

Security Crises and Preferences over Parties and Leadership Styles in Latin America

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Generally speaking, conditions of crisis have been accompanied in numerous cases by institutional changes away from liberal democracy. Across time and across countries, crises that affect physical security and/or financial well-being have been linked to restrictions on the media, suppressed civil liberties, and concentration of power in the executive office. In Latin America, in at least some countries, political, economic, and/or security crises have been accompanied by the rise of populist leaders and an associated weakening of the party system and, more generally, horizontal accountability (i.e., checks and balances). Populist leaders elected in times of crisis, such as Fujimori in Peru and Menem in Argentina, have advocated platforms aimed at dismantling and/or undermining traditional political institutions, presumably as a means to confront threats to their countries' well-being.¹

It is critical to note that the public has frequently acquiesced to and even advocated for these institutional rearrangements, for example through the re-election of these leaders. This suggests that the public mood becomes increasingly supportive of a centralized, strong executive in times of crisis.² While much has been written about crisis in Latin America, there has been limited theorizing and empirical testing of the link between crisis and public attitudes toward democratic institutions.

We investigate the contention that preferences over democratic institutional arrangements among the mass public vary across “bad” and “good” times. In this paper, we focus on security threats and, in particular, terrorist threat. Drawing on past research, we theorize that preferences over checks and balances, party-based democracy, rule of law, and democracy in general are diminished by the presence of salient security threats. We further consider whether reminders of democratic values might counteract those effects. We test our expectations using data generated from both surveys and experiments. In this concept paper, we present results from our analyses of the 2010 AmericasBarometer and a national experiment that was carried out in March 2012 in Mexico. While the broader project examines (and makes comparisons across) various types of security threats, in this concept paper we concentrate our focus on terrorist threat and its potential to affect preferences over democratic institutional arrangements in Latin America in general, and in Mexico in particular.

Terrorist Threat and Concerns in the Americas

On August 25, 2011, armed men stormed and set on fire a casino in Nuevo Leon, Mexico; 52 civilians were killed in the brutal attack.³ Near midnight on January 16, 2011, a bomb was detonated near a police station in northern Paraguay; a leftist guerilla group, the EPP, claimed

¹ Working under the specter of political and economic threat, Chávez, as another example, called together an assembly of supporters to re-write the constitution in order to shift power explicitly in favor of the executive. The agenda of Chávez's constituent assembly included these tasks: “purge the judiciary, write a new constitution, shut down the congress (Roberts 2000, p. 15).”

² It is worthwhile noting that the public has not consistently nor universally supported these maneuvers. This is perhaps best illustrated by the fact the fact that Fujimori and Menem are no longer in office (not to mention the attempts that have been made in recent times to prosecute the two). In the Venezuelan case, it is noteworthy that in December 2007 the Venezuelan voting public narrowly defeated a new set of proposed constitutional reforms.

³ http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2011/aug/29/mexico-offers-reward-in-casino-attack/?utm_source=RSS_Feed&utm_medium=RSS

responsibility.⁴ On August 12, 2010, a car bomb exploded outside the studios of a radio station in Bogota, Colombia, injuring at least nine persons; newly inaugurated President Santos condemned the event as an “act of terrorism.”⁵ These incidents are just a few sampled from numerous violent episodes in recent times. While experiences with terrorism⁶ across the Americas vary, it is clear that political violence is a significant issue for democratic politics within the region.

Considered broadly, political terrorism has had a greater presence in some countries in the Americas, such as Colombia and Peru, but terrorist acts have been recorded elsewhere in recent years in countries such as Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Ecuador, Paraguay, and Venezuela.⁷ In fact, the increased sophistication, scope, and fatalities of modern terrorism leave few corners of the globe immune. Even in countries that have not experienced significant terrorist attacks, citizens may express concern about terrorism out of concern for threats by and conflicts involving various radical groups operating inside and outside the country.

Using unique data from the 2010 AmericasBarometer by LAPOP⁸, we can document the extent to which worry about the possibility of violent terrorist attacks exists and varies across individuals and countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. To assess this subject, we consider responses to this question: “(WT1) How worried are you that there will be a violent attack by terrorists in [country] in the next 12 months?” Respondents answered on a four-point scale from not at all worried to very worried.⁹ One important and intentional aspect of the question design to note is that it did not impose a definition of terrorism on respondents. The question asks about concerns about violent attacks by aggressive actors without restricting the individual to only consider certain types of attacks or groups; thus, the question implicitly recognizes and allows for the varied conceptions of terrorism in the Americas.

⁴ http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110117/ap_on_re_la_am_ca/lt_paraguay_bomb_attacks

⁵ <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2010-08-12/santos-says-colombia-car-bomb-was-terrorist-act-.html>

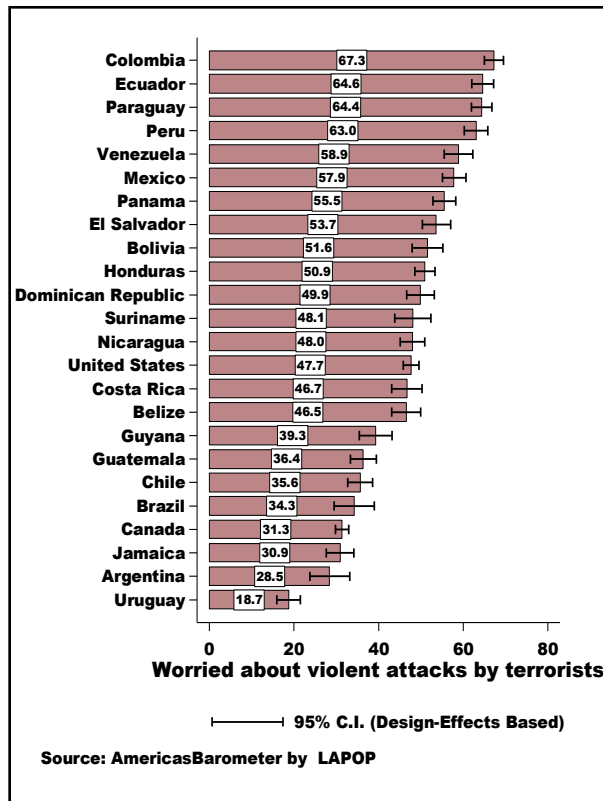
⁶ On defining terrorism, see Sánchez-Cuenca and de la Calle (2009); their definition recognizes the blurred lines between domestic and international terrorism (on this, see also Crenshaw 2010) and the possibility that terrorists target police and other state actors in such a way that terrorism becomes defined more broadly than including only attacks on civilians; they further note that terrorism is defined by violent actions by “underground” non-state organizations, in order to distinguish between terrorists and armed revolutionary groups occupying territorial bases within a country, but even still there can be overlap between these two concepts, such as when armed guerrillas leave their base to commit violent attacks for political purposes.

⁷ In addition to news sources such as those cited here, on terrorist incidents see the RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI), <http://www.rand.org/nsrd/projects/terrorism-incidents/>

⁸ We thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Program, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.

⁹ Recognizing that not everyone might have concerns about terrorist attacks, the question allowed an explicit “haven’t thought much about this” option. The percentage of individuals who responded that they “haven’t thought much about this” is 22.99 percent. In the analyses presented in the body of this paper, we omit this group of individuals. However, one interpretation of such a response is that the individual is not worried and, therefore, as a robustness check we have run all the analyses with these individuals coded as not worried and the results are consistent with what we present here. Our regression results using this measure are also robust to other operationalizations of the measure, including a series of dummy variables (see Merolla, Montalvo, and Zechmeister N.d.).

Figure 1. Worry about Terrorism in the Americas, 2010



Among those who responded to the terrorism survey question, Figure 1 shows mean responses (with confidence intervals) by country, with those responses recalibrated for the sake of easy comparison from the original 1-4 scale to a 0-100 scale, where 0 means “Not at all worried” and 100 “Very worried”.¹⁰ Mean levels of worry about terrorist attacks, as shown in Figure 1, are above the 50-unit mid-point on the scale in ten of the 24 countries. Not surprisingly, Colombia and Peru, two countries that have suffered from numerous terrorist attacks, are found in the top tier of the list of countries, with mean levels of worry of 67.3 and 63.0, respectively which is closest to the category of “worried”. The RAND Database of Worldwide Terrorism Incidents (RDWTI) reports 46 attempted and/or successful terrorist attacks in Colombia in 2009, most of which are attributed to the FARC. Fewer incidents were reported in Peru, but the country has nonetheless continued to see occasional attacks, typically attributed to the Shining Path, which serve as reminders of much greater levels of terrorism in the 1990s.

Interestingly, Ecuador and Paraguay are at the top of the list, suggesting high levels of concern about security in those countries. In Ecuador, this high value may reflect concerns about FARC activity spilling into Ecuador from Colombia as well as public anxiety over increasing numbers

¹⁰ The transformation is linear to the 0-100 variable; later we conduct a similar linear transformation of the variable, and others, to a 0-1 scale for the regression analyses. Mean non-response for this question was 5.3%; these individuals are excluded from the analyses in this paper. If we code those who “haven’t thought much about this” as “not worried”, the relative ranking of mean values across the countries remains fairly stable (see Zechmeister, Montalvo, and Merolla 2010).

of bold, public, and often lethal attacks by criminal elements (e.g., sicarios, or hit men).¹¹ In Paraguay's case, this could be due to concerns about domestic guerrilla groups such as the EPP (see the incident mentioned earlier) and, perhaps, also due to concerns about terrorist cells in the tri-border area.¹² In direct contrast to these cases, levels of worry are strikingly low in Jamaica, Argentina, and especially Uruguay (whose mean ranking is closest to the category "somewhat worried"). The United States' placement in the middle of the scale makes sense in light of the fact that economic decline rivaled for the public's attention in 2010, while the public's concern about terrorism likely had been dulled by nearly nine years of repeated terror alerts typically followed by little to no sign of terrorist activity.

What consequences might variation in levels of worry about terrorism in the Americas have for preferences over democratic institutional arrangements? The next section presents an argument for why concerns about security, and in particular terrorist threat, might influence mass public opinion over checks and balances, party-based democracy, rule of law, and democracy more generally.

The Core Argument: Worry about Terrorism Can Erode Support for Liberal Democracy

Our basic contention is simple: fear of terrorism affects the ways people think about government. A chief objective of terrorism is to induce anxiety and fear, and some research shows clearly that terror threat significantly affects political attitudes, evaluations, and behaviors in ways that may place stress on democratic values, processes, and even institutions (Davis 2007; Huddy et al. 2005; Merolla and Zechmeister, 2009). While much of this research has been limited to a focus on specific values and preferences, we argue that worry about terrorism also carries the potential to undermine individuals' support for democracy and democratic practices more generally.

The logic behind this expectation is the following: conditions of terror threat heighten individual anxiety and concern about future threats (Huddy et al. 2005; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). This type of collective threat highlights individuals' inability to control external circumstances that threaten their financial, psychological, and/or physical well-being. Merolla and Zechmeister (2009) developed the argument that, in attempting to re-establish feelings of control and safety, individuals may adopt one or more of several coping strategies, which in turn affect support for democratic values and institutions. One coping strategy involves choosing to turn over control to another agent, such as a political figure whom one deems capable of solving or handling the crisis. In presidential systems at least, citizens will most often look to the office of the executive to handle the given crisis context. For example, individuals may come to prefer that the balance of power tilt decidedly in favor of a stronger executive, one who can then pursue a quick, unhindered resolution to the crisis. The expression of this coping strategy thus carries with it some threat to democracy, as individuals prioritize and enable strong executive leadership,

¹¹ In Ecuador, but also in some other Latin American countries, there is a tendency for at least some politicians and political activists to use the term in fiery rhetoric against political rivals.

¹² See, for example, the report found at http://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/pdf-files/TerrOrgCrime_TBA.pdf.

potentially at the expense of horizontal accountability (checks and balances, parties) and the rule of law.¹³

The tendency to downgrade support for democracy and democratic processes in times of terrorist threat is unlikely to be universal. Rather, we expect such attitudinal shifts to be more likely in contexts in which diffuse support for democracy is comparatively weak, which tends to be the case more often in less established democracies than in systems in which liberal democracy is more entrenched. Members of older democracies typically have higher levels of diffuse support: a “reservoir of good will and favorable attitudes that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs...which they see as damaging to their wants” (Easton 1965, p. 273). Furthermore, overall levels of support for abstract democratic norms are generally high in older democracies, even if they are not always high in practice with respect to particular individuals, groups, and times (e.g., Stouffer 1955; Marquart-Pyatt and Paxton 2006; McClosky 1964; Sullivan, Pierson and Marcus 1982).¹⁴ Survey and experimental research post 9/11 has shown that individuals worried about future terrorist threats are less supportive of civil liberties (Davis and Silver 2004; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). Yet, while support for democratic norms in practice may wane during times of security crisis in well-established democracies, entrenched “good will” toward the system is likely to prevent support for democracy in the abstract from following the same pattern.

It is in less established democracies, where reservoirs of good will are far from full, that conditions of crisis will likely cause more citizens to withdraw support from basic democratic norms and processes. In these cases, the connection between specific and diffuse support combined with low reservoirs means that negative experiences shake individuals’ confidence in specific actors but, as well, the rules of the democratic game itself. Empirically, evidence exists to suggest that threats can undermine fragile democracies. For example, Gibson and Gouws (2001) find that as the perceived threat of a group increases, political intolerance also increases. Wang and Chang (2006) have also demonstrated a relationship between perceived threat from Mainland China and a decline in political tolerance among the Taiwanese. In considering security threats in Latin America, a number of scholars have linked crime and insecurity to decreased support for democracy and democratic practices (e.g., Maldonado 2010; Malone 2010; Mezini, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2012; Pérez 2003, 2009; Seligson and Smith 2010; but also see Ceobano, Wood, and Ribeiro 2010). Thus, there is some reason to expect that – at least in some cases – support for liberal, party-based democracy will drop when conditions of terror threat confront citizens of democracies that are comparatively less well-established.

Survey Data Analysis: Terrorist Threat and Democratic Preferences

We first assess the link between terrorism and support for democratic leadership and institutional arrangements using the AmericasBarometer 2010 survey data, and three baskets of measures: support for democracy as a regime type, support for strong, unencumbered leadership, and

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of extant work supporting this theoretical framework, see Merolla, Montalvo, and Zechmeister (N.d.).

¹⁴ For example, during the McCarthy era in the U.S., Stouffer (1955) found that majorities of citizens did not think that an admitted Communist should be allowed to speak publicly, teach in schools, or work as a clerk in a store, and this was more pronounced among those who saw Communism as an internal danger to the security of the country, and less pronounced among those higher in education.

support for democratic processes. In the next paragraph we describe how we measure the items in each of these baskets.¹⁵

First, we measure support for democracy as a regime type using two questions. The *Churchillian Agreement* item, so-called because of its association with a famous dictum by that leader, asks individuals the extent to which they agree that democracy, despite its flaws, is the best possible political system. The *Support for Democracy* item asks individuals to indicate whether a democratic system is always preferred, under some cases an authoritarian system can be necessary, or whether it doesn't matter.

Second, we tap a related set of attitudes, concerning support for a strong leader free of potentially cumbersome democratic processes and institutions, with two measures. The *Anti-Iron Fist* item reflects whether an individual agrees that democracy works best with everyone's participation or if the country needs a government with an iron fist. The *Anti-Strong Leader* item asks whether electoral democracy is always best or whether a strong leader might be needed who does not have to be elected.

Finally, the *Pro-Parties* item asks the extent to which an individual disagrees that democracy can function without political parties, in other words it taps the extent to which the individual considers parties a necessary element of democratic processes. All of the measures are coded such that higher values reflect responses that favor inclusive, partisan-based, electoral democracy.

In order to isolate the effects of worry about terrorism, we include in our analyses a number of controls, including the following: ideological¹⁶ self-placement dummy variables (with left as the baseline); crime victimization measures; perceptions of insecurity (in one's neighborhood, due to crime); evaluation of the country's economic situation; evaluation of one's personal economic situation; household wealth; gender (female=1); age; education level; size of town of residence; and, country dummy variables. All variables in the analyses are scaled to run from 0 to 1. The results are presented in Table 1. The table also notes the method of regression analysis, which varies by dependent variable.

Table 1. Predicting Support for Democracy and Preferences for Strong, Unencumbered Leadership

	Churchillian Agreement (Continuous)	Support for Democracy (Multinomial, base category: Authoritarian System Could be Necessary)		Anti-Iron Fist (Dichotomous)	Anti-Strong Leader (Dichotomous)	Pro-parties (Continuous)
		It Doesn't Matter	Democracy is Preferable			
Intercept	0.730*** (0.013)	-0.263* (1.136)	1.241*** (0.122)	1.067*** (0.120)	2.396*** (0.172)	0.649*** (0.020)
Worry About Terrorism	-0.048*** (0.006)	-0.055 (0.053)	-0.268*** (0.044)	-0.349*** (0.048)	-0.520*** (0.063)	-0.029*** (0.007)
Ideology: Right	0.015*** (0.005)	-0.043 (0.054)	0.032 (0.045)	-0.093** (0.046)	0.030 (0.060)	-0.005 (0.007)
Ideology: Center	0.015*** (0.006)	0.050 (0.061)	0.125** (0.052)	0.082 (0.053)	0.312*** (0.069)	0.000 (0.007)
Ideology: Missing	0.039*** (0.007)	0.088 (0.064)	0.124** (0.054)	-0.068 (0.054)	0.139* (0.073)	0.019** (0.008)

¹⁵ The exact wording of these and all survey items reported on in this paper can be found in the AmericasBarometer questionnaires, found online at www.LapopSurveys.org.

¹⁶ The measure is the result of combining left-right (asked in most countries) and liberal-conservative (asked in a few Caribbean countries in place of left-right) self-placement questions.

Crime Victimization	0.005	(0.005)	-0.058	(0.050)	-0.072*	(0.040)	-0.128***	(0.039)	-0.165***	(0.049)	-0.010	(0.006)
Household Member Victimized by Crime	-0.006	(0.005)	0.003	(0.049)	-0.057	(0.042)	-0.044	(0.042)	-0.033	(0.054)	0.003	(0.006)
Perception of Insecurity	-0.025***	(0.007)	-0.225***	(0.067)	-0.258***	(0.054)	-0.187***	(0.055)	-0.243***	(0.075)	0.010	(0.009)
Evaluation of Personal Economic Situation	0.021*	(0.011)	-0.025	(0.067)	0.030	(0.084)	0.101	(0.093)	-0.134	(0.116)	-0.037***	(0.014)
Relatives Living Abroad	-0.006	(0.005)	-0.107**	(0.048)	-0.173***	(0.039)	-0.043	(0.041)	-0.245***	(0.047)	-0.015**	(0.006)
Quintiles of Wealth	0.025***	(0.007)	-0.001	(0.065)	0.113**	(0.052)	0.044	(0.052)	0.159**	(0.068)	0.029***	(0.008)
Female	-0.011***	(0.004)	0.027	(0.039)	0.023	(0.032)	0.110***	(0.029)	0.051	(0.039)	0.009*	(0.005)
Age	0.169***	(0.010)	-0.268**	(0.116)	0.888***	(0.087)	-0.331***	(0.086)	0.942***	(0.119)	0.103***	(0.014)
Education	0.110***	(0.011)	-0.287***	(0.104)	0.432***	(0.079)	0.927***	(0.078)	1.172***	(0.116)	0.067***	(0.012)
Size of the Town of Residence	0.007	(0.008)	0.024	(0.070)	-0.037	(0.053)	-0.079	(0.061)	-0.093	(0.082)	-0.013	(0.009)
	<i>R-squared</i>	0.078	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	<i>n</i>	25,852	25,491	25,491	26,471	26,110						

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses. Country dummies included but not shown here.

* = $p < .10$; ** = $p < .05$; *** = $p < .01$, two-tailed.

Data: AmericasBarometer by LAPOP 2010

Across all dependent variables, we find significant effects for worry about terrorism, and in the expected direction. In other words, as fears of terrorism increase, individuals tend to disagree to a greater extent with the idea that democracy is the best system of government. Citizens are also more likely to support the idea that an authoritarian system governed by strong, iron fisted leaders could be necessary when they feel threatened by terrorist activities.¹⁷ In addition, individuals are less supportive of the notion of partisan-based democracy. The fact that effects for terrorism are found even after controlling for variables related to crime victimization and crime insecurity measures gives us confidence that we are isolating the effects of worry about terrorism on democratic public opinion. The crime and insecurity measures also tend to decrease support for democratic institutions and increase support for strong-unencumbered leaders, though perceptions of insecurity (due to crime in the neighborhood) more strongly predict democratic preferences than crime victimization.

The findings provide strong support for a link between terrorist threat and decreased public support for democratic institutions, checks and balances, and partisan-based political processes. However, one limitation to the survey data analysis is that it is difficult to establish causality. A plausible argument can be made that those with lower support for democracy are more likely to perceive threat.¹⁸ In the next section, we increase our leverage with respect to drawing causal inferences by employing an experimental approach.

¹⁷ In an extended analysis with more dependent variables, we also find that threatened individuals are even more willing to support military coups under certain conditions. Support for democratic values such as public contestation and political tolerance also decline when individuals are worried about terrorism (see Merolla, Montalvo, and Zechmeister N.d.). This latter result is consistent with the finding reported by Edwards et al. (2011), who show that worry about terrorism in the Americas predicts a lack of support for allowing regime critics the right to vote; that variable comprises one part of the political tolerance index we examine here.

¹⁸ To test for endogeneity, we performed a Hausman Specification Error Test on the non-categorical dependent variables. We find no evidence of simultaneity with respect to the *Churchillian Measure*; we do, however, find evidence of simultaneity with respect to other non-categorical measures of democratic values that are not included in

Introducing an Experimental Approach and Reminders of Democratic Values

Experiments provide unparalleled leverage when assessing causal claims about the effects of a context of threat on preferences over democratic institutional arrangements. They also allow us the possibility to test additional hypotheses, in this case whether reminders of democratic values might mitigate against the types of effects of terrorist threat that we have argued and demonstrated above. In a broader project, we intend to examine this question using experiment data from 9 countries. Here we are able to present evidence from a pilot study conducted in Mexico in March of 2012.

The objective of the experiment is to test whether individuals placed in a context of “good” versus “bad”¹⁹ times evaluate politics differently, from the perspective of preferences over democratic leadership and institutional arrangements. In addition, we examine reminders of democratic values because scholarship suggests that such statements can mitigate the negative consequences of security related threats on support for democracy. Recent research in the field of terror management theory demonstrates that the presence of a prime that references democratic values might be able to counteract certain negative tendencies associated with reminding individuals of the vulnerability of their own mortality (Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg 2002). This research suggests (but does not specifically address or test) the notion that the presence of voices promoting tolerance may offset the negative effects of terror threat on support for democracy. Thus, in our project we assess this possibility, with the additional expectation that these effects will be moderated by the type of democracy, on the assumption that reminders of democratic values will resonate more in some contexts than others, namely in more liberal democracies.²⁰ In our broader study, the design allows for comparison across democracies that differ significantly in their scores on indices such as Freedom House’s democracy scores. In the pilot study presented here, we test our experimental design using the case of Mexico, a case with a democracy score that falls in the middle of the broader array of democratic countries in our study. Given its “center” position on this range of democracy “types”, we begin with only soft expectations that reminders of democratic values may have some, but not an overwhelming, influence in mitigating the negative effects of threat on support for democracy.

Finally, the effects of threat on support for democracy may vary depending on other individual factors. With respect to the types of measures we consider here, changes to support for democratic institutional arrangements may vary conditional on the extent to which one supports the incumbent. That is, individuals may be more supportive of a move away from democratic institutions when the individual at the helm is someone they support. We show evidence of this in our pilot study, below.

this concept paper. Therefore, it is possible that – in some cases – there is a reciprocal relationship between one’s concerns about terrorism and democratic values. More details are available from the authors.

¹⁹ In this case, we examine international terrorist threat; in the broader project we also examine domestic terrorist threat, economic decline, and crime as threats.

²⁰ The logic behind this expectation is that reminders of core democratic values may be more likely to fall on deaf ears in less liberal democratic contexts.

Mexico 2012 Pilot Experiment Design

As an initial test of our expectations that conditions of terrorist threat influence preferences over democratic institutional arrangements, we conducted a pilot study in March of 2012 using the case of Mexico. The study was conducted via the internet (using a Qualtrics platform) to a sample administered by a Mexican research firm, Livra, via a contract with IPSOS. The study contained three treatment conditions, and one control. Those in the treatment conditions each were assigned to read a news story intended to make salient the threat posed by international terrorists to Mexico, while the control group did not read anything prior to responding to a battery of questions about democratic preferences. The three terrorist threat conditions differed in that two of them contained an additional paragraph that included a reminder of democratic values. In one case, this reminder was attributed to a non-partisan center and in the other it was attributed to leaders from all sides of the political system; with this, we wanted to see whether the source of the reminder matters. An appendix to this paper contains the treatments. Assignment to treatment was random; the experiment is a between subjects design.

We should note that the status quo environment in Mexico creates a difficult test case for our pilot study. Individuals in the control group in Mexico likely have high levels of concern about security already; it may therefore be difficult to shift attitudes by way of a single newspaper article on a related threat. In other work, we have made a comparison between terrorist threat and a “good times” treatment condition (see Merolla and Zechmeister 2009), which diminishes any concerns about threat, and often find stronger effects than when we compare the terror threat condition to a control group that already is exposed to high levels of threat. For the sake of keeping the pilot small, we omitted the “good times” condition from this particular study.

688 individuals participated in the Mexico threat study. The company administering the panel attempted to draw as close to a nationally representative sample as possible, given a reality in which internet access is not evenly distributed across the population in Mexico. All participants were of Mexican nationality (as indicated by the respondent in a screening question), living in Mexico (as authenticated based on the IP address), and over the age of 17 (as indicated by the respondent in a screening question). 47.6% of the sample is female, and 91.8% self-report living in an “urban” (versus “rural”) area of the country. The mean age is 37.7 and the modal education level is a college degree. The mean level of political interest, on a 1-3 scale, is 2.13. 24.4% of the sample identifies as PANista, 20.9% as PRIista, 7.7% as Perredista, and the remaining report no or other partisanship. Thus, the sample is more urban, more educated, and more conservative in their partisan preferences than the population as a whole. For the purposes of internal validity (the quintessential contribution of an experimental design), such differences are of no concern; however, in generalizing to the broader population, one would need to keep in mind these differences between the sample and the broader adult Mexican population at the time of the study.

The treatment takes the form of a news story, which highlights international terrorist threats to Mexico. The news story is based on actual reports, and modeled after an experimental design we have employed on numerous occasions in our prior research (e.g., Merolla and Zechmeister 2009). The full text of the news story is included in the appendix. As a manipulation check, we included a series of emotions questions following exposure to the treatment, or not. We find that

those who read one of the terror threat articles report greater levels of negative emotions compared to those in the control group. Thus, in general, the treatments had the expected and intended effect of elevating negative feelings such as distress and fear in the terror threat conditions, relative to the control condition.

Mexico 2012 Pilot Study Results

The Mexico pilot study allows us to assess preferences over support for democracy as a regime type, support for unencumbered leadership, and support for democratic processes, as we did with the LAPOP data, as well as look at attitudes toward other democratic processes. We included three questions that appeared in the earlier regression analysis. The first relates to support for democracy as a regime type in that it asks respondents to pick one of three statements as best expressing their view: preference for democracy, authoritarianism, or indifference. The second measures support for iron fist (*mano dura*) rule, while the third asks whether parties are necessary for democracy. With respect to additional attitudes on democratic processes, we included a question tapping support for checks and balances, which specifically asks whether the president should be stronger than congress. Second, we included a measure tapping support for the rule of law, which asks whether the authorities should occasionally be allowed to cross the line to catch criminals.²¹

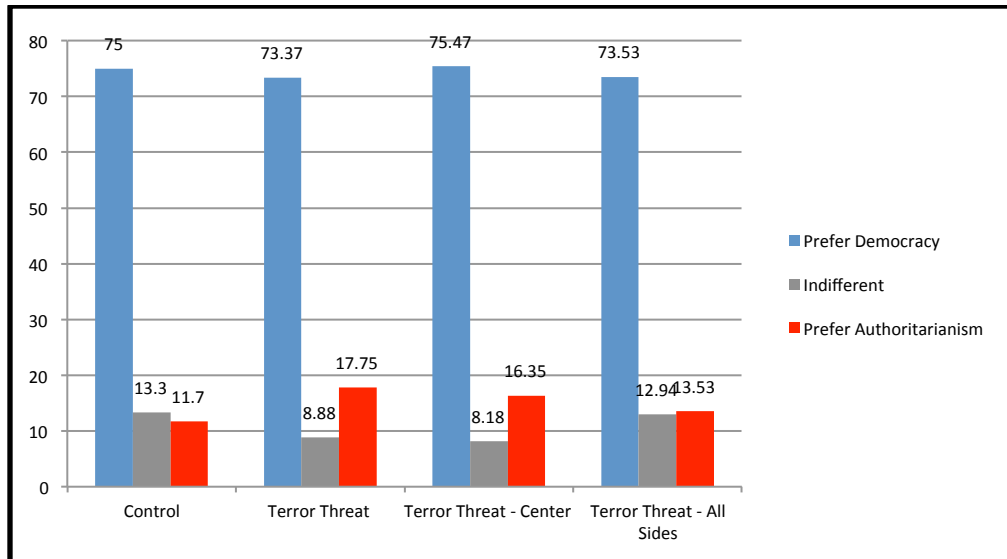
Recall that we expect that those who favor the “in” party, may be more willing to disregard checks and balances in times of threat. To consider the influence of identification with the incumbent party, we ran all analyses first for the pooled sample as a whole, and then for only those who expressed a partisan attachment with the incumbent party, the PAN (168 of the 688 study participants). We report on our findings below; in brief, we find that partisanship matters, in particular for questions related to democratic processes.

Considering the sample as a whole and the first of our measures of support for democracy, Figure 2 shows responses to the regime type question by condition. The nature of the experimental design (random assignment to conditions) and post-diagnostic tests revealing no significant differences across groups mean that we can assess the experiment results using simple difference of proportions/means tests. As the figure below shows, terror threat increases preferences toward an authoritarian option relative to indifference, except in the condition in which a reminder of democratic values was offered by “all sides” of the political system. Within the Terror Threat and Terror Threat-Center conditions, there is a clear difference between the proportion selecting the indifferent outcome and that selecting authoritarianism. Because of the trichotomous nature of the dependent variable, a simple test of those differences is difficult, so we conducted a multinomial logit analysis in which we predicted the support for democracy variable with the threat conditions. We find that those in the Terror Threat and Terror Threat-Center condition are significantly more likely ($p < .05$, one-tailed) to select the authoritarian option over the indifferent option (see appendix, Table A4, for full results). However, there is no significant difference between the control group and the Terror Threat-All Sides condition,

²¹ This question also appears in the LAPOP AmericasBarometer surveys, but we have not yet analyzed it; in the future, we will introduce this analysis into those already reported in the first part of this paper.

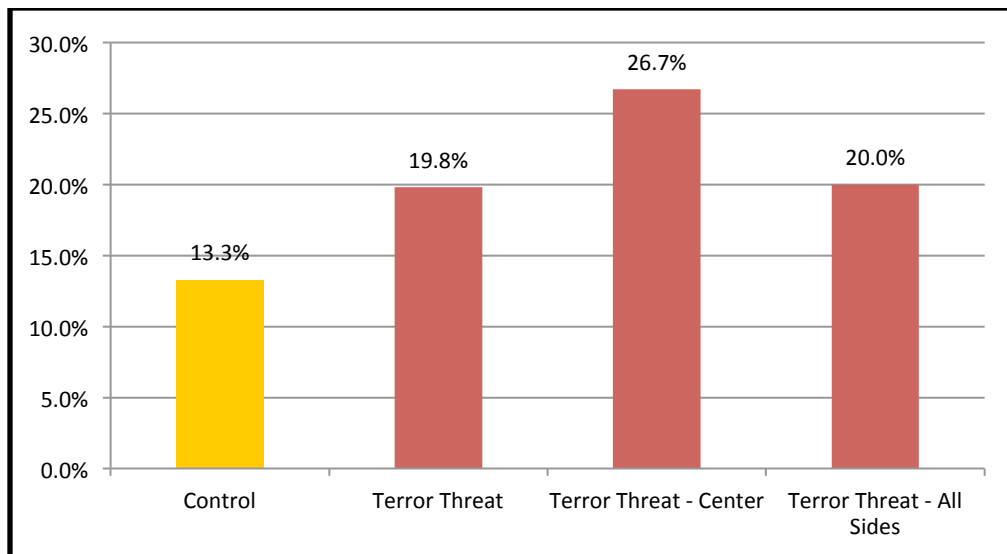
which suggests that the reminder was effective in mitigating the negative effect of terrorist threat.

Figure 2. Support for Democracy by Condition, Full Sample



In Figure 3, we turn to an assessment of a measure of general preference over strong, unencumbered leadership with the question that asks about *mano dura* governance. Figure 3 shows the proportion of respondents from the study as a whole, by condition, who support “iron fist” rule. As the figure shows, there is a tendency for those in the terror threat conditions to report a greater preference for *mano dura* governance. The differences between the Control Group and each of the terror threat conditions are significant at $p \leq 0.05$, one-tailed, using a set of standard differences of proportions tests.

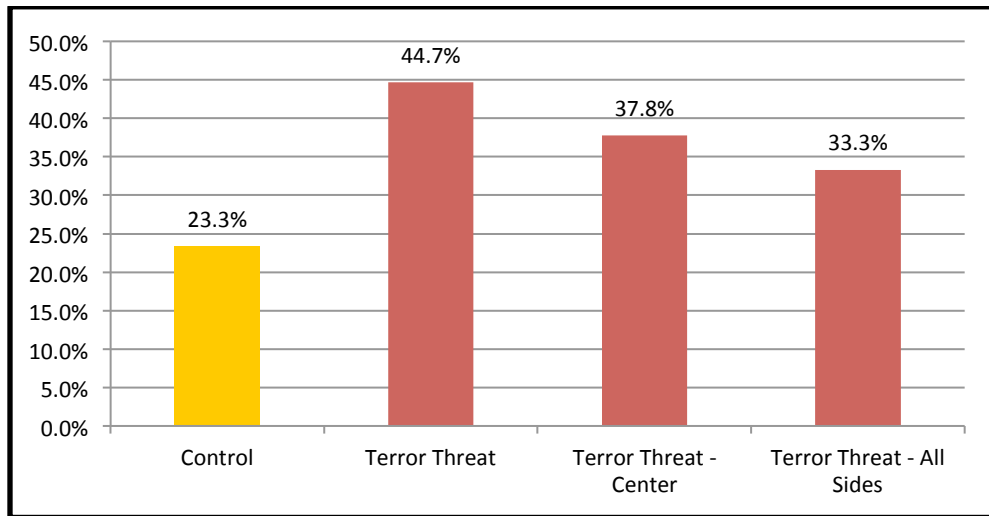
Figure 3. Preferences over “Iron Fist” Rule by Condition, Full Sample



Thus, when we consider questions about support for democracy in general and preferences over unencumbered, strong-fisted leadership, we find that terror threat pushes individuals in general away from the former and toward the latter. We further find some evidence that a reminder of democratic values attributed to all political sides is seemingly effective in preventing a turn toward authoritarianism, but no such the evidence is less straightforward for the case of leadership preferences (here those in the “all sides” condition are less supportive of iron fist rule than those in the “center” reminder condition, but they are simultaneously no less supportive than those in the basic terror threat condition).²²

We now turn to the three measures of support for democratic processes. In this case, our analyses did not reveal significant differences for any of the measures when we considered the sample as a whole. Rather, it is only among PANistas (that is, in-party supporters) that we find effects of terror threat, as we document in the discussion and figures that follow.

Figure 4. Preferences among PANistas for a Strong President, by Condition



First, Figure 4 shows the proportion of PANistas who, by experimental condition, prefer a strong president at the expense of a more balanced system or a system with a stronger congress.²³ The proportion preferring a strong president is highest in the Terror Threat condition, followed by the Terror Threat-Center condition, and the Terror Threat-All Sides. The difference of proportions between the Control and Terror Threat is significant at $p=0.02$, one-tailed; and, between the Control and Terror Threat – Center, it is significant at $p=0.07$, one-tailed. There is no significant difference between the control and Terror Threat-All Sides condition. In this case, then, there is some evidence that both reminders had some effect on mitigating against the negative effects of

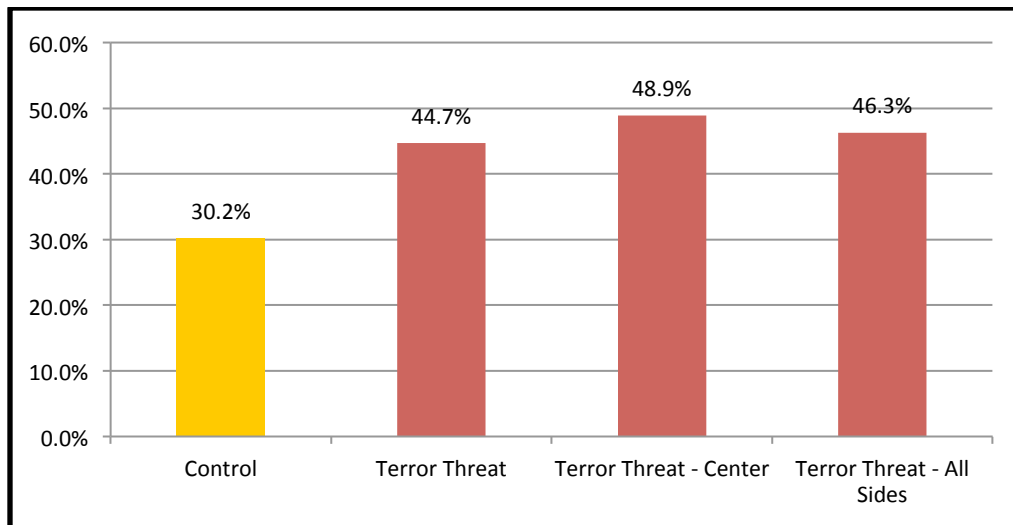
²²We also examined these two dependent variables among only those who indicated an identification with the PAN. In the case of the support for democracy in the abstract measure, our multinomial logit analysis shows that PANistas in the Terror Threat-All Sides and Terror Threat-Center condition are significantly less likely to prefer democracy relative to indifference (the baseline in the analysis) at $p=0.047$ and $p=0.09$, one-tailed. With respect to the second analysis, only 7% of PANistas in the Control condition favor *mano dura*, while 16.7%, 27.3%, and 31% of PANistas favor *mano dura* in the Terror Threat, Terror Threat Center, and Terror Threat-All Sides conditions.

²³ The question asked individuals whether they preferred (numbers in parentheses are for the sample as a whole) a president stronger than the congress (185), a congress stronger than the president (78), or that both are equal in power (423); for the analysis here, we combine these latter two categories into one.

terrorist threat on democratic public opinion and the reminder that references “all sides” appears marginally more effective of the two.

Next we examine support for the rule of law in practice using a question about whether or not the individual believes that, in order to catch criminals, it is okay for the authorities to occasionally cross the line. Figure 5 shows results on this measure, by condition, for PANistas only. We see that there is a tendency for all three terror threat conditions to report more tolerance for violations by authorities of the rule of law to combat crime. Difference of proportions tests between the Control condition, on the one hand, and Terror Threat, Terror Threat-Center, and Terror Threat-All Sides, on the other hand, are significant at $p=0.09$, $p=0.04$, and $p=0.06$, one-tailed, respectively; we find no significant evidence here that reminders of democratic values mitigate against the effects of terrorist threat on preferences over the rule of law.

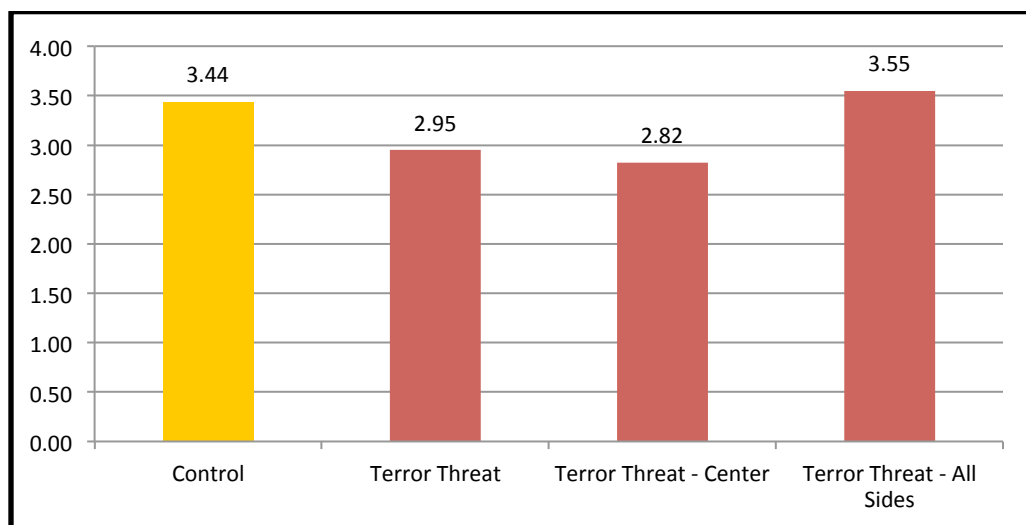
Figure 5. Preferences among PANistas for Crossing Line to Catch Criminals, by Condition



Finally, we examine support for political parties in Figure 6, showing results once again for only those who identify as PANistas in the study. The dependent variable runs from 1-7, where higher values indicate a stronger belief that parties are necessary for democracy. We see that those in the Terror Threat and Terror Threat-Center conditions are less supportive of partisan-based democracy than those in the Control and, as well, than those in the Terror Threat-All Sides condition. The difference of means test for the Control v. Terror Threat comparison falls just outside the bounds of a conventional threshold for statistical analysis (at $p=0.133$, one-tailed), while the difference of means tests for Control v. Terror Threat-Center is significant at $p=0.059$, one-tailed.²⁴ In this case, then, we find again evidence that a reminder of core democratic values presented as coming from a convergence of the political parties effectively diminishes the negative effects of terror threat on democratic public opinion.

²⁴ The differences between Terror Threat and Terror Threat-Center, on the one hand, and Terror Threat-All Sides on the other hand, are significant at $p=0.096$, one-tailed, and $p=0.039$, one-tailed, respectively.

Figure 6. Preferences among PANistas for Partisan-Based Democracy, by Condition



Conclusion

Concerns about terrorism and contexts in which terrorist threat (among other security concerns) are salient are a grim reality of modern politics in the Americas and more generally. Our contention is that such conditions can affect individuals' preferences over democratic leadership and institutional arrangements.

In this paper, we have presented evidence that worry about terrorism is high among a number of individuals, in a number of countries, in the Americas. In analyses of survey data that control for a host of potential confounding factors, we demonstrate a negative relationship between worry about terrorism and support for democracy and balance of power. We then turn to an experimental approach, which allows us to test the causal claim at the core of our project and allows us to introduce reminders of democratic values. In the case of Mexico, we find clear support that exposure to a context of terrorist threat erodes support for democracy and rule of law (i.e., *non-mano dura* governance); and, among supporters of the incumbent's party, terror threat increases presidentialism, erodes the rule of law in practice, and decreases support for partisan-based democracy.

It is important to consider that other factors correlated with preferring the incumbent party in Mexico, the right-leaning PAN (at the time of our study), may factor into the results we have presented here. For example, PANistas may be more democratically conservative by nature and therefore may have been more predisposed toward eschewing standard democratic practices in times of terrorist threat. With the limited set of questions that we asked subjects in the study, and with just this one case, we cannot disentangle the distinct effects of ideology (or authoritarian predispositions, if applicable) and identification with the incumbent party. However, in our broader study, we will have instances of left-leaning incumbent parties and we will ask a battery of questions about individuals' psychological predispositions for authoritarianism, need for closure, and perceptions of a dangerous world. With these data, we hope to identify the extent to which the types of effects we find for the PANistas in our Mexico 2012 study are truly due to

their allegiance to the in-party or perhaps also influenced by their particular orientations toward order and control.

We find here some, but only moderate, evidence that reminders of democratic values curb these tendencies; while there is inconsistency with respect to which source of reminder is more effective, there is at least some evidence overall that a reminder from “all sides” of the political system is comparatively more potent than reminders from institutions one step removed from the political core. Are these reminders more effective for certain individuals, perhaps within certain contexts, for whom and where reminders of democratic values motivate resolve to defend democratic practices and processes even in times of security threat? This is yet another question that our broader dataset will shed light on, with comparisons of individual level data across eight countries.

While members of the mass public may clamor for a strong, centralized executive institutional arrangement and be willing to tolerate violations of the rule of law in times of crisis, another important question is whether such institutional shifts are or are not effective in resolving the threat. Answers to this question might inform us as to whether there exists a feedback loop, whereby effective hardline responses to crisis convince the public to continue to support less liberal democratic arrangements under conditions of threat, terrorism or otherwise.

In our broader project, we intend to examine whether and how these relationships vary across countries, across types of threat (expanding out of just terrorist threat to other types of threats noted above), and across conditions that are accompanied, or not, by reminders of democratic values. We also hope to begin the search for feedback loops, as governments react to public demands for strong-handed policies against perceived terrorist threats. What we have presented here, then, represents a first look at some these questions, but one that contains some important and suggestive findings.

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Appendix.

A1. Terror Threat Condition

Temores a Ataques Terroristas en Territorio Mexicano

Expertos advierten que México está al borde de experimentar un gran ataque terrorista.

De acuerdo a varios informes, evidencia interceptada por agencias de inteligencia apunta a la existencia de un plan a gran escala por parte de Al Qaeda y sus afiliados para llevar a cabo una serie de atentados con fuerza letal a través de varios países.

Una triste realidad del terrorismo hoy en día es que todos los países son vulnerables, incluyendo México. De acuerdo con una encuesta reciente del Proyecto de Opinión Pública de América Latina, la mayoría de los mexicanos está algo o muy preocupada por la posibilidad de un ataque terrorista violento.

Los planes y ataques terroristas han crecido en complejidad y letalidad en la última década. Ataques mortales han sido realizados en diversos países alrededor del mundo, dejando a ciudadanos de muy diversos países con un sentimiento de inseguridad cada vez mayor. Se ha informado que la red terrorista Al Qaeda estuvo especialmente satisfecha con el ataque del 2008 en Bombay, India; en ese ataque, un pequeño grupo de terroristas bien armados asesinó a casi 200 hombres, mujeres y niños.

Al Qaeda ha manifestado su intención de implementar, de la misma manera, ataques coordinados y letales como una demostración de su fuerza. La estrategia de infiltrar un área civil altamente poblada con armas y explosivos se considera fácil de ejecutar y notoriamente difícil de evitar. Mientras que Al Qaeda prioriza zonas turísticas, los terroristas también contemplan atacar sistemas de transporte público, centros comerciales y eventos deportivos.

Interpol menciona la posibilidad de que los terroristas lancen ataques con armas biológicas o químicas como una "preocupación particularmente urgente." La forma más probable de un ataque químico es ricina, una toxina blanca en polvo tan letal que sólo una partícula puede matar si es inhalada o llega al torrente sanguíneo. Informes de inteligencia reciente indican que los afiliados de Al Qaeda en Yemen han estado trabajando con grandes cantidades de frijoles de ricino, el material vegetal necesario para hacer ricina.

Hablando del historial de ataques, un ex analista de seguridad ofreció esta conclusión pesimista: "los terroristas aún tienen inocentes en su mira y una ferviente voluntad para asesinarlos. Ellos están trabajando continuamente en la planeación de nuevos ataques así como en el perfeccionamiento de sus métodos." En vista de los recientes rumores y evidencia proveniente de los informes de seguridad, parece que la pregunta ya no es si habrá un ataque en suelo mexicano, sino cuándo, cuántos y con qué tipo de consecuencias mortales.

Con la preocupación por la posibilidad de un ataque terrorista a gran escala a la alza, expertos en seguridad en México piden a las personas estar más atentos que nunca.

Continuar



A2. Terror Threat – Center Condition (same as above, but this paragraph at the very end):

Con la preocupación por la posibilidad de un ataque terrorista a gran escala a la alza, expertos en seguridad en México piden a las personas estar más atentos que nunca. Al mismo tiempo, el Centro por los Valores Democráticos en México emitió una declaración el día de ayer urgiendo a los ciudadanos a proteger la democracia no sólo a través de la vigilancia, sino también a través de "la práctica de valores democráticos fundamentales, como la libertad y la tolerancia; y el respeto a los procedimientos democráticos fundamentales, tales como la práctica de elecciones libres y justas y un poder judicial independiente."

A3. Terror Threat – All Sides Condition (same as above, but this paragraph at the very end):

Con la preocupación por la posibilidad de un ataque terrorista a gran escala a la alza, expertos en seguridad en México piden a las personas estar más atentos que nunca. Al mismo tiempo, los líderes de todos lados del sistema político mexicano emitieron una declaración el día de ayer urgiendo a los ciudadanos a proteger la democracia no sólo a través de la vigilancia, sino también a través de "la práctica de valores democráticos fundamentales, como la libertad y la tolerancia; y el respeto a los procedimientos democráticos fundamentales, tales como la práctica de elecciones libres y justas y un poder judicial independiente."

A4. Full Results of Multinomial Logit Analysis of Support for Democracy, 2012 Mexico Pilot Study, Full Sample

	Prefer Democracy / Indifference	Prefer Authoritarianism / Indifference
Constant	1.730*** (0.217)	-0.128*** (0.292)
Terror Threat	0.382 (0.349)	0.821** (0.431)
Terror Threat – Center	0.493 (0.364)	0.821** (0.448)
Terror Threat – All Sides	0.007 (0.317)	0.172 (0.418)
N	686	
Prob > chi2	0.4050	
Pseudo R2	0.006	

***p<0.001, two-tailed; **p<0.05, one-tailed.