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Editor's Preface to the Spring Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful to host *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics*. We are proud to present the Spring 2025 issue and congratulate all authors published in this issue for their high achievement.

This publication seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that leads to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship as we showcase the work of undergraduate scholars, most of whom pursue questions that have been traditionally ignored in scholarship but that drive our discipline forward.

Following the lead of the American Political Science Review (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to publish research in the areas of "American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods." This publication also values the relationships formed through student-faculty collaboration and aims to build a culture of scholarship that expands beyond the college campus. We hope to encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and pursue their potential, contributing to scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

This year, we thank our advisors Dr. Baris Kesgin and Dr. Aaron Sparks for their support, without which the issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Public Policy Department at Elon University; our Faculty Advisory Board; and all the students who shared their exceptional work with us this semester.

We are excited to present the Spring 2025 edition of the *Journal*. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication; we hope you enjoy the edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University

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Submission of Manuscripts

The *Journal* accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to submit their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are September 15th for the Fall edition and February 15th for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore, early submissions are strongly encouraged.

Students may submit their work through Elon University's submission portal, found here: https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/arts-and-sciences/political-science/psa-journal/. Alternatively, students may email psajournalelon@gmail.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. In the body of the email, students are asked to include their name and university, the title of the manuscript, and the closest subfield of political science to which their manuscript pertains (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, or policy studies). Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we ask students to submit only one manuscript per submission cycle.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words) and citations/references that follow the APSA Style Manual for Political Science. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The *Journal* is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University. The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the *Journal's* upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournalelon@gmail.com.

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Program Reforms for Empowering Syrian Refugees: Expanding Educational Opportunities and Career Development in Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan

Megan Novak, Emmanuel College

This study evaluates Syrian refugee integration in education and employment using a rubric-based assessment grounded in global frameworks. A mixed-methods approach combines quantitative data from UNHCR, government reports, and NGOs with qualitative case studies. The rubric scores countries across legal access, program effectiveness, and economic inclusion. Findings reveal varying integration levels: Turkey (63/100) offers strong education access but faces employment barriers; Lebanon (36/100) imposes severe restrictions; and Jordan (47/100) provides partial access but limits job opportunities. In contrast, Germany (84/100) and Colombia (72/100) demonstrate best practices through streamlined credential recognition, job placement programs, and strong legal protections. Recommendations emphasize language support, credential recognition, financial aid, and employment pathways modeled after Germany and Colombia to enhance refugee inclusion. This study provides a framework for assessing and improving refugee integration policies globally.

INTRODUCTION

For refugees, access to quality education and stable employment can mean the difference between a life of dependency and one of opportunity and dignity. These essential pathways are crucial for restoring hope, self-sufficiency, and resilience for millions displaced by conflict. The Syrian conflict has created one of the most complex and protracted refugee crises in recent history, displacing millions and straining host countries' infrastructure and policy systems.

The crisis has disproportionately affected women and children. Girls face additional barriers to education due to social and cultural norms, early marriage, and the limited availability of educational spaces (Ferris and Kirişci 2016). Meanwhile, refugees face structural barriers to employment. In Lebanon and Jordan, legal restrictions such as the lack of work permits confine refugees to low-wage sectors, limiting their economic opportunities and contributing to ongoing poverty (Andersen 2016). In Türkiye, a significant portion of refugees work illegally, without the protections or benefits of formal employment (Revel 2020).

Given that Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan are not signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention, their ability and willingness to adopt comprehensive refugee protection frameworks are limited, leaving refugees largely dependent on international programs for support (Ferris and Kirişci 2016). The absence of formal legal frameworks in these countries means that refugees face uncertain and precarious legal statuses, often hindering their access to essential services like education and employment. While policy reforms are an important part of addressing the refugee crisis, their implementation has been slow and fragmented, largely due to political and economic constraints within these host countries. As a result, the majority of assistance for Syrian refugees comes from international organizations, including NGOs and UN agencies, which have created programs to address the critical gaps in legal protections, social services, and livelihood opportunities (Waters and LeBlanc 2005). Focusing on these programs, therefore, is crucial for identifying practical, sustainable solutions to improve refugees' access to education and employment, especially in the absence of effective national policy frameworks. Given the complexity of the refugee situation and the ongoing challenges to effective policy reform, examining existing and potential programs offers a more immediate path for enhancing the livelihoods of Syrian refugees, empowering them to contribute to both their host communities and their long-term futures.

Addressing these challenges through targeted programs is critical for both refugees and host communities. Quality education and meaningful employment opportunities are essential for the long-term stability and resilience of Syrian refugees, helping them rebuild their lives and reduce their dependency on humanitarian aid. For host countries, effectively

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integrating refugees can contribute positively to both economic development and social stability. For instance, the World Bank's 2021 project in Türkiye allocated over €39.5 million to support social entrepreneurship and cohesion initiatives aimed at both refugees and host communities, showing the international emphasis on refugee-led economic empowerment (Plummer 2021). Similarly, a 2020 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on Syrian refugees in Türkiye emphasized that including refugees in the formal labor market—particularly in sectors like agriculture and construction—can help address existing labor shortages while promoting decent work standards (Caro 2020). Furthermore, the OECD (2020) found that integration programs encouraging regular interaction between refugees and host communities are associated with stronger social cohesion and reduced community tensions, especially when supported by inclusive policies and local engagement mechanisms. Programs like vocational training, job placement, and community-based education initiatives can play a key role in fostering these outcomes. This study will analyze existing education and employment programs for Syrian refugees in Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan, examining the strengths and limitations of these programs and suggest new programmatic approaches to improve educational and employment outcomes for refugees. The central research question is: "How can education and employment programs be improved to enhance opportunities for Syrian refugees?" Ultimately, the study aims to provide recommendations for creating or expanding programs that support refugee education and employment, contributing to better integration outcomes for refugees and stronger, more resilient host societies.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Syrian conflict began in 2011 as a popular uprising against the Assad regime, sparked by protests following the government's arrest and torture of children who had painted anti-government graffiti (Ferris and Kirişci 2016). Initially peaceful, the protests escalated after the regime's violent crackdown, transforming into a full-scale civil war involving the Assad government, various opposition groups, Kurdish forces, and foreign powers like Russia, Iran, Türkiye, and the U.S. (Ferris and Kirişci 2016). The regime's violent suppression, including targeted attacks on civilian areas, triggered mass displacement, particularly as refugees fled the violence in search of safety in neighboring countries (Ferris and Kirişci 2016). By 2014, over 10 million Syrians had been displaced, with approximately 3.5 million seeking refuge in countries like Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan (Brandt and Mckenzie 2017). This displacement is directly tied to the regime's violence, which forced families to flee their homes, leading to one of the largest refugee crises in modern history. With the recent fall of the Assad regime, the country's future remains uncertain, as rival factions and external actors compete for influence, leaving the conflict's resolution and Syria's stability in question.

The policies of Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan toward Syrian refugees have been heavily influenced by their historical experiences with Palestinian refugee resettlement. Lebanon, which hosts a long-standing Palestinian refugee population, has consistently denied Palestinians citizenship, restricted their access to formal employment, and limited their rights to social services (Janmyr 2016). This restrictive framework has carried over to its approach to Syrian refugees, reinforcing policies that prevent long-term settlement and economic integration (Kheshen 2022). Jordan, in contrast, granted citizenship to a large portion of Palestinian refugees, shaping a different response to the Syrian crisis (Massad 2020). While Jordan has provided temporary protection to Syrians, it has stopped short of offering them the same level of integration afforded to many Palestinians, opting instead for a structured but limited refugee response (Hoffman 2020). Türkiye, which hosts a smaller Palestinian refugee population compared to Lebanon and Jordan, has historically provided them with residency rights but without pathways to full citizenship (Republic of Türkiye 2025). This precedent offers insight into Türkiye's selective approach to Syrian refugees, where naturalization has been granted primarily to those deemed beneficial to the state, such as skilled professionals or business owners (Makovsky 2019). However, the broader Syrian refugee population, like Palestinian refugees before them, faces increasing legal and social barriers as nationalist sentiments and political pressures grow (Makovsky 2019). These historical precedents continue to inform contemporary refugee policies in the region, shaping the legal and social landscapes for displaced populations.

INITIAL RESPONSES

Lebanon's Approach

In the early years, Lebanon maintained an open-door policy, allowing Syrians to enter with only an ID card (Andersen 2016). Approximately 100,000 refugees entered Lebanon in 2011, and initial reactions were calm, as the Lebanese government expected the conflict to be short-lived (Andersen 2016). However, as the situation worsened, tensions began to rise between Lebanese host communities and Syrian refugees, as well as between political factions within Lebanon, particularly given Lebanon's historical reluctance to host long-term refugees. These tensions are intensified by Lebanon's delicate sectarian makeup- divided among Sunnis, Shias, Christians, and Druze- where the arrival of predominantly Sunni Syrian refugees has raised concerns among political elites about upsetting the demographic balance and reigniting sectarian conflict (Crisis Group 2013). Many Syrian refugees have also moved into pre-existing Palestinian refugee camps, such as Shatila and Burj el-Barajneh, or settled in ad hoc informal shelters in the Bekaa Valley and southern Lebanon, compounding overcrowding, infrastructure strain, and poverty in already marginalized areas (OCHA 2014). The Lebanese government, which has not signed the 1951 Refugee

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Convention or its 1967 Protocol, is therefore not legally bound to adhere to these international guidelines on refugee treatment (Kheshen 2022).

Concerned about the potential for another protracted refugee situation, similar to the Palestinian refugee issue, Lebanon avoided establishing formal camps for Syrian refugees (Andersen 2016). Instead, Syrians were left to reside in informal settlements, creating social tension and increased poverty (Oehring 2013). In October 2014, Lebanon's Council of Ministers took further steps to address the growing refugee population by implementing a policy aimed at decreasing the number of Syrians in the country, which included new entry requirements and residency regulations through the General Security Office (Janmyr 2016). Additionally, Lebanon's 1962 Law Regulating the Entry and Stay of Foreigners, though it includes provisions related to asylum, is rarely applied, leaving Lebanon to manage refugee-related issues primarily through general immigration laws rather than specific refugee legislation, thus leaving many Syrians without clear legal protections (Saliba 2016). Further complicating the situation, Lebanon regulates refugees under the kafala system, which ties their legal residency to sponsorship by a Lebanese citizen or employer, restricting refugees' freedom of movement and limiting their access to work and essential services, which exacerbates their vulnerability and complicating integration (Robinson 2022). By 2012, the Lebanese government began imposing restrictions, such as work permit limitations and registration requirements, to control the influx (Andersen 2016).

Jordan's Response

Jordan, initially welcoming, began to face mounting challenges as the refugee influx increased. By 2012, over 200,000 Syrian refugees had entered the country (Oehring 2013). Many refugees lived with family members, but by 2013, a significant number of refugees without family ties in the country had arrived, overwhelming the system (Oehring 2013). Refugee camps, particularly in the north, became under-resourced and difficult to manage (Oehring 2013). While camps like Zaatari and Azraq have received international attention, over 80% of Syrian refugees in Jordan actually reside in urban areas rather than in formal refugee camps (Jordan n.d.). This urban majority faces distinct challenges- including rent burdens, inconsistent access to aid, and competition for low-wage jobs- that differ significantly from those in camp settings (Jordan n.d.). Although Jordan is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, it signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the UNHCR in 1998, establishing a framework for cooperation and ensuring that refugees receive protection and assistance (Janmyr 2016). In response to the prolonged crisis, Jordan introduced the Jordan Compact in 2016, an agreement with international donors to improve the living conditions of Syrian refugees and host communities by providing job opportunities and enhancing education and healthcare services (Huang and Gough 2019).

Türkiye's Strategy

Türkiye hosts the largest Syrian refugee population, with around 200,000 living in government-run camps and millions more in urban areas (Oehring 2016). Turkish authorities initially handled the crisis by drawing on their experience from past disasters, setting up 21 camps and providing medical assistance (Oehring 2016). However, as the refugee population swelled, Türkiye faced mounting challenges in ensuring adequate services and maintaining social stability. Despite significant investments in camp infrastructure, most Syrian refugees live in urban areas, where access to resources and employment remains difficult. In 2013, Türkiye introduced the Law of Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP), a comprehensive law aligning Turkish asylum policies more closely with EU standards by outlining procedures for asylum, refugee status, subsidiary protection, and temporary protection (Directorate General of Migration Management 2025). Following this, Türkiye enacted the Temporary Protection Regulation in 2014, granting temporary protection to refugees, which includes access to education, healthcare, and other social services, although this status does not lead to permanent residency (Temporary Protection in Law on Foreigners and International Protection n.d.). In 2016, the Directive on the Working Permits of Foreigners Under Temporary Protection was introduced, allowing Syrian refugees under temporary protection to obtain work permits; however, navigating this process remains complex, adding to the difficulties faced by many Syrians seeking employment (Republic of Türkiye 2016).

International Response

The initial international response focused on humanitarian aid and diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, but regional tensions and competing interests soon complicated these efforts. The United Nations and various NGOs mobilized to provide emergency assistance, but the complexity of the conflict and lack of alignment among international powers limited the effectiveness of diplomatic interventions (Christophersen 2015). The UN appointed Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary-General, and Lakhdar Brahimi, a veteran Algerian diplomat, to mediate, though both resigned after failed peace negotiations (Ferris and Kirişci 2016). The UN Security Council passed Resolution 2254 in 2015, calling for a political resolution, but this initiative was hindered by divisions over Assad's role in any future government (Ferris and Kirişci 2016). Host countries, influenced by past refugee crises, were cautious in their approach. Lebanon, haunted by the long-standing presence of Palestinian refugees, was reluctant to sign the Refugee Convention and imposed restrictions on Syrian refugees (Andersen 2016). Similarly, Jordan faced political and economic concerns, exacerbated by local resentment as refugee support created perceptions of unequal aid distribution (Oehring 2013).

The UNHCR attempted to establish formal refugee camps in Lebanon but was blocked for political reasons, as the

government feared permanent settlement and demographic shifts, leaving refugees to live in informal settlements (Andersen 2016). In Jordan, the government refrained from restricting the influx of refugees, but the strain on public services soon became apparent (Culbertson and Constant 2015). Türkiye's approach was initially structured and efficient, drawing on previous disaster management experience, yet the overwhelming numbers led to challenges in managing urban refugee populations (Batrawi 2020). The influx of refugees has had substantial economic and social impacts on host nations, creating tensions between refugees and locals and putting pressure on already limited infrastructure.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Educational Barriers

Limited access to education is a critical barrier for Syrian refugees in all three host countries (Culbertson and Constant 2015). Scholar Mona Christophersen (2015) identifies the main barrier to education for Syrian refugees in Jordan being the education system's capacity. She reports that in Jordan, approximately 40% of school-age Syrian children are not enrolled in formal education, mainly due to economic challenges within the education system and Syrian refugee households, disparities in educational access between Syrian and Jordanian students, legal and regulatory barriers to school enrollment, social tensions within schools, and competing priorities faced by refugee households (Christophersen 2015). Similarly, in Türkiye, many Syrian children face significant enrollment challenges, with over 40% of school-age children missing out on education (UNICEF 2017). UNICEF suggests that Syrian refugee children be integrated into a national program that distributes cash allowances to vulnerable families, encouraging them to keep their children in school (UNICEF 2017). In Lebanon over 44% of school-aged (aged 6-17 years) Syrian refugees are not attending, with 35% of Syrian refugee youth (aged 15-14 years) having never attended (UNHCR 2024). The 2023 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon (VASyR) reports that the key barriers to education include the cost of transportation, the cost of education materials, schools not allowing registration, and children having to work (VASyR 2023). Refugees living in camps generally have better access to education than those in informal settlements, where facilities are severely limited. This lack of access contributes to a growing educational gap among Syrian youth, increasing the risk of permanent exclusion from the education system.

The trauma caused by war, displacement, and disrupted schooling also deeply affects refugee children, many of whom suffer from anxiety, depression, and PTSD, which hinder their ability to engage in learning and adapt to new environments. The lack of mental health support in schools further exacerbates these challenges, leading to absenteeism and dropout rates. In his report, Shuan Grech (2019) suggests a broader shift is necessary among university donors and the conditions they impose to enable these universities to operate in ways that are informed, sensitive, and responsive, ensuring sustainability and scalability over time. Grech asserts this change must promote inclusivity for all refugee students and without such adjustments, the educational system will likely continue to uphold and reinforce social and other forms of inequality (Grech 2019).

Mona Chistophersen also asserts the language gap is another serious barrier for refugee children. Syrian refugees must often learn in a different language and follow a new curriculum, creating confusion, particularly for older students (Christophersen 2015). Language barriers further limit refugee educational integration. In Lebanon and Jordan, while Arabic is used, divergent national curricula hinder students' ability to meet standardized testing expectations like the Tawjihi (Christophersen 2015). In Türkiye, instruction in Turkish without adequate language support severely impairs both academic success and social inclusion (Qaddour 2018). Christophersen suggests better and more comprehensive surveys for Syrian refugees would help better identify solutions to closing the language gap amongst students (Christophersen 2015).

The quality of education is compromised across all three countries. In Jordan, the double-shift system, where Jordanian students attend in the morning and Syrian refugees in the afternoon, was designed to accommodate the influx of Syrian students but reduces classroom time, impacting educational quality (Christophersen 2015). Teachers report feeling overwhelmed by high student-to-teacher ratios, resulting in less individualized attention. Similarly, Lebanon's education system suffers from insufficient resources, including a lack of teachers and learning materials. In Türkiye, overcrowded classrooms and a shortage of trained educators further degrade the quality of education. In their research paper "International Perspectives on School Settings, Education Policy and Digital Strategies: A Transatlantic Discourse in Education research," scholars Annika Wilmers and Sieglinde Jornitz (2021) indicate that refugee students often face trauma, fear, and safety concerns, impacting both their learning capacity and identity development. Wilmers and Jornitz assert that educators play a crucial role in countering negative or dismissive narratives about immigrants and refugees sometimes promoted by media or political figures. Educators must foster inclusive approaches for integrating refugee students into schools and universities without subjecting them to stigma (Wilmers and Jornitz 2021). Language proficiency is essential for success in academic settings, yet the trauma and sense of losing one's "former" identity can hinder a refugee's openness and capacity to acquire a new language (Wilmers and Jornitz 2021). As a result, Syrian children often fall behind academically, which, combined with emotional challenges, increases the risk of dropping out.

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Employment Barriers

One of the most significant employment barriers for Syrian refugees in host countries is the difficulty in obtaining legal work permits. In Türkiye, refugees have limited access to the formal labor market, with work permits generally restricted to specific sectors. Consequently, many refugees are pushed into the informal sector, where they face poor working conditions, exploitation, and lack of social protections. In his report "Türkiye's Refugee Resilience: Expanding and Improving Solutions for the Economic Inclusion of Syrian in Türkiye", scholar Bastien Revel (2020) documents that only 7% of Syrian refugees are working formally. Revel asserts that the economic impact of refugees in Türkiye has been mixed, with some groups benefiting and others displaced. However, many Syrians are employed informally, providing cost-saving opportunities for businesses (Revel 2020). In Lebanon, while there is no formal ban on refugees working, bureaucratic barriers and fear of arrest or deportation often prevent Syrians from obtaining work permits (Hardman 2021). In Jordan, legal frameworks exist, but they are restrictive, and the lack of work permits forces many refugees into low-wage, precarious jobs (UNHCR 2024).

Labor market discrimination against Syrian refugees in Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan operates in a legal gray area, as national labor laws prohibit workplace discrimination but do not explicitly protect refugees (Peitz et al. 2023). Restrictive labor policies, sectoral limitations, and informal work conditions leave Syrians vulnerable to exploitation without clear legal recourse. In Jordan and Lebanon, refugees are often seen as a threat to local employment, resulting in hostility from local communities and discriminatory hiring practices (Christophersen 2015). Refugees in Türkiye face similar challenges, with negative perceptions contributing to social tensions (Revel 2020). Even when refugees secure jobs, they are often paid lower wages than their Turkish, Lebanese, or Jordanian counterparts for the same work, further contributing to economic inequality and exploitation (Revel 2020).

Social and Economic Pressures on Host Communities

The Syrian refugee crisis has placed significant social and economic pressures on host communities, straining resources like healthcare, education, housing, and utilities. In Lebanon, where the population has increased by over 25%, local resources, particularly water and healthcare, are stretched thin, worsening existing challenges (Concern Worldwide 2024). In Jordan and Türkiye, refugee settlements strain infrastructure, leading to overcrowded cities and informal housing (Oehring 2013).

In Jordan and Türkiye, refugee settlements have strained infrastructure, leading to overcrowded cities and informal housing (Brookings 2025). Host communities have also shown resilience. However, competition for low-wage jobs remains a major source of friction. In Lebanon, refugees often work in the informal sector at lower wages, while in Jordan, competition for jobs has led to higher unemployment and labor market discrimination (Faek 2017). In Türkiye, although the government has granted some Syrians pathways to naturalization, public resentment and political shifts have significantly restricted their access to jobs and education (Munajed and Ekren 2020). Discriminatory hiring practices further exacerbate wage disparities, with Syrian workers frequently earning 20–30% less than their Turkish counterparts for the same jobs (Elgin and Elveren 2024). The politicization of refugee issues has fueled anti-Syrian sentiment, leading to reduced support for inclusive education policies and heightened social divisions in schools and workplaces (Irgil and Norman 2024). These challenges complicate the reception of policies designed to manage the crisis. Governments in host countries face difficulties balancing international obligations with domestic needs, often resulting in political instability and a lack of policy consensus.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a comparative, rubric-based assessment to evaluate refugee integration through education and employment programs. The evaluation framework is built on existing global frameworks, including the Global Framework for Refugee Education, the OECD Report on Refugee Education, and the UNHCR Integration Handbook (Cerna 2019). The rubric establishes standardized scoring criteria across multiple indicators to assess legal, accessibility, and outcome-based dimensions of refugee integration. A mixed-methods approach is applied, combining quantitative data analysis from secondary sources (such as UNHCR reports, government statistics, and NGO datasets) with qualitative case studies to provide contextual insights.

The evaluation rubric assesses refugee integration specifically across two dimensions: Education Integration (including legal access, credential recognition, language support, enrollment and graduation rates, and vocational opportunities) and Employment Integration (covering work rights, credential recognition, employment rates, wage equality, and career advancement), as detailed in Table 1. Each indicator is scored on a 1-to-5 scale using quantitative data from UNHCR Refugee Education Reports, government labor statistics, OECD data, and NGO evaluations. Qualitative data from case studies, NGO analyses, and reports from refugee-hosting nations such as Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan provide contextual insights. Despite data limitations—like inconsistent reporting by host governments—proxy indicators (e.g., informal labor statistics) help approximate scores, ensuring thorough comparative analysis.

The scoring process involves assigning each country or program a score for each indicator based on available data. In cases where precise data is unavailable, estimates are derived from proxy indicators such as refugee labor participation rates or informal assessments from NGO reports. A final

Table 1. Refugee Integration Evaluation Rubric

Category	5 Points	4 Points	3 Points	2 Points	1 Point
Legal Access to Education	Full legal access to all education levels	Legal access but with administrative hurdles	Access only to primary & secondary, restricted higher ed	Primary education access only	No legal access to education
Recognition of Prior Education & Credentials	Automatic recognition of refugee diplomas	Recognition possible but requires verification	Limited recognition	Refugees must restart education	No recognition, must restart education
Enrollment Rates of School-Age Refugee Children	>90% enrollment	75-89% enrollment	50-74% enrollment	25-49% enrollment	<25% enrollment
Language Support Programs	Comprehensive language support programs	Language programs exist but not universal	Limited language courses	Informal language learning only	No language support
Financial & Material Support for Refugee Students	Free tuition, books, and transport support	Free primary/ secondary, limited higher ed support	Limited financial aid	Most refugees must pay full tuition	No financial aid
Graduation Rates of Refugee Students	80%+ graduation rate	65-79% graduation rate	50-64% graduation rate	30-49% graduation rate	<30% graduation rate
Transition from Education to Employment	>80% employed or further studies in 12 months	65-79% employed or further studies	50-64% employed or further studies	30-49% employed or further studies	<30% employed or further studies
Refugee Access to Universities	>10% refugee youth in higher education	7-9% enrollment	4-6% enrollment	1-3% enrollment	<1% enrollment
Availability of Vocational Training	Recognized vocational training programs	Some vocational programs with gaps	Limited vocational training	Few NGO-run vocational programs	No vocational training
Job Placement Programs for Refugee Graduates	Govt. & private sector job placement	Some industries have job placements	Limited job placement via NGOs	Few internships, no job placement	No structured job placement
Right to Work	Full work rights equal to nationals	Work permits needed but all sectors open	Work permits required, some sector restrictions	Only informal or restricted work allowed	Refugees banned from working
Recognition of Foreign Credentials	Automatic degree recognition	Recognition possible but costly/ delayed	Only some fields recognize credentials	Recognition is highly restrictive	No recognition, must requalify
Refugee Employment Rate	>70% refugee employment	55-69% refugee employment	40-54% refugee employment	25-39% refugee employment	<25% refugee employment
Work Permit Processing Time	<3 months	3-6 months	6-12 months	12-24 months	>24 months
Access to Professional & Skilled Jobs	Equal access to skilled jobs	Some barriers to skilled jobs	Few refugees in skilled jobs	Most refugees in low-wage jobs	Only informal, exploitative work
Wage Equality	Equal pay for equal work	Small wage gap (<10%)	Moderate wage gap (10-30%)	Significant wage gap (30-50%)	Refugees earn <50% of nationals
Legal Protections Against Workplace Discrimination	Strong laws enforced	Laws exist but weak enforcement	Limited protections	No effective protections	Open workplace discrimination
Job Retention Rates	>80% retain jobs for 1+ year	65-79% retain jobs	50-64% retain jobs	30-49% retain jobs	<30% retain jobs
Career Advancement for Refugees	Refugees in managerial/ executive roles	Some mid-level promotions	Slow career growth	Few promotions	No advancement
Refugee Entrepreneurship Success Rate	>10% own businesses	7-9% own businesses	4-6% own businesses	1-3% own businesses	<1% own businesses

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weighted score is calculated for each country, with emphasis placed on policy effectiveness, program impact, and economic self-reliance. Policy effectiveness is measured by assessing legal access and administrative barriers, program impact is evaluated based on graduation rates and employment transition success, and economic self-reliance is determined through job placement rates and career advancement opportunities.

Despite the structured approach, this methodology has some limitations. Data availability remains a challenge, as some refugee-hosting countries lack consistent employment or education statistics. Additionally, the gap between policy and implementation can be significant, meaning that legal frameworks may not always reflect real access to education and employment for refugees. Lastly, the comparability of findings is influenced by variations in socioeconomic contexts across host countries, making direct comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, this rubric-based methodology provides a systematic approach to evaluating refugee integration, offering insights into the effectiveness of policies and programs across different regions.

RESULTS

Türkiye: Moderate Integration (63/100)

Türkiye scored the highest among the three countries, particularly in education accessibility and legal work rights. Türkiye scored 5-points in legal access to education due to Türkiye's commitment under the Law on Foreigners and International Protection (LFIP) and Temporary Protection Regulation, which grant refugees the right to attend all levels of education (UNHCR 2025). However, recognition of prior education and credentials received a score of 3 points, as the equivalency process for refugee diplomas is complex and varies by institution (AIDA 2024). Enrollment rates for refugee children are relatively high (4 points) due to Türkiye's integration of over 1 million refugee students into the national education system, yet challenges like language barriers and economic hardship still limit full participation (AIDA 2024). The language support system scored 3 points, as courses are available but not universally accessible (AIDA 2024). Financial aid is limited (3 points), with programs such as the Higher Education Cash Grant (HECG) providing support, though not comprehensively (UNHCR 2025).

In terms of higher education and vocational training, Türkiye received a 4 in refugee university access due to scholarship opportunities and exam pathways, but financial constraints still act as a barrier (AIDA 2024). Vocational training is available (3 points) but has gaps in availability and quality, while job placement programs scored low (2 points), indicating a lack of structured employment pathways for refugee graduates (International Labour Organization n.d.).

On employment integration, Türkiye scored relatively well (4 points) in right to work, as refugees can obtain work permits and access most sectors, though the process is lengthy (International Labour Organization n.d.). However, recognition of foreign credentials remains a challenge (3 points) due to bureaucratic delays and costs (AIDA 2024). Employment rates remain moderate (3 points), as many refugees are employed but face hurdles like discrimination and permit restrictions (International Labour Organization n.d.). Key barriers persist in skilled job access (3 points), wage equality (3 points), and job retention (3 points), as many refugees remain in low-wage sectors with limited career advancement opportunities (2 points) (International Labour Organization n.d.). Additionally, entrepreneurship success remains low (2 points) due to legal and financial constraints (International Labour Organization n.d.). Overall, Türkiye offers a relatively supportive policy environment, particularly in education and work rights, but language barriers, financial limitations, and employment restrictions hinder full integration.

Lebanon: Limited Integration (36/100)

Lebanon scores significantly lower than Türkiye due to severe restrictions on education and employment opportunities for Syrian refugees. The 2-point score in legal access to education reflects that refugees only have access to primary education, with limited secondary and higher education opportunities due to financial and language barriers (Masri 2013). Lebanon also lacks a standardized process for recognizing refugee diplomas (2 points), forcing many refugees to restart their education or work below their skill level (Khawaja 2016).

Enrollment rates are low (2 points), as financial constraints, limited school capacity, and social barriers prevent many refugee children from attending school (Masri 2013). Language barriers are a major challenge (2 points), as Lebanon's education system uses French and English, creating difficulties for Arabic-speaking Syrian refugees (Shuayb, Makkouk, and Tuttunji 2014). Financial aid for refugee students is insufficient (2 points), leading to high dropout rates (1 point) and a poor transition from education to employment (1 point) (Masri 2013).

Lebanon also ranks the lowest in higher education (1 point) due to extremely low university enrollment rates (6%) (Fincham 2022). Vocational training opportunities exist (2 points) but are largely NGO-driven and inconsistent (KfW 2024). Employment integration in Lebanon is highly restricted. Refugees face sector-specific work bans and difficult permit processes, leading to a 2-point score for right to work (KfW 2024). Foreign credential recognition is nearly non-existent (2 points), and employment rates remain low (2 points), as most refugees are forced into the informal sector (El-Ghali and Alameddine 2019).

Labor market barriers are evident in long work permit processing times (2 points), limited skilled job access (2 points), and wage disparities (2 points), with refugees earning

significantly less than Lebanese workers (Mufti 2018). Workplace discrimination is widespread (2 points), and job retention rates are low (2 points) due to the precarious nature of refugee employment (Mufti 2018). Career advancement is almost impossible (1 point), and refugee entrepreneurship remains rare (2 points) (Mufti 2018). Lebanon's restrictive policies and economic challenges create a difficult environment for refugee integration, particularly in education, employment, and long-term economic stability. The country is further destabilized by the ongoing Israel-Palestine war, with Hezbollah engaged in border clashes with Israel, while a severe political and economic crisis—including government paralysis and a collapsed banking sector—has left both citizens and refugees struggling to access basic services (IOM 2025).

Jordan: Partial Integration (47/100)

Jordan falls between Türkiye and Lebanon, with some support for refugee education but severe employment restrictions. Refugees have legal access to primary and secondary education (4 points), though administrative hurdles such as documentation requirements still exist (Khan 2023). Recognition of prior education and credentials remains limited (3 points) due to inconsistent processes and fees (UNESCO 2025).

Enrollment rates are low (2 points), with high dropout rates and 41% of school-aged refugees out of school (UNESCO 2025). Jordan offers some language support (3 points), but it is not comprehensive, leaving many refugee students struggling academically (UNESCO 2025). While public primary and secondary education is free, financial support remains insufficient (3 points), especially for higher education, which is costly and inaccessible to most refugees (UNESCO 2025).

Graduation rates are low (2 points) due to high dropout rates, and only a small percentage of refugee students transition successfully from education to employment (2 points) (Parker-Magyar n.d.). Access to universities is highly restricted (2 points) due to high tuition fees and limited scholarships (Krafft et al. 2018). Vocational training programs exist (3 points) but have gaps in availability and recognition (UNESCO 2025).

On employment integration, Jordan offers some work opportunities (3 points) but restricts refugees to low-skilled sectors such as agriculture and construction (UNESCO 2025). Foreign credential recognition is difficult (2 points), and employment rates remain low (2 points), with many refugees working informally (Krafft et al. 2018). Labor market barriers include long work permit processing times (1 point), limited skilled job access (2 points), and wage inequalities (3 points), as refugees often earn less than Jordanian workers (U.S. Department of State 2023). Workplace discrimination protections are weak (2 points), and job retention rates are low (2 points) due to the unstable nature of refugee employment (Gordon 2016). Career advancement remains challenging (2 points), and refugee entrepreneurship is limited (2 points) despite some policy reforms to support small businesses (U.S. Department of State 2023). Jordan's education policies are more supportive than Lebanon's but less effective than Türkiye's. Employment opportunities remain severely restricted, leading to a lack of long-term economic integration for refugees.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM GERMANY AND COLOMBIA

While the recommendations provided aim to improve refugee integration, their success in boosting local economies, alleviating labor shortages, and enhancing social cohesion will ultimately depend on host countries' political commitment, economic conditions, and effective policy implementation. To better contextualize these recommendations and identify best practices, the five countries hosting the highest number of refugees—Islamic Republic of Iran, Türkiye, Colombia, Germany, and Uganda—were evaluated using the same rubric applied to Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan. These countries were assessed based on their policies toward all refugees, not just Syrians, to provide a broader perspective on integration strategies. After scoring each country, those that performed better than Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan were selected as case studies for best practices. Germany and Colombia emerged as the strongest models due to their higher scores, reflecting progressive policies on education access, employment rights, and vocational training. Their comprehensive legal protections, efficient credential recognition, and structured job placement programs offer valuable insights into successful refugee integration. Germany, with a score of 84/100, has comprehensive legal protections, efficient credential recognition, and strong job placement programs. Colombia, with a score of 72/100, has an open-door policy for education, financial support for refugee students, and streamlined work permit processes. By adopting key elements from these countries, Türkiye, Lebanon, and Jordan can enhance refugee access to education, improve employment outcomes, and foster long-term economic integration.

Türkiye: Enhancing Employment and Education Support

Türkiye performs relatively well in refugee integration but can improve by addressing language barriers, job placement, and foreign credential recognition. Recognition of prior education and credentials should be streamlined by adopting Germany's structured equivalency system, allowing for automatic validation of select degrees and reduced verification costs. Language support programs should be expanded, modeled after Germany's intensive government-funded language courses, ensuring universal access to free Turkish classes in schools and adult education centers (Benoit 2024). To boost employment integration, Türkiye should increase job placement programs, following Colombia's example of employer partnerships and mentorship programs that connect refugees with stable career opportunities

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(Goldberg 2024). Additionally, work permit processing should be accelerated, learning from Germany's digitalized application systems that ensure permits are granted within months rather than years (Germany Visa n.d.). To address wage disparities and career stagnation, Türkiye should implement wage monitoring policies, workplace training programs, and business incentives following Germany's "Job Turbo" initiative, which collaborates with businesses and trade unions to integrate refugees through language acquisition and skill development (Restelica 2023). Lastly, refugee entrepreneurship should be encouraged by simplifying business registration processes, providing micro-financing options, and following Colombia's model of small-business grants for displaced populations (GIZ n.d.).

Lebanon: Addressing Legal Barriers and Financial Constraints

Lebanon ranks the lowest due to severe restrictions on education and employment for refugees. Lebanon has historically been less inclined to adopt an open-door refugee policy due to its geographic location, economic constraints, and political landscape. As a small country sharing a border with Syria, Lebanon hosts over 1.5 million Syrian refugees, alongside a longstanding Palestinian refugee population, straining its limited infrastructure and resources (EU 2025). The protracted presence of Palestinian refugees, many of whom still lack basic rights and employment opportunities, has contributed to fears that granting broader rights to Syrians could lead to permanent settlement and demographic shifts, disrupting Lebanon's delicate sectarian balance (Romdhane 2024). Additionally, Lebanon's ongoing economic crisis, coupled with political instability and strained public services, has made refugee integration a contentious issue. However, international financial assistance and targeted economic incentives could shift the cost-benefit ratio, making a more inclusive approach feasible. Increased development aid, similar to the EU's €959 million in humanitarian support, could help improve infrastructure and public services for both refugees and host communities (EU 2025). Expanding initiatives like the Global Concessional Financing Facility (GCFF) would provide concessional financing to alleviate fiscal pressures while promoting economic opportunities (World Bank 2024). Encouraging private-sector partnerships and entrepreneurship programs could generate employment for both refugees and Lebanese citizens, reducing aid dependency. Programs that offer grants and microloans to refugee entrepreneurs have already shown success in parts of Lebanon, and scaling such initiatives could enhance economic integration (Triodos Bank n.d.). By implementing these measures, Lebanon can address key barriers while balancing political and economic concerns, ultimately improving refugee access to education and employment.

To improve education access, Lebanon should follow Colombia's open-door policy, removing documentation barriers and ensuring full legal access to secondary and higher education for refugees. Financial aid should be expanded, modeled after Colombia's tuition-free schooling, free textbooks, and transport assistance (Education Cannot Wait, n.d.). Language barriers should be addressed by introducing nationwide bilingual support centers, inspired by Germany's structured refugee integration programs (Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.). Vocational training and job placement must be strengthened through partnerships with NGOs and private employers, ensuring formal employment pathways for refugees, as seen in both Colombia and Germany.

Employment restrictions remain a major challenge, and Lebanon should lift sectoral work bans, following Colombia's inclusive employment policies that grant equal work rights to refugees (UNHCR 2025). Credential recognition should be improved by establishing fast-track diploma validation, similar to Germany's refugee qualification programs (Global Compact on Refugees, n.d.). To tackle wage gaps and workplace discrimination, Lebanon should implement strong labor protections, anti-discrimination laws, and equal pay enforcement policies, as seen in Germany (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, n.d.). Lastly, refugee entrepreneurship should be supported by lowering business registration costs, offering tax incentives, and providing access to capital, mirroring Colombia's successful refugee business programs (UNHCR 2024).

Jordan: Bridging Gaps in Employment and Higher Education

Jordan shows moderate progress in refugee integration but can enhance access to higher education, speed up work permits, and strengthen employment programs. University access should be expanded, modeled after Germany's scholarship programs and tuition subsidies for refugee students (UNHCR 2025). Enrollment rates must be improved by increasing school capacity, removing documentation barriers, and providing financial incentives for refugee families, as successfully implemented in Colombia (Rossiasco and Narvaez 2023). Vocational training should be more comprehensive, ensuring that certifications are nationally recognized and linked to employment, following Germany's dual education model that aligns training programs with workforce demands (Thomas et al. 2024).

On employment, Jordan should streamline work permit processing, inspired by Colombia's digitalized and time-limited work permit application systems (UNHCR 2024). To increase access to skilled jobs, Jordan should create licensing programs for refugee professionals, modeled after Germany's recognition of foreign qualifications (German Missions in the United States, n.d.). Wage equality and workplace protections should be strengthened, ensuring labor laws explicitly prohibit refugee discrimination, following Germany's strict labor enforcement policies (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency, n.d.). Lastly, refugee entrepreneurship should be encouraged, as seen in Colombia, by reducing legal barriers, offering startup grants, and providing business development support (UNHCR 2022).

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CONCLUSION

This essay was written before the fall of the Assad regime, and its analysis reflects the conditions and policies in place at that time. If current programs remain unchanged, the short-term prospects for Syrian refugees' education and employment outcomes will likely remain bleak, with ongoing humanitarian challenges exacerbating these barriers. Many refugees face food insecurity, limited healthcare access, and significant psychological struggles, such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD, due to their trauma. These factors compound educational and employment obstacles, making their integration into host communities more difficult. Educational programs in Lebanon, Türkiye, and Jordan are often overcrowded and underfunded, with legal and logistical challenges restricting access to formal schooling. Refugee children continue to experience significant literacy and skill gaps, restricting their long-term prospects. Employment programs largely confine refugees to informal, low-wage sectors with few legal protections, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependence.

Long-term improvements depend on enhancing refugee-focused programs. For example, expanding educational initiatives that support refugee children and adults, such as language skills training, digital learning platforms, and community-based tutoring, can help bridge skill gaps and improve future prospects. Expanding vocational training programs that offer market-relevant skills can better prepare refugees for the workforce, while also offering pathways to formal employment. Providing psychosocial support programs to address mental health challenges, including trauma counseling and resilience-building activities, would reduce the psychological barriers hindering refugees' education and employment opportunities.

International support plays a critical role in strengthening these programs. With sustained international funding, host countries could scale up education and job creation initiatives, reducing refugees' dependence on humanitarian aid and fostering economic resilience within host communities. Despite the fall of the Assad regime, Syria remains fragmented and unstable. Widespread destruction of infrastructure, ongoing violence in certain regions, and the absence of a coordinated reconstruction plan mean that conditions for safe, voluntary return remain deeply uncertain. Until durable solutions emerge, host countries will continue to bear long-term responsibility for refugee inclusion, making the expansion of education and employment opportunities not only necessary but urgent. Technological advancements, such as online learning platforms and remote work opportunities, offer promising avenues for integrating refugees into the formal economy. However, substantial investments in digital infrastructure are needed, especially in refugee camps and underserved areas, to make these programs accessible and effective.

Integration programs that focus on including Syrian refugees in host economies could provide long-term benefits. By offering refugees access to formal employment and education, these programs could help fill labor shortages in sectors like agriculture, construction, and services. In the long run, this inclusion would foster local economic growth, enhance GDP, and improve economic resilience, while also reducing poverty among refugee populations. Socially, an inclusive approach could foster cultural exchange and promote social cohesion, reducing stigma and supporting stronger community ties. Politically, adopting such programs could stabilize host governments, promote social unity, and reduce risks of radicalization or unrest. Countries with successful integration programs could improve their international standing, earning recognition for their commitment to human rights and refugee support.

Without improvements to these programs, however, refugees will remain trapped in prolonged dependency, leading to generational poverty, social exclusion, and instability. A "lost generation" of refugees without access to education and employment would contribute to long-term economic strain, deepen social inequalities, and fuel resentment and xenophobia. Host governments may face internal and external pressures to take restrictive measures, such as forced return policies, further destabilizing the region. This could also drive illegal migration, increase border security tensions, and strain international relations, underscoring the urgent need for more effective education and employment programs that address both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term integration outcomes. ■

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Megan Novak is a recent graduate of Emmanuel College in Boston, where she earned a B.A. in International Studies with a concentration in Sustainability and Global Justice. She graduated *magna cum laude* with distinction in the field. Megan interned with the United Nations Economic and Social Council and collaborated with the NGO Working Group on Girls, contributing to advocacy on gender equality and girls' rights in global development. At Emmanuel, she founded and led the Environmental Justice Club, organizing student engagement on climate and environmental health. Her research and writing focus on refugee education, global equity, and international cooperation, which she plans to continue exploring in graduate studies.

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The 2023 Argentine Presidential Election: Understanding the Victory of Javier Milei via Linkage Mechanisms

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Argentina's 2023 election represented a shocking upset as the outsider libertarian Javier Milei upset the establishment right-wing candidate and eventually bested the Peronists in a runoff. In this paper, I investigate the roots of Milei's support and how he shocked Juntos por el Cambio's Patricia Bullrich and outcompeted the Peronist Candidate Sergio Massa. To do so, I utilize Herbert Kitschelt's primary citizen-politician linkage mechanisms to determine which linkage mechanism best explains the surprising results. To fill out the theoretical framework, I leverage literature from spatial explanations, party identification explanations, and charismatic explanations of voting behavior and political competition. I also traveled to Argentina and conducted field interviews with local politicos and academics about the expectations, reactions, and strategies employed during the election. I found that Milei's meteoric rise is best explained by his charisma and personalistic linkages, but that his victory was ultimately sealed through shrewd programmatic moderation to bring in voters from the establishment right. These findings highlight the compatibility of personalistic and programmatic linkage mechanisms, clarifying and challenging Kitschelt's conclusion that the linkage mechanisms are somewhat mutually exclusive.

INTRODUCTION

Javier Milei's campaign for president rocketed him from a fringe right-wing politician to the *Casa Rosada* itself. Milei's fiery demeanor and bizarre personal style made him a media darling (Nicas 2023). His chainsaw, wild hair, and spiritual relationship with his deceased dog (who Milei had cloned) captivated international media (Vox 2024). Milei leaned into his wacky image by striking a hard contrast between himself and establishment politicians. He behaved irreverently and harshly criticized both the Peronists and the establishment right, cultivating a political brand of a frenetic, courageous radical who could solve the country's dire problems.

Captivating as he was, Milei was not expected to beat out either of the two established coalitions. His strangeness was considered gimmicky, and his wild policy proposals too unpopular for his campaign to represent anything more than a novelty. Despite its small size, Milei built an electoral coalition out of Argentina's right-wing fringe parties. Even more, Milei was forced to compete for the votes of conservative Argentines with the established center-right *Juntos por el Cambio* (JxC, in English: Together for Change) coalition. JxC had successfully won the presidency in 2015 and was a well-established opponent to the Peronist *Frente de Todos* (FdT, in English: Everyone's Front). Thus, while Milei was a star of television punditry and an intriguing third option in this race, his rise to the front of the race and eventual victory took the entire country by surprise.

Milei held an advantage over the established coalitions. He was a political outsider who could not be blamed for the disastrous state of the country. The incumbent Peronist Fernández-Fernández presidency did little to improve a reeling economy. Decade-long unemployment and inflation continued to grow, pressuring Alberto Fernández, the sitting president, not to seek re-election. Resentment among voters was high, with over three-quarters of voters disapproving of the government (Directorio Legislativo 2023). Milei's lack of a record of failure meant there was nothing voters could hold against him. He centered his campaign on radical changes to the Peronist economy, such as slashing government spending in half and attempting to change the national currency to U.S. Dollars. This placed him in stark contrast with not only the left-leaning Peronists but also the gradual reform attempts made by conservatives like President Mauricio Macri (2015-2019). Accusing both the FdT and JxC of corruption, Milei framed himself as a savior to the Argentinian people from the existing ineffective political establishment.

The electoral advantage of being an outsider was immediately apparent: Argentina utilizes a two-round presidential election with an open primary. Candidates compete in the Simultaneous and Mandatory Open Primaries (PASO) to qualify for the general election by receiving more than 1.5% of the vote. In the 2023 PASO, Milei finished in first place—shocking competitors and upending polling expectations. In the first round of the general election, Milei

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maintained his support but was surpassed by Peronist Sergio Massa, who relied on Peronist loyalties to significantly increase turnout. In a second-round runoff between the two men, Milei bested Massa thanks to key endorsements from the eliminated center-right candidate Patricia Bullrich and former president Mauricio Macri.

How did the unlikely outsider Javier Milei end up winning the biggest race in Argentine politics? To answer this question, I review key elements of the academic literature on elections, voter behavior, and party competition. I examine three main linkage strategies that parties use to connect with voters and analyze their explanatory power at each stage of the election. Understanding how an outsider candidate can dominate, underperform, and dominate again throughout the PASO and two rounds of the election requires that I track the dynamic strategy of the campaign as well as the multiple dimensions by which appeals occur. I also traveled to Argentina and conducted seven interviews with academics and experts on the nation's politics. I received approval from the The University of Texas' Institutional Review Board (STUDY0006361) on August 12th, 2024, to conduct these interviews and consent from the participants to use their contributions and names.

Utilizing this theoretical framework and the perspective gained from these research interviews, I find that each stage of the election was dominated by a particular linkage mechanism and that Javier Milei won in the runoff thanks to his combination of personalistic and programmatic linkages. Then, I draw on my findings for theoretical implications for the combination of these linkage mechanisms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding political competition requires exploring the relationship between party systems and voter behavior. The academic literature on this is divided into three major explanations for elections. In his 2000 Article "Linkages Between Citizens and Politicians in Democratic Polities," Herbert Kitschelt outlines three methods by which voters and candidates are tied to each other: programmatic, clientelist, and personal.

Programmatic Linkages

Programmatic linkages are voters' preferences for the kind of policies implemented by their government (Kitschelt 2000). Voters situate themselves on a left-to-right axis and evaluate programmatic offerings that are closest to their beliefs on the axis. The parties develop their programs with this in mind, seeking out the ideological position that is closest to the median voter (Downs 1957). While this model predicts that parties converge at the center, Downs also accounts for instances where an electorate is polarized in a multimodal distribution. This allows for parties to exist at the median of separate modes, explaining non-convergence in two-party systems.

Programmatic linkages account for the entry of new parties in a game-theoretic firm entry model. Under conditions of perfect information, new parties would never emerge because existing parties would perfectly approximate the median voter (Hug 2001). However, perfect information is impossible, and new parties *have* managed to win elections. Hug explains this through the party's miscalculation about the threat of challenging parties. If an established party misestimates the salience of a new party's policy platform and does not adapt, then it will be outflanked, and the new party will have better approximated the median voter.

Clientelist Linkages

Clientelist linkages are when a party or candidate promises preferential treatment and material gain for those who support them (Kitschelt 2000). It is a relationship of patronage between supporters and their governing politicians. Clientelism now represents more than just explicit vote-buying. Innovations like the secret ballot mean that parties cannot effectively monitor if voters are making good on their end of the bargain (Lawson and Greene 2014). From this challenge arises a broader understanding of clientelism that is related to the literature on party loyalty based on this longstanding exchange of benefits for votes.

The concept of party loyalty was heavily influenced by Albert Hirschman's 1970 book "Exit, Voice, and Loyalty." Here, Hirschman uses his model to predict why members of an organization in decline will either leave (exit) or demand change (voice). Organization members make their decision to stay or leave based on the perceived costs. If exiting is costless, and they have suitable alternatives, members are likely to leave. However, if members are confident in their ability to change the direction of the organization, they are likely to use their voice and stay.

Loyalty, by contrast, is a willingness to stay without demanding improvements. This patience is motivated by the earlier receipt of substantial benefits and the hope that the party will eventually recover its earlier performance and resume the distribution of benefits. Loyalty also avoids the uncertainty entailed by the "exit" option: Would an alternative party provide greater benefits?

Lawson and Greene (2014) contribute to this understanding of clientelism, explaining that parties can use clientelism to make voters feel that their vote is a debt they owe due to certain gifts or services that the party has provided them. Parties are playing off the psychological reflex of reciprocity. Voters feel that it is only fair that they do something for a party that has bestowed a selective favor upon them. Lawson and Greene's survey data even suggests that this obligation is a more powerful incentive to vote for a party than sympathizing with their policy program.

Party identification models attempt to explain how voters' attachments to parties are not based purely on rational, spatial thinking about policy. Instead, they examine social identities as a key motivator (Green et al. 2004). These ideas are not

incompatible with spatial theories; rather, they suggest that voters do not behave in perfectly rational ways. The influence of heuristics and pre-existing beliefs makes it doubtful that voters will fully analyze candidates' policy programs. These explanations explain the stability of party loyalty over time, with individuals likely to maintain their preferences for decades. Green et al. (2004) find that this strong identity attachment leads to a willingness to maintain one's affiliation despite fluctuating results. Parties downplay their losses and overstate their gains to voters who will happily consume these narratives. This idea clashes with spatial theories' expectations for voters. Voters' biases make it hard for information to pierce their worldviews.

The ultimate prediction of this theory is "divergent stability." Parties are distinct (divergent) groups to which voters form identity attachments that they defend over time. This heavily contrasts with programmatic, spatial models. Whereas the Downsian voter is constantly aware of changes undergone by the parties and perceives no cost to exiting their current party, clientelist and party ID literature depict voters as influenced by past loyalties and favors. From this understanding of clientelism, it becomes clear that there are both performance-based and psychological dimensions. While parties must be good patrons and provide for their supporters, they may also use the psychological attachments formed between the party and supporters to ensure that supporters remain loyal.

Personalistic Linkages

While programmatic and clientelist linkages are tools for parties and larger systems, politicians can leverage their charisma as a linkage mechanism. Charisma, as Kitschelt defines it, is "an individual's unique personal skills and powers of persuasion that instill followers with faith in the leader's ability to end suffering and create a better future" (2000). Personal linkages are built on grand gestures and voters' attraction to the personal styles of each candidate. While there is a clear asymmetry in the power between leader and voter, there is a direct and quasi-personal connection between them. The people are spoken to directly, and they feel a connection between their leader and their struggles. The leaders of these movements become celebrities, as the brand of the campaign is synonymous with their image.

Caitlin Andrews-Lee (2021) offers a succinct explanation of personal attachments through the case studies of Hugo Chávez and Juan Perón. Most powerful when a country is in crisis, movements based on charisma allow leaders to recognize the suffering of people and promise that they will enact sweeping change to quickly solve the crisis. Their programs become tied to the image of their provider. The leader takes on a reputation as the people's messiah, which is the basis of their legitimacy and supremacy. The direct, personal connection between leader and follower intensifies the psychological bond between the two. The result of this is an even greater willingness to ignore the leader's flaws. In times of crisis, when the people have little to lose, the charismatic leader's promise is too good to ignore. While followers expect miraculous feats to resolve a crisis, leaders are never to blame when these attempts fall short. Charismatic leaders successfully scapegoat other actors as responsible for their shortcomings.

Employing personalistic linkages requires sufficient opportunity and charisma. The state of a nation's politics must be dire, and the people must feel that the establishment politicians do not adequately represent their interests. If the country has a strong performing economy and relatively low levels of crime or corruption, the people have no grievance that a charismatic leader could use to build their new movement. Further, the leaders of this movement must be a symbol in themselves. Their persona is important for grounding legitimacy in their image rather than a party or policy program. They must be an icon who promises to end the crises the nation faces. Thus, in order for new parties with charismatic leaders to win power, there must be an opening generated by the political establishment's failure to resolve a crisis. The established parties must be perceived as weak and unwilling to do what is necessary. They do not take bold and decisive action to resolve the crisis, which alienates the people. The charismatic leader promises to solve the crisis by directly appealing to the people and empathizing with their suffering.

This contrasts with Downsian expectations, as voters are not rational calculators of self-interest but emotional and faithful followers of a charismatic leader. They eschew the policy programs that are the foundation for the spatial model. Charismatic explanations also contrast with explanations from the clientelist and party ID literature: voters feel no obligation to vote for these political newcomers. While they might develop clientelist linkages in power, charismatic leaders rely only on the faith that their political movement inspires. Additionally, while clientelism creates loyalty to the party and greater government, personalistic linkages develop ties to an individual savior.

THE PASO

Relevant History

Recent Argentine political competition was made more programmatic by the 2001 political and economic crisis. President Fernando De la Rúa came from the Radical Civic Union (UCR) party, which was ideologically heterogeneous but was the strongest anti-Peronist party in the country. De la Rúa came to power amidst a deteriorating economy that was struggling to defend the exchange rate set by Carlos Menem's "Convertibility Plan," which pegged the Argentinian Peso to the US Dollar. The country failed to export enough to afford the dollars necessary to defend such an exchange rate and began to amass a mountain of debt. Economic issues were exacerbated by political ones, as the UCR's ruling coalition did not have a legislative majority in either the House of Deputies or the Senate. Growing civil unrest and a spiraling economy led De la Rúa to resign only two years into his term.

De la Rúa was succeeded in the 2003 Presidential Election of Nestor Kirchner. Kirchner came into power at

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the same time as the commodities boom of the early 2000s, which changed the outlook of the Argentine economy (Murillo and Levitsky 2019, Llanos 2023). With exports surging, the government negotiated a favorable debt restructuring and suddenly had an influx of revenue to fund social welfare policies. Kirchner encouraged unions' collective bargaining, raised the minimum wage, and reformed the social security system to improve access for the unemployed and informally employed (Levitsky and Murillo 2008). Nestor and his eventual successor, Cristina Kirchner, were the most programmatically left-wing iterations of Peronism yet. Furthermore, *Kirchnerismo* was the most socially progressive form of Peronism yet, with support for gay marriage and human rights headlining a program that helped bring the middle class under the Peronist tent (Murillo and Levitsky 2019). However, this program became increasingly difficult to sustain. The fall of commodity prices meant that popular programs like energy subsidies might require cutting. Reducing spending on these programs might have been in the best interest of the economy, but it would have decked Peronist support. The Kirchners made a popular decision, opting not to slow economic growth or tamp down spending, prioritizing the short-term health of the economy over its long-term prognosis (Llanos 2023). Additionally, the Kirchners greatly expanded executive power, testing the limits of the country's checks and balances (Murillo and Levitsky 2019, Llanos 2023) while also alienating the middle-class voters who had joined their coalition.

These conflicts plagued the Peronists in the run-up to the 2015 election. Cristina Kirchner was term-limited, which led her to endorse Daniel Scioli, the popular governor of Buenos Aires Province, as the next Peronist nominee. However, internal division caused a dissident Peronist by the name of Sergio Massa to lead his own centrist coalition against Scioli in the 2015 election, fracturing the party's base of support. These fractures allowed Mauricio Macri, the mayor of Buenos Aires at the time, to lead his new Republican Proposal (PRO) party to the first conservative victory since De la Rúa. Even more, Macri was the first non-UCR conservative to ever win the presidency in Argentina. While Scioli took a lead in the first round of the election, Macri hung on and brought in more of Sergio Massa's dissident Peronists to win in the runoff election (Murillo and Levitsky 2019).

Macri brought a gradualist theory to economic reform and hoped to re-open the country to international markets and liberalize the sectors in which the Kirchners had heavily intervened. This gradualist theory failed due to a combination of bad politics and policymaking. On the politics side, Macri's coalition had nowhere close to a majority of seats in the Argentine legislature (Alles et al. 2016). While his initially bold leadership appealed to some Peronists and helped him pass a portion of his policy agenda, the full extent of Macri's economic program was not realized. Additionally, Macri chose to delay spending cuts and maintain an undefendable exchange rate. While he did not sink the economy to new lows, Macri failed to solve the country's economic problems and failed to win re-election in 2019.

The 2019 Argentine Presidential Election saw Cristina Fernández return to office as the vice-president, behind the more moderate Peronist Alberto Fernández. After an embarrassing defeat in 2015, the Peronists ran a much tighter coalition and were unified by the moderate Alberto and the polarizing Cristina. The failure of PRO and the conservatives to fix the economy meant that they could not accrue the popular support to beat a unified Peronist front (Garriga and Negri 2019). However, the Fernández-Fernández administration also proved to be inadequate to address the nation's failing economy. The COVID-19 Pandemic and ensuing economic downturn hit Argentina at the same time as a historic drought, which brought the country's economy to new lows. The incumbent administration was massively unpopular, leading Alberto Fernández to rule out a re-election bid. Dissatisfaction with governmental institutions was high, with disapproval rates over 70% (Directorio Legislativo 2023).

With the Peronists polling so poorly, the only question for who would be the next president of Argentina was who would emerge as the front-runner from JxC after the open primary (PASO). Juntos por el Cambio had two candidates: Horacio Rodriguez Larreta and Patricia Bullrich. Rodriguez Larreta was the mayor of the City of Buenos Aires and was seen as the most moderate conservative. He was a media darling, a skilled politician with the experience to govern as a non-Peronist. Rodriguez Larreta faced off against Patricia Bullrich, the former security minister of Mauricio Macri and a career politician, who took a more hardline stance against the Peronists and made crime and lawlessness the central theme of her campaign. Political analysts expected the less polarizing Rodriguez Larreta to be the more popular of the two candidates, continuing the trend of depolarization and programmatic moderation.[1]

The Rise of Milei

Despite these expectations that a moderate from the center-right coalition would take the lead, Javier Milei emerged as the unlikely victor of the PASO. Milei was expected to collect less than 20% of the vote and finish in third place, yet he finished in first place with 30%.[2] Despite the organizational advantages that JxC and the Peronists held over Milei's coalition, La Libertad Avanza (LLA), Juntos Por el Cambio, and Union por la Patria left this primary almost tied. Due to the historical electoral performances of Peronism and the lofty expectations set for Juntos por el Cambio, the only person who could truly claim victory was Milei. His libertarian coalition had gone toe to toe with the leading factions of Argentine politics and emerged victorious.

Programmatic linkages cannot explain this phenomenon. The central prediction of the spatial model is that candidates will converge toward the median voter in pursuit of the optimal position. It is highly unlikely that Javier Milei's far-right, libertarian attitudes represent the politics of the median

Argentine voter. Historically, the country has favored the left-wing Peronists and has only elected a handful of center-right candidates (Alfonsin, De La Rúa, Macri). With Macri representing the most conservative presidency in the country's history, it seems unlikely the country would change course and vote for the candidate who referred to the Macri Administration as "Kirchnerismo with good manners." Additionally, Milei did not attempt to run a programmatic campaign. While his policy proposals generated a lot of attention, they were infamous for their infeasibility and zaniness. Cutting half of the government's spending, removing the central bank's independence, and dollarizing the economy were radical proposals that had slim chances of success politically. The utility-maximizing voters posited by the spatial model would struggle to believe in such a vague platform.

Three pieces of evidence from the election support the argument that Milei's victory cannot be explained by programmatic linkages. First, Milei's coalition did not fare as well as he did. La Libertad Avanza put forth several candidates in provincial races that predated the presidential race. These candidates ran on similar libertarian platforms that were critical of both the Peronist and Cambiemos handling of the economy. The spatial model would estimate that these candidates would receive similar levels of support to Milei in the PASO, given that their positions are the same. Yet, these down-ballot LLA candidates could not capture the same share of the vote. Their message did not seem to resonate with voters the same way Milei's campaign did. This implies that Milei's voters did not support him because of a belief in the program that LLA put forward, but because of something more specific to Milei as a candidate.

Second, survey data about ideology indicates that Milei voters are ideologically similar to Bullrich voters. Data from voters shows that on a 1-7 ideological scale (with 4 being the median), Milei voters scored an average of 5.3, while Bullrich voters scored an average of about 5 (Calvo et al. 2024). These similarities indicate that traditional conservative opposition voters are similar to the voters who were willing to break away from the party and support Milei. Third, survey data also indicates a wide diversity of backgrounds for voters who supported Milei in the PASO. Most voters supported candidates of the same coalition that they supported in 2019. Most of Massa's support came from former Alberto Fernández voters, and most of Patricia Bullrich's support came from Macri voters. However, Milei split votes from seemingly disaffected members of these groups: 23.91% of Milei supporters backed Macri in 2019, compared to 23.41% who backed Fernández (Calvo 2023). Milei's coalition of voters had diverse backgrounds supporting both the left and right, making the likelihood of a mass conversion to the right seem unlikely.

While party identification models help explain why voters might pick a candidate who is further from the median, they cannot fully account for Milei's surge in votes. The loyalty that is key to party identification and clientelist linkages is necessarily built on feelings of reciprocity that would have been difficult for the newcomer Milei to exploit. While he did famously raffle off his paycheck in his brief stint as a member of Congress, Milei's ability to create a large patronage network is highly suspect. La Libertad Avanza was a new coalition that did not have an existing base to call upon. It would be hard to argue that an outsider candidate invoked feelings of reciprocity in his base of support as the key to his electoral strength. Furthermore, they do not account for the gap in party and individual performance for Milei. The level of analysis for party identification is that of the party organization, which means that any party identification effects would advantage other LLA candidates. Instead, Milei rose to the top alone.

Charismatic populist leadership rocketed Milei from a fringe third-place candidate into first place. The unit of analysis for charismatic linkages best explains why Milei alone rose to the top. The ideological similarity of his voters to establishment supporters is evidence that they are not swayed by a certain policy program or feelings towards a party. Instead, they are a new group that was siphoned from the bases of support of the existing parties. Milei's persuasion gives them faith to break away from the establishment and support the policy-light longshot who rages against the system.

Key to voters' willingness to break from previous party alignments (defying clientelist and loyalty-based linkages) and choose a longshot extremist candidate (defying programmatic linkages) is the impetus of a crisis. The massive unpopularity of Alberto Fernández and the failure of the conservative establishment administration of Mauricio Macri primed voters to reject the system.[3] The country's prolonged economic woes prepared voters to let go of their previous politics in favor of a new path. Milei wielded the flagging economy and failures of those previous administrations as his primary weapon in the PASO. He grouped the left and right as the "casta," insisting that these political elite were unresponsive and uninterested in helping the people of Argentina. In a system where failure has followed both Peronist and establishment anti-Peronist administrations, Milei's willingness to boldly criticize them in crude terms is a breath of fresh air for the disaffected.

While the poor state of the Argentine economy drove dissatisfaction with the political establishment, Milei needed to add credibility to his claims that he could solve the crisis. Indeed, being a political outsider was only half of the battle; Milei needed voters to connect with his personality to persuade them. First and most obviously, Milei relied on his experience as an economics professor to build the image that he was up to the task of fixing the economy. This technocratic credential was the center of his image on the main issue of the campaign. Second, Milei proved that he was not a typical politician through his undeniable authenticity.

His transgressive nature and fiery statements violated norms of political civility and tapped into the emotions of

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the electorate. Mile spoke undiplomatically, and through his courage, his supporters gave him the nickname "Milei the Lion."

Even beyond the transgressive and fiery nature of a typical anti-system populist, Milei's personality was captivating in its peculiarity. His time in a Rolling Stones cover band, his obsession with his dead dog (whom he had cloned and visits a psychic to commune with), and the unruly hair that he claims he never brushes make him a fundamentally strange candidate. This strangeness played an important role in Milei's campaign, helping voters form these quasi-personal connections with him. The uniqueness of Milei's personality was relatable and authentic, a far cry from the stilted and boring personalities of establishment political figures.

The crisis facing Argentina's economy and Milei's personality brought two key sections of the electorate to his far-right base: Informal workers and young men. The youth and informal workers were key supporters of previous Peronist coalitions, such as the election of Alberto Fernández.[4] Historically, the Peronists achieved success amongst the poor, many of whom were informal workers, through their network of patronage and the economic redistributive policies of the Kirchner era. However, as the strength of formal labor organizations in Argentina declined and public sector revenue, which fueled economic redistribution during the commodities boom, began to dry up, these voters grew less connected to the government. The best example of this in Argentina is delivery drivers.[5] These drivers are employed by corporations and increasingly work through apps on their phones. Without a union or even formal employment, the Peronists' economic policies could not help them. As the economy struggled, the revenue that funded expansive patronage dried up. These informal workers are more disconnected and isolated than previously, making them vulnerable to Milei's promises of change.

Young men took a conservative turn towards Milei. His message about the corruption of the political establishment likely resonates with this younger demographic because they have no attachment to the early economic successes of Nestor Kirchner's administration. They only saw the recent failures of the political establishment and felt that their situation was dire enough to necessitate electing a radical newcomer. This advantage amongst the youth was not typical for a conservative candidate; Juntos por el Cambio struggled to inspire younger voters (Calvo et al. 2024). Younger voters typically were progressive and backed the Peronists. While young women continued to support the Peronists in 2023, most likely due to Milei's hard-right stances on abortion and other socially progressive causes, the shift of young men points towards a non-ideological appeal from the Milei campaign. Young men did not back any conservative candidate they could, they chose to support Milei because of his charisma.

There remain some questions about how to categorize Javier Milei and whether his political style makes him a populist. Previous analysis of Milei's discourse highlights the difficult nature of this case, as he frequently employs anti-establishment and belligerent discourse but fails to connect this position as an outsider with a coherent idea of the people (Sendra and Marcos-Marne 2024). Sendra and Marcos-Marne suggest that this shortcoming could stem from the pro-market and individualist positions of Milei's libertarianism. Regardless of this partial populism, Milei's appeal is still strongly rooted in his anti-establishment positioning, as well as a personal faith in his competence.

THE RUNOFF

Milei eventually faced off with Sergio Massa in a runoff to decide the 2023 Argentine Presidential election. Polling showed a competitive race, with no clear sign as to which candidate would prevail (CNBC 2023). Patricia Bullrich's Juntos por el Cambio (JxC) had been eliminated for finishing behind Milei and Massa in the previous round. Up for grabs were JxC voters who disliked Peronism but feared Milei's radical change. Both Milei and Massa courted JxC voters by moderating their campaigns. While Massa targeted the UCR moderates of the JxC coalition, Milei secured the endorsement of PRO leaders Mauricio Macri and Patricia Bullrich. Both campaigns chased the median voter with differing levels of success.

In the end, Milei cruised past Massa, tallying 55.65% of the vote to Massa's 44.35%. Here, Milei outperformed his polling as he did in the PASO and subverted expectations with the skillful moderation of his rhetoric. Before the second round, the bombastic populist had run a campaign that, besides attacking the Peronists, was highly critical of Bullrich and JxC as well. Milei accused these establishment forces of the same corruption and ineptitude that he charged the Peronists with. Massa, by contrast, had spent the entire campaign trying to attract these voters through a highly centrist campaign. He heavily emphasized the threat of Milei and the need for national unity. Hence, the rebrand: Frente de Todos became Unión por la Patria (In English: Union for the Homeland).

Programmatic Linkages' Preeminence

The results of the final round of the 2023 Argentine Presidential Election are best explained through programmatic linkages. In the PASO and first round, Massa and Milei used clientelist and personal linkages to build their existing support. Therefore, the same mechanism cannot easily explain their success with JxC voters. In the case of Milei, voters were aware of his charisma and personal style before the final round. Therefore, they were not likely to have a change of priority in the runoff and spontaneously find his charisma more appealing. Further, Patricia Bullrich's supporters were not drawn in by personalistic linkages. As the sitting president of the PRO party and a former Security Minister of the Macri

Administration, she was another member of the political establishment. Bullrich could hardly be considered an outsider and did not rely on personal style to win over votes. Voters were not convinced of her personal capabilities to save them from Argentina's economic crisis. Rather, they responded to programmatic appeals based on center-right policies.

Massa had already mobilized the Peronist base for his strong performance in the first round. While the clientelism of the Peronists and the strength of their party brand continued, Massa needed to extend his appeal to unhappy non-Peronist moderates who were put off by Milei's radical style and far-right program. These non-Peronist voters were aware of the party brand and were far from party loyalists. Bullrich voters, even from the moderate UCR party, saw their identity as non-Peronists as very important. Thus, any alliance with Massa was made purely out of programmatic concerns and a willingness to take the "lesser of two evils."

Both the Massa and Milei campaigns understood that their previous efforts to attract voters needed to be adapted for JxC voters. For Massa, this meant jettisoning mentions of Peronism and turning to inclusive references to the entire Argentine people. Massa spoke in a non-partisan manner, acknowledging the immense problems with the economy he presided over and promising change. However, he differentiated himself from Milei by promising a slower and less painful adjustment, involving measures such as maintaining fuel and transportation subsidies. Such subsidies were politically popular but sapped public budgets.

After receiving the endorsement of Bullrich and Macri, it was clear that Milei was pivoting to the center. However, this endorsement did not put an end to concerns with Milei's polarizing style. Milei had to walk back several of his more radical policy proposals, which put him in a difficult bind. He had to admit that he no longer supported these positions if he wanted to win and maintain the backing of his new allies. He toed a careful line, dropping his most controversial proposals while refusing to admit that he had lied or misrepresented himself.

Results

Milei significantly outperformed Massa in their programmatic competition. While polling showed a competitive race, Milei cruised to a historic victory. 90% of Bullrich's supporters who voted in the runoff backed Milei (El Estadista 2023). This success raises the question: Why was Milei so much more effective than Massa? A surface-level programmatic explanation is not apparent. Both men made their campaigns more moderate in pursuit of undecided voters. However, a satisfactory explanation lies in the social utility maximization calculation that voters make under the spatial model. While policy platforms matter, voters are also calculating how likely each candidate is to implement the policies that they promised. Earlier in the race, Milei could not have used programmatic linkages because he could not credibly promise to implement his program. However, as he moderated his platform and secured the endorsement of the PRO party, the social utility of voting for Milei largely increased. Conservative voters understood that Milei had made a deal with their leaders and would be beholden to them in the legislature. Therefore, they could feel reasonably confident about a Milei administration being similar to their policy positions.

It is important to note that this round of the election is no longer modeling the entry of a new party. Spatial models of elections predict that new parties can only win by a strategic miscalculation from an established party. I argued previously that this was not the case for Milei, who used personal linkages and his massive charisma to pull voters from unlikely places (namely the informally employed and urban poor in the Peronist stronghold of the conurbano) to craft a new coalition of support. This support, as previously established, was not ideological or committed to some special set of policies that Milei offered. Instead, his personal style convinced voters that he could save the country from its economic misery.

Once Milei advanced past the PASO into a runoff election, he was no longer a new party. As the race narrowed down to Milei and Massa, both campaigns had the latitude to shift their programs freely. The models for party entrance involve three parties, which would have best applied to the competition between Juntos por el Cambio and Milei's La Libertad Avanza coalition. However, the elimination of JxC and the rise of Milei were not programmatic. If it were, we would have seen LLA defeat JxC in many down-the-ballot legislative and provincial races as an indication of an overall preference for that party's program, rather than just the top-of-the-ticket support for the individual presidential candidate Javier Milei. Charisma helped Milei enter the race, while his programmatic adaptation helped him win the runoff.

Despite his appeals to unity and his arguably more centrist program, Massa lacked the credibility to claim that he would accomplish the economic change necessary to fix Argentina's rampant inflation and rein in its high debt. While Massa attempted to shed the baggage of the Fernández-Fernández administration, the incumbent economy minister could not escape the blame for the crisis. Massa could wax poetic all he wanted about gradual tweaks to the economy and reducing the pain voters would feel, but it did not appeal to voters who had seen this strategy before and did not trust the Peronists to deliver. Indeed, Massa's move to cut income tax backfired by reinforcing his lack of credibility. This move was obviously political and not in the interest of a country attempting to tame inflation. Moderate voters were convinced that they could not trust the Peronists to prioritize the good of the national economy over political power.

Here, the limitations of clientelist linkages are on full display. The inflexibility of attachment between Massa and his base of supporters restricted his ability to move programmatically. Voters did not believe that the Peronists would change their ways and do what needed to be done for

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the entire country. Milei added fuel to these doubts, claiming that Massa only used the economic regulations of the state to enrich his friends. While Massa made grand promises of unity and moderation, he was fighting an uphill battle against his poor record and the Peronists' clientelism, which reduced moderate and conservative voters' belief that his presidency would be favorable to them.

Milei's strong second-round performance also indicates that his supporters from the PASO had not been drawn in by programmatic appeals and preferences for right-wing policies. Indeed, as these policies were toned down or removed from the campaign, Milei did not see his support decline. These PASO supporters were mostly enthralled with the charisma and personal style of Milei.

Javier Milei won the 2023 Argentine Presidential Election runoff by a large margin due to his crafty adaptation and credible commitment to voters. While Milei never lost his firebrand personality, and he refused to tone down the invective that he spat at the Peronists, he made important policy concessions and rhetorical pivots to secure the support of center-right voters from the PRO Party. This success is most clearly programmatic, as Milei converged his policy platform towards the center of the political spectrum in Argentina to attract the median voter. His charisma was still important, but it did not drive this new group of voters into his camp. Bullrich voters were aware of Milei's exploits and strangeness beforehand. They chose to vote for him because he secured the endorsement of the PRO and embraced a more establishment-conservative-friendly set of policies in the runoff. Milei outcompeted Massa and routed him in the election because of Massa's inability to attract moderate voters. While Massa had a more centrist policy program than Milei, he failed to improve the economy. Distrust of Peronists from moderate and center-right voters caused Massa to lag behind Milei in credibility. The inflexibility of Peronism's linkages was on full display, highlighting important theoretical considerations for the combination of clientelist and programmatic linkages.

Milei shocked and upended Argentine politics once again, just as he did in the PASO, in an election that proved to be anything but predictable. A massive surge in the PASO, stagnation in the first round, and then a reinvigorated rout in the runoff brought this campaign to a close. In the next chapter, I will compare Milei's rise to an American right-wing populist: Donald Trump. Additionally, I will consider the theoretical implications of Milei's victory over Massa for the theory on linkage mechanisms.

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The rise of Javier Milei—from fringe libertarian to President of Argentina—was an extraordinary shock to Argentine politics. A political novice with little support from an existing party structure, Milei was not anticipated to advance past the first round of the election. His extreme policies and fiery nature seemed incompatible with the increasing "normalization" and moderation of Argentine political competition.

Instead, Milei outperformed his polling expectations multiple times, proving that his charismatic and anti-establishment campaign struck a chord with Argentine voters. In this paper, I used a theoretical framework derived from Herbert Kitschelt's "Citizen-Politician Linkage Strategies" to explain the results of the 2023 Argentine presidential election. Beginning in the PASO (the country's open primary), I found that the success of Milei could be best explained by personalistic linkages. In a moment of deep economic crisis, Milei portrayed himself as an outsider economic technocrat who heard the concerns of the people and would take on the political establishment. Milei wielded his political inexperience as an advantage, which absolved him of any blame for the country's economic woes. He relentlessly attacked the political establishment for its decadence and greed, asserting that the existing political caste was corrupt and unconcerned with the well-being of the country.

Milei combined these attacks with a strong personal style. On this basis, he inspired faith that he could save the country from crisis. Bravery and courage were often utilized as themes of the campaign, with Milei represented as a lion. He also invoked his training as an economics professor, claiming that he was a specialist who could use this experience to fix the country's largest problem with his bold, miracle cure of drastic neoliberal adjustments. Milei's appeal attracted voters from across the ideological spectrum, and he far outperformed the rest of his right-wing coalition. His broad support was not due to a specific and clear policy program or strong party apparatus. Instead, it was motivated by a non-ideological hope, which his charisma inspired among his supporters.

Milei's surprise performance in the PASO created positive momentum. It obscured what was essentially a three-way tie between the leading contenders heading into the first round of the election. Milei's victory in the PASO was a relative one, as he had far exceeded expectations, while Juntos por el Cambio (JxC) and Unión por la Patria disappointed. However, all three coalitions sat at objectively comparable shares of the vote, between 25% and 30%. This relative disappointment forced the Peronists to adjust their approach, mobilizing the clientelist linkages that were so crucial to the party. Despite being the incumbent party, represented on the presidential ticket by the minister of one of the worst economies in the world, the Peronists successfully tapped the loyalty of their core supporters to take the lead in the first round of the election. Turnout increased, with most new support going to Massa. Peronist provincial control and local politics of strongholds like the conurbano, the highly Peronist poor suburban areas of Buenos Aires, helped push Massa to the front of the race. Massa's durable support amongst the Peronist base, despite poor economic conditions, is precisely why clientelist linkages best

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explained his first-round victory. Strong party identification and organization supported an acute mobilization of support in response to a disappointing performance in the PASO.

When Massa and Milei faced off in the second-round runoff election, neither could primarily rely on the previous linkage mechanisms that had powered their support thus far. Milei's charisma propelled his PASO victory, but his vote share stagnated in the first round. By the same token, Massa could no longer rely on Peronist loyalties to pursue JxC voters who no longer had a candidate in the race. Patricia Bullrich's defeat in the first round left a major portion of the electorate up for grabs, one that had refused to back either Massa or Milei previously. In pursuit of these middle-ground voters, Massa and Milei each turned to programmatic appeals. Massa spoke of national unity and bipartisanship to contrast himself with the polarizing extremes of the Milei campaign. Milei jettisoned his more extreme policy proposals and moderated his behavior to secure the endorsement of Patricia Bullrich and Mauricio Macri. This endorsement lent Milei credibility in his promise to these center-right voters. He had the institutional backing of the PRO and gave up the "wildest" and least plausible proposals in his platform. This increased the perceived social utility of voting for him. By contrast, Massa had difficulty establishing credibility, as the shifting message of Peronism and the weakness of the economy made center-right voters skeptical that Massa would change the country's economic fortune.

Milei cruised to a lopsided victory in the runoff, successfully combining the personalistic linkages and charisma that brought him to the forefront of Argentine politics with a deft programmatic moderation that secured a key endorsement and brought the center-right into his coalition of voters. Milei overcame the institutional and organizational advantages of the political establishment, outmaneuvering the clientelist linkages of the Peronists. Milei's success in adapting his linkage strategy, compared to Massa's struggles, has important theoretical implications for the combination of linkage mechanisms.

Theoretical Implications

Javier Milei's combination of personalistic and programmatic linkages poses an important theoretical question for the combination of these linkage mechanisms. Herbert Kitschelt in "Citizen-Politician Linkage Strategies" highlights the differences between linkage mechanisms, which in his view are only compatible at low doses (Kitschelt 2001). However, my analysis of Milei's successful programmatic shift in the second round of the 2023 Argentine Presidential Election demonstrates that personalistic and programmatic linkages can indeed be combined.

Kitschelt emphasizes the difficulty of combining personalistic linkages with programmatic linkages. As an explanation, he highlights the incongruences of the unity of analysis for either linkage mechanism. Personalistic linkages emanate from the individual as a charismatic leader of a political movement, with the strength of the campaign depending on the leader's personal style. This contrasts with programmatic linkages, which come from the party or organizational level. Policy programs are the work of technocrats and administrations rather than fearless leaders. Kitschelt adds that the mundanity and soberness of programmatic politics contrast with the theatrics of charismatic politics. Brandishing a chainsaw may woo the masses and instill them with confidence in a personalistic leader, but programmatic politics offer no such spectacle. The painstaking efforts of debating granular policy points and presenting uncontroversial, moderate platforms sap the energy and zeal of charismatic movements that thrive on transgression and controversy.

Contrary to Kitschelt's theoretical considerations, Javier Milei successfully moderated his campaign and brought in centrists without sacrificing the charismatic base of his support. This success forces us to reconsider the possibility of combining these linkages. While Kitschelt views them as distinct, if not mutually exclusive, Milei's victory points to a sequential solution to the issue of their compatibility. In the PASO and first round of the election, Milei took extreme and unworkable policy positions (such as creating a free market for organ sales) and ruthlessly railed against the entire political establishment, including the center-right. In the runoff, Milei successfully pivoted his criticism of the establishment to the Peronists and reduced his wacky policy program to only the most salient and feasible economic adjustments. Despite losing some of his favorite targets for criticism, which were instrumental to propelling him to the front of the race and securing his spot in the runoff, Milei's adapted charismatic appeals maintained his popularity with his base, while his programmatic moderation made him more palatable to centrist voters.

This success raises two important points for the combination of personalistic and programmatic linkage mechanisms. First, voters differ in their orientations: some base their electoral choice more on programmatic considerations, whereas others privilege candidate characteristics and personal style. Milei's coalition of voters highlights these differences. While some voters fully embrace the libertarian ideology and policy prescriptions of La Libertad Avanza (LLA), they likely represented a minority of his victorious coalition (As argued previously). These voters would have supported any LLA candidate, so their prevalence was discernible by the performance of other LLA candidates in non-presidential races. The handful of LLA representatives in the legislature and the poor performance of LLA candidates in provincial elections indicated that only a portion of Milei's support came from these highly ideological voters.

Rather, the rest of Milei's support from before the runoff came from his charismatic appeals. This explains the ideological heterogeneity of Milei's PASO supporters, who were equal parts former PRO and former Kirchnerist voters. Furthermore, Milei's charisma appealed to new and disaffected voters who did not think that the political establishment was responsive to their interests. A third portion of the coalition involved

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the center-right, who voted for Milei as a tactical vote against Peronism. They previously supported JxC, only voting for Milei as a "lesser of two evils." The endorsement of Patricia Bullrich and Mauricio Macri gave these voters the confidence that Milei would work with the center-right and establishment to protect their policy interests. Thus, this vote was highly programmatic. This diversity among Milei voters of preferences in linkage mechanisms confirmed that a level of combination was indeed possible. Different segments of his voters supported him for different reasons.

While Kitschelt correctly argues that linkage mechanisms eventually become mutually exclusive, the case of Javier Milei displays how personalistic linkages can feasibly adapt to pivot toward programmatic appeals. Programmatic linkages require that a candidate put forth a policy program that is amenable to the interests of the median voter. Important to this concept is the challenge of social utility and the credibility of implementing a policy program. While voters may agree with the entirety of a candidate's policy program, if there is no credible promise that the program will be carried out, then there is no social utility in supporting that candidate. Charismatic leaders eschew what is feasible in favor of a magical cure to the country's problems. These leaders are not concerned with the details of how a grave problem may be solved or the political challenges of implementing these solutions. Thus, a charismatic leader must reduce the scope of their promises and tone down personalistic appeals if they want to win over programmatic voters.

While there may eventually be a point where these linkage mechanisms become mutually exclusive, Milei shows us that it is feasible to thread the needle by adjusting his strategy to include both programmatic and personalistic appeals. The core of personalistic linkage mechanisms comes from the messianic power of a charismatic leader to save the country from a deep crisis. Milei continued to highlight the deep failure of the incumbent Peronist government, which appealed to both the programmatically and personally linked voters. Attacking the failures of the incumbent Peronists continued to excite Milei's base and satisfied their desire for change. However, Milei pulled back on his criticism of the center-right to increase the programmatic appeal and social utility of voting for him. Milei's acceptance of the Juntos por el Cambio endorsement and ensuing moderation on several issues (free markets for organs, protection of certain government ministries, etc.) convinced center-right voters that Milei's program would benefit them.

This programmatic shift did not bother Milei's base of support, either. While Milei's policies became less radical, his personal image remained the same. Milei was still the outsider firebrand who was going to shake up Argentine politics. Expecting these voters to abandon Milei because of a programmatic shift would be to misunderstand why they flocked to him in the first place. Insofar as Milei retained his outsider status, he represented the requisite level of change desired by his core base of support. While one could argue that Milei accepting the endorsement of JxC and adapting to their demands amounted to him bending the knee to the political establishment, that is not how voters saw it. They construed it as Milei besting the political establishment and the endorsement as a coronation of their new leader. The conditions imposed by JxC did not corrupt the core promise of Milei's campaign to these charismatically linked voters. Milei's radical persona was the change that these disgruntled voters sought when they abandoned the political establishment. His more moderate campaign still contained confrontational attacks on Peronism and the promise of change that would save the country from its economic woes. Milei still harnessed personalistic linkages to inspire faith in his ability to save the country from crisis. Future research would do well to put Milei's rise in the context of other strongman presidents in the twenty-first century, such as Donald Trump and Nayib Bukele. These strongmen have utilized crises of different kinds along with personalistic linkages to win election to their nation's highest office.

Javier Milei deftly moderated his presidential campaign by maximizing the most important elements of both personalistic and programmatic appeals: change and social utility. Milei maintained his persona as a political outsider who could bring change to a corrupt political system and revive a defunct economy. He added the endorsement of JxC and gave up some of his more fringe proposals to gain credibility among centrist JxC voters and win the programmatic competition of the runoff. Milei's deft pivot in linkage mechanisms demonstrates how a charismatic leader can add programmatic appeal without sacrificing his support base. Milei did so by highlighting the most important aspects of each appeal without committing so much to one linkage mechanism that he had to compromise the other. ■

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Ty Gribble is a recent graduate of the University of Texas at Austin with a Bachelor of Arts with special honors in Government. He plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Political Science, studying comparative politics and democracy.

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ENDNOTES

1 Personal Interviews with Enrique Peruzzotti and Lucas Gonzalez.

2 Elecciones 2023 I PASO." https://resultados.gob.ar/resultados/2023/1/1/0 (December 2, 2024). All following election data come from the same source.

3 According to personal interviews with members of the Universidad Torcuato Di Tella faculty, focus groups with voters revealed high levels of apathy and frustration with the political system.

4 From personal interview with Argentine Academic Juan Negri and Political Analyst Francisco Resnicoff.

5 The topic of these delivery drivers came up in several of my interviews in Argentina. These drivers, known as "Rappi guys" after the name of the popular delivery service in Argentina, were said to have backed Milei in droves.

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The Impact of Migrant Concentration and Economic Competition on Attitudes Around Redistribution for Migrants: Venezuelan and Spanish Immigrants in Colombia and Brazil

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Within the context of mass migration, a population increase without an expansion in the availability of resources may worsen economic indicators, for example, by lowering wages (Caruso et al. 2021; Lebow 2022; Peñaloza-Pacheco 2022; Ryu and Padel 2022; Shrestha and Sant'Anna 2024). Locals may blame migrants for new economic grievances and, as a consequence, reject redistribution for migrants. Using survey data from Vanderbilt University's 2023 America's Barometer, this study analyzes two questions through OLS regressions. First, whether increased migrant concentration in borderlands, and consequential resource competition, lead to less support for redistribution towards migrants. Second, whether resource competition effects impact all migrants equally or differ for migrants of nationalities with a higher population concentration. As case studies, I evaluate the Colombian and Brazilian reception of Venezuelan and Spanish immigrants. Findings show varying results depending on the country and nationality of the recipient of the benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Many times, host countries of massive refugee movements are unprepared to manage a sudden increase in the population. Nevertheless, they are impacted in different ways. For example, an increase in the labor supply may cause economic grievances for locals, such as lower wages or an expansion of the informal economy (Caruso et al. 2021; Lebow 2022; Peñaloza-Pacheco 2022; Ryu and Padel 2022; Shrestha and Sant'Anna 2024). Resentment due to worsened economic conditions may cause locals to reject government initiatives to facilitate economic migrant integration, such as granting access to education, healthcare, or housing. Since most refugees concentrate in regions closer to the border with their country of origin (UNHCR 2023), borderlands tend to experience the harshest negative impacts of massive migrant reception.

In this paper, I evaluate two hypotheses: the resource competition thesis and the national specificity thesis. The resource competition thesis argues that citizens from regions with higher migrant concentration, usually borderlands, will reject redistribution towards migrants more than citizens from regions with lower migrant concentration. The national specificity thesis states that citizens will blame worsened economic indicators solely on migrants of the nationality with a higher migrant concentration, rather than on migrants of nationalities with a lower migrant concentration.

To evaluate both hypotheses, I use an experiment included in Brazilian and Colombian data from Vanderbilt University's 2023 America's Barometer survey by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). Given the Venezuelan crisis and diaspora, the concentration of Venezuelan migrants is higher in both Brazil and Colombia than the concentration of Spanish migrants. LAPOP asks different subsets of the survey respondents to state their opinions on redistribution benefiting one of the following target groups: Brazilian or Colombian citizens, migrants in general, Venezuelan immigrants, or Spanish immigrants. I compare OLS regression coefficients of Brazilian and Colombian opinions about redistribution toward citizens, migrants, Venezuelans, and Spanish immigrants to determine which factors influence the variation in redistributive attitudes depending on which of the four target groups receives the redistributive benefits.

I perform all analyses in a step-by-step process. I first look at regional location to test for the resource competition hypothesis, assuming regions with a higher migrant

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concentration will reject redistribution more than regions with a lower migrant concentration. Then, I compare coefficients between opinions on redistribution for Venezuelan and Spanish migrants to test for the national specificity thesis, which states that citizens will reject redistribution for nationalities with a higher migrant concentration more than for nationalities with a lower migrant concentration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integration and immigration policies regulate different aspects of migration. Immigration policies determine whether migrants can enter and reside within a country. Integration policies, by contrast, stipulate which efforts the host country pursues to incorporate foreigners into its communities and institutions, assuming immigration has already occurred. Integration policies determine immigrants' access to rights and services, such as work, education, and healthcare (Siviş 2021). Given that meeting the immediate needs of millions of displaced people requires significant efforts, integration policies are paramount in the management of massive refugee movements.

Countries approach refugee integration policies in various ways, often impacted by their context, history, and resources. Some follow an expansive approach, such as allowing refugees to access national social services or work legally (Rossiasco and de Narváez 2023). Others follow a restrictive approach, such as granting work authorization under stipulated conditions or excluding refugees from accessing social services (Tsarouhas 2023). Without a centralized effort for migrant integration, local actors may perform uncoordinated integration efforts, which are rarely sufficient to address migrants' and locals' increased needs after a massive migrant mobilization (Siviş 2021). In some cases, host countries keep refugees in isolated camps indefinitely and pursue no integration policy at all (Adalı and Türkyılmaz 2020).

Integration policy can regulate multiple aspects of a migrant's life, including their economic, social, linguistic, political, and psychological conditions in the new country (IPL 2024). This paper focuses on economic integration since it is related to redistribution. The availability of resources, such as land, employment patterns, and infrastructure, determines the economic absorption capacity of the host country (Jacobsen 1996). A high concentration of refugees in one location can strain medical, educational, and municipal facilities, housing capacity, and available jobs. These strains may increase hardships for locals (Borjas and Monras 2017) and affect local public opinion (Bahar, Dolley, and Huang 2018; Del Carpio and Wagner 2015; Jacobsen 1996, 667; Peñaloza-Pacheco 2022).

Scholars have evaluated the relationship between economic strains and attitudes toward immigrants with varying results. Gerber et al. (2017) find that economic self-interest plays a significant role in shaping attitudes toward immigrants, particularly among citizens concerned about an increase in the state's fiscal burden or the cost of goods and services. Citrin et al. (1997) argue that more than the state of the economy, anxiety about it, as well as feelings around particular ethnicities, are important. Similarly, Hainmueller and Hopkins (2014) argue that apprehension about immigration's economic and cultural impact on the general well-being of society is the most critical shaping factor on related public opinion.

More narrowly, perceptions of migrants and the capacity of social services influence locals' attitudes toward redistribution that benefits immigrants. Alesina et al. (2022) find that citizens perceive immigrants as more likely to be unemployed and reliant on welfare. Having this view correlates with lower support for redistribution more than cultural distance or the perceived share of immigrants. However, reactions to the economic threat posed by immigrants may also take a positive direction. Finseraas (2008), as well as Burgoon and Rooduijn (2020), find that differences in redistribution attitudes can result in rejection of redistribution when attributed to hostility towards immigrants, or in support for redistribution when attributed to fear of personal income loss. Even though scholars disagree on the strength and direction of their effects, strains on the capacities of the economy and social services appear to be impactful on opinions on migration and redistribution for migrants, particularly when accompanied by psychological anxieties.

Beyond economic capacity, countries also consider other factors when creating integration policies. One relevant dimension is the social absorption capacity of the host country, which includes ethnicity and kinship, cultural proximity, the political rhetoric around refugees, and historical experience (Jacobsen 1996). Particularly, countries with a history of dealing with displacement, whether as receivers of displaced peoples or formerly displaced peoples themselves, are more likely to be receptive to refugees (Jacobsen 1996, 669; Müller-Funk, Fröhlich, and Bank 2023). Furthermore, political and popular rhetoric may induce prejudices against migrants of specific nationalities (Freier and Perez 2021).

Finally, any rigorous analysis of public opinion on immigration must emphasize that migrants are not a homogeneous group. They present different nationalities, ethnicities, languages, income levels, education levels, and migration statuses, among other characteristics. Discrimination against any of these descriptors will also affect migrants. Ultimately, public opinion and discrimination are not static. For example, Flores (2015) finds that discrimination by nationality is most prevalent toward migrants closer to their arrival time. As they integrate into the new country's culture, race-based discrimination becomes more prevalent.

This paper contributes to the literature on public opinion about redistribution towards migrants by analyzing the impact of migrant concentration, and assumed economic competition, on attitudes of citizens from specific regions. It also analyzes whether these economic impacts are equal across nationalities or vary for nationalities with increased migrant concentration.

CASE STUDIES BACKGROUND

Venezuelan migrants

As a result of the political and economic crisis, a significant number of Venezuelans have left their home country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports 7.7 million Venezuelans abroad, with more than 6.5 million remaining in Latin American countries. As of May 2024, 2.9 million Venezuelans reside in Colombia and 510.5 thousand in Brazil (UNHCR 2024). Venezuelan immigrants represent 5.5% of the Colombian population and 0.2% of the Brazilian population (World Bank n.d.).

Venezuelans have settled in specific regions in both countries. Figures 1 and 2 show two maps of Colombia side by side. Figure 1 is the map of Venezuelan migrant concentration elaborated with data from the official Colombian migrant management institution, Migración Colombia. The regions with the highest Venezuelan migrant concentration are Bogotá, as well as the Northern, Central, and Eastern regions. The smallest of them all, Bogotá, holds 21.46% of all Venezuelan migrants as of 2022 (Migración Colombia 2022).

Next to Figure 1, Figure 2 shows the regional delimitations LAPOP established while collecting surveys. The correlation between these two maps is important to remember during the regression results analysis. The expectation is that the citizens from the Western and Southern regions, with a smaller migrant population, will present more positive opinions towards redistribution compared to citizens from the Bogotá, Central, Northern, and Eastern regions, where migrant populations are bigger and economic competition is more intense (Caruso et al. 2021; Lebow 2022).

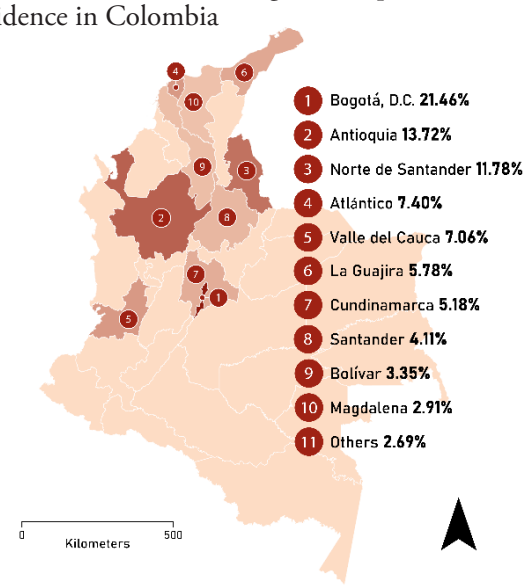
In Brazil, most refugees reside in the Northern region. Figure 3 displays the number of asylum decisions per federal unit. While not all asylees are Venezuelan, and not all Venezuelans complete their migration paperwork as asylum cases, I am using these as a proxy, given a lack of data on the final residence of Venezuelans in Brazil. The region with the most asylum decisions is the Northern region, with nearly 300 thousand.

Next to Figure 3, Figure 4 shows the regional delimitations LAPOP established while collecting surveys. The correlation between these two maps is also important to consider when analyzing the regression results. The expectation is that the citizens from the Northeastern, Center West, Southeastern, and Southern regions, with smaller migrant populations, will present more positive opinions towards redistribution compared to citizens from the Northern region, where the migrant population is bigger and economic competition is more intense (Ryu and Padel 2022; Shrestha and Sant'Anna 2024).

Spanish migrants

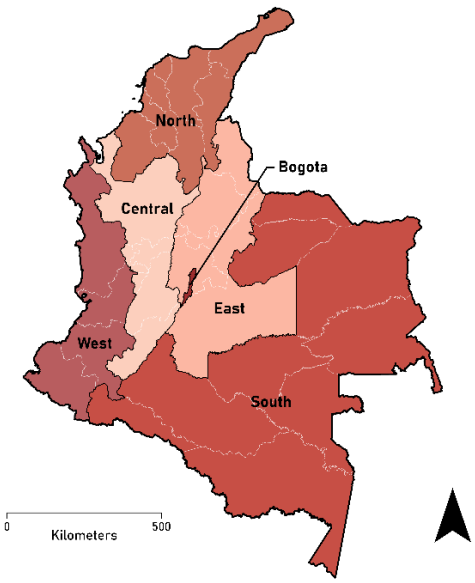
According to Spain's National Institute of Statistics (INE), as of 2024, there are 51.5 thousand Spanish migrants in Colombia and 140 thousand in Brazil (INE 2024). I lack data regarding the specific regional concentration of Spanish migrants in Colombia and Brazil. However, the concentration of Spanish migrants is much lower than that of Venezuelan migrants in both countries. Additionally, given that Spain does not share a border with Brazil or Colombia, the expectation is that there will be no significant migrant concentration in

Figure 1: Venezuelan immigrants' department of residence in Colombia



Source: Elaborated by Konrad Adenauer Foundation et al. (2024) with data from Migración Colombia (2022)
Reformatted for cohesion by Alexander Broening

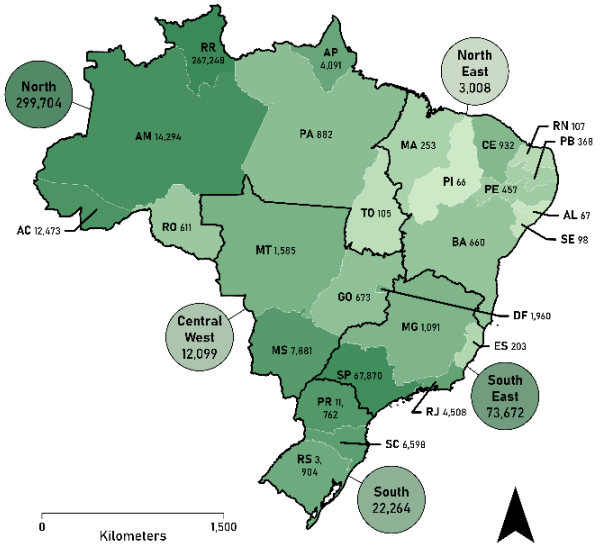
Figure 2: Sample stratification in Colombia



Source: America's Barometer by LAPOP 2016/2017. Map created from boundary data from: http://www.gadm.org
Reformatted for cohesion by Alexander Broening

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Figure 3: Recognition of asylum decisions in Brazil per region and federal unit from January 2010 to August 2024



Source: Migration in Brazil Report Number 4, October 2024. National Justice Secretary (SENAJUS). Ministry of Justice and Public Security.
Reformatted for cohesion by Alexander Broening

Figure 4: Sample stratification in Brazil



Source: America's Barometer by LAPOP 2016/2017. Map created from boundary data from: http://www.gadm.org
Reformatted for cohesion by Alexander Broening

borderlands. Therefore, no regional patterns motivated by migrant concentration and resource competition should arise in the results referencing Spanish migrant concentration.

METHOD

Hypotheses

To what extent do migrant concentration and economic competition drive discrimination around redistribution towards migrants? Does the effect of economic competition affect all migrants equally, or do citizens' opinions differ for migrants with a higher population concentration?

To evaluate these questions, I test two hypotheses:

The resource competition thesis

> H1: Citizens of regions with higher migrant concentration will show higher rates of opposition to redistribution for migrants than citizens from regions with lower migrant concentration.

The resource competition thesis uses regional migrant concentration as a proxy for resource competition. It presumes that changes in redistribution attitudes for migrants result from worsened economic conditions due to resource competition. However, it does not directly test for worsened economic indicators or whether citizens admit to blaming migrants for worsened economic indicators.

The national specificity thesis

> H2: Citizens will show higher rates of opposition to redistribution for migrants from a particular nationality if their country hosts a high concentration of migrants of that nationality.

Data used

I used interview survey data from Brazil's and Colombia's samples of the 2023 edition of Vanderbilt University's survey, America's Barometer. The Center for Global Democracy (CGD) conducts the survey as part of its Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). The CGD performed the interviews in each country's native language: Spanish in Colombia and Portuguese in Brazil. For further data-gathering methods, please refer to the CGD's website.

Dependent variables

This thesis uses an experiment included in LAPOP's 2023 Brazilian and Colombian America's Barometer survey. LAPOP divided each country sample into three groups. Then, interviewers asked each third of the sample a version of the same question:

To Brazilians:

1. Around redistribution toward immigrants: *"To what extent do you agree that the Brazilian government should offer social services, like health assistance, education, housing to **immigrants** who come to live or work in Brazil?"*

2. Around redistribution toward Venezuelan immigrants: *"To what extent do you agree that the Brazilian government should offer social services, like health assistance, education, housing to **Venezuelan immigrants** who come to live or work in Brazil?"*

3. Around redistribution toward Spanish immigrants: *"To what extent do you agree that the Brazilian government should offer social services, like health assistance, education, housing to **Spanish immigrants** who come to live or work in Brazil?"*

To Colombians:

1. Around redistribution toward immigrants: *"To what extent do you agree that the Colombian government should offer social services, like health assistance, education, housing to **immigrants** who come to live or work in Colombia?"*

2. Around redistribution toward Venezuelan immigrants: *"To what extent do you agree that the Colombian government should offer social services, like health assistance, education, housing to **Venezuelan immigrants** who come to live or work in Colombia?"*

3. Around redistribution toward Spanish immigrants: *"To what extent do you agree that the Colombian government should offer social services, like health assistance, education, housing to **Spanish immigrants** who come to live or work in Colombia?"*

Interviewees answered using a 5-point ordinal scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. I reorganized the variables so that high values indicate support for social spending. The dependent variable, then, is one of the following responses:

1 Strongly disagree

2 Somewhat disagree

3 Neither agree nor disagree

4 Somewhat agree

5 Strongly agree

Independent variables

I chose regional location, gender, income, skin color, and opinion toward redistribution outside of the context of migration as independent variables. The regional independent variable tests for the effect of increased regional economic competition. Alesina and Guiliano (2011) document the redistribution preferences of different demographics and find statistical significance in variation per gender, income, and skin color. Table 1 shows how I coded each independent variable based on LAPOP's data.

Use of OLS regressions

For the sake of simplicity, I chose OLS regressions as my method of analysis.[1] I conducted eight OLS regressions in total, four per country, following a repeated pattern.

- In each country, the first regression provides context around opinions on redistribution outside of the context of immigration. I regress redistribution attitudes against regional location, gender, income, and skin color.
- The second regression tests the resource competition thesis by introducing immigrants as the recipients of redistribution. I also control for regional location, gender, income, and skin color. These results should be read in comparison with the first regression to evaluate differences in redistribution support for citizens versus immigrants.
- The following two regressions use Venezuelan and Spanish immigrants, respectively, as examples to evaluate the national specificity thesis: whether citizens will show more intense opposition to redistribution for migrants from a particular nationality if their country hosts a high concentration of migrants of that nationality.

Evaluating the regional effect of resource competition

I conducted all eight regressions in two steps. The first step regresses opinions on redistribution only against the regional location of the respondent. The second step repeats the initial process but controls for the respondents' gender, income, skin color, and general opinion about redistribution.

The regional coefficients are the most important to evaluate the resource competition thesis. I coded the regional locations as binary variables. Each country's Northern region is the omitted region. I chose these regions to omit because they share a border with Venezuela, which translates into a higher concentration of Venezuelan migrants. However, unlike in Brazil, the concentration of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia is high in multiple regions. To visualize migrant concentration in Colombia, please refer to Figure 1 in the case studies background.

The coefficients must be interpreted in comparison. Each regional coefficient establishes how much opinions on redistribution from citizens of the coefficient's region differ compared to opinions of citizens from the omitted region (the Northern regions in both Colombia and Brazil). A positive coefficient means that citizens from that region have more positive opinions towards redistribution for the target group (citizens, immigrants, Venezuelan immigrants, or Spanish immigrants) compared to citizens from the omitted region (the Northern region). A negative coefficient means that citizens from that region have more negative opinions towards redistribution for the target group (citizens, immigrants, Venezuelan immigrants, or Spanish immigrants) compared to citizens from the omitted region (the Northern region). A larger coefficient implies a wider difference between the opinions

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Table 1: Description of each independent variable.

	Brazil	Colombia
Regional location	Binary variables based on Figure 2, coding 1 for the region named in the variable and 0 for all other regions. – Northeast – Center West – Southeast The omitted group is North.	Binary variables based on Figure 4, coding 1 for the region named in the variable and 0 for all other regions. – Bogotá – Central – East – West – South The omitted group is North.
	This independent variable tests the resource competition thesis. The expectation is that regions with higher migrant concentration will present less favorable opinions toward redistribution for migrants.	
Gender	Binary variable coding 1 for male and 0 for female. According to Alesina and Giuliano (2011), the expectation is that men will present more negative views towards redistribution.	
Income	The respondent's answer to: *"And into which of the following ranges does the total monthly income of this household fit, including remittances from abroad, government/state or municipal money aid programs, pensions/retirements, rents, and the wages/salary or income of all the adults and children living in your home?"* The respondents answered through 15 options. I divided these options into three categories: lower-income from $0 to $200, middle-income from $201 to $700, and higher-income from $701 to over $1200. I converted the three categories to binary variables. The omitted group is lower-income. Both Colombia and Brazil present high levels of economic inequality (IDB 2024). Therefore, the differences between the opinions of high and low-income locals may be stark. Having income as a continuous variable would reflect in general a result that may be caused by only one socioeconomic class. According to Alesina and Giuliano (2011), the expectation is that people with higher incomes will present more negative views towards redistribution.	
Skin color	The interviewer noted the respondent's skin color according to Figure 5 in the appendix. The possible answers range from 1 to 11, with larger values meaning a darker skin color. According to Alesina and Giuliano (2011), the expectation is that Black people will present more favorable views toward redistribution. I use this as a proxy for expectations for people with darker skin colors.	
Opinion towards redistribution	The respondent's answer to: *"The Brazilian government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality between the rich and the poor. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?"*	The respondent's answer to: *"The Colombian government should implement strong policies to reduce income inequality between the rich and the poor. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?"*
	Respondents answered through 7 ordinal options, starting at 1 with strongly disagree and ending at 7 with strongly agree. This independent variable controls for generalized attitudes toward redistribution. The expectation is that a person who typically supports redistribution will do so in the context of immigration as well. Otherwise, the respondent discriminates against migrants, at least in terms of redistribution.	

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around redistribution of citizens from the omitted region (the Northern region) and the coefficient's region. Conversely, a smaller coefficient implies a smaller difference between the opinions around redistribution of the citizens from the omitted region (the Northern region) and the coefficient's region.

ANALYSIS

Brazil—Testing the resource competition thesis

Table 2 below displays the results of two regression analyses. The first regression, the results of which are displayed

Table 2: Results of two OLS regressions with Brazilian local attitudes towards redistribution as the dependent variable. *Views on redistribution in general*

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	5.296296	<2e-16	***	5.367521	< 2e-16	***
Northeast	0.005955	0.971		0.008395	0.95958	
Center West	0.119163	0.510		0.123769	0.49390	
Southeast	0.258466	0.101		0.261891	0.09768	·
South	-0.110149	0.532		-0.093257	0.60195	
Middle-income				0.006395	0.95523	
High-income				-0.007520	0.95841	
Skin color				0.014565	0.15072	
Male				-0.281023	0.00459	**
R^2	0.005672			0.01294		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						
Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's America's Barometer 2023 cycle.						

Table 3: Results of two OLS regressions with Brazilian local attitudes towards redistribution towards immigrants as the dependent variable.

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	3.5833	< 2e-16	***	3.311359	< 2e-16	***
Northeast	0.2826	0.15024		0.298632	0.12966	
Center West	0.4003	.06592	·	0.368323	0.09182	·
Southeast	0.4396	0.01865	*	0.380739	0.04415	*
South	0.6279	0.00287	**	0.606658	0.00431	**
Middle-income				0.139576	0.31388	
High-income				0.044008	0.80458	
Redistribution				0.061280	0.06787	·
Skin color				0.006244	0.59826	
Male				-0.219736	0.06709	·
R^2	0.0237			0.04218		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						
Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's indicate America's Barometer 2023 cycle.						

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in the second and third columns of the table, tests regional differences in attitudes toward redistribution in general. The second set adds the control variables of income, skin color, and gender. The results of this second regression are displayed on the columns to the farthest right. The only statistically significant variable among the two regressions is gender. Brazilian men have a more negative view of redistribution than Brazilian women. For further analysis in this paper, it is important to note that no regional coefficient is statistically significant.

Table 3 displays the results of the repetition of the previous regression analysis, but with the survey question that specifies "immigrants" are on the receiving end of redistribution. Regional location is not significant for general attitudes on redistribution among Brazilians but becomes significant once the interviewer identifies immigrants as the receiving group. Furthermore, regional differences follow the pattern predicted by the resource competition thesis, which argues that citizens from regions with a higher migrant concentration will have more negative opinions regarding redistribution for immigrants because of intensified economic competition. This pattern holds even after controlling for attitudes toward redistribution in general. Therefore, the results suggest that regional differences are not simply the result of more conservative views of redistribution in the North than in the South.

Adding the national specificity thesis

I now turn to examine Brazilian attitudes regarding redistribution toward Venezuelan migrants, specifically. Table 4 shows the results. Brazil's Northeast, Southeast, and Southern regions present a positive, statistically significant coefficient. Once again, these results align with the resource competition thesis. Regions farther from the border with Venezuela show more favorable opinions toward redistribution for Venezuelan migrants than the borderlands. In Brazil, a citizen's regional location is the primary factor affecting their opinions about the government's provision of social services to Venezuelans. Note that the same regional patterns emerge regardless of whether the target group is immigrants in general or Venezuelans in particular. These results suggest that Brazilians understand the term "immigrants" as a proxy for Venezuelans. Moreover, larger coefficients in the regions further South imply stronger favoring opinions towards redistribution for Venezuelans than for immigrants.

A final set of regressions for Brazil tests the relationship between the respondent's region and attitudes regarding redistribution toward Spanish migrants. Southern Brazilians feel more positively towards Spanish immigrants than Northern Brazilians. These results make sense given that Southern Brazilians have higher rates of European heritage and may be biased towards Europeans (De Souza et al. 2019). Note that when asked about redistribution generally, Southern Brazilians' opinions did not differ from those of Northern Brazilians. However, after specifying that the recipients of redistribution benefits are immigrants, the opinions of Southern Brazilians are consistently more positive than those of Northern Brazilians, regardless of the origin country of the receiving group.

Table 4: Results of two OLS regressions with Brazilian local attitudes towards redistribution towards Venezuelan immigrants as the dependent variable.

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	3.4769	<2e-16	***	3.294346	< 2e-16	***
Northeast	0.4631	0.018948	*	0.439696	0.02644	*
Center West	0.2973	0.175494		0.317145	0.14928	
Southeast	0.5231	0.005211	**	0.505132	0.00734	**
South	0.7703	0.000149	***	0.805532	9e-05	***
Middle-income				-0.147144	0.28776	
High-income				-0.087239	0.59835	
Redistribution				0.056121	0.08394	.
Skin color				-0.006394	0.47675	
Male				-0.066141	0.57393	
R^2	0.03478			0.04634		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						

Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's America's Barometer 2023 cycle.

Furthermore, the difference in results between Venezuelan and Spanish immigrants confirms the national specificity thesis. Regional coefficients are significant in the case of Venezuelan migrants but not Spanish migrants. Therefore, the effect of resource competition is isolated based on nationality. Notably, a higher migrant concentration of a specific nationality is correlated with more polarized opinions on redistribution towards that nationality.

Table 5: Results of two OLS regressions with Brazilian local attitudes towards redistribution towards Spanish immigrants as the dependent variable.

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	3.57377	<2e-16	***	3.07635	< 2e-16	***
Northeast	0.13919	0.4999		0.21489	0.2948	
Center West	-0.02947	0.8932		0.03301	0.8791	
Southeast	0.04109	0.8339		0.10891	0.5754	
South	0.48257	0.0323	*	0.56283	0.0140	*
Middle-income				-0.20071	0.1389	
High-income				-0.01240	0.9442	
Redistribution				0.11932	0.0003	***
Skin color				-0.01491	0.6041	
Male				-0.15550	0.1997	
R^2	0.0166			0.05795		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						
Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's America's Barometer 2023 cycle.						

Table 6: Results of two OLS regressions with Colombian local attitudes towards redistribution as the dependent variable.

Views on redistribution in general

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	5.11194	<2e-16	***	5.059014	<2e-16	***
Bogotá	-0.39445	0.0143	*	-0.410302	0.01292	*
Central	-0.17936	0.2426		-0.182621	0.23840	
East	-0.41374	0.0103	**	-0.432704	0.00872	**
West	0.08423	0.6070		0.082694	0.61506	
South	0.29982	0.3534		0.299784	0.35677	
Middle-income				0.136720	0.23796	
High-income				-0.019945	0.88550	
Skin color				-0.008232	0.76587	
Male				0.095037	0.35484	
R^2	0.01369			0.0158		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						
Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's America's Barometer 2023 cycle.						

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Table 7: Results of two OLS regressions with Colombian local attitudes towards redistribution towards immigrants as the dependent variable.

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	3.66957	<2e-16	***	3.04896	< 2e-16	***
Bogotá	-0.34957	0.07416	.	-0.33391	0.10504	
Central	-0.41401	0.02588	*	-0.39381	0.03461	*
East	-0.60200	0.00228	**	-0.55702	0.00573	**
West	-0.01957	0.92565		-0.04054	0.84670	
South	-0.28068	0.40049		-0.27302	0.41352	
Middle-income				0.19689	0.18844	
High-income				0.13631	0.42892	
Redistribution				0.08369	0.01900	*
Skin color				0.02250	0.52178	
Male				0.02769	0.82980	
R^2	0.02978			0.04905		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						

Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's America's Barometer 2023 cycle.

Colombia—Testing the resource competition thesis

I repeat the same step-by-step analysis for Colombian responses, starting with general Colombian attitudes toward redistribution for citizens in Table 6. Citizens from the Bogotá and Eastern regions have more negative views towards redistribution than residents of the Northern region. Unlike in Brazil, Colombians from specific regions indeed have shared attitudes against redistribution. Gender, income, and skin color do not influence attitudes towards redistribution.

As shown in Table 7, when specifying "immigrants" as the recipient group of redistribution, the coefficients of the Colombian Central and Eastern regions suggest that their residents have more negative opinions regarding redistribution towards immigrants than Colombians from the Northern region. Both regions have a high concentration of migrants; therefore, these coefficients align with the resource competition thesis. Finally, a citizen's general opinion on redistribution presents a positive, statistically significant coefficient. This implies that citizens with positive views toward redistribution are more likely to extend this support when redistribution benefits immigrants.

Adding the national specificity thesis

Table 8 shows Colombians' attitudes towards redistribution towards Venezuelans in particular. Even though region and resource competition have an effect on support for redistribution towards migrants, they lose any effect after the respondents identify the migrant's nationality as Venezuelan. Colombian opinions on redistribution clearly vary depending on country of origin. In Brazil, a citizen's region proved significant for their attitude towards redistribution towards Venezuelans and immigrants. In contrast, regional location is significant for Colombians only in the case of immigrants generally, not Venezuelans particularly. Additionally, unlike Brazilians, Colombians do not understand the term "immigrants" as a proxy for Venezuelans. This finding is surprising given that Venezuelans comprise much more of the Colombian population than the Brazilian population.

Instead, general opinions on redistribution and, for the first time, skin color, have a positive, statistically significant coefficient. Therefore, people who typically favor redistribution are more likely to support redistribution towards Venezuelans. People with a darker skin color are also more likely to support redistribution towards Venezuelans. Results towards immigrants aligned with the resource competition thesis. However, non-regional factors matter more for opinions on redistribution in Colombia when evaluating attitudes towards specific nationalities.

The final set of regressions tests the relationship between Colombian respondents' region and attitudes regarding redistribution toward Spanish migrants. Most importantly, income becomes significant for the first time. Middle and higher-income Colombians favor redistribution for Spanish immigrants more than lower-income Colombians. Specifically, middle-income Colombians favor redistribution towards Spanish migrants more than high-income Colombians. The skin color coefficient is significant in the case of Venezuelan

Table 8: Results of two OLS regressions with Colombian local attitudes towards redistribution towards Venezuelan immigrants as the dependent variable.

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	3.31579	<2e-16	***	2.20451	3.07e-11	***
Bogotá	-0.47242	0.0371	*	-0.36595	0.10916	
Central	-0.19219	0.3875		-0.11576	0.60305	
East	-0.4003	0.0890	.	-0.25432	0.28793	
West	0.07088	0.7596		-0.02244	0.92223	
South	-0.21579	0.6522		-0.07824	0.87033	
Middle-income				0.11907	0.45098	
High-income				0.28055	0.15128	
Redistribution				0.09928	0.01578	*
Skin color				0.11043	0.00337	**
Male				0.08792	0.53885	
R^2	0.02134			0.06221		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						

Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's America's Barometer 2023 cycle.

Table 9: Results of two OLS regressions with Colombian local attitudes towards redistribution towards Spanish immigrants as the dependent variable.

	Controlling only for region			Controlling for other variables		
	Coefficient	P-value		Coefficient	P-value	
Intercept	3.04054	<2e-16	***	2.42367	3.21e-13	***
Bogotá	0.15946	0.505		0.09807	0.68201	
Central	-0.09801	0.660		-0.15998	0.46926	
East	-0.25107	0.275		-0.27590	0.23528	
West	0.02703	0.907		0.03525	0.87658	
South	-0.20721	0.729		-0.13185	0.82356	
Middle-income				0.47136	0.00369	**
High-income				0.39131	0.04220	*
Redistribution				0.12821	0.00117	**
Skin color				-0.03877	0.31520	
Male				-0.08467	0.55425	
R^2	0.00916			0.06397		
Significance levels: '***' 0.001 '**' 0.01 '*' 0.05 '.' 0.1						

Source: Own elaboration based on data from LAPOP's America's Barometer 2023 cycle.

migrants but not in the case of Spanish migrants. These differences between the results of Venezuelan and Spanish immigrants confirm that the effects of attitudes towards redistribution for migrants vary by nationality. Interestingly, while results in Brazil aligned with the resource competition and national specificity theses, non-regional factors drive changes in opinion in Colombia. In addition, Colombians generally oppose redistribution more than the omitted region,

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whereas Brazilians generally favor redistribution more than the omitted region.

DISCUSSION

Though some results were consistent with the resource competition thesis and the national specificity thesis, not all outcomes followed expectations. Generally, both countries show lower support for redistribution for immigrants in regions with higher migrant concentrations, which aligns with the resource competition thesis. In addition, both countries express different attitudes depending on migrant nationality.

The resource competition thesis is particularly compelling in Brazil. Consistently, across the cases of immigrants and Venezuelan immigrants, support for redistribution is inversely correlated with migrant concentration. Likewise, the national specificity thesis also holds in Brazil in the expected direction. Brazilians reject redistribution more for Venezuelans, the nationality with the higher migrant concentration, but do not have strong opinions regarding redistribution for Spanish migrants, the nationality with the lower migrant concentration. In addition, similar results for immigrants and Venezuelans suggest that Brazilians understand the term "immigrant" as a reference to Venezuelan migration.

In contrast, Colombia's results are complex and unexpected. In the case of immigrants of unspecified nationality, the resource competition thesis holds. Colombians in regions with higher migrant concentrations support redistribution for migrants less than those in regions with lower migrant concentrations. However, the national specificity thesis does not follow the expected direction. Instead of Colombians rejecting redistribution for the nationality with a higher migrant concentration, they expressed more support for redistribution in the case of Venezuelans, relative to Spanish immigrants and immigrants in general. As stated previously, these results are surprising given the considerable concentration of migrants in Colombia. Furthermore, factors that do not prove significant in other cases, such as skin color or income, appear to condition opinions on redistribution toward immigrants.

It is worth speculating why the discrepancy exists. The case of Venezuelans in Colombia might be an example of a context where social capacity weighs more heavily on public opinion than economic capacity. Multiple factors may condition such a response. First, Venezuela and Colombia are the most culturally similar countries in the experiment. Both are neighboring, South American, Caribbean, Spanish-speaking countries with diverse populations and a shared colonial background, which may morph the cultural threat that migrants might pose to native residents. Second, there is a long history of Colombian-Venezuelan migration, including Colombian migration to Venezuela due to Colombia's armed conflict (De Corso 2023). In short, Colombians are not unaccustomed to cross-border flows with Venezuela. Third, due to their armed conflict, Colombians have decades of experience with massive internal displacement, possibly prompting a more welcoming attitude towards other displaced populations (Jacobsen 1996; UNHCR 2023).

Finally, the positive response of Colombian political elites might have shifted the initial response of everyday citizens towards accepting Venezuelan migrants. The official narratives and policy responses from the Santos (2010 – 2018) and Duque (2018 – 2022) Colombian governments were overwhelmingly positive. After increasingly expansive integration efforts, the Colombian government established the Temporary Protected Status for Venezuelan Migrants (ETPV) in 2021, allowing Venezuelans to regularize their stay in Colombia for ten years and eventually transition to the traditional migration regime (Rossiasco and de Narváez 2023). Despite these efforts, the literature documented increased Colombian xenophobia against Venezuelans by the end of the 2010s motivated by economic and security concerns (Janetsky 2019; Taborda et al. 2021).

While the expectation was that xenophobia would worsen (Janetsky 2019), multiple events altered the migration landscape. First, the migration rate decreased (UNHCR 2025), possibly due to a mild stabilization of the Venezuelan economy (Moleiro 2024). Additionally, the United States granted Venezuelans Temporary Protected Status (TPS) eligibility in 2021 (USCIS 2025), encouraging migrants to travel through Colombia instead of residing there. Finally, the policies for migration management of the current Colombian President, Gustavo Petro (2022 – present), have not followed the open-arms pattern of his predecessors (Wolf 2025), which may have dampened new resentment from Colombians due to welcoming policies for migrants under the perception of economic competition.

These political and social factors, some intensifying xenophobia and others mitigating it, form the backdrop of this paper's results, which show Colombians' positive attitude towards redistribution that benefits Venezuelans. In the end, this paper cannot say for certain why Colombian attitudes toward Venezuelans stand apart. The changes in context and the lack of related time-series data hinder the possibility of assigning causation. Further research on Colombians' cultural relationship with Venezuelans and historical experiences with migration and displacement may offer more clarity around this paper's unexpected results.

CONCLUSION

This paper evaluated two hypotheses: the resource competition and national specificity theses. The resource competition thesis assumes that a higher migrant concentration induces local economic grievances that affect local public opinion. Therefore, citizens from regions with a higher migrant concentration should present higher rejection rates to redistribution

benefiting migrants. The national specificity thesis argues that locals will not extend negative attitudes to all migrants. Instead, citizens will direct their anti-redistributive attitudes only towards nationalities with a high migrant concentration in their country. I use a series of OLS regressions to evaluate both hypotheses through Colombian and Brazilian interview survey data that compared redistributive attitudes toward citizens and migrants, as well as specifically toward Venezuelan and Spanish immigrants.

The results differ per country. In Brazil, the resource competition thesis and national specificity thesis prove true. Brazilian regions with a lower migrant concentration support redistribution towards migrants more than regions with a higher migrant concentration. Moreover, redistributive attitudes vary per nationality, assigning more negative views to redistribution towards Venezuelans, the nationality with the highest migrant concentration. In Colombia, the resource competition thesis proves true for migrants generally. However, Colombians explicitly favor Venezuelans in terms of redistribution, contradicting the expected direction of the national specificity thesis. Furthermore, factors such as income and skin color shape Colombian attitudes, but not Brazilian ones. In this paper, I offer possible explanations for Colombia's discrepancy and encourage future researchers to shed light on this difference using data-driven approaches.

Public opinion matters because it shapes policy. If citizens reject redistribution towards migrants, governments may pursue restrictive economic integration models that not only prevent migrants from accessing vital services, such as education or healthcare, but may also neglect the genuine economic grievances locals experience because of a population and labor supply increase. Results on the Brazilian aspect of this paper offer some clarity that may inform Brazilian migrant economic integration policy. Thankfully, the Brazilian government has already begun a voluntary relocation program for Venezuelan migrants, called Operação Acolhida (MDS 2024), to help migrants move to more Southern regions with a lower migrant concentration. This paper reinforces the importance of the maintenance and expansion of Operação Acolhida.

However, given Colombia's results, it is not possible to draw patterns that are generalizable to countries beyond Brazil. Venezuela's and Colombia's deeply related history and culture, as well as the responses of the Colombian government, may shape public opinion in ways that a purely economic lens cannot explain. To clarify the unexpected results of this paper and inform policy, scholars must evaluate the Colombian case in greater detail, as well as other cases under different regional, social, cultural, and economic contexts.

As long as the crisis in Venezuela is ongoing, mass migration will continue to affect countries across the Americas. Regardless of location, neglecting crises of such magnitude results in significant hardships for both migrants and locals. As shown, these grievances can vary significantly within a single nation, which should be seen as an opportunity for more effective migration management. Voluntary migrant relocation to regions with a lower economic and social service burden offers an opportunity for growth that benefits both local economies and migrants seeking employment. Countries must consider regional variations when crafting integration policy, not just for Venezuelans, but for the 37.9 million refugees worldwide (UNHCR 2024). ■

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APPENDIX

Figure 5: Color palette used by LAPOP interviewers to determine the interviewees' skin color



Source: Center for Global Democracy. 'Index.' Accessed 9 November 2024. https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/index.php.

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ENDNOTE

1 Given that my dependent variable is a 5-scale ordinal variable, I also ran ordinal regressions to compare results. Using this method, attitudes around redistribution for citizens were significant in every case. Therefore, I do not mention their lack of significance using OLS. However, if its effect is strong enough to show through OLS, I mention it. Other differences were negligible.

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