Explaining Local Swedish Refugee Policy

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Abstract In the Swedish migration system, the local level plays a crucial role since the municipalities have full autonomy to accept or decline refugees. This has created a considerable variation in numbers of immigrants among municipalities, and there is a large variation in local societies' willingness to receive refugees. In this study, we focus on all the Swedish municipalities for a time span of several years and derive from economic, demographic, socio-cultural, and explanatory factors that have been put forward in earlier research. Through quantitative analysis, we can show how income, the unemployment rate, population, and support for the right-wing party negatively vary with the willingness to receive refugees. Moreover, the distribution of income results in the opposite significant direction. These results, partly contradicting theory, show the importance of a nuanced and holistic theoretical base in further research.

Keywords Refugee policy · Migration · Local government · Sweden

Introduction

As a result of developments relating to fundamental economic, social, and political transformations that have shaped most of the world in the post-Cold War era, millions of peoples are seeking work, a new home, or simply a safe place to live. Migration is therefore an important political question that is reshaping societies all around the world (Castles and Miller 2003). This transformation spans nation states and the local political level. Nevertheless, issues related to migration policy, such as policies about receiving refugees, have increasingly become local political matters in which municipalities and other local political institutions have gained an increased importance. Today, much of the practical work related to migration is handled at the local level, and the pressure on municipalities across Europe to deal with problems associated with migration and to find pragmatic solutions has risen (Caponio and Borkert 2010, 9–13; Ireland 2004, 7–8).

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There is therefore a need to increase attention on the local arena, which has previously only played a marginal role in similar studies (Chimni 2009).

However, there is still much that is unclear at the local level in migration policy processes. To address this research gap, we see a need to focus on how the local polity handles the issue of refugees. We do this by investigating one particular aspect of immigration, described by Lahav (2004, 4) as the “nuts and bolts” of the issues in the field, which is whether the reception of immigrants does occur and, if so, to what extent. The purpose of this study, with this investigation as its focus, is to investigate Swedish municipalities' willingness to receive refugees. This is carried out by adopting an explanatory approach, which is specified in the research question: What factors explain municipalities' willingness towards the reception of refugees? The focus of this article is the political will of the municipality, which is considered by studying the municipalities' agreements with the National Migration Board for their annual reception commitments. When we look at these agreements, we are interested in certain factors that explain the political decision-making in this area, which in this case make up the political dimensions of local refugee policy and apply and empirically investigate assumptions about how structural circumstances have shaped such policy for the years 2007–2010.

The background to this study is the autonomy that Swedish municipalities had between 2007 and 2010 to decide how many refugees they would receive.¹ Currently, however, even if judicial autonomy is provided, there are potentially several structural conditions that will affect the municipalities' freedom of action in shaping their refugee policy. By examining all the Swedish municipalities and their agreements with the National Migration Board between 2007 and 2010, such structural opportunities can be assessed.

Historically, refugee policy in Sweden has been characterized by a tension between central and local power. Municipalities' autonomy during the examined time was expressed through the mandate that they had to determine whether they would receive refugees and, if so, how many refugees they were committed to receive. This was done by way of an interaction between a range of actors and influencing factors (Qvist 2012). We delimit our study to the reception of refugees. One reason for this is that extensive and reliable data at the local level concerning the willingness to receive such individuals are accessible. This also creates good opportunities to examine the whole-nation bias that has been a significant problem in comparative studies (Rokkan 1970, chap. 2) by addressing the heterogeneous local level. Another motive is that the structure of annual agreement among municipalities and the National Migration Board creates good conditions for examining the political decision-making in this matter. In other words, this is a policy area in which municipalities have autonomy, compared with the admission of asylum seekers, where the central government can bypass local self-rule.

¹ By this we mean refugees including for instance quota refugees and former asylum seekers given residence. However, this group can settle in other municipalities after admission, as can asylum seekers. This situation has placed a particularly heavy burden on some municipalities, especially in metropolitan areas that have received many immigrants through their subsequent location (Åslund 2005). Our main focus, though, is on the variation in the agreed reception of refugees, since this is determined by the municipalities.

Much of the research conducted in this area has focused on studies of global migration in which explanations can be categorized according to a number of approaches, that is, that they are caused by economic incentives, social responsiveness, or cultural links (e.g., Massey et al. 1993; Massey 1990; Arango 2000; Meyers 2000; Freeman 2011). With a few exceptions (Jacobsen 1996), such studies have overlooked the local dimensions. Taking into account the specific economy, culture, and opinions of refugee reception provides additional evidence from which to create an explanatory model of it. There is a trend in contemporary research for a growing politicization of migration that is affected by, for instance, domestic politics, bilateral relationships, and national security policies (Castles and Miller 2003). According to Giugni and Passy (2006, 8–10), the role of politics is crucial but has often been neglected in migration studies. In a similar way, the local level has often been overlooked, but a growing field now directs a focus toward local circumstances when examining refugee reception, often searching for explanations of a historical, institutional, social, or economic character (Jørgensen 2012; Qvist 2012; Caponio and Borkert 2010). To create a valid model of explanation, this study will therefore derive from research in the border of local studies and from studies addressing the political dimensions of refugee reception, and it will therefore include a vast scope of economic, demographical, political, and socio-cultural explanations.

In the following section, we first discuss the historical and current situations of Swedish migration policy before we show that, although a dominating majority of Swedish municipalities have agreements for the reception of refugees, the extent of the agreements vary considerably. We then turn to discuss theoretical explanations of this variation before continuing with a description of the design of this study. In the “[Empirical Analysis and Results](#)” section, we reveal how economic, demographical, and political factors significantly affect the variation in the reception of refugees, before turning to conclusions.

Migration in Sweden

Sweden has been a member of the European Union (EU) since 1995 and has increasingly taken part in the harmonization of its migration policy. A completely common framework is still lacking, though, and domestic policies have not been affected very much by this ambition for coordination. As has already been argued, Sweden continues to be one of the main receivers of immigrants into the European Union, despite its comparatively small population (Eurostat 2012). Focusing on the local level means looking into municipalities' willingness to accept a variety of individuals who have all received a residence permit once they have been selected to arrive in Sweden. Together, they are given the term quota refugees, and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has responsibility for taking them from refugee camps to receiving countries.

From this perspective, Sweden is interesting for several reasons. One motive for its actions has already been implied and has its background in the country's tradition of receiving refugees (Schierup et al. 2006). Today, Sweden is one of the few countries within the EU that actually has a developed collaboration with UNHCR about the reception of refugees. As already implied, there are also important reasons for

examining the local level. First, the municipalities play a crucial role in the reception of refugees. Together with The Swedish Migration Board, they are mainly responsible. Second, much of the research conducted on this issue consists of comparative case studies or single case studies (Soininen 1992; Kadhim 2000; Qvist 2012). Studies have focused on the state's ability to control the municipalities' introduction of refugees and also on the integration of refugees. In addition, various forms of collaboration between municipalities and other actors have been studied. Among others, Emilsson and Hagström (2009) have investigated residential social consequences of migration legislation in the municipalities of Malmö and Södertälje. Such studies have focused on the integration of immigrants. However, this article examines the preceding phase, namely what explains why municipalities agree to receive refugees at all and to what extent they do so. Unlike many other studies, it is also designed to be able to give empirical generalizations.

Organization of Swedish Refugee Policy

Sweden, characterized as a decentralized unitary state with municipalities ensured in the constitution of a high degree of autonomy (Loughlin 2000), has a refugee reception that can be described most correctly as a complex relationship between central and local governments (Qvist 2012). This is manifested particularly by the fact that local authorities have extensive welfare commitments, combined with the power to tax their members. Within the area of refugee policy, the municipalities have a significant commitment, although their responsibilities have shifted over the years.

The background of the present policy can be traced to the beginning of the 1980s, when an unequal reception of refugees among municipalities was noticed as a problem. Reforms were then decided upon that increased the responsibilities of local government. Through better planning and control of where refugees would stay, the aim was that faster integration into Swedish society would be promoted. One feature of this change was that the Immigration Board, later titled the Swedish Migration Board, landed the role of establishing agreements with municipalities for assuring placements for new arrivals. The funding for this was provided by the national government (Borevi 2012). Initially, there was not a problem finding a sufficient number of municipalities that were taking part in the reception. Yet, there has been, during specific years, both a lack of capacity and disparities in geographical distribution in reception (Robinson et al. 2003).

Local authorities still have a key role in Swedish refugee reception and now negotiate with the Swedish Migration Board on agreements about reception, which are the result of a complex bargaining relationship between the actors (Qvist 2012). The municipalities are liable for the receiving process and housing provision under the act relating to the municipal housing of refugees (SFS 2000: 1383). The municipalities are also, if requested, responsible for providing practical assistance in connection with settlement and education, social studies, and other adult education. They are also responsible for providing education, including preschool education, childcare, and other programs for children and adolescents and for the supply of these services (The Swedish Migration Board 2012). However, it should be stressed that the central government has no authority to force the municipalities to become receivers of refugees. The agreements between the municipalities and the government

regulate municipalities' obligations and normally specify the number of individuals that each municipality agrees to receive.

Conceptualizing Local Refugee Policy

As we noted earlier, the local level has become increasingly important in matters of migration. In this section, we first discuss how the group of refugees can be conceptualized and then give some descriptive statistics about the reception of refugees in Sweden.

As a result of the changing patterns of migration in the world, the reasons to migrate have also altered. Two types of migrants are generally discussed in the literature. One type is those who are forced to move to another country. This may be because of, for example, civil war or other conflicts. In the literature, this is called forced migration (Chimni 2009). Another group of migrants are voluntary migrants (Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005, 100). This group of emigrants leaves their country of birth because of economic or social reasons. However, King argues (2002, 90) that the dichotomy holds a number of situations that might be classified as free migration but that are really based on coercion. For example, anyone can be forced to migrate because of economic reasons but would, under the traditional view, be seen as a free migrant. King proposes instead that three additional dimensions are added. These are internal versus international, temporary versus permanent, and legal versus illegal migration. Previous migrations research has largely focused on how international migration influences the migration within a country. However, this has been changing. More and more of the contemporary migrations research focus less on the difference between internal and international migration. The reason for this is that national borders are becoming less important from the perspective of international migration patterns. Furthermore, according to King (2002), it can be said that there are major differences between immigrants who stay permanently in a country and those who stay only for a transitional period. King also states that there are degrees of temporariness: A person can stay in a country for 1 or 20 years. Even a distinction between legal and illegal migration is not entirely unproblematic. An illegal migrant can, for example, overnight, become a legal immigrant due to a decision about amnesty. Even those who are legal immigrants can, in some countries, become illegal immigrants by losing their jobs.

Although this study examines the exposed group of refugees, it mainly examines individuals for whom fleeing their country is not their choice, that is, it is a forced form of migration (Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005, 100) based on humanitarian reasons; all such incoming refugees are assured a Swedish residence permit. In other words, this group of people represents a legal form of migration of people presumably coming to Sweden for good (R. King 2002).

As has been discussed, the Swedish municipalities themselves decide whether they will receive refugees and, if so, how many. To increase clarity, some descriptive statistics of the studied phenomena will be provided; see Table 1. As shown in the table, as an average, almost 92 % of the municipalities had an agreement for the examined years. Focusing specifically on those with an agreement, their average commitment was to receive more than 70 refugees yearly. However, the Swedish municipality sector is

Table 1 Descriptive statistics about municipalities' agreements for refugees, 2006–2010

Share of municipalities with agreements (in per cent)	Average number of accepted refugees in agreements in municipalities with an agreement	Average number of accepted refugees per 1,000 inhabitants in all municipalities
91.9 %	73.7	2.62

Sources: See the [Data Appendix](#)

heterogeneous and includes a range from metropolitan to extremely sparsely populated areas (Statistics Sweden 2009). A more comparable indicator is thus to relate the number of accepted refugees to population size. This average value, based on per 1,000 inhabitants, is 2.62 and also includes municipalities without agreements. It can also be seen that the tendency for the years analyzed is that, although the average number of accepted refugees does not vary remarkably over the years, the number of municipalities having agreements has increased from 2006 to 2010.²

To increase the accuracy of descriptive statistics, the distribution in the reception of refugees can be visualized using maps. In Fig. 1, two types of indicators are presented. In the map to the left, the number of accepted refugees is presented in per 1,000 inhabitants. It can be seen that municipalities in the south and south-west of Sweden in general are more hesitant about reception. In contrast, three of the five municipalities with the largest acceptance of refugees are located in the north of Sweden. Statistical comparisons of means clarify that a significant difference exists between the different parts of the country.³

Turning to the map on the right, the total numbers are presented. The variation is of course considerable when using this indicator, ranging from 0 to Stockholm's reception of more than 2,000 refugees. Of particular interest are the municipalities with no reception of refugees at all. In total, the number of municipalities without agreements is small, but between Sweden's two largest lakes something of a cluster can be noticed, with six municipalities in a limited area that resist the reception of refugees. Besides these and four municipalities in the southern region, the municipalities without agreements seem to be quite randomly distributed. An exception is the north, where every municipality has an agreement.

Theoretical Explanations for Different Outcomes of Local Refugee Policy

International research examining migration policy is vast and often positioned on a macro level. Focusing on assumptions of how the local sector reacts to one specific type of immigrants, refugees, we mainly draw from this research tradition and thereby

² The average number of accepted refugees per 1,000 inhabitants varies from 2.65 (2006) to 2.32 (2010) per municipality, but the variation is not significant. The number of municipalities has increased from 233 in 2006 to 271 municipalities in 2010.

³ Means calculated for regions gives the following numbers—2.30 (southern Sweden), 2.34 (central Sweden), and 3.91 (northern Sweden). Analysis of variance indicates that there is a significant difference between the regions, and the effect is 0.093 (eta squared).

Fig. 1 Number of accepted refugees per 1,000 inhabitants (*left*), total number of accepted refugees (*right*), among all the Swedish municipalities, average values for 2006–2010. Sources: See the [Data Appendix](#)

bring down global theories to a local context. By deriving from established frameworks on how structural conditions create opportunities for change (Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1994), we systematize theoretical assumptions and hence create possibilities for empirical examinations. In the following section, we discuss how economic, institutional, and socio-cultural characteristics of local societies can function to create either favorable or adverse circumstances for political systems themselves to outline refugee policy.

A major field in contemporary research is migration seen from an economic perspective. Developed from neoclassical economic theory, with assumptions about rational actors, this approach is today often presented as dual labor market theory (Massey et al. 1993; Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005). This approach builds on a combinatory logic where push factors stimulate people from poor countries to go to a richer country and where these countries, at the same time, pull these people to their labor markets. Quantitative research expands these theories by clarifying that economic motives are significant even beyond those immigrants who seek employment

abroad. More specifically, economic development, growth, and unemployment rates in the receiving countries are factors that are linked to the flows of incoming immigrants (Hollifield et al. 2006; Rotte et al. 1997; Sridhar et al. 2012; Thielemann 2004; Hooghe et al. 2008). In addition, it is relevant here to theorize that a generous welfare sector and equality exercise both “push” and “pull” factors, the former due to the attractive force of such a society and its welfare sector (De Giorgi and Pellizzari 2009) and the latter due to the international responsibility taken by such countries. Taking the local societies' perspective and their autonomy in these issues into account, authors argue that such theories are also applicable on a municipality level. Such an approach also has more emphasis on the governmental funding of a reception that, from an economic point of view, creates constraints (Jørgensen 2012; Jacobsen 1996; Steen 2010).

Even if the right economic conditions exist, the reception of refugees is of course dependent on the political will expressed through policies. Thus, political scientists have questioned the salient economic perspective (Giugni and Passy 2006), referring to the importance of policy-making and institutions. It has already been argued by several scholars that modern welfare states have effective methods for controlling the flows of immigrants (Freeman 1994; Joppke 1998), and this makes claims about social actors being the ones who actually decide on the flows of refugees reasonable (Meyers 2000). However, a democratic political system is dependent on the political orientation of its members, its *demos*, being those who design policy indirectly through their votes (Easton 1965; Dahl 1989). Therefore, how citizens' preferences translate into policy outcome through political institutions is a key question and provides another clue to the mapping of the context of local refugee policy (Boräng 2012; Hix and Noury 2007). Deriving from survey data, Facchini and Mayda (2008) establish that citizens are, in an examination of more than 30 wealthy countries, in general, skeptical toward accepting immigrants. More specifically, different groups show different attitudes; older individuals question immigration more, whereas a group that is more positive represents better-educated people. Similar research has verified the relationship between education and opinions toward immigrants (Scheve and Slaughter 2001).

Another institutional dimension of explanations of migration policy is founded on the role played by political parties. In general, extreme right-wing parties aim to restrict the number of immigrants, whereas liberal and left-wing parties aim to do the opposite. However, the issue is more complicated than this (De Vries 2000). As Freeman argues (2006), parties on the left are torn between the party elite's generous approach and the approach of their traditional voter group, the working class, which is often positioned to the right on the question of immigration. Hix and Noury (2007) prove, however, that the views of parties on the left are due more to politicians' ideological and political attitudes than to their constituents' economic interests. Regarding right-wing parties, their actual influence is disputed. Some scholars argue that the fact that they seldom have direct impact in the legislative or executive branch does not necessarily mean that they are completely without power, which instead occurs through their interaction with more established parties (Minkenberg 2001). Others argue that the influence that such parties have on migration policy is negligible (Akkerman 2012). Closely related to political parties is the role of interest groups. Among the most important are trade and labor unions and specific pro-immigration groups. Although empirical results on this topic are rare, Hanson and Spilimbergo

(2001) do show, by examining illegal immigration to the United States, that, when sectors using illegal immigrants as labor expand, liberalization of migration policy occurs. Facchini et al. (2011) elaborate upon this link and find that a positive relationship exists between the scope of pro-immigration lobbying and liberal migration policy. Correspondingly, strong labor unions are related to a more restricted policy.

A final determinant creating local opportunities for shaping refugee policy is socio-cultural and is connected both to the historical phenomenon of colonialism and to the modern term globalization. The point of departure is cultural links. As argued by Massey et al., “As migration grows in prevalence within a community, it changes values and cultural perspectives in ways that increase the probability of future migration” (1993, 452). This can be regarded as self-perpetuating, since established migrant networks create the right social structure for continued migration (Massey 1990). Societies that have few of these cultural links and are more ethnically homogeneous are also less likely to accept immigration that is ethnically dissimilar (Meyers 2000). Turning to the rare empirical results, hypotheses in this vein have been verified (Thielemann 2004).

Research Design

The research in this study is based on quantitative data that are multidimensional, meaning that they reflect both a spatial and a temporal dynamic.⁴ The data are analyzed through regression analyses in which the effects of different theoretically founded explanations of local migration policy are simultaneously evaluated.

There are several advantages of working with data that have this character. First, since we are interested in the dynamic political process that results in a certain policy, variation in time gives us greater leverage when examining the process of development. As argued by King et al. (1994), this is a suitable strategy for creating a more accurate test for theory. Second, and related to this, this design makes it easier to control for extraneous variance. By including a lagged version of the dependent variable, we can estimate the possible relevant factors that are hard to measure but that might have affected the dependent variable. Bias due to omitted variables is thereby limited. Third, these types of data make it easier to control for the direction of the relation between independent and dependent variable. Ensuring that the explanatory variables precede the dependent one while at the same time controlling for the earlier versions of the dependent variable increases confidence in the results.

Measures

To be able to answer the research questions, statistical estimation will be carried out through regression analyses. First, we discuss the dependent and independent variables that are used before turning to the used data set and the analytical strategy for the study.

In accordance with the purpose of this study, its aim is to explain local refugee policy. It is quantified through measuring whether and, if so, to what extent Swedish municipalities are committed to receiving refugees. As already indicated, most of the

⁴ The spatial variation between municipalities differs significantly, while the temporal variation between years does not differ significantly.

municipalities have agreements with the Swedish Migration Board which specify a certain number of refugees that they will accept yearly. To create a comparable variable, the data are calculated to show this number per 1,000 citizens. Continuing with the independent variables, the earlier discussion of the structural factors that have an impact on local societies' design of refugee policy highlights a number of more important categories that are possible determinants. In accordance with previously mentioned points of departure, we examine the structural factors that shape municipalities' autonomy in local policy-making, such as economic, demographical, socio-cultural, and political factors. These variables and the theoretical assumptions about their relationship with the dependent variable are presented in Table 2. In line with theoretical underpinnings, we argue that these structural variables affect the opportunities for shaping local refugee policy in different ways.

Economic Explanations

To control for neoclassical economic theory, municipalities' unemployment rate and income level will be included, with assumptions of a negative and a correspondingly positive relationship with a generous reception of refugees (Freeman 2011; Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1993; Cornelius and Rosenblum 2005). We also include a variable indicating the extent of the sickness rate within the labor market, theorizing that high levels can create a demand for more labor. Moreover, research has shown that the public

Table 2 Variables and arguments of relation with dependent variable

Variables	Argument
Number of accepted refugees per 1,000 citizens	
Unemployment rate (16–64 years)	Negatively related to dependent variable
Average income (+20 years)	Positively related to dependent variable
Sickness rate (16–64 years)	Positively related to dependent variable
Financial solidity	Both positive and negative arguments can be applied, thus an empirical question
Gini coefficient of income distribution	Negatively related to dependent variable
Share of population with post-secondary education	Negatively related to dependent variable
Population	Negatively related to dependent variable
Population density	Negatively related to dependent variable
Average age	Positively related to dependent variable
Share of votes for left-wing party (the Left Party) in parliamentary election	Positively related to dependent variable
Share of votes for conservative party (the Moderate Party) in parliamentary election	Negatively related to dependent variable
Share of votes for right-wing party (the Sweden Democrats) in parliamentary election	Negatively related to dependent variable
Share of population with foreign background	Positively related to dependent variable
Share of free apartments among public housing companies	Positively related to dependent variable

economy can also influence local policy (Steen 2010). The Swedish government especially reports an indicator of municipalities' financial solidity (Finansdepartementet 2010). Using the same arguments as above, it can be expected that local societies with a positive economic situation have a demand for a workforce. At the same time, the opposite argument can be hypothesized: that conversely, poor municipalities can be positive towards accepting refugees because this results in economic compensation from the government in accordance with the law. The relationship between the willingness to receive refugees and financial solidity will accordingly be an empirical question. Although the absolute figures are important, the distribution of resources is often neglected. Deriving from Rothstein (2011), we argue that equality in resources is positively related to quality of government institutions, and a Gini coefficient of income distribution will thus be theorized to be negatively related to the reception of refugees.

Demographical Explanations

As set out in dual labor market theory, the interaction between push and pull factors creates a foundation for understanding migration. Focusing on the latter and theorizing that receiving countries have a constant need for cheap labor, certain characteristics in local Swedish societies could be crucial (Piore 1979). One of these is the amount of human capital that exists, and by measuring the share of the population with a post-secondary education, it can be argued that a low value creates a demand for increasing the share of skilled labor. Three other variables, population size and density and the average age, are suitable measures for examining the demanding challenges of the welfare sector that many of the municipalities in Sweden face. We therefore assume that municipalities with a small population size and low density are more inclined toward the reception of refugees. Similarly, a considerable number of the municipalities in Sweden have a problematic age structure (Statistics Sweden 2009). This is especially troublesome for the sparsely populated municipalities located in the countryside (Finansdepartementet 2008; Borg 2009; Klevmarken and Lindgren 2008; Statistics Sweden 2009). This implies that societies with a high average age would favor incoming refugees.

Political Explanations

In Sweden, citizens' attitudes toward refugees have become more positive than in comparable countries (Demker 2007), and immigration has rarely been an issue in Swedish elections (Odmalm 2011). Nevertheless, the actual decisions studied are political. One way to measure the preference of citizens is, of course, to study how they vote. Deriving from Freeman (2006), it can be seen that a population supporting parties on the left should be more positive toward migration, while the opposite can be argued when it comes to parties on the right. An earlier Swedish survey examining the attitudes of local and regional politicians has also verified this pattern (Gilljam et al. 2010), and thus the voting share for the left, and the conservative and the right-wing parties will be included in the analyses.⁵

⁵ Gilljam et al. (2010, 26) find that politicians representing the Left Party are most positive toward immigration, while politicians representing the Sweden Democrats and the Moderate Party are most sceptical. Therefore, voting shares for these three parties will be included.

Socio-cultural Explanations

The Swedish municipalities differ significantly in terms of their history of previous flows of immigrants. As this is a potential factor influencing present migration policy (Massey 1990; Massey et al. 1993), the part of the population with a foreign background is included as a potential determinant. Correspondingly, one assumption is that municipalities with a tradition of receiving refugees will carry on doing so. Finally, to control for another reasonable factor, the proportion of free apartments possessed by the local public housing company will be included in the analyses. Since housing problems can be a key factor in municipalities' willingness and ability to receive refugees, this sets up important structural conditions (Borevi 2012).

Data and Analytical Strategy

The used data set is collected from Swedish authorities or otherwise established data sources for the municipality sector in Sweden. All variables reflect the municipality level, and all Swedish municipalities are included in the created data set. Concerning the dependent variable, the data set reflects information from the years 2007–2010, while the independent variables throughout the analyses indicate the years before these ($t-1$) and therefore range from 2006 to 2009. Potentially, the N is 1,160, but due to a lack of some data that figure is unattainable. For details about the data, see the [Appendix](#).

As previously stated, the used data are multidimensional. In political science, the term time-series cross-section (TSCS) data is often used for this kind of material, and how such data should be analyzed is an ongoing debate.⁶ Regarding this question, we adhere to the convincing argument, laid out by Beck and Katz, that ordinary least square (OLS) estimations are most appropriate (Beck and Katz 1995; Beck 2001). However, there are problems related to using OLS of TSCS that need to be managed. Among these are problems with heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation (Wilson and Butler 2007). Following the suggestion in the literature (Beck and Katz 1995), the first problem will be controlled for by using robust standard errors and the second by estimating an autoregressive model which includes a lagged dependent variable.

Limitations

There is a major restraint on the study due to the selection of Sweden. We have no ambitions to generalize the results beyond the Swedish case, and the possibility of external validity can therefore be questioned. However, the advantage of addressing the whole-nation bias is strong, and since previous research is clearly lacking a focus on the importance of local policy-making, this approach seems legitimate. It is reasonable to believe that the results of this case and its rigorous testing of theories are of importance for future studies of local migration policy, but these need to be interpreted with regard to the discussed limitations.

⁶ Here, we follow Beck's (2001) definition of time-series cross-section data as repeated observations of fixed units. Our data are characterized by a quite large N but a smaller T ($N > T$). However, two arguments make it possible to regard the data as time-series cross-section. First, the units are not sampled, and the total population is included in the dataset. Second, the units are of importance since they reflect specific political units.

Empirical Analysis and Results

The results based on regression analyses (OLS) are presented in Table 3. As argued above, the data are treated as TSCS data and are estimated in accordance with proper techniques. Three comments about the statistical modelling should be made. First, autocorrelation and reverse causation are adjusted for by adding a lagged dependent variable. A Lagrange multiplier test verifies that no autocorrelation exists. Second, to handle heteroscedasticity in multidimensional data, panel-corrected standard errors are estimated (Beck 2001; Beck and Katz 1995). Third, other possible estimation techniques are tested and compared with this model. Some differences exist which will be discussed below.

In Model 1, in addition to the lagged dependent variable, six variables are significant. However, several have signs opposite than assumed. Regarding economic factors, the unemployment rate and average income are negatively related to the reception of refugees. In other words, municipalities with a low unemployment rate and low income levels are more inclined to accept refugees. At the same time, the Gini coefficient is positively related to the dependent variable. This result can be regarded as contradictory and stresses the importance of a discussion aimed at providing theoretical contributions. The combination of low unemployment rates and low income levels seems somewhat conflicting, and in bivariate estimations, the two variables have a negative relationship to each other (in the used data set: Pearson's $R = -0.398$). Furthermore, neither is an uneven distribution in income in line with low income levels. However, when listing the cases with a high Gini coefficient, it becomes clear that two types of municipalities are common. The first are small and wealthy municipalities. The second are larger, urban municipalities. The latter types of municipalities often have a large foreign population, and some of them are also great receivers of refugees. This makes the results more reasonable and also implies that there are different effects in play in the model. The fact that some of the municipalities that have great challenges relating to a difficult economic climate are positive toward migration can thus be understood through several explanations. An additional explanation could be the tempting compensation from the government that these municipalities receive. Another, stressed by Steen (2009), is that the reception of refugees creates work due to the municipal tasks associated with the reception.

Turning to the demographic explanations, municipalities with a smaller population are more willing to accept refugees, while the effect of average age is minor and is contradictory to the assumed direction. Also, this reflects an unexpected combination. The combination of a small population and a low average age are seldom found, since the metropolitan areas are characterized by a large younger population. Of course, there are municipalities with a low average age that are great receivers, and such municipalities are often found near larger cities. The effect of population size does, though, still indicate refugee reception as one possible solution to a negative population development (Borg 2009; Klevmarken and Lindgren 2008). Although the age structure is significant, it should be noted that the effect of the absolute population is much stronger than for average age.

Finally, one variable out of the political factors is significant. The share of votes for the Swedish right-wing party the Sweden Democrats is negatively related to the dependent

Table 3 Regression analyses examining local refugee policy

Dependent variable: number of accepted refugees per 1,000 citizens.	(1)	(2)
Unemployment rate	-0.098 ^a (0.031)	-0.109 ^a (0.031)
Average income (log)	-2.546 ^b (1.100)	-2.946 ^b (1.387)
Sickness rate	0.005 (0.006)	0.003 (0.008)
Municipalities' financial solidity	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Gini coefficient (log)	2.529 ^b (1.083)	2.651 ^a (0.975)
Population with post-secondary education (log)	0.784 (0.578)	0.645 (0.625)
Population(log)	-0.511 ^a (0.160)	-0.528 ^a (0.171)
Population density (log)	-0.156 (0.110)	-0.102 (0.121)
Average age	-0.033 ^c (0.019)	-0.030 (0.021)
Share of votes for left-wing party	0.001 (0.016)	-0.002 (0.014)
Share of votes for conservative party	-0.008 (0.006)	-0.008 (0.006)
Share of votes for right-wing party	-0.040 ^c (0.021)	-0.041 ^b (0.019)
Population with foreign background (log)	0.045 (0.232)	0.089 (0.283)
Share of free apartments	0.041 (0.027)	0.040 (0.027)
South Sweden (dummy)		-0.139 (0.168)
Central Sweden (dummy)		-0.148 (0.192)
Lag ($t-1$) of dependent variable	0.775 ^a (0.122)	0.772 ^a (0.126)
<i>N</i>	1,025	1,025

Entries are unstandardized regression coefficients with panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses. Multicollinearity is controlled for. All explanatory variables have been lagged 1 year. Sources: See the [Data Appendix](#)

^a Significant at the 0.01 level. Sources: See the [Data Appendix](#)

^b Significant at the 0.05 level. Sources: See the [Data Appendix](#)

^c Significant at the 0.10 level. Sources: See the [Data Appendix](#)

variable. This implies that citizens' attitudes towards this matter, via support for political parties, influence the outcome of local political systems. Since this result questions the ability to exclude this type of party from influencing refugee policy, it casts doubt on the extent to which this is achievable (cf. Akkerman 2012; Givens 2005).

As indicated by the presented maps and associated statistical tests, the variation of the dependent variable has a spatial distribution with some patterns. In short, municipalities in the north are in general more inclined to accept refugees than municipalities in the central and southern parts of the country. To ensure that the model is not under-specified, regional dummies are introduced, measuring belonging to south and central Sweden, while the value for the north is reference category. As can be seen from Model 2, the variables have the assumed direction but neither of them is significant. Compared with the previous estimation, the results are mostly robust. The only noticeable differences are strengthening in effects for the Gini coefficient and the political variable measuring the share of votes for the right-wing party.

To increase the robustness control for this result, several other estimations have been tested. Thereby, models of random effects, fixed effects, averaging over time and with different types of clustered robust standard errors have been estimated. Partly, the results

vary due to estimation technique, and, in general, some of the variables that are significant at the lower levels (0.10 and 0.05) lose their importance in this modelling. To increase certainty in the interpretation of the model, it should be stated that the effects of these variables, in the presented model, are regarded as quite weak. In addition, some other variables become significant (population density, share of free apartments, shares of votes for the conservative party, population with foreign background, sickness rate) when testing for other estimations. However, it should be stressed that, out of a total of seven extra estimations, none of these variables became significant in more than one of them.

To conclude, the estimated models in Table 3 are considered robust. This is also verified by the fact that the differences between these estimations and others are not characterized as systematic. In other words, no general patterns are similar for more than a few of the different estimations.

Conclusions

The central argument in this study concerns the effect of the structural conditions on municipalities' willingness to receive refugees. On the basis of the empirical findings, this argument has been proved to be correct, and in line with the research question, we can show how economic, demographical, and political factors shape the opportunities for municipalities' policy-making in this issue (cf. Jacobsen 1996; Jørgensen 2012).

However, as stated earlier, some of the results seem to be contradictory. Most surprising, perhaps, is the combination of low levels of income and unemployment in relation to the reception of a large number of refugees. A more detailed analysis of these results shows that the municipalities with this combination have some common characteristics. They are small in terms of population and are located in the provinces. Moreover, several of these municipalities also have a more uneven distribution of income than the average in Sweden, as supported by the findings. We can show that the majority of these cases are situated in the middle or southern part of Sweden quite close to regional centers. In general, these are characterized by agriculture. As stated by Freeman (2011) and Massey et al. (1993), by connecting the results to earlier research, the negative relationship with unemployment rates can be verified, but income level has an opposite relationship than assumed earlier. Local governments thereby seem to have rational motives when lowering numbers of agreed refugees when the employment rate decreases in their own labor market. Since income has the opposite relation to that hypothesized, it seems reasonable to assume that poorer municipalities are more inclined to receive refugees due to the government compensation and the job-creation effects refugee reception can cause, which is an assumption that has been argued for in previous research (Steen 2010, 2009).

As argued by Giugni and Passy (2006), the political factors explaining migration are often neglected. The bias in earlier research has been proved to be problematic, since the findings in this study can establish the importance of citizens' support for certain political parties. Support for the Swedish right-wing party the Sweden Democrats shows that their actual influence on local migration policy can be substantial and more far-reaching than assumed. A similar phenomenon is revealed by Steen (2009), who has proven that the right-wing populist Progress party has a similar effect on local refugee policy in Norway. Theoretically, one could assume that the relationship would be the

opposite and that a more restrictive refugee policy initially would also enhance the breeding ground for keeping anti-immigration opinions to the fore. The estimated models have, though, specified a time order in which support for Sweden Democrats seems to negatively influence the extent of local reception. However, this crucial finding indicates a need for more detail and precision in the explanation of how such an influence is performed.

By completely focusing on how structural conditions affect local policy-making in this area, this study shows an increasing need for in-depth studies that can reveal the processes of decision-making from an inside perspective and thereby determine how opportunities of this character affect the local policy process.

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Data Appendix

Dependent variable: *number of accepted refugees* per 1,000 citizens from the Swedish Migration Board (2010), data for 2006–2010. Municipalities that lack agreement are coded with the value 0. A few municipalities have an agreement without specification of the number of places, and these are treated as missing values. Independent variables: *unemployment rate*, calculated for the population aged 16–64 years from the Swedish Public Employment Service (2010), data for 2006–2009; *average income*, calculated for the population older than 20 years, from Statistics Sweden (2010), data for 2006–2009; *sickness rate*, calculated for the population aged 16–64 years, from the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (2010), data for 2006–2009; *financial solidity*, from the Database for Local and County Councils (2010), data for 2006–2009; *Gini coefficient*, based on income distribution, from Statistics Sweden (2010), data for 2006–2009; *population with post-secondary education*, from the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise (2010), data for 2006–2009; *population*, from Statistics Sweden (2010), data for 2006–2010; *population density*, from Statistics Sweden (2010), data for 2006–2009; *average age*, from Statistics Sweden (2010), data for 2006–2009; *share of votes for left-wing party*, votes for the Left Party in National Parliament election, from the Election Authority (2010), data from elections 2002 and 2006; *share of votes for conservative party*, votes for the Moderate Party in National Parliament election, from the Election Authority (2010), data from elections 2002 and 2006; *share of votes for right-wing party*, votes for the Sweden Democrats in National Parliament election, from the Election Authority (2010), data from elections 2002 and 2006; *population with foreign background*, from Statistics Sweden (2010), data for 2006–2009; *share of free apartments*, based on statistics from public housing companies, from Statistics Sweden (2010), data for 2006–2009.

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