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COVID-19 Lockdowns and Gender-Based Violence across Ethnic Groups in Guatemala

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INTRODUCTION

Women often face barriers to accessing government services, particularly access to the justice system.¹ This is especially the case in Guatemala, where gender-based forms of violence continue to be a criminal justice and health issue.² In Guatemala, approximately 36 percent of women who live with a man experience either physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, and on average, two women per day are murdered, according to several reports that focused on gender-based violence in the country between 2015 to 2017.³ Particularly in areas of Guatemala City, the Eastern

Highlands, and Petén,⁴ indigenous women experience overwhelming rates of domestic violence, compared with Ladinos in Guatemala.⁵ In addition, these individuals often underreport or do not report being victims of domestic violence, which is often attributed to a general mistrust of the police.⁶

While the issues involving gender-based or domestic violence are now well known in Guatemala, there is limited research into how domestic violence has been impacted by COVID-19 and COVID-19-based policy responses in Guatemalan contexts.⁷ One exception is a paper by Iesue and colleagues that found that initial

About the Series

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects one in three women worldwide, making it an urgent and important policy challenge. Many countries around the world have passed laws intended to protect women from violence, yet violence persists. Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of the perils women face from gender-based violence—what has come to be known as the “shadow pandemic”—but it has also aggravated risk factors while increasing barriers to protection, support, and justice.

This publication aims to focus on the intersection of gender-based violence and the rule of law by examining how legal frameworks, judicial system responses, and public policy contribute to the ways in which gender-based violence is—and is not—addressed around the world. Each piece addresses the complicated challenge of gender-based violence and the successes and failures of various public policy responses globally, and offers recommendations for a path forward.

lockdowns were associated with an increase in domestic violence.⁸ However, this pattern varied by departments in Guatemala. While informative, this study did not explicitly consider how one's ethnicity may impact these variations, though it suggests that it may be important.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CASES

Following previous research conducted in the United States⁹ and Australia,¹⁰ this brief report considers how COVID-19 and Guatemala's lockdown policies to mitigate infection impacted domestic violence for Ladinos and Mayans. Daily domestic violence cases were compiled from a specialized policing unit of Guatemala's National Civil Police (PNC) called Departamento de Atención a la Víctima. This unit is located within police headquarters, particularly in areas with higher incidences of violence.¹¹ Altogether, it has 53 offices across Guatemala.¹² Units are staffed by female police personnel who provide emotional, physical, family, social, and legal assistance either directly or through outreach via other organizations. Victims of violence can report directly to these specialized units. Once the unit receives a complaint from a victim and services have been rendered to the victim, the complaint goes to the PNC, which initiates an investigation in coordination with the Public Ministry, which grants authorization to the PNC to make any necessary arrests.¹³ Services involved include initial attention toward the victim's well-being, taking formal complaints, accompanying victims to justice institutions, reporting cases to the judicial bodies, and ensuring compliance with judicial orders regarding the security of the victim, as well as following up on actions regarding the case.¹⁴

Individuals are classified into the following categories by the PNC: abandoned, Alerta Alba Keneth, Alerta Alejandra,¹⁵ disappeared, flagrancy, abduction of a minor, referred for (abuse or at-risk), restitution of minor's sexual offenses, intrafamilial violence, vio-

lence against women, and others. These categories are broad in scope but fit within the United Nations' definition of domestic violence, as domestic violence involves a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power over one's partner, including physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and/or psychological abuse.¹⁶

In Guatemala, there is not a socially constructed category of "mestizo," or person of a national ethno-racial identity of mixed indigenous and Spanish heritage.¹⁷ Rather, Guatemalans utilize the category of "Ladino." Ladinos are Guatemalan-born and have both indigenous and Spanish heritage, yet they choose to set aside signifiers of indigenous identity such as language and dress.¹⁸ Individuals of predominantly indigenous descent that utilize signifiers of indigenous identity are predominantly Mayan. Because of this, data for this study is broken up into two categories: domestic violence cases for Ladinos and Mayans.

“Soon after the lockdown, news outlets began to report domestic violence incidents across Guatemala.”

DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Data was collected from January 1, 2019, until December 31, 2020. In total, there were more than 1,400 cases of domestic violence involving Ladinos and Mayans during this period.¹⁹ For simplicity, an observation variable for each case was created, so a complete count of cases could be obtained based on these categories.

In this study, we consider one key date of interest: March 29, 2020. On this date, Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei implemented an

eight-day curfew due to COVID-19.²⁰ Soon after the lockdown, news outlets began to report domestic violence incidents across Guatemala.²¹ This spike in domestic violence cases is not surprising, as this trend was also seen in other countries across the globe that utilized similar lockdown measures.²² Indicator variables were created to represent the lockdown, so that we could understand how the lockdown impacted domestic violence across these two groups. Any period before the lockdown is signified as a 0, while an indicator of 1 was utilized for the lockdown period and throughout the rest of 2020.

As with past research, multiple techniques were utilized to assess the relationship between the pandemic lockdown and domestic violence.²³ First, simple descriptive graphs depicting counts of domestic violence for all data as well as the intervention date of March 29 were created. Next, Dickey–Fuller non-stationary root tests as well as correlogram plots were generated to determine if lagged values in our model were autocorrelated. Dickey–Fuller results for the Ladino and Mayan models are available in Table 1, and they indicate that the data are stationary. Based on the correlogram plots, data for Ladinos had a positive effect on the values at the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 6th, 7th, 8th, 14th, 21st, 28th, and 35th lags. For Mayans, a positive effect was seen at the 1st, 7th, 14th, 21st, 28th, and 35th lags. These lagged effects are accounted for in the Poisson regression analyses, which have been provided in the appendix. Poisson regression analyses were calculated instead of ordinary least squares, as Poisson models are commonly used with count variables.²⁴ Percentage changes in domestic violence based on the Poisson regression models were also calculated using the following equation: $(\text{coefficient} - 1) * 100 = \text{expected percentage change}$.

Finally, an interrupted time series analysis for both of our ethnic groups using the ITSA command in STATA 17.1 was conducted.²⁵ To account for autocorrelation, the Prais–Winsten model, which uses

generalized least square methods to estimate the linear regression model and account for robust standard errors, was utilized. ITSA allows for estimates of domestic violence trends before the lockdown as well as after the lockdown went into effect. ITSA also allows for treating the shutdown as a “treatment” effect, ultimately assessing whether the lockdown contributed to changes in domestic violence. Previously this test has been used to analyze the effects of community interventions on domestic violence,²⁶ and it is also useful for analyzing large-scale interventions and changes²⁷ such as government shutdowns.²⁸

“Results show that domestic violence increased for both Ladinos and Mayans during this time.”

RESULTS

Table 2 lists domestic violence cases for Ladinos and Mayans in Guatemala between 2019 and 2020. On average, there were 24.28 cases of domestic violence per day for Ladinos, and approximately 10.16 cases of domestic violence per day for Mayans. Focusing on the Poisson regression analyses, which considered whether domestic violence increased during the pandemic lockdown, results show that domestic violence increased for both Ladinos and Mayans during this time. For Ladinos, domestic violence increased between 4.08 and 5.13 percent. For Mayans, domestic violence increased between 5.5 to 7.25 percent. However, to assess whether this increase in domestic violence was associated with the pandemic, and more specifically the pandemic-related lockdown, we move to the interrupted time series analysis. Figure 1 visually represents the overall time trend on domestic violence across the two groups.

Table 3 and Figure 2 consist of the interrupted time series models for Ladinos and Mayans during this period. Starting with Ladinos, these results show that domestic violence was significantly decreasing prior to the lockdown ($b = -0.01$, $p < 0.001$). When the lockdown began, domestic violence cases jumped to 2.40 cases per day, and based on the post-estimation command ($b = 0.01$, $p < 0.001$), the lockdown was statistically associated with this increase in domestic violence. Domestic violence continued to steadily increase between March 30 and December 31, 2020 ($b = 0.02$, $p < 0.05$).

For Mayans, the results suggest that domestic violence was not significantly increasing or decreasing prior to the lockdown period. When the lockdown began, domestic violence increased to 1.06 cases per day, however the post-estimation command shows that this jump was not statistically associated with the lockdown, but likely due to some other underlying factor. Domestic violence rates did not change between the period of March 30 and December 31, 2020. Figure 2 consists of a visual representation of the interrupted time series with break points at the time the lockdown began.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Results of this study showed that during the pandemic, domestic violence increased for both Ladinos and Mayans. However, increases in domestic violence were attributed to the lockdown for Ladinos but not for Mayans.

“These results are puzzling, and they possibly suggest that once again individuals are simply reluctant to go to the police to report such crimes.”

In terms of domestic violence for Mayans, these results may seem like a good thing, at least considering that domestic violence was not exacerbated by or attributed to the lockdown. However, we must ask ourselves why this was not the case, as it was for their Ladino counterparts, particularly considering that past research has often highlighted that Mayans overwhelmingly experience more domestic violence. These results are puzzling, and they possibly suggest that once again individuals are simply reluctant to go to the police to report such crimes. Future work needs to better consider the role of trust in the police, especially whether newly formed police units such as the Departamento de Atención a la Víctima are succeeding in instilling trust and helping all victims of domestic violence. In addition, future analyses of domestic violence need to incorporate more self-reported instances, to better consider the ramifications of COVID-19 and its lockdowns across these groups. Unfortunately, very few policy evaluations focusing on this specialized department’s efficacy when working with victims have been conducted, nor have there been studies utilizing self-reports. More work, both empirically and among advocates, is needed to consider these connections.

“Guatemalans need to ensure that their law enforcement and judicial systems continue to investigate and prosecute abusers.”

In addition, future policy work needs to help expand access to resources for domestic violence survivors, either with the support of or outside of police stations. This can include providing emergency warning systems to help individuals indicate that they are in danger or need support²⁹ and expanding support services to areas such as pharmacies.³⁰ In areas where technology and infrastructure are available to make services more accessible, online

services for victims, including health and counseling services, should be considered.³¹ Other potential services include publications with specific guidance that friends and family can utilize to support victims who may be isolated during COVID-19,³² including advice about what to look and listen for in domestic violence situations and ways to encourage active conversations about domestic violence within neighborhoods.³³

Finally, changes to Guatemala’s criminal justice system need to be considered, primarily to its law enforcement and judicial systems. First, Guatemalans need to ensure that their law enforcement and judicial systems continue to investigate and prosecute abusers. Currently, the extent to which law enforcement members opt out of investigating and prosecuting domestic violence cases to free up jail space—particularly during COVID-19—is unknown.

While a strictly criminal justice approach will not be enough to eradicate domestic violence, this sector can work with public health officials and other outlets to prevent and combat domestic violence through sanctions on abusers, raising awareness along with programs as mentioned previously, and increasing women’s access to the judicial legal system. Female police units such as the one mentioned are a step in the right direction, but given Guatemala’s history of police abuses, more work is needed to build up trust and access to resources for all victims. In the end, timely and responsive law enforcement embedded in the rule of law can deter violence and provide better protections for women.

Table 1: Dickey Fuller Root Test Statistics

<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>N(Days)</i>	<i>Test Statistic</i>	<i>Critical Values</i>		
			1%	5%	10%
Ladino	730	-20.48 ***	-3.96	-3.41	3.12
Maya	730	-23.09 ***	-3.96	-3.41	3.12

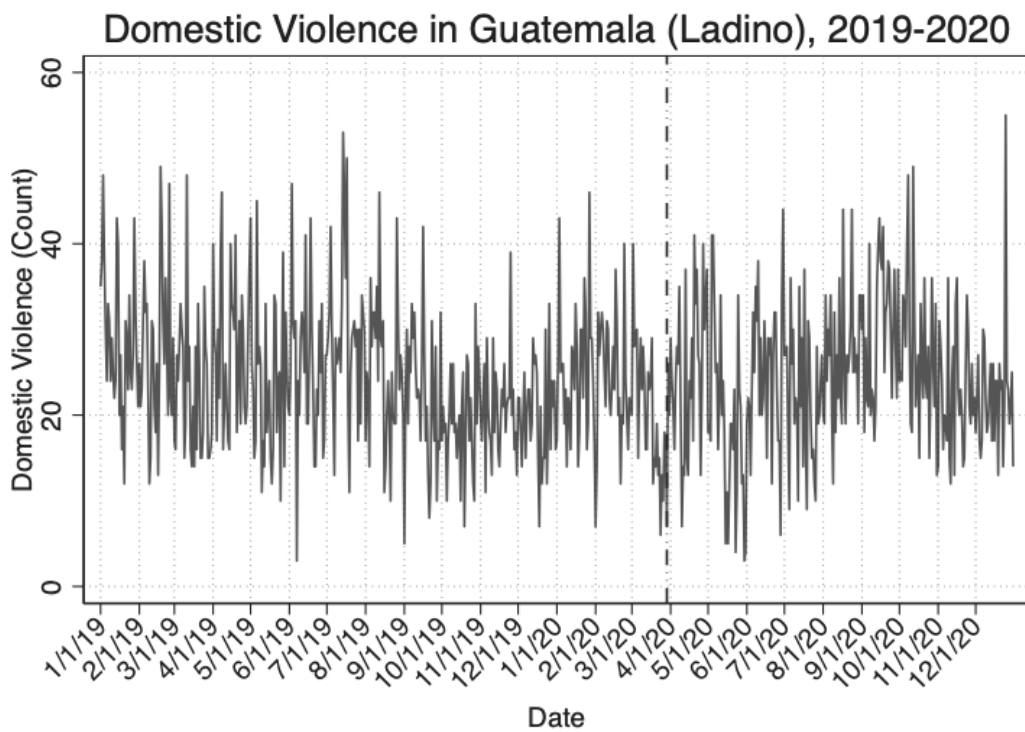
Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Domestic Violence by Ethnicity

<i>ETHNICITY</i>	<i># DAYS</i>	<i>MEAN</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>MIN</i>	<i>MAX</i>
<i>Ladino</i>	731	24.28	8.58	3	55
<i>Maya</i>	731	10.16	4.76	0	28

Table 3: Interrupted Time Series Analyses by Ethnicity					
	<i>Ladino</i>			<i>Maya</i>	
	b	(SE)		b	(SE)
Daily	-0.01	0.00	***	0.00	0.00
Lockdown Starts (3/29/20)	2.40	1.68		1.06	0.85
3/30-12/31/20	0.02	0.01	*	0.00	0.00
Post-Estimations					
Lockdown	0.01	1.05	***	0.00	0.00
Cons	27.57			10.44	0.48 ***
N	731			731	
R	0.02			0.00	

***p<0.001 **p<0.01 *p<0.05

FIGURE 1A: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE TRENDS FOR LADINOS AND MAYANS FROM 2019 TO 2020



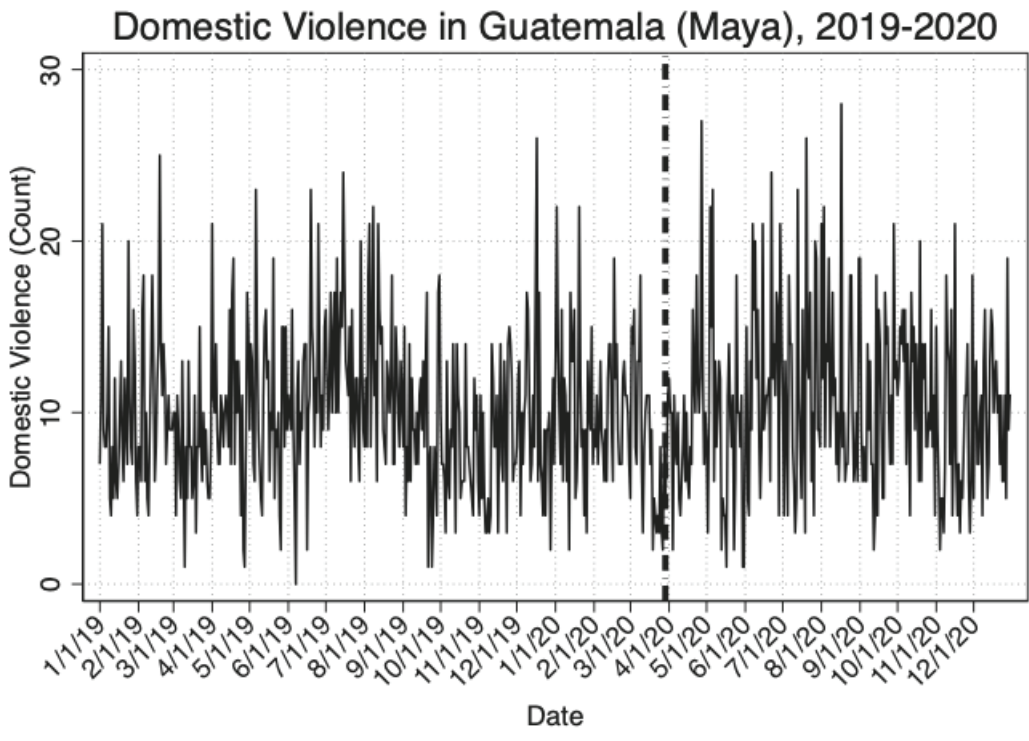
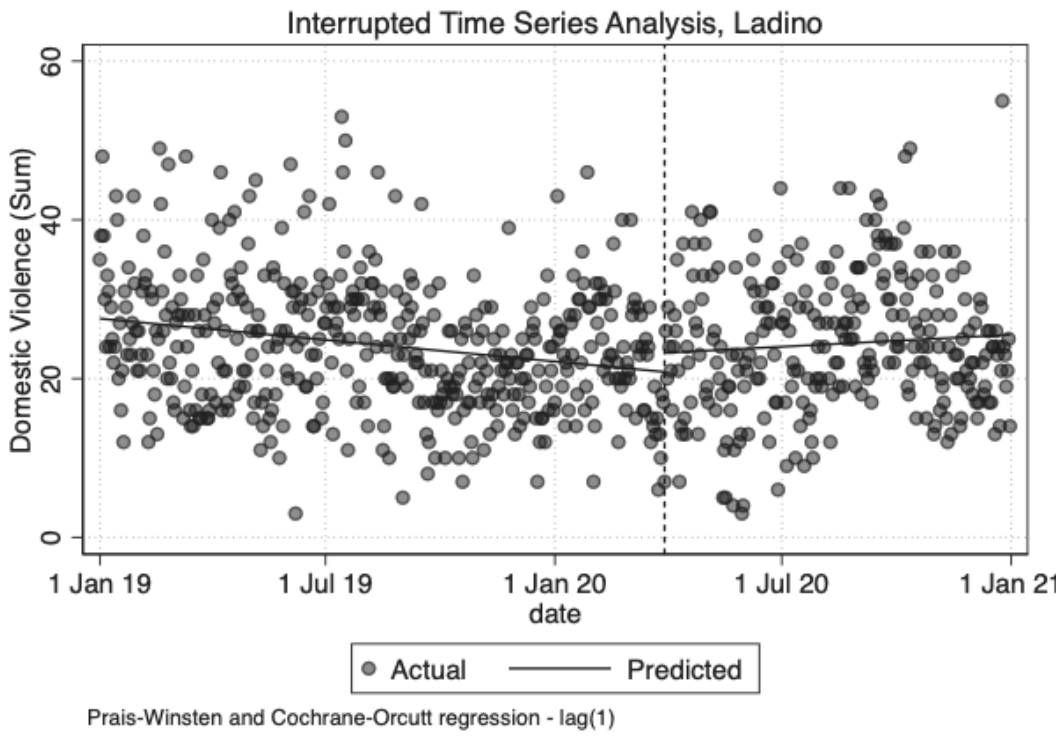
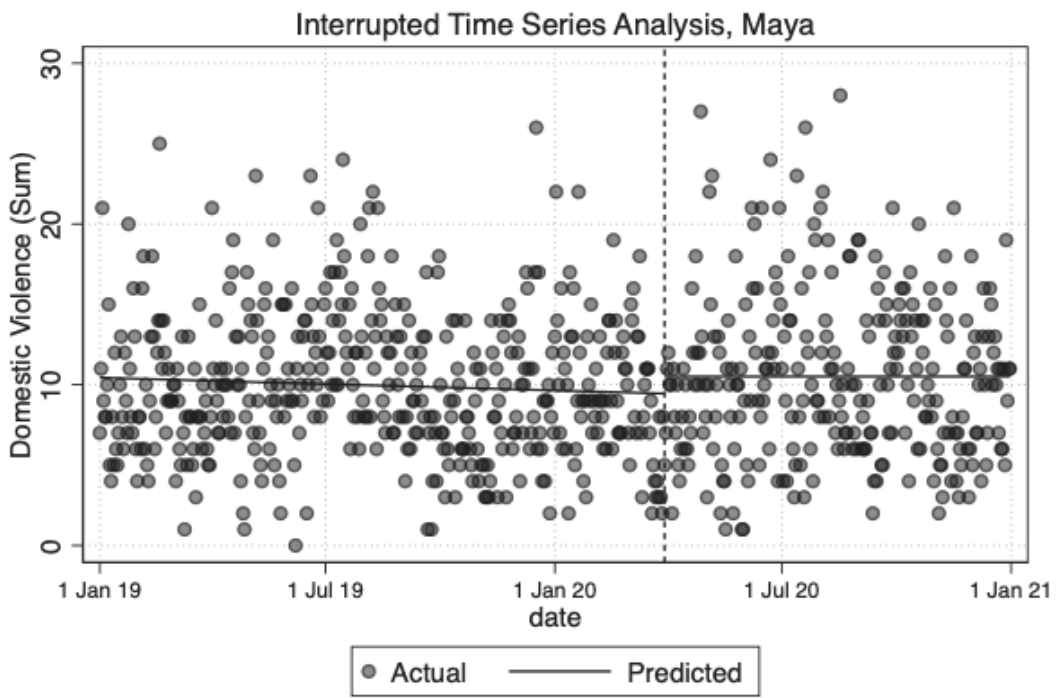


FIGURE 2: INTERRUPTED TIME SERIES MODEL FOR LADINOS AND MAYANS FROM 2019 TO 2020





Prais-Winsten and Cochrane-Orcutt regression - lag(1)

APPENDIX: POISSON REGRESSION ANALYSES

		LADINO		MAYA
		b(SE)		b(SE)
<i>Model 1</i>	Shelter in Place Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared:</i> <i>0.0001 (N=731)</i>	0.01(0.02) 3.19(0.01)***		0.07(0.03)** 2.30(0.01)*** <i>Pseudo R-Squared:</i> <i>0.0015 (N=731)</i>
<i>Model 2</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 1 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared:</i> <i>0.0275 (N=730)</i>	0.01(0.02) 0.01(0.00)*** 2.91(0.02)***	<i>Lag 1</i>	0.06(0.03)* 0.01(0.00)*** 2.16(0.03)*** <i>Pseudo R-Squared:</i> <i>0.0094 (N=730)</i>
<i>Model 3</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 2 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0033 (N=729)</i>	0.02(0.02) 0.00(0.00)*** 3.09(0.02)***	<i>Lag 7</i>	0.05(0.03)* 0.03(0.00)*** 1.98(0.03)*** <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0374 (N=724)</i>
<i>Model 4</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 3 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0036 (N=728)</i>	0.02(0.02) 0.00(0.00)*** 3.09(0.02)***	<i>Lag 14</i>	0.06(0.03)* 0.03(0.00)*** 1.98(0.03)*** <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0380 (N=717)</i>
<i>Model 5</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 6 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0063 (N=725)</i>	0.02(0.02) 0.00(0.00)*** 3.05(0.02)***	<i>Lag 21</i>	0.06(0.03)* 0.02(0.00)*** 2.07(0.03)*** <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0222 (N=710)</i>
<i>Model 6</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 7 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0468 (N=724)</i>	0.02(0.02) 0.01(0.00)*** 2.82(0.02)***	<i>Lag 28</i>	0.05(0.03)* 0.02(0.00)*** 2.04(0.03)*** <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0273 (N=703)</i>
<i>Model 7</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 8 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0047 (N=723)</i>	0.02(0.02) 0.00(0.00)*** 3.07(0.02)***	<i>Lag 35</i>	0.06(0.03)* 0.02(0.00)*** 2.09(0.03)*** <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0174 (N=696)</i>

<i>Model 8</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 13 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0108 (N=718)</i>	0.03(0.02) 0.01(0.00)*** 3.01(0.02)***		-- -- --
<i>Model 9</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 14 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0477 (N=717)</i>	0.04(0.02)* 0.01(0.00)*** 2.81(0.02)***		-- -- --
<i>Model 10</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 21 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0380 (N=710)</i>	0.04(0.02)** 0.01(0.00)*** 2.85(0.02)***		-- -- --
<i>Model 11</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 28 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0380 (N=703)</i>	0.05(0.02)** 0.01(0.00)*** 2.87(0.02)***		-- -- --
<i>Model 12</i>	Shelter in Place Lag 35 Constant <i>Pseudo R-Squared</i> <i>0.0268 (N=696)</i>	0.05(0.02)** 0.01(0.00)*** 2.90(0.02)***		-- -- --

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