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Shaping and Branding Migration Policy: A Retrospective Analysis of Portugal's Contemporary Model

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Abstract

Migrant populations have been consistently more vulnerable than others, with their vulnerability being exacerbated in crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic. In the meantime, in their effort to “flatten the curve,” governments have been adopting policies that have significantly impacted migration in various ways. The effect of these policies has found migrants suffering disproportionately from the social and economic consequences of the pandemic crisis. Mobility restrictions have stranded them in the host countries, often without decent housing conditions, exacerbating xenophobic and discriminatory treatment of migrants. The study focuses on the case of Portugal and, more specifically, aims to provide a contextual feature of historical discussions of migration in Portugal and explore the perceptions and branding of migration policies in a crisis environment during the Covid-19 pandemic through the framing lens. Using empirical evidence from a frame analysis of parliamentary debates, the article investigates how immigration policies are branded and framed within Portugal, while it also evaluates the role of branding in migration policy-making, particularly in crisis scenarios. Overall, the article underscores the importance of branding in shaping migration policies, emphasising its significance in policy making.

Keywords

branding; crisis; framing; immigration dynamics; immigration narratives; immigration policy; Portugal

1. Introduction

In the country's long migration history, intertwined with its colonial past, geopolitical changes, and evolving economic and social landscapes, Portugal's migration policies have undergone various transformations. Portugal's migration narrative spans from its colonial era, where movements of people aimed to address colonial administration, trade, and labour needs, to the decolonisation period, which ushered in new

migration dynamics. Following the Carnation Revolution in 1974, the country embraced democratic reforms, leading to increased migration flows due to political, economic, and social changes. Upon EU accession in 1986, Portugal aligned its national migration policies with EU regulations. Subsequently, it adopted an explicit accommodating model to tackle labour shortages, demographic challenges, and stimulate economic growth through immigration management. This approach encompasses various measures such as managing migration flows, issuing residence permits, facilitating family reunification, conducting asylum procedures, and implementing integration programs. In other words, the migration narrative in Portugal is multifaced and is in a constant reshaping mode. On the other hand, in politics, branding has been embraced by political parties in terms of policies (Needham, 2005), strengthening the visibility of an issue and formulating the way the electorate relates to that issue and forms its sense of identity. This article aims to retrospectively explore the immigration dynamics in Portugal, apply branding as an essential part of the migration policy process and examine it in a crisis scenario, in order to identify how migration is framed to construct an up-to-date country model. What makes Portugal an interesting case is that it has experienced both emigration and immigration waves, influencing its societal, cultural, and economic landscapes through its long history, creating unique comparative opportunities for research.

This article begins with an extensive overview of immigration attitudes in Portugal, tracing the evolution of migration discourse, policy transformations, and prevailing narratives from the late 20th century to the present day. Subsequently, Section 3 delves into the concept of political branding, contending that it offers numerous advantages in policy-making, encompassing aspects such as legitimacy, trust, recognition, identity, agenda setting, and electoral success. Following this, Section 4 presents empirical findings from a frame analysis of parliamentary debates aimed at elucidating the branding of immigration policies and the associated frames within Portugal. Finally, the article seeks to evaluate the role of branding in migration policy-making, particularly within crisis environments, though not exclusively. The overarching objective is to underscore the significance of branding in comprehending diverse facets of politics, ranging from ideological stances to public perceptions and electoral strategies and from cultural and societal contexts to issues of identity and differentiation. Ultimately, the article highlights branding as a serving tool for elucidating the intricacies of power dynamics within political systems and processes.

2. A Retrospective Analysis of Portugal's Immigration Dynamics: Policies, Colonial Legacies, and Media Framing

At the terminus of the 20th century, Portuguese society found itself immersed in unprecedented societal discussions framed as “us versus them” within its domestic sphere. The escalation of immigration resulted in a demographic surge, with official data pointing that at the end of the 2000s, the migrant population was approximately 5%, exceeding 10% of the active population after 2015. This phenomenon engendered a novel societal paradigm, encapsulated by the concept termed “the other, within us.” It supplanted the historical frameworks of either being categorised as the “other” in the context of mass emigration or grappling with the realities associated with the “other” stemming from the empire or colonies (Cunha, 1997). The actuality of heightened immigration from former colonies was, however, disregarded until 1992. This influx was often dismissed as an “extension” or an undesirable by-product of the decolonisation process, grounded in the perception of the incoming migration as a negligible social consequence. Nevertheless, the shift in the perception of the “other” led to mounting pressures compelling policymakers to realign immigration policies in harmony with prevailing European norms and standards.

Portugal's migration history can be unfolded in six evolving distinct phases. First, the 1960s witnessed substantial labour demands in France and Germany, leading to mass emigration, accompanied by Cape Verdean immigration to fill labour shortages; second, the aftermath of the empire's dissolution and the Carnation Revolution in 1974 mobilised the decolonisation process and saw the repatriation of nearly 800,000 individuals from former colonies (see Ovalle-Bahamón, 2003); third, the 1980s were marked by significant political, social, and economic upheavals in newly liberated territories like Angola, Cape Verde, and Guiné-Bissau, and Portugal's entry into the European Economic Community in 1986, which made it an attractive country for migrants (see Baganha & Góis, 1998); fourth, a pivotal change unfolded in the 1990s with a reversal in Portuguese-Brazilian migration patterns, resulting in increased immigration from diverse origins, e.g., Eastern European countries (see Baganha et al., 2004); fifth, the economic recession of 2008 resulted in a period of a notable decrease in the immigrant population, reflecting the impact of the economic crisis, which lasted until 2015; sixth, since then, a new phase of Portuguese migration has been signified along with a new-fangled significant growth in the migrant population—including from Asian countries. This period, characterised by a process of diversification of diversity (see Padilla et al., 2015), has lasted since the present day. These societal shifts were closely entwined with migration policies and media portrayals, prompting a re-evaluation of Portugal's immigration landscape.

2.1. Evolving Frames: The Phases of Migration Discourse in Late 20th Century Portugal

In Cunha's (2003) work, he delineated three distinct stages of framing migration, reflecting migration phases as discussed in Section 2. First, "Between the Empire and Europe (1992–1995)" marked tensions between colonial and European political matrices, coinciding with the ratification of the Schengen Accord and the reshaping of immigration and residence frameworks. A prominent focus of this period involved implementing public works and construction endeavours aimed at stimulating the economy. Despite these changes, the immigrant population primarily comprised individuals from Portuguese-speaking African countries (PALOP) and Lusophone countries. Brazilian immigrants, for instance, were perceived as occupying a higher social status, maintaining their position at the apex of the social hierarchy. Notably, this period witnessed a discernible shift in discourse from an ex-colonial perspective that emphasised integration within the national identity ("us") to a European institutional discourse, with a newer narrative tended to spotlight ("them") in criminality terms often associating it with ethnic minorities, making it a focal point in discussions surrounding immigration.

Second, the "European Convergence (1995–1998)" showcased the alignment with European immigration perspectives, juxtaposing official discourse with practical employment practices for unregistered immigrants. During this phase, European immigration policies began to take shape, primarily aiming to address labour shortages stemming from a focus on domestic public works and construction-based economic development (see Corkill & Eaton, 1998). The state, especially under the leadership of António Guterres (PM from 1995–2002) from the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista [PS]), increasingly embraced a European perspective on the "other," aligning institutionally and politically with European views on non-European migrants, with key policy implementations including the initiation of a second process of "extraordinary regularisation" and the establishment of a High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (see Baganha & Marques, 2001), both labelled as pro-integration tools. However, there existed a disparity between the official discourse advocating control of immigration and the lenient practices allowing the employment of non-registered immigrants in manual labour. As Cunha's (2003) research underlines, media

structures predominantly depicted the “other” in a victimised or criminalised manner, echoing the EU’s policies and reinforcing the concept of European identity that led to a more pragmatic discourse acknowledging the necessity of the “other” within the local community, albeit within determined parameters of national interest.

Moreover, during this period, public discourse frequently conflated race and nationality, particularly in impoverished neighbourhoods, disregarding nationality while associating entire communities of impoverished Portuguese citizens of PALOP descent with African immigrants (see Baganha et al., 2009). The late 1990s witnessed a shift in institutional discourse, marked by the decline of the public-works-centred economic model and the rise of communitarian policies focused on integration. This transition revealed a dual challenge in immigration policy—while PALOP and Brazilian immigration appeared manageable, there was a noted increase in immigration from Eastern Europe (see Baganha et al., 2004), posing new complexities and limitations for the existing immigration strategy.

Third, the “Route of Globalization (1999–2003)” witnessed further policy adjustments, including labour-contingent systems and extraordinary regularisation based on work contracts, amid socioeconomic changes and political transitions (Carvalho, 2018). Politically, 2001 marked a shift from a socialist to a centre-right coalition government, accompanied by neoliberal economic policies focusing on labour laws and immigration (Carvalho & Duarte, 2020). The societal landscape was influenced by events such as 9/11 and the Seville European Council meeting of June 2002, leading to stricter immigration restrictions and reshaping of public discourse towards migrants while also associating ethnic groups with migration, e.g., PALOP and the Roma population. In sum, in the late 20th century, the discourse surrounding immigration and ethnic groups evolved significantly, aligning with European integration policies and impacting political discussions with a primary focus on three main objectives: controlling human migration and limiting European entry, ensuring an inexpensive workforce for unskilled/non-qualified work, and retardation of ageing European population’s effect on social protection and welfare.

2.2. Navigating Migration: The Transformation of Immigration Policies in Portugal

Despite the long migration history in Portugal, it was only in the 1990s that immigration emerged on the political agendas. During this period, migration policies mainly focused on regulations of migrant flows and migrants in irregular situations, e.g., entrance and stay, as evidenced by laws such as n° 264-B/81, September 3 established by the Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata [PSD]) in 1981. Subsequently, in 1993, PSD introduced a new law (n° 59/1993, March 3) to address immigration flows and integration processes, including regulations on entry, stay, and exit of foreigners, with both laws however aiming to avoid a permanent stay of migrants (Baganha, 2005). Nevertheless, as Peixoto et al. (2009) highlight, it was only during the PS government period (1995–2002) that signified progress on migration issues, marking notable advancements, e.g., the 1996’s second regularisation process (n° 17/1996, May 24) or the 1998’s family reunification as a right (n° 244/1998, August 8). In the years that followed, there was a series of new regulations on migration, e.g., stay permits, a quota system for migrant labour market recruitment, and irregular migration (n° 4/2001, January 10), addressing issues like migration flows, e.g., Eastern Europe and Brazil and employment shortages (Peixoto et al., 2009). In their work exploring Portuguese migration from a systemic perspective, Góis and Marques (2009) highlight that migration policies up to 2001 included measures of positive discrimination towards specific groups of migrants, giving

preference to those with whom Portugal has close linguistic, social, and cultural ties, an approach was interrupted by n° 4/2001, January 10, that allowed legalisation of migrants irrespective of their nationalities. This shift away from privileging migrants from Lusophone countries echoed the emerging variety of nationalities of newly arrived migrants.

In 2007, a new migration law was presented (n° 23/2007, July 4), the so-called “foreigners’ law,” introducing a new system called “global contingent” that reflects the custom employment prospects and labour requirements in the country. Since 2007, the newly proposed regulations have aimed to take a position against illegal migration and human trafficking while also targeting terrorist practices and dealing with the challenge of Portugal’s ageing population. In 2012, an update of the “foreigners’ law” from 2007 was passed, expanding its scope to cover both the migration and border law of Portugal (n° 154/2012, August 9), while in 2014 (n° 85/2014, May 5), regulations focused on establishing the conditions and procedures for refugees, asylum seekers, and subsidiary protection.

From 2015 to 2019, further adjustments to the “foreigners’ law” are framed as promoting legal migration channels, developing an intercultural society, and deepening integration while promoting and proposing revision of international deals regarding social security, aiming to strengthen the social protection of migrant workers and their families (see República Portuguesa, 2015). More recently, the XXII Constitutional Government aimed to adopt a less bureaucratic and more humane approach, aiming to facilitate drawing in regular and orderly labour to carry out tasks in many areas of activity, by introducing an organic separation between police functions and the administrative functions of the authorisation and documentation of immigrants, e.g., the disband of Agency of Foreigners and Borders (n°73/2021, November 12).

2.3. Steering Migration Narratives in Crisis and Stability in Portugal

The analysis in the previous sub-section reveals that until 2019, when examining previous migration policies, there was a notable emphasis on regularisation. However, there wasn’t a distinct branding evident, as the framing accompanying the policies was often neutral, following conventional legal semantics. At times, migration was portrayed positively, with some exceptions such as positive discrimination in favour of migrants from Lusophone countries and security concerns following events like 9/11. While there is a world of academic interest and literature that has studied the evolution of migration and migration policies in Portugal (see Baganha et al., 2010; Costa, 2016; Góis & Marques, 2012; Marques & Góis, 2005), migration has, until recently, been considered a low politicised issue in Portugal (Carvalho & Duarte, 2020). This can be explained by the implementation of sensible immigration laws and cultivating very upbeat political narratives on immigration, civil society-focused policymaking with a strong integration orientation (see Maeso & Araújo, 2013), along a long-standing consensus among political actors to avoid politicising immigration. This innovative perspective in the case of Portugal is mainly based on an understanding of the critical role that migrants play in bridging employment shortages, particularly in light of an ageing and declining population (Mazzilli & Lowe, 2023).

The country’s attempts at migration policies through the years have been acknowledged consistently by the Migrant Integration Policy Index since 2004, which recognises Portugal as a leading country when it comes to best practices and favourable policies towards migrants. Migrant Integration Policy Index data covers various policy areas related to migrant integration processes. According to Citron and Gowan (2004),

Portugal surpasses the European average in migration policy indicators, while Niessen et al. (2007) note that Portugal has room for improvement in labour market access, family reunion, and anti-discrimination measures but is generally doing well. Moreover, during the 2008 crisis, Portugal treated migrants as equal victims of the recession rather than scapegoats (Huddleston et al., 2011), but despite economic challenges, Portugal maintained highly positive attitudes toward migrants both before and during the crisis (Huddleston et al., 2015). Additionally, Solano and Huddleston (2020) observe that Portugal has consistently improved over the years, maintaining a comprehensive approach to integration.

To sum up, as a former colonial power, Portugal's historical connection with its former colonies profoundly influences its migration policies and societal dynamics, with integration efforts post-colonialism to include exceptions for immigrants from ex-colonial countries, reflecting the nation's ties and the need for smoother transitions for these populations. Furthermore, although recent immigration to Portugal predominantly originates from outside its colonial or post-colonial context, the perception of populations from former colonies still significantly influences social attitudes. Distinctions between immigrant groups based on their historical connections with Portugal persist in public discourse and policymaking, shaping integration approaches. Additionally, while one would expect that the constant crisis environment since 2008 resulted in failing perceptions of migration because of the economic impact of the crisis on the native population, Migrant Integration Policy Index evidence, as discussed earlier, suggests otherwise for the case of Portugal.

The latest crisis of Covid-19, as in other countries, forced Portugal to swiftly adapt its policies involving border control measures and healthcare exploration while also altering attitudes towards health, but also brought forth new challenges for migrants in Portugal, revealing vulnerabilities in access to healthcare, economic stability, and housing, while also highlighting the essential contributions of migrant labour in critical sectors. Having said that, for Mazzilli (2022, p. 4756), the Portuguese government narratives during Covid-19, through discourses of "threat," "fragile," and "sympathetic society" managed to locate its regulation policy in a framework of crisis and emergency, "following a common topos in the European narratives of migration." Additionally, in their work on Portugal's response to Covid-19, Cordeiro-Rodrigues (2020) highlights the role of social justice in the Portuguese approach to the pandemic, with the government emphasising inclusiveness and protecting the most socio-economically vulnerable population, including migrants, e.g., full citizenship rights for illegal migrants, access to the national healthcare system.

Following extensive literature that associates crisis and migration (see Lindley, 2014) and informed by the information provided that contextualises migration narratives and policies over time in Portugal, this article uses Covid-19 to examine how migration policies are branded in a crisis scenario. The evident debate on how the pandemic apprised migration policies, e.g., regularisation measures and labour-informed measures, applicable also to migrants (irregular or not), provides an interesting opportunity to explore and test the claimed Portuguese "positive migration attitudes" with the country's overtime migration discourses in order to identify how migration policies are branded, what instructs the up-to-date model and political debate on this topic, and how/if the crisis has influenced the way migration is branded.

3. Branding in a Political Context

Brands are recognised as a critical element in marketing and are increasingly seen as central to political parties' appeals to the electorate. The role of marketing and branding, from, i.e., political parties to

governments to political actors to policymaking (Lloyd, 2005), has been occupying increasing importance when it comes to politics; in other words, they “intersect” (Marsh & Fawcett, 2011). The significance of brands lies in their capacity to establish a distinction between competing products and identify segments in society with which to establish a relationship (Tsagkroni, 2014). In that sense, brands can significantly influence consumer preferences and decisions, which can be understood as a system of identification (Basu & Wang, 2009; Lloyd, 2006; McDivitt, 2003; Wingard, 2013) while creating a distinction between different policies, politics, and ideologies among political parties. Similar to branding in marketing, policy branding is the deliberate act of creating and advancing policies or projects in a way that forges a distinctive and identifiable identity enduing a cultural exchange. In their work on branding of public policy, Basu and Wang (2009, pp. 84–86) identify three aspects of brand strategy, which include brand definition (identity of the brand), brand communication (means to identify, express, and share the product), and brand management (promote, protect, and sustain the brand). These entail framing in a way that effectively conveys their purpose and advantages to the target audience, aligns them with specific values or aims, and transmits messages that are clear and appealing. At the same time, political brands, in a way, simplify the process for voters to digest information, reduce the likelihood that they would make poor judgements, and, in the end, produce sentimental benefits by fostering a sense of belonging and identity (Schneider, 2004).

By building resonance and trust among stakeholders, policy branding seeks to improve the legitimacy and perceived worth of the policies while swaying public opinion and garnering support. For Raev and Minkman (2020), policy branding increases the legitimacy and visibility of newly implemented or revised policies in order to engender favourable feelings in them and win over important stakeholders and, ultimately, voters, built on the perception and enactment of the experience of the “product” and its “value.”

To summarise, branding in policymaking involves crafting a unique and recognisable identity for a policy to promote its objectives and build support. To achieve this, the process revolves around creating a cohesive and consistent brand image that resonates with the target audience, aiming to increase awareness, understanding, and positive perception of the policy. On the other hand, framing refers to strategic presentation of policy issues and ideas to shape public perception and influence decision-making and involves carefully selecting and emphasising certain aspects of a policy or issue to influence how it is perceived by the audience in order to influence public opinion, shape policy debates, and ultimately, drive policy outcomes. By strategically framing policy issues within the context of a well-defined policy brand, political actors can enhance the likelihood of successful implementation of their goals.

Finally, the integration of a brand in a political context can be explored in line with political objectives (Zenker & Braun, 2017) and ideologies. When it comes to immigration policies and branding, Wingard (2013) also builds on the idea of identification that stimulates a national identity that accommodates migrants as others. For Wingard (2013, p. 5), “others” are individuals to whom the country might extend “benevolence” or “salve” by integrating them into the national economy and culture. Conversely, the “other-other” is the individual who is inextricably linked to no particular culture. Expulsion, deportation, or sending away is necessary for the country to define and envision its boundaries, citizens, and itself. Deliberating on the idea of national unity, branding for Wingard (2013, p. IX) “redirects the anxieties that the material conditions of neoliberal capital’ produced through unemployment, economic disenfranchisement and changing demographics.”

4. Methodology and Data

The article employs a qualitative frame analysis to identify the structure of the policy frame in parliamentary debates regarding policies addressing migration in Portugal during the pandemic crisis of Covid-19. Frames offer the opportunity for a coherent narrative that constitutes the diagnosis of the problem and its prognosis, respectively (Entman, 1993), in a process that socially constructs problem definitions and guides policy decision-making. Based on Goffman's (1975) concept of frames, which refer to the cognitive structures that shape individuals' interpretation of events and experiences, Entman's (1993) approach to framing functions, involving notions of selection and salience, contributes to identifying holistic reasoning behind frames, that include a definition of the problem, diagnosis of the causes, moral judgements on the problem but also suggestions of treatment. As Rein and Schön (1993, p. 146) phrase it, policy frames are ways of "selecting, organising, interpreting and making sense of a complex reality to provide guideposts for knowing, analysing, persuading and acting," built on the idea that people structure a reality of an issue and attach meaning to it, adhering a particular perspective of reality (Dekker, 2017).

The aim is to explore how framing migration is formed and utilises features provided by the qualitative analysis software ALTAS.ti to look at the codes that stand for ideas, topics, and arguments with regard to policy frame. While a deductive approach is more common in framing research, this article follows an inductive strategy of open coding to identify frame elements without preconceived categories or predetermined coding structures. The research material consists of transcripts of all parliamentary debates concerning legislation on migration between December 2019 and December 2021. A total of 94 parliamentary debates were monitored and analysed, and four frames were identified as most frequently associated with migration in those debates.

5. Results and Analysis

5.1. *Economic Opportunity Frame*

This frame emphasises the positive economic effects of immigration by presenting immigrants as essential members of the labour force and the economy while it advocates for inclusive immigration policies to stimulate economic growth. Namely, the PS narrative emphasises how legal immigration can help with Portugal's ageing population and economy. The argument around this frame is that legal migration balance is a positive economic variable and beneficial for demographic stability and sustainability, which can benefit from the active management of the migration flows and provide opportunities to revive rural areas in the country. Interventions from Costa's government related to migrants include, among others, arguments that stress how reinforcement of social support and combating precariousness assist the integration of migrants and create favourable conditions for the "evolution" of demography, conceive migration as a "strategic potential" to achieve demographic sustainability through "active management" of migration flows, and that positive migration balance results from the convergence with the EU.

The positive economic impact of migrants frequently appears in the narrative of several other parties, e.g., the Left Block (Bloco de Esquerda [BE]) emphasises the contributions of migrants to social security and the wealth they bring to the country, and the Portuguese Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português [PCP]), e.g., suggesting that migration is not a "menace" but an "unavoidable social phenomenon" from which Portugal can benefit from. During the pandemic crisis, the narrative becomes more specific, with the PS government

arguing that allowing migrants through borders could be “essential” for agriculture to compensate for the absence of local workers.

In contrast to this portrait of the positive contribution of migrants, Chega!, the rising radical right party, defines migrants as hurting the economy. The party argues in favour of a nativist approach, e.g., Portuguese first, while describing migrants as an economic burden or even a “demographic substitution” that augmented during the pandemic and that requires immediate attention. Chega! also targets the EU migration policy at the expense of the native Portuguese population, highlighting that migrants shouldn’t be “prioritised” over natives while accusing the government of putting “too much focus on migration and racism” and ignoring the big problems, e.g., unemployment rates in the local population.

An additional debate under this frame is the “golden visas” issue in exchange for buyers of over 500k in property. BE and PCP speak against this criterion and favour more “human” criteria, while PSD, Christian Democrats (Centro Democrático Social-Partido Popular [CDS-PP]), and PS defend the policy for its power to attract investment, pointing out that Portugal needs all types of migrants, since they contribute in various and numerous ways to the economic growth of the country.

5.2. Humanitarian Concern Frame

This frame underscores the moral obligation to provide refuge to vulnerable migrants, especially refugees and asylum seekers. It promotes humane and compassionate immigration policies that prioritise human rights. The narrative of “victimhood” is also evident in Costa’s government discourse, emphasising the significance of accepting refugees and acknowledging the risks individuals take in pursuit of a better life. The government highlights the importance of human rights in migration, particularly regarding the protection of victims of human trafficking and breaches of human rights. Within the context of Portugal’s EU Council presidency in 2021, the PS government advocates for a solidarity-based approach towards migrants, which entails greater responsibilities under international law and humanitarian law for regulating immigration at the EU level. This stand is also supported by BE, which expresses its support for defending EU cooperation and strengthening the Union’s mechanisms to combat illegal human trafficking, condemning any radical views that impede legitimate humanitarian aid and underlining that EU immigration laws need to be humanised. However, when it comes to the role of the EU, not all parties share this notion. CDS-PP targets the EU and identifies migration as a “symbol of the failures” of the EU from the point of view of the principle of solidarity among the member states, with the party emphasising the importance of distinguishing between supporting refugees in situations of illegal migration and just supporting illegal migration while PCP also points out how the EU has largely contributed to the “catastrophic” humanitarian situation with its irresponsible migration policies.

The notion of human rights in line with migration is extensively discussed in line with the pandemic crisis. More specifically, as pointed out on various occasions by PS, BE, and PCP, the pandemic has affected narratives and human rights negatively, similar to the narratives that were taking place in the migration and refugee crisis of 2015, while stressing that accepting refugees and migrants during a crisis, is an international obligation for countries, calling for a more coherent and effective response both domestically and internationally.

Following up on the situation in the agricultural area of Odemira, in the Alentejo region in Southern Portugal, where fruit farms are highly concentrated by migrant farmhands, mainly from South Asia, and the

additional complications due to the pandemic, along with the similar situation in the region of Tejo where clams are cultivated, human rights and social exploitation of migrants, are often described as forced labour, modern slavery, and human trafficking. From the Greens to the People Animals and Nature (Pessoas-Animais-Natureza [PAN]), the CDS-PP, the BE, and the PS, all parties underline throughout the pandemic crisis that it is necessary to grant rights and proper attention to migrants while addressing issues of, e.g., “inhuman, undignified, and shocking” living conditions and access public services including healthcare and social protection while at the same time being exploited when it comes to labour. For PS, the pandemic crisis brought a “tsunami of suffering” that has hit the most vulnerable and exposed structural inequalities, i.e., migrants and refugees. Because of this, Portugal is witnessing violations of human rights and threats to freedoms and guarantees following the growth of populist and authoritarian drifts in various places, with migrants and refugees being, in particular, the preferred victims of these narratives. Finally, the Portuguese “ombudsman” as a “national prevention mechanism” in defence of the human rights of refugees and migrants is also pointed as a positive example of good practices on the subject for the international community, reflecting on the extent of the attention and commitment of Portugal given on migration.

5.3. National Security Frame

This frame emphasises the importance of border security and portrays migrants as potential threats to a nation’s safety and interests. It calls for stricter immigration policies to protect national security, following up on the “foreigners’ law” of 2015 (see Section 2), which speaks of the possibility of refusing VISAs to potentially dangerous individuals. Under this frame, for BE, the world is perceived as unstable and rich in crisis, leading to a necessary adaptation of armed forces, whereas for PSD, migration per se is a matter of security problem on its own. For Chega!, immigration vandalises Portuguese identity and fosters terrorism, with the party inviting for a reflection on the internal security of Portuguese borders. During the pandemic, migrants were also perceived by Chega! as a cause of outbreaks and spreading of the virus, with migrants being framed as a threat and dangerous to the public health.

However, this frame is often criticised and debated, especially by the PS and the PSD, with the PS arguing that the issue of migration is more complicated than being able to be stopped by only border control and with the government explicitly inviting citizens not to perceive migrants as “suspects” and promoting the fight against discrimination and the importance of equality and inclusion discourse when referring to migrants. For PS, the disbandment of Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras (Foreigners and Borders Service) and the transfer of its administrative responsibilities to a non-policial force is an example attempt to move away from the frame of immigration as being a police matter and threat to national security, framing migration as a human matter and not a security one. Additionally, PAN condemns Chega’s! “ultra-security” discourse claiming it aims to morally divide between the good natives and the bad migrants along with an encouraging logic feeding minority persecution. Similarly, PS and BE make various claims that the frame of migration as a matter of security is used to create a narrative of fear by radical right/ultra-liberals to attract the attention of the electorate, and that is also related to general fear in the pandemic. Both parties urge against any securitisation discourse of migration, with PS speaking in favour of a concept of “human security” rather than a “national” one, a concept that reflects Portugal as a country of humanitarian principles.

5.4. Climate Frame

Interestingly, an additional frame is spotted, structured on the effect of climate change on migration. More specifically, BE, PAN, PSD, and PS point out the migratory pressure due to CO₂ emission and fossil fuels consumption while discussing the flaws of the system of production and consumption, which causes, among other things, a depletion of the environment, leading to mass migration, climate refugees, worsening of inequalities, and overall, a great degree of suffering. While PS argues in favour of the term “climate-refugees” and that Portugal should accept such refugees under international humanitarian law, PSD points out climate change as a challenge due to causing uncontrolled migration. Nevertheless, in the context of the importance of environmental politics, the effect that desertification could have on the subsequent large global migration and their effects on inequality within societies and between countries are stressed in the Portuguese parliament as an increasing concern.

In summation, the examination of parliamentary deliberations elucidates a nuanced depiction of immigration policies across various conceptual frameworks. The economic opportunity frame accentuates the beneficial contributions of immigrants to both the labour force and the economy, advocating for inclusive immigration policies. Conversely, the ascendant radical right faction, exemplified by Chega!, characterises migrants as an economic liability, advocating for policies rooted in nativism. The humanitarian concern frame underscores the ethical imperative to extend refuge to vulnerable migrants, in stark contrast to the national security frame, which portrays migrants as potential security risks. Furthermore, the climate frame underscores the intricate nexus between climate change and migration, emphasizing the necessity for proactive environmental measures to confront impending challenges. Throughout these deliberations, political parties such as the PS, BE, and PCP champion human rights-centered approaches to migration, while also confronting issues of social exploitation and inequality. In sum, the parliamentary discourse reflects a sophisticated interplay of economic, humanitarian, security, and environmental considerations in shaping immigration policies within the Portuguese context.

6. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

This article delves into the evolution of immigration policies and the parliamentary debates on immigration during the Covid-19 period. Through the lens of policy branding, it resorts to frame analysis to determine the structure of the discussions concerning migration policies within the parliamentary in Portugal throughout the Covid-19 pandemic crisis.

As suggested by the literature, policy branding and framing are critical aspects of how political actors communicate, influence, and shape public perception and political discourse regarding their approaches and ideologies to specific issues. Policy branding involves deliberately constructing a narrative around policies. For migration policies, this can encompass humanitarian, economically strategic, or security-oriented angles, depending on their objectives. On the other hand, framing pertains to how political actors present and emphasise specific aspects of the topic, thereby shaping the understanding of the issue. For instance, migration may be framed, among others, as necessary for economic growth, emphasising the contribution of migrants to the labour market (see Peri, 2012) through a security lens, highlighting measures to control borders and protect native interests (see Koser, 2005), through climate, recognising the role of environmental factors in driving migration patterns (see Martin, 2010) or through

development, exploring how migration affects the development of both origin and destination countries (see de Haas, 2010).

The analysis of parliamentary debates provides a comprehensive view of the branding strategies associated with immigration policies in Portugal, focusing on distinct frames on immigration policies, ranging from economic considerations to humanitarian concerns, national security, and the impact of climate change on migration, used by various political parties. The analysis shows that political parties, including the PS, the BE, and the PCP, emphasise the positive contributions of legal immigration to Portugal's economy and demographics, with the PS government, during the pandemic crisis highlighting the need for migrant labour, especially in agriculture, to address workforce shortages, whereas in contrast, the rising radical right party, Chega!, perceives migrants as an economic burden and advocates for a nativist approach. Moreover, based on a humanitarian concern, there is a moral obligation to offer refuge to vulnerable migrants, especially refugees, and asylum seekers, with multiple parties, such as PS, BE, and PCP, advocating for solidarity with migrants and upholding human rights in migration policies. On the other hand, Chega! views immigration as a threat to national security, fostering narratives that link migrants to terrorism and public health risks, especially during the pandemic. However, PS and other parties criticise this stance, encouraging citizens to avoid stereotyping migrants and advocating for equality and inclusion. BE, PAN, PSD, and PS highlight the impact of climate change on migration, emphasising the need for environmental policies to address climate refugees, inequalities, and global migration resulting from the environmental crisis.

The aforementioned data indicates a moderate shift in Portugal's views about migration. However, comparing earlier viewpoints and current discussions on migration indicates that modern migration is progressively approached and consistently branded according to opportunity and humanitarian considerations. Therefore, the nation has adopted regularisation programmes, particularly during periods of economic boom, to incorporate illegal immigrants into the official sector and has also adjusted its immigration rules to accommodate shifting migratory trends and meeting labour market demands, highlighting the financial contributions made by immigrants, particularly in fields where there is a workforce shortage and demographic uncertainty. Additionally, Portugal has demonstrated its support for humanitarian causes and human rights in the context of migration, with the government and several political parties highlighting the significance of welcoming refugees and providing a haven and inclusive environment. Despite these notable approaches, though, the notion of securitisation of migration is also present in Portugal, with a notable increasing salience of this discourse in the political debate, along with an increase of racist and xenophobic discrimination phenomena based on ethnic and racial origin. Additionally, the pandemic crisis contributed to uncovering and aggravating narratives of inequality and discrimination towards migrant and Roma communities in the country (see Casquilho-Martins et al., 2022), adopting the "othering" discourse, challenging the portrayal of Portugal as a best-practice progressive model.

Reflecting on the acuity that policy branding contributes to creating trusting relationships between political parties and the electorate, the combination of the inclusive, progressive anatomy can be seen as a consistent characteristic brand for migration in Portugal. The empirical evidence of parliamentary debates supports this consistency in all three aspects of branding, definition, communication and management, as defined by Basu and Wang (2009). However, by acknowledging the need and reminding oneself that the electorate is not steady but can change its preferences and develop new skills, the future of migration branding relies on the capabilities of political parties to adapt and customise a future migration brand that could continue to serve

as a system of identification. For Needham (2005), brands motivate aspiration among the electorate and appear to be dedicated to a commitment to a better future, symbolising the values and principles of a political party. Overall, there has been a consistent set of supporting frames among various parties through time when it comes to accommodating pro-migration policies and narratives, creating a national dynamic of a unique Portuguese brand of migration, in contrast to many other EU countries. Keeping in mind that the success of migration policies often depends on the alignment between the chosen branding, framing strategies, and the prevailing societal attitudes, due to the increase of the radical right support to Chega! and the increase in racial, nationalistic, anti-immigration, and discrimination narratives, this best-practice inclusive progressive model of Portugal is no longer guaranteed.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

Research data associated with this article are publicly available at the official websites of the Assembleia da República (Portuguese Parliament) and the Diário da República (Journal of the Republic).

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