

Refugees and Elections: The Effects of Syrians on Voting Behavior in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

In the wake of the Syrian civil war, more than three million people have fled to Turkey, which now hosts the largest refugee population on earth. Making up 4.42 per cent of the total population in Turkey as of February 2018, Syrian refugees are nevertheless spread unevenly within its borders. The ratio of refugees to the local population ranges from as high as 99 per cent in the city of Kilis to as low as 0.05 per cent in Sinop. This article presents findings from the empirical study of the effect of this geographical variation on election outcomes in Turkey, after the arrival of major refugee populations in 2012. Drawing on a unique subnational dataset and ordinary least squares (OLS), generalized least squares (GLS), and difference-in-differences (DiD) regressions, the study compares cities hosting few refugees (control group) with cities with large refugee populations (treatment group) to determine whether significant differences in voting patterns emerged. Our findings show a negative, but insignificant, impact on the incumbent party. The findings have policy implications for Turkey as well as any country that experiences a considerable flow of refugees.

INTRODUCTION

Syrians escaping from the civil war in Syria first began to flee to Turkey in March 2011. Their numbers have gradually increased since then, reaching 3.5 million as of February 2018. As a result, Turkey now hosts the largest refugee population on earth. Syrians in Turkey are under a temporary protection regime and are thus relatively free to settle across the country; only 7 per cent remain in camps. The majority live separate but parallel lives amongst the general Turkish population. At the provincial level, the ratio of Syrians to locals ranges as high as 99 per cent in Kilis (a province along the Turkish–Syrian border) to as low as 0.05 per cent in Sinop (a province in the Black Sea region).

Turkey has held three parliamentary elections since 2011: on June 12, 2011, June 7, 2015, and November 1, 2015. Refugee arrivals at the time of the 2011 elections were minimal. However, by June 2015 refugees numbered approximately three per cent of the population overall. Furthermore, in 21 of Turkey's 81 provinces Syrians were over one per cent of the population. In any country, we would expect such high numbers of refugees to affect election outcomes, either decreasing votes for the incumbent party or increasing votes for anti-migrant ones. The electoral successes of anti-migrant parties in Europe in 2017, such as Alternative for Germany (AfD), the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands, and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) are cases in point.

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To analyse this phenomenon, we compiled a province-level dataset on social and economic variables for Turkey's 81 provinces between 2006–15. As provincial-level data has not been available until recently, existing studies on elections and refugees are based on survey data (Altındag and Kaushal, 2017). Our article, on the other hand, benefits from the recent availability of provincial-level data on refugees as well as other social and economic factors.

The question therefore arises: have Syrian refugee inflows impacted voting behaviour in Turkey? To answer this question, we examine the effect of the aforementioned geographical variation of refugees using the outcome of the June 2015 election. We match cities hosting few refugees (control group) with ones with large refugee populations (treatment group) and investigate whether significant differences in voting patterns emerge between the groups after the arrival of major refugee populations in 2012. In order to carry out our investigation, we compiled a unique province-level dataset that allowed us to test the impact of refugees through ordinary least squares (OLS), generalized least squares (GLS), and difference-in-differences (DiD) regressions.

While there is an emerging literature on the effect of Syrian refugees on elections, the focus has been mainly on European countries. The research on the impact of refugees on political outcomes in countries close to Syria is nearly nonexistent. Besides having policy implications for any country that experiences a sudden and substantial flow of refugees, this article contributes to the literature by being one of the first systemic empirical studies that focus on a country bordering Syria.

RECENT STUDIES ON ELECTORAL CONSEQUENCES OF REFUGEE PRESENCE

The effects of immigration on host countries have been widely studied in terms of economic and social outcomes. Less attention has been placed on the political and electoral consequences, particularly the impact on the voting behaviour of natives. There are two main assumptions regarding the political implications of immigration. *First*, with the rise of immigration, we see more anti-immigrant movements and parties; and *second*, certainly, support for anti-immigrant parties involve an element of protest voting, where either the votes of the incumbent party decrease and/or the votes of the anti-migrant parties increase (Castles, de Haas, & Miller, 2014, pp. 307-312).

One study by Otto and Steinhardt (2014) has provided support for the effect of immigration on local election outcomes using a dataset of 103 city districts in Hamburg, Germany, from 1987 to 1998, a period of sizeable inflows of immigrants and asylum seekers. The authors find a positive and significant relationship between increasing numbers of immigrants and the vote shares of extreme right-wing and anti-immigration parties (Otto & Steinhardt, 2014, p. 67). Furthermore, they suggest that a growing number of immigrants not only increased support for anti-immigration parties, but also decreased support for pro-immigration parties with liberal immigration policies and a commitment to minority rights. Their findings indicate that economic factors influence native voting behaviour to some extent. However, non-economic determinants – cultural preferences, national sentiments, and welfare competition – provide most of the explanation of native attitudes to immigration policy. Locals mostly focus on the potential detrimental impact of immigrants on welfare and access to local services, such as childcare and schooling.

In a similar vein, Dustmann, Vasilijeva, and Damm (2016) studied the effects of refugee migration on voting outcomes in parliamentary and municipal elections in Denmark. Drawing on a dataset of 275 municipalities between 1986 and 1998, in which refugees were allocated randomly, their research suggests that refugee allocation has a significant influence on voting outcomes; they find that a one-percentage-point increase in refugee population corresponds with an increase of 1.23 percentage points in the vote share of anti-immigration parties in parliamentary elections and an increase of 1.97 percentage points in municipal ones. Moreover, they find that parties on the left of the political spectrum ceded votes to anti-immigration parties. Surprisingly, they observed the

converse in the largest urban centres. There, increasing refugee allocation resulted in a *decrease* in the vote share of anti-immigration parties. The study concluded that refugee migration not only increases support for anti-immigration parties, but can also be a key trigger for their emergence in the first place.

The case of Italy – which has not been a major destination for migrants historically – has been explored by Barone et al. (2016). A spike in arrivals in Italy in 2012 saw the immigrant share of the total population jump from 1.7 per cent to 8 per cent, while comparable countries' rates remained stable. The authors analysed the national parliamentary elections of 2001, 2006, and 2008 by comparing voting patterns in nearly 8000 municipalities subject to migration flows. Their findings suggest that a one-percentage-point increase in immigrants in a municipality translates into a 0.86 percentage-point increase in votes for the centre-right coalition. The paper makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, the authors suggest that the results are dependent on municipality size; mid-sized districts have an especially noteworthy impact. Second, they propose that the increase in votes for the centre-right coalition results in a decrease in other centre coalitions and the left. In addition, they emphasise that increasing migration leads to a reduction in voter turnout and an increase in protest votes. Third, immigration affects municipal elections as well as national ones. Finally, the authors note that there are various elements that affect native voting behaviour such as cultural diversity, competition in the labour market, and competition in access to public services.

Looking into municipal and parliamentary elections in Germany, Gehrsitz and Ungerer (2016) have studied how the sudden and large flow of migrants to Germany in 2014–15 affected unemployment, crime, and voting behaviour. Evaluating election turnout and support for the governing party, they find that – unlike in Denmark – rising immigrant flows had no significant effect on support for the AfD (an explicitly anti-immigration outfit). However, although there was no significant change in the support for AfD, they found that a one-standard-deviation increase in refugee inflows translated into a loss of 4.5 percentage points in the governing party's vote share.

In Austria, Steinmayr (2016) differentiates between macro- and micro-level exposure to refugees and suggests that these have different effects in terms of electoral support for far-right parties in Austria. Macro-level exposure includes social and traditional media, as well as political campaigns, while at the micro level exposure is defined as contact with refugees. Steinmayr asks whether direct contact with refugees caused any change in levels of support for the FPÖ, the nationalistic and anti-immigration party in Austria, which has doubled its vote share in recent elections. The study concluded that even though macro-level exposure has seen the party's general support grow, direct contact with refugees at the neighbourhood level saw the FPÖ's vote share fall by about 4.4 percentage points.

Sekeris and Vasilakis (2016) studied the impact of refugee flows to the Greek islands on the native population's political attitudes and votes for Greece's anti-immigration party, Golden Dawn. Much like the other studies, their results provide evidence that an increase in the share of refugees is correlated with a rise in the vote share of the anti-immigration party, although with no significant impact on the other political parties.

Altindag and Kaushal (2017) studied the influence of massive refugee inflows on natives' voting behaviour in Turkey. Using surveys of Turkish citizens' political preferences from 2012 to 2015 as well as the results of the national elections between 2011 and 2015, the authors examined political outcomes based on the geographic distribution and concentration of refugees both before and after the onset of the Syrian civil war. The results of their analysis suggest a strong polarization of opinions towards refugees between supporters and opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party (JDP), which established the "open door" policy for the Syrian refugees. The analysis of the survey data showed that while the massive inflow of refugees resulted in a decrease in JDP support, this did not favour any other major parties. Similarly, their analysis of election outcomes also finds decreased backing for the JDP, where a one-percentage-point increase in refugee presence

translated into a 0.44 percentage point decrease in the JDP's share of votes. They have concluded that while Turkish citizens are highly polarized in their opinions towards Syrian refugees, JDP supporters tend to have less negative opinions than others.

Overall, recent research on the electoral consequences of refugee presence consists of scattered case studies of different countries at different points in time that nevertheless, for the most part, reach a similar conclusion: refugee inflows tend to increase support for right-wing and anti-immigration parties, and usually decrease support for incumbent parties. As Altindag and Kaushal (2017) have also argued, the Turkish case differs in so far as the decrease in support for the incumbent party did not favour any other party, right-wing or otherwise.

STUDIES ON ELECTORAL OUTCOMES IN TURKEY

There is exhaustive literature on the party preferences of the Turkish voters, demonstrating that since the 1990s the voting preferences of the voters were shaped by ethnic and religious identity, party identity, social status, political ideology and socio-tropic evaluations of the macroeconomic performance (Kalaycioglu, 2017). We classify these studies under three main headings: the social-cleavages paradigm, economic voting, and client linkages. Before proceeding, a brief explanation of the characteristics and main findings of each group is in order.¹

Political behaviour in Turkey has traditionally been studied through the lens of social cleavages. Shils' center-periphery paradigm (1961) has loomed large as the dominant framework in this context. It was first applied to Turkey by Mardin in 1973, and then by Heper in 1980 (Sayari & Esmer, 2002). This perspective casts Turkish political outcomes – including voting behavior – as a function of the interaction between a more modern, educated, Western-oriented and secular centre, and a more traditional, religious periphery (see Kalaycioglu, 1994, 2007). Academic studies based on social cleavages have focused on different issues such as divergence in left-right views (Sayari, 1978), economic ideology (Onis, 2013) and ethnic and religious identity (Yesilada and Noordijk, 2010, Karakoc 2013, Ozbudun, 2013). The results suggest that the latter issue dominates the other divides (Carkoglu, 2007).

There are different arguments regarding economic voting in Turkey. Looking at macroeconomic determinants of electoral support for incumbents in Turkey between 1950 and 1995, Carkoglu (1997) asserts that there is indeed evidence that governments have been rewarded or punished for their economic performance. Analysing the 1995 Turkish parliamentary election with a unique set of cross-section data, Akarca and Tansel (2007) claim that Turkish voters do consider the government's economic performance – they do not, however, look back further than one year. They also concluded that while poor performance benefits extremist opposition parties at the expense of the major incumbent party, the minor incumbent and the centrist opposition parties seemed to be unaffected by economic conditions, where the party preferences of Turkish voters could also be explained by their socioeconomic characteristics. Similarly, focusing on the 2002 elections, Baslevent, Kirmanoglu and Senatalar (2005) present evidence that economic evaluations play a significant role in party choice alongside non-economic factors. They argue that economic voting is present in Turkey to punish unsuccessful incumbents.

Acknowledging economic voting theory's explanatory power over voting behaviour in the context of Turkey, Erdogan (2013) questions the basic premises of the economic voting approach. Based on field research conducted in Istanbul prior to the general elections of 2011, in a "revisionist" approach, he maintains that the economic assessments of voters are greatly shaped by their partisan affiliations, leading to a vicious cycle.

Two elections were held in Turkey in 2015 successively. Looking closely at how voter preferences shifted in these two elections, held barely five months apart in the same legislative general

elections, Kalaycioglu (2017) argued that while economic voting had been the major dynamic in the June elections, security concerns interacting with popular economic evaluations were predominant factors affecting voter behaviour in the November elections.

The third group of studies endeavours to explain the voting behaviour in Turkey through client networks. Despite client relations having started during the Ottoman period and continued after the emergence of the Turkish Republic (Sayari, 2014), more recent client networks are distinct. Here, catch-all centre parties with vaguer ideological programmes establish “patron-client” relationships between voters and elites through the targeted provision of economic and social benefits (Heper & Keyman, 1998).

The power of client networks is the principal factor posited by Marschall, Aydogan, and Bulut (2016) in their study on the rise and consolidation of the JDP since 2002. Employing political, economic, and socio-demographic data from 900 municipal districts in Turkey, they study the relationship between Turkey’s Mass Housing Administration (TOKİ) financed housing projects and the JDP’s success in the three mayoral elections between 2004 and 2014. They conclude that although established accounts of Turkish party voting explain some of the JDP’s triumph, distributive politics in the form of TOKİ housing projects was a stronger determinant of the party’s enduring electoral appeal and durability.

There are also other studies looking for alternative explanations of voting behaviour in Turkey. To illustrate, analysing the effects of terrorism on the electoral choices of the Turkish voters in the 1991 and 1995 general elections, Kibris (2011) concludes that Turkish voters are highly sensitive to terrorism, blaming the government for casualties. Exposure to terrorism, she finds, leads to a rise in the vote share of right-wing parties. In a similar vein to Kibris, we want to know whether the presence of refugees affects electoral behaviour in Turkey, and if so, how much? The next session lays out the theoretical expectations and empirical analysis.

EMPIRICAL ASSESSMENT

As stated above, the number of refugees and their ratio to the local population varies significantly among the provinces of Turkey. At the end of 2015, there were more than 375,000 refugees in Sanliurfa, accounting for 20 per cent of the local population. The 124,287 refugees in Kilis constituted 95.1 per cent of the population there, meaning almost as many Syrians as Turkish citizens were living in Kilis. At the other extreme, there were only 14 refugees in Bartın, accounting for less than 0.0001 per cent of the local population.

We exploit this variation in refugee populations across different provinces to analyse how voters in Turkey responded politically to the inflows. As observed in the literature, if refugees create economic and social pressures in the daily life of the local population, one would expect the local population to react by punishing the incumbent party at the ballot box. It follows that we would see a severer reaction by voters towards the ruling party in those provinces with higher ratios of refugees.

To analyse this phenomenon, we compiled a province-level dataset on social and economic variables for Turkey’s 81 provinces between 2006–15. As provincial-level data has not been available until recently, the majority of the existing studies on elections and refugees are based on survey data. Our article, on the other hand, benefits from the recent availability of provincial-level data on refugees as well as other social and economic factors.

We collected data covering the July 2007, June 2011, and June and November 2015 general elections. This allowed us to evaluate and contrast voting behaviour before and after the major refugee flows stemming from the Syrian civil war. We chose to examine only general elections and exclude local ones in our analysis, since the most recent local elections in Turkey took place in

March 2014, when the refugee crisis had yet to impact the country significantly and refugee arrivals were only a minor concern in Turkish politics (Carkoglu, 2014).

The dependent variable in our analysis is JDP vote share in each province. We only focus on JDP vote share, because the ruling party has retained a parliamentary majority (i.e., single-party government) since 2002. It stands to reason that voters would hold the JDP rather than other parties accountable for the inflow of refugees. Nevertheless, we also collected data for those major parties consistently represented in the parliament – the Republican People’s Party (RPP), Nationalist Movement Party (NMP), and People’s Democratic Party (PDP)² – for robustness checks and controls. Province-level voting data is obtained from the records of Supreme Election Council of Turkey.

Data on refugee population for each province has been released by the Directorate General of Migration Management several times a year since 2014. Considering the annual nature of our dataset, we chose the end of the year values for 2014 and 2015. We use the ratio of refugees to the local population instead of the absolute number of refugees in each province since the population size directly affects the probability and frequency of interactions of the local population with refugees. For instance, the 36,996 refugees in Osmaniye in 2015 constitute approximately 7.2 per cent of the local population whereas the 51,428 refugees in Ankara stand for less than 1 per cent that city’s population. It stands to reason that an average voter in Osmaniye encounters more refugees in her daily life than one in Ankara.

In addition to the refugee ratio as the main explanatory variable, several social and economic indicators that have been demonstrated as theoretically and empirically significant in election outcomes in Turkey are included in the analysis as control variables. The proportion of higher education graduates and average household size in each province are included to capture the possible effects of human capital and voters’ socio-political outlook. In line with the centre-periphery hypothesis (Mardin, 1973; Kalaycioglu, 1994, 2007), we expect the provinces with higher levels of education and smaller average household size to show more progressive and secular values and those with lower levels of education and larger households to be more conservative and religious. Therefore, provinces with lower levels of education and higher average household size are expected to reveal higher vote shares for the JDP.

The JDP has made an art of publicizing major infrastructure projects and social investments during election campaigns. Public investment data is not available at the province level so, in line with existing studies, the number of hospital beds per 1000 people serves as a convenient proxy to control for the existence of client voting networks and the quality of public services in a province. We expect provinces with more beds per 1000 people to be more favourable to the JDP.

To control for economic voting, we use the rate of economic growth in the year before the election and the unemployment rate, as previously operationalized in similar studies by Carkoglu (1997, 2012).³ Economic growth is measured by the percentage change in GDP per capita. Unfortunately, data for inflation, shown to be a significant economic factor at the national level in the Turkish context (Carkoglu, 1997; Akarca & Tansel, 2006) are not available at the district level. Therefore we were unable to include them in the analysis. When the economy is performing well, indicated by higher economic growth and lower unemployment rates in a province, the JDP is expected to receive a higher share of the votes.

These control variables are all drawn from the Turkish Statistical Institute’s Regional Statistics Databases.⁴ Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics for the variables included in the empirical analysis for each election year.

In our empirical assessment, we first run multivariate OLS regressions with standard errors clustered on provinces to see whether refugees have a significant impact on the voting patterns of the Turkish electorate:

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR EACH ELECTION YEAR

Variables	2007		2011	2015
	N	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)	Mean (Std. Dev.)
Refugee Ratio	81			0.030 (0.112)
Household Size	81	4.467 (1.315)	4.080 (1.208)	3.689 (0.943)
Higher Education Ratio	81	0.047 (0.019)	0.085 (0.022)	0.122 (0.025)
Hospital Beds per 1000	81	0.227 (0.084)	0.249 (0.091)	0.268 (0.090)
GDP per Capita Growth _{t-1}	81	0.071 (0.036)	0.210 (0.062)	-0.030 (0.024)
Unemployment	81	0.104 (0.041)	0.088 (0.029)	0.089 (0.047)
JDP Vote Share	81	0.478 (0.125)	0.509 (0.132)	0.416 (0.142)

$$J_{it} = \alpha + \beta R_{it} + \chi J_{it-4} + \delta C_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

The subscript i represents the province and t denotes the election year. Thus, $t - 4$ indicates the year of the previous election. The dependent variable, J_{it} , corresponds to the vote share of the incumbent party (here, the JDP) in province i at election t . R_{it} represents the percentage of refugees, and C_{it} is a vector of socio-economic and demographic variables. We also included in the regression the vote share of the JDP from the previous election, represented by J_{it-4} , to control for the potential serial correlation of election results.

In addition to the OLS estimates, we also include GLS regressions with a heteroskedastic and correlated error structure, AR1 autocorrelation structure, and election fixed effects as a further robustness check. GLS has the same notation as OLS. It allows for the error ε_{it} to be correlated over i , allow the use of an AR(1) model for ε_{it} , and allow ε_{it} to be heteroskedastic. It provides more efficient estimates than OLS with heteroskedastic data, which appears to be the case for JDP's vote share according to the Breusch-Pagan test, even when robust or clustered standard errors are used with OLS. In Table 2, we report the results of the six regression analyses. Combining 2007, 2011, and 2015 elections,⁵ we run a baseline model that only includes the refugees, a model that includes the above-mentioned predictors of election outcomes without the refugees, and a general model that combines all variables. We run these models using OLS and GLS techniques.

The results suggest that the ratio of refugees in a province has a slightly negative effect on JDP's vote share. However, its statistical significance is either weak or absent. Despite being insignificant in the baseline OLS regression, every percentage point increase in the ratio of refugees causes JDP's vote share to decrease by 8.5 per cent when we include the control variables and use the OLS model. This finding, however, is not reproduced when we use the GLS model. The effect of the refugee ratio is still negative, but it is only significant in the baseline GLS model.

The remaining results are mostly in line with the existing literature on voting behaviour in Turkey. As expected, the strongest determinant of the JDP's vote share in a province is its vote share in the same province in the previous election. Regarding the centre-periphery argument, we find that there is a strong and negative relationship between the percentage of the population with a higher education degree and voting against JDP. Household size, on the other hand, shows conflicting results in OLS and GLS models. It is statistically significant in all models. However, it is in the unexpected direction when OLS model is used. Focusing more closely on the data reveals that this is due to the above-average household size in the provinces in Southeast Turkey, which tend to vote for pro-Kurdish parties.⁷ As some previous scholars have demonstrated (Erdogan, 2013; Marschall, Aydogan & Bulut, 2016), we find weak support for economic voting in Turkish elections. Voters tend to reward economic growth, but unemployment is not a significant determinant

TABLE 2
THE EFFECT OF REFUGEES ON ELECTION OUTCOMES⁶

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Variables	JDP Votes 2007, 2011, 2015 OLS	JDP Votes 2007, 2011, 2015 OLS	JDP Votes 2007, 2011, 2015 OLS	JDP Votes 2007, 2011, 2015 GLS	JDP Votes 2007, 2011, 2015 GLS	JDP Votes 2007, 2011, 2015 GLS
Refugee Ratio	-0.076 (0.094)		-0.085* (0.045)	-0.020** (0.009)		-0.022 (0.036)
Higher Education Ratio		-2.205*** (0.249)	-2.198*** (0.249)		-0.303 (0.190)	-0.323* (0.191)
Household Size		-0.024*** (0.006)	-0.024*** (0.006)		0.026*** (0.010)	0.027*** (0.010)
Hospital Beds per 1000		0.153*** (0.056)	0.148*** (0.055)		0.181*** (0.055)	0.184*** (0.055)
GDP per Capita Growth _{t-1}		0.107*** (0.037)	0.098** (0.037)		0.071* (0.038)	0.068* (0.039)
Unemployment		-0.016 (0.145)	-0.003 (0.144)		-0.081 (0.109)	-0.077 (0.109)
JDP Votes on Previous Election		0.722*** (0.045)	0.727*** (0.045)		0.348*** (0.045)	0.345*** (0.045)
Constant	0.468*** (0.014)	0.389*** (0.045)	0.388*** (0.045)	0.467*** (0.006)	0.348*** (0.045)	0.345*** (0.045)
Observations	243	243	243	243	243	243
R-squared	0.001	0.703	0.704	3357	612.2	614.5
Wald Chi				81	81	81
Number of Provinces						

OLS estimates in (1), (2), and (3) include standard errors clustered on provinces in parentheses. GLS estimates in (4), (5), and (6) include a heteroskedastic and correlated error structure, AR1 autocorrelation structure, and election fixed effects.

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

of voting for the JDP. Finally, as expected, providing adequate social services, measured by hospital beds per 1000 people, pays off and increases the JDP's vote share.

Although refugees constitute approximately 4 per cent of Turkey's population, they are unevenly distributed across the 81 provinces. Some provinces, due to their proximity to the Syrian border or other geographic or economic benefits they provide, received a higher number of refugees than others. Specifically, as of 2015, refugees make up more than 1 per cent of the population in 22 provinces but less than 0.1 per cent of the population in another 20.

The arrival of refugees creates a situation that can be viewed as a natural experiment. The Syrian civil war and the influx of refugees is an exogenous shock, having little or nothing to do with Turkey's domestic political or economic affairs. Refugees started arriving *en masse* after 2013. Considering the arrival of refugees as the point of intervention, we can distinguish provinces hosting a high number of refugees as "treatment provinces" and provinces with a small refugee population as "control provinces". Thus, considering the 2007 and 2011 elections as pre-treatment cases and the 2015 election as the post-treatment case, this setting enables us to analyse the impact of refugees in a Pretest–Posttest Control Group Design.

Assuming that the voting trends would be highly similar in control and treatment provinces with similar socio-economic and demographic characteristics, had the refugees not arrived, we use our data to compute difference-in-differences (DiD) estimates to further analyse the effect of refugees on election outcomes.⁸ That is, we compare the change in voting patterns before and after the arrival of refugees in provinces that host a high ratio of refugees with provinces where the ratio is low.

The setup of the DiD model is as follows. Province i belongs to either the treatment or the control group, $T_i \in \{0, 1\}$, where 0 represents the control group and 1 represents the treatment group. We then define the period of analysis, $P_i \in \{0, 1\}$, where 0 represents the period before the arrival of refugees and 1 represents the period after the arrival of refugees. The interaction term $T_i P_i$ is the indicator of the treatment, that is, $T_i P_i = 1$ for provinces with a high ratio of refugees after the refugees arrived. So, the DiD model that we are using is:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta T_i + \gamma P_i + \varphi(T_i P_i) + \theta C + \varepsilon_i$$

The value we focus on here is the coefficient of the interaction term, φ (the DiD) which captures the impact of refugees on voting behaviour. X is a vector of the socio-economic factors mentioned above. The DiD is the difference in average votes the JDP received before and after the treatment, the arrival of refugees, minus the difference in the average votes in the comparison group before and after the treatment (Athey & Imbens, 2006).

$$\varphi^{DiD} = E[Y_i | T_i = 1, P_i = 1] - E[Y_i | T_i = 1, P_i = 0] - E[Y_i | T_i = 0, P_i = 1] - E[Y_i | T_i = 0, P_i = 0]$$

One problem with this approach is the potential existence of selection bias: the distribution of settlement by Syrian refugees is non-random. Provinces located near the Syrian border have had a higher probability of being negatively affected by the war even before migrant arrivals are considered (e.g., disruption of trade and commerce). However, in this case, the selection bias works in our favour, making our analysis more conservative. If the JDP's vote share did not decrease despite all the negative influences of the war, in addition to the refugees, we can conclude that Turkish voters vote on ideological or partisan grounds rather than economically, and that the refugees do not significantly impact voting behaviour.

For other provinces, such as Istanbul and Izmir, to which refugees flocked for economic or geographic reasons, the effect of refugees is theoretically more confined. This can be problematic because it is possible that the JDP's votes might not decrease in these provinces despite the

existence of refugees, due to intensive, above-average economic activity. In this case, structurally different characteristics of these provinces, independent of refugees, can bias our results.

To exploit the aforementioned natural experiment and account for the potential selection biases, we ran six sets of DiD analyses. The first analysis assigns provinces with a higher than 1 per cent refugee ratio to the treatment group and provinces with a lower than 1 per cent refugee ratio to the control group. The second analysis uses kernel-based propensity score matching with bootstrapped coefficients and standard errors with 500 repetitions to construct the counterfactual outcome of the control group (Heckman et al., 1998; Caliendo & Kopeinig, 2008). The third analysis sets stronger thresholds and takes the provinces with the ten highest ratios of refugees as the treatment group. The fourth analysis uses a more restricted sample and only compares ten provinces with the highest ratio of refugees with the ten provinces with the lowest ratio of refugees so that the expected effect is potentially more distinguishable. Finally, the fifth and sixth analyses repeat the third and fourth but exclude provinces in Southeast Turkey in order to specifically mitigate the potential selection bias mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Table 3 presents the results of the DiD analyses. The results suggest that, when we take the overall changes in the voting patterns in Turkey into account over the last three elections, and controlling for the relevant socio-economic and demographic factors, the effect of refugees on JDP vote share is negative, but insignificant in each alternate analysis.⁹

In June 2015 elections, JDP suffered significant losses in provinces that received a substantial number of refugees compared to 2011 general elections. For example, JDP's votes decreased from 59.5 per cent to 49.2 per cent in Kilis, 61.7 per cent to 47 per cent in Gaziantep, 37.4 per cent to 30.4 per cent in Adana. In fact, JDP experienced losses in all of the ten provinces that host the most refugees. Intuitively, one can consider this observation and conclude that refugees cause JDP to lose votes. However, a more detailed look at the overall data demonstrates that JDP's vote share in June 2015 decreased in every province in Turkey. Some of the provinces where JDP experienced the heaviest losses are provinces that received the least amount of refugees. The vote share of JDP in Kars, which received 110 refugees that stands for 0.00038 per cent of its local population, decreased from 42.6 per cent to 27.2 per cent. Similarly, JDP's vote share in Erzurum, which received 331 refugees that stands for 0.00043 per cent of its local population, decreased from 69.2

TABLE 3

DIFFERENCE-IN-DIFFERENCE REGRESSIONS FOR THE EFFECT OF REFUGEES ON ELECTION OUTCOMES (ONLY DID VARIABLES ARE REPORTED)

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	1% Threshold	PS Matching	Highest 10	Highest 10 vs. Lowest 10	Highest 10 (excl. S.E.)	Highest 10 vs. Lowest 10 (excl. S.E.)
Diff-in-Diff	-0.00622 (0.0400)	-0.0106 (0.0770)	-0.0370 (0.0623)	-0.0345 (0.0675)	0.0284 (0.0632)	-0.0141 (0.0652)
Constant	0.623*** (0.0690)	0.428*** (0.0192)	0.571*** (0.0843)	0.846*** (0.238)	0.580*** (0.0816)	0.632** (0.247)
Observations	243	191	182	60	182	60
R-squared	0.221		0.156	0.196	0.141	0.233

Standard errors in parentheses

***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

per cent to 52 per cent. Most strikingly, JDP's vote share in Agri, which received 814 refugees (0.00148 per cent of its population), decreased from 47.6 per cent to 16.6 per cent.

The above remark further illustrates the results of our analyses. JDP lost a sizable amount of votes in June 2015 elections all over Turkey. Controlling for other factors that influence the election results, hosting a high (or low) amount of refugees does not make a statistically significant difference for explaining JDP's losses at the province level. On average, provinces with the highest ratio of refugees do not react differently towards JDP in the voting polls in comparison with provinces with the lowest ratio of refugees.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent literature on the impact of refugees on electoral behaviour in host countries proposes that the presence of refugees causes a decline in the support for the ruling parties and an increase in the votes of anti-migrant, far right movements. Reflecting on this literature, which is primarily derived from the studies conducted in Europe, we would expect to observe a decline in the vote share of the incumbent JDP, and an increase in the vote-share of the far-right, nationalist NMP.¹⁰ However, our findings suggest that while there is a slightly negative effect of refugees on the JDP's vote share, the relationship is not statistically significant.

We suggest four explanations for the results: *First*, following in the findings of Dustmann, Vasilijeva, and Damm (2016), we can argue that the impact of refugees is expected to be higher in local elections. The most recent local elections in Turkey took place in March 2014, when the number and salience of refugees in Turkey were lower. Future analysis of the March 2014 local elections in comparison to upcoming local elections in 2019 may paint a different picture.

A *second* explanation is that, as of 2015, at the fourth year of mass Syrian inflow, there was still no anti-immigrant rhetoric in Turkey. Studies showed that the public in Turkey was hospitable and sympathetic to Syrians, who were presented as "our guests" by government officials (Erdogan, 2015). This chimes with the traditional notions of *muhacir and ensar* – concepts of brotherhood that have characterised the region since the time of the Prophet Muhammed. Mass media outlets also endorsed this framing.

Third, as suggested by the recent literature on elections in Turkey, especially by Carkoglu (2012), and partly supported by our investigation, rationalist, economic voting models do not provide a robust explanation for the behaviour of the Turkish electorate. The increasing polarization in the country has seen voters, especially JDP ones, weigh ideological cues much more heavily, making partisanship a more critical variable.

Fourth, in line with the reasoning of Barone et al. (2016), and as demonstrated by our findings, we can claim that the effect of refugees on Turkish elections have not been significant because the JDP has been successful in delivering social and public services. The ruling party's social and public policies emphasize increased access and effective provision. This, coupled with the constructive framing of the issue in the media and the unresponsiveness of the Turkish electorate to economic factors, may well have reduced any tensions produced by refugee inflows, especially among the citizens who would consider refugees as a group competing for the same resources.

Overall, being the first macro-level work conducted in recent times, our paper is an extension to a series of studies on elections and voting behaviour in Turkey and contributes to this literature. Our results are mainly in line with the existing studies that use survey or macro-level data. Moreover, it enhances our understanding of the effect that refugees and major external population shocks have on local and regional politics and elections.

Thus, the findings of the article are substantial for Turkey as well as any other country that is hosting, or that may in the future host, significant refugee populations. A major policy implication

of our findings is that continuous delivery of social and public services, especially to those citizens who would consider refugees as a group competing for the same resources, is a key to keep anti-immigrant tensions under control.¹¹ Increased access and effective provision of social and public services together with constructive framing of the refugees in the media can reduce tensions emerging with immigration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on the earlier drafts, and to Tansu Ceyla Erenler for her research assistance.

NOTES

1. For a broad review of theories and literature on political behaviour in Turkey, see Wuthrich (2015) and Erisen (2018).
2. The Peoples' Democratic Party was founded on 2012 as the formal political branch of the Peoples' Democratic Congress (PDC), a union of left-wing, pro-minority (pro-Kurdish) political organization. PDC and previously the other pro-Kurdish parties, Democratic Society Party and Peace and Democracy Party, organized their candidates to run as independents in the 2007 and 2011 elections to bypass the 10 per cent electoral threshold. The structure of the voting data does not allow us to distinguish the pro-Kurdish votes from the other independent votes. However, considering the insignificance of other independent candidates in previous elections (Carkoglu, 2011), we combine the vote shares of independent candidates and PDP as one party in our analysis.
3. Official unemployment data was available up to 2014. Therefore, we use the 2014 values in the estimation of 2015 elections.
4. As mentioned below, we use several other variables, including the rate of urbanization, literacy rates, or the share of agriculture in GDP, for robustness checks. These variables are also sourced from the Turkish Statistical Institute's Regional Statistics Databases.
5. One issue we faced in conducting the analysis was the limited time between the two elections in 2015. When the JDP failed to form a coalition after the June 2015 elections, early elections were called for November to resolve the deadlock. Increased violence in Turkey after the collapse of the ceasefire between the government and the PKK in July and several major ISIL-related terror attacks meant security concerns dominated the November election campaign, making it an atypical election (Kalaycioglu, 2017). Thus, despite the significant changes in domestic politics and government policies between these elections, we only report the results for the June 2015 elections here to ensure isolating our analysis from extraordinary domestic events.
6. The standard pre- and post-estimation diagnostics were performed and showed that the models are suitable. Due to the heteroskedasticity of some of our variables, including JDP's vote share, we use clustered standard errors and GLS regressions. We also investigated different specifications and measures to ensure the results are robust. We replaced ratio of high school graduates with ratio of higher education graduates, used urbanization and population density instead of household size, employed cars per 1000 people and the road network to measure government's social services, and included the share of agriculture on GDP and a pro-Kurdish province dummy. We also carried out a logit analysis using a binary dependent variable that measures whether JDP was the first party in a province or not. The results were robust. On the other hand, when we run the analysis using only the 2015 elections, the results change. In this instance, refugee ratio becomes insignificant and the direction and significance of the coefficients of some of the control variables change. However, having low degrees of freedom and non-normal residuals, the results of these regressions are not reliable.
7. Breusch-Pagan test shows that household size is a heteroskedastic variable. Consequently, the results obtained using GLS estimates are more reliable.
8. For more detailed information about the DiD design, see Card and Krueger, 1994; Angrist and Pischke, 2009.

9. We only observe a small positive and insignificant effect in the case where we exclude the Southeastern provinces. This is likely due to the effect of the failed peace talks between the government and the PKK.
10. We also found no increase in the vote share of the NMP after the arrival of refugees. Although we did not specifically focus on far-right movements in Turkey in our analyses due to their relative inconsequentiality, this subject is an obvious candidate for future research.
11. Another interesting policy discussion, which we also leave for future research, can be made about the EU-Turkey refugee agreement that is forged on March 18, 2016. According to this agreement, which aims to curb the number of asylum seekers and smuggled refugees to the Greek islands across the Aegean Sea, Turkey accepted the return of irregular migrants arriving after March 20. In return, EU agreed to accelerate the visa liberalization process for Turkish citizens, revitalize the accession talks, and give financial support to Turkey. The deal provided relief to the EU leaders who were under pressure from their local populations in a context of rising populism. Our results suggest that since refugees do not have a negative impact on JDP's vote share, they do not create a significant re-election pressure on the government. This might have played a role in Turkish government's calculations and made reaching a deal easier.

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