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The Refugee Crisis and Right-Wing Populism: Evidence from the Italian Dispersal Policy

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RÉSUMÉ

This paper examines how the 2014-2017 'refugee crisis' in Italy affected voting behavior and the rise of right-wing populism in national Parliamentary elections. We collect unique administrative data and leverage exogenous variation in refugee resettlement across Italian municipalities induced by the Dispersal Policy. We find a positive and significant effect of the share of asylum seekers on support for radical-right anti-immigration parties. The effect is heterogeneous across municipality characteristics, yet robust to dispersal policy features. We provide causal evidence that the anti-immigration backlash is not rooted in adverse economic effects, while it is triggered by radical-right propaganda.

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