

## **How Do Campaigns Matter?**

### **Swing Voters, Partisan Loyalties, and Party System Institutionalization**

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**Abstract:** This research contributes to the campaigns literature by pointing out a different mechanism for which campaigns matter in new democracies. This study argues that the institutionalization of the party system conditions voters at campaign time. In particular, this study focuses on voters' unstable partisan attachments—an empirical manifestation of weak party system institutionalization. While previous research has focused on the process in which partisanship develops in new democracies, this study seeks to explain why some voters develop long-term partisan attachments making less vulnerable to political campaigns. Some voters in new democracies are able to build strong partisanship as the screen through which they observe the political world leading individuals to interpret new information so as to reinforce. However, some voters lack long-term partisan attachments enabling them to update their party identification as the campaign unfolds. These voters have a harder time to reinforce their pre-campaign predispositions and are more likely to become swing voters.

The conventional wisdom in American politics posits that a political campaign is a learning process that helps voters support the candidate in line with their preexisting political predispositions. As a result of the campaign activating voters' political predispositions, people become "enlightened," making election results largely predetermined (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954; Erikson and Wlezien, 2012; Gelman and King 1993). This is why the conventional wisdom has posited that campaigns have "minimal effects;" few voters change their declared candidate preference, and the few who change it are consistent with their pre-campaign political predispositions—what the literature has called campaign "fundamentals" (e.g. partisanship, presidential approval, evaluation of the economy).

In comparative politics there is a common assumption about the limited transportability of the "minimal effects" models of campaign influence. Some literature on Latin American political behavior has argued that in new democracies voters show little resistance to persuasive campaign messages (Lawson and McCann, 2004; Baker, Ames and Renno, 2006; Greene 2011), since only a small minority of the electorate has partisan identities strong enough to be loyal to their preferred candidate. In fact, most studies have found at least a third of the electorate can be categorized as swing voters—voters who shift their declared vote intention throughout the campaign—which represents a significantly higher proportion compared to American elections (Greene, 2011).

Based on the Mexican case—a new democracy with high levels of partisanship in Latin America—this research contributes to the campaigns literature by pointing out a different mechanism for which campaigns matter. This study argues that the institutionalization of the party system conditions voters at campaign time by focusing on voters weakly formed partisan

attachments<sup>1</sup>—an empirical manifestation of weak party system institutionalization—which makes them more vulnerable to campaigns. While most research has focused on the process in which partisanship develops in new democracies (Brader and Tucker, 2001; Brader and Tucker, 2008; among others) or the strength of voters’ partisan attachments in young party systems (Lawson and McCann, 2004; Greene 2011; among others), this study focuses on a second dimension of partisanship—individual level stability— and seeks to explain why some voters develop long-term partisan attachments making less vulnerable to political campaigns. While some voters are able to build long-term partisan attachments, others report unstable partisan attachments enabling them to update their party identification as the campaign unfolds. These voters are more likely to change the favorability of their co-partisan candidate and shift their vote intention throughout political campaigns. This phenomenon is not limited to Mexican presidential elections or specific electoral cycles, but as shown in this paper, it persists in other Latin American party systems like Brazil and Argentina.

The findings of this paper have important implications for the campaigns literature. First, it suggests that partisans in new democracies are not as persuadable as previous studies suggested. Voters with long-term partisan attachments report fairly similar electoral behavior as partisans in American elections: they have very stable vote choice throughout campaigns and report a strong connection between partisanship and the vote. These voters have built partisanship as the screen through which they observe the political world leading them to interpret new campaign information so as to reinforce. However, voters who report short-term partisan attachments have a harder time to reinforce their pre-campaign predispositions and report a different behavior than long-term partisans. They have a disproportionate likelihood of

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper I use the terms *partisanship*, *partisan attachments*, and *party identification* interchangeably to refer to voter’s self-identification with a political party.

becoming swing voters, adding a piece to the puzzle of why Latin American presidential elections report a large proportion of swing voters than in party systems like that of the U.S.

### **Campaign Fundamentals in New Democracies**

The conventional wisdom in American politics has posited that campaigns play a major role enlightening voters and providing information to support the candidate in line with their preexisting political predispositions. These pre-campaign predispositions are the so-called “fundamentals” that determine election outcomes: partisanship, presidential approval and the evaluation of the national economy (Gelman and King 1993, Kaplan, Park and Gelman 2012, Johnston, Hagen, and Jamieson 2004). According to this literature, as the campaign progresses, the campaign is able to “activate” voters’ pre-campaign predispositions and become increasingly capable of connecting their “fundamentals” to vote intention.

Campaign fundamentals also shape voters’ electoral behavior in new democracies. This is the case in party systems with high levels of partisanship like Mexico. **Figure 1** reports the aggregate percent of partisans during the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections. Cross-sectional surveys (nationally representative samples: 14 electoral polls<sup>2</sup>) find that two thirds of the electorate, on average, self-identify with a political party throughout both campaigns, which represents a higher proportion than the average for the region.<sup>3</sup> In this context, it is expected that party identification—along with other campaign fundamentals—constitutes a strong predictor of voting behavior. **Figure 2** shows the Pseudo R from multinomial logistic regressions based on

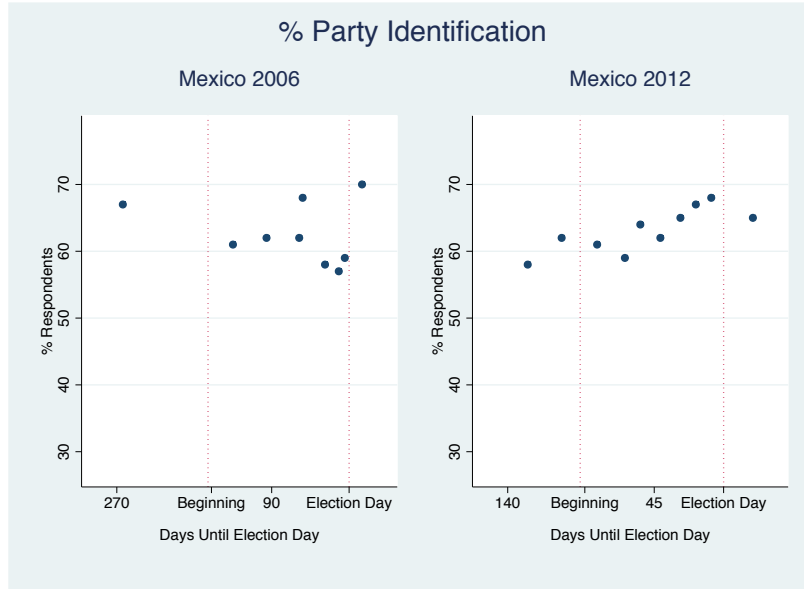
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<sup>2</sup> The average percent of voters declaring party identification is 60 and 63 percent in 2006 and 2012, respectively (excluding voters who lean to a political party) according to survey data. BGC Beltrán, Juárez y Asocs, survey research firm, conducted the 14 national electoral polls during the 2006 and 2012 presidential campaigns. Each survey had an average sample of 1,200 respondents (2006: N=7,200 and 2012: N=10,200). **Figure 1** also includes data from the Mexico Panel Surveys (Lawson, et. al., 2006; Lawson, et. al., 2013), which reports an average level of 63 and 70 percent of partisans, respectively.

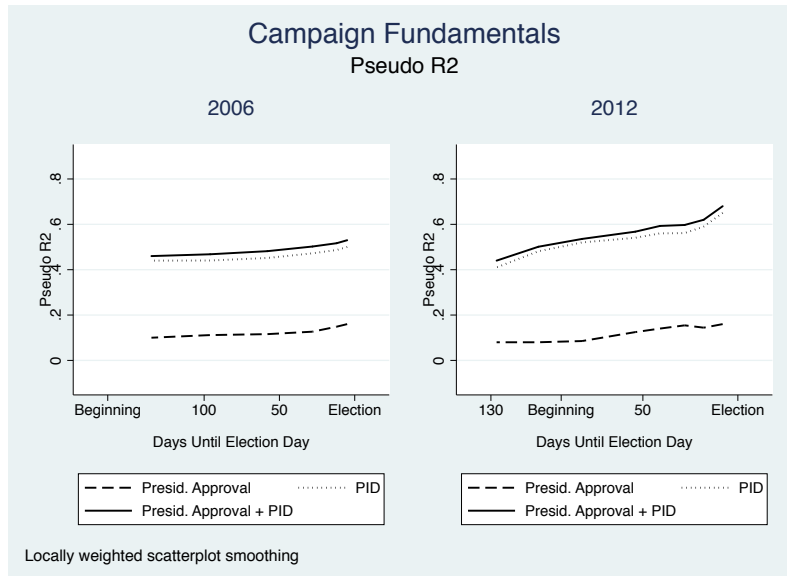
<sup>3</sup> Although the question wording varies, data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) reports an average for the region of 37% and 35% in 2006 and 2012, respectively.

cross-sectional data conducted during both presidential elections in Mexico. These models report robust  $R^2$  statistics, suggesting a strong connection between campaign fundamentals (e.g. partisanship and presidential approval) and the vote.

**Figure 1.** Aggregate Stability of PID throughout Presidential Campaigns



**Figure 2.** Connection between Campaign Fundamentals and Vote Choice



Given this context, we should expect that the proportion of swing voters would be relatively small, particularly among partisans. As the voting behavior literature suggests (Lewis-

Beck et al 2008), voters’ partisan attachments will act as a strong filter of campaign information, rejecting information inconsistent with their political predispositions (Zaller, 1992; Gelman and King 1993), making them immune to candidates’ persuasive efforts. This is the case in the U.S., a party system with strong partisanship (60 percent of partisans, 89 percent if we include partisan leaners; 2008 ANES) in which only 6 percent of partisans became swing voters during the 2008 presidential election<sup>4</sup> (Table 1). Mexico shares a fairly similar proportion of partisans among the electorate since 67 and 62 percent of respondents self-identified as partisans during the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections (if partisans leaners are included: 79% in 2012). However, data from the 2006 and 2012 Mexico Panel Survey (Lawson, et. al., 2006; Lawson, et. al., 2013) show that partisans in Mexico are more vulnerable to campaigns: 27% and 30%, respectively, changed their vote intention throughout the campaign. Furthermore, the last row of Table 1 reports the proportion of partisans who by the end of the campaign supported a candidate contrary to their party identification. While in the U.S. only 6 percent did not support their co-partisan candidate, a significant proportion during the Mexican presidential election defected: 21 and 20 percent, respectively. As the comparative literature on campaigns has noted, voters’ partisan identities do not seem strong enough to be loyal to their preferred candidate.

**Table 1.** Proportion of Swing Voters

Across groups:	ANES 2008	2006 Mexico Panel Survey	2012 Mexico Panel Survey
Complete Sample	7%	30%	33%
Partisans	6%	27%	30%
Partisans (including leaners)	7%	N.A.	31%
Independents (without leaners)	14%	40%	40%
Partisans voting against pre-campaign predispositions <sup>5</sup>	6%	21%	20%

Note: N.A. Data not available / Percentages reported are based on the entire sample.

<sup>4</sup> Source: 2008 American National Electoral Study (ANES) and 2006/2012 Mexico Panel Survey

<sup>5</sup> Partisans who did not support their co-partisan candidate by the end of the campaign based on their pre-campaign party identification measured on the first wave of the panel survey.

An alternative explanation focuses on voters' partisan instability rather than partisan strength. With few exceptions (Lupu, 2014; Baker et al, 2015) most comparative studies on campaign effects have focused on the development or strength of party identification in new democracies but have overlooked a key component of partisanship—stability—that has important implications for the campaigns literature. As explained in the next section, a pattern emerges when analyzing panel data from the 2006 and 2012 Mexican presidential elections, which cannot be uncovered with cross-sectional data: a significant proportion of partisans in these two elections changed their party identification during the few months that the campaign lasted. Most studies in American Politics have found that partisan instability throughout political campaigns is a product of measurement error (Green and Palmquist 1990; Green et al 2002). However, it is possible that in new democracies, in which voters have less democratic experience (Brader and Tucker, 2001) voters have weakly formed partisan attachments that enable them to update their partisanship throughout the campaign making them particularly vulnerable to political campaigns. As previous research suggest (Markus and Converse, 1979; Jennings and Markus, 1984, among others), this means that for some voters, party identification does not constitute a screen through which voters understand the political world—rejecting information inconsistent with their precampaign predispositions at campaign time. This phenomenon has important implications for the campaign literature. On the one hand, voters who hold short-term partisan attachments substantially contribute to increase the proportion of swing voters in elections in new democracies. And, on the other, it is possible that voters who consistently self-identify with a political party between the beginning of the campaign and election day (the “true” partisans) are more immune to political campaigns (e.g. less likely to become swing voters) than previous comparative studies have suggested.

## Partisan Instability and Party System Institutionalization

The comparative literature in Latin American political behavior suggests that voters do have unstable partisan attachments in new democracies, although most studies have focused on party systems with weak party brands (e.g. Argentina: Lupu 2013) or analyzed voters unstable partisan attachments during campaigns in party systems that have experienced party dilution (e.g. Brazil 2002-2006: Baker et al, 2015). As **Table 2** shows, in Mexico—a stable party system with high levels of partisanship—a significant proportion of the electorate report inconsistent answers to the party identification survey question throughout the 2006 and 2012 presidential campaigns. More than a third of the sample changed their response to the party identification question (35 and 45 percent of partisans, respectively). While the voting behavior literature expects that some partisans self-identify as independents under some conditions (e.g. self-identifying as independents might be socially desirable, Keith et al. 1992; Klar and Krupnikov, 2013), a striking proportion of partisans changed their declared sympathy to another political party by the end of the campaign. **Table 2** also shows voters' partisan instability is not a characteristic of a particular electoral cycle; it persists over time and across different Latin American party systems.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The wording from Mexico 2006/2012 is framed as a long-term identification (*In general, would you say you identify with the PAN, the PRI or the PRD*), while the Brazil 2010 is framed as a short-term identification and includes a filter question: *Do you currently identify with a political party? IF YES: Which political party do you identify with?* The wording from Argentina 2015 is framed as a long-term identification and includes a filter: *Regardless of what which party you vote for in the last election, or you will vote for, in general, do you sympathize with any political party? IF YES Which Party?*



**Table 2.** Stability of Party Identification between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of Panel Surveys  
*% of partisans* (in parenthesis: % of the sample)

	Consistent PID	Switched to a different party PID <--> PID	Switched to independent PID <--> Indep
2006 Mexico Panel Survey	57 (48)	16 (13)	23 (19)
2012 Mexico Panel Survey	43 (34)	17 (13)	39 (31)
2010 Brazilian Panel Survey	49 (15)	15 (5)	33 (27)
2015 Argentina Panel Survey	22 (13)	18 (10)	61 (35)

Consistent independents: Mexico 2006 (17%), Mexico 2012 (20%), Argentina 2015 (40%), Brazil 2010 (47%)  
 Consistent PID = Reports the same party identification over time  
 PID <--> PID = change from identifying with a party to another party  
 PID <--> Indep. = change from identifying with a party to independent (or vice versa)

Which voters update their party identification as the campaign unfolds? As previously mentioned, this study argues that voters’ partisan instability throughout a political campaign is an empirical manifestation of the institutionalization of the party system. As Converse (1979) argues, young voters in established democracies inherit their initial partisan loyalties from their parents. Once individuals are eligible to vote, their experiences reinforce their early predispositions and through the course of the life cycle (Campbell et al 1960; Converse 1976; Jennings and Markus 1984; Lewis-Beck et al 2008). However, in post-1978 democracies voters have a shorter democratic experience and less time to develop strong partisan attachments. This is what the literature has called the “acquisition of political experience,” the process of understanding of what parties are and what they stand for (McPhee and Ferguson, 1962; Anderson, 1979; Butler and Stokes, 1974). As Mainwaring (2017) refers, when the party system institutionalizes,<sup>7</sup> political actors behave in relatively stable and predictable ways and have clear and stable expectations about other actors. In other words, there is less uncertainty about how political actors behave, party brands have strong reputations, and electoral outcomes are more

<sup>7</sup> An institutionalized party system, then, is one in which a stable set of parties interacts regularly in relatively stable ways. Actors develop expectations and behavior based on the premise that the fundamental contours and rules of party competition will prevail into the foreseeable future. (Mainwaring, 2017).

predictable. At the individual level, the accumulation of political information (and experience) leads to the consolidation of partisan loyalties, increasing both the strength and stability of voters' partisan identification.

In new democracies, even within stable party systems in which some voters are able to develop their partisanship as a product of early socialization, partisanship is necessarily limited by the country's democratic experience. Similarly, although in some cases political cleavages might be rooted in pre-democratic eras or democratic transition periods, partisan loyalties are conditioned by the survivability of political parties. In countries where new parties tend appear in each electoral cycle and replace the old ones, most party labels will be necessarily diffuse and voters will not have a clear idea of what most parties stand for (Mainwaring 2017).

The Mexican system provides an ideal case to test the stability of partisan attachments and the broader electoral implications for the campaigns literature. Despite a short democratic experience beginning when the once hegemonic party (PRI) lost the majority in Congress in 1997, the system has remained stable since then <sup>8</sup> (Mainwaring 2017) and party brands of the three major parties are fairly strong. Previous studies on voters' partisan attachments have mostly studied cases in which the system has experienced brand dilution and partisan instability has mostly been explained by variations at the party system level (e.g. party convergence, Lupu 2013; changing party reputations, Baker et al 2015). The Mexican system up until the 2012 presidential election did not experience the collapse of major parties or the entire system as many

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<sup>8</sup> In the 1990-2015 period, the Mexican system, along with Uruguay, Dominican Republic, and Chile registered almost perfect stability in the main contenders in Latin American presidential elections. When additional indicators are added (interparty electoral competition and stability of parties' ideological positions), Uruguay, Mexico, and Chile constituted the most stable systems in Latin America (Mainwaring, 2017).

Latin American countries (Morgan 2011; Lupu 2014), or the emergence of new major parties (Mainwaring 2017),<sup>9</sup> which allows focusing on variations at the individual level.

As a new democracy, the Mexican electorate has experienced a shorter period of time to build stable partisanship compared to advanced industrial democracies. While continuously advanced industrial democracies can rely on voter's age or the number of years since the respondent had the right to vote, in new democracies political experience is necessarily limited by the country's democratic experience.<sup>10</sup> For those purposes, the 2006 Mexico Panel asked partisans about the number of years that they have identified with their preferred party (*“For how long have you identified with the...?”*). At that time, the Mexican party system had only experienced 9 years since the PRI lost the majority in congress and only six years since the PRI lost the presidency. However, some voters might identify with a party for a longer period of time since the three major parties were key actors during the transition period (PAN, PRI and PRD).

**Figure 3** shows that, in fact, there is variation on the length of party identification in Mexico: 36% have identified with their party for more than 11 years, 22% between 5 and 11 years, 25% between 2 and 5 years, and 17% have only identified for two years or less. Given this variation, it is expected that voters who have identified with a party for fewer years are more likely to change their party identification throughout the campaign period. On the contrary, voters who

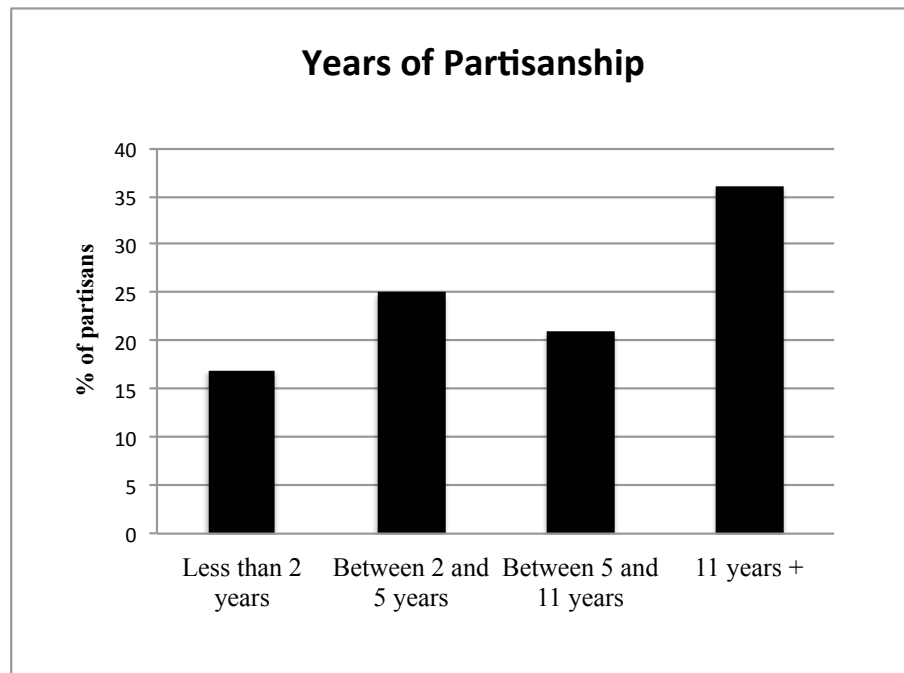
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<sup>9</sup> A new major party emerged in the 2015 legislative election: Morena (National Regeneration Movement). The new leftist, personalist party was founded in 2014 by former presidential candidate Andres Manuel López Obrador when his faction split from the PRD. It is expected to be a top contender in the 2018 presidential election.

<sup>10</sup> Studies that focus on the strength of party identification observe a relationship between age and partisanship (Converse, 1969; Niemi et al, 1969; Abramson, 1976; Tilley, 2003 among others). If I follow this operationalization, age (or number of years since the transition to democracy) fails to have meaningful variation. Since Mexico transitioned to a democracy in 1997 once the PRI lost the majority in Congress and the survey data was collected in 2006, there is only a range of 9 years of variation. In this scenario, 26 years old voters and older ones share the same years of democratic experience. Additionally, as previously mentioned, Mexico's party system is rooted in the pre-1997 democratic period. Thus, it is possible that some voters have developed their partisan attachments in the pre-democratic period.

have identified for a longer period of time are more likely to develop strong partisan attachments immune to election fluctuations.<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 3.** Length of Party Identification (2006 Presidential Election in Mexico)



An alternative explanation, as previous work have argued (Green 1990; Green and Palmquist 1990 and 1994, Schickler and Green 1995), asserts that it is necessary to distinguish between fluctuations precipitated by short-term forces and those that are driven by the survey instrument. American politics research suggests that partisan instability is a result of measurement error, in other words, the precision of survey research methods creates the appearance of instability in party identification. Similarly, previous comparative studies have argued that the changing reputations of parties drive voters' partisan instability. This is particularly the case of the Brazilian Party System in which the PT experienced visible elite-led changes that diluted their party brand (Baker et al 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Party identification is not explained by voters' age, since theoretically older voters might have a disproportionate rate of party identification than younger voters. In fact, six of every ten voters consistently identify with a political party in each of the four age groups among the Mexican electorate: 18-25 years old (66%), 26-40 (67%), 41-60 (68%), 61+ years (69%).

**Table 3** displays results from multinomial logistic regressions based on the 2006 Mexico Panel Survey to understand which variables are associated with voters' partisan instability. The dependent variable differentiates between several scenarios of partisan instability (stable PID, switches to another PID, switches to independent), which substantively differentiate from each other. Crossing party lines during the campaign—a relatively short period of time—seems a very drastic change compared to voters who switch to independent. In order to assess why some voters change their party identification, there are three important things to take from the coefficient estimates of **Table 3**. First, length of party identification, as previously mentioned, is measured by the number of years that a respondent has identified with a party.<sup>12</sup> Second, the models include a favorability index measuring the change of opinion of the respondent's preferred party.<sup>13</sup> The index is based on respondent's evaluation of their preferred party on a 0-10 scale, which was measured during the first and second wave of the 2006 Mexico Panel Survey. Positive values mean that the opinion of the their preferred party improved and negative values that it worsened throughout the campaign. Similarly, it includes a favorability index measuring change on respondents' co-partisan candidate following the same operationalization. In separate models, it also includes a combined favorability index of respondents' preferred party and co-partisan candidate since the inclusion of both indices might produce multicollinearity.

Finally, I consider respondent's survey-taking behavior as the source of the instability in party identification (Green and Palmquist 1990 and 1994). While previous studies have relied on panel studies with multiple waves to measure respondent's consistency over time, the Mexico

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<sup>12</sup> Four categories (1) less than 2 years, (2) 2 - 5 years, (3) 5 – 11 years, and (4) 11 years or more.

<sup>13</sup> I calculated the difference between Wave 2 and Wave 1 based on the responses to the following questions: *“I am going to ask you your opinion about some people and institutions. On a scale from 0 to 10, where zero means you have a very negative opinion and ten means you gave a very positive opinion, what is your opinion of...”*

Panel Surveys do not have the enough waves to follow such operationalization.<sup>14</sup> Instead, I rely on an index combining five questions in which the interviewer evaluates if the respondent survey-taking behavior was evasive, dim witted, rushed, distracted, and/or bored, as opposed to open, smart, calm, attentive, and/or interested. In addition, the index includes the number of “don’t know” answers that the respondent accumulated during the survey interview.<sup>15</sup>

Models (1), (2), and (3) evaluates which variables are driving respondents to cross party lines between the beginning of the campaign and election day. Model (1) confirms that length of partisanship is associated with partisan switching ( $p < .05$ ): voters who have identified with a party fewer years are more likely to cross party lines during the campaign period. As this study argues, only those voters with a long period of identification have partisan attachments strong enough to endure throughout political campaigns. Similarly, consistent with previous research, model (1) finds that party and candidate favorability is associated with crossing party lines: voters who worsened their views on their co-partisan candidate and their preferred candidate are more likely to switch their identification to alternative parties ( $p < .01$ ). These findings are consistent with previous comparative literature, which posits that in new democracies, partisan switching is rooted on changing views on voters’ preferred party. However, the findings of model (3) suggest that the effect of voters’ views on their preferred party and candidates is mediated by voters’ weakly entrenched partisan attachments. Model (3) reports the interaction between voters’ length of partisanship and an index that combines change of both respondent’s

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<sup>14</sup> For example, Green and Palmquist (1994) analyze nine panel studies with at least three waves of party identification measures available.

<sup>15</sup> This is what the survey research literature refers as “survey satisficing” (Vanette and Krosnick, 2014). Some voters might not be sufficiently motivated to answer the survey interview and generate answers quickly on the basis of “little thinking.” To control for respondent’s political information—that might be driving respondent’s survey-taking behavior—the models include an additive index based on three general knowledge questions about the Mexican party system: “*What is the name of the current governor of the state?*”, “*how many chambers does the Mexican Congress have?*”, and “*how many years does a deputy’s term last in Mexico?*”

preferred party favorability and co-partisan candidate favorability, which is statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ).

**Table 3.** Multinomial Logistic Regression  
 DV = Partisanship Stability / Base Category = Consistent PID  
 2006 Presidential Election in Mexico

	PID → ≠ PID			PID → INDEP		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Length of PID	-0.19** (0.10)	-0.18** (0.09)	-0.13 (0.09)	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.10)
Preferred Party Favorability Change	-0.23*** (0.04)			-0.21*** (0.05)		
Co-partisan Cand. Favorability Change	-0.08** (0.04)			-0.00 (0.04)		
(Party + Candidate) Favorability Change		-0.72*** (0.11)	-1.28*** (0.26)		-0.51*** (0.12)	-0.37 (0.30)
(P + C) Fav. Change X Length of PID			0.24** (0.10)			-0.06 (0.11)
Survey-Taking Behavior (Inattentive Respondent)	0.68 (0.72)	0.23 (0.61)	0.25 (0.61)	2.72*** (0.74)	2.18*** (0.61)	2.17*** (0.61)
Political Information	-0.26 (0.20)	-0.33* (0.18)	-0.35* (0.18)	0.89*** (0.25)	0.63*** (0.21)	0.64*** (0.21)
Female	-0.01 (0.19)	0.02 (0.18)	0.06 (0.18)	0.49** (0.22)	0.46** (0.20)	0.45** (0.20)
Age	-0.01* (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Education	-0.04 (0.09)	-0.01 (0.08)	-0.02 (0.08)	0.17 (0.11)	0.14 (0.10)	0.14 (0.10)
Constant	-0.18 (0.78)	-0.38 (0.73)	-0.49 (0.74)	-3.97*** (0.97)	-3.31*** (0.88)	-3.22*** (0.88)
Observations	937	1,056	1,056	937	1,056	1,056
Pseudo R-squared	0.0781	0.0612	0.0659	0.0781	0.0612	0.0659

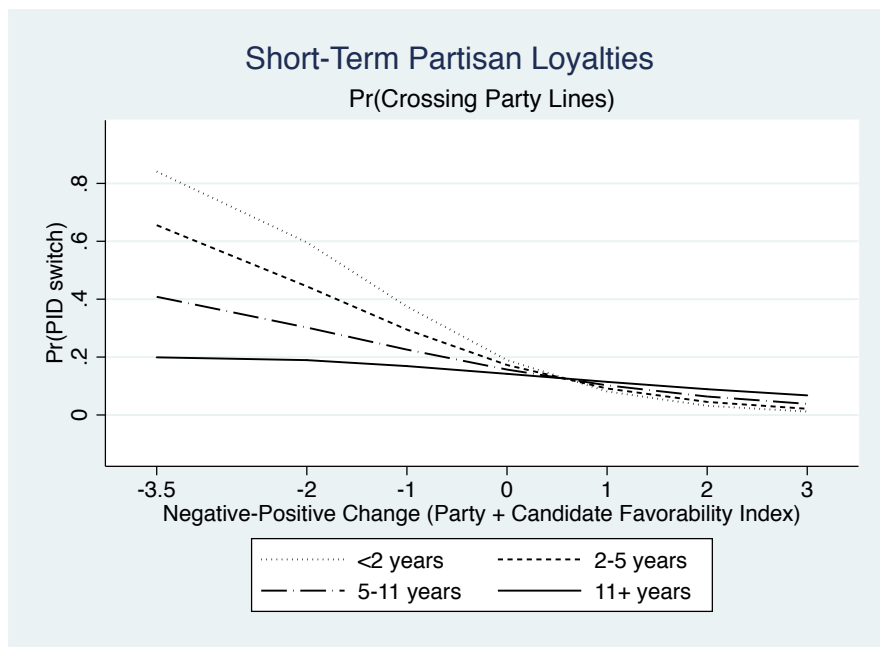
Standard errors in parentheses; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$

The table displays results from a multinomial logit model. The dependent variable is categorical (party identification stability). The base category is STABLE PID. Source: 2006 Mexico Panel Survey.

For ease of interpretation [Figure 4](#) reports the probability of crossing party lines. Positive values mean that the opinion of the co-partisan candidate and the respondent's preferred party improved and negative values that it worsened throughout the campaign. [Figure 4](#) shows that

voters who have identified with their preferred party for a very short period of time are more likely to cross party lines when they worsen their views of their preferred party. However, voters who hold party identification for a longer period of time are almost immune to partisan switching, even when they worsen their views of their preferred candidate and party throughout the campaign. For example, a partisan who reports a very negative change is very likely (0.80) to cross party lines when identifying with their preferred party for less than two years, but only 0.20 when identifying for more than 11 years; in other words, a 60 percentage points gap. Only voters with long-term partisan attachments are able to build partisanship as the screen through which they observe the political world, leading individuals to dismiss negative views of their preferred party, rather than switching their partisan allegiance.

**Figure 4.** Conditional Effect of Length of Partisanship on the Effect of (Candidate + Party) Favorability Change on the Likelihood of Partisan Switching



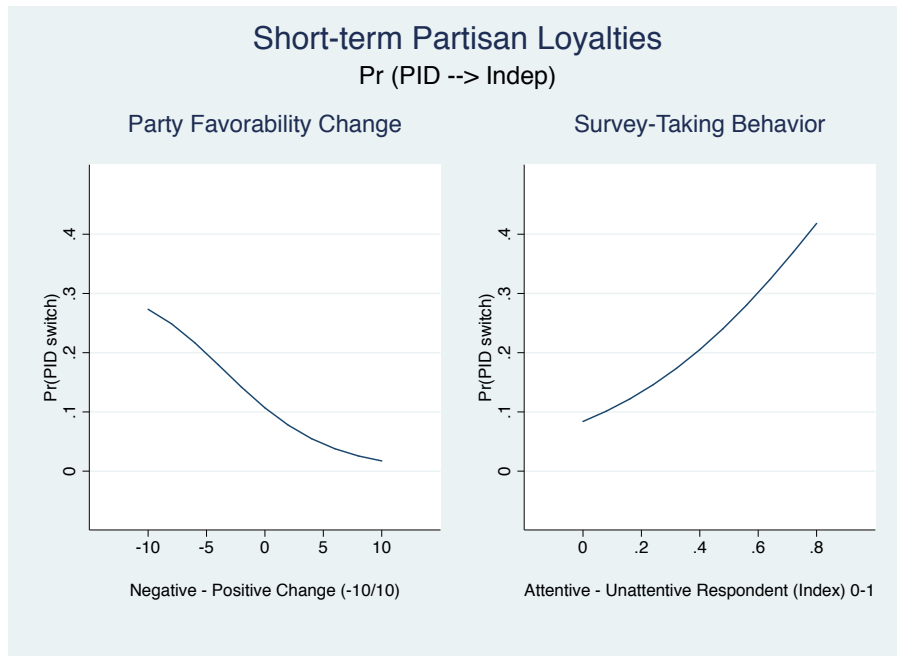
Respondent's survey-taking behavior is not associated with crossing party lines ( $p > 0.10$ ).

However, switching to independent seems to be driven by respondent's behavior during the survey interview (models 4, 5, and 6). Model (4) shows that partisans who switch to



independents are significantly more likely to be evaluated by the interviewer as evasive, dim witted, rushed, distracted, and/or bored, and report more “don’t knows” answers during the survey interview ( $p < .01$ ). In turn, they do not differentiate in years of partisanship or change their views on their co-partisan candidate. However, partisans who switch to independent report changes on their preferred party. **Figure 5** reports the probability in switching to independent throughout the campaign. Changing views of their preferred party period is associated with 25 points increase in the probability of switching to independent. In turn, respondents’ survey-taking behavior is associated with a 33-point increase.

**Figure 5. Probability in Switching to Independent**



Overall, these results are consistent with previous characterization of partisanship in new democracies (Brader and Tucker, 2001; Lupu 2013) and broader theories of partisanship (Brody and Rothenberg 1988; Converse and Markus 1979; Fiorina, 1981). For some voters in new democracies—particularly those who have identified with a party for shorter periods of time—campaigns play a major role helping them understanding what parties are and what they stand for.

They are fundamental for their political learning since during the campaign period parties and candidates disclose political stances and structure voters' political perceptions (Weber 2012).

The next section will focus on the implications for the broader campaigns literature.

### **Why does Partisan Instability Matter?**

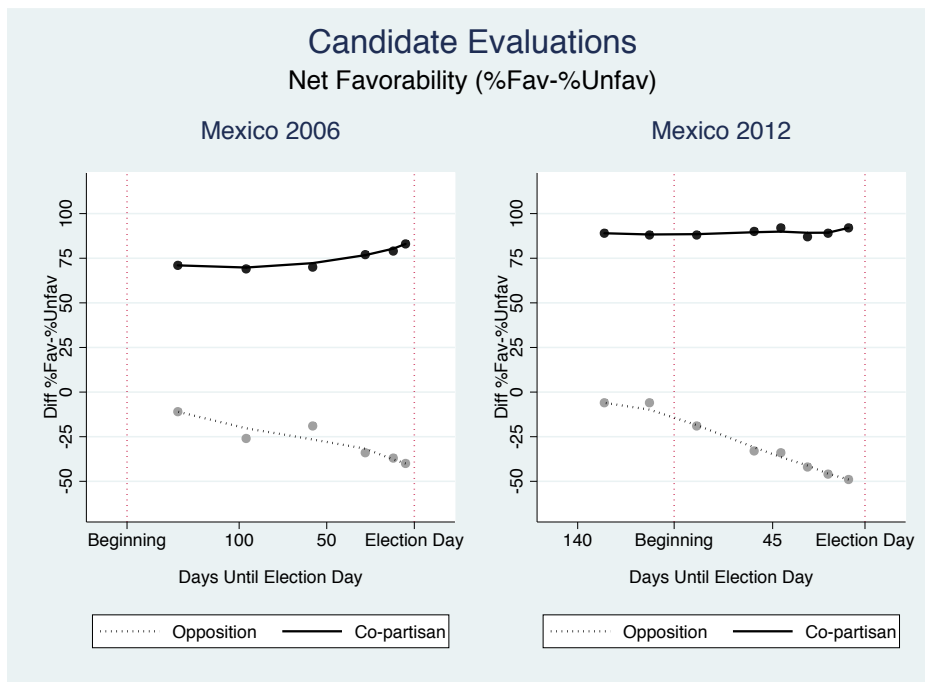
As early theories of voting behavior suggest, partisanship constitutes the screen through which citizens makes sense of the political world (Lewis-Beck et al 2008, Green, Palmquist and Schikler, 2002) playing a major role during political campaigns. At campaign time, voters use their partisan attachments as a shortcut for making political judgments (Bartels 2000; Sniderman, 2000) filtering campaign information, particularly rejecting the one that is inconsistent with their political predispositions (Zaller 1992). This is what recent literature has called motivated reasoning, the process in which citizens acquire information and tend to confirm and reinforce their prior beliefs while rejecting those that contradict pre-campaign considerations (Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge 2006; Nir 2011).

During political campaigns, there are multiple paths in which a partisan bias can guide the process by which voters interpret campaign information: candidate evaluations and vote choice. For instance, partisanship can inform how voters perceive the candidates competing in the election. As noted by the voting behavior literature, candidate evaluations constitute a major element in what the early Michigan school referred as the “funnel of causality” leading to vote choice (Campbell et al, 1960). In other words, long-term variables such as partisanship provide the necessary information to evaluate the candidates and, ultimately, vote choice.

The next figure provides evidence that partisans in both 2006 and 2012 presidential elections in Mexico reinforce their pre-campaign candidate evaluations. **Figure 6** averages the net candidate favorability of the three major candidates competing in both campaigns based on

cross-sectional data (PRI, PAN, and PRD candidates, 14 national representative polls). Since it measures the difference between favorable and unfavorable opinions,<sup>16</sup> positive values mean that voters' opinion improved and negative values that it worsened. The evaluations of co-partisan candidates are very stable throughout both campaigns, and even slightly improved during the 2006 presidential campaign (+75 in 2006 and +89 in 2012). However, evaluations on the opposition candidate are far from stable; it significantly worsens as election day approaches. For example, in 2006 the opposition candidates registered an average net favorability of -11 at the beginning of the campaign and turned into -40 (29 percentage points difference). In 2012, the difference was even larger: from -6 to -49 (43 percentage points difference).

**Figure 6.** Candidate Net Favorability Ratings



However, while cross-sectional can measure candidate evaluations among self-declared partisans at a given time point, it cannot distinguish if those partisans changed their partisan

<sup>16</sup> "What is your opinion about (NAME CANDIDATE): very good, good, bad or very bad?"

allegiance throughout the campaign. As previously mentioned, in young party systems in which some voters lack long-term partisan attachments, they might not reinforce their prior beliefs while rejecting those that contradicts their pre-campaign predispositions as long-term partisans do. **Table 4** displays results from an OLS regression based on data from the 2006 and 2012 Mexico Panel Surveys. The dependent variable of each model is respondent's co-partisan candidate favorability, in particular, the favorability change between the first and second wave of both panel surveys.<sup>17</sup> The results support the notion that voters with short-term partisan loyalties have a different behavior than partisan with long-term attachments ( $p < 0.01$ ): they are more likely to deteriorate the opinion of their co-partisan candidate rather than reinforce a positive evaluation.

**Table 4.** OLS Regression. Candidate Favorability and Partisanship  
DV = Co-partisan Candidate Favorability (Normalized)

	2006	2012
Partisanship: PID → ≠ PID	-0.41*** (0.09)	-0.68*** (0.11)
Partisanship: PID → Indep	-0.24** (0.10)	-0.60*** (0.11)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Education	-0.09*** (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)
Female	0.10 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.09)
Constant	0.78*** (0.26)	0.16 (0.21)
Observations	943	492
R-squared	0.04	0.11

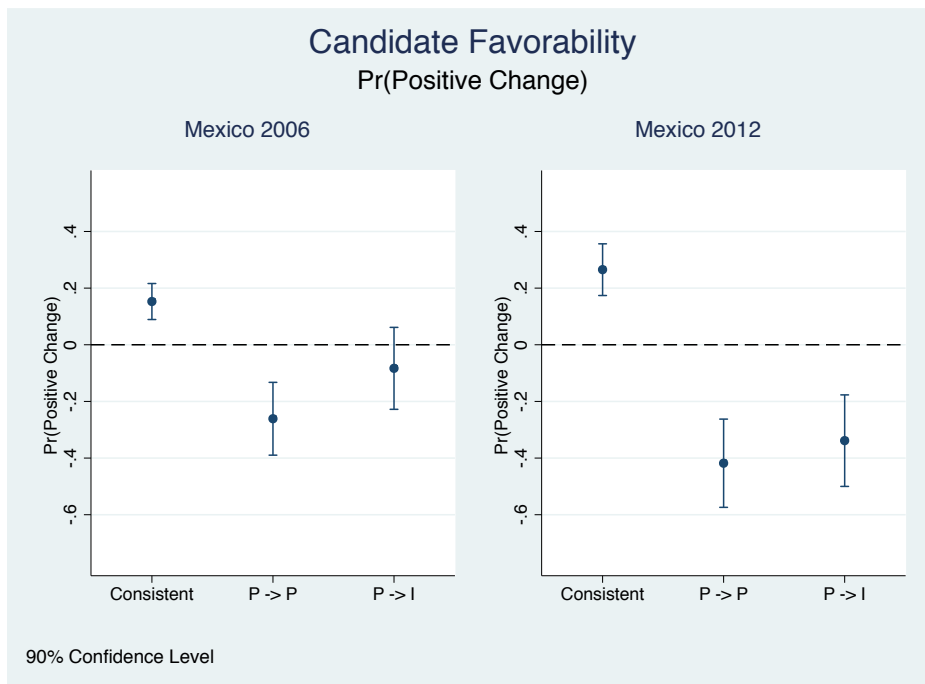
Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$   
BASE CATEGORY Partisanship: Stable PID

**Figure 7** presents the substantive differences on the relationship between candidate evaluations and partisan stability. Positive values mean that the opinion on the co-partisan

<sup>17</sup> Difference between candidate evaluations of the co-partisan candidate (Wave2-Wave1) based on the following question: “On a scale from 0 to 10, where zero means you have a very negative opinion and ten means you gave a very positive opinion, what is your opinion of...?”

candidate improved and negative values that it worsened. Only voters with stable partisanship throughout the campaign have strong enough partisan attachments to interpret new information so as to reinforce. Voters with unstable partisanship have a harder time to filter campaign information: rather than reinforce their pre-campaign predispositions they are more likely to worsen their views on the candidate that coincides with their party identification at the beginning of the campaign. The deteriorating effect is particularly strong for voters who crossed party lines in the 2006 presidential election.

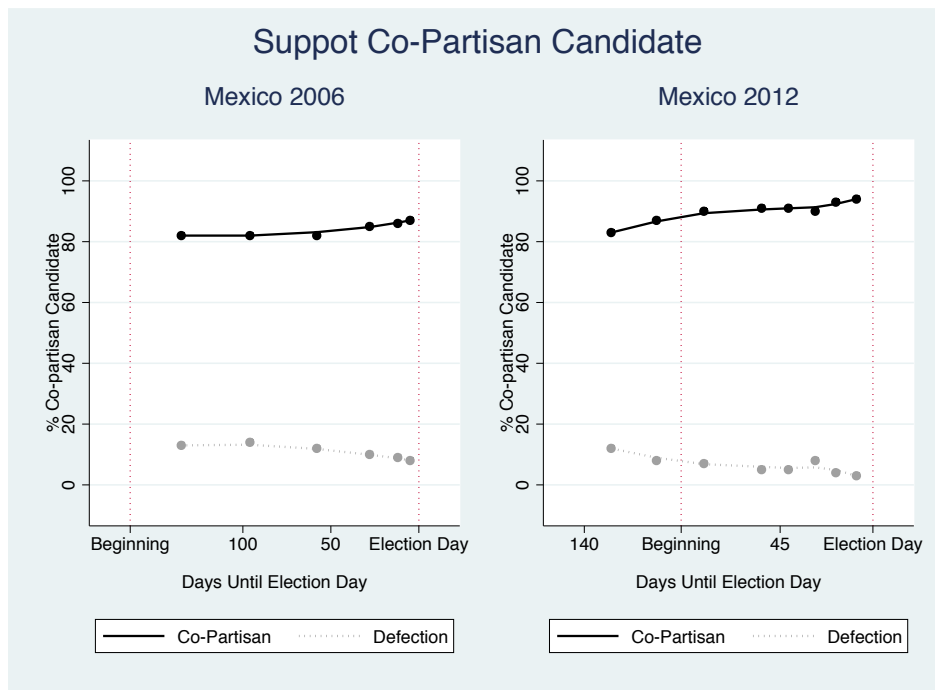
**Figure 7.** Co-partisan Candidate Favorability



A second path in which a partisan bias informs voters during campaigns is vote choice; partisanship ultimately guides which candidate voters support. As the literature posits, political campaigns help voters support the candidate in line with their preexisting political predispositions. As a result of the campaign activating voters’ political predispositions, people become “enlightened,” making stronger the connection between partisanship and vote choice as the campaign unfolds. (Gelman and King 1993).

The next figure provides evidence that a significant proportion of partisans in Mexico support their co-partisan candidate. **Figure 8** averages the co-partisan vote for the three major candidates competing in both campaigns based on cross-sectional data (PRI, PAN, and PRD candidates, 14 national representative polls). While in 2006 the connection between partisanship and vote choice slightly increased throughout the campaign (from 82 to 87 percent,<sup>18</sup> 5-percentage points increase), in 2012, the connection became much stronger: it increased from 83 to 94 percent (11-percentage points increase).

**Figure 8.** Support for Co-Partisan Candidate



However, as in the case of candidate evaluations, vote choice based on cross-sectional data cannot speak to the behavior of partisans who update their party identification throughout the campaign. **Table 5** displays results from a logistic regression based on the 2006 and 2012 Mexico Panel Surveys. The dependent variable of each model is the likelihood of becoming

<sup>18</sup> In 2006 the connection between partisanship and vote choice did not increase in the same way as in 2012. Voters who self-identify with the PRI defected in higher levels than other partisans by the end of the campaign since the PRI candidate was perceived to have no chance of winning the election. Only a third of self-identified PRI voters thought that their co-partisan candidate was going to win the election.

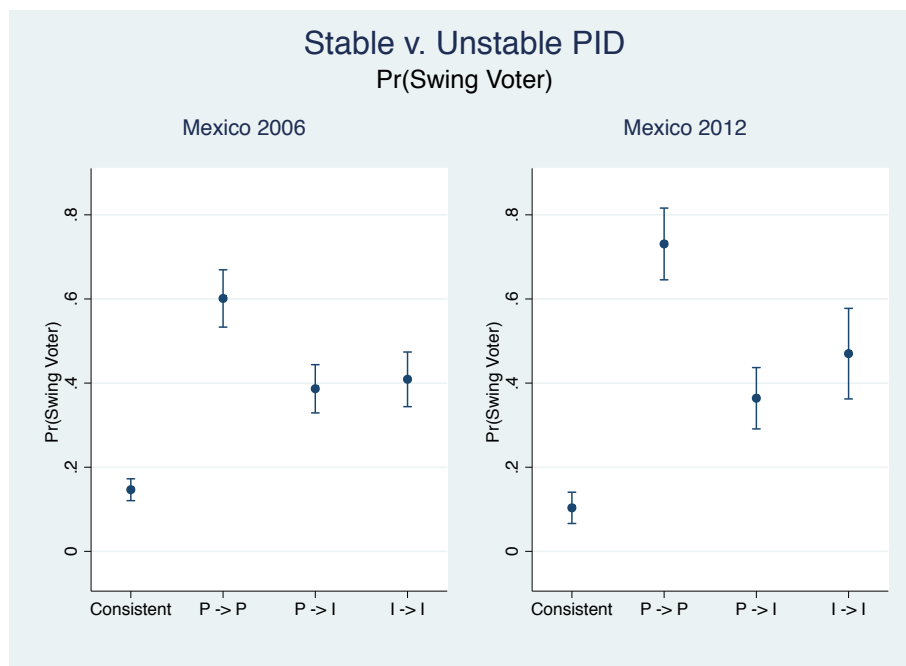
swing voters. The results support the notion that voters with long-term partisan attachments are the least vulnerable group to political campaigns: they are less likely to become swing voters than voters who report unstable partisanship ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 5.** Logistic Regression. Swing Voter and Partisanship  
(DV = Swing Voter / No Change)

	2006 (1)	2012 (2)
Partisanship: PID → ≠ PID	2.21*** (0.18)	3.16*** (0.30)
Partisanship: PID → Indep	1.32*** (0.17)	1.60*** (0.26)
Partisanship: Indep → Indep.	1.42*** (0.18)	2.04*** (0.30)
Female	0.32** (0.13)	-0.04 (0.20)
Age	-0.02*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.01)
Education	-0.01 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.05)
Constant	-1.23** (0.53)	-1.96*** (0.51)
Observations	1,429	624
Pseudo R-squared	0.129	0.196
Standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$ , ** $p < 0.05$ , * $p < 0.1$ BASE CATEGORY PID: Stable partisanship		

Figure 9 displays the predicted probabilities of becoming swing voters. As expected, voters with consistent partisanship tend to have stable vote choice over the course of the campaign; they report the lowest likelihood of becoming swing voters (15% on average for both the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections). Interestingly, partisans who identify with a different party by the end of the campaign are the most likely voters to change their vote intention throughout the campaign (beyond 60%,  $p < .01$ )—they even report a higher likelihood than self-identified independents (40% on average,  $p < .01$ ). These findings are not limited to a specific electoral cycle; they are robust for the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections.

**Figure 9.** Vote Choice and PID Stability



The last part of this paper focuses on the type of vote shifts, in other words, in what direction did partisans switch their vote choice. Partisans can consistently support their co-partisan candidate reinforcing their pre-campaign predispositions throughout the campaign—or might switch their vote to “return home” and support their co-partisan candidate in case they were supporting an alternative candidate at the beginning the campaign (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee, 1954). Partisans might also defect from their co-partisan candidate and support an alternative candidate by the end of the campaign. Alternatively, it is possible that some partisans consistently support candidates against their partisan predispositions.

**Table 6** presents the type of vote shifts that partisans experienced during the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections. The few voters with long-term partisan attachments that were not supporting their co-partisan candidate by the beginning of the campaign returned home (7 and 4 percent, respectively) making the connection between partisanship and vote choice very strong: 90 and 94 of stable partisans supported their co-partisan candidate in both presidential elections.



In other words, on average, only 8 percent of voters with long-term partisan attachments supported a candidate against their pre-campaign predispositions. This degree of connection is fairly similar to the electoral behavior of partisans in advanced industrial democracies like the U.S. For example, only 6 percent of partisans voted against their partisan predispositions during the 2008 American presidential election (table 1 of this paper). However, voters with less entrenched partisan attachments tend to report a different behavior. Voters who self-identify as both partisans and independents during the campaign period<sup>19</sup> report a weaker connection (70 and 77 percent, respectively). Broadly speaking, one third of them defected and supported a candidate against their pre-campaign predispositions.

**Table 6.** Type of Vote Shift throughout the Campaign  
(Between 1st and 2nd Wave)

	Stable partisans		PID <--> Indep	
	2006	2012	2006	2012
Reinforcement Returning Home (activation)	83	90	54	58
Consistent with pre-campaign predispositions	<b>90</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>77</b>
Defection Against their PID	6	5	15	14
Inconsistent with pre-campaign predispositions	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>23</b>

Finally, voters who updated their party identification crossing party lines by definition do not have clear partisan predispositions thus, making the connection between partisanship and vote choice a pointless measure. However, it is possible to trace the direction of the partisan shift vis-à-vis vote choice. Data from the 2006 and 2012 Mexico Panel Surveys suggest that party identification shifted following vote choice (table 7): among swing voters who updated their

<sup>19</sup> I consider that partisans who move to independents lean to the political party that self-identify during one wave of the panel survey.

party identification, a substantial majority did it in the same way vote choice did (76% and 88%, respectively). Consistent with previous research (Jennings and Markus, 1984; Dinas, 2014), the findings suggest that for some voters, partisanship and voting choice are empirically and conceptually intertwined.

<b>Table 7. Direction of PID change (Between 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Wave)</b>		
	Mexico 2006	Mexico 2012
PID shift followed their vote choice PID <sub>T2</sub> = Vote Choice <sub>T2</sub>	76%	88%

## **Discussion**

The findings of this paper have important contributions for the campaigns literature and broader political behavior studies. On the one hand, the findings of this study are consistent with the comparative literature that suggests that in post-1978 democracies voters are qualitatively different from advanced industrial democracies. As this research finds, in new democracies like Mexico, some partisans hold weakly formed partisan attachments, making them vulnerable to political campaigns. However, it differs from current campaigns studies in identifying which types of partisans are the most likely to be most responsive to campaigns. Voters who lack long-term partisan attachments and have identified fewer years with a political party have a harder time to filter and reject campaign information inconsistent with their pre-campaigns political predispositions and contribute to increase the proportion of swing voters in a given election. Similarly, this study differs from conventional wisdom in comparative political behavior that suggests that partisanship in new democracies is weak, making partisans highly persuadable during campaigns. Stable partisans report fairly similar electoral behavior to partisans in

American elections: they report a very stable vote choice throughout campaigns and have a strong connection between partisanship and the vote. These voters have built partisanship as the screen through which they observe the political world leading them to interpret new information so as to reinforce.

A relevant question that relates to this study is the role of partisanship for the democratic process. On the one hand, at the systemic level, partisanship provides regularity and stability to electoral competition and, more broadly, helps stabilizing the party system (Converse 1969; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007; Lupu 2015). At the individual level, voters take advantage of partisan cues to make inferences about candidates helping them support the candidate in line with their political predispositions (Popkin, 1994; Sniderman, Brody, and Tetlock, 1991; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). However, during campaigns voters also tend to reject information that is inconsistent with their prior beliefs. Voters can engage in politically motivated reasoning and reinforce inaccurate beliefs or facts (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010). In these contexts, political misperceptions can distort campaign debate and undermine voters' ability to form meaningful and accurate opinions. Future studies should test if partisan cues guide political misperceptions in new democracies as party systems like that of the U.S. (Nyhan and Reifler, 2015; Flynn, Nyhan, and Reifler, 2017).

Similarly, future studies should study the consistency of party identification during longer periods of time. While most studies in new democracies report aggregate changes on partisanship levels across elections, measuring changes at the individual level for longer periods of time beyond political campaigns might provide further information on the condition under which some voters in young party systems update their party identification—even crossing party lines.

Finally, the results reported in this paper may be conservative. Although the democratic experience and strength of party roots in society in Mexico does not equate to advanced industrial democracies like the U.S., it is higher to the average of the region. If this study is replicated in party systems in Latin America in which new parties tend to appear in each election cycle and parties are more delegitimized (Mainwaring and Scully, 1999; Mainwaring, 2017)—a larger proportion of partisans might report partisan instability and be vulnerable to campaign events and appeals of candidates.

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