Dismantling the « Jungle » : Migrant Relocation and Extreme Voting in France

Project team:

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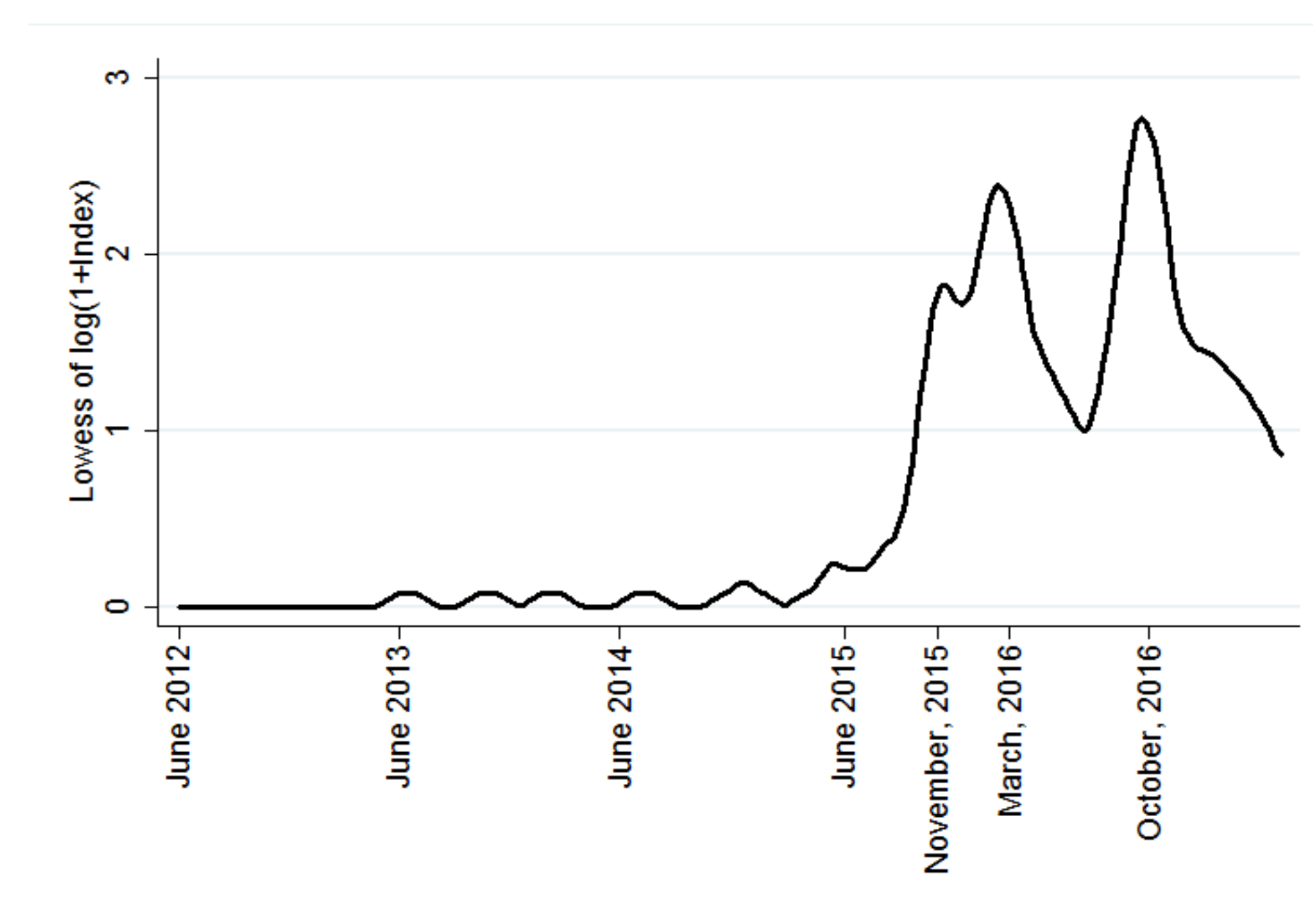
Introduction and Motivation

This paper uses the dissolution of the Calais squatter camp conducted between October 2015 and October 2016 as a natural experiment assessing the electoral repercussions of short run exposition of the population to migrants. Many studies so far have focused on the long run impact of sustained waves of immigration whereas our project asesses the short run effect of a small amount of migrant exposure (usually one to three months). Our outcome variable is the voting support of the Front National measured in the first round of the Presidential election. Our results show that contact between migrants and the native population can soften the progression of the far-right vote.

Institutional Setting

The Calais « Jungle » was dismantled starting from October 2015 and was closed in October 2016, where it received most media attention :
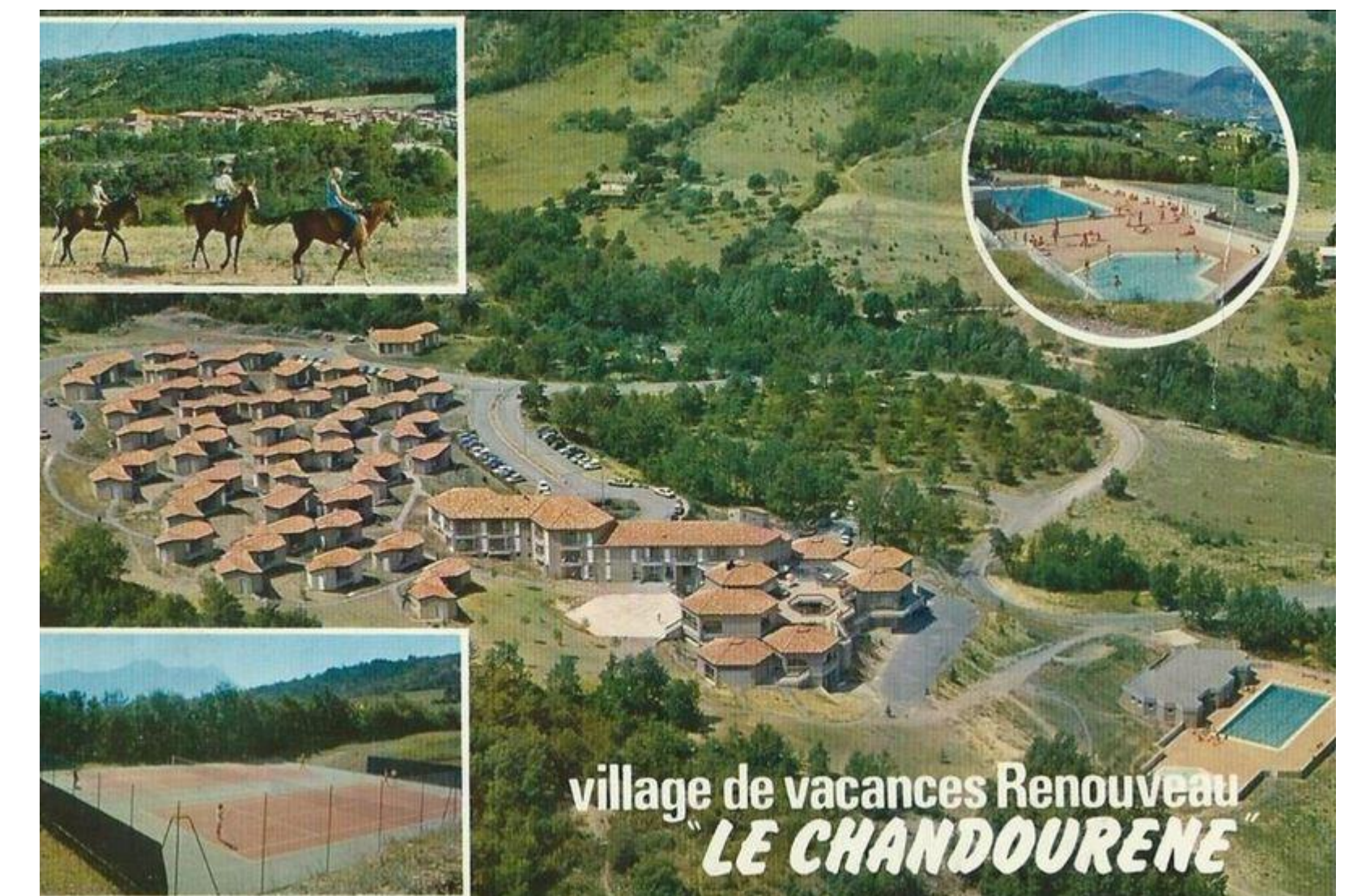

This graph shows the progression of Google searches of the words « *Jungle de Calais* » aggregated since 2012. Media attention is clearly highest in times of dismantlement and peters out afterwards.

After the dissolution of the Camp was ordered, the migrants were relocated to temporary centers called *Centres d'Accueil et Orientation* (CAO), which provided room and board for the migrants to stay for 1-3 months in order to give them time to apply for refugee status. It is important to highlight that the final decision was made by the *préfets* and that said migrants neither had any monetary allocation nor the right to work.
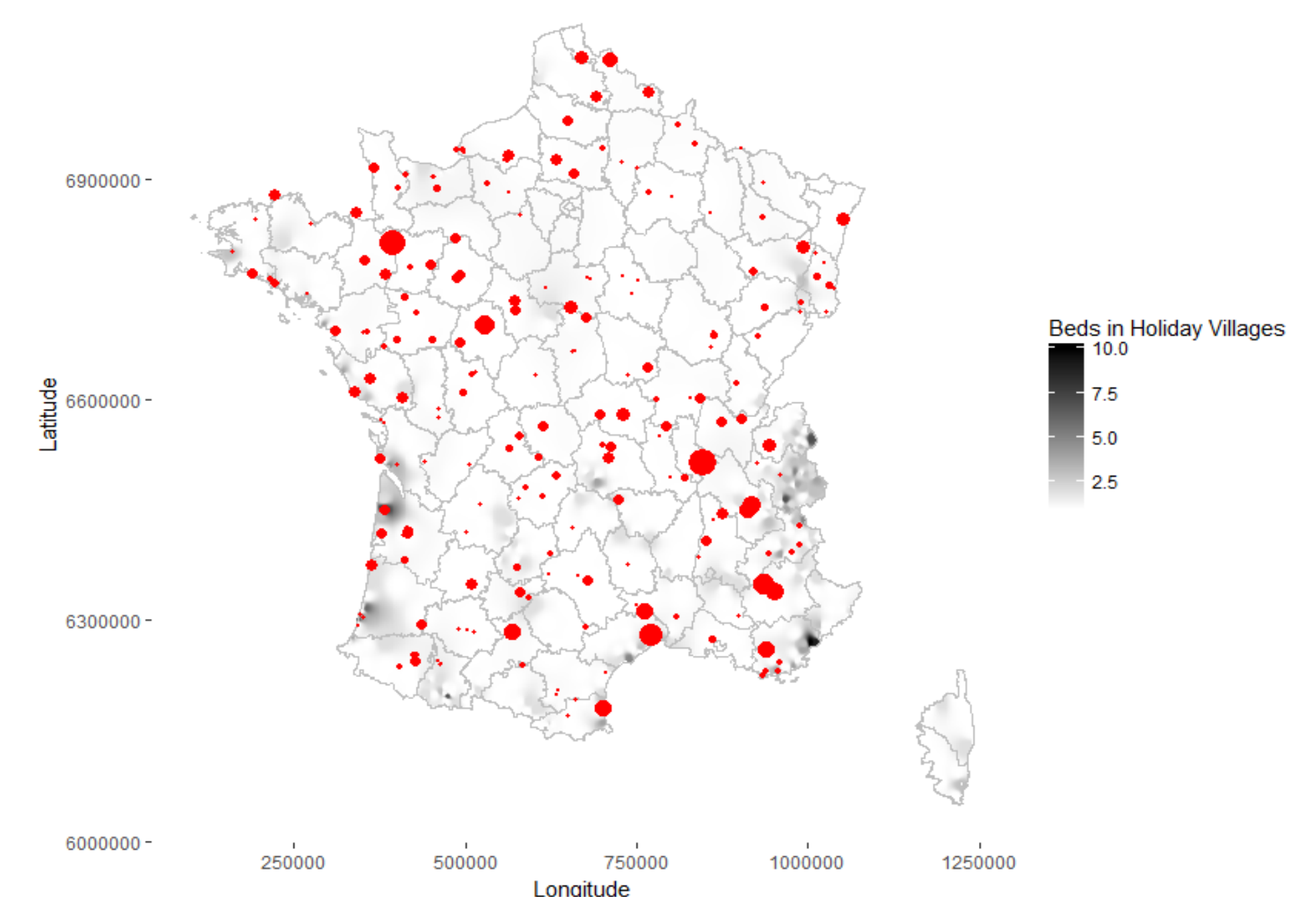
Therefore we seek to measure, at the municipal level, the impact of natives' exposure to migrants relocated in the CAOs, using as a voting outcome the share of Front National votes in the first round of the Presidential election in 2017 compared to 2012.

Identification and Main results

Endogeneity biases are likely to affect naive OLS estimates. In particular, some *préfets* might have decided to open CAOs in certain municipalities based on systematic unobserved characteristics, and mayors are likely to have bargained over the number of migrants they were willing to host. To circumvent these potential biases, we rely on an instrumental variable approach, in which we instrument the presence of a CAO by the number of beds in holiday villages:

Since the dismantlement took place off season, many holiday villages would be unoccupied, thus making them suitable places to host migrants. Furthermore, most of these villages were built long before the period under scrutiny, which makes the exclusion restriction likely to be warranted. A graphical illustration of the first stage shows that there is sufficient correlation to pursue our main analysis.

After instrumenting the allocation of a CAO with the log number of beds in holiday villages we find a negative impact of about 15.7 percentage points on the difference in growth rate of the Front National between 2017 and 2012. Given that the overall increase of the Front National is about 20 percentage points this amounts to a nearly 75 percent reduction in the increase of the vote across municipalities.

Conclusion

Our results are robust to the inclusion of many control variables and we show that there is no local economic effect of the relocation, which points towards the contact hypothesis.

This research sets a silver lining to public discourse on the repercussions of immigration on the political landscape.