

# Does Crime Matter? The Politics of Crime Prevention in Colombia

Juan D. Gelvez<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>University of Maryland, Government and Politics Department, USA. , Email: [jgelvez@umd.edu](mailto:jgelvez@umd.edu). Website: [juangelvezf.github.io](https://juangelvezf.github.io)

This manuscript was compiled on February 16, 2024

**Why do governments prevent crime in some places and not others? Who are the primary beneficiaries of the security provision? This paper examines how the incumbent uses crime prevention projects as a pork-barrel good, in order to finance swing-voter municipalities. Using a mixed-method approach, which includes the analysis of a granular dataset of crime prevention funds and interviews with policymakers and bureaucrats, I study how electoral incentives can explain differences in security provision in Colombia. To do so, I conduct several fixed effect models and a regression discontinuity design that measures the effects of electoral results on money distribution, taking advantage of party alignment and margin of victory. I also interviewed policymakers and bureaucrats to shed light on the mechanisms behind these results. My study suggests that electoral competition, party alignment between national and local politicians, and the minister's interest play pivotal roles in shaping security provisions across the country.**

Crime | Mixed-methods | Pork Barrel | Swing voter | Colombia

High rates of crime, from street-level violence to transnational illicit activities, present challenges to both individual safety and community well-being. The repercussions of crime extend throughout societies, impacting economic development (Fe and Sanfelice, 2022), public health (Baranyi et al., 2021), and overall quality of life (Kawachi et al., 1999). Citizens worldwide, especially in Latin America, advocate for effective policies against crime (Blair and Weintraub, 2023; Flores-Macías and Zarkin, 2023). Therefore, politicians across the political spectrum have clear proposals and increasing their agendas for addressing crime issues (Enns, 2014; Jennings et al., 2017). In simpler terms, crime matters.

If crime is salient, then, strategies to prevent it should be focused on areas with higher levels of criminality. However, similar to other public policies (Stokes et al., 2013; Calvo and Murillo, 2019), the allocation of resources for security may be influenced by factors beyond the primary goal of crime prevention. Does crime matter in the prevention of crime? Who are the primary beneficiaries of crime prevention? or even more specifically, how are funds designated for addressing insecurity and reducing crime at the local level distributed among sub-national beneficiaries?

This paper studies the politics of crime prevention in Colombia, a country with one of the highest levels of violence and crime in Latin America. Mainly, I focus on the distribution of crime prevention funding from the national government to sub-national authorities. Electoral and “pork-barrel” incentives, I argue, play a significant role in shaping the allocation of crime prevention funds. This way of pork-barrel distribution - understood as the targeted exchange of votes for goods, money, or benefits - is a common phenomenon throughout the world (Golden and Min, 2013). When the exchange of targeted rewards for votes becomes widespread, this can undermine

electoral accountability and lead to democratic backsliding (Mares and Young, 2018).

This research presents compelling evidence that the incumbent has an interest in providing security projects to electoral strategic places, rather than prioritizing areas with higher crime prevalence. To demonstrate this, I propose a multi-methods approach whereby I unpack the preferences of the national government involved in the provision of security. First, I conduct several fixed effects models, using granular data at the project level ( $n=546$ ), to test potential determinants of the provision of crime prevention projects. The controls include factors that can influence both the State’s ability to respond to insecurity and the levels of crime in the municipality. I also take advantage of the incumbent’s margin of victory to employ a regression-discontinuity (RD) design, testing whether the national government favors those locations where it won by a narrow margin.

Both quantitative approaches strongly suggest that the national executive considers the outcome of the previous presidential election when providing security, favoring places with greater electoral competition. In fact, this research shows that money transfers followed an inverted U-shape across levels of presidential vote share, a behavior that scholars have called swing-voter strategy (Cox, 2009; Stokes et al., 2013). Within areas with electoral competition, I found strong evidence that municipalities where the president lost predominantly benefit from the implementation of crime prevention projects. In sum, I find that the incumbent’s vote share is the main driver of security provision in the country, and those places where he lost with a small margin benefit the most.

Likewise, I triangulate my quantitative findings by presenting the results of semi-structured interviews with policymakers and bureaucrats. My fieldwork evidence strengthens my quantitative analysis by triangulating<sup>1</sup> whether these behaviors are a strategy of the incumbent’s political coalition. In particular, the interviews explored the reasoning behind the prioritization of certain places over others, considering factors such as political alignments, electoral outcomes, the role of the ministers, and the presence of competing political parties. My qualitative findings suggest that the incumbent president indeed implemented a plan to strengthen his political allies in preparation for the upcoming presidential elections.

My contribution to literature is threefold. First, this article builds on the research of distributive politics, which involves allocations of government goods and services, especially in the Global South a region where literature has less explored these

<sup>1</sup>Read Lieberman (2005) and Seawright (2021)’s research of triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods.

phenomena (Golden and Min, 2013; Stokes et al., 2013). Several authors have found that clientelistic parties use outcome-contingent transfers to allocate resources among districts and voters (Calvo and Murillo, 2019); fewer studies, however, have explored sensitive policies such as crime prevention in the Global South<sup>2</sup>. Second, this article contributes to the growing literature on the politics of crime and the relationship of crime with electoral behavior<sup>3</sup>. Due to the difficulty of tracking crime prevention funding in developing countries, this paper is particularly important in this enlarging literature. Finally, I contribute to the literature on multi-methods approaches by using advanced regression techniques that informed extended semi-structured interviews with policymakers and bureaucrats at the national and sub-national levels.

## Background

**Colombia's Political Background: Iván Duque and Centro Democrático.** In the first two decades of the century, *Uribismo* has been the most powerful force in the electoral arena in Colombia (Gamboa Gutiérrez, 2019). Its leader, Álvaro Uribe, and its political party, *Centro Democrático*, are characterized by a focus on national security and combating crime and drug trafficking. In 2018, Iván Duque, a protégé of Uribe and a member of the *Centro Democrático*, was elected as president. Duque was victorious in the second round, earning 54% of the vote to Gustavo Petro's 42%. Duque won 24 of Colombia's 32 departments and performed well in the inland areas. Duque campaigned on a platform of continuing Uribe's policies of combating crime and drug trafficking, as well as promoting economic growth and job creation (Kline and Rettberg, 2022).

During Iván Duque's presidency (2018-2022), he prioritized security and combating crime. As a result, the budget allocated to this area increased significantly, making it one of Colombia's top three public expenditures, surpassing other sectors like transportation, equity, and science.<sup>4</sup> One of Duque's main initiatives was to strengthen and support the Colombian National Police, which involved increasing the number of police officers and providing them with additional resources, including new technology and training (Gélvez et al., 2023).

However, Duque's policies on crime deterrence were not without controversy. Some criticized his approach as being too heavy-handed and focused on punishment rather than prevention (Moya, 2022). For example, in November 2019, a wave of protests broke out across Colombia in response to a range of issues, including proposed economic reforms, corruption, and police brutality (Turkewitz and Villamil, 2021). The protests often turned violent, with clashes between police and demonstrators, vandalism, and looting. During the protests, Iván Duque strongly defended the police and their actions. He argued that the police were doing their job to maintain public order and prevent violence, and that they had acted with restraint and professionalism in the face of difficult circumstances (Tejada and Turkewitz, 2021).

**Crime prevention funds in Colombia.** In Colombia, there are different ways of financing crime prevention projects at the

subnational level. According to the National Government, these can be categorized into intergovernmental transfers, own-source revenues, and public-private partnerships (Gobierno Nacional, 2019). Even though local governments can use all of these resources, qualitative studies have found that subnational entities prefer own-source revenues and intergovernmental transfers (Gélvez et al., 2023). Own-source revenues, however, depend on the capacity of municipalities to collect taxes (Jaimes, 2020). Therefore, municipalities with low capacity have limits to self-finance security projects, making them dependent on a number of centrally managed transfers. This research focuses on the main fund of intergovernmental transfer, the *Fondo Nacional de Seguridad y Convivencia Ciudadana* (FONSECON).

FONSECON is a fund established by the Colombian government to provide financial support for programs and initiatives to improve public safety and promote peaceful coexistence among citizens at the subnational level (MinInterior and Policía, Nacional, 2020). Managed by the Ministry of the Interior, the fund primarily finances local projects and activities related to deterring crime, community policing, and rehabilitating victims of crime and violence. As one of the bureaucrats explained, through the year, subnational entities -sometimes encouraged by the National Government- submit project requests to the Ministry of the Interior, which then supports project formulation and occasionally requests counterpart funding from the municipality or department where the project will be implemented.<sup>5</sup>

Even though the main objective of FONSECON is to reduce crime and violence in Colombia (Congreso de Colombia, 2010), the type of project has changed depending on the government or minister in charge. Twenty years ago, FONSECON was mostly used to finance projects to fight against rebel groups; therefore, the funds were mainly used to buy "war material" (construction of barracks, intelligence networks, equipment for the military forces, among others) (Congreso de Colombia, 1997). Nowadays, FONSECON is dedicated to addressing crime prevention (Gil et al., 2021) and supports four main types of projects: Police Mobility (comprising motorcycles, vehicles, and boats for law enforcement), Public Infrastructure (encompassing Municipal Administrative Centers, Fire Stations, and Police Stations), Public Parks (including design, construction studies, and development), and Surveillance (involving cameras and radios). Refer to Figure 1 for a breakdown of FONSECON costs per project from 2018 to 2022.

During each annual or bi-annual meeting, bureaucrats from four institutions - Ministries of Interior, Defense, and ICT, and the National Planning Department - come together to decide which projects FONSECON will finance. A former bureaucrat explained that, in theory, the committee discusses each project's necessity, structure, and viability before voting on them. Each institution casts a vote for every project, and the Ministry of Interior ultimately makes the final decision.<sup>6</sup>

## Theoretical expectations

**Pork-barrel goods.** Political scientists have deeply studied how government goods and services are provided (Cox and McCubbins, 1986; Dixit and Londregan, 1996). This field, distributive

<sup>2</sup> See Alberti et al. (2023) as a remarkable example of crime funds and political outcomes in Chile.

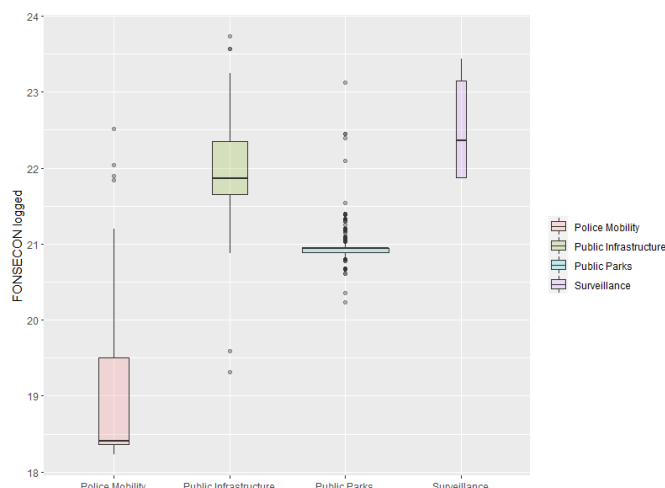
<sup>3</sup> For instance, Bateson (2012); Holland (2013); Dow (2022); Carreras and Visconti (2022); Nieto-Matiz (2023).

<sup>4</sup> In 2022, for example, Duque's administration allocated 43 trillion Colombian pesos to the security sector, making it the second largest allocation following the education sector. Ministerio de Hacienda (2023).

<sup>5</sup> Interview by the author, National Bureaucrat, 19 June 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Interview by the author, National Bureaucrat, 19 June 2023.

Fig. 1. FONSECON distribution by type of project during 2018-2022.



politics, lies at the heart of comparative politics, which involves specifically discussing the targeted voter, the type of resources distributed, the period of the electoral cycle, and the effect of the distribution on voters' preferences, among other particularities of the politics of redistribution (Lasswell, 1936).

This part of the literature assumes that politicians are motivated by the desire to retain public office and, therefore, offer voters particularised benefits, from programmatic to pork-barrel goods (Golden and Min, 2013). Our understanding of electoral practices has advanced in both democratic and authoritarian regimes and in several regions worldwide. Particularly in Latin America, clientelistic exchanges have been documented in a variety of settings, including Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, Panama, and Paraguay, among others (Larcinese et al., 2006; Diaz-Cayeros et al., 2016; Calvo and Murillo, 2019; Johnson, 2020; Alcañiz and Giraudy, 2022; Nieto-Matiz, 2023).

This research builds from this literature by studying the provision of crime prevention projects at the subnational level. As I delve into this section, I argue that these projects were used as a pork barrel good destined to target "swing" municipalities. To do so, I firstly adopt the definition of pork-barrel goods provided by Stokes et al. (2013), wherein they characterize them as nonprogrammatic allocations not specifically targeted at individuals—typically local public goods, defined as locally nonexcludable and nonrivalrous— but determined on the basis of partisanship. They further define nonprogrammatic allocations as those based on criteria that are not made fully public.<sup>7</sup>

The distribution of pork-barrel goods has been closely linked to candidates pursuing a "personal vote" (Cain et al., 1987; Carey and Shugart, 1995). These politicians engage in the allocation of pork and patronage to specific constituencies with the aim of increasing their visibility among voters, thereby bolstering their prospects for future electoral support. Ac-

cording to Milesi-Ferretti et al. (2002), this practice leads to a bias in public spending patterns, favoring visible and locally identifiable goods, such as public construction. This bias is particularly evident in policies closely associated with the political identity of the candidates (Powell Jr and Whitten, 1993).

FONSECON's crime prevention projects are specifically targeted at certain locations —municipalities— with the aim of implementing crime prevention projects. The majority of these resources are designated for the construction of public infrastructure (e.g., police stations) or public parks, which are non-rivalrous and non-exclusive goods. Additionally, FONSECON's allocations are made based on categories that were not previously defined, and the decision on fund allocation depends on private decisions among policymakers and bureaucrats.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, FONSECON's allocation might align with the definition of pork-barrel goods provided by Stokes et al. (2013). Since these projects are directed towards specific locations, the distribution of these money might follow a political interest rather than a necessity driven by crime prevention.

**Hypothesis 1:** Crime prevention funds are allocated to locations of political interest to the current president.

**Hypothesis 1.1:** Crime rates are not correlated with the funding of crime prevention projects.

**Swing-voters and competitive municipalities.** Even though incumbents often allocate pork-barrel goods to their constituents, voters are not all alike (Dixit and Londregan, 1996). Literature has distinguished at least two types of voters: The first category, known as "core supporters," argues that politicians tend to favor constituencies providing stronger party support, as these areas are more mobilized to turn out and support the party's candidate (Cox, 2009; Calvo and Murillo, 2019). The second category, the "swing-voter," argues that evenly split constituencies receive more government funding because weak supporters are more likely to change their electoral preferences (Stokes, 2005; Berry et al., 2010; Kofi Frimpong et al., 2022).<sup>9</sup>

Results in this line of research are usually interpreted as favoring the swing voter hypothesis (Golden and Min, 2013), and even suggesting a core voters' curse (Mares and Young, 2018). Voters with strong partisan attachments require larger transfers than voters with weak partisan attachments to vote for the other party (Jankowski et al., 2023; Garzia and Ferreira, 2022). Hence, parties compete for swing voters, also known as political moderates, because they are more cheaply purchased with transfers than voters whose partisan attachments are stronger (Tribin, 2020). Political scientists argue that despite voters' political ideology, they also increase their utility from whatever allocations they receive (Dixit and Londregan, 1996). In this sense, votes can be "bought" with distributive allocations; that is, material inducements shift voters from the party to which they are loyal to the rival party (Golden and Min, 2013).<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For more details, refer to the background and qualitative sections.

<sup>9</sup> Note that I use the terms swing voters or swing municipalities interchangeably. According to (Stokes, 2005) (p. 134), the terminology of vote partisanship can also be applied to types of subnational districts.

<sup>10</sup> Scholars have previously examined the relationship between the allocation of security programs and voting behavior. For instance, Alberti et al. (2023) argue that politically aligned municipalities with the national government received more projects to improve urban infrastructure, thus making public spaces less vulnerable to crime.

<sup>7</sup> Further research has discussed the distinction between formulaic and discretionary criteria emphasized by Diaz-Cayeros et al. (2016). Stokes et al. (2013) define patronage goods as the contingent allocation of a nonprogrammatic material benefit for a vote; and Hicken (2011) uses the term clientelism definition to refer to the same activities.



Specifically, utilizing the framework of the "swing-voter" approach and acknowledging that crime prevention projects can function as politically motivated goods with electoral repercussions (Alberti et al., 2023), I propose a hypothesis regarding the relationship between FONSECON funds and presidential voting. I hypothesize that there is an inverted U-shaped correlation, implying that the national government allocates a greater amount of resources for crime prevention in municipalities characterized by intense electoral competition. Conversely, less competitive areas may receive comparatively fewer resources from the national government for crime prevention initiatives.

**Hypothesis 2:** Electoral competitive municipalities received more funds to develop crime prevention projects.

Finally, resource allocation may also vary depending not just on whether the municipality is competitive or not, but also on whether the candidate won or lost in that specific area (Wantchekon, 2003; Arulampalam et al., 2009). Districts can be into two distinct groups based on the electoral outcome: those where the candidate emerged victorious with a small margin and those where the candidate faced a narrow defeat. This division allows scholars to explore the dynamics of resource allocation in the aftermath of closely contested elections (Marshall, 2022). Therefore, following the literature of competitive elections (Ward and John, 1999), I hypothesize that in areas where the incumbent narrowly lost, there may be a heightened awareness of the need to address public concerns related to safety and crime prevention, and, therefore, the incumbent strategically allocate more resources.

**Hypothesis 3:** Within competitive municipalities, funds strategically concentrate on places where the incumbent faced a narrow defeat.

## Data and methodology

Two primary datasets were used to measure the effect of electoral outcomes on crime prevention policy provision. First, I used granular data of all projects approved in the *Fondo Nacional de Seguridad y Convivencia Ciudadana* - (FONSECON) committees from 2018 to 2022. This dataset was collected by the *Ministerio del Interior*, the governmental body that financed and co-approved the destination of these projects. FONSECON dataset includes the type of project financed (infrastructure, mobility, public parks, and surveillance), the amount of money allocated from the national to local governments, and the *Municipal Contribution* (the amount of money the local government brought to a project). From this dataset, I took my main dependent variable, *FONSECON Allocation*, which is the amount of money allocated by the National Government to subnational units per project normalized.<sup>11</sup>

Second, electoral data were obtained at the municipality level from the *Registraduría Nacional de Estado Civil*, the governmental body that implements elections, and collected by *Misión de Observación Electoral* (2023). I focus on the run-off returns given that (a) third parties had an important effect upon vote shares in the first round (the Conservative Party and *Cambio Radical* drew votes from Duque, the *Polo Democrático* and *Partido Verde* from Petro) and (b) abstention

declined from the first to the second round. From this dataset, I use the two main independent variables for the statistical analysis: *Margin of victory*, the percentage point difference of total votes in a municipality cast for the incumbent in the run-off, and *Margin of victory squared*, in order to test my second hypothesis of inverted u-shaped relationship.

From this dataset, I also gathered data on the political alienation between the incumbent president and the elected governors and mayors<sup>12</sup>. Following Ariza Marín et al. (2021)'s approach, the political alignment of the president with the party of the respective state governor, *Governor aligned*, and mayor, *Mayor aligned*, is treated as follows: it is assigned a value of 0 if the political party of the local authority (mayor or governor) differs from that of the president, and 1 if the mayor and governor belong to one of the parties that supported the president in the Congress.

Likewise, to ensure the validity and robustness of my results, I control for factors that might influence both crime prevention projects and voting. These controls include three variables related to insecurity: Homicides, Theft, and Residential Burglary rates, which are the average number of the felony between 2003 and 2019 divided by the total population of the municipality, collected by the Ministry of Defense and prioritized by Duque's administration (Government of Colombia, 2019). Considering the historical context of violence in Colombia and ongoing peace implementation efforts, I also account for the frequency of military actions between rebel groups and Public Forces, and one of the current peace programs in the country, PDET; both of these variables have been previously utilized in the literature on the politics of violence and peace in Colombia (Gelvez and Johnson, 2023). Also, to control for law and order capacity, I included the arrest rate, which is the average number of arrests made by law enforcement between 2010-2019 divided by the total population of the municipality. All the previous variables were collected by the Economics Department of the *Universidad de Los Andes*.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to variables that affect crime, I control for factors that might influence electoral support and State capacity. These controls include the log of municipal population, altitude, and average annual rainfall, all of which might condition recruitment and the effectiveness of state policing (Fearon and Laitin, 2003); variables that account for the municipality's economic isolation, such as indexes of the administrative capacities of the local entities, the proportion of a municipality that is rural, and the average of unsatisfied basic needs as both vote shares and crime are expected to be conditioned by state reach and the dynamics of economic activity (e.g. Kalyvas (2019)). Also, in order to control for the potential effects of the pandemic, I included the rate of deaths due to Covid-19 published by *Datos Abiertos Colombia*.<sup>14</sup> Department and year-fixed effects are used to account for unobserved heterogeneity. See in the Appendix a codebook with the variables used.

I test my hypothesis through a mixed-methods strategy. Firstly, I employ an ordinary least squares estimator while controlling for the factors mentioned earlier, which may affect

<sup>11</sup> I chose to apply the natural logarithm (log) transformation to the monetary allocation for ease of interpretation and to represent proportional changes. This variable sum 1 to the original value to handle instances where the variable takes zero values. Additionally, I conducted a sensitivity analysis using the hyperbolic arcsine (asinh) transformation, and the results remained consistent across both transformations.

<sup>12</sup> The political alignment of the mayor and governors with the president might affect positive or negative the allocation of funds in several sectors, including transfer payments from the national government to respond to crime issues Bonilla-Mejía (2017)

<sup>13</sup> The data can be found online at <https://datoscede.uniandes.edu.co>.

<sup>14</sup> The data can be found online at <https://www.datos.gov.co/>

the allocation of crime and electoral support.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, I utilize the margin of victory of the president to conduct a regression discontinuity (RD) design. Widely applied in political science, this method capitalizes on close elections to discern the influence of elected politicians’ characteristics on subsequent outcomes (Marshall, 2022).<sup>16</sup> This RD specifically aims to assess hypothesis 3, exploring how funds are allocated in municipalities where the incumbent experienced a competitive election. Lastly, in the discussion section, I employ qualitative triangulation to provide a comprehensive understanding of the quantitative findings.

Results

Model 1 in Table 1 indicates that, without controls, the margin of victory of the incumbent is positively and significantly correlated with the allocation of funds to prevent crime. The effect size is comparable to Model 2, which incorporates the municipal contribution to the FONSECON projects. However, after including all specified controls, as well as year and department fixed effects, the margin of victory loses its significance in models 3 and 4.

To explore non-linear relationships, Table 1 also incorporates the margin of victory squared. The four models consistently demonstrate robust evidence that the margin of victory squared is negatively and significantly correlated with the allocation of funds to prevent crime. The negative and significant quadratic term suggests the existence of an inverted-U relationship between the margin of victory and FONSECON allocation. As presented in the theory section, these findings align with what the literature categorizes as swing districts.

Furthermore, Model 4 in Table 1 presents evidence that variables related to crime (homicides, theft, and residential burglary rates), conflict (subversive actions), and law-and-order capacity (arrest rate) do not correlate with the allocation of funds to prevent crime. This finding supports the notion that crime prevention funds have been utilized as a pork-barrel good, aligning with the implications of Hypotheses 1 and 1.1. Additionally, the models include the political alienation between the governor and the mayor, finding evidence to suggest that an aligned governor influences positively the allocation of FONSECON resources (See the complete table in the Appendix ).

Additionally, the visual representation in Figure 2 highlights the distinctive U-shape of the relationship. The peak of the allocated funds is concentrated precisely in the middle of the graph, where the margin of victory equals zero. This indicates that municipalities experiencing a tight electoral contest receive a higher allocation of resources. Contrarily, the tails of the graph show a decline in allocated funds, suggesting that municipalities with more decisive electoral outcomes, whether in favor or against the incumbent, receive comparatively fewer resources. These findings provide empirical support for the hypothesized pork-barrel and swing-voter hypotheses 1 and 2. (See more figures with different fitted adjusted orders in the Appendix ).

To examine hypothesis 3, I implemented a Regression Discontinuity (RD) design, a method characterized by three key

Table 1. Multivariate Regression Analysis of Factors Influencing FONSECON Allocation

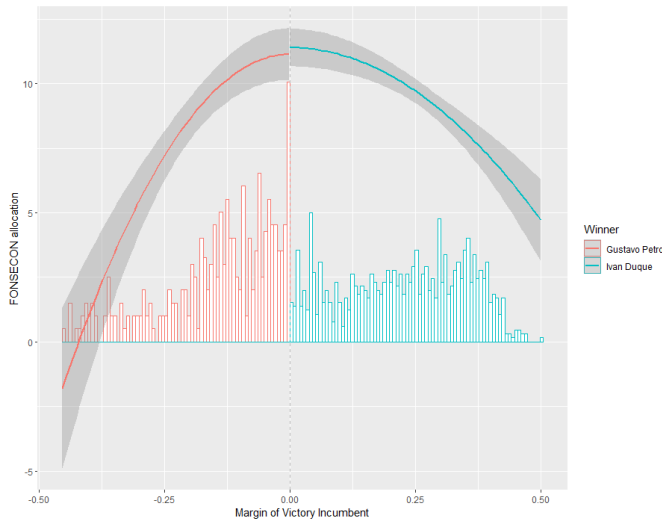
	FONSECON Allocation			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Margin of victory	5.92*** (1.24)	4.32*** (1.10)	−0.03 (0.18)	0.03 (0.25)
Margin of victory squared	−41.63*** (4.47)	−36.30*** (3.97)	−1.16* (0.63)	−2.02*** (0.75)
Governor aligned			0.15*** (0.05)	0.14** (0.06)
Mayor aligned			−0.001 (0.04)	−0.03 (0.04)
Municipal Contribution		0.69*** (0.02)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Homicides rate				29.32 (118.70)
Theft rate				−16.00 (75.95)
Residential Burglary				−60.44 (145.78)
Subversive actions				−0.00 (0.00)
Arrest rate				4.88 (18.16)
Controls	N	N	N	Y
Department Fixed Effects	N	N	Y	Y
Year Fixed Effects	N	N	Y	Y
Observations	2652	2652	1159	1045
R <sup>2</sup>	0.032	0.237	0.296	0.319
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.031	0.237	0.271	0.283
Residual Std. Error	10.584	9.395	0.717	0.715

Note: \*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

<sup>15</sup>This approach aligns with established practices in the literature on political violence in Latin America, as demonstrated by studies such as Weintraub et al. (2015) and Gelvez and Johnson (2023).

<sup>16</sup>As highlighted by Marshall (2022), nearly 40% of studies employing RD (also known as politician characteristic regression discontinuity) focus on executive and national elections.

**Fig. 2.** Non-linear effect of Duque's margin of victory on FONSECON Allocation.



components: a running variable, a cutoff, and a treatment rule that allocates units to treatment or control based on a strict thresholding rule utilizing the score and cutoff (Skovron and Titunik, 2015).<sup>17</sup> In practical terms, the cutoff is established at 0, with the margin of victory serving as the running variable. The treatment rule stipulates that if the margin of victory is positive (indicating the incumbent's victory in a specific municipality), the treatment is assigned a value of 1; otherwise, it is set to 0. This approach ensures a systematic and transparent means of evaluating the impact of President Duque's victory on the allocation of crime prevention resources in competitive districts, providing a robust foundation for testing hypothesis 3.

Table 2 presents an overview of the RD results. Both conventional and robust RD procedures consistently show a significant coefficient in my estimation. This finding supports the anticipated hypothesis, that within competitive municipalities, funds strategically concentrate in certain areas (Hypothesis 3). In particular, the negative coefficients observed indicate that, on average, municipalities where the incumbent narrowly lost in closely contested elections receive lower *FONSECON allocations* (refer to the visual representation in the Appendix). In essence, the data suggests that locations, where Duque won by a small margin, receive fewer resources for the implementation of crime prevention projects, providing compelling evidence in favor of Hypothesis 3. To ensure the validity and robustness of my RD design, I examined the balance of pre-treatment covariates (see Table in the Appendix).<sup>18</sup>

### Qualitative triangulation

To qualitatively explore the aforementioned findings, I conducted interviews with a range of national and subnational policymakers and bureaucrats. These interviews aimed to garner deeper insights into the observed correlation between

**Table 2.** RD estimates funds allocation within electoral competitive municipalities

Number of Observations	622	2030
Eff. Number of Obs.	171	256
Order est. (p)	1	1
Order bias (q)	2	2
BW est. (h)	0.057	0.057
BW bias (b)	0.105	0.105
rho (h/b)	0.545	0.545
Unique Obs.	258	840

Method	Coef.	Std. Err.	P> z	[ 95% C.I. ]
Conventional	-4.54	1.35	0.001	[-7.19, -1.88]
Robust	-	-	0.001	[-8.08, -2.13]

**Sharp RD estimates using local polynomial regression.** The outcome variable is *FONSECON Allocation*, and the running variable is the margin of victory, with the cut-off set at 0.0. The bandwidth type utilized was "mserd," with a triangular kernel employed for smoothing. The variance-covariance estimation method chosen was nearest neighbor (NN). Bandwidths *h* and *b* were computed by the companion command *rdbwselect*. No additional covariates added in the estimation.

electoral outcomes and crime prevention efforts in Colombia (refer to the Appendix for the structured interview questions). Through these interviews, participants suggested four distinct political mechanisms that shed light on the criteria influencing why the national government allocates security resources to certain municipalities while neglecting others.

First, as observed in the regression models, participants indicated that electoral competition plays a significant role in allocating security funds. As was observed from the quantitative findings, government officials often direct resources to regions where their incumbent faces electoral competition. This idea was supported by one government bureaucrat, for example, who said, "In theory, there is justification based on crime rates -especially homicides and lack of capacities-, but in my experience, there is a clear electoral bias(...) for example, the previous government changed all the approved projects in the last minute because it was approved by the former one"<sup>19</sup> Another interviewee, with experience in local governments, emphasized the influence of political factors, saying, "Security aids, especially FONSECON, go to regions with votes, not necessarily the areas with the greatest security needs."<sup>20</sup>

Second, the interviews shed light on the strategic considerations of the incumbent president. Policymakers disclosed that the allocation of crime prevention projects is often used as a tool to consolidate political power. One policymaker revealed, "The allocation of funds in FONSECON is hard to follow and would not be hard to think that it has been used to consolidate political power, especially for the incumbent's party."<sup>21</sup> This indicates that the distribution of funds is not solely based on crime rates or security needs but is rather driven by political motives and electoral interests.

Likewise, political alignment and the role of the minister's party might be key factors in resource allocation. Policymakers revealed that regions aligned with the ruling party often receive preferential treatment in terms of funding for security projects,

<sup>17</sup> I used the package *rdrobust* in Rstudio, which implements local polynomial RD point estimators with robust bias-corrected confidence intervals and inference procedures developed in Cattaneo and Titunik (2022).

<sup>18</sup> The results showed that there were no significant differences in most of the control variables between the treatment and control groups.

<sup>19</sup> Interview by the author, National Policymaker, 20 June 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Interview by the author, Local Policymaker, 21 July 2023.

<sup>21</sup> Interview by the author, National Bureaucrat, 19 June 2023.

granting them more resources compared to areas aligned with opposition parties, which may face resource constraints. One policymaker stated, “It’s no surprise that the ruling party directs resources to its support base. It’s a strategic move to secure electoral support in the long run.”<sup>22</sup> According to other interviewees’ statements, the Minister of Interior plays a significant role in selecting and prioritizing security projects. One interviewee stated, “The minister’s political interests are clearly visible in the resource allocation process. The minister favors projects that benefit their party and political image in my experience.”<sup>23</sup> Another interviewee mentioned, “(FONSECON) follows a logic of political clientelism, where the minister seeks to consolidate support within their party and secure influence in future elections.”<sup>24</sup>

Finally, participants expressed concerns about the lack of clear and objective criteria for allocating security funds. One of the interviewees said, “In my experience, there is a lack of clear guidelines or objective criteria for distributing security funds. It often feels like decisions are made on a whim, depending on who has the ear of the decision-makers.”<sup>25</sup> This discretion can result in funds being allocated based on personal preferences rather than evidence-based assessments of security needs. One former bureaucrat said, “There is a need for more objective and evidence-based assessments of security needs. Right now, it feels like decisions are made based on who has the most political clout rather than where the resources are truly needed.”<sup>26</sup> Another one said “I’ve seen instances where projects with strong political backing get approved quickly, while others with potential merit are left waiting for months without a clear explanation.”<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusions

Why do governments prevent crime in some places and not others? As many countries in the Global South, Colombian municipalities have low state capacities, which limits their ability to provide security and makes them dependent on a number of centrally managed transfers. To answer the previous question, I focus on the main fund of intergovernmental transfer to prevent crime and provide security, the *Fondo Nacional de Seguridad y Convivencia Ciudadana* (FONSECON), and I hypothesized that these funds were used as a pork-barrel good by financing swing-voters.

Using a mixed-methods approach, I present compelling evidence that electoral competition significantly shaped the distribution of security resources. The findings reveal that municipalities experiencing competitive elections were more likely to receive substantial security provisions from the National Government, particularly when the president’s party faced narrow electoral defeats. In other words, I found evidence to claim that the incumbent uses crime prevention projects as a pork-barrel good, in order to finance swing-voter municipalities.

This study constitutes a significant contribution to the extant literature on distributive politics, particularly within the framework of crime politics in the Global South. By studying the electoral dynamics and resource allocation of crime

prevention, it underscores the political motivations underpinning technical decisions. The identified mechanisms, from electoral competition to the strategic consolidation of political power, offer an understanding of how security provisions become trapped by political interests.

Future research should delve deeper into the interactions between electoral politics and resource allocation for crime prevention. Exploring the temporal dynamics and potential shifts in the identified mechanisms over different electoral cycles would enhance our understanding of the sustainability and adaptability of pork-barrel strategies. Additionally, investigating the role of local governance structures and their influence on resource distribution could provide insights into how subnational political dynamics contribute to the observed patterns. Furthermore, a comparative analysis across countries facing similar challenges in crime prevention funding allocation could offer valuable cross-contextual insights, contributing to a broader understanding of the factors shaping distributive politics in the realm of security. Lastly, given the potential implications for democratic accountability raised by the observed pork-barrel strategies, future research could explore the long-term effects of such resource allocation practices on citizens’ trust in the political process and institutions.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.** I thank Isabella Alcañiz, Juan Diego Alvarado, Matilde Angarita, Laia Balcells, Ernesto Calvo, Laura García-Montoya, Marcus Johnson, Manuel Moscoso, Youngjoon Lee, the attendees of the American Society of Criminology 2023, the Southwest Workshop on Mixed Methods Research 2023, and the Institute for Qualitative & Multi-Method Research 2023, and members of Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center at the University of Maryland (UMD) for their valuable comments. This research received IRB approval from the Institutional Review Board of UMD (2025093-1). This research was supported by the *Comparative Politics* field in the Government and Politics Department at UMD.

## References

- Alberti, C., Díaz-Rioseco, D., and Visconti, G. (2023). Can political alignment reduce crime? evidence from Chile. *Political science research and methods*, 11(2):223–236.
- Alcañiz, I. and Giraudy, A. (2022). From international organizations to local governments: how foreign environmental aid reaches subnational beneficiaries in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico. *Environmental Politics*, page 1–21.
- Ariza Marín, D., Goda, T., and Tabares Pozos, G. (2021). Political competition, electoral participation and local fiscal performance. *Development Studies Research*, 8(1):24–35.
- Arulampalam, W., Dasgupta, S., Dhillon, A., and Dutta, B. (2009). Electoral goals and center-state transfers: A theoretical model and empirical evidence from India. *Journal of Development Economics*, 88(1):103–119.
- Baranyi, G., Di Marco, M. H., Russ, T. C., Dibben, C., and Pearce, J. (2021). The impact of neighbourhood crime on mental health: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Social Science & Medicine*, 282:114106.
- Bateson, R. (2012). Crime victimization and political participation. *American Political Science Review*, 106(3):570–587.
- Berry, C. R., Burden, B. C., and Howell, W. G. (2010). The president and the distribution of federal spending. *American Political Science Review*, 104(4):783–799.

<sup>22</sup> Interview by the author, Local Policymaker, 21 July 2023.

<sup>23</sup> Interview by the author, National Bureaucrat, 19 June 2023.

<sup>24</sup> Interview by the author, National Policymaker, 20 June 2023.

<sup>25</sup> Interview by the author, Local Policymaker, 21 July 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Interview by the author, National Bureaucrat, 19 June 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Interview by the author, National Policymaker, 20 June 2023.



- Blair, R. A. and Weintraub, M. (2023). Little evidence that military policing reduces crime or improves human security. *Nature Human Behaviour*, pages 1–13.
- Bonilla-Mejía, L. (2017). Political alignment in the time of weak parties: electoral advantages and subnational transfers in colombia. *Documentos de Trabajo Sobre Economía Regional y Urbana*; No. 260.
- Cain, B., Ferejohn, J., and Fiorina, M. (1987). *The personal vote: Constituency service and electoral independence*. Harvard University Press.
- Calvo, E. and Murillo, M. V. (2019). Richer voter, poorer voter, and the diversification of parties' electoral strategies. pages 1–314.
- Carey, J. M. and Shugart, M. S. (1995). Incentives to cultivate a personal vote: A rank ordering of electoral formulas. *Electoral studies*, 14(4):417–439.
- Carreras, M. and Visconti, G. (2022). Who pays for crime? criminal violence, right-wing incumbents, and electoral accountability in latin america. *Electoral studies*, 79:102522.
- Cattaneo, M. D. and Titiunik, R. (2022). Regression discontinuity designs. *Annual Review of Economics*, 14:821–851.
- Congreso de Colombia (1997). Ley 418 de 1997. *Congreso de la República de Colombia*, pages 1–68.
- Congreso de Colombia (2010). Ley 1421 de 2010. *Congreso de la República de Colombia*, page 122.
- Cox, G. W. (2009). Swing voters, core voters, and distributive politics. *Political representation*, 342.
- Cox, G. W. and McCubbins, M. D. (1986). Electoral politics as a redistributive game. *The Journal of Politics*, 48(2):370–389.
- Díaz-Cayeros, A., Estévez, F., and Magaloni, B. (2016). *The political logic of poverty relief: Electoral strategies and social policy in Mexico*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dixit, A. and Londregan, J. (1996). The determinants of success of special interests in redistributive politics. *The Journal of Politics*, 58(4):1132–1155.
- Dow, D. A. (2022). Policing in a post-conflict state: Evidence from uganda. *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(9):1595–1628.
- Enns, P. K. (2014). The public's increasing punitiveness and its influence on mass incarceration in the united states. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(4):857–872.
- Fe, H. and Sanfelice, V. (2022). How bad is crime for business? evidence from consumer behavior. *Journal of urban economics*, 129:103448.
- Fearon, J. D. and Laitin, D. D. (2003). Ethnicity, insurgency, and civil war. *American political science review*, 97(1):75–90.
- Flores-Macías, G. and Zarkin, J. (2023). The consequences of militarized policing for human rights: evidence from mexico. *Comparative Political Studies*, page 00104140231168362.
- Gamboa Gutiérrez, L. (2019). The readjustment of the colombian right. uribismo's electoral success. *Colombia Internacional*, (99):187–214.
- Garzia, D. and Ferreira, F. (2022). The electoral consequences of affective polarization? negative voting in the 2020 us presidential election. *American politics research*, 50(3):303–311.
- Gélvez, J. D., Aguirre, C. M., and Rodríguez, M. P. N. (2023). De la planeación nacional a la territorial: cómo se diseña y articula la política de convivencia y seguridad ciudadana en colombia? *Gestión y Política Pública*, 32(1):131–160.
- Gelvez, J. D. and Johnson, M. (2023). Los nadies y las nadies: The effect of peacebuilding on political behavior in colombia. *Latin American Politics and Society*, pages 1–28.
- Gil, C. A., Lopez, J. S., Jesus, A., Novoa, J. Y., Zúñiga, M. A., and Tolosa, A. M. (2021). Fuentes de financiación de los planes integrales de seguridad y convivencia ciudadana (piscc) de departamentos y municipios priorizados por el gobierno nacional.
- Gobierno Nacional (2019). Guía metodológica para la formulación, implementación y seguimiento de los planes integrales de seguridad y convivencia ciudadana (piscc). *Gobierno de Colombia*, pages 1–68.
- Golden, M. and Min, B. (2013). Distributive politics around the world. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 16:73–99.
- Government of Colombia (2019). Política Marco de Convivencia y Seguridad Ciudadana. Accessed on 11/24/23, Available at: <https://osc.dnp.gov.co/politica.pdf>.
- Hicken, A. (2011). Clientelism. *Annual review of political science*, 14:289–310.
- Holland, A. C. (2013). Right on crime?: Conservative party politics and mano dura policies in el salvador. *Latin American Research Review*, 48(1):44–67.
- Jaimes, R. (2020). Fiscal adjustments at the local level: evidence from colombia. *International Tax and Public Finance*, 27(5):1148–1173.
- Jankowski, M., Juen, C.-M., and Lewandowsky, M. (2023). Turning a blind eye on the black sheep: when are voters loyal to corrupt politicians? *Acta Politica*, 58(4):765–791.
- Jennings, W., Farrall, S., Gray, E., and Hay, C. (2017). Penal populism and the public thermostat: Crime, public punitiveness, and public policy. *Governance*, 30(3):463–481.
- Johnson, M. (2020). Electoral discrimination: The relationship between skin color and vote buying in latin america. *World Politics*, 72(1):80–120.
- Kalyvas, S. N. (2019). *The landscape of political violence*. Oxford University Press Oxford.
- Kawachi, I., Kennedy, B. P., and Wilkinson, R. G. (1999). Crime: social disorganization and relative deprivation. *Social science & medicine*, 48(6):719–731.
- Kline, H. F. and Rettberg, A. (2022). Colombia: Coping with multiple transitions. In *Latin American Politics and Development*, pages 178–200. Routledge.
- Kofi Frimpong, A. N., Li, P., Nyame, G., and Hossin, M. A. (2022). The impact of social media political activists on voting patterns. *Political Behavior*, pages 1–54.
- Larcinese, V., Rizzo, L., and Testa, C. (2006). Allocating the us federal budget to the states: The impact of the president. *The Journal of Politics*, 68(2):447–456.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1936). *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*. Pickle Partners Publishing.
- Lieberman, E. S. (2005). Nested analysis as a mixed-method strategy for comparative research. *American political science review*, 99(3):435–452.
- Mares, I. and Young, L. E. (2018). The core voter's curse: Clientelistic threats and promises in hungarian elections. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(11):1441–1471.
- Marshall, J. (2022). Can close election regression discontinuity designs identify effects of winning politician characteristics? *American Journal of Political Science*, page ajps.12741.



- Milesi-Ferretti, G. M., Perotti, R., and Rostagno, M. (2002). Electoral systems and public spending. *The quarterly journal of economics*, 117(2):609–657.
- MinInterior and Policia, Nacional (2020). Conceptos normativos de la gestión pública territorial para la convivencia y la seguridad. pages 1–58.
- Ministerio de Hacienda (2023). Cifras presupuestales históricas. presupuesto general de la nación - pgn - 2000-2022. *Gobierno de Colombia*.
- Misión de Observación Electoral (2023). Datos electorales. [datos-electorales.org](https://datos-electorales.org).
- Moya, M. (2022). Iván duque centró su periodo en la seguridad, pero deja una colombia más violenta. *France 24*.
- Nieto-Matiz, C. (2023). When the state becomes complicit: mayors, criminal actors, and the deliberate weakening of the local state in colombia. *Comparative Political Studies*, 56(9):1295–1327.
- Powell Jr, G. B. and Whitten, G. D. (1993). A cross-national analysis of economic voting: taking account of the political context. *American journal of political science*, pages 391–414.
- Seawright, J. (2021). What can multi-method research add to experiments? *Advances in Experimental Political Science*, pages 383–399.
- Skovron, C. and Titiunik, R. (2015). A practical guide to regression discontinuity designs in political science. *American Journal of Political Science*, 2015:1–36.
- Stokes, S. C. (2005). Perverse accountability: A formal model of machine politics with evidence from argentina. *American political science review*, 99(3):315–325.
- Stokes, S. C., Dunning, T., and Nazareno, M. (2013). *Brokers, voters, and clientelism: The puzzle of distributive politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tejada, C. and Turkewitz, J. (2021). Colombia’s troubles put a president’s legacy on the line. *The New York Times*.
- Tribin, A. (2020). Chasing votes with the public budget. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 63:101875.
- Turkewitz, J. and Villamil, S. (2021). Colombia police respond to protests with bullets, and death toll mounts. *The New York Times*.
- Wantchekon, L. (2003). Clientelism and voting behavior: Evidence from a field experiment in benin. *World politics*, 55(3):399–422.
- Ward, H. and John, P. (1999). Targeting benefits for electoral gain: Constituency marginality and the distribution of grants to english local authorities. *Political Studies*, 47(1):32–52.
- Weintraub, M., Vargas, J. F., and Flores, T. E. (2015). Vote choice and legacies of violence: evidence from the 2014 colombian presidential elections. *Research & Politics*, 2(2):2053168015573348.