

The Political Economy of Open Borders

Theory and Evidence on the role of Electoral Rules*

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Abstract

Institutions matter for the political choice of policies, and hence the consideration of the median voter's preferences should not be considered sufficient. We study theoretically and empirically how different electoral systems affect the level of openness of a country or city, zooming on the labor market as the main source of heterogeneous economic preferences towards immigration. The general result is that a polity is more likely to display open border policies when its electoral rules tend towards proportional representation or, more generally, the more unlikely it is that policymaking can be supported by a plurality of voters who do not constitute an absolute majority. There is evidence for this result at all levels in terms of correlations, and we establish causality via regression discontinuity design for the Italian case.

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