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ABSTRACT

Do Refugees Impact Voting Behavior in the Host Country? Evidence from Syrian Refugee Inflows in Turkey*

We study the effect of an influx of approximately three million Syrian refugees on voting behavior in Turkey. We use a difference-in-differences approach, comparing the political outcomes in geographic areas with high and low intensity of refugee presence before and after the beginning of Syrian civil war. To address the endogeneity in refugees' location choices, we adopt an instrumental variables approach that relies on the historic dispersion of Arabic speakers across Turkish provinces, taking advantage of the fact that Syrians are more likely to settle in locations with high Arabic-speaking host populations. We document a strong polarization in attitudes towards refugees between the supporters and opponents of the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP). Regression analyses of monthly survey data, however, suggest that the massive inflow of refugees induced only a modest drop in support for the AKP. We show similarly small, but statistically insignificant impact on actual election outcomes.

JEL Classification: F22

Keywords: Syrian refugees, voting behavior in Turkey, attitudes towards refugees

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Introduction

Recent years have seen an astounding increase in refugee population fleeing wars and conflicts (UNHCR, 2016). In 2015 there were 65 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, of whom, 21 million were refugees, representing a 38% rise since 2011. Roughly half the global refugee population lives in six countries neighboring the regions of conflict.[1] In addition to the burden of resettlement, for which these host countries have limited resources, such large-scale refugee inflows impose economic, social, and political costs that are likely to influence the political will and administrative capability of host societies towards refugee resettlement and integration.

In this paper, we provide causal estimates of the effect of the Syrian refugee influx on voting behavior in Turkey that currently hosts the largest refugee population in the world. As of December 2016, there were more than 2.8 million Syrian refugees registered in Turkey, around 3.5% of its population. However, there is no research on the impact of the refugee influx on political preferences of the Turkish people, an important issue that is likely to influence Turkey's ability and commitment to resettle the vast population of Syrians already in the country, and may even have consequences on European politics.

To this end, we use data from repeated monthly cross-sectional surveys of Turkish citizens' political preferences from 2012-2016 and results of three recent national elections from 2011 and 2015. We exploit the substantial variation in the inflow of refugees, both over time and across provinces, and use a difference-in-differences approach, comparing the political outcomes in geographic areas with high and low intensity of refugee presence before and after the beginning of Syrian civil war. To address the endogeneity in refugees' location choices, we adopt an instrumental variables approach that relies on the historic dispersion of Arabic speakers across Turkish provinces based on the 1965 Turkish census, the only census that collected information on native language at the province level. Our instrument takes advantage of the fact that Syrians are more likely to settle in locations where the host population speaks Arabic. Thus, the total number of Syrians displaced by the recent civil war and the historic geographic dispersion of the Arabic speakers across Turkish provinces jointly predicts the province level inflow of refugees between 2011 and 2016.

Our analyses of survey data document strong polarization in attitudes towards refugees between the supporters and opponents of the ruling Justice and Development party (AKP), the architect of the "open door" policy for Syrian refugees. The empirical analysis of political preferences, however, suggests that the massive inflow of refugees induced a modest drop in support for the ruling AKP. A one percentage-point increase in the share of refugees in the population led to a 0.68 percentage points decrease in support for AKP. Leavers, however, did not swing to the other major political parties but were more likely to become indecisive or absentee. While ethnic Turk voters largely drive these results, there is otherwise little heterogeneity across demographic groups based on the age, gender, and education of respondents. We also provide evidence that the decline in

[1] According to UNHCR, in 2014, 45% of the global population of refugees was hosted in Turkey, Pakistan, Lebanon, Islamic Republic of Iran, Ethiopia, and Jordan (UNHCR, 2015).

support for AKP coincides with the rapid acceleration of refugee inflows in late 2014, triggered by the expansion of the Islamic State in northern Syria. We find similarly small, but statistically insignificant impact on actual election outcomes during the study period.

Literature Review and Background

Migration and Electoral Behavior

Extant research on the effect of migration flows on voter preferences has primarily focused on western countries and leans towards the general finding that migration flows strengthen anti-immigration attitudes. Barone et al. (2016), for instance, find that migration flows induced voters in Italian municipalities to favor right-wing parties with a more conservative agenda on migration. Otto and Steinhardt (2014) show that in Hamburg, an increase in the number of immigrants and asylum seekers leveraged support for the German far-right whereas in Denmark, Harmon (2017) and Dustmann et al. (2016) show that increased inflows of immigrant workers and refugees strengthened the native population's anti-immigration attitudes in political preferences. In a recent study, Sekeris and Vasilakis (2016) show that Syrian refugees triggered a similar sentiment among Greek voters, and increased support for the Golden Dawn, an extreme-right movement with neo-Nazi tendencies. Evidence from Austria is mixed: Halla et al. (2017) provide evidence that immigration of unskilled workers contributed to the rise of the Austrian extreme right while Steinmayr (2017) argues that the recent Syrian refugee inflows weakened the political support for the same far-right movement.

Syrian Refugee Inflow

Syrian refugees began entering Turkey in April 2011, shortly after the Syrian government violently cracked down on anti-government protests (Erdoğan and Ünver, 2015). In 2011, the majority of the refugees who left Syria were politically active youth on their government's "black list", and many of them returned to Syria as conditions stabilized temporarily (Özden 2013; İçduygu 2015). The refugee influx began again in 2012, when ceasefire talks between the Syrian government and the opposition failed, and has continued to grow over the past four years (Figure 1). In March 2012, the Government of Turkey announced a directive on resettlement of Syrians in Turkey, which was enacted as a Temporary Protection regime in April 2013. It assured no forced return and allowed temporary stay for all Syrian refugees.

From April 2011 to December 2016, Turkey received over 2.8 million of the 4.8 million refugees that have fled Syria; this number is expected to remain high as the Syrian civil war continues, and with the European Union imposing pressures on Turkey to restrict the flow of refugees into Europe.[2] While the issue of providing work permits to Syrian refugees continues to be debated, in 2014 refugees were granted permission to receive education and health care (Yeginsu, 2014). The refugee resettlement efforts of the

[2] In December 2015, the European Union and Turkey reached a deal that involved the EU providing $3.2 billion in aid for refugee resettlement and Turkey promising to take action to reduce the flow of migrants from the Middle East to Europe (The Economist, December, 2015)

Turkish authorities, without significant contribution from the international community in the initial years, have received praise from the international media (McClelland, 2014).

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the average monthly inflow was roughly 13,000 in 2012, 32,000 in 2013, and 88,000 in 2014. Inflows reached a peak in October 2014 after the siege of Kobane by Islamic State, and declined to 73,000 in 2015, and to 23,000 in 2016 (Figure 1). The refugee flows show significant regional patterns, changing the ethnic and sectarian balance of the population in the eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey, where many of the refugees are settling (Figure 2a). Sunni Arab refugees, for instance, now outnumber Alawites who previously dominated the ethic Arab population in many of these regions. These demographic changes have created fears that refugee resettlement would sow seeds of ethnic and sectarian strife in eastern and southeastern regions of Turkey (Çağaptay and Menekşe, 2014).

A substantial proportion of the refugees initially lived in camps that the Turkish government had built to provide them temporary settlement. However, as the influx increased, it became increasingly difficult to accommodate the refugees in camps, and they began to move out of southern provinces to larger cities. Currently, less than 10 percent of the refugees live in the camps. The continuing refugee flow has affected their welcome. In the initial years, Turkey welcomed the incomers as "guests." However, in the more recent period, reports indicate that the Turkish government engaged in efforts to resettle refugees within Syria (İçduygu 2015).

Turkish Politics

There are four national parties represented in the Turkish parliament: President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP),[3] which has a pro-Islamist, socially conservative, and economically liberal political agenda; the center left and secular Republican People's Party (CHP); the extreme nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and the socialist and pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). The electorate is consolidated around these four political movements; other political parties received merely 3.5% of the votes during the last three general elections. Voter turnout in Turkey was substantially high during these recent elections with more than 84% of the eligible voters casting their votes. AKP has dominated Turkish politics since 2002, securing nearly half of the electoral support during the last three general elections: 49.8% in June 2011, 40.9% in June 2015, and 49.5% in November 2015. The party has no coalition partner, and has been the sole decision making authority in Turkish foreign policy since 2002.

Among political parties, AKP has maintained the most explicit policy with respect to refugees. In his speech to refugees in 2014, Erdogan summarized Turkey's role as being *ansar,* a historical reference to the people of Medina who supported the Prophet

[3] Turkish Constitution mandates to strip the President off his party affiliation, a regulation that President Erdoğan has ignored since his presidency began in 2014. As a result, although AKP's official party leader is Binali Yildirim, Erdoğan remains the *de facto* party ruler.

Mohammad and his followers after fleeing Mecca.[4] More recently, he promised citizenship to a number of the Syrians who have permanently resettled in Turkey.[5] On the other hand, CHP considers the "refugee crisis" an outcome of AKP's foreign policy mistakes, including attempts to topple the Syrian regime. In its policy report on Syria, CHP emphasizes the economic cost of an "adventurist" foreign policy, but does not provide a specific framework for refugee resettlement (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, 2015). MHP also believes that Turkey must host the Syrians who fled the war yet heavily criticizes the government on national security concerns resulting from the government's foreign policy towards Syria. Finally, HDP views the Syrian refugee question from a human rights perspective. HDP's policy report on Syrian refugees recommends a change of status for refugees from Temporary Protection to equal permanent residents, abolition of refugee camps as resettlement zones, as well as a number of policies for the social and economic integration of refugees (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, 2016). Among the four major political parties, CHP stands as the most outspoken critic of Syrians in Turkey and HDP their biggest supporter.

There are many potential reasons why voting behavior would change in response to the refugee influx. Citizens have diverse views on the ruling AKP's refugee policy, which may influence their political preferences. Regional factors and labor market conditions are strong predictors of voting behavior in Turkey and have been influenced by the refugee influx (Çarkoglu and Eren, 2002; Çarkoglu, 2007, Akarca and Tansel, 2006). Fears that the refugee influx compromises national security and has adverse economic effects may cause voters to favor a political party that advocates for a more conservative refugee policy and blame AKP for the refugee inflow. Kıbrıs (2011), for example, provides evidence that during the early 1990s, instances of terrorist attacks in Turkey caused a decline in support for the governing party. Best to our knowledge, however, there is no research on how the Syrian refugee influx affected voter behavior. Our empirical model attempts to bridge this knowledge gap.

Data

The data used in the empirical analysis come from multiple sources that we describe in detail below.

Data on Refugees

We obtained data on the number of refugees who fled Syria and those who resettled in Turkey from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The reporting began in December 2011 and has continued at frequent but irregular intervals. We aggregated the data into a monthly format.

The data on refugee population by province for April 2016 and December 2016 come from the Directorate General of Migration Management (GIGM) and Disaster and Emergency Management Authority (AFAD). We also use the geographic distribution of

[4] http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/erdogan-suriyeli-siginmacilara-seslendi-27342780
[5] http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2016/07/160703_erdogan_suriyeliler

refugees complied by Erdoğan and Ünver (2015) from the same institutions for September 2015.

As shown in Figure 3, the geographic dispersion of refugees is remarkably similar in September 2015, April 2016, and December 2016. In each panel of this figure, we plot the dispersion of refugees across provinces in September 2015 on the x-axis. The y-axis in the top panel shows the refugee dispersion in April 2016, and in the bottom panel, it shows the refugee dispersion in December 2016. The nationwide refugee population is normalized to 100 in each period. The points indicating provinces in both panels are clustered remarkably close to the 45-degree line as well as the regression line in the top and bottom panels. Put another way, the provinces that host the majority of refugees did not change even though around 725,000 additional refugees arrived from September 2015 to December 2016.[6] We estimated the province level monthly refugee inflows by multiplying the nationwide refugee inflow at each period with the share that each province received in September 2015.[7]

Note that data on refugee population at province level covers only three periods and these numbers merely reflect the cumulative number of Syrians who are registered within the administrative boundaries of a province. Refugee population is highly mobile, and some of the refugees might have left the province or even the country after registration. As a result, data on province level refugee population could at best serve as a proxy for the intensity of refugee presence. Later, we directly test if the data on geographic dispersion of refugees offer a meaningful variation in native population's exposure to refugees.

To calculate the refugee exposure measure, defined as the share of refugees in total population, we used the population of Turkish citizens for 2011-2016, provided by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). We interpolated the monthly province populations from the yearly data. Finally, we digitized the aggregate data from the 1965 Turkish Census to calculate the percentage of the Arabic native population at the province level. The 1965 Census, conducted in an early stage of the rapid urbanization and mass internal migration to major Turkish cities, provides a reliable proxy for the historical ethnic/linguistic distribution of the population. (Gedik, 1997). Later censuses do not include data on mother language or ethnicity.

Survey on Attitudes towards Refugees

Data on local perceptions of refugees come from a field survey conducted in February 2016 by Konda Research and Consultancy, an independent leading research company in Turkey. Konda regularly conducts surveys on political attitudes and has been quite accurate in predicting the general election results in Turkey since the early 2000s (Akarca and Başlevent, 2009; Dağı, 2008). The survey data from a nationally representative sample of 2649 respondents aged 18 and above include information on their voting

[6] Erdoğan (2014) also provides similar estimations for December 2014.
[7] As expected, results from the regression analyses are robust to using the geographic distributions in April or December 2016.

behavior and demographic characteristics. Importantly, the survey also includes a range of questions to capture attitudes on the economic and social effects of the refugee presence, policies towards refugee inclusion in the Turkish society, and overall attitudes towards Syrian refugees. Based on a 6-point Likert scale, the respondents ranked the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements detailing these attitudes. The survey also asked whether the respondents voted for the ruling party in the most recent general election, held in November 2015.

Survey on the Political Affiliation of Turkish Citizens

Konda conducts a monthly survey to capture the political affiliation of Turkish citizens. We use 54 monthly surveys[8] conducted from January 2012 to December 2016 that include 149,746 individual observations. The survey instrument includes the following question: "Which party would you vote for if the elections were held today?" The respondents can select a political party, abstain or even express their indecisiveness about the elections. We use the answer to this question to create four binary variables for each of the four major parties that have seats in the current parliament and a fifth variable that captures responses that are in favor of other minor parties, indecisive or absentee.

Data on Election Results

We collected the June 2011, June 2015, and November 2015 General Election Results, which are publicly available through TurkStat. These results include province-level data on number of voters, votes, and valid votes that each party received.

Turkish electoral system is based on proportional representation that requires a 10 percent minimum vote share at the national level to secure representation in parliament. The threshold does not apply to independent candidates. Therefore, candidates from political parties who do not expect to receive the 10% vote share can participate in elections independently. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) candidates followed this strategy in the June 2011 General Elections, but not in the subsequent two elections. Due to the data structure,[9] it is not possible to separate the votes for HDP and other independent candidates in the June 2011 election results. The non-HDP independent candidates, however, constituted only 0.57% vote share in the two following elections. Given the relatively weak support for the non-partisan independent candidates, we combined the HDP and independent votes for all election results. For convenience, we use the term HDP to describe the outcome for this group.

[8] Konda did not conduct surveys in some months, which usually corresponds to Ramadan. Thus, we do not have data on 6 months out of 60 months between January 2012 and December 2016.
[9] TurkStat only reports the aggregated number of votes for all independent candidates.

Identification Strategy

Our empirical strategy exploits changes in the Syrian refugee population over time and across provinces to study the effect of refugee influx on voting behavior. The second stage specification is given by:

$$y_{ijt} = \alpha_1 + \delta_{1j} + \gamma_{1t} + X_i'\Gamma + \tau_1 S_{jt}^{ref} + \varepsilon_{1ijt} \quad (1)$$

where y_{ijt} is a binary indicator of respondent i 's (living in province j and interviewed in time t) support for a specific political party (*e.g.* AKP). The parameters δ_{1j} and γ_{1t} respectively capture the fixed effects for each province and survey month. X_i is a vector of individual covariates that include respondent's sex, age, education, ethnicity, whether the respondent is Sunni Muslim, and religious as well as indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. S_{jt}^{ref} is a continuous measure of treatment intensity, defined as the share of refugees in province j's population at period t. The coefficient τ_1 captures the effect of a one-percentage point increase in refugee influx on party affiliation.

There is no restriction on the location choice of Syrians who live outside the refugee camps. Because more than 90% of refugees live outside camps, the geographic variation in refugee resettlement is potentially endogenous. For example, districts/provinces with booming economies may have attracted refugees as well as influenced political preferences in favor of a certain political party (for instance the ruling party) that voters consider responsible for the robust economic growth. Therefore, regression estimates based on equation (1) could be biased. Moreover, as mentioned before, the estimate of S_{jt}^{ref} involves a potentially large measurement error, as refugees often register at one place and then move to another where they find better opportunities or they may even register in multiple provinces.

We use a precisely measured instrument to overcome these threats to the internal validity of the empirical design. Syrian refugees in Turkey are more likely to settle in areas with a historically higher proportion of Arabic speakers. The population share of Arabic natives among Turkish population in 1965, as we document, strongly predicts the geographic distribution of refugees. Further, the total refugee outflow from Syria is plausibly exogenous to Turkish electoral behavior/preferences given that the intensity of conflict in Syria has remained largely unpredictable throughout the civil war. Thus, we interact the percentage of Arabic native Turkish population in 1965 with the cumulative number of refugees who fled Syria in period t as an instrument to predict S_{jt}^{ref}. Therefore the first stage regression is:

$$S_{jt}^{ref} = \alpha_2 + \delta_{2j} + \gamma_{2t} + X_i'\Lambda + \pi_2 iv_{jt} + \varepsilon_{2ijt} \quad (2)$$

where the instrument iv_{jt} is the percentage of Arabic native Turkish population in 1965 weighted by the cumulative number of refugees who fled Syria at period t, and expressed as: $iv_{jt} = Arab_j^{1965} \times S_t^{reftot}$.

Thus, the refugee inflow into provinces in Turkey is jointly predicted by: (1) the overall outflow of refugees from Syria in time t, and (2) the share of Arabic-speaking Turkish population in a province in 1965. The identifying assumption is that after controlling for both components through province and survey month fixed effects, their interaction is as good as random.[10] We cluster the standard errors at the province level to capture the within-province correlations in voter behavior.

Note that it is not possible to purge the effect of a refugee influx on internal mobility. Previous studies suggest that the refugee influx altered the internal migration patterns of the native population, and therefore, might also have altered the composition of the electorate (Akgündüz et al., 2015). Our analysis captures the impact of the refugee influx on the overall voting pattern, which is a combination of its direct effect on voting behavior as well as its indirect effect via changed composition of native residents due to internal migration.

We supplement our empirical analysis with the actual election data for the three most recent elections in June 2011, June 2015, and November 2015. We accordingly modify the specification in equation (1) to fit a model for five outcomes: the vote share of each of the four major parties and voter turnout by province and election. The regressions control for province- and election fixed effects as well as a vector of time-varying voter characteristics: percentage of voters under 40, percentage with a primary school degree, and share of female voters in each province. These control variables aim to account for, among other things, the increasing share of young voters from 2011 to 2015 who were exposed to the compulsory schooling law, and were more likely to graduate from secondary school or above, which might have influenced their voting preferences (Cesur and Mocan, 2013). As in the previous analysis, the standard errors are clustered at the province level.

Results

Table 1 presents data on the Syrian refugee population as of December 2016, in and outside, refugee camps. We report the intensity of refugee presence (share of refugees in total population) in the top 19 provinces with the highest refugee presence and the rest of Turkey. Figure 2a provides a graphical presentation of the same data on a province level map. There are a few points to note. First, refugee density is higher in provinces in the southeast of Turkey, specifically those closer to the Syrian border. Second, refugees are more likely to move to industrial areas and coastal provinces with established immigrant smuggling networks such as Mersin, İzmir İstanbul, and Bursa (Reitano and Tinti, 2016). Overall, refugees are a little over 6% of the population in the 19 provinces listed in Table 1. In the rest of the country, refugee presence is modest by comparison, representing about 0.5% of the population.

[10] The instrument is conceptually similar to Altonji and Card (1991) and Card (2001) who use geographic variation in immigrants' past settlement patterns to predict future inflows.

We first use data from the public opinion survey on Syrian refugees to investigate if there is evidence that citizens' opinions of refugees are associated with (i) their electoral preferences, and (ii) the intensity of refugee inflow in their provinces.

The first two columns in Table 2 show the overall attitudes towards refugees of Turkish citizens who voted for the ruling AKP and those who did not. The third column reports the difference between columns (1) and (2) adjusted for a large set of demographic variables as well as location fixed effects.[11] These statistics show that voters are highly polarized on their perception of refugees. Individuals who mentioned that they voted for the ruling party in November 2015 were less likely to have negative views on the effects of refugees on the economy and society than those who did not report voting for AKP by large margins. For instance, they were 13 percentage points less likely to agree that "job opportunities decreased due to Syrians", 11 percentage points less like to agree that "refugees harm the Turkish economy", and 11 percentage points less likely to agree that "refugees make cities less safe" compared to those who did not vote for the ruling party. The differences in perceptions are similar across all survey questions except on the question that "refugees should integrate to daily life" for which there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. These differences are mostly driven by the extreme points in the Likert scale; that is, non-AKP voters are more likely to strongly disagree with a statement sympathetic towards Syrian refugees, and vice versa (Figure 4). Importantly, the last row in Table 2 shows that AKP supporters are equally likely to come across refugees in their daily life as compared the rest of the population. This suggests that the stark differences in voter attitudes towards refugees are not driven by differential exposure to refugees.

The rows of column 5, Table 2 contain coefficients from separate regression estimates in which the question listed in the row heading is the dependent variable and refugee share in province population and demographic characteristics[12] are independent variables.[13] The reported coefficient in each cell shows the association between a one percentage-point increase in the refugee share in the population and the likelihood of agreeing with the statements on refugees listed in the row heading. Exposure to refugees is associated with negative attitudes, especially on issues related to labor market and national security, which reveal perceptions on the effect of refugee influx on issues directly linked to the lives of the local population. For example, respondents who live in high-intensity refugee areas are substantially more likely to argue that refugees reduced the number of available jobs and express concerns on security. But perceptions on the humanitarian responsibilities towards refugees, such as "Turkish aid to Syrians is sufficient", "Syrians should be granted a residence permit", "Syrian children should receive education in Arabic", and "Accepting refugees is a geographic/historic responsibility" do not seem to

[11] The adjusted difference controls for respondent's gender, age, education level, ethnicity, she is religious, and Sunni Muslim plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Location fixed-effects are captured by dummy variables for each district.

[12] Gender, age, education level, ethnicity, whether the respondent considers herself as religious, and Sunni Muslim plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables.

[13] Because the survey on attitude towards refugees is a single wave conducted in February 2016, these regressions do not include location fixed effects.

vary with the intensity of refugee presence in the province. Remarkably, a one percentage-point increase in the share of refugees in total population is associated with a 2.5 percentage-point increase in the likelihood of daily encounter with refugees. This last estimate shows that despite the potential measurement error in the refugee population at province level, our treatment intensity variable clearly captures the differences in exposure to the refugee population.

These findings suggest that a substantial proportion of the national population (44%) experience the presence of refugees on a daily basis. Further, public opinion towards refugees is strongly divided along political lines and to some extent by geographic proximity to refugees. In the next sections, we investigate whether these observed associations imply a causal effect of refugee presence on political affiliation.

Effect of Refugees on Voting Behavior

Table 3 reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflows on voter behavior, based on equation (1). OLS estimates from the survey data (panel A) suggest that a one-percentage point increase in refugee presence is associated with a 0.44 percentage point drop in AKP's vote share. There is no detectable impact on the voting share of other political parties. The instrumental variable estimate is slightly larger, and shows a modest 0.68 percentage point decline in the ruling AKP's vote share in response to a one percentage point increase in refugee presence. The refugee influx has no effect on the electoral fortunes of the other three major opposition parties in the OLS and 2SLS models. The likelihood of not supporting any of the four political parties increases by 0.54 percentage point.

In the bottom row of Panel 1, we report the F-statistic from the first stage results. In line with Figure 2b, the interaction of the intensity of Arabic speakers with the overall number of refugees strongly predicts the refugee distribution, indicating that the instrumental variable is sufficiently strong (Bound et al.,1995).

The causal interpretation of these results requires the assumption that in the absence of refugee inflows, regions with high- and low-intensity of Arabic speakers would have similar trends in voting behavior. In Figure 5a, we show the trends in unadjusted rates of political support for AKP and the share of non-supporters of the major four parties, the two outcomes that show significant regression results, from 2012 to 2016 (Table 3). We compare the 11 provinces[14] that have the highest share of Arabic speakers in 1965 (and drive the variation in our instrument) with the rest of the country. Panel (A) shows overlapping trends until 2014, followed by a clear drop in AKP's vote share during the expansion of ISIS in northern Syria. Panel (B) shows a similar pattern in the reverse direction: the share of respondents unaffiliated with any major political party rises after the acceleration of refugee inflows in 2014 in provinces that are more likely to receive these refugees.

[14] Hatay, Mardin, Siirt, Sanliurfa, Osmaniye, Adana, Mersin, Diyarbakir, Van, Kilis, and Gaziantep. 97 percent of the native Arabic speakers in 1965 lived in these 11 provinces.

In a similar way, we fully interact the Arabic speaker intensity with each survey period and plot the estimated interaction coefficients from the following model:

$$y_{ijt} = \propto + \delta_j + \gamma_t + X_i'\Omega + \sum_t \pi_t \left(d_t \times Arab_j^{1965}\right) + \varepsilon_{ijt} \quad (3)$$

where, as before, y_{ijt} indicates the binary outcome for political affiliation, δ_j and γ_t capture the province and survey month fixed effects, and the vector X_i include characteristics of the survey respondent. d_t is a binary indicator for each survey month and is interacted with the population share of Arabic speakers in 1965. The estimated coefficients for π_t are reported in Figure 5b, panels (C) and (D). We observe similar trends in the pre-refugee period for both outcomes and the movement of the coefficients afterwards, as expected, follow the same patterns as in Figure 5a, panels (A) and (B). In other words, the reported 2SLS coefficients in Table 3 appear to be mainly driven by the peak of the refugee movement in 2014 and 2015.

In Table 3, panel B we provide the 2SLS estimates with the province level data on actual election outcomes. OLS results show that a one percentage point increase in refugee influx lowered the voting shares of CHP by 0.08 percentage points but increased the voting share of MHP by 0.06 percentage points. The effects are marginally significant and tiny in magnitude, but precisely estimated. The only significant effect for the 2SLS models is the effect on CHP voting share, which is modest and negative. The 2SLS estimates for AKP and HDP lack precision although 95% confidence interval of the estimated coefficients from the election data overlap with the survey data results. We also find no discernible effect on voter turnout.

Table 4 shows the 2SLS results based on survey data from subgroups by ethnicity, gender, age, and education. The estimated coefficients are similar for all demographic groups except when the samples are broken by ethnicity. The negative impact of refugees is larger for ethnic Turks who constitute the majority of the electoral body in Turkey. There are tiny but precisely estimated coefficients for CHP and MHP for some demographic groups, which we interpret cautiously. We conclude that the empirical evidence is too weak to indicate any impact of refugees on the voting preferences for the three opposition parties; rather suggests a modest and temporary decline in support for the ruling AKP party with no cross-party transition of voters.

Conclusion

The Syrian civil war has caused one of the largest movements of people in recent history, and resulted in over 2.8 million refugees entering Turkey. This abrupt and unexpected inflow of refugees has provided an opportunity for scholars to investigate the effects of refugee migration on economic opportunities of local populations (Ceritoğlu et al., 2015; Del Carpio and Wagner, 2016). Our study extends the existing literature to the political domain. Given that most refugees settle in countries neighboring conflict zones, how refugee influx affects economic conditions and political stability in neighboring countries has critical political and policy implications for refugees as well as host countries.

We find that Turkish citizens are highly polarized in their perceptions of Syrians. AKP supporters are less negative about the effects of Syrian refugees on the economic opportunities of the Turkish population and Turkey's economy and national security and more sympathetic towards providing government services to the refugees. Differences in perceptions across voters' political preferences are substantial, although we find little evidence that this reflects a transition in party affiliations induced by the refugee influx in analyses with multiple data sources including the actual election data of the past three general elections and survey data on political affiliations. These findings are consistent with a polarized political environment in which party line plays a more important role than the individual exposure or significant information on the subject in forming public opinion (Druckman et al. 2013).

Our findings also differ from previous literature on high-income countries, where voter preferences shifted towards far-right parties in response to increased refugee presence. One possible explanation for the lack of any effect of refugee influx on electoral outcomes in our analysis could be that there is more empathy towards Syrian refugees in Turkey than across Europe, where studies have found increasing support for xenophobic political fractions on account of refugee and immigration flows. Religious and cultural similarities might have mitigated a strong political reaction. More than half of the respondents in our sample believe that Syrians will return home when the conflict is over (Table 2). Thus, the Turkish voters might perceive the Syrian refugee resettlements as a temporary service to a neighborhood country.

Another potential explanation is that the Turkish voters are responding to the ongoing civil war in neighboring Syria by opting for political stability. Our survey data suggest that AKP voters are much more confident in the capability of their party to solve the pressing issues in Turkey compared to the supporters of other political fractions. According to the combined monthly surveys, 87% of AKP supporters believe that AKP is the only political party that could solve Turkey's most important and pressing problems. The corresponding ratios are only 55% for CHP, 49%for MHP, and 65%for HDP (Appendix Table 1). These results suggest that Turkish voters think that President Erdogan, whose party has as much support as all the other major political parties combined, is in a better position to lead the country out of the economic and security threats associated with the influx of refugees as well as with the civil war in neighboring regions. In other words, the opportunity cost of reactive voting in a conflict zone might be higher if voters consider no viable alternatives to the status quo.

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Table 1. Geographic Distribution of Syrian Refugees in Turkey, December 2016

	Refugee population		Local	Refugee Share in
	In Camp	Outside Camps	Population	Population
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Kilis	36,580	85,448	130,825	48.26
Hatay	19,350	359,240	1,555,165	19.58
Şanlıurfa	114,092	289,889	1,940,627	17.23
Gaziantep	39,039	279,489	1,974,244	13.89
Mardin	4,128	89,371	796,237	10.51
Mersin	7,250	34,331	522,175	7.38
Osmaniye	-	139,475	1,773,852	7.29
Kahramanmaraş	17,968	68,849	1,112,634	7.24
Adana	10,341	139,492	2,201,670	6.37
Adıyaman	-	55,063	1,358,980	3.89
Kayseri	9,554	15,098	610,484	3.88
Bursa	-	102,733	2,901,396	3.42
Batman	-	19,348	576,899	3.24
Konya	-	70,038	2,161,303	3.14
Burdur	-	7,807	261,401	2.90
Şırnak	-	14,314	483,788	2.87
İstanbul	-	426,262	14,804,116	2.80
Malatya	10,283	10,218	781,305	2.56
İzmir	-	98,671	4,223,545	2.28
Subtotal	268,585	2,305,136	40,170,646	6.02
Rest of Turkey	-	240,910	39,644,225	0.60
Total	268,585	2,546,046	79,814,871	3.41

Note: This table shows the geographic distribution of Syrian refugees by province as of December 2016. Refugee data come from Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Interior, Directorate General of Migration Management. Column (1) shows the number of refugees who live in a refugee camp. Column (2) shows the number of refugees who live outside of a refugee camp. Column (3) shows the local population as of December 2016. Local population data come from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). Column (4) shows the share of refugees in the total population, and is calculated by the authors.

Table 2. Turkish Citizens' Perception of Syrians by Party Affiliation and Host Area, February 2016

	Voted for AKP in November 2015?				Correlation with	
	Yes	No/Unk.	Adj. diff.	Overall Mean	Refugee Intensity	*N*
% Agree with statement	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Q1: Job opportunities decreased due to Syrians	0.644	0.774	-0.13***	0.715	0.94***	2,610
Q2: Turkish aid to Syrians is sufficient	0.806	0.672	0.07***	0.733	0.05	2,584
Q3: Refugees harm the Turkish economy	0.652	0.774	-0.11***	0.718	0.61*	2,627
Q4: Refugees make cities less safe	0.678	0.789	-0.11***	0.739	1.11***	2,616
Q5: Turks are culturally similar to Syrians	0.371	0.253	0.09***	0.307	-0.77*	2,603
Q6: Turkey should no longer accept refugees	0.564	0.676	-0.15***	0.625	0.67*	2,613
Q7: Syrians should be granted residence permit	0.416	0.338	0.12***	0.374	-0.63	2,608
Q8: Syrians should integrate to daily life	0.762	0.785	-0.02	0.774	-0.30	2,605
Q9: Accepting refugees is a humanitarian mission	0.770	0.692	0.09***	0.727	-1.06*	2,608
Q10: Refugees should only live in the camps	0.541	0.585	-0.08***	0.565	1.14***	2,616
Q11: Syrians should be granted work permit	0.496	0.397	0.12***	0.442	-0.77**	2,617
Q12: Syrian children should receive education in Arabic	0.542	0.490	0.08***	0.514	-0.28	2,611
Q13: Syrians will return home when the war is over	0.594	0.450	0.12***	0.516	-0.75	2,603
Q14: Accepting refugees is a geographic/historic responsibility	0.660	0.510	0.11***	0.578	-0.20	2,600
Come across refugees on a daily basis (%)	0.398	0.474	-0.03	0.439	2.48***	2,635

Note: This table reports the statistical association between responses to survey questions about Syrian refugees and (1) political party affiliation (2) local presence of refugees in respondent's province of residence. The data come from the survey conducted by Konda Research and Consultancy in February 2016. Original survey questions, except in the last row, are based on a 6-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, partially agree, partially disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Table reports the percentage of respondents who agree/partially agree with the statement. Columns (1) and (2) contrast the respondents who voted for Justice and Development Party in November 2015 General Elections and those who did not, respectively. Column (3) reports the regression adjusted differences between columns (1) and (2). Column (4) shows the overall percentage of respondents who agree with the statement. Column (5) reports the association between a one-percentage point increase in the share of refugees in province population and the change in likelihood of agreeing with the statement. Reported coefficients in column 3 are based on an OLS regression that controls for gender, age, education level, ethnicity, whether the respondent considers herself religious, and Sunni Muslim plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Column (3) additionally controls for district fixed effects. Standard errors are clustered at province level. Significance levels are indicated by <.1, **<.05 , ***<.01.

Table 3. Effect of Refugees on Voting Behavior

A. Survey results: January 2012-December 2016					
	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other†
(*N*=149,746)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	-0.44***	0.11	-0.07	0.07	0.32
	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.06)	(0.11)	(0.24)
2SLS	-0.68***	0.02	-0.05	0.17	0.54***
	(0.17)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.22)	(0.11)
Outcome mean	41.36	18.23	9.98	6.58	23.85
First stage	0.15***				
	(0.02)				
F-stat	45.45				
B. Election results: 2011 June, 2015 June, 2015 November					
	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Voter turnout
(*N*=263)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
OLS	0.03	-0.08*	0.06*	-0.03	-0.00
	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.09)	(0.03)
2SLS	-0.65	-0.33*	-0.04	1.01	0.34
	(0.44)	(0.18)	(0.09)	(0.63)	(0.24)
Outcome mean	47.70	20.27	14.81	13.45	86.34
First stage	0.10***				
	(0.02)				
F-stat	16.77				

†: Indecisive, absentee, or other party.

Notes 1: Panel (A) reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on political preferences. Data come from the monthly surveys conducted by Konda Research and Consultancy between 2012 and 2016. The outcome variables are binary and equal one if the respondent affirmed that she would vote for the indicated party if the elections were held at the time of the interview. The independent variable of interest is the share of refugees in total population during the survey month, i.e. S_{jt}^{ref}. In the 2SLS regressions, the endogenous variable, S_{jt}^{ref}, is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language in 1965, weighted by the global number of Syrian refugees at the time of the survey. Regressions control for province and survey-month fixed effects as well as gender, age, education level, ethnicity, whether the respondent considers herself religious, and Sunni Muslim plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables.

2: Panel (B) reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on election results. The outcome variables are the vote shares for each of the parties in the parliament and the voter turnout. The independent variable of interest is the share of refugees in total population during the election month, i.e. S_{jt}^{ref}. In 2SLS regressions, the endogenous variable, S_{jt}^{ref}, is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother tongue in 1965, weighted by the global number of Syrian refugees at the time of the elections. Regressions control for province and election-year fixed effects, as well as the percentage of population under 40, percentage of population with primary education, and the percentage of female voters.

3: The first stage coefficients and the *F*-tests on the excluded instrument are indicated at the bottom rows of each panel. Standard errors are clustered at province level, and significance levels are indicated by <.1, **<.05 , ***<.01.

Table 4. Effect of Refugees on Voting Behavior: Subgroup Analysis

2SLS Results by Demographic Subgroups

	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other†	*N*	*F*-stat
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Turkish	-0.65***	0.15**	0.01	0.01	0.49***	120,252	131.66
	(0.11)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.09)		
Kurdish	-0.35	0.03	-0.06	-0.15	0.53*	21,458	12.14
	(0.27)	(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.58)	(0.30)		
Male	-0.59**	-0.01	0.01	0.14	0.44**	77,710	47.04
	(0.23)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.18)	(0.20)		
Female	-0.81***	0.05	-0.11***	0.19	0.68***	71,718	42.70
	(0.16)	(0.11)	(0.04)	(0.25)	(0.11)		
Age≤32	-0.65***	0.01	0.01	0.14	0.49***	48,634	41.40
	(0.17)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.16)	(0.11)		
Age [33-46]	-0.71***	-0.12	0.01	0.20	0.62***	53,641	35.02
	(0.18)	(0.07)	(0.12)	(0.26)	(0.10)		
Age≥46	-0.67**	0.25*	-0.21***	0.13	0.50***	47,164	48.17
	(0.26)	(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.22)	(0.18)		
< High school	-0.69***	0.11	-0.03	0.13	0.48***	85,330	34.55
	(0.18)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.22)	(0.11)		
≥ High school	-0.70***	-0.04	-0.06	0.20	0.60***	63,591	92.84
	(0.21)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.22)	(0.13)		

†: Indecisive, absentee, or other party.

Note: This table reports the OLS and 2SLS estimates of the effect of refugee inflow on political preferences. Data come from the monthly surveys conducted by Konda Research and Consultancy between 2012 and 2016. The outcome variables are binary and equal one if the respondent affirmed that she would vote for the indicated party if the elections were held at the time of the interview. The independent variable of interest is the share of refugees in total population during the survey month, i.e. S_{jt}^{ref}. In 2SLS regressions, the endogenous variable, S_{jt}^{ref}, is instrumented by the share of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language in 1965, weighted by the global number of Syrian refugees at the time of the survey. Regressions control for province and survey month fixed effects as well as gender, age, education level, ethnicity, whether the respondent considers herself religious, and Sunni Muslim plus indicator variables for missing observations for each of these variables. Standard errors are clustered at province level, and significance levels are indicated by <.1, **<.05 , ***<.01.

Appendix Table 1. Voter Confidence in Governance Capability of the Affiliated Party, 2010-2016

"Which political party can solve the most important and pressing issues in Turkey?"

	Political Affiliation					
Answer to question (%)	AKP	CHP	MHP	HDP	Other	Overall
Justice and Development Party (AKP)	**84.46**	2.51	6.96	10.77	13.64	40.15
Republican People's Party (CHP)	0.32	**57.01**	1.86	1.65	2.11	12.04
Nationalist Movement Party (MHP)	0.21	0.63	**50.91**	0.25	1.00	5.33
Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)	0.14	0.21	0.25	**58.00**	0.59	3.76
Other	0.14	0.47	0.50	0.44	**5.20**	1.43
None	14.72	39.17	39.51	28.88	77.47	37.29
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	43,521	20,425	9,993	6,312	24,256	104,507

Note: This table shows the cross tabulation of the voter confidence in governance capability of the affiliated party. Each cell reflects the distribution of the answers to the question "Which political party is capable of solving the most important and pressing issues in Turkey?" conditional on the party affiliation of respondents.

Figure 1.

Number of Registered Refugees 2010–2016

This figure shows the cumulative number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey and the total number of refugees that left Syria between April 2010 and December 2016. Data come from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). UNHCR reports the refugee population data on irregular time intervals. We report the average number of refugees for each quarter.

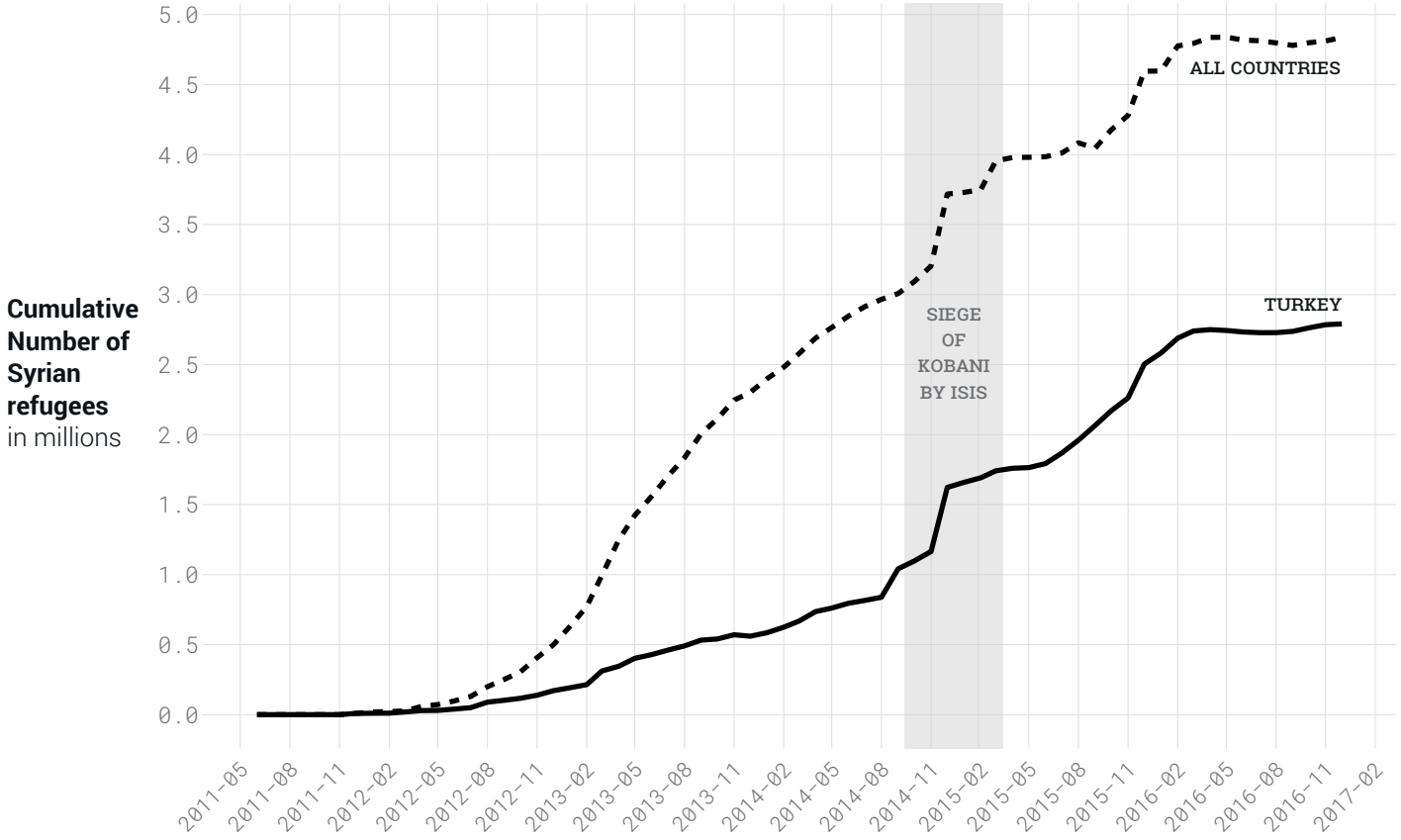


Figure 2a.

Geographic Distribution of Refugees

December 2016

This figure shows the geographic distribution of the Syrian refugees as share of the total population for each province in December 2016. Data come from the Directorate General of Migration Management in Turkey.

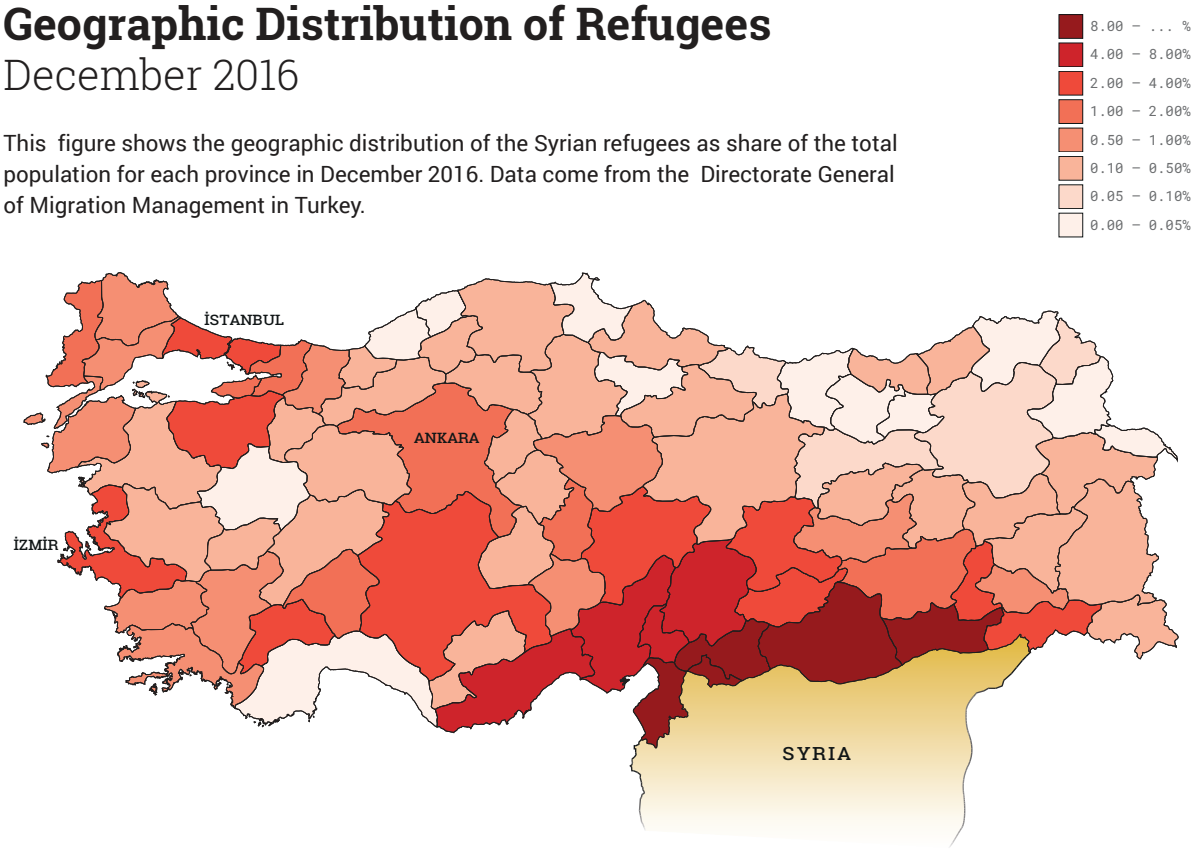


Figure 2b.

Geographic Distribution of Turkish Citizens with Arabic Mother Language

1965

This figure shows the geographic distribution of Turkish citizens with Arabic mother language as share of the total population in 1965. Data come from the 1965 Turkish Census.

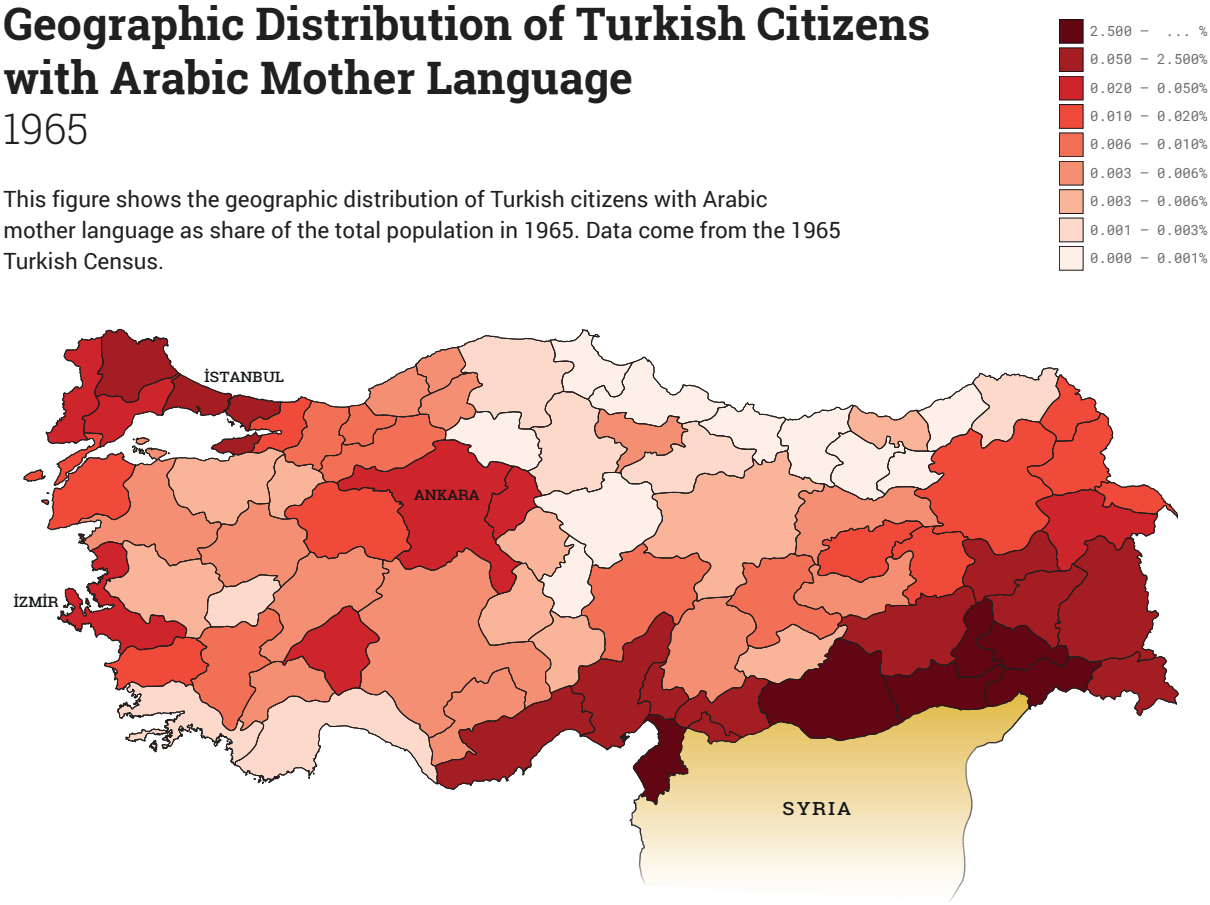
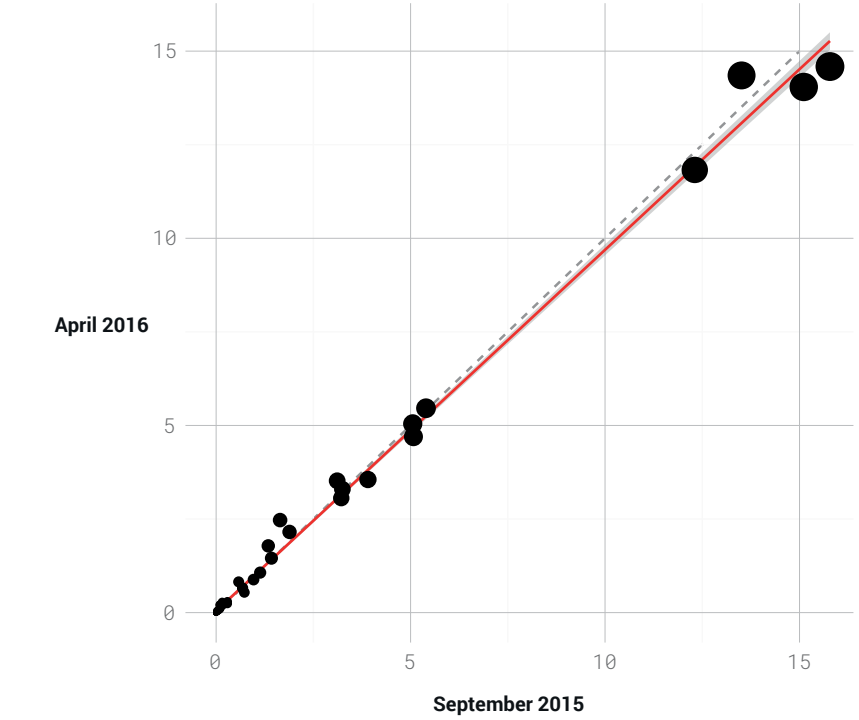


Figure 3.

Proportion of Refugees Received by Province in September 2015, April 2016, and December 2016

This figure contrasts the number of refugees, out of 100, received by each province in September 2015, April 2016, and December 2016. Each circle indicates a province, and is sized proportional to the number of refugees who live in that province. The regression line shows the linear trend weighted by the refugee population. Shaded region shows the 95% confidence interval.



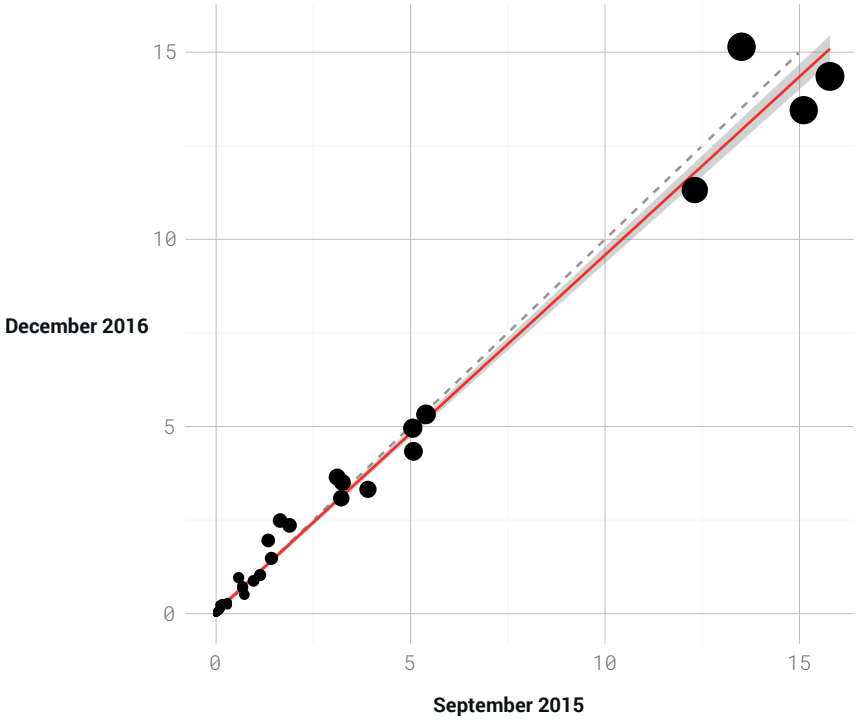
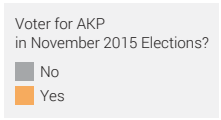


Figure 4.

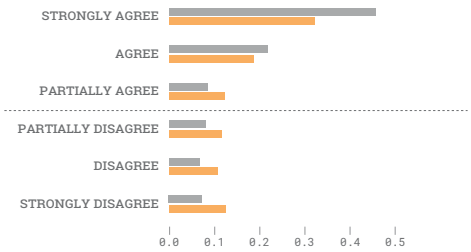
Turkish Citizens' Perception of Syrians by Party Affiliation

February 2016

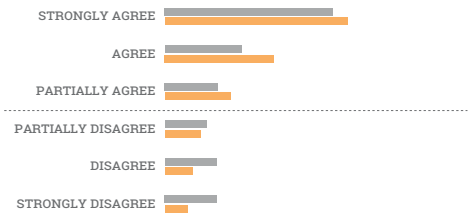
This figure shows the distribution of responses to survey questions about Syrian refugees by political affiliation. The data come from the survey conducted by Konda Research and Consultancy in February 2016. The answers are based on a 6-point Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, partially agree, partially disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree.



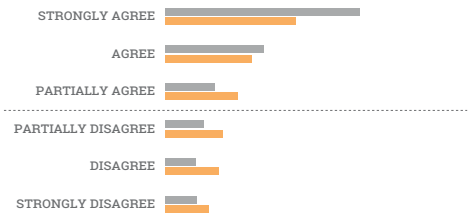
Q1.Job opportunities decreased due to Syrians.



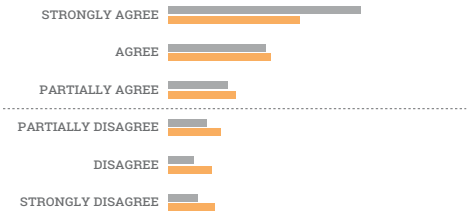
Q2.Turkish aid to Syrians is sufficient.



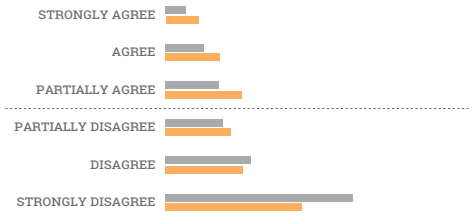
Q3.Refugees harm the Turkish economy.



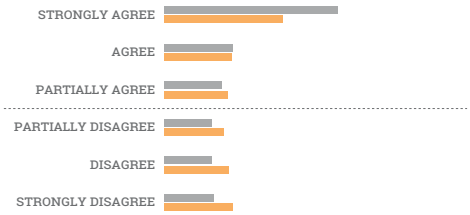
Q4.Refugees make cities less safe.



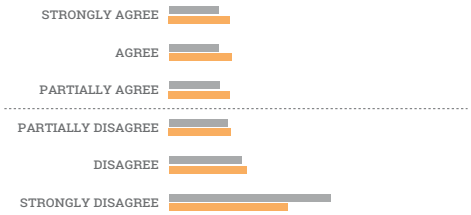
Q5.Turks are culturally similar to Syrians.



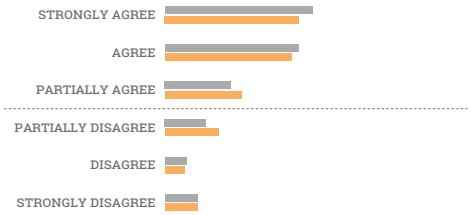
Q6.Turkey should no longer accept refugees.



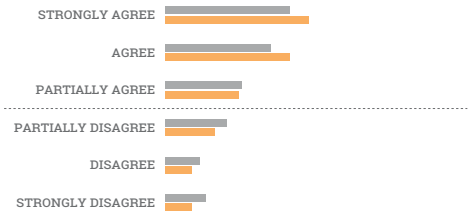
Q7.Syrians should be granted residence permit.



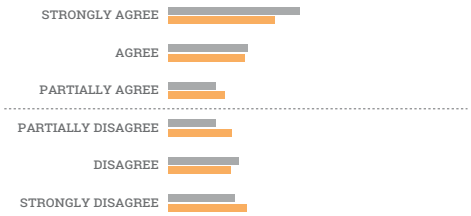
Q8.Syrians should integrate to daily life.



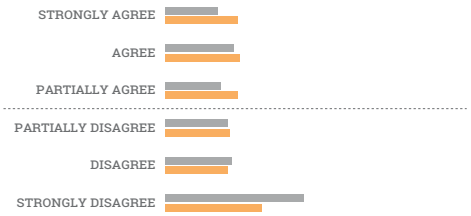
Q9.Accepting refugees is a humanitarian mission.



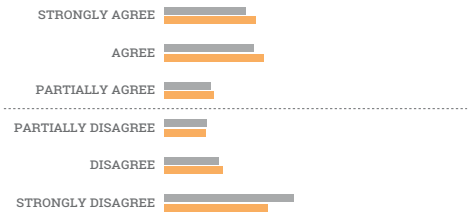
Q10.Refugees should only live in the camps.



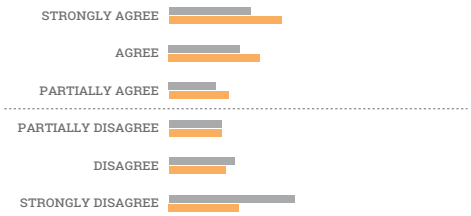
Q11.Syrians should be granted work permit.



Q12.Syrian children should receive education in Arabic.



Q13.Syrians will return home when the war is over.



Q14.Accepting refugees is a geographic/historic responsibility.

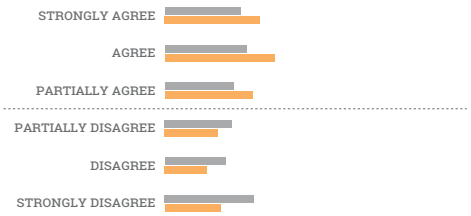
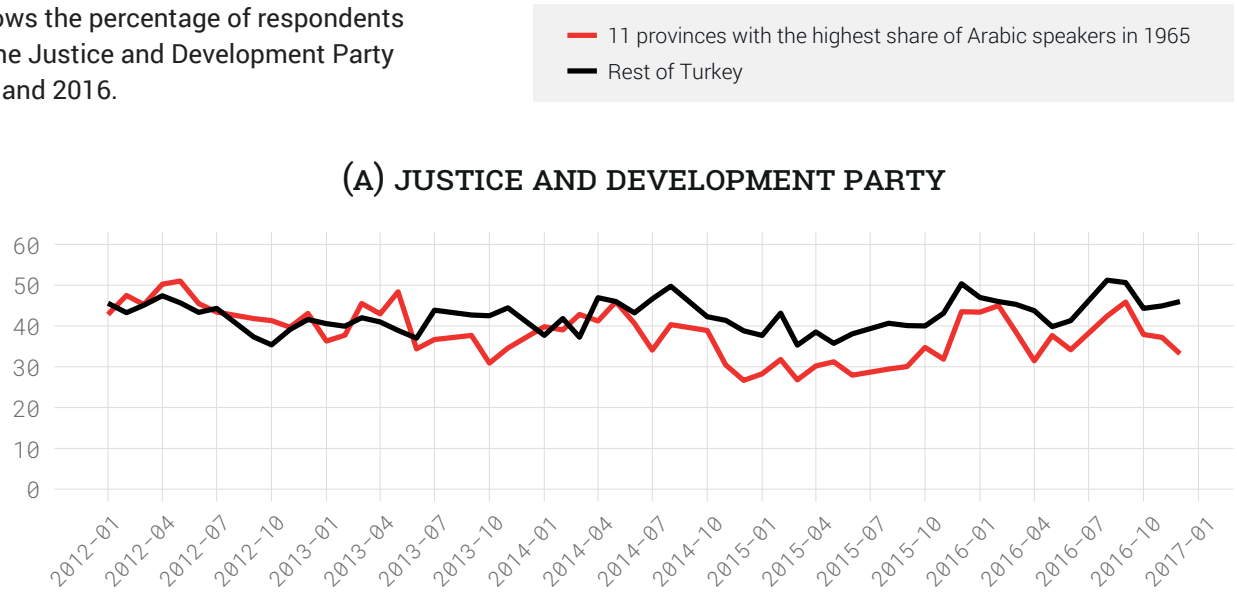


Figure 5a.

An Event Study of Political Support for AKP

This figure shows the percentage of respondents who support the Justice and Development Party between 2012 and 2016.



This figure shows the percentage of respondents who do not support any of the major political parties (*i.e.* AKP, CHP, MHP, and HDP) between 2012 and 2016.

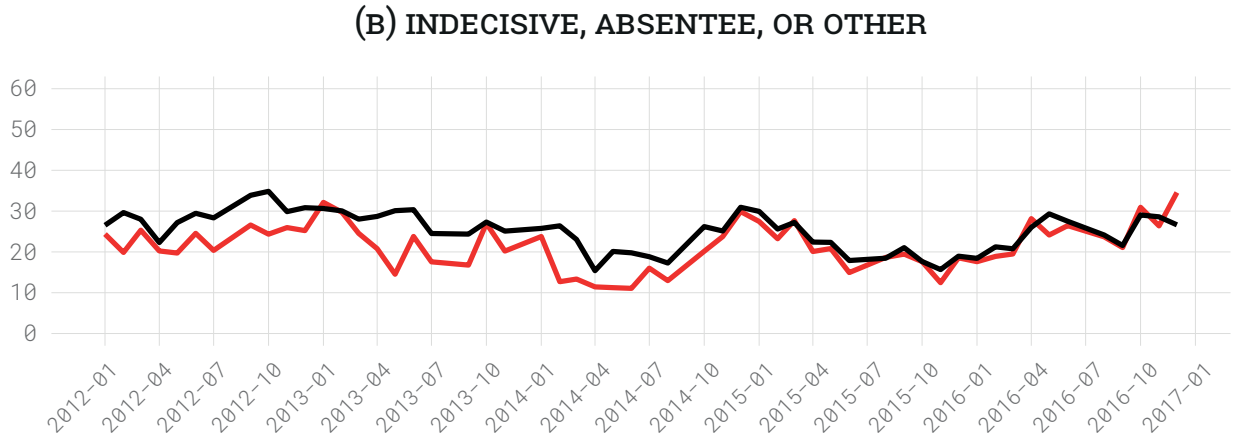
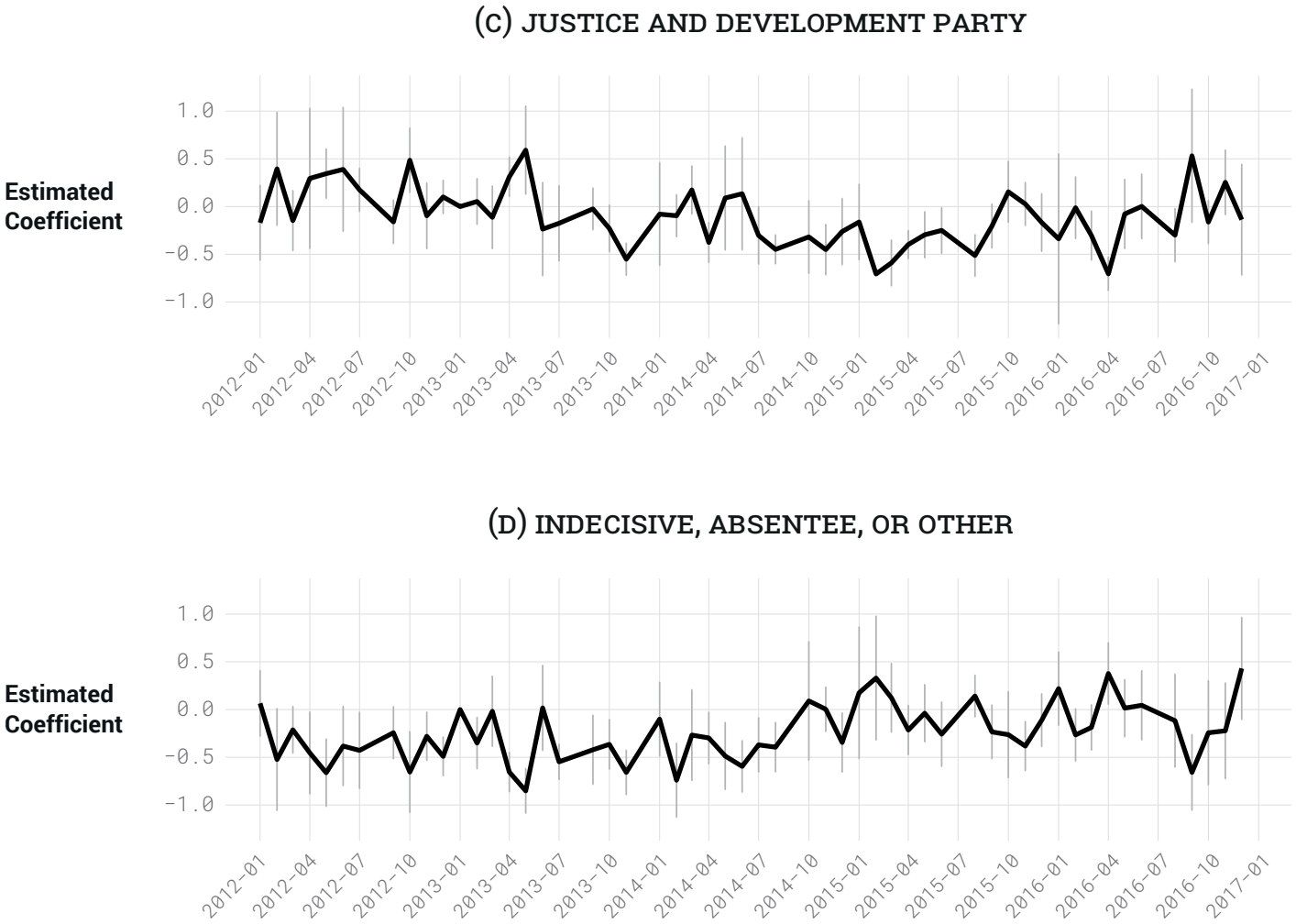


Figure 5b.

An Event Study of Political Support for AKP

The figure below shows the estimated coefficients for the interaction terms from the following regression:

$$y_{ijt} = \alpha + \delta_j + \gamma_t + \sum_t \pi_t (d_t \times Arab_j^{1965}) + \varepsilon_{ijt}$$

where y_{ijt} is the binary outcome of political affiliation, δ_j and γ_t control for province and survey month fixed effect. Each survey month dummy, d_t is interacted with the share of Arabic speakers in 1965 , *i.e.* $Arab_j^{1965}$, and we plot the estimated coefficients π_t for the outcomes indicated in panels (C) and (D).