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**Voting Behavior in Violence-Plagued New Democracies:  
Crime Voting in Mexico's Recent Presidential Elections**

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**by**

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## **Abstract**

### **Voting Behavior in Violence-Plagued New Democracies: Crime Voting in Mexico's Recent Presidential Elections**

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Crime and violence are central issues for citizens in new democracies, many of which are increasingly threatened by organized crime and “brown areas” of lawlessness. The impact of crime concerns on vote choice, however, has been largely overlooked in the existing literature on voting behavior, which has centered on the role of partisanship, clientelistic linkages, or economic voting in explaining electoral outcomes. In this paper, I argue that crime voting explains much of vote choice in high crime new democracies. Using Mexico as a representative case of a new democracy facing rising violence, I find that crime considerations significantly affect vote choice in the country's recent presidential elections. In 2006, crime views had up to five times the effect on vote choice as economic considerations. In 2012, despite stronger partisanship, clientelism, and economic effects, and a dearth of candidate attention to the issue, crime perceptions remained a significant predictor of vote choice. This finding suggests crime matters to vote choice and should be incorporated into models of voting behavior in violence-plagued new democracies.

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## **Introduction**

Crime and violence are central issues for citizens in new democracies, many of which are increasingly threatened by organized crime and “brown areas” of lawlessness (O’Donnell 1993). In Latin America’s consolidating democracies, homicide rates are three times the world average and the proportion of voters who consider crime to be their country’s most urgent problem has increased dramatically in recent years, quintupling between 1995 and 2010 (Casas-Zamora 2010). In Mexico alone, an estimated 60,000 people were killed in drug-related violence between 2006 and 2012 (Human Rights Watch). Since 2006, crime has surpassed economic concerns as most Mexicans’ primary concern (BCG-Excelsior). Despite the urgency and salience of the issue for citizens in many new democracies, however, predominant theories of voting behavior have largely overlooked the effect of crime on vote choice.

Crime voting has been neglected in the literature on voting behavior because issue voting is thought to either be negligible, compared to the effect of partisanship or clientelism, or predominantly based on economic issues. Behavioralists, for instance, argue that party identification explains almost all of individual vote choice; other factors are thought to matter only at the margins. Other researchers similarly dismiss the role of issues but instead highlight the role of clientelistic linkages in explaining voting patterns (Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004, Schedler 2002, Stokes et al. 2013). Adherents of economic voting theories, on the other hand, do believe in issue voting but consider it to be limited to economic considerations (Lewis-Beck 1990, Duch and Stevenson 2005, Downs 1957, Vavreck 2009, Moreno 2007).

These factors may not adequately explain vote choice in high crime new democracies. Partisanship is often weak, due to incipient competitive democracy, and

fails to behave as a social identity, as in established democracies. Clientelism has grown increasingly difficult with democratic competition and the privatization of previously lucrative state resource slush funds used for vote buying under neoliberal reforms (see Greene 2007 on Mexico). Economic theories implicitly assume that economic concerns trump other considerations in public opinion polls; as noted above, this is not always the case in countries confronting severe challenges to citizen security. Crime now rivals or dominates issue concerns for voters, so crime may figure prominently in citizens' vote choices.

In this paper, I show that crime considerations significantly affect vote choice, using Mexico's 2006 and 2012 presidential elections as representative cases of elections in high crime new democracies. In 2006, only partisanship impacted vote choice at a higher level than voters' perceptions of candidates' ability to address crime. In 2012, party identification, economic evaluations and clientelism played a greater causal role, yet crime perceptions were still a significant predictor of vote choice. This is surprising since none of the 2012 candidates campaigned on the issue, as Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party (PAN) did towards the end of the 2006 race in particular. Even in elections during which politicians largely ignore the issue, then, crime explains an important part of citizens' voting behavior. This finding suggests that crime matters to vote choice and should be incorporated into models of voting behavior in violence-plagued new democracies.

The next section of this paper discusses the limitations of existing approaches in explaining vote choice in Mexico. In the third section, I draw on the assumptions of the economic voting literature and work on "valence" issues to establish that crime should matter to vote choice in countries with high crime concerns through voters' evaluations of candidates' competence in confronting the issue. The fourth section derives observable



implications of the competing theories and offers an empirical test using public opinion data from the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections in Mexico. The concluding section addresses the implications of these findings for models of voting behavior and theories of issue emergence in new democracies.

## **Limitations of existing approaches in explaining vote choice in violence-plagued new democracies**

The determinants of vote choice at the core of existing theories on voting behavior are weak in many new democracies facing insecurity, leaving substantial space for voting on the crime issue. After briefly addressing extant theories and their limitations in many of today's crime-afflicted new democracies, I argue for the incorporation of crime concerns in models of vote choice.

First, party identification is often at the core of models of vote choice, but partisanship is both weaker overall and less likely to predict vote choice in new democracies than in established ones. Partisanship is considered a social identity that remains remarkably stable over an individual's lifetime (Green et al. 2002), providing a useful heuristic shortcut to information processing in a noisy political environment (Riker 1983). Lupu (2013), drawing on Latin American cases, argues that partisanship seems to develop in similar ways in old and new democracies.

The effect of partisanship on vote choice, however, should be far more limited in places where partisanship is still weak and not yet a crystalized social identity. In many new democracies, parties are too new or ideologically flexible to provide a reliable heuristic in voting (Seawright 2012, Roberts 2013). Even in places with established parties that survived authoritarian periods, partisans are largely limited to an older and more politically informed subset of the population (Lupu 2013). On the whole, 34 percent of Latin Americans claim a party affiliation, according to the Americas Barometer 2010 (see Table 1). Party identification should influence vote choice in new democracies for an

increasing number of voters over time, as they consolidate, but fails to determine vote behavior patterns in early elections; in that vacuum, issue voting on crime may emerge as an important predictor of vote choice.

Second, some scholars argue that clientelistic relationships take partisanship's place as the primary determinant of voting behavior in new democracies but overlook structural changes that have slowly reduced the power of political machines. Clientelism, or the exchange of short-term, typically material goods for political support, is generally thought to be the primary driver of vote choice in places where political "patrons" can successfully reward or punish voters based on their ballots.<sup>1</sup> In general, poorer voters are thought to be more likely to engage in clientelism because the marginal benefit of clientelistic goods is greater than for higher income voters (Stokes et al. 2012, Schedler 2002). Authors such as Dalton and Weldon (2007) and Roberts and Wibbels (1999) have argued that voters' links to parties in developing democracies are indeed clientelistic in nature.

Neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and 1990s in regions including Latin America, however, have made clientelism more complicated for patrons. The privatization of a range of previously state-owned enterprises, most notably, lowered the amount of state resources available for paying off supporters (Greene 2007). It is also unclear if certain parties systematically benefit from the remaining resources due to incumbency advantages. On the one hand, the incumbent party in the executive office could make use

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<sup>1</sup> See Lawson and Greene 2012 for an alternative, reciprocity-based argument about clientelism.

	<b>% Partisanship*</b>	<b>% Clientelism*</b>	<b>Most important problem**</b>	<b>Homicide rate*** (per 100,000)</b>
Argentina	20	18	Crime/public safety (37%)	5
Belize	29	17	-	42
Bolivia	31	17	Economic problems (21%)	9
Brazil	30	13	Healthcare problems (28%)	23
Chile	12	6	Crime/public safety (22%)	4
Colombia	37	15	Unemployment (31%)	33
Costa Rica	52	9	Crime/public safety (38%)	11
Dominican Republic	55	22	Crime/public safety (20%)	25
Ecuador	16	8	Economic problems (57%)	18
El Salvador	34	10	Crime/public safety (44%)	66
Guatemala	18	14	Crime/public safety (35%)	41
Guyana	28	6	-	18
Honduras	44	-	Crime/public safety (25%)	6
Jamaica	43	6	-	52
Mexico	29	17	Crime/public safety (35%)	18
Nicaragua	43	6	Economic problems (78%)	13
Panama	30	18	Crime/public safety (46%)	22
Paraguay	39	16	Unemployment (35%)	12
Peru	21	12	Unemployment (20%)	5
Suriname	45	7	-	14
Trinidad & Tobago	28	5	-	35
Uruguay	66	6	Crime/public safety (28%)	6
Venezuela	32	12	Crime/public safety (64%)	49
<i>Average</i>	<i>34.03</i>	<i>11.79</i>		<i>22.93</i>

Note: Countries highlighted where crime/public safety is citizens' primary concern.

Sources: \*Americas Barometer 2010, \*\*Latinobarometer 2010, \*\*\*UNODC Homicide Statistics 2011.

Table 1: Partisanship, clientelism and primary concern in Latin America, 2010-2011.

of the reduced pie, as some argue has occurred in Argentina (Seawright 2012). Budgetary constraints, on the other hand, have been enforced at the national level to a much greater extent than at the state level. Indeed, large financial transfers to state governments in Mexico, for example, have remained largely free of strings and accountability (Trillo, Díaz Cayeros, and Gamboa González 2002). In that case, perhaps the lingering effects of clientelism advantage the parties with the most state governments and thus access to remaining resources. In either case, Stokes and colleagues (2012) and the results of the Americas Barometer 2010 suggest that clientelism affects the vote choice of about 12 percent of Latin Americans. This leaves substantial room for issue voting on crime in countries plagued by violence.

Finally, some scholars consider economic voting to be the decisive factor in vote outcomes because it is typically the dominant issue for voters; however, this is not the case in many new democracies facing crime threats. Most contemporary scholars argue that voters engage in retrospective and/or prospective economic voting. In a strong economy, voters will reward the incumbent party; in a weak economy, voters will punish incumbents for their poor performance by supporting challengers with the greatest perceived capacity to manage the economy. Indeed, many recent studies have found a positive relationship between economic performance and support for the incumbent party in new democracies like Mexico (Paolino 2005, Buendía 1996, 2000, Magaloni 1999, 2006).

This relationship should hold when economic considerations are the dominant issues for voters, as they were in Mexico in the years under investigation in the

aforementioned studies, but crime may rival or dominate economic issues in voting calculations where it is more salient. According to the Latinobarómetro, concerns about crime increased five-fold between 1995 and 2010 in Latin America. As can be seen in Table 1, crime is now the dominant concern of citizens in most Latin American countries. Models of vote choice should include stances on the issues of greatest importance to voters, which is now crime for many citizens of new democracies. In addition, we should expect the relative effects of the two priority issues for voters to depend in part on the presidential campaigns themselves (Carmines and Stimson 1989, Burton and Shea 2010, Hillygus and Shields 2008). As Vavreck (2009) has argued, the “message matters:” citizens hearing largely economic messages from candidates should vote more on economic issues, while crime campaigns should privilege that issue in voters’ decisions. In crime-heavy campaigns in places where the issue is the primary concern for voters, the crime issue should dominate economic concerns in vote choice; the reverse should be true for economy-heavy campaigns.

## **Incorporating crime into models of vote choice**

In general, crime is more likely to affect vote choice in countries where voters are concerned about the issue. Crime should explain much of vote choice, moreover, in countries where partisan identification is unsolidified, clientelism constrained, and crime at least as salient an issue as the economy. There are three further theoretical reasons why we should expect crime to affect vote choice in such countries as new democracies confronting crime.

First, individual exposure to crime, which is higher in violence-plagued countries, has been shown to raise concerns about crime, increasing its salience and likely impact on vote choice. Baker et al. (1983) argue that victimization is the foremost determinant of an individual's perception about crime. This observation is analogous to the "pocketbook" theory about economic voting that personal experience (individual victimization in this case, rather than one's personal economy) is the driving force behind concerns on an issue (Markus 1988). In Mexico, which has seen a spike in violence since the late 1990s, contemporary surveys show that one in four citizens has now been a victim of crime or has a close family member who has been a victim of crime (Consulta Mitofsky 2014). If victimization drives crime perceptions, rising violence levels should result in greater concerns about crime; these should thus have a growing effect on vote choice.

Second, there is evidence that crime concerns should be even more salient when personal experience resonates with media coverage. The media plays the crucial role of translating personal experiences into political attitudes about an issue (Lewis-Beck et al.

2008, 26). Mutz (1994) shows that even when individuals have personal experience with an issue (her research focuses on unemployment), private incidence becomes political when activated by media coverage. The resonance hypothesis asserted by Gerbner et al. (1980) too supports the media's moderating role between the personal and political: they find media portrayals of crime to be most persuasive when they mesh with personal experience. The extensive and graphic coverage of crime in the media, including in Mexico, should thus make individual exposure to crime all the more salient.

Finally, the impact of crime concerns on vote choice should apply beyond those with personal experience because the media informs broader perceptions on crime due to its priming ability. McCombs and Shaw (1972) show that the media can influence the salience of a topic based on the extent and tone of its coverage. Graber (1980) and Surette (2007) both show that the majority of the public receives its information about crime from the mass media rather than from personal experience. This would concur with the finding of the "sociotropic" model of economic voting that perceived national conditions exert a consistent effect on individual vote decisions, even when personal circumstances are held constant (Markus 1988). Gordon and Heath (1981) demonstrate that fluctuations in perceptions of crime can be attributed to a strong media effect. The wisdom of "if it bleeds, it leads" seems to ring true from New York (Fishman 1978) to Argentina (Stanley 2005) to Mexico, as commercial interests ultimately present a perhaps exaggerated or even distorted "reality" about crime conditions. The salience of crime should thus extend to consumers of media in the country, beyond just those with personal exposure to crime.



Crime should thus impact vote choice in countries afflicted by violence due to high levels of personal exposure, resonance, and media priming. Specifically, Stokes (1963) argues that voters will choose between candidates in part based on candidates' perceived competence in addressing crime. Since crime is a valence issue in politics, on which everyone (except criminals) shares the same position that less crime is better, voters distinguish between candidates based on their competence to address the issue. Indeed, Mexican respondents in the Mexico 2006 Panel Study and the Mexico 2012 Panel Study placed the candidates' respective abilities to address crime at different levels (see the Appendix). As such, we should expect voters' perceptions of candidates' ability to confront crime to affect vote choice in high crime new democracies.

## **Modeling and testing the determinants of vote choice in Mexico's recent elections**

In the previous sections, I have addressed several approaches to explaining vote choice in new democracies; I now formalize their predictions into hypotheses to be tested. First, as developed in the above section, I hypothesize that (1) *Crime will significantly affect vote choice in new democracies confronting insecurity*. Second, drawing on the partisanship literature on democratic consolidation, I expect that (2) *The impact of partisan identification will increase over time*. Third, the work on clientelism provides two competing hypotheses: (3a) *Clientelism will benefit incumbent parties at the national level* and its converse, that (3b) *Clientelism will benefit parties competing at the national level that control more state governments*. Finally, studies on campaign effects suggest that campaign themes impact which issues are most important to voters on Election Day. As such, (4a) *The economy should matter more to vote choice than crime when it is the focus of presidential campaigns* and (4b) *Crime should matter more to vote choice than the economy when it is the focus of presidential campaigns*.

In order to evaluate these hypotheses, I evaluate vote choice in Mexico's 2006 and 2012 presidential elections. These elections provide a test of the hypothesized determinants of vote choice in a democratizing country facing insecurity and violence over time. I rely on data from the Mexico 2006 Panel Study and the Mexico 2012 Panel Study. The Mexico Panel Studies include measures of these explanatory variables, as

detailed below, for approximately 800 respondents from a nationally representative sample for each election.<sup>2</sup>

I use alternative-specific conditional logit to model vote choice. I employ this model because the dependent variable of vote choice depends in part on the individual-specific variables unique to each respondent, such as partisanship and clientelistic relationships, and in part on candidate-specific variables. These latter so-called “alternative-specific” variables take on different values for each “alternative” for the same respondent (Liao 1994, 59). For example, the evaluation of crime fighting ability will depend on the candidate specified; each respondent will have different evaluations of the three candidates. The alternative-specific conditional logit model allows an individual’s utility of an alternative to be based in part on characteristics of the alternative itself (Alvarez and Nagler 1994, McFadden 1973). This version of conditional logit is thus ideal for this study because it accommodates both alternative-specific and individual-specific variables in a multi-party system (Alvarez and Nagler 1994).<sup>3</sup>

The dependent variable of vote choice is trichotomous. In 2006, the right-of-center National Action Party (PAN) ran Felipe Calderón, the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and leftist allies supported Andrés Manuel López

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<sup>2</sup> I use the waves closest to Election Day as a cross-sectional dataset. In 2006, the explanatory variables are from Wave II and Wave III, measured immediately before and after the election, respectively; the dependent variable of vote choice is from the same individuals in the post-election Wave III. In 2012, the explanatory and dependent variables are both from the final wave, Wave II, since all relevant questions were asked in that wave.

<sup>3</sup> Note that this model assumes a multinomial distribution, which is justified by the theory, since all the candidates are politically unique (Liao 1994, 4). It also entails the assumption of independence of irrelevant alternatives (IIA); Dow and Endersby (2004) demonstrate that the property is not particularly restrictive in similar applications. The coefficients will be estimated using maximum likelihood estimation, since the method produces estimates with robust statistical properties and is useful when dealing with special distributions.

Obrador, and the centrist former ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) ran Roberto Madrazo. In 2012, the PAN candidate was Josefina Vázquez Mota, the PRD and leftist coalition candidate was again Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and the PRI supported Enrique Peña Nieto. In the model, I assign PAN candidates the baseline value of 0, the PRI candidates the value of 1, and PRD candidates the value of 2. I drop non-responses, fourth-party and annulled votes from the measure.

To measure crime evaluations of candidates, I use a measure of candidate competence in addressing crime.<sup>4</sup> In 2006, the relevant survey question was: “In your opinion, how capable of reducing crime is [candidate name]; very, somewhat, not very or not at all?”<sup>5</sup> After dropping “don’t know” and “not applicable” responses, the measure in both elections is on a four-point scale with 1 as “not at all” and 4 as “very.”

For partisanship, I use a measure of partisanship identification from the following question: “In general, would you say you identify with the PAN, the PRI or the PRD? Would you say you identify strongly with (...) or only somewhat with (...)?”<sup>6</sup> Survey workers recorded one of nine possible answers: strong PAN, weak PAN, strong PRI, weak PRI, strong PRD, weak PRD, other, none, and don’t know/not applicable. After dropping the don’t know/not applicable responses, I assign respondents a value of 0, 1, or 2 for partisanship for each alternative. A strong PAN supporter, for instance, is given a

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<sup>4</sup> Note that for each variable, the survey question utilized varies in its wording between 2006 and 2012. While the questions enable an analysis of vote choice in 2006 and vote choice in 2012, the added measurement error makes comparisons between the coefficients of variables *across* elections speculative. Comparisons of the values across elections are thus suggestive rather than conclusive.

<sup>5</sup> The 2012 survey question is slightly different: “How capable is [candidate name] at reducing crime and insecurity in the country: very, somewhat, a little, not at all?”

<sup>6</sup> In 2012, the question was changed slightly to “Generally, do you identify with the PAN, PRI or PRD? Do you identify strongly or weakly?” The options are the same.

value of 2 for the PAN candidate and 0 for the PRD and PRI candidates. Weak partisans have a value of 1 for their party's alternative and 0 otherwise.

To measure clientelism, I use a similar but distinct question for each election year since the survey language changed. In 2012, respondents were read the following question: "Let's suppose there is a person named Gabriel/Gabriela who is a citizen like you and lives in a community like yours. If someone offers Gabriel/Gabriela a large and varied basket of food in exchange for his/her vote, do you think Gabriel/Gabriela would accept?" The measure is thus dichotomous.<sup>7</sup> In 2006, the final part of the question was phrased: "A representative of a political party gives money to Gabriel(a) to buy a week's groceries. In your opinion, how much of an obligation should Gabriel/Gabriela feel to vote for this political party – a lot, some, a little, or none?" The measure in 2006 is thus on a four-point scale.<sup>8</sup>

To measure perceptions of candidates' economic competence, I use a measure analogous to that of crime positions: how capable the respondent considers the different candidates in managing the economy. Like the crime question, the variable is a four-point

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<sup>7</sup> Survey workers recorded an answer of yes, no, don't know, or not applicable. Note that this question may have confused some respondents, as the question could appear to ask either whether Gabriel/Gabriela would accept the basket of food or if she would accept the trade of the basket for the vote. As a result, it probably overestimates the prevalence of clientelism. Indeed, after dropping the "don't know" and "not applicable" responses (one percent and .9 percent, respectively), a full two-thirds of the sample answered in the affirmative to this question that Gabriel/Gabriela would accept the gift. I continue to use the dichotomous measure, however, as it provides a particularly difficult test of my hypothesis that crime stances will affect vote choice.

<sup>8</sup> Unlike the 2012 question, Gabriel/Gabriela is not given the opportunity to decline the gift, and the measure is on a four-points scale rather than dichotomous. Still, the basket of goods in the 2012 question is similar, the main character is again a fictional character with the same name, and a smaller but still high percentage of the respondents answered that they would feel at least a little obligated.

scale. The 2006 survey question reads, “In your opinion, how capable of managing the economy is [candidate name]; very, somewhat, not very or not at all?”<sup>9</sup>

Finally, I include gender and age in the model to test if either variable has a systematic effect on vote choice in Mexico’s elections. I have no firm expectations about their effects across these elections, so refrain from including related hypotheses about the two variables.

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<sup>9</sup> In 2012, the question is: ““How capable is [candidate name] at manag[ing] the country’s economy: very, somewhat, a little, or not at all?” See Questions 16-18, subsection A, in the 2012 Mexico Panel Survey Wave II: <http://web.mit.edu/clawson/www/polisci/research/mexico06/files/secondwaveenglish.pdf>.

## Results of empirical tests of vote choice in Mexico's recent elections

The results of the models for the two elections are presented below in Table 2 and Table 3. I address the support for each hypotheses in separate discussion sections in the following subsections.

### *Crime evaluations significantly affect vote choice*

I find Hypothesis (1) to be empirically supported in the Mexican case: crime is a significant predictor of vote choice in Mexico's recent presidential elections. In 2006, as seen in Table 2, a one-unit increase in their evaluation raises the log odds of supporting

	PRI vs. PAN	PRD vs. PAN
<b>Crime evaluations</b>		0.924*
		(0.097)
<b>Party identification</b>		1.432*
		(0.097)
<b>Economic evaluations</b>		0.202*
		(0.103)
<b>Clientelism</b>	-0.016	-0.018
	(0.106)	(0.087)
<b>Age</b>	0.011	0.002
	(0.010)	(0.008)
<b>Gender</b>	-0.154	-0.697*
	(0.280)	(0.226)
<b>Number of cases</b>		836
<b>Wald test (with 9 degrees of freedom)</b>		372.83
<b>Prob &gt; chi squared</b>		0.000

*\*Statistically significant in two-tailed test at  $p < .05$ . Standard errors in parentheses.*

Table 2: Vote choice in Mexico's 2006 presidential election.

	PRI vs. PAN	PRD vs. PAN
<b>Crime evaluations</b>		0.885*
		(0.164)
<b>Party identification</b>		1.833*
		(0.161)
<b>Economic evaluations</b>		1.110*
		(0.165)
<b>Clientelism</b>	0.916*	1.064*
	(0.399)	(0.456)
<b>Age</b>	-0.014	-0.024
	(0.011)	(0.012)
<b>Gender</b>	0.067	-.478
	(0.355)	(0.400)
<b>Number of cases</b>		772
<b>Wald test (with 9 degrees of freedom)</b>		241.98
<b>Prob &gt; chi squared</b>		0.000

*\*Statistically significant in two-tailed test at  $p < .05$ . Standard errors in parentheses.*

Table 3: Vote choice in Mexico's 2012 presidential election.

that candidate by .92 ( $p = .00$ ). This effect is almost five times the size of the effect of voters' perceptions of candidates' economic capacity, at .20 ( $p = .05$ ).<sup>10</sup> In 2012, the impact of crime consideration is almost as high: as seen in Table 3, a one-unit increase in a candidates' perceived crime competence raised the log odds of voting for them by .88 ( $p = .00$ ). These figures are helpful for tracking the impact of crime views on vote choice across elections, but it is also useful to compare the impact of changes in the values of the explanatory variables on likely support for each candidate. For this purpose, I compute the marginal effects of each variable for each candidate, as presented in Table 4 and Table 5.

<sup>10</sup> These two variables are on the same scale and thus their coefficients can be compared.



	Marginal effect on probability of PAN vote	Marginal effect on probability of PRI vote	Marginal effect on probability of PRD vote	Mean
<b>Crime evaluations</b>				
Calderón (PAN)	0.226* (0.024)	-0.048* (0.007)	-0.178* (0.020)	2.51
Madrazo (PRI)	-0.074* (0.007)	0.099* (0.013)	-0.051* (0.007)	2.28
López Obrador (PRD)	-0.178* (0.020)	-0.051* (0.007)	0.229* (0.024)	2.36
<b>Economic evaluations</b>				
Calderón (PAN)	0.049* (0.025)	-0.010* (0.005)	-0.039* (0.020)	2.74
Madrazo (PRI)	-0.010* (0.005)	0.021* (0.011)	-0.011* (0.006)	2.29
López Obrador (PRD)	-0.039* (0.020)	-0.011* (0.006)	0.050* (0.026)	2.29
<b>Party identification</b>				
Calderón (PAN)	0.347* (0.025)	-0.074* (0.009)	-0.273* (0.023)	0.36
Madrazo (PRI)	-0.074* (0.009)	0.153* (0.016)	-0.079* (0.009)	0.32
López Obrador (PRD)	-0.274* (0.023)	-0.079* (0.009)	0.353* (0.024)	0.39
<b>Clientelism</b>	.004 (0.018)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.004 (.020)	2.10
<b>Age</b>	-0.001 (0.519)	0.001 (0.001)	0.000 (0.002)	41.20
<b>Gender</b>	.142* (0.051)	0.022 (0.027)	-0.164* (0.051)	N/A
<b>Total probability</b>	0.423	0.122	0.455	

\*Statistically significant in two-tailed test at  $p < .05$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 4: Marginal effects of variables on probability of vote choice in Mexico's 2006 election, by party.

	Marginal effect on probability of PAN vote	Marginal effect on probability of PRI vote	Marginal effect on probability of PRD vote	Mean
<b>Crime evaluations</b>				
Vázquez Mota (PAN)	0.115* (0.024)	-0.090* (0.019)	-0.025* (0.007)	2.44
Peña Nieto (PRI)	-0.090* (0.019)	0.198* (0.037)	-0.108* (0.023)	2.63
López Obrador (PRD)	-0.025* (0.007)	-0.108* (0.023)	0.133* (0.028)	2.34
<b>Economic evaluations</b>				
Vázquez Mota (PAN)	0.144* (0.026)	-0.113* (0.021)	-0.039* (0.020)	2.55
Peña Nieto (PRI)	-0.113* (0.020)	0.248* (0.037)	-0.011* (0.006)	2.75
López Obrador (PRD)	-0.031* (0.008)	-0.136* (0.024)	0.050* (0.026)	2.37
<b>Party identification</b>				
Vázquez Mota (PAN)	0.238* (0.029)	-0.186* (0.023)	-0.052* (0.011)	0.30
Peña Nieto (PRI)	-0.186* (0.023)	0.410* (0.036)	-0.224* (0.032)	0.58
López Obrador (PRD)	-0.052* (0.011)	-0.224* 0.032	0.276* (0.039)	0.29
<b>Clientelism</b>	-0.123* (0.018)	-0.075 (0.080)	-0.080 (0.053)	1.67
<b>Age</b>	0.002 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.002)	39.72
<b>Gender</b>	0.007 (0.043)	0.074 (0.069)	-0.080 (0.053)	N/A
<b>Total probability</b>	0.153	0.662	0.185	

\*Statistically significant in two-tailed test at  $p < .05$ . Standard errors in parentheses.

Table 5: Marginal effects of variables on probability of vote choice in Mexico's 2012 election, by party.

From these tables, it is clear that crime evaluations drove much of vote choice in both elections. In 2006, summarized in Table 4, Calderón and López Obrador were the biggest benefactors of crime voting. As depicted in Table 6(a), a one-unit increase from the mean in the evaluation of the PAN candidate's crime competence, holding all other variables constant at their means, boosted the probability of voting for him by 23 percent ( $p=.00$ ).<sup>11</sup> The same one-unit increase for PAN decreased the likelihood of supporting the PRD candidate by 18 percent and for the PRI candidate by five percent. The magnitude of the effect of crime evaluations was equally large for López Obrador. As seen in Table 6(c), increasing competence evaluations of one unit from the mean made respondents 23 percent more likely to vote for the PRD candidate, while reducing support for his PAN rival by 18 percent and his PRI rival by five percent.<sup>12</sup> Finally, higher perceptions of the PRI candidate's competence in addressing crime boosted his support as well, as seen in Table 6(b). Voters were 10 percent more likely to vote for Madrazo when their evaluations of his crime competence increased by one unit from the mean. That increase caused declines in likely votes for his competition by equal amounts of five percent.

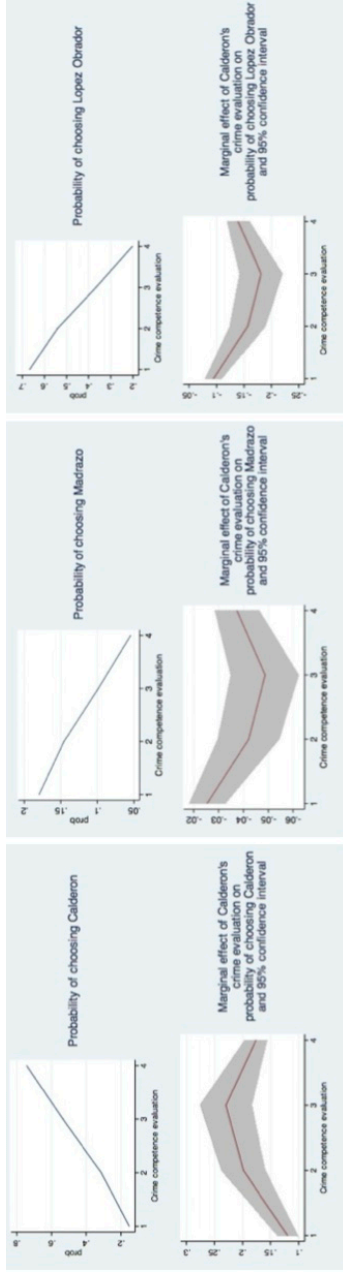
In 2012, the PRI is the greatest beneficiary of rising crime evaluations. In this election, as seen in Table 5, a one-unit increase from the mean in Peña Nieto's perceived crime competence, holding all other variables constant at their means, raised the

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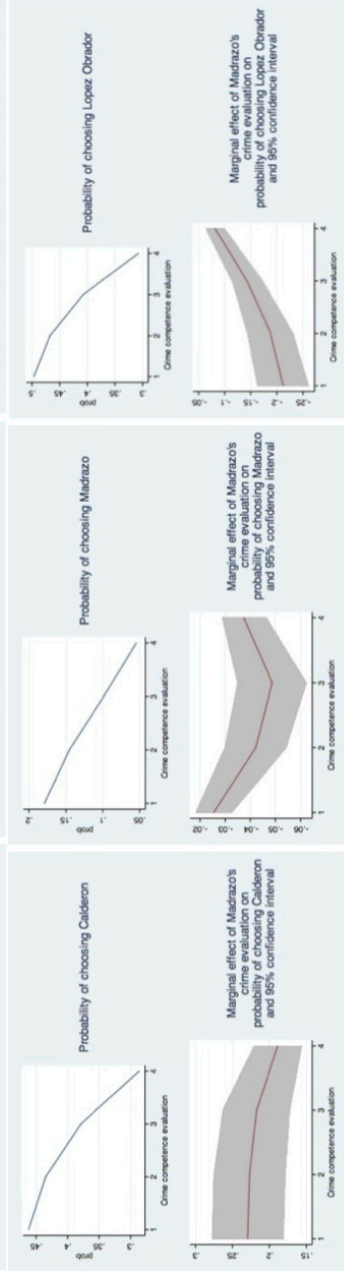
<sup>11</sup> To see this in Table 4, note that moving from the mean of Calderón's crime evaluations, 2.51 out of the possible 4.0, to one higher unit, 3.51, has a marginal effect on the probability of choosing Calderón of .226, or 22.6 percent.

<sup>12</sup> The numbering of the figures follows the order of the alternatives for consistency and comparability across the two elections, despite variation in the greatest beneficiaries of crime evaluations. The PAN candidates, then, are in Figures 1 and 4, the PRI in Figures 2 and 5, and the PRD in Figures 3 and 6.

a. Probability of vote choice given **Calderon's crime evaluations** and marginal effect of these evaluations on probability of vote choice.



b. Probability of vote choice given **Madrazo's crime evaluations** and marginal effect of these evaluations on probability of vote choice.



c. Probability of vote choice given **López Obrador's crime evaluations** and marginal effect of these evaluations on probability of vote choice.

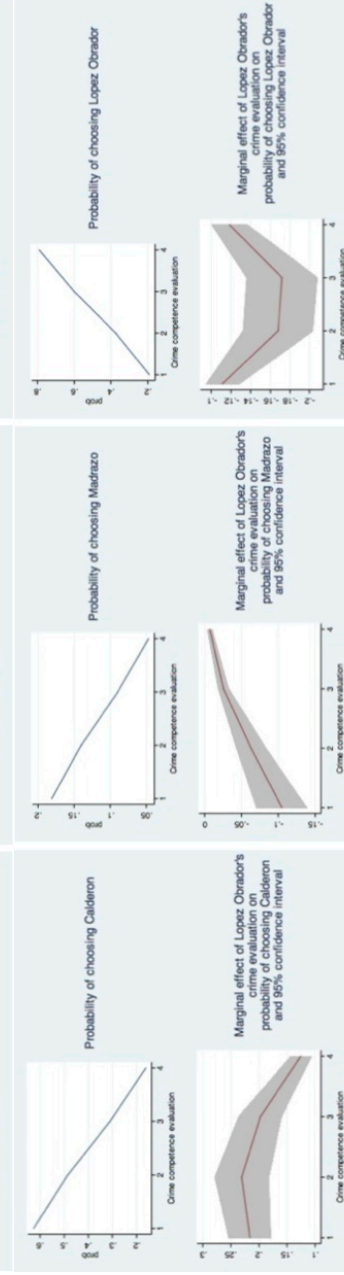
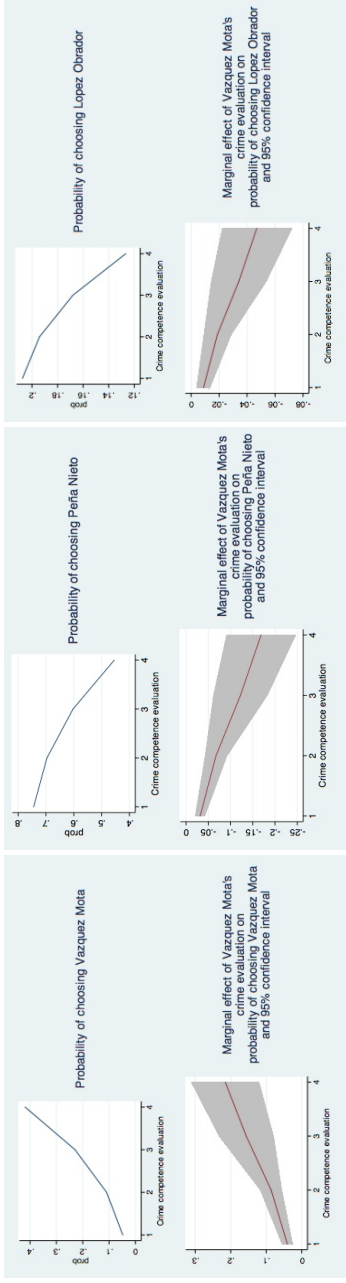


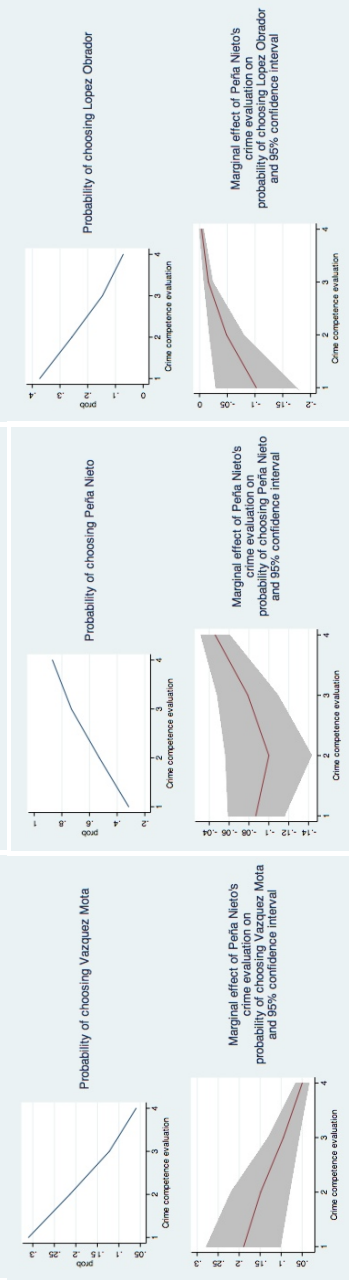
Table 6 (a - c):

Probability of 2006 vote choice given candidate crime evaluations and marginal effects of candidate crime evaluations on probability of vote choice.

a. Probability of vote choice given **Vázquez Mota's crime evaluations** and marginal effect of these evaluations on probability of vote choice.



b. Probability of vote choice given **Peña Nieto's crime evaluations** and marginal effect of these evaluations on probability of vote choice.



c. Probability of vote choice given **López Obrador's crime evaluations** and marginal effect of these evaluations on probability of vote choice.

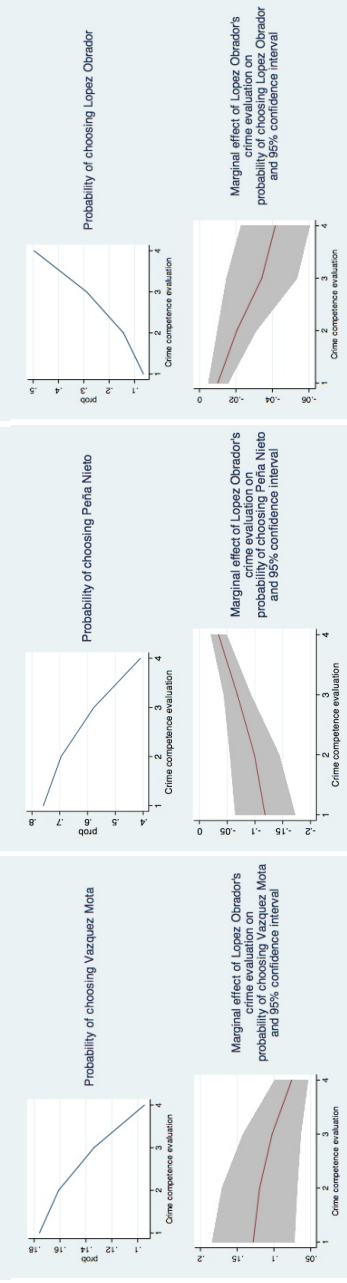


Table 7 (a - c):

Probability of 2012 vote choice given candidate crime evaluations and marginal effects of candidate crime evaluations on probability of vote choice.

probability of voting for him by 20 percent. That increase made voters 11 percent less likely to support his PRD rival and nine percent less likely to vote for the PAN candidate, as seen in Table 7(b). López Obrador in this election received of boost of 13 percent in the likelihood of receiving a vote for one-unit increases from his mean in crime evaluations, as seen in Figure 7(c), which also hurt probable support for the PRI (by 11 percent) and, to a lesser extent, for the PAN (by three percent). Lastly, likely votes for Vázquez Mota increased by 11 percent with rising increases from the mean, as seen in Table 7(a). As was true of López Obrador, better evaluations for the PAN candidate mostly damaged probable support for the PRI (by nine percent); they lowered the likelihood of voting for the PRD by two percent.

### *Greater partisanship effects over time*

Party identification is statistically significant in both elections and increasing in magnitude over time, consistent with Hypothesis (2). In 2006, as seen in Table 2, a one-unit increase in partisanship resulted in an increase of 1.42 in the log odds of supporting their party's candidate ( $p = .00$ ). By 2012, that number had indeed increased. In that election, a one-unit rise in partisanship increased the log odds of voting for the party's candidate by 1.83 ( $p = .00$ ). The marginal effects suggest that this growth was driven by the large boost to the PRI's likely support in 2012 of increasing partisanship.

In the 2006 election, the PAN and PRD gained the most from increasing partisan identification with their parties. A one-unit increase from their means in partisanship translated into a 35 percent increase in the probability of support for their parties'

candidates. For the PRI, rising partisanship from the mean resulted in a 15 percent increase in the likelihood of voting for Madrazo. In 2012, the impact of partisanship dropped somewhat for the PRD, from 35 percent in 2006 to 28 percent in 2012. For the PAN, the drop was slightly steeper, from 35 percent in 2006 to 24 percent in 2012. The PRI's likely gain from a one-unit increase in partisanship, on the other hand, nearly tripled between 2006 and 2012, to 41 percent. The surge in the marginal effect of partisan identification with the PRI, combined with the lower but still large marginal effects for the PAN and PRD, likely explain the increase in the log odds of partisans supporting their party's candidate observed in the results of the 2006 and 2012 models.

*Inconclusive but suggestive findings on clientelism effects*

The model results do not provide support for Hypothesis (3a) though the 2012 results suggest tentative support for Hypothesis (3b). The effect of clientelism fails to meet conventional tests of significance ( $p = .89, .88$  for the two alternatives) in the 2006 model, as did the marginal effects of clientelism on the probability of support for each candidate. As a result, there is no clear evidence that clientelism either benefits the incumbent party, the PAN in both cases, nor the party with the largest share of state governorships, the PRI in both cases.

In 2012, the clientelism variable is significant in the model results. Compared to the baseline PAN candidate, an increase in clientelism raises the log odds of support by 1.06 ( $p = .02$ ) for López Obrador and .92 ( $p = .02$ ) for Peña Nieto. The figure is high for the PRI, the largest party in terms of state governorships, providing some support for

Hypothesis (3b), but still higher for the PRD. The marginal effects are similarly tentative. The only statistically significant finding is that a one-unit increase from the mean in perceived clientelistic obligation reduced the probability of supporting Calderón by 12 percent. This suggests that clientelism may indeed have benefitted the PRD and/or PRI, though the marginal effects on support for Peña Nieto and López Obrador, which would help determine which benefitted more, fail to reach conventional levels of significance. As such, though one-unit increases from the mean raise the likelihood of support for the PRI candidate by 7 percent ( $p=.35$ ) and for the PRD candidate by 5 percent ( $p=.44$ ), we can have very little confidence in the accuracy of those results. As such, there is no support for Hypothesis (3a) and suggestive evidence only for Hypothesis (3b).

### ***Campaigns and the relative importance of crime and the economy to vote choice***

Crime considerations had a greater impact on vote choice in the 2006 election than economic considerations; in 2012, the effect of economic considerations on vote choice was greater. This result is in line with Hypotheses (4a) and (4b) that voter priorities reflect presidential campaign emphases.

In 2006, Calderón increasingly focused on crime as Election Day neared. “Drug-traffickers will find me to be their worst nightmare,” he said in an early campaign speech (January 21, 2006).<sup>13</sup> A BBC News brief of the electoral prospects released the day before the election noted, “Mr. Calderon has pledged an iron fist approach, with life

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<sup>13</sup> Notimex, available at <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2006/222077.html>.



sentences for kidnappers” (July 6, 2006).<sup>14</sup> In this election, crime evaluations were more important to vote choice than economic evaluations on every measure. The impact of a one-unit change in the log odds of crime evaluations was .92 for crime compared to .20 for economic evaluations, as seen in Table 2. For each candidate, improved competence ratings in crime generated greater likely support than did rising economic evaluations, as seen in Table 4, even for Calderón’s rivals, who campaigned on economic issues. This is consistent with Hypothesis (4a). The impact was over four times greater- 22 percent for crime to five percent for the economy- for Calderón and López Obrador. For Madrazo, the effect was five times greater- 10 percent for crime to two percent for the economy.

In 2012, the candidates shared an economic focus, largely focused on job creation and growth; crime was rarely mentioned.<sup>15</sup> This may have raised the relative importance of economic considerations, which, in accordance with Hypothesis (4b), surpass crime evaluations in this contest, though by a smaller margin than the reverse in 2006. In the model results, one-unit increases in perceptions of candidates’ economic competence increase the log odds of candidate support by 1.11 ( $p = .00$ ) in 2012, compared to .20 in 2006 ( $p = .00$ ). In the marginal effects, economic evaluations also provide a greater boost to likely support across the candidates. With an increase in perceived economic competence of one unit from the mean, the probability of voting for the PRI candidate rose by 25 percent; a fifth higher than the 20 percent for increasing crime evaluations. For the PRD candidate, one-unit increases in economic evaluations from the mean raised the

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<sup>14</sup> Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/5114388.stm>.

<sup>15</sup> See Clare Seelke’s analysis for the Congressional Research Service, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R42548.pdf>.

likelihood of support by 18 percent, compared to 13 percent for increases in perceived crime competence. For the PAN candidate, the increase was 14 percent for economic evaluations and 11 percent for crime evaluations. There is thus some evidence that candidate campaigns condition the relative importance of these issues, in accordance with Hypotheses (4a) and (4b), though the size of the difference varies substantially between 2006, when crime evaluations were four to five times as important as economic considerations, and 2012, when the effects economic evaluations were up to 50% greater than crime views.

### *The effect of gender*

The only additional significant effect was gender in the 2006 elections. Table 2 shows that women were less likely than men to support López Obrador, when compared to the baseline of the PAN candidate, decreasing the log odds of support for the PRD candidate by .70 ( $p = .00$ ). The importance of gender is clearer in the marginal effects, as seen in Table 4. Women were more likely to vote for Calderón, at 15 percent higher rates than men ( $p=.01$ ), and less likely to vote for López Obrador, at 16 percent lower rates than men ( $p=.00$ ). Interestingly, there is no evidence that women were more likely than men to support the PAN in 2012, when the party had its first female candidate, as the results fail to reach conventional significance levels. Nor does it appear that women were less likely to support López Obrador in 2012, when he represented the PRD for the second time.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that crime considerations significantly affected vote choice in Mexico's 2006 and 2012 presidential elections. The effect of perceived candidate competence on crime on candidate support is evident across all candidates; indeed, one-unit increases in crime evaluations boosted likely support for the candidates by up to 23 percent. In 2006, these considerations were second only to partisanship and mattered up to five times more than economic evaluations. The importance of these crime calculations remained weighty in 2012, even as the impact of partisanship increased over time, clientelism became significant in the results, and the presidential candidates emphasized economic issues, likely increasing their salience to voters.

This study has three primary implications. First, scholars should explicitly account for crime voting in countries afflicted by violence. Especially in countries where partisanship and clientelism are limited and crime highly salient, crime perceptions may affect vote choice as it does in Mexico. If so, incorporating crime considerations into models of vote choice will give us greater purchase in explaining voting behavior and electoral outcomes. One avenue for future research, then, would be to test the relative effects of this model on a broader dataset of new democracies confronting violence.

Second, the evidence of crime voting carries implications for electoral campaigns. Candidates in elections across Latin American democracies threatened by crime, for example, vary in the extent to which they address the issue, if at all, in their campaigns. Clearly citizens vote in large part based on crime perceptions, which begs the question of why more candidates do not campaign on the issue. Two fruitful research projects could

emerge from this disconnect. First, disaggregating the extent of crime voting by voter type could yield insight into candidate calculations. If the individuals that vote most based on crime are also the strongest partisans, for example, it may be unnecessary for candidates to address the issue. On the other hand, crime could be a mobilizing issue that would drive strong partisans to the polls on Election Day, in which case it would be an advantageous issue for parties. If instead the “leaners” vote the most based on crime, a study could elucidate the relative ability of campaigns to persuade weak partisans to their side.

This disaggregation would complement a second future research agenda about the “supply side” of campaigns. Even if campaigning on crime could potentially boost electoral support, there may be risks to candidates who politicize the issue. These risks could pertain to personal security, if a vocal candidate becomes a target for criminals. They could also include the political risks of appearing too weak on crime in an environment of heightened citizen concern, on the one hand, or too authoritarian in a context of democratization, on the other hand.

In sum, this study demonstrates that crime affects vote choice in a high crime, new democracy. It suggests that crime should be incorporated into models of vote choice in other violence-plagued new democracies, likely yielding improvements to studies of voting behavior. Finally, the findings highlight potential future research agendas about the relationship between voter “demand” on issues such as crime, candidate “supply” of campaign attention, and vote choice in new democracies.

## Appendix: Sample Characteristics

In the 2006 Mexico Panel Survey sample, the proportion that reportedly voted for López Obrador was slightly higher than that for Calderón: 39.22 percent voted for López Obrador, 36.89 for Calderón, and 19.14 for Madrazo (as seen in Table A1).<sup>16</sup> The distribution of vote choice in this representative sample reflects the closeness of that race, in which Calderón won by less than half a percentage point, according to official results.

	<b>PAN</b>	<b>PRI</b>	<b>PRD</b>
<b>Vote choice</b>	36.29	19.14	39.22
<b>Party identification</b>			
Strong	7.74	9.09	8.66
Weak	15.54	13.04	15.44
<i>Total</i>	23.28	22.13	24.10
<b>Crime evaluations</b>			
Very or somewhat capable	52.29	40.60	47.46
Not very or not at all capable	47.72	59.41	53.45
<b>Economic evaluations</b>			
Very or somewhat capable	61.65	44.61	50.53
Not very or not at all capable	38.35	55.40	49.47
<b>Average age</b>	41		
<b>Gender (percent female)</b>	53.20		
<b>Urgency of crime</b>			
Very urgent	49.03		
Urgent	47.85		
Not very urgent	3.12		
<b>Clientelist obligation</b>			
A lot	25.53		
Some	13.44		
A little	9.16		
None	51.87		

Table A1: Sample characteristics of 2006 Mexico Panel Study.

<sup>16</sup> Just under five percent were non-responses; these were dropped from the analysis.

Crime is highly salient for the 836 respondents, with 97 percent responding that crime and public safety are urgent or very urgent.<sup>17</sup> When asked to name the primary problem facing Mexico, 32 percent listed crime. Crime is slightly more salient than the economy for the sample and the two are by far the most common responses. Total crime, the grouped responses of crime, corruption, drug trafficking and kidnappings, is the primary concern of 37 percent of the sample. Total economic concerns, the grouped responses of economy, job creation, poverty, and inflation, represent 35 percent of the sample.

Among other characteristics of the sample, about 70 percent reported some partisanship. Of these, a third were strong partisans and the rest were weak partisans. There is no clear majority party, as can be seen in Table A1. While the PRI has the most strong partisans (9.09 percent of the sample, compared with 8.7 for the PRD and 7.7 for the PAN), it has slightly smaller overall support: 23.3 percent of the sample identifies as strong or weak PAN, while 24.1 percent support the PRD and 22.1 support the PRI. The majority of the sample thus “leans” towards one party or another.

When asked about crime perceptions, respondents overall evaluated the PRI candidate, Roberto Madrazo, to have the lowest ability to fight crime. Fifty-nine percent said he was “not very” or “not at all” able to fight crime. López Obrador fared somewhat better, with 53 percent choosing these options. López Obrador was actually was candidate with the highest percentage of “very” able responses, by a small margin, with 11.2 percent selecting “very,” compared with 10.3 percent for Calderón and 9.9 percent for Madrazo. Overall, however, Calderón was considered most able by a five-point

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<sup>17</sup> 47.85 percent of the sample said crime was “urgent” and 49.03 said crime was “very urgent.”

margin: 52.3 percent of the sample said he was “somewhat” or “very” able to fight crime, compared with 46.6 percent for López Obrador and 40.6 percent for Madrazo.

The same order is true of respondents’ economic perceptions of candidates’ ability to handle the economy, though Calderón has an even greater advantage on this question. Sixty-two percent of respondents considered Calderón “somewhat” or “very” able to manage the economy, compared with 51 percent for López Obrador and 45 percent for Madrazo. The differential is particularly noticeable on the “not at all” option: 25 percent responded that Madrazo was “not at all” able to manage the economy and 22 percent said this of López Obrador, compared with only 11 percent for Calderón.

The question on clientelism reveals an interesting divide in the sample. Fifty-two percent said that the fictional Gabriel/Gabriela should feel no obligation to vote for the party that gave him/her money to buy groceries. The rest felt he/she should feel “a little” (9 percent), “some” (13 percent), or “a lot” (26 percent) of obligation to support the giving party. The sample population is thus split on whether a gift requires reciprocity, with a full quarter of the sample feeling “a lot” of obligation to vote accordingly.

Finally, the sample has a small gender gap, with slightly more women than men (53 percent female). The average age is 41 years old. The sample included individuals from ages 18 to 92, with a standard deviation of 16.0.<sup>18</sup> With the summary statistics described, I continue to the findings of the model.

After dropping non-responses, the 2012 sample reflects the actual ordering of vote choice outcomes (as seen in Table A2) but has more distinct distributions from the actual outcome than in 2006.<sup>19</sup> Peña Nieto’s support in the sample is seven points higher than in

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<sup>18</sup> I excluded 17 year olds, who represented one percent of the sample population, because they are not of voting age.

<sup>19</sup> I exclude Quadri from the analysis because he was not included in the 2012 Mexico Panel Survey other than in the vote choice question.

the electoral returns, at 46.40 percent. Support for López Obrador is four points lower compared to the actual outcome, at 28.32 percent. Vázquez Mota does slightly better in the sample, with 28.32 percent support.

	<b>PAN</b>	<b>PRI</b>	<b>PRD</b>
<b>Vote choice</b>	26.05	39.12	34.42
<b>Party identification</b>			
Strong	7.65	18.96	8.43
Weak	9.39	12.00	7.57
<i>Total</i>	17.04	30.96	16.00
<b>Crime evaluations</b>			
Very or somewhat capable	56.13	46.77	41.55
Not very or not at all capable	43.88	53.22	58.44
<b>Economic evaluations</b>			
Very or somewhat capable	61.56	51.96	44.82
Not very or not at all capable	38.45	48.05	55.18
<b>Average age</b>	40		
<b>Gender (percent female)</b>	54.70		
<b>Urgency of crime</b>			
Very urgent	70.21		
Urgent	27.70		
Not very urgent	2.09		
<b>Clientelistic acceptance</b>			
Yes	66.67		
No	33.33		

Table A2: Sample characteristics of 2012 Mexico Panel Study.

Crime is even more salient to respondents than in 2006. Seventy-percent said crime was “very urgent,” up from 49 percent in 2006. Overall, 98 percent of respondents called crime “urgent” or “very urgent.” Again respondents named it the most important problem facing the country. Of the top ten most common responses, 50 percent were



crime-related and 23 percent economy-related. “Insecurity” alone was the response of 27 percent of the sample.

The sample has weaker partisanship than the 2006 sample, but has a greater proportion of PRI supporters. Thirty-five percent have no partisanship, up from 26 percent in 2006. Partisans of the PAN and PRD decreased, while strong partisans of the PRI more than doubled, to 19 percent. Overall, 31 percent of the sample identified as *priista*, 17 percent as *panista*, and 16 percent as *perredista*. It is difficult to determine movement over the two elections, since the same respondents were not re-interviewed, but it is remarkable that partisanship with the PRI increased at the same time that non-partisanship rose. The likely source of both increases resides in the weak PAN and PRD supporters from 2006: the numbers of strong PAN and strong PRD supporters is almost identical to the 2006 results, but the number of weak partisans of those two parties declined by more than 50 percent.

Despite the decline in PAN supporters and bias towards Peña Nieto supporters (see “vote choice” above), the PAN candidate was again the highest ranked in the questions on crime perceptions and economic perceptions of candidates. Fifty-six percent of respondents thought Vázquez Mota was “somewhat” or “very” able on fighting crime, compared with 47 percent for Peña Nieto and 42 percent for López Obrador. The ten-point advantage is even higher than it was in 2006, when Calderón’s advantage in this category was five points. The PRD candidate had the highest “not at all” able opinions, representing 29 percent of his total (compared to 21 for the PRI candidate and 19 for the PAN candidate).

On the ability to handle the economy, Vázquez Mota again had a ten-point advantage in being “somewhat” or “very” able to manage the economy, with sixty-four

percent compared to Peña Nieto's 52 percent and López Obrador's 45 percent. López Obrador's positive rating fell six percentage points from 2006.

Clientelism here is a dichotomous measure, as respondents answer a question about whether fictional Gabriel/Gabriella would *accept* a gift of groceries from a party in exchange for their vote. To this version, sixty-seven percent said yes, while 33 percent answered no. Note that this question is different from the one asked in 2006, which asked how *obligated* Gabriel/Gabriela would feel to vote for the party providing the gift on a four-point scale.

Finally, the average age is 40 years old. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 90 (standard deviation = 15.7). The majority of the sample was female (55 percent vs. 45 percent), as in 2006 but the gender gap is more skewed in this sample.

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