Does Immigration Cause Electoral Backlash? Evidence from the Mariel Boatlift[*]

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Abstract

Immigration to the US has outstripped population growth in every decade since the 1970s, a trend we have not seen since the early 20th century. Should we expect this demographic shift to cause an electoral backlash? In this letter, I estimate the change in voter behavior caused my an extreme version of this demographic shift—mass migration. I use as a case study the 1980 Mariel Boatlift in which more than 120,000 people fled Cuba for Miami in seven months. I find an approximately 7-percentage-point increase in support for Republican presidential candidates in the six subsequent elections. Using archival precinct-level election results from Miami and a Cuban enclave in New Jersey, I find evidence that this increased support for Republicans is not a local white backlash to Cuban migration. Instead, my results suggest that Cuban enclaves shifted toward Republicans in 1980 even in places that were less exposed to the new migrants.

1 Introduction

The United States has undergone a massive demographic shift over the last fifty years. In every decade since 1970, immigration has outstripped population growth among native-born residents. Approximately 25% of the current US population was born abroad or to immigrants (Abrajano and Hajnal 2015). Pundits have identified this population change as a key driver of native-born support for the Tea Party and Donald Trump. Does immigration cause native-born residents to support more conservative politicians?

Observing the relationship between where immigrants settle and support for conservative politicians or parties is insufficient for answering this question—immigrants do not move at random, they likely move where they have the best chance to fit in and build a good life. Surveys accordingly often report that support for anti-immigration candidates such as Donald Trump is lower where immigrants live (Irwin and Katz 2016; Hinojosa Ojeda, Wynnand, and Chen 2016). One way to overcome this challenge is to study cases in which the decision to migrate is driven by changes in the sending country instead of the receiving country (Becker and Fetzer 2016; Dinas et al. 2017; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2016; Steinmayr 2016; Tabellini 2018). In this letter, I study the Mariel Boatlift, a seven-month-long event in 1980 during which Fidel Castro allowed Cubans to flee. More than 120,000 left Cuba for the United States. Almost all of these Cubans passed through Miami for processing, the closest major city, and more than 60,000 ultimately settled there.

Using the synthetic control method, I estimate a 7-percentage-point increase in support for the Republican presidential ticket in Miami following the Boatlift relative to similar counties. Historical accounts and contemporaneous newspaper reports point to white attitudes and an anti-bilingualism ballot measure as evidence of a causal link between the Boatlift and Republican voting. But, candidate Ronald Reagan's anti-Castro stance may have also motivated an earlier Cuban cohort to vote for him and his Republican co-partisans. Was the large shift toward Republicans an immigration backlash, a Cuban response to Reagan, or some other response?

To answer this question, I build a new dataset of archival precinct-level election results from Miami and show that the shift toward Republicans was concentrated in neighborhoods with large Cuban populations. Had Cuban neighborhoods shifted toward the Republicans at the same rate as other neighborhoods, Miami would have been about as supportive of Reagan in 1980 as comparable

counties. This suggests that white backlash is a less plausible explanation for the large shift toward Republican presidential candidates. This also raises and important question: was this a Cuban response to exposure to the new Cuban migrants, or some national change in the Cuban population's taste for Republicans? While I cannot measure the independent effect of these changes because the Boatlift and Reagan's campaign were coincident, I provide suggestive evidence that the Cuban shift toward Republicans was similar whether the exposure to the Boatlift was direct or not. To do so, I build a similar dataset of archival precinct-level election results in Hudson County, New Jersey, which had the second largest Cuban population of any county but only received a small number of migrants from the Boatlift. I find that Cubans in Hudson County shifted toward Republicans at nearly the same rate as Cubans in New Jersey.

2 Studying the Effect of Immigration on Voting

The United States has experienced a dramatic demographic shift over the last fifty years as immigrants have gone from making up 4.7% of the population in 1970 to 13.5% in 2015.[1] Has this demographic change influenced the way native-born residents vote? If a voter has to pay higher taxes to support an immigrant or risks losing their job, they may believe it is in their interest to support politicians who oppose immigration (Scheve and Slaughter 2001; Campbell, Wong, and Citrin 2006; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2016). Voters may also prefer to live with people like themselves and therefore oppose immigration when it changes the demographic makeup of their home (Sniderman et al. 2002; Kinder and Kam 2009; Branton et al. 2011). Yet, survey and field experiments tend to find mixed evidence for these theories (Hainmueller and Hiscox 2010).

We can answer the question more directly by looking at election results. Studies measuring the change in votes for conservative and anti-immigration parties after a change in the immigrant population, including those that instrument for immigration flows, tend to find small and conditional effects of immigration on voting (Mayda, Peri, and Steingress 2016; Hopkins 2010; Barone et al. 2014; Mendez and Cutillas 2014; Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller 2017). Yet these studies are still unable to account fully for the natural tendency of immigrants to move to places where they will fit in.

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[1]This data comes from the US Census Bureau.

When war breaks out, refugees are likely willing to trade away quality for convenience in deciding where they go first. Their final destination is often determined for them by an aid agency and selected based on availability rather than fit (Bansak et al. 2018). This prevents refugees from directly choosing to move to a city with the best labor market or the most immigrant-friendly culture. Accordingly, refugee flows offer a particularly plausible natural experiment for estimating the impact of migration on the votes of native-born citizens. The same logic holds for cases in which immigrants who were previously unable to migrate are suddenly allowed to move. In this case, it is plausible that the immigrant was not motivated to move by the quality of the labor market in their new home at the exact time they moved. Rather, they would have moved to this place at any time in recent years, but they were unable to due to a policy barrier.

Recent flows of Syrian refugees have been linked to increased votes for far-right parties, with some mixed results (Dinas et al. 2017; Dustmann, Vasiljeva, and Damm 2016; Steinmayr 2016). Immigration flows to the United Kingdom that were permitted only following the accession of eight Eastern European countries to the European Union increased votes for the far-right UK Independence Party (Becker and Fetzer 2016). And, in the early twentieth-century US, European immigration induced by World War I and the Immigration Acts of the 1920s resulted in a political backlash in receiving cities (Tabellini 2018). I extend this set of natural experiments to the modern-day United States and study the impact on votes for the mainstream conservative Republican party.[2]

3   Estimating the Effect of the Mariel Boatlift on Elections

3.1   Setting

According to Duany (1999) and Garcia (1996), following the Cuban Revolution and the ouster of Cuban President Fulgencio Batista in 1959, 250,000 Cubans fled to the US over three years. This migration was halted after the Missile Crisis in 1962, but resumed when President Lyndon Johnson agreed to an airlift between Varadero, Cuba and Miami, Florida known as the Freedom Flights primarily for Cubans with family members living in the US. 300,000 Cubans used the airlift to

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[2]A large literature in economics uses the Mariel Boatlift as a case for studying the effect of immigration on labor market outcomes, relying on a similar justification to the one I laid out in this section (Card 1990; Borjas 2016; Peri and Yasenov 2015).

reach the US until 1973 when Castro closed the port. Only a small number of Cubans made it to the US between 1973 and 1980.

After thousands of Cubans seeking asylum took over the Peruvian embassy in the spring of 1980, the Cuban government opened the Mariel harbor, immediately west of Havana, to ships coming to pick up Cuban citizens. Roughly 125,000 Cubans—over 1% of the Cuban population at the time—fled to the US between April and September 1980, the vast majority of whom traveled through Key West and Miami, Florida for processing. 16% of all Cubans living in the US in 1990 arrived in 1980 via the Boatlift. 60% of Marielitos were living in Miami-Dade County as of 1990. In 1990, the county with the second largest population of Marielitos was Hudson County, New Jersey with 4%. This massive influx of new Cuban residents in Miami-Dade County represented an increase in the non-citizen population of roughly four percentage points.

3.2   Using the Mariel Boatlift as a Case Study

For the Mariel Boatlift to serve as a good case for the study of the effects of immigration on politics, Miami must have been on track to support Reagan to the same degree as some relevant set of comparison counties in 1980. If the Mariel Boatlift was caused by changes in the Miami labor market or political climate, this would certainly be invalid. Three facts about the history suggest that the Boatlift was not driven by changes associated with Miami or American politics. First, the protests that led Castro to open the port of Mariel were directed at the Venezuelan and Peruvian embassies for denying dissidents asylum, rather than a direct protest to leave for the US (Hawk, Villella, and de Varona 2014). Second, economic growth in the US was falling to below 2% and ultimately going negative while inflation remained high throughout this period according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis. Lastly, Cubans could reasonably assume that Castro would shut down the port of Mariel after some time given his prior decision to shut down the arilift. These facts suggest that decisions about whether to leave Cuba during the Mariel Boatlift were likely not driven by primarily American factors.

Instead, the primary threat to using the Boatlift as a case is Miami's unique demographics. Miami had the largest Cuban population in the US prior to the Boatlift. Though I can find counties with similar voting patterns to Miami-Dade prior to 1980, if the national parties or Presidential

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candidates changed their stances on issues that are salient for Cubans in 1980, there are few counties that will be as impacted as Miami-Dade.

3.3 Data

To study the effects of the Mariel Boatlift on presidential voting, I obtained county-level presidential election results for 1960 through 2000 from the Congressional Quarterly elections results database. This data covers 3,060 of the 3,142 counties in the US, with 82 missing due to historical data gaps in the data. I add to this dataset population estimates by age group, gender, and race for each county based on the 1970 decennial census from the US Census Bureau.

3.4 Estimating the Impact of the Mariel Boatlift Using Panel Methods

The key barrier to estimating the effect of the Mariel Boatlift on presidential vote is selecting an appropriate set of comparison counties for Miami-Dade. I use a two step process for producing these estimates. First, I select a set of counties that can act as a control pool for producing these. Counties with similar populations follow more similar patterns than do counties within the same state or neighboring one another. Accordingly, I use population estimates from 1978 as the basis for determining how similar a county is to Miami-Dade and rank counties from most similar to least similar.[3] I then select a threshold for the number of counties to include. I use forward prediction error for the 1976 presidential vote share as a criterion, and select the error-minimizing candidate pool for my baseline estimate. I also report estimates based on variety of population thresholds, including estimates using all counties.

Once I have a pool of candidate counties, I estimate the impact of the Mariel Boatlift on Republican presidential vote percentage using a panel regression with election and county fixed effects of the form

$$V_{it} = \tau M_{it} + \alpha_i + \gamma_t + \epsilon_{it}$$

where V_{it} is the Republican presidential vote percentage in county i at time t, M_{it} is a dummy variable that takes on the value 1 for Miami-Dade in 1980 and after and zero otherwise, α_i is a

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[3]I leave the counties immediately bordering Miami-Dade out of this ranking since they may also be considered treated.

county fixed effect, γ_t is an election fixed effect, ϵ_{it} is a residual, and τ is the estimated treatment effect.

I also estimate the effect using the synthetic control method, which was designed with this type of case study in mind (Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller 2010). The synthetic control method directly constructs an estimate of how Miami would have voted had the Mariel Boatlift never happened as a weighted average of the vote pattens among the control counties. The weights are selected such that the weighted average of presidential vote patterns among control counties best matches the vote patterns in Miami-Dade before the Boatlift. The weights are restricted to fall between zero and one, inclusive, so that this synthetic control county cannot vote more (less) for Republicans than the most Republican (Democratic) control pool county.

Formally, I consider a pool of N potential contributor counties to the synthetic control indexed by $i = 0, 1, 2, ..., N$ where $i = 0$ represents Miami-Dade. I use T_0 pre-treatment observations indexed by t to select the weights. I represent the pre-treatment outcome data as an $N \times T_0$ matrix K_0 for the control pool counties and a $1 \times T_0$ vector K_1 for Miami-Dade. I select the $J \times 1$ vector of weights W such that

$$W^* \;=\; \underset{W}{\arg\min}(K_1 - K_0'W)(K_1 - K_0'W)' \;\; \text{subject to} \;\; \sum_{i=1}^{N} w_i = 1, w_i \in [0, 1].$$

Using the moving average of squared forward prediction error for Republican presidential vote percentage in 1976 as my criterion, I select a threshold of 1,500 control counties for the fixed effects analysis and 555 control counties for the synthetic control method. I present the output from this analysis in the Appendix.

4 Republican Presidential Vote Share Increased After the Boalift

4.1 Fixed Effects Estimates

Table 1 presents the results of the fixed effects analysis. Columns one through four report estimates for the effect of the Mariel Boatlift on Republican presidential vote percentage based on an ex ante plausible set of comparison counties: the 250 and 500 counties nearest to Miami-Dade in terms of population. I also adjust for county-specific time trends in columns two and four to account

Table 1: **Increase in Republican Presidential Vote Share After the Mariel Boatlift, Fixed Effects.**

Counties Included:	250		500		1500		Florida		All Counties
Treatment Effect	7.3	7.5	5.9	7.4	4.5	7.6	0.4	3.2	3.8
	(0.3)	(2.7)	(0.3)	(2.1)	(0.2)	(0.1)	(1.0)	(0.1)	(0.1)
	[91.2]	[96.0]	[85.4]	[97.2]	[76.3]	[-]	[52.5]	[85.2]	[72.1]
County FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
County Trends	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
# of Elections	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11	11
# of Counties	250	250	500	500	1,500	1,500	61	61	3,060

All estimates calculated holding out counties that border Miami-Dade. Columns 250, 500, and 1500 are estimated with the 250, 500, and 1500 counties most similar to Miami-Dade in log population as of 1978. Percentile of the placebo distribution reported in square braces. No percentile is reported when linear time trends are estimated due to run-time constraints.

for differences in the paths that Miami-Dade and the comparison counties were on prior to the Boatlift. In columns five and six, I report the fixed effects estimates using 1,500 counties in the control pool, which minimized the forward prediction error for the 1976 presidential election, first without and then with county-specific time trends. In column nine, I present the estimates using all counties. And, in columns seven and eight, I report the fixed effects estimates after restricting the control pool to include only Florida counties. This is the least plausible estimate since nearly all of the counties remaining in the control pool, after removing counties that border Miami-Dade, are rural counties that almost certainly should not be expected to exhibit parallel trends in presidential voting to Miami-Dade. Beneath each of the six estimates I report the standard errors from the regression, which are only valid under implausibly strong assumptions because I only have one independent treated unit in my regression (Bertrand, Duflo, and Mullainathan 2004). In the absence of meaningful analytic standard errors, I report placebo-based estimates of the standard errors using the procedure proposed in Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller (2010).

Despite the wide variety of control pools I use, all nine of my fixed effects estimates imply an increase in the percentage of Miami-Dade voters supporting Republicans over the six presidential elections after the Boatlift. Still, these estimates are noisy—as captured by the large placebo-based standard errors—and there is reason to think that the counter-factual trends implied by these estimates may not be right. This is clear in the case of the Florida-only column, but it is

Figure 1: **Synthetic Control Method Estimate of Mariel Boatlift Impact on Republican Presidential Vote Percent**
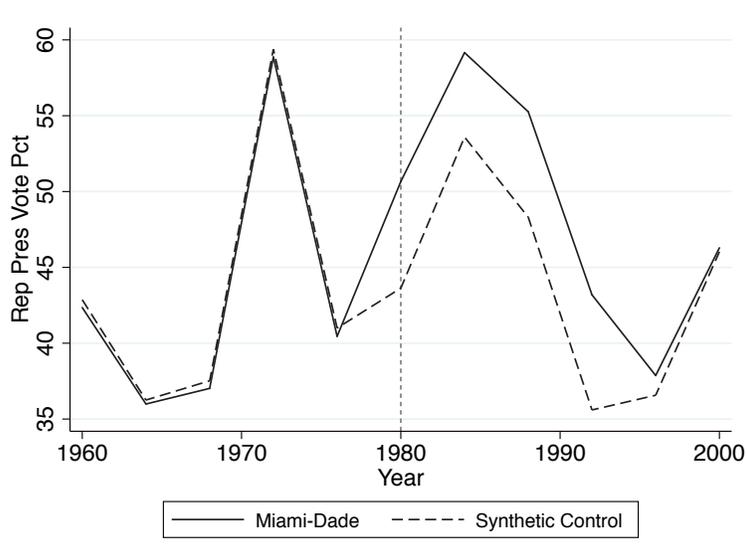
also evident from the swing in the estimate between the two columns using 1,500 counties. If the parallel trends assumption held for this estimate, these two estimates would be nearly identical, yet one is almost twice that of the other. In order to impute a more plausible counter-factual trend for Miami-Dade, I turn to the synthetic control method.

4.2   Synthetic Control Estimates

Figure 1 presents observed and synthetic Miami-Dade County Republican presidential vote percentage from 1960 to 2000. As intended in the construction of the weights, the synthetic Miami-Dade is nearly identical to the true Miami-Dade prior to the election in 1980, at which point a clear separation occurs.[4] Assuming that the weights model the types of idiosyncratic shocks faced by Miami-Dade other than the Boatlift well, these post-Boatlift trends imply a roughly 5 to 7-percentage-point increase in Republican presidential vote share from 1980 to 2000.

As I described in the previous section, I conducted a placebo analysis for each of the remaining roughly 550 counties that I used in the construction of the Miami-Dade synthetic control, per the advice of Abadie, Diamond, and Hainmueller (2010). Each of these counties received their own synthetic control, which allows me to construct a null distribution from the placebo impacts. In

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[4]What may appear to be a separation between 1976 and 1980 is only an artifact of the linear interpolation of the line graph since no presidential election was held between 1976 and 1980.

Figure 2: **Miami-Dade Synthetic Control-Estimated Impacts Against Distribution of Placebo Impacts**
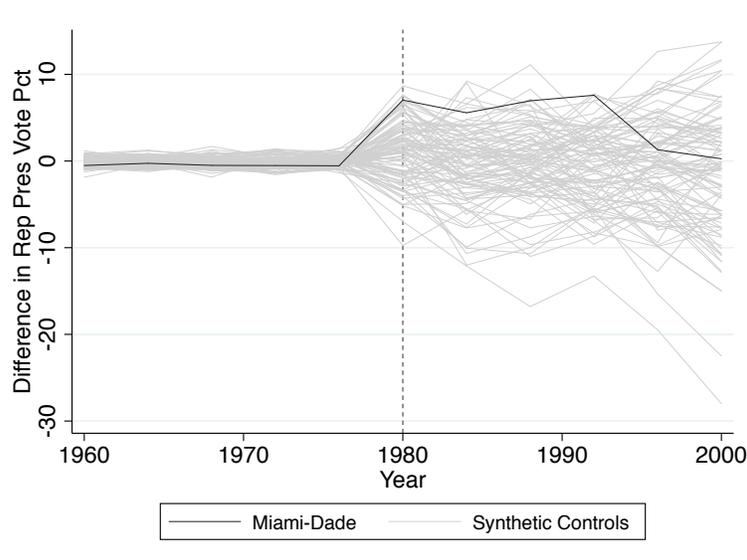

Figure 2, I present the results of this analysis. The dark line represents the synthetic-control-method-estimated impacts for Miami-Dade and the light grey lines reflect the placebo impacts for all of the remaining counties. This figure clearly shows that the impacts Miami-Dade experienced were near the edge of the range of null effects, particularly in the first few years after the Mariel Boatlift. The average estimated impact in Miami-Dade County across the six elections following the Boatlift is at the 96th percentile of the average placebo impacts represented in this figure, suggesting that these estimated impacts are very unlikely to be a purely chance event. I further infer from this figure that the standard deviation of placebo treatment effects is 4.0 percentage-points, suggesting that, though this average 5-percentage point treatment effect is large relative to the null distribution, it is still a noisy estimate.

In Table A.1 in the Appendix, I report the estimated effects for all six of the presidential elections held after the Mariel Boatlift. In the first column, I present the synthetic control estimates based on a control pool of 250 counties. In the second column, I present the results based on the control pool size selected by minimizing a moving average of mean squared forward prediction error, which is 555. I find a 7.4 percentage-point shift toward Republicans in 1980 using the control pool of 250 counties, and a 4.8 percentage-point shift using a control pool of 555 counties. These fall in the

96th and 90th percentiles of the empirical placebo distributions, resprectively. I also find that this move toward Republicans is persistent, but the estimates are increasingly noisy as time goes on.

In total, these large estimated effects provide evidence for the the causal effect of immigration on presidential voting behavior. The dramatic increase in the non-citizen population of Miami-Dade prior to the election in 1980 represents a shift well outside of typical demographic changes, but it is also an unusual swing in voting patterns toward Republican presidential candidates.

As I indicated above, the most important methodological concerns I have about this analysis are that the synthetic control may be fit on the wrong set of counties or may be over-fit on pre-treatment time trends given the inclusion of all pre-treatment outcomes in the weight construction procedure. I conduct tests that probe the robustness of my analysis to each of these modeling decisions and find that the results are similar under reasonable extensions of these tests. I present both of these analyses in the Appendix. The first test supports the fact the synthetic control estimated impact is very similar using a control pool of any number ranging from 100 to 500.

5 Did the Boatlift Cause the Rightward Shift?

The results above suggest that voters in Miami-Dade County supported Republican presidential tickets after 1980 more than we should expect based strictly on prior election results. Only a small number of similar counties moved more toward the Republican party at the same time. One plausible explanation for this shift is that voters punished the incumbent president or more voters developed anti-immigrant attitudes alligned with the right. Miami's demographics offer an alternative explanation: Since Miami has a uniquely large Cuban population, might this simply reflect a Cuban political reallignment unrelated to the Boatlift?

I diagnose this possibility in two steps. First, I show that the shift toward Republicans from 1976 to 1980 in Miami was concentrated in Cuban neighborhoods. This could be a Cuban reallignment, but it could also be a result of the Boatlift with effects isolated in neighborhoods that absorbed a large share of the migrants. To tease this out, I run a similar analysis in Hudson County, New Jersey, the US county with the second largest Cuban population but very few Marielitos. I find that this shift toward Republicans among Cubans is nearly identical in Hudson County and Miami.

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5.1 Largest Republican Shift in Cuban Neighborhoods

A chain of events in the summer and fall of 1980 suggests a plausible explanation of how the Boatlift might result in increased support for the Republican presidential ticket. As the Boatlift was taking place and public opinion was turning against it (Garcia 1996), activated citizens added a measure to the ballot to end Spanish-language provision of public services in Miami-Dade County. Contemporaneous reporting (Johnson 1980; Press 1980; Tasker 1980), as well as historical analysis (Hawk, Villella, and de Varona 2014), has suggested that the measure was developed as a response to anti-Marielito attitudes. Newspaper coverage at the time also claimed that the ballot measure motivated white turnout (Greene 1980). One could reasonably conclude from this string of event that the increased support for Republican presidential candidates was part of this non-Latin white response to the Boatlift. Neighborhood-level election results suggest otherwise.

To investigate this possible link, I used public records requests to obtain historical precinct-level election results from Miami-Dade County. This data, which covers all Miami-Dade County elections from 1976 to 1992, allows me to allocate county-wide changes in voting to particular parts of town. Unfortunately, Miami-Dade does not use consistent or informative precinct labels. This means that often I cannot identify the same precincts or even neighborhoods from one election to the next. Fortuitously for this project, the precinct numbering system stayed the same from 1976 to 1980, and all precincts in nine neighborhoods housing approximately 65% of the city of Miami's residents are flagged with their neighborhood names.[5] I use these neighborhood flags to estimate the change in support for the Republican presidential ticket between 1976 and 1980. I also produced neighborhood-level estimates of the Cuban, non-Latin black, non-Latin white, and total population. I construct these estimates by aggregating block-level 1980 Census counts to the neighborhood level using Zillow's Florida neighborhood shapefile and the IPUMS NHGIS 1980 block shapefile (Manson et al. 2017).[6]

A simple comparison of the change in Republican presidential vote share from 1976 to 1980 in majority Cuban neighborhoods versus other neighborhoods reveals that majority-Cuban neighborhoods swung toward Republicans much more than majority-white or majority-black neighborhoods.

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[5]Some neighborhoods have changed names over time, so I confirmed their historical names with an archivist at HistoryMiami, a Miami-based history museum.

[6]https://www.zillow.com/howto/api/neighborhood-boundaries.htm

Figure 3: **Shift Toward Republicans in Miami-Dade Is Concentrated in Cuban Neighborhoods**
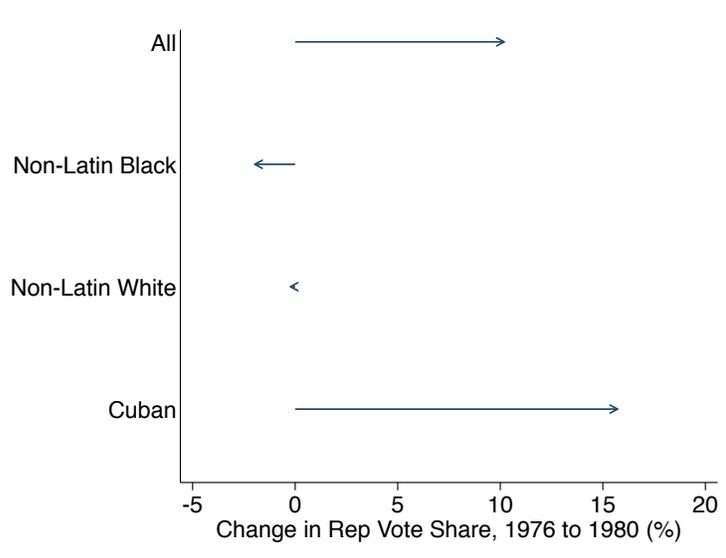
Of course, this is not direct evidence that the causal effect of the Boatlift on non-Latin whites was small or negative. It is possible that non-Latin white neighborhoods would have swung dramatically toward Democrats had the Boatlift not occurred. But the striking shift toward Republicans in Cuban neighborhoods seems more consistent with an stimulus that impact Cubans in particular. Formal regression estimates reported in the Appendix corroborate this, as well as the high degree of correlation (0.98) between the size of a neighborhood's shift to Republicans and the size of its Cuban population. Neighborhoods with Cuban populations that were four percentage points larger shifted toward Republicans by one more percentage point. Cubans made up roughly one-quarter of Miami-Dade's population in 1980. This means that, putting aside concerns about ecological inference, Cubans could be responsible for seven percentage points out of ten percentage-point shift toward Republicans.

5.2 Smaller Shift Among Cubans Outside Miami-Dade

Given this suggestive evidence that white backlash is not responsible for the shift toward Republicans, the best explanations are those related to changes impacting Cubans or Cuban neighborhoods. Cuban neighborhoods in Miami received an outsized share of the Boatlift migrants (Garcia 1996), but they also could be subject to national partisan platform changes that are of particular inter-

Table 2: **Similar Shift toward Republicans among Cubans in Miami and Hudson County.**

	Diff in Rep Vote (%)	
	(1)	(2)
Miami X Cuban Share	5.9	2.7
	(3.7)	(4.8)
Cuban Share	19.8	22.6
	(3.2)	(3.4)
Miami	-3.7	-7.0
	(0.9)	(2.3)
Controls	No	Yes
Miami Obs	9	9
Hudson County Obs	51	51

The controls included in regression 2 are the share of the neighborhood or ward that identifies as non-Latin black, the share that identifies as Latin but not Cuban, and the share that identifies with any other group other than non-Latin white, as well as these three variables interacted with a dummy variable for Miami. Heteroskedasticty robust standard errors are reported in parentheses below each estimate. All population share variables, including the Cuban population share, range from zero to one.

est to Cubans. Though Cuban migrants who came during the Boatlift ended up in many Cuban enclaves throughout the US, Miami-Dade experienced the largest increase in Cuban population in levels and percentage terms of any Cuban enclave. I can use this fact to distinguish between a national and local Cuban shift by comparing the voting patterns of Cuban neighborhoods inside and outside of Miami.

To make this comparison, I gathered precinct-level presidential election results for Hudson County from the New Jersey State Archives. I obtained the results for the 1976 and 1980 elections. I also worked with the Hudson County Division of Planning to gain access to election district maps. I construct ward-level demographic estimates in Hudson County using the same procedure I use to construct neighborhood-level estimates in Miami.[7]

With this paired ward-level demographic and presidential election data, I estimate the difference in the shift toward the Republican presidential ticket among Cubans between Miami and Hudson

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[7]The ward boundaries I received from the Division of Planning are for the current day and may have changed since 1980. I discuss my choice to use these boundaries in the Appendix. I also present results using city boundaries, which are fixed through this period, and the findings remain the same.

County. I report these results in Table 2. In the first column, I find that if one Hudson County ward has a Cuban population that makes up five percentage points more of its total population than another ward, it should have shifted toward Republicans in 1980 by about one percentage-point more. This shift is slightly larger in Miami, where it only takes a four-percentage-point difference in Cuban population share to expect one-percentage point larger shift toward Republicans. Since an increase in the Cuban population share means a decrease in some other population share, these regressions are estimating how much more a neighborhood with more Cubans, rather than non-Cubans, shifted toward Republicans in 1980. The non-Cuban population in the Miami neighborhoods I have data may have a different demographic profile than the non-Cuban population in Hudson County. I deal with this in column 2 by controling for the share of the neighborhood or ward that identifies as non-Latin black, the share that identifies as Latin but not Cuban, and the share that identifies with any group other than non-Latin white, as well as these three variables interacted with a dummy variable for Miami. Using these controls, I make non-Latin whites the held-out comparison group, and find that a higher Cuban population and lower white population is associated with a very similar shift toward Republicans in Miami and Hudson County.

These results suggest that the large shift toward Republicans in 1980 in Miami-Dade County may be an artifact of its unique demographics. This does not rule out the importance Boatlift as an event for Cuban politics in the US. But it suggests that Miami's unique exposure to the mass migration event was not the primary driver of this shift.

6   Final Remarks

Does mass migration produce a local electoral backlash? In this letter, I have presented a case in which even large-scale migration likely did not produce a backlash by the economically impacted or the in group. I have found instead that, despite observing a large shift toward Republicans in Miami-Dade, Cuban neighborhoods could account for nearly all of the increased support between 1976 and 1980 relative to similar counties. The county with the second largest Cuban population also increased its support for Republicans at the same time, with Cubans leading the move to the right. All together, these results point to a national change in Cuban politics. This change may be

a response to the Boatlift, a platform change, Carter's performance, or some other change. Either way, my analysis does not support theories that predict a large electoral backlash.

The evidence I have presented throughout is only suggestive—my precinct-level data does not permit any well-justified strategies for estimating ethnicity-specific effects. But the robustness checks also clarify a risk to any analysis of the effects of immigration: most immigrants move to places with unusually high concentrations of expats from their country, making it difficult for the analyst to rule out changes in that population's voting unrelated to the immigration.

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Appendix

Contents

A.1 Formal Synthetic Control Estimates

Table A.1: **Increase in Republican Presidential Vote Share After the Mariel Boatlift, Synthetic Control.**

	Counties in Control Pool	
	250	555
All Years	7.4	4.8
	[96.3]	[90.0]
1980	6.7	7.0
	[96.3]	[96.0]
1984	7.5	5.6
	[96.3]	[93.0]
1988	8.5	7.0
	[96.3]	[95.0]
1992	9.2	7.6
	[97.8]	[98.0]
1996	4.2	1.3
	[72.6]	[63.0]
2000	8.4	0.3
	[81.5]	[56.0]

All estimates calculated holding out counties that border Miami-Dade. The 250 or 555 counties most similar to Miami-Dade in terms of 1978 population are included in the control pool. The percentile of the placebo distribution where Miami-Dade lands is reported in square brackets. The placebo distribution is found using the procedure discribed in Abadie et al (2010).

A.2 Sensitivity of Panel Estimates

The fixed effects estimates decline as more counties are included in the analysis, up to roughly 1,000 counties. After that, the estimates stabilize and hover around 4 percentage points.

Figure A.1: **Sensitivity of Fixed Effects Estimate to Counties Included.**
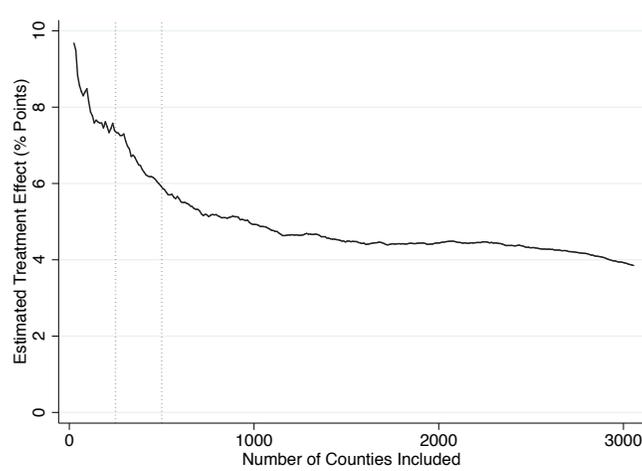
The synthetic control estimates also generally decline as more counties are included in the analysis, but the estimates are less stable.

Figure A.2: **Sensitivity of Synthetic Control Estimate to the Number of Counties Included in the Control Pool.**
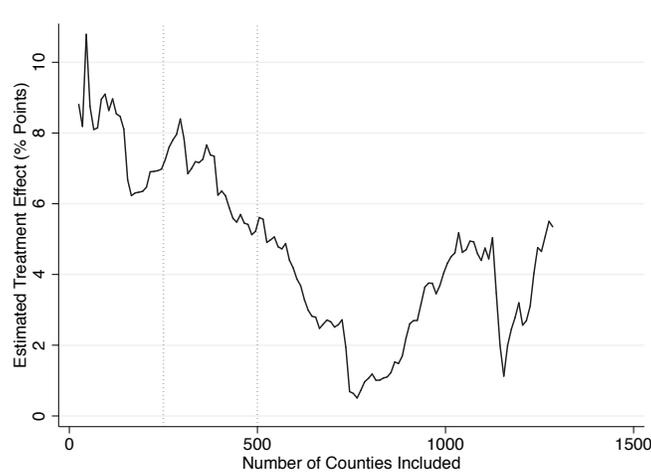
## A.3 Procedure for Selecting Number of Counties

I find that the number of counties that minimizes a moving average of the squared forward prediction error for 1976 from a fixed effects regression is approximately 1,500. Given that I am predicting only one point, this may not be generally applicable to predicting other elections. This is just one rule by which to select the number of counties.

Figure A.3: **Mean Squared Forward Prediction Error for Selecting Number of Counties, Fixed Effects.**
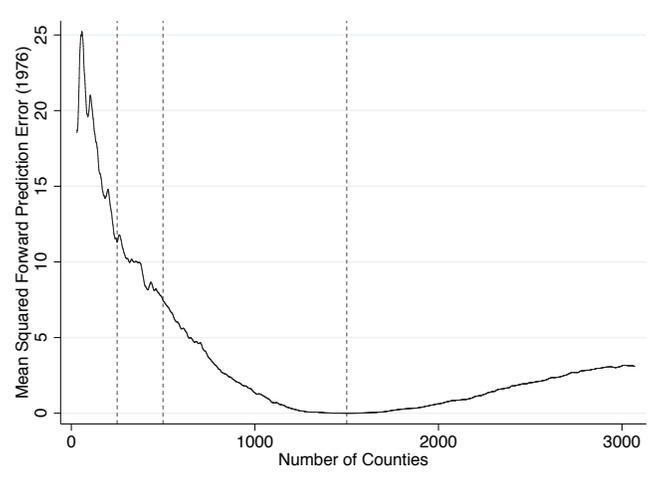
I find that the number of counties that minimizes a moving average of the squared forward prediction error for 1976 from the synthetic control method is approximately 555.

Figure A.4: **Mean Squared Forward Prediction Error for Selecting Number of Counties, Synthetic Control.**
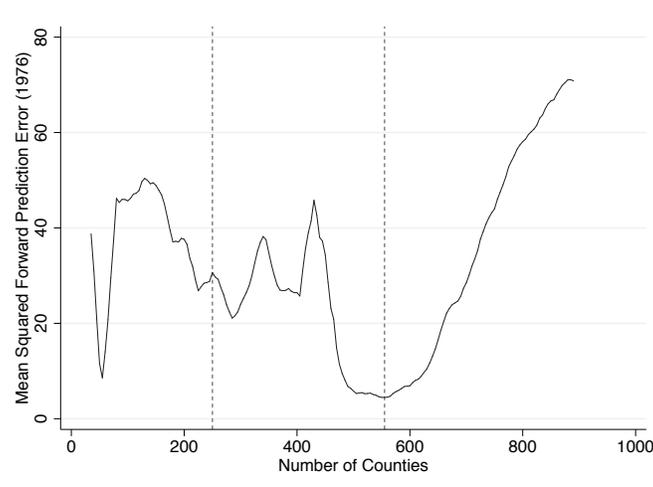
A.4 Procedure for Estimating Neighborhood and Ward Demographics

I used three datasets to estimate neighborhood demographics in Miami. First, I downloaded a shapefile containing the block boundaries for the 1980 Census. I then overlaid a Miami neighborhood shapefile produced by the housing data company Zillow. I identified the portion of each block that fall within a given neighborhood's boundaries and stored that share as a column in a dataset indexed by neighborhood and block. Finally, I merged on 1980 population Census counts by block, multiplied that population count by the proportion of the block in each neighborhood, and summed up the population numbers for each neighborhood. I matched these neighborhoods to the neighborhoods tallied in Miami's 1981 precinct-level local election results.

I used a very similar procedure for ward demographics in Hudson County. The only change I made was to use a ward shapefile provided by the Hudson County Department of Planning. I was unable to confirm that the ward boundaries are approximately the same as in 1980. I was able to find articles referencing a change in the Jersey City boundaries in 2012. Accordingly, I re-ran all analyses dropping Jersey City, and the results did not substantively change. I also checked that every city in my analysis has the same number of wards as they had in 1980 and that the wards have similar population distributions—large ones in 2018 were also the large ones in 1980.

A.5 Shift toward Republicans in Miami by Cuban Population

In addition to the simple analysis of majority Cuban neighborhoods in the body of the letter, I present here a more formal analysis of the shift to Republicans among Cubans. I show these results in Table A.2 and Figure 3. I find that, relative to other Miami residents, a hypothetical neighborhood with 10 percentage points more of the population with Cuban backgrounds swung toward Republicans by 2.5 percentage points.

Figure A.5: **Large Shift toward Republicans in Miami by Cuban Population.**
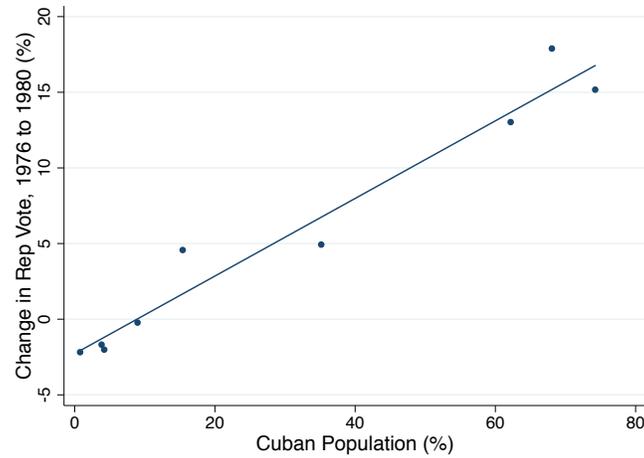
Table A.2: **Large Shift toward Republicans among Cubans in Miami.**

	Diff in Rep Vote (%)	
	(1)	(2)
Cuban Share	25.6	25.3
	(2.1)	(4.6)
Controls	No	Yes
Obs	9	9

The controls included in regression 2 are the share of the neighborhood or ward that identifies as non-Latin black, the share that identifies as Latin but not Cuban, and the share that identifies with any other group other than non-Latin white, Heteroskedasticty robust standard errors are reported in parentheses below each estimate. All population share variables, including the Cuban population share, range from zero to one.

A.6 Similar Shift toward Republicans among Cubans in Miami and Hudson County

Figure A.6: **Similar Shift toward Republicans among Cubans in Miami and Hudson County.**