

“It’s an Odyssey:” Centering Mexican and Central American Immigrant Entrepreneurs in an Examination of County-Level Sanctuary

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Abstract

Using a comparative case study methodology, this research explores how Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs in two types of county-level sanctuary contexts (limited and robust) operate their enterprises. Through interviews with 48 small-scale entrepreneurs and 52 organizational contacts facilitated in part through lead local community partners, the study explores entrepreneurs’ perceptions of sanctuary as a factor affecting their business decisions. Self-employment and business registration data from the American Community Survey (ACS) provide context for the narratives. This research suggests that sanctuary policy has an indirect but contributing effect on entrepreneurs’ decision-making and livelihoods. Interviews substantiate the key roles federal and state policy play in shaping the entrepreneurial landscape for immigrants at the county level across sanctuary types. The research illuminates the multi-scalar environment in which immigrant entrepreneurs are embedded and the strategic choices they make with the tools at their disposal. Key recommendations for business ecosystems—including an emphasis on access to driver’s licenses and culturally responsive, multilingual resources—are highlighted. The insights of entrepreneurs deepen understanding of existing theory about immigrant entrepreneurship and the effects of sanctuary policy on immigrant choices.

In the wake of Trump’s 2016 presidential win, calls for “sanctuary” swept across politically liberal sections of the country, while conservatives countered with legislation, lawsuits, and rhetorical blowback. But what does sanctuary mean to affected immigrants? While it may serve as an effective tool to promote legal rights and protection from family separation, how does it impact the socioeconomic well-being of immigrants’ households? And for the subset of immigrants who operate their own businesses, does sanctuary inform decision-making or shape commercial outcomes?

Using a comparative case study approach that incorporates interviews and survey data, the research explores how small-scale Mexican and Central American citizen and non-citizen immigrant entrepreneurs in two types of county-level sanctuary contexts (limited and robust) operate. The research centers these participants given the consistent nationwide growth in entrepreneurship within these communities coupled with disproportionate domestic attention to their arrival (Bellovary et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2014; Sandoval-Strausz, 2019; Schuch & Wang, 2015).

Through interviews with small-scale entrepreneurs and organizational contacts across four U.S. counties primarily selected for sanctuary

type—Franklin, Ohio; Maricopa, Arizona; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Wake, North Carolina—the research explores perceptions of Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs and associated agency staff on local sanctuary policy. Self-employment and business registration data from the American Community Survey (ACS) provides a backdrop. Because access to entrepreneurs as an outside researcher is limited, the research depended upon relational linkages of key community partners in each case. Foundational virtual interviews with immigrant-serving nonprofits identified through internet and social media exploration during the early days of COVID-19 established local contacts, provided sociopolitical context, and laid the groundwork for invaluable in-person interviews and feedback on the initial themes in the field. The leadership and participation of local contacts impacted the interview questions, the participant and neighborhood samples, and products identified as desired outcomes of the project.

Given the contemporary explosion of rhetoric, activism, and policy discussion around sanctuary, alongside the rapidly developing literature on immigrant entrepreneurship, the question of the influence of county-level sanctuary policy on Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs is

timely. Over the past decade, Latinos have launched more small businesses and microenterprises than any other ethnic group (Orozco et al., 2020). Meanwhile, a growing number of state and local governments have passed sanctuary-related policies (Graber & Avila, 2019; Reich, 2017). This research builds on the insights, experience, priority topics, and networks of government and agency staff to highlight entrepreneurs' perspectives and recommendations for policy and practice.

Immigrant Entrepreneurship in the U.S.

Latin American immigrant-owned enterprises contribute to U.S. society by adding economic value, strengthening social bonds, and welcoming fellow immigrants (Becerra et al., 2012; Kemeny & Cooke, 2018; Zhou, 2004). Businesses contribute beyond the narrowly economic: they create social capital, develop community-building opportunities, and revitalize neighborhoods (Liu et al., 2014; Sandoval-Strausz, 2019; Schuch & Wang, 2015; McDaniel & Drever, 2009). Furthermore, immigrant entrepreneurship plays a facilitating role in the social, cultural, and political integration of immigrants into U.S. communities (Golob & Giles, 2017; McDaniel, 2016; Zhou & Cho, 2010). Although immigrants from a broad range of groups start businesses, those from Latin America have among the highest rate of new entrepreneurs in the U.S. (Fairlie et al., 2019). A plurality of these business owners should be considered "opportunity entrepreneurs," as they establish businesses motivated by a combination of personal and environmental conditions (Orozco et al., 2020).

Culturally responsive and multilingual access to funding, training, and relevant information on U.S. business practices, commercial codes, licensing, and financial reporting are key factors to successful Latin American immigrant entrepreneurship (Albro & Hershberg, 2021; Chrysostome & Arcand, 2009; Kalu & Okafor, 2021; Theodos et al., 2021). Immigrants have more business opportunities when they can access information on licensing, registration, regulatory guidelines, loan requirements, and government training (Moon et al., 2014). They know how to access, choose to access, and implement information when they have trusting lines of communication with information sources (Huang & Liu, 2019). Starting a business requires the sharing of personal information, which requires trust in government agencies that administer the paperwork (Lee & Black, 2017).

Despite empirical work underscoring the contributions of Latin Americans, anti-immigrant rhetoric is on the rise (Pew Research Center, 2019). Latin Americans—especially Mexicans and Central Americans—have become the face of perceived "problem" immigration (Bellovary et al., 2020; Chavez & Provine, 2009). These communities operate within a punitive federal immigration regime: unauthorized immigrants fear deportation, while authorized immigrants worry about racial profiling, criminalization of co-ethnics, and the breakup of community networks (García Hernández, 2018; Lopez et al., 2018). Many avoid contact with uniformed officers, uncertain of which have the prerogative to investigate migratory status (Nguyen & Gill, 2016). These concerns chill the desire of immigrants to participate in the public sphere and dampen trust in U.S. institutions (Bernstein et al., 2020; Cholera et al., 2020; Wong et al., 2019). As a result, Latin American collaboration with local law enforcement, use of social and medical services, and school attendance rates have suffered (Allen & McNeely, 2017; Amuedo-Dorantes & Arenas-Arroyo, 2019; Amuedo-Dorantes & Lopez, 2015; Cervantes et al., 2018; Dee & Murphy, 2020; Kline & Castañeda, 2020; Martínez et al., 2018; O'Brien et al., 2019). The impact on Mexican and Central American immigrant-owned businesses has been less studied.

U.S. Sanctuary Practices and Entrepreneurship

Localities have adopted their own practices—some welcoming and others restrictive—related to immigrants (Reich, 2017; Huang & Liu, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2018; McDaniel et al., 2019). County-level sanctuary policies are a key tool for incorporation and welcome. Although there is no legal definition of sanctuary, the U.S. Department of Justice (2007) describes it as "state laws, local ordinances, or departmental policies limiting the role of local law enforcement agencies and officers in the enforcement of immigration laws" (p. 7). Although sanctuary policy is not a cure-all to address immigrant concerns, Davis (2020) finds that, at least at the local level, more robust local sanctuary policy reduces fear, facilitates trust in public institutions, and improves integration.

Although immigration scholars have examined the ways reception contexts integrate immigrants into the labor force (DeWind & Kasinitz, 1997; Massey, 1995; Portes & Rumbaut, 2014), few have explored the impacts of local immigration-related policy on the entrepreneurial activities of Mexican

and Central American immigrants (Wang & Lofstrom, 2020). It is here that theoretical work around “ethnic” entrepreneurship may provide critical insights into the behavior, motivations, and opportunities for immigrants. Volery’s (2007) enhanced interactive entrepreneurship model, for example, serves as an essential theoretical framework to explain immigrant entrepreneurship, recognizing that immigrant entrepreneurs operate within an environment impacted by local opportunity structures, characteristics unique to the context, and participant resources. Volery (2007) updates existing frameworks traditionally used to describe the entrepreneurial process by integrating an analysis of the ethnic strategies utilized by immigrants. His work recognizes the ways so-called ethnic aspects are impacted by—and in turn impact—the core entrepreneurial process. Volery’s (2007) enhanced interactive entrepreneurship model visualizes the ways the distinct pressures impacting immigrant entrepreneurs influence the process itself.

This study builds on research demonstrating that county-level anti-sanctuary policies repress immigrants’ trust of law enforcement and other public entities (Amuedo-Dorantes & Arenas-Arroyo, 2019; Cervantes et al., 2018; Cruz Nichols et al., 2018; Wong et al., 2019). It seeks to extend findings from this line of inquiry, hypothesizing that local pro-sanctuary policy should encourage immigrants to trust in local public institutions throughout Volery’s entrepreneurial process. If successful immigrant entrepreneurship is associated with immigrants’ positive relationships with the government and government-affiliated institutions that manage the tools for business registration, regulation, and development, then a sanctuary framework should facilitate entrepreneurial advancement. In sanctuary jurisdictions, immigrants should enjoy more trusting relationships with agencies that manage business registration and development, leading to more opportunities for Mexican and Central American immigrant owners.

Methods

The research explores questions around the role of sanctuary policies in facilitating entrepreneurship using a mixed methods methodology. Descriptive statistics present self-employment data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) to convey business registrations of U.S. citizen and non-citizen Mexican and Central American immigrants between 2013 and 2019 in

four counties: Franklin, Ohio; Maricopa, Arizona; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Wake, North Carolina. Qualitative research draws upon 100 semi-structured interviews conducted between July 2020 and August 2021, starting with staff from community-based organizations in each case which explore Mexican and Central American immigrants’ business decisions and perceptions of sanctuary. The research includes interviews with 48 U.S. citizen and non-citizen entrepreneurs and 52 organizational contacts across the cases. The selection criteria for cases and participants are described below.

Case Selection

Counties were primarily selected for sanctuary type, described below. Latin American immigrant gateway type—that is, the length of time the locale has received immigrants from Latin America—was considered in the discussion. All cases featured a large city as county seat, Mexican and Central American communities, a similar immigrant population percentage, and an absence of statewide sanctuary policy. The cases differ, including by geography, commercial climate, and statewide partisan political profile. Although these factors change the local environment for immigrant entrepreneurship, the research contends that sanctuary policy is a factor requiring attention.

To identify the county’s sanctuary category, the research utilized the sanctuary spectrum developed by the Immigration Legal Resource Center (ILRC) in 2016 and updated in 2018 and 2019 (Avila et al., 2018; Graber & Avila, 2019). The ILRC tracks U.S. counties’ sanctuary ordinances and policies, assigning each county a sanctuary score or degree of sanctuary protection. This score is based on analysis of seven common practices through which local law enforcement engages with federal immigration authorities (Graber & Avila, 2019):

- No 287(g) agreement with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) permitting state and local law enforcement to conduct federal enforcement duties and enforcement of criminal and civil immigration violations.
- No contract with ICE to detain immigrants in county detention facilities.
- Restriction or refusal to hold individuals after their release date on the basis of ICE detainees.
- Policy against notifying ICE of release dates and times or other information about inmate status.

- Prohibition against ICE in jails or requirement of detainee consent before ICE is allowed to interrogate.
- Prohibition against asking about immigration status.
- General prohibition on providing assistance and resources to ICE to enforce civil immigration laws.

Those counties with low scores feature low levels of sanctuary protection, while the reverse is true for counties with high scores. Utilizing the ILRC (Graber & Avila, 2019) ranking, Franklin and Philadelphia counties rank as “robust” sanctuary jurisdictions, as they score a 5 and 6 on the ILRC scale, while Maricopa and Wake counties are “limited” sanctuary jurisdictions, with scores of 3 and 1. Franklin and Philadelphia counties are also affiliates of the Welcoming America network, jurisdictions that pledge to adopt policies that integrate immigrants, while Maricopa and Wake Counties are not (Welcoming America, n.d.). The Welcoming America affiliation provides additional evidence that the local seats of government in the Franklin and Philadelphia cases position themselves as friendly sites of settlement to newcomers.

Because the length of a community’s residence in a locale affects the existence and accessibility of resources, the study considers the effect of gateway status. It acknowledges that the sample includes one county in a major-emerging gateway metropolitan region (Maricopa County in the Phoenix, AZ metropolitan statistical area [MSA]), two counties in minor-emerging gateways (Franklin County in the Columbus, OH MSA and Wake County

in the Raleigh, NC MSA), and one county that is a re-emerging gateway (Philadelphia County in the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD MSA) (Singer, 2015). Maricopa and Philadelphia have been home to Latin American communities for many decades, while Franklin and Wake are recent destinations, with Mexican immigrants arriving in significant numbers since the 1990s and Central Americans subsequently. Total population numbers were drawn from the 2020 U.S. Census. See Table 1 for an overview.

Descriptive Data

The descriptive data was intended to illustrate whether Mexican and Central American immigrants register businesses and claim self-employment in increasing numbers over time in robust versus limited sanctuaries. Although several datasets initially appeared to offer useful information on self-employment, each has significant limitations because of their focus on the state or metropolitan level rather than county level and their lack of inclusion of unpaid employees, which compose an important part of Latino-owned businesses. As a result, the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS) serves as the best option. ACS Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) provide records of individual persons or housing units at the national, regional, divisional, state, and Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) levels. They are available in one-year and five-year files and employ a 5% sample size (United States Census Bureau, n.d.b.). PUMAs contain approximately 100,000 residents across census tracts, allowing

Table 1. Key Comparisons of Cases

	Franklin, OH	Maricopa, AZ	Philadelphia, PA	Wake, NC
Total population	1.32 million	4.42 million	1.60 million	1.13 million
Immigrant population	11%	14.7%	14.3%	13.3%
County seat	Columbus	Phoenix	Philadelphia	Raleigh
U.S. region	Midwest	Southwest	Northeast	Southeast
State law	No	No	No	No
Sanctuary type	Robust	Limited	Robust	Limited
Gateway type	Minor-emerging	Major-emerging	Re-emerging	Minor-emerging
County seat is Welcoming America affiliate	Yes	No	Yes	No

users to see detail beyond what state-level data permit. The PUMS files allow customization of tables unavailable through pre-tabulated data resources. Due to limitations with the reliability of the one-year estimates, collection and analysis of descriptive statistics focused on the four cases rather than analyzing all U.S. counties.

Using the microdata access tool on data.census.gov, the research identified the PUMAs for each of the four case study counties. It aggregated PUMAs-level data to the county level to explore the *class of worker* variable among U.S. citizen and non-U.S. citizen (permanent resident, temporary resident, and unauthorized) foreign-born Mexicans and Central Americans. The *class of worker* variable describes participants of working age who report 15 hours or more of work at the employer. Two classifications of the *class of worker* were examined as a proxy for entrepreneurship: *self-employed not incorporated* and *self-employed incorporated*. Data were observed at four points in time: 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019. These years cover a period of sustained national discussion and local activism on immigration, creating an opportunity to observe entrepreneurship during the Obama and Trump Administrations.

Descriptive statistics using the ACS cross-sectional data provide a static and limited view of immigrant entrepreneurship; moreover, there are high margins of error when an estimate reflects a subset of a population over a one-year period (Folch et al., 2016). To surface the mechanisms driving self-employment and business registration, interviews were essential.

Lead Community Partners and Collaborators

An essential approach of the interview process was collaboration with Latin American immigrant and/or Latino/a-lead community-based partners in each case. This collaboration shaped the research questions, the interview protocol, the selection of interview participants, the audit process, and the nature of proposed outputs. The partners were immigrants or first-generation representatives of immigrant communities whose knowledge of the case and of the local Mexican and Central American communities focused the research on timely and relevant questions. Identification of the lead partner grew out of targeted recruitment launched in summer 2020 via internet and social media (Twitter, now X) searches and initial telephone and Zoom calls.

In Philadelphia, the lead partner was a staff organizer with a community-based nonprofit

dedicated to immigrant integration services via economic development. The organizer provided context, identified interview participants, made introductions, and accompanied the researcher to targeted neighborhoods to indicate community hubs. The partner suggested research outcomes designed to facilitate enhanced programming for nonprofit agencies.

In Wake County, two lead partners emerged. One was a statewide community organizer with a grassroots arts and culture, education, health promotion, advocacy, and leadership development agency identified via outreach to a nonprofit lender. The other was a businessperson and community activist involved in the emerging Hispanic and Immigrant Affairs Board in the City of Raleigh (the city hub of Wake County). The organizers participated in multiple conversations prior to fieldwork, curated a list of small businesspersons to interview, facilitated introductions, and provided feedback on interview questions. The researcher presented findings of the research to both the statewide lead partner and the lender organizations for their professional development and educational aims.

In Franklin County, a businesswoman who also directs a local business association served as lead partner. In her leadership role, she conducts outreach to Latino/a and Latin American businesspeople, facilitates relationship-building among members to foster professional development, and advocates for members' priorities among local decision-makers. Her network of small businesspeople spans the county, as well as types and scales of business. The partner met several times prior to fieldwork, created a list of participants, proffered introductions, and reflected on interview themes and results. Her perspective as a well-connected leader with deep relationships in the local entrepreneurial ecosystem and participation in the regional discussion provided essential orientation and contextualization for the research findings.

Research in Maricopa County served as an exception to the lead partner approach. Although the researcher attempted to develop a lead partner, the results were less robust than in the other cases. Although three local businesswomen involved in Chamber of Commerce work provided extensive context and commentary on local politics and actors, they fulfilled a highly-engaged participant role, but not one of a lead. It is difficult to extrapolate the impact on the research, but it is notable that in the case without a clear lead

partner, the researcher's attempts to connect with local entrepreneurs were more difficult, resulting in fewer interviews and less data.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews of between 20 and 120 minutes with entrepreneurs and organizational staff examined experiences of local sanctuary policy, trust of and collaboration with public and private institutions, and resources needed to support entrepreneurship. Purposive sampling identified well-informed interviewees, an approach adopted by researchers studying a range of migration issues (Menjívar, 2011; Pisani, 2012; Spring et al., 2003). The sample includes nonprofit and government staff in immigrant commercial and business-supporting entities and in the microcredit lending sector. It also includes Mexican and Central American immigrant small-scale entrepreneurs selected for the following characteristics: firm size of under nine employees (Orozco et al., 2020); representation in the local market; a public-facing presence; identity as a Mexican or Central American immigrant; registration as a business (and therefore a willingness to share personal identifying information with government entities potentially seen as linked with federal agencies); and location in a commercial district with a visible Mexican or Central American presence. These entrepreneurs were identified through recommendations from the lead partners, organizational interviews, and from sampling in Mexican- and Central American-dominant corridors. Entrepreneur participants were offered a \$25 gift card to participate in the interview. The amount was selected via conversations with lead community partners: it was considered a fair acknowledgement of entrepreneurs' time, but not so large that it would unduly sway recruits to participate.

As highlighted in the research on culturally responsive research, identification, trust-building, and collaboration with local community agency gatekeepers was an essential part of recruitment (Karwalajtys et al., 2010; Ojeda et al., 2011; Suh et al., 2009). Culturally responsive research seeks to create knowledge with and in support of communities, particularly those that have been historically mistreated and exploited, such as Latin American immigrants (Ojeda et al., 2011). During the summer of 2020, internet searches for immigrant-serving business development,

financial services, education, rights, and social service organizations surfaced relevant agencies in each case. Following the agencies' media, newsletters, and listservs led to targeted outreach. A total of 29 Zoom interviews with agencies focused on perceptions of the local context, impacts of sanctuary and commercial policies, and barriers to success for Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs; additionally, participants identified ways research could explore agencies' questions. (See Appendix A for agency interview questions.) Interviewees recommended further organizational contacts, entrepreneurs, and strategies for engaging with entrepreneurs in their workplaces. (See Appendix B for the entrepreneur interview questions.) Lead community partners willing to facilitate in-person meetings between the researcher and entrepreneurs emerged in each of the cases demonstrated by multiple Zoom sessions, offers to arrange for in-person meetings between researcher and entrepreneurs when in the field, and expression of interest in follow-up reports and presentations. When the public health scenario allowed for travel and in-person interaction in the spring and summer of 2021, the researcher conducted interviews with 48 entrepreneurs and an additional 23 agencies in the field. The organizations are not listed here as some serve immigrants working without authorization, making discretion and privacy necessary; however, Table 2 for a list of types of organizations and entrepreneurs interviewed.

Using U.S. Census data to pinpoint commercial corridors with Mexican and Central American populations, the researcher posted Spanish-language flyers on community bulletin boards in social and recreational spaces and conducted purposive drop-in visits to entrepreneurs to mitigate selection bias linked to snowball sampling, or talking only with entrepreneurs who share a common perspective thereby limiting possible diversity of results. Although flyers yielded only one response, approaching entrepreneurs in their workplaces produced approximately half of the interviews with entrepreneurs. The other half resulted from leads from lead community partner staff, which was in its majority from the nonprofit sector, but also included some government agencies. Community-based staff participants offered critical advice for culturally responsive methods during drop-ins and prearranged interviews, including interpersonal connection (*personalismo*), small talk (*plática*),

use of honorific language, and responsiveness to gestures of hospitality and graciousness (Ojeda et al., 2011). See Table 2 for a list of interviewees and lead partners.

Interviews were coded in a multi-step inductive process which identified patterns that emerged from interviews (Saldaña, 2013; Thomas, 2006). Initially, interview transcripts were scanned to identify relevant words, phrases, and concepts, and converted to approximately 40 thematic categories in NVivo. A review process focused on overlaps or redundancies eliminated the categories by half. Subsequent reflection on the existing literature around immigrant trust, entrepreneurship, and sanctuary solidified and sharpened themes to allow for comparisons across cases. After additional time spent re-reading the interviews, a primary theme directly related to sanctuary surfaced: participants’ articulation of the indirect impacts of sanctuary on businesses across cases. The interviews also underscored the

mitigating factors impacting the entrepreneurial environment for Mexican and Central American entrepreneurs, which, although the research had not set out to explore, the researcher believed important to share.

Limitations

Descriptive statistics reflect the limitations of the ACS and ILRC datasets. ACS data collected from a population subset over a one-year period suffer from high margins of error (Folch et al., 2016). Moreover, rapid numerical fluctuations suggest uneven data collection, exacerbated by systematic undercounting of undocumented individuals (Passel & Cohn, 2018). ILRC sanctuary scores are drawn from a static moment in time. These issues raise concerns about data quality and reliability. The shortcomings underscore the need for qualitative data collection and analysis to address gaps and improved datasets to mitigate inconsistencies.

Table 2. Interview Participants and Lead Community-Based Agencies

	Franklin, OH	Maricopa, AZ	Philadelphia, PA	Wake, NC
Total number of interviews	26	18	27	28
Interviews with community-based organizations (non-governmental)	11 • 2 lenders • 5 business development • 4 community organizations	11 • 2 lenders • 6 business development • 2 community organizations • 1 education	11 • 1 lender • 9 business development • 1 community organization	11 • 4 lenders • 4 business development • 3 community organizations
Interviews with community-based organizations (governmental)	4 • 3 states • 1 city	0	1 • 1 city	2 • 2 international agencies
Interviews with entrepreneurs	11 • 6 food services • 2 hair care • 1 building trades • 1 consultant • 1 shop	7 • 7 food services	15 • 11 food services • 1 hair care • 1 real estate • 1 media • 1 shop	15 • 8 food services • 2 hair care • 3 building trades • 1 consultant • 2 cleaners • 1 insurance • 1 automobile
Lead community-based partner(s)	Nonprofit lender and state government agency	Business development leader	Business development leader	International consulate and statewide community organization leader

Note. One staff person working for a national nonprofit dedicated to education and advocacy for immigrant entrepreneurship was interviewed for her broad view.

The sanctuary variable may be a proxy for other phenomena: sanctuary is associated with factors that may be better able to explain or predict outcomes for Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs. Future regression analysis, if reliable and representative data exist, could provide insight. Because the sample for participants used purposive rather than probabilistic methods, the entrepreneurs interviewed may not be representative of the sector. Although the interview methods do not create statistically generalizable results, they do surface rich information about entrepreneurs' experiences, and access a traditionally hard-to-reach group. The researcher identified a portion of the participant pool through collaboration with lead partners; while this approach generally resulted in rich interviews, it could be critiqued for constraining the sample. Finally, despite attention to culturally responsive best practices, the study faces limitations as it was conducted by a white, middle-class researcher. The strategies recommended by the lead community partners in each case, as well as the literature, served to mitigate, not eliminate, these constraints.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The U.S. Census Bureau offers overall population and self-employment data for Mexican and Central American communities. Table 3 shows the total number of self-employed Mexican and Central American respondents from 2013 to 2019. Maricopa County is the sole case with a decline in Mexican and Central American self-employment despite growth in the population (United States Census Bureau, n.d.c.). Both Franklin and Philadelphia counties experienced

exponential growth of Mexican and Central American self-employment which far outstripped growth of the total population. Although Wake County appeared to lose Mexican and Central American population, it experienced business growth of over 36% among the demographic (United States Census Bureau, n.d.c.). It is notable that Maricopa County, a county with limited sanctuary policies, saw declines while the two robust counties experienced increases. The case of Wake, however, complicates the picture; even while its sanctuary policies are limited, Mexicans and Central Americans increased the number of businesses they registered. Numbers for Wake in 2017 suggest data reliability issues.

Tables 4 and 5 break down citizen- and non-citizen self-employment among Mexican and Central American respondents. Table 4 lays out the growth in self-employment for those who are U.S. citizens.

Table 5 indicates that non-U.S. citizen self-employment was strongest in Franklin and Philadelphia counties. Again, Wake's numbers are inconsistent, but reflect growth. Maricopa, a county with limited sanctuary, experienced a decline of nearly 20% in self-employment even while the overall demographic grew (United States Census Bureau, n.d.c.). In comparison, Table 6 shows the same data by number, rather than share of the foreign-born population.

Interviews

Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs identified the indirect impacts of sanctuary policies on their businesses across cases. They also shared their perceptions on and recommendations for inclusion in local business ecosystems. Primary themes follow.

Table 3. Foreign-Born Mexican and Central American Self-Employment in Own Incorporated and Not Incorporated Business

	Limited Sanctuary		Robust Sanctuary	
	Maricopa	Wake	Franklin	Philadelphia
2013	31,908	2,719	435	359
2015	31,217	3,600	1,999	822
2017	33,953	318	1,691	1,389
2019	31,081	3,707	1,752	1,978
Total change	-827	988	1,137	1,619
% change	-2.6	36.3	302	451

Source: U.S. Census ACS One-Year Estimates PUMS (n.d.c.)

Table 4. Share of Foreign-Born Mexican and Central American Self-Employment in Own Incorporated and Not Incorporated Business

Limited Sanctuary			Robust Sanctuary	
	Maricopa	Wake	Franklin	Philadelphia
2013	18.4	6.7	1.1	1.0
2015	16.8	8.1	4.5	2.0
2017	16,5	0.7	3.5	3.0
2019	14.2	7.3	5.0	5.0
% change	-4.2	0.6	3.9	3.9

Source: U.S. Census ACS One-Year Estimates PUMS (n.d.c.).

Table 5. Foreign-Born U.S. Citizen Mexican and Central American Self-Employment in Own Incorporated and Not Incorporated Business

Limited Sanctuary			Robust Sanctuary	
	Maricopa	Wake	Franklin	Philadelphia
2013	5,044	83	0	0
2015	5,591	0	459	228
2017	7,047	174	156	676
2019	9,413	890	40	930
Total change	4,369	807	40	930
% change	86.6	872	4,000	93,000

Source: U.S. Census ACS One-Year Estimates PUMS (n.d.c.).

Table 6. Foreign-Born Non-U.S. Citizen Mexican and Central American Self-Employment in Own Incorporated and Not Incorporated Business

Limited Sanctuary			Robust Sanctuary	
	Maricopa	Wake	Franklin	Philadelphia
2013	26,864	2,636	435	359
2015	25,626	3,600	1,540	594
2017	26,906	144	1,535	713
2019	21,668	2,817	1,712	1,048
Total change	-5,196	181	1,277	689
% change	-19.3	6.9	294	192

Source: U.S. Census ACS One-Year Estimates PUMS (n.d.c.).

Entrepreneurs Entertain a Range of Perceptions Towards Sanctuary Across Types. Some participants identified robust sanctuary status as an enabling factor for immigrant business. When asked why he appreciated sanctuary, a Mexican restaurant owner in Philadelphia shared:

Because [the government] doesn't harass. ... They let you work, they let us work, they don't bother you. ... They [the government] know that ... we don't have the right status. But if you pay your taxes and everything, they leave all of us alone. (A., interview, April 8, 2021)

A leader of a small business development nonprofit in southeastern Pennsylvania commented:

I believe the idea of being a sanctuary city and what that means creates a space for freedom and creates a space for dreaming about what we can do as immigrants ... even if you're documented, you know people, you have family and friends that may not be in that situation, because that's the nature of immigration. So [sanctuary policy] does create a sense of opportunity for communities' business ownership to expand because all of a sudden you know

that ... you're not going to be persecuted, you're not going to be walked out of the city. (L., interview, September 1, 2020)

These comments suggest that sanctuary contributes to an environment conducive to immigrant-owned business.

Other participants were less certain of a link between sanctuary policy and improved conditions for entrepreneurship. A Mexican business owner using a Social Security Number (SSN) in Franklin County expressed ambivalence noting, "It's better. That's not necessarily saying it's great, but it's better" (A., interview, August 6, 2021). While he preferred to have sanctuary, he did not see it as a critical boon.

Some variation emerged between perceptions of the benefits of sanctuary in new gateways versus established. A Wake-based organizer saw sanctuary as an emerging possibility:

Slowly and surely government's and people's minds [are] beginning to change. ... I think that everyone's more in unison ... willing to hear other people and have those open, crucial conversations. None of these conversations about legality of residency or citizenship or allowment [sic] of [unauthorized to] have an ID in previous years has been as open as it has been now. (E., interview, May 19, 2021)

This participant is optimistic about the evolving local conversation. Variation in perception exists between jurisdictions with robust versus limited sanctuary. Philadelphia lending agency staff articulated the ambivalence about sanctuary's impact on entrepreneurs heard in multiple conversations:

I guess in my experience that change hasn't been that drastic. I think what [sanctuary] is doing is providing a better and safer place for ITIN [Individual Taxpayer Identification Number] holders to open bank accounts or get better jobs and also open their own businesses but still everything is so far behind, they are still struggling ... they're still afraid for their rights or they may not even know they have rights. (K., interview, August 11, 2020)

The participant sees a value in sanctuary but does not trace significant links between sanctuary and favorable conditions for entrepreneurship.

She also raises a common theme: the lack of awareness of sanctuary and rights among affected immigrants themselves.

Yet to a Maricopa-based lending agency staffer, the possibility of someday having robust sanctuary is meaningful:

I think it would help a lot with the fear. It would build more confidence. It would push people to create businesses the right way ... when you have that confidence, you're able to then go to a government building and then say, "I want to register my business in the state of Arizona." "I want to go get my IRS EIN [Employer Identification Number] number." And it would just give them a breather ... it would just push them way more to do better and to be better and to grow their businesses. A lot of them are like, "Oh no, I like my *tiendita*. I want to keep it here. I don't want anyone to come in and ruin what I have." And that's because they're not willing to talk about their status. (L., interview, July 8, 2021)

The staff person believes that sanctuary could provide the layer of protection entrepreneurs need to register their businesses and grow with confidence. Sanctuary functions as an aspiration with the potential to unlock positive outcomes.

Notably, organizational contacts across the cases raised issues of trust more frequently than did entrepreneurs themselves. An employee of a public agency supporting immigrants in Wake County articulated reasons why entrepreneurs experience distrust:

[Immigrants have] fear of what documentation they [local government] are going to ask. If they don't have any legal status, there is even more hesitancy. Getting registered, even though it comes with a lot of benefits ... there's always this fear of being in the system, that the government will have their information now. (J., interview, April 28, 2021)

Yet few entrepreneurs reported distrust themselves: the majority either had limited interaction with entities or expressed no opinion other than frustration with bureaucracy. The interviews suggest that entrepreneurs are largely unaware of resources or disinclined to make requests due to a lack of relationship, not due to fear.

Sanctuary Impacts Businesses by Shaping Clientele and Entrepreneur Behaviors. Some entrepreneurs link robust sanctuary with a growth in their customer base. The comments of the owner of a Mexican enterprise in Philadelphia were representative:

I guess that's why a lot of Mexicans and Central Americans are moving to Philadelphia ... because it [sanctuary] is bringing a lot of new customers. ... I'm sure the word goes around that Philadelphia is not that immigrant aggressive ... as long as they don't take the sanctuary from Philadelphia, that's a big one for us. (A., interview, July 3, 2021)

This owner perceives sanctuary as a way for Philadelphia to communicate its relatively welcoming attitude to immigrants. In his estimation, the message flows through immigrant communities and triggers arrivals, thereby growing his customer base. Robust sanctuary serves his business aims because it may increase earnings, not because his trust in government increases.

Participants across cases emphasized the importance of access to a state-issued driver's license, regardless of sanctuary type. The Mexican owner of a Wake County cleaning company explained that 20% of his day is spent driving, observing:

When I started my company, I didn't have a license; I wasn't pulled over by the police, but I used many apps to see where the police were or if a policeman was driving behind me. ... Now that I have a license, I feel free and at peace. (J., interview, May 28, 2021)

A Wake County-based Mexican owner of a construction company with an SSN refers to the ways immigrant business owners manage staffing and work responsibilities in a limited-sanctuary jurisdiction:

I try to send people [employees without driver's licenses] to low-risk places ... if I have a client by downtown, I'd rather go there because there are many policemen or I tell them to drive in the surrounding areas, to drive under the speed limit. (J., interview, May 27, 2021)

This owner invests time strategizing and advising his workers around driving. Notably, even though

Wake County police should not base their traffic stops on profiling, the participant suggests that this phenomenon occurs. These comments made in a county with limited sanctuary protections, and which until 2019 featured the draconian 287(g) policy, are salient: driver's licenses offer a degree of peace-of-mind. The owners' comments also underscore the reality that unauthorized immigrants do in fact drive without licenses but use strategies to avoid detection.

Entrepreneurs Experience Federal Immigration Policy as Trumping Local Sanctuary. Even when robust sanctuary protections are in place, aggressive federal immigration enforcement—like workplace or residential raids that detain immigrants accused of no violations short of illegal border entry—chills immigrant patronage and creates staffing shortages. An advocate for Mexican-owned small businesses in Philadelphia noted:

Mexican entrepreneurs ... haven't had COVID for a year: it's been four years of many problems with federal government policy and these constant raid campaigns. The businesses failed at least in the [neighborhood name] corridor because of the lack of clients and a little bit of fear. (E., interview, February 26, 2021)

This community activist blames the aggressive enforcement practices of the Trump Administration and the fear they engendered among clientele hesitant to leave their homes to shop, eat, recreate, and socialize for the problems of local businesses. When asked why immigrants are fearful even when they reside in a sanctuary jurisdiction, a Mexican restaurant owner using an ITIN in Philadelphia responded, "Fear is fear ... we're Latinos and we're scared ... because Trump said, 'Philadelphia shouldn't be a sanctuary,' so that affected us" (P., interview, April 21, 2021). Despite local sanctuary, federal policy shapes the environment for immigrants concerned about detection.

Similarly, a local government employee in Franklin County observed the difference in immigrants' sense of security in public during the Trump versus Biden Administrations, pointing to the vulnerability of businesses, even in sanctuaries, under a restrictive federal regime:

One thing that happened [during Trump] was people were feeling nervous about going to the grocery store because there

was a perception or maybe a reality that ICE will go to the grocery store and follow people home, go to churches that have services in Spanish ... and try to capture you in a weak moment. (S., interview, June 11, 2021)

This participant highlights the perception that leaving home for routine activities could place immigrants in danger of arrest or deportation. Although she does not explicitly discuss the impacts on business, the sentiment is there: some individuals curtailed outings to avoid detection.

The Philadelphia and Franklin examples are notable as they draw upon interviews in jurisdictions with robust sanctuary. If immigrants worry about being outside in these cases, it is likely across U.S. jurisdictions. Participants across the cases highlighted that federal policy constrains the ways immigrant entrepreneurs can operate, in spite of local policy choices. A Wake County Mexican handyman highlighted the frustrating impacts of federal policy for business people:

[North Carolina] is a state that's growing, the economy is growing very fast and all that, but federal immigration laws are halting growth, especially for Latinos. ... I have hopes [for immigration reform], but we have to be realistic. Congress is still dominated by Republicans. (J., interview, May 27, 2021)

This participant immediately refers to decision-makers at the federal level when discussing policy towards Latinos and immigrants in his state. Yet it is notable that he did not raise sanctuary policy until the interview protocol raised these themes. He perceived that critical changes to the immigration system happen at the federal level—but are dependent upon a Democratic majority.

Immigrants Respond to Multi-Scalar Conditions as “Opportunity Entrepreneurs”. Across the cases, agency staff routinely highlighted the perseverance and resourcefulness of entrepreneurs. A financial services staffer in Wake County remarked, “We know that if they are immigrants, they make a will, they make a way” (J., interview, April 30, 2021). In Maricopa County a nonprofit loan officer noted that his immigrant clients increased their applications for loans during the Trump years, “specifically because if something were to happen, I think people wanted to be in control of their own destiny” (G., interview, December 28, 2020). A business development

consultant in Franklin commented, “the sheer nature of the population I work with renders mostly driven individuals that are willing to stop at nothing to conquer their goals” (R., interview, January 15, 2021).

Determination is echoed by entrepreneurs across cases. After describing the many challenges, she has confronted, the co-owner of a religious goods store (*botánica*) in Franklin noted, “It’s an odyssey trying to start a business in the middle of a pandemic. I’m very proud” (D., interview, June 23, 2021). Or as the Mexican owner of a cleaning company in Wake County using an ITIN tells her peers:

Don’t be scared, you have to fulfill your goal. Give yourself a chance because you won’t have any chance inside your house, that’s why we’re here. We came here to do that ... we have to overcome [fear of ICE] ... we have to accomplish our dreams. (H., interview, May 27, 2021)

A longtime leader in Latin American immigrant and Latino business circles in Franklin concludes about his group’s success: “It’s a whole combination of resiliency, self-preservation, and self-knowledge” (R., interview, June 24, 2021).

Discussion

The research finds that although immigrant entrepreneurs and supporting organizations value sanctuary, the policies alone do not directly influence choices to register or grow businesses. The interviews surfaced a range of factors impacting the environment for Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs regardless of sanctuary status: access to state driver’s licenses; knowledge and use of the ITIN; utility of municipal identification cards; multilingual and multicultural resources; access to relevant education and training; and attitudes towards local law enforcement. Most entrepreneurs also addressed concerns around capital: some cannot access enough, while others prefer to avoid loans and indebtedness. The discussions suggest additional areas of inquiry. Entrepreneurs formulate business strategies in response to conditions within each multi-scalar context, reshaping the environment as they operate. Entrepreneurs utilize available tools like ITINs, financial capital, and capacity-building opportunities, particularly when culturally responsive and representative staff and community members encourage use, yet simultaneously call upon the business ecosystem for improvements.

The initial hypothesis theorized that robust county-level sanctuary policy would influence the opportunity structure component of Volery's Model: sanctuary would bolster immigrant trust in local public institutions, trigger increased business registration and use of business development tools, and lead to entrepreneurial success. The research suggests that a different phenomenon is at work: entrepreneurs operate as "opportunity entrepreneurs" (Orozco et al., 2020) as they navigate conditions like sanctuary in the multi-scalar environment. Would-be business owners register and develop their businesses using the tools at their disposal like ITINs and capital, whether that capital originates from the formal financial sector, savings, or more attractive non-institutional options. These "opportunity entrepreneurs" formulate business strategies around the conditions they find. Moreover, they operate within local county environments subject to the authority of the federal government and decisions of state governments around driver's licenses, which highlights the multi-scalar nature of their context. Moreover, interviews reveal that the strategies entrepreneurs employ shape the opportunity structure itself: by exploiting commercial opportunities through tools like the ITIN or loans; by crafting or modifying behaviors essential to their business practices given state and federal laws; by negotiating local laws that govern business practices and codes; and by identifying and collaborating with public and private sector staff who reflect and respect their cultural identities, they create enterprises in both limited and robust sanctuary jurisdictions, modeling business development for the greater Mexican and Central American immigrant community. As noted in Huang and Liu (2019), when immigrants are aware of resources and enjoy rapport with staff, they take advantage to the degree possible—given their time, documentation, and financial capacity—but need ways to develop their business skills and access to financial capital. Interviews suggest that the behaviors of entrepreneurs should be tracked across Volery's entrepreneurial process and include considerations not only of local immigration-related policy but also of federal immigration enforcement and state-level policy and practice.

Even as entrepreneurs articulate the resilient ways they operate within existing business ecosystems, they highlight limitations of identity documentation. For instance, while the ITIN provides an essential tool for business

development and municipal identification cards help access social services, state-issued driver's licenses are crucial to entrepreneurs. Driving a car or truck can be a critical aspect of an entrepreneur's existence: shopping for supplies, operating a vehicle, or managing a house-cleaning or gardening operation, among other tasks. Participants with driver's licenses assert that licenses would allow them to hire from a larger pool of workers and reduce the extent to which they themselves need to drive. Yet at the time of writing, only 16 states—none of which were case study sites in this research—and the District of Columbia permit unauthorized immigrants to receive a license (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2021). Participants also point to the utility of SSNs for business purposes, particularly in applying for loans. Participants link having an SSN to other scenarios in which identity must be proven, as in the case of gaining access to clients' property for construction, cleaning, or heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) work, in addition to renting equipment. Notably, a driver's license could be used for similar purposes.

Descriptive statistics suggest differences in experience between immigrants with U.S. citizenship versus those without, Self-employment numbers among citizens in limited sanctuary jurisdictions do not dip as they do among non-citizens, suggesting that citizens may experience a sense of security that impacts their business experiences. Yet immigrant citizens are more likely to have been in the country for longer, leading to relative greater familiarity with U.S. society and the business sector, and potentially complicating this observation. Interviews do not reveal significant differences for non-citizens in robust versus limited jurisdictions, although not surprisingly non-citizens do articulate desire for an SSN. Yet the research also reinforces the contention of Pisani and Morales (2020) that new datasets on Latin American entrepreneurs are necessary to build knowledge around the topic: there simply is was a lack of robust and reliable data on small-scale Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs.

Implications for Research

The lead community partners in each case identified and facilitated key connections and interviews with peer agencies and, critically, with individual entrepreneurs. The partners opened the doors to over half of the entrepreneurs interviewed and offered feedback on interview

questions, the key questions of the research, and final products; moreover, these participants were leaders in their communities and familiar with local contexts, generating rich, relevant, and far-ranging perspectives in their own interviews. Particularly in gateways, they were involved with either domestic or international government agencies with a mission to support immigrant entrepreneurs. This is reminiscent of the research by de Graauw (2021) on the important role of government activists in the promotion of urban citizenship for immigrants, which this research extends to include consular staff. Because research that centers the voices of a hard-to-reach group like busy immigrant entrepreneurs requires a methodology that foregrounds relationships and trust-building with gatekeepers, the development of lead partners in each case able to arrange for in-person interviews in the field, introductions to key entrepreneurs, and follow-up presentations and reporting provided a critical boon to the research process. These partners actively participated in the sampling process, making introductions to participants they believed had relevant and critical perspectives to shape the research in neighborhoods they knew from experience to be centers of Mexican and emerging Central American immigrant business—particularly helpful in cases in which these entrepreneurs do not advertise widely.

These lead partners identified ways that the research might serve partners' educational, advocacy, or programming purposes which functioned as one avenue to co-create knowledge and extend collaboration. For example, during this study, the researcher participated in panels hosted by community partners to share initial research findings with an aim to open spaces whereby research work elevates the expert, concrete, and nuanced proposals of immigrant entrepreneurs. This priority became clear to the researcher via the "unexpected" finding that county sanctuary status had an indirect effect on business registrations and success: although the research posited a spillover effect of sanctuary on immigrant trust in public processes and agencies, the interviews highlighted the ways immigrants are identifying opportunities and utilizing tools in two different types of sanctuary.

Researchers looking to develop lines of inquiry around the strategies and priorities to which entrepreneurs point should include improved multilingual and multiculturally responsive resources and staff at the local level and

the impacts of the expansion of driver's licenses for all. Given the fractured state of U.S. immigration reform, restrictive policies and practices towards immigrants entering at the southern border, and the expectation of immigration as a key issue in the 2024 presidential campaign, discussion of the ways Mexican and Central America immigrants can develop enterprises will continue to be a critical conversation in community development: relationships with lead community-based organizational staff offer academic researchers a way to connect their scholarship with questions of interest and priority to partners.

Conclusion

The research hypothesized that Mexican and Central American immigrants would be more inclined to register businesses when operating within robust sanctuary jurisdictions. Given the empirical research on the spillover effects of sanctuary on immigrant trust in local government, robust sanctuary policies were predicted to encourage immigrants to develop businesses even within the context of national anti-immigrant rhetoric. ACS self-employment data provided a backdrop for interviews with Mexican and Central American immigrant entrepreneurs and associated organizations. Key local community agencies and partners in each case served as gatekeepers and facilitators for access to entrepreneurs and provided strategies for culturally informed research methods. The research finds that county-level sanctuary policy has an indirect effect on entrepreneurs' decision-making processes and livelihoods. Interviews illuminate the multi-scalar environment in which immigrant entrepreneurs are embedded and the strategic choices they employ. They substantiate the roles federal and state policy play in shaping the entrepreneurial landscape for immigrants across sanctuary types. The interviews offer key recommendations for business ecosystems across the cases, including an emphasis on access to driver's licenses and culturally responsive, multilingual resources.

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About the Author

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Appendix A: Agency Questions

- How does your agency work with immigrant workers and/or entrepreneurs?
- Can you describe the profile(s) of your clients—particularly your Central American and Mexican clients?
- What are the kinds of businesses your clients—particularly your Central American and Mexican clients—open?
- What would be their employment options if not for small business?
- What is the range of capital needed for these enterprises?
- What types of business entities do they run, i.e., sole proprietor, partnership, Limited Liability Company (LLC), or corporation?
- What is the employment and entrepreneurship climate like for your Central American and Mexican clients in your locale?
- What are the successes of your Central American and Mexican clients?
- What are the barriers to success for your Central American and Mexican clients?
- What allows your clients to take risks for the good of their business?
- To whom do your clients turn for information and support?
- What is the role of multiservice centers for your clients? Why might some of your clients use them? What are your perceptions of those roles?
- To whom do you turn for information and support?
- How do your Central American and Mexican clients use intra-ethnic networks?
- What are the limitations of these supports?
- How do your Central American and Mexican clients use government-provided trainings, supports, and information?
- What are the limitations of these supports?
- For nonprofits: What are the perceptions of local government representatives, like law enforcement, licensing, or city agencies, among your clients? Can you site examples that back up these perceptions? Has this changed over time?
- Does your county's sanctuary policy or rhetoric impact your clients?
- For nonprofits: If you could tell local (city or state) government one thing that would help you and your clients, what would that be?
- What could the city/local offices that work with new businesses need to do to improve their interactions with Central American and Mexican clients?
- Do you have organizational materials you can share/highlight like an annual report?
- Do you conduct surveys or otherwise track data?
- Do you have recommendations of organizations to speak with?
- What data sources do you use to track larger trends in entrepreneurship?
- Do you have individual entrepreneurs you would recommend I reach out to? Could you provide an introduction, or could I use your name?
- What am I missing in my thinking?

Appendix B: Entrepreneur Questions

- What is your age/race/country of origin/gender/educational level/marital status/number of children?
- What is your business?
- What led you to open your own business?
- How long have you been in business?
- What challenges have you had with your business?
- How is the climate for immigrant businesses in [location]?
- What business regulations have impacted your business or the businesses of your peers?
- Are there immigration laws or regulations that impact your business?
- Does sanctuary policy impact your business? (variations below)
 - X County is a sanctuary jurisdiction. Does this impact your business?
 - X County recently had a 287(g). Did this impact your business?
 - In the recent past, X County allowed the local police to work with immigration. Not now. Did this policy impact your business?
- If X were not a sanctuary county, would you still have opened your business?
- Were you worried about sharing personal information on your business paperwork?
- Where do you go to get help or information for your business?
- Have you received any training or workshops for your business from any organization?
- If you have expanded your business, why did you decide to do so?
- If you have downsized or closed a business, why did you decide to do so?
- What prevents people like you from starting a business?
- What was your experience in terms of business success when Obama was president? Trump? Now? Are there differences?
- How did you get the money to start your business?
- Do you use banks? Do you get loans “on the street?”
- Without access to loans, how could you open a business?
- Is your company registered? Is it a sole proprietorship, limited liability company, or something different?
- Do you use an ITIN (Individual Taxpayer Identification Number)?
- What is your annual/monthly income?
- Do you have employees? How many?
- How many employees do you have on the payroll?
- How many do you pay under the table?
- Do you have confidence in or any problems with local government representatives, such as:
 - Licensing and inspections
 - Business Registration
 - Business Managers
 - Corridor Managers
 - Trash
 - Parking
 - Police
 - Sheriff
 - Others who administer schools, health centers, or other agencies
- Did you have a business in your country of origin? If so, what was it? How was the experience? How was it different from your experience in the U.S.?
- Do you work with an accountant? A notary public? Tell me about your experience.
- How do you do the paperwork for your business?
- How has COVID affected your business?
- Did you request assistance for your business for COVID? If so, from where?
- What is your plan for the future of your business? What are your goals?
- What are your recommendations on what the city could do to help or support immigrant businesses, especially those without papers?
- If political leader X were here right now, what would you tell him/her/them to help your business?
- Do you have recommendations of others I could talk to?
- What advice do you have for me as I do this research?