Betraying the Heartland

Estimating the Political Cost of the British Labour Party's Asylum Seeker Immigration Policy

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Abstract

This paper estimates the political cost to the British Labour Party government of a policy change that dispersed new asylum seekers away from councils in London and the southeast to local authorities in other parts of the United Kingdom during the 2000s. It shows that Labour's vote share fell sharply in response to asylum seeker inflows at the local authority level. Additionally, the paper demonstrates that the fall in support was higher in the Labour "heartland" than in swing electorates. The paper proposes a novel "betrayal" mechanism to explain this counter-intuitive result.

1 Introduction

The United Kingdom, like many states in Western Europe, experienced a surge in applications for asylum in the mid-1990s. Even though the uptick in asylum seeker immigration began under the Conservative government of John Major, inflows grew even more strongly under the post-1997 Tony Blair Labour government, peaking at over 84,000 in 2002 (Consterdine and Hampshire, 2014). The Labour government was well aware of the potential political costs of asylum seeker immigration (Maughan, 2010). As one Labour MP put it, "Tony Blair was obsessed by immigration, particularly about illegal immigration and abuse of the asylum system" (Watt and Wintour, 2015). The majority of asylum seekers to arrive in the 1990s took up residency in London and the southeast of England while their claims were being assessed. The government passed the Immigration and Asylum Act in 1999 in order to ameliorate the political costs of increased overall asylum seeker inflows by dispersing immigrants away from marginal seats in London and the southeast to regional centers, mostly in the former heavy industry and coal mining regions of the country, where Labour had larger vote shares. This paper examines the electoral costs of this policy to the Labour Party.

In this case, the policy "treatment" of interest – asylum seeker dispersal – is applied at the local authority level. We thus focus on explaining variation in aggregate support for Labour in local authority elections over time. Our main empirical strategy is a difference-in-differences model. We find that an increase in the number of asylum seekers dispersed to a local authority is associated with a large decline in the vote share of the Labour Party. Results are robust to a range of model specifications and sensitivity tests. Additionally, we test whether the political cost to Labour was conditional on the economic or demographic characteristics of recipient locales Dustmann et al. (2018). We find little evidence for such an interaction effect. However, we find that the marginal decline in Labour's vote share was most pronounced in the party's former electoral "heartland" (measured by the party's average

vote share in the 1990s). That is we find evidence of a political, rather than economic or demographic, interaction effect.

We also analyze individual attitudes and voter preferences from the British Election Study. Although we do not have direct evidence on the quality and quantity of native-immigrant contact at the individual level, we do have the data to show that disapproval of the Labour government's asylum seeker immigration policy is the most important explanation for defection from Labour in the early 2000s irrespective of respondent class or ethnicity. Along with the absence of an interaction between dispersal and economic characteristics at the aggregate level, this evidence indicates that the decline in Labour's support over the 2000s was less a revolt of the white working class per se than a geographic realignment of the party's support away from its older industrial heartland in the north towards more highly educated and middle class marginal electorates in the south in response to the locally differential impact of asylum seeker inflows.

This paper makes several contributions. First, it contributes specifically to research on the political effects of immigration policy. A large and growing body of work examines the effect of immigration on support for the far right (Stockemer, 2015; Stockemer and Lamontagne, 2014; McLaren, 2003; Otto and Steinhardt, 2014; Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller, 2017; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Harmon, 2018; Dinas, Matakos, Xefteris, and Hangartner, 2019; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm, 2018). Thus far, however, there has been little work that explicitly theorizes and tests the effect of immigration on mainstream parties (Dustmann et al., 2018). This is of particular concern in places like Britain, where the majoritarian electoral system means that extremist party support is likely to significantly understate the political impact of immigration policy. The desertion of mainstream parties in response to immigration is a process worthy of examination in its own right, in addition to being a possible precursor of far right or populist party support (Kenny, 2017; Evans and Chzhen, 2013).

Second, this paper adds to the debate on the political impact of subnationally targeted government policy. Previous research on its effects has tended to focus on the allocation of additional "goods" (e.g., public sector jobs) (Albertus, 2013; Cox, 2009; Stokes, 2005) or less commonly on the retrenchment of existing benefits (e.g., school or hospital closures, changes to welfare programs) (Lindbom, 2014; Schumacher et al., 2013). We instead focus on the imposition of a "cost", i.e., the dispersal asylum seekers. We build on this literature by proposing that core electorates will react more strongly to the imposition of costs than swing electorates, with the former punishing parties that take their loyalty for granted. Although applied to the particular case of asylum seeker inflows in this paper, this proposed "betrayal" mechanism could be evident across a wide range of policy domains.

2 Background: The Labour Party'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 Labour Party introduced the asylum seeker dispersal program under Section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum 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.[1] Dispersal was far from uniform. The cities of Birmingham (15,380), Liverpool (11,728), Leeds (10,781), Manchester (9,946), and Newcastle (8,490) were the most common destinations.[2] 69 percent of all local authorities took fewer than ten asylum seekers (Lyons and Duncan, 2017).

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 observational studies of the political effects of immigration, the location decision is thus independent of the preferences of immigrants themselves (but see Hangartner et al., 2019; Dustmann et al., 2018). The dispersal program therefore operates as a policy shock, exposing some local authorities to the "treatment" of asylum seeker dispersal, while leaving others "untreated".

To be clear, 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 to attract central funds (Burnett, 2011). As a result, asylum seekers came to be concentrated in relatively deprived areas of the United Kingdom (Anie et al., 2005; Phillimore and Goodson, 2006; Lyons and Duncan, 2017). 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,

[1]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.

[2]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.

while in 2004, 70 percent were still going to such areas.[3] We find that local authorities receiving asylum seekers tended to have higher unemployment, higher levels of violent crime, and to be more ethnically diverse (c.f. Stewart, 2011) (see Table 1).

We also find that recipient local authorities had a higher average Labour Party vote in local authority elections during the 1990s, i.e., before dispersals began, than those not receiving asylum seekers (see Table 1). Local authorities could themselves opt out of the dispersal program. In fact, most Conservative Party controlled local authorities refused to accept any asylum seekers. For this reason, we focus on the period of the dispersal program in which Labour was in control nationally, from 2001 to 2010. During this period, the national Labour leadership was essentially faced with the problem of how to allocate asylum seekers among the local authorities that it controlled. From 2010 onwards, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition and Conservative governments appear to have continued to direct asylum seekers toward the largely Labour-controlled local authorities that had received asylum seekers during the 2000s (Lyons and Duncan, 2017).[4] We explain how we deal with these selection issues the Empirical Strategy section.

Table 1: Summary Statistics by Council Recipient Status

	Recipient	Non-recipient	T Test (Diff)	P Value (Diff)
Unemployment Rate	0.063	0.051	8.875	0.00
Violent Crime PC	0.044	0.031	14.791	0.00
White UK PC 2001	0.857	0.925	-11.597	0.00
Mean Labour Share 1990s	0.481	0.342	23.411	0.00

[3]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.

[4]As of 2016, 34,936 asylum seekers live in areas with Labour-led councils compared with 1,680 in Conservative-led local authorities.

3 Theoretical Considerations

We argue that the asylum seeker inflows created by the dispersal program are a "cost" imposed on recipient localities, which should locally reduce support for the governing party (Ferwerda et al., 2017). Research across a wide variety of national contexts shows that migrant inflows are unpopular among a non-negligible prorportion of the population at least in the short-term (Hopkins, 2010; Kaufmann, 2018; Semyonov et al., 2006; Hjerm, 2007; McLaren, 2003; Ceobanu and Escandell, 2010; Dinas et al., 2019; Dustmann et al., 2018). We thus theorize that asylum seeker dispersals should cause a reduction in support for Labour, which was the party responsible for introducing the program. We theorize that these effects should be felt across class and occupational groups, but remain largely agnostic on the psychological process at work, i.e., whether anti-asylum seeker sentiment is driven by perceptions of labor market competition, welfare competition, ethnocentrism, or some other factor (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014). Although some studies have found working class individuals to express more nativist views than those of other occupational groups (Evans and Tilley, 2017), these results are confounded by the problem of social desirability bias in survey research on race and ethnicity (Banaji and Greenwald, 2016). Rather, following Enos (2017) and Hopkins (2010), we argue that the political geographies of different types of immigration matter in their own right because of how they affect contact between natives and immigrants.

Even though a substantial body of research suggests that as contact between groups increases, anti-outsider sentiment should fall (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008, 2006; McLaren, 2003), the quality of that contact is critically important (Clayton et al., 2019). Contact between natives (of all classes) and asylum seekers is limited by linguistic and cultural distance and the geographic segregation of asylum seekers. We hypothesize that the visibility of asylum seekers as an ethnically distant group (Smith and Dempsey, 1983; Dustmann and Preston, 2007), along with their geographical concentration and segregation into urban public or low-cost private housing at the local level (Sales, 2002), is likely to exacerbate native con-

cerns over immigration, irrespective of a locality's demographic or economic characteristics. Both because of their geographic isolation and segregation, and because of their exclusion from the labor market, from natives' perspective, asylum seekers are perceived to display little enthusiasm for integration, which in turn increases anti-immigrant sentiment (Rudolph and Wagner, 2019; Sniderman et al., 2004; Kenny and Lockwood-Kenny, 2011; Hangartner et al., 2019). Moreover, the extensive state controls over asylum seekers – from where they are dispersed to the length of time it takes their claims to be assessed – are likely to accentuate the attribution of responsibilty for asylum seeker inflows to government policy compared to other categories of immigrant. In sum, the introduction of a different group in close proximity but with which there is little cross-group engagement is sufficient to cause strong out-group sentiments and in turn, political disaffection and defection from the governing party, if not also extremism (Allport, 1954; Blumer, 1958; Enos, 2017).

4 Empirical Strategy

Determining the causal effect of immigration policy on political behavior poses some econometric challenges. Most importantly, internal migration paths may be endogenous to the politics of subnational areas (Dustmann and Preston, 2001), i.e., immigrants self-select into communities in which coethnics exist and in which they may be more likely to be accepted. This could in turn lead to a significant underestimation of the impact of immigration on political behavior. To deal with the endogeneity bias introduced by immigrant self-selection into localities where they may be most favorably accepted, a number of recent papers have instrumented for immigration flows with prior immigrant stocks (Halla et al., 2017; Otto and Steinhardt, 2014) or with the availability of low-cost housing (Harmon, 2018; Steinmayr, 2016, 2017). However, there remain two problems with this approach. 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 electoral outcomes.

Thus far, only Dustmann et al. (2018) in the case of Denmark utilizes the quasi-random variation in the timing of refugee allocation to municipalities by the central government to estimate the causal effect of immigration on voting behavior. The British case allows us to adopt a similar approach. Asylum seeker dispersal is independent of the preferences of migrants, which removes one source of endogeneity bias. However, as we noted above, there are important underlying differences between the local authorities receiving asylum seekers and those not receiving them.

To deal with this, our primary empirical strategy is a difference-in-differences model. The main model takes the form:

$$y_{it} = \alpha + \delta_{dd} Dispersed\ PC_{it} + \sum_{k=Allerdale}^{York} \gamma_k Authority_{ki} + \sum_{j=2001}^{2010} \kappa_j Year_{jt} + \beta x_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$$

Where *Dispersed PC* is asylum seekers in dispersed accommodation as a proportion of the working age population; y_{it} is Labour'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; and the quantity of interest is the causal effect of dispersals on the vote share of the Labour Party δ_{dd}.

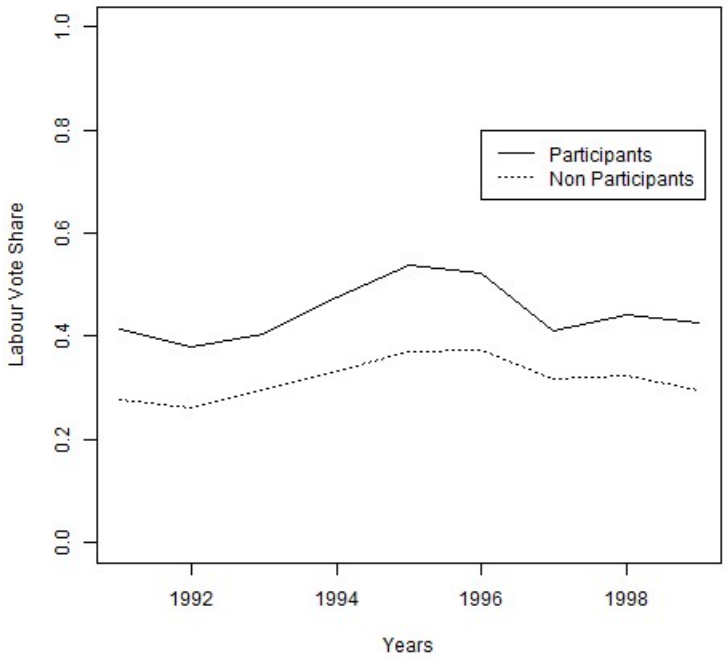
Our difference-in-differences model allows us to control for any potential confounders which are invariant within local authorities over time or which might result from time specific shocks at the national level. For instance, the local authority fixed effects allow us to rule out the possibility that 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 Labour'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 voting behavior. Two possible time-varying conditions within local authorities stand out. 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 could be correlated with anti-immigrant violence and harassment as well as with support for a party perceived to be soft on law and order issues.

To address these concerns we adopt three approaches. First, in our main models we include time-varying location-specific controls for unemployment and violent crime. Second, in our Sensitivity Analysis section, to deal with the possibility that there are omitted local authority specific time-varying confounders, we run additional models in which we interact a linear time trend and location dummies (Angrist and Pischke, 2015). Third, in the same section, following Oster (2017), 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. This assumption can be tested only with reference to pre-treatment trends. As Table 1 shows, the pre-2000 Labour vote share has a significant and positive association with whether a local authority later received asylum seekers. That is, asylum seekers are disproportionately sent to Labour supporting electorates. However, while the baseline of Labour support differs, as Figure 1 illustrates, Section 95 participating local authorities were subject to the same trend in Labour vote share prior to the program as non-participating lo-

Figure 1: Pre-treatment trends in Labour vote share by recipient status



cal authorities. There is thus no reason to believe that Labour's support would have declined to a greater degree in those areas receiving asylum seekers in the absence of dispersals.

Last, our results could still be biased upwards if it was the case that the national Labour Party government either a.) believed that asylum seekers would boost the Labour vote and so sent them to places where the Labour vote would have been weaker even absent asylum seekers, or b) believed asylum seekers would harm the Labour vote and deliberately sent them to local authorities so as to reduce Labour's vote share. We argue that both of these scenarios are implausible. In addition to statements revealing concerns about the political costs of immigration made by Tony Blair, David Blunkett, and others in the Labour leadership (Watt and Wintour, 2015; Maughan, 2010), two further pieces of evidence suggest that Labour's national and local leadership believed that asylum seekers might reduce Labour's vote and so avoided sending them to places where they might generate the largest electoral opposition or threaten Labour's local electoral control. First, the Home Office under the national Labour government, responded to requests from local police forces to suspend

dispersals to local authorities where the anti-asylum seeker backlash was strongest (Casciani, 2004).[5] Second, 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 local authority. To this end, we regress Labour'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 regressors). Table A1 in the online supporting information (p. 3) shows there is no evidence that the councils which were to receive asylum seekers were trending away from Labour before the program began relative to councils which did not receive asylum seekers. Consequently any selection bias due to the strategic placement of asylum seekers by national and local authorities will push our coefficients towards zero.

5 Data

The main dependent variable is the vote share of the Labour Party (*Labour share*) in local authority elections. We focus on elections for local authorities for largely practical reasons. First, local authorities, rather than national parliamentary constituencies, are the geographical units to which assylum seekers are dispersed. The two sets of boundaries do not match up precisely, rendering an attempt to estimate the effect of dispersals on parliamentary constitutency results problematic. We can say, however, that the subnational distributions of Labour's vote share in local and national elections correspond closely. Second, local authority elections are more frequent than national ones, increasing the number of unique observations by administrative unit. This is of particular importance given that we focus on yearly flows of asylum seekers rather than stocks.

[5] Some $2,000$ racist attacks, verbal harassment, and physical assaults against asylum seekers had been reported to the Home Office by 2002 (Burnett, 2011; Anie et al., 2005).

For the independent variable, we collected data from the United Kingdom Home Office on the dispersal of asylum seekers from 2001 to 2010. 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 our main models, the dispersal measurement is proportional to the local population size. We use the estimate of the working age 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.

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.[6] 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. 5) 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 the Heterogenous Treatments Section.

[6]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.

Summary statistics are shown in Table A2 of Appendix A (p. 4) and source information for all variables is given in Appendix C (p. 11) of the online supporting information.

6 Main Results

Table 2: Effect of Asylum Seeker Dispersal on Labour Vote Share

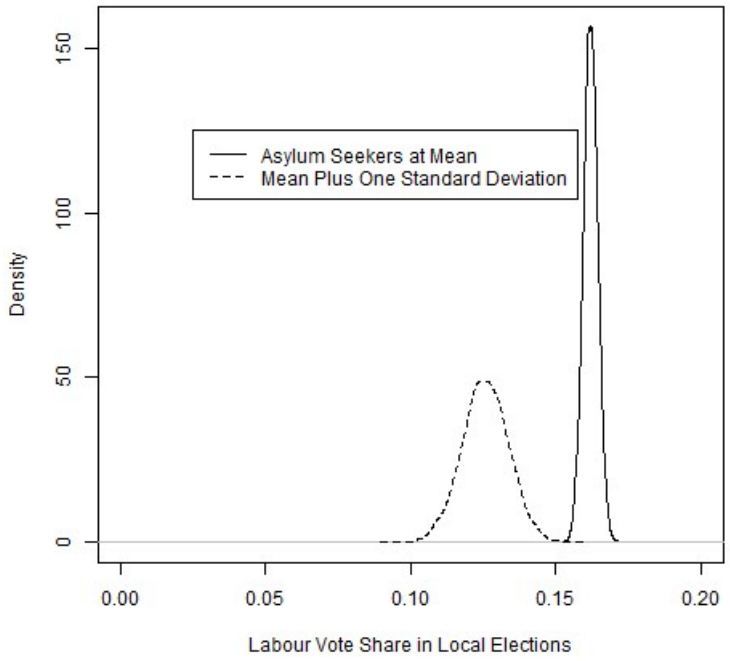
	(1)	(2)
Asylum PC	-30.753	-43.987
	(6.210)***	(7.043)***
Unemployment PC		0.220
		(0.119)
Crime PC		-0.388
		(0.079)***
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	Yes	Yes
N	2,122	1,343
r^2	0.91	0.923

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

As shown in Table 2, *Asylum PC* has a large negative effect on the *Labour share* (1). The effect is statistically significant. Standard errors are clustered by local authority. Model 2 controls for *Unemployment* and *Violent Crime*. *Unemployment* is *positively* associated with *Labour share*, but the coefficient is not statistically significant at conventional levels. Violent crime is negative and statistically significant, implying that Labour's vote share fell in local authorities suffering from higher rates of violent crime. The effect of *Asylum PC* continues to have a negative effect on the *Labour share*.

As illustrated in Figure 2 (based on model 2 of Table 2), we find that a one standard deviation deviation increase in the dispersal of asylum seekers per capita is associated with a decline in Labour's vote share of approximately four percentage points. We engage further with the substantive implications of this effect in the Discussion section.

Figure 2: Marginal Effects of Asylum Seeker Disperal on Labour Vote Share



7 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 A3 in Appendix A in the online supporting information, p. 5).

To rule out the possibility that our results are driven by a time trend in the Labour 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 Table A4 in Appendix A, in the online supporting information, p. 6).

Additionally, we run models in which we only use local authorities in years in which Labour was in control of the council (see Table A5 in Appendix A in the online supporting information, p. 7). We found our results to be unchanged.

To deal with 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 Labour 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 in the online supporting information, pp. 9-10).

More substantively, we check whether it is immigration from Central and Eastern Europe following the enlargement of the EU in 2004, rather than asylum seeker immigration, that is driving down the Labour vote share. We find no evidence of an effect of EU-8 immigration on Labour's vote share with or without controls for unemployment and violent crime (see models 1 and 2 in Table A6 in Appendix A in the online supporting iformation, p. 8).[7] EU-8 immigration is negatively correlated with asylum seeker dispersal while dispersal remains robust to the inclusion of EU-8 immigration as an additional control variable (model 3 in Table A6).

8 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 two 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 time-varying factor (e.g., an increase in anti-immigrant sentiment in specific local authorities over time), following the approach of Angrist and

[7]The EU-8 refers to Malta, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Hungary, while the EU-10 includes Hungary and Romania. EU-8 member citizens gained full rights to live and work in the UK from 2004, but Hungarian and Romanian nationals faced extended restrictions until 2014.

Table 3: Effect of Asylum Seeker Dispersal on Labour Vote Share Including Local Authority Time Trend

	(1)	(2)
Asylum PC	-34.834	-38.471
	(5.469)***	(7.216)***
Unemployment PC		-0.050
		(0.142)
Crime PC		-0.186
		(0.098)
LA Dummies	Yes	Yes
Year Dummies	No	No
LA Specific Time Trend	Yes	Yes
N	2,122	1,343
r^2	0.952	0.962

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

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 *Labour share*, without (1) and with (2) controls. The correlation bewteen *Violent crime* and the *Labour share* is no longer statistically significant at conventional levels.

Second, we followed Emily Oster's recommended sensitivity analysis procedure (Oster, 2017). This procedure calculates how strong the degree of bias from an omitted confounder would have to be in order to overturn a significant finding based on two parameters – the degree of selection on unobservables (δ) and the difference in the r squared between the fully controlled regression and the simulated regression also including the unobservables ($rmax$). If δ is assumed equal to 1, so that selection on observables is equal to selection on unobservables and $rmax$ is 1.3 times the r squared on the fully controlled regression, then the causal status of the finding may be considered robust by Oster's criterion. Since our difference-in-differences model explained so much of the variation in Labour support (r squared of 0.92), setting $rmax$ to 1.3 times this number would result in an impossible r squared of greater than 1. This in

itself suggests that there is very little room for any unobserved confounders to affect a model which already has such strong explanatory power. To probe the sensitivity of our findings further, we instead set $rmax$ to 1 and probed the sensitivity of our results to different values of δ. We found that δ would need to be -1.35 – that is, that the degree of selection on unobservables would need to be more than 35 percent greater than the degree of selection on the observed controls (including the year and local authority fixed effects) and that it would need to move the coefficients in the opposite direction to the observed controls, in order to overturn our results. As our model explains so much of the variance in Labour's vote share, the requisite value of δ would increase rapidly for values of $rmax$ less than 1. A value of $rmax$ of 0.95 would imply that selection on unobservables would need to be more than three times more important than selection on unobservables in order to overturn our result.

9 Heterogeneous Treatment Effects: Betraying the Labour Heartland

The use of local authority fixed effects in our analysis indicates that asylum seeker dispersal has a negative effect on support for the Labour Party irrespective of the underlying socioeconomic or ethnic characteristics of a given locality. However, Dustmann et al. (2018) has demonstrated that the cost to incumbents may be exacerbated by the economic or demographic characteristics of recipient locales. In fact, a common narrative in the British case is that the political difficulties associated with asylum seeker immigration were due to asylum seekers being located in predominantly white working class areas (Hynes, 2006). Indeed, we noted earlier that the decline in Labour's vote share was most pronounced in the United Kingdom's former centers of heavy industry and mining. We thus test whether there is an *interaction* effect between local authority socioeconomic and demographic characteristics and the influx of asylum seekers on political behavior.

In the British case, however, for historical reasons the former industrial center overlaps significantly with what we call Labour's political heartland. We define the heartland as those local authorities in the upper quartile of Labour's average vote share in the 1990s. Table 4 shows how heartland and non-heartland local authorities compare. Heartland local authorities tend to be more working class, have higher levels of unemployment, and to be whiter, but with a higher Muslim share of the population, than non-heartland local authorities (the construction of these local authority variables is described below). We therefore also test whether there is a more direct political interaction effect. Specifically, we test whether the effect of asylum seeker dispersal on the Labour vote share is conditional on the party's prior levels of electoral support.

Table 4: Summary Statistics by Labour Heartland Status

	Heartland	Non-heartland	T Test (Diff)	P Value (Diff)
Unemployment Rate	0.065	0.048	10.970	0.000
Violent Crime PC	0.043	0.032	12.325	0.000
White UK PC 2001	0.919	0.915	-1.442	0.000
Working Class PC 2001	0.454	0.382	35.579	0.000
Ethnic Fragmentation 2001	0.140	0.153	-2.378	0.018
Muslim PC 2001	2.088	1.729	2.728	0.006
Asylum Seekers	158.540	77.577	6.328	0.000

In estimating the conditioning effects of prior local authority characteristics on the relationship between the pre-program Labour vote share and asylum seekers, we follow the method of Dustmann et al. (2018). Since prior local authority characteristics would be collinear with local authority fixed effects, we omit them and instead interact prior characteristics with differences in asylum seeker inflows. Specifically we estimate an equation of the form:

$$\Delta LabourShare_{it} = \beta_1 \Delta AsylumPC_{it} + \beta_2 \Delta AsylumPC_{it} \times Context_i + Year$$

Where $\Delta LabourShare_{it}$ is the difference between the Labour vote in year t and its vote in the last year in which local elections were held in authority i, $\Delta AsylumPC_{it}$ is the difference in the proportion/number of asylum seekers between year t and the levels in the last year in which local elections were held in authority i, $Context_i$ refers to a specified demographic, economic, or political characteristic of all local authorities, and *Year* is a dummy variable for year.

For our fixed local authority data, first, we take the working class share of the local authority population from the 2001 census, classifying categories 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the Standard Occupational Classification as working class. These occupational categories include skilled trades, personal service occupations, sales and customer service, process, plant and machine operatives, and those in elementary occupations such as restaurant service staff. Second, we use the measure of local authority *Deprivation* from Norman (2017), which gives estimates of the Townsend Deprivation Index (Townsend et al., 1988). The index is calculated from unemployment as a percentage of the working age population, non-home ownership as a percenage of all households, no access to a car as a percentage of all households, and household overcrowding. Third, we include the percentage of the local authority's population identifying as 'White British' in the 2001 census (*White UK % 2001*). Fourth, we constructed an index of ethnic fragmentation, which is calculated as the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a given local authority will belong to different ethnic groups as defined in the UK 2001 Census *Ethnic Fragmentation 2001* (Greenberg, 1956). Fifth, we include the Muslim share of the local authority population from the 2001 census (*Muslims 2001*). Last, we use the average Labour vote share across local authority elections in the 1990s.

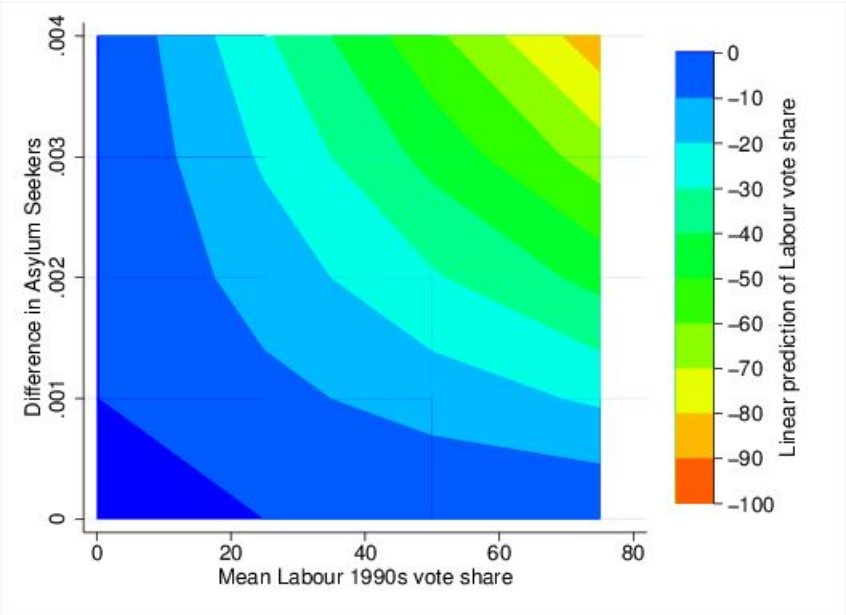
We find little evidence that the negative effect of asylum seeker dispseral on Labour's support is conditional on local authority socioeconomic or demographic characteristics per se. As shown in Table 5, the interactions with the working class proportion of a local authority population (1), its socioeconomic deprivation (2), the proportion of the population that is white UK (4), and the level of ethnic fractionalization (5) are all insignificant. The

Table 5: Heterogenous Treatment Effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Δ Asylum PC	-8.299	-47.045	-85.571	31.032	-63.259	104.355
	(38.537)	(5.619)***	(15.833)***	(54.512)	(12.584)***	(33.841)***
Δ Asylum PC × Working Class PC	-84.902					
	(84.865)					
Δ Asylum PC × Deprivation		0.105				
		(3.951)				
Δ Asylum PC × White UK PC			-91.297			
			(63.439)			
Δ Asylum PC × Ethnic Fragmentation				64.012		
				(42.639)		
Δ Asylum PC × Muslim PC					2.562	
					(1.233)**	
Δ Asylum PC × Pre Labour Share						-289.240
						(65.771)***
1-8 Year Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	1,777	1,770	1,214	1,299	1,326	1,779
r^2	0.403	0.405	0.454	0.435	0.432	0.423

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

Figure 3: Effects of Asylum Seeker Disperal Conditional on Prior Labour Vote Share



coefficient on the interaction between asylum seeker dispersals and the 2001 Muslim share of a local authority population (5) is positive and statistically significant, implying that the negative impact on Labour's vote share due to asylum seeker inflows is mitigated in local authorities with higher Muslim share of the population. This may be explained by the fact that a significant proportion of asylum seekers during this period came from Muslim majority countries. Higher native Muslim numbers may have mitigated the problems of immigrant isolation. Beyond this, however, there is little evidence to indicate that the socioeconomic or demographic profile of a recipient area has an impact on the political effects of asylum seeker inflows.

More interesting is the novel finding in model 6 of Table 5 that the negative effect of asylum seeker inflows on the Labour vote share is exacerbated in local authorities where the party's average vote share was highest in the 1990s. The interaction term between asylum seeker per capita inflows and Labour's pre-program average vote share in the 1990s is large, negative, and statistically significant. As Figure 3 illustrates, the higher Labour's 1990 vote share, the more pronounced the negative effect of asylum seeker per capita inflows

on its current vote share. This result indicates that asylum seeker dispersals had a greater marginal effect on Labour's political support in "core" than in "swing" electorates.

10 Indivdiual Evidence

Table 6: Individual Evidence: Switching from the Labour Party, 2001-2005

	Dependent variable:	
	Switching from Labour	
	(1)	(2)
White Working Class	−0.762***	−0.676***
	(0.120)	(0.092)
Disapprove of asylum seeker policy	1.241***	1.396***
	(0.152)	(0.082)
White Working Class × Disapprove of asylum seeker policy	0.349	
	(0.179)	
Prospective Economic Evaluation		−0.790***
		(0.084)
Constant	−0.233**	0.046
	(0.092)	(0.090)
Observations	3,116	3,116
Log Likelihood	−1,961.814	−1,918.356
Akaike Inf. Crit.	3,931.627	3,844.711
Robust standard errors clustered by panel ID in parentheses	**p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

To explain the fall in Labour's support in response to asylum seeker dispersal, and its particular decline in its former heartland, our main models use variables aggregated to the local authority level. We next present the results from an analysis of survey data to probe some of the individual dynamics at work. Specifically, we draw on the responses of 3,116 2001 general election Labour voters in the 2005-2009 BES 6 Wave Internet Panel Study. Table

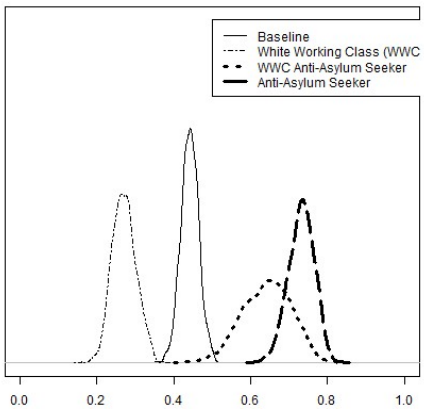


Figure 4: Predicted probability of switching from Labour (all groups)

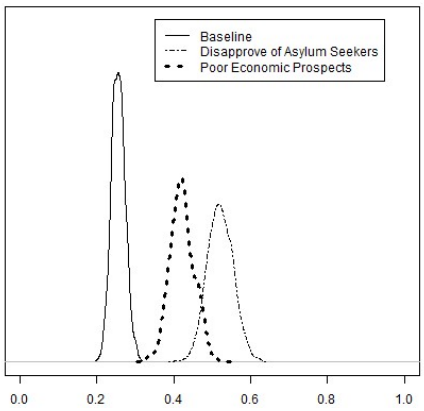


Figure 5: Predicted probabilty of WWC switching from Labour

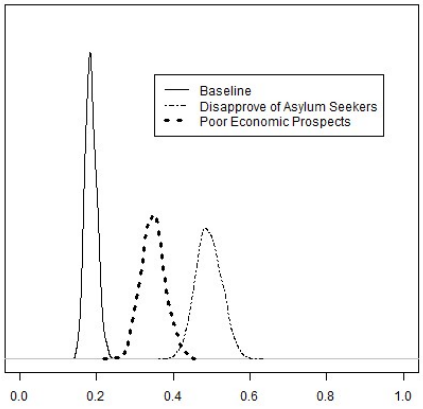


Figure 6: Predicted probability of WC switching from Labour

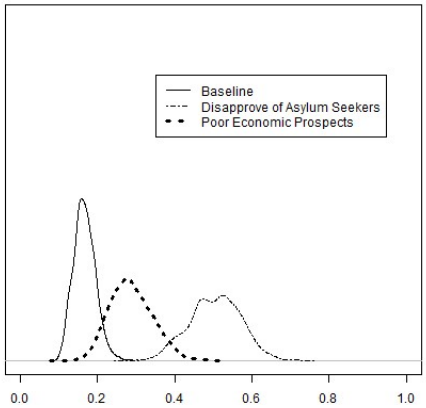


Figure 7: Predicted probability of manual WC switching from Labour

6 presents the results of logistic regressions in which the outcome is defection from Labour (i.e., voting for Labour in 2001 but not in 2005 – the period of highest asylum seeker inflows).

We find that disapproval of the Labour government's handling of asylum seeker immigration is the strongest predictor of whether voters switch from Labour to another party or to abstention between 2001 and 2005 across respondent socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that the effect of asylum seeker disapproval on support for Labour is confined to the white working class (WWC). White working class respondents were in fact overall less likely to defect from the Labour Party than members of other economic and ethnic groups (models 1 and 2). In fact, as we illustrate in Figures 4–7, disapproval of asylum seeker policy has a greater impact on the predicted probability

of switching from the Labour Party between 2001 and 2005 than economic concerns for all groups, not just the white working class.

11 Discussion

The dispersal of asylum seekers across England and Wales by the Labour Party carried a steep political cost, especially in places where it had previously been politically dominant. Take the example of the City of Newcastle. The Labour Party had controlled the Newcastle City Council since the 1970s. Its vote share in the 1990s averaged 53 percent. However, from 2001 on, the city became one of the major destinations for asylum seeker dispersals. It took 425 asylum seekers in 2002, 386 in 2003, and 1,502 in 2004. Labour's vote share plummeted to 24.8 percent in 2004, with the party losing control of the City Council to the Liberal Democrats.

Newcastle was not an isolated case. There were large swings against Labour the 2000s that led to it losing power in dozens of councils across its traditional heartland. Figure 8 plots the Labour political heartland (i.e., the upper quartile of Labour's mean vote share in the 1990s), while Figure 9 shows where the largest swings in vote share away from the Labour Party beween the 1990s and 2010s occurred. Table 7 presents the results of a regression of the magnitude of the negative swing in Labour's vote share on (1) Labour's mean vote share in a local authority across all council elections in the 1990s and (2) on a dummy variable for whether a local authority fell in the heartland in this period. Both measures are strongly correlated with a negative shift in Labour's vote share, controlling for local authority ethnicity and socioeconomic deprivation.

This large negative swing across the heartland, moreover, is not simply due to an underlying tendency for a party's vote share to be more variable where its vote share is greater. To demonstrate this claim, we collected data on the ward level results of every local election going back to 1889. The dispersion of the Labour vote share is in fact lowest when its

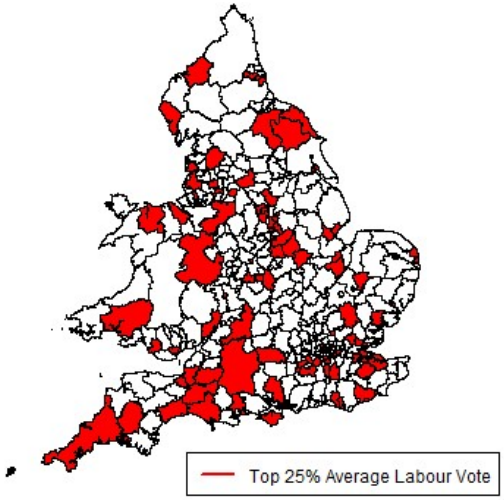


Figure 8: Upper Quartile Labour Vote, 1990s

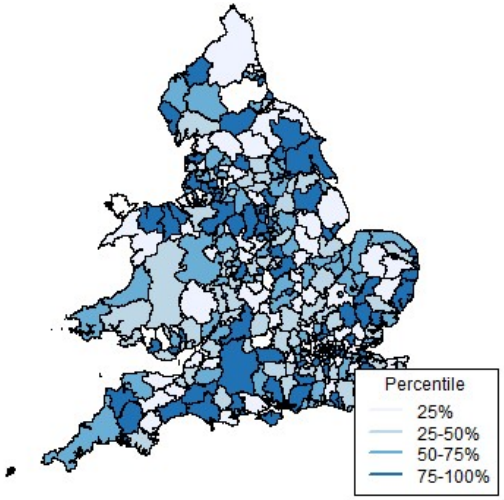


Figure 9: Swing from Labour, 1990s-2010s

Table 7: Vote Swing from Labour, 1990s-2010

	(1)	(2)
Labour Share 1990s	0.928***	
	(0.048)	
Heartland		0.133***
		(0.012)
Deprivation	0.005	0.027***
	(0.005)	(0.005)
% White UK 2001 Census	−0.019	0.080
	(0.099)	(0.118)
Constant	−0.216**	0.054
	(0.086)	(0.101)
Observations	522	522
R^2	0.495	0.291
Adjusted R^2	0.492	0.287
Residual Std. Error (df = 518)	0.095	0.113
F Statistic (df = 3; 518)	168.975***	71.002***
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

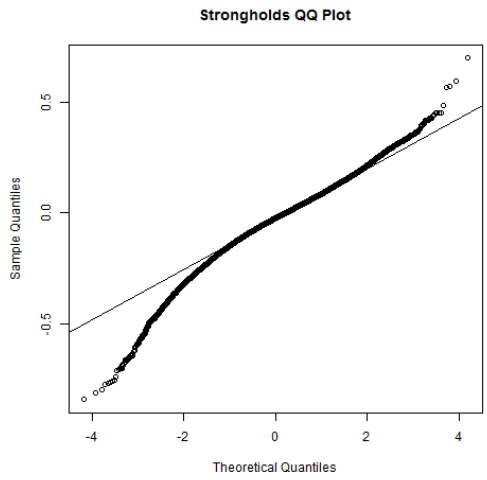


Figure 10: Swings in Stronghold Ward level Labour Vote 1880-2003

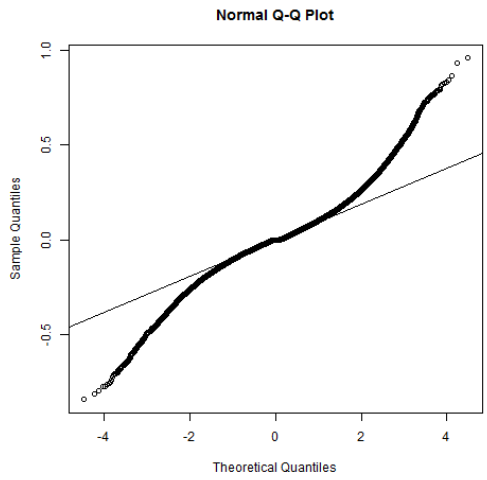


Figure 11: Swings in Non-stronghold Ward level Labour Vote 1880-2003

vote share in preceding elections is highest. That is, where the party holds a dominant vote share, it tends to experience more modest swings in subsequent elections. For illustrative purposes, we plot the skewness of the swings in the Labour vote share for both stronghold wards (those in the upper quartile of the Labour vote share in the prior decade) (Figure 10) and non-stronghold wards (all others) (Figure 11). The marginally greater drop in Labour's share in its heartland in response to asylum seeker inflows in the 2000s does, therefore, appear to be substantively significant.

We interpret this novel heartland interaction finding as evidence of a "betrayal" mechanism. We propose that core electorates react more strongly to the imposition of costs than swing electorates, as costs in the former may be additionally perceived as a betrayal. That is, we suggest that voters in core electorates perceive that they are being punished for their prior loyalty to the party of government. In this case, voters in core or heartland electorates may have thus received two "treatments", which lowered their vote for the Labor Party: asylum seeker inflows to their electorate *and* the betrayal of the interests of their electorate to those of swing electorates. Thus, while both core and swing electorates respond to the dispersal of asylum seekers by defecting from Labour (either to another party, or by abstaining),

a betrayal mechanism of this sort would account for why this shift is exacerbated in core electorates.

12 Conclusion

This paper estimates the effects of a British Labour Party policy intervention that dispersed asylum seekers to local authorities across England and Wales on support for the party during the 2000s. It finds that asylum seeker dispersals, in spite of their modest numbers compared to overall immigration flows, decreased the Labour Party's vote share over the decade. 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. The paper makes several contributions.

First, this paper is the first to specifically examine the relationship between immigration policy and mainstream party support. The effects of immigration on support for parties of the far right have been studied extensively. Comparably detailed analyses of how immigration affects mainstream parties are much fewer. Even the most sophistated of these (Dustmann et al., 2018) does not provide a specific theory for why and how immigration affects mainstream party support. This is of particular consequence in Britain, where the country's majoritarian electoral system means that extremist party support is likely to significantly understate the political impact of immigration. Before disaffected mainstream party supporters turn to a minority, anti-immigrant party such as the British National Party (BNP), they are likely to abstain altogether. Indeed, Evans and Chzhen (2013) find that many United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) supporters in 2010 came to the party from Labour through this indirect route. Some of these same voters have since migrated to the anti-immigrant and pro-Brexit fringes of the Conservative Party. This paper advances our understanding of the causes of defection from mainstream parties such as the British Labour Party.

Second, we present the first evidence that the political cost of asylum seeker immigration policy varies with the level of an incumbent party's existing political control. While previous research on the social effects of asylum seeker dispersal argued that its impact was exacerbated by, if not caused by, the dispersal of asylum seekers to poorer or more diverse localities (Hynes, 2006), we find little evidence that this is the case. The effect of asylum seeker immigration on support for the Labour Party at the elctorate level is not conditional on the local socioeconomic context, nor is it conditional at the individual level on social class or ethncity. We show instead that core and swing electorates respond differently to asylum seeker inflows. We proposed a "betrayal" mechanism to account for exacerbation of the negative effects of the unpopular policy of asylum seeker dispersal among core electorates.

Last, the paper contributes to policy debates on immigration policy. The dispersal of asylum seekers and refugees across a recipient state's territory poses a challenge for many governments, especially, but not only in Western Europe. In states where public opinion favors lower levels of immigration, the dispersal of new immigrants is likely to carry a political cost for any administration. Our analysis indicates that mainstream incumbents face the additional challenge of allocating costs across "safe" and "swing" electorates. Although the latter may make sense in light of research on the effects of the targeting of club goods or pork barrel towards swing electorates, the imposition of costs appears to follow a distinct logic, in which core electorates may balk at bearing additional costs because of their perceived loyalty.

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