**[Hard cover or ring ]**

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Political Science

**[Fill in the name of your institute and department]**

**Master's Thesis**

**[Year of the MA thesis defence] [Name and Surname]**

**2024 Student's Name**

**[Front page in the hard cover/ second page in the ring bond]**

**CHARLES UNIVERSITY**

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Political Studies

Department of Political Science

**[Fill in the name of your institute and department; in the case of a joint study programme, please specify according to the workplace of the supervisor]**

**[Title of the Thesis in the language of the Thesis]**

Master's Thesis

**[in case of MA study]**

Author of the Thesis: **[fill in your name and surname]**

Study programme: Political science **[previously called a study course, e.g. Security Studies]**

Supervisor: prof. **[name and surname including all the academic titles]**

Year of the defence: 2024 **[fill in the year of the Master's thesis defence]**

**Declaration**

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.
4. During the preparation of this thesis, the author used **[name of tool/service]** in order to **[state reason]**. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as necessary and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication. **[This statement does not cover the use of basic tools for checking grammar, spelling, references, etc. If there is nothing to publish, there is no need to add a disclaimer.]**

In Prague on Vojtěch Pohanka

**[date of the declaration]** **[name of the author + no signature!!!]**

**References**

POHANKA, Vojtěch. *.* Praha, 2024. 97 s. Master’s thesis (Mgr). Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Institute of Political Studies, Department of Political Science. Supervisor Mgr. Jakub Stauber, Ph.D.

**[When writing bibliographic quotations, follow the norms ČSN ISO 690, ČSN ISO 690-2 or other recommended quoting styles]**

**Length of the Thesis: [Write the number of characters with spaces without abstract and appendices, minimum length is given by Directive S\_SO\_003]**

**Abstract**

**[Fill in your own abstract in English, the length 15-20 lines, short overview of your work, when downloading the thesis into SIS, the abstract is downloaded separately]**

**Abstrakt**

**[Fill in your own abstract in Czech, the length 15-20 lines, short overview of your work, when downloading the thesis into SIS, the abstract is downloaded separately]**

**Keywords**

**[Fill in 5-10 words in English which characterise the work]**

**Klíčová slova**

**[Fill in 5-10 words in Czech which characterise the work]**

**Title**

**[Here write the title of your work in English if written in Czech]**

**Název práce**

**[Here write the title of your work in Czech if written in English]**

**Acknowledgement [optional]**

I would like to express my gratitude... **[Fill in your own text of acknowledgement; align it to the lower part of the page]**

**Table of Contents**

[Introduction 8](#_Toc146697232)

[[Introduction and Conclusion are not numbered, but correspond in style to the first level heading] **Error! Bookmark not defined.**](#_Toc146697233)

[1. Headline first level 10](#_Toc146697234)

[1.1 Headline second level **Error! Bookmark not defined.**](#_Toc146697235)

[1.1.1 Headline third level **Error! Bookmark not defined.**](#_Toc146697236)

[Conclusion 29](#_Toc146697237)

[Summary 29](#_Toc146697238)

[List of References 30](#_Toc146697239)

# Introduction

How do political parties decide to emphasize some issues while instead downplaying or ignoring others in their appeals to voters? What roles do parties’ strategic considerations and external factors play in influencing the content of party programs and that of party competition as a whole? A growing

These are some of the important open questions vexing the growing literature on issue competition

(Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009; Guinaudeau and Persico 2014; Green-Pedersen 2019; 2023).

On the one hand, parties may place selective emphasis on certain issues that they deem to be politically favorable, in accordance with the issue ownership concept (Carmines 1991; Budge 2015). On the other hand, research has shown that external factors, namely societal problems and the overall party system agenda, effectively force parties to focus on pressing issues even if they may not be perceived as favorable (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010; Kristensen et al. 2023).

While the issue competition perspective goes back to the seminal works by Robertson (1976) and Budge and Farlie (1983), spatial competition approaches concerned with parties’ positions on broad ideological dimensions have generally been the more dominant theoretical lens for studying party competition ever since Downs’s (1957) spatial voting model.

The goal of this thesis is to contribute to this literature through a study of issue competition in Central and Eastern Europe, a region that has been rather overlooked when it comes to this topic. Since most of the issue competition research has focused on West European party systems, we still know surprisingly little[[1]](#footnote-1) about how the issue content of party competition has developed in CEE in the thirty-some years after democratization.

This thesis is concerned with the development of issue competition in Central and Eastern Europe over the medium to long-term period of the last three decades.

The goal of this thesis is to fill this gap in the research and answer the following research questions:

*1) How salient have cultural issues been for party competition in CEE and how has this varied over time and between countries?*

*2)Which factors are associated with the degree of salience that parties assign to cultural issues?*

*3) How has the content of cultural issues in CEE developed over time?*

# 1. Literature review

As a result of decades of scholarly attention, there is by now an extensive body of literature examining the patterns of party competition and its content. For instance, significant theoretical advancements have been made in the areas of spatial theory and the structuring of party competition (e.g. Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009; Rovny 2015; Oesch and Rennwald 2018; Kitschelt and Rehm 2023). The literature on issue competition and parties’ salience strategies has especially grown in the recent decade and a half (e.g. Meguid 2005; 2008; Green-Pedersen 2007; Wagner and Meyer 2014; Green-Pedersen 2019; de Vries and Hobolt 2020; Green-Pedersen 2023). Nonetheless, given the goals of this thesis, this literature review will limit itself specifically to the research on the salience and content of cultural issues.

First, for the sake of conceptual clarity, the following subsection focuses on conceptualizing the category of cultural issues around which the empirical analysis is centred. After that, the review will move on to the theoretical approaches that can help explain the content and dynamics of party competition on cultural issues. The first of these is the work on cleavages and how they influence the content of politics on a second, “cultural dimension” of politics. Studies in this area generally fall under what Vries and Marks (2012) and Green-Pedersen (2019, 10–11) have referred to as “bottom-up” or “demand-side” approaches to party politics (see also Rovny 2015b). These focus mainly on how societal transformations and conflicts influence the spatial dimensionality of party politics. The next subsection will then review the relevant literature on issue competition which, by contrast, takes a rather “top-down” or “supply-side” perspective. It focuses more on how the salience of issues varies over time and between parties, while often also using party positions as well as other dependent variables to explain this variance. This approach also aligns more closely with the goal of this thesis.

These two areas of research provide some of the general theoretical expectations relevant to explaining party competition on cultural issues. However, they are also overwhelmingly derived from the West European context. Therefore, the following subsection will review the research focusing specifically on party competition in Central and Eastern Europe. Given the different legacies of political development, among other factors, party competition in these systems has some distinct dynamics which should also be considered in the analysis. Finally, the last subsection of this chapter relies on the main findings discussed in the preceding parts to develop a series of theoretical expectations for the salience and content of cultural issues in CEE politics.

## Conceptualizing cultural issues

Before delving into the literature on issue salience and content, it is necessary to conceptualize the notion of “cultural issues”, which are sometimes also referred to as “social” or “sociocultural” issues (Flanagan and Lee 2003; Charalambous, Conti, and Pedrazzani 2023; Cely 2024). Political scientists generally conceptualize cultural issues as those that are about fundamental social and cultural values rather than about the “traditional” politics of economic redistribution (Bornschier 2010b; Tavits and Potter 2015). According to Kitschelt (1994), these issues map onto an authoritarian-libertarian dimension of politics, which is based on competing conceptions of the community and cross-cuts the economic distributional dimension. In this conception, social order in a political community may be based either on individual liberty and the free association of individuals, as in a libertarian[[2]](#footnote-2) conception, or on adherence to community norms and hierarchical forms of social organization, as envisioned by authoritarians (Kitschelt 1994, 10–11).

Building on Kitschelt’s theory, Bornschier (2010a; 2010b) postulates that cultural conflict in contemporary Europe is based on a divide between libertarian-universalistic and traditional-communitarian values. While the former stem from a universalistic conception of community and emphasize individual autonomy in life choices, the latter argue for the preservation of traditional communities and traditionalist moral norms (Bornschier 2010a, 2). This implies that cultural conflict should be manifested in issues broadly relating to religious and moral norms, the nation and nationalism, as well as multiculturalism and the opposing idea of cultural protectionism, which are strongly tied to the issue of immigration (Bornschier 2010a, 37–38; Abou-Chadi 2016). Similarly, Hooghe and Marks (2009; 2018) also take inspiration from Kitschelt in defining the cultural dimension as one based on a divide between green/alternative/libertarian politics on one side and traditional/authoritarian/nationalist politics on the other. The main difference here is that they additionally conceive of environmentalism as a cultural issue.

In the context of European politics, one can also distinguish between an “old cultural conflict” based mainly on the opposition between religious and secular values or between the church and the state (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Flanagan and Lee 2003), and a “new cultural conflict” based on the more encompassing division between libertarianism and authoritarianism outlined above (Bornschier 2010b; Kriesi 2010). The latter emerged after the 1960s and coincided with the rising salience of “new politics” issues, such as the rights of women and LGBTQ people, environmentalism, or immigration (Borre 1995; Green-Pedersen and Little 2023). There are differing views on whether new politics issues constitute an entirely new dimension of politics or whether they simply represent a transformation in the content of the old cultural dimension tied to religion (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2008; Bornschier 2010b; Rovny and Polk 2019; Ford and Jennings 2020; Westheuser and Zollinger 2024; Cely 2024). This is not a question that this thesis seeks to answer directly. Rather, given the aim to study issue competition on cultural issues in general, this category is conceptualized broadly enough to include both old and new cultural issues. At the same time, part of the goal of this thesis will be to examine which specific cultural issues have been salient in Central and Eastern Europe and whether their content has developed over time as would be implied by the “new politics” perspective.

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

From a strict point of view, it is not always easy to distinguish whether a specific issue represents an economically redistributive issue or a cultural issue as defined above. Classifications differ between authors and are all to some extent debatable. Häusermann and Kriesi (2015) even argue that it does not make sense to distinguish between economic and cultural dimensions of politics because people’s cultural preferences often influence views on redistribution. It is no doubt true that many important political issues have distributional and cultural aspects, environmentalism and European integration being two examples[[3]](#footnote-3). Nonetheless, this thesis argues that the category of cultural issues is a relevant analytical category to study the content of party politics (see Tavits and Potter 2015; Charalambous, Conti, and Pedrazzani 2023; Green-Pedersen and Little 2023 for examples of other studies that take a similar approach in this regard).

In order to make sure that the conceptualization of cultural issues does not determine the results, the empirical analysis will also take into account the salience of European integration and the environment. In this regard, the analysis does not hinge on the definition, because the issues will be measured at a disaggregated level, instead of being grouped together into one aggregate category. Nonetheless, the main theoretical thrust of this thesis admittedly centres on the issues that more straightforwardly fit into the conceptualization derived from Kitschelt (1994), Bornschier (2010a; 2010b) and Pytlas (2017). This is why explicit theoretical expectations for the salience of the environmet are not developed, although research dealing with this topic is also covered in the literature review.

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

## Cleavages and the cultural dimension of politics

In their classic chapter on the formation of West European party systems, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) famously argued that West European party systems reflected four main historically-determined social conflicts: the center/periphery, church/state, urban/rural, and labor/capital cleavages[[4]](#footnote-4). While the content and relative importance of the first three cleavages varied depending on country characteristics, it was generally the class-based labour/capital cleavage that crucially structured political conflict in European democracies around left-right distributional conflict (Bartolini and Mair 2007). Political competition was thus practically unidimensional and based on socioeconomic issues, with the orthogonal second dimension based on territorial, ethno-linguist, and religious differences generally remaining insignificant for party politics in most West European countries.

In the decades following the publication of Lipset and Rokkan’s theory, scholars began to argue that traditional cleavages had begun to decline or substantively change as a result of various social changes, such as secularization, tertiarization, the changing structure of the economy, or globalization and demographic changes (e.g., Dalton et al. 1984; Franlin 1992; Kriesi et al. 2008; Ford and Jennings 2020). At the same time, a new literature also emerged focusing specifically on the changing content and rising salience of the cultural dimension, which authors such as Müller-Rommel (1985) referred to as a “new politics dimension”.

One of the most impactful theories in this regard was Inglehart’s (1977; 1990; 1997) “silent revolution” thesis. In this account, the changing social structure in advanced post-industrial democracies caused younger generations who were socialized in the economically prosperous post-war years to prioritize “post-materialist” values of individual autonomy and self-expression, in contrast to the “materialist” generations who were socialized during the periods of war and economic instability in the first half of the 20th century. According to Inglehart, the competing materialist and postmaterialist values are linked to a variety of newly salient second dimension cultural issues, which include, for example, abortion, sexual freedoms or environmental protection (Inglehart 2008). This then has consequences for party competition, as the opposition between individuals holding materialist, culturally authoritarian values and those with postmaterialist, culturally libertarian values is mobilized by parties, increasing conflict on the second dimension (Norris and Inglehart 2019).

However, the argument that societal changes lead to younger generations having more libertarian values has been criticised as invalid (Flanagan and Lee 2003; A. Schäfer 2022). Indeed, both libertarian and authoritarian values can be viewed as compatible with postmaterialism (Steel et al. 1992; Cely 2024, 6–7). This is why both new left and new right radical right parties can be seen as representing new politics (Cely 2024, 7; Bornschier 2010b; 2010a). Additionally, as Ford and Jennings (2020, 299) point out, the silent revolution thesis is mostly concerned with explaining value shifts in society, and has relatively little to say about how these value shifts are actually mobilized by parties.

A more comprehensive theory in this regard is presented in two monographs by Kriesi et al. (2008; 2012). In their framework, a new integration-demarcation cleavage has emerged in Western Europe, separating the “losers” and “winners” of a broadly defined process of economic globalization and integration.

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

With their transnational cleavage concept, Hooghe and Marks (2018) conceptualize the transformed cultural dimension similarly. However, they place more emphasis on the difficulties that established parties face in adapting to new issues, as well as on the impact of specific external shocks, such as the so-called refugee crisis of 2015-2016, which can significantly reconfigure party competition and increase the salience of cultural issues. Importantly, and in contrast to Kriesi et al. (2008; 2012), they also extend the scope of their theory to postcommunist countries. They note that CEE EU members have also been affected by recent EU crises, and that this has led to the increased salience of cultural issues as well as greater support for the radical right in the region (Hooghe and Marks 2018, 124–25).

Summing up, the cleavage literature has generated a variety of similar yet distinct concepts that seek to explain changes in party competition with various factors exogenous to party systems, such as long-term economic and societal changes, globalization, or external shocks. As Green-Pedersen (2019, 13) points out, the general implication of this literature for the content of party competition is that the transformation of social divides lead to changes in the second dimension of politics, which are accompanied by the increasing salience of cultural issues and the ensuing success of parties successful in mobilizing these issues, particularly the radical right. Green-Pedersen also notes that the cleavage-based literature has significant limitations when it comes to explaining the content of party competition. For example, while a new cultural cleavage may have emerged among the electorate, there is less evidence that this divide has actually been fully translated into a new second dimension at the party system level (Green-Pedersen 2019, 14). Relatedly, the salience of second dimension issues varies significantly across countries and parties, and it is impossible to explain this variation with reference to changes in social conflict (Green-Pedersen 2019, 13–15). Therefore, a fuller explanation of the content of party competition may be obtained by focusing on the supply-side of politics, namely on party behaviour and how parties assign salience to individual issues.

## Issue competition and parties’ salience strategies

Having reviewed the key research on cleavages and the cultural dimension, this subsection focuses on party competition on cultural issues from the angle of issue competition. The issue competition literature is the other prominent theoretical approach to studying party competition (Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020, 751).

It starts from the premise that parties have different preferences regarding which issues should be part of the political debate, and that conflict over which issues become politicized is an integral aspect of party competition (Green-Pedersen 2007; 2023; Guinaudeau and Persico 2014; Grossman and Guinaudeau 2024). The key variable of interest here is thus how much parties emphasize specific issues, rather than their positions on broad ideological dimensions. The main theoretical expectation in this regard is that parties compete by selectively emphasizing different issues, rather than directly confronting each other on the same issues (Budge 2015, 767)[[5]](#footnote-5).

The issue competition approach is relevant to this thesis for two reasons. First, it has developed theories that help explain which factors influence issue competition in general and why some issues become more salient at the expense of others. Second, it also brings insights about issue competition dynamics that are specific to cultural issues.

With regards to the first strand of research, de Vries and Hobolt (2012) introduce the concept of issue entrepreneurship to explain why some parties emphasize issues that are totally new on the party system agenda (see also Hobolt and de Vries 2015). According to their model, which is inspired by work on US politics by Carmines and Stimson (1986; 1990; 1993) and Riker (1986; 1988; 1996), new issues are most likely to be emphasised by “political losers” (Hobolt and de Vries 2015, 1163). In their definition, losing parties are those that have remained in opposition for many years, suffered electoral defeat, and are far away from the mean party position on the dominant left-right dimension of party competition. Since these parties have not been successful within the existing patterns of party competition, they have an incentive to introduce a previously ignored issue to the political agenda to improve their fortunes. It is through such issue entrepreneurship strategies by losing parties that new issues become salient and lead to a change in the existing pattern of issue competition (Hobolt and de Vries 2015). In subsequent work, the authors specify that not only losing parties, but also new parties are likely to use strategies of issue entrepreneurship (de Vries and Hobolt 2020). They also stress that the types of issues that are most suitable to be emphasized as part of a successful issue entrepreneurship strategy are those that do not align with the dominant left-right dimension of politics, such as the environment, European integration, and immigration (de Vries and Hobolt 2020, 118–20).

Perhaps the most comprehensive theoretical framework aimed at explaining general patterns in issue competition is Green-Pedersen’s (2019) “issue incentive” model. It starts from the premise that niche parties and mainstream parties differ significantly in their behavioural motivations as defined by Strom (1990), and therefore also in their issue incentives. The former were established with the intent of putting a single issue on the party system agenda (e.g. environment for Green parties, immigration for the radical-right), and they are more likely to hold policy and vote-seeking motivations. By contrast, mainstream parties are conceptualized as paying attention to a much wider range of issues, and are expected to place a greater weight on office-seeking, which makes them more pragmatic in their issue focus (Green-Pedersen 2019, 29–30). Because the issue strategies of niche parties are expected to be straightforward and focused on emphasizing a single issue, Green-Pedersen argues that the issue incentives of large mainstream parties are key for explaining the content of party competition in institutionalized party systems.

According to him, three main factors shape mainstream parties’ incentives to emphasize a given issue: 1) issue characteristics; 2) issue ownership; and 3) coalition considerations (Green-Pedersen 2019, 31). The latter two factors lead to relatively straightforward predictions: mainstream parties should be more likely to emphasize issues that they own; and they should also emphasize those issues on which they hold similar positions as potential coalition partners close to them on the left-right dimension. By contrast, the factor of issue characteristics is more complex, as it includes various aspects, such as the amount of information available about an issue, the number of people affected by it, the difficulty of “solving” an issue through government policies, and so on (Green-Pedersen 2019, 31–34). Through this emphasis on issue characteristics, Green-Pedersen’s general framework illustrates the difficulty of theorizing about the content of issue competition a priori, because numerous and differing characteristics can influence party incentives for different issues and in different points in time.

Next to these general l frameworks, another strand of research investigates issue competition specifically on cultural issues. This includes several studies treating cultural issues as an aggregate category and comparing them to the overall salience of economic issues, as well as those examining individual cultural issues.

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

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

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

Besides these studies that worked with cultural issues as an aggregate category, a substantial amount of work has also examined the dynamics of issue competition on individual cultural issues. Immigration, together with the broader issue of nationalism, as well as the environment[[6]](#footnote-6) are issues that have received the most scholarly attention, and it is therefore for these issues that theoretical expectations for party behaviour are most developed.

Green-Pedersen (2019, 82–98) finds that the share of immigrants in a country is associated with the issue’s salience (see also Green-Pedersen and Otjes 2019). He also shows that the coalition considerations of major centre-right parties can determine immigration salience to a large degree. If its most-likely coalition partner is a radical right party, then a large centre-right party may have an incentive to increase emphasis on immigration in order to gain votes and facilitate cooperation with the radical right, as is illustrated by the example of the Danish Liberals (Green-Pedersen 2019, 93–95). Abou-Chadi (2016) also shows that parties further to the right tend to react to radical right electoral success by increasing their emphasis on multiculturalism.

However, other research suggests that the objective share of immigrants per se likely does not have much of a direct causal effect on salience (Grande, Schwarzbözl, and Fatke 2019). Rather, it seems that media attention on immigration is more important, as it can help political entrepreneurs mobilize this issue even in contexts where immigration remains objectively low, as exemplified by CEE countries during the European refugee crisis of 2015-2016 (Hutter and Kriesi 2022; Wondreys 2021). An open question in this regard is whether the refugee crisis significantly affected parties’ issue strategies in the long term, or whether it only led to a short-term spike in salience (Gessler and Hunger 2022).

Besides the substantial amount of attention devoted to immigration in particular, another strand of research has focused on the salience of nationalism more generally. Here, Johnston (2023; 2024) has argued that the increasing salience of cultural issues in recent years is not just driven by the cultural protectionism characteristic of anti-immigrant appeals, but also due to a heightened salience of ethnoregionalism in regionalised countries such as Italy or Spain. He suggests that new EU institutions, such as the Committee of the Regions, create incentives for regionalist parties to increase their emphasis on ethnoregionalism and to highlight the possibilities of regional autonomy from the national centre (Johnston 2024, 540–41).

When it comes to the environment, Spoon, Hobolt and de Vries (2014) find that the electoral success of green parties leads left-wing parties to start emphasizing the environment more so as to prevent vote losses to the greens. However, Abou-Chadi (2016) disputes this finding and argues that, since environmental protection is generally a valence issue that the greens clearly own, it does not pay off for non-green parties to increase its salience. This is a crucial difference compared to immigration, where, due to its more positional nature, centre-right parties may calculate that it is beneficial to increase emphasis on it and partly move towards the radical right position (Abou-Chadi 2016). Nonetheless, it is disputable to what extent the environment continues to be a valence issue, as positions on climate change have become strongly contested in recent years (Farstad 2018; Dickson and Hobolt 2024; Puleo et al. 2025). This may lead to analogous dynamics as on immigration in which mainstream parties also start to emphasize the environment more.

Party strategies on European integration are often described similarly as those on immigration and the environment. Analogously, to the other two issues, mainstream parties in Western Europe historically avoided the topic of European integration (Hooghe and Marks 2009). Both the centre-left and the centre-right were also internally split on the issue (Marks, Wilson, and Ray 2002; Rovny 2024, 51). This allowed challenger parties, namely the Eurosceptic radical right, to mobilize European integration in a successful issue entrepreneurship strategy, increasing its salience for party competition (de Vries and Hobolt 2020, 120).

Morality issues have received comparatively less attention from the perspective of issue competition, and the theory of parties’ salience strategies on these issues is thus less developed. Engeli, Green-Pedersen and Larsen (2012) observe that morality issues tend to be politicized, and thus more salient, in countries in which a religious-secular conflict dimension historically exists in the party system, as is the case in the Netherlands or Switzerland. In countries where no such historical conflict exists, e.g. the UK, Denmark, morality issues remain insignificant (Engeli, Green-Pedersen, and Larsen 2012, 185–86). Building on this work, Euchner (2019) develops a theoretical framework to explain the variance in morality issue salience in countries that do have a historical religious-secular conflict in the party system. She finds that, in these countries, minority opposition parties have an incentive to emphasise morality issues in situations when they can use them as wedge-issues that internally split a major governing party or create conflict between several governing parties (Euchner 2019, 237–38).

By contrast, we lack understanding of party strategies in party systems that are not characterized by a religious-secular conflict dimension. In this regard, the literature has been limited to more general insights, such as the suggestion by Guasti and Bustikova (2023, 130) that morality issues have become more salient particularly in the CEE region in recent years, as socially conservative parties seek to limit reproductive and LGBTQ rights as part of an “illiberal backlash” phenomenon.

## Party competition in Central and Eastern Europe

The issue competition literature brings a series of important findings that lead to clearer expectations about parties’ salience strategies compared to the work drawing on cleavage theory. Nonetheless, similarly to the cleavage literature, studies of issue competition still mainly focus on West European party politics. As a result, some of the key theoretical underpinnings, particularly those pertaining to the dimensional structure of party competition as well as the clear distinction between niche and established parties may not travel well to the CEE context.

One of the oft-mentioned supposed particularities of the dimensional structure of CEE politics is that economically-left wing party positions tend to be combined with cultural conservatism, while economically right-wing positions are associated with cultural liberalism, contrary to the pattern in Western Europe (Kitschelt et al. 1999; Marks et al. 2006; Vachudova and Hooghe 2009; Jackson and Jolly 2021). The cause of this difference is said be the result of the legacy of the communist regime and the ensuing transition, as anti-communist parties were often both right-wing and culturally conservative (Kitschelt 1995; Vachudova and Hooghe 2009).

Kitschelt (1995) also makes the separate argument that communist regime types influenced the structure of party competition in postcommunist democracies. According to him, a cultural conflict divide became most salient in party systems that emerged after national-accommodative communism (Poland, Hungary). In countries that had a past of bureaucratic-authoritarianism (Czech Republic), party competition became structured by the economic dimension (Kitschelt 1995, 460–61), which implies that cultural issues were less salient here.

A newer strand of research has offered some correctives to these general legacy-based arguments. Several studies point out that there is significant country-level variance in the dimensional structures of postcommunist party systems, which in some cases (e.g. Slovenia, Estonia) resemble the common pattern found in Western Europe (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2012; Rovny and Edwards 2012; Rovny 2014a; 2015a). Rovny (2014a) argues that, rather than regime type alone, the legacies of communist federations and ethnic structure can explain the structure of party positions more fully. He shows that containing a politically salient ethnic minority that stemmed from the centre of a former communist federation (such as Russians in Estonia), economically left-wing parties took up multicultural positions to support ethnic minorities in opposition to economically right-wing nationalists who represented the majority ethnic group. Rovny then further argues that parties that support ethnic minorities also take liberal stances on the cultural dimension in general, including on new issues such as gay rights or immigration (Rovny 2014a, 701; 2024, 118). This research thus expands on Kitschelt’s (1995) argument about the influence of regime types on party competition. It also implies that cultural issues should also be more salient in countries with politically salient ethnic minorities (whether they stem from a former federal centre or not). Indeed, in a rare study directly examining issue salience in CEE, Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2009) find that ethnic pluralism is positively associated with the salience of ethnic issues, but they do not examine whether this is also true for other cultural issues.

Importantly, another implication may be that, depending on the type of relationship between the economic and cultural dimensions, the salience strategies of different types of parties may be the same or different than in the West. For example, a Czech centre-left party could have an incentive to emphasize immigration to win votes in competition with left-authoritarian parties, while this will not be the case in Estonia, where the dimensional structure resembles Western Europe.

We can also expect communist and transition legacies to impact issue salience more directly. Whitefield and Rohrschneider (2015) argue that while in Western Europe, European integration is mostly emphasized by niche parties, in CEE it became a mainstream party issue since right after the transition, one that was also incorporated into the main dimensions of party competition. By contrast, immigration was for a long time not a salient issue in CEE politics (Minkenberg 2013, 14; Rovny 2014b), and radical right parties mainly emphasized their opposition to historical national minorities (Buštíková 2018; Heinisch et al. 2021). Nonetheless, immigration appears to have become much more importan since 2015, and the question in this regard is whether the party strategies on this issue follow a similar logic in CEE as in the West, where the issue entrepreneurship of radical right parties has been crucial (Wondreys 2021; Lancaster 2022; Hutter and Kriesi 2022). In CEE, the situation may be complicated due to the presence of “radicalized mainstream parties”, such as the Polish PIS or Hungarian Fidesz, whose issue profiles overlap with the radical right (Buštíková 2018, 810–12; Pytlas 2017, 25–28; Minkenberg 2017; Heinisch et al. 2021)

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

Relatedly, another strand of research has been quite sceptical about the significance of ideological structure for CEE party politics altogether, highlighting the importance of non-ideological factors such as personalization and clientelism (Hutter and Kriesi 2022, 344; see also Rovny 2024, 62–63 for an overview). It is certainly true that such factors play a role in party competition and in party-voter linkages . Nonetheless, based on the extensive literature on the dimensionality of postcommunist party systems reviewed above, this thesis starts from the premise that the ideological structure of party competition should theoretically still be associated with parties’ salience strategies when it comes to cultural issues[[7]](#footnote-7). Of course, it this association may turn out to be weaker compared to West European party systems, perhaps due to a lower level of party system institutionalization.

## Theoretical expectations

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

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

*RQ2) How are CEE parties’ ideological positions associated with their emphasis on cultural issues?*

*RQ3) How has the content of cultural issues in CEE developed over time?*

As the literature review showed, there is a substantial amount of research that is potentially relevant for these questions. However, it does always lend itself to being synthesized as a set of straightforward theoretical propositions or hypotheses, since some of the existing findings can lead to contradicting expectations. Nonetheless, the following paragraphs attempt to shine light on the observable implications of the existing theories about the salience of cultural issues at the country- and party-levels as well as about the shifting content of cultural issue categories.

First, we can derive several empirical expectations about the aggregate relative salience of cultural issues as well as its country-level and temporal variance. On the one hand, the existing studies suggest that cultural issues should be relatively less salient than economic issues since the 1990s up to the present (Stoll 2010; Green-Pedersen and Seeberg 2025). Since issues related to economic policy and redistribution affect nearly everyone, parties have a very strong incentive to focus on it, either to project their competence or criticize their rivals’ lack of it (Green-Pedersen and Seeberg 2025, 252; Green and Jennings 2017). Due to this, the incentive to focus on the economy should be a lot stronger than on cultural issues, which generally do not directly affect a majority of voters in the same way as the economy does. We thus derive the first observable implication:

*OIa: At the aggregate level of party systems, cultural issues have been relatively less salient than economic issues throughout the whole studied period.*

At the same time, we may also expect the salience of cultural issues to increase over time in CEE, as the level of European integration and globalization has increased in the region, thus potentially raising the relevance of these issues (Ward et al. 2015). This pattern of increasing integration and globalization has also coincided with increasing economic development, which may in turn be connected to wider societal developments that make cultural issues more important politically, as is presumed by the post-materialism thesis and related theories (Inglehart 1977; Kriesi et al. 2008; 2012). Furthermore, many studies have pointed to the so-called refugee crisis in 2015-2016 as a significant exogenous shock that has put multiculturalism and particularly immigration to the top of the political agenda (Wondreys 2021; Gessler and Hunger 2022; Hutter and Kriesi 2022; Buštíková and Guasti 2024). This leads to the following observable implications:

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

*OIc: The period following the migration crisis is associated with an increase in the salience of multiculturalism and immigration.*

Next to the first three expectations related to the temporal dynamics of issue salience, we can also derive expectations about how the salience of cultural issues varies by countries. Work on the ideological structuring of CEE party systems (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009; Rovny 2014a; 2024) points to the role of ethnic diversity in making cultural issues related to ethnicity and multiculturalism more salient for politics. Similarly, an implication of Tavit’s and Letki’s (2014) study is that higher levels of religiosity in a society allow parties to emphasize morality issues more. Next to these social factors, we may expect communist legacies to also play a role, whereby countries that previously had a national-accommodative regime may also see a higher salience of cultural issues (Kitschelt 1995; Kitschelt et al. 1999; Rovny 2014a, 701). Based on this, we derive the following three observable implications:

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

*OIIb: A legacy of a national-accommodative communist regime (Poland, Hungary) is associated with a higher salience of cultural issues, even in the absence of politically significant ethnic minorities.*

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

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

However, this straightforward association between issue emphasis and right-wing party positions may be complicated in the CEE context, where in some countries, left-authoritarian parties exist whose issue profiles may be similar to the radical right (Ivanov 2024). In these contexts, the difference in issue salience between parties with different positions may be smaller or insignificant, especially if relevant radical right parties are also present in the party system. These considerations lead to the following set of observable implications for the associations between party positions and issue emphasis:

*OIIIa: Radical right parties should place a higher degree of salience on cultural issues, particularly multiculturalism, nationalism and immigration, compared to other parties.*

*OIIIb: Right-wing parties that do not belong to the radical right should place a higher emphasis on cultural issues compared to left-wing parties.*

*OIIIc: In countries where left-authoritarian parties are present, the difference in emphasis between parties with different left-right positions will be smaller, especially if radical right parties are also present in the party system.*

Another important point highlighted by the literature is the interaction between the radical right and mainstream parties. Here, the main takeaway is that mainstream parties may react to the electoral threat of the radical right by increasing their emphasis on precisely those cultural issues that are raised by radical right parties. It may be the case that mainstream right-wing parties are especially incentivized to react to the radical right in this way (Han 2015; Pytlas and Kossack 2015; Abou-Chadi 2016). However, Abou-Chadi and Krause’s (2020) study suggests that both right-wing and left-wing mainstream parties adjust their positions when the radical right breaks through into parliament, although it is not certain whether they should adjust their issue salience as well. Specifically in the CEE region, some so-called “radicalized mainstream parties” (e.g. the Polish PIS or Hungarian Fidesz), which often compete for votes with a smaller radical-right party, are especially likely to have are especially likely to have an issue profile that is similar to the radical right (Buštíková 2018, 810–12; Pytlas 2017, 25–28; Minkenberg 2017; Heinisch et al. 2021). Therefore, we add the following observable implication for the interaction between the salience strategies of the radical right and of mainstream parties:

*OIIId: The presence of a strong radical right party in the party system is associated with an increased emphasis on cultural issues by mainstream parties, and this association may be conditional on mainstream parties’ left-right position.*

Finally, the literature also suggests that the substantive content of cultural issues may be evolving in recent years. This is a proposition that is distinct from the salience of cultural issues in aggregate and can rather be formulated as the salience of different subtopics within specific cultural issue areas. In this regard, the following empirical analysis focuses solely on the issue areas related to multiculturalism and morality, because analysing the content of every single cultural issue would, unfortunately, be beyond the scope of this thesis.

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

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

*OIVa: Within the issue area of multiculturalism, immigration from non-European countries became more salient following the refugee crisis.*

*OIVb: Within the issue area of morality issues, issues related to LGBTQ rights and women’s reproductive rights have become increasingly significant over time.*

# 2. Data and Methods

Before delving into the data and methods, it is necessary to emphasize that the goal of this thesis is descriptive, in that the focus is on examining systematic patterns in the variance of the salience and content of cultural issues in CEE. Given the paucity of existing studies on this region, the aim is to examine whether there are associations between the various independent variables set out in the theoretical expectations on the one hand and issue salience and content on the other hand. Finding out whether any of the potentially uncovered associations are driven by causal relationships is an undertaking that is left to future studies, which should focus on single independent variables and carefully specify their relationship to salience or content.

The spatial focus of the thesis centres on Central and Eastern Europe, and the countries included in the empirical analysis are the 11 post-communist member states of the European Union, that is Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The decision to include only eventual EU member states follows other recent studies of CEE party politics (Engler 2023; Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2020) and is based on the comparability of these cases when it comes to background factors such as democratic quality and party system institutionalization. Temporally, the analysis spans the period from 1990 until the last elections included in the MARPOR dataset.

## Using manifesto data as a measure of the salience of issue areas and parties’ left-right positions

The data source for the empirical analysis of issue salience is the Manifesto Project[[8]](#footnote-8) (MARPOR) dataset (Lehmann et al. 2024a). It includes data on the relative proportions of party manifestos[[9]](#footnote-9) that are devoted various thematic categories, such as economic issues, welfare, foreign policy, multiculturalism etc. MARPOR is the best available data source for this thesis for several reasons. First, the logic behind its thematic coding of manifesto texts was developed on the basis of salience theory and thus provides a valid measure of parties’ issue attention (Budge and Farlie 1983; Budge et al. 2001; Budge 2015; Gunderson 2024). Second, MARPOR generally includes data for all parties that received at least two seats in parliamentary elections for all the studied countries in elections going back to 1990, which allows for cross-section and longitudinal analysis of salience.

Manifestos in general have traditionally been used to estimate both party positions and issue emphasis, and they are often viewed as one of the best comparative sources of parties’ self-declared policy goals and preferences (Laver and Garry 2000; Lowe et al. 2011; Helbling and Tresch 2011, 175–77). In regards to the observable implications about salience changes in response to the refugee crisis and about party interactions (*OIc, OIVa* and *OIIId*), manifesto data also presents a conservative test, because parties are less likely to react to external shocks or to their rivals’ issues in manifests compared to other sources, such as press releases (Hutter and Gessler 2019, 55; Dolezal et al. 2014, 73; Meyer and Wagner 2016, 559).

The MARPOR data is not perfect by any means, and various drawbacks pertaining to the project’s coding scheme, reliability, document selection, and scaling of party positions have been widely discussed (Mikhaylov, Laver, and Benoit 2012; Gemenis 2013). One of the most problems when it comes to using the data to measure issue salience is that the indicators some of the 56 individual categories suffer from low intercoder reliability (Mikhaylov, Laver, and Benoit 2012).

Another serious problem is the construction of the coding scheme, which in some cases makes it difficult to differentiate between different type of cultural issues as well as to distinguish cultural from economic appeals. The construction of the two categories measuring multiculturalism can lead to an undercounting of mentions of ethnicity (Protsyk and Garaz 2013). Additionally, there is no category directly measuring mentions of immigration, as these are most likely to be coded into the multiculturalism or national way of life categories.

Building on previous approaches (Stoll 2010; Wagner and Meyer 2014; 2017), the analysis attempts to partially deal with the problems of reliability and undercounting by combining the 56 MARPOR categories into fewer aggregate categories and by not including the MARPOR categories are too controversial to be meaningfully aggregated. These categories thus form larger issue areas rather than individual issues as such (Wagner and Meyer 2017, 90)[[10]](#footnote-10).

Table 1 below shows how the MARPOR categories were used to create two aggregate issue areas that are meant to track the salience of issues related to multiculturalism, nationalism, minorities, and immigration as well as morality issues. This aggregation is inspired by Stoll’s (2010) approach for creating indicators of cultural issue areas and it follows Abou-Chadi et al. (2020, app. 1) in using the national way of life and multiculturalism categories as indicators of mentions of inter-alia immigration. A more detailed explanation of the construction of all the aggregate issue areas that are used in the analysis is provided in Appendix no. 1.

*Table 1: MARPOR categories and their aggregation into cultural issue areas*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Aggregate issue area** | **MARPOR categories used (category indicator in MARPOR dataset in parentheses)** |
| Nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities | National Way of Life: Positive (per601) National Way of Life: Negative (per602) Multiculturalism: Positive (per607) Multiculturalism: Negative (per608) Underprivileged Minority Groups (per705) |
| Morality issues | Traditional Morality: Positive (per603) Traditional Morality: Negative (per604) |

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

This approach is not ideal because the issue areas do not differentiate between mentions of nationalism, immigration and ethnic or non-ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, this is arguably not such a major problem since the main goal of the first and second research questions is to track the salience of cultural issues in aggregate and not individually, while the individual issue content of the issue areas is examined through the textual analysis of the manifesto corpus.

The salience of the different issue areas is operationalized as the sum of percentages of quasi-sentences[[11]](#footnote-11) in a manifesto devoted to the individual MARPOR categories that make up that issue area. Therefore, the salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism, immigration, and minorities issue area is calculated as follows:

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

Here the “per…” variables equal the percentage of quasi-sentences of a manifesto devoted to a given category.

Besides measuring salience, the MARPOR data can also be used to estimate party positions, including the left-right scale. This is convenient, because other sources of party positions, such as expert surveys, do not cover nearly as many parties and election years as MARPOR. Thus, the the Manifesto Project “rile” scale (Laver and Budge 1992) is used as the basis of parties’ general left-right positions. However, based on Lowe et al. (2011), the rile scale is further logit transformed, as this likely better captures party positions and also helps deal with the problem of endogeneity that arises from using the same data to calculate positions and issue salience (Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020, 756). Party left-right positions are thus calculated as:

log(R + 0.5) – log(L + 0.5)

where R equals the sum of percentages of quasi-sentences that are devoted to categories deemed as right by the rile scale and L equals the sum of percentages of quasi-sentences devoted to left categories[[12]](#footnote-12).

## Examining country-level and temporal variance in salience

The first research question of this thesis deals with the spatial and temporal variance of cultural issues in Central and Eastern Europe. This question is gauged through a combination of graphs showing the development of salience trends over time and in between countries. To systematically test whether the salience of cultural issue areas is increasing over time, we conduct an OLS regression with salience as the dependent variable and year as the independent variable, including country fixed effects and robust standard errors (Green-Pedersen and Seeberg 2025)

## Examining party-level variance in salience

## Examining the development of the content of cultural issues

# 3. The salience of cultural issues across countries and over time

This first empirical chapter explores how the salience of cultural issues varies over time and across countries, with the goal of assessing whether the trends in the data follow the expectations set out in section 1.5.

The first expectation derived from the literature is that cultural issues are relatively less salient compared to economic issues. Figure 1 below compares the mean salience of economic and cultural issues[[13]](#footnote-13) in CEE in the first three decades after the political transition, whereby each point represents mean salience for a single election. In line with the expectation, economic issues are significantly more salient at this aggregate level in each of the three decades. Interestingly, the difference in medians between the two issue areas increases from 16.6 percentage points in the 1990s to 22.7 percentage points in the 2000s and decreases slightly to 21.6 percentage points in the 2010s. In line with earlier research (Stoll 2010) on Western Europe, this suggests that economic issues as a whole remain the area to which parties pay the most attention to.

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

*A graph of different colored squares

AI-generated content may be incorrect.*

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

Figure 1 already also suggests that the second expectation about the increasing relative salience of cultural issues may likely not hold. Figure 2 plots the mean salience of 4 disaggregated cultural issue areas at elections over the years, employing locally smoothed regression lines to show general trends rather than spikes caused by individual elections. The figure shows that issues related to nationalism, multiculturalism and minorities have remained at a relatively stable level of salience between four to seven percent, while the salience of morality issues has even slightly decreased. Interestingly, the salience of European Integration roughly doubled in the 2000s compared to the 1990s, but while also remaining at a comparatively low absolute level of under three percent. Salience for the environment shows a slightly curvilinear trend, driven by high levels of salience in the first free elections in the 1990s, followed by a drop in subsequent elections and a steady increase since the year 2000.

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

A graph showing the number of different states

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

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

Nonetheless, as the predictions of individual parties’ issue emphasis displayed in Figure 3 show, apart from the European integration issue, there is no linearly increasing trend in salience over time. The attention that parties devote to morality issues even appears to be decreasing over time.

*Figure 3: Percentage of quasi-sentences devoted to cultural issues in party manifestos over time*

*A graph of different values

AI-generated content may be incorrect.*

*Note: OLS models connected to these plots are included in Appendix no. 2*

The third expectation regarding country-level and over-time trends relates to the more specific impact of the so-called European refugee crisis as an exogenous shock to CEE party systems. According to earlier research (Hutter and Kriesi 2022; Gessler and Hunger 2022), parties should presumably increase their emphasis on this issue as it becomes viewed as more relevant. Figure 4 shows how mean issue salience at elections developed in the years before, during and after crisis. The top panel displays the salience of the nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities issue area according under which mentions of immigration should be subsumed within the MARPOR data. Interestingly there does not appear to be a visible discontinuity in salience in the elections taking place in 2015 and later. It might be the case that, since the earlier research was mainly based on sources such as press releases or newspaper coverage, parties simply did not pay attention to this highly medialized issue so much in their manifestos. However, this may also be due to an artefact of the MARPOR categories, which do not measure immigration directly. Therefore, the bottom panel of the plot displays the same period using the immigration salience indicator from the Chappel Hill Expert survey. Here, the trend line does show an increase in salience between the 2010 and 2017 surveys, although the sparsity of the expert surveys makes it hard to tell how salience developed in the interval of years between 2010 and 2015[[14]](#footnote-14). Overall, it is likely both that parties tend to mention immigration in other arenas besides manifestos (which is then picked up by the expert scores), and that the aggregate nature of the MARPOR categories means that spikes in immigration salience might not be picked up by the manifesto data.

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

*A graph of different values

AI-generated content may be incorrect.*

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

Finally, the last three observable implications regarding country-level variance posited that the salience of cultural issues would be higher in countries with politically significant minorities, a national accommodative communist legacy as well as higher levels of religiosity. Figure 5 displays the salience of the two main cultural issue areas at elections for individual countries. Again, the plot brings inconclusive evidence for our expectations.

*Figure 5: Mean salience of cultural issues at elections by country and issue area*

*A graph of a person and person

AI-generated content may be incorrect.*

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

On the one hand, the top panel shows that for, nationalism, multiculturalism, and minorities, the country with the smallest median is the Czech Republic, which does not have a legacy of national accommodative communism or a politically significant ethnic minority. Latvia, Estonia, and Bulgaria, all countries where party politics are marked by ethnic minorities (Rovny 2024), are the top three countries in terms of salience. On the other hand, the differences between the country medians are relatively small. Similarly, for morality issues, the catholic Poland and Slovakia have high level of salience. However, relatively atheist countries such as the Czech Republic and Estonia have higher values than for example Croatia, where questions related to religion may be expected to play a more significant role in party competition (Milačić 2022, 140). As a more formalized examination of the association between these country-level factors and issue salience, we estimate hierarchical linear models

# Conclusion

In conclusion, the author should briefly summarise what he/she has found in his/her work in relation to what he/she has set as the aims of the work. He/she should show a factual summary of his/her own contribution or perspective on the problem addressed. The conclusion should not include any elements that have not already been covered in the main body of the thesis and should build on the analysis and arguments presented in the main body. Summaries should be cogent statements illustrating what the author now knows about the topic compared to what was known in the introduction.

# Summary

**[The conclusion also needs to be translated into English. If the thesis is written in a foreign language, it must include a conclusion in Czech.]]**

# List of References

**[Fill in all the used literature and material with which you have worked correctly. Do the quotation according to the norms ČSN ISO 690, ČSN ISO 690-2 or according to other recommended quotation styles. Quotation sample according to ČSN ISO 690, 690-2 is provided below]**

**WARNING: Individual institutes can have their own recommendation regarding the quotation norm; you can obtain updated information from your supervisor or the teacher of the diploma seminar.**

**List of Appendices**

Appendix No. 1: Construction of the aggregate issue categories

Appendix No. 2: Predicting parties’ emphasis on cultural issue areas

Appendix No. 3: Examining immigration salience using CHES data

**Appendices**

Appendix No. 2: Predicting parties’ emphasis on cultural issue areas

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Multiculturalism | Morality | Environment | EU |
| year | -0.00 | -0.05 \*\*\* | 0.01 | 0.03 \*\*\* |
|  | (0.03) | (0.01) | (0.03) | (0.01) |
| N | 696 | 696 | 696 | 696 |
| R2 | 0.06 | 0.07 | 0.05 | 0.08 |
| Standard errors are heteroskedasticity robust. \*\*\* p < 0.001; \*\* p < 0.01; \* p < 0.05.  Country dummies included but not shown | | | | |

Appendix No. 3: Examining immigration salience using CHES data

A graph showing the number of numbers and the number of the number of words

AI-generated content may be incorrect.

1. The few studies explicitly examining issue salience in CEE as an independent variable only examine one point in time (Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009) or only look at one single issue (Whitefield and Rohrschneider 2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In this context, Kitschelt (1994) uses the term “libertarian” to refer to a culturally liberal conception of community. As Bornschier (2010b, 241) points out, this conception is compatible with various state interventions and is not synonymous with libertarianism as a political philosophy arguing for a minimal state. The polar concepts of social libertarianism and authoritarianism are thus equivalent to the terms cultural liberalism and conservatism used by other authors (Rovny 2014a). In the following, the two sets of polar concepts are used interchangeably. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For example, Schäfer et al. (2021, 536–37) argue that European integration was originally mostly an economic issue but has changed to become more about national sovereignty in recent years. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. While Lipset and Rokkan did not actually define the cleavage concept, later scholarly work has generally followed Bartolini and Mair’s (2007) conceptualization of a cleavage as a social divide that combines socio-structural, normative, and organizational dimensions into one “compound divide” (see Bartolini 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Empirically, the testing of this selective emphasis assumption has brought mixed results. While different party families appear to place different levels of relative emphasis on different issues (Budge et al. 2001, 2003; Budge 2015, 768), there is also a significant amount of issue overlap between parties (Green-Pedersen 2007; Guinaudeau and Persico 2014; Dolezal et al. 2014; Meyer and Wagner 2016). To explain these parallel trends, the contemporary issue competition literature relies on the concept of a party system agenda (Mortensen 2010; Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2015), which constrains parties to also at least partially emphasize the issues that their competitors talk about. Based on this, Grosmman and Guinadeau (2024) highlight the large degree of endogeneity in the issue emphasis of different parties. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. As noted above, the environment as well as European integration are issues that have both cultural and economic aspects. The main findings of the literature devoted to these issues are briefly reviewed here for the sake of completeness. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Non-ideological factors always play a role in party politics to a certain extent, even in highly institutionalized party systems. For example, vote choice for radical right parties in Western Europe is more strongly associated with leader evaluations than with left-right self-placement (Michel et al. 2020), suggesting that personalization also has an effect here. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The Manifesto Project was previously known as the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In some cases where a party did not publish an election manifesto, the Manifesto Project uses alternative “manifesto documents” instead. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Moreover, Of the 56 individual MARPOR categories, 20 are positional, in that they indicate whether a party takes a positive or negative stance on a given topic (e.g. multiculturalism: positive and multiculturalism: negative). Following Lowe et al. (2011, 133), these dyadic categories are also combined, in order to indicate the relative emphasis that a party places on a given topic and not the position that it takes. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Lowe et al. (2011, 133–34) argue for log-transforming the quasi-sentences on the basis that mentions of the same topic have a decreasing marginal importance. However, the simple sum of percentages arguably better fits the concept of relative salience and is also much more widely used (Abou-Chadi, Green-Pedersen, and Mortensen 2020, 756; Green-Pedersen 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The categories categorized as right are: Pro-military (104), Freedom, human rights (201), Constitutionalism (203), Political authority (305), Free enterprise (401), Economic incentives (402), Anti-protectionism (407), Economic orthodoxy (414), Social services limitation (505), National way of life (601), Traditional morality (603), Law and order (605), Civic mindedness (606). The categories categorized as left are: Decolonization (103), Anti-military (105), Peace (106), Internationalism (107), Democracy (202), Regulate capitalism (403), Economic planning (404), Pro-protectionism (406), Controlled economy (412), Nationalization (413), Social services expansion (504), Education expansion (506), Pro-labour (701). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The MARPOR categories used to construct these aggregate indicators are shown in Appendix no. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A measure of immigration salience was, unfortunately, not included in the CHES 2014 wave. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)