

Why is Mexican politics divided between conservative, northern “blue” states and left-leaning, southern “yellow” states? While factors such as the regional concentration of wealth and urbanization certainly contribute, I suggest that political discussion plays an important role in reinforcing regional differences. Mexico’s regional cleavage limits the supply of differently-minded conversation partners in a voter’s immediate social environment, thus making it less likely that s/he will hear arguments sympathetic to an opposing side.

**Why is Voting Behavior so Regionalized in Mexico?
Political Discussion and Electoral Choice in 2006**

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Mexico's political landscape is dominated by a regional cleavage. During the 2006 election campaign, "blue" and "yellow" became the shorthand for expressing the divide between the mostly conservative North with its blue states and the more left-leaning South awash in yellow states. Yet the stark regional concentration of each party's support base was not new. Scholars of Mexican voting behavior have been pointing to such a division ever since Mexican elections became competitive in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Despite this, the causes of Mexico's regional cleavage remain poorly understood. In this paper, I claim that political discussion, which scholars of Mexico have completely overlooked, plays an important role in reinforcing and sustaining Mexico's regionalized politics.

The Regional Cleavage and Voting Behavior in Mexico

Once the PRI's hegemony began to crack in 1988, opposition parties rushed to fill the void. They did so, however, in a highly uneven, at least geographically speaking, manner. Throughout the 1990s, the PAN was a capable challenger to the PRI in elections that occurred in the North, while the PRD was the primary challenger in the South. Neither of the two main opposition parties, however, had any meaningful presence in the other's stronghold. This arrangement led some analysts to speak of an electoral "bifurcation" or "two separate two-party systems" instead of a three-party system (Klesner 1995: 143). Northern states featured competition between only the PRI and the PAN while southern states featured a PRI-PRD divide.

The historic presidential election of 2000 initiated an important adjustment to this scenario. *Panista* candidate and eventual winner Vicente Fox had enough of a national following that he actually out-pollled the *Perredista* candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, in many

southern states. Yet this reflected more the relative weakness of Cárdenas than any fundamental shift in Mexico's political geography: Fox's best draw was still in the North while Cardenas's was in the South. The PRI, for its part, remained a "national" party, albeit a losing one, as its vote was much more evenly distributed across Mexico's different regions. The 2006 election saw a further decline of the PRI, as it gave way to the PRD and PAN as the front-running challenger in numerous states. Yet the fact remained that the PAN's candidate Felipe Calderón had much greater success in the North than the South, while *Perredista* candidate Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador outran Calderón in the South. Calderón won all but 3 of the 18 states lying to the north of Michoacán's and Hidalgo's northern borders, and Lopez Obrador won all but 2 of the 14 states (and 1 federal district) lying to the south of this obvious political fault line.

Scholars of Mexican voting behavior have thus stressed region as a primary, if not *the* primary, cause of voting behavior (Dominguez and McCann 1996; Klesner 1993, 1995; Magaloni 1999; Poiré 1999). "Region, not class, remained the dominant cleavage in electoral politics [in 2006]. Our findings thus support the conventional wisdom that Mexico has increasingly become a nation of 'blue states' and 'yellow states'" (Lawson 2006: p. 2, 4). The reasons why political cleavage has assumed such a regional logic are multiple, but in general scholars have given four reasons: wealth-related factors, religiosity, urbanization, and political-historical factors.

First, by far the most frequently cited reason is the regional disparity in living standards and overall levels of economic development. Northern states are more economically developed, featuring higher living standards and higher rates of industrialization, literacy, and education (Klesner 1995). Since wealthier, middle-class voters tend to be more attracted to the market-oriented policy proposals of the center-right PAN, the more highly developed North leans toward

Panista candidates while the less developed south favors the PRD. For example, NAFTA and the rise of the export-oriented *maquila* sector have been partially responsible for the North's relative prosperity and its thriving middle class. As such, pro-market rhetoric no doubt resonates more favorably among middle-class northerners than among poor southerners who see few benefits from integration with the United States.

Second, the PAN is a culturally conservative party—opposing capital punishment as well as abortion rights and other methods of birth control—with historically tight linkages to the Roman Catholic Church. Numerous northern states and cities, especially Guadalajara and Monterrey, feature higher than average levels of church attendance and more conservative dispositions on moral and cultural issues. In contrast, the historically anti-clerical PRI and the largely secular PRD tend to pull from voters with less traditional beliefs who disproportionately reside in the Federal District and the South.

Third, Mexico's urban-rural divide is an important political cleavage that could have regional consequences. Even at the height of its hegemony in the 1960s, the PRI polled more strongly in rural areas than in urban ones, with the PAN enjoying greater relative success in Mexico's urban centers (Klesner 1993). After the late 1980s, the left crept into the PAN's urban redoubt by competing with it for opposition voters, eventually establishing a stronghold in the Federal District, where much of Mexico City is located. As such, urbanization has sharply stratified PRI versus non-PRI voters since the late 1980s. Yet despite the left's incursion onto the PAN's urban territory, the PAN remained the strongest urban party throughout the 1990s and 2000s, especially outside the Federal District (Klesner 1993, 1995, 2004). The urban-rural divide may thus induce a regional effect since the South is much more rural than the North.

A final factor relates to the brief political history of democratic contestation in Mexico (Lawson 2006). As elections became more free and fair, Mexico's plurality-rule contests for governors, mayors, and most lower house members encouraged two-party competition at the state and local levels. Most voters also tended to approach competitive elections with the "regime cleavage" foremost in their mind, asking themselves above all whether they wanted to prolong the hegemonic rule of the party of the state (Dominguez and McCann 1996). For the PRI's opponents, *which* opposition party won was secondary, so voters chose merely between the PRI and the strongest opposition party. This gave tremendous "first-mover" advantages to the opposition party in each state that established an organizational presence and emerged as the PRI's most viable challenger in the early 1990s (Lawson 2006). A positive by-product of achieving this early "front-running challenger" status was the emergence of a much larger pool of partisan sympathizers in the state down the road. By itself, this explanation cannot explain why preferences assumed the eventual North/South logic, but it does account for the persistence of the divide.

What are Regional "Effects"?

Scholarly work on Mexican voting behavior has demonstrated that these four factors certainly help to account for Mexico's regional divide, yet they do not entirely explain it and in fact seem to only explain a small part of regional "effects." These lingering regional effects can be thought of in a number of ways. They exist because scholars find that individuals with identical demographic traits but different regional locations have vastly different probabilities in voting for each candidate. For example, statistical analyses of Mexican voting behavior have found that a college-educated, middle class, economically liberal, highly observant, culturally

conservative, urban (for the sake of exposition) woman residing in a northern state has a much higher probability of voting for the PAN than a southern woman with equivalent traits. Both voters have identical, prototypically *Panista* individual traits, but the voter from the North ends up choosing the PAN with far more likelihood than the voter from the South. A more technical way of relating this is that regional dummy variables fail to “drop out” of multiple regression models—that is, they remain statistically significant and explain residual variance that the demographic and ideational factors cannot.

Most analyses stop at this point (cf. Lawson 2006) and report the standard claim that Mexico has deep regional cleavages. This claim is most certainly and obviously true, yet from the standpoint of a scholar trying to derive theoretical explanations for how Mexican voters decide the way they do, such a claim should be unsatisfying. Consider the two prototypically *Panista* voters again. That a statistical model is able to identify the regional effect on their differences in voting behavior is undoubtedly important, yet it does not in any way explain *why* this residual regional effect remains. What are the causal mechanisms behind this important difference? Why is a northerner more *Panista* than a southerner with identical politically relevant traits? Again, a more technical description of the problem would describe regional dummy variables as “proper nouns” or “fixed effects” variables that, while identifying important group-level behavioral differences, accomplish little by way of explaining why these differences exist (Przeworski and Teune 1970). The goal of a voting behavior analyst should be to better account for these residual group-level differences with theoretical variables.

Why, then, do individuals with identical demographic traits and political beliefs exhibit different voting behavior patterns that correspond to their region of residence?¹ I claim that a

¹ One intriguing possibility that scholars offered in the 1990s was that residents of some northern states had experience living under non-*priista* governors that lowered the perceived risks entailed in opposition governance

crucial but to date completely overlooked link between individual-level traits and aggregate-level outcomes in Mexico is the nature of each voter's social environment (Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). Voters do not decide in a social vacuum. They reach political decisions amidst ongoing interpersonal interactions and exchanges. They discuss politics and openly deliberate over their choices with family and friends, accepting advice and new information from others while at times attempting themselves to persuade. In short, citizens are embedded in social networks that sustain politically relevant interpersonal exchanges.

Social interactions have the ability to induce disparities between individual-level patterns and aggregate outcomes (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004). Consider, yet again, the two prototypical *Panista* women with identical individual-level traits. What is the difference between the northern state resident and the southern state resident? The northern resident lives in an environment in which she is far more likely than the southern resident to encounter other *Panistas*. The supply of *Panista* discussants that may persuade her to convert away from a non-*Panista* option or, alternatively, reinforce her *Panista* predispositions is relatively high in her blue state. In contrast, the southern resident would find far fewer *Panista* interlocutors to reinforce her obvious *Panista* predispositions. Even if she is inclined to favor the PAN, as her personal traits might dictate, she may often find herself in the uncomfortable position of supporting a minority viewpoint when discussing politics. Since the “socially heroic partisan holdout is rare,” she is more likely than her blue state counterpart to “cave” to the majority position (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004: xyz; Asch 1951; Noelle-Neumann 1984). In

(Poiré 1999). In fact, however, Mexico's regional cleavages remained sharp in elections occurring after 2000, when the entire country had experience living under a non-*priista* administration.

sum, the lingering effects that make region in Mexico more than the sum of its individual parts may be due to the relative supply of reinforcing versus countervailing discussants.

Political Discussion and Discussant Networks in Mexico

Whether discussion can help explain regional effects is contingent, at the very least, on Mexicans' actually discussing politics during election campaigns. The 2006 Mexico Panel Study has multiple ways of gauging this. First, the panel contained a straightforward question on the *Frequency of political discussion*, asking respondents if they discuss politics with other people "daily," "a few times each week," "a few times each month," "rarely," or "never." Second, the final two waves each contained a political discussant "name generator" that tapped into the nature of discussion networks. The battery read as follows: "Could you tell me the name of the three people with whom you must discuss politics? If you would like, you may tell me their complete names or just their first names and last initials." These name generator data are the first of their kind for the Mexican case. I use the name generator to measure the *Number of political discussion partners*.

The frequency distributions for these two variables, reported in Figure 1, provide an initial look at the rate of political discussion in Mexico. The left half of the graph with red bars shows the overall frequency of political discussion. The median response is "a few times each month." Relatively few Mexicans—less than 10 percent—discuss politics daily. Moreover, a plurality of Mexicans say they "rarely" discuss politics. At the same time, however, the vast majority of citizens *do* discuss politics at some point: just 14 percent claim they "never" do so. All told, wide variation exists around a rather low mean response, as 36 percent of citizens discuss politics more than just a few times per month. The number of political discussants that

respondents named, shown in the right half with brown bars, also has a large variation: The two most frequent categories were “Three” and “Zero.” Forty-one percent of respondents had (at least) three discussants, while 38 percent mentioned none. The average Mexican citizen splits the difference between these two extremes: the mean respondent reported 1.5 political discussants.

[Figure 1 here]

Taken together, these results appear to be generally consistent with standard characterizations of citizens living in most democracies: average citizens are clearly not preoccupied with politics such that it permeates their daily conversations, yet most individuals engage in some politically relevant conversations, even if only occasionally (Lippmann 1922). Moreover, there is wide variation around this central tendency, with a notable minority discussing politics daily and a roughly equally sized minority avoiding the topic altogether.² However, to provide a more concrete basis by which to judge whether Mexicans discuss politics frequently or rarely, I place these numbers in a comparative context.

Comparative networks data are still rare because name generators have only been administered in a few countries.³ As such, the average number of discussion partners per country is not widely available. However, the frequency of political discussion variable is available for many countries since this question has been asked in the World Values Survey (WVS). I merged aggregate cross-national data on discussion frequency (from the WVS) with the mean number of discussants when available (mostly from reports in Gibson 2001) to create the scatterplot in Figure 2. It is based on a meager *N* of less than 15. Moreover, numerous

² The high correlation (-.58) between these two variables, which appeared at opposite ends of the questionnaire, is reassuring in that it provides evidence of their validity and reliability.

³ Mutz (2006) uses data from 12 countries in the Cross-National Elections Project (CNEP), but these data still mostly unavailable to the public.

“apples and oranges” issues exist in comparing the networks data across. Most importantly, some countries in the sample requested the names of those with whom the respondent discussed “important matters,” while others, as in Mexico, queried exclusively “political” discussants.⁴ The former question wording queries a much larger pool of discussants and will obviously draw mentions from wholly apolitical individuals, although research shows these measurement differences to be not as consequential as one might think (Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004: xyz). Also, two cases are not countries but rather cities, and are therefore strictly urban. To address this problem, the scatterplot reports results for urban Mexico, rural Mexico, and “MEXICO” as a whole.

[Figure 2 here]

Despite these potential drawbacks, the results in Figure 2 still provide some understanding of Mexico’s comparative status. The *X*-axis is the country’s mean level of self-reported political discussion expressed in terms of the percentile vis-à-vis *all* 70 countries in the WVS. Mexico as a whole is in the lowest quintile, although countries with slightly longer democratic traditions—Brazil, Hungary, and Spain—rank even lower. Urban Mexicans are far more likely to engage in political discussion than rural Mexicans, although both groups are still firmly entrenched in the world’s lowest quintile. Average network size, on the *Y*-axis, is even lower by international standards. Mexico’s 1.5 discussants per respondent locate it in last place, although again this national average papers over a stark urban/rural divide. Urban Mexicans listed 1.8 discussants, while rural ones mentioned just *half* that figure: 0.9.

All told, despite the methodological shortcomings of these comparative data, it seems safe to conclude that the average frequency of political discussion and average network size in

⁴ Bulgaria, France, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Spain, and the US results are based on “important matters” name generators. Brazil, Mexico, and South Bend are based on “political” discussants.

Mexico is low by international standards. At the same time, huge variation exists *within* Mexico around this central tendency. In particular, a large number of individuals rarely or never discusses politics and reports no political discussants, pulling down Mexico's overall mean. Indeed, the share of Mexican respondents listing no discussants, 38 percent, is almost *three times* the international mean share of 14 percent. More often than not, these "politically mute" individuals are rural dwellers; for example, over 60 percent of rural residents mentioned no discussants and never or only rarely discussed politics. In contrast, a large share of Mexicans does discuss politics daily or almost daily, often with 3 or more individuals. Mexico's urban settings are more likely to feature such vibrant interpersonal exchanges.

Discussion frequency and network size are not the only means by which to describe and understand the nature of politically relevant interpersonal exchange. The intimacy, insularity, and diversity of discussion networks are also crucial dimensions that determine how interpersonal contacts may shape individuals' beliefs. A highly insular network is one in which members share little communication with individuals outside the network. Societies that are comprised largely of highly insular networks tend to be segmented into units (e.g., families or tribes) that only rarely communicate with outside units (i.e., other families or tribes). Societies with less insular networks feature "weak ties," or communications across networks, thus enabling a more rapid diffusion of innovations and information as well as greater exposure to a diversity of viewpoints (Granovetter 1973; Huckfeldt, Johnson, and Sprague 2004; Mutz 2006).

The insularity and political heterogeneity of networks in Mexico can be explored because respondents were asked two follow-up questions to the name generator query. Respondents were asked (1) to describe their relation to each discussant named (spouse, neighbor, etc.) and (2) for whom each discussant was voting in the presidential race. Insularity is high if citizens tend to

talk only to immediate family members. Heterogeneity or diversity is low if they tend to talk only to people who agree with them.

Exactly 50 percent of discussants named in Mexico were non-family members, and this figure did not vary at all between urban and rural areas. Interestingly, 50 percent places Mexico in the *least insular* half of countries with available network data, and means that Mexicans are less likely than the United States (60%) to name family members.⁵ In short, Mexican citizens are not abnormally segmented into insular, familial groups when it comes to interpersonal political communication. But what is the political nature of these networks? Are they characterized by agreement, such that insularity and group homogeneity exist in political terms?

Table 1 indicates the extent to which respondent-discussant dyads in Mexico and Brazil were characterized by political agreement (see Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006 for details). Political agreement exists in a dyad when the discussant’s presidential candidate preference (at least as perceived by the respondent) is the same as that of the respondent. Disagreement exists when their preferences diverge. Only dyads in which *both* members had a known preference are used in the analysis: In other words, dyads in which either the respondent or the discussant had no preference (due to abstention or indecision) or no known preference are not considered.

TABLE 1. The Prevalence of Political Agreement in Mexico and Brazil			
	(1) Share of dyads in which both partners agreed	(2) Probability two randomly chosen people agreed (based on election results)	(3) Observed agreement given random probability of agreement: (1)/(2)
Mexico 2006	.68	.32	2.14
Brazil (2-city) 2002	.69	.41	1.68
United States 2000	xyz	xyz	xyz

⁵ This percentage does not have a large cross-national variance. The interquartile range across the 12 cases is only 9 percent, from 42.3% to 50.9%.

Table 1 clearly indicates that agreement was the rule in Mexico. Column 1 shows that a large majority of almost 70 percent of dyads featured agreement; only 32 percent were characterized by disagreement. Similarly, only 43 percent of respondents had at least one disagreeing discussant (this figure is not reported in Table 1). That citizens tend to cluster with like-minded individuals is not at all surprising or rare: cross-national evidence shows rates of agreement in discussion networks to be much higher than sheer chance would dictate (Huckfeldt, Ikeda, and Pappi 2005).

But do Mexicans shy away from conversation with disagreeing interlocutors more than is typical? Table 1 provides one point of comparison: Brazil. Column 1 suggests that the rate of agreement in dyads is essentially equivalent to that observed in Mexico, but these raw rates of agreement may mislead. After all, the nature of party competition, and in particular the number of party or candidate options, establishes different cross-national probabilities in the overall potential for disagreement. Two randomly chosen people in an eight-party system have a much higher probability of disagreeing (.875) than do two such people in a two-party system (.5). As such, any international comparison of how amenable citizens are to engage in disagreement must adjust for these differences.

Column 2 thus reports the probability—based on the actual election results—that two randomly chosen voters would agree.⁶ Brazilians had more opportunities for agreement than did Mexicans, which casts the equivalent raw rates of agreement from column 1 in a new light. Mexicans, despite having a more limited supply—at least at the national level—of like-minded discussants, were just as likely to find them as were Brazilians. Column three illustrates these

⁶ Although Brazil has a much more fragmented party system than does Mexico, the probability of random agreement was actually higher in Brazil because one candidate, eventual winner Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, received a near majority of the four-candidate vote share in 2002. Mexico's three-candidate race in 2006 was, by comparison, much more balanced. Brazilian results are based on the election returns in the two cities, while those for Mexico are based on nationwide results.

cross-national differences most effectively: Mexicans were more than twice as likely as chance to have agreeing discussants. Brazilians were just 1.7 times as likely.

A primary reason for this could be Mexico's higher rates of partisanship (Samuels 2006). Mexico is a more politicized society than Brazil, and rigid partisans are much more likely than independents to prefer like-minded discussion partners (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). But another possible reason brings us back to the regional question that is the focus of this paper. The distribution of partisan preferences is more regionalized in Mexico than Brazil. This means that the supply of differently-minded discussants in one's immediate social environment will tend to be much smaller in Mexico than in Brazil. Stated differently, the rate of agreement among randomly chosen discussants, reported in column 2 of Table 1, would be much higher if reported for each region or state rather than nationwide. Candidate preferences tend to be more highly skewed toward one candidate within particular states than they are nationwide. To the extent that individuals find only like-minded discussants, regional effects have an self-perpetuating infrastructure.

Can Discussion Explain Regional Effects?

To see if indeed the supply and influence of political discussants helps to explain the overwhelming regional effects in Mexico, I conduct two sets of analyses. First, I assess the extent to which the distribution of preferences in one's broader social environment influences the make-up of one's discussant network. On the one hand, the availability or supply of certain preferences among potential discussants in a person's social milieu may influence the distribution of partisan preferences within her or his conversation networks (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1988). Stated as an example, do *Priistas* living in the Federal District, where only 9

percent of residents voted for Madrazo, end up discussing politics with differently-minded persons because they have a hard time finding *Priista* discussants? If so, then aggregate factors such as region hold the potential to influence individual-level political choice since they shape the political color of argumentation to which citizens are directly exposed. On the other hand, citizens may be so politicized that they seek out like-minded discussants even in contexts where they may be hard to find (Finifter 1974; Mutz and Martin 2001). Stated differently, do *Priistas* still seek out sympathetic conversation partners and avoid political conversation with citizens who comprise their environment's majority opinion? If so, then the aggregate distribution may play no role whatsoever. Yet if discussion itself has no influence, then the distribution of preferences in one's immediate social environment is irrelevant. As such, a second analysis considers the extent to which discussion actually influenced vote choice.

For the first set of analyses, I seek to explain the number of respondents' discussants supporting each candidate. In other words, using the 2006 Mexico Panel Study, I model three separate dependent variables: the *Number of pro-Calderón discussants* a respondent has, the *Number of pro-AMLO discussants* a respondent has, and the *Number of pro-Madrazo discussants* a respondent has. These variables range from 0 to 3. For example, a respondent with two pro-Calderón discussants, one pro-AMLO discussant, and (thus by virtue of having capped discussants at three) zero pro-Madrazo discussants receives scores of 2, 1, and 0, respectively. Respondents reporting no discussants or not knowing any of their discussants' preferences receive a score of 0 on all three.

To measure the availability of each type of discussant in a respondent's social environment, I use state-level election results as the key independent variables: the *Vote share in*

the respondent's state for each party.⁷ (The state preference distribution is a rather crude measure of one's social environment, so future iterations of this paper will consider more localized variables, probably the municipal-level distribution of vote preferences.) If the aggregate distribution of vote preferences matters, then these state-level variables will have an important impact above and beyond individual-level determinants—such as political preferences, interest in politics, and demographic factors—of the number of discussants supporting each candidate. To keep the focus on the role of aggregate-level factors, I discuss the nature of the individual-level independent variables and report the results in the appendix. For now, I merely discuss the nature of the regional effects, which are both statistically and substantively significant.

Figure 3 depicts their effects graphically. Similar to the running example discussed earlier in this paper, I consider the impact that state of residence has on an individual with equivalent individual-level traits. That individual, in this case, is an exceedingly “typical” Mexican, one who has the average value on all individual-level political and demographic variables. Consider the two left-most bars, one yellow and one blue. When this person resides in Tabasco, a very yellow state, s/he has an expected value of .18 pro-Calderón discussants. A person with identical traits, were s/he to live in the very blue Guanajato, would have more than twice as many (.43) pro-Calderón discussants. In contrast, the predicted number of pro-AMLO discussants falls from .42 to .22 with this move. Of course, citizens do not speak with fractions of people, so another way of thinking about this impact is to note that the predicted ratio of pro-Calderón to pro-AMLO discussants rises from less than .5 to almost 2 with this move from a

⁷ Of course, only two of these three variables can be used in any particular model since knowledge of two for a given state is enough to identify the value of the third. Using all three would induce near perfect collinearity.

yellow to a blue state. In sum, the average respondent's social environment mattered greatly for determining the kind of politically colored information s/he heard in conversation.

[Figure 3 here]

Figure 3 also reports the influence of social environment on the prevalence of discussion with pro-Madrazo discussants. Although considered a yellow state, Tabasco was where Madrazo received his highest vote share. This share was only a bit lower in Guanajato, however, so the predicted number of pro-Madrazo discussants was essentially equivalent in both states. By contrast, in the Federal District, where *Priistas* are hard to find, the predicted number of pro-Madrazo discussants was smaller. Interestingly, however, the overall environmental effects were much weaker in explaining the number of pro-Madrazo discussants, an intuitive finding that reflects the PRI's less regionally concentrated support base.

All told, social environment clearly conditions the supply of discussants and, in turn, the types of persuasive information a citizen is likely to encounter in politically relevant conversations. But do these politically relevant conversations matter? More to the point, can they help account for the sharp regionalization of Mexican politics? To answer these questions, I construct a model of vote choice that accounts for potential discussant effects while also controlling for many of the individual-level factors—wealth, religiosity, urbanization, partisanship—that might help explain the regional effect in Mexico.

The dependent variable in this case is simply respondent's candidate preference in May. Because there were four main candidate options (the three major parties plus Patricia Mercado) in Mexico's 2006 race, I estimated a multinomial logit model. Such models proliferate coefficients, most of which are reported in Table 2. However, the goal is not to construct a comprehensive analysis and understanding of the factors that determined Mexicans' voting

behavior in 2006. Rather, I merely want to assess whether discussant effects help account for regional differences in voter preferences. As such, I only discuss a few of the coefficients in Table 2 and present the main substantive points graphically. The main findings of interest are shaded in grey.

[Table 2 here]

I estimated three types of voter choice models. “Model 1” contains only the regional effects, that is, the vote share of each party in the respondent’s state. “Model 2” contains these regional effects plus many potential individual-level factors that might help explain the regional gap. “Model 3” contains all of these variables plus the three dependent variables from Table 1: the number of discussants supporting each candidate. The purpose of proceeding iteratively in this way is to document the extent to which successively adding in individual-level factors and discussion measures helps to eliminate lingering regional effects.

Model 1 thus shows the unconditional regional “effects.” All six coefficients, three each for PAN and PRD vote share in respondent’s state, are statistically significant. In fact, however, this reveals absolutely nothing at all about how region influences vote choice. It merely shows that there tends to be more AMLO-voting respondents in strong PRD states, more Madrazo-voting respondents in strong PRI states, and more Calderón voting respondents in strong PAN states. Indeed, if these coefficients were *not* statistically significant, it would indicate nothing more than that the survey sample failed to reflect the population distribution of preferences in each state. But they are statistically significant, so Alejandro gets to keep his job. All kidding aside, this discussion hopefully points out how meaningless regional “proper noun” variables can be in regression models.

Model 2 gets more serious in considering factors that might account for Mexico's regional divide. It includes numerous individual-level factors that are potentially relevant in defining voter cleavages, such as socioeconomic status, issue attitudes, wealth, and partisan identification. Many of these matter, but of greater interest for the task at hand is what happens to the coefficients on the regional variables when controlling for these factors. If they do indeed help to explain Mexico's regional divide, then the six coefficients on PAN and PRD vote share in respondent's state should converge toward zero. In fact, they take an important step in that direction: All six coefficients in model 2 are closer to zero (have a smaller absolute value) than their counterparts in model 1. In other words, these individual-level factors, as previous scholarship has pointed out, *do* help to explain Mexico's deep regional cleavages. However, they leave much work to be done. Five of the six coefficients are still statistically significant, and some barely budged from their unconditional position in model 1. In short, the standard and well-known individual-level factors do help to explain Mexico's political geography, but more assistance is needed.

Model 3 suggests that discussion effects can provide such assistance. All relevant discussion variables are statistically significant, and highly so. More interestingly, however, the addition of the discussant network variables further pushes the regional effects coefficients toward zero. The regional effects are stubborn, and most remain statistically distinguishable from zero. However, five of the six coefficients take further steps toward the theoretical nirvana of zero, with most declining on the order of 20 to 50 percent.

[Figure 4 here]

Figure 4 illustrates these patterns graphically. The figure plots these coefficients so as to enable an easier comparison of their relative magnitudes. The bottom row of figure 4 plots the

coefficients for the PAN's vote share variable from model 1. The farther left is a candidate's name, the lower is the conditional mean value of his voters on this independent variable. In other words, according to the bottom row, Calderón-voting respondents had a higher chance of living in states where he did well while Madrazo-voting respondents had a lower chance of living in states where Calderón did well. The model 2 plots for this variable are one row up. A comparison between this row and the bottom row shows how accounting for the individual-level factors results in a convergence toward zero. The physical spread of the names shrinks dramatically between the model 1 and model 2 results, a sign that the so-called regional effect is weakened by inclusion of these theoretically sharper variables. Finally, the model 3 results show the three names even more tightly clustered together, an indication that controlling for discussant networks reduces the lingering effect of region all the more. The upper panel reports the coefficients for PRD vote share variable, and shows a similar pattern. The coefficients converge closer to zero at each iteration, a sign that individual-level and discussant-related variables go a long way toward explaining why preferences in Mexico are so regionalized.

Conclusion

In an ideal world, democratic citizens would seek out a diverse array of political viewpoints and deliberate in polite but reasoned exchange with differently minded associates. In reality, scholars of political behavior have shown all too well that citizens rarely have the motivation to seek out political information in such a purposive and open-minded manner. Yet even if they did have this motivation, the supply of diverse and differently minded viewpoints in their immediate social environments would circumscribe their ability to find them. In this paper,

I demonstrated that this supply reinforces a regionalization of politics and political preferences in Mexico.

That discussion plays such an important role could explain why regional effects seemed to sharpen through the campaign (Lawson 2006). Campaigns increase interpersonal communications about politics, which may lead many individuals to converge on the dominant preference they encounter in their social environments (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948). This speculation awaits further research.

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Appendix: Explaining Who Voters Choose as Discussants

With whom one ends up discussing politics is based not only on the supply of potential conversation partners, but also on demand—that is, factors that encompass one’s motivation to discuss politics as well as one’s preferences over the characteristics of discussion partners. Motivational factors such as political interest play a role in determining how many conversation partners one has. Citizens may also tend to prefer agreeable conversations (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1988). As such, the three models of vote choice reported in the Appendix Table contain measures of political preferences as well as motivational and supply factors. All else equal, *Panistas* probably prefer pleasant conversation with fellow *Panistas* rather than conflictual discourse with *Perredistas*. Moreover, since the dependent variable is based on *perception* of discussant preferences, it is crucial to control for political preferences because individuals may tend to project their own preferences onto others (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995).⁸

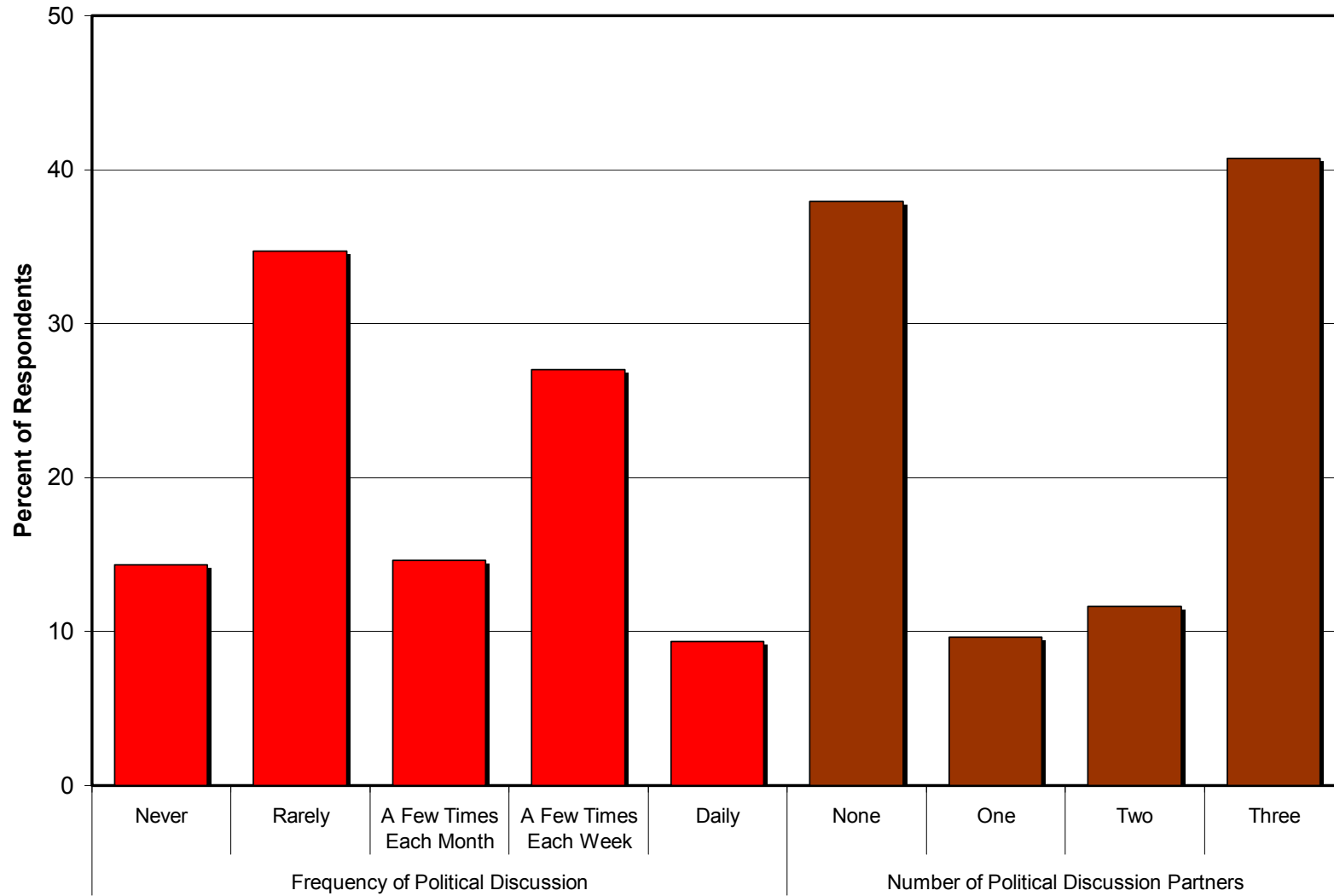
⁸ Although “... the only reality that matters is the reality that is perceived” (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1988: 477).

Appendix Table. Determinants of the Number of Discussants Supporting Each Candidate

	Number of pro-Calderón discussants	Number of pro-AMLO discussants	Number of pro-Madrazo discussants
<i>Regional Effects</i>			
PAN vote share in respondent's state	.024* (.008)	.002 (.006)	.007 (.004)
PRD vote share in respondent's state	.012 (.007)	.018* (.004)	0 (0)
PRI vote share in respondent's state	0 (0)	0 (0)	.021* (.006)
<i>Political Preferences</i>			
<i>Panista</i>	.164* (.084)	.011 (.095)	.069 (.141)
<i>Perredista</i>	-.206 (.119)	.254* (.050)	-.211 (.120)
<i>Priista</i>	-.097 (.127)	.038 (.157)	.363* (.118)
Independent	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)
Calderón feeling thermometer	.047* (.020)		
AMLO feeling thermometer		.065* (.022)	
Madrazo feeling thermometer			.058* (.022)
Voting for Calderón _(t-1)	.556* (.122)	-.426 (.234)	-.367 (.210)
Voting for AMLO _(t-1)	-.215 (.160)	.510* (.181)	-.255 (.185)
Voting for Madrazo _(t-1)	-.256 (.171)	-.339 (.190)	.364* (.170)
Undecided or Voting for Other _(t-1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	.058* (.022)
Interest in politics	.158* (.061)	.315* (.070)	.348* (.068)
<i>Demographics</i>			
Urban resident	.055 (.141)	.168 (.089)	.163 (.094)
Education	.099* (.025)	.044 (.027)	.072* (.026)
Income	.075* (.015)	.048* (.019)	-.025 (.018)
Woman	.040 (.094)	-.114 (.096)	-.292* (.090)
Age	-.008* (.003)	-.007* (.003)	-.010* (.004)
Skin color	-.170 (.111)	.025 (.054)	.025 (.083)
Constant	-3.237 (.618)	-3.670 (.394)	-3.351 (.411)
ln(α): Dispersion parameter	-1.101 (.659)	-.982 (.603)	.212 (.242)

Notes: Entries are negative binomial regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Results are averaged over 10 imputed datasets (King et al 2001; Royston 2004). Standard errors are adjusted for clustering within state. $N = 1620$. * = $p < .05$.

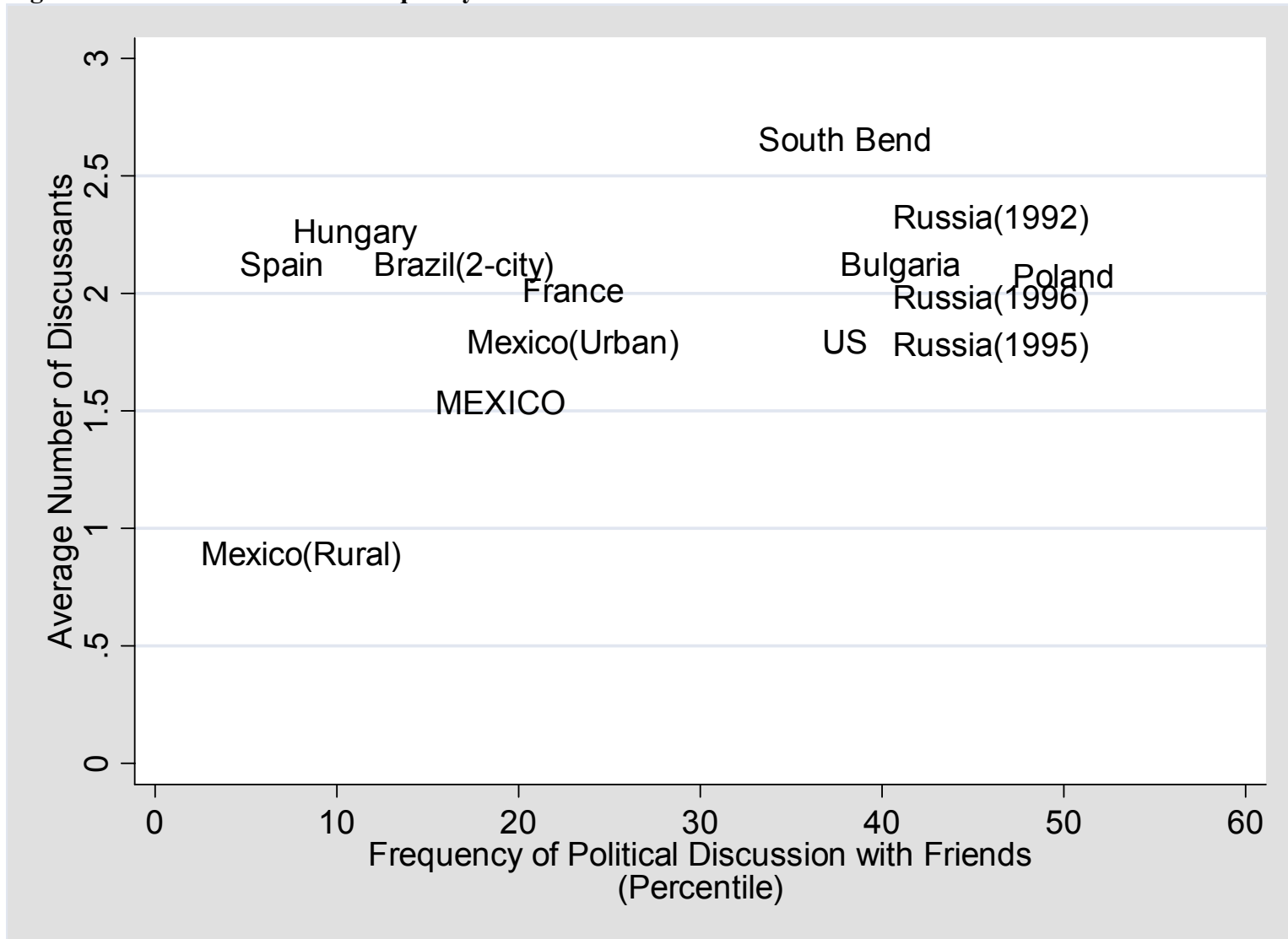
Figure 1. Political Discussion Frequency and Network Size in Mexico's 2006 Election Campaign



Source: Mexico 2006 Panel Study, second (May) wave.

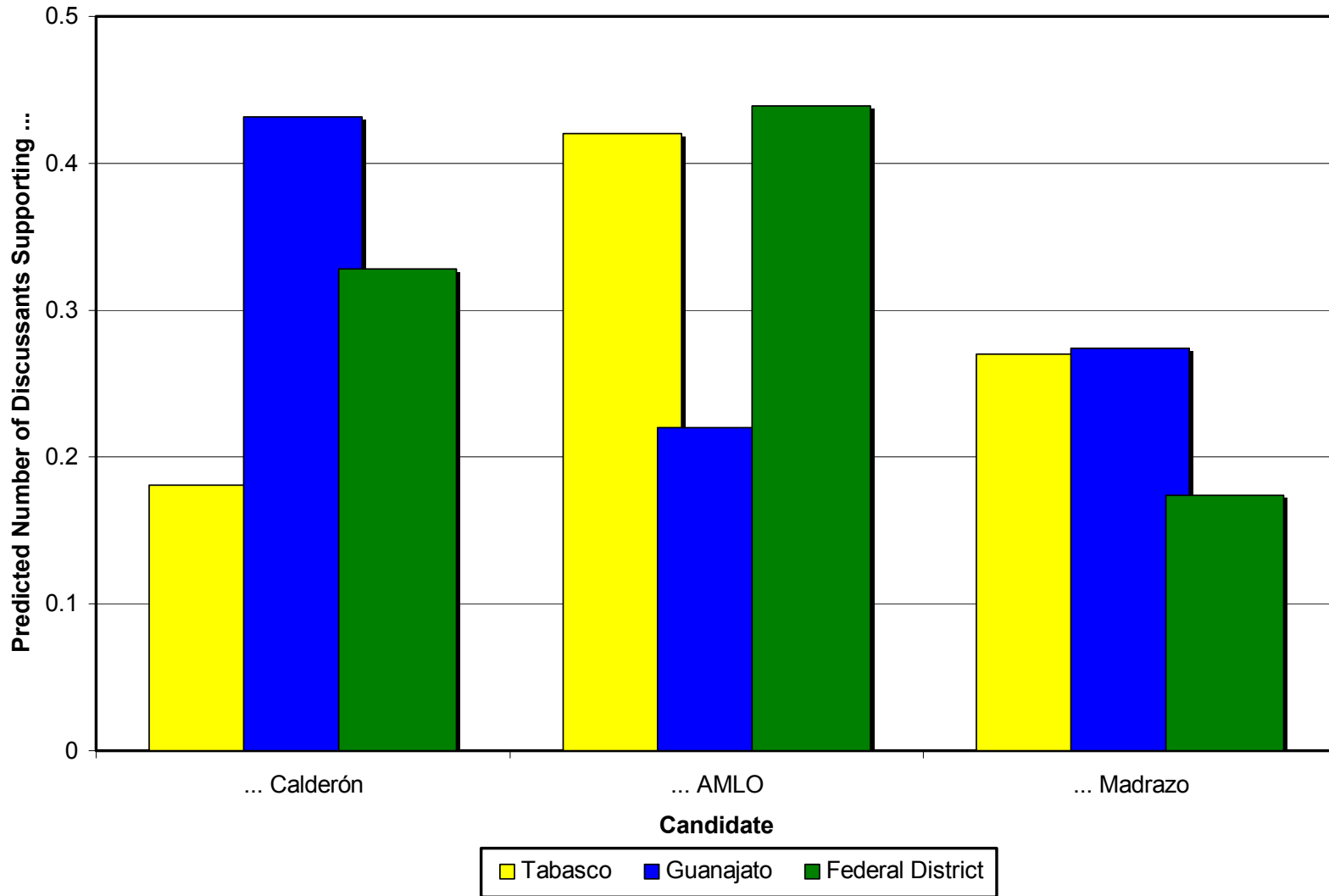
Note: Polychoric correlation between the two variables is $-.58$.

Figure 2. Political Discussion Frequency and Network Size across Nations



Source: Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006; Gibson 2001; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Mexico 2006 Panel Study, second (May) wave; World Values Survey 2000.

Figure 3. The Impact of Region on the Number of Discussants Supporting Each Candidate



Note: Predictions are from the Appendix Table. All variables except state-level election returns are set at their means, so these results are for an average respondent.

Table 2. Determinants of Voting Behavior in Mexico 2006

	Model 1: Regional Effects Only						Model 2: Regional Effects and Individual-Level Traits						Model 3: Regional Effects, Individual-Level Traits, and Discussant Effects					
	$\frac{PAN}{PRD}$		$\frac{PAN}{PRI}$		$\frac{PRI}{PRD}$		$\frac{PAN}{PRD}$		$\frac{PAN}{PRI}$		$\frac{PRI}{PRD}$		$\frac{PAN}{PRD}$		$\frac{PAN}{PRI}$		$\frac{PRI}{PRD}$	
	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.	$\hat{\beta}$	S.E.
<i>Regional Effects</i>																		
PAN vote share in respondent's state	.036	.009	.093	.010	-.058	.006	.033	.009	.063	.011	-.030	.011	.027	.010	.048	.013	-.020	.010
PRD vote share in respondent's state	-.034	.005	.070	.006	-.103	.004	-.009	.007	.046	.012	-.055	.011	-.009	.008	.031	.013	-.040	.011
PRI vote share in respondent's state	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<i>Discussant Effects</i>																		
Number of pro-Calderón Discussants													1.02	.138	1.15	.142	-.124	.159
Number of pro-AMLO Discussants													-.968	.158	.150	.144	-1.12	.116
Number of pro-Madrazo Discussants													-.303	.179	-.896	.154	.593	.140
<i>Wealth-Related Factors</i>																		
Income							.082	.030	.187	.036	-.105	.038	.084	.037	.141	.040	-.057	.039
Education							.060	.043	.067	.063	-.008	.062	.054	.046	.065	.055	-.011	.069
Skin color							-.132	.144	.050	.115	-.182	.131	-.035	.138	.124	.123	-.158	.125
Support for more trade with US							.064	.055	-.031	.066	.095	.076	.057	.062	-.037	.068	.095	.077
Support for priv. investment in electric							.045	.092	-.033	.098	.078	.074	.014	.115	-.072	.109	.086	.079
<i>Religiosity</i>																		
Frequency of church attendance							.093	.050	.020	.054	.073	.065	.079	.074	.005	.053	.073	.078
Support for abortion rights if raped							.019	.063	-.081	.063	.100	.053	.021	.059	-.084	.057	.106	.052
Support for capital punishment							-.006	.046	.099	.050	-.104	.050	-.008	.059	.065	.059	-.073	.056
<i>Urbanization and Other Demographics</i>																		
Urban resident							-.163	.100	-.060	.170	-.104	.127	-.109	.096	-.028	.159	-.081	.124
Woman							.286	.217	.051	.196	.235	.247	.226	.249	.014	.225	.211	.265
Age							-.006	.006	.004	.006	-.010	.009	-.007	.008	.006	.007	-.013	.010
<i>Political-Historical Factors</i>																		
<i>Panista</i>							.988	.152	.803	.193	.184	.152	.858	.170	.708	.213	.150	.146
<i>Perredista</i>							-1.60	.133	-.328	.249	-1.27	.149	-1.45	.170	-.366	.290	-1.08	.159
<i>Priista</i>							.054	.156	-1.40	.172	1.45	.204	.173	.168	-1.27	.172	1.45	.199
Independent							0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Constant	.117	.497	-5.53	.553	5.65	.273	-1.26	.736	-4.33	.876	3.07	.864	-1.15	.774	-3.29	.904	2.14	.847

Notes: Entries are multinomial logit coefficients and standard errors. A fourth choice, minor candidate Patricia Mercado, was also included in the choice set, but all results related to her are not shown to reduce clutter. Results are averaged over 10 imputed datasets (King et al 2001; Royston 2004). Standard errors are adjusted for clustering within state. $N = 1620$.

Figure 4. The Impact of Region in Three Different Statistical Models

