

GENERAL INFORMATION

Title: Rebuilding trust, social cohesion and democratic values.

Initial registration date: 6/5/2021

Last updated:

LOCATION(S):

Country: [Mexico](#)

Region: Oaxaca

PRIMARY INVESTIGATORS

Name: [Saumitra Jha](#)

Affiliation: Stanford GSB

Name: [Eduardo Rivera](#)

Affiliation: MIT

Name: [Enrique Seira Bejarano](#)

Affiliation: Instituto Tecnologico Autonomo de Mexico

Status: In development.

Dates

Trial Start date

2021-05-01

Intervention Start date

2021-05-01

Trial end date

2021-12-01

Intervention End date

2021-06-30

Keywords (multi-select): Electoral; Governance; Democracy, Identity, Corruption,
Additional Keywords:, Civic Engagement, Voting, Ethnicity, Trust, Finance

JEL code(s)

C93, C72, O10, D02, D91, N00, J15

Secondary Identifying Numbers :

ABSTRACT

The last decade has witnessed a large increase in the perception of corruption in Latin America, and at the same time a decrease in preferences for democracy and trust. In this study, we examine whether these relationships are causal, and whether trust, civic participation, and support for democracy can be (re-)built, focusing on historically marginalized communities in Mexico. We aim to test three different approaches, both in isolation and together: providing information about corruption or economic performance, encouraging social cohesion and nation building through a common narrative, and aligning incentives with finance. The first approach examines whether civic participation (including voting), democratic values, trust and trustworthiness are affected by randomly providing individuals informational videos about national economic performance (government effectiveness) and corruption by politicians. The second approach examines whether these outcomes respond differently when exposing individuals, particularly of historically marginalized groups, to a video emphasizing their common ground, traditions, and shared destinies as Mexicans. A third, cross- randomized approach examines the effects of “sharing the economic future of the nation” by exposing urban participants to opportunities to trade assets that track the index of Mexican stock exchange. We implement our individually randomized control trial among close to 4000 adults who consent to participate in face-to-face interviews in a set of precincts in Oaxaca City and in more than 60 rural municipalities in Oaxaca. One of Mexico’s largest and poorest states, Oaxaca is also a state whose members have maintained indigenous identities and political institutions dating from pre-Columbian times. We selected a subset of municipalities that produced cochineal ---an indigenous product, non-replicable but highly valued historically in international markets--- due to optimal microclimatic conditions, and matched them to nearby municipalities that did not have such conditions.

Sponsors & Partners (optional)

Sponsors and Partners: Conflict and Polarization Initiative, King Center on Global Development (<https://kingcenter.stanford.edu/>)

Experimental Details

INTERVENTION:

We will conduct an individually randomized control trial in Oaxaca, Mexico. Not only one of the largest States in Mexico, but its more diverse, Oaxaca encompasses several indigenous ethnic groups, including the Mixtecs, Zapotecs and Mixe and a majority of municipalities that retain traditional indigenous governance institutions, called *usos y costumbres*.¹ Oaxaca is also a historic center for the production of cochineal, a domesticated insect that was produced by indigenous communities and was Mexico's most valuable processed export during the colonial period, second only to gold and silver. Micro-climatic differences in suitability for cochineal provides exogenous variation to historic market exposure among indigenous communities that we will stratify upon in our study. The experiment involves visiting close to 4,000 voting age Mexicans in 66 municipalities of Oaxaca, explaining that we are surveying people on their opinions and we may also ask them to participate in some games. Upon providing signed informed consent, we will allocate them to 5 main arms.

The objective of the arms is to understand both, how perceptions about corruption and government economic underperformance as well as whether nation-building activities—both through priming shared identity and providing shared exposure to the economy—may affect stated preferences for democracy, civic participation, and mutual trust. Of particular interest is how these effects differ among historically marginalized indigenous groups and those with different histories of exposure and assimilation, as well as by their political sympathies.

Two videos of corruption: We will randomly expose different to videos showing official information about how prevalent and costly to the pockets of citizens certain kinds of corruption are, using data from INEGI, while also showing them footage of corruption scandals of major politicians in Mexico in the last 10 years. One video involves politicians of the current ruling party, and a second video of those in the opposition. We hypothesize that compared to those in the control who were not already aware of the videos, these effects will diminish support, particularly for the culpable group, but also for the democratic system and for trust more broadly. We will test for differential effects among ex ante supporters of these parties (due to motivated reasoning/ cognitive dissonance or greater informational content). In particular, we anticipate that while many people think the opposition parties are corrupt, the incumbent party –Morena-- is viewed as much less so, so there could be more updating with the Incumbent video.

Economic performance: A third video summarizes some of the (unfortunately mostly negative) economic results for Mexico in recent years (economic growth, poverty, and the handling of the COVID19 crisis, compared to other Latin American countries). The aim of this video is to test whether retrospective information about economic performance – i.e. failures in outcomes— have different effects than corruption—i.e. failures in processes. We again hypothesize that since performance has been relatively poor, these effects will diminish support for incumbent party, for the democratic system, and mutual trust. We will again test for differential effects among ex ante supporters of the ruling and opposition parties.

¹ Oaxaca has 540 municipalities out of Mexico's almost 2,500. More than 100 of those decide their mode of municipal government and “judicial” adjudication system on their own using traditional usos y costumbres.

Common identity video: we have designed (with the help of a professional creative designer) a 3 minute motivational video that primes individuals to recall many aspects of Mexican history and culture that forge its common identity (including food, music and soccer), and including a common past with indigenous people, and how it took centuries to have a democracy with power alternating parties. It also discusses the importance of getting involved to shape a common future, and the importance of protecting democracy. For a small sub-sample, we combine the video with a narrative exercise on why one should vote and participate in civic life (following Broockman and Kalla *Science* 2016). Here we expect heterogeneous treatment effects by indigenous identity to be particularly important, with indigenous people experiencing a broader sense of community with other Mexicans as a result of the video, reflected in more trust. A modification we will attempt if feasible is to also develop subsets of the broader video more tailored to priming the indigenous communities' contributions to Mexico and another tailored to mainstream Mexican identity.

Stocks: sharing the future (cross randomized). After these treatments, we will give a subset of people in the urban sample the opportunity to trade a financial asset that tracks the Mexican stock exchange (200 pesos). Each week they will be able to invest or divest 25 pesos. We will use by one of the authors in the Israeli context in Jha and Shayo "Valuing Peace: The Effects of Financial Market Exposure on Votes and Political Attitudes" (2019, ECMA). Unlike those studies, which recruited individuals participating in an online panel in a richer country specifically for a financial study, in this study we will be recruiting door-to-door for a broader study. We anticipate low compliance and thus will focus on treatment effects on the treated. In addition to testing for the outcomes and heterogeneous treatment effects above, we will also test for financial literacy effect differences by gender.

Control group: this group will receive no information/videos about corruption and no stock assets.

Stratification: In the urban sample we will stratify in electoral precincts. In the rural sample, we will sample communities that were historic cochineal producers because they were located in the optimal micro-climate for cochineal prior to 1870 (following Diaz-Cayeros and Jha 2016 and Diaz-Cayeros, Espinosa-Balbuena and Jha 2021), compared with otherwise similar nearby municipios that had sub-optimal micro-climates and did not produce cochineal. As Diaz-Cayeros and Jha show, cochineal towns were exposed more historically to global markets and were more likely to develop entrepreneurial cultures. We will test for differences both on average between cochineal and non-cochineal municipalities in their baseline levels of the outcomes above, but also for heterogeneous treatment effects of the arms above. In the urban sample, we also examine whether the effects differ for migrants from rural municipalities.

Implementation Notes:

- 1) We will present results anticipating differential effects among those who *ex ante* are already aware of the informational content of the information videos.
- 2) Given the face-to-face nature of the intervention, and the possible temptation to the surveying team of the cash involved in some of the games, we will present results

controlling for surveyor fixed effects, and exclude observations when the surveyor has demonstrated failure to follow the research protocol.

- 3) We will also use precinct fixed effects, and control for demographics and prior opinions about corruption and democracy to increase power.
- 4) To correct for potential imbalances *ex post*, if necessary, we will use double-lasso procedures as suggested by Belloni, Chernozhukov and Hansen 2014 and Duflo et al. 2020.
- 5) Some of the outcomes are measured on a 4 or 5 points Likert scale. We will either convert these into dichotomous variables by grouping answers, or use ordered probit/logit models to use the whole range of variation.

PRIMARY OUTCOMES

Primary Outcomes (end points)

- Administrative data on turnout (and for the urban subset, surveyed voting choices) at the June 2021 election.
- Preference for democracy using questions adapted from Latinobarometer. We will create an index with the following 3 questions (standardizing each and summing them and standardizing the sum), but also show effects separately for each.
 - a. *In general, would you say you are very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, a little satisfied or not satisfied with the democracy in Mexico?*
 - b. *Do you consider it essential to live in a country where governors are elected by the majority's vote?*
 - c. *Please, state if you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: "Democracy may have its problems, but it is still the best form of government"*
- Stealing from /donating to the municipality: using the Resource Allocation Game --- following Lowes et al (2017, ECMA), and from neighbors. We conjecture the stealing from politicians will be larger and more precise than stealing from neighbors, as the videos are about politicians. However, there may still be (small) spillovers to neighbors.
 - a. We conjecture also that people will tend to keep for themselves higher denomination coins more than lower denomination ones.
- Survey measures of trust in others (from the community and outside, including politicians of different parties). Note that corruption may erode social capital and trust not only in politicians, but in a broader cross section of groups of institutions or people. These are the primary questions on trust we will use.
 - a. *Please state, for each one of the groups, institutions or people mentioned in the following list, how much trust do you have in them? A lot, some, a little or none?*
 - i. *Political parties*
 - ii. *Political parties*
 - iii. *MORENA, PRI or PAN politicians*
 - iv. *In a person from same the community*
 - v. *In a person from other community*
 - vi. *In neighbors*
 - vii. *In rich people (relevant mostly for the Mexico video arm)*
 - viii. *In non-indigenous (relevant mostly for the Mexico video arm)*
 - ix. *Media*
 - x. *Army*

- b. *Speaking in general terms, would you say most people can be trusted, or do you believe one is never careful enough when dealing with other people?*
- Perceptions about the prevalence of corruption. We expect that the videos will cause people to update upwards on average on the level of corruption in the country. We will create an index with the following 4 questions (standardizing each and summing them and standardizing the sum), but also show effects separately for each.
 - a. *How much progress do you think has been made in reducing corruption within State institutions in these past 2 years?*
 - b. *Please state if you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: "All politicians are corrupt"*
 - c. *What percentage of politicians in Mexico do you think are involved in acts of corruption?*
 - d. *Out of every 100 pesos from tax revenues, how much do you think is stolen by politicians?*
- Survey measures of voting
 - a. *If federal elections were to be held this Sunday, which party would you vote for?* We conjecture that the incumbent video will reduce the intention to vote for the incumbent, and the analogous will happen for the non-incumbent parties.
 - b. *How likely are you to go to vote in the 2021 election?*

We will measure these a few minutes after treatment, and also 1-2 months later. The baseline surveys are done in person, but the follow up survey could be done in person, by email, or by phone.

Secondary Outcomes (end points)

Secondary outcomes gather conjectures which are not as important to us, or those for which we think our measures are weaker. We list them here for completeness only.

- Revealed preference willingness to participate as an electoral observer in the June 2021 election or to donate money to for electoral observers. This will only be measured for surveys conducted before the election.
- Hypothetical questions about tradeoffs between freedom and surveillance.
 - a. *Would you agree to have the army run checkpoints in the streets to maintain order?*
 - b. *Would you support a government controlling the media and bugging phones to fight corruption?*
- Propensity to cheat and to help: Hypothetical questions on paying taxes, donating blood, and skipping the order to get vaccinated for COVID even if its not your turn.
 - a. *If you were asked to donate blood to a complete stranger (with no economic remuneration), would you accept?*
 - b. *On a scale from 1 to 10, where "1" is "not justifiable" and "10" is "completely justifiable", how justifiable do you think it is to Avoid taxes.*
 - c. *On a scale from 1 to 10, where "1" is "not justifiable" and "10" is "completely justifiable", how justifiable do you think it is to: Get the COVID-19 vaccine before your turn*
- A trust game: amount sent in a trust game either to a member of congress ("Diputado") or a member of the community ("Encuestado en tu municipio"). We attempted an implementation akin to that of Alan et al (2021, QJE), however this was done in a one-shot manner socially distant due to Covid, with the receivers and senders that appeared abstract to the participants. Pilots revealed that our implementation was hard to understand for both surveyors and for participants. Nonetheless we attempted this with the full trial. To address potential lack of

understanding we will implement a procedure to over-weight participants whose characteristics match those for whom the correlation between the self-reported trust measure and choice in the trust game is strongest in the control.

- We will also randomize who gets the Resource Allocation Game, which allows us to measure its effect on the later trust game, and on the finance arm.

EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

We will have 5 main arms:

1. Incumbent corruption video: A video showing official information about how prevalent and costly to the pockets of citizen certain kinds of corruption are using data from INEGI, and also showing them footage of corruption scandals of major politicians in Mexico in the last 10 years of the current ruling party (Incumbent corruption)
2. Opposition corruption video: A second video like the first, but with corruption scandals of members of the opposition.
3. Economics Video. A third video summarizes some of the (unfortunately mostly negative) economic results for Mexico in recent years (economic growth, poverty, and the handling of the COVID19 crisis, compared to other Latin American countries).
4. Mexico video. Common identity video and perspective-taking: a motivational video that primes individuals to recall many aspects of Mexican history and culture that forge its common identity, and including a common past with indigenous people, and how it took centuries to have a democracy with power alternating parties. It also discusses the importance of getting involved to shape a common future, and the importance of protecting democracy. We combine the video with a perspective taking on why people should vote and participate in civic life.
5. Control group (no video)

Some of these groups are cross-randomized with the “Stock treatment”. We will give a subset of people financial assets (stock) that tracks the Mexican stock exchange (200 pesos of stock), which is about 1.5 days of salary for them.

Table 1: Treatment Arms and Sample Sizes

		Stocks (cross randomized)		No stocks	
		<i>City</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Rural</i>
Incumbent corruption video	G1	200	0	0	450
Opposition corruption video	G2	200	0	0	450
Economics video	G3	0	0	150	150
Mexico video	G4	400	0	0	600
No video (Control group)	G5	400	0	400	600
				Total = 4000	

EXPERIMENT CHARACTERISTICS

Sample size: planned number of clusters

4000 subjects: adults with a valid voting ID. Randomization at the individual level.

Sample size: planned number of observations

4000 subjects

Sample size (or number of clusters) by treatment arms

On the main arms we have about 600-1000 observations per arm. See the respective table in the pre-analysis plan.

- Incumbent corruption video G1 650
- Opposition corruption video G2 650
- Economics video G3 300
- Mexico video G4 1000
- No video (Control group) G5 1400

Minimum detectable effect size for main outcomes (accounting for sample design and clustering)

Given individual level randomization, 95% confidence, and 80% power, we have power to detect the following effects approximately:

- **Trusting:** 3 percentage points in trust comparing any pair of the groups.
- **Reciprocity:** 3 percentage points in reciprocity comparing any pair of the groups.
- **Voting turnout:** 5 percentage points in a comparison of corruption: Corruption (G1+G2) vs Control.
- **Preference for democracy:** we can detect an effect of 0.2 points in the classic 4-points Likert “satisfaction with democracy” question.
- **Perceptions about corruption:** For the question “Out of 100 how many politicians are corrupt” we can detect an increase of 3pp.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARDS (IRBs)

IRB Name

ITAM IRB (no number provided)

IRB Approval Date

2021-04-18

IRB Name

Stanford IRB

IRB Approval Date

2021-06-04

IRB Approval Number

60746

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alan, Sule et al. (forthcoming) “Building Social Cohesion in Ethnically Mixed Schools: An Intervention on Perspective-Taking”, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*
- Broockman, David and Joshua Kalla (2016) “Durably reducing transphobia: A field experiment on door-to-door canvassing” *Science* 352:6282,pp 220-224
- Belloni, Alexandre, Victor Chernozhukov and Christian Hansen (2014) “Inference on Treatment Effects after Selection among High-Dimensional Controls”, *Review of Economic Studies* 81:2,pg. 608-650
- Diaz-Cayeros, Alberto, Juan Espinosa-Balbuena and Saumitra Jha (2021) “Pandemic Spikes and Broken Spears: Indigenous Resilience after the Conquest of Mexico”, Stanford working paper.
- Diaz-Cayeros, Alberto and Saumitra Jha (2016) “Conquered but not Vanquished”, Stanford working paper.
- Duflo, Esther et al. (2020) “In Praise of Moderation: Suggestions for the Scope and Use of Pre-Analysis Plans for RCTs in Economics”, NBER working paper 26993.
- Jha, Saumitra and Moses Shayo (2019) “Valuing Peace: The Effects of Financial Market Exposure on Votes and Political Attitudes”, *Econometrica* 87:5,pp.1561-1588
- Lowes, Sara et al. (2017) “The Evolution of Culture and Institutions: Evidence from the Kuba Kingdom”, *Econometrica*, 85:4,pp.1065-1091