Do left-wing governments fuel far right success?

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Introduction

The question

- Increasing success of the far right in the last 20 years all over Europe
- Many factors have been said to contribute to this success (Golder 2016)
- Strategies of mainstream parties have been said to pave the way for the far right (e.g. Meguid 2005; Ziblatt 2017)
- In this paper we focus on the partisan composition of governments

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- In this paper we focus on the partisan composition of governments

Does radical right support increase more when voters are exposed to mainstream right or to mainstream left governments, and what are the mechanisms?

Arguments

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1. On the one hand, the far right could fare better under a right-wing government because...

   ▶ Disillusionment with the performance of mainstream right when in government

   ▶ Evidence that many far-right supporters are previous voters of mainstream conservative parties (e.g. Abou-Chadi et al. 2021)

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Reasons to expect both:

1. On the one hand, the far right could fare better under a right-wing government because...
   - ▶ Disillusionment with the performance of mainstream right when in government
   - ▶ Evidence that many far-right supporters are previous voters of mainstream conservative parties (e.g. Abou-Chadi et al. 2021)

2. But on the other hand, reasons to believe that left-wing governments can fuel far-right success:
   - ▶ Ideological backlash (e.g. Bischof & Wagner 2019)
   - ▶ Salience of issues owned by the far right (e.g. Dahlström and Sundell 2012)
   - ▶ Compensational voting (e.g. Kedar 2005)
   - ▶ Valence of the mainstream right (e.g. Liang 2013)

Contribution

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- And, surprisingly, in general we do not know much about what is the effect of who is in government on far-right success

- We will do that using an original threefold empirical strategy to identify the main effect and the mechanisms behind it
    1. Comparative evidence: Descriptive, correlational, cross-country over time data
    2. Quasi-experimental evidence: RDD with close local elections in Spain
    3. Individual-level evidence: Survey in Spain using an RDD-based sampling strategy
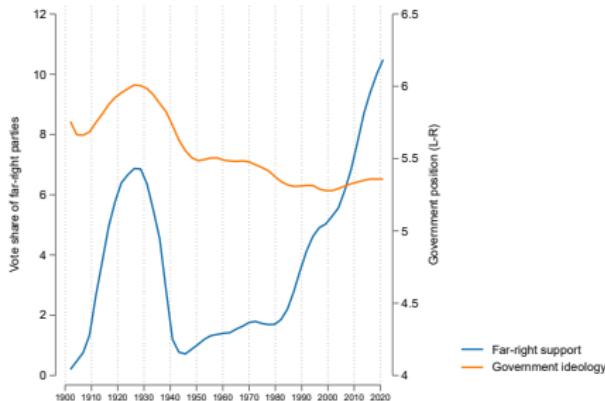
Comparative evidence

Data

- Correlation between partisanship of incumbent government and far-right election results

- ParlGov data (Döring et al. 2023)
    - ▶ 37 countries (EU and most OECD democracies)
    - ▶ 1904-2021
    - ▶ 854 democratic elections

Variables

- **Outcome variable**: aggregate vote share of ParlGov's 'right-wing' party family (nationalist, fascist, and right-wing populist parties)
- **Independent variable:** Seat-weighted average left-right position of the incumbent government at election time, excluding caretaker cabinets (parties' positions from expert surveys)

Results I
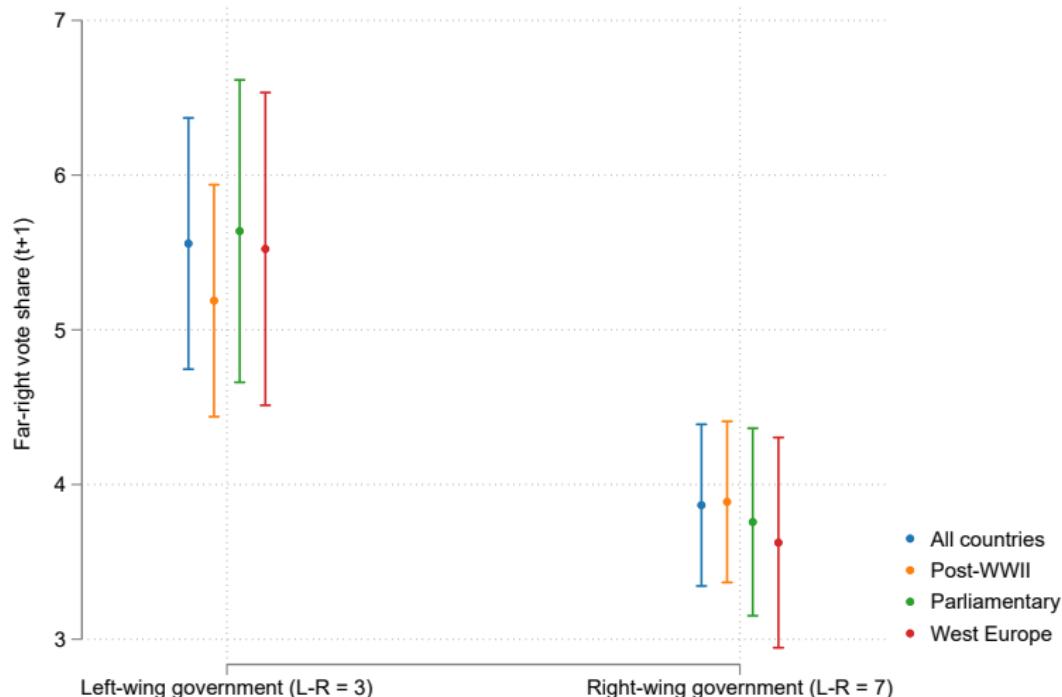
$$FRSupport_{t,i} = \beta_1 FRSupport_{t-1,i} + \beta_2 IncGov(L\text{-}R)_{t,i} + \gamma_i + \lambda_t + u_{t,i}$$

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Incumb. gov. L-R	-.333***	-.276**	-.388***	-.422***	-.325**	-.469***	-.474**
	(.123)	(.134)	(.134)	(.144)	(.137)	(.173)	(.185)
Lagged DV	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FE	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sample	All	All	All	All	Post-WWII	Parl.	West Eur.
N. of countries	37	37	37	37	37	29	20
N. of elections	854	854	852	852	710	715	608

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.
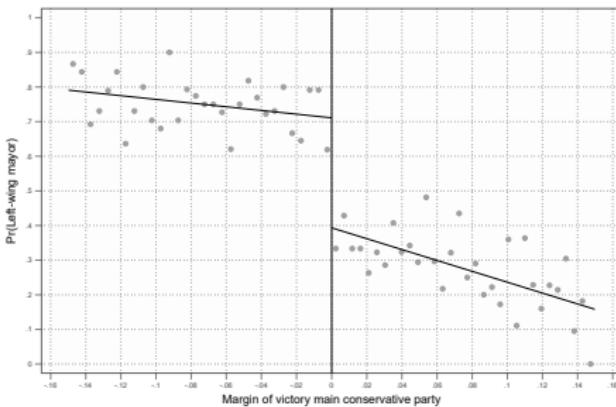
# Results II

Quasi-experimental evidence

Close local elections in Spain (fuzzy RDD)

- Given the Spanish local electoral system, we instrument the incumbency of a left-wing mayor (2015-2019) with a narrow mainstream-right win vs narrow mainstream-right defeat in the 2015 local elections
- Forcing variable is the **margin of victory of the main conservative party (PP)** ▸ continuity ▸ balance

Main results

- We want a measure of far-right support *for all municipalities*
  $\rightarrow$ Vote for Vox in national general elections in 2019 as an
  outcome
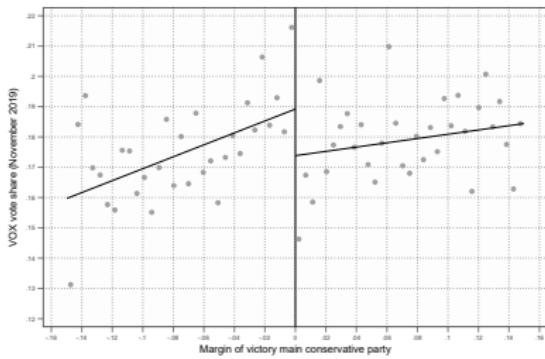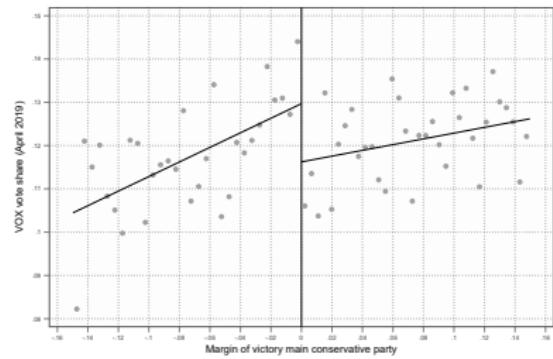
	Apr. 2019	Nov. 2019
Left mayor 2015 (2SLS)	0.042***	0.048**
	(0.015)	(0.020)
First-stage	-.317***	-.317***
Bandwidth	.15	.15
Effective N	1,647	1,647
N	4,699	4,700

Standard errors in parentheses
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Reduced-form

The reduced-form (sharp RDD) looks like this:

Further analyses and robustness

- No systematic effect on other parties' vote shares or turnout
  ▸ Go

- No evidence of short-run symbolic response to the mere access to office ▸ Go

- Different kernels ▸ Go

- Multiple bandwidths ▸ Go

- Falsification tests ▸ Go

Individual-level evidence
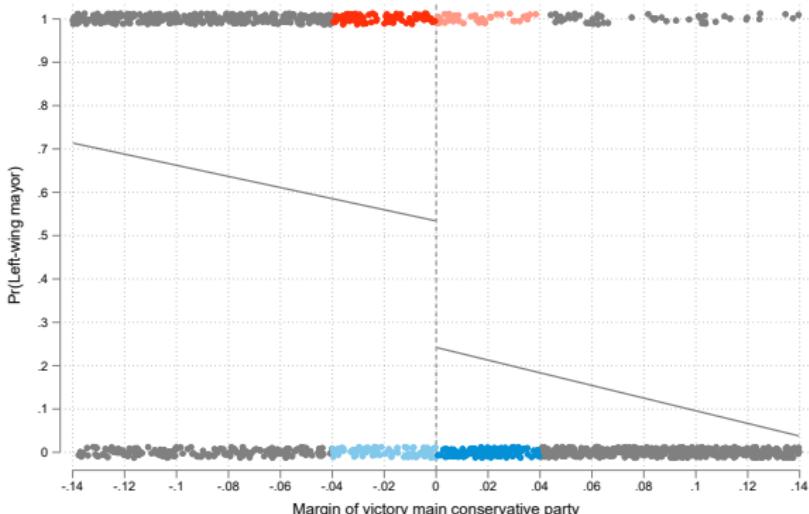
Testing the mechanisms

Main expectations regarding the mechanisms:
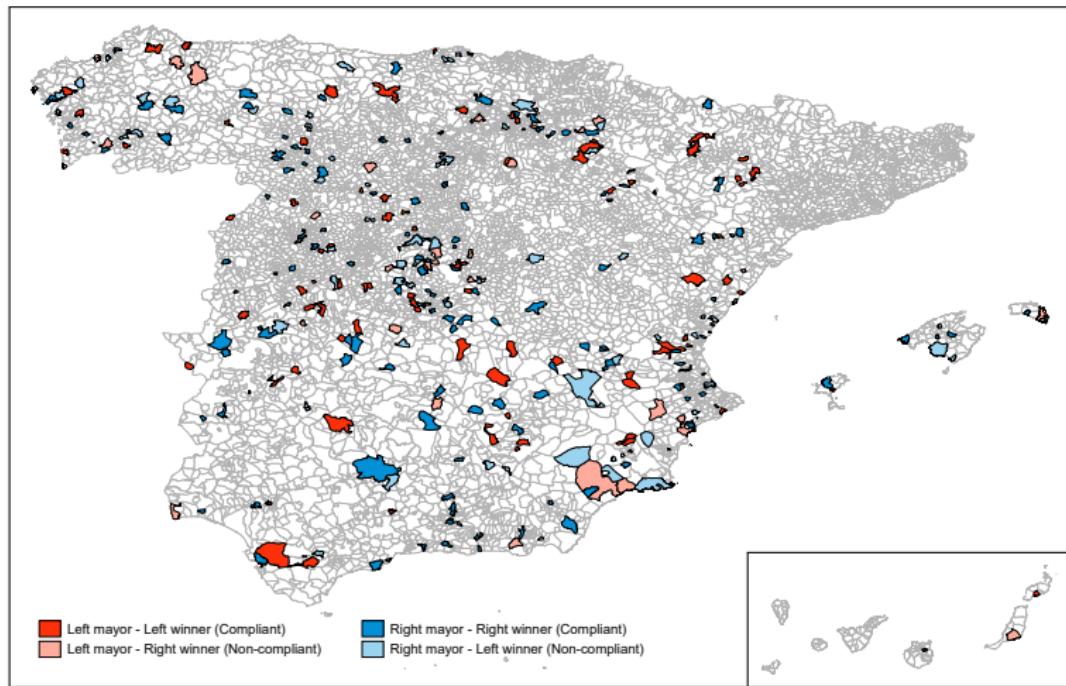
- **Ideological backlash**: Voters' positions on left-right issues will move toward the right when the Left governs.
- **Issue salience**: Voters' perceptions of the salience of issues owned by the far right will be higher when the Left governs.
- **Compensational voting**: Voters' perceptions of the status quo and utility of extreme alternatives will be higher when the Left governs.
- **Center-right valence**: Voters' perceptions of conservative parties' capacity to govern/deliver will be lower when the Left governs.

Sample I

- Instead of representative sample, we want to build upon the RDD evidence → RDD-based sample of respondents living in municipalities close to the 2019 cutoff ($\pm 4\%$)
- Conducted on May 2023 (end of the local term 2019-2023)

Sample II

Left mayor - Left winner (Compliant)
Left mayor - Right winner (Non-compliant)
Right mayor - Right winner (Compliant)
Right mayor - Left winner (Non-compliant)

Results I (ideological backlash)

Ideology

	Left (Economy)			Left (Cultural)			Left (Total)		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Left mayor	-.973**	-.595*	-2.054**	-.754*	-.602*	-1.173	-1.727**	-1.197*	-3.227*
	(.410)	(.337)	(1.002)	(.398)	(.329)	(.974)	(.784)	(.647)	(1.916)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

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Results II (salience)

Salience

	Left Issues Salience			Right Issues Salience		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Left mayor	-.198*	-.150	-.273	-.00358	-.00371	-.0419
	(.118)	(.0967)	(.286)	(.0998)	(.0823)	(.243)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

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Results III (compensation)

Compensation

	Perceived PSOE ideology			Radical local politics			Moderation necessary		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Left mayor	.003	.021	-.097	-.043	.028	-.240	.086	.053	.164
	(.059)	(.048)	(.140)	(.068)	(.056)	(.167)	(.063)	(.051)	(.151)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1021	1516	1516	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

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Results IV (valence)

Valence

	PP likely to rule			PP prepared to rule		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Left mayor	.00877	.0119	-.0466	.0110	-.0370	.127
	(.0519)	(.0417)	(.123)	(.0495)	(.0405)	(.120)
Sample	Compl.	All	All	Compl.	All	All
Model	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1045	1555	1555	1045	1555	1555

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Conclusions

Summary and implications

- The far right seems to fare better when the Left governs, both comparative cross-country evidence and quasi-experimental RDD evidence in Spain indicate so

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! Open question: can backlash be prevented or is it just an inevitable swing of a pendulum?

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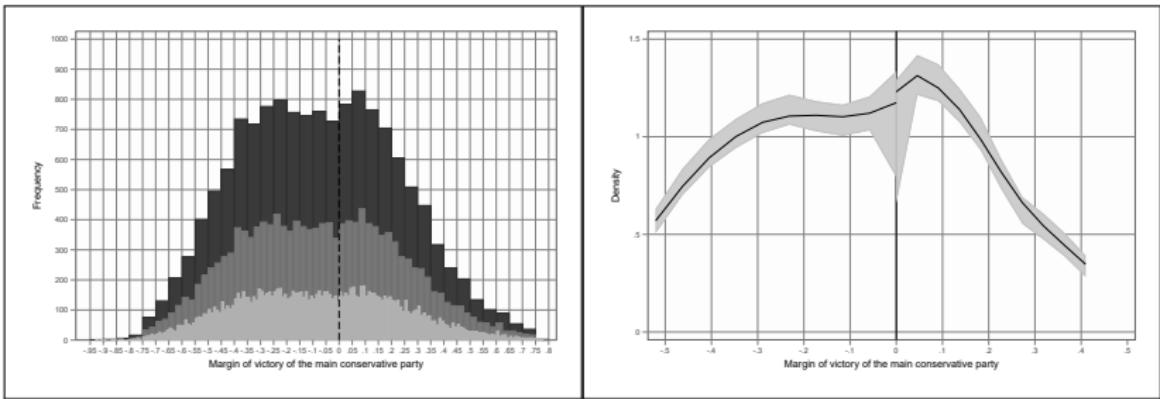
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Measuring, Modeling and Mitigating
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Zurich -- September 13-15, 2023

Continuity of the forcing variable (manipulation)

Covariate balance

	RD Estimate	S.E.	P-value	Effective N	N
Population	22,397	12,614	0.0758	1647	4702
Population (log)	0.203	-0.157	0.196	1647	4702
Unemployment rate (2011)	-0.000587	-0.00422	0.889	1646	4695
Coastline municipality	0.0199	-0.0298	0.504	1646	4694
Rural municipality	-0.0371	-0.0427	0.385	1646	4687
N. of electoral parties s	0.345	-0.252	0.171	1647	4702
Turnout (t)	-0.00581	-0.00916	0.526	1647	4702
PP vote share	-0.0145	-0.00896	0.106	1647	4702
PSOE vote share	-0.0132	-0.0143	0.357	1647	4702

No effect on other parties or turnout

April 2019	Turnout	PP	PSOE	Podemos	Cs	Blank	Null
Left mayor (2SLS)	0.004	0.001	-0.008	-0.012	0.007	-0.001	0.000
	(0.015)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.001)	(0.002)
First-stage	-.317***	-.316***	-.317***	-.314***	-.316***	-.317***	-.317***
Bandwidth	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15
Effective N	1,647	1,645	1,647	1,624	1,645	1,647	1,647
N	4,700	4,646	4,699	4,344	4,646	4,699	4,699

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

November 2019	Turnout	PP	PSOE	Podemos	Cs	Blank	Null
Left mayor (2SLS)	0.009	0.008	-0.006	-0.024	0.001	-0.000	-0.003
	(0.017)	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.016)	(0.008)	(0.002)	(0.002)
First-stage	-.317***	-.316***	-.317***	-.314***	-.316***	-.317***	-.317***
Bandwidth	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15	.15
Effective N	1,647	1,645	1,647	1,624	1,645	1,647	1,647
N	4,700	4,647	4,700	4,345	4,647	4,700	4,700

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No immediate "symbolic" reaction

	Nov. 2019
Left mayor June 2019 (2SLS)	0.025
	(0.029)
First-stage	-.294***
Bandwidth	.13
Effective N	1,163
N	4,417

Standard errors in parentheses

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Different kernels
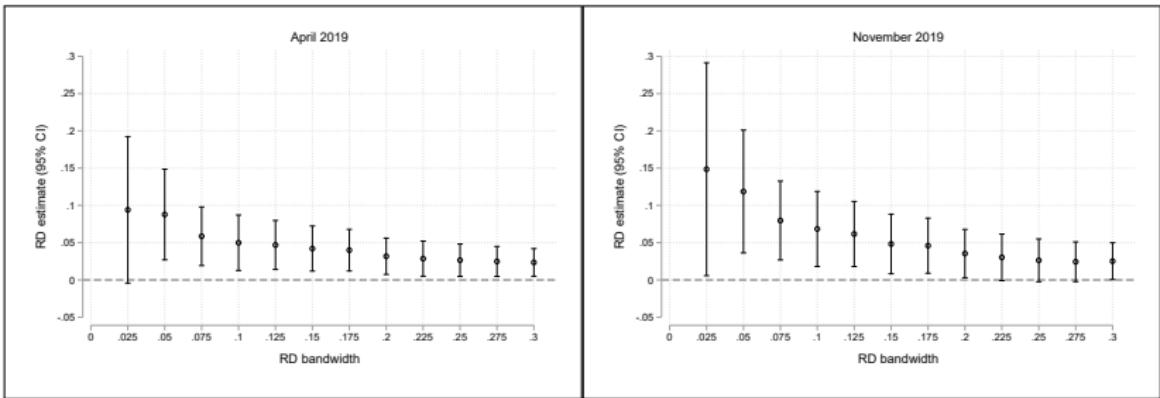
	Apr. 2019			Nov. 2019		
	Uniform	Triangular	Epan.	Uniform	Triangular	Epan.
Left mayor 2015 (2SLS)	0.042***	0.049***	0.041***	0.043**	0.056***	0.051***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.014)	(0.018)	(0.020)	(0.020)
First-stage	-.317***	-.341***	-.328***	-.325***	-.332***	-.332***
Bandwidth	.15	.15	.18	.18	.18	.17
Effective N	1,647	1,647	1,960	1,960	1,960	1,839
N	4,699	4,699	4,699	4,700	4,700	4,700

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$.

Multiple bandwidths

Falsification test

	Apr. 2019
Left mayor June 2019 (2SLS)	0.016
	(0.021)
First-stage	-.294***
Bandwidth	.13
Effective N	1,163
N	4,416

Standard errors in parentheses

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