

Chapter 7: Positional Issue Voting in Latin America

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Published as Andy Baker and Kenneth F. Greene (2015). "Positional Issue Voting in Latin America." In Ryan Karlin, Matthew Singer, and Elizabeth Zechmeister (eds.) *The Latin American Voter*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Many treatments of voting behavior, party competition, democratic representation, and the political accountability of elected officials in the new democracies of the developing world are downright depressing.¹ These countries are often said to be mired in clientelist or populist political arrangements, their voters bought off – often quite cheaply – or beholden to quasi-charismatic political figures, and their democracies of such low quality that some question whether they would be better classified as something else (Ames 2001; Mainwaring, Bejerano, and Leongómez 2006; Zakaria 2003).

A key element of these devastating portraits is the notion that citizens cannot (or choose not to) act like those in the ideal democracy by voting for the candidate whose publicly announced platform most closely matches their own policy preferences. Many analysts of new democracies assume that this practice of "positional issue voting" does not exist and focus their work on other influences on vote choice. But if voters are in fact exercising roles as issue voters, then there may be more political representation and more accountability than indicated by many existing accounts.

We argue that positional issue voting is much more prevalent in Latin America's new democracies than previous research suggests. After all, unless the rise of the left across Latin

¹ We thank Raymond Duch and Carole Wilson as well as the editors and other contributors to this volume for their comments on earlier drafts.

America between 1998 and 2008 was well-timed luck – a series of simultaneous idiosyncratic outcomes – then it seems plausible that voters are voting their policy preferences (see Baker and Greene 2011). In this paper, we show that positional issue voting has occurred over the last 15 years in at least 14 of the 18 major countries in Latin America, save Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Paraguay.

In the first section of this chapter, we define positional issue voting and discuss the stringent requirements among voters and candidates for it to obtain. In the second section, we show why existing studies, including some of our own previous work, have generally not used adequate methods to detect positional issue voting. The third and fourth sections present our empirical analysis using cross-sectional survey data from 18 countries and panel data from Brazil in 2010 and Mexico in 2006. Though it is not the main goal of our chapter, we also offer an explanation for variation in the degree of positional issue voting across countries. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for the study of voting behavior and democratic quality in new democracies.

Positional Issue Voting in New Democracies

Positional issue voting occurs when a voter chooses the candidate whose publicly announced platform best approximates the voter's own policy preferences. The policy issues at play must be meaningful to voters and politicians. Typically, salient policies will motivate political contestation among the candidates and broad debate among major socio-political actors. In many democracies, the government's approach to economic development, the degree to which it redistributes material wealth, the means by which the state combats

criminality, and the extent to which it regulates certain moral issues are often salient enough to be the focus of positional issue voting. The public nature of the issues that underlie positional issue voting separates the practice from clientelistic voting, which occurs when citizens exchange their vote for access to an individually excludable private benefit (Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004, Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007b). The policy basis of positional issue voting also differentiates it from personalist voting that occurs when voters choose candidates due to personal traits that are not associated with their stances on public policy (Bartels 2002, Conover 1981). We also consider positional issue voting to be distinct from valence issue voting (Stokes 1963), in which voters choose the candidate who they perceive to be the most likely to achieve goals on which there is a societal consensus, such as job creation, national security, or lowering crime rates.

Positional issue voting encompasses two major models of how voters rationally relate their personal policy preferences to those of the competing candidates. One model is the “directional voting rule” (Rabinowitz and McDonald 1989), in which voters choose the candidate on their side of an issue relative to a neutral point (often thought of as “the center”). In directional voting models, voters prefer the candidate most distant from the neutral point yet inside a vaguely defined “region of acceptability”. We do not employ this approach because it struggles to explain the existence of multiparty competition that includes centrist parties, a characteristic that describes virtually all Latin American party systems.²

² Directional theorists argue that seemingly centrist parties win votes by appealing to voters on issues on which they are non-centrist (MacDonald, Listhaug, and Rabinowitz 1991), an analytical move that is tantamount to dismissing the presence of centrist parties. Moreover, Tomz and Van Houweling (2008) show that few voters employ the directional rule in the

We instead conceive of positional issue voting using the “proximity voting rule,” where each voter chooses the candidate whose policy stance is minimally distant from the voter’s policy preferences on salient packages of issue. Anthony Downs (1957) employed this voting rule as the foundation for his far-reaching spatial theory of party competition. In his model, voters relate their fixed policy preferences to the publicly announced policies that candidates choose in the attempt to maximize their vote share.³ To Downs and other spatial theorists, the dimension that structures partisan competition is an ideology or a package of issues that politicians yolk together for convenience and advantage (Enelow and Hinich 1984). Politicians have incentives to reduce the number of salient issue dimensions to help voters differentiate among the competing candidates and facilitate homogeneity in the messages espoused by candidates from the same party running in different constituencies (Enelow 1986). Most empirical studies on Latin America find that, at the elite level, one or two issue dimensions structure political contestation in countries where public policy issues are salient enough to organize partisan politics (Kitschelt et al. 2010; Wiesehomeier and Benoit 2009).

Other requirements for positional issue voting to exist give the practice a strong normative appeal (Ames, Baker and Renno 2008; Kitschelt et al. 2010, Stokes 2004). Voters

U.S., where the two-party system should be most propitious for directional theory.

³ We focus on sincere positional issue voting. We do not consider the impact of moderators that can lead to “sophisticated” issue voting, such as strategic defection from preferred losers to less preferred winners (Duverger 1954) or “discounting” whereby voters consider the impact that supporting a particular candidate will have on eventual government policy (Kedar 2009).

must have enough relevant political information to possess preferences over the public policy matters that feature in campaigns and know where at least two candidates stand on these matters. Voters must also downplay candidates' traits that are not correlated with their issue positions, such as attractiveness, fund-raising ability, personal wealth, place of origin, race, ethnicity, and gender. Voters must also eschew attempts by politicians to buy their support with short-term clientelist payoffs. Positional issue voting also carries requirements for politicians' behavior. For starters, they must engage in public policy debates rather than obfuscate their positions on major issues. If politicians successfully hide their stances on the issues, then voters cannot differentiate among them and must instead vote on valence or some other criterion with little policy relevance. In most instances, politicians must also follow through, to a reasonable extent, on their stated policy preferences once in office. If they do not, then voters may heavily discount the policy stances of future candidates and positional issue voting would crumble. Finally, a positional-issue voting model also implies responsive elites. If voters have fixed preferences on the issues that inform their vote choices, then election-minded elites will be induced to adopt platforms that mirror those of the large mass of voters, conditional on the number of competitors (Downs 1957; Sartori 1976). Where it exists, positional issue voting thus provides a key means by which elites remain accountable to the preferences of the electorate.⁴

The substantial requirements among voters and politicians to make positional issue voting viable has created skepticism that political systems of all sorts could support the

⁴ There are important theoretical exceptions to this melodious result that links voters' choices to politicians' actions in a symphony of democratic harmony (McKelvey 1976, 1986; Shepsle and Cohen 1990).

practice. Over fifty years ago, Campbell and his colleagues argued that just 12 percent of the American electorate held a coherent ideology and correctly identified the ideologies of the Democratic and Republican parties (Campbell et al. 1960: Ch. 10). The authors concluded that positional issues cannot drive vote choices except among highly educated and politically knowledgeable citizens.

Whereas this skepticism has abated somewhat for the U.S. case (Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008), it has become well-rooted in scholarship on democracies in the developing world. Latin American party systems are often characterized as “inchoate”, “volatile”, or “clientelistic”, but rarely as “programmatic” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). For example, Kitschelt and his collaborators (2010) classify virtually all Latin American party systems as less programmatically structured than those of the new democracies of Eastern Europe (p. 320). None of the 12 Latin American systems they examine qualify as high or even moderately high on their scale of programmatic party structuration, and just two (Chile and Uruguay) rise to the intermediate level.

Research on voting behavior in Latin America is similarly skeptical that positional issue voting can exist, in part because the raw ingredients necessary to support it would seem to be absent. Voters are alleged to have lower levels of relevant political knowledge (Gronlund and Milner 2006), material deprivation may inhibit voters’ willingness to gamble on asynchronous and uncertain payoffs from policy (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007), and policy-switches by politicians encourage voters to discount their campaign promises (Stokes 2001). Arnold and Samuels (2011: 33) sum up the sentiment echoed by many analysts when they argue that Latin American “citizens’ voting behavior is, at the aggregate level at least, largely devoid of policy or ideological content.” Analysts instead focus on other elements in

voters' decisions, including the influence of candidate traits, partisanship, demographics, clientelist payoffs, retrospective evaluations of economic performance, and (oft-tendentious information channeled through) the mass media.⁵

Challenges in Testing for Positional Issue Voting in Latin America

Providing a cross-national test of positional issue voting is fraught with methodological challenges. It is no surprise then that research shows contradictory findings. As we discuss in this section, some studies on Latin America show null results using time-series data at the aggregate or individual-level. But poor instrumentation in these studies enhances the probability of finding no effect of positional issues on vote choices even when such effects exist (i.e., type II error). Other studies use cross-sectional individual-level data that can bias findings in support of positional issue voting due to endogeneity (i.e., type I error). Obtaining contradictory results about the validity of positional voting using alternative research strategies is by no means limited to Latin America. Tomz and Van Howeling (2008) reference some 50 studies on the subject – many on voting in the United

⁵ On media and campaign effects, see Baker, Ames, and Renno 2006; Boas and Hidalgo 2011; Greene 2011; and Lawson 2002. On candidate traits, see Ames, Baker and Renno 2009; Lawson, Lenz, Baker, and Myers 2010; and Merolla and Zechmeister 2011. On clientelism, see Brusco, Nazareno, and Stokes 2004; Greene 2007; Stokes 2005; and Von Mettenheim 1995. On partisanship, see Samuels 2006. On ethnoracial identity, see Madrid 2012. On retrospective economic voting, see the many works cited by Gelineau and Singer in this volume.

States – that together yield no firm conclusion. We review existing findings in more detail below and then suggest an approach to diminish the various sources of measurement error and bias.

Research on Latin America that examines elections and voting over time has concluded that positional issue voting does not occur. In one approach, Stokes (2001) points out that many presidential candidates who campaigned as economic statisticians in the 1980s and 1990s and then implemented market-friendly policies after inauguration (e.g., Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Carlos Menem in Argentina) won re-election anyway. This implies that voters may not hold economic policy preferences in the first place or, at a minimum, that such preferences did not inform their vote choices. Either way, Stokes concludes that the spatial model has limited relevance for Latin America (2001: Chapter 1). Presidents' policy switches themselves also imply that, even if voters had clear preferences over economic policy at the outset, they might discount candidates' promises so much in the future that positional issue voting would fade. We find Stokes's argument compelling, but without a direct test of positional issue voting, we do not know whether shifts in voting behavior over time in the countries she studies simply reflect shifts in voters' issue preferences.

Another approach uses individual-level panel survey data that permits a time-series test of the relationship between voters' issue preferences and their vote choices. Using data from the Mexico 2000 Panel Study, McCann and Lawson (2003) argued that voter's beliefs about the main economic issues fluctuated wildly over just a six-month campaign period. From this evidence, they conclude that "the notion that citizens might base their voting decisions on candidates' issue positions seems implausible at best" (2003: 75). Using data

from the Mexico 2006 Panel Study, Greene (2009) also argued that vote choice revolved more around candidate images than positional issues.

The Mexico case is particularly instructive because the panel survey findings would seem to reinforce the earlier conclusions reached by Dominguez and McCann (1996) in *Democratizing Mexico*, a book that helped initiate a wave of research on voting behavior in Mexico. Using public opinion data from the 1988 presidential and 1991 legislative elections, the authors found that “these Mexican elections were not about the issues” (1995: 41). Instead, voters were more concerned with how the PRI handled the economy and whether the party would be a good manager going forward, not with the content of economic policy. The conclusion is especially surprising because the incumbent Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) had recently presided over a dramatic market-oriented economic reform program, a significant recession, and massive cuts in spending on social programs (Lustig 1998),

With data spanning nearly 20 years and elections under both dominant-party authoritarian and democratic rule, the conclusion that Mexico’s voters do not choose based on the issues would seem easy to sustain. Yet each of the studies cited relies on noisy indicators of voters’ issue preferences that enhance the probability of finding no effect of positional issues on vote choices even when such effects exist (i.e., type II error). For example, McCann and Lawson (2003) looked at the stability of voters’ preferences on just two items, one on electricity privatization and one on how to combat crime. We recognize that researchers are often hamstrung by a lack of more appropriate data for a variety of reasons including cost, access, and continuity over time, yet it is not entirely surprising that these scholars found a high degree of attitudinal instability. Null results are just as likely

caused by poor or limited instrumentation as they are by the respondents' attitudinal instability or failure to match policy preferences with candidate choice.

Another group of studies has found evidence of positional issue voting in Latin America and elsewhere using cross-sectional survey data, but this approach also suffers from methodological problems. In their region-wide study, Luna and Zechmeister (2005) (parts of which appear in Kitschelt et al. 2010, chapter 4) show "elite-mass congruence," meaning a strong correlation between the average policy opinions of mass partisans and those of partisan elites, in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay.⁶ Baker and Greene (2011) use a positional issue voting model to explain the rise of the left in Latin America, and a few other studies show respondents' issue positions to be significant predictors of vote choice (Greene 2007; Moreno 1999; Zechmeister 2008). In the U.S. context, Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2011) show that positional issue voting on economic issues impacted voter's decisions in the 2008 presidential election even more than retrospective evaluations of economic performance. By measuring respondents' vote choices and issue preferences at the same point in time, all of these studies may suffer from problems of endogeneity and omitted variable bias.

One common version of endogeneity in vote choice models occurs when voters first decide on their preferred candidate and then, out of affinity that has nothing to do with shared policy views, adopt the candidate's policy stance. Voters may develop a sympathy or even an identity with a particular political party in early adulthood because nearby agents of socialization, such as political discussants, localized media, and community opinion leaders,

⁶ Elite and mass opinions diverge significantly in the other six countries in their analysis.

Similarly, Bruhn and Greene (2009) show that congressional candidates for major parties in Mexico are significantly less centrist than their constituents.

endear them to it for non-policy reasons (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). Subsequently, such socialized voters “learn” their issue stances from their preferred party’s elites and candidates, adopting them largely without criticism or reflection. A substantial body of evidence from the United States supports the idea that elites can cue or lead voters’ preferences on public policy (Zaller 1992). In these situations, cross-sectional correlations between issue beliefs and candidate choice make it appear as if voters choose candidates because of shared policy preferences, but in fact the causal ordering is the reverse. If elites do lead voters in this way, and evidence from some work on Latin America suggests that they do (Baker 2009; Kaufman and Zuckerman 1998), then cross-sectional analyses can bias findings in favor of finding support for positional issue voting (i.e., type I error).

Cross-sectional analyses can also artificially bias results in favor of positional issue voting because they suffer from omitted variable bias. Imagine citizens who prefer to consume left-leaning media and also hold anti-market policy preferences. Both tendencies incline these voters to choose a leftist party, but if their media consumption habits are not measured or measured with error, the researcher may attribute causality to issue positions instead of media influence. The standard strategy of controlling for as many variables as possible is inadequate, since it is virtually impossible to control for every variable that influences issue preferences and vote choice, even when survey questionnaires are well-designed.

The accumulated methodological challenges seem to suggest that analysts simply cannot determine whether Latin Americans use positional issues when making their vote choices. As is well known, we cannot avoid all sources of type I and type II error using observational data, and we do not currently have access to data from experiments designed to

test for positional issue voting (Tomz and Van Houweling 2008). Thus, we cannot offer a definitive solution, but we hope to advance the empirical foundations of the debate over positional economic voting in Latin America by addressing some of the key methodological shortcomings discussed above and by using a variety of data.

We begin with a cross-sectional, region-wide analysis (similar to Luna and Zechmeister 2005) using surveys with questions asked across eighteen countries in the same year. This approach is especially useful for detecting underlying issue dimensions that are common to all Latin American countries. To avoid some of the instrumentation problems discussed above, we construct indices of issue preferences rather than using one or two variables (Achen 1975; Ansolabehere, Rodden, and Snyder 2008). Indices are composites created from the shared variation among multiple items, variation that captures a latent dimension of attitudes toward a particular policy debate. In any single survey item, measurement error can be enormous: respondents may have misunderstood the question, struggled to fit their nuanced or ambivalent beliefs onto the researcher's contrived and oversimplified scale, been distracted, or misrepresented their views for any number of other reasons. Compiling an index of policy attitudes from the covariance across multiple such items helps to represent respondents' true policy preferences, since the shared variance is likely to be meaningful "signal" amidst the measurement error "noise." We think that this simple measurement fix may help resuscitate positional issue voting in Latin America. Indices of voters' policy preferences are also theoretically closer to what Downs had in mind when he argued that voters choose the candidate most proximate to their personal policy preferences (Enelow and Hinich 1984).

By itself, the use of cross-sectional surveys is insufficient. Not only do they suffer from the endogeneity and omitted variables bias discussed above, but when used cross-nationally, they are typically constrained to using the same issue questions, regardless of context. In one sense, standardization is useful for enhancing comparability. At the same time, it raises the possibility of either not measuring the specific issues that arose in particular elections or measuring these issues with substantial error, thus making it more difficult to detect positional issue voting.

As a partial remedy, we follow our cross-national analysis using cross-sectional data with an analysis of panel survey data from Brazil and Mexico collected before and after single election cycles. By repeating interviews with the same panel of respondents and using election-specific survey questions, we can diminish the problem of using inappropriate indicators of voters' issue preferences. We can also ameliorate the bulk of the endogeneity problem because interviewing the same respondents just weeks apart naturally holds constant many of the variables that would otherwise change across individuals in cross-sectional surveys. We focus on Brazil and Mexico because these are the only two countries in the region where researchers have so far collected panel data on voters during election cycles.

For our analysis, we look only at economic issues as potential sources of positional issue voting. By economic issues we mean policies around material redistribution (such as the size and shape of the welfare state) and economic development (such as the proper role of the state in the market as well as the scope of international trade and investment.) Other issues do structure political contestation in Latin America, including authoritarian versus democratic values (Moreno 1999), socio-religious cleavages (Luna and Zechmeister 2005), and preferences over anti-crime policy (this volume); however, research shows that these

“second” dimensions typically appear in addition to a more fundamental economic policy dimension that accounts for the lion’s share of party position-taking in Latin American countries (Kitschelt et al. 2010, Wiesehomeier and Benoit 2009). Because we focus only on economic policy issues in this chapter, excluding other issues that could inform vote choices, our results can be viewed as lower-bound estimates on the prevalence of positional issue voting.

Cross-Sectional Results from 18 Latin American Countries

We begin with a cross-national analysis that demonstrates the strong potential for positional voting on economic issues in at least 14 of 18 countries in Latin America. Our data come from the Latinobarometer (LB) project and the Americas Barometer (AB) project, both of which contain (different) questions about the desirability of welfare programs and/or the recent shift to a more market-friendly development model. None of the surveys were designed specifically to measure economic policy preferences, so we use the survey waves that contain the most relevant questions. The 1998-1999 and 2007 Latinbarometer survey waves include a sufficient number of questions about privatization, free trade, foreign investment, and core capitalist values. The 2008, 2010, and 2012 waves of the Americas Barometer survey asked questions about the role of the state in the economy, specifically regarding public ownership and redistribution.

Because the methods used to detect positional issue voting are so important in informing analysts’ final conclusions about its existence, we use some space to present our approach in detail. Our test relates each respondent’s self-placement on economic policy

issues to the ideology of the party they report that they would vote for in elections. To generate the respondents' preferences over economic policy, we ran a separate factor analysis⁷ for each country on the full battery of available economic policy items (eight for Latinbarometer 1998/9, five for Latinbarometer 2007, and four for Americas Barometer).⁸

⁷ This approach allows item loadings to vary across countries, thus taking country-specific context into account.

⁸ Latinobarometer 1998/9 items are (1) "The market economy is the most suitable system for the country. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this statement?" (2) "The privatization of state-owned enterprises has been beneficial to the country. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this statement?" (3) "From the following list of activities, which do you think should be majority-owned by the state and which do you think should be majority-owned by private hands? Petroleum, electricity, telephones, drinking water." (4) "The state should leave productive activity to the private sector. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this statement?" (5) "Would you say that your country benefits a lot, quite a bit, a little or not at all for being part of your regional trade agreement?" (6) "Thinking about trade between your country and the United States, how important do you think it is for the economic development of your country? Very important, somewhat important, not very important, not important at all." (7) "Foreign investment should be encouraged. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with this statement?" (8) "In general, do you consider foreign investment to be beneficial or harmful for the development of the country?"

Latinobarometer 2007 items are 1-3 above plus (4) "Imagine the following situation: two people, of the same age, work as computer programmers doing the same work. One earns

With minor exceptions, all items loaded in the expected direction on a latent statist↔liberal economic policy dimension. We then generated each respondent's self-placement on the economic issue dimension from the factor scores, with higher values equating to more liberal sentiments.⁹

Our dependent variable is the ideological location of each respondent's preferred party in a hypothetical presidential election. These scores were generated by a panel of experts where a score of 1 represents the furthest left position and 20 represents the furthest right position (Wiesehomeier and Benoit 2009).¹⁰ Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009) show that economic policy issues are the main contributor to experts' scores.¹¹ Yet to use these

20,000 pesos (equivalent to U\$50) more than the other one, but he does his work more quickly, efficiently, and is more trustworthy than the other. In your opinion, do you consider it fair that, in this situation, one programmer is paid more than the other or do you consider it unfair?" (5) "Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each of the following phrases that I am going to read? Only with a market economy can (country) become a developed country." AmericasBarometer items are the four "role of the state" items described elsewhere in this volume.

⁹ Respondents who answered "don't know" to one or more of the items in the batteries were not dropped. Instead, they were scored on the dimension using the questions they did answer. Only respondents that answered "don't know" to *all* of the items (less than 0.5% in LB, less than 3% in AB) were casewise deleted and considered not to hold positions on the economic policy dimension.

¹⁰ See Baker and Greene 2011 for details.

¹¹ We do not construct the candidate-to-voter issue distances that typically inform empirical

scores, we must still identify each respondent's preferred party. Here it should be stressed that the LB and AB projects are not election surveys and thus most were fielded outside the confines of presidential or legislative election seasons. For LB, we use a question that asks respondents which partisan option they would choose if the election were held the day after the interviews were conducted. For AB, we use a question that asked citizens to recall their presidential vote choice in the previous election, employing the survey wave closest to the most recent presidential election in each country.¹²

Our regression-based approach reveals the correspondence between elites and masses for multiparty systems by testing for a statistically significant individual-level partial correlation between respondents' self-placement on the statist↔liberal economic policy dimension and the expert placement of their preferred party on the left-right scale. We ran 51 separate OLS regressions, one for each country-year (within the confines of the timing discussed above) for which data were available. Our models also include the standard demographic control variables of wealth, gender, age, and education.

Figure 7.1 graphically summarizes the most important finding from each regression. It shows the standardized coefficient and 90% confidence interval for respondents' economic

models of proximity voting because none of the surveys we employ asked respondents to place the competing candidates on the same economic policy issues where they placed themselves. Even if they had included such questions, voters often project their own personal preferences onto those of the candidates, thus confounding tests of proximity voting (Conover and Feldman 1982).

¹² For both AB and LB, responses to the vote choice question of "don't know" or "did not vote" or "would not vote" were dropped from the analysis.

policy preferences aggregated by country. Countries are arrayed from left to right in descending order of the average size of this coefficient in their set of regression models.

<Insert Figure 7.1 here>

We find evidence of positional issue voting in 14 of the 18 countries. Our findings are quite strong for Uruguay, El Salvador, Chile, Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina, where at least two of the three public opinion data sets spanning 14 years show that voters had party preferences that corresponded to their economic policy views. We have access to just one public opinion poll for Dominican Republic, and our models using these data also show positional issue voting. In Nicaragua, Peru, Costa Rica, and Mexico, at least one of the polls returns evidence of positional issue voting and in all but Nicaragua, models using a second poll fall just short of reaching statistical significance at the 90% level. Given the persistent characterizations of Latin American voters as pawns of clientelist machines, swayed by charismatic or telegenic individuals, or overly influenced by their demographic profiles, we find it fascinating that the great majority of countries feature some level of positional voting on economic issues.

Only four countries in the region (Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Panama) do not show any evidence of positional voting on economic issues. It is still possible that *some* positional issues other than economic ones structure vote choices in these countries or that more tailored questions administered during an election campaign would have revealed positional issue voting. But lack of appropriate public opinion data means that we are unable to fashion a useful test, so we treat our 14 of 18 mark as a lower-bound estimate for the region.

It is also possible that positional issue voting is activated by contextual variables that are beyond the voters' control. For instance, where party platforms converge and offer voters few meaningful policy differences, we would expect less issue-voting. In addition, where politicians can generate clientelist resources and buy many votes, citizens are less likely to vote based on policy. Such contextual influences may shed light on variation in the degree of positional issue voting across all countries in the dataset and account for the four outlier countries.

To test these contextual influences, we constructed a multi-level model. At the individual level (level 1), the model is similar to those constructed above. The dependent variable is the ideological location of each respondent's preferred party in a hypothetical presidential election. The independent variables are self-placement on the statist↔liberal economic policy dimension, wealth, gender, age, and education. We estimate policy preference as a random coefficient that can vary by country (level 2). We also specify three cross-level interactions: we test whether the size of the policy preference coefficient varies with a country's level of polarization in the party system, the degree of clientelist effort exerted by politicians, and the effective number of parties.¹³ We expect that party systems that are highly polarized, low on clientelist effort, and minimally fragmented will have a greater degree of issue voting. These conditions make it easier for voters to align their policy preferences with parties that represent distinct ideological options.

<Insert Table 7.2 here>

¹³ See the Introduction to this volume for information on the operationalization of these latter three variables.

As expected, more polarized party systems enable issue voting ($p < .01$) whereas more clientelist effort mutes it ($p < .05$).¹⁴ These effects are so strong that a highly polarized party system with very low levels of clientelist voting is predicted to generate more than a three standard deviation increase in positional issue voting over a system where parties converge on the issues and buy votes routinely. (The coefficient on the effective number of parties variable was not statistically significant.) Overall, this simple contextual model does a remarkably good job at predicting the degree of positional issue voting across countries.

The contextual model also helps explain why Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Panama do not feature positional issue voting. These countries have less polarizing disagreements over economic policy and relatively high levels of clientelist politics. As a result, more voters are drawn into material exchanges for political support rather than voting their policy preferences.

Panel Data Results from Brazil and Mexico

The shortcomings of cross-sectional surveys imply that the strong support for positional issue voting demonstrated in the prior section could be an artifact of endogeneity or omitted variable bias. To ameliorate these problems, we use purpose-designed panel surveys of voters conducted in single countries and during individual election cycles provide excellent data for detecting positional issue voting. When such surveys begin well before Election Day and include a post-election wave, analysts can assess whether short-term

¹⁴ Party polarization data for Panama in 1998 were not available. We used data from 2000 as a substitute. Dominican Republic was not polled in the 1998/9 Latinobarometer.

changes between panel waves in issue attitudes are correlated with short-term change in vote choice. Panel waves are often spaced just weeks apart and, as a result, charting change in the same respondents automatically controls for all confounds except those that also change quickly in the short intervals between panel waves. For our purposes, the great virtue of panel data is that it can control for individuals' past issue preferences and past vote intentions, making confounds that are stable or change only slowly irrelevant to our models because we will have controlled for both of their consequences. Panel data that are collected over reasonably short periods of time thus eliminate a substantial amount of omitted variable bias.¹⁵

Panel surveys are also well-suited to detect positional issue voting because, unlike cross-national surveys that achieve comparability by using the same questions in different political contexts, panel surveys typically use questionnaires designed to tap public opinion during specific election cycles. Such sensitivity to context is important because the issues that matter to voters can differ across countries or even from election-to-election, even if they tend to belong to the same categories. For instance, the adoption of market-oriented economic reforms may be a hot-button issue in two countries, but in one context the debate may revolve around a proposed free trade pact whereas in another the argument is about privatization of a particular utility. Asking voters questions about the desirability of international trade and privatization broadly defined may measure opinions well in both contexts, but context-specific questions are more likely to elicit valid responses.

¹⁵ They do not, however, resolve endogeneity and omitted variable bias problems entirely: only a well-executed experiment can do so.

Yet panel models also contain a drawback (aside from their limited availability due to high cost) that encourages us to pair analyses of these data with the cross-sectional analysis presented above. Panel models detect positional issue voting only to the extent that changes in voters' issue preferences across panel waves correlate with changes in their vote choices.¹⁶ For this reason, we would not advocate the exclusive use of panel data even if it were available for all countries in the region.

For our panel data analyses, we turn to the Mexico 2006 Panel Study¹⁷ and the Brazil 2010 Panel Study.¹⁸ (The scarcity of panel data in the region does not allow us to include other countries.) Both panels included three waves, with respondents interviewed twice before the election and once immediately after. Unlike statistical models that use cross-

¹⁶ Of course, if voters' issue preferences are highly changeable, then researchers should focus on the variables that cause such instability, even if vote intentions continue to shift with changes in issue preferences.

¹⁷ Mexico 2006 Panel Study participants are Andy Baker, Kathleen Bruhn, Roderic Camp, Wayne Cornelius, Jorge Domínguez, Kenneth Greene, Joseph Klesner, Chappell Lawson (Principal Investigator), David Leal, Beatriz Magaloni, James McCann, Alejandro Moreno (pollster), and Alejandro Poiré. Data available at <http://web.mit.edu/polisci/research/mexico06/>.

¹⁸ Ames, Barry, Fabiana Machado, Lucio Renno, David Samuels, Amy Erica Smith, and Cesar Zucco 2013. The Brazilian Electoral Panel Studies (BEPS): Brazilian Public Opinion in the 2010 Presidential Elections. IDB Technical Note No. 508. http://www.iadb.org/en/research-and-data/publication-details,3169.html?pub_id=IDB-DB-

sectional data and are thus constrained to examining the static relationship between issue preferences and vote choices at one point in time, panel models are dynamic in that they allow us to examine the impact of prior changes in issue preferences on subsequent changes in vote choices (De Boef and Keele 2008). This structure is particularly appealing for two reasons. First, examining the partial effect of prior issue preferences on subsequent vote choices ameliorates the endogeneity problem. (Our multinomial logit panel models estimate vote choice in waves two and three, using wave one and two, respectively, to measure lagged values.) Second, the structure allows us to control for a series of potential confounds we are able to measure, including past vote intentions and past and present partisan identification, *and* for the potential effects of unmodeled confounds that are unlikely to vary between panel waves. The short intervals between panel waves mean that each respondent's civic activism, union membership, religiosity, social class, education, and a host of other demographic variables are unlikely to have changed. As a result, the structure greatly diminishes concerns over omitted variable bias.

For Mexico, the national sample includes interviews of 2,250 ordinary voters in October 2005, May 2006, and just after the July 2, 2006 elections. The May wave occurred during the hard-fought campaigns that pitted the eventual winner, pro-market Felipe Calderón of the incumbent National Action Party (PAN), against Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), who criticized free trade, privatization, and the market system more generally. Roberto Madrazo of the centrist and formerly dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) finished a distant third. Interestingly, economic issues became more central to the campaigns over time (Hart 2013). After months of campaigning on transparency and conservative values, Calderón abruptly

shifted his focus to jobs just three months before the election. A candidate debate on economic issues soon followed. The increasing emphasis on economic issues might have shifted voters' economic policy views and given them enough new information to change their view of the candidates (Greene 2011). Our panel model is well-designed to capture such shifts.

The Mexico panel data contain repeated questions on economic policy issues related to privatization, trade, redistribution, and the social safety net.¹⁹ These variables scaled onto a single *Economic liberalism* dimension in a principal components factor analysis. We then used this variable in panel regression models with the leftist candidate, López Obrador, as the base category. If positional issue voting occurs, the coefficient on the economic issue dimension will be positive and statistically significant.

Table 7.2 shows that voters' shifting preferences on economic policy issues had a notable impact on vote choices.²⁰ As one would expect, increasing economic liberalism

¹⁹ Questions are (1) "Do you believe that more private investment should be allowed in the electricity sector or that the electricity sector should remain almost completely in hands of government." (2) "What would you prefer: that commercial relations between Mexico and the United States increase, decrease, or remain the same?" (3) In general, what would you prefer? That the government be responsible for the economic well being of individuals or that individuals be responsible for their own economic well being?" (4) "In your opinion, what should the government do to reduce poverty? Give money to the poor and raise taxes to the rich or promote private investment and leave taxes as they are."

²⁰ It may appear as though the changing economic policy preferences of some voters violates the assumption of fixed preferences in the spatial model, but see Kollman, Miller, and Page

benefited Calderón's market-friendly candidacy and, to a lesser extent, Madrazo's relatively centrist stance, relative to leftist López Obrador. A one-standard deviation increase in liberal economic sentiment made a voter about four to eight percentage points more likely to support Calderón over López Obrador. We should stress that these effects are quite large in the context of a political campaign, especially one that ended with a 0.5% margin of victory. In other words, there is a tight and important relationship between a voter reconsidering her view of the over-arching economic model during the rhetorical melee of the campaigns and a subsequent change in her choice to support the presidential candidate more proximate to her newly acquired policy preferences.

<Insert Table 7.2 here>

For Brazil, the national sample had 2,482 respondents in wave one (March and April 2010), 908 re-interviews in wave two (August 2010), and 1,221 re-interviews in wave three (November 2010 after the October 31 second-round election). Nine candidates competed for the presidency, but as in Mexico, only three rose to prominence: Dilma Rousseff of the incumbent center-left Workers' Party (PT) that held the presidency under incumbent Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva; José Serra of the centrist Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) that was associated with the pro-market policies of the Fernando Henrique Cardoso Administration (1995-2002); and Marina Silva, a former PT member who ran under the Green Party (PV) label. Rousseff won a plurality of the votes in the first-round, missing an outright victory by just over three percentage points. In the second-round, she bested Serra 56% to 44%.

(1992).

The Brazil panel study contains questions about the desirability of the conditional cash transfer program (*Bolsa Família*) and government spending on pensions for the poor as well as a preference for government or private ownership.²¹ All three variables loaded onto a single *Economic liberalism* dimension in a principal components factor analysis. We again put the major leftist candidate (Rousseff) as the base category, so that coefficients on the economic liberalism variable should be positive when comparing Serra to Rousseff supporters. Silva's campaign focused primarily on environmental sustainability and may have drawn supporters from across the economic policy dimension. We thus do not have strong expectations about the differences between her voters' preferences on economic policy and those of the other candidates.

Table 7.3 shows that voters' shifting economic policy preferences during the campaigns affected which of the major candidates they decided to support. A rightward shift toward more liberal preferences increased the probability of voting Serra whereas a leftward shift made voters more likely to support Rousseff. As in Mexico, the magnitude of the effect is noteworthy in the context of a closely fought campaign: a one-standard deviation shift toward liberal sentiments increased the likelihood of supporting Serra over Rousseff by about

²¹ The wordings of the three questions is as follows: (1) "To what extent do you agree with the statement that the Brazilian government, more than the private sector should own the most important firms and industries in the country." (2) "What should the government do about the Bolsa Família program? Extend it, keep it as is, reduce it, or end it?" (3) "How much should the government spend on non-contributory pension benefits. It should increase taxes and spend more, maintain current expenditure levels, reduce taxes and spend less, or reduce taxes and end the service provision."

four to eight percentage points. Our finding that increased liberalism also helped Marina Silva is perhaps mildly puzzling, but the fact that she staked her candidacy on non-economic issues makes her supporters tougher to pin down on the economic policy dimension.

Although it is certainly possible that environmental politics could become a second primary dimension of competition in Brazil's party system, economic issues remain dominant at present. As our findings show, these positional issues clearly informed vote decisions made between the top two candidates.

<Insert Table 7.3 here>

Panel data on single election cycles offer an excellent opportunity to test for positional voting. When they are well-designed, panel studies yield context-specific questions that tap salient economic issues better than multi-country cross-sectional surveys that are, by necessity, blunter instruments. Coupled with the ability to construct panel models that control for a host of measured and unmeasured influences on vote choices, panel data provide even more convincing evidence of positional issue voting.

Conclusion

Positional issue voting in new democracies sounds unlikely, on the face of it. Circumstantial evidence such as mandate violations and the common observation that elections turn on clientelist payoffs, demographics, or short-term macroeconomic trends rather than campaign promises make many observers skeptical at the outset. Add to that the very narrow requirements among both voters and candidates for engaging in positional issue

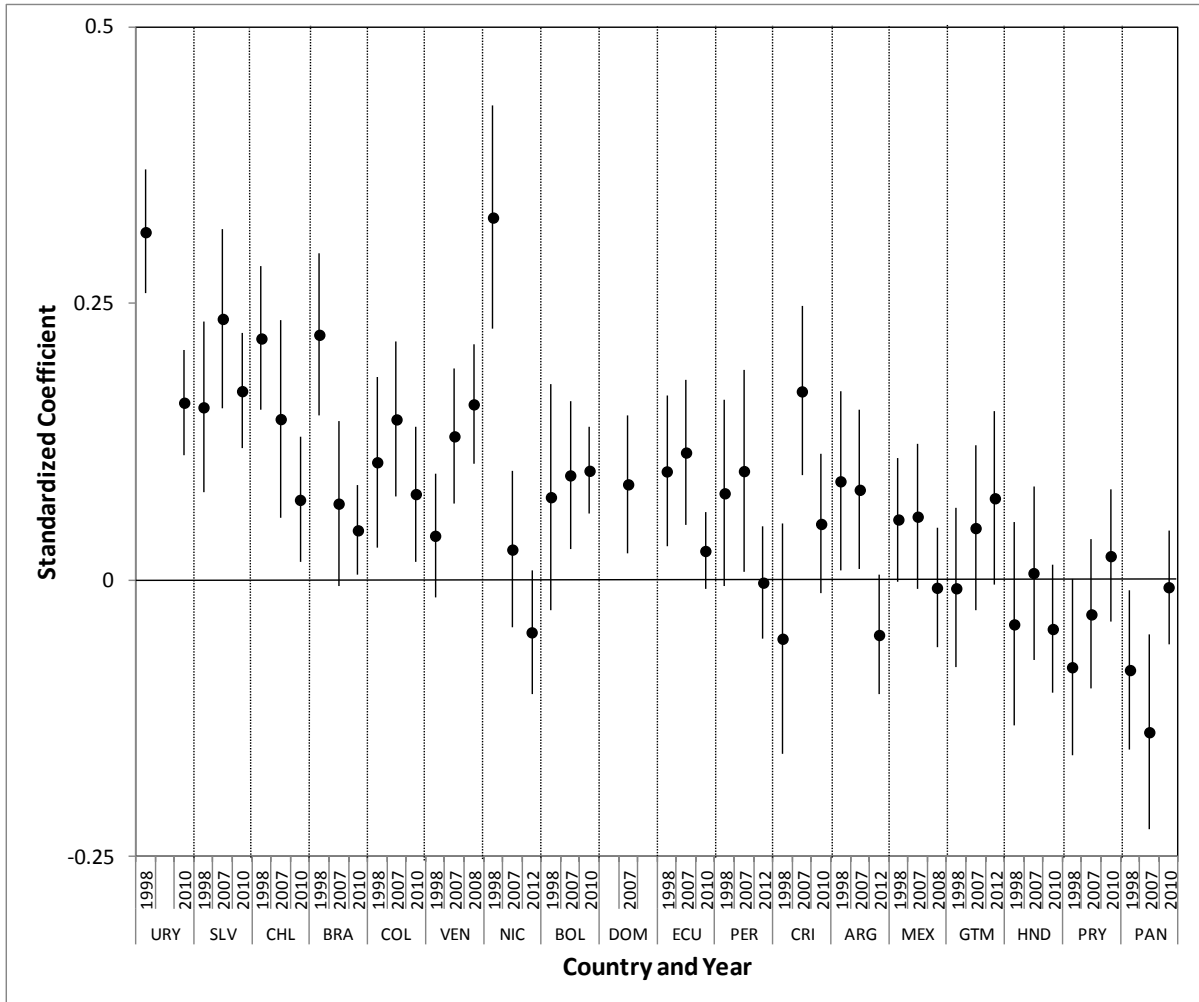
voting, and the conclusion seems obvious: Latin America's new democracies involve elite-mass linkages that are either populist, clientelist, or charismatic, but not programmatic.

Yet despite the circumstantial evidence against positional issue voting, when we construct proper measures of voters' economic policy preferences and create models that help minimize biases against positive findings on issue voting, we find compelling evidence that voters really do choose from among competing parties and candidates to a substantial extent based on their personal economic policy preferences. Among the 18 countries for which we have appropriate data over a 14-year period, positional voting on economic policy issues occurs in at least 14 of them. We would be more convinced by the apparent absence of issue voting in Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, and Panama if we had access to well-constructed panel survey data with context-specific questions and the ability to minimize potential problems due to endogeneity and omitted variables bias; however, our best evidence for the moment suggests that voters make their choices based on other criteria in these countries. Our contextual analysis suggests that structural features of the party systems in these countries – features that are less prevalent in the other 14 countries in the region – may diminish positional issue voting for reasons that are beyond the voters' control.

Our findings suggest that analysts of voting behavior in Latin America have more work to do. There is no doubt that clientelism, candidate traits, media influence, and retrospective economic evaluations all influence vote choices to varying degrees; however, these dominant approaches struggle to explain the causes of partisan waves that have swept across the region, such as the rise of the left from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s and the subsequent resurgence of the right (see Baker and Greene 2011). Constructing better explanations of voting behavior will require scholars to collect more high-quality survey data

that replicates issue position questions across countries and over time through large-scale cross-sectional surveys but also through (admittedly expensive) panel surveys on single elections. Analysts will also need to construct better theoretical explanations that go far beyond what we have done here and integrate the multiple influences on voting behavior rather than treating them as separate and conflicting causes. For the time being, our findings that voters do choose in part according to candidates' and parties' issue stances means that Latin American countries may be developing the type of programmatic party systems that most analysts agree enhances democratic representation and accountability, but that were once thought to be out of reach for the average citizen in most countries in the Western Hemisphere.

Figure 7.1: Positional Economic Issue Voting in Latin America



Note: Dots represent standardized regression coefficients on measures of self-placement on the statist↔liberal economic issue dimension. A separate OLS regression was run for each country year (and thus for each entry in the figure). Dependent variables were the ideological location of respondents' preferred party in a hypothetical presidential election (for 1998 and 2007) or who the respondent voted for in the most recent presidential election (for 2008, 2010 and 2012). Vertical bars are 90% confidence intervals on the standardized regression coefficients.

Sources: Latinbarometer (1998 and 2007) and Americasbarometer (2008, 2010, and 2012)

**Table 7.1: Multilevel Model of Vote Choice in a Hypothetical Presidential Election:
1998 Latinbarometer**

<i>Level-1 × Level-2 Interactions</i>	
Self placement on economic issue dimension × Party polarization	-.108* (.054)
Self placement on economic issue dimension × Clientelist effort	.879* (.174)
Self placement on economic issue dimension × Effective No. of Parties	.033 (.063)
<i>Level-1 Variables</i>	
Self placement on statist↔liberal economic issue dimension	1.224 (.883)
Wealth	.022 (.065)
Gender	.236* (.092)
Age	.008* (.003)
Education	-.034* (.013)
Constant	12.415* (.528)
<i>Random Coefficients</i>	
Standard deviation of Self placement on economic issue dimension	.292* (.094)
Standard deviation of random intercept	1.951* (.338)
Entries are multilevel model coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. N=8,602 clustered in 17 countries.	

Table 7.2: Panel Model of Vote Choice in 2006 Mexican Presidential Election

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Calderón</i>	<i>Madrazo</i>
	<i>López Obrador</i>	<i>López Obrador</i>
Economic liberalism t	.276* (.094)	.186* (.102)
Economic liberalism $t-1$	.104 (.094)	-.078 (.099)
<i>Party ID</i>		
PAN partisan t	1.889* (.216)	.743* (.258)
PAN partisan $t-1$	.184 (.181)	.181 (.227)
PRD partisan t	-2.307* (.269)	-1.875* (.326)
PRD partisan $t-1$	.026 (.200)	-.039 (.247)
PRI partisan t	.177 (.233)	1.738* (.208)
PRI partisan $t-1$	.204 (.189)	.326* (.174)
Independent or DK $_t$	0 (0)	0 (0)
Independent or DK $t-1$	0 (0)	0 (0)
<i>Lagged DVs</i>		
Calderon vote intention $t-1$	.984* (.236)	-.403 (.325)
López Obrador vote intention $t-1$	-1.980* (.218)	-1.549* (.265)
Madrazo vote intention $t-1$	-.353 (.283)	1.324* (.283)
Others, abstain, or DK $t-1$	0 (0)	0 (0)
Constant	.388 (.179)	-.670 (.209)
<p>Entries are multinomial logit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are corrected for clustering by respondent. * $p < .05$, one-tailed test. N=2,824 (1,721 different respondents). T=3. Coefficients for $\frac{\text{Others}}{\text{López Obrador}}$ and $\frac{\text{Abstain or DK}}{\text{López Obrador}}$ were estimated but are not shown.</p>		

Table 7.3: Panel Model of Vote Choice in 2010 Brazil Presidential Election

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Serra</i>	<i>Silva</i>
	<i>Rousseff</i>	<i>Rousseff</i>
Economic liberalism t	.715* (.270)	.978 (.291)
Economic liberalism $t-1$	.217 (.235)	.571 (.264)
<i>Party ID</i>		
PT partisan t	-1.267* (.228)	-.896* (.235)
PT partisan $t-1$	-.259 (.244)	.188 (.242)
PSDB partisan t	2.287* (.481)	.823 (.683)
PSDB partisan $t-1$	.765* (.444)	.675 (.532)
Other party partisan t	.328 (.269)	1.046* (.268)
Other party partisan $t-1$	.074 (.255)	-.154 (.297)
Independent or DK t	0 (0)	0 (0)
Independent or DK $t-1$	0 (0)	0 (0)
<i>Lagged DVs</i>		
Rousseff vote intention $t-1$	-.913* (.200)	-.944* (.217)
Serra vote intention $t-1$	1.424* (.193)	-.163 (.250)
Silva vote intention $t-1$	.477 (.280)	.845* (.270)
Others, abstain, or DK $t-1$	0 (0)	0 (0)
Constant	-.518 (.138)	-.892 (.154)
<p>Entries are multinomial logit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are corrected for clustering by respondent. * $p < .05$, one-tailed test. $N=1,621$ (905 different respondents). $T=3$. Coefficients for $\frac{\text{Others}}{\text{Rousseff}}$ and $\frac{\text{Abstain or DK}}{\text{Rousseff}}$ were estimated but are not shown.</p>		