

How Do Campaigns Matter? Independents, Political Information, and the Enlightening Role of Campaigns in Mexico

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Abstract

Based on the Mexican case, this study finds that voters who report low levels of campaign information are more likely to update their vote intention as election day gets closer. Moreover, in contrast to previous studies which argue that political campaigns mainly persuade voters to support candidates against their precampaign dispositions, this article shows that, by the end of the campaign, most voters support the candidate best aligned with their underlying political predispositions—partisanship and presidential approval. In other words, voters become enlightened. This effect is particularly important among independents, a portion of the electorate understudied by the literature on Latin American political behavior.

Research in comparative political behavior, particularly on Latin America, has primarily focused on campaign persuasion as the main campaign effect influencing voting behavior. Since most countries are young democracies in which partisanship is considered to be weak, most of the literature has argued that political campaigns play a crucial role in making voters support candidates against their own precampaign dispositions through candidates' persuasive efforts (Baker, Ames, & Renno, 2006; Greene, 2011). This study argues that, in addition to persuasion, campaign enlightenment constitutes a major campaign effect that helps explain why many voters in Latin America change their vote preference between the onset of a campaign and election day. Particularly in young democracies, campaigns provide voters with the information they need to support the candidate best aligned with their political predispositions.

Based on the Mexican case, this study relies on both cross-sectional survey data and panel data and finds that voters who report low levels of campaign information,

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especially during a campaign's first days, are more likely to update their vote intention as they gather more information. This effect is particularly strong among independents since partisans are able to compensate for their low-information levels by supporting their co-partisan candidate. In contrast, independents have a harder time connecting their precampaign dispositions to vote choice. Moreover, this study shows that by the end of the campaign, most partisans and independents support the candidate best aligned with their political predispositions, that is, the one consistent with their partisanship and/or presidential approval.

These findings have important implications for the campaigns literature as they show a different way in which campaigns matter in young democracies. This research highlights that campaigns can help voters make enlightened electoral decisions—supporting candidates in line with their precampaign dispositions, rather than changing their vote choice as an outcome of campaign persuasion. Similarly, this research contributes to the literature by focusing on the behavior of independents—understudied subjects in Latin American political behavior who, according to comparative surveys, constitute the majority of the region's electorate (*LAPOP*, 2018 ; *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems [CSES]*, 2018). Although most of the literature has focused on partisans' electoral behavior (*Baker, Ames, Sokhey, & Renno*, 2016 ; *Castro Cornejo*, 2020 ; *Lupu*, 2015), this research highlights conditions under which independents are responsive to campaigns. The implications of this study are relevant for studies on young democracies and weakly institutionalized party systems (*Mainwaring*, 2018), where party roots in society are weak and new parties tend to appear in each election cycle. In such contexts, the gap between low and highly informed voters may be larger than in Mexico and campaign information may play a more crucial role for voters.

This article is structured as follows. It first discusses the literature on campaign enlightenment. The second section analyses existing explanations of campaign effects in Latin America. The third section discusses how campaign enlightenment travels to campaigns in Latin America, and Mexico in particular. The next sections describe the methodological strategy, the results, and the implications for the study of campaign effects in Latin America.

The Enlightenment Role of Political Campaigns

Voters' levels of information have been a recurrent topic of interest in the literature on public opinion (*Converse*, 1962). These studies share a common normative ideal, arguing that an informed electorate is desirable for any well-functioning democracy (*Carpini & Keeter*, 1996). These voters are more likely to participate in politics, engage more actively in policy voting, think in ideological terms, and hold more stable opinions (*Carpini & Keeter*, 1996). Although some studies suggest that voters can make rational decisions even when their information levels are low (*Popkin*, 1994), most studies express concerns about information deficits since there is no substitute for a well-informed electorate (*Gilens*, 2001). In fact, studies have found that informed voters are better able to support parties closer to their own interests (*Carpini & Keeter*, 1996). In turn, low-information voters tend to vote for the “wrong” candidates since they might have arrived at a different choice had they been informed (*Bartels*, 1996).

As far as the campaign literature is concerned, different studies have argued that campaigns play a major role in “enlightening” voters by providing information that

bolsters their support for the candidate best aligned with their preexisting political dispositions (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Finkel, 1993), making the latter more influential on vote choice as election day draws closer (Gelman & King, 1993). The “enlightenment” hypothesis (Gelman & King, 1993) suggests that campaign activities increase the amount of information about candidates’ positions and about a set of “fundamental variables” (e.g., partisanship, the economy, and presidential approval) that voters have at their disposal. Gelman and King argue that, while forecasting models can accurately predict election outcomes relying on said fundamental variables, voters do not yet have accurate knowledge of these variables during the campaign’s first days. Similarly, Finkel (1993) argues that vote choice depends less on campaign events than on long-term dispositions which guide voters toward their already chosen destination. Finkel’s study relies on individual panel data and finds that a model of campaign activation based on race, party identification, and presidential approval accounts for most vote shifts that take place during American campaigns. In other words, vote shifts during campaigns are predictable because campaigns activate existing political predispositions and make them electorally relevant.

In comparative politics, the enlightenment hypothesis has mostly been tested in advanced industrial democracies (German general election, Finkel & Schrott, 1995; general elections in the United Kingdom, Andersen, Tilley, & Heath, 2005; 13 western democracies, Stevenson & Vavreck, 2000; and 9 European democracies, Arceneaux, 2006, among others). These studies have found strong evidence that campaigns play an informational role in helping voters make up their minds. However, while voters in advanced industrial democracies do not have complete information about the economy or candidates’ policy positions, levels of information about the broader party system are fairly high compared with those in young democracies. Given that voters in those contexts have a long democratic experience, there is less uncertainty about political actors’ behavior since parties have fairly strong reputations: uncertainty is confined to topics such as the state of the economy, candidates’ policy positions, and governing coalitions, among others. Moreover, even when voters in advanced industrial democracies possess low levels of information about policy positions, they can take advantage of partisan cues which help them form their views and perceptions (Bartels, 2002; Carsey & Layman, 2006; Zaller, 1992).

How does the enlightenment hypothesis travel to young democracies? In post-1978 democracies, voters have a much more limited democratic experience and political uncertainty includes a wider set of variables than in advanced industrial democracies (e.g., weak political institutions and economic shocks, Lupu & Riedl, 2013; sudden programmatic shifts by parties, Stokes, 2001). This is what the literature has called the “acquisition of political experience,” the process of understanding what the democratic process entails, what parties are, and what they stand for (Butler & Stokes, 1975). As such, voters’ uncertainty is not only constrained by parties’ programmatic platforms, but also by basic information like who the major political actors are given many countries’ limited democratic experience or their party systems’ fluidity whereby new parties emerge in each election cycle. In this context, low levels of knowledge are likely to constitute an important constraint for voters at the time of campaigns.

The next section describes existing explanations of campaign effects in Latin American elections, and argues that voters’ information levels can account for the

important percentage of voters who change their vote preference during campaigns. In contrast to elections in advanced industrial democracies, where a minority of voters change their vote preference, at least a third of the electorate in Latin America is estimated to change their vote preference during the course of campaigns (Baker et al., 2006; Lawson et al., 2007).

Campaigns and Elections in Latin America

Campaigns are consequential in Latin America. To understand the important number of vote shifts, the literature has highlighted the persuasive role interpersonal social networks (Baker et al., 2006) and mass media (Lawson & McCann, 2005) play in vote choice, as well as campaign effects like persuasion (Greene, 2011) and priming (Hart, 2013). For example, Baker et al. (2006) study the 2002 presidential campaign in Brazil and find that vote shifts during the campaign resulted from persuasive information that voters gathered during political discussions in their immediate social networks. Greene (2011) studies the 2006 presidential campaign in Mexico and shows that persuasion “accounts for the massive pre-electoral vote swing between candidates” (p. 399), since “only a small minority [of Mexican voters] possessed partisan identities strong enough to resist being persuaded” (p. 406). As these studies argue, campaigns are more consequential in Latin America since partisanship is nascent, which leads voters to support candidates not in line with their political predispositions.

In addition to campaign persuasion, this research argues that, particularly in young democracies, campaign enlightenment can explain why so many voters in Latin America shift their vote choice over the course of a campaign. Although both campaign effects rely on a similar mechanism—voters do learn from campaigns—they significantly differ in the outcome: while persuasion assumes that voters shift their vote intention away from their precampaign dispositions, campaign enlightenment argues that vote shifts are predictable since they are in line with voters’ underlying political predispositions. Previous research on Latin America has focused on knowledge gaps and political conversation in Brazil (Smith, 2018) and information gains during campaigns in Mexico (McCann & Lawson, 2006). However, campaign studies have paid less attention to the effect that voters’ levels of information have on vote choice, which, as research on old democracies suggests (Nadeau, Nevitte, Gidengil, & Blais, 2008), can influence voting behavior. This is particularly important in young democracies where parties convey less information since their reputations in government are less known, their party brands are weaker (Lupu, 2015), and the party systems are less institutionalized (Mainwaring, 2018). Therefore, in young democracies, campaigns are fundamental for voters’ learning since they allow parties to disclose political stances and help structure voters’ political perceptions (Weber, 2011).

This is particularly important in Latin America, where a very important proportion of the electorate does not report any identification with a political party. Supplementary Appendix Figure SA1 shows the percentage of Latin American voters who self-identified as independents between 2006 and 2019 based on survey data from the LAPOP. Although the question wording that LAPOP uses to measure partisanship tends to underestimate voters who self-identify as partisans (Baker and Renno, 2019; Castro Cornejo, 2019,b), the results generally highlight the important prevalence of independents: on average, only a third of respondents self-identify as partisans.

Although important variation exists in the region, this context provides an opportunity for campaigns to be consequential.

Campaign “enlightenment” thus entails that as election day draws near, campaigns activate prior political orientations and bring voters to vote in line with their underlying predispositions. How does campaign enlightenment travel to Latin America where voters have less democratic experience and parties convey less information than in advanced industrial democracies (Mainwaring, 2018)? As previous studies highlight (Lupu, Oliveros, & Schiumerini, 2019), policy positions play a fairly limited role in political discourse in Latin America, which can affect voters’ information gathering during electoral campaigns. Given that parties do not always strongly differentiate themselves on the basis of issue positions and clientelism is high, electoral choices are less structured along demographics lines—class, religious, or gender, which makes catch-all politics fairly common in Latin America (Singer & Tafoya, 2020). In other words, parties are pragmatic in ideology, multiclass in their support, and oriented to broad-based electoral appeals (Carlin, Singer & Zechmeister, 2015; Singer & Tafoya, 2020). Therefore, Latin American elections are strongly shaped by government performance (Gélineau & Singer, 2015; Singer & Tafoya, 2020). Candidates thus tend to focus their campaigns on valence issues like competence (Bleck & Van de Walle, 2013) and, especially, economic performance, which constitutes a strong predictor of voting behavior in Latin America (Gélineau & Singer, 2015). This means that, while elections are still a mechanism of holding parties accountable, voters are less motivated by policy preferences and instead consider the incumbent government’s performance, becoming retrospective voters (Fiorina, 1981). This is particularly the case in Mexico (Beltrán, 2003; Singer, 2009) and in other Latin American democracies, where voters tend to retrospectively evaluate incumbents (Benton, 2005).

To test the enlightenment hypothesis, this paper first focuses on the connection between retrospective voting and vote intention and the extent to which it is moderated by voters’ levels of information. For example, it is expected that more informed voters will be able to support a candidate who is aligned with their precampaign dispositions, for instance, relating their evaluation of the incumbent government’s performance—one of the most important campaign predispositions (Finkel, 1993; Sides, Tesler, & Vavreck, 2019)—to their vote intention. In contrast, voters with lower levels of information will not have the informational tools that allow them to punish or ratify the incumbents, and will find it difficult to relate their retrospective assessments to their vote intention:

Hypothesis 1. More informed voters who positively evaluate the incumbent president are more likely to vote for the incumbent party than their less-informed counterparts.

A second way through which information can influence electoral behavior is vote intention volatility—that is, the probability that voters will change their vote preference between the beginning and the end of the campaign. In particular, voters with lower levels of information are more likely to take advantage of campaigns and, if the enlightenment hypothesis is right, vote shifts will make voters support the candidate best aligned with their political predispositions. In contrast, voters with higher levels of information are more likely to report a more stable vote intention since they have more crystallized

preferences and do not need to incorporate new information to make their electoral decision (Zaller, 1992):

Hypothesis 2. Voters with lower levels of information are more likely to change their vote intention during the course of a campaign than voters with higher levels of information.

This study advances a psychological/behavioral approach to the study of campaign information by bringing the moderating role of partisanship into the analysis of voting behavior, since it expects that low levels of information produce different outcomes among partisans and independents. Although partisanship is not as widespread in Latin America as it is across advanced industrial democracies, partisans in Latin America tend to behave in a similar way: they are more informed, more engaged, and more likely to participate in the political process (Lupu, 2015). This means that voters' partisan attachments are likely to mediate voters' reception of political information, making them filter and reject information that is inconsistent with their political predispositions (Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2004). In turn, independents—who, by definition, lack partisan attachments and constitute the majority of Latin American voters—are likely to find campaign learning consequential since campaigns will not activate a psychological attachment or a perceptual bias (Bartels, 2002). Independents, in fact, behave like partisans in a primary campaign in American politics—where voters' identification with a party does not necessarily help them choose one of the candidates (Sides et al., 2019) and where they tend to be very responsive to campaign messages (Bartels, 1988). In other words, in Latin America, campaigns allow independents to find a candidate who comes closer to their political predispositions.

It is important to note that, while independents are not motivated by partisan attachments, they still have precampaign dispositions that make their vote shifts not entirely unpredictable. In particular, they can still shift their vote and reward parties on the basis of the incumbent's performance in office—which as previously discussed, is a very strong predictor of voting behavior in Latin America. This is what Iyengar and Petrocik (2000) call the “basic rule” of voting: when partisanship is absent, voters turn to their evaluation of presidential performance. Those voters who believe the president has done a good job will vote for that party in the next election. In contrast, the voters who rate the incumbent's performance negatively will vote for the challenger. These effects are expected to be particularly consequential when elections follow the “referendum model” of presidential campaigns (Finkel, 1993; Erikson, 1989), whereby incumbent performance evaluations constitute a strong predictor of vote intention.

Based on the previous discussion, the last set of hypotheses considers the moderating role of partisan attachments in both hypotheses 1 and 2. It is expected that partisans with low levels of information who positively/negatively evaluate the incumbent president will still be able to support/punish the incumbent party since they are able to rely on their partisanship to evaluate said party. In contrast, uninformed independents will lack the information necessary to become retrospective voters, since they have a harder time connecting presidential approval to vote intention than informed independents. Similarly, independents will be more likely to respond to campaign information than

partisans; those independents who change their vote choice over the course of the campaign will be more likely to vote in line with their campaign predispositions:

Hypothesis 3a. More informed partisans who positively evaluate the incumbent president are more likely to vote for the incumbent party than more informed independents with the same evaluations.

Hypothesis 3b. Less-informed independents are more likely to change their vote intention than low-informed partisans.

The Mexican Party System and the 2006 Presidential Election

The 2006 presidential campaign in Mexico provides an ideal case to test political information's effect on voting behavior. Mexico is a young democracy that transitioned to democracy in 2000 after 71 years under a hegemonic party system. At the time, the party system consisted of three major political parties that all played a key role in the democratization process: the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the center-right National Action Party (PAN). The following sections focus on the 2006 presidential election, the first presidential election celebrated after the 2000 elections, in which campaign information likely played a major role. Although citizens had come to know the parties during the transition period, the country still was a very young democracy.

The 2006 presidential election constitute the first election in which two different alternatives to the PRI competed for Mexico's Presidency: the PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón, campaigned in favor of economic stability and continuity and the PRD candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, campaigned against the PRI and PAN governments' neoliberal policies. Therefore, the main cleavage was not the regime/democracy divide, but a nascent economic dimension of electoral competition (Moreno, 2007). Although explicit policy-oriented programs were not part of the day-to-day campaign, both candidates championed economic valence issues: "helping the poor" versus "economic stability." López Obrador, candidate of the electoral coalition "For the Good of All" lead by the PRD, criticized the neoliberal model and the Fox administration for not bringing a profound change to Mexico and promised to bring socioeconomic development to the country's poorest regions (Klesner, 2007). In contrast, the PAN presidential candidate appealed for economic stability and accused that López Obrador would bring Mexico back to its past of inflation, economic crisis, and debt and endanger the economic gains made during the PAN administration's final years (Singer, 2009). President Fox also participated in the campaign, explicitly calling voters to vote for the continuation of his administration's economic achievements of low inflation, stable exchange rates, etc., and colloquially demanding "to change the rider, but not the horse." As different studies find, evaluations of the national economy became one of the most important predictors of support for the incumbent PAN (Moreno, 2007; Singer, 2009).

In terms of knowledge about the different candidates, even though Calderón had previously served as the PAN's president and held a cabinet position in the Fox administration, he was a relatively unknown figure at the time (Moreno, 2007). In contrast, López Obrador had become a national political figure after serving as Mexico City's mayor (2000–2005) and in the aftermath of the polarized impeachment he faced between

2004 and 2006, during which he accused Vicente Fox's government of trying to prevent him from running for the Presidency. The PRI candidate, Roberto Madrazo, also was a well-known politician who had previously served as a governor and president of his party. His negative image among the electorate and the internal division within the PRI—many party factions never fully supported Madrazo's campaign—made his campaign struggle and lose support even among his own party's allies, many of whom eventually defected to the PAN and the PRD campaigns (Langston, 2007). Two other candidates competed, nominated by smaller parties: Patricia Mercado from the Social Democratic Alternative and Roberto Campa from the New Alliance, which was founded by the national teachers' union, formerly tied to the PRI. While at the beginning of the campaign they were mostly unknown, Mercado and Campa increased their name recognition particularly after the campaign debates, when Mercado championed progressive issues—abortion, same-sex marriage, etc—which are rarely discussed by Mexico's major parties, whereas Campa negatively campaigned against the PRI and its candidate.

The presidential campaign began in mid-January 2006 when most electoral polls reported a 10- to 15-point advantage for López Obrador. This polling advantage decreased over the course of the campaign and, eventually became a two-race campaign between the PRD and the PAN candidates. On July 2, Calderón was able to win the election with a narrow difference: he won with 36.7% of the vote and a 0.57 percentage point lead over López Obrador. As such, the 2006 presidential campaign seemed to constitute a learning process. On the one hand, many voters got to know different candidates—in particular, the PAN candidate who, mere months before the campaign's onset, had not even been the favorite to win his party's nomination (Moreno, 2007) but eventually won the presidency. Second, voters were also able to contrast the two major campaigns: the call for the end of neoliberal policies endorsed by López Obrador, and the call for continuity and stability endorsed by both Calderon and President Fox, which explicitly depicted López Obrador as a “danger” to the country. Campaign information is expected to have been particularly consequential for independents, who constituted between 30% and 50% depending on question wording (Castro Cornejo, 2019b).

Political Information in the 2006 Presidential Election

The first methodological challenge has to do with measuring the levels of political information during campaigns. Most voting behavior studies rely on a battery of “quiz” items measuring citizens' knowledge of politics (Zaller, 1992; Carpini & Keeter, 1996). For example, Mexico's National Electoral Study (1997–2015), which is part of the CSES, has consistently included the same set of questions (e.g., name of the governor, Congress chambers, and the length of a member of the Mexican Congress's term). As Supplementary Appendix Figure SA2 shows, consistent with the argument of this paper, there is a significant increase in voters' levels of political information during these years. In 1997, 20% of voters were able to correctly answer all three questions. Since then, this share has increased 25 percentage points, and the average number of correct answers has increased from 1.5 to 2. In other words, there has been an increasing acquisition of political experience once voters became more familiar with the democratic process.

Other survey projects like the 2006 Mexico Panel Survey also rely on factual questions about the country's political system, for example, querying respondents about the branches of government, NAFTA, the nationalization of the oil industry, and poverty alleviation programs.¹ Although both the National Electoral Study and the Mexico Panel Survey do not rely on campaign-specific information—in fact, few of the covered topics were even mentioned by the candidates—this knowledge is expected to be correlated with voters' levels of campaign information. However, as [Converse \(1962\)](#) suggests in his seminal work, it is necessary to distinguish between general political information and campaign-specific information. Although both are conceptually and empirically intertwined, focusing on campaign-specific information helps better estimate information's effect on voting behavior since levels of broader political information tend to remain stable during campaigns. For those purposes, several survey projects include questions designed to estimate voters' knowledge of candidates' name, policy positions, campaign slogans, or campaign events. The benefits of these measures rest with the fact that levels of information about these items can vary over the course of a campaign.

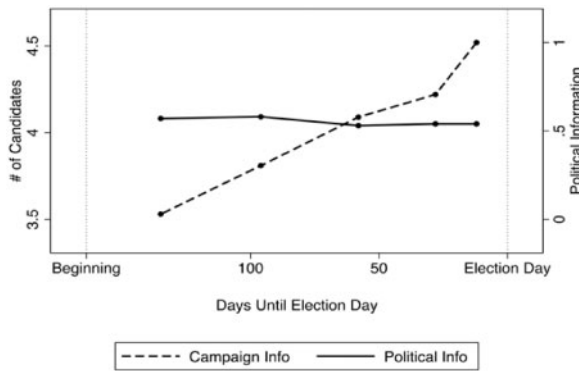
Although it would be ideal to measure voters' knowledge of policy positions, consistent with the previous discussion of catch-all politics in Latin American elections ([Singer & Tafoya, 2020](#)), few survey projects include such items since candidates rarely take explicit policy positions during campaigns. Instead, they endorse broader issues like “support for the poor” or “economic stability.” Moreover, while campaign slogans can constitute a good proxy for voters' attention to campaign events, for example, during the 2006 presidential campaign, Felipe Calderón changed his campaign slogan—and, in fact, his general campaign strategy—in the middle of the campaign, to shift from a focus on honesty to one on the economy, making this measure less useful for this particular campaign. Therefore, this study operationalizes campaign information with candidates' name recognition since the latter is constantly measured throughout the campaign and increases as election day draws closer. Moreover, including two well-known candidates (PRD and PRI), a relatively unknown candidate (PAN), and two less-known candidates provides the necessary variation to identify voters with higher and lower levels of campaign information.

[Figure 1](#) compares the levels of candidates' name recognition to those of the index of information about the political system (name of the governor, Congress chambers, and the length of a member of the Mexican Congress's term), measured throughout the 2006 Mexican presidential campaign based on cross-sectional surveys (six nationally representative polls) conducted by the survey research firm BGC Beltrán Juárez y Asocs. [Figure 1](#) shows that, consistent with the previous discussion, levels of political information—recoded on a 0–1 scale—are fairly stable. In turn, most increases in information are limited to campaign-specific information like candidates' name recognition (dotted line), which increases from 3.5 to 4.5, out of a total of 5.

Supplementary [Appendix SB](#) also reports additional information about which voters tend to report higher levels of candidates' name recognition. High levels of name recognition are, in fact, associated with variables expected to be related to information gathering (e.g., education, general political information about the political system,

¹“Together with Mexico and the United States, which of the following countries is a member of NAFTA: Canada, Chile, or Cuba?”, “Could you tell me the names of the three branches of government, or do you not remember right now?”, “Could you tell me which former Mexican president nationalized oil, created the National Solidarity Program/the PROGRESA program or do you not remember right now?”

Figure 1.
Campaign Information versus Political Information in 2006.
 Note: Locally weighted scatterplot smoothing.



proximity to the election). In other words, like other measures of information, this variable is not just associated with the ability to name who is running for the presidency but also with broader political information about Mexico's political system. An interesting pattern also emerges from these data: candidates' name recognition does not substantially differ between partisans and independents—they both know the same number of candidates and increase their knowledge in a fairly similar way. However, as the next sections detail, the consequences of information on retrospective voting and vote choice significantly differ between partisans and independents. Furthermore, focusing on candidate name recognition is also advantageous from a theoretical perspective. This strategy allows us to focus on voters' knowledge about who the major actors in the democratic process are—factors that, as this study argues, are particularly crucial in young democracies. Although Mexico did not experience the collapse of its major parties or of its entire system as did many Latin American countries (Morgan, 2011; Lupu, 2014), its party system is still less institutionalized than those of advanced industrial democracies where voters have strong democratic experience.

Empirical Strategy and Data

In order to test this article's hypotheses, this research relies on both cross-sectional and panel survey data. The test of hypothesis 1 is based on pooled survey data from six electoral polls conducted throughout the 2006 presidential election by BGC Beltrán, Juárez y Asocs. (an average sample of 1,200 respondents). Relying on these survey data has several benefits. First, they contain enough observations to allow us to analyze the behavior of both partisans and independents since these groups are expected to behave differently across levels of information. And second, as opposed to other survey projects, these electoral polls have more refined questions measuring candidates' name recognition. In particular, these surveys ask respondents: "Before I mentioned his/her name, had you heard of [CANDIDATE'S NAME]?"

In contrast, hypothesis 2 relies on the 2006 Mexico Panel Survey (Lawson et al., 2007). This survey follows an indirect strategy to measure candidates' name recognition, asking: "On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates that you have a very negative opinion of the candidate I name and 10 means you have a very positive opinion of him or her, what is your opinion of [CANDIDATE'S NAME]?" If voters have not heard of the candidate, they voluntarily need to let the interviewer know. Although this question possibly makes respondents less likely to accept that they are not familiar with some of the candidates since respondents need to voluntarily let the interviewer know that they do not know a particular candidate, given the nature of the panel data, it has the advantage of providing direct evidence of change by comparing the same respondents at different moments in time. It is important to highlight that the first wave of the panel survey only measured the name recognition of the three major candidates, which means that this variable has less variation than the one constructed with the cross-national surveys, making for a harder test of the influence of low and high levels of information on vote intention (hypothesis 2). The models test two types of variables based on the Mexican Panel Survey: (a) a variable that distinguishes between voters with low and high levels of information as measured in the first wave of the survey, and (b) a variable that measures information gains between the first and the second wave. Although the two measures are interrelated (low-information respondents are more likely to have less crystalized vote preferences), the second measure captures the information gains that respondents experience during campaigns.

To measure campaign predispositions, this research follows Finkel (1993: pp. 16–17) and relies on party identification and presidential approval to show that campaigns serve to activate political predispositions and bring votes in line with these underlying predispositions even in young democracies. This strategy differs from Greene's (2011) study that also analyzes the 2006 Mexican Panel Survey but relies on vote-intention in October as a proxy for campaign predispositions. Greene's strategy can be problematic because it relies on a behavioral measure—voting behavior—to test for an attitudinal concept—campaign predispositions. It also potentially overestimates campaign persuasion since it assumes that vote choice in October 2005 is a long-term variable,² instead of relying on party identification, which is a political predisposition that is more likely to constitute a long-term measure.

Moreover, the analysis also operationalizes campaign predispositions with (a) presidential approval and (b) vote choice in 2000, both of which are particularly relevant for independents. As Finkel (1993) argues, voters can follow the "referendum model" of presidential campaigns, meaning that evaluations of the incumbent president can strongly influence vote intention. This was particularly relevant in the case of the 2006 presidential campaign, in which the incumbent president, Vicente Fox, explicitly campaigned in favor of the PAN candidate—who also presented himself as a continuity candidate—leading to the election being perceived as a referendum of Fox's government. Presidential approval was, in fact, polarized along partisan lines: according to the same set of polls conducted during the 2006 presidential campaign, while 94% of PAN partisans approved of Vicente Fox's work, 67% of PRD partisans disapproved of his work (PRI partisans were split and 62% of independents approved of his work).

²Vote choice measured in October 2005 (first wave) is also likely to be a noisy measure since the campaign did not begin until mid-January 2006 and primaries were still taking place in October 2005 (Castro Cornejo, 2019)

Finally, the analysis also includes self-reported vote choice in the previous presidential elections. Given that Mexican parties are stable, it is plausible that some independents lean to a political party despite self-identifying as “independents” (Petrocik, 2009). A follow-up question designed to identify independent leaners was not included in the Mexican Panel Survey but individuals’ self-reported vote choice in the previous presidential elections can serve as a proxy for campaign predispositions for the purpose of identifying those independents who voted for the same party in both the 2000 and the 2006 presidential elections. The complete wordings of the questions used in the next section appear in [Supplementary Appendix Table SA1](#).

Results

Although partisans and independents acquire information in a fairly similar way throughout the campaign, low levels of campaign information can moderate the connection between presidential approval and vote choice (retrospective voting, hypothesis 1) and, ultimately, the stability of voter preferences (hypothesis 2). For this purpose, [Table 1](#) displays the results of logistic regressions based on pooled cross-sectional survey data. To focus on the main argument, the dependent variable of each model is individuals’ vote for the incumbent party (PAN), and the results for incumbent

Table 1.
Logistic Regressions

	Dependent Variable = Vote for Incumbent Candidate (PAN)			
	Aggregate (1)	Independents (2)	Pro-incumbent partisans (3)	Opposition partisans (4)
Presidential approval	0.91 (0.17)***	0.18 (0.25)	1.52 (0.48)***	0.39 (0.41)
Campaign information	-0.12 (0.14)	-0.36 (0.18)*	0.81 (0.40)**	-0.04 (0.30)
Approval × campaign information	0.07 (0.04)*	0.15 (0.06)***	-0.19 (0.11)*	0.04 (0.10)
Days until election day (ln)	0.04 (0.03)	0.13 (0.06)**	-0.05 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.10)
Age	0.01 (0.00)**	0.01 (0.00)*	0.01 (0.01)*	0.01 (0.01)
Female	-0.04 (0.07)	0.01 (0.12)	-0.26 (0.21)	0.16 (0.23)
Education	0.22 (0.03)***	0.19 (0.05)***	0.18 (0.10)*	0.29 (0.10)***
Constant	-4.82 (0.63)***	-2.89 (0.88)***	-4.52 (1.77)**	-5.53 (1.46)***
Observations	4,977	1,629	1,213	2,222
Pseudo R ²	0.23	0.13	0.07	0.05

Note. Probability of voting for the incumbent candidate (PAN). Standard errors in parentheses.

*** $p < .01$,

** $p < .05$, and

* $p < .1$.

partisans, opposition partisans, and independents are presented separately. The results show that levels of campaign information have a moderating effect on the relationship between presidential approval and vote choice (hypothesis 1), but this relationship is restricted to independents ($p < .01$, hypothesis 3a). As expected, partisans are able to relate their vote choice either to supporting or opposing the incumbent (PAN) regardless of their levels of information: the interaction between presidential approval and information is not statistically significant for opposition partisans (PRI and PRD partisans). For pro-incumbent partisans (PAN partisans), it only reaches weak statistical significance ($p < .10$) with no substantive effect. In other words, as opposed to partisans who can compensate for their low levels of campaign information and rely on their partisanship to support their co-partisan candidate, less-informed independents have a harder time relating presidential approval to vote intention.

For ease of interpretation, Figure 2 converts the logit coefficients into predicted probabilities of voting for the PAN incumbent. Among less-informed independents, 30% of voters who approve of the president support the PAN, whereas 20% of those who disapprove of Fox support his party: a gap of only 10 percentage points. In contrast, the approval-gap is more noticeable among highly informed independents: it reaches 51 percentage points (60% of those who approve of the president support the PAN, while only 9% of those who disapprove of him do so). In short, the results suggest that campaigns matter because information enables voters to evaluate the incumbent retrospectively. However, less-informed independents cannot compensate for their low levels of information, which makes them less likely to become retrospective voters than less-informed partisans; only independents with high levels of information are able to vote in line with their political predispositions (hypotheses 1 and 3a). The same result obtains when the dependent variable is vote for López Obrador: only high-informed independents are able to relate their negative retrospective evaluation of the incumbent to their vote choice (Supplementary Appendix SC).

The second hypothesis of this study focuses exclusively on the probability of changing one's vote preference during the campaign. For this purpose, the following analysis

Figure 2.
Probability of Voting for Incumbent Candidate (PAN): Independents.

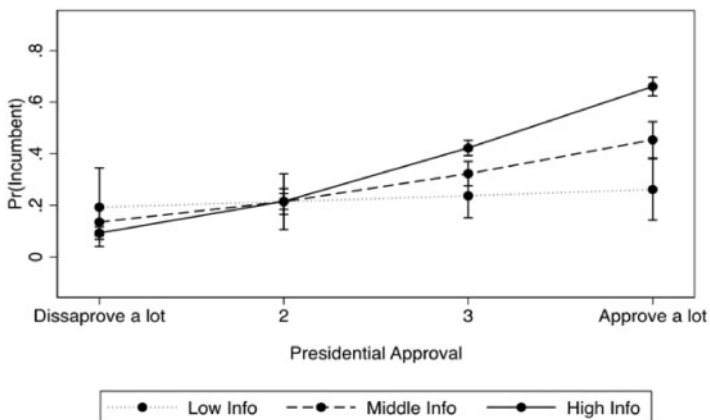


Table 2.

Vote Shifts between the First and Second Wave (Mexico Panel Survey 2006)

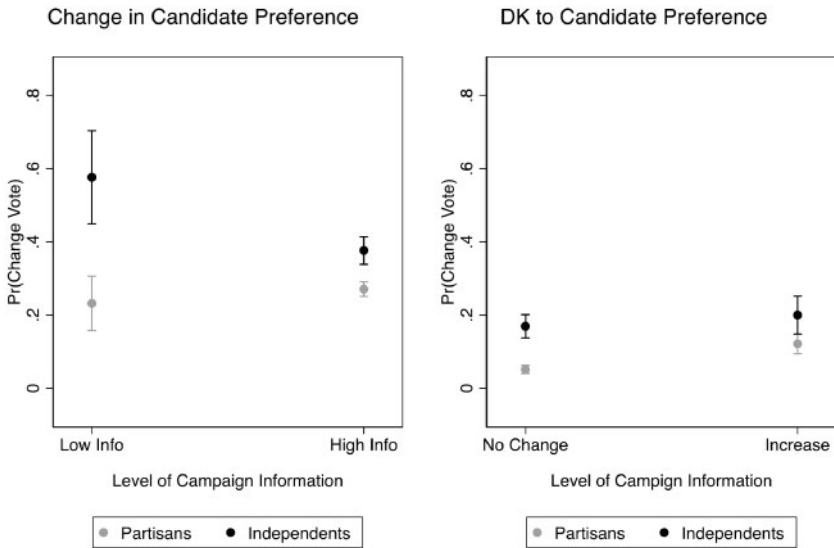
	All voters	Partisans	Independents
Consistent vote choice	58%	64%	43%
Change vote choice	25%	23%	29%
Don't know → vote	10%	7%	15%
Vote → don't know	4%	4%	3%
Consistent don't know	4%	1%	9%

is based on data from the 2006 Mexico Panel Survey (Lawson et al., 2007), concentrating particularly on: (a) the voters who switched from a nonresponse to a defined candidate preference and (b) the voters who changed their vote intention from one candidate to another. Previous comparative political behavior studies on campaign effects have overlooked the role of those voters who shift from a nonresponse to a defined vote choice. However, as research in American politics suggests (Hillygus & Jackman, 2003), the latter represent one of the largest groups that change vote preference. As Table 2 shows, in the 2006 presidential elections, 10% of the voters moved from indecision to vote choice (15% among independents).

Supplementary Appendix Table SA2 reports logistic models in which the dependent variable is a changing vote preference from one candidate to another between the first and the second wave of the panel survey. Consistent with hypothesis 3b, while levels of information do not achieve statistical significance by themselves ($p > .05$), their effect is moderated by partisanship: the interaction between levels of information and partisanship is statistically significant ($p < .05$). For ease of interpretation, Figure 3 converts the logit coefficients into predicted probabilities (left panel). As expected, independents are more likely to report an unstable vote choice than partisans. Moreover, low levels of information exacerbate the former's vote instability: 58% of less-informed independents change their vote preference, whereas 38% of highly informed independents switch their vote intention (a 20 percentage points gap). In contrast, levels of information do not substantially condition the probability of a partisan changing her vote choice (highly informed partisans: 28%; less-informed partisans: 24%). Interestingly, the interaction between partisanship and information gains is not statistically significant. This means that levels of information measured at the onset of the campaign condition independents' subsequent behavior making them more likely to update their vote preferences.

The opposite happens when we analyze voters who transition from a "don't know" answer to a defined candidate preference. Indeed, information gains are most consequential in this group (interaction term, $p < .05$, Supplementary Appendix Table SA3). For ease of interpretation, Figure 3 (right panel) shows that information gains increase the probability that the average voter will shift from "don't know" to a defined vote choice by 6 percentage points (from 17% to 20% among independents, and from 5% to 12% among partisans). This means that, in contrast to switching between candidates, information gains are highly relevant for "don't know" voters' transition from indecision to a candidate preference (hypothesis 3b). These results are consistent with

Figure 3.
Change in Vote Preference throughout the Campaign.



research in American politics that identifies this group as one of the most responsive to campaigns (Hillygus & Jackman, 2003).

Although low levels of information and information gains make independents responsive to campaigns, the role of information among them can only be fully understood after answering a final question: do independents become “enlightened?” According to the Mexico Panel Survey, 90% of voters who consistently self-identify with the same political party (i.e., in both the first and the second wave of the panel survey) support their co-partisan candidate. Similarly, according to their self-reported past vote history, 78% of partisans voted for the same political party during the 2000 and the 2006 presidential campaigns. In other words, consistent with previous research, party identification seems to be a very strong predictor of voting behavior in Latin America (Lupu, 2015).³ In turn, Table 3 reports the percentage of independents who supported a candidate in line with their precampaign political predispositions—consistent with their presidential approval, their vote in 2000, or both. Table 3 also presents this information for independents who switched their vote choice during the campaign, and for those who reported a stable vote choice. In fact, the vast majority of independents supported a candidate in line with their presidential approval, past vote, or both. Moreover, 78% of independents who switched their vote choice throughout the campaign relied on their precampaign dispositions vis-à-vis 68% who did not change their vote choice (a difference of 10 percentage points). These findings suggest that political campaigns do enlighten voters. Independents who switch their vote intention do not support a

³One exception is a relatively small fraction of partisans who change their partisanship over the course of the campaign and are highly responsive to campaigns, as studied by Castro Cornejo (2020).

Table 3.

Vote Choice According to Precampaign Dispositions (Among Independents)

	Switch (41%)	No switch (58%)
Consistent with presidential approval	20%	19%
Consistent with past vote	14%	12%
Consistent with presidential approval + past vote	44%	37%
Total (consistent with precampaign dispositions)	78%	68%
Total (inconsistent with precampaign dispositions)	22%	32%

candidate who stands against their political interests. Consistent with [Finkel \(1993\)](#) and [Iyengar and Petrocik's \(2000\)](#) studies, when partisanship is absent, voters turn to alternative political predispositions, like their evaluations of the president's performance, in order to make electoral decisions. This means that even those voters who are more likely to be persuaded by campaigns appear to become enlightened over the course of the campaign, particularly those who switch their vote intention.

Discussion

The findings of this study represent important contributions to the campaigns literature. On the one hand, they are consistent with the comparative literature suggesting that voters in post-1978 democracies are qualitatively different from those in advanced industrial democracies: an important proportion of the electorate has low levels of information about the major actors competing in elections and reports a significant probability of switching vote choice throughout the campaign. However, this work differs from current campaigns studies insofar as it argues that enlightenment constitutes the major mechanism of campaign influence in young democracies like Mexico. The majority of voters who switch their vote choice are more likely to support a candidate in line with their political predispositions. This is good news for representation. Even in contexts with less democratic experience or where the party systems are not as institutionalized ([Mainwaring, 2018](#)), campaigns play a major role in the democratic process enlightening voters' electoral decisions.

Some features not tested in this article may also turn out to be influential if examined in future studies. This article finds that information gains mostly influence "don't know" voters to transition to a candidate preference but have no apparent effect on transitions from one candidate to another. These results are potentially driven by the variable measuring campaign information, which varies less when based on panel survey data, since it only includes knowledge about the three major presidential candidates. This means that the information gains of voters with lower levels of information are not accurately identified, underestimating the effect of information on voters' behavior. Another interpretation relates to the operationalization of campaign information. Future studies may explore how other variables that capture knowledge of party brands, party leaders' name recognition, or campaign slogans can influence voting behavior.

Although they might be correlated with candidates' name recognition, these variables could capture another dimension of campaign information that allows voters to update their vote preference.

A relevant question related to this study is the extent to which its findings extend to other Latin American countries and other regions of the world. Although the democratic experience and the strength of party roots in Mexican society do not equate to those of advanced industrial democracies like the United States, they are higher than the average for the region. In that sense, the results reported in this study may be conservative. If this study is replicated for party systems in which new parties tend to appear in every election cycle (Mainwaring, 2018), a larger proportion of the electorate might report vote choice instability due to low levels of information since voters are not familiar with most of the new parties and candidates, making them likely to update their vote preference as election day approaches.

Supplementary Data

Supplementary Data are available at *IJPOR* online.

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