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The consequences of hosting asylum seekers for citizens' policy preferences☆,☆☆

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ABSTRACT

Asylum migration is a major societal challenge in the Western world affecting residents' policy preferences. We analyze the effects of newly hosting asylum seekers in a given municipality on local citizens' preferences in terms of migratory and redistributive policies as well as of support or opposition to political change in general. Policy preferences are measured based on citizens' actual voting behavior in national referendums in Switzerland between 1987 and 2017. We exploit the administrative placement of asylum seekers across municipalities and find that citizens vote temporarily slightly more restrictively on immigration issues in national referendums and are less supportive of redistribution than before hosting asylum seekers. Citizens are not more likely to vote for the status quo and not more likely to participate per se.

1. Introduction

People migrating to the Western world from countries where they have few economic and political perspectives presents a major societal challenge.[1] Citizens of the receiving countries react to their new fellow residents with a mixture of feelings including compassion, insecurity and angst. And governments struggle to find arrangements to cope with people asking for asylum.[2] How much this development will transform Western societies is a subject of controversy itself. Asylum migration is often seen as an important driver of new nationalist and populist movements. This is reflected in a growing body of research studying the link between asylum immigration and voters' support of right-wing parties.[3] However, whether and how citizens' *specific* policy preferences shift in response to exposure to asylum seekers is still not well understood.

☆ *in memoriam* – This essay is the scholarly legacy of Severin Zimmermann, who passed away unexpectedly on September 30, 2021, at the age of only 33. Severin Zimmermann worked on a dissertation in the field of migration economics with high standards for himself and his research. With him, we lose a conscientious young scientist and a helpful, modest and lovable person whom we will miss very much.

☆☆ The order of the authors was determined with the dice.

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[1] These challenges are widely discussed in research literature across the social sciences (see, e.g., Borjas, 2016, Collier, 2013, Hatton, 2017, 2020 or Joppke, 1998).

[2] A fair process for granting asylum is only one of numerous aspects involved in the difficult decisions concerning these people's right to stay and the measures to be undertaken to integrate accepted refugees economically, socially, and politically into their host countries. Recent research studies have dealt with, for example, various labor market policies (Brell et al., 2020; Fasani et al., 2020; Marbach et al., 2018; Slotwinski et al., 2019), housing policies Martén et al., 2019; Schüller, 2016, or non-citizen voting rights (Slotwinski et al., 2020).

[3] While Dinas et al. (2019) and Gessler et al. (2021) find that people who experience an exceptionally high exposure to refugees, as in some parts of Greece and Hungary are much more likely to support extreme-right-parties, studies in contexts involving fewer refugees report heterogeneous findings: Dustmann et al. (2019) discover a positive effect on right-leaning parties in rural, yet a negative effect in the most urban municipalities in Denmark; Steinmayr (2021) distinguishes between mere exposure, which has led to an increase in the vote share of far-right parties in Upper Austria, and sustained contact, which has resulted in a corresponding decrease; Tomberg et al. (2021) report a polarizing effect for Germany, which depends on local economic conditions for left- but

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In this paper, we analyze the consequences of hosting asylum seekers[4] on local voters' policy preferences in a given municipality. In particular, we focus on preferences regarding migratory and redistributive policies as well as on support for or opposition to political change in general. In this, policy preferences are measured on the basis of citizens' actual voting behavior in national referendums in Switzerland between 1987 and 2017. The underlying hypothesis is that immigration is affecting the "demand" for public policy. While there are potentially many reasons for such a link, we are particularly interested in the aspect of a cultural threat (or a rather unspecific fear of what is foreign). This aspect seems especially relevant for the type of immigration that is not driven by a labor shortage in the host country but by push factors in the country of origin. Specifically, we want to study whether citizens who are newly exposed to asylum seekers in their municipality become less open to immigration and immigrants, less likely to support redistribution, and maintain a stronger preference for the political status quo than previously. In a complementary analysis, we also check whether there are mobilization effects in terms of turnout. This is relevant for the interpretation of the effects on aggregate voting behavior.

In our empirical strategy, we exploit the placement of asylum seekers across municipalities. Importantly, the municipality of residence is not chosen by the asylum seekers but is assigned by the cantonal authorities. Across cantons the allocation of asylum seekers is following an exogenous rule and every canton hosts asylum seekers in proportion to its population size.[5] Accordingly, many municipalities receive and host asylum seekers over time. We focus on the consequences of intensified asylum immigration to Switzerland starting from the mid-1990s and define our treatment as the new exposure to a group of asylum seekers (on average, 3.2 individuals) in a given municipality. The municipalities that are treated during our observation period are relatively small, with, on average, 862 residents. This treatment intensity is fairly representative for the exposure to asylum seekers of many people in Europe. However, it is far from the confrontation with migrants reported for some hot spots in the news.[6] Moreover, the treatment continues for quite some time, as the asylum process takes, on average, more than a year (and subsequently provisionally admitted foreigners must stay in the assigned municipality at least as long as they have no job). Finally, there is some heterogeneity in the treatment, for example, with regard to the degree of asylum seekers' foreignness based on their origin (Africa/Asia versus Europe or in terms of language proximity), as well as other dimensions.

We define the sample for the empirical analysis based on a matching strategy and the requirements of an event study design (an approach that is similar to that by Gathmann et al., 2020). We begin by matching the newly treated municipalities with untreated ones, relying on propensity score matching with replacement, and subsequently estimate the effect of the exposure on policy preferences within an event study design for which we group the data into two-year periods around an announcement and initial placement period and use binning at the endpoints. Regarding the measurement of policy preferences, we consider from the universe of popular votes at the federal level between 1987 and 2017 those that are categorized as related to immigration (25 votes) or redistribution (40 votes) and validate their common policy domain with a principal component analysis. A preference for change and against the status quo is measured in terms of the fraction of people voting "yes" in 275 popular votes (as initiatives as well as referendums are always set up so that people express support for the new by voting "yes").

The estimation results indicate a series of systematic patterns. First, citizens who have newly experienced the hosting of asylum seekers in their municipality of residence tend to vote temporarily slightly more restrictively in national referendums on immigration issues than before the hosting. The most pronounced negative effect is estimated for the two years following the initial hosting with a drop in support for an open immigration policy of around 1.7 percentage points ($p = 0.005$) with a mean level of support in the sample of 47.7%. This drop seems driven by placements during the beginning of our sample period and votes related to asylum issues. There is no clear evidence for a persistent negative long-term effect on policy preferences in this domain. The effect seems more pronounced for linguistically more distant asylum seekers and those with a relatively lower labor force participation. If we differentiate between groups of asylum seekers with lower and higher application acceptance rates, there is suggestive evidence that hosting asylum seekers who have a lower probability of being granted asylum leads to a more pronounced negative effect on voting pro foreigners, in particular regarding potential longer-term effects. Moreover, the intensity and duration of treatment both seem to play a role, i.e., municipalities that accommodate relatively many asylum seekers over a longer time period seem to react more strongly.

Second, citizens who newly experience the hosting of asylum seekers in their municipality of residence show less voting support for redistribution. The effect is relatively small and amounts to −1.1 percentage points ($p = 0.009$) in the first and second year after the placement of asylum seekers and −1.0 percentage points ($p = 0.032$) in the third and fourth year at a mean level of support in the sample of 44.1%. There is some suggestive evidence that the negative effect on voting pro redistribution is driven by asylum seekers whose chances of being granted asylum are of lower probability and who have a comparatively lower labor force participation rate. Again, treatment intensity and duration also seem to matter here, i.e., the negative effect on preferences for redistribution is stronger in municipalities that accommodate relatively many asylum seekers over a longer time period.

Third, citizens are not more likely to vote for the status quo, i.e., there is no effect in terms of a stronger reluctance to change independent of the concrete policy context.

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not for right-wing parties; and Schneider-Strawczynski (2020) and Vertier and Viskanic (2020) provide suggestive evidence that anti-immigrant sentiments in France are lower when the inflow is small-scaled, but stronger when exposure is more disruptive.

[4] Our use of the term *asylum seeker* encompasses persons in the process of applying for asylum as well as individuals who have been rejected for asylum, yet have obtained a temporary residence permit. Fully recognized refugees are not the subject of our analysis (see detailed explanations in Sections 3 and 4.2).

[5] Asylum seekers are only allowed to change their place of residence once they are granted refugee status.

[6] An example of the latter might be the many refugees landing on the small Greek islands next to Turkey. Hangartner et al. (2019) show that this experience has clearly affected citizens' policy preferences in Greece.

Fourth, citizens who newly experience the hosting of asylum seekers in their municipality of residence are, on average, not more likely to vote and only slightly more likely when it comes to immigration-related issues. Overall, this corroborates an interpretation of the above results in terms of a change in policy preferences rather than differential mobilization. However, as we are analyzing aggregate data, we cannot rule out that there is a change in the composition of the active electorate.

In Section 2, we put our contribution in perspective and present the underlying theoretical arguments as well as the related empirical evidence. Section 3 provides background information on the institutional environment in Switzerland. Section 4 describes our data sources, and Section 5 sets up our empirical strategy. Section 6 presents the main empirical findings for the overall effects, the heterogeneity analyses and the robustness tests. Section 7 offers some concluding remarks.

2. Theoretical background and previous evidence

Our study rests upon a large body of related research on the effects of immigration on host societies. The potential reactions of the resident population are manifold and reflect various sociopsychological and economic forces (see, e.g., Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014 or Elsner and Concannon, 2020 for reviews). We first mention the theoretical ideas and the evidence related to the reactions to immigrants in general and then focus on asylum seekers (being aware that a distinction is often difficult).

2.1. Consequences of immigration on policy preferences

At the risk of oversimplification, theories about how the experience of immigration affects policy preferences can be broadly classified into two groups. On the one hand, there are approaches explaining why immigration increases reservations regarding foreigners and reduces (economic) solidarity; for example, the Group Conflict Theory (see, e.g., Blumer, 1958 or Blalock, 1967) or the theory of In-Group Bias (see, e.g., Tajfel, 1970 or Brewer, 1979). Regarding the former, the larger the size of an out-group, the more the corresponding in-group perceives it to threaten its own interests, resulting in the in-group members having more negative attitudes toward the out-group. In economics, the focus is on reservations that arise due to residents' concerns about wage pressure, a higher risk of unemployment or price increases for particularly scarce goods and services like housing. Regarding the latter theory, biases in favor of members of one's own group are the product of intergroup competition, serving the dual functions of preserving in-group solidarity and justifying exploitation of out-groups. One specific aspect is emphasized in the so-called fiscal threat hypothesis (see, e.g., Hanson et al., 2007 or Facchini and Mayda, 2009), in which residents, especially the more skilled, worry about immigrants being a burden on the welfare system and therefore support a liberal immigration system less.

On the other hand, there are theories that predict positive effects for inter-ethnic contact on attitudes towards ethnic minorities. Most prominently among these approaches is the intergroup contact hypothesis by Allport (1954). Intergroup contact is posited to lead to reduced prejudice in the presence of equal group status, common goals, intergroup co-operation and support of authorities, law, or custom.

Many empirical analyses consider these theories together when trying to understand the relationship between the stock or inflow of immigrants and some indicator of reservations towards them. Any net effect is usually interpreted as either favoring some conflict/in-group theory or the contact theory. While research in social psychology often explores people's reported attitudes towards immigrants, applied research in political science and economics focuses on reported policy preferences as well as on stated and actual party support in elections (see, e.g., Hatton, 2021). In doing so, eliciting attitudes towards foreigners from surveys creates the additional challenge that respondents might be reluctant to truly report their political stance. A recent contribution by Funk (2016) provides corresponding evidence that preferences for immigration are especially prone to survey bias. One of the few exceptions of studies that investigate people's directly revealed policy preferences in popular votes is Brunner and Kuhn (2018). Relying on an instrumental variable approach, they find that citizens vote more restrictively towards immigrants and immigration if more culturally different immigrants (from former Yugoslavia, Africa, Asia and South America) are present.

Regarding the drivers of reservations, economic factors are often contrasted with non-economic cultural or social factors like crime. Here it is important to consider the kind of immigration (Lee, 1966). Any expected economic effects of immigration, i.e. pressure on wages and higher unemployment strongly depend on whether the same number of immigrants have entered because they are pulled due to a labor shortage or because they are pushed by the adverse conditions in their country of origin. We focus on the latter kind and try to understand the consequences that arise due to variation in the inflow of asylum seekers.

2.2. Reactions to asylum seekers

Large scale survey research indicates that sociotropic evaluations of asylum seekers' economic contributions, humanitarian concerns about the accuracy of their claims, and a general reservation towards Muslims are important determinants of public preferences in many Western countries (Bansak et al., 2016). Differences in these preferences seem to arise partly because some natives overestimate the total number of immigrants and their cultural distance, yet underestimate their economic contribution (Alesina et al., 2018).

Field studies that explore how preferences for redistribution and political preferences in general shift with a greater presence or influx of asylum seekers often exploit placement programs. In an early contribution, Dahlberg et al. (2012) find negative effects of increased immigration on the support for redistribution, exploiting exogenous variation in the share of immigrants from a refugee placement program in Sweden during the years 1985–1994. Using a similar scheme in Denmark, yet focusing on party preferences in elections, Dustmann et al. (2019) identify a negative causal effect of the allocation of refugees between electoral cycles on the

vote share of right-leaning parties in all but the most urban municipalities. Next to differences in age, gender and educational composition, they explain this urban–rural divide partly by residents in rural communities being involuntarily exposed to refugees in their immediate neighborhood, in contrast to urban citizens, who might have chosen to be in contact by selecting in a particular neighborhood or job.

In the Swiss context, two recent concurrent studies have also started to exploit the placement of asylum seekers across cantons in order to explain policy preferences. At the cantonal level, Zurlinden et al. (2020) observe that the arrival of asylum seekers increases voters' alignment with policy recommendations from right-wing and conservative parties in referendums during the years 1995–2015. Exploiting intra-year variation in the number of asylum seekers a canton is allocated, they reveal that the shift in voters' policy orientation is mainly explained by episodes of unusually high inflows of asylum seekers.

At the local level, Myohl and Stadelmann (2020) find that residents living within close proximity to an asylum center opened between the years 2011–2017 are more likely to relocate compared to those living further away. In line with their argument about increased anti-immigrant sentiments, the rise in the propensity to move away is higher across municipalities than across cantons, especially in municipalities in which many voters support parties oriented towards the right. Their heterogeneity analysis further reveals that the effect is mainly driven by highly educated individuals and renters, i.e., people who exhibit more flexibility to move.

Finally, there are potential effects on politics that are not related to shifts in specific preferences but rather to a more general stance towards change in institutions and policies and towards political engagement. Resistance to change has not so far been linked to exposure to refugees in the empirical literature. However, it has been linked to negative mood (i.e., feeling down in Meier et al., 2019) and overload in complex political decisions (Hessami and Resnjanskij, 2019), in both cases leading to behavior maintaining the status quo.

Regarding mobilization, Dustmann et al. (2019) provide evidence for increasing voter turnout in response to refugee allocation in municipality elections but not in national parliamentary elections. One reason for the differential response might be that anti-immigrant parties are more likely to stand in municipal elections where past refugee allocation was comparatively higher. Steinmayr (2021) finds no effect on voter participation in state elections of Upper Austrian municipalities hosting asylum seekers.

3. Institutional setting

Switzerland has had long experience with labor and asylum migration (see Appendix A for some general information on the migration context). The corresponding legal framework is captured in the law on foreigners in Switzerland (i.e., the Foreign Nationals and Integration Act, FNIA) and the asylum law (i.e., the Asylum Act, AsylA). They are both federal laws and form the legal basis for the asylum process. This includes the reception and placement of asylum seekers in Switzerland. Upon arrival, persons seeking asylum are first accommodated in federal asylum centers run by the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM). In a preparatory phase, SEM staff carry out preliminary investigations and verify whether or not Switzerland is responsible for conducting the asylum procedure. If the initial criteria are met, the applicant gets status N, which allows her to stay in Switzerland until the final decision of the SEM is made. The procedure at the federal asylum center is limited to 140 days, after which the applicant is transferred to one of the 26 cantons. Assignment to a canton is undertaken at the federal level by staff of the SEM without interference from the cantons. The single relevant criterion is a canton's population size, proportional to which a canton is allocated new asylum seekers according to Art. 21 of Asylum Decree 1. Exceptions to this rule are rarely granted to individual asylum seekers and occur primarily if the initial assessment cannot be completed before assignment to a canton. In this latter case, asylum seekers are placed in a canton where the main language is the same as in the federal asylum center, so that the case documentation does not need to be translated. The allocation of asylum seekers to Swiss cantons can thus essentially be regarded as close to exogenous.[7] Fig. 1 depicts the relationship between the average cantonal population and the average number of hosted asylum seekers with status N, i.e., people in the application process, and status F, i.e., foreigners who have been provisionally admitted, over the period 1995 to 2017 showing that the proportional assignment is working.

If the evaluation of an application ends in a positive decision, the applicant is given the refugee status permit B, which allows him or her to stay in Switzerland and move freely between cantons. If the application is rejected, the applicant has to leave the country. However, if removal is seen as inadmissible, unreasonable or impossible, the applicant will be given status F as a provisionally admitted foreigner. With status F, the person is allowed to stay in Switzerland, yet cannot move between cantons if she is receiving social benefits. Since the quota for provisionally admitted foreigners depending on social benefits usually fluctuates around 90 per cent, they can thus plausibly also be seen as being exogenously allocated to cantons.[8] Taken together, persons with statuses N and F constitute the basic asylum population in Switzerland (and of our analysis as further discussed in Section 4).

The cantonal authorities are then responsible for allocating asylum seekers within cantons. Due to the federal structure of the Swiss asylum system, cantonal asylum practices vary substantially (Belser, 2015), which also influences how asylum seekers are allocated across municipalities. Some cantons follow the national strategy more or less and pass on the responsibility for hosting asylum seekers to the municipalities in proportion to their population size. For example, in the canton of Basel-Landschaft the governing council targets a uniform quota for all of its municipalities.[9] The municipalities then have to provide accommodation for

[7] A description of the quasi-exogenous allocation of asylum seekers across cantons is provided, for example, in Couttenier et al. (2019) or Hangartner and Schmid (2020).

[8] We are aware that within the group of foreigners with status F, there are about 10 per cent provisionally admitted refugees. They can freely choose their place of residence. Our administrative data do not allow us to separate them out.

[9] This information is based on personal conversation with the cantonal asylum coordinator.

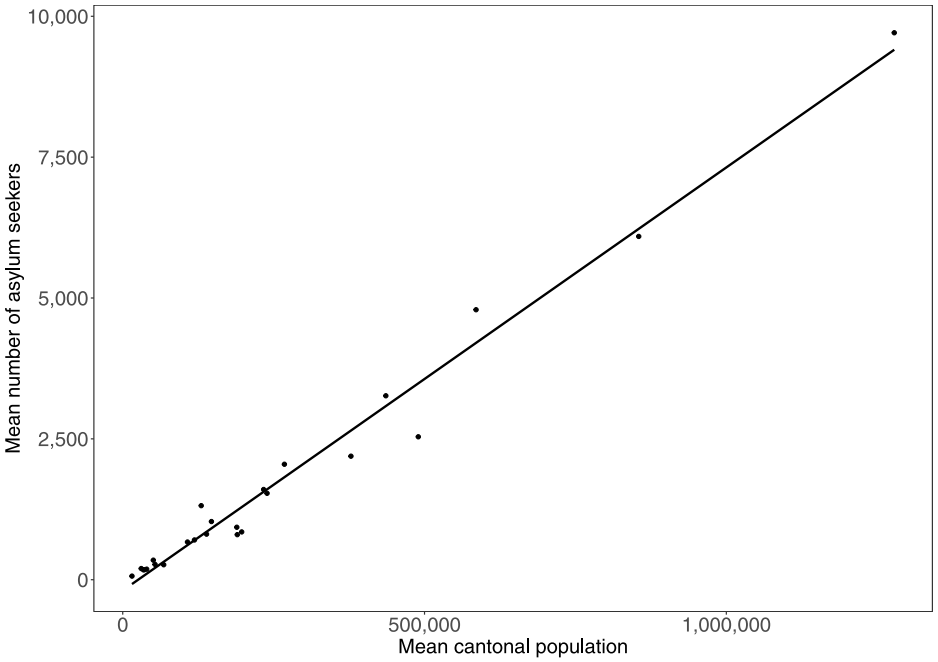

Fig. 1. Proportional placement policy: Cantonal population and the hosting of asylum seekers between 1995 and 2017
Note: The graph shows the mean cantonal population and the mean number of hosted asylum seekers (N and F) per year, both over the whole observation period 1995–2017. Slope of the regression line: 0.0075.
Data sources: State Secretariat for Migration and Federal Statistical Office

the asylum seekers that have been assigned to their municipality. Other cantons organize the accommodation more centrally and host asylum seekers in rented apartments, houses and cantonal centers. This holds, for example, in the canton of Zug, where the canton is primarily responsible for accommodating asylum seekers during the application process. While an even allocation across municipalities is aspired, the availability of affordable housing also plays an important role.

As Switzerland has many small municipalities, these cantonal allocation procedures mean that it is no longer the case that every municipality hosts asylum seekers; furthermore, those that host might only do so after some point in time. It is this variation between municipalities and over time that we exploit in our empirical analysis. Fig. 2 shows for our set of municipalities introduced in the next section that there is substantial variation in the mean number of asylum seekers hosted across municipalities over the years 1995 to 2017. While the mean number is higher in relatively larger municipalities as indicated by the line reflecting the simple correlation, there are numerous municipalities that do not host any asylum seekers during our observation period. This holds in particular for municipalities with a population of less than 1,000 inhabitants. For these smaller municipalities some do not host asylum seekers – or only in recent years – probably because there has not been any need to do so or because suitable housing was not available. However, it was then during the Yugoslav Wars that such a need arose and many municipalities newly (or again) hosted asylum seekers.

To the extent that no hosting or later hosting of asylum seekers reflects local opposition, our empirical strategy introduced below will capture lower bound effects of citizens' reactions to the exposure to asylum seekers in their municipality. However, when approximating local opposition by the share of right-wing parties in the 1995 national elections, municipalities that subsequently did *not* host asylum seekers exhibited no more opposition than municipalities that did, actually even a bit less (see Table D.1 in the Appendix). This is indicative of local opposition not constituting a force large enough to disrupt the allocation process of higher-level authorities — even before the share of right-wing parties is considered in the econometric matching procedure.

In the case of other types of political factors affecting the allocation of asylum seekers within cantons, the direction of the bias would be harder to determine. This holds, for example, for the case that municipalities where the political orientation of the council is more aligned with the responsible cantonal governing council were allocated fewer asylum seekers. While we have no anecdotal evidence for such political considerations, treated municipalities might then react more strongly than the average municipality.

4. Data

4.1. Policy preferences

Policy preferences of citizens on the municipal level are captured based on their voting behavior in federal referendums and popular initiatives in Switzerland between 1987 and 2017. Data were obtained from the Federal Statistical Office (FSO). For

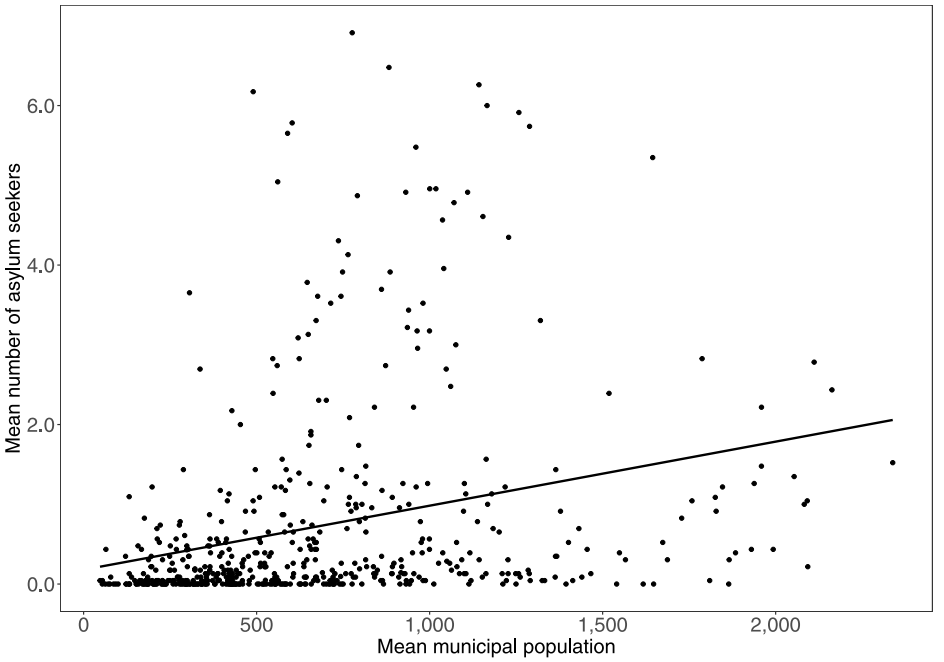

Fig. 2. Discretionary placement policy: Municipal population and the hosting of asylum seekers between 1995 and 2017
Note: The graph shows the mean municipal population and the mean number of hosted asylum seekers (N and F) per year for the 131 non-treated and 421 newly treated municipalities over the whole observation period 1995–2017. For the sake of readability, only 99% of the mean municipal population and the mean number of asylum seekers are shown. Slope of the regression line: 0.0015.
Data sources: State Secretariat for Migration and Federal Statistical Office.

the selection of migration-specific votes, we rely on the carefully selected and validated Dataset on Migration Referendums and Initiatives of Arrighi (2017). For our time period, this dataset involves 25 votes that are re-scaled so that a higher vote share reflects higher support for immigration or immigrants. The same approach is pursued for 40 votes reflecting preferences for redistribution. In Appendix B we provide a list for both sets of votes. For the measurement of voter turnout and the maintenance of the status quo, we consider all votes in the years 1987 to 2017. Support for the status quo can thus be simply measured by the share of "no" votes.

As an additional validation check on whether the sets of votes capture a common underlying issue-specific policy preference, we conducted Principal Components Analyses (PCA) (see Appendix C). It shows that all the votes in the two respective datasets meaningfully load on the first principal component.

4.2. Asylum seekers

Data on asylum seekers for the period 1995–2017 is from the administrative registry PETRA (the aliens register until 2009) and its successor registry STATPOP (registry of all residents from 2010 onwards).[10] Specifically, we derive the number of asylum seekers in the admission process (with an *N* permit) and that for the provisionally admitted foreigners (with an F permit) in every municipality as of December 31st every year. The individual-level data contain various characteristics of the asylum seekers such as their gender, age and country of origin, which we will exploit in the heterogeneity analyses (see also Appendix A). Information on acceptance rates and labor force participation rates available on an annual basis for every canton, every country of origin and also separately for both statuses (N and F) is then matched with the individual data.

Based on the registry data, we define our treatment, i.e., the new exposure to a group of asylum seekers in the municipality. This is possible for 461 municipalities that newly hosted asylum seekers in the period 1996–2017.[11] In addition, we have 292 municipalities that could have been treated but did not host any asylum seekers during this time period. These are all municipalities that are observed over the whole time period and were not involved in a merger. The new exposure to asylum seekers involves,

[10] This data was kindly provided by the SEM.

[11] It can be derived from the 1990 population census that some of these municipalities already accommodated asylum seekers before Switzerland experienced a large inflow in the mid-1990s. We consider this fact in a test of potential effect heterogeneity and do not observe systematic differences across groups of municipalities (see Appendix F.6).

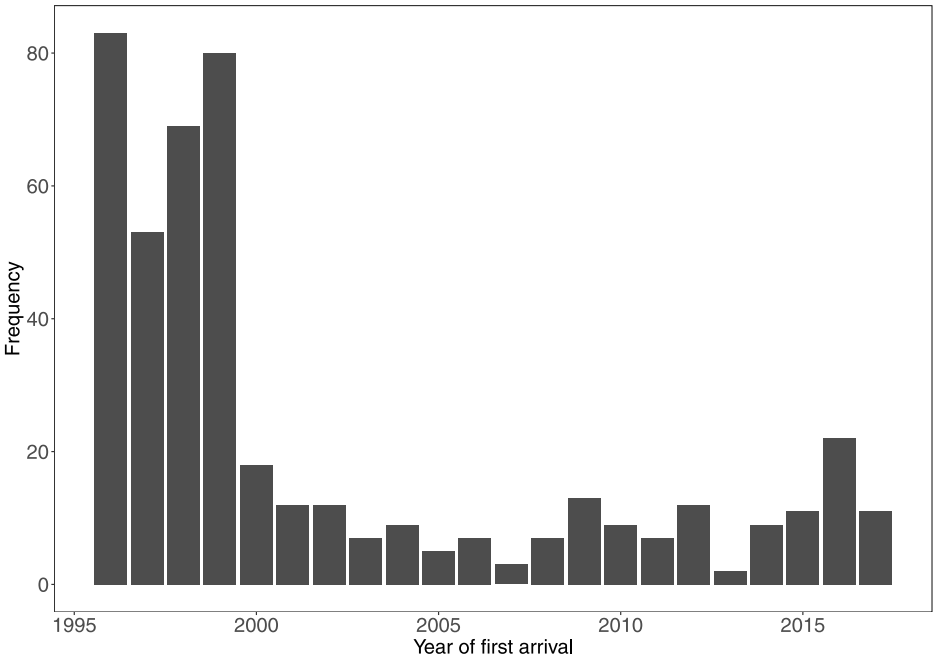

Fig. 3. Newly hosting asylum seekers
Note: The graph shows the number of municipalities that newly hosted asylum seekers in the years 1996–2017 (n = 461).
Data sources: State Secretariat for Migration.

on average, 3.2 individuals in municipalities that, on average, have 862 residents.[12] Fig. 3 shows that many of these incidences occurred in the years 1996 to 1999, which is a direct consequence of the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia.

The duration for which the 461 municipalities hosted asylum seekers varied from just one year to 6 years and more. We still code the treatment as in a regular event study design, i.e., after being newly treated, treatment continues indefinitely. This follows from the theoretical idea that the experience of asylum seekers in the municipality shifts otherwise rather stable policy preferences. It is thus the initial presence that brings about a broader discourse on immigration with a potentially long-lasting impact. Moreover, asylum seekers who are granted asylum get a B permit. These people are no longer observed in our data. However, they are still present in the municipality as long as they do not move away.

4.3. Municipality characteristics

For the propensity score matching below, we draw on administrative data at the municipality level from the FSO. This includes the average population size, the share of foreigners, the vote shares of political parties in the 1995 national elections, the vacancy rates of flats/houses, the share of people with tertiary education, the spatial structure of municipalities as classified by the FSO, and the main language spoken in a particular municipality.

5. Empirical strategy

5.1. Sample selection based on propensity score matching

A challenge for any analysis of the effect of the presence of asylum seekers on policy preferences is reverse causality. Not only do natives who are intolerant of migration move to places with a low share of migrants, but migrants themselves are more likely to move to places where people hold positive attitudes towards foreigners. Slotwinski and Stutzer (2019), for example, show that immigrants to Switzerland are less likely to move to municipalities that expressed strong reservations about foreigners in a national referendum. As a result, any straightforward regression estimates of the impact of foreigners on policy preferences would be biased.

We address the issue of selection by exploiting that asylum seekers are not free to choose where they reside within Switzerland. Instead, federal authorities centrally decide on the assignment of asylum seekers to cantons following a clear and simple allocation rule based on a canton's population size. Within cantons, it is again higher-level authorities that decide on the placement of asylum

[12] The 95th percentile of the 461 newly treated municipalities lies at hosting eight asylum seekers, which means the vast majority are treated by relatively small collective housing or private apartments and not large-scale asylum centers.

seekers across municipalities. However, the procedures for assignment differ and do not generally follow an exogenous rule. As pointed out in Section 3 above, whether any observed treatment effect for the treated municipalities is a lower bound depends on whether the assignment is primarily motivated by authorities trying to avoid anticipated opposition or them following some partisan considerations.

Moreover, as we want to focus on changes in policy preferences over time in response to the exposure to asylum seekers, trends in attitudes over time might be different in treated municipalities than in non-treated ones. In order to address this threat to identification, we select a sample of control municipalities that is most similar to the treated ones based on a propensity score matching approach that considers variables related to policy preferences as observed before any treatment occurs. A detailed description of the propensity score matching is offered in Appendix C. Based on this procedure, the final sample consists of 421 treated units and 131 (weighted) non-treated units.

Finally, we choose the municipalities as the spatial units in our analysis as they are the natural units within which social interactions with fellow residents as well as asylum seekers take place.[13]

5.2. Event study design

Following Schmidheiny and Siegloch (2020), we apply a standard event study design where each municipality $i = 1, \dots, 421$ is newly assigned asylum seekers at a unit-specific time e_i, i.e., treatment is staggered over the period 1996–2017 (see Section 4.2). We add 131 matched non-treated units to the sample because this puts much less weight on potentially problematic two-group/two-period difference-in-differences estimators that use the already treated municipalities as control units (Goodman-Bacon, 2018). While this set-up does not accommodate treatment effect heterogeneity (Sun and Abraham, 2021), treatment effects can be captured dynamically over time. In our baseline model, we estimate the following equation:

$$y_{it} = \mu_i + \theta_t + \sum_{j=\underline{j}}^{\overline{j}} \beta_j b_{it}^j + \epsilon_{it} \tag{1}$$

where y_{it} is one of the outcome measures for policy preferences in municipality i at time t. We observe the dependent variable y_{it} in a balanced panel on a yearly basis with $t = 1987, \dots, 2017$. On the right-hand side of the equation, we include a set of municipality (μ_i) and vote (θ_t) fixed effects in order to control for unobserved heterogeneity across these units. $\beta_j b_{it}^j$ is a treatment indicator for newly hosting asylum seekers, which is defined as:

$$b_{it}^j = \begin{cases} \sum_{s=-\infty}^{\underline{j}} d_{is} & \text{if } j = \underline{j} \\ d_{i,t-j} & \text{if } \underline{j} < j < \overline{j} \\ \sum_{s=\overline{j}}^{\infty} d_{is} & \text{if } j = \overline{j} \end{cases} \tag{2}$$

where d_{it} is an event dummy that takes the value 1 in the year of the treatment, e_i, and zero otherwise.

We allow the treatment effect to vary over a window ranging from $\underline{j} = -6$ years prior to the event to $\overline{j} = 7$ periods after the event. That is, we assume constant treatment effects outside of the effect window $[-6, 7]$. We deem this economically plausible for the following reasons: First, it is likely that municipalities' citizens learn about the assignment before asylum seekers actually arrive, for example, because some accommodation is prepared. However, it is unlikely that this has an effect on the outcome variables more than six years before any new arrivals, even with long planning horizons.

Second, while treatment effects are likely to vary after asylum seekers have been placed, for example, due to contact with the host municipality's citizens, changing numbers of asylum seekers, and/or the relocation of accepted refugees, we expect any remaining effect to stabilize after some years. Instead, new factors might come into play. For this reason, we also apply a further sample restriction and only consider observations of the dependent variable that lie no more than 12 years away from treatment. Furthermore, we bin observations at the endpoints $\underline{j}$ = -6 years prior to the event and $\overline{j} = 7$ periods after the event.

In order to gain precision, we group the event study coefficients in two-year groups: D_i^g is an indicator variable equal to 1 if municipality i is observed in event-year group g, where g is a category for $j \leq -6, -5 \leq j \leq -4, -3 \leq j \leq -2, -1 \leq j \leq 0, 1 \leq j \leq 2, 3 \leq j \leq 4, 5 \leq j \leq 6$, and $j \geq 7$. All the following tables and figures reflect this grouping of event study estimates.

Since treatment indicators b_{it}^j sum up to one over all j treated units (i.e., the binned event indicators b_{it}^j are perfectly multicollinear with the municipality-specific effect), at least one coefficient β_j needs to be fixed as a standardization. The standard procedure is to drop the pre-treatment indicator b_{it}^{-1} from the regression. In our case though, a change in resident citizens' attitudes towards foreigners might already be expected and reflected in voting results before the actual event takes place due to an announcement/anticipation of the treatment.[14] Following Borusyak and Jaravel (2017) (see also Malani and Reif, 2015), we chose a fixed number of periods for anticipation of the event, in our case one year, and set $\beta_{-3 \leq j \leq -2}$ as the omitted category, i.e., we standardize the grouped coefficient $\beta_{-3 \leq j \leq -2}$ from the pre-treatment indicator $b_{it}^{-3 \leq j \leq -2}$ to zero.

[13] As mentioned by David et al. (2018), the scale chosen is not innocuous when measuring the effects of contextual factors (i.e. characteristics of the locality in which individuals are embedded) on voters' policy preferences. Their results suggest that the most significant impacts are found on an intermediary scale, i.e., 5 to 15 km radius around one's residence or at the municipality level. The latter is also the scale that we use in our analysis. A lower scale was not available and also does not makes sense in our opinion: The majority of Swiss municipalities are relatively small and there are few large cities where asylum seekers are hosted without any form of interaction with the native population.

[14] For example, in order to organize and prepare accommodation, the municipal administration most likely had to be informed in advance by the cantonal authorities who allocate the asylum seekers. In local networks, information about the placement of asylum seekers is thereby likely to find its way to other inhabitants in the municipality.

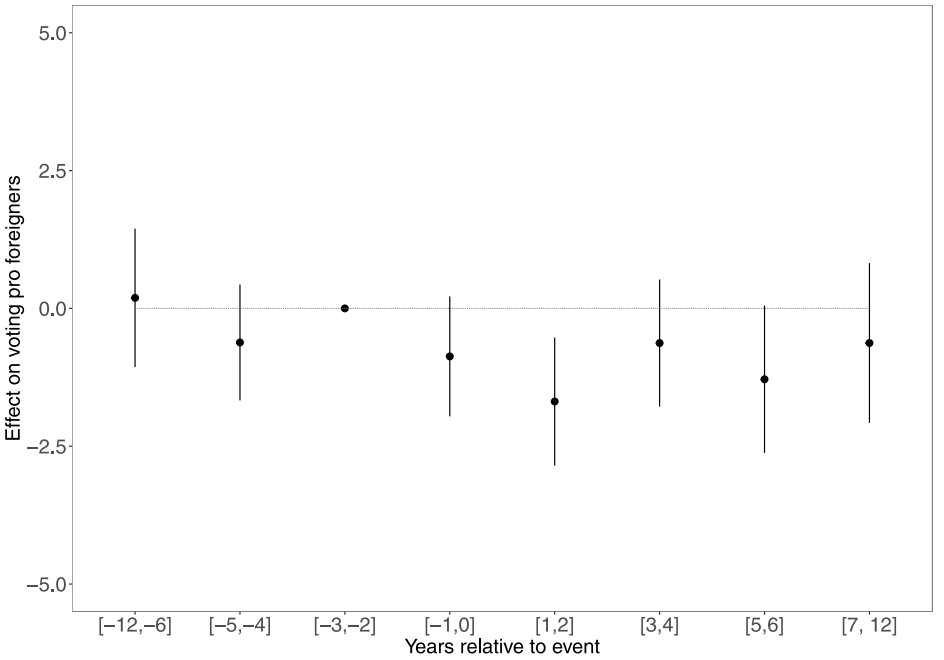

Fig. 4. Hosting asylum seekers and pro-foreigner voting
Note: The graph shows event time coefficients estimated for newly hosting asylum seekers. The effects are measured relative to event time t = [−3, −2], and thus the *y*-axis depicts the difference in the vote share relative to two to three years before treatment. The dependent variable is the vote share in favor of foreigners for legislation about immigration and immigrants. The 95% confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

6. Empirical results

6.1. Main results

Based on the sample of treated and control municipalities derived from the propensity score matching approach and a regression analysis relying on Eq. (1) with an event study design, we derive our main results for citizens' voting behavior in response to newly hosting asylum seekers. The full estimation outputs are shown in Appendix H. Here, we display the event study coefficients and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals based on the baseline model for our four main outcome variables.

Issue-specific vote outcomes — Fig. 4 shows the effect on pro-foreigner voting. In accordance with the graphic summary of standardized voting outcomes presented in Appendix E, citizens who newly experience the hosting of asylum seekers in their municipality of residence reveal slightly more restrictive policy preferences in national referendums and popular initiatives on immigration issues than before hosting.

However, there is no clear evidence for a persistent negative long-term effect on policy preferences regarding immigration and immigrants. While there is a negative point estimate for the time period around the initial placement (period during which the placement is potentially announced and the asylum seekers arrive), the small negative effect is not statistically significant ($p = 0.117$). The most pronounced negative effect is estimated for the two years following the initial placement with a drop in support for foreigners of around 1.7 percentage points ($p = 0.005$) at a mean level of support in the sample of 47.7%. This amounts to 9.2% of a standard deviation (of 18.4) in the sample.

The overall pattern is particularly pronounced in the sub-sample of votes related to asylum but much less so in votes more generally related to immigration and immigrants. In the latter case, the confidence intervals of the point estimates in the first few years cover both the zero and the values obtained in the estimations overall (see Figures F.25 and F.26 and the corresponding regression tables in the Appendix).

Fig. 5 shows how citizens react to newly hosting asylum seekers with regard to preferences for redistribution. The estimate indicates that the effect is relatively small and amounts to −1.1 percentage points ($p = 0.009$) in the first and second year after the placement of asylum seekers and -1.0 percentage points ($p = 0.032$) in the third and fourth year. These effect sizes amount to 5.8% and 5.2%, respectively, of a standard deviation (of 18.7) in the sample.

We cannot draw a strong conclusion regarding the persistence of the effect. While the negative point estimates still amount to about -1 percentage point for the periods five and more years after the exposure, they are not statistically precisely estimated.

General voter reactions — So far, we have implicitly assumed that any change in a municipality's share of citizens voting pro-foreigners or pro-redistribution is due to a change in individuals' policy preferences. There is, of course, a second channel through

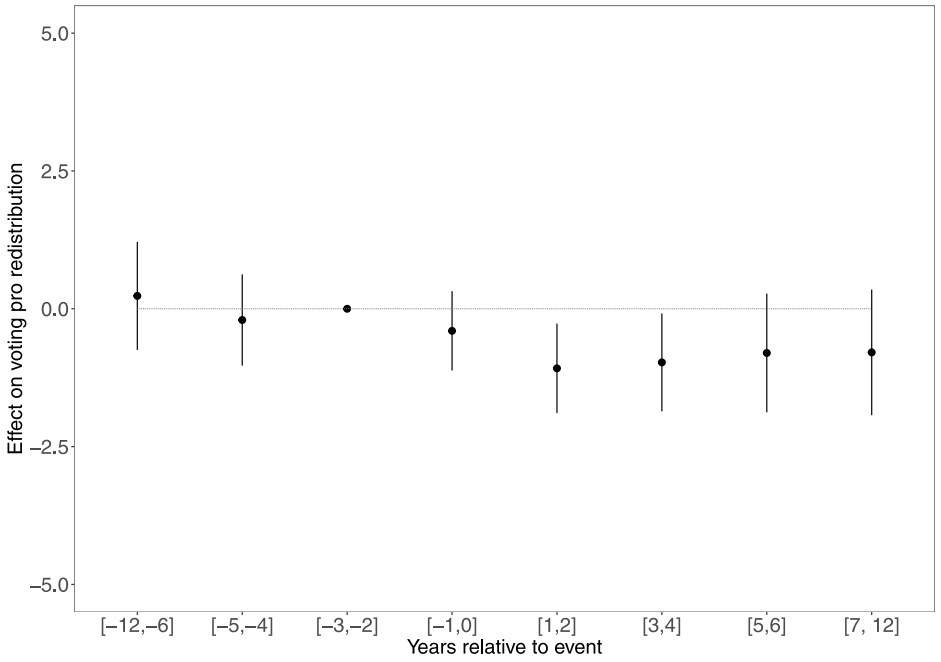

Fig. 5. Hosting asylum seekers and pro-redistribution voting
Note: The graph shows event time coefficients estimated for newly hosting asylum seekers. The effects are measured relative to event time t = [−3, −2], and thus the *y*-axis depicts the vote share difference relative to two to three years before treatment. The dependent variable is the vote share in favor of higher redistribution. The 95% confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

which the hosting of asylum seekers might affect voting outcomes, i.e., the prompting of citizens who would otherwise not care about voting to participate in referendums and initiatives. While we cannot directly test for a change in the composition of the active electorate due to the aggregate nature of the data, we can analyze whether or not the placement of asylum seekers increases participation. Thereby, being newly exposed to asylum seekers can have two different effects on mobilization: It can either lead to a higher or lower political participation in general, i.e., more or less people go to the ballot no matter the topic of the vote; or it only affects their participation in votes that concern the two specific issues.

In order to investigate these two channels, we analyze voter participation as the dependent variable and re-estimate the event study model specified above on the one hand with *all* votes within the observation window and on the other hand only with votes that refer to the two particular issues.

In Fig. 6, the event time coefficients marked with a dot indicate that citizens who newly experience the hosting of asylum seekers in their municipality of residence are, on average, not more likely to vote. This result is in line with that in Dustmann et al. (2019) for parliamentary (but not municipality) elections in Denmark and Moriconi et al. (2018) for European elections between 2007 and 2016. When the set of votes is restricted to the 25 and 40 votes on policies regarding immigration and redistribution, respectively, a slightly different picture emerges. The coefficients marked with a triangle referring to immigration-related issues suggest – if anything – small positive effects on voter turnout. The estimate for the event time [1,2] of 0.501 could account for about a third of the negative effect observed for voting pro foreigners if all of the additionally mobilized voters were to hold and express reservations towards immigrants and immigration. The respective estimate for the event time [1,2] when the set of votes is restricted to redistribution-related issues (squares) is rather small (−0.244). Such a demobilization effect cannot easily account for the effect on the vote outcome. In sum, we tentatively conclude that the political reaction to hosting asylum seekers is mainly due to a shift in individual policy preferences rather than a change in the number of people who are mobilized to vote.

Finally, if citizens become worried when asylum seekers are placed in their municipality, they might react by generally opposing legal change, which might be spuriously reflected in lower support of referendums on immigration and redistribution issues. Alternatively, such a reaction to reject change might also be issue-specific. Accordingly, we estimate the effect on citizens voting for the status quo only with votes on immigration and redistribution, respectively.

Fig. 7 shows the estimates for the full sample and the two sub-samples. When concentrating on the dots, i.e., the effect on citizens voting for the status quo, i.e., voting "no" in any referendum or initiative, the evidence clearly indicates that there is no effect in terms of a stronger resistance to change.

However, citizens might not oppose legal change on votes in general. In particular, they might actually vote in favor of policies regarding immigration because "maintaining" Switzerland with a low number of foreigners often means voting in support of a restrictive popular initiative. The estimates marked with a triangle in Fig. 7 indicate that voters indeed tend to vote less for the status quo following the two years after treatment when exclusively estimating the model with votes on immigration. However,

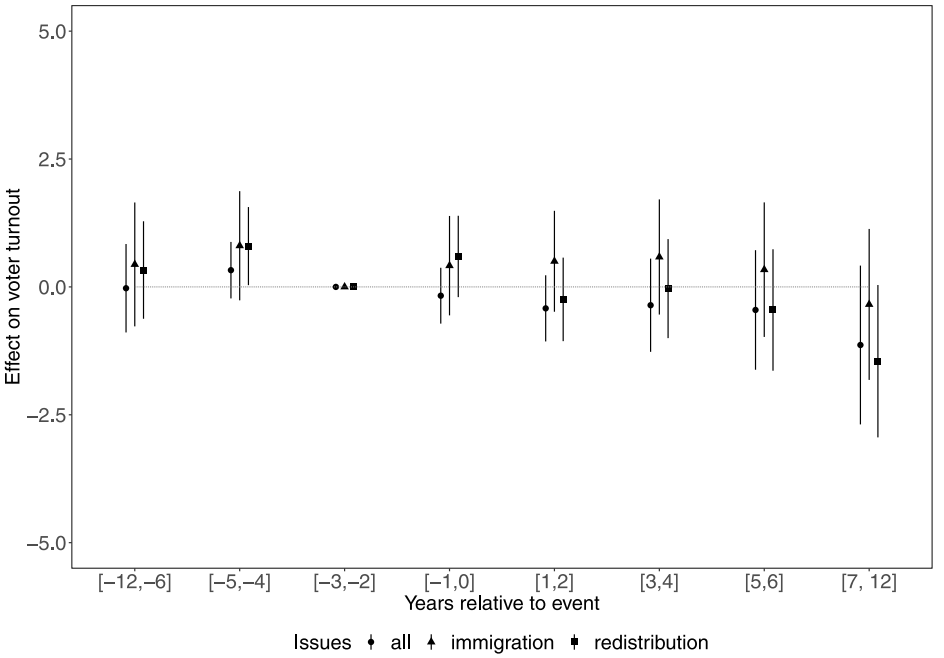

Fig. 6. Hosting asylum seekers and voter turnout
Note: The graph shows event time coefficients estimated of newly hosting asylum seekers with either all votes (dots) or issue-specific votes (immigration in triangles and redistribution in squares). The effects are measured relative to event time t = [−3, −2], and thus the *y*-axis depicts the vote share difference relative to two to three years before treatment. The dependent variable is voter turnout in referendums and popular initiatives. The 95% confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

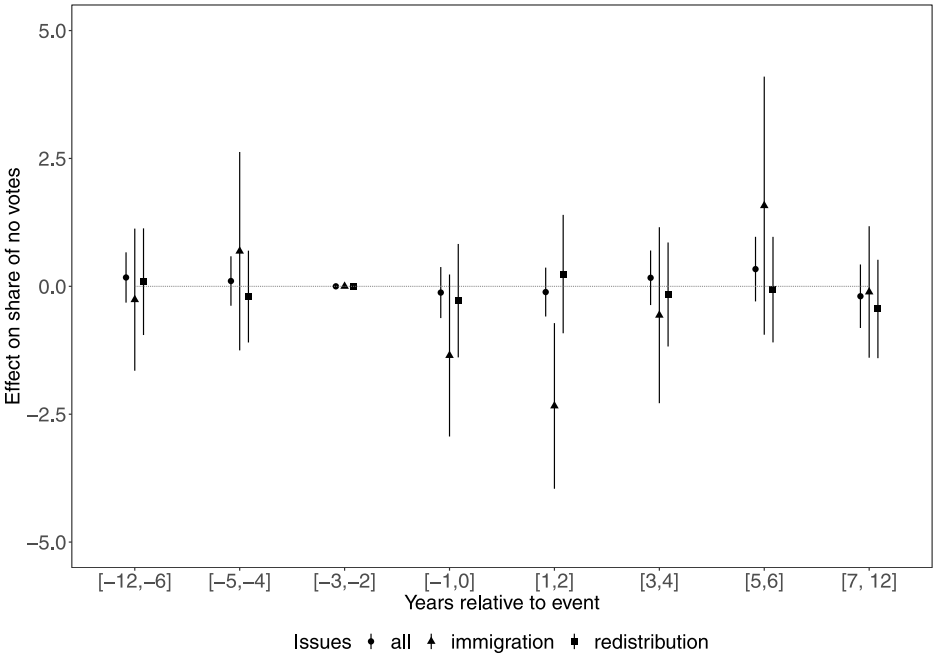

Fig. 7. Hosting asylum seekers and voting for the status quo
Note: The graph shows event time coefficients estimated for newly hosting asylum seekers with either all votes (dots) or issue-specific votes (immigration in triangles and redistribution in squares). The effects are measured relative to event time t = [−3, −2], and thus the *y*-axis depicts the vote share difference relative to two to three years before treatment. The dependent variable is the share of citizens voting "no" in referendums and initiatives. The 95% confidence intervals are based on standard errors clustered at the municipality level.

Table 1
Hosting asylum seekers and electoral outcomes over a long period (not considering dynamics)

	Dependent variable:			
	Pro foreigners (1)	Pro redistribution (2)	Turnout (3)	Status quo (4)
Pre-reference	−0.012	0.040	0.099	0.131
	(0.500)	(0.376)	(0.351)	(0.225)
Post-reference	−0.987**	−0.786**	−0.472	−0.037
	(0.465)	(0.383)	(0.406)	(0.231)
Mean dep. var.	47.657	44.130	45.011	53.190
Observations	10,701	18,142	117,665	117,665
R^2	0.807	0.726	0.676	0.730

Notes: The table shows grouped coefficients estimated for newly hosting asylum seekers, pooling all observations before $j = -3$ years prior to the event into one dummy and all observations after $j = -2$ periods after the event in another dummy. The effects are measured relative to the reference period t=[−3,−2], and thus the latter has been standardized. The dependent variables are the four main variables as defined in the data section. The standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$.

effects turn positive five to six years after hosting asylum seekers and are generally imprecisely estimated.[15] For the sub-sample of votes on redistribution, no systematic pattern is observed. The corresponding estimates are marked with a square in Fig. 7.

In preparation of the heterogeneity analysis, Table 1 provides a rough summary of the results for the four main outcome variables when the estimation equation just includes one dummy variable capturing all periods before the reference period and one dummy capturing all periods after the reference period. We thus neglect the dynamics and average over generally small and unsystematic anticipation/announcement effects, systematic short-term effects and imprecisely measured smaller medium- to long-term effects. With this strategy the overall effect of newly hosting asylum seekers is negative for both our two main dependent variables measuring preferences regarding immigration and redistribution, and statistically significant. For our two supplementary dependent variables measuring voter participation and voting "no", we see no overall effect as suggested also by the dynamic results. The summary estimates thus still indicate the direction of citizens' reaction to newly hosting asylum seekers and its rough magnitude over a longer period. This simple metric allows us to easily describe differential reactions across municipalities in the following section.

6.2. Effect heterogeneity

Political reactions to the hosting of asylum seekers likely depend on the context. We study a series of contextual factors that should help to interpret the general effects presented above. In particular, we consider the linguistic proximity of asylum seekers, their acceptance rates, their labor force participation, but also treatment intensity, treatment duration, time of placement, region of origin and prior local experience with asylum seekers. For the heterogeneity analyses, we interact the event study indicators with some characteristic of the treated municipalities' asylum population, or split the sample into sub-samples for specific circumstances. Graphical results and the corresponding regression tables for the detailed results with multiple event indicators are shown in Sections F and H in the Appendix. Table 2 offers a complementary summary based on simple regression results that condensate the effect heterogeneity in just four estimated coefficients including one time indicator capturing the periods before the reference period and one time indicator capturing the periods after the reference period for both groups each. The summary for the baseline is reported at the top of the table in row (1).

Linguistic proximity — Imagine that voters react to the foreignness of asylum seekers. Citizens from a French-speaking municipality might then, for example, find it easier to interact with asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo since they speak the same language. We create a binary variable that denotes those municipalities whose asylum seekers have, on average, either a lower or higher linguistic proximity at treatment start. We represent those above the median as 1 and the rest as 0. In order to make that distinction, we draw on the common language index created by Melitz and Toubal (2014). The results in row (2) in Table 2 suggest that the negative effect on pro-foreigner political attitudes in the post-reference period is more pronounced for linguistically more distant asylum seekers. For political attitudes on redistribution, we do not observe a more pronounced reaction to linguistically more distant asylum seekers, yet, if at all, rather the opposite.

Acceptance rates of asylum applications — If citizens consider asylum seekers with a higher acceptance rate of their applications as more deserving, they might react less to their presence in the municipality. We implement this differentiation with an interaction term denoting those municipalities whose asylum seekers have, on average, an acceptance rate at treatment start above the median as 1 and the rest as 0. Row (3) in Table 2 provides suggestive evidence for this expected pattern, which seems more pronounced both in popular votes on immigration issues and on redistribution issues.

Labor force participation — Asylum seekers who are integrated into the labor market might be considered less likely to be a fiscal or criminal threat. Accordingly, asylum seekers from, for example, Sri Lanka with comparatively high labor force participation

[15] Analyzing all but those votes on immigration leads to precisely estimated effects that are close to zero (see Figure G.4 in the Appendix), corroborating the evidence found in the main analysis.

Table 2
Hosting asylum seekers and electoral outcomes: Summary results for the heterogeneity analyses

		Pro foreigners		*Pro redistribution*	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post
(1) Baseline		−0.013	−0.986**	0.040	−0.786**
		(0.500)	0.465)	(0.376)	(0.382)
(2) Linguistic proximity	Low	−0.417	−1.523**	0.265	−0.670
		(0.658)	(0.635)	(0.548)	(0.518)
	High	0.497	−0.293	−0.213	−0.905*
		(0.775)	(0.623)	(0.537)	(0.507)
(3) Acceptance rate	Low	−0.294	−1.643**	−0.089	−1.182**
		(0.847)	(0.705)	(0.556)	(0.521)
	High	0.164	−0.391	0.063	−0.374
		(0.600)	(0.577)	(0.533)	(0.518)
(4) Labor force participation	Low	0.096	−1.281**	0.237	−0.965*
		(0.731)	(0.655)	(0.595)	(0.600)
	High	−0.156	−0.708	−0.176	−0.605
		(0.657)	(0.595)	(0.492)	(0.429)
(5) Treatment intensity	Low	−0.865	−0.354	−0.297	−0.234
		(0.581)	(0.515)	(0.479)	(0.480)
	High	0.955	−1.701**	0.364	−1.375**
		(0.828)	(0.747)	(0.612)	(0.542)
(6) Treatment duration	Short	−0.109	−0.608	0.095	−0.504
		(0.639)	(0.569)	(0.490)	(0.469)
	Long	0.522	−1.911**	0.127	−1.423**
		(0.859)	(0.777)	(0.637)	(0.630)
(7) Time of placement	Early	−0.567	−1.534**	0.072	−0.857**
		(0.700)	(0.624)	(0.474)	(0.433)
	Late	0.985	0.100	0.072	−0.478
		(0.799)	(0.749)	(0.789)	(0.822)
(8) Region of origin	Balkans	−0.095	−0.076	−0.300	−0.406
		(0.901)	(0.767)	(0.576)	(0.598)
	Non-Balkans	0.030	−1.570***	0.196	−0.893**
		(0.567)	(0.557)	(0.471)	(0.450)
(9) Prior local experience	No	0.349	−0.900	0.433	−1.243**
		(0.801)	(0.738)	(0.620)	(0.504)
	Yes	−0.201	−1.030*	−0.177	−0.588
		(0.661)	(0.590)	(0.502)	(0.516)

Notes: The coefficients of the two categories present the full effect of the respective category on the outcome variable with the asterisk giving probabilities for the null hypothesis of the respective category compared to the non-treated municipalities. The standard errors are clustered at the municipality level. $^{*}p < 0.1$; $^{**}p < 0.05$; $^{***}p < 0.01$.

rates would evoke less negative (or even positive) reactions with regard to citizen's policy preferences, especially in the domain of redistribution as they could be seen as actively contributing to the social insurance system. We consider information on asylum seekers' labor force participation rate on an annual basis separately for every canton and for every country of origin as well as for both immigration statuses (N and F). We denote those municipalities whose asylum seekers have, on average, a labor force participation rate above the median at treatment start, as "high" (and coded 1) and the rest as "low" (and coded 0). Row (4) in Table 2 reveals that asylum seekers whose labor force participation rate is comparatively higher indeed seem to provoke less of a negative reaction with regard to policy preferences for immigration and redistribution over time.

Treatment intensity — The placement of asylum seekers in our sample refers to a relatively mild exposure (as discussed in Section 4.2). Small differences in the number of assigned asylum seekers relative to a municipality's population size might thus give rise to substantive variation in treatment intensity. We create another set of interaction terms and denote municipalities whose relative share of asylum seekers at treatment start lies above the median as 1 and the rest as 0. Row (5) in Table 2 suggests that effects are indeed driven by municipalities with a relatively more intense treatment and Figures F.9 and F.10in the Appendix suggest that this difference applies throughout the short and long term.

Treatment duration — Our empirical strategy focuses on the initial new exposure to asylum seekers of a municipality. While we do not know for how long these people stay in a municipality (see Section 4.2), we can differentiate between municipalities that continuously hosted asylum seekers for a shorter or longer time period. Specifically, we undertake an additional test considering an interaction term for whether a municipality hosted asylum seekers for at least four years. The results in row (6) in Table 2 and the corresponding tables in the Appendix suggest, on average, a more pronounced pattern in the medium- and long-term when municipalities non-stop hosted asylum seekers for a longer period with regard to both policy preferences.

Time of placement — More than half of the 461 municipalities in the treatment group newly received asylum seekers in the four years just before the turn of the century (see Fig. 3 above). This was mainly a consequence of the conflicts in the Balkans and in Sri

Lanka, which drove the total number of asylum applications to an all-time high in the years 1998 and 1999 (not even surpassed by the influx of people in 2015). We explore whether the impact on policy preferences was different during the first half compared to the second half of our study period. Accordingly, we split the sample in those 355 municipalities that were treated during the years 1996 to 2006 and separate them from the 106 municipalities that were treated during the years 2007 to 2017. We then again match the two sets of treated municipalities with the 292 non-treated municipalities and analyze these two samples separately. Row (7) in Table 2 and Figures F.17 and F.18 in the Appendix show that the experiences during the early period (1996–2006) seems to drive the effects of both main outcomes: zero as well as positive effects for at least six years following the exposure to asylum seekers can be statistically rejected with high probability. One reason for these relatively large effects might be that the corresponding municipalities were located in cantons where simultaneously also relatively many other municipalities were newly treated. This might have led to a more intensive debate about the issue in the regional media. For the late period (2007–2017) based on fewer treated municipalities, the effects seem – if anything – slightly positive for pro-foreigner voting (though the statistical significance is rather low) and no clear pattern is observable regarding policy preferences pro-redistribution (see Figures F.19 and F.20 in the Appendix).

Region of origin — Asylum seekers from the Balkans constitute by far the largest group hosted in the municipalities in our sample (as well as in Switzerland overall, see Figure A.2). Due to the ending of the Yugoslav wars they are mainly (but not exclusively) represented in the early treatment sample (1996–2006). Municipalities with asylum seekers from the Balkans might thus drive the negative reactions of citizens with regard to policy preferences. In order to further explore this descriptively, we split the sample into those 218 municipalities that hosted asylum seekers from the Balkans at treatment start and the 243 municipalities that did not do so. We also performed an analysis with the 195 municipalities that *exclusively* hosted asylum seekers from the Balkans at treatment start with very similar results. We again match the two samples with municipalities in the control group, and analyze them separately. Row (8) in Table 2 and Figures F.21 and F.23 in the Appendix show that the negative point estimates for voting pro-foreigners for municipalities hosting asylum seekers from the Balkans at treatment start are only statistically significantly different from zero in the two years following treatment, whereas for the other municipalities this is the case for all six years following treatment. Regarding the negative effects on voting pro-redistribution, the evidence suggests that both groups of municipalities contribute to the drop in support for redistribution (see Figures F.22 and F.24 in the Appendix).

Together, the results for the subset analyses (7) and (8) suggest that the municipalities treated early indeed drive the effects with regard to citizens' policy preferences. Asylum seekers from the Balkans, who are over-represented in the early sample, thereby seem particularly relevant for the negative effect on policy preferences pro-redistribution (see Figure F.28 in the Appendix). However, people from the Balkans seem not to drive the negative effect on pro-foreigner policy preferences (see Figure F.21 in the Appendix). Rather, non-Balkan people, who also constitute a non-negligible group in the sample for the early period, seem to substantially contribute to this latter effect.

Prior asylum experience — As mentioned in Section 4.2, some of the municipalities that were newly treated during our observation period had already hosted asylum seekers in 1990. Having had prior experience with asylum seekers locally might lead to different reactions compared to being treated for the first time. We thus distinguish the two corresponding groups of municipalities with another set of interaction terms. Row (9) in Table 2 suggests that for those municipalities that did not host asylum seekers in 1990, the observed effect of newly hosting asylum seekers during our main study period is similar to the one for municipalities that did host regarding the political preferences pro foreigners (with slightly larger standard errors for the former estimate). However, for political preferences pro redistribution, municipalities newly exposed and potentially for the first time seem to react and reduce support more strongly.[16]

7. Conclusion

Citizens' decisions at the ballot box on concrete legal changes or policy measures are the most direct manifestation of political preferences tied to substantive consequences. We study whether the policy preferences expressed in two important areas of politics, namely immigration and welfare, are in any way systematically related to citizens' local exposure to asylum seekers. On the one hand, based on incorrect beliefs about the presence of asylum seekers or prejudices, policy preferences on immigration might well be unrelated to the actual confrontation with asylum seekers in people's vicinity. On the other hand, locally concentrated strong reactions might be a major driver of policy demand.

Our study based on citizens' decisions in 25 immigration-related votes and 40 welfare-related votes in Switzerland over the period 1987–2017 reveals that reactions to the hosting of asylum seekers are present but are rather moderate. The reaction of locally affected citizens is thus a relevant mechanism via which policy demand in these areas is determined. In it, asylum seekers seem to be perceived as a threat. Citizens in municipalities that newly host asylum seekers reduce their support for pro-immigration popular votes within the first six years by around 1.2 percentage points. Moreover, electoral support in pro-redistribution votes is reduced by around 0.9 percentage points within the same period. Our statistical power is too weak to draw strong conclusions about the persistence of these effects seven and more years after the initial exposure to asylum seekers. As there is little reaction in

[16] In two supplementary tests, we also considered the information about the prior hosting of asylum seekers in the analyses for turnout and status quo voting. The corresponding results are presented in Tables H.9 and H.10 in the Appendix. For voter turnout, an ex-post rationalization of the pattern suggests some voter alienation after having being newly exposed to asylum seekers (rather than a general mobilization effect) for those municipalities that did not host asylum seekers in 1990. For status quo voting, a temporary increase in the general propensity to vote "no" is observed in those municipalities that are not only newly treated but likely also did not have asylum seekers in the years before, at least not in the census year 1990.

turnout in response to the hosting of asylum seekers, we interpret the effects to be actual changes in policy preferences rather than a reflection of differential mobilization. Moreover, the changes in policy preferences are issue-specific and do not reflect a general resistance to change (or a preference for the status quo) in response to the experience with asylum seekers.

While the analysis relies on a subset of Swiss municipalities that either experienced the hosting of asylum seekers relatively late or not at all (by 2017), we expect the results to be externally valid for Switzerland as a whole. Specifically, we observe that the partisan preferences in the municipalities in the sample are rather similar to those in the rest of Switzerland, i.e., the share of votes for parties on the political right in the national elections in 1995 was 0.26 for the sample and 0.29 for the non-sample municipalities.

While there is a policy reaction that is tied to the local exposure to asylum seekers in citizens' municipalities, we consider this reaction to be relatively small (compared, for example, to the reactions in Greece mentioned above). We can only speculate on the contextual factors that moderate citizens' reactions. The presence of asylum seekers reflects the outcome of an orderly process that ensures a proportional allocation of them across cantons and thus an equal contribution to this joint responsibility (an allocation that is widely supported in Europe according to Bansak et al., 2017). It remains an open question as to whether the benefits of decentralized allocation – in the form of a shared responsibility that potentially strengthens national cohesion – outweigh its potential drawbacks — in the form of asylum seekers being placed in regions where it is difficult for them to benefit from ethnic networks and relatively easier access to the labor market.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Our analysis is partly based on proprietary data of the Swiss Federal Statistical Office in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Office for Migration and can thus not be posted on the EJPE's website.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary material related to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2021.102130.

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