

**OPIICS 2019****International Conference of Psychology, Sociology, Education, and Social Sciences****XENOPHOBIC THOUGHTS AND ATTITUDES OF THE URBAN  
POPULATION OF DE CITY OF IBARRA TOWARDS  
VENEZUELAN IMMIGRANTS**

Miguel Posso Yépez (a)\*, Nhora Benítez B. (b), Ángela M. Posso A. (c), Cristian Guzmán (d)

\*Corresponding author

(a) Technical University of the North, Ibarra, Ecuador, maposso@utn.edu.ec

(b) Technical University of the North, Ecuador, nmbenitez@utn.edu.ec

(c) Technical University of the North, Ibarra, Ecuador, amposso@utn.edu.ec

(d) Technical University of the North, Ibarra, Ecuador, reguzman@utn.edu.ec

***Abstract***

In recent years, due to crisis in Venezuela, Ecuador has become for Venezuelan immigrants not only a destination but also a point of transiting onward to countries in the south of the continent. In light of this challenge, the objective of the investigation is to determine the relationship that exists between the variable xenophobic thoughts and attitudes of the urban population of the city of Ibarra, with these variables: gender, ethnic self-definition, nationality, religion, Ibarra citizens' academic level, and contact or relationship with Venezuelan citizens. This is a quantitative cross-sectional study, in which a correlational and descriptive design was utilized. The universe studied was the 90,919 people over 18 years of age living in the urban area of the city of Ibarra, from this universe a survey was applied to a representative sample of 1094 people. By using the Chi Square hypothesis test, it was found that there is no relationship between xenophobic thoughts and gender, religion or with the nationality of the respondents ( $p > .05$ ); in contrast, with regard to ethnicity, academic level, and contact with Venezuelans, it was found a relationship ( $p < .05$ ), although it was very moderate. It is concluded that, xenophobic thoughts and attitudes towards Venezuelans can be found in the population from the city of Ibarra in different forms and measures.

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**Keywords:** Immigrants, Venezuelans, Ibarra, xenophobic thoughts, xenophobic attitudes.



## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Correlational study variables definitions

There are several definitions of xenophobia; this concept has even been evolving. Simply put, xenophobia refers to attitudes or behaviors related to the social exclusion of foreigners, that is, people with a nationality other than their own (Diez Nicolás, 2009). A more elaborated concept is the one proposed by Herrans (2008), who considers xenophobia as the behavior or attitude that a social group develops due to fear or dislike towards other groups (ethnic, social or national) considered foreigners. Etymologically it comes from two Greek words: *Xeno*, meaning "strange", "foreigner", and *Phobos*, meaning "fear".

Xenophobia, although activated in a social context, has its emotional roots in ethnocentric prejudices, regardless of possible negative experiences with immigrants (Alaminos, López, & Santacreu, 2010). The term xenophobia is understood by the majority of persons; therefore, its social and academic use quite is common. The problem lies in the use and acceptance of the term immigrant, since in several emergent nations people do not use this term to refer to someone who comes from a developed country.

The second variable of this study, immigrant, must be understood from the three related concepts; that is, migrant, emigrant and immigrant. The three of them are valid and correct ways to refer to the same idea: a person who leaves a place to settle in another. Migrant refers to the person who migrates, who leaves the place where he/she lives, arrives elsewhere to settle and establish as his/her home. Emigrant refers to a person who emigrates, the one who moves from the place where his/her home is established (town, city, country), to settle in another. Finally, immigrant refers to a person who leaves his/her native country and leaves for another, to settle in it. It also should be noted, the noun emigrant focus on the person who is leaving a country while immigrant refers to the person who is entering a foreign country to live there permanently.

### 1.2. Similar studies

There are not many studies on xenophobia in South America, and even fewer that refer to Venezuelan immigrants, perhaps because this phenomenon is relatively new. Currently, as the massive Venezuelan migration is portrayed on daily news in social networks and media, there are several ongoing investigations that will clarify this panorama and give clues to deal with this xenophobic problem that is increasing in the region every day.

It could be stated that in the last century, Venezuelan migration has had stages or phases. Initially, the Venezuelan population with some degree of academic training migrated to Nordic countries. However, at the moment, due to the political and socio-economic instability of their country, people from Venezuela have been massively abandoning their homeland and seeking refuge in neighboring countries (Heredia & Batistessa, 2019).

In Latin America, strong migration processes were frequently directed from countries of the South to countries of the North of the continent or even to Europe. In the last decade, as a new migration phenomenon, massive migration processes in the same region of the continent have been witnessed among countries in South America. The most relevant example of this new phenomenon is the one that is

happening from Venezuela to the south of the continent. In 2019, it is estimated that Venezuelans exodus will exceed five million people (OAS, 2019). In Ecuador alone, about one million people have entered in 2017, one in five of them have stayed in this country (León, 2019).

It is evident that the conditions of vulnerability of people arriving from Venezuela are getting worse, among of the factors to highlight are the conditions through which refugees and migrants travel to Ecuador. In this regard, it should be noted that among the households interviewed in Rumichaca, in crossing border from Ecuador to Colombia, more than 36% had made a part of their trip from the country of origin on foot. Likewise, it has been identified with concern that 25% of the cases interviewed reported some type of security incident throughout the displacement cycle (SNU, 2018).

In migratory contexts, manifestations of bigotry and intolerance have been a social scourge against which it is necessary to fight from all flanks. Its eradication depends on the synergies that are created among society, family, organizations and education institutions at all levels. In the province of Imbabura and in general, in all places, the serious concerns about these prejudices is that they claim, directly or indirectly, to harm or withdraw the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on equal terms, of the fundamental human rights (Posso, León, Guzmán, & Escobar, 2019).

### **1.3. Geographical region from the study overview**

Ibarra is the principal city of the homonymous canton and it is also the capital of the province of Imbabura, located in the northern Andean region of Ecuador. It is situated at 110 km north from Quito, capital of Ecuador and 120 km south from the international bridge from Rumichaca, crossing border with Colombia. The city's population, projected to 2019, is 156,487 people, of them 58.1% are over 19 years old; that is, 90,919 people living in five urban settings (INEC, 2019).

According to "Plan de Desarrollo y Ordenamiento Territorial del Municipio de Ibarra" (2014), Ibarra's population is multicultural; 80.4% define themselves as mestizos, 9.46% white, 3.77% indigenous, 3.65% Afro-descendants, 2.59% mulattos.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Since Nicolás Maduro assumed the presidency of Venezuela in 2013, the migration of Venezuelans to several countries in Latin America has become world news. Each year the number of those who leave that country is fundamentally increasing for economic and political reasons. Political and socio-economic instability has led to the need of many citizens to massively abandon their homeland and seek refuge in neighboring countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Brazil and Argentina (Heredia & Battistessa, 2019).

It is evident that the migratory processes in Venezuela were already, to say the least, notable, since the end of the first decade of the present century, but they were not as alarming as they are today. The climate of coexistence in the country began to be affected by high political conflict and insecurity problems (Freitz, 2011).

According to the Ministry of Interior of Ecuador (SNU, 2018), it is estimated that, until June 2019, the Venezuelan population settled in this country is approximately 350,000 people, while in 2015 there

were barely 8901 Venezuelans. Those numbers placed Ecuador as the third Latin American country receiving Venezuelan immigrants, only surpassed by Peru and Colombia. In May 2019, 3,000 Venezuelans had entered the country across the international Rumichaca Bridge, on the northern border with Colombia. Nonetheless, since June, because the Peruvian government reported that it would be mandatory to hold a visa to Venezuelan immigrants for entering their country; this number has increased to more than 5,000 Venezuelans entering Ecuador daily. It is estimated that by the end of 2019 there will be 5.3 million Venezuelans settled in Latin America (El Telégrafo, 2019).

The present investigation deals exclusively with xenophobia. This problem is becoming increasingly evident in all Ecuadorian cities; Ibarra is not the exception. In fact, it is possibly one of the cities where this problem is most accentuated since it is located 120 kilometers from the border with Colombia and is an obligatory path for Venezuelan immigrants heading to southern Ecuador and countries like Peru, Chile and Argentina.

Since the migration of Venezuelan people is a relatively new phenomenon in Ibarra, there is no data that indicates how many Venezuelans are living in the city; however, it is evident the growing number of people from this nationality established in the city during the last five years.

### **3. Research Questions**

Is there a relationship between the variable thoughts and xenophobic attitudes of the urban population of Ibarra, with the variables: gender, ethnic self-definition, nationality, religion, academic level of Ibarra citizens and contact or relationship with Venezuelan citizens?

What are the levels of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes of people from Ibarra towards Venezuelan immigrants?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The objective of the investigation is to determine the relationship that exists between the variable, xenophobic thoughts and attitudes of the urban population of Ibarra, with the variables: gender, ethnic self-definition, nationality, religion, academic level of Ibarra citizens and contact or relationship with Venezuelan citizens.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. Type of research**

We worked with a quantitative cross-sectional approach; it has a correlational, descriptive and random design, which aims to establish the level of xenophobia with the academic level of people from Ibarra, as well as to describe the xenophobic thoughts and attitudes of the urban population of the city towards Venezuelan immigrants.

## 5.2. Participants

From the universe of 90,919 inhabitants of the city of Ibarra, a representative sample of 1094 citizens over 18 years of age living in the urban area of the city was obtained with mathematical formula. A population variance of 0.25, a significance level of 95% ( $Z = 1.96$ ) and an error of 3% were used to calculate the sample.

Of the investigated group: 50.3% are men, 48.3% are women and 1.5% are of another gender. By self-definition, 79.5% define themselves as mestizos, 8.5% Afro-descendants, 7.3 indigenous, 4.4% white and 0.3% from another ethnic group. By nationality, 93.2% are Ecuadorian, 5.9% are Colombian and 0.9% are from other nationalities (except Venezuelan). From the group surveyed, the majority identified themselves as Catholic with 68.5%, evangelical 11.6%, Jehovah witness 2.4%, atheists 8.6% and other religions 9%. As for the higher academic degree level obtained: 7% have a graduate degree, 28.8% have a bachelor's degree, 17.8% associate degree, 37.4% are high school graduates, complete elementary school 7% and incomplete elementary school 1.3%. It is important to highlight that 61.3% of those investigated have had some type of relationship with Venezuelan immigrants, while 38.6% have never had any type of relationship.

## 5.3. Instruments

The survey applied consists of eighteen variables; eight of them are related to data of the people in the study: gender, ethnic self-definition, nationality, religion, academic level, contact with Venezuelans and possible causes for leaving Venezuela. The remaining eleven variables, measured using the Likert scale, referring to the dimension of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes of the citizens of Ibarra towards Venezuelan immigrants have the following questions: Do you consider that Venezuelan migrants cause conflict? Do you think that Venezuelan migrants feel superior to Ecuadorians? Has crime in recent years in Ibarra increased due to the presence of Venezuelan migrants? When a Venezuelan who commits acts against the law is caught, do you think people should take justice by their own hands? Do you dislike the presence of Venezuelans in Ecuador? In a job, must a Venezuelan migrant earn less than an Ecuadorian? Do you think that Venezuelan migrants are taking work away from Ecuadorians? Should the entry of Venezuelan migrants into Ecuador be limited? In general, do you think Venezuelans are bad neighbors in your neighborhood? In general, do you think Venezuelans are bad people? Should the Ecuadorian government remove social and humanitarian assistance provided to Venezuelan migrants? The Likert scale for these variables is: totally agree (5), agree (4), somewhat agree (3), somewhat disagree (2), disagree (1).

The eleven variables related to the dimension "xenophobic thoughts and attitudes" were weighted in a single variable, for which the sum of observed values of the 11 variables in each respondent was multiplied by the number of response options (5) and divided for the maximum possible value that could be obtained from the eleven variables (55). The new variable was called "xenophobic thoughts and attitudes" and values were assigned according to the following Baremo: highly accentuated xenophobic thinking (5), accentuated xenophobic thinking (4), moderately accentuated xenophobic thinking (3), poorly accentuated xenophobic thinking (2) and no xenophobic thinking (1).

#### 5.4. Procedure

The survey designed by the authors, composed of categorical variables, was validated by five experts in the area, three psychologists and two educators. A pilot survey was then applied to 60 individuals. To determine the level of reliability of the 11 variables group that are part of the category "thoughts and attitudes xenophobic", Cronbach's Alpha was used, obtaining a value of  $\alpha = 0.825$ , considered good according to the criteria of George and Mallery (2003). The final version of the survey was conducted from February 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019 in the urban area of Ibarra.

To determine whether or not there is a relationship between the variables, the "Chi Square" statistic was used. To determine the coefficient or magnitude of that relationship, depending on the type of related discrete variables, Cramer's V, Kendall's Tau or Contingency Coefficient was used.

### 6. Findings

To define the relationship between the variable thoughts and xenophobic attitudes, with six other variables (see Table 1), the Chi-square hypothesis test (significance level of 0.05) was applied, determining that there is no relationship ( $p > .05$ ) with the variables: population gender, nationality, or religion; while there is a relationship ( $p < .05$ ) with the variables: ethnic self-definition, academic level and relationship or contact with Venezuelans. As can be seen in Table 1, to conclude the magnitude of the association of these three variables, different statistics were applied, depending on the type of related variables, a moderate magnitude UNCL was found among these relationships. In the cases where no relationship was found between variables, it was not necessary to calculate the magnitude of the association.

**Table 01.** Chi-square values of the variables related to xenophobic thoughts and attitudes

Related variables	Pearson's Chi-square Value	Asymptotic Significance (2 sides)	Magnitude and statistic of the association
Gender with xenophobic thoughts and attitudes	11,196	,191	Not applicable
Ethnic self-definition with xenophobic thoughts and attitudes	26,402	,049	,078 (Cramer's V)
Nationality with xenophobic thoughts and attitudes	5,664	,685	Not applicable
Religion with xenophobic thoughts and attitudes	16,123	,444	Not applicable
Academic level with xenophobic thoughts and attitudes	36,578	,013	,065 (Kendall's Tau-b)
Contact or relationship with Venezuelans with xenophobic thoughts and attitudes	32,785	,000	,171 (Contingency coefficient)

Elaboration: The authors. Source: survey February 2019.

Unexpectedly, only 2.4% of respondents who have not had contact or relationship with Venezuelan immigrants, do not have any xenophobic thoughts or attitudes towards them (Table 2); that is to say, 97.6% of respondents who have not had a relationship with Venezuelans, have some kind of

xenophobic thinking (highly accentuated, accentuated, moderately accentuated or poorly accentuated), which demonstrates a serious prejudice and social stigmatization in fact influenced by the press and social media. The information they regularly transmit, consciously and/or unconsciously generate harmful feelings and thoughts towards Venezuelans. Xenophobia, annoyance or hatred against immigrants, or the one who is different, is a consequence of prejudiced descriptions that depict immigrants as the cause of society's ills (Lara, 2007).

These xenophobic thoughts and attitudes in the city of Ibarra have gradually increased over the last two years due to the growing presence of immigrants of this nationality who practically, for the most part, beg for money in the streets of the city. This way of thinking is a significant problem; in fact, if xenophobia is understood as a predisposition to act in a certain way towards people because they are perceived as different, it involves a social problem (Hjerm, 2001).

Considering the other standpoint, that is of those who had contact or relationship with Venezuelans, only 4.2% have no xenophobic thoughts and attitudes; while 95.8% have some type or degree of xenophobic thinking (Table 2), highlighting that 48.1% have a poorly accentuated xenophobic thinking.

**Table 02.** Has had direct contact or relationship with Venezuelans \* Xenophobic thoughts and attitudes cross tabulation

		Xenophobic thinking and attitudes					Total
		None	Poorly Accentuated	Moderately Accentuated	Accentuated	Highly Accentuated	
Contact or direct relationship with Venezuelans	YES	28 4,2%	323 48,1%	148 22,1%	151 22,5%	21 3,1%	671 100,0%
	NO	10 2,4%	184 43,4%	58 13,7%	152 36,0%	19 4,5%	423 100,0%
<b>Total</b>		38 3,5%	507 46,3%	206 18,8%	303 27,7%	40 3,7%	1094 100,0%

Elaboration: The authors. Source: survey February 2019.

Of the 550 surveyed men, only 3.1% have no xenophobic thoughts and attitudes while in the case of women, only 3.8% have no xenophobic thoughts. It can be seen that, in both cases, more than 96% of the examinees has some type of xenophobic thinking and attitude. In the case of xenophobia, there are no differences between men and women (Hatibovic, Bobowik, Faúndez, & Sandoval, 2017).

From all the respondents self-defined as white, only 2.1% do not have any xenophobic thinking and attitude towards Venezuelans, with the remaining 97.9% having some level of xenophobic thinking. Having no xenophobic thoughts and attitudes: 3.9% of mestizos, 2.2% of Afro-descendants and 1.3% of indigenous people. The high percentage of xenophobic feelings from those of different ethnicities is evident and worrisome. As stated by Alaminos et al. (2010) societies with greater multiculturalism (of immigration origin) have more xenophobic attitudes of ethnocentric origin.

From an intercultural perspective, Borboa (2006) proposes that knowledge of the “others” allows us to understand and appreciate many cultural aspects that may be seen negative at first; consequently, interculturality becomes a dialogue that allows understanding and harmonious coexistence by restricting ethnocentrism, prejudice and discrimination. Bearing in mind that the majority of the sample define

themselves as mestizos (79.5%), and from this total, in comparison to other ethnic groups, these are the ones with a higher percentage (3.9%) of people not having any thought and xenophobic attitude, the results show that there is no direct relationship between the ethnic majority in this study and the levels of xenophobic thinking. The above-mentioned contradicts several studies such as Herrera & Kcraus, (2016) that indicates that the superiority of an ethnic group, expressed in the orientation to social dominance, would also be related to xenophobia.

Relating to nationality, some level of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes were presented in 96.6% of Ecuadorians, 96.9% of Colombians and 90% of the total of individuals of other nationalities. One of the most interesting findings is the fact that, although being immigrants in the city of Ibarra, Colombian and other nationality respondents express high percentages of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes towards Venezuelans, inferring that they also feel threatened or afraid of losing their jobs in the city.

Regardless of the various religions professed by people from Ibarra, the sum of the different levels of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes towards Venezuelans, in each religion, exceeds 92%. No significant differences were found from the totals of each religion of respondents who do not have any xenophobic thoughts and attitudes towards Venezuelans: 3.3% of Catholics; 2.4% evangelicals; 7.7% Jehovah's Witnesses; 3.2% of atheists and 5.1% of other religions. The different religious congregations in Ibarra, apparently, have not yet become aware of or deeply analyzed the migration phenomenon that is taking place in the city, so the official and public statements of their leaders are very prudent and brief.

Throughout Latin America there are no marked or antagonistic religious differences as can be found in other places on the planet, where religious differences are a source for discrimination leading to xenophobic attitudes and thoughts. Religious orientation remains in any country a potential source of discrimination and intolerance towards the ones who think differently (Hatibovic, Bobowik, Faúndez, & Sandoval, 2017). Alternatively, the association with religious belonging has been examined and it has been found that those who define themselves as atheists or indifferent to religion have lower levels of xenophobia compared to those who profess some religion (Aymerich, Canales, & Vivanco, 2007).

People with the highest academic level in Ibarra have lower levels of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes towards Venezuelans. In other words, 5.2% of the population with graduate studies, 3.8% with third level studies, 1.5% with associate studies, 3.9% with high school studies, 3.6% with elementary school studies, and 0% from those with no formal education have no xenophobic thinking towards Venezuelans. If it is reflected that, Ecuador's education at all levels is intercultural, it would be understood that the levels of xenophobia should be low; nonetheless, in the variable academic level, the xenophobic thoughts and attitude towards Venezuelans exceed 95% in each group investigated, which shows that the teaching-learning processes within the framework of interculturality are not drawing the expected results.

In this sense, it has been shown that intercultural education is relevant in the eradication of prejudices (Esteban & Bastiani, 2010). The level of education goes hand in hand with the socioeconomic status of an individual resulting in the appearance of social classes in a nation. Classism is defined as the acceptance of social inequalities necessary to the social system and reference of the lifestyles of the upper social class as models of social aspirations and social distance in relation to the poor (Aymerich, Canales, & Vivanco, 2007).



Weighing the eleven variables of the dimension of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes, it was determined that only 3.5% of the population has no xenophobic thoughts towards Venezuelan immigrants and the highest percentage value (46.3%) corresponds to a low level of accentuated thinking and xenophobic attitude (Table 3). In relation to the Venezuelan population living in Ecuador, about 22 % of the Venezuelans surveyed mentioned not having enough and 98% said they suffered discrimination related to their nationality (SNU, 2018).

Definitely, the different levels of xenophobic thinking and attitudes found are very worrying. It was believed that due to Ecuadorians experiences in the last two decades of the last century and in the first decade of the current one, this social issue would not have to present severe connotations. Ecuadorian citizens generated numerous migratory waves to the USA, Europe and neighboring countries, in such a way that, the majority of those who stayed in the country or those who returned, know or have suffered in their own flesh, xenophobic attitudes to relatives or acquaintances. Bearing in mind the aforesaid, it was assumed that xenophobia was an evil that, although far from be eradicated, was at least decreasing.

Xenophobic thoughts and attitudes indeed are sustained by objective and subjective elements related to how immigrants are seen and how they are integrated into receiving contexts. This is evident when one or more migrants commit crimes; society assimilates by generalizing the wrong idea that all immigrants are criminals. In this exemplified process, different actors and dynamics are involved. On the one hand, there are the social actors who are the carriers of perceptions themselves and who exercise opinion or pressure based on them. On the other hand, public opinion, through the media and opinion analysis, contributes to highlighting perceptions, and finally, the political and cultural context in which these perceptions and images of the immigrant are formed (Lara, 2007).

**Table 03.** Levels of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Accumulated percentage
None	38	3,5	3,5	3,5
Poorly Accentuated	507	46,3	46,3	49,8
Moderately Accentuated	206	18,8	18,8	68,6
Accentuated	303	27,7	27,7	96,3
Highly Accentuated	40	3,7	3,7	100,0
Total	1094	100,0	100,0	

Elaboration: The authors. Source: survey February 2019.

At present times new forms or manifestations of xenophobia have appeared, characterized by a more elaborate discourse. Xenophobic thoughts and attitudes continue to exist in an overlapping manner, where many people and authorities have adopted a more symbolic and subtle discourse and actions that hinders their perception, measurement and evaluation.

## 7. Conclusion

Xenophobic thoughts and attitudes are related to the variables: ethnic self-definition, academic level and relationship or contact with Venezuelans; while, with the variables: population gender, nationality, or religion, there is no relationship.

Taken the xenophobic thoughts and attitudes as a dimension composed of eleven variables, there are different levels of xenophobic thoughts and attitudes towards Venezuelans in the vast majority of the urban population of the city of Ibarra (very pronounced, accentuated, moderately accentuated and poorly accentuated). Only 3.5% of the population has no xenophobic thinking.

## 8. Limitations

The investigation may be influenced or biased by the fact of having surveyed people from Ibarra after three weeks of the death of a local pregnant woman in the hands of a Venezuelan immigrant. Social media and local news blew this event out of proportions, thus xenophobic thoughts and attitudes could have been generated after this unfortunate incident.

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