

# **Populism and Proximity to Immigrants and Refugees: Evidence from Individual-level Voting Behaviour**

## **Abstract**

This study investigates some mechanisms through which immigration may impact voting. We collect detailed data on immigration density around voters' residence and conduct a survey to elicit individual retrospective voting choices of eligible electors in Bologna, a large municipality in Northern Italy, over a twenty-year period. We supplement this data with geo-referenced information on apartments hosting asylum seekers, whose presence surged in Bologna since 2014 during the Mediterranean refugee crisis. Using this unique information, we find that the opening of asylum seekers hosting facilities reduces the likelihood of nearby voters turning to populist parties in areas where the share of non-Italian residents is higher, while the opposite is true for the areas with the lowest shares of immigrant residents. Our study supports the notion that "contact" and "group conflict" theories are not mutually exclusive and can coexist within the same context across different groups.

This paper is joint work with G. Prarolo and A. Schiavone

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