

Katherine Eriksson (UC Davis)

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Webinar: The Economics of Migration

Understanding the Success of the Know Nothing Party

joint with Marcella Alsan and Gregory Niemesh

ABSTRACT

The Know-Nothing Party swept to power in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 1854, running on a staunchly anti-Catholic and anti-Irish platform. In this paper, we examine the contribution of various factors that have been hypothesized to contribute to the party's success. We digitize several censuses to develop exposure measures of shocks to labor supply and demand as well as measures of Irish assimilation and the fiscal burden associated with foreign-born paupers. Consistent with Fogel's hypothesis, we find labor market crowd-out from the Irish is positively correlated with Know-Nothing vote shares. Yet, as emphasized by Mulkern (1990) industrialization and associated deskilling of the labor force was as important. These two forces played a decisive role in some, but not all, years of the Know-Nothing's electoral success and stronghold locations were unaffected by both. Lastly, we find migration and occupational upgrading partially offset the negative association between Irish labor crowdout and the evolution of wealth for native-born men.

[Read the paper\(https://cerdi.uca.fr/medias/fichier/alsan-eriksson-niemesh-knownnothings_1601625216969-pdf?ID_FICHE=50556&INLINE=FALSE\)](https://cerdi.uca.fr/medias/fichier/alsan-eriksson-niemesh-knownnothings_1601625216969-pdf?ID_FICHE=50556&INLINE=FALSE)

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Katherine Eriksson(<http://kaeriksson.ucdavis.edu/>)

UCDavis(<https://www.ucdavis.edu/>)

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