

Agents of Change? Political Consequences of Return Migration

IPES 2017

UT Austin, November

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Migration and Political Change: What do we know?

Mostly **optimist view**: Migration facilitates transition to democracy

Two channels:

- 1. Financial Channel**: Remittances weaken electoral support for clientelistic parties (Pfutze 2012, 2014 for the case of Mexico)
- 2. Social Remittances**: Emigrants transmit democratic values and practices (Spilimbergo 2009; Rother 2009; Barsbai et al. 2017; Córdova and Hiskey 2015; Mesequer et al. 2016).

Both effects depend on specific conditions:

at **destination**: Democracy? Quality of institutions?

at **origin**: Autocracies? One-party-systems?

Alternative View: Out-migration and remittances facilitate the survival of autocracies (Abdih et al. 2012, Ahmed 2012, 2013):

Additional resources channeled towards patronage

Return Migration and Political Change

A new scenario?

New scenario after 2007: ↑ Return migration

net zero migration between Mexico and the US in recent years (Pew, BBVA/Bancomer)

- Unemployment after crisis 2007
- Threats of deportations

We know little about the effects of **return migration** on political change

Pérez-Armendáriz (2014): Less optimistic assessments on the role of returnees

- Role of émigrés as opinion leaders vanishes once they come back
- Returnees lose interest in politics

Possible links/hypotheses:

1. Returnees diffuse **democratic values** and beliefs when they return (Batista and Vicente 2011, Mercier 2014)?

Or are they disengaging (Pérez-Armendariz 2014)?

2. Return migration affects **voting preferences**

- a) Are households blaming governments for migration shock (Doyle 2017)?
- b) Does return migration increase preferences for re-distribution (Acevedo 2017)?
- c) Back to clientelism (Pfütze 2012 reversed)?

The Mexican Context

Long tradition of clientelism and patronage under PRI's hegemony in Mexico

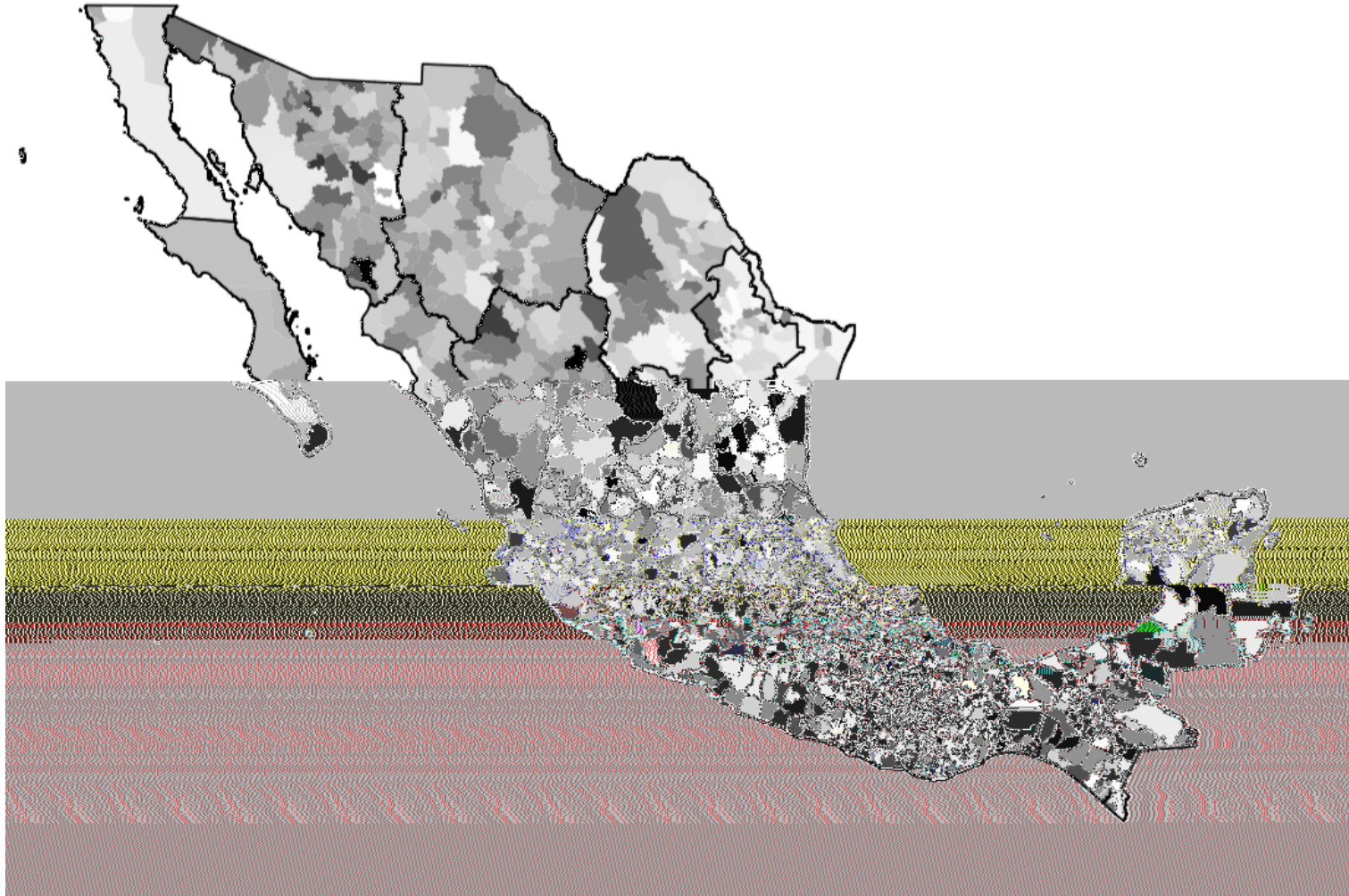
- Decline of the **PRI-dominance** in the 1990s
 - opposition party PAN (center-right) wins presidential elections in 2000 after 71 years of PRI
 - Migration claimed to have played a role (Pfutze 2012, 2014)

Return of the PRI

- PRI wins elections back from PAN in 2012
- At the same time: Labor market shocks and return migration after 2008
- Is there any relation?

Return Migration to Mexico in 2010

darker shades indicate a higher share of return migrants over the previous five years



PRI votes in municipal elections

darker shades indicate higher gains (lower losses) for PRI
in 2010 relative to 2000



Data and Method

Municipal Data: Two-period panel for 2000 and 2010

- CIDAC and IFE (election data), CONAPO (migration variables), Census
- **Instrumental variable** approach to solve endogeneity: Labor market shocks in the US as exogenous variation for return migration (cp. Adams & Cuecuecha 2010, 2013, Anzoategui et al. 2014 for similar instruments)
Instrument USEMPL: Weighted at the level of states **by diaspora's exposure to US unemployment increases over previous 3 years** (cp. Ambrosius &

Municipal Level Analysis

ca. 1600 obs. in 2000 and 2010

First Step: Estimate return migration (*RETMIG*) from exogenous labor shocks in the US (*USEMPL*), time-varying controls (*X*) and municipal fixed effect (*v*)

$$\text{(eq. 1) } RETMIG_{i,t} = \beta_1 + \beta_2 USEMPL_{i,t} + \beta_3 X_{i,t} + v_i + u_{i,t}$$

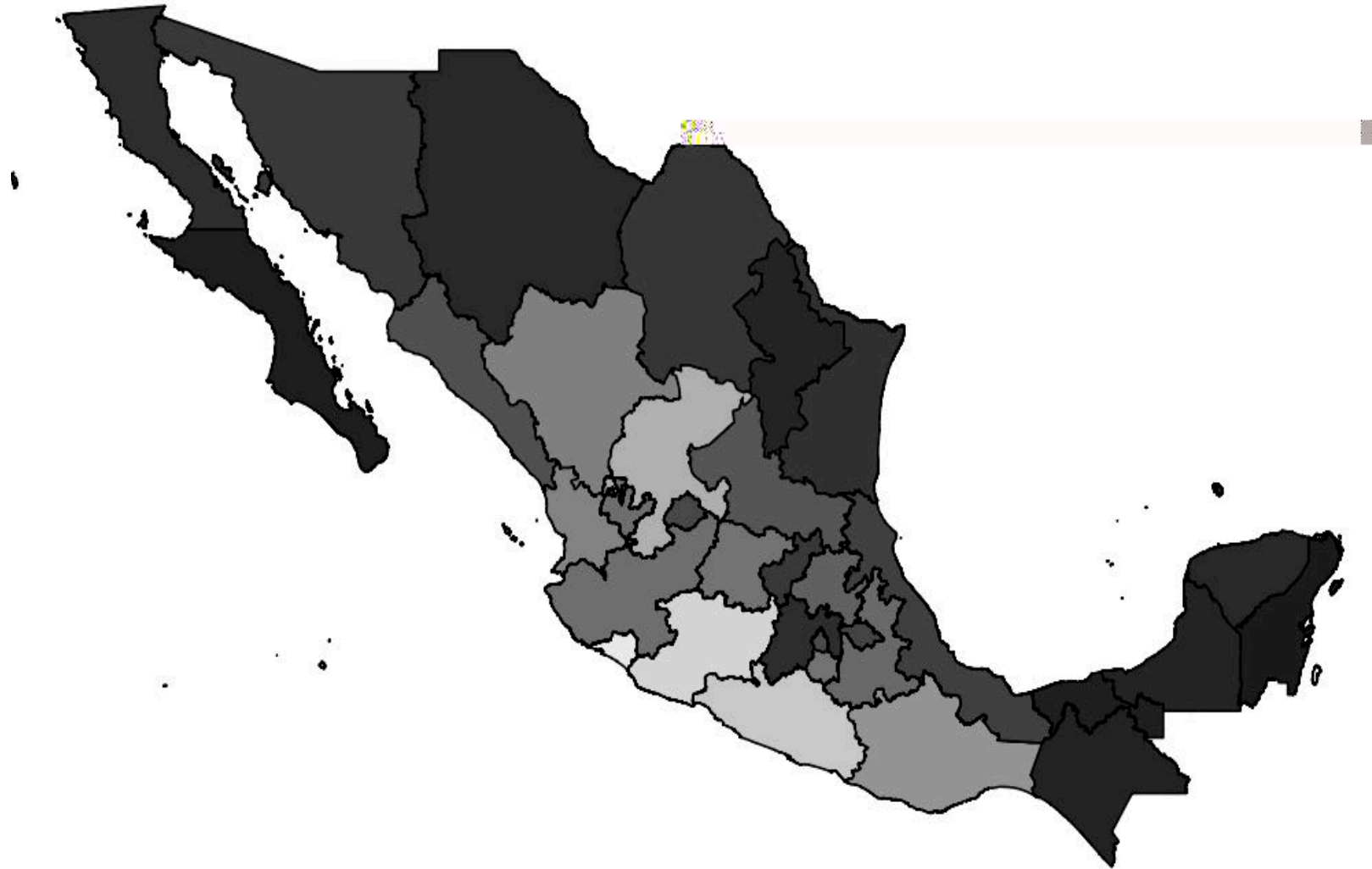
Second Step: Estimate election outcomes (*ELEC*), using the first step estimate for *RETMIG*

Municipal and presidential elections

Effects on election outcomes and competitiveness

$$\text{(eq. 2) } ELEC_{i,t} = \beta_4 + \beta_5 \widehat{RETMIG}_{i,t} + \beta_6 X_{i,t} + v_i + u_{i,t}$$

Instrument: State-Level Variation in the Exposure to Unemployment Increases in the US

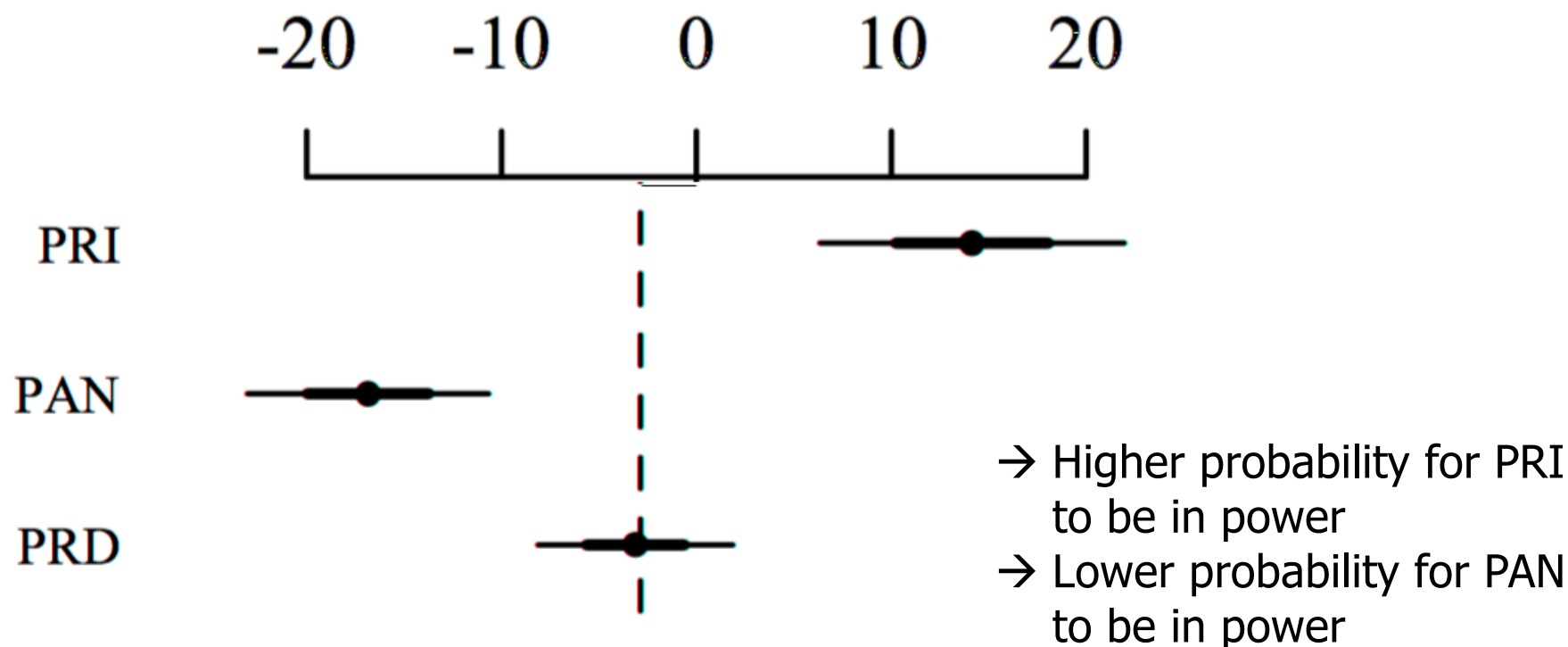


Source: Own Elaboration based on [IME \(2008\)](#) and [USBLS \(2015\)](#)

Effects of Return Migration on the Probability of Holding Power in Municipality (OLS, 2nd Step)

coefficient plot (+/- 2 s.d.)

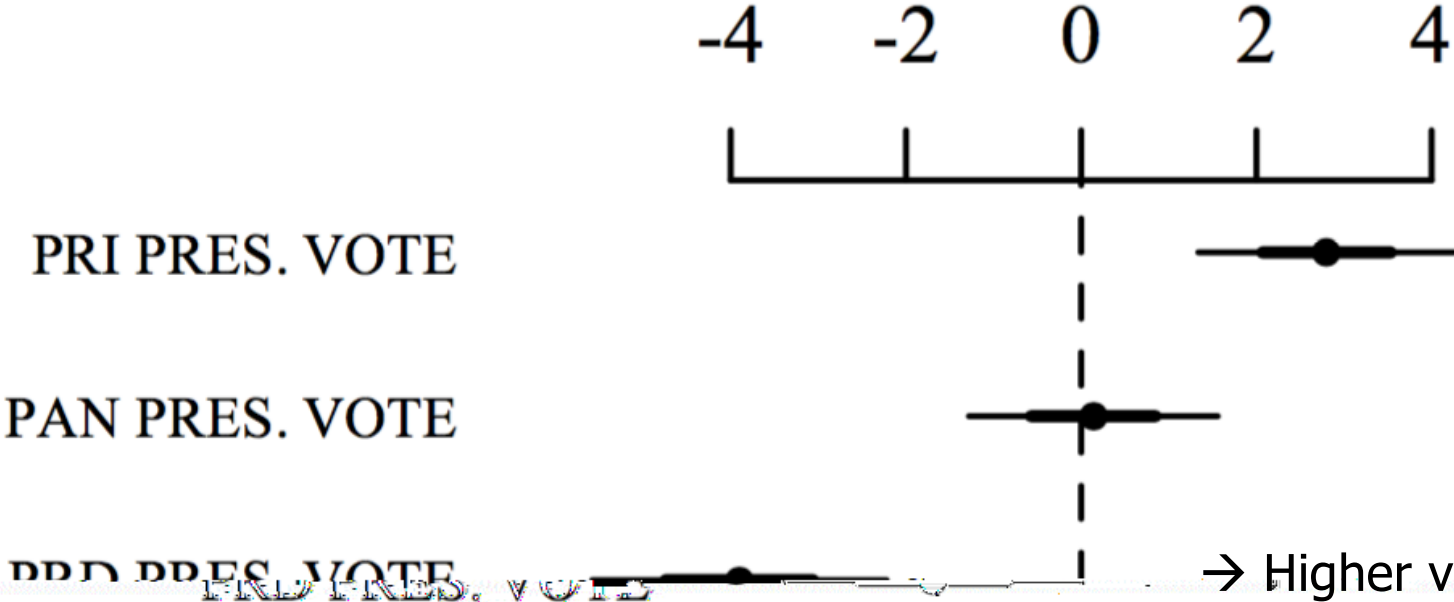
for one perc. point increase in return migration (2000 and 2010)
(municipal fixed effects and time-varying controls)



Effects of Return Migration on Presidential Election Outcomes (OLS, 2nd Step)

coefficient plot (+/- 2 s.d.)

for one perc. point increase in return migration (2000 and 2010)
(municipal fixed effects and time-varying controls)

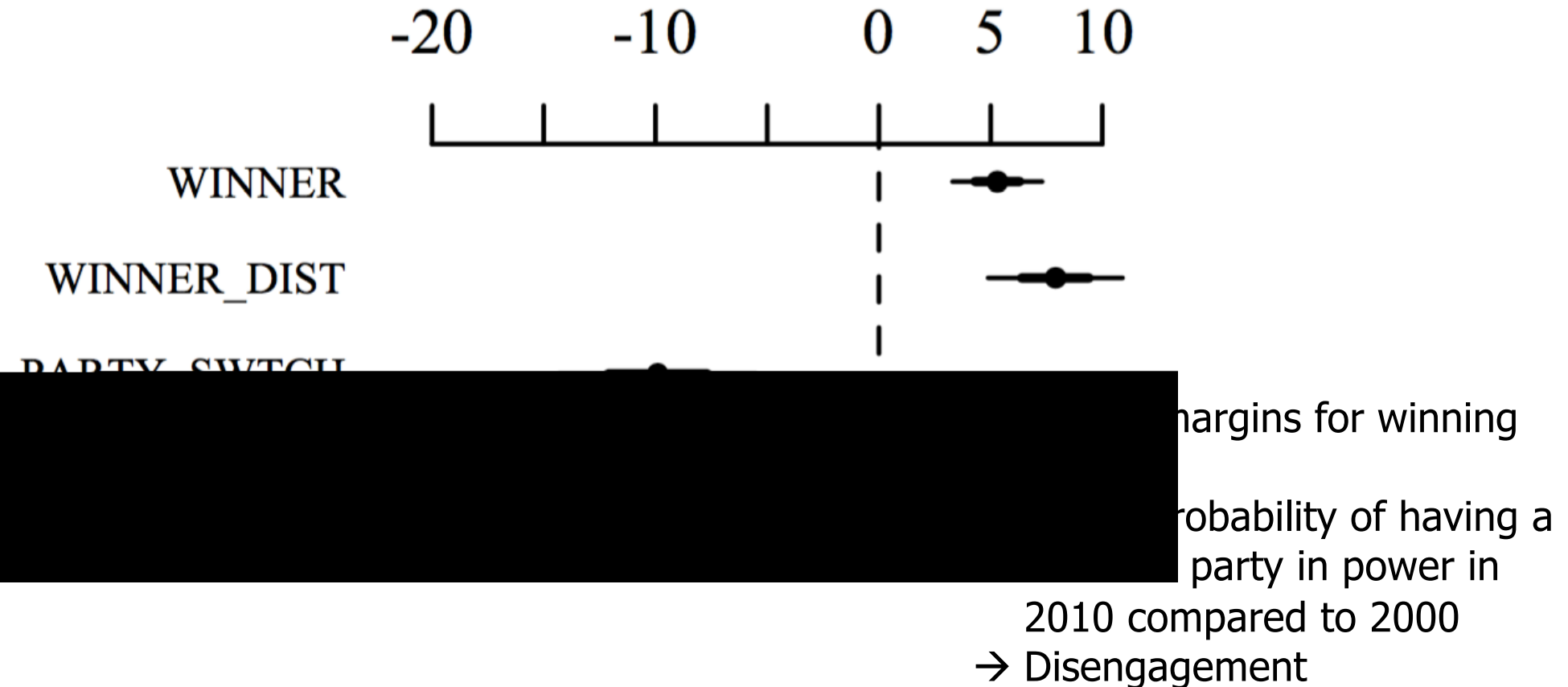


- Higher voteshares for PRI in presidential elections
- Lower voteshares for PRD in presidential elections

Effects of Return Migration on Competitiveness of Elections (OLS, 2nd Step)

coefficient plot (+/- 2 s.d.)

for one perc. point increase in return migration (2000 and 2010)
 (municipal fixed effects and time-varying controls)



Evidence from Survey Data

Complementary evidence. Direct effect?

"Mexico y el Mundo", repeated cross section (2014, 2016)
(covers a different period)

$$(eq. 3) \textit{PoliticalOutcomes}_j = \beta_7 + \beta_8 \textit{Livedabroad} + \beta_9 \textit{ReturneeFamilyMember} + \beta_{10} X_j + u_j$$

Dependent Variable:

- Party affinity, turnouts, perceptions of democracy.

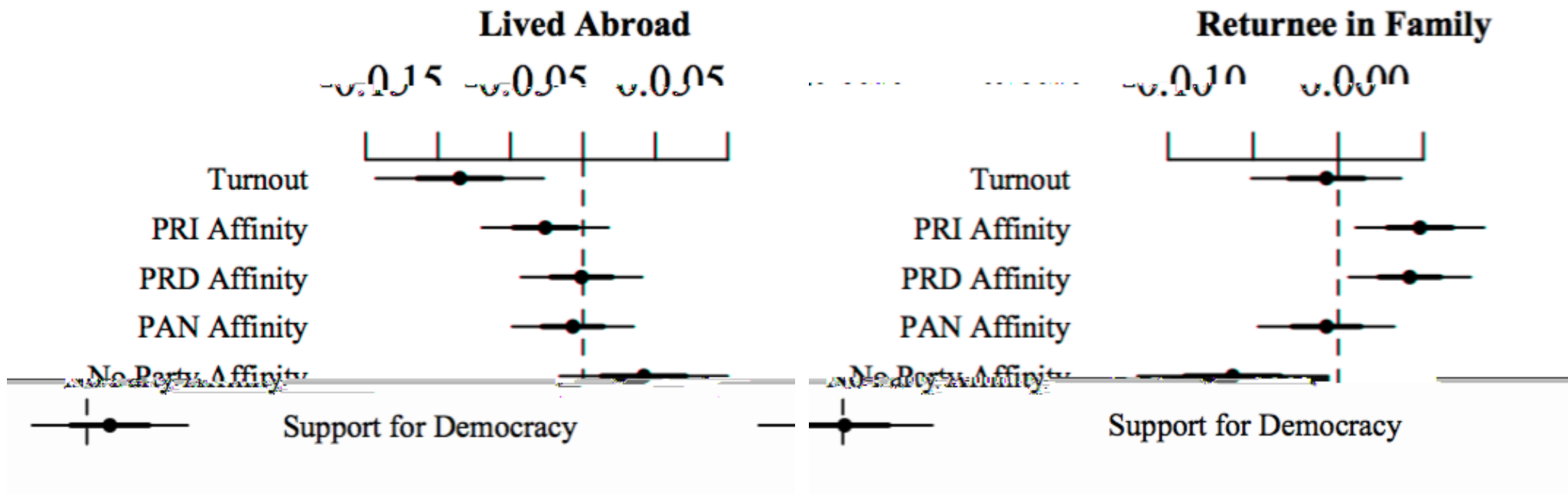
Independent Variables:

- Own migration experience (livedabroad)
- Effect of having a returnee in the family

Control Variables:

- Individual controls (demography, wealth, assessment of personal and country situation, remittances, family abroad, etc)
- Year and municipality fixed effects

Evidence from Survey Data (marginal effects)



- **Lower turnout** during recent elections
- No clear party affinity
- No effect on support for democracy

- **Preference for PRI and PRD**
- Stronger affinity to **established parties**
- No effect on voter turnout

Summary and Interpretations

Robust evidence for political effects of return migration in Mexico:

- Municipal Evidence
 - (1) **PRI gains** from return migration (2) Elections become **less competitive**
 - (3) Lower turnouts
- Survey Evidence
 - (1) **Returnees are disengaging** (2) **Families of returnees prefer PRI** (3) **Divergent preferences** of returnees and their families (4) **Not unambiguous support for democracy** as system

Interpretation

1. Returnees **are not** the agents of democratic political change.
 - Challenge to optimist assumptions in the literature on migration and politics at home
 - Return migration is different ([Pérez-Armendáriz 2014](#))
2. Channel is not voting behavior of returnees themselves, but at the level of **families** (and/or communities) with returnees

Possible explanations:

- a) Former presidency (PAN) blamed for (exogenous) migration shock?
- b) New uncertainty → preference for old “efficient authoritarianism”