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NOTE



The formation of attitudes toward immigration in Colombia

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ABSTRACT

What explains elevated hostility toward immigrants? We identify two concerns that affect support for immigration: labor market competition and social proximity between immigrants and natives. Relying on a conjoint experiment embedded in an original face-to-face survey, we explore these dynamics in one of the largest migratory flows of the last decade: the Venezuelan exodus to Colombia. We find that respondents primarily reject lower-skill migrants. While ethnic proximity does not mitigate xenophobic attitudes in our context, familial ties and personal contact do. These findings confirm the relevance of pocketbook considerations in guiding attitudes toward foreigners but challenge the common assumption of positive in-group bias among co-ethnics. Moreover, we affirm the relevance of individual and familial proximity as key contributing factors to attenuating xenophobia in response to immigration in the Global South.

¿Qué es lo que explica los elevados niveles de hostilidad hacia los inmigrantes? Identificamos dos de las inquietudes que influyen sobre el grado de apoyo a la inmigración: la competencia en el mercado laboral y la proximidad social entre inmigrantes y nativos. Exploramos estas dinámicas, apoyándonos en un experimento conjunto integrado en una encuesta presencial original, en uno de los flujos migratorios más grandes de la última década: el éxodo venezolano hacia Colombia. Concluimos que los encuestados rechazan principalmente a los migrantes menos calificados. Si bien, en este contexto, la proximidad étnica no mitiga las actitudes xenófobas, sí lo hacen tanto los lazos familiares como el contacto personal. Estas conclusiones confirman la relevancia que tienen las consideraciones económicas para orientar las actitudes hacia los extranjeros, pero desafían la suposición común de que existe un sesgo positivo dentro del grupo entre personas pertenecientes a la misma etnia. Además, afirmamos la relevancia de la proximidad individual y familiar como factores clave que contribuyen a atenuar la xenofobia en respuesta a la inmigración en el Sur Global.

Comment expliquer l'augmentation de l'hostilité à l'encontre des immigrants? Nous identifions deux préoccupations qui

KEYWORDS

Colombia; conjoint experiment; ethnicity; immigration; labor-market competition; proximity; Venezuela; xenophobia

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ont une incidence sur le soutien à l'immigration: la concurrence sur le marché du travail et la proximité sociale entre les immigrants et les autochtones. En nous fondant sur une expérience conjointe ancrée dans un sondage inédit en présentiel, nous analysons ces dynamiques au sein de l'un des plus gros flux migratoires de la dernière décennie: l'exode vénézuélien vers la Colombie. Les personnes sondées rejettent principalement les migrants les moins qualifiés. Bien que la proximité ethnique n'atténue pas les attitudes xénophobes dans notre contexte, les liens familiaux et les contacts personnels, eux, le font. Ces conclusions confirment la pertinence des considérations de portefeuille quand il s'agit d'orienter les attitudes à l'égard des étrangers, mais remettent en question l'hypothèse courante d'un biais positif à l'intérieur du groupe chez les membres de la même ethnie. En outre, nous affirmons la pertinence des proximités personnelle et familiale en tant que facteurs clés qui contribuent à l'atténuation de la xénophobie découlant de l'immigration dans les pays du Sud.

Introduction

Scholarships across political science and economics have extensively studied attitudes toward immigrants and refugees around the world (e.g. Dahlberg, Edmark, and Lundqvist 2012; Halla, Wagner, and Zweimüller 2017). While this significant work on the politics of migration advances our understanding of xenophobic attitudes and behavior, it tends to focus on the developed world (e.g. Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015) and on migrant-native relations when racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious chasms between the two are significant. Consequently, cultural explanations often come to the fore.¹

However, some of the most important migratory movements of the past decade have been between countries in the Global South with a shared ethnicity. Indeed, 85% of the world's refugees reside in developing countries. This paper asks, what are the underpinnings of elevated hostility toward immigrants in the context of south-south migration?

We examine one such context: Venezuelan migration to Colombia. The Venezuelan diaspora constitutes the largest refugee crisis in modern history. Since 2015, ~6.8 million Venezuelans—more than one-fifth of the country's population—have fled repression, hunger, disease, and looting in their nation, altering the demographic landscape of several other Latin American countries, particularly neighboring Colombia, where nearly two million Venezuelans have immigrated.² As with other cases of south-south

¹Notable exceptions correspond to the literature exploring Syria migration in Jordan and Lebanon (Alrababa'h et al. 2021; Corstange 2019).

²The pre-refugee crisis number of Venezuelans in Colombia hovered around 37,000 (International Organization for Migration 2019).

migration, there exists little ethnic distance between Venezuelans and Colombians. Since the 19th Century, they considered themselves “*paises hermanos*” (brother countries), following Simón Bolívar’s vision of a “*Gran Colombia*.”³

To understand the support or rejection of immigrants in this context of south-south migration, we identify two main concerns—highlighted by previous scholarship—that jointly structure these attitudes. The first is the perception of labor market competition, namely the extent to which migrants threaten the majority’s jobs. We follow conventional understanding and focus on migrant skill level as the determinant of these expectations of labor competition (Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Material motivations can alter perceptions of immigrants, even co-ethnic ones; in such cases, protectionist preferences and a desire to block labor competition by raising border barriers might drive xenophobia. The second consideration is proximity. Here, we distinguish three types: ethnic, familial, and individual. Regarding ethnic proximity, scholarship in political economy has defined in-group bias as the tendency to favor people with shared ethnicity (Alesina, Murard, and Rapoport 2019). As Colombians share ethnic traits with Venezuelans more so than they do with other immigrant groups, such co-ethnicity could act as a mitigator of xenophobic attitudes. Furthermore, we explore whether familial proximity and individual contact may ameliorate a generalized tendency toward xenophobia. In other words, even if material considerations correspond with an increase in hostility toward immigrants, micro-level proximity could act as a counteracting force, as argued by contact theory (Allport 1954).

To understand the determinants of attitudes toward immigrants, we analyzed original data collected from a face-to-face, representative survey of 1510 Colombians. We embedded a conjoint experiment in the survey to test the fine-grained mechanisms suggested above: labor market competition, shared ethnicity, familial proximity, and individual contact. Survey respondents were asked to choose between two hypothetical immigrant profiles seeking entry into Colombia.⁴

We find that low-skilled immigrants were considerably more likely to be rejected, indicating that a perceived labor market threat may account for the hostility of the majority non-college-educated Colombian population. This is corroborated by the fact that low-income respondents exhibited the highest hostility to low-skilled workers. Moreover, we find that shared ethnicity did not attenuate xenophobia; on the contrary, an immigrant of Venezuelan origin, as opposed to a Peruvian, was more likely to be rejected. However, having Colombian relatives did increase support for immigrants,

³Personal interview, Bogotá, January 2019.

⁴Our University’s Institutional Review Board approved this study. The design and core estimation strategies were pre-registered in EGAP.

potentially suggesting that familial proximity to natives is a relevant factor. Finally, individual proximity ameliorated the negative effect of being a Venezuelan on acceptance, confirming that individual contact counteracted a general trend toward hostility.

This paper advances the study of the politics of immigration, asylum, and ethnic identities in the context of globalization and mass movements of people. We join scholarship including Alrababa'h et al. (2021), Corstange (2019), Getmansky, Sinmazdemir, and Zeitzoff (2018), and Holland, Peters, and Zhou (2021) to develop insights on attitudes in the context of south-south migration. Our findings align with an important body of scholarship demonstrating that material motivations in general, and perceptions of labor competition in particular, strongly influence attitudes and preferences over immigration (Dancygier and Donnelly 2013; Gaikwad and Nellis 2017; Malhotra, Margalit, and Mo 2013; Scheve and Slaughter 2001).

In the specific case of Colombia, our findings are consistent with Rozo and Vargas (2021), which finds that Venezuelan immigration caused a shift to the political right due to the real economic effects of the migration shocks. Moreover, we demonstrate the relevance of distinguishing between different types of proximity. Whereas, in our context, ethnic proximity does not favor support for immigration, both familial and personal proximity do constitute important correlates of dampened xenophobia; these types of contact may mitigate or even cause favorable attitudes toward foreigners (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay 2008; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). Indeed, our results align with the recent work of Lebow, Moreno Medina, and Coral (2020), which finds that close personal proximity with immigrants—measured at the municipal level—has a positive effect on trust toward the incoming group in urbanized localities.

At the same time, our findings depart from recent work positing that migrants' political ideology could threaten the balance of political forces, driving negative attitudes toward immigration (Holland, Peters, and Zhou 2021). Moreover, we do not find strong evidence of fear of insecurity as a driving force. Likewise, against prior studies, we find little evidence that fear of increased demands for public welfare—a fiscal burden argument—constitutes the dominant mechanism driving xenophobia in our research setting (Facchini and Mayda 2009; Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007).

Context: Colombia 2020

Colombia is an optimal context to study the impact of immigration shocks in the Global South for several reasons. First, Venezuelan migration to Colombia has been one of the most significant migratory movements in recent history. According to the United Nations migration report, it was

the fourth largest bilateral corridor between 2010 and 2019 (United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and Population Division 2019). Even if Venezuelan migration to other parts of South America was considerable, the largest movement was, by far, to Colombia.

Second, the ethnic proximity between the two countries makes this an interesting case. In both countries, ~90% of the population is defined as either mestizo or white, distinguishing them from other Latin American countries with a higher share of indigenous populations. For instance, in Perú, mestizos and whites represent 66% of the country, while indigenous peoples are 26% of the population (CIA 2021a, 2021b; Republica Bolivariana de Venezuela 2014).

At the end of the 20th century, polling suggests that Venezuelans and Colombians not only shared demographics but also shared a sense of fraternity and common identity. In 1999, 87% of Colombians believed that Venezuela was a brother country due to geographic proximity, while 84% agreed that the two countries had a shared history (Salazar 2011).⁵ This shared ethnicity could attenuate xenophobia—as we see in Western Europe (Brunner and Kuhn 2018; Edo et al. 2019; Mendez and Cutillas 2014)—or instead could encourage actors to highlight other boundaries of exclusion (Adida 2011; Zhou 2021).

A third relevant factor is the surprising way that Colombian political elites have framed this issue. Unlike the case of Western Europe, the political right in Colombia has not taken a hard stance against immigration, likely because the migrant flow has come from a left-wing authoritarian regime with which Colombia has had conflictive relations. Indeed, in a bold move, conservative president Ivan Duque granted legal status to 1.7 million Venezuelan immigrants on humanitarian and practical grounds (New York Times 2021). In this sense, the political context differs from the Global North, where far-right politicians typically have advanced explicitly anti-immigration platforms, but it more closely approximates other south-south migration cases. For example, the Turkish government welcomed the mass flow of Syrians escaping the war, in part because of its antagonistic relationship with the Assad regime.

Finally, we highlight a common factor that could make skill level more relevant in the Global South. According to a study conducted by the OECD, only 22% of Colombians between 25 and 64 years have a college degree; moreover, even among the youth (25–34 years), only 28% reach this educational level (Tiempo 2018). Thus, a high percentage of the population could feel threatened by labor market competition from mostly low-skill migrants (Scheve and Slaughter 2001).

⁵In fact, as millions of Colombians fled decades of political and criminal violence, oil-rich Venezuela provided them a haven.

It is worth discussing briefly how our context aligns with the scope conditions of contact theory upon which we lean conceptually to understand attributes that may mitigate xenophobia (Allport 1954). Historically, Colombia and Venezuela have enjoyed similar levels of economic development; if anything, Venezuela was more prosperous. At the same time, Venezuelan migrants to Colombia have tended to be poor; crossing the border to Colombia—which may be done on foot—is less expensive than migrating to any other country. Thus, while many Colombians are similarly poor, the immigrants may have had lower status than the native population. At the same time, Venezuelan migration has enjoyed the support of authorities, even right-wing ones. Accordingly, we believe the case at least partially meets the scope conditions of contact theory and merits its application.

Data and empirical strategy

To analyze the varied potential determinants of attitudes toward immigrants, we embedded a conjoint experiment in a face-to-face, representative survey in Colombia fielded in 2020 (see [Supplementary Appendix A](#) for more details on the sampling strategy). We randomized eight different attributes of the immigrant profiles, which sought to capture the mechanisms underpinning attitudes toward immigrants: labor market competition, shared ethnicity, perception of fiscal burden, ideological threat, and fear of insecurity. Widely used in the study of immigration (Gaikwad and Nellis 2017; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Holland, Peters, and Zhou 2021), the conjoint approach enables the estimation of the causal effects of several treatment components simultaneously. It allows us to disentangle the effects of theoretically and observationally correlated attributes. It can potentially reduce social desirability concerns because it offers respondents the confidentiality of several potential justifications for a preference (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). At the same time, each randomized attribute could, nonetheless, reflect a bundled treatment, signaling more than one thing in respondents' minds.

Respondents were assigned (with equal probability) a prospective immigrant of either Peruvian or Venezuelan nationality. We chose these categories to draw a sharp contrast between migrants from neighboring countries with varying degrees of shared ethnicity. We expected that the nationality attribute might signal to respondents whether the immigrant was likely to be co-ethnic or not. Ethnic proximity between local nations and newcomers has been found to play a crosscutting role in materially-driven preferences (Gaikwad and Nellis 2017) and to attenuate xenophobic attitudes across contexts (Brunner and Kuhn 2018; Edo et al. 2019).

Table 1. Example of two profiles.

Category	Immigrant 1	Immigrant 2
Country of origin	Venezuela	Peru
Type of worker	Low-skill	High-skill
Age	More than 40	<40
Gender	Man	Woman
Number	Alone	With family
Ideology	Right	Left
Colombian relatives	Yes	No
Reasons to immigrate	Political asylum	Economic opportunities

Next, to capture labor market competition, we included an attribute indicating the immigrant's skill level: low or high. Immigrants' skill endowment is hypothesized to guide whether immigrants are perceived to be competing for the same occupations as natives and, as a result, dampening natives' wages (Scheve and Slaughter 2001).

To probe familial proximity, we randomized whether the immigrant had Colombian relatives or not. Such familial proximity could signal higher degrees of assimilation with local norms and culture.

We also exposed respondents to immigrants of varying ideologies, allowing us to capture a political competition logic: natives may prefer co-partisan immigrants to obtain future electoral benefits. Specifically, natives' interests and identities may be not material but political; put another way, they may fear not labor competition, but electoral competition: that migrants will shift the balance of political forces.⁶

Moreover, we randomly assigned whether the immigrant came alone or with family, and the reasons for the migration, both as proxies for a fiscal burden hypothesis: that natives fear competition over social services and access to the welfare state (Facchini and Mayda 2009; Hanson, Scheve, and Slaughter 2007).

Finally, we randomized the immigrant's gender and age as plausible proxies for insecurity, given young males' greater likelihood of engaging in crime. Natives have been found to fear immigrant populations because of the risk of instability, violence, and crime that such migrant waves may bring (Getmansky, Sınmazdemir, and Zeitzoff 2018). See Table 1 for an example of two possible immigrant profiles in the conjoint.

Our quantity of interest is the average marginal component effect (AMCE) of an attribute compared to the reference category, averaged over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes included in the conjoint (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). Since the attributes were randomized independently, we can estimate the AMCEs for all included components simultaneously through a simple linear regression.

⁶Using a conjoint experiment in a survey of Colombians and Venezuelans in the cities of Cúcuta and Cali, Holland, Peters, and Zhou (2021) finds that native respondents, particularly right-leaning ones, were more likely to prefer right-leaning immigrants compared to leftist ones.

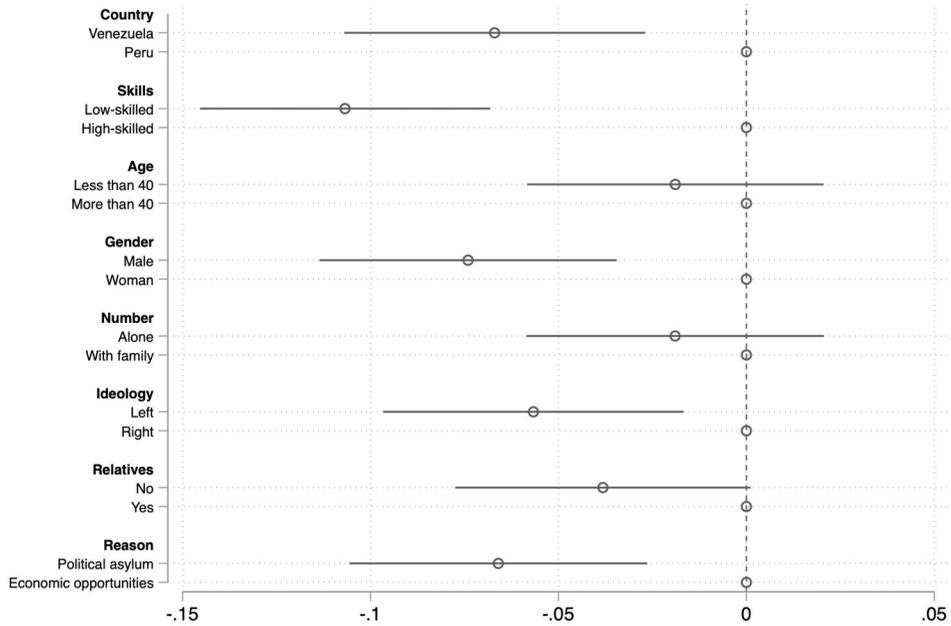


Figure 1. Coefficient estimates conjoint experiment (outcome: forced choice).

We analyze two dependent variables: the forced *choice* between migrants and a score of *support* assigned to each migrant profile. The former is coded 1 for the candidate profile, which the respondent indicates s/he would select among the pair, and 0 for the candidate that s/he would not choose. The exact wording of the experimental set-up was as follows: “Next, I will read you a description of two potential immigrants who wish to live in Colombia. If you were to decide which of these two immigrants to admit to Colombia, which would you choose?” This phrasing, which asks respondents to choose one of two profiles, corresponds to the conventional practice of eliciting preferences in conjoint experiments, particularly in studies of immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2014).

The other dependent variable is a score from 0 to 7, where higher numbers imply greater support for the profile. The exact wording was “On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 means that the Colombian government should definitely not admit this immigrant, and 7 means that the government should definitely admit this immigrant, how would you rate each immigrant?”⁷

The independent variables are indicators for each attribute. We cluster standard errors by the respondent as is standard practice in conjoint analyses. It should be noted that we administered only one round of the conjoint experiment because the survey instrument was long, and we were concerned about retaining respondents’ attention. The main downside of this decision is that the

⁷The survey was conducted in Spanish. The English translation of the dependent variables’ wording is our own.

bar for statistical significance is higher than in many conjoint experiments. Accordingly, the non-findings reported below should be treated with caution.⁸

We estimate two regression models:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{choice}_i = & \alpha + \alpha_1(\text{ven})_i + \alpha_2(\text{un})_i + \alpha_3(< 40)_i + \alpha_4(\text{man})_i + \alpha_5(\text{alone})_i \\ & + \alpha_6(\text{left})_i + \alpha_7(\text{norel})_i + \alpha_8(\text{asy})_i + \epsilon \end{aligned} \quad (1)$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{support}_i = & \alpha + \alpha_1(\text{ven})_i + \alpha_2(\text{un})_i + \alpha_3(< 40)_i + \alpha_4(\text{man})_i \\ & + \alpha_5(\text{alone})_i + \alpha_6(\text{left})_i + \alpha_7(\text{norel})_i + \alpha_8(\text{asy})_i + \epsilon \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

All attributes of interest are included in both regressions. Some respondents refused to choose between the two immigrant profiles. Accordingly, there are 301 missing observations in the forced-choice models (see [Supplementary Appendix C](#) for a detailed analysis of non-response and multiple ways in which we address the potential for bias).

Results

[Figure 1](#) presents the estimated effect of each attribute.⁹ The data indicate a marked rejection of Venezuelans. Concretely, being Venezuelan decreased the chance of being preferred by Colombians for immigration by 6.7 percentage points. Venezuelans received 0.35 fewer points on the support scale (see [Table E1](#) in [Supplementary Appendix D](#)). A cultural logic is hard-pressed to explain these effects, as Venezuelans and Colombians have little ethnic distance. At the same time, we cannot be sure that, when exposed to the “Peruvian treatment,” respondents were conceiving of an immigrant from a different ethnicity, as we expected them to do. In this sense, we cannot rule out that Colombians preferred Peruvians for other reasons. Nonetheless, it is still relevant to note that a sense of shared culture between Colombians and Venezuelans did not seem to have been dominant in people’s minds when they judged immigrants based on their country of origin.

This result finds support in observational and qualitative data. Despite a long history of “brotherhood,” over the last decade, Colombians began to hold increasing levels of hostility toward Venezuelans. In interviews, Colombians who once described Venezuelans as having “always been the same as us,” “always ... a brother,”¹⁰ now instead rejected their co-ethnic kin (Janetsky 2019). According to the World Values Survey, between 2012 and 2018, the percentage of Colombians who declared they would not want immigrants as neighbors increased by 9 percentage points, from 5 to 14%.

⁸Our pre-registered power calculations show that with an alpha level of 0.05, and our sample size of 1510, we could capture an effect of 0.06. See [Supplementary Appendix G](#) for more details about statistical power.

⁹The corresponding regression Table is in [Supplementary Appendix D](#).

¹⁰Personal interview, Medellín, January 2020.

The 2020 Latinobarometer Survey revealed that 78.6% of Colombians considered receiving immigrants from Venezuela as somewhat or very negative.

While the data indicate rejection of Venezuelans, they also suggest several potential mitigating forces. Specifically, immigrants with Colombian relatives were more likely to be accepted, as shown by the “Relatives” attribute in [Figure 1](#). In this sense, whereas ethnic proximity did not appear as a mitigator in our context, familial proximity did. An alternative explanation for this finding is that having Colombian relatives constituted a signal of an immigrant with dual nationality: half Colombian and half Venezuelan. In this sense, accepting such a person would indicate a predisposition toward a co-national rather than to one with familial proximity. To further disentangle these interpretations, in [Table E1](#), we interact a pre-treatment variable capturing whether the respondents reported having a Venezuelan relative with whether they preferred a Venezuelan or a Peruvian; we find that Colombians with familial ties to Venezuelans were more likely to support the entry of a Venezuelan.

To analyze the impact of individual proximity, we interact the nationality attribute with a respondent’s pre-treatment individual proximity to Venezuelans. We measure proximity using an indicator variable equal to one if the respondent reported daily contact with Venezuelans and zero otherwise. In [Supplementary Appendix Table E2](#), column 1, we see that, among respondents with frequent personal contact with Venezuelans, the rejection of Venezuelans was $-0.087 + 0.068 = 0.019$, which is not statistically different from zero. In other words, people with personal contact with Venezuelans were indifferent between Venezuelans and Peruvians. This provides some evidence in favor of social contact theory ([Allport 1954](#)); there was little rejection of Venezuelans among people who actually had contact with them, a mitigating factor, also consistent with the effect of familial proximity. Nonetheless, this finding is only correlational, and having personal contact with Venezuelans is likely non-random; those with more positive attitudes toward Venezuelan immigrants may also have greater personal proximity to them.

Meanwhile, we find a substantial effect of skill level: compared to professional workers, low-skilled immigrants were eleven percentage points less likely to be selected for entry. This second finding aligns with the labor market competition approach, particularly given that a majority of the Colombian workforce in our survey—over 90%—had not completed a college education.

We probe this latter finding further, asking whether college-educated respondents similarly rejected immigrants of their own skill level who posed a greater threat to their professional labor positions. [Table E3 in Supplementary Appendix E](#) shows that college-educated respondents were not more likely to reject high-skilled immigrants; on the contrary, they

appeared more likely to prefer professionals, as shown by the interaction coefficient in column 2. At first glance, this finding seems to call into question the labor-market competition hypothesis. However, it may instead reflect the fact, one established in the literature, that educated (and urban) natives tend to have more progressive and cosmopolitan views about immigration in general (Maxwell 2019).

To further test the skill-level proposition, we interacted the skill-level attribute with respondents' socioeconomic status.¹¹ We clearly see, in [Table E4 in the Supplementary Appendix](#), that low-income respondents are the ones driving the rejection of low-skilled immigrants; actually, both rural and high-income respondents seem to be almost indifferent with regard to skill level, especially when looking at the support outcome (column 2). In these models, both interaction coefficients are significant at conventional levels. This correlational finding is consistent with the interpretation of low-income Colombians as the ones rejecting immigrants who may compete with them for jobs.

The conjoint experiment further shows that respondents rejected left-leaning immigrants, a result consistent with Holland, Peters, and Zhou (2021). We probe the drivers of this finding. Specifically, a pure partisan competition hypothesis would predict symmetrical heterogeneous effects, which we evaluate in [Table E5](#). Right-wing respondents were, indeed, more likely to reject leftist immigrants: concretely, right-wing respondents were $-0.046 - 0.055 = -0.101$ percentage points more likely to do so (column 1). However, this result is not mirrored among left-wing respondents, as demonstrated by the interaction coefficient in column 3. Left-wing Colombians proved indifferent between left and right-leaning immigrants ($-0.089 + 0.101 = 0.012$). This finding challenges a purely electoral motive in which all natives prefer to bolster their co-partisan base, by accepting immigrants that aligned with their political preferences. However, if Colombians (erroneously)¹² perceived arriving Venezuelans to be disproportionately on the political left and pro-Maduro—the Venezuelan president associated with democratic backsliding and economic collapse—partisan fears would be consistent with these results. Variation in the content of right and left political ideologies on immigration—with the latter more tolerant of it, the former more hostile at a mass level—may also have contributed to this finding.

Other immigrant attributes emerge relevant in our context. We find a significant rejection of those seeking political asylum over those in pursuit

¹¹To measure socioeconomic status, we used an ordinal scale of 6 values, typically used in survey research, based on the respondent's assets, which applies to households in urban places. We classified respondents with values 1, 2, and 3 as low-income (58%), 4, 5, and 6 as high-income (5%), while the rest are considered rural.

¹²Holland, Peters, and Zhou (2021) shows that Venezuelan immigrants to Colombia tended to be centrist or lean right; they were fleeing Maduro.

of economic opportunities. This may bolster a fiscal burden interpretation: respondents valued the signal of willingness to work and contribute to the Colombian national treasury and economy, and reciprocally, they rejected political activism. However, other findings in the conjoint experiment are inconsistent with this logic. If the fiscal burden theory were correct, then we might expect to have observed a preference for immigrants coming alone. However, we do not see such a result, though this could be due to a lack of statistical power.

Likewise, we do not find strong evidence of the fear of insecurity mechanism. On the one hand, respondents tended to reject male immigrants; however, it is not clear that they also rejected young ones. We interact the under 40-year-old dummy with the male dummy and also estimate conditional AMCEs based on respondent gender and age; women may be more likely to be opposed to younger male immigrants due to concerns over security. In [Table E6](#), we see that the interaction coefficient of male and youth is not significant, and its magnitude is quite small. When analyzing the results by gender ([Table E7](#)), we see that, for women, age seems to be a mitigating factor for the gender attribute (column 3). In other words, even if women generally reject male immigrants, they seem more open to young men.¹³ This result runs contrary to the predictions of a fear of insecurity mechanism.

Conclusion

Migration has become a critical dimension of politics in a globalized world. Mass population movements profoundly impact citizens' attitudes, with downstream effects on electoral politics and policymaking. Research centers on migration from developing to developed countries and thus, less is known about public opinion toward migration within the developing world and particularly so in contexts where ethnicity is shared. We build on scholars, such as Alrababa'h et al. (2021), Corstange (2019), Getmansky, Sınmazdemir, and Zeitzoff (2018), and Holland, Peters, and Zhou (2021) to explore the impact of migratory movements in the context of south-south migration.

By focusing on one of the largest migratory movements of the past decades—Venezuelan migration to Colombia—which took place within the global south, our research identifies two concerns that affect support for immigration: labor market competition and proximity. In turn, we propose that it is necessary to distinguish between ethnic, familial, and personal proximity, as they may exercise varied influences on perceptions of immigrants.

Our results suggest that individual material concerns may underpin xenophobia more so than do other issues—fear of rising insecurity, political

¹³Note that the interaction coefficient in [Table E7](#), column 3 is not statistically significant at conventional levels, although it is quite substantive in magnitude.

contagion, or fiscal burden—that may be used to justify and mask the pocketbook concerns. This finding aligns with recent observational evidence from the Colombian case, which finds that Venezuelan migration caused a shift to the political right, precisely because of the economic effects of migration shocks (Rozo and Vargas 2021).

The data further reveal the impotence of shared ethnicity in the face of mass migrant flows, casting doubt on cultural explanations of xenophobia in our context. Once heralded as brothers, some natives began to reject Venezuelan co-ethnics. At the same time, we should be cautious in interpreting the results as casting doubt on a cultural logic; familial proximity did reduce the rejection of immigrants, and our setting did not exhibit the full range of ethnic distance. In this sense, it is plausible that, in this particular context, having kinship connections with the native population operated as a clearer signal of a shared understanding of cultural norms. While only correlational, the impact of individual-level proximity—measured as frequent contact with Venezuelans—further supports this interpretation; this variable was associated with dampened xenophobic attitudes toward Venezuelans, underscoring the need to consider more micro-level conceptualizations of proximity in future research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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