

Examining Push and Pull Factors Among Oaxacan Immigrants and Their Relatives: A Comparative Case Study¹

Migration refers to the phenomenon where individuals leave their home countries to establish semi-permanent or permanent residence elsewhere. Every year, countless people from various regions around the world move to foreign countries to obtain citizenship.² According to the Population Reference Bureau, U.S. migration dates back to the early 1800s, and most immigration waves to the U.S. involve large groups coming at different times.³ During the 1800s to 1880s, the frontier expansion saw a large influx of Northern and Western European immigrants. From the 1880s to the 1900s, the main demographic of immigrants moving to the United States (U.S.) was Southern and Eastern Europeans drawn up industrialization in America. The next phase occurred from the 1920s to 1975, called the immigration pause; during this period, very few immigrants arrived, and most of them were Western Europeans. The current phase began after 1995, characterized mainly by immigrants from Asia and Latin America.⁴

According to the Census Bureau 2020, over 62 million Hispanic/Latino individuals reside in the U.S., accounting for approximately 19 percent of the total U.S. population.⁵ The largest subgroup of Hispanics/Latinos was Mexicans, with 35.9 million, representing 58 percent.⁶ Arkansas's estimated Hispanic/Latino immigrant population is about 266,000, accounting for 8.8 percent to 9.2 percent of the state's total population.⁷ Mexican immigrants are the largest group of foreign-born residents in Arkansas, representing roughly 38 percent of immigrants in 2023.⁸ Oaxacan migrants make up a small portion of the total Mexican migrants to the U.S.⁹ The Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática (INEGI) ranked the southwestern Mexican state of Oaxaca as twentieth among Mexican states in terms of the percentage of its population migrating to the U.S. in 2020. Between 2000 and 2020, Oaxaca experienced a

significant decline in population across many municipalities due to migration, both within Mexico and abroad.¹⁰ Since the population of Oaxacan immigrants in the U.S. is smaller than that of other Mexican states, a significant gap exists in the literature regarding the Oaxacan community and its connection to immigration in the U.S. Another unexplored aspect in the literature concerns the push and pull factors that may or may not influence Mexican immigrants, particularly Oaxacan immigrants.

Given the current political climate surrounding immigrants and the influx into the U.S., the purpose of the current study is to examine Everett S. Lee's push and pull theory¹¹ and expand the area of research by applying this theory to Oaxacan immigrants who reside in Arkansas. It compares them to their close relatives who decided to stay in Oaxaca and did not migrate. More specifically, this study assesses which push and pull factors are prevalent among Oaxacan immigrants in Arkansas, in comparison with their Oaxacan relatives in Oaxaca, Mexico.¹²

The current study addresses the following research questions: What are the most prominent push factors in determining Oaxacan immigrants to migrate to the U.S.? What are the most prominent pull factors in determining Oaxacan immigrants to migrate to the U.S.? What are the factors that deter their Oaxacan relatives from immigrating to the U.S. compared to those who did immigrate? This study is significant because it fills in a gap in the immigrant literature on Oaxacan immigrants in the U.S. Additionally, this study adds to the existing literature by analyzing original data related to the factors that push and/or pull Oaxacans to migrate to the state of Arkansas and the factors that deter Oaxacans from migrating.

Literature Review

Migrants who travel internationally have a multitude of reasons as to why they leave their home country and move to another destination. They decide whether their living conditions will improve by relocating, which is called the pull factor, or based on the conditions in their home country that force them to migrate, known as push factors.¹³ According to Everett S. Lee, who theorized the push and pull theory of migration, four factors are associated with migration: “factors associated with the area of origin, factors associated with the area of destination, intervening obstacles, and personal factors.”¹⁴ These factors exert a push or pull influence on the migration process. Mariusz Urbanski (2022) further explains the push and pull theory, arguing that push factors force migrants to leave their home country, while pull factors attract migration to a specific region or country.¹⁵ Previous research has mainly focused on three primary factors contributing to migration: political, social, and economic factors.

Economic factors

The economic factor was clearly the most common theme throughout all the literature on migration. Examples of economic push factors that migrants encounter when deciding to leave their country include unemployment, poverty, lack of jobs, low living standards, scarcity of food and shelter, and natural disasters.¹⁶ Recently, Altanchimeg Zanabazar, Nam Son Kho, and Sarantuya Jigjiddorj (2021) examined the push and pull factors influencing Mongolian migration to South Korea.¹⁷ The authors described the demand-pull economic factor as labor recruitment, while the supply-push economic factors included unemployment, low wages, and limited job opportunities, especially when moving from a developing country to a developed one.¹⁸ Similarly, other researchers identified demand-pull and supply-push economic factors such as wage gaps between the U.S. and Mexico, poverty, and socioeconomic issues as major drivers of

migration, particularly from Mexico to the U.S.¹⁹ To illustrate economic factors, the authors compared wages, gross domestic product (GDP), unemployment rates, and poverty levels in the U.S. and Mexico. They discovered that Mexican states with higher rural populations tend to have higher poverty rates; one such state is Oaxaca. Between 1993 and 2005, migration from Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Chiapas to the U.S. increased.²⁰ To further explore the situation in Oaxaca, a study by Harvard researchers Rafael Sanchez, Angel Hinojosa, and Sebastian Wright (2018) used an Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition econometric technique to identify the main sources of wage gaps between regions. They found Oaxaca to be the second poorest state in Mexico, with a 28.8 percent wage gap compared to the rest of the country.²¹

Social Factors

Other factors influencing the increase in migration from developing countries to developed countries are social push and pull factors. These factors include “better healthcare, religious tolerance, freedom from persecution as social pull factors for developed countries, as well as push factors in developing countries such as lack of health care, educational opportunities, and religious tolerance.”²² Natasha Parkins's (2010) study describes social factors as social opportunities that could include desired healthcare systems that are currently unattainable in the country of origin of the migrant, as well as the recognition of less crime and violence as a social pull factor.²³ Another study describes violence and crime as social push factors.²⁴ For instance, domestic violence, as well as rape and gang violence in the workplace, were among the factors that pushed migrants from South Africa to migrate to countries like Australia, the U.S., and Canada.²⁵ States such as Oaxaca, Mexico, that have at least four major cartels present in the state, according to the Department of Homeland Security, have a higher risk

of human rights violations caused by Mexican cartels that are tied to human trafficking, smuggling, and prostitution rings.²⁶

Political factors

Besides the social lens, the political push factor that may drive migrants to undertake the dangerous crossing of the border could be political violence. Political violence can take many forms, such as civil war and political revolutions, and one pull factor that influences migrants to move to America is the overall safety of the political environment.²⁷ Nozomi Matsui & James Raymer (2020) examined the relationship between political terror and civil rights violations and how these political factors explain patterns of asylum migration from different origins. They found that political terror is mostly linked to a higher number of asylum seekers when civil rights violations are high. However, political terror is less likely to influence migration patterns if the migrants come from lower-income backgrounds, as they often lack the resources to emigrate.²⁸ Other political conflict events, such as an unfair legal system, war, terrorism, and political corruption, were found to significantly impact migration.²⁹ Oaxaca is characterized by notable political conflicts and factionalism.

In line with this, Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera (2012) investigates the roots of these conflicts and factionalism and how they connect to electoral exclusion, political patronage, corruption, and long-standing political rivalries.³⁰ The author defines active political factionalism (APF) as “major manifestations of popular discontent and anti-government actions that negatively impact democratic progress and consolidation, such as the assassination of political opponents, attacks on the liberty, physical safety, and property of political adversaries.”³¹ News outlets have reported on mayoral candidate assassinations in Oaxaca: On March 20, Ivonne Gallegos Carreños, a mayoral candidate in Ocooltán de Morelos, Oaxaca, tragically lost her life in

a fatal ‘accident’ while traveling on a southern Oaxacan highway.³² Merely eight days earlier, on March 12, Aime Rodriguez from Zamaltan de Alvarez, Oaxaca, faced a distressing incident involving gunfire as an intimidation tactic to discourage her from seeking political office. On March 17, Auriela Benitez was running for mayor of El Espinal, Oaxaca, when she received death threats on social media telling her to withdraw from the race altogether.³³ With Oaxaca experiencing one of the most intense and violent electoral conflicts in Mexico, it will be interesting to see if these political conflicts influence any migration from Oaxaca to Arkansas. Besides the political perspective, other demographic factors are also important indicators of migration patterns.

Other Factors

Demographic factors and other perspectives are used in most case studies, replacing the political factor as the primary focus. Similar to Urbanski (2022) and Imran Arif (2020), Aguila et al. (2012) added a third category for causes of migration, called Networks, alongside push and pull factors. Previous research shows that Mexican individuals are more likely to migrate to the U.S. if they have family or friends already living there.³⁴ The networks category also appears in other cases, like Khan et al.’s (2023) study, which discusses socio-cultural attraction factors involving family ties in the destination country that migrants can depend on for help.³⁵ Conversely, socio-cultural deterrent factors that discourage migration include social instability, discrimination, and marriage-related concerns.³⁶

Other important push and pull factors to recognize include education levels, skill levels, poverty rates, occupations, and more. Natasha Parkins (2010) analyzed the migration decision process among professional Jamaicans leaving Jamaica, specifically focusing on their education levels. The author identified four key factors influencing emigration among highly skilled

individuals: high crime and violence rates, social disorder, mismatches between occupation and skills, limited economic opportunities, and a lack of social amenities.³⁷ Aguila et al. (2012) also highlighted that individuals with lower education levels in Mexico tend to face higher unemployment rates and lower wages, which increases their attraction to U.S. labor markets and significantly influences their decision to migrate to the U.S. among this group.³⁸ Arif (2019) further explains that individuals with higher education levels are more aware of the economic, political, and social dynamics in the country they plan to move to, compared to those with less education who are more conscious of social structures and institutions in their home country. These findings suggest that migration decisions are influenced by economic, political, and social factors, with the impact of each varying according to one's education level.³⁹ Other potential migration drivers include environmental factors such as exposure to hazards, food and water security, energy security, land productivity, and land grabbing.⁴⁰ For example, studying water quality in Oaxaca, Mexico, Rowles and colleagues (2018) found that Oaxaca faces high rates of infectious diseases, leading to significant infant mortality due to the lack of clean water, as seen in widespread parasitic infections among Oaxacan children in a study from 2006.⁴¹

Previous research outlines Mexico's background as a country and explores how the economy, political upheaval, and social institutions may influence Mexicans to migrate to the U.S. or other developed countries. Additionally, studies have identified multiple factors that impact migration patterns, especially from developing countries to developed nations. While there is literature on the push and pull theory related to migration, to our knowledge, no previous studies have specifically examined the migration pattern from Oaxaca, Mexico, to Arkansas, U.S. In this study, we apply the push and pull theory to investigate the political, social, and economic factors that influence Oaxacan immigrants to migrate to Arkansas and compare them

to their Oaxacan relatives who chose not to migrate.⁴² The research questions guiding this study are: 1) What are the most significant push factors influencing Oaxacan immigrants to move to the U.S., particularly to Arkansas? 2) What are the primary pull factors influencing Oaxacan immigrants to Arkansas? 3) What factors discourage their Oaxacan relatives from migrating to the U.S. compared to those who have migrated?

Data and Methods

Research Design

This study employed a comparative case study design to examine the factors influencing migration decisions among two groups: 1) Oaxacan individuals who migrated to Arkansas, U.S., and 2) their Oaxacan relatives who chose to stay in Oaxaca, Mexico. To address our research questions, we employed a mixed-methods approach, combining face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a cross-sectional web-based and/or paper-based survey. Employing a mixed-methods approach was crucial for providing a comprehensive understanding of the data from multiple perspectives, particularly providing both quantitative breadth and qualitative depth. To develop the interview and web-based questionnaires, this study utilized questions from established surveys, such as Klein et al.'s (2009) study, to guide our questions and tailor them to our population of interest.⁴³ Moreover, a pre-test of the survey was conducted to determine how participants understood survey questions and assess their ability to provide valid and reliable responses. All survey questions were closed-ended.

Participants

This study draws on original data from a unique, convenient sample of forty-two adult Oaxacans, including twenty-seven Oaxacan immigrants who are current residents in the State of Arkansas and fifteen of their adult relatives who remained in Oaxaca, Mexico. To ensure

representation across sex, age, and socioeconomic status, we selected our participants utilizing a purposive and snowball sampling technique. Toward the end of the survey, we asked Oaxacan immigrants whether they have close relatives who stayed in Oaxaca, Mexico, and if they would be interested in participating in our study. This helped us identify participants in Oaxaca, Mexico, allowing for a direct comparison.

Procedures

After completing all required documents⁴⁴ and obtaining approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researchers began seeking voluntary participation in the study. We used recruitment flyers in English and Spanish with QR codes and distributed them in Latino supermarkets, churches, and other places where Oaxacan immigrants are concentrated in Arkansas. The web-based survey questions were constructed in Spanish and English, utilizing Google Forms. For individuals without internet access, we provided a printed version of the web-based survey for them to complete.

The data collection took place from August 2023 to March 2024, yielding responses from twenty-seven web-based surveys, ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Oaxacan immigrants, fifteen paper-based surveys, and ten in-depth interviews with Oaxaca relatives. Participants who agreed to participate in the study have signed an informed consent. To protect participants' confidentiality, all responses to survey questions were anonymous, and participation was voluntary. Participants were told that they were free to refuse participation and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Notably, all participants opted to complete the survey and interviews in Spanish. Participants were also given the opportunity to participate in a poll for a chance to win a gift card as an incentive for completing the study.

Measures

Our outcome variable, migration, was measured by whether participants migrated to Arkansas, U.S., or remained residents of Oaxaca, Mexico. The main independent variables among Oaxacan immigrants were push and pull factors. Following Adebayo & Akinyemi (2021) and Urbanski (2022), participants answered six key questions about these factors, indicating "yes" or "no" to show whether each factor influenced their migration to Arkansas.⁴⁵ The questions are: 1) Did you leave Oaxaca for Arkansas because of economic factors? 2) Did you leave Oaxaca for Arkansas because of social factors? 3) Did you leave Oaxaca for Arkansas because of political factors? 4) Did you migrate to Arkansas due to economic factors? 5) Did you migrate to Arkansas due to social factors? 6) Did you migrate to Arkansas due to political factors? The push and pull factors were coded as: economic push factor (yes=1), social push factor (yes=1), political push factor (yes=1), economic pull factor (yes=1), social pull factor (yes=1), and political pull factor (yes=1). If participants answered 'yes' for any of the push and pull factors questions, they were then asked to rate the importance of each underlying sub-factor to gather more detailed responses. For example, if participants selected 'yes' for the economic push factor, they were subsequently asked to rate related sub-factors using a 3-point Likert scale (important, somewhat important, not important). For analysis, these responses were recoded into a binary variable: 'important' and 'somewhat important' were coded as 1, while 'not important' was coded as 0. See Table 1 for the overall push and pull factors and subfactors.

Additionally, we controlled for several variables including demographic variables such as: age (18-44=0, 45-older=1), sex (male= 0, female=1), marital status (not-married=0 & married=1), levels of education (<HS=0, HS=1, >HS=2), state born in (Oaxaca =0), and current residing state (Arkansas=0), having children (yes =1), living alone in Arkansas (yes =1),

employment status (part-time =0, full time=1, homemaker=2), the number of years spend in the U.S. (continuous), and having family relatives in Oaxaca (yes=1).

Table 1. Oaxacan Immigrant Push & Pull Factors and Sub-Factors⁴⁶

Overarching Factors	Economic Push Factors	Social Push Factors	Political Push Factors
Sub-factors	Poverty Lack of work Low pay Not enough food Rent is expensive Other economic push factors	Discrimination Poor medical care Lack of education Lack of religious tolerance Crime and violence Social other push factors	Violence Corruption bad governance Human rights abuse Terrorism Other political push factors
Overarching Factors	Economic Pull Factors	Social Pull Factors	Political Pull Factors
Sub-factors	Higher salaries Better standard of living Job opportunities Labor demands Personal development Other economic pull factors	Family reunification Freedom against discrimination Better medical care Better education Other social pull factors	Safety and security Political freedom Democracy Stable government Other political pull factors

For Oaxacan relatives, the independent variables that were used to measure their responses were the stay factors. Similar to Oaxacan immigrants, the key independent variables were coded as economic stay factors (yes =1), social stay factors (yes = 1), and political factors (yes = 1). Under all the overarching factors, some sub-factors were also measured in terms of their prominence. Responses for these sub-factor questions were re-coded into a binary variable: important/somewhat important =1, not important =0. We also controlled for the same variables as Oaxacan immigrants. Refer to Table 2 for the overall stay factors and sub-factors.

Table 2. Oaxacan Relatives Stay Factors and Sub-Factors⁴⁷

Overarching Factors	Economic Stay Factor	Social Stay Factor	Political Stay Factor
Sub-factors	High salaries Better standard of living Job opportunity Labor demands Personal development Other economic factors	Family reunification Freedom against discrimination Better healthcare Better educational opportunities Other social factors	Safety & security Political freedom Democracy Political stability Other political factors

Data Collection

Quantitative Data (Web-Based & Paper-Based Surveys)

Quantitative data were gathered using two different methods. First, in the fall of 2023, flyers with a QR code linking to web-based surveys were distributed in areas with a high Hispanic population in Arkansas, such as Pulaski County, Garland County, Southwest Arkansas, Benton County, and parts of Northwest Arkansas.⁴⁸ The second method involved digital outreach, such as posting the flyers on Facebook and Instagram, and asking college professors to share the flyers with various Hispanic organizations in Arkansas. The study used Google Forms to conduct the online survey. Participants included twenty-seven Oaxacan immigrants. Using closed-ended questions, they identified factors that contributed to their migration to Arkansas. After completing the survey, participants were asked if they could share the researcher's contact information with family members in Oaxaca who might be interested in participating in the survey. As a result, the first researcher was contacted by fifteen Oaxacan natives. In December 2023, fifteen relatives or natives from Oaxaca completed a paper-based survey, also featuring closed-ended questions about the reasons they chose to stay in Oaxaca rather than migrate to the U.S.

Qualitative Data (Interviews)

At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to take part in a 15-minute follow-up, semi-structured interview to explore their responses more deeply. The interviewed participants included ten Oaxacan immigrants living in Arkansas and ten of their Oaxacan relatives currently residing in Oaxaca, Mexico. Using the purposive snowball sampling method to recruit more participants, the researcher, after conducting interviews in Arkansas, asked participants if they still had close family members living in Oaxaca who might be interested in participating in a study. If they answered yes, the researcher shared their contact information and asked them to pass it along to their Oaxacan family members. Once contacts in Oaxaca connected with the researcher, plans to travel to Oaxaca, Mexico, were sped up.

During the interview, Oaxacan immigrants answered several open-ended questions about the push and pull factors. For example, participants explained the economic, social, and political reasons that motivated them to leave Oaxaca and move to the U.S., especially to Arkansas. Likewise, Oaxacan relatives were asked open-ended questions about the economic, social, and political reasons that attracted them to stay in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data, we used *STATA/SE* 14.2 statistical software to analyze a total of 42 survey responses, including Oaxacan immigrants and their relatives. Luckily, there are no missing values in the data. For the interviews, *Dedoose* software was utilized to analyze the responses. All survey and interview responses were translated from Spanish to English. Once the interview transcripts were finalized by a certified translator/interpreter, they were uploaded into *Dedoose*. This mixed-methods software facilitates qualitative data analysis through coding, including both deductive and inductive approaches. The coding system utilized seven codes for

the Oaxacan immigrant interviews: social push factor, social pull factor, economic push factor, economic pull factor, political push factor, political pull factor, and other factors. The code, “other factors,” was added for participants who mentioned other reasons or circumstances that led them to leave Oaxaca or drew them to move to Arkansas. Furthermore, we utilized three codes for the Oaxacan native interviews: social stay factor, economic stay factor, and political stay factor. For Oaxacan immigrant interviews, both inductive and deductive coding were utilized. The study specifically focused on language that referred to the six main factors being measured, specifically social push and pull factors, economic push and pull factors, and political push and pull factors, including any sub-factors associated with the overarching factors presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Results

Quantitative Results

The researchers analyzed quantitative survey responses using descriptive statistics and comparative analysis, along with Chi-Square tests, to identify significant differences in factors that influenced the decision of Oaxacan individuals to migrate to the U.S., comparing them to the factors that influenced Oaxacan relatives to stay in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Descriptive Statistics of Survey Responses

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Oaxacan Immigrants and Their Relatives ($n=42$), aged 18 and above

Variables	Percentage
Oaxacan Immigrants	64.29 percent
Oaxacan Relatives/Natives	35.71 percent
Age	
18-44 years of age	71.43 percent
45-older	28.57 percent
Sex	
Female	47.61 percent
Male	52.38 percent
Marital Status	

Not-Married	28.57 percent
Married	71.43 percent
Having Children	
Yes	88.10 percent
Family Size	
≤ 2	57.14 percent
3-6	42.86 percent
Education	
< High School diploma	90.48 percent
High School diploma	9.52 percent
Employment Status	
Part time	11.90 percent
Full time	64.29 percent
Homemaker	23.81 percent

As shown in Table 3, 64.29 percent of this sample were Oaxacan immigrants, while 35.71 percent were Oaxacan natives. The majority of participants (71.43 percent) were young, aged between 18 and 44, whereas 28.57 percent were over 45. In terms of sex, there were slightly more males (52.57 percent) than females (47.61 percent). Regarding marital status, most participants (71.43 percent) were married, and 90 percent of them had at least one child. Additionally, 90.48 percent of participants had not completed a high school diploma. While 64.29 percent worked full time, 11.90 percent worked part time, and the remainder were homemakers.

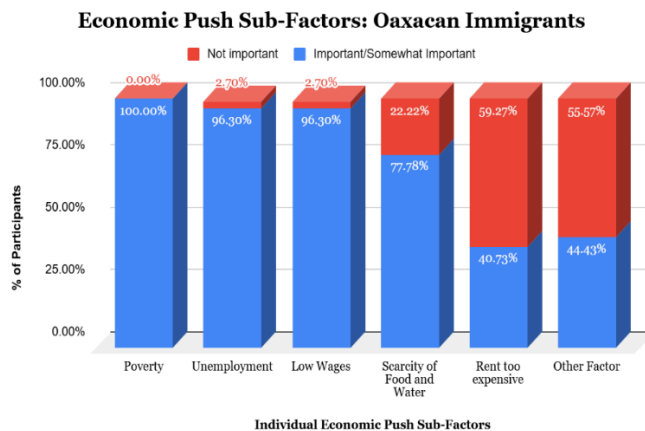
Table 4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Economic, Social, and Political Push Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants

Push Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants (n=27)			
	Economic Factors	Social Factors	Political Factors
Yes	100 percent	70.37 percent	40.74 percent
No	0	29.63 percent	59.26 percent

Table 4.1 shows the descriptive statistics for the three key independent variables, economic, social, and political push factors, among Oaxacan immigrants. According to this table, all Oaxacan immigrants reported that economic factors were the most influential factors that

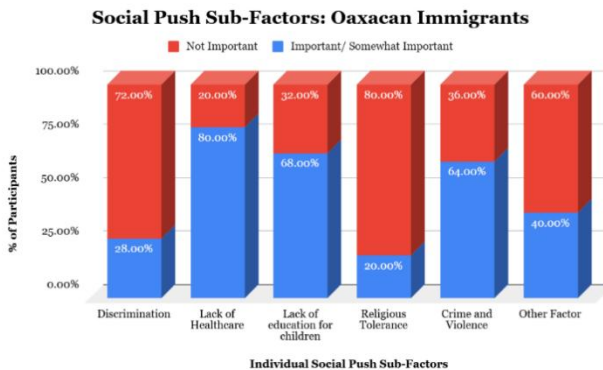
pushed them to emigrate from Oaxaca, Mexico. While 70.37 percent reported social factors as the main reasons for emigration from Oaxaca, only 40.74 percent cited political factors as the primary push factors.

Figure 1. Economic Push Sub-Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants



For those who responded affirmatively to the questions about economic push factors, they were asked to rate the importance of various economic sub-factors. The most significant economic reasons for pushing Oaxacans to leave their home country were poverty (100 percent of respondents rated it as important), unemployment (96.30 percent), low wages (96.30 percent), and scarcity of food and shelter (77.78 percent). (See Figure 1 for more details) Additionally, participants who indicated that social factors influenced their decision to leave Oaxaca were asked to rate each social sub-factor based on its importance. These social push sub-factors included discrimination, poor medical care, social insecurity, lack of religious tolerance, and other social push factors.

Figure 2. Social Push Sub-Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants



The most prominent social push sub-factors that influenced migration were lack of medical care (80 percent of respondents rated this factor as important), lack of education for children (68 percent), and crime and violence (64 percent). Although social push factors were not as prominent as the economic push factors, it is still important to highlight that they play a role in shaping migration decisions. (See Figure 2 for more details).

Likewise, participants who responded affirmatively to the political push factors were asked to rate some political push sub-factors to determine whether they are important or not. These political push sub-factors were conflicts, corruption, poor governance, human rights abuse, terrorism, and other political push factors. The two most prominent political push sub-factors were corruption (50 percent of respondents rated this as important) and bad governance (59.09 percent), as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Political Push Sub-Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants

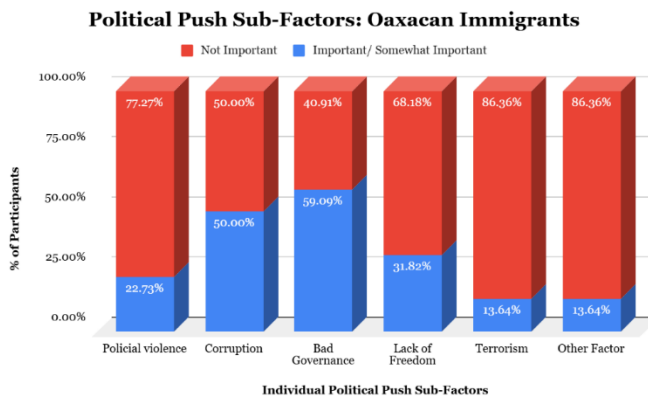


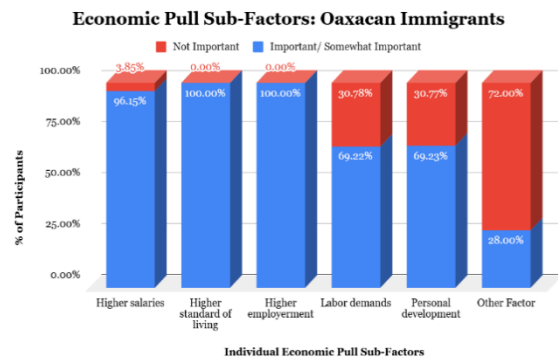
Table 4.2 Descriptive Statistics for Economic, Social, and Political Pull Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants

Pull Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants (n=27)			
	Economic Factors	Social Factors	Political Factors
Yes	88.89 percent	74.07 percent	48.15 percent
No	11.11 percent	25.93 percent	51.85 percent

Table 4.2 shows the descriptive statistics for the three key independent variables, economic, social, and political pull factors, among Oaxacan immigrants. As shown, the majority of Oaxacan immigrants (88.89 percent) reported economic factors as the major factors that pull them to immigrate to the U.S. Similarly, 74.07 percent of Oaxacan immigrants reported social factors as the major pull factors for their migration, and close to half of the participants (48.15 percent) reported political factors as the major pull factors for their migration.

If participants stated yes, they were asked to rate some economic pull sub-factors as to whether they are important or not. These economic pull sub-factors were higher wages, higher standard of living, employment, labor demands, personal development, and other sub-factors.

Figure 4. Economic Pull Sub-Factors: Oaxacan Immigrants



As shown in Figure 4, the three most prominent economic pull sub-factors influencing migration were: higher salaries (96.15 percent of respondents rated this as important), a higher standard of living (100 percent), and employment opportunities (100 percent).

Furthermore, Oaxacan immigrants were also asked: “Did you migrate to Arkansas due to social pull factors?” Only 25.9 percent of the respondents answered “no,” indicating that social pull was not the reason for their migration to Arkansas, while 74.1 percent answered “yes,” suggesting that social pull factors played a significant role in their decision to migrate to the state of Arkansas. If respondents answered "yes," they then rated social pull sub-factors from important to somewhat important to not important.

Similarly, participants who responded affirmatively to the social pull factors were asked to rate certain social pull sub-factors to see if they are important. These sub-factors included family reunification, freedom from discrimination, improved medical care, enhanced educational opportunities, and other social factors.

Figure 5. Social Pull Sub-Factors for Oaxacan Immigrants

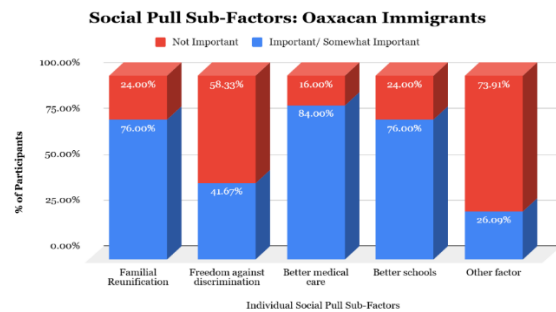
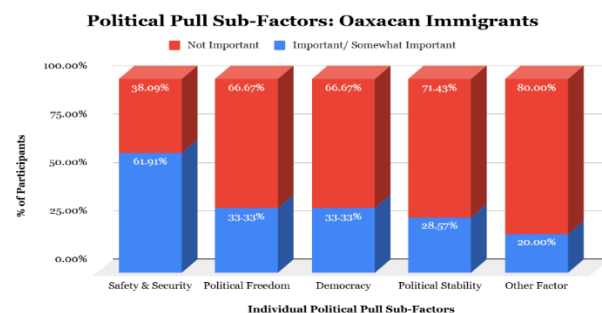


Figure 5 demonstrates that the three most prominent factors among the five sub-factors were family reunification, with nearly 76 percent of respondents considering this important or somewhat important. Better medical care was another sub-factor that was rated as important or somewhat important by 84 percent of respondents. The last key social pull sub-factor was better schools, at 76 percent importance. Although political factors were less significant overall, it is still worth noting the most prominent sub-factors among respondents who cited political reasons for migrating to Arkansas. Participants were asked: “Did you migrate to Arkansas due to political factors?” 51.85 percent answered 'no,' and 48.15 percent answered 'yes.' Among those who responded yes, the most prominent sub-factor was safety and security, with 61.9 percent of respondents rating it as the most important or somewhat important.

Figure 6: Political Pull Sub-Factors: Oaxacan Immigrants



The overall results from the push and pull factors indicated that economic factors were the most prominent factor that pushed Oaxacans to emigrate to the U.S. The lack of financial stability in Oaxaca is reflected in the more prominent economic factors mentioned earlier, such as poverty, unemployment, and low wages. These figures align with the high percentage of economic pull factors that attracted migrants to Arkansas, which included higher salaries, a higher standard of living, and higher employment opportunities. In addition, social factors played a role in the migration flow from Oaxaca to Arkansas. Although the overall percentages of push and pull social factors differed by only a margin of 12-30 percentage points, the significance of the social factor remains apparent. The more prominent social sub-factors that have pushed Oaxacans to leave were a lack of health care, education, and a surge of crime and violence. According to Mexican data, healthcare and education in rural regions are not adequately resourced (2022). The social pull factors that attracted migrants to Arkansas were familial reunification, better medical care, and education. Familial reunification is a core element of many key sub-factors that will be examined more thoroughly in the qualitative data section.

Survey results among Oaxacan Natives

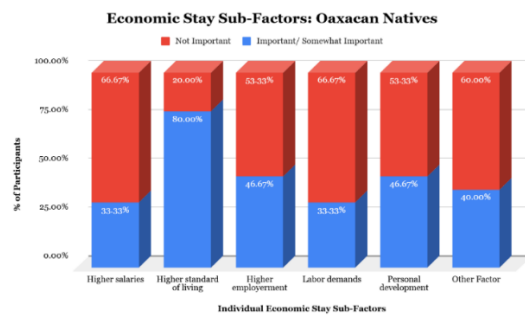
Table 5. Descriptive Statistics for Economic, Social, and Political Stay Factors for Oaxacan Natives

Stay Factors for Oaxacan Natives (n=15)			
	Economic Factors	Social Factors	Political Factors
Yes	60 percent	100 percent	20 percent
No	40 percent	0 percent	80 percent

Table 5 presents the responses from 15 Oaxacan natives regarding the economic, social, and political factors that influenced their decision to stay in Oaxaca rather than emigrate to Arkansas. Sixty percent of the respondents stated that they remained in Oaxaca for economic reasons such as higher wages, higher standard of living, job opportunities, labor demands,

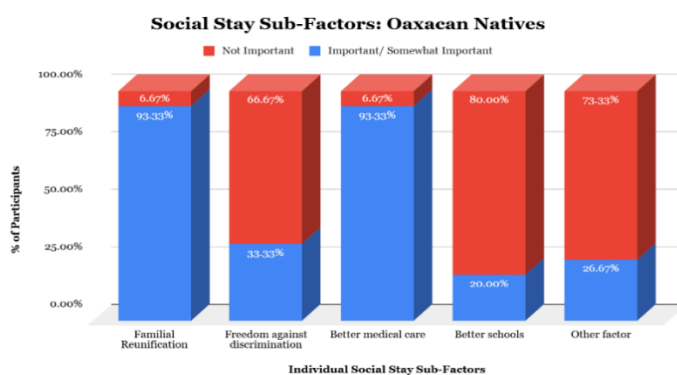
personal development, and other economic factors. The most prominent economic stay sub-factor was “higher standard of living,” with 80 percent of respondents rating this as important or somewhat important. (See Figure 7 for more details)

Figure 7. Economic Stay Sub-Factors for Oaxacan Natives



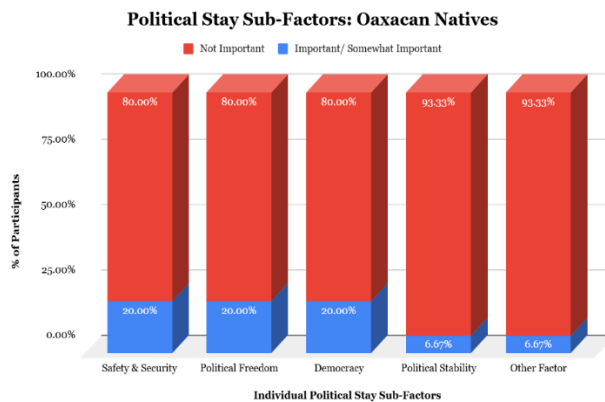
Regarding the social stay factors, all 15 participants consistently agreed that social factors played a significant role in their decision to stay in Oaxaca, Mexico, instead of migrating to the U.S. Family reunification (93.33 percent) and better healthcare (93.33 percent) were the two main social sub-factors discouraging Oaxacan natives from moving to the U.S. (Refer to Figure 8)

Figure 8. Social Stay Sub-Factors for Oaxacan Natives



Regarding political factors, most respondents (80 percent) said that political factors did not discourage them from remaining in Oaxaca, Mexico.

Figure 9. Political Stay Sub-Factors: Oaxacan Natives



Bivariate Analysis for Survey Results

Table 6. Chi-square Tests for Oaxacan Immigrants and Natives, aged 18 and above

	Oaxacan Immigrants (<i>n</i> =27)	Oaxacan Natives (<i>n</i> =15)
Economic Push (Stay) Factors		
Yes	100	60***
No	0	40
Social Push (Stay) Factors		
Yes	70.37	100*
No	29.63	0
Political Push (Stay) Factors		
Yes	40.74	20
No	59.26	80

Significance: † $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Table 6 presents Chi-square tests of independence to compare Oaxacan immigrants and natives regarding push factors (for immigrants) and stay factors (for natives). The table reveals a highly significant statistical difference between the two groups concerning economic (p-value= 0.000) and social factors (p-value= 0.02). While 100 percent of Oaxacan immigrants indicated that economic factors were the main reason for their migration from Oaxaca, 60 percent of Oaxacan natives reported that economic reasons deterred them from migrating. Additionally, 70.37 percent of Oaxacan immigrants cited social push factors as reasons for emigrating to the U.S., whereas all members of the Oaxacan native sample reported social factors as reasons for

staying in Oaxaca. Regarding political factors, although 40.74 percent of Oaxacan immigrants identified political reasons as their primary motivation for emigrating to the U.S., only 20 percent of Oaxacan natives reported political reasons as deterrents for migration. This relationship was not statistically significant.

Interview results for Oaxacan Immigrants

This study utilized *Dedoose* software to analyze qualitative data from interview responses of Oaxacan immigrants. It applied thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns related to push and pull factors influencing Oaxacan individuals to migrate to Arkansas. In particular, how often each factor was mentioned during the interviews. A total of 10 Oaxacan immigrants were interviewed for about 15 minutes each using semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Before the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The interviews were conducted entirely in Spanish by the first researcher, who is bilingual.

This study included a thorough review of all interview transcripts. It used deductive coding to identify phrases and responses that represented any of the sub-factors related to the previously mentioned overarching factors. For example, participants were asked: “What were the main reasons you emigrated to the state of Arkansas?” When participants mentioned sub-factors such as higher salaries, a higher standard of living, job opportunities, labor demands, personal development, or other economic factors, we coded these phrases as an economic pull factor. The same process was systematically applied across all ten Oaxacan immigrant interviews, coding all three factors: social, economic, and political. Table 7 shows the top five codes, both combined and individually, based on cell count.

Table 7. Top 5 in 'Codes Applied Combined and Individual ' by cell count

Codes Applied Combined	Count of Codes Applied Combined
Social Pull Factor	15
Economic Push Factor	13
Economic Pull Factor	12
Economic Pull Factor, Social Pull Factor	11
Social Push Factor	7
Grand Total	58

Regarding the most prominent factors during the Oaxacan immigrant interviews, economic push and pull factors received the highest ratings. Many immigrants discussed their lack of money due to the economic decline in rural Oaxaca. One participant, talking about economic push factors, said, “Well, yes, how do I explain the economy in Oaxaca, because in the rural ranch where I used to live, I didn’t have enough money to get ahead. I only had well, how do I explain, I didn’t have steady work, and well, what my wife, children, and I did to survive was raising animals and tending to plants to sell.”

Other participants shared the same view, explaining that they lacked the money, job opportunities, or the ability to financially leave their low socioeconomic status. Therefore, the main pull factor for many Oaxacan immigrants was not just the income they could earn in the U.S., but also the opportunity to climb the economic ladder, not only for themselves but for their entire families. One participant, discussing economic pull factors, said, “Well, my brother sent a lot of money and I also wanted to help get the family ahead. I also had to start doing something on my own. The economy over there wasn't that great.”

Furthermore, immigrant participants identified the economic factor as the main motivation for moving to Arkansas, along with reassurances from family members or friends who were already there that job opportunities were available. One participant said, “Well, I had a close relative already living in Arkansas when I was told that there was better pay here [AR].”

With the necessary assurances to make the trip to Arkansas, many saw this opportunity as the best option to escape hunger with their family. All participants mentioned economic factors at least once in their interview as a key reason for migration.

Behind economic, social push and pull factors had the second-highest combined total across all ten interviews. The common social factors that pushed them to leave Oaxaca were a lack of social mobility, the inability to support their families or themselves, and the desire to give their children a higher standard of living. With over 90 percent of participants having children, the need for a better future for their children aligns with the descriptive statistics.

One participant stated, “Well, it was to give my children a higher standard of living because I had them working hard with the Ox (agriculture).” Another participant said, “Because the children did not have a good education. When I went to school, I didn't even have a pencil.”

Many participants, regarding their families, either did not want to be a burden on the already challenging economic situation in Oaxaca or wanted to go somewhere where they could better support their families. The more prominent social pull factors mentioned in the interviews included helping family members back home (in Oaxaca), providing their children with a higher standard of living and better education in Arkansas, and the ability to support themselves and their children. One participant commented on children's education, saying: “Well, I only had one friend in Arkansas, and when I was there, I saw that the schools were similar and that there was

transportation. Over there at the ranch (in Oaxaca), the children walk to school. Schools attracted us to come to Arkansas. ”

Regarding familial support and social mobility, the majority of the participants identified these factors as the primary reasons for their attraction to the State of Arkansas. For example, one participant stated, “To give you an idea, to support seven people, when I came to Arkansas, I was 19 and I was able to support my two parents and my five siblings by myself in Arkansas, working 6 days a week. I was able to support myself and my family who live in Oaxaca.”

Familial relationships are the core structure not only in Oaxaca but throughout all of Mexico. Contemporary family values and hierarchical systems of a nuclear family support many of the sentiments shared by immigrants coming to Arkansas seeking a better life, not only for themselves but also for their families back home. Eight out of ten (80 percent) participants mentioned social (push or pull) factors at least once during their interview.

Furthermore, the combination of social and economic factors was evident. Although all participants reported that economic reasons motivated their migration to Arkansas in the survey, 80 percent of their interview responses showed that social factors also played a role in their decision to move. Many participants said that money was the main reason for migrating, but they also discussed family members and social mobility. One participant stated, “Well, my brother sent a lot of money and I also wanted to help get the family ahead. I also had to start doing something on my own. The economy over there was not that great.”

Many people said they needed to support their families and seek social mobility in Oaxaca to survive. Many believed that moving to Arkansas could help their family members and improve their own socioeconomic status. Although economic (push and/or pull) factors were the most prominent in the qualitative data, social (push and/or pull) factors were also significant,

often appearing not alone but in combination with economic factors. Notably, political factors were rarely mentioned across all ten interviews. Only 40 percent of the participants considered political factors somewhat important.

Interview Results for Oaxacan Native

Similarly, *Dedoose software* was used to analyze interview responses from Oaxacan natives. Ten Oaxacan natives were interviewed for an average of 15 minutes using semi-structured, in-depth, and open-ended questions. All interviews were conducted in Spanish. Before the interviews, participants signed informed consent. It was the same procedures as with Oaxacan immigrants to conduct a thorough review of all interview transcripts and apply deductive coding to identify phrases and responses that reflected any of the sub-factors linked to the previously outlined overarching factors. Table 8 presents the percentage of how often each factor or a combination of both appeared across all 10 interviews.

Table 8. Oaxacan Native Interviews: percent distribution of 'Codes Applied Combined/Individual '

Codes Applied Individually/ Combined	Percentage: Coding applied	Frequency
Social Stay Factor	41.67 percent	15
Economic Stay Factor	36.11 percent	13
Political Stay Factor	8.33 percent	3
Political Stay Factor, Social Stay Factor	5.56 percent	2
Social Stay Factor, Economic Stay Factor	5.56 percent	2
Economic Stay Factor, Social Stay Factor	2.78 percent	1
Grand Total	100.00 percent	36

As shown in Table 8, social factors played a more significant role in their migration decision, especially the choice to remain in Oaxaca, and they were the most frequently mentioned during interviews (41.67 percent). This finding aligned with the survey results. One participant mentioned, regarding healthcare and family responsibilities, “Well, I am here because my health was not all great, and here in Oaxaca, I would get better treatment and better health care. I also have my elderly parents who need someone to take care of them since my siblings moved farther away.” Surprisingly, 36.11 percent of native participants from Oaxaca indicated that economic factors influenced their decision to stay there. They emphasized that living expenses are lower in Oaxaca compared to Arkansas and that they have already established agriculture, restaurant businesses, and other investments like properties in Oaxaca. One participant stated:

I was able to sell animals and plants at the market and she was able to sell tortillas there as well. We were doing okay, but not great. We would have left but at that point life just passed us by and we got comfortable.

Discussion and Conclusion

Using a comparative case study and mixed methods approach, this study examined Everett S. Lee’s push and pull theory and extended its application by analyzing a unique sample of Oaxacan immigrants and their close relatives. The study aimed to compare the factors influencing migration decisions among Oaxacan individuals who migrated to Arkansas and their relatives who chose to stay in Oaxaca. It also enhances existing migration research by focusing on populations that have typically been understudied. The current study addressed three important questions about the push and pull theory of migration: What are the more prominent push factors that influence Oaxacan immigrants to migrate to the State of Arkansas? What are

the more prominent pull factors that influence Oaxacan immigrants to Arkansas? And what are the most prominent factors that deter Oaxacan natives from migrating to Arkansas?

Several noteworthy findings emerge from this study. Not surprisingly, the economic push and pull factors were the most influential in encouraging Oaxaca immigrants to migrate to Arkansas. Oaxacan immigrants consistently reported poverty, unemployment, low wages, and scarcity of food and shelter as the driving factors that pushed them to leave Oaxaca. Furthermore, they reported a higher standard of living, employment, and higher salaries as the most influential factors that pulled them to migrate to Arkansas. This finding aligns with previous literature that emphasizes economic factors as the primary driver of migration decisions.⁴⁹ It is important to mention that 80 percent of the economic factors that were mentioned had an underlying social factor for either push or pull factors. Conversely, both qualitative and quantitative data supported the finding that social factors were indeed the most influential factor in deterring Oaxacan natives from migrating to Arkansas, and instead keeping them in their country of origin. Oaxacan relatives who stayed prioritized family reunification and better healthcare. Although political factors were not significant, they were still somewhat present in the qualitative findings.

The current study has a few limitations. First, it used a unique, convenience sample of immigrant and native Oaxacans. As a result, the findings may not be generalizable. Additionally, the sample might not represent the broader population of Oaxaca, which could lead to biased results. Furthermore, the study relied on cross-sectional data, which prevents making causal inferences. Therefore, the results do not support conclusions that economic factors cause migration to the U.S. or that social factors alone keep Oaxacan individuals in their home country.

It is also possible that the limited geographic area from which participants were chosen may have influenced the results. Because of the sample's uniqueness, the level of heterogeneity is limited.

This study suggests that further research on Oaxacan immigrants in the U.S. is necessary. Future research incorporating balanced samples from different locations across the U.S. could offer a deeper understanding of the key factors influencing immigration decisions among Oaxacans. Future research could also investigate differences in pull factors associated with the particular U.S. regions that attract this immigrant group. Future studies could explore this specific migration pattern topic further, not only testing the push and pull theory on Oaxacan immigrants but also on any subgroup of populations in Mexico or Central and South American countries experiencing increased migration to the U.S. Finally, researchers are encouraged to investigate indigenous communities in Mexico that may or may not choose to migrate.

Overall, this study is significant because it bridges a gap in the existing literature on immigrants from Oaxaca by evaluating empirical data provided by participants on the factors that push them to leave Oaxaca and/or pull them to migrate to the state of Arkansas. Additionally, findings from this study confirm that Everett S. Lee's push and pull theory⁵⁰ is relevant and applicable among Oaxacan individuals. This study also contributes to migration literature by providing a more nuanced understanding of the factors that influence migration decisions among this unique group. Specifically, economic factors were the primary drivers for Oaxacan individuals who decided to migrate to the U.S. In contrast, social factors were the primary drivers for Oaxacan relatives who chose to stay in Oaxaca, Mexico. These findings underscore the need for nuanced migration policies and community programs that consider both economic and social dimensions of decision-making.

ENDNOTES

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