

Support for torture

Experimental evidence from the Mexican war on drugs

Javier Osorio*

John Jay College, CUNY

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Abstract

People living in environments deeply affected by violence might be willing to approve the implementation of harsh security policies, even at the expenses of the respect of physical integrity. In the context of the Mexican war on drugs, this research seeks to understand why some individuals support the use of torture to fight crime. The argument claims that support for torture stems from the convergence between perceptions of insecurity, exposure to violence, and institutional trust. To overcome the challenge of eliciting truthful responses in dangerous settings, this study uses a list experiment to estimate torture approval. Results reveal that more than 30% of respondents support the government torturing presumed criminals, a higher proportion than the one estimated using a direct question. Results also show that national and local security threats have heterogeneous effects on torture approval. Heightened perceptions of contextual insecurity increase torture approval, while direct exposure to violent situations undercut support for torture. In addition, results indicate that torture approval is mediated by low levels of institutional trust.

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*Assistant Professor, John Jay College, CUNY. Contact: josorio@jjay.cuny.edu

Introduction

Despite decades of international efforts to obliterate torture, a broad menu of harsh interrogation tactics still is broadly used throughout the world (Cingranelli & Richards, 1999; Rejali, 2007). Recent research on torture has focused on analyzing the presumed tactical benefits, institutional incentives, international constraints and organized pressures that explain cross national variations in the use of this interrogation tactic (Walsh, 2009; Sullivan, 2014; Hafner-Burton, 2008; Davenport & Armstrong, 2008; Conrad & Moore, 2010). However, scholars have paid limited attention to explain public support for the use of torture as governments strive to provide security. As a result, it remains puzzling that about half of the American public supports the use of torture, even after the Abu Ghraib scandal triggered general outcry (Gronke et al., 2010; The Pew Research Center, 2009). Unfortunately, when it comes to attitudes towards torture, the problem of a two-faced public affects several other countries. Considerable sectors of the population in different latitudes judge torture as sometimes necessary and acceptable to gain information that may procure security (Miller, 2011; Kull et al., 2008; Amnesty International, 2014). This research seeks to understand why some individuals are willing to support their government using torture in an effort to provide security? The main argument claims that public support for torture stems from the convergence between increasing perceptions of insecurity, not having direct exposure to violence, and low levels of trust in government authorities.

To test this argument, the study analyzes public support for torture in the context of the Mexican war on drugs. The dramatic escalation of drug violence in Mexico creates a phenomenal context for examining people's commitment to civil liberties and the protection of human rights. Starting in December 2006, the Mexican government launched a full-fledged military campaign against drug trafficking organizations. The war on drugs led to a severe security crisis characterized by violent clashes between the state and criminal organizations, and among rival criminal groups. As the conflict escalated though out the country, so did state repression, and the gruesomeness of criminal tactics. Innocent civilians

often became victims of both state and criminal violence. The surge of drug related violence created a context of intensified threat and, in consequence, a greater need for security. This background puts democratic commitment to civil liberties and human rights to the test. In some situations, people might be so desperate that they might be willing to support the government in whatever needs to be done to provide security, even if that means sacrificing the freedoms and physical integrity of others.

Following public opinion research on support for counter-terrorist policies, this study identifies a set of conditions that favor torture approval (Lerner et al., 2003; Huddy et al., 2005, 2007; Davis, 2007; Davis & Silver, 2004; Conrad et al., 2015). Based on this literature, it is possible to expect attitudes towards torture to result from the interplay between perceptions of insecurity, experiences of violence, and levels of institutional trust. In line with the appraisal-tendency theory (Lerner et al., 2003), threat stimuli are likely to generate heterogeneous reactions on individuals. Heightening perceptions of contextual threats tend to induce feelings of anger and motivate risk-taking behavior, thus increasing the levels of support for torture. In contrast, direct exposure to violence seems to have the opposite effect. Intensifying exposure to concrete and direct threats tends to trigger feelings of fear and favor risk-avoidant decisions, which undercut the propensity of favoring the use of torture as a tactic to fight crime. In addition, contrary to the expectations of the civil liberties trade-off approach (Davis, 2007; Davis & Silver, 2004), individuals who have low levels of trust towards government institutions are more likely to support the use of torture.

The evidence in this research comes from a nationally representative survey conducted amidst the Mexican war on drugs. Given the challenges of eliciting truthful answers from respondents living in settings affected by violence, this study follows other scholars implementing list experiments to overcome the methodological challenges of eliciting sensitive information in settings affected by violence and the presence of criminal organizations (Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2011; Lyall et al., 2013; Blair et al., 2014). By focusing on the Mexican case, this research expands the scope of theories developed in the U.S. to explain support

for counter-terrorism policies (Lerner et al., 2003; Huddy et al., 2005; Davis, 2007), and increase our knowledge about the determinants of harsh security policies in different settings. In addition, studying the Mexican war on drugs broadens our understanding of how security threats affect the prospects of democratic governance in Latin America, a region severely affected by criminal violence (Bergman & Whitehead, 2009; Arias & Goldstein, 2010; Cruz, 2000; Malone, 2010).

The article is structured in five sections. The first segment reviews extant explanations for public support for torture and other harsh security measures, and derives some key hypotheses. The second section provides a brief background of the use of torture in the Mexican war on drugs. The third part evaluates the methodological challenges of using direct questions to measure support for torture in violent settings, and commends the list experiment as a more reliable measurement strategy. The fourth section presents the statistical analysis identifying the extent of support for torture in Mexico, the stereotypical profile of a torture supporter, and the main determinants of torture approval. Finally, the last segment discusses the findings and their implications for democratic governance.

Understanding torture approval

A vast literature in conflict research aims at understanding why and how governments engage in the use of torture. Research tends to gravitate around topics such as the pervasiveness of torture as an interrogation tactic around the globe (Cingranelli & Richards, 1999; Rejali, 2007); the normative arguments employed for justifying or condemning its use (Davis, 2005; Sussman, 2005); the presumed effectiveness of torture for deterring challengers (Walsh, 2009; Sullivan, 2014); the determinants of the adoption of international conventions against torture and their effectiveness (Simmons, 2009; Hafner-Burton, 2008); and the institutional characteristics that constraint torture across regime types (Davenport & Armstrong, 2008; Conrad & Moore, 2010).

In contrast to the vast research at the country-year level, scholars have paid considerably less attention to understanding attitudes towards torture at the individual level. A handful of studies estimate the pervasiveness of torture approval in the U.S. (Gronke et al., 2010; The Pew Research Center, 2009, 2011; Miller et al., 2014; Mayer & Armor, 2012) and an even smaller set of studies explore this topic in comparative perspective (Kull et al., 2008; Amnesty International, 2014; Miller, 2011). Unfortunately, despite the contributions of these studies, little is known about *why* people support the use of torture. Due to the limited scope of research on torture approval, this study draws from a broader literature on support for anti-terrorist policies and criminal punishment.

Perception of threat and exposure to violence

Most explanations of support for harsh security measures are consistent with the prototypical valence approach (Johnson & Tversky, 1983), which claims that negative (or positive) stimuli evoke a similar valence reaction. In other words, a negative stimulus is likely to generate a negative reaction as well as a positive impulse triggers a positive response. According to this approach, it is plausible to expect that heightened perceptions of insecurity will increase support for the use of torture as a way to reduce the threat. This reaction evokes a functionalist response mechanism known as ‘problem-focused coping process,’ in which individuals take actions to change the actual person-environment relationship (Lazarus, 1991). In this sense, if the environment generates a negative stimulus, individuals might try to alter the environment (or their position in it) in order to counteract the negative stimulus. Attitudes aiming at mitigating the source of insecurity are consistent with numerous studies showing that perceptions of domestic or international threats favor support for anti-terrorist measures and aggressive foreign policies, which often come at the expenses of civil liberties (Davis & Silver, 2004; Davis, 2007; Herrmann et al., 1999; Jentleson & Britton, 1998). These expectations lead to hypothesis H_1 , which argues that growing perceptions of insecurity increase public support for torture.

A direct extension of this hypothesis suggests that those who were direct victims of violence are more likely to engage in or justify the use of aggressive behavior. The ‘cycles of violence’ approach suggests that people who suffered violence are prone to display aggressive conduct (Haynie et al., 2009). Similarly, the ‘desensitization’ mechanism argues that recurrent exposure to violence increases individual tolerance or propensity to violence (Huggins, 1998; Zimbardo, 2002). Other show that merely being a witness of violence generates violent behavior comparable to that of direct victims of violence (Ballif-Spanvill et al., 2007). Research on crime control also indicates that criminal victimization makes individuals supportive for harsh crime punishment in the U.S. (Bennett et al., 1996; Dilulio, 1997; Johnson, 2001) as well as in Latin America (Krause, 2014; Hume, 2007; Malone, 2010; Cruz, 2000). Based on these expectations, hypothesis H_2 argues that direct exposure to violence is likely to increase torture approval.

As an alternative to the single valence approach, political psychologists offer explanations based on emotions as intervening components that shape distinct coping mechanisms and their subsequent behaviors (Lazarus, 1991). According to this framework, similar valence stimuli can generate heterogeneous effects on people’s attitudes based on the distinct emotions they evoke (Lazarus, 1991; Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Lerner et al., 2003). One of such emotions is anger. Concerns about the well-being of oneself, or other persons and ideas are likely to generate anger, which in turn are related to retaliation or vengeance (Lazarus, 1991). Further developments of this theory indicate that increasing feelings of insecurity might make some people angry, thus increasing their propensity to engage in risky behavior (Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Lerner et al., 2003). Specific applications of this theory on anti-terrorist policies show that perceptions of general threat modulated by anger trigger the desire for retaliation, promote support for implementing aggressive domestic and international security measures, curtailing domestic civil liberties, imposing tougher visa requirements, or promoting deportation of minority groups after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. (Huddy et al., 2005, 2007; Lerner et al., 2003; Skitka et al., 2006). In this sense, anger-based explanations

make similar predictions to the functionalist approach as outlined in H_1 , yet the underlying mechanisms are different.

In contrast to anger, emotions of fear are more likely to make people avoid risks rather than seeking confrontations (Lazarus, 1991; Lerner et al., 2003). In this sense, anger and fear seem to have different consequences on attitudes and behavior. Fright is related to an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming physical danger, and those who experience it are more prone to circumvent dangerous situations. In line with this argument, several studies have shown that fear is a powerful inhibitor of support for aggressive security stands and anti-terrorist policies (Huddy et al., 2005, 2007; Lerner et al., 2003; Skitka et al., 2006). According to this perspective, direct experiences of violence might exacerbate feelings of fear, which make people more risk-averse and avoid behavior or situations that might represent danger. In consequence, it is possible to formulate hypothesis H_3 arguing that direct exposure to violence decreases torture approval.

In addition to emotion-based explanations, literature analyzing the effects of violence on pro-social behavior suggests alternative mechanisms through which exposure to violence might curtail support for torture. According to Blattman (2009), the intense trauma associated with participating in or suffering from political violence can generate experiences of personal growth that could favor pro-social behavior. Crime victims present a similar response as they tend to participate in politics more than comparable non-victims (Bateson, 2012). These pro-social and pro-democratic effects of victimization are congruent with the expectation that direct exposure to violence hinders torture approval. Although these mechanisms yield to a similar prediction as the one offered by fear-based explanations in H_3 , their operating components might be different from emotion-based explanations.

Trust in government

Trust in government institutions also contributes to shaping public support towards security policies, especially at high levels of perceived threat (Davis & Silver, 2004; Davis, 2007).

According to this perspective, institutional trust tends to increase acceptance of government policies to combat the source of threat, even at the expenses of civil liberties. Those who trust the government may be confident that authorities will be able to provide security without violating people's rights and liberties. This is consistent with the finding that torture approval increases when respondents know that an intelligence agency is conducting the interrogation (Conrad et al., 2015). In addition to these explanations, Milgram's (1974) classic study indicates that obedience to authority is a powerful determinant of individual behavior even when it might cause harm or be morally questionable. Based on these accounts, hypothesis H_4 argues that high levels of institutional trust increase torture approval.

However, this positive relationship might not hold in some Latin American countries in which pervasive crime is associated with low trust for government institutions and high support for harsh crime policies (Krause, 2014; Cruz, 2000, 2003; Malone, 2010). This is congruent with well known arguments linking high levels of trust in government with pro-civic behavior (Almond & Verba, 1963) and support for democratic norms (Inglehart, 1990; Muller & Seligson, 1994). As individuals regard their government institutions in high esteem, they are less likely to support anti-civic or anti-democratic policies. Based on these expectations, hypothesis H_5 claims that high levels of trust in government institutions decrease torture approval.

Other covariates

One of the most robust findings in the small body of literature analyzing the determinants of torture approval indicates that women tend to be less supportive of torture than men (Haider-Markel & Vieux, 2008; Lerner et al., 2003). Partisanship is another determinant of support for torture (Miller et al., 2014; Mayer & Armor, 2012). Education has shapes attitudes towards coercive measures as uneducated individuals tend to experience intense feelings of anxiety, high risk of terrorism, and support harsh crime punishment (Friedland & Merari, 1985; Barkan & Cohn, 2005).

Case background

Between December 2006 and December 2010, the escalation of drug related violence in Mexico generated more than 34,000 people killed (Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública, 2011). Based on the standard definition of a civil war onset using 1,000 casualties per year (Sambanis, 2004), this death toll is comparable to three dozen civil war onsets in only a few years (Osorio, 2012). At its core, the government's security strategy consisted in launching a full-fledged military campaign against drug trafficking organizations. Right after taking office in December 2006, President Calderón deployed tens of thousands of troops to fight crime and kept increasing military spending to support this effort. Quantitative scholars analyzing the Mexican war on drugs have primarily focused on understanding the structural causes and micro-determinants to explain the escalation of drug violence in this country (for a review on the literature see Shirk & Wallman, 2015). However, scant attention has been paid to the systematic study of human rights abuses.

One of the few studies analyzing this topic finds that the involvement of the military in the Mexican war on drugs exposed the civilian population to human rights abuses (Olson et al., 2010). As a result, the number of human rights violations increased substantially. According to the study, the National Human Rights Commission in Mexico received 6,620 complaints of presumed human rights violations between 2006 and 2011; the army leads the list of possible perpetrators. The 182 human rights complaints issued in 2006 against the army increased up to 1,626 complaints in 2011. Physical abuse (broadly defined) stands as the most common tactic documented in 95% of all cases, the use of torture is present in 59%, and killings in 44% (Olson et al., 2010).

The escalation of drug violence in Mexico, along with the increasing involvement of the army in domestic law enforcement, and the raising concerns of human rights abuses constitute a phenomenal context for examining people's commitment to civil liberties under highly violent conditions. Moreover, as Osorio (2015) shows, the spatial contagion of violence perpetrated by criminal organizations and the government reaction towards the security crisis

did not affect all parts of the territory in the same way. As a consequence, there is wide spatial variation in the extent of criminal violence and exposure to human rights violations across the country. As violence intensifies from a variety of sources, some sectors of the population may feel the need of the government using harsher security measures, even if they compromise the protection of human rights and civil liberties.

Data and measures

In order to test the main argument advanced in this research, the empirical strategy relies on a nationally representative public opinion survey conducted in Mexico with 1,000 interviews. The survey was conducted in 2011 by a professional pollster using face-to-face interviews with structured questionnaires. The data frame consists of females and males older than 18 years old registered to vote. Electoral precincts constitute the primary sampling unit and were selected using probabilistic, stratified, multi-stage sampling. The response rate of the survey is 67% and the margin of error is 3.4%.

Direct measure of support for torture

In order to assess people's support for torture, researchers might directly ask individuals their opinion about this security tactic. Following Davis' (2007) strategy for assessing the security-liberty trade-off, respondents in this study received the following direct question:

Some people say that the government should resort to physical punishment to extract information from those who are suspected of belonging to drug-dealing organizations. Others say that to obtain this information we should respect the rights of all citizens, even those who are suspected of belonging to drug trafficking organizations. With which of these two options do you agree more?

Respondents received the following response categories:

1. *The government should resort to physical punishment to extract information from those suspected of belonging to drug trafficking organizations.*
2. *The government should respect the rights of all citizens, even of those who are suspected of belonging to drug trafficking groups.*

This wording has the advantage of explicitly balancing the security–liberty trade-off, thus helping to reduce possible measurement bias induced by loaded or decontextualized questions. However, the literature indicates that respondents might not offer honest answers when confronted with sensitive questions, especially in environments charged with heavy social pressures (Glynn, 2013; Davis, 2007; Berinsky, 2004). Therefore, using direct questions may constitute a limited strategy for measuring public approval for using torture against criminals in a context affected by high levels of criminal violence.

Three main sources of bias might affect responses to direct questions about torture. Fear of disclosure may be a powerful mechanism undercutting individuals’ willingness to express their sincere opinion about using torture to fight crime. As shown by Diaz-Cayeros et al. (2011), respondents may fear ‘giving the wrong answer’ when interviewed in areas with strong presence of criminal organizations. Another source of bias may be systematic under-reporting. As noted by Zvekic & Alvazzi del Frate (1995), crime victims may refuse to answer questions about crime in public opinion surveys due to the emotional stress associated with traumatic experiences. Systematic measurement error may also come from social desirability bias, which occurs when respondents try to present themselves in a positive or socially acceptable manner (DeMaio, 1984; Johnson & Van deVijver, 2003). When asked about torture, respondents may distort their answer to show a favorable image of themselves (as ‘good’ citizens or ‘humane’ individuals) and to avoid being associated with negative connotations (as ‘supporters of torture’ or ‘authoritarian’).

Moreover, these different sources of bias are not mutually exclusive. Fear of disclosure, under-reporting and social desirability may overlap and enhance their distorting effect on public opinion surveys, especially in environments affected by intense violence. Research ignoring this risk is likely to base its inferences on unreliable measures, thus increasing the risk of generating misleading conclusions (King et al., 1994).

List experiment for measuring support for torture

In order to minimize the risk of drawing misleading inferences from obtrusive questions about torture approval, the empirical strategy used in this research relies on a list experiment, also known as item count technique. This type of survey experiment is used for indirectly addressing sensitive topics when respondents are expected to misrepresent their answers. List experiments have gained popularity for studying sensitive political issues such as vote buying (Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., 2012), voter turnout (Holbrook & Krosnick, 2010), and racial attitudes (Kuklinski et al., 1997). List experiments are becoming a popular strategy to study sensitive attitudes in environments ravaged by violence and show how this technique can provide valid measures that could not be reliable otherwise (Blair et al., 2014; Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2011; Nickerson et al., 2012).

The item count technique follows the experimental principle of randomly assigning respondents into a control or treatment group, and applying an intervention to the latter (Morton, 2010). Random assignment guarantees that individuals in the treatment and control groups have, on average, the same defining characteristics. Respondents in both groups are read the same question and shown a card with a list of response options, which differs only in the number of response categories. The control group receives a card listing placebo items and the treatment group receives the same placebo list plus a sensitive item addressing the topic of interest.*In this way, the only difference between both groups is the randomized exposure of the treatment group to the sensitive item. Instead of asking respondents to reveal their true opinions, list experiments simply ask them to count the number of applicable items presented in the card. Approaching sensitive topics in this indirect manner allows respondents to keep to themselves their sincere answer and simply report a number, thus reducing concerns of fear of disclosure or social desirability bias.

All respondents in the treatment and control groups receive the following question:

Some people consider that the government must obtain precise information to fight drug traffickers. I am going to give you a card mentioning various activities. Please tell me

*For a detailed discussion on key design principles of list experiments, see Glynn (2013).

*how many of these activities you think the government should do to get information?
PLEASE DO NOT TELL ME WHICH ACTIVITIES, JUST HOW MANY (zero, one,
two, three...)*

Respondents in the control group received a card[†] listing four activities that the government could carry out to obtain information against drug traffickers:

- *Infiltrate drug cartels by placing spies*
- *Interrogate any citizen without justified cause*
- *Install more security checkpoints in the streets*
- *Reduce sanctions for drug traffickers who cooperate*

In the treatment group, respondents received the same question and a card listing the previous four activities plus a fifth item considered to be sensitive:

- *Infiltrate drug cartels by placing spies*
- *Interrogate any citizen without justified cause*
- *Torture detainees*
- *Install more security checkpoints in the streets*
- *Reduce sanctions for drug traffickers who cooperate*

In congruence with the question wording commonly used in public opinion surveys on torture, this list experiment question prompts respondents about the utility of torture for obtaining valuable information, and locates them in the specific context of drug-related violence. Items in the control group keep a balance between broadly supported tactics—such as using security checkpoints, approved by 76% of the population (Milenio, 2010)—and those hardly endorsed by the public—such as randomly interrogating citizens. In addition, the explicit mention of ‘torture’ in the sensitive item reduces the risk of artificially inflating approval with the use of euphemistic terms such as ‘enhanced interrogation tactics,’ which are known to evoke a broader and softer interpretation (Gronke et al., 2010; Richards et al., 2012; Bandura, 2002). In this sense, the term ‘torture’ provides confidence about the validity of the experimental manipulation. ‡

[†]Besides handing the card to the respondents, enumerators read out loud the content of the answer card. This reduces the concern of illiterate respondents attenuating or distorting the treatment.

[‡]The term ‘torture’ may comprise a set of specific interrogation techniques such as electric shocks, waterboarding, sexual humiliation, forced naked, exposure of extreme heat or cold, punching, kicking or slapping, stress position, denial of food or water, noise bombs or sleep deprivation, among others (for a review of these techniques see Rejali (2007)). Future experimental research might consider analyzing in detail the variation of public support for these specific torture techniques.

Insecurity, violence, trust, and demographics

The statistical analysis considers several measures of insecurity, exposure to violence, trust, and demographic characteristics to identify the determinants of support for torture. The study relies on two measures of perceptions of insecurity. First, the operationalization of hypothesis H_1 relies on *national insecurity*, which asks respondents about how concerned they are with respect to drug-related violence in the country as a whole. Second, *local insecurity* is the measure for hypotheses H_2 and H_3 , and inquires about drug violence concerns at the community level. In contrast to broad questions about security, the wording in these measures explicitly refers to drug-related violence, thus conveying a narrower meaning and isolating drug violence from other sources of threat.

To further explore the effect of exposure to different types of drug violence in hypotheses H_1 , H_2 and H_3 , the analysis relies on a variety of measures. Variables *occasional shootings* and *frequent shootings* take a value of 1 whether the respondent reported hearing gunshots at those respective frequencies, and 0 otherwise. Using an additional set of dummy variables, the assessment also explores the extent to which the population directly experienced dangerous situations. These measures provide information about whether or not respondents witnessed an *armed clash*, witnessed someone's *violent death*, had to take *cover from bullets*, or became *victims of extortion*.[§]

To capture the extent of trust in government institutions and law enforcement agencies advanced in hypotheses H_4 and H_5 , the instrument includes a battery of questions asking respondents about their degree of trust towards the *president*, *governor*, *mayor*, *army*, and *local police*. To avoid measurement problems with systematic response error, enumerators rotated the order of institutions when conducting the interviews.

The questionnaire also includes a set of socio-demographic components. Variable *fe-*

[§]Given the ethical concerns of conducting quantitative research in violent settings (Blattman, 2009; Osorio, 2013), the questionnaire informed respondents about the possibility of not responding to questions if they felt upset about them. The extent to which this caveat may have affected their responses is an empirical question. Nevertheless, the “do no harm” ethical principle and protecting the emotional well-being of research subjects is preponderant.

male indicates the gender of the interviewee. Self-reported income is disaggregated in three variables indicating whether respondents earn a *low* (US\$0 - US\$126), *middle* (US\$127 - US\$758) or *high* (US\$759 - US\$3,760) income; “no answer” and “do not know” responses are the excluded category. Additional measures consider respondents’ *education*, *age*, and their self-reported partisan identification towards the Revolutionary Institutional Party (*PRI*), the National Action Party (*PAN*) or the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*PRD*).

Table I reports the descriptive statistics. In the last two columns, the balance check indicates that the randomized treatment assignment was correctly implemented. The report indicates that the control and treatment groups are strongly balanced. The variable *victims of extortion* is the only one showing a statistically significant mean of differences, yet it has so few positive responses (92 cases) that it does not represent a major concern. All other variables are balanced.

[Insert Table I]

Statistical analysis

The presentation of results proceeds as follows. First, it examines the extent of torture approval to fight crime in Mexico. Then, identifies the profile of the stereotypical supporter of torture. Finally, analyzes the determinants of torture approval and estimates the magnitude of their effect.

Extent of support for torture

Figure 1 reports the prevalence of torture approval measured by the direct question and the list experiment. Although the wording of these two measures is different, both questions aim to grasp the latent support for the use of torture. In line with the methodological expectations, the list experiment reveals a higher proportion of support torture than the estimate suggested by obtrusive question. According to the self-reported measure, 21.1%

of the respondents approved the government using physical torture against suspected drug traffickers. However, as discussed before, directly asking people about their support to torture criminals in an environment ravaged by the presence of criminal organizations is likely to generate distorted responses. In contrast, results from the list experiment indicate that 32.4% of respondents are in favor of the government torturing presumed drug traffickers. The estimate of the treatment effect in the experiment is statistically significant at more than 99% of confidence.

[Insert Figure 1]

The experiment shows that about one out of three respondents in Mexico are in favor of the state using torture as a way to extract information from suspected criminals. This suggests that considerable portion of the population is willing to allow the state do whatever is necessary to protect them, even if that implies violating people's physical integrity. The t-test between the direct and the experimental estimates shows that the results are statistically different. As expected, the list experiment reveals higher torture approval than the obtrusive question. The gap between these estimates suggests measurement problems in the direct question probably derived from fear of disclosure, under-reporting, or social desirability.

Who supports the use of torture?

Table II reports the effects of different covariates on torture approval. Model 1 uses the direct measure of torture as the dependent variable and results are calculated using logistic regression. The experimental item count is the dependent variable in Model 2 and uses maximum likelihood as estimation technique (Imai, 2011; Blair & Imai, 2012). To facilitate the comparison across Models 1 and 2, Table II reports the change in the predicted probability of approving torture caused by the variation of each covariate from its minimum to its maximum value.

[Insert Table II]

Consider first the distinct profiles of the stereotypical supporter of torture as depicted from the direct question and the list experiment. To do so, focus on the sign of the statistically significant coefficients in Models 1 and 2. According to the direct question (Model 1), the average supporter for torture in Mexico is an individual with low concern about drug-related violence in the community, who had to take cover from bullets, has not been a victim of extortion, and does not self-identify with PRD. In contrast, the list experiment (Model 2) portrays a substantially different stereotype. According to the unobtrusive measure, the average torture supporter is a poorly educated young individual with middle income, who is broadly concerned about drug-violence in the country as a whole, yet is not concerned about this problem in the community, has heard gunshots occasionally, but not frequently, has not had to take cover from bullets, does not trust the army, and sympathizes with the PRD.

Systematic measurement error in the direct question is likely to underestimate the extent of torture approval and distort the depiction of the average supporter of torture. This measure yields contradictory results as the stereotypical supporter is presumably not concerned about drug violence in the community, yet had to take cover from bullets. This discrepancy raises questions about the validity of the direct question to assess support for torture in environments affected by violence. In contrast, the item count technique provides a more consistent and reliable portrayal of the average torture supporter.

Determinants of support for torture

Besides identifying the stereotypical torture supporter, Models 1 and 2 evaluate the effect of each independent variable on the levels of torture approval. The multivariate analysis of the list experiment reveals that security threats have an heterogeneous effect on public support for using torture against presumed criminals. Heightened perceptions of contextual insecurity are associated with increasing torture approval. In contrast, close exposure to dangerous situations undercut approval for torture.

Figure 2 reports the distinct effects of increasing concerns of drug violence in the country

as a whole and at the community level. The direct question (panel a) shows no statistically distinguishable effect of national insecurity on torture approval. In contrast, the list experiment (panel b) shows a positive and statistically significant effect. Increasing the perception of insecurity at the national level from low to high, boosts torture approval from 2% to 39.3%. In congruence with hypothesis H_1 , this result indicates that intensified contextual threats are conducive to endorsing harsh security measures.

[Insert Figure 2]

In contrast to the positive effect of sociotropic threats, increasing concerns of drug-related violence at the local level undermine torture approval. According to panels (c) and (d) in Figure 2, both the direct measure and the list experiment show a statistically significant and negative relationship. However, the predicted effect from the direct question is about three times smaller than the list experiment estimate. According to the obtrusive measure (panel c), raising concerns of local drug violence from low to high reduces the probability of consenting torture from 30.5% to 18.7%. A comparable increase of local insecurity inhibits torture approval from 57.5% to 25% in the list experiment (panel d). These results confirm hypothesis H_3 linking the intensification of direct threats with the decline of torture approval.

In addition to people's perceptions of insecurity, the analysis reveals that individual direct exposure to violent episodes is crucial for understanding torture approval. The top two panels in Figure 3 compare the relationship between sporadic exposure to gunshots and support for torture according to both measures. The direct question (panel a) reports no statistically significant effect for those who heard shots occasionally. In contrast, results of the list experiment (panel b) indicate that contextual exposure to gunfire increases the propensity for approving torture. Respondents who heard sporadic shots are 41.6% more likely to favor the use of torture against criminals than those who have not heard gunshots. This finding supports the expectation of hypothesis H_1 indicating that intensified contextual threats are conducive to greater torture approval.

[Insert Figure 3]

In contrast to the positive effect of contextual exposure to violence, results in panels (d) and (f) in Figure 3 indicate that experiences of intense and proximate violence undermine support for torture. The direct question estimates in panel (c) are too uncertain to reveal a significant relationship between hearing frequent shootings and torture approval. In a similar manner, the direct measurement in panel (e) fails to identify a statistically significant relationship between covering from bullets and support for torture. Contrary to the uncertain results derived from the direct question, the list experiments reports clear and highly significant estimates in the expected direction. The experimental result presented in panel (d) shows that respondents who heard frequent shootings are 18.1% less likely to approve torture when compared to those who did not hear gunshots regularly. The list experiment also shows in panel (f) that those who were not exposed to direct gunfire have a probability of 32% of approving torture, whereas those who had to take cover from bullets only have a 6% chance of supporting torture. As suggested in hypothesis H_3 , experiencing highly threatening and proximate episodes of violence such as hearing frequent shootings and taking cover from direct gunfire tend to hinder support torture.

The empirical analysis reveals that national and local perceptions of insecurity, as well as remote and direct exposure to violence have a distinct impact on the levels support for torture in Mexico. These heterogeneous reactions to same valence stimuli are consistent to the predictions of the appraisal-tendency framework and coincide with anti-terrorism studies in the United States (Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Lerner et al., 2003; Huddy et al., 2005). Further research is necessary to identify whether the emotional mechanisms of anger and fear operate in these diverging relationships, or if there are alternative mechanisms at work.

In addition to the perceptions of threat and experiences of violence, the analysis reveals that attitudes towards political institutions also play an important role in determining support for harsh interrogation tactics. In line with hypothesis H_5 , the list experiment reports a strong and negative relationship between trust in the army and torture approval. The

estimates of Model 2 presented in panel (b) in figure 4, indicate that increasing trust in the army from low to high levels decreases the probability of supporting torture from 67.2% to 11.5%. The direct measure in panel (a) fails to show a statistically significant relationship. The levels of trust in other political institutions (president, governor, mayor or local police) do not seem to affect public attitudes towards torture in either the direct or experimental measures.

[Insert Figure 4 about here]

The negative effect of institutional trust on torture approval in Mexico is contrary to the results of research conducted in the U.S. (Davis & Silver, 2004; Davis, 2007). Several explanations can help to account for this negative effect. Following Gronke et al. (2010), those who trust the army may have this institution in such high esteem that they would consider it unprofessional and degrading for soldiers to engage in this type of behavior. Alternatively, Solomon et al. (1991) suggests that those who trust the army may feel protected by a large and strong institution, thus reducing their need to rely on harsh security measures for protection. A third explanation might be related to people's trust in the institutional capabilities of government authorities (Mishler & Rose, 2001). As indicated by Moreno (2010), the Mexican army is the second most trusted institution in the country, just after the church. Given the remarkably high levels of trust in the army, respondents might consider that the army has the material, institutional, and training capabilities as well as moral stature to provide security without the need of using torture. Due to data limitations, it is not possible to identify the specific causal mechanism linking institutional trust and torture approval.

Finally, the list experiment in Model 2 finds analytical leverage in some socio-demographic variables. Contrary to the recurrent finding of gender as a powerful predictor of support for aggressive security measures, the results show no significant effect of gender on torture approval in the direct question nor in the experimental measure. It is possible that gender could be operating indirectly through other covariates such as perceptions of insecurity, trust in institutions, income or education. In any case, gender does not seem to affect attitudes

towards torture in Mexico. The direct question fails to identify any statistical relationship between income and torture approval. In contrast, the list experiment shows that individuals earning a middle income (US\$127 - US\$758 per month) are 35.9% more likely to support the use of torture to fight crime, than those who do not belong to that income bracket. The list experiment also finds that increasing education from elementary to college level reduces torture approval by 46.1%. In contrast, the direct question finds no effect of scholarly attainment on support for torture. Age is also negatively correlated with torture approval in the list experiment. Senior respondents (50 years or older) are 38.3% less likely to support torture than young respondents (18-25 years old). Finally, the different measurement techniques show mixed results with respect to PRD party identification: the direct question indicates a negative effect whereas the experimental measure indicates a positive one.

Conclusion

Individuals living in communities torn by violence are forced to make difficult choices between allowing the government to implement harsh measures to provide security or supporting a legal framework that protects civil liberties. In contexts of conflict, increasing concerns of insecurity may come at a cost for the protection of human rights. This research reveals that in the Mexican war on drugs, a large proportion of individuals are willing to sacrifice respect for human rights and civil liberties in exchange for harsher security strategies. In particular, the wave of criminal violence led some individuals to support authorities using torture against detainees in an effort to extract valuable information to fight drug cartels. Results from a list experiment indicate that 32.39% of the population supports the government using torture for interrogating suspected members of drug trafficking organizations.

Estimates from the list experiment reveal that distinct perceptions of insecurity have different effects on support for torture. Those concerned about security conditions in the country as a whole tend to report higher levels of support for torture. In contrast, those who

are worried about security in their community or directly experienced episodes of violence are less supportive for this harsh interrogation tactic. There might be different mechanisms driving these heterogeneous attitudes towards torture. Approving torture might be the consequence of rational efforts to address contextual perceptions of threat as well as the product of risk-prone behavior caused by anger. In contrast, fear and anxiety might be powerful deterrents of torture approval among victims of violence. Further research is necessary to investigate how support for harsh security policies might combine functionalist mechanisms aiming at neutralizing the source of threat and emotion-based reactions generating heterogeneous attitudes.

Finally, the list experiment suggests that public attitudes towards torture do not only depend on impressions, exposure and emotions, but are also shaped by levels of institutional trust. Results indicate that respondents with high levels of trust in government institutions are less supportive of the use of enhanced interrogation tactics against suspected criminals. Further research is necessary to disentangle the causal mechanisms operating in this relationship. A plausible explanation suggests that those who trust the government might not feel too afraid or insecure, thus hindering their support for the state using torture.

The results of this study have broad implications for the prospects of democratic governance and the protection of human rights and civil liberties (Conrad et al., 2015; Davis, 2007). The inclusion of fundamental rights in constitutional charters and international treaties aiming to protect the population constitutes a central characteristic of democratic regimes. This set of legal prescriptions, institutional frameworks and values has the main purpose of generating a space of individual liberty. This principle is known as ‘negative liberty,’ which prescribes the protection of people against the transgressions of the state into the individual sphere of freedom (Berlin, 1969). A key area of personal liberty concerns the protection of physical integrity of a person detained by state authorities, which protects individual survival and security from torture, forced disappearance, unjustified imprisonment, and extrajudicial execution. The international and domestic frameworks for human rights have been devel-

oped to contain the power of the state and guarantee a certain level of individual liberty and safety. However, as shown in this research, when people live in contexts of intense threat or recurrent episodes of violence, some individuals may be willing to sacrifice certain personal liberties and protection of human rights in exchange for protection from violence. Thus high levels of public support for torturing detainees represent a marked reversal to long-standing efforts to protect individuals from repressive state actions.

Moreover, the extent to which people surrender fundamental rights in exchange of harsh security policies generates an ample scope for vulnerability and impunity. Authorities enjoying broad support for the use of harsh security policies are more likely to engage in abusive practices without the fear of being sanctioned by the electorate. Repressive authorities might even justify repressive actions as a response to public demands for security. Furthermore, intensified security concerns may lead politicians to actively campaigning on a platform of increasingly repressive security policies. Demands for harsh security tactics thus become a battering ram eroding individual safeguards, and threaten the prospects of democratic governance and accountability.

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To be disclosed.

Biographical statement

To be disclosed.

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Table I: Descriptive statistics and balance check

	Control		Treatment		Difference	
	N=516		N=484		in means	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	t-test	p-value
Item count	1.59	1.06	1.9	1.13	-4.46	0.0000
Torture direct	0.2	0.4	0.22	0.42	-0.82	0.4124
National insecurity	2.64	0.54	2.69	0.53	-1.64	0.1019
Local insecurity	2.54	0.64	2.58	0.6	-0.97	0.3318
Trust in president	2	0.59	1.96	0.57	1.09	0.2779
Trust in governor	2	0.57	1.96	0.57	1.27	0.2061
Trust in mayor	1.98	0.54	1.93	0.54	1.25	0.2098
Trust in army	2.26	0.62	2.21	0.59	1.24	0.2155
Trust in police	1.9	0.54	1.87	0.54	0.91	0.3638
Occasional shootings	0.37	0.48	0.37	0.48	-0.1	0.9171
Frequent shootings	0.14	0.35	0.15	0.36	-0.51	0.6092
Violent death	0.09	0.28	0.09	0.28	-0.01	0.9929
Armed clash	0.09	0.29	0.1	0.3	-0.34	0.7333
Victim of extortion	0.07	0.26	0.12	0.33	-2.62	0.0089
Cover from bullets	0.05	0.23	0.07	0.25	-0.84	0.4006
Low income	0.53	0.5	0.49	0.5	1.24	0.2148
Middle income	0.19	0.4	0.21	0.41	-0.51	0.6134
High income	0.04	0.21	0.05	0.22	-0.37	0.7089
Education	2.16	1.06	2.2	1	-0.63	0.5272
Female	0.54	0.5	0.56	0.5	-0.55	0.5834
Age	2.72	1.06	2.68	1.06	0.65	0.5163
PRI	0.26	0.44	0.28	0.45	-0.61	0.5409
PAN	0.27	0.44	0.26	0.44	0.33	0.7421
PRD	0.12	0.33	0.1	0.3	1.05	0.2952

Table II: Support for torture

		Direct question		List experiment	
		Model 1	Pred. %	Model 2	Pred. %
Contextual	National insecurity	0.23 (0.21)	6.5	4.79*** (1.35)	37.3
	Occasionally heard shots	-0.21 (0.22)	-3.2	5.56*** (1.40)	41.6
Proximate	Local insecurity	-0.34** (0.17)	-11.8	-2.28** (0.94)	-32.5
	Frequently heard shots	-0.10 (0.30)	-1.5	-3.14** (1.32)	-18.1
	Witnessed a violent death	0.42 (0.33)	7.2	0.77 (1.16)	5.3
	Witnessed an armed clash	0.25 (0.35)	4.2	0.93 (1.05)	6.5
	Victim of extortion	-0.75** (0.37)	-9.9	-0.86 (1.12)	-5.6
	Took cover from bullets	1.08*** (0.41)	21.1	-5.74*** (1.78)	-25.6
	Trust in army	0.11 (0.17)	3.5	-3.94*** (1.08)	-55.7
Institutional trust	Trust in president	0.23 (0.18)	7.1	-0.05 (0.87)	-0.6
	Trust in governor	-0.03 (0.19)	-0.8	0.18 (0.65)	2.4
	Trust in mayor	-0.29 (0.20)	-9.0	-0.74 (0.65)	-9.9
	Trust in police	0.27 (0.19)	8.6	0.31 (1.08)	4.1
	Low income (\$0 - \$126)	-0.08 (0.22)	-1.2	0.48 (0.80)	3.2
Socio-economic	Middle income (\$127 - \$758)	0.05 (0.27)	0.8	4.96*** (1.34)	35.9
	High income (\$759 - \$3760)	0.09 (0.47)	1.5	0.53 (1.71)	3.7
	Education	-0.13 (0.10)	-6.0	-2.65*** (0.61)	-46.1
	Female	-0.04 (0.18)	-0.7	-0.47 (0.65)	-3.2
	Age	-0.02 (0.09)	-1.0	-1.92*** (0.45)	-38.3
	PRI	0.15 (0.22)	2.4	-1.20 (1.05)	-7.8
Partisanship	PAN	-0.16 (0.23)	-2.4	-0.85 (0.76)	-5.7
	PRD	-0.62* (0.35)	-8.4	3.46** (1.34)	26.9
	Constant	-1.24 (0.82)		8.59*** (3.24)	
	Observations	836		836	

Significance: * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01. Standard errors in parentheses.

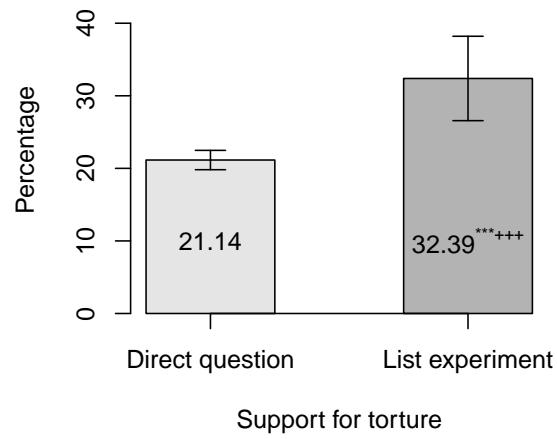
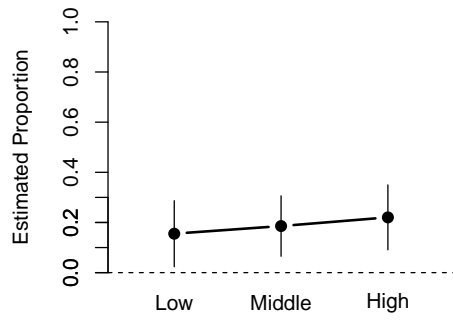
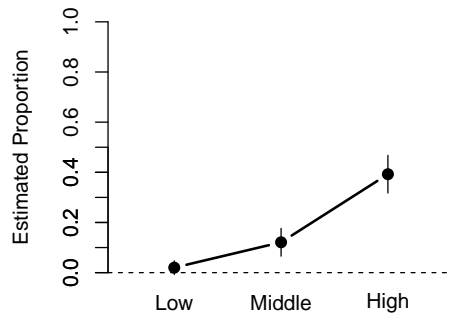


Figure 1: Extent of torture approval

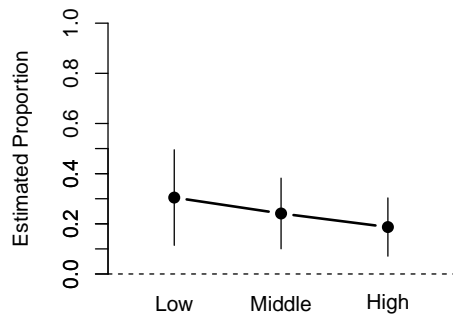
Note: *** $p < 0.01$ for the difference in means between treatment and control groups in the list experiment.
+++ $p < 0.01$ for the difference in means between the direct question and the list experiment estimates.



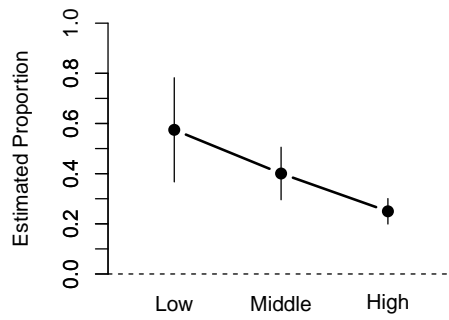
(a) Direct question



(b) List experiment

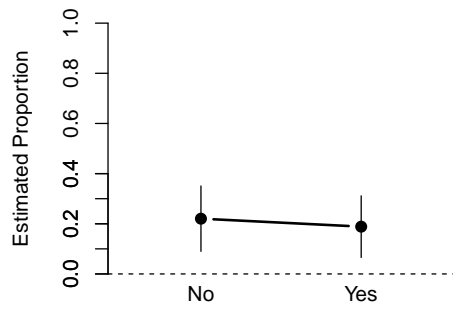


(c) Direct question

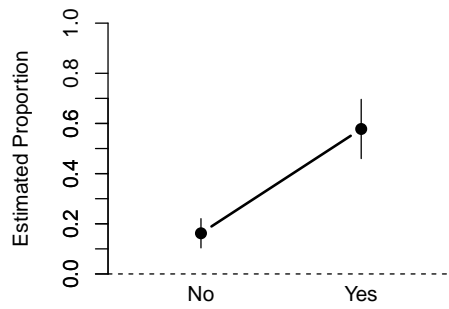


(d) List experiment

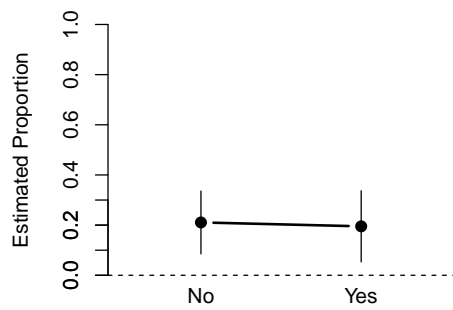
Figure 2: Torture approval by perceptions of insecurity



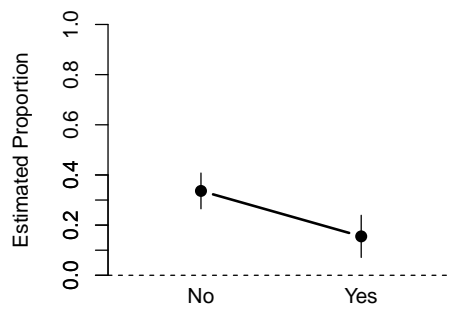
Heard occasional shootings
(a) Direct question



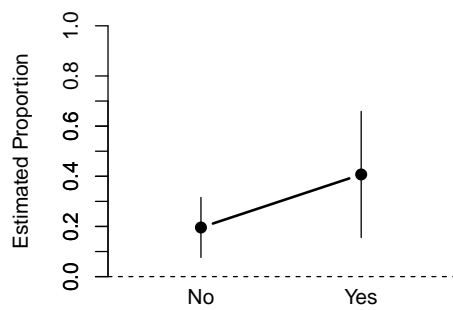
Heard occasional shootings
(b) List experiment



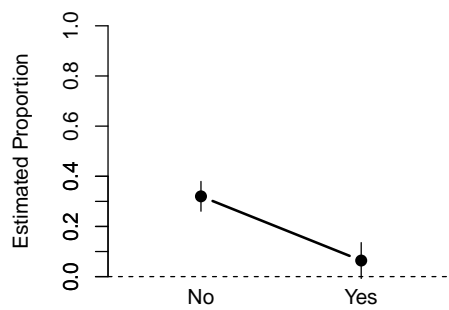
Heard frequent shootings
(c) Direct question



Heard frequent shootings
(d) List experiment

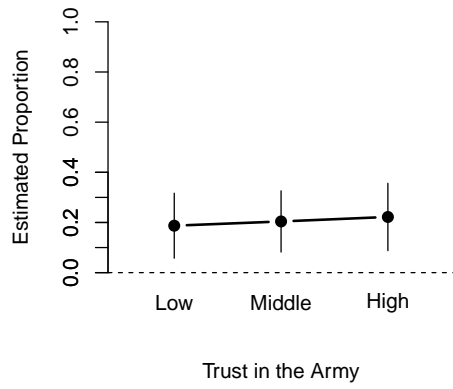


Took cover from bullets
(e) Direct question

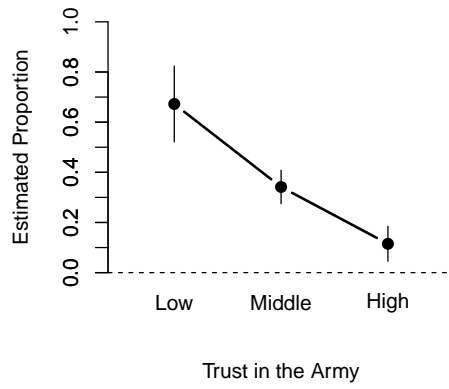


Took cover from bullets
(f) List experiment

Figure 3: Torture approval by exposure to violence



(a) Direct question



(b) List experiment

Figure 4: Torture approval by trust in the army

Appendix. Main survey questions

Q1. Some people consider that the government must obtain precise information to fight drug traffickers. I am going to give you a card mentioning various activities. Please tell me how many of these activities you think the government should do to get information? PLEASE DO NOT TELL ME WHICH ACTIVITIES, JUST HOW MANY (zero, one, two, three ...)

Control list:

- Infiltrate spies in drug cartels
- Interrogate any citizen without justified cause
- Install more security check points in the streets
- Reduce sanctions for drug traffickers who cooperate

Treatment list:

- Infiltrate spies in drug cartels
- Interrogate any citizen without justified cause
- Torture detainees
- Install more security check points in the streets
- Reduce sanctions for drug traffickers who cooperate

Q2. How concerned are you about drug-related violence in Mexico?

Q3. How concerned are you about drug-related violence in your community?

Q4. I would like to ask you about your evaluation of different institutions:

- Q4.1** To what extent do you trust in the president?
- Q4.2** To what extent do you trust in the governor?
- Q4.3** To what extent do you trust in the mayor?
- Q4.4** To what extent do you trust in the army or the navy?
- Q4.5** To what extent do you trust in the local police?

Q5. Now I would like to ask you about your exposure to organized-crime violence. Some of these questions may not apply to you. However, thinking or talking about this may be upsetting for some people. If that is your case, feel free not to answer. You could say, "I prefer to go to the next question" or "I prefer to stop talking about this and move on". Also, remember that your answers are completely confidential and will only be used for statistical purposes.

In the last year, as a consequence of drug-related violence, did you...?

- Q5.1** Hear gunshots occasionally
- Q5.2** Hear gunshots frequently
- Q5.3** Witness an armed confrontation
- Q5.4** Witness someone's violent death
- Q5.5** Have to cover from bullets
- Q5.6** Become a victim of extortion