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Brothers or invaders? How crisis-driven migrants shape voting behavior

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Brothers or invaders? How crisis-driven migrants shape voting behavior[☆]Sandra V. Rozo^{a,*}, Juan F. Vargas^b^a USC Marshall School of Business, 701 Exposition Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90089, USA^b Universidad del Rosario, School of Economics, Colombia

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ABSTRACT

We study the electoral effects of the arrival of 1.3 million Venezuelan refugees in Colombia as a consequence of the Venezuelan humanitarian crisis. We exploit the fact that forced migrants disproportionately locate in places with earlier settlements of Venezuelans after the intensification of the crisis. We find that larger migration shocks increase voter's turnout and shift votes from left-to right-wing political ideologies. These effects are predominantly driven by voter's concerns on the economic effects of migrants as well as by a novel channel that we call *strategic electoral misinformation*, whereby political parties make the forced migration shock salient to voters in order to demonize the political agenda of competitors.

"The fear of immigration is poisoning Western politics. Donald Trump owes his job to it. Brexit would not be happening without it. Strident nationalists wield power in Italy, Hungary, Poland, and Austria, and have gained influence elsewhere." The Economist¹

1. Introduction

A growing stream of studies has documented a strong correlation between migration inflows and voter's antipathy toward pro-migrant political views.² However, there is an ongoing debate on the

mechanisms driving these effects. A group of studies suggests that voters penalize politicians who are more welcoming to migrants if the latter displace local labor or depress wages and thus threaten their socioeconomic well-being.³ Another group of studies suggests that voter's antipathy toward immigration is driven by group-related concerns about the cultural impacts of migrants, due to factors such as race, religion, language, nationality, or social norms.⁴

This paper proposes a third driver of these effects, that is likely to occur in contexts of political polarization. We call this novel mechanism *strategic electoral misinformation*. It takes place when political parties in

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¹ Last accessed August 30, 2018, from: <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/08/25/the-way-forward-on-immigration-to-the-west?cid= cust/ednew/n/bl/2018/08/23n/owned/n/n/nwl/n/n/LA/146317/n>.

² Examples of these studies include Gerdes and Wadensjo (2008); Otto and Steinhardt (2014); Mendez and Cutillas (2014); Barone et al. (2016); Harmon (2017); Halla et al. (2017); Dustmann et al. (2016). Current examples include the rise in support for the anti-immigration *Swedish Democrats*, which increased their vote share in the parliamentary elections of September 2018 by 5 percentage points relative to the 2014 elections, giving them 18% of the seats in the Riksdag. Over the past few years, right-wing parties have also seen their vote share increase significantly in other parts of Europe, including Italy, Poland, and Germany.

³ See Scheve and Slaughter (2001); Mayda (2006); Dustmann and Preston (2006); Hanson et al. (2007); Facchini and Mayda (2009); Malhotra et al. (2013) for examples.

⁴ A few notable examples include Citrin et al. (1997); Sniderman et al. (2004); Card et al. (2012); Tingley (2012); Dustmann et al. (2019); Tabellini (2020).