

How Does Living Under Left-Wing Authoritarianism Affect Refugees Who Settle in Democracies? Evidence from Soviet Refugees

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March 26, 2023

Abstract

We use data on Jewish refugees resettled in the United States between 1938 and 2005, along with survey data on Israeli citizens born in the Former Soviet Union, to demonstrate the persistent downstream political consequences of socialization under left-wing authoritarian regimes. Using a within-family research design that allows us to identify the effect of spending more time under left-wing authoritarianism relative to younger siblings, we show that additional years spent under such regimes result in a higher likelihood of voting and of identifying with right-wing political parties after immigration to democratic countries.

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1 Introduction

Approximately three million refugees have entered the United States since the federal Refugee Resettlement Program was established in 1980, making it the largest refugee resettlement program in the world (Budiman, 2020). People seeking refuge from war, environmental or humanitarian crises, or states that targeted and oppressed them had been arriving in considerable numbers since long before the U.S. established “refugees” as a legal category of immigrants in the wake of World War II. Almost by definition, this means that a significant proportion of both refugees and the larger immigrant population settling in the U.S. came from countries without broad civil rights protections or participatory democratic institutions. In fact, approximately 65% of the 482,579 refugees resettled in the United States between 2011 and 2022 came from countries Freedom House categorizes as “not free” in the sense that they do not preserve citizens’ civil or political rights (Refugee Processing Center, 2022).

This group of Americans has enormous potential to impact U.S. politics. Indeed, they already have. By recent estimates, 23.2 million of the people eligible to vote in the 2020 presidential election, or one-in-ten eligible voters, were naturalized immigrant-citizens – a number that has more than doubled since 2000 (Budiman, Noe-Bustamante and Lopez, 2020). In 2020, 50.7% of foreign-born respondents to the United States Current Population Survey who claimed to have voted in the 2020 general election listed countries of birth with Polity scores below 6, the cutoff the Center for Systemic Peace typically uses to indicate democracies (Flood et al., 2022; Marshall and Gurr, 2020). While registration and turnout estimates specific to refugees are unavailable, we know that rates of naturalization for refugees and asylees have been high relative to other immigrant subgroups. For instance, 66% of refugee arrivals between 2000 and 2010 attained citizenship by 2015 (Mossaad et al., 2018). Once immigrants are naturalized, they become eligible to register

and vote in federal and state elections and to donate to political campaigns.

Despite the size and significance of migrant populations living in the United States and many other countries, social scientists have only just begun responding to calls among immigration researchers, policymakers, and advocates to better understand the ways that pre-migration experiences shape the attitudes and behaviors that migrants adopt after settlement (Superti and Gidron, 2021; Ramakrishnan, 2005; Jones-Correa, 1998a,b). Expectations about the importance of pre-migration experiences are ultimately rooted in theories of political socialization. Scholars have long understood that the places where we grow up, as well as the social, political, and economic contexts prevailing in them during our formative years, have an enormous effect on our levels of political engagement and our political affiliations. As children, we gradually learn political ideas and norms governing how to participate in politics from our parents and social networks (Hyman, 1959; Almond and Verba, 1963; Davies, 1965; Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Plutzer, 2002; Jennings and Bowers, 2009). Beyond this, going through formative civic experiences such as military conscription, political realignments, unrest, or public prejudice can have lasting effects on political views for whole cohorts (Harvey, 1972; Seibert, Jennings and Niemi, 1974; Beck, 1977; Tedin, 1980; Lajevardi, 2020).

Although research on political socialization has largely focused on native-born populations, socialization meets people where they are, which implies that pre-migration experiences should matter for refugees' post-migration political behaviors and attitudes. The few empirical studies examining this question have found that to be the case. For instance, immigrants from Mexico to the U.S. are more likely to declare partisan affiliations and participate in politics in the U.S. if they had been politically active in Mexico before migration (Wals, 2011, 2013). Superti and Gidron (2021) likewise find that immigrants to Israel who were old enough to remember their birth country political context tended to use it as a benchmark when expressing trust in political institutions operating within

their adopted country.

Still, the question of *how* coming of age under a regime that is undemocratic or even repressive might affect immigrants' political lives after they settle in participatory democracies continues to perplex scholars of migration – and for good reasons. One of the most fundamental is selection. For researchers who detect distinctive patterns among immigrant populations, it's hard to discount the possibility that such differences in preferences or behaviors are themselves the factors that drove migration in the first place (Turcu and Urbatsch, 2022; Lim, 2022). Immigrants who support right-wing parties in their settlement country, for instance, may have also been right-wing partisans *before* migration. It's this form of selection that typically characterizes white Cuban immigrants to Miami-Dade County (Portes and Mozo, 1985). Furthermore, for immigrants coming from countries without participatory institutions to those that have them, evidence of political (dis)engagement can typically only be obtained in settlement countries. Together, these features make identifying the effect of pre-migration regime on downstream political life almost impossible.

If these challenges were not enough, as a practical matter obtaining *any* data that connect individual immigrants to individual outcomes is prohibitively difficult. Administrative records describing immigrants who enter the U.S. contain no information about their subsequent political attitudes or behaviors, and data sources rich in information about the latter rarely ask about immigrant status. Most research on this topic relies on surveys of relatively small samples of immigrants where political behaviors are self-reported. This is potentially problematic because not only do respondents regularly over-report voting (Hanmer, Banks and White, 2013; Belli et al., 1999; Belli, Traugott and Beckmann, 2001), but overreports are not randomly distributed throughout the population (Ansolabehere and Hersh, 2012; Deufel and Kedar, 2010) and immigrants with either a more optimistic view of the United States and their civic duty to it or a conditioned fear of the state might

be disproportionately compelled to “comply” and report participation. Additionally, surveys tend to aggregate respondents by immigrant status, race, ethnicity, language, or region of birth. Immigration year and country of origin are frequently absent (Abramitzky, Baseler and Sin, 2022), making the effect of living under a particular regime impossible to assess.

Our contribution in this paper is to provide a first look at how living under a repressive, authoritarian regime affects political participation and party affiliation for immigrants who come to the United States. We rely on a data set of refugees resettled in the U.S. with help from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), a nonprofit organization that has provided humanitarian aid and assistance to refugees entering the U.S. since 1881. HIAS was originally founded to help Jews fleeing discrimination and violence throughout Tsarist Russia, and their data consist primarily (though not exclusively) of people leaving former Soviet Bloc countries – all of which are under communist authoritarian rule for most of our observation period. Crucially, this dataset identifies individuals, family connections, dates of birth, and countries of origin, which allows us to get causal leverage on the question of how living under a left-wing authoritarian regime as a member of a persecuted minority pre-migration affects individual immigrants’ political lives in the U.S.

We focus on children *within the same refugee families*, which allows us to hold fixed potential confounding that might arise from genetics, socialization within family, family structure, and the migration experience itself. We merge our extensive data on refugees to commercially available individual voter files to track the effects of coming of age in a left-wing authoritarian regime on voting (conditional on registration) and party identification. We find that children who spent more time living under left-wing authoritarian regimes are, on average, more likely to participate in presidential and midterm elections, and to register as Republicans in the United States. We also find that people who left the

same left-wing authoritarian regimes around the same time, but who resettled in Israel, are likewise more likely to report both voting and voting for right-wing parties in Israel's parliamentary elections for every additional year of childhood spent in their birth countries.

Our results are consistent with the hypothesis that coming of age in left-wing authoritarian regimes without participatory institutions drives higher levels of voting and higher levels of affiliation with a right-wing party in the country of arrival. We discuss theoretical expectations for how features of authoritarian regimes might influence downstream politics for the people who leave them in Section 2, detail the historical context that drove migration for the refugees in our sample in Section 3, describe our data in Section 4, present results in Section 5, provide a discussion of underlying assumptions in Section 6, and conclude in Section 7.

2 The Imprint of Authoritarianism

Any theory of how coming of age under an authoritarian regime might affect citizens must be nuanced and multifaceted for a variety of reasons. The first is that there is considerable heterogeneity among authoritarian regimes themselves (Geddes, 1999, 1995). These vary in terms of stability (Brownlee, 2007), economic conditions (Wright, 2008), and the extent of human rights protection or repression of specific groups (Davenport, 2005, 2007) - among other things. While some authoritarian regimes are generally permissive and allow citizens broad freedom to participate in every arena of civic and economic life except for law- and rule-making, others target and violently repress segments of their populations. Researchers working on populations both outside (Zhukov and Talibova, 2018; Rozenas, Schutte and Zhukov, 2017; Rozenas and Zhukov, 2019) and inside (Komisarchik, Sen and Velez, 2022) of the United States have shown that victims of

state-sponsored violence, repression, or catastrophic failure to provide resources suffer long-lasting political consequences.

The second factor complicating theories of how pre-migration socialization might affect post-migration outcomes is that citizen responses to these features of regimes are not deterministic. While some citizens living under high levels of restriction respond by disengaging with the state as much as possible to avoid punishment, others protest, join movements to dislodge the regime, or flee even if the potential cost of doing so might be enormous. The very fact that some residents emigrate while most stay put demonstrates this heterogeneity and suggests those who leave might be unlike those who stay. People who ultimately choose to leave might perceive themselves to be in greater danger from the regime, may face more dire economic circumstances on average than those who stay, or any number of differences that drive their cost-benefit analysis of whether to stay or go.

Finally, exposure to a particular type of regime early in life is necessarily exposure to a bundle of different “treatments”. As we’ll discuss in Section 3, the vast majority of immigrants in our data are Jewish refugees who come from formerly Soviet Bloc countries – a class of what [Geddes \(1999\)](#) calls “single-party autocracies,” or authoritarian regimes governed by members of a single, ruling party that exercises control over its leaders and the careers of public servants and officials, distributes benefits to loyal supporters, and mobilizes citizens to support it. This means individuals pre-migration experiences were structured simultaneously by (1) totalitarianism, or the state’s extensive regulation of public and private life (2) left-wing economic policies, or the state’s ownership of most means of production and heavy regulation of the economy, and (3) belonging to an ethnic and religious minority targeted for persecution by the state.

All three of these features produce an affective backlash among immigrants who successfully leave and resettle in countries where they can cast meaningful votes and volun-

tarily affiliate with parties. That is, immigrants who feel most abused by the governing regime (either because they suffer most from the government's mismanagement of the economy, because they perceive the state's influence over their lives and their inability to change it via the political process as particularly unjust, or because they perceive a great deal of threat from the government or the public as the result of their religious or ethnic identity) are most likely to participate in politics in democratic settlement countries precisely because meaningful participation is barred in their birth countries and most likely to affiliate with right-wing parties because these appear furthest away from the governing parties they fled. Additionally, the longer immigrants spend in a totalitarian, left-wing regime in which they are a persecuted minority, the deeper their sense of aversion and the stronger their backlash is likely to be.

The reasons for this, repeated by countless immigrants interviewed in the popular press, stem from a combination of the desire to express their dissatisfaction with the ruling regimes that drove them out of their birth countries and the desire to protect their settlement countries from becoming like the places they left. Disentangling *which* of the three main treatments in the bundle is likely to matter most is beyond the scope of what is possible for our data, but since a large proportion of party-based authoritarian systems are or have been communist ([Davenport, 2007](#)), most immigrants leaving communist countries will have experienced both extensive economic management and government repression. Thus, expectations for how these treatments might affect political behavior in democratic settlement countries likely generalize to populations from outside of the former Soviet Union ("FSU").

2.1 Participation

How might people leaving totalitarian regimes without democratic institutions adjust to them post-migration? In contemporary authoritarian states, either as a result of limited exposure to democracy or messaging deployed by governments seeking to disparage democracy, residents might have limited trust in the public and skepticism of deliberative democratic institutions themselves. In fact, several surveys across western democracies have suggested that immigrants from authoritarian regimes are more likely to express skepticism of democracy or openness to other forms of government (McAllister and Makkai, 1991; Bilodeau, McAllister and Kanji, 2010; Bilodeau, 2014, 2016; Just, 2017). This certainly appears to be the case among immigrants from the Soviet Union, who report low levels of public trust and faith in institutions (DiFranceisco and Gitelman, 1984; Rose, Mishler and Haerper, 1998; Holmes, 1997). Immigrants from Vietnam have also expressed high levels of distrust in the government relative to members of other Asian-American subgroups emigrating from less repressive regimes (Collet, 2000). Researchers have pointed out that political participation often *does* take place in some form under a left-wing authoritarian regime. However, in authoritarian regimes political participation is often compulsory and performative; citizens may be expected to join the governing party, attend rallies and political events, take part in political debates, or even cast ballots - all without any expectation of exerting real influence over government (DiFranceisco and Gitelman, 1984; Kuran, 1991).

Taken together, pre-migration distrust in public political institutions, aversion to engagement with the state after being forced to do it ceremonially, or outright oppression at the hands of the state might all suggest that party autocracies, at least, politically demobilize their citizens. That is likely to represent at least a portion of the direct effect that living under such regimes has on immigrants and non-immigrants alike. However,

it remains important to account for the theoretical implications of both selection and socialization. It is possible that those who leave authoritarian regimes are precisely those people with the greatest desire to participate in the democratic process. Accordingly, immigrants who obtain citizenship in new countries may actually be more likely to participate in elections despite the disincentives to do this in their countries of origin. It's similarly possible that, despite a learned reluctance to engage in politics in their countries of birth, immigrants might think of the United States, Canada, Australia, Israel, or other mature democracies as places where political participation is fruitful and welcome any encouragement that they receive to obtain citizenship and engage in politics upon arrival. In other words, conditional on knowing that they might be settling in a democratic country, immigrants may adopt positive views of the democratic process.

These countervailing forces may help explain why empirical findings attempting to relate political participation to country of birth among immigrants to western democracies are such a mixed bag. There appears to be no clear empirical relationship between turnout and country of origin for immigrants to Canada ([White, 2017](#)) or Australia ([Bilodeau, McAllister and Kanji, 2010](#)). Using surveys of first generation immigrants to the U.S. spanning 1994-2000, [Ramakrishnan \(2005\)](#) finds that the relationship between coming of age in a repressive regime and turnout varies by ethnicity, changing signs from negative for white and non-Cuban LatinX immigrants to positive for Asian immigrants. Earlier studies of Cuban immigrants to the United States have suggested *higher* rates of political participation relative to immigrants from other LatinX subgroups who were not fleeing repressive regimes ([Portes and Mozo, 1985](#); [Arvizu and Garcia, 1996](#)).

We'll show evidence that, for the population we study, longer periods of exposure to left-wing authoritarian regimes actually increase the likelihood of participation. It's worth pointing out some important caveats in the context of theoretical predictions. First, as we'll discuss in [Section 4](#), our data constrain us to look at people who turn out *condi-*

tional on having registered to vote. We will not be able to address the question of whether or not living under authoritarian regimes makes people more or less likely to register to vote, and the possibility that coming of age under authoritarianism is broadly demobilizing in the sense that smaller proportions of immigrants coming from authoritarian countries register relative to native born people or other immigrants will remain open.

2.2 Party Affiliation

After deciding that they want to participate in democratic politics, the first relevant question for immigrants navigating the political landscape might be whether to affiliate with particular parties or candidates at all. Indeed, [Just \(2017\)](#) argues that for immigrants coming from party autocracies where party membership is compulsory and party organizations largely function as a means of monitoring and controlling the population, freedom in the context of a democracy means the freedom to avoid committing to a party. For those that do find their way to party affiliations, scholars have presented an abundance of evidence for a similar type of backlash against prevailing regimes in their birth countries. Immigrants hailing from left-wing authoritarian regimes across continents, religions, races, and ethnicities have tended to affiliate with right-wing parties rather than left-wing ones – at least at much higher rates than immigrants coming from other regime types.

Scholars working in the comparative literature have observed this backlash against left-wing authoritarian governments is affective more than it is ideological. Pervasive public anti-communism in the countries that implement left-wing authoritarian regimes is rooted in opposition to party control over civic, political, and economic life; disappointment at the deprivation and economic inefficiency introduced by central planning, and anger over violent repression at the hands of the state ([Kuran, 1991](#); [Darden and](#)

Grzymala-Busse, 2006; Just, 2017). Sentiments like these abound in popular press accounts from Soviet-Jewish refugees to the United States, who are heavily represented in our data. “They have experienced socialism and communism in a totalitarian regime,” the director of Russian-Jewish Community Affairs at the American Jewish Committee explained to *The Atlantic*; “anything that remotely resembles that, they hate it, they despise it” (Khazan, 2016). Immigrants from the Soviet Union are not alone. Examples of similarly fervent anti-communism appear in studies of immigrants from China, Vietnam, and Cuba (Takaki, 1989; Girard, Grenier and Gladwin, 2012; Wong et al., 2011).

An abundance of descriptive survey evidence points to the possibility that reflexive rejection of communist authoritarian parties helps guide political orientation for immigrants coming from left-wing autocracies. Many studies have documented the tendency for immigrants from left-wing authoritarian regimes to identify with right-wing parties in democratic countries. Studies have shown this is the case among Eastern European immigrants to Germany (Wüst, 2000, 2004), Switzerland (Strijbis, 2014), Australia (McAllister and Makkai, 1991), and Romanian immigrants to Spain (Bird, Saalfeld and Wüst, 2010). Several studies have pointed out similar trends among Vietnamese and Cuban immigrants to the U.S. (Cain, Kiewiet and Uhlaner, 1991; Hill and Moreno, 1996; Alvarez and Bedolla, 2003; Lien, Conway and Wong, 2004; Hajnal and Lee, 2006).

There is evidence for this in the U.S. voting behavior of Soviet refugees as well. Some of the most extensive existing surveys of the Russian-Jewish immigrant population suggested that 60-70% would support Donald Trump in the 2016 general election (Khazan, 2016). In fact, Donald Trump ultimately won 84% of the Republican primary vote in Brooklyn’s Brighton Beach neighborhood, historically an enclave for Russian-speaking immigrants (Bagri, 2016). This phenomenon is not limited to Donald Trump’s candidacy. Russian-Jewish immigrants reported casting predominantly Republican ballots in the 2004, 2008, and 2012 presidential elections. Additionally, an older literature in social

psychology suggests that Russian immigrants to the U.S. expressed conservative social attitudes about gender equality, sexuality, and race (Goldenberg and Saxe, 1996). These attitudes seem anchored to the pre-migration context. If anything, the authors find that residence in the U.S. pulls racial attitudes toward the average for native-born Americans, implying the existence of a pre-migration bundle of attitudes that map to right-wing social platforms. The results we'll present in Section 5 are certainly consistent with these survey data, with the advantage that they are not as vulnerable to the possibility of selection bias induced by surveying immigrants who were right-leaning before migration and continued on that political trajectory after migration.

3 The Case of Jewish Refugees from the Soviet Union

The predecessor organizations that would ultimately constitute HIAS, our primary source of data on refugees to the United States, began their operations in New York City in the 1880s. These organizations provided shelter, transportation, job opportunities, and meals to thousands of Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution throughout Eastern Europe. The vast majority of these refugees originated from “The Pale of Settlement,” a strip of territory including Belorussia, Bessarabia, the Crimean Peninsula, Lithuania, all of Russian-controlled Poland, and most of Ukraine (see Figure 1). Jewish settlement in the Russian empire was formally restricted to this area in the 1780s, and remained this way through World War I. By the late 1890s, Russian census data suggest that almost five million Jews lived in the Pale, which remained home to most of the Jews in Europe until their mass murder during World War II. A wave of violent anti-Jewish riots, or “pogroms,” spread across this region following the assassination of Alexander II in 1881; these, along with other official forms of state persecution, sent approximately two million Jews fleeing from the Russian Empire, Romania, and Austria-Hungary to the United States between

1881 and 1924.



Figure 1: Pale of Settlement. Source: [Grosfeld, Rodnyansky and Zhuravskaya \(2013\)](#)

Partially in response to this group of newcomers, the United States severely restricted immigration with the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, limiting the number of visas granted each year to just two percent of the total number of residents of a given nationality already settled in the United States (and barring Asian immigrants altogether). This would remain in force until Congress reformed immigration quotas in 1965. On the Soviet side, the ruling Communist Party drastically restricted emigration in the 1920s, closing borders under its control and investing heavily in border security to restrict movement out ([Gitelman, 1977](#)).

Given the lengthy periods of restricted immigration in the U.S. and emigration in the Soviet Union, the story of contemporary migration from the FSU to the United States essentially begins in the 1970s. Under mounting international pressure following World

War II and subsequently the Six-Day war in 1967, the FSU began to allow limited Jewish emigration to Israel. The process of obtaining visas was initially cumbersome and arbitrary, and applicants put themselves at risk of government retaliation. Still, approximately 160,000 Jews emigrated to Israel in this period. In 1973, the U.S. passed the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which made permitting emigration a human rights issue and a condition for trade agreements between the U.S. and FSU. The FSU responded by reversing its position and restricting Jewish emigration again, largely in response to Jackson-Vanik. These restrictions were lifted under Gorbachev beginning in 1986, when ethnic Germans were permitted to return to west Germany and Jews were allowed to go to Israel or the United States.

Jews remaining in Soviet Bloc countries during this period were still widely subject to official and unofficial discrimination, including: restrictions on university entry, employment, and Communist Party membership, along with a legacy of religious repression held over from earlier Soviet regimes that had banned religious practice. Ironically, the liberalization of free expression rules under Gorbachev's *perestroika* heralded an *increase* in public anti-semitic demonstrations (Gitelman, 1991), all prompting subsequent waves of emigration out of the Soviet Union that would continue after the Soviet Bloc dissolved in 1991.

This exodus is a particularly remarkable one in its scale and near-completeness. Approximately 2.2 million Jews lived in the Soviet Union in 1970 – a population that fell to 1.5 million in 1989 and dwindled to just 248,000 by the beginning of 2019 (Tolts, 2019). Of the approximately 1.6 million Jews born in the FSU who now live elsewhere, an estimated 750,000 currently live in the United States. This group constitutes approximately 10% of the American Jewish population, but looks profoundly different politically¹. As we'll dis-

¹Over 70% of Jewish respondents to a [2020 Pew Survey](#) reported self-identifying as Democrats or leaning toward the Democratic Party.

cuss in the subsequent section, while the records we have obtained from HIAS go back to nineteenth century arrivals, the people we can confidently merge to contemporary voting records belong largely to these later waves of immigrants.

4 HIAS Data and Merge

4.1 HIAS

631 BARDFELD REBECCA Loc A 31184

CASE SURNAME BARDFELD I. MAN REBECCA 2. WOMAN CASE NO. A 31184

ALT. SURNAMES CITY AND COUNTRY OF RESIDENCE GY

CASE UNIT MEMBERS	BIRTHDATE	CT OF BIRTH	MR	REL TO #1	ARRIVAL DATE
1.					
2. Inga	-27		M	D	
Wolfgang Wulf	9-6-17		M	SL	
Uri					

U. S. ADDRESS CITY AND STATE DATE 10-23-39 DEPT M

FIG. UND. T2/54 MASTER CARD WHELDEX FORM C-41209-1A

(a) Front

INTERESTED U. S. PERSONS ADDRESS WHELDEX FORM C-41209-1B REL. TO #1

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CYTER: HILMA	MILLVILLE N J	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BERNSTEIN: LEA	NYC	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PETROW: RICHARD	Forest Hills LI	
D.		
E.		
F.		

CROSS-REFERENCE CASES - CHANGES - ADD'L DATA

CASE SURNAME BARDFELD I. MAN REBECCA A 2. WOMAN REBECC A CASE NO. A 31184

(b) Back

Figure 2: An example card from the administrative files, 1955-1980. This sample record is [publicly available](#) via HIAS’s weblog describing the digitization of the organization’s records.

Our project leverages novel data from the HIAS administrative files, digitized through a collaboration with the American Jewish Historical Society (“AJHS”). For clients who immigrated (roughly) from 1980-2016, the AJHS database provides information that includes first and last name, country of birth, arrival date, and case number. For clients who immigrated between (roughly) 1955 and 1980, the AJHS database contains information that is derived from an extensive hand-coding of an old paper card system. The AJHS data from before 1980 contain fields including last name, man’s name, woman’s name, country of origin, case number, and registration date. These fields are similar to what

is available post-1980, but are subtly different. The AJHS also provides scanned copies of these index cards, making it possible to recode the originals and resolve ambiguities. Note that while the majority of people in this data are refugees their immigration visa categories are not officially provided in the HIAS data and many older arrivals pre-date the establishment of modern visa categories.

Figure 2 provides an example of what these cards look like. Other information visible on these cards include birth date, country of birth, marital status, relationship to the head of household, arrival date, arrival address, and the names of related cases and interested persons. To assemble our dataset, we began by acquiring these web-available records, and then contracted with a vendor to extend the manual coding of the scanned index card files to the remaining fields that were available on these cards, but not already coded by AJHS.

The AJHS's records always describe the names of clients and their case numbers. By definition, individuals with common case numbers are people who immigrate together. Inspection of these files reveals that a particular case number usually corresponds with a nuclear family, however it may include cousins, in-laws, or more distant relations. We eventually use shared case numbers to implement our within-family design, however before reaching that point we attempt to gather information about the subsequent political behavior of these individuals. In particular, we set about matching these sets of names to voter files.

Specifically, we merge the HIAS and AJHS refugee records to individual voter records made commercially available by L2. L2 curates records of approximately 208 million U.S. voters, providing a large list of covariates describing each voter, including: full name, registration status (active or inactive), birth date, age, race, gender, address, turnout history, and party affiliation. Like all voter records, L2's data are limited to U.S. citizens that have, at some point in the past, registered to vote. Residents who have never registered to

vote do not appear in voter files, so there is no way to obtain information on non-voters from these files or to strictly distinguish between people who have truly never voted and people who do not match to the files as a result of having been purged off voter rolls or mis-transcription.

Three important considerations about the underlying data merit mention in thinking about how to implement the name matching. First, the immigrants that HIAS helped come to the United States often had idiosyncratic surnames as compared with American natives, particularly those largely Soviet-bloc immigrants that arrived post-1980. Second, HIAS was not always perfectly reliable about filing out all available fields in their old index card system, however, they did often record birth-dates. For pre-1980, the matching exercise to voter files can take advantage of the fact birthdates are highly discriminating and surnames are fairly discriminating, while for post-1980 the matching exercise can take advantage of the fact that surnames for this group are particularly unique. Finally, one must recognize that better matching might be possible with more data on individuals, especially birth dates for the post-1980 cohort. Unfortunately, the government's version of such administrative files will only become available to scholars when these individuals are older than 100, which is to say in 30 years for the oldest immigrants in our files.

We engage in a step-wise matching procedure for both the pre-1980 and post-1980 immigrants. For each of the post-1980 immigrants, we search through the voter files for individuals with active registration that have the same first and last name. If we find a unique match, we accept that match and remove it from the pool of immigrants we are attempting to match. With the new, smaller set of unmatched immigrants, we look for unique exact matches on first and last name, now including inactive registrations as well. Successfully matched names are removed from the pool. With the remaining unmatched immigrants, we again look through the entire voter file for individuals with the same last name and one character edit to the first name. Particularly with foreign names, minor

transcription errors are fairly common. Any successful unique matches are added to our dataset. At this point, we stop searching for more tenuous matches of the post-1980 cohort.

Our strategy for finding the pre-1980s immigrants proceeds similarly with a search for unique exact matches according to some restrictive set of criteria, removing successful finds from the pool, and then matching the leftovers against some less restrictive criteria. We iterate this process through more filters than in the case of the post-1980 group, because we have more relevant data. In particular, the index cards more or less exactly described birthdate. Individuals are with some frequency recorded as having two names. Sometimes these two names appear to be first and middle while other times it appears to be a more anglicized alternative (e.g. Dawid David). In such cases, it is hard to know which given name to search for in the voter file; if an index card describes an immigrant named Ben David, does one expect to find that person registered as Ben, David, or Ben David? Therefore, we will consider the possible variations on the name that are contained in the cards. In particular, we apply our iterative procedure for searching for unique exact matches against the following pieces of information: (1) birthdate, transcribed given name, transcribed surname; (2) birth year, given, surname; (3) given, surname, birthday, birth month, birth year ± 1 or birth year ± 2 ; (4) surname, birthdate, plausible variations on the given name; (5) birth year, surname, variations on given; (6) surname, variations on given, birthday, birth month, and birth year ± 1 or ± 2 ; (7) birthdate, surname, one edit to the given name, (8) birthdate, surname, one edit to variations on the transcribed given name.

5 Empirical Strategy and Results

5.1 Sample Characteristics

The matching process described above leaves us with individuals for whom crucial data, such as age at arrival and voting history, are available. There are 4,797 such individuals, representing 2,439 families who came to the U.S. from 24 Soviet or Soviet-bloc countries.² 4,419 of these individuals arrived in the U.S. as children, which we define as younger than 21 years old. Figure 3 presents the number of individuals in our data set from each country who arrived as children. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (“USSR”) is the most common country of origin, representing all arrivals prior to the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991, followed by Russia, Ukraine, Poland, and Romania.

Panel A in Figure 4 shows the distribution of years of arrival for the child arrivals. The distribution is very similar for the whole sample. Although our earliest refugees came to the U.S. in 1938 and the latest in 2005, there are two main waves of migration. The first, in the 1960s and early 1970s, is largely (75%) from the Soviet bloc countries of Poland and Romania, where migration was slightly less restricted than in the USSR. The second wave is largely in the 1980s and 1990s, when refugees departed the former Soviet Union.

Panel B in Figure 4 presents a distribution of the children with siblings in our data according to the age gap between the siblings. Most of our children have siblings who are 10 years or fewer apart from them. The outliers, those with a greater than 10 year gap, are possibly cousins rather than brothers or sisters. Excluding these outliers from our analyses produces very similar results (see Table C.6 in the Appendix).

²Countries of origin are classified by their names at the time of departure, giving us some individuals who, for example, fled the Soviet Union and others who fled Russia.

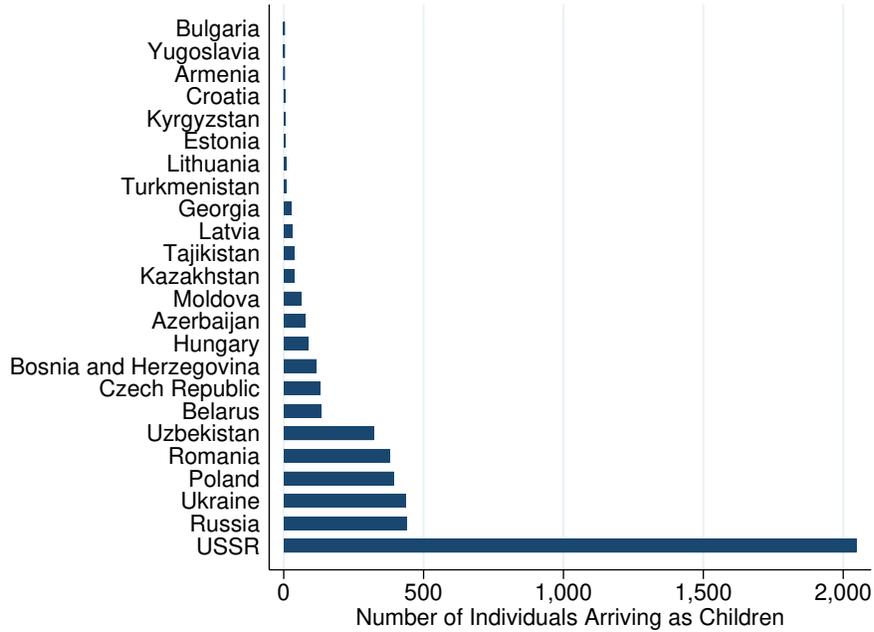


Figure 3: Top 10 Countries of Origin

Note: Countries of origin, by number of people arriving as children (under age 21).

5.2 Voting Behavior

We are interested in understanding whether there is a relationship between age at arrival in the U.S. and an individual’s political engagement and preferences later in life. Numerous studies have shown a causal relationship between exposure to a particular environment, especially in childhood, and one’s income, health, and education, among other outcomes (Chetty and Hendren, 2018). We use our data to understand whether environment shapes political preferences and behaviors. Since our voting pattern data are only available for those who are registered to vote, we are limited to studying only those who are civically engaged enough to register.

Panel A of Figure 5 shows the unconditional relationship between age at arrival and the probability of voting in the 2016 general election. The binned scatter plot reveals

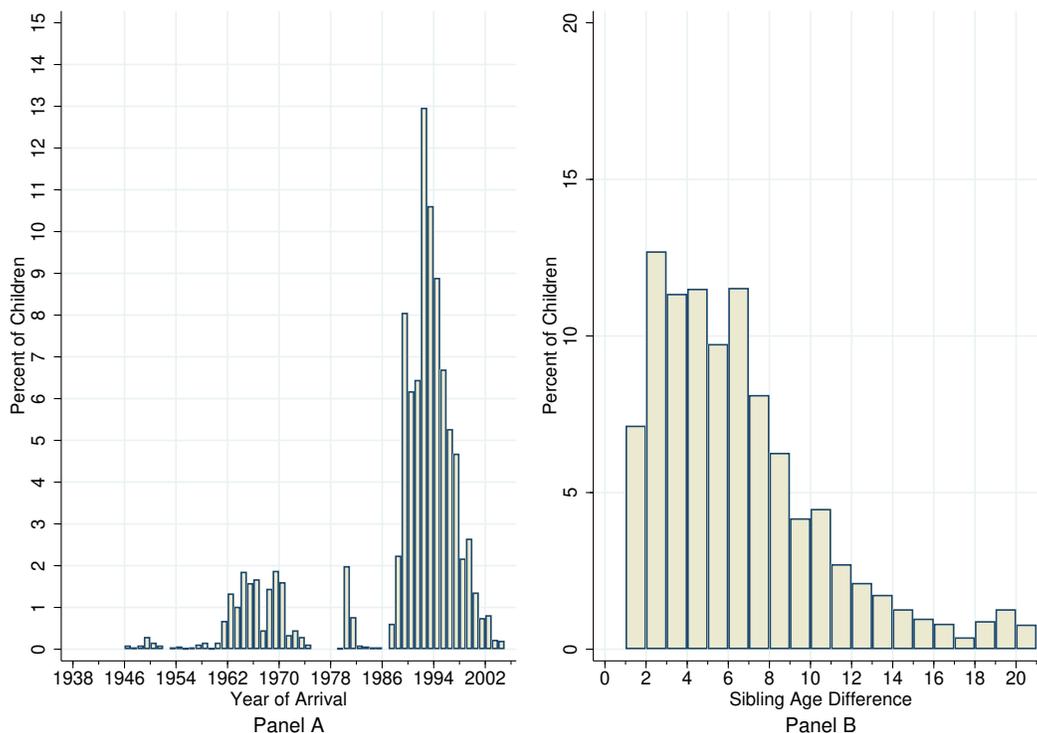


Figure 4: Descriptive Distributions

Note: Panel A shows the distribution of individuals arriving as children (under the age of 21), by year of arrival. Panel B shows the distribution of individuals who arrive as children and who have siblings, by the age gap between siblings.

a fairly linear relationship, with every additional year associated with a 0.64 percentage point increase in the probability of voting in 2016. Here, we are concerned with numerous omitted variables driving the pattern, but the result does suggest that more years of life spent in the origin country results in a higher probability of voting in U.S. elections later in life.

Panel B presents the same relationship, but for the 2014 midterm election instead. Every additional year is associated with a 1.05 percentage point increase in the probability of voting, suggesting that environmental exposure might be playing a bigger role in

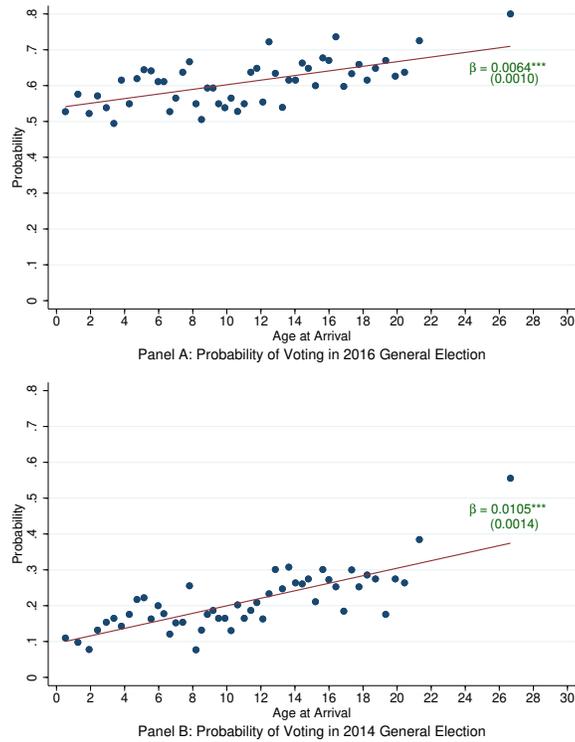


Figure 5: Probability of Voting by Age at Arrival

Note: Panel A shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. votes in the 2016 general (presidential) election. Panel B shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. votes in the 2014 general (midterm) election. In both Panels A and B, the specification includes no controls, no fixed effects, and no restrictions on age at arrival. Charts show binned scatter plots, with each circle an average over an equal number of data points. Errors are clustered at the level of the state in which an individual is registered to vote. Standard errors on the age at arrival variable are shown in parentheses.

generating turnout during the less-salient midterm elections than the more-salient presidential elections. As one would expect, Figure 5 also shows that the probability of voting in the 2014 midterm election is considerably lower than the probability of voting in the 2016 presidential election.

To see whether there is indeed a causal relationship between age at arrival and the probability of voting, we estimate family fixed effects regressions of the following form:

$$y_{ij} = \alpha + \beta \text{ArrivalAge}_{ij} + \theta \text{Female}_{ij} + \kappa \text{ArrivalYear}_{ij} + \omega_i + \phi_j + \eta_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where y_{ij} is the outcome of child i in family j , Female_{ij} is a dummy variable for the child's gender, ArrivalAge_{ij} is the child's age at arrival in the U.S., ArrivalYear_{ij} is the year of arrival in the U.S., ω_i is a fixed effect for the current state of residence, and ϕ_j is a family fixed effect that captures unobserved family characteristics that are common to all siblings in the same family.³ η_{ij} denotes the error term. We cluster standard errors at the state level in all model estimations.

This specification allows for a *within family* analysis that compares differences in the political behaviors and preferences of siblings. This approach takes care of a lot of concerns that we might have from Panels A and B in Figure 5, since siblings come from the same country of origin, share a similar upbringing, and in almost all cases share the exact same immigration experience. Controlling additionally for sibling differences in gender and year of arrival in the U.S., as well as for more recent influences that might come from the current state of residence, we zero in on the causal effect of environmental exposure on political behaviors and preferences. Panels A and B of Figure 6 present a residualized binned scatter plot of the relationship between age at arrival and voting in 2016 and 2014, respectively.

The positive, mostly linear relationship we saw in Figure 5 is present here as well. The new slopes are 0.56 percentage points for the 2016 presidential election and 0.62 percentage points for 2014 midterm election. With about 60% of our child sample voting in the 2016 election, every year of later arrival is equivalent to about a 0.9% increase in the

³We use a linear term for *ArrivalAge* instead of a series of dummy variables because Panels A and B in Figure 5 show a fairly linear unconditional relationship between voting and age at arrival.

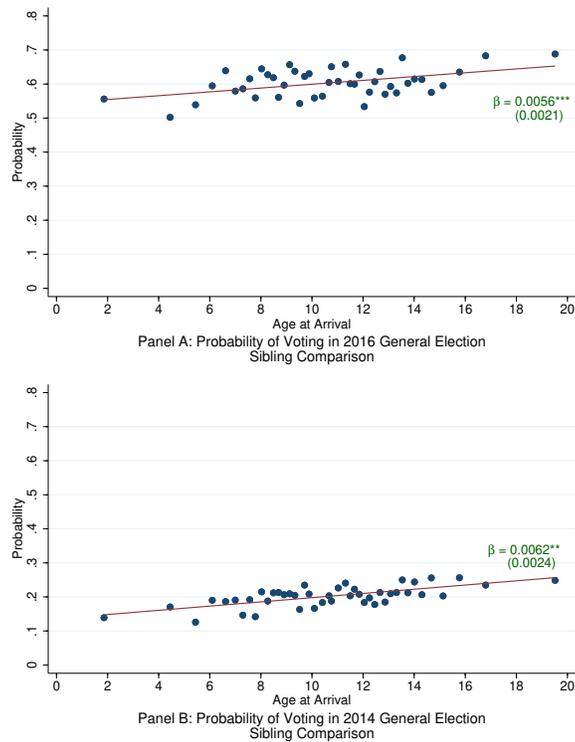


Figure 6: Probability of Voting by Age at Arrival, Sibling Comparison

Note: Panel A shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. votes in the 2016 general (presidential) election. Panel B shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. votes in the 2014 general (midterm) election. In both Panels A and B, the specification includes controls for gender and arrival year, as well as family and current state fixed effects. Charts show binned scatter plots, with each circle an average over an equal number of data points. Errors are clustered at the level of the state in which an individual is registered to vote. Standard errors on the age at arrival variable are shown in parentheses.

probability of voting in a general presidential election.⁴ In 2014, about 20% of the sample voted, translating our effect into a 3.1% increase in the probability of voting in a general midterm election. As with our unconditional look at the relationship between voting and time spent outside of the U.S., the sibling analysis demonstrates a larger effect of origin

⁴According to a Pew analysis, 86.8% of registered voters cast a ballot in 2016, so turnout among refugees in our sample is lower than in the general population. Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/03/in-past-elections-u-s-trailed-most-developed-countries-in-voter-turnout/>

country exposure on midterm election turnout than on presidential election turnout.

Assessed in concert, the unconditional and conditional analyses provide strong evidence that the more time a refugee spends in the country that they are fleeing, the more likely they will be to vote once in the U.S. The fact that the effect is larger, in percentage terms, in midterm than in presidential elections lends credence to the appreciation hypothesis: more time spent in an authoritarian regime, without the freedom to participate in a democratic electoral process, leads to a greater appreciation for this freedom once in the U.S. The consistency of our findings across model specifications and a sample with a range of countries of origin suggests that our results are not driven by sibling, family, or sample-selection dynamics.

5.3 Party Affiliation

Does environmental exposure have an effect not only on voting behavior but also on party affiliation? We answer this question with the same approach as above, but now turning the outcome variable into a dummy variable for an individual's party registration. Figure 7 illustrates the unconditional relationship between age at arrival and party affiliation as measured in 2018 using our whole sample. The figure reveals another linear trend: the later the age at arrival and thus the more exposure a refugee has to their country of origin, the more likely they are to be registered as a Republican in 2018. The increase with every year of about 0.52 percentage points (Panel B) comes almost entirely at the expense of registration with the Democratic Party (Panel A). There is no relationship between registration as a Non-Partisan and age at arrival (Panel C).

Applying the specification in (1) to do a sibling comparison for party affiliation, we find a similar pattern. Panels A to C in Figure 8 reveal that every additional year spent in the country of origin decreases the probability of being registered as a Democrat by

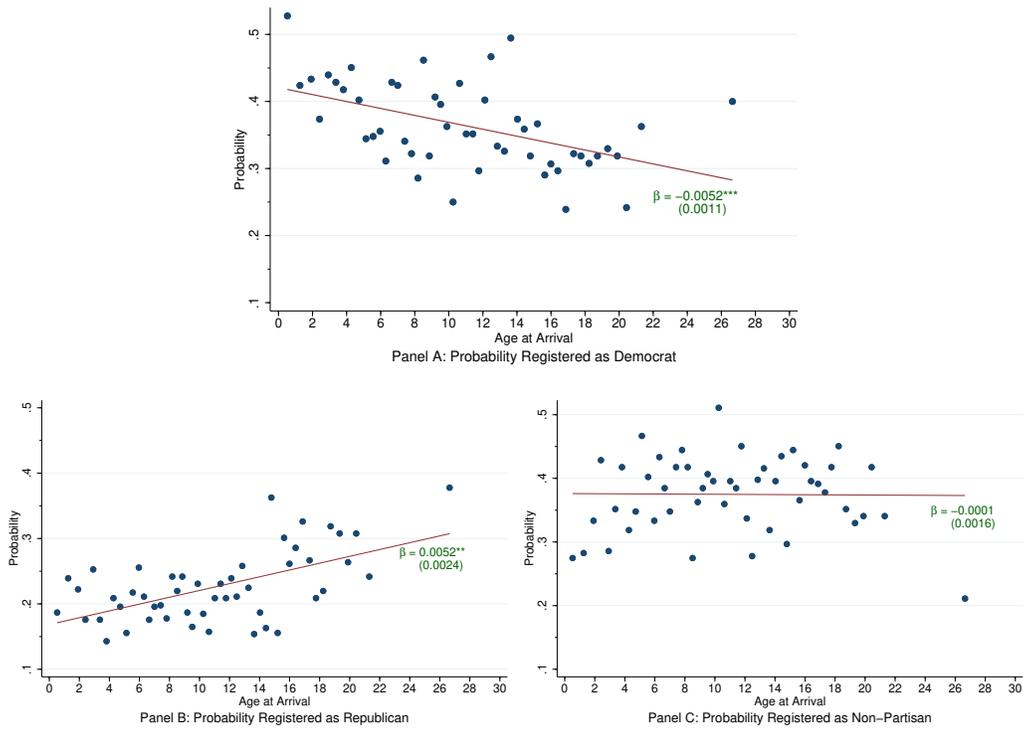


Figure 7: Probability of Party Registration by Age at Arrival

Note: Panel A shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. is registered with the Democratic Party. Panel B shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. is registered with the Republican Party, and Panel C shows the same for a Non-Partisan registration. Party registration is measured in 2018. The specification used here includes no controls, no family fixed effects, and no restriction on age at arrival. Charts show binned scatter plots, with each circle an average over an equal number of data points. Errors are clustered at the level of the state in which an individual is registered to vote. Standard errors on the age at arrival variable are shown in parentheses.

0.99 percentage points or 2.7%, while increasing the probability of being registered as a Republican by 0.53 percentage points or 2.3%. Unlike in the specification without family fixed effects, the probability of Non-Partisan registration here also goes up by 0.41 percentage points or about 1.1% for each additional year spent in the country of origin.

As with political engagement and voting, the consistency of our results across unconditional and conditional analyses of effects on party affiliation is encouraging. Since

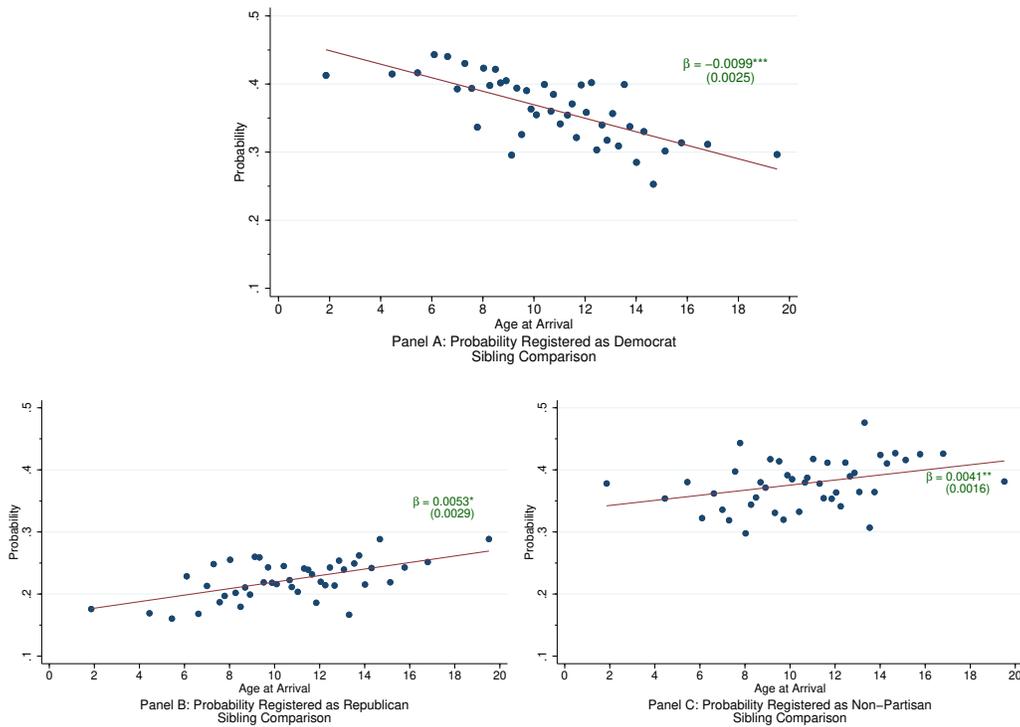


Figure 8: Probability of Party Registration by Age at Arrival, Sibling Comparison

Note: Panel A shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. is registered with the Democratic Party. Panel B shows the probability that an individual arriving at a particular age in the U.S. is registered with the Republican Party, and Panel C shows the same for a Non-Partisan or Independent registration. Party registration is measured in 2018. The specification includes controls for gender and arrival year, as well as family and current state fixed effects, so the relationships shown graphically here are residualized. Charts show binned scatter plots, with each circle an average over an equal number of data points. Errors are clustered at the level of the state in which an individual is registered to vote. Standard errors on the age at arrival variable are shown in parentheses.

the majority of the refugees in our sample flee not just authoritarian but also communist regimes, our results suggest that greater exposure to such regimes increases the probability that a refugee will gravitate towards the more conservative political party once in the destination country.

6 Discussion

6.1 All in the Family?

We rely on family fixed effects to identify the impact of living under an authoritarian regime. Because families with children tend to live together pre- and post-migration and make the move together, this allows us to hold the vast majority of socioeconomic, religious, traditional, biological, and migration-related confounders that might affect political outcomes fixed. Identification under a family fixed effect relies on the less explicit assumption that family organization, structure, and parenting are likewise relatively constant across children within the same family.

If parents treated elder children systematically differently than they treated younger children – and did this in a way that produced more political engagement and conservative-leaning political orientation in older children – we could not interpret our results as a function of each child’s level of exposure to the political context prevailing in their country of birth. Instead, differences between younger and older children would result from differences in the treatment they received from parents rather than from reactions to spending more or less time under authoritarian regimes. One practical example of this that appears in the comparative and development economics literatures are families that disproportionately rely on older children to work or contribute to the raising of younger children.

This particular scenario is unlikely to apply to our sample of refugees; data detailing demographic characteristics of the Jewish refugee population from the FSU suggest that families were very small (averaging fewer than two children) and educational attainment among parents was quite high (almost two thirds of respondents to a large survey of immigrants entering the U.S. between 1972 and 1981 reported having college degrees).

Additionally, most adults reported employment in an occupation before migration, public schooling was available to children throughout the FSU ([Chiswick, 1993](#); [Simon, 1985](#)), and little evidence points to widespread family reliance on work by children in the FSU during this period. Accordingly, it is unlikely that small families in which parents had college or advanced degrees and were generally unaccustomed to relying on children's wages to survive would have put much pressure on older children either to work or raise younger children.

Still, we test for evidence of the possibility that older children might have been treated differently explicitly in [Appendix C](#). First, we replicate our main results on a restricted sample of just families with two children. This precludes the possibility of large families in which older children might necessarily have more responsibility for younger children because parents are overextended. This appears in [Table C.4](#), and our results are consistent with [Section 5](#). We also test for the converse of this situation. We restrict our sample to just families that have more than two children and drop the oldest child. This tests the possibility that the effects we report are simply the effects of being the oldest child made more engaged and conservative via the endowment of more general responsibility for family welfare. Our results remain unchanged in this specification too, represented in [Table C.5](#), suggesting that this is more consistent with exposure than an "oldest child" effect since it is just as likely to appear in second oldest children relative to younger siblings.

Finally, we replicate our results on a sample of families with children relatively close in age. We do this because we expect relatively few differences in how parents might bring up children who are close in age and at similar stages of development at any given time. While some studies have suggested that parents are indeed likely to supervise older children with more intensity than younger children ([Averett, Argys and Rees, 2011](#)), partially as a result of anxiety over the challenges of parenting for the first time and partially

as a result of simply being younger and possessed of more energy when their first children are born, there is little evidence that parental supervision itself produces a systematically different outlook or behavior among children. The majority of empirical research into the relationships between birth order and psychological, sociological, or political outcomes has consistently found no systematic patterns connecting birth order to any of these (Ernst and Angst, 1983). Researchers examining the connection between birth order and ideology, policy views, and political engagement have pointed out that birth order is no more predictive of any of these than other covariates like age or gender (Urbatsch, 2014). Even if we think that persistent differences in relationships between parents and children of different ages exist on average, we can reduce the potential that this might confound our results by looking at families with children very close in age, because parents will not be meaningfully older or likely to be facing considerably different circumstances. We report these results in Table C.6, and they are also consistent with our main results in Section 5.

6.2 Over Here or Over There? Evidence from Immigrants to Israel

Like almost all existing studies of immigrants, we base our conclusions at least partly on post-migration data. Astute observers may point out that, especially in the American case where all immigrants who register to vote will have waited the requisite five years before obtaining citizenship and becoming eligible, there is plenty of time for assimilation into the U.S. political climate in the moments between when immigrant children arrive and when we observe their voter registration. Why, then, should we assume that the increased political engagement and propensity to identify as Republicans on the part of older children is the result of something that happens before migration rather than something that happens in the U.S.?

This is a fundamentally important question, and there are two primary reasons we think the results we observe stem from pre-migration life under authoritarian regimes rather than post-migration assimilation or experience in the United States. The first of these has to do with our research design. It's important to remember that the family fixed effect also accounts for much of the post-migration experience for children, meaning that the primary vehicles for the assimilation of children (e.g. schools, neighborhoods, social milieu) in the United States are also fixed once families arrive.

Consider, for example, a family from the Russian Federation with two children, aged ten and five at the moment of emigration to the United States in 1992. At the moment of migration, the children will have gotten a five year difference in the levels of direct and indirect exposure to the FSU with most other features of life relatively constant across children. On the U.S. side, these children will have likely lived in the same household, attended the same schools (though not necessarily exactly at the same time), done many of the same activities, and shared in their parents economic fortunes. Most importantly, by 2023, both siblings will have spent exactly the same 31 years living in the United States.

If one thinks the main driver of the turnout and party affiliation behavior observed is something happening in the United States, then one would need to explain why differences emerge between children who have the same lengths of exposure to the assimilating forces here. For example, if socialization had larger effects at some ages than others, with earlier childhood mattering more than late childhood, that could result in differences between siblings emerging purely as a result of what is happening in the United States. That said, we look and find no evidence for "critical age" effects in our data. Another story about how causal attribution to the United States goes wrong is if both older and younger siblings simply emulate otherwise prevalent differences in the United States. If it were the case that native-born older siblings in the U.S. were generally more politically engaged and politically conservative than their younger siblings, then the differences we

observe could be purely due to political socialization in the U.S. But studies of native-born children have suggested no such differences in the native-born U.S. population (Urbatsch, 2014), and we do not see whether and why such differences would exist in other wealthy democracies.

We allude to the second most important reason we believe these effects are a function of pre-migration experiences in Section 2: though not causal, survey data describing immigrants from Soviet Bloc countries to democracies all over the globe consistently demonstrate the immigrants' propensity to identify with right-wing parties. This is more consistent with the possibility that immigrants carry the imprint of the FSU with them than the alternative, because they report similar behavior on surveys taken in very different developed democracies that have taken vastly different approaches to assimilating immigrants.

We go further by providing analysis of survey data from Israel, where immigrants from the FSU constitute approximately 15% of the country's 7.7 million inhabitants. Israel is a parliamentary democracy with party-list proportional representation; voters vote for parties they wish to see represented in the Knesset – the country's unicameral legislature. Using data from the Israel Polarization Panel Dataset (Gidron, Sheffer and Mor, 2022), we replicate our analysis of the relationship between age upon arrival to a democratic settlement country, political participation, and party affiliation to show that the results we present for immigrants from the FSU to the United States also hold for immigrants from the FSU to Israel.

The Israel Polarization Panel Dataset is a 10-wave panel survey designed to be representative of the Israeli electorate as of 2015. Sampling was conducted by a public opinion survey firm between 2019 and 2021. This dataset includes observations collected from 2,542 respondents (where observations for core demographic characteristics relevant to our study purposes are complete), 495 of whom report being foreign-born and 261 of

whom report having been born in the FSU⁵. This panel does not include family identifiers, but it does contain information on residents' country of birth, immigration year, age, gender, turnout in various years between 2015 and 2021, and indicators of support for the various political parties represented in the Knesset between 2019 and 2021. We use these survey data to run the most analogous specification to Equation 1 that the data allow:

$$y_i = \alpha + \beta \text{ArrivalAge}_i + \theta \text{Female}_i + \kappa \text{ArrivalYear}_i + \omega_i + \eta_i \quad (2)$$

where y_i represents a binary indicator for either turnout in a given year (we model turnout in 2015, 2019, 2020, and 2021 separately) or declared support for a right wing political party for respondent i depending on the specification. Arrival age, gender, and arrival year represent the corresponding self-reported fields for each individual respondent in the panel and ω_i represents a dummy variable for region of residence⁶ for each respondent. η_i represents the error term. The survey panel provides more socioeconomic information about respondents, but we limit ourselves to pre-migration controls to the extent possible in order to avoid inducing post-treatment bias (Acharya, Blackwell and Sen, 2016). We do not restrict this sample to people who immigrated as children in order to preserve power since only 205 respondents born in the FSU were under 21 at the time they migrated, but doing this produces results consistent with those in Tables 1 and 2 since most people in this sample who emigrated from the FSU came as children.

⁵ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, The Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan

⁶ Jerusalem, Northern Israel, Haifa, Central Israel, Tel Aviv, Southern Israel, Judea and Samaria, or living outside of Israel

Table 1: Age at Arrival and Turnout

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Voted 2015 (1)	Voted 2019 (2)	Voted 2020 (3)	Voted 2021 (4)
Age at Arrival	0.006*** (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	0.0001 (0.002)
Male	0.059 (0.043)	-0.056* (0.033)	-0.031* (0.017)	0.093 (0.073)
Constant	0.981*** (0.007)	0.979*** (0.061)	0.991*** (0.006)	1.000*** (0.005)
Immigration Year Dummy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region Dummy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	254	88	159	116
R ²	0.182	0.493	0.319	0.297

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 1 summarizes the relationship between age at arrival and turnout in a series of election years for immigrants from the FSU to Israel. In each election year, outcomes are just binary indicator variables for whether respondents reported voting in that year. Bearing in mind the restrictions on power we face in this sample relative to our U.S. data – especially for survey waves asking about elections after 2015 – these results are consistent with U.S. data. Each additional year of exposure to the FSU (that is, arriving to Israel one year later) is associated with a slightly higher probability of turning out in each election year. In 2015, the 0.006 estimate is 0.7% of average turnout (77.5%).

Table 2: Age at Arrival and Party Affiliation

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Would Vote for Right Wing Party	Did Vote for Right Wing Party
	(1)	(2)
Age at Arrival	0.009*** (0.002)	0.010** (0.004)
Male	0.109*** (0.031)	0.099* (0.056)
Constant	0.973*** (0.007)	0.971*** (0.012)
Immigration Year Dummy	✓	✓
Region Dummy	✓	✓
Observations	254	254
R ²	0.212	0.206

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Respondents in the Israel Polarization Panel were asked which party or parties they might support “if Knesset elections were held today” in waves 1 (2019), 2 (2019), and 8 (2021) of the study. Additionally, respondents were asked which party or parties they did support in the most recent Knesset elections relative to the panel month. Table 2 summarizes the relationship between age at arrival and a binary indicator for respondents who said they might or did support a right-wing party⁷ in any wave of the survey.

Here, too, people who arrived from the FSU at older ages are more likely to report supporting right-wing political parties. This is approximately a 2% effect for each additional year of exposure to the FSU relative to overall support for right-wing parties in the sample. All specifications reported in Tables 1 and 2 are estimated using ordinary least squares regression; using logistic regressions that constrain outcome variables to be bi-

⁷We classify Habayit Hayehudi, Hazionut Hadatit, Kulanu, Tikvah Hadasha, Yahadut Hatorah, Yemina, Zehut, Israel Beitenu, Likud, and Shas as right wing parties based on Hazan (2021), but our results replicate if we restrict this list just to people who reported supporting either just Likud - Israel’s primary right-of-center party or Likud and Israel Beitenu (the latter party advocating for Russian speakers’ interests in the country).

nary, as they are in our data, does not change our substantive conclusions (see Appendix D). Standard errors are cluster-robust, where clusters correspond to regions of residence. The fact that arriving later in life, after having had more extensive exposure to life under an authoritarian communist government, manifests in higher levels of political engagement and willingness to support right-of-center parties in Israel as well as the United States makes it more difficult to interpret the main effects in this study as a function of something idiosyncratic to the United States.

7 Conclusion

Our results, based on one of the largest samples of information on refugees to the United States analyzed to date, shed considerable light on the way coming of age under an authoritarian regime affects those who go on to emigrate to democratic countries. Under the assumption that families generally stick together before, during, and after migration, we considerably expand on the extant literature by making it possible to identify the effect of an additional year spent under a left-wing authoritarian regime.

Beyond this, we make several important substantive contributions to the literature. We show that children who spent more time living in the FSU are actually more likely to turn out to vote, conditional on having registered, than their younger siblings. There are several possible mechanisms for this. While it's possible that living under an authoritarian regime directly catalyzed a desire to participate in politics and change the features of the state they disapproved of, people who emigrated as children were unlikely to have had much opportunity to foster a deep sense of the elements of civic life that were unsatisfying. Instead, higher levels of mobilization likely result from a greater appreciation of the potential that electoral participation has to influence the state, either learned explicitly after finding out they were migrating to the U.S. or communicated by parents who

were justifying the decision to emigrate.

Our findings about party affiliation in this population are broadly consistent with a growing survey literature on the political attitudes and behaviors of immigrants coming to democracies from various types of authoritarian regimes. We echo [Just \(2017\)](#) in calling for an understanding of the lingering impact of living under authoritarian governments that is nuanced by a specific accounting of the features that define those authoritarian governments. Our findings, however, should generalize more widely to immigrants coming from left-wing authoritarian governments and generally seeking electoral opportunities to cast votes against these types of governments even in vastly different political contexts. As we show empirically in [Appendix B](#), while sample sizes get too small to conduct any reliable analysis by country of birth on HIAS-assisted refugees from outside of the FSU, our results hold when we analyze a sample with refugee children from 74 different countries.

One alternative possible mechanism driving political orientation is cultural. It's possible that children who spend longer periods living in the FSU before emigrating develop a stronger set of beliefs rooted in Soviet or post-Soviet social and political culture that they take with them and map to a Republican platform upon arrival in the United States. Past survey literature concentrated on this population of immigrants to the United States, though scant, has, for example, presented some preliminary evidence that members of this population are socially conservative. The question of how much of the propensity to identify with right-wing parties is driven by the blanket rejection of communism and anything on the left, and how much is a function of a nuanced mapping of beliefs and policy positions to party platforms, requires carefully gathered survey data and is a fruitful prospect for future research.

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Appendices

A Matching HIAS/AJHS Client Files to the L2 Voter File

A.1 Process

Our matching procedure for both the pre-1980 and post-1980 immigrants proceeds in a step-wise fashion. For each of the post-1980 immigrants, we search through the voter files for individuals with active registration that have the same first and last name. If we find a unique match, we accept that match and remove it from the pool of immigrants we are attempting to match. With the new, smaller set of unmatched immigrants, we look for unique exact matches on first and last name, now including inactive registrations as well.⁸ Successfully matched names are removed from the pool. With the remaining unmatched immigrants, we again look through the entire voter file for individuals with the same last name, but now allow for one character edit to the first name. Particularly with foreign names, minor transcription errors are fairly common. Any successful unique matches are added to our dataset. At this point, we stop searching for more tenuous matches of the post-1980 cohort. Table A.1 shows the number of matches we obtain at each stage. In total, we match 155,421 individuals, a success rate of around 30%.

Table A.1: Matching process post 1980.

Stage	Unique	Given Name	Surname	Voters	Clients	Matches
1	✓	Exact	Exact	Only Active	All Post 1980	128,370
2	✓	Exact	Exact	All	Stage 1 Misses	5,620
3	✓	One letter edit	Exact	All	Stage 2 Misses	21,431

Our strategy for finding pre-1980 immigrants proceeds similarly: we search for unique exact matches according to some restrictive set of criteria, remove successful finds from the pool, and then match the leftovers against some less restrictive criteria. We iterate this process through more filters than the post-1980 group, because we have more relevant data. In particular, the index cards more or less exactly record birth dates. Individuals are

⁸If we did not distinguish between active and inactive in this way, then no individual with multiple registrations, some active and others inactive, would end up being included in our sample.

with some frequency recorded as having two names. Sometimes these two names appear to be first and middle, while other times it appears to be a more anglicized alternative (e.g. Dawid vs. David).

In such cases, it is hard to know which given name to search for in the voter file; if an index card describes an immigrant named Ben David, does one expect to find that person registered as Ben, David, or Ben David? Therefore, we consider the possible variations on the name that are contained in the cards. In particular, we apply our iterative procedure for searching for unique exact matches against the following pieces of information: (1) birth date, transcribed given name, transcribed surname; (2) birth year, given name, surname; (3) given name, surname, birthday, birth month, birth year ± 1 or birth year ± 2 ; (4) surname, birthdate, plausible variations on the given name; (5) birth year, surname, variations on given; (6) surname, variations on given, birthday, birth month, and birth year ± 1 or ± 2 ; (7) birth date, surname, two character edits to the given name, (8) birth date, surname, two character edit to variations on the transcribed given name. Table A.2 describes how many matches each step generates. In total, we match 6,140 individuals, a success rate of around 5%. The much lower success rate is not surprising given the median age of a pre-1980 immigrant at present writing is 96.

Table A.2: Matching process pre-1980.

Stage	Unique	Given	Surname	Birth Day/Month	Birth Year	Voters	Clients	Matches
1	✓	Exact	Exact	Exact	Exact	All	Pre-1980	2,664
2	✓	Exact	Exact	.	Exact	All	Stage 1 Misses	1,360
3	✓	Exact	Exact	Day and Month	$\leq \pm 2$	All	Stage 2 Misses	127
4	✓	Variations	Exact	Exact	Exact	All	Stage 3 Misses	439
5	✓	Variations	Exact	.	Exact	All	Stage 4 Misses	258
6	✓	Variations	Exact	.	$\leq \pm 2$	All	Stage 5 Misses	36
7	✓	2 Edits to Exact	Exact	Exact	Exact	All	Stage 6 Misses	1,078
8	✓	2 Edits to Variations	Exact	Exact	Exact	All	Stage 7 Misses	178

A.1.1 Representativeness

One important question is whether and how focusing on individuals who match to a voter file differ from those in the larger client population. Table A.3 examines how the sample of matched immigrants differs from the sample of unmatched immigrants in the administrative file for the pre-1980 cohort. While similar analysis is desirable for the post-1980 population, we simply lack the necessary information to do this analysis. The

table reveals that the interaction of marriage with naming conventions has a substantial impact on the sub-sample. There are fewer women in the matched sample than the administrative file. If an individual was separated at the time of immigration, they are relatively more likely to match. The fact that people known to be married are a smaller part of the matched sub-sample is initially curious, however it is important to recognize that someone who was already married sometime in the 1955-1980 time frame is likely relatively old by 2018, when we search for them in the voter files. The more likely a person is to be deceased, the less likely they are to appear in the voter file. Indeed, immigrants who are in families with children are relatively more common in the matched sample than in the initial administrative file, which again makes sense given aging dynamics. Finally, it seems that matching against another set of records has induced some selection on administrative data quality. 18% of the individuals in the administrative files have no gender indicated, whereas only 3% of the matched sample are missing gender in the HIAS file.

Table A.3: Sample characteristics of the pre-1980 client population before and after matching

	Mean (Unmatched)	Mean (Matched)	Difference (Standardized)
Deceased	0.003	0.000	-0.079
Divorced	0.014	0.003	-0.113
Engaged	0.000	0.000	-0.005
Married	0.693	0.411	-0.593
Separated	0.258	0.584	0.701
Widowed	0.032	0.001	-0.240
Unknown Marital Status	0.379	0.390	0.023
Female	0.420	0.311	-0.228
Unknown Gender	0.179	0.032	-0.492
Family Size	3.433	4.118	0.467

On the one hand, the difference between the matched and unmatched samples may lead to concerns about how representative the families we study are as compared with the typical family assisted by HIAS. We discuss external validity concerns at greater length in the manuscript, but it is worth noting here that the national origin of the typical HIAS immigrant changes drastically over decades, so the representative immigrant family is a strained notion to begin with. Moreover, we find that our results are robust to these drastic changes in national origin of the client population.

On the other hand, the difference observed in the balance table may raise questions

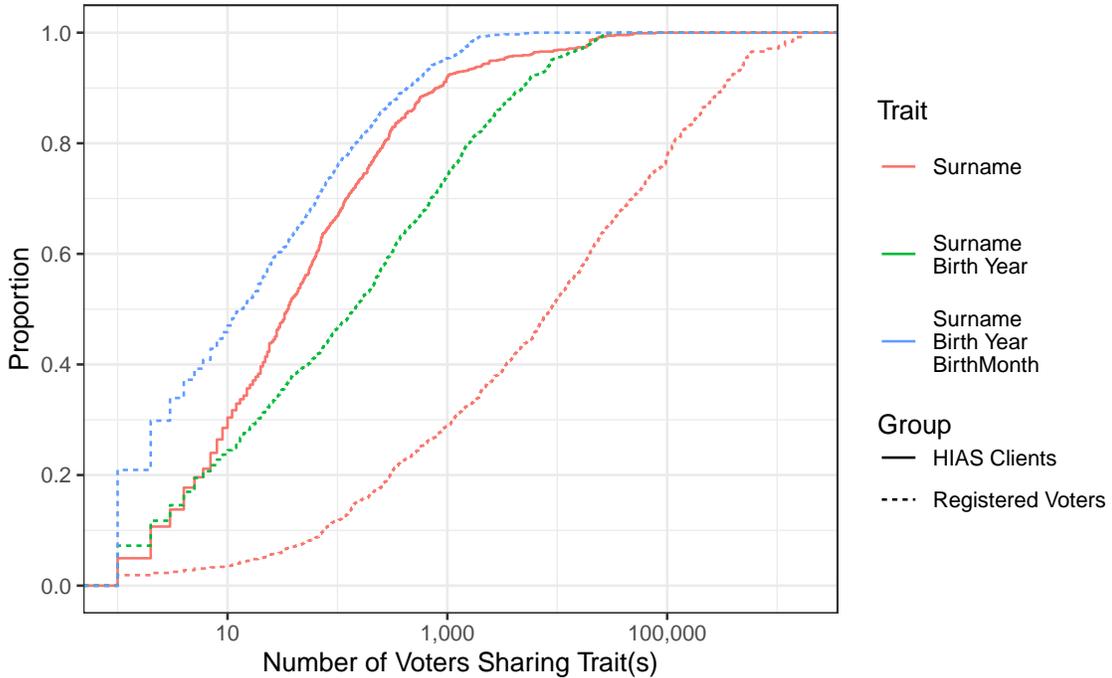
about match quality. It is difficult to directly test the proposition, but we do have some indirect tests we can do. For one, the administrative case files describe a small percentage of deceased individuals. Encouragingly, none of our immigrants known to be deceased prior to 1980 appear as active or inactive voters. Another indirect test is that voter files often include gender and so do the HIAS administrative files, but gender is not used in the matching procedure. In greater than 98% of the matched cases, these two genders are concordant. It would be surprising, given the possibility of transcription and intake errors in both files, if the number of matches was 100%.

A.2 How Distinctive Are Soviet Jewish Names?

Our matching approach for post-1980 immigrants relies explicitly upon the assumption that the surnames in this group are distinctive. While this is not necessarily true for all individuals in this client population, it is often true. In presenting our work, we have sometimes been asked how to consider how distinct these last names really are. Figure [A.1](#) presents a thought experiment. We can think about how distinctive an registered voter's last name typically is by considering the number of other individuals sharing that name. As the figure shows, the typical voter shares a surname with a few thousand other voters in the United States, it is pretty rare for a voter to share a last name with only a few dozen others, and one in five has a surname such as "Johnson" shared by hundreds of thousands of other voters. If we consider the combination of surname and birth year, the distinctiveness of voters is several orders of magnitude higher. One in five voters will share a surname and birth year with roughly 1,000 other voters, while for the median voter the number of individuals sharing a last name and birth year could fit in a typical classroom. If we think about the combination of birth year, birth month and surname, the median registered voter would share this combination of traits with about 10 people. Only about 5% of registered voters share this trait with 1,000 others or more.

Calculating similar statistics for the last names found post 1980, we see that such surnames have a discriminating power that is close to the power of conditioning on last name, birth year, and birth month in the general population. 70% of these immigrant last names are possessed by 100 registered voters or fewer. This exercise provides some confidence that our matching approach, based additionally on first names and uniqueness constraints, is quite conservative in the sense that our matches are very likely true. At the same time, these statistics may give some indication why relaxing the uniqueness, first or last name constraints give us pause.

Figure A.1: Distinctiveness of Surnames in Sample v. Registered Voters



B HIAS-Assisted Refugees Beyond the FSU

While the main results we present in Section 5 focus on HIAS-assisted refugees who came to the U.S. from former Soviet Bloc countries, our data contains information on refugees to the U.S. from more than 70 countries around the world. Full frequencies for national origin in our HIAS sample appear in Figure B.2. Outside of Soviet Bloc and Russia (if refugees moved after 1991), our sample includes children resettled from other regimes that were socialist dictatorships at the period of emigration - most notably Egypt and Cuba. Accordingly, we replicate our analysis of voting behavior and party affiliation from Section 5 here to show that our results for both are consistent when we expand our sample to children from other repressive authoritarian regimes. Results for participation using family fixed effects and refugees who emigrated as children from all countries of birth in the HIAS merged sample appear in Figure B.3, while results for party affiliation appear in Figure B.4. These results are similar to the main results in terms of magnitude, direction, and statistical significance, suggesting our results apply to a broader set of repressive authoritarian regimes than just the FSU.

Figure B.2: Countries of Origin for All Children in the Merged HIAS Sample

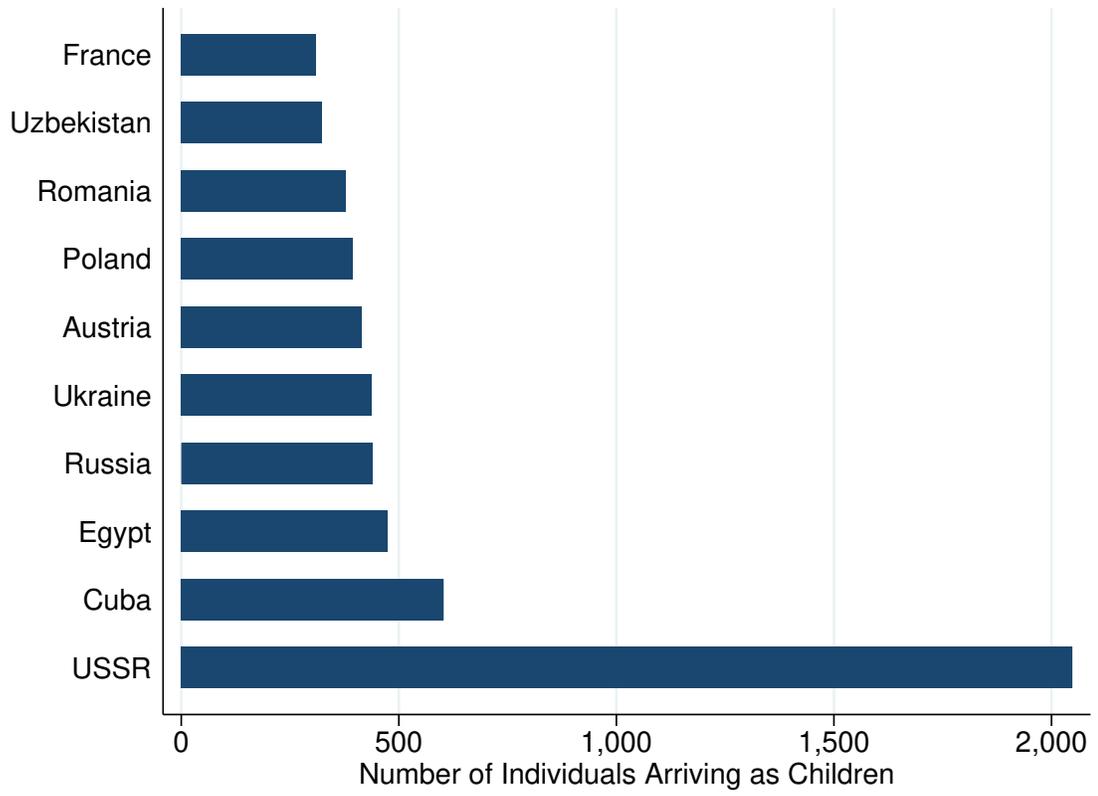


Figure B.3: Age at Arrival and Voting in the 2016 Presidential and 2014 Midterm Elections, All Refugees

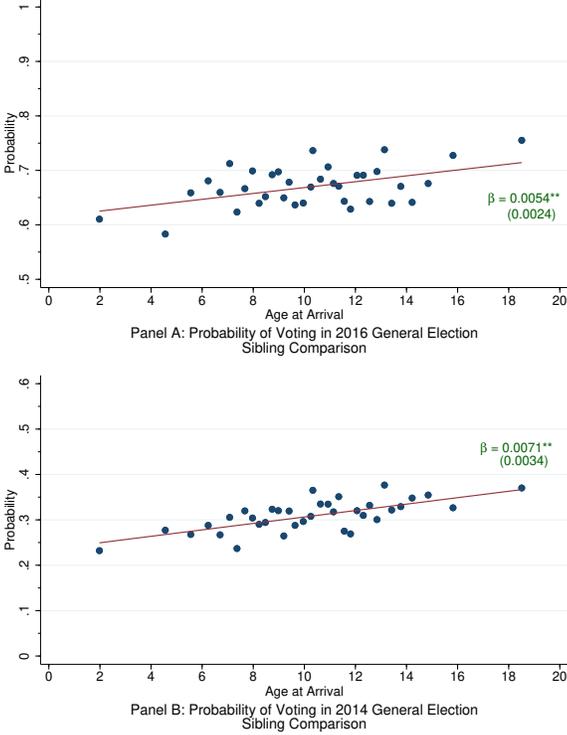
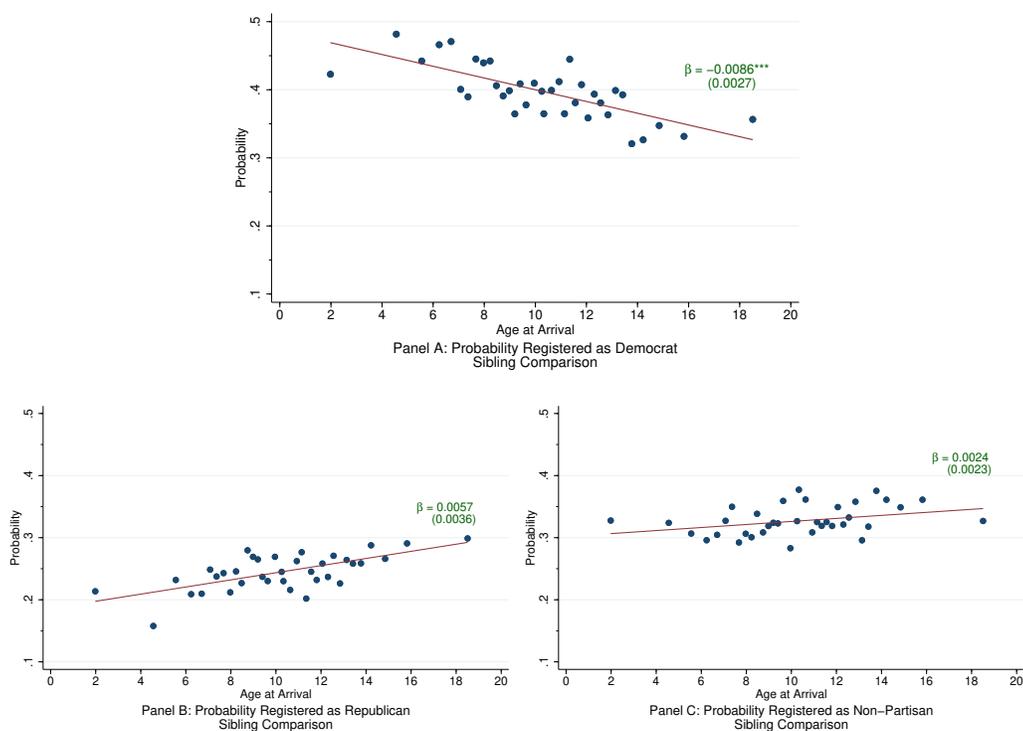


Figure B.4: Age at Arrival and Party Affiliation, All Refugees



C Family Structure Robustness Checks

Table C.4 reports our main results from Section 5 on a sample of children from families with only two children. This restricted sample is one in which it is unlikely that oldest children bear disproportionate responsibility for tending to a large group of younger siblings. These findings are consistent with the results presented in the manuscript, which makes sense given that most families in this population of refugees had two or fewer children.

Table C.5 reports the effect of an additional year of exposure to a left-wing authoritarian regime on voting (conditional on registration) in 2014 and 2016 and party registration when we restrict our sample to families with three or more children and drop the oldest child in order to assess whether the main effects we report in Section 5 are just the effect

Table C.4: Focusing on Families with Only 2 Children

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Voted in 2016?	Voted in 2014?	Registered Republican?	Registered Independent?	Registered Democrat?
Age at Arrival	0.00445* (0.00200)	0.00608** (0.00214)	0.00502 (0.00344)	0.00498* (0.00193)	-0.0110*** (0.00199)
Constant	0.643*** (0.0456)	0.133** (0.0412)	0.149* (0.0587)	0.467*** (0.0635)	0.331*** (0.0485)
Observations	3349	3349	3349	3349	3349

Standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered at the state of residence level. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

of being the oldest child rather than the effects of prolonged exposure to these regimes. These results suggest that our effects are *not* restricted to oldest siblings. Since most families in our sample have two or fewer children we lose considerable power and most results in Table C.5 fall short of statistical significance at the 5% level, but they are consistent with the main results. Children who are older (but not the oldest in their families) are still more likely to turn out and significantly more likely to register as Republicans than younger siblings. Results in Tables C.5 and C.6 are calculated using families from countries of origin that are socialist dictatorships. Controls include gender, year of arrival, state of residence, and family fixed effects.

Table C.5: Results without Oldest Children

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Voted in 2016?	Voted in 2014?	Registered Republican?	Registered Independent?	Registered Democrat?
Age at Arrival	0.0106 (0.0136)	0.0116 (0.00884)	0.0186* (0.00864)	-0.0234 (0.0127)	0.00183 (0.00747)
Constant	0.689* (0.308)	0.0275 (0.172)	-0.317 (0.234)	2.705*** (0.306)	-1.331*** (0.196)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	289	289	289	289	289

Standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered at the state of residence level. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table C.6 replicates our main results but restricts the sample to families in which age differences are relatively small: less fewer than 11 years. While 10 years may seem like a large age gap in the absolute sense, the distribution of age gaps in our data, presented in Figure 4, contains a large proportion of families with relatively large age gaps between siblings. Over 55% of children in our sample have age gaps of 3 or more years between themselves and their siblings. Reducing the data to siblings with, say, 1-2 year age gaps would preserve just 20% of observations.

Table C.6: Restricting to Children with Age Difference ≤ 10 Years

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
	Voted in 2016?	Voted in 2014?	Registered Republican?	Registered Independent?	Registered Democrat?
Age at Arrival	0.00119 (0.00279)	0.00564 (0.00398)	0.00560 (0.00352)	0.00567* (0.00245)	-0.0134*** (0.00303)
Constant	0.701*** (0.0743)	0.199** (0.0668)	0.163* (0.0702)	0.429*** (0.0671)	0.384*** (0.0494)
Observations	3933	3933	3933	3933	3933

Standard errors in parentheses. Errors are clustered at the state of residence level. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

D Israel Survey Data

Tables D.7 and D.8 replicate the results reported in Tables 1 and 2 using logistic regression since all outcome variables are binary. These results are consistent with the results reported in the manuscript.

Table D.7: Age at Arrival and Turnout, Logistic Regression

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
	Voted 2015	Voted 2019	Voted 2020	Voted 2021
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Age at Arrival	0.038* (0.019)	0.591 (0.598)	0.162* (0.092)	-0.639 (0.660)
Male	0.376 (0.344)	-4.475 (4.680)	-0.392 (0.885)	31.649 (41,194.970)
Constant	18.453 (6,522.639)	21.793 (79,462.010)	21.080 (29,232.440)	27.483 (216,000.100)
Immigration Year Dummy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region Dummy	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	254	193	160	116

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table D.8: Age at Arrival and Party Affiliation, Logistic Regression

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Would Vote for Right Wing Party	Did Vote for Right Wing Party
	(1)	(2)
Age at Arrival	0.046** (0.018)	0.045*** (0.017)
Male	0.564* (0.319)	0.485 (0.314)
Constant	17.428 (3,956.180)	17.431 (3,956.180)
Immigration Year Dummy	✓	✓
Region Dummy	✓	✓
Observations	254	254

Note: * $p < 0.1$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$