

# Refugee Urban Shelters and Electoral Outcomes: Evidence from the Venezuelan Refugee Crisis in Northern Brazil

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August 27, 2025

**European Economic Association Congress**



# Motivation: Urban Refugee Shelters

- Since 2014, **7.7m Venezuelans emigrated**, mostly to neighboring countries (UNHCR).
- Brazil (4th main destination in South America - 500,000 Venezuelans):
  - Flow concentrated at the border region (Roraima state);
  - Open borders + **Shelters in a urban area** + Extensive rights.



Tancredo Neves Shelter



Rondon 1 Shelter

↪ Contrast with “traditional” reception of other developing countries:  
Camps in rural/secluded areas + rights restrictions (movement, work, etc)

↪ Specially important given: **majority of refugees (78%) live in cities** - UNHCR.

# Political Backlash

- Political Backlash: ↑ social tensions and steer policy decisions
- **Immigrant flows** ⇒ ↑ **populist, far-right, anti-migration voting**  
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- Open borders + **Shelters in a urban area** + Extensive rights.
  - ↑ contact/interaction with locals - Rozo and Vargas (2021)
  - ↑ labor market and public services competition - Becker, Fetzer, et al. (2016)
  - Affect local amenities - Hennig (2021)

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ELEIÇÕES 2010 - VENEZUELA

## Crise migratória vira principal assunto da eleição em Roraima

Candidatos se unem em discurso contra refugiados, e governadora diz que fronteira aberta afeta popularidade

## Na eleição de Roraima, o que importa mesmo é a Venezuela

Candidatos ao governo de Roraima debatem sobre a entrada de imigrantes venezuelanos pelas fronteiras

*"Migration Crisis becomes the main topic in Roraima's election"*

*"In Roraima's election, what really matters is Venezuela"*

- *"... all these NGOs that are here should go to Venezuela and serve these people there, preventing them from entering Brazil."* - Roraima's Elected Governor.

# This Paper

## **Research Question:**

How does the introduction of a modern refugee reception policy affect the political landscape in developing countries?

- Is there a political loss for the incumbent and movements towards far-right?
- What is the extent of public service deterioration?
- What about cultural backlash?

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## Main Findings:

- 1 **Reception Policy shaped within-city vote patterns without increasing overall far-right performance**
  - Shelter proximity boosted far-right while hurting incumbent
  - However, city's far-right voting mirrored the rest of the country's
- 2 **Sheltered population matters more than shelter itself for political backlash**
  - Shelters hosting Indigenous migrants are driving the results.

# Venezuelan Refugee Crisis and “Operação Acolhida”

- Refugees cross the border at Pacaraima and walk towards Boa Vista (state capital), especially after 2016. [Details](#) [Flow](#)



- Refugees (freedom of movement within the country) can access:
  - National Health System (free with universal coverage);
  - Public education;
  - Formal labor market (once regularized);
  - Welfare programs (cash transfer) (once regularized).
- June 2018: 25,000 refugees living in Boa Vista (7.5% of the population)
- Operação Acolhida: 11 Shelters in Boa Vista (5,000 Venezuelans by October 2018).

[Operação Acolhida](#)

[Shelters Info](#)

[Shelters Location](#)

# Political Background

- Voting is mandatory for 18 to 65-year-old Brazilians (immigrants cannot vote without citizenship).
- Voting logistics: polling station (building) + section (room).
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  - **Suely (Incumbent):** State government participated in the reception policy, provided land/buildings, and managed some shelters.

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  - **Denarium (Bolsonaro Support):** *"Together with refugees, drug dealers, and criminals are entering; one country, Venezuela, does not fit inside Roraima."*

# Data

## Political Outcomes (TSE - Superior Electoral Court):

- Election results (2006-2022)
- Characteristics of the registered voters: age, sex, education (2014-2022)

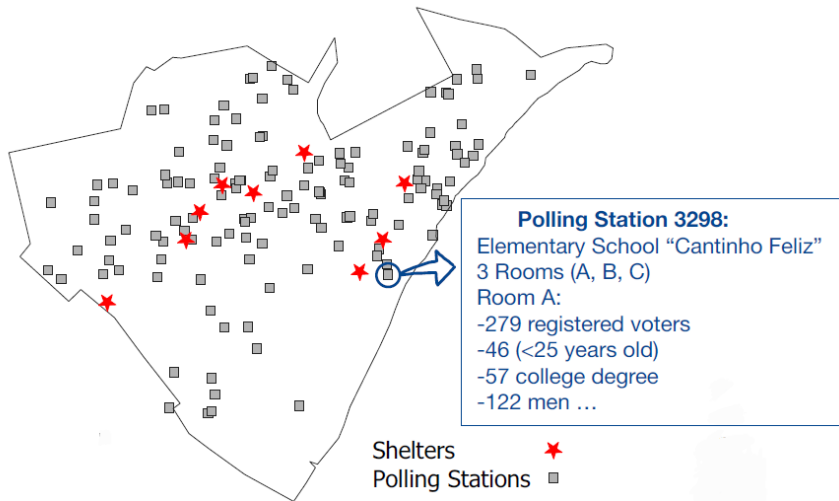
## Shelters (UNHCR Reports):

- Location, opening/close dates, total capacity, monthly number sheltered, refugees' socioeconomic/demographic data.

## Others:

- Polling station coordinates from the Hidalgo code output. [Details](#)
- Public schools' data: Administrative Schools' Annual Census (2010-2023).
- Crime data (date, street, neighborhood, and type): NEAC/DENARC/PCRR reports (2014-2022).

# Boa Vista Map



## Empirical Strategy: Diff-in-Diff

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta \text{Treated}_j \times I(t \geq 2018) + \text{Controls} + \gamma_i + \mu_t + \nu_{ijt}$$

- $Y_{ijt}$  = Vote outcome of room "i" in polling station "j" for year "t"
- $\text{Treated}_j$  = Dummy for Distance to the closest shelter < 1 Km or  $\frac{1}{\text{Distance}_j}$
- $\mu_t$  = Time FE;
- $\gamma_i$  = Room FE;
- *Controls*: (also estimate DRDiD and MDiD)
  - Geographic: Distance to Downtown (Km) x Time Dummies
  - Demographic: 23 variables for voters' education, age, and gender
- Clustered errors at the polling station level.

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- Clustered errors at the polling station level.
- **Panel 2006-2022:**
  - 238 balanced rooms
  - 34% treated
  - 326 registered voters per room on average

## Quasi-Exogenous Shelters' Location

- "Operação Acolhida" was an emergency effort quickly implemented, and the Defense Ministry was responsible for visiting available spaces;

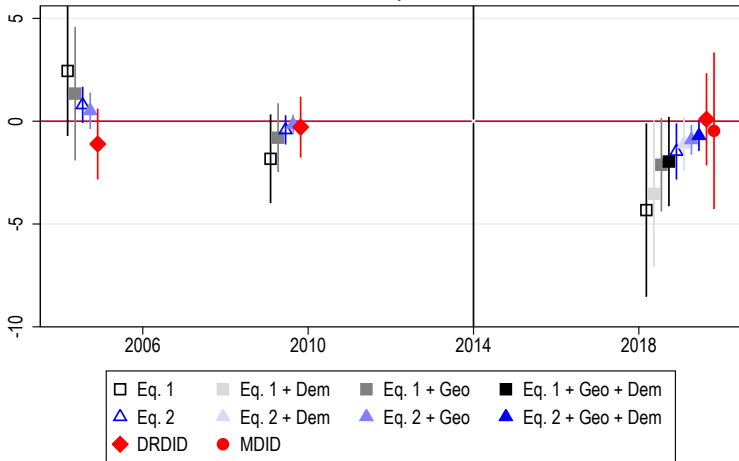
	Treatment			Control			Diff
	n	mean	sd	n	mean	sd	
Distance (Km) to Boa-Vista center/downtown	81	5.62	2.85	157	4.27	3.23	1.352***
Distance (Km) to the closest shelter	81	0.59	0.25	157	1.94	1.02	-1.354***
Average Distance (Km) to all shelters	81	3.87	0.52	157	5.11	1.35	-1.248***
Share Men	81	47.27	3.26	157	47.09	3.89	0.178
Share Illiterate	81	1.75	1.08	157	1.21	1.37	0.538***
Share Less than High-School	81	46.01	13.01	157	34.46	17.02	11.552***
Share with some college	81	20.44	12.20	157	33.69	19.49	-13.252***
Share <25 Years Old	81	19.82	6.02	157	18.20	7.54	1.620*
Share <40 Years Old	81	48.94	11.19	157	46.80	13.82	2.143
Share >65 Years Old	81	5.50	3.05	157	6.05	3.91	-0.544

- DiD will take care of those differences, but have to check for trends.
- ↪ Estimate pre-treatment effects: Event Study version of (1) and (2).

# Results: Governor Election (↓ Incumbent)

Y: Suely (Incumbent) % Valid Votes

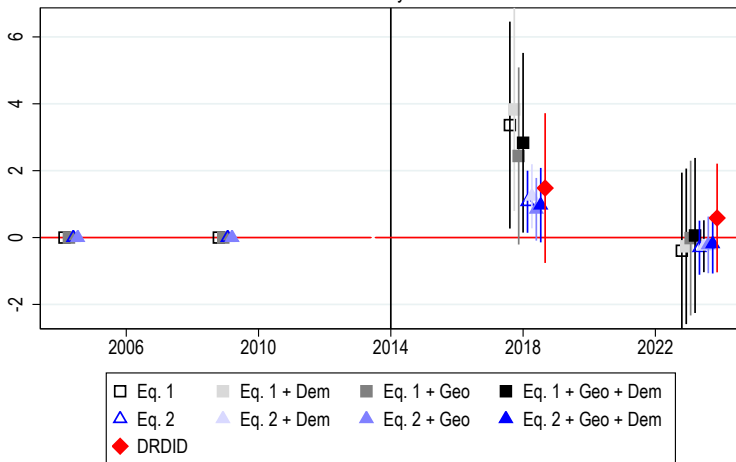
Event Study Version



# Results: Governor Election ( $\uparrow$ Far-Right)

Y: Denarium (Bolsonaro Support)

Event Study Version



# Other Results

- **President Election**

[Details](#)

- There was no Incumbent to be voted for
  - ↑ **Bolsonaro** in the 2nd round (2 to 4 p.p)
  - ↓ **Workers' Party** in the 2nd round (2 to 4 p.p)
  - Effect persisted for the 2022 election.
- 
- **Turnout** (1st and 2nd round): No Effects
  - **Non-Valid Votes** (both governor and president): No Effects
- 
- **State Congress**: No Effects
  - **National Congress**: No Effects

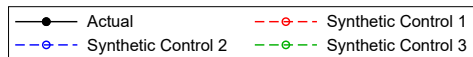
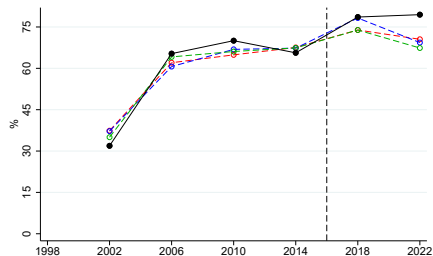
# Putting the Effects into Perspective

- How big are the effects?  
↳ Synthetic control using Boa Vista as the treated unit and the rest of Brazil's municipalities outside Roraima as the donor control pool.

(a) Workers' Party (1st Round)



(b) Challenger (2nd Round)



- Turnout and Non-valid votes also null effects.

## Mechanism: Indigenous Vs Non-Indigenous Shelters

- Among the 11 shelters: 2 host exclusively Venezuelan Indigenous refugees.
- Ethnicities:
  - Warao (majority, no previous history of presence in Brazilian territory);
  - Taurepang; Pemón; Arekuna; and others (more than 13).

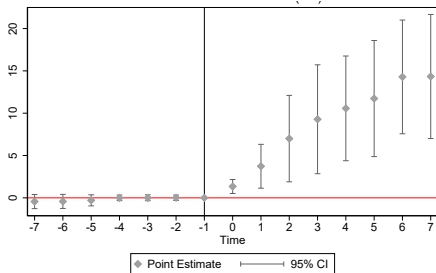
Differences between hosted refugee population (October 2018):

	<b>Indigenous Shelters</b>	<b>Non-Indigenous Shelters</b>
Hosted Population*	1,236	2,636
Capacity	109%	87%
Share Male	51,5%	52,4%
Share Some College	9,0%	12,7%
Share High School	46,2%	66,3%
Share Less than High-School	28,9%	18,3%
Share Illiterate	15,9%	2,7%
Share Children (0-11 Years Old)	34,2%	29,6%
Share Teenagers (12-17 Years Old)	11,1%	8,9%
Share Male 18-59 Years Old	50,2%	58,2%
Share Female 18-59 Years Old	52,9%	61,4%
Vaccination Rate	24.4%	64%
% Has Social Security Number	35.5%	74.8%
% Has work permit card (18+)	25%	44%

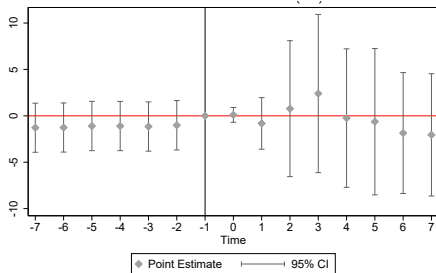
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- More on the differences in integration:

Shelters' Effect on Public Schools % of Venezuelan Students (Event Study):



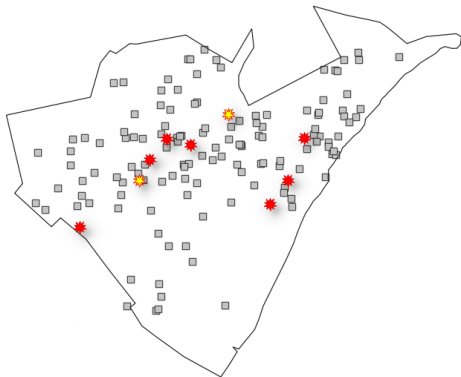
(a) Non-Indigenous Shelters



(b) Indigenous Shelters

- Neither shelter types affect: number of Brazilian students, school amenities, students per teacher ratio, and class size.

## Mechanism: Indigenous Vs Non-Indigenous Shelters

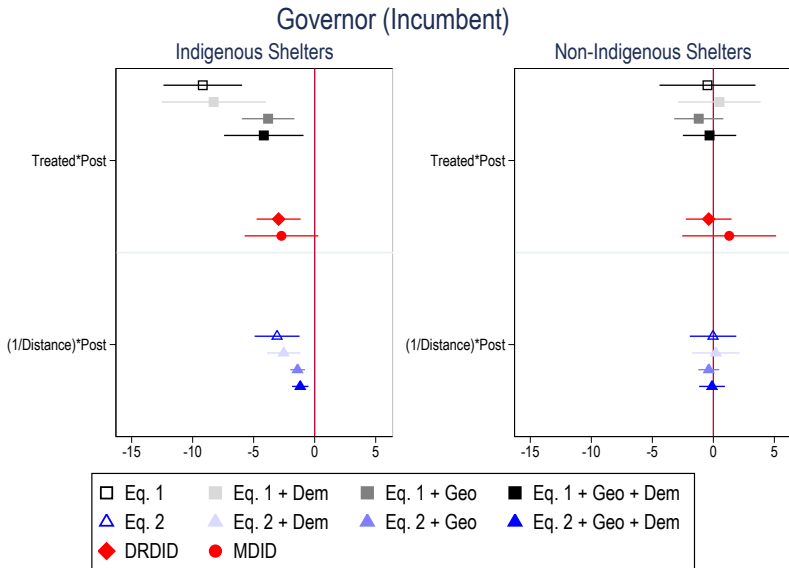


- To estimate shelter-type effects:

$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_1 \text{Treat-Ind.}_j \times \text{Post}_t + \beta_2 \text{Treat-Non-Ind.}_j \times \text{Post}_t + \gamma_i + \mu_t + \nu_{ijt}$$

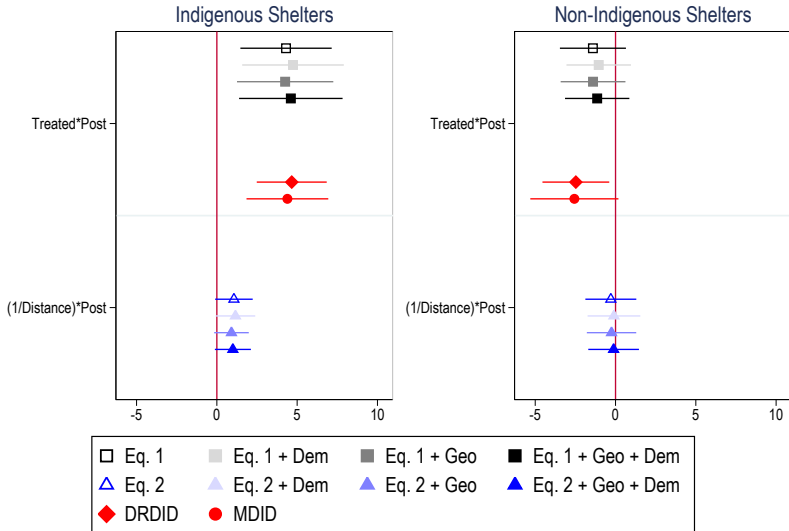
$$Y_{ijt} = \beta_1 \frac{1}{\text{Dist. Ind.}_j} \times \text{Post}_t + \beta_2 \frac{1}{\text{Dist. Non-Ind.}_j} \times \text{Post}_t + \gamma_i + \mu_t + \nu_{ijt}$$

# Results: Governor Election



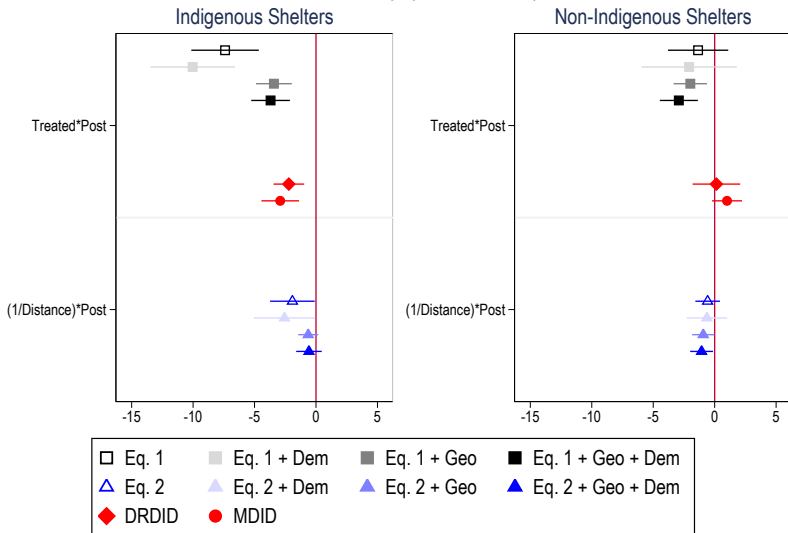
# Results: Governor Election

## Denarium (Bolsonaro Support)



# Results: President Election

## Workers' Party (2nd Round)



# Alternative Stories and Robustness Tests

1. **No change of voters composition** ✓
2. **No Differential Election Logistics** ✓
3. **Unbalanced Panel** ✓
4. **Other unit of observations:**
  - Polling stations ✓
  - Mock voting districts using Voronoi polygons ✓
5. **Keep only likely not treated controls** ✓
6. **Weighted Regressions** (sections' number of registered voters) ✓
7. **Standard Errors Geographically Clustered** (neighborhood level) ✓

# Conclusion

- Reception policy reshaped the within-city voting:
  - proximity to shelters: ↑ far-right and incumbent.
- However, shelters' effects were not strong enough to increase the city's overall far-right performance.
- Results are driven only by shelters hosting Venezuelan Indigenous people:
  - Especially socioeconomically vulnerable subgroup
  - Public school data and UN reports suggest that locals' exposure to poverty and vulnerability, such as children outside of school, child labor, and homelessness, can be behind the results.
- Other results not in this presentation:
  - Shelters didn't affect party affiliation, results restricted to voting
  - Shelters didn't increase crime (homicides, robbery, rape, and bodily injury)

## Appendix

# The Venezuelan Refugee Crisis in Brazil

UNHCR estimates that 7.7 million citizens have left Venezuela since 2014

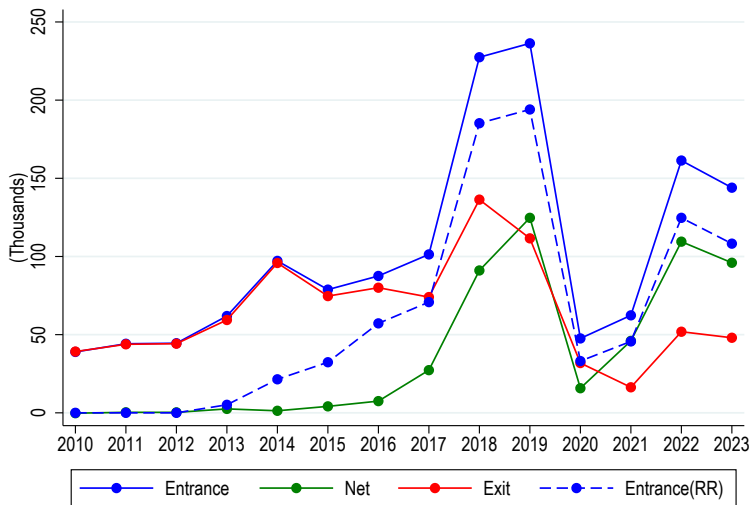


↪ From January 2017 to September 2023:

- 980,625 Venezuelans entered Brazil
- 510,499 stayed (427,534 left)
  - ↪ 429,888 got residency
  - ↪ 103,713 got refugee status
  - ↪ 37,245 waiting for refugee status
- 52% Male, 48% Female
- 71% ( $\leq 29$ )

Back

# The Venezuelan Refugee Crisis in Brazil



Source: STI. For 2023 data includes January to September.

# Operação Acolhida

- Operation launched by the Brazilian Government in February 2018.
- Coordination between federal, state, and local Governments, International Organizations, NGOs, and civil society.
- It consists of three foundations:
  - 1 Border Planning;
  - 2 Dispersal Policy (started on April 2018);
  - 3 **Shelter and Reception** (11 Shelters operating in 2018)



Tancredo Neves Shelter



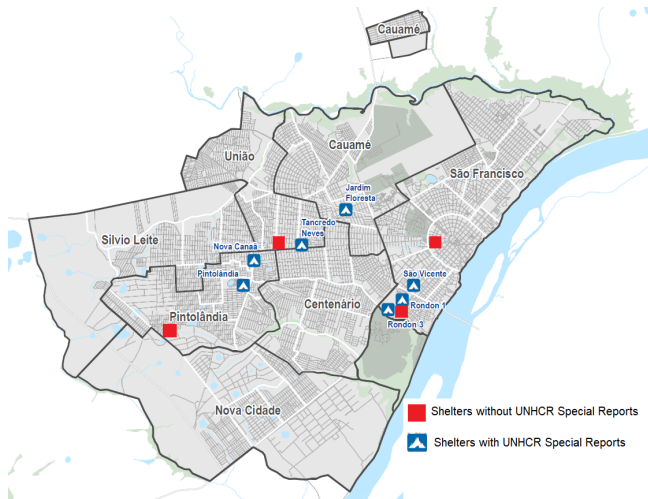
Rondon 1 Shelter

# Shelters Info

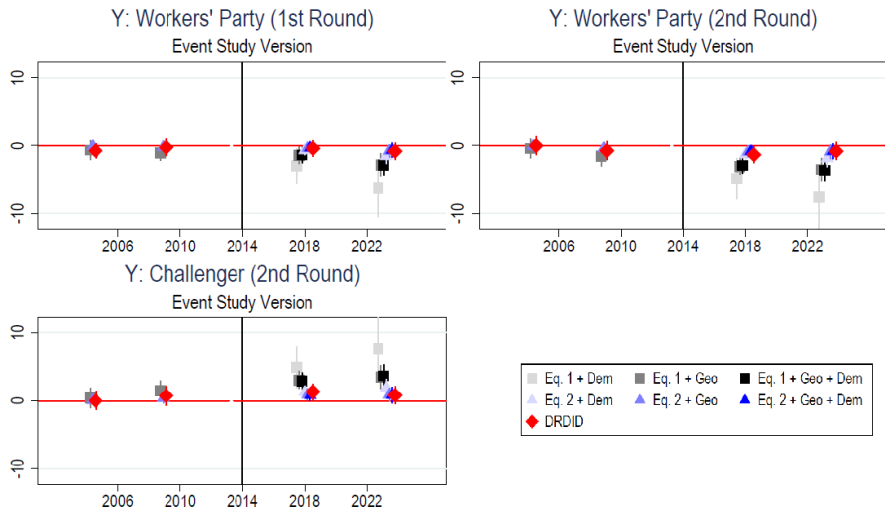
Table: Shelters Statistics

Name	Opening Date	Capacity (September or October* 2018)	Sheltered Population (September or October* 2018)	Capacity (August 2020)	Sheltered Population (September 2020)	Average Length of Stay - days (September 2020)
Pintolândia	March 2018	448	754	640	536	470
Tancredo Neves	March 2018	232	324	280	217	270
Hélio Campos	December 2017	no info	252*	closed	closed	closed
Jardim Floresta	March 2018	594	693	550	368	293
São Vicente	April 2018	378	353	300	251	270
Nova Canaã	April 2018	390	436	350	235	265
Rondon 1	July 2018	600	715	810	559	240
Latife Salomão	April 2018	no info	514*	300	195	248
Santa Tereza	May 2018	no info	531*	320	255	191
Rondon 2	September 2018	no info	453*	645	340	223
Rondon 3	October 2018	1086*	344*	1386	844	245
São Vicente 2	July 2019	did not exist	did not exist	250	110	177

# Operação Acolhida - Shelters Location



# Results: President Election



# Alternative Stories: Change in Voters' Composition

## 1. Composition Effect (endogenous moving or assignment to sections)

- Voters had until May 9 to change polling stations, and most shelters (8 out of 11) opened after March: small time window to change.
- Can test it: Equations (1) and (2) using voters' characteristics as outcomes.

Outcomes	Eq. (1)		Eq. (2)	
	$Treated_j \times I(t \geq 2018)$	R2	$\frac{1}{Distance_j} \times I(t \geq 2018)$	R2
Share Men	-0.876 (0.674)	0.002	0.118 (0.330)	0.001
Share Illiterate	-0.135 (0.118)	0.025	0.023 (0.035)	0.023
Share Less than High School	0.495 (0.894)	0.029	-0.503 (0.349)	0.031
Share Some College	0.302 (0.715)	0.008	0.404 (0.257)	0.009
Share 16-17 Years Old	-0.331 (0.587)	0.042	-0.349* (0.181)	0.050
Share 18 Years Old	-0.247 (0.536)	0.146	-0.295* (0.166)	0.156
Share <25 Years Old	1.317 (1.355)	0.087	-0.924 (0.761)	0.090
Share <40 Years Old	-1.418 (1.169)	0.294	-0.110 (0.687)	0.293
Share >65 Years Old	0.083 (0.361)	0.336	-0.022 (0.155)	0.336
Share Men Illiterate	-0.006 (0.060)	0.003	-0.007 (0.013)	0.003
Share Men Less than High School	-0.099 (0.685)	0.015	-0.610*** (0.215)	0.020
Share Working-Age Men	-0.504 (0.786)	0.022	0.375 (0.311)	0.022
Share Women Illiterate	-0.129* (0.076)	0.048	0.030 (0.028)	0.045
Share Women Less than High School	0.594 (0.644)	0.009	0.108 (0.213)	0.008
Share Working-Age Women	0.732 (0.771)	0.035	0.082 (0.259)	0.034

# Alternative Stories: Differential Electoral Logistics

## 2. Differential Electoral Logistics:

- Can test it: Equations (1) and (2) using the election logistics variables (at the section and polling station levels) as outcomes.

Outcomes	Eq. (1)		Eq. (2)	
	$Treated_j \times I(t \geq 2018)$	R2	$\frac{1}{Distance_j} \times I(t \geq 2018)$	R2
<b>Polling Station Level:</b>				
Number of Sections	0.069 (0.160)	0.308	-0.087 (0.199)	0.308
Number of Registered Voters	-14.628 (70.093)	0.167	-32.307 (75.469)	0.168
Average Section Size	-9.938 (9.391)	0.135	-2.453 (3.890)	0.134
Size Biggest Section	-6.321 (9.709)	0.176	-0.444 (4.163)	0.176
Size Smallest Section	-14.820 (15.699)	0.073	-5.168 (7.343)	0.073
Not Operating in year t	-0.009 (0.038)	0.129	0.023 (0.026)	0.132
<b>Section Level:</b>				
Number of Registered Voters	3.772 (11.785)	0.335	2.088 (2.869)	0.335
Not Operating in year t	0.011 (0.057)	0.315	-0.025 (0.034)	0.316