**Migration and Regime Change**

*Outflows Follow Democratic Decline; Inflows—Amplified by the Syrian Shock—Weaken Liberal-Democratic Institutions*

INCOMPLETE

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*September 2025*

## Abstract

This paper analyzes the two-way relationship between international migration and political regime change, highlighting a feedback loop in which political shifts shape migration flows, while migration itself reshapes political trajectories. Relying on a Difference-in-Differences (DiD) framework and a dataset combining migration flows, regime quality indicators (CHRI), and measures of international integration, we identify three central results.

First, substantial immigration into politically fragile democracies undermines institutional quality. The 2015 Syrian shock provides a particularly valuable exogenous case: a sudden, large-scale refugee inflow that bypassed domestic policy controls and provoked sharp political responses, allowing for clearer identification of immigration's institutional effects. Second, democratic decline increases emigration, draining human capital and further weakening prospects for democratic recovery. Third, international integration—most notably through EU accession—conditions these dynamics, amplifying or dampening the outflow response to political change.

Taken together, these findings show that migration is not merely a symptom of political instability but also a driver of institutional transformation, simultaneously reinforcing and accelerating regime shifts toward illiberalism.

## Introduction

Migration is often portrayed as two sides of the same coin—exit through emigration or entry through immigration—but this symmetry is misleading. Our evidence shows a sharp asymmetry: immigration can erode institutional quality and precipitate regime change, while emigration typically follows such institutional decline. Emigration patterns tend to be predictable, shaped by policy and economic conditions, whereas asylum seeking is more erratic, driven by crises.

On the inflow side, the "Syrian shock" was a rare exogenous surge that bypassed normal policy channels. Its abrupt scale and timing reshaped political dynamics across Europe,

creating a natural experiment for causal identification.[1] Treating inflows and outflows as symmetric obscures key differences in costs, benefits, labor market effects, and policy asymmetries. Our findings highlight this divergence: immigration often initiates institutional erosion, whereas emigration is its consequence.

In recent years, many countries have drifted toward illiberal democracy, marked by the weakening of liberal institutions and the erosion of democratic norms. These shifts are not merely political; they carry deep economic consequences, altering policy priorities and redistributing state resources.

Immigration is a central driver of this process, particularly during surges in cross-border flows. The most striking example in recent decades was the **Syrian shock**. Beginning in 2011, Syria's civil war triggered one of the largest refugee movements since World War II. Millions of Syrians were displaced, with neighboring countries absorbing the initial burden, and by 2015, a massive wave of asylum seekers reached Europe.

What made this episode distinctive was its suddenness, scale, and exogeneity. Unlike regular migration, which is shaped by long-term economic incentives and policy design, the Syrian refugee crisis erupted from geopolitical conflict and humanitarian collapse—factors well outside Europe's control. The inflow strained reception systems, overwhelmed asylum procedures, and became a lightning rod in political debates across the continent.

The Syrian shock catalyzed sharp regime shifts, reinforcing illiberal currents already underway. Thus, the Syrian refugee crisis was as an exogenous migration surge that

[1] See Appendix A.

transformed Europe's political landscape and provided a natural experiment for studying the causal impact of immigration on regime change.

.When inflows consist of groups perceived as culturally distinct or economically costly, they amplify public anxieties over identity, jobs, and welfare sustainability (Dustmann, Schönberg, and Stuhler 2019; Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller 2017). These pressures accelerate institutional erosion and fuel regime change.

Populist and far-right parties have proven particularly adept at mobilizing the anxieties unleashed by large migration shocks.[2] The 2015 Syrian refugee crisis provided fertile ground for such mobilization, transforming immigration from a policy challenge into a defining political fault line. In Germany, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) capitalized on anti-immigration sentiment to reinvent itself from a fringe movement into a major parliamentary force (Dinas, Kauffmann, and Hangartner 2019). In France, the Rassemblement National (formerly Front National) has long sustained electoral strength, particularly in regions with high immigrant concentrations, demonstrating the enduring resonance of anti-immigrant platforms (Edo, Giesing, Öztunc, and Poutvaara 2019).

These cases illustrate how migration shocks operate as more than cultural flashpoints: they become **strategic political resources** for actors seeking to delegitimize liberal institutions and advance authoritarian agendas. Populist leaders frame immigration as evidence of elite failure, justify centralizing power in the name of "protecting the nation," and erode judicial and parliamentary checks. In this way, inflows such as the Syrian shock accelerate not only

[2] See Appendix B.

the rise of populism but also the structural transformation of democratic regimes toward illiberalism.

A branch of the literature on the impact of regime changes on economic growth (Acemoglu and Robinson (2019)) contend that a judicial overhaul that erodes the liberal legal system undermines the protection of investors' rights and fosters corruption. The latter encourages businesses to divert economic resources to 'integrate' into the corrupt system, instead of directing their efforts to productive activities. Eichengreen (2023) indicates that democratization and economic growth are positively correlated. Evidently, correlation does not necessarily indicate the existence of causality or its direction3 (Eichengreen, 2023). observes that the relationship between the various measures of democracy and economic growth are ambiguous. In contrast, the relationship between measures of judicial independence and economic growth is clearer. His survey of literature finds a strong, positive, and highly significant effect of de facto judicial independence on economic growth, both when levels of growth and judicial independence are considered, and when the effects of changes in the level of judicial independence are the focus.4

[3] Acemoglu and Robinson (2019) are aware of this 'endogeneity problem' and employ a dynamic panel strategy control for country fixed effects and the time variety of patterns of GDP, which would otherwise confound the effect of democracy on growth. (Boese-Schlosser & Markus, 2025) examine the economic consequences of democratic breakdown and pinpoint which specific institutions are responsible for the decline in liberal democracy. By disaggregating broad democracy indices into their core institutional components, they identify the erosion of free and fair elections as the primary driver of erosion of liberal democracies.

[4] See also Razin (2024). For a broader discussion on the economic consequences of the transition to il-liberal democracies.

Traditional models of international migration, such as neoclassical economics (Harris and Todaro, (1970)) and labor migration (Stark and Bloom, (1985)), typically emphasize wage differentials, employment prospects, and household risk diversification strategies. Welfare-state impact on the skilled-unskilled migration composition are explored by Loungani and Razin (2001) and Razin and Wahba (2015). More recent political economy models incorporate institutional factors, showing that regime type—liberal democracy versus illiberal democracy—can significantly influence both emigration and immigration flows (Hatton and Williamson, (2002); Geddes, (2015)). Liberal democracies tend to foster higher levels of civil liberties, personal security, and institutional predictability, which attract immigrants and reduce incentives for native-born emigration. Conversely, illiberal regimes may increase the incentives for emigration by constraining freedoms and limiting economic opportunities, even when such regimes pursue nationalist and anti-immigrant policies domestically (Docquir, Lohenst and Marfouk (2007).

A growing recent strand of the literature focuses on how transitions from liberal to illiberal regimes affect migration. de Haas et al. (2019) argue that democratization initially leads to increased emigration, as political liberalization loosens mobility restrictions and broadens individual aspirations. However, long-term democratic consolidation tends to reduce emigration through improved governance and economic development.

On the reverse, transitions toward illiberalism—often accompanied by democratic backsliding, repression, and economic volatility—can catalyze large-scale emigration, particularly among skilled and educated workers (the so-called “brain drain”) (Boeri, Brücker, Docquier and Rapoport, (2012)). The erosion of democratic norms and legal

protections undermines expectations of long-term security, often leading to an anticipatory increase in emigration even before institutional changes are formally enacted (Giuliano and Spilimbergo, (2009)).

Economic integration—through trade, investment, and capital flows—has complex effects on both migration and regime stability. According to Rodrik, (1998)), globalization can create tensions between national sovereignty, democracy, and economic integration. Illiberal regimes may attempt to maintain economic integration while centralizing political control, creating a hybrid regime structure that attracts or deters migrants in non-linear ways.

Empirical studies suggest that economic openness can exacerbate the "authoritarian advantage" by delinking regime legitimacy from domestic political accountability (Guriev and Treisman, (2022). These regimes often pursue selective migration policies, favoring highly skilled workers while excluding refugees or low-skilled labor. Conversely, liberal democracies may be more constrained by public opinion and legal norms, resulting in more inclusive but politically contested migration policies (Facchini and Mayda, 2008).

The literature also explores feedback loops whereby migration influences regime outcomes. Remittances and diaspora networks may support democratization by increasing the capacity of civil society or fostering norm diffusion (Pfutze, 2012). However, large-scale emigration can also weaken the domestic opposition by externalizing dissent, enabling illiberal leaders to consolidate power (Miller and Ritter, 2014). Moreover, the emigration of politically active or economically productive individuals can reduce the internal pressure for reform.

One promising avenue is the use of natural experiments—such as EU enlargement, sudden coups, or sanctions-induced economic shocks—to isolate the impact of regime change on migration. There is also a growing need to understand the role of information flows (via social media and diaspora networks) in shaping perceptions of regime quality and migration options.

Empirical research on this topic increasingly employs causal inference methods such as difference-in-differences (DiD), synthetic control methods, and instrumental variables. For instance, recent studies have used the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) index to quantify regime changes and link them to migration flows from administrative or survey data (e.g., OECD, Gallup).

Our study examines the interactions between regime changes—such as transitions to illiberal democracies—and access to the European Union, and their effects on immigration and emigration in a cross-country panel. We employ a standard Difference-in-Differences (DiD) approach, leveraging both time-series and cross-national variation in regime shifts and migration flows.

## 1. A Measure of Institutional Integrity

There is increasing concern that large-scale migration may exert stress on the institutional integrity of recipient countries, particularly when governance structures are fragile or under strain. Our analysis draws on the Civil and Human Rights Integrity (CHRI) Index to assess the robustness of civil rights protections across a range of indicators:

- The presence and enforcement of civil rights laws;

- The extent of freedom of speech and freedom of movement;
- The degree of religious freedom and the prevalence of religious extremism;
- The existence of independent media and the autonomy of journalists to investigate and publish critiques of those in power;
- The availability of legal recourse for rights violations;
- The frequency and nature of arbitrary or state-sponsored arrests.

We hypothesize that when migration inflows are perceived (rightly or wrongly) as undermining cultural cohesion or economic stability, illiberal political actors may exploit such tensions to justify repressive policies. This in turn, can erode institutional checks and balances, reduce media freedom, and incentivize the centralization of power under populist or authoritarian leadership. The DiD estimates show a statistically significant correlation between sudden increases in immigration and subsequent declines in CHRI scores, particularly in countries lacking robust civic institutions at the outset.

On the flip side, transitions from liberal to illiberal regimes often prompt increased emigration. Citizens confronted with growing repression, economic uncertainty, or political violence are more likely to seek opportunities abroad. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among skilled individuals and youth cohorts, whose exit represents a long-term drain on human capital and democratic potential.

## 2. Data Sources

In this study, we combine a range of internationally recognized datasets to examine the relationships between international migration and freedom and rule of law indexes.

The migration data is obtained from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which offers detailed of emigration, immigration and foreign-born population in for the organization's countries. These statistics cover a wide time span (typically from 1995 onward), allowing us to trace medium-term trends and compare countries with different economic and institutional time profiles.

Corresponding data for macroeconomic indicators are obtained from World Bank Development Indicators (WDI) database.

For measures of institutional and social stability, we use the Fragile States Index (FSI) published by The Fund for Peace. The FSI combines 12 political, economic, and social indicators. Integrating this measure allows us to consider how institutional vulnerability interacts with migration and capital flows, particularly in economies experiencing significant structural or political challenges. The Human Rights and Rule of Law Indicator (CHRI) considers the relationship between the state and its population insofar as fundamental human rights are protected and freedoms are observed and respected. The Indicator looks at whether there is widespread abuse of legal, political and social rights, including those of individuals, groups and institutions (e.g. harassment of the press, politicization of the judiciary, internal use of military for political P3 ends, repression of political opponents). The Indicator also considers outbreaks of politically inspired (as opposed to criminal) violence perpetrated against civilians. It also looks at factors such as denial of due process consistent with international norms and practices for political prisoners or dissidents, and whether there is current or emerging authoritarian, dictatorial or military rule in which constitutional and democratic institutions and processes are suspended or manipulated.

## 4. Findings

This section presents the main findings, linking migration dynamics to the quality of political institutions. First, the evidence shows that immigration into fragile democracies is not neutral: rising inflows are systematically associated with institutional weakening, consistent with the view that migration pressures can destabilize already vulnerable governance structures. Second, the 2015 Syrian shock stands out as an exogenous and amplifying event. Its sudden scale and timing bypassed domestic policy controls and ignited intense political reactions across Europe, making it a natural test case for understanding how unexpected inflows accelerate institutional erosion. Third, the results on regime change and emigration highlight a complementary mechanism: when institutions weaken and democracies drift toward illiberalism, emigration increases. This outflow not only reflects a loss of confidence in governance but also drains human capital, further constraining the prospects for democratic recovery. Together, these findings underscore the dual role of migration—as both an external shock and an endogenous response—in shaping the trajectory of regime change.

### I. Immigration and the Quality of Legal Governance

This section presents the empirical link between immigration and institutional quality, focusing on measures of legal governance as captured by the **CHRI index**. Recall that higher CHRI values indicate weaker legal institutions and enforcement, reflecting deterioration in the rule of law. The central question is whether immigration inflows,

relative to the labor force, are systematically associated with changes in institutional quality.

**Table I.1** reports estimates for EU countries over the period 2006–2023.

The results show a strong and statistically significant relationship between immigration intensity and weaker legal governance. The estimated coefficient (0.61, significant at the 0.001 level) suggests that increases in immigration relative to the labor force are robustly associated with higher CHRI values, implying institutional erosion. With an adjusted R2R^2R2 of 0.906, the model explains most of the observed variation, lending confidence to the result.

**Table I.2** extends the analysis to a broader set of OECD countries, testing whether the EU-specific finding generalizes across advanced economies. By incorporating both EU and non-EU members, this specification captures variation in institutional resilience and migration policies, allowing us to assess whether the observed pattern is unique to the European Union or reflects a more general dynamic.

Together, these tables provide the first systematic evidence that immigration inflows are not neutral with respect to institutional quality. Instead, they appear to correlate with measurable weakening in legal governance, a finding consistent with our broader argument that migration pressures can catalyze regime change toward illiberalism.

**Table I.1: Legal Governance and Immigration (EU countries)**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|

| | |
|---|---|
| Immigration to Labor ratio | 0.61 *** |
| | (0.13) |
| Observations | 144 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.923 / 0.906 |

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

$$CHRI_j = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Log\left(\frac{Migration\ inflow_j}{Labor\ Force_j}\right) + \alpha_2 Country_j + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: OECD, Fund for Peace
Notes: 2006-2023, sample of countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom.
An increase in the CHRI measures of legal governance is indicative of a deterioration in the rule of law, with higher CHRI values corresponding to weaker institutional and legal enforcement.

**Table I.2: Legal Governance and Immigration (OECD countries)**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| Immigration to Labor ratio | 0.27 * |
| | (0.12) |
| Observations | 224 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.916 / 0.902 |

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

$$CHRI_j = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Log\left(\frac{Migration\ inflow_j}{Labor\ Force_j}\right) + \alpha_2 Country_j + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: OECD, Fund for Peace
Notes: 2006-2023, sample of countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United kingdom and United States.

An increase in the CHRI measures of legal governance is indicative of a deterioration in the rule of law, with higher CHRI values corresponding to weaker institutional and legal enforcement.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

The empirical evidence presented in Tables I.1 and I.2 supports the hypothesis that immigration may contribute to institutional weakening in host countries. Specifically, we find that higher CHRI values—signifying weaker rule of law—are positively and significantly associated with increases in the immigration-to-labor force ratio. This relationship is particularly robust among EU countries in the sample. These results suggest that rising immigration flows can play a role in facilitating transitions toward weaker legal and institutional frameworks, especially in advanced economies.

## II. Internal Legal Governance and External Migration Pressures

**Table II.1: Legal Governance and External Emigration Pressures (OECD countries)**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| Emigration in other countries | -7.09 *** <br> (1.51) |
| Observations | 143 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.923 / 0.906 |

** p<0.05  ** p<0.01  *** p<0.001*

$$CHRI_j = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Log\left(\frac{Migration\ outflow_{-j}}{Labor\ Force_j}\right) + \alpha_2 Country_j + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: OECD, Fund for Peace
Notes: 2006-2023, sample of countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United kingdom and United States.
An increase in the CHRI measures of legal governance is indicative of a deterioration in the rule of law, with higher CHRI values corresponding to weaker institutional and legal enforcement.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

Tables II.1 and II.2 reveal a significant negative relationship between emigration from other countries and the CHRI measure of domestic legal governance. Specifically, higher levels of emigration originating in other countries are associated with lower CHRI values, indicating an improvement in the strength of domestic legal and institutional frameworks. The negative and statistically significant coefficient on other countries' emigration may reflect the effects of a global economic shock that disproportionately impacts highly liberal democracies, thereby increasing global emigration flows. In response, receiving countries may reinforce institutional quality—tightening legal governance—to manage the associated pressures and maintain stability.

Table II.2: Governance and External Emigration Pressures (EU countries)

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| Emigration in other countries | -8.25 *** <br> (1.57) |
| Observations | 131 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.925 / 0.908 |

** p<0.05  ** p<0.01  *** p<0.001*

$$CHRI_j = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Log\left(\frac{Migration\ outflow_{-j}}{Labor\ Force_j}\right) + \alpha_2 Country_j + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

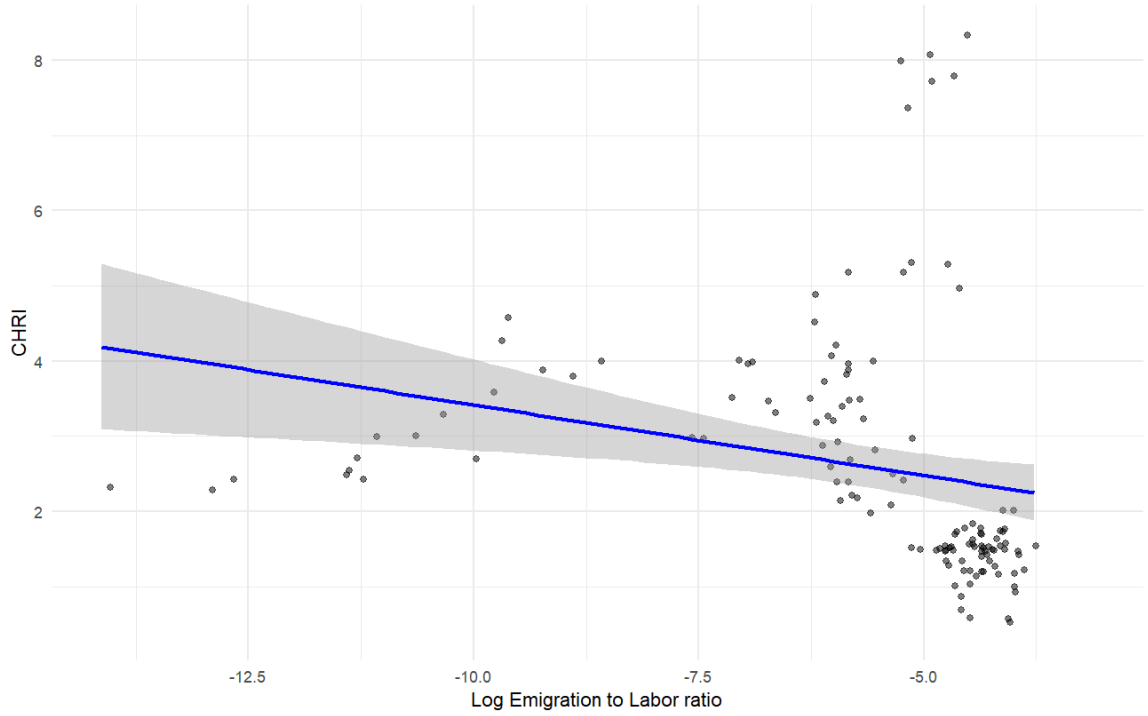
Source: OECD, Fund for Peace

Notes: 2006-2023, sample of countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom.

An increase in the CHRI measures of legal governance is indicative of a deterioration in the rule of law, with higher CHRI values corresponding to weaker institutional and legal enforcement.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

Figure4: Governance and External Emigration Pressures (EU countries)




Tables II.1 and II.2 reveal a significant negative relationship between emigration from other countries and the CHRI measure of domestic legal governance. Specifically, higher levels of emigration originating in other countries are associated with lower CHRI values, indicating an improvement in the strength of domestic legal and institutional frameworks. The negative and statistically significant coefficient on other countries' emigration may reflect the effects of a global economic shock that disproportionately impacts highly liberal democracies, thereby increasing global emigration flows. In response, receiving countries may reinforce institutional quality—tightening legal governance—to manage the associated pressures and maintain stability.

## III. Illiberal Regime shifts and the III. Illiberal Regime Shifts and the Rise of Emigration

This section examines how transitions from liberal to illiberal regimes affect outward migration. The analysis relies on Difference-in-Differences (DiD) estimations that compare emigration behavior before and after regime change.

Table III.1a presents results for a broad sample of OECD countries between 1995 and 2023. The coefficient on the post-transition dummy (POST1) is positive and statistically significant, indicating that emigration rises following a liberal-to-illiberal regime shift. The corresponding Figure III.1b illustrates this dynamic, showing a clear uptick in emigration flows after regime change.

To probe further, Table III.2a focuses on selected European countries—France, Germany, Hungary, and Poland—where institutional transformations have been especially salient. The results confirm that regime change is strongly associated with rising outmigration, even when using the ratio of outflows to inflows as the dependent variable. This evidence suggests that illiberal transitions both push citizens abroad and reduce the relative attractiveness of immigration, amplifying demographic and economic strains.

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## IV. How International Integration Influences Outmigration

The next set of results examines how international economic integration, particularly through European Union (EU) accession, shapes migration patterns.

Table IV.1a shows that across the OECD sample, accession to the EU (POST2) is followed by higher emigration rates, as captured by the migration outflow–to–labor

force ratio. Figure IV.1b illustrates this pattern visually, with a distinct increase in outflows after countries join the EU.

Table IV.2a narrows the analysis to European countries alone. The results remain robust: EU membership is associated with a significant increase in emigration flows. This finding highlights the role of international integration in facilitating mobility, particularly in periods of political strain. Together, Tables IV.1–IV.2 indicate that EU accession expands the exit option, magnifying the outmigration response to institutional weakening.

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**Table III.1a: Emigration and liberal-Illiberal Regime Transition (OECD countries)**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| Post1 | 0.44 ** <br> (0.16) |
| Observations | 691 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.831 / 0.815 |

** p<0.05  ** p<0.01  *** p<0.001*

$$Log\left(\frac{Migration\ Outflow}{Labor\ Force}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Post_1 + \alpha_2 Country + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: OECD.
Notes: 1995-2023 (when possible), sample of countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United kingdom and United States.
POST1 is a dummy variable that equals 1 for all years following (and including) the year in which a country experiences a regime change from a liberal to an illiberal political system. It takes the value of 1 for countries that undergo such a transition, starting from the year of the change and continuing in all subsequent years. For countries that do not experience a liberal-to-illiberal transition during the sample period, POST1 remains 0 throughout.
In the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) regression, the "treatment" variable is a dummy indicating the year of the regime change.

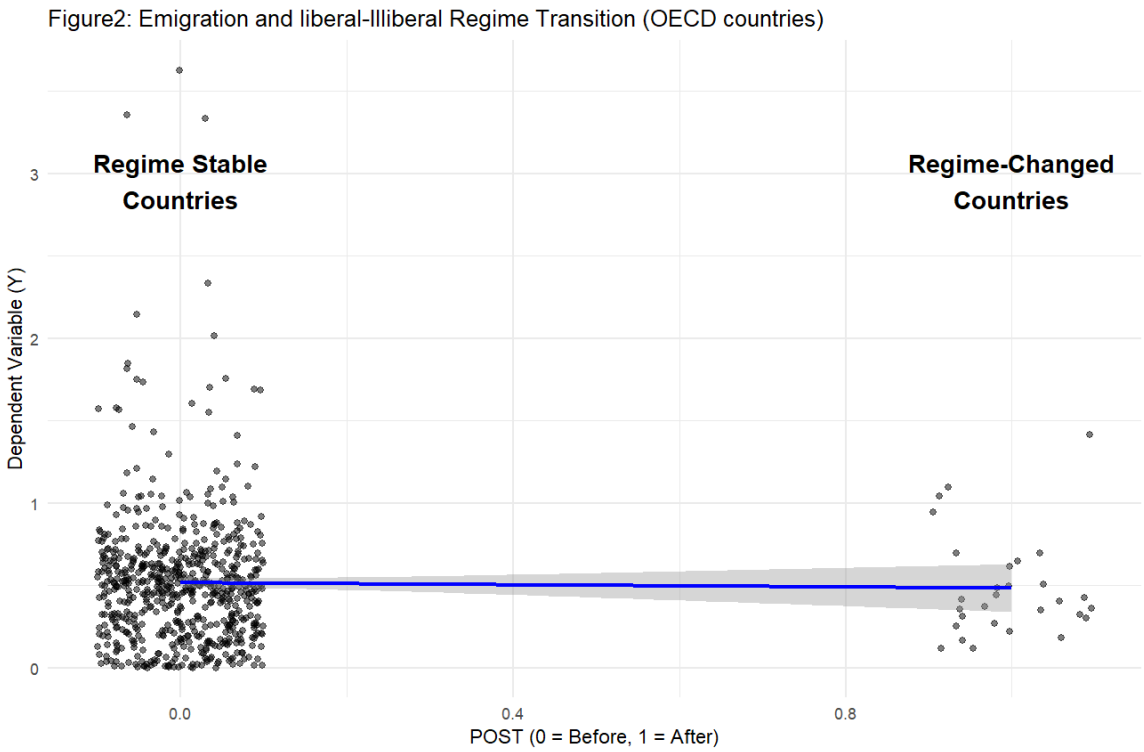



**Figure III.1b: Emigration Before and After Liberal-Illiberal Regime Change**

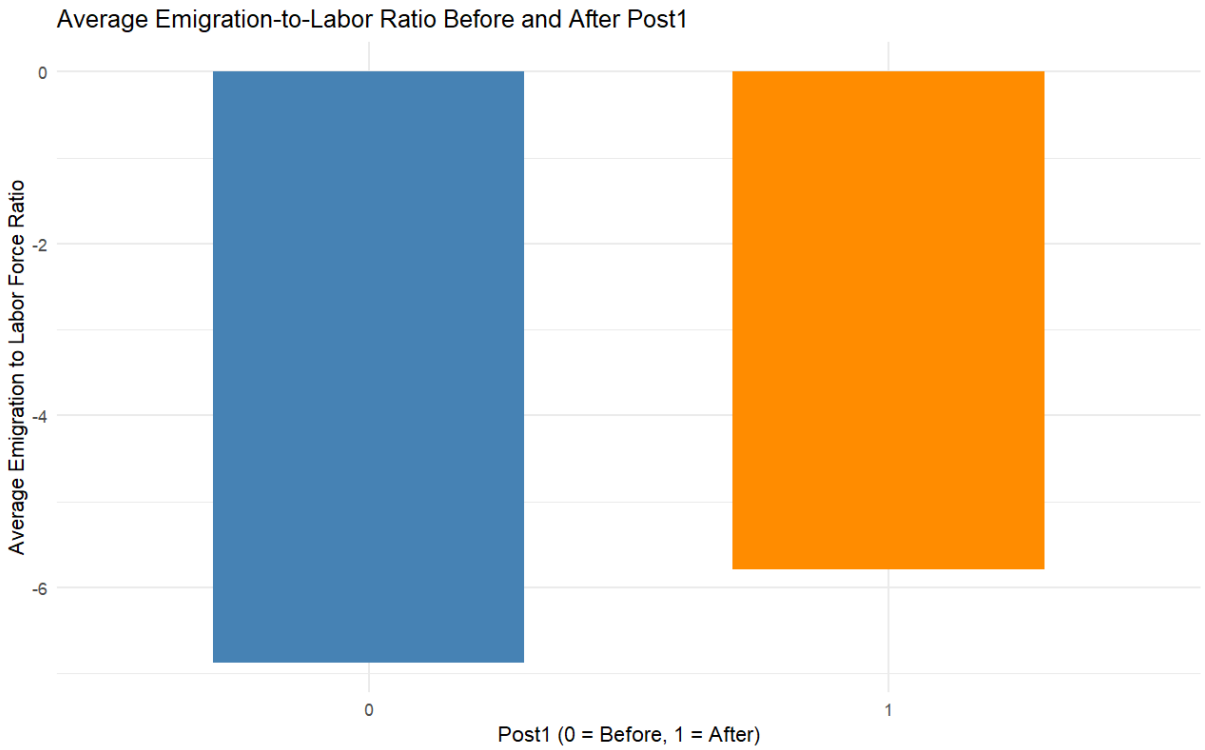


**Table III.2a: Emigration and liberal-Illiberal Regime Transition (Selected European Countries)**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| Post2 | 0.38 ** <br> (0.11) |
| Observations | 80 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.600 / 0.355 |

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

$$\frac{Migration\ Outflow}{Migration\ Inflow} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Post_2 + \alpha_2 Country + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: World Bank.
Notes: 1995-2023 (when possible), sample of countries: France, Germany, Hungary and Poland.
Standard errors are in parentheses.
In the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) regression, the "treatment" variable is a dummy indicating the year of the regime change.

## IV. How International Integration Influences Outmigration

**Table IV.1a: Emigration and Access to European Union (OECD countries)**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| Post2 | 0.75 * <br> (0.33) |
| Observations | 691 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.836 / 0.821 |

** p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001*

$$Log\left(\frac{Migration\ Outflow}{Labor\ Force}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Post_2 + \alpha_2 Country + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: OECD.
Notes: 1995-2023 (when possible), sample of countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, United kingdom and United States.
POST2 is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 starting from the year a country joins the European Union (EU) and for all subsequent years. It captures the post-accession period for EU member states. For countries that never joined the EU during the sample period, POST2 remains 0 throughout. This variable is used to identify the potential effects of EU membership on relevant economic or institutional outcomes.
In the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) regression, the "treatment" variable is a dummy indicating the year of the regime change.

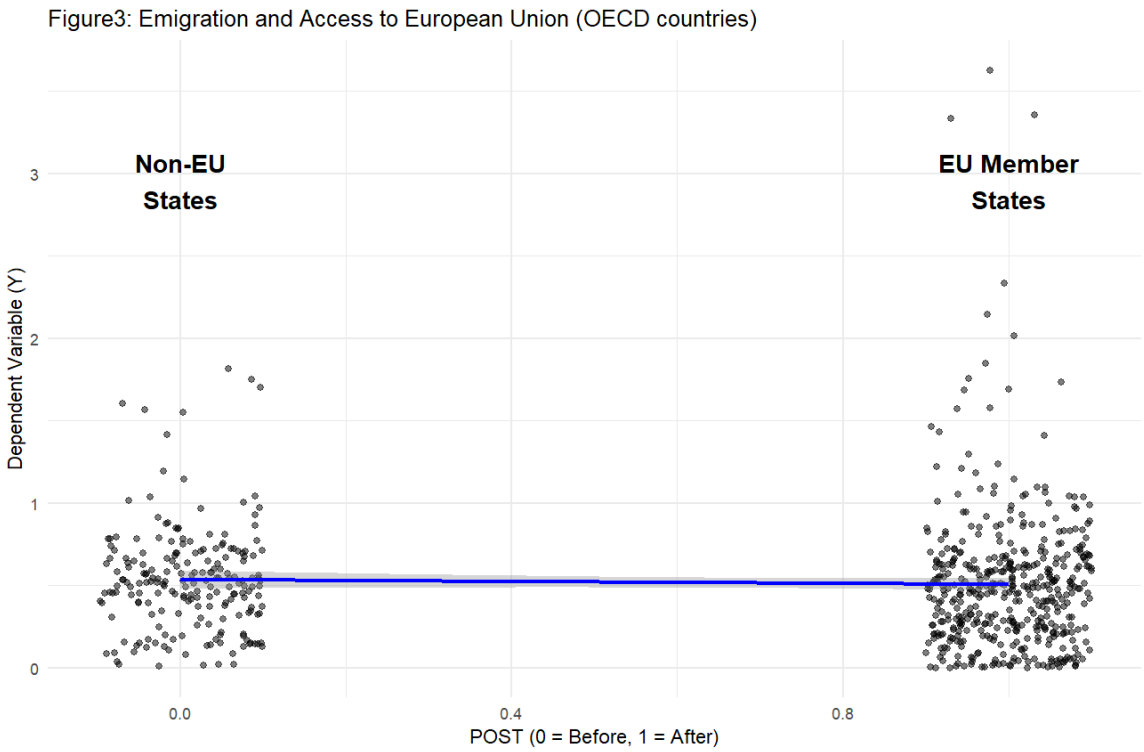



**Figure IV.1b: Emigration Before and after Accession to the European Union**

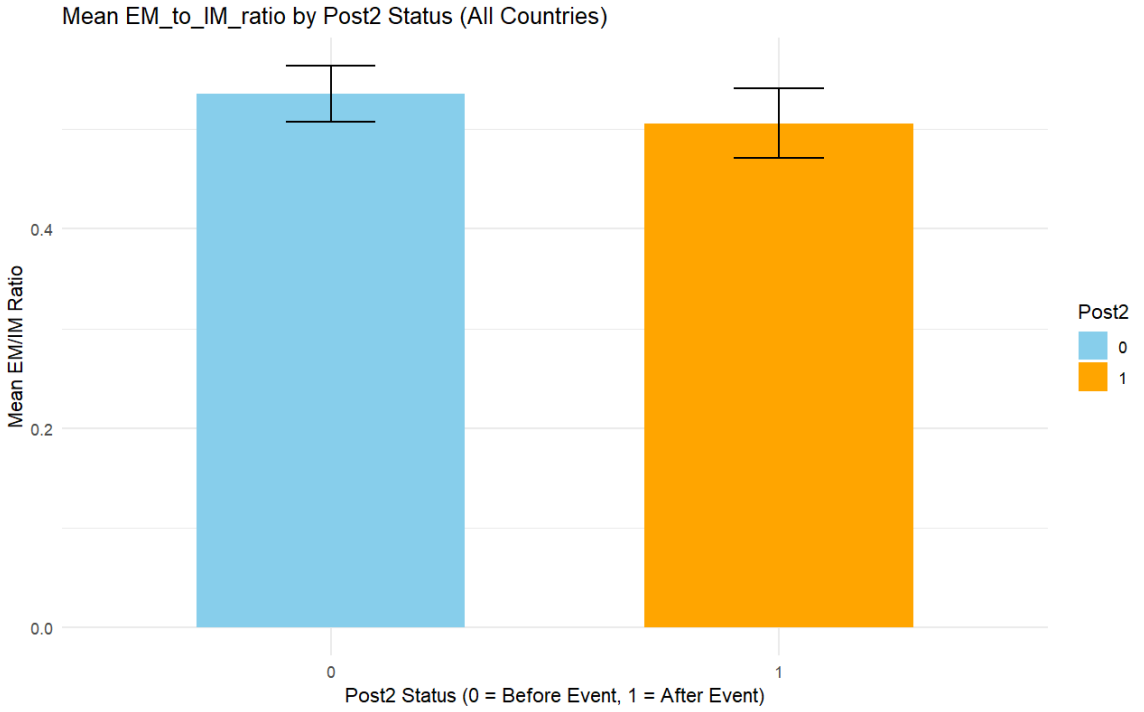



**Table IV.2a: Emigration and International Economic Integration (European countries)**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| **Post2** | **0.74** * |
| | **(0.33)** |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Observations** | **594** |
| **$R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted** | **0.834 / 0.817** |

**** p<0.05  ** p<0.01  *** p<0.001***

$$Log\left(\frac{Migration\ Outflow}{Labor\ Force}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Post_2 + \alpha_2 Country + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: OECD.

Notes: 1995-2023 (when possible), sample of countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom.

POST2 is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 starting from the year a country joins the European Union (EU) and for all subsequent years. It captures the post-accession period for EU member states. For countries that never joined the EU during the sample period, POST2 remains 0 throughout. This variable is used to identify the potential effects of EU membership on relevant economic or institutional outcomes.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

In the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) regression, the "treatment" variable is a dummy indicating the year of the regime change.

Tables IV.1–IV.2 show that accession to the European Union has a positive effect on emigration flows—countries that became EU members exhibit increased emigration from the year of accession onward. The timing of EU accession is captured by the variable POST2, a dummy that takes the value 1 starting in the year a country joins the EU and remains 1 in all subsequent years. For countries that did not join the EU during the sample period, POST2 remains 0 throughout. This variable identifies the potential impact of EU membership on migration and related economic or institutional outcomes.

**Table IV.2b: Emigration Before and after Accession to the European Union**

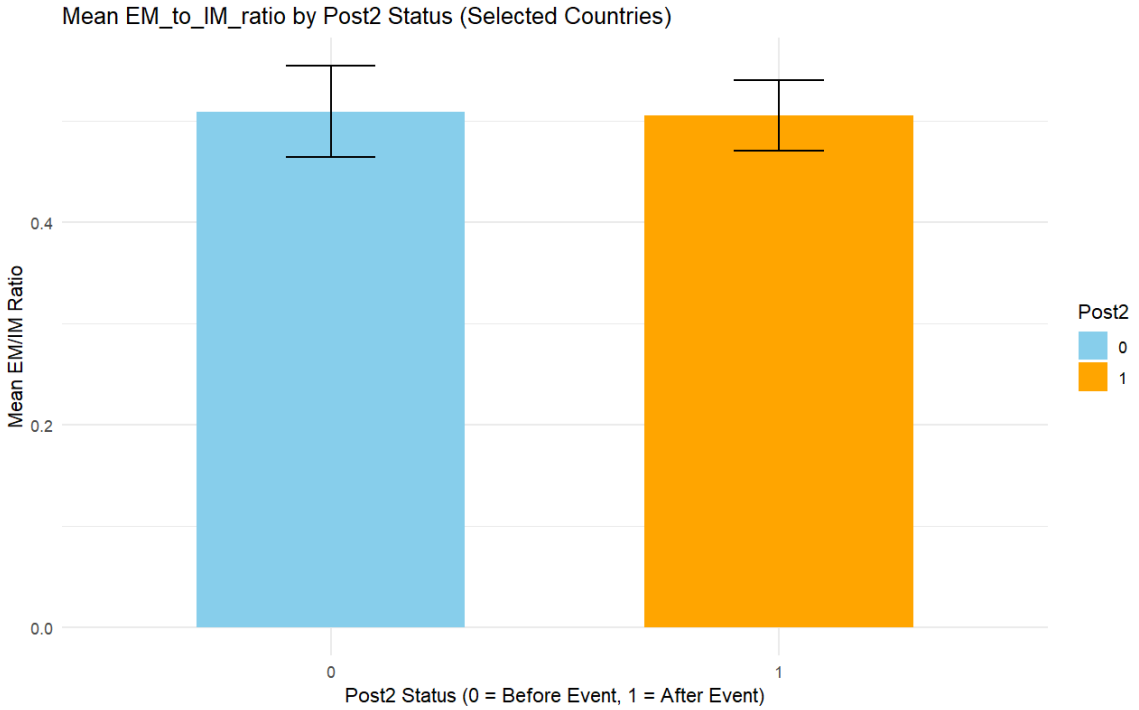



**Table IV.3a: Emigration and International Economic Integration (EU countries)**

**Migration regression**

| *Predictors* | *Estimates* |
|---|---|
| Post2 | 0.76 ** |
| | (0.29) |
| Observations | 184 |
| $R^2$ / $R^2$ adjusted | 0.737 / 0.673 |

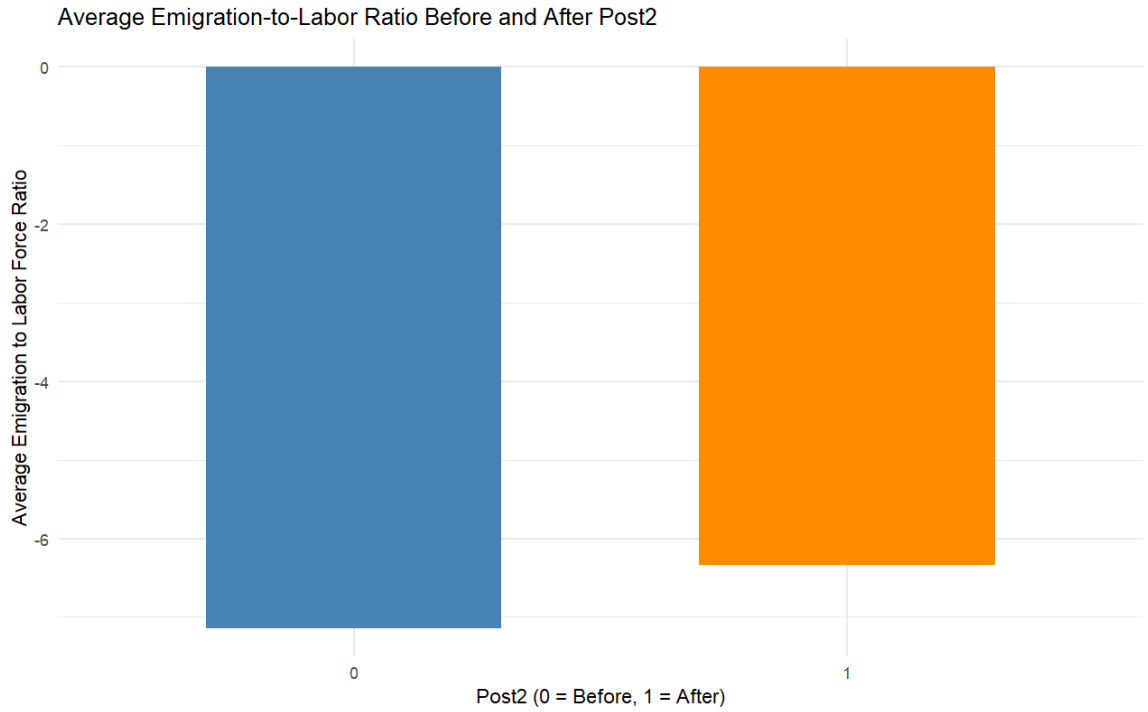
*$p<0.05$ **$p<0.01$ ***$p<0.001$

$$Log\left(\frac{Migration\ Outflow}{Labor\ Force}\right) = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Post_2 + \alpha_2 Country + \alpha_3 Year + u$$

Source: OECD.
Notes: 1995-2023 (when possible), sample of countries: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.
POST2 is a dummy variable that takes the value 1 starting from the year a country joins the European Union (EU) and for all subsequent years. It captures the post-accession period for EU member states. For countries that never joined the EU during the sample period, POST2 remains 0 throughout. This variable is used to identify the potential effects of EU membership on relevant economic or institutional outcomes.

Standard errors are in parentheses.
In the Difference-in-Differences (DiD) regression, the "treatment" variable is a dummy indicating the year of the regime change.

**Table IV.3b: Emigration Before and after Accession to the European Union**




## Conclusion

Although emigration and immigration are often framed as mirror choices—exit versus entry—our evidence reveals a key asymmetry. Immigration can erode institutional quality and precipitate regime change, while emigration typically responds to such institutional decline.

On the **outflow** side, emigration patterns are relatively predictable, shaped by policy frameworks and broader economic conditions. In contrast, asylum seeking tends to be far more erratic, often driven by crises rather than long-term structural factors.

On the **inflow** side, the "Syrian shock" represented a rare exogenous migration surge that bypassed normal policy channels. Its sudden scale and timing triggered significant political shifts across Europe, creating a natural experiment for identifying causal impacts.

By treating the two flows as symmetric, migration research overlooks differences in endogenous policy asymmetries. Our findings show that immigration often initiates institutional erosion, whereas emigration is its consequence.

This study examined the dynamic relationship between migration flows and political regime change, especially the shift from liberal democratic systems to illiberal or hybrid regimes. The findings—based on cross-country panel regressions and Difference-in-Differences analysis—reveal a dual causal mechanism. First, weakening democratic institutions often trigger surges in emigration, as people seek stability, opportunity, and security elsewhere. Second, increased immigration—particularly in advanced economies—can strain institutional capacity, potentially undermining the rule of law and fostering illiberal political shifts.

By employing rule-of-law measures of legal governance and systematically analyzing pre- and post-transition periods, the evidence underscores that migration is not merely a consequence of political change, but also a potential driver of institutional evolution. Notably, EU countries exhibit heightened sensitivity to these dynamics, reflecting their integrated legal and economic structures. A critical yet often overlooked dimension in the nexus between migration and political regimes lies in the interaction between government

spending and immigration policy. The theoretical and empirical contributions of (Razin, Sadka and Swagel, (2002) and Razin and Wahba (2015) shed light on how welfare-state generosity and fiscal policy shape, and are shaped by, patterns of immigration and political support for openness. Their framework highlights a fundamental trade-off in liberal democracies: on one hand, extensive government spending on social transfers—particularly in universal welfare regimes—tends to attract low-skilled migrants seeking economic security. On the other hand, the fiscal burden posed by such migrants, perceived or real, can provoke native voter backlash, especially among the middle class and lower-income groups. This tension often translates into political demands to restrict immigration or reduce welfare generosity, setting the stage for populist, anti-immigrant parties to gain traction. More precisely, this approach models immigration policy as an endogenous outcome of majority voting within a political economy framework. When immigration is unrestricted and skewed toward low-skilled entrants, it can shift the political equilibrium toward more restrictive policies, especially if the welfare state is large. In contrast, skill-based immigration policies—favoring high-skilled entrants who are net contributors to the fiscal balance—tend to generate less resistance and more sustainable political support for openness.

This interaction between immigration and regime shifts is particularly salient during periods of political fragility or institutional stress, such as transitions from liberal to illiberal regimes. In such contexts, the fiscal-immigration nexus can act as a feedback loop: populist leaders capitalize on fears of welfare depletion and cultural erosion to justify both anti-immigrant measures and institutional weakening (e.g., curbing judicial independence

or press freedom). In turn, these policies may reduce migrants' integration and exacerbate social tensions, reinforcing the illiberal trajectory.

The policy implication is clear: migration and government spending cannot be decoupled. Sustainable immigration regimes require careful calibration of fiscal policy—one that balances economic inclusion with political feasibility. Countries that fail to manage this balance may find themselves vulnerable not only to populist backlash but to broader democratic erosion.

The broader implication is that migration and regime change should no longer be treated as isolated phenomena. Instead, they must be understood as mutually reinforcing processes, embedded within global trends of democratic backsliding and economic interdependence. For liberal democracies, the findings offer both caution and call to action. Managing migration in a way that strengthens—rather than undermines—institutions will be key to preserving democratic norms in an era of heightened political volatility.

Potential extensions of this research include distinguishing between skilled and less-skilled migration, as their political and institutional effects are likely to differ significantly. Moreover, fruitful areas for exploration involve interactions between regime change and structural variables such as income inequality, the legacy of communism or fascism, and measures of cultural or economic proximity to existing autocratic regimes. Countries with deep-rooted authoritarian pasts may possess institutional or normative residues—such as weak civil society, centralized state control, or political apathy—that make them more susceptible to illiberal relapses. Similarly, nations with high economic or cultural affinity to autocratic powers may be more exposed to ideological diffusion or external influence,

which can legitimize or accelerate domestic illiberal trends. These dimensions offer a fertile ground for understanding not just where regime change occurs, but why some democracies are more vulnerable than others in the face of global migratory and populist currents.

## Appendix A. The Syrian Shock as an Exogenous Event

The Syrian civil war, which began in 2011, generated one of the largest refugee movements in recent history. By 2015, a sudden surge of asylum seekers reached Europe, creating a major inflow that overwhelmed domestic policy frameworks. Unlike regular migration, which is shaped by economic incentives and state policy, this inflow was driven by geopolitical conflict and humanitarian collapse—factors outside European governments' control. Its abrupt scale and timing make it a valuable exogenous shock for empirical analysis.

A.1 Constructing the Dummy Variable

To capture this event, we define a Syrian Shock dummy variable (SYR_t) that equals 1 for all European countries in the years 2015 and onward, and 0 otherwise. This specification treats the arrival of the refugee wave as a common, externally imposed treatment across receiving states. Countries outside Europe are coded 0 throughout, serving as a control group.

Formally, the DiD specification is:

CHRIjt=α0+α1log⁡(Migration inflowjtLabor Forcejt)+α2SYRt×EUj+α3Countryj+α4Yeart+ujtCHRI_{jt} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1

\log\left(\frac{Migration \; inflow_{jt}}{Labor \; Force_{jt}}\right) + \alpha_2 SYR_t \times EU_j + \alpha_3 Country_j + \alpha_4 Year_t + u_{jt}CHRIjt=α0+α1 log(LaborForcejtMigrationinflowjt)+α2SYRt×EUj+α3Countryj+α4Yeart+ujt

where CHRIjtCHRI_{jt}CHRIjt measures the quality of legal governance, EUjEU_jEUj indicates membership in the European Union, and SYRtSYR_tSYRt captures the onset of the Syrian refugee crisis. The interaction term SYRt×EUjSYR_t \times EU_jSYRt×EUj isolates the causal effect of the Syrian shock on institutional quality within EU host countries, relative to both their pre-shock baseline and to countries not exposed to the inflow.

A.2 Interpretation

This approach allows us to treat the Syrian shock as a natural experiment: it provides exogenous variation in immigration inflows that is not driven by internal European economic or political dynamics. The DiD estimates therefore capture how an unanticipated, large-scale refugee inflow affected institutional quality in recipient countries. Consistent with our broader results, we find that the Syrian shock amplified the erosion of democratic governance, accelerating the shift toward illiberal politics in vulnerable states.

## Appendix B: Immigration, Far-Right Mobilization, and Democratic Backsliding in Europe

A substantial and growing literature in political economy and comparative politics underscores the catalytic role of immigration in the rise of far-right political movements across contemporary Europe. Periods of heightened immigration—especially those involving groups perceived as culturally distant or economically burdensome—have

consistently provoked public anxieties over national identity, labor market pressures, and the viability of the welfare state (Dustmann, Schönberg, and Stuhler, 2019; Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller, 2017). These anxieties, though not always correlated with actual migration flows, are often amplified by media narratives and political framing, a phenomenon scholars refer to as the increased salience of immigration.

Far-right parties have adeptly harnessed these sentiments, constructing emotionally resonant narratives that depict immigration as a civilizational threat and a source of social disorder. These narratives—frequently couched in the rhetoric of cultural preservation, economic protectionism, and national sovereignty—have proven politically effective. The electoral ascent of Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis (Dinas, Kauffmann, and Hangartner, (2019)), and the long-standing electoral resilience of France's Rassemblement National (formerly Front National) in regions with significant immigrant populations (Edo, Giesing, Öztunc, and Poutvaara, (2019)), offer empirical confirmation of these dynamics.

Importantly, the consequences of such mobilizations extend well beyond the domain of party competition. Once far-right parties gain institutional footholds—either through executive control or a dominant opposition presence—they frequently engage in practices that erode liberal-democratic norms. These include undermining judicial independence, curtailing media freedom, weakening institutional checks and balances, and constraining civil liberties, particularly those of minority groups. These processes, broadly characterized as democratic backsliding, are often justified in the name of "restoring popular

sovereignty" or defending the "authentic" nation against external and internal threats (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Bermeo, 2016).

The trajectories of Hungary and Poland provide emblematic case studies. In Hungary, the Fidesz government under Viktor Orbán has systematically curtailed the independence of the judiciary, restructured electoral laws to entrench incumbency, and centralized media ownership. Similarly, Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) party has pursued reforms that subjugate judicial institutions to executive control and delegitimize independent media. In both cases, the initial consolidation of power was facilitated by anti-immigration campaigns that cast migration as an existential threat—even in contexts where actual immigration rates were relatively low.

In sum, while immigration may initially appear as a discrete electoral issue, it increasingly functions as a structural vector for regime transformation. The confluence of migration-induced anxieties, far-right mobilization, and institutional erosion suggests that immigration policy and discourse hold far-reaching implications—not only for party politics but for the integrity and resilience of democratic governance itself.

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