Public Distrust in Disputed Elections: Evidence from Latin America*

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Abstract

The comparative literature on democratization has shown that election trust depends as much on subjective factors as on the objective conditions of the process. This literature, however, has thus far overlooked the consequences of candidates refusing to concede an electoral defeat. This research note argues that a disputed electoral outcome further inflames negative perceptions of electoral integrity among voters who supported a losing candidate. Support for this claim emerges from a multilevel regression that includes data from the AmericasBarometer surveys on almost 100,000 respondents across 49 elections and 18 Latin American countries. We combine these responses with an original database of disputed elections in the region. The empirical findings demonstrate the eroding effect of challenged election outcomes on voters' election trust, particularly among those who voted for a losing candidate. We employ additional tests to account for omitted variables and measurement issues. The findings underscore an intuitive yet untested pattern: candidates' refusal to accept the electoral outcome is a strong signal among their supporters, increasing their distrust on the integrity of the process.

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Introduction

Functional democracies require not only a fair electoral process, but also voters' belief that such is the case. The way in which citizens perceive the integrity of the election is a relevant source of legitimacy and political participation (Birch, 2010; Norris, 2014). Scholars have therefore explored the determinants of election trust, demonstrating the importance of institutional factors such as the impartiality of the electoral authorities, the efficiency of the voting process, and the power of voters' idiosyncratic characteristics. An important yet disturbing insight in this literature is that voters' confidence depends on subjective factors as much as on the objective conditions of the election.

The best illustration of how subjective factors shape electoral trust is the importance of the "winner-loser" status. The distrust among those who voted for a losing candidate and its contrasting effect among those who voted for the winner have been extensively documented across multiple elections (Anderson et al., 2005; Alvarez et al., 2008; Maldonado and Seligson, 2014). However, it remains unclear whether such reactions reflect only the election result or also depend on the candidates' assessment of the process. Distinguishing both components allows us to evaluate the extent to which candidates' refusal to accept the electoral outcome can affect voters' ultimate confidence in the process.

To narrow this gap, this article focuses on the relationship between election trust and the reaction to an election result by losing candidates. We expand on the recent works explaining the incentives for candidates and parties to challenge the election outcome (Hartlyn et al., 2008; Beaulieu, 2014a; Chernykh, 2014; Lago and Martinez i Coma, 2017; Hernández-Huerta, 2020) and explore the consequences of such challenges on voters' election trust. We argue that candidates' disputing the electoral outcome widens the so-called "winner-loser gap" in election trust. In particular, the effect of a candidate challenging an election outcome is more prevalent among voters on the losing side, for they are more likely to seek out and believe negative assessments of the election itself.

We test our prediction by combining the extensive LAPOP survey data with contextual

information for almost 50 presidential elections in Latin America. Our main finding is that the negative effect of supporting a losing candidate on electoral trust is about twice as large when a losing candidate challenges the outcome. This relationship holds across different robustness checks and specifications to account for the integrity of the election and candidates' reactions to the electoral outcome.

The Catalyst for Election Distrust

The perceptions of electoral integrity are shaped by several objective and subjective factors. Most of the objective predictors focus on the institutional conditions that promote a "level playing field" (Birch, 2008). These conditions include, for example, the autonomy and performance of the Electoral Management Bodies (Rosas, 2010; Garnett, 2019), along with the fairness of election laws (Frank and Martínez i Coma, 2017), public funding for political parties (Birch, 2008), or the quality and quantity of information that voters receive (Kerr and Lührmann, 2017).The common assumption of all these works is that voters are able to perceive the factual conditions of electoral integrity.

By contrast, the subjective predictors include those factors that affect voters' election trust *even* when they are not necessarily related to the integrity of the process (Daxecker et al., 2019). For example, several studies have shown how partisan attachments color individuals' perceptions of vote fraud (Alvarez et al., 2008; Ansolabehere and Persily, 2008; Beaulieu, 2014b). Other factors include voters' political sophistication (Karp et al., 2018), predispositions to believe conspiracy theories (Norris et al., 2020), or preconceptions about the news sources (Bush and Prather, 2017).

Perhaps the most studied subjective predictor of election trust, and other indicators of trust in government, is the voter's "winner-loser" status (Anderson et al., 2005). That is, those who voted for a losing candidate tend to show lower levels of election trust than those who voted for the winning candidate. This response is rooted in individuals'

emotional reactions to winning and losing (Brown and Dutton, 1995). Additionally, voters for a losing candidate build a negative assessment of the integrity of the process to relieve the cognitive dissonance associated with facing an electoral defeat despite supporting the "best" candidate (Daniller and Mutz, 2019). A growing body of literature has also offered rich nuances about the effect of the "winner-loser" status on trust in elections; for instance, the gap in electoral trust between winners and losers is moderated when voters perceive higher levels of electoral integrity (Maldonado and Seligson, 2014; Mauk, 2020) or when a non-partisan entity certifies that elections were well conducted (Kernell and Mullinix, 2019). Furthermore, there is evidence of heterogeneous effects of partisanship among losers (Cantú and García-Ponce, 2015).

We argue that distrust among election losers intensifies when a candidate challenges the election result. This is the result of voters' limited capacity to monitor the integrity of the entire electoral process themselves. As a result, when assessing the integrity of the election, citizens often rely on personal experiences (Kerr, 2018) or media coverage (Norris, 2014).

In particular, we expect that candidates' negative claims about the election will resonate more with voters on the losing side. Our expectation is based first on the fact that voters are more likely to seek out information from candidates and parties they support (Goren et al., 2009; Robertson, 2017). Additionally, theories of motivated reasoning suggest that voters will attribute different importance to the available information on the integrity of the election, depending on whether they are on the winning or losing side. In this case, motivated reasoners are more likely to search for evidence consistent with confirming information, regardless of the accuracy of the source (Kunda, 1990; Little, 2019). As a result, supporters of losing candidates are more attentive to their allegations of fraud and view the negative rhetoric about the integrity of the election as an acceptable explanation of the election defeat.

In sum, voters on the losing side are less trusting of the integrity of the election. The

reason for that distrust has to do with the emotional and cognitive processing of losing. We expect this reaction to be inflated when a candidate rejects the outcome of an election. Voters on the losing side are motivated to consume and believe this type of information, which is used to construct a negative assessment of the election's integrity. Supporters of the winning candidate, on the other hand, are hardly affected by the rejection of election results or by fraud allegations, since they did not receive the directional signal from their preferred candidate. Therefore, our working hypothesis is that *the decline of election confidence among respondents on the losing side is magnified when a candidate challenges election results*.

Empirical Strategy and Data

To study the relationship between voters' election trust and candidates' refusal to accept an outcome, we use data carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) in 18 Latin American countries. These surveys include the answers of almost 100,000 individuals from 2004 to 2018. Our dependent variable, *Election Trust*, uses answers on a scale of 1 (Not at all) to 7 (A lot) to the question: "To what extent do you trust elections in this country?" The overall mean of this variable in our database is 4.17, and it ranges at the country-wave level from 2.46 in Paraguay (2008) to 5.98 in Uruguay (2010).

We explore election trust in relation to two, key independent variables. First, *Vote Loser* identifies those respondents who voted for a losing candidate, using the answers provided in each survey to the question "For whom did you vote for president [in the last presidential election of the country]?" Second, *Result Rejection*, is a dummy variable identifying a presidential election after which a runner-up candidate made a public statement rejecting the validity of the results. This variable covers all Latin American presidential elections from 2001 to 2018 and follows the same coding rules as Hernández-Huerta (2020). Our coding found instances of disputed outcomes in 24% of the elections. The

Supplementary Information (SI) provides a detailed explanation for each of the elections considered in the database.

Our theoretical expectation is that, among those who voted for a losing candidate, the value of *Election Trust* should be lower when a losing candidate questions the integrity of the process. To test for this expectation, we model a cross-level interaction between *Vote Loser* and *Result Rejection*. The effect of this interaction is interpreted as the additional change in election trust among voters on the losing side of a disputed election.

We also include a battery of control variables that the literature associates with electoral trust and that are available in all of our survey waves. At the individual level, we consider covariates such as the respondent's *Age*, *Gender*, and years of *Education*, as well as their self-reported *Interpersonal trust*. At the election level, our most important control addresses the possibility that distrust and candidates' reactions to the process indeed reflect an unfair election. Using data from the Varieties of Democracy project (Coppedge et al., 2020), *Free and fair (V-Dem)* summarizes election experts' assessments of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, intimidation of the opposition, vote-buying, and election violence. Other election-level variables include the *Margin* of victory and how long the country has been democratic by the time of the election (*Years of democracy*). Finally, we include a factor variable classifying the electoral rules for the presidential election as *Plurality* (our baseline category), *Runoff*, or *Runoff held by Congress*. The summary statistics and the coding scheme of all of these variables are available in the SI.

Additional tests include a battery of control variables available only in a subset of surveys. *Party Identification* follows Birch's (2008) approach and captures whether the respondent identifies with the party that won the election (reference group), with any of the losing parties, or with no party. *Days After the Election* is the log number of days between Election day and the interview date. This variable addresses the possibility that respondents' ability to recall their vote and assessment of the election decays over long periods of time. We also include two important variables related to the levels of electoral

trust: *Political interest*, *Ideology*, and a quadratic transformation of the latter to model the effect of ideological extremism.

We specify a linear multilevel model with voters nested within elections and elections nested within countries.[1] This approach allows us to model different random intercepts for each election and country, accounting for the omitted covariates at both levels that may affect the levels of election trust across respondents.

Results

Table 1 summarizes the main results and some of our robustness checks.[2] The findings for our benchmark estimation are in Column (1), which includes the interaction of *Vote Loser* and *Result Rejection* plus the main control variables at the individual and election-level. The coefficient for *Vote Loser* confirms the lower levels of election trust among those voters on the losing side. In this case, the average difference in *Electoral trust* between those who voted for the winning candidate and those who supported someone else is about 0.4 points. Such *dis*trust among those who supported a losing candidate amplifies under a disputed election. In particular, as the interaction between *Vote Loser* and *Result Rejection* shows, the election trust among those who supported a losing candidate is about 0.6 points lower when the election outcome is disputed than when it is not.[3]

[1] Our model selection tries to simplify the interpretation of the results. The results for Figure 1 illustrate the average predicted values for different subgroups on out 7-point dependent variable. Table A6 in the Supplementary Information shows that the results are very similar than when estimating a multi-level ordered logit model.

[2] The complete models are available in Section 1 of the Appendix.

[3] Model 1 of Table A1 in the SI presents the model with no interaction and shows that *Result Rejection* presents a non-significant result. This finding suggests that a disputed election outcome does not affect the overall level of trust in the election *per se*.

Table 1: Determinants of Election Trust

	Trust in Elections					
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Vote Loser	−0.381***	−0.223***	−0.447***	−0.423***	−0.382***	−0.409***
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.036)
Result Rejection	−0.028	−0.056			−0.172	0.305
	(0.168)	(0.194)			(0.258)	(0.193)
Vote Loser × Result Rejection	−0.572***	−0.512***			−0.513***	−0.591***
	(0.026)	(0.031)			(0.032)	(0.050)
Legal Challenge			−0.605***			
			(0.027)			
Vote Loser × Legal Challenge			−0.415***			
			(0.028)			
Post-Electoral Protest				−0.607***		
				(0.022)		
Vote Loser × Post-Electoral Protest				−0.684***		
				(0.031)		
Main Control Variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Additional Control Variables		✓				
Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Electoral Integrity (NELDA)					✓	
Electoral Integrity (PEI)						✓
Countries	18	17	18	18	18	10
Elections	49	37	49	49	37	13
Respondents	99858	57929	99858	99858	79092	22895
Log Likelihood	−200245.3	−114561.4	−200377.1	−200245.2	−158019.7	−46467.9
AIC	400522.6	229164.8	400786.2	400522.4	316071.5	92965.9
BIC	400674.8	229353.1	400938.4	400674.6	316219.9	93086.5

Notes: All estimates are based on OLS regressions. Standard errors are shown in parentheses. Main control variables include *Female*, *Age*, *Education*, and *Inter-personal trust*, *Years of democracy*, *Margin of victory* for the election and the *Electoral Rule* for choosing the president. Additional control variables include *Political Interest*, *Political Ideology*, *Party Identification*, and *Days after the Election*. *** is significant at the 0.1%; **p is significant at the 1%; and ** is significant at the 5%.

To interpret the results more substantively, Figure 1 presents the average predicted values of our dependent variable across supporters of winning and losing candidates in challenged and non-challenged elections, leaving all other variables at their median levels. As the figure shows, supporters of the winning candidate display similar levels of trust in elections, irrespective of whether the election outcome was challenged or not. By contrast, the winner-loser gap when the runner-up candidate rejects the outcome is at least twice as large as what is observed when candidates conceded defeat.

A suggestive way to confirm this relationship is to compare the values for our dependent variable in Mexico's presidential elections of 2012 and 2018, where, despite the consistency of the institutional and logistic conditions for the elections, a candidate who ran in both times had a different assessment of each event. In 2012, the election was plagued with informal and legal challenges to the election result by the runner-up candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador. For this election, the average values of *Election Trust* for voters on the winning and losing side are 3.8 and 2.9, respectively—a difference of 0.9 on our 7 point scale. In 2018, López Obrador won the election, and all of the losing candidates conceded defeat. In this case, the average values of the dependent variable are 4.2 and 3.8 for election winners and losers—a difference of only 0.4 points. We corroborate this effect using panel data from 2012 and 2018 and present the results in Section C in the SI.

Columns (2)-(6) in Table 1 summarize the results of some of our robustness checks included in the Appendix. The goal of these models is to verify whether our results hold after considering additional controls and alternative codings of the dependent and main independent variables. Column (2) replicates the analysis, including *Party Identification*, *Ideology*, *Political Interest*, and *Days after the election*. While these variables are available only for a subset of surveys, the results follow what is expected by the literature (see Model (2) in Table A2 in the Appendix). Partisan losers and those with no partisan identification display lower levels of trust than partisan winners. Similarly, respondents report

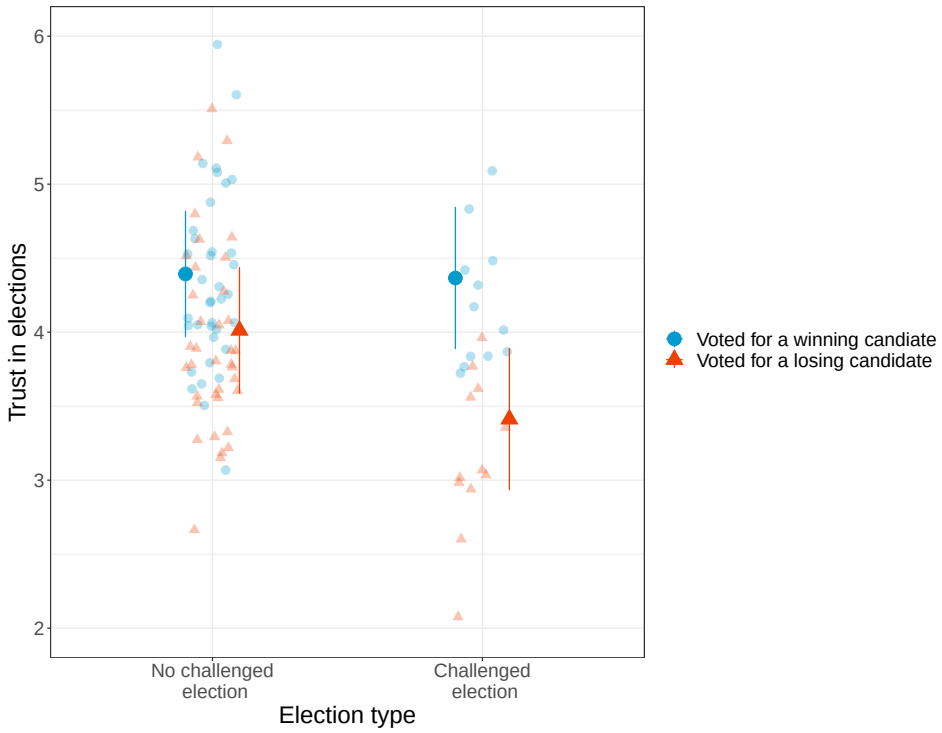

Figure 1: Estimated Effects

Notes: The figure shows the estimated effects on *Electoral trust* by (1) whether the respondent voted for a winning or losing presidential candidate in the last election and (2) whether the electoral result was challenged by one of the candidates. Each bubble shows the average value for *Electoral trust* by election and voter type. Triangles are the median estimated effect and the vertical lines denote the 95% confidence interval for each voter and election type.

lower levels of *Election trust* as they have less interest in politics and are interviewed more days after the election. In any case, the magnitude and statistical significance of our variables of interest show results similar to those of our main specification.

Columns (3) and (4) test for the robustness of the results by using alternative measurements for an election challenged by a candidate. In particular, we consider whether she proceeded legally in court against the integrity of the election (*Legal Challenge*) or led a post-electoral protest against the very integrity of the process (*Post-Electoral Protest*). Both models show that the main findings remain unchanged under these specifications.

Table A3 in the SI also verifies the robustness of the findings with two alternative measurements of *Result Rejection*. The first one is an additive index for whether a candi-

date makes a negative claim, proceeded legally in court, and led a post-electoral protest (Model 3, Table A3). The second one uses data from the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI) survey (Norris and Grömping, 2019) to build *Result Rejection (PEI)*, an election-mean score of experts' agreement, on a scale of 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 5 ("Strongly agree"), to the statement "Parties candidates challenged the result." Both robustness checks show very similar results to our main model. Also, we included year fixed effects (Table A7) to control for factors changing yearly and constantly across countries, such as possible trends in levels of election trust. Our results remain unchanged under any of these specifications.

We also acknowledge that our coding for *Result Rejection* captures only the behavior of the runner-up candidate. We expect that adding the reaction of more candidates will increase voters' distrust in the election. So our variable, if anything, is a noisy measurement of the heuristics that voters receive about the integrity of the election.[4] To explore the specific effect of the challenging candidates upon their supporters, Model 3 in Table A2 replicates the main analysis, substituting *Vote Loser* for *Vote First Loser* and *Vote Other Loser*, which identifies those voters supporting the runner-up in the election and other losing candidates, respectively. As our results show, both sets of supporters of losing candidates display lower levels of trust in elections, and this effect is magnified for both groups when interacted with *Result Rejection*. Nonetheless, the magnifying effect is stronger among the supporters of the runner-up candidate than among the supporters of other losing candidates.

Finally, Columns (5)-(6) in Table 1 verify whether our main findings hold under alternative ways of measuring the integrity of the election. The first one uses data from the NELDA dataset (Hyde and Marinov, 2012) regarding whether there is "evidence of

[4]An additional coding of the challenges by the second losers in our database only found two cases in which the election outcome is disputed not by the runner-up but rather by the candidate finishing third: Lourdes Flores (Peru, 2006) and Manuel Baldizón (Guatemala, 2015).

domestic or international concerns that the election process was not going to be free or fair." The second one uses data from the PEI database to summarize experts' answers to 49 substantive variables regarding the compliance of the election to international standards. An additional test in Table A4 uses data from the V-Dem project and, instead of directly controlling for electoral integrity, we control for the autonomy of the Election Management Body (EMB) from the government. Our results are robust under any of these specifications. An additional test splits our sample in elections with high and low levels of electoral integrity (Table A5). While the results remain significant for both subsamples, the magnitude of the coefficients for *Vote Loser* and *Result Rejection* are larger among elections with low levels of electoral integrity, confirming the moderating effects of electoral integrity on electoral trust (Maldonado and Seligson, 2014; Mauk, 2020). In other words, voters assign more credibility to candidates' rejection of election results in contexts where violations of electoral integrity are feasible.

Discussion

The idea that supporters of a losing candidate have lower levels of trust in elections is a well-established finding in the comparative politics literature. However, as Anderson et al. (2005, p. 142) note, there are "standing differences across different kinds of losers across different countries." In this article, we differentiate between elections in which losers conceded defeat from those in which they challenged the election. We argue that when a losing candidate refuses to accept an election outcome, distrust in elections is magnified among the loser's supporters.

One way to interpret our finding is that, although the negative effect of supporting the losing candidate has often been explained as an affective response of losers' supporters, part of this effect is also driven by the actions of the losing candidates themselves. In particular, when the supporter of a losing candidate receives information that her preferred

candidate refuses to concede the election, that individual is directed in motivation by this action and uses the information received to construct a negative image of the election, leading her to distrust it. This result is robust to other controls, including the respondent's partisan identification and indicators of the overall quality of the election.

This research has implications for scholars and practitioners of elections alike. It suggests that objective variables, such as the degree to which an election is free and fair, are not necessarily the main determinant to explain trust in elections, especially when the losing candidate refuses to concede. The information conveyed by the behavior of losing candidates is a strong cue assimilated by their supporters, which in turn could magnify possible irregularities that might have been present during the election. Therefore, the efforts of electoral authorities to improve trust in elections should not be circumscribed to improve electoral integrity itself, but rather to be accompanied by campaigns that emphasize that, in democracies, it is expected that losers accept the election results.

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A Supplementary Information: Complete Tables

Table A1: Determinants of Election Trust (Main Results)

	Trust in Elections	
	Model 1	**Model 2**
Vote Loser	-0.538^{***}	-0.381^{***}
	(0.012)	(0.014)
Result Rejection	-0.298	-0.028
	(0.166)	(0.168)
Vote Loser $\times$ Result Rejection		-0.572^{***}
		(0.026)
Age	0.003^{***}	0.003^{***}
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)
Female	-0.070^{***}	-0.074^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.011)
Education	-0.001	-0.001
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Inter-personal Trust	0.195^{***}	0.196^{***}
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)	0.859	0.873
	(0.627)	(0.629)
Years of Democracy	-0.003	-0.003
	(0.008)	(0.008)
Vote Margin	0.005	0.005
	(0.006)	(0.006)
Electoral Rule: Runoff	0.168	0.161
	(0.257)	(0.257)
Electoral Rule: Congress Elected	0.199	0.183
	(0.606)	(0.607)
Constant	3.124^{***}	3.061^{***}
	(0.520)	(0.521)
Countries	18	18
Elections	49	49
Respondents	99858	99858
$\sigma_{Country}$	0.383	0.381
$\sigma_{Election}$	0.395	0.399
Log Likelihood	-200480.8	-200245.3
AIC	400991.5	400522.6
BIC	401134.2	400674.8

$^{***}p < .001$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$

Table A2: Determinants of Election Trust (Robustness Checks: Additional Controls)

	Trust in Elections		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Vote Loser	−0.439***	−0.223***	
	(0.017)	(0.020)	
Vote First Loser			−0.231***
			(0.026)
Vote Other Loser			−0.226***
			(0.023)
Result Rejection	−0.073	−0.056	−0.046
	(0.198)	(0.194)	(0.192)
Vote Loser × Result Rejection	−0.516***	−0.512***	
	(0.029)	(0.031)	
Vote First Loser × Result Rejection			−0.765***
			(0.042)
Vote Other Loser × Result Rejection			−0.368***
			(0.036)
Age	0.003***	0.002**	0.002**
	(0.0005)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	−0.061***	−0.029	−0.032*
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Education	−0.005**	−0.015***	−0.015***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Inter-personal Trust	0.190***	0.160***	0.160***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)	1.328	1.254	1.236
	(0.724)	(0.699)	(0.696)
Years of Democracy	−0.005	−0.004	−0.004
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Vote Margin	0.006	0.005	0.004
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Electoral Rule: Runoff	−0.074	−0.066	−0.063
	(0.295)	(0.285)	(0.284)
Political Interest		0.212***	0.214***
		(0.008)	(0.008)
Ideology		0.041***	0.037***
		(0.011)	(0.011)
Ideology^2		0.002*	0.003**
		(0.001)	(0.001)
PID: Losing Party		−0.605***	−0.582***
		(0.027)	(0.027)
No PID		−0.607***	−0.603***
		(0.022)	(0.022)
Days After Election	−0.142***	−0.128***	−0.133***
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Constant	3.898***	3.679***	3.713***
	(0.603)	(0.591)	(0.589)
Countries	17	17	17
Elections	38	37	37
Respondents	70540	57929	57929
$\sigma_{Country}$	0.450	0.427	0.427
$\sigma_{Election}$	0.391	0.385	0.385
Log Likelihood	−141595	−114561.4	−114511.2
AIC	283221.9	229164.8	229068.4
BIC	283368.5	229353.1	229274.6

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Table A3: Determinants of Election Trust (Robustness Checks: Alternative Measurements for a Challenged Election)

	Trust in Elections			
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**
Vote Loser	−0.447***	−0.423***	−0.394***	0.057
	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.075)
Legal Challenge	0.016			
	(0.182)			
Post-Electoral Protest		0.079		
		(0.202)		
Challenge Cumulative			0.020	
			(0.054)	
Challenged (PEI)				0.028
				(0.119)
Vote Loser × Legal Challenge	−0.415***			
	(0.028)			
Vote Loser × Post-Electoral Protest		−0.684***		
		(0.031)		
Vote Loser × Challenger Cumulative			−0.178***	
			(0.008)	
Vote Loser × Challenged (PEI)				−0.232***
				(0.021)
Age	0.003***	0.003***	0.003***	0.003***
	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.0004)	(0.001)
Female	−0.071***	−0.073***	−0.072***	-0.047
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.024)
Education	−0.001	−0.001	−0.001	−0.032***
	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.003)
Inter-personal Trust	0.196***	0.196***	0.196***	0.188***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.013)
Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)	1.103	0.991	0.994	0.821
	(0.602)	(0.627)	(0.623)	(0.919)
Years of Democracy	-0.004	-0.005	-0.004	-0.019
	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.012)
Vote Margin	0.005	0.005	0.004	0.017*
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Electoral Rule: Runoff	0.213	0.212	0.196	0.378
	(0.250)	(0.255)	(0.254)	(0.417)
Electoral Rule: Congress Runoff	0.212	0.211	0.205	
	(0.597)	(0.608)	(0.604)	
Constant	2.896***	2.997***	2.985***	3.429**
	(0.505)	(0.523)	(0.523)	(1.075)
Countries	18	18	18	10
Elections	49	49	49	13
Respondents	99858	99858	99858	22895
$\sigma_{Country}$	0.355	0.378	0.372	0.299
$\sigma_{Election}$	0.411	0.403	0.403	0.222
Log Likelihood	−200377.1	−200245.2	−200250.5	−46475.4
AIC	400786.2	400522.4	400533	92980.9
BIC	401068.4	400798.1	400853.3	93101.4

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Table A4: Determinants of Election Trust (Robustness Checks: Alternative Measurements for Electoral Integrity)

	Trust in Elections		
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Vote Loser	-0.381^{***}	-0.382^{***}	-0.409^{***}
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.036)
Result Rejection	-0.009	-0.172	0.305
	(0.157)	(0.258)	(0.193)
Vote Loser $\times$ *Result Rejection*	-0.573^{***}	-0.513^{***}	-0.591^{***}
	(0.026)	(0.032)	(0.050)
Age	0.003^{***}	0.003^{***}	0.003^{***}
	(0.0004)	(0.0005)	(0.001)
Female	-0.071^{***}	-0.081^{***}	-0.049^{*}
	(0.011)	(0.013)	(0.024)
Education	-0.001	0.006^{***}	-0.032^{***}
	(0.001)	(0.002)	(0.003)
Inter-personal Trust	0.196^{***}	0.201^{***}	0.188^{***}
	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.013)
EMB Autonomy (V-Dem)	0.269^{*}		
	(0.124)		
Electoral Integrity (NELDA)		0.287	
		(0.359)	
Electoral Integrity (PEI)			0.021^{*}
			(0.010)
Years of Democracy	-0.003	0.004	-0.011
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.011)
Vote Margin	0.004	-0.006	0.015^{*}
	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.006)
Electoral Rule: Runoff	0.027	0.394	0.231
	(0.227)	(0.254)	(0.371)
Constant	$.800^{***}$	3.407^{***}	2.580^{***}
	(0.581)	(0.475)	(0.635)
Countries	18	18	10
Elections	49	37	13
Respondents	99858	79092	22895
$\sigma_{Country}$	0.466	0.413	0.294
$\sigma_{Election}$	0.358	0.43	0.180
Log Likelihood	-200245.600	-158019.700	-46467.940
AIC	400523.200	316071.500	92965.880
BIC	400675.400	316219.900	93086.460

$^{***}p < .001$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{*}p < .05$

Table A5: Determinants of Election Trust (Robustness Checks: Splitting the Data According to Level of Electoral Integrity)

	Trust in Elections			
	Cutoff: Electoral integrity=0.5		**Cutoff: Electoral integrity=0.75**	
	High electoral integrity	**Low electoral integrity**	**High electoral integrity**	**Low electoral integrity**
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
Vote Loser	−0.342***	−0.902***	−0.297***	−0.480***
	(0.014)	(0.055)	(0.018)	(0.021)
Challenge	−0.354	0.483	−0.497	0.168
	(0.188)	(0.566)	(0.260)	(0.192)
Vote Loser × Challenge	−0.355***	−0.754***	−0.303***	−0.788***
	(0.323)	(1.004)	(0.666)	(0.196)
Age	0.004***	−0.002	0.005***	0.001
	(0.0004)	(0.001)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Female	−0.097***	0.060	−0.132***	−0.015
	(0.012)	(0.035)	(0.015)	(0.017)
Education	0.003*	−0.026***	0.012***	−0.013***
	(0.001)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Inter-personal Trust	0.206***	0.132***	0.222***	0.170***
	(0.007)	(0.018)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Years of Democracy	−0.003	−0.090	−0.021	−0.009
	(0.010)	(0.091)	(0.016)	(0.008)
Vote Margin	−0.004	0.003	−0.001	0.010
	(0.006)	(0.016)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Electoral Rule: Runoff	0.365	−0.513	0.624	0.378
	(0.323)	(1.004)	(0.666)	(0.196)
Electoral Rule: Congress Runoff	0.520		0.242	
	(0.651)		(0.875)	
	(0.029)	(0.072)	(0.036)	(0.038)
Constant	3.580***	7.120*	4.084***	3.696***
	(0.356)	(3.351)	(0.619)	(0.285)
N	88015	11843	52530	47328
Log Likelihood	−175522.100	−24397.370	−103112.000	−96779.100
AIC	351074.200	48822.750	206253.900	193586.200
BIC	351214.900	48926.060	206387.000	193708.900

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Table A6: Determinants of Election Trust: Multi-level Ordered Logit

	Trust in Elections					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Vote Loser	−0.37***	−0.21***	−0.43***	−0.41***	−0.37***	−0.37***
	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.03)
Result Rejection	−0.03	−0.06			−0.17	0.30*
	(0.16)	(0.19)			(0.25)	(0.17)
Vote Loser × Result Rejection	−0.57***	−0.53***			−0.48***	−0.63***
	(0.03)	(0.03)			(0.03)	(0.05)
Vote Loser × Legal Challenge			−0.40***			
			(0.03)			
Post-Electoral Protest				0.08		
				(0.20)		
Vote Loser × Post-Electoral Protest				−0.72***		
				(0.03)		
Main Control Variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Additional Control Variables		✓				
Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Electoral Integrity (NELDA)					✓	
Electoral Integrity (PEI)						✓
Cutpoints 1|2	−1.37***	−2.52***	−1.17***	−1.26***	−1.94***	−0.56
	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.46)	(0.26)	(0.49)
2|3	−0.74	−1.87***	−0.55	−0.63	−1.32***	0.08
	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.46)	(0.26)	(0.49)
3|4	-0.04	−1.13**	0.15	0.07	−0.60**	0.73
	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.46)	(0.26)	(0.49)
4|5	0.77	−0.29	0.96**	0.88*	0.22	1.50***
	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.46)	(0.26)	(0.49)
5|6	1.67***	0.65	1.86***	1.78***	1.13***	2.39***
	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.46)	(0.26)	(0.49)
6|7	2.65***	1.65***	2.84***	2.76***	2.11***	3.35***
	(0.48)	(0.52)	(0.43)	(0.46)	(0.26)	(0.49)
Countries	18	17	18	18	18	10
Elections	49	37	49	49	37	13
Respondents	99858	57929	99858	99858	79092	22895
Log Likelihood	−185206.73	−106008.97	−185344.62	−185185.38	−146345.38	−42640.34
AIC	370453.46	212067.93	370729.24	370410.75	292730.77	85318.67
BIC	370643.69	212292.11	370919.47	370600.98	292916.34	85471.41

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

Table A7: Determinants of Election Trust: Year Fixed-Effects

	Trust in Elections					
	(1)	**(2)**	**(3)**	**(4)**	**(5)**	**(6)**
Vote Loser	−0.371***	−0.222***	−0.437***	−0.414***	−0.368***	−0.403***
	(0.014)	(0.020)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.036)
Result Rejection	0.374*	−0.351			0.284	0.102
	(0.171)	(0.240)			(0.252)	(0.287)
Vote Loser × Result Rejection	−0.581***	−0.519***			−0.533***	−0.587***
	(0.026)	(0.031)			(0.032)	(0.050)
Legal Challenge			0.422*			
			(0.173)			
Vote Loser × Legal Challenge			−0.427***			
			(0.028)			
Post-Electoral Protest				0.433*		
				(0.200)		
Vote Loser × Post-Electoral Protest				−0.694***		
				(0.031)		
Main Control Variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Additional Control Variables		✓				
Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Electoral Integrity (NELDA)					✓	
Electoral Integrity (PEI)						✓
Year Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Countries	18	17	18	18	18	10
Elections	49	37	49	49	37	13
Respondents	99858	57929	99858	99858	79092	22895
Log Likelihood	−200038.500	−114524.700	−200169.600	−200037.600	−157795.000	−46431.700
AIC	400129.000	229107.400	400391.200	400127.200	315636.100	92901.400
BIC	400376.300	229367.400	400638.500	400374.500	315849.500	93054.140

***p < .001; **p < .01; *p < .05

B Supplementary Information: Summary Statistics

Table A8: Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Median	Max
Trust Elections	102,660	4.079	1.920	1	4	7
Result Rejection	102,660	0.276	0.447	0	0	1
Age	102,479	26.404	15.305	16	40	112
Education	101,888	9.167	4.642	0	9	18
Inter-personal Trust	100,746	2.798	0.929	1	3	4
Political Interest	96,694	2.139	0.989	1	2	4
Ideology	85,497	5.665	2.696	1	5	10
Electoral Integrity (V-Dem)	102,660	0.729	0.168	0.313	0.761	0.973
Years of Democracy	102,660	38.425	13.679	7	39	68
Margin of Victory	102,660	14.983	11.993	0.220	12.100	57.410
PID	93,092	2.426	0.805	1	3	3
Days After Election	72,659	819.670	560.197	19	796	2,811
Vote First Loser	102,660	0.209	0.407	0	0	1
Vote Other Loser	102,660	0.294	0.456	0	0	1
Legal Challenge	102,660	0.219	0.413	0	0	1
Post-Electoral Protest	102,660	0.170	0.375	0	0	1
Challenge Cumulative	102,660	0.812	1.428	0	0	4
Challenged (PEI)	23,889	3.356	1.177	1.000	3.429	4.857
EMB Autonomy (V-Dem)	102,660	3.824	0.860	2	4	5
Electoral Integrity (NELDA)	80,946	0.073	0.261	0	0	1
Electoral Integrity (PEI)	23,889	54.906	11.534	29.235	57.179	81.381

C Supplementary Information: Evolution of election trust and disputed elections

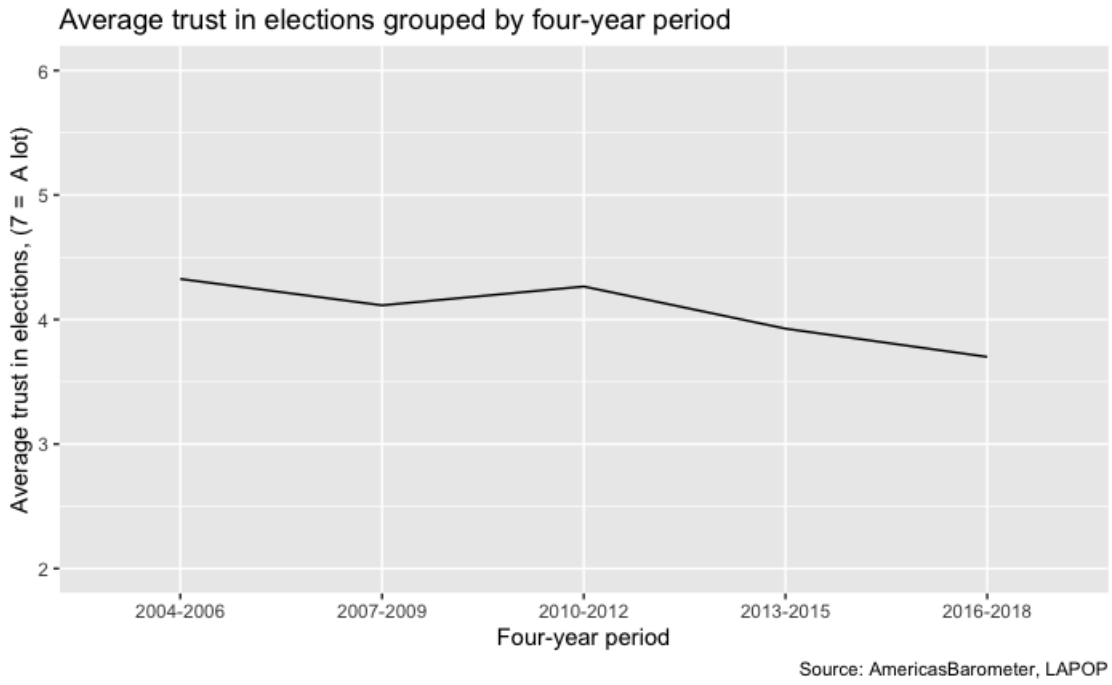

Figure 2: Average trust in elections (in sample) grouped by four year period

Notes: The figure shows the average responses in our AmericasBarometer sample to the question: "To what extent do you trust elections in this country?" Responses are coded in a 1 (Not at all)-7 (A lot) scale.

Table A9: Elections included in the analysis

Country	Frequency	Disputed elections	Presidential elections included
Argentina	1	0	2007
Bolivia	1	0	2005
Brazil	2	0	2006, 2010
Chile	1	0	2006
Colombia	4	0	2002, 2006, 2010, 2018
Costa Rica	4	0	2002, 2006, 2010, 2014
Dominican Republic	4	2	2004, 2008, **2012**, **2016**
Ecuador	3	2	2002, **2006**, **2009**
El Salvador	3	1	2004, 2009, **2014**
Guatemala	3	0	2007, 2011, 2015
Honduras	5	2	2001, 2005, 2009, **2013**, **2017**
Mexico	3	2	**2006**, **2012**, 2018
Nicaragua	3	2	2006, **2011**, **2016**
Panama	2	0	2004, 2009
Paraguay	4	1	2003, 2008, 2013, **2018**
Peru	3	0	2006, 2011, 2016
Uruguay	2	0	2004, 2009
Venezuela	1	0	2006
Total	49	12	

Note: Years in a bold font correspond to cases of disputed elections.

Table A10: Disputed elections in Latin American democracies over time

Years	Elections	Disputed elections	Percentage
1986-1990	15	4	26.67
1991-1995	16	2	12.50
1996-2000	22	3	13.64
2001-2005	17	0	0
2006-2010	23	3	13.04
2011-2015	20	6	30.00

D Supplementary Information: Panel Data from Mexico, 2012-2018.

To check whether such differences among voter groups can be explained by *ex-ante* attitudes towards the election outcome, we bring additional data from the 2012 and 2018 Mexico Panel Study (Greene et al. 2012; Greene et al. 2018). The first study asked respondents how much they agree or disagree with the statement "This year's elections will be[were] clean." On a 1-4 scale, where higher numbers mean more agreement with the statement, the average values for election winners and losers were very similar—2.5 and 2.4, respectively—before the election. However, the post-election wave registered an average change of 0.6 and -0.6 points among winners and losers, respectively.

For the 2018 panel, the survey asked respondents whether they agree or disagree with the statement "The results announced by the electoral authority are trustful." Using a similar scale than the mentioned above, the average values among election winners before and after the election were 2.3 and 2.7, respectively. For election losers, the average values were 2.4 and 2.5.

This example suggests that perceptions of electoral integrity are explained not merely by the affective reaction of supporting the losing side, but that trust in elections among the supporters of the losing side is strongly shaped by the cues that voters receive from the candidate whom they support.

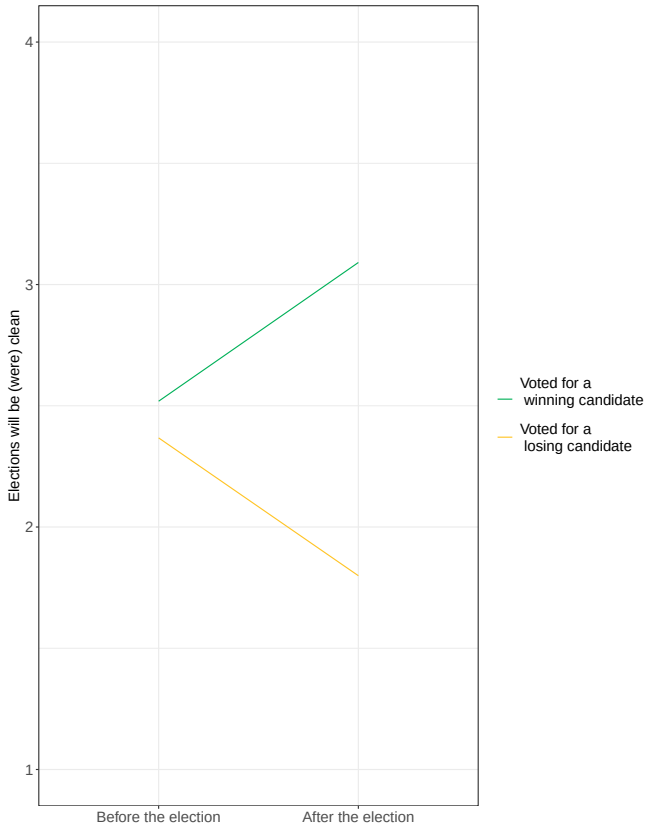

Figure 3: Perceptions of Electoral Integrity among Winners and Losers. 2012 Mexico Panel Study

Notes: The figure shows the average responses of survey panel respondents before and after the election to the question: "I am going to read some phrases and for each one, I want you to tell me if you agree completely, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree completely (...) This year's elections will be[were] clean." Responses are coded in a 1-4 scale, where 1 means "completely disagree" and 4 means "completely agree." Source: Greene, Kenneth, Jorge Domínguez, Chappell Lawson, and Alejandro Moreno. 2012. "Mexico Panel Study, 2012. Wave 2." https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR35024.v1.

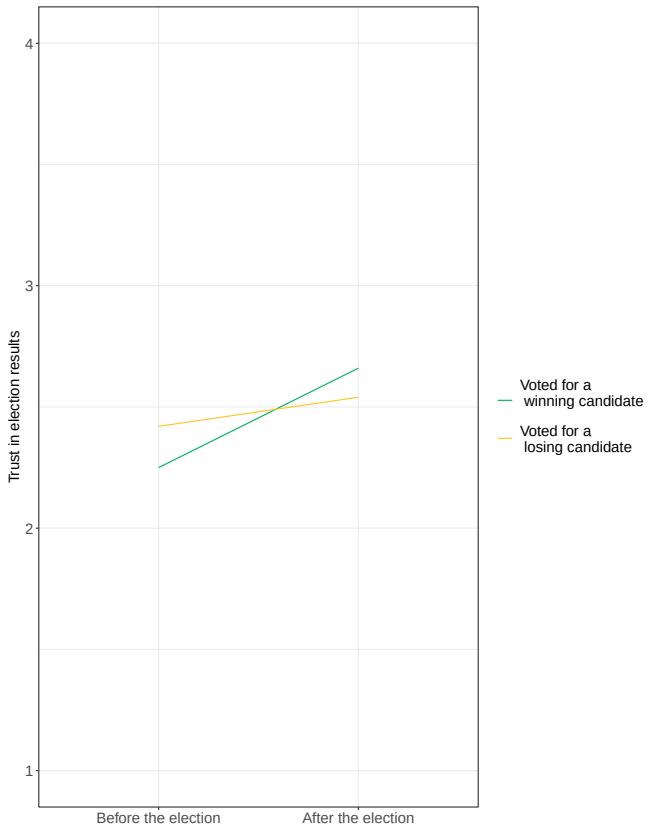

Figure 4: Perceptions of Electoral Integrity among Winners and Losers. 2018 Mexico Panel Study

Notes: The figure shows the average responses of survey panel respondents before and after the election to the question: "The results announced by the electoral authority are trustful." Original responses are coded in a 1-4 scale, where 1 means "completely agree" and 4 means "completely disagree." The scale was reversed for illustration purposes. Source: Greene, Kenneth, Alberto Simpser, Alejandro Ponce, Pablo Parás, and Carlos López (2018), Elections and Quality of Democracy Survey, Mexico. Datafile.

E Supplementary Information: Codebook

Table A11: Public Distrust in Disputed Elections - Codebook

Variable	Coding	Source
Election Trust	"To what extent do you trust elections in this country?" Scale: 1 (Not at all) - 7 (A lot)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Vote Loser	"For whom did you vote for president [in the last presidential election of the country]?" Recoded as: 1 (Voted for any non-winning candidate in the previous presidential election), 0 (Otherwise)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Result Rejection	Dummy variable identifying an election when a runner-up candidate made a public statement rejecting the validity of the election. Scale: 1 (Rejected), 0 (Otherwise) (Detailed explanation for the coding of every case is available at: https://bit.ly/33HwSWg)	Authors' compilation
Vote First Loser	"For whom did you vote for president [in the last presidential election of the country]?" Recoded as: 1 (Voted for the runner-up party/coalition), 0 (Otherwise)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Vote Other Loser	"For whom did you vote for president [in the last presidential election of the country]?" Recoded as: 1 (Voted for losing party other than the runner-up party/coalition), 0 (Otherwise)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Legal Challenge	Dummy variable identifying an election when a runner-up candidate presented a legal suit demanding a recount of the nullification of the lection result. Scale: 1 (legal suit was presented), 0 (Otherwise)	Authors' compilation

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Table A11 – continued from previous page

Variable	Coding	Source
Post-Electoral Protest	Dummy variable identifying an election when a runner-up candidate mobilized her supporters into the streets or to engage in other protests actions. Scale: 1 (followers were urged to protest), 0 (Otherwise)	Hernandez-Huerta (2020)
Challenge Cumulative	Dummy variable identifying an election when runner-up candidates simultaneously publicly rejected election results, presented a legal suit and urged their follower to protest. Scale: 1 (These actions occurred simultaneously), 0 (Otherwise)	Hernandez-Huerta (2020)
Challenged (PEI)	"Parties challenged the result" Scale: 5 (Strongly agree) â" 1(Strongly disagree)	Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI), Norris and Gromping (2019)
Age	Age of the respondent. Scale: Continuous numeric variable	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Female	Sex of the respondent. Recoded as: 1 (Female), 0 (Male)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Education	Years of schooling. Scale: 0 (None), 1, [. . .], 17, 18+	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Interpersonal Trust	"And speaking of the people from around here, would you say that people in this community are very trustworthy,â?" Scale: 1 (Very trustworthy) - 4 (Untrustworthy)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Political Interest	"How much interest do you have in politics?" Scale: 4 (A lot) â" 1 (None)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018

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Table A11 – continued from previous page

Variable	Coding	Source
Ideology	"According to the meaning that the terms "left" and "right" have for you, and thinking of your own political leanings, where would you place yourself on this scale?" Scale: 1 (Left) â" 10 (Right)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
PID: Winning party	"Which political party do you identify with?" Recoded as: 1 (Respondent identifies with the winning party), 0 (Otherwise)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
PID: Losing Party	"Which political party do you identify with?" Recoded as: 1 (Respondent identifies with any of the losing parties), 0 (Otherwise)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
No PID	"Do you currently identify with a political party?" Recoded as: 1 (The respondent does not identify with any political party), 0 (Otherwise)	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Days after election	Log value of the number of days between Election day and the interview date	AmericasBarometer, Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), 2004-2018
Free and fair (V-Dem)	"To what extent are elections free and fair? Free and fair connotes an absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence." (v2xel_frefair). Scale: Interval, from low to high (0-1)	V-Dem Codebook v9, Coppedge et al. (2019)

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Variable	Coding	Source
EMB Autonomy (V-Dem)	"Does the Election Management Body (EMB) have autonomy from government to apply election laws and administrative rules impartially in national elections?" (v2elembaut) Scale: 0 (No. The EMB is controlled by the incumbent government), 5 (Yes. The EMB is autonomous and impartially applies elections laws and administrative rules)	V-Dem Codebook v9, Coppedge et al. (2019)
Vote Margin	Difference in the share of votes between the winning and the runner-up parties	IFES Election Guide
Years of democracy	Number of years a country has been democratic since 1945 at the moment of the election analyzed. Scale: Continuous numeric variable	Cheibub, Gandhi, and Vreeland (2010)
Electoral Integrity (NELDA)	This variable assesses the extent of the problems in the election. This is a combined assessment that considers problems in the legal framework, political and administrative problems in the pre-election period, and then the integrity of the election day itself. (sa2) Recoded as: 1 (major problems), 0 (no problems)	Hyde and Marinov (2012)
Electoral Integrity (PEI)	The PEI index is designed to provide an overall summary evaluation of expert perceptions that an election meets international standards and global norms. It is generated at the individual level using experts' answers to the 49 substantive variables below. The 49 scores are summed and then standardized to a 100 point scale. (PEIIndexp)	Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (PEI), Norris and Grömping (2019)

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