Puzzle: Why do we see sudden waves of migrants?

Source: Frontex, Detections of Illegal Border Crossings by Route, through first quarter of 2016.
Puzzle: Why do we see sudden waves of migrants?

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, Unaccompanied Alien Children Encountered by Fiscal Year.

Introduction
Most media accounts of migrant waves focus on violence in sending countries, but...

- Waves aren’t always tied to *changes* in violence
- Last week’s flow of migrants best predictor of this week’s flow (Shellman and Stewart 2007)
- People from unaffected areas and countries join waves.

Source: The Economist, Frontex, Eurostat.
Our Theory: A Political Cycle

- Conditions of violence and poor economic circumstances create the incentive for those in sending countries to pay attention to the policy environment.
- “Safety in numbers:” when migrants move in large numbers (due to violence or policy changes), receiving countries are more likely to see them as “real” refugees.
- Migrants join the wave because they expect a sympathetic reaction when part of a crisis.
- Too many migrants leads to a backlash that ends the wave (also a brief “now or never” mentality among migrants).
Empirical Implications

1. Migrants are very knowledgeable about the politics of migration.
2. Migrants further along on the route will be more knowledgeable about policy.
3. Legal expectations will shape desires to migrate.
4. Migrants will be more likely to want to migrate when reminded that others are traveling at the same time and that receiving country policy is changing.
Survey Design

- Survey of \( \approx 750 \) recent migrants in Turkey and Jordan, and \( \approx 750 \) non-migrants in Syria and Iraq
  - Asking migrants once they have arrived in Europe may lead to imperfect recall of the decision process, bias due to final outcome, and selection issues (since only capturing those who successfully migrated)
- Battery of questions about reasons for migrating, experiences of violence, political knowledge, social networks, etc., plus an embedded survey experiment
- The sample is 67% male, mean age of 33, 92% Sunni Muslim, 30% with college education
Survey Sites

Istanbul and Gaziantep, Turkey; Amman and Marfaq, Jordan; Idlib, Syria; Erbil and Duhok, Iraq.
Sampling and Data Recording

No census of migrants or households to sample from so:

- In Turkey and Jordan, enumerators went to places migrants tended to congregate and approached every Xth migrant and rotated locations every few hours.
- In Syria and Iraq, security precautions prevented surveying in public spaces. Instead, household survey following a skip rule. Enumerators worked in mixed-gender pairs and used mobile devices (some online and some off-line). Many problems with data uploading.
Migrants are incredibly knowledgable about the policy environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Correct</th>
<th>Location of Survey</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Jordan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning of asylum</td>
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<td>50.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asylum in Gulf</td>
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<td>Country Accepting Most</td>
<td>82.3</td>
<td>62.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Could Name Merkel</td>
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<tr>
<td>Country Accepting Least</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relocation</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>86.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean Knowledge</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>0.68</td>
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</table>
Evolving Political Knowledge

Differences in political knowledge are best explained by location, not following the news or education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Survey</th>
<th>Migrant-Resident</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Difference</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
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<td>Media</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Goods Access</td>
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Legal Expectations and Desires to Migrate

A typical Syrian man in Turkey wants to migrate to Europe if he...

Higher \( \text{pr(Migrate)} \)
- didn’t finish high school: 44%
- has a family member in Europe: 46%
- has no children: 59%
- experienced most types of violence in Syria: 50%
- never prays daily: 47%
- believes migrants can stay in Europe: 86%

Lower \( \text{pr(Migrate)} \)
- attended some college: 35%
- has no family in Europe: 29%
- has children: 34%
- experienced few types of violence in Syria: 34%
- always prays daily: 32%
- believes migrants can’t stay: 11%

Predicted probabilities calculated from logit models with all other predictors held at their means.
Violence as a Partial Explanation

Migrant left in conditions of tremendous violence, but violence does less to explain why some people want to migrate to Europe.

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Survey Experiment

In an ideal world, test how migrants react to new information about the size of migrant flows. The challenge: how to make the wave salient to migrants given it already had begun.

- Earlier in the survey will ask about how many people have traveled to Europe
- Control condition gets no information
- Treatments give information about the size of the wave and the policy environment
- Pictures to prime specific concerns about the wave with short descriptions.
- Questions about the desire to migrate, expectations about policy, perceptions of smugglers, advice to others who want to migrate
Survey Experiment

T1: Large and Sympathetic Numbers More than a million migrants arrived to the EU in 2015, making it the largest influx of migrants in Europe’s history.
T2: Large and Sympathetic Numbers More than a million migrants arrived to the EU in 2015, making it the largest influx of migrants in Europe’s history. About two-thirds of the migrants are women and children fleeing conflict.
T3: Policy Opening More than a million migrants arrived to Europe in 2015, making it the largest influx of migrants in Europe’s history. In response, citizen groups in Europe have mobilized to help migrants, and EU member states have increased the number of refugees that they are accepting.
More than a million migrants arrived to Europe in 2015, making it the largest influx of migrants in Europe’s history. In response, protests have broken out to pressure leaders across Europe to stop the migrant flow, and EU member states are preparing to tighten border controls.
Well, turns out our experiments didn’t work so well

- People know a lot, so hard to move with information treatment
- We do find some statistically significant results for
  - Low knowledge respondents
  - Low estimate of 2015 wave respondents
  - Iraqis
- Will show you results from t-tests
Changes in Views of Legal and Policy Treatment

- Low Est: All vs Control
- Low Est: Open vs Control
- Low Know: Open vs Hostile
- Low Know: Open vs Info
- Low Know: Open vs Control
- Iraqis: All vs Control
- Iraqis: Symp vs Control
- Low Know: Open vs Hostile
- Low Know: Open vs Info
- Low Know: Symp vs Control
- Low Know: Symp vs Info
- Low Est: Open vs Hostile
- Low Est: Open vs Control
- Iraqis: Hostile vs Control
- Iraqis: All vs Control
- Iraqis: Open vs Control
- Iraqis: Symp vs Control
- Rescued at Sea
- Iraqis: Hostile vs Info
- Iraqis: Opening vs Hostile
- Low Know: Hostile vs Info

Information makes respondents think the will receive better treatment

Survey Experiment
Information makes respondents less likely to want to go with a smuggler; more likely to apply for asylum; more optimistic that they will be in the EU soon.
Information makes respondents think changes for friends will be worse next year and should leave now
Changes in Views of Conditions at Home

- **Violence at Home Worse**
  - Iraqis: Hostile vs Info
  - Iraqis: Symp vs Info

- **Conditions in Turkey Worse**
  - Iraqis: Symp vs Info
  - Low Est: Open vs Hostile

- **Trust Back Home**
  - Low Know: Hostile vs Info

- **Trust at Home**
  - Low Know: Hostile vs Control

Not much significant; most wrong direction for Bayesian updating hypothesis

Survey Experiment
Opening treatment makes respondents think their lives will be better in Europe
Conclusion

What causes sudden, large increases in flows of migrants?

- Conventional wisdom: violence, sudden downturns
- Our hypothesis: political cycle of sympathy and backlash
- Some evidence: very knowledgable migrants!
- But a largely failed survey experiment: treatments too weak? or unlikely to work given knowledgable population?
- We could do another survey in Italy? Greece?
- Also have a survey going out in the US soon (now that the election is over...)
Thank you!