POLL WORKER RECRUITMENT: EVIDENCE FROM THE MEXICAN CASE*

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Abstract

The success of a democratic election greatly depends on poll workers. However, our knowledge of citizen engagement in the organization of elections is still limited. This paper studies the contextual factors that shape citizens' decisions to volunteer as poll workers. To accomplish this task, we take advantage of an original feature of the Mexican election system: the participation of randomly selected citizens in organizing and overseeing the operation of polling stations. We argue that the sociopolitical context in which elections take place greatly affects work at the polls. In particular, electoral competition and rising violence affect the organization of elections and citizen participation in this process. We find that competitive elections facilitate poll worker recruitment, especially in the early stages of the democratization process. However, at the same time, criminal violence depresses citizen participation in the organization of elections. This paper contributes to the developing literature on electoral administration and the burgeoning literature on the political consequences of criminal activity.

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1 Introduction

Elections cannot take place without poll workers. The success of a democratic election ultimately relies on thousands of citizens willing to set up voting booths, guide the voting process, and count the ballots at the end of the day. However, compared with other aspects of elections—for example, electoral rules, parties, or turnout—studies on polling work still remain relatively limited. The omission of this issue is somewhat surprising given that this kind of citizen involvement provides great transparency and credibility to the electoral process (Killesteyn, 2015).

The literature on polling work mostly focuses on how its performance affects the perceptions of electoral integrity (Atkeson and Saunders, 2007; Claassen et al., 2008; Hall, Monson and Patterson, 2009; Alvarez et al., 2013). By contrast, the logic behind citizens' decisions to attend electoral training and serve as poll workers remains unknown. The scarcity of research on this issue is puzzling because the recruitment of poll workers is as pressing as their training (Burden and Milyo, 2015). As evidence from Australia (Killesteyn, 2015) to the United States (McAuliffe, 2009) shows, electoral authorities have reported increasing difficulty in finding and recruiting poll workers in recent elections. This is also the case of Mexico, the focus of this paper.

In Mexico's long quest for democracy, the country's electoral administration underwent profound changes. A crucial reform in this process was the depoliticization of polling officials. As a result, since the early 1990s, work at polling stations in Mexico relies on citizens who are randomly selected from among all the voters in every precinct and voluntarily agree to serve as polling officials on Election Day. Over time, however, it has become more challenging for the Mexican electoral authority to persuade voters to undergo training and serve as poll workers.

In this paper, we examine the contextual factors that have shaped Mexican citizens' decisions to become poll workers. We study how the socio-political context in which elections take place affect poll worker recruitment. By turning away from the studies in established democracies, we look into the challenges of recruiting polling officials

in a consolidating democracy, such as Mexico, in which polling work may have an even more important role in legitimizing elections.

We argue that citizen engagement in the organization of elections greatly depends on the context in which voters socialize. In particular, for the study of new and consolidating democracies, we must incorporate two dynamic processes that many of them face: electoral competition and criminal violence. As the political system opens new spaces for the opposition, citizens have increased incentives to take part in the organization of elections, and founding elections that trigger an unprecedented level of electoral competition are particularly attractive. However, as democratic elections become routinized, the novel and stimulating effect of electoral competition on citizen participation gradually decays. At the same time, new democracies are often confronted with rising crime rates, which make electoral organization particularly challenging. Poll workers in violent contexts have to add to their already heavy load of responsibilities the risk of the occurrence of violence both before and during Election Day. Therefore, in an insecure environment, the incentives to take part in electoral administration are likely to decrease.

To test our argument, we use data from Mexico, where the particular characteristics of its electoral design allow us to carefully study the contextual determinants of poll worker recruitment. The analysis of the Mexican case is important for two additional reasons. First, it provides an opportunity to examine poll worker recruitment in a country where the scope of democratization has been uneven across regions (Cornelius, 2000; Gibson, 2013; Giraudy, 2015). Second, the rising and geographically scattered wave of criminal violence in the country allows us to analyze the effects of violence on democratic governance and participation.

Our findings reveal that the higher the electoral competition in a given municipality, the higher the rate in which citizens serve as polling officials. Therefore, more competitive elections appear to motivate citizens to actively participate as poll workers. The positive impact of party competition appears to be pronounced during the elections that immediately followed a democratic transition. In subsequent elections,

such effect diminishes. At the same time, we find that criminal violence depresses poll worker recruitment. In the face of violence, citizens face new and multiple risks that keep them from serving as polling officials.

This paper is organized as follows. First, we review the literature on poll workers. Then, we examine the role that electoral competition and criminal violence play in citizen involvement in elections. Next, we discuss the case in which we test our argument. We then introduce our research design and empirical results. Finally, we discuss the theoretical contributions and policy implications of our analysis.

2 Election Administration and Polling Work

Electoral administration includes a wide range of activities before, during, and after elections. However, voters' interaction with the electoral administration generally only takes place through poll workers. Polling officials set up booths, open ballot boxes in the presence of voters, certify voters IDs on the registration list, verify that citizens vote privately in accordance with established procedures, and submit the electoral material to authorities, among many other responsibilities. Therefore, not only are poll workers providing a service to the electorate, but they are also administering and implementing the electoral law (Alvarez and Hall, 2006; Hall, Monson and Patterson, 2009; Claassen et al., 2008).

The academic work on electoral administration, however, is most developed in regards to the determinants of electoral management designs (Elklit and Reynolds, 2002; Lehoucq, 2002; Alvarez et al., 2013) and their impact on voters' confidence in elections (Hartlyn, McCoy and Mustillo, 2008; Birch, 2008; Rosas, 2010). The latter strand of research has led to a growing literature on the role that poll workers' performance plays in the perceptions of electoral integrity. In fact, many studies on polling work have examined how the interaction between voters and poll workers shapes confidence in elections (Claassen et al., 2008; Karpowitz et al., 2011; Herrnson et al., 2013). Overall, the more efficient and helpful poll workers are, the higher voters evaluate the entire

electoral process. The evidence also suggests that the ratio of voters to poll workers is equally important to the voting experience. In other words, understaffed polling stations can negatively influence voters' electoral perceptions of the process (Burden and Milyo, 2015). Therefore, citizens' satisfaction with the election is affected by both the quality and the quantity of poll workers at the voting booth.

The guidelines for who can be a poll worker and how polling officials are selected are, of course, first defined by a country's electoral system. In South Africa, the Party Liaison Committee provides a list of people it would want to serve as electoral officers (Independent Electoral Commission, 1994). Similarly, in El Salvador, parties propose citizens to be recruited for polling work on Election Day (Tribunal Supremo Electoral, 2011). In the United States, poll workers are usually nominated by political parties, but recently, they are also being recruited from colleges, universities, and non-profit organizations. Regarding the American case, we further know that individual public service motivations are important explanatory variables of citizens' willingness to serve as poll workers (McAuliffe, 2009). At the same time, jurisdiction size appears to affect poll worker recruitment efforts (Kimball et al., 2009).

Given the distinct electoral designs as well as the difficulty of gathering data on poll workers in widely varying environments, we are still unable to say much regarding how context further shapes citizens' willingness to take part in the organization of elections. By focusing on the Mexican case—which features an invitation to a random selection of citizens to serve as poll workers without the threat of sanction in case of refusal—we seek to contribute to our understanding of polling work, particularly in regards to the features that shape its recruitment, in the face of common challenges that developing democracies undergo after their transition. It is likely that polling work has an even more prominent role in consolidating democracies such as Mexico, where citizen involvement in one of the most fundamental aspects of electoral administration is essential for the transparency, integrity, and legitimacy of elections.

3 Theoretical Perspectives

We shed new light on the logic of poll worker recruitment by combining the strengths of two largely disparate lines of research—electoral competition and criminal violence—and applying their insights to the study of citizen engagement in the organization of elections in consolidating democracies. We argue that poll worker recruitment is affected by at least two contextual factors: a) the general political environment in which electoral processes take place, and b) the violence that surrounds elections. The following sections develop this argument.

3.1 Electoral Competition and Poll Work

The literature on electoral behavior has widely established that electoral participation is more likely when individuals perceive their vote as being crucial to determining the final outcome (Downs, 1957; Riker and Ordeshook, 1968). Therefore, more competitive elections are expected to have higher turnout rates. In fact, vast empirical evidence shows that electoral competition is the variable with the most consistent effect on turnout (Franklin, 2004; Blais, 2006).

We argue that, in the case of citizen participation in the organization of elections, the importance of electoral competition goes beyond the usual rational calculus of voting. High levels of electoral competition increase the *ex-ante* uncertainty of the outcome, enlarging the intrinsic value of participation and motivating citizens to become an active part of the process. It is under a competitive context that the transparency and accountability of the electoral administration becomes most crucial. In particular, impartiality and professionalism during the vote count are fundamental for future political stability. Therefore, electoral competition increases the incentives and motivation to take part in the organization and supervision of the election. Citizen oversight in this process can have fundamental consequences for democracy.

By contrast, limited electoral competition hinders the legitimacy of the electoral management bodies (Maldonado and Seligson, 2014). Such distrust will translate not

only into lower turnout rates (Birch, 2010; Carreras and Irepoğlu, 2013), but also in fewer incentives for citizens to become poll workers. Under such circumstances, low electoral competition gives electoral institutions a perception of bias. Citizens' motivation to take part in the electoral process—particularly through such a crucial responsibility as polling work—diminishes. Therefore, we expect that the incentives and enthusiasm to participate as a polling official in a given election will rise with the levels of electoral competition.

H1.a Electoral competition is positively associated with citizen involvement in polling work.

The positive effect of electoral competition on citizen participation in the organization of elections, however, wanes over time. Democratic transitions are episodes of high civic enthusiasm and participation. When a non-democratic regime opens up to electoral competition and the rules for the new distribution of power among political actors are set in motion, citizens are eager to take part in historic founding elections (O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986; Anderson et al., 2005). This is precisely the moment in which electoral participation is most valued and important, since citizen involvement in and oversight of elections strengthen the political transition. However, such enthusiasm gradually declines as democratic elections become routinized in political life. As the literature in transitional countries shows, the vigorous electoral participation observed during the transitional period in Eastern Europe gradually faded away as elections became a habit in the political culture of post-Communist societies (Kostadinova, 2003). Therefore, in consolidating democracies, the effect of electoral competition is initially amplified and then moderated in the elections that follow the transitional period.

H1.b Electoral competition is positively associated with citizen involvement in polling work, but this effect declines over time.

Overall, while electoral competition is an important predictor of citizen involvement in the organization of elections, its effect gradually decays as more democratic

elections are held in a country. In an environment of uncertainty, the novelty and initial expectations of the founding elections entice citizens to be part of the process. As citizens become used to elections and their political consequences, however, the perceived impact of electoral competition on participation becomes moderated.

3.2 Violence and Poll Work

During regime transition, many nascent democracies are often confronted with rising violence (Wantchekon and Yehoue, 2002; Osorio, 2013). Unlike electoral or political violence resulting from a political strategy by authoritarian governments (Davenport, 1997; Hafner-Burton, Hyde and Jablonski, 2014), criminal violence in new democracies is rather a consequence of weak law enforcement and ongoing institutional consolidation (Pérez, 2003). As rising electoral competition disrupts informal protection networks, it also stimulates violence (Snyder and Durán-Martínez, 2009; Dube, Dube and García-Ponce, 2013). Ultimately, we argue, such criminal activity alters the organization of elections and citizen involvement in this process.

Criminal activity may jeopardize several steps of the electoral process. Although criminal groups are not ideologically driven actors and do not attempt to take over power, they sometimes use violence to influence politics (Schedler, 2014) and public policies (Lessing, 2015). Under such circumstances, the organization of elections faces an additional layer of complexity. The setup of voting booths must take into consideration the prevailing violent context to assure voter safety, the privacy of the vote, and impartial ballot counting. Moreover, in the midst of violence, poll workers have to add to their already heavy load of responsibilities the risk of the occurrence of violence both before and during Election Day. They will be on the front line and will need to resolve the new complexities that may arise as a result of violent activity. A violent context therefore increases the risks and costs that poll workers face and reduces incentives to participate in elections.

We acknowledge that not all criminal groups have the incentive or the capacity to influence elections. Still, the prevalence of violent activity shows a government's

inability to fulfill one of its main responsibilities, public security (Cruz, 2000; Blanco, 2013; Puck, 2017). As a result, citizens become disenchanted with democracy and political institutions (Fernandez and Kuenzi, 2010; Carreras, 2014), including the electoral system (Blanco, 2013). In this context, citizens are more likely to refuse to have a role beyond the act of voting, in one of the most essential democratic processes. Moreover, since poll workers have a very visible and public role on Election Day, perceptions of personal insecurity in association with such a role are likely to be heightened.

We would then expect violence to have a negative effect on poll worker recruitment. This expectation correlates with previous work that has shown that increasing violence is associated with diminished turnout (Bravo Regidor and Hernández, 2012; Trelles and Carreras, 2012; Ley, forthcoming). Overall, as violence permeates the electoral process, the organization of elections becomes more challenging and the incentives to become a poll worker decrease. Therefore, we propose that:

H2. The higher the levels of violence, the lower the level of citizen involvement in polling work.

The following sections describe the case on which we test the theoretical expectations we present here.

4 The Organization of Elections in Mexico

We use the Mexican case for hypothesis testing for both theoretical and methodological reasons. First, Mexico is a relatively new and young democracy. There is general agreement that the country became a democracy in 2000, after the party in power for 71 years lost the presidential election and allowed alternation at the executive level (Magaloni, 2006). However, like other federal countries, the scope of democratization at the subnational level has been uneven across Mexican regions (Cornelius, 2000; Gibson, 2013; Giraudy, 2015). Although multiparty electoral competition and opposition victories occurred in some areas by the mid-1990s, subnational democracy is still an

unfinished task in the country (Lawson, 2000; Hiskey and Bowler, 2005). Therefore, we can exploit the different levels of electoral competition in the country to explore their effects on citizen involvement in the organization of elections.

Second, in Mexico, polling work on Election Day has been largely depoliticized and its success relies on voluntary citizen participation (Peschard, 2004). As part of the electoral reforms that took place in the 1990s, poll workers are now randomly selected from among all the voters in every precinct. Together with the creation of impartial electoral authorities, this was a crucial institutional transformation that enabled Mexico's transition to democracy (Woldenberg, 2012). Therefore, since 1994, millions of citizens have been randomly pre-selected at the beginning of every electoral cycle to receive training and prepare them to manage and supervise elections. In comparison with other countries where the recruitment of poll workers relies on specific social groups—college students, political parties, or social clubs[1]—the Mexican system avoids an initial bias in the recruitment process by giving every voter the same opportunity to be a poll worker. This feature allows us to isolate the effect of the sociopolitical characteristics on poll worker recruitment.

Third, the Mexican democratization process has evolved along with an unprecedented rise of criminal violence. Since the mid-1990s, drug-related violence has been present in the northern part of the country. However, in recent years, drug-trafficking organizations have played a major role in the production of violence across Mexico. The war against drugs in the 2006-2012 period resulted in over 70,000 deaths (Shirk and Wallman, 2015), over 22,000 disappearances (Merino, Zarkin and Fierro, 2015), and approximately 200,000 internal displacements (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2011). Despite ongoing violence, Mexico has continued to hold democratic elections, but the challenges have mounted exponentially.

Rising violence has translated, first of all, into increasing efforts to find and contact citizens. As a result of insecurity, many individuals have left their homes. This phe-

[1]See description of selection processes in the United States, South Africa, El Salvador, or Guatemala in preceding and subsequent sections.

nomenon has been particularly noticeable in the states of Chihuahua, Coahuila, Michoacán, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas, where citizens abandoned their homes when criminal groups began victimizing civilians via extortion and kidnapping (Hernández, 2009; Taniguchi, 2012).

Violence has also transformed the general conditions in which elections are organized. Electoral staff members and voters alike have fallen victim to criminal groups. For instance, in the 2009 midterm election, two members of the electoral training staff in the State of Mexico and in Guerrero were kidnapped and killed by a local crime group (Reforma, 2009; Castro, 2009). Similarly, in Aguililla, a small rural municipality in the state of Michoacán, voters refused to serve as poll workers after an armed group extorted the local community and threatened to come back on Election Day (Rea and Guerrero, 2009). Overall, the Mexican case provides variation across both time and space in order to more accurately evaluate the effect of violence on poll worker recruitment.

As Figure 1 shows, over time, fewer Mexican citizens have accepted invitations to serve as poll workers. While the national average acceptance rate throughout the 2000–2012 period was 81 percent, this figure declined from 95 percent in 2000 to 68 percent in 2012. This drop cannot be completely explained by criminal violence, of course—the number of refusals to participate as poll workers began to increase *before* the beginning of the war on drugs in December 2006. Moreover, the drop in the acceptance rate may respond to the increasing lack of confidence in Mexican electoral institutions after the claims of fraud from one of the candidates in the 2006 election and a public opinion's general disappointment with political institutions (Morris and Klesner, 2010; Mendizabal and Moreno, 2010).[2] In this paper, however, we seek to analyze the *extent* to which temporal and spatial changes in poll worker recruitment are explained by electoral competition and criminal violence.

[2]Unfortunately, the data on institutional trust in Mexico covers a shorter time period than the one we focus on this paper and is unavailable at a subnational level. As noted in our statistical analysis, we expect that the inclusion of a time trend in our models—in addition to allowing us to test Hypothesis H1b—also helps us to account for declining trust over time.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

We must note that although election authorities continue to seek poll workers until the minimum needed to carry out the election are procured, the declining rate in poll worker acceptance implies great costs for the electoral authorities, as they must also continue to pay electoral officers to keep searching for volunteers. Therefore, from a public policy point of view, we consider that it is also particularly important to understand the factors associated with a continuing difficult process of poll worker recruitment.

5 Research Design and Data

This section describes the data we use to examine citizens' decisions to actively take part of elections. We first describe the recruitment process of polling officials in Mexico. Next, we explain the operationalization of our dependent variable. We then justify our empirical strategy and discuss our independent variables and controls.

5.1 Poll Worker Recruitment in Mexico

Poll-work design is quite varied across the world. Recently, many countries have incorporated a component of volunteerism. For instance, in the United States, where poll workers in some states may even have term requirements, the Election Assistance Commission has made an effort to recruit volunteer college students to do poll work in local elections (U.S. Election Assistance Commission, 2007). Similarly, in Guatemala, non-partisan citizens are encouraged to sign up to serve as poll workers.[3] Using data from the Mexican case, we seek to understand what drives citizens to voluntarily take part in poll work.

As a result of Mexico's long and gradual democratization, its poll worker recruitment process entails a careful non-partisan design, including the random selection

[3]See, for example, http://elecciones2011.tse.org.gt/voluntariado.php.

of polling officials in each precinct, a process that takes place through two different lotteries. The first lottery, held in January of every election year, draws a letter of the alphabet and two consecutive calendar months. Citizens whose last name begins with the selected letter and who were born in either of the selected months are eligible to participate in the next lottery. Based on the subset of the population selected in the first stage, the second lottery—held in March of the election year at each of the 300 electoral district offices—chooses a list of potential poll workers in every district.

Next, drafted citizens receive a home visit from an electoral training officer, who notifies and invites them to a training course held in April of the election year. In this visit, the officer delivers a letter detailing the lottery results and encouraging the selected citizen to participate as a poll worker during the election. The phrasing of the letter is generic and has been relatively consistent over the years.[4] Once the selected citizen is contacted and invited to serve as a poll worker, he or she can either accept or decline the invitation. In the case of a rejection, there is no political or economic sanction. If the invitation is accepted, the selected citizen is then required to attend a training course.

It is important to highlight that citizens who agree to serve as poll workers do not receive any kind of pay for their public service. They only receive a small and symbolic per diem—which historically has not exceeded 20 dollars per person—intended to be used for the purchase of food on Election Day. Therefore, those who volunteer as poll workers are unlikely to be responding to economic incentives. As we explain below, literacy is a requirement for all poll workers and consequently, we would not expect such an amount to generate an overrepresentation of those in the lowest socioeconomic status. Also, employers are not obligated to give mandatory time off in the case any of their employees are selected to serve as poll workers. We consider that this strengthens our analysis, as we would not expect other incentives, such as time off from work, to influence citizens' decisions to serve as poll workers.[5]

[4]See Appendix for letter wording.

[5]It is important to also note that elections on Mexico are always held on a Sunday, when most people do not work.

5.2 Measuring Poll Worker Participation

In this paper we examine the determinants of Mexican citizens' decisions to participate in federal elections as polling officials. As a result of an information petition directed to the Mexican electoral authority, the National Electoral Institute (INE),[6] we gained access to the database containing the information of almost 36 million citizens randomly selected across 60,000 precincts in five federal elections, organized from 2000 to 2012,[7] to manage the election in more than 140,000 polling stations.

Since our data registers citizens' acceptance at the moment of their being invited to participate in the poll worker training, we avoid a common problem of postelectoral surveys in which respondents tend to misreport their political participation as a result of social desirability bias (Katz and Katz, 2010). Furthermore, our dataset includes the reasons why individuals could not be notified about their selection as poll workers. Among those notified, the answers provided by the selected individuals in declining the invitation are also available. Therefore, our data enables us to carefully code the information on why citizens selected through the lottery did or did not accept the invitation to participate as poll workers.

As shown in Figure 2, there are multiple and varied reasons for why those invited did not participate. Some citizens changed addresses and could not be found to be contacted and others had died—both of these fall into the "not found" category. Others were not qualified to serve as poll workers, because they were sick or illiterate, served as public officials, or belonged to a political party (unsuitable/unqualified). A few others mentioned social barriers, such as gender discrimination,[8] as well as religion or indigenous traditional laws, that kept them from participating (social impediments). Finally, there is a group that rejects the invitation out of hand—with some of them saying they have a "fear of participating" or claiming they have personal

[6] Former Federal Electoral Institute (IFE).

[7] Federal elections in Mexico take place every three years, alternating between presidential and midterm legislative elections.

[8] Refers to women whose husbands do not allow them to participate in public affairs.

commitments on Election Day, such as school work or a trip.[9]

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

The first three categories do not necessarily translate into an individual unwillingness to serve as a poll worker. Citizens do not explicitly reject the invitation, but express their *inability* to participate. For example, someone will not quit their public office just to be a poll worker for a day and a change of address implies the possibility of participating elsewhere. Some others may want to serve as a poll worker, but their partners or religious authorities may forbid them from doing so. In contrast, the last category includes those answers expressing an explicit rejection of the invitation. In fact, as shown in part B of the Appendix, the Mexican electoral authority only classifies the latter type of responses as a rejection.

Given the above description, our analysis only includes those who were personally contacted by the electoral authority and either a) explicitly rejected the invitation, or b) accepted the invitation and were able to participate, regardless of whether the electoral authority selected them to serve as poll workers. This cleaning process reduces the database from 36 million observations to around 19 million. By doing this, we are more strict with what we define and measure as a rejection; we avoid a Type I error—assuming there was a rejection, when the selected citizen's answer could not be qualified as such—and this allows for a more precise analysis.

Despite our careful coding, we are aware that some citizens may lie about the real reason why they refuse to participate. In particular, they may say that they face work or social impediments, when they are actually afraid of participating—which in our case would be coded as a rejection. However, as shown in Figure 2, it is important to note that throughout our period of analysis, the answers corresponding to the category of social impediments has never exceeded 3.5 percent. In addition, we must emphasize that precisely because of the diversity of responses and the possibility that citizens may lie, we do not attempt to explain the nature or type of reasons

[9] In the Appendix, we list the possible reasons that, according to the Mexican electoral authority, selected citizens provide for not participating as poll workers in a given election.

a selected citizen may provide to not participate as a poll worker. Instead, what we seek to understand here is to what extent, if any, electoral competition and violence affect citizens' decisions to simply accept or reject the invitation, regardless of the exact reasoning behind such decision.

5.3 Modeling Poll Worker Participation

To test our hypotheses, we conduct a time-series cross-sectional analysis that explores the effect of electoral competition and violence on poll worker recruitment across Mexican municipalities during the five federal elections that took place between 2000 and 2012. Our dependent variable is the percentage of citizens who accepted the invitation to serve as polling officials in each municipality-year, from among all those contacted and able to participate.

Our analysis is conducted at the aggregate level, as opposed to the individual level, for three main reasons. First, the only additional individual covariates that were made available to us were age and gender, which leaves aside a battery of other individual characteristics that the literature has found to be associated with political participation. Without this information, our individual estimations would be substantially biased.[10] Second, while we could try to compensate for this lack of data through multilevel models, the analysis of more than 19 million observations clustered in 60,000 precincts and five elections requires computer power unavailable to us at the moment. Finally, since the municipality is the administrative area closest to Mexican citizens, it is also the most immediate area of action on which to assess political behavior. Accordingly, in our analysis, we include a battery of political, social, and demographic variables associated with each municipal observation and that may affect poll workers' participation rates.

To test Hypothesis H1a, which proposes a positive association between electoral

[10]Basic individual-level logistic models are available upon request. Overall, this set of results are consistent with our expectations on electoral competition and criminal violence. However, given the vast number of observations, we are unable to run multilevel models to fully assess these effects. Moreover, as noted, we are limited in regard to the individual covariates we are able to use in our estimations.

competition and poll worker acceptance rates, we estimate the *Effective number of parties* (ENP), according to the municipal-level results in the previous federal election. We consider that larger numbers of electoral parties indicate a more even distribution of votes and a higher level of electoral competition in the municipality. As a robustness check, we also offer tests using the *Margin of victory* as an alternative operationalization of electoral competition.

Following Hypothesis H1b, according to which we argue that the positive effect of electoral competition on citizen involvement in polling work declines over time, we generate a *Time trend* variable that ranges from 0 to 4 and increases in one unit for every election between 2000—which marks the transition to democracy in Mexico—and 2012—the most recent presidential election. We interact this time trend with our measure of effective number of parties. We expect such interaction to be negative, indicating that the positive effect of electoral competition on poll worker participation wanes over time. In addition, the inclusion of a time trend in our models allows us to account for the declining interest in the poll worker program in our analysis.

To analyze the effect of violence on citizens' decisions to participate as poll workers, as proposed in Hypothesis H2, we rely mainly on two sources. Since we are particularly interested in assessing the effect of organized crime-related violence, we use a newspaper-based dataset, Criminal Violence in Mexico (CVM) (Trejo and Ley, 2016), which focuses exclusively on homicides associated with organized crime activity.[11] As a robustness check, we also use the national census (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía, INEGI) dataset on homicides, which is derived from death certificates. While this data source provides information at the municipal level with a monthly frequency, it does not focus exclusively on organized crime-related homicides, which

[11]The authors collected this information from *Reforma*, which as noted by Shirk and Wallman (2015), is one of the most useful nongovernmental sources of information on organized-crime violence. Overall, the CVM Dataset gathers detailed information on 17,368 organized crime-related events, resulting in 45,161 victims. It includes the names of the organizations involved, the type of violent actions, the identity of victims and their affiliation, by state and municipality. When the newspaper report did not clearly attribute responsibility to a specific criminal organization, the event was only included in the dataset if any of the following criteria were present: a) Multiple gunshot wounds, b) Coup de grâce, c) Signs of torture, d) Decapitation or other signs of mutilation, e) Message left on or next to the body, f) Use of high-caliber firearms.

is the focus of our paper. Relying on both the CVM and INEGI data, we estimate the total number of homicides to compute the *Homicide rate* per 1,000 inhabitants[12] during the 12 months before the second lottery where citizens were selected—that is, from April of the previous year to March of the election year.[13]

We include a battery of control variables that may account for variations in political participation. To control for the stationary participation level in a given municipality, we use the proportion of registered voters who cast a vote in the previous federal election, *Lagged turnout*. We expect citizens to be more likely to accept the invitation if they live in a municipality with high levels of electoral turnout in the previous election. This expectation builds on the literature of political participation that finds a high correlation between different acts of political participation (Verba et al., 1993; Schlozman, Burns and Verba, 1994; Brady, Verba and Lehman Schlozman, 1995). Moreover, we take this variable as a proxy of citizens' political involvement in their community (Merino and Zarkin, 2015). Following the same logic, we also show models using the *Lagged acceptance rate* of poll worker invitations.

We also incorporate a set of political and sociodemographic controls. First, given that a requirement for all poll workers is to have a minimum literacy rate, we use a measure of *Literacy* in the municipality. Next, building on the extensive literature exploring the differences in political participation at different levels of economic development (Lijphart, 1997; Smets and Ham, 2013; Kasara and Suryanarayan, 2015), we proxy for these conditions in the municipality by including measures on the scope of public services: *Sewage* denotes the proportion of households in the municipality connected to the sewage system and *Infant mortality rate* is used a as a proxy of the access to the health system.[14] Also, following previous work that has identified the impor-

[12]Although the most frequently used ratio to record homicide rates is per 100,000 people, we use the homicide rate per 1,000 inhabitants because the demographic density at the municipal level is significantly lower than national aggregates. See Trelles and Carreras (2012).

[13]We considered measuring instances of high-profile violence against poll workers. Unfortunately, such information is not readily available and newspapers do not cover this type of event in a consistent fashion. However, our measure of criminal violence through the CVM data provides us with a good proxy for testing our argument, which does not refer exclusively to targeted attacks against poll workers.

[14]Following Trelles and Carreras (2012), the infant mortality rate was obtained by calculating the number of infant deaths (under one year old) per 1,000 live births in each municipality.

tance of political scale in the shaping of incentives and opportunities for democratic political participation (Remmer, 2010), we include the logarithm of the *Population* in the municipality. Finally, given that several studies have found different socialization patterns and resources between men and women (Schlozman, Burns and Verba, 1994; Burns, Schlozman and Verba, 2001), as well as across age groups (Jankowski and Strate, 1995), and which ultimately affect political participation, we also consider the *Sex ratio* and the percentage of *Senior population* in a municipality for any given year.

6 Results

Table 1 shows the results from our municipal panel analysis of acceptance rates to serve as poll workers in the Mexican federal elections from 2000 to 2012, focusing on the effective number of parties as our main operationalization of electoral competition and using organized crime-related homicides, as measured by the CVM dataset. In Table 2 we offer robustness checks, estimating models with alternative measures of our main explanatory factors and using the margin of victory and the general homicide rate, as measured by the Mexican census data. Overall, both sets of results are consistent with our expectations.

As proposed under Hypothesis 1a, more competitive electoral results at the municipality level, either measured by the effective number of parties or the margin of victory, are associated with higher percentages of accepted invitations. In particular, for each additional party, there is a one percentage point increase in the acceptance of poll worker invitations (Model 1 in Table 1). Consistently, smaller margins of victory are associated with higher acceptance rates (Model 3 in Table 2).

To assess Hypothesis 1b, which proposes that the positive effect of electoral competition wanes over time, we interact our time trend variable with the effective number of parties (Model 3 in Table 1 and Model 1 in Table 2). The coefficient of the effective number of parties remains positive and statistically significant, indicating that when the time trend equals zero—that is, during the 2000 election—more electorally

Table 1: Assessing Municipal Acceptance Rates to Serve as a Poll Worker, 2000-2012 (Ordinary Least Squares Panel Estimations)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Effective number of parties (ENP)	1.100***	0.675***	2.042***
	[0.242]	[0.256]	[0.398]
Time trend	-5.798***	-6.625***	-4.814***
	[0.176]	[0.244]	[0.375]
ENP*Time trend			-0.355***
			[0.119]
Organized crime-related homicide rate, CVM	-2.025***	-1.748***	-2.087***
	[0.552]	[0.552]	[0.552]
Lagged turnout	0.057***		0.057***
	[0.011]		[0.011]
Lagged acceptance rate		-0.118***	
		[0.012]	
Literacy	0.261***	0.213***	0.228***
	[0.055]	[0.077]	[0.056]
Sewage	-0.024**	-0.032**	-0.028**
	[0.012]	[0.014]	[0.012]
Infant mortality	-0.013*	-0.012	-0.014**
	[0.007]	[0.008]	[0.007]
Ln(Population)	-5.029***	-0.305	-4.374***
	[1.469]	[1.902]	[1.484]
Sex ratio	-0.186***	-0.107*	-0.180***
	[0.049]	[0.061]	[0.049]
Senior population	0.866***	0.800***	0.822***
	[0.153]	[0.193]	[0.154]
Constant	124.688***	95.282***	119.300***
	[15.678]	[20.443]	[15.776]
Observations	12,039	9,641	12,039
R-squared	0.4	0.357	0.401
Number of municipalities	2,419	2,421	2,419

Standard errors in brackets.
All models include municipal fixed effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, *p<0.10

competitive municipalities had higher acceptance rates. Our time trend variable exhibits a negative and statistically significant coefficient, supporting the diminishing acceptance rates across elections. The interaction coefficient is consistent with our expectations: In the course of the subsequent elections after Mexico's transition to democracy in 2000, the positive effect of electoral competition on poll worker recruitment has diminished over time, at an average rate of 0.35 percent. These results are consistent with our expectations in H1b and align with the evidence in other consolidating democracies in Eastern Europe, where high levels of political participation gradually faded away after the transition to democracy (Kostadinova, 2003).

In order to carefully assess this interactive relationship, Figure 3 illustrates this effect. We observe that a higher effective number of parties in the year 2000 was associated with a higher predicted acceptance rate. However, in the subsequent elections this positive impact is less pronounced. Each linear prediction starts off at a lower intercept and has a smaller slope, indicating that the impact of the effective number of parties decreases across elections. The impact of the effective number of parties in the 2003 and 2009 midterm elections seems to disappear, suggesting that effect of electoral competition on the willingness to become poll worker may only be perceivable during presidential elections.

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

To attend to the possibility of differentiated effects of electoral competition according to the type of election, Model 2 in Table 2 explores this interaction. The positive and significant coefficient of the effective number of parties indicates a positive effect of electoral competition in midterm elections. However, the interaction of the effective number of parties and presidential election years is not statistically significant, indicating that there are no substantive differentiated effects of electoral competition by type of election.

Consistent with Hypothesis 2, all models, across both sets of results, reveal that higher homicide rates are associated with lower percentages of accepted invitations.

Table 2: Assessing Municipal Acceptance Rates to Serve as a Poll Worker, 2000-2012 (Ordinary Least Squares Panel Estimations)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Effective number of parties (ENP)	2.103***	0.730*	
	[0.395]	[0.400]	
Margin of victory			-3.199***
			[0.773]
Time trend	-4.737***	-6.388***	-5.681***
	[0.371]	[0.179]	[0.174]
ENP*Time trend	-0.397***		
	[0.118]		
Presidential election		-4.702***	
		[0.993]	
ENP*Presidential election		0.619	
		[0.377]	
Homicide rate, INEGI	-1.621***	-1.300***	-1.645***
	[0.394]	[0.392]	[0.396]
Lagged turnout	0.055***	-0.051***	0.041***
	[0.011]	[0.014]	[0.011]
Literacy	0.227***	0.280***	0.245***
	[0.056]	[0.054]	[0.055]
Sewage	-0.026**	0.004	-0.023*
	[0.012]	[0.012]	[0.012]
Infant mortality	-0.015**	-0.012	-0.013*
	[0.007]	[0.007]	[0.007]
Ln(Population)	-4.261***	-2.336	-4.826***
	[1.480]	[1.468]	[1.475]
Sex ratio	-0.174***	-0.118**	-0.175***
	[0.049]	[0.049]	[0.049]
Senior population	0.824***	0.967***	0.816***
	[0.153]	[0.152]	[0.154]
Constant	117.749***	98.252***	128.023***
	[15.759]	[15.695]	[15.766]
Observations	12,119	12,119	11,999
R-squared	0.403	0.412	0.403
Number of municipalities	2,435	2,435	2,435

Standard errors in brackets.
All models include municipal fixed effects.
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, *p<0.10

This holds regardless of whether we measure the organized crime-related homicide rate through the CVM data (Table 1) or through the general homicide rate, as measured by census data (Table 2). This makes us confident in our results. For each one unit increase in the homicide rate associated with organized crime activity, the percentage of accepted invitations decreases by over two percent. In fact, as expected, the effect is stronger when using our measure of organized crime-related homicides, as reported by the CVM dataset. We must recall that criminal violence in Mexico has been much more visible and public (Durán-Martínez, 2015), most likely having a stronger impact on citizens' political behavior than petty crime, for example.

To better understand the negative impact of violence on poll worker acceptance rates, Figure 4 shows this effect graphically. In relatively peaceful municipalities, where no homicides associated with organized crime occurred—as measured by the CVM data—the average predicted acceptance rate is 84 percent. However, in violent municipalities, with a homicide rate of 10 per 1,000 inhabitants, the predicted acceptance rate is 66 percent.

[FIGURE 4 HERE]

To further understand the relationship between violence and poll worker recruitment, consider the case of the municipality of Vallecillo, Nuevo León. Up until 2009, Vallecillo had been a relatively peaceful municipality, with no homicides associated with organized crime activity. The majority of the selected citizens generally agreed to serve as polling officials. Between 2000 and 2009, the average acceptance rate was 88 percent. However, violence rose rapidly after 2009 in the state of Nuevo León, and Vallecillo was among the most affected regions. By the end of 2011, the homicide rate was at 10 per 1000 inhabitants. In the following 2012 election, Vallecillo's acceptance rate dropped to 44.5 percent.

To control for the overall level of political participation in the municipality, we include the turnout level in the municipality. We use this variable as an indirect measurement of civic engagement and social capital in the municipality. Table 1 shows

that past turnout levels are positively correlated with poll worker participation (Models 1 and 3). Alternatively, we also look at the effect of the lagged percentage of acceptance rates per municipality. This variable helps to capture the temporal changes in citizen participation in the organization of elections. The negative effect of the lagged acceptance rate suggest a regression to the mean, where extremely high (low) acceptance levels at a given time tend to be followed by a drop (rise) of the acceptance level in the following election. The rest of our results remain unchanged. Notice that since we do not have data on poll worker rejections for the 1997 election, we inevitably lose information for the year 2000.

Also, municipalities with higher literacy rates and a higher proportion of senior citizens exhibit higher acceptance rates. The negative and significant coefficient for the sex ratio variable suggests that municipalities with a higher proportion of males have lower participation rates. This is consistent with recent research conducted by the Mexican electoral authority, which finds that women are more likely to be notified and complete their training as polling officials (Loza, 2012).

Overall, the statistical results presented here support our expectations. Criminal violence makes poll worker recruitment more challenging and difficult, while electoral competition stimulates citizen participation in the organization of election, but at a diminishing rate over time.

7 Conclusion

This paper examined the logic of citizen participation in the organization of elections. Drawing from the case of Mexico, we argue that poll worker recruitment is explained by the sociopolitical context in which elections take place. Specifically, we focus on two contextual variables: electoral competition and criminal violence.

We claim that increased electoral competition that results from a democratic transition encourages citizens to take an active part in elections. Competitive elections make citizen oversight of the electoral process even more valuable and meaningful.

Therefore, we should expect rising competitiveness to increase participation, although to a lesser extent as elections get routinized Mexico's political life. At the same time, as several works have shown, electoral competition often comes at the cost of rising criminal activity (Dube, Dube and García-Ponce, 2013; Osorio, 2013; Trejo and Ley, forthcoming). Consequently, our analyses of citizen engagement in the organization of elections must also take into account the violence that surrounds elections and that most likely negatively affects incentives to participate as a poll worker.

In order to test our argument, we take advantage of a unique feature of the Mexican electoral system in which citizens are randomly selected every election to participate as poll workers. The findings from this unusual setting can help scholars and policy advocates in other countries to consider the baseline factors determining citizens' participation in the administration of elections. Our results confirm that electoral competition is positively associated with citizen participation in the organization of elections. This effect was larger during the founding democratic election of 2000. At the same time, we find that criminal violence depresses poll worker recruitment.

This paper makes several contributions. By examining the determinants of becoming a poll worker—an often dismissed feature of elections—this paper contributes to the nascent literature on electoral administration, while at the same time expanding the already prolific work on citizen participation. By incorporating violence into our analysis, we also contribute to the burgeoning literature on the political consequences of criminal activity. Additionally, our results reassert the importance of incorporating contextual variables into the explanation of political behavior.

Although the electoral design of the Mexican poll worker system is unique, the growing difficulties in poll worker recruitment are shared by the electoral authorities in many other countries. To that extent, our work helps identify some of the factors that influence such recruitment processes. Higher levels of electoral competition encourage poll worker participation, while high levels of organized crime-related violence dampen incentives to participate.

Finally, the paper's findings have crucial policy implications. In a country with a

long history of fraud, citizens' reluctance to participate in election organization and oversight may further lower voters' trust in the political process and reduce participation, both for poll workers and Mexican voters in general. In the context of rising violence, this is also alarming because a lack of citizen participation in the organization of elections may further increase the chances of organized crime to influence electoral politics.

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Figure 1: Acceptance Rates for Becoming a Poll Worker in Mexico, 2000-2012

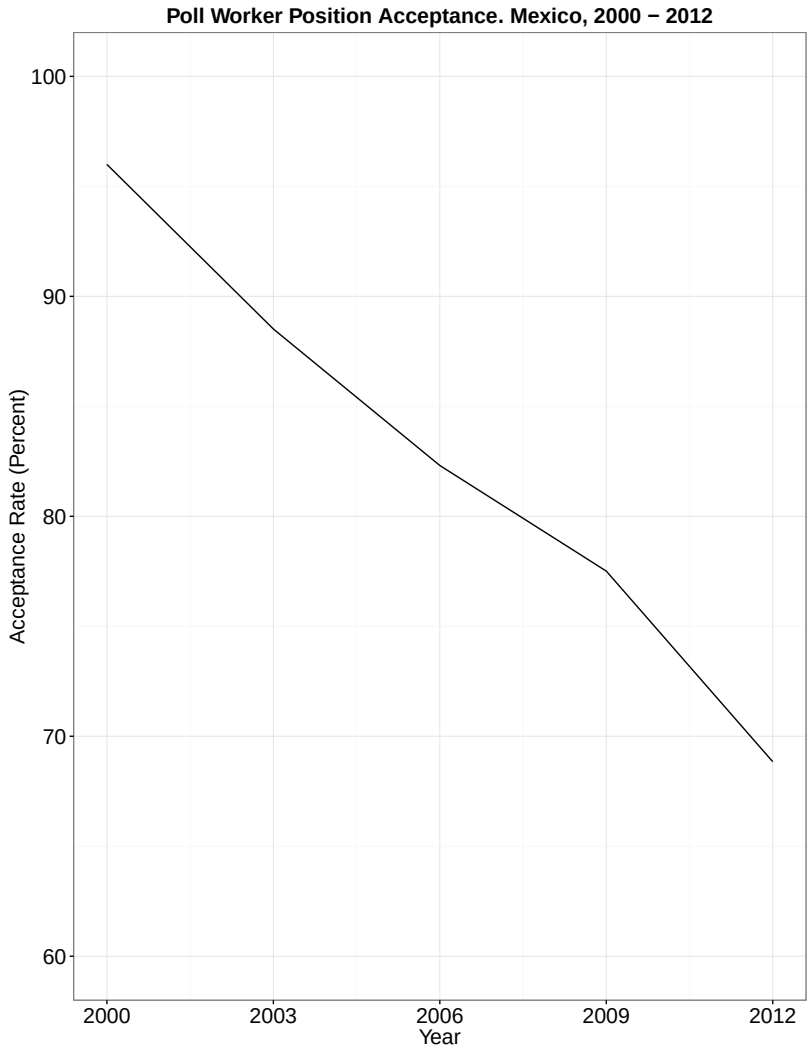

Figure 2: Types of Responses to Invitation to Participate as a Poll Worker in Mexico, 2000-2012

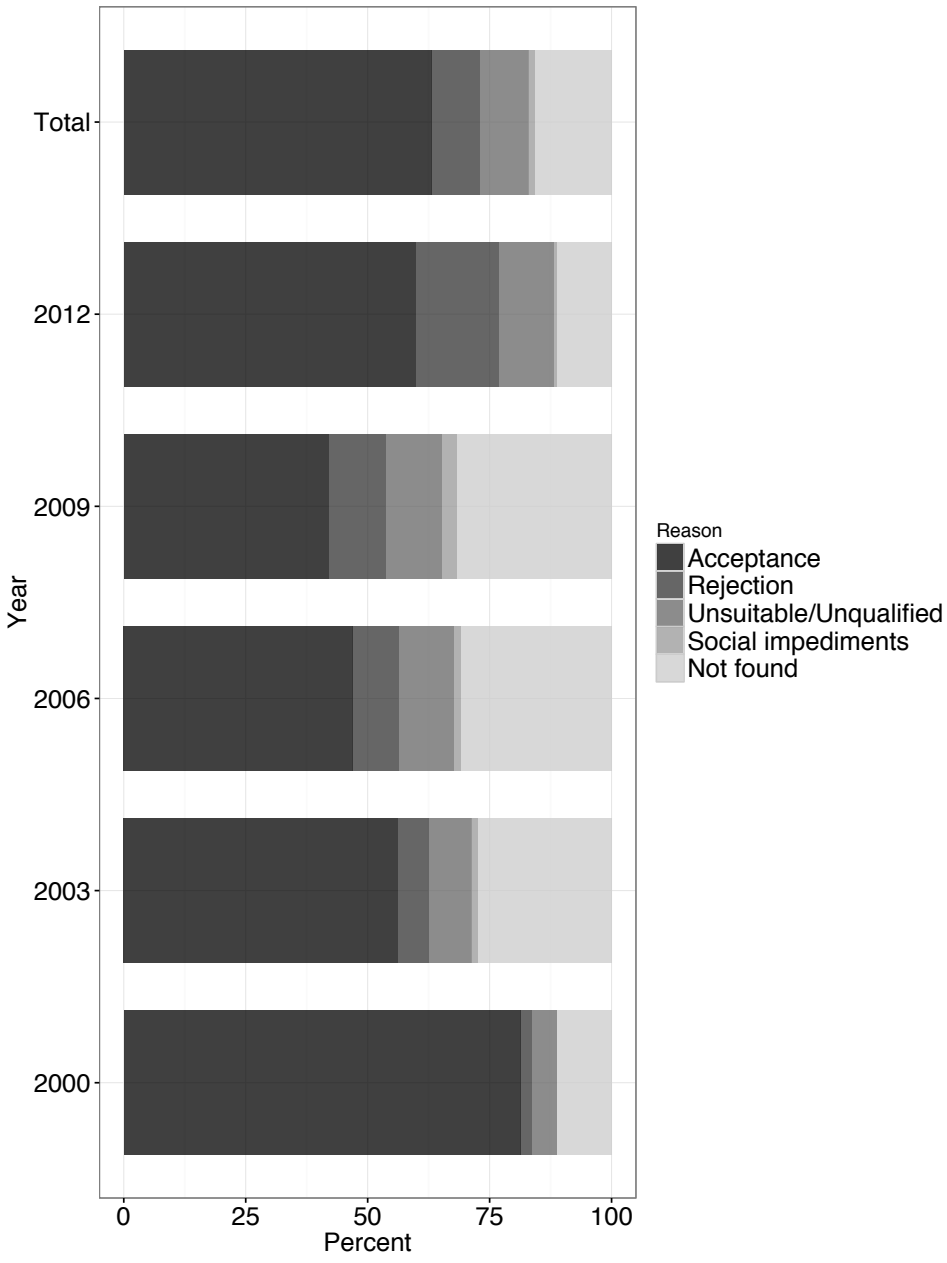

Figure 3: Predicted Margins of the Effective Number of Parties by Election

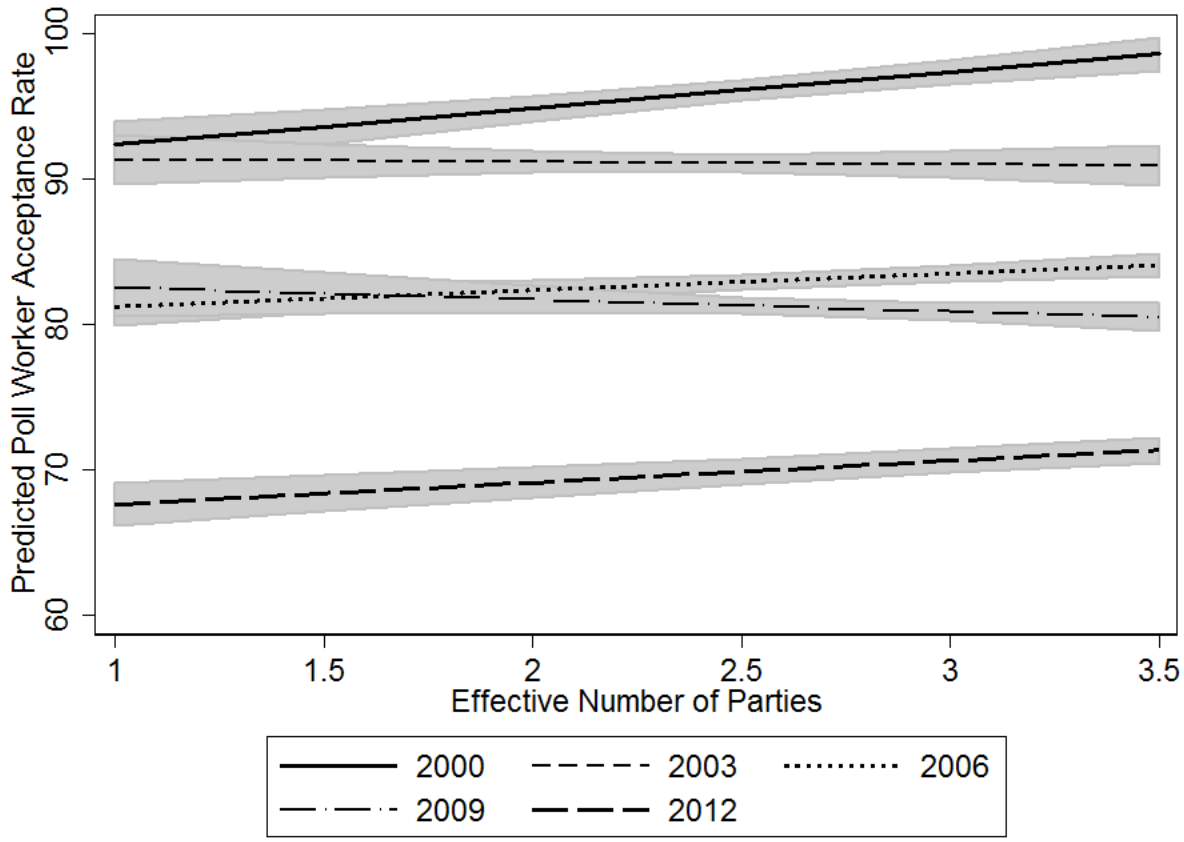

Figure 4: Predictive Margins of the Homicide Rate