

The Domestic Constraints on International Assistance to Counter Drug Trafficking



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Does foreign aid influence if/how a government counters illicit trafficking?

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- Targeted assistance aims to insulate donor states, increasing the likelihood of creating spillovers when countering trafficking
- Some states reject or bargain over counter trafficking assistance
- Potential risks in accepting counter trafficking assistance
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- Changes in support for assistance over time



*Calderón accepts US anti-drug trafficking assistance.
(Mexico)*



*Morales rejects US aid targeting drug trafficking.
(Bolivia)*

Under what conditions does a government accept foreign aid to counter drug trafficking within its borders?

- What does a government gain from accepting foreign aid?
- What are the potential consequences of counter trafficking aid.?

Case Selection

Mexico: critical case

- Medium-capacity democracy
- Significant for understanding drug trafficking
- Important relationship with United States
- Recent changes in enforcement



Mexico's Militarized Crackdown on Drug Trafficking

- 1980s Major drug trafficking routes move across US-Mexico border
- 1990s Mexican drug cartels gain control over trafficking
- 2000 First non-PRI president elected (Fox - PAN)
Territorial competition between drug cartels leads to an increase in violence
- 2006 Calderón (PAN) elected w close margin, militarizes crackdown on drug trafficking
- 2008 US and Mexico negotiate the Merida Initiative (Bush and Calderón)**
- 2012 Peña Nieto (PRI) elected, uses army and police to fight cartels, new police force
- 2018 López Obrador (MORENO) elected, creates National Guard
- 2021 US and Mexico start negotiating replacement for MI (Biden & López Obrador)

Evidence & Expectations

- Negotiation and initial implementation of the Merida Initiative: **semi-structured interviews** to inform process-tracing case study
- Mexican public opinion: **conjoint experiment** to measure Mexican's preferences over anti trafficking assistance
- Mexico gains from agreement, but US influence allows for influence in implementation potentially increasing spillovers
- Distribution of costs from countering the illicit market alter public support

Does Mexico gain from accepting counter trafficking aid from the US?

- “Shared responsibility” to address drug trafficking
- Inclusion of firearms trafficking
- Access to hard-to-access equipment
- Many states do not have the same sway as Mexico



Does the US Influence Mexico's Strategy to Counter Drug Trafficking?

“The US Embassy starts saying that the **kingpin strategy is the way to go**, and had already started to develop this strategy with the Fox administration.”

-High-level advisor to former President Felipe Calderón

Sample for Survey Experiment

- Nationally representative, in-person survey
- Run in fall 2018
- ~1200 respondents



Respondent View of Conjoint Pairs

Program A

To support the fight against criminal organizations, this program would focus on security. The program would include:

- Training for Mexican military in surveillance, seizures and use of canine equipment.
- New provision of equipment for the Mexican army and police forces, including aircraft, helicopters and equipment for border inspections.

This program would be implemented in areas with and without criminal violence.

This potential program would be funded by the government of Mexico.

Program B

To support the construction of strong and resilient communities, this program would focus on economic development and community building. The program would include:

- Extracurricular activities and job training for young people at risk of possible gang participation.
- Anti-drug community action groups to deter local drug use.

This program would be implemented in areas with and without criminal violence.

This potential program would be funded by the United States government.

A

Both

B

Neither

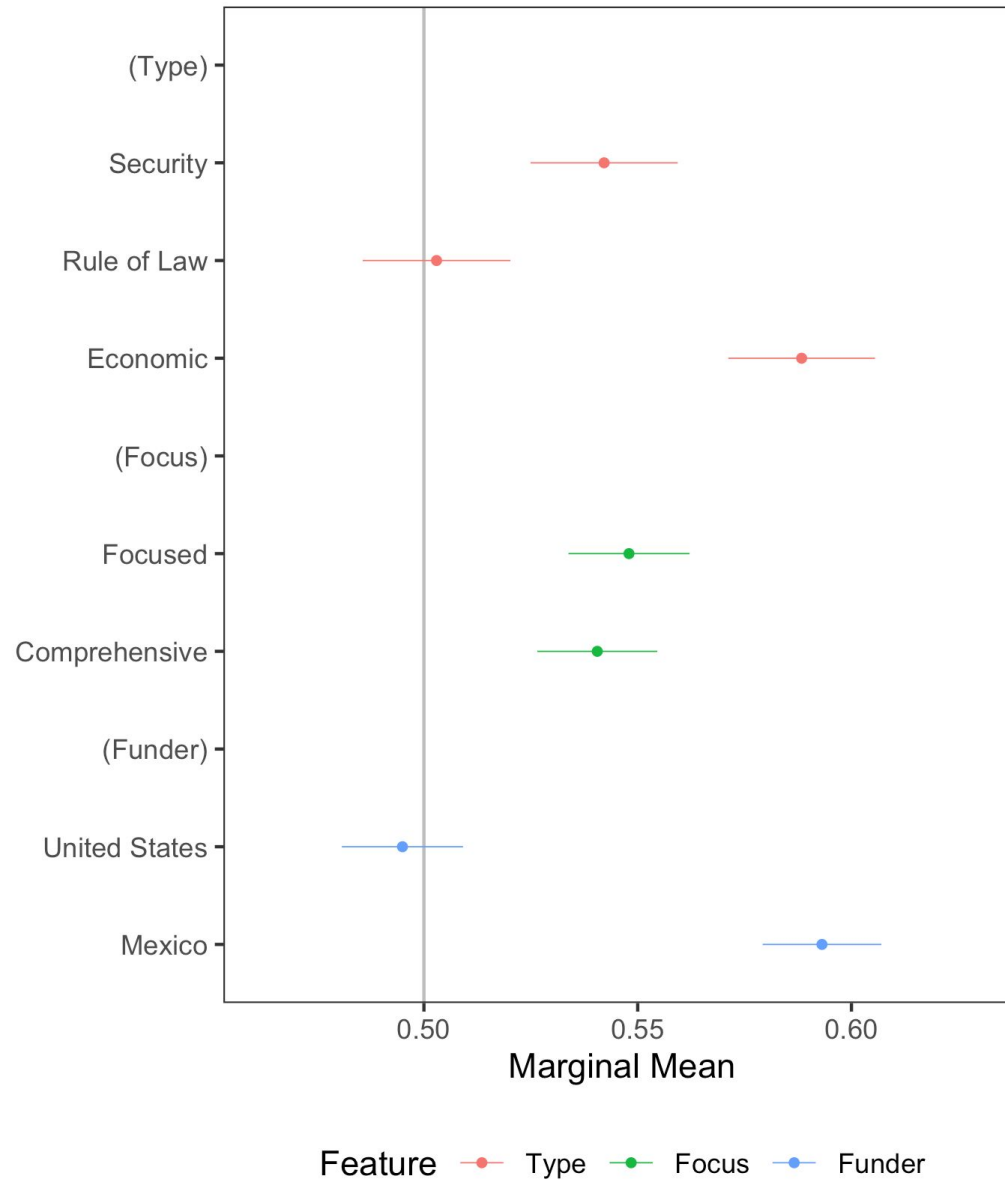
Conjoint: Measuring Support for Anti-Trafficking Initiatives

Conjoint choice:

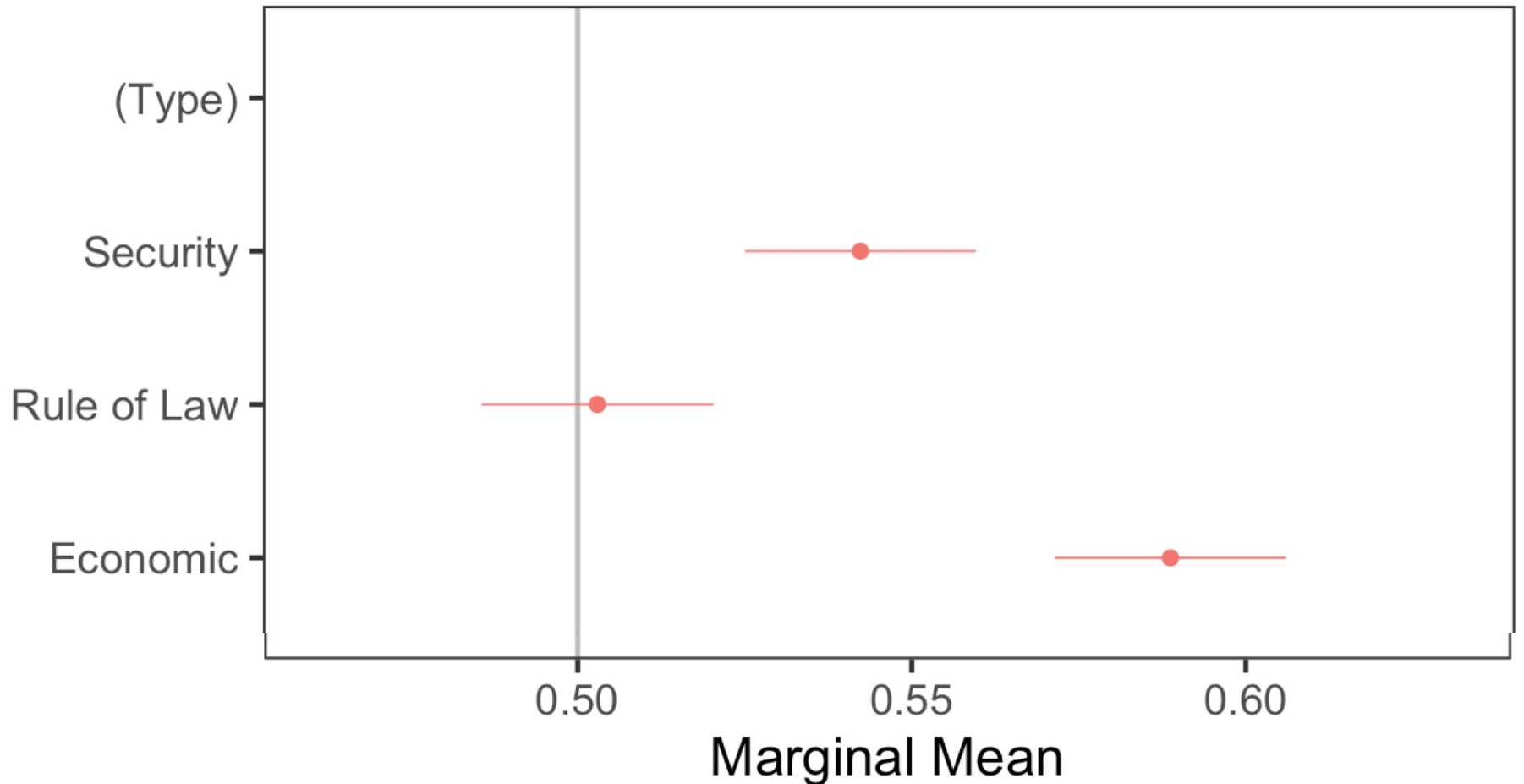
Whether the respondent supports both, neither, or one of two anti-drug trafficking programs, varying:

- **type:** security, rule of law, economic development
- **geographic focus:** targeting areas w high narcoviolence
- **funder:** Mexico or the U.S.

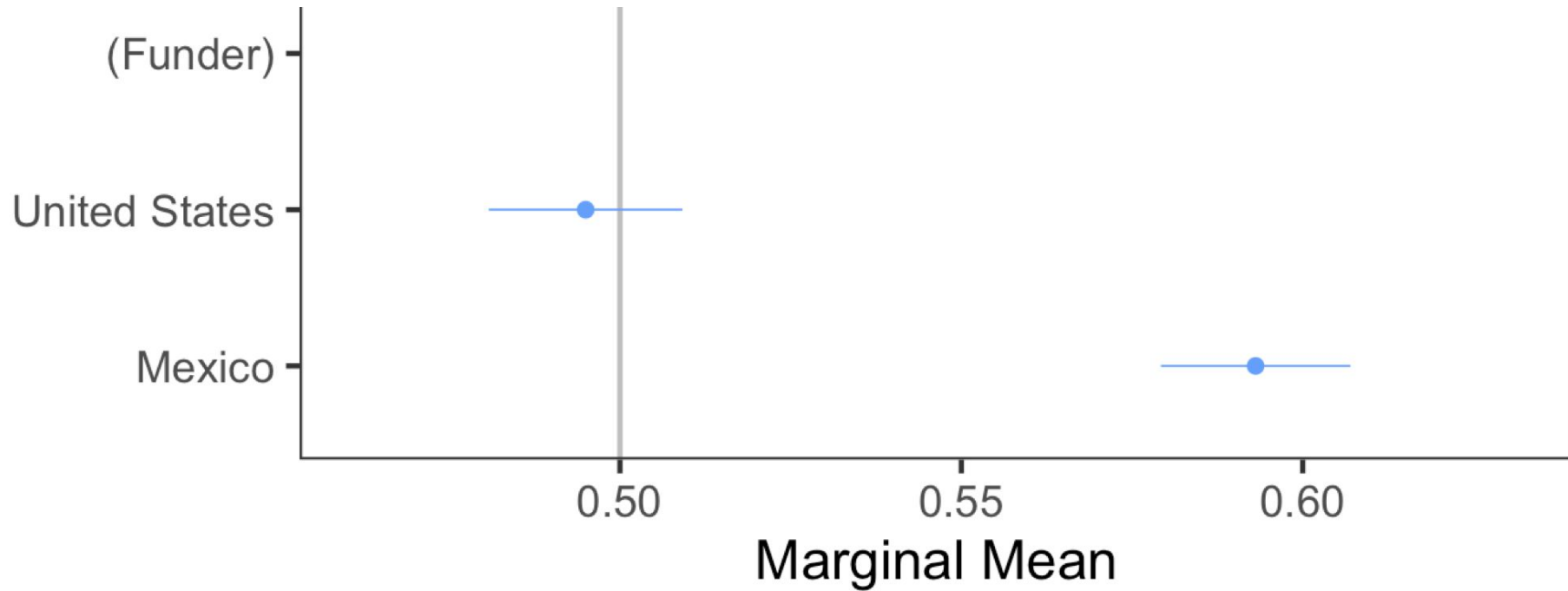
Support for Anti-Trafficking Measures?



Significantly Less Support for Programs Linked to Spillovers

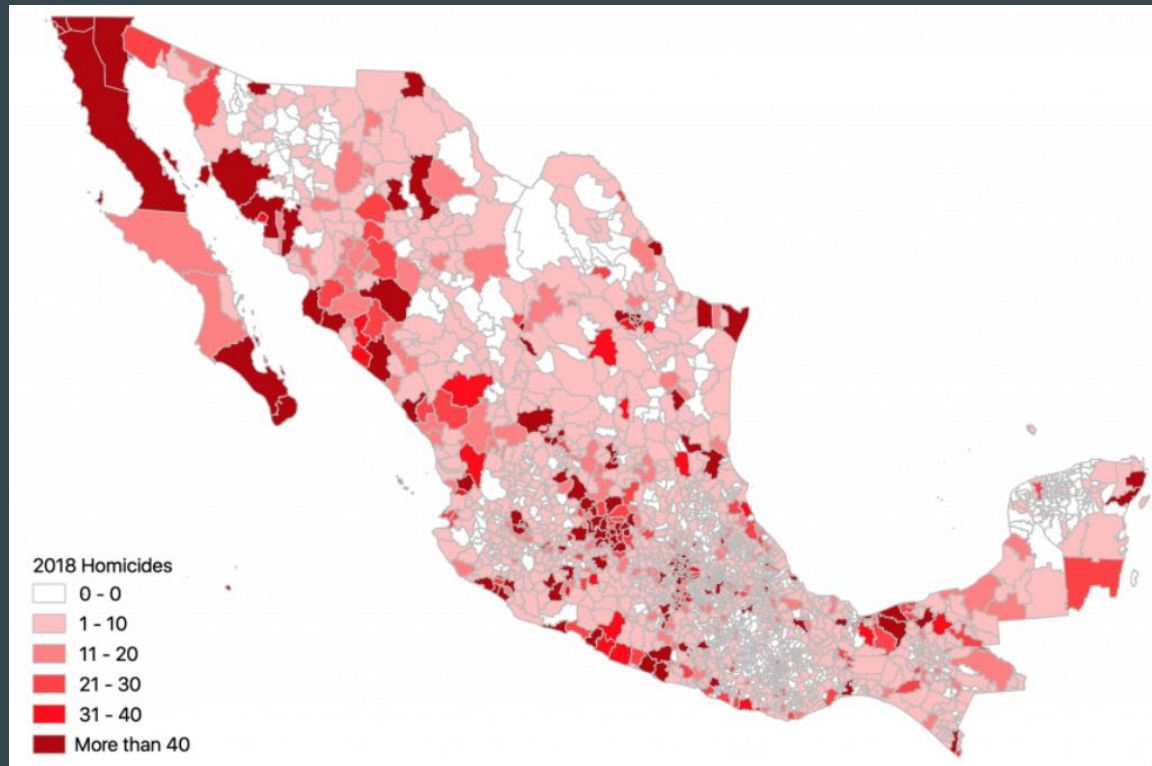


Significantly Less Support for US Funded Programs



Subgroup Analysis Results

Exposure to violence: respondents in areas with high homicide rates show less support for Mexico-funded programs compared to respondents in less violent areas.



Map from *Justice in Mexico Report*

Outcomes

- US pressure on Mexico (in the form of international assistance) altered *how*, but not whether, Mexico cracked down.
- US influence on strategy (kingpin strategy) increased negative externalities created by drug cartels in Mexico.
- Mexicans show less support for US funded programs and less support for programs increasing spillovers.
- Mexicans in more violent areas show a lower level of support for Mexico-funded programs.

What Disincentivizes Countering Illicit Markets?

- Countering illicit trafficking may increase local spillovers, creating a backlash in public support.
- A foreign power's enforcement strategy is likely to increase local spillovers.
- As a result, states may lack the resources for an effective crackdown, but still refuse international assistance.

Implications for the IPE Literature

- Analyzing government's strategic decision over illicit market control, including whether to accept counter trafficking aid
- Theorizing the distributional effects of illicit markets
- Nuance to the foreign aid literature on recipient state preferences over aid and when states reject aid

Next Steps

- Interviews surrounding the current negotiation process
- Comparative analysis of US congressional committee hearings and floor speeches on Plan Colombia and Merida Initiative
- Additional case where US is not the main donor or full aid rejection (instead of bargaining) case?