

The Legacy of Mexico's Drug War on Youth Political Attitudes^{*}

Omar García-Ponce[†]

Isabel Laterzo-Tingley[‡]

March 25, 2026

Abstract

How does childhood exposure to large-scale criminal violence and militarized law enforcement shape political attitudes and behavior? We examine the case of Mexico's drug war, where a generation has been raised amidst the country's most violent conflict in over a century. Surveying nearly 3,000 urban youth to measure their political and interpersonal trust, we matched respondents to historical data on criminal violence and military confrontations and operations in their childhood municipalities. Disentangling the effects of criminal violence and military interventions, we find that exposure to homicidal violence during childhood erodes interpersonal trust and trust in law enforcement, while military interventions—especially those involving violent confrontations—undermine trust broadly in federal security institutions and generate political backlash against the parties that governed Mexico during the exposure period. These findings have important implications for young democracies affected by high crime and violence and advance our understanding of how criminal wars influence political socialization.

Keywords: Criminal Violence, Militarization, Political Socialization, Trust, Youth Politics.

Word Count: 9,961 (excluding references)

^{*}We are grateful to Elena Barham, Tanisha Fazal, Gabriella Levy, Vicky Murillo, Ye Wang, and participants at APSA, MPSA, WADES, UNU-WIDER, the 2022 Conference on Long Range Development in Latin America, the Public Choice Society, and seminars at CIDE, Duke, UC San Diego, UPenn, Columbia, American University, and the Multi-Method Conflict Consortium for helpful comments and feedback. We also thank Vivian Bronsoler, Elisa Lavore, and the field team at Buendía Márquez for their invaluable contributions, and UNU-WIDER and USAID for their generous support. All errors are our own.

[†]Associate Professor, George Washington University. Contact: garciaponce@gwu.edu

[‡]Assistant Professor, UT-Austin LBJ School. Contact: isabel.laterzo@austin.utexas.edu

Introduction

Over the past two decades, an entire generation of Mexicans has come of age during the country's deadliest wave of violence since the 1910 Revolution. The ongoing "drug war" has claimed more than 450,000 lives and led to over 100,000 disappearances since December 2006.¹ Millions of Mexicans have transitioned to adulthood in communities torn apart by violence and insecurity, witnessing an unprecedented militarization of public security and public life more generally. This generation now constitutes one-third of the country's voting-age population.² Despite the scale and intensity of this conflict, little is known about its sociopolitical impact on the youth. How does growing up in communities marked by large-scale criminal violence and militarized security policies shape young people's political attitudes and behaviors?

This question highlights a significant gap in the literature, as youth make up a disproportionately large share of victims and perpetrators of organized criminal violence (Chioda, 2017; Muggah and Tobón, 2018; Rivera, 2016; Sweeten, Piquero and Steinberg, 2013). Our study addresses this gap by examining how childhood exposure to both criminal violence and militarized law enforcement shapes political trust and attitudes among Mexican youth, albeit in nuanced ways. While existing research has documented the effects of exposure to violence in adulthood, far less is known about how early-life exposure shapes political attitudes and behaviors. Drawing on insights from political socialization theories (Campbell et al., 1980; Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2008; Healy and Malhotra, 2013; Hyman, 1959) and research on the attitudinal and behavioral effects of exposure to violence (Bateson, 2012; Bauer et al., 2016; Balcells and Torrats-Espinosa, 2018) and militarized security (Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021; Masullo and Morisi, 2024), this study demonstrates that early-life exposure to violence and conflict has lasting consequences for political attitudes in adulthood.

A key contribution of our work is showing how different types of exposure shape these attitudes by theoretically distinguishing and empirically testing the distinct effects of lethal criminal violence and

¹Based on official data from the Mexican government. This information is publicly available from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and the Registro Nacional de Personas Desaparecidas y No Localizadas (RNPNDNO).

²As of January 2025, Mexico has over 37 million registered voters aged under 34 years, representing nearly 37% of the national registry. See <https://www.ine.mx/credencial/estadisticas-lista-nominal-padron-electoral/>

military interventions. Specifically, we argue that childhood exposure to lethal criminal violence should negatively affect trust in both the community and law enforcement later in life.³ In contrast, childhood exposure to state-led militarized operations should decrease trust in specific institutions responsible for these operations. In Mexico, the detrimental impact on trust is more likely to be observed in government authorities and state security forces such as the federal police (or national guard) and the military, which were deployed throughout the country to combat organized criminal groups (OCGs). However, we note that although military interventions often coincide with increased violence, this is not always the case. We adjudicate between military-cartel confrontations versus military operations alone to explore conditional effects.

To test our empirical expectations, we use an original in-person survey of nearly 3000 individuals representative of Mexico's urban population aged 16-29. A distinctive feature of our survey design is that respondents indicate where they spent the majority of their childhood, enabling us to match them with fine-grained municipal data on criminal violence and militarized law enforcement during their childhood. Specifically, we construct measures of childhood exposure to lethal criminal violence, armed confrontations between military forces and drug trafficking organizations, and military operations based on respondents' birth year and childhood municipality of residence.

Thus, the core of our empirical strategy exploits variation in exposure to violence and militarized law enforcement during childhood based on respondents' geographic location and date of birth. In essence, we test whether respondents exposed to varying levels of violence, military confrontations, and military operations during childhood exhibit different levels of interpersonal and political trust. To strengthen causal identification, we also implement a quasi-experimental design that treats the 2007 deployment of military forces to combat drug cartels as an exogenous policy shock, building upon previous research that has employed similar approaches (e.g., [Flores-Macías, 2018](#); [Trejo and Skigin, 2024](#)).

The results confirm our expectations: (1) Youths who grew up in the most violent environments exhibit lower levels of trust in law enforcement authorities and their communities; and (2) military confrontations and operations negatively impact trust in the authorities involved in the militarization of

³We focus on trust as our primary dependent variable because trust in institutions and in one's community is vital to understanding democratic functioning and social cooperation ([Citrin and Stoker, 2018](#); [Warren, 2018](#)). Childhood is also a critical period for the formation of beliefs about authority, legitimacy, and social trust ([Erikson, 1963](#); [Koenig and Harris, 2007](#)).

public security—specifically, the federal police, the military, and, to some extent, the government. The results of exposure to military interventions are strongest when they involve violent confrontations. We also find that citizens may not lose trust in the government as a whole but instead hold specific politicians accountable for militarized security policies. Analyzing how violence and militarized law enforcement shaped vote choice in the June 2021 midterm election among voting-aged respondents, we find backlash against the PAN and PRI and higher null voting and abstention, likely in reaction to drug-war-era military actions. Taken together, these findings support the argument that citizens selectively punish politicians linked to militarized security strategies, and that such efforts may foster political disaffection.

Our findings do not discount the fact that exposure to drug war violence during other life stages influences political attitudes. Rather, we show that childhood exposure has a direct effect on political attitudes that is not confounded by alternative explanations or later exposure. This is one of the key contributions of our study. Previous research has examined the effects of organized criminal violence on political participation (Córdova, 2019; Dorff, 2017; Trelles and Carreras, 2012), electoral accountability (Carreras and Visconti, 2022; Ley, 2017), political competition (Daniele and Dipoppa, 2017; Trejo and Ley, 2021), and policy preferences (García-Ponce, Zeitzoff and Wantchekon, 2021; Visconti, 2020; Laterzo, 2024), among other political outcomes (García-Ponce, 2025). Newer research has extended this work to consider the impacts of militarized law enforcement on political attitudes (Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021; Masullo and Morisi, 2024). However, these studies have focused on adulthood, and the effect of exposure on relatively contemporaneous attitude formation; the political consequences of growing up in communities affected by criminal violence and related conflict have largely been overlooked. We extend this literature by shifting the focus to this critical younger age group.

We also contribute to research on the formation of political beliefs and the causal effects of childhood experiences on political attitudes. Childhood socialization processes and life conditions heavily influence political attitudes, behavior, and preferences in adulthood (Campbell et al., 1980; Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2008; Healy and Malhotra, 2013; Hyman, 1959; De Neve, 2015; Jennings and Niemi, 2014). Numerous studies show that childhood exposure to violence—particularly during civil war—affects human capital accumulation (Chamarbagwala and Morán, 2011; Justino, Leone and Salardi, 2014; Leon, 2012; Shemyakina, 2011), health-related outcomes (Akbulut-Yuksel, 2017; Akresh,

Lucchetti and Thirumurthy, 2012), and broader human development. This trauma can even be transmitted across generations (Lupu and Peisakhin, 2017). We advance this scholarship by showing that childhood exposure to criminal violence and militarized security has lasting effects on adult political attitudes and voting preferences.

While our study is focused on Mexico, it offers broader insights for other contexts. Many countries across Latin America and beyond face unprecedented crises of criminal violence, territorial control by non-state armed groups, and increasingly militarized government responses. Understanding how these experiences influence the political attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs of young people coming of age during these conflicts is vital for understanding and addressing threats to democratic governance.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. We first present our theoretical framework and situate our argument within the relevant literature, then provide historical context on Mexico's drug war and outline our empirical expectations. Next, we describe our data collection and empirical approach. We then report the main findings and discuss their implications. We conclude by underscoring the need for further research on how rising criminal violence shapes the political beliefs and values of younger generations across the Global South.

Theoretical Framework

The notion that early-life exposure to protracted violence can significantly impact the development of political attitudes and behavior finds support in two complementary strands of research. The first underscores the influence of childhood experiences in shaping political beliefs but seldom considers the influence of exposure to crime and violence. The second establishes a link between exposure to violence and subsequent political attitudes and behaviors, but focuses primarily on adults. Our study weaves these literatures together to reveal the impacts of childhood exposure to criminal violence and military interventions on political attitudes within the context of Mexico's drug war.

Childhood Experiences and Political Socialization

Cornerstone research in developmental psychology and neuroscience shows that the architecture of the human brain is affected by early childhood experiences and environmental factors, particularly during

the first eight to ten years of life. Early life experiences—positive and negative— provide the foundation for future behavioral, cognitive, and social skill development (Feldman, 2020; Heim and Nemeroff, 2001; Knudsen et al., 2006). Adverse or traumatic experiences— especially in this formative period —have strong impacts on outcomes such as skill development and later employability (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000), mental health (Boullier and Blair, 2018), high-risk behaviors (Campbell, Walker and Egede, 2016), and personality traits (Fletcher and Schurer, 2017).

Childhood experiences heavily influence the formation of political attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs. Building on Hyman (1959)’s seminal work on the political socialization of children in the United States, longitudinal and inter-generational studies have consistently found persistent relationships between processes of childhood socialization and political beliefs (Hatemi et al., 2009; Jennings and Niemi, 2014). Indeed, political identities adopted early in life strongly predict adult political views (Campbell et al., 1980; Green, Palmquist and Schickler, 2008; Healy and Malhotra, 2013), and powerful early-life experiences can shape ideology and policy preferences. For instance, Madestam and Yanagizawa-Drott (2012) find that childhood exposure to patriotic events in the U.S. increases Republican identification, votes for Republicans, and turnout later in life, while Guo, Gao and Liang (2023) show that early-life famine severity experienced by Chinese politicians influences their policy preferences.

A growing body of work corroborates that social cognition in early childhood is already oriented toward group living, setting the foundation of political sensitivities and attitudes (Reifen-Tagar and Cimpian, 2022; Wegemer and Vandell, 2020). This challenges the assumption that young children lack the cognitive capacity and social understanding to develop political thought (Rizzo, Elenbaas and Vanderbilt, 2020; Guidetti, Carraro and Castelli, 2021; Taylor, 2020). Most of these studies have primarily focused on understanding the development of political beliefs in the context of the U.S. and Western Europe. In Mexico, the foundational work by Segovia (1975) demonstrated that Mexican children’s political attitudes in the early 1970s mirrored the authoritarian tendencies of the hegemonic one-party regime.⁴

⁴The context of Segovia’s research differs from that of contemporary Mexico. Whereas Segovia studied the deliberately orchestrated political socialization of an authoritarian regime, we examine the post-democratic transition era. Still, Segovia’s core insight—that institutional and environmental experiences during childhood fundamentally shape political orientations—offers an important historical antecedent for our analysis.

Although we know that childhood plays a foundational role in shaping attitudes and behaviors, existing research often overlooks the significance of childhood exposure to violence on political attitudes. Only a handful of studies have paid attention to this subject. [Lupu and Peisakhin \(2017\)](#) provide evidence of inter-generational effects of violence on ethnic identity and political attitudes among Crimean Tatars who suffered the violence of deportation. Similar patterns have been shown in South Korea ([Hong and Kang, 2017](#)) and in Africa ([Adhvaryu and Fenske, 2023](#)). This nascent literature—in tandem with well-established knowledge of the larger impact of childhood events on adult attitudes and behaviors—provides strong suggestive evidence that exposure to violence, as well as to state interventions aimed at curbing it, should shape political orientations later in life. Importantly, the effects may vary with the type of violence, since different forms of violence are not equally visible, salient, or psychologically processed. Our study contributes to this literature by examining how exposure to organized criminal violence and drug-war militarized operations during childhood in Mexico affects political attitudes in adulthood.

Exposure to Violence, Military Interventions, and Political Attitudes

A large body of research finds that exposure to violence increases political engagement (e.g., [Bauer et al., 2016](#); [Bateson, 2012](#)). However, studies that isolate different types of violence exposure present more nuanced findings ([García-Ponce, 2019](#); [Grossman, Manekin and Miodownik, 2015](#); [Jones, Troesken and Walsh, 2017](#)). In Latin America, where organized crime is a major security threat, exposure to criminal violence seems to negatively impact political trust, particularly in security-related institutions ([Malone, 2010](#); [Blanco, 2013](#); [Blanco and Ruiz, 2013](#); [Corbacho, Philipp and Ruiz-Vega, 2015](#); [Pion-Berlin and Carreras, 2017](#)). This suggests that individuals attribute insecurity to the actors that generate it—or fail to prevent it—a pattern observed beyond the region as well ([Deglow and Sundberg, 2021](#)). Although these studies do not connect childhood experiences to adult behaviors or attitudes, they show that experiences across one’s lifecycle are impactful. This does not contradict evidence that crime and violence can also increase political participation or prosocial behavior; victimization can simultaneously reduce trust, and increase participation in social and political organizations ([Pazzona, 2020](#)).

Effects on institutional trust are context-specific. In countries with lackluster justice systems, personal experience with crime erodes support only for the police. But the negative impacts of violence on

institutional trust can travel beyond the criminal justice system (Malone, 2010). Some find that exposure to crime and insecurity decreases trust in government entities more generally. In Mexico, criminal violence demobilizes voters (Ley, 2018) and support for the national incumbent party varies inversely with prevailing levels of violence (Ley, 2017). In poor-performing, high-crime countries, fear of neighborhood crime has a negative relationship with measures of diffuse support (Blanco and Ruiz, 2013; Malone, 2010). Such studies show that crime exposure can transcend measures of specific support, affecting individuals' trust in major national institutions and the entire regime.

Violence exposure can also negatively affect interpersonal relationships and social cohesion. In terms of psychological effects, this includes a decreased ability to express empathy, increased antisocial behavior, and the normalization of aggression (Hawkins et al., 2000; Guerra, Rowell Huesmann and Spindler, 2003; Baskin and Sommers, 2015). In addition to direct cognitive and behavioral effects, exposure to violence leads to related secondary effects by increasing the likelihood that individuals interact with the justice system (Hawkins et al., 2000; Siegel et al., 2019). Crime victimization during adulthood has also been shown to decrease overall horizontal trust in one's community, family, and friends (Salmi, Smolej and Kivivuori, 2007; Corbacho, Philipp and Ruiz-Vega, 2015).

While deployment of law enforcement to combat drug-related violence typically entails exacerbated conflict—including substantial civilian casualties and human rights abuses (Calderón et al., 2015; Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2023)—effects of this exposure may be nuanced. Research indicates that conflict related to law enforcement operations should have similar negative effects on attitudes. In Mexico, support for militarization decreases if operations cause civilian casualties, but not when victimization is isolated to cartel members (Masullo and Morisi, 2024). Given that such operations often lead to increased violence, negative attitudes are likely to grow following exposure to law enforcement-related conflict.

However, not all military operations necessarily entail violence, and operations without conflict may not have these effects. Indeed, individuals tend to be supportive of military operations and war in response to an imminent threat, but civilian costs can curtail this support (Dill and Schubiger, 2021). Further, in the context of Mexico, Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2021) show that military uniforms and weapons are perceived positively. Little research has adjudicated if exposure to military presence itself, versus presence involving violence and conflict, has differing effects on trust.

Hence, prior work suggests that childhood exposure to violence, insecurity, and militarized law enforcement can diminish trust in various entities, both at the government and community levels. However, it also suggests that exposure should have differential effects on trust depending on the type of insecurity at hand. Exposure to criminal violence should have more general impacts on trust in one's community but also law enforcement agencies, who may be seen as responsible for preventing and responding to these acts. On the other hand, violence and insecurity more directly attributed to the state—such as conflicts between law enforcement and criminal groups—should affect trust in a distinct manner. This insecurity may be seen more attributable to specific actors deployed (e.g., the military, police) and officials involved in this deployment. Law enforcement deployments on their own, without necessarily entailing violence, should not necessarily have negative effects.

A Generation Exposed to Mexico's Drug War

In December 2006, former Mexican president Felipe Calderón began a war against organized crime by deploying military forces throughout Northern and Western Mexico. Drug cartels in the country had flourished during the years prior, particularly during the era of one-party rule. [Trejo and Ley \(2018\)](#), for example, show that in the 1990s, cartels engaged in significant violence, especially during periods of gubernatorial power shift. When one-party rule was broken, cartels continued their violent practices in attempts to re-establish and hold onto their power ([Osorio, 2013](#); [Ríos, 2015](#); [Trejo and Ley, 2020](#)).

The beginning of Calderón's administration marked a significant public security policy shift. The drug war became the centerpiece of his presidency ([Lessing, 2017](#)), and the Mexican army (under the direction of the Secretariat of National Defense, SEDENA), which had not been trained to fight OCGs, became the leading force behind its operations. Federal police were often deployed in tandem with these forces, while lower level police forces were often reported to be in collaboration with drug trafficking groups.⁵

In this way, the country largely saw the constabularization of the military, where the armed forces assumed domestic public safety tasks. Militarized policing was also present, where civilian-led police forces were equipped with military-grade weapons, gear, and engaged in military-style tactics, often in

⁵<https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna8206233>, last accessed on June 27, 2023

tandem with military forces (Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021). This entailed the adoption of security strategies developed for war, leading to human rights violations and the deterioration of democratic controls (Brewer and Verduzco, 2022; Magaloni and Rodriguez, 2020).

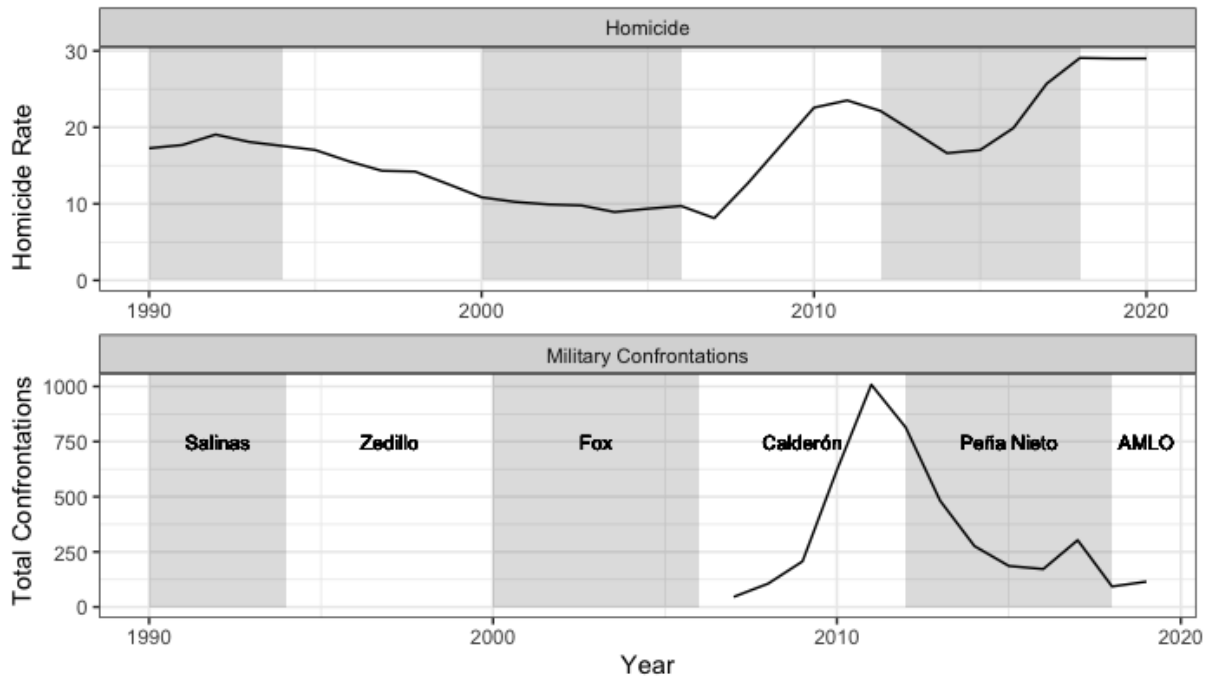
During the subsequent presidential administration, President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018) adopted a similar strategy towards organized crime. In addition to the domestic deployment of the military, he created a new national police force (the national gendarmerie) to assist in the efforts (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). Although the number of military operations declined, the core of his security strategy relied on capturing or killing criminal bosses, seizing drugs, and eradicating illicit crops. This approach deepened under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (2018-2024), although he applied different rhetoric to combating crime (Deare, 2021).

The militarization of public security has failed to reduce crime and violence in Mexico. As shown in Figure 1 (upper panel), despite a modest decline in the homicide rate at the beginning of Peña Nieto's administration, homicides began to trend up again in 2015 and remained at record-high levels during López Obrador's administration. Approximately 420,000 people have been killed and around 120,000 have been reported disappeared since the start of the drug war.

The production of violence involves a complex network of armed actors, including OCGs, state security forces, and vigilante groups, making it difficult to precisely estimate how many homicides are directly attributable to the drug war. However, there is growing evidence that the law-enforcement approach adopted over the past two decades has contributed to the escalation of violence (Calderón et al., 2015; Dell, 2015; Phillips, 2015). Although the Mexican state deployed troops domestically in the postrevolutionary era to suppress political opposition (Rath, 2013), the military's role in everyday public security was far less visible and consequential prior to the drug war's militarized turn. Work by Flores-Macías (2018) suggests that militarized anti-drug enforcement has weakened the Mexican state's capacity not only to provide public order, but also to extract fiscal resources.

Thus, the drug war initiated by Calderón represents a defining era in Mexico's modern history. An entire generation of Mexicans was born, raised, and transitioned to adulthood during the most violent episode in the history of the country over the past century. Those who were school-age children in the early years of the drug war now comprise a substantial part of the voting-age population. Many of these young adults grew up in communities with unprecedentedly high levels of crime and violence,

Figure 1: Homicide Rate and Military Confrontations, 1990–2020



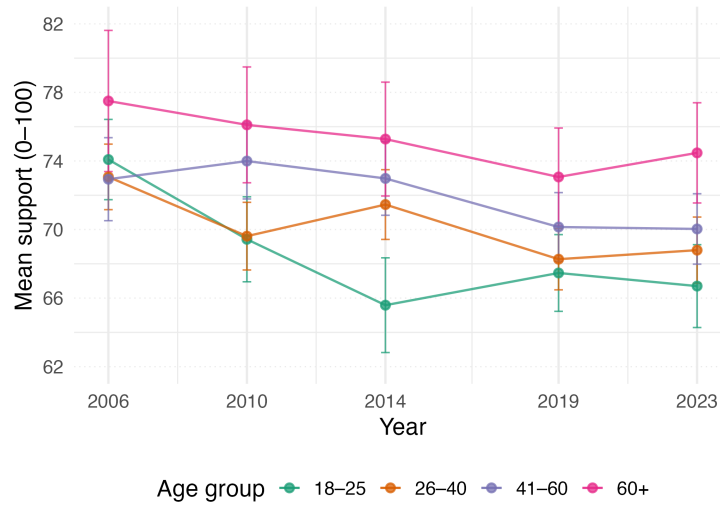
Note: Annual homicide rate and military confrontations across presidential administrations in Mexico (1990–2020), based on data from INEGI and SEDENA, respectively.

witnessing both the consolidation of the militarization of public security and the government’s failures to make their communities safer.

In addition, youths account for an overwhelmingly high percentage of victims of criminal violence in Mexico. Based on official statistics from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), the homicide rate among youths aged 15–24 increased by three-fold between 2007 and 2011. As of 2021, the year of our survey, approximately 21% of the victims of intentional homicide were 24 years old or younger—more than half were under 34 years old. As a result of this, life expectancy has deteriorated among males and it has stagnated among females (Aburto et al., 2016; Canudas-Romo et al., 2017).

The effects of criminal violence on young people’s life choices and political beliefs remain understudied in Mexico and beyond. Looking at the impact on youths is important for developing policies that foster social and political stability, democratic norms, and social cohesion among the younger generation. As shown in Figure 2, data from the AmericasBarometer (LAPOP Lab, 2024) indicates a significant decline in democratic support among the youngest citizens. This disparity is also evident in voter turnout rates among younger and older citizens. For example, during the 2021 midterm elec-

Figure 2: Trends in Support for Democracy in Mexico across Age Groups, 2006–2023



Note: Support for democracy measured on a 0–100 scale using survey-weighted means from five AmericasBarometer waves in Mexico. Vertical bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. (LAPOP Lab, 2024).

tions, held just a few weeks prior to our survey, only 41% of eligible voters aged 20–29 cast ballots. In contrast, turnout among voters aged 50–80 exceeded 60%.⁶

This generational disaffection with democracy is not unique to Mexico. Across Latin America, younger citizens generally express lower trust in institutions and weaker commitment to democracy than older generations (Latinobarómetro Study, 2023; UNDP, 2024). Nonetheless, Mexico represents an extreme case in terms of the violence and insecurity accompanying its democratic era. The intensity of the drug war provides a critical test of the impact of violence on youth attitudes. By focusing on violence in Mexico’s context, we isolate a factor that is plausibly a key driver of youth disaffection.

Empirical Expectations

Individuals raised in communities marked by pervasive violent crime and impunity are likely to develop mistrust toward government, security institutions, and even their own communities. Drawing on research on political socialization, evidence on the political consequences of violence, and accounts of Mexico’s militarized drug war, we hypothesize that childhood exposure to drug-war violence leaves a

⁶See Census Counts of Citizen Participation 2009–2021 from the National Electoral Institute <https://ine.mx/transparencia/datos-abiertos/visualizacion-datos/conteos-censales-participacion/>

distinct imprint on political attitudes. However, we argue that not all forms of exposure exert the same influence. We distinguish between three forms of exposure: *lethal criminal violence*, *military presence*, and violent *military confrontations*. Each varies in visibility and in the extent to which responsibility can be attributed to state actors, and we therefore expect these forms of exposure to differentially shape the political trust of Mexican youth.

A growing literature emphasizes that the political consequences of violence depend not only on its intensity but also on its visibility and attribution. As Durán-Martínez (2015) notes, criminal organizations often deploy clandestine or concealed violence to regulate illicit markets while minimizing the risk of detection and prosecution. At other times, violence is made deliberately visible and spectacular, executed to challenge state authority, intimidate the public, or signal dominance. Violence also varies in the extent to which responsibility can be clearly assigned—some events are easily attributable to the (in)action of specific actors, while others remain ambiguous. These dimensions shape attitude formation: visible and clearly attributable violence should facilitate more precise belief updating than diffuse or ambiguous events. We use these conceptual distinctions to derive empirical expectations for each of our three exposure measures.

First, *lethal criminal violence* signals severe insecurity, constitutes the most publicly documented manifestation of drug-war violence—captured most directly through homicide statistics—and reflects a profound failure of public security. Yet despite its severity, such violence often involves unknown perpetrators, contested victim status, and considerable ambiguity regarding responsibility. As a result, exposure to homicidal violence is likely to generate generalized fear and uncertainty rather than precise attribution. We therefore expect childhood exposure to lethal criminal violence to have its strongest corrosive effects on social cohesion and on trust in public security institutions. Specifically, we hypothesize that higher levels of exposure to homicidal violence during childhood will erode *interpersonal trust*, as persistent insecurity encourages withdrawal from community life. We also anticipate declines in trust in the *federal police*. Given the federal government’s mandate to combat organized crime, responsibility attribution is clearer at the federal level than for subnational police forces.⁷ The distinction between federal and subnational policing offers a strong test of our responsibility attribution mechanism.

⁷Citizens struggle to assign responsibility for public security, especially where mandates overlap and authority is fragmented (León, 2011; Carlin, Love and Martínez-Gallardo, 2015). In Mexico, this ambiguity is pronounced for subnational police forces.

Second, we argue that exposure to the state’s militarized response to the drug war has distinct implications for political trust, depending on whether that exposure involves violence. We first consider violent *military confrontations*, i.e., direct armed clashes between military or militarized federal forces and criminal organizations. These events are highly visible, explicitly violent, and readily attributable to state security policy. Rather than signaling protection or order, repeated exposure to such confrontations during childhood may communicate that militarization fails to deliver lasting security and instead brings sustained conflict into civilian spaces. We therefore hypothesize that childhood exposure to violent military confrontations will have particularly strong negative effects on trust in the institutions responsible for the design and implementation of this strategy: the *military*, the *federal government*, and the *federal police*.

In contrast, the mere presence of *military operations*—the deployment of troops without direct confrontation or visible acts of violence—may have more muted effects. While military presence can reshape daily life as the state attempts to maintain or restore order, it does not necessarily involve overt violence or civilian harm. Given the historically high levels of public confidence in the Mexican military, which have proven resilient even during the drug war (Bailey, Parás and Vargas, 2013; Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2021), we expect that exposure to military presence alone will not generate the same erosion of institutional trust observed in contexts marked by violent confrontations. Distinguishing between violent and non-violent forms of militarization allows us to assess whether declines in trust are driven by the presence of security forces per se or by their engagement in visible and violent conflict.

Together, these expectations allow us to isolate the distinct effects of different types of exposure and test mechanisms through which violence affects trust. By contrasting ambiguous criminal violence with violence involving state security forces, and by distinguishing violent from non-violent forms of military involvement, we provide a framework for understanding how early exposure to violence shapes trust in communities and political institutions later in life.

Empirical Approach

Survey and Data

Our goal is to examine how childhood exposure to lethal criminal violence and drug war military interventions shapes individuals' trust in political institutions and their communities later in life. To investigate this, we leverage three primary data sources: (1) an original survey fielded in Mexico among youths; (2) official municipal-level data on homicide rates over the past few decades; and (3) official records detailing the frequency of military confrontations and operations in each municipality.

In partnership with Buendia & Marquez, a leading survey firm based in Mexico City, and a team of local enumerators, we conducted an in-person survey of 2,880 young individuals aged 16 to 29 in June 2021. The sample is representative of urban Mexico for our target age group. Ethical considerations were a central concern in the design of our survey. All participation was informed, voluntary, and confidential. Since our study did not include people under 16 years of age, parental consent was not required. The research presented no more than minimal risk to subjects, researchers, and enumerators, with the only potential concern being possible discomfort when responding to certain questions. Participants were informed of this risk and the consent process emphasized their right to withdraw from the study at any time. See Appendix 1 for a description of our participant recruitment process and our adherence to principles of ethical human subjects research.

We focus on urban Mexico for two reasons. First, the forms of violence experienced in urban versus rural areas of Mexico are different in nature. Rural areas are more likely to experience violence associated with illicit crop production, land disputes, or the extortion of agricultural workers in a context of limited state presence (Dube, García-Ponce and Thom, 2016; Herrera and Martínez-Alvarez, 2022), which is why the socio-demographic profiles of victims and perpetrators tend to be different than in urban areas (Villarreal, 2004; Muñoz-Sánchez, Fuerte-Celis and Méndez-Ramírez, 2022). Second, 80% of Mexico's population resides in urban areas. A similar percentage of homicides and violent crime take place in metropolitan areas, where youths are at a disproportionately high risk of becoming targets of organized criminal violence. Therefore, while rural violence is prevalent in many communities of Mexico, we believe it is conceptually distinct.

Our survey was representative of common sociodemographic characteristics, such as income and

education level. In addition, we employed a unique strategy to ensure representativity of the various levels of municipal violence across the country. Within this strategy, we considered three variables that capture variations in violence at this geographic level: homicide rates, reported non-homicidal crime, and perceived levels of violence. Although homicide rates are often used as a benchmark for the prevalence of violence, we chose to involve additional measures as homicide does not capture the complete reality of citizen insecurity.

These measures are typically not available at the subnational level, particularly at units as small as the municipality. To circumvent this issue, we rely upon measures available at the national and city level from Mexico's National Survey of Urban Public Security (ENSU) and use multilevel regression and poststratification (MrP) to generate subnational measures (Gelman and Little, 1997). We model respondents' perceptions of violence and reported victimization as a function of selected sociodemographic characteristics (i.e., location, age, gender, occupation, education) and generate municipal-level estimates with such models via poststratification using Mexico's 2015 intercensus. We thus create 157 municipal estimates of both reported victimization and perceived insecurity. We utilize these estimates and the most recently reported homicide rates collected by the Executive Secretariat of the National System of Public Security (SESNSP) to stratify our survey sample.⁸ We limit our sampling frame to municipalities surveyed by ENSU, and order these units based on the three levels of insecurity via seriation.

Our outcome variables were measured by asking respondents to rate their level of trust on a 1–7 scale, with 1 indicating no trust and 7 indicating a great deal of trust. Respondents completed this exercise for the following groups: their community (neighbors), the police (municipal, state, federal), the military (army and navy), and the government (federal, state, local).⁹ We standardize these variables and center them at 0, allowing us to interpret results in terms of standard deviations from the mean.

⁸We rely on two sources of homicide data due to differences in temporal coverage and availability. INEGI offers the most reliable and comprehensive historical data on homicide counts, and it serves as our primary source for estimating long-term homicide rates. However, at the time we fielded our survey, SESNSP was the only source providing municipal-level homicide data for 2020, which we used for stratifying our sample.

⁹The federal police in Mexico was replaced by the national guard in 2020. In light of this change happening 18 months before our survey, respondents were asked about their opinions regarding the federal police *or* national guard, in case they were not yet familiar with the change.

To measure exposure to lethal criminal violence and the military strategy of the drug war, we match respondents with administrative data regarding these factors at the municipal level. To do so, respondents were asked where they were born (either the municipality where they currently reside, or elsewhere). This is uncommon in current public opinion surveys in the area and allows us to measure exposure to violence and militarization in one's childhood hometown.¹⁰ We then rely on these municipal identifiers to calculate their exposure to both violence and militarization.

First, to measure childhood exposure to lethal criminal violence, we draw on annual municipal homicide counts from Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) and population estimates from the National Population Council (CONAPO). For each respondent, we calculate the average homicide rate experienced during the first ten years of life, based on their birth year and the municipality where they spent the majority of their childhood. Intentional homicides constitute the most complete and reliable proxy for lethal criminal violence over our study period, as death certificates are processed through medical and forensic systems and coded by both medical personnel and the Attorney General's Office.¹¹ Furthermore, most of the dramatic increases in homicidal violence during the drug-war period stem from inter- and intra-OCG conflict (Calderón et al., 2015).¹²

Second, to capture exposure to drug war military interventions, we calculate the average level of exposure to military confrontations and operations across individuals' first ten years of life. Data for these measures were collected via right-to-information requests filed to the Mexican government by Flores-

¹⁰We drop respondents that grew up in a different municipality than their current residence, as their exposure cannot be confidently measured. This leaves us with 2,425 respondents. Appendix 10 demonstrates that our outcome variables are uncorrelated with one's move during childhood.

¹¹Our measure requires data beginning in 1992, the birth year of the oldest respondents in our survey. No other municipal-level indicator of lethal criminal violence is available consistently for this time range. For instance, the Criminal Violence in Mexico Database (Trejo and Ley, 2020), one of the most comprehensive alternatives, spans 1994–2012.

¹²Other forms of violence—extortion, kidnapping, and especially disappearances—are inconsistently recorded. Visible lethal violence also serves as a salient signal of OCG presence and state weakness (Durán-Martínez, 2015), and increases in homicides typically accompany broader intensifications of organized criminal activity. A limitation is that disappearances are not classified as homicides unless a body is recovered, and official data on disappearances are incomplete and inconsistent, particularly in earlier years. If disappearances shape political attitudes through mechanisms distinct from visible violence, our measure may not fully capture those effects. However, in Appendix 3 we show a strong correlation between municipal-level disappearances and homicide rates.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

	Min.	Median	Mean	Max.	SD
Trust:					
Federal Police	1.00	5.00	4.81	7.00	1.68
Subnational Police	1.00	3.50	3.59	7.00	1.52
Federal Government	1.00	4.00	4.24	7.00	1.70
Subnational Government	1.00	4.00	3.76	7.00	1.52
Military	1.00	5.50	5.32	7.00	1.46
Neighbors	1.00	4.00	4.25	7.00	1.87
Exposure (10 yrs):					
Avg Lethal Crim. Violence Exposure (10 yrs)	0.64	10.41	13.63	92.67	12.12
Avg Military Conflict Exposure (10 yrs)	0.00	0.00	0.33	7.80	0.95
Avg Military Operations Exposure (10 yrs)	0.00	0.00	0.11	0.80	0.20
Sociodemographics:					
Gender (Female = 1)	0.00	0.00	0.47	1.00	0.50
SES Scale	0.00	1.98	1.96	2.56	0.54
Education	1.00	7.00	6.69	10.00	1.92
Age	16.00	21.00	21.72	29.00	4.18

Note: Sample size is 2,425 respondents. Individuals who spent their childhood in a municipality different from their current place of residence are excluded.

Macías and Zarkin (2021, 2023).¹³ To capture *military confrontations* we utilize municipal-level data regarding the military's confrontations with criminal groups (*enfrentamientos*). This is a count variable, indicating the number of confrontations each year between SEDENA and suspected criminals across all municipalities.¹⁴ To measure *military presence*, we draw on data regarding operations, which indicates if the military (specifically the army, or SEDENA) was deployed to a municipality to participate in law enforcement operations. Functions included patrols, checkpoints, and detentions. This is a binary variable, indicating if at least one of these functions was present or not.

These two measures of militarization are complementary and allow for a nuanced assessment of mil-

¹³These data were collected by Flores-Macías & Zarkin via right-to-information requests filed to the Mexican government (the National Institution for Transparency, Access to Information, and Personal Data Protection, INAI) and published in Flores-Macías and Zarkin (2021, 2023). Information requests #0000700018420 and #000070023818.

¹⁴While individuals were also exposed to deployments of federal police, data regarding this is not available. The measures we utilize are a suitable proxy for military and federal police deployment, as presidents often deployed the military along with federal police to confront OCGs (Felbab-Brown, 2014).

itary strategy and policing at the municipal level. Confrontations, our first measure, allow us to explore if drug war-interventions that explicitly involved violence and conflict has long-term effects on attitudes. Operations (our second measure) allow us to explore whether or not exposure to deployment—without necessitating violent conflict—has such effects.

Our survey also collected sociodemographic information which we use as controls. These variables are respondent gender, level of education, and socioeconomic status (SES). To create our SES index, we rely on a battery of questions regarding individuals' possession of a series of assets and use principal component analysis (PCA) to create a singular variable (Appendix 4). Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.

Methods

We employ two complementary identification strategies to test if childhood exposure to lethal criminal violence, military confrontations, or military operations affects trust later in life. The first exploits variation in childhood exposure to our independent variables based on year of birth and geographic location. The second strategy leverages the sudden, large-scale troop deployments that began in 2007 as a quasi-experimental shock, enabling us to isolate the causal effects of exposure to both military confrontations and operations.

Exposure Defined by Birth Year & Childhood Municipality

Following recent work on the long-run consequences of early-life violence (e.g., [Gutiérrez-Romero, 2024](#); [Justino, Leone and Salardi, 2014](#); [Leon, 2012](#)), we exploit exogenous differences in childhood exposure to lethal criminal violence, military confrontations, and military operations that arise from respondents' year of birth and geographic location during their first ten years of life. The resulting variation allows us to compare individuals who, during their formative years, experienced higher or lower levels of criminal violence and military interventions, even though they share either a common birthplace or a common birth year.

Formally, we estimate the following reduced-form specification via OLS:

$$y_{ijt} = \beta_1 V_{jt} + \mathbf{X}'_i \beta_2 + \alpha_j + \phi_t + \varepsilon_{ijt}, \quad (1)$$

where y_{ijt} denotes the trust outcome for individual i born in year t in municipality j . Our parameter of interest, β_1 , captures the effect of childhood violence exposure, measured by

$$V_{jt} = \frac{1}{11} \sum_{a=0}^{10} \text{Violence}_{j,t+a}$$

the average annual intensity of (1) lethal criminal violence, (2) military confrontations, or (3) military operations in municipality j from the respondent’s birth year t through age 10. The vector \mathbf{X}_i includes individual covariates—gender, socioeconomic status, and education level—that might correlate with both exposure and trust. Municipality fixed effects (α_j) absorb all time-invariant local characteristics, while birth-year fixed effects (ϕ_t) purge nationwide shocks common to each cohort. Identification therefore hinges on within-municipality, across-cohort deviations in violence intensity and on cross-municipality differences experienced by the same cohort. Robust standard errors account for any remaining correlation in unobserved shocks, ε_{ijt} .

Quasi-Experimental Design based on Military Interventions

The nature of the dramatic shock of military deployments across the country in 2007 allows us to leverage a quasi-experimental design for both exposure to confrontations and operations. This strategy is in line with previous research leveraging this shock (Brown et al., 2019; Flores-Macías, 2018; Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2023; Trejo and Skigin, 2024), and supplements our previous analysis. We can only do so for military-related variables as deployment of the military in drug war operations was rare prior to 2007, while lethal criminal violence was present in the country across all years.¹⁵ Our empirical strategy compares individuals born in the same municipality but in different periods, and individuals born in the same period but in different municipalities, during the drug war’s early years. This design allows us to calculate a debiased estimator which accounts for confounding factors both at the municipal and cohort levels. By comparing across these groups, we incorporate not only a group exposed to the treatment alongside potential confounders, but also a group exposed to those confounders in the absence of the treatment.

¹⁵In communication with the federal government provided in information request #0000700233818, transparency officials noted that “between January 1st and December 31st, 2006 there was no personal aggressions against military personnel recorded [domestically].” Rather, confrontations began in 2007. See Appendix 10 for further evidence.

To employ this strategy, we define treated individuals and a range of treatment years. As municipalities have gone in and out of treatment over time (varying levels of military presence), and respondents have continuously aged throughout this period, we approach this by conservatively defining a range of years in which the military was domestically active in addition to a cohort of individuals who were consistently younger than 10 years old during this time period. Based on our data, this approach results in examining the years 2007-2011. This period not only represents the height of the drug war’s military interventions but perfectly intersects with a group of respondents under the age of 10 which we can explore utilizing our data—those born between 2001 and 2005. Defining treatment in this way is the most conservative approach. In Table 2 we show that exposure to both military confrontations and operations is balanced across those who were both eligible (born 2001-2005) and ineligible for treatment. Further, in Appendix 15, we also less conservatively define the cohort eligible to be treated.

Table 2: Balance in Exposure to Military Interventions Across Cohorts

	Mean Confrontations	Mean Operations
Cohort: Eligible	1.33	0.35
Cohort: Ineligible	1.39	0.36

Note: Calculated as the average level of confrontations or operations (binary variable) for each group. Those eligible for treatment are those born between 2001 and 2005 in our sample.

With this in mind, we utilize standard OLS models with the following equation:

$$y_{ij} = \beta_1 M_{j[i]} + \beta_2 D_i + \beta_3 M_{j[i]} D_i + \mathbf{X}'_i \beta_4 + \alpha_j + \epsilon_i \quad (2)$$

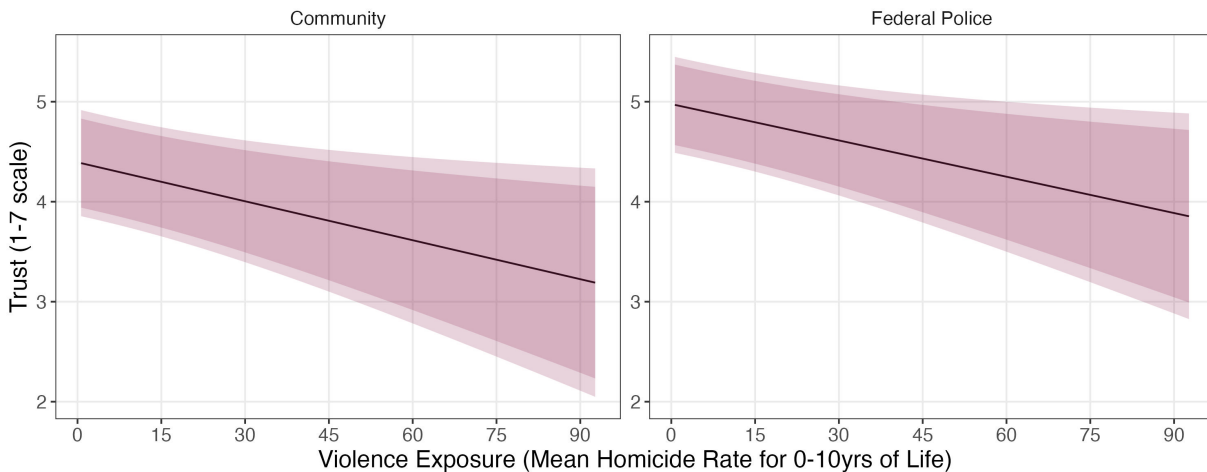
Here, y_{ij} is the outcome variable observed for respondent i in municipality j . $M_{j[i]}$ represents either the average military confrontations or operations between 2007 and 2011 for each municipality j of residence, for each respondent i . D_i is a binary indicator which is 1 if respondent i was born between 2001 and 2005, and 0 otherwise. The parameter of interest is β_3 , which captures the effect of the interaction between $M_{j[i]}$ and D_i . In the X_i vector of controls, we also include the age of the respondents to account for the differing effects within each cohort (eligible or ineligible for exposure). We retain municipality-level fixed effects (α_j) as in Equation 1, but we do not include birth-year fixed effects in this model as we include terms for both cohort and age (continuously operationalized).

Results

Exposure to Lethal Criminal Violence

Increased exposure to lethal criminal violence during early childhood results in a statistically significant decline in trust in the federal police and one’s community later in life (Figure 3). Negative relationships are present for all actors explored, although others are not significant (Table 3). The magnitude of statistically significant results is also notable. To contextualize our findings, consider two individuals: one who spent their first ten years of life in a municipality with an average homicide rate of 40 per 100,000 residents—approximately two standard deviations above the mean—and another who experienced minimal homicidal violence (fewer than one per 100,000). According to our estimates, the former would express 10% less trust in the federal police compared to the latter. These results support our expectations that exposure to criminal violence early in life should not only erode trust in law enforcement, but also one’s community more broadly. In Appendix 9, we demonstrate that this result is driven by the socioeconomically well-off, which comports with literature showing that the rich are especially sensitive to crime shocks (Rueda and Stegmueller, 2016; Clément and Piaser, 2021).

Figure 3: Exposure to Homicide and Decreased Trust



Note: Predicted values from OLS models. corresponding to models 4 and 6 in Table 3. Models used to generate predictions do not use standardized DVs or IVs. Shaded regions represent 90% (dark) and 95% (light) CIs.

Table 3: Exposure to Homicide and Trust

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Subnat'l Gov't	Federal Gov't	Subnat'l Police	Federal Police	Military	Community
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Homicide Exposure (0-10yrs)	-0.039 (0.041)	-0.041 (0.040)	-0.046 (0.038)	-0.087** (0.040)	-0.024 (0.046)	-0.084** (0.037)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Birth Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,402	2,402	2,401	2,405	2,391	2,407
R ²	0.091	0.088	0.085	0.090	0.083	0.096

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Exposure to Military Interventions

Results in Tables 4 and 5 report observational estimates of the effect of exposure to military confrontations and operations on trust (Equation 1). Results show that as childhood exposure to military confrontations and operations increases, trust in the federal police and military later in life decreases. Negative relationships with all other variables explored are also present, although only trust in the federal government reaches a traditional level of significance in the case of confrontations (Table 4, $p < 0.1$). The stronger effects restricted to the federal police and military support our theory, suggesting a pattern of actor-specific blame attribution. Results in Appendix 9 demonstrate that the negative relationship between exposure to confrontations and trust is driven by those from lower socioeconomic strata and with lower levels of educational attainment. This is supported by research showing that marginalized groups – particularly youths – are most vulnerable to state-criminal conflict, both in terms of their increased exposure to repressive state security practices (Ryngelblum and Peres, 2021) and their higher likelihood of OCG recruitment and victimization (Juárez, Urdal and Vadlamannati, 2022).

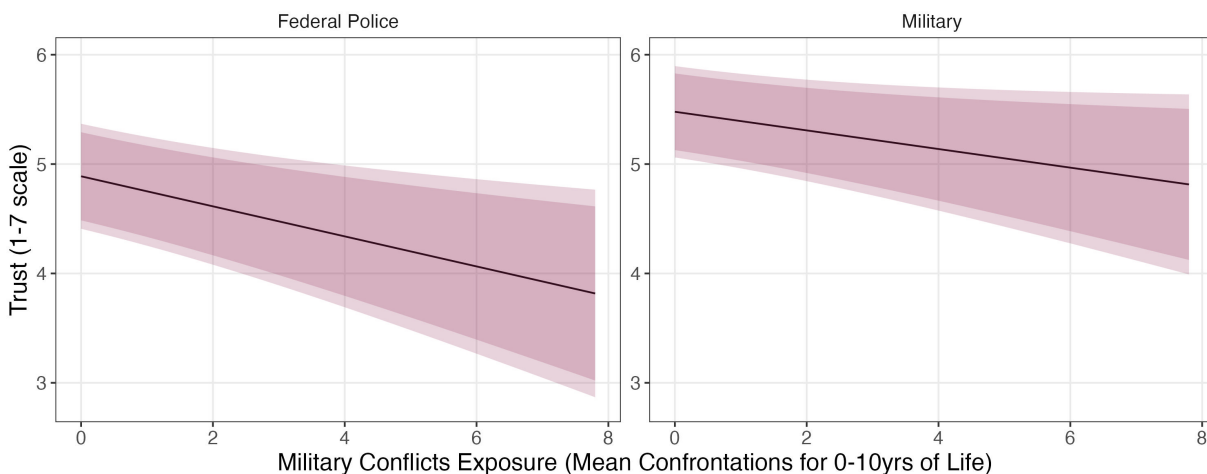
Results in Tables 6 and 7 correspond to our quasi-experimental assessment, leveraging the exogenous shock of military deployments beginning in late 2006/early 2007 (Equation 2). This strategy is a more stringent and conservative estimation of this effect, utilizing our debiased estimator. Estimates indicate that exposure to military confrontations during one's formative years is associated with marked declines in trust in the federal government, federal police, and military. Exposure to military operations—which does not necessarily entail conflict—results in consistent negative effects, but are

only statistically significant for federal police.¹⁶ In Appendix 12, we provide additional support for this point, isolating the impact of confrontations holding constant exposure to operations. We demonstrate that exposure to violent confrontations have an additional impact on trust, particularly in the federal police and military.

Consistent with our expectations, we find strong and method-consistent evidence that exposure to military confrontations results in the long-term erosion of trust in the military and federal police. By contrast, the negative effect associated with military operations is more method-sensitive and only significant at the $p < 0.1$ level. This suggests that exposure to military presence alone during childhood may not have a prominent effect; instead, violence associated with military confrontations may be necessary to strongly depress trust later in life.

Further, we proposed that trust in the federal government should also suffer from exposure to, at minimum, military confrontations. While the effect is negative, it is only significant in two instances at the $p < 0.1$ level (Tables 4 & 6). To probe this tenuous result, in the subsequent section we evaluate if opinions of the federal government are specifically targeted at officials who are co-partisans of those most responsible for drug war-era violence – namely, the PRI and PAN.

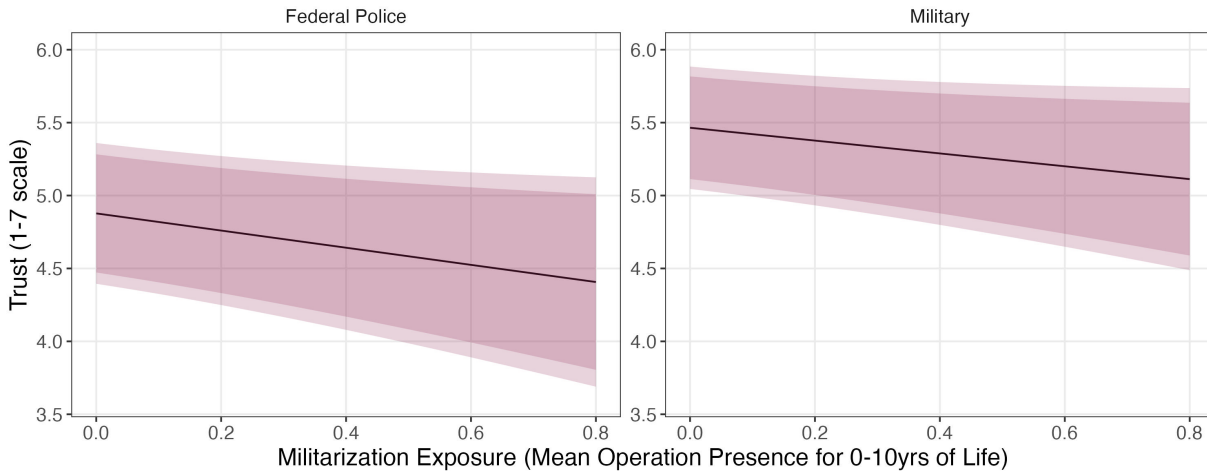
Figure 4: Exposure to Military Confrontations and Decreased Trust



Note: Predicted values from OLS models. Results correspond to models 4 and 5 in Tables 4. Models used to generate predictions do not use standardized DVs or IVs. Shaded regions represent 90% (dark) and 95% (light) CIs.

¹⁶Results are robust to a more relaxed classification of the eligible cohort (Appendix 15).

Figure 5: Exposure to Military Operations and Decreased Trust



Note: Predicted values from OLS models. Results correspond to models 4 and 5 in Tables 5. Models used to generate predictions do not use standardized DVs or IVs. Shaded regions represent 90% (dark) and 95% (light) CIs.

Table 4: Exposure to Military Confrontations and Trust

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Subnat'l Gov't (1)	Federal Gov't (2)	Subnat'l Police (3)	Federal Police (4)	Military (5)	Community (6)
Mil Confrontations Exposure (0-10yrs)	-0.039 (0.030)	-0.055* (0.030)	-0.012 (0.033)	-0.078** (0.032)	-0.056** (0.028)	-0.026 (0.029)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Birth Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,402	2,402	2,401	2,405	2,391	2,407
R ²	0.091	0.089	0.084	0.091	0.085	0.094

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 5: Exposure to Military Operations and Trust

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Subnat'l Gov't (1)	Federal Gov't (2)	Subnat'l Police (3)	Federal Police (4)	Military (5)	Community (6)
Mil Operations Exposure (0-11yrs)	-0.042 (0.038)	-0.023 (0.036)	-0.009 (0.037)	-0.069* (0.037)	-0.060* (0.036)	-0.042 (0.038)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Birth Year FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,402	2,402	2,401	2,405	2,391	2,407
R ²	0.091	0.088	0.084	0.090	0.084	0.095

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 6: Military Confrontations and Cohort Eligibility

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Subnat'l Gov't	Federal Gov't	Subnat'l Police	Federal Police	Military	Community
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cohort: Eligible X Mean Conf. (2007-11)	-0.020 (0.016)	-0.027* (0.016)	-0.005 (0.018)	-0.038** (0.017)	-0.030** (0.015)	-0.011 (0.015)
Mean Conf (2007-11)	-0.551 (0.910)	1.131 (1.454)	-1.132 (0.998)	-0.636 (1.042)	-0.624 (1.229)	-0.079 (1.434)
Cohort: Eligible	-0.042 (0.084)	0.038 (0.086)	0.070 (0.084)	0.131 (0.086)	0.050 (0.085)	0.045 (0.081)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,402	2,402	2,401	2,405	2,391	2,407
R ²	0.087	0.085	0.082	0.084	0.080	0.090

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 7: Military Operations and Cohort Eligibility

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>					
	Subnat'l Gov't	Federal Gov't	Subnat'l Police	Federal Police	Military	Community
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Cohort: Eligible X Mean Ops. (2007-11)	-0.099 (0.112)	-0.101 (0.108)	0.017 (0.111)	-0.194* (0.109)	-0.140 (0.108)	-0.090 (0.109)
Mean Ops (2007-11)	-0.575 (0.373)	-0.537 (0.395)	-0.517 (0.374)	-0.211 (0.347)	0.405 (0.328)	-0.324 (0.355)
Cohort: Eligible	-0.035 (0.090)	0.035 (0.092)	0.057 (0.091)	0.146 (0.092)	0.057 (0.092)	0.062 (0.088)
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Municipality FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	2,402	2,402	2,401	2,405	2,391	2,407
R ²	0.087	0.084	0.082	0.083	0.079	0.090

Note:

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Effects on Vote Choice

Results in the previous section suggest that exposure to militarized violence may lead citizens to form more targeted political assessments, rather than broadly eroding trust in government. To further evaluate this, we examine whether individuals exposed to local military engagements during childhood are more likely to penalize politicians affiliated with the parties of the presidents who authorized troop deployments in their communities—Calderón’s PAN and Peña Nieto’s PRI.¹⁷ Voters exposed to violence during childhood and to the continued failure of this strategy under successive governments may have developed generalized skepticism toward both parties, consistent with theories of political socialization that emphasize early-life experiences.

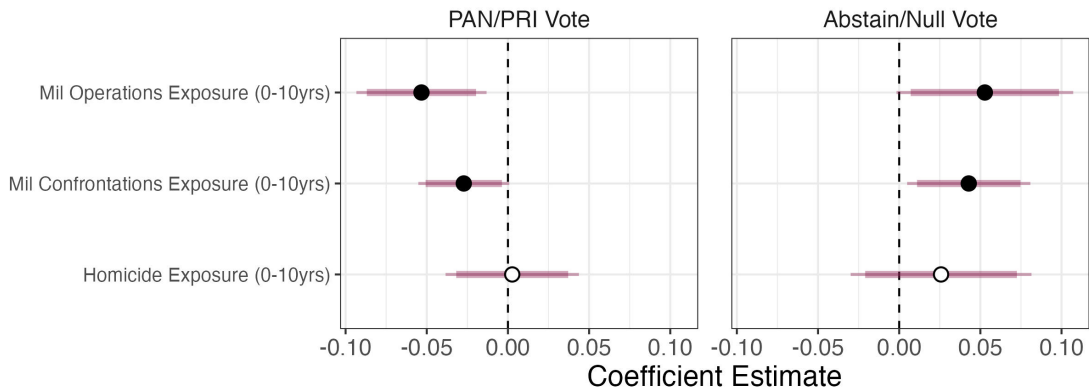
Accordingly, we examine the reported vote choice of voting-aged respondents in our sample ($n = 1,898$), assessing how exposure to lethal criminal violence, military–criminal confrontations, and military operations during the first decade of life shapes support for PAN and PRI candidates in the 2021 legislative election. In these midterm elections, a vote for the PAN or PRI primarily reflected support for each party’s national brand rather than for individual legislative candidates.¹⁸ Because both parties governed during respondents’ childhood years, voters who link those periods to militarization and drug-war violence may penalize both parties across levels of office. Conducted one week after the June 2021 legislative election, our survey allows us to measure recent vote choice with minimal recall error while maximizing the eligible electorate in our sample, as all respondents aged 18 or older by mid-2021 were eligible to vote.

The results presented in Figure 6 provide evidence in support of a backlash against the PAN and PRI in light of exposure to drug war-era military interventions. See Appendix 13 for full results. As exposure to confrontations ($p < 0.1$) and operations ($p < 0.05$) during childhood increases, the probability of voting for the PAN or PRI later in life decreases. Notably, as exposure to lethal violence

¹⁷PAN’s association with the drug war is unambiguous: President Calderón (2006–2012) initiated military deployment and presided over the dramatic escalation of violence, meaning cohorts exposed during early childhood experienced this violence precisely during his presidency. The PRI’s link is less obvious but follows from policy continuity, as Peña Nieto (2012–2018) largely maintained Calderón’s militarized approach despite different rhetoric. See <https://insightcrime.org/news/analysis/mexico-president-reprises-controversial-kingpin-strategy/>, last accessed January 5, 2026.

¹⁸Although Mexico employs a mixed electoral system, party labels remain the primary heuristic in legislative contests.

Figure 6: Effect of Criminal Violence and Military Interventions on Vote Behavior



Note: Coefficients correspond to linear probability models, predicting a PAN/PRI vote (left panel) or vote abstention/null vote (right panel). The main independent variables are standardized. Models include controls for gender, SES, and education, with birth year and municipality fixed effects. Error bars represent 90% (bold) and 95% (thin) CIs.

increases, the PAN/PRI vote probability does not decrease. A one standard deviation increase in exposure to military presence, for example, resulted in a 5% decrease in the likelihood of voting for the PAN or PRI. This supports our argument regarding targeted effects on specific government-led efforts. We also analyze the degree to which this reduced probability of voting for the PAN or PRI translates into increased support for competing parties – namely MORENA – or disengagement with the political system. We find that both exposure to military operations and confrontations is associated with decreased engagement overall, as measured by vote abstention and null voting. As shown in Appendix 13, there is no relationship between exposure and vote for MORENA.

Robustness

We test the robustness of our findings using alternative specifications and additional controls. In our continuous models (Tables 3, 4, 5), we account for pre–drug war trends by controlling for SEDENA drug-trafficking detentions prior to the drug war (Appendix 6), and ensure current violence is not driving results by including the contemporary municipal homicide rate (Appendix 7). We also implement a risk-set matching design (Rosenbaum, 2020), restricting analyses to municipalities on similar exposure paths but with different onset timing (Appendix 11). Finally, we consider the reliability of our results in light of the modifiable areal-unit problem (MAUP) (Lee, Rogers and Soifer, 2025) by re-estimating

exposure using a respondent's municipality and all adjacent municipalities (Appendix 8). Across all robustness checks, results remain consistent in sign and typically in significance.

For our results leveraging the exogenous shock of the drug war (Tables 6 & 7), we adopt a more relaxed definition of the eligible cohort, including respondents born as early as 1999. Although this captures some individuals aged 11–12 in 2010–2011 and younger children in 2007–2010, results remain largely unchanged (Appendix 15). Our claim of exogeneity assumes no systematic pre-shock differences between municipalities with high- versus low-levels of military interventions. Consistent with the logic of parallel-trends, we find no pre-drug war differences in drug-trafficking detentions among municipalities first targeted in 2007 (Appendix 14). We also document balance across homicide rates, pre-war detentions, and respondent demographics (Appendix 14), supporting a lack of systematic difference in observable potentially confounding variables.

Conclusion

We document the lasting detrimental effects of Mexico's drug war on the political attitudes of conflict-exposed children. We provide evidence that exposure to lethal criminal violence and to the government's militarized security strategy during the first decade of life lowers community and political trust in ways that persist into early adulthood. We also find that childhood exposure to military interventions triggered a political backlash against the PAN and PRI—the parties responsible for implementing these security policies during this generation's formative years—and heightened political disaffection.

While our focus is on childhood experiences, we acknowledge that exposure to violence at later stages of life also shapes political attitudes (e.g., Bauer et al., 2016; Pion-Berlin and Carreras, 2017; Ley, 2017). Nevertheless, our central finding is that early-life exposure exerts particularly durable effects. We use the terms “long-lasting” and “persistent” in a precise sense: these effects carry forward from exposure during ages 0–10 to political attitudes measured between ages 16–29, and remain evident even after accounting for contemporaneous violence.

Our study also brings conceptual nuance to research on exposure to militarized conflict. We differentiate between experiences with violent military *confrontations* and with nonviolent military *operations*. While exposure to confrontations produces consistent and sizable decreases in trust, exposure to operations—capturing presence without violence—has weaker and less consistent effects. This dis-

inction highlights that mass deployments alone may not be sufficient to generate long-term changes in opinion; it is the experience of violent confrontation that appears to most undermine trust in related government institutions. These results reinforce the argument that it is childhood exposure to violence, rather than militarization itself, that yields enduring consequences for political attitudes.

We also show that exposure to lethal criminal violence during one's formative years undermines trust in both federal police forces and one's community. This aligns with research demonstrating that violence weakens a community's social fabric (Salmi, Smolej and Kivivuori, 2007; Corbacho, Philipp and Ruiz-Vega, 2015), while contributing new evidence that these effects persist over time. We also find a negative, although not statistically significant, relationship across all political entities examined. Observing statistically significant decreased trust in the federal police, rather than across government entities, brings a new perspective to the impact of violence on trust that contrasts with earlier research reporting more widespread negative impacts.

Our analysis further demonstrates that childhood exposure to both military confrontations and presence produces electoral consequences. Individuals exposed to these forms of militarization are less likely, years later, to support PAN or PRI candidates—the parties of the presidents who oversaw the bulk of these operations. Notably, we do not find consistent declines in overall trust in the federal government, suggesting that youths attribute responsibility to specific political actors rather than to governing institutions more broadly. While our evidence comes from the 2021 midterm election, these partisan effects may be even stronger in high-salience contests, warranting further research.

These patterns carry important implications for downstream political engagement. Lower interpersonal and institutional trust can diminish individuals' willingness to participate in civic and electoral life, and prior research shows that political participation tends to be lower in high-violence settings (Córdova, 2019; Ley, 2018; Trelles and Carreras, 2012). Our findings suggest one potential mechanism: violence experienced during formative years weakens trust, which in turn may discourage individuals from participating in the political life of their communities (Wollebæk, Lundåsen and Trägårdh, 2012). In contexts where individuals continue to reside in the same communities where they experienced violence—as is common in Mexico and much of Latin America—the erosion of social and political trust may thus have severe and lasting consequences.

Finally, understanding the long-term effects of childhood exposure to violence is essential for de-

signing policies that foster political stability, strengthen democratic norms, and promote social cohesion. This study provides new evidence of the sociopolitical consequences of exposure to criminal violence and militarized security interventions during childhood—an area that remains understudied despite the millions of children growing up amid conflict in the Global South. Further research should examine whether particular forms of violence exposure shape the adoption of specific political ideologies in adulthood and whether the impacts on trust and engagement persist as exposed cohorts age.

References

- Aburto, José Manuel, Hiram Beltrán-Sánchez, Víctor Manuel García-Guerrero and Vladimir Canudas-Romo. 2016. "Homicides in Mexico reversed life expectancy gains for men and slowed them for women, 2000–10." *Health Affairs* 35(1):88–95.
- Adhvaryu, Achyuta and James Fenske. 2023. "Conflict and the formation of political beliefs in Africa." *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 71(2):000–000.
- Akbulut-Yuksel, Mevlude. 2017. "War during childhood: The long run effects of warfare on health." *Journal of Health economics* 53:117–130.
- Akresh, Richard, Leonardo Lucchetti and Harsha Thirumurthy. 2012. "Wars and child health: Evidence from the Eritrean–Ethiopian conflict." *Journal of development economics* 99(2):330–340.
- Bailey, John, Pablo Parás and Dinorah Vargas. 2013. "Army as Police? Correlates of Public Confidence in the Police, Justice System, and the Military: Mexico in Comparative Context'." *Política y Gobierno* pp. 161–185.
- Balcells, Laia and Gerard Torrats-Espinoso. 2018. "Using a natural experiment to estimate the electoral consequences of terrorist attacks." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115(42):10624–10629.
- Baskin, Deborah and Ira Sommers. 2015. "Trajectories of exposure to community violence and mental health symptoms among serious adolescent offenders." *Criminal justice and behavior* 42(6):587–609.
- Bateson, Regina. 2012. "Crime victimization and political participation." *American Political Science Review* 106(3):570–587.
- Bauer, Michal, Christopher Blattman, Julie Chytilová, Joseph Henrich, Edward Miguel and Tamar Mitts. 2016. "Can war foster cooperation?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 30(3):249–74.
- Blanco, Luisa and Isabel Ruiz. 2013. "The impact of crime and insecurity on trust in democracy and institutions." *American Economic Review* 103(3):284–88.
- Blanco, Luisa R. 2013. "The impact of crime on trust in institutions in Mexico." *European Journal of Political Economy* 32:38–55.
- Boullier, Mary and Mitch Blair. 2018. "Adverse childhood experiences." *Paediatrics and Child Health* 28(3):132–137.
- Brewer, Stephanie and Ana Lucia Verduzco. 2022. "Militarized Transformation: Human Rights and Democratic Controls in a Context of Increasing Militarization in Mexico." *The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA)*.
- Brown, Ryan, Verónica Montalva, Duncan Thomas and Andrea Velásquez. 2019. "Impact of violent crime on risk aversion: Evidence from the Mexican drug war." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 101(5):892–904.

- Calderón, Gabriela, Gustavo Robles, Alberto Díaz-Cayeros and Beatriz Magaloni. 2015. "The beheading of criminal organizations and the dynamics of violence in Mexico." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(8):1455–1485.
- Campbell, Angus, Philip E Converse, Warren E Miller and Donald E Stokes. 1980. *The American Voter*. University of Chicago Press.
- Campbell, Jennifer A, Rebekah J Walker and Leonard E Egede. 2016. "Associations between adverse childhood experiences, high-risk behaviors, and morbidity in adulthood." *American journal of preventive medicine* 50(3):344–352.
- Canudas-Romo, Vladimir, José Manuel Aburto, Victor Manuel García-Guerrero and Hiram Beltrán-Sánchez. 2017. "Mexico's epidemic of violence and its public health significance on average length of life." *J Epidemiol Community Health* 71(2):188–193.
- Carlin, Ryan E, Gregory J Love and Cecilia Martínez-Gallardo. 2015. "Security, clarity of responsibility, and presidential approval." *Comparative Political Studies* 48(4):438–463.
- Carreras, Miguel and Giancarlo Visconti. 2022. "Who pays for crime? Criminal violence, right-wing incumbents, and electoral accountability in Latin America." *Electoral studies* 79:102522.
- Chamarbagwala, Rubiana and Hilcías E Morán. 2011. "The human capital consequences of civil war: Evidence from Guatemala." *Journal of development economics* 94(1):41–61.
- Chioda, Laura. 2017. *Stop the violence in Latin America: a look at prevention from cradle to adulthood*. World Bank Publications.
- Citrin, Jack and Laura Stoker. 2018. "Political trust in a cynical age." *Annual review of political science* 21(1):49–70.
- Clément, Matthieu and Lucie Piaser. 2021. "Do inequalities predict fear of crime? Empirical evidence from Mexico." *World Development* 140:105354.
- Corbacho, Ana, Julia Philipp and Mauricio Ruiz-Vega. 2015. "Crime and erosion of trust: Evidence for Latin America." *World Development* 70:400–415.
- Córdova, Abby. 2019. "Living in gang-controlled neighborhoods: Impacts on electoral and nonelectoral participation in El Salvador." *Latin American Research Review* 54(1):201–221.
- Council on Foreign Relations. 2022. "Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels."
URL: <https://www.cfr.org/background/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartelschapter-title-0-3>
- Daniele, Gianmarco and Gemma Dipoppa. 2017. "Mafia, elections and violence against politicians." *Journal of Public Economics* 154:10–33.
- De Neve, Jan-Emmanuel. 2015. "Personality, childhood experience, and political ideology." *Political Psychology* 36(1):55–73.
- Deare, Craig A. 2021. *Militarization a la AMLO: How bad can it get?* Wilson Center.

- Deglow, Annekatrin and Ralph Sundberg. 2021. "Local Conflict Intensity and Public Perceptions of the Police: Evidence from Afghanistan." *The Journal of Politics* 83(4):1337–1352.
- Dell, Melissa. 2015. "Trafficking networks and the Mexican drug war." *American Economic Review* 105(6):1738–79.
- Dill, Janina and Livia I Schubiger. 2021. "Attitudes toward the use of force: Instrumental imperatives, moral principles, and international law." *American Journal of Political Science* 65(3):612–633.
- Dorff, Cassy. 2017. "Violence, kinship networks, and political resilience: Evidence from Mexico." *Journal of Peace Research* 54(4):558–573.
- Dube, Oeindrila, Omar García-Ponce and Kevin Thom. 2016. "From maize to haze: Agricultural shocks and the growth of the Mexican drug sector." *Journal of the European Economic Association* 14(5):1181–1224.
- Durán-Martínez, Angélica. 2015. "To kill and tell? State power, criminal competition, and drug violence." *Journal of conflict resolution* 59(8):1377–1402.
- Erikson, Erik Homburger. 1963. *Childhood and society*. Vol. 2 Norton New York.
- Felbab-Brown, Vanda. 2014. "Changing the Game or Dropping the Ball?"
- Feldman, Ruth. 2020. "What is resilience: an affiliative neuroscience approach." *World Psychiatry* 19(2):132–150.
- Fletcher, Jason M and Stefanie Schurer. 2017. "Origins of adulthood personality: The role of adverse childhood experiences." *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy* 17(2).
- Flores-Macías, Gustavo. 2018. "The consequences of militarizing anti-drug efforts for state capacity in Latin America: evidence from Mexico." *Comparative Politics* 51(1):1–20.
- Flores-Macías, Gustavo and Jessica Zarkin. 2021. "Militarization and perceptions of law enforcement in the developing world: Evidence from a conjoint experiment in Mexico." *British Journal of Political Science* pp. 1–21.
- Flores-Macías, Gustavo and Jessica Zarkin. 2023. "The Consequences of Militarized Policing for Human Rights: Evidence from Mexico." *Comparative Political Studies* p. 00104140231168362.
- García-Ponce, Omar. 2019. "Women's Political Participation After Civil War: Evidence from Peru." *Working Paper*.
- García-Ponce, Omar. 2025. "Criminal Violence, the State, and Society." *Annual Review of Political Science* 28.
- García-Ponce, Omar, Thomas Zeitzoff and Leonard Wantchekon. 2021. "Are voters too afraid to tackle corruption? Survey and experimental evidence from Mexico." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(4):709–727.

- Gelman, Andrew and Thomas C Little. 1997. "Poststratification into many categories using hierarchical logistic regression." *Survey Methodology* .
- Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist and Eric Schickler. 2008. Partisan hearts and minds. In *Partisan Hearts and Minds*. Yale University Press.
- Grossman, Guy, Devorah Manekin and Dan Miodownik. 2015. "The political legacies of combat: Attitudes toward war and peace among Israeli ex-combatants." *International Organization* 69(4):981–1009.
- Guerra, Nancy G, L Rowell Huesmann and Anja Spindler. 2003. "Community violence exposure, social cognition, and aggression among urban elementary school children." *Child development* 74(5):1561–1576.
- Guidetti, Margherita, Luciana Carraro and Luigi Castelli. 2021. "Children's inequality aversion in intergroup contexts: The role of parents' social dominance orientation, right-wing authoritarianism and moral foundations." *PLoS one* 16(12):e0261603.
- Guo, Shiqi, Nan Gao and Pinghan Liang. 2023. "Winter Is Coming: Early-life Experiences and Politicians' Decisions." *The Economic Journal* p. uead061.
- Gutiérrez-Romero, Roxana. 2024. "The intergenerational impact of electoral violence on height and human capital." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 220:608–630.
- Hatemi, Peter K, Carolyn L Funk, Sarah E Medland, Hermine M Maes, Judy L Silberg, Nicholas G Martin and Lindon J Eaves. 2009. "Genetic and environmental transmission of political attitudes over a life time." *The Journal of Politics* 71(3):1141–1156.
- Hawkins, J David, Todd I Herrenkohl, David P Farrington, Devon Brewer, Richard F Catalano, Tracy W Harachi and Lynn Cothorn. 2000. "Predictors of Youth Violence. Juvenile Justice Bulletin."
- Healy, Andrew and Neil Malhotra. 2013. "Childhood socialization and political attitudes: Evidence from a natural experiment." *The Journal of Politics* 75(4):1023–1037.
- Heim, Christine and Charles B Nemeroff. 2001. "The role of childhood trauma in the neurobiology of mood and anxiety disorders: preclinical and clinical studies." *Biological psychiatry* 49(12):1023–1039.
- Herrera, Joel Salvador and Cesar B Martinez-Alvarez. 2022. "Diversifying violence: Mining, export-agriculture, and criminal governance in Mexico." *World Development* 151:105769.
- Hong, Ji Yeon and Woo Chang Kang. 2017. "Trauma and stigma: The long-term effects of wartime violence on political attitudes." *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 34(3):264–286.
- Hyman, Herbert. 1959. *Political Socialization: A Study in the Psychology of Political Behavior*. Free Press.

- Jennings, M Kent and Richard G Niemi. 2014. *Generations and politics: A panel study of young adults and their parents*. Vol. 68 Princeton University Press.
- Jones, Daniel B, Werner Troesken and Randall Walsh. 2017. “Political participation in a violent society: The impact of lynching on voter turnout in the post-Reconstruction South.” *Journal of Development Economics* 129:29–46.
- Juárez, Nicolás Corona, Henrik Urdal and Krishna Chaitanya Vadlamannati. 2022. “The significance of age structure, education, and youth unemployment for explaining subnational variation in violent youth crime in Mexico.” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 39(1):49–73.
- Justino, Patricia, Marinella Leone and Paola Salardi. 2014. “Short-and long-term impact of violence on education: The case of Timor Leste.” *The World Bank Economic Review* 28(2):320–353.
- Knudsen, Eric I, James J Heckman, Judy L Cameron and Jack P Shonkoff. 2006. “Economic, neurobiological, and behavioral perspectives on building America’s future workforce.” *Proceedings of the national Academy of Sciences* 103(27):10155–10162.
- Koenig, Melissa A and Paul L Harris. 2007. “The basis of epistemic trust: Reliable testimony or reliable sources?” *Episteme* 4(3):264–284.
- LAPOP Lab. 2024. “AmericasBarometer Mexico.”. Data retrieved from, www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop.
- Laterzo, Isabel G. 2024. “Progressive Ideology and Support for Punitive Crime Policy: Evidence from Argentina and Brazil.” *Comparative Political Studies* 57(6):999–1034.
- Latinobarómetro Study. 2023. “Latinobarómetro Corporation: 2023 Wave – Aggregated Version.” <https://www.latinobarometro.org/latinobarometro-2023>.
- Lee, Dong Wook, Melissa Rogers and Hillel David Soifer. 2025. “The modifiable areal unit problem in political science.” *Political Analysis* pp. 1–13.
- Leon, Gianmarco. 2012. “Civil conflict and human capital accumulation the long-term effects of political violence in Perú.” *Journal of Human Resources* 47(4):991–1022.
- León, Sandra. 2011. “Who is responsible for what? Clarity of responsibilities in multilevel states: The case of Spain.” *European Journal of Political Research* 50(1):80–109.
- Lessing, Benjamin. 2017. *Making peace in drug wars: Crackdowns and cartels in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Ley, Sandra. 2017. “Electoral accountability in the midst of criminal violence: Evidence from Mexico.” *Latin American Politics and Society* 59(1):3–27.
- Ley, Sandra. 2018. “To vote or not to vote: how criminal violence shapes electoral participation.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 62(9):1963–1990.

- Lupu, Noam and Leonid Peisakhin. 2017. "The legacy of political violence across generations." *American Journal of Political Science* 61(4):836–851.
- Madestam, Andreas and David Hans Yanagizawa-Drott. 2012. "Shaping the nation: The effect of Fourth of July on political preferences and behavior in the United States." *HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series*.
- Magaloni, Beatriz and Luis Rodriguez. 2020. "Institutionalized police brutality: Torture, the militarization of security, and the reform of inquisitorial criminal justice in Mexico." *American Political Science Review* 114(4):1013–1034.
- Malone, Mary Fran T. 2010. "The verdict is in: The impact of crime on public trust in Central American justice systems." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 2(3):99–128.
- Masullo, Juan and Davide Morisi. 2024. "The human costs of the war on drugs. Attitudes towards militarization of security in Mexico." *Comparative political studies* 57(6):887–920.
- Muggah, Robert and Katherine Aguirre Tobón. 2018. *Citizen security in Latin America: facts and figures*. Vol. 33 Igarape Institute.
- Muñiz-Sánchez, Victor, Pilar Fuerte-Celis and Kenny Méndez-Ramírez. 2022. "The killing fields. A Bayesian analysis of crop eradication and organized crime violence in Mexico." *Spatial Statistics* 47:100553.
- Osorio, Javier. 2013. *Hobbes on drugs: Understanding drug violence in Mexico* PhD thesis University of Notre Dame.
- Pazzona, Matteo. 2020. "Do victims of crime trust less but participate more in social organizations?" *Economics of Governance* 21(1):49–73.
- Phillips, Brian J. 2015. "How does leadership decapitation affect violence? The case of drug trafficking organizations in Mexico." *The Journal of Politics* 77(2):324–336.
- Pion-Berlin, David and Miguel Carreras. 2017. "Armed forces, police and crime-fighting in Latin America." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 9(3):3–26.
- Rath, Thomas. 2013. *Myths of demilitarization in postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920-1960*. UNC Press Books.
- Reifen-Tagar, Michal and Andrei Cimpian. 2022. "Political ideology in early childhood: Making the case for studying young children in political psychology." *Political Psychology* 43:77–105.
- Ríos, Viridiana. 2015. "How government coordination controlled organized crime: The case of Mexico's cocaine markets." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(8):1433–1454.
- Rivera, Mauricio. 2016. "The sources of social violence in Latin America: An empirical analysis of homicide rates, 1980–2010." *Journal of Peace Research* 53(1):84–99.

- Rizzo, Michael T, Laura Elenbaas and Kimberly E Vanderbilt. 2020. "Do children distinguish between resource inequalities with individual versus structural origins?" *Child Development* 91(2):439–455.
- Rosenbaum, Paul R. 2020. Risk-set matching. In *Design of Observational Studies*. Springer pp. 279–297.
- Rueda, David and Daniel Stegmueller. 2016. "The externalities of inequality: Fear of crime and preferences for redistribution in Western Europe." *American Journal of Political Science* 60(2):472–489.
- Ryngelblum, Marcelo and Maria Fernanda Tourinho Peres. 2021. "Social segregation and lethal police violence in the city of São Paulo, Brazil (2014-2015)." *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* 26:4275–4286.
- Salmi, Venla, Mirka Smolej and Janne Kivivuori. 2007. "Crime victimization, exposure to crime news and social trust among adolescents." *Young* 15(3):255–272.
- Segovia, Rafael. 1975. *La politización del niño mexicano*. El Colegio de México.
- Shemyakina, Olga. 2011. "The effect of armed conflict on accumulation of schooling: Results from Tajikistan." *Journal of Development Economics* 95(2):186–200.
- Shonkoff, Jack P. and Deborah A. Phillips, eds. 2000. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. National Academies Press.
- Siegel, Jenifer Z., Suzanne Estrada, Molly J. Crockett and Arielle Baskin-Sommers. 2019. "Exposure to violence affects the development of moral impressions and trust behavior in incarcerated males." *Nature communications* 10(1):1942.
- Sweeten, Gary, Alex R Piquero and Laurence Steinberg. 2013. "Age and the explanation of crime, revisited." *Journal of youth and adolescence* 42:921–938.
- Taylor, Laura K. 2020. "The Developmental Peacebuilding Model (DPM) of children's prosocial behaviors in settings of intergroup conflict." *Child Development Perspectives* 14(3):127–134.
- Trejo, Guillermo and Natán Skigin. 2024. "Silencing the Press in Criminal Wars: Why the War on Drugs Turned Mexico into the World's Most Dangerous Country for Journalists." *Perspectives on Politics* pp. 1–22.
- Trejo, Guillermo and Sandra Ley. 2018. "Why did drug cartels go to war in Mexico? Subnational party alternation, the breakdown of criminal protection, and the onset of large-scale violence." *Comparative Political Studies* 51(7):900–937.
- Trejo, Guillermo and Sandra Ley. 2020. *Votes, drugs, and violence: The political logic of criminal wars in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press.
- Trejo, Guillermo and Sandra Ley. 2021. "High-profile criminal violence: Why drug cartels murder government officials and party candidates in Mexico." *British Journal of Political Science* 51(1):203–229.

- Trelles, Alejandro and Miguel Carreras. 2012. "Bullets and votes: Violence and electoral participation in Mexico." *Journal of Politics in Latin America* 4(2):89–123.
- UNDP. 2024. "Disenchanted youth, debilitated democracies." Accessed: 2025-11-11.
URL: <https://www.undp.org/latin-america/blog/disenchanted-youth-debilitated-democracies>
- Villarreal, Andrés. 2004. "The social ecology of rural violence: Land scarcity, the organization of agricultural production, and the presence of the state." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(2):313–348.
- Visconti, Giancarlo. 2020. "Policy preferences after crime victimization: panel and survey evidence from Latin America." *British Journal of Political Science* 50(4):1481–1495.
- Warren, Mark. 2018. "Trust and democracy." *The Oxford handbook of social and political trust* pp. 75–94.
- Wegemer, Christopher M and Deborah Lowe Vandell. 2020. "Parenting, temperament, and attachment security as antecedents of political orientation: Longitudinal evidence from early childhood to age 26." *Developmental psychology* 56(7):1360.
- Wollebæk, Dag, Susanne Wallman Lundåsen and Lars Trägårdh. 2012. "Three forms of interpersonal trust: Evidence from Swedish municipalities." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 35(4):319–346.