

The Saliency of Crime in Satisfaction with Democracy in Central America*

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Abstract

This paper examines public opinion data to assess public concern about ordinary crime and the effect of this concern on satisfaction with democracy. I use public opinion data from Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua and show that victimization and concern about crime do not negatively affect citizens satisfaction with democracy in these three countries. I argue that increases in crime is more a function of the decisions of political elites to emphasize certain types of delinquencies (particularly property and drug related crimes) in an attempt to advance a political, economic and social agenda rather than a public demand for the government to combat solely an expanding wave of lawlessness.

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Introduction

Crime and criminal justice relate to discussions of democratic development for at least two reasons. First, the behavior of police and courts is important to public support of the institutions of the democratic state. Second, ordinary crime has increased dramatically in many of the countries that transitioned to democracy during the Third Wave (countries that have democratized since 1974). The increase in ordinary crime has created problems for police and judicial institutions that have sought public support in their attempts to institutionalize their positions in these new democracies.

While this brief discussion suggests that crime and democratic development are related, the nature of this relationship is a source of debate. For example, Ming-Jen Lin (2007) argues that democracy (and not just transitional democracy) increases low intensity crime (particularly property crime). Call (2003, 828) on the other hand argues that “crime represents the biggest threat to democracy in El Salvador and other countries.”¹ Still other scholars contend that increasing crime in Latin America is a manifestation of the economic choices of political elites (Benson, Fischer and Thomas 2008). These competing explanations present an important puzzle for students of democracy. Should we view crime as a threat to democracy or as a natural byproduct of economic, political and social liberalism?

I argue that increases in crime is more a function of the decisions of political elites to emphasize certain types of delinquencies (particularly property and drug related crimes) in an attempt to advance political, economic and social agenda rather than a public demand for the government to combat solely an expanding wave of lawlessness. While crime has increased, the majority of these new crimes are property, vice and drug related crimes. Moreover the increase in reported crime should not always be viewed as a negative aspect of new democratic societies. Increased reporting and prosecution of violence against women and children is a positive aspect of women’s involvement in new and established democracies (Barthauer and Leventhal 1999; Ellsberg et al. 2000; Sagot 2005). This paper examines public opinion data to assess public concern about ordinary crime and the effect of this concern on satisfaction with democracy. I use public opinion data from Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua and show that victimization and concern about crime do not negatively affect citizens satisfaction with democracy in these three countries.

Crime, the Politics of Crime and Liberal Democracy

In the provocative work *Governing through Crime*, Jonathan Simon (2007) argues that political actors in the United States manipulate citizens fears about crime and security with negative consequence for American democracy. Indeed, issues of crime and punishment are major aspects of elections in many democracies (Walker and Waterman 2008). The electoral connection is only one way in which crime and democratic processes are linked. Increased crime is empirically linked to liberal democracy. Ming-Jen Lin (2007) goes so far as to suggest that liberal democracy causes crime.

On the other hand, socialist governmental models appear to produce lower rates of crime. Nicaragua during the 1990s is a good example. During the Nicaraguan Revolutionary period (1979-1990), the crime rate dropped dramatically. Economic, ideological and institutional factors contributed to this decline: economic (land reform,

¹See also Perez (2002).

increase in real wages, decline in unemployment); ideological (education programs); and institutional (professionalization of Sandinista Police and developments in law and penal justice) factors (Núñez 1985, 14). These factors resulted in a steep decline in documented crime. In 1980, law enforcement officials documented 38,781 felony-type crimes. By 1984, officials documented only 4,779 felony-type crimes. While some of the decline may be attributable to under-reporting by the Sandinista Government, a great portion of the decline in crime relates to the socialist model of justices devaluation of private property as a fundamental societal value. Indeed, reported theft declined from 10,497 in 1980 to 1,986 in 1983 (Nuñez 1985, 17). Most remarkably, theft as a percentage of all crime dropped from 27% in 1980 to 5% by 1983.

Alternatively, the liberal democratic model places value on private property. Returning to the Nicaraguan example, by 1994 and under the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) government, reported theft rebounded to 7,655 incidents and 16% of all reported crime (Burnham and Burnham 1999). In 1990, the Sandinista government lost control of government to the United Nicaraguan Opposition. Violeta Chamorro's UNO Government and the Liberal Governments that followed took a markedly differ approach to crime and criminalization. Two bodies of Nicaraguan criminal law illustrate UNO's and Liberal agendas to control the behavior of citizens in the subordinate classes: drug policy and juvenile crime policy. Despite the fact that the Nicaraguan National Assembly was unable to agree on a coherent drug law until July of 1994, the number of arrest for drug related crimes increased substantially as soon as center-right governments took control of the state after 1990. Drug related offenses increased from 245 in 1990 to 986 in 1994.

At the same time, the Liberal approach to juvenile crime is more revealing. While the Revolutionary Government of the 1980s also pointed to youth violence as a major societal problem, the Sandinista government attacked the problem as “a symptom of unfavorable social conditions” and not as a problem of crime control (Núñez 1985, 20). Altering this socially oriented juvenile justice policy, the Liberal Party-led Nicaraguan National Assembly passed a juvenile justice law in 1999 “to clamp down on visible youth crime and thereby restore a sense of security among the urban populace” (MaClure and Sotelo 2003, 681). Under the Integrated Development Plan for the Prevention of Juvenile Violence, Managua police systematically arrested suspected gang members without judicial warrants (MaClure and Sotelo 2003, 681).

By contrast, the center-right governments of the 1990s were much slower to produce legislation that dealt effectively with white-collar crimes like fraud, embezzlement, and governmental corruption. The lack of a modern criminal procedural code hindered the justice systems ability to deal effectively with white-collar crime.² For example, there were 178 reported cases of fraud in Managua in 1994, but only eleven of these 178 cases were prosecuted (Burnham and Burnham 1999).

What is the Crime/Liberal Democracy Relationship

I show that crime and criminalization is very much a political decision. Studies of the criminal justice system and criminal law traditionally have followed two foundations

²The new criminal code was not passed until 2002.

concerning law creation: consensual and conflict.³ The consensual model posits criminal law as the embodiment of the moral beliefs and preferences of the consensus of a society and asserts that criminal actions occur because individuals have not internalized social norms concerning behavior (Gurr 1977, 13). By contrast, the conflict model posits criminal actions as actions that offend and threaten the interests of the dominant group in society (Gurr 13). Stalans and Lurigio (1996, 370) argue that the conflict model suggests that this dominant group “has a different value system from the one held by less powerful members of society, and that the legal system protects the most powerful groups in society.”

The argument advanced in this paper reflects the conflict model. This is not to say that crime and personal security is not important. However and like Benson, Fischer and Thomas (2008); I believe that crime is a way to mask the more viscous aspects of the liberal economic model, which leads to greater economic and social inequality, at least in the short run. Nicaragua is again an important example of this process because of the transition from Sandinista Popular socialism to neoliberal democracy.

Two decisions by the Chamorro administration created an elite consensus for liberal democracy and private property: Chamorro’s determination that the 24th hour Sandinista-led National Assembly’s Law of Protection of Agricultural Property was binding, and the re-establishment of the Nicaraguan jury system. These two decisions involved the elevation of private property that conservatives worshipped and the inclusion of mass participation that the Nicaraguan popular/political left stressed.

Chamorro’s validation of Sandinista land redistribution had three important consequences. First, it signaled to the public that land was now distributed more equitably and with Sandinista consent. Second, it validated the renewed importance of private property as a fundamental value. Third, it consolidated the new group of property-holding citizens created by the Sandinista land reform initiatives. These new landholders would look to the courts to protect their property interests. This condition would make the judicial power, which was not necessarily predisposed to the protection of property rights, interested in protecting the property rights of this new group of property holders.⁴

The second decision was less controversial but equally important to the foundation of Nicaragua liberal democracy. The reinstatement of the jury system seems contrary to the interests of the center-right governments for two reasons. First, it would give the masses some control over the administration of criminal law enforcement. Second, citizens in the lower classes could nullify the laws passed by liberal governments. The Sandinista government partly abolished the jury trial in 1988 because of juries’ tendencies to acquit, particularly to acquit poor defendants. Why did the UNO government→a government interested in re-establishing dominant class hegemony← reinstate the jury system and risk its new laws being un-enforced by citizens sympathetic to poor defendants?

The answer is a manifestation of the contradictions of the law creating process

³Chambliss (1993, 9) offers a third approach to law creation that bridges the consensual/conflict divide and asserts that law creation is “a process aimed at the resolution of contradictions, conflicts, and dilemmas that are historically grounded.”

⁴The decision also had two other important implications: It suggested that a decision made by the government was binding even when the new administration might fundamentally disagree with the decision, and this concession by the center-right government contributed to negotiations that led to the de-mobilization of the Nicaraguan Army.

(Chambliss 1993). Believing that courts and the police shared the Sandinista disdain for property rights, the UNO government saw the jury as a way to take the total enforcement of criminal law out of the hands of judges. The center-right government (particularly members of the National Assembly) was more interested in the implementation of laws that would protect property than they were in the strict enforcement of these laws. Increasing crime (particularly property crime) necessitated greater governmental authority to control this increasing crime problem. In re-establishing the jury system, the center-right government gained the assistance of newly propertied citizens who would also have an interest in protecting private property. Again however, liberal governments were not interested in strict enforcement of the law. The center-right UNO government knew that jury nullification was likely; nevertheless, they reinstated the jury system more quickly than they did any other form of state power devolution to weaken Sandinista-leaning judges.

Liberal governments opted for an ineffective criminal justice system. The ineffectiveness of the system of punishment benefited Liberal interests in three ways. First, ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system led to calls for greater political-government authority in the fight against crime. This is similar to the crime and punishment approach that Simon (2007) highlights in the US. Second, the ineffectiveness of the system of punishment overshadowed public scrutiny of the types of laws that were being written by the Liberal government. This allowed Liberal government to write new laws that increased the number of recognized crimes and increased the need for new crime enforcement power. Finally, the ineffectiveness of the system of punishment allowed the dominant class to selectively use the justice system to avoid responsibility for its crimes, at least for a time. The elasticity of the law makes it possible to disguise much of the class interest of the law.⁵

Nicaragua is an obvious case in which regime type, economic system, and criminal justice interact. As a former Nicaraguan Supreme Court Justice asserts, ten years of Sandinista rule “disrupted the orientation that some Nicaraguans had toward private property.”⁶ El Salvador’s transition from authoritarian rule also shows that regime transition involves changes in criminal justice that include political, economic, and state dimensions. Salvadoran judicial reform of the early 1990s had two main goals: enhancing the independence of “specific judges who were trying high-profile human rights cases, and increasing the technical and investigative capabilities of the criminal court system” (Prillaman 2000, 44). In efforts to attract supporters of social justice policies, the reform included a juvenile justice law, which created a justice system that is more sympathetic to the needs of youth who participate in criminal activity (Call 2003, 840).

Additionally, Salvadoran judicial reform was quite effective in insulating the judiciary from the president (Prillaman 2000). The reform changed Supreme-Court-justice terms from five to nine years, stipulated that the president must nominate potential justices from a list provided by two legal professional organizations, and mandated that two-third of the legislature approve the nominated judge for elevation to the Supreme Court. The Salvadoran democratic regime has clearly made some effort to moderate the

⁵See Hay (1975, 33) for a similar argument about 18th century England.

⁶Interview with Harlan Kent Henriquez, former Supreme Court Magistrate, Managua Nicaragua February 2002. Williams (1994, 183) argues that the Nicaraguan Revolution fundamentally changed “power and property relations” in the country.

heavy hand of the previous authoritarian state.

While these legal and institutional improvements are quite positive, crime has been a major problem for Liberal ARENA party governments. Reported robbery is an important indicator of the public's acceptance and use of the liberal-criminal justice system. For El Salvador, reported robbery increased from 4000 in 1997 to 10000 in 1999 (Call 2003, 841). This increase in reported robbery is also a function of increased gang activity. Salvadoran estimated gang membership was reported to between 30,000 and 35,000 in 2001 (Santacruz-Giralt and Concha-Eastman 2001, 13). Additionally violent crime has been a particular problem in El Salvador, and the country had the highest homicide rate in the world in 1996 (Pérez 2003, 637).

Crime and Satisfaction with Democracy

In most cross-national literature, specific support for democracy has been measured as "satisfaction with democracy" (Lagos 2003; Mishler and Rose 1994; Graham and Sukhtankar 2003; Sarsfield and Echegaray 2005). This measure captures how citizens evaluate the short-term performance of the democratic regime. Many studies have linked support for democracy to economic performance (Lewis-Beck 1988; Finkel 1989; Graham and Sukhtankar 2003) or performance against corruption (Davis, Ai Camp and Coleman 2004). Crime is another measure of the performance of the regime. Scholars make strong arguments that high rates of crime and personal insecurity can destabilize democratic regimes (Call 2003; Perez 2003). Given the crime argument, the first research hypothesis follows.

- H1: Victims of crime should have lower satisfaction with democracy than individuals who have not been victims of crime.

The examples of Nicaragua and El Salvador show a convergence to higher crime rates in new liberal democracies whether the regime transitions from left-wing socialism (Nicaragua) or right-wing authoritarianism (El Salvador). Given the argument about the destabilizing effects of high crime, we should expect crime to have a negative effect on specific support for democracy. However, my argument suggests that citizens who accept the criminalization directives of the liberal democracy will be more likely to acknowledge the high level of crime but are also likely to blame the crime on perpetrators than the institutions of the democratic state. This suggests that individuals who see crime as the major problem of the society should be more likely to be satisfied with democracy. This suggests the second research hypothesis.

- H2: Individuals who believe that crime is the major problem in the society have lower satisfaction with democracy than do individuals who do not see crime as the major problem.

Crime in Central America

Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua are the cases of interest. I have explained in some detail the increase in crime in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Crime has also increased in Costa Rica. While Costa Rica is a consolidated democracy, "incremental" neo-liberal reform and a wave of urban migration affect crime and criminal justice in this stable democracy (Booth 1998; Davis, Ai Camp and Coleman 2004). Property crime grew 40.5% between 1987 to 1997 (Chinchilla 2000, 207). Accordingly, the

three cases offer similar environments in which crime is increasing. At the same time, the three countries differ in that Costa Rica is a consolidated democracy, El Salvador transitioned from democracy from a right wing dictatorship, and Nicaragua transitioned from right-wing dictatorship by social revolution (1979) through popular social democracy (1980-1990) to liberal democracy.

The Structure of Criminal Decisions and Enforcement

In this section, I briefly discuss judicial decision making and police administration as they relate to the distribution of justice in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua. At all criminal judicial levels (the *Juzgados Penales*, the Superior Tribunals, and the Criminal Chamber of the Costa Rican Supreme Court), Costa Rica uses a panel of judges to oversee cases, render verdicts and impose sentences. Costa Rica does not use the jury system.⁷ In felony-type cases, both El Salvador and Nicaragua allow defendants to choose trial-by-jury. El Salvador has three levels to its criminal court structure (trial courts, appellate courts and a Criminal Chamber within the Supreme Court), while Nicaragua has four levels to its criminal court structure (local courts, district courts, appellate courts and a Criminal Chamber within the Supreme Court). Trial-by-jury is most likely at the trial-court level in El Salvador and the district-court level in Nicaragua. Felony-type cases are also handled at these levels. In both countries, juries are not a part of the evidential process (juries hear no oral evidence).⁸ Juries have access to judicial instruction, the court record and defense and prosecuting attorneys' arguments in rendering their decisions. In both countries judges pronounce the sentences of individuals who are convicted by juries. In both countries, however, defendants can forgo a jury trial, and most defendants do. When the accuse choses not to use a jury trial, the judge renders the verdict and the sentence.

The Costa Rican national police structure is housed in two national institutional structures. The Ministry of Interior oversees the *Fuerza Pública* (the National Police), while the Supreme Court of Justice oversees the *Organismo de Investigación Judicial* (OIJ). In this separation, Costa Rica divides the two functions of the police. The *Fuerza Pública* oversees disorder patrol, while the OIJ oversees investigative duties. Police reform was a major component of the Salvadoran Peace Accords of 1990s. In the aftermath of civil war, the *Policia Nacional Civil* replaced the old national police, which had been controlled by the Ministry of Defense (Call 2003, Pérez 2003-04). These reforms de-militarized the police and created a police organization whose doctrine emphasizes "protection of civilian rights" (Pérez 203-04, 631). The Nicaraguan National Police is also civilian controlled and is housed under the Ministry of Government (formerly under the Ministry of Interior).

⁷Each Juzgados Penal is assigned four judges (3 serve on each case); Superior Tribunal courts is assigned six judges (3 serve on each case), and the Supreme Court Criminal Chamber has five members.

⁸Both countries have modernized their criminal procedures to include more oral hearing and to give juries a larger role in the evidential process. El Salvador revised its criminal code in 1998 (source *Revista Judicial 2003: Tomo CIV*. San Salvador: Rústico), while Nicaragua revised its code in 2002.(source *Ley No. 406: Código Procesal Penal de la Republica de Nicaragua*, published in *La Gaceta* Nos. 243 and 244, December 21 and 24 2001.)

Data, Measurement and Method

I use the 1997 and 2003 *Latinobarómetro* to test the hypotheses of interest. These two years are useful because 1997 marked an important point in the increasing crime pattern. It marked a peak in Nicaragua and point of relative stabilization in El Salvador and Costa Rica. 2003 is a good comparison year because it validates the trends found in 1997 data. The *Latinobarómetro* Corporation of Santiago, Chile compiled these data. The same pre-coded questionnaire was used in the three countries.⁹ The Costa Rican, Salvadoran and Nicaraguan samples contain 1007, 1010, and 1002 respondents in 1997, respectively; and 1004, 1008, and 1010, respectively in 2003. The six samples each has a 3% margin of error.

Measurement

Dependent Variable: Satisfaction with Democracy→I measure democratic satisfaction by the standard question: “Would you say that you are satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat unsatisfied or not satisfied at all with the way democracy works in your country?”. Table 1 shows that satisfaction with democracy was higher in all three countries in 1997 than in 2003. In Costa Rica, the percentage of individuals who were somewhat or very satisfied with democracy was 68.2% in 1997 and 35.9% in 2003. In El Salvador, specific support for democratic governance declines from 47.7% in 1997 to 31.9% in 2003. Meanwhile in Nicaragua, satisfaction declines from 50.7% in 1997 to 39.2% in 2003.

→Table 1 about Here←

Independent Variables: Victimization and Crime as a Problem→*Victimization* is the first measure of the impact of crime and assesses whether the respondent or a family member has been a victim of crime in the past 12 months (yes =1). The actual question states: “Have you, or someone in your family, been assaulted, attacked or a victim of a crime in the last 12 months?” The victim of crime measure is a relatively good measure of individuals who should be more responsive to crime issue as they have been victimized by crimes. Table 1 shows the percentage of individuals who have been victimized by crime for 1997 and 2003. For Costa Rica, the percentage of individuals who have experience crime in the past 12 months remains constant from 1997 to 2003. Meanwhile, the percentage of individuals who have been victimized in El Salvador and Nicaragua declines from 1997 to 2003. This decline in reported victimization conforms to decline from the 1997 peak in violent crime in both countries (Call 2003; Pérez 2003).

Crime is major Problem is the second measure of the impact of crime in the three countries. The *Latinobarómetro* question ask respondents, “Which of the following would you consider to be the most important problem facing the country?”. *Crime* is dichotomous with individuals who see crime as the most important issue in the country coded as 1.¹⁰ Table 1 shows that the percentage of Nicaraguans who see

⁹Scholars have criticized the *Latinobarómetro* as unrepresentative and biased toward urban respondents (e.g., Canache, Mondak and Seligson 2001). Since these criticisms, the geographical demographics of the survey have improved in most countries.

¹⁰Other responses include salary, transportation, political violence, unemployment, corruption, drug trafficking, poverty, housing and health care.

crime as the major problem in Nicaragua is small in both 1997 and 2003 (2% and 3%, respectively). The small percentage of Nicaraguans who see crime as the major problem given the recent increase in crime suggests that many Nicaraguans have not internalized the criminalization decisions of political society. Additionally, the percentage of Costa Ricans who see crime as the major problem in the country remains relatively constant from 1997 to 2003. Meanwhile, Salvadoran respondents are more likely to see crime as the major problem in 2003 than they are in 1997. This increase occurs despite the fact that violent crime is actually higher in 1997 than it is in 2003. This paradox suggests that Salvadoran officials have been successful in convincing a good proportion of the public that crime is indeed a problem. Moreover, citizens generally agree about violent crime as a societal problem.

Crime and Satisfaction with Democracy

To test the relationship between crime and satisfaction with democracy, I use multiple regression analysis. I posit satisfaction with democracy to be a function of attitude about crime (*Crime as a problem* and *Victimization*), survey year, assessment of the national economy, exposure to media, municipality size, gender, interest in politics, age, progress in corruption, and political ideology. These controls are necessary to account for other factors that may influence citizens' satisfaction with democracy. Assessment of the national economy accounts for the relationship between the economic performance and satisfaction with democracy. Progress in corruption and exposure to media also relate to factors that may influence satisfaction with democracy. Because satisfaction with democracy is an ordered outcome variable, I use ordered logistic regression to analysis the data.

Findings

Table 2 shows that Hypotheses 1 is not supported. Across all three countries, *Victim of Crime* is not significantly related to satisfaction with democracy, when other factors are controlled. This means individuals who have been victims of crime are not less likely to be satisfied with democracy than are individuals who have not been victims of crime. While Pérez (2003) finds a significant relationship between victimization and support for democracy, he does not look specifically at specific support for democracy (satisfaction). Importantly, the two most important regime performance controls (Assessment of the National Economy and Progress in Corruption) are quite significant in Nicaragua and El Salvador, while only progress in corruption has a significant relationship with satisfaction with democracy in Costa Rica.

→Table 2 about Here←

The finding concerning crime as a problem and satisfaction with democracy supports Hypotheses 2. Individuals who see crime as a problem are more likely to be satisfied with democracy in all three countries. Again, it is important to note that only a small percentage of Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans see crime as the major problem in their country. Table 2 also shows that the crime variable interacts with survey year to affect satisfaction with democracy negatively. Satisfaction with democracy is higher in 1997 than it is in 2003. Additionally, the satisfaction with democracy of

individuals who believe that crime is a problem declines even more in 2003 than the satisfaction of individuals who do not see crime as the major problem.

To illustrate the effect in Costa Rica, Figure 1 shows the probability of falling in each of the four levels of satisfaction. Plot 1-1 shows the probability of being very satisfied with democracy. The circle with the red line represents the mean predicted probability for individuals who see crime as the major problem and the 95% confidence interval for this mean probability, while the square with the black line indicates the mean predicted probability for individuals who do not see crime as the major problem and the 95% confidence interval for this mean probability. Plot 1-1 shows that in 1997, Costa Ricans who see crime as a problem are far more likely to be very satisfied with democracy. By 2003, individuals who see crime as a problem and individuals who do not see crime as a problem are roughly equally likely to be very satisfied with democracy. In short, the predicted probability of being very satisfied with democracy declines more greatly for persons who see crime as the major problem. Importantly, all four predicted probability plots of Figure 1 show that no difference exists in 2003 between the probability of satisfaction with democracy of persons who see crime as a problem and persons who do not see crime as a problem.

→Figure 1 about Here←

Meanwhile, plot 2-2 of Figure 2 shows that Salvadorans who see crime as a problem are more likely to be somewhat satisfied with democracy than are individuals who do not see crime as a a problem in both 1997 and 2003. Across all four plots of Figure 2, there is a slight difference in the probabilities of persons who see crime as a problem and persons who do not. Importantly, individuals who see crime as a problem are more positive about democratic governance.

→Figure 2 about Here←

Figure 3 shows that Nicaraguans who see crime as a problem are more likely to be very satisfied with democracy than are individuals who do not see crime as a problem in 1997. By 2003, the gap between the predicted probability of being very satisfied with democracy for persons who see crime as a problem and persons who do not disappears.

→Figure 3 about Here←

Discussion and Conclusion

The difference between the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran cases concerning crime as a problem and democratic satisfaction is important and reflects on the fact that criminalization decisions are still contested in civil society of both counties. First, very few Nicaraguans see crime as the major problem (only 20 of 1002 people in 1997 and 34 of 1010 people in 2003). Of course, this is a function of the fact that many other problems exist in Nicaraguan society during this period (corruption and poverty are clearly major concerns). Nevertheless, the accounts of judges concerning jury nullification in property-related crime (not accompanied by violence) conforms to the argument that Nicaraguans do not see property-related crime as a major problem. Admittedly, Nicaragua is very different from El Salvador in that gang-related violence has yet to penetrate the society in the same manner as it has El Salvador and Guatemala. In turn, Nicaraguans have not experienced the high level of violent crime that Salvadoran

society has experienced. In fact, violent crime has decreased dramatically since 1994, when political violence and ordinary crime was strongly linked.

For El Salvador, violent crime is quite high and all citizens acknowledge this type of crime as problematic, but is this type of crime destabilizing to democracy. Conventional wisdom suggests that high levels of violent crime will increase societal demand for a crack down on lawlessness (Call 2003; Pérez 2003). Accordingly, failure by democracy will lead to acceptance of authoritarian governance. While this is a logical conclusion, Salvadoran findings indicate that individuals who see crime as a major problem are more satisfied with and supportive of democracy. Even though violent crime is high, this finding suggests that individuals who see crime as a problem are also more accepting of the government's criminalization decisions. In turn these individuals are more satisfied with the way that democracy works. This means people who see crime as the major problem and individuals who are most dissatisfied with democracy are likely to be different people.

While I find a significant relationship between satisfaction with democracy and crime as the major problem in Costa Rica, this relationship is only relevant in 1997. Even during this period of a significant relationship persons who see crime as a problem are far more likely to be satisfied with democracy than are persons who see other concerns as more important.

In short, the relationship between crime and democracy is extremely nuanced and not easily explained through direct statistical relationships. A possible answer is that support for the institutions of the justice system (courts, police, prisons) is an intervening variables to support for democracy. Second and more to my argument, attitudes about crime and punishment are filtered through attitudes about equality of justice (Walker 2008). Subsequently, attitudes about democracy are a function of attitudes about the equality of justice. These issues are large and extremely important to democratic development. Guillermo O'Donnell (1999) is particularly persuasive in his argument that the failure of Latin American democracies to establish an "equality of persons" is a major impediment to full democracy. Still, O'Donnell is also persuasive in arguing that less than perfect democracies of Latin America may persist for some time.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Satisfaction with Democracy

	Costa Rica		El Salvador		Nicaragua	
	1997	2003	1997	2003	1997	2003
Satisfaction with Democracy						
Not Satisfied at all	6.7	14.7	18.0	31.0	12.8	36.4
Somewhat Unsatisfied	25.1	38.4	34.3	37.1	36.4	34.4
Somewhat Satisfied	36.8	25.2	36.8	25.2	29.4	21.5
Very Satisfied	31.4	10.7	10.9	6.7	21.3	7.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Victim of Crime						
Victim	32.3	32.6	44.6	39.6	40.3	32.2
Not Victim	67.7	67.4	55.4	60.4	59.7	67.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Crime is Major Problem						
Major Problem	11.9	10.6	18.3	22.5	2.0	3.3
Not Major Problem	88.1	89.4	81.7	77.5	98.0	96.7
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Progress in Handling Corruption						
No progress	93.3	29.2	66.5	24.3	83.2	20.6
Little progress	4.1	36.3	21.8	40.0	9.0	36.3
No Change/Not sure	2.2	6.7	10.6	11.5	4.3	5.3
Some Progress	0.1	18.9	0.9	12.1	3.0	22.5
Much Progress	0.3	9.1	0.2	12.1	0.3	15.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total N	1007	1004	1010	1008	1002	1010

Table 2: Ordered Logistic Regression Model of Satisfaction with Democracy

	Costa Rica coefficient(std. error) [z-value]	El Salvador coefficient(std. error) [z-value]	Nicaragua coefficient(std. error) [z-value]
Crime	0.662(0.185) [3.57]	0.262(0.102) [2.57]	1.046(0.432) [2.42]
Victim of Crime	0.033(0.090) [0.37]	-0.003(0.084) [-0.04]	-0.059(0.088) [-0.68]
Survey Year 2003	-1.134(0.132) [-8.61]	-0.792(0.103) [-7.70]	-0.623(0.139) [-4.47]
Crime×Survey2003	-0.665(0.263) [-2.53]		-1.163(0.554) [-2.10]
Regime Performance Control Variables			
Assessment of Economy	0.013(0.028) [0.45]	0.125(0.027) [4.66]	0.116(0.028) [4.16]
Progress in Corruption	0.138(0.043) [3.24]	0.235(0.040) [5.83]	0.117(0.038) [3.07]
Other Control Variables			
Exposure to Media	-0.006(0.042) [-0.14]	0.051(0.043) [1.16]	0.005(0.043) [0.11]
Exposure to Media Squared		0.097(0.042) [2.30]	0.087(0.037) [2.33]
Municipality Size	0.029(0.033) [0.88]	-0.046(0.020) [-2.31]	-0.128(0.026) [-5.01]
Gender: Woman	-0.034(0.083) [-0.41]	-0.304(0.083) [-3.65]	-0.124(0.084) [-1.49]
Interest in Politics	0.243(0.046) [5.29]	0.351(0.049) [7.20]	0.316(0.048) [7.08]
Age	0.079(0.044) [1.80]	0.019(0.047) [0.40]	-0.035(0.048) [-0.73]
Ideological Right	0.000	0.000	0.000
Ideological Center	-0.346(0.103) [-3.22]	-0.470(0.107) [-4.38]	-0.337(0.111) [-3.03]
Ideological Left	-0.269(0.132) [-2.03]	-0.456(0.118) [-3.85]	-1.014(0.127) [-7.97]
No Ideology	-0.612(0.200) [-3.06]	-0.430(0.155) [-2.78]	-0.786(0.150) [-5.24]
No Ideology Response	0.041(0.136) [0.30]	0.604(0.165) [-3.67]	-0.558(0.159) [-3.52]
cut 1	-1.990(0.203)	-0.621(0.218)	-1.520(0.222)
cut 2	-0.054(0.196)	-0.714(0.218)	0.238(0.218)
cut 3	1.729(0.200)	3.161(0.233)	-1.800(0.224)
Null Deviance	5225.06	5204.40	5396.96
Residual Deviance	4986.73	4926.59	4986.49
Likelihood Ratio χ^2	238.27	277.81	410.47
Observations	2011	2018	2012

Exposure to media is constructed from questions about tv newsviewing, newspaper reading and radio news listening. I use factor, extract the first factor score, and standardize the measure by dividing each value by the country's standard deviation (range is -2 to 2.5). Interest in Politics: 1=none; 2=little; 3=some; 4=much. Corruption Progress: 1 = no progress, 2=little, 3=not sure, 4=some progress, 5=much progress.

Data source: 1997 and 2003 *Latinobarómetro*.

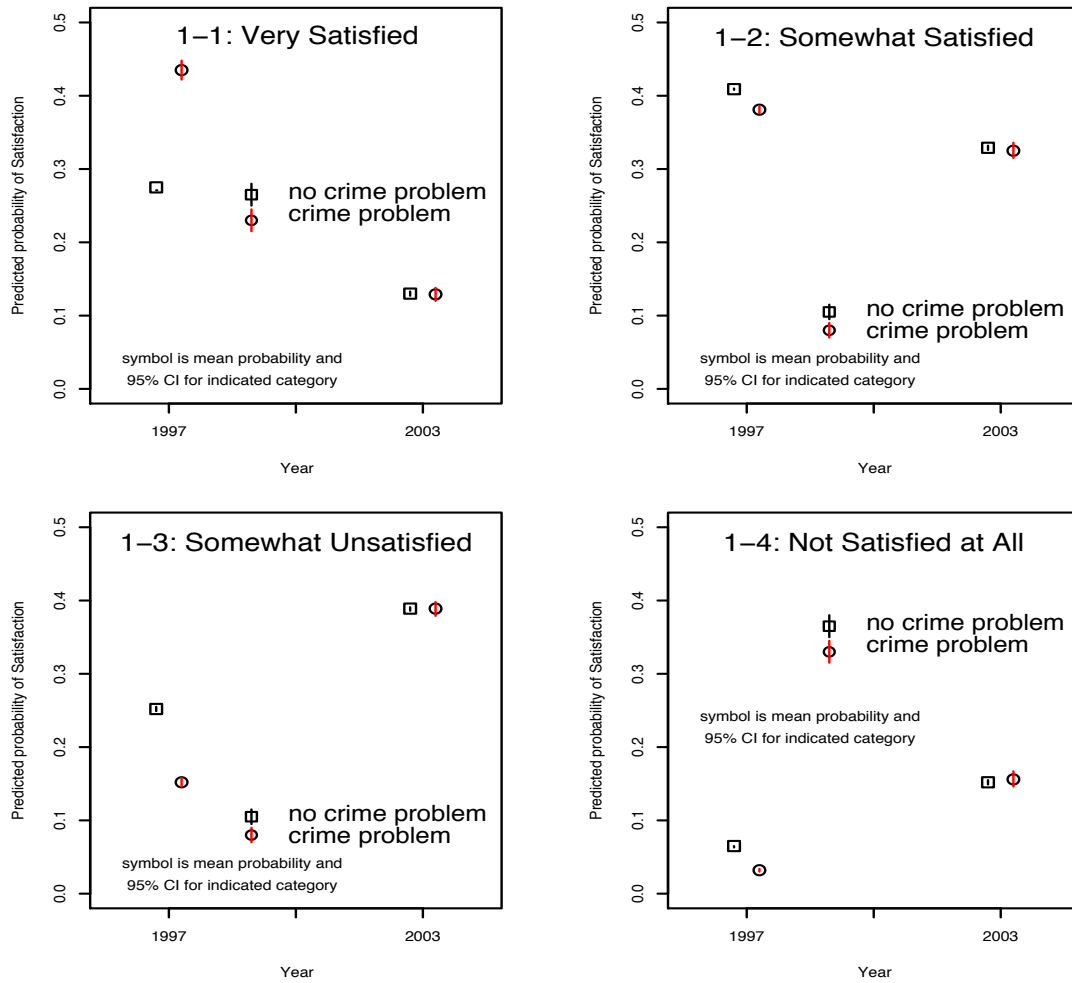


Figure 1: Costa Rican Predict Probability of Satisfaction with Democracy

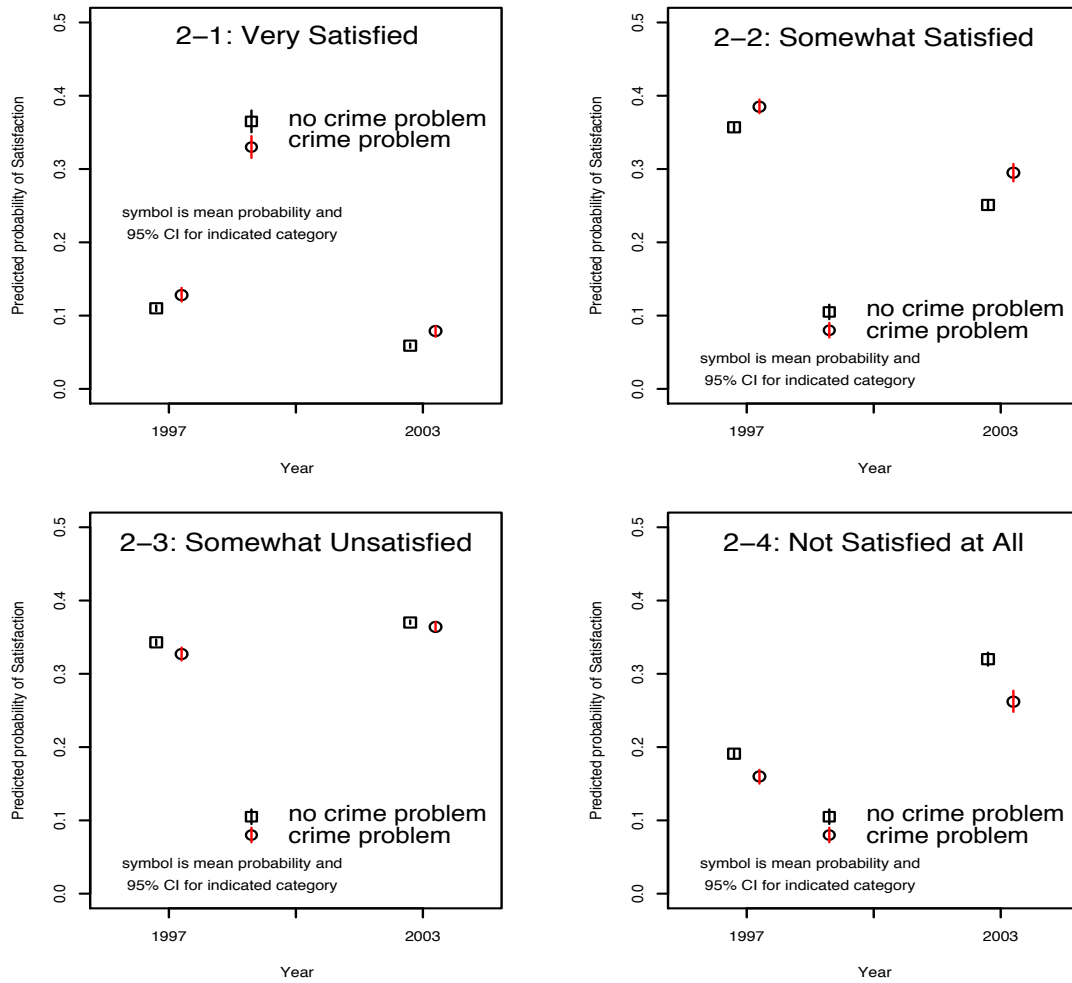


Figure 2: Salvadoran Predict Probability of Satisfaction with Democracy

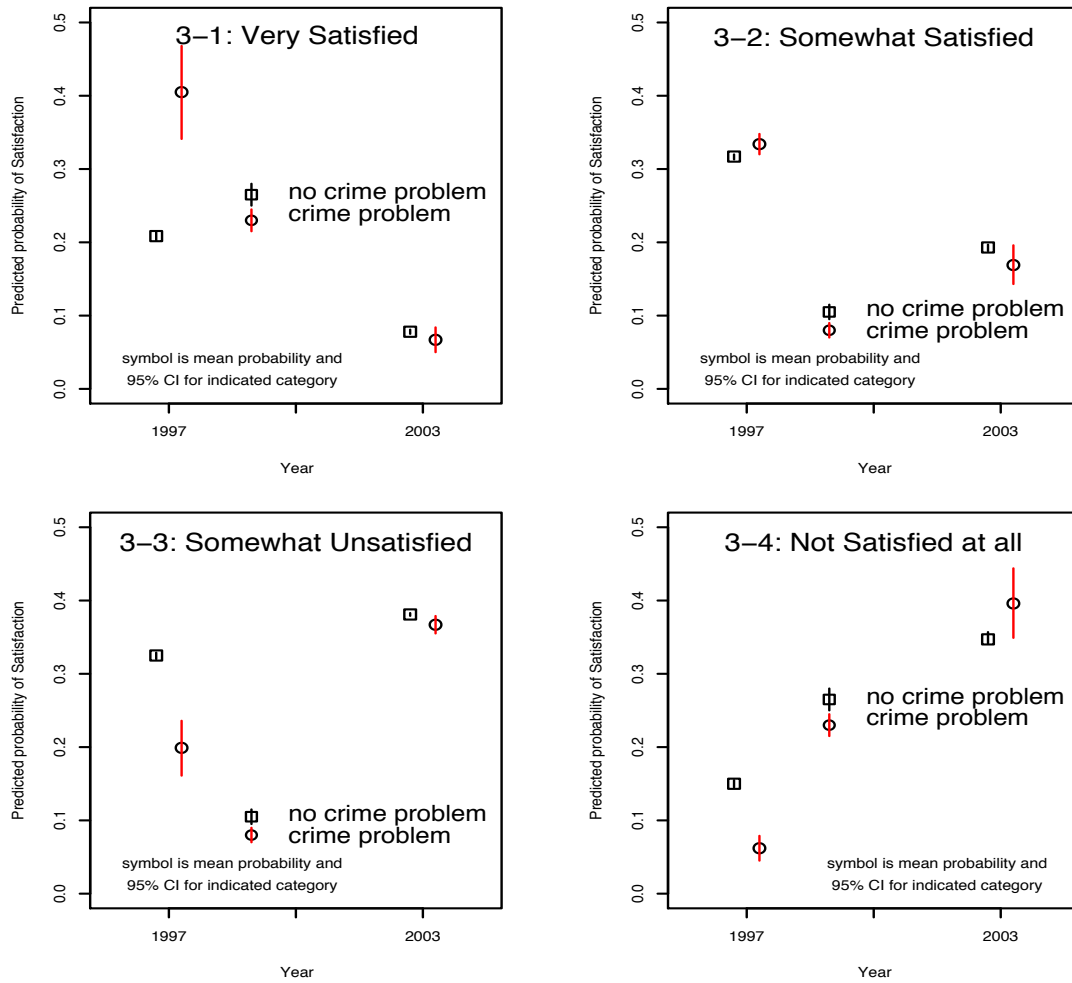


Figure 3: Nicaraguan Predict Probability of Satisfaction with Democracy