři hlavní otázky: 1) jak se celková salience kulturních témat liší v čase a mezi jednotlivými zeměmi, 2) zda a do jaké salienční strategie stran strukturovány jejich ideologickým zaměřením a volebními dynamiky a 3) do jaké míry vzrůstá salience tzv. nových kulturních témat, jako jsou migrace či práva LGBTQ osob. Výsledky ukazují, že strany ve svých programech nadále kladou větší důraz na ekonomická témata než na témata kulturní, což naznačuje, že často konstatovaný posun v obsahu stranické politiky od ekonomických ke kulturním tématům by neměl být přeceňován. Práce rovněž ukazuje, že dlouhodobé charakteristiky zemí, jako je etnická struktura nebo komunistické dědictví, souvisejí s významem kulturních témat jen slabě, což naznačuje, že více proměnlivé faktory, jako například veřejné mínění, mohou lépe vysvětlit tuto variabilitu. Na stranické úrovni je patrné, že radikální pravice klade systematicky větší důraz na témata spojená s nacionalismem, multikulturalismem a menšinami než ostatní strany. Na rozdíl od zjištění ze západní Evropy se však nepotvrzuje očekávání, že by ostatní strany reagovaly na volební úspěch radikálně pravicových stran tím, že by samy začaly kulturním tématům věnovat větší pozornost. Případová studie dále ukazuje, že témata migrace, LGBTQ a genderu v čase nabývají na významu, což naznačuje, že tematické strategie stran se při srovnání parlamentních debat a volebních programů liší. Celkově tato diplomová práce přispívá k literatuře o postkomunistické politice tím, že přináší řadu nových empirických zjištění o salienčních strategiích politických stran a zároveň poukazuje na perspektivní oblasti pro další výzkum.

Keywords

Issue salience, cultural issues, party strategies, party competition, electoral manifestos, postcommunist politics

Klíčová slova

Salience, kulturní témata, strategie politických stran, stranická soutěž, volební programy, postkomunistická politika

Title

Party Competition on Cultural Issues in Central and Eastern Europe: Examining Patterns in Issue Salience and Content

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Stranická soutěž ohledně kulturních otázek ve střední a východní Evropě: Vzorce salience a obsahu témat

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Introduction

Which issues are important for the political agenda, and how do parties decide to focus on certain issues while downplaying others? An extensive political science literature shows that the issue content of party politics has implications for vote choice (Bélanger and Meguid 2008; Lefevere et al. 2015; Adams et al. 2024), policy outcomes (Grossman and Guinaudeau 2021), citizens' perceptions of party positions (Meyer and Wagner 2020), and preference formation (Ares 2022). Despite these important findings, most of the research on politics in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has focused on positional competition on the broad economic and cultural dimensions (Vachudova and Hooghe 2009; Rovny 2015a; Rovny and Polk 2017). While we thus have a sophisticated knowledge of the structure of party positions, fundamental questions about the salience strategies of parties in the region remain unanswered. In this regard, recent case studies have suggested that cultural issues, such as immigration or morality issues, have become more important in CEE party politics (Sałek and Sztajdel 2019; Wondreys 2021).

This thesis seeks to contribute to the debate through a comparative study of party competition on cultural issues in CEE. Cultural issues are defined here in line with what Pytlas (2017, 6–7) refers to as the "politics of collective identity" and include issues of nationalism, ethnic minorities, multiculturalism, as well as religion and morality. The key theoretical question that the thesis seeks to address is how parties' ideological backgrounds relate to their issue strategies, and whether the patterns in this regard differ from the more researched West European context, where we know that right-wing positions are connected to greater emphasis on cultural issues, and particularly immigration (M. Wagner and Meyer 2017; Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019). This question is worth studying because it can expand our knowledge of CEE party politics beyond the traditional spatial focus of the literature. Examining patterns of issue salience on cultural issues can also help us understand the extent to which recent exogenous shocks, such as the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015-2016, have impacted politics.

Regarding the substantive focus on cultural issues, the final version of the thesis differs somewhat from the thesis proposal, which sought to examine party competition on "new issues" in general. However, I decided to narrow down the scope because cultural issues are

a conceptually clearer category, and focusing on these issues in particular makes it possible to link this study to the ongoing debate about the transformation of European politics and the changing content of party competition (Green-Pedersen 2019; Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019; de Vries and Hobolt 2020; Vachudova 2021; Jackson and Jolly 2021; Gessler and Hunger 2022).

Research Questions, Research Design, and Outline of the Thesis

Issue salience is typically studied at two main levels of analysis: at the aggregate level of the "party system agenda" (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; 2015) and at the disaggregate level of individual parties' salience strategies. In the first step, this thesis focuses on the former by setting the following research question, which aims at comparing the over-time salience of cultural issues relative to other types of issues:

RQ1) How salient have cultural issues been for party competition in postcommunist countries, and how has this varied over time and between countries?

In the second step, the thesis moves on to individual parties and the relationship between ideological background and issue strategies. The second research question thus is:

RQ2) How and to what extent are parties' ideological backgrounds associated with emphasis on cultural issues?

The third research question then seeks to investigate which cultural issues have been salient over time, and whether it is true that "new" issues, such as immigration or LGBTQ rights, are becoming more important in CEE:

RQ3) How has the content of cultural issues changed over time?

Given the paucity of research on this topic, the research questions are purposefully exploratory, and the research design gives precedence to descriptive over causal inference. One of the main goals of this thesis is to provide avenues for more focused studies in the future. To do so, the study systematically compares the salience of cultural issues in 11 postcommunist countries over a span of thirty years. Besides the comparative analysis, which relies primarily on manifesto data, the thesis also draws on a case study of parliamentary debate in the Czech Republic. The aim of the case study is to partially triangulate the findings of the comparative analysis as well as to provide answers for RQ3, which is ill-suited to be answered using the manifesto data. The Czech Republic provides an interesting comparative

case, as it is a country where the radical right has experienced a stark increase in its electoral fortunes and where party politics have historically been structured mainly by economic issues.

The thesis is structured as follows. The literature review first clarifies the conceptualization of cultural issues. It then surveys the research on 1) social conflicts and the content of party politics, 2) parties' issue salience strategies, and 3) party competition in CEE. These literatures are then used to develop expectations for the empirical analysis. The second chapter presents the data, operationalization, and research design. The subsequent empirical chapters are each guided by one of the three research questions. The conclusion summarizes the findings and points to potential areas for further inquiry.

Findings and Contribution

By shifting the focus to issue salience, the thesis expands our knowledge of CEE party politics beyond the traditional positional focus of the literature. Empirically, it contributes the first comparative study of issue salience in CEE. The results of chapter 3 show that it is economic issues that are becoming more salient in party manifestos rather than cultural ones. This finding thus offers a partial corrective against the arguments, made from a positional perspective, that party competition is increasingly about cultural issues (Vachudova 2021). While party positions on these types of issues may well be becoming more polarized, their long-term salience in parties' programmes is not increasing. This suggests that researchers should not overlook economic issues in analyses of CEE party competition. Chapter 3 also takes an innovative approach in exploring whether the salience of cultural issues varies based on countries' communist legacies, ethnic structure, or religiosity levels. The results demonstrate that these factors play a limited role at best in explaining the variation. This suggests that supply-side dynamics, such as the role of parties as issue entrepreneurs, are more important determinants of the content of party politics.

At the party level, chapter 4 finds that the radical right systematically emphasizes the issue area of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities more than other party families, in accordance with theoretical expectations (M. Wagner and Meyer 2017). However, left-right positions do not correlate with cultural issue salience, suggesting that the salience strategies of CEE parties are not particularly constrained by the left-right divide. The results also do not find support for the expectation that the increasing electoral success of the radical right

leads other parties to put more emphasis on cultural issues in their manifestos. This supports previous studies of the CEE radical right (Pytlas and Kossack 2015; Pytlas 2017; Bustikova 2019; Heinisch et al. 2021) and suggests that interactions between parties are more complex than changes in salience between elections would show.

In this vein, the case study in chapter 5 offers a more temporally dynamic approach to mapping issue salience. Here, the over-time trend of cultural issue salience goes in the other direction from the manifesto data, showing a clear increase in the salience of issues such as immigration or LGBTQ rights. The chapter thus highlights how the dynamics of party competition differ in the parliamentary arena compared to manifestos. This provides support for earlier findings that parties focus on their long-term issue preferences in manifestos, choosing to avoid incorporating new issues. It suggests that, while manifestos may overwhelmingly tell a story of stability, significant changes in the content of party politics may be underway in different political arenas.

1 Literature Review

Political science has produced an extensive literature on party competition and its content. For instance, significant advancements have been made in the areas of spatial theory (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Rovny 2015b) and the social structuring of party positions (Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Kitschelt and Rehm 2023). The literature on issue competition and parties' salience strategies has also especially grown recently (e.g., Meguid 2005; 2008; Green-Pedersen 2007; Wagner and Meyer 2014; Green-Pedersen 2019; de Vries and Hobolt 2020; Green-Pedersen 2023). Nonetheless, given the goals of this thesis, this literature review will limit itself specifically to the research on the salience and content of cultural issues.

First, for the sake of conceptual clarity, the following section focuses on conceptualizing the category of cultural issues around which the empirical analysis is centred. After that, the review will move on to the theoretical approaches that can help explain the content and dynamics of party competition on cultural issues. The first of these is the work on cleavages and how they influence the content of politics on a "second", cultural dimension of politics. Studies in this area generally fall under what Vries and Marks (2012) and Green-Pedersen (2019, 10–11) refer to as "bottom-up" or "demand-side" approaches, in that they focus on how societal conflicts are translated into party positions. The next section then reviews the issue competition literature. It focuses more on the supply side and how issue salience varies between parties. In this strand of research, party positions and ideological backgrounds are often used as the independent variable to explain variation in salience strategies, and this aligns with the approach of this thesis.

The following section also briefly reviews the findings on party competition specifically in CEE. Party competition theories have traditionally been derived from the Western European context, and the distinct dynamics of CEE political development should thus also be considered in the analysis. Finally, the last section of this chapter derives a series of theoretical expectations for the empirical analysis.

1.1 Conceptualizing Cultural Issues

Before delving into the literature on issue salience and content, it is necessary to conceptualize the notion of "cultural issues", which are sometimes also referred to as

"social" or "sociocultural" issues (Flanagan and Lee 2003; Charalambous et al. 2023; Cely 2025). Political scientists generally conceptualize cultural issues as those that are about fundamental social and cultural values rather than about the "traditional" politics of economic redistribution (Bornschier 2010b; Tavits and Potter 2015). According to Kitschelt (1994), these issues map onto an authoritarian-libertarian dimension of politics, which is based on competing views of community and social order. In this conception, social order in a political community may be based either on individual liberty and the free association of individuals, as in a libertarian[1] conception, or on adherence to community norms and hierarchical forms of social organization, as envisioned by authoritarians (Kitschelt 1994, 10–11).

Building on Kitschelt's theory, Bornschier (2010a; 2010b) postulates that cultural conflict in contemporary Europe is based on a divide between libertarian-universalistic and traditional-communitarian values. While adherents of the former hold a universalistic conception of community and emphasize individual autonomy in life choices, supporters of the latter argue for the preservation of traditional communities and traditionalist moral norms (Bornschier 2010a, 2). This implies that cultural conflict is manifested in issues broadly relating to religious and moral norms, the nation and nationalism, as well as multiculturalism and the opposing idea of cultural protectionism, which are strongly tied to the issue of immigration (Bornschier 2010a, 37–38; Abou-Chadi 2016).

Similarly, Hooghe and Marks (2009; 2018) also take inspiration from Kitschelt in defining the cultural dimension as one based on a divide between green/alternative/libertarian politics on one side and traditional/authoritarian/nationalist politics on the other. The main difference here is that they additionally conceive of the environment as a cultural issue.

In the context of European politics, one can also distinguish between an "old cultural conflict" based mainly on the opposition between religious and secular values or between

[1] In this context, Kitschelt (1994) uses the term "libertarian" to refer to a culturally liberal conception of community. As Bornschier (2010b, 241) points out, this conception is compatible with various state interventions to regulate the economy and is not synonymous with libertarianism as a political philosophy arguing for a minimal state. The polar concepts of social libertarianism and authoritarianism are thus equivalent to the terms cultural liberalism and conservatism used by other authors (Rovny 2014a). In the following, the two sets of polar concepts are used interchangeably.

the church and the state (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Flanagan and Lee 2003), and a "new cultural conflict" based on the more encompassing division between libertarianism and authoritarianism outlined above (Bornschier 2010b; Kriesi 2010). The latter emerged after the 1960s and coincided with the rising salience of "new politics" issues, such as women's and LGBTQ rights, environmentalism, or immigration (Borre 1995; Green-Pedersen and Little 2024).

There are differing views on whether new politics issues constitute an entirely new dimension of politics or whether they simply represent a transformation in the content of the old cultural dimension tied to religion (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2010b; Rovny and Polk 2019; Ford and Jennings 2020; Westheuser and Zollinger 2024; Cely 2025). This is not a question that this thesis seeks to answer directly. Rather, given the aim to study issue competition on cultural issues in general, this category is conceptualized broadly enough to include both old and new cultural issues. At the same time, one of the goals of this thesis is to examine which cultural issues have been salient in Central and Eastern Europe and whether their content has developed over time as would be implied by the "new politics" perspective.

In the following, cultural issues are thus defined drawing on Kitschelt and Bornschier's work as those issues that 1) relate to different conceptions of community and individual autonomy and 2) cannot be straightforwardly subsumed into an economic-redistributive dimension of politics (for a definition of cultural issues as non-economic issues, see also Rovny and Polk 2019, 12; Tavits and Potter 2015, 745). This definition brings to the forefront what, in the CEE context, Pytlas (2017, 6) refers to as the "politics of collective identity". This includes political competition on issues related to the nation, minorities, religion, morality, and personal rights, as well as adjacent topics. Both "old" and "new" cultural issues belong in this category.

A potential problem with this is that it is not always easy to distinguish between economically redistributive and cultural issues. As Häusermann and Kriesi (2015) argue, at the level of individuals, attitudes toward economic redistribution are often intertwined with identitarian preferences. It is no doubt true that many important political issues have distributional and cultural aspects; the environment and European integration are two

examples[2]. Nonetheless, this thesis argues that cultural issues remain a relevant analytical category (see Tavits and Potter 2015; Charalambous, Conti, and Pedrazzani 2023; Green-Pedersen and Little 2023 for examples of other studies that take a similar approach in this regard).

Although European integration and the environment are also considered in some of the analyses, the main thrust of this thesis centres on the conceptualization derived from Kitschelt (1994), Bornschier (2010a; 2010b), and Pytlas (2017). The focus is thus broadly on morality issues on the one hand and issues related to nationalism, ethnic minorities, and multiculturalism on the other. Explicit theoretical expectations for the salience of European integration and the environment are thus not developed.

Having thus specified what is meant by "cultural issues", the following sections focus on providing context for the empirical analysis through a discussion of two strands of research that focus on the party competition dynamics of these issues. The first of these is the literature dealing with the "cultural dimension" of politics, which explains its shifting content as a result of long-term social changes and cleavages.

1.2 Cleavages and the Cultural Dimension of Politics

Following Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) cleavage theory, scholars have traditionally conceptualized European party politics as primarily based on the left-right economic divide that emerged from the class-based worker-owner cleavage (Bartolini and Mair 2007). At the same time, country-specific territorial, ethno-linguist, and religious conflicts corresponding to the three other historical cleavages were translated into a second cultural dimension, which was considered to be of secondary importance (Rovny and Polk 2019).

Reacting to the sociostructural changes of the latter part of the 20th century, a new scholarly literature emerged in the 1970s and 1980s focusing specifically on the changing content and rising salience of the cultural dimension, which authors such as Müller-Rommel (1985) referred to as a "new politics dimension". One of the implications of Inglehart's (1977; 1990; 1997) "silent revolution" thesis was that issues such as abortion, sexual freedoms, or

[2] For example, Schäfer et al. (2021, 536–37) argue that European integration was originally mostly an economic issue that has become more about the cultural question of national sovereignty recently.

environmental protection would become more salient, as parties mobilized conflict on the second dimension between "postmaterialists" and cultural authoritarians (Norris and Inglehart 2019).

However, as Ford and Jennings (2020, 299) point out, Inglehart and his coauthors are mostly concerned with explaining value shifts in society and less with how parties actually respond to these shifts. A more comprehensive theory in this regard is presented by Kriesi et al. (2008; 2012). In their framework, a new integration-demarcation cleavage has emerged in Western Europe, separating the "losers" and "winners" of a broadly defined process of economic globalization and integration.

This new cleavage crosscuts the old ones and has both economic and cultural aspects. When it comes to the latter, the authors expect increased conflict on issues relating to cultural liberalism and, particularly, ethnicity and nationalism. On the supply side, the globalization losers' grievances against immigrants, the European Union, and cultural liberalism should be mobilized by new populist radical right parties or by existing right-wing parties that become radicalized. While Kriesi et al. (2008; 2012) especially highlight the role of the radical right in bringing culturally conservative and ethnocentric issues into party competition, they also expect mainstream parties to react to the latter's success by increasing the salience of cultural issues in their programmatic appeals as well.

Hooghe and Marks (2018) provide a similar account of a transformed cultural dimension, but they emphasize more strongly the difficulties that established parties face in adapting to new issues. According to them, external shocks such as the so-called refugee crisis of 2015-2016 have the potential to significantly reconfigure party competition and increase the salience of new issues that favour challenger parties. In contrast to Kriesi et al. (2008; 2012), they also extend the scope of their theory to CEE, noting the increased salience of cultural issues and the rise of the radical right in the region (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 124–25).

Summing up, an implication of these studies is that the salience of second dimension cultural issues is increasing over time because of long-term social changes, and that it is primarily the radical right that is driving this increase on the supply side. However, with its demand-side focus, the cleavage literature does not say much about the variation in issue salience across countries and parties. Therefore, the next section reviews the literature on issue competition theory, which focuses explicitly on party behaviour and salience strategies.

1.3 Issue Competition and Parties' Salience Strategies on Cultural Issues

The issue competition perspective on party competition starts from the premise that parties have different preferences regarding which issues should be part of the political debate. Conflict over the politicization of issues thus becomes an integral aspect of party competition (Green-Pedersen 2007; 2023; Guinaudeau and Persico 2014; Grossman and Guinaudeau 2024). The key dependent variable of interest here is thus how much parties emphasize specific issues, rather than their positions, which are considered to be antecedent to salience (M. Wagner 2012).

Issue competition theory frames party competition on new issues as a struggle between mainstream and niche parties (Meguid 2005; 2008). While the former have established themselves on the dominant left-right dimension, the latter attempt to break through into the party system by politicizing heretofore overlooked issues as part of an issue entrepreneurial strategy (Hobolt and de Vries 2015; de Vries and Hobolt 2020). Moving beyond the focus on niche and mainstream party interactions, Green-Pedersen's (2019) "issue incentive" model shows how issue characteristics and coalition considerations shape mainstream parties' decisions to focus on certain issues while ignoring others. With its emphasis on issue characteristics, such as problem information or solubility, Green-Pedersen's approach illustrates the difficulty of theorizing about the content of issue competition a priori, since numerous time-varying considerations can affect party strategies.

Next to these general frameworks, another strand of research investigates issue competition specifically on cultural issues. In her descriptive study of the issue content of West European politics from the 1950s to the 2000s, Stoll (2010) underscores that economic issues have remained by far the most salient topic for parties. Nonetheless, she also shows that issues related to ethnic and national identity, European integration, and environmentalism also became significantly more salient during the observed period. In accordance with these findings, Green-Pedersen and Seeberg (2025) highlight that economic issues remain the most prominent issues for party competition, even though the rise of niche parties has brought "asymmetric incentives" for mainstream centre-left and centre-right parties to increase their salience on the environment and immigration, respectively. Similarly, Wagner and Meyer (2017) find that centre-right and, to a smaller extent, centre-left parties have increased their emphasis on cultural issues since 1980, and they explain this as a reaction to the rise of the radical right. However, while the salience increases for mainstream parties appeared to be

rather small, they show that the radical right itself significantly increased its emphasis on cultural issues in the 2000s and 2010s compared to the two previous decades.

In an effort to explain the cross-country and temporal differences in the salience of cultural issues, Tavits and Potter (2015) find that right-wing parties are more likely to emphasize these issues in contexts of higher economic inequality, presumably in order to draw attention away from the left's redistributive economic programmes. They find that this effect is particularly strong in countries that have a "social demand" for the politicization of cultural issues, namely in those with high religiosity, ethnic fragmentation, or a sizable share of immigrants (Tavits and Potter 2015). Tavits and Letki (2014) come to similar findings while focusing specifically on CEE cases.

Ward et al. (2015) theorize that because global economic integration constrains economic policy and leads parties to converge on their economic positions, parties in integrated economies should strategically emphasize the salience of non-economic issues that they have more control over. They show that joining the EU systematically increased the salience of non-economic issues in member states that acceded in 2004. This pattern appeared to work both through established parties changing their issue emphasis as well as through the emergence of new parties (Ward et al. 2015).

Focusing specifically on immigration and multiculturalism, Abou-Chadi (2016) shows that mainstream right parties react to radical right electoral success by increasing their emphasis on these issues. This finding echoes extensive research suggesting that mainstream parties adjust their immigration positions in response to the radical right (van Spanje 2010; Han 2015; Abou-Chadi et al. 2020; Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020).

Regarding factors external to party competition, results are mixed when it comes to the effect of immigration patterns on issue salience. While some studies (Green-Pedersen 2019, 82–98; Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019) find an association, other research suggests that the objective share of immigrants in a country does not by itself have a direct effect on salience (Grande et al. 2019). Rather, it is likely the case that media attention is more important, as it can help political entrepreneurs mobilize this issue even in contexts where immigration remains objectively low, as exemplified by CEE countries during the European refugee crisis of 2015-2016 (Hutter and Kriesi 2022; Wondreys 2021). An open question in this regard is whether the refugee crisis significantly affected parties' issue strategies in the long term, or

whether it only led to a short-term spike in salience (Gessler and Hunger 2022).

Morality issues have received comparatively less attention in the research. Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen (2012) observe that morality issues tend to be politicized, and thus more salient, in countries in which a religious-secular conflict dimension historically exists in the party system, as is the case in the Netherlands or Switzerland. In countries where no such historical conflict exists, for example, the UK or Denmark, morality issues remain insignificant (Engeli et al. 2012, 185–86). Building on this work, Euchner (2019) develops a theoretical framework to explain the variation in morality issue salience in countries that do have a historical religious-secular conflict in the party system. She finds that, in these countries, minority opposition parties have an incentive to emphasize morality issues in situations when they can use them as wedge issues that internally split a major governing party or create conflict between several governing parties (Euchner 2019, 237–38). However, party strategies in countries not characterized by a religious-secular conflict dimension are more unclear. Guasti and Bustikova (2023, 130) suggest that morality issues have become more salient in CEE in recent years, as socially conservative parties seek to limit reproductive and LGBTQ rights as part of an "illiberal backlash" phenomenon.

1.4 Party Competition in Central and Eastern Europe

The research on issue competition offers a more detailed understanding of the content of party politics compared to the more aggregate focus of the work drawing on cleavage theory. Nonetheless, similarly to the cleavage literature, most issue competition studies focus on Western Europe. As a result, some of the key theoretical underpinnings, particularly those pertaining to the dimensional structure of party competition or the clear distinction between niche and established parties, may not travel well to the CEE context, which has not yet been subject to a comparative study.

One of the oft-noted features of CEE politics is that parties tend to combine economically left-wing positions with cultural conservatism, while economically right-wing positions are associated with cultural liberalism, contrary to the pattern in Western Europe (Kitschelt et al. 1999; Marks et al. 2006; Vachudova and Hooghe 2009; Jackson and Jolly 2021). A possible implication is that the relationship between left-right positions and issue salience may also be reversed in CEE. However, several newer studies point out that there is significant country-level variation in the dimensional structures of postcommunist party

systems, which in some cases (e.g., Slovenia, Estonia) resemble the pattern found in Western Europe (Bakker et al. 2012; Rovny and Edwards 2012; Rovny 2014a; 2015a). An implication of this is that, depending on the type of relationship between the economic and cultural dimensions, parties' salience strategies may differ compared to the West. For example, a Czech centre-left party could have an incentive to emphasize immigration to win votes in competition with left-authoritarian parties, while this will not be the case in Estonia, where the dimensional structure resembles Western Europe.

At the country level, Kitschelt (1995) argues that the structure and content of party competition in postcommunist democracies have been shaped by regime legacies. A cultural conflict divide became most salient in party systems that emerged after national-accommodative communism (Poland, Hungary). In countries that had a past of bureaucratic-authoritarianism (Czech Republic), party competition became structured by the economic dimension (Kitschelt 1995, 460–61). By extension, cultural issues should be more salient in formerly national-accommodative countries than those shaped by bureaucratic-authoritarianism.

Building on the legacy approach, Rovny's (2014a; 2024) work on ethnic structure and party systems suggests that cultural issues are more salient in countries with politically significant minorities, such as the Baltic states. Indeed, in a rare study directly examining issue salience in CEE, Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2009) find that ethnic pluralism is positively associated with the salience of ethnic issues, but they do not examine whether this may also be the case for a broader set of related cultural issues.

CEE party politics have also differed in other relevant respects. Immigration was for a long time not a salient issue in CEE politics (Minkenberg 2013, 14; Rovny 2014b), and radical-right parties mainly based their appeal on opposition to national minorities (Bustikova 2018; Heinisch et al. 2021). Nonetheless, recent studies have noted the rising importance of immigration since 2015 (Wondreys 2021; Lancaster 2022; Hutter and Kriesi 2022). The question in this regard is whether party strategies on this issue follow a similar logic in CEE as in the West, where the issue entrepreneurship of radical right parties has been crucial. In CEE, the situation may be complicated due to the presence of "radicalized mainstream parties", such as the Polish PiS or Hungarian Fidesz, whose issue profiles overlap with the radical right (Bustikova 2018, 810–12; Pytlas 2017, 25–28; Minkenberg 2017; Heinisch et al. 2021)

Aside from the differences in the ideological landscape of party competition, it is also relevant to mention other particularities of postcommunist politics that may influence the results. One is the oft-noted weaker organizational development and high degree of turnover of parties in this region (e.g., Tavits 2013; Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015; 2020). While the ideological structure of postcommunist party systems remains relatively stable over time (Rovny and Polk 2017), party organizations come and go quite rapidly (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015; 2020). In this context, the distinction between established, traditional parties and newer niche parties is not as clear-cut as in the West, because there is a larger variety of parties at different stages in their life cycle. One may thus not be able to neatly distinguish between the issue strategies of established mainstream parties and newer niche parties.

Some research has been quite sceptical about the significance of ideological structure for CEE party politics altogether, highlighting the importance of non-ideological factors such as personalization and clientelism (Hutter and Kriesi 2022, 344; see also Rovny 2024, 62–63 for an overview). Existing studies indeed find that such factors play a role in party competition and in party-voter linkages (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Engler 2023; Stauber and Cirhan 2024). Nonetheless, based on the extensive literature on the dimensionality of postcommunist party systems reviewed above, this thesis starts from the premise that the ideological structure of party competition should theoretically still be associated with parties' salience strategies[3]. Of course, this association may turn out to be weaker compared to West European party systems, perhaps due to a lower level of party system institutionalization.

1.5 Theoretical Framework: Party Competition on Cultural Issues in CEE

Having reviewed the relevant strands of research above, I now draw on the existing findings to develop theoretical expectations for the empirical analysis. As set out in the introduction, the three research questions that this thesis seeks to answer are:

[3] Non-ideological factors always play a role in party politics to a certain extent, even in highly institutionalized party systems. For example, vote choice for radical-right parties in Western Europe is more strongly associated with leader evaluations than with left-right self-placement (Michel et al. 2020), suggesting that personalization also has an effect there.

RQ1) How salient have cultural issues been for party competition in postcommunist countries, and how has this varied over time and between countries?

RQ2) How and to what extent are parties' ideological backgrounds associated with emphasis on cultural issues?

RQ3) How has the content of cultural issues changed over time?

First, we can derive several empirical expectations about the aggregate relative salience of cultural issues as well as their country-level and temporal variation. On the one hand, the existing studies suggest that cultural issues should be relatively less salient than economic issues (Stoll 2010; Green-Pedersen and Seeberg 2025). Since issues related to economic policy and redistribution affect nearly everyone, parties have a very strong incentive to focus on them, either to project their competence or criticize their rivals' lack of it (Green-Pedersen and Seeberg 2025, 252; Green and Jennings 2017). Due to this, the incentive to focus on the economy should be a lot stronger than on cultural issues, which generally do not directly affect a majority of voters in the same way as the economy does. I thus derive the first observable implication:

OI1a: Parties emphasize cultural issues relatively less than economic issues

At the same time, we may also expect the salience of cultural issues to increase over time, as CEE countries become integrated into the European Union and as the region becomes exposed to globalization, potentially raising the relevance of these issues (Ward et al. 2015). This pattern of increasing integration and globalization has also coincided with increasing economic development, which may, in turn, be connected to wider societal developments that make cultural issues more important politically, as is presumed by the post-materialism thesis and related theories (Inglehart 1977; Kriesi et al. 2008; 2012).

Many studies have also pointed to the so-called refugee crisis in 2015-2016 as a significant exogenous shock that has put multiculturalism and particularly immigration to the top of the political agenda (Wondreys 2021; Gessler and Hunger 2022; Hutter and Kriesi 2022; Bustikova and Guasti 2024). This leads to the following observable implications:

OI1b: The relative salience of cultural issues is increasing over time in CEE party systems.

OI1c: The period following the so-called migration crisis between 2015 and 2016 is

associated with an increase in the salience of multiculturalism and immigration.

When it comes to the variation between countries, work on CEE party systems points to ethnic diversity as a factor leading parties to emphasize issues of ethnicity and multiculturalism (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009; Rovny 2014a; 2024). Similarly, an implication of Tavits' and Letki's (2014) study is that higher levels of religiosity in society create a social demand for party appeals on morality issues. Next to these social factors, we may expect communist legacies to also play a role, whereby countries that previously had a national-accommodative regime may also see a higher salience of cultural issues (Kitschelt 1995; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Rovny 2014a, 701). Based on this, I derive the following three observable implications:

OI2a: The presence of politically significant ethnic minorities in a country is positively associated with the salience of cultural issues, especially those related to multiculturalism and ethnic politics.

OI2b: A legacy of a national-accommodative communist regime is positively associated with the salience of cultural issues, even in the absence of politically significant ethnic minorities.

OI2c: Countries' religiosity levels are positively associated with the salience of cultural issues, especially those related to morality.

Having set out these expectations about country-level variation, I move on to the second research question, which is focused on variation across parties. Here, the focus is on the ideological underpinnings of parties' salience strategies. In this regard, the extensive literature on issue competition generally highlights the role of the radical right in bringing cultural issues related especially to multiculturalism and immigration to the forefront of the party system agenda (M. Wagner and Meyer 2017; Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019; de Vries and Hobolt 2020). At the same time, another strand of research points to the importance of mainstream party strategies. Given their coalition considerations, mainstream right-wing parties may also find it advantageous to emphasize the issues raised by the radical right (Green-Pedersen 2019, 82–98). This would result in the radical right as well as other right-wing parties generally placing a higher emphasis on immigration and multiculturalism than parties of the left.

However, this straightforward association between issue emphasis and right-wing party

positions may be complicated in the CEE context, where, in some countries, the relationship between economic left-right and cultural dimension positions is reversed (Vachudova and Hooghe 2009; Jackson and Jolly 2021; Rovny 2014a), and left-authoritarian parties have issue profiles similar to the radical right (Ivanov 2024).In these contexts, the difference in issue salience between parties with different positions may be smaller or insignificant, especially if relevant radical right parties are also present in the party system. These considerations lead to the following set of observable implications for the associations between party positions and issue emphasis:

OI3a: Radical right parties place more salience on cultural issues, particularly multiculturalism, nationalism, and immigration, compared to other parties.

OI3b: Right-wing parties that do not belong to the radical right place more salience on cultural issues compared to left-wing parties.

OI3c: In countries where left-authoritarian parties are present, the association between left-right position and cultural issue salience is weaker.

Another important point highlighted by the literature is the interaction between the radical right and mainstream parties. Here, the main takeaway is that mainstream parties may react to the electoral threat of the radical right by increasing their emphasis on precisely those cultural issues that are raised by radical right parties. It may be the case that mainstream right-wing parties are especially incentivized to react to the radical right in this way (Han 2015; Pytlas and Kossack 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016). However, Abou-Chadi and Krause's (2020) study suggests that both right-wing and left-wing mainstream parties adjust their positions when the radical right breaks through into parliament, although it is not certain whether they should adjust their issue salience as well. In the CEE region, some mainstream parties, such as the Polish PiS or Hungarian Fidesz, may be viewed as extreme cases of adaptation to the radical right's issue profile (Bustikova 2018, 810–12; Pytlas 2017, 25–28; Minkenberg 2017). To test this, I add the following observable implication:

OI3d: The presence of an electorally strong radical right party in the party system is associated with an increased salience of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities by non-radical right parties, especially those with more right-wing positions.

Finally, the literature also suggests that the substantive content of cultural issues has been

evolving in recent years. This is a proposition that is distinct from the expectations towards aggregate cultural issue areas, as it rather focuses on the salience of specific cultural issues.

As already suggested above, the literature suggests that the so-called refugee crisis represented an exogenous shock that raised the salience of immigration from non-European countries (e.g., Wondreys 2021; Hutter and Kriesi 2022). It might thus be the case that the content of issues related to multiculturalism is transforming to become more about immigration, although it is less certain to what extent this is a long-term phenomenon or only a short-term spike.

Second, there is also reason to suspect that issues related to personal rights, particularly LGBTQ rights and women's reproductive rights, are also becoming more salient and politically contested over time, as part of a larger political change in which parties emphasize issues that belong to a new cultural divide (Green-Pedersen and Little 2024; Guasti and Bustikova 2023). I thus derive two observable implications about the content of cultural issues:

> *OI4a: Immigration became more salient following the refugee crisis.*
>
> *OI4b: Issues related to LGBTQ and gender have become increasingly salient over time.*

2 Data and Methods

The goal of this thesis is to examine how the patterns in the salience and content of cultural issues in CEE vary across countries and party types. Given the paucity of existing studies on this region, the main focus is on exploration and descriptive inference (King et al. 1994). Finding out whether any of the potentially uncovered associations are driven by causal relationships is an undertaking that is left to future studies, which should focus on single independent variables and carefully identify their effect on issue competition.

The spatial focus of the thesis centres on Central and Eastern Europe. Therefore, the countries included in the empirical analysis are the 11 eventual member states of the European Union: Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The decision to include only eventual EU member states follows other recent studies of CEE party politics (Engler 2023; Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2020) and is based on the comparability of these cases when it comes to background factors such as democratic quality and party system institutionalization. These 11 cases provide the data for the comparative analysis of issue salience in chapters 3 and 4.

In addition, I conduct a case study of the over-time development of the salience of cultural issues in Czech parliamentary debates in chapter 5. As a country where the radical right originally had modest electoral success and where party competition has historically revolved around the economic dimension, the Czech Republic provides an interesting case to complement the comparative analysis. Importantly, the case study enables observing changes in the salience of individual issues within the larger cultural issue areas, thus making it possible to answer research question 3.

The rest of this chapter is structured as follows: the following section describes the data and operationalization of the main variables used in the comparative analysis. Sections 2.2 and 2.3. explain the research design used for the country- and party-level analysis respectively. Section 2.4. explains the case selection and methods of the case study in greater detail. The full replication materials for the data preparation and analysis described here are available on GitHub (https://github.com/vojtechpohanka/MA-thesis).

2.1 Data and Operationalization

The source of data for the comparative analysis is the Manifesto Project[4] (MARPOR) dataset (Lehmann et al. 2024a), which contains indicators of the relative proportions of party manifestos[5] that are devoted to various thematic categories, such as economic issues, welfare, foreign policy, multiculturalism, and others. MARPOR is the best available data source for this study for several reasons. First, the logic behind its coding scheme was developed on the basis of salience theory and thus provides a valid measure of parties' issue attention (Budge and Farlie 1983; Budge et al. 2001; Budge 2015; Gunderson 2024). Second, for the countries of interest, MARPOR includes data for all parties that received at least one seat in parliamentary elections going back to 1990. It thus remains the dataset with the widest coverage of CEE parties' issue salience[6]. Table 1 shows the number of elections and manifesto documents included, as well as the year of the first and last election included for each country. In total, the dataset includes 696 unique manifesto documents.

Table 1: Countries and elections included in the MARPOR dataset

Country	Year of first election included	Year of last election included	Number of elections included	Number of manifesto documents included
Bulgaria	1990	2017	10	59
Croatia	1990	2020	10	84
Czech Republic	1990	2017	9	63
Estonia	1992	2019	8	52
Hungary	1990	2018	8	50
Latvia	1993	2018	9	61

[4] The Manifesto Project was previously known as the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP).

[5] In some cases where a party did not publish an election manifesto, the Manifesto Project uses alternative "authoritative documents" that come closest to an electoral program. In the dataset used here, roughly 2% of the observations are alternative documents, the rest are election manifestos.

[6] The Comparative Agendas Project (CAP), for example, does not include party manifestos for CEE countries.

Lithuania	1992	2020	8	60
Poland	1991	2019	9	74
Romania	1990	2016	8	52
Slovakia	1990	2016	9	69
Slovenia	1990	2018	9	72

Source: own table based on data from MARPOR (dataset version 2024a) (Lehmann et al. 2024a)

Manifestos have traditionally been used to estimate both party positions and issue emphasis, and they are viewed as one of the best comparative sources of parties' self-declared political preferences (Laver and Garry 2000; Lowe et al. 2011; Helbling and Tresch 2011, 175–77). When it comes to the observable implications related to salience changes in response to the refugee crisis and about party interactions (*OI1c, OI4a,* and *OI3d*), the manifesto data also presents a conservative test. This is because parties are less likely to react to external shocks or to their rivals' issues in manifestos compared to other sources, such as press releases (Hutter and Gessler 2019, 55; Dolezal et al. 2014, 73; Meyer and Wagner 2016, 559).

The MARPOR data is not perfect by any means, and various drawbacks pertaining to the project's coding scheme, reliability, document selection, and scaling of party positions have been widely discussed (Mikhaylov et al. 2012; Gemenis 2013). One of the main issues is that the indicators for some of the 56 individual categories suffer from low intercoder reliability (Mikhaylov et al. 2012). A related problem is the construction of the coding scheme, which in some cases makes it difficult to differentiate between different types of cultural issues as well as to distinguish cultural from economic appeals. The construction of the two categories measuring multiculturalism can lead to an undercounting of mentions of ethnicity (Protsyk and Garaz 2013). Additionally, there is no category directly measuring mentions of immigration, as these are most likely to be coded into the multiculturalism or national way of life categories.

Building on previous approaches (Stoll 2010; M. Wagner and Meyer 2014; 2017), I alleviate these problems by combining the 56 MARPOR categories into fewer aggregate categories and by excluding those categories that are too problematic to be meaningfully aggregated. The categories used in the analysis thus represent issue areas rather than individual issues as

such (cf. Wagner and Meyer 2017, 90)[7].

Operationalizing Issue Salience

Table 2 below shows how the MARPOR categories were used to create the issue areas used in the analysis. To test the expectations regarding cultural issues in general, I create an aggregate category of cultural issues. In addition to the topics of multiculturalism and morality issues that relate directly to the conceptualization of cultural issues in section 1.1, this aggregate category also includes mentions of the European Union, environment, or law and order. This conforms with the wider conceptualization of cultural issues used by some scholars (Tavits and Potter 2015; Charalambous et al. 2023). In addition, I create the more disaggregated issue areas of 1) multiculturalism, nationalism, and minorities and 2) morality issues. These correspond to my more delineated conceptualization of cultural issues described in section 1.1.

The aggregation is inspired by Stoll's (2010) approach, and it follows previous research (Abou-Chadi et al. 2020, app. 1; Spoon and Williams 2023) in using the national way of life and multiculturalism categories as a way to capture mentions of immigration (together with more general appeals to the nation or ethnic identity). A full table with all issue areas that are used in the analysis is provided in Appendix no. 1.

Table 2: MARPOR categories and their aggregation into issue areas

Issue area	**MARPOR categories used (MARPOR category indicator in parentheses)**
Aggregate cultural issues	National Way of Life: Positive (per601) National Way of Life: Negative (per602) Multiculturalism: Positive (per607) Multiculturalism: Negative (per608) Underprivileged Minority Groups (per705) Traditional Morality: Positive (per603) Traditional Morality: Negative (per604) Law and Order: Positive (Per605) European Community/Union: Positive

[7] Of the 56 individual MARPOR categories, 20 are positional, in that they indicate whether a party takes a positive or negative stance on a given topic (e.g., "multiculturalism: positive" and "multiculturalism: negative" form two separate categories). Following Lowe et al. (2011, 133), these dyadic categories are combined, in order to capture the relative emphasis that a party places on a given topic and not the position that it takes.

	(per108) European Community/Union: Negative (per110) Anti-Growth Economy: Positive (per416) Environmental Protection (per501)
Nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities	National Way of Life: Positive (per601) National Way of Life: Negative (per602) Multiculturalism: Positive (per607) Multiculturalism: Negative (per608) Underprivileged Minority Groups (per705)
Morality issues	Traditional Morality: Positive (per603) Traditional Morality: Negative (per604)

Source: own table, MARPOR categories are taken from the MARPOR project codebook (Lehmann et al. 2024b)

At the party level, the salience of the different issue areas is operationalized as the sum of percentages of quasi-sentences[8] in each manifesto devoted to the individual MARPOR categories. To illustrate, the salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area is calculated as follows:

$$Salience\ of\ nationalism, multiculturalism, and\ minorities = per601 + per602 + per607 + per608 + per705$$

Whereby the "per…" variables equal the percentage of quasi-sentences of a manifesto devoted to a given category.

When comparing patterns across countries and time, the empirical analysis uses mean election-level salience. Following previous work (Steenbergen and Scott 2004; Green-Pedersen 2019), this is calculated as the unweighted average of the salience of individual parties. This means that all parties that gained parliamentary representation at a given election count equally and are not weighted by their size. As Green-Pedersen (2019, 49) points out, weighing makes it difficult to analyze changes in salience over time, because fluctuations in both salience and party size could be driving the observed patterns. It is also unlikely that a party's importance for overall party system salience increases as a linear

[8] Lowe et al. (2011, 133–34) argue for log-transforming the quasi-sentences on the basis that mentions of the same topic have a decreasing marginal importance. However, the simple sum of percentages arguably better fits the concept of relative salience and is also much more widely used (Abou-Chadi et al. 2020, 756; Green-Pedersen 2019).

function of, for example, its share of seats in parliament.

Due to the potential problems of the MARPOR categories, salience measures from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Jolly et al. 2022; Rovny et al. 2024) are also used to suplement the analysis where possible. Here, experts were asked to rank the importance of a given issue or issue area for political parties on a scale from 1 to 10, and these scores are aggregated at the country survey-year level where relevant[9].

Operationalizing Left-right Positions

Besides measuring salience, the MARPOR data can also be used to estimate parties' left-right positions. This is crucial because to test the expectations on how positions relate to issue emphasis, it is necessary to observe both variables at the same time.

I use the MARPOR "rile" scale (Laver and Budge 1992) to operationalize parties' left-right positions directly from the manifesto codings. Based on Lowe et al. (2011), the original rile scale developed by Laver and Budge is further logit transformed, as this better captures the positional logic of party positions and mitigates the endogeneity that arises from using the same data to calculate positions and issue salience (cf. Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020, 756). Party left-right positions are thus calculated as:

$$\log rile = log(R + 0.5) - log(L + 0.5)$$

where R and L equal the sum of percentages of quasi-sentences devoted to the subsets of categories that are theoretically identified as indicating right-wing (left-wing) positions. The MARPOR categories used in this calculation are shown in Appendix no. 2.

2.2 Examining Temporal and Country-level Variation in Salience

The first research question of this thesis focuses on the spatial and temporal variation of cultural issues in Central and Eastern Europe. To investigate $OI1a$ through $O1c$, I use several descriptive graphs and statistical models comparing 1) the overall salience of cultural and economic issues and 2) the variation in salience over time. To systematically test whether the salience of cultural issue areas is increasing over time, I conduct an OLS regression with salience as the dependent variable and year as the independent variable. I include country

[9] Data on salience is currently available in five CHES survey years (2006, 2010, 2017, 2019, 2024).

fixed effects and standard errors clustered by party to account for the fact that observations within party panels are not independent (Angrist and Pischke 2009, 308–19).

To test the observable implications regarding cross-country differences in issue salience, I code countries according to their communist legacy based on Kitschelt et al. (1999, 39) and whether or not they have a politically significant ethnic minority as classified by Rovny (2024, 61). For religiosity levels, I use data from 11 waves of the European Social Survey (2003; 2012; 2018; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; 2023e; 2023f; 2023g; 2023h; 2024) and match the survey years to the closest election. Following Tavits and Letki (2014), I operationalize religiosity as the share of respondents who say they attend religious services at least once a week[10]. I also collect data on countries' GDP per capita for every year since 1990 from World Bank Open Data (World Bank 2025a).

To systematically test if there is an association between religiosity and parties' emphasis on morality issues, I also estimate OLS models with country fixed effects and clustered standard errors by party. Besides religiosity, I adjust for logged GDP per capita, parties' status as a Christian Democratic party, and I also include the lagged dependent variable.

2.3 Examining Party-level Variation in Salience

The second research question focuses on the party level, namely on how parties' ideological backgrounds – conceptualized as party family membership and left-right position – relate to their emphasis on cultural issues (this corresponds to *OI3a* through *OI3d*). This requires an indicator of party families, and I use the party family classification from the CHES dataset. I also make use of the party family codes included in the MARPOR dataset as a guide to classify parties for which CHES codes are not available[11]. Some parties classified as radical-right in this way, such as the Bulgarian Attack Party, for instance, may plausibly also be

[10] Since the ESS data only goes back to 2002, I impute that year's data to the previous elections so as to avoid having too many missing values.

[11] Parties are thus classified as belonging to the liberal, socialist, conservative, radical-right, agrarian/center, regionalist, Christian democratic, radical-left, or green families, or to the residual "nofamily" category (Jolly et al. 2022). I also rely on the list of far-right parties provided by the PopuList dataset (Rooduijn et al. 2024; Van Kessel et al. 2023) to verify the classification and add radical-right parties potentially missed in the MARPOR/CHES data.

categorized as extreme right. However, since the radical and extreme right differ primarily in their stance towards democracy, they can be considered as "functional equivalents" (Mudde 2017, 617; Wondreys 2021, 727; Pirro 2023) when it comes to their focus on cultural issues. Terminologically, I use the "radical right" label from the CHES dataset. The parties classified this way (see list in Appendix no. 3) generally match those in Bustikova's (2019, 80–82) study of the radical right in CEE, lending support to the validity of the classification used here.

To test the expectation that radical-right parties will place more emphasis on cultural issues compared to other parties (*OI3a*), I estimate several OLS models where the cultural issue areas from above are the dependent variables and party family is the main independent variable. I adjust for parties' vote shares and their government status during the previous electoral period, taking the latter variable from PARLGOV (Döring and Manow 2024). I also include both country and year fixed effects to account for both baseline country differences as well as potential temporal effects that affect all countries in the same way.

As for the expectation that right-wing parties that do not belong to the radical right also place relatively more emphasis on cultural issues (*OI3b)*, I utilize similar fixed effects models but with the logged rile indicator instead of party family as the main independent variable. I exclude radical-right parties from the datasets for these models, and I further split the sample by country. Estimating the models separately for each country allows for examining whether the results differ systematically between countries with left-authoritarian parties and those where left-wing positions are instead associated with culturally progressive positions (providing a test for *OI3c*).

Do parties adjust their issue emphasis in response to the radical right?

A further observable implication developed in the previous section was that the presence of electorally strong radical-right parties in a party system is associated with an increased emphasis on cultural issues by the non-radical right parties (*OI3d*). To examine this, I construct two fixed effects OLS models in which the dependent variable[12] is the salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area for non-radical right parties at a

[12] I also model alternative specifications of the DV using Abou-Chadi's (2016) operationalization and only the negative national way of life (per602) and multiculturalism (per608) categories.

given election (t).

In specifying these models, I partly follow Abou-Chadi's (2016) framework for modelling the impact of radical-right parties in Western Europe. In the first model, I operationalize radical-right strength as the combined vote share of all parties classified as radical-right at the preceding election (t_{-1}). This operationalization tests if higher vote shares for the radical right correspond to increasing issue salience for the other parties. In the second model, I use a simple binary indicator of radical-right presence, which takes on the value of 1 if radical-right parties received at least one seat in parliament at the previous election. In this regard, the difference from Abou-Chadi's framework is that parties may react to the radical right's entry into parliament, rather than their increasing vote shares per se. Following Abou-Chadi (2016), I adjust for immigration, since this is a factor that may impact both the success of the radical right in a country as well as the salience of cultural issues. The variable comes from the World Bank (2025b) and is operationalized as annual net migration divided by a country's total population. This value is then averaged out over the electoral term preceding a given election[13].

The models also include a lagged dependent variable, because parties' issue emphases at time t are likely to be associated with their emphases at time t-1 (Abou-Chadi 2016; Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019). Including the lagged DV thus helps correct for autocorrelation in the residuals and panel heteroskedasticity (Beck and Katz 1996; Wilkins 2018). I additionally adjust for parties' vote share and their government status. Including fixed effects for parties reduces the focus on within-party variation, thus dealing with unobserved time-invariant confounders at the country and party levels.

The two regression models are thus specified as follows, with *i* indicating parties and *t* elections:

I) $$Nationalism, multiculturalism, minorities_{i,t} = \beta_0 radicalrightvoteshare_{i,t-1} + \beta_1 nationalism, multiculturalism, minorities_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 partyvoteshare_{i,t} +$$

[13] Given that the focus here is on migrant inflows rather than net migration, it would be better to have a variable of annual gross immigration. Unfortunately, such data is only available for a small number of country-years. The data on both net migration and total population are sourced from World Bank Open Data (World Bank 2025b; 2025c).

$$\beta_3 governmentparty_{i,t} + \beta_4 netmigration_{i,t} + \alpha_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

II) $$Nationalism, multiculturalism, minorities_{i,t} = \beta_0 radicalrightpresence_{i,t-1} + \beta_1 nationalism, multiculturalism, minorities_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 partyvoteshare_{i,t} + \beta_3 governmentparty_{i,t} + \beta_4 netmigration_{i,t} + \alpha_i + \epsilon_{i,t}$$

Since the outcome of interest is the issue emphasis of non-radical right parties, radical-right parties are excluded from the model data. Descriptive statistics for the model variables are displayed in Appendix no. 4. To test the expectation that the relationship between radical-right electoral strength and adjustments in issue emphasis is different for left- and right-wing parties, I add an interaction term between radical-right vote shares (presence) and parties' left-right positions to the models above.

2.4 Case Study Design: Examining the Changing Content of Cultural Issues

The third research question asks how parties' issue emphasis has changed within the broader cultural issue areas of multiculturalism and morality issues. Doing so requires going beyond the broad MARPOR coding scheme and constructing a more disaggregated issue classification. I opt for doing this within a single-country case study of the Czech Republic for two reasons. First, focusing on a single country means that language characteristics remain constant, which increases the validity of the automated textual analysis required to classify issues at a large scale. Second, a case study also allows me to utilize temporally more dynamic data from parliamentary speeches, which represent an alternative arena of party competition and thus provide a partial triangulation of the results obtained from the manifestos.

Due to its low religiosity, the historically low importance of the cultural dimension, as well as the comparatively low electoral success of the far-right, the Czech Republic represents a unique case in the CEE region. The country's background conditions may lead us to expect cultural issues to be less salient here. Exploring this theoretically interesting case may aid the discovery of additional factors that impact issue competition and help generate hypotheses for further research (Gerring 2017, 63–65). The introduction to chapter 5 provides a more detailed explanation of the specificities of the Czech case.

I analyze textual data from all plenary debates in the Czech Chamber of Deputies between

1993 and 2023. These are taken from the Czech Parliamentary Speeches Dataset (Jabůrek 2024), which is an extended and improved version of ParlSpeech V2 (Rauh and Schwalbach 2020). The dataset is pre-cleaned and contains the relevant metadata on speakers' party affiliation, date, and the full text of each plenary speech. The data used in the analysis excludes speeches made by the chair of the chamber, since these are procedural in nature and would somewhat distort the comparison between parties. This reduced dataset includes a total of 222,253 speeches.

I construct nine regular expression (regex) dictionaries to capture MPs' mentions of various cultural issues (displayed in Appendix no. 5). I look separately at immigration and multiculturalism as potential new issues in the Czech Republic and compare these with mentions of ethnic minorities and the Czech nation, which are "old" cultural issues that are theoretically likely to be relevant for a longer period of time. To test the rising salience of LGBTQ, gender, and reproductive rights, I also construct separate dictionaries for these issues. Again, I compare the salience of these with mentions of religious institutions and the family, which represent "traditional" morality issues. I also include a dictionary of terms related to general economic issues to have an additional comparison for relative salience. In constructing these dictionaries, I take an inductive approach inspired by previous work (Rovny 2024, 175; Gessler and Hunger 2022). The main idea is to create dictionaries to capture mentions of disaggregated cultural issues (e.g., to measure mentions of immigration separately from multiculturalism). As Muddiman et al. (2019, 223) point out, dictionary approaches are unlikely to capture all relevant mentions of an abstract concept, and they suggest that researchers should focus on the validity of the mentions that do get captured. I thus narrow down the terms used in the dictionaries to find valid mentions of the relevant concepts while also limiting the number of false negatives.

Applying these dictionaries to the speech data thus allows for measuring the salience of the issues over time and across parties. Here, I operationalize a party's issue salience as the share of plenary speeches made by its MPs that mention the given issue at least once during a certain period (year or month). I present the results in percentage form, which gives the following equation for party salience for a given issue at time t:

$$Party\ issue\ salience_t = \left(\frac{N\ speeches\ by\ Party\ MPs\ mentioning\ issue_t}{Total\ number\ of\ speeches\ by\ Party\ MPs_t}\right) \times 100$$

To measure mean overall salience for each issue, I take the means of each party in the lower chamber without weighing by parliamentary group size, as this is consistent with the procedure for calculating election means from party manifestos in chapter 3.

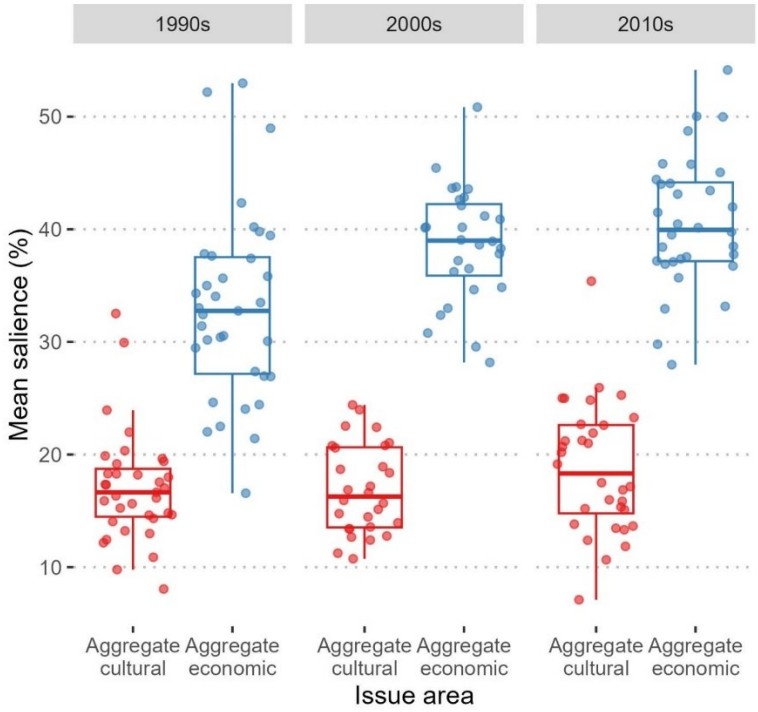
3 The Salience of Cultural Issues Over Time and Across Countries

Guided by the first research question, this first empirical chapter explores how the salience of cultural issues has varied over time and across countries. The units of observation in most of the analyses below are thus elections, since the main question is how important these issues have been in party systems, as opposed to variation between individual parties. The following section tests the observable implications regarding over-time variation, examining the relative salience of cultural and economic issues as well as the association between the so-called refugee crisis and the salience of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities. The section after that focuses on differences between countries, testing whether countries' macrosocial and historical characteristics (ethnic structure, religiosity, communist legacies) correlate with the salience of cultural issues.

3.1 Temporal Trends

According to Observable Implication 1a (O*I1a*), cultural issues have remained consistently less salient than economic issues throughout the whole post-1990 period. To test this, Figure 1 below compares the mean salience of aggregate economic and cultural issues in CEE in the first three decades after the political transition, whereby each point represents a single election. In line with *OI1a*, economic issues are significantly more salient in each of the three decades. Interestingly, the difference in the median salience of the two issue areas has become larger over time (from 16.6 percentage points in the 1990s to 21.6 percentage points in the 2010s). In accordance with earlier research (Stoll 2010) on Western Europe, this first figure thus suggests that economic issues as a whole remain the area to which parties pay the most attention.

Figure 1: Salience of aggregate economic and cultural issue areas at elections by decade



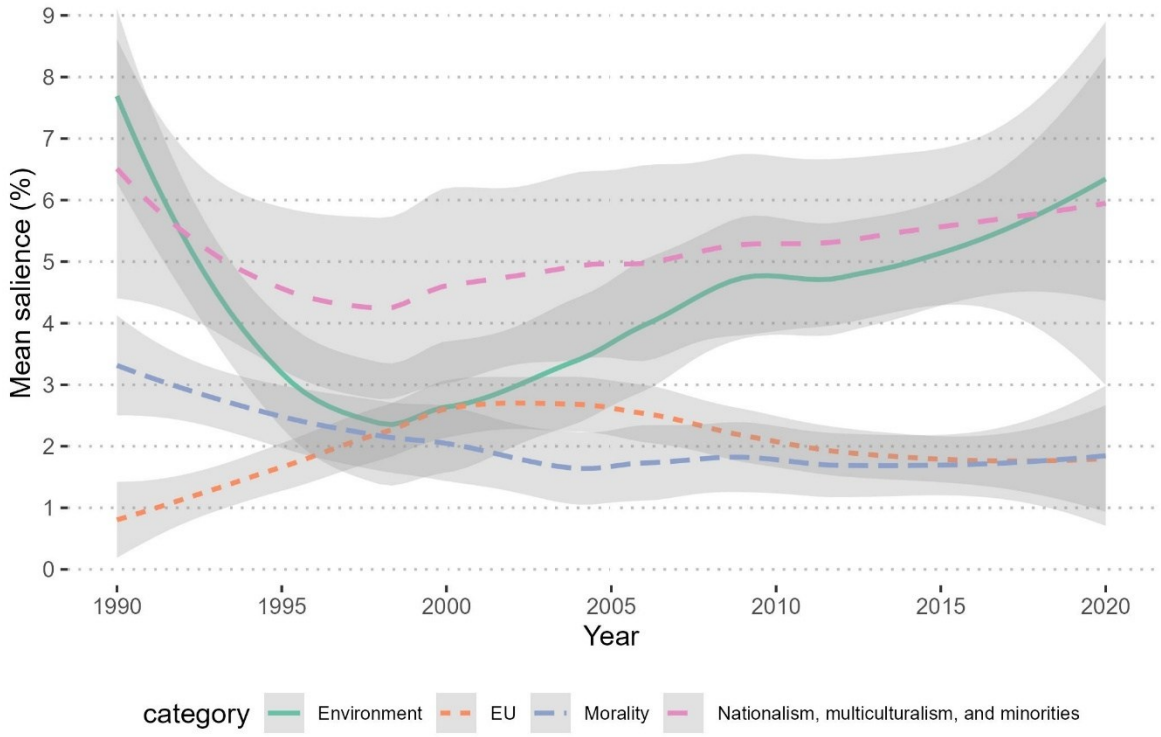
Source: own visualization based on MARPOR data (Lehmann et al. 2024a)
Note: the aggregate cultural issue area includes issues related to nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities, morality issues, the EU, and the environment. Aggregate economic issues include all the MARPOR categories related to the economy, welfare, and labour groups. The first two rows in Appendix no. 1 show the MARPOR categories used here.

Figure 1 already suggests that the salience of cultural issues is not significantly increasing over time, as posited by *OI1b*. Nonetheless, the aggregate categorization used here may mask important variation within the component issues. To examine this, Figure 2 plots how the election-level salience of the four distinct issue areas that make up the aggregate category has developed over time. The plot uses locally smoothed regression lines to show general temporal trends and reduce noise in the data caused by single elections.

The figure shows that issues related to nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities have remained at a relatively stable level of salience (between 4-7%), while the salience of morality issues has even slightly decreased. Interestingly, the salience of the EU roughly doubled in the early 2000s compared to the 1990s, but while also remaining at a comparatively low absolute level (below 3%). Nonetheless, the apparent increase in salience around the 2004 enlargement, when eight of the 11 countries in the sample joined the EU, is in line with earlier research on the impact of European integration (Ward et al. 2015).

The environment displays somewhat of a curvilinear trend, driven by high levels of salience in the first free elections in the 1990s, followed by a drop in subsequent elections and a steady increase since the year 2000. This trend may reflect the fact that the environment was salient during the transition to democracy due to the environmental damage caused by the communist regimes. In turn, increasing salience in recent years may reflect the growing importance of climate change.

Figure 2: Salience of cultural issue areas at elections over time

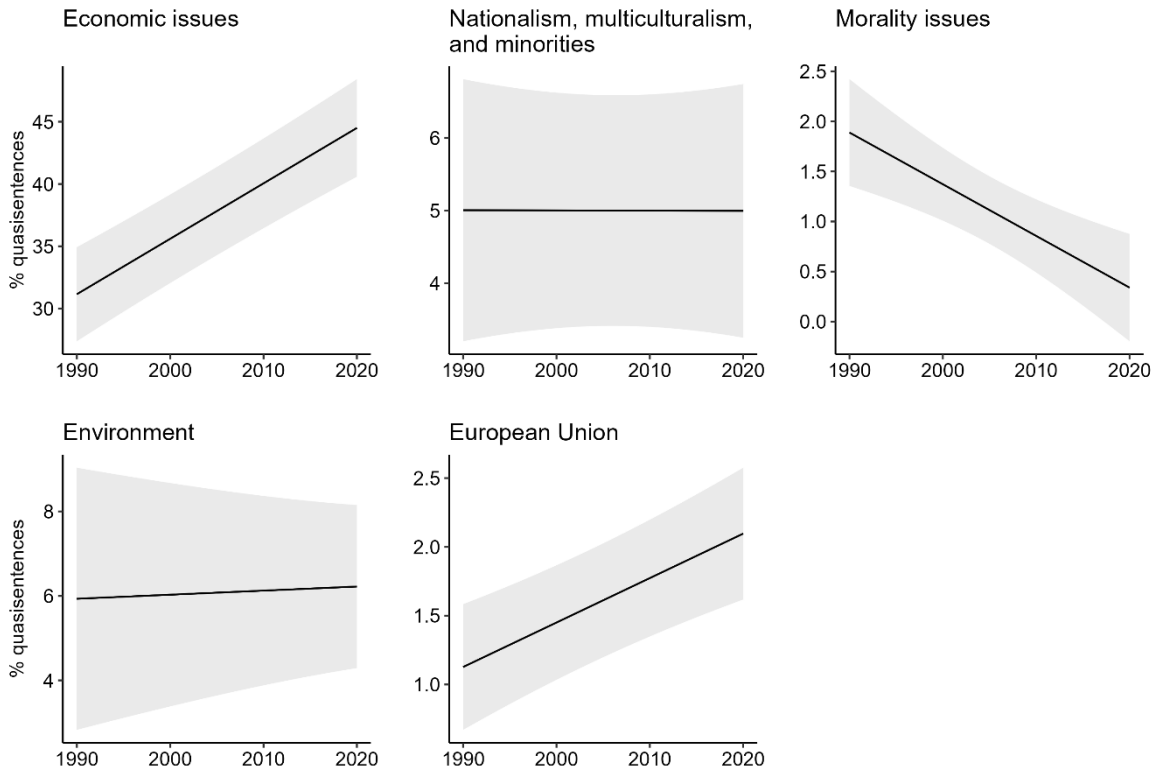


Source: own visualization based on MARPOR data (Lehmann et al. 2024a). *The bottom four rows in Appendix no. 1 show the MARPOR categories used here. Note: LOESS regression lines with span = 0.66*

Figure 3 provides another perspective on the temporal changes in issue salience by plotting the predictions of individual parties' issue emphasis as a function of election year, including country fixed effects. The predictions show that, rather than cultural issues, it is economic issues that have strongly increased in salience (from 31% ± 3 percentage points in 1990 to 45% ± 3 percentage points in 2020), again contrary to *OI1b*.

Besides economic issues, it is only the salience of the European Union for which the models predict an increase. In accordance with the plot of election means in Figure 2, parties' attention to morality issues is even slightly decreasing. This result thus goes against the idea that cultural conflict over morality is becoming more important for party competition in CEE. However, it may also be the case that such conflict is not reflected in party manifestos but rather takes place elsewhere, such as on parties' social media or in parliamentary debates.

Figure 3: Salience of different issue areas over time, predictions from OLS regressions with country dummies



Note: own visualization based on data from MARPOR, OLS regressions connected to these plots are displayed in Appendix no. 6

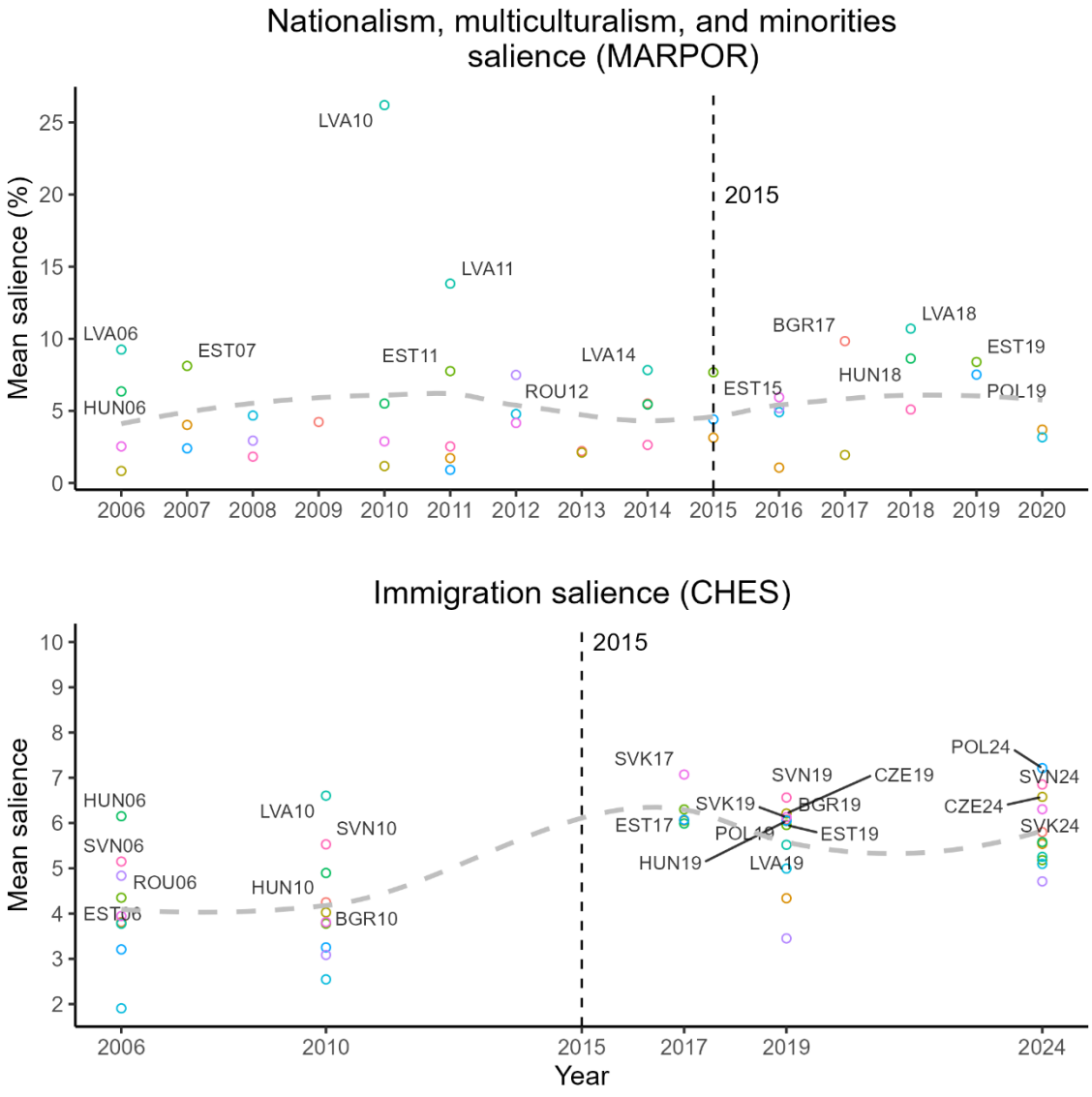
The final observable implication regarding temporal trends, *OI1c,* states that the so-called European refugee crisis acted as an exogenous shock that forced parties to pay increased attention to immigration, as well as related issues connected to multiculturalism and nationalism. The top panel in Figure 4 displays the election salience of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities, which is the issue area in which mentions of immigration are subsumed in the MARPOR data. Interestingly, and contrary to *O1c*, there is no visible discontinuity in salience in the elections taking place in 2015 and later compared to the

previous period. It may again be the case that parties did not pay attention to immigration so much in their manifestos, as research on the impact of the crisis has mainly been based on sources such as newspaper coverage (Hutter and Kriesi 2022) or press releases (Gessler and Hunger 2022). The construction of the MARPOR coding scheme, with its lack of a direct immigration measure, may also be driving this result. The issue area of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities combines references of immigration together with more general mentions of multiculturalism, which can also pertain to long-standing ethnic minorities. This likely explains the consistently high salience of these issues in ethnically divided countries such as Latvia.

As an alternative, the bottom panel of Figure 4 displays mean salience using the direct immigration measure from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey. Here, there does appear to be an increase in salience between 2010 and 2017, although the sparsity of the expert surveys makes it impossible to infer how the issue developed between 2010 and 2016[14]. Nonetheless, since immigration is a relatively new issue in CEE (Rovny 2014b), it may be the case that parties have been delayed in incorporating it into their manifestos, and rather emphasize it in other forms of communication (which would then be picked up by the expert scores).

[14] A measure of immigration salience was, unfortunately, not included in the CHES 2014 wave.

Figure 4: Mean salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area/immigration issue at elections/expert surveys over time – top panel shows data from manifestos, bottom panel shows data from expert surveys



Source: own visualization, data for the top panel from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a), *data for the bottom panel from CHES* (Jolly et al. 2022; Rovny et al. 2024).

3.2 Differences Across Countries

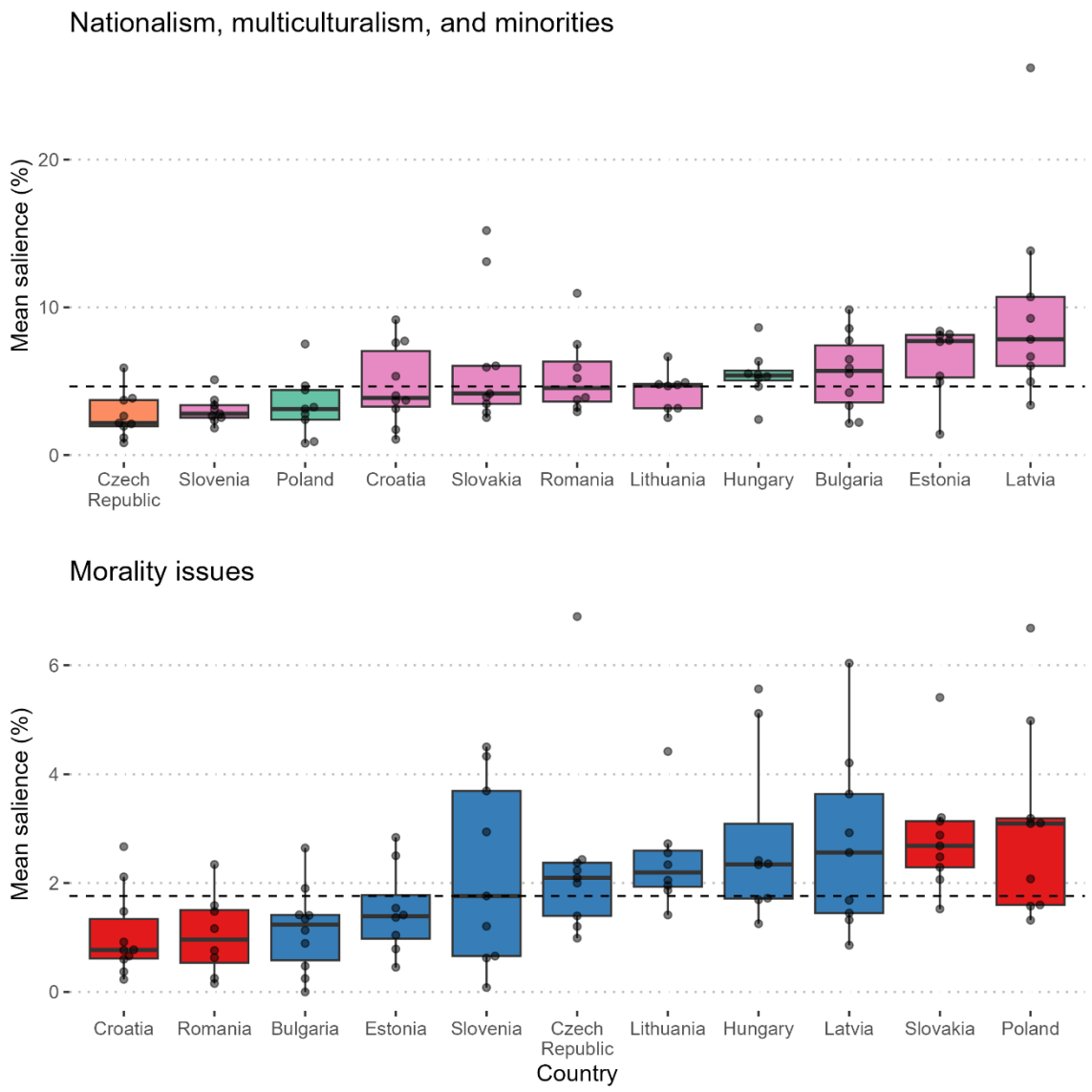
When it comes to country-level variation, I expect that the presence of politically significant ethnic minorities (*OI1a*) and a legacy of national accommodative communism is associated with a higher salience of cultural issues (*OI1b)*. I also expect religiosity and the salience of morality issues to be positively associated (*OI1c*).

Figure 5 displays the salience of the two main cultural issue areas at elections for individual countries, which are ordered according to their median value. As the top panel shows, countries with politically significant ethnic minorities, such as Latvia, Estonia, or Bulgaria, also have the highest salience on nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities. Hungary, which has a legacy of a national accommodative communist regime, is also in the top four. The Czech Republic, which has no politically significant ethnic minorities and does not have a national accommodative communist regime, has the lowest median. However, the difference here is quite small compared with Poland and Slovenia. The latter's low value aligns with the fact that ethnic issues have been less decisive in Slovenian politics in comparison with the other former Yugoslav republics (Milacic 2022).

The patterns in the salience of morality issues, displayed in the bottom panel, are mixed. On the one hand, Poland and Slovakia have the highest levels of salience, and these also happen to be the two countries with the highest religiosity levels according to the ESS[15]. On the other hand, relatively atheist countries such as the Czech Republic and Estonia have higher median values than Croatia and Romania, which have above-average religiosity.

[15] Operationalized as the share of the population that says that they attend religious services at least once a week.

Figure 5: Mean salience of cultural issues at elections by country and issue area – countries with politically significant ethnic minorities (pink fill), a legacy of nationally accommodative communism (green fill), and above average religiosity (red fill), dashed line shows overall median



Source: own visualization, data from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a) *and ESS, and country classification by Rovny* (2024, 61) *and Kitschelt* (1999, 39)

For a more formalized test of the association between religiosity and party emphasis on morality issues, the table below presents the results of OLS models including country fixed effects and standard errors clustered by parties. The results do not support the idea that

changing levels of religiosity in a country are associated with parties' emphasis on morality issues, as the coefficient for the religious share of the population fails to reach statistical significance across the model specifications. Models II and III also include a dummy variable denoting if a party belongs to the Christian Democratic family, as these parties pay increased attention to religious issues. Indeed, the coefficient is positive and significant, but the association goes away once we include the lagged dependent variable. Interestingly, the logged GDP per capita coefficient remains negative and significant at the 0.1 level in all three models. Contrary to the post-materialism thesis, this result would suggest that parties pay less attention to morality issues when the economy is more developed. However, the association is very small. Adjusting for the other covariates, an increase in log GDP per capita is associated with a decrease of less than one percentage point in the salience of morality issues.

Table 4: OLS fixed effects models of party emphasis on morality issues

	Model I	Model II	Model III
Religious share of the population	0.435 (5.140)	0.430 (4.964)	0.450 (4.630)
GDP p.c. (log)	-0.730** (0.280)	-0.653* (0.263)	-0.391+ (0.211)
Christian-Democratic party		2.650** (0.856)	0.683 (0.473)
Lagged DV			0.290*** (0.058)
Observations	696	696	377
Standard errors	by: party	by: party	by: party
Country fixed effects	X	X	X

*Note: + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001, clustered standard errors in parentheses*

Source: own models using data from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a), ESS (2003; 2012; 2018; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; 2023e; 2023f; 2023g; 2023h; 2024), and the World Bank (2025a)

To summarize, the analysis of cross-country and temporal variation in the salience of cultural issues brings only mixed support for the observable implications. As expected, economic issues have consistently been the most salient topic at elections, providing support for *OI1a*. At the same time, the salience of cultural issues is not increasing as posited by *OI1b*, and

this is contrary to what we would expect if these issues were becoming more politicized[16]. In fact, it is economic issues that have become more salient in party manifestos. Similarly, we do not see an association between the post-refugee crisis period and the salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism and minorities issue area. The manifesto data thus does not provide support for *OI1c*, although the salience measures from expert surveys suggest that parties may be increasing their emphasis on immigration through other communication channels.

Moreover, the long-term country characteristics of ethnic structure, communist legacies, and religiosity appear to at best only partially explain the variation that we see in issue salience. Countries with similar background characteristics still vary substantially on salience, suggesting that more proximate political factors account for this more than the factors singled out in *OI2a to OI2c*. I come back to discuss the implications of these findings and the avenues that they provide for further research in the conclusion.

[16] Issue salience is not equivalent to the concept of politicization per se, but it is one of its three key components alongside *actor expansion* and *polarization* (Hutter and Grande 2014, 1003; Green-Pedersen 2019, 104).

4 Which Parties Emphasize Cultural Issues?

Having examined the general trends in cross-country and temporal variation in issue salience, I now move on to investigating the variation at the party level. The main goal here is to examine how parties' ideology influences their issue preferences and strategies. I begin by testing the expectation that radical right parties place more emphasis on cultural issues. Second, I look at whether there is a more general relationship between left-right positions and salience and whether this relationship differs across countries. Lastly, building on previous research (Abou-Chadi 2016; Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Heinisch et al. 2021), I examine whether support for the radical right is associated with increases in the salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area for non-radical right parties.

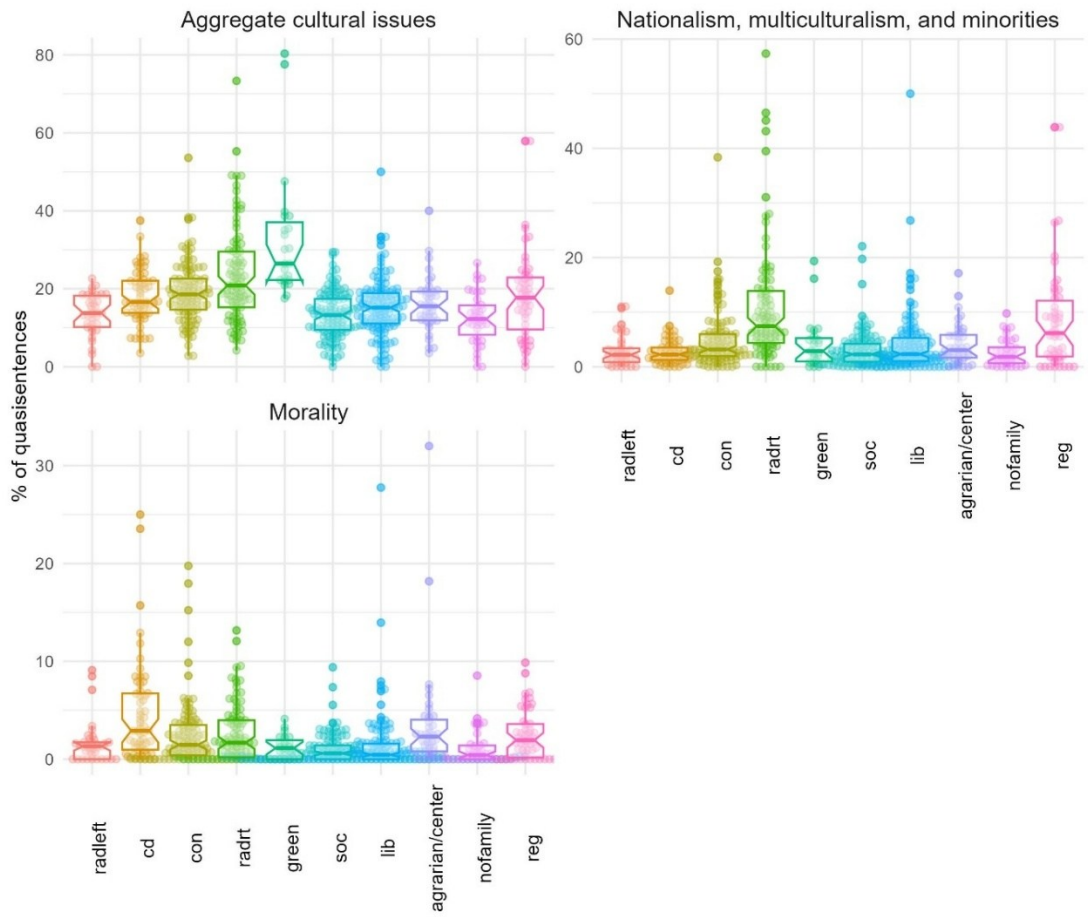
4.1 Differences Between Party Families

I begin by plotting the salience of the relevant cultural issue areas for different party families in Figure 6. Each point in the plot represents a party manifesto at a single election. Consistently with *OI3a*, a comparison of the median values shows that radical-right parties place a significantly higher emphasis on issues related to nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities than almost all other party families except for the regionalist parties. The latter's high salience is not surprising, given that parties representing ethnic minorities are also grouped into this category. More generally, questions tied to the centre-periphery cleavage, for example relating to the preservation of regional culture, are an important part of the regionalists' issue profile (Habersack and Werner 2023, 870).

By contrast, the differences between party families are smaller when considering the aggregate conceptualization of cultural issues (i.e., including also the environment and the EU) in the top-left panel of the figure. Here, the distribution is more similar for radical right, conservative, and Christian democratic parties. Moreover, Green parties have the highest median due to their high emphasis on the environment.

Interestingly, radical right parties do not place more emphasis on morality issues compared to other families, as only Christian Democratic parties appear to have a slightly higher salience on this issue. This is quite surprising since appeals to traditional morality are often seen as another significant aspect of radical-right rhetoric, alongside opposition to

Figure 6: Salience of different issue areas by party families

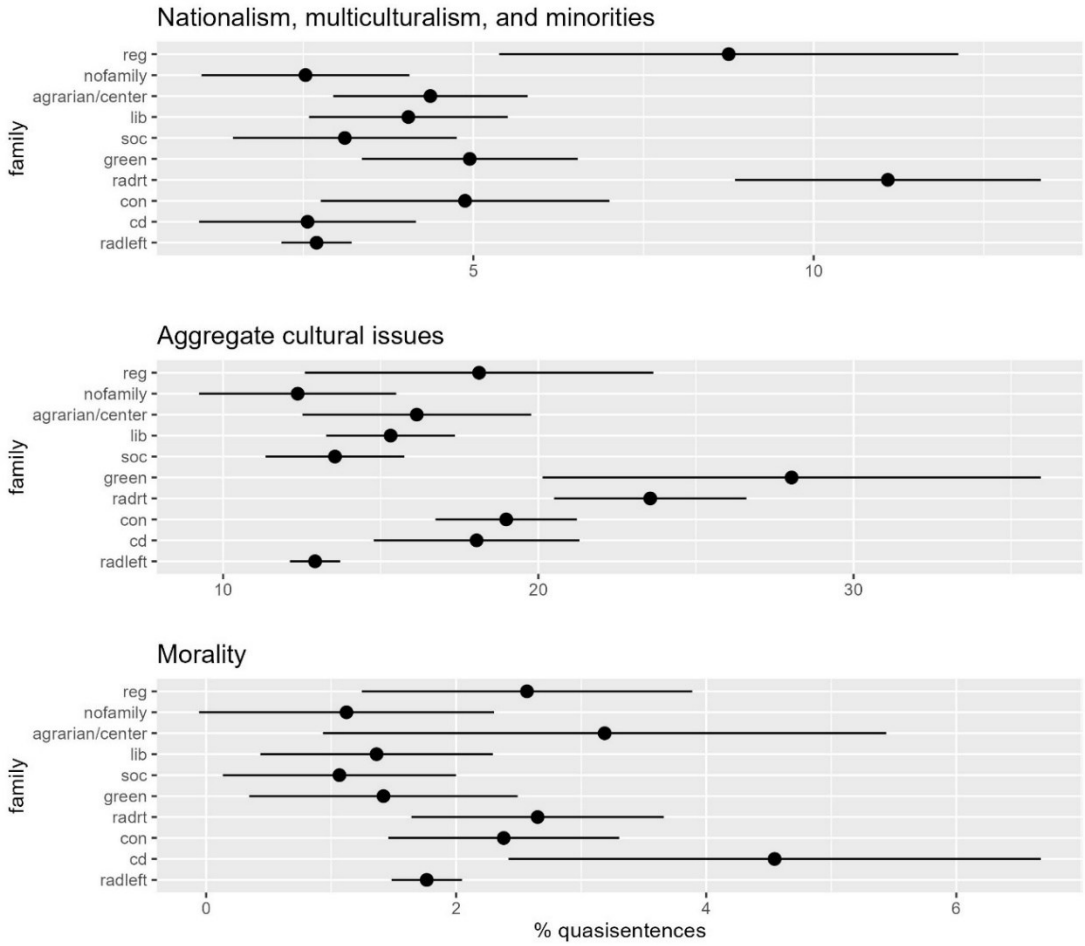


Source: own visualization, data from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a)

multiculturalism (e.g., Pytlas 2017; Bustikova 2020). The conclusions from the raw data distribution are further supported by the model predictions shown in Figure 7. These include country and year fixed effects while adjusting for parties' vote shares and government status in the previous electoral term.

In the top panel, the model for nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities shows that it is the radical right that consistently places the most emphasis on this issue category. In line with the descriptive plots, the point estimate for the radical right is over twice as large as for the conservatives and nearly three times as large compared to socialist parties. The point estimate for the regionalists also approaches that of the radical right, but with a wider 95% confidence interval. This makes sense, since the regionalist party family is arguably a more diverse group, including explicitly ethnic parties as well as regionalist parties that are less focused on ethnic issues.

Figure 7: Salience of different issue areas by party families – predictions from OLS models including country and year fixed effects and covariates



Note: confidence interval levels at 95%, controls: vote share, government participation, country and year fixed-effects, regression tables connected to these plots are included in Appendix no. 7.

Source: own visualization, data from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a) and PARLGOV (Döring and Manow 2024)

By contrast, the bottom two panels of the plot again show that salience levels are much less distinguishable for the categories of aggregate cultural issues as well as morality issues. The confidence intervals here tend to overlap, although radical-right parties are predicted to emphasise aggregate cultural issues significantly more than, for example, socialist, liberal, or radical-left parties. Estimating similar models using indicators from the CHES data (Appendix no. 8) paints a similar picture. It also lends further support to *OI3a* in that it is the

high emphasis on the immigration issue that sets the radical right apart from other parties.

4.2 Left-right Positions and Salience

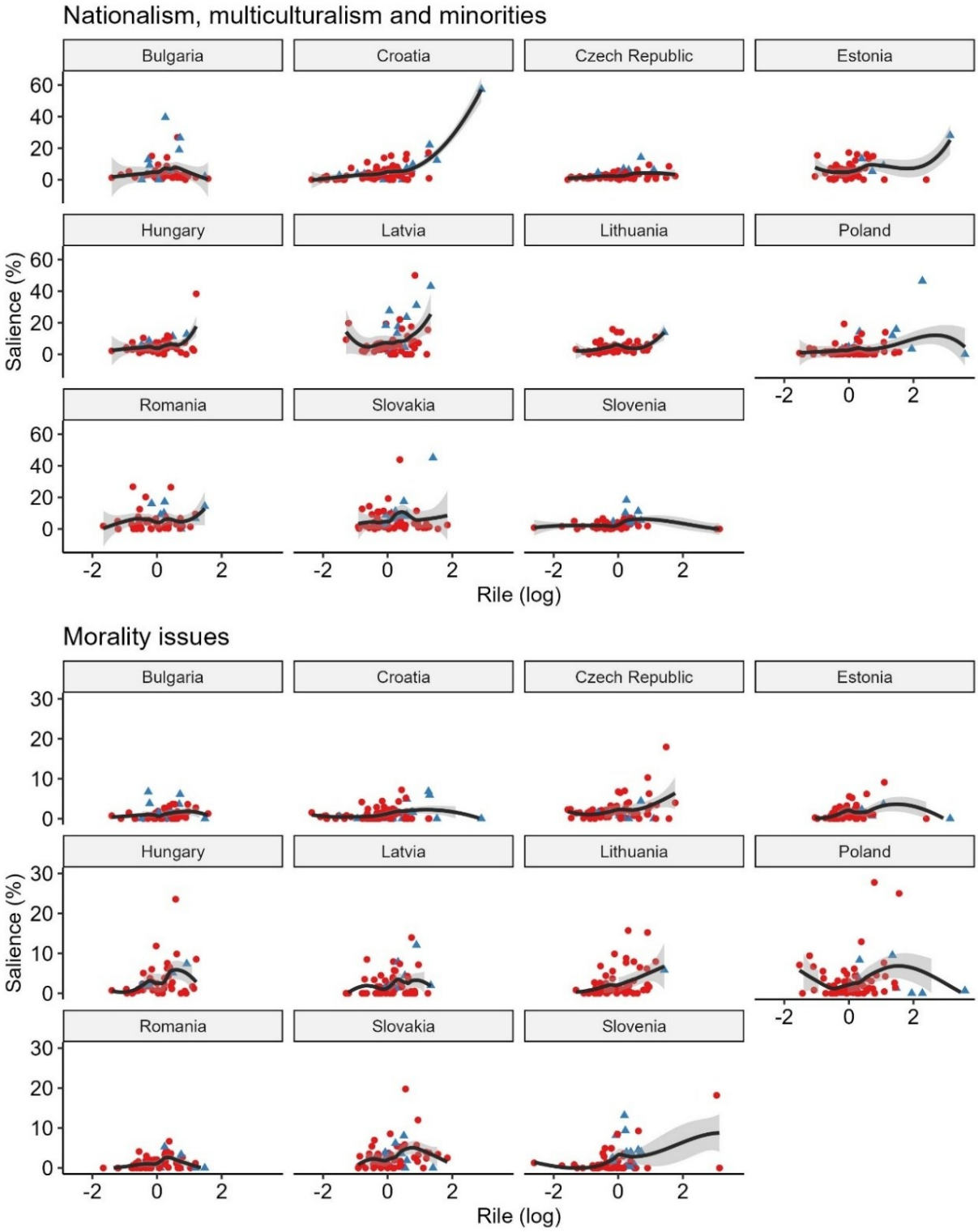
We can thus see that the radical right does emphasize cultural issues, specifically those related to multiculturalism and immigration, more than other party families. But do left-right positions also play a role in structuring salience strategies? The scatter plots in Figure 8 display parties' emphasis on the two main MARPOR issue areas in relation to their left-right positions operationalized using the log-transformed rile score proposed by Lowe et al. (2011). To help visualize the associations, the plots also include the loess trend lines (span = 0.66) for each country.

The figure suggests that there is no strong relationship between left-right positions and the salience of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities, with the trend lines remaining mostly flat. When the trend lines do curve upwards, this appears to be driven by radical-right parties (marked as triangles in the plots), which combine high salience with right-wing positions (larger than zero on the log scale). A noteworthy example in this regard is the Croatian Party of Rights (HSP), which dedicated 57% of its 2003 manifesto to the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area.

For morality issues, the trend lines also remain mostly flat, apart from somewhat positive associations in countries such as the Czech Republic or Lithuania. The absence of a strong linear relationship between position and salience is further supported by the regressions reported in Appendices no. 9 and 10, which are estimated separately for each country. Radical-right parties are excluded from the models so that their higher emphasis does not drive the results.

Contrary to *OI3b*, a more right-wing position is not associated with higher salience of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities in any of the countries at the 0.05 significance level. For morality issues, the patterns are the same, with the only exceptions of Lithuania and Slovakia, where we do see significantly positive associations. Overall, these results align with the models for party families, where the emphases for socialist, conservative, and Christian Democratic parties also did not differ significantly.

Figure 8: Salience and left-right position across countries – radical right parties marked as triangles



Source: own visualization based on MARPOR data (Lehmann et al. 2024a)

Importantly, the relationship is insignificant both in countries with left-authoritarian parties (e.g., the Czech Republic, Bulgaria) as well as in those where the left is more culturally liberal (e.g., Estonia, Slovenia). This thus goes against *OI3c*, which stated that the relationship between position and salience would be stronger in the latter group of countries, where the ideological structure of party competition resembles patterns found in the West (Rovny and Edwards 2012, 64).

4.3 Electoral Success of the Radical Right and Other Parties' Salience Adjustments

Lastly, *OI3d* expects that parties respond to the electoral strength of radical-right competitors by increasing their emphasis on cultural issues. Table 5 below presents the results of OLS models testing this expectation. In Model I on the left, the salience that non-radical right parties assign to nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities is regressed on the vote share that radical-right parties received at the previous election. As an alternate specification, in Model II, the same outcome variable is regressed on a dummy variable indicating that a radical-right party gained parliamentary representation at the previous election.

Since party fixed effects are included, the analysis is limited to over-time variation in salience within individual parties. The results do not support a significant association between the electoral success of the radical right at the previous election and the issue salience of other parties, contrary to *OI3d* and previous findings on Western Europe (Abou-Chadi 2016)[17]. The lack of a significant effect is, however, consistent with previous work on the Visegrad countries, which has found that radical-right parties do not influence their mainstream competitors (Heinisch et al. 2021). The results may thus be indicative of the fact that radical-right parties have already been normalized in CEE, and that mainstream parties adopted radical-right issues from the outset of democratic party competition (Minkenberg 2013; 2017). The situation was thus different from the West, where mainstream parties that traditionally focused on the economy felt pressured to adjust their issue profiles to accommodate the increasingly popular radical right.

[17] The results remain substantively the same if the analysis is limited to parties belonging to the socialist, liberal, conservative, or Christian Democratic families and if we use the same operationalization of the dependent variable as in Abou-Chadi's (2016) study.

Interestingly, the coefficients for parties' lagged issue salience are also not significant, indicating that the emphasis that parties place on these issues is not strongly correlated over time, unlike in the analysis of morality issues in the previous chapter. This suggests that parties' salience strategies are rather volatile, potentially driven by shorter-term political factors within the electoral cycle. The models also include a migration variable, which tracks net migration flows averaged out over the previous election cycle[18]. Again, these variables are not significant. Party rhetoric on multiculturalism is thus likely not driven by actual migration patterns, in line with previous findings (Grande et al. 2019).

Table 5: OLS fixed-effects model of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities salience on radical-right vote shares

	Model I	Model II
Radical right vote (t-1)	0.034 (0.079)	
Radical-right presence (t-1)		0.098 (0.853)
Party vote share	0.045 (0.039)	0.042 (0.036)
Cabinet party	0.102 (0.581)	0.099 (0.571)
Lagged DV	0.167 (0.203)	0.172 (0.208)
Net migration	-9.559 (115.430)	-29.602 (107.531)
Observations	311	311
Standard errors	by: party	by: party
Party fixed effects	X	X

*Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001, clustered standard errors in parentheses*
Source: own models using data from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a), PARLGOV (Döring and Manow 2024), and World Bank (2025b)

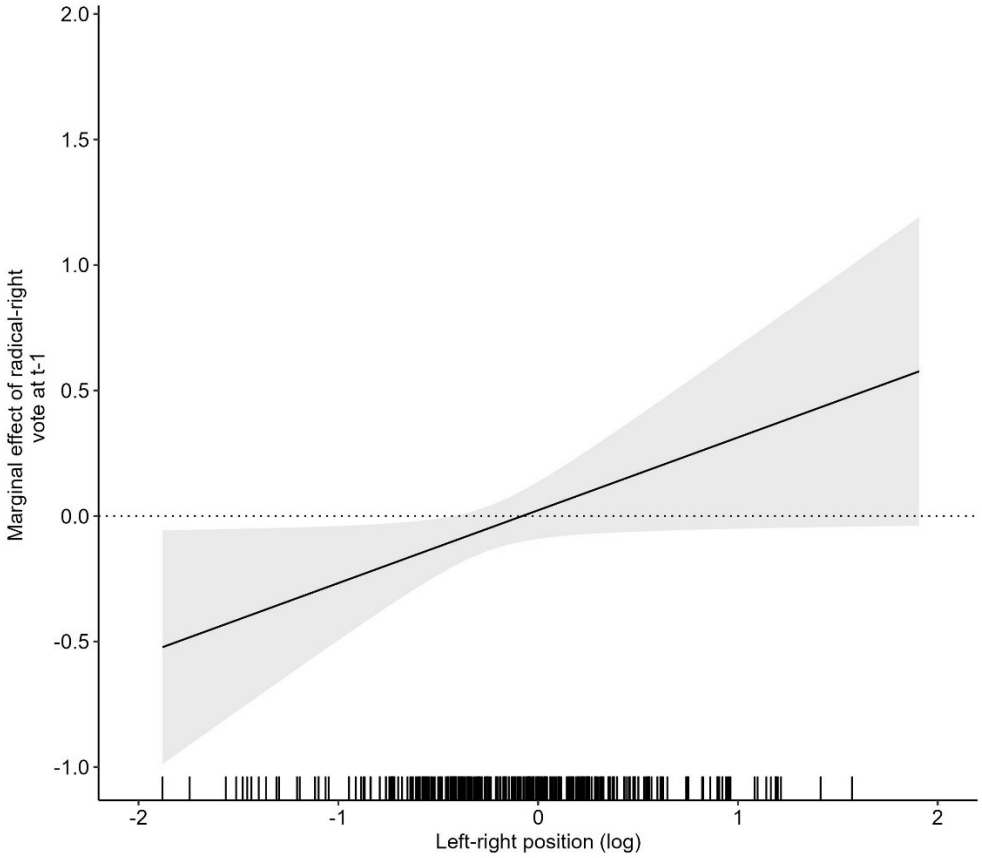
OI3d also expects that right-wing parties, as the radical right's nearby competitors, will be more likely to react to the latter by adjusting their issue emphasis. To examine this, Figure 9 plots the marginal effect of previous radical-right vote shares on issue salience conditional on left-right positions, calculated from an interaction effect added to Model I in Table 5. The marginal effect of radical-right success is predicted to be slightly negative for parties on the left and insignificant for parties to the right of centre. In other words, the success of the radical right would be associated with left-wing parties slightly decreasing their emphasis

[18] The net migration indicator is taken as a proportion of the total population and standardized using z-scores.

on nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities. This is surprising and perhaps indicative that left-wing parties de-emphasize the issues of the radical right in order to limit its electoral success as part of a dismissive strategy (Meguid 2005). However, the negative association is substantively small. For a party with a logged rile score of -1 (corresponding to the top 7% of most leftist parties), an increase in the lagged radical vote share by one percentage point is estimated to correspond with a decrease of around 0.3 percentage points in the salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area.

More importantly, the lack of a significant marginal effect for right-wing parties means that the expectation that they would be more likely to react to radical-right competitors cannot be confirmed. The null result could mean that since non-radical right parties have already adopted aspects of radical right rhetoric, they do not see these parties as an electoral threat.

Figure 9: Marginal effect of radical-right vote share (t_{-1}) conditional on left-right position



Source: own visualization based on data from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a)

To summarize, this chapter brings several main findings about how party ideology structures issue salience. First, radical-right parties consistently place a greater emphasis on issues

related to nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities, confirming *OI3a*. Using the CHES data, this is also the case for the immigration issue specifically. In this regard, the pattern is similar to Western Europe, where the radical right also traditionally focuses on these issues (M. Wagner and Meyer 2017). Unlike in the West, however, general left-right positions do not seem to explain much of the variation in the salience of cultural issues in countries with and without left-wing authoritarian parties, thus going against *OI3b* and *OI3c*. These issues are thus not strictly the domain of culturally conservative right-wing parties. Nor does the association follow a U-shape, with the progressive left and conservative right both emphasizing cultural issues. The fact that the results do not support the expectation that parties adjust their issue emphasis in reaction to the radical right, as posited by *OI3d*, is puzzling, and I discuss this in greater detail in the conclusion.

5 The Salience of Cultural Issues in Czech Parliamentary Debates

This chapter complements the comparative analysis with a focused case study of the Czech Republic, with the goal of examining the salience of cultural issues from a more disaggregated and short-term perspective. Using a combination of parliamentary speeches and the regular expression dictionaries displayed in Appendix no. 5, I track mentions of individual cultural issues (instead of issue areas) and observe how parties adjust their emphasis at yearly and monthly intervals (not only at elections). Since it enables looking at issues at a more detailed level, the case study makes it possible to answer the third research question, which is concerned with how the content of cultural issues has changed over time. In the following empirical study, I thus focus on testing *OI4a* and *OI4b*, which posit that immigration as well as LGBTQ and gender issues have become more salient in recent years.

To situate the case study in the broader comparative context, I first briefly position the Czech case in relation to other CEE party systems and point to the theoretical expectations for party competition on cultural issues in this country. I then move on to analyze how the salience of various cultural issues in parliamentary debates developed over time and across parties.

5.1 The Czech Republic in the Context of CEE Politics

Scholars have often described the Czech Republic as a unique case compared to other postcommunist party systems. In the 1990s, Czech politics became institutionalized around a left-right economic division (Bértoa 2014; Havlík and Voda 2018). This led to a bipolar pattern of party competition pitting the free-market conservative Civic Democratic Party (ODS) together with various smaller right-wing parties against the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). Political contestation between ODS and ČSSD was based on different approaches to the economic transformation and managing the economy (Mansfeldová and Lacina 2019, 133). Meanwhile, the authoritarian Communist successor party KSČM was excluded from parliamentary cooperation and government involvement. The radical right in the form of the fringe Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ), while present in parliament in the 1990s, was similarly excluded by other parties and irrelevant for the mainstream right from a coalition perspective.

The Czech Republic is also an ethnically homogenous society with low religiosity, and this would suggest that there is a lower social demand for parties to mobilize on issues of

ethnicity or religion. In addition to the historical importance of economic positions in structuring party competition, we may expect Czech party politics to be characterized by a relatively low salience of cultural issues compared to other CEE countries. Chapter 3 shows that Czech parties place the lowest emphasis on the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area. On the other hand, the salience of morality issues was surprisingly high. This may be driven by the small but relevant Christian-Democratic Party, KDU-ČSL, whose presence in the system may make the state-church divide salient. Nonetheless, given the historical weakness of the cultural dimension in structuring Czech party politics, it may be the case that new issues such as immigration do not easily become incorporated into the political agenda, as they do not fit into the existing patterns of ideological competition.

On the other hand, recent work has also suggested that new issues, particularly immigration, became very salient in post-2015 political debates, even in the absence of a significant number of asylum seekers (Bustikova and Guasti 2024; Wondreys 2021). Wondreys (2021, 737–38) concludes that the migration crisis led to an unprecedented radicalisation of mainstream parties on immigration, and it is an open question to what extent this was driven by the return of a strengthened radical right into parliament in 2013.

The existing findings may lead us to expect a low salience of ethnic and religious issues in the 1990s, driven mainly by the radical right and the Christian Democrats, followed by a sharp increase in immigration salience following 2015. As for the "new" morality issues of gender and LGBTQ rights, we might also expect an increase in salience over time. However, it is an open question to what extent there will be a difference in emphasis on these issues between the radical right and other parties. In the Czech context of widespread public opposition to immigration, it may be the case that the incentive to emphasize this issue is quite balanced among the parties. In the case of morality issues, it will also be interesting to see if these are incorporated by the radical right as part of their cultural conservatism. The main contribution of this case study is thus empirical. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first study of the salience of cultural issues in Czech parliamentary debates that spans the full three decades of democratic party competition in the country.

5.2 Temporal Trends

I first examine how the salience of different issues varies in parliamentary debates over time. Figure 10 plots the yearly mean salience of the nine cultural issues as well as the broad

economic issues category for comparison. The plots in the figure are ordered from right to left in descending order based on their mean overall salience. While it is unsurprising that economic issues have the highest overall mean, their salience remained below 30%[19] until 2007, when a large spike coincided with the 2007-2009 financial crisis.

At the same time, the high salience (around 15%) of the nation in the 1990s is likely to be explained by the fallout of the breakup of Czechoslovakia and state-building during the formative years of the Czech Republic. Interestingly, the issue of ethnic minorities was at its most salient in the late 1990s and 2000s, and this can only partially be explained by the influence of radical-right parties, which were not present in parliament between 1999 and 2012.

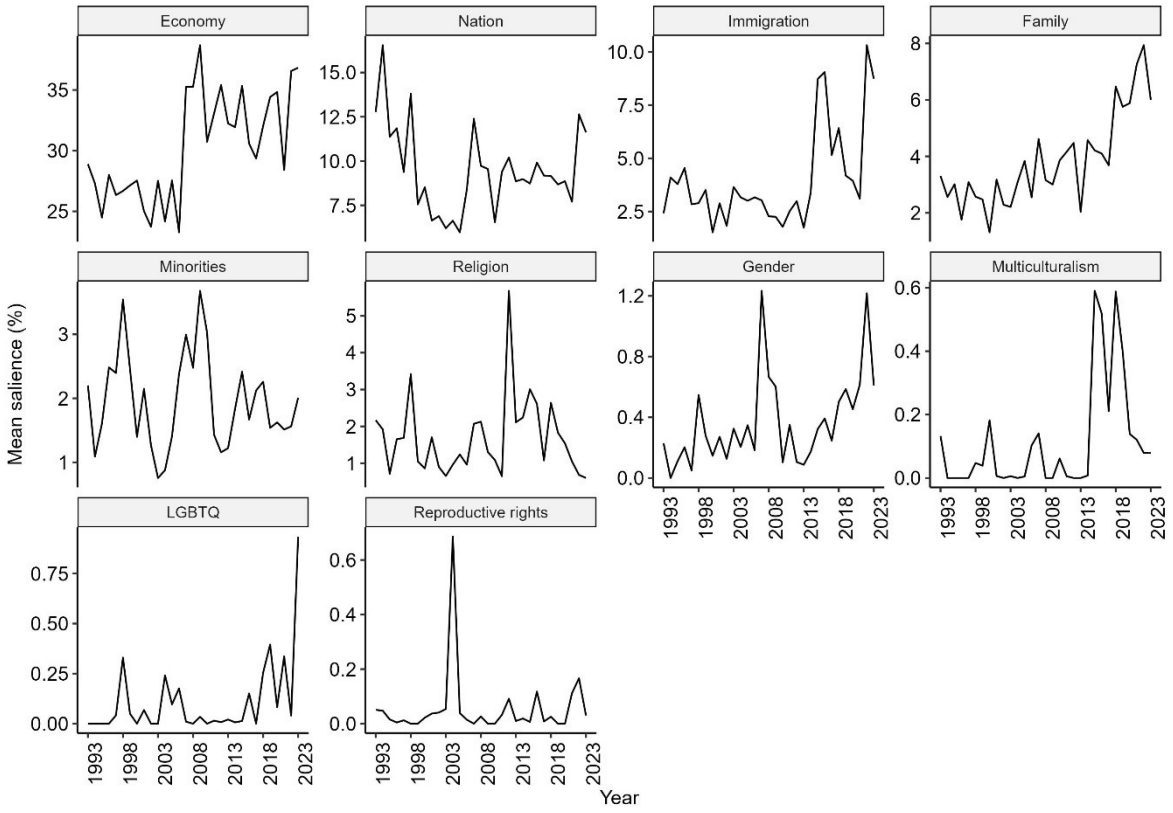
In line with *OI4a*, there is a significant spike in the salience of immigration in 2015, with the topic being mentioned in nearly 9% percent of all speeches, more than double the previous year. This shows that politicians indeed reacted to the crisis in a significant way, and the increase is much more visible here compared to the manifesto and expert survey data presented in chapter 3. Immigration salience peaks in 2016 at over 9%, before falling again afterward, and this is in line with Gessler and Hunger's (2022) results for the German-speaking countries. The issue then returns to the top of the parliamentary agenda again in 2022, this time associated with the wave of Ukrainian refugees arriving in the country. The post-2015 period is also associated with an uptick in debate about multiculturalism, an issue that was otherwise hardly debated in the Czech parliament.

As for morality issues, there is a notable increasing trend of the salience of LGBTQ rights since the latter half of the 2010s, as well as gender rights, in line with the expectation in this regard. Debates about the family also appear to become salient in line with recent discussions around same-sex marriage and gender rights. On the other hand, reproductive rights have had the lowest mean salience. Moreover, the notable spike in 2003 was driven by the discussion of a legislative amendment to the law on national health statistics that related to the government's collection of abortion data. This suggests that abortion policy has not been a particularly important issue compared to LGBTQ and gender rights.

[19] The salience estimates presented here should be treated with caution since the dictionary approach cannot possibly capture all relevant mentions of the given issues (Muddiman et al. 2019, 223).

The salience of religion/religious institutions has, in recent years, been smaller than the combined salience of the "new" cultural issues of LGBTQ and gender rights. At the same time, it bears mentioning that debates that mention the church are often connected to the restitution of nationalized church property, a topic that is more connected with the postcommunist transformation rather than religious conflict per se.

Figure 10: The salience of various issues in Czech parliamentary debates over time



Source: own visualization, data from Jabůrek (2024)

5.3 Differences Between Parties

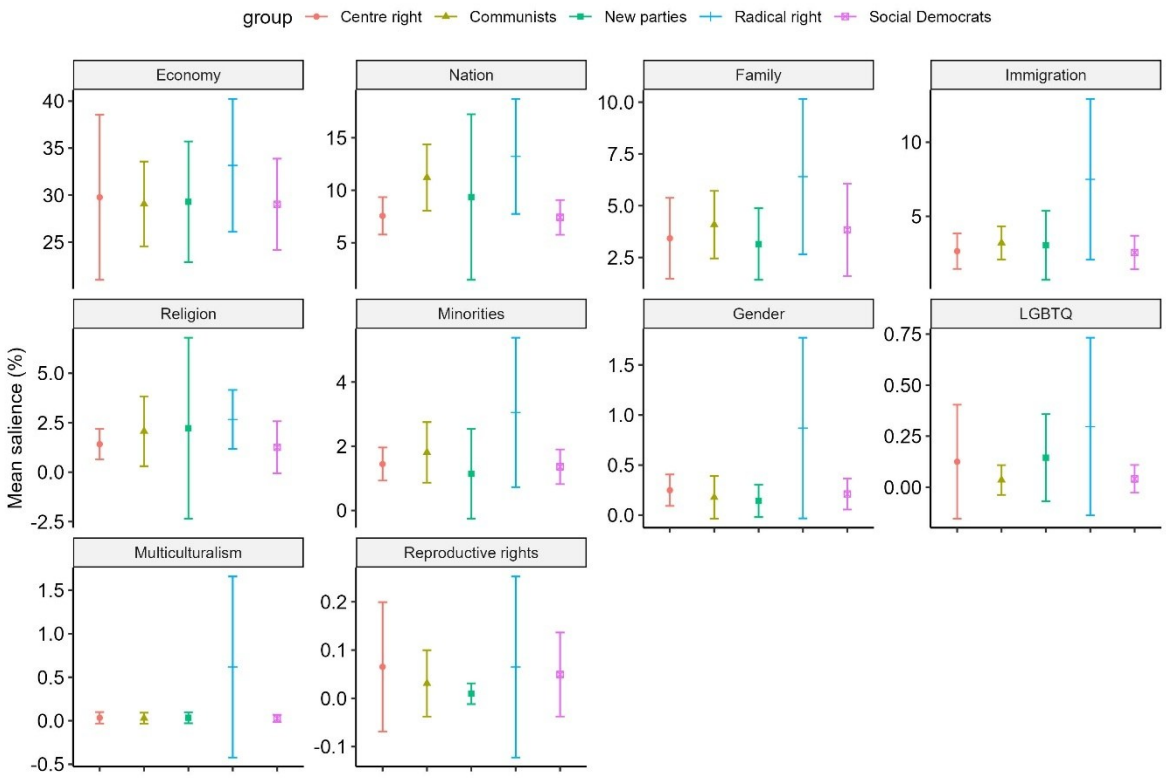
The overall trends indicate that the salience of different cultural issues is changing over time, with immigration and LGBTQ issues becoming more important. However, it is quite likely that these changes are not uniform across parties but are rather driven by issue entrepreneurs who strategically place these new issues on the agenda. To investigate this, Figure 11 plots the variation in salience across issues for different party groups[20] in the full sample of years.

[20] To summarize the data over time, parties were categorized as centre-right, communist, radical right, social

The plot suggests that the rising salience of immigration, multiculturalism, and gender has, in large part, been driven by the radical right. Nonetheless, the large standard errors show that salience has fluctuated a lot even for the radical right. This is because, as Figure 10 shows, some of the issues only had very low salience before the mid-2010s or were mentioned very sporadically. Interestingly, older cultural issues, particularly the nation, show only small differences between the radical right and the Communists, lending support to the finding that the Communist Party has been a nearby competitor of the radical right on nationalism but not, for example, on gender issues (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009, 471; Bustikova 2019, 72). The similarity of the means when it comes to mentions of religion again reflects how this issue is mostly mentioned in relation to the conflict between the communist regime and the church. Potential attempts by conservative parties to promote religious values do not lead them to have higher salience. When the centre-right group is further disaggregated, the means and standard deviations are virtually the same for the Christian Democrats and the Communists.

democrat, and new parties, based on the ideological structure of the Czech party system. The latter group contains four new parties (Public Affairs (VV), ANO, STAN, and the Pirate Party) that entered the party system after 2010 and whose ideology cannot be clearly placed on the left-right scale or a traditional party family. The parties DAWN (ÚSVIT) and SPD are grouped as radical right along with SPR-RSČ.

Figure 11: Overall mean salience of various issues across parties



Source: own visualization, data from Jabůrek (2024)

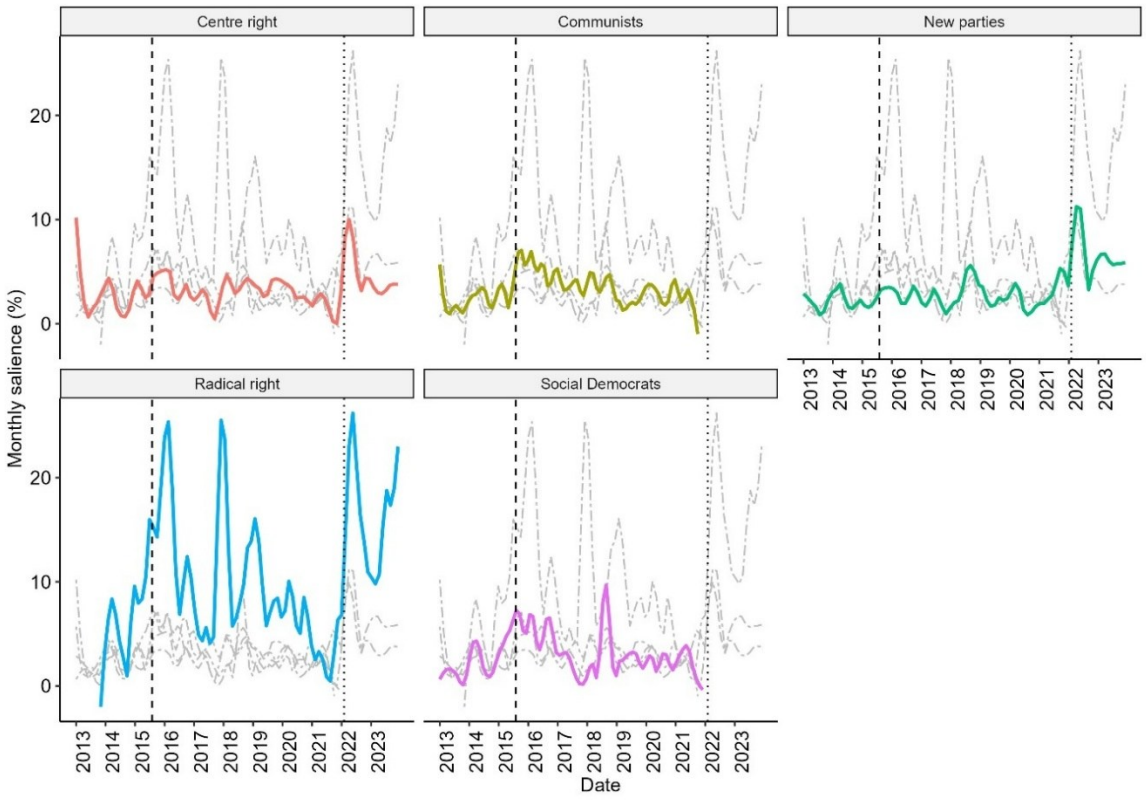
Note: shapes show party groups' overall mean salience, while the error bars show the standard deviation from the mean. ***Social Democrats****: ČSSD.* ***Communists****: LB; KSČM.* ***Centre right****: ODS; KDU-ČSL; US; US-DEU; ODA; TOP 09; KDS.* ***Radical right****: SPR-RSČ; Úsvit; SPD.* ***New parties****: ANO; STAN; VV; Piráti.*

To further show the cross-party differences, Figure 12 plots the monthly salience of immigration during the 2013-2023 period. The plots show that radical-right parties reacted to the 2015 refugee crisis (dashed vertical line at August 2015) and the Ukrainian refugee wave (dotted vertical line at February 2022) by strongly increasing their immigration salience. While other parties also reacted to these events, their salience increases are nowhere near as large and start from a lower baseline value. The radical right appears to make the biggest effort to push this issue to the top of the agenda both in 2015 and 2022.

Examining the temporal patterns on other issues (see Appendix no. 11), a similar pattern also holds for multiculturalism and gender, where the radical right is also driving most of the attention. By contrast, for the "older" cultural issues, such as minorities, the nation, religion,

or the family, salience is more evenly distributed among the parties.

Figure 12: Monthly immigration salience by party group (January 2013 to December 2023)



Source: own visualization, data from Jabůrek (2024)

Note: colored solid lines show the monthly salience for each given party group, light grey dashed lines in the background show the values for the other party groups. Vertical lines at August 2015 (refugee crisis) and February 2022 (full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine).

In summary, this case study of attention to cultural issues in the Czech parliamentary debates brings two main findings that complement the comparative analysis. First, new cultural issues, such as immigration or LGBTQ rights, have increased in salience on the parliamentary agenda, providing support for *OI4a* and *OI4b*. This even though economic issues have played a strong role in structuring politics in the Czech context and despite the fact that social demand for politicizing cultural issues should be lower than in other CEE countries. This suggests that cultural issues may be significantly increasing in salience in CEE countries with more permissive background conditions compared to the Czech Republic, although more investigation is needed in this regard. On this note, the salience

trends in the parliamentary debates also confirm that the dynamics of this arena of party competition differ from party manifestos, where the salience of different issue areas remains mostly stable over time.

Second, the radical right is placing most of the emphasis on immigration. This is in line with general theoretical expectations, and somewhat goes against previous research on the Czech case (Wondreys 2021; Kovar 2023; Bustikova and Guasti 2024), which has rather emphasized that all major parties have paid attention to the issue or all culturally conservative ones have done so. While parties beyond the radical right also increased immigration salience in 2015 and 2022, they did so to a far lesser extent. Indeed, echoing the findings of chapter 4, it is surprising that the data does not show a larger spike in immigration salience for the centre right, which should presumably react to competition from the radical right (Abou-Chadi 2016; Gessler and Hunger 2022). The fact that we do not observe this may highlight the particularity of the Czech case, where radical-right parties have so far not been a viable coalition option for the mainstream right, thus decreasing the latter's incentive to engage with radical-right issues (Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019).

While scholars have traditionally noted the radical right's lack of electoral success in the Czech Republic (Minkenberg 2013), the SPD party has gained ground and may be more likely to influence other parties' issue strategies in the future. In this regard, the country may be starting to resemble paradigmatic West European cases, where the radical right's issue entrepreneurship plays a key role in shaping party competition. Nonetheless, more research should examine issue competition in and outside of parliament, and the following concluding chapter points to potential directions for future studies.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to map the variation in the salience of cultural issues in Central and Eastern Europe and to examine how parties compete over these issues. This concluding chapter discusses the implications of the main findings, points to the methodological limitations of the analysis, and suggests avenues for further research.

First, the finding that cultural issues have not significantly risen in salience in recent years is surprising in light of studies suggesting that CEE politics is becoming more about culture than the economy, both at the level of parties (Vachudova 2020) and citizens (Lancaster 2022). This suggests that, while parties' and voters' positions on these topics might be growing further apart, this polarization is not necessarily met with increased salience. If we conceptualize the politicization of an issue area as entailing both polarization and increased salience (Hutter and Kriesi 2022, 343), then the results partly challenge commonplace arguments that cultural issues are becoming more politicized in recent years. However, as the contradicting results from the parliamentary debates suggest, another implication may be that increased emphasis on cultural issues has not yet been reflected in manifestos. This may change in the future as parties adapt to the changing issue content of other political arenas. The cross-country analysis found that countries with similar background characteristics in terms of ethnic structure, religiosity, and communist legacies still vary substantially in the mean salience of cultural issues. This may suggest that parties influence the content of the party system agenda as political entrepreneurs, irrespective of long-term macrosocial factors. This aligns with the finding that issue salience is less stable than issue positions are (Green-Pedersen 2023, 214), and this might be why the former is less amenable to explanation via long-term country characteristics.

At the level of individual parties, I find that the radical right consistently emphasizes issues related to nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities more than other party families, in line with theoretical expectations and research on Western Europe (M. Wagner and Meyer 2017). However, left-right position as such does not appear to significantly structure party strategies on these issues. Aside from the higher emphasis of the radical right, the association between left-right position and salience is insignificant. This suggests that CEE parties may be less constrained in their salience strategies by the positional dimensions of party competition than what research suggests for their West European counterparts (Green-

Pedersen and Otjes 2019; Green-Pedersen and Little 2024). This result is complementary to studies showing that, in CEE, left-right identification is less important in structuring political attitudes and party choice at the citizen level (Dassonneville and McAllister 2025). An implication is that CEE parties' issue profiles are less determined by ideological background and are based more on political expediency, for example. This means that taking public opinion into account in future work is necessary.

A further important finding is that there was no evidence for the expectation that mainstream parties react to the radical right's vote gains by adopting its issues. This supports the idea that CEE mainstream parties have, by default, partially covered the radical right's issues, and their issue profiles are thus already radicalized (Bustikova and Kitschelt 2009; Minkenberg 2013; Pytlas 2018; Heinisch et al. 2021). An alternative and potentially parallel explanation is that other parties simply ignore the radical right as part of a dismissive strategy (Meguid 2005).

Methodological Limitations

As hinted above, one of the limitations of this thesis is the reliance on manifesto data. While using manifestos as an indicator of issue salience has a long tradition, this method can only offer a limited perspective on the content of party competition. The case study in chapter 5 shows how cultural issues have seen a clearer relative increase in salience in parliamentary debates compared to manifestos, suggesting that the dynamics of this arena of party competition are indeed different (Schwalbach 2023). This is why future studies should compare the results obtained from manifesto data with other forms of party communication, such as press releases or social media, which allow for a more short-term analysis compared to the temporally static manifestos. Examining party interactions within electoral cycles would also allow for a more causally oriented research design, and this is crucial for providing more definitive answers about the interactions between the radical right and its competitors. In this regard, the model testing parties' reactions to previous radical-right vote shares in this study were limited by the small number of elections per country included in the analysis. Moreover, the results for the association between country characteristics and salience were limited by the small sample of countries.

The methods section also noted the drawbacks of the MARPOR categories, which are defined too broadly to study different cultural issues and have been criticized for insufficient

reliability (Mikhaylov et al. 2012; Gemenis 2013). While the aggregation of these categories into issue areas was based on the theoretically grounded conceptualization of cultural issues and followed previous empirical approaches, there were nonetheless some researcher degrees of freedom involved in constructing the issue areas. Part of this problem stems from the still unclear definition of what cultural issues mean substantively. Using a more fine-grained classification of issues in future studies could at least partly help with these problems. On this note, parties' left-right positions were operationalized using manifesto indicators for the sake of data availability, since expert survey data cannot effectively be used for the whole studied period. However, this means that the position measures might be biased since they are derived from the salience scores. While the logged rile measure tries to account for this (Lowe et al. 2011), using an independent measure of position would improve the validity of the results.

Avenues for Further Research

Aside from the extension of the research questions to other forms of party communication data, this thesis also provides several substantive avenues for further research.

First, there is significant potential to investigate how more dynamic demand-side factors related to public opinion influence party competition in CEE. Specifically, one avenue for a future study is to examine whether parties respond to changes in issue salience for the general public or their own supporters (Klüver and Spoon 2014; Malet and Thiébaut 2024). Moreover, short-term dynamics within electoral cycles, such as problem indicators (Seeberg 2023), could also condition parties' salience strategies, and this further underlines the need to go beyond the manifesto data. Just as public opinion shifts have the potential to explain variation in parties' issue emphasis, research should also ask how parties' salience strategies influence voters. Since left-right position has been shown to have less of an impact on vote choice in CEE (Dassonneville and McAllister 2025), issue salience might be more promising as a factor explaining voter behavior.

The dynamics of competition between mainstream and radical-right parties in CEE should also be examined more closely. Even if parties do not react to radical-right challengers by adjusting their issue emphasis, they might react in other ways, such as by changing their issue framing (Pytlas 2017; Habersack and Werner 2023). There is thus a possibility for further quantitative studies using more sophisticated text analysis methods, such as word

embeddings (F. Wagner et al. 2025), to assess how parties' communication might change in reaction to the radical right. Additionally, research on German-speaking countries has suggested that mainstream parties' salience adjustments can take place in the short term and then die down again after some months (Gessler and Hunger 2022). This further highlights the need to use more dynamic data in the study of CEE cases. Beyond the interaction between the radical and mainstream right, Bustikova et al. (2020) highlight how non-proximate parties also influence each other.

The growing availability of data from parliamentary debates means that the analysis in chapter 5 could be extended to a wider range of CEE cases, allowing for a comparative analysis of how competition on cultural issues plays out in the parliamentary arena. There is potential to use more sophisticated techniques both for classifying the debate texts and for statistically analysing party interactions over time.

Shrnutí

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá stranickou soutěží ohledně kulturních témat ve střední a východní Evropě, a to prizmatem důležitosti témat (issue salience). Práce vychází z literatury o ideologické struktuře stranických systémů a stranické soutěži v západní i postkomunistické Evropě, na jejímž základě formuluje řadu očekávání týkajících se variace salience kulturních témat napříč zeměmi, stranami a v čase. K ověření těchto očekávání práce využívá komparativní analýzu programových dat z projektu MARPOR a případovou studii parlamentních debat v České republice.

Jedním z hlavních zjištění práce je, že kulturní témata v programech stran nevzrůstají na důležitosti ve srovnání s tématy ekonomickými. To naznačuje, že současná polarizace v postojích voličů nebo elit nutně nevede strany k tomu, aby kulturním tématům začaly věnovat více programatického prostoru. Dalším hlavním poznatkem práce je, že rozdíly v salienci na úrovni zemí nelze dostatečně vysvětlit strukturálními faktory, jako jsou etnické složení, religiozita či komunistická minulost. Na úrovni stran práce ukazuje, že krajní pravice systematicky klade větší důraz na témata nacionalismu, multikulturalismu a menšin, zatímco mezi ostatními stranickými rodinami není významná souvislost mezi pravolevou pozicí a saliencí těchto otázek. Výsledky dále nenacházejí podporu pro očekávání, že by ostatní strany reagovaly na volební úspěch krajní pravice zvýšením důrazu na kulturní témata. To může být dáno vyšší mírou programového překryvu radikálně pravicových a mainstreamových stran v tomto regionu.

Z metodologického hlediska práce poukazuje na omezení dat z volebních programů, zejména jejich nízkou citlivost na krátkodobé změny a také na příliš obecné kódovací schéma projektu MARPOR, které lépe odpovídá klasické stranické soutěži 20. století zaměřené primárně na ekonomická témata. Případová studie parlamentních debat ukazuje, že kulturní témata jsou zde výrazně důležitější než ve stranických programech, což naznačuje, že se strategie stran významně liší napříč různými formami stranické komunikace. Budoucí výzkum by proto měl zahrnout také alternativní datové zdroje, například sociální sítě nebo tiskové zprávy, a měl by se zaměřit na to, jak se pozornost stran vyvíjí v rámci volebního cyklu. Mezi perspektivní oblasti pro další výzkum patří také prozkoumání vlivu salience na volební chování nebo například srovnání rámování témat napříč stranickými rodinami.

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Appendix no. 1: Aggregate issue areas used in the empirical analysis and MARPOR categories used in the aggregation

Aggregate issue area	**MARPOR categories used (category indicator in MARPOR dataset in parentheses)**
Aggregate economic issues	Free Market Economy (per401) Incentives: Positive (per402) Market Regulation (per403) Economic Planning (per404) Corporatism/Mixed Economy (per405) Protectionism: Positive (per406) Protectionism: Negative (per407) Economic Goals (per408) Keynesian Demand Management (per409)

	Economic Growth: Positive (per410) Technology and Infrastructure: Positive (per411) Controlled Economy (per412) Nationalisation (per413) Economic Orthodoxy (per414) Marxist Analysis (per415) Equality: Positive (per503) Welfare State Expansion (per504) Welfare State Limitation (per505) Labour Groups: Positive (per701) Labour Groups: Negative (per702)
Aggregate cultural issues	National Way of Life: Positive (per601) National Way of Life: Negative (per602) Multiculturalism: Positive (per607) Multiculturalism: Negative (per608) Underprivileged Minority Groups (per705) Traditional Morality: Positive (per603) Traditional Morality: Negative (per604) Law and Order: Positive (Per605) European Community/Union: Positive (per108) European Community/Union: Negative (per110) Anti-Growth Economy: Positive (per416) Environmental Protection (per501)
Nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities	National Way of Life: Positive (per601) National Way of Life: Negative (per602) Multiculturalism: Positive (per607) Multiculturalism: Negative (per608) Underprivileged Minority Groups (per705)
Morality issues	Traditional Morality: Positive (per603) Traditional Morality: Negative (per604)
European Union	European Community/Union: Positive (per108) European Community/Union: Negative (per110)
Environment	Anti-Growth Economy: Positive (per416) Environmental Protection (per501)

Appendix no. 2: MARPOR categories used to construct the logged rile scale

Following Laver and Budge (1992), the following categories are used in the rile calculation. The scale is further logit transformed as proposed by Lowe et al. (2011).

Right (R)	Pro-military (per104) Freedom, human rights (per201)

	Constitutionalism (per203) Political authority (per305) Free enterprise (per401) Economic incentives (per402) Anti-protectionism (per407) Economic orthodoxy (per414) Social services limitation (per505) National way of life (per601) Traditional morality (per603) Law and order (per605) Civic mindedness (per606)
Left (L)	Decolonization (per103) Anti-military (per105) Peace (per106) Internationalism (per107) Democracy (per202) Regulate capitalism (per403) Economic planning (per404) Pro-protectionism (per406) Controlled economy (per412) Nationalization (per413) Social services expansion (per504) Education expansion (per506) Pro-labour (per701).

Appendix no. 3: Radical-right parties included in the analysis

Country	Parties
Bulgaria	National Union Attack (ATAKA); Order, Law and Justice (RZS); Patriotic Front - NFSB and VMRO (NA); Bulgaria without Censorship (BBZ); United Patriots (OP); Will (NA); People's Union (NS)
Croatia	Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ); Croatian Party of Rights (HSP); Croatian Democratic Assembly of Slavonia and Baranja (HDSSB); Bridge of Independent Lists (MOST); Miroslav Škoro Homeland Movement (DPMŠ)
Czech Republic	Association for the Republic – Republican Party of Czechoslovakia (SPR-RSČ); Tomio Okamura's Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit); Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)
Estonia	Estonian National Independence Party (ERSP); Electoral Union 'Estonian Citizen' (NA); Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE)
Hungary	Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP); Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)
Latvia	For Fatherland and Freedom (TB); Popular Movement for Latvia-Zigerista Party (TKL-ZP); For Fatherland and Freedom - Latvian National Independence Movement (TB-LNNK); National Alliance 'All For Latvia!'

	– ‘For Fatherland and Freedom - Latvian National Independence Movement' (NA)
Lithuania	Lithuanian National Union (LTS)
Poland	Union of Real Politics (UPR); Polish Western Union (PZZ); Party X (PX); Movement for the Reconstruction of Poland (ROP); League of Polish Families (LPR); Confederation Liberty and Independence (KWiN); Confederation for an Independent Poland (KPN)
Romania	Romanian National Unity Party (PUNR); Romanian Unity Alliance (AUR); Greater Romania Party (PRM); Republican Party (PR)
Slovakia	Slovak National Party (SNS); Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS); We Are Family (NA); National Democratic Party - New Alternative (NDS)
Slovenia	Slovenian National Party (SNS); New Slovenian Christian People’s Party (Nsi); Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)

Appendix no. 4: Descriptive statistics for models testing association between radical right success and salience

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range (min-max)
Nationalism, multiculturalism, minorities	604	4.15	5.29	50 (0-50)
Nationalism, multiculturalism, minorities (t-1)	327	4.25	5.48	43.86 (0-43.86)
Radical right vote share (t-1)	514	7.75	10.62	51.77 (0-51.77)
Radical right presence (t-1)	514	0.62	0.49	1 (0-1)
Party vote share	557	14.02	11.62	67.88 (0-67.88)
Government party	604	0.24	0.43	1 (0-1)
Net migration (divided by total population)	514	-0.00	0.00	0.02 (-0.02-0)

Source: own calculation, data from MARPOR (Lehmann et al. 2024a), ESS (2003; 2012; 2018; 2023a; 2023b; 2023c; 2023d; 2023e; 2023f; 2023g; 2023h; 2024), World Bank (2025a)

Appendix no. 5: Dictionaries used in the analysis of Czech parliamentary speeches

Issue	**Keywords**
Economic issues	Zaměstnanost (employment) zaměstnat (employ) zaměstnal* (employed) zaměstná* (employ) mzd* (wage) mezd* (wages) clo (tariff) cla (duties) celní* (customs *adjective*) cel (custom) cena (price) cen (prices) cenov* (price *adjective*) ekonom* (economy) finan* (finance) důchod* (pension) kapitalism* (capitalism) kapitál* (capital) hospodář* (economic) výrob* (production) daň* (tax) trh (market) trž* (trade) monopol* (monopoly)
Minorities	ras* (race) etnick* (ethnic) etnikum (ethnicity) vietnam* (Vietnam) rom (Roma) romští (Roma *adjective*) roms* (Roma *adjective*) cikan* (gypsy) menšin* (minority) minorit* (minorit)
Nation	národ* (nation) čech* (Czech) češi (Czechs) češt* (Czech *adjective*)
Multicultularism	multikult* (multicultural)
Immigration	migrant* (migrant) imigrant* (immigrant) uprchlick* (refugee) uprchlí* (refugee) přistěhoval* (immigrant) cizin* (foreign) hranice (border) azyl* (asylum)
LGBTQ	gay* (gay) lesb* (lesbian) stejnopohlavní (same-sex) registrované partnerství (registered partnership) manželství pro všechny (marriage for all)
Gender	práva žen (women's rights) ženská práva (women's rights) *feminist* (feminist) *feminismus (feminism) *gender* (gender) pohlaví (sex) rovnost žen a mužů (gender equality) rovnost mužů a žen (gender equality) rovnost pohlaví (equality of sexes) genderov* (gender *adjective*)
Reproductive rights	interrupce (abortion) potrat* (abortion) antikoncepc* (contraception)

Family	rodin* (family)
Religion/religious institutions	kostelní* (church-related) církev* (church) bůh (God) bohoslužb* (service) nábožen* (religious) světsk* (secular) sekulární (secular) sekularizace (secularization) křesťan* (Christian) víra (faith) duchov* (spiritual)

Appendix no. 6: Regression models for predictions in Figure 3

	Nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities	Morality	Environment	EU	Economic issues
year	0.000 (0.027)	-0.052*** (0.014)	0.010 (0.030)	0.032*** (0.007)	0.445*** (0.051)
FE: country	X	X	X	X	X
Num.Obs.	696	696	696	696	696

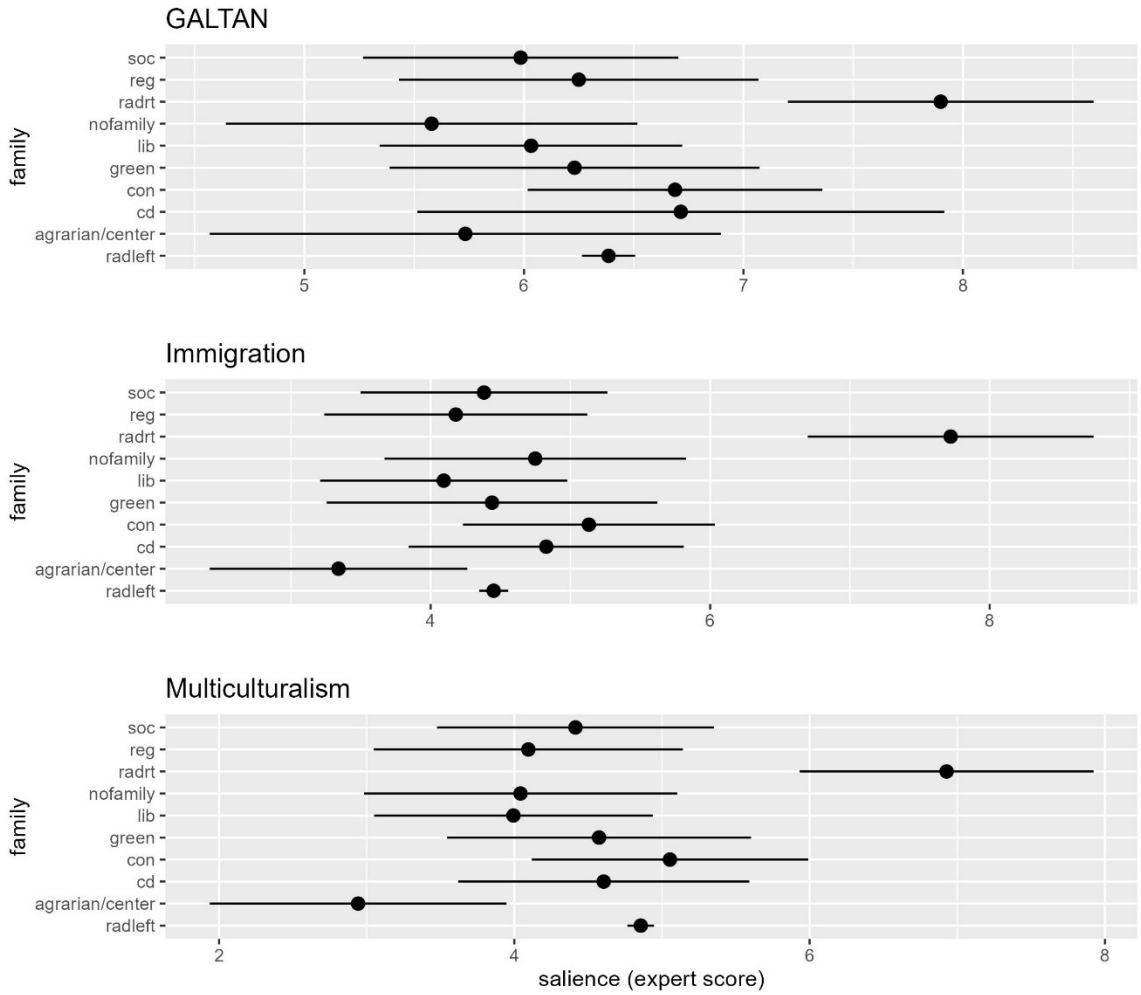
*Note: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001, heteroskedasticity robust standard errors in parentheses*

Appendix no. 7: Regression models for predictions in Figure 7

	Nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities	Aggregate cultural issues	Morality
Christian Democratic	0.368	5.794**	2.911**
	(0.711)	(1.662)	(1.050)
Conservative	1.855+	4.729***	0.631
	(0.951)	(1.134)	(0.480)
Radical right	8.462***	10.977***	0.966+
	(1.108)	(1.525)	(0.487)
Green	0.090	13.005**	-0.440
	(0.796)	(4.087)	(0.546)
Socialist	0.357	0.661	-0.570
	(0.835)	(1.178)	(0.452)
Liberal	0.669	1.960+	-0.141
	(0.703)	(1.011)	(0.485)
Agrarian/center	1.445*	3.889*	1.375
	(0.618)	(1.876)	(1.143)
Nofamily	0.751	-0.482	-0.144
	(0.797)	(1.640)	(0.566)
Regionalist	6.379***	5.776*	0.848
	(1.728)	(2.822)	(0.644)
Pervote	0.004	-0.031	-0.009
	(0.018)	(0.029)	(0.010)
Cabinet party	0.219	-0.686	-0.685***
	(0.316)	(0.530)	(0.170)
Num.Obs.	647	647	647
Std.Errors	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)
FE: factor(country)	X	X	X
FE: factor(year)	X	X	X

- p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Appendix no. 8: Predicting the salience of issue categories using CHES data



Appendix no. 9: Split regressions predicting the salience of nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities

	sample: Bulgaria	sample: Croatia	sample: Czech Republic	sample: Estonia	sample: Hungary	sample: Latvia	sample: Lithuania	sample: Poland	sample: Romania	sample: Slovakia	sample: Slovenia
log_rile	-1.347	1.608	0.790+	2.246	4.597	1.503	1.703+	1.067	0.157	0.759	0.058
	(0.869)	(1.134)	(0.404)	(2.048)	(2.499)	(2.220)	(0.732)	(0.771)	(0.713)	(2.223)	(0.454)
pervote	-0.150+	0.016	-0.009	-0.054	0.057	-0.377	-0.074	-0.001	-0.158	-0.127	0.018
	(0.075)	(0.044)	(0.014)	(0.065)	(0.053)	(0.236)	(0.066)	(0.027)	(0.111)	(0.092)	(0.026)
factor(pgv_cabinet_party)1	-0.693	-0.263	0.215	0.174	1.785	-0.380	-0.425	0.603	-1.309	-0.450	-0.079
	(0.801)	(0.547)	(0.458)	(0.833)	(1.542)	(1.536)	(1.088)	(0.574)	(1.403)	(1.342)	(0.508)
Num.Obs.	40	52	54	47	44	51	55	61	41	53	57
Std.Errors	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)
FE: factor(year)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

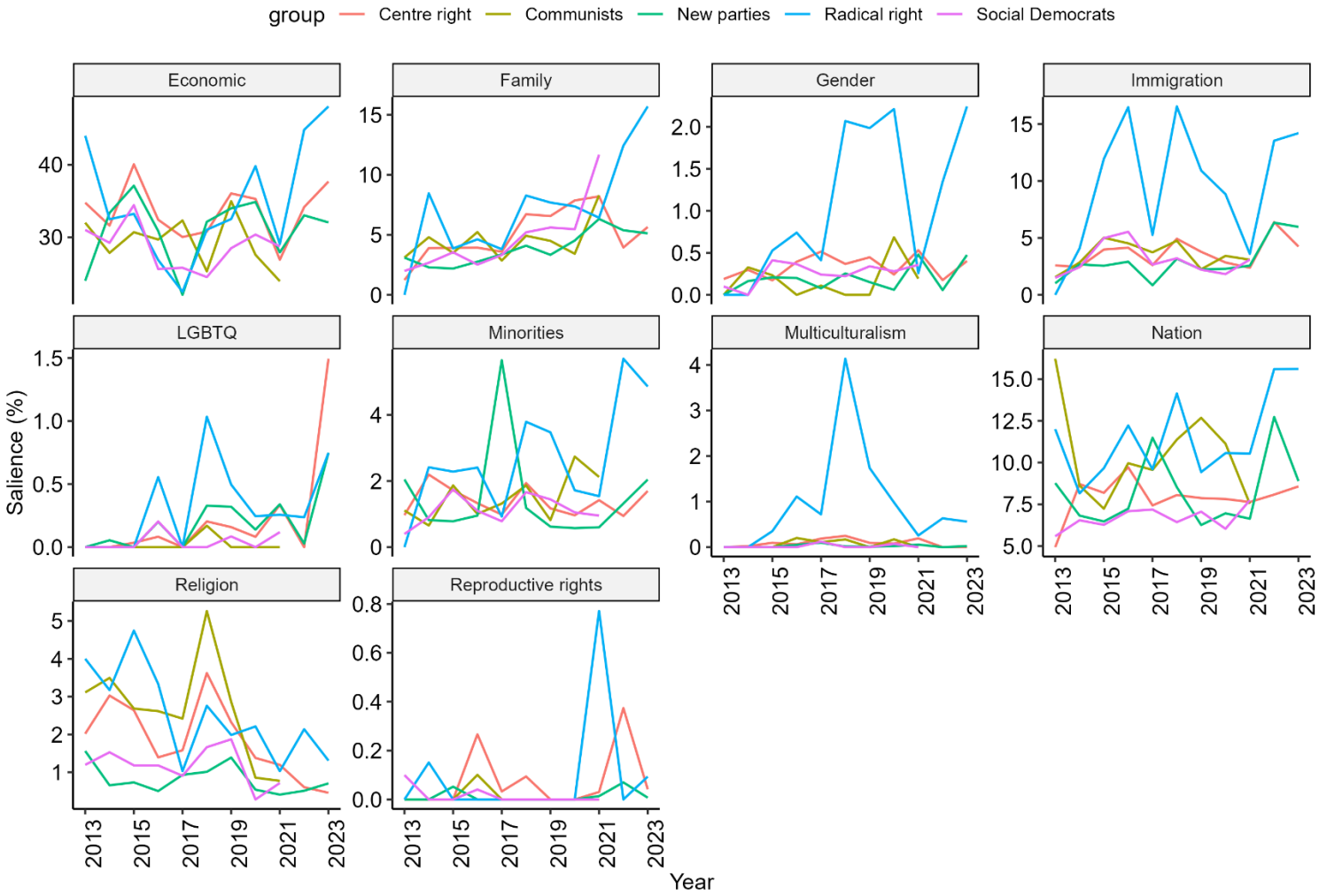
Note: clustered standard errors in parentheses, + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Appendix no. 10: Split regressions predicting the salience of morality issues

	sample: Bulgaria	sample: Croatia	sample: Czech Republic	sample: Estonia	sample: Hungary	sample: Latvia	sample: Lithuania	sample: Poland	sample: Romania	sample: Slovakia	sample: Slovenia
log_rile	0.049	0.149	0.779	0.431	1.989	4.005	4.266**	2.210	0.482+	2.788*	0.372
	(0.374)	(0.221)	(0.565)	(0.577)	(1.325)	(2.554)	(1.198)	(1.311)	(0.230)	(1.170)	(0.565)
pervote	0.004	0.020	-0.075	-0.004	0.004	-0.128	-0.111*	-0.045*	-0.019***	0.057***	-0.019
	(0.007)	(0.016)	(0.042)	(0.020)	(0.031)	(0.070)	(0.044)	(0.019)	(0.003)	(0.007)	(0.023)
factor(pgv_cabinet_party)1	-0.475+	-0.407	1.223*	0.134	-0.418	-1.634	-0.471	-2.294*	-1.651*	0.335	-0.199
	(0.237)	(0.773)	(0.388)	(0.406)	(1.727)	(1.228)	(1.069)	(0.967)	(0.473)	(0.452)	(0.783)
Num.Obs.	40	52	54	47	44	51	55	61	41	53	57
Std.Errors	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)	by: factor(party) & factor(year)
FE: factor(year)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note: clustered standard errors in parentheses, + p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Appendix no. 11: Yearly issue salience for different party groups in Czech parliament after 2013



Appendix no. 12: Link to replication materials for this thesis

The R scripts together with instructions on how to access the data used in the analysis can be accessed at the following link: https://github.com/vojtechpohanka/MA-thesis.