Does Asylum Seeker Immigration Increase Support for the Far Right? Evidence from England and Wales, 2000-2015

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Abstract

What effect does the influx of asylum seekers have on the electoral support of the far right? This paper answers this question by examining changes in support for far right parties in response to the British government's relocation of asylum seekers across England and Wales from 2000 to 2015. Relying primarily on a difference-in-differences empirical strategy, our main finding is that an increase in the number of asylum seekers dispersed to a local authority is associated with an increase in the vote share of parties of the far right. Further tests indicate that the effect is due both to the far right contesting more seats in those localities receiving asylum seekers and to higher levels of support it receives in those areas where it is present. We find no evidence that the effect is conditional on local socioeconomic or demographic contexts or that more moderate right-leaning parties gain support in response to asylum seeker inflows.

1 Introduction

Europe is currently experiencing its most severe refugee crisis since the Second World War, with around 1.3 million immigrants seeking asylum in European Union states in each of 2015 and 2016. This massive inflow of asylum seekers comes at a time when far right parties have already made inroads into the dominance of moderate mainstream parties across the continent. Anti-immigrant sentiment is correlated with support for the far right (Van der Brug and Fennema, 2003; Cutts et al., 2011; Lubbers et al., 2002), but does the actual inflow of asylum seekers, in spite of their temporary residential status and relatively small numbers relative to immigrants as a whole, increase electoral support for far right parties?[1]

To date, there has been little research on the effects of asylum seeker inflows on support for the far right, while research on immigration in general has yielded mixed results. A substantial body of research has found that those countries and regions receiving the highest number of immigrants and with the highest immigrant populations display greater support for the far right (Arzheimer, 2009; Golder, 2003; Kitschelt and McGann, 1995; Knigge, 1998; Semyonov, Raijman, and Gorodzeisky, 2006). However, other research at the cross–national (Hjerm, 2007; Stockemer, 2015; Van der Brug et al., 2005) and subnational levels (Stockemer and Lamontagne, 2014; McLaren, 2003; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Scheve and Slaughter, 2001) finds no evidence of a relationship between actual immigration levels and anti-immigrant attitudes or political behavior. In the United Kingdom, on the one hand, Ford and Goodwin (2010) find that immigration levels positively contribute to the far right's electoral success, while on the other, Goodwin and Cutts (2013) find a negative correlation between immigration and far right support. Researchers further disagree over whether gains in response to immigration are experienced by all parties on the right or just those on the

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[1]Refugees and asylum seekers are a subset of all immigrants. A refugee is any person who is outside of the country of his nationality and is unable or unwilling to return for fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, nationality or political affiliation; an asylum seeker is a person who claims to be at risk of persecution but has not yet been determined to be a refugee. While refugees are brought to destination countries with UN, national government, and NGO assistance, asylum seekers arrive in destination countries on their own.

extreme end, and whether the effects are dependent on preexisting socioeconomic and sociodemographic conditions (Otto and Steinhardt, 2014; Dustmann et al., 2016; Arzheimer, 2013; Mair, 2001).

Critically, much of the existing published research misidentifies the true effect of all types of immigration – including that of asylum seekers – because migration paths are typically endogenous to the politics of receiving countries or subnational units (Dustmann and Preston, 2001; Anderson, 2003; Neumayer, 2004). That is, asylum seekers are likely to go to the places where they are most accepted (Transatlantic Trends, 2014), thus leading to the potential underestimation of the effect of immigration on support for the far right. A number of recent papers have sought to deal with this endogeneity bias by instrumenting for immigration with prior immigrant stocks (Halla et al., 2013; Otto and Steinhardt, 2014) or with the availability of low-cost housing (Harmon, 2012; Steinmayr, 2016). Some of this research has found a positive effect of immigration on support for the far right (Halla et al., 2013; Otto and Steinhardt, 2014; Harmon, 2012), while other research has found no such effect (Steinmayr, 2016). Two further problems exist, however. First, because the instruments used are static, the problem of confounding due to omitted time-varying variables persists; second, it is impossible to exclude alternative pathways through which instruments such as the availability of social housing would plausibly be related to the outcome of far right support. In short we still don't know whether the actual influx of refugees – or of those seeking refugee status – increases support for the far right.

We tackle this question by examining changes in subnational support for far right parties in England and Wales in response to a distinctive policy intervention governing the immigration of asylum seekers. Due to growing numbers of immigrants in the late 1990s and their concentration in London and the Southeast, the Labour government passed the Immigration and Asylum Act (1999), which required that new asylum seekers be dispersed to local authorities in other parts of the country if they wished to receive housing and benefits while their claims were being processed (Robinson, Andersson, and Musterd, 2003). The fact

that location decisions were exogenous to the preferences of asylum seekers allows for an unusually precise identification of the effects of refugee inflows on electoral support for the far right.

Relying primarily on a difference-in-differences empirical strategy to control for unobserved variation between local authorities and over time, we find that an increase in the number of asylum seekers dispersed to a local authority is associated with a small but significant increase in the vote share of the British National Party (BNP) and other parties of the far right. A selection model indicates that the effect is due both to the far right contesting more seats in those localities receiving asylum seekers and to higher levels of support in those areas where the far right is present. In contrast to recent research (Otto and Steinhardt, 2014; Dustmann et al., 2016), we find no evidence of an effect on the vote share of conservative or merely Eurosceptic right-leaning parties. We also find that the effect is not conditional on recipient area characteristics.

2 Background: The United Kingdom's Asylum Seeker Dispersal Program

Asylum seekers represent a significant (minority) category of immigrant to the United Kingdom. The number of asylum applications has grown dramatically since the late 1980s. There were just 5,000 applications for asylum in 1988, but this figure rose to over 15,000 in 1989, 30,000 in 1990, and eventually peaked at 84,132 in 2002 (excluding dependents) (Dancygier, 2007). In 2015, there were 277,000 non-EU immigrants to the United Kingdom, 32,414 of whom were asylum seekers. Only a minority of asylum seekers are ultimately granted permission to stay; the rest are repatriated.

The dispersal program was introduced by Labour under Section 95 of the Immigration Act (1999). The policy was put into operation in April 2000 under the control of the Home

Office's newly formed National Asylum Support Service (NASS), and the first asylum seekers were dispersed in 2001. Overall, of the 473 local authorities that existed in England and Wales between 2001 and 2015, 138 had some asylum seekers provided with accommodation by NASS.[2] The cities of Birmingham (15,380), Liverpool (11,728), Leeds (10,781), Manchester (9,946), and Newcastle (8,490) were the most common destinations.[3]

From an analytical perspective, this program has a particularly useful design in that asylum seekers had no choice where they would be located except in instances of family reunification (which were a fraction of total asylum seekers and which we exclude from the analysis). Unlike many studies of the political effects of immigration, the location decision is thus independent of the preferences of immigrants themselves. The dispersal program thus operates as a policy shock, exposing some local authorities to the 'treatment' of asylum seeker dispersal, while leaving others 'untreated'.

Table 1: Summary statistics by recipient status

	Recipients (Mean)	Non-recipients (Mean)	T-test (Diff)	P-value (Diff)
Unemployment	0.063	0.051	8.875	0.000
Violent Crime	0.044	0.031	14.791	0.000
White UK PC 2001	0.857	0.925	-11.597	0.000
Max BNP Vote Share Pre 1999	0.0003	0.0001	2.265	0.024
Mean BNP share pre-1999	0.001	0.0003	2.743	0.006

However, dispersal itself was not fully randomized. Previous research has argued that dispersal was driven primarily by the availability of temporary accommodation or 'bedspaces', which were typically found in more economically disadvantaged areas (Hynes, 2006). In addition, poorer local authorities were motivated to participate in the program as a way

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[2] We exclude Scotland because of the combination of its substantially different political landscape and the concentration of all Scotland-bound asylum seekers in the single city of Glasgow, which make identification of a causal effect problematic.

[3] These figures are for flows of asylum seekers dispersed, not for stocks of asylum seekers resident at any one time in a given local authority.

to attract central funds (Burnett). As a result, asylum seekers came to be concentrated in relatively deprived areas of the United Kingdom (Anie et al.; Phillimore and Goodson, 2006). This was especially the case in the early years of the program. In 2001, 80 percent of dispersals went to so-called 'multiply deprived' areas, while in 2004, 70 percent were still going to such areas.[4] We find that local authorities receiving asylum seekers tended to have higher unemployment, higher levels of violent crime, to be more ethnically diverse (c.f. Stewart, 2011), and to have greater prior support for the BNP than those not receiving asylum seekers (see Table 1).

Because of the underlying differences in the local authorities receiving asylum seekers, our primary empirical strategy is a difference-in-differences model. This model calculates the effect of a treatment on an outcome by comparing the average change over time in the outcome variable for the treatment group with that of the control group. Our difference-in-differences model allows us to control for any potential confounders which are invariant within local authorities over time or which might result from time specific shocks at the national level. For instance, the local authority fixed effects allow us to rule out the possibility that our results are driven by the fact that asylum seekers tended to go to authorities with a prior history of deindustrialization and social deprivation, while the year fixed effects rule out the possibility that our results could be affected by a decline in the Labour government's popularity following the Iraq War or the global financial crisis.

Our strategy does rely, however, on the assumption that asylum seeker dispersals are uncorrelated with time and location specific shocks which may also have affected the BNP's vote share. Even though the dispersal program removed the choice of location from the asylum seekers themselves, the Home Office retained some discretion in where it would disperse asylum seekers, while local authorities could opt out of the program, leading to the possibility that local area- and year-specific shocks could have impacted both dispersal and

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[4]The Multiple Deprivation Index is a qualitative measure of socioeconomic deprivation composed of seven indicators: income, employment, health and disability, education and training, housing and services, crime, and living environment.

voting behavior. While cross-sectional variation in socioeconomic conditions between local authorities is dealt with by the inclusion of local authority fixed effects, we need to take into account the possible effect of time-varying conditions within local authorities.

First, both local authorities' decisions to participate in the dispersal program and vote choice could be affected by local economic conditions, such as a localized increase in unemployment. Second, asylum seeker dispersal is correlated with incidents of verbal harassment, racial harassment, and physical assault of asylum seekers at the local level (Anie et al.). Some 2,000 racist attacks against asylum seekers had been reported to the Home Office by 2002 (Burnett). Police forces responded by requesting that the Home Office suspend dispersals to some local authorities (Casciani, 2004). Violent crime could influence not just asylum seeker dispsersal, but also support for a party focused on law and order issues.

To address these concerns we adopt four approaches that are described further in sections 4 and 5.2. First, in our main models we include time-varying location-specific controls for unemployment and violent crime. Second, we run additional models in which we interact a linear time trend and location dummies (Angrist and Pischke, 2015). Third, we examine whether electoral outcomes in any election year affect asylum seeker allocation to a particular local authority. Fourth, following (Imbens, 2003), we run additional sensitivity analyses to estimate the magnitude that an omitted confounding variable would have to take on to undermine the results.

In addition, the validity of the difference-in-differences strategy depends on the assumption that there is no difference in *trends* in the outcome of interest between treated and untreated units prior to the beginning of the treatment. As Table 1 shows, the pre-2000 BNP vote share has a significant and positive association with whether a local authority later received asylum seekers. However, while the baseline of BNP support differs, as Figure 1 shows, Section 95 participating local authorities were subject to the same trend in BNP vote share prior to the program as non-participating local authorities. To test this assumption formally,

Figure 1: Pre-dispersal trend in BNP share by recipient and non-recipient local authorities
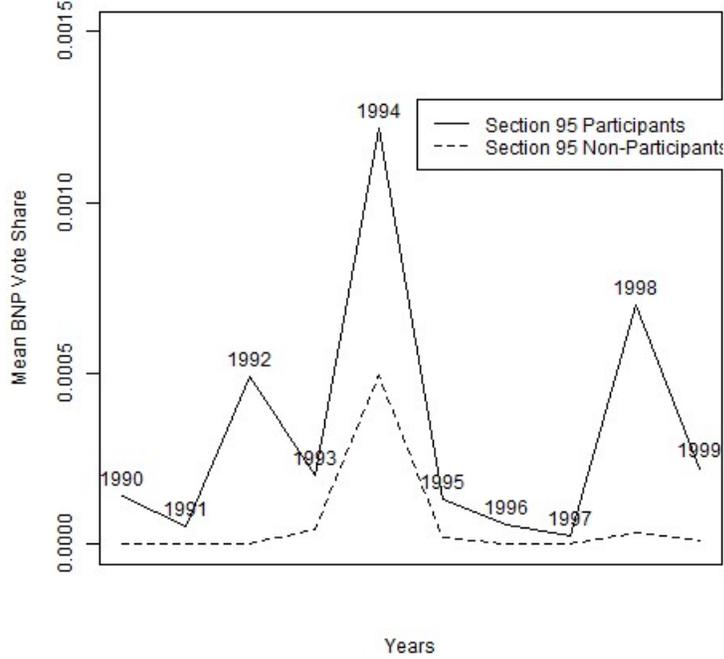
we regressed the BNP vote share on an interaction between participation in the dispersal program and year, and found it to be insignificant (see Table A1 in Appendix A). That is, the prior *trend* in BNP vote share is not statistically distinguishable between 'treated' and 'untreated' units. As described in section 5.1, we also run additional models in which we measure the outcome as the difference between the BNP vote share and is pre-dispersal maximum.

The main model takes the form:

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \delta_{dd} Dispersed\ PC_{it} + \sum_{k=Allerdale}^{York} \gamma_k Authority_{ki} + \sum_{j=2000}^{2015} \kappa_j Year_{jt} + \beta x_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$$

Where *Dispersed PC* is asylum seekers in dispersed accomodation as a proportion of the working age population; y_{it} is the BNP's/ far right's vote share in local authority i in year t; γ_k and κ_j are the coefficients on local authority and year dummies respectively; x_{it} is a vector of controls comprising lagged unemployment and lagged violent crime per capita;

7

and the quantity of interest is the causal effect of dispersals on the vote share of the BNP, and far right parties δ_{dd}.

3   Data

We collected data from the United Kingdom Home Office on the dispersal of asylum seekers from 2000 to 2015. We use the number of asylum seekers dispersed per annum as a proportion of the adult population in local authority as our main independent variable (*Asylum PC*). The majority of asylum seekers whose applications are approved continue to live in the location to which they were originally dispersed (Stewart, 2011). However, because a majority of asylum applications are denied and because some approved asylum seekers do move away, the number of asylum seekers dispersed in a given year is preferable to the total number of asylum seekers claiming support in a local authority (Bell et al., 2012). In other words, we use a flow measure rather than a stock measure of asylum seekers. In our main models, the dispersal measurement is proportional to the local population size. We use the estimate of the population at the local authority level from the Labour Force Survey rather than population statistics from the 2001 census, as the latter do not sufficiently incorporate the substantial population movements that occur between census periods.

The main dependent variable is the vote share of the BNP (*BNP share*) in local authority elections. The BNP is Britain's main far right party (Goodwin, 2011). There is no universally agreed upon definition of the *far right* or on the criteria by which parties can be categorized as members of the far right party family. In general terms, however, far right parties are characterized by an emphasis on law and order, traditional family values, ethnonationalism, opposition to immigration and European integration, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism (Mudde, 1996).[5] In Britain, the BNP has the weakest commitment to liberal

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[5]Many European far right movements have moved away from these anti-Semitic positions, in part in response to the perception that radical Islamism represents a greater threat to Western culture (Zúquete, 2008).

democracy (especially its protections for minorities) of any major British party and is the most openly racist and xenophobic (Goodwin, 2011; Ford and Goodwin, 2014). We also include an measure of the broader far right share (*Far right share*), which includes includes the vote shares of the British Freedom Party (BFP) and the National Front (NF) in addition to that of the BNP.[6] For comparative purposes, we also separately measure the vote share of the United Kingdom Independence Party or UKIP (*UKIP share*), which as a Eurosceptic party focuses more on issues of national sovereignty, especially vis-à-vis European integration, and the center-right Conservative Party (*Conservative share*).

Elections occur in most local authorities every two years, but in some cases they are less frequent. We focus on elections for local authorities for a number of reasons. First, as local authorities are the bodies that ultimately decide whether or not to accept dispersed asylum seekers, this is the level at which we would expect an effect to be observed. This focus thus allows for a tighter matching of cause and effect for each unit of analysis. Second, the geographical pattern of support for minority parties in a majoritarian electoral system means that it is only at the local level that there are likely to be constituencies in which minority party support is sufficiently concentrated for victory to be possible. In part for this reason, the BNP and other minor right-wing parties themselves strategically targeted local authority elections in their political activity in this period (Goodwin, 2011; Hill, 2003). We explain how we deal with the potential selection bias raised by minority parties' strategies below. Finally, this level of analysis is substantively and theoretically important. In the experience of other parties such as the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party (SNP), success at the local level has been a precursor to increased vote shares in national elections. Local election results may thus be a bellwether for future political trends.

A threat to internal validity from the use of figures aggregated to the local authority level would arise if the influx of asylum seekers to a local authority affected the composition

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[6]The far right also includes the street protest movement, the English Defence League (EDL), but it has not been directly active in local or national electoral politics. The EDL instead furnished candidates and support for the BFP.

of the local authority electorate in a way that introduced bias in favor of our hypotheses. However, there are good reasons to doubt that this is the case. First, in their study of inter-ward migration in the United Kingdom, Kaufmann and Harris (2015) find no evidence that whites who support the BNP or UKIP are more likely to leave more diverse areas or that such individuals are any less likely to migrate to a more diverse area than non-BNP or UKIP supporters. Second, using data from the 2001 and 2011 census, we find that dispersal is correlated with a reduction in the level of the ethnically white population in a local authority.[7] Given that the BNP received less support in wards with the highest white outflows (Harris, 2012), this finding should bias against our finding a positive relationship between asylum seeker dispseral and the BNP's vote share.

We include controls for a number of location-specific time-varying conditions that may have been associated with dispersal. First, we use the level of unemployment (proportional to the working age population), lagged by one year, as a measure of deprivation at the local authority level (*Unemployment*). Second, we use the level of violent crime lagged by one year (*Violent Crime*), as a proxy for violence involving resettled asylum seekers.[8] Note again that the use of local authority fixed effects means that we do not need to control for variables such as 'multiple deprivation' (see fn. 4) that vary between local authorities but that are slow-moving or static within local authorities. We address the possibility of heterogeneous treatment effects, in which the effect of asylum seeker immigration would be conditional on local authority sociodemographic characteristics in section 5.4.

Summary statistics are shown in Table A3 of Appendix A and source information for all variables is given in Appendix C.

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[7]See Table A2 in Appendix A. The table shows the change in the ethnically white percentage of the United Kingdom population population as a percentage of local authority population in the 2001 census vs 2011 regressed on total number of asylum seekers received up to that point.

[8]Data on hate crimes, which include religiously- or ethnically-motivated violence or abuse, are collected in United Kingdom; however, these data are only available from 2011/12 and are aggregated to the 44 Police Force Areas (PFAs), making them unsuitable for our purposes.

4   Main Results

Table 2: Main vote share models

	BNP share	BNP share	Far right share	Far right share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Asylum PC	9.742	9.216	9.718	9.214
	(3.347)***	(3.824)**	(3.331)***	(3.815)**
Unemployment		-.142		-.132
		(.054)***		(.054)**
Violent crime		.005		.005
		(.020)		(.021)
N	1710	1343	1710	1343
r^2	.61	.694	.615	.698

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Figure 2: Marginal effect of asylum seeker dispersal on BNP vote share
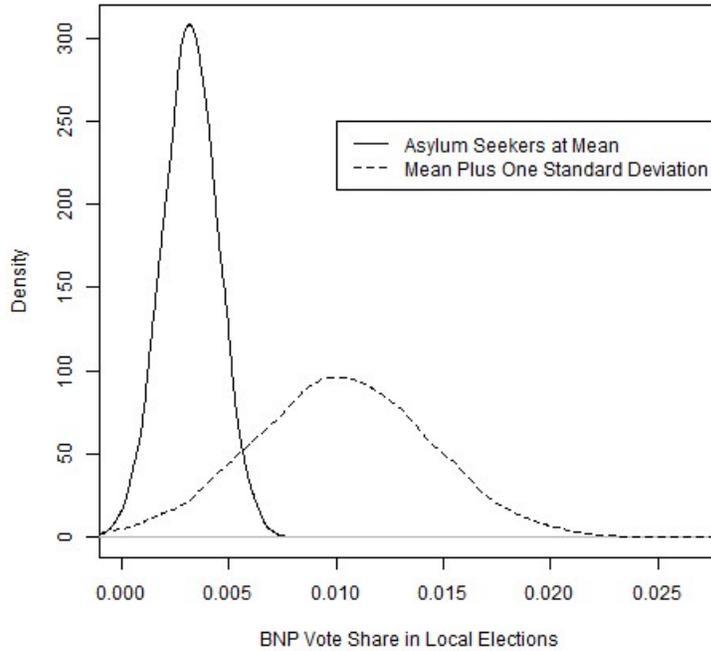
As shown in Table 2, *Asylum PC* has a positive (but small) effect on the *BNP share* and the *Far right share* (models 1 and 3 respectively). The effect is statistically significant at the 1 percent level. Standard errors are clustered by local authority. Models 2 and 4 control for *Unemployment* and *Violent Crime*. *Unemployment* is *negatively* associated with

11

BNP share (significant at 1 percent level) and *Far right share* (significant at the 5 percent level). The effect of *Asylum PC* continues to have a positive effect on the *BNP share* and the *Far right share* (significant at the 5 percent level). As illustrated in Figure 2, we find that a one standard deviation deviation increase in the dispersal of asylum seekers per capita is associated with more than a doubling of the BNP's vote share.

5 Additional Analysis

This section reports the results of a number of additional analyses and robustness checks, which are reported in Appendices A, B, and C as indicated in the following text.

5.1 Robustness Checks

All main models use dispersed asylum seekers as a proportion of the local population. Results do not change when we use raw numbers of asylum seekers (see table A4 in Appendix A).

To ensure that the main results were not driven by outliers, we reran the models for *BNP share* and *Far right share* excluding observations which were excessively influential in terms of Cook's distance (i.e. Cook's distance greater than the standard threshold of 4/n) and found our results to be unchanged (See Table A5 in Appendix A.) (Fox and Long, 1990).

To rule out the possibility that our results are driven by a time trend in the BNP vote, we ran alternative specifications with first a linear and then a quadratic time trend instead of year dummies and found our results to be unchanged (see Tables A6 in Appendix A).

To account for the correlation between the vote shares of different parties running for election in the same places and times, we also ran our results as a seemingly unrelated regression and again found our results to be unchanged (see Table A7 in Appendix A) (Tomz et al., 2002).

As a check against the possibility that our results are driven by differential responses to asylum seeker dispersal in those local authorities with higher pre-treatment levels of support for the BNP, we also rerun our main model with the dependent variable calculated as the difference between the BNP vote share and its pre-1999 maximum. This strategy allows us to deal with the fact that the local authorities that received asylum seekers had a higher pre-dispsersal mean and maximum BNP vote share than those that did not participate in the dispsersal program. Our results remain unchanged, indicating that they are not driven by some underlying political differences between recipient and non-recipient local authorities (see Table A8 in Appendix A).

To check against the possibility that difference-in-differences methods systematically under-reject the null hypothesis, we implemented a revised version of the Bertrand et al. (2004) suggested check, repeatedly generating 'placebo' asylum seekers at random and regressing the BNP vote share on them. In 1,000 simulated regressions we found that the null was rejected less than 5 percent of the time, allowing us to rule out the possibility that our chosen approach was insufficiently conservative (see Appendix B).

5.2   Sensitivity Tests

Although the inclusion of control variables for unemployment and crime should mitigate concerns of omitted variable bias, we cannot rule out the possibility of confounders which vary both by time and local authority. However, we have three additional answers to this issue.

First, to test the sensitivity of our results to the assumption that they are driven by some omitted local authority-varying factor (e.g., an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment in specific local authorities over time), following the approach of (Angrist and Pischke, 2015) we re-ran the above models with a local authority-specific time trend added in, as shown in Table 3. We found our results to be practically unchanged with respect to the *BNP share*

13

Table 3: Vote share models including a local authority time trend

	BNP Share	BNP Share	Far Right Share	Far Right Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Asylum PC	8.733	8.447	8.736	8.301
	(4.321)**	(3.998)**	(4.295)**	(4.019)**
Unemployment		-.112		-.106
		(.060)		(.060)
Violent Crime		-.047		-.045
		(.039)		(.039)
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
LA Specific Time Trend	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1710	1343	1710	1343
r^2	.669	.797	.672	.798

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** $p<0.01$; ** $p<0.05$

(models 1 and 2) or the *Far right share* (models 3 and 4), with the asylum seekers variable still having a significant effect at the 5 percent level.

Second, in order for our results to be driven by some omitted time and location specific shock we would need to assume that the Westminster government was sending asylum seekers to local authorities where the BNP vote share would have been higher even absent the asylum seekers or where asylum seekers would be likely to have had the strongest effect on the BNP vote share. We argue that this is highly implausible given that all major British parties are publicly committed to opposing the BNP. To test this claim more formally, following Dustmann and Preston (2007), we examine whether electoral outcomes in any election year affect asylum seeker allocation to a particular authority. To this end, we regress the asylum seekers variable on the BNP's vote share, lagged 1, 2, 3, and 4 years respectively in models 1 to 4 of Table 4. We find that the BNP's vote share, lagged 4 years, has a significant and *negative* effect on asylum seeker dispersal (although the BNP's vote share lagged 1, 2, or 3 years has no effect).

14

Table 4: Effects of lagged BNP vote share on asylum seeker dispersals

	Asylum PC	Asylum PC	Asylum PC	Asylum PC
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
One Year Lag	.002			
	(.002)			
Two Year Lag		-.0002		
		(.0007)		
Three Year Lag			-.0001	
			(.0007)	
Four Year Lag				-.001
				(.0006)**
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	831	1036	1049	2073
r^2	.75	.763	.811	.788

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Table 5: "Effects" of $1 - 5$ year lead of asylum seekers on BNP vote share

	BNP Share	BNP Share	BNP Share	BNP Share	BNP Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
One Year Lead	4.521				
	(2.837)				
Two Year Lead		-.548			
		(1.690)			
Three Year Lead			-.537		
			(2.988)		
Four Year Lead				-3.730	
				(1.812)**	
Five Year Lead					-6.902
					(2.162)***
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	831	1036	1049	2073	1071
r^2	.601	.54	.52	.524	.509

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

We also regress the BNP's vote share on the 1 to 5 year leads of the asylum seeker variable (that is, using the asylum seekers per capita which a local authority would receive 1 to 5 years in the future). As Table 5 shows, we found a *negative* and significant effect for the 4 and 5 year lead of the BNP share. These findings suggest that local authorities and the central government in London may have been attempting to systematically divert asylum seekers away from authorities in which they would have had the most positive effect on the BNP's vote share or in which the BNP's vote share would otherwise have been higher. This in turn implies that the estimated effect on the BNP's vote share is most likely to be an underestimate.

Finally, we ran a sensitivity analysis to determine the magnitude that an omitted confounder would have to take on in order to overturn our main results (Imbens, 2003). We began our sensitivity analysis by simulating a set of unobserved omitted variables which were set to have a given correlation with both our main independent variable and our main dependent variable. We did this by first solving the following set of equations, where $\bar{x}$ and $\bar{y}$ are the standardized versions of our main independent and dependent variables respectively, δ is the correlation between them, γ is the desired correlation between the new variable and our dependent variable and ω is the desired correlation between the new variable and our independent variable.

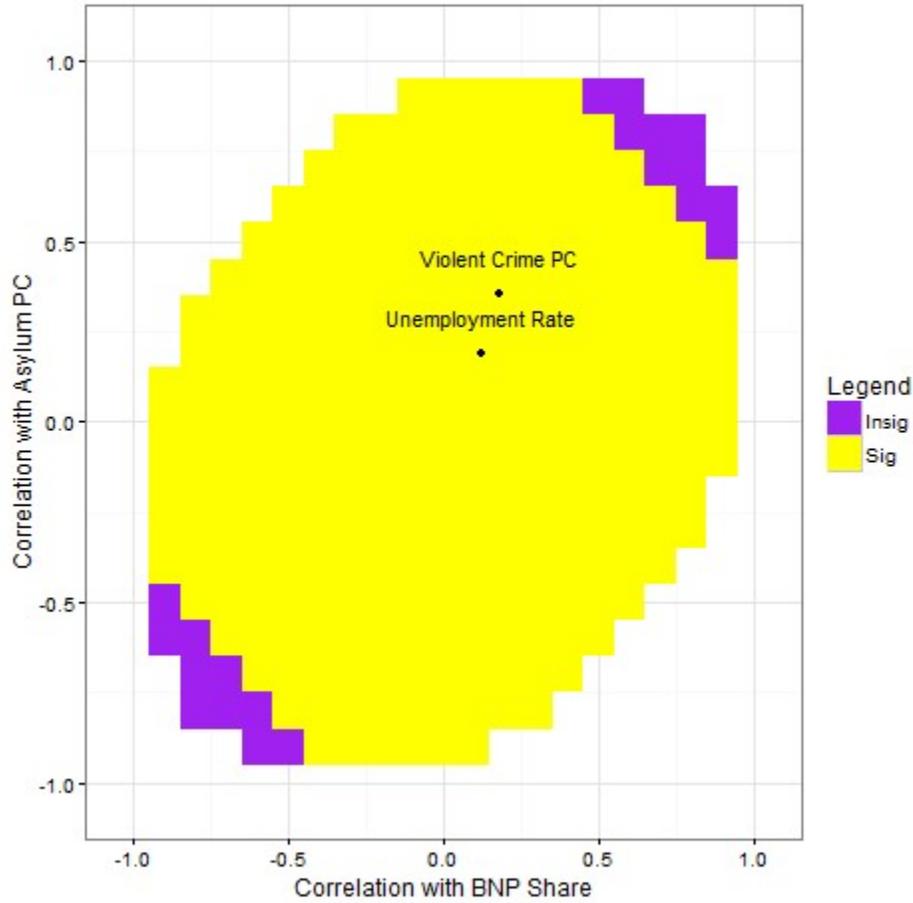$a1 + \delta \times a2 = \gamma$

$\delta \times a1 + a2 = \omega$

$a3 = \sqrt{(1 - a1^2 - a2^2) - (2 \times a1 \times a2 \times \delta)}$

and

$V = a1 \times \bar{x} + a2 \times \bar{y} + a3 \times e$

where e is a randomly generated standard normal variable.

Figure 3: Sensitivity plot

We repeated this process for all correlations between this omitted variable and the independent and outcome variables ranging from -1 to 1. We then re–ran our main model including this simulated variable. Figure 3 plots the results as a function of the correlation between the independent and the dependent variables. The darker shaded (purple) areas represent those combinations of correlations between the independent and dependent variables and the confounder which resulted in an insignificant result for our main independent variable of interest. The ligher shaded (yellow) areas represent those combinations of correlations for which the results remained significant and correctly signed. We also plot the correlation between the main independent variable, the dependent variable and two of the observed control variables – (lagged) violent crime per capita and the (lagged) unemployment rate – to give some basis for comparison. As can be seen, to overturn our results, an

omitted time-varying confounder would have to correlate much more highly with both the independent and dependent variable than any of the observed controls do.

5.3 Selection Effects

Figure 4: Distribution of BNP vote share in local authority elections, 2000–2015
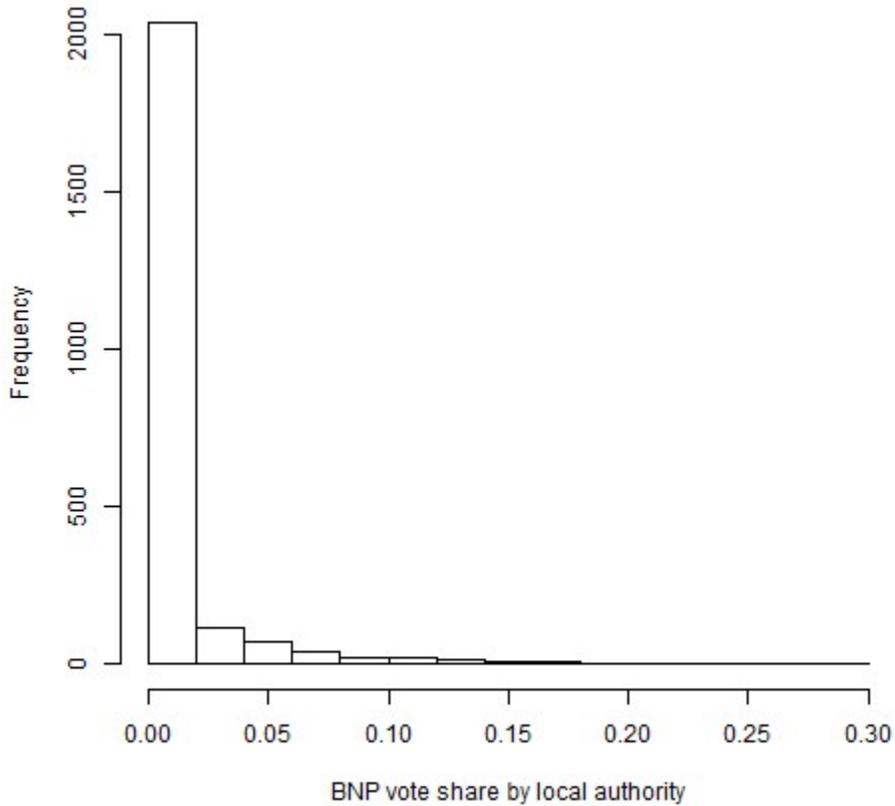
Because of their minority status, a critical issue arises with respect to interpreting the effect of dispersal on the vote share of far right parties (Bowyer, 2008; Golder, 2003). We want to know whether the increase in the far right's vote share is solely due to such parties' decisions to selectively field candidates in asylum seeker receiving local authorities or if it reflects a change in the quantity of support that the far right receives assuming it is an actual option for voters. Figure 4 shows that the BNP vote share is zero for the vast majority of election-year observations. However, many of the zeros observed for the BNP's vote may

reflect the fact that voters did not have the option of choosing a BNP candidate, while the apparent increase in BNP support in other constituencies may not be due to a change in the level of its support in the authorities that received asylum seekers but rather to the BNP's decision to selectively field candidates in those localities. That is, the BNP may have seen the dispersal program as an opportunity to win seats and so ran candidates in recipient councils, meaning that individuals, whose support for the BNP had previously been latent (because there were no local BNP candidates to vote for), had the opportunity to translate this support into votes. In this scenario, we would not be able to tell whether an increase in asylum seekers changes voters preferences or simply affects the strategic decision of the far right to contest particular seats. Both dimensions are of course substantively important, but a more complete interpretation of the process requies further disaggregation.

Table 6: Cragg hurdle model: BNP local authority selection (first stage) and BNP vote share (Second stage)

	Coefficients	Robust SEs	T Values	P Values
First Stage				
Intercept	-0.855	0.111	-7.714	0.000
Asylum PC	540.524	78.082	6.923	0.000
Unemployment	9.346	1.484	6.297	0.000
Violent Crime	2.377	2.380	0.999	0.318
Ethnic Fragmentation in 2001	-0.559	0.266	-2.101	0.036
Second Stage				
Intercept	-0.520	0.167	-3.106	0.002
Asylum PC	350.429	50.432	6.949	0.000
Unemployment	-0.966	2.042	-0.473	0.636
Violent Crime	13.962	3.202	4.360	0.00001
Ethic Fragmentation in 2001	-1.288	0.395	-3.262	0.001

To distinguish these effects, we model both the selection decision of the BNP leadership to run candidates in a given constituency *and* the outcome decision that is the result of

an aggregation of choices made by individual voters to vote for the BNP conditional on a candidate running. We employ a corner solution model to deal with clustering or 'piling up' of the dependent variable at zero rather than a tobit which assumes left censoring of the data (Wooldridge, 2002). We utilize the truncated normal hurdle model put forward by Cragg (1971). This two-stage approach allows us to separate the effects of selection from increased support, as it effectively models the selection decision by the BNP as a probit in the first stage, and a truncated normal regression (with truncation at zero) for the share of BNP support in the second stage. As shown in Table 6, asylum seeker dispersal is positively associated with both the decision of the BNP to run in a given election (first stage) and on the decision of voters to support the BNP, conditional on a BNP candidate being on the ballot (second stage). In other words, dispersal positively influences not just the decision of the BNP leadership to field candidates but also the level of support that BNP candidates receive if they do run. However, because it is not possible to employ location fixed effects in this approach, caution is still needed in interpreting its results.

5.4   Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

The use of local authority fixed effects in our analysis indicates that asylum seeker dispersal has a positive effect on support for the far right irrespective of the underlying socioeconomic or ethnic characteristics of a given locality. However, it may be that local areas with different economic and sociodemographic profiles react differently to the same type and level of immigration; that is, there may be an *interaction* effect between these local characteristics, the influx of asylum seekers, and political preferences. To test for this possibility, in Table A9 in Appendix A we present the results of additional models in which we include interaction terms for the percentage of the local authority population that is white British (*White UK PC*). We use the estimate of white British from the Labour Force Survey in models 1 and 3. However, because this data only begins in 2006, we also include a linear interpolation of

white British *White UK PC (Int)* using the percentage of the local authority population that is white British according to the 2001 census (models 2 and 4). None of the interaction terms are statistically significant. Thus, it is not the case that the positive effects on the far right's support were due to asylum seekers being sent to areas with high (or low) levels of minority populations. We do not present the results of models in which dispersal is interacted with local authority characteristics for which there is only static data (e.g., Muslim, urban–rural, etc.) as the need to drop local authority dummies reintroduces the problem of confounding.

5.5 Effects on Related Parties

We find that asylum seeker immigration is not associated with an increase in support for the right more broadly defined. As shown in Table A10 in Appendix A, it has no effect on *Conservative share* (models 1 and 2) or *UKIP share* (model 3 and 4). We argue that the absence of a positive finding in this respect makes good sense in spite of UKIP's increasing reputation as a 'nativist' party. In contrast to the BNP, UKIP only turned its attention to immigration relatively late, after most of the dispersion had already occurred;[9] Moreover, at least until the lead-up to the Brexit vote in 2015, UKIP maintained a moderate, indeed supportive, position with respect to asylum seekers, if not immigrants from the EU. In fact, former UKIP leader Nigel Farage actually called for refugees from the Syrian conflict to be given asylum to the United Kingdom. Moreover, as late as 2009, Ford and Goodwin (2010) found that the main distinction between BNP and UKIP supporters was that the former were more openly racist. Asylum seekers, which we know to have come from largely non-White countries (see Figure A1 in Appendix A), were of more concern to BNP than UKIP voters. However, with the virtual disappearance of the BNP, we cannot rule out that future asylum seeker inflows could increase the vote share of UKIP if it embraced a more explicit anti-asylum seeker posture.

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[9]Section 95 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act came into effect in 2003, limiting the time people had to claim asylum after they entered the United Kingdom. Most new asylum applications were made before 2004.

6 Conclusion

Exploiting a British policy intervention that dispersed asylum seekers to local authorities across England and Wales, this paper provides one of the most rigorously identified studies of the effect of asylum seeker immigration on support for the far right to date. It finds that asylum seeker inflows, in spite of their modest numbers compared to overall immigration flows, do increase the vote share of the far right. Although the precise outlines of this dispersal policy are unique to the United Kingdom, both the methodological approach and the substantive findings should have implications beyond this case.

First, this setting allows us to simultaneously address several limitations of existing research on the political effects of immigration. Because dispersal location is unrelated to immigrant preferences, we avoid confounding due to the endogeneity of migration paths to the politics of the receiving subnational units. Moreover, by focusing on a particular category of immigrant – asylum seekers – we avoid the problem of multiple categories of immigrant having significant but offsetting effects on political behavior. Studies of the aggregate effect of immigration or foreign-born populations on political behavior may not be calibrated to capture the small marginal effects that we do here. Similarly, by distinguishing between the extreme far right and the merely conservative, populist, or Eurosceptic right, we are also able to detect a marginal effect that might not be observed without attention to differences within the right family of parties.

Second, our results indicate that the effect of asylum seeker immigration on far right support is due both to the far right contesting more seats in those localities receiving asylum seekers and to higher levels of support in those areas where the far right is an option for voters. Substantively, we can infer that while there is a strategic element to the increase in far right support in response to asylum seeker inflows, there is some change in the intensity of far right support at the aggregate (local authority) level. This finding provides an important contextual complement to psychological models of voter behavior in response to immigration.

Finally, while previous research on this issue has argued that the political effects of asylum seeker dispersal were exacerbated by, if not caused by, the dispersal of asylum seekers to poorer or more diverse localities, we find no evidence that this is the case. The effect of asylum seeker immigration on support for the far right is not local socioeconomic or demographic contexts. Studies in which immigrant inflows are interacted with static recipeint area characteristics reintroduce the possibility of omitted variable bias and should be viewed skeptically.

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Appendix A   Additional Tables and Figures

Table A1: Pre-1999 BNP Vote Share Trend

Pre-1999 BNP Vote Share	
Asylum Relocation Participant Dummy	-.010
	(.047)
Asylum Relocation Participant Dummy × Year	5.19e-06
	(.00002)
Year	1.84e-06
	(2.62e-06)
LA Dummies	No
Year Dummies	No
N	2615
r^2	.007

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Table A2: Effects of Asylum Seekers on White Flight

Change in White UK Proportion of the Population, 2001–2011 Census

	(1)
Total Asylum Seekers	-8.29e-06
	(1.42e-06)***
N	312
r^2	.099

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Table A3: Summary Statistics for Key Variables (whole sample)

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
BNP Vote Share	4,857	0.005	0.019	0.000	0.296
UKIP Vote Share	4,857	0.007	0.026	0.000	0.292
BNP, NF & BFP Vote Share	4,857	0.005	0.019	0.000	0.296
UKIP & EDP Vote Share	4,857	0.007	0.026	0.000	0.292
Asylum Seekers	2,172	100	254	0	3,210
Population	4,554	66,619	52,780	3,658	609,719
Unemployment	3,712	0.050	0.030	0.000	0.281
Asylum Seekers Per Capita	2,149	0.0003	0.001	0.000	0.006
% White UK	944	1.692	0.287	0.412	2.500
Crime Per Capita	1,628	0.178	0.093	0.023	0.705
Violent Crime Per Capita	1,628	0.035	0.017	0.005	0.132
Ethnic Fragmentation (2001 Census)	4,240	0.149	0.136	0.024	0.845
% White UK (2001 Census)	4,240	0.916	0.092	0.292	0.988
% Muslim (2001 Census)	4,348	1.817	3.314	0.040	36.400
Mean BNP Vote Share Pre–2000	4,779	0.0001	0.001	0.000	0.031

Table A4: Using raw numbers of asylum seekers

	DV: BNP Vote Share	DV: BNP Vote Share
	(1)	(2)
Asylum Seekers	.00003	.00003
	(8.51e-06)***	(9.58e-06)***
Unemployment		-.144
		(.055)***
Violent Crime		.008
		(.019)
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes
N	1733	1353
r^2	.616	.698

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Table A5: Main Model excluding outliers

	BNP Share	BNP Share
	(1)	(2)
Asylum PC	9.017	7.896
	(2.569)***	(2.857)***
Unemployment		-.013
		(.033)
Violent Crime		-.007
		(.012)
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes
N	1635	1284
r^2	.682	.823

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Table A6: Linear and Quadratic Time Trends

	BNP Share	BNP Share	Far Right	Far Right
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Asylum PC	11.461	9.216	11.479	11.479
	(3.581)***	(3.826)**	(3.582)***	(3.582)***
Unemployment	-.172	-.142	-.162	-.161
	(.052)***	(.054)***	(.052)***	(.052)***
Violent Crime	-.052	.005	-.050	-.050
	(.019)***	(.020)	(.019)***	(.019)***
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	No	No	No	No
Linear Time Trend	Yes	No	Yes	No
Quadratic Time Trend	No	Yes	No	Yes
N	1343	1343	1343	1343
r^2	.67	.694	.675	.675

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Table A7: Seemingly unrelated regression

	BNP Share
	(1)
Asylum PC	9.14
	(1.46)***
Violent Crime	.08
	(.07)
Unemployment	-.14
	(.03)***
LA Dummies	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes
N	1323
r^2	0.93

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05
Note: The related regressions (not shown) regressed the Labour, Conservative, UKIP and Liberal Democrat vote on the same control variables and fixed effects

Table A8: BNP Vote Minus Pre-1999 Maximum

	BNP Vote - Max BNP Vote Pre-1999	BNP Vote - Max BNP Vote Pre-1999
	(1)	(2)
Asylum PC	-9.742	-9.216
	(3.340)***	(3.817)**
Unemployment		.142
		(.054)***
Crime		-.005
		(.020)
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes
N	1703	1338
r^2	.61	.692

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

8

Table A9: Interaction Effects with Percentage White UK

|	BNP Share	BNP Share	Far Right Share	Far Right Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Asylum PC	8.122	-3.406	8.117	-3.489
	(11.891)	(7.141)	(11.921)	(7.131)
Asylum PC × White UK PC	3.335		3.190	
	(4.549)		(4.557)	
Asylum PC × White UK PC (Int)		7.232		7.265
		(4.286)		(4.250)
White UK PC	.005		.005	
	(.007)		(.007)	
White UK PC (Int)		-.003		-.003
		(.004)		(.004)
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1254	1703	1254	1703
r^2	.698	.613	.704	.618

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05

Table A10: Effects of Asylum Seekers on the Conservative and UKIP vote shares

	Con Share	Con Share	UKIP Share	UKIP Share
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Asylum PC	-2.282	.222	-1.019	-1.445
	(3.088)	(2.907)	(2.113)	(2.726)
Unemployment		-.027		.108
		(.088)		(.067)
Violent Crime		.021		-.004
		(.036)		(.029)
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	2117	1338	1710	1343
r^2	.93	.95	.579	.611

Robust clustered standard errors in parentheses; *** p<0.01; ** p<0.05
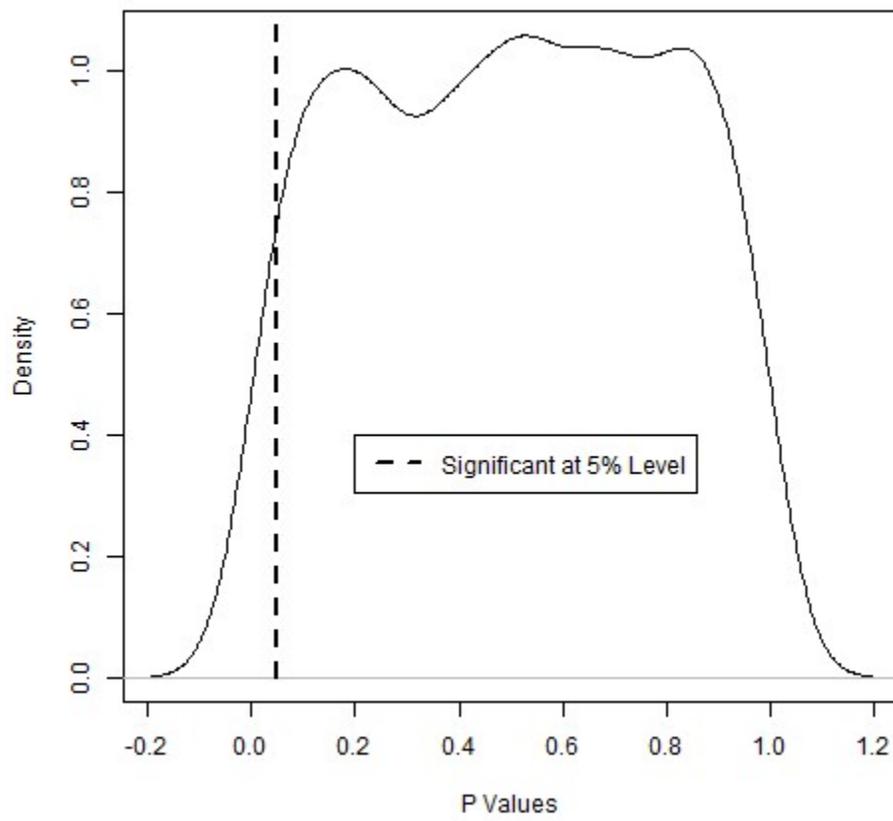
Figure A1: Asylum Seeker Origins, 2000–2012
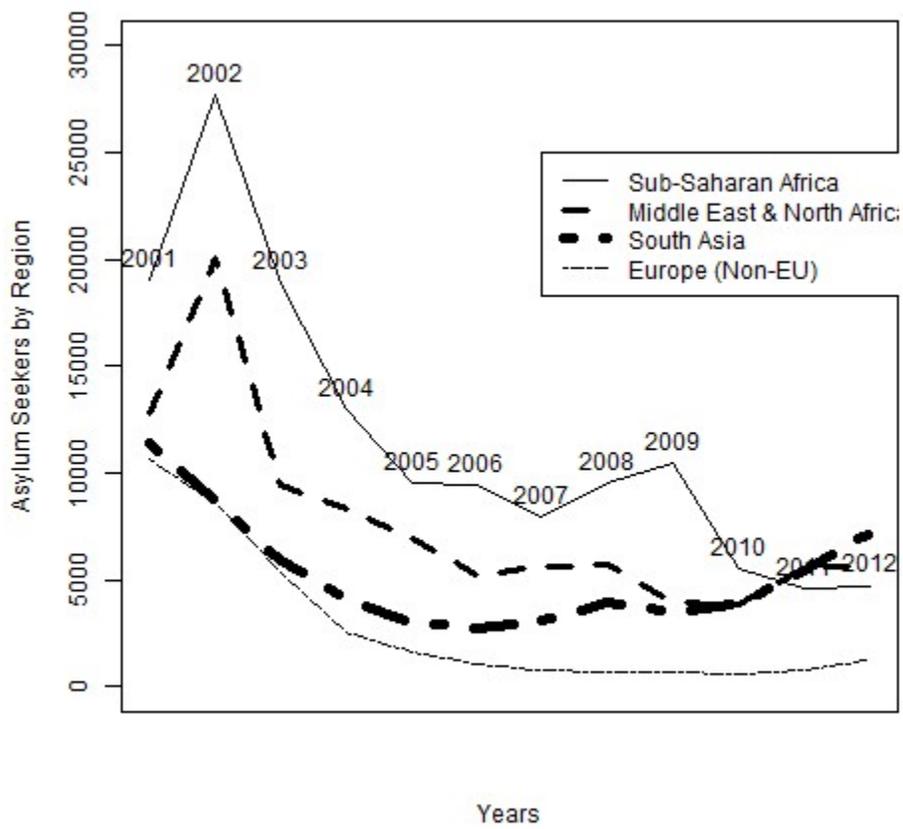
Appendix B   Placebo Regressions

The p values for the placebo regressions are described and plotted below. Assuming our chosen difference in differences strategy to be a sufficiently conservative estimation strategy, the distribution of simulated p values should look approximately uniformly distributed over the interval (0,1), with no more than 5% of p values falling below the .05 level. As can be seen below, this is exactly what we observe.

Table B1: Placebo Regression P Values

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
4	1,000	0.505	0.286	0.002	1.000

Figure B1: Distribution of P Values for Placebo Regressions

Appendix C   Data Sources

- English local authorities `https://www.lgbce.org.uk/records-and-resources/local-authorities-in-england`

- Welsh local authorities `http://gov.wales/topics/localgovernment/unitary-authorities/?lang=en`

- Asylum data from December 2003 onwards `https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/immigration-statistics-april-to-june-2015/asylumdata--tables`

- Asylum data from 2000 to Q4 2003 - Home Office Information Request (Annex E IR 35866)

- Elections pre 2004 - UK Data Archive - SN 5319: British Local Elections Database 1889-2003

- Elections post 2004 (inclusive) - Local Elections Archive Project `http://www.andrewteale.me.uk/leap/`

- Unemployment data – from March 2005 onwards -`https://www.nomisweb.co.uk`; from 1993 onwards - UK Data Archive SNs 3512, 3516, 3520, 3824, 3722, 4059, 4063, 4521, 4522, 4652, 4654, 5384 (Quarterly Labour Force Survey)

- White UK Ethnicity - from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey `https://www.nomisweb.co.uk`

- Crime Data - from 2002 - Office of National Statistics "Notifiable Offenses recorded by the police" `http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk`

- 2001 Census Data on Ethnicity from the Office of National Statistics `http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk`

- Foreign born population from Nomis website `https://www.nomisweb.co.uk`