How Far “Left” are South American Legislators?

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Abstract

Over the past decade, left-of-center candidates have won presidential elections throughout Latin America. This trend has led many observers to proclaim the existence of a “Left Turn” in the region. However, most of these statements are made without taking into account another critical institution: the national legislature. Therefore, in order to properly evaluate the rise of the left in Latin America, investigating two key questions will be helpful. The first asks how far “left are Latin American legislators. A second would inquire as to whether there is evidence of a shift to the left among them. In this paper I examine five South American legislatures between 1993 and 2007. I find that a left-right divide exists in all these legislatures. I also show that legislators tend to locate themselves to the left of the political spectrum. However, there is substantial variation in the degree of ideological polarization in each of these legislatures. Moreover, relative to the position of presidents and mainstream parties, most of South American legislators are quite moderate. Finally, I find that there was a small shift to the left in past few years; but the trend was neither large nor extended to the whole region.

Introduction

Over the past decade, left-of-center candidates have won presidential elections throughout Latin America. Húgo Chavez was elected president of Venezuela in 1998, re-elected in 2000, confirmed in a referendum in 2004 and elected again in 2006. Luiz Inacio “Lula” da Silva was elected president of Brazil in 2002 and re-elected in 2006. Nestor Kirchner was elected president of Argentina in 2003, and his wife will succeed him in office at the end of this year. Tabaré Vazquez was elected president of Uruguay in 2004. In 2005, Chile inaugurated Michelle Bachelet as its second consecutive Socialist president. Evo Morales was elected president of Bolivia early in 2006. More recently, Alan García was elected president of Perú, Daniel Ortega returned to the presidency of Nicaragua, and Oscar Arias won the presidency in Costa Rica. And early in 2007, Rafael Correa became president of Ecuador.

These recent victories of leftist presidential candidates have led many observers to proclaim the existence of a “Left Turn” in the region (Castañeda 2006, Schamis 2006, Cleary 2006). However, there is a heated debate regarding the classification of these left-wing governments. The main point of contention is whether these governments are social-democratic or populistic regimes (Petkoff 2005, Castañeda and Navia 2007a) Regardless of how these different classifications come about, most of them tend to focus on the placement of each country’s president on a left-right ideological spectrum (Castañeda and Navia 2007b).

Presidents are undoubtedly very important in Latin America. However, as recent studies have shown, legislatures in the region do not solely exist to “rubber stamp” executive
decisions (Ames 2001, Morgenstern and Nacif 2002, IADB 2006). Therefore, in order to properly evaluate the rise of the left in Latin America, investigating two key questions will be helpful. The first asks how far “left” are Latin American legislators. The second inquires as to whether there is evidence of a shift to the left among them.

Answering these questions requires studying the beliefs and attitudes of Latin American legislators across the region. In particular, we need to establish their location on a common ideological spectrum. The basic approach I take in this paper is based on a spatial model of individual preferences. The Euclidean model assumes that policy alternatives can be represented geometrically, as points in a low-dimensional space, and that each legislator has a most preferred policy or “ideal point in this space. When given a choice among alternatives, each legislator is assumed to choose the alternative that is spatially closer. To identify legislators’ ideal points I analyze the Universidad de Salamanca’s *Parliamentary Elites of Latin America* survey using the Aldrich-McKelvey (1977) scaling procedure. Next, I measure the degree of ideological “extremism” of any given legislator by comparing the “true” (estimated) spatial locations of the main political parties/politicians in his/her country with his/her own placement in a left-right ideological continuum.

There is a growing literature on spatial analysis of legislators, parties and party systems in Latin America. For example, Morgenstern (2004) uses roll call votes to examine patterns of legislative politics in Latin America’s Southern Cone. However, his focus is not on the ideological orientations of individual legislators. Instead, his primary goal is to identify who are the main legislative agents in these countries, and to test their levels of identifiability and flexibility. Rosas (2005) uses the Salamanca survey to asses the level of ideological orga-
nization of Latin American legislative parties. However, his unit of analysis is the legislative party system rather than each individual legislator. Both Zoco (2006) and Zucco (2007) analyze the ideological organization of the legislative branch at both aggregate (political party) and individual (legislator) levels. Nonetheless, the former restricts her analysis to Central America, while the latter focuses on the Brazilian case. ¹

This article fills this gap in the literature by providing a detailed analysis of the ideological orientations of individual legislators in Latin America’s Southern Cone. In particular, the article offers a common “metric” to assess not only how ideological are most parties in these Latin American legislatures, but also to establish how ‘leftist’ or ‘rightist’ are the individual legislators themselves. The results in this paper indicate that Chile and Uruguay exhibit the most programmatic party systems, followed by those of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. They also suggest that ideologically, the typical legislator in these countries tends to be relatively “leftist”. However, the mean ideal point of the legislature is sometimes to the right and sometimes to the left of the president. I also find that in the legislative arena, a slight “shift to the left” has occurred, but the magnitude of the shift has been small, and has not been a regionwide trend.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. The first section of this paper describes the data. I go on to present an overview of the statistical model used to estimate legislators’ ideal points and the placement of the stimuli. In section 2, I discuss the empirical findings generated using the estimates generated by the A-M technique. A final section concludes.
1 Data and Methods

Since the seminal work of Davis, Hinich, and Ordeshook (1970), the Euclidean model has become the standard for formal theoretical and empirical work on legislatures. Empirically, much of the work has relied on the use of roll call data – the recorded votes in these legislatures – to estimate legislators’ ideal points. These estimates, in turn, allow us to describe legislators and legislatures. Particularly, the distribution of ideal points reveals how cleavages between legislators reflect partisan affiliation or geographical schisms, and if these divisions are stable or rather become more polarized over time (e.g., McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2006).

Indeed, the use of roll call votes to analyze lawmakers’ preferences has become a common practice not only in the study of the U.S. Congress, but also in comparative politics. In fact, many recent studies of Latin America have taken advantage of roll-call data to advance our understanding of those systems (Figueiredo and Limongi 2000, Londregan 2000, Ames 2001, Carey 2002, Desposato 2003, Morgenstern 2004, Jones and Hwang 2005, Aleman and Saiegh 2007).

However, the use of voting records to estimate legislators’ ideal points also has its critics. From a practical standpoint, the main pitfall associated with this technique in the Latin American context is the scarcity of information. As Morgenstern (2004) notes, studies of the Latin American legislatures have been hampered by a lack of available roll-call data. The use of roll call votes to identify legislators’ preferences has also been criticized on the grounds that agenda manipulation and strategic voting tend to affect the inferences that can be made from the record of public votes (Ames 2002).
More generally, some authors put in question the idea that voting scores reflect legislators’ ideologies altogether, and argue that the use of actions (votes) to impute policy positions can be problematic. These critics do not doubt the role of ideology in influencing legislative behavior. Rather, they are concerned about how these ideological predispositions can be measured. In particular, they claim that in order to assess the impact of ideology on behaviors such as roll call votes, measurements of ideology that are constructed independently of the roll call votes themselves are required (Jackson and Kingdon 1992).

As Morgenstern (2004) points out, one method of collecting such data is the straightforward procedure of simply asking legislators to place themselves on a common scale. Indeed, asking respondents to place themselves and/or stimuli on issue/attribute scales is a common type of data gathered by social scientists. For example, the National Election Study in the U.S. has been collecting seven-point scale data since 1968. The endpoints of these scales are labeled, and the respondent is asked to place himself or herself on the scale (his or her “ideal point”) along with a set of political figures and the two main political parties.

Fortunately, these types of data for Latin American legislators have been collected by the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA) survey carried out by the Instituto de Estudios de Iberoamérica y Portugal of the University of Salamanca, Spain. The survey was given to legislators from 17 national legislatures between 1994 and 2005, in three different waves. 2 This survey offers valuable information about the beliefs and ideologies of national legislators, and thus constitutes the empirical foundation for this study.
1.1 Overview of the Data

This paper makes use of data from legislators in the five Southern Cone countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay) during the period between 1993 and 2007. Table 1 shows more detailed information regarding these surveys. In particular, it disaggregates response rates by survey and identifies their timing. In two of the countries, Argentina and Chile, the survey was conducted in three waves. For Uruguay and Paraguay, I am using the data collected in 1996 and 2001, and 1996 and 1998, respectively. The Brazilian survey was conducted only for the 2003-2007 period. As the table shows, the surveys do not include every legislator. However, they do include a representative sample of legislators from each country’s lower house of the national legislature.

The respondents cannot be individually identified, as the surveys are anonymous. Nonetheless, the respondents were asked a very broad range of questions ranging from policy positions to personal characteristics. Most importantly, all legislators were asked about their partisan affiliations, and the respondents included members of both major and minor parties. The major parties include the following: in Argentina, the Partido Justicialista (PJ Partido Peronista), the Union Civica Radical (UCR), the Frente para un País Solidario (FREPASO), and the Alternativa por una República de Iguales (ARI); in Brazil, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), the Partido do Movimento Democratico Brasileiro (PMDB), the Partido da Frente Liberal (PL), the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (PTB) and the Partido da Social
Democracia Brasileira (PSDB); in Chile, the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (DC), the Partido Socialista, the Partido por la Democracia (PPD), Renovación Nacional (RN), and the Unión Democrata Independiente (UDI); in Paraguay, the Asociación Nacional Republicana (ANR - Partido Colorado), the Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA), and the Partido Encuentro Nuevo (PEN); and, finally, in Uruguay, the Partido Colorado (PC), the Partido Nacional (PN Partido Blanco), and the Frente Amplio/Nuevo Espacio (FA/NE). Moreover, some minor parties with representation in the lower chamber are also included.

All the respondents sampled by the PELA project were asked to locate themselves, their country’s main parties, and their country’s leading political figures in a 10-point left-right ideology scale (where 1 represented ‘far left’ and 10 ‘far right’). For example, the Argentine legislators sampled in 2004 were asked to locate themselves, four parties, the PJ, the UCR, the ARI and RECREAR, and six prominent politicians, Carlos Menem, Lilita Carrio, Ricardo López-Murphy, Eduardo Duhalde, Raul Alfonsín, and Nestor Kirchner on the left-right dimension. I limit my attention to those respondents who placed all stimuli and themselves on the scale. I also remove any respondent who placed all stimuli on the same point on the scale. These restrictions leave me with an aggregate \( n \) of 832, or about 87 percent of the 958 respondents asked the questions in all five countries.

1.2 Methodology

The surveys described above can be used to gauge the ideology of the legislators in these five Latin American countries. The basic idea is to treat the preferential choice data as
Euclidean distances between respondents and stimuli. In particular, I will make use of their responses about their placement of major parties/prominent political figures, and their own placement on the ten-point left-right scale.

Note, though, that the scale may have different meanings to different people. Namely, different respondents may be anchoring them according to their own interpretation of these endpoints. Moreover, the fact that respondents are asked to locate their own ideal points on the scale may accentuate this tendency. For example, a legislator who perceives himself/herself as a true leftist is likely to interpret the endpoints of the left-right scale in order to accommodate his/her own ideal point, thus pushing his/her perceptions of the candidates farther to the right than a less committed leftist would. Just to give one example, one of the respondents in the 2003-2007 Argentine survey located himself/herself in the left-most category (1), and placed his/her perceptions of all the stimuli in right-of-center categories (i.e. he/she gave a score of 7 to both ARI and Carrio, a score of 8 to Kirchner, and a score of 10 to Lopez Murphy).

In addition, and associated with the ambiguity of the endpoints, is the problem that different respondents may interpret the intervals on the scale differently. As the example of the Argentine legislator shows, an extreme leftist may see less difference between Kirchner and Lopez Murphy than a moderate would. Finally, given the forced categorization, respondents tend to place their perceptions of the stimuli, as well as their placement of their own ideal points, more frequently in the “prominent” categories (one, three, five, seven, nine).

These problems are quite common when one studies individual level perceptual data
and their consequences are well understood. In essence, the difficulty is that if one uses the raw data to make inferences, the conclusions can be seriously misleading. For example, it is possible that there might be complete agreement in the perceptions of the stimuli, but that because of different interpretations of the scale, we might be led to believe that there was little or not agreement.

The Aldrich-McKelvey (1977) (henceforth A-M) scaling procedure allows one to factor out the variations due to differential response to the response task by placing all respondents in a common space such that their perceptions are most in agreement with the common perception of the stimuli. Therefore, one can use this technique to construct estimates of legislators’ ideal points and the location of the stimuli on a left-right dimension using the responses to the ten-point scales described above. Given the problem that different respondents may report their perceptions of the left-right scale differently, the method requires simultaneous estimation of these individual “distortion parameters.”

The basic A-M model assumes that individual $i$'s perception of stimulus $j$ is given by

$$Y_{ij} = Z_j + e_{ij}$$

where $Z_j$ is the true location of $j$ and $e_{ij}$ is a random variable which has zero expectation, positive variance which is independent of $i$ and $j$ (homoscedastic), and zero covariance across the $i$s and $j$s.

In the second stage of the data generation, Aldrich and McKelvey assume that the stimuli hold fixed positions on an underlying true issue dimension and that a respondents perception of the stimuli issue scale positions are simple linear mappings from the stimuli
positions. Formally, letting $X_{ij}$ represent the position where respondent $i$ reports that he/she sees stimulus $j$, they assume that for each respondent, there are scalars $c_i, w_i \in \mathbb{R}$ such that

$$c_i + w_i X_{ij} = Y_{ij} = Z_j + e_{ij},$$

or

$$X_{ij} = \frac{1}{w_i} (Y_j - c_i) + \frac{e_{ij}}{w_i},$$

Given the $X_{ij}$ matrix of reported positions, the A-M scaling procedure allows us to recover the true parameters $\hat{Z}_j, \hat{c}_i$ and $\hat{w}_i$. To obtain the legislators ideal point in the common space, A-M merely subject it to the same transformation that his/her perceptions are subjected to. Namely, if $X_{i0}$ represents the ith respondent placement of his/her ideal point, then

$$Y_{i0} = \hat{c}_i + \hat{w}_i X_{i0},$$

is the estimate of his/her ideal point in the common space.  

2 Empirical Results

I now turn to a discussion of the empirical results. I divide my discussion into three subsections. First, I examine the distribution of the ideal points in the eleven cases under study. Next, I present the point-estimations of the stimuli, followed by the consideration of the location of the legislators’ ideal points in the common space for each one of the cases.
2.1 Perceptual Variation

The overall fit statistics of the estimates generated using the A-M procedure are presented in Table 2. The fourth column presents a measure that indicates the reduction in variance of perceptions accomplished by the scaling technique. These figures indicate substantial reductions in variance for all eleven cases. These range from about 44 percent of the variance in the original data for the 1993-1998 Paraguay scale to only 7 percent for the 1993-1998 Chile scale. As these figures indicate, a substantial proportion of the observed variance in perceptions seems to be due to different reactions to the interview response task.

These results should be taken with a grain of salt, however, because, as Aldrich and McKelvey (1977) note, they are not totally free of bias. Regression toward the mean implies that “... extremists will be estimated as somewhat less extreme than they actually are ...” (Aldrich and Mckelvey 1977: 120). In addition, respondents who perceive a mirror image of the true configuration improve the fit of the model (Aldrich and McKelvey 1977: 116). The fifth column of table 2 reports the number of respondents who “see things backwards.” The caveat regarding the quality of the scaling estimations of Paraguayan legislators receives additional support from the proportion of respondents who report a mirror image.

On the other hand, as Poole and Palfrey (1987) note, the A-M scaling method can be used as a powerful filter. Respondents who see the political universe as backward have a very low level of information about politics. Therefore, we can use the information provided

< Table 2 Here >
in column five to make inferences about how meaningful are the ideas of “left” and “right” in a given country. If legislators are confused about the location of major parties in a left-right scale, then it must be the case that party labels are not meaningful indicators of their ideological orientations. In other words, if legislators are not well informed about the political stimuli, then we must be in the presence of an ideologically disorganized party system (Rosas 2005).

The last column in Table 2 provides additional evidence to evaluate the degree of ideological organization of partisan competition in these five countries. As mentioned above, the results obtained using the A-M scaling procedure can be used to define a one-dimensional ideological space in which we can locate both respondents and stimuli. Column six indicates the one-dimensional fit of the model. Note that in some cases the r-square is very large. We can interpret this as evidence indicating that the main dimension of political competition is left/right, or liberal/conservative. This is the certainly the case in Chile and Uruguay: the left-right continuum accommodates very well the perceptions that legislators have of the main political parties and figures in their country. In contrast, the left-right dimension does not seem to be such a good predictor of the perceptions that legislators have about the In contrast, the left/right dimension only accounts for about fifty percent of the variance (r-squares of .50 and .51) in Paraguay. In between these three countries, we find the cases of Brazil and Argentina.

These estimates tend to agree with the usual interpretations of the nature of the party systems in the literature. For example, Rosas (2005) constructs an index of ideological organization of legislative parties. According to his results, Chile and Uruguay rank much higher
than Argentina and Brazil, respectively. Unfortunately he does not include Paraguay in his analysis. These results also square well with those obtained by Jones (2005). He develops an index to capture the extent to which parties are institutionalized and programmatic. According to his index, Chile and Uruguay exhibit the most programmatic party systems, followed by those of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay.

In summary, the results presented in Table 2 show that the A-M procedure produced very good estimates of the positions of legislators and stimuli in these five Latin American countries. I turn now to the stimuli position estimates.

### 2.2 Stimuli Position Estimates

The scaling estimates of the stimuli’s positions are presented in Table 3, along with the standard deviation of the respondents perceptions of each one of them. I also included the mean and standard deviation of the estimated distribution of legislators’ ideal points (denoted by I in the Table). The table also identifies the incumbent president (in bold) whenever he/she was included among the stimuli. For the reasons discussed above, I have not included in the table the scaled estimates obtained from the two Paraguayan surveys. However, I will refer to them in the analysis presented below.

Moving onto the estimates, the order of the political stimuli in all countries is intuitively appealing. Moreover, it is also interesting to note that in four out of the seven country/periods in which the incumbent president is included among the stimuli, the mean
of the estimated distribution of legislators’ ideal points is to the left of the president’s location (Argentina 95-97, Argentina 97-01, Uruguay 95-00, and Uruguay 00-05). In one case, the opposite is true (Chile 02-06); and in the remaining two cases, the location of the president and the mean ideal point of the legislature is almost identical (Argentina 03-07, and Chile 97-01).

With respect to the location of the parties on the political spectrum, in six out of the nine country/periods, the party holding a plurality of seats in the legislature is to the right of the mean of the estimated distribution of legislators’ ideal points. This is the case in Argentina (95-97, 97-01, and 03-07), Uruguay (95-00), and Brazil (03-07). The opposite is true in Chile (all three periods) and Uruguay (00-05). In fact, in six out of the nine country/periods, those parties holding a plurality of seats in the legislature appear to be the centrist ones: the PJ in Argentina (in 95-97 and 03-07), the DC in Chile (in all three periods), and the Partido Colorado in Uruguay (in the 95-00 period). This is not the case with the PJ in Argentina during the 97-01 period, the Frente Amplio in Uruguay (00-05), and the PT in Brazil. Finally, in four out of the seven country/periods in which the incumbent president is included among the stimuli, the party holding a plurality of seats in the legislature is to the left of the president (Argentina 95-97, Argentina 97-01, Chile 97-01, and Uruguay 00-05). The opposite is true in the remaining cases (Argentina 03-07, Chile 02-06, and Uruguay 95-00).

As these figures show, the picture presented by the location of the representative legislator relative to that of the main political party and the president is not a simple one. In three cases out of seven, the ideal point of the typical legislator is to the left of both the
plurality party and the president (Argentina 95-97, Argentina 97-01, and Uruguay 95-00). In two cases (Chile 97-01, and Chile 02-06), the ideal point of the typical legislator is to the right of both the plurality party and the president. And, in the remaining case, the ideal point of the typical legislator lies in between the locations of the plurality party and the president (Uruguay 00-05).

Unfortunately, this is as much as we can say about the relative location of legislators, parties, and political figures in comparative terms. As Aldrich and McKelvey (1977) point out, the unit of measurement of each these dimensions has been arbitrarily set to have a mean of zero and unity sum of squares of stimulus’ positions. Therefore, it would not be meaningful to make further comparisons of the stimulus’ positions across countries/periods.

Nonetheless, each of these cases is worthy of an individual examination. I will start with Argentina. The survey conducted on August/September 1996 when Carlos Menem was president, indicate that he was distinctively to the right of all the other leading political figures in the country. Only Alvaro Alsogaray’s party, the UceDe was to the right of Menem. At the other end of the political spectrum was Chacho Alvarez; and moving toward the center were (in that order), Rodolfo Terragno and José Octavio Bordón. Eduardo Duhalde was to the right of Bordón, but clearly to the left of Menem. In fact, he was almost equidistant from these two figures. An interesting fact is that there is a discernible gap between the main political parties and their leading figures. Alvarez and Terragno appear to be more moderate than their parties (the Frepaso and the UCR, respectively). In contrast, the PJ was more centrist than Menem and Duhalde.
In 1998, Menem is once again the most right figure. Unfortunately, Chacho Alvarez was not included among the stimuli, but Graciela Fernández Meijide, the other leading figure of the Frepaso at the time is estimated to be the most left figure. Raul Alfonsín is estimated to be very similarly leftist. Fernando de la Rúa appears to be quite centrist, relative to the positions of the other figures. To his right, we find Eduardo Duhalde, Ramon Palito Ortega, and Carlos Menem (in that order). Nonetheless, there is a clear gap between Duhalde and Menem. The distance between them is much more than that separating Duhalde and de la Rúa. Likewise, de la Rúa is closer to Duhalde than to Fernández Meijide and Alfonsín. Note also that the PJ and Duhalde are estimated to be very similar. In contrast, de la Rúa appears to be more moderate than both the UCR and the Frepaso (the two partners of the “Alianza”).

The third wave of the PELA survey in Argentina only came in 2004, so unfortunately we cannot evaluate the direct impact of the 2001 crisis and how the popular protests (embodied in the slogan “Que se vayan todos”) affected the country’s political landscape. However we can analyze the realignment produced by the fall of the Alianza and the consolidation of Nestor Kirchner as Argentina’s president. Actually, the most noteworthy fact is Kirchner’s location. While Lilita Carrio appears to be the left-most figure, the distance between her and Kirchner is much less than that separating him and the rest of the leading politicians. Kirchner is also considerably to the left of the Partido Justicialista. At the other end of the spectrum once again we find Menem, and Ricardo López Murphy with very similar positions. Eduardo Duhalde is now estimated to be at the “center” of the left-right continuum, with Raul Alfonsín immediately to his left.
The overall evaluation of the placements indicates that they are very consistent with the ordinal properties of the scale. This consistency supports the notion that the left-right dimension sufficiently captures the differences between the main political figures in Argentina. These estimates are also very consistent with other evaluations of the Argentine party system, such as the ones by Coppedge (1998) and Carey and Reynolds (2007).

Turning to Chile, the scaling results indicate that Jovino Novoa (UDI) was the most conservative political figure in 1994. Andrés Allamand, of Renovación Nacional, stood to the left of Novoa and to the right of Alejandro Foxley (DC). Camilo Escalona (PS) appeared to be the most left figure, to the left of Jorge Schaulsohn, a prominent member of the Partido por la Democracia (PPD) at the time. The scaling results also indicate that the location of partisan positions along the left-right ideological dimension coincide with the way parties have been typically ordered in the literature (Coppedge 1998, Londregan 2000, Carey, Aleman and Saiegh 2007).

The left is comprised of socialists (PS) and moderate leftists (PPD); Christian Democrats (DC) are closer to the center; and the right is comprised of former nationalists who endorsed, albeit sometimes critically, the Pinochet regime (RN), and supporters of free-market policies linked to the former military regime (UDI). Note also that the gap between the “right-most” party of the Concertación (the DC) and the “left-most” party of the Alianza (RN) is larger than the one separating the DC and the Socialists. These results are in line with those in Alemán and Saiegh (2007), who find that that Chilean parties can indeed be ordered along a left-right dimension, but that a relevant centrist block does not exist. In their analysis (based on roll call votes during the same period), Alemán and Saiegh find that the two
parties that are ideologically adjacent but pertaining to different electoral coalitions do not constitute a distinctive policy coalition (i.e. a “centrist bloc”).

In 1998, the UDI leader – in this case Joaquín Lavín – is once again the most right figure. Sebastián Piñera appears to be less conservative than both Lavín and his own party (RN). On the other end of the spectrum, PPD’s Ricardo Lagos is the most left figure. However, the distance between him and Chile’s president, Eduardo Frei (DC), is much less than that separating Lavín and Piñera. Another Christian Democrat, Jaime Ravinet is located at the center of the political spectrum. The alignment of the parties does not show much variance with respect to four years earlier. In particular, the distance between the DC and RN remains larger than the one separating the former and the PS.

The scaling results indicate that Lavín remained the most conservative figure in 2002. During this period, however, Piñera appeared to be much more centrist, closer to the president, Ricardo Lagos, than to Lavín. In fact, Piñera was clearly less conservative than his party. It is also interesting to note that Adolfo Zaldívar Larraín (DC) is located to the right of both his party and Piñera. Guido Girardi (PPD) was the most leftist politician, relative to the positions of the other figures. In 2002, the location of partisan positions along the left-right ideological dimension remained the same. However, for the first time, the gap between two of the Concertacion partners, the PS and the DC became larger than then one between the DC and RN.

The analysis of the scaling results for Uruguay in 1996 indicate that the left-right dimension and the order of the political stimuli from Tabaré Vazquez at the left to Julio
María Sanguinetti near the center of the spectrum, to Luis Alberto “Cuqui” Lacalle at the right is intuitively appealing. It is also interesting to notice how the scaling results reflect the characteristic factionalism of the Uruguayan party system (Morgenstern 2004). For example, Sanguinetti and Jorge Batlle are located to the left and to the right of the Partido Colorado, respectively. Likewise, Alberto Volonté and Lacalle are to the left and to the right of the Partido Nacional, respectively. In fact, Battle is closer to Lacalle than Sanguinetti, and Volonté is closer to Sanguinetti than to Lacalle. To the left of the political spectrum, are Rafael Michelini and his Nuevo Espacio (with very similar positions), and further left, Tabaré and the Frente Amplio.

The survey responses recorded five years later produced very similar results. The most significant difference is the location of Jorge Battle who was the president at the time and appeared to be more moderate now compared to Julio María Sanguinetti. Volonté was not included among the stimuli, but Juan Andrés Ramírez, another leading figure of the Partido Nacional now appears to be more moderate than both his party and Lacalle. It is also interesting to note that Tabaré is somewhat less leftist than the Espacio Progresista/Frente Amplio coalition. To his right, though, we find Michelini and Nuevo Espacio.

As mentioned above, the scaling results obtained from the surveys conducted in Paraguay have to be taken with a grain of salt. Nonetheless, they do reflect our understanding of the Paraguayan party system. In 1996, during Juan Carlos Wasmosy’s presidency, the left was comprised by the Febrerista Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Febrerista –PRF), and the moderate leftists Christian Democratic Party (Partido Demócrata Cristiano –PDC) and National Encounter (Partido Encuentro Nacional –PEN); the liberals (PLRA) were
closer to the center; and at the right of the political spectrum was the Colorado Party (ANR). In 1998, when Raúl Cubas was inaugurated, the ANR remained as the most right party. However, the left was now comprised of the Liberal Party and the PEN. In terms of Paraguay’s leading figures, the scaling results indicate that – despite the concerns raised above—, they can certainly be ordered in a left-right continuum. Lino Oviedo is located at the far right, Argana is to his left, Cubas is near the center of the spectrum, and Domingo Laino is at the far left. Once again, these results are in line with the description of the Paraguayan party system in the existing literature (Molinas et. al. 2004).

Finally, the analysis of the responses of the Brazilian legislators in 2005 also reveals a pattern validated by previous work (Ames 2001). Ordered from right to left, on the right we find the Progressive Party (PP), the Liberal Front Party (PFL), and the Brazilian Labor Party (PTB); in the center, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB) and the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB); and on the left the Workers Party (PT). With respect to the country’s leading figures, their location in the left-right continuum is also quite appealing. Unfortunately, major figures such as Lula or Cardoso were not included in the survey. However, we can make some informed guesses about their plausible locations by examining those of other prominent politicians.

The leader of the PT in the lower house, Arlindo Chinaglia, was the most left figure. At the other end of the spectrum was the president of the chamber, Severino Cavalcanti (PP). Roberto Jefferson (PTB) and Jose Carlos Aleluia (PFL) appeared to be less conservative than Cavalcanti, and to the right and left of their parties, respectively. Renan Calheiros (PMDB) and Arthur Virgilio (PSBD) were right at the center of the political spectrum.
2.3 Distribution of Ideal Points

The last step of the analysis concerns the location of the legislators’ ideal points in the common space. I will use the aggregate distributions to make some cross-sectional and longitudinal comparisons. In particular, I will examine the distributions’ central tendencies to characterize the ideological makeup of these Latin American legislatures. Using the mean and the variance of the distributions, I will determine the relative dispersion of legislators’ preferences in each country/period (i.e. the degree of polarization). Some of the assertions, though, should only be considered tentative, since they are based on results obtained from non-identical sets of respondents.

Figure 1.a. graphs the distribution of legislators’ ideal points in Argentina between 1995 and 2007. The distributions look nearly unimodal. Nonetheless, their means are not centrally located, but are rather skewed to the left. The unimodal nature and relatively large dispersal of the distributions of ideal points in Argentina support the view that politics in Argentina is not as structured along the left-right dimension as it is in Chile or Uruguay. I explore the role of Peronism in explaining this pattern of ideological organization below.

< Figures 1.a.-1.c Here >
It also worth noting how the distribution of the legislators’ ideal points compares to the scaled position of the president. Both in 1996 and 1998, the incumbent president Carlos Menem is located to the right of most legislators. In contrast, the position of Nestor Kirchner in 2004 corresponds almost exactly to the mean of the legislators’ ideal point distribution. If anything, then, the “turn to the left” applies to the position of the Argentine president elected in 2003 rather than to the country’s legislators.

The distribution of the ideal points of Chilean legislators between 1993 and 2006 are presented in Figure 1.b. In contrast with the Argentine case, legislators’ preferences in Chile are centered around zero, and bimodally distributed. Notice also how stable these preferences are over time; the distributions are almost identical. The well-defined left-right legislative preferences, and the stability of these preferences over time square very well with our understanding of Chilean politics.

Figure 1.b. also illustrates the relationship between the distribution of ideal points and the scaled position of Chilean presidents. Both Frei and Lagos appear to be located at the center of the overall distribution, and also at the position where the “hump” on the left “peaks.” With respect to whether there is a turn to the left in Chile, the evidence in Figure 1.b. indicates that the answer seems to be negative. In 2002, the position of Lagos is somewhat to the left of center. However, the ideological location of the typical legislator is slightly right of center.

Figure 1.c. graphs the distribution of legislators’ ideal points in Uruguay between 1995 and 2005. Notice the similarities with the Chilean case. The distributions appear to be
bimodal, and they are virtually identical. On the other hand, unlike his/her Chilean counterpart, the typical Uruguayan legislator is not located at the center of the political spectrum. In this respect, legislators in Uruguay resemble more those in Argentina.

Turning to the relationship between the distribution of ideal points and the scaled position of the president, Uruguay also looks quite similar to Argentina before 2004. Both Sanguinetti and Battle appear to be located slightly to the right of the center of the overall distribution, and at the position where the “hump” on the right has a “peak.” Unfortunately the lack of data after 2001 does not allow us to identify if there were substantive changes in the ideological makeup of the Uruguayan legislature after Tabaré Vazquez took office. However, using his scaled position in the 2001 survey, we can conclude that, at least in the legislative arena, nothing like a radical shift to the left has occurred.

I turn now to a more detailed analysis of the distribution of legislators’ ideal points in each of these countries. Specifically, I examine how well these ideological preferences match the partisan composition of these legislatures. In party systems organized along ideological lines we should expect to find recognizable patterns linking party membership and legislative preferences. In contrast, under non-ideological party systems, partisan identities may not correlate very well with the left-right ideological placement of legislators.

Figures 2.a.-2.c. graph the ideal points of Argentine legislators identified by their membership to the country’s main political parties. The figures also show the scaled positions of these parties. The first thing to note is that in the 1995-1997 legislature members of the two major parties are “all over the place”. In fact, the distributions of preferences of the
PJ and UCR legislators are quite similar to that of members of other parties. There are peronists to the left, and peronists to the right (and the same is true for members of the UCR). This indicates that “left” and “right” are less meaningful ways of structuring partisan competition than the traditional peronism versus non-peronism.

Figures 2.a.-2.c. lend more support to this view. As the graphs show, after 1998, legislators belonging to the Frepaso, and the ARI located themselves to the left of the political spectrum. Even the remaining members of the UCR have ideal points that are more concentrated and located at the left of the spectrum. However, the peronists still exhibit the same amorphous tendencies over time: they are neither to the left nor to the right. This is clearly to be expected: given that peronism is hard to define, their legislators tend to adopt distinct ideological positions regardless of their partisan affiliations. These results are thus consistent with those in Palfrey and Poole (1987). As they note, we should expect the ideal points of an uninformed group of respondents to be unimodally distributed over the range of ideal points.

The figures also show that while legislators’ ideal points tend to be quite volatile over time, their assessments about the location of the country’s leading political parties remains quite stable. The PJ is consistently located at the center of the distribution, with the UCR slightly to its left. Even parties that come and go tend to be located in similar places. For example, in 2004, the ARI clearly replaces the defunct Frepaso, while Recrear does the same with the UceDe.
The distributions of Chilean legislators’ ideal points are presented in Figures 3.a.-3.c. Notice that partisan positions along the left-right ideological continuum coincide with the way in which Chilean parties have been typically ordered. Note also that the distribution of preferences for each of the parties in the two main coalitions is unimodal, with peaks to the center-left for the Concertación parties (PS, PPD, and DC) and to the center-right for the Alianza ones (RN, UDI). It is also evident that the center of the distribution is relatively less populated and that the ideal points of legislators from different coalitions do overlap too much. This finding stands in stark contrast to the Argentine case, where partisan affiliations (especially among peronists) do not seem to bear a strong relation to legislators’ ideological orientations.

Figures 3.b. and 3.c. are also consistent with prior findings in the literature regarding inter-coalition heterogeneity (Londregan 2000, Carey 2002, Morgenstern 2004, Aleman and Saiegh 2007). Inside both coalitions, the distributions of legislators’ ideal points have a non-trivial degree of overlap. However, we observe less unity inside the Alianza in the latter two periods. The distributions of ideal points of the RN and UDI legislators have substantive overlap in 1993-1997. However, they exhibit some differences during 1997-2002 and 2002-2006 periods.

Overall, the data presented in Figures 3.a.-3.c. provide strong support for the notion that political competition in Chile is based on two non-centrist coalitions with very cohesive memberships. The results clearly reveal a fairly homogeneous Concertación coalition. The evidence is also very consistent with the results in Aleman and Saiegh (2007). The estimates
in this paper also suggest that the notion that a centrist block exists in the legislature (based on the hypothesis that members of the DC and the RN are so close that they could readily form such an alternative policy coalition) can be rejected.

Figures 4.a.-4.b. graph the ideal points of Uruguayan legislators identified by their membership to the main political parties. The most striking pattern is how the traditional parties (Blanco and Colorado) overlap with each other on the left-right dimension, while the Frente Amplio is clearly located to their left. This ideological organization of the legislature has some resemblance with both the Argentine and Chilean cases. As it is the case in Argentina, the traditional parties are quite heterogeneous and tend to occupy the center of the political spectrum. In contrast, the leftist Frente Amplio is much more homogeneous, and there is little overlap between the ideal points of their legislators and those belonging to the traditional parties.

Notice also that as these traditional parties started to lose ground to the Frente Amplio in the 2000-2005 period, their legislators moved slightly from the center of the political spectrum to the left. Nonetheless, they remained (both of them) as the centrist parties in the Uruguayan political landscape.

Finally, the distributions of Brazilian legislators’ ideal points are presented in Figure 5. The results square well with existing descriptions of Brazilian legislative politics (Ames 2001, Morgenstern 2004). Brazilian parties have distinct ideological centers. However, they are quite heterogeneous. The electoral rules imply that for many legislators, party labels have little importance. Moreover, as Ames (2002) notes, most Brazilian parties typically lack any sort of coherent programs.
The heterogeneity of Brazilian parties can be clearly seen in the graph: there is substantial overlap in the ideal points of legislators belonging to the PMDB, PTB and PFL. This is not the case, though, with PT legislators. Even though they are quite heterogeneous, their ideal points are located to the left of the political spectrum and have little overlap with those of legislators from other parties. Another interesting finding shown in Figure 5 is how Brazilian legislators tend to locate themselves to the left of their own political parties. This is the case of both legislators on the left and on the right of the political spectrum. Unfortunately, the survey did not include Lula among the stimuli, so we cannot evaluate the relative position of the Brazilian legislators vis-à-vis their president. But, we can take the position of the PT (or that of Chinaglia, which is virtually identical) as an indicator of where Lula would be located. Notice that given this position, most of the PT legislators would be to his left; while most of the legislators who belong to the other parties would be to his right. In fact, some of the legislators of the PMDB and PTB appear to be closer to this ideal point than those in the PT. This is quite an interesting finding in light of the Mensalão scandal.

Conclusions

The analysis presented in this paper shows that there is substantial variation in the degree of ideological organization of Latin American legislatures. Some of them are highly programmatic, like Chile, while in some others, partisan affiliations do not seem to bear a strong relation to legislators’ ideological orientations. Overall, though, the analysis reveals that a left-right divide exists in all these legislatures, and that legislators tend to locate themselves
to the *left* of the political spectrum. Nonetheless, relative to the position of presidents and mainstream parties, most of Latin American legislators are quite moderate. In addition, I find that there was a small shift to the left in past few years. Yet, this trend is neither large nor extended to the whole region.
Notes

1In addition, in contrast to Rosas (2005) and Zoco (2006), who work with a correlation or covariance matrix computed from the data matrix, the scaling procedure used in this paper analyzes the data matrix directly without any intervening transformations of the original data.


3For a more detailed description of the methodology employed here see Aldrich and McKelvey (1977).

4Monte Carlo work done by Aldrich and McKelvey (1977) and Palfrey and Poole (1987), show that the recovery of the stimulus configuration is very accurate even when the error level is very high and a large number of respondents are reporting mirror or semi-mirror images.

References


# Tables and Figures

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Scaled Estimates of Stimuli Positions on Left-Right Scale

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Figure 1.a.
Argentine Legislators 1995–2007
From PELA 10-Point Scale

Figure 1.b.
Chilean Legislators 1993–2006
From PELA 10-Point Scale

35
Figure 1.c.
Uruguayan Legislators 1995–2005
From PELA 10-Point Scale

Left–Right Scale Value

Density

95–00
00–05
Sanguinetti
Battle
Tabare

1995–2000 52.4
2000–2005 47.5
Figures 2.a.-2.c.

Argentine Legislators
From 1996 PELA 10-Point Scale

Argentine Legislators
From 1998 PELA 10-Point Scale

Argentine Legislators
From 2004 PELA 10-Point Scale
Figure 4.a.
Uruguay’s Legislators
From 1996 PELA 10-Point Scale

Figure 4.b.
Uruguay’s Legislators
From 2001 PELA 10-Point Scale
Figure 5

Brazilian Legislators
From 2005 PELA 10-Point Scale

PT  20.5
PMDB  15.2
PFL  10.7
PP  8.9
PTB  10.7
Others  33.9