

Do Recent Latino Immigrants Compete for Jobs with Native Hispanics and Earlier Latino Immigrants?

Adriana Kugler
University of Houston, NBER, CEPR and IZA

and

Mutlu Yuksel
IZA

April 23, 2008

Abstract

Immigrants have long been perceived to take jobs away and to push down the wages of native workers. Given that the recent bout of Latin American immigration in the 1980s and 1990s coincided with the fall in earnings and employment of the less skilled, it is not surprising that, like previous immigration waves, recent Latin American immigration is sometimes blamed for the misfortunes of less skilled Americans. There is, however, little evidence showing that immigration reduces native employment and earnings. Some believe that this is because immigrants are employed in jobs that natives are not willing to do in any case. In this chapter, we examine whether the recent Latino immigrants are hurting the chances of earlier Latino immigrants and native Hispanics who are more likely to do the same jobs as recent Latin Americans. We find little evidence showing that the recent influx of Latin Americans hurt Latinos and Hispanics. If anything, once we control for ongoing trends in regions receiving immigrants, we find that the recent Latin American immigration helped native Hispanics but had no effect on previous Latin American immigrants. The earnings of native Hispanics increased with the most recent wave of Latin American immigration probably because immigrants help the productivity of native Hispanics by providing cheap services and doing jobs that free up the time of natives for more specialized tasks.

1. Introduction

Like the early European immigration to the U.S., Latin American immigration experienced two large bouts. The first wave of immigration in the 1960s and 1970s was largely motivated by political turmoil in Latin America, while the second wave after the 1980s has been driven mainly by economic factors. Also, in contrast to previous immigrants, recent immigrants are less educated and experienced and are generally less skilled (see, e.g., Borjas (1985, 1995a)).

The lower skill of the more recent Latin American immigrants would suggest that these recent immigrants are most likely to compete for jobs with less skilled natives or other equally unskilled immigrants who came before them. Moreover, they are likely to compete with others with similar language skills, who may either be serving the same Spanish-speaking market or who do similar jobs that do not require English fluency. On the other hand, more skilled natives and previous immigrants would not likely be affected by the competition from these immigrants and may actually benefit from having less-skilled workers either work for them or work with them.

This chapter analyzes the impact of the recent wave of unskilled Latin American immigrants on native Hispanics and previous Latin American immigrants, who are likely to have similar language skills. Moreover, we focus on the impact of recent Latin Americans on the earnings and employment of Hispanics with various levels of educational attainment, i.e., drop-outs, high-school graduates and college-educated workers.

We take advantage of the fact that the recent Latin American immigration varied widely across regions and states. However, many immigrants come to the U.S. driven by

economic factors and looking for a better life. Thus, a usual problem when estimating the impact of immigration on the earnings and employment of natives in different states is that immigrants may move precisely to states with good economic opportunities. This means that one may be unlikely to find any adverse effects of immigration on natives, since natives will also be doing particularly well in the states that attract immigrants.

We use two strategies to control for this possibility. First, we use the Latin American immigration driven by the presence of previous Latin Americans from the same countries, and who likely came to a state attracted by their social networks rather than by economic conditions (see, Card (2001), for a discussion of this strategy). The idea is that social networks make it less costly to immigrate by providing initial housing and may increase the benefits from locating in a place by providing job information and opportunities. Second, we use the Latin American immigration that came to the border-states in the U.S. following Hurricane Mitch. The idea here is that those who came after the Hurricane were forced to migrate due to the natural disaster and could not be as picky in terms of their choice of destination. Consequently, these immigrants went to the closest states rather than to states with better economic conditions (see Kugler and Yuksel (2006) for more details).

We find no evidence that the recent wave of unskilled Latin Americans displaced native Hispanics or even previous Latin Americans from their jobs. Neither do we find that they competed with them in any way by reducing the earnings of low skilled native Hispanics or previous Latin Americans. Instead, we find that unskilled Latin Americans who came in the past few decades to the U.S. benefited more skilled Hispanic men by raising their earnings. Why would unskilled Latin American immigrants have a positive

impact on the earnings of skilled Hispanics? There are two possible channels through which this may occur. On the one hand, unskilled Latin American workers may work directly with skilled Hispanics and they may complement each other at work, making skilled Hispanics more productive at work. A good example would be unskilled or semi-skilled Latin Americans who speak good Spanish and can serve the Spanish-speaking market.¹ On the other hand, the price of goods and especially of services bought by skilled Hispanics, like child care and gardening, may have declined with the arrival of unskilled Latin Americans, thus, increasing the real earnings of skilled Hispanic workers.

In the next section we provide a brief history of Hispanic immigration to the U.S. We then summarize the existing literature on the impact of immigration on U.S. natives and explain the importance of focusing on recent unskilled immigration from Latin America and its impact on Hispanics. The following section describes the demographic and labor market characteristics of native Hispanics and previous and recent Latin American immigrants, and compares them with immigrants from other parts of the world. Finally, we present evidence on the impact of the recent bout of Latin American immigration on Hispanics in the U.S. and discuss some policy implications of our analysis.

2. A Brief History of Hispanic Immigration to the U.S.

Much like the earlier European immigration, Latin American immigration experienced two waves of immigration: the first wave mainly driven by political and religious prosecution; and the second wave motivated by economic factors. However,

¹ Saiz and Zoido (2005) highlight the returns to speaking another language in the U.S. and make it clear that this is a valuable skill in the U.S. labor market.

prior to that, economically motivated migration from Mexico started earlier in the 20th century.

Mexican migration grew quickly in the early 1900s and it became such an important concern for the U.S. that the government introduced “The U.S. Immigration Act of 1907.” This Act reorganized the states bordering Mexico (i.e., Arizona, New Mexico and part of Texas) into the Mexican border district to keep closer control and stem the flow of immigrants from Mexico.² By the 1920s, Mexicans comprised 0.6% of the U.S. workforce due to the increased demand for Mexican labor by U.S. employers and the restricted flow of European migration during WWI. Mexican migration declined significantly after the 1920s and it was only until the next shortage of labor in 1942 during WWII that a guest worker program known as the Bracero program was introduced to try to encourage Mexican laborers to come to the U.S. The program was then discontinued in the early 1960s. However, rather than discouraging Mexican migration, the flow of immigration from South of the border, in fact, accelerated from the 1960s onwards.³

It was only later in the second half of the 20th century that migration from the rest of Latin America towards the U.S. got underway. Migration from the rest of Latin America was very limited prior to the 1960s. The initial Latin American migration during the 1960s and 1970s was mostly driven by political instability in some of these countries, e.g., Cuba, Argentina, and Chile. Even in 1970, we find that, according to Census figures, the fraction of Latin American immigrants in the population was only 0.005. After the 1970s, the increase in Latin American immigration due to political factors is more

² U.S. Immigration History description at <http://www.rapidimmigration.com>.

³ This description of the Mexican immigration experience comes from Borjas and Katz (2005).

noticeable. By 1980, we find that the share of Latin American immigrants in the population had risen to 0.009. A much larger migration started to arrive after the 1980s. The more recent Latin American immigration starting in the 1980s was largely motivated by poor economic conditions in most Latin American countries. The debt crisis in the 1980s and the structural reforms during the 1990s followed by the Mexican and the Brazilian crises and the contagion effect of the Asian Crisis in the region all generated a large flow of immigration from the rest of Latin America into the U.S. The increase in the share of Latin American immigrants in the population is, however, most noticeable after the 1980s. We find that the share of Latino immigrants in the population rose to 0.015 in 1990 and to 0.031 in 2000. The first and second waves of Latin American immigrants differ in terms of their educational attainment, with the later generation being less educated. Also, Borjas (1985, 1995) finds that the quality of the recent Latin American immigrants is much lower than that of the earlier immigrants from the region.

3. Why Focus on the Impact of Immigration on Hispanics?

There is an extensive literature focusing on the impact of immigration on the labor market conditions of all natives in the U.S. Like this paper, one strand of this literature focuses on differences in immigration to different states to analyze the impact of immigration on natives. For the most part, analyses of U.S. data following this approach find little or no effect of immigration on American workers (e.g., Altonji and Card (1991); Card (1990, 2001)).⁴ Another strand of the literature, analyzes the impact of immigration by exploiting the drastic change in the shares of immigrants in the labor

⁴ By contrast, analyses for Europe following this regional approach find larger negative effects on the employment of natives (see, Angrist and Kugler (2003), Carrington and deLima (1996), and Hunt (1993)).

force over time. For the most part, studies in this tradition find larger negative effects of immigrants on U.S. workers (see, e.g., Borjas, Freeman, and Katz (1997); Borjas (2003)).

Studies in both traditions tend to focus on the impact of immigrants on the earnings and employment of natives of different skill levels. The reason for focusing on different skill groups is that, during the past few decades immigrants have been relatively less skilled than the rest of the population, so that immigrant workers may be expected to generate more competition for less-skilled workers. Previous studies indeed tend to find negative effects on less-skilled Americans. On the other hand, in our recent study (Kugler and Yuksel (2006)) and a study by Ottaviano and Peri (2006), we find positive effects of immigration on more-skilled Americans.⁵

While distinguishing the impact of immigrants on natives with different educational attainment and experience is informative, worker skills may also differ along other dimensions. For instance, individuals may differ in terms of other observable skills like language and social skills. As an attempt to deal with this, some studies have examined the impact of immigration on different ethnic and racial groups. For example, the well-known Mariel boatlift analysis examines the impact of the Marielitos not only on all U.S. natives, but in particular on African-Americans and previous Cuban immigrants (Card (1991)). Similarly, a recent study by Borjas, Grogger and Hanson (2006) looks at the impact of immigration on African Americans. An alternative approach would be to follow Card's analysis which distinguishes natives by income deciles as an attempt to distinguish the impact on natives with different observable and unobservable skills.

⁵ Like our previous work, the paper by Ottaviano and Peri (2006) also finds positive effects of immigration on other U.S. natives. However, unlike our study, the Ottaviano and Peri (2006) analysis finds positive effects on all natives irrespective of skill level. Another major difference between Kugler and Yuksel (2006) and Ottaviano and Peri (2006) is that our analysis exploits the differences in immigration shares across states, while Ottaviano and Peri mainly exploit changes in immigration shares over time.

In this study, we focus on the impact of the recent Latin American immigration to the U.S., which has been composed of relatively unskilled workers compared to previous waves of immigration. Moreover, here we focus on the impact of these recent Latino immigrants on U.S. Hispanics and on previous Latino immigrants. Why would we be interested in focusing on the impact on Hispanics? First, as discussed in the next section, native Hispanics and previous Latino immigrants are relatively less educated than the population at large and, thus, most likely to be affected by the recent immigration wave from Latin America. Borjas and Katz (2005) report that in 1980 4.1% of male high school dropouts were Mexican immigrants, while in 2000 26.2% of all male high school dropouts were Mexican-born. This indicates that previous Mexican immigrants were already relatively uneducated but that recent Mexican immigrants are even less educated. Second, recent Latino immigrants not only have similar educational attainment and experience, but they share similar language and intangible skills (e.g., in terms of serving a Spanish-speaking market and providing certain services). For this reason, it would seem like Latino immigrants may be particularly substitutable with native Hispanics and previous Latin American immigrants. Finally, given the slow assimilation of second generation Hispanics, it is important to understand why native Hispanics are not catching up in terms of earnings with other Americans. Competition from new immigrants may be one factor affecting their earnings but not those of white natives.

4. Demographic and Labor Market Characteristics of Native Hispanics, and Latino and Non-Latino Immigrants

Our analysis uses data from the 1970, 1980, 1990 and 2000 Censuses. In particular, we focus on U.S. born workers who report to be Hispanic and on foreign born workers who were born in Central America, Mexico, South America and the Caribbean. Then, we present some comparisons of immigrants from this group of countries to immigrants from the rest of the world.

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics for Native Hispanic men and women, i.e., U.S. born workers who report Hispanic as their race, as well as descriptive statistics for Native White and Native Black men and women. This table reports labor market and demographic characteristics of Hispanic, White, and Black men and women in 2000 between 16 and 65 years of age. The table shows that Hispanic men and women earn lower hourly wages than both whites and blacks and work less than whites. On the other hand the employment rate and weeks and hours worked of Hispanic men are slightly higher than of Black men. Hispanics men are on average high school dropouts, while Hispanic women are on average high school graduates. The educational attainment of Hispanics contrasts with that of both whites and blacks who have on average beyond high school. Native Hispanic men and women are also more likely to work in blue-collar occupations and in the agriculture and construction sectors than both whites and blacks. Finally, Hispanic men and women are somewhat younger than native whites and blacks.

Table 2 presents similar statistics for Latin American Immigrants who arrived more and less than 10 years ago, or what we call veteran and recent Latin American Immigrants, respectively. For comparison, the table also reports similar statistics for

veteran and recent immigrants from other regions, i.e., non-Latin American immigrants. This table shows that while the earnings of veteran Latin American immigrants are closer to the earnings of native Hispanics, the earnings of recent Latin Americans are lower than those of the veteran Latin American immigrants and native Hispanics and substantially lower than those of native whites and blacks. By contrast, the earnings of both recent and veteran non-Latin American immigrants are much closer to those of native whites. This partly reflects differences in schooling and experience of recent Latin Americans compared to veteran Latin Americans and other immigrants. While recent Latin Americans men and women have on average 9.4 and 9.9 years of education, veteran Latin Americans have on average 9.7 and 10 years of education. More striking the education of non-Latin American immigrants is much higher. Recent non-Latin American men and women have on average 13.5 and 13.2 years of schooling and veteran non-Latin American immigrants have 13.2 and 13 years of schooling on average or very close to the educational attainment of native whites. Recent Latin American immigrants are also younger than both natives and previous Latin American immigrants and immigrants from other regions, which means that they also have less experience. They are on average between 28 and 30 years of age compared to previous immigrants who are around 40 years old on average and compared to native Hispanics who are on average 33 years old. Recent Latin Americans are also more likely to be blue-collar workers and to work in agriculture and construction than other immigrants, so that they tend to do jobs more similar to what native Hispanics do.

These differences in skills and labor market outcomes between Latino and other immigrants highlight how distinct this recent wave of immigrants from Latin America is

and helps to explain why we are interested in focusing on this group of workers for our study.

5. The Impact of Recent Latino Immigrants on Native Hispanics and Earlier Latino Immigrants

Our analysis begins by establishing simple relationships between the share of recent Latin American immigrants in a state and the wages and employment of native Hispanic and earlier Latino immigrants. The analysis controls for individual characteristics of the native Hispanics and veteran Latinos; for fixed differences across states; for aggregate shocks that affect all states, and even for differential ongoing factors that affect different regions differently. Thus, the regression we run here is as follows:

$$Y_{ijt} = \mu_j + \tau_t + \beta'X_{ijt} + \gamma S_{LAjt} + \varepsilon_{ijt},$$

where Y_{ijt} is the log of earnings or an indicator of whether the person is employed, μ_j are state effects, and τ_t are time effects. X_{ijt} are individual level controls including years of schooling; potential experience and a quadratic term of experience; a marital status indicator; Black, Asian and Hispanic indicators; and industry and occupation indicators. S_{LAjt} is the share of Latin American immigration in a given state at a point in time.

Tables 3 and 4 show the relationship between immigrant shares and wages and employment, respectively. The results in Table 3 show that immigration has positive effects on the wages of native Hispanic men and women in all educational groups. By contrast, results controlling for region trends show no impact on the wages of earlier Latino immigrants. Similarly, Table 4 shows the impact of immigrants on the employment of native Hispanics and on the employment of dropout veteran Latino

immigrants. The results with region trends show a positive impact of Latin American immigrants on Hispanic employment and on the employment of less skilled veteran Latino immigrants.

As mentioned above, however, one may be suspicious that this relationship may not be due to immigrants increasing the earnings and employment of Hispanic men and women, but rather due to the fact that immigrants go to states where native Hispanics and others are already doing well. To address this possibility, we exploit the Latin American immigration whose location choices may have been driven by other than economic reasons. First, we use the immigration of recent Latinos that was motivated by the presence of social networks of those from the same countries in those states. Next, we use the immigration driven by closeness to the countries affected by Hurricane Mitch in the late 1990s (i.e., the Central American countries). Table 5 reports the relationship between the share of recent Latin American immigrants and the share of those from the same countries already in the state in the previous decade.⁶ The table also reports how the recent Latino share changed after Hurricane Mitch in states closer to the affected countries.⁷ The results show that the share of recent Latino immigrants grew more in states where there was already a social network from the same country. Moreover, similar

⁶ That is, this reports the results from the following regression:

$$S_{LAjt} = \theta_j + \pi_t + \alpha S_{SCjt} + v_{jt},$$

where $S_{SCjt} = [\sum_c c_{LA} (M_{cjt-1} / M_{ct-1}) M_{ct}] / [\sum_c (M_{cjt-1} / M_{ct-1}) M_{ct} + N_{jt-1}]$ is the predicted share of immigrants from the same country based on previous migration from those countries to the state in the previous past.

⁷ In this case, the table reports results from the following regression:

$$S_{LAjt} = \theta_j + \pi_t + \alpha(\text{Distance}_j \times \text{Post-Mitch}_t) + v_{jt},$$

where Distance_j measures the distance in miles from Tegucigalpa (the capital of Honduras) to the Southernmost point in each state and Post-Mitch_t is an indicator of whether the immigrants came before or after the Hurricane hit Central America.

in spirit to Kugler and Yuksel (2006), we find that the share of recent Latin American immigrants fell in states farther from the Central American countries affected by Hurricane Mitch after the Hurricane hit.

We then proceed to use the share of immigrants that came to different states driven by social network and closeness considerations, rather than due to economic reasons, to reconsider the impact of immigration on wages and employment. Tables 6 and 7 show results using the share of immigrants that came because of their social networks, while Tables 8 and 9 show results using the share of immigrants that came after Mitch to close-by states.⁸ The results in both set of tables show a similar story. Immigrants that did not pick their location for economic reasons increase the wages of native Hispanics, but have no effect on the wages of veteran Latin American immigrants. On the other hand, immigrants seem to have no effect on the employment of either native Hispanics or veteran Latino immigrants. The results using the Mitch immigrants also suggest that the results are greater for more educated native Hispanic men and women than for the less-educated ones.

These results suggest that an increase in the share of recent Latino immigrants of 10% increases the hourly wages of dropout native Hispanic men by half a percentage point (i.e., multiply 0.53 from Table 8 Panel A with region trends by 0.1), while increasing the hourly wages of high school graduates and college educated native Hispanic men by close to 1 percentage point (i.e., multiply 0.083 and 0.08 from Table 8

⁸ That is, here we estimate two-stage least squares regressions, where the first stages are those reported in Table 5 and the second stages are based on the regression:

$$Y_{ijt} = \mu_j + \tau_t + \beta'X_{ijt} + \gamma\hat{S}_{LAjt} + \varepsilon_{ijt},$$

where \hat{S}_{LAjt} is the predicted share of Latin Americans coming due to social networks and due to Hurricane Mitch, respectively.

Panel A with region trends by 0.1). The results for women suggest smaller results of half a percentage point for high school and college educated Hispanic women and less than half a percentage point for dropout Hispanic women (i.e., multiply 0.044, 0.054 and 0.059 from Table 8 Panel A with region trends by 0.1). By contrast, veteran Latino immigrants do not seem to benefit or suffer from the recent immigration from Latin America. This makes sense if one remembers that native Hispanics were much more educated and experienced than recent Latino immigrants, so that recent immigrants may complement Hispanic workers rather than compete with them. At the same time, recent and previous Latino immigrants are likely different enough that they do not do the same types of jobs, so that the more recent immigrants are not merely substituting the immigrants who came before them but rather taking up new jobs.

6. Policy Implications and Conclusions

Immigrants are often perceived as taking away jobs or reducing the earnings of natives by generating competition in the labor market. In this sense, they are viewed as a threat to native workers. However, here we find that less-skilled Latino immigrants increase the earnings of native Hispanics, especially of the most educated ones. This implies that rather than substituting natives, immigrants tend to complement the work of natives and thus increase their productivity and their earnings.

Borjas (1995) points to several benefits of immigration even when native workers suffer wage losses. In particular, there is a welfare gain from the increased employment when wages drop due to the entry of immigrants. In addition Borjas (1995) points to the potential increase in demand for native workers when immigrants arrive to the U.S. This

increase in demand could come due to an increase in consumption by immigrants or due to the fact that immigrant workers complement the work of natives and, thus, employers increase the employment of both immigrant and native workers. This last benefit due a shift in the demand for skilled workers is exactly what we find in our analysis. Consequently, our study suggests that this benefit from immigration is important and should be considered when designing immigration policy. It may be that rather than trying to encourage more skilled immigration, and implicitly discourage unskilled immigration, as is the current focus of U.S. immigration policy, the U.S. may want to attract immigrants who have complementary and different skills from those of the native population. The analysis here suggests that this would generate gains for more educated natives without necessarily hurting the less skilled or even previous immigrants.

As suggested above, there may be two channels through which immigrants may be raising the earnings of skilled natives. First, immigrants may work directly with natives and increase their productivity by complementing their work. Second, immigrants may provide cheap services and goods to natives that lower prices and raise their real earnings. It would be interesting to investigate this further to find out whether it is the first or the second channel that is increasing the earnings of natives. While more analysis is needed to clarify which channel is at work, the fact that veteran immigrants do not experience the same gain in real earnings, though presumably they were benefiting from the same drop in prices, suggests that the first channel is probably more important in increasing the real wages of native Hispanics.

Finally, it is important to point out that any deterioration suffered by native Hispanics during the past decades does not appear to be linked to the increased

competition by recent immigrants. On the contrary, our analysis suggests that immigration actually helped the fortunes of native Hispanics and that any deterioration in their labor market conditions needs to be explained by other factors and requires further investigation.

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