

Comments on Fergusson, Vargas, and Vela's

*Words versus Bullets:  
Media and Democracy with Coercion*

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# Question

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## Media and Political Accountability

- 1 A free and active press informs citizens about policy-makers (mis-)behavior
- 2 Based on this information citizens can **freely decide** who to vote for
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- What happen when vote is not (or is only partially) free?
- Will a free press still increase accountability?
- Scope for unintended (and undesired) consequences?

# Goal & Results

## Goal

- Investigate this issue in the context of Colombia's *parapolitica* case
- *Parapoliticians*: linked to paramilitaries in the position to **coerce** electors in controlled areas in **exchange** for pro-paramilitary policies
- Links between paramilitaries and parapoliticians **exposed** by the press

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## Results

- *Parapoliticians* exposed by the press get more vote than “clean” competitors
- *Parapoliticians's* votes concentrated in areas with weak state institutions
- Effect stronger for *Parapoliticians's* exposed before the elections
- Interpretation: exposure results in increased coercion in controlled areas

# Model: compares to Grossman-Helpman (96)

- Analogies:

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- Special interest groups vs. Paramilitaries
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- Differences:

- Influence of paramilitaries is only local
- In GS candidates “sell” policies to SIGs; this **directly** affects their popularity among informed voters

- Comments:

- Pro-paramilitarism is a campaign issue in itself (especially after a scandal!)
- Shouldn't parapoliticians suffer an additional popularity loss when they intensify coercion (if this can be even imperfectly observed?)
- Stronger popularity loss among free voters in coerced areas?



# Empirics

- 1 Provide more background on paramilitaries (origins, organization, ideological connotation)
- 2 More about the geographic distribution of paramilitary intensity (map!)
- 3 Is the presence of paramilitary endogenous to electoral forces?
- 4 More about electoral rules for senators (vs. reps?)
- 5 Different popularity shock in areas with more (less) pro-Uribe supporters?
- 6 Can you compare the effect of parapolitica scandals with that of other scandals?
- 7 Relationship between coercion and judicial cases non-linear?

# Empirics (cont.)

## Specifications

- Regressions with  $\widetilde{y}_{ct}$  are intuitive but somewhat confusing (you can only test one variable at the time)
- Ideal specification with municipality level data and double and triple interactions (*parapolitician* \* *paramilitaryarea*, *parapolitician* \* *paramilitaryarea* \* *exposed*, etc.)

## Direct evidence of increased coercion

- Can you look at whether acts of violence/intimidation increased in paramilitary-controlled areas **after** a local parapolitician was exposed but **before** the elections?
- Maybe using the event-based dataset?