



Estimating the Impact of Irregular Migration Policies Using Synthetic Controls and Machine Learning: Evidence from the UK

Marcello Carammia | University of Catania

Jakub Bijak | University of Southampton

Stefano M. Iacus | Harvard University

Evaluating the effects of irregular migration policies is challenging due to volatile flows and heterogeneous impacts across nationalities. This paper uses the Augmented Synthetic Control Method (ASCM), combined with machine-learning regularisation, to estimate the impact of some major policy interventions introduced in 2022–2023 in the UK. We first analyse a nationality-specific package targeting Albanian nationals only. The ASCM counterfactual closely matches pre-intervention trends and indicates a large, sustained reduction in arrivals as an effect of the intervention. Second, we examine three additional policy interventions with generalised application across all nationalities. Effects here are more varied: some groups display modest or short-lived declines, while others show limited measurable impact, reflecting heterogeneous responsiveness across migrant populations. The study demonstrates how combining synthetic controls with machine-learning tools can generate credible, group-specific estimates of policy effects in complex and rapidly changing migration environments.

Marcello Carammia is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Catania, where he holds the Jean Monnet Chair *EuDARe* in European Politics and coordinates the Master's programme in *Global Politics and Euro-Mediterranean Relations*. He is also an affiliate of the Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University. His research focuses on the comparative analysis of public policies and institutions, with special interest in agenda-setting processes, and in the interaction among migration dynamics politics, and policy. He is also interested in advanced quantitative methods—including time-series analysis, machine learning, and causal inference. His work has been published in such journals as the *International Migration*

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