

# Unlocking Impact: Assessing CCTs and Mexico's *Progresa* for Broader Latin American Applications

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*This paper examines the evolving political impact of Mexico's Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) program, originally launched as Progresa (later transitioning and expanding to Oportunidades and Prospera) in 1997, as it grew in effectiveness and scale over the course of its tenure, before being dissolved and merged with other welfare initiatives. While the program has been widely credited with meeting its core goals, improving health, nutrition, and school enrollment for marginalized communities alongside contributing to long-term human capital development, its long-term influence on political attitudes and electoral behavior remains under-explored. This study examines how shifts in programming, namely in the change from Oportunidades in 2002, originally launched under Vicente Fox and Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), to Prospera in 2014, orchestrated by Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) and Partido Institucional Revolucionario (PRI), shaped voter perceptions and support, using Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) data from 2014 and 2016/17, with attention to income levels, age, and geographic location. By integrating data-driven results with insights from Revolutionary Mexican literature, this analysis contextualizes CCTs with broader patterns of distrust, ineffective reform, and marginalization throughout Mexico's history. Ultimately, this research aims to inform sustainable policy design in Latin America by highlighting how, when created and instituted authentically, welfare programs can foster both human development and renewed trust between marginalized communities and democratic institutions.*

## Introduction

In Latin America, various countries continue to struggle to address issues of inequality, poverty, and instability, rooted in colonialism, extractive economies, and concentrated power (39). The region has increasingly focused on instituting and measuring the effectiveness of healthcare, education, and social welfare programs to tackle persistent inequality and low growth. Programs like Conditional Cash Transfers (CCTs) allow participants to receive immediate aid if they meet specific program requirements. They focus on human capital development, in its various forms, and can be directly measured through Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) to determine if they are effective compared to a control group.

This study investigates the political effects of renaming Mexico's *Progresa*, a social welfare program whose impact spanned from 1997-2019. The program aimed to reduce poverty by improving education, health, and nutrition via CCTs through health check-ups and monitoring school attendance (43), spanning from *Oportunidades* to later *Prospera*. Using a difference-in-differences (DiD) estimation strategy, my primary research question assesses how name changes (i.e., to *Prospera*) influenced political support for the incumbent president and ruling party in 2014 and 2016/17, controlling for factors such as age, sex, income, and exposure to crime. These findings suggest that lower-income, older, and rural populations

were more sensitive to the program's rebranding. These groups showed disproportionately decreased support for President Enrique Peña Nieto and the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) compared to their wealthier, younger, urban counterparts.

These results reflect similar sentiments to the longstanding history of disillusionment between the Mexican lower class and the government; this history is the focus of study and analysis in the cultural context section, where I used Revolutionary Mexican literature to amplify the voices of marginalized groups from the early 20th century into the modern day. The persistent sense of distrust and unanswered promises serves as a through line across Mexican history and remains essential to study, as many of the structural issues and examples of systemic inequality that have fueled past grievances continue to affect vulnerable communities today.

This analysis aims to offer broader insights applicable to other Latin American contexts, encouraging policymakers to understand the effectiveness of social welfare programming in addressing immediate needs and fostering long-term human capital development, all while underscoring the importance of maintaining authenticity and open communication with beneficiary communities to build sustained trust. Such programs dramatically contribute to sustainability efforts by encouraging participation in the formal economy, fostering engagement in the community, and promoting economic growth overall.

Examining this programming through a political lens is crucial to understanding the impact of similar initiatives not only on addressing immediate economic needs but also on how they shape political dynamics, legitimacy, long-term development, and relationships with constituents.

The motivation for this paper stems from a unique combination of factors seen throughout my time at Villanova, both in academic and personal interests. Firstly, it presents the perfect opportunity to explore the intersection between my three primary areas of interest—Economics, Political Science, and Spanish Language & Literature—through the lens of economic welfare programs and their political impact in Spanish-speaking countries. Additionally, this research is framed within the context of U.S.-Mexico relations, emphasizing that understanding Mexico's development strategies is essential to analyzing political and economic ties between the two nations. My interest in Progresa was shaped through various academic experiences at Villanova, including studying Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) in economics courses, analyzing inequality metrics like the Gini coefficient (measured from 0 to 1), and exploring state-led economic policies such as Puerto Rico's debt restructuring policy, PROMESA.

Further, this research sparked my interest due to my exposure to Emerging Markets during my summer internship. During my time on the desk, I gained firsthand exposure to the relationship between government stability, institutional trust, and stable economic growth. I observed how crucial investments in human capital development and growth, especially through education, health, and other targeted programs, can directly influence both economic potential and political stability. Witnessing the connection of these dynamics in a professional setting sparked my deeper interest in how large-scale social welfare initiatives, like Progresa, can serve as strategic tools for crucial development and long-term market expansion. My investment in this project is multidimensional, allowing me to weave together various passions, draw from personal experience, and understand real-world applications through the study of Progresa and its political impact.

### **Foundations and Background: Mexico's Economic, Political, and Social Landscape**

#### ***Conditional Cash Transfers***

Conditional cash transfers (CCTs) gained popularity in the late 1990s following unfavorable economic conditions in the previous decade, which exacerbated inequality and needed to be addressed in the form of social welfare programming. This decade, known as *La Década Perdida*, followed a series of crises in the 1980s, including Mexico's near-default on its debt obligations and the subsequent fallout of other Latin American countries.

These crises not only worsened income disparity but also weakened public trust in the state, creating an incentive for more effective, equitable, and just social welfare policies. Out of this came CCTs, which were introduced to combat short-term poverty struggles alongside long-term human capital development (16). One such example includes Progresa (later renamed Oportunidades and then Prospera), which became the gold standard for programming in Latin America due to its successes in increasing standards for nutrition, school attendance, and health checkups. Following the success of Progresa, Latin America has seen several other effective CCTs inspired by this standard, including *Bolsa Família* in Brazil, *Familias en Acción* in Colombia, and *Juntos* in Peru. Scholars widely agree that these initiatives have contributed significantly to the achievement of development goals related to health, education, and gender equality, through increasing school enrollment, improving child and maternal health outcomes, and increasing income levels of families (43). However, while the socioeconomic and social impacts of CCTs are well-documented, there remains an open question related to the broader political consequences of these programs. Specifically, it remains uncertain whether programs like Progresa meaningfully impact shifts in participants' political behavior, civic engagement, or perception of the state. Further, there is little literature related to how beneficiaries perceive the government and incumbent parties over time as programs, like Progresa, improve effectiveness and increase efficacy to address participant needs.

#### ***Recent Mexican Political History***

Mexico's political history is dominated by a rich and complex evolution, ranging from indigenous rule, Spanish colonization, the struggle for independence, the establishment of a republic, and revolutions and reforms that have all shaped the modern-day government and are essential for understanding current political events. The Mexican Revolution serves as a key historical event in understanding the modern-day makeup of political rule in Mexico. Starting in 1910, indigenous groups, working-class populations and cities, and the larger lower class as a whole rose against the corrupt 30-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz. This conflict, which continued until 1920, culminated in the formation of the Constitution of 1917, a document that reshaped standards and implementation for the Mexican government, including key rights and reforms advocated for by parties fighting for revolution. It's important to note that while this fight was successful in ending formal dictatorship in Mexico, advocacy for land reform, labor rights, political equality, and indigenous equality remain unaddressed topics, necessitating social programs like Progresa, which tried to confront

issues related to systemic discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization. However, even with social welfare policies in place, these deeply rooted issues continue to express ties to colonial dynamics and require greater, more holistic changes to be distinguished as a just political system.

Following the Revolution, which was centered in part around frustration related to a 30-year rule by a single leader, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) took hold of the Presidency, and in many ways the federal government as a whole, until the end of the 20th century. From 1929 until the election of 2000, PRI won every Presidential election, with each incumbent president effectively selecting their successor while in office. PRI, initially founded as el Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR), started with very altruistic policy ideals related to distancing Mexican reliance on foreign control, prioritizing nationalism, social justice and land reform, and state-led industrialization to remain competitive internationally. These early party ideals, deeply rooted in the priorities of the Revolution, became increasingly disconnected as the years went on. Starting with President Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) and later Miguel Alemán (1946-1950), the PRI centralized power, prioritized bureaucratic economic development projects, and shifted from a desire for reform to a sole need for political control. What followed in the 1960s-1980s is characterized as the “perfect dictatorship” (32). The PRI institutionalized authoritarianism, using repression to suppress dissidents and heavily relying on drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) to enforce their power. As put by Khan and Lara-García:

What makes these DTOs so threatening is their utilization of violence in not only an inter-organizational setting, but also against “the government, political candidates, and the media” (Beittel, 2019, p. 3). Many commentators have also argued that the Mexican DTOs can be “excessive” and “exceptional” in their displays of violence (Beittel, 2019, p. 3). In recent years, many government actors, including those of the PRI, have been implicated in criminal collusion with the DTOs; for instance, Javier Duarte, the Governor of Veracruz, was arrested in 2017 on the charge of criminal involvement with the DTOs that led to the “forcible disappearances” of more than five thousand persons (Beittel, 2019, p. 5). Given the PRI’s proclivity towards co-optation, it stands to reason that many actors under the PRI umbrella would be prone to collude with the DTOs that hold immense power in the region, using their positions in the state to benefit from the illicit activities the DTOs carry out.

During this period, the government was attacking freedoms

and employing corruption at unprecedented levels. Replacing its revolutionary identity with a new modernizing zeal, the PRI utilized the co-optation of any political opposition, demonstrating overwhelming strength over the political scene along with its constituents. As a key example of the public reaction to these violent methods, in 1968, thousands of students and civilians gathered to protest the government’s repressive tactics just days before the Mexico City Olympics. In a sudden turn, brutal violence erupted in the streets at the will of military troops and other officers, attacking the unarmed crowd.

Beyond the repression of rights and violent tactics, the PRI enabled widespread corruption through a system of patronage that rewarded party loyalists. This system dismantled the very reforms upon which the party was founded, consolidated and commandeered control over the political landscape, and continued to rely on DTOs to enforce order through violence. Despite this agenda, they maintained a facade of democracy by holding elections, which were heavily manipulated to guarantee the PRI remained in power.

The tide was turned with the 1982 Pesos Crisis, “when Mexican Finance Minister Jesús Silva Herzog informed the Federal Reserve chairman, the US Treasury secretary, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) managing director that Mexico would no longer be able to service its debt, which at that point totaled \$80 billion” (42). It was then clear that the PRI was not just failing to govern its citizens justly but also to perform on a global economic scale. The PRI gradually lost support and power throughout the 1980s-90s, with the first competitive election occurring in 1994 with Ernesto Zedillo and the following term seeing a non-PRI representative candidate elected for the first time in almost 80 years.

In the 2000 election, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) secured its first presidential victory, marking a historic shift after decades of challenging the PRI on the grounds of corruption, which the PAN had been prominently outspoken about since the 1980s. Their party prioritized social conservatism and was closely connected with Mexico’s Catholic faith tradition.

### ***Recent Administration Overview***

The following section outlines the intersection of Mexico’s recent Presidents, their political affiliations, and their influence on social welfare initiatives originating from Progresa. Progresa was launched under Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), the last President in the longstanding PRI rule, in 1997. The program initially started to address education and health disparities in select rural areas by providing cash transfers to families if they met certain benchmarks for school attendance, doctor’s visits, and nutritional support. Under President Vicente Fox (2000-2006), a member of

the PAN, Progresa expanded into Oportunidades on July 10, 2002 to include all 31 Mexican states alongside urban areas. Oportunidades continued the same initial goals while increasing cash benefits to account for inflation, incentivizing girls school attendance through scholarships for female students at higher levels, providing additional support for households with elderly members over 70, creating savings accounts for youth who finish secondary school, and using greater technology to ensure program integrity (4). Following the Presidency of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012, PAN), the PRI was back in power under Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018). Under his administration, President Peña Nieto expanded the program once more on September 2, 2014, to continue the same goals as its predecessors while also promoting access to higher education, formal employment, financial literacy, and overall greater inclusion under the rebrand as Prospera. This final name change is one that inspired the greatest disillusionment amongst the targeted communities when paired with the political incentive of the PRI and serves as the focus for this research.

#### **Latin American Economic Context**

Mexican policy is interconnected with global and regional dynamics, so to understand a more complete picture of the landscape, it is essential to discuss the economic conditions of the period leading up to and during Progresa, regional concerns and shared vulnerabilities, and the interconnectedness of external financing. The 1970s marked a period of high borrowing, largely due to low interest rates inspired by investment from OPEC members after petrodollars were deposited into Western banks. Seeking new places to lend, banks looked to Latin American countries that were seeking to finance state-led infrastructure to decrease reliance on foreign goods. Cheap credit, optimistic growth, and state-led development ended up being the perfect storm that would lead to *La Década Perdida* in the following years. During the early 1980s, Mexico announced that it would not be able to meet its debt obligations (August 1982), revealing that debt levels across the region had become unsustainable and exposing weakness across their economic models. With rising U.S. interest rates (following low rates in the years prior), a strengthening dollar, and failing exports, many Latin American economies became overexposed. Almost overnight, international leaders like the United States and European banks stopped lending, impacting not just Mexico but other nations heavily reliant on external financing like Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. This exposure of systemic vulnerability and weakness led to decades of debt restructuring and IMF, World Bank, and U.S. Treasury intervention.

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw the rise

of neoliberalism as governments sought to privatize the programming that had previously been a fiscal burden, attract capital, and bring in foreign investment. Deregulation and privatization in places like Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, and Peru resulted in success, but with foreign investment also came job losses, social backlash, and dramatic inequality. Economic growth was seen, but gains were fragile, volatile, and deeply uneven in their recovery. Mexico's Tequila Crisis (1994)—inspired by overreliance on short-term foreign borrowing, political instability, and the devaluation of the peso—and Brazil's Currency Crisis (1999)—influenced by a growing trade deficit, high levels of foreign debt, and pressure on the real—demonstrated the risk of fixed change rate systems but also highlighted the vulnerability of Latin American markets even after restructuring in the decade prior.

Arguably more impactful than the logistics of debt reform or economic liberalization were the social costs, leaving the average citizen feeling disillusioned with government programming while foreign investors and elites benefited. Cuts to education and health programs left the public distrusting of institutions and set the stage for increased inequality across the region. Recognizing the limits of market reforms and budget cuts, cost-effective poverty-alleviation programs emerged, namely Conditional Cash Transfers, first seen in the successful example of Progresa.

#### **Mexican Politics and Elections Standards**

Mexico is a federal republic made up of 31 states and Mexico City (32 federative regions). The President, serving in the role of head of state and government, is elected for a single six-year term. This strict one-term limit is in place to protect from authoritarian rule following Porfirio Díaz's dictatorship, which ended with the Mexican Revolution. However, dominant bodies have taken rule during recent history due to political parties, most recently seen through the dominance of the PRI throughout the 20th century. Within the multi-party system, there are several major players, including MORENA (left-wing, currently in power through President Claudia Sheinbaum), PAN (center-right), and PRI (centrist, dominant from 1929-2000). Elections in Mexico are overseen by the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE) to ensure fair and transparent elections. Despite respect for this governing body, opportunities for bias still exist as related to media concentration, violence, voter suppression through organized crime groups, and alleged candidate disqualification based on favoritism for the opposition.

#### **Literature Review**

Progresa, a program established in 1997 under

President Ernesto Zedillo (member of PRI), which later transitioned to Oportunidades and then Prospera, remains one of Latin America's most impactful CCT programs addressing poverty, education, and health inequalities. This program provided cash transfers to low-income households, initially only in rural northern Mexico, conditional on children's attendance at school and health appointments. This literature review focuses on existing research showing the effective impact of the program on its stated goals, government perception, and larger implications for Latin America as a whole. This review seeks to address the following research question: What is the effect of Progres'a's name change, from Oportunidades to Prospera, on the share of votes for the incumbent political party?

Firstly, understanding Progres'a is essential to connecting its goals and framework to other contexts. Skoufias (2005), a leading World Bank economist who specializes in poverty and distributional issues, provides a longitudinal study examining the impact of Progres'a on key outcomes like children's nutrition, schooling, and overall household income. In this study, Skoufias finds that programming contributed towards significant improvement in welfare, specifically increasing school attendance and improving health outcomes, thereby contributing to the programs' success in rural Mexico. Notably, this study adds to a pool of evidence to suggest that Progres'a had a positive impact on nutritional standards, increased school enrollment (most importantly amongst girls), and contributed to greater consumption per household, specifically in sectors related to food and education. Several studies have demonstrated Progres'a's effectiveness in achieving its intended outcomes. As previously mentioned, this study demonstrates the positive impact of Progres'a on its stated goals, but beyond this, Skoufias emphasizes that this success has broader implications for social policy in various other developing countries. Similarly, Levy (2006), the former director of the Mexican Social Security Institute, deputy minister of finance, and the primary architect of Progres'a, examines the impact of Progres'a, mainly from the lens of overall economic benefits. While the text agrees with other works that Progres'a achieved its stated goals related to education, health, and nutrition, it also impacted broader socioeconomic development in rural areas. Not only did the program impact short-term financial health through cash transfers, but it also invested in long-term human capital development and further contributed to integration into the formal economy alongside breaking cycles of generational poverty (35). Further, *Progress against Poverty: Sustaining Mexico's Progres'a Oportunidades Program* highlights that the holistic outlook of this study, focusing on education and health, had a profound impact on marginalized communities in rural Mexico and is

an approach that should be applied in other contexts. Similarly, these findings are supported by Hariton and Locascio (2018), who underscore and emphasize the value of randomized controlled trials (RCTs). RCTs are widely used to evaluate impact by establishing clear causal links between interventions and outcomes.

This research contributed to a thorough history of Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs), especially related to Latin America and the Global South as a whole. Investigating the effectiveness of public programming is critical in order to demonstrate measurable improvements at the hands of the taxpayer dollar (27). Literature suggests that effectiveness related to social programming represents tangible results that allow increased inclusion in the formal economy. By using the RCT design, Progres'a's impact was clearly seen, and observed benefits were attributed to the program itself rather than exogenous factors.

The success of Progres'a has influenced several other programs of similar design throughout Latin America, specifically in Brazil and Colombia, whose programs also focused on improving health, education, and poverty outcomes via targeted cash transfers. Hall (2006), an economist at the Department of Social Policy through the London School of Economics and Political Science, examines the development of Brazil's Bolsa Família, which, much like Progres'a, focuses on short-term poverty relief and long-term human capital development. Another similar program is seen in Colombia's Families en Acción, launched in 2001, which maintains the core pillars of Progres'a in a Colombian context to account for regional disparities, internal displacement, and their respective history of marginalization.

While the goals of economic and human capital development through Progres'a have been widely proven by various scholars, the impact of CCTs expands beyond their stated goals, venturing into the political realm. Galiani et al. (2017), in their working paper through the National Bureau of Economic Research, investigate not only the effectiveness of CCTs on immediate poverty mitigation but also how the timing and distribution of transfers can impact voting behavior and political impact. This study highlights two types of transfers: Peak and End Transfers. In the former, recipients are given a larger sum of money at a specific point during the program's cycle, which allows for immediate visibility and is more noticeably associated with the immediate actions of the government. However, this study shows that when strategically used close to an election or important political event, the impact may be seen as a vote-buying strategy, creating suspicion amongst incumbents and program participants (22). However, in End Transfer patterns, recipients are paid at the end of a stated period, conditional on the completion of agreed-upon tasks; these transfers normally occur at the end of the program period (inherent in its name). This option

capitalizes on the result of the programming, typically focusing on the culmination of the benefits, encouraging a sense of trust in the incumbent party. In simpler terms, the timing and motivation of transfers directly influences voter impact, decidedly impacting trust depending on context. So, politicians must consider the authenticity of their programming alongside timing, as it may impact voter preferences.

Because of the difficulty in addressing efficiency within public policy, RCTs have been set as the clear standard for assessment and have been influential in proving the success of programs like Progresa. Hariton and Locascio (2018), doctors publishing their work within the *International Journal of Obstetrics & Gynaecology*, explain that because RCTs provide this clear and simple causation framework, public welfare programs can be easily evaluated, and evidence to justify the continued use of these programs remains clear. However, beyond meeting the criteria outlined in their mission statements, CCTs have also been evaluated for their impact on political implications, specifically regarding governance and various election impacts. De La O (2013), associate professor of Political Science at Yale University, examines the relationship between CCT programming and electoral behavior. In her study, De La O suggests that CCTs may lead to increased voter turnout and political engagement from marginalized groups. De La O takes things a step further, noting that by providing direct financial support, social welfare programs create a sense of political loyalty and, in some cases, dependency among various beneficiaries. In turn, this can shift political preferences and allegiances and reshape electoral dynamics in a given state. She notes that this relationship is even more important in emerging democracies, countries where political attitudes dramatically influence policymaking and elections (16).

Along the same lines, Imai, King, and Velasco Rivera (2019) suggest in their piece published in the *Journal of Politics*, *Do Nonpartisan Programmatic Policies Generate Partisan Electoral Effects? Evidence from Two Large Scale Experiments*, that CCTs can very well have unintended political consequences. They argue that even if these policies are created solely with the intent of improving the well-being of marginalized groups, they may also influence a shift in party support, namely if that party is recognized to be the main supporter or provider of various social benefits. In simpler terms, doing good for constituents can also increase voter support for incumbent policymakers. This intersection between social welfare policy and election impact reveals a complex relationship for policymakers. Do they appease the upper class by decreasing taxes or shift electoral support by increasing effective welfare programming, the benefits of which include short-term poverty alleviation and long-term human capital development? This relationship can shape

policy and political outcomes, reinforcing the idea that understanding the political impact of CCTs is important alongside addressing social benefits.

A common misconception of CCTs is that these policies solely make an impact in the short term. It has been proven that the impact of CCT programs like Progresa extends beyond the immediate needs of impoverished groups. Fiszbein, Schady, and Ferreira (2009), through the World Bank Group, suggest that these programs provide for short-term relief while also creating important next steps for reducing overall inequality and fostering sustainable development. Their study examines the impact of well-implemented social programs on narrowing the income inequality gap, demonstrating that making essential services, like education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, more accessible plays a crucial role in this battle. Examining this long-term impact is increasingly impactful regions like Latin America, which has been defined by a history of exploitative economies, colonial roots, and persistent inequality through the implementation of outsiders. Prados de la Escosura (2007), in his work published in *The New Comparative Economic History* through the MIT Press, further explores the context of inequality in Latin America with a historical deep dive, emphasizing that while poverty reduction efforts are a stated focus for many institutions, structural inequalities persist and require targeted intervention to allow for truly sustainable development for future generations. This piece agrees that CCTs, like Progresa, are tools that can be used to address deeper structural inequalities by fostering economic mobility alongside social inclusion (39).

Furthermore, it is essential to critically examine top-down program structures commonly seen in CCTs and actively involve community advocates in the planning process to foster accountability and ensure that implementation reflects the needs and voices of local populations. Improved long-term outcomes arise when governments invest in the education and health of their constituents while actively incorporating the voices of the communities they serve.

The broader and current context within Latin America is crucial to understanding how CCTs like Progresa can be adapted and impactful across the region. As demonstrated through the previously listed texts, CCTs not only impact access to essential services but also change the political dynamics of various governments (28). Cornelius (2004), an expert on immigration policy and Mexican studies published by the Stanford University Press, explains that policies like vote-buying and political intimidation were once common tools that political parties used to secure support in countries like Mexico. Targeted financial benefits were used as informal mechanisms to ensure politicians maintained loyalty from their constituents and the status quo remained in place. These practices were effective

in securing short-term political gains but reinforced the concept of the explicit exchange of goods for political support and perpetuated long-standing inequality in these nations.

In direct contrast, initial efforts by Progresá represented a major departure from this model, offering direct cash transfers not for political gain, but for investment in future generations; this marked a major shift towards increased citizen empowerment. However, by the third name change, the electorate realized that motivations for programming had departed from initial altruistic incentive and transitioned to a hopeful example of clientelism on behalf of Enrique Peña Nieto's Administration (4). This transition incited disillusionment amongst the very constituents EPN, and PRI, were aiming to win over (15). Scholars note that under EPN, the rebranding of Prospera was accompanied by the strategic use of social program benefits timed to election cycles and increased party-linked messaging at program-associated sites (4). This frustration from Mexico's marginalized groups underscores the tension between the program's original promises and the shifting political realities. De La O examines CCTs as tools for fostering trust, promoting transparency, and encouraging political engagement, highlighting the potential of these programs to strengthen democratic institutions when implemented with authenticity, accountability, and care. Through the transition of this program throughout its tenure, these tools faltered to live up to these standards despite their potential.

When implemented correctly, De La O (2015) argues that the transformative nature of this policy has led and can lead to a powerful stimulus for political engagement in the region. CCTs, specifically the early days and immediate goals of Progresá, offer transparent and direct benefits that increase trust in the state (15) because their direct goal is not to buy votes but to uplift the nation. This study further demonstrates that the increased popularity of CCTs in Latin American welfare systems encourages greater political participation amongst marginalized populations, contributing towards stability, social cohesion, and security within the political realm (15). But while these results seem promising, not all scholars agree with this impact across various contexts. Wilson (2018), an anthropology research affiliate with the University of Missouri, St. Louis, highlights that informal workers, who make up a large portion of the marginalized economy, often remain excluded from formal social welfare programs like Progresá and other CCTs. Informal workers make up a significant portion of the labor force within Latin American countries, making eligibility for programming more difficult and proper social change on behalf of governments even harder (43).

Exclusion from these programs means CCTs are not reaching the most vulnerable populations, those whom the programs were meant to benefit. This exclusion

perpetuates existing inequality and demonstrates a direct need for rethinking CCT scopes so that informal workers can receive program benefits. This not only applies to Mexico but also Brazil and Colombia, which implemented similar programs with promise in addressing their main goal but saw challenges reaching the informal sector. Addressing this gap is key to making CCTs an inclusive tool to effectively mitigate the impact of structural inequality throughout the region.

In summary, the literature indicates that properly instituted CCTs, in part like Progresá, have been incredibly effective in addressing their stated goals within marginalized populations. However, the relationship between political perception and social welfare programming warrants further investigation to understand the influence on political engagement and perception. While the positive impact of Progresá on human capital investment and integration into the formal economy is well-documented, shifts must be instituted to expand access to these programs to informal workers and other excluded groups to promote equitable growth. Addressing these apparent gaps is crucial to ensure that CCTs can comprehensively mitigate inequality and foster sustainable development across Latin America.

#### **Program Overview: Progresá**

Progresá (Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación) was a conditional cash transfer program launched in 1997 under PRI President Ernesto Zedillo. Its short-term objectives served to alleviate poverty through direct cash transfers, while its long-term goals were aimed at breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty by investing in human capital development in key areas of education, health, and nutrition. This program targeted children over seven years old "so as to prevent incentives for higher fertility" and increased subsidies by grade, acknowledging that opportunity costs of prioritizing education became more impactful with age, especially for girls (11). Initial benefits starting at 3rd grade were approximately 80 pesos per child, increasing to 265 and 305 pesos for boys and girls, respectively, by 9th grade (11). Transfers required an 85% attendance record and focused on achievement in school, with program eligibility dropping if students repeated a grade more than twice. It is important to note that increasing enrollment is not a comprehensive method to ensure improved educational outcomes amongst poor and marginalized groups. This sentiment was shared by the Mexican government, so while it is clear there were still many barriers to entry, they worked closely with the Ministry of Education to ensure extra resources were available for students in high-demand program areas. The food transfer portion was a 125 peso per month fixed subsidy, conditional on households making regular trips

to health clinics alongside monthly nutrition and hygiene information sessions. In total, depending on the number of children, households could be eligible for up to 750 pesos per month from education and health transfers, values which were inflation-indexed every six months.

In its infancy, “The Program began with an initial coverage of 300,000 families and a budget of \$59 million USD, accounting for 0.004% of the country’s GDP” (4). By 1999, the program had dramatically expanded covering “approximately 2.6 million rural families, constituting about 40% of all rural families and one ninth of all families in Mexico” (11), with the budget increasing to \$777 million or 20% of the Federal poverty alleviation budget (12). In 2002, the program transitioned to Oportunidades under Vicente Fox Quesada’s Administration. According to the International Food Policy Research Institute, additional program attributes were added to support vulnerable households, including:

- Income and nutrition assistance for female-headed families
- Educational scholarships for children and youth
- Financial aid for families with children under the age of nine
- Savings programs for youth who have completed secondary education
- Funding for essential school supplies
- Access to medical care and health education
- Nutritional supplements for infants (6–23 months), malnourished children (ages 2–5), and pregnant or nursing women
- Additional support for households with elderly members aged 70 or above
- Assistance with household energy costs (29)

By the end of its lifespan, Oportunidades had reached 6.5 million families and effectively laid the foundation for Prospera, a rebranded program launched in 2014. By the end of 2015, Prospera beneficiaries numbered more than 30 million, with the program spreading to approximately 7 million households (11). This rebrand focused on the original goals, while also expanding its stated mission to encourage long-term empowerment through job training and financial inclusion. It was under these additional elements, those that might have been the most impactful, that programming began to overpromise and underdeliver. By 2019, the program was officially phased out by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who criticized the program’s neoliberal conditionality over universal aid, insufficient impact on structural inequality, and targeted methods of clientelism (44). Prospera’s budget was repurposed to fund other poverty-reduction programs like Pensión para el Bienestar, Jóvenes Construyendo el

Futuro, and Becas Benito Juárez scholarships.

### Empirical Analysis

In this section, I present the results of my difference-in-differences (DiD) estimation, which aims to measure the political impact, in the form of share of voters, of the name change from Oportunidades to Prospera on voter support for the incumbent President, Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN), and the governing party, Partido Institucional Revolucionario (PRI). By utilizing LAPOP survey data from 2014 and 2016/17, this analysis isolates the long-term impact of program rebranding on voter support and preferences while controlling for key demographic variables, including income, age, sex, and victimization status. The results below test this effect across various subsamples, including various income levels, age brackets, and regions, offering important insight into how social program perception and government authenticity may shape electoral support.

### Methodology

This study uses a quantitative approach, employing a regression analysis to assess how political support varies throughout Progres’s tenure, namely support for the Partido Institucional Revolucionario (PRI) represented by Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) from 2012-2018. This regression examines how income, age, victimization status, and sex influence share of support for EPN in 2014 and then again after the program name change from Oportunidades to Prospera during the next Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) sampling (during 2016/17).

**Model specification:**  $\text{Share of Voters for EPN}_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{Income}_{it} + \beta_2 \cdot (\text{Income}_{it} \cdot \text{Treat}_{it}) + \beta_3 \cdot \text{Treat}_{it} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Age}_{it} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{Victim}_{it} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{Sex}_{it} + \epsilon_{it}$

The dependent variable is the share of people voting for EPN or PRI at the municipality and urban/rural level. This analysis is conducted at different aggregation levels, specifically municipality (share of voters), province (share of voters<sup>2</sup>), and urban/rural (share of voters<sup>3</sup>), to test the robustness of the treatment effect. The treatment of this study is employed via a dummy variable equal to 1 for the 2016/17 survey (following the name change) and 0 for 2014 (with data collected before the name change in January/February of that year). The independent variables are:

- $\text{Income}_{it}$ : Monthly household income for individual  $i$  in group  $j$  (measured at the individual level).
- $\text{Treat}_{it}$ : A dummy variable indicating whether or not the survey was exposed to the

- treatment (Prospera name change in 2014).
- $\text{Income} * \text{Treat}$ : An interaction term between income and treatment to test if the effect of income on the vote share changed after the name change.
- $\text{Age}_{it}$ : Age of individual  $i$  in year  $t$ .
- $\text{Victim}_{it}$ : A dummy variable indicating whether or not the individual  $i$  has been a victim of a crime in the last 12 months in year  $t$ .
- $\text{Sex}_{it}$ : Gender of individual  $i$  in year  $t$ .
- $\epsilon_{it}$ : The error term.

After cleaning the data, the sample size consisted of 656 individuals, including respondents from Mexico in both the 2014 and 2016/17 surveys. The sample was then further divided into subsamples by income level, age, and geographic location. Income levels and age cohorts were broken into subsamples using LAPOP's scale to examine heterogeneous effects. Income was classified by above or below the median as well as by quartiles: income  $\leq 4$  representing the bottom quartile (low-income), income  $> 8$  representing above the median, and income  $> 12$  representing the top quartile (high-income). Age was divided into three groups: younger than 38, older than 38, and older than 52. The urban/rural analysis showed a high  $R^2$  ( $\approx 0.80$ ), suggesting meaningful differences in voting patterns across different geographic contexts; these differences bolster reasoning to test this model across aggregation levels.

### Results

Across both models, the treatment exposure has a consistently negative and highly statistically significant effect on voter support for EPN. In other words, across all populations surveyed, support for EPN throughout his term decreased. In the full sample model seen within Table 2, the coefficient on the treatment variable is  $-0.10545$ , meaning there is a statistically significant result of a 10.5 percentage point decrease ( $p = 0.000$ ) in support from 2014 to 2016/17 for EPN. In Table 3, this lack of support remains consistent with the treatment coefficient of  $-0.11448$ , corresponding to an 11.4 percentage point decrease ( $p = 0.000$ ) in support, highlighting consistently negative impacts across the municipality level alongside urban and rural level models.

In both models, income independently predicts lower support for EPN, particularly amongst older individuals and those living in rural communities. The full sample at the municipality level in Table 2 shows an income coefficient of  $-0.00641$ , indicating a 0.64 percentage point decline in support per income unit ( $p = 0.001$ ). This effect is also significant for older groups, like those aged 38+, showing a 0.63 percentage point decline ( $p = 0.001$ ) and

those aged 52+, indicating a 0.62 percentage point decrease per income unit ( $p = 0.045$ ), respectively. The strongest negative income effect is measured amongst the poorest group (income  $\leq 4$ ), where the coefficient is  $-0.01229$ , corresponding to a 1.23 percentage point decrease per income unit ( $p < 0.001$ ). These findings suggest that while EPN largely lost support amongst all his constituents following the name change to Prospera, the support of poorer and older groups decreased most dramatically.

Further, the interaction term reveals that treatment effects are impacted by income, with lower-income individuals showing stronger negative treatment effects. In the municipality full model seen in Table 2, the interaction term coefficient for Income  $\leq 8$  is  $-0.01133$ , suggesting a 1.13 percentage point additional decrease under treatment ( $p = 0.095$ ). However, amongst higher-income individuals, for Income  $> 8$ , the interaction coefficient is a positive  $0.01222$  ( $p = 0.073$ ), indicating that higher-income individuals are less negatively affected, or in this case, experience a slight increase in support, from treatment exposure.

Within the Urban/Rural aggregation, the Income x Treatment coefficient in the full sample is  $0.00164$ , meaning that for each additional unit of income, there is a 1.64 percentage point increase for EPN ( $p < 0.001$ ). Amongst the poorest constituents (Income  $\leq 4$ ), the interaction term is  $0.00949$  ( $p = 0.019$ ), meaning that the overall negative effect of the treatment, the decreasing support for EPN, is the largest for the poorest of voters. Additionally, among older individuals, those in the Age  $\geq 38$  category, the coefficient is  $0.00201$  ( $p < 0.001$ ). This implies that the negative effect of treatment is strongest for older, low-income individuals. Across all models, these results show that rural, older, and lower-income groups' support for the incumbent president is more sensitive to the name change in 2014.

### Discussion

#### ***Branding, Legitimacy, Trust, and the Political Impact of Social Programs***

The rebranding of Progresa to Oportunidades and then Prospera highlights how public perception and political legitimacy are impacted by program changes, or in this case, politicized program changes. While programs that are authentically improved and modernized are met with positive responses from the constituents they serve, like the expansion of Progresa into Oportunidades, those perceived as politically motivated branding efforts can have the opposite effect. When social programs are delivered in these ways, especially given the context of Mexico's history in which trust between marginalized communities and the government is already strained, their legitimacy becomes compromised. This breakdown of trust is reflected in lower

voting support, as voters recognized that their political leaders misrepresented their intentions. This erosion of confidence did not impact Prospera's program cycle but instead raised broader concerns about democratic accountability and sustainable development. Progresa's outcomes, much like other CCTs, highlight the impact of branding, not just program content, in shaping voter trust and offer a foundation for understanding how these shifts impact public sentiment in other settings.

#### ***From Assistance to Empowerment: The Long-Term Potential of CCTs***

Conditional cash transfer programs like Progresa, while instituting effective temporary assistance measures, have always been framed as long-term investments in human capital (8). In many ways, this program delivered on its immediate promises of increased school attendance and child health with declining poverty rates. However, the more difficult question, one which focuses on whether those gains actually instituted long-term structural change, is more complex. Some studies show modest improvements in long-term outcomes (7) while others believe the program simply redistributed human capital, productivity, and cash to more dynamic urban centers instead of investing in rural, marginalized areas (10). This disconnect points to the promise and potential of Progresa, suggesting that it was effective in completing its short-term objectives, while it had the opportunity to influence and help supply-side investment by confronting underlying structural issues that might limit economic mobility. Progresa was effective and serves as the gold standard for replicable CCTs, but it also reveals the limits of social policy when not paired with broader, inclusive growth strategies in exclusionary, segmented societies. Understanding these limits helps explain why rebranding the program without deeper structural reforms and direct community involvement did not inspire voter support, especially in communities that felt little long-term, structural changes.

#### ***Historical Disillusionment and the Weight of Marginalization***

The deeply-rooted distrust that many marginalized communities feel towards the government and programs sponsored by it, like Progresa, cannot be understood without revisiting the long history of exclusion, broken promises, and systemic neglect since the Mexican Revolution. Unequal access to resources, including land, education, healthcare, financial systems, and political voice, has left a legacy that is only worsened by inauthentic or passive policy that maintains the status quo. This history puts the burden of proof on the Mexican government; they must do more than roll out renamed old policies

and instead engage with communities so their voices are centered in the design and implementation of policy. Trust must be earned, and the early years of Progresa serve as an important, altruistic example of meaningful steps in the right direction. However, the larger task of rebuilding trust is ongoing and requires recognition, accountability, and continued commitment.

#### ***Conditionality, Agency, and Social Contracts***

At the heart of social programs comes the question of agency, whether CCTs like Progresa empower recipients or reinforce paternalistic control. This tension represents a fine line, but one that Progresa managed more successfully than other similar programs. On one hand, requiring school attendance and health check-ups could be seen as a form of coercion, with recipients needing to earn the support of the state. However, because these conditions were so closely tied to the well-being and fair treatment of individuals who had long been excluded from access to these programs, it served as a promotion of agency rather than dependency. Through these conditions, program beneficiaries were empowered and engaged with resources, increasing their accessibility and human capital development. And while Progresa handled this balance well, intentionality and integrity must remain so that there is a genuine investment in dignity, inclusion, and transparency of program development.

#### ***Key Collaborations: Sustainable Development and Institutional Reliance***

While the stated goals of Progresa, and later Prospera, directly align with many of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—most notably SDG 1 (poverty elimination), SDG 3 (ensure good health and well-being), SDG 4 (promote quality education), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities)—its limitations highlight the complex realities of implementing sustainable development models, to scale, within politicized national contexts. This program was applauded for its usage of conditional cash transfers, aiming to break intergenerational poverty while ensuring agency and dignity amongst program participants. However, sustainability cannot be assessed only in short-term contexts. With a reliance on institutional infrastructure, long-term investment, and interdisciplinary collaboration, Progresa demonstrates the difficulties of actualizing theoretical programming.

One of the core limitations of the model facilitates a reliance on institutions, highlighting the need not just for demand-side incentives but also parallel investments in institutional capacities, including in schools and health clinics. In a comprehensive study within the journal for

Economic Development and Cultural Change, economists Behrman, Sengupta, and Todd emphasize the effectiveness of Progresa's early years, including higher enrollment, lower dropout and repetition rates, and better grade progression. However, they also found "no support for the existence of strong spillover effects on children who did not receive school subsidies under the program but who reside in communities where PROGRESA is active" (8). These findings reinforce that the main driver of improved outcomes was the conditional cash transfer, focusing on demand-side policies, but that did not mean that education and healthcare were increasing in quality for communities with noticeable deficits in resources and infrastructure. Progresa did not directly fund schools, but focused supply-side efforts on resource allocation to ensure increased demand did not overwhelm the already existing systems (11). A key assumption within this model is that increasing access to education, health clinics, and financial systems will allow for the upward mobility of historically marginalized groups. However, even when people are encouraged to participate in these systems and given cash incentives to do so, it does not mean that the institutions themselves are improving. Increasing access to these systems is the differentiator that will decrease inequality in Mexico and other developing countries, but results require demand-side investment so these institutions can deliver meaningful services that allow individuals to thrive, not just participate.

Additionally, political shifts challenge the understanding that Progresa was *sustainable*. Because this program was so closely tied to individual administrations, with Progresa paired with Zedillo and PRI, Oportunidades with PAN administrations, and Prospera with EPN (and back to PRI), programming was highly susceptible to rebranding or repurposing for political gain rather than sustained development outcomes. By the announcement of Prospera in 2014, it became increasingly clear that EPN was appealing to clientelism rather than focusing on legitimate change, undercutting the continuity and memory of the program.

The messaging cannot be misunderstood: Progresa was effective in hitting key goals, increasing access to education and health care, and contributing towards long-term human capital development through scholarships, vocational training, and financial inclusion, allowing for its replication across 52 countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa (19). However, in its many iterations, it remains debatable whether Progresa achieved holistic sustainability through the lens of structural resilience and institutional reliance. Due to the exposure of its limitations, through political connections, institutional fragmentation, and largely one-sided investment, Progresa and its replications have the capacity for growth as they aim to serve a growing base of individuals pleading for legitimate, sustainable reform. Ultimately, the continued challenge for Progresa and other conditional cash transfer

programs globally lies not in proving short-term impact but in delivering resilient, equitable systems that can authentically reform exclusionary systems.

### ***Building Better Social Contracts: Authenticity, Communication, and Community Trust***

Rebuilding public trust in institutions and government goes far beyond policy efficiency, but instead demands authenticity, transparency, and a willingness to engage with marginalized communities as equal partners. Progresa's effective, immediate poverty-alleviation and long-term development model reveals both the promise and limitations of top-down design. The success Progresa saw in improving education and health outcomes fell short in fostering sustained community trust and success, in part due to limited feedback loops and minimal community involvement in decision-making. The scale at which Progresa operated was impressive, but it also demonstrated a lack of cultural grounding and localized engagement that would have allowed beneficiaries to express community-specific concerns and to feel embedded in the planning of the program. Building stronger social programs means relying on open forums, community feedback loops, and increased inclusion of community members in the planning process to ensure that communities feel active in solution making. More importantly, community members must have the opportunity to voice specific concerns that could only be known through conversations at the grassroots level. For initiatives like Progresa and its global peers, the next hurdle is not just scale, but authentic inclusion that strengthens the social contract between governments and constituents from the ground up.

### ***Broader Latin American Application and CCTs as Tools of Regional Reform***

Mexico's Progresa laid the foundation for the conditional cash transfer method, one of the most influential anti-poverty strategies instituted throughout the Global South. Progresa's core strengths in targeting low-income households with conditional measures, having clearly measurable results through randomized control trials (RCTs), and focusing on long-term benefits of investment in education and health represented replicable frameworks for other nations in the region. While Progresa successfully reached 6.5 million families, its top-down structure limited community participation in decision-making and focused on bolstering party support rather than instituting effective aid, all of which stand as important concerns for other countries adopting similar models.

Brazil's Bolsa Família used Progresa's initial model and expanded on several measures to increase impact. Firstly, while still focusing on measures related to health

and education, the Brazilian model layered other effective small-scale assistance efforts into a comprehensive national policy, overlapping ideals of local implementation, unconditional basic income and universal protection, and broad bipartisan support without branding issues (30).

Colombia's Familias en Acción also adapted a CCT model, specifically focusing on vulnerable regions of those most impacted by violence and displacement. This served as a key example of programs, specifically CCTs, being tailored to the individual contexts, as Colombia focused on preventive care services related to vaccination programs, nutritional workshops, access to contraception, and incentives to attend school (36). Peru's Juntos targeted those in remote, extreme poverty, again focusing on health and education advances through CCTs, enabling not only improved school attendance but also measurable and disproportionate improvements in growth (less stunting) for children with access to the programming (18).

What was effective for Progresas, and remains an essential pillar for CCTs, was the rigorous and ethical use of RCTs for program evaluation, justifying policy decisions and further investment. However, Progresas's struggles with institutional fragility, insufficient community consultation, and susceptibility to politicization exposed vulnerability within this model. Taking Progresas and its later iterations as examples, other Latin American nations must not only rely on technical design but also focus on transparency, the incorporation of community advocates, local oversight bodies, and institutional investment for continued success and empowerment.

#### ***Limitations, Bias, and Future Research***

While this study is comprehensive in approach, it is limited by the availability of the data. LAPOP data serves as an invaluable resource for understanding public opinion data across Latin America for high-quality analysis, but the current biennial frequency of the data collection limits the ability to track rapid political changes. In the case of this study, increasing the frequency of data collection might enable more accurate capture of the impact of the name change to Prospera on support for EPN and PRI. This analysis recognizes that the treatment dummy variable may be capturing other exogenous factors that would contribute to a lack of support for EPN outside of this social programming. However, it is important to recognize that sentiments of distrust and disillusionment were deeply embedded in the larger context of EPN's policy and presidency (43). While the data may not perfectly isolate the effects of the transition to Prospera, it effectively captures the overall political climate and voter sentiment during this period of name change. These findings reinforce broader public perception, even if causality cannot be attributed to the program change alone.

Similarly, while this analysis provides evidence about how voting patterns differ across various populations, emphasizing the increased sensitivity of income level, geographic location, and age, this study cannot definitively identify the causes of such differences. However, when supplemented by external research pointing to a larger history of frustration and broken promises on behalf of the government, a more informed picture emerges. These patterns may reflect deeper structural issues, including declining confidence in institutions, limited access to quality education, and perceived stagnation of economic mobility. While these factors are beyond the scope of this study, this context is essential for interpreting voter behavior.

Finally, this analysis is limited by a lack of a personal approach. In an ideal world, a longitudinal case study following several children exposed to the early years of Progresas into their adulthood would offer a powerful, grassroots-level perspective on the program's long-term impact. Such data could offer insights beyond statistical effectiveness, focusing on the lived experience of intergenerational change and long-term human capital development.

#### ***Hope, Buen Vivir, and Vision Rooted in Human Dignity***

In the midst of all these contingencies, hope, agency, and potential remain for marginalized populations in Mexico. Current President Claudia Sheinbaum (member of MORENA, elected in 2024) has made addressing social inequalities, connecting with indigenous roots, and crafting comprehensive welfare policies a priority of her administration. Through initiatives like Pensión Mujeres Bienestar and Salud Casa por Casa alongside programs to protect indigenous planting methods and ban pesticides, Sheinbaum's government is working to restore a more inclusive society highlighting the dignity and rights of historically marginalized groups. While challenges remain, her leadership offers a new perspective to top-down government, one which focuses on voices from the bottom-up and where marginalized communities can have agency, connect, and thrive.

#### **Conclusion**

Mexico's Progresas, while widely praised for its measurable improvements in education, health, and poverty reduction, reveals deeper nuance and complexity when examined through a political, historical, and cultural lens. The program's rebranding, from Progresas to Oportunidades to Prospera, revealed more than logistical and scaling changes; it reflected shifting political priorities with tangible effects on public perception, trust, and support. These shifts demonstrate that even technically

sound, impactful, comprehensive, top-down welfare programs can lose touch with the groups they are aiming to serve when authenticity, active communication, and cultural alignment falter—namely in lower-income, rural, and older communities. The history of marginalization, unmet promises, and disillusionment in Mexico, amplified by Revolutionary literature and echoed in modern data-driven results, emphasize that social progress and reforms are not just about increasing access to resources; they also reveal how well-designed programs can serve as the foundation for rebuilding trust between governments and communities that have been underserved. Progresa's trajectory illustrates the challenges of balancing policy implementation with democratic authenticity. Social programs must be viewed not only as economic interventions, but as integral components of government responsibility that continually shape citizen-state relationships and political behavior. For conditional cash transfers and other similar programs throughout Latin America and beyond, design cannot only focus on economic efficiency but must also reflect the voices and needs of the communities most impacted. If Latin America is to escape the trap of inequality and instability, a trap set by external colonial and neocolonial power structures, it must reimagine social welfare as a social contract, deeply rooted in mutual respect, equity, and empowerment. Only by listening to those whom programs seek to serve can states evolve from top-down institutions into partners fit for mutual human flourishing.

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APPENDIX

Model	Dependent Variable	Sample	Independent Variables
Model 1	Share of Voters (Municipality)	Full Sample	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 2	Share of Voters (Municipality)	Income > 8	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 3	Share of Voters (Municipality)	Income = 8	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 4	Share of Voters (Municipality)	Age < 38	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Victim, Sex
Model 5	Share of Voters (Municipality)	Age = 38	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Victim, Sex
Model 6	Share of Voters (Municipality)	Age = 52	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Victim, Sex
Model 7	Share of Voters (Urban/Rural)	Full Sample	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 8	Share of Voters (Urban/Rural)	Income > 8	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 9	Share of Voters (Urban/Rural)	Income > 12	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 10	Share of Voters (Urban/Rural)	Income = 4	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 11	Share of Voters (Urban/Rural)	Income = 8	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Age, Victim, Sex
Model 12	Share of Voters (Urban/Rural)	Age < 38	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Victim, Sex
Model 13	Share of Voters (Urban/Rural)	Age = 38	Income, Income × Treat, Treat, Victim, Sex

Table 1. Model Summary

Variable	Full Sample (1)	Income > 8 (2)	Income = 8 (3)	Age < 38 (4)	Age = 38 (5)	Age = 52 (6)
<b>Income</b>	-0.00641 (***) (0.00187)	-0.00732 (0.00477)	0.00602 (0.00489)	-0.00448 (0.00311)	-0.00629 (***) (0.00232)	-0.00618 (**) (0.00302)
<b>Income × Treat</b>	0.00250 (0.00246)	0.01222 (*) (0.00740)	-0.01133 (*) (0.00611)	0.00237 (0.00437)	0.00177 (0.00297)	0.00199 (0.00404)
<b>Treat</b>	-0.10545 (***) (0.02174)	-0.22036 (**) (0.09354)	-0.04337 (0.03191)	-0.08635 (**) (0.03540)	-0.11050 (***) (0.02741)	-0.11444 (***) (0.03609)
<b>Age</b>	-0.00109 (***) (0.00034)	-0.00079 (0.00057)	-0.00119 (***) (0.00042)	–	–	–
<b>Victim</b>	0.01440 (0.01270)	0.01038 (0.01927)	0.01721 (0.01727)	0.02776 (0.02082)	0.00239 (0.01610)	-0.03269 (0.02440)
<b>Sex</b>	-0.00701 (0.01116)	-0.00617 (0.01770)	-0.00909 (0.01440)	0.03738 (*) (0.01941)	-0.02635 (**) (0.01333)	-0.03281 (*) (0.01843)
<b>Constant</b>	0.47071 (***) (0.03901)	0.46367 (***) (0.07828)	0.41828 (***) (0.05429)	0.32420 (***) (0.05899)	0.46378 (***) (0.04484)	0.52918 (***) (0.06579)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.113	0.089	0.125	0.086	0.128	0.142
<b>F-statistic</b>	13.38	3.63	10.26	4.32	11.27	6.53
<b>Prob &gt; F</b>	0	0.0018	0	0.0009	0	0
<b>Root MSE</b>	0.137	0.132	0.14	0.139	0.136	0.134

Table 2. Regression Results Using Municipality-Level Share of Voters Full Sample for EPN.  
 Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance: \*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*p<0.05, \*p<0.10.

APPENDIX

Variable	Full Sample (1)	Income > 8 (2)	Income > 12 (3)	Income = 4 (4)	Income = 8 (5)	Age < 38 (6)	Age = 38 (7)
<b>Income</b>	-0.00225 (***) (0.00040)	-0.00206 (**) (0.00096)	-0.00051 (0.00238)	-0.01229 (***) (0.00369)	-0.00189 (0.00127)	-0.00144 (*) (0.00081)	-0.00256 (***) (0.00046)
<b>Income × Treat</b>	0.00164 (***) (0.00043)	0.00161 (0.00105)	-0.00020 (0.00276)	0.00949 (**) (0.00387)	0.00109 (0.00133)	0.00071 (0.00086)	0.00201 (***) (0.00049)
<b>Treat</b>	-0.11448 (***) (0.00434)	-0.11365 (***) (0.01365)	-0.08874 (**) (0.04060)	-0.13492 (***) (0.01196)	-0.11229 (***) (0.00725)	-0.10619 (***) (0.00786)	-0.11796 (***) (0.00525)
<b>Age</b>	-0.00003 (0.00006)	0.00000 (0.00010)	-0.00020 (*) (0.00011)	-0.00012 (0.00010)	-0.00005 (0.00009)	–	–
<b>Victim</b>	0.00534 (**) (0.00210)	0.00315 (0.00274)	0.00539 (**) (0.00222)	0.00536 (0.00451)	0.00679 (**) (0.00311)	0.00571 (0.00351)	0.00472 (*) (0.00263)
<b>Sex</b>	-0.00207 (0.00207)	0.00028 (0.00285)	0.00124 (0.00353)	-0.00597 (*) (0.00351)	-0.00344 (0.00289)	-0.00107 (0.00351)	-0.00188 (0.00252)
<b>Constant</b>	0.32817 (***) (0.00772)	0.32470 (***) (0.01500)	0.30745 (***) (0.03136)	0.36324 (***) (0.01573)	0.32739 (***) (0.01172)	0.31723 (***) (0.01167)	0.33076 (***) (0.00857)
<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	0.804	0.833	0.912	0.826	0.792	0.8	0.807
<b>F-statistic</b>	531.27	302.4	365.49	117.69	250.34	205.89	439.87
<b>Prob &gt; F</b>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Root MSE</b>	0.025	0.021	0.015	0.024	0.027	0.025	0.025

**Table 3. Regression Results Using Urban/Rural-Level Share of Voters for EPN.**  
 Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Statistical significance: \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.10$ .



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Mia Clingham ('25) graduated from the Villanova University Honors Program with majors in Economics, Political Science, and Spanish Language & Literature. Among many formative experiences, she served as the Co-Chair of the 19th Annual St. Thomas of Villanova Day of Service, a Teaching Assistant for the Economics Department, a Line Producer and Fundraising Team member with Oak Tree Films, and the President of Kappa Kappa Gamma. She is incredibly grateful for the support and guidance of the Villanova community in fostering her academic interests, leadership, and personal growth over the past four years. She is excited to start her professional career in High Yield Credit while continuing to pursue research opportunities stemming from her undergraduate interests.



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