

Informality and Attitudes Toward Immigrants: Evidence from Colombia

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Agenda

1. Motivation and puzzle

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2. Theory: why informality should matter

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3. Data and vignette-experiment design

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4. Results

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5. Takeaways

I. Motivation and puzzle

The labor-market competition debate

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- ▶ Largely discredited in the Global North.
- ▶ Evidence in the Global South is mixed. (Argote & Daly 2024; Holland, Peters, & Zhou 2024)

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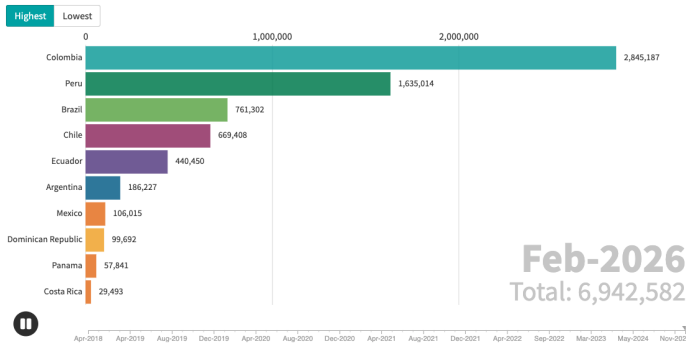
1. Larger share of the native population is **low-skilled**.
2. **Economic concerns** tend to be more salient than in rich countries.
3. High **native informality**: informal natives may perceive informal migrants as a direct threat.

Venezuelan Displacement in the Region

6,947,649

Last updated February 2026.

EVOLUTION OF THE FIGURES IN THE R4V 17 COUNTRIES



Why Colombia?

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- ▶ Colombia has received nearly **2.9 million** Venezuelan migrants since 2015. (Migracion Colombia 2024)
- ▶ Venezuelan migrants are concentrated in **informal and lower-paid jobs, often below their qualifications.**
(Observatorio de Venezuela 2024; Colombian Labor Ministry 2024; Busso, Carrillo, & Chauvin 2023)

Why Colombia? Labor-market and attitudinal context

- ▶ Labor-market studies find sharper wage and employment pressures for low-skilled and informal workers in Colombia.
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- ▶ Prior attitude studies are mixed: lower-skilled migrants are penalized, but skill effects are small in *Holland et al.* (Argote & Daly 2024; Holland, Peters, & Zhou 2024)

II. Theory and hypotheses

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- ▶ **Test:** do **informal natives penalize informal migrants more than formal natives do?**
- ▶ **Alternative:** if both groups react the same, informality is a general negative signal, not a sectoral-competition cue.

Hypotheses

Three channels through which **informal natives may react more negatively than formal natives:**

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- ▶ **H2. Wage-undercutting channel.** Stronger rejection of migrants willing to work for a *lower wage*.
- ▶ **H3. Credential channel.** Stronger rejection of high-skilled migrants whose degree is *not recognized* (and who therefore take informal work).

III. Data and design

Survey and sample

- ▶ Online survey of **N = 1,203** economically active Colombians (Netquest, 2025).
- ▶ Stratified 50/50 by formal vs. informal labor status.
- ▶ Pre-registered analysis plan: all outcomes, moderators, and equations fixed before data collection.
- ▶ Vignette experiment embedded in the survey. Each respondent sees one randomized Venezuelan-migrant profile.

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- ▶ Gender randomized as a control.

Example vignette

Each respondent reads one randomized profile of the following form:

[Juan / María] Pérez is a 35-year-old Venezuelan who recently arrived in Colombia in search of work. [He / She] migrated due to economic hardship. Before migrating, [he / she] worked as [an engineer / a medical doctor / a street vendor / a delivery worker]. [His / Her] degree was [recognized / not recognized] in Colombia. As a result, [he / she] now works [with / without] a formal contract as [an engineer / a doctor / a delivery worker]. [He / She] would [accept a lower salary than Colombians / seek a salary equal to that of Colombians].

Degree-recognition sentence shown only in the professional arm (engineer / doctor).

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 - ▶ Direct job competition.
- ▶ **Attitudinal (symbolic / status):**
 - ▶ Negative evaluation of the migrant.
 - ▶ Opposition to the migrant staying in Colombia.

IV. Results

Estimation

$$Y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{InfMig}_i + \beta_2 \text{LowWage}_i + \beta_3 \text{InfResp}_i \\ + \beta_4 (\text{InfMig}_i \times \text{InfResp}_i) + \varepsilon_i$$

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- ▶ β_1 : effect of migrant informality on all respondents.
- ▶ β_4 : *differential* effect for informal respondents — the key parameter.

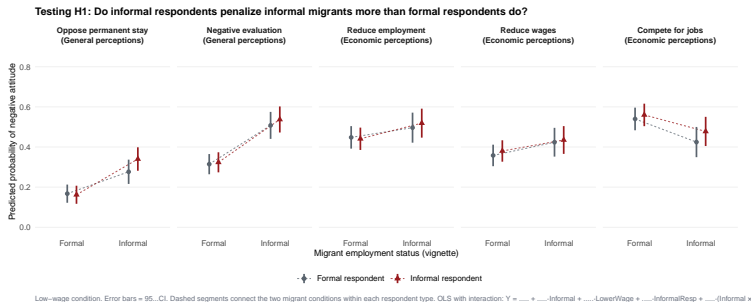
H1 (occupation): slopes are parallel

Testing H1: Do informal respondents penalize informal migrants more than formal respondents do?



Low-wage condition. Error bars = 95% CI. Dashed segments connect the two migrant conditions within each respondent type. OLS with interaction: $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Informal} + \beta_2 \text{LowerWage} + \beta_3 \text{InformalResp} + \beta_4 (\text{Informal} \times \text{LowerWage}) + \beta_5 (\text{Informal} \times \text{InformalResp}) + \beta_6 (\text{LowerWage} \times \text{InformalResp}) + \beta_7 (\text{Informal} \times \text{LowerWage} \times \text{InformalResp})$

H1 (occupation): slopes are parallel



Informal migrants are rejected across the board. Formal and informal respondents react the same way \Rightarrow migrant informality is a **universal negative signal**, not a sectoral cue.

H2 (wages): willing to work for a lower wage

Same pattern as H1 — no sectoral differentiation.

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Takeaway. Willingness to undercut wages is read as a negative signal by *everyone*, not just by informal natives in direct competition.

H3 (credentials): unrecognized degrees

Professional arm only ($N = 799$). A migrant whose foreign degree is not recognized must take informal work.

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Takeaway. Non-recognition of credentials does *not*, on its own, activate informal natives. The credential channel is the weakest of the three.

V. Takeaways

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- ▶ **Key null:** the interaction with respondent informality is ≈ 0 in *all three* channels — occupation (H1), wages (H2), credentials (H3).

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- ▶ The self-interest / pocketbook story does not fit: informal Colombians are *not* the ones driving rejection of informal migrants.
- ▶ What we rule out: a *sectoral-competition* account in which informal natives defend their turf.

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- ▶ Best read as a **status / reputation signal** about the migrant, not as a cue about who is competing with whom.
- ▶ Non-recognition of degrees is the weakest of the three: the informality-by-credentials path does little on its own.

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- ▶ **Financial (non-)resilience:** non-resilient respondents hold more hostile views on the economy, public services, and culture.
- ▶ ⇒ Labor-market competition partially explains rejection, but runs through *precariousness*, not formal/informal status.

Thank you

Questions and discussion

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