

Latin American Studies Center

University of Maryland, College Park



Voting in the Shadow of Violence: Electoral Politics and Conflict



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2120 Francis Scott Key
(Merrill Room)

In the context of violence, the assumption that the democratic process serves its accountability function has recently come under fire. This presentation will argue that the aggregate evidence casting doubt on democratic accountability is misleading, as it assumes that coercion directly motivates increased support for the perpetrator. Responsible parties – whether incumbent governments or insurgency-affiliated parties – are held accountable at the polls but only by voters directly exposed to violence. In contrast, voters learning about violence from afar will punish governing parties only when they fail to curb the violence. The analysis of two consecutive Peruvian elections held during the height of the civil war supports the story of discriminating electoral punishment, with important implications for our understanding of mobilization and political participation in conflicts.

Jóhanna Birnir is Associate Professor in the Department of Government & Politics and the Research Director of the Center of International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland. Her research is in the field of Comparative Politics. Broadly speaking, Dr. Birnir focuses on political developments in new democracies in Latin America and Eastern Europe. More specifically, she studies the effects of institutions on party system development and ethnic politics with a special emphasis on conflict and terrorism.