

How COVID-19 Affected Attitudes Towards Venezuelan Migrants in Colombia: Evidence from a Panel Survey

Yang-Yang Zhou and **Daniel Rojas Lozano** (UBC)
with **Margaret Peters** (UCLA)

UBC Comp-Can Workshop | June 9, 2021



Research Question

How has exposure to COVID-19 affected citizens' attitudes towards (forcibly displaced) migrants?

Strong link between fears of disease and xenophobia

- Worry about the Avian flu predicts anti-immigrant attitudes in Switzerland (Green et al., 2010)
- Disgust underlies protection against disease and attitudes towards ethnic minorities in the US and Denmark (Aarøe, Petersen and Arceneaux, 2017)
- US media use vermin and disease metaphors to discuss undocumented, prompting disgust (Marshall and Shapiro, 2018)
- Politicization of the 2014 Ebola outbreak led to more anti-immigrant attitudes among Republicans in the US (Adida, Dionne and Platas, 2018)
- With COVID-19, rise of anti-Asian discrimination in North America (Coates, 2020; Ng, 2020; Reny and Barreto, 2020)



Why might our expectations differ for Global South contexts?

- Refugees / migrants may not be as stigmatized
- Cultural and ethnic ties with host communities
- History of cross-border exchanges that might mitigate against “vermin framing”
- Politicization of immigration does not fall on a left-right partisan divide
- Refugees’ presence might bring aid and local development in contexts where the state has weak capacity



Hypotheses

Main hypothesis

H1a. Colombians' views towards Venezuelan migrants will be more negative towards migrants during COVID compared to pre-COVID.

H1b. Views will be more negative when reminded of COVID compared to not.

Hypotheses

Main hypothesis

H1a. Colombians' views towards Venezuelan migrants will be more negative towards migrants during COVID compared to pre-COVID.

H1b. Views will be more negative when reminded of COVID compared to not.

Mechanisms

H2. Colombians whose *health* (& family's health) has been affected by COVID will have more negative views.

H3. Colombians who have experienced *employment/income loss* due to COVID will have more negative views.

H4. Colombians who are concerned about the *security situation* due to COVID will have more negative views.

H5. Colombians who have more *direct contact* with Venezuelan migrants will have more positive views.

H6. Colombians who view Venezuelan migrants as *essential workers* will have more positive views.



Context: Venezuelans in Colombia during COVID-19

Pre-COVID Migration Context

- Ethnic, cultural, historical similarities: Spanish, Catholicism, mixed skin tones, history of displacement and cross-border exchange.
- Since 2015, about 2 million Venezuelans (80% of all Venezuelan migrants) have migrated to Colombia
- Due to political and economic crisis under Nicolás Maduro
- Do not technically meet formal international legal definitions as refugees (1951 Refugee Convention)
- Pre-COVID, the Colombian government under Juan Manuel Santos (centrist) and Iván Duque (right wing) welcomed Venezuelan migrants
- Permiso Especial de Permanencia (PEP) in 2017 granted legal residency for 2 years, extended in 2021 for 10 years



COVID-19 and Migrant Reception

- First confirmed case of COVID-19 on March 6, 2020
- Colombia closed its borders with Venezuela and declared a country-wide quarantine starting March 25
- News reports of increased xenophobia against Venezuelans, evictions and deportations
- UNHCR and other humanitarian organizations had to limit aid and activity

Large Venezuelan Migration Sparks Xenophobic Backlash In Colombia

December 29, 2020 · 10:02 AM ET

"Colombians treat Venezuelans badly," says González, 19, as he takes a breather in the Colombian town of Pamplona before setting off on foot for the capital of Bogotá. "They practically spit in our faces."

"They come here at night like rats," says Carlos Espitia, 62,

Meanwhile, local officials all across Colombia complain that they've been left largely on their own to deal with a flood of sick and impoverished Venezuelans. This burden comes at a time when the pandemic is already severely straining town and city budgets and is filling up local hospitals with COVID-19 patients.



Jose Paéz (right), who migrated from Venezuela, pleads with a Colombian police officer. He was detained with about 50 other people at a roadblock in Pamplona.

John Otis for NPR

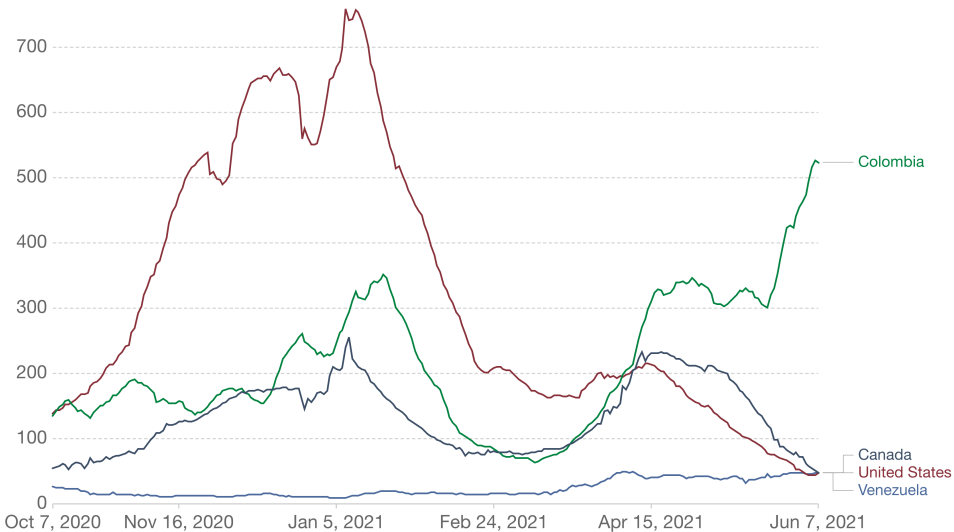


COVID-19 and Political Instability

- As of January 12, 2021 (when our survey starts), over 1.8 million confirmed cases in Colombia and over 46,000 deaths
- Currently, 3.5 million confirmed cases and over 92,000 deaths
- In April, widescale anti-government protests kicked off by tax increase proposals
- In large cities, deadly clashes with security forces

Daily new confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people

Shown is the rolling 7-day average. The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of actual cases; the main reason for that is limited testing.



Research Design: Panel Survey Experiment



Fall 2019 Baseline Survey

- Sept–Oct 2019, in-person survey in Cali and Cúcuta with 1000 Colombians (500 in each city)
- Main finding: concerns around political ideology (Venezuelans will turn Colombia socialist) drove anti-migrant attitudes
- 92% of respondents already believed that “there are too many Venezuelans in the country,”
- 66% supported border closure
- 72% feared Venezuelans would take jobs from Colombians

Spring 2021 Follow-up Survey

- Jan–Feb 2021, follow-up phone survey with 374 recontacted respondents (211 Cali, 163 Cúcuta)
- Also recruited 550 new respondents by phone, stratifying based on characteristics of attrited
- Survey experiment of COVID-First Module: randomize between COVID Qs and Migration Attitude Qs (from 2019)

COVID Qs examples

Have you had COVID-19?

Has anyone in your family had COVID-19?

Have you lost your job due to COVID-19?

Where do you rate the Colombian national government's COVID-19 response?

Which sources of information do you trust when it comes to advice about prevention of COVID-19?

Migrant Attitudes Qs examples

There are too many Venezuelans in Colombia

Colombia should close its borders to immigration immediately

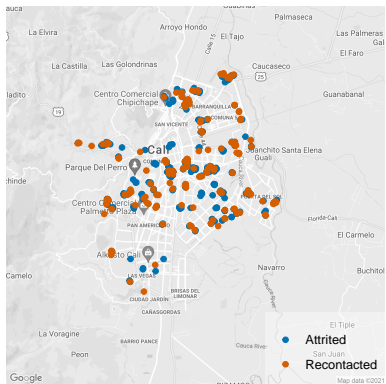
With all the Venezuelans here, it's now easier to access government services

Venezuelans take Colombians' jobs

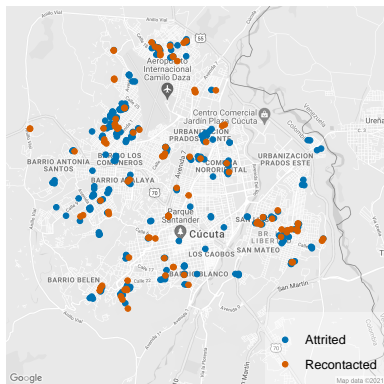
The majority of migrants have integrated successfully into Colombian society

Comparing Recontacted with Attrited

Cali



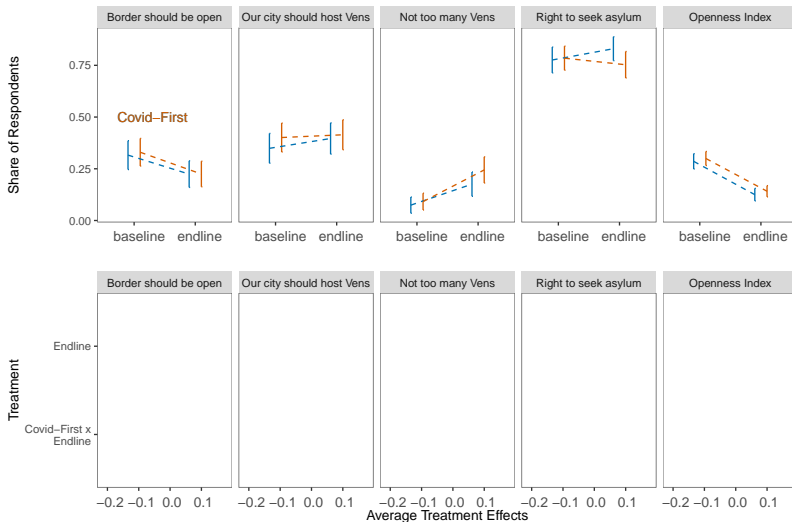
Cúcuta



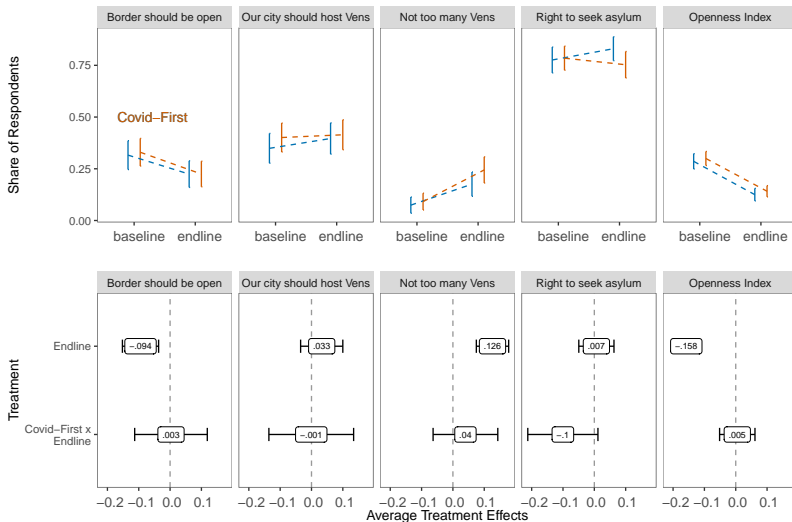
Compared to Attrited, Recontacted tend to be less educated, more religious, female, ideologically right, and from Cali.

Preliminary Panel Results

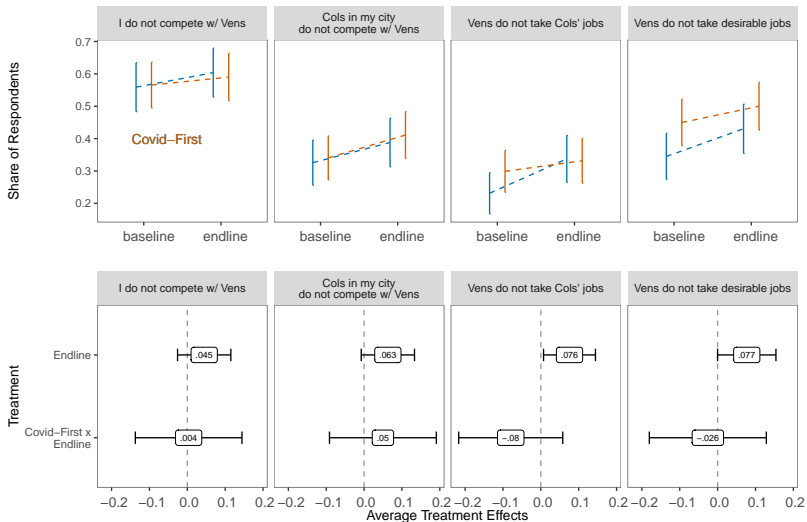
Migration Openness Attitudes



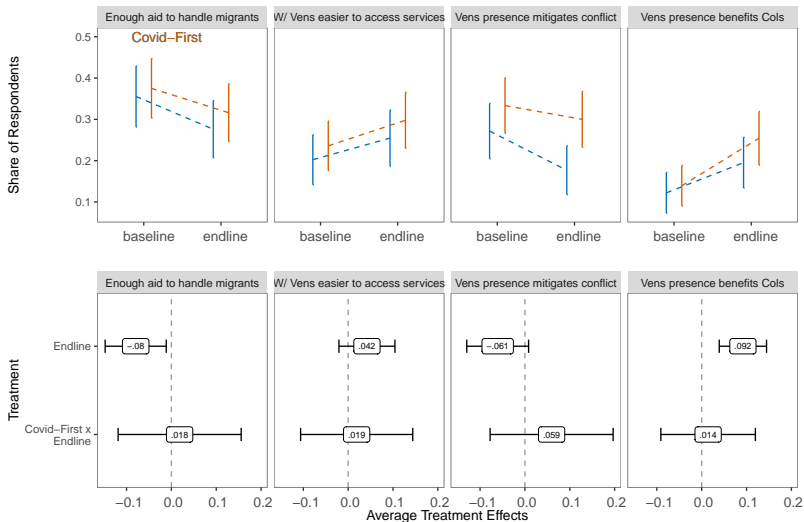
Migration Openness Attitudes



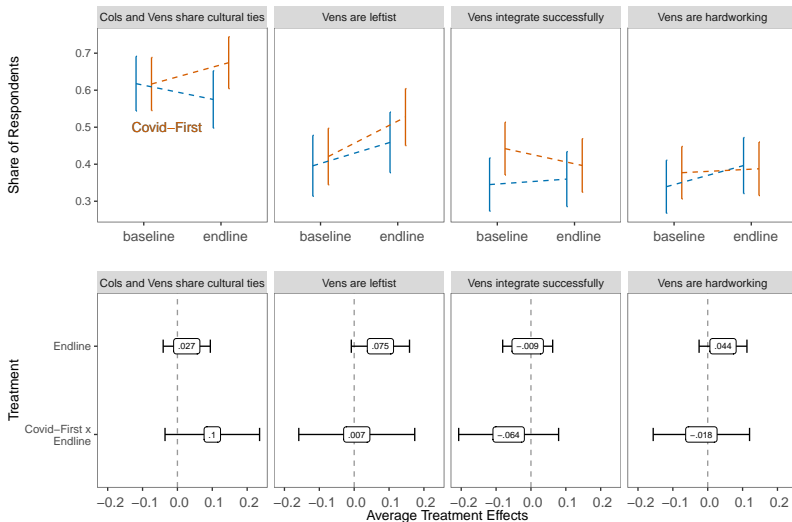
Migrants do not compete for employment



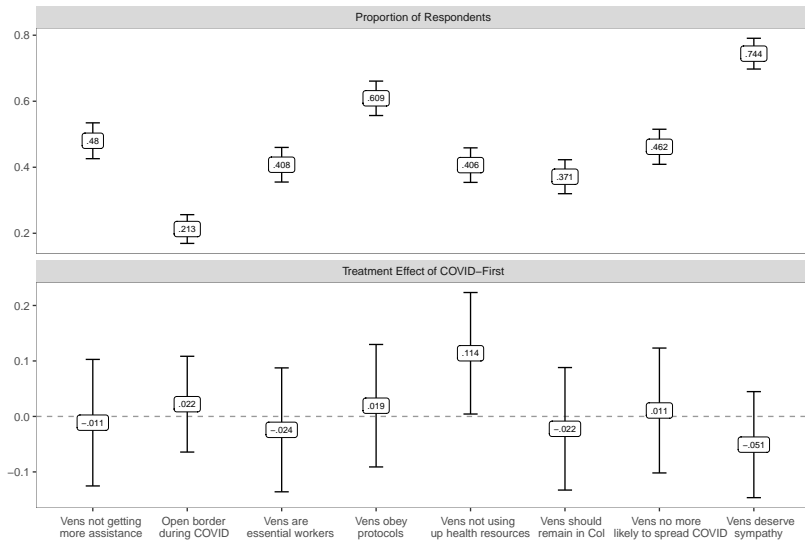
Migrants bring benefits



Migrants can integrate



Migration and COVID endline attitudes



Next Steps



Conclusion and Next Steps

- Unique contribution of measuring pre- and during COVID-19 attitudes
- Preliminary results for H1 suggests that during COVID, our Colombian respondents feel less open to migrants, want to close borders, and don't think there is enough aid to handle the migration situation. But they're also not as negative as media portrays.

Conclusion and Next Steps

- Unique contribution of measuring pre- and during COVID-19 attitudes
- Preliminary results for H1 suggests that during COVID, our Colombian respondents feel less open to migrants, want to close borders, and don't think there is enough aid to handle the migration situation. But they're also not as negative as media portrays.
- Examine mechanisms (H2-H6)
- Cross-sectional analysis with new respondents
- Heterogeneous effects by city, levels of direct and indirect contact, media news consumption
- Multiple hypothesis testing
- Possible post-COVID survey

- Aarøe, Lene, Michael Bang Petersen and Kevin Arceneaux. 2017. "The behavioral immune system shapes political intuitions: Why and how individual differences in disgust sensitivity underlie opposition to immigration." *American Political Science Review* 111(2):277-294.
- Adida, Claire L, Kim Yi Dionne and Melina R Platas. 2018. "Ebola, elections, and immigration: how politicizing an epidemic can shape public attitudes." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* pp. 1-27.
- Coates, Melanie. 2020. "Covid-19 and the rise of racism." *Bmj* 369.
- Green, Eva GT, Franciska Krings, Christian Staerklé, Adrian Bangerter, Alain Clémence, Pascal Wagner-Egger and Thierry Bornand. 2010. "Keeping the vermin out: Perceived disease threat and ideological orientations as predictors of exclusionary immigration attitudes." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 20(4):299-316.
- Marshall, Shantal R and Jenessa R Shapiro. 2018. "When "scurry" vs."hurry" makes the difference: Vermin metaphors, disgust, and anti-immigrant attitudes." *Journal of Social Issues* 74(4):774-789.
- Ng, Edmond. 2020. "The Pandemic of Hate Is Giving Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) a Helping Hand."
- Reny, Tyler T and Matt A Barreto. 2020. "Xenophobia in the time of pandemic: othering, anti-Asian attitudes, and COVID-19." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* pp. 1-24.