



Do refugees impact voting behavior in the host country? Evidence from Syrian refugee inflows to Turkey

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Abstract

We study how individual political preferences changed in response to the influx of over 3.5 million Syrian refugees to Turkey during 2012–2016. Using a difference-in-differences research design, we compare the political outcomes in geographic areas with high versus low intensities of refugee presence before and after the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. To address the endogeneity of refugees' location choices, we adopt an instrumental variables approach that relies on (1) historical dispersion of Arabic speakers in Turkish provinces and (2) driving distances between Turkish and Syrian residential areas to predict the flows of refugees across Turkish provinces during the study period. We find strong polarization in attitudes towards refugees between the supporters and opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). However, regression analyses of monthly survey data suggest that the massive inflow of refugees induced only a modest net drop in support for the AKP. Refugee inflows did not have a significant impact on election outcomes during the study period.

Keywords Refugees · Political preferences · Voting

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1 Introduction

Recent years have seen an astounding increase in the populations of refugees fleeing wars and conflicts (UNHCR 2017). In 2017, 66 million people worldwide were displaced forcibly, of whom 23 million were refugees, representing a 48% increase since 2011. Roughly half the global refugee population currently lives in six countries neighboring regions of conflict.¹ In addition to the burden of resettlement, for which the host countries have limited resources, such large-scale refugee inflows impose economic, social and political costs that are likely to influence the political wills and administrative capacities of host societies towards refugee resettlement and integration.

In the present paper, we study the effect of the Syrian refugee influx on voting behavior in Turkey, which now hosts the largest refugee population in the world. As of October 2017, more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees were registered in Turkey, accounting for approximately 4.4% of its population. However, little is known about the impact of the refugee influx on the political preferences of the Turkish people, an important issue that is likely to influence Turkey's ability and commitment to host the vast population of Syrians already in the country and even may have consequences for European politics.² Getmansky et al. (2018) is the only study we know of that has focused on public attitudes towards refugees in Turkey in a causal framework. They study public perceptions of refugees and whether messages (positive or negative) about the possible effects of hosting refugees affect those perceptions using a survey-experiment conducted in the summer of 2014 in Turkey.

Our study provides new evidence on the impact of refugee inflows on voting behavior using data from repeated monthly cross-sectional surveys of Turkish citizens' political preferences during 2012–2016, along with the results of three recent national elections in June 2011, June 2015 and November 2015. Studying refugee migration from Syria to Turkey is empirically appealing because (1) the population movements between Turkey and Syria were restricted before the Syrian Civil War, rendering both the timing and the scale of migration between the two countries plausibly exogenous, and (2) regional and time variations in refugee resettlement are substantial, which allow empirical comparisons of Turkish provinces with varying levels of refugee arrivals during the civil war.

Using a difference-in-differences approach, we compare political outcomes in geographic areas with high and low intensities of refugee presence before and after the beginning of Syrian Civil War. To address the endogeneity of refugees' location choices, we adopt an instrumental variable (IV) approach that relies on the historical dispersion of Arabic speakers across Turkish provinces based on the 1965 Turkish Census, the most recent census that collected information on native languages at the province level. Our instrument relies on the fact that Syrians are more likely to settle in locations where the host population is more likely to speak Arabic. We provide evidence on the parallel-trends assumption that is crucial for causal identification, that the trends in voting behavior were similar in regions with varying intensities of Arabic speakers before Syria's civil war intensified.

¹ According to UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees), in 2016, around half of the global population of refugees was hosted in Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ethiopia and Jordan (UNHCR 2016).

² Turkey has been using Syrian refugees' resettlement as a bargaining chip in its negotiations with the European Union. The EU, in turn, has given six billion euros to Turkey to aid in refugee resettlement.

We supplement our analysis with an alternative distance-based instrumental variable, first used by Del Carpio and Wagner (2015), which relies on the variation in driving distances between 13 governorates of Syria and 81 Turkish provinces to predict the flows of refugees across Turkish provinces during the study period. The identifying assumption of both IVs is that they affect voting patterns exclusively through their impacts on the refugee movement.

To preview our results, we first document strong polarization in attitudes towards refugees between the supporters and opponents of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the architect of the “open door” policy for Syrian refugees. The empirical analysis of political preferences, however, suggests that the massive inflow of refugees induced a modest drop in support for the AKP. A one percentage-point increase in the population share of refugees led to between a 0.47 and 0.72 percentage point reduction in AKP support. Voters who abandoned the AKP, moreover, did not swing to the other major political parties, but turned “indecisive” or expressed an “unwillingness to vote”. In particular, using election data, we cannot detect any impact of refugee inflows on Turkish general elections between 2011 and 2015. Self-reported voting behavior from the surveys confirm those findings.

The results remain robust across various specifications, including the two IV models. Refugee inflows are one dimension of the Syrian civil war; provinces in Turkey that received more refugees are likely to be more sensitive to the Syrian crisis than those in provinces that receive fewer refugees. Therefore, it is not possible to assert that our estimates strictly capture the effect of the refugee influx and not a response to broader Syrian crisis.

2 Background

2.1 Theoretical issues

Public choice theory postulates that voting decisions are motivated by self-interest and individuals vote for the political party that they believe would maximize their economic opportunities (Mueller 2003). When a large number of refugees acquire residency in a country and are perceived to be a burden on its welfare system, the standard median voter framework predicts that the native population will begin to oppose the ruling party that supported, or failed to restrict, refugee resettlement (Holcombe 1989; Magni-Berton 2014). Labor market competition, coupled with rising ethnic/religious fractionalization, leads voters to reduce their support for publicly funded safety nets or welfare transfers that are designed to ease refugee settlement (Mueller and Murrell 1986; Alesina and Ferrara 2005). Following that theoretical framework, we hypothesize that voters will penalize the ruling party if it pursues a liberal refugee policy that voters perceive as reducing their welfare transfers or employment opportunities.

The Syrian refugee influx to Turkey offers an ideal case for testing our hypothesis. First, existing empirical evidence suggests that the Syrian refugee influx has affected the economic opportunities of Turkish citizens in host regions adversely, especially unskilled workers who compete with the Syrian labor force in the informal labor market (Del Carpio and Wagner 2015; Ceritoglu et al. 2017; Altindag et al. 2018; Aksu et al. 2018). Second, since the start of the Syrian civil war and refugee flows to Turkey, Tayyip Erdoğan’s AKP has been the single political party in power. AKP’s policy generally is perceived as

supportive of a temporary settlement of the refugees with relatively generous welfare transfers. Erdoğan's government has provided Syrian refugees access to education and health insurance. Syrian families that live in poor urban poor communities also have access to cash welfare programs, which is portrayed in the media as a source of public antagonism towards the refugees (International Crisis Group 2016).

Competing theories of social identity, contact, and conflict provide similar predictions (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944; Campbell et al. 1980). Based on social identity theory, a common hypothesis is that natives think immigrant (or refugee) presence reduces their political hegemony and respond by voting for parties or candidates that oppose immigrants (or refugees). Allport's dual theory of 'threat' and 'contact' predicts that refugee inflows may strengthen perceptions of threat from refugees, creating fear and hatred towards them, yet some of those negative effects could be mitigated by social interactions between the host society and refugees, which might increase trust and sympathy towards the latter (Allport 1979). Group conflict theory also postulates that perceived collective threats from a minority group may result in prejudice and negative stereotyping from the members of the majority group (Quillian 1995; Sidanius and Pratto 2001; Lahav 2004). Such negative sentiments likely will reduce support for political parties advocating pro-refugee or pro-settlement policies.

Country specific factors, however, could tamper the predicted voter response to a refugee influx. For example, if voters think that the government was not instrumental in prompting the refugee influx, which largely is true for the Syrian refugee presence in Turkey, then forced displacement may not be an important factor guiding voting choices. Similarly, electoral choices might remain unaffected if opposition parties do not propose policies that could restrict the refugee inflow. Voter responses to a refugee influx could be complicated further if citizens fear that refugee flows may threaten civic unrest and communal violence in the host country. In such a scenario, national security concerns could even surpass other positive (compassion) or negative (economic harm) factors. Voters, irrespective of party affiliation, may decide to unify behind a candidate whom they perceive as strong and capable of keeping the host country safe and secure when civic unrest is growing in a neighboring region.

2.2 Previous research

A small but growing literature has investigated whether immigration affects political outcomes in a number of host European countries; the general finding is that immigration inflows increase support for anti-immigration parties (Otto and Steinhardt 2014; Barone et al. 2016; Harmon 2017; Vasilakis 2017; Hangartner et al. 2017)³

Economists have investigated public attitudes towards various groups of immigrants based on whether those groups affect natives positively or negatively through labor market and fiscal (taxes) channels (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Mayda 2006; Dustmann and Preston 2007; Facchini and Mayda 2009). The studies find evidence that citizens who perceive themselves to be affected by immigrants have negative or more negative attitudes towards them. Similarly, Mayda et al. (2018) study voting responses of US citizens to various types of immigrants and find that an increase in the share of unskilled workers increases support

³ One exception is a study by Steinmayr (2016), who found that the recent Syrian refugee inflows weakened political support for the far-right movement in Austria.

for the Republican Party and even more so within local labor markets with larger shares of low-skilled native populations.

Most previous research on the effects of immigrant and refugee inflows on host populations' political attitudes has focused on western countries. Reasons can be found for expecting the impacts of refugee inflows to be different in host countries in conflict regions. First, refugees arrive most often in neighboring countries in highly vulnerable conditions, which may make the host community more sympathetic to them and therefore minimize adverse public reactions to their presence than is the case in countries of final resettlement. Second, refugees often share ethnic and religious backgrounds and histories with the host populations in neighboring countries. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in predominantly Muslim host countries within the MENA region, the ethnic and sectarian composition of refugee populations are central to acceptance policies in neighboring countries. Refugee migration to neighboring countries is, on the other hand, usually is unregulated and results in geographic clustering of the refugees, which threatens to change the ethnic balances of resettled communities. Recent evidence suggests that perceptions of the risk of hosting refugees in a conflict zone are quite responsive to the native population's perceived security (Braithwaite et al. 2019).

Our study differs from the existing literature on several fronts. First, we examine the political effects of refugee inflows between two neighboring countries with largely Sunni Muslim populations and a shared, sometimes turbulent, history going back to the Ottoman Empire. Second, we study one of the largest refugee influxes since the World War II. Finally, we analyze the impact on a developing country, neighboring regions of civil conflict that create the refugees, with little administrative and economic capacity to absorb them. Our study therefore complements the existing literature, which has focused almost exclusively on western countries with relatively well-functioning migration systems and stronger state capacities for managing refugee flows than developing countries.

2.3 Syrian refugee inflows

Syrian refugees began entering Turkey in April 2011, shortly after the Syrian government cracked down violently on anti-government protests (Erdoğan and Ünver 2015). In 2011, a majority of the refugees who left Syria were politically active youth on the government's "black list," and many of them returned to Syria as conditions stabilized temporarily (Özden 2013; İçduygu 2015). The refugee influx began again in 2012, when ceasefire talks between the Syrian government and the opposition failed, but continued over the next 5 years (Fig. 1). In March 2012, the government of Turkey announced a directive on the resettlement of Syrians in Turkey, which was enacted as a temporary protection measure in April 2013. It promised no forced returns of migrants and allowed all Syrian refugees to remain at least temporarily.

From April 2011 to December 2016, Turkey received more than 2.8 million of the 4.8 million refugees who fled Syria. While the issue of providing work permits to Syrian refugees continues to be debated, in 2014 refugees were granted permission to receive publicly financed education and health care (Yeginsu 2014). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the average monthly inflow of refugees was roughly 13,000 in 2012, 32,000 in 2013 and 88,000 in 2014. Inflows reached a peak in October 2014, after the siege of Kobane by the Islamic State, declining to 73,000 in 2015, and to 23,000 in 2016 (Fig. 1). The refugee flows reveal significant regional patterns, changing the ethnic and sectarian balance of the population in the eastern and southeastern

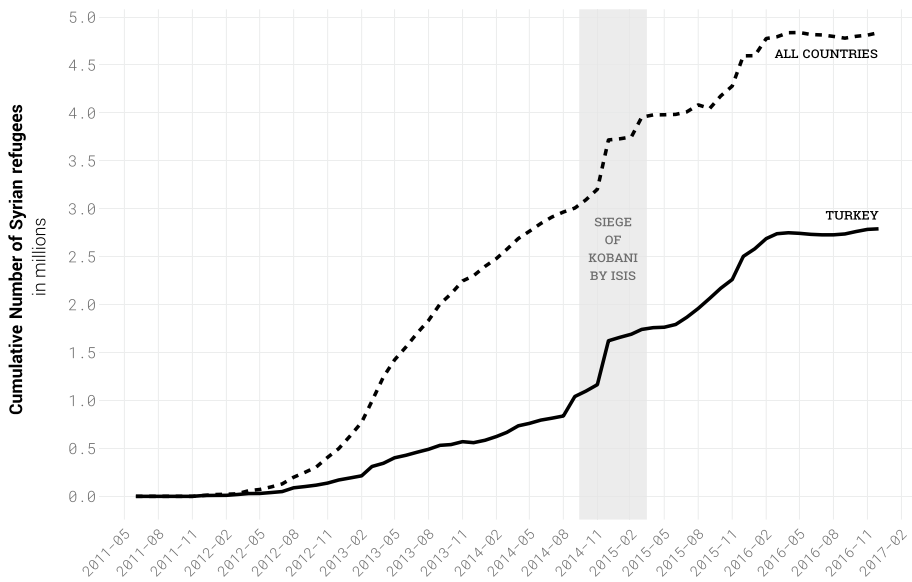


Fig. 1 Number of Syrian refugees in Turkey and Worldwide, 2010–2016. *Source:* United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

regions of Turkey, where many of the refugees are settling (Fig. 2). Sunni Arab refugees, for instance, now outnumber Alawites, who dominated the ethnic Arab population in many of those regions. The demographic changes have created fears that refugee resettlement would sow seeds of ethnic and sectarian strife in eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey (Cagaptay and Menekşe 2014).

A substantial proportion of the refugees initially lived in camps that the Turkish government had built to provide temporary settlements for them. However, as the influx grew, it increasingly became difficult to accommodate the refugees in resettlement camps; they began to move out of the southern provinces and into larger cities. As a result, less than 10% of the refugees live in camps today. Thus, whereas Turkey at first welcomed the incomers as “guests”, more recent reports indicate that the Turkish government is engaging in efforts to resettle refugees within Syria (İçduygu 2015).

2.4 Refugee politics

Four national parties are represented in the Turkish parliament: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP), which promotes an authoritarian, pro-Islamist, socially conservative, and economically liberal political agenda; the center-left and secular Republican People’s Party (CHP); the extreme Nationalist Movement Party (MHP); and the socialist and pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). The electorate is consolidated around those four political parties. In the last three general elections, merely 3.5% of votes went to other political parties. Voter turnout in Turkey was very high during the recent elections with more than 84% of the eligible voters casting their votes. AKP has dominated Turkish politics since 2002, securing nearly half of the electorate’s

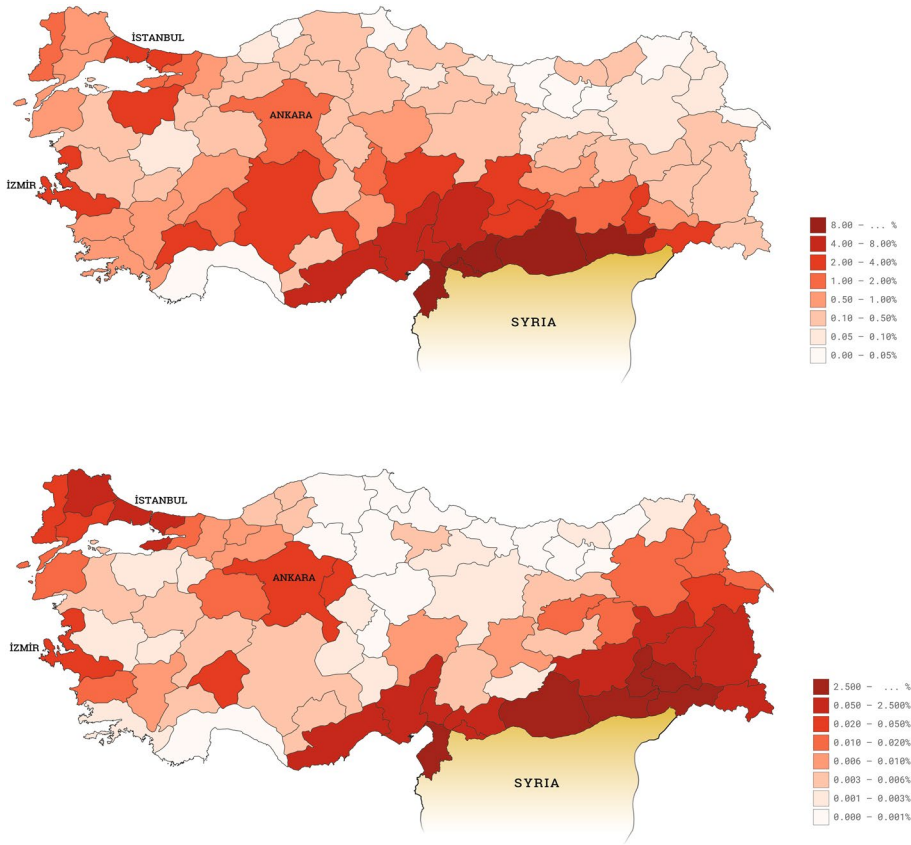


Fig. 2 **a** Geographic distribution of refugees, December 2016. **b** Geographic distribution of Turkish citizens with an arabic mother language, 1965

support in the past three general elections: 49.8% in June 2011, 40.9% in June 2015, and 49.5% in November 2015. The party has no coalition partners in government and has been the sole decision-making authority for Turkish foreign policy since 2002.

Among political parties, the AKP has maintained the most explicit policy with respect to refugees. In his speech to refugees in 2014, Erdoğan summarized Turkey's role as being *ansar*, a historical reference to the people of Medina who supported the Prophet Mohammad and his followers voluntarily after fleeing Mecca.⁴ More recently, he promised citizenship to a number of the Syrians who have resettled permanently in Turkey.⁵ On the other hand, CHP considers the “refugee crisis” to be a consequence of AKP's foreign policy mistakes, including attempts to topple the Syrian regime. In its policy report on Syria, CHP emphasizes the economic cost of an adventurist foreign policy, but does not provide a specific framework for refugee resettlement (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi 2015). MHP believes

⁴ See <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/erdogan-suriyeli-siginmacilara-seslendi-27342780>. Accessed 18 Dec 2019.

⁵ See <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-38534106>. Accessed 18 Dec 2019.

that Turkey must host the Syrians refugees who fled the war, yet criticizes the government vigorously on national security concerns resulting from the government's foreign policy towards Syria. HDP views the Syrian refugee question from a human rights perspective: its policy report on Syrian refugees recommends a change in the status of refugees from temporary protection to treatment equal to permanent residents, abolition of refugee camps as resettlement zones, as well as a number of policies for the social and economic integration of refugees (Halkların Demokratik Partisi 2015). Among the four major political parties, CHP remains the most outspoken critic of Syrians in Turkey. In short, Turkey's major opposition parties have not taken an explicit anti-refugee stance nor do they have a common view of refugees that distinguishes them from the AKP, which is a remarkable difference from the positions taken by political parties across Eastern and Western Europe.

The civil war in neighboring Syria and the refugee influx have affected Turkey's geopolitical influence and its economy. Both factors are strong correlates of voting behavior (Çarkoğlu and Ergen 2002; Çarkoğlu 2002; Akarca and Tansel 2006). Both Ceritoglu et al. (2017) and Del Carpio and Wagner (2015), for example, show that during our study period, refugee workers lowered labor costs and replaced Turkish workers in the informal labor market. What is more significant, the fear that the refugee influx compromises national security might have caused voters to reduce their support for the AKP, even more so in areas to which the refugees migrated. Kibris (2011), for example, provides evidence that during the early 1990s, instances of terrorist attacks in Turkey caused the governing party's support to decline. Yet another factor that may influence public opinion is media coverage of refugee issues. Yaylacı and Karakuş (2015) find that the leading national newspapers that reach an overwhelming majority of readers in Turkey, provide frequent yet biased coverage of Syrians, depending on editorial support for the government. The major television outlets in Turkey are under the strict control of the government and support the government's policy on refugees. The impact of national media is likely to mitigate any negative effects of local exposure to refugees.

3 Data

The data used in the empirical analysis come from multiple sources that we identify in detail below.⁶

3.1 Information on refugees

We obtained data on the aggregate number of refugees from the UNHCR. The UNHCR began reporting these data in December 2011; continues at frequent but irregular intervals. We aggregated the data into a monthly format and used the information on the aggregate number of Syrian refugees who (1) left Syria (total number of refugees) and (2) who arrived to Turkey (total number of refugees in Turkey) on a monthly basis over the study period.

The data on refugee populations by province for April 2016 and December 2016 came from the Directorate General of Migration Management (GIGM) and Disaster and

⁶ See online Appendix Table (A1) for the complete list of datasets, sources, and measurement.

Emergency Management Authority (AFAD). We obtained the geographic distribution of refugees compiled by Erdoğan and Ünver (2015) from GIGM and AFAD for September 2015.⁷ We used the provincial data at those three points to extrapolate refugee dispersions across provinces linearly over the entire period.

As shown in Fig. 3, the geographic dispersion of refugees is remarkably similar in September 2015, April 2016, and December 2016. In each panel of the figure, we plot the dispersion of refugees across provinces in September 2015 on the x-axis. The y-axis in the top panel shows the dispersion of refugees in April 2016; the bottom panel shows the refugee dispersion in December 2016. The nationwide refugee population is normalized to 100 in each period. Each circle indicates a province, and is sized proportionally to the number of refugees who live in that province. The regression line shows the linear trend weighted by the refugee populations. The circles in the scatter plots in both panels are clustered remarkably close to the 45-degree line as well as to the regression line in the top and bottom panels. Put another way, provinces hosting the majority of refugees did not change even though around 725,000 additional refugees arrived from September 2015 to December 2016.

We estimated the province-level monthly refugee inflows by interpolating the number of refugees in each province between the three periods for which we have data. According to the UNHCR, the first refugees started to arrive in December 2011, after which we begin the interpolations for all provinces and we assign zero refugee presences beforehand. The linear interpolation assumes that the provinces received the same shares of the incoming refugee populations between two consecutive periods.

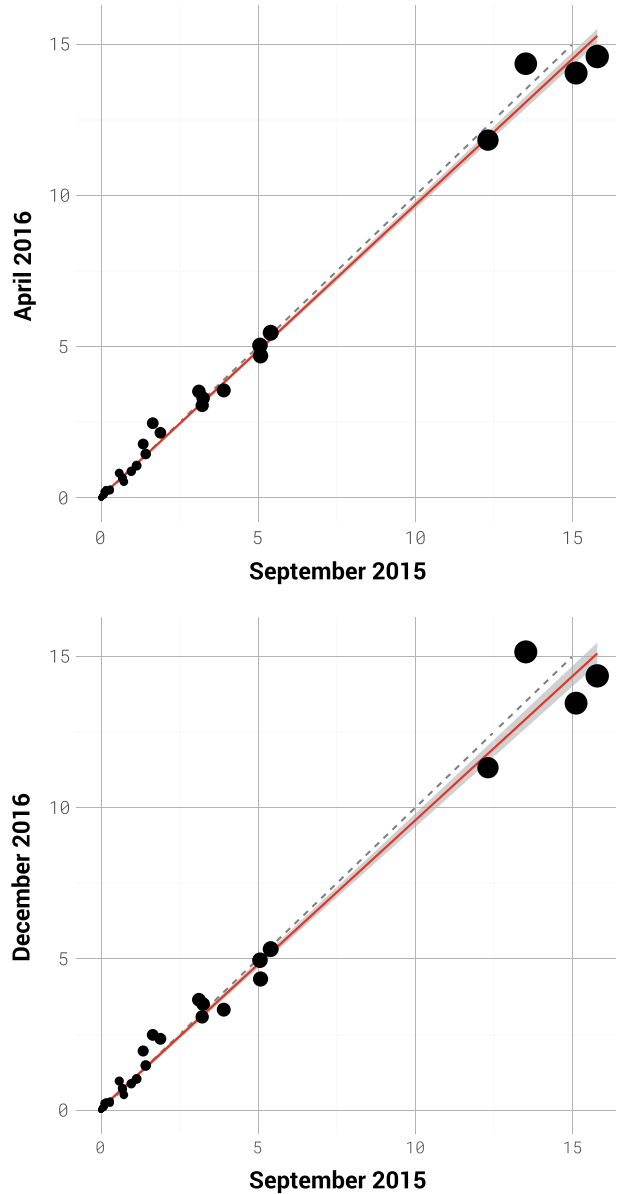
In addition to potential measurement error associated with interpolation, the data on refugee populations at the province level also reflect the cumulative number of Syrians registered within the administrative boundaries of a given province. Refugee populations are transient; some of the refugees might have moved out of the province or even the country after registration. As a result, data on province-level refugee population best serves as a proxy for the intensity of refugee presence. In section 5.1, we test directly whether the geographic dispersion of refugees offers a meaningful proxy for variations in the native population's exposure to refugees.

To calculate the refugee exposure measure, defined as the share of refugees in the total population, we used the population of Turkish citizens for 2011–2016, provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). We interpolated the monthly provincial populations from the yearly data. We digitized the aggregate data from the 1965 Turkish Census to calculate the population percentages of Arabic natives at the province level. The 1965 Census, conducted in an early stage of rapid urbanization and mass internal migration to major Turkish cities, provides a reliable proxy for the historical ethnic/linguistic distribution of the population (Gedik 1997). Later censuses do not include information on mother languages or ethnicities. In 1965, Turkey was divided into 67 provinces, the smallest administrative unit in which data availability allows us to conduct the analysis. Over time, additional provinces were carved out, raising the total to 81. In our empirical analysis, we measured the Arabic speaking population density based on the administrative units of 1965.⁸ To check the sensitivity of the results, we conduct the empirical analysis based on the sample of 67 provinces in 1965, finding that they are similar, as shown in the empirical section. To construct the distance-based instrument, we calculated the driving

⁷ Erdoğan (2014) also provides similar estimates for December 2014.

⁸ For example, Aksaray was a district of Niğde until becoming a province in 1989. We assigned the same percentage of Arabic speaking population to both.

Fig. 3 Proportion of Syrian refugees by Province in September 2015, April 2016 and December 2016. Note: Each circle indicates a province, and is sized proportional to the number of refugees who live in that province. The regression line shows the linear trend weighted by the refugee population. Shaded region shows the 95% confidence interval. *Source:* Directorate General of Migration Management, Turkey



distance between the centers of 13 Syrian governorates and 81 Turkish provinces using Google Maps Programming Interface application embedded in R.

3.2 Survey of attitudes towards refugees

Data on local perceptions of refugees come from a field survey of a nationally representative sample of 2649 respondents aged 18 and above. The survey was conducted in February 2016 by Konda Research and Consultancy, a leading and independent research company in

Turkey. It included a range of questions to capture views on the economic and social effects of refugee presence, government policies towards refugee inclusion in Turkish society, and overall attitudes towards Syrian refugees. Based on a six-point Likert scale, the respondents ranked the extents to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements detailing such attitudes. The survey also asked whether the respondents voted for the ruling party in the most recent general election, held in November 2015.

3.3 Survey of the political affiliations of Turkish citizens

Konda also conducts a monthly survey to capture the political affiliations of Turkish citizens. The surveys have been quite accurate in predicting general election results in Turkey since the early 2000s (Akarca et al. 2009; Dağı 2008). We used 54 monthly surveys⁹ conducted from January 2012 to December 2016, which contain 149,746 individual observations. The survey instrument asked the following question: “Which party would you vote for if the elections were held today?” The respondents can select a political party, abstain, or express their indecisiveness about the elections. We relied on the answers to that question to create four binary variables for each of the four major parties that hold seats in the current parliament and a fifth variable that captures responses that favor other minor parties, or indicate indecision or abstention. Because of voter coalescence around the four main political parties during the study period, the overwhelming majority of the voters in the last (fifth) category typically comprises indecisive or absentee voters.¹⁰

3.4 Data on election results

We collected the June 2011, June 2015, and November 2015 general election results, which are publicly available through TurkStat. Those results include province-level data on the number of voters, votes cast, and valid votes for each party. The Turkish electoral system is based on proportional representation that requires a minimum 10% vote share at the national level to secure representation in parliament. The threshold does not apply to independent candidates. Therefore, candidates from political parties who do not expect to capture a 10% vote share can participate in elections independently. HDP’s candidates adopted that strategy in the June 2011 general elections, but not in the next two elections. Because of the data’s structure,¹¹ it is not possible to separate the votes for HDP from other independent candidates in the June 2011 election results. Non-HDP independent candidates, however, constituted only 0.57% of the vote share in the two elections following June 2011. Given the relatively weak support for non-partisan independent candidates, we combined HDP and independent votes for all election results. For convenience, we use the term HDP to identify the outcome for that group.

⁹ Konda did not conduct surveys in some months, which usually correspond to Ramadan. Thus, we do not have data on six of the 60 months between January 2012 and December 2016.

¹⁰ Owing to the format in which Konda provides data, it is impossible to create an exclusive category of indecisive and absentee voters for all of the survey months.

¹¹ TurkStat reports only the aggregate number of votes for all independent candidates.

4 Identification strategy

Our empirical strategy exploits changes in the Syrian refugee population over time and across provinces to study the effect of the refugee influx on voting behavior. Equation 1 specifies the empirical model:

$$y_{ijt} = \alpha_1 + \delta_{1j} + \gamma_{1t} + X_i' \Gamma + \tau_1 S_{jt}^{\text{ref}} + \epsilon_{1ijt}, \quad (1)$$

where y_{ijt} is a binary indicator of respondent i 's (living in province j and interviewed at time t) support for a specific political party (for example, AKP). The parameters δ_{1j} and γ_{1t} respectively capture fixed effects for each province and survey month. Vector X_i represents individual covariates that include respondent's sex, age, education, ethnicity, place of residence,¹² income category, whether the respondent is a Sunni Muslim, and whether she considers herself religious, along with indicators for missing observations on each of the variables. Variable S_{jt}^{ref} is a continuous measure of treatment intensity, defined as the share of refugees in province j 's population in period t . The coefficient τ_1 captures the effect of a one-percentage point increase in the population share of refugees on voters' party affiliations.

Note that it is not possible to purge the effect of a refugee influx on internal mobility. Previous studies suggest that refugee inflows altered the internal migration patterns of the native population and, therefore, also might have altered the electorate's composition (Akgündüz et al. 2015). Therefore, S_{jt}^{ref} captures the impact of the refugee influx on overall voting patterns, which is a combination of its direct effect on voting behavior as well as its indirect effect in changing the composition of native residents resulting from internal migration.

In the setting at hand, the most important empirical concern is the locational choices of Syrians who live outside the refugee camps. Because more than 90% of refugees do so, the geographic variation in refugee resettlements potentially is endogenous. For example, districts or provinces with booming economies may have attracted refugees as well as influenced political preferences in favor of a certain political party (for instance, the ruling party) that voters consider responsible for robust economic growth. Therefore, regression estimates based on Eq. 1 could be biased. Moreover, as mentioned before, the estimate of S_{jt}^{ref} involves a potentially large measurement error, as refugees often register in one place and then move to another where they find better opportunities or they even may register in multiple provinces. We rely on an instrumental variable approach to overcome those threats to the internal validity of our empirical analysis.

4.1 Language-based instrument

Our primary analysis relies on a language-based instrument that takes advantage of the fact that refugees are more likely to settle in areas with historically high proportions of Arabic speakers. The population share of Arabic-speaking natives within the Turkish population in 1965, as we document below, predicts the geographic distribution of refugees strongly. Furthermore, the total refugee outflow from Syria is plausibly exogenous to

¹² Denoted by three categories: rural, urban and metropolitan area.

Turkish electoral behavior/preferences, given that the intensity of conflict in Syria largely has remained unpredictable throughout the civil war. We interact the population percentage of native Arabic speakers in 1965 with the cumulative number of refugees who fled Syria in period t as an instrument for predicting S_{jt}^{ref} . The first-stage regression is:

$$S_{jt}^{\text{ref}} = \alpha_2 + \delta_{2j} + \gamma_{2t} + X_i' \Lambda + \pi_2 iv_{jt} + \epsilon_{2ijt}, \quad (2)$$

where the instrument iv_{jt} is the population percentage of Arabic-speaking Turkish citizens in 1965, weighted by the cumulative number of refugees who fled Syria in period t expressed as:

$$iv_{jt} = Arab_j^{1965} \times S_t^{\text{ref}tot} \quad (3)$$

Refugee inflows into provinces in Turkey jointly is predicted by: (1) $S_t^{\text{ref}tot}$, the overall outflow of refugees from Syria in time t , and (2) $Arab_j^{1965}$, the population share of Arabic-speaking Turks in province j in 1965.¹³ The identifying assumption is that after controlling for province and survey-month fixed effects, the interaction is “as good as random”. We cluster standard errors at the province level to capture within-province correlations in voter behavior.

The causal interpretation of the language-based instrument described in Eq. 3 requires, first, that the trends in voting behavior across provinces with varying 1965 Arabic speaking population intensities be similar in the early stages (when the refugee flow is negligible) and diverge as migrant flows intensify. We estimate dynamic difference-in-differences regressions to test the validity of that assumption directly in the empirical section. Second, the differential impact of conflict intensity on provinces with historically larger ratios of ethnic Arabs should impact voting preferences exclusively through refugee inflows and not on the bases of the conflict itself or the Turkish government’s border policy with respect to the ongoing civil war in Syria. That is a restrictive assumption, given that most of the cross-sectional variation in our sample is driven by provinces near the Syrian border, which might have been affected differentially by the conflict. Under the assumption that the conflict had an adverse effect on the likelihood of supporting the incumbent AKP government, a Wald estimator would be biased upward.

We estimate two additional specifications to check the sensitivity of our results with respect to regional level changes in political attitudes: (1) we add 12 region \times 54 survey-month fixed-effects to Eq. 1 so as to account fully for any differential changes in outcomes that are observed in 12 administrative regions and (2) we exclude six Turkish provinces that border Syria. As discussed later in detail, the empirical findings remain qualitatively similar after that exclusion.

¹³ Our instrument differs from a typical shift-share instrument proposed in Altonji and Card (1991) and Card (2001), who use geographic variation in past immigrant settlement patterns to predict future inflows of immigrants. Before the Syrian conflict, migration from Syria to Turkey was negligible. Thus, the Arabic speaking population in Turkey that generates geographic variation in our instrument is not Syrian immigrants, but rather natives of the Turkish Republic, which was founded following the collapse of the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire in 1922. We estimated the correlation between the population proportions of Arabic-speaking by province in 1965, and provincial level populations of Arabic-speaker in our monthly 2012–2016 surveys. This exercise yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.66.

4.2 Distance-based instrument

We supplement our empirical analysis with an alternative distance-based instrument that first was used by Del Carpio and Wagner (2015). Adopting their approach, we construct the following instrument:

$$iv_{jt} = \sum_{k=1}^{13} \frac{\phi_k \times S_t^{Ref}}{dist_{jk}}, \quad (4)$$

where $dist_{jk}$ is the driving distance between Turkish province j and Syrian governorate k , ϕ_k is the fraction of the Syrian population residing in governorate k as of 2011, and S_t^{Ref} is the total number of refugees who moved to Turkey in period t . The IV in this context captures jointly population density in the pre-migration era, geographic proximity, and the intensity of refugee flows to predict the incoming refugee population at the provincial level.

4.3 Election estimates

We rely on actual voting data for the three most recent general elections (June 2011, June 2015 and November 2015). Accordingly, we modify the specification in Eq. 1 to fit a model for five outcomes: the vote shares of each of the four major parties as well as voter turnouts by province and election. Both instruments are constructed using data from three election periods only. The regressions control for province and election fixed effects plus a vector of time-varying voter characteristics: percentage of voters under 40, percentage with a primary school diploma and the share of female voters in each province. The control variables aim to account for, among other things, the increasing share of young voters from 2011 to 2015 who were exposed to the compulsory schooling law and were more likely to graduate from secondary school or above, which might have influenced their voting preferences (Cesur and Mocan 2018; Gulesci and Meyersson 2012). As in the previous analysis, the standard errors are clustered at the province level.

5 Results

5.1 Descriptive analysis and voter perceptions of refugees

Table 1 presents data on the Syrian refugee population as of December 2016, in and outside refugee camps. We report the intensities of refugee presence (share of refugees in total population) in the top 19 provinces with the largest refugee presences and the rest of Turkey. Figure 2 provides a graphical presentation of the same data on a province-level map. A few points are noteworthy. First, refugee density is higher in provinces in the southeast of Turkey, specifically those provinces closer to the Syrian border. Second, refugees are more likely to move to industrial areas and coastal provinces home to established immigrant smuggling networks, such as Mersin, İzmir, İstanbul and Bursa (Tinti and Reitano 2016). Overall, refugees comprise slightly more than 6% of the population in the 19 provinces listed in Table 1. In the remainder of the country, the refugee presence is modest by comparison, representing about 0.6% of the population.

Table 1 Geographic dispersion of Syrian refugees in Turkey, December 2016

Province	Refugee population		Local Population	Refugee share in Population (%)
	In Camps	Outside Camps		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Kilis	36,580	85,448	130,825	48.26
Hatay	19,350	359,240	1,555,165	19.58
Şanlıurfa	114,092	289,889	1,940,627	17.23
Gaziantep	39,039	279,489	1,974,244	13.89
Mardin	4128	89,371	796,237	10.51
Osmaniye	7250	34,331	522,175	7.38
Mersin	–	139,475	1,773,852	7.29
Kahramanmaraş	17,968	68,849	1,112,634	7.24
Adana	10,341	139,492	2,201,670	6.37
Kayseri	–	55,063	1,358,980	3.89
Adıyaman	9554	15,098	610,484	3.88
Bursa	–	102,733	2,901,396	3.42
Batman	–	19,348	576,899	3.24
Konya	–	70,038	2,161,303	3.14
Burdur	–	7807	261,401	2.90
Şırnak	–	14,314	483,788	2.87
İstanbul	–	426,262	14,804,116	2.80
Malatya	10,283	10,218	781,305	2.56
İzmir	–	98,671	4,223,545	2.28
Subtotal	268,585	2,305,136	40,170,646	6.02
Rest of Turkey	–	240,910	39,644,225	0.60
Total	268,585	2,546,046	79,814,871	3.41

The refugee data come from the Directorate General of Migration Management, Ministry of Interior, Republic of Turkey. Local population data are from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat)

We first use data from the public opinion survey on Syrian refugees to investigate whether evidence exists that citizens' opinions of refugees are associated with (1) their electoral preferences and (2) the intensity of refugee inflows to their provinces. Note that this evidence is based only on one cross-sectional survey and therefore we cannot use our main identification strategy to study the effect of refugee influxes on public attitudes towards them causally.

The first two columns in Table 2 show the overall attitudes towards refugees of Turkish citizens who voted for the ruling AKP and those who did not. The third column reports the difference between columns (1) and (2), adjusted for a large set of demographic variables as well as provincial fixed-effects.¹⁴

¹⁴ The adjusted difference controls for respondent's gender, age, education level, ethnicity, residential area (rural, urban, metropolitan), income group, whether the respondent considers herself religious, and whether she is Sunni Muslim, plus indicator variables for missing observations. Location fixed-effects are captured by dummy variables indentifying each province.

Table 2 Turkish Citizens' perception of Syrians by party affiliation and host area, February 2016

% Agree with statement	Voted for AKP in November 2015?		Adj. diff.	Overall mean	Correlation coefficient	N
	Yes	No/Unk.				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Job opportunities decreased due to Syrians	0.644	0.774	-0.14***	0.715	0.99***	2610
Turkish aid to Syrians is sufficient	0.806	0.672	0.07***	0.733	-0.03	2584
Refugees harm the Turkish economy	0.652	0.774	-0.12***	0.718	0.71**	2627
Refugees make cities less safe	0.678	0.789	-0.12***	0.739	1.15***	2616
Turks are culturally similar to Syrians	0.371	0.253	0.10***	0.307	-0.82*	2603
Turkey should no longer accept refugees	0.564	0.676	-0.14***	0.625	0.68**	2613
Syrians should be granted residence permit	0.416	0.338	0.12***	0.374	-0.61	2608
Syrians should integrate to daily life	0.762	0.785	0.00	0.774	-0.30	2605
Accepting refugees is a humanitarian mission	0.770	0.692	0.09***	0.727	-1.18**	2608
Refugees should only live in the camps	0.541	0.585	-0.09***	0.565	1.12***	2616
Syrian refugees should be granted work permit	0.496	0.397	0.13***	0.442	-0.74*	2617
Syrian refugee children should receive education in Arabic	0.542	0.490	0.08***	0.514	-0.23	2611
Syrians refugees will return home when the war is over	0.594	0.450	0.12***	0.516	-0.76	2603
Accepting refugees is a geographic/historic responsibility	0.660	0.510	0.11***	0.578	-0.29	2600
I come across refugees on a daily basis (%)	0.398	0.474	-0.02	0.439	2.88***	2635

The data come from the Konda Research and Consultancy Survey conducted in February 2016. Original questions were based on a 6-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, partially agree, partially disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Figures in the table reports the percentage of respondents who agree/strongly agree with the statement. Columns (1) and (2) contrast the views of respondents who voted for Justice and Development Party in November 2015 General Elections and those who did not, respectively. Column (3) reports the regression adjusted differences between columns (1) and (2). Column (4) shows the overall percentage of respondents who agree with the statement. Column (5) reports the association between a one-percentage point change in the share of refugees in province population and the likelihood of agreeing with the statement. Figures in columns (3) and (5) adjust for gender, age, education level, ethnicity, income, residential area, whether the respondent is a Sunni Muslim and whether she considers herself religious plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Figures in Column (3) also adjust for province fixed-effects. Significance levels are indicated by ***1%, **5%, and *10%

These statistics show that voters are very polarized in their perceptions of refugees. Individuals who mentioned that they voted for the ruling party in November 2015 were less likely to have negative views on the economic and social effects of refugees than those who did not report voting for AKP; by large margins. For instance, AKP's voters were 14 percentage points less likely to agree that "job opportunities decreased due to Syrians", 12 percentage points less likely to agree that "refugees harm the Turkish economy" and 12 percentage points less likely to agree that "refugees make cities less safe" than those who did not vote for the ruling party. The differences in perceptions are similar across all survey questions, except on the question that, "refugees should integrate to daily life", for which no statistically significant difference arises between the two groups. The differences observed, moreover, are driven mostly by the extreme points on the Likert scale; that is, non-AKP voters are more likely to disagree strongly with a statement sympathetic towards Syrian refugees, and vice versa (Fig. 4). Importantly, the last row in Table 2 shows that AKP supporters are equally likely to encounter refugees in their daily lives as the rest of the population, suggesting that the stark differences in voter attitudes towards refugees are not driven by differential exposure to refugees.

Turkish citizens, similar to residents of other countries, are quite polarized in their perceptions of Syrians. Here we find that opinions are polarized based on existing party affiliations and independent of where respondents live.

The rows of column 5, Table 2, report coefficients from separate regression estimates in which the question shown in the row heading is the dependent variable. The regressions control for a rich set of demographic characteristics and we report the coefficient on the provincial population refugee share. The reported coefficient in each cell shows the association between a one percentage-point increase in the refugee population share and the likelihood of agreeing with the statements on refugees shown in the row heading.

Exposure to refugees is associated with negative attitudes, especially on issues related to labor market conditions and national security, which reveal perceptions about the effects of refugee influxes on issues linked directly to the local population's daily lives. For example, respondents who live in high-intensity refugee areas are substantially more likely to agree that refugees reduce the number of available jobs and express security concerns. But perceptions on humanitarian responsibilities towards refugees, such as "Turkish aid to Syrians is sufficient", "Syrians should be granted a residence permit", "Syrian children should receive education in Arabic" and "Accepting refugees is a geographic/historic responsibility", do not seem to vary with the intensities of refugees' presence in the province. Remarkably, a one percentage-point increase in the share of refugees in the total population is associated with a 2.9 percentage-point increase in the likelihood of daily encounters with refugees. That last estimate shows that despite potential measurement error in refugee populations at the province level, our treatment intensity variable clearly captures differences in exposure to refugees.

Overall, a substantial proportion of the national population (44%) experience refugee presence on a daily basis. Furthermore, public opinion towards refugees divides strongly along political lines and, to some extent, along geographic proximities to refugees. In the following sections, we investigate whether the observed associations imply a causal effect of refugee presence on political affiliations.

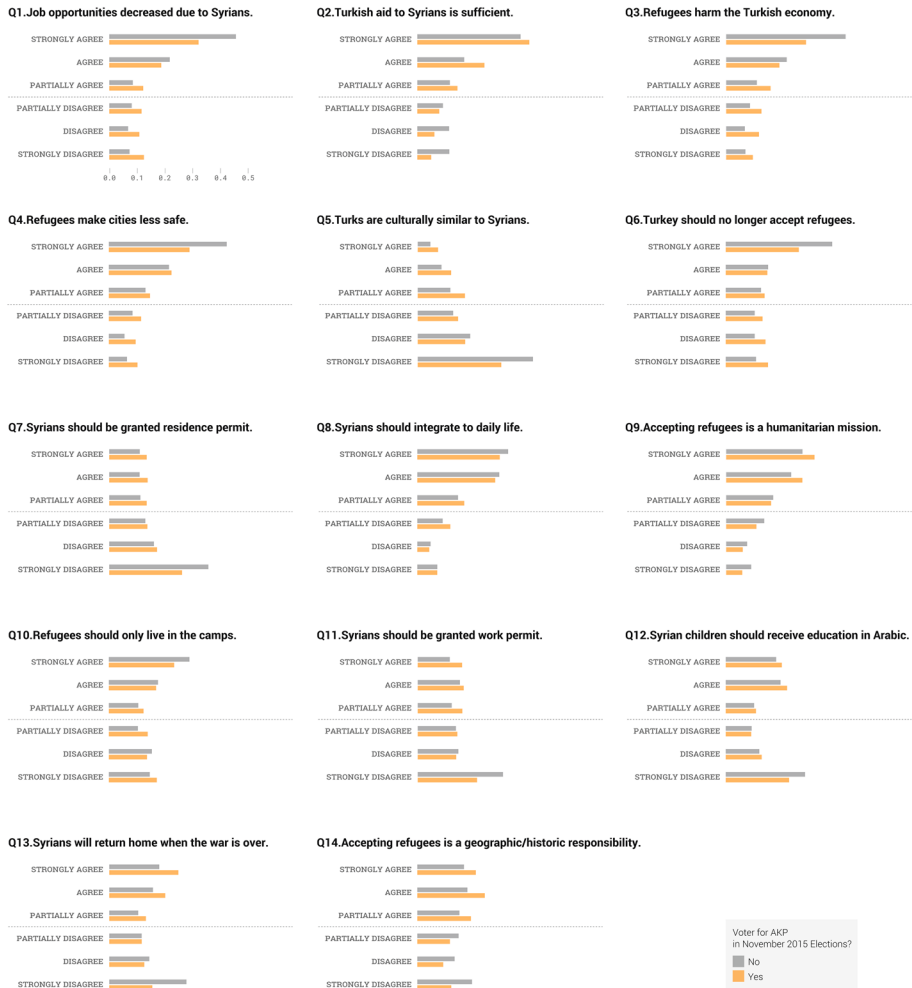


Fig. 4 Turkish citizens' perceptions of Syrian refugees, by party affiliation, February 2016. *Source:* Field Survey, Konda Research and Consultancy, 2016

5.2 Effect of refugees on voting behavior

Table 3 presents the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effects of refugee inflows on voter behavior using our language-based instrument, based on Eq. 1. OLS estimates from the survey data (panel A) suggest that a one-percentage point increase in refugee presence is associated with a 0.48 percentage point drop in support for AKP. The instrumental variable estimate is slightly larger, suggesting a 0.72 percentage point decline in the ruling AKP's voter base in response to a one-percentage point increase in refugee presence. Refugee influxes have no effect on the electoral fortunes of the other three major opposition parties in the 2SLS models. The likelihood of not supporting any of the four political parties increases by 0.54 percentage points. In the bottom row of panel A, we report the F-statistic

Table 3 Effect of refugees on voting behavior

Panel A. Survey results: January 2012–December 2016					
(<i>N</i> = 149,746)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other [†]
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	– 0.48*** (0.12)	0.14* (0.08)	– 0.08 (0.06)	0.10 (0.12)	0.32 (0.24)
2SLS	– 0.72*** (0.19)	0.05 (0.07)	– 0.06 (0.05)	0.18 (0.23)	0.54*** (0.12)
Outcome mean	41.36	18.23	9.98	6.58	23.85
First stage	0.14*** (0.02)				
<i>F</i> -stat	45.93				
Panel B. Election results: 2011 June, 2015 June, 2015 November					
(<i>N</i> = 243)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Voter turnout
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	0.04 (0.06)	– 0.08* (0.05)	0.06 (0.04)	– 0.03 (0.09)	0.00 (0.03)
2SLS	– 0.69 (0.59)	– 0.35 (0.25)	– 0.04 (0.12)	1.07 (0.85)	0.36 (0.32)
Outcome mean	47.70	20.27	14.81	13.45	86.34
First stage	0.09*** (0.03)				
<i>F</i> -stat	10.18				

Panel A reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on political preferences using Konda Research and Consultancy monthly surveys from 2012 to 2016. Each figure is based on a separate regression with a binary outcome variable, equal to one if the respondent said she would vote for the party listed in the column heading if the elections were held at the time of the interview. The reported figures are estimated coefficients on the variable on share of refugees in total population during the survey month S_{jt}^{ref} . In 2SLS regressions, S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language in 1965, weighted by the global number of Syrian refugees at the time of the survey. Each regression controls for province and survey month fixed effects, gender, age, education level, ethnicity, income, residential area, whether the respondent is a Sunni Muslim and whether she considers herself religious plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Panel B reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on election results. OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on election results. The outcome variables are the vote shares for each of the parties in the parliament and the voter turnout. The reported figures are estimated coefficients on S_{jt}^{ref} . In 2SLS regressions, S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language in 1965, weighted by the global number. Significance levels are indicated by * $<.1$, ** $<.05$, *** $<.01$

from the first stage results. In line with Fig. 2, the interaction of the intensity of Arabic speakers with the overall number of refugees predicts the refugee distribution significantly, indicating that the instrumental variable is sufficiently strong (Bound et al. 1995).

As mentioned before, the causal interpretation of these results requires satisfying the assumption that in the absence of refugee inflows, regions with high- and low-intensities of Arabic speakers would reveal similar trends in voting behavior. In Fig. 5, we show the

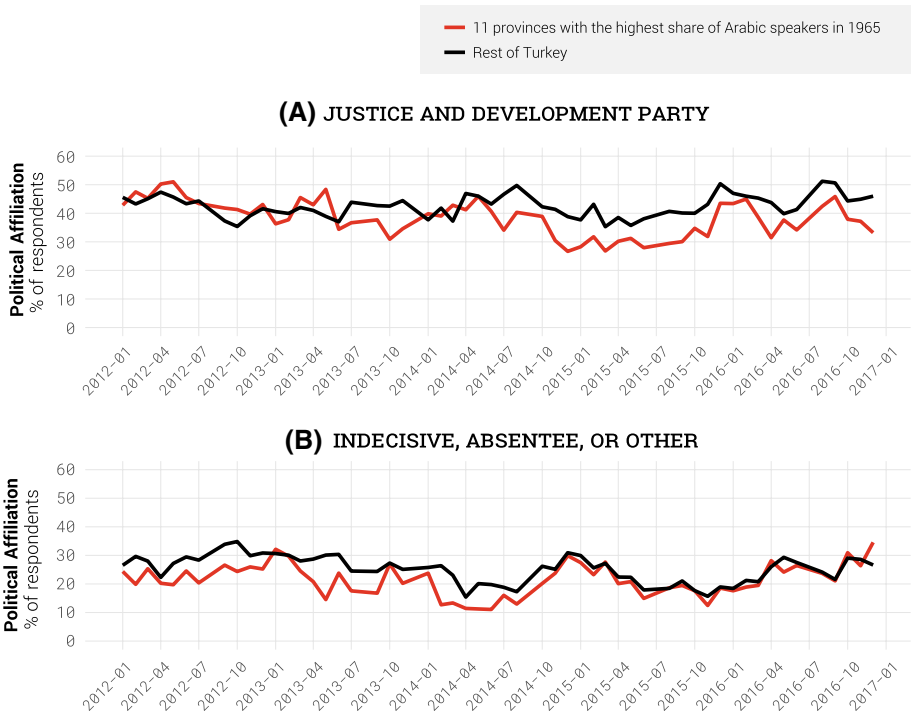


Fig. 5 Trends in political party affiliation, 2012–2016. *Source:* Field Survey, Konda Research and Consultancy, 2016

trends in unadjusted rates of political support for the AKP and the share of non-supporters of the four major parties, the two outcome for which regression results indicate statistically significant estimates, from 2012 to 2016 (Table 3). We compare the 11 provinces that have the largest population shares of Arabic speakers in 1965 (and drive the variation in our instrument) with the rest of the country.¹⁵ Panel (A) shows strikingly overlapping trends until 2014, followed by a slight, but marked drop in AKP's vote share during the expansion of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in northern Syria. Panel (B) shows a similar pattern in the reverse direction: the share of respondents unaffiliated with any major political party rises after the acceleration of refugee inflows in 2014 in provinces that were more likely to receive the refugees.

In a similar way, we interact Arabic speaker intensity with each survey period and plot the estimated interaction coefficients from a dynamic difference-in-differences model:

$$y_{ijt} = \alpha_3 + \delta_{3j} + \gamma_{3t} + X_i' \Omega + \sum_t \pi_t (d_t \times Arab_j^{1965}) + \epsilon_{3ijt}, \quad (5)$$

where, as before, y_{ijt} indicates the binary outcome for political affiliation, δ_{3j} and γ_{3t} capture the province and survey-month fixed effects and the vector X_i includes characteristics of the survey respondent. Binary indicator d_t for each survey month is interacted with $Arab_j^{1965}$,

¹⁵ Hatay, Mardin, Siirt, Şanlıurfa, Osmaniye, Adana, Mersin, Diyarbakır, Van, Kilis and Gaziantep. Ninety-seven percent of the native Arabic speakers in 1965 lived in those 11 provinces.

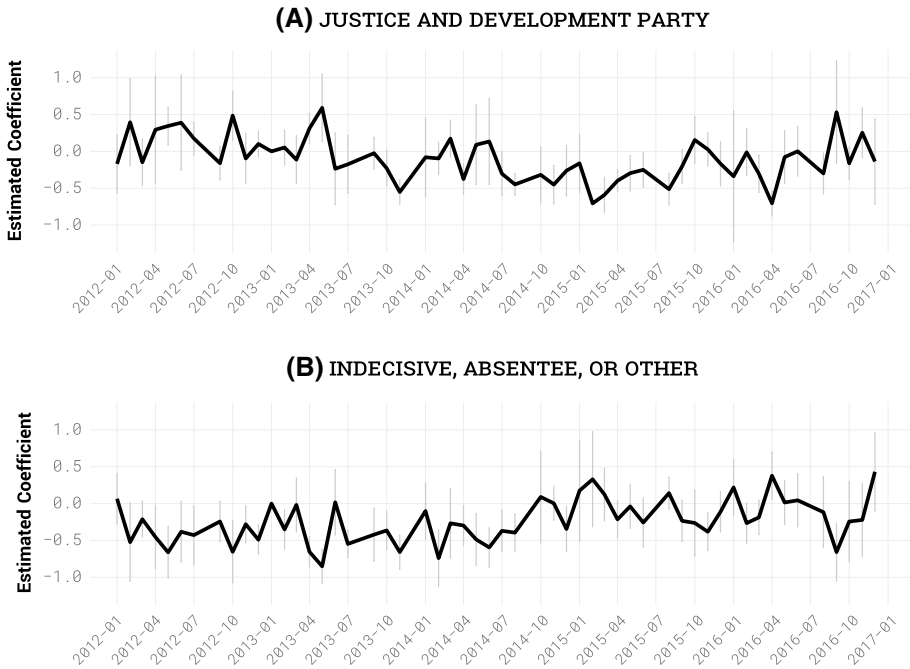


Fig. 6 An event study of political party affiliation, 2012–2016. The figure below shows the estimated coefficients for the interaction terms from the following regression: $y_{ijt} = \alpha + \delta_j + \gamma_t + \sum_i \pi_i (d_i \times Arab^{1965}) + \varepsilon_{ijt}$ where y_{ijt} is the binary outcome of political affiliation, δ_j and γ_t control for province and survey-month fixed effect. Each survey month dummy, d_i is interacted with the share of Arabic speakers in 1965, i.e. $Arab^{1965}$, and we plot the estimated coefficients π_i for the outcomes indicated in panels (C) and (D). *Source:* Field Survey, Konda Research and Consultancy, 2016

the population share of Arabic speakers in 1965. The estimated coefficients for π_i are plotted in Fig. 6, panels (A) and (B). Despite being less precise, we observe similar trends in the pre-refugee period for both outcomes and a movement of the coefficients afterwards, as expected, following the same patterns as in Fig. 5, panels (A) and (B). In other words, the reported 2SLS coefficients in Table 3 appear to be driven mainly by the peak of the refugee movement in 2014 and 2015.

In Table 3, panel B, we report the 2SLS estimates with province-level data on actual election outcomes. The OLS results show that a one-percentage point increase in refugee inflows lowered the vote shares of CHP by 0.08 percentage points, but the effects are only marginally significant and tiny in magnitude, albeit estimated precisely. The 2SLS models do not reveal any impact of refugee presence on the vote shares of any political party. The 2SLS estimates for AKP and HDP lack precision, although the 95% confidence intervals of the estimated coefficients from the election data overlap with the survey data results. We also find no discernible effect on voter turnout. Overall, the results suggest that refugee inflows caused a small decline in support for the government party and a shift in a small number of voters into not affiliating themselves with any political party in the Konda survey, while producing no impact on the actual election results.

Table 4 shows the 2SLS results based on survey data from subgroups by ethnicity, gender, age and education. The estimated coefficients are similar for all demographic groups, except when the samples are categorized by ethnicity. The negative impact of refugees is

larger for ethnic Turks, who constitute the majority of Turkey's electorate. Tiny, but precisely estimated coefficients are found for CHP and MHP for some demographic groups, which we interpret cautiously. We conclude that the empirical evidence is too weak to reveal any impact of refugees on the voting preferences for AKP's three opposition parties; our results rather suggest a small and temporary decline in support for the ruling party with no cross-party voter transitions.

We modify our main specification in Eq. 2 using Del Carpio and Wagner (2015)'s distance-based instrument as described in Eq. 4. The results from that specification are shown in Table 5 and provide estimates very similar to those presented in Table 4. The 2SLS estimates in Panel A suggests that one-percentage point increase in the population share of refugees is associated with a 0.47 percentage point drop in support for AKP. Again, we observe a 0.36 percentage point increase in the likelihood of not supporting any of the four major political parties, but those estimates now lack statistical power.

The results presented in Panel B of Table 5 again suggest no relationship between refugee inflows and election results. We estimate a coefficient that is only marginally significant for CHP, but smaller in magnitude to the less precise estimate in Table 4. The results confirm our previous findings that refugee inflows are associated with a temporary decline in support for the ruling political party, while they do not lead to changes in actual voting behavior.

5.2.1 Election results using survey data

Given the lack of statistical power owing to smaller sample sizes in election results ($N=243$), we estimated Eq. 2 using the survey data on self-reported voting behavior. In the Konda surveys, respondents also were asked about the political party they voted for during the previous general elections.¹⁶ We use that information to create outcomes for actual voting behavior and re-estimate the main model. In those specifications, both the endogenous variable (S_{jt}^{ref}) and the instruments (iv_{jt}) are based on province j at the time of the election in period t .

Table 6, panels A and B, show the results on self-reported voting behavior using the language- and distance-based instruments, respectively. The estimated coefficients from 2SLS results are small, but relatively precise and sometimes marginally significant. Overall, they suggest that the refugee population shock during the study period had a negligible impact on elections outcomes in Turkey. For example, the 2SLS results in panels A and B suggest that the vote share of AKP dropped by 0.18 to 0.30 percentage points in response to a 1% increase in the refugee share in the total population during the three elections between 2011 and 2015. Those small estimates are statistically significant only at less than a 10% threshold and we no longer observe any changes in the "other" category of voters.

5.2.2 Sensitivity analysis

A potential criticism of our IV approach is that voters' responses to the Syrian crisis itself, apart from their responses to the refugee influx, may differ across areas that are in the south

¹⁶ These data were not collected for the monthly Konda surveys from June 2014 to March 2015.

Table 4 Effect of refugees on voting behavior: 2SLS results by demographic subgroups

	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other	<i>N</i>	<i>F</i> -stat
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Turkish	− 0.67*** (0.13)	0.18** (0.07)	0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.04)	0.48*** (0.10)	120,252	130.41
Kurdish	− 0.37 (0.31)	0.04 (0.14)	− 0.07 (0.06)	− 0.16 (0.62)	0.55* (0.31)	21,462	12.13
Male	− 0.61** (0.25)	0.01 (0.05)	0.01 (0.08)	0.15 (0.20)	0.44** (0.21)	77,710	47.76
Female	− 0.87*** (0.18)	0.10 (0.11)	− 0.12** (0.05)	0.21 (0.27)	0.68*** (0.12)	71,718	42.84
Age ≤ 32	− 0.79*** (0.21)	− 0.08 (0.08)	0.01 (0.13)	0.22 (0.28)	0.63*** (0.11)	53,641	41.23
Age [33–46]	− 0.70** (0.28)	0.29** (0.14)	− 0.23*** (0.07)	0.14 (0.24)	0.49*** (0.18)	47,164	44.11
Age ≥ 46	− 0.66*** (0.19)	0.01 (0.06)	0.01 (0.06)	0.15 (0.17)	0.49*** (0.12)	48,634	55.42
< High school	− 0.71*** (0.19)	0.11 (0.09)	− 0.03 (0.05)	0.14 (0.24)	0.48*** (0.11)	85,330	34.70
≥ High school	− 0.75*** (0.24)	0.00 (0.06)	− 0.06 (0.07)	0.22 (0.23)	0.60*** (0.14)	63,592	95.01

Estimates are based on regressions models using data from the Konda Research and Consultancy monthly surveys from 2012 to 2016. The row headings describe the sample. Each figure is based on a separate regression with a binary outcome variable, equal to one if the respondent said she would vote for the party listed in the column heading if the elections were held at the time of the interview. The reported figures are estimated coefficients on the variable on share of refugees in total population during the survey month (S_{jt}^{ref}). S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language in 1965, weighted by the global number of Syrian refugees at the time of the survey. Each regression controls for province and survey month fixed-effects, gender, age, education level, ethnicity, income, residential area, whether the respondent is a Sunni Muslim and whether she considers herself religious plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Standard errors in parenthesis are clustered at the province level, and significance levels are indicated by * $<.1$, ** <0.05 , *** <0.01 .

† Indecisive, absentee, or other party

and southeast regions of Turkey, which drive a substantial fraction of the variations in both instruments. In an effort to test the sensitivity of our results to regional political dynamics, we conduct two sensitivity checks. First, we add region \times survey-month fixed effects to our main specification, which fully traces out month-to-month variation in political dynamics in Turkey's 12 regions. Second, we exclude six provinces neighboring Syria from the regression sample. We report the estimates using our main specification and the survey sample in Table 7. Because of the small sample size, the instrument is too weak to provide any reliable information for the election sample.¹⁷ As shown in Panel A, we obtain remarkably similar results after additionally controlling for region-specific, non-linear trends. The instrument is much weaker when the sample is restricted to non-border provinces, but the very imprecise estimates remain qualitatively similar to our main findings. While we

¹⁷ See Staiger and Stock (1997) and Stock and Yogo (2002) for a general discussion of weak instruments.

Table 5 Effect of refugees on voting behavior, using Del Carpio and Wagner (2015) distance-based instrument

A. Survey results: January 2012–December 2016					
(<i>N</i> =149,746)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	– 0.48*** (0.12)	0.14 (0.08)	– 0.08 (0.06)	0.10 (0.12)	0.32 (0.24)
2SLS	– 0.47*** (0.14)	0.17 (0.12)	– 0.05 (0.07)	0.00 (0.09)	0.36 (0.29)
Outcome mean	41.36	18.23	9.98	6.58	23.85
First stage	1.47*** (0.16)				
<i>F</i> -stat	87.53				
B. Election results: 2011 June, 2015 June, 2015 November					
(<i>N</i> =243)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Voter turnout
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	0.04 (0.06)	– 0.08* (0.05)	0.06 (0.04)	– 0.03 (0.09)	0.00 (0.03)
2SLS	– 0.03 (0.11)	– 0.20* (0.11)	0.06 (0.06)	0.13 (0.18)	0.04 (0.05)
Outcome mean	47.70	20.27	14.81	13.45	86.34
First stage	0.75*** (0.001)				
<i>F</i> -stat	10.43				

Panel A reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on political preferences using Konda Research and Consultancy monthly surveys from 2012 to 2016. Each figure is based on a separate regression with a binary outcome variable, equal to one if the respondent said she voted for the party listed in the column heading during the most recent election. The reported figures are estimated coefficients on the variable on share of refugees in total population during the survey month S_{jt}^{ref} . In 2SLS regressions, S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the inverse of the driving distance between province j and Syria weighted by the total number of refugees in Turkey at period t . Each regression controls for province and survey month fixed effects, gender, age, education level, ethnicity, income, residential area, whether the respondent is a Sunni Muslim and whether she considers herself religious plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Panel B reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on election results. OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on election results. The outcome variables are the vote shares for each of the parties in the parliament and the voter turnout. The reported figures are estimated coefficients on S_{jt}^{ref} . In 2SLS regressions, S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the inverse of the driving distance between province j and 13 Syrian governorates weighted by the total number of refugees in Turkey at period t . Significance levels are indicated by * $<.1$, ** <0.05 , *** <0.01

acknowledge that no fully robust approach exists for isolating the impact of refugee migration, the results at a minimum suggest that our previous findings are not driven entirely by the responses of voters near the conflict area.

We conduct multiple additional robustness checks to corroborate our results. First, we estimate our baseline models with only three covariates: refugee density, province and

Table 6 Effect of refugees on voting behavior: using survey self-reported voting outcome

Panel A. Survey results: January 2012–December 2016, language-based IV					
(N=121,369)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other [‡]
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	– 0.23* (0.12)	0.15* (0.09)	– 0.04 (0.08)	0.13 (0.13)	– 0.01 (0.10)
2SLS	– 0.18* (0.11)	0.06 (0.05)	– 0.11** (0.04)	0.17 (0.24)	0.06 (0.09)
Outcome mean	46.83	20.03	10.36	6.10	16.68
First stage	0.14*** (0.02)				
F-stat	48.98				
Panel B. Survey results: January 2012–December 2016, distance-based IV					
(N=121,369)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other [‡]
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	– 0.23* (0.12)	0.15* (0.09)	– 0.04 (0.08)	0.13 (0.13)	– 0.01 (0.10)
2SLS	– 0.30* (0.16)	0.18 (0.12)	0.01 (0.10)	0.10 (0.12)	0.02 (0.12)
Outcome mean	46.83	20.03	10.36	6.10	16.68
First stage	1.61*** (0.17)				
F-stat	91.28				

Panel A and B report the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on political preferences using Konda Research and Consultancy monthly surveys from 2012 to 2016. Each figure is based on a separate regression with a binary outcome variable, equal to one if the respondent said she voted for the party listed in the column heading during the most recent election. The reported figures are estimated coefficients on the variable on share of refugees in total population during the election month S_{jt}^{ref} . In Panel A regressions, S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language in 1965, weighted by the global number of Syrian refugees at the time of the election. In Panel B regressions, S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the distance-based instrument defined in Eq. 4. All regressions control for province and survey month fixed effects, gender, age, education level, ethnicity, whether the respondent is a Sunni Muslim and whether she considers herself religious plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Significance levels are indicated by * $<.1$, ** <0.05 , *** <0.01

period fixed effects. The results should be similar to those including additional covariates if we are capturing the exogenous variation after accounting for location and period fixed effects. Second, we exclude Istanbul to confirm that our results are not driven by that province, which is an outlier on most indicators, including Turkish and Syrian population in addition to its excessive share in Turkey's economic production. Third, we exclude Kilis, which also is an outlier, with almost half of the population composed of refugees as of December 2016. Fourth, we exclude provinces that were districts in 1965 and use the exactly matched sample of administrative units in both 1965 and the analysis period. The results from those four robustness checks for survey data and election results are shown in

Table 7 Effect of refugees on voting behavior: sensitivity analysis

Panel A. Survey results: January 2012–December 2016

Region \times survey month fixed-effects

($N=149,746$)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other [†]
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	– 0.13*** (0.22)	0.15* (0.08)	– 0.07 (0.06)	– 0.03 (0.09)	0.08 (0.33)
2SLS	– 0.61*** (0.16)	– 0.03 (0.15)	– 0.12 (0.08)	0.21 (0.21)	0.55** (0.25)
Outcome mean	41.36	18.23	9.98	6.58	23.85
First stage	0.12*** (0.02)				
<i>F</i> -stat	42.21				

Panel B. Survey results: January 2012–December 2016

Excluding border provinces

($N=134,276$)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Voter turnout
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	0.15 (0.58)	– 0.11 (0.26)	– 0.28 (0.24)	– 0.24 (0.32)	– 0.02 (0.59)
2SLS	– 1.53** (0.59)	– 0.28 (0.50)	0.25 (0.34)	0.82 (0.71)	0.74 (0.53)
Outcome mean	40.68	19.14	10.30	5.80	24.09
First stage	0.33*** (0.13)				
<i>F</i> -stat	6.86				

Panel A and Panel B report the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on political preferences using Konda Research and Consultancy monthly surveys from 2012 to 2016. Each figure is based on a separate regression with a binary outcome variable, equal to one if the respondent said she would vote for the party listed in the column heading if the elections were held at the time of the interview. The reported figures are estimated coefficients on the variable on share of refugees in total population during the survey month S_{jt}^{ref} . In 2SLS regressions, S_{jt}^{ref} is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language in 1965, weighted by the global number of Syrian refugees at the time of the survey. Each regression controls for province and survey month fixed effects, gender, age, education level, ethnicity, income, residential area, whether the respondent is a Sunni Muslim and whether she considers herself religious plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Panel A additionally controls for region \times survey month fixed-effects whereas Panel B excludes the border provinces from the regression sample. Significance levels are indicated by * $<.1$, ** <0.05 , *** <0.01

online Appendix Tables (A2), (A3), (A4), and (A5) and are similar to those in the main analysis.

In online Appendix Table (A6), we report the results from our main specification using the 1927 Turkish Census to calculate the population shares of native Arabic speakers to

re-construct our instrument.¹⁸ Turkey's population more than doubled from 1927 to 1965 in addition to within-country mobility of the population. The results from the language-based instrument that relies on the 1927 Census, as shown in online Appendix Table (A6), are very similar to the main results that we report in Table 3, suggesting that our findings are robust to the choice of census for constructing the language-based instrument.

6 Conclusion

The Syrian Civil War has caused one of the largest international movements of people since World War II and resulted in a massive influx of refugees to Turkey. In this paper, we study how that large entry of Syrian refugees affected voter preferences in Turkey. Turkish voters, as our study documents, are very polarized in their attitudes towards refugees based on their political party affiliations. Yet, our estimates suggest that the refugee inflow had only modest effects on the political affiliations of Turkish voters and negligible effect on actual voting outcomes. Those findings remain robust to a host of multiple identification strategies as well as robustness checks.

One possible explanation for the findings is that despite their polarized attitudes towards Syrian refugees, Turkish voters did not hold Erdoğan or his ruling AKP responsible for the influx of Syrian refugees. The finding is analogous to results of US election studies reporting weak associations between macroeconomic conditions and voting in elections to the House of Representatives because voters did not hold their representatives responsible for the state of the economy (Mueller 2003; Crain et al. 1978). Our results may also reflect the fact that opposition candidates did not offer any restrictive migration policies that would have been sufficiently attractive to the AKP's voters to induce them to switch to the opposition. CHP, the only political party that supported more restrictive policies towards refugees may not have been attractive enough on other issues, given the historical lack of voter switching between the secular and religious political camps in Turkey. It also is likely that refugees did not rank sufficiently high on voters' priority lists to prompt transitions to other political parties.

The refugee inflows to Turkey are emblematic of the civil war in neighboring Syria; the estimates that we report might not simply reflect the presence of Syrian refugees, but Turkish responses to the civil war. We have tried to separate national and time-varying regional factors that are correlated with the refugee influx. We also conduct a number of robustness checks that allow us to control partially for those other factors. Yet, a study conducted during a highly tumultuous political era in Turkey and the Middle East still might not fully isolate the effect of the refugee inflows from the effect of the civil war. If that were the case, one likely reason for our inability to find any effect would be that we

¹⁸ We digitized data using the figures provided by TurkStat from Umumi Nufus Tahriri, Fasikül III, Usuller Kanun ve Talimatnameler Neticelerininin Tahlili, page 32 (<https://kutuphane.tuik.gov.tr/pdf/0018326.pdf>, last access - 2019/12/13 19:14:03). Hatay was not part of Turkey until the mid-1930s and we relied on the 1936 share of Arabic speakers in Hatay as reported by French High Commission in 1936 (Brandell 2006). The report provides data on shares of native Arabic speakers for nine provinces that hosted 97.46% of the native Arabic speakers in 1927. Given their negligible populations, we assigned zero to other areas that are not mentioned in the census report.

have not been able to isolate the effect of other factors correlated with the refugee influx that affected political opinions and outcomes in Turkey.

Using a different survey instrument, Getmansky et al. (2018) also document voter alignment along party lines in Turkey. Those findings are consistent with a polarized political environment in which party affiliation plays a more important role than other sources of information relied on in formulating public opinion (Druckman et al. 2013). The mostly uniform political narrative by the national media, which promotes AKP's viewpoint and strengthens their political hegemony, also mitigates any regional response to refugee presence. Nor is it possible to rule out that voters' responses to refugees to a country neighboring a conflict region would be influenced substantially by support for a political leader whom voters think would be able to safely steer the host country if the regional conflict spills into it. Our empirical results are consistent with all such arguments and differ from those of comparable studies in western countries that have found refugee inflows resulting in extreme right-wing anti-immigration parties gaining support. Thus, an important corollary that can be drawn from the present paper is that the findings from other studies are not generalizable to countries located in a conflict region.

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