



Organized Criminal Syndicates and Governance in Mexico and Central America

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Introduction

Organized criminal groups (OCGs), ranging from local gangs to powerful drug cartels that operate across national boundaries, represent the single most important security threat in Mexico and Central America. A growing body of research in political science and other disciplines has examined the political and socioeconomic roots of these organizations, as well as the mechanisms underlying the production of organized criminal violence. The unprecedented wave of organized criminal violence that has been affecting the region in recent years can be traced back to political transformations and policy changes that disrupted the social and political order at the local level, redefining the organization of illicit markets, and undermining the rule of law. On these issues there is a particularly rich literature that focuses on understanding the outbreak of violence and criminal rivalry in Mexico. Several studies have emphasized the role of state-criminal group relationships as a key factor to understand the challenges that organized crime poses in terms of peacebuilding and democratic rule. Within this framework, the existing literature has identified various forms of criminal governance prevalent in Mexico and Central America, and shed light on how communities respond to crime and violence in contexts of low state capacity. Some of these responses include social mobilization, vigilantism, and support for extralegal violence. The use of violence by OCGs in electoral contexts has also received particular attention in the literature, since they often target candidates or intimidate voters, affecting political preferences and patterns of political participation. Finally, a series of studies has rigorously investigated the impact of organized criminal violence on a number of outcomes, including political attitudes and behavior, trust in institutions, and health and education, among others.

Approaches to the Study of Organized Crime in Political Science

Since the 2010s, the study of organized crime has become increasingly important in political science. The escalation of organized criminal violence around the globe, and particularly in Latin America, has encouraged political scientists to study the causes and consequences of organized crime. The proliferation of organized criminal groups and their violence remained understudied for a long time in political science because they were not regarded as fundamentally political. The relatively recent interest in the study of organized crime in political science has brought conceptual challenges and important theoretical contributions. In this regard, Kalyvas 2015 and Barnes 2017 are essential contributions that approach the study of organized crime from an integrated political science perspective. These studies are relevant for the study of large-scale organized crime in Mexico, Central America, and elsewhere.

Barnes, Nicholas. "Criminal Politics: An Integrated Approach to the Study of Organized Crime, Politics, and Violence." *Perspectives on Politics* 15.4 (2017): 967–987.

Barnes presents a conceptual typology for incorporating the study of criminal organizations into the political violence literature. This integrated approach to the study of organized crime underscores the collaborative and competitive relationships between criminal organizations and the state—these organizations exert significant political influence through different mechanisms, including violence and intimidation.

Kalyvas, Stathis N. "How Civil Wars Help Explain Organized Crime—and How They Do Not." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59.8 (2015): 1517–1540.

This study addresses the conceptual challenges of studying organized criminal violence from a political science perspective. Kalyvas argues that large-scale organized crime occupies a gray zone between ordinary crime and political violence. The author proposes to draw primarily from the micro-dynamics identified by the civil war literature to study organized crime.

The Political and Socioeconomic Origins of Organized Criminal Violence in Mexico

Several studies have examined the political and socioeconomic factors driving Mexico's sharp increase in organized criminal violence. Trejo and Ley 2018 and Villarreal 2002 emphasize how growing electoral competition during the 1990s disrupted networks of protection and informal agreements between organized criminal groups and local politicians, pushing drug cartels to fight against each other and against state security forces for territorial control. Ríos 2015 and Durán-Martínez 2018 argue that coordination and cohesiveness of the state response is key to explain variation in violence. In a seminal work, Dell 2015 demonstrates a partisan bias in the allocation of the policy toward drug trade organizations. There is also evidence that the government's security strategy—heavily focused on the beheading of criminal organizations—has contributed to the escalation of violence, as shown in Phillips 2015 and Calderón, et al. 2015. Dube, et al. 2013 shows that the supply of assault weapons enabled by lax gun laws in the United States fueled criminal violence, particularly in Northern Mexico. From a political economy perspective, studies like Dube, et al. 2016 and Enamorado, et al. 2016 highlight the role of income inequality and economic shocks in rural Mexico as major drivers of drug-related violence.

Calderón, Gabriela, Gustavo Robles, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros, and Beatriz Magaloni. "The Beheading of Criminal Organizations and the Dynamics of Violence in Mexico." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59.8 (2015): 1455–1485.

The authors analyze whether the captures or killings of kingpins and lieutenants increase drug-related violence and whether the violence spills over spatially. They find evidence that captures or killings of drug cartel leaders have exacerbating effects not only on drug trafficking organization-related violence but also on homicides that affect the general population. Captures or killings of lieutenants, for their part, only seem to exacerbate violence in strategic areas.

Dell, Melissa. "Trafficking Networks and the Mexican Drug War." *American Economic Review* 105.6 (2015): 1738–1779.

This study examines the direct and spillover effects of Mexican policy toward the drug trade. Dell shows that drug-related violence increased substantially in areas governed by Mexico's conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) party, which adopted a policy characterized by large-scale confrontations against organized crime. The study also uses a network model of trafficking routes to show that PAN victories divert drug traffic along alternative routes.

Dube, Arindrajit, Oeindrila Dube, and Omar García-Ponce. "Cross-Border Spillover: U.S. Gun Laws and Violence in Mexico." *American Political Science Review* 107.3 (2013): 397–417.

This study looks at how US gun laws affect drug-related violence in Mexico. The authors exploit a unique natural experiment: the 2004 expiration of the US Assault Weapons Ban exerted a spillover on gun supply in Mexican municipalities near Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico, but not near California, which retained a state-level ban. They find that municipalities located closer to the non-California border experienced differential increases in violence.

Dube, Oeindrila, Omar García-Ponce, and Kevin Thom. "From Maize to Haze: Agricultural Shocks and the Growth of the Mexican Drug Sector." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 14.5 (2016): 1181–1224.

The authors study how economic opportunities of rural workers in Mexico affect the dynamics of the drug trade. Using rich micro-level data for the 1990–2010 period, they present causal evidence that exogenous shocks in the price of maize induce farmers to grow illicit crops—

opium poppy and marijuana—that then spurs violence as criminal organizations fight over drug production.

Durán-Martínez, Angélica. *The Politics of Drug Violence: Criminals, Cops, and Politicians in Colombia and Mexico*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

An important source to understand the drivers of organized criminal violence in Mexico and elsewhere. The author builds on extensive fieldwork in Mexico and Colombia to show that violence escalates when drug-trafficking organizations compete in a context of fragmented state security. In contrast, when the criminal market is monopolized and the state security apparatus is cohesive, violence tends to be contained.

Enamorado, Ted, Luis F. López-Calva, Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán, and Hernán Winkler. "Income Inequality and Violent Crime: Evidence from Mexico's Drug War." *Journal of Development Economics* 120 (2016): 128–143.

This paper examines the effect of inequality on crime rates in the context of Mexico's drug war. The analysis indicates that a one-point increment in the Gini coefficient between 2007 and 2010 translates into an increase of more than 36 percent in the number of drug-related homicides per one hundred thousand inhabitants.

Phillips, Brian J. "How Does Leadership Decapitation Affect Violence? The Case of Drug Trafficking Organizations in Mexico." *The Journal of Politics* 77.2 (2015): 324–336.

This article presents a theoretical framework for how political and criminal groups differ and uses the framework to explain how group type should condition leadership removal's effects. Decapitation is expected to weaken criminal organizations temporarily, but as groups fragment and newer groups emerge to address market demands, violence increases in the longer term. Empirical analysis using original data on Mexican criminal organizations generally supports the argument.

Ríos, Viridiana. "How Government Coordination Controlled Organized Crime: The Case of Mexico's Cocaine Markets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59.8 (2015): 1433–1454.

Ríos provides empirical evidence suggesting that organized crime can be more effectively controlled when the same political party is in power at all levels of government. The author uses time-series data of Mexico's cocaine markets at the subnational level and shows that partisan misalignment produced by Mexico's democratization set the conditions for violent conflict between drug cartels in the mid-2000s.

Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. "Why Did Drug Cartels Go to War in Mexico? Subnational Party Alternation, the Breakdown of Criminal Protection, and the Onset of Large-Scale Violence." *Comparative Political Studies* 51.7 (2018): 900–937.

This article examines the outbreak of intercartel wars and criminal violence in Mexico from 1995 to 2006. Following decades of hegemonic one-party rule, the process of democratization made criminal groups lose access to informal networks of protection due to the alternation of political parties at the subnational level. This led criminal organization leaders to form and use private militias to protect themselves from rival cartels and opposition government authorities.

Villarreal, Andrés. "Political Competition and Violence in Mexico: Hierarchical Social Control in Local Patronage Structures." *American Sociological Review* 67.4 (2002): 477–498.

This is one of the first studies that look at the impact of political factors on criminal violence in Latin America. The author examines the relation between greater electoral competition and violence at the subnational level in the context of Mexico's uneven transition to democracy. A robust association between electoral competition and homicide rates is found in rural municipalities.

State-Criminal Group Relationships in Mexico and Central America

OCGs interact with the state in complex ways. When confronting them, the state could opt for direct confrontation, as in the case of Mexico (Lessing 2018) or negotiation like some countries in Central America (Cruz and Durán-Martínez 2016). A growing body of evidence suggests that direct confrontation increases violence (Cruz 2016, Osorio 2015). Rather than being passive against the government, OCGs might seek to capture state institutions taking advantage of political competition (Trejo and Ley 2020) or corruption (Andreas 1998). OCGs tend to attack places with low state capacity (Yashar 2018) since they are wary of calling too much attention to their illicit activities (Bailey and Taylor 2009). Countries that were successful in keeping violence in line such as Nicaragua had early security reforms (Cruz 2011).

Andreas, Peter. "The Political Economy of Narco-Corruption in Mexico." *Current History* 97.618 (1998): 160–165.

An important study on *narco-corruption*, which according to Andreas represents a major security threat for Mexico and the United States. The key argument of this article is that the structure of corruption in Mexico allows powerful criminal syndicates in Mexico to operate with impunity as long as they can afford to bribe the authorities.

Bailey, John, and Matthew M. Taylor. "Evade, Corrupt, or Confront? Organized Crime and the State in Brazil and Mexico." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 1.2 (2009): 3–29.

A study of the "equilibrium" between criminal syndicates and the government, focusing on when criminal groups will challenge this balance with the state. The authors argue that criminal groups will confront the state when they believe the costs of tolerating the government's action risks drawing undesired attention to the group and when they are highly likely to reap benefits. Confrontation can range from intimidation to wide-scale violence.

Cruz, José Miguel. "Criminal Violence and Democratization in Central America: The Survival of the Violent State." *Latin American Politics and Society* 53.4 (2011): 1–33.

The authors ask why Nicaragua exhibits lower levels of crime and violence than Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, which also underwent political transitions in the 1990s. The authors argue that public security reforms carried out during the political transitions shaped the ability of the new regimes to control the violence produced by their own institutions and collaborators.

Cruz, José Miguel. "State and Criminal Violence in Latin America." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 66.4 (2016): 375–396.

This article examines the ways in which the state directly contributes to violence. For instance, state agents contribute to the escalation of criminal violence in the region by extending the legal limits of the use of legitimate force, by tolerating and supporting the employment of extralegal approaches to deal with crime and disorder, and by partnering with criminal groups and militias.

Cruz, José Miguel, and Angélica Durán-Martínez. "Hiding Violence to Deal with the State: Criminal Pacts in El Salvador and Medellín." *Journal of Peace Research* 53.2 (2016): 197–210.

This piece examines whether negotiations between or with criminal organizations can reduce criminal violence. The key argument is that pacts can reduce homicidal violence if they (1) involve the state as an administrator of incentives and (2) if the criminal groups in question have a level of cohesion and leadership that allow for territorial control and dependability.

Lessing, Benjamin. *Making Peace in Drug Wars: Crackdowns and Cartels in Latin America*. Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

This book examines when criminal organizations turn to confrontation with the state. Based on the cases of Mexico, Colombia, and Brazil, Lessing argues that brute-force repression generates incentives for drug cartels to engage in violent conflict, while policies that condition repression on cartel violence are more likely to effectively deter violence.

Osorio, Javier. "The Contagion of Drug Violence: Spatiotemporal Dynamics of the Mexican War on Drugs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59.8 (2015): 1403–1432.

This study examines spatial diffusion of violence based on the interactions between the state and organized criminal groups in Mexico. Using a large database of events, the author shows that disruptive law enforcement tactics contribute to the intensification of violence between criminal organizations, especially when deployed in areas with high concentration of criminal groups.

Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. *Votes, Drugs, and Violence: The Political Logic of Criminal Wars in Mexico*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020.

This book presents a novel theoretical argument about the logic of criminal violence in weak democracies, focusing on the case of Mexico. Political competition from the process of democratization in Mexico undermined bargains between drug trade organizations and politicians, creating incentives to recur to violence between drug trade organizations and the state and between each other. Electoral competition also pushed for the political bias of government response to drug-related violence.

Yashar, Deborah J. *Homicidal Ecologies: Illicit Economies and Complicit States in Latin America*. Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Yashar seeks to explain variation in levels of lethal crime in Latin America, both in terms of geographical and temporal variation. One of Yashar's explanations is that criminal organizations are most attracted to territories with low state capacity, particularly police and judicial capacity. Localities with high state capacity are more likely to deter organizations. In particular, violence will also increase if there are territorial disputes between criminal organizations.

Constellations of Criminal Governance

Millions of people in Mexico and Central America live under some form of criminal governance. As defined in Lessing 2020, criminal governance takes on many activities of the state, with varying degrees of legitimacy. Criminal governance might be complementary or a substitute of the state (Müller 2018; Magaloni, et al. 2020). Organized criminal groups might gain authority through fear and repression (Arias 2017), but they could also provide assistance and services to their communities (Blume 2021; Magaloni, et al. 2020). Adherence and fidelity to criminal organizations might be motivated by state repression (Miguel Cruz 2010).

Arias, Enrique Desmond. *Criminal Enterprises and Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

An important study to understand criminal governance in Latin America, including Mexico and Central America. The author examines in depth cases from Brazil, Colombia, and Jamaica, where democratic regimes contend with subnational armed groups that dominate territory and play important roles in politics despite inflicting fear and violence.

Blume, Laura Ross. "Narco Robin Hoods: Community Support for Illicit Economies and Violence in Rural Central America." *World Development* 143 (2021): 105464.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and Honduras, Blume argues that rural and marginalized communities where there is widespread corruption and limited state capacity are more inclined to be supportive of and form collaborative relationships with

traffickers. Furthermore, traffickers who are native to the community, limit their use, and invest economically in the community are the most likely to win the community's support.

Lessing, Benjamin. "Conceptualizing Criminal Governance." *Perspectives on Politics* 19.3 (2020): 854–873.

A conceptual framework centered around the who, what, and how of criminal governance, organizing extant research and proposing a novel dimension: charismatic versus rational-bureaucratic forms of criminal authority. The author delineates the logics that may drive criminal organizations to provide governance for nonmembers, establishing building blocks for future theory building and testing.

Magaloni, Beatriz, Edgar Franco-Vivanco, and Vanessa Melo. "Killing in the Slums: Social Order, Criminal Governance, and Police Violence in Rio de Janeiro." *American Political Science Review* 114.2 (2020): 552–572.

This article offers a theory about criminal governance in five types of criminal regimes—Insurgent, Bandit, Symbiotic, Predatory, and Split. These differ according to whether criminal groups confront or collude with state actors, abuse or cooperate with the community, and hold a monopoly or contest territory with rival OCGs. Police interventions in these criminal regimes pose different challenges and are associated with markedly different local security outcomes.

Magaloni, Beatriz, Gustavo Robles, Aila M. Matanock, Alberto Diaz-Cayeros, and Vidal Romero. "Living in Fear: The Dynamics of Extortion in Mexico's Drug War." *Comparative Political Studies* 53.7 (2020): 1124–1174.

Why do drug trafficking organizations sometimes prey on the communities in which they operate but sometimes provide assistance to these communities? Using survey data from Mexico, this article measures the prevalence of extortion and assistance among drug trafficking organizations. The findings indicate that territorial contestation among rival organizations produces more extortion, and they provide more assistance when they have monopoly control over a turf.

Miguel Cruz, José. "Central American *Maras*: From Youth Street Gangs to Transnational Protection Rackets." *Global Crime* 11.4 (2010): 379–398.

This article depicts the processes through which the *maras* evolved from youth street gangs in the late 1980s to protection rackets with features of transnational organizations. Intense migratory flows between El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the United States, and the hardline suppression policies against youth gangs in Central American countries created the conditions that prompted networking and organization among Central American street gangs.

Müller, Markus-Michael. "Governing Crime and Violence in Latin America." *Global Crime* 19.3–4 (2018): 171–191.

Governance is both shaped by and a contributing factor to the pervasiveness criminal violence. This article offers an analytical framework to understand criminal governance. To this end, it highlights different modes and instances of governance with, by, and through crime (and violence) in Latin America.

Vigilantism and Community Responses to Criminal Violence

There is a growing political science literature on harsh, extralegal responses to crime, including vigilantism (Bateson 2021, Moncada 2017). Support for vigilantism and extralegal violence occurs frequently in contexts with high crime and low rule of law (Zizumbo-Colunga 2017, Cruz and Kloppe-Santamaría 2019). However, there is significant heterogeneity within these contexts in terms of when and where vigilantism occurs, and how it affects the rule of law (Moncada 2021). Several studies have found that the occurrence of vigilante violence is explained by enabling factors, such as inequality (Phillips 2017) or the existence of organizations that facilitate collective action (Berg and Carranza 2018). Historical legacies might also favor the formation of vigilante groups (Osorio, et al. 2021; Mattiace, et al. 2019).

Bateson, Regina. "The Politics of Vigilantism." *Comparative Political Studies* 54.6 (2021): 923–955.

This article explains why vigilantism is a theoretically and empirically important concept for political science, despite being understudied. Bateson situates vigilantism in relation to other concepts in political science and defines it as the extralegal prevention, investigation, or punishment of offenses. A clear conceptualization of vigilantism is provided in the article.

Berg, Louis Alexandre, and Marlon Carranza. "Organized Criminal Violence and Territorial Control: Evidence from Northern Honduras." *Journal of Peace Research* 55.5 (2018): 566–581.

This paper examines geographic variation in organized crime in urban Honduras and finds that variation in community organization, defined as density of interpersonal ties and prevalence of shared expectations for collective action, is a key explanation. Community organization affects the costs and benefits of the three main functions of violence used to control territory (competition, coercion, and exploitation).

Cruz, José Miguel, and Gema Kloppe-Santamaría. "Determinants of Support for Extralegal Violence in Latin America and the Caribbean." *Latin American Research Review* 54.1 (2019): 50–68.

Using data from the 2012 AmericasBarometer, the authors examine different explanations regarding citizen support for extralegal violence in Latin America and the Caribbean. They find that support for extralegal violence is higher not only in countries with extreme levels of violence but especially in countries in which people distrust the political system.

Mattiace, Shannan, Sandra Ley, and Guillermo Trejo. "Indigenous Resistance to Criminal Governance: Why Regional Ethnic Autonomy Institutions Protect Communities from Narco Rule in Mexico." *Latin American Research Review* 54.1 (2019): 181–200.

This article examines the mixed success of organized crime groups in becoming de facto rulers of indigenous regions across Mexico. It determines under what circumstances indigenous communities are able to successfully resist local government co-optation by these groups. The authors argue that three main factors explain successful resistance: (1) a history of social mobilization that connects communities, (2) facilitation of trans-local bonds, and (3) expansion of village-level customary laws/tradition to create a regional ethnic autonomous regime.

Moncada, Eduardo. "Varieties of Vigilantism: Conceptual Discord, Meaning and Strategies." *Global Crime* 18.4 (2017): 403–423.

Moncada offers a conceptual analysis of vigilantism to identify and analyze the points of conceptual discord that make vigilantism an essentially contested concept. To address these challenges, he establishes the concept's core definitional dimensions and develops a root concept of vigilantism as the collective use or threat of extralegal violence in response to an alleged criminal act.

Moncada, Eduardo. *Resisting Extortion: Victims, Criminals, and States in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

A study of how victims resist criminal extortion in Colombia, El Salvador, and Mexico. Moncada examines the processes that lead to individual and collective acts of resistance against criminal extortion. This book sheds light on the logic behind institutionalized and sustained collective vigilantism, and its implications for the rule of law and the role of the state in contexts of widespread crime and violence.

Osorio, Javier, Livia Isabella Schubiger, and Michael Weintraub. "Legacies of Resistance: Mobilization against Organized Crime in Mexico." *Comparative Political Studies* 54.9 (2021): 1565–1596.

Focusing on mobilization against organized crime in contemporary Mexico, the authors argue that historical experiences of armed resistance can facilitate armed collective action under conditions of rampant insecurity in the long run. The authors show that communities

that pushed back against state incursions during the Cristero Rebellion in the early twentieth century are more likely to rise up against organized crime in contemporary times.

Phillips, Brian J. "Inequality and the Emergence of Vigilante Organizations: The Case of Mexican Autodefensas." *Comparative Political Studies* 50.10 (2017): 1358–1389.

This article argues that local economic inequality creates a situation ripe for vigilante organizations. Inequality creates demand for vigilantism because poorer citizens feel relatively deprived of security compared with wealthier neighbors who have advantages regarding private and public security. Phillips shows that municipal-level income inequality in Mexico is robustly associated with organized vigilantism.

Zizumbo-Colunga, Daniel. "Community, Authorities, and Support for Vigilantism: Experimental Evidence." *Political Behavior* 39.4 (2017): 989–1015.

The author argues that citizens' perceptions of a trusting community, on the one hand, and an untrustworthy law enforcement, on the other, jointly influence support for vigilantism. The argument is tested using a lab-in-the-field experiment in Mexico.

Electoral Violence and Political Participation

Electoral candidates are often targets of criminal organizations who attack politicians because they are colluded with a rival group, they are honest and refuse to cooperate, or compete against an ally candidate of a criminal group (Blume 2017). Influentially, Ley 2018 argues that criminal groups seek opportunities to gain power by attacking politicians. Hernández Huerta 2020 finds evidence of violence against politicians motivated by increasing electoral competition. Attacks on candidates have effects at the voter level, who participate less in politics (Ley 2018, Córdova 2019, Trelles and Carreras 2012), and on political elites, who are less willing to run for office (Ponce 2019). However, victims of violent crime with strong kinship ties seem to be more likely to be politically engaged (Dorff 2017). Citizens are sophisticated voters that ask for accountability, being able to identify the origins of violence and the response of the state (Ley 2017).

Blume, Laura. "The Old Rules No Longer Apply: Explaining Narco-Assassinations of Mexican Politicians." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 9.1 (2017): 59–90.

Blume examines assassinations of politicians in Mexico by criminal groups. Three main reasons for these assassinations are identified: (1) acceptance of illicit funds by politicians and increased likelihood of being targeted by rivals or being caught in intra-cartel conflicts; (2) refusal to cooperate with criminal groups and stands taken against them; and (3) having a political opponent who is connected to a criminal group and may utilize this group to eliminate competition.

Córdova, Abby. "Living in Gang-Controlled Neighborhoods: Impacts on Electoral and Nonelectoral Participation in El Salvador." *Latin American Research Review* 54.1 (2019): 201–221.

Córdova examines the ways in which gang dominance limits the ability of citizens to engage politically as well as effectively resist gang violence. In neighborhoods with strong gang dominance, gangs are incentivized to deter, monitor, and punish electoral and community participation, particularly that which involves close contact with political operatives. Contact between citizens and political operatives could result in dissemination of information dangerous to gang survival.

Dorff, Cassy. "Violence, Kinship Networks, and Political Resilience: Evidence from Mexico." *Journal of Peace Research* 54.4 (2017): 558–573.

The author argues that victims of criminal violence with strong kinship ties are more likely to participate in political and community settings. Social connectivity can increase a sense of purpose among victims, incentivizing them to participate more actively in the political life of their communities. The argument is tested using survey data from Mexico within the context of the war on drugs.

Hernández Huerta, Víctor Antonio. "Candidates Murdered in Mexico: Criminal or Electoral Violence?" *Política y Gobierno* 27.2 (2020).

The authors examine competing explanations for a wave of political assassinations in the 2017–2018 electoral process in Mexico. They ultimately argue that these assassinations are not motivated by electoral competition and do not constitute a form of electoral violence. Rather, they are linked to the presence of criminal organizations and are driven by criminal violence in the municipalities where they occur.

Ley, Sandra. "Electoral Accountability in the Midst of Criminal Violence: Evidence from Mexico." *Latin American Politics and Society* 59.1 (2017): 3–27.

Ley examines whether or not voters can hold their elected officials accountable for rising levels of crime and violence, and under what circumstances they do so. She finds that voters hold political authorities accountable for violence when (1) it was a result of organized criminal activity and particularly when it was directed against public figures, and (2) when governing bodies are politically aligned (or are members of the same party).

Ley, Sandra. "To Vote or Not to Vote: How Criminal Violence Shapes Electoral Participation." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62.9 (2018): 1963–1990.

This piece demonstrates that voters are significantly demobilized by the strategic use of violence by organized crime groups during elections in Mexico. High-profile attacks induce anxiety among voters, reduces their perceived benefits and satisfaction from voting, and increases the costs and risks of voting, all resulting in decreased electoral participation. Ley demonstrates this relationship using both aggregate-level municipal voting data and individual-level survey data.

Ponce, Aldo F. "Violence and Electoral Competition: Criminal Organizations and Municipal Candidates in Mexico." *Trends in Organized Crime* 22.2 (2019): 231–254.

This paper examines the use of violence by criminal organizations during electoral competitions to determine its political effect. Ultimately, he finds that intimidation and assassinations in Mexico reduces the number of candidates, thereby creating a substantial difference in the number of competitors in violent versus nonviolent municipalities. However, in particularly violent municipalities, criminal organizations may become more involved by providing illegal funding to facilitate candidacies in their favor and/or providing protection to certain candidates.

Trejo, Guillermo, and Sandra Ley. "High-Profile Criminal Violence: Why Drug Cartels Murder Government Officials and Party Candidates in Mexico." *British Journal of Political Science* 51.1 (2021): 203–229.

The authors seek to explain attacks on politicians and party candidates in Mexico during 2007–2012. They argue that attacks are motivated by perceived political opportunities by criminal organizations to gain power over local governments, people, and territories. Criminal attacks tend to be concentrated in subnational actors that are unprotected—politically or militarily—by central powers. Attacks follow local election cycles and target clusters of neighboring municipalities to establish territorial regimes.

Trelles, Alejandro, and Miguel Carreras. "Bullets and Votes: Violence and Electoral Participation in Mexico." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 4.2 (2012): 89–123.

The authors argue that, in the context of Mexico, as criminal violence increases, electoral participation decreases. The authors examine municipal-level crime and turnout rates, and contend that municipalities with higher levels of crime result in increased levels of fear and

political dissatisfaction. The authors establish these relationships by examining four federal elections in Mexico at the municipal level along with individual-level survey data examining exposure to violence and electoral participation.

The Political and Socioeconomic Consequences of Organized Criminal Violence

Exposure to organized criminal violence affects people's lives in important ways. For Schedler 2014 its most profound effect is democracy itself. Relatedly, Flores-Macías 2018 shows that state responses to violence affect state capacity. The political consequences of this violence also includes lower levels of trust in institutions like the presidency (Romero, et al. 2016) and democracy itself (Blanco and Ruiz 2013). Exposure to criminal violence also shapes beliefs and behaviors of citizens when engaging with the state, increasing the support for repressive policies (Visconti 2020) and acceptance of corruption (García-Ponce, et al. 2021). Importantly, exposure to violence has human-development impacts beyond political institutions, affecting education attainment (Caudillo and Torche 2014, Michaelsen and Salardi 2020) and infancy health (Brown 2018). All in all, violence has considerable effects for economic growth (Enamorado, et al. 2014).

Blanco, Luisa, and Isabel Ruiz. "The Impact of Crime and Insecurity on Trust in Democracy and Institutions." *American Economic Review* 103.3 (2013): 284–288.

This article examines to what extent crime and the perception of insecurity affect trust in democracy and institutions in Colombia. In particular, the authors examine the effect of perceived insecurity, crime victimization, exposure to armed conflict, and being asked for a bribe. They use survey data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project from 2004 to 2010. In general, these factors are associated with lower levels of support for democracy and trust in government institutions.

Brown, Ryan. "The Mexican Drug War and Early-Life Health: The Impact of Violent Crime on Birth Outcomes." *Demography* 55.1 (2018): 319–340.

Brown studies how exposure to violence in utero negatively affects health outcomes of newborns, particularly birth weight. Exposure could negatively impact birth weight via heightened psychological stress and changes in health behaviors of the mother, which, in low income households, may affect the mother's consumption of nutritious foods/vitamins. The most likely explanation of adverse birth outcomes as it relates to violent crime exposure is the biological response to maternal anxiety.

Caudillo, Mónica L., and Florencia Torche. "Exposure to Local Homicides and Early Educational Achievement in Mexico." *Sociology of Education* 87.2 (2014): 89–105.

This paper assesses the adverse effects of exposure to community violence on children's educational outcomes. The authors examine the effect of homicides within the same municipality of a school on children's grade failure rate in Mexico (1990–2010). Exposure to municipal violence is consistently associated with a higher probability of failing an elementary school grade. Exposed cohorts might have poor long-term educational attainment and labor market outcomes.

Enamorado, Ted, Luis F. López-Calva, and Carlos Rodríguez-Castelán. "Crime and Growth Convergence: Evidence from Mexico." *Economics Letters* 125.1 (2014): 9–13.

The authors examine if drug- and non-drug-related crime have differential effects on income growth in Mexico between 2005 and 2010. They do so by exploring data on homicide rates differentiated by whether or not they were related to drugs, as compiled by the Technical Secretary for the National Security Council (SNSP). Their analysis finds that drug-related crimes have a negative effect on municipal income growth, while non-drug-related crimes do not.

Flores-Macías, Gustavo. "The Consequences of Militarizing Anti-drug Efforts for State Capacity in Latin America: Evidence from Mexico." *Comparative Politics* 51.1 (2018): 1–20.

Flores-Macías investigates subnational patterns in antidrug efforts in Mexico and demonstrates that the militarization of these efforts in fact harms state capacity. Locations with such efforts face difficulty in providing public order and extracting fiscal resources, as evidenced by increased homicide and kidnapping rates and a decrease in tax collection. This is examined in the context of a 2006 policy shift in Mexico that led to militarization of antidrug efforts.

García-Ponce, Omar, Thomas Zeitzoff, and Leonard Wantchekon. “Are Voters too Afraid to Tackle Corruption? Survey and Experimental Evidence from Mexico.” *Political Science Research and Methods* 9.4 (2021): 709–727.

This article examines the effects of fear and violence stemming from the Mexican drug war on attitudes toward corruption using a survey experiment conducted one week before the 2012 Mexican presidential election. The authors find strong evidence that individuals who have been victims of crime are more likely to report both higher levels of fear and willingness to accept corruption if it lowers violence.

Michaelsen, Maren M., and Paola Salardi. “Violence, Psychological Stress and Educational Performance during the ‘War on Drugs’ in Mexico.” *Journal of Development Economics* 143 (2020): 102387.

The authors examine exposure to community-level violence due to the Mexican war on drugs and standardized exam performance among youths. They investigate whether the psychological stress caused by violence could explain poor educational performance. By examining homicides that occurred a week prior to standardized national exams, they show that such exposure not only negatively impacts performance on tests, but can have long-term impacts over the entire school year.

Romero, Vidal, Beatriz Magaloni, and Alberto Díaz-Cayeros. “Presidential Approval and Public Security in Mexico’s War on Crime.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 58.2 (2016): 100–123.

This piece examines how perceptions of public security affect performance evaluations of the president in Mexico. It examines the effect on approval of support for policy interventions, socio-tropic evaluations, and direct victimization. They argue that when public security is extremely salient, the perceived responsibility of the president will increase. In such scenarios, bold public policy interventions will lead to increased support for the executive.

Schedler, Andreas. “The Criminal Subversion of Mexican Democracy.” *Journal of Democracy* 25.1 (2014): 5–18.

This piece examines the origins of Mexico’s drug war and the damages it may have on key tenants of democracy. Schedler highlights patterns such as the inability of the Mexican government to protect its citizens from harm, the suppression of mass media by criminal organizations, and threats to nongovernmental organizations. Special attention is paid to electoral integrity, undermined by cooptation of parties and candidates, violence against candidates and voters, and effects on agenda setting.

Visconti, Giancarlo. “Policy Preferences after Crime Victimization: Panel and Survey Evidence from Latin America.” *British Journal of Political Science* 50.4 (2020): 1481–1495.

Using panel data from Brazil, Visconti demonstrates that crime victimization increases support for iron-fist (*mano dura*) crime-reduction policies. He shows that victimized citizens are less likely to support democracy, and suggests this is a possible mechanism through which they develop preferences for iron-fist policies. Lower levels of support for democracy indicate an acceptance of an erosion of civil rights in favor of suppression of crime. He validates his results using LAPOP data and demonstrates its generalizability across Latin America.

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