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To cite this article: Michelle J. Bellino & Marcela Ortiz-Guerrero (19 Jul 2023): "The Worst Thing That Could Happen to us but Unfortunately They Have Nowhere to Go": Colombian students' Contradictory Views on Venezuelan Migration, Democratic Crisis, and Xenophobia, Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies, DOI: [10.1080/15562948.2023.2228243](https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2023.2228243)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15562948.2023.2228243>



Published online: 19 Jul 2023.



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“The Worst Thing That Could Happen to us but Unfortunately They Have Nowhere to Go”: Colombian students’ Contradictory Views on Venezuelan Migration, Democratic Crisis, and Xenophobia

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore Colombian secondary students’ views on Venezuelan migration. Despite contradictory feelings on the topic, our findings show the prevalence of (perceived) economic and security threats associated with migrants. Tensions emerged over perceptions that Venezuelan migration has shifted attention from unresolved domestic issues, contributing to nationalist and xenophobic sentiments. Young people also exhibited concerns about xenophobic discourse and showed efforts to resist the harms of mainstream narratives. We suggest that critical openings for curricular inquiry and dialogue in classrooms are needed to engage explicitly with young people’s concerns and to mitigate potential discrimination Venezuelans experience in schools.

KEYWORDS

Colombia; Venezuela; migration; education/schools; xenophobia

Introduction

In a grade 11 classroom in northern Bogotá, a fifteen-year-old male student explained, “I am not interested in the political situation in Venezuela and I am not affected in any way by the migration of Venezuelans, in reality I have not seen many of them.” Unbeknownst to him, four of his classmates were Venezuelan migrants. The majority of students in this class disagreed that Venezuelan migration had little to do with their lives. The majority linked Venezuelans to crime and unemployment, suggesting that Colombia was becoming more unstable and violent since Venezuelans had arrived. Most expressed more moderate views, emphasizing that Venezuela and Colombia were neighbors, and that Venezuelans were fleeing a dictatorship and came to Colombia for their survival. Nonetheless, most of these moderate stances also emphasized that migration had brought social and economic problems for Colombia. There were also some extreme points of view, with one student explaining, “The *venecos* [a derogatory term for Venezuelans] are a plague, just eradicate them, they bring disease and economic crisis.” Across the room, one of the Venezuelan students wrote, as if speaking directly to her Colombian classmates, “I don’t know what to say about migration but thank you for accepting us in your country.” Another Venezuelan student lamented, “It is something very intense and sometimes people are cruel.” Meanwhile, their teacher noted the presence of Venezuelan students as part of the school’s “*población flotante*/floating population,” but did not believe their arrival was a source of social conflict or curiosity for students.

The range of responses in this classroom raises questions about what Colombian students (and their teachers) understand about their classmates' experiences and the level of discrimination that Venezuelan students might be navigating daily, including while attending school. In this paper, we explore the views of Colombian students across 45 public schools located in Bogotá. We ask, what do young people attending school in Colombia understand about the Venezuelan crisis driving migration, and how do they feel about how their country has responded to the influx of migrants in a neighboring country? These research questions offer a critical window into Colombian citizens' views on migration in 2019–2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been associated with higher instances of xenophobia globally (Esses & Hamilton, 2021; Xun & Gilman, 2021).

In the following section, we describe Venezuelan migration trends, and regional as well as country-specific responses within Colombia. Our findings show the prevalence of (perceived) economic and security threat narratives associated with migrants, and few expressions of migrants' cultural resources in terms of real or potential assets (e.g., knowledge and skills that can drive economic contributions, cultural traditions and diversity that contributes to social enrichment). Admonitions that Colombia needed to welcome Venezuelans because it was “what is right” were readily expressed alongside fears and worries that migration was “destroying our country.” Though some responses were laced with hatred, most students demonstrated complex, at times contradictory feelings on the topic. Strong tensions emerged over perceptions that the state's favorable treatment of Venezuelans shifted attention from unresolved domestic issues such as Colombia's peace process and the need to address longstanding socioeconomic inequities. Unsettled grievances were projected onto Venezuelan migrant bodies, contributing to nationalist and xenophobic sentiments. Finally, young people also exhibited concerns about harmful xenophobic discourse and practices and were struggling to make sense of their own mixed emotions. Together, these findings suggest critical openings for curricular inquiry and dialogue in classrooms as opportunities to engage more directly with young people's understandings, questions, and concerns about migration and changes they are seeing in their community.

Background and research context

The ongoing political and socioeconomic crisis in Venezuela has led to one of the largest movements of refugees and migrants across Latin America and the Caribbean. Once one of the region's wealthiest countries and a migration destination due to economic opportunities linked to the oil industry, Venezuela has experienced significant economic decline. Fluctuations in oil prices and government overspending have contributed to hyperinflation, extreme poverty, food insecurity and malnutrition, and democratic decline (Bull & Rosales, 2020). Recent Figures (R45, 2022) estimate that 7.3 million Venezuelans have left their country of origin. Intraregional migration is particularly high, with approximately 6.1 million Venezuelans (~84%) living in Latin America and the Caribbean. Colombia, which shares a 2,000 km long border with Venezuela, has received the highest number of migrants, hosting an estimated 2.48 million people.

Colombia has adopted the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol and is a signatory to the 1984 Cartagena Declaration on Refugees, a regional non-binding agreement to protect refugees. Most Latin American host countries do not recognize Venezuelan migrants as refugees, though many meet international definitions in that they are fleeing political persecution and “perhaps most or all” meet definitions articulated through the Cartagena Declaration (Selee & Bolter, 2022, p. 113). Though only a small number of Venezuelans have filed asylum claims to seek international protection (952,250 since 2014), the magnitude of the crisis has led UNHCR to report annual figures with a separate category for “Venezuelans displaced abroad.” (In 2022, UNHCR introduced the category “other people in need of international protection,” which now includes Venezuelans.)

In Colombia, there are three types of Venezuelan migrants, including those (1) settling in Colombia, (2) moving through or staying temporarily with a different destination country,

and (3) those moving back and forth across the border, sometimes daily (Bahar et al., 2020, p. 21). Daily border-crossing is characterized as “pendular movement” (R4V, 2021, p. 99) and in most cases a response to the need to access goods (e.g., food, medicine) and/or services (e.g., healthcare, education) that are no longer affordable or have experienced significant quality deterioration in Venezuela (Mojica Acevedo et al., 2020). Although pendular migration has increased due to the Venezuelan crisis, active border crossing patterns between these two countries have a long history (Álvarez de Flores, 2004). Frequent cross-border movement even led to an interstate agreement to consolidate a border integration zone (Zona de Integración Fronteriza), which aimed to promote economic and social integration and regularize daily border-crossing in the area Táchira-Norte de Santander (Suárez Plata, 2015). Additionally, the Colombian armed conflict displaced thousands into Venezuela dating back to the 1940s (Comisión de la Verdad, 2022), though the majority of Colombian victims have been internally displaced. Colombian schools and communities have had decades of experience with “floating populations,” based on large-scale displacement and integration efforts, a history that was initially assumed would translate into more seamless integration of Venezuelan migrants. Venezuelan migration is thus a relatively new type of transborder movement, with few studies examining Venezuelan students’ experiences in host country schools, or perceptions of young people from contexts hosting migrants.

Several years into the Venezuelan crisis, in 2018, the Regional Refugee and Migrant Response Plan (RMRP) was developed “as a strategic regional response plan and advocacy tool to support country and sub-regional operations and to ensure the most pressing humanitarian, protection and integration needs of refugees and migrants from Venezuela, as well as those of host countries, were met” (R4V, 2021, p. 14). The RMRP encompasses 159 humanitarian and development organizations working within 17 host countries, and a guiding principle in their work is an aim to address immediate humanitarian and protection needs while working toward socioeconomic integration. RMRP conceives integration through a three-pronged approach, advocating for regularization processes (regular status and documentation), livelihood opportunities, and social cohesion between Venezuelans and the communities hosting them. Colombia as well as other host states, have taken steps to strengthen their asylum systems and to expand Venezuelans’ access to regularization processes, through temporary or exceptional visa categories. In May 2021, Colombia began the implementation of a ten-year Temporary Protection Statute for Venezuelan Migrants, allowing Venezuelans who were living in Colombia by January 31, 2021 to apply for this protection (IOM, 2022). Additionally, approximately 47,000 children born in Colombia to Venezuelan parents have been granted Colombian nationality.

Authorized status and documentation for refugees and migrants has increased access to basic services such as healthcare and education. Yet despite these efforts, it is estimated that more than 56% of Venezuelans in Colombia have irregular status, putting them at greater risk of gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, recruitment by armed groups, human trafficking and smuggling, and family separation (R4V, 2021). Lack of documentation has impacted young people’s access to school as well as their accreditation, based on participation in Colombia’s national completion exam, *Prueba Saber 11*. Recent studies illustrate that Venezuelans don’t perform as well academically on the exam as their Colombian peers, but perhaps more worrying is that only 32% of those who are eligible opt to take the exam (GIFFMM & R4V, 2021). Meanwhile, 39% of those who sat for the exam in 2020 lacked valid identity documentation to certify their grades. As of July 2021, a total of 479,818 Venezuelan students were studying in Colombian schools across the country, totaling 5% of the total students enrolled (GIFFMM & R4V, 2021). Yet this proportion is low when compared to the number of school-age children in the Venezuelan migrant population. Despite that all children in Colombia have a legal right to education, about half of school-age Venezuelan children are unable to access educational opportunities due to barriers such as lack of documentation, indirect costs, distance to school, and lack of space (Diazgranados et al., 2020). Additional barriers encompass discrimination and lack of awareness of migrants’ rights on the part of school staff (Namen et al., 2021).

Moreover, the temporary nature of Venezuelans' protective status in Colombia impacts their ability to live, learn, and plan for the future (Roth, 2021).

Venezuelan migration in Colombia has taken place during a contested peace negotiation process and a social context characterized by high levels of inequality, which marginalize both Colombians and migrants. Nation-wide protests were held during the course of our data collection, centering on social, economic, and environmental concerns, including demands for increased funding to public education. These movements and their demands added to other social justice concerns, such as calls for better working conditions, pension, and social services. Data presented below are situated within this context.

Perceived threats, real consequences: Theorizing education, nationalism, and xenophobia

An expansive body of educational research examines the role of schools in influencing young people's civic development, national identity, and attitudes toward diverse groups (e.g., Knowles et al., 2018; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). A related but distinct body of anthropological literature explores how migrant children and youth experience integration in schools as they are exposed to civic messages within national institutions (e.g., Ríos-Rojas, 2014; Rodriguez, 2020). Meanwhile, scholarship in political science and political psychology examines public attitudes toward migrant groups (e.g., Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). However little work brings these bodies of literature together, examining the intersections of national identity formation and xenophobic attitudes, and how these interact with dominant discourses circulating within and outside of schools. We draw from group threat theory (Blumer, 1958) to explain how anti-migrant sentiments circulating public spaces interact with historical grievances, contributing to anxiety, fear, and resentment toward migrants. These perceptions permeate social spaces, including schools, where learning and social interactions across diverse identity groups can reinforce or challenge them.

Schools as sites for inclusion and exclusion

Educational access is linked to child protection, and it is often assumed that schools offer protective environments, buffering young people from harms and risks of exploitation in surrounding contexts, particularly in contexts impacted by armed conflict and displacement (Nicolai & Triplehorn, 2003). These assumptions underlie humanitarian efforts to ensure educational access for Venezuelan migrants, with concern that protection risks increase when young people are out of school (e.g., R4V; World Vision, 2020). However, schools across the globe have also been shown to be hostile environments for young people, particularly refugee and migrant populations (Bartlett, 2015). On its own, access to schools is an insufficient measure of inclusion, as barriers to learning, participation, and social acceptance can exist inside of schools (Bellino & Dryden-Peterson, 2019; Chopra & Dryden-Peterson, 2020; Patel, 2013).

In surveys with Venezuelan migrant families in Colombia, experiences with, and fears of, discrimination and xenophobia are among the reasons why children do not attend school (Namen et al., 2021; R4V, 2021). A recent study (Diazgranados et al., 2020), compared math, literacy, and socioemotional skills across primary school-aged children (approximately half Colombian, half Venezuelan) in grades 1–5 across 29 public schools in Cúcuta. Though Venezuelan children enrolled in school outperformed out-of-school Venezuelan peers academically in math and reading assessments, measures of their socioemotional skills revealed that being “in school is associated with lower levels of empathy, higher sadness and anger intensity, higher hostile attribution bias...[and] higher levels of victimization” (p. 12). The study concluded that the school environment exposes young people to risks in their socioemotional development, as well as higher instances of victimization. Though these findings are set in the border city of Cúcuta and focused on primary school-aged children, our study suggests that high levels of xenophobia

persist in school environments in Bogotá at secondary levels. Public opinion surveys reveal that levels of xenophobia might be even higher in Bogotá, with more economic competition associated with intergroup tensions in the capital (Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 2020).

Studies of education in the context of South-South migration in Latin America and the Caribbean are limited (Bartlett, 2012; Bartlett & Ghaffar-Kucher, 2013), yet available research shows patterns of marginalization, including barriers to school access despite legal frameworks, poor quality schools, and experiences of discrimination and even physical abuse inflicted on migrant students in schools (Bartlett, 2012; Namen et al., 2021; Rodríguez-Gómez, 2019; Summers et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2016, 2022). Numerous studies set in the US and Western Europe, indicate that migrant and refugee young people experience schools as spaces that convey both inclusion and exclusion (Gitlin et al., 2003; Hertzberg, 2015; Olivos & Mendoza, 2010), though in many cases schools are sites of “unbelonging” (Rodríguez, 2020, p. 497), or belonging that is partial, conditional, or coercive (Abu El-Haj, 2015; Jaffe-Walter, 2016; McWilliams & Bonet, 2016; Peguero et al., 2015; Ríos-Rojas, 2014). Transnational students’ biographies and educational histories are largely ignored in the daily praxis of school, leading to “everyday ruptures” (Hamann & Zuñiga, 2011). Meanwhile, transnational identities, affiliations, and aspirations are funneled through implicitly nation-centered curriculum and assimilationist assumptions of schooling (Bajaj & Bartlett, 2017; Dyrness & Abu El-Haj, 2020). Racism, xenophobia, and nationalism can manifest in schools through disciplinary discourse and practices, underpinned by perceived cultural threats such as fears of migrants maintaining cultural and linguistic attachments to their countries of origin (e.g., Abu El-Haj, 2015; Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020; Jaffe-Walter, 2016). Though schools reflect and can amplify dominant discourses about belonging, macro forces such as xenophobia can also be mitigated and challenged in schools (Bajaj, Ghaffar-Kucher, & Desai, 2016).

In anthropological literature, there has been a tendency to focus on school and community dynamics as experienced by migrant students and families who navigate, adapt, and resist largely negative discourses and practices embedded in schools (Gibson & Koyama, 2011). Less research has focused on attitudes of native populations toward their migrant classmates and neighbors, or how these attitudes develop or gain traction in school settings, particularly in new host country settings. Yet the integration of refugee students is a “two-way process” (Phillimore, 2021), in which host communities and newcomers co-construct the school context, albeit with asymmetrical access to power. Conceptualizing integration as bi- or multi-directional, the attitudes of native students profoundly impact the academic and social experiences of migrant students enrolled in national schools.

Perceived threats and growing xenophobia

Drawing from political science and political psychology, there is a robust scholarship engaged with public opinion surveys, aimed at understanding the individual characteristics and contextual conditions under which native populations are more and less likely to support migration. Across scholarly reviews of these studies, higher levels of education are consistently associated with decreased levels of xenophobia and nationalism (Ceobanu & Escandell, 2010; Dinesen & Hjorth, 2020; Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). However, education is often measured as a numerical variable based on years in school, with less focus on classroom experiences and the potential for education to contribute to both increased tolerance toward migrants or exclusionary citizenship that fuels xenophobia (Hjerm, 2001).

Discrimination and xenophobia have worsened over the years, suggesting that Colombians’ initial welcoming response became more negative over time. *Semana* magazine conducted a survey (Proyecto Migración Venezuela) with more than 1,000 adults in 86 cities and municipalities across the country. The survey found that 71% of respondents believed that migration increased poverty, 64% viewed migration as a burden on the State, and only 28% saw migration as an opportunity for development (Rosales, 2020). Education emerged as a

hot-button topic, with questions about Venezuelan children having access to Colombian schools associated with lower approval ratings than other services. The Gallup Migrant Acceptance Index, which compared public opinions toward migrants cross-nationally between 2016 and 2019, showed a decline on a global scale, with Colombia showing the third biggest decline globally (Esipova et al., 2020). Dwindling support for refugees and migrants over time is not uncommon, as host states experience “hospitality fatigue” or “compassion fatigue” in the context of prolonged crises (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022). Other studies (e.g., Okumura et al., 2022; Said & Jara, 2022) have posited that responses to Venezuelan migration have changed over time, in part, because of shifting demographics, as migrants became more diverse, less educated, and more socioeconomically marginalized (Paez & Vivas, 2017; also see Esses, 2021).

In the general public’s awareness, narratives regarding refugees, displaced migrants, and asylum-seekers correspond to three dominant frames. These narratives are fueled by media coverage and sometimes manipulated by political actors to elicit support for or against migrant groups (Eberl et al., 2018; Esses et al., 2013; Seate & Mastro, 2016). The “victim narrative” portrays displaced peoples as in need of protection, highlighting their vulnerability. The “benefit narrative” emphasizes cultural, economic, and political resources of migrants and potential human capital gains for the host context. The “threat narrative” emphasizes the perceived risks and burdens associated with migrants, which can be further broken down into economic, security, and cultural threats (See Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022, pp. 16–18). Group threat theory (Blumer, 1958) underlies threat narratives, linking anti-immigrant attitudes to fear and perceptions of threats to one’s identity group, including threats to security, competition for resources and employment, and cultural anxieties (see Hjerm, 2007). Perceived threats of migrant and refugee populations are rooted in moral and nationalist discourses, which can trigger strong emotions such as anger and fear (Hoewe et al., 2022; Jeong, 2013). Even though young people’s attitudes toward migration tend to be more positive than older generations (McLaren & Paterson, 2020), young people can also hold negative perceptions grounded in economic and cultural threats (e.g., Keating & Janmaat, 2020). The existing body of research on group threat theory has established that those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or perceive themselves as having less access to wealth and resources than others, tend to express more negative attitudes toward migrants (Aleksynska, 2011; Igarashi & Laurence, 2021). The importance of absolute and “relative deprivation” (Gurr, 1970) in shaping attitudes toward migrants is a critical finding when we consider that migrant populations often settle in low-income communities (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

Though these are *perceived* threats (Dinesen & Hjorth, 2020; Hjerm, 2007), widespread negative perceptions of migrants are consequential for young people’s learning and overall wellbeing. For instance, a longitudinal study of migrant children in the US found that young people were cognizant of negative stereotypes associated with their country of origin (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Strom, 2017). Twelve-year-old migrant students from various countries of origin were asked to fill in the blank, “Most Americans think that most [people from the respondent’s birthplace] are ____.” 65% of the young people surveyed filled in the blank with negative terms, a percentage that varied depending on the country of origin. Though the most frequent response was “bad,” other negative responses indicate the prevalence of threat narratives and young people’s awareness of others’ associations between migrants and criminality, contamination, and incompetence.

This study contributes to these diverse bodies of work, exploring Colombian students’ perspectives of the Venezuelan crisis driving migration and the Colombian response. It offers a window into young people’s perceptions, concerns, and curiosities several years into hosting a large migrant population, in the context of a fragile and polarizing national peace process, and before the onset of the global pandemic.

Research methods

This paper draws from a larger study with a mixed methods design, including surveys with 3,133 students and interviews with their teachers ($n=41$) across 45 public schools in 19 of Bogotá's 20 district divisions, or *localidades*. The survey was initially designed to understand students' attitudes toward learning about difficult topics, such as Colombia's armed conflict, peace negotiations, and transitional justice processes, which have been ideologically polarizing (see Bellino et al., 2022). Given the numbers of Venezuelans entering the country at the time of the survey distribution (2019–2020), we added one open-ended question inquiring about students' attitudes toward Venezuelan migration. We anticipated that the survey's focus on learning controversial issues in classroom spaces would encourage young people to reflect on another polarizing public issue, including their perceptions of the role that Colombia had played in hosting Venezuelan migrants. The question asks students, "What are your thoughts on the current political situation in Venezuela and the migration of Venezuelan citizens to Colombia? What do you think about the Colombian state's response to this situation?" This paper centers on qualitative responses to this multipart question.

School selection and participants

We limited our sample to public schools in Bogotá, aiming for some representativeness across localities in the capital city. Given the original study scope, we purposefully oversampled schools located in Bosa, Ciudad Bolívar, and Kennedy, three localities with the highest number of registered conflict victims residing in Bogotá (Observatorio Distrital de Víctimas de Conflicto Armado, 2018). These localities also had the highest number of Venezuelan students enrolled in schools at the time. A total of 3,133 students were surveyed across grades 9 (36.2%), 10 (34.4%) and 11 (29.1%), the final years of secondary education in Colombia. The average age of the participants was 16, and 53% identified as females, 46% males, and 0.5% indicated "other gender." 91% of the total sample self-reported as belonging to strata 1, 2 and 3, the lowest socioeconomic brackets on a 6-point scale. Most students in the sample are Colombian—only 42 declared a birthplace outside Colombia. Of these, 37 identified as Venezuelan. In line with conflict-sensitive approaches and inclusive research practices, we invited all students to participate in the research and did not make decisions about inclusion/exclusion based on nationality or other identities. However, this paper focuses only on the substantive themes that emerged from students who identified as Colombian citizens. This study was approved by [the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board (HUM00158300)], and permissions were granted by the Secretaría de Educación de Bogotá. Individual schools, teachers, and students were given the option to participate.

Analysis

The question posed essentially encompassed three distinct questions, asking students to reflect on (1) the crisis in Venezuela that drove such extreme migration, (2) the phenomenon of Venezuelan migration in Colombia, and (3) the Colombian state's response as a country hosting Venezuelan migrants. Students' responses to the question ranged significantly from one-word expletives to well-developed narrative responses which spoke to each of the three dimensions of the question posed. To accommodate such a range, we independently open-coded a third of the responses, conferred about emergent themes, then developed an inductive, multitiered coding scheme. The tiers map onto different dimensions of the question, some which were explicitly posed (e.g., distinguishing thoughts about the crisis itself from how Colombia responded), and others which showed a range of ways that young people interpreted the question. For example, thoughts about migration and Colombia's response yielded code families clustering around issues of blame and

responsibility, cause and effect, worries about Colombia, attitudes toward Venezuelans, and calls for action. We then applied the coding scheme to all responses. See Table 1 for details of the coding scheme with anchor quotes. When a response warranted, it could be coded with multiple themes within one or more tier. That is, the codes are not mutually exclusive within or across tiers.

Of the 3,133 students who participated in the survey, 239 left the question blank, while 156 expressed not knowing enough or feeling insufficiently informed to respond. Thirty-nine responses were too unclear to interpret, and thirty-five students preferred not to share their views on the topic, explaining that the issue was too contentious or sensitive to share. For example, expressions such as “I reserve my opinion, which is controversial” and “I really don’t want to comment, because it’s a very sensitive issue” offer little in the way of students’ understanding, but are telling in that they emphasize the theme as controversial even in the context of an anonymous survey. Fifty-nine responses expressed marked disinterest, with expressions such as, “I DON’T CARE LOL.” In coding, we distinguished between these responses for their varying levels of investment in the question. It is worth noting that these responses, too, offered a window into young people’s thoughts on the topic and in some cases their embedded nationalism, such as statements insisting, “Honestly, the situation in Venezuela doesn’t matter to me, just like the immigrants” and “I’m not interested, I only care about my country.” The analysis proceeded with 2,605 remaining responses that mapped onto the coding scheme. All coding was done using NVivo software.

Throughout the analytic process, we remained attentive to potential ways that our identities as outsiders to the Colombia context, as well as our professional commitments to refugee rights, might be influencing our perceptions of the data. We engaged with researcher reflexivity through ongoing dialogue and written memos, as we refined the coding scheme. Through a pilot study, we worked with a subset of student participants to reword the question and to better understand written responses. We were not able to engage in member-checking with individual students as a validity strategy, both due to the size of the study and the nature of the anonymous survey. However, teacher interviews and classroom observations served as opportunities to validate student attitudes as they emerged in the survey data.

Findings

Findings are organized into four sections. First, we describe students’ overreliance on “threat narratives,” as they draw causal links between the arrival of Venezuelan migrants and increases in crime and unemployment. We then consider questions raised about whether Colombia is in a position to host migrants, given unresolved domestic issues, before focusing explicitly on ways that nationalism and state abandonment are threaded together. We close with young people’s growing concerns over xenophobia and their efforts to resist harmful narratives and empathize with Venezuelan migrants’ struggles.

Reception and perception of migrant threats

Approximately 12% of student responses included at least some appreciation for, or pride in Colombia’s welcoming response to Venezuelan migrants. Students reported positive sentiments such as, “I think that the situation in Venezuela is very hard and that Colombia has acted in a good way,” and “I feel very strongly that the Colombian government lends its support to Venezuelan immigrants.” Others agreed with Colombia’s welcome, while adding conditions such as population or time limitations, such as, “it seems good to me that Colombia helps Venezuela, but when their country is fixed, they should also return.” Twenty-two students suggested that though Colombia had been hosting large numbers of migrants, “[we] can give them a better welcome to our country.” As one student observed, Colombia’s response to Venezuelan migrants was ambivalent, “one of welcome and rejection at the same time.”

Table 1. Multi-Tiered Coding Scheme with Anchor Quotes.

| | |
|--|---|
| Orientation to Colombia's response | |
| Sympathy / empathy for Venezuelans | "What they are going through is very worrying and it is very sad to see the country like this... [we must] put ourselves in their place, as it is not easy to arrive in a country that they do not know." |
| Pride / appreciation for Colombia's welcoming response | "Colombians have treated Venezuelans very well. They have given them the service and care that they deserve." |
| Calls for Colombia to do more to support Venezuelans | "What Colombia does for Venezuela does not seem to me to be enough." |
| <i>Note: we did not code critiques of Colombia's response at this level, as they manifest in more detailed ways through codes below.</i> | |
| Blame and responsibility | |
| Venezuelan citizens' fault | "They were the ones who voted for Chávez, so these are the consequences." |
| Abuse of state power | "That their president only thinks of his well-being and does not care about his country or his people." |
| Critiques of global response to migration | "It has become a global problem and the most affected country has been Colombia, because now we not only have to 'deal' with the country's problems... [but also host] half of the Venezuelan country" Cause-effect claims |
| Economy/ unemployment | "They arrived and the Colombian unemployment rate increased." "I don't know why they come to take our parents' jobs, asking for a miserable salary that they don't deserve." |
| Insecurity/ crime | "The vast majority of them are dedicated to crime and make Colombia an increasingly insecure country." |
| Overpopulation and resource scarcity | "By bringing Venezuelans to Colombia there is an overpopulation, our resources are going to them..." |
| Asset orientation | "It's cool to know a different dialect and culture from which one can learn without leaving our roots." |
| Worries about Colombia | |
| Prioritizing foreigners, Colombia needs to take care of Colombia | "I think that in Colombia they are giving more opportunities to foreigners than to their own Colombians, when Colombian people die of hunger in La Guajira, the state helps Venezuelans more... what happens in Venezuela is not our problem." |
| Migration is destroying our country | "Thanks to the Venezuelans little by little Colombia is being destroyed" |
| Colombia is becoming the new Venezuela | "We will end up being Venezuela 2.0" |
| Colombia cannot be a good host | "Now Colombia belongs to Venezuelans and not Colombians." "Colombia does not have the necessary resources to provide a good quality of life to its own inhabitants, it is illogical that now it is practically 'maintaining' 2 countries" |
| Shifting our attention from domestic issues | "I think that this country is not the right one for them to migrate [to]." "The news and the government give more importance to what happens in Venezuela than the problems that Colombia suffers, they try to act as a screen for the current situation of our people." |
| Anxiety about long-term stays | "Colombians are doing well to help them but it must be temporary." "There should be...a change in the Colombian constitution so that their children do not have Colombian nationality." |
| Involvement with armed groups | "Many Colombian guerrillas have taken refuge in Venezuela" |
| Worries about xenophobia and discrimination | "It seems very ugly to me how they treat Venezuelans since they came to our country looking for help and well many times we discriminate against them and call them 'venecos'" |
| Why help or not help | |
| Human rights framing | "I think that every Venezuelan has the right to seek the means to survive and if the only option they have is Colombia, then our duty as human beings is to help them as much as possible." |
| Positive reciprocity | "When Venezuela was well and the Colombians began to desert the conflict they began to go to Venezuela and...the Venezuelans opened their doors to them and treated them well." "We have to help them because if one day we need their help... they will help us." |
| Negative reciprocity | "I don't really like migration because when Colombia was in crisis and we Colombians had to emigrate to our nearby country (Venezuela) they rejected us, so why not do it ourselves." |
| Address drivers of migration in Venezuela | Calls for action "Helping Venezuelans is not enough, Venezuela must be freed... and so everything returns to its balance" |

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

| | |
|---|---|
| Orientation to Colombia's response | |
| Tighter restrictions on immigration policy | "I think they should close the border now because there are already a lot of Venezuelan migrants" |
| | "It is okay to receive them but not undocumented" |
| Deportation and forced removal | "Give them back! Take them out." |
| Venezuelans need to take responsibility- fight not flee | "My opinion on this issue is that Venezuelans, instead of fleeing their country, should fight to be able to defend their homeland and make it return to the way it was before." |
| Bad intentions | "Venezuelans came to harm our country...they only came to harm our country and I do not agree." |
| Attitudes toward Venezuelans | |
| Open disdain for Venezuelans | "Venezuelans are more than simple worms that walk the earth and have become a plague for the country, they should have been kicked out." |
| Venezuelans should show gratitude and respect | It's good that we help them... but I think there should be rules for them and that they shouldn't be so ungrateful to us Colombians." |

However, the majority counterbalanced positive expressions with negative consequences they attributed to migration and often linked them to concerns about Colombia's stability and quality of life for Colombian citizens. Students' worries about the economy were acute. The most frequent code overall was an expression that migration negatively impacted Colombia's economy and/or increased unemployment, with 471 mentions (~18%). Many gestured to employment generally, such as claims that, "the arrival of Venezuelans caused more poverty, more unemployment." A handful of students viewed the economic consequences of migration through the lens of personal experiences, mentioning their parents' economic struggles, or their own loss of work due to Venezuelans' willingness to work for lower wages. One student explained, "My father is an independent worker, he has been out of work for two months, he asks in different places for work and they tell him no because they already have Venezuelan workers." Economy was followed by 332 mentions (~13%) that migration has coincided with a rise in insecurity and crime. Frequently, economy and crime went together, as in this response, "They arrived and the Colombian unemployment rate increased, but as if this were not enough, there are many Venezuelans who came to increase delinquency and crime in Colombia." Students referenced Venezuelan migrants as new violent actors in an already violent landscape, "[making] Colombia an increasingly insecure country." Violent acts encompassed theft, murder, organized crime, drug trafficking, scams, rape, vandalism, destruction of property, kidnapping, gangs, and general mentions of delinquency. Two students referenced personal experiences being robbed by Venezuelans. Many others spoke about changes to their environment, explaining, "they took over the neighborhoods," and "take away the comfort and confidence of walking through a public sector of the country." Nearly 200 responses emphasized the "bad intentions" of Venezuelan migrants who want to cause Colombians harm, thus attributing a rise in crime to individual character. Ninety-nine students went as far as to conclude that migration was "destroying Colombia," or was "the worst thing" that had happened to their country, a bold statement given that the remainder of the survey was focused on their responses to negotiating an end to the country's armed conflict, which had lasted all of their lives and for most of the lifespan of their parents.

Overpopulation was a related concern, with 170 mentions of overcrowding, environmental degradation, and/or resource scarcity. Educational opportunities became a particular site of anxiety, as students critiqued Venezuelans' access to public schools and higher education. One student worried that Colombian children "no longer have the right to education thanks to the overcrowding of Venezuelans who are there in the different schools." A mere five responses pointed to the positive potential or beneficial impact of migration on Colombia. We intentionally coded this theme generously, in order to cast a wide net for asset orientations. Yet even recognitions that migrants bring cultural, linguistic, and economic resources were often couched within concerns about the overall negative impact of migration. One student began, "Well, this is delicate because I don't want to sound xenophobic or anything like that, but Colombia, or

rather the government, opened its doors so much that the government helps people from another country more than its own people from their country.” The student ended by recognizing, “on the other hand, it’s cool to know a different dialect and culture.”

Is Colombia fit to be a good host?

Sixty-one students explained that Colombia was not able to be a good host country, given its internal challenges, including longstanding socioeconomic inequities. These responses characterized Colombia as “a country that barely sustains [itself],” noting that “it is not going through its best moment.” One student gestured to “parts of the country that need a lot of help,” explaining that Colombian politicians “only worry about looking good with the other countries, while Colombia is in bad shape.” Worries that Colombia could not be a good host for others when it had not yet resolved so many domestic inequities were largely directed at the Colombian state, though sometimes were framed as if Venezuelans should have known better than to seek refuge in Colombia. For example, one student wrote, “[Venezuelans should recognize that] they arrived in a country that was very poor and full of a lot of violence.” Another similarly expressed, “I support their idea of seeking a better life, [but] I think that they should have gone to a country with a stable economy and not to one that is following their footsteps.”

Some students referenced Colombia becoming the “new Venezuela,” or “Venezuela 2.0.” These assertions encompassed two types of worries: one in which the Venezuelan population was reaching a tipping point, and another oriented toward political and economic concerns that Colombia might end up in a similar crisis. The latter has been encapsulated in the public discourse of *Castrochavismo*, intended to stoke public fears about socialism (Gomez-Suarez, 2017). In terms of population growth, the theme of Colombia carrying two countries in one was a common thread. For example, “because of them [Venezuelan migrants], the country [Colombia] is in crisis because the government is maintaining two countries and it is too heavy,” and “it is illogical that now it [Colombia] is practically ‘maintaining’ two countries.” One student estimated that “half of the Venezuelan country [was] inside Colombia.” Others worried, “now Colombia belongs to Venezuelans and not Colombians.” The prompt to analyze the situation in Venezuela led some students to make comparisons to the high levels of corruption and democratic backsliding they were experiencing in Colombia. For example, one student suggested that the situation in Venezuela should “open our eyes.” Another warned, “I think that if Colombia does not get its act together with corruption, we will soon reach this catastrophe.”

The consequences that young people attributed to migration also interacted with their hopes for the country’s peace process. A handful of students noted that rising conflict at the Colombia-Venezuela border and high-level disputes between political leaders could jeopardize the Colombia’s fragile peace. They worried that Venezuelans who could not locate work were more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, and meanwhile Venezuela was harboring armed actors. One student worried that migration drew necessary attention away from the peace process, “Colombia has many problems that have not been resolved, such as peace.” Others juxtaposed the fragile peace process with a rise in violence they attributed to Venezuelan migrants, explaining, “many families come to our country to encourage crime and make peace more and more a longed-for dream instead of a fact.” Another referenced peace in quotes, emphasizing its elusive nature, “they invade the ‘peace’ that we have.”

Nationalism and state abandonment

One of the most salient threads across student responses, with 310 mentions, is a sense of state abandonment, contrasted with perceptions of the Colombian state showing care for Venezuelan migrants. As one student explained, “the Colombian government has helped, but it has exceeded

itself to the point of caring more about the citizens of another country than its own, leaving adrift all the problems that Colombia has, which are almost as serious and worrying as those of Venezuela.” Another similarly reflected, “I think that the government is very committed to Venezuelans, which is not bad, but I think that we Colombians should be a priority since it is our nation.” Several contrasted the government’s treatment of victims of the armed conflict to Venezuelans, “I think that the Colombian government has been quite unfair to the Colombian people... foreigners have been helped more in their crises than Colombians who have been affected by wars for years and have been cruelly displaced and exiled from their lands.” Another stressed, “it makes me too sad that they take more care of a Venezuelan than a peasant displaced..., or an indigenous Colombian.” Feelings of neglect and abandonment are salient in expressions such as the state “leaving aside their own country,” “it is good to help but who helps us?” Another wrote, “you [Venezuelans] take everything away from us.”

We interpret these expressions of nationalism articulated through a sense of abandonment as distinct from expressions of nationalism that reified state borders as absolute. As one student put it, “It does not seem to me that Colombia has to bear the problems of Venezuela.” The discourse of “problem” stretched to include both the crisis driving Venezuelans from their country of origin and to encompass migration in Colombia. Statements like “This is not Colombia’s problem,” and “they destroyed their country, it’s their problem, not ours” locate “the problem” in Venezuela. But as one student explained, the “problem” moved across borders as if it were located within Venezuelans themselves, “what is happening in Venezuela is an internal problem of that country, but when migrants arrive in Colombia they become a problem for this country.” Another explained that a country’s problems should be kept within national borders, because “Venezuela is Venezuela and Colombia is Colombia, we must solve our own problems and worry about our own population.”

Regarding reasons to support Venezuelans, 72 students showed efforts to explicitly empathize with and imagine the conditions that Venezuelans were fleeing. Others (116) applied human rights discourse to Colombia’s responsibility to welcome migrants, emphasizing that individuals everywhere have the right to a dignified existence. Students explained, “rights are for everyone,” and “I think that every Venezuelan has the right to seek the means to survive and if the only option they have is Colombia, then our duty as human beings is to help them as much as possible.” Meanwhile, others gravitated toward a reciprocity lens, with positive and negative elements projected into the past and future. For example, sixty-five explained that Colombia should help Venezuela because they have been or might one day be in a similar situation and would rely on their neighboring country for support. Gesturing to the future, one student explained, “we must think that we are human beings with needs and perhaps today it is them but we do not know the day that [crisis] touches us.” A student who self-identified as *Colombovenezolana* drew on their family’s cross-border experiences to explain, “I think that many Colombians... do not remember when Venezuela was well and [as] Colombians began to desert the conflict... Venezuelans opened their doors to them and treated them well.” Eighteen students reversed this frame and explained that Venezuela had not supported Colombia in the past, or suggested that Venezuela would not offer support in the future if Colombians faced a similar crisis. These distinct interpretations of Colombia-Venezuela relations and experiences with transborder movement led to different orientations toward Venezuelans taking refuge within Colombia’s borders. They also seemed to lead to different understandings of national borders, with some students critiquing the nationalism that divided them, “a border simply separates us, we are citizens of the world.”

Confronting xenophobia

Despite recognition of the devastating nature of the Venezuelan crisis and the obligations engendered in human rights frameworks, there were clear references to Colombia having reached the

threshold with the number of Venezuelans it could host. For example, students explained, “it’s good to help, but we can’t help an entire migratory country,” and “it is very nice that the government accepts migrants but we have reached the limit.” Some students recognized that the nature of Colombia’s response shifted over time as the crisis persisted and the numbers of migrants rose, “I think that at first there was a lot of solidarity on the part of Colombia, but it is clear that today Venezuelans are everywhere having priorities that in principle should be for us.” This led them to conclude that, “in a mass migration like this, we have to be stricter” because “it got out of hand.” One student characterized the number of Venezuelans as “decadent,” while another turned to water metaphors, a persistent image for migrants and refugees (Catalano, 2017), insisting that “they are flooding us.” Anxieties about having reached the limits were expressed both in terms of numbers and timeline, with particular concerns mapped onto children and women’s bodies. Students explained, “they [Venezuelans] only think about having children,” and “there are many more Venezuelan pregnancies.” Another student contrasted “good Colombians” with Venezuelan women who do not “respect their bodies.” These statements tapped into stereotypes of oversexualized Venezuelan women and girls (R4V, 2021), while also suggesting that pregnancies were strategic, in order to anchor connections to the Colombian state. In all capital letters, one student wrote, “I DON’T AGREE WITH GIVING IT [Colombian nationality] TO BABIES OR CHILDREN.”

Across student responses, we classified 77 as expressions of open disdain for Venezuelans, casting migrants as “lazy,” “ignorant,” and “dirty.” Fifteen responses likened Venezuelans to “animals,” “dogs,” and “worms,” associated them with disease, or resorted to extremely harmful language (e.g., *Venecos, hp (hijo de puta/son of a bitch)*). A number of these responses drew on persistent stereotypes that migrants carry disease, such as claims that “they are not hygienic,” “they are a plague,” which have “contaminated [us],” and “those gonorrhea [should] be returned to their country.” Others cast Venezuelans as “assholes,” claiming that “this country is becoming garbage because of them.” One student added a happy face to lighten their admission: “Sorry I’m xenophobic:).” These responses often co-occurred with calls for widespread deportation and expulsion. For example, one student wrote, “they should expel them and return them all to their country...I hope they go away and leave Colombia alone”—a comment that seems mild compared to others, such as, “they are a disgusting country, horrible people who do not seek a solution to their problems, and flee their country like dogs... We are in Colombia motherfuckers go back.” Though these responses are startling in their hatred, it is important to emphasize that they are in the minority.

There is also strong evidence in these responses that students were grappling with complex, and often contradictory emotions on the topic. One student demonstrated an effort to empathize with Venezuelans’ experiences, only to reveal feelings of anger at their (alleged) mocking of Colombian culture:

I put myself in their place and I would not like to arrive in a foreign country where I do not know anyone and that they begin to judge me and treat me as if I were worth nothing. I think no one deserves it...[But] many Venezuelan residents make fun of and complain about our country. Why do you do ...[that]?

On the whole, there were efforts to recognize heterogeneity within the Venezuelan community, so that claims that migrants bring violence were tempered by recognition that this was not a fair characterization of all Venezuelans. “The problem comes [because] they come to this country and steal...obviously NOT ALL OF THEM ARE LIKE THIS, but almost all... the majority.” Despite characterizing Venezuelan migration as “a strong blow,” one student “realized that some Venezuelans are very good people, thoughtful, kind.” Many emphasized that this migration was forced, and that “they have had to come to Colombia not because they want to.” Some students shared that they were working to make sense of their internalized discomfort. One student explained, “Venezuelans are quite frequently in the streets, not that it bothers me but it is somewhat uncomfortable... they walk around and people don’t say much to them...I don’t blame them but I feel bad in a way.” Another admitted, “It is somewhat uncomfortable to be surrounded

by them, but it is important to understand that they have no other options.” In some cases, students openly wrestled with their efforts to work against mainstream discourses. Several reflected on how they have changed their views on Venezuelans over time, such as “Initially I allowed myself to be influenced by the media where it puts Venezuela in a bad situation but I [realized] that immigration is their last option.” Similarly, another explained they had to actively resist negative discourse, “for me all Venezuelans are not the same that they only come to steal or take away our jobs, they are opinions that I hear around me but I don’t think they are all the same.” As one explained, “I have felt some xenophobia. But I try to keep in mind that they are human beings, that they have dreams, ideas, that they are like me and that they are not at all to blame for their situation.”

Relatedly, sixty-seven responses identified rising xenophobia as a critical issue for Colombia to address. Students critiqued the prevalence of harmful discourses and discrimination, reflecting “it seems very ugly to me how they treat Venezuelans since they came to our country looking for help and well many times we discriminate against them and call them ‘venecos.’” Another reflected on the underpinnings of nationalism as essentially arbitrary, “they despise Venezuelans for the simple fact of not being from this country.” As one put it, “It is sad to see how people are suffering and not because of them but because of their ruler, but the intolerance that exists in Colombia toward them is even sadder.” Another similarly worried, “Every day xenophobia increases in the country and this is an issue that has to be controlled at all costs.”

Discussion and conclusion

There is a silent debate happening across student responses: blaming Venezuelans for voting Chávez and Maduro into office and lamenting political leaders who do not serve the public; praising Colombia’s welcome to “our Venezuelan brothers,” and critiquing the scale, informality, and indiscriminate nature of entry; empathizing with, and expressing disdain for Venezuelan migrants. Importantly, these debates are not only unfolding across students within classrooms as in the opening narrative; in many cases, students are wrestling with complicated feelings and their own internal contradictions. This finding reinforces the notion that people can and do “hold multiple, competing beliefs and opinions about forced migration and its impacts on society” (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022, p. 1). Students’ expressions offer a window into their efforts to identify varying responses to shifting demographics in their city, holding together feelings of compassion, worry, fear, and frustration.

For the most part, responses encompass the three predominant narrative frames toward migration: victim, benefit, and threat narratives (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022). Economic and security threats are far more prevalent than the other narrative types. In contrast to abundant literature documenting perceptions of migrants as a “cultural threat” (Abu El-Haj, 2015; Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020), this concern is infrequently mentioned by Colombian students. Discriminatory views about oversexualized women and girls, and references to a clash between Colombians and Venezuelans’ socialist viewpoints, are among the few cases where students perceived threats that might be cast as “cultural.” That cultural threats were less salient in this context is likely due to a history of transborder movement and cultural and linguistic proximity. However, this proximity has not been sufficiently rooted to overcome perceived material and societal threats, perceptions of group threats documented in other host contexts (e.g., Moyo & Zanker, 2022). Though disheartening that so few responses gravitated toward “benefit narratives,” recognizing cultural resources and assets that migrants bring, students also made efforts to go beyond the terms of the question to empathize with Venezuelans forced to leave their home country, only to encounter individual and systemic discrimination in Colombia.

Highly xenophobic views are in the minority, though these voices may have disproportionate impact on classroom dynamics, enforcing feelings of unwelcome toward Venezuelan students and further supporting discriminatory views amongst Colombian classmates. Given evidence that

anti-migrant sentiments increased in the years following this study, during the onset of COVID (Esipova et al., 2020; Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 2020), we can see the groundwork for these more emboldened strands of xenophobia in students' associations with migrants as contaminants and carriers of diseases.

Intense feelings of state abandonment arose in tandem with nationalist sentiments. These tensions are echoed throughout responses, as students juxtaposed the state's neglect of Colombian citizens with what they perceived as rights and privileges offered to Venezuelan migrants. The "scarcity mindset," "the tendency to view resources as a zero-sum game, whereby generosity for newcomers means less for natives" (Banulescu-Bogdan, 2022, p. 15) has an implicitly nativist frame. Yet what underlies this reveals more complicated emotions, tied up with local inequities and grievances linked to decades of armed conflict and displacement. In most cases, historical grievances are not personalized in students' articulations; rather, they are projected onto more vulnerable social groups such as Indigenous, rural communities and regions impacted more directly by the long history of armed conflict. Feelings that the state has not adequately dealt with domestic inequalities, including those rooted in and exacerbated by violent conflict, added to perceptions that Colombia was insufficiently stable to host such large numbers of migrants, and that migrants were destabilizing an already fragile environment and peace process. It is possible that the prevalence of public protests and visibility of national peace negotiations and transitional justice processes (and their critics) influenced students' views and lent further support for Colombia's need to resolve domestic tensions first and foremost.

There are glimmers of hope in that young people are trying to resist harmful discourses about Venezuelans, including from those in positions of power such as the Bogotá mayor, Claudia López (Torrado, 2021). Some students are trying to flip the script, casting escalating xenophobia as the critical concern to be addressed, rather than locating the "problem" in Venezuelans' transborder movement. In some cases, students are actively calling out xenophobia as discordant with public narratives of Colombia's welcoming humanitarian response. Responses also illustrate that some Colombian students interpret their choice to empathize as a deliberate way of countering dominant discourses. In a few cases, students bravely admitted grappling with feelings of xenophobia themselves. Some even report shifts in their attitudes over time, from less to more tolerant.

Students' recognition of complexity and heterogeneity within the Venezuelan migrant community, as well as their efforts to put individual instances of crime in conversation with structural discrimination and legal constraints on income-earning opportunities for Venezuelans in Colombia indicate that there are pedagogical openings that can be leveraged to build both greater understanding and empathy. Educational research has shown that inviting migrant students to consider their transnational identities and experiences can offer powerful entry points into collective learning and poignant critiques of democratic citizenship (Dyrness & Abu El-Haj, 2020; Dyrness & Sepúlveda, 2020; Myers & Zaman, 2009). Though some teachers made efforts to hang the Venezuelan flag in their classrooms as a symbolic gesture of welcome and recognition of Venezuelan students in their school, no teachers reported discussing Venezuelan migration in the context of curriculum. For the most part, teachers did not view this subject as relevant, despite what these data confirm as overwhelming student interest. Meanwhile, differing views of the history of transborder movement shaped distinct interpretations of what Colombians and Venezuelans owed one another, and to what extent they lived up to neighborly relations. These openings can build on empirical insights from studies demonstrating that language, classifications, and a deeper understanding of the drivers of displacement influence attitudes toward migrants (Hoewe et al., 2022; Kotzur et al., 2017; Petroula & Zembylas, 2019).

This survey was distributed at a particular moment in time, which has both advantages and limitations. One advantage is the snapshot offered by these data in a pre-COVID moment, and during a political context in which anxieties about Colombia's national peace process intersected with widening anti-immigrant sentiment. The vast majority of scholarship focused on public

attitudes toward refugees and migrants is situated in the Global North (Thisted Dinesen & Frederik Hjorth, 2020), overlooking low- and middle-income contexts, despite that most of the world's displaced populations cross borders into neighboring contexts in the Global South (UNHCR, 2023). For most part, young people are not included in these public opinion polls, a unique contribution of this study.

This work generates questions about whether xenophobic views are more or less likely to occur in schools where Venezuelans are enrolled, the conditions under which anti-migrant attitudes are externalized, and the role of curriculum and open dialogue in modifying student's attitudes over time. These remain open questions that future research should explore, particularly given that educational institutions emerged as a contentious site of integration in public opinion surveys amongst Colombian adults and a source of tension amongst students responding to our survey. Studies of migrants' educational experiences in contexts hosting large numbers of displaced populations emphasize that the structures and quality of school-based interactions matter (Bartlett, 2015). Though we cannot conclude from this evidence that anti-migrant sentiments are activated in school spaces or expressed as physical or verbal abuse, it seems likely that Venezuelan students are navigating high levels of discrimination daily, and that xenophobic discourses and actions may manifest in school spaces. Left uninterrupted, these views could contribute to school environments that are overtly hostile to Venezuelan migrants, resulting in further exclusions from educational and other community-building opportunities while in exile. On the other hand, schools could mitigate against anti-immigrant attitudes, engage in open dialogue about global migration and national borders, and create connections across diverse identity groups.

Funding

This work was supported by the University of Michigan-Weiser Center for Emerging Democracies, Spencer Foundation, Grant No. 201900112.

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