Migrants' Self-Selection and the Vicious Circle of Right-Wing Populism

Frédéric Docquier[a], Chrysovalantis Vasilakis[b]

[a]LISER and University of Luxembourg
[b]University of Bangor and IZA

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Introduction

- Populism = anti-establishment stance (opposed to corrupt and self-centered rulers) and commitment to protect (claim to represent the good/pure people)
- Political indicators show that populism is an all time peak (Docquier at al. 2023; Funke et al. 2020; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2022).
- Populists can be from the right or left of the political divide.
    - Left-wing populists (also known as social populists) combine left-wing politics with populist themes rhetoric.
    - Right-wing populists (also known as nationalist populists) do the same on the right side of the political spectrum.
- The on-going surge of right populism in Europe is worrisome given its intensity and persistence.

Introduction

What are the reasons for surges and persistence of populism?

- Episodes of economic insecurity and rising inequality
- Corruption scandals, anti-elite campaigns on social media
- Low levels of human capital of voters
- Large inflows of low-skilled immigrants (Docquier et al. 2023, Edo et al. 2019)

Examples:

- US elections 2017: Trump declared that he will build a wall to protect the country from illegal immigrants... and Mexicans will pay for it
- Brexit: Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster (Breaking Point)
- Italy: "As long as I live, it is my duty to defend the borders, the dignity and the sovereignty of my country" (Salvini)

Preamble

(a) I'll build a wall to protect the country from illegal immigrants... and Mexicans will pay for it

(b) Le grand remplacement: ni un fantasme ni un complot... c'est le secret le mieux gardé de la mondialisation

(c) As long as I live, it is my duty to defend the borders, the dignity and the sovereignty of my country

(d) Breaking point: the EU has failed us all

(e) They don't do anything. I don't think they're even good for procreation any more

(f) For us migration is not a solution but a problem ... not medicine but a poison, we don't need it and won't swallow it

Immigration has long been a focal point of nationalist populist discourse

Goal of our paper

- In this paper, we turn the question around and investigate the int'l migration responses to right-wing populism
- Does right-wing populism influence the skill structure of immigration and emigration flows? Does it induce:
  1. A brain drain (as natives vote their feet)?
  2. A decrease in the educational level of immigrants?
- These would be mechanisms potentially leading to "snowball" dynamics of populism despite its adverse economic consequences (Bellodi et al. 2022, Funke et al. 2020)

What we do to deal with this research question

- We combine data on right-wing populism with proxies of dyadic migration flows.
- We test whether the extent of ring-wing populism in destination (origin) influences skill-specific migration inflows (outflows).
- We rely on two measures of populism:
  1. Sum of vote shares of parties (volume margin)
  2. Continuous measure of overall exposure of voters to right-wing populism in a given election
- We combine annual migration flow data with proxies for their skill structure (based on closest census round)
- Endogeneity: we use an IV method (instrument = combination of collective memory and trigger variables).

Preview of results

Immigration:

- We find that one standard deviation in the mean margin of populism reduces high-skilled immigration flows by 36 percent.
- One standard deviation in the mean margin of populism reduces low-skilled immigration flows by 16 percent
- The high-skilled workers are less likely to move to countries where populist parties are strong nationalist and anti-immigration views.
- Low-skilled workers migrants originating from countries with large diasporas have fewer opportunities and less likely to change their location decision.

Preview of results

Emigration:

- We find that one standard deviation in the mean margin of population increases high-skilled emigration flows by 15 percent.
- No effect to low skilled workers.

Literature Review

- We contribute to existing literature on populism and migration
- Several studies focus on how the presence of immigrants affects voter's political preferences for countries like the US (Mayda et al. 2022), Greece (Vasilakis, 2017), France (Malgouyres, 2017), United Kingdom (Becker and Fetzer, 2016), Italy (Barone et al. 2016), Spain, Austria, Denmark, etc.
- Studies decomposing migration flows along the skill dimension suggest that these effects are driven by low-skilled immigration. By contrast, high-skilled immigration tend to reduce the level of right-wing populism (Docquier et al. 2023; Edo et al. 2019; Moriconi et al. 2019).

Literature Review

Fewer papers investigate the reverse effect of populism on population movements:

- Bracco et al. (2018): Investigate how immigrant location decisions in Northern Italy are affected by the rise of the populist and anti-immigration party Lega Nord between 2000 and 2014. They find that the election of a Lega Nord mayor discourages immigrants from moving into the municipality in general, and into smaller and less educated municipalities in particular.
- Schmutz et al. (2023) Use data from French municipalities over three decades (1982–2014), and tested whether variations in the share of immigrants are influenced by the election of a left- instead of right-wing mayor. They find important effects within 6 years (+1.5 pp) and 12 years (+3.0 pp), which are mostly driven by partisan differences in public housing constructions and changes in the composition of the population within existing public housing units.

Database – Migration

- We use data on migration flows by country destination period 1960-2018 that obtained from Abel et al. (2018).
- For robustness, we use data obtained from Rayp et al. (2022).
- Flow data by education level are not directly observable but can imputed by using information about the skill level of the dyadic stock of migrants in the closest census
- We also rank dyads by intensity of skill-selection (proxied by the ratio of shares of college graduates in migration stock to origin-country population)
- Estimated share of college grads at time t = selection index in closest census round $\times$ Share of college grads in origin population at year t
- This method proved to be relevant as the dyadic levels of skill selection are stable over time(Burzynski et al. 2018).

Database – Populism

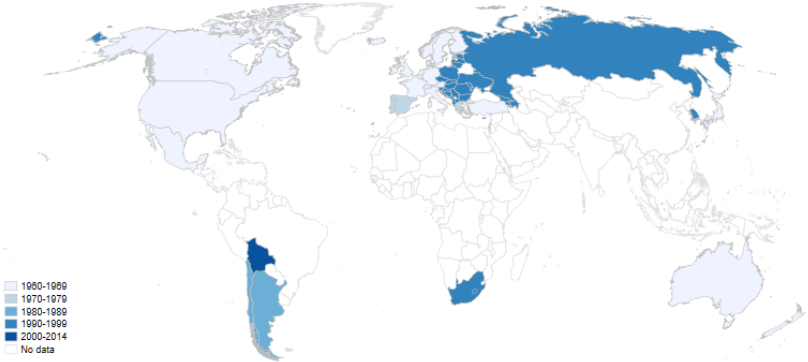
We cover 55 countries and 628 elections over the period 1960-2018.
Three party characteristics available in Manifesto Project dataset.

1. The first characteristic is their position along the left-right political spectrum (Budge and Laver, 2016). Mostly governed by parties' attitudes towards redistribution and political preferences related to moral values
2. The second characteristic is a zero-mean populism score built by Docquier et al. (2023) and based on parties' political platform data. This continuous score is a weighted combination of several variables capturing the anti-establishment stance and the commitment to protect the people of each party available in the MPD.
3. The third one is the vote share obtained in election year

Database – Populism

Let's illustrate the set of countries available in our data set. We cover both developing and developed countries (unbalanced panel).

Figure 2: Countries available in MPD data



Database – Populism

Two measures to capture populism (Docquier et al. 2022):

- Sum of vote shares of parties classified as "right-wing populists" (volume margin)
    1. Requires to classify parties as populist or not
    2. Populist ideas are not restricted to populist parties but can spillover to traditional (or non-traditional) parties not classified as populist.
- Continuous measure of overall exposure of voters to right-wing populism in a given election = vote-weighted average of populism scores of all right-wing parties running in election

Empirical strategy

- Dependent: skill-specific, annual migration flows
  - Various sources of annual observed/imputed migration flows (DEMIG, Standaert and Rayp 2022, Abel et al. 2018)
  - Various proxies of selection: share of college grads in nearest census, dyads w. high shares of college grads
- Main RHS variables: volume or mean margins of right-wing populism
  - Right-wing ($R_{i,t} = 1$) = 3rd tercile of Budge and Laver (2016)
  - PopuList clasification (or parties with scores above one s.d. ($\mathbf{1}^p_{i,t} = 1$) in DGIRTV data)
  - $\text{RWP}^{\text{Votes}}_{i,t} = \frac{\sum_p R^p_{i,t} \mathbf{1}^p_{i,t} V^p_{i,t}}{\sum_p V^p_{i,t}}$ and $\text{RWP}^{\text{Index}}_{i,t} = \frac{\sum_p R^p_{i,t} S^p_{i,t} V^p_{i,t}}{\sum_p V^p_{i,t}}$
- IV approach: combination of **collective memory** and **trigger** variables (Cantoni et al. 2021, Fouka and Voth 2022, Oschner-Roesel 2017)

Empirical strategy

Baseline PPML model:

$$\begin{aligned}\text{Inf:}M^{In,s}_{ji,t} &= \exp\left[\alpha^{In,s}_{j,t} + \alpha^{In,s}_{ij} + \beta^{In,s}\text{RWP}_{i,t} + \mu^{In,s}\mathbf{1}^{c}_{i,t} + \varepsilon^{In,s}_{ij,t}\right]\\ \text{Out:}M^{Out,s}_{ij,t} &= \exp\left[\alpha^{Out,s}_{j,t} + \alpha^{Out,s}_{ij} + \beta^{Out,s}\text{RWP}_{i,t} + \mu^{Out,s}\mathbf{1}^{c}_{i,t} + \varepsilon^{Out,s}_{ij,t}\right]\end{aligned}$$

First-stage OLS regression:

$$\text{RWP}_{i,t} = \gamma_i + \gamma_t + \gamma_0\mathbf{1}^{c}_{i,t} + \rho\text{REM}_i \times \mathbf{1}^{c}_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t} \tag{1}$$

with REM_i = average vote share of nationalist parties during the period from 1900 to 1950 (collective remembrance variable proxying "latent intolerance"), and $\mathbf{1}^{c}_{i,t} = 1$ in times of crisis (0 otherwise).

First-stage regressions

First-stage regressions for $\text{RWP}_{i,t}^{\text{Index}}$

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Inflation crisis	0.035***				
	(0.002)				
$\text{REM}_i \times$ Inflation crisis	0.847***				
	(0.025)				
GDP crisis		0.047***			
		(0.002)			
$\text{REM}_i \times$ GDP crisis		0.163***			
		(0.008)			
Employment crisis			0.021***		
			(0.002)		
$\text{REM}_i \times$ Employment crisis			0.132***		
			(0.007)		
Corruption crisis				0.182***	
				(0.002)	
$\text{REM}_i \times$ Corruption crisis				0.935***	
				(0.008)	
Financial Crisis					0.030***
					(0.001)
$\text{REM}_i \times$ Financial Crisis					-0.152***
					(0.008)
Constant	0.024***	-0.023***	0.002*	-0.002**	0.037***
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Observations	268,533	275,457	275,457	275,457	275,457
Time and country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
R-squared	0.371	0.350	0.345	0.363	0.344

- Our first-stage regressions confirm that the prevalence of economic uncertainty and corruption fuels discontent and mistrust towards democratic institutions.
- We use party level data to investigate the mechanism.
- we examine the probability of a party being classified as right-wing populism, which represents the extensive margin of populism.
- Next, we focus on the populism score of parties classified as right-wing populist.
- Then, we analyze the (endogenous) variations in the vote shares of parties identified as right-wing populist.
- Our findings indicate that episodes of economic uncertainty lead to an increased likelihood of right-wing populist parties participating in elections, as well as higher populism scores for these parties.
- We find that the probability of right-wing populist parties participating in elections is higher in countries with latent intolerance/nationalist.

First-stage mechanism

Party-level responses to inflation crises

	With country FEs			Without country FEs		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	$\Pr\left(R^p_{i,t}\mathbf{1}^p_{i,t}=1\right)$	$S^p_{i,t}$	$V^p_{i,t}$	$\Pr\left(R^p_{i,t}\mathbf{1}^p_{i,t}=1\right)$	$S^p_{i,t}$	$V^p_{i,t}$
REM_i	–	–	–	0.071**	0.085	0.010
				(0.032)	(0.053)	(0.006)
Infl. crisis	0.089**	0.145*	0.005	0.076***	0.107**	0.008**
	(0.040)	(0.071)	(0.006)	(0.023)	(0.043)	(0.004)
$\text{REM}_i\times$ Infl. crisis	0.199	0.265	0.072**	0.227	0.401	0.078*
	(0.234)	(0.381)	(0.034)	(0.182)	(0.348)	(0.042)
Constant	0.050***	0.086***	0.007***	0.041***	0.077***	0.006***
	(0.003)	(0.006)	(0.000)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.001)
Observations	2,618	2,618	2,618	2,618	2,618	2,618
Time FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
R-squared	0.108	0.093	0.063	0.017	0.010	0.014

Crises increase "supply" of populism... and demand in countries with "latent intolerance" (Halla et al. 2017, Cantoni et al. 2021)

Results – Immigration

Synthesis:

- We find that one standard deviation in the mean margin of populism reduces high-skilled immigration flows by 36 percent
- One standard deviation in the mean margin of populism reduces low-skilled immigration flows by 16 percent
- The high-skilled workers are less likely to move to countries where populist parties ave strong nationalist and anti-immigration views
- Low-skilled workers migrants originating from countries with large diasporas have fewer opportunities and less likely to change their location decision
- A 10- percent increase in the vote shares of right-wing populism parties induces a 3.8 percent decrease in high-skilled immigration
- Also, 10- percent increase in the vote shares of right-wing populism parties induces a 1.7 percent decrease in low-skilled immigration

Table 3: PPML regressions with various crisis definitions
Dependent = Annual skill-specific immigration flows

	Inflation crisis		GDP crisis		Empl. crisis		Corruption crisis	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS
RWP Index	-0.313***	-0.120***	-0.332***	-0.155***	-0.321***	-0.141***	-0.323***	-0.152***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Crises	-0.497***	-0.630***	0.122***	0.114***	0.214***	0.206***	0.201***	0.112***
	(0.048)	(0.053)	(0.020)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Constant	10.582***	9.596***	10.538***	9.567***	10.522***	9.555***	10.369***	9.476***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Observations	249,735	241,602	255,377	247,185	255,377	247,185	256,216	248,004
Origin-Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
RWP Votes	-0.026***	-0.016***	-0.036***	-0.027***	-0.034***	-0.025***	-0.037***	-0.028***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Crises	-0.536***	-0.637***	0.135***	0.120***	0.223***	0.210***	0.225***	0.126***
0.120***	(0.049)	(0.052)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.016)	(0.018)	(0.023)	(0.024)
Constant	10.602***	9.606***	10.560***	9.583***	10.543***	9.570***	10.372***	9.479***
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Observations	249,735	241,602	255,377	247,185	255,377	247,185	256,216	248,004
Origin-Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 4: IV regressions with various crisis definitions Dependent = Annual skill-specific immigration flows

	Inflation crisis		GDP crisis		Empl. crisis		Corruption crisis	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS
RWP Index	-0.311***	-0.115***	-0.329***	-0.155***	-0.339***	-0.137**	-0.298***	-0.158***
	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Crises	-0.686***	-0.919***	0.110***	0.108***	0.496***	0.476**	0.164***	0.125***
	(0.058)	(0.067)	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.035)	(0.041)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Constant	10.539***	11.437***	9.369***	9.546***	10.585***	9.753***	10.395***	9.469***
	(0.099)	(0.437)	(0.228)	(0.017)	(0.007)	(0.025)	(0.021)	(0.022)
Observations	249,735	241,602	255,377	247,185	255,377	247,185	256,216	248,004
Origin Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
RWP Votes	-0.026***	-0.015***	-0.035***	-0.027***	-0.037***	-0.028***	-0.034***	-0.028***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Crises	-0.977***	-1.216***	0.116***	0.110***	0.344***	0.357***	0.162***	0.129***
	(0.111)	(0.117)	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.024)	(0.025)
Constant	11.706***	11.438***	10.752***	9.673***	9.112***	9.898***	9.470***	9.234***
	(0.444)	(0.437)	(0.006)	(0.087)	(0.081)	(0.056)	(0.067)	(0.0366)
Observations	249,735	241,602	255,377	247,185	255,377	247,185	256,216	248,004
Origin Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively. Standard errors adjusted for clustering at the origin and destination level. Our benchmark results are reproduced in Cols. (1-2). Cols. (3-4) use GDP crisis episodes in the

Results – Emigration

Synthesis:

- We find that one standard deviation in the mean margin of populism increases high-skilled emigration flows by 15 percent
- No effect to low skilled workers
- A 10- percent increase in the vote shares of right-wing populism parties induces a 3.8 percent increase in high-skilled outflows

Results-Emigration

Table 5: PPML regressions with various crisis definitions
Dependent = Annual skill-specific emigration flows

	Inflation crisis		GDP crisis		Empl. crisis		Corruption crisis	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS
RWP Index	0.145***	0.030	0.143***	0.028	0.144***	0.030	0.101**	-0.004
	(0.046)	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.044)	(0.044)
Crises	-0.043	0.022	-0.136***	-0.163***	-0.190***	-0.152***	0.369**	0.558***
	(0.076)	(0.065)	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.158)	(0.108)
Constant	9.065***	10.611***	8.984***	10.477***	8.989***	10.475***	9.034***	10.576***
	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Observations	214,632	217,157	284,883	288,239	284,883	288,239	221,061	223,621
Origin-Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
RWP Votes	0.200***	0.400***	0.300***	0.400***	0.422***	0.401***	0.121**	0.402***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Crises	-0.038	-0.002	-0.140***	-0.167***	-0.154***	-0.154***	0.394**	0.568***
	(0.076)	(0.065)	(0.031)	(0.034)	(0.027)	(0.027)	0.160	(0.109)
Constant	9.057***	10.599***	8.973***	10.461***	10.458***	10.458***	9.027***	10.560***
	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.005)
Observations	214,632	217,157	284,883	288,239	288,239	288,239	221,061	223,621
Origin-Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Results-Emigration

Table 6: IV regressions with various crisis definitions
Dependent = Annual skill-specific emigration flows

	Inflation crisis		GDP crisis		Empl. crisis		Corruption crisis	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS	HS	LS
RWP Index	0.144***	0.020	0.141***	0.039	0.105***	0.001	0.099***	0.003
	(0.046)	(0.043)	(0.046)	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.043)	(0.0472)	(0.046)
Crisis	0.162***	0.290***	-0.071*	-0.107***	0.895**	1.400***	0.270***	0.344
	(0.147)	(0.104)	(0.043)	(0.044)	(0.360)	(0.338)	(0.095)	(0.064)
Constant	15.839***	11.978***	9.112***	10.666***	8.057***	9.251***	9.079***	10.785***
	(3.481)	(1.544)	(0.011)	(0.014)	(0.295)	(0.334)	(0.103)	(0.101)
Observations	214,632	217,157	213,902	216,418	220,331	220,331	221,061	223,621
RWP Votes	0.272***	0.055**	0.264***	0.039	0.264***	0.055	0.230***	.052
	(0.076)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.042)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Crisis	0.156	0.166	-0.070*	-0.093**	-0.178***	-0.139***	0.248***	0.052
	(0.148)	(0.103)	(0.041)	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.115)	(0.114)	(0.108)
Constant	15.453***	16.513***	9.106***	10.591***	8.003***	8.830***	8.831***	10.981***
	(3.501)	(2.015)	(0.025)	(0.0250)	(0.325)	(0.308)	(0.383)	(0.327)
Observations	214,632	217,157	213,902	216,418	220,331	220,331	221,061	223,621
Origin Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Robustness – Immigration

Table 7: Robustness Total immigration

VARIABLES	(1) Model Flows	(2) Model Flows	(3) Model Flows	(4) Model Flows
Normalized pop index (rw)	-0.240***	-0.135**	-0.247***	-0.121**
	(0.055)	(0.057)	(0.057)	(0.059)
			(32.031)	(40.348)
Constant	9.820***	9.792***	9.956***	9.955***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.008)	(0.010)
Observations	374,576	380,839	260,708	265,751
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Origin-Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively. Standard errors adjusted for clustering at the origin and destination level. First and the third columns use the Abel's data estimating the model in PPMLE and IV-POISSON. Second and forth columns use the Rayp-Standaert data.

Robustness – Emigration

Table 8: Robustness – Total Emigration

VARIABLES	(1) Model flows	(2) Model flows	(3) Model flows	(4) Model flows
Normalized pop index (rw)	0.100**	0.160***	0.075*	0.225***
	(0.041)	(0.046)	(0.042)	(0.050)
Constant	10.526***	8.984***	12.017***	11.986***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(1.746)	(1.130)
Observations	303,006	339,012	222,700	246,941
Origin-Dest FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Origin-Time FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Notes: ***, **, and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% levels respectively. Standard errors adjusted for clustering at the origin and destination level. First and the third columns use the Abel's data estimating the model in PPMLE and IV-POISSON. Second and forth columns use the Rayp-Standaert data.

- Instead of estimating the yearly shares of college graduates in each migration corridor, we adopt a different approach.
- We classify migration dyads into various groups. based on the proportion of college graduates in the most recent census data, rather than estimating yearly shares.
- We define four dummies, denoted as HumX%, which are set to 1 if the share of college graduates in the bilateral migration corridor exceeds X percent, using census round 2000 as the reference.
- We consider four education thresholds (X = 15, 20, 25, or 30 percent).
- The results remain robust.

Concluding remarks

- We find evidence that the extreme right populism leads to a decrease in the migration inflows and an increase of migration outflows
- Evidence that the populism affects mainly high skilled workers in migration inflows and outflows
- The results are robust under other migration data sets
- We investigate the selection index related to skill structure in more detail for robustness
- We discuss the role collective remembrance by using party-level data