Clarity of Responsibility, Corruption, and the Context-Specific Nature of Voters' Basic Needs: Evidence from Mexico*

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March 13, 2022

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 meet voters' context-specific basics. To provide an empirical test for the argument, I leverage new, objective corruption data from 11 years of Mexican municipal audits reports, and identify the causal effects of full-, partial-, non-alignment through a close-election regression discontinuity design. Consistent with my theory and the fact that freedom from violence is a first-order basic need in Mexico, I find some evidence that full party alignment reduces corruption in municipalities with decreasing violence. However, I do not find the same results when examining the effects of lower poverty, which is less of a first-order basic need than violence reduction in Mexico. 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.

*For extraordinary research assistance, I thank María Eugenia Blanco and the following current and former Research Affiliates and Graduate Research Fellows at UT Austin's Innovations for Peace and Development research lab: Ana Ramírez, Ana Suárez, Augustine D'Eramo, Briana Rocha, Daisy Landaverde, Ethan Tenison, Fabiola Ramírez, Isabel Campos, Iulia Tothezan, Ivana Jelenzsky, Jenny Rodriguez, Magdalena Ibarra, Mary White, Monserrat Ramón, Paige Johnson, Paul Orszag, Rachel Rosenberg, and Sterling Moseley. For advice or feedback, I thank Analía Gómez Vidal, Carolien Van Ham, Dan Nielson, Jan Pierskalla, Joel Simmons, John Gerring, Ken Greene, Mike Findley, Nara Pavão, Xiaobo Lü, and participants at the ECPR and MPSA conferences. All errors are those of the author.

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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 prisoner's dilemma 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; 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' basic needs are prerequisites for institutional structures facilitating clarity of responsibility to reduce corruption through programmatic accountability mechanisms.[3] For most countries, basic needs refer to poverty and economic circumstances more broadly, but basic needs can also refer to violence in countries where it is widespread. To that end, because widespread violence can represent a more first-order threat to people's livelihoods than poverty, reducing violence is likely a more salient basic need under such circumstances. Consequently, I argue that violence reduction under such circumstances is also more likely to trigger voter coordination on programmatic voter-politician accountability linkages and,

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

in turn, the reduction of corruption via clarity of responsibility.

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*a*). In short, the data are suitable for theorizing.

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). The design exploits random variation in close elections to as-if randomly assign mayors and governors into one of the following alignment configurations: mayor-governor-president alignment

[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.

(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 most corruption studies.

To examine how basic needs relating to poverty and violence condition the degree to which alignment affects levels of corruption, I divide the data into poverty-decreasing, poverty-increasing, violence-decreasing, and violence-increasing samples to complement the full sample analysis. Consistent with my theory that stresses the importance of basic needs, I do not find any empirical support for the proposition that, by itself, clarity of responsibility reduces corruption. Similarly, given that poverty reduction is less of a first-order basic need than violence reduction, results suggest that lower-poverty municipalities with full clarity of responsibility do not exhibit lower level of corruption. Only the reduction of violence leads politicians to decrease their levels of corruption under full clarity of responsibility.

Assuming the results hold after further analysis, the study contributes to three different literatures. The first concerns how difficult it is possible to shift from high- to low-corruption equilibria. Although Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits (2016) find some evidence that clarity of responsibility reduces corruption, as I show here for a 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 a sticky 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. Often, the relationship flips and politicians pay brokers to monitor voters (e.g., Stokes, 2005). Even though vote-buying can fail (Greene, 2021), it still weakens vertical accountability through norms of voter reciprocity (Finan and Schechter, 2012; Lawson and Greene, 2014).

Second, the paper contributes to a better understanding of the conditions under which economic modernization processes reduce corruption. While there is some robust statistical

evidence connecting an increase in mass education to the reduction of corruption (Uslaner, 2017), the other component of modernization theory, economic growth and poverty reduction, does not yield consistent evidence that it reduces corruption Fisman and Golden (2017, 15-16). Likely, the dearth of evidence along those lines relates to the fact that the reduction of corruption through economic modernization forces take place through political institutions (Denly and Gautam, 2022). However, the combination poverty reduction and institutional clarity do not produce the same results here when examining Mexico. While these results may seem puzzling at first, particularly in light of Mexico's membership in the OECD, they follow logically when considering past literature on social orders and the symbiotic relationship between violence and corruption in Mexico (e.g., Morris, 2013). As North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) underscore, reducing violence a first-order concern for the rule of law to take hold. My results help extend this literature on limited- and open-access social orders to corruption. More specifically, reductions in violence are the primary public good that citizens need to overcome the voter coordination problem that prevents clarity of responsibility to reduce corruption through programmatic accountability linkages. Without these reductions in violence, voters are too afraid to tackle corruption due to the power of "entrenched insiders" that limited-access social orders can produce (Díaz-Cayeros, 2013; García-Ponce, Zeitzoff and Wantchekon, 2021).

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.

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 than 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, Nellis, Adida, Arias, Bicalho, Boas, Buntaine, Chauchard, Chowdhury, Gottlieb, Hidalgo, Holmlund, Jablonski, Kramon, Larreguy, Lierl, Marshall, McLendon, Melo, Nielson, Pickering, Platas, Querubín, Raffler and Sircar, 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 clear that alignment not only provide clarity of responsibility but also increases corruption.

I resolve the trade-off between alignment providing both clarity of responsibility and resources that increase corruption 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; Stokes et al., 2013). As voters become less dependent on politicians to meet basic needs, however, the marginal benefit of a clientelistic handout decreases. A body of literature also suggests that voters' discounting of clientelistic benefits makes them more likely to vote more programmatically (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Manzetti and Wilson, 2007). Since corruption finances clientelistic spending (Gingerich,

2013*b*), it stands to reason that, as voters are increasingly able to meet basic needs, they will be less tolerant of corrupt politicians as well. In turn, aligned politicians, who again generally enjoy significant resource advantages, will be more likely to respond to the changing voting environment and reduce their corruption levels.

The above is similar to Denly and Gautam (2022), but present paper goes further. More specifically, it provides an ordering/hierarchy of basic needs necessary to fulfill before voters are willing to activate programmatic linkages. After doing so, the clarity of responsibility from alignment becomes a liability to such politicians, who will be more likely to reduce their corruption levels—even despite their resources advantages.

Consistent with past research on the dynamics of social orders and the rule of law (North, Wallis and Weingast, 2009), I theorize that reducing violence is at the top of basic needs hierarchy. Because violence is generally a more first-order concern than poverty in contexts where violence is widespread, I argue that reducing violence is the key to overcoming the the collective action problem that characterizes voters' *de facto* preference for corrupt politicians. Otherwise, voters accept corruption as part of the Faustian bargain to maintain an equilibrium of peace (García-Ponce, Zeitzoff and Wantchekon, 2021, 709).

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. 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 municipali-

ties,[5] 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 effectively an authoritarian regime.[6] 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 single-party authoritarian regime (Magaloni, 2006; Greene, 2007).

Nowadays, corruption, clientelism, and violence, which are part of Mexico's authoritarian legacy, remain salient. For example, vote-buying and turnout buying continue to be widespread,[7] 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 all levels using the infamous *plata o plomo* technique.[8] In turn, Mexico has low levels of citizen trust in government and pockets of very 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,

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

[6] 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.

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

[8] "*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).

2014), but mayoral re-election was implemented in a staggered fashion so as to minimize disruption (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 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 first and the second order, $p \in \{1, 2\}$, 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 murdered 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).[9]

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 during each census, which take place 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

[9] 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).

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.[10]

2.4. Samples for Estimation

Given the inability of regression discontinuity designs to accommodate interactions,[11] I use the aforementioned poverty and violence data to divide the sample into the following groups: poverty-increasing, poverty-decreasing, violence-decreasing, and violence-increasing municipalities. 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. As Cattaneo, Idrobo and Titiunik (2019, 70) explain, such a strategy is acceptable when the number of subgroups is small.

[10] 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.

[11] A recent working paper from Carril et al (2017) provides a first attempt to conduct subgroup analysis for regression discontinuity designs. Even though the method does not produce bias-corrected inference or accommodate data-driven bandwidth selection, we attempted to use the paper's accompanying Stata routine, `rddsga`, for estimation. However, the Stata routine produced many bugs, and would not estimate properly. For all of these reasons, the main estimates do not rely on the `rddsga` Stata routine.

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.[12] 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.

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 acceptable because the aligned party in each municipal coalition generally wields the most power and sway anyway. Finally, I also 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.

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

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

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. If neither the first- nor second-place candidate is from the aligned party, I exclude the data from the analysis. Such a strategy allows the empirical analysis to focus on close races in line with the theory and is consistent with the regression discontinuity analyses of Meyersson (2014), Dell (2015), and Fergusson et al. (2021).

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

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

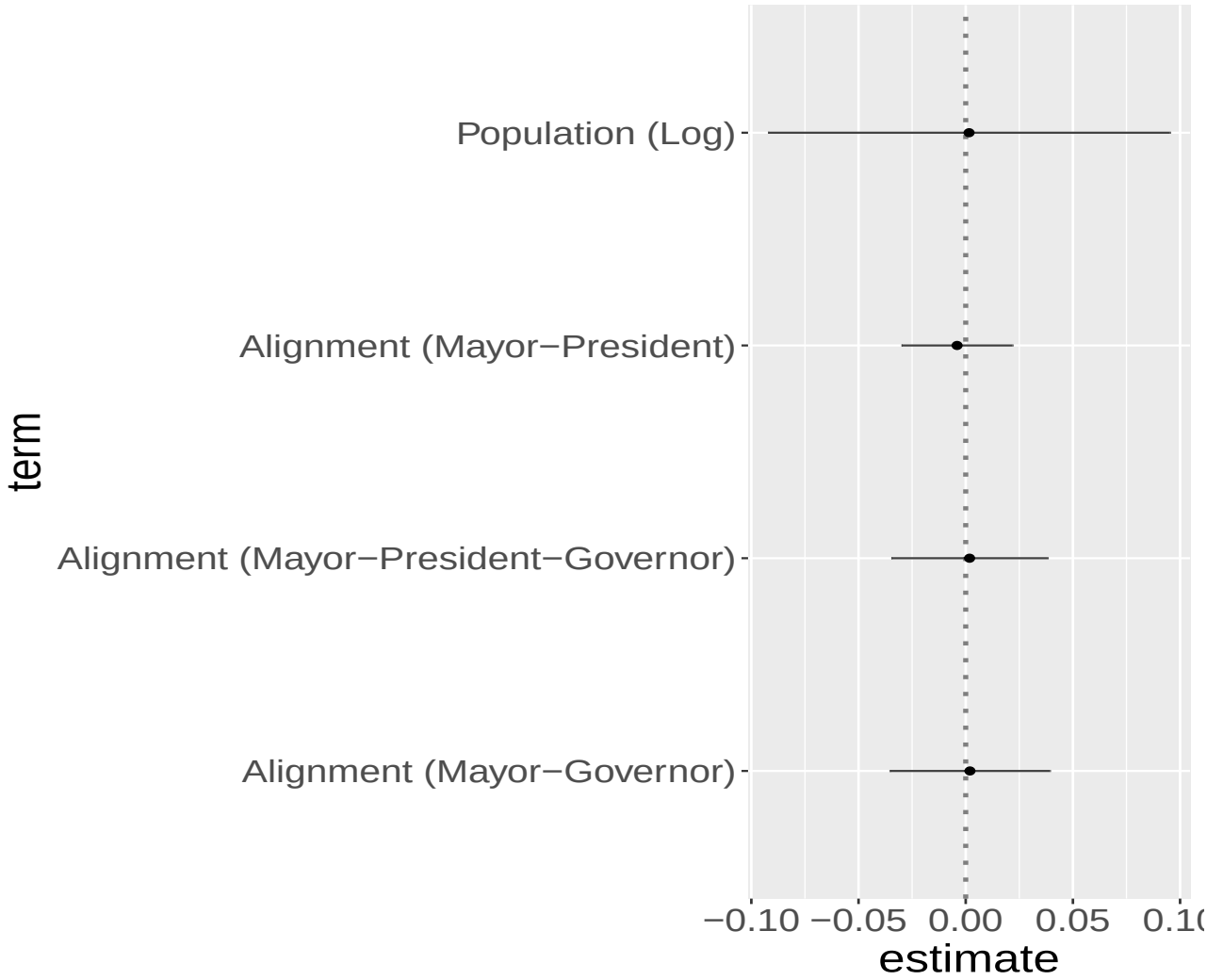
year, which I deflate to 2013 Mexican pesos to account for inflation; the type of audit(s) undertaken (see Table 1); and the frequency of each type of irregularity (see Table 2).

Given that the ASF performs risk-based municipal audits of a small share of Mexico's 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 challenges from local governments do not affect ASF findings or decisions 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 regres-

sion (since receiving an audit is binary), regressing an audit dummy variable on partisan alignment, demographics characteristics (i.e., population). As I show in Figure 1, there is no such bias in the audit distribution; being an opposition party politician does not predict which municipalities are subject to audit.

Figure 1: Do Partisan Alignment Patterns Predict Which Municipalities Receive an Audit?



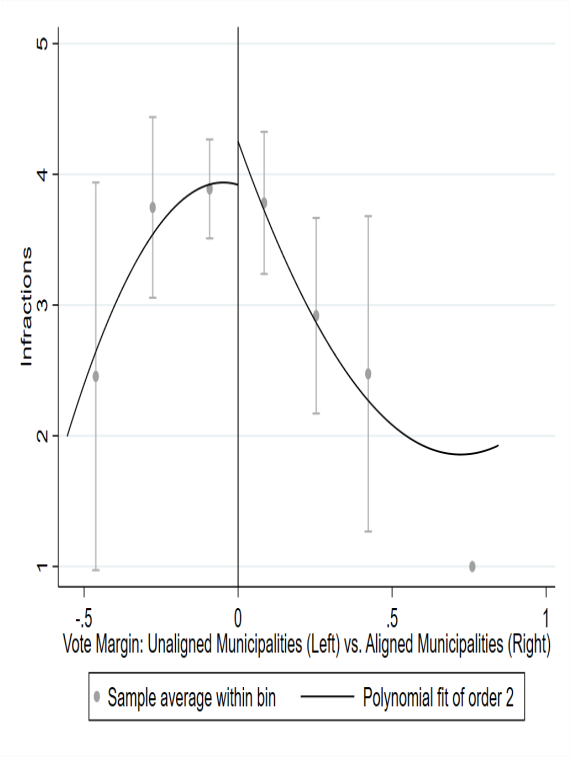
Note: Logistic Regression with Municipality Fixed Effects (Years: 2007-2018; $N = 7412$)

2.7. Additional Covariates

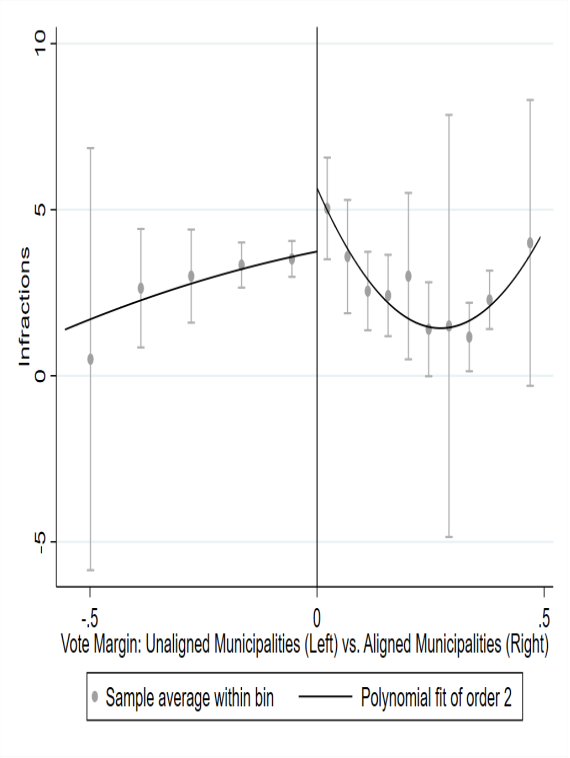
[COMING SOON]

Figure 2: Infractions: Three-Way Alignments (Mayor-President-Governor)

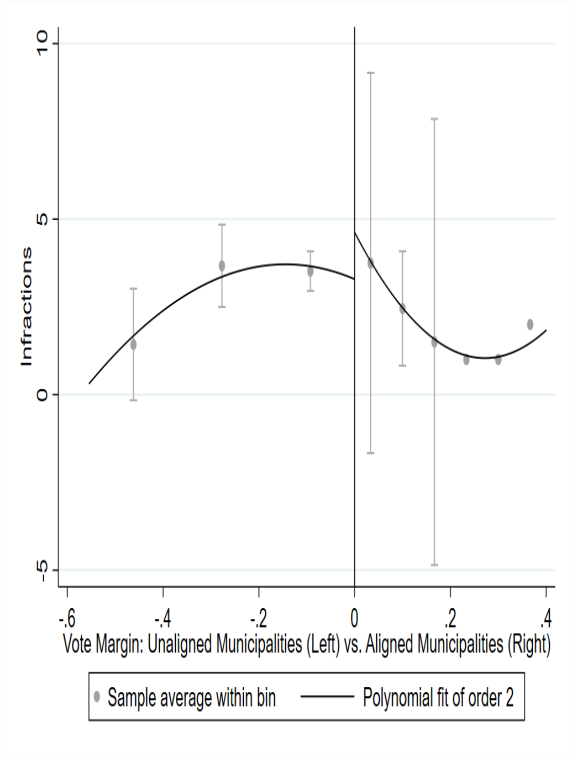
(a) Whole Sample



(b) Poverty Reduced (Old Measurement)



(c) Poverty Reduced (New Measurement)



(d) Violence Reduced

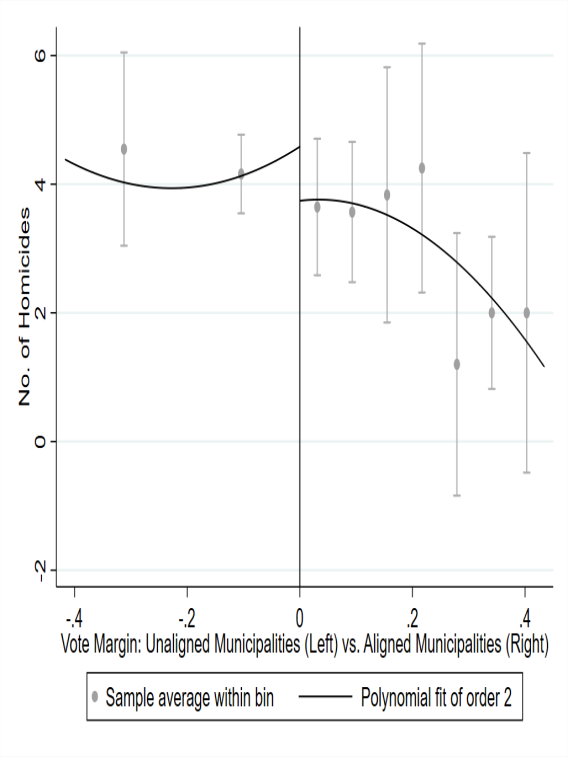
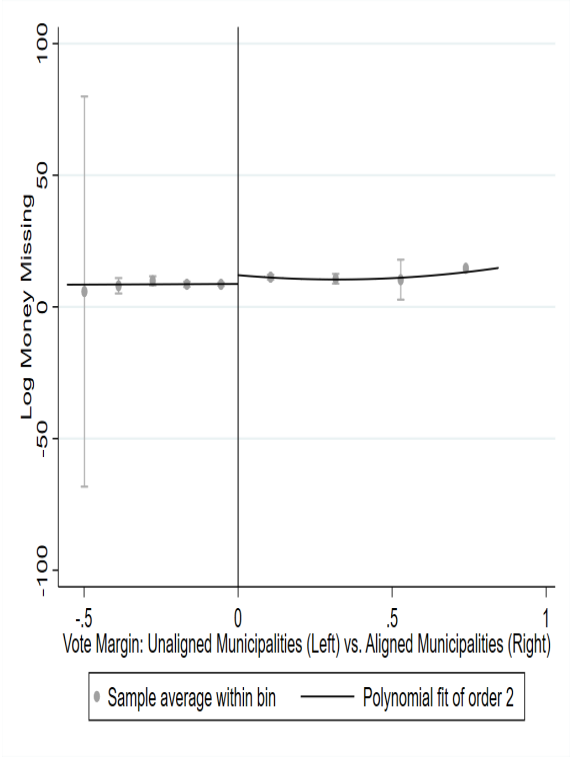
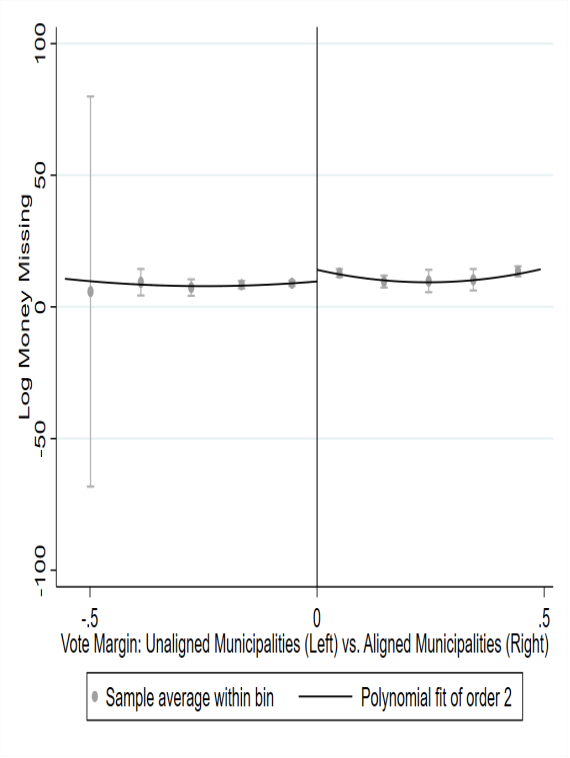


Figure 3: Log Money Missing: Three-Way Alignments (Mayor-President-Governor)

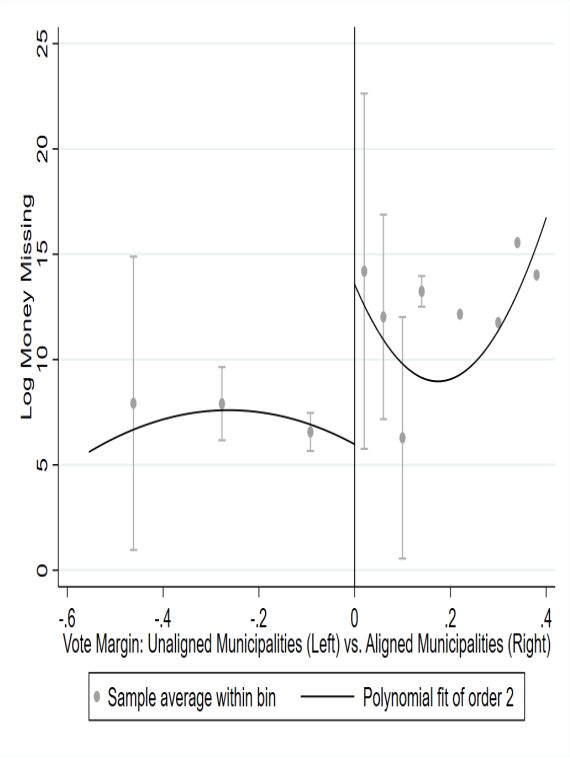
(a) Whole Sample



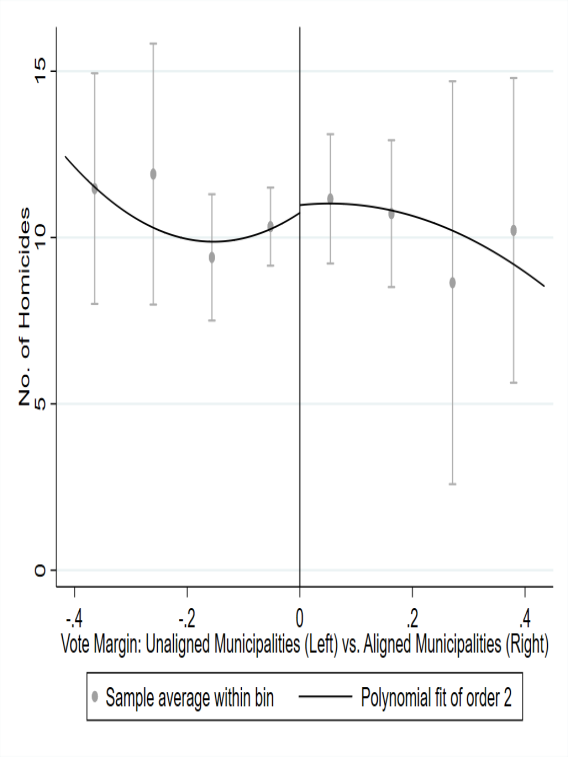
(b) Poverty Reduced (Old Measurement)



(c) Poverty Reduced (New Measurement)



(d) Violence Reduced



3. Preliminary Results

3.1. Preliminary Results: Infractions and Log Money Missing

Figure 2 presents preliminary results for the infractions dependent variable, and Figure 3 presents preliminary results for the (log) money missing/stolen dependent variable. Consistent with my theory, three-way party alignment (full clarity of responsibility) between mayors, governors, and presidents is not enough to induce politicians to administer municipalities with less corruption (see Figures 2a and 3a). These results run counter to the overall predictions of clarity of responsibility theory (see Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits, 2016).

Although the results show some support for my conjecture that, by itself, full clarity of responsibility is not enough to reduce corruption, the empirical support for my basic needs theory is moderate to weak. For example, none of the samples examining municipalities where poverty reduced from one census to the next show signs of decreased corruption under full clarity of responsibility (see Figure 2b/c as well as Figure 3b/c). With respect to the violence-reduction estimates, Figure 2d is promising. It examines infractions under 3-way alignment and municipalities where violence reduced from one year to the next. Under such a scenario, infractions levels reduce quite significantly. However, the same results do not travel when I switch the dependent variable from infractions to log amounts of money missing/stolen (see Figure 3d).

3.2. Density Test Results

Given that previous studies on Mexico have highlighted that voter fraud is a potential concern (e.g., Magaloni, 2006; Simpser, 2012; Cantú and García-Ponce, 2015), and voter fraud would render the regression discontinuity results null, I check for it. Specifically, I perform McCrary (2008) density tests corresponding to the running variable, margin of victory for the aligned party, for all of the different samples. Unfortunately, none of the estimations pass the density tests. After further investigation, it appears that the source of

the problem relates to the inaccurate voter turnout data that Imai, King and Velasco Rivera (2020) discovered when analyzing De La O (2013, 2015). Against this backdrop, readers should view the above results as preliminary and subject to change—after I fix the issues with the municipal turnout data.

4. Preliminary Conclusion

In the corruption literature, there is consensus that clarity of responsibility induces politicians to reduce their corruption levels (e.g. Schwindt-Bayer and Tavits, 2016). Given that the literature has primarily relied on problematic corruptions perceptions data to arrive at such conclusions, I put those predictions to the test using actual measures of corruption in Mexico. Specifically, I gathered municipality-year panel data on corrupt infractions and missing/stolen money.

Consistent with my theory, my very preliminary results show that clarity of responsibility is not enough to reduce corruption. Similarly, consistent with my theory that provides a hierarchy of basic needs, I find that only municipalities with reduced violence under full clarity of responsibility reduce their corruption levels. I do not find similar results when examining municipalities with reduced levels of poverty.

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