

# The rhetoric of closed borders: quotas, lax enforcement and illegal migration

Cecilia Testa<sup>1</sup>, Giovanni Facchini<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Nottingham

<sup>2</sup> University of Nottingham

## **Resumo/Abstract:**

This paper studies why Western democracies systematically fail to enforce ‘immigration control’ despite its prominence in the political agenda. We develop an agency model in which a politician decides on an immigration target and its enforcement, facing uncertainty on the supply of foreign workers. Illegal immigration can arise for two reasons: the policy maker may be unable to enforce the target because supply is higher than expected; alternatively, he may underinvest in enforcement because of electoral concerns, and this occurs only when the incumbent and the majority of voters have different preferences on immigration. Empirical evidence provides strong support for our predictions, highlighting how electoral concerns affect illegal immigration flows.