

## The Rise of Far-Right in Europe: Refugees Crisis and the Role of Mass Media

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### Abstract

This article assesses the degree and the channels through which European mass media coverage of random arrivals of refugees to European soil, and in particular in Greece, are associated with the voting intentions of European citizens for far right parties. This paper challenge cross-sectional findings that refugee flows in Greek islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos between 1 January 2016 and 28 April 2019 have indirect effect on voting intention for far-right party via media coverage. The analysis uses fixed effects as well as time dummies to capture both time invariant and time variant country specific characteristics. The panel estimates imply that cumulative refugee flows in Greek islands have stronger effect on opinion poll for far-right parties in Europe by media coverage.

**Keywords:** refugee flow, European Union, voting behavior, far right, rolling polls

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### **1. Introduction**

National populism is not a new phenomenon. Since 1980 mainstream parties embodied the national identity in their agenda. Immigration, nationality and asylum are the hot topics which keep far right parties on the political scene. The question is: 'How far right parties with an insignificant economic budget acquaint to the audience their belief? Mass media do not only tell us who to think about, but also how to think about them (McCombs, Llamas, Lopez-Escobar, & Rey, 1997)

Mass media has an essential role in revealing political views and they legitimize far right's validity via making people believe in their electoral viability (Ellinas, 2010). Undoubtedly, far-right parties gain a notable and emergence space in parliamentary seats in Europe the last years. According to Guardian, populist parties have more than tripled their support in Europe in the last 20 years. Namely, in 1998 the percentage was 5% and in 2018 the percentage reach almost the 15%.

Since 2015 Europe has experienced the largest mass movement by people after World War II. More than 1 million refugees and immigrants arrived in Europe Union due to conflicts and tensions in the Middle East, trying to escape the war and the terror in Syria and other countries. Greece is one of the European countries that received enormous per capita refuging that were camped in asylum accommodation hot spots pending a decision on their asylum request or willing to escape in another European country with higher living standards or more labor opportunities.

This article assess the random shock in arrivals of refugees in Greek islands and link it to mass media coverage in European countries and then associate this with voting intentions recorded in rolling polls to estimate if cross sectional variation in coverage can potentially explain cross sectional variation in far right voting intentions.

### **2. Populism and Mass Media**

Populism is clearly widespread in mass media (Rooduijn 2014) and scholars (Laclau 1977) had made vital contributions to the populism literature. Regarding Figure 1, far-

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right parties in Europe had consecutively rise from 10.28% to 11.5%, almost 1.5% increase within 3 years.

In 2015, during Europe's migration crisis, Heinz-Christian Strache the leader of far-right Freedom (FPO) party in Austria during to interview in a newspaper quotes: "It is our goal to correct the legacy of the previous government's immigration policy and stop immigration from Islamic countries and promote integration". Between 2016 and 2019 the average percentage of far right party in Austria was almost 29%. In 2016, Norbert Hoffer was the winner of the first round of presidential elections in Austria with 35.1%. In the Sunday's rally, he received 49.7%. The power of the news media to set a nation's agenda is a vast and well-documented influence. Figure 2 illustrates the effect of the media on rolling polls between October and December 2017 in Austria.

In Germany, between 2016 and 2019, rolling polls show that far right party "Alternative for Germany" it has a 13.6% people's support, the first far-right party to pass the door of the German Parliament after the Second World War. The party adopted a manifesto stating that "Islam does not belong to Germany" and calls for the ban on the construction of mosques.

Figure 3 illustrates Poland has the largest percentage of people's intention to vote for far right party. Jarosław Kaczyński, head of the ruling party Law and Justice (PiS) said in a speech broadcast on television: "We have not exploited the countries from which these refugees are coming to Europe these days, we have not used their labor force and finally we have not invited them to Europe. We have a full moral right to say 'no'."

The anti-immigration Sweden Democrats (SD) made also significant gains in the 2018 general election, winning about 18% of the vote while the rolling polls between 2016 and 2019 shows that has almost 21% of people's trust (Figure 3). In 2015, Sweden Democrat leader, Jimmie Åkesson, told Swedish newspaper Dagens Nyheter that he wants a total ban on asylum immigration to Sweden and that he wants Sweden to leave the European Union. Figure 4 shows the corresponding route between media coverage on refugee flow and people's intention to vote a far right party.

### **3. Literature Review**

The most important common denominator of far right parties is the slogan 'own people first' (Betz, 1994; Rydgren, 2005a). The role of mass media in rising far right parties has earned substantial scholarly attention (Kitschelt & McGann 1995: 130, Norris 2005:270, Walgrave & de Swert, 2004; Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden & van Spanje, 2012; Koopmans & Muis, 2009). Clarifications of the rise of anti-immigrant parties in Europe are prominent in modern research on electoral behavior (e.g. Arzheimer, 2009; Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Van der Brug & Fennema, 2003; Van der Brug et al. 2005). Research on individual level (e.g. Linden & Klandermans, 2007; Van der Brug et al., 2000) and country level (e.g. Smith, 2010) linked the individuals vote for far right parties with the anti-immigrant policies.

There is little systematic evidence about how mass media coverage may affect support for the populist right on the level of the individual voter. However we have the intention to investigate how the daily refugee volatility of arrivals in East Aegean islands as a random shock that hits the European Union can affect peoples' decision to vote a far right party via media coverage on refugee crisis. According to Hainsworth, migration is one of the "key themes" for a better understanding of the "nature and character" of far-right parties. The issue of immigration has been linked to modern far right, probably "more than any other issue".

In individual-level data studies shown that far right's voters have more negative perception for immigrants, refugees and multiculturalism than others voters. (Norris 2005: 181-185, Kitschelt & McGann 1995:74). Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart in 2009 using monthly time-series data, showed that the frequency of newspaper coverage of immigration is related to public opinion about immigration in Germany. In addition, Linda Bos, Wouter van der Brug, and Claes H. de Vreese in 2011 showed significant effects of the content of media coverage on the public image of political leaders.

#### **4. Econometric Specification and Data**

##### 4.1. Estimation Strategy

Our analysis is based on the following regression equation:

$$Y_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta X_{i,t} + V_{i,t} \quad (1)$$

The dependent variable is the logarithmic rolling polls in country  $i$  in day  $t$ . Country-fixed effects ( $i$ ) and time fixed-effects ( $t$ ) control for time-invariant country characteristics and time trends respectively. The explanatory variable is  $X_{i,t}$ , the logarithmic media coverage of random arrivals of refugees in Greek islands. Regression (1) reflects the effect of media power on people's intention vote for far-right party from an alternative perspective, by focusing on the daily refugee volatility of arrivals in East Aegean islands as a random shock that hits the European Union. The method used is IV estimation. 'RefGr' is used to denote the indicator of refugees' arrivals.

The mathematical forms used are therefore simple regression models:

$$\log(X_{i,t}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{RefGr} + u, \quad (2)$$

Where, the IV estimator  $\beta_1$  indicates the return of RefGr on media coverage ( $X$ ). The variation between countries clearly does not allow the use of the modest regression of pooled OLS. Fixed-effects estimation takes into account the heterogeneity of individuals and highlights the unobserved effect that influences the dependent variables. In regression (1), fixed effects allow unobserved country factors to be correlated with the explanatory variable. This is clearly not sufficient, as the method of fixed effects modelling assumes that the time invariant is enclosed by the fixed effects term. Hence, the process of fixed effects modelling is not a perfect method of controlling for the heterogeneity problem over time.

However, the results of fixed-effects estimation do not illustrate a rigorous effect of the explanatory variable on the outcome variable, since, as previously stated, the FE

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estimation eliminates the impact of time-invariant characteristics. In other words, the absence of the time variable in the FE regression causes bias in the results.

#### **4.2. Data**

For the refugees' arrivals indicator variable we construct a unique dataset that records daily refugee arrivals in the Greek Islands of Lesbos, Samos, Chios, Leros and Kos between 1 January 2016 and 28 April 2019. Since the number of refugees is not recorded in Greek islands before 2016, we consider 2016 the first year of our analysis. Data on the numbers of refugees are drawn from the Greek Ministry for Immigration Policy. The number of refugees are those stationed in local hot spots. Concerning refugee flows in EU is the overall daily refugees in Europe between 1 January 2016 and 28 April 2019. Data on the numbers of refugees are drawn from Migration.iom.int is an IOM online platform - Flow Monitoring which access to Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) migration flow information products, including a visualization of population flows.

Our key explanatory variable is 'media coverage' which measure the degree of refugees flow's coverage by parsing all major daily newspapers in 28 countries. The data corresponds to a daily search from 1/1/2016 to 28/4/2019 in the daily newspapers with the highest circulation in 2017 according to Eurotopics. By using the word "refugees," we count the numbers of articles appearing.

The rolling polls in voting intentions for far right parties in 28 countries. Due to the fact that we don't have rolling poll every single day, we fill the gap with the previous poll until the next poll. For these countries which have opinion polls after the first date of analysis, we consider the percentage as the result of previous elections.

#### **5. Results**

The intention of the present study is to explore the correlation between the rise of far right and the refugee flows in Greece, by using the media coverage. In this paper we indicate the relationship between mass media news reporting and voting intention for

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far right parties in three ways. First, we go beyond a simple linear regression in order to investigate if there is any direct effect between media coverage or refugees and rolling polls for far right in the daily frequency in Europe. The results (Table 2) demonstrates that there is no direct effect between them in daily frequency.

Secondly we examine if refugees arrivals affect media coverage that affects polls. We use instrument media with exogenous flow shocks in Greece and in Europe in order to specify if any proxies media coverage. Refugee flows in Greece is the 70% - 100% of the total flows in Europe. First of all, in Table 3 all results are significant and we detect that random arrivals in Greece do affect media coverage, although there is no effect of arrivals in Europe on media coverage.

Due to the fact that only arrivals in Greece has effect on media we use only this channel to explore the relationship between rolling polls and media coverage. The results (Table 4) prove that the instrument media effect on people's intention for far right parties. Namely, the coefficient of media coverage (0.13) is statistically significant, implying that an increase in number of articles referred to refugees will tend to increase people's intention for far right party 13%.

Finally using the instrumented media with accumulated flows we specify that the cumulative refugees flows in Greece has stronger effect on opinion poll for far-right parties in Europe by media coverage (Table 5).

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## Appendix A

**Table 1**

Country	Description
Austria	Kronen Zeitung had the highest circulation in 2017, 732.000, 29.54% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: FPÖ
Belgium	Der Standaard, 100.000 in 201, 23.47% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: VI. Belang.
Bulgaria	Trud with 27.70%, of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: Coalition United Patriots (IMRO +NFSB+ATTACK)
Croatia	24Sata, 97.000 circulation in 2015. 42.36% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: There is no significant
Cyprus	Phileleftheros, 17.000 circulation in 2016. 25% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: ELAM
Czech Republic	Mlada Fronta dnes, 135.000 circulation in 2017. 32.87% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: ANO
Denmark	Politiken had the highest circulation in 2017, 275.000, 22.44% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: DPP

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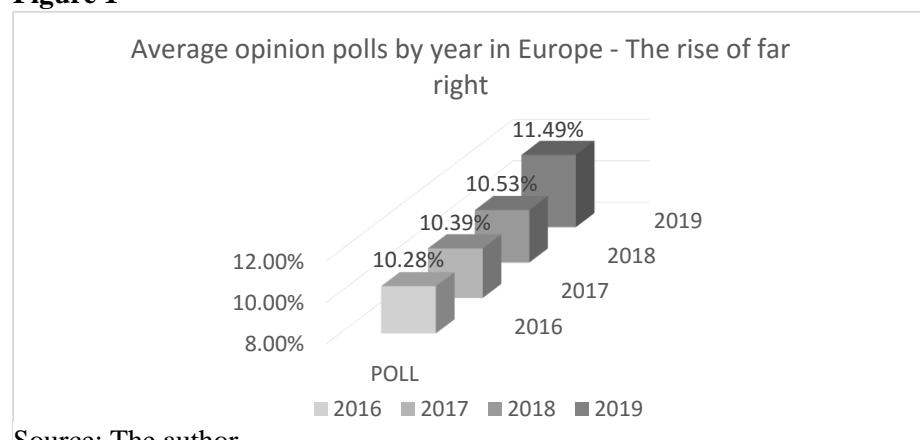
Estonia	Ohtulet, 45.800 circulation in 2018. 40.97% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: EKRE
Finland	Helsingin Sanomat, 325.000 circulation in 2017. 24.28% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: SIN
France	Quest France had the highest circulation in 2017, 721.000, 26.28% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: FN
Germany	Bild, the best-selling daily newspaper with 2.350.000 in 2017, 51.30% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: AfD
Greece	To Vima, had the highest circulation in 2016, 139.540, 45,37% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: Golden Dawn.
Hungary	Népszabadság, 58.597 circulation in 2016, 34.34% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: Jobbik
Ireland	The Irish Independent, 95.000 circulation in 2018, 43.12% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: No significance
Italy	Corriere della Sera had the highest circulation in 2018 with 305.000, 24.09% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: Lega
Latvia	Diena, 31.000 circulation in 2018, 35.35% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: NA
Lithuania	Lietuvos Rytas, 28.650 circulation in 2017, 33.12% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: TT
Luxembourg	Luxemburger Wort, 63.000 circulation in 2017, 67.51% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: There is no significant.
Malta	Times of Malta had the highest circulation in 2017 with 35.000, 68.63% % of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: MENF
Netherlands	De Telegraaf, 382.000 circulation in 2017, 21.25% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: Party of Freedom
Poland	Fakt had the highest circulation in 2017, 261.400, 36.41% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: Law & Justice
Portugal	Correio de Manha, 130.000 circulation in 2017, 43.41% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: No significant
Romania	Romania Libera, 10.800 circulation in 2017, 30.68% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: No significant

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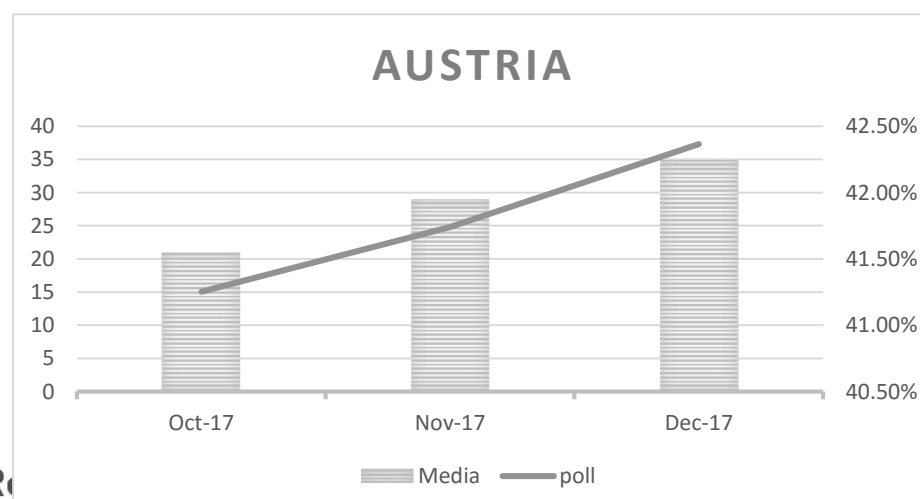
Slovakia	Pravda, the best-selling with 38.000 circulation in 2017, 35.27% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: SNS
Slovenia	Delo, 32.551 circulation in 2017, 36.61% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: FN
Spain	El Pais, 175.000 circulation in 2017, 16.25% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: Vox
Sweden	Svenska Dagbladet with 155.800 circulation in 2017, 33.39% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: SD
UK	The Sun, , the best-selling with 1.545.600 circulation in 2017, 24,21% of the total circulation in daily newspapers. Far-Right party: UPIK

**Figure 1**



Source: The author

**Figure 2: The correlation between mass media of refugee flow in Greece and opinion poll for far right party “FPO” in Austria.**

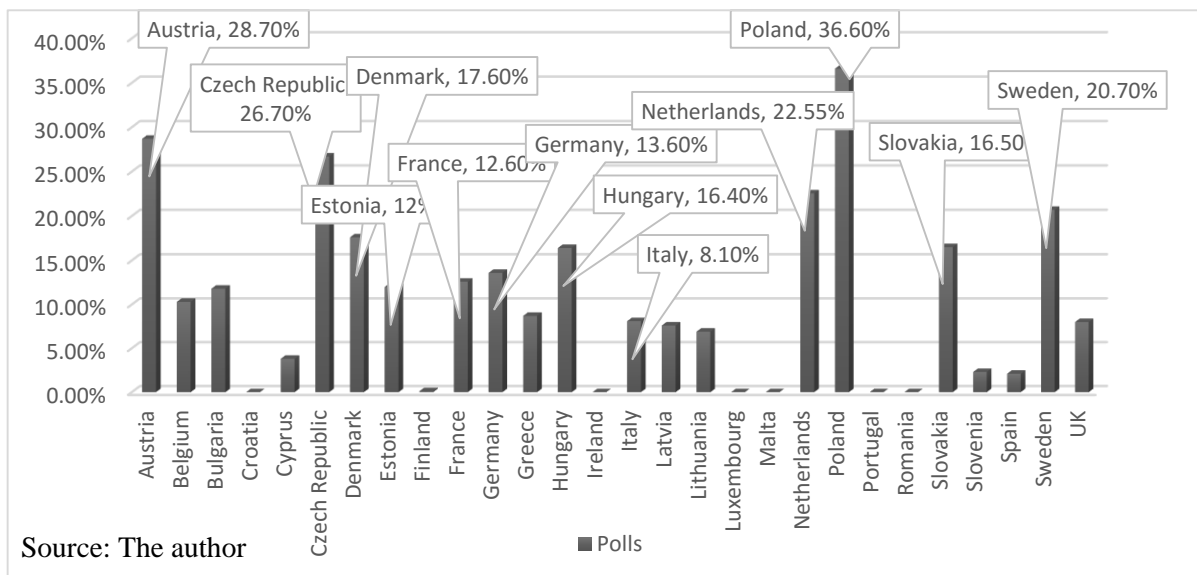


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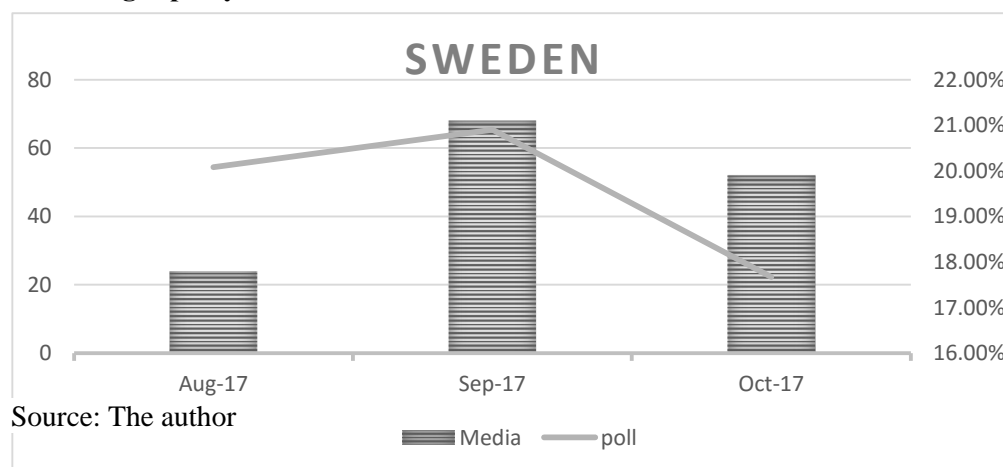
Source: The author

**Figure 3: The average percentage of the people's intention to vote far right parties in Europe.**



Source: The author

**Figure 4: The correlation between mass media of refugee flow in Greece and opinion poll for far right party “SD”**



Source: The author

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**Table 2**

**Conditional Correlations - Dependent Variable: Opinion Polls**

Sample Countries	All	All	All
Period	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019
	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>
<i>Media</i>	.26049	-.013591	-.023388
P-value	(0.000)	( 0.610)	(0.397 )
<i>RefGr</i>	-.01109	-.008787	-.000698
P-value	(0.076)	(0.174)	(0.888)
<i>RegEu</i>	-.00644	-.007131	-.000211
P-value	(0.220)	(0.300)	(0.932)
Fixed Effect	No	Yes	Yes
Time Effect	No	No	Yes
Adjust R-squared	0.0152	-	-
Within R-squared	-	0.0026	0.0286
Obs.	23.015	23.015	23.015

**Table 3**

**Instrument Media with Exogenous Flow Shocks in Greece – Dependent Variable: Media**

Sample Countries	All	All	All
Period	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019
	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>
RefGr	.00995	.00995	.01346
P-value	(0.000)	( 0.020)	(0.002)

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Fixed Effect	No	Yes	Yes
Time Effect	No	No	Yes
Adjust R-squared	0.0005	-	-
Within R-squared	-	0.0013	0.0044
Obs.	28.784	28.784	28.784

**Table 4**

**The Instrument Media Effect on Polls - Dependent Variable: Opinion Polls**

Sample Countries	All	All	All
Period	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019
	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>
DailyMedia	1.4697	1.4701	-.14774
P-value	(0.000)	( 0.000)	(0.708)
Fixed Effect	No	Yes	Yes
Time Effect	No	No	Yes
Adjust R-squared	0.0011	0.0389	0.0400
Obs.	28.783	28.783	28.783

**Table 5**

**The Intrument Media Effect on Polls with Accumulated Flows - Dependent Variable: Opinion Polls**

Sample Countries	All	All	All
Period	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019	1/1/2016 - 28/4/2019
	<b>(1)</b>	<b>(2)</b>	<b>(3)</b>
Media	.04077	.042961	.09878
P-value	(0.022)	( 0.016)	(0.000)
Fixed Effect	No	Yes	Yes
Time Effect	No	No	Yes
Adjust R-squared	0.0070	0.0243	0.0618

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Obs.	1.822	1.822	1.822
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