

# Context, Cohorts and Congruence

## Immigration Salience and Voter Socialisation

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## Background

- ▶ Issue salience has long been central to theories of issue voting (Edwards et al., 1995; Bélanger and Meguid, 2008)

“Individuals place more weight on congruence on the dimension they are more concerned about.” (Lefkofridi et al., 2014)

- ▶ Immigration is an especially ‘salience-driven’ issue. (Mader and Schoen, 2019; Dennison and Geddes, 2019; Kustov, Laaker and Reller, 2021)

“It is the level of salience of immigration as an issue, and not a change in preferences, which is associated with far right political success.” (Magistro and Wittstock, 2021)

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- ▶ In most of the literature, immigration salience effects are:
  - ▶ *individual-level* (how does the importance voter  $i$  attaches to immigration affect voter  $i$ 's behaviour?), and
  - ▶ *short-term* (how does immigration issue salience at time  $t$  affect voters' behaviour/attitudes at  $t$ , or a proximate  $t + 1$ ?)
- ▶ We shift the focus on immigration issue salience as a *context* for political socialisation, shaping behaviour *in the long run*.
- ▶ The politics people are exposed to in adolescence leaves lasting traces on their attitudes and habits (Dinas, 2013).

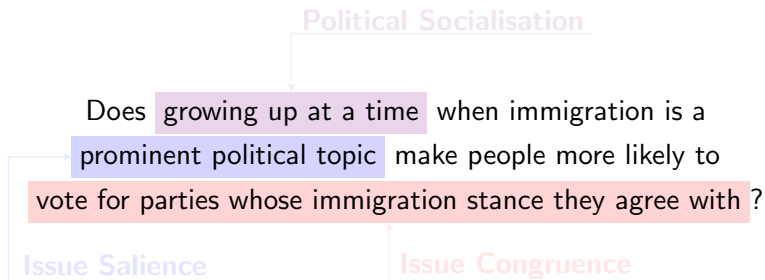
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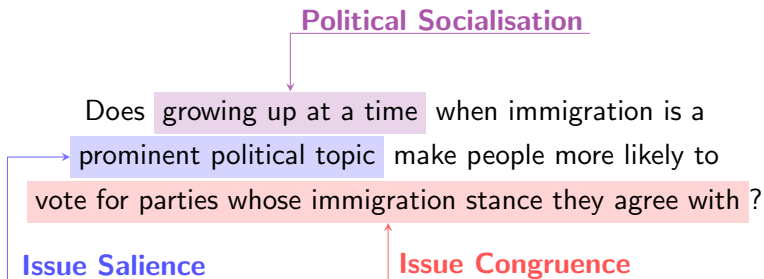
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# Assumptions

The ‘impressionable years’ of adolescence are significant because:

1. *Partisanship* is forming: “socialization of party identification is largely complete by the time preadults leave the parental nest, with the individual’s ‘first vote’ seeming to mark real crystallization” (Sears and Valentino, 1997)
2. *Attitudes* are most pliable: “Young adulthood is [...] a time of lability and receptivity.” (Jennings and Niemi, 2014)

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## Mechanism I – Sorting

- ▶ Assumes adolescents have issue positions, and at this stage they **develop partisanship**. Party choice later ‘crystallises’.
- ▶ In the evaluation of party platforms for the aim of party choice, the weight attached to each issue depends on:
  - ▶ Individual-level salience (how much I care)
  - ▶ Party system-level salience (how much parties talk about it)
- ▶ Both endogenous to ‘salience context’.
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## Mechanism I – Sorting

Formally:

- ▶ Adolescent has ideal policies  $\{x_1, x_2, \dots, x_n\}$ , selects a party in  $P = \{p_1, p_2, \dots, p_m\}$  and has quadratic utility function  $u(p_{j,i}) = -(x_i - p_{j,i})^2$  over party  $j$ 's policy over issue  $i$ ,
- ▶ She will choose  $p^*$  to minimise the sum of squared distances between the party's positions and hers, weighted by issue-specific salience terms  $s$ , with  $\sum_{i=1}^n s_i = 1$ :

$$\min_{p \in P} \sum_{i=1}^n s_i (x_i - p_i)^2$$

- ▶ Bottom line: the more salient an issue  $i$  is, the more likely it is that  $p^*$  has a position  $p_i^*$  that is close to  $x_i$ .



## Mechanism II – Cueing

- ▶ Assumes adolescents inherit familial partisanship, and at this stage **develop issue positions** to match their party. These issue positions thereafter remain 'sticky'.
- ▶ The higher the salience of an issue, the clearer the party's cue as to where it stands on the issue.
- ▶ High issue salience at the time of attitude formation makes partisanship-consistent position-taking on that issue easier → congruence.

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## Mechanism I – Cueing

Formally:

- ▶ Adolescent takes positions on all issues to match the *perceived* positions of her parents' party  $p^*$ :  $\{\hat{p}_1^*, \hat{p}_2^*, \dots, \hat{p}_n^*\}$ .
- ▶ The 'guess'  $\hat{p}_i^*$  is normally distributed with a std. deviation of  $\frac{1}{s_i}$ : the more salient  $i$ , the more confident the guess.

- ▶ So, the expected mean squared error of the estimate  $\hat{p}_i^*$  is

$$MSE(\hat{p}_i^*) = E[(\hat{p}_i^* - p_i^*)^2] = (\hat{p}_i^* - p_i^*) + \text{Var}(\hat{p}_i^*) = \frac{1}{s_i^2}$$

- ▶ Bottom line: the more salient an issue  $i$  is, the more accurately  $\hat{p}_i^*$  will reflect the party's true position  $p_i^*$ .

## Challenges

- ▶ Socialisation is a cohort-level 'treatment' and cohorts may be different for reasons other than salience context:
  - ▶ We need cross-sectional variation *within* cohort.
- ▶ Data to gauge issue congruence is rare and inconsistent (normally only 'best party on most important issue').
- ▶ We need measures of issue salience *at the time of socialisation*, so going quite far back in time for older voters.

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## Our Approach

- ▶ Data triangulation:
  - ▶ Two observational studies, using two different sources for salience and congruence in each.
  - ▶ Plus a third one in the works.
- ▶ Extensive use of placebo tests, comparing estimates to:
  - ▶ Placebo IV models with salience of immigration *at times other than the 'impressionable years'*.
  - ▶ Placebo IV models with *salience of other issues*.
  - ▶ Placebo DV models with *congruence on other issues*.



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## Study 1: Dependent Variable

Immigration Issue Congruence from *Euroinion* item:

- ▶ “How suitable do you think each of the following parties is to deal with the issue of immigration?” (1–7 scale)

Asked for the six largest parties in each of 10 EU countries in 2019:



- ▶ Two versions of the DV:
  1. **Congruence (rating)**: score of R's *own party*. (1–7)<sup>1</sup>
  2. **Congruence (binary)**: 1 if R's own party is the best rated on the issue, 0 otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

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Immigration Issue Salience from Comparative Manifesto Project:

- ▶ Sum of # of sentences on 'Multiculturalism' in manifestos as a percentage of policy sentences, weighted by party vote share.<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Each respondent in *Euroinion* is assigned the value of party-system immigration salience measured with *CMP* in the first election they were eligible to vote in.<sup>4</sup>

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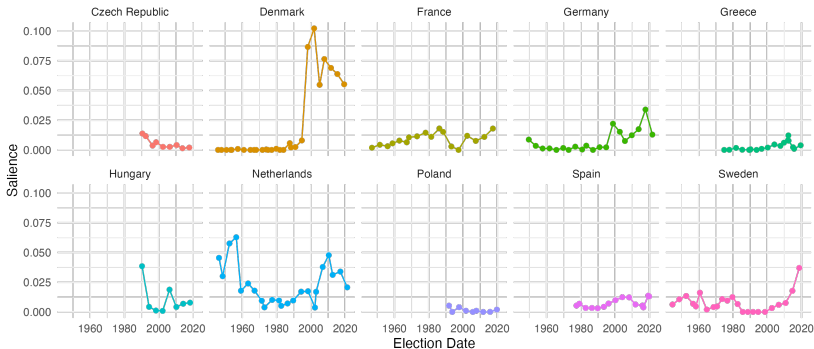
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## Study 1: European/CMP Cross-National Data

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## Models

Model 1 (N = 8314):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Congruence (Rating)}_i = & \alpha_{\text{country}} + \beta_1 \text{Salience}_i + \beta_2 \text{Age}_i + \beta_3 \text{Age}_i^2 + \\ & \beta_4 \text{Education}_i + \beta_5 \text{Gender}_i + \beta_6 \text{Partisanship}_i + \beta_7 \text{Interest}_i + \\ & \beta_8 \text{LeftRight}_i + \beta_9 \text{UrbanRural} + \epsilon_i \end{aligned}$$

- ▶ Heteroskedasticity-robust S.E. (R.C.: cluster by country)
- ▶ Cubic polynomial of age (Model 2), L-R slopes varying by country (Model 3), party family instead of L-R (Model 4).
- ▶ Same specification with logit link for binary DV.

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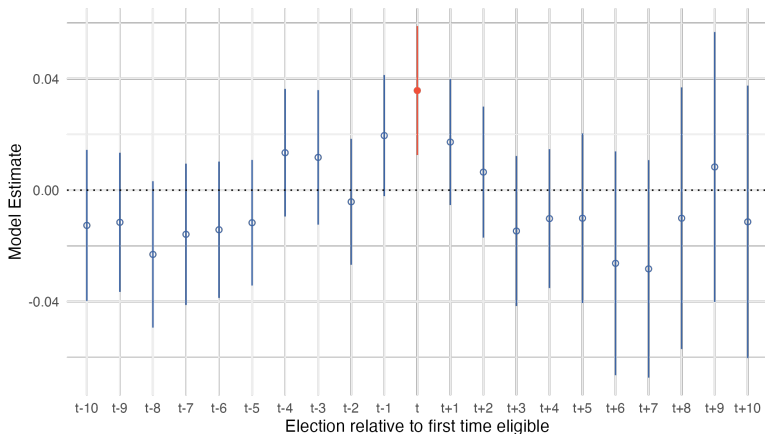
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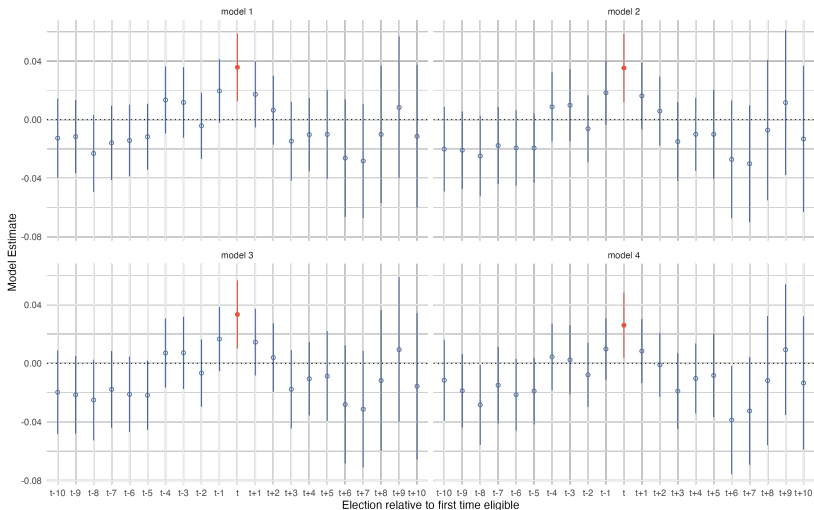
## Results

- ▶ Model 1 estimate of AME of salience in 1<sup>st</sup> election R was of age vs AMEs of placebo IVs: salience in the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> election eligible or last election underage, last-but-one, last-but-two etc.



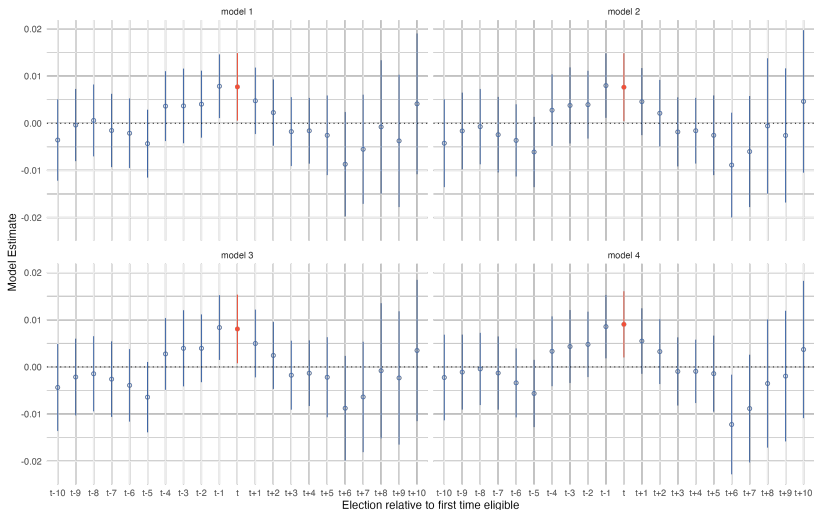
## Study 1: European/CMP Cross-National Data

## Results: Alternative Specifications

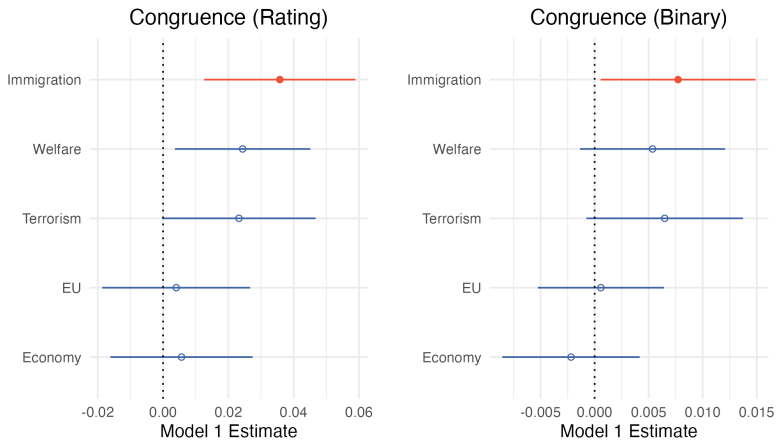


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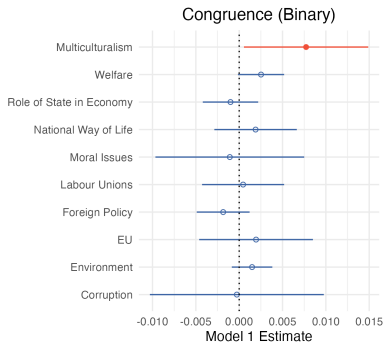
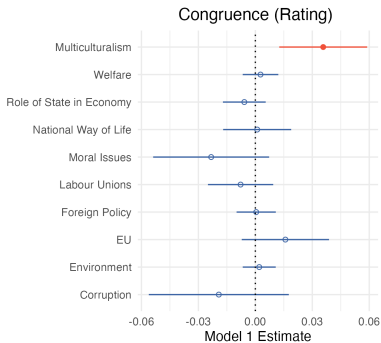
## Results: Binary DV (AME in percentage points)



# Results: Placebo DVs



## Results: Placebo IVs



## Study 2

Data from two long-running German surveys:

- ▶ DV from *ARD-DeutschlandTrend* (1998–2021). If 'Best Party to handle immigration' = Vote Intention, R is congruent.
- ▶ IV from *Politbarometer* (1986–2021): share of respondents citing immigration-related topics as either of their top 2 concerns, **aggregated at State level** by year.
  - ▶ East-West divide in salience in the 1<sup>st</sup>, but not the 2<sup>nd</sup>, wave of immigration concern yields (some) within-cohort variation.<sup>5</sup>
  - ▶ Linked to birth-years of ARD respondents with a 5-year moving window: e.g. immigration salience at 18 is the mean of salience estimates in years R was 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20.

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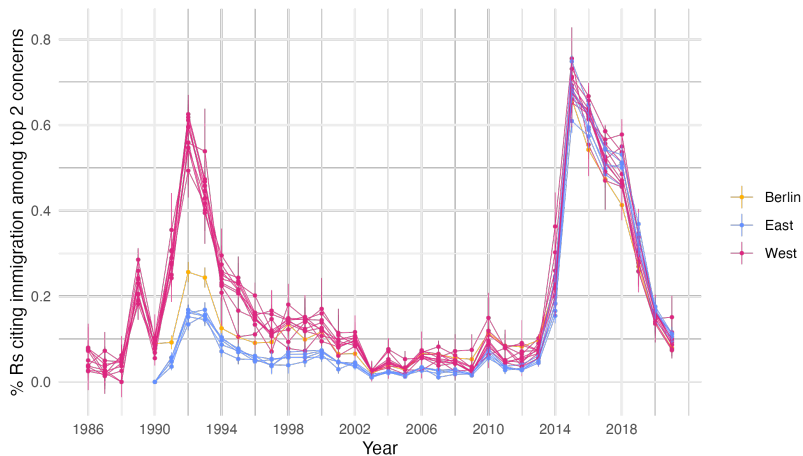
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## Model

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- ▶ Models estimated for immigration salience at all ages between 12 (N = 2576) and 65 (N = 7189).
- ▶ R.C.: quadratic polynomial of birth-year instead of age.
- ▶ S.E.s clustered by survey-year.

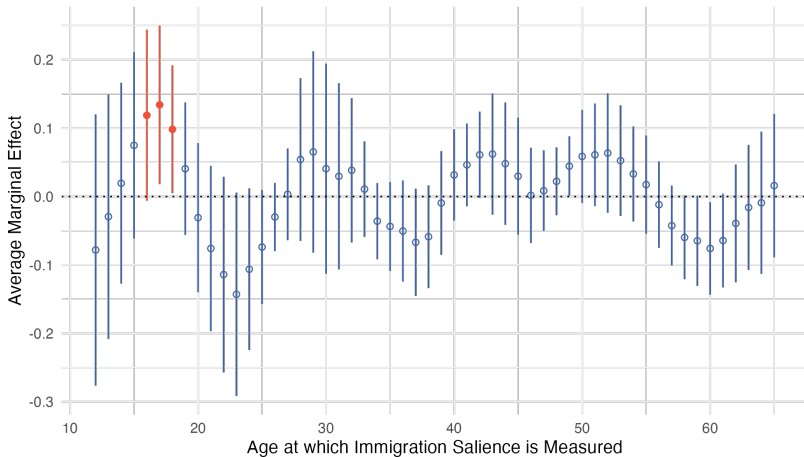
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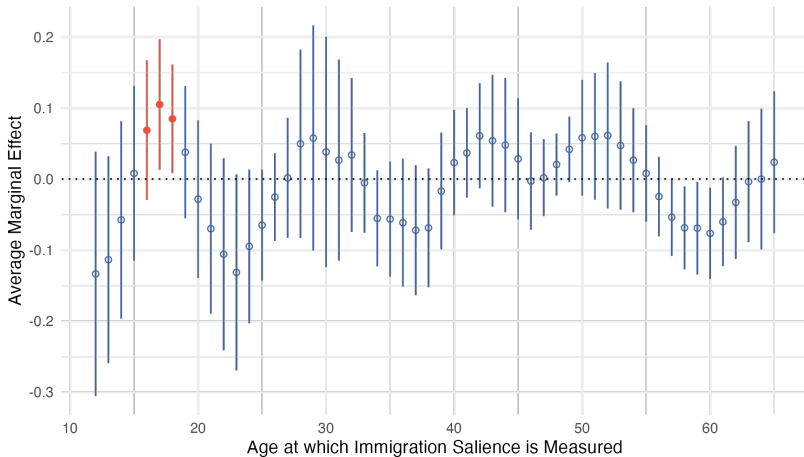
## Study 2: German Repeated Cross-Sectional data

## Results: Main Model



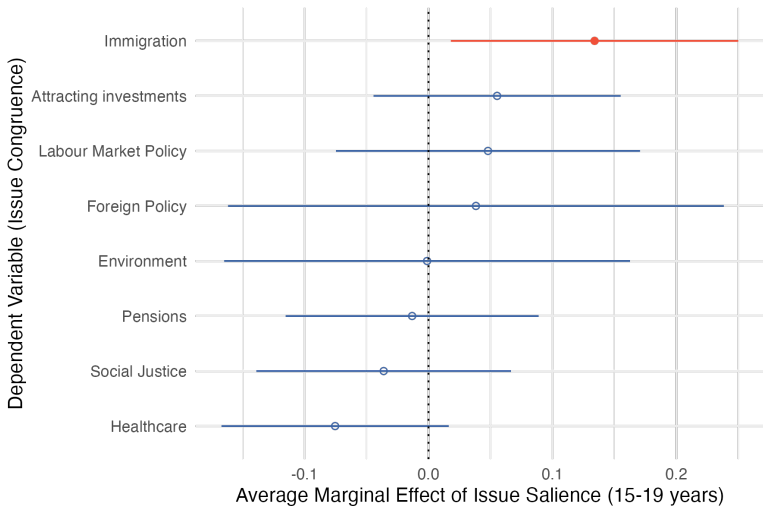
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## Results: Alternative Specification (Y.O.B. controls)



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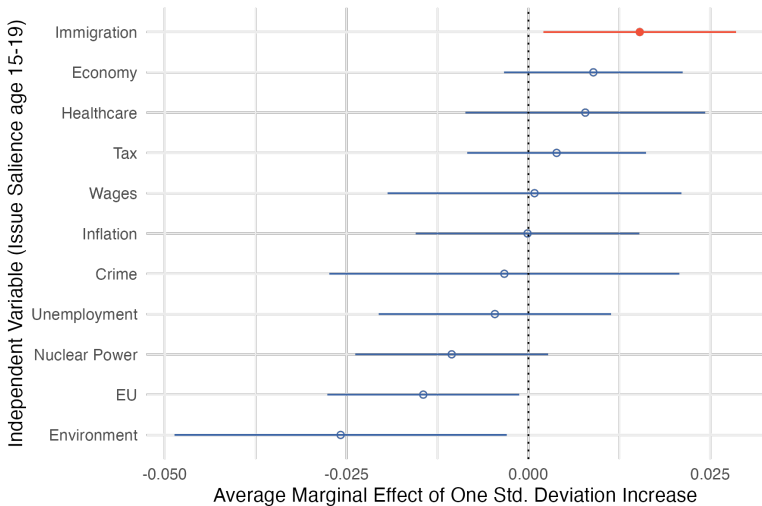
## Results: Placebo DVs





## Study 2: German Repeated Cross-Sectional data

## Results: Placebo IVs



## Contributions

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- ▶ We show that, as partisan attachments formed in adolescence are ‘sticky’, salience contexts at such time have long-term consequences on issue congruence.

“Immigration attitudes are more strongly associated with left–right positions among those born later” (Steiner, 2023)

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## Next Steps

- ▶ Study 3: repeated cross-country data from Post-Election Studies (8 countries) → control for age *and* cohort, actual vote choice, positional items (R/party placement).
- ▶ Any idea on quasi-experimental designs?
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# Thank you for your kind attention!

Get in touch:

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## References I

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