Clarity of Responsibility, Corruption, and Basic Needs: Evidence from Mexico*

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Abstract

Clarity of responsibility theory suggests that once political parties align/match at higher and lower levels of government, voters can more easily discern who is responsible for corruption, and politicians react accordingly by reducing their corruption levels. By the same token, the same party alignment structures that yield clarity of responsibility also facilitate clientelistic resource advantages in newer democracies, and many countries have multi-tiered political systems involving local, state, and national levels. To activate programmatic accountability and voter sanctioning of corrupt politicians through clarity of responsibility, I argue that it is first necessary to have high doses of clarity of responsibility and meet voters' most immediate basic needs: freedom from poverty and violence. To provide an empirical test for the argument, I leverage new, objective corruption data from 12 years of Mexican municipal audits reports, and identify the causal effects of full-, partial-, non-alignment through a close-election regression discontinuity design. I find some support that the dosage of clarity of clarity of responsibility matters for reducing corruption, but statistical support for the basic needs hypothesis is mostly inconclusive. The paper contributes to a better understanding of how poverty, violence, and political-institutional configurations interact to produce different levels of corruption in young democracies.

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Corruption is one of the world's most intractable problems, encompassing the misuse of entrusted power or public office for private gain.[1] Often at the heart of corruption's intractability is politics. Consequently, researchers have dedicated significant attention to the effects of different political-institutional configurations on corruption (e.g., Gerring and Thacker, 2004; Kunicová and Rose-Ackerman, 2005; Ferraz and Finan, 2011).

In this paper, I focus on a prominent antidote to corruption in countries with democratic institutions: clarity of responsibility.[2] It "refers to institutional and partisan arrangements that make it easy for voters to monitor their representatives, identify those responsible for undesirable outcomes, and hold them accountable by voting them out of office" (Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits, 2016, 1). Clarity of responsibility can arise from different institutional configurations, but a particularly salient one is party alignment: that is, when politicians' parties match at higher and lower-levels of government. Prominent examples of party alignment include when a governor or mayor share the same party as the president. Irrespective of its specific configuration, party alignment facilitates clarity of responsibility because it is a manifestation of single-party control of government.

Despite the literature's support for the idea that clarity of responsibility reduces corruption (e.g., Tavits, 2007), the relationship is likely more complicated, especially for party alignment. First, the clarity of responsibility that party alignment facilitates also yields clientelistic resource advantages for aligned politicians that can outweigh the benefits of clarity of responsibility for voters (e.g., Greene, 2010; Brollo and Nannicini, 2012). Second, many countries have multi-tiered federal structures, involving national, state, and local levels, so party alignment configurations do not always yield full clarity of responsibility. Third, existing empirical studies on the relationship between clarity of responsibility and corruption use perceptions data, not actual measures of corruption (Tavits, 2007; Ecker, Glinitzer and Meyer, 2016; Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits, 2016; Xezonakis, Kosmidis and Dahlberg, 2016).

[1] For more on the definition of corruption, see, for example, Søreide (2014) and Rose-Ackerman and Palifka (2016).

[2] Note: I specifically say "democratic institutions" because authoritarian countries can still have some democratic institutions, and the argument in this paper especially applies to full democracies, less-than-full democracies, and authoritarian regimes with democratic institutions.

For these reasons, I conjecture that clarity of responsibility—especially as manifested by partial party alignment—is usually not enough to reduce corruption in newer or less robust democracies. Alignment serves as an objective indicator of clarity of responsibility, and objective indicators are generally more powerful at fostering political accountability than information (Dunning, Grossman, Humphreys, Hyde, McIntosh and Nellis, 2019). However, voters often overlook whether a politician is corrupt in order to reap other benefits regarding, for example, financial resources, partisanship, and ideology (Manzetti and Wilson, 2007; Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013; Pereira and Melo, 2015; Fernández-Vázquez, Barberá and Rivero, 2016; Muñoz, Anduiza and Gallego, 2016; Chang and Kerr, 2017; Boas, Hidalgo and Melo, 2019; Leight et al., 2020). That is particularly the case when voters are poor and less educated (Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colunga, 2013; Del Mar Martínez Rosón, 2016; Nichter and Peress, 2017; Bøttkjær and Justesen, 2021; Botero et al., 2021). In such contexts, a collective action problem characterizes voters' *de facto* preference for clientelistic accountability and, by extension, more corrupt politicians. First, voters act as a collective, not individual, principal of the agent/politician, so sanctioning corrupt politicians inherently involves a voter coordination problem (Lyne, 2008). Second, politicians in such contexts tend not to make credible policy and public goods commitments (Keefer, 2007*a*; Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros and Estévez, 2007), thereby making clientelistic accountability the safer option for voters.

Against the above backdrop, I posit that full clarity of responsibility and the fulfillment of voters' short-term basic needs are prerequisites for institutional structures facilitating clarity of responsibility to reduce corruption through programmatic accountability mechanisms.[3] With respect to basic needs, they condition voter demand for clean aligned politicians, because their fulfillment yields two benefits for voters. First, they lead voters to have smaller future discount rates and, in turn, reduce the potential for an equilibrium in which voters support a corrupt politician to reap clientelistic benefits. Second, the fulfillment of basic needs, especially the freedom from violence and poverty, leads voters to have more time to invest in politics. With that extra time, I posit that voter learning and the clarity of respon-

[3] For more on the distinction between programmatic and clientelistic accountability, refer to Kitschelt and Wilkinson (2007).

sibility from alignment makes it easier for voters to demand less corruption from aligned politicians. As compared to partial clarity of responsibility, full clarity of responsibility amplifies the above regularities, because dosage is crucial for understanding how clarity of responsibility affects corruption.

To support my argument, I gathered and cleaned 12 years of municipal-level corruption data from Mexico, encompassing the years 2007-2018. Officially, Mexico is a member of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), a club for wealthier countries. However, Mexico also has average levels of poverty as well as high levels of corruption and violence—with both the former and latter being fueled by the drug trade. Institutionally, Mexico has political variation at the national, state, and municipal levels, a configuration that differs from many of its neighboring countries in Central America.[4] Additionally, most Mexican politicians did not have a reelection motive for the period under study, which complicated voters' efforts to keep politicians accountable (Motolinia, 2021). For these reasons, Mexico exemplifies the types of new and less-than-perfect democracies where clarity of responsibility can be full or partial, and other factors, such as poverty or violence, can attenuate the power of clarify of responsibility to reduce corruption.

Unlike the corruption perceptions data that dominate the literature, the data underpinning this study are actual measures of corruption that I draw from audit reports produced by the Mexican supreme audit institution (ASF, *Auditoría Superior de la Federación*). With these objective data, I can make accurate assessments regarding corruption without having to worry about information leakage, halo effects, content opacity, and low construct validity that characterize the perceptions data (see Kurtz and Schrank, 2007*a*,*b*; Hollyer, 2018). Additionally, because the data are subnational, they overcome level of analysis problems that challenge many corruption studies (Gingerich, 2013).

To test whether different alignment configurations affect levels of corruption in Mexico, I rely on a regression discontinuity design along the lines of Brollo and Nannicini (2012).

[4] In contrast to neighboring countries Guatemala and Honduras, Mexico has political variation at the state level, as voters elect their state governors. In Honduras and Guatemala, the president chooses department (state) governors from his or her own party, and voters have no say on the process.

The design exploits random variation in close elections to as-if randomly assign mayors and governors into one of the following alignment configurations: three-way, mayor-governor-president alignment (full clarity of responsibility); mayor-governor alignment (partial clarity of responsibility); and mayor-president alignment (partial clarity of responsibility). The advantage of this research design is that it approximates a randomized experiment and allows the estimation to overcome endogeneity issues that plague many corruption studies.

To examine how basic needs relating to poverty and violence condition the degree to which alignment affects levels of corruption, I examine the whole sample by itself and divide it into different samples based on high/low poverty and violence levels as well as poverty and violence increases/decreases. Although I do not find consistent statistical support for the basic needs theory by itself, the results regarding clarity of responsibility are in line with my projections. More specifically, as predicted, clarity of responsibility does not influence corruption outcomes on its own, but clarity of responsibility dosage matters. In this case with Mexico, three-way party alignment tends to yield lower corruption levels than partial party alignment between mayors and presidents. The latter case is very significant, because the decentralization literature indicates that it is the institutional configuration that facilitates the highest high degree of rent-sharing (e.g., Brollo and Nannicini, 2012; Lara and Toro, 2019).

The present study furthers scholarly understanding on the conditions under which it is possible to shift from high- to low-corruption equilibria. Although Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits (2016) find some evidence that, by itself, clarity of responsibility reduces corruption, as I show here for Mexico and Denly and Gautam (2022) show for Guatemala, such a theory does not find empirical support when examining party alignment in mid-to-low income countries. The results likely stem from the fact corruption entails an onerous collective action problem, and principal-agent approaches that do not account for how to overcome voter coordination problems often fail (Lyne, 2008; Persson, Rothstein and Teorell, 2013). As the clientelism literature demonstrates, voters do not automatically monitor their politicians through a programmatic vertical accountability relationship (e.g., Stokes, 2005; Kitschelt

and Wilkinson, 2007). Similarly, the corruption literature highlights that voters trade-off the value of corrupt politician with respect to the benefits regarding ideology or resources that a politician can bring (e.g., Winters and Weitz-Shapiro, 2013). However, increasing the dosage of clarity of responsibility may alter such outcomes, even more in more developed, middle-income countries like Mexico.

1. Theoretical Framework

At the most basic level, the theoretical framework underpinning this paper posits that the extent to which politicians reduce their corruption levels depends on pressure from voters. In other words, there must be some form a vertical accountability relationship to reduce corruption. If voters do not put pressure on politicians to reduce their corruption levels, then politicians will extract rents—i.e., engage in corruption—at will. Essentially, the rent extraction part of the theoretical framework closely follows the canonical Barro (1973)-Ferejohn (1986) model (see Gehlbach, 2021, Chapter 7).

Although there are many determinants of corruption (see Treisman, 2007), the present paper examines the conditions under which political institutions can reduce corruption. On that score, previous literature suggests that reelection (Ferraz and Finan, 2011), unitary and federal systems of government (Gerring and Thacker, 2004), and clarity of responsibility all reduce corruption (Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits, 2016). I aim to show the conditions under which the latter relationship holds, focusing particularly on countries where programmatic voter-politician linkages and Downsian-style spatial voting are compromised.

To further understand when clarity of responsibility can reduce corruption under less than consistent programmatic citizen-politician linkages, I focus on party alignment. Alignment provides an objective indicator of clarity of responsibility, because it usually suggests single-party control of government. That objective indicator is very significant to voters, too, particularly in younger democracies, where information is generally not enough to sway voters not to vote for corrupt politicians (Dunning, Grossman, Humphreys, Hyde, McIntosh

and Nellis, 2019). By the same token, the literature is clear that alignment consistently provides an institutional setting for clientelism and additional discretionary transfers (e.g., Greene, 2010; Brollo and Nannicini, 2012). Given that additional resources usually fuel more corruption (e.g., Brollo et al., 2013), it is evident that alignment can not only provide clarity of responsibility but can also increase corruption.

1.1. Voters' Basic Needs and Willingness to Sanction Corruption

I attempt to resolve the trade-off between alignment providing both clarity of responsibility and resources that increase corruption in weak partisanship environments by learning from the clientelism literature. In environments of poverty, clientelistic handouts are very compelling and useful to voters (e.g., Dixit and Londregan, 1996; Auyero, 1999). The main reason is that poor people tend to be more risk averse (Stokes et al., 2013, 167), so they discount the future more (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007, 25). The logic is sound, too, particularly because politicians in such environments tend not to make credible, programmatic policy commitments to voters (Keefer, 2007*a*,*b*; Keefer and Vlaicu, 2008). The resulting equilibrium, especially given that voting out politicians who are corrupt or engage in clientelism involves significant voter coordination, is thus one of a collective action problem.[5] Under that collective action problem, voters prefer private transfers (clientelism) to the less credible commitment of public goods provision (Magaloni, Díaz-Cayeros and Estévez, 2007; Robinson and Verdier, 2013). The consequence for corruption under a clientelistic equilibrium, as much work now demonstrates, is that corrupt politicians maintain voter support (e.g., Manzetti and Wilson, 2007; Chang and Kerr, 2017; Leight et al., 2020; Botero et al., 2021; Bøttkjær and Justesen, 2021).

To overcome that collective action problem, which prevents voters from taking action on the clarity of responsibility from alignment to collectively demand less corruption from

[5] I draw the idea from Lyne (2008), who characterizes the voter's coordination dilemma as a prisoner's dilemma, which only has one dominant strategy and a single equilibrium by definition. Because I find the the multiple-equilibria collective problem, such as the stag hunt or assurance dilemma, more convincing here, I do not cite Lyne (2008) directly.

politicians, I argue that it is necessary to meet voter's basic needs. Once voters need to worry less about meeting basic needs, the marginal benefit of a clientelistic handout is lower (Dixit and Londregan, 1996), and voters can afford to discount of the future less. By extension, voters can also afford demand less corrupt politicians—even if that entails foregoing a clientelistic handout. Finally, meeting basic needs affords voters more time to pay attention to politics. In turn, voters have more time to dedicate to learning about politics and selecting less corrupt politicians. Doing so is within voters' interests, too: the marginal benefit of a clientelistic handout is small once voters' basic needs are already met, so at that point public goods are more attractive for voters (Lizzeri and Persico, 2004, 756).

Given that there are many types of basic needs, it is necessary to specify which ones are most likely to shift voters and politicians toward lower-corruption equilibria and, in the process, make voters and politicians respond to the clarity of responsibility from alignment. To that end, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a useful list of basic needs (see United Nations, 1948). However, many of them involve difficult-to-overcome collective action problems in countries with low levels of such basic needs. Overcoming discrimination, instituting a system of property rights, or enforcing equal protection before the law are but three such examples.

Voters are ostensibly aware about the intractability of many collective action problems, so I argue that voters prioritize the short-term, more basic needs of freedom from violence and poverty.[6] In many ways, the various forms of clientelism—such as vote-buying, turnout buying, and legitimacy-buying—are short-term substitutes to actually providing full relief from poverty. Freedom from violence is so central to human life it corresponds to the third article on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948). Freedom from violence also relates to corruption, because the latter is often part of the Faustian bargain

[6] Freedom from poverty and violence are covered in the United Nations's (1948) Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With respect to freedom from violence, Article 3 specifically states: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." The relevant part of Article 25 regarding poverty specifically states: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control." For more, see United Nations (1948).

that voters must accept to maintain an equilibrium (North, Wallis and Weingast, 2009; García-Ponce, Zeitzoff and Wantchekon, 2021, 709). For these reasons, I hypothesize:

> Hypothesis 1: As voters in contexts of weak partisanship are increasingly able to fulfill their short-term basic needs of having less violence and poverty, they will be less tolerant of aligned corrupt politicians. In turn, aligned politicians, who generally enjoy significant resource advantages, will be more likely to respond to the changing voting environment and reduce their corruption levels due to the clarity of responsibility from alignment.

1.2. Clarity of Responsibility Dosage and Sanctioning Corruption

Thus far, the article has treated both clarity of responsibility and its sub-indicator of party alignment as binary concepts: either there is clarity of responsibility/alignment, or there is none. That view corresponds to the literature on clarity of responsibility and corruption (Tavits, 2007; Ecker, Glinitzer and Meyer, 2016; Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits, 2016; Xezonakis, Kosmidis and Dahlberg, 2016). It is also corresponds to the majority of the even more voluminous decentralization literature on alignment (e.g., Brollo and Nannicini, 2012; Bueno, 2018; Corvalan, Cox and Osorio, 2018; Fiva et al., 2021).

I argue that clarity of responsibility dosage is crucial for understanding its effects on corruption. With party alignment, the issue of dosage is easily understandable to voters in federal systems of government, where voters choose representatives at the national, state, and municipal levels. Typically, such representative correspond to the president/prime minister, governors, and mayors, though names may vary by country. In any case, consistent with Benton's (2019) recent work on debt spending in Mexico, I posit that full clarity of responsibility activates high levels of risk from a corruption scandal. Those risks correspond to both respective politician and their political party. In light of their incentives to mitigate the damage from corruption scandals, I hypothesize:

> Hypothesis 2: Higher doses of clarity of responsibility will yield less corruption,

especially in areas with lower poverty and lower violence.

2. Research Design

2.1. Institutional Context for Mexico

Mexico is a large country in Central America with a population of approximately 126 million. Although it is officially a part of the OECD, about 23% of Mexicans live below the poverty line, and levels of inequality are high by international standards—with a Gini coefficient circa 45 (World Bank, 2017). As with other countries in the region, Mexico is currently a presidential democracy with a federal structure, encompassing 32 states and more than 2,400 municipalities,[7] but some authoritarian legacies remain (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer, 2018; Simpser, Slater and Wittenberg, 2018).

Until 2000, when Vicente Fox won the presidency for the Nacional Action Party (PAN, *Patido de Acción Nacional*), Mexico was a dominant-party authoritarian regime (Greene, 2007).[8] From 1919 to 2000, the country had democratic institutions (e.g., bicameral legislature, voting), but the the Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) did not lose a presidential election. And there was not much luck involved. Notably, the PRI misappropriated resources from state-owned enterprises and engaged in clientelism, repression, and voter fraud to keep Mexico a dominant-party authoritarian regime (Magaloni, 2006; Greene, 2007; Cantú, 2019*b*).

Although the most recent evidence suggests that voter fraud is no longer a threat for Mexico (Challú, Seira and Simpser, 2020), other challenges remain. For example, the partisan distribution of government resources is still a concern (Timmons and Broidy, 2013), and corruption, clientelism, and violence, which are part of Mexico's authoritarian legacy, are par-

[7] The number of municipalities has changed throughout the course of this study. I take appropriate precautions when dealing with the data.

[8] Note that there is some dispute among scholars about the exact date that Mexico became a democracy, but most analysts agree that Mexico certainly was a democracy in 2000.

ticularly salient. For example, vote-buying and turnout buying continue to be widespread,[9] and Mexico ranks 130th out of the 180 countries that Transparency International surveyed for its 2019 Corruption Perceptions Index. Part of the reason why corruption and violence are rampant pertains to the drug trade. Over the years, many drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs) have successfully bribed officials at most levels of government using the infamous *plata o plomo* technique.[10] In turn, Mexico has low levels of citizen trust in government and pockets of weak state capacity (Morris and Klesner, 2010; Morris, 2013, 2018).

Presidential elections take place in Mexico every six years, and the Mexican constitution specifically prohibits any incumbent from seeking re-election. From 1919 to 2014, that prohibition on re-election applied to all positions within the government. In 2014, Mexico relaxed the prohibition to allow for re-election in the lower house and mayoral positions (Agren, 2014), but mayoral re-election was implemented in a staggered fashion (Motolinia, 2021). In any case, governors remain ineligible for re-election—even after the harmonizing of the electoral calender to align mayoral and gubernatorial elections with that of the president in 2017 (Graham, 2020).

2.2. Identification Strategy

I identify the causal effects of alignment on corruption in each sample using sharp electoral regression discontinuity design. It uses random variation in close elections to as-if randomly assign mayors or governors into alignment or non-alignment on the basis of other mayoral, gubernatorial, and presidential election outcomes. To accommodate the concept of alignment, I use Brollo and Nannicini's (2012) modification of Lee's (2008) seminal framework for the incumbency advantage. The estimand of interest, the Local Average

[9] See, for example, Holland and Palmer-Rubin (2015), Larreguy, Marshall and Querubín (2016), Cantú (2019*a*), and Greene (2021).

[10] "*Plata o plomo*" translates to "silver or lead" in Spanish. The expression is one that drug traffickers tell public officials and means that the officials have a choice between accepting a bribe to overlook trafficking activity or will be killed for refusing the money (Dal Bó, Dal Bó and Di Tella, 2006). For more on political violence in Mexico, see, for example, Calderón et al. (2015) and Trejo and Ley (2018, 2021).

Treatment Effect (ATE), is thus:

$$\begin{aligned}&\tau = \mathbf{E}[r_{it}^{(aligned)} - r_{it}^{(unaligned)} | MV_{it} = 0] = \\ &lim_{MV\downarrow 0}\, \mathbf{E}[r_{it} | MV_{it} = \text{MV}] - lim_{MV\uparrow 0}\, \mathbf{E}[r_{it} | MV_{it} = \text{MV}], \text{ such that } MV \in (-h, h)\end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where r_{it} reflects the amount of corruption in the aligned/unaligned municipality i at time t after a close election; the running variable, MV_{it}, is the margin of victory for aligned/unaligned mayor i in the most recent election for time t; and $\pm h$ corresponds to the upper/lower limit of an automatically derived, optimal close-election bandwidth for MV, following Calonico, Cattaneo and Titiunik (2014). For $MV_{it} \in (-h, h)$, I estimate τ through a local polynomial regression following Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2019, 70):

$$\begin{aligned}&r_i = \alpha + f(MV_i) + \tau D_i + Z_i'\rho + \eta_i \\ &\text{where } f(MV_i) = \sum_{k=1}^{p} \beta_k MV_i^p + \sum_{k=1}^{p} \gamma_k D_i \cdot MV_i^p\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where r_{it} is the corruption level in the municipality i in year t; MV_{it} is the margin of victory for aligned or unaligned mayor; D_{it} is the alignment dummy for the respective mayor-governor-president alignment, mayor-governor alignment, or governor-president alignment; and Z_{it} are the additional covariates. In line with Gelman and Imbens (2019), the estimation relies on polynomials fits, p, of the second order, $p \in \{2\}$, and I follow Bartalotti and Brummet (2017) by clustering standard errors at the municipality level.

2.3. Poverty and Violence Data

The municipality-level violence data in this paper are from the Mexican National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI). The data specifically refer to homicides, and are available on INEGI's website for the 1990-2018 period. Although there are many different types of violence, homicides correspond most to the basic needs approach advanced in this paper, and are highly visible to voters. Drug-Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) have mur-

dered many Mexican journalists for reporting on drug-related violence, but many intrepid journalists continue to report on homicides. Overall, Mexican citizens are keenly aware of the security issues facing them, and the same is true for politicians. For example, in the run-up to 2018 General Election, DTOs were responsible for murdering more than 130 candidates, incumbent politicians, and party workers (Diaz and Campisi, 2018).[11]

The municipality-level poverty data in this paper come from Mexico's National Evaluation Council of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL, *Consejo Nacional de la Evaluación de la Política de Desarrollo Social*). As with most countries in the world, Mexico does not measure municipal-level poverty rates on a yearly basis. Instead, the country only measures municipal-level poverty rates for the whole country every five years.

Until 2010, Mexico used an income-based classification scheme that divided poverty into food-based poverty (*pobreza alimentaria*), capacities poverty (*pobreza de capacidades*), and assets poverty (*pobreza de patrimonio*). After 2010, however, Mexico no longer published the income-based scheme and, per the 2004 Law of Social Development (*Ley de Desarrollo Social*), calculated poverty through a multidimensional measure. The income-based poverty data are available for 2000, 2005, and 2010, and the multidimensional poverty data are available for 2010 and 2015. Given the three-pronged nature of the income-based poverty data, I use the average of the food, capacities, and assets measures to get one average measure of poverty for 2000-2010. For 2010-2015, there is one unique poverty score, which is the one I employ in this study. I also impute values for missing years based on the closest year of data available.[12]

[11] Outside of the political class, the murder rate in Mexico is so high that it has lowered health- and technology-related life expectancy gains for all Mexicans (Aburto et al., 2016).

[12] For the income-based poverty measure, I assigned the 2000 values to 2001 and 2002; I assigned the 2005 values to 2003, 2004, 2006, and 2007; and I assigned the 2010 value for 2008 and 2009. For the multidimensional poverty measure, I assigned the 2010 value to 2011 and 2012, and I assigned the 2015 measure to 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018. Note: 2020 poverty data are not yet available at the time of this writing.

2.4. Samples for Estimation

Given the inability of regression discontinuity designs to accommodate interactions, I use the aforementioned poverty and violence data to divide the sample into groups by poverty and violence levels (i.e., low/high poverty or violence), as well as poverty and violence changes (i.e., increasing/decreasing poverty or violence). For comparison with the macro-level predictions of Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits (2016) on clarity of responsibility theory, I also provide estimations using the whole sample—i.e., not dividing the sample by the poverty/violence changes.

2.5. Electoral Data

I draw the electoral data for this study from Magar's (2020) vote returns dataset as well as my own examination of individual municipal results.[13] In instances where Magar's (2020) data differed from that of my own, I double-checked the results to ensure maximum accuracy. For each election I collected panel data on: (i) the names of each winning mayor and governor; (ii) the political party/ies of each winning mayor or coalition; (iii) the political party or coalition of each second-place candidate; (iv) the number of votes acquired by each winning mayor; (v) the number of votes received by each second-place candidate; (vi) the total number of votes received in the municipalities; and (vii) the number of spoiled ballots.

Given that Mexican municipal elections often have a time delay between the election date and the date in which the winning candidate takes office, I used the Mexican National Municipal Information System (SNIM, *Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal*) to obtain precise dates for the actual periods in office of each mayor. Based on the starting and ending days of each mayor's term, I then lagged the electoral data accordingly. Consequently, each municipality-year in the sample corresponds to the mayor with the most days in office in each year. I also performed the same lagging procedure with using data on the precise governor periods to mitigate any potential misattribution/measurement errors.

[13] Note: Mexico's Federal Electoral Tribunal (IFE) does not have municipal election data.

Prior to 2018, Mexican mayoral, gubernatorial, and presidential elections were not on the same electoral calendar, so I calculated the party alignment variables of interest to this study on a day-wise basis. Specifically, I created the following alignment variables: mayor-governor-president alignment (full clarity of responsibility); mayor-governor alignment (partial clarity of responsibility); and mayor-president alignment (partial clarity of responsibility). Given the diversity of multi-party mayoral coalitions, I follow Benton (2019) and calculate the above alignment configurations on the basis of whether at least one party in a municipal coalition matched that of the president or governor. As Benton (2019) explains, such a strategy is prudent because the aligned party in each municipal coalition generally wields the most power and sway anyway. Finally, I also follow Benton (2019) by excluding municipalities from the state of Oaxaca given its use of traditional election procedures that differ from the rest of the country.[14]

Because the research design that allows me best capture causal patterns is an electoral regression discontinuity design, I also need to calculate a margin of victory variable at the mayoral level. To do so, I first calculate the number of valid votes for each mayoral race by subtracting the number of spoiled ballots from the total votes. I then calculate the valid vote shares for the winning and second-place candidates by dividing the number of votes that each candidate received by the total number of valid votes. The margin of victory is thus the winning mayor's share of valid votes received subtracted by those of the second-place candidate.

Similar to Brollo and Nannicini (2012), the running variable for the regression discontinuity design is the margin of victory for the aligned/unaligned party mayor. To capture this distinction between aligned and unaligned politicians, I multiply the margin of victory for the unaligned mayors by negative one. What this design features accomplishes is that it allows the researcher to directly compare the results of the specific alignment configuration against that of the counterfactual, non-alignment.

[14] For example, many of the electoral data from Oaxaca only include a winner with no second place candidate.

2.6. Corruption Data

Table 1: Municipalities Receiving ASF Audits by Type (2007-2018)

Statistic	Frequency
Compliance	23
Compliance and performance	50
Financial and compliance	2,088
Financial compliance	105
Financial compliance with performance focus	133
Forensic	4
Performance	97
Physical investment	5
Total	2,505

The corruption data for this study come from Mexico's Supreme Audit Institution of the Federation (ASF, *Auditoría Superior de la Federación*), which is the institution responsible for government audits in Mexico. Audit data for the 2007-2018 period are available on the ASF website, from which I collected municipality-year data on the following: whether the ASF audited each municipality in each year; the number of infractions committed by each municipality in the given year; the amount of missing or stolen money in the given year, which I deflate to 2013 Mexican pesos to account for inflation; the type of audit(s) undertaken (see Table 1); and the frequency of each type of irregularity (see Table 2).

Given that the ASF performs risk-based municipal audits of a small share of Mexico's more than 2,400 municipalities every year, it is necessary to both analyze the distribution of these audits and the independence of the ASF. With respect to independence of the ASF, it receives its mandate directly from Articles 74, 79, and 113 of the Mexico Constitution, and the ASF also reports to the Chamber of Deputies, not the President. Further safeguarding against the prospect of the presidential interference in the audit process is the fact that the Chamber of Deputies, not the President, elects the Supreme Auditor of ASF (*Auditor Superior*). The Supreme Auditor serves a term of 8 years that may be renewed once. According to the OECD (2018), the ASF's main independence challenges emanate from local government bodies flouting national laws (see also Pattanayak et al., 2018). However, those

Table 2: ASF Findings/Corrective Actions by Municipality (2007-2018)

Variable/Statistic	Mean	Max
Infractions	3.73	47
Money missing (deflated to 2013 Mexican pesos)	6,714,158.00	774,237,624.00
Money missing (log)	7.50	20.47
Share of total money audited	0.81	1.00
Financial irregularity with required compensatory action	0.39	10
Performance recommendations	0.16	7
Punitive noncompliance with regulations	1.65	44
Recommendation	4.90	67
Report of crime	0.06	4
Formal request for clarification	0.15	9
Statement of financial irregularity	1.47	16
Tax evasion or financial regulatory noncompliance	0.09	5

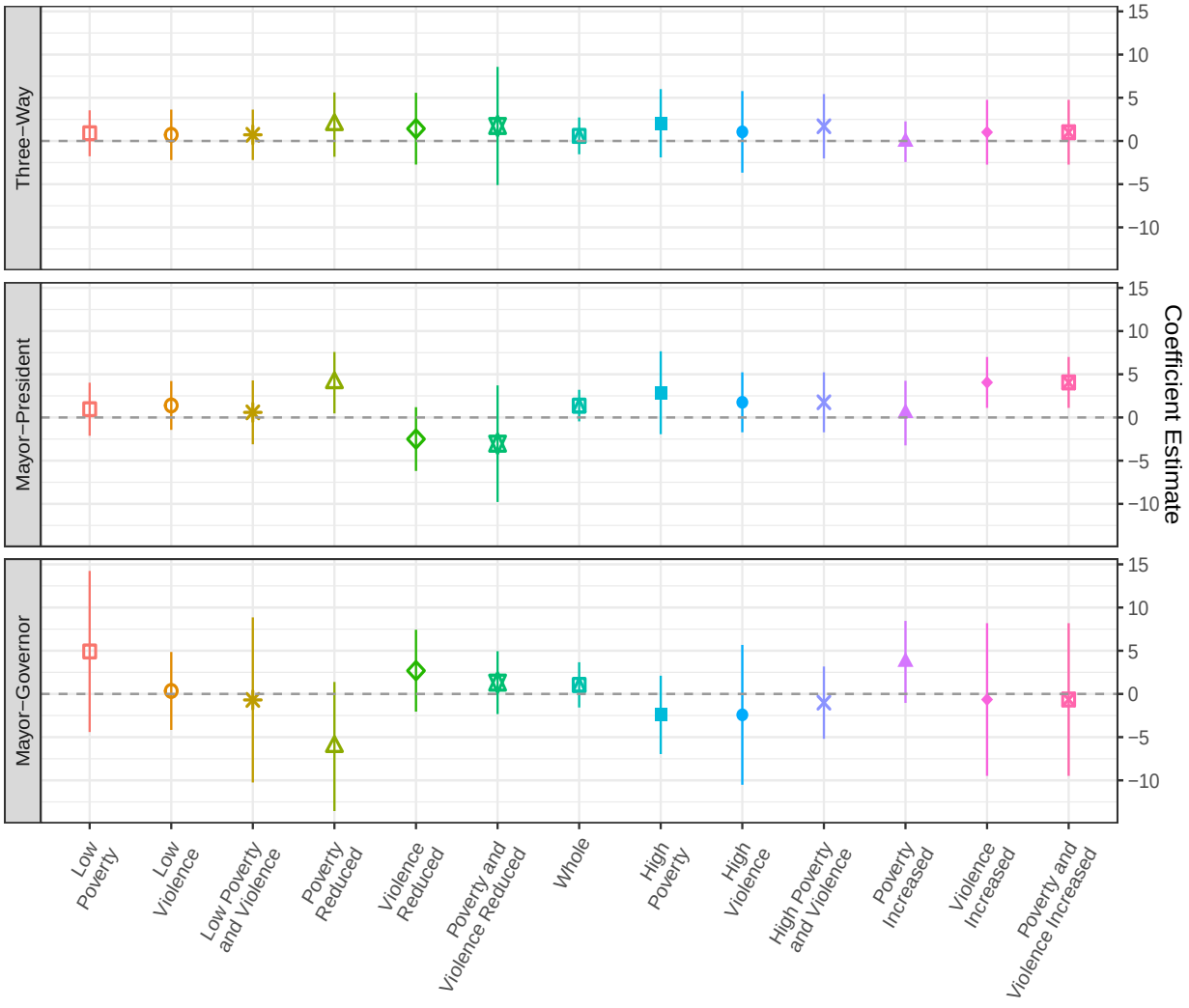
Note: data only refer to municipalities audited in each given year

challenges from local governments do not affect ASF findings or decisions on whether to undertake audits.

Especially given that law and policy implementation is a perennial challenge in Latin America (Scartascini et al., 2010), it is still necessary to examine whether political/partisan considerations shape the audit distribution. On this score, I first conduct a logistic regression (since receiving an audit is binary), regressing an audit dummy variable on partisan alignment, demographics characteristics (i.e., population). As I show in Chapter 1, there is no such bias in the audit distribution; being an opposition party politician does not predict which municipalities are subject to audit. Furthermore, Chapter 1 shows that there are no biases regarding the implementation of the audits. Overall, there do not appear to be any issues with the Mexican audit data from the ASF.

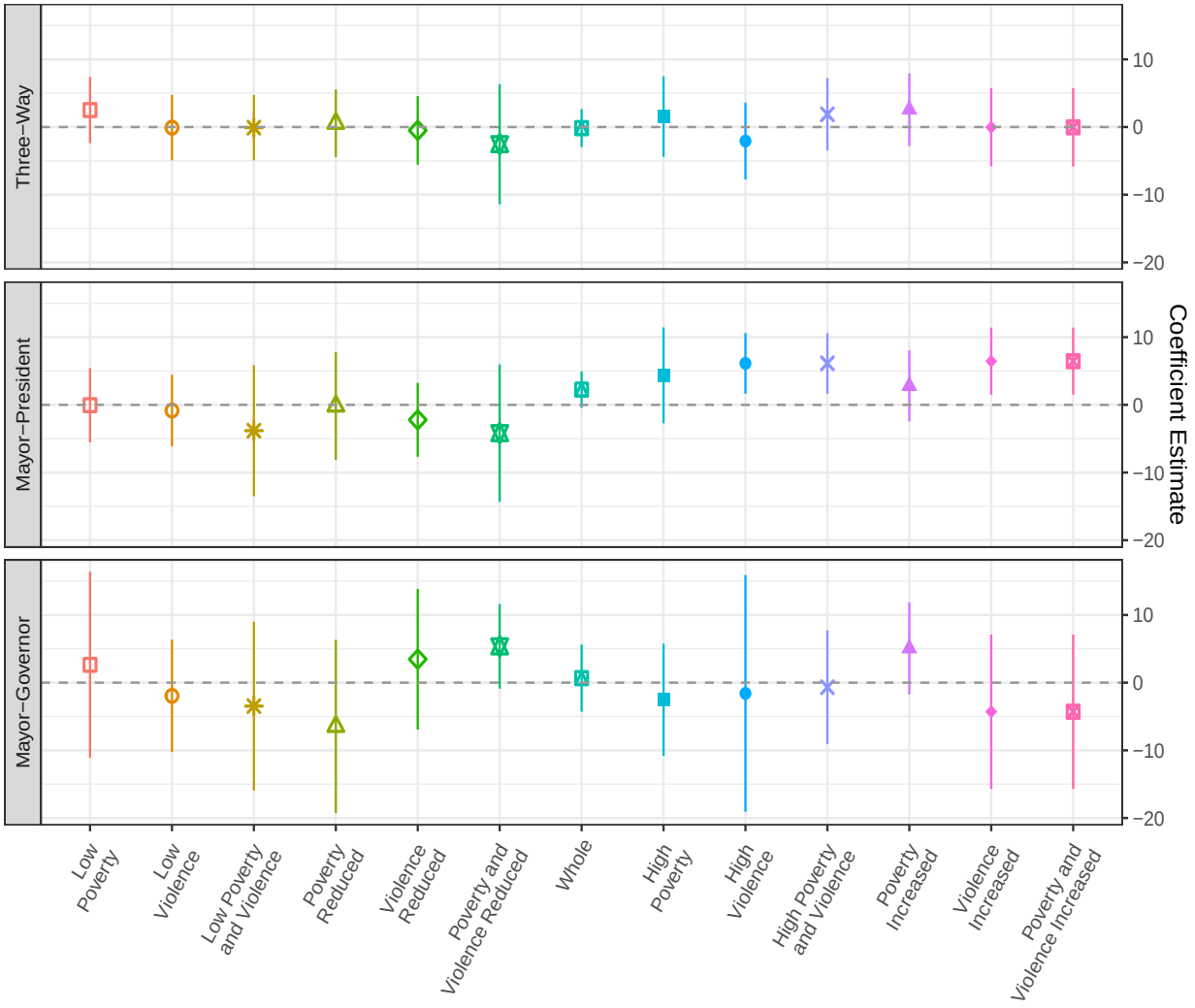
3. Results

Figure 1: Infractions by Alignment Type



Note: The above estimates are second-order polynomial fits in line with Gelman and Imbens (2019), using standard errors clustered by municipality and confidence intervals at the 95% level.

Figure 2: Stolen/Misappropriated Money (Log) by Alignment Type



Note: The above estimates are second-order polynomial fits in line with Gelman and Imbens (2019), using standard errors clustered by municipality and confidence intervals at the 95% level.

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