



Department SEMINARS

"Who Becomes a Populist?
Proximity to Immigrants and
Refugees and Individual Voting
Behaviour"

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the multifaceted mechanisms through which immigration may impact voting behavior. Utilizing detailed data on immigrant residents in voters' neighbourhoods, we conduct a survey to elicit individual retrospective voting choices of eligible electors in Bologna, a large municipality in Northern Italy, spanning a period of twenty years. We supplement this data with geo-referenced information on apartments hosting asylum seekers, whose presence surged in Bologna since 2014 due to the Mediterranean refugee crisis.

Our empirical analysis finds that the opening of facilities hosting asylum seekers diminishes the likelihood of nearby voters leaning towards populist parties in areas with higher shares of non-Italian residents. Conversely, the likelihood increases in areas with the lowest shares of immigrant residents. Importantly, through a triple difference analysis, we find strong heterogeneities among voters. Males, individuals without children, and those in the working age are responsive to the opening of facilities and drive the results. Other groups are less responsive irrespective of the level of diversity experienced.

Our study substantiates the notion that "contact" and "group conflict" theories are not mutually exclusive but can coexist within the same context across different demographic groups.

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