

Migration and elections*

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September 2015

Abstract

Migration policies and migration flows are partly determined by political economy factors. However, there is little evidence on the precise linkages between migration flows, election outcomes and changes in migration laws. This paper intends to fill this gap by analyzing a large panel data set on migration flows for 15 OECD (destination) countries. In particular, we test whether the identity of the governing parties / the parties in parliament affects migration patterns.

Keywords: Migration policies, elections.

JEL: D72, F22

*Financial support by the Leibniz Association (SAW-2012-ifo-3) is gratefully acknowledged.

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1 Extended abstract

Migration policies and migration flows are partly determined by political economy factors. However, there is little evidence on the precise linkages between migration flows, election outcomes and changes in migration laws. Mayda (2010) analyzes how changes in destination countries' migration policies affects migration flows into 14 OECD countries between 1980 and 1995. She finds evidence consistent with the constraining role played by migration policies. Similarly, Ortega and Peri (2013) find that tightening laws regulating immigrant entry reduces rapidly and significantly their flow. However, both contributions regard changes in migration laws as exogenous and do not investigate its underlying drivers. This paper intends to precisely fill this gap by testing whether the identity of the governing parties / the parties in parliament affects migration patterns.

A first step to shed light on the interactions between the migration flows, election outcomes and migration laws is to analyze whether the identity of the governing parties / the parties in parliament affects migration patterns. A priori it is not evident whether there is a stable pattern across countries as both right and left parties might be sceptical towards migration albeit for different reasons. However, it seems plausible that extreme right or nationalist parties deter potential immigrants directly or force the more moderate parties to take stronger stance on migration issues. The latter effect might work immediately via changes in migration laws, but there could also be an independent effect via a stricter implementation or enforcement of existing laws. Even for already existing laws, their implementation is up to the discretion of the current government that decides on priorities (e.g. deportation policies in France, policy change in the UK). To test our hypotheses, we first try to explain why migration laws change and then analyze the effect of elections on migration flows directly.

Our analysis is based on a large panel data on bilateral migration flows for 15 OECD destination countries and 150 countries of origin over the period 1980 to 2006. The data set is based on Ortega and Peri (2013) and has been compiled using the OECD's International Migration Database and the UN migration statistics. These data excludes temporary migration for tourism, study, or business reasons. As regards the election data we build on two sources: First, we use the Manifesto Project data by Volkens, Lehmann, Merz, Regel, and Werner (2013) to calculate the average position of the national parliament on a right-left scale. The data on the share of the parties classified as right and as nationalist (including the nationalist party dummy) as well as the information on the election years in the destination countries also stem from this source. Second, we use the Comparative Political Dataset by Armingeon, Knöpfel, Weisstanner, Engler, Potolidis, and Gerber (2013) to obtain an indicator for the position of the government in power on a right-left scale. Furthermore, we use the data on migration laws' tightness compiled by Ortega and Peri (2013), data from CEPII and the Penn World Tables.

We estimate variants of the following equation:

$$V_{odt} = \beta_o W_{ot} + \beta_d W_{dt} + \alpha_o + \alpha_d + \gamma X_{od} + \delta E_{dt} + \delta Gov_{dt} + \delta Ext_{dt} + \tau_t + e_{odt}, \quad (1.1)$$

where o refers to origin country, d to country of destination and t to time period. V_{odt} represents bilateral migration flows, W_{ot} and W_{dt} the GDP/population in the origin and the destination country, α_o and α_d are origin and destination country fixed effects, whereas X_{od} represent country-pair specific variables, in particular a population weighted density. We also control for the tightness of entry laws E_{dt} as classified by Ortega and Peri (2013). Our main variable of interest is Gov_{dt} which classifies the government in power and the parliament on a right-left scale. We also we include a dummy Ext_{dt} which indicates whether a nationalist party is represented in the national parliament (and interact it with the indicator for the government / the parliament). Finally, τ_t are year fixed effects and e_{odt} represents an error term. In some regressions, we include further interaction terms to test whether the political drivers depend on the income differential between destination and origin country. Standard errors are cluster by country pair (as standard in the (gravity model) literature and in line with Ortega and Peri (2013)). Other variants of our main equation rely on country-pair and origin-time fixed effects.

The summary statistics of our data set are presented in Table 1.

[Table 1 about here.]

In the first set of regressions we investigate whether the election variables explain changes in migration laws. As evident from Table 2 migration laws become tighter the more right-wing are the parties in the parliament and in government. As expected, the effect of nationalist parties is particularly striking. As regards our main estimation (1.1) the preliminary results displayed in Table 3 indicate that partisan effects translate into changes in bilateral migration flows.

[Table 2 about here.]

[Table 3 about here.]

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Table 1: Summary statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
mig_long	45565	1.498	7.239	0	455075
gdpcap_d	41515	23990	9750	4354	66964
gdpcap_o	38877	6560	9833	6294	89563
distw	41515	7366	4.402	1609	19516
contig	41515	.021	.144	0	1
comlang_off	41515	.184	.387	0	1
comcur	41515	.016	.126	0	1
comleg	41515	.223	.416	0	1
colony	41515	.044	.207	0	1
entry_laws_tight	35805	-.90	1.991	-6	2
maastricht	35805	.247	.431	0	1
schengen	35805	.212	.409	0	1
electyear	33520	.332	.471	0	1
govparty	33520	2.33	1.70	1	5
shareright	41515	.552	.137	.320	.956
parliament	41515	2.16	12.11	-29.81	39.44
nationalist	41515	.080	.273	0	1
nationalistshare	41515	.002	.007	0	.079
growthrate	60289	.020	.018	-.071	.066

Table 2: Explaining migration laws

Depvar: entry_laws_tight	(1)	(2)	(3)
log_gdpcap_d	1.357*** (12.23)	0.333** (3.00)	0.109 (0.93)
growth	2.921*** (7.48)	3.209*** (8.47)	1.278** (3.17)
parliament	0.00928*** (11.62)		
nationalist	1.713*** (66.28)		
share_right		1.220*** (14.97)	
nationalistshare		181.6*** (79.13)	
gov_r			0.456*** (18.83)
gov_rc			0.0662* (2.04)
gov_lc			-0.358*** (-11.33)
gov_l			-0.0908** (-3.20)
N	49459	49459	49459

Table 3: Main results

Depvar: Bilateral migration flows	(1)	(2)	(3)
log_gdpcap_d	0.433** (2.91)	0.568*** (3.79)	0.700*** (4.35)
log_gdpcap_o	-0.359*** (-11.45)	-0.354*** (-11.32)	-0.422*** (-12.74)
distw	-0.000162*** (-74.03)	-0.000162*** (-74.01)	-0.000170*** (-67.15)
contig	0.824*** (17.22)	0.824*** (17.21)	0.753*** (14.42)
comlang_off	0.480*** (18.33)	0.480*** (18.30)	0.570*** (20.69)
comcur	0.547*** (9.69)	0.546*** (9.66)	0.598*** (9.67)
col45	1.734*** (31.13)	1.739*** (31.19)	1.684*** (29.01)
parliament	-0.00318*** (-3.43)		-0.00282** (-2.63)
nationalist	-0.193*** (-5.14)		-0.205*** (-4.94)
share_right		-0.0120 (-0.11)	
nationalistshare		-4.347** (-2.82)	
entry_laws_tight			-0.0253*** (-3.93)
schengen			-0.151*** (-5.04)
maastricht			0.275*** (7.95)
N	39099	39099	33614