PUBLIC OPINION ON MIGRATION IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

2023 EDITION
Migration Unit

IDB

Public Opinion on Migration in Latin America and the Caribbean

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INDEX

I. Executive summary

This document presents the main findings of the **Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.** It does this by analyzing major trends in public opinion on migration in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years. The publication seeks to demonstrate the importance of using different data sources to arrive at a comprehensive analysis of public opinion that can be tracked over time.

The **Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration** analyzes data from regional public opinion polls, national surveys, social media, traditional media, and research and experiments that focus on changing attitudes and opinions. The laboratory was created as a tool for research and action regarding public opinion on migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Migration is on the rise within the region. There is evidence of a growing conversation around migration on social media, and migration is also featuring more heavily in regional public opinion polls. This is particularly true in cities located along major migration routes.

Some topics spark more discussion than others, and some prejudices associated with migrants prompt stronger reactions than others. Security and employment are two issues that prompt particularly intense conversations and reactions, as evidenced in both social media activity and opinion polls.

Although public opinion is a complex and often contradictory matter, xenophobic attitudes toward migrants have been on the rise in recent years. Although most conversations on social media are neutral in sentiment, certain topics generate more negative reactions than others. Regional public opinion polls show that the public hold negative opinions on the issues of security and employment in relation to migration but are more open-minded regarding issues such as migrants accessing services and remaining in the country.

Despite this, the findings of the **Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration** show that xenophobic attitudes and opinions can be modified. Research and experiments conducted by the laboratory show that different interventions can effectively change opinions and attitudes in host communities. Interventions that provide information or encourage interaction between migrants and locals can be effective at influencing people's opinions on migration.

The **Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration** generates information, knowledge, and resources that policy-makers can draw on to design responses that foster social cohesion and the integration of the migrant population. Through its analysis of surveys and online conversations, the laboratory seeks to position itself as a reference tool for decision-makers in Latin America and the Caribbean and those interested in learning more about public opinion on migration in the region.

# II. Latin America and the Caribbean, a region on the move

Since 2010, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has seen an increase in intraregional migration flows in response to factors such as sociopolitical and economic crises and natural disasters.

The current wave of migration from Venezuela is the largest displacement of people in the region's history (R4V, 2022) and is one of the main factors behind the increase in migration in LAC since 2015. By the end of 2022, more than 7.1 million people had left Venezuela, the majority of whom (more than 85%) remained in the region. The primary receiving countries for these flows are in the Andean region: Colombia, Peru, Chile, and Ecuador are now hosting large numbers of Venezuelan migrants—a combined total of nearly five million (with Colombia and Peru playing a particularly significant role).

The Caribbean subregion has also seen an increase in migration flows, especially in the last five years. There are two major trends in the history of migration in the Caribbean. The first is the notable levels of extraregional emigration, primarily to the United States. The second comprises intraregional movements consisting mainly of the migration of Haitian nationals to the Dominican Republic, and from the Dominican Republic and Haiti to other islands where there are greater employment opportunities, such as the Bahamas and Saint Kitts and Nevis, which are among the highest-income countries in the region (IOM, 2021).

Haiti is one of the main countries of origin of migrants from the Caribbean. These historically complex migration flows have been driven primarily by political instability and economic adversity. At times, Haitians have also been motivated to migrate by natural disasters. An estimated 13% of Haiti's total population (1,585,681) reside abroad, primarily in countries such as Canada, the Dominican Republic, and the United States. After the 2010 earthquake, some Haitians settled in Chile, where they came to represent 15.8% of foreigners (UNDESA, 2020).

Figure 1. Total number of venezuelan migrants in the Andean countries
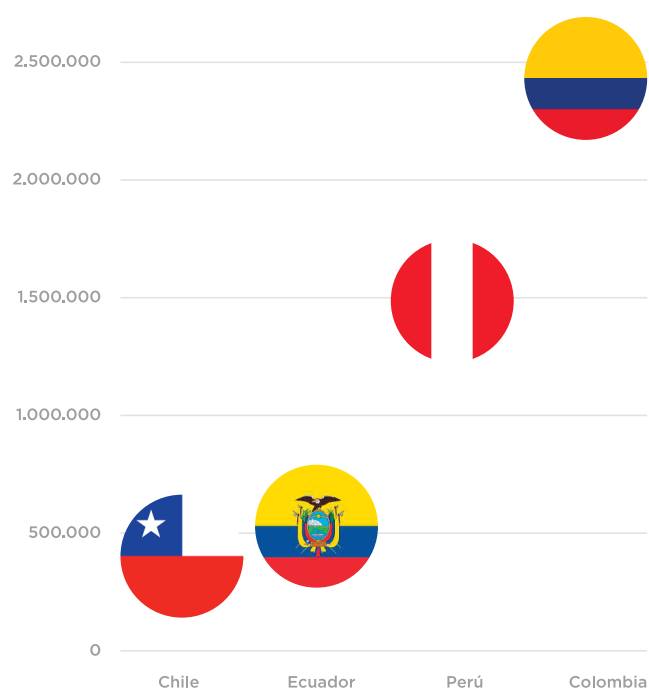
The Dominican Republic and Trinidad and Tobago have also seen an increase in migration from Venezuela. In Central America, Costa Rica remains a favored destination for Nicaraguans. In 2020, more than 10% of Costa Rica's population were migrants, mostly from Nicaragua (76%). In addition, new migration flows from the Andean countries northward intensified in 2022. About 150,000 migrants crossed the Darién Gap in the first nine months of that year, according to Panamanian government statistics. In 2019, only around 24,000 people had done so.

Another significant aspect of migration in the region are the flows from northern Central American countries to Mexico, Belize, and the United States, along with the return migration that these movements also generate.
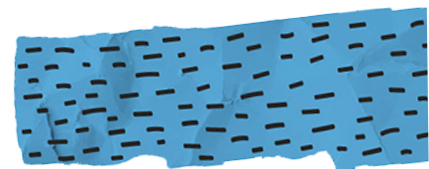
III. It's public opinion, stupid

How the public view the migrant population is central to social cohesion, the effective inclusion of migrants in host communities, and public policy design. Several factors help explain how people form opinions about migrants. Economic factors relate to the native-born population's economic interests, which are mainly connected with the labor market and employment. For example, the literature includes studies such as Mayda (2006) and O'Rourke and Sinott (2006), which conclude that highly skilled native-born individuals are less opposed to immigration than lower-skilled individuals. This effect is more common in higher-income, more egalitarian countries. This could imply a less favorable initial outlook for LAC, where informal employment rates are high.

Among the noneconomic factors that influence public opinion toward migrants are discriminatory behaviors and cultural or racial preferences. O'Rourke and Sinott (2006) find that the older population tends to have more negative attitudes toward migrants than younger people, which may be due to a culture of attempting to preserve traditional social norms. The vast literature on migration puts forward different theories for the reasons behind positive or negative attitudes toward certain groups of migrants or migration policies. Berg (2015) divides up the theoretical literature on attitudes toward immigration under five headings: 1) social and personal identity, 2) personal and group interests, 3) cultural values and beliefs, 4) social interaction, and 5) multilevel theories. The explanations in most theoretical studies are largely causal, focus on psychology or social structure, and assume that effects are additive rather than interactive.

In LAC, the most common narratives in response to increased migration rates argue that the presence of migrants increases crime rates (Bahar et al., 2020), endangers working-class jobs, and erodes the receiving country's culture (Banulesco-Bogdan, 2021).

In Peru, for example, feelings of insecurity in Metropolitan Lima are now associated heavily with Venezuelan migrants (Cuevas-Calderón, 2018). Maeda et al. (2021) conducted a study in Peru that found that Venezuelans were significantly criminalized by the Peruvian media. The study shows that 70% of television news stories that refer to Venezuelans are related to crime and security (his rate is even higher in popular newspapers—80%). The Ecuadorian media convey biased messages that tend to discriminate against Venezuelans and express xenophobia toward them (Ynciarte, 2020). However, the data reveals otherwise. An analysis using 2019 data suggests that the Venezuelan population commit fewer crimes than the native-born population relative to their share in the total population. In 2019, 1.3% of the prison population in Peru were foreigners (including both Venezuelans and other nationalities), while Venezuelan nationals accounted for 2.9% of the country's total population that year (Bahar et al., 2020). This may suggest that these narratives are based on opinions rather than reality and thus respond to the biases of the native population.

People's views on the migrant population often change in response to increases in migration flows. LAC was no exception to this tendency. Rivero (2019) analyzes information from surveys conducted in Ecuador, Colombia, and Peru, finding that people feel migration laws to be too permissive and say that "borders need to be regulated more strictly" to limit the entry of more migrants. There is also a fear of the "overflow effect," which then reinforces negative views of immigration.

Surveys in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and Peru show that there is still support for migrants accessing government-funded social services (Norford, 2021). On this issue, Peruvians are the most opposed to immigrants accessing government social benefits, while Colombians express the highest levels of support.

Many academic studies have focused on countries in the global north. Dražanová et al. (2020) confirmed that studies on the US and Europe prevail over other geographic locations. Although the discussion around migration in LAC is expanding, there are still gaps in the literature, at least in comparison with what is available in developed countries.

Interventions to change attitudes and opinions regarding immigration

What measures can be implemented to revert negative attitudes toward immigration? Receiving societies often respond to large-scale migration flows by overestimating the percentage of immigrants in the population or the number of people who have entered the country via unauthorized means. These studies often have mixed results. Some find that providing accurate information on the migration process may have a direct impact on how migrants are viewed (Klimecki, Vétois, and Sander, 2020; Rodríguez

and Rozo, 2021). However, Hopkins et al. (2019) conducted a randomized experiment in the United States in which survey respondents were asked to estimate how many of every 100 individuals in the United States are foreigners. The researchers concluded that correcting misperceptions around migration flows does not alter attitudes toward immigrants, giving rise to the hypothesis that misperceptions of the size of the migrant population may be the consequence rather than the cause of attitudes toward this group.

Furthermore, Grigorieff et al. (2020) note that providing information on the profile of the migrant population may have greater effects than merely discussing its size. The authors provided information packets on migrants and found that these led to an improvement in general attitudes toward immigration among those who took part in the experiment. The study argues that including additional information of this sort may allow locals to identify with those who have been forced to leave their homes.

While information campaigns can correct misperceptions regarding the size and profile of the migrant population, this does not always translate into more favorable attitudes and behavior toward them. Alternative approaches include interventions based on social psychology, which get the individual to consider the circumstances of others (in this case, migrants) to get the former's emotional state to influence their prejudices toward the latter.

Rodríguez and Rozo (2021) conducted a randomized experiment in which a group was shown a documentary and a video game. The main topic of the film and the game was what happens to migrants as they leave home and set out on their journey. The main finding of the experiment was that both interventions

increased the population's levels of altruism and improved their attitudes toward migrants and their interactions with them. They were also found to have a significant effect on trust and the belief that migrants bring more to the country than they get back from it. In another experiment (Adida, Lo, and Platas, 2018), locals were asked to imagine themselves as refugees and think about migrating, taking into account the challenges that this would involve. Overall, this process was effective at promoting a more inclusive attitude among the native-born population. It also increased the likelihood of locals speaking out in favor of allowing more refugees into the country.
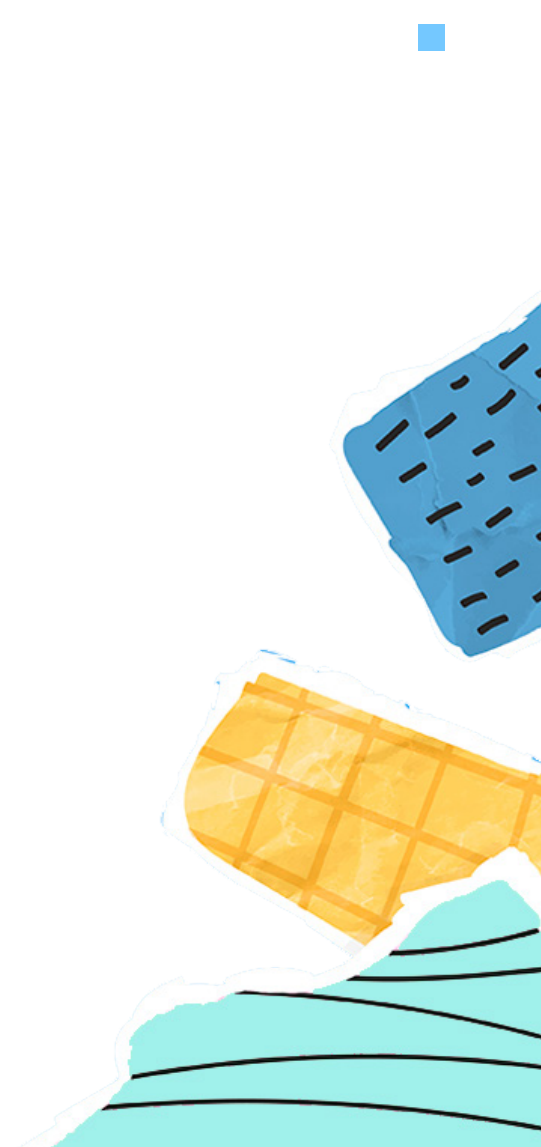
IV. Times change, and so do sources of data on public opinion toward migration

Combining different sources of information is key to measuring public opinion on migrants. In several countries and regions, public opinion polls are often carried out on different topics, including migration. The resulting data may be a useful indicator of how open receiving societies are to immigration and diversity, among other things. It also sometimes reveals attitudes that differ from those suggested by the media.

Generally speaking, opinion polls tend to ask questions based on the population's overall opinions on immigrants and immigration. These questions allow researchers to measure attitudes toward various migration-related issues, such as opinions on migration policy or the perceived effects of migration on a country's crime rates. Although surveys often cover several countries and enable comparative analyses, it is also true that they usually provide information on a specific period and do not always allow the factors underlying the population's fears and prejudices to be understood (Banulesco-Bogdan, 2022).

Regional public opinion polls

The **World Values Survey (WVS)** provides insight into changes in the beliefs, values, and motivations of people around the world. It collects nationally representative data through a public opinion poll on immigration-related issues in more than 100 countries and measures changes in attitudes toward immigration. The survey covers some of the prevailing discourses on immigration, such as whether people would like to have immigrants or foreign workers as neighbors or whether employers should prioritize native-born candidates over immigrants when jobs are scarce. The survey has been carried out in several LAC countries over the years. The most recent data collection round (round 7) was conducted between 2017 and 2021.

Latinobarómetro is a public opinion poll that conducts almost 20,000 interviews in 18 Latin American countries each year, representing more than 600 million inhabitants. It examines how democratic rule, the economy, and society as a whole are faring, using public opinion indicators to measure attitudes, values, and behavior. It is a regionwide survey that includes various questions on migration. The latest data available is from 2020.

The AmericasBarometer (Latin American Public Opinion Project) is a periodic survey of 34 countries in the Western Hemisphere that uses nationally representative stratified samples, a common core questionnaire and country-specific modules. It covers all independent

countries in North America, Central America, and South America, as well as a significant number of Caribbean countries. The AmericasBarometer measures attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and behaviors in the Americas using national probability samples of voting-age adults. Its use of standardized methods and a common core questionnaire allow comparisons to be made across countries and over time on topics including the economy, the rule of law, state capacity, trust in institutions, individual values, corruption, security, and more. It was launched in 11 countries in 2004–2005 and quickly grew to cover 34 countries in the Americas. The most recent round of the AmericasBarometer was conducted in 2021 and included more than 64,000 interviews in 22 countries.

Country-specific public opinion polls

Various public opinion polls are conducted in different countries in the region. Many of these include questions on migration and some look specifically at citizen attitudes toward migration flows in the country. In Peru, for example, the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights at the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (IDEHPUCP) has conducted nationwide surveys looking at how Venezuelan migrants are viewed in Peruvian society. In Colombia, Invamer conducts periodic opinion polls that frequently cover public attitudes to migration and include questions on the public management of migration. In Chile, surveys such as Pulso Ciudadano and the CEP Survey also provide information on public attitudes toward migration in the country.

The challenges of using national and regional surveys

Representativeness of the data. Data from regional or national opinion polls is not always representative of the local population, as the samples used may be small or the surveys may have only been conducted in a few cities. This may bias the results.

Overly general questions. These are questions that do not enable researchers to understand why people hold certain opinions or have certain fears or prejudices. Conseqeuently, they do not reveal how changes in their opinions and behavior could be generated.

Lack of consistency in questions over time. Although regional and national surveys often contain migration-related questions, they are not consistently included. Many migration-related questions are not asked on all rounds of regional surveys or in all the countries included, which limits the possibilities of comparing findings over time or across the region. Furthermore, the wording of questions often changes, which also makes them hard to compare.

Short time periods. National surveys often take place over a short period, and migration-related polls are only conducted more frequently when there is a rise in migrant arrivals. This prevents comparisons with baseline periods before such increases or studies of public opinion over time. In response to these challenges, the Inter-American Development Bank's Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration is seeking to generate data on public opinion on migration in LAC, using different data sources and combining different, innovative ways of measuring public opinion.

Analysis of social media and news

Social media platforms and the news are important sources of information on public

opinion. By harnessing specific algorithms, the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration has been able to systematize data on the opinions that people express on social media in order to calculate indicators on migration in a given country. The analyses the lab has conducted to date focused on the conversation around migration on two main platforms:

Twitter. Most of the social media analyses carried out by the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration have drawn on Twitter conversations around migration since early 2017. Based on this analysis, volume and thematic indicators were constructed, and the sentiments expressed in the tweets in question were measured. This allowed the laboratory to compare the evolution of each indicator in each country over time These indicators provide insight into the evolution of online conversations about migration.

News articles. The laboratory has tracked major news media outlets in each LAC country since 2017 to identify stories focusing on or mentioning migration. Analyzing news stories sheds light on the role of the media in shaping beliefs about migration among the population.

Research and experiments

Research and experiments are an important source of data for measuring public opinion on migrants and migration. International studies conducted in other regions of the world provide important lessons around understanding trends in public opinion on migrants in similar contexts to LAC. The literature that seeks to understand how prejudices toward the migrant population arise and how such attitudes are determined by demographic factors is of value when studying similar patterns in the region. Many experiments

have also been carried out to evaluate the types of interventions and programs that effectively change the local population's attitudes and behaviors toward the migrant population. Such findings are particularly useful when designing and implementing activities of this type in LAC and may provide valuable inputs for formulating public policies.

V. How people in Latin America and the Caribbean feel about migration

Migration is on the rise within the region

Today, the conversation around migration is at one of its all-time highs and continues to grow, in parallel with the increase in migration flows in the region. Figure 2 tracks the number of tweets about migration in LAC, showing that the total rose from 382,592 tweets in the first quarter of 2017 to 548,099 in the second quarter of 2022 (a 43% increase in 5 years).

This increase points to a clear uptrend in the importance of migration as an issue in LAC. At the same time, there has been an increase in both the number of national public opinion polls focusing on migration and the number of questions on migration-related issues in regional public opinion polls. For example, since 2020, the Latinobarómetro survey has included a total of five questions about the population's attitudes

Figure 2. Evolution of the total number of tweets concerning migration (2017–2022)
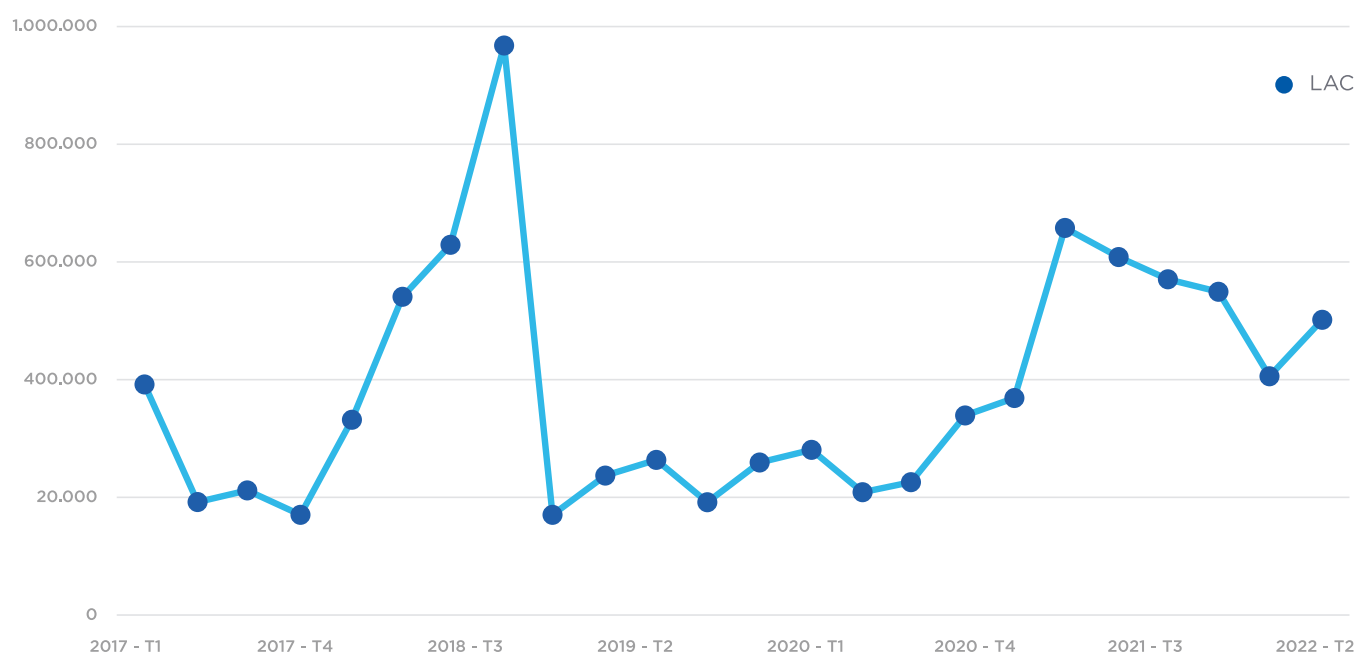
Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

toward migration and migrants, with a particular emphasis on social harmony, work, crime, and public services.

Although in volume terms, most conversations on migration take place in the capital cities of each country, in relative terms, it is often border cities where the largest number of conversations on the topic happen.

To conclude the section analyzing the conversation around migration conversation on social media, city-level data is also available. Annex 2 presents systematized information for selected countries in the region, particularly those that have received large migration flows from Venezuela or Haiti.

Except in Colombia and Chile, the conversation around migration on Twitter tends to be concentrated in capital cities. This makes sense, given that these are both the destinations that many migrants tend to choose when they move to other countries and are also where the majority of the native-born population reside. This is particularly true in LAC, where most employment and educational opportunities are concentrated in capital cities.

In addition to having the highest numbers of migration-related tweets per 10,000 inhabitants, capital cities also account for the highest numbers of xenophobic tweets about migration. This is true in Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Peru, and Colombia. Colombia is an interesting case: the capital, Bogotá, is not among the cities with the most discussion around migration. Instead, the social media conversation around migration in Colombia is mostly concentrated in the country's border cities, which are experiencing heavy migrant traffic. The cities of Arauca, Riohacha, Puerto Carreño, and Cúcuta

are all on the Colombia–Venezuela border, which explains why the discussion around migration is more active there.

Indeed, by connecting the cities with the highest levels of migration-related social media activity in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, it is possible to map a "path" of the online conversation that seems to follow the migration pattern of Venezuelans in the region. This is shown in figure 3. In the same vein, while cities in the north of Peru were not the main focus of the social media conversation

Figure 3. Cities with the most social media conversation around migration in Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru (2022)

Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

around migration, there was considerable discussion in Sullana and Trujillo toward the end of 2017.

A similar analysis was attempted for Haitian migration in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, but no relevant pattern was found, even though the Dominican Republic shares a border with Haiti. All that was identified in these countries is that the capital cities tended to account for most of the social media activity around migration.

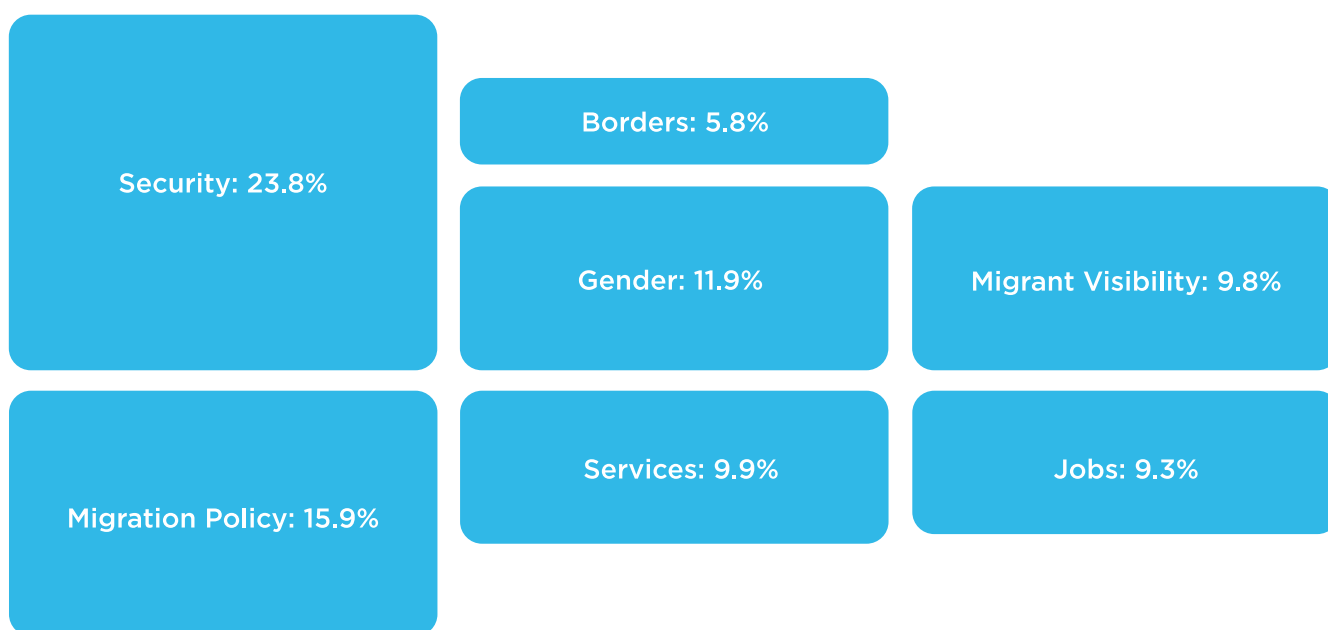## Some topics spark more discussion than others...

Some issues seem to matter more than others in the region. The last few years have brought changes in the migration-related issues that matter to the public. In 2018, the top three topics in the conversation around migration were migration policy (21.5%), the visibility of migrants (19%), and security (18.2%). Most of the discussions on Twitter at that time focused on migration flows and the policies adopted by states in response to these.

Two years later, in the midst of the first waves of COVID-19 when vaccines were still not available, it is not surprising that the most frequent topic of migration-related conversation on Twitter was COVID-19 (34%), followed by services (21.4%) and borders (11.1%). The conversation shifted from focusing on migration policy to the availability of public services, in a context of difficulty in meeting demand from both nationals and migrants.

The main topics of discussion changed again in 2022 (figure 4). The most frequently discussed issues were security (23.8%), migration policy (15.9%), and employment (9.3%). The increased

Figure 4. Main topics in the conversation around migration on Twitter in LAC (2022).

Security: 23.8%

Borders: 5.8%

Gender: 11.9%

Migrant Visibility: 9.8%

Migration Policy: 15.9%

Services: 9.9%

Jobs: 9.3%

Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

importance of security, migration policy, and employment issues may be evidence of certain prejudices associated with the migrant population in the region.

The increase in the conversation around security on social media shows growing public concern around rising crime rates in relation to the arrival of migrants (Ajzenman, Domínguez, and Undurraga, 2020). Recent studies in several LAC countries show a rise in negative associations between regional migration flows and crime rates. According to Bianchi et al. (2012), concern about rising crime rates following an increase in migrant arrivals is often one of the main fears related to immigration. However, results from studies conducted in several countries suggest that migration does not increase crime. Instead, these concerns about the relationship between migration and crime are apparently unfounded

(Ajzenman, Domínguez, and Undurraga, 2020; Bahar et al., 2020).

Public feelings of increased insecurity as a result of the arrival of migrants are also one of the most salient issues in regional and national surveys. Round 7 of the WVS asked about the belief that migration causes an increase in crime. Some 46% of those surveyed said that they agreed with the statement. There are two countries where more than 70% of respondents said they believed that immigration had caused an increase in crime: Colombia (75%) and Peru (73%). Coincidentally, these are two of the countries that have received the largest numbers of Venezuelan migrants in recent years.

Furthermore, in the Latinobarómetro 2020 survey, 56% of respondents said they agreed or strongly

Figure 5. Evolution of engagement with security as an issue in the conversation around migration on Twitter (2017–2022)

Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

agreed that migrants increased criminal activity. The countries in which more than 70% of people thought so were Ecuador (79%), Bolivia (73%), Chile (72%), Peru (72%), and Colombia (70%). The countries with values below 40% are Brazil (38%), Argentina (32%), and Uruguay (21%).

Another issue that often triggers strong reactions among the local population is employment. In the conversation on social media, these rates remain fairly stable, going from 7.1% in 2017 to 13.7% in 2019 and 11.7% in 2022.

Another common belief within communities that receive sudden large-scale migration flows is that these are linked to increased unemployment and greater labor market competition. This is revealed by regional surveys, in which the issue features prominently.

The different rounds of the Latinobarómetro survey conducted between 2015 and 2020 inquire about the belief that immigrants come to compete for jobs. In 2015, 45% of respondents agreed with this statement at the regional level. By 2020, 60% did so. In other words, there has been an overall rise in the feeling that immigrants increase labor market competition (figure 8).

Another employment-related question asked in round 7 of the WVS is whether respondents believe that employers should prioritize native-born workers over immigrants when jobs are scarce. Some 73% of respondents agreed with the statement.

Overall, xenophobia is on the rise

An analysis of the conversation on social media and in regional and national opinion polls reveals that xenophobic messages and opinions are on

Although employment is not one of the main topics in the conversation around migration on Twitter, discussion of this issue peaks in 2019, just before the outbreak of the pandemic. In 2022, the percentage of tweets on employment was slightly up. According to information from regional surveys, more than half of people in LAC believe that immigration increases unemployment or labor market competition.

**Figure 6. Percentage of respondents who agree that immigrants cause an increase in crime rates**
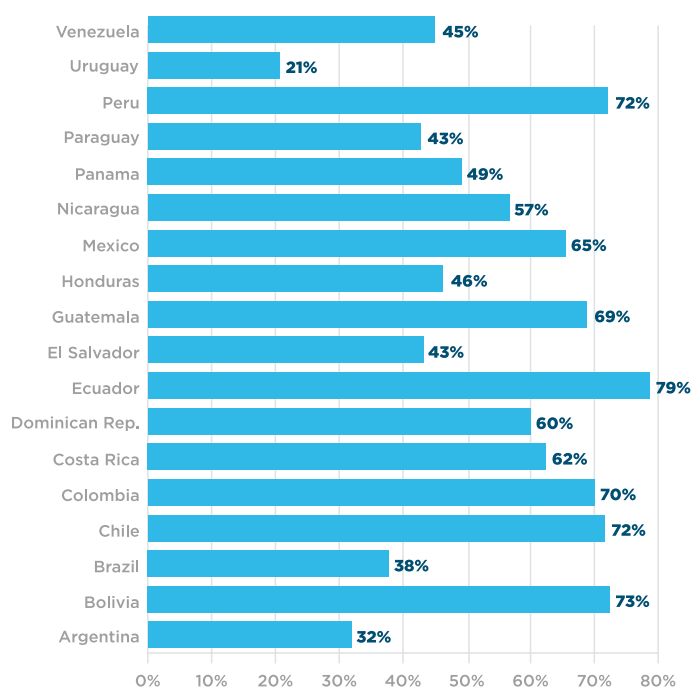
Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

Figure 7. Evolution of engagement with employment as an issue in the conversation around migration on Twitter (2017–2022)
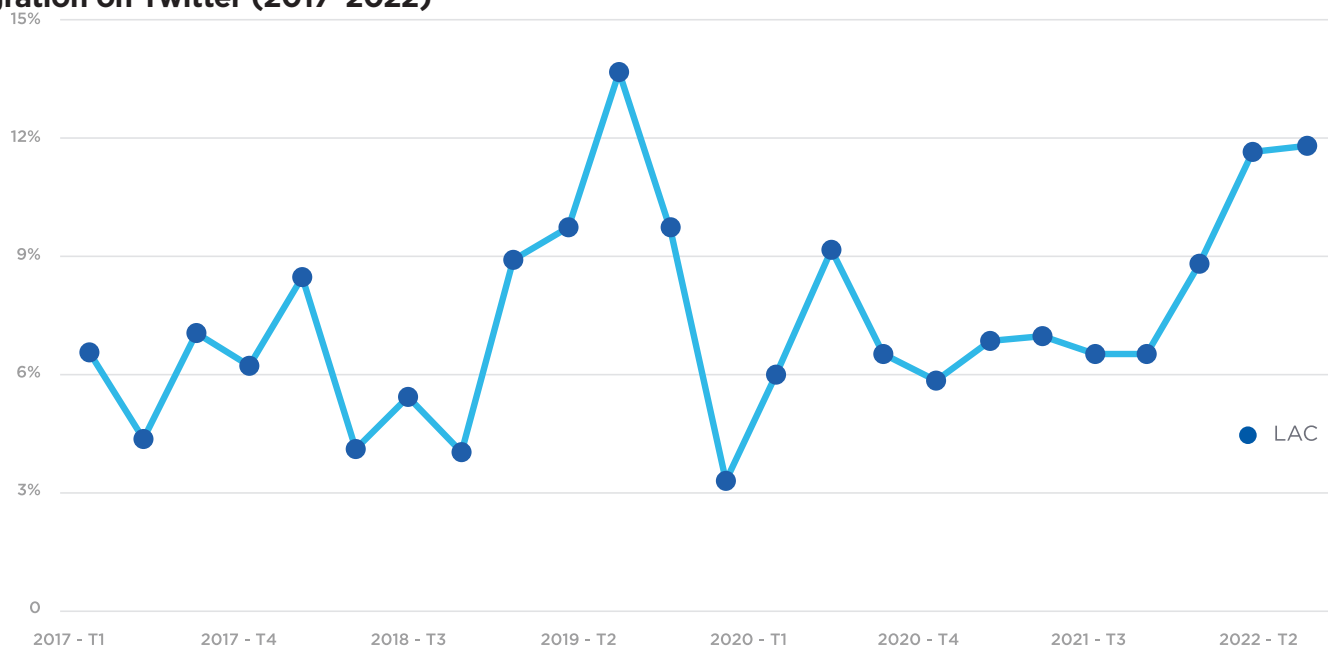
Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

Figure 8. Percentage of respondents who think that immigrants come to compete for their jobs
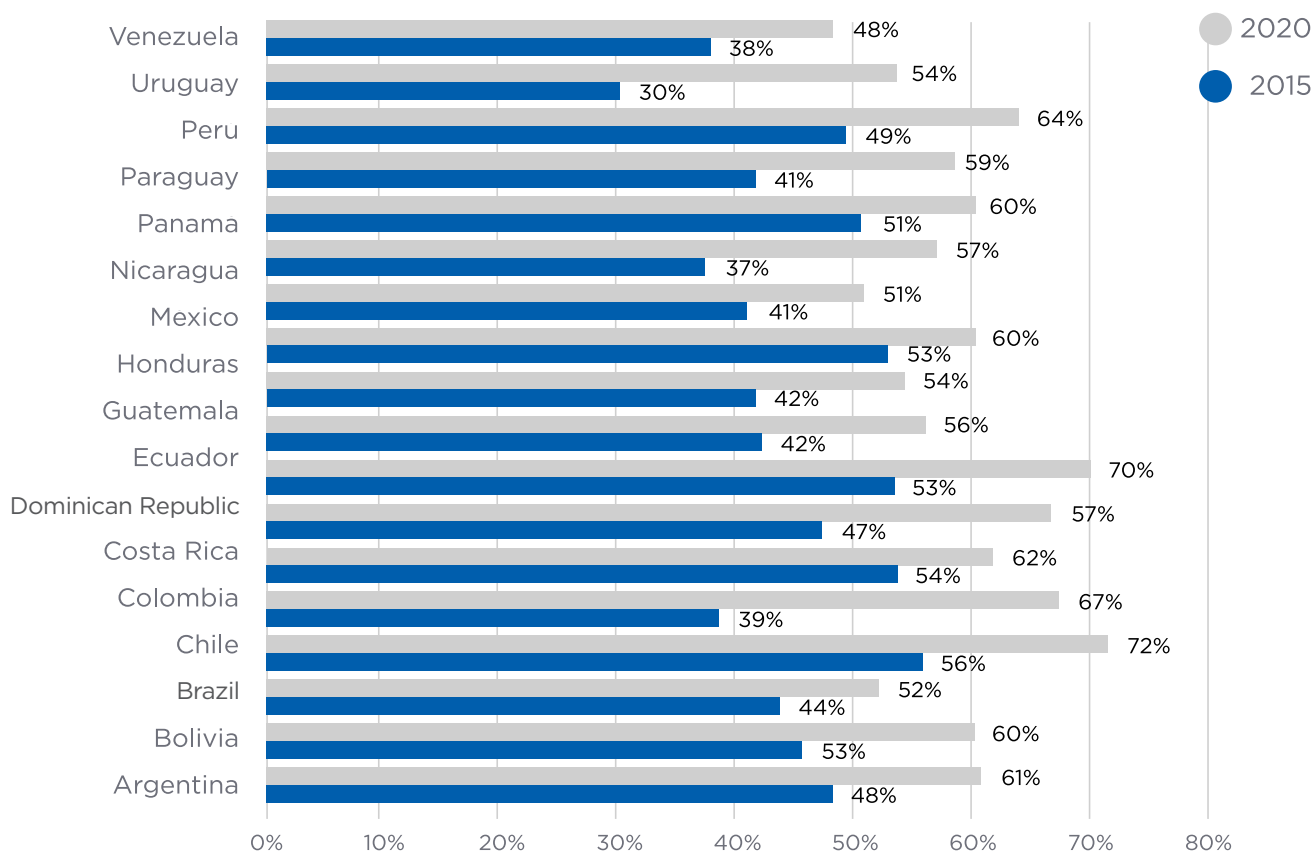
Source: Latinobarómetro 2015 and 2020.

19.

the rise. Messages with xenophobic content were at a low in 2017 (4%) but then began to trend upward. They peaked in the first quarter of 2021, when almost 28% of tweets on migration-related issues had xenophobic content.

These results are in keeping with the trend in regional and national surveys, which show less acceptance of the migrant population.

Despite the increase in messages with xenophobic content, the reach of these tweets is usually small. During the entire study period, positive migration-related tweets have greater reach than those with xenophobic content. On average, migration-related tweets with positive content are seen by 157,424 people, peaking at 292,533 people during the second half of 2018. Meanwhile, tweets with xenophobic content are seen by an average of 5,089 people, peaking at 8,521 people in the second quarter of 2017. The large gap between the two types of tweets owes

to the fact that accounts posting xenophobic content tend to have very few followers, on average.

People's feelings toward migration are complex...

And they are sometimes contradictory. Figure 12 shows the evolution of the percentages of positive, xenophobic, and neutral tweets on migration. Most of the online conversation is neutral in sentiment: people generally do not hold strong opinions on the matter. The percentage of tweets with positive content accounted for between 10% and 20% of the total for almost the entire period of study. It peaked in the fourth quarter of 2017, when 22.3% of migration-related tweets featured positive content. In contrast, xenophobic feelings around migration seem to have been on the rise since 2017.

Diametrically opposed positions on migration

Figure 9. Evolution of xenophobic comments on Twitter (2017–2022)
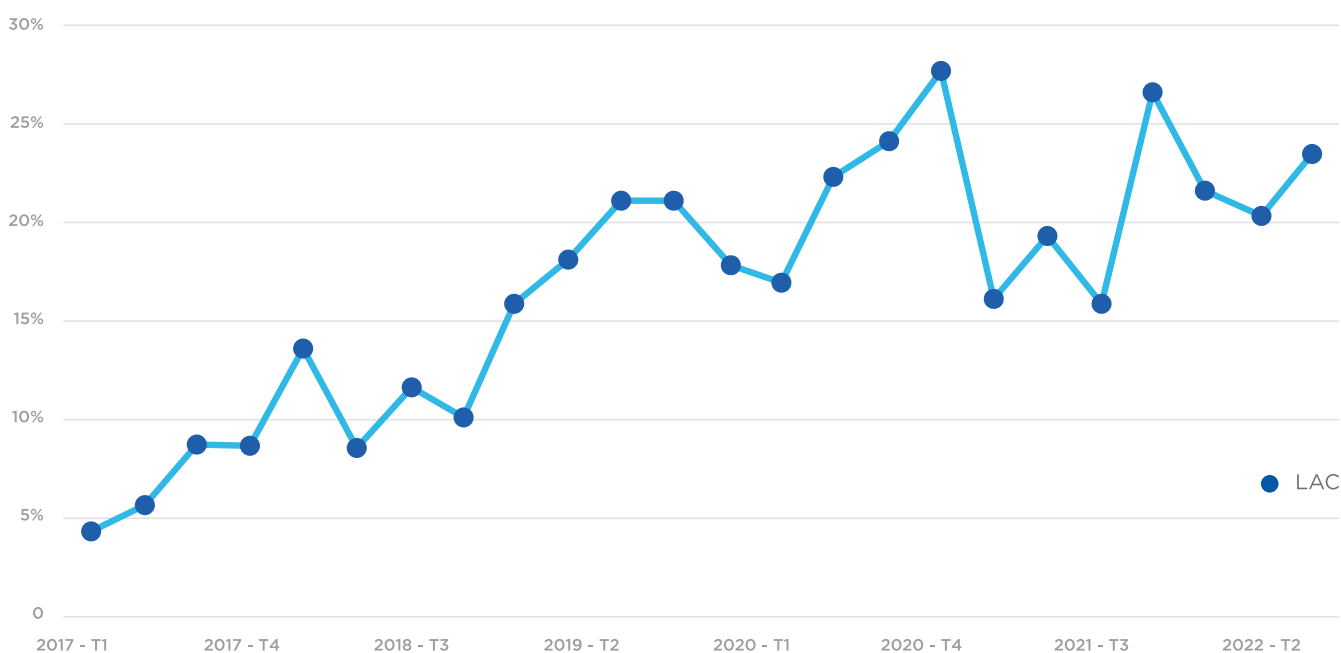
Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

Figure 10. Percentage of those that believe migrants compete for their jobs and increase crime rates.
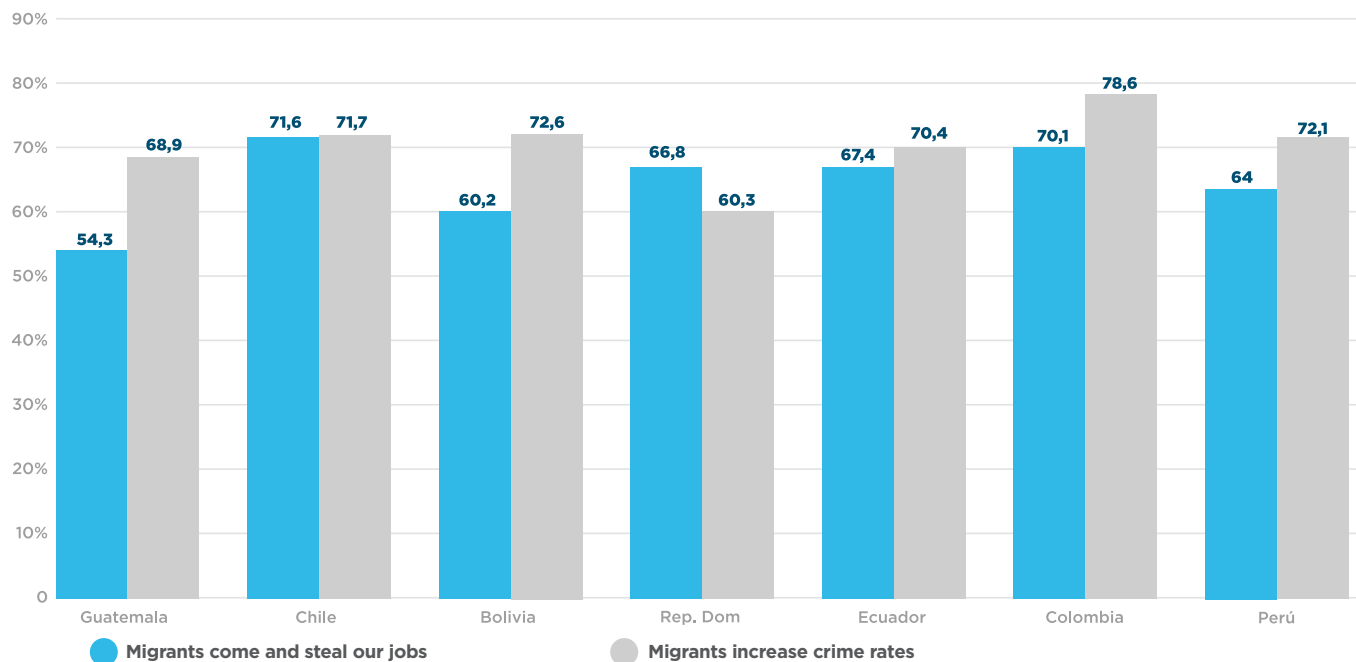
Source: Latinobarómetro 2020

Figure 11. Reach of tweets with positive and xenophobic content on Twitter, 2017 to 2022.
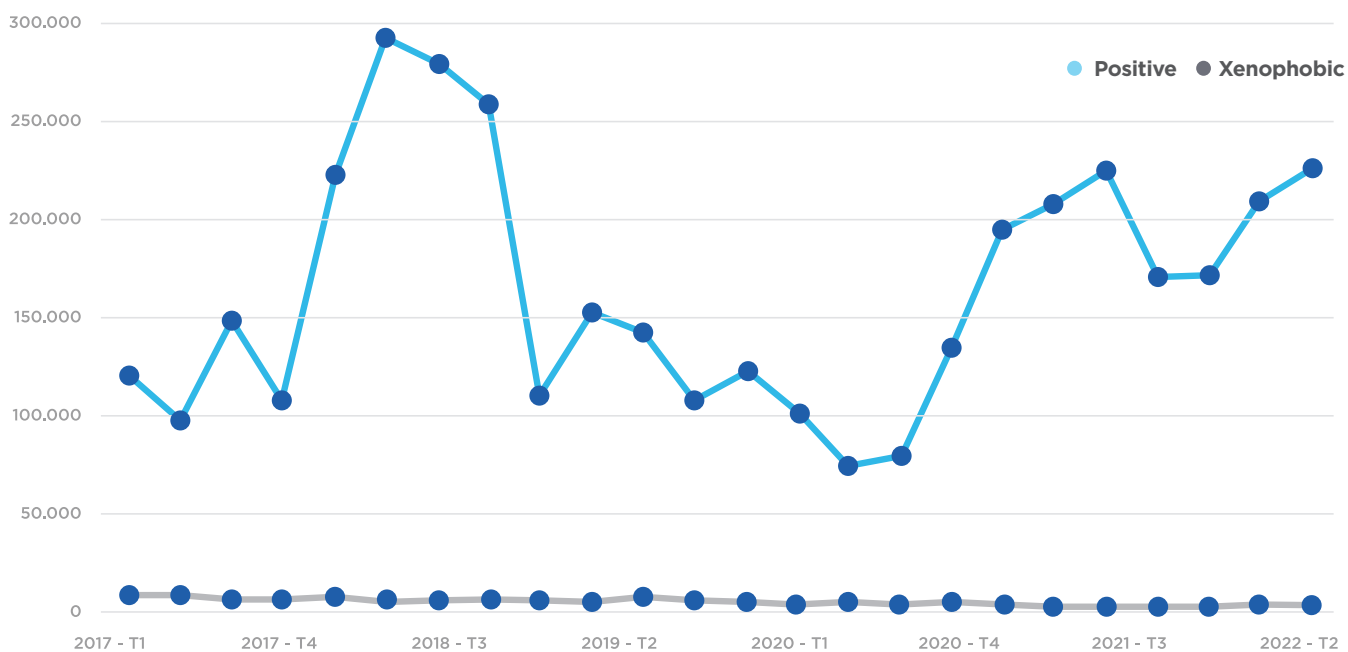
Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

are especially evident in relation to the more controversial topics that spark prejudice. Neutral messages around the security issue have been on the decline throughout the period analyzed, and there has been a clear increase in xenophobic messages on this matter. At the end of 2020, most of the conversation on security featured xenophobic content (more than 35%). The same is true in relation to employment: since the beginning of 2019, there has been an increase in messages with xenophobic content that parallels the decrease in neutral content.

Turning to the evolution of conversations around the visibility of migrants, a positive sentiment prevails throughout practically the entire period studied. In other words, most messages speak out against xenophobia and in favor of migration. Regional and national surveys show that public opinion on migration-related issues concerning

Between 2017 and 2022, 46% of the total tweets about migration were neutral, while 15% included positive content and another 16% were xenophobic.

security and employment tends to be negative but is positive in connection with migrants accessing services like healthcare, education, and housing.

And people's beliefes can change

Studies and experiments seeking to change attitudes and reduce prejudice toward migration and migrants often have mixed outcomes. People frequently arrive at biased opinions

Figure 12. Evolution of sentiment in the conversation about migration on Twitter, 2017-2022.
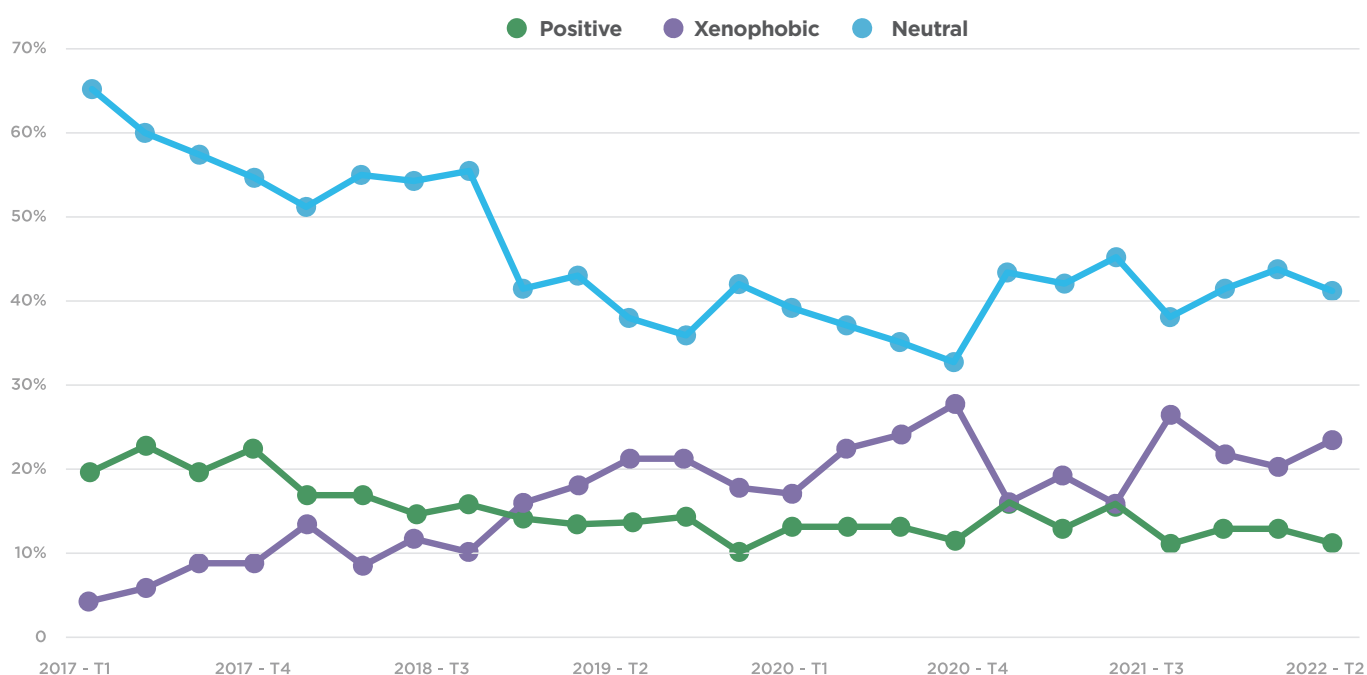
Source: Graphic produced by the IDB with data from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration.

about the migrant population because they have no contact with them, are negatively influenced by the media, or are misinformed. The kinds of intervention that can be effective at influencing people's opinions on migration include approaches that provide information, those that tell people about migrants in an emotionally charged way (such as through videos that appeal to people's empathy), and those that encourage interaction between migrants and locals.

In a study conducted in Colombia, the IDB examined how looking at things from the perspective of another group can reduce prejudice and promote prosocial behavior (Rodríguez and Rozo, 2021). An internet-based

Figure 13. The percentage of people who are not in favor of migrants accessing state services remains high.
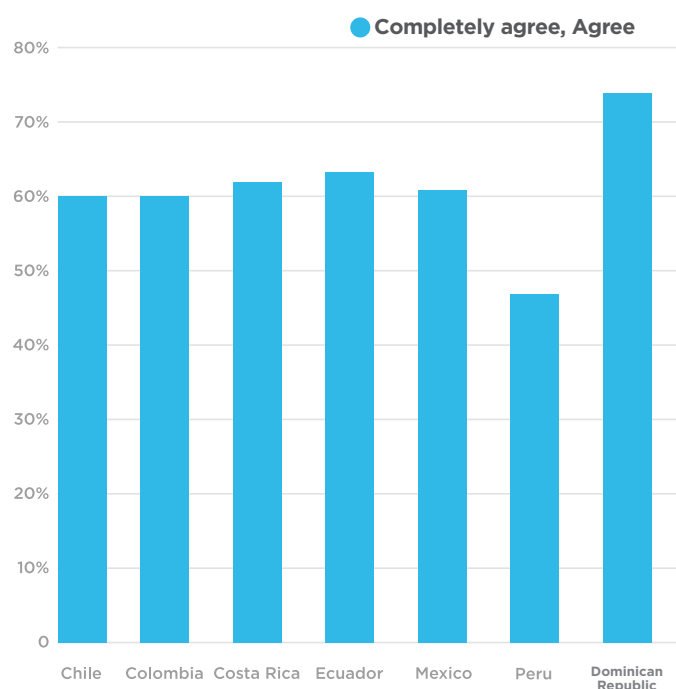
Source: Latinobarómetro, 2020

experiment was conducted in which native-born individuals were recruited to play an online game that immersed them in the life of a Venezuelan migrant in Colombia. The game improved prosocial behavior toward migrants. It also increased people's trust in Venezuelans. Exposure to the game had a significant positive impact on people thinking that the difficulties experienced by Venezuelan migrants owe more to circumstances beyond their control than to a lack of effort.

Another study conducted in Colombia sought to understand how altruism and attitudes toward Venezuelan migrants changed during the economic crisis that arose during the pandemic (Rodríguez and Rozo, 2021b). Using a COVID-related topical elicitation technique, the study explored how people's opinions of the migrant population changed. The findings show that when the native-born population was prompted to think about the association between migrants and COVID-19, they felt resentment toward them. Second, there were positive signs of altruism in people aged 18–25 years who were given information about the COVID-19 crisis in comparison with the control group. People in this age group are generally also more prosocial and have better attitudes toward immigrants in both the treatment and control groups. This cohort, therefore, could be excellent candidates for programs seeking to improve prosocial behaviors and reduce prejudice.

Finally, a study conducted by the IDB and UNDP in nine LAC countries shows that a video-based intervention can influence and modify the local population's beliefs and attitudes toward migration. Participants in the study were shown one of two videos, an informational video and an emotionally charged video. The findings suggest

that both impacted levels of acceptance of the migrant population. There was an increase in the number of people who acknowledged the benefits of migration and the contributions that migrants make to society, and trust between the two populations also grew.

VI. Final considerations

This publication from the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration explores trends in public opinion toward migration in LAC over the last five years. The document analyzes the growing need to generate information and evidence on this issue in the region, where recent intraregional migration flows have increased the importance of social cohesion and the inclusion of migrants in host communities.

By combining traditional data sources (national and regional public opinion surveys) and nontraditional data sources (social media and conventional media analysis), the Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration provides a comprehensive analysis of trends in public opinion in the region. The paper sheds light on the topics that most influence the conversation and that generate the most concern among the native-born population, while at the same time showing that despite an increase in the xenophobic content of social media messages, the prevailing feeling toward migration in LAC is neutral and sometimes contradictory.

Finally, this publication concludes that there are different ways to influence and change public opinion of migration. The Public Perceptions Laboratory on Migration puts forward interventions and programs that are effective at changing how people think about migration in LAC. Perspective-taking exercises and interventions that correct misinformation or generate connections between the native-born and migrant populations can increase trust, foster prosocial feelings, reduce prejudice, and promote social harmony.

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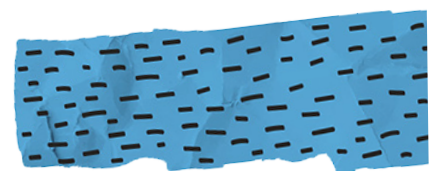
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Notes

1. https://datamig.iadb.org/es/Profile?country=CRI

2. https://datamig.iadb.org/es/movimiento-migratorio

3. https://idehpucp.pucp.edu.pe/lista_publicaciones/boletin-n02-percepcion-sobre-la-sociedad-y-la-migracion-venezolana-en-el-peru/

4. https://www.invamer.com.co/es/producto/Poll-Invamer

5. https://chile.activasite.com/pulso-ciudadano/

6. The main data source for this aspect of the analysis was the GDELT Project (Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone), which monitors different events around the world, including protests and wars. Every 15 minutes, GDELT tracks the articles published on hundreds of media platforms, translates them into English, and runs different algorithms on them, such as name entity recognition or classification by topic, feeling, or tone. These news stories are stored in the GDELT Global Knowledge Graph (GKG), a public database hosted by Google Cloud's BigQuery data warehouse.

7. Note: information up-to-date as of September 2022.

8. The indicator calculated is the of number of tweets on migration per 10,000 inhabitants.

9. The numerator includes all respondents who said they "strongly agree" or "agree" in response to the question about whether they believe that immigrants cause an increase in crime rates.

10. Note: although the response options were quite similar in the two rounds, in 2015 there was an extra response option: "neither agree nor disagree."

11. This indicator is obtained by dividing the number of tweets with xenophobic content by the total number of migration-related tweets in each period.

12. The reach of a tweet is the sum of the followers of all unique accounts that published a tweet with migration-related content. This estimate was made for tweets classified as positive and tweets classified as xenophobic.

13. The analysis carried out by Laboratory on Public Attitudes Toward Migration allows online conversation to be categorized by sentiment. The content of each of the migration-related messages is assigned one of the following sentiments: positive, negative, and neutral. Some of the tweets within the negative category are also classified as xenophobic.

ANNEX

ANNEX I

Questions from the Latinobarómetro opinion poll (2020)

• Do you think that immigrants come to compete for our jobs?
• Do you think immigrants are good for the country's economy?
• Do you think that immigrants cause an increase in crime rates?
• Do you think that immigrants should have the same access to healthcare, education, and housing as the local population?
• Are immigrants a burden on the state?

LAPOP questions (2018–2019 round)

• How much would having an immigrant as a neighbor bother you? (Peru and Colombia only.)
• How much would having a Venezuelan as a neighbor bother you? (Peru and Colombia only.)
• How far do you agree with the government offering social services (healthcare, education, housing) to immigrants who come to the country to live or work?

World Values Survey (round 7)

• Do you trust people from other countries? (Also included in rounds 5 and 6.)
• Would you like to have immigrants/workers from other countries as neighbors? (also included in round 6).
• Do you think that immigration leads to higher unemployment rates?
• Do you think that immigrants perform useful jobs?

• Do you think employers should prioritize employing nationals over immigrants when job opportunities are limited? (Also included in rounds 5 and 6.)
• Do you think that immigration has led to a rise in crime rates?

ANNEX II

Table 1. Cities with the highest number of migration-related tweets per 10.000 inhabitants in selected countries (2017–2018).

Period (year/ quarter)	Country	Cities with the highest number of migration-related tweets per 10.000 inhabitants	Cities with the highest number of xenophobic tweets per 10.000 inhabitants
2017-4	Ecuador	Milagro (33.4) Cuenca (11) Quito (6)	Quito (0.1) Guayaquil (0.1)
2018-1	Ecuador	Milagro (211.8) Cuenca (12.4) Quito (10.3)	Quito (0.7) Cuenca (0.5) Guayaquil (0.2)
2017-4	Chile	Puerto Natales (38.2) Valparaíso (26.1) Los Ángeles (23.8)	Valparaíso (2.1) Antofagasta (2.1) Iquique (1.9)
2018-1	Chile	Puerto Natales (292.6) Puerto Varas (62.1) Valparaíso (46.7)	Valparaíso (11.2) Viña del Mar (8) Concepción (7.8)
2017-4	Panamá	Panamá (3.3) Santiago (0.7) Chitré (0.5)	Panamá City (0.2)
2018-1	Panamá	Panamá (3.9) David (1)	Panamá (0.2)
2017-4	Costa Rica	Puerto Armuelles (0.7) La Cruz (2.3) San José (1.9)	-
2018-1	Costa Rica	Canas (1) Ciudad Cortés (6.3) San José (2.8)	San José (0.2)
2017-4	R. Dominicana	La Cruz (2.3) San Francisco de Macorís (3) Barahona (2.7)	Santo Domingo (0.5) Santiago (0.2)
2018-1	R. Dominicana	Santo Domingo (2.5) Santo Domingo (5.9) San Francisco de Macorís (5.2)	Santo Domingo (1.4) La Romana (1) Santiago (0.9)
2017-4	Perú	La Romana (4.1) Urubamba (9) Junín (3.9)	Lima (0.1)
2018-1	Perú	Lima (2.8) Chancay (7.8) Lima (7.2) Motupe (6,8)-Urubamba (6.8)	Lima (0.7)
2017-4	Colombia	Arauca (6.7) Riohacha (5.6) Puesto Carreño (3.4)	Valledupar (0.5) Cúcuta (0.2)-Bogotá (0.2)
2018-1	Colombia	Arauca (23.5) Riohacha (14.6) Cúcuta (8.8)	Valledupar (1) Barranquilla (0.6)-Bogotá (0.6)