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Partisan Cues, Candidate Images, and Political Messages: How Mexican Voters Assimilate Campaign Information

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Abstract

Using public opinion data gathered during the campaign for the State of Mexico's Governorship in 1999, this paper shows that (1) Mexican voters do rely on information cues, (2) that such cues are likely to be gathered from credible sources of information, and (3) that partisan cues are crystallizing among the Mexican electorate, as shown by the coherence between candidate images and campaign messages. Political awareness, partisanship, and media credibility are important factors in understanding how Mexicans process campaign information.

Introduction

One of the major findings in public opinion research is that most citizens are generally uninformed about politics. The lack of information or, better say, the "sea of ignorance" that characterizes mass electorates was a shocking reality for democratic theorists, who assumed that in a democratic polity citizens should be relatively aware and knowledgeable about politics in order to make correct choices. Information was an important issue of inquiry since the early 1920s, when Walter Lippman noticed in his volume Public Opinion (1922) that the "world of politics" was just too far away from people for them to be interested in it. In the 1950s, Anthony Downs (1957) suggested that individuals may behave rationally, but acknowledged that rational choices require levels of information that most citizens simply do not have. In spite of these two early and important pieces of work, the public opinion research agenda in the sixties and seventies was dominated by the study of ideology, rather than information itself (Kinder and Sears 1981).

Public opinion research did not shift its focus towards information until the eighties and nineties. During those years, a major assumption in the literature was that, no matter how uninformed and uninterested voters are in the realm of politics, they always find their way to make reasoned choices. Some of the primary subfields of the information literature include the rational processing of political information (McKelvey and Ordeshook 1990, Fiorina 1990); learning during political processes and campaigns

(Markus 1982, Alvarez 1995); selective attention and the use of information shortcuts (Iyengar 1990, Popkin 1991); the role of political elites in the information flow (Zaller 1992); the impact of campaign and media messages (Iyengar and Kinder 1987, Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995); the role of framing (Zaller 1992, Kinder and Sanders 1996); political persuasion (Mutz et. al.1996); and credibility and delegation (Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

In this paper I develop the concept of "cues" and attempt to provide some evidence about how they work among the Mexican electorate. I should say that there is no previous evidence about the role of cues in Mexican elections and this is definitively an exploratory analysis. Other systematic efforts at analyzing this topic are very scarce in Mexico. Estévez and Moreno (2000) provide some evidence about how cues were taken during the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) national primary in 1999, and what role campaigns played in that process. However, this is a completely new area of research in the Mexican public opinion literature.

Today, partisan cues are common in American politics. Almost anything that sounds Democratic or Republican is in fact Democratic or Republican and viceversa. The question is how such cues are formed, not only in a political campaign but also in an evolving political environment, one where political contestation is so recent that voters face new information about the political alternatives. This is the case of Mexico.

In this paper I show that voters do rely in cues and that cues actually work in a similar way for individuals with different levels of political awareness and partisan orientations.[1] I also show that cues are taken from different sources with varying levels of credibility, and this makes a difference in how candidates are perceived.

[1] In previous research, Moreno (1999) has analyzed the role of political awareness in campaign effects, for both partisans and non-partisans, demonstrating that awareness is in fact an important explanatory factor of how individual perceptions about government performance vary, and, especially, how campaign effects take place. The role of awareness in explaining opinion differences has been extensively demonstrated in the U.S. (See Zaller, 1992)

What are cues?

V.O. Key Jr. once wrote that speaking with precision of public opinion is like "coming to grips with the Holy Ghost" (Kinder and Sears, 1981). Key's metaphor not only is a symptom of definition problems on this field, but also an easy escape for new research. Cues are almost everywhere, and this may raise some theoretical and empirical problems. Without expecting to reach a final definition about cues, I will attempt to provide a general concept on which this paper is based.

Cues are pieces of information that lead individuals to think about an object—let the object be, for our purposes, a candidate, a political party, or a policy—in a way that is consistent with the frames in which such information is presented. Cues can be either given or taken. A cue giver is an individual who, consciously or unconsciously, provides frames of reference that make an object understandable in a certain way. A cue taker is an individual who, consciously or unconsciously, understands the object in terms of the cues provided to her. This is why framing is so important in how an object or an issue is understood by a voter.

A partisan cue is one in which the frame of reference for, say a policy, is a political party or symbols related to it. Cue takers may favor or oppose such a policy depending upon their own partisan predispositions.

Political cues may be provided by anyone who expresses anything about politics: a party leader, a candidate, a political analyist, a news anchor, a comedian, a friend, a family member, a taxi driver during a conversation, or even an image perceived on a banner, a button, an ad, and so forth.

If cues are almost everywhere, how can they be of any importance at all? The fact is that some cues are more important than others. First of all, in order to be relevant they have to be salient. Popkin (1991) has suggested that information cues are made salient to us, usually by some sort of "fire alarms", that is, by someone or something that tells us when and where there is a fire, instead of us keep looking for it.

In his "always shuck your tamales" story, Popkin argues that President Ford apparently lost the support of the Latino community in the 1976 campaign because he ate tamales without removing the corn shucks from them. It seems that this sole piece of information was enough for the Latino community not to vote for him. The reasoning behind such a decision seems to be as follows: if the candidate is not knowledgeable of such a basic part of the community's culture, it is hard to believe that his policies would be any good for such a community. Of course, such a cue should have been given to Latinos in the first place; it had to be salient for them to reason this way. According to Popkin, both national television and newspapers' front pages were responsible for letting the nation know that Ford bite tamales without removing the wrapper. So, if the Latino voter did not catch this incident right away, the media made sure she did later on.

Secondly, information has to be credible in order to be relevant. It is likely that cues that are not credible are simply ignored. Individuals tend to accept or reject information that is respectively consistent or inconsistent with their previous beliefs (Zaller 1992). Likewise, the potential for persuasion increases if the source of information or the message itself is credible (Lupia and McCubbins 1998).

In this paper I deal with this two issues: credible information and cues. In the following sections I argue that Mexican voters rely on different sources of information and that they actually perceive candidates differently, according to the cues provided during the campaign process.

The data

The empirical evidence used in this paper is a preelection poll conducted by newspaper Reforma on June 18-21, 1999, in the State of Mexico, two weeks before the election for State Governor, July 4. The poll had a total of 1,345 adult respondents and interviews were conducted face-to-face in the interviewee's home. The sampling was based on a multi-stage, systematic selection of electoral sections, blocks, households, and respondents. Electoral sections were previously stratified by the 36 federal districts as well as by urban-rural conditions. There were 135 polling points throughout the

state, and ten people were interviewed in each of them. The poll results were very close estimates of the election outcome: The PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) candidate, Arturo Montiel, obtained 43 percent of support in the poll (without considering responses "don't know"), and he got 43 percent of the valid votes in the actual election. José Luis Durán, a candidate nominated by a coalition of PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) and PVEM (Partido Verde Ecologista de México), got 34 percent in the poll and 35 percent of the actual vote. Finally, Higinio Martínez, candidate from the coalition PRD (Partido de la revolución Democrática) and PT (Partido del Trabajo) received a 23 percent of support in the poll and 22 percent of the valid votes. Reforma published the poll on June 25, 1999.

The State of Mexico: Basic information

The State of Mexico surrounds Mexico City in the East, North and West. It is the largest state in terms of population and electorate size. There were 7.3 million people with voting age and 7.1 registered voters in the 1999 Governor election. This figure represents 12.8 percent of the country's electorate, the country's largest. Eighty one percent of the state's electorate lives in urban areas and 19 percent live in rural ones. The state has 121 municipalities and is one of the few states in the country where all three major political parties have a significant level of support. It is also one of the states where no opposition party has won the governorship, ieven with the important presence of the PAN in the metropolitan and industrial areas located north of Mexico City and Toluca, the state capital, and the PRD's presence in the metropolitan area east of Mexico City. Both parties govern an important proportion of the municipalities. Because of its size and strategic importance, the State of Mexico elections on July 1999 were thought to be crucial for the Presidential election a year later.

What the data show

Before getting into a detailed analysis of the data, let me present some of the general results obtained in the survey.

First, the aggregate level of credibility in alternative sources of information varies significantly among voters. Television news is the primary and most credible source of political information in Mexico.[2] Mexican citizens are exposed to news and political information through television broadcasts more than through any other medium available to them. Moreover, they tend to believe the news that they watch on their TV sets more than the information that they see or hear anywhere else. These differences can be seen in Table 1.

[2] This is true both in the State of Mexico, as shown in this paper, as in the country as a whole, as shown by a recent national opinion poll conducted and published by *Reforma*, February 26, 2000. In that poll, conducted February 11-14 among 1,510 Mexican adults, the percent of respondents who said that they believe "a lot" or "a great deal" in what television news says about the Presidential candidates was forty five porcent; forty percent said they believe what their friends and family say when they talk about the candidates; thirty five percent believes news radio broadcasting, 32 percent believes what people who are not close friends or family say about the candidates; 30 percent believes what they read in newspapers—although this is partly because newspapers are the least common way for people to get information about the candidates—and only 21 percent believes what political ads paid for by parties and candidates say about the candidates themselves.

Table 1. Media credibility by voters' characteristics.
Percent of respondents who said that they find information about political campaigns "very credible" or "somewhat credible" in each of the shown media.

	Television News	*Radio News*	*Newspapers*	*Political editorials*	*Friends and family*	*Opinion leaders*	*Political ads*
Total	42	41	33	32	32	29	24
Education level							
Lower	36	33	25	24	24	20	22
Middle	47	44	36	34	36	33	26
Higher	45	56	54	54	42	55	23
Level of political awareness							
High	58	52	58	51	59	52	35
Mid-high	45	44	40	43	43	38	26
Middle	49	46	34	32	38	32	27
Mid-low	46	45	41	38	32	29	27
Low	33	33	23	23	21	21	19
Intensity of party identification							
Strong partisans	49	43	41	38	39	37	32
Weak partisans	46	46	36	34	36	33	26
Independents	34	33	28	27	24	20	18
Ideological orientation							
Left	34	38	42	43	40	37	19
Center	50	51	40	38	39	37	29
Right	50	45	40	38	37	35	30
Voting intentions							
Montiel supporters (PRI)	48	42	32	31	33	29	27
Durán supporters (PAN-PVEM)	45	48	41	38	35	37	26
Higinio supporters (PRD-PT)	36	37	36	36	37	31	25
Undecided/Don't know	34	33	25	23	22	17	16

Source: Reforma's State of Mexico Preelection Poll, June 1999. Total sample 1,325.

In contrast, political ads are the least credible source of political information, even the ones shown on TV. Somewhere in between these two poles of credibility is the political information that citizens may learn by listening to the radio, by reading newspapers, by following political editorials, by chatting with friends, family or other close people, and by listening to individuals who are considered opinion leaders.

Second, at the individual level, credibility in sources of political information also varies depending upon the voter's characteristics. Variables such as education, political awareness, party identification, ideology, and even voting intentions are some of the factors that account for the level of credibility in each of the media mentioned before.

As shown in Table 1, the higher the level of education, the greater the level of credibility in political information offered by the radio, newspapers, political editorials, and opinion leaders. In contrast, education does not account for individual credibility in television news or political ads. With the exception of the latter two, the proportion of respondents who express credibility in the different sources of information grows as education increases, which means that respondents with more education seem more capable to answer this question during the interview than less educated respondents. This may not reflect the fact that highly educated voters are the ones who believe what is said about politics, but that they are more likely to be exposed to it.[3]

The level of political awareness is strongly and positively related with credibility in political information shown by any media, even political ads: the higher the level of awareness, the greater the level of credibility.[4]

Partisanship also accounts for the variance in credibility: no matter what party they identify with, strong partisans tend to believe political ads more than weak partisan and much more than independents. That is, the more intense the sense of partisanship, the more likely it is to believe in political ads. However, the level of credibility in

[3] There may be some measurement errors related with education. More educated respondents seem to answer questions more easily than less educated respondents. The latter are more likely to give "don't know" responses than the former, but not necessarily more responses on the low credibility categories.
[4] Political awareness was measured with composite index of campaign slogan recognition, as in Moreno (1999).

political information gathered through other media has little difference among strong partisans and weak partisans. Only independents systematically consider political information less credible in every case.

Ideology is another important explanatory factor of how credible information can be, depending upon the voter's orientation: television news are more credible among voters from the center and right positions of a left-right scale, while newspapers and political editorials are slightly more credible among leftist voters. Political ads are definitively a more trusting source of information for the center and right, but not for leftists, who seem to posit less credibility in any electronic medium than the rest of the electorate who expresses an ideological position.

Breaking down credibility by voting intentions also shows interesting results, which seem partly related to ideology.[5] Voters supporting the two front-runners, Montiel and Durán, tended to believe more the information on the electronic media, TV and radio, and less the information presented by the press or told by other people. Meanwhile, supporters of the leftist underdog, Martínez, tended to believe all the information in about the same proportion, except for political ads. The race for governor was highly contested, and some observers and polls even suggested that the end would be so close that it would be a tough call. The spread between first and second was eight points at the end, but during the four weeks before Election Day there was a general belief that any of the two stronger candidates could win the election. The relative consensus that Martínez would be the sure loser might explain the fact that credibility on the media among his supporters did not vary significantly. However, different interpretations about whom the winner would be probably caused a higher variance in media credibility. Differences are not very significant, but Montielistas tended to believe television news slightly more than Duranistas, while the latter believed more information on the radio, the press, and from opinion leaders than the former.

[5] The median placement for each candidate's group of supporters defined PRI's Montiel on the right, PAN's Durán on the center, and PRD's Martínez on the left.

Third, political ads are consistently the least credible of all sources of political information addressed in this paper, and this poses a real dilemma for politicians. If the persuasive potential of a message or an information source is positively and significantly related to the level of credibility in such a message or source (Lupia and McCubins, 1998), then efforts for political persuasion through advertising may be less effective than politicians would like them to be.

For political strategists in campaigns, the Shakesperean dilemma "to be or not to be" does not become a simple question of "TV or not TV". Among modern electorates, being on TV can be more rewarding for a candidate than not being on TV. However, the underlying question is how the candidate should be on TV. The payoffs of being in the news—even with the "unbearable lightness" that news coverage may print on a candidate, from the strategist's point of view—may be higher than the payoffs of advertising on TV.[6] Another option is a combination of both, news and ads. However, based on experimental evidence, Ansolabehere and Iyengar (1994) have demonstrated that there are no interactive effects between advertising and news.

The fact that advertisements may not be as credible as other sources of political information does not mean that they are politically insignificant. Indeed, they may have different effects in political campaigns depending upon their objectives and targets. It has been suggested that negative advertising, for example, may be a serious cause of lower turnout (Ansolabehere and Iyengar, 1995), but they may also be important stimuli to reinforcing partisan orientations. As mentioned earlier, strong partisans tend to believe the information shown in political ads more than weak partisans do or independent voters do. In other words, political ads may play a reinforcing role, rather than a persuasive one.[7] Also, political ads are important to develop name recognition in early stages of the campaign.

[6] Estévez and Moreno (2000) have shed some light on the role of TV news coverage and TV advertising in the PRI national primary that was held last November. Their findings suggests that there were indeed strong campaign effects and that favorable coverage may have played a more important role than advertising.

[7] Moreno (1999) has distinguished between the persuasive role of campaigns, which is likely to be more important among independent voters, and the reinforcing role of campaigns, which is likely to take place among partisan voters.

Fourth, no matter what sources of information voters use or believe, public opinion studies have shown for years that average levels of political information in a polity are usually low, and that the individual levels of information vary significantly. Converse (1964) put it very clearly in one statement: information among the electorate has a high variance around a low mean. However, it has also been broadly suggested that, no matter how much information voters have, want to have, or are able to have, they always find a way to make reasoned choices. Cues play an important role in all this.

Candidate images and voter cues

In order to assess differences in candidate images and how cues are probably taken, in this section I develop a statistical model in which the dependent variables are perceptions about the candidates. In the model I simply estimate the probalities of candidates being perceived in one way or another, according to measures of group representation, personal features, and policy orientations.

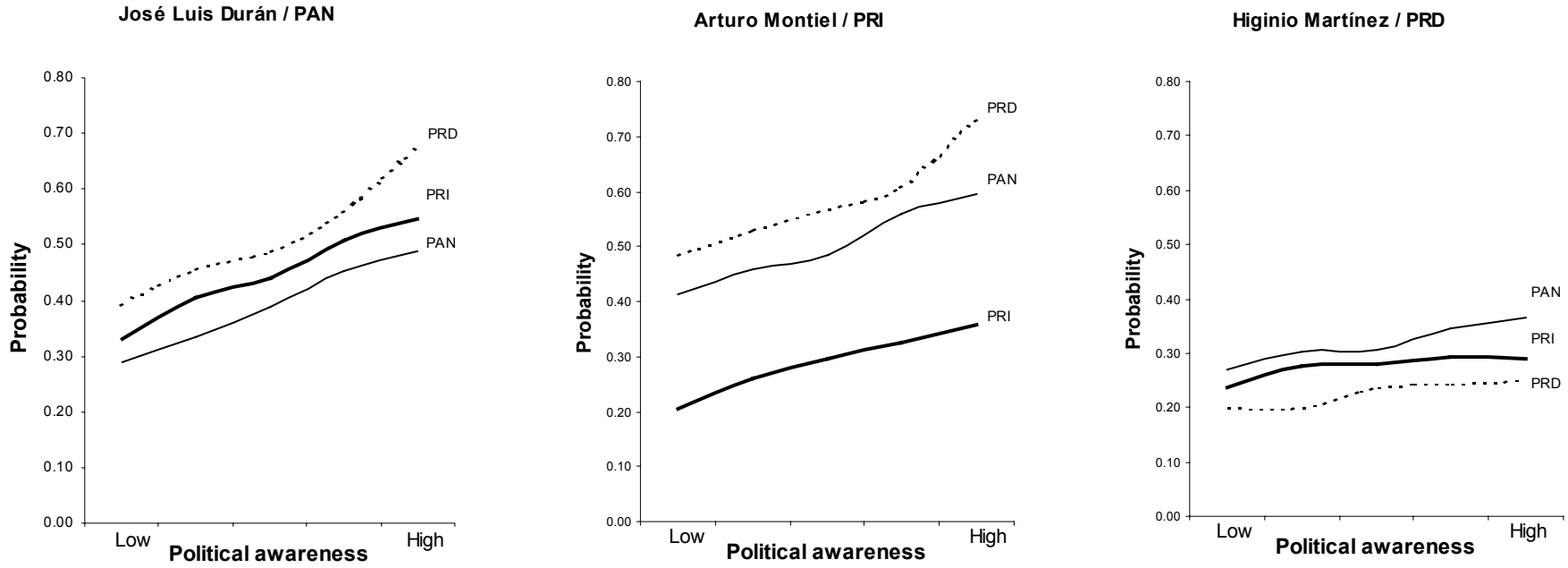
The model uses several independent variables: a) political awareness—measured with an index of slogan recognition—which is a variable that controls for the voter's level of attention to the campaign; b) political interest—measured with a scale of interest in the political campaigns; c) news exposure—measured with a composite index of exposure to political news on TV, radio, the press, and interpersonal conversations; d) candidate support—measured with voting intentions for each of the three candidates—which controls for the bias not only of selective attention to one's own candidate but also by partisanship; e) ideology—measured with a ten-point left-right self-placement scale; and f) socio-demographic variables, such as education, urban-rural conditions, age and gender. The statistical model is based on logit estimates, assuming that dependent variables reflect the fact that the candidate is either perceived under the image emphasized or not. I ran 30 models with different dependent variables, ten for each one of the three candidates. The results shown in the following sections are based on these models. However, the focus will be on the estimated probabilities of

perceiving the candidates in a certain way, rather than on the estimated coefficients themselves.[8]

Middle class versus working class interests. The first type of perceptions I analyze refers to the candidate as a representative of middle class interests, as opposed to the working class. Mexican voters have consistently shown significant differences in party support depending on certain political, ideological, and sociological features. In this case we should expect the PAN candidate as more likely to be perceived as middle class representative, the PRD candidate as working-class representative, and the PRI candidate without a specific orientation.

[8] The coefficients can be obtained directly from the author. The average percent of correctly predicted responses in the models was 83.2%.

Figure 1. Perceptions about Candidates as Representatives of Middle Class Interests
(Probabilities estimated from logistic regression model described in text)



Source: Reforma's State of Mexico Preelection Poll, June 1999. Total sample 1,325. Author's calculations.

Based on the coefficient estimates from the logistic regression model described in the previous section, Figure 1 shows very important differences in perceptions from voters depending upon their level of political awareness and partisan orientation. José Luis Durán, municipal president of middle-class Naucalpan, in the Mexico City metropolitan area, was by far the most identified candidate with middle class interests. Both PRD and PRI supporters were more likely to see Durán in those terms than PAN supporters themselves. Also, the higher the level of political awareness, the more likely it was to perceive Durán and the other two candidates as representatives of the middle class.

As in Durán's case, Montiel was also perceived as a middle class representative by supporters of other parties, not his own. PRD supporters did in fact perceive Durán and Montiel as middle-class oriented in a similar way and even Montiel as more middle-class oriented than Durán. PRD voters with a low level of political awareness had around 0.4 probability of seeing Durán as a middle class representative, but almost 0.5 probability of seeing Montiel in those terms. In contrast, they only had a 0.2 probability of seeing their party's candidate, Martínez, in those terms, and awareness did not make a big difference.

PRI supporters clearly had a different perspective about their own candidate: they had the lowest probability of all voters of seeing the PRI candidate as middle-class oriented. This perception grew as political awareness increased. While supporters of other parties were from 0.4 to over 0.7 in terms of probabilities of seeing Montiel as middle-class oriented, depending on their level of political awareness, PRI supporters had a range from about 0.2 to slightly over 0.3. This seems a huge difference on how supporters from different parties perceived the candidate.

By showing the differences in perceptions about the candidates depending on partisanship and political awareness, the data on Figure 1 demonstrates two things: first, voters do perceive candidates differently. If being considered as a middle-class representative as opposed to working class was in important cue of candidate differentiation, in all cases party supporters saw their own candidate as less middle-class oriented than his opponents. Among all voters, Durán was the most identified with the

middle class, and Martínez the less identified with it, with Montiel in the middle. For each candidate, their own party supporters were more likely to see them as middle-class oriented than the other party supporters. Second, in every case the perception of a candidate in the terms shown increases as political awareness increases. This means two things: that information cues such as references to class interests are more salient to more informed individuals and that more politically aware voters are more likely to answer questionnaire items according to the framing given to them. Less politically aware individuals simply answer "don't know".

The estimated probabilities shown in Figure 1 indicate that voters use different frames of references that help them think about the candidates. The evidence shown in Table 2 also indicates that, by showing how the candidates were also perceived differently depending upon what source of information voters find more reliable, that is, based on the credibility that they posit in different media.

Table 2. Percent who perceived the candidate as a middle class or working class representative by media credibility

Believes a lot in…	**Montiel**		**Durán**		**Martínez**	
	Middle class	*Working class*	*Middle class*	*Working class*	*Middle class*	*Working class*
Television news	34	**51**	33	38	29	**40**
Radio news	40	45	37	41	30	**42**
Newspapers	**49**	40	41	39	25	**47**
Political editorials	46	42	**51**	33	28	**49**
Friends and family	37	**46**	**43**	33	37	35
Opinion leaders	39	**51**	**44**	37	38	38
Political ads	32	**57**	**43**	37	34	**41**

Source: Reforma's State of Mexico Preelection Poll, June 1999. Total sample 1,325.

It was more likely for voters who rely on the press to see Montiel as a representative of middle class interests, than those who rely on TV news, radio, friends and family, opinion leaders and even political ads—who in fact perceived Montiel more as a working class representative. Those relying on political ads showed the highest proportion of voters thinking about Montiel as a working class type of guy, the image that the party wanted his candidate to have.

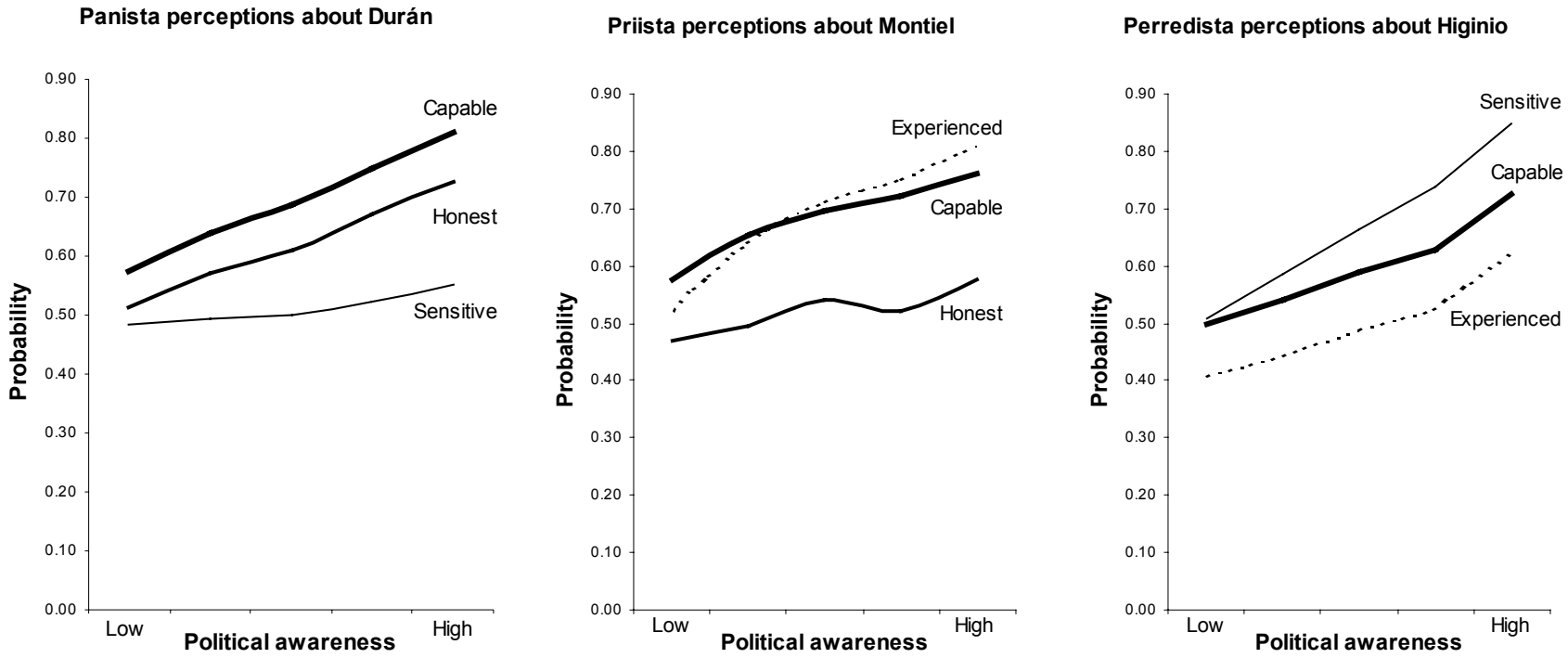
In the case of Durán, voters who rely more on TV and radio news were more likely to perceive him in association with the working class. However, voters who rely more on the other media, including the press and personal conversations were more likely to see him as middle-class oriented. The most common perceptions in these terms were observed among voters relying on political editorials in newspapers.

Finally, Martínez was almost unanimously perceived as a working-class representative, except among those who relied on friends and family and opinion leaders, where there are no significant differences in perceptions.

In summary, candidates are perceived differently by voters depending on partisan orientations, political awareness and credibility of media information. This is the case of using general frames of reference, such as class, but it holds true when looking at the candidate personal characteristics.

Candidate personal features. I also estimated the probabilities of perceiving the candidates in terms of personal features, such as capabilities, experience, honesty, and sensitiveness. Figure 2 shows the results by levels of political awareness. Of the four attributes, the graphs only show the highest two for each candidate and the lowest one, so the figure is no so crowded with lines.

Figure 2. Perceptions about Candidate Qualities by Political Awareness.
(Probabilities estimated from logistic regression model described in text)



Source: Reforma's State of Mexico Preelection Poll, June 1999. Total sample 1,325. Author's calculations.

The data show that the three candidates were perceived in terms of different attributions: Montiel, as many other PRI candidates in different elections, was perceived as an experienced candidate, but not so much as an honest one. Given the time that the PRI has been in power at both the national and the local levels, that party's candidates are likely to be seen as experienced themselves, even if they are unknown to most voters. Experience is probably a partisan cue that may dissolve as opposition parties win elections and have relatively successful administrations. By now, experience is still one of the main attributes of PRI candidates, who have usually had professional trajectories in the public administration. In fact, PRI campaigns tend to emphasize the experience of its candidates.[9] Interestingly, as shown in the figure, Montiel was more commonly perceived as capable than as experienced among voters with low political awareness. This shows that, if campaign messages centered on experienced rather than capabilities, the level of awareness was an important factor behind "getting" that message. Efforts at presenting the candidate as an honest person may be less persuasive when the candidate is from the PRI, and the State of Mexico was no exception. While experience and clearly played in favor of Montiel, the chances of seeing him as an honest candidate were virtually like flipping a coin. There was a fifty-percent chance of seeing him that way and fifty-percent chance of not seeing him that way, no matter what the level of political awareness was.

In spite of being the Municipal President in Naucalpan, Durán was not perceived as an experienced candidate, but as one who is capable to govern instead. The image of honesty also played in favor of the Panista, as it does for other PAN candidates in different contests. However, something consistent with his image as a representative of middle-class interests was that he was barely perceived as a sensitive candidate, as someone who understands and cares for the people.

[9] This will be an interesting question in the 2000 Presidential contest, in which all three major candidates have been governors of their respective states: PRI's Francisco Labastida in Sinaloa, Vicente Fox in Guanajuato, and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in Michoacán in the 1980s and the Federal District from 1997 to 1999. In fact, Labastida's campaign has so far developed an image based on his candidate's long trajectory in the public administration, as secretary of State in different ministries, including the Interior ministry during President Zedillo's term. Fox's campaign has emphasized the achievements of the Guanajuato governor as well, but the Cárdenas campaign has barely made any reference to his job in Mexico City, where his popularity constantly dropped down.

Unlike Durán, the PRD candidate, Higinio Martínez, was very clearly perceived as a candidate who is close to the people, who is sensitive, and this perception was stronger among voters with higher levels of political awareness. His campaign was based on producing such an image, which explains why more politically aware voters were more likely to perceive him in those terms.[10] Martínez was also likely to be perceived as "capable" to govern, which seems to be a symptom of opposition candidates as opposed to candidates from the ruling party, who are usually seen as experienced. In the case of the PRD candidate, experience was simply not an attribute he could count on, at least not in the voters' minds.

In summary, the data shown in Figure 2 indicate that candidates are indeed perceived differently by voters and the way they are perceived varies by levels of political awareness. These perceptions also vary by partisanship in a way that is consistent with the party message. Partisans are more likely to reflect the views about the candidate according to the campaign messages. The next section focuses on policy issues.

Issues, policies, and candidate competence. This section continues to rely on the logistic model employed in previous sections to obtain the probabilities of perceiving candidates in a certain way. In this case the dependent variable refers to which candidate is the best one to deal with the issues or policies mentioned to respondents. Such issues and policies are poverty, crime, private investment, public works, public services, corruption, and negotiating with federal authorities to get more resources for the state.

Table 3 displays estimated probabilities of perceiving the candidate as the best one to deal with the issues mentioned, by levels of political awareness. The issues are ranked under each candidate depending on the competence attributed to them by highly aware voters, that is, by those who are more likely to reflect the campaign discourse. In

[10] PRD campaign strategies have followed that pattern in recent times, based on the idea that its candidates are sensitive to people's needs. For example, in the current race for Mexico City mayor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador's campaign has not only emphasized his "valiant honesty" but also his major preocupation: the city's poor.

every case, as political awareness increases, the probability of perceiving the candidate as the most competent one also increases.

Table 3. Issues and Perceptions about Candidate Competence.
(Probability of party supporters perceiving the candidate as the best option for dealing with the issues shown)

	Level of political awareness				
	Low				High
Priista perceptions about Arturo Montiel					
Public services	0.59	0.66	0.71	0.73	0.79
More federal resources	0.59	0.67	0.72	0.73	0.78
Private investment	0.58	0.66	0.71	0.72	0.77
Public works	0.59	0.67	0.71	0.72	0.76
Crime	0.57	0.63	0.68	0.69	0.74
Poverty	0.58	0.62	0.66	0.66	0.70
Corruption	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.62	0.66
Panista perceptions about José Luis Durán					
Public services	0.58	0.63	0.67	0.72	0.78
Crime	0.57	0.62	0.65	0.70	0.76
Public works	0.54	0.60	0.64	0.70	0.75
Poverty	0.56	0.59	0.63	0.66	0.70
Private investment	0.51	0.55	0.59	0.65	0.69
Corruption	0.50	0.55	0.58	0.63	0.67
More federal resources	0.49	0.54	0.58	0.63	0.67
Perredista perceptions about Higinio Martínez					
Poverty	0.59	0.63	0.69	0.73	0.82
Public works	0.53	0.57	0.63	0.68	0.81
Corruption	0.48	0.54	0.63	0.69	0.78
Public services	0.56	0.58	0.62	0.65	0.76
More federal resources	0.51	0.53	0.61	0.62	0.73
Crime	0.50	0.53	0.58	0.62	0.70
Private investment	0.45	0.48	0.53	0.56	0.64

Source: Reforma's State of Mexico Preelection Poll, June 1999. Total sample 1,325. Author´s calculations.

The data show, one more time, that candidates tend to be perceived in terms of different frames of reference, by different cues. Montiel, for example, was more likely perceived in terms of dealing with public services, negotiating resources with the federal government—which is hands of his same party—and promoting private investment in the state. During his campaign, Montiel was more commonly seen with the state's industrialists and entrepreneurial groups than the other candidates, which is clearly reflected in the voters' perceptions.

Durán's issues also included public services, as in the case of Montiel, but he did better in creating an image related to crime and public works. Crime was and has been one of the top priorities measured by public opinion polls in the state, and Durán was as likely as Montiel to be perceived as capable of dealing with it. The difference is that this wasn't one of Montiel's strongest points, but it was one of Durán's.

Montiel started a late campaign based on a tough hand towards criminals, literally warning them and letting the public know that he would be even willing not to respect their human rights if that helped reduce crime. He ran an advertisement three or four weeks before the election that stated that "criminals are like rats, and rats do not have human rights". This caused an outrage among journalists, opinion leaders, intellectuals, and political analysts in Mexico City, but a public opinion poll conducted at the time showed that more people in the state agreed with Montiel's statement than people who disagreed.[11]

Once again, Higinio Martínez was perceived in different terms. Dealing with poverty and public works were undoubtedly his strongest attributes. Fighting corruption was also a strong point, but he was weakly perceived in terms of crime.

In summary, Table 3 shows that different images were developed during the campaigns for governor in the State of Mexico in regards to policies and issues.

[11] That poll is the same one used in this paper for analysis, *Reforma* published the results on June 25, 1999. Respondents were asked the following question: "One of the candidates for governor said that criminals have to be treated like rats and their human rights shouldn't be respected. Do you personally agree or disagree with this statement?" Forty seven percent said they agreed, 35 percent said they disagreed, 8 percent didn't agree nor disagree, and 10 percent gave no answer or "don't know". In a subsequent question, respondents were asked to say who was the candidate that compared criminals with rats: 48 percent correctly responded Arturo Montiel, 47 percent didn't know, and 5 percent mentioned the other two candidates.

Conclusion

The evidence shown in this paper suggests that voters use cues in their reasoning about candidates, cues that make sense of politics. The argument is simple, but empirical evidence has been scarce. Voters make reasoned choices, and their reasoning can be based on higher or lower levels of information. The evidence shown here indicates that political awareness—as a proxy of the level of information that voters have—matters in explaining weaker or stronger perceptions about the candidates. However, partisan orientations and credible sources of information are also important, not only in explaining weaker or stronger perceptions, but different perceptions indeed.

Mexican voters process campaign information and respond to political messages in understandable and even predictable ways. One of the relevant theoretical questions is whether their reasoning crystallizes in a way that partisan cues are developed. The evidence shown here and evidence from other elections suggest that candidates from the same parties are likely to be perceived in a similar way. However, it is not quite clear whether this is because partisan cues are already developed or because parties are following similar strategies of political communication across different campaigns (or both). In any case, we could argue that campaigns matter in this sense. Voters do get information from them and process it according to their individual predispositions and level of awareness.

The findings from the 1999 State of Mexico election are of particular relevance for the 2000 Presidential Elections. The presidential race is a candidate-centered event in which cues are common. Vicente Fox's catch-all strategy will make it hard for voters to get consistent cues, given that he has appealed to different and opposite electorates. However, his campaign is definitively full of cues and it will be an interesting task to determine which of those were more effective in his direct and indirect attempts of political communication, especially the idea that he can really beat the PRI. Francisco Labastida, an apparent beneficiary of an "official" candidate cue during the PRI national primary, seems to be relying on the typical partisan cue of experience, as well as on his closeness to people's needs, especially medical care and education. Cuauhtémoc

Cárdenas is facing a very tough moment by being constantly showed by opinion polls at the bottom of the three-man race. His messages focus on nationalism, ideological principles and coherence—unlike Fox, who is totally pragmatical and incoherent—and sensitive to the most disadvantaged segments of Mexican society. The lesson from the State of Mexico campaign is that voters do respond to political messages, and that once they develop pictures of the candidates, they can be a consistent across elections and candidates, that is, they can become partisan cues.

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