Immigration and Nationalistic Attitudes: Panel Evidence from Chile *

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Abstract

Does rapid and large-scale migration fuel nationalism? Using administrative and panel survey data from Chile, we show that sudden, large-scale migration inflows increase identity-based nationalistic attitudes, such as national pride, among native-born citizens. These "immigration shocks" appear to activate perceptions of identity threat, leading to stronger expressions of national pride and belonging. Supplementary evidence—from surveys, media reports, social media, and crime records—suggests that this nationalism is predominantly exclusionary: areas most affected by migration also experienced spikes in anti-migrant rhetoric, hate crimes, and support for a newly formed far-right party. These findings underscore how rapid demographic change can reshape political attitudes and contribute to the rise of exclusionary forms of national identity.

Keywords: Nationalism, Immigration, Political Attitudes, Panel Data, Chile.

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1 Introduction

Nationalism has reemerged as a powerful force in global politics. From the rise of far-right parties in Europe to populist movements in Latin America and the United States, nationalistic appeals increasingly shape political discourse and voter behavior (Bremmer, 2017; Cagaptay, 2020; Wehner, 2022). This resurgence raises urgent questions about the factors that activate nationalist sentiments and their political consequences. Understanding nationalism is crucial because it influences not only political preferences but also shapes exclusionary attitudes, democratic backsliding, and responses to globalization (Lubbers and Coenders, 2017; Rosenzweig and Zhou, 2021).

While nationalism has traditionally been portrayed as a fixed identity (Smith, 1989), a growing body of research suggests that it is malleable and shaped by contextual factors (Depetris-Chauvin et al., 2020). In particular, demographic shifts—especially those triggered by migration— can shape how native-born citizens perceive themselves and others (Zhou, 2019), which might make national identity more salient. As people confront the presence of newcomers, they may seek clearer boundaries to distinguish "us" from "them," leading to increased identification with the nation and, in some cases, nationalistic backlash.

Global migration flows have intensified over the past decade, with millions leaving unsafe and impoverished regions in search of stability and opportunities (Holland and Peters, 2020). These movements have transformed host societies and, in many cases, sparked political and social tensions (Adida, 2014; Kustov, 2021; Choi et al., 2022). Although much of the scholarship on migration and nationalism has focused on advanced industrial democracies (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014; Ferwerda et al., 2017), an emerging literature has begun to explore these dynamics in the Global South (Alrababa'h et al., 2021; Rozo and Vargas, 2021; Holland et al., 2024; Severino and Visconti, 2025; González-Rostani et al., 2024). These contexts offer important new insights into how national identities are constructed and reshaped outside the Western European and North American settings where most nationalism theories

were developed.

Chile offers a compelling case to examine the political consequences of migration-driven demographic change. Since 2015, the country has experienced a sharp increase in immigration from other Latin American and Caribbean nations, with some municipalities undergoing rapid and sizable demographic shifts while others remained relatively unaffected (Bellolio and Valdés, 2020). Importantly, the availability of detailed administrative and survey data allows for the precise measurement of these changes at the local level (Severino and Visconti, 2025).

We combine fine-grained administrative records on local migration patterns with a three-wave panel survey to examine how exposure to immigration affects nationalistic attitudes. Using a dynamic difference-in-differences (event-study) design, we assess whether individuals who experienced sudden increases in migrant populations became more likely to adopt nationalistic sentiments. We find that one year after initial exposure to a migration shock, individuals are more likely to report stronger national pride and national identity.

We also show that areas more heavily affected by migration were more supportive of a newly formed far-right party in Chile's 2021 presidential election. These findings suggest that exposure to migration not only activates nationalist attitudes but may also reshape electoral behavior. Furthermore, we provide evidence from social media, crime records, and media reports showing an identitarian mechanism driving this relationship: increased prejudice and hostility toward migrants appear to mediate the rise in nationalism.

Our results speak to two major literatures. First, they contribute to the study of nationalism by documenting how identity can be activated in response to demographic shocks, particularly in South-South migration contexts. As nationalism continues to influence contemporary politics, understanding its social foundations and contextual triggers remains a pressing task. Second, while most of the literature examines how migration can increase natives' grievances related to the labor market, the provision of public services, or concerns about cultural threats, we move beyond these traditional grievances by showing that migration can also influence other important political attitudes, such as national identity.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 What Is Nationalism?

Nationalism is a multifaceted and deeply consequential political identity, encompassing both symbolic attachments (e.g., pride and identity) and ideological commitments (e.g., exclusionary policies, authoritarianism). Like other foundational political concepts, it has been defined in numerous—and sometimes contradictory—ways. On one hand, nationalism has been associated with xenophobia, exclusion, and authoritarianism in contemporary politics (Mylonas and Tudor, 2023). On the other hand, it has played a pivotal role in advancing freedom, independence, and democratization, particularly during moments of anti-colonial struggle, such as in postcolonial Africa (Birmingham, 2008) and in Latin America's 19th-century independence movements (Miller, 2006).

This dual nature—simultaneously emancipatory and exclusionary—makes nationalism a powerful yet ambiguous force. Its political effects depend on the actors who invoke it, the narratives they construct, and the contexts in which it is activated. As a result, scholars stress the importance of distinguishing among different types or expressions of nationalism (Bonikowski and DiMaggio, 2016).

In this study, we focus on identity-based nationalism, which involves emotional and cognitive expressions of belonging and loyalty to the national community. At its core, nationalism involves identification with a nation—a socially constructed community imagined as both limited and sovereign (Anderson, 1983). This identity depends on drawing symbolic boundaries between those who belong and those who do not (Rosenzweig and Zhou, 2021; Mylonas and Tudor, 2023). It is through this process that nationalism becomes a potent form of social identity: it situates individuals within a broader political collective while simultaneously delineating outsiders.

To capture these underlying dimensions, empirical studies frequently use measures of

national pride and national identity as proxies for nationalism (Bonikowski and DiMaggio, 2016; Rosenzweig and Zhou, 2021). National pride reflects positive emotional attachment to the nation-state, while national identity denotes a cognitive sense of belonging to the national community. These indicators, taken together, help operationalize the notion of an "imagined political community," which is the conceptual foundation of nationalism (Anderson, 1983).

2.2 Migration and the Activation of Nationalism

Although nationalism has been traditionally portrayed as a fixed or deep-rooted identity (Smith, 1992; Geertz, 2017), an emerging literature demonstrates that it is dynamic and contextually shaped. External shocks—such as terrorism, economic crises, and sport events—can activate nationalist sentiments by intensifying individuals' identification with the nation (Skitka, 2005; Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Depetris-Chauvin et al., 2020; Kuehnhanss et al., 2021). In this view, nationalism is not a dormant trait but a responsive social identity shaped by contextual cues and political events (Bisbee and Rosendorff, 2020).

One particularly powerful contextual trigger is immigration. Migration represents a demographic and symbolic challenge to established boundaries of national belonging, often provoking identity-based responses from native-born citizens. Insights from social psychology explain this process as one of group categorization: people tend to classify others into in-groups and out-groups, favoring their own group and devaluing those perceived as different or threatening (Tajfel and Turner, 1982; Dunne, 2018). This bias is not merely symbolic—perceptions of competition over resources, cultural dominance, or political influence can intensify the salience of group distinctions (Piazza, 2015).

In such contexts, in-groups may engage in hierarchy-enhancing behaviors to protect their social status and distinctiveness (Craig and Phillips, 2023). Migration thus becomes more than a demographic fact; it is experienced as a symbolic disruption that compels native-born citizens to reassert national identity, drawing sharper boundaries between "us" and "them." Nationalism, in this framework, becomes a psychological response to the perceived erosion

of social cohesion or cultural homogeneity.

Importantly, the effects of migration on nationalism are not necessarily conditioned by stark cultural differences. Even when migrants and host communities share language or regional heritage—as is the case in much of Latin America—the presence of a new, sizable out-group can still activate nationalist sentiment. The human propensity to categorize and compare persists, and national identity becomes the most salient available axis for distinguishing between groups. The Venezuelan migratory crisis in Chile provides a clear example of this dynamic: despite shared linguistic and regional ties, rapid and large-scale immigration created conditions that encouraged native-born Chileans to reaffirm their national identity.

In sum, migration can serve as a critical juncture in the reactivation of nationalist identities. Whether as a perceived economic, cultural, or symbolic threat, the presence of migrants reshapes how individuals understand national membership, and ultimately, how they relate to the political community itself.

3 Immigration in Chile

A large share of global migration today occurs within the Global South, as refugees and economic migrants often relocate to nearby countries. One of the most significant recent examples is the Venezuelan crisis, which has triggered mass displacement across Latin America (Vega-Mendez and Visconti, 2021; Holland et al., 2024). In this context, Chile has emerged as a major destination, receiving a substantial influx of migrants primarily from Venezuela but also from Haiti (Bivort et al., 2019).[1]

Historically, Chile has had one of the lowest proportions of foreign-born residents in the region. However, this began to change rapidly in the early 2000s. Between 2002 and 2018,

[1]For examples of research on the politics of migration in Latin America, see Malone (2019), Vega-Mendez and Visconti (2021), Acevedo and Meseguer (2022), Hammoud-Gallego and Freier (2023), Argote and Perelló (2024), and Bessen et al. (2024).

the percentage of migrants in the country grew from approximately 1% to 8% of the total population, marking the fastest immigration growth rate in Latin America during that period (Doña Reveco, 2018; Bellolio and Valdés, 2020). This rapid and concentrated demographic shift fueled political debates over migration, echoing patterns seen in Europe and the United States (Arostegui, 2018).

Before 2018, visa application data served as a reliable proxy for immigration levels in Chile. This is largely because Latin American citizens—who accounted for 90% of all migrants in the country (Bellolio and Valdés, 2020)—could enter Chile as visitors without a visa. Once inside the country, they could apply for a temporary visa by presenting a basic employment contract. These contracts did not require formal employer registration: informal arrangements, such as domestic work or small-scale contracting, were sufficient (Fernandez, 2017). After two years under a temporary visa, migrants could apply for permanent residency (Stefoni, 2011).

As a result, most migrants regularized their status through in-country visa applications rather than irregular entry. Official records from the National Statistics Institute (INE) show that the migrant population grew from 300,000 in 2010 to over 1.3 million by 2018—a more than fourfold increase in just eight years. During this period, Chilean border enforcement remained relatively strict, and irregular crossings were minimal: government figures report an average of only three arrests per day for unauthorized entry (Vedoya, 2017).

The legal and political landscape changed dramatically in 2018 under President Sebastián Piñera, whose administration enacted a sweeping immigration reform. The new law required citizens from Venezuela and Haiti—the two largest migrant-sending countries—to obtain a tourist visa *prior* to entering Chile, effectively eliminating the practice of entering as a visitor and regularizing status from within the country (Bellolio and Valdés, 2020). This reform significantly reduced legal migration pathways and triggered a sharp rise in irregular border crossings, fundamentally altering the nature of migration to Chile.

Because these policy changes drastically changed the migration process, post-2018 visa

data no longer accurately reflect immigration flows. For this reason, our analysis focuses on the period prior to the 2018 immigration reform, during which administrative visa application records serve as a valid and precise measure of local exposure to migration (Severino and Visconti, 2025).

4 Data and Empirical Strategy

To understand the impact of migration on attitudes, we use a three-wave panel survey and administrative data from Chile to implement a dynamic difference-in-differences (DiD) analysis to estimate how immigration affects nationalistic attitudes.

A DiD design employs pre- and post-treatment longitudinal data to estimate the effects of a given intervention by comparing outcomes over time between a treatment and a control group. These groups need to follow a similar trajectory before the treatment (i.e., the parallel-trends assumption) so that any difference in their trajectories after the treatment can be attributed to exposure to the treatment.

We use a dynamic (also called event-study) DiD, which is ideal when the treatment being measured occurs across multiple time periods (Callaway and Sant'Anna, 2021). When relying on a dynamic DiD, effects are aggregated by the length of exposure. For example, we can determine the impact of being exposed to an immigration shock just once or more than once. When using a dynamic DiD, the treatment follows a staggered adoption, meaning that when subjects are treated, they will remain in the treatment group, and the control group is composed only of never-treated units.

Measuring exposure to immigration is not easy. One option is to use perceptions of demographic changes, but previous studies have shown that people's perceptions tend to be endogenous to their political attitudes (Evans and Andersen, 2006). A possible solution to this problem is to use administrative data to calculate immigration rates. However, demographic changes can be explained by both regular and irregular migration, and administrative

data can only inform us about the former. The case of Chile provides an opportunity to address this concern since, as explained above, before 2018, Latin American citizens could easily request a (non-tourist) visa while in Chile as visitors. Regular migration thus explains most of the demographic transformations before 2018. We use administrative data that contains all visa requests made in Chile between 2014 and 2017 and includes information about each migrant's municipality of residence. This data allows us to compute immigration patterns at the municipality level. In Appendix B, we expand on the use of these administrative data.

Another potential issue associated with studying the impact of immigration is that native residents of areas exposed to high levels of immigration might get used to these demographic changes and, as a result, not update their political attitudes after foreigners arrive. Previous studies have highlighted the limitations of using immigration rates to measure perceived immigration (Newman and Velez, 2014). To address this concern, we analyze immigration shocks or substantive demographic changes caused by migratory waves that occur in a short time period (Severino and Visconti, 2025).

We compute the annual change in immigration to measure demographic transformations. For example, for the survey implemented in 2017, we use the number of visas requested in 2016 and 2015 to estimate the demographic change. In particular, we calculate the percentage-point change between 2016 and 2015 (i.e., changes in visa requests from one year to the next).[2] We define exposed municipalities as those with a change in visa requests equal to or greater than one standard deviation above the mean (considering all of the differences between years in a given survey wave). Control municipalities are those in which demographic changes were less than one standard deviation. Survey respondents living in exposed municipalities are considered exposed subjects, and those in control municipalities are control subjects. We use a continuous version of the exposure indicator in Appendix C as a robustness check (i.e., the change in percentage points), and conclusions do not change.

[2] Percentage change: (Visas year 1 – Visas year 2)/(Visas year 2).

Finally, since we only use administrative data before the immigration reform in 2018 to better capture migration changes, we compute immigration shocks for the years 2015, 2016, and 2017.

The panel study is based on a nationally representative sample; the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies administered the survey in person (Appendix D includes details about sampling). We use three waves from 2016 to 2018 to measure the outcomes. For example, for an outcome from the second wave (year 2017), the immigration shock is computed using visa requests from 2016 and 2015 to compute changes in migration. The logic of using a lagged treatment is that exposure to migration needs to precede the measurement of the outcome. Regarding the outcomes, we use two questions from this panel study to evaluate how demographic changes (measured using administrative data) affect nationalistic attitudes (measured using panel survey data). We use agreement with the statements "I feel proud to be Chilean" and "I identify with Chile" (1: strongly disagree; 5: strongly agree). We use the average of responses to both statements to proxy for nationalistic attitudes to simplify the interpretation of the main results. Appendix E reports the findings when using pride and identity as different outcomes, and the conclusions hold. We standardize all outcomes to facilitate their interpretation.

To estimate the dynamic DiD, we rely on the Callaway and Sant'Anna (2021) DiD estimator, which computes the treatment's effect by the length of exposure using never-treated units as the control group. We also include a set of placebo covariates (i.e., not affected by exposure to migration), respondents' education, gender, age, and survey date. Appendix F includes the results of the dynamic DiD without controls, and the main conclusions hold.

The data of the panel survey include 25% of all municipalities in Chile, but cover 67% of the population. We have 6,249 observations (or 2,083 participants across three waves) from the 92 municipalities used in the study (29 exposed and 63 never treated). Since exposure to a demographic change is assigned at the municipality level, but outcomes are measured at the individual level, we use bootstrapped-based standard errors. Figure 1 depicts the

distribution of the control (i.e., never treated) and exposed groups (i.e., regardless of the time of exposure). We compare the pre-exposure characteristics of both groups in section 6.

The exposed and control municipalities are located in the country's three main geographic areas – north, center, and south.[3] Regarding spillovers, since the entire country experienced a demographic transformation and the key distinction between places is the degree of change, we expect violations of the non-interference assumption to bias the effects toward zero. This design is, therefore, a hard test to find any effects.

In the final dataset, the units of analysis are thus survey respondents embedded in panel data. Exposed individuals are those living in a municipality in which immigration increased by more than one standard deviation in the previous year, and control subjects live in municipalities that were never exposed to an immigration shock. The outcome measures national sentiments toward Chile.

[3] Excluding the deep south (Aysen and Magallanes regions), which only accounts for around 1% of the population.

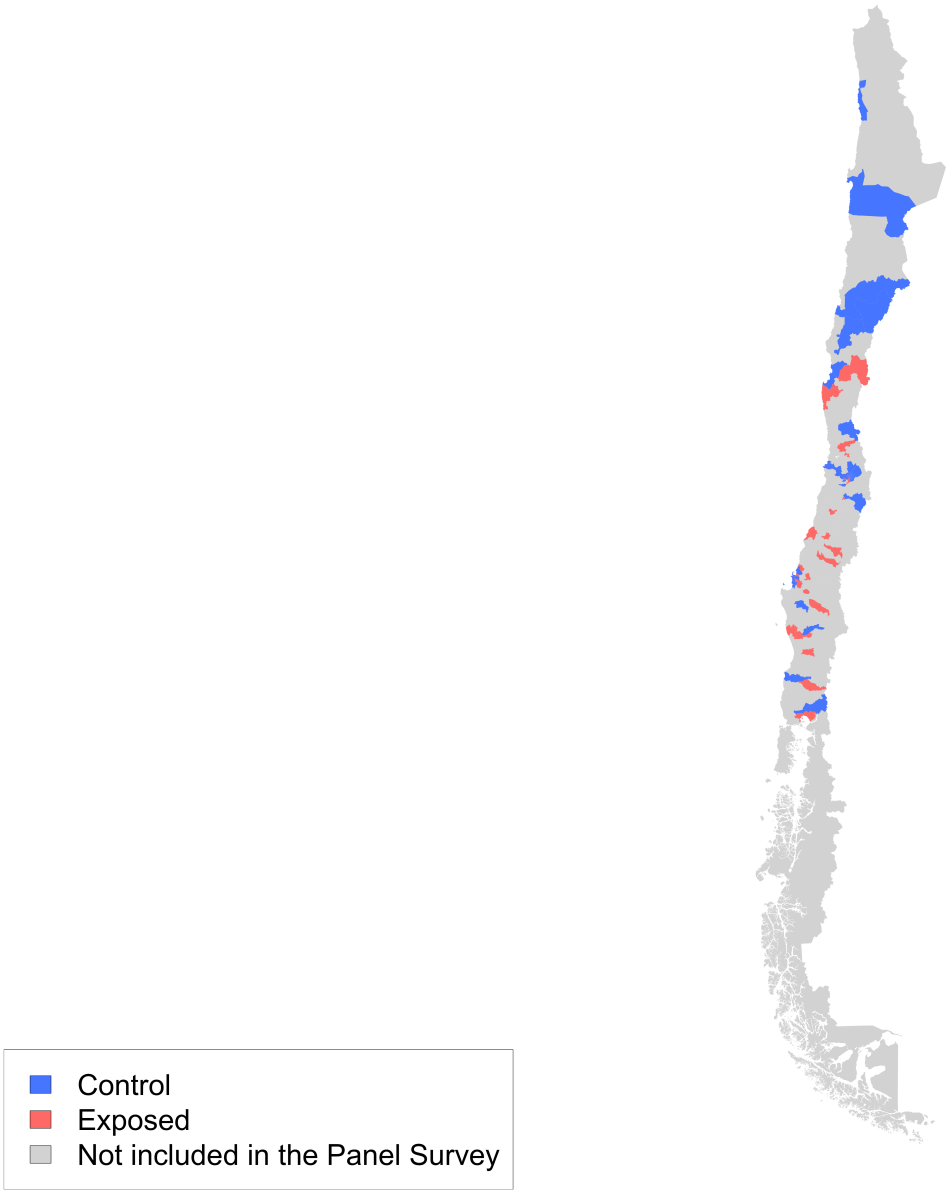

Figure 1: Map of Chile depicting municipalities that: (i) were exposed to an immigration shock, (ii) were not exposed to an immigration shock, and (iii) were not included in the panel survey data.

5 Results

In Appendix G, we explore the descriptive statistics of nationalistic attitudes. In this section, we focus on the results from the dynamic DiD. Because it is not easy to interpret a design based on multiple time periods, a common approach is to aggregate group-time effects into an event-study plot (Callaway and Sant'Anna, 2021). This approach provides the average treatment effects with different lengths of exposure. We report the effects of the first (immediate) and second (after one year) exposures to an immigration shock.

Figure 2 displays the main results of immigration shocks on nationalistic attitudes. The dots represent the average effects, and the lines 95% confidence intervals. The results in gray correspond to the pre-exposure analysis, which compares the *never treated* (i.e., controls) and *eventually treated* (i.e., not exposed at the time but will be exposed in the next waves). The results in black correspond to the post-exposure analysis or the effects of an immigration shock by the length of exposure, which is based on the comparison between *never treated* and *first treated* (i.e., exposed for a first time or immediate exposure), and *never treated* and *second treated* (i.e., exposed one year after initial exposure).

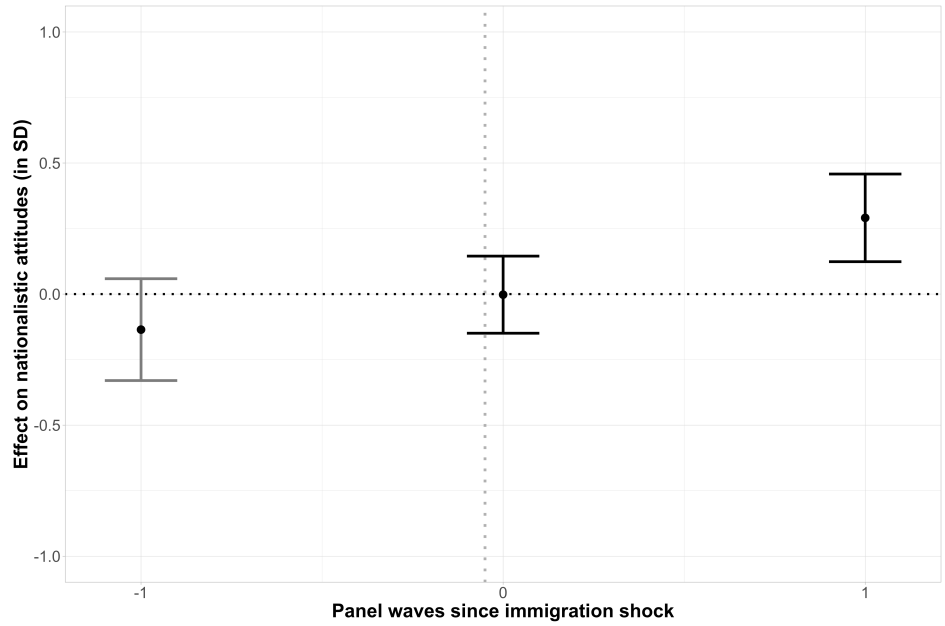

Figure 2: Average effect of immigration shocks on nationalistic attitudes by length of exposure. A length of exposure of -1 refers to the period before the first exposure, 0 to the first exposure, and 1 to the second exposure to an immigration shock. 5,782 observations (respondent-wave). See full results in Appendix K.

The figure shows a nonsignificant result before the first exposure (95% CI: [-0.325, 0.053]), which provides evidence to support the parallel-trends assumption (i.e., both groups followed the same trajectory in the pretreatment period, which is expressed by the null results). There is no evidence of an effect during the initial exposure (95% CI: [-0.139, 0.134]), but there is evidence of such an effect one year after the first exposure. A second exposure to an immigration shock increases nationalistic attitudes by 0.29 standard deviation units (95% CI: [0.102, 0.479]). The patterns are the same when using national pride and national identity separately (rather than the average of both): there is no evidence of a pretreatment effect, no evidence of an immediate effect, and a significant increase one year after the initial exposure (national pride 95%: [0.164, 0.541], national identity 95%: [0.004, 0.401]).

To provide more context to effect sizes, unstandardized nationalistic attitudes are scored between 1 and 5. When we use this version of the outcome rather than the standardized one, we find that the immigration shock increases nationalism by 0.21 points after two exposures (see Appendix F). Considering that the average score for nationalistic attitudes in the never-treated group is 4.31, changing this outcome by a fifth of a point is not a minor update.

Figure 2 thus shows that people do not change their political attitudes immediately after being exposed to an immigration shock. Their new attitudes crystallize after a year, suggesting that some contact with migrants is needed to make them more nationalistic. Two explanations may account for this temporal delay in the treatment effect. First, it may reflect the time it takes for individuals to interpret and internalize the consequences of local demographic shifts. At first exposure, native-born residents may not perceive the presence of newcomers as politically or culturally significant—especially if contact is limited or indirect. Over time, increased visibility, interpersonal interactions, or exposure to political discourse may activate identity-based responses. Second, the absence of an immediate effect could stem from social desirability bias: respondents may initially underreport nationalistic sentiments, which only surface as such views become more socially acceptable or politically salient.

In Appendix J, we present additional survey data from eight Latin American countries to enhance the external validity of our main findings. These analyses support the central conclusions of the study.

6 Support for Far-Right Parties

The main findings show that Chileans became more nationalistic following a demographic shock driven by migration. Notably, this change occurred before the emergence of a far-right party employing nationalistic rhetoric, given that the Republican Party in Chile was founded in 2019. These results suggest that these demographic changes might make nationalistic parties more appealing to these now more nationalistic citizens. Now we evaluate whether

immigration shocks impact far-right parties' electoral performance and, as a result, people's behavior. We want to document whether a far-right party obtains more votes in places that receive more immigrants as suggestive evidence of a connection between people's updated nationalistic sentiments and support for nationalistic parties.

In 2021, a far-right party competed nationally for the first time by presenting candidates for the Lower and Upper Chambers and the presidency. This party elected legislators in both chambers, and its presidential candidate received the most votes in the first round. Since the panel survey data do not include respondents' intended vote choice for the 2021 presidential election, in this section, we use municipality-level electoral results. This approach fits the main analysis in the manuscript since exposure to migration is also measured at the municipality level.[4]

Given that the far-right party emerged in 2019, we have only one time period for the outcome, therefore it is not possible to implement a DiD design as we did in the previous analysis. We, therefore, use a different empirical strategy in this section. We rely on advances in optimal matching and mathematical programming to construct a matched sample in which the matched exposed and matched control groups are similar in key observed characteristics.

Although traditional matching techniques such as propensity score matching do not guarantee covariate balance (King and Nielsen, 2019), we rely on cardinality matching where the researcher defines the tolerances for imbalances in advance and then identifies the largest matched sample that meets those tolerances (Zubizarreta et al., 2014; Visconti and Zubizarreta, 2018).[5]

We define standardized differences between the matched exposed and control groups to be no greater than 0.2 standard deviations for all covariates in our study, a threshold commonly used in the literature to illustrate covariate balance (Silber et al., 2013). As a result, our

[4]We use the same 92 municipalities included in the panel survey to be able to compare between analyses.

[5]Unfortunately, the unmatched sample is too small and the groups too different to include more constraints such as constructing a representative matched sample (Bennett et al., 2019; Kuffuor et al., 2022). However, cardinality matching is particularly good at addressing problems of limited overlap in small samples (Visconti and Zubizarreta, 2018).

exposed and control groups will not differ on more than a fifth of a standard deviation unit. We use a mean balance constraint for all the pretreatment covariates,[6] and municipalities as the unit of analysis.

Regarding pretreatment covariates, we use the vote share of the center-right and center-left candidates in the 2013 presidential election (the two candidates who made it into the second round), income index in 2003, health index in 2003, education index in 2003, human development index (HDI) in 2003, and population in 2002.[7]

We acknowledge that matching is not an identification strategy in itself (Sekhon, 2009; Keele, 2015). However, this design allows us to implement a sensitivity analysis afterward to assess whether the findings are robust to hidden biases of different magnitudes (Rosenbaum, 2010). We believe that this method generates more robust results than relying on techniques that also adjust on observables but do not check for sensitivity to unobservables.

Table 1 compares the averages for all covariates between the exposed and control groups before matching. It shows how both groups present important differences regarding their observed characteristics (i.e., all of the standardized differences are greater than 0.2 standard deviation units).[8]

Table 1: Average values of covariates before matching

Covariates	Control group	Exposed group	Stan. Diff.
Center-right vote share 2013	0.26	0.22	0.53
Center-left vote share 2013	0.44	0.55	1.31
Education 2003	0.77	0.70	1.27
Health 2003	0.79	0.74	0.77
Income 2003	0.69	0.60	1.03
HDI 2003	0.75	0.68	1.17
Population 2002	140,776	68,780	0.78
Observations	61	29	

[6] All of these covariates are continuous, ordinal, or binary, so the mean balance constraint is a meaningful requirement, which would not be the case if we included nominal covariates.

[7] We use official electoral results for the vote share, census data for population, and UNDP data for income, health, education, and the human development index. All covariates are pretreatment since the exposure indicator is constructed using immigration data between 2014 and 2017.

[8] Two municipalities were removed from the control group for lack of pretreatment covariates.

Table 2 illustrates what happens after implementing cardinality matching to achieve covariate balance. Now, the matched exposed and the matched control have similar averages for the pretreatment covariates (i.e., all the standardized differences between these three groups are lower than 0.2 standard deviation units).

Table 2: Average values of covariates after matching

Covariates	Matched control	Matched exposed	Stan. Diff.
Center-right vote share 2013	0.21	0.22	0.16
Center-left vote share 2013	0.53	0.54	0.18
Education 2003	0.72	0.71	0.19
Health 2003	0.76	0.75	0.17
Income 2003	0.62	0.61	0.15
HDI 2003	0.70	0.69	0.20
Population 2002	89,932	73,322	0.18
Observations	25	25	

Finally, to assess the impact of an immigration shock, we use a one-sided permutational t-test in matched pairs that incorporates a sensitivity analysis to hidden biases (Rosenbaum, 2015). The outcome of interest is the vote share of the candidate representing the far-right party in the first round of the 2021 election. We find that municipalities exposed to immigration shocks had, on average, a 4.8 percentage point higher vote share for the far-right Republican candidate in the first round of the 2021 presidential election (Table 3). As a reference, previous research indicates that the 2010 earthquake in Chile (i.e., the sixth-largest earthquake ever recorded) affected the incumbent's vote share by 1.5 percentage points (Visconti and Zubizarreta, 2018). Therefore, exposure to an immigration shock has an impact three times greater than exposure to one of the most devastating disasters in Chile's history.

For the sensitivity analysis, the parameter Γ represents the odds of differential assignment to the immigration shock due to an unobserved factor that we call u. A $\Gamma = 1.00$ means that two municipalities with the same observed characteristics have the same probability of being exposed to an immigration shock (i.e., there are no hidden biases). A $\Gamma = 1.42$ means

that two municipalities with the same observed characteristics have different probabilities of being exposed to an immigration shock; one is 1.42 times more likely than the other to be exposed due to the existence of hidden biases. Therefore, since the p-values are still significant for a $\Gamma = 1.42$, we have evidence that our results are robust to medium-sized hidden biases explained by failing to adjust for some unobserved covariate u.[9]

Table 3: Effect of immigration shocks on the far-right vote share in 2021

Point estimate	0.048
p-value (Γ=1.00)	0.010
p-value (Γ=1.42)	0.049

The far-right Republican Party in Chile put forward a radical anti-immigration and nationalistic agenda in the 2021 presidential election (Díaz et al., 2023). Therefore, the results depicting an increase in electoral support for this party in areas that experienced an immigration shock can be interpreted as suggestive evidence of the existence of exclusionary (rather than benign) nationalism. These results show that demographic shocks can reshape political preferences in ways that pave the ground for far-right mobilization.

[9]The results stop being significant at the 0.05 level for a $\Gamma = 1.42$.

7 Exploring Mechanisms

Why does exposure to migration increase national pride and national identity? While our main results establish an association between immigration shocks and rising nationalism, the underlying mechanisms remain difficult to identify conclusively. In this section, we present suggestive evidence, drawn from surveys, interviews, media reports, and secondary data sources, to explore (1) the main argument presented in the theoretical section: exclusionary nationalism, which reflects an identitarian backlash against perceived outsiders; but also (2) an alternative explanation, benign nationalism or patriotism, which entails inclusive forms of national attachment. Our goal is not to formally adjudicate between these mechanisms but rather to assess which interpretation aligns more closely with observed social and political patterns in Chile.

A first and well-established mechanism is what scholars describe as exclusionary nationalism—a defensive and often hostile response to the presence of out-groups. According to social psychology, migration can activate national sentiments by encouraging individuals to classify others into social categories (Tajfel and Turner, 1982), particularly in-groups and out-groups (Dunne, 2018). Group membership, in turn, often leads individuals to favor their own group and devalue others (Druckman, 1994, p.48). This dynamic is especially pronounced when the out-group is perceived as threatening or competitive (Piazza, 2015). In such contexts, in-groups may engage in hierarchy-enhancing behavior to protect their social standing and identity (Craig and Phillips, 2023).

In the context of migration, native-born citizens may feel compelled to reaffirm and intensify their national identity when confronted with demographic change. This process fuels "us versus them" thinking and can result in heightened prejudice, discriminatory behavior, and political backlash against newcomers.

An alternative mechanism is that the rise in national pride and identity reflects a more positive and inclusive form of national attachment. Concepts such as patriotism (Feshbach,

1987) and benign nationalism (Fine, 1999) describe identification with the nation that is grounded in civic responsibility, affection for national institutions, and pride in democratic values (Zhai and Yan, 2022). These sentiments have been linked to tolerance toward immigrants (de Figueiredo Jr and Elkins, 2003; Green et al., 2011; Jeong, 2013), increased civic participation (Marzęcki, 2020), and openness to cosmopolitan ideals (Audi, 2009). In this view, increased national pride does not necessarily entail hostility to outsiders and may instead reflect a desire to defend an inclusive national project.

To assess which of these mechanisms better characterizes the Chilean case, we draw on several sources of qualitative and quantitative data. Taken together, these sources suggest that the rise in national identity and pride observed in our main analysis is more consistent with exclusionary nationalism than with benign patriotism.

Survey data from 2018 reveal that over 50% of migrants in Chile reported discrimination by native-born citizens across various domains, including employment, housing, public transport, and healthcare (CENEM, 2018). These findings are echoed in qualitative interviews with migrants, who describe frequent and overt differential treatment—such as Chileans receiving public services before migrants, regardless of wait times (Rojas Pedemonte et al., 2015).

Media coverage further highlights the challenges of integration and rising anti-migrant sentiment. In 2022, protesters in northern Chile organized large anti-immigration demonstrations, some of which involved violent attacks on migrants and the destruction of their belongings. These incidents prompted formal condemnation by the United Nations, which characterized the events as a threat to basic human rights.[10] Migrants themselves have also protested to demand better labor conditions, protection from abuse, and an end to racial discrimination.[11] Testimonies collected by the *New York Times* during the 2021 Haitian migrant crisis underscore this hostility: "They tell us to go back home, that we are scum."[12]

[10] *Voz de America*, "The UN expresses concern about violence against Venezuelans in Chile," February 2, 2022.
[11] *El Mostrador*, "Immigrants march against labor abuse and discrimination," February 18, 2018.
[12] *New York Times*, "Why Haitians in Chile keep heading north to the U.S.," September 27, 2021.

Figure 3: Anti-migrant protests and violence in Chile. Top: sign translates as "Chile for Chileans: No more unwanted immigrants" (photo by Martin Bernetti, AFP). Bottom: protesters destroying property belonging to Venezuelan families in a homeless camp (photo by Fernando Muñoz, AFP).

Additional evidence in Appendix H strengthens this interpretation. Using administrative data, we construct a proxy for hate crimes—defined as criminal acts motivated by the victim's perceived ethnicity or national origin (Alrababah et al., 2019). We find that areas more exposed to immigration experienced increases in such crimes. Appendix I complements this analysis by examining geo-located tweets from 2016–2018. Sentiment analysis of these posts reveals higher levels of anti-migrant rhetoric while the rates of migration increases. While these patterns are not causal, they align with prior research showing that negative national discourse around immigration can foster ethnic resentment, social exclusion, and

even violence against minorities (Igarashi, 2021; Dipoppa et al., 2023).

As a second alternative mechanism, Appendix A considers whether nationalism was shaped by elite cues. We find this unlikely, as the trends we document began before the emergence of the far-right Republican Party in 2019 and its adoption of an anti-immigration agenda.

In sum, although it is theoretically possible that immigration could foster benign forms of nationalism, our triangulation of secondary sources suggests that the post-shock increase in national pride and identity in Chile was more likely driven by exclusionary reactions to demographic change. Rising discrimination, hostile discourse, and incidents of violence against migrants point toward a reactive and defensive form of nationalism, rather than an inclusive one.

8 Conclusion

Large and rapid demographic changes caused by immigration can reshape political attitudes in host societies. When migration flows significantly alter the population structure, native-born citizens may experience these changes as symbolic or cultural threats. This perception can activate nationalistic sentiments, which, in turn, may create fertile ground for far-right political movements. In this paper, we argue that rising nationalism is not simply a consequence of elite-driven rhetoric or partisan mobilization, but can emerge as a bottom-up reaction to immigration—preceding and potentially enabling the success of exclusionary political actors.

Our analysis focuses on Chile, a country that experienced a sudden and uneven immigration shock in the mid-2010s. By combining rich administrative data on visa applications with a three-wave panel survey, we examine how exposure to local demographic change affects identity-based nationalistic attitudes. Leveraging a dynamic difference-in-differences design, we find that individuals living in areas with large migration inflows become more likely to

report feelings of national pride and identification with Chile, core indicators of nationalism.

To explore the nature of this nationalism, we draw on supplementary evidence from surveys, interviews, media reports, social media, and administrative crime records. This triangulation suggests that the nationalism triggered by immigration in Chile is largely exclusionary in character. Reports of discrimination, public protests against migrants, increases in hate-motivated incidents, and the rise of anti-migrant rhetoric all point toward a reactionary form of identity politics rooted in a desire to preserve in-group status and cohesion.

Additionally, we also document that municipalities more heavily affected by immigration were more likely to support the far-right Republican Party when it entered the electoral arena for the first time in the 2021 presidential election. These results suggest that demographic shocks can produce a shift in political attitudes that not only predates the emergence of exclusionary parties but also facilitates their electoral appeal. In this sense, immigration-induced nationalism acts as a precursor to—and enabler of—far-right political mobilization.

These findings contribute to a growing literature on the political consequences of migration, particularly in the Global South. While most scholarship on nationalism and radical right politics has focused on Europe and the United States, our study highlights how similar identity-based dynamics unfold in Latin America, where South–South migration is reshaping societies and political coalitions. As far-right parties gain ground across the globe, understanding the conditions under which exclusionary nationalism emerges becomes critical for explaining challenges to democratic inclusion and pluralism.

In sum, this paper shows that immigration can activate nationalistic identities in ways that have downstream effects on political behavior and party support. These dynamics are not unique to Chile: they reflect a broader pattern in which demographic change, identity-based reactions, and political realignment converge to shape the future of democratic politics.

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