

# **Progressive Ideology and Support for Punitive Crime Policy: Experimental Evidence from Brazil and Argentina<sup>1</sup>**

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*February 16, 2022*

Working Paper: Please do not circulate or cite without permission

## **Abstract:**

Citizen support for crime policy has typically linked broader ideological views to two opposing approaches to fighting crime: Ideological conservatives are typically associated with support for punitive approaches, while progressives are associated with support for social-policy oriented solutions. I argue that ideology is an insufficient explanation of support for punitive policies and build on research that points to certain perceptual factors and experiences as crucial. I explore this phenomenon in the context of vote choice using a conjoint survey experiment fielded in Argentina and Brazil. I demonstrate that perceptions regarding insecurity, effectiveness of social policy, and the sources of crime explain support for punitive solutions across the general population, including among progressives. Contrary to what past works suggests, I find that victimization is not a strong explanatory factor. I demonstrate the external validity of my results by replicating them using observational data from the Americas barometer.

**Word Count:** 9,984

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<sup>1</sup> Thank you to Jonathan Hartlyn, Evelyne Huber, Omar García-Ponce, Cecilia Martínez-Gallardo, Sandra Ley, Lucía Tiscornia, Connor Huff, Nicolás de la Cerda, Isaac Mehlhaff and attendees of Duke's Latin American Politics and Party Competition Workshop and APSA's Justice and Injustice Mini Conference for comments on prior versions of this paper. Funding for this project was provided by the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill's Institute for the Study of the Americas, Professor Jonathan Hartlyn (UNC), and the UNC Political Science Department's Uhlman Fund. This project was deemed exempt from full review by UNC-Chapel Hill's IRB (#20-3095).

## **Introduction**

In 2018, Rui Costa of Brazil's left-leaning Workers' Party (PT) won the state of Bahia's gubernatorial race as a progressive PT candidate, but with a tough-on-crime, punitive rhetoric aimed to capture voters concerned with the state's worsening violence (Kinosian 2017). Along with social policies to address economically motivated crime, he proposed strengthening police forces to combat homicides and drug trafficking, the integration of crime-fighting institutions, and increased arms investment to repress delinquency. These latter proposals notably left his administration the option to involve the military, a common yet more conservative crime fighting strategy typically associated with right-wing parties (Costa 2018; Holland 2013). Costa's candidacy was wildly successful and he received over 75% of the vote in the first round of elections.

This seemingly unconventional mix of policies is actually not uncommon in Latin America; examples of left-wing yet punitive rhetoric can be found in other places such as Argentina (Bonner 2018) and Mexico (Pskowski 2018). However, research on why these platforms attract voters is sparse. Why do voters, particularly progressives, support punitive tough-on-crime platforms? Scholars commonly accept that progressive voters support social policy-oriented tactics to reduce crime, while right-wing, authoritarian voters support punitive, iron fist policies (Cohen and Smith 2016). I argue that this perceived dichotomy between progressive and conservative voters on the issue of crime is a misconception. Rather, perceptions and experiences related to insecurity, sources of crime, and efficacy of social policy can lead not only the general population, but also progressive voters, to support punitive candidates.

In particular, I argue that three key factors can lead even progressive voters to support punitive candidates: 1) perceptions of insecurity and victimization, 2) the belief that gangs constitute the main source of crime, 3) and perceived ineffectiveness of social policy, a common foil to punitive approaches to crime. Although scholars have argued that various related perceptions and experiences often influence support for punitive or iron fist crime-fighting strategies (Ayres 1998; Cohen and Smith 2016; Gerber and Jackson 2016; 2017; Muggah 2017; Gerber 2021), they have predominantly treated ideology as a control or ancillary factor in this relationship. Here, I dedicate explicit attention to ideology. I examine how these perceptions and experiences effect crime policy preferences of specifically progressive voters, who we typically consider to be strongly against punitive measures. In this way, I seek to understand why we see

progressive, yet punitive, candidates such as Rui Costa receive such strong levels of support at the polls.

To test my argument, I field an online conjoint experiment in Argentina and Brazil. Respondents are presented with profiles of candidates for governor with randomized attributes across a variety of policy areas, including public security policies. Each respondent in a forced choice “vote” each round. The results from this experiment provide overwhelming support for the majority of my hypothesized relationships, but challenge one. I find that those who perceive social policy as ineffective and those who believe gangs overwhelmingly drive crime in their communities are more likely to support punitive candidates. Importantly, when I examine both sociocultural and economic progressive respondents, these patterns remain strong. However, I find mixed results when examining insecurity. Although perceived community insecurity is associated with an increased likelihood of selecting a punitive candidate, victimization is not. Following this analysis, I validate my results using observational data from the Americasbarometer survey. This analysis finds support for all results revealed in the experimental portion of this paper.

In the following sections, I proceed as follows. First, I discuss relevant literature and my hypothesized relationships. I then present my data collection strategy, discussing the fielded survey and conjoint experiment. I discuss the use of marginal means to determine the effect of punitive policy on candidate choice, and then present my results. Finally, I elaborate on implications of this work and conclude.

### **Ideology as an Insufficient Explanation**

Research has explored factors which explain support for various crime fighting strategies. Some of this research suggests that ideology is a strong predictor of both citizen preferences for such policies and the politicians who offer them. Scholars have demonstrated that more progressive citizens favor social policy-oriented approaches and progressive politicians in turn offer these strategies to their constituents (Ayres 1998; Muggah 2017). On the other hand, it is assumed that ideologically conservative citizens prefer tougher, repressive crime-fighting strategies, with corresponding politicians offering such options as well (Cohen and Smith 2016; Gerber and Jackson 2016; 2017; Gerber 2021). On the conservative side of this spectrum, there has been a focus on the most extreme iron fist and repressive authoritarian measures.

Historically, iron fist policies have been popular among autocrats in the region, with the allowance of police brutality, extrajudicial retribution and violence, and nondemocratic justice measures (Holland 2013).

Just as prevalent as iron fist policies are punitive solutions to crime. These are often short of authoritarian measures in terms of outright human rights violations, but seek to increase prison sentences, increase the deployment of security forces, and condemn criminals to harsher sentences (Holland 2013; Muggah, Garzón, and Suárez 2018). In this paper, I consider punitive policies, as they are both used and supported across the region, particularly in post-dictatorship contexts (Bonner 2019; Tiscornia et al. Working Paper). Regardless of the exact place on this progressive to conservative spectrum of crime policy, research argues that citizen ideology is a key predictor of preferences for these policy options. That is, a citizen's ideological stance on a variety of other, non-crime related issues should correspond to the policies they prefer with regard to crime. Furthermore, it is presumed that political operatives (officials and candidates) also operate along this spectrum, with the type of crime policies they propose corresponding to their broader ideological positions.

Although this research is compelling, two main factors suggest these relationships might not hold. First, we see evidence of progressive candidates who offer mixed policy propositions. Notably, these candidates have seen significant electoral victories. Second, theoretical and empirical evidence at the individual-level suggests citizen preferences are more complex.

With regard to political candidates and officials, research suggests that the nature of their crime policy often does not correspond to their ideological placement, with progressive candidates often offering more repressive solutions to crime. For example, seemingly ideologically progressive candidates for political offices across Latin America have offered punitive measures alongside progressive policies in their crime-fighting policy propositions (Bonner 2018).

In both Brazil and Argentina, recent subnational elections provide ample evidence of this phenomenon. This paper's opening case of Governor Rui Costa of Bahia, Brazil offers motivating evidence. But further, in 2018 Paraíba's João Azevêdo of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB)<sup>2</sup> offered a similarly complex series of policies. Azevêdo proposed investing in both land

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<sup>2</sup>The PSB can be difficult to place ideologically. However, this party has a history of supporting progressive and socialist policies, and has supported progressive candidates such as Lula da Silva in the recent past.

and air resources for police, creating two new battalions of military police, and increasing the integration of military police with municipal guards. These proposals were alongside propositions of increased jobs training for prisoners to reduce recidivism and police reform to improve respect of human rights (Azevêdo 2018). In Argentina, determining the ideology of candidates can be more complicated with the strong presence of personalistic parties, but evidence still exists. For example, the Frente de Todos coalition, a more progressive and left-wing coalition of parties, fielded multiple candidates in the 2019 election with a platform that emphasized not only human rights, but a crackdown on narco-trafficking. Similarly, the Frente de Todos affiliate and governor of the Buenos Aires province, Axel Kicillof has recently made rounds discussing increased investment in police and patrolling of police vehicles (Cottet 2021).<sup>3</sup>

Costa, Azevêdo, and Kicillof were elected in their respective most recent elections, indicating support for their complex proposals. Ultimately, this phenomenon suggests two main factors: first, we must revise our thinking to consider crime as not a clearly ideological issue, and second we must consider that citizens are faced with more complex decisions when evaluating and choosing political operatives. Research should be updated to reflect this complexity.

Supporting this idea, prominent public opinion research and work regarding crime policy preferences in Latin America suggests that ideology may be not be wholly informative in understanding citizen policy preferences. As Converse's (1964) seminal work shows, the liberal-conservative ideological dichotomy is often not a useful heuristic for the mass public. Rather, mass public opinion and policy preferences are far messier. From a comparative perspective, research suggests that citizens often act out of step with partisan cues, often voting for candidates based on specific issues of importance (Dalton 1984; 2000).

More specifically, in the context of Latin America and crime policy, Rosen and Cutrona (2020) demonstrate that ideology does not have a statistically significant effect on support for iron fist policies in the region. Rather, research indicates that certain experiences and perceptual factors may prevail in influencing citizens preferences for crime policy, such as their community context and recent experiences with crime (e.g., victimization) (Visconti 2020; Altamirano and Ley 2020) or perceptions of deservingness (Tiscornia et al. Working Paper). Thus, the

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<sup>3</sup> Similar behavior can be seen outside of Latin America as well. Gunderson (2021) finds that it in the United States it is Democrat governors who most advance the carceral state, often imprisoning more individuals than Republican counterparts.

assumption that citizen preferences for punitive policy consistently follows their broader ideological placement has been challenged. However, these works have not specifically investigated the influence of these factors on ideological progressives. Instead, they have typically treated ideology as an ancillary, control factor in their analyses.

Further, this work has typically not explored support for these crime policies in an electoral context, leaving room for further study. Particularly as we see candidates who offer more punitive solutions receiving strong support across a variety of country contexts (Fuentes 2005; Hunter and Power 2019; Bonner 2019) it is important to understand what citizen-level factors might help to explain their popularity. With these points in mind, I ask the following questions: Under what circumstances will citizens prefer political candidates who offer more punitive policies? When might we see otherwise ideologically progressive citizens support punitive candidates?

### **Support for Punitive Policy**

Here, I examine factors which may be important determinants of support for various crime policies. I highlight hypotheses regarding crime exposure and feelings of insecurity, effectiveness of certain policies aimed to combat crime, and the source of crime in communities. Previous work regarding insecurity has more explicitly drawn connections to support for punitive crime policy. However others, particularly perceptions of the source of crime and perceived policy effectiveness, have been largely underexplored in this context. I extrapolate as to how related existing work can inform our thinking regarding support for punitive candidates and how these factors might transcend ideology.

#### *Insecurity*

Scholars have increasingly demonstrated that personal insecurity has a strong effect on one's preference for different forms of crime policies. Direct victimization or the victimization of one's family and friends leads to increased desire for iron fist polices and extralegal violence (Bonner 2018). Apart from these direct experiences, perceived insecurity or fear of crime also influences support for similar policies (Krause 2014; Cruz and Kloppe-Santamaría 2019).

Some research in the region has considered support for more traditionally punitive policies, such as increasing the punishment of criminals rather than the use of preventative crime

measures. This research has found that fear of crime strongly influences the desire for increased punishment, even when controlling for ideology (A. J. Singer et al. 2020). Work outside of the region confirms such findings, suggesting fear of crime influences preferences for a range of punitive strategies, including support for punishment and increased sentencing for criminals rather than their rehabilitation (Langworthy and Whitehead 1986; Dowler 2003).

In addition to this focus on support for tough-on-crime and punitive policies, scholars have considered the role that perceived insecurity plays in affecting preferences for welfare provision, often seen as an alternative to punitive measures (Guetzkow 2020). Rueda and Stegmüller (2016) demonstrate in Europe that fear of crime is often associated with increased demands for redistribution, with the hope that redistribution will reduce crime. However, this stems from the assumption among citizens that crime is economically driven, which may not apply to all contexts. Preferences for “bottom up” approaches seem to be attenuated by fear of crime and perceived risk of victimization. Although at the aggregate level, citizens across the ideological spectrum tend to prefer investment in rehabilitative crime policies by the state, such experiences reduce the odds that an individual will express preference for these policies (Baker et al. 2015). The support for public welfare provision also decreases as fear of crime increases due to overall distrust in government based on its inability to properly reduce inequality, and subsequently crime (Altamirano, Berens, and Ley 2020).

### *Perceived Source of Crime*

Citizen preferences for certain crime policies also may hinge on the perceived source of crime in one’s community. These perceptions do not always reflect reality and can be affected by exogenous sources, such as the media (Martinez Barahona and Lejarraga 2011; Krause 2014; Bonner 2018). Irrespective of their basis on reality, these perceptions can influence which policies respondents may see as most appropriate for decreasing crime, and subsequently which policy propositions they prefer among political candidates.

As discussed, Rueda and Stegmüller (2016) find that preferences for increased redistribution are high when fear of crime is high, but in a context where crime is seen as primarily economically motivated. However, in contexts where crime is seen as non-economic, such as driven by gangs or criminal groups, respondents tend to prefer more punitive or tough-on-crime solutions (Martinez Barahona and Lejarraga 2011; Bonner 2018). Bonner (2018)

demonstrates that where the media influences public opinion to see crime as driven by criminal groups and paints the police favorably, punitive populist candidates tend to see more support. For example, in Argentina, organizations such as the Network of Mothers and Family Members of Drug Victims serve as journalistic sources, often discussing the presence of criminals and gangs as a main source of crime. Importantly, much of the rise of iron fist policy is attributed to increased criminal and gang risks as an attempt by the government to quash these groups (Rodgers 2009).

Even though both iron fist and punitive policies have seen mixed success in achieving their goals, they are consistently still advertised and accepted as the most appropriate solutions to solve crime. In particular, this seems to be the case where crime is seen not to be driven by poverty and inequality, but by illicit groups. However, few studies have tested this idea directly and empirically, suggesting a clear connection must still be made between perceived source of crime and preferred policy solution.

#### *Policy Effectiveness & Prospective Policy Evaluations*

Voters may also respond to past experiences with similar policies. Even if an individual supports the *idea* of a policy, past experience and the perceived success of policies can influence the degree to which they support a candidate who offers said solution. This logic is similar to that of retrospective voting, suggesting that voters select candidates based on the previous performance of the incumbent, rewarding the incumbent by casting a vote for her if she was “successful,” and choosing her competitor if not (Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2011; Lewis-Beck and Ratto 2013). Although this theory often applies to the economy, it has been explored across multiple issues, including social matters, responses to natural disasters, crime, and corruption (Healy and Malhotra 2013; Altamirano and Ley 2020) and in the context of Latin America (Benton 2005; Michael S. Lewis-Beck and Ratto 2013; Altamirano and Ley 2020).

In addition to retrospective voting, scholars have proposed a theory of prospective voting in which individuals evaluate candidates less on the basis of their past performance and more on the likelihood that they will accomplish their goals based on promises for the future (Lewis-Beck and Tien 1996; M. M. Singer and Carlin 2013). Singer and Carlin (2013) find that prospective voting is especially dominant when a candidate has spent little time in office. This phenomenon

has been observed at both the national and subnational level (Svoboda 1995; Remmer and Gélinau 2003).

In considering this work's applicability to voting and crime policy, it suggests that voters should select candidates who they believe will most effectively reduce crime. In cases where incumbents must leave office due to term limits, evaluations regarding crime extend to the incumbent's party and chosen successor (Altamirano & Ley 2020). However, research has largely not explored the role of retrospective policy evaluations, independent of candidate or party, in affecting preferences for candidates and future policy. Based on the theories of retrospective and prospective voting, voters should consider past experience with a policy (whether or not their lives improved, worsened) or their perceptions of its effectiveness when evaluating a candidate based on their propositions. We may expect to not only see the influence of retrospective and/or prospective voting during elections, but also retrospective policy experience. This phenomena is relevant, and realistic, for a handful of reasons. First, as demonstrated, candidates increasingly propose crime policies which cannot neatly be attributed to one ideological or partisan camp. Further, the policies proposed and enacted by a party or official may be highly diverse. Voters may need to evaluate not only a candidate or party, but also the policy stance proposed prior to an election.

In addition, retrospective voting with regard to crime has been explored little in contexts where incumbency (of a candidate or party) is not at play, but crime is equally salient. In highly fragmented party systems, such as Argentina and Brazil, where many parties participate in elections and coalitions change frequently, it is unclear how citizen evaluations of crime policy affect candidate choice. Based on knowledge of prospective voting, it is possible that in elections without an incumbent, and where parties are less disciplined and punishment/reward processes are not as available, voters will make evaluations regarding a policy's possible effectiveness. In an election with no incumbent candidate or party, voters may engage in a form of prospective voting, evaluating the likelihood of crime reduction based on the candidate's proposed crime policy. In such scenarios, individuals are equipped with their past experiences and perceptions of similar policies. Thus, they should factor in retrospective evaluations of policy success in their prospective evaluations of candidates.

## Hypotheses

Based on existing literature, I propose that support for punitive policy can often be explained through non-ideological factors. Although ideology likely has a degree of influence, this effect is moderated by certain experiences and perceptions. I argue that the effect of ideology is moderated by three key factors: 1) victimization and insecurity, 2) perceived effectiveness of social policy, and 3) perceived source of crime in one's community. I propose that we should see this relationship at play even among ideologically progressive voters, who we typically believe support more social policy oriented approaches to solving crime. When these three factors are considered, we should see clear patterns among the ideologically progressive, and observe circumstances under which they will in fact support punitive policies.

I test these relationships in the domain of electoral choice. I argue that we should see the influence of these factors when voters evaluate candidates for political office. First, I propose:

*H1A: Victims of crime and those who perceive significant insecurity in their communities will prefer candidates who offer punitive solutions to crime*

*H1B: Even among ideologically progressive individuals, this relationship will hold*

I propose these hypotheses based on knowledge that victimization and insecurity often increase support for conservative crime policies, although this has predominantly been explored outside of electoral scenarios. I extend this consideration to examine not only electoral scenarios, but also to punitive crime policy, instead of preferences for more extreme iron fist policies often explored in past literature. I then argue:

*H2A: Those who see the main source of crime as gang-related will prefer candidates who offer punitive solutions to crime*

*H2B: Even among ideologically progressive individuals, this relationship will hold*

These hypotheses are forwarded based on previous research which suggests punitive and iron fist policies are typically supported in contexts where violence is seen as driven by gangs or criminal groups, while social policy oriented solutions tend to be preferred in areas where crime is seen as economically motivated. Finally, I propose:

*H3A: Those who see social policy-oriented, redistributive policies as ineffective will prefer candidates who offer punitive solutions to crime*

*H3B: Even among ideologically progressive individuals, this relationship will hold*

I propose this final relationship based on knowledge of prospective candidate evaluations, and preferences for effective policy across issue domains. If individuals do not see social policy-oriented approaches as effective, they will be less likely to select individuals who offer such policies. Even if these policies are more coherent with citizens' broader ideological beliefs, such candidates will not be preferable if their proposals are not seen as viable solutions. In turn, citizens will be more likely to support punitive candidates.

I test these hypotheses in the contexts of Brazil and Argentina, which vary in terms of crime salience. However, in both countries, both punitive policies and social policy-oriented solutions to crime have been pursued by political authorities, as discussed earlier. In the following sections, I discuss the mechanisms I use to test these hypotheses in these contexts, including data collection and statistical analyses. I then discuss the results and conclude.

## **Data and Analysis**

To test these hypotheses, I utilize an original survey fielded in Brazil (n = 1512) and Argentina (n = 1521) of respondents age 18 or older. The survey was fielded utilizing an online panel and was collected in March 2021. The samples were designed to reflect the countries' populations in terms of gender, age, socioeconomic status, and region. Within this survey, I embedded a conjoint experiment to evaluate citizen preferences for policies proposed by gubernatorial candidates. All hypothesized relationships were pre-registered prior to the fielding of the survey.<sup>4</sup>

Although online surveys are can be criticized for their lack of representativity, this survey form is justifiable for two reasons. First, research demonstrates that differences in population representativity resulting from the online modality can be attenuated if controlling for various background characteristics (Grewenig et al. 2018). Furthermore, the experimental nature of this analysis still allows the results to be internally valid, regardless of such controls. Second, given the public health crisis (the COVID-19 pandemic) present in both nations during the time, online data collection is ideal. Respondent were not put at risk of increased contact with others, nor were required to break any local guidelines of quarantining or social distancing.

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<sup>4</sup> Pre-analysis plan #XXXXXX filed with XXXXXX on XXXXXXXX.

### *Measuring Ideology*

To measure respondent ideology, I rely on a battery of questions regarding various beliefs and policy preferences. I focus on two sets of questions, the first which elicits information about beliefs regarding social and cultural issues and the second regarding economic issues. The questions for each of these groups can be seen in Table 1 which I use to create two measures of ideology (sociocultural and economic). A unidimensional measure of ideology has been shown to misrepresent or not fully capture respondent ideology generally speaking (Treier and Hillygus 2009; Laméris, Jong-A-Pin, and Garretsen 2018; Harbers, de Vries, and Steenbergen 2013) and research demonstrates that the unitary left-right dimension is context-specific and unstable in Latin America (Ames and Smith 2010; Harbers, de Vries, and Steenbergen 2013; Zechmeister and Corral 2013). Although these ideological dimensions are often highly correlated and complementary, their relationship can vary by individual and context (Johnston and Ollerenshaw 2020). Therefore, separating out ideology into multiple dimensions is most prudent.

In defining these dimensions, I draw on Rosas' (2010) conception of the economic divide, which he determines pertains to both economic governance and social protection concerns, where conservatives favor limited government involvement and assistance in reducing inequality. I also draw upon Bobbio and Cameron's (1997) (also utilized by Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012) conceptualization, where progressives see inequalities between individuals as artificial, and to be overcome through explicit action. Conservatives see such inequalities as natural or a product of personal responsibility, and are outside of the purview of the state to solve. In terms of the sociocultural divide, I rely upon Rosas' (2010) conception of the religious dimension, which I refer to as a sociocultural dimension. This dimension captures traditional religious and cultural values, where conservatives do not approve of abortion nor same sex marriage and believe in the involvement of the church in public affairs. Ideologically progressives hold opposite views.

In creating the indexes, I utilize the questions outlined in Table 1 which were asked on a five point scale, where "1" indicates the individual strongly disagrees with the statement, and "5" strong agreement. With these questions, I develop an index of progressive vs. conservative ideology for each dimension. To do so, I engage in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and model two latent variables of ideology (sociocultural and economic). Similar practices have been used to examine contemporary voter ideology in the past, and has been shown to out-perform

unidimensional left-right voter identification in capturing multi-dimensional ideologies (Rosas 2010; Laméris, Jong-A-Pin, and Garretsen 2018).

I confirm that a two-dimensional structure for ideology is superior to a unidimensional measure in this context. I do so by exploring both a one- and two-dimensional structural equation model for ideology. I find that a two-dimensional measure which separates out sociocultural and economic dimensions provides indices with a stronger fit. This is inspired by previous work of other scholars of ideology in Latin America (Martínez-Gallardo et al. Working Paper). Comparisons between the one- and two-dimensional indices, fit statistics, and further description of the creation of the indices can be found in the Appendix.<sup>5</sup>

With these indices, I divide respondents into progressive and conservative groups along both ideological spectrums. The indices created, which capture latent measures of ideology as discussed above, are centered at zero. Respondents with scores greater than 0 are progressive along these issue dimensions, and below 0 are conservative. I divide respondents into two groups based on this centered value. I then use the progressive respondents (n = 762 sociocultural progressives, n = 768 economic progressives) as a subset of data on which to test my hypotheses regarding preferences for punitive candidates among ideological progressives.

**Table 1: Ideological Measurement Questions**

*The response nature (agree vs. disagree) to the following questions do not directly correspond to conservative vs. progressive. All responses were recoded so lower values corresponded to agreement with conservative ideas, and higher values corresponded to agreement with progressive ideas. Recoding procedures can be found in the Appendix.*

<b>Economic Dimension</b>	<b>Sociocultural Dimension</b>
The government should NOT spend a lot to help the poor	The government should consult with religious authorities in interpreting laws
The majority of the unemployed could encounter work if they really tried	Religious considerations should guide/influence government actions
The economy functions better and the country develops more when the government does not intervene in the economy	Same sex couples should NOT have the right to marry
	Abortion should be legal in all circumstances

<sup>5</sup> Robustness checks are included in the Appendix to demonstrate the degree of association with left-right self-placement of participants. Although left-right self-placement is an imperfect measure, an association between left-right placement and the measures I create using CFA lends credence to the validity of the CFA measures.

### *Respondent Attributes*

Included in the survey are questions which measure additional variables of interest. With these questions, I determine respondents' personal experience with crime (victimization), perceived insecurity in their neighborhoods, perceived source of crime, and beliefs about the effectiveness of social assistance. These questions are included in the Appendix. Respondents are divided into subgroups based on their responses to these questions to test my hypotheses. Information is also collected about common sociodemographic characteristics, including age and education. However, such attributes are not included in the analysis as the methods used here are experimental in nature.

### *Conjoint Experiment*

To measure citizen preferences for punitive vs. social-assistance oriented crime policies proposed by candidates, I field a conjoint forced choice experiment. Respondents were presented with a choice between two candidates for state office (governor) with each choice presenting five varying political beliefs and policy propositions. Candidates also varied by gender. I choose a gubernatorial election as state or provincial governments in Brazil and Argentina are typically in charge of the majority of day-to-day policing, and have a high degree of control over other public security matters. The main policy belief of interest for this analysis is the proposed public security platform. Via a conjoint experiment, I can isolate the effect of the public security platform presented, as such experiments allow for the determination of precisely which components of the experimental manipulation influence observed effects (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014). All experimental attributes were randomized and each respondent completed the experiment five times. In Table 2, I present the conjoint experimental design.

The conjoint experiment was forced choice. These designs have been demonstrated to perform well across country contexts in replicating real-life choice behavior (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015). Similar designs have been employed across political science and social science research, and elucidate the role of various candidate attributes and expressed policy positions or beliefs on respondents' sincere preferences (Horiuchi, Smith, and Yamamoto 2020; Christensen, Rosa, and Grönlund 2020). Such designs remain useful even when exploring valence issues, position issues, and personal candidate attributes (Franchino and Zucchini 2014).

No restrictions were imposed on the possible attribute combinations for each candidate as it is possible that any combination may occur in reality.

**Table 2: Conjoint Experimental Design**

*The experiment was presented in Spanish in Argentina and Portuguese in Brazil. Each respondent was presented with this experiment five times. Candidate attributes were fully randomized.*

<p>Next, we will present two candidate choices for governor and a series of their beliefs and political positions. Which of the candidates would you choose for governor or your state/province (mayor in Buenos Aires)? Even if you are not completely sure, please indicate your preference.</p> <p>Which of the following candidates would you choose for governor of your state/province? Please choose one.</p>
<b>Candidate (Present Two):</b>
<i>Sex:</i> [Female/Male]
<i>Public Security:</i> [Investment in community-based social programs, such as prisoner reinsertion and jobs training programs, will reduce crime / Harsher sentencing, increased presence of police in high violence areas, and increased use of force by the police will reduce crime]
<i>Abortion:</i> [In the majority of cases, abortion should be illegal / Abortion should be legal]
<i>Taxes:</i> [Taxes should be reduced in general / Taxes should be increased on the rich]
<i>Same-Sex Marriage:</i> [Same sex marriage should not be permitted / Marriage should be permitted, irrespective of the individuals' gender identities]
<i>The Environment:</i> [Believes in investment in business and the economy, regardless of its impact on the environment / Believes in investment in "green" practices and in the protection of natural resources (for example Patagonia / the Amazon)]

*Analysis*

I estimate the marginal mean for each experimental attribute as the quantity of interest. In a forced choice experiment with two alternatives, the marginal mean of an attribute can be interpreted as a probability of candidate choice given the specified attribute by the respondent. If a marginal mean is equal to 1, it indicates there is a 100 percent chance (probability of 1) that respondents will choose the presented candidate with that given attribute. A value which exceed

0.5 indicates a candidate feature increases candidate profile favorability, while a value below 0.5 indicates the feature decreases favorability.

Although the average marginal component effect (AMCE) is also popularly used in conjoint experiments, researchers have demonstrated shortcomings with this quantity of interest (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020; De la Cuesta, Egami, and Imai 2022). Particularly when comparing subgroup preferences, marginal means have been determined as more appropriate. Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley (2020) demonstrate that the AMCE is not sensitive to reference categories, which severely affect this quantity when used to examine subgroup differences. Using marginal means, I examine subgroup preferences based on respondent-reported victimization, perceived safety, perceived effectiveness of social assistance, and perceived source of crime. These factors are all considered pre-treatment, or experiences or perceptions which are not affected at any point by the survey or conjoint experiment.

## Results

Here, I present results from the conjoint experiment, separating each subgroup by relevant experiential or perceptual factors and ideology. All results are presented at the  $p < 0.05$  level. I also present differences in marginal means ( $p < 0.05$ ). I present results disaggregated by country in the Appendix. Results are directionally consistent across countries.<sup>6</sup>

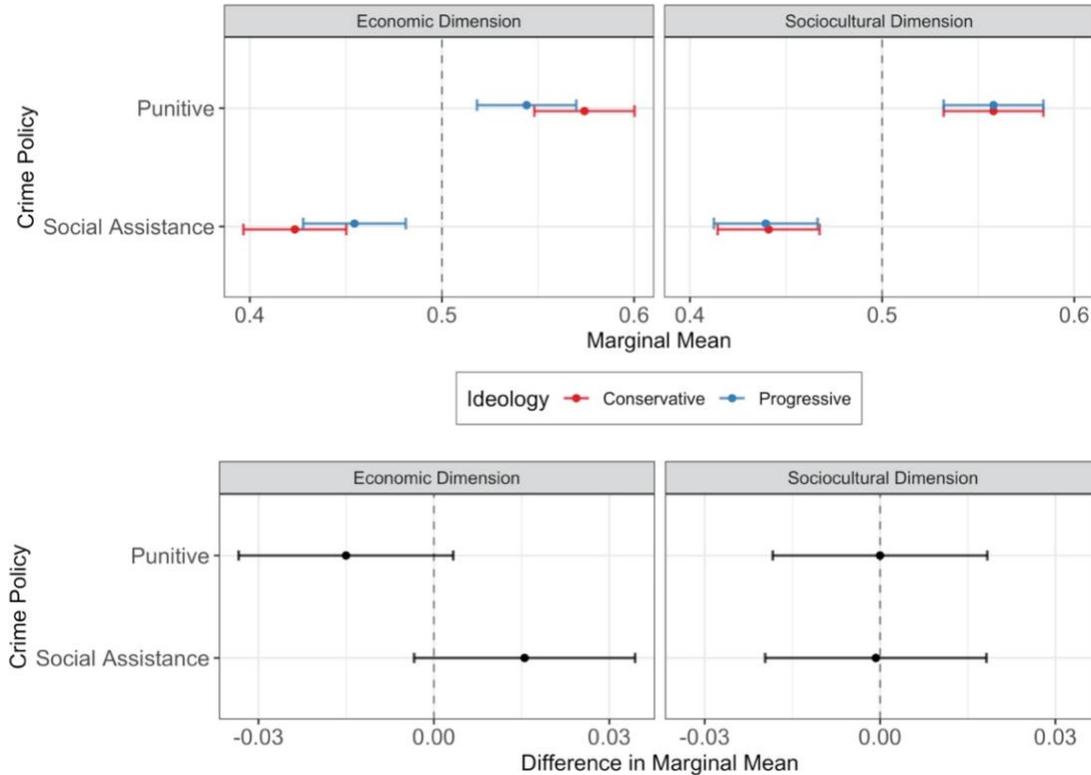
Pooled results (Figure 1) demonstrate that if respondents are disaggregated as either progressive or conservative (both along economic and sociocultural dimensions), the preference for candidates who offer punitive policy is only stronger among conservatives if we examine the economic dimension. However, the differences in preferences among conservatives and progressives is not statistically different from zero. This challenges previous ideas about the role of ideology in influencing preferences for punitive vs. social-assistance oriented crime policy. In particular, it is unexpected that progressives seem to prefer candidates who offer punitive policies. This supports my claim that ideology is an insufficient explanation for support for punitive vs. social policy-oriented crime policies. In the following sections, I demonstrate that

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<sup>6</sup> This is worth noting as the sample size of the respondents when divided by ideology decreases significantly. When separating the sample, it is reduced to about 800 respondents in each ideological group. When further dividing by country, these groupings are reduced to between 300 and 500 respondents. Testing hypotheses on such small samples reduces the statistical power of calculations, making it more likely that the null hypothesis is incorrectly rejected.

the perceptions and experiences I identify often explain the preference for punitive policy, particularly among progressives.

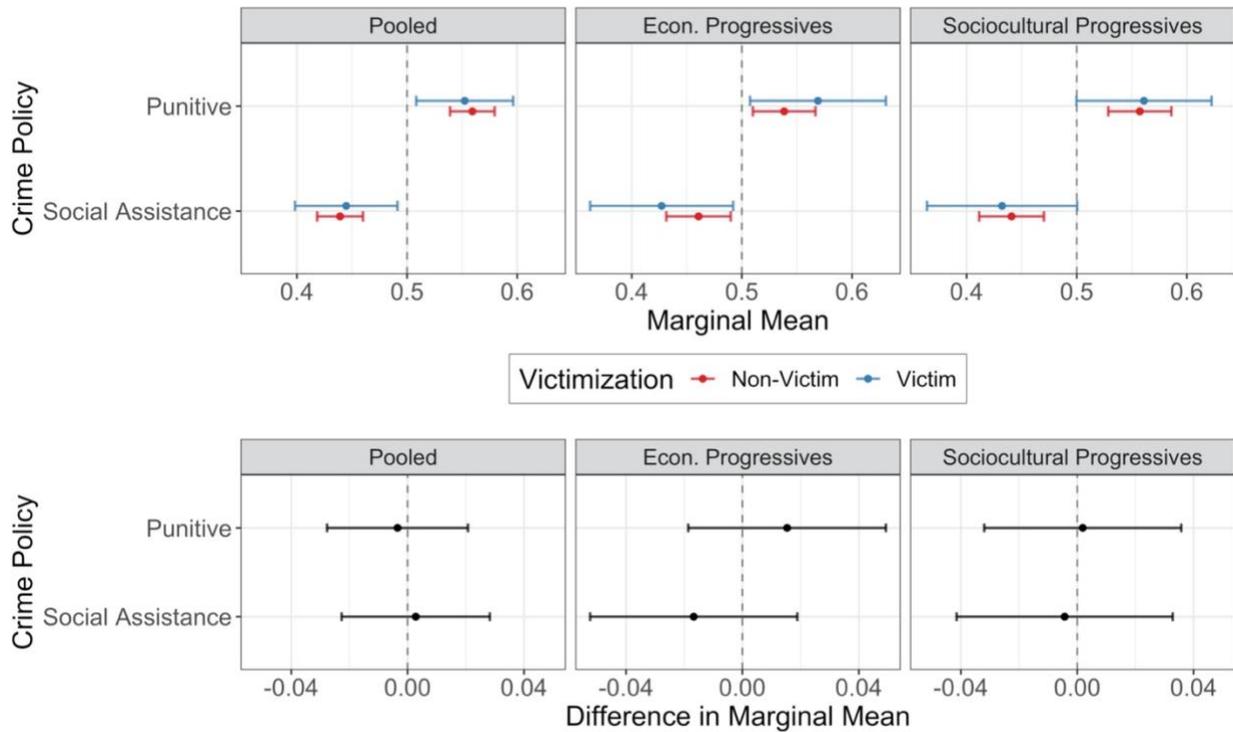
**Figure 1: Candidate Attribute Preferences Across Divided by Ideology**



*Victimization and Personal Insecurity*

Results which examine H1A and H1B, focusing on the preferences for crime policy among victims/non-victims of crime and those who perceive their communities to be safe/unsafe, are presented in Figure 1 (victimization) and Figure 2 (community safety). Overall, results show some support for the hypotheses, although this depends on the subgroups examined. Models exploring the role of victimization indicate that H1A and H1B are not supported. Across the pooled sample, both non-victims and victims prefer candidates who propose punitive policies to combat crime (Figure 1). The marginal mean for the punitive policy attribute across candidates is greater than 0.5 and statistically significant. This effect holds when just examining both economic and sociocultural progressive respondents (Figure 1). In some cases, it seems that victims may have an increased preference for candidates that offer punitive policies (economic progressives). However, this difference is not statistically significant.

**Figure 2: Victimization and Candidate Attribute Preferences and Differences in Marginal Means**

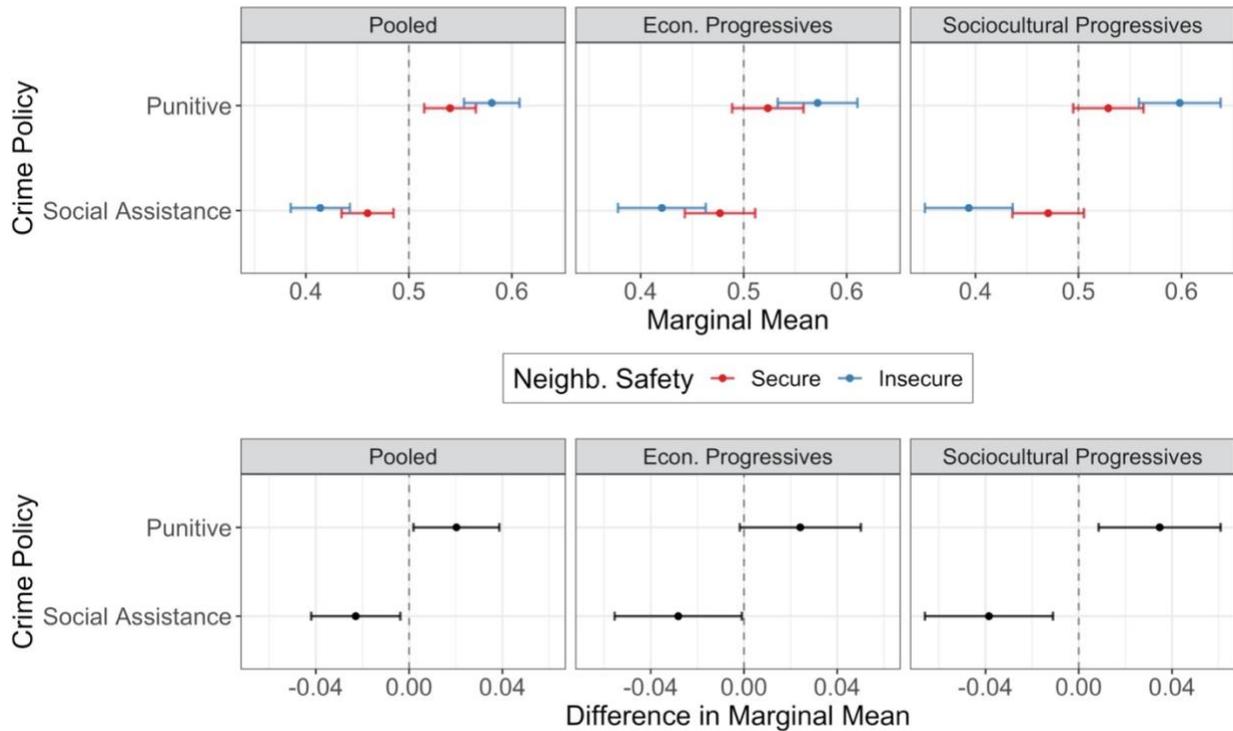


However, results regarding perceived neighborhood safety do support hypotheses H1A and H1B (Figure 2). In the pooled sample, those who rate their neighborhoods as “unsafe” or “very unsafe” more strongly prefer candidates who offer punitive crime policy. The difference in marginal means between those who perceive their community to be safe vs. unsafe is statistically significant from zero, supporting H1A.

Among the ideologically progressive (both economic and sociocultural), those who live in unsafe neighborhoods prefer punitive candidates, with a marginal mean that is greater than 0.5 and statistically significant. However, the difference in marginal means is only significant if exploring sociocultural progressives, and is not when examining economic progressives. Thus, we see some support for H1B among this subsample. This suggests that even among sociocultural progressives, those who perceive their community to be unsafe prefer candidates who offer punitive policy while those who perceive their community to be safe do not. Furthermore, it demonstrates differentiation among ideological progressives; those who are more

secure in their neighborhoods express preferences which comport with previous ideas about their ideological preferences, namely that they are *not* more likely to support punitive candidates.

**Figure 3: Preferences for Candidate Attributes Disaggregated by Community Safety and Differences in Marginal Means**

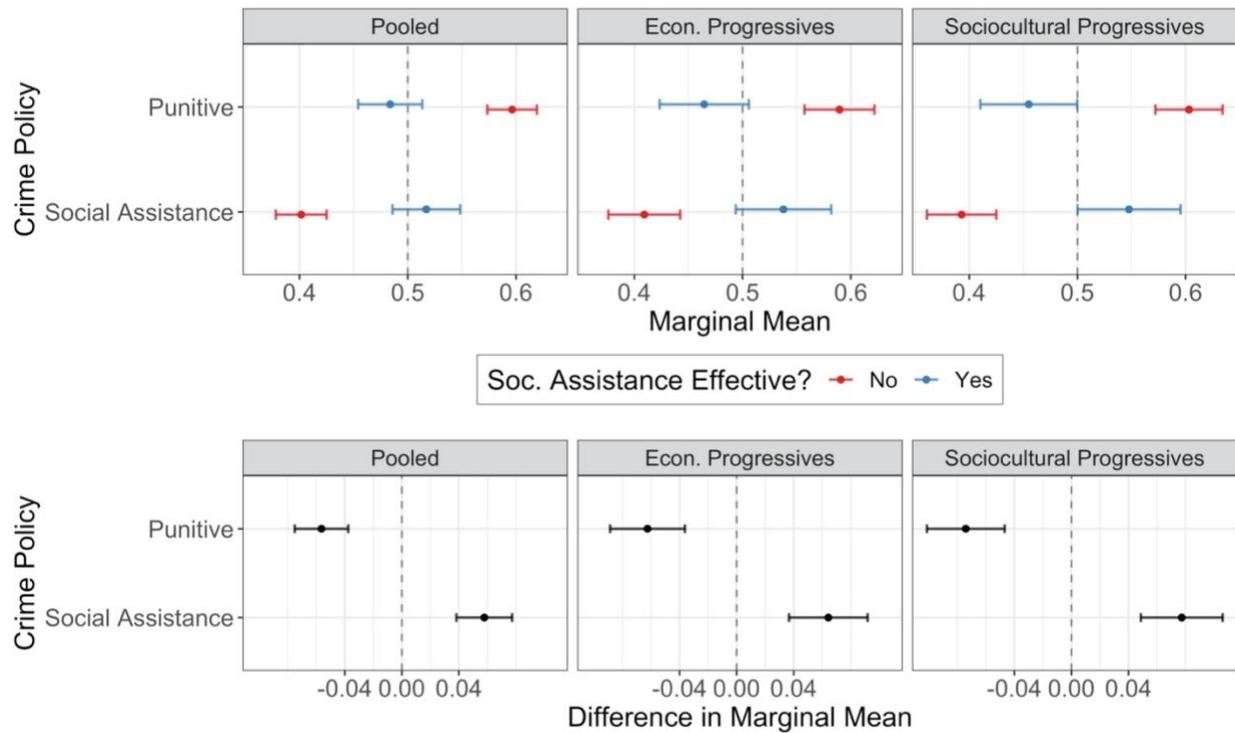


### *Social Policy Effectiveness*

I proceed by evaluating the role of perceived social assistance effectiveness. Results from this examination support both H2A and H2B. In Figure 3, we can see that among all respondents (pooled regardless of ideology), when social assistance is perceived as ineffective, the marginal mean for candidates who propose punitive policy is greater than 0.5 and statistically significant. That is, the presence of this attribute has a positive and significant effect on that candidate being chosen. The marginal mean for social assistance-oriented crime platforms is negative and significant, suggesting candidates who propose such policies are not popular among those who believe social assistance is ineffective. Punitive platforms do not have a significant effect on candidate choice among respondents who believe that social assistance is effective. Further, the difference between these effects is significant.

When disaggregating respondents by ideology, we see that even among both economic and sociocultural progressive respondents this effect is present (H2B). Across progressives who believe social assistance is ineffective, the effect of punitive policy on the probability of candidate choice is greater than 0.5. Furthermore, the difference in marginal means is also statistically significant. Among progressives who see social policy as effective, the marginal mean is greater than 0.5 for those who propose social assistance policies, demonstrating increased preference for these candidates. However, this effect is not distinguishable from zero. Regardless, this result once again supports the idea that progressives may demonstrate preferences that comport with their broader ideological beliefs, but certain perceptions transcend this influence.

**Figure 4: Perceived Effectiveness of Social Assistance and Candidate Attribute Preferences and Differences in Marginal Means**



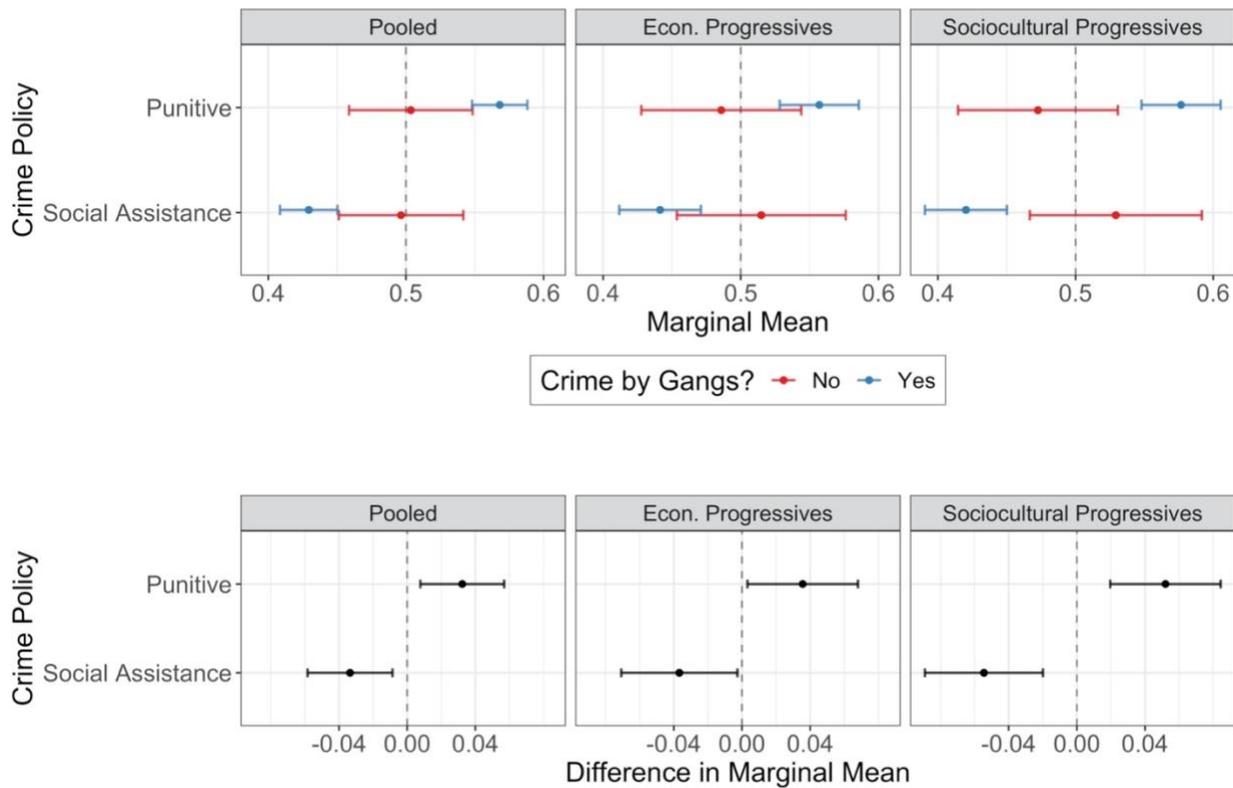
*Source of Crime*

Finally, I evaluate the role of perceived source of crime. Results also support hypotheses H3A and H3B, shown in Figure 4. Across all pooled respondents, those who report that the main source of crime in their community are gangs are more likely to choose candidates who propose

punitive policies. Among those who do not see the main source of crime in their community as gang-related, the marginal mean is greater than 0.5, but is not statistically significant. Further, the difference between these two groups in the pooled sample is significant.

When examining both economic and sociocultural progressive respondents, these effects remain, providing support for H3B. Once again, the difference between those who believe the main source of crime is gang-related, and those who do not, is significantly different. Among progressives who do not believe that the main source of crime is gangs, there is a negative effect on the probability of electing an official when she proposes punitive policy. However, this effect is not statistically different from 0.5. Furthermore, we see that among progressive respondents who believe the main source of crime is gang-related, there is a negative effect on the probability of choosing a candidate if he or she proposes social assistance-oriented solutions to crime.

**Figure 5: Perceived Source of Crime (Gangs) and Candidate Attribute Preferences and Differences in Marginal Means**



## **Validation on a Nationally Representative In-Person Survey**

Although the experimental results provide strong evidence of the proposed hypotheses, it is worth exploring the external validity via available in-person. To do so, I engage in an analysis of the 2014 AmericasBarometer survey in both Brazil and Argentina (n = 1500 cases for each). This data provides a nationally representative sample of each country's population and, unlike other recent rounds of the survey in both countries, also asks respondents to evaluate their preferences for punitive vs. social-policy oriented solutions to crime (or a combination of both). In particular, the survey asks respondents:

*In your opinion, what should be done to reduce crime in a country like ours: Implement preventative measures or increase punishment of criminals? [Option included for 'both']*

With this survey, I establish the patterns observed from my experimental results are characteristic of opinions of the national population, regardless of their ability to access internet. To do so, I conduct a logistic regression to explain differences in responses to the above question.<sup>7</sup> Responses are coded as a binary response variable where support for punitive policy or "both" is considered punitive, while support for preventative policy alone is considered preventative. I examine the degree to which my hypotheses may explain preferences for punitive vs. progressive policies, although in this case outside of an electoral scenario. I examine how victimization, perceived community safety, the perception that the current administration is effective at managing the economy, and the degree to which there are gangs present in one's community affect such preferences. Indeed, these variables are not perfect matches for those employed in my survey, but serve as close proxies. To factor in ideology, I examine the effect of these variables all while controlling for the ideology of respondents, as measured by self-reporting on a left-right scale. Unfortunately, I cannot perfectly replicate the sociocultural and economic ideology spectra included in the previous analysis, but results with this control included should produce a close approximation. To validate the use of the left-right control, I show that it is highly correlated with respondent's opinions on issues related to the ideology

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<sup>7</sup> In the Appendix, a multinomial logistic regression model (where the outcome variable is either support for preventative, punitive, or a combined policy approach) is presented. Results support findings presented in this section.

indices used in the main analysis (e.g., opinions on abortion and same-sex marriage). These results can be seen in the Appendix.

The results from the pooled models can be seen in Table 3 and reiterate the experimental results. Notably, ideology does have its expected effect: Individuals who identify as right-wing have an increased propensity to support punitive policy. However, the results also demonstrate important factors which influence support for punitive vs. social-policy oriented solutions even when controlling for ideology. Victimization does not seem to influence preferences, while a decrease in community safety increases preferences for punitive policy across the pooled sample. Both perceptions of the administration's economic effectiveness and the presence of gangs in one's neighborhood affect such preferences in the expected direction. Specifically, as perceptions of economic effectiveness increase, preferences for punitive and combined policy decrease. Further, as the presence of gangs increase, preferences for punitive policy (and a combined policy) increases.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, I also split the sample into left-wing and right-wing respondents to demonstrate whether or not these views can be seen just among progressive respondents, beyond the inclusion of a control. Results, provided in the Appendix, show that the results from the pooled sample still hold within the left-wing sample of respondents, providing further support for the conclusions found within the experiment. These results are, of course, not causal conclusions. But they lend credence to my experimental results and suggest they should be observable in a nationally representative sample via an in-person survey. Additional discussions about threats to inference beyond generalizability can be found in the Appendix.

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<sup>8</sup> Statistical significance in certain cases disappears when models are fully specified with all covariates. When both the presence of neighborhood gangs and perceptions of community security are considered in the same model, the presence of neighborhood gangs is no longer statistically significant. This is to be expected, as these variables are correlated (0.35). I expect these variables to be causally intertwined, as gang presence is likely to contribute to lower perceived community security. Thus, I consider these coefficients separately.

**Table 3: Logistic Regression Models: Support for Punitive Crime Policy***Dependent variable:  
Support for Punitive Crime Policy*

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Victim	0.10 (0.12)				-0.01 (0.12)
Comm. Safety		-0.16*** (0.05)			-0.11* (0.05)
Effective Econ			-0.12*** (0.03)		-0.10*** (0.03)
Neighb. Gangs				0.12*** (0.05)	0.08 (0.05)
Right Wing	0.05** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	0.05** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)
Female	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.10 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.09)	-0.11 (0.10)
Age	-0.01* (0.003)	-0.01* (0.003)	-0.01* (0.003)	-0.01* (0.003)	-0.01* (0.003)
Education	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.11*** (0.01)	-0.12*** (0.01)
Race/Eth: Black	-0.13 (0.19)	-0.13 (0.19)	-0.14 (0.19)	-0.16 (0.19)	-0.15 (0.20)
Indig.	0.11 (0.36)	0.11 (0.36)	0.15 (0.36)	0.07 (0.37)	0.10 (0.37)
Other	-0.001 (0.10)	-0.005 (0.10)	0.03 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.10)	-0.02 (0.11)
Brazil	-0.18* (0.10)	-0.20* (0.10)	-0.15 (0.10)	-0.18* (0.10)	-0.17* (0.11)
Constant	2.00*** (0.27)	2.45*** (0.30)	2.33*** (0.28)	1.83*** (0.28)	2.50*** (0.35)
Observations	2,298	2,300	2,286	2,246	2,219
Log Likelihood	-1,364.03	1,361.91	1,351.54	1,328.50	1,305.21
Akaike Inf. Crit.	2,748.07	2,743.82	2,723.09	2,677.00	2,636.43

*Note:*

\*p&lt;0.10 \*\*p&lt;0.05 \*\*\*p&lt;0.01

Data from the AmericasBarometer 2014 round, Latin American Public Opinion Project at Vanderbilt. Logistic regression employed where 1 is equal to support for increased punitive policy OR increase punitive and preventative measures, while 0 is support for increased preventative measure alone. Reference category for Race/Eth is “White”. Victim is a binary variable where 1 signifies victim in the past year and 0 is not a victim. Comm. Safety is a continuous variable from 1-4 where higher values indicate increased perceptions of community safety. Effective Econ is a continuous variable where high values indicate the perception that the government is managing the economy well, while low values indicate the opposite. Neighb. Gangs is a continuous variable where high values indicate the perception that gangs greatly affect one’s neighborhood, while low values indicate the opposite. Controls included are left-right partisan identification, gender, age, education, and country dummies. Income is not included due to high non-response in Argentina.

## Discussion & Conclusion

This paper aims to explain why voters from a diverse range of ideological backgrounds support tough-on-crime, punitive policies. I argue that three main factors ultimately influence support for punitive vs. social-policy oriented approaches to crime: insecurity (victimization and perceived community safety), perceived social policy effectiveness, and perceived source of crime. I further contend these influences are resistant to the influence of ideology, and may transcend previously assumed ideological predispositions to prefer punitive vs. social-policy oriented crime solutions. Overall, experimental results show strong support for my proposed hypotheses, with some challenge to the influence of victimization and insecurity. I also engage in secondary analysis of AmericasBarometer data. Results from this analysis supports that my findings are generalizable to a nationally representative sample.

In particular, I find that both perceived social assistance effectiveness and perceived source of crime influence preferences for punitive vs. social-policy oriented candidates. This effect even holds among ideologically progressive respondents (both economic and sociocultural). Overall, the perception that social policy is ineffective leads respondents to prefer candidates who offer punitive crime policy. Notably, those who believe that social assistance is effective exhibit preferences regarding crime policy that conforms with what previous research suggests: they prefer more social-policy oriented solutions. Similarly, the perception that the local crime is driven by gangs also leads individuals to prefer punitive candidates.

Results, however, do provide mixed support for hypotheses regarding victimization and perceived neighborhood security. Initially, I proposed that we should observe increased support for punitive candidates among both victims of crime and those who perceive their neighborhoods to be insecure. However, I only find support for the influence of community security and do not find evidence for the influence of victimization. When respondents are pooled (regardless of ideology) it seems there is almost equal support for punitive policy among both victims and non-victims. If we examine just ideologically progressive individuals, we similarly do not see statistically significant differences between victims and non-victims.

In considering null results with respect to victimization, it is possible that important information was not considered when developing the hypotheses and appropriate tests. Namely, respondents were not asked *who* victimized them, or *why* they perceive their neighborhoods to be insecure. For ethical reasons, asking such questions may be too sensitive, but could provide the

key to understanding the observed effects. In particular, it is well known that police brutality is common, and that many victimized individuals were in fact victimized by the state (Fuentes 2005; Ahnen 2007; French 2013). Police brutality often also occurs in high-crime, insecure areas (Bonner 2019). For this reason, it is possible that victims do not desire punitive policies as it might increase insecurity and victimization. However, further research must be conducted to determine the validity of this relationship.

Overall, I have forwarded a theory which argues that ideology is an incomplete explanatory variable to understand citizen support for punitive crime policy in Latin America. Although previous research suggests it is typically conservatives who support such policies, I instead argue that ideology does not capture support for such policies completely. I demonstrate two factors which challenge these preconceptions. First, I find there are no statistically significant differences in preferences for punitive or social-assistance policies between ideological conservatives and progressives when pooled. But more compellingly, I find that ideological progressives often do express policy preferences we might expect, but it is largely dependent on certain perceptions. Namely, the belief that social policy is ineffective and the perception that the main source of crime in one's community is gang-related leads individuals to support punitive crime policies at higher levels. To some degree, perceptions of community insecurity also has this effect. This project thus contributes to work which challenges the role of ideology in understanding the continued trend in use of and support for punitive policy in Latin America.

This work is not only relevant to the contexts of Argentina and Brazil, but also to Latin America and countries across the globe. Progressive politicians who run on or offer more conservative solutions can be found in diverse country contexts, such as Mexico and the United States. For example, Enns (2014) shows that punitive attitudes in the United States have increased substantially over time. This research suggests a possible causal mechanism for what leads to such attitudes across the electorate. Further, as mentioned, future work may investigate the differences between the role of victimization and perceived insecurity in affecting support for punitive policies. Moreover, this work could be extended to examine particular types of punitive policies to determine if there are specific policies which are more, or less, palatable to progressives. This work could also examine if certain perceptions or experiences lead ideologically conservative individuals to prefer more progressive solutions.

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