

Wagner F. Oliveira (Brazilian School of Economics and Finance)

Published on March 3, 2022 – Updated on March 18, 2022

Date

Le 09 March 2022 De 17:30 à 18:30

Informations complémentaires :5.30 pm CET

Webinar: The Economics of Migration. Unpacking the Political Impact of Low-skilled Immigration

Unpacking the Political Impact of Low-skilled Immigration

ABSTRACT

There is evidence that particular types of immigration induce electoral shifts to the right-wing. With that in mind, we ask: is this purely a short run effect or is there persistence or attenuation through time? Also, to what extent is the effect mediated by changes in the living conditions of natives? This paper aims to unpack the underlying economic mechanisms through which low-skilled immigration shifted votes towards republicans in the United States between 1992 and 2016. Building upon a dynamic shift-share strategy for identification, we are able to disentangle between short and longer-term adjustment dynamics. We show that unemployment among low-skilled natives and local welfare expenditure per capita increase in the short run as a result of low-skilled immigration, but those effects fade through time, while voting is shifted towards republicans in the short run, but does not attenuate. We then use causal mediation analysis to measure the joint contribution of these channels to explain changes in voting. We estimate this explanation potential to be 60% in the short run. In the medium run, if only economic channels were at play, we would expect attenuation in voting shifts to be higher, suggesting that there are possibly other non-economic factors generating persistence in the right-wing shift.

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Wagner F. Oliveira(<https://sites.google.com/view/wagnerfoliveira>)

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