

Iron Fist Politics in Latin America:
Politicians, Public Opinion, and Crime Control

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Crime has plagued Latin American countries for decades, and drug trafficking, gang violence, and the often lethal responses of security forces to rising crime rates have become highly salient political issues. In many cases, zero tolerance and iron fist policies have become controversial political tools and new crime policies and police reforms are focal points of electoral campaigns. Both crime and the increasingly harsh crime control measures imposed by iron fist policies have grave implications for the rule of law, the expansion and consolidation of human rights, and the quality of public life. A high quality democracy should, in principle, be able to protect its citizens from crime without resorting to arbitrary arrest, harshly punitive punishment and the violation of human rights perpetrated by agents of the state. Yet this is not the view of crime control prevalent in many Latin American democracies. The public image of crime and crime control, as well as political rhetoric, often conflates security with authoritarian iron fist measures.

This is not the only image of crime control available in Latin America, however, and my paper seeks to understand how the interaction of media images, public opinion, and political rhetoric affects the debate over how the government should deal with crime. In this paper I explore a possible explanation of how candidates engage the issue of crime during the 2007 presidential elections in Guatemala. By examining the dynamics particular to the problem of crime, I hope to better understand the relationship between politicians, the media, and the public.

Background

The problem of crime has become a hotly debated topic across Latin America, not only among politicians but also among social scientists. However, despite this rising interest in crime, researchers know little about why there is such strong support for punitive, iron fist crime control policies among both politicians and citizens.

General trends in Central and South America reveal three main ways that the problem of crime is addressed during campaigns: in some cases, candidates debate whether iron fist or social reform tactics are the best way to address the problem, in other cases support for iron fist measures is the unchallenged status quo, and in other cases candidates demanding police reform confront candidates who support iron fist policies. This leads us to the question of when iron fist crime policies become a disputed issue. That is, when, given widespread concern of rising levels of crime and violence, will a social reform or police reform candidate campaign in opposition to an iron fist candidate? While a body of literature exists that addresses the problem of crime in Latin America, the literature does not discuss this issue directly. When confronting the political ramifications of the growing problem of crime, researchers tend to focus on the police violence that often goes hand in hand with iron fist policies.¹ These studies deal with the

¹ Such studies include investigations of judicial responses to police violence, political responses to police violence in the form of police reform initiatives, and civil society's response to police violence in the form of pressure for police reform. See Brinks, Daniel. 2004. *Legal Tolls and the Rule of Law: The Judicial Response to Police Killings in South America*: University of Notre Dame.; Hinton, Mercedes S. 2006. *The State on the Streets: Police and Politics in Argentina and Brazil*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Eaton, Kent. 2005. *Police Vs. Military Reform in Latin America: Or Why Reining in Cops Can Be Harder Than Controlling Soldiers*: Naval Postgraduate School.; Ungar, Mark. 2002. *Elusive Reform : Democracy and the Rule of Law in Latin America*. Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers; Fuentes, Claudio. 2005.

consequences of iron fist policies and focus their attention on the widespread failure of police reforms.² This is an important question. However, approaching the problem of authoritarian iron fist policies in Latin America by addressing the consequences of these policies overlooks an important aspect of the issue: the role of public opinion. These Latin American, which that meet the threat of crime with an iron fist, are electoral democracies in which the politicians who devise and implement iron fist policies can, through elections, be sanctioned by the public.³ While the studies cited above help to explain the failure of reform, they cannot help us explain why a politician would campaign on a reform platform.

The Politics of Crime Control

Despite relatively widespread support for punitive crime policies, the question of how to combat rising crime rates can be a highly contested issue. As described above, in some countries politicians wage debates over crime control policies both within and across elections. In others, there seems to be little dissent among politicians in their support of iron fist policies, particularly during political campaigns. Given the patterns of political competition over this issue in Central and South America, how can we explain when a social reform or police reform candidate will challenge an iron fist candidate in an election? This paper will move outside political parties themselves and look to the role of the media as a driving force in the dynamics of iron fist politics. While much attention has been paid to how the media can create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety over the threat of insecurity,⁴ little has been written to address how the media can also frame the political debate over crime in such a way as to open up an opportunity for social reform and police reform candidates to emerge. My paper will examine how media framing of

Contesting the Iron Fist: Advocacy Networks and Police Violence in Democratic Argentina and Chile. New York: Routledge

² The question is why have policy makers been unable to curb a rising tide of state violence and civil rights abuse; answers include failed institutions, corruption, an impotent civil society, and a political culture that supports authoritarian methods of crime control. See Pérez, Orlando J. 2003-04. "Democratic Legitimacy and Public Insecurity: Crime and Democracy in El Salvador and Guatemala." *Political Science Quarterly* 118 (4):627-644.; Hinton. *The State on the Streets: Police and Politics in Argentina and Brazil*; Weyland, Kurt. 2003. Political Repercussions of Crime and Violence in Latin America. In *Culture and Peace: Violence, Politics and Representation in the Americas*. University of Texas at Austin.; Eaton. *Police Vs. Military Reform in Latin America: Or Why Reining in Cops Can Be Harder Than Controlling Soldiers.*; Caldeira, Teresa P. R. and James Holston. 1999. "Democracy and Violence in Brazil." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41 (4):691-729.

³ Caldeira. "Democracy and Violence in Brazil.", Caldeira, Teresa Pires do Rio. 2000. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, Caldeira, Teresa. 2002. "The Paradox of Police Violence in Democratic Brazil." *Ethnography* 3 (3).

⁴ see Altheide, David L. 2002. *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis, Social Problems and Social Issues*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter, Becker, Howard Saul. 1966. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York.; Free Press, Caldeira. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*, Ericson, Richard Victor, Patricia M. Baranek, and Janet B. L. Chan. 1991. *Representing Order: Crime, Law, and Justice in the News Media*. Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, Lupia, Arthur and Jesse O. Menning. 2006. When Can Politicians Scare Citizens into Supporting Bad Policies? A Theory of Incentives with Fear-Based Content. In *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*. Philadelphia, PA, Roberts, Julian V. 2005. *Understanding Public Attitudes to Criminal Justice*. Maidenhead, England: Open University Press

the crime problem can make a difference in how the debate over crime control issues plays out in elections.

Crime is a complex issue that does not fit squarely into traditional spatial models of party competition. It can be seen both as a valence issue and as a position issue when approached from different perspectives. For voters, it is primarily a valence issue, an issue that “involve[s] the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate.”⁵ Neither politicians nor voters are pro-crime; crime is negatively valued and when politicians address the issue they do so by offering various solutions to the problem, not by choosing different positions that advocate different degrees of security. Crime exists both in the past and the present, and as a valence issue, voters’ evaluation of candidates hinge on what credit or blame can be assigned to the failure or success of past policies and on which proposed solution to the problem seems more likely to succeed in the future.⁶ Yet politicians do offer solutions to the crime problem that can be measured out in spatial terms. Political candidates do not simply associate themselves with security and accuse the other candidates’ parties of promoting insecurity; parties often offer specific policy prescriptions as to how to lower crime rates, and these proffered solutions often fall on an ideological spectrum.

Given the complexity of the politics of crime control, the issue can be approached in different ways. My larger project will address the question by examining when the major candidates in an election decide to engage the issue of crime control and what solution (if any) the candidate will support. This paper takes up the case of the 2007 presidential elections in Guatemala, in which the two most viable candidates were a retired army General whose campaign slogan was “*urge mano dura*” (urge the iron fist) and a businessman who campaigned with the slogan “*la delincuencia se combate con inteligencia*” (crime should be fought with intelligence). It will treat the issue of crime control as primarily a position issue and will focus on the role of the media in setting the political agenda and framing the issue.

Influence of the Media

This analysis rests on a few basic assumptions. First, following theories of substantive or dynamic representation, which contend that policy makers take citizens’ preferences into account, I assume that politicians respond to voters. In other words, citizen’s preferences and opinions shape and/or constrain politicians’ stated policy preferences via the electoral process.⁷ Second, I assume that the media can affect

⁵ Stokes, Donald E. 1963. "Spatial Models of Party Competition." *American Political Science Review* 57 (2):368-377.

⁶ The idea that voters evaluate candidates based on past credit or blame or the feasibility of future success also coincides with domain specific theories of public opinion, which posit that individuals tend to simplify political issues by reducing them to questions of responsibility. Responsibility can be divided into causal responsibility, which focuses on the origin of the problem (who or what is to blame), and treatment responsibility, which focuses on the alleviation of the problem (who or what can solve it). See Iyengar, Shanto. 1991. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

⁷ Miller, W. E., and D. E. Stokes. 1963. "Constituency Influence in Congress." *American Political Science Review* 57 (1):45-56.; Powell, G. B. 2004. "Political Representation in Comparative Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 7:273-296. Schmitt, Hermann, and J. J. A. Thomassen. 1999. *Political Representation and Legitimacy in the European Union*. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press;

politicians' choice through its impact on public opinion and voters' preferences, an assumption that has strong support in time series and experimental analysis. According to the theories of agenda setting and framing, cues created by the news media force the public's attention to certain issues. By raising awareness of particular problems, the media can set the agenda of what people think about, and influence how the issue is debated by framing the problem a particular way.⁸

The direction of influence, of course, does not flow solely from the media to the public. Scholars have found evidence of feedback loops between the media and the public, with each influencing the other. Although this kind of feedback loop suggests that agenda setting studies have an inherent endogeneity problem when looking at issues of agenda setting—the media, in order to meet public demand, devotes a large amount of space or time to a particular issue (e.g. crime), which in turn raises the public's level of concern on this issue—this is not exactly how the feedback loop works. Newspapers and television stations are concerned with publishing or airing attention grabbing stories that attract a large audience and the public is interested in being entertained. The stories the media chooses to use to ensure that people continue to buy newspapers and watch television newscasts are what set the agenda. The public's demand is not for crime news but for entertainment. The media determines how to meet this demand for entertainment by choosing to emphasize a particular type of news story. In other words, the media responds to consumer demand.⁹ In addition, the media and the public do not have equal influence over each other; studies have found that the media has more influence on public opinion than public opinion has on the media.¹⁰

According to theories of issue ownership, political parties or candidates will take ownership of an issue by framing it in such a way that voters become convinced that one party is better equipped to handle a problem than the opposition.¹¹ In order to win an election, a candidate will be better served by making his or her own proprietary issues more salient while avoiding issues “owned” by his or her opponents. It is not the media that sets the agenda and frames the issue, but politicians. Examples of issue ownership are particularly noticeable in some elections in Argentina and Brazil where leftist politicians attempt (and often succeed) in shifting the focus of a campaign from an

Stimson, J. A., M. B. Mackuen, and R. S. Erikson. 1995. "Dynamic Representation." *American Political Science Review* 89 (3):543-565.

⁸ Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York,; Harcourt; McCombs, M. E., and D. L. Shaw. 1972. "Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2):176-&. Lang, Gladys Engel and Kurt Lang. 1991. "Watergate: An Exploration of the Agenda-Building Process." *Agenda Setting: Readings on the Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking*, ed. David L. Press and Maxwell McCombs. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.; Kinder, D. R. 1998. "Communication and Opinion." *Annual Review of Political Science* 1:167-197.; Gamson, W. A., D. Croteau, W. Hoynes, and T. Sasson. 1992. "Media Images and the Social Construction of Reality." *Annual Review of Sociology* 18:373-393.; Funkhouser, G.R. 1973. "Issues of 60s - Exploratory Study in Dynamics of Public Opinion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 37 (1):62-75.

⁹ Smith, Kim A. 1991. "Newspaper Coverage and Public Concern About Community Issues." *Agenda Setting: Readings on the Media, Public Opinion, and Policymaking*, ed. David L. Press and Maxwell McCombs. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Graber, Doris A. 1980. *Crime News and the Public*. New York: Praeger

¹⁰ Smith. "Newspaper Coverage and Public Concern About Community Issues."

¹¹ Petrocik, John R. 1996. "Campaigning and the Press: The Influence of the Candidates." *Do the Media Govern? Politicians, Voters, and Reporters in America*, ed. Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

emphasis on crime control to an emphasis on police reform rather than tackling the issue of crime by offering a social reform platform. I argue, however, that while these cases are good examples of issue ownership, we should not dismiss the media as primarily a mouthpiece for politicians.

Given the two assumptions that politicians respond to public opinion and that the media often shapes public opinion, I argue that we need to approach the question of how the problem of crime is addressed by politicians by looking at how the media address the problem of crime. Fear of crime and perceptions of insecurity do not necessarily reflect the actual amount and intensity of crime in a city or country.¹² Citizens become concerned with crime not because crime rates rise, but because the media reports a rise in crime or a rise in violence. As Erikson explains, the term “crime wave” may or may not mean an actual rise in crime but instead, “refers to a rash of publicity, a moment of excitement and alarm, a feeling that something needs to be done.”¹³ It is this media coverage, and public concern about the problem, that makes crime a salient issue in political campaigns. The media frames the issue by defining who the criminals are, who the victims are, and what is considered dangerous.

Media coverage of crime and the resultant public anxiety puts crime on the political agenda and provides politicians with a frame in which to talk about this issue. This frame is not always the same and may emphasize certain types of crime over others or raise fears of one kind of insecurity rather than another. Media reports can, for example, frame crime in terms of social class or race, define it as gang violence, link it to the drug trade, implicate the mafia, or tie it to police corruption. Studies have found that how the news frames crime can reinforce the basic ideas behind punitive crime control policies,¹⁴ and have shown that event oriented reports lead viewers to blame the personal qualities of an individual offender for an offense and to support punitive punishment.¹⁵

What the media reports and how it reports it can constrain politicians’ choices as to what policy options are viable in any given election. When looking at whether a candidate will address the problem of crime and what sort of stance he or she will take on crime control policy, it can be helpful to see the issue as positional. In these terms, the candidate can choose to advocate one of several different positions on the political spectrum. Those who advocate iron fist policies tend to be from right-leaning parties, particularly those who have been associated with authoritarian regimes or authoritarian figures, while those who advocate social reform policies tend to be from left-leaning parties, particularly those associated with human rights campaigns. Left-leaning parties are also more likely to attempt to shift focus away from crime control and towards police reform.

Political ideology alone, however, does not define how the debate over crime policy will unfold. If politicians respond to voters, given the strong perception of danger due to rising crime rates and the apparent lack of effectiveness of state institutions to deal

¹² Erikson, Kai. 1966. *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York,: Wiley; Becker. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*

¹³ Erikson. *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*; for a personal account of the media creating a crime wave, see Steffens, Lincoln. 1931. *The Autobiography of Lincoln Steffens*. New York,: Harcourt

¹⁴ Becker. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, Caldeira. *City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo*, Iyengar. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*

¹⁵ Iyengar. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*

with this growing threat, we should see more left-leaning politicians moving their ideological position to capture votes. While this does occur in some cases,¹⁶ it is more often the case that a left-leaning candidate will remain silent on the issue rather than promote iron fist policies. This may be because crime control does not fall neatly into traditional left and right spatial categories, but instead cuts across political constituencies. Unless there is overwhelming, across the board support for iron fist policies, a left-leaning candidate could lose more voters than he or she would gain by moving to an iron fist position.

The amount of public support for iron fist policies depends in a large part to media framing of the issue. The steady support for punitive policies suggests that a particular frame that supports the basic ideas behind iron fist policies is predominant. However, specific events, such as incidents of state corruption, police violence, and judicial failure, can push the media to move off of this frame, making an opening that can allow social reform candidates and police reform candidates to bring their proposals into the public agenda. This does not mean that public opinion swings completely from one position to the other, but that the change in media frame allows for the possibility of debate.

This, then, suggests that when crime becomes a salient political issue, politicians take either (1) an iron fist stance, (2) a social reform stance, (3) choose not to emphasize the problem or (4) shift focus away from crime and towards police reform. As outlined above, a politician's stance depends on his or her political ideology, whether the issue cuts across his or her constituency, and on the opportunity to advance an iron fist, social reform or police reform position offered by the framing of the issue in the media.

These, then, are the hypotheses of my project:

H₂: The right-leaning candidates will take a stance on the crime issue while the left-leaning candidates will not address the issue when crime control policy cuts across the left-leaning candidate's constituency.

H_{2a}: Crime will be a crosscutting issue for the left when news coverage frames the crime issue as a war between criminals and agents of the state, where criminality is seen as a moral flaw, and violence is portrayed as arbitrary and indiscriminate.

H_{2b}: Left-leaning politicians will attempt to shift focus away from crime control and towards police reform when police violence or police corruption is emphasized in the media.

H₃: The major candidates in an election will be split over the crime control issue, some supporting iron fist policies and other supporting social reforms, when crime control policy does not cut across the left-leaning candidates' constituencies.

¹⁶ For example, the 1999 Gubernatorial Race in the state of Mexico, Mexico, where the PRI, PAN, and PRD candidates ran on platforms that emphasized zero tolerance policies and other punitive measures.

H_{3a}: Crime will not be a crosscutting issue for the left when news coverage provides context and analysis of crime and/or frames the issue in terms of social problems.

The discussion above also leaves us with an important question concerning the independence of the media. I argue that media framing of crime news can create an opening for left-leaning politicians to confront the iron fist rhetoric of right-leaning candidates either by taking up the crime issue and supporting social reforms or by shifting the debate to one concerning police reform rather than crime control. To make this argument, one has to assume that media outlets have a large degree of autonomy as to what they report and how they report it. However, if politicians or political parties have control over the content and framing of certain important newspapers, television, or radio stations, then the hypotheses outlined above will not hold. We can no longer suggest that media framing of crime can create opportunities for left-leaning politicians to challenge the rhetoric of iron fist crime control. Instead, media framing of crime becomes a tool used by political parties to control campaign debates.

This leads us to an alternative hypothesis:

AH₁: Politicians and/or political parties control the media framing of crime.

Research Design and Operationalization of Variables

My dependent variable, the state of the debate over crime control policies, refers to what stances (if any) the major candidates take on crime control policy. The major candidates are coded according to whether they take an iron fist stance, a social reform stance, a neutral/indifferent stance, or if they shift the debate to one of police reform. In the case of the Guatemalan presidential elections of 2007, the frontrunners in the polls had starkly different approaches to the crime problem: Otto Pérez of the Partido Patriota, a retired army General, strongly supported iron fist policies, while Alvaro Colom, a businessman representing UNE, emphasized programs that encouraged employment and tackled the issue of poverty as a way to combat crime in the long term. Thus, Pérez is coded as taking an iron fist stance and Colom is coded as taking a social reform stance.

I measure how the media frames the crime issue using data from a content analysis of newspaper articles and op-ed pieces. The news articles were collected from the two papers with the highest circulation in Guatemala, *Nuestro Diario* and *Prensa Libre*. I analyzed articles appearing in these newspapers six months prior to first round of the election, two months prior to the first round and one month prior to the first round. Within each of these three months I collected news articles, editorial pieces, and opinion pieces published on five randomly selection days.

I coded any news article, editorial, or opinion piece within the fifteen days selected that deals with crime, law enforcement, or the coming election. In conducting a content analysis of these news articles and op-ed pieces, I focused specific attention on frames that coincide with the ideas that support punitive crime strategies (stress on character deficiencies of lower-class individuals and minorities, stress on violence against individuals, emphasis on murder and assault rather than theft or vandalism, less emphasis on white collar crime, stress on apprehension and punishment, and emphasis on growth

of crime rates) or that support social reform policies (stress on poverty and unemployment, emphasis on communal victims, emphasis on white collar crime and corruption, stress on police violence). I also paid attention to frames that support a call for police reform (stress on police incompetence, police violence, or police corruption).

The Guatemalan Media

Broadcast and print media in Guatemala are controlled by a few elite monopolies. Angel Gonzalez, a Mexican who also controls most of the major radio stations, owns all four of the major television news networks. *Prensa Libre*, one of the two most popular newspapers in the country, owns the main cable competitor of Gonzalez' television stations and has financial and legal ties to the highest selling newspaper in Guatemala, *Nuestro Diario*, and the smaller *El Periodico*. *Prensa Libre*'s main competitor, *Siglo XXI*, also owns *Al Día*, the fifth morning daily competing for advertising and readers, but neither of these papers reaches the levels of readership enjoyed by *Prensa Libre* or *Nuestro Diario*. Gonzalez' ties to political elites within Guatemala has caused concern about political parties' influence over media content on television, an accusation which led to fights between broadcast and print media at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, each accusing the other of corruption and deception.¹⁷ Yet when I asked journalists if they believed that politicians or political parties influenced how crime was reported in newspapers, on television or on the radio, the common answer was that it is business, not politics, that drives crime reporting in Guatemala.¹⁸

The crime reporting in Guatemala has undergone a dramatic shift in the last ten years. The closing of the newspaper *El Gráfico*, the second largest paper in Guatemala during the 1990s, left a space for new graphically based newspapers to emerge. In partnership with *El Periódico*, a left-wing paper focused on investigative reporting, *Prensa Libre*, a conservative newspaper that at the time had the highest circulation in Guatemala, reopened and reoriented *Nuestro Diario*, a newspaper that was founded in the 1930's but that had lost its readership in the intervening years. In the last few years, *Nuestro Diario* has become the most popular and widely circulated paper not only in Guatemala, but also in all of Central America. Starting with a daily circulation of just over 27,000 in 1998, *Nuestro Diario* currently sells an average of 300,000 papers daily, a number that more than twice the circulation of *Prensa Libre* (at a circulation of 120,000 papers daily) and that nearly doubles the number of people reading newspapers in Guatemala.¹⁹ On its website, *Nuestro Diario* claims to be the most widely read paper in Latin America and its dramatic rise in circulation over the last decade places it with Brazil's *O Globo* (with an average of 350,000 papers daily during the week; 550,000 on Sundays) and Argentina's *Clarín* (with an average of 550,000 paper daily) as the top selling newspapers in all of Latin America. More than one journalist I interviewed claimed that each copy of this paper is read by at least four people, as it is often passed

¹⁷ Berganza, Gustavo. 2009. "Ese Poder Paralelo Llamado "Televisión Guatemalteca": El Poder Imaginado De La Tv." *Diálogo* 73:1-5.

¹⁸ Author's interviews

¹⁹ LaMay, Craig L. 2007. *Exporting Press Freedom: Economic and Editorial Dilemmas in International Media Assistance*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers

from person to person on public buses and in cafes, thereby allowing the paper to reach an estimated 1.2 million people.²⁰

Popular among young people, *Nuestro Diario* consists mainly of photographs, graphics, and illustrations paired with short paragraphs detailing the bare bones of the incident under scrutiny and captions describing the photos. Many news items also include headshots of witnesses or people from the neighborhood where a crime or accident took place offering their opinions on and reactions to the incident being reported. The main stories are short, usually only two or three paragraphs, and almost never quote sources.²¹ The paper is notorious for sensationalist journalism, photographs of violent deaths due to crime or traffic accidents and a daily two page pin-up photo of a scantily clad woman. One scholar writes that, while this style of news coverage is a success when viewed from the perspective of business, “to call it a work of reporting is charitable.”²² He goes on to argue that it is “by any reasonable editorial standard a bad newspaper. . . . It is a collection of “captions” and “snippets” and “headshots” that substitute full-color, garish graphics for narrative context and editorial explanations.”²³ As one journalist I interviewed described, *Nuestro Diario* takes advantage of the morbid and plays on the public’s attraction to voyeurism, a lucrative business practice that has shifted both print and broadcast media towards more violent and sensationalist news reporting.²⁴

It is this *periodismo amarillista* (sensationalist journalism) that many cite as the reason for the success of *Nuestro Diario*.²⁵ In this sense, murder becomes entertainment. Violence sells; it captures an audience with what one Guatemalan columnist describes as “a form of necrophiliac pornography.”²⁶ The columnist is referring specifically to a particular story published in November of 2008 by *Nuestro Diario*, which had placed on the front page a photo of an imprisoned gangster holding the decapitated head of a member of a rival gang who had been murdered during a prison riot. The day that this photograph appeared, *Nuestro Diario* sold more newspapers than any other day in its history.²⁷ Violence becomes good business; in this sense crime pays not only for the criminals but for the newspapers as well. In light of *Nuestro Diario*’s success, its competitors have had to move in the direction of sensationalist reporting in order to maintain readership.

Business drives the emphasis on violent crime in Guatemalan newspapers, but there is another, external force that influences crime reporting as well. Criminal networks, particularly drug traffickers and street gangs, have begun to put pressure on

²⁰ Author interviews

²¹ Quotations are usually reserved for opinions of bystanders and witnesses in boxes labeled “opinions” or “reactions” or are included in a daily section titled “Faces and Opinions,” where headshots of people encountered on the street are paired with short quotations from their answers to a topic of the day. In a personal interview, a journalist who runs a media monitoring NGO explained to me that this section is not always an accurate depiction of what is actually said by those interviewed, citing an incident where one interviewee called the NGO complaining that the paper published her picture next to an opinion that she did not express. Author interview

²² LaMay. *Exporting Press Freedom: Economic and Editorial Dilemmas in International Media Assistance*. pg.10

²³ *ibid.* pg.10.

²⁴ Author’s interview.

²⁵ LaMay. *Exporting Press Freedom: Economic and Editorial Dilemmas in International Media Assistance*

²⁶ Berganza, Gustavo. 2008. Postal De La Violencia. *El Periódico*, November 25, 2008.

²⁷ Author’s interview

journalists not to publish certain details of a crime or to avoid certain stories altogether. These threats, sometimes backed by physical and sometimes fatal retaliation for the publication of details of certain criminal activities, have led to self-censorship within the press. An article on criminal threats against journalists cites a departmental press group that claims massive gun battles between rival drug traffickers go unreported in the capital due to these types of threats. In turn, concerns over security have stopped most journalists from investigating the origins and causes of gang violence. While Guatemala has a lower incidence of murders of journalists than some other countries in the region, a number of cases have occurred in the last few years.²⁸

Besides pushing television news towards more sensationalist practices by demonstrating that violence sells, what influence can print media have on a country where only 65 percent of the population can read Spanish? The main source of news for most Guatemalans is the radio, which reaches highland areas where mountainous terrain makes it difficult to distribute print copies of newspapers based in the capital, illiteracy rates are high, and most inhabitants speak one of more than a score of indigenous Mayan languages. However, despite the fact that radio stations such as *Radio Sonora*, the main source for news on the radio, have budgets big enough to support their own reporters, most stations (including *Radio Sonora*) use newspapers as their main source of news. In many cases, radio news broadcasts (as well as some television news broadcasts) read newspaper articles verbatim.²⁹ In this way, newspapers not only set the agenda by reaching the elites in the capital but also distribute an image of crime and crime control to rural areas.

2007 Guatemalan Presidential Election

Guatemalan presidential elections are determined by absolute majority and include the possibility of a second round run-off election between the top two candidates held within 60 days of the first election if no candidate wins more than 50 percent of the vote in the first round. In 2007, the first round of the presidential election included 14 candidates. Of these, only three were considered viable: Alvaro Colom, representing *Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza* (National Unity of Hope: UNE); Otto Pérez, representing *Partido Patriota* (Patriot Party: PP); and Alejandro Giammattei, representing the incumbent *Gran Alianza Nacional* (Great National Alliance: GANA). These three candidates also represented three of the four main parties expected to do well at the polls in the concurrent Congressional and Municipal elections (the fourth party being the *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (Guatemalan Republican Front: FRG)).

The 2007 elections had the most violent campaign season since the return to democratic elections in the 1980s: between March and October 2007, unknown assailants killed 56 politicians and political activists.³⁰ Many of these murders were portrayed both domestically and internationally as the result of common crime or internal wars among gangs and drug cartels. However, other sources, such as the Guatemala Human Rights

²⁸ Lauría, Carlos. 2009. *Drug Trade, Violent Gangs Pose Grave Danger* Committee to Protect Journalists, 2009 [cited February 26 2009]. Available from <http://cpj.org/2009/02/drugs-violence-press-latin-america.php>.

²⁹ Author's interview. See also Rockwell, Rick J., and Noreene Janus. 2003. *Media Power in Central America, The History of Communication*. Urbana Ill.: University of Illinois Press

³⁰ Azpuru, Dinorah. 2008. "The 2007 Presidential and Legislative Elections in Guatemala." *Electoral Studies* 27:547-577.

Commission/USA, reports that election violence was “deliberately targeted to inspire fear and demonstrate control,” and that “people are dying so that other candidates, with connections to organized crime and drug traffickers, can buy off towns without criticism or opposition.”³¹ In addition, prior to the legally sanctioned beginning of electoral campaigns in May, a crime scandal shocked both Guatemalans and the international community after three Salvadoran representatives in the Central American Parliament and their driver were murdered on a highway in Guatemala. Suspects implicated in the crime included Guatemalan police officials, and shortly after authorities detained four of these officials for trial they were murdered while imprisoned in a jail in Guatemala City. Although their deaths were officially blamed on gang members involved in a prison riot, newspapers also reported an alternate explanation, claiming that members of a death squad within the PNC assassinated the four police officials in order to keep them from talking about the PNC’s involvement in the murders of the Salvadoran politicians. This violence aimed at political figures added to already rising homicide rates, which had risen dramatically, almost doubling in seven years (from 24 homicides per 100,000 people in 1999 to 45 homicides per 100,000 people in 2006).³² Insecurity and crime control policies became a central focal point of the election, with the two leading candidates, Colom and Pérez, taking up opposing positions on the issue.

At first glance, the campaigns of Colom and Pérez seem to be a straightforward contest between a center-left candidate who supports long-term crime-fighting policies based on poverty reduction and the creation of new jobs and a conservative right-wing candidate urging further iron fist policies and harsher punitive measures against criminals. Head of the UNE party, Colom has experience as a textile businessman and former Deputy Minister of the Economy and has connections to the indigenous community through his training as a Maya spiritual guide. While UNE advertised itself as a center-left party during the 2007 election cycle, it has also been portrayed as centrist and right-wing and was once described by Colom as recently as 2003 as a center-right party. 2007 marked Colom’s third attempt at gaining the presidency, twice as a candidate for UNE and once as a candidate for the leftist *Alianza Nueva Nación* (New Nation Alliance: ANN) in 1999. The party most affected by political assassinations during the campaign, UNE is rumored to be infiltrated by clandestine groups, organized crime, and drug cartels despite the expulsion of some UNE candidates from the party due to their association with drug trafficking. Colom’s main policy proposals included police, prison, and judicial reforms as well as programs to reduce poverty and unemployment.

Pérez, a former army general and head of the army’s intelligence unit in the later years of the civil war, graduated from the School of the Americas in the late 1980s and has been accused by human rights activists of being involved in high profile human rights cases, including the murder of Bishop Juan José Gerrardi. Human rights organizations

³¹ Franzblau, Jesse. 2009. *Elections for Dummies: Misleading the Public on Guatemala* Media Accuracy on Latin America, 2008 [cited May 28 2009]. Available from <http://www.mediaaccuracy.org/node/47>, Suarez, Julie, and Marty Jordan. 2009. *No Sé: Guatemalan 2007 Pre-Election Report* Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA, 2007 [cited May 28 2009]. Available from <http://www.ghrc-usa.org/Publications/Publications.htm>. Quoted in Franzblau, Jesse. 2009. *Elections for Dummies: Misleading the Public on Guatemala* Media Accuracy on Latin America, 2008 [cited May 28 2009]. Available from <http://www.mediaaccuracy.org/node/47>,

³² 2007c. Número De Víctimas Y Tasas De Homicidios Dolosos En Guatemala (1999-2006). Ciudad de Guatemala: Observatorio Centroamericano sobre Violencia.

also claim that he was the head of a clandestine counterinsurgent organization called the *Sindicato* linked to many human rights abuses during the civil war.³³ During the campaign, however, Pérez and the PP stressed his dedication to democracy by emphasizing his role in the military opposition to Ríos Montt's coup in 1983 and Serrano's attempted *autogolpe* in 1993 and his position as the army's representative at the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996.³⁴ Pérez' campaign slogan, *urge mano dura* (urge the iron fist), represented a platform that promised an increase in military involvement in crime control, the reinstatement of the death penalty, and the reinstatement of the infamous civil patrols.³⁵

Images of Crime

As outlined above, I have focused this content analysis of newspaper coverage of crime and insecurity on whether the images of crime, criminals, and criminal justice that appear in print media coincide with ideas that support punitive crime control, social reform agendas, or police reform. The analysis will explore what kind of articles newspapers publish that deal with crime, violence, or other public security issues, what kind of crimes are reported, who the victims and perpetrators of crimes are, and what kind of solutions to the crime problem are offered.

As cited earlier, studies have found that event oriented reports lead television viewers to blame the personal qualities of an individual offender for an offense and to support punitive punishment.³⁶ This would suggest, then, that media framing of crime in newspapers would support the iron fist ideology if the majority of articles address specific events and crimes against individuals (as opposed to articles describing crime trends and crimes against collectives such as environmental crimes or embezzlement committed by public servants). In light of this framework, we can see that reports of crime in the Guatemalan media are more heavily skewed towards images that foster punitive attitudes towards crime. Of the news articles collected, 55 percent were reports of specific incidents of crime. Another 34 percent were made up of reports of judicial proceedings (either details of a trial or sentencing of a convicted criminal), police actions (such as the detention of a suspected criminal, police searches for weapons or drugs, or gun fights between criminals and the police) and crime within prisons (deaths due to prison riots and attempted escapes). In total, 89 percent of the news stories on public security focused on some part of the criminal justice process in relation to a specific crime. Of these, only 16 percent dealt with crimes with no specific victim (eg. embezzlement, money laundering or mismanagement of public funds) or used a specific crime as a springboard to discuss general crime trends.

³³ Durbin, Alexandra, and Sue Kuyper. 2009. *The Usual Suspects Retain Power: Guatemalan Elections 2007* Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala, 2007 [cited May 28 2009]. Available from http://www.nisgua.org/news_analysis/index.asp?id=3006.

³⁴ 2009. *Documental Otto Pérez Molina* [television advertisement]. 2007b [cited May 28 2009]. Available from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PCKzcbiNLt4>.

³⁵ Bartlett, Sean. 2009. *Is a Run-Away Likely in Guatemala's Runoff? Unfortunately, No* Council on Hemispheric Affairs, 2007 [cited May 28 2009]. Available from <http://www.coha.org/2007/11/is-a-runaway-likely-in-guatemalas-runoff-unfortunately-no/>, Durbin, and Kuyper. *The Usual Suspects Retain Power: Guatemalan Elections 2007* [cited].

³⁶ Iyengar. *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*

In order to show that the way journalists write crime reports lends itself to iron fist views toward crime control, we should expect to see an emphasis on violent crime, particularly murder. We should also see an emphasis on reports of crime but not reports of the apprehension of criminal suspects. This emphasis cultivates the image that crime is always violent and that murder is pervasive, even if this is not necessarily the case. While murder rates are strikingly high in Guatemala, this does not necessarily mean that a person is more likely to be killed than to have their car or their cell phone stolen. However, an emphasis on violent deaths conveys an image that is often repeated in Pérez' campaign propaganda, that Guatemalans should be worried when they leave their homes in the morning for work that they may not return alive. The crimes news collected include everything from murder and kidnapping to vandalism and reckless driving. Over the fifteen days selected for analysis, 161 reports of crime were coded, averaging 10.7 per day.³⁷ The majority of crimes reported were murders (76 percent) and the majority of these murders involve guns (80 percent).³⁸ Only 7 percent include the capture of a criminal suspect; 83 percent of the reports either do not mention a suspected perpetrator, do not mention the consequences a suspect faced or report that the suspect escaped, thereby not only focusing the reader's attention on the victims of crime but also creating an image of ineffective policing. By not mentioning a suspect or the consequences of committing a crime or describing the escape of a suspect, news reports draw attention to the failures of the police and other security forces through the absence of effective police action in the apprehension of criminals. Focusing on the victims of crime makes the news both more personal and more voyeuristic. The reader can both empathize with the victim, which raises awareness that this could happen to anyone, and satisfy morbid curiosity with the details or photographs of the crime scene.

Violent death is a pervasive image in these articles not only because murder is the most commonly reported crime but also because of the way murder is reported. Each murder report includes an average of 2 people killed, and descriptions of murders and other violent crimes, particularly in *Nuestro Diario*, foster not only the sense that such acts are common but that they are often arbitrary. 68 percent of articles on specific crimes included some details of the crime, such as witnesses' or police accounts of what occurred and details of the crime scene. These details do not, however, reach much beyond the actual incident and rarely include information about the victim beyond name and age nor do they put the crime into a broader context of why it might have occurred. *Nuestro Diario* in particular is notorious for headlines that suggest murder is random and senseless, that anyone can be shot at any time for no reason. Such headlines include: "He Was On His Way To Work;" "They Were Eating Breakfast;" and "They Murdered a Bricklayer." These are not reports of gang-on-gang violence or wars between rival drug cartels; instead, they are news stories about regular people gunned down by unidentified *desconocidos* (strangers) or *sicarios* (assassins) while going about their normal lives. Readers are able to identify with the mundane tasks of going to work or eating breakfast and are encouraged to picture themselves as the victims of these crimes. In many cases, reports describe how an unidentified assailant shoots the victim *sin decir una palabra*

³⁷ The discrepancy between newspapers was large: while *Nuestro Diario* averaged 7 reports of crime per day, *Prensa Libre* averaged only 4 articles on specific crimes per day.

³⁸ In *Nuestro Diario*, 84 percent of the crimes reported were murders, with 84 percent involving guns, while in *Prensa Libre* 63 percent of crimes reported were murders, 73 percent of which involved guns.

(without saying a word) and *a quemarropa* (point blank), thereby offering to the readers the image of an innocent victim brutally executed by strangers who give no justification for their actions. By describing the perpetrators of these murders as strangers and by leaving out much of the detail that is used to describe the victims, these news reports reinforce the idea that criminals are dangerous “others” and create an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Violence can happen anywhere at anytime to anyone for no reason. The remaining 32 percent of articles have little or no details beyond the two or three sentences reporting that a person was shot or that a body with bullet wounds or bound hand and foot with signs of torture was found at the side of the road or under a bridge. The image conveyed is one of indiscriminate, arbitrary violence. With over 50 percent of all articles making no mention of motive or declaring the motive unknown, news reporting of crime gives the reader the sense that crime is unpredictable and random.

Reports of crime also give the impression that crime targets all social strata, reinforcing the image that crime is indiscriminate. While many of the accounts place the crimes in poor neighborhoods, thereby identifying the victims as poor, reports of violence against politicians, lawyers, and other members of the upper class are also frequent. Reports of attacks on bus drivers and passengers by gang members and bands of thieves and murders, a relatively new form of crime that has grown significantly in the last few years, also contributes to this image of arbitrariness. In some cases, thieves kill bus drivers or passengers when they refuse to hand over their money or their cell phone, a situation that demonstrates to readers the low value criminals place on human life. In other cases, police sources explain that gang members have killed a bus driver most likely because the driver had not paid his daily or weekly protection money, emphasizing the control organized crime has on even the most mundane aspects of life in the capital and once again conveying the image that criminals will kill with little provocation.

A small portion (12 percent) of the news stories reports violence against suspected or convicted criminals. The suspected or convicted criminals that are victims of violence are almost never identified as victims of a crime unless the incident occurred in prison between inmates. Not including attacks on prisoners by other prisoners, most of these reports describe the consequences of suspected criminals who have been caught in the act. In a few cases, police sources describe tattoos found on unidentified bodies as signs of gang membership or neighbors identify corpses found at the side of the road as criminals. Two thirds of the suspected or convicted criminals who are attacked die. While these news reports make no overt moral judgments, the death of a suspected gangster during a gunfight with police or the death of a thief at the hands of his or her intended victim is not reported as a crime. I have coded such incidents as crimes because they are accounts of violent death perpetrated by one human being on another. These are deaths that not only add to the atmosphere of violence but also implicitly support the idea that the killing of a suspected criminal is justified because that person (allegedly) committed a crime.

This is an idea that seems to go hand-in-hand with the rising tide of vigilantism in Guatemala that followed the Peace Accords. Lynchings, attempted lynchings, and other forms of vigilante justice account for a third of the reports dealing with suspected criminals who were victims of violence and make up 4 percent of the overall new reports collected. There are a few cases in which vigilante groups, usually a group organized by neighbors or hired by local merchants, kill suspected thieves. In these cases, the death is

reported as a murder but the articles also include testimony from neighbors who attest to the rising levels of insecurity in the neighborhood, an inclusion that implicitly justifies the vigilantes' actions. The two newspapers report lynchings, which in Guatemala mainly consist of spontaneous mob violence against a suspected thief or murderer that terminate in the mob throwing gasoline on the victim and burning him or her alive, as crimes. But they become crimes in which readers do not empathize with the victim and that have no identifiable perpetrators; lynching is the act of a mob, where individual perpetrators become anonymous and the victims are suspected criminals who, following a circular logic, must have done something wrong. Reports of lynchings are often ambiguous, quoting neighbors who lament the act as reprehensible but at the same time citing witnesses who point to the rising levels of violence and crime as justifications for vigilantism.

These competing attitudes can be seen well in a feature section published by *Nuestro Diario*, one appearing in mid July and the other in mid August 2007.³⁹ In this feature, people on the street are asked to respond to the questions: how can we avoid lynchings in Guatemala; and what do you think about the lynching that happened in Chimaltenango. This is not, of course, a scientific survey of public opinion but it does offer readers the pared down answers of respondents as if it represents the entire range of public opinion. A common answer to any question dealing with crime or violence asked in this daily feature is that there is a lack of justice and that the government should *aplicar la ley* "apply the law." Two thirds of the respondents to the question on lynchings in general offered this type of response, with answers that included specific suggestions ranging from that the police patrol the streets more and the government eliminate corruption to more general demands for justice and security. More than half of those asked about the lynching in Chimaltenango also mentioned the lack of justice and a need to apply the law. This could mean that the respondent is frustrated that the police are not able to stop the lynchings, but it is more likely that the respondent is unhappy with the effectiveness of the police in stopping crime. If the police and the courts were better at applying the law, if the system was not corrupt, if there was justice for all law-abiding citizens, then villagers would not form mobs and lynch criminals.

One respondent also suggests that the way to avoid lynchings is to lower crime rates, but rather than focus on law and order the respondent suggests that lower unemployment rates and less poverty are the key. This logic suggest that with more employment and a higher standard of living, criminals would have less reasons to break the law and lynchings would be less because there would be less crime. This response supports a social reform outlook towards crime—that crime is the result of poverty and unemployment and other social factors—but also takes up the attitude that the cause of lynchings is crime, laying the blame ultimately on the person who was lynched and not on those who did the lynching.

In reaction to the specific incident of lynching in Chimaltenango in August 2007, some of the respondents support the action outright: one respondent declares that the mob has it right because the police never do anything good and do not protect people. Another

³⁹ The feature, called *Caras y Opiniones* (Faces and Opinions), is a daily column that publishes the responses of 10 to 12 inhabitants of Guatemala City to a question concerning recent events in Guatemala. 2007a. ¿Cómo Evitar Los Linchamientos En Guatemala? *Nuestro Diario*, July 18, 2007d.; ¿Qué Opina Usted Del Linchamiento Cometido En Chimaltenango? *Nuestro Diario*, August 18.

claims that it is a necessary evil if it makes the government react and fix the security problem. A third states that the lynching is not a good thing but that the townspeople had no other choice. Again, both incompetent or ineffective authorities and the target of the lynching shoulder the blame for the incident. Yet there is some dissent among the responses: two of the eleven respondents quoted condemn the actions of the lynch mob without also mentioning a lack of justice, calling the act “incorrect” and arguing that “no one can take justice into their own hands.”⁴⁰ These comments shift the focus away from the crimes allegedly committed by the victim and towards the illegality (and immorality) of act of lynching itself. Only one person suggests that action should be taken against those involved in the lynch mob, citing the fact that such violence generates more violence. These contrary viewpoints act to counterbalance to some extent the implicit justifications of extreme vigilantism offered by those responses that cited rising insecurity and ineffective police and judiciary as reasons why such acts are taking place.

Even though Guatemala has an abysmally low number of arrests leading to trial and even fewer ending in a conviction, 15 percent of the news articles deal with criminal justice proceedings.⁴¹ By reporting on trials and sentencing, these news reports offer two distinct images of justice. On one hand, they emphasize a punitive form of justice; many of the articles, for example, highlight when judges hand down the maximum sentence. On the other hand, by publishing news of judicial proceedings the newspapers also send out the image that the justice system is actually sending criminals to jail. The biggest concentration of articles that describe criminal justice proceedings dealt with murder (45 percent), while the second largest crime reported within criminal justice news was white-collar crime (23 percent), which includes such offenses as fraud, money-laundering, misallocation of funds, and embezzlement. Once again the emphasis is on violent crime. However, the presence of white-collar crimes is significant in that it draws some attention away from violence and offers the readers images of crimes with collective victims. In such cases there is no individual victim with which the reader can empathize, nor is there any violence to draw the readers’ attention. These types of crimes are more removed from the daily lives of the population and therefore instill less fear of victimization.

Reports that focused solely on police actions are also somewhat ambiguous in the image they portray both of crime and of the police. These articles tended to focus on the capture of suspected criminals: 55 percent of articles describing actions by the police are reports of the detention of a criminal suspect.⁴² Reports of the capture of criminals conveys a similar double image to reports of trials and convictions of criminals; it both shows the importance of punitive justice by giving importance to arresting criminals and shows that the police are actually making arrests, an image that should alleviate some fears that crime goes unpunished. Yet in 22 percent of the articles, the criminal suspect

⁴⁰ ¿Qué Opina Usted Del Linchamiento Cometido En Chimaltenango?

⁴¹ 50 percent of these articles describe specific criminal suspects whose cases have gone to trial; 25 percent describe the sentencing of convicted criminals. The remaining quarter of the cases include reports of witness testimony, as well as court proceedings such as the Constitutional court suspending the involvement of the Office of Human Rights in the investigation of the death of three Salvadoran deputies, the selection of judges for the trial of a mayor accused of falsifying documents, the rejection of legal action seeking to stop a capture order for a suspected drug dealer, and a request from the Attorney General’s office for a judge to act against university students accused of vandalism and extortion.

⁴² This does not include those articles that cite the police as a source of information or mention that the police are investigating a crime.

escaped, mostly during searches, which constituted 20 percent of the articles, and gunfights, which made up 7.5 percent of the reports coded. In these cases, however, the news reports do not criticize the police for incompetence but instead report the escape as just another fact of the case. Reports of police action do not tend to offer any judgment on how the police operate. Murder rates are much lower within reports of police action: only thirteen killings are reported in five different articles, giving it an average of 0.33 people killed per article on police action, with only 12 percent of news specifically about the police involving a death (in comparison to the 78 percent of crime reports that involved one or more deaths). News reports that mention the police rarely criticize their actions unless they are quoting a citizen's opinion or citing a professional source. There is an image of police ineffectiveness, but this is not stated overtly in crime news. Rather it comes from the absence of the police in many reports or through the words of witnesses and neighbors.

Conclusion

On March 27, 2007, *Nuestro Diario* asked in their daily feature *Caras y Opiniones*: how do you think we can fight crime? Answers varied widely, and included direct support for both *mano dura* and social reform crime control policies. The responses fall in to four main categories. First, some supported punitive crime control policies, calling for drastic measures, for the government to act *con firmeza* (firmly), to reinstate the death penalty, and for the police and soldiers to patrol the streets. Second, some respondents placed the blame on the government and called for an end to corruption. Another group of respondents focused on the social causes of crime: two respondents emphasized the importance of employment and education, and a third suggested rehabilitation programs for gang members. Finally, some respondents found the source of criminal behavior at the individual level and emphasized family solidarity and moral education of youth within the home.

These responses mirror the larger tension between support for *mano dura* tactics, which are based on ideas of crime that emphasize individual faults as the root of crime and look for punitive solutions, and social reform tactics, which emphasize social causes of crime and long-term socio-economic solutions to the problem. While almost none of the news articles on crime offer any analysis as to the causes of crime or the most effective solutions, the mixed message seen in the responses of Guatemalan citizens to the question of how to combat crime is mirrored in the image print news portrays. There is an overwhelming image of violent, arbitrary, senseless crime, but there are also reports of court cases (some of which end in conviction), white collar crime, and opinions of average citizens that bring up the link between a lack of education, unemployment, and high levels of poverty to crime.

Hypothesis 3 states that: the major candidates in an election will be split over the crime control issue, some supporting iron fist policies and other supporting social reforms, when crime control policy does not cut across the left-leaning candidates' constituencies. In turn, Hypothesis 3a states: crime will not be a crosscutting issue for the left when news coverage provides context and analysis of crime and/or frames the issue in terms of social problems. While almost no analysis offered by *Nuestro Diario* and *Prensa Libre* and the percentage of articles that provided some kind of context are small (10 percent overall), there were articles that provided context. There was some mention

of social problems as contributing factors to criminal behavior. One could argue that there was some space for a politician to argue in favor of social reform policies aimed at curbing rising crime rates.

This tentative conclusion, however, leaves us with more questions. For example, where does this image of social reform come from, given the success of selling violence and fear? Why is there space for social reform candidates to get a foothold in the public agenda? Is this a legacy of the civil war, a reaction of the people (or at least the media) of Guatemala against authoritarian policies? Was there some other kind of exogenous event that kept the print media from moving over completely to images that support the ideas behind iron fist politics? Why did the police involvement in the murder of the Salvadoran deputies and the murder of four police officials in prison not make police reform a bigger issue? Finally, many of those I interviewed argued that everyone knew Colom was only blowing smoke with his campaign slogan about fighting crime with intelligence. This insight provokes the question: is it really possible to speak out against *mano dura* and still remain a viable candidate? Future research within my broader project will address these issues through a comparative study of elections both in Guatemala and other Latin American countries.

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