Ready or not. National identity, vote choice, and mass media: Evidence from Germany

Antonia C. May 🆔

GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Cologne, Germany

Correspondence
Antonia C. May, GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Cologne, Germany.
Email: antonia.may@gesis.org

Abstract

Exploiting the increased prominence of debates on immigration, right-wing parties often frame and campaign against immigrants as a threat to national societies. Research on national identity has shown that these parties are particularly successful among voters with an ethnically charged, exclusionary conception of nation. National identity, however, tends to be rather latent and stable, while far-right voting is much more volatile. Explaining a temporal influence of national identity on political behavior, social-psychological theories argue that identities need to be activated to become behaviorally relevant. The main argument of this article is that the presence of immigration-related news in the mass media can serve as such a situational factor for thinking about the nation and thus increase its salience for electoral behavior. Combining individual-level panel data from the German Longitudinal Election Study's Short-term Campaign Panel (GLES, 2019) with a measure of media salience of immigration-related news in news articles, this study is the first to examine whether national identity can be activated for political behavior through the salience of immigration-related issues in the mass media using panel data.

KEYWORDS

identity activation, media salience, national identity, voting

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, immigration issues had a profound impact on voting behavior in advanced democracies (Dennison, 2020; Dennison & Geddes, 2019). Particularly, far-right

---

Highlights

- National identities that are normally more latent and not politically salient can be activated for political behavior.
- Both parties on the left and on the right benefit from the increased importance of national identities, if they offer policies that fit in with the voters' ideas of nationhood.
- The salience of immigration issues has an activating effect on national identities, and the effect is particularly strong for those with exclusionary conceptions who vote for the far right.
- The way individuals conceptualize the national in-group has a stronger effect on the activation potential than the position/centrality of national identity within the individual's self-concept.

(populist) parties benefited from the immigration issue's prominence (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Damstra et al., 2021; Dennison & Geddes, 2019; Krause et al., 2023). By advocating nativist and restrictive positions on immigration, they largely appeal to anti-immigrant attitudes in the electorate (Abou-Chadi et al., 2022; Arzheimer, 2008, 2009; Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020; Stockemer et al., 2018), which is closely linked to exclusionary national identity (Helbling et al., 2016; e.g., Hjerm, 1998a; Hochmann et al., 2016; Kunovich, 2009; Trittler, 2017; Wright, 2011; Wright et al., 2012). But national identity is rather latent and stable (Mader & Schoen, 2023) and should therefore have a continuous effect on attitudes and voting, whereas (far-right) voting tends to be more volatile. The key question is, thus, *when* national identity influences voting decisions (Bonikowski et al., 2021). Accounting for the temporal influence of national identity on voting, previous research argued that political elites play a crucial role in activating national identity by increasing the salience of immigration issues (Bonikowski et al., 2021; Garand et al., 2020; May, 2023; Schulte-Cloos, 2022; Thompson, 2021). Complementing this research on national identities' activation, I focus on the role of mass media content as a key activating factor. The mass media is the primary source of information for citizens regarding political actors, issues, and policies (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016) and additionally serves as a gatekeeper for political elites' messages (McCombs & Shaw, 1972, p. 176). Thus, immigration-related issues in the mass media alone may influence the relevance of national identity for voting decisions.

Drawing on national identity research, social-psychology, and public discourse, I examine whether national identity can be activated for electoral behavior by immigration-related issue salience in the mass media. According to national identity research, narrow conceptions of nationhood are strongly associated with hostility toward immigrants (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Hjerm, 1998a; Trittler, 2017) and an increased propensity to vote for far-right parties (Bonikowski et al., 2021; Mader et al., 2020). To account for changes in this relationship over time, social-psychological theories claim that identities require activation by situational cues to become behaviorally relevant (Carter, 2013; Monroe et al., 2000; Schnakenberg, 2014; Sniderman et al., 2004; Stets & Burke, 2000). Thereby, the presence of immigration issues in the media may act as such situational cue, prompting individuals to reflect on their nationhood and consequently increasing the likelihood that national identity will influence voting behavior. The salience of immigration-related issues in public debates has been consistently shown to generally increase both the prevalence of anti-immigrant attitudes (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Czymara & Dochow, 2018) and far-right voting (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Dennison, 2020). I argue that this salience affects those with narrow conceptions specifically. The effect, however, is not necessarily limited to the right. As the importance

of immigration increases, the relevance of national identity should increase for all members of society. Therefore, those with more open conceptions of nationhood should be more likely to vote for left-wing parties that offer more integrative immigration policy positions.

By combining individual-level panel data from the German Longitudinal Election Study's (GLES) 2017 Short-term Campaign Panel (GLES, 2019) with contextual data on immigration-related news articles provided by LexisNexis, I examine (i) whether divergent conceptions of nationhood form the breeding ground for voting decisions, (ii) whether, and (iii) under which conditions these conceptions are specifically susceptible to activation by short-term changes in the salience of immigration-related news in the mass media.

Germany is a very interesting case to study. Despite being a textbook example of ethnic nationalism that underpins citizenship policies with blood relations in line with the *jus sanguinis* principle, Germany underwent a hotly debated metamorphosis at the turn of the millennium. Germany's inclusion of more civic elements, such as granting citizenship to the descendants of immigrants, and the debates surrounding naturalization tests, has drawn attention to the issue of national in-group perceptions. Notably, the 2017 federal elections were particularly interesting as they marked the first major success of the country's right-wing party in a national parliamentary election. In this election, immigration and the so-called "migrant crisis" were among the most important political issues for most voters (see Supplementary Material A1.1) and had a significant impact on voting behavior (Wagner & Lichteblau, 2022). Thus, Germany in 2017 provides an excellent opportunity to test the activation hypothesis of national identities being activated through immigration-related issue salience.

This study demonstrates that situational cues, such as the presence of immigration-related issues in the mass media, impact the relevance of national identity for voting decisions, particularly benefitting parties on the fringes of the political spectrum. However, individuals with exclusionary conceptions are more affected by this activation and are notably drawn to the far right. The findings provide initial evidence of the activation potential of social identities for political behavior and emphasize the key role of content and knowledge structures associated with identities.

National identities, anti-immigrant attitudes, and voting

Explaining anti-immigrant attitudes and the appeal of far-right parties, national identity research finds that the way individuals differentiate between compatriots and "others" plays a key role (Helbling et al., 2016; Hjerm, 1998a; Hochmann et al., 2016; Kunovich, 2009; Lindstam et al., 2019; Lubbers & Coenders, 2017; Mader et al., 2020; Thompson, 2021). Intergroup differentiation is a prerequisite for the devaluation of outsiders and the development of outgroup hostility (cf. Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1979). In particular, ethnically charged, exclusionary conceptions of nationhood are found to explain anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g., Hjerm, 1998b; Jones & Smith, 2001; Kunovich, 2009; Wright, 2011), which are among the main individual-level predictors of far-right voting in electoral studies (Abou-Chadi et al., 2022; Arzheimer, 2008, 2009; Halikiopoulou & Vlandas, 2020; Mason et al., 2021; Stockemer et al., 2018).

The ethnic-civic dichotomy of national identity (Brubaker, 1994; Kohn, 2005; Smith, 1991) argues that differentiating between compatriots and "others" is either based on voluntaristic criteria (civic), such as law-abidingness, or ascriptive criteria (ethnic), such as blood relations and descent (e.g., Helbling et al., 2016; Jones & Smith, 2001; Wright et al., 2012). Ethnic conceptions are inherently restrictive and exclusionary. Therefore, immigrants (or their descendants) are often perceived as outsiders and culturally and economically threatening (cf. Lindstam et al., 2019). This fosters anti-immigrant attitudes and support for political parties that offer anti-immigrant issue positions, as shown for Trump in the

2016 US election (Thompson, 2021) and the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Germany between 2015 and 2017 (Mader et al., 2020; Pesthy et al., 2020). Recent research challenges the ethnic-civic dichotomy, indicating that ethnic and civic conceptions often coincide, particularly among individuals with anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g., Helbling et al., 2016; Hjerm, 1998a; Lindstam et al., 2019; Mader et al., 2020) but also among far-right parties (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012, 2013; Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014). The conceptions of nationhood are moreover found to be more complex and to range from inclusionary to exclusionary (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; Helbling et al., 2016; Hjerm, 1998a, 1998b; May, 2023; Trittler, 2017). Particularly, the way individuals arrange and combine membership boundaries uncovers the underlying conceptions, which are found to drive attitudes toward immigrants (Trittler, 2017).

Against this backdrop, exclusionary conceptions of nationhood – using a variety of criteria to delineate the national in-group – are expected to explain anti-immigrant attitudes and, consequently, voting for parties that advocate issue positions on immigration that are in line with these conceptions. However, the relationship between conceptions of nationhood and voting should not be limited to the right. Eger and Olzak (2022), for example, find a polarizing effect of anti-immigrant violence. As these acts of violence draw attention to immigration issues for all members of the nation, those with pro-immigrant attitudes are mobilized against the far right. Mader et al. (2020) also find that both right-wing and left-wing parties in Germany are associated with different conceptions of nationhood. Similarly, while successful right-wing parties are found to offer exclusionary conceptions of nationhood (by combining ethnic and civic criteria) (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012, 2013; Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014), left-wing parties are also found to offer concrete and alternative conceptions to their voters (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012). In line with these findings, data from the Manifesto Project (Lehmann et al., 2022) shows that particularly the AfD, the Left and the Greens offered positions on the national in-group and immigrants in the 2017 federal election (see Supplementary Material A1.2). In contrast, the manifestos of the other main parties contained few positions on immigration. While the AfD offers restrictive positions on immigration and demands cultural assimilation in their party manifesto, both left-wing parties offer positive stances on multiculturalism, which may make them more attractive to voters with more inclusive and open conceptions of nationhood.

Based on these findings, I hypothesize that

> **H1.** (Direction of Effects 1): Individuals with more exclusionary conceptions of nationhood are more likely to vote for parties that offer anti-immigrant issue positions.

> **H2.** (Direction of Effects 2): Individuals with more inclusionary conceptions of nationhood are more likely to vote for parties that offer immigrant-friendly issue positions.

Activation of (national) identities: Social-psychological perspectives

Explaining the inconsistency of rather latent and stable national identity and more volatile voting behavior, various contextual factors are thought to increase the importance of national identity to the point of shaping electoral decisions (Bonikowski et al., 2021; Garand et al., 2020; May & Czymara, 2023; Schulte- Cloos, 2022; Steiner & Harms, 2021; Thompson, 2021). The general assumption is that national identities are rarely explicitly relevant in political contexts. However, the presence of globalization or immigration issues is assumed to highlight national boundaries and, consequently, increase their relevance in voting. Put differently: Contextual factors are expected to *activate* national identity's potential to influence political behavior.

Social psychological theories suggest that identities require activation to become behaviorally relevant and that this activation is largely situational (c.f., Stets & Burke, 2000). Due to different social situations, individuals constantly shift between guiding identities (Aquino et al., 2009; Brewer & Weber, 1994; Huddy, 2003, p. 533ff.). These shifts have consequences: In a survey experiment, respondents preferred policy positions that benefited either their ethnic group or their larger national group, depending on which group had been previously primed through question wording (Transue, 2007). This suggests that identities not only develop political potential but also influence the decision between competing policy preferences, depending on which identity has been primed. Based on Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1979) and Realistic Group Conflict paradigm (Blumer, 1958), individuals tend to select the option that benefits their in-group the most either in terms of positive self-esteem or (perceived) competition over scarce resources such as jobs and economic well-being (McLaren, 2003; Sniderman et al., 2004). Yet, the group used as a reference depends on activation.

Activation, here, is the process of prioritizing one identity over others to guide behavior. The prioritization of identities depends on the fit between a given situation and the meanings individuals attach to an identity as well as the overall accessibility of these meanings within the self-concept (Aquino et al., 2009; Carter, 2013, p. 206; Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 230). Although certain identities have an a priori higher position in the hierarchical network of identities (Stryker, 1980; Stryker & Serpe, 1994) and are therefore more easily accessed across situations, others that are lower in this network require explicit activation through situational cues. In contrast to person-based (e.g., moral identity) and role-based (e.g., mother and student) identities, group-based identities, like national identity, are relatively low in this network of identities and therefore require explicit activation (Stets & Burke, 2000). In the latter case, the knowledge structures associated with identities and social cues must align to guide behavior. The attached meanings, thereby, influence the processing of information and, moreover, guide the behavioral consequences (Monroe et al., 2000, p. 423f).

Taken together, group-based identities can influence decisions and behavior, depending on the alignment of identity-related knowledge structures and the situational cues present in specific social situations. In the case of national identity, knowledge structures are represented by the conceptions of nationhood. Globalization and immigration in public discourse can arguably act as situational cues that bring national identity to the fore by reminding individuals of their national boundaries. Having narrower conceptions thereby is expected to increase sensitivity to situational cues because larger parts of society are perceived as "others" and potentially threatening to the national in-group. The overall position of the national identity within an individual's self-concept should further increase the activation potential so that those with a strong national attachment are potentially more affected by situational cues.

> **H3.** (Activation Hypothesis): The relationship between national identity and vote choices is conditional on the activation through situational cues.

Mass media, issue salience, and voting

Even though the mass media have long been discussed as an important driver of both threat perception of immigrants and anti-immigrant attitudes (Czymara & Dochow, 2018), immigration-related issue salience in the mass media has been overlooked in previous studies as potentially activating national identity for political behavior. The mass media, positioned between the political system and the public (Wettstein & Wirth, 2017, p. 262), is an important gatekeeper in the exchange of information between politicians and the public that influences perceptions

of issue importance, attitudes, and (voting) decisions (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016).

According to agenda-setting and priming literature, by discussing immigration issues, the media position immigration as an important issue (Dunaway et al., 2011; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and shape perceptions of immigrants by bringing pre-existing issue-related knowledge structures to the forefront of thinking, making them accessible in decision-making (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007, p. 11). As conflicts over immigration relate to belonging, national identity, sovereignty, and solidarity (Hutter & Kriesi, 2022), the presence of immigration issues in the news is likely to cause individuals to reflect on the boundaries of their national in-group, activating existing out-group stereotypes and feelings of competition. The increased salience of national identity then ultimately increases the likelihood of voting according to national identity. Again, the mechanism should be a function of the pre-existing knowledge structures associated with the nation, with those who hold more exclusionary views likely to be more sensitive to news about immigration.

Studies show that an increase in the prominence of immigration-related topics is linked to concerns about immigration (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Czymara & Dochow, 2018; Dunaway et al., 2011, p. 919; McLaren, 2017; Schlueter & Davidov, 2013) and (far-right) voting (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Damstra et al., 2021; Dennison, 2020; Dennison & Geddes, 2019; Hutter & Kriesi, 2022). The studies agree on the relationship between media coverage and attitudes toward immigrants and immigration, but diverge on the impact of news content, tone, or direction, as well as the interaction between mass media and other contextual or individual factors. Some argue that framing influences the understanding and assessment of issues (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Negative news is thereby found to shape perceptions of immigrants as problematic or threatening (Dunaway et al., 2011; Schemer, 2012; Schlueter & Davidov, 2013), while positive news about immigration has the opposite effect (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Schemer, 2012). In contrast, others suggest that undirected issue salience of immigration has a stable and increasing effect on concerns about immigration (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Czymara & Dochow, 2018) and voting for anti-immigrant parties (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007). However, media coverage is found to focus mainly on the negative aspects of immigration (Eberl et al., 2018; Esses et al., 2013; Hopkins, 2010), making it difficult to distinguish between frequency and tone effects (Hopkins, 2010). Overall, individuals who are more educated and better informed, as well as progressives and centre-left voters, are less likely to be influenced by immigration-related news (Czymara & Dochow, 2018; Dunaway et al., 2011; Schemer, 2012). The impact of immigrant shares and unemployment on anti-immigrant attitudes and voting varies across countries and studies (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009; Dunaway et al., 2011; Schlueter & Davidov, 2013), a puzzle which, according to Erisen and Vasilopoulou (2022), may be attributable to individual-level emotional responses that shape the perception and cognitive processing of contextual information.

Overall, the mass media are found to influence the perception of immigrants, which, again, ultimately touches upon national boundaries. Immigration-related issue salience in the media, thus, may provide the situational cues that activate national identity for political behavior. Accordingly, hypothesis 4 reads as follows:

> **H4.** (Issue Salience): The relationship between national identity and vote choices is conditional on immigration-related issue salience.

DATA AND METHODS

The individual-level data used in the analysis stems from the GLES's Short-term Campaign Panel (GLES, 2019), fielded between October 2016 and October 2017. Due to missing data, the analysis

is based on seven of the eight waves that cover one year prior to the German federal election and two weeks immediately afterward. The GLES employs quota sampling to draw respondents from a heterogeneous online sample, with quotas based on age, gender, and education. This approach is designed to approximate the German adult population with internet access who were eligible to vote in the 2017 election. The sample consists of a main sample, which started in October 2016, and a refresher sample, which started in July 2017 and fully merged with the main sample at the fifth wave. To reduce bias based on other national origins, the sample is limited to individuals with a long socialization in Germany (holding German citizenship and both parents being born in Germany). The final sample includes 69,363 observations from 14,020 individuals after list-wise deletion of cases with missing values for the included variables. Supplementary Material A2 provides an overview of all included variables, their distribution, and the data structure, as not all variables (e.g., socio-demographics and national identity) were surveyed in each panel wave, which also varied in length and intervals between the waves. The media data was obtained from LexisNexis, which provides full-text press information that was selected using a subject-specific search string to identify immigrant-related news articles.

Outcome: Vote intentions

To analyze the impact of immigration-related news on the activation of national identity for vote choice, I combine questions on intended vote choice and questions on early voters' vote choice from the pre-election waves with the retrospectively reported vote choice in the final wave. I created a binary variable (0 not voting for party, 1 voting for party) for the six main parties in Germany. These six variables are the dependent variables.

Individual-level predictors: Conceptions of nationhood

For the main individual-level predictor, I follow recent advances recommending the use of person-centered methods to capture national identity at the individual level (Bonikowski & DiMaggio, 2016; May, 2023; Trittler, 2017). To identify conceptions of nationhood, I use six items from the membership boundary question that asks respondents to rate the importance of each membership criterion for being considered a true German. The item selection is based on the qualitative research by Ditlmann and Kopf-Beck (2019) in Germany and includes being born in Germany, having German ancestors, living most of one's life in Germany, sharing German manners and customs, speaking accent-free German, and having democratic beliefs. To ascertain conceptions of nationhood, I use latent class analysis (LCA) by employing the LCA Plugin version 1.2.1 for STATA (Collins & Lanza, 2009; Lanza et al., 2018). After considering up to ten classes, the five-class solution is suggested a good model fit, with no significant improvement in the information criteria (BIC, AIC, CAIC, adjusted BIC) beyond that point (see Figure 1). With an entropy value of .866, the five-class solution represents an acceptable accuracy of class definitions. Table 1 reports the average latent class posterior probabilities for each class.

Figure 2 shows the results of the LCA. The values indicate the probabilities of members of a class choosing a scale option for the surveyed criteria. High values indicate high probabilities and high within-class homogeneity. For example, when asked how important "being born in Germany" is for being German, the probability of choosing "very important" exceeds .9 for the exclusionists. Thus, members of this class have an over 90 per cent probability of choosing "very important" as their answer.

Members of the first type, which I call the "Exclusionist," who make up 16.21% ($N = 2273$) of the sample, have very narrow conceptions of nationhood. With conditioned probabilities
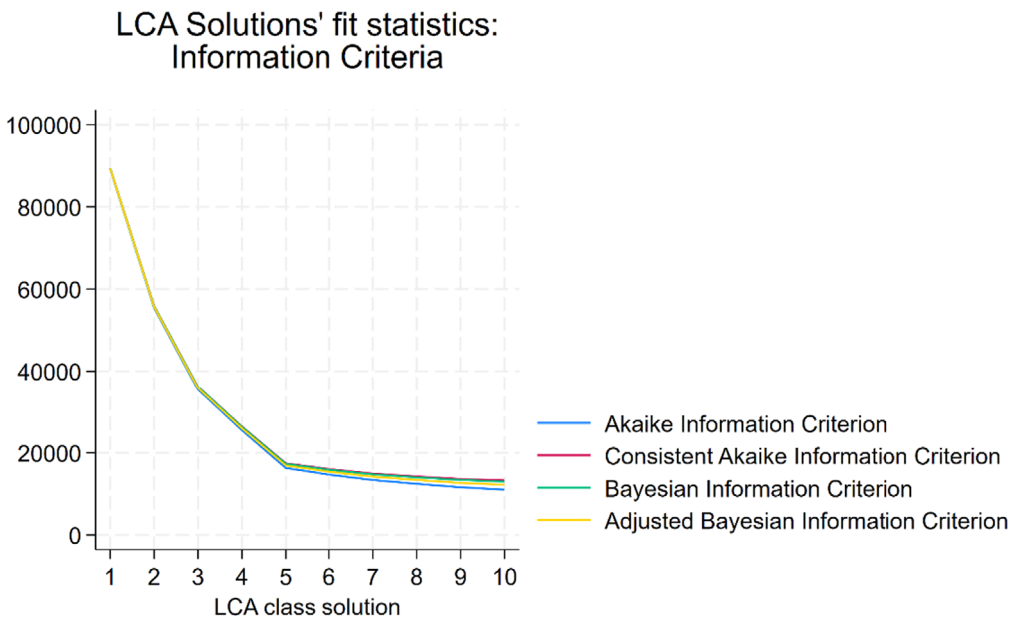
FIGURE 1 Elbow plot of fit statistics for all considered LCA solutions. Plotted are the values of Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC), consistent AIC (CAIC), and sample-size adjusted BIC to determine the ideal LCA class solution.

TABLE 1 Average latent class posterior probability.

	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Class 5
Class 1 (Exclusionists)	**.952**	.045	.000	.002	.001
Class 2 (Assimilationists)	.025	**.903**	.022	.049	.001
Class 3 (Indifferents)	.000	.070	**.884**	.046	.000
Class 4 (Integrationists)	.000	.054	.020	**.910**	.015
Class 5 (Pluralists)	.001	.003	.000	.049	**.948**

Note: The values on the diagonal (in bold) represent the average probability that the class model correctly predicts the class membership of individuals. The values are based on the average of the probabilities of all individuals belonging to that class, given the individual scores on the indicator variables.

above .75 to rate all the surveyed criteria as at least "somewhat important" but mostly "very important," such individuals set very high barriers to national membership and are very likely to use all available criteria to exclude "others" from their national in-group. In doing so, they base their conceptions on both ethnic (e.g., German ancestry) and civic (e.g., having democratic beliefs) criteria. In line with the *Direction of Effects* Hypotheses (H1), I expect individuals with these exclusionary conceptions of nationhood to favor the far-right party AfD, as the far-right party family offers a combination of ethnic and civic elements of national in-group definitions (Halikiopoulou et al., 2012; Halikiopoulou & Vasilopoulou, 2014). Given the narrow conceptions, members of this type categorize a large proportion of immigrants as outsiders, which should furthermore increase their sensitivity to immigration-related news. Therefore, in line with the Activation and Issue Salience Hypothesis (H3 and H4), an increase in the salience of immigration issues in the media should further increase their likelihood of voting for the AfD.
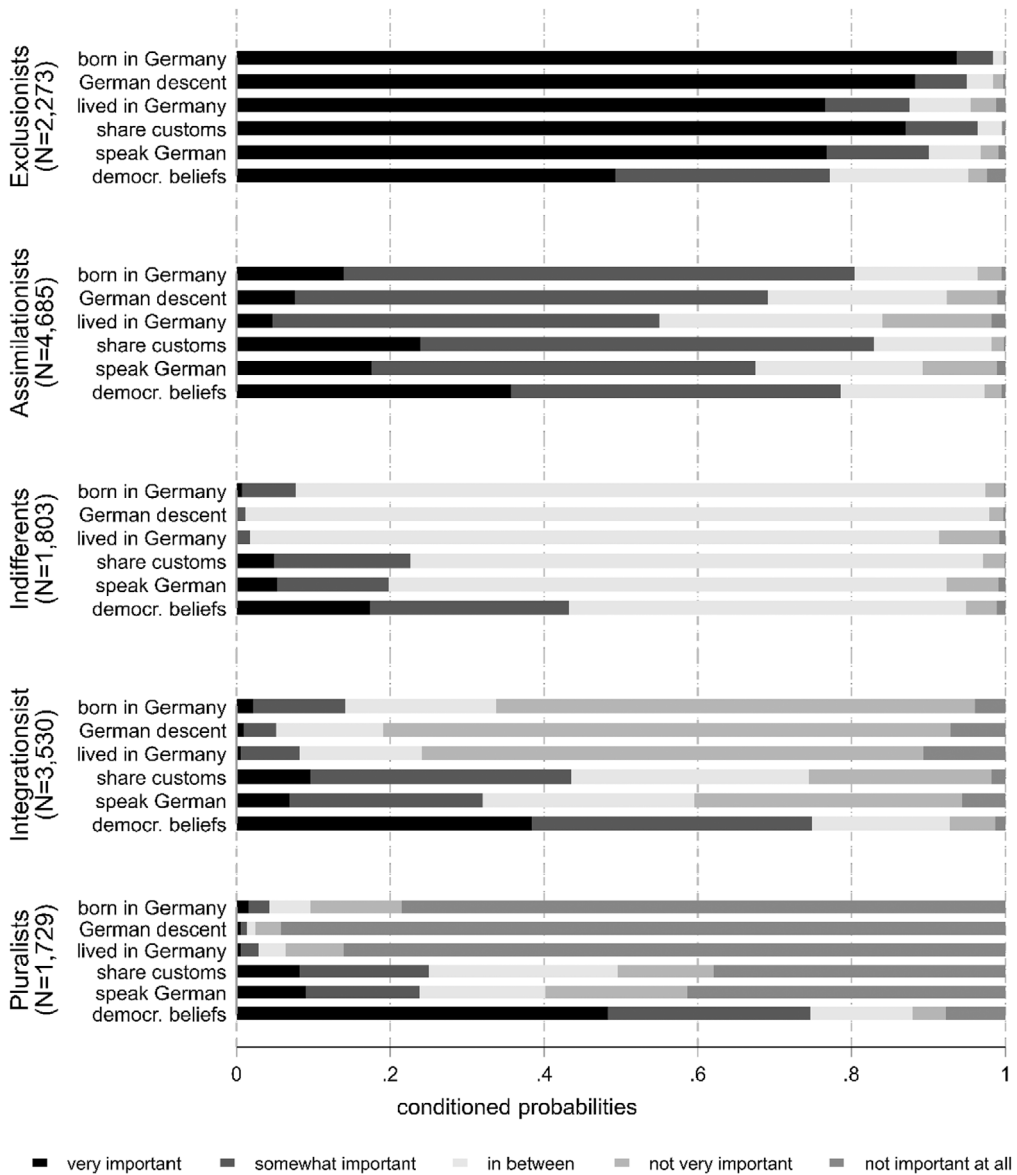
FIGURE 2 Conceptions of nationhood.

The second type, called "Assimilationist," represents 33.42% (*N* = 4685) of the sample. Members of this type also attach importance to most of the membership criteria. However, they are more likely to choose the "somewhat important" response, which makes them less rigid in their views. Furthermore, members of this type are more likely to place more importance on ideational and cultural integration (e.g., sharing German manners and customs and having democratic beliefs) and some form of naturalization (e.g., being born in Germany). As ancestry, language proficiency, and residence are also seen as important in-group markers, members of this type would probably be more likely to accept second-generation immigrants into their national in-group if they are willing to integrate culturally and ideationally. Accordingly, in the 2017 election, in which only the AfD offered assimilationist policy positions alongside narrow in-group positions, members of this type would

also be expected to favor the far-right party (H1). However, due to their less rigid conceptions of nationhood, the role of national identity as a voting motive is likely to be weaker and less likely to be activated by an increase in immigration-related issue salience (H3 and H4).

Thirdly, members of the "Indifferent" type, who make up 12.86% ($N = 1803$) of the sample, remain largely indifferent to the membership criteria. They are therefore not expected to be influenced in their voting by national identity or an increased immigration-related issue salience. This type serves as a reference category in the following analyses.

Next, members of the "Integrationist" type tend to reject nativist criteria, while placing a strong emphasis on democratic values and cultural-ideational integration (e.g., sharing German customs and speaking accent-free German). To some extent, members of this type probably prefer and expect immigrants to be willing and able to participate in and interact with German society. I expect members of this type to prefer parties that offer integrative immigration policies, that is, mainly the Greens and the Left. This type represents 25.18% ($N = 3530$) of the sample (H2).

Finally, members of the "Pluralist" type are strongly opposed to particularly nativist criteria and require of co-nationals only the basis of social coexistence, namely a belief in democratic principles. As members of this type tend not to demand cultural integration, they are likely to be more comfortable with higher levels of diversity. Therefore, I expect parties with positive positions on multiculturalism, like the Greens, and the Left, to be favored by individuals with pluralistic conceptions of nationhood (H2). But, based on their clear profile, they are arguably more consolidated in their conceptions of nationhood, which makes their in-group/out-group boundaries easier accessible in an environment of high salience of immigration-related issues (H3 and H4). This type represents 12.33% ($N = 1729$) of the sample.

For the following analyses, I generated a categorical variable that classifies respondents based on the LCA results (i.e., their response patterns) into these five groups.

Macro-level predictor: Media-salience of immigration-related news

Following Czymara and Dochow (2018), the immigration-related issue salience measure is obtained by using exploratory factor analysis of variables that count the number of articles referring to immigration in four German news outlets. To ensure ideological balance, news articles from the two German non-tabloid national newspapers (the conservative *Die Welt* and the left-wing *taz.die tageszeitung*) and two weekly news magazines with the highest circulation in Germany (*Der Spiegel* and *Stern*) were considered. The full-text articles were extracted from LexisNexis using a keyword search that identified articles that directly referred to immigration, included a reference to Germany, and included at least one term that was broadly connected to immigration.[1] To calculate the daily factor scores, the number of identified articles for the past 21 days was cumulated to ensure that the topic was salient for long enough to be discussed and remembered. The obtained factor scores thus represent the media salience on a given day, based on the identified articles of the past 21 days. These daily values are merged with the individual-level data based on the date of the interview of

---

[1]The search string reads as follows (* are wildcards): "(*migrant* or *migration* or *flücht* or *flucht* or *ausländer* or *asyl*) and (*deutschland* or *bundesrepublik* or *brd) and (*integration* or *abschieb* or *abgeschob* or *einbürgerung* or *aufenthaltsgenehm* or *ausländerkriminalität*) or (*kriminalität* w/5 (*wander* or *migrant* or *flücht* or *ausländer* or *fachkr* or (*qualifi* w/3 (*wander* or *migrant* or *flücht* or *ausländer*)) or (*arbeit w/3 (*wander* or *migrant* or *flücht* or *ausländer*)) or (*beruf w/3 (*wander* or *migrant* or *flücht* or *ausländer*)) or ((*terror* or *anschlag*) w/5 *islam*) or zwangshochzeit or zwangsheirat or *parallelgesellschaft* or *kopftuch* or *ehrenmord* or *hassprediger* or *burka* or (*islam* or *muslim* w/5 (*wander* or *migrant* or *flücht* or *ausländer*))".

the respondents. During the period under review, 558 articles on immigration were published in all outlets. The measure of the salience of immigration-related issues varies between −.21 and 1.01, with higher values indicating greater salience of immigration-related issues. A detailed description of the immigration-related issue salience measure can be found in the Supplementary Material A2.4.

The measure does not distinguish between positive and negative immigration-related news. Since immigration-related news is mostly negative overall (Eberl et al., 2018), the effect of immigration-related issue salience may at best underestimate the effect of negative news.

Confounders

Across all models, I account for socio-demographic characteristics that may influence national identity, voting behavior, and perception of media salience. Less-educated, younger, male, and economically vulnerable individuals are found to favor parties with restrictive positions concerning immigration (Arzheimer, 2009; Stockemer et al., 2020). Religious denomination (Siegers & Jedinger, 2021) and religiosity (Arzheimer & Carter, 2009), in contrast, are found to "immunize" voters against far-right voting. Furthermore, rural–urban residence has been shown to influence voting in Germany (Deppisch et al., 2022). I therefore control for time-constant education level, subjective class membership, a nonlinear age effect, gender, rural–urban residence, religiosity, and religion. As the panel was surveyed in an election year, to capture intensified party campaigning and communication as well as increased attention to national politics, I also include a linear time variable representing days until the election based on the respondent's specific interview date, with the value taking on 0 for the post-election wave.

Socio-psychological theories furthermore suggest that the a priori positioning of identity may influence the relationship between conceptions of nationhood, voting preferences, and their activation potential. I therefore also control for the position of national identity within the individual's self-concept. I additionally control for exposure to the included media outlets by including self-reported media consumption of the outlets included in the media salience measure. Since issue-specific knowledge (Schemer, 2012) and educational attainment (Czymara & Dochow, 2018) are likely to decrease the media effects, I also control for political knowledge and political interest in addition to educational level.

Finally, the robustness checks include both left–right self-placement and party identification. Left–right self-placement is included in waves 1, 3, 4, 6, and 7 and is measured on a scale from 1 (left) to 11 (right). Party identification is a categorical variable indicating identification with each of the major German parties, which are surveyed in all included waves.

Statistical model

For the analyses I use linear hybrid random effects panel models with clustered standard errors at the individual level. Hybrid models have the advantage of decomposing within- and between-individual effects of all time-varying variables by including unit-specific means and demeaned variables of these variables. The use of a hybrid model thus has the advantage of obtaining an unbiased within-individual effect equivalent to a fixed-effect estimate while also allowing for the inclusion of time-constant predictors, such as different conceptions of nationhood, in the models (Andreß et al., 2013; Schunck, 2013). Hybrid models are thus suitable for analyzing how a time-constant characteristic (conceptions of nationhood) explains voting (H1 and H2) and how these time-constant characteristics interact with the time-varying macro-level variable of media salience (H3 and H4). The within-effects represent the changes within
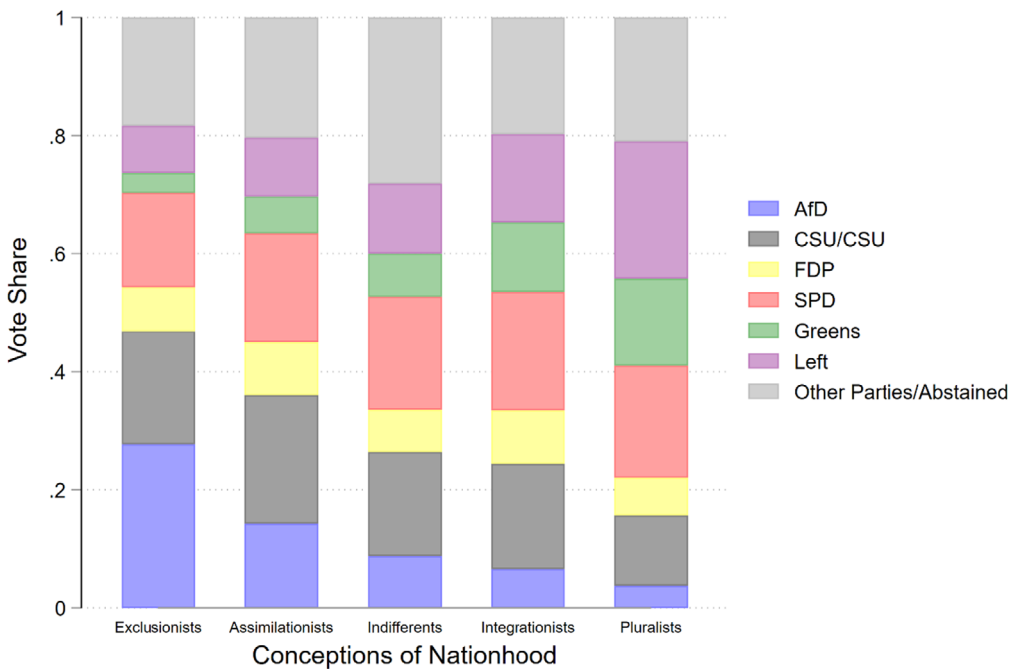
FIGURE 3 Voting preferences by conceptions of nationhood. Bars represent the vote share of all parties by Conceptions of Nationhood across all panel waves and respondents in the main models.

individuals with respect to the dependent variables, in this case vote switching. The results of the linear probability models are robust to using nonlinear (logistic) probability models (see Supplementary Material B). To adjust for any time-invariant unobserved characteristics at the German federal state level that may be correlated with the dependent variable and that vary across states, such as immigration history and urbanization, I include state dummies for each of the sixteen German federal states ("Bundeslaender") with 1 representing respondents living in a given state.

RESULTS

Descriptive overview[2]

A large proportion of the exclusionists and assimilationists in the sample appear to favor the right-wing AfD, while voting preferences among more inclusive respondents are less concentrated, with some leaning toward the Left or the Greens (Figure 3). Vote switching is comparatively low at around 20 per cent across the sample, with votes for the AfD appearing to be the most stable. This implies that voting for the AfD may be already quite popular among those with exclusionary conceptions, making the activation effects less likely to be identified throughout the analysis. In addition, media salience does not vary considerably across panel waves, which may cause identification problems.

Figure 4 plots the average voting preferences against the immigration-related media salience at the aggregate level for all major German parties. The relationship between media

---

[2]For a descriptive overview of all variables, please refer to Supplementary Material A2.
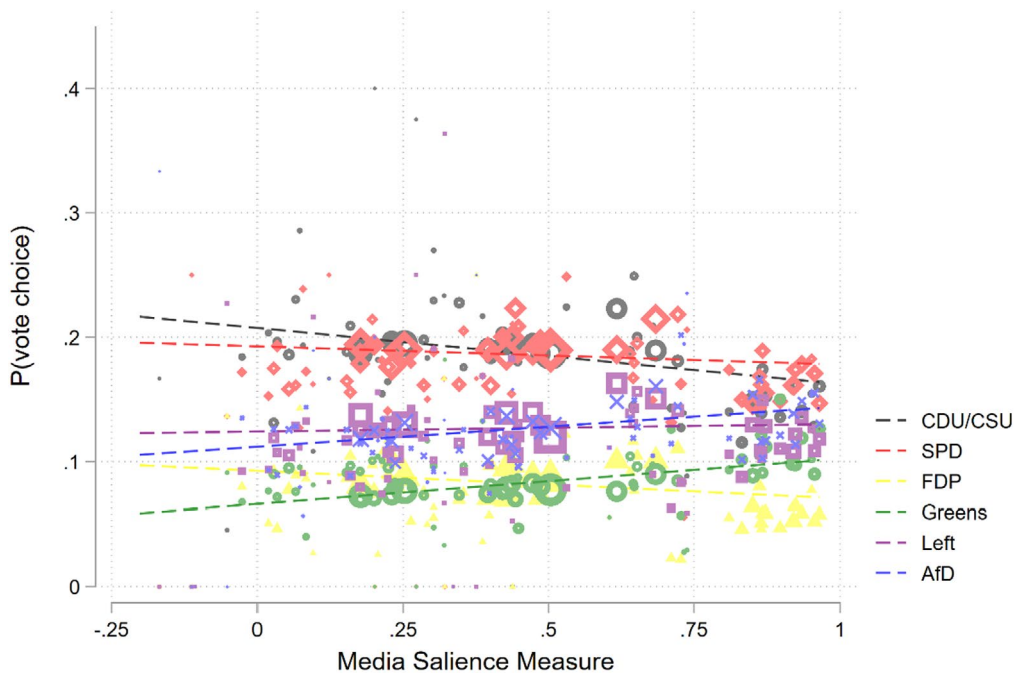
FIGURE 4 Voting preferences and immigration-related media salience in Germany 2017. Points represent the average voting preference, shown as the proportion of respondents choosing each major German party (y-axis), at different levels of immigration-related issue salience (x-axis) at the aggregate level.

salience and the likelihood of voting varies considerably across parties. While parties in the center are significantly negatively correlated to the salience of immigration-related issues (with correlation coefficients of −.19 for Social Democrats (SPD), −.48 for Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU), and −.32 for Liberals (FDP)), the correlation coefficients for parties on the fringes of the political spectrum are positive and significant (.08 for the Left, .43 for AfD, and .59 for Greens). The latter are, thus, more likely to benefit from an increased salience of immigration-related issues in the media, while the center parties seem to lose. To test the relationships in more detail, and to examine whether the effect of media salience is stronger for individuals with different conceptions of nationhood, we now turn to the longitudinal panel models.

Main effects models[3]

Table 2 reports the main effects of the hybrid panel models on vote choice for all major German parties. Providing support for H1 (*Direction of Effects 1*), having a more exclusionary conception of the national in-group, significantly increases the likelihood of voting for the AfD, while significantly decreasing the likelihood of voting for left-wing parties (SPD, Greens, and the Left). Conversely, providing support for H2 (*Direction of Effects 2*), more inclusive conceptions of nationhood significantly increase the likelihood of voting for the Greens and the Left, while decreasing the likelihood of voting for both AfD and CDU/CSU. Compared to all conceptions of nationhood effects, having exclusionary conceptions has

---

[3]See Supplementary Material B for a stepwise inclusion of control variables, nonlinear models, and a comparison of fixed, random, and the presented hybrid effects models.

TABLE 2 Hybrid main effects models on vote choices.

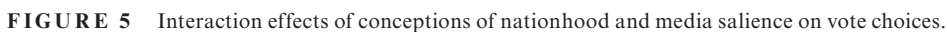|	CDU/CSU	SPD	FDP	Greens	The Left	AfD
Contextual level						
Media salience (within)	−.004	.009	.013**	.023***	.039***	.038***
	(.005)	(.005)	(.004)	(.004)	(.005)	(.004)
Media salience (between)	−.029	.053	.001	.020	.010	.084*
	(.029)	(.030)	(.020)	(.021)	(.025)	(.027)
State-dummies	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Individual level						
Conceptions of nationhood						
Exclusionists	.005	−.032**	−.007	−.018**	−.039***	.149***
	(.011)	(.010)	(.007)	(.006)	(.008)	(.010)
Assimilationists	.019*	−.007	.005	−.003	−.013	.040***
	(.009)	(.009)	(.006)	(.006)	(.007)	(.007)
Indifferents (=Ref.)						
Integrationists	−.008	.006	.005	.040***	.023**	−.024***
	(.009)	(.010)	(.006)	(.007)	(.008)	(.007)
Pluralists	−.040***	−.005	−.017*	.052***	.085***	−.050***
	(.010)	(.011)	(.007)	(.009)	(.010)	(.007)
Controls						
Socio-demographics	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Media consumption	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political interest	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Political knowledge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Days until election	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant	.049	.096**	.009	.020	.410***	.192***
	(.030)	(.030)	(.019)	(.020)	(.030)	(.029)
Observations	69,363	69,363	69,363	69,363	69,363	69,363
sigma_e	.215	.234	.177	.180	.195	.168
sigma_u	.307	.299	.205	.200	.248	.268
rho	.671	.622	.571	.552	.617	.718

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

the largest effect size in predicting voting for the AfD. Having exclusionary conceptions increases the likelihood of choosing the AfD by almost 15 per cent ($p < .001$), in reference to the reference category of indifferents. In contrast, the effect sizes of more open conceptions predicting left-wing vote choices range only between 2.3 ($p < .01$) (integrationists choosing the Left) and 8.5 per cent ($p < .001$) (pluralists choosing the Left). Effect sizes of both moderate types (assimilationists, integrationists) are, as expected, smaller than for both clear-cut profile conceptions of nationhood (exclusionists, pluralists). Center parties are largely unaffected by conceptions of nationhood, except for a significantly smaller likelihood of pluralists choosing the center-right parties CDU/CSU or FDP.

The main effects models provide support for H1 and H2 (*Direction of Effects*). Individuals with more inclusionary conceptions vote for left-wing parties. Those with more exclusionary conceptions vote for the far right. In these main effects models, the salience of immigration-related issues in the media is shown to also significantly affect voting preferences. Controlling

for interindividual differences (within-effects), an increase in media salience increases the likelihood of voting for parties on the fringe of the political spectrum: Greens, Left, FDP, and AfD. Large parties in the center (which also do not offer substantial positions on immigration) seem to be unaffected by increased media salience of immigration issues. In what follows, we focus on the interaction between conceptions of nationhood and the salience of immigration-related issues for voting, thus testing H3 and H4.

Interaction models: Conceptions of nationhood × media salience

To examine the potential impact of media salience on the directional effects of conceptions of nationhood, I estimated two-way interaction models. Figure 5 plots the relationships between media salience and the predicted vote probabilities for the six parties based on different conceptions of nationhood. Given the difficulty of plotting and interpreting predictive margins for hybrid models (Schunck, 2013), the plots rely on random effects models. Fortunately, the effect sizes and significance levels are very similar between the

FIGURE 5 Interaction effects of conceptions of nationhood and media salience on vote choices.

within-individual effects of the hybrid models and those of the random effects models (see Supplementary Material B2.1).

The results provide partial support for the hypotheses H3 (*Activation*) and H4 (*Issue Salience*), confirming that the effects of conceptions of nationhood on voting are conditional on activation by situational cues (H3) and particularly by immigration-related issue salience (H4). This is particularly true for those with exclusionary conceptions and voting for the far-right AfD. This conditional relationship is evidenced by the statistically significant interaction effect of 5.7 percentage points (SD: .013, $p < .001$). Among those with exclusionary conceptions, the likelihood of voting for the far-right AfD differs significantly from the reference category by 11 percentage points (SD: .014, $p < .001$) at the minimum salience of immigration-related issue salience (.2) and amounts to 18.4 percentage points (SD: .012, $p < .001$) at the media salience's maximum (1.01). Individuals with assimilationist views do not differ substantially from the reference category when the salience of immigration-related issues is minimal, as the difference is only .2 points (SD: .01, $p = .05$). However, the difference increases to 5.9 percentage points (SD: .009, $p < .001$) when immigration-related issue salience reaches its maximum, indicating a moderating effect of immigration-related issue salience on the relationship between conceptions of nationhood and voting for the AfD. At the other end of the spectrum, changes in the media salience have only a minimal impact on voting preferences for the Left, but substantially increase the likelihood of voting for the Greens among more inclusionary types. Pluralists are significantly more likely to vote for the Left. However, the predicted difference between pluralists and the reference category only increases from 9.0 (SD: .015) to 9.1 (SD: .013) percentage points (both $p < .001$) between the minimum and maximum immigration-related issue salience. While these results indicate that media salience does not moderate the relationship between conceptions of nationhood and voting for the Left, the main effect of media salience remains strong and statistically significant at 4.7 percentage points (SD: .010, $p < .001$) for the Left. However, when immigration issues salience is at its minimum, both pluralists and integrationists practically do not differ from the reference category in their probability of voting for the Greens. For integrationists and pluralists, the difference to the reference category changes from being weakly or not substantially different by 1.5 percentage points (SD: .011, $p > .05$) and 2.7 percentage points (SD: .013, $p < .05$), respectively, when the immigration-related issue salience is at its minimum, to 6 percentage points (SD: .009, $p < .001$) and 7.2 percentage points (SD: 0,012, $p < .001$) when immigration-related issue salience is at its maximum. Media salience, thus, appears to also have a moderating effect on inclusionary conceptions of nationhood and voting for the Greens. Put together, the conditional activating effect (H3 and H4) of increased media attention on immigration-related issues is not substantial for all individuals. It is, however, particularly substantial for those with exclusionary conceptions of nationhood who are increasingly drawn to the far-right when immigration-related issues are salient in the media. Also, those with inclusionary conceptions are more drawn to the Greens in times of increased media attention to immigration issues.

The findings generally support the Activation-Hypothesis (H3), which proposed that the relationship between national identities and voting is conditional on activation through external factors. Activation means increasing the likelihood of voting in line with the voting preferences associated with the conceptions of nationhood. Furthermore, the Issue Salience-Hypothesis (H4), which proposes that immigration-related issue salience is a key situational cue to increase the relevance of national identity in voting, is also supported by these findings.

Robustness checks[4]

Using hybrid random-effects models with unbalanced data (i.e., missing time points for some respondents) can lead to rather large differences between the estimated within-effects of the hybrid models and the desired unbiased FE estimates (Andreß et al., 2013, p. 165). Therefore, I additionally estimated both hybrid- and FE-models with those who participated in all panel waves. Despite losing roughly 40 percent of the sample, both the main effects and the within-individual interaction effects are substantially stable and even increase slightly in the models.

Secondly, both left–right ideological position and party identification are considered stable and latent factors that play a crucial role in explaining vote choices. Party identification explains attitudes, as well as perceptions of issues and candidates (Campbell et al., 1960), while left–right self-placement captures voters' ideological position (De Vries et al., 2013; Inglehart & Klingemann, 1976). Nevertheless, it is important to note that both are endogenous to national identity and anti-immigrant positions (Van Der Van Der Brug & Harteveld, 2021). Therefore, establishing a clear causal direction between national identity and party identification (cf. Mader et al., 2020) or left–right self-placement is not possible. To address this issue, I have included both party identification and left–right self-placement as additional controls in my models. Even with this conservative approach of including the potential moderating variables for the influence of the concept of national identity, the interaction results remain essentially similar. In other words, despite controlling for party identification and left–right self-placement, conceptions of nationhood retain their explanatory value.

Thirdly, it may be questioned whether the same mechanisms are at work in East and West Germany. National identity is partly influenced by the available repertoires provided, such as citizenship policies, and conceptions of nationhood may differ due to the different political regimes between 1949 and 1990. Additionally, subnational identities may also influence the proposed relationship. When splitting the sample into East and West Germany, similar results to the models above were obtained. The distribution of conceptions is equal between East and West Germans, with the Left and the AfD being more popular and the Greens less popular among East German voters. The effect sizes, however, differ in the split samples, while the overall findings are replicated. While the interaction effect of exclusionary national identity conceptions and media salience for the AfD remains at 5.1 per cent (SD: .015, $p < .001$) in the West and even increases to 7.7 per cent (SD: .027, $p < .01$) in the East, the activating effect of immigration-related issue salience on conceptions of nationhood is only stable for the Greens in West Germany (integrationists: 3.8 percentage points, SD: .014, $p < .01$, pluralists: 4 pp., SD: .017, $p < .05$).

Finally, testing the impact of individual media outlets on the relationship reveals that the daily newspapers have a stronger influence than the news magazines, while the identified relationships remain stable. This also underlines the suspected spillover effects within the news outlets for news-relevant information.

CONCLUSION

National identity is often associated with anti-immigrant attitudes and voting, especially for far-right parties. However, national identity tends to be latent and stable and should therefore have a continuous impact on voting preferences, while the vote for the far right has increased

[4]For all robustness checks, detailed descriptions and regression tables are available in Supplementary Material C.

significantly over the last decade. To explain the temporality of the relationship, social–psychological theories suggest a situational relevance of identities in guiding behavior. Regarding national identity, I argued that national identity is a breeding ground for voting preferences, with individuals who hold exclusionary conceptions favoring parties that offer restrictive immigration policies and those who hold open conceptions favoring left-wing parties, and that this relationship becomes particularly strong when national identity becomes relevant to the individual. To increase the relevance of national identity, I argued that media content may play a role by increasing the salience of immigration-related issues, which stimulates reflection on national boundaries.

The results of this article provide several important insights into the relationship between national identity, immigration-related issue salience in the media, and voting preferences. First, confirming the findings of previous studies, voters with different conceptions of nationhood have different voting preferences, with open types preferring left-wing parties, and exclusionary types preferring the far right. Second, the salience of immigration-related issues in the media seems to benefit parties on the fringes of the political spectrum (FDP, Greens, the Left, and AfD). The media effects in the hybrid panel models that are driven by intra-individual changes suggest that in periods of high salience of immigration-related issues, there is an increased likelihood of switching to parties that offer different solutions to immigration-related issues. Third, the combination of the two components is particularly potent. Individuals with exclusionary conceptions of nationhood are already likely to vote for the AfD, but increased immigration-related issue salience further strengthens the relationship, confirming the activation effect. The same is true for open types and voting preferences for the Greens. However, also the moderate exclusionary type is more likely to favor the Greens in times of high immigration-related issue salience. As the Greens offer multicultural approaches to immigration, the results potentially highlight the need for alternative positions on immigration, far from the far right. For the Left, in contrast, increased media salience does benefit the Left, but the effects do not substantially differ for different conceptions of nationhood.

The results demonstrate the advantages for political parties that propose solutions to immigration-related issues in times of overall high immigration-related issue salience. While some parties (notably SPD and FDP) integrated only a few positions on issues of immigration and integration despite high public interest, those that did present positions (e.g., AfD and Greens) gained votes in the 2017 election. Previous research often suggests that far-right parties win votes when other parties adopt immigration issues (Krause et al., 2023). This study indicates that offering integrative and multicultural solutions to immigration, as an alternative to right-wing positions, can also benefit left-wing parties. However, the prevalence of immigration-related issues in the media has been found to particularly mobilize the electoral potential for the far right. While the study offers insights into the activation hypothesis, the study is limited in several ways. In addition to mass media content, events such as the so-called "migration crisis" and, as suspected by previous work (Bonikowski et al., 2021; Garand et al., 2020; May & Czymara, 2023; Schulte- Cloos, 2022; Thompson, 2021), political elite rhetoric may also have the potential to independently increase the importance of national identity for voting decisions. Particularly party communication and campaigning may additionally influence changes in voting preferences (c.f. Johann et al., 2018). Future research may want to test the proposed relationship aloof from electoral campaigns to better disentangle party communication on immigration-related issues and news media effects. For now, I argue that especially during electoral campaigns, mass media are an important gatekeeper that provides citizens with information on politics (Banducci et al., 2017; McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Van Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2016). Secondly, the 2017 federal election in Germany may be considered a special case, marking the first significant electoral success of the far-right AfD shortly after a peak in Germany's immigration history. This peak coincided with a surge in immigration-related issue salience, as seen in respondents' perceptions of immigration as a major problem (see Supplementary Material A). Consequently, the present

study is unable to ascertain whether national identity may be activated during periods of comparatively lower issue salience. Furthermore, it is unclear whether this activation may apply to other countries or other nation-related issues. Nevertheless, national identity is a cross-country phenomenon that has been shown to influence political behavior when activated through, for example, economic hardship caused by foreign imports (cf. Steiner & Harms, 2021). Moreover, while the findings support the activation hypothesis, they rely on the information environment as a proxy for actual exposure to and perception of situational cues. Future research could address this gap by controlling for actual exposure to situational cues, possibly using experimental settings to examine both exposure to messages in the information environment and the effects of directed messages. Finally, the effects attributed to priming and thus activation may be also attributed to learning effects (Lenz, 2009), which include learning about prominent issues and related party positions on these issues and thus altering either issue positions or party preferences. Although learning effects cannot be completely ruled out, I argue that voters were well-informed about immigration and related party positions before participating in the panel. This makes priming and subsequently activation more likely. The immigration issue has been prominently discussed in the public since late 2015, and the AfD had already established itself as an anti-immigrant party by mid-15 (Arzheimer & Berning, 2019).

In conclusion, this work emphasizes the interrelatedness of conceptions of nationhood, media salience, and national identification in shaping voting preferences. Conceptions of nationhood do form the breeding ground for voting decisions. The relationships are moreover found to be activated by immigration-related issue salience in the media. The combination of the two is found to be particularly potent for the support of the AfD. The study is the first to test the activation hypothesis using panel data and offers valuable insights into the (short-term) dynamics of voter behavior based on social identities and opens avenues for future research in understanding the interplay between identity, media, and political preferences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

All included datasets are publicly available. All scripts that are used to prepare and analyze the data are publicly available via the author's OSF page (https://osf.io/z26f9/): https://osf.io/ctvk2/, DOI 10.17605/OSF.IO/CTVK2. The research was not preregistered.

ORCID

Antonia C. May https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4979-0977

REFERENCES

Abou-Chadi, T., Cohen, D., & Wagner, M. (2022). The centre-right versus the radical right: The role of migration issues and economic grievances. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 48*(2), 366–384. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1853903

Andreß, H.-J., Golsch, K., & Schmidt, A. (2013). *Applied panel data analysis for economic and social surveys*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-32914-2

Aquino, K., Freeman, D., Reed, A., Lim, V. K. G., & Felps, W. (2009). Testing a social-cognitive model of moral behavior: The interactive influence of situations and moral identity centrality. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*(1), 123–141. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0015406

Arzheimer, K. (2008). Protest, neo-liberalism or anti-immigrant sentiment: What motivates the voters of the extreme right in western Europe? *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft, 2*(2), 173–197. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-008-0011-4

Arzheimer, K. (2009). Contextual Factors and the Extreme Right Vote in Western Europe, 1980–2002. *American Journal of Political Science, 53*(2), 259–275. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00369.x

Arzheimer, K., & Berning, C. C. (2019). How the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and their voters veered to the radical right, 2013–2017. *Electoral Studies, 60*: 102040, 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.04.004

Arzheimer, K., & Carter, E. (2006). Political opportunity structures and right-wing extremist party success. *European Journal of Political Research, 45*(3), 419–443. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00304.x

Arzheimer, K., & Carter, E. (2009). Christian religiosity and voting for west European radical right parties. *West European Politics, 32*(5), 985–1011. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380903065058

Banducci, S., Giebler, H., & Kritzinger, S. (2017). Knowing more from less: How the information environment increases knowledge of party positions. *British Journal of Political Science, 47*(3), 571–588. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123415000204

Blumer, H. (1958). Race prejudice as a sense of group position. *The Pacific Sociological Review, 1*(1), 3–7. https://doi.org/10.2307/1388607

Bonikowski, B., & DiMaggio, P. (2016). Varieties of American popular nationalism. *American Sociological Review, 81*(5), 949–980. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122416663683

Bonikowski, B., Feinstein, Y., & Bock, S. (2021). The partisan sorting of "America": How nationalist cleavages shaped the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *American Journal of Sociology, 127*(2), 492–561. https://doi.org/10.1086/717103

Boomgaarden, H. G., & Vliegenthart, R. (2007). Explaining the rise of anti-immigrant parties: The role of news media content. *Electoral Studies, 26*(2), 404–417. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2006.10.018

Boomgaarden, H. G., & Vliegenthart, R. (2009). How news content influences anti-immigration attitudes: Germany, 1993–2005. *European Journal of Political Research, 48*(4), 516–542. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2009.01831.x

Brewer, M. B., & Weber, J. G. (1994). Self-evaluation effects of interpersonal versus intergroup social comparison. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 66*(2), 268–275. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.66.2.268

Brubaker, R. (1994). *Citizenship and nationhood in France in Germany* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1960). *The American Voter.* University of Chicago Press.

Carter, M. J. (2013). Advancing identity theory: Examining the relationship between activated identities and behavior in different social contexts. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 76*(3), 203–223. https://doi.org/10.1177/0190272513493095

Collins, L. M., & Lanza, S. T. (2009). *Latent class and latent transition analysis: With applications in the social, behavioral, and health sciences.* Wiley.

Czymara, C. S., & Dochow, S. (2018). Mass media and concerns about immigration in Germany in the 21st century: Individual-level evidence over 15 years. *European Sociological Review, 34*(4), 381–401. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcy019

Damstra, A., Jacobs, L., Boukes, M., & Vliegenthart, R. (2021). The impact of immigration news on anti-immigrant party support: Unpacking agenda-setting and issue ownership effects over time. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties, 31*(1), 97–118. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2019.1607863

De Vries, C. E., Hakhverdian, A., & Lancee, B. (2013). The dynamics of voters' left/right identification: The role of economic and cultural attitudes. *Political Science Research and Methods, 1*(2), 223–238. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2013.4

Dennison, J. (2020). How issue salience explains the rise of the populist right in western Europe. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research, 32*(3), 397–420. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edz022

Dennison, J., & Geddes, A. (2019). A Rising Tide? The salience of immigration and the rise of anti-immigration political parties in western Europe. *The Political Quarterly, 90*(1), 107–116. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12620

Deppisch, L., Osigus, T., & Klärner, A. (2022). How rural is rural populism? On the spatial understanding of rurality for analyses of right-wing populist election success in Germany*. *Rural Sociology, 87*(S1), 692–714. https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12397

Ditlmann, R. K., & Kopf-Beck, J. (2019). The meaning of being German: An inductive approach to national identity. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology, 7*(1), 423–447. https://doi.org/10.5964/jspp.v7i1.557

Dunaway, J., Goidel, R. K., Kirzinger, A., & Wilkinson, B. C. (2011). Rebuilding or intruding? Media coverage and public opinion on Latino immigration in post-Katrina Louisiana. *Social Science Quarterly, 92*(4), 917–937. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2011.00797.x

Eberl, J.-M., Meltzer, C. E., Heidenreich, T., Herrero, B., Theorin, N., Lind, F., Berganza, R., Boomgaarden, H. G., Schemer, C., & Strömbäck, J. (2018). The European media discourse on immigration and its effects: A literature review. *Annals of the International Communication Association, 42*(3), 207–223. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2018.1497452

Eger, M. A., & Olzak, S. (2022). The polarizing effect of anti-immigrant violence on radical right sympathies in Germany. *International Migration Review, 57*(2), 746–777. https://doi.org/10.1177/01979183221126461

Erisen, C., & Vasilopoulou, S. (2022). The affective model of far-right vote in Europe: Anger, political trust, and immigration. *Social Science Quarterly, 103*(3), 635–648. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13153

Esses, V. M., Medianu, S., & Lawson, A. S. (2013). Uncertainty, threat, and the role of the media in promoting the dehumanization of immigrants and refugees: Dehumanization of immigrants and refugees. *Journal of Social Issues, 69*(3), 518–536. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12027

Garand, J. C., Qi, D., & Magaña, M. (2020). Perceptions of immigrant threat, american identity, and vote choice in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *Political Behavior, 44*(2), 877–893. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-020-09644-z

Halikiopoulou, D., Mock, S., & Vasilopoulou, S. (2013). The civic zeitgeist: Nationalism and liberal values in the European radical right. *Nations and Nationalism, 19*(1), 107–127. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2012.00550.x

Halikiopoulou, D., Nanou, K., & Vasilopoulou, S. (2012). The paradox of nationalism: The common denominator of radical right and radical left euroscepticism: the paradox of nationalism. *European Journal of Political Research, 51*(4), 504–539. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.02050.x

Halikiopoulou, D., & Vasilopoulou, S. (2014). Support for the far right in the 2014 European parliament elections: A comparative perspective. *The Political Quarterly, 85*(3), 285–288. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12102

Halikiopoulou, D., & Vlandas, T. (2020). When economic and cultural interests align: The anti-immigration voter coalitions driving far right party success in Europe. *European Political Science Review, 12*(4) , 427–448. https://doi.org/10.1017/S175577392000020X

Helbling, M., Reeskens, T., & Wright, M. (2016). The mobilisation of identities: A study on the relationship between elite rhetoric and public opinion on national identity in developed democracies. *Nations and Nationalism, 22*(4), 744–767. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12235

Hjerm, M. (1998a). National identities, national pride and xenophobia: A comparison of four western countries. *Acta Sociologica, 41*(4), 335–347. https://doi.org/10.1177/000169939804100403

Hjerm, M. (1998b). National identity: A comparison of Sweden, Germany and Australia. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 24*(3), 451–469. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.1998.9976644

Hochmann, O., Raijman, R., & Schmidt, P. (2016). National identity and exclusion of non-ethnic migrants: Germany and Israel in comparative perspective. In J. Grimm, L. Huddy, P. Schmidt, J. Seethaler (Eds.). *Dynamics of National Identity* (1st ed.). London: Routledge.

Hopkins, D. J. (2010). Politicized places: Explaining where and when immigrants provoke local opposition. *American Political Science Review, 104*(1), 40–60. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055409990360

Huddy, L. (2003). *Group identity and political cohesion*. In D. O. Sears, L. Huddy, J. S. Levy (Eds.). The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology (1st ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hutter, S., & Kriesi, H. (2022). Politicising immigration in times of crisis. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 48*(2), 341–365. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1853902

Inglehart, R., & Klingemann, H.-D. (1976). Party Identification, Ideological Preference and the Left-Right Dimension among Western Mass Publics. In I. Budge, I. Crewe, & D. Farlie (Eds.), *Party Identification and Beyond. Representations of Voting and Party Competition* (pp. 243–273). London: Wiley.

Johann, D., Königslöw, K. K., Kritzinger, S., & Thomas, K. (2018). Intra-campaign changes in voting preferences: The impact of media and party communication. *Political Communication, 35*(2), 261–286. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2017.1339222

Jones, F. L., & Smith, P. (2001). Diversity and commonality in national identities: An exploratory analysis of cross-national patterns. *Journal of Sociology, 37*(1), 45–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/144078301128756193

Kohn, H. (2005). *The idea of nationalism. A study in its origins and background*. With a new Introduction by Craig Calhoun (C. Calhoun, Ed.; 1st edition). New York: Routledge.

Krause, W., Cohen, D., & Abou-Chadi, T. (2023). Does Accommodation Work? Mainstream Party Strategies and the Success of Radical Right Parties. *Political Science Research and Methods, 11*(1), 172–179. https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2022.8

Kunovich, R. M. (2009). The sources and consequences of national identification. *American Sociological Review, 74*(4), 573–593. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240907400404

Lenz, G. S. (2009). Learning and opinion change, not priming: Reconsidering the priming hypothesis. *American Journal of Political Science, 53*(4), 821–837. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00403.x

Lindstam, E., Mader, M., & Schoen, H. (2019). Conceptions of national identity and ambivalence towards immigration. *British Journal of Political Science, 51*(1), 93–114. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123418000522

Lubbers, M., & Coenders, M. (2017). Nationalistic attitudes and voting for the radical right in Europe. *European Union Politics, 18*(1), 98–118. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116516678932

Mader, M., Pesthy, M., & Schoen, H. (2020). Conceptions of national identity, turnout and party preference: Evidence from Germany. *Nations and Nationalism, 27*(3), 638–655. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12652

Mader, M., & Schoen, H. (2023). Stability of national-identity content: Level, predictors, and implications. *Political Psychology, 44*(4), 871–891. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12888

Mason, L., Wronski, J., & Kane, J. V. (2021). Activating animus: The uniquely social roots of Trump support. *American Political Science Review, 115*(4), 1508–1516. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000563

May, A. C. (2023). And if they don't dance, they are no friends of mine: Exploring boundaries of national identity. *Nations and Nationalism, 29*(2), 579–597. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12926

May, A. C., & Czymara, C. S. (2023). Careless whisper: Political elite discourses activate national identities for far-right voting preferences. *Nations and Nationalism, 30*(1), 90–109. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12985

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176–187. https://www.jstor.org/stable/2747787

McLaren, L. M. (2003). Anti-immigrant prejudice in Europe: Contact, threat perception, and preferences for the exclusion of migrants. *Social Forces, 81*(3), 909–936. https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2003.0038

McLaren, L. M. (2017). Immigration, national identity and political trust in European democracies. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 43*(3), 379–399. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2016.1197772

Monroe, K. R., Hankin, J., & Vechten, R. B. V. (2000). The psychological foundations of identity politics. *Annual Review of Political Science, 3*(1), 419–447. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.419

Pesthy, M., Mader, M., & Schoen, H. (2020). Why is the AfD so successful in eastern Germany? An analysis of the ideational foundations of the AfD vote in the 2017 federal election. *Politische Vierteljahresschrift, 62*(1), 69–91. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11615-020-00285-9

Schemer, C. (2012). The influence of news media on stereotypic attitudes toward immigrants in a political campaign: Influence of news media on stereotypes. *Journal of Communication, 62*(5), 739–757. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2012.01672.x

Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of Communication, 57*(1), 9–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x

Schlueter, E., & Davidov, E. (2013). Contextual sources of perceived group threat: Negative immigration-related news reports, immigrant group size and their interaction, Spain 1996–2007. *European Sociological Review, 29*(2), 179–191. https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcr054

Schnakenberg, K. E. (2014). Group Identity and Symbolic Political Behavior. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science, 9*(2), 137–167. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2258869

Schulte- Cloos, J. (2022). Political potentials, deep-seated nativism and the success of the German AfD. *Frontiers in Political Science, 3,* 1–13. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.698085

Schunck, R. (2013). Within and between estimates in random-effects models: Advantages and drawbacks of correlated random effects and hybrid models. *The Stata Journal: Promoting Communications on Statistics and Stata, 13*(1), 65–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/1536867X1301300105

Siegers, P., & Jedinger, A. (2021). Religious immunity to populism: Christian religiosity and public support for the alternative for Germany. *German Politics, 30*(2), 149–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644008.2020.1723002

Smith, A. D. (1991). *National identity.* University of Nevada Press.

Sniderman, P. M., Hagendoors, L., & Prior, M. (2004). Predisposing factors and situational triggers: Exclusionary reactions to immigrant minorities. *American Political Science Review, 98*(1), 35–49. https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305540400098X

Steiner, N. D., & Harms, P. (2021). Trade shocks and the nationalist backlash in political attitudes: Panel data evidence from Great Britain. *Journal of European Public Policy, 30*(2), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2021.2002925

Stets, J. E., & Burke, P. J. (2000). Identity theory and social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 63*(3), 224–237. https://doi.org/10.2307/2695870

Stockemer, D., Halikiopoulou, D., & Vlandas, T. (2020). 'Birds of a feather'? Assessing the prevalence of anti-immigration attitudes among the far right electorate. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, 47*(15), 3409–3436. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1770063

Stockemer, D., Lentz, T., & Mayer, D. (2018). Individual predictors of the radical right-wing vote in Europe: A meta-analysis of articles in peer-reviewed journals (1995–2016). *Government and Opposition, 53*(3), 569–593. https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2018.2

Stryker, S. (1980). *Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version.* Blackburn Press.

Stryker, S., & Serpe, R. T. (1994). Identity salience and psychological centrality: Equivalent, overlapping, or complementary concepts? *Social Psychology Quarterly, 57*(1), 16–35. https://doi.org/10.2307/2786972

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33–37). Brooks/Cole.

Thompson, J. (2021). What it means to be a "true American": Ethnonationalism and voting in the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *Nations and Nationalism, 27*(1), 279–297. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12638

Transue, J. E. (2007). Identity salience, identity acceptance, and racial policy attitudes: American national identity as a uniting force. *American Journal of Political Science, 51*(1), 78–91. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4122907

Trittler, S. (2017). Repertoires of national boundaries in France and Germany—Within-country cleavages and their political consequences. *Nations and Nationalism, 23*(2), 367–394. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12291

Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favouritism. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 9*(2), 187–204. https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420090207

Van Aelst, P., & Walgrave, S. (2016). Information and Arena: The dual function of the news media for political elites. *Journal of Communication, 66*(3), 496–518. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12229

Van Der Brug, W., & Harteveld, E. (2021). The conditional effects of the refugee crisis on immigration attitudes and nationalism. *European Union Politics, 22*(2), 227–247. https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116520988905

Wagner, A., & Lichteblau, J. (2022). A new player in the game: Changing electoral competition in Germany. In R. Schmitt-Beck, S. Roßteutscher, H. Schoen, B. Weßels, & C. Wolf (Eds.), *The changing German voter* (1st ed), 121–142. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198847519.003.0006

Wettstein, M., & Wirth, W. (2017). Media Effects: How Media Influence Voters. *Swiss Political Science Review, 23,* 262–269. https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12263

Wright, M. (2011). Diversity and the imagined community: Immigrant diversity and conceptions of national identity. *Political Psychology, 32*(5), 837–862. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2011.00843.x

Wright, M., Citrin, J., & Wand, J. (2012). Alternative measures of American national identity: Implications for the civic-ethnic distinction. *Political Psychology, 33*(4), 469–482. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9221.2012.00885.x

DATASETS

GLES. (2019b). Short-term Campaign Panel (GLES 2017) Wahlkampf-Panel (GLES 2017) (7.0.0) [dataset]. GESIS Data Archive. https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13323

Lehmann, P., Burst, T., Matthieß, T., Regel, S., Volkens, A., Weßels, B., Zehnter, L., & Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin Für Sozialforschung (WZB). (2022b). Manifesto Project Dataset (Version 2022a) [dataset]. Manifesto Project. https://doi.org/10.25522/MANIFESTO.MPDS.2022A

SOFTWARE

Lanza, S. T., Huang, J. J., Wagner, A. T., & Collins, L. M. (2018b). *LCA Stata plugin users' guide (Version 1.2.1).* The Methodology Center, Penn State.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.