

Socioeconomic Status and Intolerance Towards Immigrants in Mexico

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Abstract

In an age of globalization, the flow of humans across borders has gained increasing attention across the media and academia alike. In countries that attract large immigrant populations, anti-immigrant attitudes tend to form among certain native populations. Many economists and political scientists have suggested a link between anti-immigrant attitudes and perceived labor threats among country nationals, forming what is commonly referred to as the labor substitution theory. This theory holds especially true in countries where arriving immigrants have similar skill levels to the majority of the countries' national populations as demand for jobs in specific labor markets increases, and competition for labor rises. This competition for labor, among other resources, has been found to foster intolerance towards immigrants in various cases around the world. This study investigates the relationship between socioeconomic status and anti-immigrant attitudes by answering the question: what impact does socioeconomic status have on intolerance of immigrants in Mexico? This study uses a logistical regression to test hypotheses derived from these propositions. Though the results of the study show very little differentiation in intolerance towards foreign immigrants across socioeconomic status they nonetheless have important implications for understanding the intolerance of immigrants in Mexico.

In a globalizing world, understanding native populations' attitudes towards immigration is increasingly important. These attitudes shape immigration policy but also lead to serious human rights violations and overall lower quality of life for immigrant populations in any given country. In the case of Mexico, a unique migration situation includes not only the outflow of many Mexican natives to the United States (US), but also a significant inflow of Central and South American migrants fleeing extreme poverty, political crisis, civil war, gang violence and lack of

opportunity for socioeconomic mobility in their countries of origin. Due to Mexico's proximity to the US and its strengthening economy, it has become an important destination, both transient and permanent, for hundreds of thousands of migrants annually.

This article will discuss public attitudes towards immigration in Mexico with a focus on which social factors cause intolerance of immigrants among native Mexicans, and will broadly address the question of what impact socioeconomic

status has on the intolerance of foreign immigrants in Mexico.

The theory of labor substitution (Borjas, 1987) claims that immigrants replace native workers in some labor markets. Increased competition for jobs causes heightened job insecurity among natives, fostering intolerance toward immigrant groups. In Mexico, many immigrants do not hold high levels of education nor high-paying/high-skill jobs in their home country and therefore are more likely to fill low-skill jobs in Mexico, entering sectors such as agriculture and manufacturing (Izcarra-Palacios, 2012). According to the CIA World Factbook, 13.4% of working Mexicans work in agricultural (CIA, 2018) meaning a large native group may experience job insecurity due to immigrant populations entering their country and their agricultural market.

Competition for resources and public benefits may also influence the negative perception of immigrants among lower socioeconomic Mexican populations (Hjerm, 2009). In 2014, it was estimated that 46.2% of Mexicans were living below the poverty line (CIA, 2018) and the 30.6% either sometimes or often went without medical treatment that they needed in the last 12 months (WVS, 2012). If low-income Mexican populations must also compete with large immigrant populations for access to resources, such as medical treatment and government funded programs, it could contribute to an increase of native intolerance towards immigrants.

This article hypothesizes: rising income decreases intolerance towards immigrants (H1) and that rising education level decreases intolerance towards immigrants (H2). In this case income and education are used as a proxy measure for

socioeconomic status. This paper contends if a native Mexican is has higher income and education, they will be less likely to feel the negative pressures of resource competition due to heightened access to resources and less job insecurity (Espenshade and Calhoun, 1993).

The 2012 version of the World Values Survey was used as the data source for this quantitative study. The dependent variable is from a single questionnaire item used to understand respondents' intolerance towards immigrants by judging their unwillingness to live next to someone of this status. The independent variable was measured by how respondents reported their level of education and what income level they identify with compared to their perception of national standard. After reviewing related literature, I found that other variables such as age, gender, concern with protecting domestic jobs, participation in professional organizations such as labor unions, unemployment, nationalism, receiving news from television, and identification as a first or second generation immigrant were likely to have an affect the attitudes towards immigrants and were controlled for in this study (Knoll 2005).

Due to the nature of the dependent variable in this study, a logistical regression was employed. The Appendix presents the results of the analysis which demonstrate that intolerance of immigrants is not differentiated by socioeconomic status in Mexico as income and education were not found to be statistically significant. However, age, nationalism, and being part of a professional organization were found to increase the likelihood of intolerance of immigrants while getting news from television was found to decrease the likelihood of intolerance.

It could be proposed that the reason why competition-based theories do not hold in Mexico is due to the fact, or the perception, that far more immigrants are simply passing through Mexico on the way to the US compared to those who actually stay. Exact numbers of transient versus permanent migrants are hard to capture, mostly due to the large number of illegal immigrants. If the perception of natives is that immigrants will not stay in Mexico, perhaps labor and resource competition is seen as temporary and therefore not a great source of animosity.

A second consideration is that though the mistreatment, extortion and abuse of immigrants in Mexico is extensive (Izcara-Palacios, 2012) (Nazario, 2007) (Alarcón, 2013) the large number of such accounts of abuse portray corrupt Mexican police, gangs, and employers, the main source of violence towards immigrants. Perhaps it could be questioned whether the abuse of immigrants in Mexico has less to

do with general social intolerance and more to do with power and the opportunity to take advantage of immigrants, especially those of illegal status: a group not defended by the law, whose status impedes them from filing legal complaints or demanding fair wages (Izcara-Palacios, 2012). This could be an interesting topic for future study.

Despite the lack of statistical support for the hypotheses in this study, the results nonetheless paint a picture of what intolerance of immigrants looks like in Mexico and therefore contributes, in part, to the solution to the issue at hand. If we can combat intolerance by targeting specific demographics such as those found in this study, we can work more efficiently in improving the overall tolerance of immigrants in Mexico. As the true origins of intolerance and mistreatment of immigrants is explored, we can seek to find solutions to this problem and work towards the reduction of human rights violations of such vulnerable populations.

Appendix

Table 1. Logistic regression results of immigrant intolerance in Mexico

Regressor	Coefficient (Standard Error)	Odds Ratio
Income	-0.025 (0.032)	0.975
Education	-0.562 (0.036)	0.945
Age	0.009* (0.005)	1.009
Gender	-0.043 (0.160)	0.957
Protect Domestic Jobs	0.122 (0.150)	1.13
Professional Organizations	0.290*** (0.109)	1.337
Immigrant Mother	0.006 (0.615)	1.006
Immigrant Father	-0.245 (0.585)	0.781
Immigrant Respondent	-0.398 (1.044)	0.671
TV News	-0.170*** (0.060)	0.843
Unemployment	0.314 (0.205)	1.369
Nationalism	0.319** (0.160)	1.376
Informal Labor	-0.035 (0.032)	0.965

*indicates statistical significance at the 0.10 level

**indicates statistical significance at the 0.05 level

***indicates statistical significance at the 0.01 level

Source: World Values Survey 2012

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Recommended Citation

Verkouw, E. (2019). Socioeconomic status and intolerance towards immigrants in Mexico. *Made in Millersville Journal*, 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.mimjournal.com>