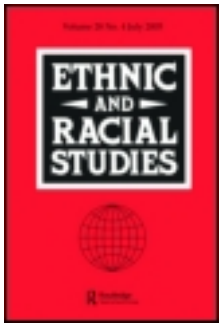

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British and French policies towards high-skilled immigration during the 2000s: policy outplays politics or politics trumps policy?

João Carvalho

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Abstract

Within the context of global competition for human talent, two policy shifts in favour of the promotion of high-skilled immigration (HSI) were observed in the UK and France during the 2000s. In light of similar policy inputs, this article compares the development and implementation of the British Highly Skilled Immigration Programme between 2002 and 2008 and the French *Carte de Competences et Talents* (Card of Competences and Talents) from 2006 to 2009. This research explores whether there was an overall convergence across these two European countries' policies towards HSI and if they have conformed to a similar client politics model. Whereas this politics model was identified in the UK, a policy gap was observed in France. This article relates the identified divergences with the political agency of the British and French policymakers, while the conclusions argue that politics trumped policy in the two selected cases.

Keywords: high-skilled immigration; immigration policy; client politics; immigration politics; UK; France

Introduction

Globalization has been regarded as a driving force fuelling the demand for high-skilled immigration (HSI) to the most industrialized nations in the world (Lavenex 2007). The enhanced value of human capital is a source of increasing concern for national governments that actively seek to prevent shortages of HSI in domestic labour markets and support endogenous economic growth. As it has been noticed that 'most OECD countries have introduced policies aimed at facilitating the recruitment of such workers in recent years and efforts along these lines can be expected to continue' (Chaloff and Lemaître 2009, 4). Thereby HSI refers to immigrants who move country for labour purposes, possess at least tertiary education and integrate into the top tiers of the labour market within the host societies. Unlike other types of immigration, the recruitment of this category of immigrants among industrialized countries has been conceived as 'successfully sold as a cost-free policy that produces substantial, if diffuse, benefits for the society in a global economy' (Freeman 2006, 238). Notwithstanding its increasing salience at the international level, 'high-skilled labour immigration remains largely unexplored in political science owing to the lack of controversy it tends to trigger in the overall population' (Cerna 2009, 156).

Within this context, similar policy shifts in favour of the overt competition in the global labour market to attract HSI were observed across the British and French immigration policies in the 2000s. In the UK, the Labour government, initially led by Prime Minister Tony Blair, adopted a narrative of managed immigration from the early 2000 onwards. In France, the Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy, member of the government formed by the centre-right party *Union pour un Mouvement Populaire* (UMP), announced a new paradigm in favour of a 'selective' immigration policy in 2005. Both events were celebrated as the reopening of the British and French labour markets to immigration for the first time since their closure in the 1960s and 1970s (De Wenden 2008; Geddes 2008). Furthermore, recent studies on British and French immigration policies suggest that 'the entry of highly qualified workers, either temporarily or for settlement, has generally been decided administratively, by decision-makers who are relatively insulated from the political process' (Schain 2008, 282).

In light of similar policy shifts in favour of promoting HSI into the two countries during the first half of the 2000s, this article will compare the British and French experiences by examining the development and implementation of the British Highly Skilled Immigration Programme (HSMP) between 2002 and 2008 and the French *Carte de Competences et Talents* (Card of Competences and Talents, CCT) from 2006 to 2009. Therefore, the potential convergence will be evaluated at the output (actions taken in pursuance of policy decisions) and implementation levels (consequences after the policy implementation) (Vedung 2000). In parallel, this investigation will explore whether the British HSMP and French CCT conformed to a similar client politics model (Freeman 2006). As it will be seen further on, this political model suggests that a minority of interest groups benefit from the implementation of a particular public policy at the expense of the wider public and thereby constrain the public interest to attain their particular objectives (Freeman 1995). Following the structural approach to the study of immigration policy implied by the latter proposal, this article discusses whether 'policy trumped politics' and if the similar types of policy towards HSI adopted in France and the UK determined the subsequent intensity of this type of immigration.

In alternative to the increasing exclusion of political parties from the group of relevant actors within the policymaking process, this research will explore the role of the political stream behind the selected policy developments in the two cases (Kingdon 1995; Bale 2008). This article will suggest that whereas the client politics model was observed in the UK, the observation of diffuse costs and concentrated benefits on the French CCT failed to explain the low intensity of HSI into France by 2009. Drawing from the analysis of immigration politics in the two countries, this investigation will help to understand the variations found at domestic level in the UK and at cross-national level by highlighting the differences on the agency of the British and French governments. The article begins by presenting the theoretical background that supports this comparative research and the following sections develop the analysis of the British and French policies towards HSI during the 2000s.

The convergence thesis and the policy gap hypothesis are explored throughout the first section, while the second section examines the client politics model. A third section explores the increasing negligence of political parties within immigration studies. The justification for the employment of a most-similar-cases research design is developed in the fourth section. The next sections develop the single-case analysis

of the development of HSMP in the UK and the CCT in France, while the final section provides a comparative synthesis that seeks to assess potential similarities and divergences across the British and French policies towards HSI. The conclusions explore the theoretical implications of this research and the contribution of this investigation to the field of immigration studies.

Convergence and policy gap theses

The convergence thesis suggests that immigration policies of industrialized liberal democracies are becoming increasingly similar (Meyers 2002; Cornelius et al. 2004). This process is expected to be stronger at the regional rather than at the global level because of similar macro-structural characteristics across countries, such as membership of supranational organizations like the EU. Diverse factors have been proposed to understand the aforementioned convergence, such as parallel path development (similar domestic pressures and constraints prompt similar immigration policies); policy emulation; regional integration; global events as well as geopolitics; and public behaviour (Cornelius et al. 2004, 17–19). Nonetheless, past comparative research on the HSI policies of nineteen industrialized countries has highlighted stronger levels of 'divergence rather than convergence toward a single HSI policy' across the selected cases (Cerna 2009, 157). This research concluded that proportional electoral systems were expected to be more restrictive on the policy towards HSI than majoritarian systems. Considering the similar policy departures in favour of the promotion of HSI in the UK and in France (two countries with single-member constituency systems), this article assesses if a convergence was observed across the British and French policies towards HSI in terms of policy outputs and outcomes.

Comparative research has also found an increasing number of cases where the objectives set on immigration policy by the national governments diverge from the policy outcomes. This political process was named a 'policy gap' (Cornelius et al. 2004, 4). Policy gaps can be of two main types: (1) those caused by unintended consequences of policy; and (2) those caused by inadequate implementation/enforcement of the policy (Cornelius et al. 2004, 5). Nonetheless, a policy gap can be observed either in restricting an already active inflow, or in the process of promoting a new type of immigration as happened in Germany (Joppke 2004). Whereas the German government launched a green card programme with 20,000 available permits to incentivize the settlement of HSI in the country in August 2000, only 12,000 had been requested by April 2002 (Martin 2004). This policy proved incapable of jump-starting the desired inflow, notwithstanding the German's government official objectives (Joppke 2004). Therefore, this article explores whether a policy gap was found in the British or French policies towards HSI in contrast to the expected convergence at cross-national level. The next section reviews the outline of a client politics model on immigration policy.

Client politics model

A recent analytical framework proposed to understand immigration policy involves its disaggregation according to the distinct types of migration policy (not types of migration flows). This proposal suggests that particular types of policies are associated with specific patterns of politics and that 'policy determines politics'

(Freeman 2006, 229). Consequently, each type of immigration policy (like the concession of permanent residence authorizations or visas for asylum and refugee purposes) involves a distinct distribution of costs and benefits across the host society. The structural regularities of each type of migration policy are expected to determine the patterns of politics to the corresponding type of immigration flow to which the policy is applied. Within this perspective, the concession of right to long-term settlement (with direct access to a stable residence authorization and entitlement to family reunion) is considered a good of scarce availability that entails the production of diffuse costs and concentrated benefits indicating the presence of distributive politics (Freeman 2006).

Whereas the benefits are shared among the visa recipients and employers who hire these immigrants, the cost of conceding such residence authorizations is spread across the overall host society (Freeman 2006, 230). The presence of a client politics model on immigration policy is supposed to account for the expansion of immigration into Western Europe in the last fifty years against the backdrop of public hostility (Freeman 1995, 234). The presence of a client politics model on the immigration policies of western states is supposed to account for the expansion of the number of visas in the last fifty years against the backdrop of public hostility (Freeman 2006, 234). Considering the similar objectives of the British and French governments to promote HSI, this article will assess whether the British HSMP and the French CCT conformed to an identical client politics model by examining both the distribution of the costs and benefits of the selected immigration channels and the outcomes of their implementation. The next section explores the potential role of political parties on the management of external borders of liberal states like the UK and France.

'Bringing parties back in'

Political parties have been increasingly excluded from the range of explanatory factors explored by immigration studies, a trend that has been associated with the gap separating this strand of research from the literature on party politics (Bale 2008). However, there are several reasons to consider political parties as relevant actors within the policymaking process. National governments are responsible for the levels of politicization of immigration policy, the ways that this social phenomenon is framed, and for its relevance within the legislative agenda (Schain 2008). Executive power in liberal democracies rests with political parties that are oriented towards the renewal of their electoral mandates by defining issues and developing policies to advance their main aim (Hansen and Koehler 2005). Furthermore, past research conducted in the UK has indicated that political elites continue to enjoy considerable autonomy from pressure groups to determine immigration policy, which apparently challenges the client politics model (Statham and Geddes 2006).

Finally, the absence of a common immigration policy across the EU means that the European Commission lacks competence over the admission policies of the EU member states. Therefore, the national governments continue to manage labour inflows according to their own political priorities (Boswell and Geddes 2011). In sum, it should be expected that political parties with access to government actually influence the steering of immigration policy. Drawing from the analysis of immigration politics across the two countries, this article will associate the variations

found in the British policy towards HSI, and at the cross-national level with the different political objectives of the British and French political actors. Before developing the analysis of the British and French experiences, the next section provides a brief justification of the present case selection.

Justification of case selection

The justification of case selection is a topic frequently neglected in comparative studies that employ a most-similar-systems research design (Peters 1998). The UK and France were selected as the most appropriate case studies because of the autonomy of the national governments to manage labour inflows and these two countries' similar macro-economic background. According to the 'veto players' theory, the British political system is characterized by the presence of a single veto player on the executive: the House of Commons (Tsebelis 2002). This grants strong autonomy to the government because the first-past-the-post electoral system enhances the formation of a two-party system and solid government majorities in parliament (Mitchell 2008). In the French semi-presidential system, the president lacks veto powers over governmental laws approved by the parliament. The National Assembly can veto the decisions of the French government, but the executive is often formed by a single party that enjoys a consistent majority in parliament, pre-empting potential opposition (Elgie 2008). Nevertheless, the French Constitutional Council operates as an additional chamber of legislature that possesses authority to suppress entire pieces of legislation before they are promulgated as law (Tsebelis 2002).

The French government is thus subjected to one more institutional veto player than its British counterpart, reflecting the lack of a written constitution and constitutional court in the UK. Nonetheless, the admission of immigrant workers in France has never been subjected to vetoes from the Constitutional Council in the past, unlike the management of family reunion (Weil 2005). Therefore, the British and French governments have so far enjoyed full autonomy to manage labour inflows according to their domestic priorities. At the economic level, the UK and France are among the most industrialized nations in the world and possess the sixth

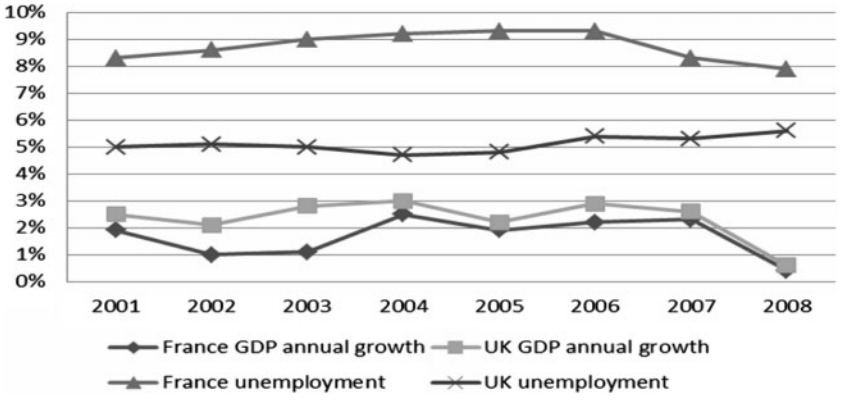

Figure 1. Unemployment rates and GDP growth in the UK and France between 2001 and 2008.
Source: OECD (2011).

and fifth largest economies in the world. Whereas unemployment was most intense in France than in the UK from 2003 to 2009, economic growth was stronger in the latter country (see Figure 1) (OECD 2011). Within these overall macro-structural similarities, the economic trends suggest a greater level of demand for foreign labour in the UK than in France. After the development of the theoretical background that supports this investigation, the next section explores the British case study.

UK: the development of the British HSMP

In a confident position after the overwhelming victory in the British 2001 general election, the Labour government, led by Prime Minister Blair, introduced an overt policy shift on the management of labour inflows. A new narrative of 'managed migration' had been identified in a speech by the Immigration Minister Beverley Hughes in 2000 (Balch 2009). This narrative was consolidated two years later within the 2002 White Paper entitled 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven' under the leadership of the Home Secretary David Blunkett (Home Office 2002). The document consistently emphasized the importance of human capital for economic success and the negative impact of skills gaps for economic growth reflecting a pro-business approach (Boswell 2003). The liberalization of British immigration policy was also underpinned and legitimized by research conducted by epistemic communities (Balch 2009).

The 2002 White Paper recognized that computer services, health and medical services accounted for a large proportion of the labour visas issued before 2002 – 20% and 23%, respectively (Home Office 2002, 40). Consequently, the policy shift reflected the increasing shortages of skilled labour at the domestic level whilst the Labour government was eager to prove its credentials to sustain economic growth (Layton-Henry 2004; Rawnsley 2010). Furthermore, Labour's project of modernizing public services, especially the National Health System (NHS), through the expansion of public expenditure would subsequently exacerbate the overall demand for HSI and the shortage of labour in the health sector (Labour 2001).

A new scheme to attract HSI was announced in the 2002 White Paper: the HSMP that replaced the preceding Innovators Scheme established in 2000 (Home Office 2002). This new migration channel operated as a points system based on qualification levels, past income and professional achievement (Messina 2007). Those who obtained seventy-five points and proved possession of financial means to support themselves and their families during the duration of stay were granted a one-year residence authorization to seek a job without having a previous sponsor. After securing employment at a level warranted by their skill base, further leave to remain would be granted. These immigrants enjoyed the right to family reunion, while entitlement to a long-term residence authorization was acknowledged after a probation period of four years (Home Office 2002). Concession of this right to HSI suggests the distribution of concentrated benefits and diffuse costs that should lead to the identification of a client politics model (Freeman 2006).

Moreover, the HSMP was characterized as a supply-driven system wherein the UK state welcomed applications independently of a specific job offer in the labour market and HSI were allowed to enter the UK without secure employment (Messina 2007; Challof and Lemaître 2008). This trend indicated the adoption of a laissez-faire approach because these immigrants' legal settlement was only dependent on

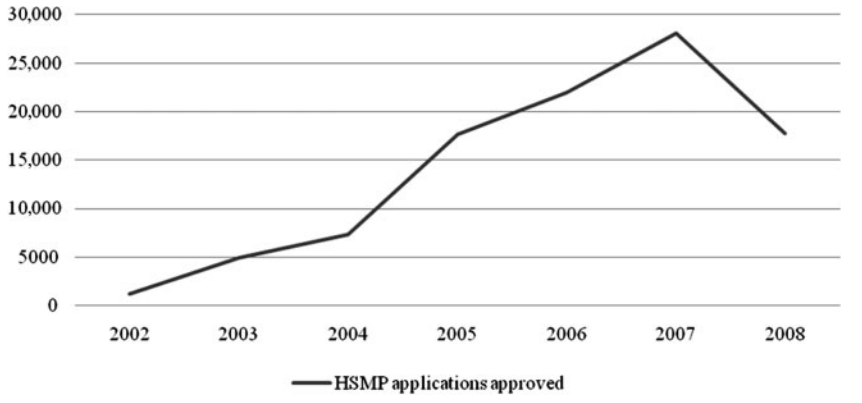

Figure 2. HSMP applications approved in the UK between 2002 and 2008.
Source: Salt (2009, 109).

incorporation into the labour market at a level warranted by their skills. Reflecting the government's liberalism, Blunkett argued that no upper limit on immigration could be imposed (Geddes 2008, 143). The entry requirements of the HSMP were lowered to sixty-five points in 2003 in response to a decline in the number of candidates, an objective fully attained in the following years (see Figure 2) (Sales 2007).

Just three years after the publication of the 2002 White Paper, the Labour government issued a new blueprint for immigration policy entitled 'A points- based system: Making immigration work for Britain' (Home Office 2005). Unlike the past narrative of managed immigration, this document subjected the management of inflows to the national interest only (Sales 2007). The new plan reflected Labour's electoral strategy to neutralize the Conservatives' challenge on this public policy in the context of Blunkett's forced resignation as home secretary and intense public concern with immigration (Gould 2007, 35). Notwithstanding the announcement of a general points system to manage all labour inflows, Blair directly acknowledged the dependence of public services upon the provision of HSI in the foreword of the 2005 White Paper: 'Our vital public services depend upon skilled staff from overseas. Far from being a burden on these services, our expanding NHS, for example, would have difficulty meeting the needs of patients without foreign-born nurses and doctors' (Home Office 2005, 5).

The Prime Minister's foreword conforms to the policy model of distributive politics because the promotion of HSI was framed as a cost-free policy that entailed diffuse benefits across society (Freeman 2006). Besides recognizing the domestic shortage of this type of immigrant, Blair overtly acknowledged the Labour government's vested interest in hiring HSIs to support the NHS modernization, which had been a platform of his electoral campaign. Otherwise, Labour's project to rebuild public services could be derailed by bottlenecks of skilled labour in the domestic market that would send financial costs soaring and jeopardize its implementation, according to a *National Review* article on 8 May 2006. The potential shortage of human capital could also jeopardize overall economic prosperity. Consequently, Blair placed the British state among the social groups with a vested interest in promoting HSI that push for a client politics model

(Freeman 1995). Notwithstanding the proposal for a points system in 2005, the HSMP was only replaced in 2008 after Gordon Brown became the Labour prime minister (Rawnsley 2010).

The Labour government curtailed access to the HSMP after the eruption of the financial crisis in the late 2000s. At the 2007 Conference of Trade Unions, the new prime minister presented an employment package seeking to provide 'a British job on offer for every British worker' (*Daily Telegraph*, September 10, 2007). Brown's discourse was interpreted as an attempt to reconnect with the disfranchised British working class (Eatwell 2010). The proposed package increased levels of past income demanded to candidates and imposed the deployment of English tests on access to the HSMP. Therefore, Brown dropped Blair's laissez-faire approach, while the subsequent crackdown on the intensity of HSI was conceived as an instrument to tackle growing unemployment (Sales 2007). Henceforth, this type of immigration decreased in 2007, demonstrating the Labour government's ability to attain its overt policy aims (Figure 1). In sum, the British government adopted a laissez-faire approach towards HSI with the establishment of the HSMP, which conformed to the outline of a client politics model until 2007. Now, an examination of the French policy towards HSI is provided in the next section.

France: the elaboration and implementation of the CCT

A policy shift for the promotion of HSI into France was observed in June 2005 in the discourse of the Interior Minister Sarkozy (Schain 2008). At the UMP convention on immigration policy entitled 'Selected immigration, reinsured integration', Sarkozy announced a new paradigm that sought to move from 'unwanted immigration' to 'selective immigration'. The objective was to obtain a stronger balance between 'labour immigration and rights' immigration' (referring to family reunion and asylum) (Sarkozy 2005). Subsequently, Sarkozy added: 'We need to attract skilled workers, entrepreneurs, researchers, university professors through a points-system like Canada' (Sarkozy 2005). Consequently, this event was identified as a policy departure towards an active policy to attract HSI. While the problems in the recruitment of engineers and scientific researchers were low in 2005, particular bottlenecks were still found in the construction and health sectors between 2005 and 2007, indicating some modest demand of HSI in France (CREDOC 2005, 2008).

Nonetheless, the policy departure on immigration policy was closely associated with Sarkozy's two-pronged electoral strategy for the 2007 presidential elections (Marthaler 2008). On the one hand, Sarkozy detached himself from President Jacques Chirac's unpopular legacy to win the UMP presidential nomination for the 2007 ballot by promoting his political programme as a 'rupture' with the Chirac's political and economic legacy (Perrineau 2008, 79; Schain 2008). On the other, the Sarkozy's framing of family reunion as an illegitimate or unwanted type of immigration represented the informal co-option of the agenda on the immigration policy of a French extreme-right party – *Front National*'s (FN)[1] and operated as a vehicle to mobilize this party's voters for the 2007 presidential elections (Marthaler 2008; Noiriel 2008). Sarkozy assumed his intention to 'seduce the FN's electorate' (*Le Parisien*, March 29, 2006) at the public level but was forced to distance himself from the extremists' proposals as well: 'I challenge anyone to find a single idea that I

have presented that is consistent with Mr. [Jean-Marie] Le Pen's,[2] including on immigration' (*Le Parisien*, October 20, 2006).

Sarkozy (2006, 39–40) presented a new immigration law to the French parliament in 2006 as a 'rupture with a single-sided rationality' and a 'zero-immigration' policy that damaged France's interests. Consequently, the third component of the new legislation encompassed the promotion of 'selected immigration' and Sarkozy announced the creation of a new residence card: the CCT valid for a period of three years to HSI 'who contribute for French economic dynamism' (Sarkozy 2006, 5). However, the interior minister also informed the members of parliament that 'any opening to global labour migration is not envisaged' while the long-term settlement of HSI from underdeveloped countries would be prevented to prevent the brain-drain effect (Sarkozy 2006, 5). These statements suggested a salient level of incongruity between the initial objective to set a points system for HSI, like Canada, and simultaneously ensure the closure of the French labour market to labour inflows. The legislator's concerns with the development of overseas countries also seemed incompatible with the objective to compete with other industrialized nations for attracting HSI at the international level (Ferrand 2008).

In consequence of Sarkozy's priorities, the 2006 immigration law instituted the CCT for those immigrants whose skills and talents were ranked by the French state as relevant for sustainable economic development or to the country's improvement in scientific, sports, cultural or humanitarian areas. This channel for HSI was thus based on 'discretionary consideration of the ''added value'' of hiring a foreign worker' (Chaloff and Lemaître 2009, 20), leaving sufficient powers to the French state to refuse admission of any candidate, even after they had secured an employment sponsor. The CCT included the right to long-term settlement after a probation period of six years (Lochak and Foteau 2008). Nevertheless, nationals from countries included in the Priority Solidarity Zone (PSZ)[3] were deprived of the right to renew their CCTs to prevent the brain drain effect. This action reduced the incentives provided to a large pool of potential candidates to the CCT, in particular from francophone countries with former colonial ties with France (Ferrand 2008). Consequently, the geographic criterion within the CCT imposed on access to long-term settlement prevents the observation of diffuse benefits and concentrated benefits at the general level, unlike the HSMP in the UK.

Despite the announcement of the policy shift in 2005, the CCT was left inoperative until the *Commission nationale des compétences et des talents* (CNCT) specified the vague access criteria set by the 2006 immigration law, at a time when Sarkozy was already the French president (Lochak and Foteau 2008). Consequently, the 2007 immigration law integrated the CNCT's conclusions: to liberalize the concession of this residence authorization to high-ranking employees of multi-nationals, and set specific key priority areas (physics, chemistry, biology, maths, information technology, agronomy, marketing, human resources, management and finance (CNCT 2007). Possession of a master's degree or higher qualification was demanded to gain the CCT, while candidates deprived of work experience were ineligible to apply (CNCT 2007). The CCT had a far more restrictive character than the scheme inspired by the Canadian points system mentioned by the interior minister in 2005, which suggests important divergences between the policy inputs and the actions taken in pursuance of those objectives.

The implementation of the CCT from 2007 onwards was followed by insignificant inflows of HSI into France: only five CCTs were granted in 2007, 183 in 2008, and 364 in 2009 (SGCICI 2011, 43). Consequently, fewer than 600 immigrants benefited from Sarkozy's objective to attract HSI by 2009, leading to the identification of a policy gap between the objectives set by the interior minister in 2005 and the outcome of this policy implementation in 2009. A report elaborated by Senator André Ferrand (member of the UMP) and presented to the French senate on the policy towards labour inflows noted that only forty-four CCTs had been granted in 2008 notwithstanding the official target of 2,000 (Ferrand 2008, 65). The French CCT proved unable to address the particular bottlenecks of HSI that had been identified in the domestic labour market, both in the construction and health sectors.

Furthermore, the report complained about the widespread lack of information about the CCT across French embassies, and recommended the relaxation of access criteria to this labour authorization, as well as the suppression of obstacles posed to the long-term settlement of candidates from countries included in the PSZ, particularly those of Francophone origin (Ferrand 2008, 65). References to potential opposition from social actors, like trade unions, to the promotion of HSI or to the diminished availability of candidates with French fluency were absent from the conclusions of this report. Consequently, difficulties to jumpstart the inflow of HSI into France were associated with inadequate implementation of the policy objectives set in 2005 throughout the subsequent years, rather than with other factors.

Whereas the policy towards HSI from countries included in the PSZ had the outline of a guest worker system, the recognition of the right to long-term settlement of the candidates of the remaining countries presupposed the distribution of diffuse costs and concentrated benefits that should lead to a client politics model. However, this structural regularity failed to explain the residual intensity of HSI into France between 2007 and 2009. The policy shift operated in France regarding HSI was associated with the electoral strategy of the interior minister for the 2007 presidential elections and failed to become a reality by the end of the 2000s. Consequently, the French policy towards HSI can be regarded as a case of 'words that succeed policies that fail' in light of Sarkozy's electoral success or as a case of 'simulative politics' (Edelman 1977; Cento Bull 2009). The following section compares the policies of the two selected countries towards HSI.

Comparative synthesis

This section presents the comparative analysis of the British and French policies towards HSI during the 2000s. Policy shifts towards the active promotion of HSI were observed in the two countries in the early and mid-2000s, suggesting a potential convergence of policy inputs. However, this convergence did not encompass the narrative employed to support the policy shifts or the motivations behind the policy developments. Whereas the British government adopted a narrative of managed migration stirred by the national shortages of HSI and the Labour Party's project to modernize public services, the French policy shift sought to increase the intensity of 'selected immigration' in comparison to 'unwanted inflows' motivated by Sarkozy's strategy for the 2007 presidential elections.

Furthermore, the convergence of the British and French policies to promote HSI derailed at the output and implementation levels. A points system was established

with the deployment of the HSMP in 2002 reflecting the Labour government's laissez-faire approach to the management of HSI. The French CCT of 2006 set a highly discretionary process for HSI admission, while the concession of long-term residence authorizations was dependent on the geographic origins of the candidates. Consequently, the British HSMP had a far more liberal character than the French CCT and the implementation of these two channels for HSI led to completely distinct outcomes in the two countries. The annual rate of HSI into the UK between 2002 and 2008 is greater than the sum of all the CCTs granted by the French state between 2007 and 2009. Notwithstanding the higher levels of unemployment in France, the CCT failed to address the identified shortages of HSI at the domestic level.

The failure to promote HSI into France reflected the inadequate implementation of the policy objectives set in 2005, as it was referred in the Senate's report on labour inflows, prompting the observation of a policy gap in this case. The restrictive character of the CCT in France challenges the conclusion that majoritarian systems are more prone to adopt liberal policies towards HSI (Cerna 2009). The distribution of diffuse costs and concentrated benefits of the British HSMP and the intensity of HSI into the UK between 2002 and 2008 suggests the observation of a client politics model in the UK. However, the partial observation of the same structural regularities within the CCT (regarding candidates from countries excluded from the PSZ) failed to help to understand the residual intensity of this type of inflow into France. Notwithstanding the selective concession of the right to long-term settlement to HSI, the subsequent concentrated benefits and diffuse costs failed to determine the intensity of HSI, demonstrating the limits of the client politics model.

Alternatively, the distinct political objectives of the British prime ministers and the French interior minister (later elected president) helped to understand the fluctuations found within the UK and the strong divergence at the cross-national level. Blair adopted an initial laissez-faire approach that was moderated by his successor after the emergence of an economic crisis in the late 2000s. In France, a strong contradiction was found between Sarkozy's announcement of a 'points-system like Canada' in 2005 and his objective to simultaneously keep the French labour market closed to inflows. Unlike the British pro-business approach, the French policy shift reflected Sarkozy's two-pronged strategy for the 2007 presidential election. Consequently, the British and French policies towards HSI throughout the 2000s seemed to be deeply embedded in domestic political contexts rather than formulated by policymakers insulated from the political process (Schain 2008). The analysis of the agency of political actors involved in the policymaking process has complemented the identification of a client politics model in the UK and has helped to understand the policy gap identified in France.

Conclusions

This article has highlighted the lack of convergence between British and French policies towards HSI, which was confined to the broad aim to compete to attract HSI at the international level. Strong variations have been identified on the different stages of this policy cycle in the two countries. Both national governments employed different narratives to support the policy shifts within different economic contexts. The substantial divergences found at the output level across the two countries were later reflected in the opposite outcomes of the implementation process. The British

HSMP had an overt liberal character in contrast to the restrictive nature of the French CCT, a trend that helps to explain the disproportional annual intensity of HSI into the UK in comparison to France. Effectively, a policy gap was identified across the objectives set by the French policy towards HSI in 2005 and the policy outcomes of the CCT by 2009, which was associated with the ambiguous aims of the French interior minister.

This investigation warns immigration studies of the potential pitfalls of inducing policy outcomes from the policy input without consistent research of the output and implementation levels. Failure to perform an analysis of the different stages of a policy development can lead to flawed conclusions about its outcomes, like the aforementioned celebrations of the reopening of the French labour market to immigration. Whereas this investigation identified a client politics model on the British policy towards HSI, the French CCT entailed the partial distribution of diffuse costs and concentrated benefits. The assumption that structural regularities, like the particular distribution of costs and benefits caused by the different types of policy, determine the subsequent intensity of the corresponding inflows is thus challenged by the French experience. The majoritarian character of the British and French electoral systems also failed to help to understand the divergences found at the cross-national level, suggesting that important variations might have been understated by previous comparative research.

In contrast to the latter approaches, this article has associated the identified fluctuations in HSI policy within the UK and at the cross-national level with the political agency of the British and French governments. The Labour government's laissez-faire approach to HSI until 2007 reflected a pro-business approach and the vested interest of supporting the ongoing investment of the modernization of public services. This approach was watered down by Blair's successor in face of a new political context in the late 2000s. By contrast, Sarkozy's policy shift in favour of the promotion of HSI stemmed from his electoral strategy for the 2007 presidential election, rather than on economic pressures, and never became a reality. Therefore, this article has argued that politics trumped policy and reasserted the importance of political parties with access to the policymaking process as an indispensable explanatory factor to understand policy developments in the UK and France. Immigration studies should therefore acknowledge the salience of political parties and complement the analysis of structural factors with the examination of political agency.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1. The FN electoral manifesto at the 2002 presidential election included references such as: 'The massive immigration that we endure affects our national identity and consequently France's existence' (*Front National* 2001, 26); 'Family reunion: the installation of settlements' and 'Right of asylum and renewable residence authorisation: immigration becomes uncontrollable' (*Front National* 2001, 18).
2. Jean Marie Le Pen was the leader and founder of the extreme-right party *Front National* since 1972.

3. The PSZ includes countries with which France plans to sign privileged solidarity and sustainable development partnerships: Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Kenya, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Palestinian Territories, Rwanda, São Tomé and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, South Africa, Suriname, Uganda, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

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