

The Prodigal Child Returns? Attitudes Towards Return Migration in a Developing Economy

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Abstract

Data estimates suggest that up to half of all migrants return to the country of origin within 5 years of leaving. Return migration is known to be a boon for the local economy and a catalyst for political reform. However, these effects are conditional on successful reintegration, which is dependent on the preferences of non-migrants. What causes negative attitudes towards return migration, given its significant potential economic benefits? I argue that non-migrants are concerned about both the economic and political competition of returnees. Non-migrants prefer to welcome back migrants who can bring back home financial capital and employment, but will oppose competitors on the job market when unemployment is high. Furthermore, non-migrants are concerned about the potential role of return migrants as norm entrepreneurs. I test my hypotheses with a conjoint survey experiment conducted in Colombia, as well as an analysis of the 2016 peace referendum.

Keywords: *return migration, public opinion, development, Colombian peace process*

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1 Introduction

Migration is arguably the most politically charged component of contemporary globalization, and it has become an increasingly important facet of the foreign policies of both democratic and authoritarian states (Gamlen 2019; Graham 2019; Miller and Peters 2020). Diasporas have helped their home countries access global finance through remittances, and have helped usher in democratic reform in many developing countries (Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps 2016). However, migration is often a temporary event for individuals. Data estimates suggest that up to 50% of migrants return to their country of origin within 5 years of migrating (Wahba 2014), a number which grows even further when taking into account labor migrants specifically (Bijwaard, Schluter and Wahba 2014; van Stiphout-Kramer et al. 2023). Another recent empirical study suggests that 1 in every 4 migration events is an instance of return (Azose and Raftery 2019). Even in the context of ongoing conflict, migrants abroad often choose to return home, for example in the case of the ongoing war in Ukraine.

In general return migration is associated with strong positive sociotropic effects, aiding local economic development (Bucheli and Fontenla 2022), increasing demands for government accountability (Batista and Vicente 2011), and depressing criminal violence (Bucheli, Fontenla and Waddell 2019). However, despite these positive sociotropic effects, firms in emerging economies have been found to discriminate against returnees (Abarcar 2016), and returning refugees often face violence from their compatriots when coming back home (Schwartz 2019). This limits the potential of return migration to lead to positive spillovers for society. What determines whether return migrants reintegrate successfully? Existing explanations focus on the role of conflict between returnees and non-migrants (International Organization for Migration 2016; Mueller and Kuschminder 2022). Therefore, understanding what determines the attitudes of stay-behind locals is an important step in understanding the conditions under which migrants can contribute meaningfully to their communities of origin after return, especially in the context of developing countries and post-conflict settings.

By now there exists a prolific literature on what determines attitudes towards immigrants in North America and Western Europe. Among the emphasized explanations are labor market competition and complementarities (Baccini, Lodefalk and Sabolová 2024; Dancygier and Donnelly 2013; Malhotra, Margalit and Mo 2013; Pardos-Prado and Xena 2019; Scheve and Slaughter 2001), sociotropic attitudes (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Jeannet 2018; Valentino

et al. 2019), and cultural anxiety effects (Clayton, Ferwerda and Horiuchi 2021; Goldstein and Peters 2014; Hedegaard and Larsen 2023; Semyonov et al. 2023; Ward 2019). However, the focus of these studies is almost exclusively on attitudes in the advanced economies of the OECD. Others have rightfully pointed out that a nativist backlash against immigrants can occur in emerging economies and non-OECD countries as well (Helms 2024; Singer and Quek 2022; York 2022). Yet, even these studies tend to focus on first-time immigrants: newcomers to the polity who are more often than not culturally distinct from the native population. While we have some indication of the attitudes of non-migrants to those who leave (Kustov 2022), we have little knowledge about the attitudes towards emigrants that make the decision to return to their country of origin. Given the importance of return migrants for their countries of origin, there is a pressing need to incorporate returnees in our understanding of what drives opposition to global human mobility.

Returnees¹ are not comparable to first-time migrants on several economic, political, and ethnic dimensions, and therefore we cannot assume that existing explanations for attitudes towards immigrants apply, even for those studies that examine attitudes in non-OECD economies (Kustov 2022; Singer and Quek 2022; York 2022). For example, while Colombians may perceive Venezuelan migrants to be politically to the left of them (Holland, Peters and Zhou 2024), we cannot assume that their perception of fellow Colombian nationals returning from Venezuela are similar. Furthermore, research in development economics shows that returnees tend to bring home savings and are more likely to start their own businesses (Abainza and Calfat 2018; Martin and Radu 2012; Wahba 2014). While concerns over immigrants in Western countries may indeed be due to concerns over labor market competition or fiscal burdens (Scheve and Slaughter 2001), return migrants are far less likely to be labor market competitors: instead they often bring employment to local communities by generating entrepreneurship (Hagan and Wassink 2020). Furthermore, while immigrants are ethnically and culturally distinct from natives and this may generate anxiety among native populations (Semyonov et al. 2023; Ward 2019), returnees are ethnically and culturally much closer to non-migrant compatriots.

If mainstream accounts of attitudes towards immigrants cannot account for backlash against returnees, what can? I argue that the preferences of non-migrants over reintegration are moderated by both economic and political characteristics of the returnees. Specifically, locals

¹In this paper, I choose to focus on individuals born in a particular country, who leave that country as adults and come back after a particular period spent abroad. This excludes individuals born in the country who left as children as well as second generation migrants who may contemplate return. This helps mitigate concerns about perceived cultural differences between returnees and natives.

will oppose not only prospective returnees that represent economic competitors (either as labor or as entrepreneurs), but also those that are likely to bring home political norms that go against locals' own preferences, while preferring returnees that are labor market complimentary and support the same political norms. Furthermore, locals will generally be more positive towards return migrants that bring home financial capital in the form of savings. I test these predictions using a conjoint experiment fielded in Colombia in the Spring of 2024. Colombia makes for a good testing ground of my hypotheses, as return migration is a salient political topic due to the legacy of the civil conflict and the reintegration of both rebels and refugees. Furthermore, many of those who have returned to Colombia since 2016 have become active in local advocacy groups and political organizations (Díez Jiménez, Cabrera Izquierdo and Márquez Guerra 2021). I also provide observational evidence that concerns over the economic and political effects of return migrants moderated votes for the 2016 Peace Referendum, providing some measure of external validity for my experimental results in a high-stakes, closely contested election.

This paper contributes to several research agendas in political science and political economy. First and foremost, it extends a small but growing group of studies that examines attitudes to different forms of migration outside of the OECD by focusing on a group of migrants not previously considered by the literature: returnees (Helms 2024; Holland, Peters and Zhou 2024; Kustov 2022; Singer and Quek 2022; York 2022). Economic and political conflict between migrants and non-migrants is not unique to post-industrial democracies, and understanding the conditions under which such conflict becomes more inflamed matters for the building of peaceful and prosperous societies.

Second, it adds to the literature on the political consequences of migration and return for developing countries by flipping the script and examining the roles and attitudes of non-migrant locals, and how they react to returnees who may have an effect on the political status quo (Barsbai et al. 2017; Batista and Vicente 2011; Bucheli and Fontenla 2022; Bucheli, Fontenla and Waddell 2019; Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps 2016; Chauvet and Mercier 2014; Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth 2023; Mercier 2016; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010; Spilimbergo 2009; Tuccio, Wahba and Hamdouch 2019; Vari-Lavoisier 2016). Return migrants can have far reaching effects on their home countries' politics and economy. Extending our understanding of these effects to attitudinal and behavioral changes among local non-migrants helps build a more thorough understanding of the economic and political consequences of human mobility.

Third, its empirical application speaks to the conditions under which the resolution

of civil conflict will be supported by citizens (Blair and Wright 2022; Branton et al. 2019; Esparza et al. 2020; Hazlett and Parente 2023; Kennard, Sonin and Wright 2021; Pechenkina and Gamboa 2022; Tellez 2019). Sustainable peace can only be achieved if the underlying causes of conflict do not flare up again between those who attempt to reintegrate, and those who never left. Understanding the drivers of conflict between return migrants and non-migrant locals therefore matters extensively for how we think about the politics of development, post-conflict peace building, and the political and economic role of the diaspora in the modern transnational state.

The theory and results presented in this paper should be of interest not only to political scientists and political economists studying migration, integration, and development due to its novel predictions and results, but also to public policy professionals. The International Organization for Migration has recently published work highlighting the possible positive developmental consequences of return migration, but also acknowledges that these positive externalities are moderated by successful reintegration upon return (International Organization for Migration 2022). My results suggest that public policy in migrant destination countries should emphasize migrant employment and savings schemes, and limit barriers to migrant transnational capital flows so that individuals can bring financial capital home with them upon return. Furthermore, countries of origin can help successful reintegration by incentivizing the reinvestment of money saved abroad to maximize positive spillovers.

2 The Consequences of Return Migration

Governments in developing countries are aware of the positive consequences of both emigration and return migration, and try to enact policies that maximize economic gains while balancing potentially detrimental political consequences for the regime (Graham 2019; Miller and Peters 2020; Peters and Miller 2022). Remittances sent from abroad by migrants can stabilize access to global capital due to their counter-cyclical nature, and return migrants possess valuable human capital that can be turned towards productive use. While working or studying abroad, migrants gain knowledge, and form networks that can help promote trade, foreign direct investment, and financial services (Leblang and Helms 2023). The idea of “diaspora politics” has gained ground in recent years to capture the various policies enacted by governments to keep in touch with their citizens (or the descendants of their citizens) living abroad (Gamlen 2019). Such policies are

usually enacted with the goal of incentivizing migrants to send home financial and human capital in order to aid with the economic growth of the home country. The return of migrants achieves both, as they bring home earned savings as well as skills and innovative ideas (Tuccio, Wahba and Hamdouch 2019; Wahba 2014). Broadly speaking, the literature separates the consequences of return migration into two categories: economic and political / normative.

2.1 Economic consequences

While refugees and family migrants occasionally return to the country of origin as well, the majority of those who return are labor migrants and students (van Stiphout-Kramer et al. 2023). The initial reason for emigration of these two groups is explicitly economic, and so it is no surprise that the bulk of returnee studies focuses on the economic consequences of return. This research has found that, compared to similar non-migrants, returnees are more likely to be entrepreneurs, a feature that is typically attributed to a combination of financial and human capital garnered abroad, both of which facilitate setting up a successful business venture of one's own (Martin and Radu 2012). In fact, some have shown that return migrants are not only more likely to be self-employed, their business ventures are also more likely to take on additional employees (Hagan and Wassink 2020, p.536). Furthermore, returnees raise demand for durable goods such as real estate, providing further jobs for local citizens in construction (Abainza and Calfat 2018). In general, economic research has shown that migrant return leads to local economic development, aiding not only employment and wages, but also health care access and school attendance, while lowering food poverty (Bucheli and Fontenla 2022). Return migration has also been found to lead to decreases in violent crime rates in Mexico (Bucheli, Fontenla and Waddell 2019). In summary, returnees not only improve the economic and social health of their own households, but also those of the communities they return to.

It is important to note that these benefits are conditional on migrants returning voluntarily and having been gainfully employed while abroad, and that not all returnees are equally successful in achieving their migration goals. While some migrants acquire savings and skills abroad, others are unable to find employment and return without financial or human capital. The existing literature typically distinguishes between return of failure, return of conservatism, return of retirement, and return of innovation (Cerese 1974; Kunuroglu, van de Vijver and Yagmur 2016). These categories vary according to their economic success in the destination country, the eventual goal of their migration journey, and their intended activity in the home country.

The last group – the innovators – may or may not have had an ex ante intent to return, but ended up integrating reasonably well abroad, acquiring not only financial capital, but also social and human capital, potentially even seeing themselves as agents of change for their country of origin. Paradoxically, they are also most likely to perceive cultural stigma in return due to their adoption of norms overseas (Mueller and Kuschminder 2022). This observation further emphasizes the need to disentangle the causal mechanisms that lead to returnee-local conflict. If the explanation was wholly economic, one would expect to see successful returnees perceive less stigma than non-successful returnees.

2.2 Political consequences

Return migration has political consequences as well as economic ones. Individuals educated or employed abroad usually pick up political norms in the host country, and can promote those norms upon their return to the country of origin (Gaikwad, Hanson and Toth 2023; Mercier 2016; Spilimbergo 2009). While foreign migrants can become politically active as well, they face high barriers to doing so, making returnees a far more likely case for gaining political influence after (return) migration. Case study evidence suggest that return migrants were instrumental in enabling regime change in Senegal (Vari-Lavoisier 2016), and Mali (Chauvet and Mercier 2014; Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps 2016). Even when they do not directly help usher in a new political era, they still help mobilize non-migrants and raise electoral turnout, suggesting that returnees' experience abroad matters not only for markets, but for states as well (Bucheli and Fontenla 2022; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010). Interestingly, these effects are driven by both grass-roots organizers demanding bottom-up accountability (Batista and Vicente 2011; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010), and elites imposing democratic reforms from above after being educated abroad (Mercier 2016; Spilimbergo 2009).

In explaining these effects, the literature relies on theories of norm transfer. While abroad, migrants are faced with political institutions, cultures, and norms different from their own. To some extent, migrants internalize these norms, and update their expectations of what they can legitimately expect from their home country government. As a result, returnees are more likely to demand accountability after they return. Batista and Vicente (2011) show, using a costly action experiment conducted in Cape Verde, that returnees are not only more likely to demand transparency and accountability from their representatives, their norms are transferred to their local communities. Furthermore, these effects are far stronger for returnees

who came back from more democratic countries. Similarly, Barsbai et al. (2017) find that Moldovan migrants returning from the EU decrease local support for the Communist Party, whereas returnees from Russia have no such effect. These results suggest that norms transfer is the mechanism through which return migration affects home country changes in political culture and institutions. As norm adoption is dependent on the political conditions in the host country, this literature emphasizes the conditional effects of return as a function of host country regime type and political liberties.

Some authors place an important caveat to findings that suggest the pro-democratic effect of return migration. Changing the norms of migrants to be more pro-democratic and favorable to social out-groups requires that they actually benefit from liberalism and democracy while abroad. Rother (2009) shows that emigrants from the Philippines update their preferences in favor of democracy only when their rights are not violated in practice, taking into account the level of democracy in the host country. Similarly, Fan et al. (2020) find that Chinese students in the United States become less in favor of democratic norms if they experience discrimination or harassment while abroad. These are valid concerns, and the results presented later in this article should be interpreted with this point in mind. For the purpose of this article, it is assumed that migrants residing in more democratic countries will adopt more democratic norms on average, a fair assumption given the findings in the literature (Barsbai et al. 2017; Maydom 2017; Mercier 2016; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010; Spilimbergo 2009; Tuccio, Wahba and Hamdouch 2019). Looking forward to my empirical strategy, willingness to become involved in politics and the initial migration destination are separately randomized in my experimental study in order to address any concerns one may still have. In the observational component of the study, political preferences of the diaspora are inferred from their actual voting record.

Despite these great studies, there is virtually no research about how citizens in countries of origin view the diaspora or prospective returnees, despite their potential to affect both the economy and broader political norms and values. Given that successful reintegration upon return strongly affects the development potential of return migration (International Organization for Migration 2022; Kunuroglu, van de Vijver and Yagmur 2016; Wahba 2014), and returnees are not universally embraced by their compatriots (Abarcar 2016; International Organization for Migration 2016; Mueller and Kuschminder 2022; Schwartz 2019), this question is not without import. In order to improve upon the development impact of return migration, it is important to understand how those who stayed behind respond to returnees, which kinds of returnees are

evaluated most positively, and by extension how governments in both host and origin societies can improve reintegration to help promote sustainable local economic development. I now move on to developing a theory that provides predictions for under which conditions returnees are welcomed or opposed by non-migrants.

3 Economic and Political Competition

There are good reasons to expect returnees to be fundamentally different from other types of migrants in ways that meaningfully affect the expectations of existing theories on public attitudes toward migration. Just as citizens in immigration countries have a sense of moral obligation to those already residing in the country (Margalit and Solodoch 2022), citizens in emigration countries may have a sense of moral obligation towards returnees due to a shared nationality. Alternatively, natives may be weary of returnees, as they represent new insights, norms, and values gained abroad. Natives may also see emigrants as “traitors” to the homeland, taking with them important resources for national development, and thus view their return negatively for sociotropic reasons (Kustov 2022). On the other hand, if returning migrants bring more resources home with them, they may be evaluated more positively. How are returnees different from other forms of migrants, and how might this affect how non-migrant locals react to their return?

First of all, because they return to their country of origin, anxieties pertaining to cultural, ethnic, or religious diversity are likely to be less acute. Existing studies on attitudes to immigrants emphasize the importance of perceptions of “cultural threat” for both Western (Semyonov et al. 2023; Valentino et al. 2019; Ward 2019), and non-Western countries (Singer and Quek 2022; York 2022). Return migrants, by definition, do not represent the same level of cultural threat to natives, as they speak the same language and grew up in the same communities prior to leaving the country. Indeed, as a subset of all migrants, those who return voluntarily are those who are more likely to have retained the habits and norms of their countries of origin, especially compared to migrants who decide to integrate in the host society and are not committed to return. Furthermore, return migrants are visually non-distinguishable from natives, and are thus less likely to prime xenophobic attitudes based on racism and ethnocentrism. Therefore, arguments centered around racial, ethnic, or cultural attitudes as explanations of attitudes to migrants are unlikely to be as persuasive for return migration as they are for immigration.

However, despite cultural similarities, economic considerations may still be cause opposition to return migrants. Kennard, Sonin and Wright (2021) show that those residing in regions more affected by negative economic shocks are less likely to support negotiating an end to civil war, and reintegrating rebel fighters. Other authors have shown that, even though returnees may decrease insurgent violence by raising reservation wages, they can also increase social conflict due to competition for scarce resources (Blair and Wright 2022). Thus, even when returnees are culturally and ethnically homogeneous and similar to locals, and their return is associated with a strong positive sociotropic effect – ending civil conflict – local economic conditions may still determine opposition to inward migration, even from co-ethnics. Locals can anticipate either labor market or price-demand shocks due to returnees and such anticipations moderate support for the reintegration of returnees, especially when local economic conditions are precarious.

Potential concerns over labor markets and resource competition notwithstanding, return migrants are, economically speaking, not equivalent to other types of migrants. Whereas most initial migrants (or for that matter returning insurgents as in Kennard et al., 2021) are likely job seekers, and thus potential labor market competitors to natives, returnees are not unambiguously a threat to the employment opportunities of non-migrants. Economic research has shown that, compared to those who do not migrate in the first place, returnees are more likely to be self-employed (Martin and Radu 2012; Wahba 2014). Returnees also tend to generate local employment by increased demand for construction jobs (Abainza and Calfat 2018). These types of return migrants are not labor market competitors: if anything they should increase demand for labor by generating employment opportunities and access to financial capital, tightening, rather than loosening local labor markets, and thus raising the wages of non-migrants, rather than competing for the same jobs. Stay-behind job seekers therefore likely support return migration, if they believe returnees will offer employment opportunities. By contrast, small local firms, who may not be able to compete with returnees' accumulated financial and human capital, will likely oppose returnee reintegration for fears of losing their market share.

Additionally, research has shown that natives may oppose migrants not due to direct labor market competition, but rather because of concerns over the higher fiscal burden potentially imposed by immigrants. In the context of immigration into North America and Western Europe, scholars have argued that opposition to immigration may run through cost-benefit expectations regarding social services and public finance, rather than labor markets (Cordero, Zagórski and Rama 2023; Scheve and Slaughter 2001). Because of ideas that immigrants make more use

of public services while contributing less to taxes,² people may oppose immigration due to concerns over public spending. Again, however, such concerns do not translate clearly to the context of return migration. Those returnees who managed to be meaningfully employed in the host country bring home savings (Martin and Radu 2012; Wahba 2014), and tend to improve investment in local public goods (Bucheli and Fontenla 2022). In general, this suggests that non-migrants will have a preference for “successful” returnees (Cerase 1974; Kunuroglu, van de Vijver and Yagmur 2016): those who return with financial capital that can offset potential greater demands on public services, or help provide for public goods through private investment.

Hypothesis 1. *Non-migrants prefer returnees who bring home financial capital in the form of savings.*

Hypothesis 2. *Non-migrants who are employed by others or seeking employment prefer returnees intending to start their own business, and non-migrants who are self-employed prefer returnees intending to become employed by others.*

The potential influence of return migrants is not merely economic, however. Returnees do not only bring home financial or human capital, but also political capital. A bevy of studies from the social remittances literature has shown that members of households with a returnee from a democratic country hold stronger pro-democratic attitudes than households with no returnees or households with returnees from autocratic countries (Batista and Vicente 2011; Barsbai et al. 2017; Maydom 2017; Pérez-Armendáriz and Crow 2010; Tuccio, Wahba and Hamdouch 2019). Furthermore, return migrants that adopted pro-democratic attitudes abroad are more likely than non-migrants to publicly advocate and work towards the liberalization of their polities, if they returned to an autocratic or flawed-democratic home country (Chauvet and Mercier 2014; Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps 2016; Vari-Lavoisier 2016).

Much like the economic effect of returnees can generate winners and losers on an economic level, so too can their political entrepreneurship generate winners and losers on a political level. Not every citizen living in an emerging economy holds pro-democratic attitudes, and support for such undemocratic events such as military coups remains fairly high across countries (Acevedo 2023; Konte 2016). For those that do not hold pro-democratic attitudes,

²The economic literature provides no consensus on whether the migrant welfare burden is real or not. For the present discussion, this is irrelevant: what matters is that many people *perceive* migrants to make a disproportionate use of public services while contributing less to public finances

returnees from democratic countries, who may engender political change, can be a threat to their preferred regime type and a favorable status quo. Furthermore, norm transfers could be less positive as well. For example, Tuccio and Wahba (2018) find that labor migrant return from more conservative countries to Jordan can lead to lower female empowerment in the household. Again, those who hold preferences that run against those that could be promoted by return migrants will oppose those returnees settling in their communities.

Hypothesis 3. *Non-migrants with (non-)democratic preferences prefer returnees from (non-)democratic countries.*

Hypothesis 4. *Non-migrants with (non-)democratic preferences prefer returnees who (do not) intend to become politically active, conditional on the migrant returning from a democratic country.*

These hypotheses capture various components of and reasons for return. In doing so, the theory captures many different types of return migrants, including returning labor migrants, refugees, and political exiles. Nevertheless, I do not include reason for emigration in my hypotheses for two reasons. First, while these categories are used extensively in public discourse, they are difficult to delineate clearly in academic work, as many refugees and political exiles also end up employed and in a position to gather savings, while labor migrants may have had secondary political reasons for emigration. To the extent that there are systematic differences between these groups, they are captured by the hypotheses and variables used in this study. Second, returning labor migrants and refugees likely do not label themselves explicitly as such when returning. The case of Colombia, discussed later in the paper, illustrates this dynamic well. In its *Colombia Nos Une* program (Colombia Unites Us), the government makes no distinction between returnees that were labor migrants or refugees, and so locals have only the impact of returnees after return to go on while former their attitudes and evaluations of them.

In summary, I argue that the determinants of preferences over return migrants are both economic and political: I argue that non-migrants are as much concerned with the potential economic impact of returnees (based on whether or not they bring home savings, as well as their prospective role in the local labor market) as with their prospective political impact as norm entrepreneurs (based on which country they return from and whether or not they intend to become involved in politics). Overall, those who do not migrate should prefer returnees who

provide labor market complementarities and who offset demand for public services by bringing private savings, as well as returnees who intend to promote political norms in line with their own preferences.

4 Returnees and the Colombian Civil War

I test my hypotheses in the context of Colombia, where two civil wars, *La Violencia* (1948–1958) and the so-called Colombian conflict (1986–2016), have caused large scale internal displacement and outward international migration. This makes it an excellent case to provide an initial test for my novel theory, as in the post conflict era (2016 onward) repatriation and returnee reparations have become a politically salient topic (Sánchez León 2021). Returning migrants are not just the passive target of politics, however, they also actively make claims on resources provided by the state after return. Local estimates suggest that about one in three returnees have become active in some sort of local political or advocacy group since returning (Díez Jiménez, Cabrera Izquierdo and Márquez Guerra 2021, p.201). The political facets of return migration makes Colombia a good first test of my theory.

During *La Violencia*, Liberal and Conservative communities segregated spatially in response to the violence, as members of both groups were targeted and discriminated against by the other (Steele 2017, p.69). Indeed, even where Liberals wanted to return to their communities of origin, their ability to do so was often hampered by their political affiliation: local Conservative rulers demanded Liberals openly change their political affiliation or be driven off (Steele 2017, pp.70–71). During the second civil war, displaced communities and individuals were those with high levels of social capital and political organization, as they were deliberately targeted by insurgents and counter-insurgents (Steele 2017). This matters because it means the hypothesis that non-migrants prefer or oppose returnees who intend to become politically active is both testable and mirrors the political reality of Colombia. The idea that returnees will organize politically is believable in this context, because their penchant for organization is what led to them being targeted for forced displacement in the first place. The empirical record supports this assertion (Díez Jiménez, Cabrera Izquierdo and Márquez Guerra 2021).

After a first referendum on a peace deal between several armed groups and the Colombian government narrowly failed to get majority support on October 2, 2016, the Congress of Colombia ratified a revised peace deal in November of the same year. Article 5.1.3.5 of the agreement

includes provisions for the return of displaced persons.³ Far from being empty rhetoric, existing findings emphasize that government officials are indeed more responsive to victims of the conflict than they are to regular citizens (Barceló and Vela Barón 2024). Interestingly, the Colombian diaspora was heavily involved in advocating for the peace process (Bermudez 2011), suggesting that their political preferences aligned with those of the incumbent President Santos. During the Referendum, expatriate Colombians overwhelmingly supported the Peace Deal, although there were some exceptions to this rule, most notably Colombians living in the United States.

Given the history of *La Violencia* and the politically targeted nature of the displacements in the more recent conflict (Steele 2017), negotiating the return and reparations for IDPs and refugees has been fraught with conflict over how many can return, how their claims to land should be resolved, and how many reparations are appropriate, especially in locales where largely conservative landowners have an economic stake in preventing redistribution (Sánchez León 2021). Given these concerns about both the economic and political impact of returnees on local communities, Colombia makes for a good case for the testing of my hypotheses. Returnees have been politicized through the peace process, and emigration patterns hold a particularly political connotation due to *La Violencia*.

5 Conjoint Experimental Design

I conduct a conjoint experiment to test my hypotheses. I designed and fielded a original survey fielded in Colombia during February and March of 2024. I recruited 1,572 respondents⁴ from a panel maintained by the research firm Netquest, which has a strong track record of facilitating survey research in Latin America (Zhirkov and Smilan-Goldstein 2023). I used quota sampling to achieve a panel that matched the Colombian population in the breakdown of gender, age, and socio-economic status. Prior to completing the experimental tasks, respondents answered several questions regarding their political opinions, current labor market status, and migration background.⁵

Because there are divergent characteristics of immigrants, each of which may determine

³A full English translation of the agreement is available through the Peace Agreements Database of the University of Edinburgh: <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/1845>, last retrieved the 10th of February, 2024. The full text of Article 5.1.3.5 is provided in the appendix.

⁴The small deviation with the pre-registered sample size is due to an issue with the stopping rule when implementing the survey. The panel remains a random sample, and remains balanced on the main variables of interest.

⁵The research was approved by the author's IRB under protocol IRB-SBS #6356. An anonymized version of the study's preregistration can be found at https://osf.io/esm5f/?view_only=112ea2970c674d25a049d61c1931368b

preferences of readmission among locals (potentially conditional on characteristics of the locals), the most obvious methodological approach to this problem would be the conjoint experimental approach, which has been widely used in existing studies of attitudes towards migrants (Clayton, Ferwerda and Horiuchi 2021; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Hedegaard and Larsen 2023). The conjoint design allows the researcher to test competing hypotheses: are attitudes predominantly about whether returnees bring home savings, their prospective political impact due to norm entrepreneurship, or their anticipated effect upon the local labor market? The conjoint method allows for the generation of comparable treatment effects across various competing dimensions. Furthermore, the conjoint method helps mitigate social desirability bias compared to standard survey experiments (Horiuchi, Markovich and Yamamoto 2022), which matters for a study that asks respondents about a potentially sensitive subject matter.

My conjoint experiment is set up as follows. After filling out a brief battery of questions looking to establish the political and economic preferences of respondents, as well as their baseline attitudes towards policies facilitating return as stipulated by Article 5.1.3.5 of the Peace Agreement, each respondent is shown two profiles of potential returnees, and then asked who they would prefer to see move into their community: the so-called forced choice design. Respondents are also asked to respond to a 10 point ordinal scale indicating their overall willingness to welcome the prospective returnee into their community. As in the majority of the literature on conjoint experiments and migration preferences (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015; Zhirkov and Smilan-Goldstein 2023), I take as my main unit of analysis the profile, and as my main outcome whether or not that profile was selected as the preferable one by the respondent. Each respondent evaluated six pairs of profiles, meaning the total number of observations is $1,572 \times 2 \times 6 = 18,864$. I provide several robustness checks using the profile score as the outcome variable in the replication materials. Those robustness checks verify the results of the primary experimental analysis

Each returnee profile has four attribute values, which are independently randomized. These variables, and their potential values, are listed in Table 1. Hypotheses 1 and 2 are tested by the first two (economic) variables, and Hypotheses 3 and 4 are tested by the latter two (political) variables. In the experiment, the order of variables is randomized to account for the chance that the first attribute observed could consistently outperform the other variables. However, each respondent still views all their own profiles in the same order. To account for differences between respondents, I cluster standard errors at the respondent level, as is common

practice for the conjoint method (Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015).

Table 1: Experimental Variables and Potential Values

Variable Name	Potential Values
Savings	Has savings earned abroad Has no savings
Employment	Intends to start their own business Intends to work for someone else
Country	United States Venezuela
Politics	Wants to get involved in politics Does not want to get involved in politics

The choice for having the United States and Venezuela as potential values for the Country variable stems from both the theoretical literature and the empirical situation in Colombia. Theoretically, the literature emphasizes that returnees from democratic countries tend to bring home pro-democratic norms, and that returnees from non-democratic countries may bring home non-democratic norms (Barsbai et al. 2017). Out of all countries with Colombian migrants, the United States and Venezuela host the most Colombians out of democratic and authoritarian countries respectively.⁶ I include a pretest to establish a baseline for preferences by asking respondents whether they believe the government should facilitate the return of Colombian expatriates. Through the original survey, I also collect data on respondents' type of residence (urban or rural), their political leanings, their employment status, whether they have ever lived outside of Colombia themselves or whether they have family currently living abroad, as well as their preference for democracy. These variables can be used to predict baseline preferences for returnees, as well as mediators of the experimental conditions. In the main body of the article, I focus only on those interactions that were preregistered. The full text of the survey preamble – in both English and Spanish – and conjoint experiment task – in Spanish – are provided in the online appendix.

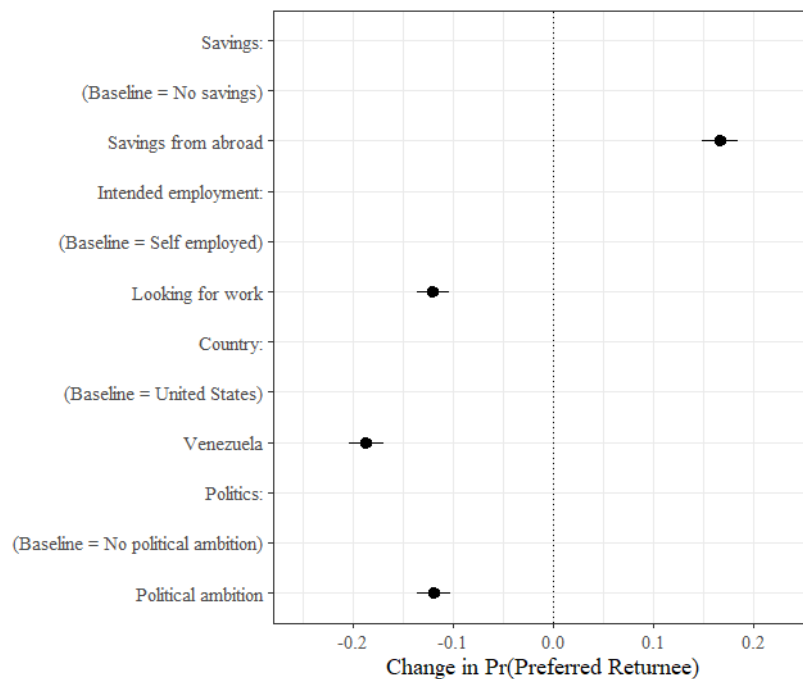
5.1 Results

The results of the unconditional effects of the variables from Table 1 are shown graphically in Figure 1. Results presented are based on the forced choice design, but are robust to using

⁶While concerns may exist that American and Venezuelan returnees do not bring home the same amount of financial capital due to vastly different levels of economic development and unemployment, the separate randomization of the Savings variable should account for this. Nevertheless, in my replication materials I show that the effect of the Savings variable does not depend on the Country variable, which is what one would see if respondents believe returnees from Venezuela bring home fewer savings than returnees from the United States.

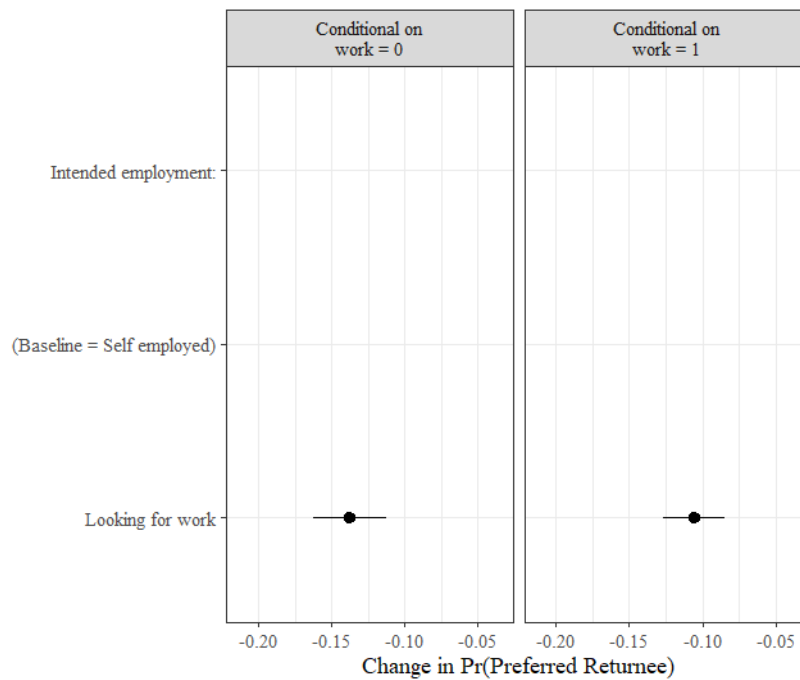
ratings as the outcome instead, as shown in the replication materials. Respondents have a strong preference for returnees with savings, and returnees intending to become self-employed. Conversely, respondents strongly disfavored returnees coming from Venezuela, as well as returnees who reported a desire to become politically active. The results of the savings variable provide strong support for Hypothesis 1, as savings earned abroad were a strong predictor of support for returnees. Regarding the next Hypothesis, I code as 1 any respondent who is employed by a private firm or the state, or who is actively seeking employment, and 0 otherwise. Results are shown graphically in Figure 2. I find no statistically significant difference between the two subgroups in the AMCE of the Employment variable. Against my expectations, those who are self-employed are as opposed to job seekers as are those who are job seekers themselves.

Figure 1: Unconditional AMCEs



While not part of this study's preregistration, the existing literature provides a possible explanation for the results of Figure 2. Research by Hainmueller and Hopkins (2015) suggests that individuals evaluate migrants not based on concerns over competition rooted in factor-endowment models, but rather through sociotropic attitudes. To the extent that locals view those who intend to become self-employed positively for sociotropic reasons, i.e. based on their contribution to the community overall, this could account for the results in Figure 2. However, this potential explanation was not preregistered, nor was the conjoint experiment designed to account for it. Future research should explicitly design experimental conditions meant to test for sociotropic economic evaluations of returnees.

Figure 2: Employment AMCE conditional on respondent’s employment status



Regarding the political variables, I code as 1 any respondent who reports preferring democracy at any and all times, 0 otherwise.⁷ Results are shown graphically in Figure 3. I find that those who prefer democracy have a stronger preference for returnees from the United States vis-à-vis returnees from Venezuela. Therefore Hypothesis 3 is backed up by the experimental results from my sample. However, the triple interaction between country of return, political ambitions, and respondent preferences for democracy are statistically insignificant, despite the effect being in the hypothesized direction. I am thus unable to find full support for Hypothesis 4. Overall, the experimental results provide strong support for Hypotheses 1 and 3, but not for Hypotheses 2 and 4.

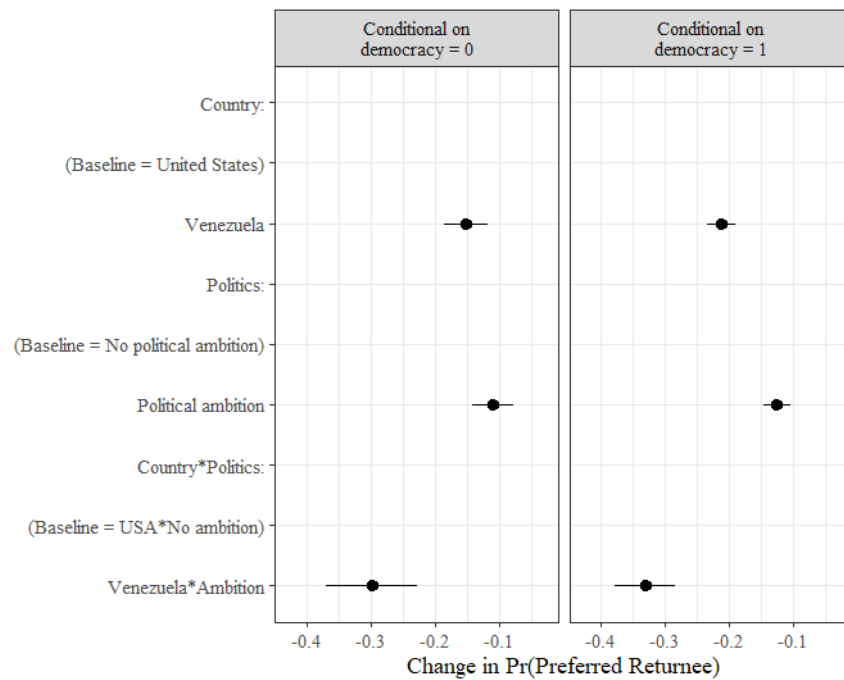
6 Observational Research Design

The experimental results presented above provide support for some of my hypotheses. However, are these stated preferences reflective of actual political behavior? In order to address this important issue, I provide a supplementary analysis based on the results of the 2016 referendum on the Colombian peace agreement.⁸ The 2016 referendum, its defeat, and subsequent amended adoption by the Colombian Congress, mark arguably the single most important political event

⁷The 0-category includes people who responded “In some circumstances, a strong non-democratic government may be preferable” or “For someone like me, it does not matter what kind of government we have”.

⁸Unlike the experimental study, the observational component of the paper was not preregistered.

Figure 3: Political AMCEs conditional on respondent's attitude to democracy



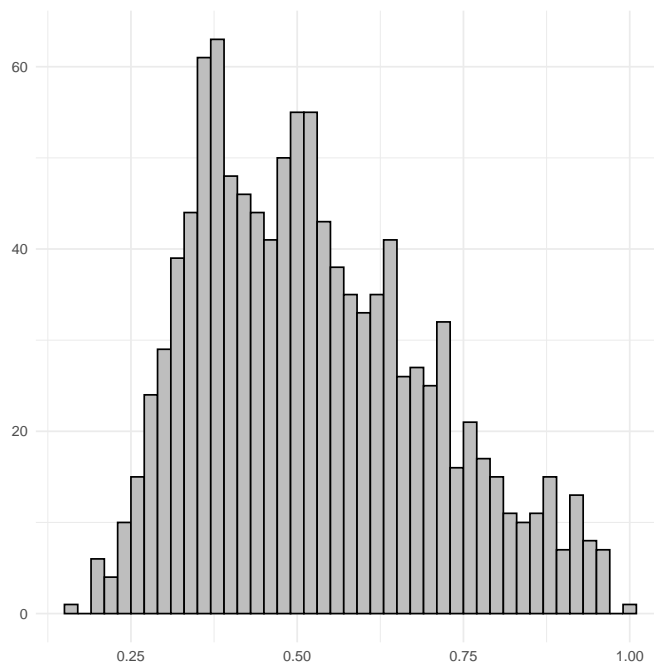
in Colombia this millennium. If the implications of my theory – that is to say, if the potential local effect of returnees matters for political behavior – prove to have predictive power vis-à-vis its outcome, it can be said to matter for actual political outcomes broadly conceived.

Previous explanations for support for the referendum focus on two variables: exposure to violence during the conflict and trust in and support for the Santos administration, which brokered the agreement (Branton et al. 2019; Esparza et al. 2020; Pechenkina and Gamboa 2022; Tellez 2019). Both are argued to increase support for peace, however, statistical support for the effect of political affiliation is more robust than that of exposure to violence (Hazlett and Parente 2023). Zooming in on specific arrangements in the agreement, Matanock and Garbiras-Díaz (2018) find that aspects of the deal that granted concessions and political power to former rebels were particularly unpopular, and even more so if they were endorsed by ex-insurgents. The role of displacement and migrant return is generally not considered among the relevant explanatory factors. Furthermore, the economic and redistributive effects of peace are left out of explanations for referendum support. Considering concerns over economic competition during peace building and post-conflict recovery have been shown to be important causes of opposition to peace (Blair and Wright 2022; Kennard, Sonin and Wright 2021), this omission is concerning, and my contribution is a first step to rectifying this lacuna.

Within this setting, one observable implication of my theory is that regions where more individuals were displaced during the conflict should have lower support for the peace agreement,

as those who were not displaced are concerned about having to compete in loose labor markets or share scarce land resources. Compared to returning labor migrants, returning refugees are less likely to have access to earned savings. The hypothesized effect of net refugee flows should be conditional on the actual state of the labor market: where unemployment is low voters have little reason to be concerned about the level of competition that returnees may present. Thus, I test whether the interaction between net refugee flows and municipal employment indicates that voters oppose potential returnees when labor markets are loose. I use municipal level voting results of the referendum, where the YES share of all valid YES and NO votes is the outcome of interest. There is considerable variation to explore in this outcome: at the municipal level, the lowest YES vote share is 16.2% in the municipality of *Vetas*, whereas the highest is 100% in *Morichal Nuevo*. A histogram of the distribution of this outcome at the municipal level is shown in Figure 4.

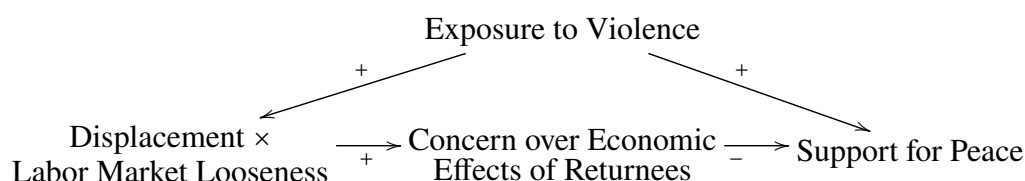
Figure 4: Distribution of yes vote share (municipalities)



In order to address the potential for omitted variable bias due to the relationship between exposure to violence and displacement, I propose and test the directed acyclic causal graph shown in Figure 5. According to the mechanisms proposed in Figure 5, conditional on controlling for a region's exposure to wartime violence, the marginal effect of displacement combined with loose labor markets, i.e. higher levels of potential labor market competition by returnees, on support for the peace deal ought to be negative. Data on emigration and violence come from

the municipal data of the Economics Faculty of the University of the Andes (CEDE).⁹ I use total number of FARC attacks, homicides, and subversive actions over the course of the conflict as controls for wartime violence. Results are robust to the inclusion of alternative forms of violence and violence perpetrated by other actors, as shown in the replication materials. I also include support for president Santos as an additional control, given that it has been by far the most influential explanation for the referendum results (Hazlett and Parente 2023).¹⁰

Figure 5: Causal graph of the 2016 Colombian peace referendum



Unfortunately, exact data on municipal unemployment levels in 2016 are not available even in the CEDE municipal data. Local unemployment at the time of the referendum would have been the best indicator for likely concerns over labor market competition due to returnees. Instead, I rely on the 23 departmental capitals for which unemployment data is available. While data on unemployment for all municipalities in 2016 is unavailable, the Colombian statistics office, DANE, does publish moving trimester unemployment data for the 23 departmental capitals. Thus, I test for the interactive effect of unemployment with net normalized refugee flows directly for this more limited panel, using unemployment data that runs from July to September 2016 (the referendum took place October 2, 2016).

For the second observable implication of my theory, Hypotheses 3 and 4 suggest that the effect of potential returnees on support for peace should also be conditional on the political characteristics of the municipality. My theory implies that, where return migrants and locals have similar political preferences, support for return and reintegration should be higher. By contrast, in municipalities where locals have opposing viewpoints to potential returnees, there ought to be greater opposition to peace. I test this by including an interaction between net normalized refugee flows and support for the incumbent President Santos, whose peace proposal garnered considerable support from the Colombian diaspora (Bermudez 2011). Since the diaspora supported Santos' peace deal, we should expect those municipalities where support for Santos was greater to be less concerned with potential returnees than municipalities where

⁹<https://datoscede.uniandes.edu.co/es/>

¹⁰In the online appendix, I estimate models excluding support for Santos due to its potential role as a post-treatment collider. Results are robust to the exclusion of this variable.

support for Santos was lower, and therefore that the interaction between support for Santos and refugee flows should be a significant predictor in the model. This model requires us to assume that local voters had some level of awareness of the preferences of potential returnees. While possibly problematic in other settings, the unique circumstances of the politically targeted nature of displacement during the conflict makes this assumption plausible in the Colombian context (Steele 2017).

6.1 Results

I run a total of three models. The first model contains as covariates the net number of refugees (inward minus outward) between 1993 and 2015 normalized by the 2016 municipal population, the number of FARC attacks between 1993 and 2010, the number of FARC homicide victims between 2003 and 2013, the total number of subversive actions between 2003 and 2015, and the support for President Santos in the runoff of the 2014 Presidential Election. The second model has all the same covariates as the first, but adds an interaction between the normalized refugee variable and support for President Santos. The third model directly tests for the interactive effect of unemployment, but only for the 23 departmental capital cities, which are the only municipal units for which unemployment data is available. All models are estimated using ordinary least squares regression.

Since refugees are measured by subtracting outward refugee flows from inward refugee flows, greater potential numbers of returnees are indicated by negative numbers on the refugee variables. If the labor market competition story is correct, the coefficient should be positive when unemployment is high. Conditional on high levels of concern about labor market looseness, measured by unemployment, lower values of the net normalized refugee variable (indicating greater out-migration during the conflict and therefore greater numbers of potential returnees with peace) should be associated with lower support for peace, meaning the coefficient should be positive (or at least less negative than under conditions of no labor market concern). If the political competition story is correct, the coefficient of net normalized refugee flows should be negative when support for Santos is high, indicating that there is more openness to returnees when support for President Santos is higher.

As can be seen in Table 2, higher levels of refugees leaving the municipality are associated with higher levels of support for the peace deal, even keeping constant support for President Santos and exposure to violence perpetrated by the FARC. However, this effect is mediated by the

Table 2: Potential returnees and support for peace in the 2016 referendum

	Support for peace		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Net norm. refugees	-0.076*** (0.009)	-0.020 (0.023)	-2.039** (0.517)
Support for Santos	0.006*** (0.0001)	0.006*** (0.0002)	0.005*** (0.001)
Unemployment			-0.035** (0.010)
Refugees × Santos		-0.001** (0.0004)	
Refugees × unemployment			0.195*** (0.045)
FARC attacks	-0.002*** (0.0004)	-0.002*** (0.0004)	-0.001 (0.001)
FARC homicides	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.001 (0.002)	0.003 (0.005)
Subversive actions	0.001* (0.0005)	0.001* (0.0005)	0.003 (0.003)
Constant	0.218*** (0.008)	0.227*** (0.009)	0.630*** (0.132)
N	1,122	1,122	23
R ²	0.661	0.663	0.834
Adjusted R ²	0.660	0.661	0.757

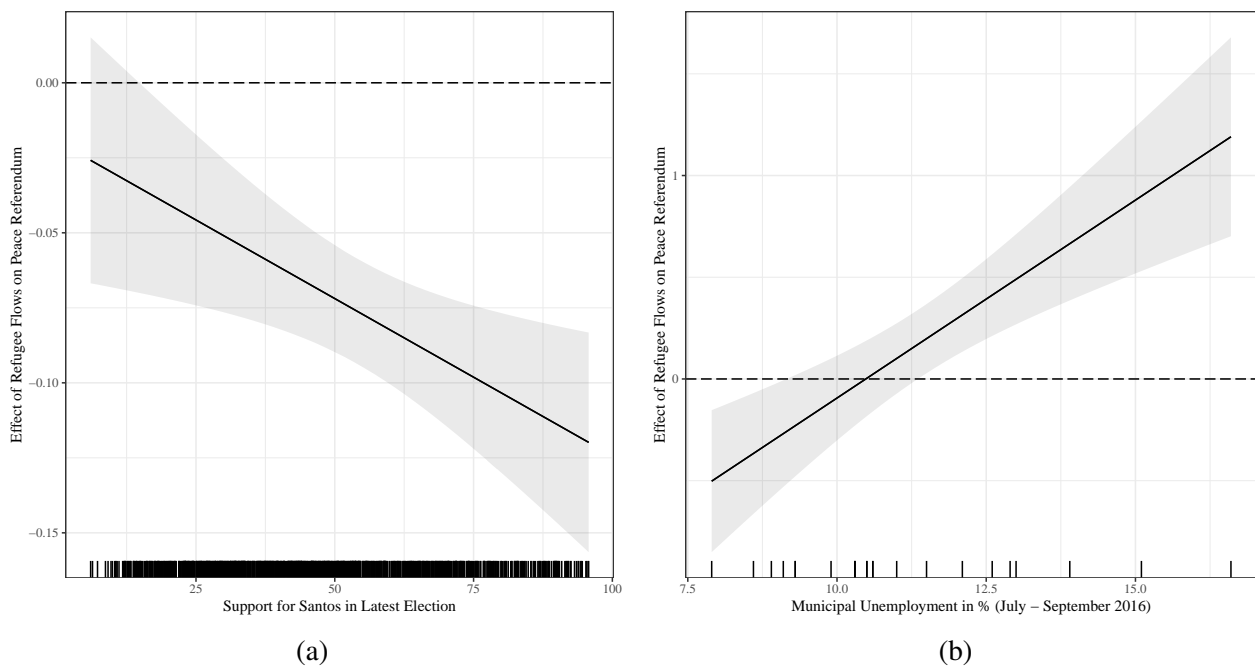
*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

potential of returnees to compete on loose labor markets, as well as support for Santos. Where voters face high levels of unemployment, higher levels of potential returnees are associated not with higher levels of support, but rather with lower levels of support, as predicted by my theory. Furthermore, in municipalities where support for Santos is low, the effect of refugee flows on peace practically disappears, also as predicted. All results are robust to alternative controls for insurgent violence, and decomposing net flows into normalized inward and outward refugee flows, as shown in the replication materials

Figure 6 visualizes the effects of the interactive variables on support for peace. Where unemployment is below 11%, the effect of net refugee flows is negative, meaning potential returnees are associated with greater support for peace. Above that mark, the dynamic shifts, and potential returnees become associated with lower support for peace. The positive sign and significance of the interaction underscores the importance of my hypotheses on attitudes toward return migration, not only in the abstract setting of a survey experiment, but also in the real

world application of the 2016 Colombian peace referendum. Similarly, the interaction between support for Santos and net normalized refugee flows emphasize that this is not only an economic process, but a political one as well. I acknowledge that this is a far more crude test of my hypotheses than the preceding conjoint experiment, which was able to identify attitudinal effects conditional on individual economic and political covariates. Nevertheless, these results help illustrate the applicability of the proposed causal mechanisms in a setting with direct material consequences for political actors.

Figure 6: Marginal effect of refugee outflows (1993–2015) on support for peace



7 Conclusion

In this paper, I have presented a new theory about attitudes to immigration by looking at a class of migrants previously not considered by the literature: returnees. Given that a large part of migrants return home after several years (Wahba 2014; van Stiphout-Kramer et al. 2023), and that the developmental prospects of communities are maximized when reintegration goes smoothly (Mueller and Kuschminder 2022), the findings presented here are important for both academic and practical purposes. On the one hand, it extends our understanding of the political-economic causes of opposition to migration in emerging economies, contributing to a small but growing literature (Helms 2024; Holland, Peters and Zhou 2024; Kustov 2022; Singer and Quek 2022; York 2022). On the other, these results may help governments and civil society in

emerging economies tailor their return policies in order to maximize successful reintegration and development policies.

While the focus of this paper has been on Colombia, its results are generalizable to other settings. High volumes of returnees that are active as both economic and political entrepreneurs are common to many other developing countries. For example, in recent years return migration from the United States to Mexico was about 75% of the size of immigration from Mexico to the USA, and while flows from Mexico to the United States have decreased since the 1990s, flows from the United States to Mexico have increased over the same time frame (Azose and Raftery 2019, p.119). Some of those who return become engaged in local and national politics, inspired by their own experience of emigration (Schwartz 2008). Similar dynamics have been observed in Sub-Saharan Africa, where returnees also became politically active to try to change the status quo (Chauvet and Mercier 2014; Chauvet, Gubert and Mesplé-Somps 2016; Vari-Lavoisier 2016). Though empirical verification is needed, these studies lend credence to the position that my theory will have explanatory power outside of Colombia.

The results of my novel experiment imply that governments in migrant home and host countries should cooperate to facilitate the safe and effective transfer of migrant savings to improve local development and returnee acceptance. This could take the form of savings and retirement transfer schemes, as well as international banking cooperation to improve capital mobility for migrant workers. Furthermore, since non-migrants prefer returnees who intend to be entrepreneurs in their neighborhoods, my results also suggest that migrant sending communities should work to lower barriers to returnees starting their own small businesses. The implications of my study matter for academia as well. Multiple studies have noted the potential positive effects of returnees for local politics and democratic reform (Bucheli and Fontenla 2022; Chauvet and Mercier 2014; Tuccio, Wahba and Hamdouch 2019). The results of my conjoint experiment suggest that, such beneficial effects notwithstanding, non-migrants have an apprehensive view of returnees with political ambitions. Future studies should further unpack how and under what conditions such reservations can be ameliorated.

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A Peace agreement repatriation clause (highlights added)

5.1.3.5. Collective processes of return of displaced persons and reparations of victims abroad

In developing this Agreement and in the context of the conflict, the National Government will introduce specific collective territorial- and gender-based programs to return and relocate displaced persons on the one hand, and accompanied and assisted return plans for victims abroad on the other. The coordination of such plans will be strengthened at territorial level by other aspects of the Victim Reparation Policy, particularly collective reparation and land restitution programmes, and by implementation of the agreement “Towards a New Colombian Countryside: Comprehensive Rural Reform”, where applicable.

Measures will be taken accordingly to guarantee collective or individual returns and relocations in conditions of safety and dignity according to a voluntary approach involving the following elements:

- **Identification of territories:** return and relocation plans will prioritise areas in which the DPTFs are implemented and other areas in which collective reparation plans are developed and will be coordinated with land restitution processes.
- **Interinstitutional coordination:** return and relocation plans will be coordinated, where applicable, with the various plans and programmes agreed, particularly the DPTFs, rural housing and water plans, measures to provide access to land, income generation, boosting of the small-scale farmer economy and programmes to clear and decontaminate areas of APM, IED, UXO, or ERW, and with land restitution processes.
- **Security in territories for return:** in areas in which return and relocation plans are to be prioritised, the Government will set up the security measures necessary to guarantee life and personal integrity in communities, which will always participate in this process.
- **Strengthening of community advocates:** The Government will take the necessary measures to strengthen the community advocates (*defensores comunitarios*) programme, and in particular their functions of protection and promotion of human rights, so that they can effectively monitor the processes of land restitution, return and relocation of displaced persons and victims abroad, including refugees and exiles, which form part of these processes and can support and assist the victims in order to guarantee access to the institutional

services offered with regard to realisation of their rights.

The implementation of these processes of returns and relocations will require the cooperation of specialised and interdisciplinary teams, capable of ensuring the participatory process and use of local resources.

With regard to the large number of victims who had to leave the country as a consequence of different human rights violations and breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL) during the conflict, the National Government, in fulfillment of this Agreement, will strengthen the programme of recognition and reparation of victims abroad, including refugees and exiles victimised during the conflict, by means of the implementation of “supported and assisted return” plans. The assisted return will consist of promoting conditions to facilitate their return to the country and the construction of their life project, including decent reception conditions through the coordination of these plans with the specific institutional services offered, to progressively guarantee access to basic rights, decent employment, housing, health and education at all levels according to each person’s individual needs. Priority will be given to their relocation to the places they had to leave, respecting the wishes of the victim. The Government will adopt the necessary measures to coordinate these plans, where appropriate, with the different plans and programmes agreed, in particular the DPTFs.

All this is without prejudice to the different measures that, in an end-of-conflict scenario, have to be adopted to drive forward and promote the return of exiles and other Colombians who left the country because of the conflict.

B Conjoint information

B.1 Conjoint preamble (English)

Study Information Sheet

Study Title: Attitudes Towards Return Migration in Colombia

Protocol #: 6356

Please read this study information sheet carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of the study is to understand attitudes of Colombian citizens to fictional Colombian migrants currently residing abroad, who wish to return home.

What you will do in the study: You will take a survey in which you will answer questions about your employment status and political opinions, but your participation will be fully anonymous. No personalized information will be collected. You will then be shown six pairs of hypothetical return migrants, each with distinct characteristics. Please indicate which of the Colombian citizens living abroad you would most rather see return to your community. You can skip any question that makes you uncomfortable and you can stop the survey at any time.

Time required: The study will require about ten to fifteen minutes of your time.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks to this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us understand how Colombians living abroad who want to return can be best reintegrated into our society.

Confidentiality: The information that you give in the study will be anonymous. Your name and other information that could be used to identify you will not be collected or linked to the data.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. However, once your responses are submitted there is no way for them to be deleted since this study is anonymous.

How to withdraw from the study: If you want to withdraw from the study, you can close the browser. There is no penalty for withdrawing: you will still receive full payment for the study. Because the data are not connected to your identity, you cannot withdraw after you submit your data.

Payment: You will receive what the survey company normally pays you.

Using data beyond this study: The researcher would like to make the information collected in this study available to other researchers after the study is completed. The researcher will remove any identifying information (such as your name, contact information, etc.) connected to the information you provide. The researcher will share all the information collected in this study (not just your individual file) with other researchers for future research studies, including but not limited to replication of the researcher's work. The researcher will make the information available on a public website such as Dataverse. Researchers of future studies will not ask your permission for each new study. The other researcher will not have access to your name and other information that could potentially identify you nor will they attempt to identify you.

You may also report a concern about a study or ask questions about your rights as a research subject by contacting the Institutional Review Board listed below.

B.2 Conjoint preamble (Spanish)

Página electrónica de información del estudio

Título del estudio: Actitudes hacia la migración de retorno en Colombia

Protocolo #: 6356

Antes de decidir si participar o no en el estudio, lea atentamente esta hoja de información del estudio.

Propósito del estudio de investigación: El propósito del estudio es comprender las actitudes de los ciudadanos colombianos hacia los migrantes colombianos hipotéticos que actualmente residen en el exterior y que desean regresar a su país.

¿Qué harás en el estudio?: Realizará una encuesta en la que responderá preguntas sobre su situación laboral y sobre algunos temas políticos. Su participación será totalmente anónima y no se recopilará información personalizada. Luego, se le mostrarán seis pares de migrantes hipotéticos de retorno, cada uno con características diferentes. Deberá, entonces, indicar cuál

de esos dos ciudadanos colombianos hipotéticos que viven en el exterior preferiría que regresara a su comunidad. Tenga en cuenta que puedes omitir cualquier pregunta que le haga sentir incómodo y que puede detener la encuesta en cualquier momento.

Tiempo requerido: El estudio requerirá entre diez y quince minutos.

Riesgos: No se prevén riesgos para este estudio.

Beneficios: No habrá beneficios directos para usted por participar en este estudio de investigación. Sin embargo, el estudio puede ayudarnos a comprender cómo los colombianos que viven en el exterior y que desean regresar al país pueden reintegrarse de la mejor manera a nuestra sociedad.

Confidencialidad: La información que usted proporcione en el estudio será anónima. Su nombre y otra información que podría usarse para identificarlo no serán recopilados ni vinculados a los datos.

Participación voluntaria: Su participación en el estudio es completamente voluntaria.

Derecho a retirarse del estudio: Tiene derecho a retirarse del estudio en cualquier momento sin penalización. Sin embargo, una vez enviadas sus respuestas, no hay forma de eliminarlas ya que este estudio es anónimo.

¿Cómo retirarse del estudio?: Si desea retirarse del estudio, puede cerrar el navegador. No hay penalización por retirarse: aún recibirá el pago completo por el estudio. Debido a que los datos no están relacionados con su identidad, no puede retirarlos después de enviar sus datos.

Pago: Recibirá lo que normalmente le paga la empresa encuestadora.

Use de datos más allá de este estudio: Al investigador le gustaría que la información recopilada en este estudio esté disponible para otros investigadores una vez finalizado el estudio. El investigador eliminará cualquier información de identificación (como su nombre, información

de contacto, etc.) relacionada con la información que usted proporcione. El investigador compartirá toda la información recopilada en este estudio (no solo su archivo individual) con otros investigadores para futuros estudios de investigación, incluidos, entre otros, replicando este estudio. El investigador pondrá la información a disposición en un sitio web público como Data-verse. Los investigadores de estudios futuros no le pedirán permiso para cada nuevo estudio. El otro investigador no tendrá acceso a su nombre ni a otra información que pueda identificarlo ni intentará identificarlo.

También puede informar cualquier inquietud sobre un estudio o hacer preguntas sobre sus derechos como sujeto de investigación comunicándose con la Junta de Revisión Institucional que se detalla a continuación.

B.3 Choice task example (Spanish)

Figure A7: Conjoint choice task

Pregunta 1

Revise cuidadosamente las opciones que se detallan a continuación y luego responda las preguntas.

¿Cuál de estas opciones prefieres?

	Opción 1	Opción 2
Empleo previsto	Tiene la intención de iniciar su propio negocio	Tiene la intención de iniciar su propio negocio
País de retorno	Estados Unidos	Venezuela
Política	No quiere involucrarse en política	Quiere involucrarse en política
Ahorros	Tiene ahorros ganados en el extranjero	No tiene ahorros

Opción 1

Opción 2

Indique qué tan favorables considera ambas opciones.

Más favorable 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Más favorable

Opción 1

Opción 2

B.4 Ethical principles

The survey experiment and data collection were designed with the highest standards of ethical research in mind. Remuneration of respondents went through NetQuest, the owner of the online

panel used to recruit respondents. Netquest follows the European General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), placing it well beyond legally mandated American data protection standards. Respondents were quota sampled on age, gender, and socio-economic status to generate a diverse, representative sample of the Colombian population. In order to minimize the potential for trauma recollection in the context of the Colombian conflict, no reference to the Conflict, refugees, or victims was made at any point in the survey. Instead, the survey referenced “return migrants” broadly, in line with the approach that has been taken by the Colombian government itself. At no point during data collection was the true purpose of the experiment obfuscated, and the survey reiterated several times that the conjoint profiles viewed by individuals were entirely fictional. All laws of the Republic of Colombia were followed in the collection and analysis of the data.

B.5 Conjoint results (tables)

B.5.1 Unconditional model (Figure 1)

Table A3: AMCEs Figure 1

Change in Pr(Preferred Returnee)	
Savings	0.1665*** (0.0090)
Intent to work for others	-0.1197*** (0.0080)
Venezuela	-0.1864*** (0.0089)
Political ambition	-0.1188*** (0.0084)
<i>N</i>	18,864

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Number of respondents: 1,572

B.5.2 Model conditional on employment (Figure 2)

Table A4: Conditional AMCEs Figure 2

Change in Pr(Preferred Returnee) due to “Intent to work for others”	
Among labor market competitors (work = 1)	-0.1058*** (0.0106)
Among others (work = 0)	-0.1375*** (0.0128)
Difference	0.0317 (0.0166)
<i>N</i>	18,144

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Number of respondents: 1,512

B.5.3 Model conditional on democratic attitudes (Figure 3)

Table A5: Conditional AMCEs & ACIEs Figure 3

Change in Pr(Preferred Returnee) due to “Venezuela”	
Among respondents with pro-democratic attitudes (democracy = 1)	-0.2127*** (0.0113)
Among others (democracy = 0)	-0.1520*** (0.0172)
Difference	-0.0606** (0.02058)
Change in Pr(Preferred Returnee) due to “Political ambition”	
Among respondents with pro-democratic attitudes (democracy = 1)	-0.1256*** (0.0107)
Among others (democracy = 0)	-0.1102*** (0.0163)
Difference	-0.0154 (0.0195)
Change in Pr(Preferred Returnee) due to “Venezuela × Political ambition”	
Among respondents with pro-democratic attitudes (democracy = 1)	-0.3308*** (0.0242)
Among others (democracy = 0)	-0.2978*** (0.0359)
Difference	0.0431 (0.0330)
<i>N</i>	16,620

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Number of respondents: 1,385

B.6 Preregistration

Study Information

Hypotheses

The experimental component of the study tests the following hypotheses:

1. Non-migrants prefer returnees who bring home financial capital in the form of savings.
2. Non-migrants who are employed by others or seeking employment prefer returnees intending to start their own business, and non-migrants who are self-employed prefer returnees intending to become employed by others.
3. Non-migrants with (non-)democratic preferences prefer returnees from (non-)democratic countries.
4. Non-migrants with (non-)democratic preferences prefer returnees who (do not) intend to become politically active, conditional on the migrant returning from a democratic country.

Design Plan

Study type

Experiment - A researcher randomly assigns treatments to study subjects, this includes field or lab experiments. This is also known as an intervention experiment and includes randomized controlled trials.

Blinding

For studies that involve human subjects, they will not know the treatment group to which they have been assigned.

Personnel who interact directly with the study subjects (either human or non-human subjects) will not be aware of the assigned treatments. (Commonly known as “double blind”)

Is there any additional blinding in this study?

No response

Study design

I will test the hypotheses with a conjoint survey experiment on a sample representative of the adult Colombian population. Respondents will be presented with descriptions of pairs of hypothetical return migrants and asked which of the pair they would rather see return. Attributes of

the countries presented to respondents will be the following: whether they have savings from abroad, whether they intend to become self-employed or be employed by others, whether they come back from the United States (democracy) or Venezuela (autocracy), and whether they intend to become involved in politics. Potential effects' heterogeneity with respect to all attributes except savings will be explored along respondents' attitudes towards democracy, self-placement on the left-right scale and their employment status.

Randomization

Values for all experimental attributes will be randomized with uniform distributions. As there are only 4 potential values to randomize, I restrict profile randomization to have at least a single difference between them. The order of attributes will be randomized between respondents (kept the same for each individual respondent).

Sampling Plan

Existing data

Registration prior to creation of data.

Explanation of existing data

No response

Data collection procedures

I collect respondents from a panel provided by survey firm Netquest, which has a strong track record of facilitating survey research in Latin America (Zhirkov and Smilan-Goldstein 2023). I used quota sampling to achieve a panel that matched the Colombian population in the breakdown of gender, age, and socio-economic status.

Sample size

Overall sample size: 1,694

Gender quotas: 836 men, 858 women

Age quotas:

402 18 through 24,

364 25 through 34,

294 35 through 44,

265 45 through 54,

200 55 through 64,

114 65 through 74,

55 75 and up

Socio-economic status:

269 strata 1

490 strata 2

582 strata 3

187 strata 4

120 strata 5

46 strata 6

Sample size rationale

No response

Stopping rule

No response

Variables

Manipulated variables

For each conjoint profile, the following variables and potential values will be randomized. English version:

English version:

Savings:

- Has savings from abroad
- Does not have savings

Prospective employment:

- Intends to be self-employed
- Intends to work for someone else

Politics:

- Wants to be involved with politics

- Does not want to be involved with politics

Country of Return:

- Venezuela
- United States

Spanish translation:

Ahorros:

- Tiene ahorros ganados en el extranjero
- No tiene ahorros

Empleo Previsto:

- Tiene la intención de iniciar su propio negocio
- Tiene la intención de trabajar para otra persona

Política:

- Quiere involucrarse en política
- No quiere involucrarse en política

País de Retorno:

- Venezuela
- Estados Unidos

Measured variables

Outcome variables:

- Forced choice design, i.e. binary indicator if a profile is preferred
- Ordinal ranking for each profile

Conjoint variables

- Whether the hypothetical returnee has savings
- The prospective employment of the hypothetical returnee
- Which country the hypothetical returnee is returning from
- Whether the hypothetical returnee wants to be involved in politics

Other survey variables

- Whether the respondent is an urban or rural resident
- Whether the respondent considers themselves liberal, conservative, or other

- The respondent's employment status
- Whether the respondent has ever lived outside of Colombia
- Whether the respondent has family living abroad
- The respondent's attitude towards democracy
- Whether the respondent believes in general if the government should aid the return of Colombians abroad.

Analysis Plan

Statistical model

Average marginal component effects (AMCEs) from the conjoint experiment will be estimated using a standard OLS regression. Standard errors will be clustered on the respondent level. As a robustness check, I also estimate average component preferences (ACPs) as causal estimands (see Ganter 2023).

To explore the hypothesized heterogeneity of effects, the same regression will also be estimated for (1) those who prefer democracy versus those who do not, (2) those who are self-employed versus those who are employed by others versus those not in the labor market, (3) those with conservative preferences versus those with liberal preferences, and (4) those who have lived abroad or have family abroad versus those who have / do not.

Transformations

The employment variable (which is multinomial) will be recoded into two binary variables, one identifying self-employed individuals, the other individuals outside of the labor market, with the baseline category being individuals employed by others or looking for employment (i.e. those who will face most competition on the labor market by returnees intending to be employed by others).

The variables capturing the respondent's history abroad or family abroad will be combined into a single variable that equals 1 if either of the first two variables equal 1.

All other variables will be recoded to exclude "Don't Know / Prefer not to Answer"

Inference criteria

No response

Data exclusion

No response

Missing data

No response

Exploratory Analysis

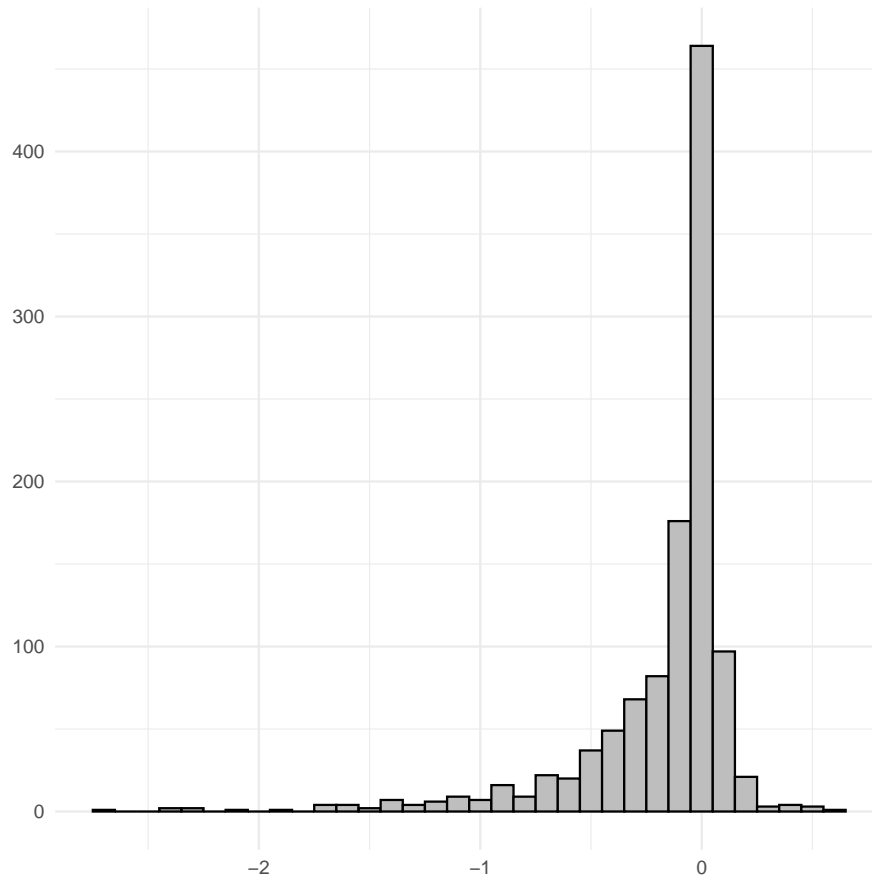
No response

Other

No response

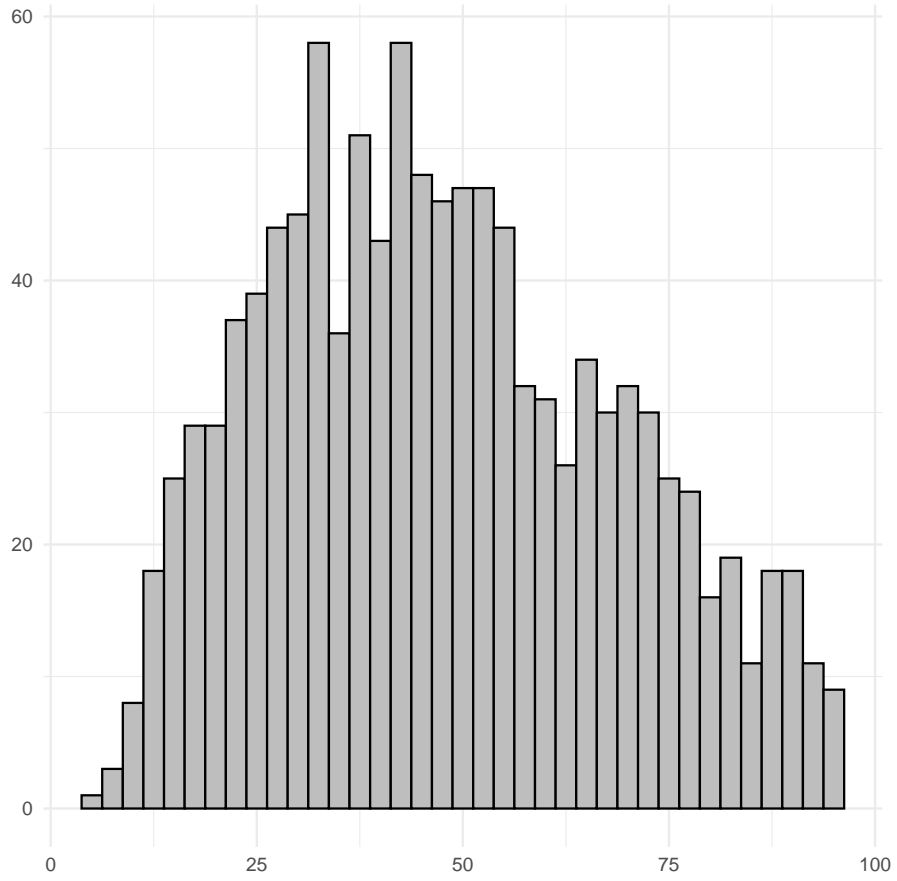
C Distribution of net normalized refugee flows

Figure A8: Net normalized refugee flows, by municipality



D Distribution of support for president Santos

Figure A9: Support for President Santos, by municipality



E Support for Santos as a possible collider

If support for President Santos was affected by net refugee flows, then it becomes a possible collider in the causal graph and controlling for it can induce bias in OLS estimates by opening a backdoor path to common causes of support for Santos and support for peace. To account for this possibility, I re-estimate models 1 and 3 from Table 2 excluding support for Santos. Results are presented below and do not diverge meaningfully from those shown in the main body of the text.

Table A6: Excluding support for Santos

	Support for peace	
	(1)	(2)
Net norm. refugees	-0.122*** (0.014)	-2.610** (0.797)
Unemployment		-0.043* (0.016)
FARC attacks	-0.004*** (0.001)	-0.004* (0.002)
FARC homicides	-0.001 (0.002)	0.009 (0.007)
Subversive actions	0.005*** (0.001)	0.004 (0.004)
Refugees × unemployment		0.248** (0.069)
Constant	0.513*** (0.006)	0.996*** (0.174)
N	1,122	23
R ²	0.115	0.558
Adjusted R ²	0.112	0.392

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001