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## Community capacity and the reporting of extortion victimization

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### ABSTRACT

The present research examines the impact of actualised collective efficacy on the probability of reporting extortion victimisation in Mexico. The mechanisms that encourage crime reporting have been an important area of study for years, however the specific factors that increase the probability of reporting extortion have eluded examination. The analysis extends the concept of collective efficacy, adapting it to contexts where actual informal social control effects can be examined. Therefore, the present study moves beyond perceptions and measures knowledge of, and participation in, such neighbourhood activities. The statistical analysis of 3,453 cases of extortion revealed that both actualised collective efficacy and participation in informal social control were strong predictors of reporting extortion victimisation to authorities after controlling for 20 other potentially confounding variables.

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Collective efficacy; crime reporting; extortion; Mexico

Both the police and the public have important roles to play in the establishment of community order (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). Perhaps the most important community role is alerting authorities when a crime has occurred. Indeed, crime reporting is “one of the most influential decisions in the justice process” (Xie & Lauritsen, 2012, p. 265).<sup>1</sup> Reporting crime is also key to reliable crime statistics which feed into innumerable official and personal processes that shape the lives and well-being of others. There is no doubt, in this regard, that a reciprocal relationship of dependency exists between the police and the public as the latter possesses intimate knowledge of crime and disorder that the police require. As Skogan (1985) noted regarding community residents’ monopoly on information, “...the most critical aspect of policing is how effectively the authorities gain access to this information” (p. 334).

The consequence of low reporting rates is that the police are excluded from a potentially large portion of violent incidents (Baumer, 2002). By choosing not to report, any chance that the police may apprehend the subject and prevent other offences is greatly reduced (Tarling & Morris, 2010). Moreover, disparities in reporting can confound the identification of high crime areas and the delivery of services where they are needed most (Baumer, 2002).

Understanding the factors behind the willingness to report crimes to the police remains a critical area of study as such reporting behaviour is linked to deterrence and the imposition of criminal sanctions. Previous studies of such reporting behaviours demonstrate that the willingness to alert the authorities may even reduce repeat victimisation (Ranapurwala et al., 2016). Yet the collective benefits of reporting remain tethered to the crime-specificity of reporting events. That is, the rich criminological literature on this phenomenon points to specific reporting dynamics that are dependent on the specific type of criminal event. For some crime types, despite their prevalence and gravity, we understand very little due to this negative reinforcing loop. One such crime is extortion, a crime that has become commonplace in Mexico, the backdrop of the present study.

Extortion has been characterised as an invisible crime. It is estimated that nearly 98% of extortion attempts are not reported to the police (Ramírez de Garay, 2020). While it can be highly prevalent in certain neighbourhoods, authorities are unable to ascertain its presence because it intermingles with daily life and may be seen as a cost of living or operating expense (Yupari-Azabache et al., 2020). According to official data, extortion occurs throughout Mexico and is not limited to certain states or municipalities (Ramírez de Garay, 2020).

So far only a few articles have explicitly focused on neighbourhood characteristics and their impact on the decision to report crime victimisation to the police (Goudriaan et al., 2006). Of particular interest is collective efficacy<sup>2</sup> which has been shown to impact not only crime rates but the fear of crime (c.f. Lee et al., 2020). Most studies of collective efficacy have utilised perceptions as an approximation of informal social control. As discussed later, there are other ways, in the appropriate contexts, to operationalise this construct to gain a wider understanding of its criminological impact.

The current research links community action with wider processes such as how citizens interact with the police (e.g., reporting crime). Here it is hypothesised that actualised collective efficacy, or the knowledge of previous organised neighbourhood action against crime-related issues, will encourage the reporting of extortion victimisation. To the author's knowledge this is the first analysis explicitly linking neighbourhood processes to the reporting of extortion victimisation while controlling for a wealth of factors derived from previous studies of crime reporting.

In the literature review that follows, the factors that influence crime reporting are discussed. The section begins by discussing the impetus for utilising an actualised approach to collective efficacy in the Mexican context. Afterwards, factors ranging from incident and victim characteristics to perceptions of police are discussed while incorporating extortion dynamics to guide the analysis in later sections.

## Review of literature

While the mechanisms that encourage or discourage crime reporting have been an important area of study for years, “the literature on extortion has rarely been concerned with understanding the phenomenon at the incident level” (Estévez-Soto et al., 2021, p. 1123). One potential mechanism resides in the characteristics of neighbourhoods, an area of renewed criminological interest in recent years. It has been recommended, in line with the current aims, to pursue research that examines “measures of resources at the neighborhood-level, including... informal social networks and other supportive resources” (Xie & Lauritsen, 2012, p. 284). Within the numerous potential neighbourhood-level variables, it is important to understand how community action impacts reporting behaviour (Dirikx & Van den Bulck, 2014).

### **A primer on actualized collective efficacy**

Collective efficacy is a well-studied concept within criminology, with roots in social disorganisation theories of crime and deviance. Its operationalisation can be described as perception-based, measuring residents' perceptions of the mutual trust amongst neighbours in a neighbourhood and the likelihood that informal social control will be utilised (often using vignettes) (Hipp, 2016). Collective efficacy captures neighbourhood potential as it relates to informal social control, but it does not presuppose the actual use of informal social control (Browning et al., 2016; Carbone & McMillin, 2019). Put another way, collective efficacy has relied on subjective appraisals of this community capacity and is thus subjective as traditionally operationalised (Brunton-Smith et al., 2018). Predominant approaches notwithstanding, the “collective efficacy literature is sensitive to... collective events...” (Sampson et al., 2005, p. 677). A corollary to the predominant approach of operationalising this concept is a focus on respondent awareness of actual collectively efficacious events.

An alternative approach, as applied here to operationalise this concept, focuses on “CE signifiers” (Brunton-Smith et al., 2018, p. 626) where clearer signifiers lead to clearer consensus. In the right context these signifiers can represent previous demonstrations of the activation of resources or, more precisely, neighbourhood informal social control. Such an action-oriented approach has been referred to as actualised collective efficacy (Dulin, 2022). This adaptation of the original collective efficacy framework is considered “actualized” as it captures respondent knowledge or awareness of prior use of informal social control as opposed to a *perception of the likelihood* that it may occur. Recent research suggests that this actualised approach taps into an understudied neighbourhood dimension that may overlap with collective efficacy. That is, while the latter does not translate into acts of informal social control, it taps into strongly held beliefs on the topic that are durable yet take longer to develop (Weisburd et al., 2020).

This approach, in essence, adapts collective efficacy to individual information ecologies. That is, the system of friends and family we have and the technology we use to stay apprised of events in a particular setting (Nardi & O’Day, 2000). Just as strong ties are not necessary for collective efficacy, weak ties can be constructed through entirely virtual means (Granovetter, 1973; Morenoff et al., 2001). Our neighbourhoods serve as one such information environment, with its unique ecological traits (much like schools, households etc.). A technologically reinforced closeness and simultaneous maintenance of weak and possibly physically distant social ties highlights how individual awareness of social events informs not just shared expectations but also individual-level processes. This knowledge-based corollary to collective efficacy relies not on perceptions of shared willingness, but on the information neighbours possess on neighbourhood activity.

This collective-action orientation not only aids in better understanding the impact of collective efficacy at the individual-level, but it also allows one to analytically avoid potential pitfalls inherent in the measurement of perceived collective efficacy. At the individual-level, assessments of perceived collective efficacy can be highly heterogenous within neighbourhoods as it can be difficult to assess how others will respond. The likelihood that neighbourhood environmental indicators will further confound perceptual uniformity further complicates each neighbours’ assessment of collective efficacy (Brunton-Smith et al., 2018).

### **Reporting crime**

Much of the extant literature stresses the rational choice decision-making process that a victim will go through when deciding to report a crime (Bowles et al., 2009). That is, if there are benefits to reporting, the likelihood will increase. This decision-making framework asserts that a chain of decisions will occur that may result in the final decision to report or not report a crime. These decisions are influenced by direct and vicarious experiences such as those of friends and the media (Greenberg & Ruback, 1985).

Previous research has identified three incentives that influence the decision to report: (1) protection; (2) desire for justice; and (3) desire to protect others. These incentives to report should be increased as a function of the seriousness of the offence (Felson et al., 2002). While these incentives inform the rational choice framework, “a wide range of emotions can play a role” (Goudriaan et al., 2006, p. 721). Further, characteristics present at the individual, household and neighbourhood level can impact the decision to report a crime (Goudriaan et al., 2006).

Of additional importance are a range of variables connected to crime and victim characteristics as well as perceptions of the police and how these perceptions impact, positively or negatively, the benefits of reporting (Soares, 2004). For example, easy access to the police can reduce the cost of reporting (e.g., time spent filing reports) yet certain victimisation experiences impose additional costs contingent on the police responsiveness to name but one scenario. Indeed, the costs are seemingly innumerable, ranging from the desire for privacy to the fear of reprisal (Felson et al., 2002).

## **Incident characteristics**

The seriousness of the crime, judged by whether the crime was completed and accompanying injury or financial loss, has been one of the most significant and important predictors since studies of this type commenced (Bennett & Weigand, 1994; Schnebly, 2008; Skogan, 1984). Indeed, Tarling and Morris (2010) went so far as asserting that “the seriousness of the crime is the most important consideration when reporting a household crime” (p. 485). The likelihood of reporting increases when the crime involves physical (or emotional) injury or the theft of personal belongings (Conaway & Lohr, 1994; Fishman, 1979; Goudriaan et al., 2006). Similar results bolster this assertion with studies of other crimes, such as rape, particularly as they co-occur (Addington & Rennison, 2008). For property crimes, the degree of damage influences the decision to report. In cases of minor to no damage caused, reporting a crime can “be perceived as a nuisance” (Fishman, 1979, p. 152).

Perceived offence seriousness is inextricably linked to the range of modalities employed to commit extortion. Tactics occur along a gradient from highly impersonal phone calls to physical acts, such as leaving notes or damaging property to reinforce the implication that non-cooperation will result in further harm (Yupari-Azabache et al., 2020). While more physical extortive acts may be perceived as more serious, telephonic extortion has assumed a special significance due to its widespread use. In Mexico City, for example, it has been estimated that 1 in every 20 households has been targeted by telephonic extortion. While the source of telephonic extortions may vary, it has been ascertained that prisoners will dedicate themselves to this type of extortion (Azaola, 2009).

There is also the emotional impact, as mentioned by Goudriaan et al. (2006) that can play a role. Interviews with individuals arrested for extortion reveal the astonishing level of information gathered in preparation for an extortion operation. This information will include the victim’s family dynamic, bank accounts and earnings. Much of the information is obtained with the goal of effectively threatening the victim (Fondevila & Carlos Vilalta, 2020). Regardless of modality, one common element that sets extortion apart from other crimes is that the “reputation for violence” creates the opportunity to extort (Yupari-Azabache et al., 2020).

## **Victim and offender characteristics**

The victim-offender relationship also weighs heavily on whether a crime will be reported to the police. There are numerous potential costs to reporting that may arise from interdependencies between the victim and offender. These costs may be amplified when access to the victim is equated with possible threats or retaliation. Previous research has found that in the case of ex-spouses there was an increased likelihood of reporting (Felson et al., 1999). Offenders who were spouses or ex-spouses increased the odds of reporting domestic violence as did cases where the aggressor was an offspring of the victim (Kang & Lynch, 2014). Perpetrators who are strangers to the victim may also not be reported because the victim feels they have little information to provide; thus, there is little the police can offer (Tarling & Morris, 2010).

Earlier research stressed that demographic differences had scant explanatory power (Skogan, 1984). However, this view has ceded way to investigative findings showing, for example, that females are more likely to report violent crimes (Conaway & Lohr, 1994). Age has also demonstrated an inverse relationship with reporting (c.f. Acierno et al., 2001), although there is by no means a consensus as other studies report a positive relationship (Baumer, 2002; Boateng, 2018; Watkins, 2005). Level of education may also evince an inverse relationship with reporting (Goudriaan et al., 2006).

One issue overlooked in some research is family composition and its impact on the decision to report crimes to the police. In the context of domestic violence, for example, raising a child may influence the calculations made by a victim to report (Kang & Lynch, 2014). Victims who are not married may also be less likely to report crimes (Boateng, 2018). The more time spent gainfully employed also reduces the likelihood (Goudriaan et al., 2006). However, socioeconomic

disadvantage may have little to no impact on the reporting of certain crimes such as aggravated assault and robbery (Baumer, 2002; Fishman, 1979).

There is also the issue of victim-offender overlap in which victims themselves are involved in risky lifestyles that preclude voluntary contact with law enforcement to report victimisation. Indeed, some studies have found a substantial degree of overlap between victims and offenders in terms of offending and risky behaviours (c.f. Jennings et al., 2011; Van Dijk & Steinmetz, 1983). This lifestyle overlap, and concomitant unwillingness to report, may be influenced by other socialisation processes as well, such as legal cynicism which further reduces the probability of reporting victimisation (Nivette et al., 2015).

While research on extortion is in a formative stage, Yupari-Azabache et al. (2020) found in a study of extortion in Peru that males were most likely to report and 86% had children, consistent with Kang and Lynch (2014). Further, the authors found a positive relationship between reported income, having a fixed residence and the reporting of extortion. These results echo a case study of extortion in Ciudad Juarez that pointed to an increased likelihood that the owner of a business will report extortion attempts (Fondevila & Carlos Vilalta, 2020). Interestingly, this contrasts with previous research showing an inverse relationship between employment and reporting (c.f. Goudriaan et al., 2006).

One critical aspect of extortion within the Mexican context is that it is a local phenomenon. That is, most extortions are committed by local groups whose territory consists of a neighbourhood and perhaps some neighbouring areas (Ramírez de Garay & Lopez, 2020). However, offenders also include organised crime groups and lone criminals who may pose as one of the former (Pérez Morales et al., 2015). Current research suggests that criminals committing extortion are younger, in their teens and twenties, and generally come from and reside in socially disorganised areas and unstable family environments (Yupari-Azabache et al., 2020).

Regardless of the offender characteristics, what sets extortion apart from other crimes is that the victim is coerced into paying money (or other goods) in return for protection from the extortioner or from rival criminals. In other words, the victim and the offender cooperate to a certain degree (Best, 1982). In essence this cooperation implies a certain victim-offender overlap that may inhibit reporting such crimes. The two parties may even enter into an implicit and recurring pact where payments are regular and the potential for violence omnipresent (Kelly et al., 2000; Martínez Trujillo, 2021).

### ***Perceptions of the police***

Perceptions of the police, through various methods of operationalisation, are one of the more consistent and powerful predictors of crime reporting, along with offence seriousness. Previous research indicates a positive relationship between attitudes towards the police and the likelihood of reporting victimisation (Watkins, 2005). Kidd and Chayet (1984) asserted that perceptions of police effectiveness will affect the decision to report a crime, in addition to how they believe the police will treat them. Routine follow-up, for example, can increase the odds of reporting later violent crime. For non-violent crimes, recovery of property or an arrest can contribute to a greater likelihood of reporting (Conaway & Lohr, 1994).

However, actual effectiveness may bear little to no influence in other cases. The process-based model (Tyler, 2011; Tyler & Fagan, 2008) posits that perceptions of police legitimacy are influenced by the way in which the police treat the citizenry in terms of fairness. This belief in police legitimacy increases the willingness to cooperate. One important takeaway in this regard is that people are attentive to negative stimuli and negative experiences have a greater impact on reporting behaviour (Skogan, 2006). Parallel to these findings, modest gains in reporting have been noted for community police programmes (subject to various control variables), which may be further enhanced by public-private partnership activities à la crime stoppers that engage the citizenry (Rosenbaum et al., 1989; Schnebly, 2008).

Further, subcultural prohibitions against reporting crimes to the police will impact reporting (Huey & Quirouette, 2010). Such impediments to reporting may intensify based on news coverage. Given that many people have sporadic or no interaction with the police, the media serves as an intermediary through which people form perceptions of the police. Previous research has found that “publicized cases of police violence against unarmed black men have a clear and significant impact on citizen crime reporting” (Desmond et al., 2016; p. 870). These effects may endure and/or compound perceptions of police corruption and ineffectiveness, which further exacerbate negative attitudes towards the police and a resultant unwillingness to report which has been observed in cases of gender-based violence (Britton, 2020).

Prior research on extortion reporting by Yupari-Azabache et al. (2020) identified a lack of confidence in authorities as one reason for not reporting. This negative relationship may relate to subcultural norms and publicised cases of police violence. However, the context is radically different from previous studies. Indeed, in Mexico a lack of trust and confidence in police touches on the sensitive topic of perceived police corruption and accusations of outright collusion between extortioners and law enforcement (Ramírez de Garay & Lopez, 2020). These negative perceptions translate into scenarios where a victim of extortion may believe they face reprisals from extortioners, who pay the police, or from the police they would report to, who may also demand payment (García, 2020; Ruiz Torres & Azaola Garrido, 2014).

Despite low confidence in the police many state and local governments have made significant strides in implementing community policing programmes to supplant a “focus on numbers” and create community ties (Agudo Sanchíz, 2021). Other government efforts have been implemented to strengthen social cohesion and create safe urban spaces to prevent crimes of opportunity and reduce fear of victimisation (Jasso-López, 2019). While the long-term benefits of these programmes, and the extent of their implementation, are subject to systematic evaluation, certain environmental characteristics may promote the reporting of extortion in Mexico consistent with previous research.

### ***Extortion in context and beyond***

Crime specificity weighs on the current analysis as the “factors affecting the reporting of crimes are likely to differ among different types of crimes” (Conaway & Lohr, 1994, p. 32). Extortion should be no exception; given its unique characteristics, the factors that promote its reporting should be unique as well. Even victim-offender dynamics may take on new significance given that a predatory or parasitic dynamic enables extortion to take place (Norza & Peñalosa, 2016).

While the literature provides ample clues as to what may influence the decision to report extortion, the resultant variables are insufficient to adequately explain this phenomenon. If for nothing else, this owes to the context of previous studies where institutional capacity in the criminal justice sector could be comfortably assumed. In Mexico, however, such assumptions cannot be made (Ingram & Shirk, 2012; Zamora Grant, 2020). There are parallel systems of governance at play. The state does not have a monopoly on violence. Drug cartels co-opt police and other authorities in order for their illegal activities to function (Snyder & Durán-Martínez, 2009). Thus, police respond to both licit and illicit sources of authority that have functioned in parallel for decades. The law of silence reigns in Mexico, where there are constant reminders of what happens to those who go against the will of drug cartels (Suarez de Garay, 2005). Since 2006, the Mexican cartels have challenged the state in a much more brutal way by directly targeting government officials (e.g., mayors) in armed attacks (Trejo & Ley, 2021).

The literature discusses normative constraints and street subcultures that strictly proscribe any reporting of victimisation. This is enforced through physical violence that may come from the larger community subscribing to a particular subculture (Huey & Quirouette, 2010). There also exists normative prescriptions that fall within a sense of justice or a duty to report that can positively influence such decisions (Tarling & Morris, 2010). In the Mexican context, such normative

prescriptions have been observed (Montes Pesquera et al., 2022). Thus, Mexico serves as the ideal backdrop for the present study of actualised collective efficacy.

It can be asserted that actualised collective efficacy is connected to those feelings of civic responsibility that promote reporting of crimes (Hart & Colavito, 2011). Civic responsibility is the hypothesised mechanism through which actualised collective efficacy can promote the reporting of crimes to the police. Accordingly, it is hypothesised that extortion victims who are aware of previous neighbourhood demonstrations of informal social control are more likely to report their victimisation ( $H_1$ ). Likewise, extortion victims who have previously participated in neighbourhood informal social control are more likely to report extortion victimisation ( $H_2$ ).

As it relates to the current study, a wealth of research supports the idea that informal social control promotes interaction with formal social control agencies (c.f. Nix et al., 2015; Yesberg & Bradford, 2021). Previous research has demonstrated, for example, that participating in civic and anti-crime organisations significantly increased the odds of assisting the police (Hawdon & Ryan, 2011). Analogous studies have also found that perceptions of efficacy at the neighbourhood level promote the *intent* to report crime (Davis & Henderson, 2003) and engage in civic acts (Nishishiba et al., 2005). It has even been suggested that merely staying abreast of events in the community can positively impact the likelihood of reporting (Schneider, 1977).

Delving further into the neighbourhood context, knowledge of neighbourhood capacity is expected to attenuate other factors that decrease the likelihood of reporting. Regarding perceptions of police, “an individual’s cognitive orientation towards legal authorities may be largely shaped by how he or she perceives community informal social control” (Nix et al., 2015, p. 617). The negative effects of other factors, such as fear of crime, should also be reduced. Previous research indicates that dysfunctional fear is attenuated by collective efficacy (Lee et al., 2020).

## **Methodology**

Data from the 2019–2021 iterations of Mexico’s National Victimization and Perceptions of Public Security Survey (Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública [ENVIPE]) was utilised for this research (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI], 2019a -, 2021a). ENVIPE is an annual survey carried out in Mexico and administered by the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI]). ENVIPE includes anonymised individual-level micro-data for all survey respondents that is broken down into a series of database files for each year of the survey. These database files include victimisation and neighbourhood security modules that are easily merged via the anonymised personal ID numbers in the ENVIPE micro data.

All three ENVIPE iterations obtained good response rates (i.e., completed interviews at selected households). ENVIPE 2019 employed a total of 630 interviewers for the 102,043 selected households with a response rate of 88% (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI], 2019b). ENVIPE 2020 and 2021 employed a total of 698 interviewers each year and achieved a response rate of 86.79% and 88.23% respectively. In 2020, 101,988 households were selected and in 2021, 102,297 households were selected (INGEI, 2021b; Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI], 2020b).

## **Variables and operationalization**

Among the variables available in the ENVIPE datasets is extortion victimisation, making the Mexico survey data an ideal vehicle for this research. Accordingly, the dataset is a population-based purposive sample of all ENVIPE survey respondents who experienced extortion victimisation in the year prior to survey. There are operational distinctions between extortion payments and payments for protection. However, the two are often analysed together because, in practice, it’s not

clear to the victims what they are paying for. For example, the implied benefit in many extortion payments is that the victims of extortion will not be harmed if they pay. In other words, they are “protected” from those demanding extortion. Thus, we follow Sabates-Wheeler and Verwimp (2014) and include both activities as a form of extortion, consistent with the approach in the ENVIPE surveys<sup>3</sup> and likely to bolster the internal validity of the study.

The dependent variable of interest is whether the survey respondents reported extortion victimisation to the authorities. An important issue in the reporting of crime is whether the victim decided to report to an alternate authority<sup>4</sup> (Tarlung & Morris, 2010). In some cases, victims may prefer to report to such individuals or groups as opposed to the police<sup>5</sup> (Bachman, 1998; Golding et al., 1989). Accordingly, the dependent variable includes reporting to both the Public Ministry and alternate authorities to cover the full range of reporting options.

### ***Actualized collective efficacy and participation in collective efficacy***

There are two independent variables of interest in the analysis. The first is actualised collective efficacy (ACE) addressing robbery<sup>6</sup> in the respondent’s neighbourhood. The ACE variable is a binary indicator included in ENVIPE that asked respondents whether “The majority of neighbors have organized to address robbery issues” (INEGI, 2019a, 2020a, 2021a). Importantly, there are no temporal limitations placed on this survey item.

Following Weisburd et al. (2020) the second independent variable of interest is whether the respondent had previously participated in actualised collective efficacy. For the year prior to survey administration respondents were asked whether they had “taken joint action with their neighbors to protect themselves from delinquency” (INEGI, 2019a, 2020a, 2021a). It can be noted here that the indicator for respondent participation addresses delinquency in general within a specified time-frame, a useful distinction from a methodological perspective as it reduced the possibility of high variance inflation factors (discussed later in this section).

***Control variables.*** Based on the extant literature, a number of variables need to be controlled to include victim characteristics, incident characteristics, experiences with the police, and environmental factors. Concerning victim characteristics, age and number of persons living with the respondent are included as numeric indicators. Employment status is a binary indicator that asked respondents if they were responsible for contracting or employing other workers. Gender (0=female and 1 = male) and time living at the current residence were also included as binary indicators. For the latter, 1 signified living at the residence for at least one year. Education level is also accounted for as it may influence one’s knowledge of rights and procedures and the perceived need to report (Soares, 2004). ENVIPE included measures for education ranging from 0 (no education) to 9 (master’s degree) (INEGI, 2019a, 2020a, 2021a).

Both fear of crime and prior victimisation are also included. Previous victimisation experiences, which have been shown to decrease crime reporting (Kwak et al., 2019), were addressed with a binary indicator asking respondents if they had been victimised prior to the survey based on a list of 15 different crimes. Fear of crime,<sup>7</sup> included as a binary indicator, asked respondents if they felt they were likely to suffer robbery or assault victimisation in what remained of the survey year (INEGI, 2019a, 2020a, 2021a).

Various incident characteristics are also controlled for to include a binary indicator for whether or not the extortion threat was delivered via telephone. A categorical indicator was also included for the location where the crime occurred. Response options included 1 = out in public; 2 = house; 3 = work; and 4 = business or establishment. Control variables also address the dynamic between victim and offender. Variables under this category included binary indicators for whether the victim recognised the assailant and whether others were present during the crime.

This research follows Boateng (2018) and includes multiple indicators to control for perceptions and activities of police. These controls include confidence in the police, a binary indicator with 0 = no confidence and 1 = at least some confidence. Perceptions of police corruption were also included

with a binary indicator that asked respondents whether they considered the police corrupt. Both indicators specifically address the municipal preventive police as they are the most common in Mexico (Esparza & Ugues, 2020). Related to perceptions of police, respondents were also asked if they were aware of any municipal programmes implemented to raise awareness of reporting crimes to the authorities. Finally, respondents were asked if they had witnessed police violence against citizens in their neighbourhood which is included as a binary indicator.

Finally, numerous control variables are included that fall under the environmental category. Variables that gauge disorder include binary indicators that ask respondents if they know or have heard of gangs, drug use or extortion occurring in their neighbourhoods. These three indicators are controlled for as they may impact perceptions of the police, insecurity and subsequent reporting behaviour (Fine et al., 2022; Nix et al., 2015). In Table 1 below, descriptive statistics for each variable under analysis can be found. Also included is the percentage of missing data which factored into the imputation procedure discussed in the following subsection.

### Data analysis

ENVIPE micro-data was merged in the R statistical environment (R Core Team, 2020). Initial examination of raw data revealed that missing data would need to be addressed. The proportion of missing data was of less concern than determining the patterns of missingness and the extent to which all available variables could be utilised in the imputation procedure to reduce bias and produce realistic pooled model results. With adequate information (covariates) in a dataset, even

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for variables under analysis.

Variable Name	Category	Descriptives	% Missing
Extortion Report	Dependent variable	1 = 3,453 (13.9%); 0 = 21382 (86.1%)	N/A
ACE Robbery	Independent variable	1 = 6,965 (28%); 0 = 11003 (44%)	27%
ACE Participation	Independent variable	1 = 6,517 (26%); 0 = 18184 (73%)	0.50%
Age	Victim characteristics	Avg. = 41	N/A
Employment Status	Victim characteristics	1 = 852 (3%); 0 = 17545 (70%)	25.90%
Previous Victimization	Victim characteristics	1 = 15093 (60%); 9,735 (39%)	0.03%
Gender	Victim characteristics	1 = 12416 (49.9%); 0 = 12419 (50%)	N/A
Education Level	Victim characteristics	Avg. = 6 (High School)	N/A
Police Corruption	Police characteristics	1 = 13150 (52%); 0 = 2,952 (11%)	35%
Police Confidence	Police characteristics	1 = 7,204 (29%); 0 = 9,743 (39%)	31%
Crime Fear	Victim characteristics	1 = 21150 (85%); 0 = 3,453 (13%)	0.90%
Time at residence	Environmental factors	1 = 22909 (92%); 0 = 1,926 (7.7%)	N/A
Neighborhood Gangs	Environmental Factors	1 = 10628 (42%); 0 = 14207 (57%)	N/A
Neighborhood Police Violence	Police characteristics	1 = 6,802 (27%); 0 = 18033 (72%)	N/A
Neighborhood Drugs	Environmental Factors	1 = 16118 (64%); 0 = 8,717 (35%)	N/A
Neighborhood Extortion	Environmental Factors	1 = 9,352 (37%); 0 = 15483 (62%)	N/A
Reporting Programs	Police Characteristics	1 = 6,500 (26%); 0 = 6,101 (24%)	49%
Victimization Location	Incident Characteristics	1 = 5240 (21%); 2 = 13297 (53%); 3 = 2,860 (11%); 4 = 2,427 (9%)	4%
Victimization Others Present	Incident Characteristics	1 = 5,634 (22%); 0 = 5,856 (23.5%)	53%
Number of House Occupants	Environmental factors	Avg. = 3.6	N/A
Assailant Known	Incident Characteristics	1 = 650 (2%); 0 = 10842 (43%)	53%
Telephonic Extortion	Incident Characteristics	1 = 13024 (52%); 0 = 1,289 (5%)	43%

\*Sample size: 24835\*

variables with an extreme degree of missingness (e.g., 90%) can be properly imputed (Madley-Dowd et al., 2019).

Initial data cleaning and examination in the *naniar* package revealed that some variables had a high degree of missingness (Tierney et al., 2020). An Upset plot was used for further examination of potential dependencies in missing values for some of the control variables and ensure the Missing at Random<sup>8</sup> (MAR) assumption was not violated. To deal with missing data this author employed multiple imputation via the *mice* package in R (Rubin, 1987; van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). All independent and control variables were included in the imputation model (Collins et al., 2001). The inclusion of more predictors has the benefit of increasing the likelihood that the missing at random assumption is tenable (Schafer, 1997). After the data cleaning, a final dataset(s) was produced with a total of 24,835 cases of respondents who reported extortion victimisation to INEGI surveyors.

The logistical regression was conducted in the R statistical environment (R Core Team, 2020). The *mice* package was utilised for all post-imputation pooling procedures, according to Rubin's rules (Rubin, 1987; van Buuren & Groothuis-Oudshoorn, 2011). Accordingly, the model results shown in Table 3 indicate the pooled results for each variable's performance<sup>9</sup> across all imputed datasets so that naturally occurring uncertainty is present while accounting for within and between imputation variances. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was calculated using the *car* package (Fox & Weisberg, 2019). No VIFs exceeded 1.5 in the model, well below any thresholds established for this statistic. Table 2 below provides a full breakdown of the VIFs<sup>10</sup> for all variables in the analysis.

## Results

After specifying the below pooled model results in Table 3, deviance residuals were examined for the presence of extreme values or skewness. These residuals did not indicate the presence of any issues as there were no extreme values ( $\min = -1.2$ ;  $\max = 2.4$ ) and the median ( $-0.4$ ) was close to zero which suggests little bias in the residuals. The Hosmer – Lemeshow test was utilised as a global goodness of fit test after variable entry (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 1980). As with some goodness of fit tests, non-significant p-values are indicative of good model fit. The global test returned a Chi square

**Table 2.** Variance inflation factors for variables under analysis.

Variable	GVIF	GVIF <sup>(1/(2*Df))</sup>
Number of House Occupants	1.08	1.04
Education Level	1.15	1.07
Telephonic Extortion	1.50	1.23
Employment Status	1.11	1.05
Gender	1.07	1.04
Age	1.18	1.09
Time at residence	1.08	1.04
Neighborhood Gangs	1.23	1.11
Neighborhood Police Violence	1.18	1.09
Neighborhood Drugs	1.29	1.13
Neighborhood Extortion	1.17	1.08
Crime Fear	1.08	1.04
ACE Robbery	1.38	1.18
ACE Participation	1.43	1.19
Reporting Programs	1.13	1.06
Police Corruption	1.30	1.14
Police Confidence	1.32	1.15
Previous Victimization	1.08	1.04
Victimization Location	1.34	1.05
Victimization Others Present	1.03	1.01
Assailant Known	1.31	1.14
*Sample size: 24835*		

**Table 3.** Logistic regression pooled model results.

Variable	Estimate	std.error	statistic	p.value
(Intercept)	-2.076	0.188	-11.052	0.000
Number of House Occupants	-0.005	0.012	-0.401	0.688
Employment Status	0.221	0.102	2.170	0.033
Education Level	0.058	0.009	6.425	0.000
Victimization Others Present	0.230	0.043	5.404	0.000
Assailant Known	0.367	0.083	4.403	0.001
Police Corruption	-0.086	0.057	-1.493	0.136
Telephonic Extortion	-0.952	0.093	-10.249	0.000
Gender	-0.078	0.042	-1.864	0.063
Age	0.000	0.002	-0.292	0.770
Time at Residence	-0.021	0.073	-0.285	0.775
Victimization Location [House]	0.076	0.058	1.309	0.194
Victimization Location [Work]	0.055	0.072	0.755	0.450
Victimization Location [Business or Establishment]	0.130	0.093	1.408	0.161
Neighborhood Gangs	0.088	0.045	1.969	0.049
Neighborhood Police Violence	-0.034	0.048	-0.705	0.481
Neighborhood Drugs	0.054	0.047	1.161	0.246
Neighborhood _Extortion	0.137	0.043	3.221	0.001
Crime Fear	-0.012	0.061	-0.196	0.844
ACE Robbery	0.218	0.046	4.793	0.000
ACE Participation	0.229	0.049	4.706	0.000
Reporting Programs	0.269	0.049	5.520	0.000
Police Confidence	0.109	0.052	2.097	0.042
Previous Victimization	0.026	0.043	0.617	0.538

\*Sample size: 24835\*

value of 14.5 ( $p = 0.07$ ). It was thus determined that the residuals could be examined to further determine if model fit was adequate.

Analysis of residuals was conducted in DHARMA (Hartig, 2022). This R package allows for the visual examination and testing of quantile residuals, a more precise method to determine if there are patterns and potential dependencies in the specified model. Testing of quantile residuals further indicated good model fit. A QQ plot showed normality with associated Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, dispersion test and uniformity test all non-significant.

The ACE Robbery variable had an odds ratio (exponentiated coefficient) of 1.24 and was significant at the .01 level, all of which supports the hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) that extortion victims who are aware of previous neighbourhood demonstrations of informal social control are more likely to report their victimisation. The model indicates that when actualised collective efficacy for robbery was present, there was a 24% increase in the odds ratio of reporting extortion victimisation. ACE Participation likewise contributed to an increase in the log odds of reporting extortion victimisation. The variable was significant at the .01 level and demonstrated a slight stronger impact on reporting than ACE Robbery in support of the hypothesised relationship ( $H_2$ ) that victims who have previously participated in neighbourhood informal social control are more likely to report extortion victimisation. The odds ratio of 1.25 indicates that survey respondents who had previously participated in neighbourhood action to address delinquency (not specific to any crimes) were 25% more likely to report extortion victimisation.

### Victim characteristics

In examining victim characteristics, the model results indicate that education level also increased the odds of reporting extortion victimisation. The coefficient of .058 indicates a modest increase in the log odds of reporting the victimisation, which equates to 6% increase in the odds of reporting for each additional diploma/degree obtained by the respondent. Employment status was also significant, with an exponentiated coefficient of 1.25. Thus, victims of extortion, who employed or contracted other workers, had 25% greater odds of reporting the extortion.

### **Environmental factors**

The presence of neighbourhood gangs was modestly significant and increased the log odds of reporting by .09. The corresponding odds ratio of 1.09 is associated with a 9% increase in the odds of reporting if gangs were present in the neighbourhood. Neighbourhood extortion was a stronger predictor than neighbourhood gangs and highly significant ( $p$ -value  $\leq .01$ ). In fact, respondent awareness of extortion acts in the neighbourhood increased the odds of reporting extortion victimisation by 14.7%.

### **Incident characteristics**

The model results indicate that some incident characteristics increased the odds of reporting. The presence of others at the time of victimisation was highly significant ( $p \leq .01$ ) and increased the log odds of reporting extortion by .23. This change in the log odds equates to a 25.9% increase in the odds of reporting (odds ratio = 1.25) extortion victimisation if the victim was not alone.

The strongest variable in the model per change in the log odds was the indicator for whether the extortion attempt was telephonic or not ( $p \leq .01$ ). This control variable decreased the log odds of reporting extortion by -0.95. The odds ratio of 0.38 equates to a 61% *decrease* in the odds of reporting extortion if the attempt is made over the telephone.

### **Police**

Confidence in the municipal preventive police was marginally significant. Respondents who displayed at least some confidence in the municipal police were 11.5% more likely to report extortion (OR = 1.11). Respondent awareness of reporting programmes was also highly significant ( $p \leq .01$ ) and conducive to reporting of victimisation. In fact, the indicator for reporting programmes was one of the strongest predictors, associated with a 30% increase in the odds of reporting.

### **Model effects**

The marginal effects derived from the model show similar variable effects on the probability scale. As Table 4 below indicates, the average marginal effect for ACE Robbery was 0.24. That is, on average the predicted probability of reporting extortion victimisation increased by 24% when the ACE Robbery variable was present. Similar effects can be seen in the probability increase for ACE Participation (22% vs 24%).

Importantly, the associated p-values for the marginal effects are calculated as non-linear functions taking into account all other covariates to arrive at each variable impact on the probability scale. Thus, some coefficients that demonstrate a significant impact on the log odds may not significantly impact the probability scale. This was the case for police confidence which was marginally significant in the logistic regression model but displayed a non-significant marginal effect. That said, the marginal effects largely mirror the model results in Table 3 and support the positive impact of actualised collective efficacy on crime reporting.

### **Discussion**

It was posited earlier in this article that civic responsibility is the mechanism through which actualised collective efficacy can promote the reporting of crimes to the police. It has been found in prior research that feelings of mutual trust and support promote increased feelings of civic duty (Lenzi et al., 2013). The current study provides a nice corollary as individual knowledge of previous community action against robbery promoted crime reporting, itself an expression of civic duty.

**Table 4.** Average marginal effects for logistic regression model.

factor	AME	SE	z	p	lower	upper
ACE Participation	0.220	0.048	4.562	0.000	0.126	0.314
ACE Robbery	0.239	0.045	5.328	0.000	0.151	0.327
Assailant Known	0.445	0.056	7.926	0.000	0.335	0.556
Crime Fear	0.002	0.061	0.032	0.975	-0.117	0.121
Age	-0.001	0.002	-0.587	0.557	-0.004	0.002
Education Level	0.056	0.009	6.311	0.000	0.039	0.073
Number of House Occupants	-0.005	0.011	-0.440	0.660	-0.027	0.017
Employment Status	0.245	0.088	2.791	0.005	0.073	0.416
Victimization Location [House]	0.003	0.050	0.060	0.952	-0.095	0.101
Victimization Location [Work]	-0.036	0.070	-0.524	0.600	-0.173	0.100
Victimization Location [Business or Establishment]	0.103	0.086	1.199	0.231	-0.065	0.271
Victimization Others Present	0.205	0.040	5.191	0.000	0.128	0.283
Gender	-0.069	0.040	-1.722	0.085	-0.146	0.009
Neighborhood Drugs	0.058	0.046	1.273	0.203	-0.031	0.147
Neighborhood Extortion	0.137	0.042	3.230	0.001	0.054	0.220
Neighborhood Gangs	0.095	0.043	2.199	0.028	0.010	0.180
Neighborhood Police Violence	-0.031	0.047	-0.674	0.501	-0.123	0.060
Police Confidence	0.075	0.043	1.730	0.084	-0.010	0.159
Police Corruption	-0.054	0.054	-0.990	0.322	-0.160	0.053
Previous Victimization	0.016	0.042	0.389	0.698	-0.066	0.099
Reporting Programs	0.251	0.041	6.180	0.000	0.171	0.330
Telephonic Extortion	-0.768	0.054	-14.168	0.000	-0.874	-0.662
Time at Residence	-0.043	0.072	-0.594	0.553	-0.183	0.098

\*Sample size: 24835\*.

Indeed, respondent knowledge of previous community action to address robberies was significantly and positively related to the reporting of extortion victimisation.

Interestingly, participation in such community action was similarly significant and promoted reporting activities. Both variables of interest contributed almost equally to the likelihood of reporting extortion. Thus, it may be the case that community informal social control can promote other civic obligations even when the victim is not directly involved in community actions, but aware that it occurs in the neighbourhood context. Such awareness (or participation) sets the stage for empowerment of victims to report what they have experienced within the context of actualised community capacity.

In a theoretical sense this parity between the predictors of interest is akin to the concept of declining marginal utility. This perspective offers the idea that increasing quantities of a certain good or activity, such as socialising with friends, can often mean less in terms of perceived gains (e.g., well-being) (Kushlev et al., 2018). While a concerted criminological analysis aimed at drawing statistical parallels remains to be seen, the idea that “awareness is sufficient” is intriguing as it applies to efforts to increased crime reporting.

Collective efficacy is context and task specific and there is little doubt that the actualised counterpart adopted here is as well. That is, there is a process of updating that occurs as new information becomes available and new experiences occur (Hipp, 2016). However, the present research indicates that some theoretical extensions of the collective efficacy framework may be less susceptible to updating than others. This tentative conclusion owes to a couple of issues.

First, knowledge of community capacity and participation in community action had similar effects despite the two variables touching on quite different aspects of the collective efficacy puzzle. Second, the variables of interest impacted on extortion despite addressing different crime issues (e.g., robbery vs extortion). And both variables were highly significant after controlling for neighbourhood extortion. Of course, it must be highlighted that this conclusion only applies within the extortive context of Mexico.

Theoretically, the linkages found in this research should apply to other types of crimes as well. That is, actualised collective efficacy in the context of other crimes should positively impact reporting. This observation is based off perceived offence seriousness; a range of crimes deemed

less serious than the crime in question (to which a neighbourhood has responded) may also be reported with greater frequency. That said, it is unclear the extent to which neighbourhood informal social control must overlap with the type of crime victimisation. This is an aspect of crime reporting that future studies can address.

It bears noting that the present research diverged greatly from traditional approaches to measuring neighbourhood collective efficacy. The approach adopted here is, in the author's opinion, a natural progression as it distinguishes between perception and awareness within our personal information ecologies. Both perceptions and maintenance of knowledge are important. The push and pull of seemingly strong virtual ties that can be maintained through technological advances should be reconciled with increasingly distant physical ties. Awareness of certain events is one such corollary to perceptions that holds promise as scholars continue to unveil neighbourhood effects.

These findings have policy implications. Police activity and citizen perceptions of the police may serve as antecedent conditions to the formation of collective efficacy (Sargeant, 2017). But the relationships are not straightforward nor are the effects always direct. This is particularly the case with ACE as it addresses the realised capacity to impart informal social control. ACE need not reflect confidence in the police as neighbourhoods may respond to a lack of policing with informal social control (Kubrin & Weitzer, 2003). Thus, police programmes that promote community proximity in its various forms can focus on harnessing realised community capacity as well as publicising its usage to link that awareness/knowledge component of ACE to more formal control mechanisms. Doing so can prevent excesses on both sides of the social control dynamic.

It is important to highlight that the control variables were quite impactful. The analysis controlled for novel victim and incident characteristics that resulted in significant impacts on the probability of reporting extortion. For example, victims who employed others were significantly more likely to report extortion victimisation than others. The telephonic extortion modality evinced the largest effect on reporting and was thus crucial to control for while analysing the variables of interest.

Other control variables bolster the extant literature highlighting the likely overlap between neighbourhood effects and legal socialisation processes.<sup>11</sup> That is, victims with more education, confidence in police and awareness of crime reporting sensitisation programmes were more likely to report extortion, even when other negative environmental factors were also present (e.g., gangs and drugs). However, these findings were counterbalanced by fear of crime.

While the results are congruent with theoretical expectations, it is important to highlight that the present findings are limited to a subpopulation of extortion victims within a stratified random sample of the population, this hampers generalisability. Yet previous studies demonstrate that collective efficacy evinces protective effects in developing countries (Kochel, 2013). Thus, the growing literature on this phenomenon points to durable effects across contexts that may apply to the current results as well.

Extortion victims represent a difficult population for study particularly in certain contexts such as Mexico where drug trafficking organisations (DTO) wage intense conflict with the government. Despite the inherent difficulties the present study represents a gain in academic understanding of a commonplace crime and how to promote reporting. Afterall, developing solutions to crime encompasses not only crime itself but victims and their relationship with the criminal justice system.

## Notes

1. The views expressed in this manuscript are strictly those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Department of State or any official or office in the U.S. Government.
2. "Collective efficacy is conceived of as a confluence of networks, values, and norms of reciprocity that combine to enable individuals and communities to intervene as a way of suppressing norm-deviant behaviour and of maintaining social order" (Brunton-Smith et al., 2018, p. 608).
3. Extortion is operationalised in the ENVIPE surveys as the use of threats, coercion and trickery to demand money, goods or to make the victim do or stop doing something (INEGI, 2021a).

4. The role of citizens in combatting this crime in Mexico has been emphasised in recent years. In 2007 a call centre was created in Mexico City, staffed by citizen volunteers, to assist victims of telephonic extortion by providing guidance and gathering critical information on this type of extortion (Azaola, 2009).
5. Particularly in Mexico where police are seen as corrupt (Garduno, 2019).
6. Robbery was chosen as a proxy consistent with other studies (c.f. Gray et al., 2011).
7. Admittedly, operationalisation of “fear” of crime is subject to pitfalls. Concepts such as fear and worry can be confused (Hough, 2004). What this analysis controls for is a cognitive assessment of victimisation risk consistent with other previous studies (c.f. Rengifo & Bolton, 2012).
8. Number of assailants, presence of weapons, and injury to victim had missingness patterns that were potentially missing not at random (MNAR). This was compounded by the high degree of missingness (up to 92%) in the variables, which drastically reduced their utility in the multiple imputation procedure as well as their informativeness in the modelling. As such, the injury and weapon variables were excluded from the analysis to address these concerns.
9. Interactions between different variables, such as gender and fear of crime were explored initially for inclusion. However, no significant interactions were identified for inclusion in the final model.
10. The data for the GVIF column are Generalized VIFs developed by Fox and Monette (1992) while the rightmost column shows typical VIF values.
11. This refers to the internalisation of values related to the place of police in society as well as legal reasoning capacity that is connected to the school environment among others. Attitudes towards police is another component of legal socialisation that undergoes updating through interactions with police and other authorities such as through crime reporting programs (Trinkner & Tyler, 2016).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

## Notes on contributor

**Adam Dulin** received his Ph.D. in Criminology in 2006. Since then he has worked in law enforcement while pursuing varied research interests. His current areas of research include crime victimization, policing and organized crime.

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