The Downside of Hubs: How Industrial Clusters Turn Economic Shocks Into Political Shocks

Sung Eun Kim (Korea U.) & Krzysztof Pelc (McGill)

IPES, Boulder, November 2021
Puzzle

- Some economic shocks have political consequences, while others are brushed off as structural change. Why?

- Our argument: an industry’s geographic concentration magnifies the perception of regional economic dislocation.

- When economic shocks hit geographically concentrated industries, they produce the widely reported sense of loss that populist right-wing parties capitalize on.
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Geographically Concentrated Industries

▶ Industrial hubs are commonly portrayed as a strength by business media and policymakers: "engines of regional economies" and "building blocks of US competitiveness" (Porter 2003).

▶ But for every Silicon Valley, there are fabric mill towns in South Carolina and furniture manufacturing clusters in Mississippi.

▶ These clusters have borne a disproportionate share of economic dislocation of last 20 years: import competition, automation, offshoring.
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The Darker Side of Geographical Concentration

- Conventional wisdom: concentration means (i) richer information exchange, (ii) more mobilization, (iii) "denser social networks that shape identity formation" (Busch and Reinhardt 2000)

- But if concentration intensifies preferences, then under economic hardship, it may also intensify feelings of resentment.

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Findings

▶ Deindustrialization of last 20 years has disproportionately targeted geo-concentrated industries.
▶ Geo-concentration of industries magnifies perception of regional decline (MacArthur Scale of Subjective Status)
▶ Workers in geo-concentrated industries more likely to blame politicians for economic downturns.
▶ Overlapping social and professional networks also increase political blame for economic downturns.
▶ Media disproportionately covers layoffs in geo-concentrated industries
▶ Layoffs in geo-concentrated industries associated with political shift to the right.
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Data: Operationalizing Concentration

- US Cluster Mapping Project (USCMP): Clusters groups of related industries with geographical co-location in terms of employment.
- USCMP data identify 68 clusters, composed of 313 sub-clusters; distinguish between traded vs. non-traded.
- Relies on Location Quotient: a cluster’s share of regional employment, divided by its share of national employment.
- Calculates labor market changes in identified regional clusters.

\[ \Delta LM_{i,16-00} = \frac{\sum_{j \in s} (L_{ij,2016} - L_{ij,2000})}{L_{i,2000}} \] (1)
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(1)
Textile Manufacturing

Location Quotient

Location Quotient
Video Production and Distribution

Location Quotient
Two survey questions:

- To what extent do you think politicians should be held responsible for preventing layoffs in your industry?
- If many people in your area are losing their jobs and have trouble making ends meets, which of these is the more likely reason?
  - Political leaders are failing at their task
  - The economy is doing poorly
  - Companies are poorly managed
  - Others (Open-ended responses)
Table 1: Trade Shocks, Geo Concentration, and Political Blame

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1) Political Blame</th>
<th>(2) Political Blame</th>
<th>(3) Political Responsibility</th>
<th>(4) Political Responsibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed in Regional Cluster</td>
<td>-0.188</td>
<td>-0.645*</td>
<td>-0.004</td>
<td>-0.070^</td>
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<td>(0.143)</td>
<td>(0.271)</td>
<td>(0.022)</td>
<td>(0.042)</td>
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<td>Δ Import Shock</td>
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<td>-0.364*</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>-0.019</td>
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<td>(0.145)</td>
<td>(0.165)</td>
<td>(0.023)</td>
<td>(0.026)</td>
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<td>Δ Import Shock * Employed in Regional Cluster</td>
<td>0.525^</td>
<td>0.076^</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.265)</td>
<td>(0.041)</td>
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<td>Observations</td>
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<td>1612</td>
<td>1612</td>
<td>1612</td>
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</table>

Workers hit by import shocks blame political leaders more, but only if they work in geo-concentrated industries.
Social Networks, Kin Networks, Professional Networks

▶ E.g. 2019 media story on layoffs at GM plant: "Mother and daughter said their roots in Detroit are deep. "My grandparents came to Detroit from the South to work for the auto industry," Watson said. "My mother’s father retired from GM. Basically, a lot of family members worked for the Big Three."

▶ To proxy for these networks, we ask respondents how many high school peers / family members work in the same industry as they do.
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If many people in your area are losing their jobs and have trouble making ends meets, which of these is the more likely reason? [estimates of response "Political leaders are failing at their task"]

(a) High School Peers in Industry
(b) Family Members in Industry

Figure: Social Networks and Political Blame
To what extent do you think politicians should be held responsible for preventing layoffs in your industry?

(a) High School Peers in Industry       (b) Family Members in Industry

Figure: Social Networks and Political Responsibility
DepVar2: Media Coverage

Does the media report on economic dislocation in geo-concentrated industries differently?

- Consider all layoff events reported in TAA petitions in 2015.
- We collect all related news stories in Lexis Nexis, searching for company, city, and a list of keywords: “layoffs”, “laid off”, “job cuts”, “downsizing”, “downsize.”
- Yields more than 10,000 layoff-related news stories.
- We find that volume of coverage is up to 23-27% higher for geographically concentrated industries (greater effect than magnitude of layoffs).
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Reporting Binary</th>
<th>Reporting Intensity</th>
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<td><strong>Regional cluster</strong></td>
<td>0.085** (0.029)</td>
<td>0.230** (0.083)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.096** (0.029)</td>
<td>0.268** (0.082)</td>
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<td><strong>Location Quotient</strong></td>
<td>0.002 (0.000)</td>
<td>0.004** (0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.002** (0.000)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Affected workers, logged</strong></td>
<td>0.013 (0.008)</td>
<td>0.008 (0.022)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.017* (0.008)</td>
<td>0.023 (0.022)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.010 (0.008)</td>
<td>0.000 (0.022)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.016* (0.008)</td>
<td>0.020 (0.022)</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Geographic Concentration and Media Coverage
DepVar3: Voting Behavior

Are employment changes in clusters associated with a political shift?

\[ \Delta \text{Republican Party}_{i,16-00} = \alpha + \beta_1 \Delta \text{LM}_{i,16-00} + \theta \text{Controls}_i + \varepsilon_i \]  

(2)
### Table 3: Jobs, Geo Concentration, and Votes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(1)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Δ Jobs in Non-Geo-Concentrated Industries</td>
<td></td>
<td>-5.011</td>
<td>0.092</td>
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<td>-0.883</td>
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<td>Employment in Routine Occupation</td>
<td>0.007*</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td>0.009**</td>
<td>0.003</td>
<td>0.004*</td>
<td>0.007*</td>
<td>0.002</td>
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<td>(1.297)</td>
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<td>3100</td>
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</table>
Change in GOP Vote Share, 2000-2016

- Jobs in Geo-Concentrated Industries
- Jobs in Non-Geo-Concentrated Industries
- Employment in Manufacturing
- Employment in Routine Occupation
- Offshorability Index

Basic Model
Region FE
Region FE + Additional Controls
Conclusion

- Geo-concentrated industries have borne the brunt of labor dislocation of last 20 years.
- This economic dislocation also receives disproportionately high media coverage.
- Geographic concentration activates perceptions of regional decline following economic dislocation.
- Overlapping social and professional networks associated with greater political blame for economic dislocation.
- Losses in geo-concentrated industries increase GOP vote share. Losses in non-geo-concentrated industries have no effect.
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IPES, Boulder, November 2021
Geo-Concentrated Industries and Labor Market Changes

**Figure**: Job Gains by Industry Clusters, 2000-2016
DepVar1: Perceptions of Regional Decline

We adapt the MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status to measure regional standing:
DepVar1: Perceptions of Regional Decline

“Think of this ladder as showing the status of all people in the United States. At the top of the ladder are the people who have the highest standing. At the bottom are the people who have the lowest standing.”

Now think of an average person living in your area. Where on the ladder would you place that person, compared to the rest of the country?
Trade Shocks and Perceptions of Regional Decline

Does working in a geographically-concentrated industry aggravate perceptions of regional decline?

\[
RegionalStatus_{ij} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Regional Cluster Worker}_i + \beta_2 \Delta \text{Imports Shock}_j + \beta_3 \text{Regional Cluster Worker}_i \ast \Delta \text{Imports Shock}_j + \theta \text{Controls}_i + \lambda + \varepsilon_{ij}
\]  

(3)
Perceptions of Regional Decline

Survey questions:

1. Where would you place yourself on this ladder? Pick a number between 1 (highest standing) and 10 (lowest standing).

2. Now think of an average person living in your area. Where on the ladder would you place that person, compared to the rest of the country?

3. Now think of that same person living in your area 25 years ago. Where on the ladder would you have placed them then, compared to the rest of the country?
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<td>Regional Standing</td>
<td>Δ Regional Standing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Employed in Regional Cluster</td>
<td>-0.073</td>
<td>-0.457*</td>
<td>-0.294+</td>
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<td>Δ Imports Shock</td>
<td>-0.088</td>
<td>-0.207+</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
<td>-0.170+</td>
<td>-0.275**</td>
<td>-0.258*</td>
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<td>(0.105)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Δ Imports Shock * Employed in Regional Cluster</td>
<td>0.443*</td>
<td>0.360*</td>
<td>0.388*</td>
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<td>Individual Subjective Status</td>
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Outcome is Subjective Regional Status (columns 1, 2, 3) and Δ Subjective Regional Status (columns 4, 5, 6).