Victim or Threat? Shipwrecks, Terrorist Attacks and Asylum Decisions in France*

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Tragic events such as terrorist attacks have been shown to influence voters' policy preferences, but less is known about whether such events also affect actual immigration policy. In this study, I bring new evidence to this question by examining whether migrant shipwrecks and terrorist attacks affected asylum decisions in France during the refugee crisis of 2015–2016. I find that asylum officers are more likely to approve an individual's refugee application after a shipwreck than they are before. Yet they are less likely to grant refugee status to asylum seekers from Syria and Iraq after a terrorist attack. Together, these findings suggest that tragic events can affect immigration policy through their influence on asylum officers.

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1 Introduction

Between 2015 and 2016, over 2 million refugees fled wars in the Middle East and Africa and sought safety in Europe.[1] Many migrants have risked their lives crossing the Mediterranean Sea, and more than 8,000 have been reported dead or missing on their journey to Europe.[2] Tragic shipwrecks of boats carrying migrants in the Mediterranean have made headlines around the world and highlighted the developing humanitarian crisis.[3] The European Union (EU) also experienced renewed terrorist activity during this period: a record number of 211 terrorist attacks causing 151 fatalities in 2015 alone,[4] fueled fears that terrorists were entering Europe undetected hidden in the wave of migrants.[5]

European leaders have been split in their response to this crisis. While Chancellor Angela Merkel opened Germany's borders and allowed hundreds of thousands of people to enter the country in 2015, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic cited national security concerns to justify their refusal to take part in the European Council's emergency response plan to relocate 160,000 asylum seekers from Italy and Greece.[6] These diverging responses illustrate the fundamental challenge at the heart of the international asylum system as defined by the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees: how to provide shelter to those fleeing persecution without jeopardizing national security.

Political science research has explored how asylum officers arbitrate between these potentially conflicting considerations in practice for several decades (Gibney, Dalton, and Vockell, 1992; Gibney and Stohl, 1988). Humanitarian considerations and strategic interests have both been found to help explain variation in acceptance rates by countries of origin in Europe and the U.S. (Keith and Holmes, 2009; Keith, Holmes, and Miller, 2013; Miller, Keith, and Holmes, 2015; Neumayer, 2005; Rosenblum and Salehyan, 2004; Rottman, Fariss, and Poe, 2009; Salehyan and Rosenblum, 2008). However, the difficulty of controlling for a case's merit has prevented researchers from concluding whether the relationship between a country's humanitarian

[1] Eurostat, Asylum applications (non-EU) in the EU-28 Member States, 2008–2020 https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Asylum_statistics (Accessed on June 15, 2021).

[2] UNHCR, "Refugees/migrants emergency response — Mediterranean" https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/mediterranean (Accessed on June 15, 2021).

[3] *The New York Times*, "Hundreds of Migrants Are Feared Dead as Ship Capsizes Off Libyan Coast," April 19, 2015; *The New York Times*, "Three Days, 700 Deaths on Mediterranean as Migrant Crisis Flares," May 29, 2016.

[4] European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2016 https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016 (Accessed on June 15, 2021).

[5] *The New York Times*, "Three Teams of Coordinated Attackers Carried Out Assault on Paris, Officials Say; Hollande Blames ISIS," November 14, 2015.

[6] *The New York Times*, "E.U. Court Rules 3 Countries Violated Deal on Refugee Quotas," April 2, 2020.

situation and the acceptance rate of its citizens is the result of asylum officers' normative concerns or simply due to the fact that applicants from countries with worse humanitarian situations are more severely persecuted.

In this study, I use individual level data to bring new light to this question by analyzing the effect of migrant shipwrecks and terrorist attacks on asylum decisions in France in the context of the 2015–2016 refugee crisis. By temporarily increasing the salience of strategic considerations (for terrorist attacks) or humanitarian considerations (for migrant shipwrecks), these events allow me to test whether these factors play a role in asylum officers' decision-making. The recent refugee crisis is an ideal setting in which to examine this question. Between 2014 and 2015, the number of migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean nearly doubled, and the number of fatalities from terrorist attacks in the EU increased from 10 to 151 — 148 of whom were in France; a further 350 were injured in France.[7]

To identify the causal effect of these unexpected events on asylum decisions, I leverage the fact that the date of the interview, a central step in the asylum decision process, is set weeks in advance. Thus the timing of the events is plausibly exogenous to the type of applicants interviewed on a particular day. To estimate these effects, I combine non-publicly available data from the French asylum office on a representative sample of 34,678 asylum applications with data on migrant shipwrecks from the Missing Migrant project, terrorist attacks from the Global Terrorism Database, and synopses of daily prime time news broadcasts from the National Audiovisual Institute (INA). These high-frequency data allow me to estimate the short-term effect of terrorist attacks and migrant shipwrecks by comparing the outcomes of applicants interviewed the day after an event to those interviewed on any other day, using a design similar to the one employed by Philippe and Ouss (2018).

This study provides new empirical evidence that both normative and strategic concerns play a role in asylum decision-making. First, I find that asylum officers are more likely to approve asylum applications immediately after a migrant shipwreck, but only when it was featured on prime time television news. Applicants interviewed the day after such an event were 4.4 percentage points more likely to obtain refugee status than those interviewed on any other day; the average acceptance rate in the sample is 21.4 percent. While this effect is sizable and robust to covariate adjustment, bandwidth reduction and falsification tests, it is very short-lived: applicants interviewed 2 days after the event were no more likely to be granted refugee status than those interviewed on any other day. Second, I find that terrorist attacks negatively affect asylum decisions when they are featured on the news, but this effect is only robust and sizable for applicants from Syria and Iraq, strongholds of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) — the terrorist group responsible for one-third of the attacks carried out in France during the study period. For those applicants, being interviewed the day after an attack featured on

[7]European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2016.

the news reduced their chances of receiving refugee status by 13.2 percentage points; the average acceptance rate for applicants from Syria and Iraq combined is 93.4 percent. Finally, I find that news reports alone do not affect asylum decisions.

These findings enhance our understanding of whether and how (unrelated) tragic events can affect immigration policy. Numerous empirical studies have shown that terrorist attacks can affect political attitudes (see Helbling and Meierrieks (2020a) for a review), but few have assessed whether tragic events more broadly can also affect immigration policy (Bove et al., 2021; Choi, 2021; Helbling and Meierrieks, 2020b). While the effect of terrorism on asylum decision-making has been of interest to scholars for a while (Avdan, 2014; Holmes and Keith, 2010; Rottman et al., 2009), researchers have only recently been able to credibly estimate this causal effect. Using a difference-in-differences design, Brodeur and Wright (2019) show that isolated terrorist attacks (9/11 and the 2004 Madrid train bombing) negatively affected asylum seekers from Muslim-majority countries in the U.S. in the 3–9 months following these attacks. The current study is the first to demonstrate that these findings replicate when analyzing the daily effect of multiple events in a context of sustained terrorist activity, lending further credibility to their findings.

The study's main contribution is to provide the first empirical evidence that migrant shipwrecks, a different type of tragic event that has not been analyzed in the literature until now, can also affect asylum decisions. This finding has implications for our understanding of the mechanisms through which tragic events can affect asylum decisions since in-group bias, a common explanation for how terrorism influences attitudes, cannot easily explain this finding. Indeed, additional analyses suggest that these effects are unlikely to be driven by racial bias, cognitive bias such as availability heuristics, or political influence. Instead, the data is most consistent with an alternative mechanism in which events affects the trade-off asylum officers face between security versus humanitarian concerns.

2 Tragic events and immigration policy

Several recent studies have examined how terrorist attacks shape voters' attitudes and policy preferences. For instance, Helbling and Meierrieks (2020a) reviews research which hypothesizes that such attacks increase prejudice against minorities and exacerbate negative attitudes towards immigrants by triggering fear among citizens. Early empirical studies investigating how 9/11 affected attitudes found the attacks had a negative effect on voters' attitudes toward immigrants in both the U.S. (Hopkins, 2010) and Europe (Åslund and Rooth, 2005; Noelle-neumann, 2002; Schüller, 2016; Sheridan, 2006). Research on more recent attacks in Europe (the 2004 Madrid bombing, the 2015 Bataclan attack and the 2017 Manchester bombing) has drawn more mixed conclusions. Some studies have identified an effect (Boomgaarden and Vreese, 2007; Echebarria-Echabe and Fernández-Guede, 2006; Ferrín et al., 2020), while others

have not (Boydstun et al., 2018; Castanho Silva, 2018; Giani, 2020; Jungkunz et al., 2019; Van Assche and Dierckx, 2019; Van Hauwaert and Huber, 2020). Yet these studies focus on 1–2 events at a time. In a multi-event, multi-country study, Böhmelt et al. (2019) find that terrorism abroad affects the salience of immigration-related issues at home, suggesting that terrorism abroad may also affect voters' attitudes.

Few studies have examined how other types of tragic events affect attitudes toward immigrants. Two recent empirical studies investigating the effect of the death of Alan Kurdi, the 3-year-old boy who drowned in September 2015 while trying to reach Europe with his family, suggest that tragic events other than terrorist attacks can affect voters' attitudes toward immigration. The publication of the iconic picture of the boy coincided with a marked increase in the popularity of search terms "Syria," "refugees," and "Aylan," on Google and donations to help refugees (Slovic et al., 2017). Sohlberg et al. (2019) further show that randomly priming Swedish survey respondents with a picture of Alan Kurdi increased self-reported support for generous refugee policies in September, an effect that persisted even a month after the event. The increase in donations lasted about 6 weeks (Slovic et al., 2017); 4 months after the publication of the photograph, preferences for refugee policy had reverted to their May 2015 level (Sohlberg et al., 2019).

Can tragic events also lead to changes in immigration policy? Helbling and Meierrieks (2020a) identify two main channels through which terrorist attacks could result in more restrictive immigration policies. First, politicians could adjust to account for changes in voters' general preferences, either through incumbent governments adjusting their platform or via the election of politicians with different platforms. In a second channel, these events could affect immigration policy more indirectly "by reducing economic activity and life satisfaction."Helbling and Meierrieks (2020a, pp. 9) This line of inquiry has generated contrasting evidence. While some cross-country studies have identified a positive association between exposure to transnational terrorism and migration controls (Helbling and Meierrieks, 2020b) and more restrictive immigration policies (Bove et al., 2021), Choi (2021) find no such relationship. The current study helps fill this gap by investigating whether tragic events (migrant shipwrecks and terrorist attacks) can affect immigration policy through another, indirect, channel – asylum decision-making. According to Miller et al. (2015), "understanding how immigration judges decide asylum cases is the best place to begin trying to grasp asylum policy." By examining the effect of tragic events on asylum decisions in France during the refugee crisis, I hope to bring new evidence to examine this pressing question.

3 Background

To apply for refugee status, asylum seekers first need to fill out an application form and produce a personal narrative, in French, describing why they need refugee protection. They have 21

days after their arrival to submit their application to the Office for Refugee Protection and Stateless Persons (OFPRA), referred to as the "French asylum office," which has the authority to grant or deny asylum claims. It was created in 1952 shortly after France ratified the Geneva Convention, thereby committing it to grant refugee protection to those persecuted for reasons of "race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular group or political opinion."[8] The Geneva Convention initially applied only to events that took place in Europe before January 1, 1951, but the Bellagio Protocol, which came into effect in France in 1971, removed these limitations. The French asylum office's mandate further expanded in 2003 to include granting subsidiary protection to those who do not meet the Geneva definition but who face the "death penalty, torture or indiscriminate violence in the context of an internal or international armed conflict."[9]

Submitted applications are dispatched to the relevant geographic division, where division supervisors assign them to asylum officers. Although it is not clear on what basis cases are allocated to individual officers, cases are assigned well in advance of the interview such that even if this assignment is not random, it does not compromise the main identification assumption, which is that the timing of these events is exogenous to the type of applicants interviewed on a particular day. The designated asylum officer first reads the application before calling the applicant for a face-to-face interview, a mandatory requirement since 2006. In preparation for the interview, the asylum officer can also access country reports produced in house by the research division, as well as more confidential communications from the Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs when relevant. During the interview, the asylum officer questions the applicant to determine whether her claims of persecution have merit. Using the information collected during the interview, the officer then makes a motivated recommendation to grant or deny refugee status to his supervisor, who makes the final decision and can decide to overrule the officer's recommendation. The entire process took 262 days on average in 2015, and an average of 220 days in 2016.[10]

In 2015, the French asylum office employed 214 asylum officers to examine claims.[11] Officers are recruited either via a competitive national exam (permanent contract) or ad hoc recruitment drives (temporary contract). New hires are paired with a senior asylum officer who becomes their reference person during their first couple of weeks on the job. Since 2013, they have completed an induction program that explains the main steps of the application process. Little is known about the identity of these asylum officers; the asylum office publishes statistics on the entire employee population. Contacts at the French asylum office involved in the recruitment

[8] Article 1(A)2 of the 1951 Geneva Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees.

[9] Article L.712-1 of the Code de l'entrée et du séjour des étrangers et du droit d'asile (CESEDA).

[10] OFPRA 2015 and 2016 Activity Reports.

[11] OFPRA 2015 Activity Report.

process confirm that the large majority are women, relatively young and tend to be highly educated (Master's degree) but have little work experience.

Why would we expect asylum officers to be affected by tragic events? The asylum decision-making process involves two main stages. Asylum officers first need to determine whether, based on their claims, asylum seekers are eligible for refugee protection on the basis of either the Geneva Convention or the subsidiary protection mandate. This part is relatively objective. For example, the former only applies to applicants persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular group or political opinion. In the first stage, asylum officers must thus decide whether claims meet one of these five criteria. The second stage of the decision process is more subjective, since asylum officers have to decide whether the claims are truthful or not. Despite sustained efforts by the French asylum office to standardize the process, the decisions largely rest on the gut feeling of the interviewing officer. Yet, we know this kind of discretion can lead to substantial variation between decision-makers (Fischman, 2011; Hausman, 2016; Ramji-Nogales et al., 2007; Rehaag, 2008, 2012); it can also make them susceptible to the influence of external events such as fatigue, emotions and the weather (Danziger et al., 2011; Eren and Mocan, 2018; Heyes and Saberian, 2019). In this study, I analyze the influence of irrelevant but related events on asylum decisions.

4 Data

This study combines non-publicly available administrative data from the French asylum office with daily data on (1) migrant shipwrecks that occurred in the Mediterranean from the International Organization for Migration's (IOM) Missing Migrant project and (2) terrorist attacks in Europe from the Global Terrorism Database. I supplement this information with data on synopses of daily prime time news broadcasts, which I scraped from the INA website.

Asylum decisions The study sample includes 34,678 asylum applicants, who were randomly selected among applicants who filed their applications before December 2015 and who were scheduled to be interviewed at the French asylum office between January 2015 and December 2016. These administrative records contain information about applicants' basic demographic characteristics (country of origin, age, gender and marital status), interview date, whether the applicant was present during the interview, the anonymous identifier of the asylum officer in charge of the case, as well as the final asylum decision. While the records only include the final decision, anecdotal evidence suggests that supervisors generally follow the asylum officers' recommendations. Only one of the nine asylum officers interviewed by the head archivist at the French asylum office mentioned cases in which the division head did not follow her recommendations.[12] Even if overruling were common practice, this would bias my

[12]AD du Val de Marne/OFPRA/BDIC.

estimates toward zero since deliberations between asylum officers and their supervisors usually do not take place on the day of the interview.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics on asylum applications

	N	Mean	S.d.	Min	25th p.	Median	75th p.	Max
Year of application								
Before 2013	34,678	0.018	0.132	0	0	0	0	1
2013	34,678	0.058	0.234	0	0	0	0	1
2014	34,678	0.225	0.417	0	0	0	0	1
2015	34,678	0.699	0.459	0	0	1	1	1
Month of interview								
Between Jan. and June 2015	34,678	0.290	0.454	0	0	0	1	1
Between July and Dec. 2015	34,678	0.352	0.478	0	0	0	1	1
Between Jan. and June 2016	34,678	0.290	0.454	0	0	0	1	1
Between July and Dec. 2016	34,678	0.068	0.253	0	0	0	0	1
Applicant present during the interview								
Yes	34,678	0.849	0.358	0	1	1	1	1
No	34,678	0.120	0.325	0	0	0	0	1
Missing	34,678	0.031	0.172	0	0	0	0	1
Decision								
Denied refugee status	34,678	0.774	0.418	0	1	1	1	1
Granted refugee status	34,678	0.210	0.407	0	0	0	0	1
Not a decision	34,678	0.010	0.100	0	0	0	0	1
No information	34,678	0.006	0.074	0	0	0	0	1
Number of days between								
Application and decision	34,094	242.953	183.247	1	112	189	317	5,288
Application and interview	34,671	241.683	420.474	1	90	149	258	9,598
Interview and decision	33,076	49.146	82.414	0	8	20	49	946

Notes: Summary statistics on the number of days between the application, interview and decision are missing for some observations for which the dates were not listed chronologically.

Table 1 presents summary statistics on the asylum applicants included in the sample. The vast majority of them (69.9 percent) filed their applications in 2015; 22.5 percent filed in 2014, 5.8 percent in 2013, and 1.8 percent before 2013. Most interviews took place between January 2015 and June 2016; only 6.8 percent of the applicants in the sample were interviewed between July and December 2016. This is because the dataset only contains applications filed until December 2015 such that the interviews are clustered at the beginning of the year. We also know that 85 percent of applicants were present during the interview. Importantly, the data specifies the scheduled interview date even for applicants who did not attend, which prevents me from having to restrict the sample on a post-treatment variable (interview attendance) (Montgomery et al., 2018). By the time the French asylum office shared the data (in September 2107), over 98 percent of all applicants in the sample for whom an interview had been scheduled had been notified of their decision. I exclude the 545 applicants from the sample. These include 192 applicants who had not received their decision by then and 353 applicants who withdrew their applications (150), died (15), or for whom the recorded decision does not allow me to

determine the first decision. In the appendix, I show that the results are not sensitive to coding all 545 of these applicants as either acceptances or rejections. A total of 21 percent of applicants in the sample received refugee status, and 509 different asylum officers made between 1 and 271 decisions (average of 68 decisions).

Migrant shipwrecks The IOM's Missing Migrant project has collected data on migrant deaths around the world since October 2013. This database records every incident of "migrants who have died at the external borders of states, or in the process of migration towards an international destination, regardless of their legal status" (IOM, 2020, pp.4). The database is not restricted to shipwrecks but includes all known events in which migrants have died or gone missing via "transportation accidents, shipwrecks, violent attacks or due to medical complications during their journeys"(IOM, 2020, pp.4). For each incident, the database provides information on the location, date, the number of migrants who died or went missing, and their probable cause of death. I use this dataset to record information on two types of events. First, I code events taking place in the Mediterranean or Europe for which the cause of death is (presumed) drowning as *migrant shipwrecks in Europe*. Second, I code all other incidents involving migrants that occurred in the Mediterranean or Europe for which the cause of death is not (presumed) drowning as *other migrant deaths in Europe*. For each event, I extract the date and the number of dead and wounded.

Table 2 provides information about these events. In 2015 and 2016, the IOM recorded 154 incidents in which at least one migrant died in Europe or the Mediterranean in a drowning. In 2015 and 2016, 35 migrants on average were reported dead in shipwrecks, but the distribution of the number of migrants dead or missing is highly skewed to the right since half of these incidents recorded seven or fewer drownings. The highest death toll was recorded on April 18, 2015, when a fishing boat carrying more than 700 migrants sank in the Mediterranean. In the main specification I report the results from shipwrecks coded as events in which more than 40 migrants died. The appendix reports the results for different thresholds as well. The IOM recorded an additional 124 incidents in which a migrant died in Europe but not by drowning. These events tend to be less deadly than shipwrecks, on average: only 6 percent of them featured more than 20 deaths (compared to 31 percent for shipwrecks).

Terrorist attacks The Global Terrorism Database is an open-source database of domestic and international terrorist events around the world since 1970 (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2015). It contains a wide range of information, including the location of the attack, whether it was successful, the type of weapon used, as well as information about the target, perpetrator, and number of casualties. I use this database to code two types of events. First, I code *terrorist attacks in France* by restricting the dataset to the 63 terrorist attacks, successful or not, perpetrated in France in 2015 and 2016. These attacks took place on 43 different days, including 30 on weekdays. ISIS perpetrated one-third of the attacks; the identity of the terrorist organization involved is unknown for half

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on events and their coverage in the news

	Events				Applicants
	Number	Proportion covered during prime time	Diff. in prob. of related news story that day		Nb. interviewed the day after the event
			coef.	s.e.	
Migrant shipwrecks in Europe					
> 0 *deaths*	154	0.12	0.04	0.03	10,481
> 20 *deaths*	47	0.26	0.17	0.05	3,103
> 40 *deaths*	30	0.23	0.14	0.06	1,648
> 60 *deaths*	19	0.32	0.23	0.07	817
Other migrant deaths in Europe					
> 0 *deaths*	124	0.10	-0.00	0.03	6,501
> 20 *deaths*	8	0.13	0.03	0.11	382
> 40 *deaths*	3	0.00	-0.10	0.17	140
> 60 *deaths*	1	0.00	-0.10	0.30	62
Terrorist attacks in France					
All attacks	30	0.37	0.09	0.08	2,060
Islamist attacks only	12	0.50	0.23	0.13	600
Other terrorist attacks in Europe	178	0.28	-0.00	0.04	13,077
News stories about shipwrecks	50				3,638
News stories about attacks	141				9,810

of the attacks. The estimates reported here de facto exclude the largest terrorist attack that occurred during the study period. Since the November 13, 2015 attacks happened on a Friday, no asylum seekers were interviewed the following day and are thus not included in the sample. Importantly, no asylum seeker was accused or convicted of conducting any of these attacks. In a second type of event, I code *other attacks in neighboring European states* by restricting the dataset to the 178 attacks that were perpetrated in France's neighboring states (including the UK) on weekdays.

News reports I downloaded the synopses of daily prime time news broadcasts between January 2015 and December 2016 for France's two main free television channels, TF1 and France 2, from the INA website. Together, these two channels drew about 40 percent of viewers in 2010 (Philippe and Ouss, 2018). Daily prime time news starts at 8pm, lasts about 35 minutes, and covers an average of 26 stories. Each story is described with a title (about 8 words) and a short content overview (about 27 words)[13]. I coded a news broadcast as featuring a news story about a migrant shipwreck by searching for the keywords "migrants" or "refugees" in conjunction with "shipwreck," "rescue," "drowning," "Mediterranean," or "survivors." I coded a story as featuring a terrorist attack if the terms "terrorist" or "attack" featured in its title or description. These stories include news reports about new attacks, as well as those about the

[13]My data differs from that of Philippe and Ouss (2018) who only have keywords for each news report. Instead, I have a short description for each news story.

aftermath of prior terrorist attacks, as well as failed attacks.

This last data source serves two purposes. First, it allows me to use the same research design to analyze the effect of both events and news reports on asylum decisions. Prior research has examined the effect of events Brodeur and Wright (2019); Shayo and Zussman (2011) *or* news coverage on judicial decisions Philippe and Ouss (2018); Spirig (2021). To the best of my knowledge, this study is the first to investigate both simultaneously. According to the results reported in Table 2, there were approximately 50 days on which a story of a migrant shipwreck was run on either channel, while there was a news story about a terrorist attack on 141 days, even though such events were less frequent. Second, data on news coverage allows me to proxy for compliance by being able to distinguish between events that were reported in the news and those that were not. I code events as being reported in the news if there was a prime time news report on either channel about it on the day of the event. Table 2 shows that 37 percent of terrorist attacks were featured on the news, as were 28 percent of shipwrecks that caused more than 40 deaths.

5 Empirical strategy

To estimate the effect of events and news reports on asylum decisions, I regress an indicator variable $y_{i,t}$, which is equal to 1 if applicant i interviewed on day t was granted asylum and 0 otherwise, on a binary variable Event_{t-1} which is equal to 1 if there was a migrant shipwreck, a terrorist attack or a news report about either type of event the day before the interview.

$$y_{i,t} = \tau \text{Event}_{t-1} + X_i'\beta + \gamma_j \text{Asylum Officer}_j + \epsilon_{ijt} \text{ if } \text{Event}_t = 0$$

This specification also includes a vector X_i' of applicant (country of origin, age, gender, marital status) and interview characteristics (year, month and day of the week of the interview), as well as asylum officer fixed effects. I exclude asylum seekers who were interviewed on the day of the event considered in the analysis because they could be either treated or not depending on the (unobserved) timing of the event (e.g. morning, afternoon or evening). Unless otherwise noted, all standard errors are clustered at the level of the asylum officer. Therefore, $\hat{\tau}$ estimates the difference in the probability of being granted refugee status between those interviewed the day after one of these events or news reports and those interviewed on any other day, controlling for observable characteristics.

Under what conditions is $\hat{\tau}$ an unbiased estimate of the causal effect of events on asylum application decisions? First, the treatment should be ignorable, i.e. the potential outcomes should be independent of the timing of the interview. This first assumption is particularly credible in this setting, both because the events I consider were unexpected and because the interview date is set weeks in advance to give applicants sufficient time to make arrangements

to attend. As a result, applicants interviewed before and after the event should be comparable in their (unobserved) potential outcomes, such that the treatment can be considered ignorable. Table A.1 compares the observable characteristics of asylum seekers interviewed the day after an event (a migrant shipwreck or a terrorist attack) to those interviewed on any other day, and reveals no systematic imbalances in their characteristics.

In a second condition, the treatment should be excludable — i.e. it should not affect the outcome through another variable. The study design minimizes the chances of detecting an effect running through another variable. Muñoz et al. (2020) confirms that "the ideal way to increase the generalizability of [Unexpected Event Study Design] studies is to analyze more than one event of the same class in order to establish some regularities." Indeed, averaging the effects of multiple events helps rule out the possibility that the estimated effect is an artifact of something else happening at the same time. While simultaneously analyzing multiple events represents a methodological improvement, it also presents at least two unique challenges related to causal inference. First, it makes treatment compliance difficult to precisely control for. Studies focusing on a single event have the advantage of being able to examine whether relevant actors knew about a specific event. But when averaging several events, it is impossible to determine the extent to which actors knew about the various events. To mitigate this challenge, I use data on media coverage of these events to proxy for compliance. The second challenge associated with assessing multiple events at the same time is that, like Philippe and Ouss (2018), I restrict my attention to the short-term effect of repeated events because the events I study occur multiple times over a short period of time and at intervals of varying lengths; thus it is difficult to track them for more than a few days.

6 Results

Overall, I find that asylum seekers interviewed the day after an event, whether a terrorist attack or a migrant shipwreck, were *not* more or less likely to be granted refugee status than those interviewed on any other day. Controlling for observable characteristics and asylum officer fixed effects, I find that the difference in the probability of being granted refugee status between these two groups is in the expected direction – positive for shipwrecks and negative for attacks – but small in size (1 percentage point or less) and not statistically distinguishable from zero (column 1 of Table 3).

To test whether this result is due to non-compliance (asylum officers were simply not aware of some of these events) or a null effect (asylum officers were aware of the events, but were not affected), I separately analyze the effect of events featured in the news vs. those not featured in the news (Table 3, columns 2 and 3, respectively). I find that applicants who were interviewed the day after a shipwreck occurred that was featured on prime time news were 4.4 percentage points (s.e. = 2.1) more likely to obtain refugee status than those interviewed on any other

Table 3: Effect of migrant shipwrecks and terrorist attacks on asylum decisions

	Events			News Reports
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	All	Reported	Not reported	All
Shipwreck *t-1*	0.008	0.044**	-0.005	-0.000
	(0.009)	(0.021)	(0.009)	(0.007)
Observations	32,044	33,286	32,461	30,276
Nb of treated units	1,557	411	1,226	3,096
Mean of DV	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214
R^2	0.369	0.368	0.369	0.370
	Events			News Reports
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	All	Reported	Not reported	All
Attack *t-1*	-0.013	-0.026*	-0.005	-0.009
	(0.009)	(0.014)	(0.012)	(0.006)
Observations	31,809	32,814	32,698	24,184
Nb of treated units	1,777	884	1,034	4,731
Mean of DV	0.213	0.213	0.213	0.212
R^2	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.369

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$. Standard errors, clustered at the asylum officer level, are reported in parentheses. Asylum seekers interviewed on the day of the event or news report are excluded from this analysis. See text for control variable details.

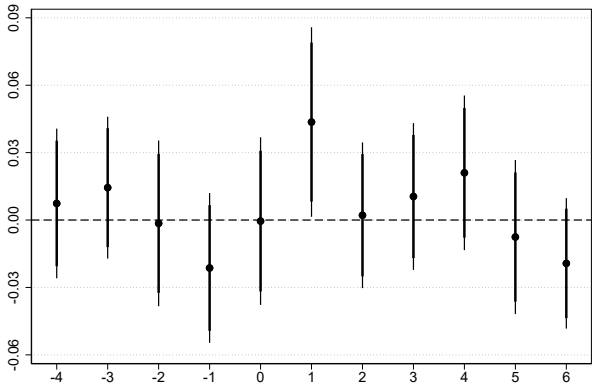
day, while the difference is less than one percentage point when considering events that did not feature on prime time news (top panel). The difference between these two estimates (5 percentage points, s.e. = 2.3) is significant at the 5 percent level (Table B.6).

These results suggest that migrant shipwrecks *did* affect asylum decisions, but only if asylum officers knew about them. I confirm this result using the shipwreck's death toll, a more indirect proxy for compliance, which Table 2 demonstrates is correlated with the probability that a shipwreck will feature on prime time news. Appendix Table B.1 demonstrates that the effect of migrant shipwrecks increases from 0.2 percentage points for all shipwrecks (irrespective of their death toll) to 3.8 percentage points for those in which 90 or more people died; the difference between the two (0.036) is statistically significant at conventional levels (s.e. = 0.015) (Table B.6). Consistent with my hypothesis, I find that other events in which migrants died in Europe, which tend to have a lower death toll and are less likely to be featured on prime time news, had no effect on asylum decisions in France (Table B.5, columns 5 and 6).

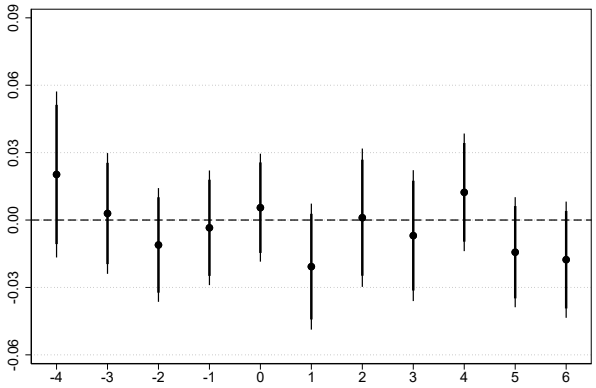
I check the robustness of this finding in three ways. First, I demonstrate that the effect of migrant shipwrecks reported in the news on asylum decisions is robust to increasing the comparability of the control group. I do this in two different ways. I first show that the effect of migrant shipwrecks is robust to reducing the bandwidth around the event (Appendix Table B.4). Compared to asylum seekers interviewed 4 days before a migrant shipwreck, those interviewed the day after a shipwreck featured on the news were 7.5 percentage points more likely to obtain refugee status (s.e. = 2.7) (column 10, top panel). Second, I demonstrate that the results are robust to controlling for event fixed effects. I construct an event indicator variable by assigning each asylum application to a single event as follows: I assigned applicants to the event that took place on the day of, or the day before, the interview, where relevant, and to the next event otherwise. When controlling for event fixed effects, the point estimate almost doubles in size (8.3 percentage points), and the coefficient remains highly significant (s.e. = 2.7) (Appendix Table B.2, column 5, top panel).

Figure 1: Duration of the effect of events reported in the news on asylum decisions

(a) Shipwrecks



(b) Terrorist attacks



Notes: These figures display the coefficients, along with 90 and 95 percent confidence intervals from standard errors clustered at the asylum officer level, of six lag and four lead indicator variables included in an ordinary least squares regression, controlling for all observable characteristics.

In a second robustness check, I conducted two types of falsification checks. In Table B.5 (column 7), I report the estimate of the effect of 40 events which I generated randomly, using the main specification. Reassuringly, this estimate is small (1.5 percentage point) and not statistically significant. I also check that the events did not have an effect on applicants interviewed before the event occurred by plotting the marginal effect of migrant shipwrecks for applicants interviewed 4 days before to 6 days after the event (Figure 1). Reassuringly, the effect of a migrant shipwreck for those interviewed beforehand is smaller, on average (about 2 percentage points) than the main estimated effect and is not statistically different from zero. This analysis also reveals that the effect of migrant shipwrecks is very short-lived since those

interviewed 2 days afterwards are not more likely to be granted refugee status. This pattern is consistent with Philippe and Ouss (2018)'s finding that news stories about crime only affect jurors' decisions for a day.

Finally, in Appendix Table B.2, I check that the effect of migrant shipwrecks is robust to removing all covariates, which confirms that the effect I estimate is not an artifact of the combination of control variables I decided to include in the main specification (column 4) (Lenz and Sahn, 2021). I also check that the results are robust to clustering standard errors at the asylum officer and day of interview levels (B.2, column 6). In Appendix Table B.3, I show that results are also robust to excluding extremely deferred cases (column 2), and to coding all applicants for whom a decision is missing as rejected (column 3) or accepted (column 4).

For terrorist attacks, the pattern is similar: events featured in the news are associated with a 2.6-percentage-point reduction in the probability of being granted refugee status (standard error: 1.4), while those not reported in the news had no effect on decisions (Table 3, bottom panel, columns 2 and 3). However, the effect of attacks reported in the news is only significant at the 10 percent level, and the difference between the effect of reported and unreported attacks is smaller (2.1 percentage points) and not statistically significant at conventional levels (Table B.6). Moreover, additional robustness checks detailed above confirm that this effect cannot be distinguished from zero. For instance, the effect of terrorist attacks is no longer significant when the bandwidth is reduced to 20 days before the event (Table B.4), or when controlling for the event identifier (Table B.2, column 5). It is therefore not surprising to find that attacks in other contiguous European countries did not affect asylum decisions (Appendix Table B.5, columns 3 and 4). This result suggests that even if terrorism abroad can increase the salience of immigration-related issues among voters (Böhmelt et al., 2020), this does not necessarily imply that it can also directly affect immigration policy. However, this null effect could be due to a ceiling effect — a long-term effect over the period that nullifies the impact of any subsequent attacks. My research design does not allow me to directly test this hypothesis. In the next section, however, I test a hypothesis regarding the heterogeneity of the type of applicants who were affected by these events.

Finally, I find that news reports have no effect on decisions. Being interviewed the day after a news report about either a shipwreck or an attack, or on any other day, does not make a difference for asylum seekers (point estimates are smaller than 1 percentage point and not statistically significant at conventional levels) (Table 3, column 4). The magnitudes of these estimates are consistent with the findings of a recent study of the effect of coverage of the asylum issue on asylum decisions in the Swiss asylum appeal process: Spirig (2021) finds that when the average daily number of circulation-weighted articles during the appeal period increases by one, the probability of being granted asylum decreases by 0.4 percentage points. Like Philippe and Ouss (2018), who analyzed the effect of crime-related news on judicial decisions among professional decision-makers using a similar design as mine, I conclude that asylum officers

were not affected by news reports of shipwrecks and attacks.

To summarize, this study yielded four main findings: (1) overall, events have no short-term effects on asylum decisions, (2) migrant shipwrecks have a strong positive impact on decisions, (3) terrorist attacks do not affect decisions even when they are featured on the news, and (4) news reports alone do not affect asylum decisions.

7 Mechanisms

Scholars have identified three main channels through which tragic events such as terrorist attacks and migrant shipwrecks could affect asylum officers' decision-making in the short term: racial bias, cognitive bias and emotions. In this section I discuss each potential mechanism in turn.

7.1 Racial bias

The first mechanism is that terrorist attacks could affect asylum decision-making by exacerbating asylum officers' in-group bias. The extent to which people identify with different facets of their social identity, and therefore the affinity they feel with their ingroup, depends on their environment (Shayo, 2009). Prior studies have shown that judicial in-group bias is related to the intensity of terrorist activity in the vicinity of the court in the months prior (McConnell and Rasul, 2020; Shayo and Zussman, 2011). Therefore, by making religion a salient issue, Islamist terrorist attacks could make asylum officers less likely to grant refugee status to Muslim applicants. Consistent with this mechanism, Brodeur and Wright (2019) finds that applicants from Muslim-majority countries suffered a greater penalty after 9/11 than other applicants did.

I examine this mechanism empirically by comparing the effect of all attacks, Islamist attacks only and shipwrecks, among applicants from Muslim-majority countries (columns 1, 3 and 5) to the effect among applicants from non-Muslim-majority countries (columns 2, 4 and 6) in Table 4. To classify countries as either Muslim majority or non-Muslim majority, I use data from the Association of Religion Data Archive's World Religion dataset. This dataset estimates the percentage of the population that identifies with Christianity or Islam for most countries in the world from 1945 to today. I classify a country as Muslim majority if more than half of its population identified as Muslim according to this dataset in 2010.

Surprisingly, the evidence in favor of this mechanism is particularly weak. The estimated effect of attacks is indeed more negative among applicants from Muslim-majority countries (top panel, column 1) than among those from non-Muslim-majority countries (column 2), but their difference is small and not significant, whether considering all attacks or only reported attacks (Table B.6). The conclusion is the same when considering only Islamist attacks (columns 3 and 4). Therefore, the short-term effect of tragic events does not seem to be operating mainly

Table 4: Heterogeneity by religious composition of the country of origin

	Attacks		Islamist Attacks		Shipwrecks	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Muslim majority countries	Excl. Muslim majority countries	Muslim majority countries	Excl. Muslim majority countries	Muslim majority countries	Excl. Muslim majority countries
Event *t-1*	-0.021*	-0.013	-0.032	-0.003	0.010	0.005
	(0.012)	(0.015)	(0.025)	(0.031)	(0.012)	(0.017)
Observations	18,612	13,197	19,259	13,696	18,742	13,302
Nb of treated units	997	770	281	175	952	588
Mean of DV	0.243	0.171	0.243	0.172	0.244	0.171
R^2	0.448	0.252	0.448	0.250	0.448	0.251
	Reported Attacks		Reported Islamist Attacks		Reported Shipwrecks	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Muslim majority countries	Excl. Muslim majority countries	Muslim majority countries	Excl. Muslim majority countries	Muslim majority countries	Excl. Muslim majority countries
Event *t-1*	-0.040**	-0.018	-0.022	-0.030	0.042*	0.045
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.022)	(0.040)
Observations	19,216	13,598	19,435	13,826	19,456	13,830
Nb of treated units	459	421	210	161	249	155
Mean of DV	0.244	0.171	0.243	0.172	0.244	0.171
R^2	0.448	0.251	0.448	0.250	0.448	0.251

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$.

through racial bias, even if I cannot rule out the possibility that this is at play in the long run. However, migrant shipwrecks do not have the potential to antagonize different ethnic or religious groups, because they portray migrants as victims rather than threats. Therefore in the next section we look further to understand the mechanism at play behind this effect.

7.2 Cognitive bias

It could be the case that migrant shipwrecks and terrorist attacks affect asylum decisions by directly influencing asylum officers' prior assumptions about the applicant's type. Asylum decisions should be a function of the decision-maker's assessment of the probability that the applicant will be persecuted if forced to return home (this belief should increase the probability that the applicant will be granted refugee status) and her assessment of the probability that the applicant is a terrorist (this belief should decrease the probability that the applicant will

be granted refugee status). Tversky and Kahneman (1973) established early on that people tend to evaluate the frequency of a class with "the ease with which relevant instances come to mind," and that this "availability" heuristic can lead to "biases due to the retrievability of instances" (p. 1127). In other words, familiarity, salience and recency increase the availability of instances and potentially bias an individual's assessment of frequencies and probabilities. Moreover, evidence from survey experiments with experienced judges reveals that they can also be subject to a range of cognitive biases, including anchoring and framing (Guthrie et al., 2001, 2007, 2009). Using real-world data, Chen et al. (2016) further show that experienced decision-makers tend to underestimate the likelihood of sequential streaks occurring by chance (a phenomenon known as the gambler's fallacy). Overall, the evidence suggests that asylum officers are unlikely to be are not immune to cognitive biases.

As a result, an asylum officer could be more likely to believe an applicant is a terrorist if she is interviewed after, rather than before, a terrorist attack, because the officer would be able to quickly recall such an attack. For the same reasons, asylum officers might be more likely to think an asylum seeker is persecuted if she is interviewed after, rather than before, a shipwreck. One implication of this argument is that we would expect to observe a stronger effect for applicants from countries associated with the events. In other words, we would expect the effect of terrorist attacks to be concentrated among applicants from the countries most closely associated with Islamist attacks, namely Syria and Iraq, which were ISIS strongholds in 2015. Similarly, we would expect the effect of shipwrecks to be stronger for applicants from the countries most associated with these events, such as Syrians and migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, who were most like to come to Europe by boat and lose their lives at sea.

The results suggest that this is indeed the case for attacks, but not for shipwrecks. Table 5 (columns 1 and 2) demonstrates that terrorist attacks have a large negative effect on the success of Syrian and Iraqi asylum seekers' applications. Syrians and Iraqis interviewed the day after an attack were 9.1 percentage points less likely to be granted refugee status, a 10 percent decrease compared to the average acceptance rate of 93 percent for Iraqis and Syrians in the sample (top panel, column 1). Other applicants were only 1.1 percentage points less likely to be granted refugee status after an attack (top panel, column 2); the difference between the two is significant at the 10 percent level (Table B.6). I conduct several robustness tests and find that the effect of terrorist attacks among Syrians and Iraqis is relatively robust to restricting the bandwidth (Appendix Table B.4) and covariate specifications (Appendix Table B.2), considering the small number of units treated. I do not see a consistent pattern when comparing the effect of shipwrecks in associated countries vs. those not associated with the event (columns 5 and 6). Therefore, this analysis reveals that the null effect of terrorist attacks obscures important heterogeneity, but also suggests that the effect of migrant shipwrecks on asylum decisions does not operate mainly through cognitive bias.

Table 5: Effect of shipwrecks and attacks on asylum decisions, by country of origin

	Attacks		Islamist Attacks		Shipwrecks	
	(1) Associated countries	(2) Excl. Associated countries	(3) Associated countries	(4) Excl. Associated countries	(5) Associated countries	(6) Excl. Associated countries
Event *t-1*	-0.091**	-0.011	-0.116	-0.018	0.018	0.002
	(0.042)	(0.009)	(0.098)	(0.020)	(0.017)	(0.012)
Observations	1,385	30,424	1,433	31,522	11,310	20,734
Nb of treated units	77	1,700	24	435	544	1,013
Mean of DV	0.934	0.181	0.934	0.181	0.300	0.167
R^2	0.185	0.271	0.178	0.270	0.434	0.308
	Attacks in the news		Islamist Attacks in the news		Shipwrecks in the news	
	(1) Associated countries	(2) Excl. Associated countries	(3) Associated countries	(4) Excl. Associated countries	(5) Associated countries	(6) Excl. Associated countries
Event *t-1*	-0.132*	-0.022	-0.097	-0.021	0.027	0.051**
	(0.068)	(0.014)	(0.090)	(0.023)	(0.039)	(0.024)
Observations	1,436	31,378	1,453	31,808	11,722	21,564
Nb of treated units	42	842	24	349	129	282
Mean of DV	0.934	0.181	0.934	0.181	0.300	0.167
R^2	0.184	0.270	0.176	0.270	0.433	0.309

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$.

7.3 Emotions

The evidence presented thus far is consistent with an alternative mechanism related to asylum officers' emotional response to tragic events, which could affect their decision-making by changing the relative weight they attach to security versus humanitarian concerns. Research from psychology has shown that the vividness with which outcomes are represented influences people's emotional reactions, a finding used to explain customers' behaviors in purchasing insurance (for a review, see Loewenstein et al. (2001)). This emotional response could in turn affect asylum officers' sense of priorities and the importance they attach to humanitarian versus security concerns and be more or less generous as a result. Indeed, one implication of this mechanism is that the emotional response triggered by shipwrecks would increase asylum officers' generosity across the board, not just for applicants from associated countries (as shown in Table 5). This mechanism is also consistent with evidence that the attacks have a stronger effect on applicants from Syria and Iraq. Indeed, the threat of Islamist terrorism loomed large during the study period. We would therefore expect asylum officers to update their prior beliefs that applicants from Syria and Iraq may present an increased risk. We would also expect

them to keep these priors high, even after a couple days after the attack. However, each individual attack could momentarily increase the weight asylum officers place on security versus humanitarian concerns.

7.4 Alternative mechanisms

It is also possible that the effects of either attacks or shipwrecks could instead be the result of a change in the attitudes of the applicants themselves, or of other individuals present during the interview, like lawyers or the interpreter. While this scenario is impossible to rule out entirely, one piece of evidence suggests that applicants do not condition their behavior on these events: if asylum seekers believed that being interviewed after a shipwreck (an attack) was beneficial (detrimental) to their case, we would expect them to be more (less) likely to show up to their interview if it was scheduled the day after a shipwreck (an attack). Yet this does not seem to be the case. In Table B.7, I show that applicants scheduled to interview the day after a shipwreck or an attack were not more or less likely to attend. Finally, tragic events could indirectly affect asylum decisions by increasing the amount of political pressure on the administration. While this mechanism could plausibly explain medium- to long-term effects, it is less likely to be the main explanation for the very short-term effects identified here.

8 Conclusion

The refugee crisis that began in 2015 coincided with renewed terrorist activity in Europe, which forced asylum officers to strike a delicate balance between protecting the lives of refugees fleeing persecution and preventing future terrorist attacks. During the first 2 years of the refugee crisis, two types of events, often reported by the media, unambiguously reminded citizens and asylum officers of this dual objective. News of migrant shipwrecks in the Mediterranean underlined the risk that asylum seekers take to reach Europe, while terrorist attacks underscored the potential cost of granting refugee status to even a single terrorist.

To determine whether these events affected asylum officers' decisions about whether to grant or deny refugee status to the applicants they were interviewing at the time, I estimate the short-term effect of migrant shipwrecks and terrorist attacks on asylum decisions, leveraging both the unexpected nature of these events and the fact that interviews at the French asylum office are scheduled weeks in advance. Combining administrative data on asylum applications filed at the French asylum office with data on migrant shipwrecks, terrorist attacks and news reports, I find that asylum officers were more generous with applicants interviewed the day after a shipwreck (compared to applicants interviewed on any other day), but only when the shipwreck was reported in the news. The effect of terrorist attacks was concentrated among applicants from Syria and Iraq, strongholds of ISIS, which claimed responsibility for one-third

of all terrorist attacks perpetrated in France in 2015 and 2016.

Examining possible alternative mechanisms to explain these short-term effects, I find that the evidence in favor of racial bias, a common explanation of the effect of terrorism on voters and decision-makers, is surprisingly weak. Instead, the evidence is most consistent with a mechanism in which tragic events trigger an emotional reaction that affects the extent to which asylum officers value security versus humanitarian concerns when making their decisions. This study thus contributes to recent research investigating the effect of unrelated events on decision-making by judges and asylum officers. Future research should explore the effectiveness of various interventions at mitigating the role of emotions in judicial decision-making.

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Online Appendices

A Balance test

Table A.1: Balance table

	Interviewed after a shipwreck		Interviewed on any other day		t-test		Interviewed after an attack		Interviewed on any other day		t-test	
	Mean	N	Mean	N	Diff.	p	Mean	N	Mean	N	Diff.	p
Did not come to the interview	0.11	1,648	0.12	33,030	-0.01	0.44	0.13	2,060	0.12	32,618	0.01	0.27
Gender												
Female	0.33	1,648	0.34	33,030	-0.01	0.32	0.32	2,060	0.34	32,618	-0.02	0.07
Male	0.67	1,648	0.66	33,030	0.01	0.32	0.68	2,060	0.66	32,618	0.02	0.07
Age												
Less than 20	0.05	1,648	0.05	33,028	-0.00	0.44	0.05	2,060	0.05	32,616	-0.00	0.33
Between 20 and 30	0.47	1,648	0.46	33,028	0.00	0.70	0.49	2,060	0.46	32,616	0.02	0.04
More than 30	0.48	1,648	0.48	33,028	-0.00	0.96	0.46	2,060	0.48	32,616	-0.02	0.10
Family Situation												
Single	0.54	1,642	0.54	32,828	-0.00	0.82	0.56	2,050	0.54	32,420	0.02	0.05
Married	0.46	1,642	0.46	32,828	0.00	0.82	0.44	2,050	0.46	32,420	-0.02	0.05
Nationality												
Afghanistan	0.04	1,648	0.03	33,030	0.00	0.73	0.03	2,060	0.03	32,618	-0.00	0.96
Albania	0.03	1,648	0.03	33,030	-0.01	0.07	0.04	2,060	0.03	32,618	0.01	0.08
Algeria	0.03	1,648	0.03	33,030	0.00	0.60	0.03	2,060	0.03	32,618	0.00	0.74
Bangladesh	0.06	1,648	0.05	33,030	0.00	0.51	0.04	2,060	0.05	32,618	-0.02	0.00
China	0.04	1,648	0.05	33,030	-0.01	0.06	0.04	2,060	0.05	32,618	-0.01	0.22
DRC	0.06	1,648	0.07	33,030	-0.01	0.41	0.05	2,060	0.07	32,618	-0.02	0.01
Guinea	0.04	1,648	0.04	33,030	-0.00	0.60	0.04	2,060	0.04	32,618	-0.00	0.76
Haiti	0.02	1,648	0.04	33,030	-0.02	0.00	0.07	2,060	0.03	32,618	0.04	0.00
Kosovo	0.05	1,648	0.04	33,030	0.01	0.30	0.04	2,060	0.05	32,618	-0.01	0.19
Nigeria	0.03	1,648	0.03	33,030	0.00	0.70	0.03	2,060	0.03	32,618	-0.00	0.98
Other	0.36	1,648	0.35	33,030	0.01	0.54	0.36	2,060	0.35	32,618	0.01	0.59
Pakistan	0.06	1,648	0.04	33,030	0.01	0.00	0.03	2,060	0.04	32,618	-0.01	0.01
Russia	0.05	1,648	0.04	33,030	0.00	0.57	0.04	2,060	0.04	32,618	-0.00	0.46
Sri Lanka	0.03	1,648	0.03	33,030	0.00	0.33	0.03	2,060	0.03	32,618	-0.00	0.74
Sudan	0.08	1,648	0.08	33,030	0.00	0.72	0.09	2,060	0.08	32,618	0.01	0.21
Syria	0.04	1,648	0.04	33,030	0.00	0.71	0.04	2,060	0.04	32,618	0.00	0.31
Asylum officer ID												
129	0.00	1,648	0.01	33,030	-0.00	0.16	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	-0.00	0.59
135	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.37	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.01	0.00
225	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	-0.00	0.60	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.00	0.37
233	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.89	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.00	0.04
245	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.56	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.00	0.39
269	0.00	1,648	0.01	33,030	-0.00	0.37	0.00	2,060	0.01	32,618	-0.00	0.52
324	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.02	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.00	0.20
444	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.30	0.00	2,060	0.01	32,618	-0.00	0.50
508	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.72	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	-0.00	0.69
658	0.00	1,648	0.01	33,030	-0.00	0.04	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	-0.00	0.80
669	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.14	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.00	0.13
754	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	-0.00	0.64	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.00	0.16
766	0.00	1,648	0.01	33,030	-0.00	0.40	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	0.00	0.44
785	0.00	1,648	0.01	33,030	-0.00	0.04	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	-0.00	0.63
786	0.01	1,648	0.01	33,030	0.00	0.96	0.01	2,060	0.01	32,618	-0.00	0.70
Other	0.91	1,648	0.90	33,030	0.00	0.69	0.89	2,060	0.90	32,618	-0.02	0.02

B Robustness

Table B.1: Robustness to varying the threshold used to define shipwrecks

	All shipwrecks									
	(1) > 0 drowned	(2) > 10 drowned	(3) > 20 drowned	(4) > 30 drowned	(5) > 40 drowned	(6) > 50 drowned	(7) > 60 drowned	(8) > 70 drowned	(9) > 80 drowned	(10) > 90 drowned
Shipwreck *t-1*	0.002	0.005	0.011	0.008	0.008	0.026*	0.036**	0.036**	0.036**	0.038**
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Observations	22,930	29,762	30,806	31,506	32,044	32,806	32,910	32,911	32,911	33,001
Nb of treated units	6,303	3,556	2,912	2,079	1,557	802	726	726	726	612
Mean of DV	0.208	0.212	0.213	0.213	0.214	0.213	0.213	0.213	0.213	0.214
R^2	0.373	0.368	0.367	0.368	0.369	0.369	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.369
	Shipwrecks reported in the news									
	(1) > 0 drowned	(2) > 10 drowned	(3) > 20 drowned	(4) > 30 drowned	(5) > 40 drowned	(6) > 50 drowned	(7) > 60 drowned	(8) > 70 drowned	(9) > 80 drowned	(10) > 90 drowned
Shipwreck *t-1*	0.019*	0.026**	0.026**	0.035**	0.044**	0.057**	0.057**	0.057**	0.057**	0.057**
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)	(0.023)
Observations	32,404	32,815	32,836	32,949	33,286	33,372	33,372	33,372	33,372	33,372
Nb of treated units	1,443	932	932	720	411	322	322	322	322	322
Mean of DV	0.213	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214
R^2	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.368	0.368

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$. Standard errors, clustered at the asylum officer level, are reported in parentheses. Asylum seekers interviewed on the day of the shipwreck are excluded from the sample. See text for control variable details.

Table B.2: Robustness to covariates

	Shipwrecks reported in the news					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Shipwreck *t-1*	0.044*	0.042**	0.042**	0.044**	0.083***	0.083***
	(0.024)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Observations	33,712	33,286	33,286	33,286	33,286	33,286
Nb of treated units	411	411	411	411	411	411
Mean of DV	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214	0.214
Applicant characteristics	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bureaucrat fixed effects	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Time fixed effects	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Event ID	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
R^2	0.000	0.327	0.367	0.368	0.373	0.373
	Attacks reported in the news					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Attack *t-1*	-0.041***	-0.035***	-0.034**	-0.026*	-0.024	-0.024
	(0.015)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.017)	(0.015)
Observations	33,235	32,814	32,814	32,814	32,814	32,814
Nb of treated units	884	884	884	884	884	884
Mean of DV	0.213	0.213	0.213	0.213	0.213	0.213
Applicant characteristics	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bureaucrat fixed effects	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Time fixed effects	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Event ID	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
R^2	0.000	0.327	0.367	0.368	0.369	0.369
	All attacks (Associated countries)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Attack *t-1*	-0.090**	-0.091**	-0.105**	-0.091**	-0.084*	-0.084**
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.046)	(0.037)
Observations	1,387	1,385	1,385	1,385	1,385	1,385
Nb of treated units	77	77	77	77	77	77
Mean of DV	0.934	0.934	0.934	0.934	0.934	0.934
Applicant characteristics	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bureaucrat fixed effects	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Time fixed effects	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Event ID	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
R^2	0.007	0.067	0.150	0.185	0.207	0.207
	Attacks reported in the news (Associated countries)					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Attack *t-1*	-0.138*	-0.152**	-0.148**	-0.132*	-0.133	-0.133*
	(0.073)	(0.074)	(0.071)	(0.068)	(0.093)	(0.072)
Observations	1,438	1,436	1,436	1,436	1,436	1,436
Nb of treated units	42	42	42	42	42	42
Mean of DV	0.934	0.934	0.934	0.934	0.934	0.934
Applicant characteristics	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Bureaucrat fixed effects	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Time fixed effects	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Event ID	N	N	N	N	Y	Y
R^2	0.008	0.071	0.151	0.184	0.206	0.206

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$. Standard errors, clustered at the asylum officer level, are reported in parentheses in columns 1 to 5. In column 6, standard errors are two-way clustered at the asylum officer and day of interview level. Asylum seekers interviewed on the day of the shipwreck are excluded from the sample. See text for control variable details.

Table B.3: Additional robustness tests

	Shipwrecks reported in the news			
	(1) Main Specification	(2) Including applicants interviewed on day of event	(3) Excluding Cases filed before 2014	(4) Coding those missing a decision as rejections
Shipwreck *t-1*	0.044**	0.049**	0.041*	0.044**
	(0.021)	(0.023)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Observations	33,286	30,793	33,620	33,286
Nb of treated units	411	362	411	411
Mean of DV	0.214	0.220	0.210	0.214
R^2	0.368	0.384	0.362	0.368
	Attacks reported in the news			
	(1) Main Specification	(2) Excluding Cases filed before 2014	(3) Coding those missing a decision as rejections	(4) Coding those missing a decision as acceptances
Attack *t-1*	-0.026*	-0.027*	-0.027*	-0.026*
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Observations	32,814	30,298	33,138	32,814
Nb of treated units	884	838	884	884
Mean of DV	0.213	0.220	0.210	0.213
R^2	0.368	0.385	0.362	0.368
	All Attacks (Associated countries)			
	(1) Main Specification	(2) Excluding Cases filed before 2014	(3) Coding those missing a decision as rejections	(4) Coding those missing a decision as acceptances
Attack *t-1*	-0.091**	-0.096**	-0.078*	-0.091**
	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.045)	(0.042)
Observations	1,385	1,378	1,415	1,385
Nb of treated units	77	77	77	77
Mean of DV	0.934	0.938	0.907	
R^2	0.185	0.171	0.209	0.185
	Attacks reported in the news (Associated countries)			
	(1) Main Specification	(2) Excluding Cases filed before 2014	(3) Coding those missing a decision as rejections	(4) Coding those missing a decision as acceptances
Attack *t-1*	-0.132*	-0.118*	-0.134*	-0.132*
	(0.068)	(0.066)	(0.070)	(0.068)
Observations	1,436	1,428	1,468	1,436
Nb of treated units	42	41	42	42
Mean of DV	0.934	0.938	0.906	0.934
R^2	0.184	0.168	0.214	0.184

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$. Standard errors, clustered at the asylum officer level, are reported in parentheses in columns 1 to 5. Asylum seekers interviewed on the day of the shipwreck are excluded from the sample. See text for control variable details.

Table B.4: Robustness to reducing the bandwidth before the event

	Shipwrecks reported in the news										
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Shipwreck *t-1*	0.058**	0.074***	0.075***	0.077***	0.079***	0.078***	0.079***	0.077***	0.078***	0.075***	0.060*
	(0.023)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.031)
Observations	22,524	22,321	21,553	19,441	19,029	18,702	17,915	17,230	16,545	15,011	12,675
Nb of treated units	312	261	261	261	261	261	261	261	261	261	196
Mean of DV	0.210	0.210	0.210	0.212	0.212	0.211	0.211	0.212	0.211	0.211	0.210
Bandwidth	[1, ∞)	[1, 20]	[1, 15]	[1, 10]	[1, 9]	[1, 8]	[1, 7]	[1, 6]	[1, 5]	[1, 4]	[1, 3]
R^2	0.376	0.376	0.377	0.382	0.384	0.383	0.382	0.383	0.384	0.384	0.389
	Attacks reported in the news										
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Attack *t-1*	-0.024	-0.015	-0.019	-0.021	-0.021	-0.027	-0.033	-0.023	-0.039	-0.030	0.022
	(0.015)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.050)	(0.051)	(0.055)
Observations	31,273	20,711	17,259	13,054	11,973	10,761	9,482	8,235	6,979	6,022	4,961
Nb of treated units	790	484	484	484	484	441	441	235	119	119	119
Mean of DV	0.214	0.213	0.213	0.211	0.212	0.211	0.213	0.212	0.212	0.209	0.211
Bandwidth	[1, ∞)	[1, 20]	[1, 15]	[1, 10]	[1, 9]	[1, 8]	[1, 7]	[1, 6]	[1, 5]	[1, 4]	[1, 3]
R^2	0.371	0.369	0.371	0.375	0.380	0.385	0.391	0.403	0.411	0.411	0.425
	All attacks (Associated countries)										
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Attack *t-1*	-0.094**	-0.127*	-0.171**	-0.130	-0.150*	-0.159*	-0.144	-0.092	-0.019	-0.018	0.181
	(0.042)	(0.068)	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.085)	(0.087)	(0.088)	(0.126)	(0.111)	(0.098)	(0.160)
Observations	1,378	892	725	543	515	463	413	352	296	251	209
Nb of treated units	77	43	31	26	25	22	22	13	9	9	6
Mean of DV	0.938	0.933	0.930	0.921	0.922	0.920	0.913	0.918	0.926	0.925	0.923
Bandwidth	[1, ∞)	[1, 20]	[1, 15]	[1, 10]	[1, 9]	[1, 8]	[1, 7]	[1, 6]	[1, 5]	[1, 4]	[1, 3]
R^2	0.155	0.215	0.239	0.276	0.312	0.327	0.337	0.368	0.439	0.508	0.600
	Reported attacks (Associated countries)										
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Attack *t-1*	-0.132*	-0.151*	-0.164*	-0.129	-0.138	-0.154	-0.139	-0.059	0.120	0.119	0.181
	(0.072)	(0.090)	(0.094)	(0.096)	(0.097)	(0.103)	(0.105)	(0.170)	(0.103)	(0.110)	(0.160)
Observations	1,378	892	725	543	515	463	413	352	296	251	209
Nb of treated units	37	21	21	21	21	18	18	9	6	6	6
Mean of DV	0.938	0.933	0.930	0.921	0.922	0.920	0.913	0.918	0.926	0.925	0.923
Bandwidth	[1, ∞)	[1, 20]	[1, 15]	[1, 10]	[1, 9]	[1, 8]	[1, 7]	[1, 6]	[1, 5]	[1, 4]	[1, 3]
R^2	0.155	0.212	0.233	0.274	0.309	0.324	0.335	0.366	0.441	0.510	0.600

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$. Standard errors, clustered at the asylum officer level, are reported in parentheses. Asylum seekers interviewed on the day of the event featured in the news are excluded from the analysis. See text for control variable details. I construct the bandwidth variable as the number of days to the next event.

Table B.5: Other types of events

	Islamist attacks in France		Other attacks in Europe		Other migrant deaths in Europe		Random Event
	(1) All	(2) Reported	(3) All	(4) Reported	(5) All	(6) Reported	(7) -
Event *t-1*	-0.022	-0.025	-0.002	0.001	0.001	-0.005	-0.015
	(0.019)	(0.022)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.013)	(0.010)
Observations	32,955	33,261	21,548	30,263	26,824	32,967	31,851
Nb of treated units	459	373	8,859	3,745	4,609	845	1,556
R^2	0.368	0.368	0.371	0.368	0.376	0.370	0.371

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$.

Table B.6

	Model 1			Model 2			Difference	
Table	variable	est.	s.e.	variable	est.	s.e.	est.	s.e.
Table 3	Shipwrecks reported in the news	0.044	0.021	Shipwrecks not reported in the news	-0.005	0.009	0.050	0.023
Table 3	Attacks reported in the news	-0.026	0.014	Attacks not reported in the news	-0.005	0.012	-0.021	0.019
Table 4	All attacks Among Muslims majority countries	-0.021	0.012	All attacks excl. Muslims majority countries	-0.013	0.015	0.008	0.019
Table 4	Reported attacks Among Muslims majority countries	-0.040	0.019	Reported attacks excl. Muslims majority countries	-0.018	0.019	0.022	0.026
Table 4	All attacks Among Syrians and Iraqis	-0.091	0.042	All attacks excl. Syrians and Iraqis	-0.011	0.009	0.080	0.041
Table 4	Reported attacks Among Syrians and Iraqis	-0.132	0.068	Reported attacks excl. Syrians and Iraqis	-0.022	0.014	0.111	0.066
Table B.1	All shipwrecks (> 0 drowned)	0.002	0.006	All shipwrecks (> 90 drowned)	0.038	0.016	-0.036	0.015
Table B.1	Reported shipwrecks (> 0 drowned)	0.019	0.011	Reported shipwrecks (> 90 drowned)	0.057	0.023	-0.037	0.020

Table B.7: Effect of events on probability that applicants were present during the interview

	(1) Shipwrecks in the news	(2) Attacks in the news
Event *t-1*	0.023	-0.019
	(0.017)	(0.014)
Observations	33,620	33,138
R^2	.1916205	.1915755

Notes: $^{***}p < 0.01$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{*}p < 0.1$.