

Temporary Internal Displacement and Receiving Communities' Voting Behavior

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Introduction: The Topic

- Europe has experienced a dramatic increase in the number of forcibly displaced persons, rising from 3.42 million in 2011 to 19.5 million in 2023 (UNHCR, 2024).
- Dispersal policies have shifted the electoral support from pro-integration to anti-immigration parties in municipalities with a high displaced-to-inhabitants ratio (Bratti et al., 2020; Bredtmann, 2022; Campo et al., 2024; Dustmann et al., 2019).
- Anti-immigration parties underline two features of the recent inflows of displaced persons in their speeches to increase their electoral support:
 - a permanent stay of displaced persons in the hosting places.
 - the difference in socio-demographic characteristics between hosts and guests.

Introduction: Why Do We Care?

- The rearm of nations all around the world and the increase in the production of weapons will likely lead to an increase in the number of displaced persons.
- Understanding the causes of the anti-immigration voting is key to provide public policies that would avoid a further increase in the anti-immigration sentiment.
- Studying recent arrivals is not enough to understand whether anti-immigration voting behavior is context-specific or a more general reaction. Looking at different displacement events would provide better insights.

Introduction: This Paper

- **RQ:** I investigate the effect of a temporary forced internal migration on voting behavior.
- **RD:** I exploit the quasi-random assignment of internally displaced persons across Italian municipalities during the World War I to identify the causal effect.
- **RF:** I find that a higher displaced-to-inhabitants ratio reduces electoral support for a pro-integration party in both the 1919 and 1921 general elections. This effect is heterogeneous across municipal public spending per capita.

- First, I exploit an internal resettlement policy for displaced natives lasting less than two years to see whether it affects the political outcomes. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first paper to assess the effects of a short-lasting "refugee" shock on political outcomes.
- Second, I complement the previous findings on economic and non-economic motivations for demanding stricter immigration policies by using an internal displacement event.
- Third, my findings add to a recent literature on the effect of forced internal displacement on host communities from an historical perspective.

Paper in a nutshell:

- **Motivation**

- **Literature Review**

- **Historical Background:** The Battle of Caporetto and the dispersal policy.

- **Data:** i) population of internally displaced persons at the municipal level; ii) municipal electoral results in 1919, 1921 and 1924.

- **Empirical Strategy:** Cross-section analysis at municipal level using the quasi-random variation in the displaced-to-population ratio to identify the effect on electoral outcomes.

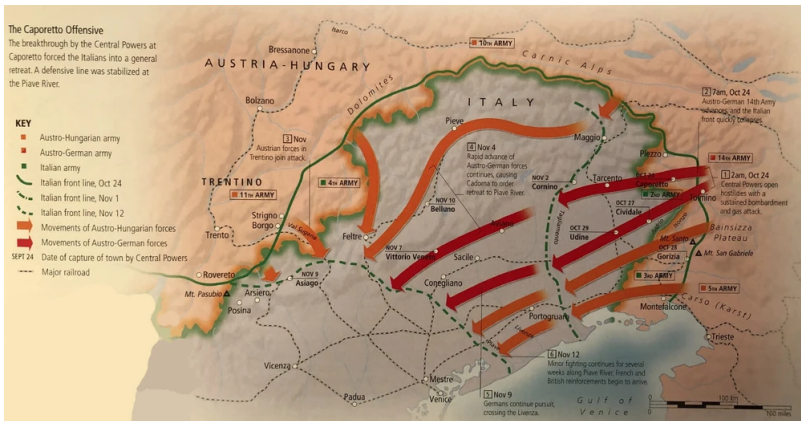
- **Findings:** A 1 p.p. increase in the displaced-to-inhabitants ratio lowers by .3 p.p. the vote share for the Catholic Party.

- **Conclusion**

- **Refugees and Voting Behavior:** passing-through asylum seekers (Dinas et al., 2019; Gessler et al., 2022; Hangartner et al., 2019) vs refugees (Bratti et al., 2020; Campo et al., 2024). Dispersal policy (Dustmann et al., 2019) vs ad-hoc resettlement policy (Gamalerio et al., 2023; Vertier et al., 2023). Contact vs Exposure (Achard et al., 2024; Fremerey et al. 2024; Steynmair, 2021)
- **Anti-Immigration Voting Behavior:** Economic and non-economic motivations (Alesina and Tabellini, 2024; Hargatner et al., 2021, for a survey)
- **Historical Displacement Events:** long run (Ochsner and Roesel, 2020) vs short run (Chavalier et al., 2024; Braun and Dwenger, 2020).

Historical Background: The Battle of Caporetto and The Displacement

Figure: The Battle of Caporetto (24 October - 19 November 1917)



Historical Background: The Resettlement

- Governmental resettlement policy followed two criteria:
 - The travel distance from the places of first reception (Bologna, Florence and Milan).
 - Urban areas must host a small share of refugees, relative to their population's size, to avoid public discontent in strategic cities.
- The Government was preparing a plan to reunify families and to move displaced persons aimed at improving labor market opportunities.
- The resettlement plan failed due to the outbreak of the Spanish Flu. The Health Ministry hampered any movements to avoid the spread of the pandemic. Giardini(1919, p. 11)

Historical Background: Catholic Help, Reception Policy and the Stay

- Catholic associations immediately after the arrival of displaced persons start to collect donations from worshipers. To collect and assign donations, the Catholics organized in committees that, then, became the formal providers of the governmental subsidy for hosted people.
- In the spring of 1918, people started to blame forced migrants for soaring prices and food shortage (Ceschin 2006, p. 190).
- Only Catholic organizations and the representatives of Catholic Church, parishioners and bishops, kept on providing moral and financial assistance to forced migrants in the host communities for the whole displacement period (Ceschin 2006, p. 75-77).

Historical Background: The End of the War

- Displaced persons returned to their hometowns before the 1919 general elections.
- Catholics funded the Italian Popular Party in 1919.
- The PPI was the most voted party in Veneto region, the area partially invaded by the Austrian-Hungarian and German armies, collecting around 35% and around 40% votes at 1919 general elections and at 1920 municipal elections, respectively.

- Dataset:
 - 1918 Census of War Refugees
 - Acemoglu et al. (2022) data on 1919, 1921 and 1924 vote shares and a huge set of control variables for more than 5,000 municipalities.
 - Data on the auxiliary firms in the World War I from the Census of Auxiliary Firms.
 - 1912 Public Spending per Capita at municipal level.
 - Microdata of displaced people hosted in the province of Naples.
 - Data on the number of priests and churches at municipal level in 1884
- I select a sample of more than 4,500 observations for the main analysis.
- Summary statistics at municipal level Descriptive 1 Descriptive 2
- Summary statics from microdata Descriptive Micro
- Correlation Catholic Influence and Displaced Persons Poisson Regression

Empirical Specification

- Cross-sectional analysis with exogenous treatment:

$$y_{m(dp)} = \beta DP_m + \gamma_{dp} + X'_m \beta + \varepsilon_m$$

- $y_{m(dp)}$ is the vote share for each political party in 1919, 1921, 1924 general elections at municipal level m .
 - DP_m is the ratio of displaced persons to the population in each municipality m .
 - γ_{dp} is a set of district-population fixed effects.
 - X'_m is a matrix of controlling variables at municipal level m .
 - ε_m is the error term.
-
- Adjusting the regression for municipality controls and district-population decile fixed effects, the IDPs-to-inhabitants ratio is as good as random.

Auxiliary Firms

Table: The Effect of Internal Displacement on Vote Share for Popular Party in 1919

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
DP	-0.463*** (0.086)	-0.421*** (0.083)	-0.413*** (0.082)	-0.389*** (0.078)	-0.365*** (0.085)	-0.318*** (0.076)
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓
<i>N</i>	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517
<i>Adjusted R</i> ²	0.552	0.555	0.560	0.563	0.565	0.579

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table: The Effect of Internal Displacement on Vote Share for Popular Party in 1921 and 1924

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel 1: Vote Share for Popular Party in 1921						
DP	-0.434** (0.164)	-0.392** (0.157)	-0.375** (0.154)	-0.356** (0.159)	-0.337** (0.152)	-0.277** (0.126)
N	4082	4082	4082	4082	4082	4082
Panel 2: Vote Share for Popular Party in 1924						
DP	-0.146* (0.082)	-0.122 (0.079)	-0.134 (0.083)	-0.126 (0.084)	-0.114 (0.079)	-0.096 (0.072)
N	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ *

- **Other parties:** Test whether the negative result stems from an increase in the vote share for another party. Other Parties
- **Falsification Test:** I use the share of both *irredenti* and repatriates to test whether the results depend on municipal characteristics. Falsification
- **Different Specifications:** I create different population-district cells and I use different cluster standard errors. Other Specif

Heterogeneity Analysis

Three main sources of heterogeneity may explain anti-IDPs behavior of voters:

- **Cultural Distance:** Receiving communities may dislike hosting persons with different culture.
- **Job Competition:** The increase in the labor supply may affect the job competition leading to lower employment and wages.
- **Public Spending per Capita:** The presence of IDPs may decrease the public spending per capita leading to a public discontent.

Cultural Distance 1/2

- Since hosts and guests are both Italians, I rely on the geographical distance to measure the cultural distance.
- I split the sample between Italian border, **Emilia-Romagna and Lombardy**, and non-border regions to Veneto to test the heterogeneity in the cultural differences. I assume that the probability of speaking with a different accent, or a different dialect, and of having different cultural habits varies with geographic distance.
- Furthermore, Lombardy was part of the Austrian Empire before the Unification of Italy.

Cultural Distance 2/2

Table: The Effect of Internal Displacement on Vote Share for Popular Party in 1919 by Geographical Distance

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel 1: Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna						
DP	-0.574*** (0.084)	-0.504*** (0.082)	-0.504*** (0.082)	-0.462*** (0.073)	-0.478*** (0.068)	-0.392*** (0.082)
N	2101	2101	2101	2101	2101	2101
Panel 2: No-Border Regions						
DP	-0.335** (0.122)	-0.307** (0.115)	-0.280** (0.110)	-0.250** (0.105)	-0.215** (0.103)	-0.200** (0.095)
N	2416	2416	2416	2416	2416	2416
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ *

- The unstable economic conditions of displaced persons may increase cheap labor supply leading to a decrease in wages and an overall increase in the unemployment rate in the hosting municipalities.
- The characteristics of forced migrants reported by the High Commissioner for Displaced People show the low likelihood of participating in the labor market. To test the anecdotal facts, I use two measures:
 - 1911 Population Density
 - 1911 Industrial Firms per Male Population

1911 Population Density

Table: The Effect of Internal Displacement on Vote Share for Popular Party in 1919 Below and Above the Median of 1911 Population Density

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel 1: Below Median of 1911 Population Density						
DP	-0.487*** (0.147)	-0.466*** (0.153)	-0.470*** (0.162)	-0.433** (0.164)	-0.437** (0.173)	-0.415** (0.189)
<i>N</i>	2135	2135	2135	2135	2135	2135
Panel 2: Above Median of 1911 Population Density						
DP	-0.387*** (0.095)	-0.309*** (0.091)	-0.305*** (0.092)	-0.294*** (0.088)	-0.269*** (0.098)	-0.242*** (0.079)
<i>N</i>	2163	2163	2163	2163	2163	2163
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ *

1911 Industrial Firms

Table: The Effect of Internal Displacement on Vote Share for Popular Party in 1919 Below and Above the Median of 1911 Industrial Firms per Male Population

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel 1: Below Median of Industrial Firms						
DP	-0.565*** (0.162)	-0.557*** (0.156)	-0.600*** (0.175)	-0.565*** (0.186)	-0.546*** (0.172)	-0.507*** (0.159)
N	2096	2096	2096	2096	2096	2096
Panel 2: Above Median of Industrial Firms						
DP	-0.527*** (0.159)	-0.429*** (0.132)	-0.429*** (0.115)	-0.399*** (0.109)	-0.385*** (0.119)	-0.341*** (0.106)
N	2105	2105	2105	2105	2105	2105
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ *

Public Spending Per Capita 1/2

- The provision of a public subsidy and a stricter food rationing following the arrival of displaced persons may raise public discontent towards Catholic associations, and more in general against Catholic institutions.
- I split the sample below and above the 1912 public spending per capita to test whether the voting behavior changes according the public services supplied in the municipalities.

Public Spending Per Capita 2/2

Table: The Effect of Internal Displacement on Vote Share for Popular Party in 1919 Below and Above the Median of 1912 Public Spending Per Capita

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel 1: Below Median of 1912 Public Spending Per Capita						
DP	-0.503*** (0.070)	-0.489*** (0.074)	-0.488*** (0.071)	-0.402*** (0.066)	-0.418*** (0.070)	-0.392*** (0.090)
N	2149	2149	2149	2149	2149	2149
Panel 2: Above Median of 1912 Public Spending Per Capita						
DP	-0.311** (0.139)	-0.239** (0.118)	-0.221* (0.115)	-0.208* (0.121)	-0.182 (0.123)	-0.156 (0.110)
N	2086	2086	2086	2086	2086	2086
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ *

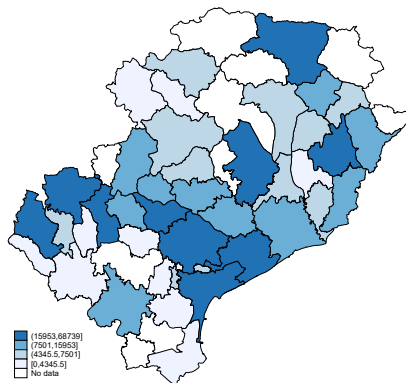
■ Main Results:

- Hosting a greater share of internal displaced persons relative to municipal population size has a negative effect on the vote share for the Catholic party for two consecutive general elections.
- The effect of a short-run internal displacement on voting behavior is similar to the effect of a long-run international displacement.

■ Heterogeneity Analysis:

- **Cultural Distance:** farthest regions do not show a greater anti-IDPs voting behavior than closest regions.
- **Job Competition:** inhabitants of municipalities with a different degree job competition vote alike.
- **Public Spending Per Capita:** Municipalities with a lower public spending per capita show a greater electoral punishment towards the Italian Popular Party.

Displaced Persons by District



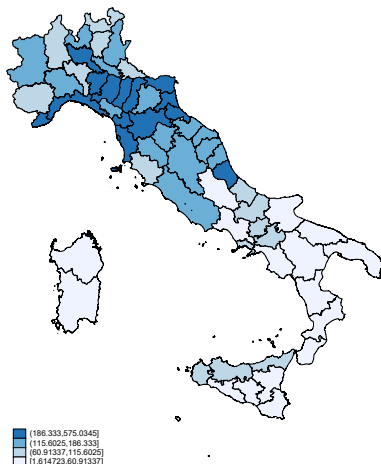
Source: 1918 Census of War Refugees.

Daily Transfer by Household

- 2 lire (4 euro) for single people.
- 3.6 lire (8 euro) for a couple.
- 4.5 lire (10 euro) for a family of three people.
- 1.25 lire (2.61 euro) per each person in a family with a maximum of six people.
- 1.1 lire (2.29 euro) per each person in a family with more than six people.
- the subsidy was .5 (1 euro) for the babies with less than one year old.
(Converter: <https://inflationhistory.com/>),

Return

Figure: Refugees per 10k of inhabitants



Source: 1918 Census of War Refugees and 1911 Census of Italy.

Summary Statistics at Municipal Level

Table: Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Panel A: Outcomes</i>				
Popular Party 1919	.268	.228	0	1
Popular Party 1921	.287	.223	0	1
Popular Party 1924	.132	.149	0	1
<i>Panel B: Further Outcomes</i>				
Fascist 1919	.005	.036	0	.656
Socialist Party 1919	.335	.272	0	1
Traditionalist 1919	.334	.272	0	1
<i>Panel C: Treatment</i>				
Displaced Persons' Share	.008	.021	0	.615
N	4,517	4,517	4,517	4,517

Summary Statistics at Municipal Level

Table: Summary Statistics

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Panel D: Controls</i>				
Altitude	865.925	858.830	1	4810
Altitude of the major centre	328.398	274.860	1	1816
Auxiliary Firms	.240	3.276	0	161
Log Area	7.369	1.185	2.303	12.243
Literacy rate	.760	.204	.101	1
Log Pop 1911	7.558	1.114	3.97	13.427
Presence of Army suppliers	.0837	.277	0	1
Public Spending per Cap	23.906	24.447	.803	412.885
Share of Industrial Firms	.013	.011	0	.138
Share of Industrial Workers	.126	.236	0	6.028
Share Pop below 6	.154	.030	.0537	.864
Socialist Party 1913	.171	.232	0	1
N	4,517	4,517	4,517	4,517

Summary Statistics From Microdata

Table: Gender Distribution by Age Classes

	Females	Males
<i>Age Class:</i>		
Less than 16	53	47
Between 16 and 18	48	52
Between 19 and 28	80	20
Between 29 and 38	72	28
Between 39 and 48	49	51
More than 48	47	53
Total	59	41

Notes: The total sample includes 1,243 observations.

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Relationship between Catholic Influence and Displaced Persons' Share

Poisson quasi-maximum likelihood model (PQML):

$$DP_m = \exp[\omega_0 + \omega_1 CathInfl_m + X'_m \Phi + \gamma_{dp} + \varepsilon_m]$$

- DP_m is the ratio of internal displaced persons to population in each municipality m
- $CathInfl_m$ is the share of priests in the municipality m .
- X'_m is a matrix of controlling variables at municipal level m .
- ε_m is the error term.

Relationship between Catholic Influence and IDPs Share

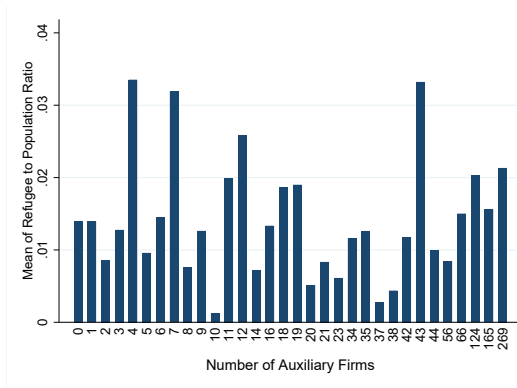
Table: Relationship between Catholic Influence and Share of Displaced People at Municipal Level

	(1)	(2)	(3)
CathInfl	43.975** (17.104)	43.840** (17.076)	48.297*** (18.673)
Demographic controls		✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓
N	3613	3613	3613

Notes: The outcome variable is the share of displaced people. The main regressor, *CathInfl*, is the share of priests relative to the municipal population size in 1881. All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Column (2) includes population in 1881 as control. Column (3) additionally includes geographic controls (log area, elevation of the main center, and maximum elevation). Regressions are estimated using Poisson quasi-maximum likelihood models. Standard errors are clustered at *circondario* level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Testing Assumptions

Figure: Average Displaced Persons to Population Ratio over the Number of Auxiliary Firms



Source: 1918 Census of Auxiliary Firms.

Table: The Effect on Vote Share for Other Running Parties in 1919

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel 1: Socialist Party						
DP	0.370** (0.170)	0.351** (0.164)	0.190 (0.146)	0.168 (0.145)	0.155 (0.146)	0.055 (0.119)
Panel 2: Fascist Party						
DP	0.000 (0.014)	-0.004 (0.013)	-0.010 (0.011)	-0.009 (0.011)	-0.008 (0.011)	-0.007 (0.012)
Panel 3: Traditionalist Parties						
DP	0.032 (0.109)	0.022 (0.114)	0.191* (0.100)	0.193** (0.096)	0.185* (0.097)	0.225** (0.092)
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓
N	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$. ** $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.01$

Table: Falsification Test on the Vote Share for Popular Party in 1919

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
<i>Panel 1: Irredenti</i>						
Irr/Pop	-0.311 (0.210)	-0.247 (0.205)	-0.231 (0.193)	-0.180 (0.187)	-0.129 (0.170)	-0.128 (0.174)
<i>Panel 2: Repatriated Italians</i>						
Rep/Pop	-0.166 (0.345)	-0.224 (0.345)	-0.163 (0.361)	-0.045 (0.356)	-0.063 (0.352)	-0.065 (0.373)
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓
N	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517

Notes: All specifications include district-population fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$ *

Table: Robustness Checks

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Panel 1: Population Quintiles						
DP	-0.492*** (0.079)	-0.434*** (0.069)	-0.439*** (0.069)	-0.410*** (0.069)	-0.390*** (0.070)	-0.350*** (0.061)
N	4647	4647	4647	4647	4647	4647
Panel 2: District Cluster Standard Errors						
DP	-0.463*** (0.104)	-0.421*** (0.097)	-0.413*** (0.102)	-0.389*** (0.099)	-0.365*** (0.102)	-0.318*** (0.095)
N	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517	4517
Demographic controls		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Geographic controls			✓	✓	✓	✓
Urban controls				✓	✓	✓
Labor Demand controls					✓	✓
Socialist share in 1913						✓

Notes: Panel 1 use population quintiles to compute district-population fixed effects, while Panel 2 use population deciles. Standard errors are clustered at province level in Panel 1. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$