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Jorge Buendía

UNCERTAINTY AND REGIME TRANSITION:
THE MEXICAN EXPERIENCE
Introduction

One of the key characteristics of transitions to democracy is the uncertainty the process entails. In their classic book O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986:3) describe their attempts to “capture the extraordinary uncertainty of the transition” and how it affects the outcome of the transition process. Likewise, Bunce and Csánadi in their analysis of Eastern European transitions argue that uncertainty is the central characteristic of the period and propose it should be “the point of departure for analyzing postcommunism” (1993:273). More recently, some efforts have been made to model in game-theoretical terms the fluidity and uncertainty of political life in regimes undergoing political transition (Calvert and Johnson, 1997).

Uncertainty is also receiving more attention in analysis of established democracies. It is a feature that permeates most political interactions whether they occur in consolidated democracies or transitional polities: “Uncertainty appears to be a characteristic of all political life” (Dahl quoted by Cioffi-Revilla, 1998: 3). “Normal politics is not so settled and, therefore, ...transitional politics is not so uniquely indeterminate as is commonly supposed” (Calvert and Johnson, 1997:3). Recent political science works on the subject have attempted to deal with the impact of uncertainty on institutions (Downs and Rocke), on voting behavior (Álvarez, 1997; Bartels, 1986) and, more ambitiously, on political life in general (Cioffi-Revilla, 1998). The consensus then seems to be that uncertainty is a general feature of politics heightened during transitional periods.

Notwithstanding the increasing role uncertainty now plays in political analysis there is a lack of empirical evidence on the issue. Direct survey measures of uncertainty were only recently introduced (1995 and 1996) in the National Election Studies conducted in the United States (Álvarez and Glasgow, 1998). Public opinion data on uncertainty during regime transitions are also missing and therefore we can only make educated guesses on important questions such as how pervasive uncertainty is during such periods? In which areas should we expect uncertainty to prevail? Does uncertainty affect all people alike or are there clear and distinguishable patterns? How can uncertainty be reduced during regime transitions? These are some of the questions that I will try to answer in this paper.

I will focus in particular on three areas where I expect uncertainty to be widespread during regime transition: 1) uncertainty about political stability; 2) uncertainty about future economic performance and 3) uncertainty about political institutions, namely political parties. In the particular case of Mexico, where the same party has governed since 1929, there is a high degree of uncertainty regarding alternation of power, in particular what will happen to political stability and
uncertainty and regime transition: the Mexican experience

Economic performance if the ruling party loses. As Mexican opposition parties have never held national office, voters should then also be uncertain about their likely performance. If voters dislike uncertainty this should benefit the PRI which should be better known than the other parties.

The data used in this paper come from 1) a pre-electoral national survey conducted in the weekend prior to the July 6th 1997 mid-term elections. It was carried out by Consulta, S.A. de C.V (N=1200) and the author had a role in designing the questions here analyzed; 2) a post-electoral national survey, the Mexican version of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project, conducted in the aftermath of the election (N=2033). The questionnaire was designed by researchers at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE) and the field work carried out by Consulta, S.A. de C.V. and Berumen and Associates, S.C. Again, the author had a role designing the questions here analyzed.

The analysis of uncertainty about political stability and economic performance will be based on the pre-electoral survey. My concern is with the uncertainty Mexicans face when casting their vote: how certain or uncertain they are about political stability if the PRI loses the election. This type of questions can only be asked in a pre-electoral survey. In a post-electoral survey voters already know the outcome of the election and what its impact on political stability was.

Measurement of uncertainty about the governing capabilities of Mexico's three major parties was done in both surveys. However, the post-electoral survey is richer in measures on items such as political sophistication, mass media exposure and political ideologies (plus it has a larger sample size). The analysis of uncertainty regarding political parties is then based on this survey.

The paper is structured in two parts: first, I demonstrate that uncertainty about political stability and economic performance is widespread in Mexico. I argue that uncertainty is of an endogenous nature as politicians, through their campaign strategies, try to increase the uncertainty about an alternation of power that has never occurred in Mexico. I then proceed to analyze the determinants of this uncertainty. I focus on how the dynamics of regime transition affect uncertainty about political stability, in particular if 1) alternation of power at the local level and 2) local post-electoral conflicts, reduce or increase Mexicans' uncertainty about political stability if the PRI were to lose.

In the second part I analyze the uncertainty about political parties and its determinants. I center on how holding office at the state and municipal level reduces uncertainty about opposition parties. I also assess the effectiveness of the parties' media strategies in promoting uncertainty about their political rivals.
When asked to evaluate likely outcomes dependent upon election results, Mexican voters face a highly difficult task. They can only make educated guesses, if at all, if the election winner is the incumbent Institutional Revolutionary Party. Guessing what the opposition might do is for many voters a rather impossible task. When participants in one focus group were asked how their personal finances would be affected if Congress were to be in opposition hands, one of them answered candidly:

“I am not certain about it. First, we have never had a majority in Congress from the opposition. It could be an improvement, it could be in detriment of our economy, I do not know. I can not foresee it clearly because we have never had such an experience”.

Uncertainty also pervaded voters’ judgments when asked to evaluate Mexico’s political stability if a party other than the PRI were to govern. People gave answers like “I would need to have lived a sexenio under the government of another party to make the comparison”, “It is hard [to give an answer] because we have not lived through it”, “You can imagine the worse, or the best”.

Politicians, mainly from the ruling party, have taken advantage of this state of affairs. Their pronouncements have fueled voters’ uncertainty about what might happen if the PRI were to lose the elections. Fidel Velazquez, who dominated Mexico’s labour movement for more than fifty years and recently passed away, was famous for his declarations. One of his most famous was the following: “We the revolutionaries came to power through the bullets. Whoever wants to get rid of us can not do it with votes he will have to do it with bullets as well” (Quoted by Aguilar Camín: 72). The ruling party, on the other hand, has traditionally emphasized its record as provider of political stability: one of its slogans on the eve of its 60th anniversary (1989) contended that the PRI had provided Mexicans with “60 years of stability and social peace”.

Uncertainty is then of an endogenous nature: voters are uncertain about alternation of power and likely opposition performance because such experience has been missing in Mexico. PRI politicians, on the other hand, try to increase voters’ uncertainty through their statements and political ads while the opposition offers counter arguments to the PRI’s strategy.

1 Eight focus groups were conducted to evaluate the questionnaire of the Mexican version of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project. The composition of the groups were as follows: 2 among middle-income men aged 30-45 years old; 1 among low-income women, 26-40 years old; 2 among low-income women aged 30-45 years old; 1 among middle-income women; 1 among low-income men; 1 among low-income men aged 30-45 years old. All sessions were conducted in Mexico City. The remarks from focus groups I report are drawn from the transcripts of such focus groups. The quotation above is from a middle-income male aged 30-45 years old.

2 Remarks from middle low-income women aged 30-45 years old.
In order to substantiate my assertion about the endogeneous nature of uncertainty, in the next subsection I will refer to the electoral campaign strategies pursued by the PRI in 1997 as well as to the responses opposition parties gave to the PRI. I will base my discussion on statements made by politicians and on the analysis of TV ads broadcast during the electoral campaign (March1-July 2, 1997).

**Uncertainty and the 1997 Electoral Campaign**

The 1997 electoral process was surrounded by continuous references to the possibility of economic and political chaos if the opposition were to win. The PRI claims did probably have an impact as voters did not have information to verify the validity of such claims.

As soon as Roque González Villanueva was named PRI president in late 1996, it was clear that the upcoming electoral campaign would have a strong negative content. González Villanueva claimed that the government’s economic recovery program would be in jeopardy if the PRI were to lose: “another [partisan] choice would be very risky because it will work against economic recovery” (La Jornada, 12/17/96, p. 5).

This theme was echoed in a TV ad aired during the early phase of the campaign (March and April). The ad begins with a sunny sky which suddenly turns dark, and a thunderstorm begins. The ad is worth quoting at length as it is the best example of this type of argument. The message of the ad is as follows:3 “Everything can be lost from one day to the next: your family, your education and your job. What you have achieved with your effort and experience. The PAN and PRD offer a change as if by magic. This is not possible and risks what we have. You decide the future of Mexico. Vote for the PRI” (italics are mine). A variant of this ad substituted the name of the opposition parties with the term “other parties”. The ad was broadcast 57 times in the major TV networks (most of them in March:45).

Obviously, opposition parties contested the PRI’s strategy. Certainly past memories of post-electoral conflicts, plus the possibility of divided government and conflict among the Executive and Legislative branches, made voters receptive to the PRI arguments. The opposition strategy was to communicate to voters that a PRI defeat would not mean political chaos or economic instability. Felipe Calderón, president of PAN, even offered a proposal of a national political agreement to facilitate alternation of power with stability. And both the PAN and the PRD tried to calm investors: They assured that in case the opposition were to win the majority in

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3 The full text in Spanish is as follows: “Sí se puede perder todo de la noche a la mañana: tu familia, tu educación, tu trabajo. Lo has logrado con esfuerzo y experiencia. El PAN y el PRD ofrecen un cambio como por arte de magia. Esto no es posible y se arriesga lo que tenemos. Tú decides el futuro de México. Vota por el PRI. Porque México eres tú, México es PRIMERO” (la última frase fue uno de los lemas de campaña del PRI).
Congress, investments and foreign capitals would be guaranteed and there would be
governability because nobody wanted destabilization (La Jornada, 01/22/97). López
Obrador, president of the PRD, also declared that “if the opposition wins, my party
will maintain an attitude of respect and institutionalization towards the Federal
Executive and there will be no problem of ungovernability” (El Universal,
01/24/97).

The PRD TV ads, unlike those of the PAN, took direct issue with PRI’s
statements that if the PRI were to lose everything would be at risk. Two of its ads
answered directly the PRI ad quoted above. In one of them two unmiddle-aged persons
are talking. One of them says: “Hey, if you don’t vote for the [a beep sounds
eliminating the name of a party] you lose everything”. The other person answers:
“What? Because of them [the priistas] I lost my job, my property and even my
children’s school. This July 6th I vote for the sun [the PRD symbol]”.

The policies the opposition would pursue while in office were also the focus
of the PRI’s negative campaign. As there was no previous information on a national
scale about it, voters were likely to be influenced by this type of arguments. Attacks
on the PAN centered around the latter’s traditional opposition to labor and
educational policies advocated by previous PRI governments (which are based on
what is loosely known as the “ideology of the Mexican Revolution”). PRI politicians
and labor leaders associated with the PRI argued that if the PAN were to win the
election labor achievements would experience a severe setback. PRI’s candidate for
mayor of Mexico City argued that a PAN administration “would destroy the Federal
Labor Law and dispose with the labor unions” (La Jornada, 4/3/97). PAN’s feeble
support for public education was also a subject of criticisms: “If the opposition wins,
instead of a change it will be a step backward. We have to support the PRI to
continue having free and lay education, lunchrooms, scholar breakfasts... for the
other parties this is only electoral clientelism...” (La Jornada, 1/27/97).

PRI TV ads emphasized the risks of an opposition victory in the fields of
education and health services. The message of the ads was practically identical
except that in one the reference was to education and in the other the reference was
to public health services (obviously the background images were different): “We
Mexicans have built an important system of public education. Millions of children

Another PRI ad addresses the PRI attack that the opposition offers a change as if it were to
happen by an act of magic. In this ad a woman declares: “How come it is not possible to change
things as if by magic? If on July 6th we get rid of corrupt politicians this country will improve as if by
magic [the woman gestures and, as if by magic, a vase full of sunflowers (the other PRD symbol)
appears]. Cross the sun”.

Diódoro Guerra, Director of the National Polytechnic Institute (NPI), the second largest
public university in Mexico which was originally created as an university for students of blue-collar
background, had also something to say on this issue: “The educational project of the NPI will be
under risk if a party promotes a different model of the nation than the one that originated this
university [the PRI’s model]” (La Jornada, 2/12/97).
and young people go daily to school. We will defend a free education and will improve its quality. That is our proposal and compromise. We should not interrupt the effort. We should defend what you have built. Reason your vote” (italics are mine)." This is a subtler message than the one discussed previously but the content is similar: opposition will get rid of public education and public health services. The use of the verb “to defend” which means to guard from attack is self-explanatory. The two ads combined were broadcast 120 times during the last two months of the campaign (60 ads in May and 60 in June).

An even subtler message by the PRI has a woman talking about different things. In one part she says: “We want a better Mexico, a safer Mexico, one that is peaceful, and one with higher salaries” (Queremos un México mejor, más seguro, que mantenga la paz y con mejores salarios). This ad dominated the last part of the electoral campaign with 89 repetitions during the last two weeks of June.

As uncertainty about what the opposition would do in office was a major theme of the PRI campaign, the PAN addressed the issue directly by emphasizing their experience on government. In one TV ad the background image has figures with the number of the major elected offices Acción Nacional held by 1997: 4 states, 12 state capitals and 250 municipalities. The message, read with those figures in the background, was as follows: “The PAN is not a proposal for government. The PAN is a reality. Today one out of three Mexicans are already governed by the PAN. This July 6th vote for a change, vote for the PAN. Do it for the Mexico we all want to see”. Two other TV ads by the PAN emphasized the achievements of the states they governed and the leadership of their governors. Both ads ended with “Actions say more than words. The PAN governs and governs better. Vote for the real change”.

The 1997 electoral campaign was then characterized by pronouncements anticipating economic and political problems if the opposition were to win. The existence of guerrilla movements in Chiapas and Guerrero probably made Mexicans sensitive to issues of political stability. In the next section I will evaluate if those concerns were shared by the Mexican mass public.

Uncertainty, Political Stability and Economic Performance

We have data since 1988 to document citizens’ perceptions about the possibility of political instability in case the opposition wins the elections (graph 1). As we can

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6 The text in Spanish reads as follows: “Los mexicanos hemos construido un importante sistema de educacion publica. Millones de ninos y jovenes acuden diariamente a clases. Defendemos la educacion gratuita y elevaremos su calidad. Esa es nuestra propuesta y compromiso. No interrumpamos el esfuerzo. Defendamos lo que has construido. Razona tu voto”. The person who expressed this message was Esteban Moctezuma, then candidate for the Senate (in the case of the public health ad the person speaking was another candidate for the Senate, Yolanda Leñero).
see, the percentage of people sharing this perception is surprisingly stable between 1988 and 1994. This makes evidence that this concern did not originate in the election of 1994 as a consequence of the Zapatista guerrilla in the southern state of Chiapas. As argued here, the concern is related to the uncertainty inherent in a regime transition and the lack of information about the opposition parties. The chart shows that in 1997 the percentage of people considering the possibility of political instability due to a triumph of the opposition decreased. The many electoral victories the opposition achieved in the 1995 and 1996 local elections, and the absence of any political conflict due to such victories, probably explain the decrease. We have seen that the PAN used in its electoral campaign the fact that alternation of power, even while at the local level, had already occurred in many parts of Mexico without any negative consequence.

Graph 1
Public Perception on the Possibility of Political Instability if an Opposition Party Wins the Elections.7

7 The 1988 and 1991 data are from Domínguez and McCann (p.133) and the 1994 data come from a poll made by the Technical Advisory, Presidency of the Republic. Although similar in meaning the wording of the questions varies across surveys: in 1988 and 1991 the question was: If a party other than the PRI comes to power, do you think there would be any problem with the country's social peace or do you think there would not be problems with the country's social peace? In 1994 the format of the question was different: people were asked to answer "yes" or "no" to different statements. One of them was: if an opposition party comes to power, there will be political instability. Those who are reported here as answering "yes" are those who agreed with the statement and those who are reported as "no" are those who disagree partially or completely with the statement. In 1997 the question was: if a party other than the PRI wins the election, do you think political instability might arise in Mexico?
The decline of the monopoly of the PRI over local offices has been steady: In 1982, 97% of the municipalities were governed by the PRI. By the end of 1997 this percentage had dropped to 56% (Casar). Insofar as the experience of government reduces the uncertainty on opposition parties it is likely that the levels of uncertainty on Mexico’s opposition parties is now lower that it was ten years ago (see below).

Unfortunately the surveys from 1988 to 1994 do not allow to distinguish if political instability would ensue because the ruling party would not accept its defeat or because the new government would be unable to maintain political stability. These issues might be related (political instability caused by the former ruling party) but it is important to distinguish between them.

In the 1997 survey we asked why people believe in the possibility of political instability. Are they fearful of the opposition inexperience? Do they fear the incumbent party will not recognize an opposition victory and will fight back? Or, in the case of mid-term elections, do they fear conflicts between a Congress dominated by the opposition and the head of the executive branch? The results of the poll show that among those who believed in the possibility of political instability, 52% of them answered that political instability would arise because the incumbent would not accept its defeat. A quarter of them (23%) feared the possibility of conflicts among Congress and the Executive and 19% mentioned inexperience on the part of the opposition.

As discussed previously, the possibility of an economic downturn if the PRI were to lose the elections was also an issue during the campaign even though it was downplayed in its later phases. There was concern that political conflicts among parties would lead to capital flight but there was also a lack of trust in the economic program of the PRD, the leftist party. The results of the survey show that 39 percent of the interviewees expected economic decline if the PRI were to lose. Among the reasons they gave for such expectation were ungovernability due to conflicts between the President and Congress (41%), inexperience on the part of the opposition (29%) and capital flight (24%). On the other hand, 41% thought nothing would happen to the economy if the opposition were to win the election (19% could not give an opinion on the issue).

In order to assess the degree of uncertainty Mexicans have while thinking what would happen to political stability and economic performance if the PRI were to lose, the survey here analyzed introduced a follow-up question to measure voters’ degree of uncertainty. After the interviewees gave their opinion on political stability or economic performance they were asked how certain they were of such judgment. The question follows the format suggested by Michael Álvarez to measure

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8 For instance, the Mexican Association of Banks declared that “the economic plans the PRD is introducing can cause massive capital flights. This worries the private sector and not just the banks” (The Wall Street Journal, 6/13/97).
uncertainty and which has been included in recent National Election Studies surveys.\(^9\)

As it can be seen in table 1 almost half of the sample (47\%) is uncertain or somewhat uncertain when evaluating what will happen to political stability if the PRI loses. Those who believe political instability will rise are a little bit more uncertain than those who believe it will not happen (39 and 33 percent respectively). This confirms the hypothesis advanced previously that uncertainty is pervasive during a regime transition. The Mexican mass public is not only divided in their expectations about what will happen but also their judgments are not very stable as many of them can not attach a high degree of probability to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Uncertainty on the Political Situation if the PRI Loses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Certain</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Uncertain</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>533</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding the issue of economic performance, about half of the interviewees (48\%) are uncertain on the issue. Like in the case of political stability, those who have a pessimist opinion (economic instability) are slightly more likely to be uncertain than those who have a positive one (38 to 31 percent respectively). Although those who are uncertain on political stability are more likely to be uncertain on the economic issue. The relationship is far from being perfect: the correlation (Pearson’s) between the two uncertainty measures is .55. Overall, if we consider both issues, 59\% of the Mexican mass public is uncertain about political stability and/or economic performance if the PRI were to lose.

\(^9\) The question on political stability is as follows: if a party other than the PRI wins the election, do you think political instability might arise in Mexico? After they answer yes or no, interviewees were asked: how certain are you that there will be political (in)stability if the PRI loses?: very certain, certain, somewhat uncertain or uncertain.
Table 2
Uncertainty on the State of the Economy if the PRI Loses\textsuperscript{10}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Economic Stability</th>
<th>Economic Instability</th>
<th>Don't Know</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Certain</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certain</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Uncertain</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>460</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>1177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What Determines Uncertainty?

As argued at the beginning, there is agreement that political uncertainty abounds in almost all type of regimes but it is heightened during regime transitions. The appropriate research design to test this hypothesis would require a cross-national analysis where the unit of analysis would be each country and the dependent variable its level of uncertainty on different issues. The sample should include established democracies, transitional regimes and even authoritarian ones. Such research design can not be used at this time because of the lack of data. As I said at the beginning, the empirical analysis of uncertainty is still in its infancy and most of the relevant work has been done in the field of U.S. voting behavior. I am therefore unable to use such a research design.

Instead, my research design will be cross-sectional, with the individual as the unit of analysis. The analysis will be based on only one country, México. This makes harder to distinguish how the dynamics of regime transition affect the degree of uncertainty. In other words, as México is undergoing regime transition this variable is constant in our research design. Under such conditions, assessing how uncertainty is influenced by México's regime transition becomes a formidable task. There is, however, a way to cope with this problem: political change in Mexico has not been uniform. As I said before, PRI's electoral strength has been declining and by the end of 1997 44% of Mexico's municipalities were in the hands of the opposition (plus six governorships). Urban areas and the northern parts of México have traditionally been strongholds of the opposition. Although this within-country variance is probably not as large as cross-country variance, it allows us to test how the dynamics of regime transition affect the degree of uncertainty.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} The question is as follows: Do you think there will be negative consequences for the country’s economy if a party other than the PRI wins the election? After saying yes or no voters were asked how certain they were of their opinion: very certain, certain, somewhat uncertain or uncertain.

\textsuperscript{11} I had however to restrict my analysis only to uncertainty on political stability and political parties. Alternation of power at the local level does not have any influence on uncertainty on economic issues as local governments do not deal with the management of the economy.
In order to do so I added three aggregate variables to the survey here analyzed: 1) a variable measuring if the respondent lived in a state where alternation of power had already occurred; 2) a variable measuring if the respondent lived in a municipality where alternation of power had occurred within the past three municipal elections; 3) a variable measuring if, since the Salinas government, any post-electoral conflict occurred in the state where the respondent lives. The hypothesis behind the first two variables is that a person's degree of uncertainty (about what will happen if the PRI loses at the national level) will be lower if he has already experienced alternation of power at the state or local level (or higher if he has not experienced any). The hypothesis of the third variable is that a person living in a state where post-electoral conflict has occurred is more likely to be uncertain about political stability if the PRI loses the election. Post-electoral conflicts are proof that political parties do not accept the electoral outcome and resort to means other than the vote to alter the result. Voters who have lived through such experiences should be more likely to be uncertain than voters who have not had that experience.

Individual-level variables were also included in the statistical model. They are the following:

4) If, as suggested by Downs, uncertainty is inversely related to information we would expect the more educated and more politically involved to be less uncertain about political issues. Empirical analyses conducted by Bartels and Álvarez and his colleagues show that this is indeed the case in the U.S. (Bartels, 1986; Álvarez, 1995, 1997; Álvarez and Glasgow, 1998). Therefore items measuring level of education and interest in politics were included as independent variables.

5) A related variable deals with voters' most preferred source of information. The expectation is that those who prefer newspapers over TV or radio as preferred source of information will be more politically sophisticated and hence less uncertain.

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12 I would like to thank Alain de Remes for generously sharing his impressive data base on municipal elections which allowed me to code this variable.
13 I would like to thank Todd Eisenstadt for crucial advise on the coding and classification of postelectoral conflicts.
14 I am aware that introducing aggregate data in the survey introduces a problem of multiple level analysis (aggregate versus individual level variables). I have for the moment ignored this problem.
6) Because the dependent variable deals with uncertainty about political instability if the PRI were to lose, I used as independent variables the uncertainty voters have regarding each party. The hypothesis has two variants: 1) both types of uncertainty are related and therefore I should expect that if a person is uncertain about a party, including the PRI, he is more likely to be uncertain about political instability or economic performance; 2) As the dependent variable deals with the hypothetical case of the PRI losing the election, being uncertain about the PAN or the PRD should have a greater effect than being uncertain about the PRI. The PRI is equivalent to the status quo. If people are uncertain on the PRI they can still base their judgment on the status quo.

7) The rest of the variables in the equation are included as control variables. Foremost among these were party identification and traditional socio-demographic variables such as age, occupation, place of residence and so on.

The dependent variable, uncertainty regarding political stability, is ordinal (very certain, certain, somewhat uncertain and uncertain). An ordered probit regression however turned out to be a very poor fit of the data with almost all predicted values falling into the very certain and certain categories. Therefore I coded the dependent variable as a dichotomous choice where voters who are uncertain and very uncertain are coded as 1 and those who are very certain and certain are coded as 0.

The results of the statistical analysis are shown in table 3 (appendix). The main findings (and non-findings) are the following:

1) Previous experience with post-electoral conflict increases the probability of being uncertain about political instability. Conflicts between parties have made voters more wary about political change. If voters dislike uncertainty post-electoral conflicts may lead them to stick with the better known option, namely the PRI.

2) Experience with alternation of power does not affect voters’ degree of uncertainty regarding political stability. Respondents who have lived always under a PRI government at the state and/or municipal level do not

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15 A dummy variable was included to assess if post-electoral conflicts in states where no alternation of power had ever occurred increased the degree of uncertainty. It does not.
differ in their degree of uncertainty with voters who live or have lived under opposition governments. There are three likely explanations for this non-finding: first, voters do not infer from local experiences what will happen at the national level; 2) alternation of power influences uncertainty on political stability through the degree of information voters have on the governing party. That is, alternation of power reduces uncertainty on opposition parties which in turn diminishes uncertainty on political stability (see below and next section); 3) There is not enough variance in the survey. The percentage of respondents in the survey living in municipalities where alternation of power has occurred is only 18% (this is a problem not present in the post-electoral survey as it covers a larger number of municipalities).

3) Uncertainty about political parties is related positively to uncertainty about political stability. There are however important differences in the impact of partisan uncertainty on political stability. Being uncertain about the PRD has the largest effect on uncertainty on political stability while uncertainty on the PRI has the lowest effect. This is consistent with the fact that, among those who believe there will be political instability if the PRI loses, 57% consider a PRD government as the most conducive to political conflict (32% mentioned the PAN).

4) The more educated a person the less uncertain a respondent is regarding political instability. This is consistent with findings from other settings. Interest in politics, on the other hand, did not achieve statistical significance although the relationship is in the expected direction: the more interested in politics the less uncertain a person is.

5) Newspaper readers are not more likely to be less uncertain. Although the relationship is in the expected direction it was short of achieving statistical significance.

6) Among the control variables only governmental workers were less likely to be uncertain about political stability if the PRI were to lose. A likely explanation for this finding is the following: because of the nature of their job these are people often involved in political issues and therefore they are more politically sophisticated than the rest. If political sophistication is
inversely related to uncertainty as the theory suggests this is the reason why they are less uncertain.\textsuperscript{16}

To summarize this section, alternation of power at the local level does not reduce the uncertainty voters have about alternation of power at the national level. Local post-electoral conflicts, on the other hand, do increase uncertainty about political stability if the PRI loses. If alternation of power at the local level does not seem to directly mitigate the uncertainty of alternation of power at the national level it is likely it has an impact through the information voters have about parties (and therefore an indirect impact on uncertainty on political stability). In the next section I will evaluate this possibility.

\section*{II. - Uncertainty about Parties' Performance}

Political parties provide information through their behavior in office. Performance in office is a central element of voters' evaluation of parties. In some regime transitions voters are highly uncertain about parties because they have to choose among new parties which have never been in office. In some cases the uncertainty is compounded by the fact that dozens of parties compete in the founding election. Turner (1993: 341) reports that 161 parties registered for the 1977 Spanish elections while Greek voters in 1974 had to choose among 46 parties.

The above picture is somewhat an extreme one. A critical variable is how long electoral politics has been absent from a given polity. If the authoritarian period was a short one it is likely that party ideologies will be alive (Chile, Uruguay) and information on past performance can also be readily available to voters. In general, it is plausible to assume that the longer the authoritarian period the less information voters may have on the competing parties. As Barnes and his colleagues (1985: 697) wrote for the Spanish case, “By the time of the first genuinely free elections in 1977, only Spaniards over 60 had personal experience with competitive parties and elections”. The elections were then characterized by inexperienced voters facing a fluid and new partisan environment.

The situation is somewhat different in the case of Mexico. The incumbent party has been in office since 1929 and voters' uncertainty about the PRI should be relatively small. Furthermore, electoral politics has been uninterrupted in Mexico since the end of the Mexican revolution (1917) and the right-wing opposition party has participated in such contests since its foundation in 1939. Accordingly, we

\textsuperscript{16} It is worth noting that none of the variables measuring party identification did attain statistical significance. In other words, there is no endogeneity between partisan identification and uncertainty on political stability.
should expect uncertainty on Mexico's political parties not to be very high although the incumbent party should elicit the lowest level of uncertainty. Even though the opposition parties have had increasing success at the polls in the last ten years it is still likely that voters will be less uncertain about the PRI than about the PAN or PRD. In this section I show in a straightforward way that this is the case. The items measure voters' judgments on the parties' governing capabilities and the uncertainty of these judgments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Uncertainty on Parties' Governing Capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERY CERTAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CERTAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOMEWHAT UNCERTAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCERTAIN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Excluding "No Answer".

As table 4 shows, the hypothesis that voters' are less uncertain about the PRI's ability to govern is confirmed. About 28% of the interviewees were uncertain about the PRI but 42% were uncertain about the PAN and 37% about the PRD. Notwithstanding its status as a young party (it was founded in 1989) the PRD generates less uncertainty than the PAN (although due to the survey's margin of error they could still have similar levels of uncertainty). The likely reason for this is the negative campaign waged by the PRI and the government against the PRD since the latter's foundation. By providing information, albeit of a negative nature, the government strategy led to a reduction of the uncertainty on the PRD.

I will now proceed to analyze the determinants of uncertainty about parties. As in the case of the pre-electoral survey, I included variables on alternation of power at the local level within the past three elections. Given the size and the sample

17 The question asked is: In general, how capable do you think is (name of the party) to govern Mexico: very capable, capable, somewhat capable, incapable? This question was followed by another: How sure you feel that (name of the party) is (answer to the first question) to govern Mexico? These questions are phrased following the format suggested by Michael R. Alvarez to measure uncertainty (1996). I included a first version of this question in a poll made on May of 1997. For an analysis of that question in such survey, see A. Cinta, 1997.
design of the survey, the number of respondents living under a municipal PAN or PRD government is larger than in our previous analysis (33% and 13% respectively for a total of 46 percent). I created an additional variable by combining which party holds the municipal and the state government which I call, following De Remes (1998), juxtaposed government. It indicates a panista municipal government under a priista state government.\(^\text{18}\) The hypothesis is that persons living under a juxtaposed government will be subject to conflicting information about the governing parties and henceforth they will be more uncertain about both of them. This situation is compounded if there is divided government at the state level. Holding office then can either reduce the level of uncertainty or increase it depending on which party holds office at the state level.

Table 5 summarizes the expected relationships between holding office at the municipal and state level and its impact on the degree of uncertainty on political parties. The relationships are predicted only for the case of PAN and PRD. As the PRI has been in office for so many years it is not clear how not maintaining office at the local level affects knowledge about this party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Government</th>
<th>Uncertainty about PAN</th>
<th>Uncertainty about PRD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRD Municipal Government *</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>- or +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN Municipal Government</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN Municipal/ PRI State</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN State/ PRI National</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All PRD municipal governments are juxtaposed.

Holding office at the municipal level should reduce uncertainty about the governing party. Likewise, being out of office should increase uncertainty about outcomes under a government of the minority party. In the case of the PRD we can not control for juxtaposed PRD governments and non-juxtaposed PRD governments as the latter did not exist by the time of the mid-term elections. That is why we hypothesize either a negative or positive relationship. In the case of juxtaposed PAN governments we hypothesize an increase of uncertainty on the PAN for the reasons

\(^{18}\) Given the smaller number of municipalities the PRD holds I was unable to find, in the survey sample, a PRD municipality under a panista state government. Likewise I was unable to find a PRD municipal government under a PRD state government (as the latter was attained until 1998). All PRD municipal governments are juxtaposed to a PRI state government.
stated above. We also hypothesize an increase of uncertainty for the PRD because it is out of office.

As I said previously, the postelectoral survey is very rich in individual-level variables and therefore many more variables can be included.

The individual-level variables used were the following:

1) A variable measuring the ideology of the respondents composed of responses to three questions asking respondents’ preferences regarding the economic role of the state (this variable is called *Left Ideology*). Two other variables related to ideology were also used: *Panright* which means that a respondent was able to place the PAN as a right-wing party (in a scale of 0 to 10) and *Prdleft* which does the same for the PRD as a leftist party. The rationale for these three variables is the same: ideology is an heuristic that allows voters to foresee what a party will do (Downs; Sniderman). As Hinich and Munger put it (1996:11), “an ideology tells us what is good, who gets what, and who rules”. If voters were able to place correctly the PAN and the PRD on an ideological scale it is less likely that they will be uncertain about these parties as they will have an idea about what these parties stand for.

2) *Political sophistication* is an index composed of respondents’ answers to four questions measuring factual levels of information. This index was built following John Zaller’s suggestion that measures of political sophistication are more accurate when they are actually measuring citizens’ neutral factual knowledge of political affairs (1992:335). Again, the hypothesis is that the most politically sophisticated individuals will be less uncertain. A related variable, *Political Interest*, is composed of the responses to two questions asking how often people follow political news and talk with friends about politics.

3) Exposure to the parties’ TV ads. As argued at the beginning, the electoral campaign, particularly that by the PRI, was full of references to the governmental experience of the parties. *Priad, Panad, Prdad* are variables measuring if a voter was exposed to the TV ads of each party. If a voter

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19 The questions were: how long a Congressman occupies his post, how long the president lasts in his job, which chambers compose the Mexican Congress and knowledge about which party controls the Chamber of Deputies, if at all.
has got information from a party it is more likely he will be less uncertain about that party.

4) RadioTv and Newspaper indicate the most important source of information voters use to decide which party to support. The expectation is that those who use newspapers as their main source of information will be less uncertain about the parties as newspaper readership is related to political sophistication.20

5) The usual control variables (party identification, sociodemographic characteristics and so on) were also included.

Table 6 reports the results of an ordered probit analysis where the dependent variable was voters' uncertainty about the governing capabilities of each party. I did use ordered probit as there were no improvements in the model by coding the dependent variable as a dichotomous choice.

Holding office at the municipal level reduces the uncertainty about opposition parties. This is an important finding because, if voters dislike uncertainty, governmental experience at the local level will increase the chances any of these parties have of winning a national election (other factors hold constant).

PAN juxtaposed governments (municipal/state or state/federal) increase the uncertainty voters have regarding both the PRI and PAN. As argued previously, conflicting information seems to be the main reason for this finding. In the case of the PRD this hypothesis was not confirmed as holding municipal office reduces, rather than increases, the uncertainty on this party (as I said previously all PRD municipal governments are juxtaposed governments and we do not know if there would be any significant differences with a respondent living under both a PRD municipal and state government). Overall, five out of the eight expected relationships described in table 5 were found. The hypothesis that being out of office under a PAN municipal government increases the uncertainty about the PRD was not confirmed (likewise with the PAN under a PRD municipal government). Being out of office under a priísta government, however, increases the uncertainty about both the PAN and the PRD.

20 Two minor hypothesis included in the model are: 1) presidential approval. The expectation is that presidential performance is an indicator of what the ruling party does while in office. If an individual can give an opinion on the president’s job performance he is less likely to be uncertain about the ruling party; 2) Political stability is a variable that measures respondents’ evaluations on the issue. Given the mass media campaign conducted by the PRI the expectation is that the better evaluated this issue is the more uncertainty a voter will have regarding opposition parties.
Media Strategies. The PAN was particularly successful with its TV ads. I will consider a media strategy to be successful if 1) it changes a voter’s opinion. This will be reflected by a negative sign in the regression equation meaning that exposure to a TV ad reduces the uncertainty on a given party. However, as the content of the ad is positive for the sponsoring party and negative for the other parties the reduction of uncertainty does not carry the same meaning. A successful PRD ad, for instance, should reduce the uncertainty on the three parties. That will mean that uncertainty reduction is done by improving the image of the PRD and tarnishing the image of the other two parties; 2) Assuming voters dislike uncertainty, a second best strategy for the media of the parties is to increase the uncertainty on the other two parties. The least successful strategy for a party is when its messages do not get through (as reflected in a non-significant statistical sign).

The results of the statistical analysis reported in table 6 can be summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Uncertainty on PAN</th>
<th>Uncertainty on PRD</th>
<th>Uncertainty on PRI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI AD</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN AD</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD AD</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen, the PAN was most effective with its TV ads. It reduced the uncertainty on the PRI (adding negative information to people’s evaluations of that party) and itself (adding positive information). Regarding the PRD the PAN ads increased the uncertainty on that party. The PAN’s slogan that voting for it would mean “the real change” (vota por el verdadero cambio) seems to have worked as put doubts on people’s minds about the PRD.

The PRI ads worked only in the case of the PAN as exposure to its ads increased uncertainty about the latter party. The campaign emphasizing the risks of an opposition government for the public education system may have had a role in this. The PRD campaign was successful insofar as it reduced the uncertainty about itself. The PRD ads tried to present the image of a “happy”, friendly, party in order to dispel the images of violence associated with it. Although the PRD ads were not effective in changing people’s opinions about the other parties this is not due to the fact that they carried out a “positive” media campaign: the PRD ads had a very strong negative content in particular against the incumbent party, the PRI.

Ideology and Uncertainty. As hypothesized, possessing certain level of ideological awareness reduces the uncertainty voters have about each party. Those who advocate a stronger role of the state (Left Ideology) are less likely to be
uncertain about the parties (except in the case of PAN). In the same vein, those who were able to locate correctly the PAN in an ideological scale are less uncertain about the latter. The same was found for the PRD. Ideology then serves as an heuristic device allowing voters to reduce information costs about parties.

**Political sophistication.** The items on political sophistication and interest in politics work in general as predicted. The more politically sophisticated are less uncertain about each party (although in the case of the PRI the relationship is a little bit short of being significant). The higher the interest in politics the less uncertain respondents are about each party (the same happens with level of education). Mexicans then do not differ from citizens from other polities in the way uncertainty and political sophistication are related.

An unexpected finding is that newspaper readers are not less uncertain about the parties. People who rely more on newspapers to inform themselves about political affairs are more sophisticated (Beltrán y Cinta, 1998) and hence should be less uncertain. This was not found however. Rather, people who rely more on TV and radio turned out to be less uncertain about the parties than the rest (except for the case of the PRD). This suggests that the TV and radio coverage of the campaign, as well as the parties' media strategies, were effective in providing voters with information on the parties.

Regarding the control variables, let me note that party identification plays a very important role as determinant of partisan uncertainty. Being a priísta makes a voter less uncertain about the PRI but more uncertain about the PRD. It does not affect its evaluation of the PAN. Being a perredista makes a voter less uncertain of both the PRI and the PRD. Being a panista only diminishes uncertainty about the PAN. In all these cases party identification works as a heuristic allowing a person to guess with some confidence what his preferred party will do. In the case of perredistas, party identification does something else: it gives them certainty about what the PRI would do. It is the only case where having a party ID gives clues about another party.

Even after controlling for levels of education and political sophistication, rural dwellers are more uncertain about the parties than urban people. Probably this has to do with the organizational penetration of the parties but this is just a guess. Union members are more uncertain about the PRD and the PAN than about the PRI. This is to some extent understandable as unions in Mexico have traditionally been linked to the PRI.  

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\[20\]

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The item on political stability worked as expected. The better evaluated political stability is the more uncertainty there is about the PRD. The presidential approval item, however, worked in an unexpected direction. Having an opinion on the president reduces uncertainty on both the PAN and the PRD but not on the PRI.
Conclusions

Uncertainty about what will happen if the PRI loses power in Mexico is widespread. Almost 6 out of 10 Mexicans are uncertain either about political stability and/or the state of the economy. Alternation of power at the local level does not reduce uncertainty about alternation of power at the national level. The former, however, does reduce the uncertainty on the incumbent parties and, in this indirect way, reduces uncertainty on political stability.

Uncertainty about political parties, on the other hand, is not so extended thanks to the fact that electoral politics has been uninterrupted in Mexico since early in this century. Other countries undergoing regime transition, however, do not have the advantage of such political institutions to anchor to some degree voters’ opinions. Nevertheless, and as a consequence that the opposition has only held office at the local level, the PRI is the better known party which has obvious electoral advantages if voters dislike uncertainty.

This paper also shows that sensitivity to uncertainty is higher among the less politically sophisticated, the less educated and the less involved in political affairs. In this regard, Mexicans do not behave differently than citizens from other parts of the world. An important contribution of this paper is to demonstrate the endogenous nature of uncertainty: if voters are uncertain about the parties it is in part due to the media strategies of the political parties. Exposure to partisan TV ads emphasizing the risks associated with a given party affects voters’ degree of uncertainty.

Mexico’s regime transition is to some extent caught in a non-virtuous circle: if voters dislike uncertainty, the opposition’s lack of governmental experience decreases their chances of winning office but governmental experience can be achieved only if they win the election! The mechanism suggested in this paper to escape from this non-virtuous circle is through the winning of office at the local level, requiring initially an exogenous shock, such as an economic crisis, to get started. Holding office at the municipal level decreases uncertainty about the opposition increasing their future chances of winning office (other factors held constant). Even if juxtaposed governments increase uncertainty about the PAN it does the same for the PRI canceling the electoral advantages for the latter. This is, however, a slow and sometimes painful process of arriving at democracy.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Coeff.</th>
<th>S.E.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Constant</td>
<td>.510</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Always governed by PRI (municipal)</td>
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<td>.128</td>
<td>.674</td>
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<td>.823</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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<td>Post electoral conflict</td>
<td>.184*</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>1.83</td>
<td>1-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post electoral conflict in always PRI state</td>
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<td>.166</td>
<td>.244</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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<td>.115*</td>
<td>.047</td>
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</tr>
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<td>TV</td>
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<td>.139</td>
<td>.572</td>
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<td>Radio</td>
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<td>.162</td>
<td>.168</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in politics</td>
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<td>1-3</td>
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<td>-.193</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>3.64-4.38</td>
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<td><strong>Control Variables</strong></td>
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<td>PANID</td>
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<td>.163</td>
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<td>.107</td>
<td>.283</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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<td>PRDID</td>
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<td>.173</td>
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>.112</td>
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<td>2.89-4.59</td>
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<td>.064</td>
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<td>Independent worker</td>
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<td>.137</td>
<td>.228</td>
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<td>.264</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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</table>

* Statistically significant at the .05 level.
Percentage of correctly predicted cases: 69%.
### Table 6
Determinants of Uncertainty on Parties

#### Ordered Probit

1997 Post-electoral Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>PRI Coeff.</th>
<th>PRI S.E.</th>
<th>PAN Coeff.</th>
<th>PAN S.E.</th>
<th>PRD Coeff.</th>
<th>PRD S.E.</th>
<th>Mean X</th>
<th>Range X</th>
</tr>
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<td>.157</td>
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<td>.159</td>
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<td>.317*</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.318*</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.176</td>
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<td>PRD municipal gov.</td>
<td>-.144*</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>-.048</td>
<td>.065</td>
<td>-.260*</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.129</td>
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<td>.109</td>
<td>-.267*</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>.127</td>
<td>.330</td>
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<td>.124</td>
<td>.244*</td>
<td>.105</td>
<td>.107</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>.183</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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<td>PAN right</td>
<td>-.037</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>-.265*</td>
<td>.046</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.252</td>
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<td>.050</td>
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<td>.052</td>
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<td>.109</td>
<td>-.278*</td>
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#### Control Variables

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* Statistically significant at the .05 level.
** Statistically significant at the .10 level.
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