Symbolic Refugee Protection: Explaining Latin America's Liberal Refugee Laws

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Abstract of Original Study

"What drove an entire region in the Global South to significantly expand refugee protection in the early twenty-first century? In this paper, we test and build on political refugee theory via a mixed-methods approach to explain the liberalization of refugee legislation across Latin America." (Hammoud-Gallego & Freier, 2022).

Details of Original Study

- The authors consider several domestic and international drivers of policy liberalisation in 19 countries in Latin America between 1990-2020, including:
- The impacts of the wave of redemocratisation, a process beginning in the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s.
- The emergence of the Pink Tide, a period in which a series of left-leaning governments won presidential elections across the region.
- The turn towards stronger regional integration in the form of trade blocs like MERCOSUR and intergovernmental organisations like ALBA.
- Greater government revenues derived from the resource boom of the early 2000s, which, coupled with relatively low stocks of migrants and refugees, decreased the costs of policy signaling.
- The influence of diaspora communities engaging in domestic political debates, specifically regarding the need for better protection of migrants' rights

Hypotheses

- The authors formulate three quantitatively testable hypotheses:
- 1)More democratic and left-wing governments are more likely to pass liberal refugee policies.
- 2)Economic liberalisation and increased regional integration allow governments to expand refugee rights.
- 3)Countries with low immigration and refugee stocks can more easily pass liberal refugee policies.

Variables

- **Outcome Variable:** In this study, policy liberalisation is operationalised as an increase of rights-enhancing legislative measures, as, in the context of Latin America, it reflects the creation of new regulatory frameworks for the protection of refugees not previously in place.
- **Predictor Variables:**
- Political factors: One variable consisting of Polyarchy score to assess impacts of redemocratisation. The other is a binary variable recording whether the government is right-wing (0) or left-wing (1).
- Economic factors: Trade as a percentage. The other is percentage change in GDP per capita.
- Migration factors: Two continuous variables recording international migration stock and refugee population as a percentage of total population.
- Diaspora: Emigrant population in United States and Spain, the two most common destinations.

Methods

- The authors deploy a two-tier strategy to test their three quantitative hypotheses:
- First, they estimate a series of nested tobit models with standard errors clustered at the country level. Tobit is selected on the basis of left-censoring at 0 for regulatory complexity.
- These models attempt to isolate the effects of the political (government ideology and polyarchy score) and, economic factors (trade as % of GDP and change in GDP per capita) and refugee and migrant flows. These models are fitted separately to avoid collinearity.
- Second, they estimate a lagged model at one and three years.

Tobit Model on Regulatory Complexity

	Dependent variable:				
	Regulatory Complexity				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
VDEM Polyarchy	-7.36				-3.43
	(7.25)				(7.41)
Left-Wing Gov	18.33***				16.70***
	(2.13)				(2.13)
Change in GDP per capita		-0.14			-0.08
		(0.26)			(0.22)
Trade as perc. of GDP		0.38***			0.31***
		(0.05)			(0.05)
International Migration Stock			-0.97		-0.77
			(0.76)		(0.90)
Refugees as perc. of pop.				0.89	1.79
				(0.92)	(1.15)
Emigrants in US and Spain					-0.59
					(0.52)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Clustered SE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	551	551	551	551	551
Log Likelihood	-2,215.21	-2,240.62	-2,258.01	-2,258.33	-2,202.34

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

These models use left-censoring at zero

Results:

- Finds a statistically significant relationship between the ideology of the executive and trade and regulatory complexity.
- A left-wing president is associated with a 16.7% increase in regulatory complexity, holding all else constant.
- A one unit increase in trade as a % of GDP is associated with a 0.31% increase in regulatory complexity, holding all else constant.

Tobit Model on Regulatory Complexity

	Dependent variable:			
	Regulatory Complexity Lagged		Three_Year_Lag_Regulatory_Complexity	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
VDEM Polyarchy	-8.57	-2.92	-12.66	-13.63
	(7.68)	(8.39)	(8.59)	(9.22)
Left-Wing Gov	15.82***	15.86***	14.37***	14.48***
	(2.10)	(2.10)	(2.15)	(2.15)
Change in GDP per capita		-0.05		0.32
		(0.22)		(0.26)
Trade as perc. of GDP	0.27***	0.29***	0.16***	0.15**
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
International Migration Stock		-0.70		0.18
		(1.02)		(1.15)
Refugees as perc. of pop.		4.69*		-2.48
		(2.43)		(5.13)
Emigrants in US and Spain		-0.67		-0.30
		(0.55)		(0.59)
Observations	532	532	494	494
Log Likelihood	-2,152.27	-2,150.32	-2,009.30	-2,008.04

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

These models use left-censoring at zero with clustered standard errors at the country leve

Lagged Tobit Model

As we can see, in both lagged models the direction and significance of ideology and trade remain consistent.

So far, it's looking good for left-wing presidents

- From left to right: Hugo Chavez (Venezuela, 1999-2013), Evo Morales (Bolivia, 2006-2019), Lula da Silva (Brazil, 2003-2010, 2022-present), Rafael Correa (Ecuador, 2007-2017)

Checking Model Assumptions

Multicollinearity: calculate VIF score for each predictor variable

Heteroskedasticity: plot residuals and fitted values

VIF Scores

```
> vif_score
                      GVIF Df GVIF^(1/(2*Df))
VDEM_Polyarchy    6.111360  1        2.472116
Left1_Other0      2.276876  1        1.508932
GrowthGDPperCap   1.477884  1        1.215683
Trade_Perc_GDP    8.040252  1        2.835534
IntMigStock      16.627668  1        4.077704
RefAsPerc         2.032290  1        1.425584
MigSpainUSPerc   14.500297  1        3.807926
Country       10784.594250 18        1.294262
Year              4.388963 28        1.026764
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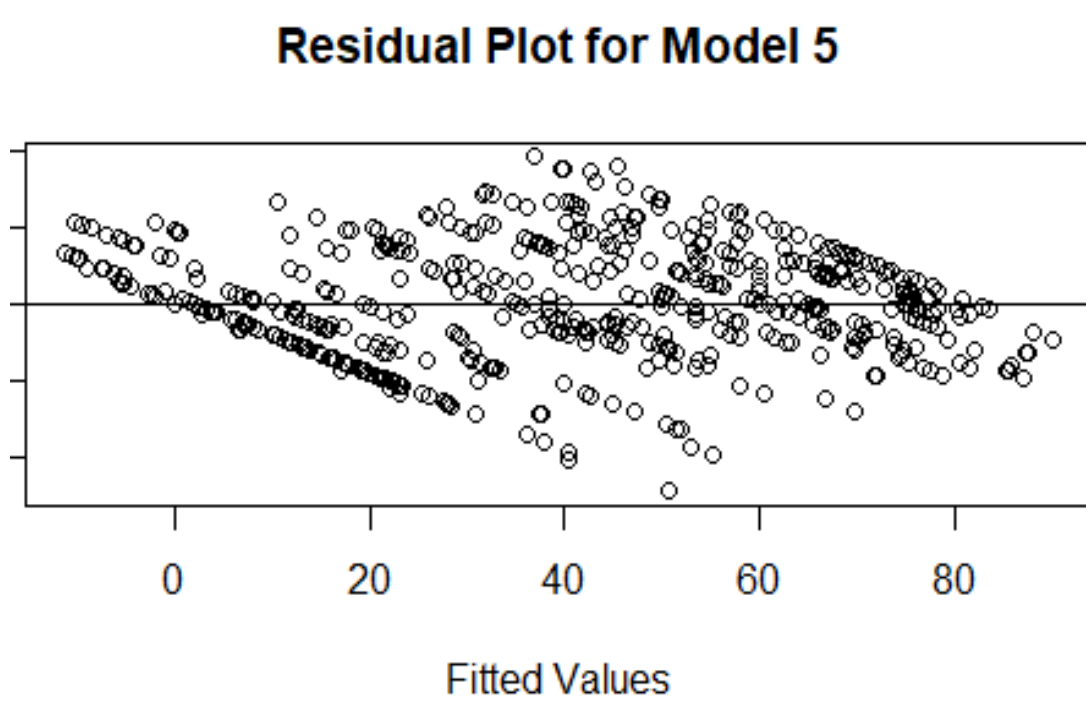
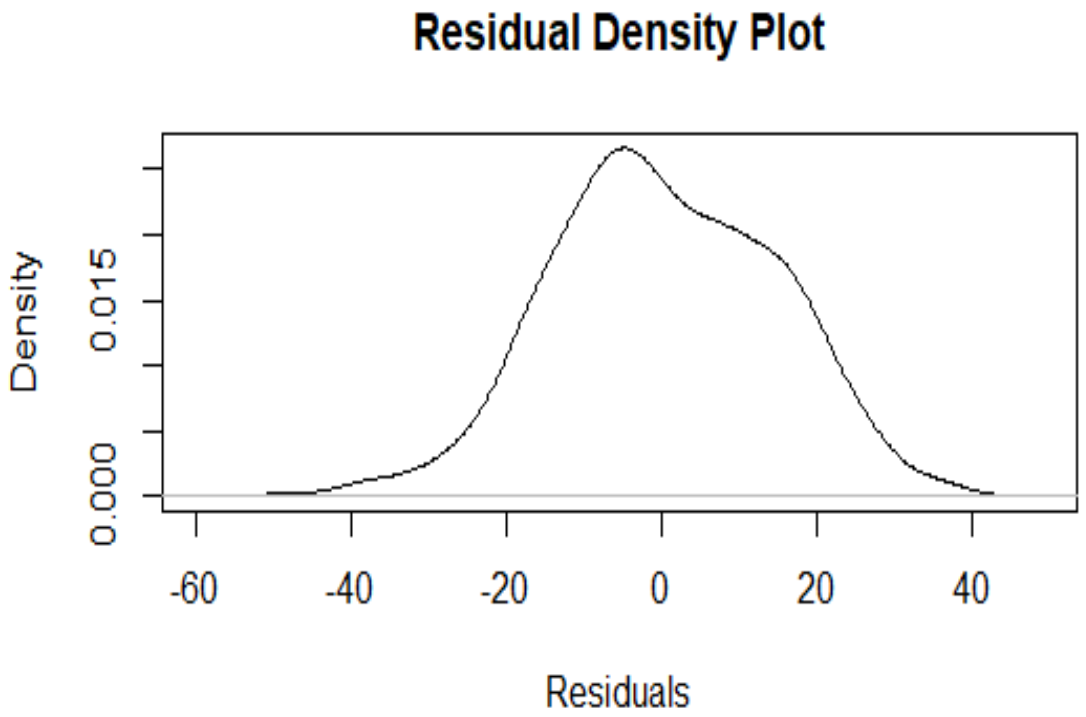
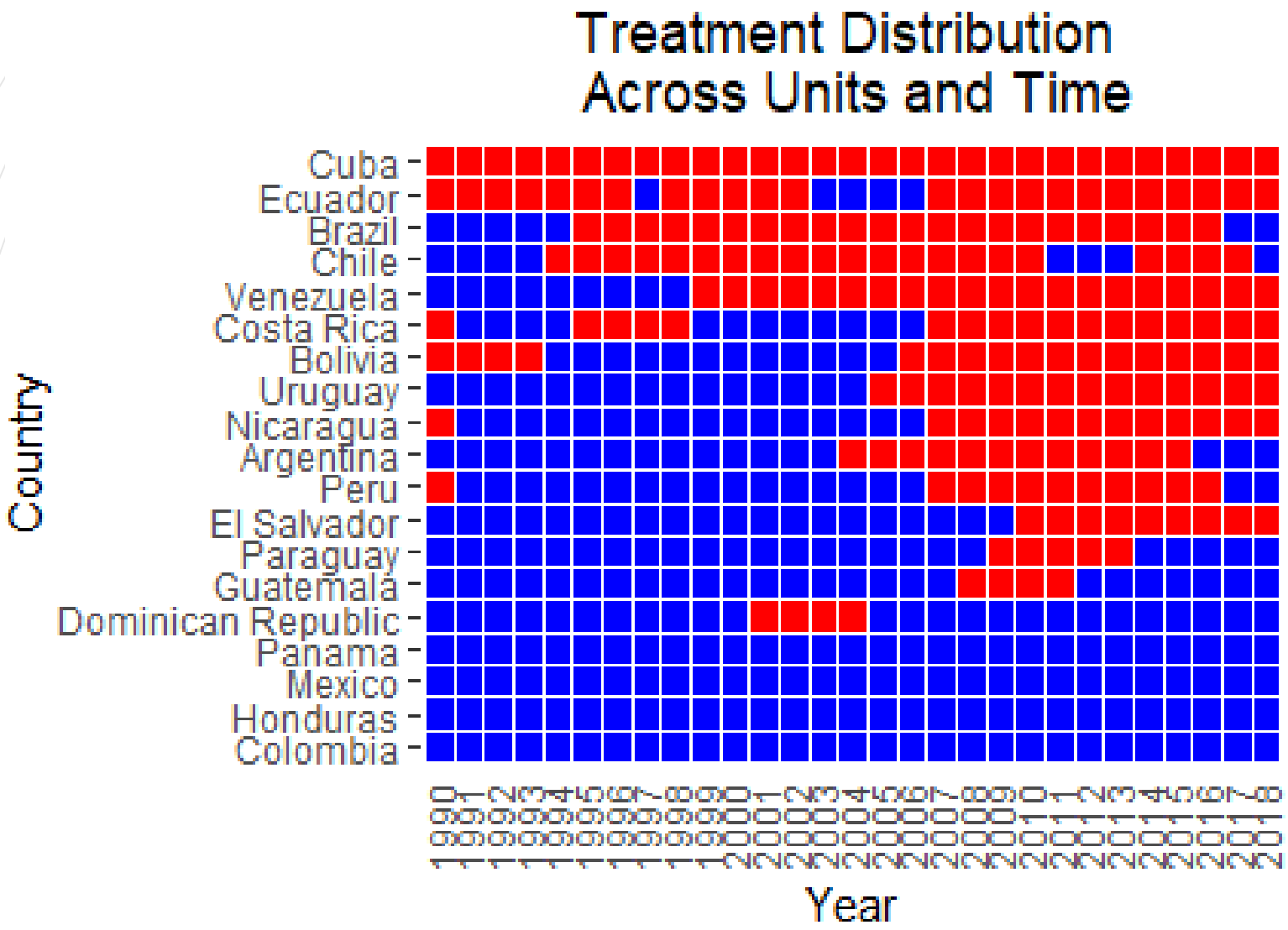
Plotting Residuals



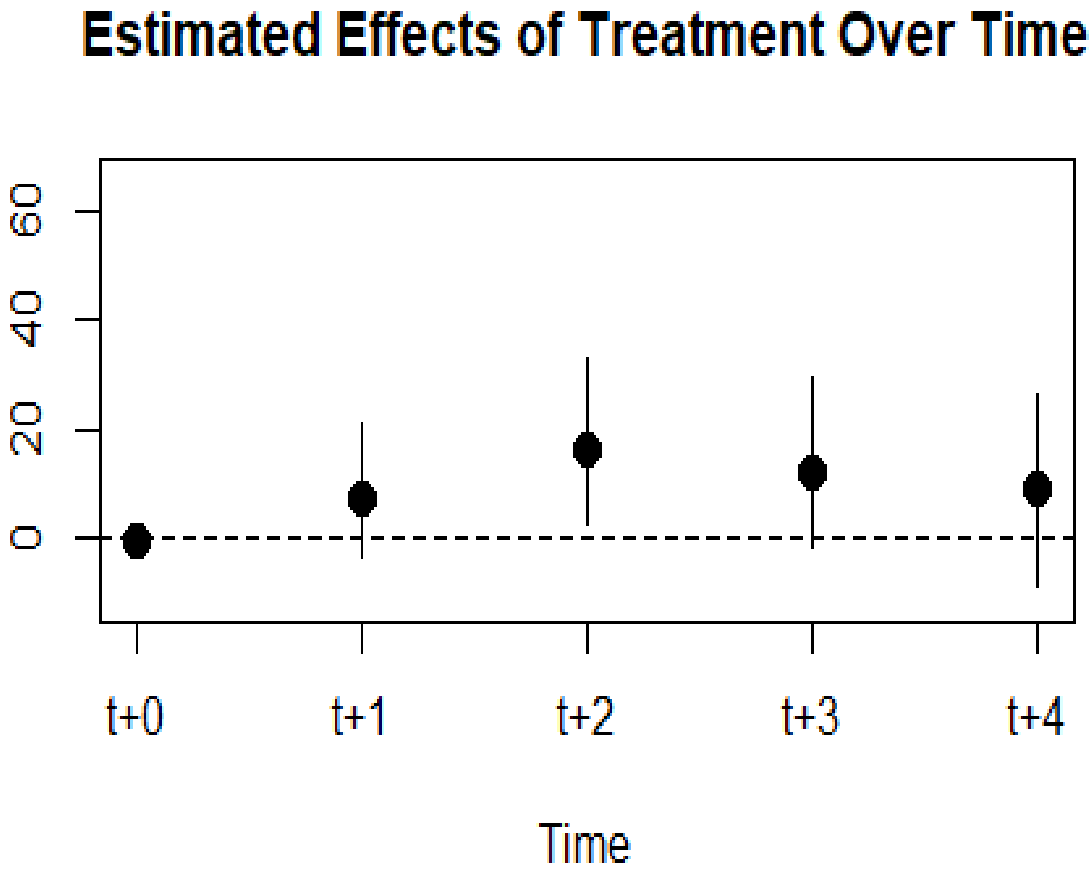


Twist

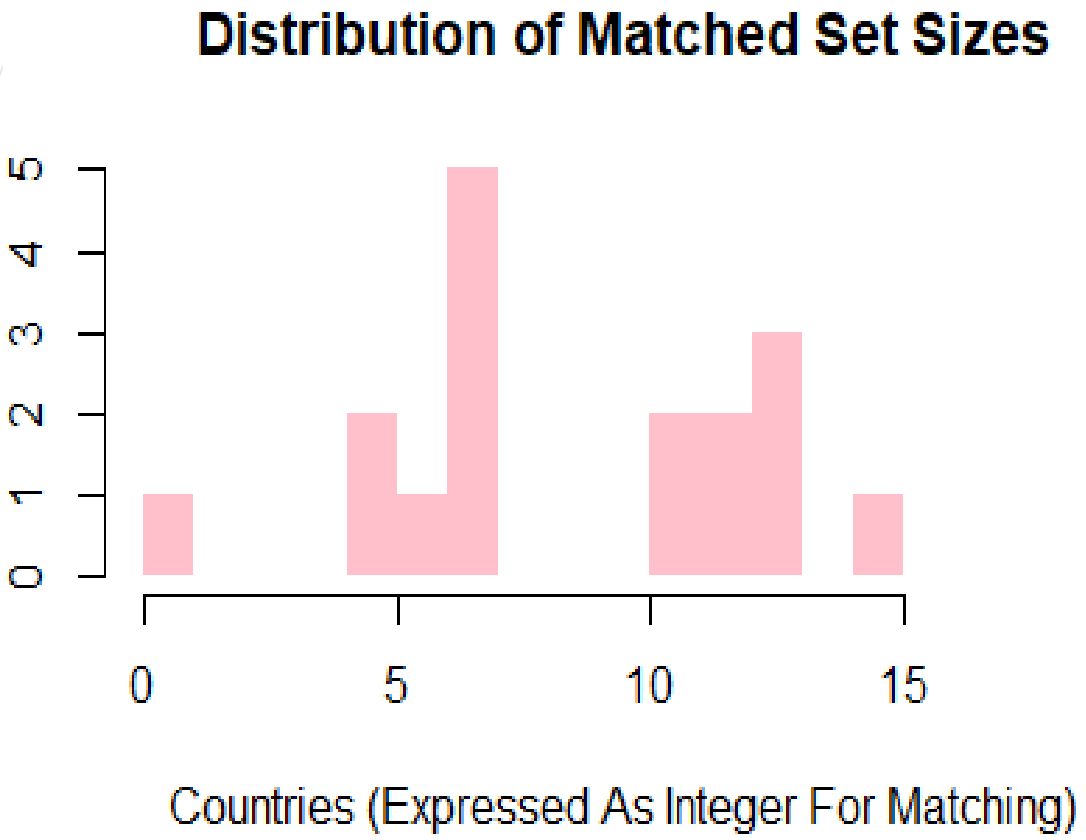
- Potential for measurement error in the construction of the regulatory complexity variable
- Closer examination reveals that when operationalized in this way, regulatory complexity becomes a cumulative score, only varying positively and rarely decreasing in value. This could inflate the influence of the binary variable of government ideology.
- How to test for this? Panel Match
- Panel matching applies matching methods for causal inference on time-series cross-sectional data with binary treatments
- Allows for visualisation of variation of treatment across space and time.



- A few issues:
- In some cases, the coding schema is quite incoherent. For example, Brazil during the Cardoso years (1995-2002) is coded as left-wing. Whereas, Honduras under Manuel Zelaya (2006-2009) is coded as right-wing.
- Another concern is that there is no variation in 5 countries over the time-period (26% of observations).



- Effects of treatment are highest after two years.



- Most treated observations have fewer than five matched sets.
- Insufficient number of matches to be confident of causal inference for the treatment.

Conclusions

- As demonstrated by the panel matching, there are significant barriers to causal inference in the statistical models. In addition, there is likely a degree of measurement error built into the regulatory complexity variable.
- However, the authors compliment their quantitative analysis with qualitative process-tracing methods which teases out a plausible causal-process supporting the idea that left ideology was a significant driver of refugee policy liberalisation between 1990-2020.