The Political Consequences of Mass Repatriation

RÉSUMÉ

What happens when the electorate of a country is suddenly increased by hundreds of thousands of new potential voters? How parties adjust their strategies in response to such an event? To address these questions I exploit a quasi-experiment represented by the arrival in France of about 1 million repatriates from Algeria, the so called pieds noirs, which happened in 1962. To study the causal impact of the pieds noirs on political voting, I instrument their location choice based on the average temperature by department. I find that the arrival of the pieds noirs increased the turnout and the vote share of far-right parties while decreased the vote share of center-right parties in both legislative and presidential elections between 1962 and 1974. I then analyse how this shock affected the political strategies of the different French parties by looking at more than 10,000 political manifestos issued in the legislative elections between 1962 and 1973. I show that, the larger the exposure to the repatriates’ arrival, the larger the share of the political manifestos devoted to the issues associated with pieds noirs. These findings, are not simply relegated to an historical setting but can be relevant in explaining current parties’ behaviour. As in the case of the pieds noirs, ignored issues may still be captured by radical parties and used for their own political advantage.

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