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Abstract*

This paper uses joint scaling methods and similar items from three large-scale surveys to place voters, parties and politicians from different Latin American countries on a common ideological space. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, the findings reveal that the “median” voter in Latin America is located to the left of the ideological spectrum, and that voters’ ideological locations are highly correlated with their partisan attachments. The location of parties and leaders suggests that three distinctive clusters exist: one located at the left of the political spectrum, another at the center, and a third to the right. The results also indicate that legislators in Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Peru tend to be more “leftist” than their voters. The *ideological drift*, however, is not large enough to substantiate the claim that a representation gap exists in those countries.

JEL classifications: O54, C83, Y80

Keywords: Partisanship, Ideology, Ideological drift, Representation gap

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1. Introduction

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the Latin American Left experienced an extraordinary revival in Latin America. In fact, by 2009 nearly two-thirds of Latin Americans lived under some form of leftist national government (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). In country after country, the so-called “new Left” managed to defeat the Center and the Right in free and fair elections (Smith, 2012). Several scholars, however, argue that the success of leftist leaders at the polls does not reflect a consistent shift in the self-placement of Latin American citizens along the left-right ideological spectrum. For example, Seligson (2007) finds that Latin American citizens’ ideological self-placement on the left-right scale is actually skewed to the right. Arnold and Samuels (2011) use survey data to document a weak connection between mass public opinion and the region’s leftist shift at polls. Likewise, Remmer (2012) claims that a discernible leftward shift in terms of voters’ ideological positions has not accompanied Latin America’s so-called left turn.

These findings are quite paradoxical, suggesting not only that ideology is an insignificant determinant of vote choice in Latin America, but also that elected officials display an appreciable *ideological* drift from the public. I contend that the alleged ideological *disconnect* between voters and politicians in Latin America is mainly an artifact of measurement error. These previous studies have primarily relied on perceptual data to compare disparate populations. Such a reliance presents three main problems: i) individual-level respondent bias, ii) biases in scale perception *across* countries, and iii) disjoint groups facing disjoint sets of choices (i.e., politicians and voters surveyed in different ways).

In this paper, I address these issues by constructing superior measures of the policy preferences of both citizens and politicians in Latin America. Specifically, I use joint scaling methods and similar items from three large-scale surveys to place voters, parties and politicians from different Latin American countries on a common ideological space.

I proceed in three stages. First, I rely on the 2010 *Latinobarómetro* to estimate the ideological location of 11,245 respondents from 18 Latin American countries. The survey contains rating scales to evaluate several prominent political figures who are well-known throughout the region (e.g., Fidel Castro, Hugo Chávez, and Barak Obama). As such, it is possible to employ these questions as the “glue” to jointly scale respondents from all countries. Second, I analyze data

from eight countries included in the most recent wave of the Universidad de Salamanca's Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA) survey which focuses on elected officials. I examine responses to questions where legislators were presented with the task of locating themselves and a number of relevant political actors on a 10-point ideological scale. Some common *stimuli*—consisting of prominent Latin American politicians—are used in all eight countries. I thus rely on these data to estimate the location of parties and politicians from different countries on a common ideological space. Third, I combine some of the PELA surveys with Module 3 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) to jointly place voters and elected officials in 4 Latin American countries (Brazil, Chile, Mexico, and Peru). These surveys focus on two different sets of respondents: voters in the case of CSES, and legislators in PELA's case. But both surveys ask respondents to locate themselves and a common set of relevant political actors on a 10-point ideological scale. Therefore, these common questions serve as *bridges* to connect the policy preferences of voters within each country to the preferences of the legislators who represent them.

The paper makes two important contributions. First, the analysis presented here has important implications for our understanding of Latin America's leftward shift. The existing literature has struggled to explain why alienated, or even right-wing, voters would support left-wing candidates (see Castañeda and Navia, 2006; Debs and Helmke, 2008; Murillo, Oliveros and Vaishnav, 2010; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011; Remmer, 2012). The results presented in this paper demonstrate that Latin Americans' voting behavior does not lack for policy or ideological content. In particular, the findings indicate that: i) Latin American voters can be effectively placed on a left-right ideological continuum; ii) the "median" Latin American voter is located to the left of the ideological spectrum; iii) voters' ideological locations are highly correlated with their partisan attachments; and iv) the region's "left turn" has not fostered extreme levels of political polarization. The analysis of the location of parties and leaders also reveals that three distinctive clusters exist: one located at the left of the political spectrum, another at the center, and a third to the right. Finally, the results suggest that irrespective of their ideological location, legislators in Brazil, Chile, Mexico and Peru tend to be more "leftist" than their voters. Yet, in all of these countries, this *representation gap* is not large enough to claim that Latin America's left turn is rooted in a disconnect between mass public opinion and their leaders.

The second contribution is methodological. The findings call into question a number of studies that fail to account for the aforementioned interpersonal comparability problems in their analyses (Colomer, 2005; Seligson, 2007; Arnold and Samuels, 2011; Remmer, 2012; Wiesehomeier and Doyle, 2012; Lupu, 2013; Zechmeister and Corral, 2013). In this respect, this paper is closely related to Jessee (2010), Shor and Rogowski (2010), Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013), and Battista, Peress and Richman (2013), who use common items and scaling techniques to examine policy representation in the United States. In addition, my study nicely aligns with recent analyses of Europe's common ideological space by Bakker et al. (2011), König, Marbach and Osnabrügge (2013), and Lo, Proksch and Gschwend (2014), as well as Saiegh (2009) who uses scaling techniques to estimate the location of political actors in Latin America.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, I discuss Latin America's alleged representation gap. In Section 3, I review the main problems associated with self-reported measures of ideology. Section 4 introduces the data used in this study. In Section 5, I present my main empirical findings. Section 6 concludes.

2. Latin America: A Representation Gap?

The 2000s witnessed an unprecedented increase in the electoral victories of left-of-center presidential candidates in Latin America. Traditionally, the Latin American Left drew on socialism—and even Marxism—for ideological inspiration. By the 1990s, however, leftist candidates became more moderate and ambiguous as their parties watered down or abandoned their preexisting platforms (Stokes, 2001). Left-of-center candidates also coexist with equally moderate right-wing candidates, as well as a myriad of *populist* movements in the region. Although populists often appeal to an ill-defined *pueblo*, or “the people” against an established elite, these appeals can seldom be defined in programmatic or ideological terms (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). So, for example, populist figures such as Peru's Ollanta Humala may not be easily located along the conventional left-right ideological spectrum.

The persistence of populism and the fact that both left- and right-wing candidates pursue diverse agendas suggest that parties' standpoints may not necessarily be defined in programmatic or ideological terms. In fact, much of the extant literature has discussed the classification of leftist governments (Castañeda and Navia, 2006; Cleary, 2006). Moreover, the controversy over the

proper labels for various administrations continues to influence and shape the debate on the Latin American left (Cameron and Hershberg, 2010; Weyland, Madrid and Hunter, 2010; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011).

Less attention has been paid in the literature to the political orientation of the forces sustaining these administrations. A few studies, however, use public opinion data to identify the relationship between the beliefs and attitudes of Latin American citizens and the region's "left turn" (Colomer, 2005; Seligson, 2007; Arnold and Samuels, 2011; Remmer, 2012; Wiesehomeier and Doyle, 2012; Zechmeister and Corral, 2013). Drawing on self-reported measures of ideology, these studies find that most Latin American voters have a clear and coherent understanding of the ideological meaning of left and right. Their findings also indicate that the median Latin American voter is slightly to the right of center.¹ The majority of the studies thus conclude that the success of leftist leaders at the polls does not reflect a major shift in the ideological orientation of Latin America's citizens along the left-right ideological spectrum (Seligson, 2007; Arnold and Samuels, 2012; Remmer, 2012).

These findings are quite paradoxical. They suggest: i) ideology is an insignificant determinant of vote choice in Latin America, and) there exists a considerable representation gap between elected officials and the public. In other words, the conventional wisdom implies that either Latin Americans' voting behavior is somewhat devoid of policy or ideological content, or that elected officials in the region are not fully responsive to their constituents. As I demonstrate below, however, this perceived *representation gap* is mainly an artifact of measurement error due to problems of interpersonal comparability, or differential item functioning.

3. Self-Reported Ideology: Measurement Issues

The aforementioned studies rely on perceptual data to place voters, parties and politicians from different countries on a common ideological space. Such a reliance presents three main problems: i) individual-level respondent bias, ii) biases in scale perception *across* countries, and iii) disjoint groups facing disjoint sets of choices (i.e., politicians and voters surveyed in different ways). In

¹ For example, according to Remmer (2012: 965), "over the past decade public opinion first shifted slightly to the right and then back to the left, leveling off in 2007 slightly to the right of center at approximately the same point as in 1996."

this section, I describe these problems in more detail and discuss how valid measures of ideology from disparate populations can be estimated.

3.1 Differential Item Functioning

Issue scales are frequently used to measure ideology in public opinion. These surveys often ask people to place themselves and prominent political figures on a scale with labeled endpoints such as “liberal” and “conservative” or “left” and “right.” A well known difficulty associated with this approach is the problem of systematic respondent-level bias, or *differential item functioning* (Aldrich and McKelvey, 1977; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; King et al., 2004; Alvarez and Nagler, 2004).²

Survey respondents *within* a given country may display systematic perceptual biases when placing stimuli in a common scale for a number of reasons. First, predetermined scales force respondents to cluster on only seven or 10 points (as the case may be), and thus the survey-based estimates of respondents’ preferences are coarse relative to the actual positions that underlie the dimension under investigation (Kam, 2001). Second, the scale may have different meanings to different people. Namely, respondents may be anchoring their responses according to their own interpretation of the endpoints.³ Third, and associated with the ambiguity of the endpoints, is the problem that respondents may interpret the intervals on the scale differently. For example, an extreme leftist may see less difference between a center-left and center-right politician than a moderate would. Finally, as Aldrich and McKelvey (1977) note, given the forced categorization, respondents may place the stimuli, as well as themselves, more frequently in the “prominent” categories (one, three, five, seven, nine).

The consequences of these problems are also 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 complete agreement exists in perceptions of the stimuli, but due to

² The use of differential item functioning (DIF) to refer to systematic respondent-level bias originated in the educational testing literature: a test question is said to have DIF if equally able individuals have unequal probabilities of answering the question correctly (see King et al., 2004).

³ Moreover, the fact that respondents are asked to locate themselves on the scale may exacerbate this tendency (Wilcox, Sigelman and Cook, 1989). For example, a respondent 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.

different interpretations of the scale, one might interpret this as little or no agreement. It is still possible, however, to obtain reliable estimates of respondents' ideological preferences from survey data by using the appropriate scaling techniques.⁴ One of the most satisfactory approaches is the Aldrich-McKelvey (henceforth A-M) scaling procedure (King et al., 2004; Armstrong et al., 2014). The basic A-M model assumes that key political actors occupy fixed positions on an underlying latent dimensions and that survey respondents report a noisy linear transformation of the stimuli's "true" location. By estimating each respondent's perceptual distortion parameters, the locations of the stimuli as well as his/her ideological placement in the underlying space can be recovered.⁵

Poole (1998) generalizes the A-M solution to allow for missing data and multiple dimensions with his "blackbox" technique. Moreover, his procedure can be applied to a wide variety of perceptual as well as preference data. Therefore, in the analysis presented below I use both Aldrich and McKelvey (1977) and Poole (1998) as my estimation techniques.

3.2 Cross-Country Comparisons

Biases in scale perception arise because labels such as "liberal" and "conservative" or "left" versus "right" often depend on context, both in time and space. Therefore, the problem of cross-context comparability can be compounded when survey respondents in different geographical locations are asked to place themselves and various political actors on an abstract left-right scale. For example, in the United States, Conservative means one thing in Texas, and something different in Massachusetts. Likewise, the PELA survey reveals that many respondents in Chile place the political party National Renewal (Renovación Nacional, RN) at 8 on an 10-point left-right scale and a number of respondents in Argentina also place the Peronist Party (Partido Justicialista, PJ) at an 8 on the same scale; yet most observers would agree that these two parties do not occupy the

⁴ King et al. (2004) suggest the use of *anchoring vignettes* as a method to evaluate and improve the information revealed by surveys. These vignettes are descriptions of hypothetical people or situations that survey researchers can use to correct otherwise interpersonally incomparable survey responses. Ideally one would like to use such vignettes to enhance interpersonal comparability when measuring the preferences of key political actors. The use of the vignettes, however, must be implemented at the design stage. Therefore its use may not be possible when the researcher is working with secondary data collected by somebody else.

⁵ One criticism of the A-M approach is that because of the limited computational resources available at the time, they recognized but did not model several other features of the problem, such as the ordinal nature of the response categories (King et al., 2004). However, subsequent work by Palfrey and Poole (1987) indicate that the A-M procedure recovers the stimulus locations very well, even if errors are heteroskedastic over stimuli.

same ideological position on the left-right scale (Coppedge, 2010; Murillo, Oliveros and Vaishnav, 2010).

Producing cross-national measures of party positions is analogous to the problem of estimating comparable preferences across political institutions or over time. To address this problem, the existing literature tends to rely on *bridge* actors, such as members of Congress who serve multiple terms, or who migrate from the House to the Senate (Poole and Rosenthal, 1997). Relying on European political groups to identify the location of parties in different European countries is another case in point (König, Marbach and Osnabrügge, 2013; Lo, Proksch and Gschwend, 2014). An alternative approach is to treat questions that are asked in the same form to respondents in different countries as bridges to create a common spatial map. The respondents' answers to common questions can be then used to place different stimuli (i.e., parties, or prominent politicians) on the same latent scale, thus facilitating cross-context comparisons.

I rely on Armstrong et al.'s (2014) Bayesian implementation of the Aldrich-McKelvey method to jointly scale parties and politicians from different countries on a common ideological space. This approach offers multiple desirable features. First, like Poole's (1998) blackbox technique, it allows for the inclusion of individuals with missing responses. Because missing data is present, this property is necessary to bridge across responses from different countries. Second, the use of Markov Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) methods produces more realistic measures of uncertainty for the estimated measures of ideology than the standard A-M approach.

3.3 Disjoint Samples

Applying scaling techniques such as Aldrich-McKelvey requires some sort of bridging information. This limitation usually prevents one from directly comparing policy preferences between disjoint groups responding to disjoint sets of choices. For instance, studies seeking to establish if legislators faithfully represent their constituents' views often lack the necessary data to conduct meaningful tests. In the case of citizens, their ideology is usually recovered from voting decisions or self-reported measures from survey data; yet, legislators' policy preferences are often estimated using observable roll call voting decisions.

Some recent research has made an effort to measure the preferences of voters and politicians on a common scale. For example, Gerber and Lewis (2004) recover legislators'

ideology using roll call votes and obtain comparable estimates of voter preferences using voting data on statewide ballot measures in Los Angeles County, California. Likewise, Bafumi and Herron (2010) combine legislators' voting records from the 109th and 110th Congresses with public opinion data to obtain comparable measures of ideology. Another solution to the disjoint samples problem is to use surveys of voters and politicians containing a common set of questions. This is the approach followed by Shor and Rogowski (2010), who use common items from Project Vote Smart's National Political Awareness Test (NPAT) and the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES) to generate comparable measures of voter and candidate ideology. Tausanovitch and Warshaw (2013) and Battista, Peress and Richman (2013) use a similar approach to examine policy representation in the Congress, state legislatures and cities in the United States. The latter approach holds an important virtue. Unlike measures of ideology based on legislative behavior (i.e., recorded votes), survey responses are not contaminated by the effects of legislative or party institutions, including party discipline, agenda-setting, log-rolls, and the like (Kam, 2001; Morgenstern, 2004).⁶

As discussed above, the A-M method can be used to recover the ideological location of both respondents and stimuli. In the case of the former, each respondent's rating can be transformed into an ideology score by applying his/her perceptual distortion parameters to that score. Therefore, as long as both legislators and voters answer some of the same questions (including a self-placement one), one can use the Aldrich-McKelvey estimation technique to obtain measures of ideology that are both valid and comparable across these two groups *within* each country.

4. Data

4.1 Latinobarómetro

I first use the *Latinobarómetro*, an annual public opinion survey, to scale respondents from different Latin American countries on a common ideological space. The survey is produced by Latinobarómetro Corporation, a non-profit non-governmental organization based in Santiago,

⁶ In some of these studies, the respondents cannot be individually identified, as the surveys are anonymous. While this places a restriction on matching the responses with other data sources, it ensures that responses are sincere. As Kam (2001) notes, there seem to be little incentive for respondents to misrepresent their preferences in an anonymous survey.

Chile. Various local opinion-research companies conducted the 2010 survey in 18 countries. It involved 20,204 face-to-face interviews conducted between September-October 2010. In each country, the sample size of 1,000-1,200 respondents is representative of 100 percent of its population, with a margin of error of approximately 3 percent for each country. As such, the survey is representative of the region's more than 500 million inhabitants.⁷

The survey instrument is identical in all countries; that is, the same exact questions are asked to all respondents. To bridge respondents across countries, I rely on a battery of questions that ask them to evaluate some of the region's presidents and a number of overseas leaders using an 11-point scale in which 0 means "very bad" and 10 is "very good." Very few respondents rate all the stimuli. Nonetheless, respondents do not limit their evaluations to political figures solely from their country. For example, only 2,636 respondents rated Uruguayan President José Mujica; but this figure is more than double the country's sample size (1,200). On the other hand, some leaders such as Barak Obama, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez were rated by more than 70 of respondents. Therefore, I consider 14 stimuli for which at least 13 percent of respondents provided a rating. Appendix Table A1 lists these stimuli as well as their response rates.

4.2 Parliamentary Elites of Latin America

To place parties as well as prominent politicians from different Latin American countries on a common space I use the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA) survey. Established in 1994 by a group of researchers at the Universidad de Salamanca (Spain), the PELA surveys contain information regarding party membership, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values, and policy preferences of legislators in 18 Latin American countries.⁸

Over the past two decades, Latin American legislators have been asked to place themselves as well as political parties and prominent politicians on a left/right ideological scale. In particular, the following prompt has been consistently used: "When we talk about politics, the expressions left and right are usually used. Where would you place < yourself > on a scale where 1 is left and 10 is right?" Questions containing political *stimuli*, such as a country's main political parties or its leading politicians, are phrased in the same way. Until the most recent wave of the PELA

⁷ For more details go to www.latinobarometro.org.

⁸ For a more detailed description of the PELA project, see García-Diez and Mateos (2006) and Alcántara (2008), or go to <http://americo.usal.es/oir/elites/>

surveys, however, legislators were only asked to place parties/leaders from their respective country. Therefore, despite their common design, the PELA surveys were still limited instruments for fostering systematic cross-national comparisons.

Fortunately, in the 2010-2011 PELA surveys, legislators were also asked to place a number of regional leaders on the left/right ideological scale. Only eight countries, however, were included in this most recent wave. A total of 823 legislators participated in these surveys, all of them drawn from samples mirroring the relative importance of their political parties in the different legislatures.⁹ There are at least seven stimuli that were rated by more of 82 percent of respondents. Therefore, I use the responses provided by these legislators to these “bridge” questions (i.e. placement of regional leaders) to estimate the locations of parties and prominent Latin American politicians in a common ideological space.¹⁰ Appendix Table A2 lists the seven stimuli that provide the bridging along with their response rates.

4.3 Comparative Study of Electoral Systems

One final goal of this paper is to develop common space estimates for elected officials and a sample of voters. Unfortunately, the *Latinobarómetro* and PELA surveys do not contain identical survey items in this respect. The former asks respondents to express how much they like/dislike a set of leaders (preferential data) while the latter asks them to place the stimuli (as well as themselves) on a left/right ideological scale (perceptual data). Nonetheless, it is possible to bridge legislators and voters using common items found in the PELA survey and Module 3 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The CSES is a collaborative program of research among election study teams from around the world. The core questionnaire of CSES Module 3 focuses on voters’ perceptions and assessments of the variety and quality of political choices in an election. The module was implemented using face-to-face interviews administered to a nationally representative sample of voters in Brazil (with 2,000 respondents), Chile (1,200), Mexico (2,400), Peru (1,570), and Uruguay (968).¹¹

⁹ The countries covered by these surveys are Argentina (with 70 respondents), Bolivia (97), Brazil (129), Chile (86), Colombia (91), Mexico (98), Peru in 2010 (80), Peru in 2011 (93), and Uruguay (79).

¹⁰ I exclude from the analysis respondents who rate less than three stimuli.

¹¹ For more details see www.cses.org.

Although the PELA and CSES surveys are not identical, they contain similar items. Specifically, they both ask respondents to place themselves as well as political parties and prominent politicians from their own country on a left/right ideological scale.¹² Moreover the two sets of surveys were conducted at nearly the same time in all the countries under consideration. Therefore, one can merge these two surveys into a common data set to obtain measures of ideology that are both valid and comparable across voters and politicians *within* each country. Appendix Table A3 provides information regarding “bridging” questions and the timing of the interviews in the two surveys.

5. Empirical Analysis

In this section, I demonstrate how survey data and the scaling techniques described above can be used to place voters, parties and politicians from different countries on a common ideological space. I first analyze the location of Latin American voters. Second, I examine the location of parties and politicians from eight different countries on the common space. Finally, I connect the policy preferences of voters to the preferences of the legislators who represent them in four Latin American countries.

5.1 Voters

Using common items to bridge across countries, I apply Poole’s (1998) “blackbox” method to the 2010 Latinobarometro survey described above and estimate a one-dimensional solution for the left/right position of the respondents in the sample. I exclude from the analysis respondents that failed to rate more than three stimuli. Using this criterion, I can recover the ideological location of more than half of the respondents in the sample (55.6 percent, or 11,245 respondents).¹³ I use

¹² The CSES question reads: “In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place [YOURSELF/STIMULUS] on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?” The PELA scale’s endpoints are 1 and 10; therefore, for comparability, I recoded respondents’ answers from a 0 to 1 in the CSES survey.

¹³ The measures of ideology are defined only up to an affine transformation of the true space (Armstrong et al., 2014). Therefore in order to identify the rotation of the estimated positions, I correlate the recovered scores with the respondents self-reported ideology scores, where higher scores indicate placements on the right-end of the scale. The Latinobarómetro question reads: “In politics, people normally speak of ‘left’ and ‘right.’ On a scale where 0 is left and 10 is right, where would you place yourself?” The correlation is positive, suggesting that as the recovered scores increase, the respondents tend to be on the right.

respondents' self-reported ideology scores to ensure that the sub-sample of scaled respondents is representative of the entire sample.¹⁴

Figure 1 displays a boxplot with the distribution of the respondents' recovered ideological locations (horizontal axis) according to their self-reported, unscaled, ideological location (vertical axis). So, for example, the uppermost box corresponds to the estimated ideology of the respondents who placed themselves on the left-end of the scale (i.e. they located themselves at 0).¹⁵ Therefore, the figure includes 11 boxes, each extending from approximately the first to third quartiles.¹⁶

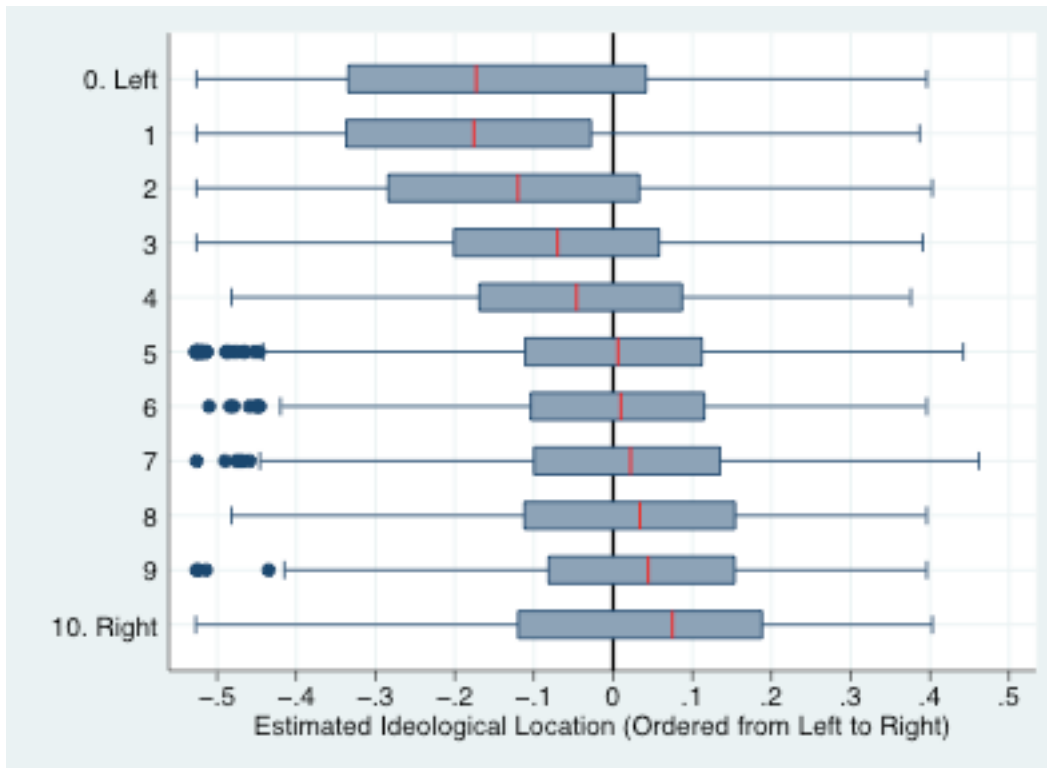
Several features are worth noting. First, the estimates demonstrate that preferential data can be effectively used to infer the placement of survey respondents in an ideological space. The red band inside each box marks the location of the second quartile (the median) of the recovered estimates of ideology. As Figure 1 indicates, in the boxes corresponding to respondents who identify as "leftists" (i.e., those who use answers of {0,1,2,3,4} on the 11-point scale), the red band is located to the left of 0 in the horizontal axis. Likewise, the red band is located to the right of 0 in the boxes corresponding to the respondents who identify as being on the right of the political spectrum (i.e., those who use answers of {5,6,7,8,9,10} on the 11-point scale).

¹⁴ A comparison between these two populations indicates that they are similar to each other.

¹⁵ I exclude from the comparison respondents who do not provide a self-reported score on the 0-10 scale (i.e., those who answered "None," "Don't Know" or "No Answer")

¹⁶ Outlier observations—those more than the 1.5 interquartile range beyond the first or third quartile—are plotted individually.

Figure 1. Recovered Estimates of Ideology versus Raw Self-Placement Data



The recovered estimates, however, also highlight the notion that if one uses the unscaled ideological self-placement data to make inferences about the location of Latin American voters, the conclusions can be seriously misleading. Simply put, if the spacing between the different parts of each of the boxes were minimal, then the problem of interpersonal comparability, or differential item functioning could be dismissed. Yet, as Figure 1 indicates the degree of dispersion (spread) in the estimated ideological locations for each of the categories of the self-reported ideology scale is significant. In fact, a considerable number of respondents place themselves at the endpoints (0 and 10), when their actual positions in the underlying left/right dimension are at the center. In addition, as discussed above, respondents place themselves more frequently in a few “prominent” categories (five, six, seven). As such, the evidence presented in Figure 1 cast doubts over the findings of the aforementioned studies that do not account for differential item functioning (Colomber, 2005; Seligson, 2007; Arnold and Samuels, 2011; Remmer, 2012; Wiesehomeier and Doyle, 2012; Lupu, 2013; Zechmeister and Corral 2013).

Having established the superiority of the corrected measures of voters' policy preferences, I am now in a position to answer some of the main questions posed in this paper. Specifically, i) are partisan attachments devoid of ideological connotations in Latin American countries?; ii) is it true that Latin Americans tend to be "leftists"?; and iii) has the region's "left turn" fostered extreme levels of political polarization?

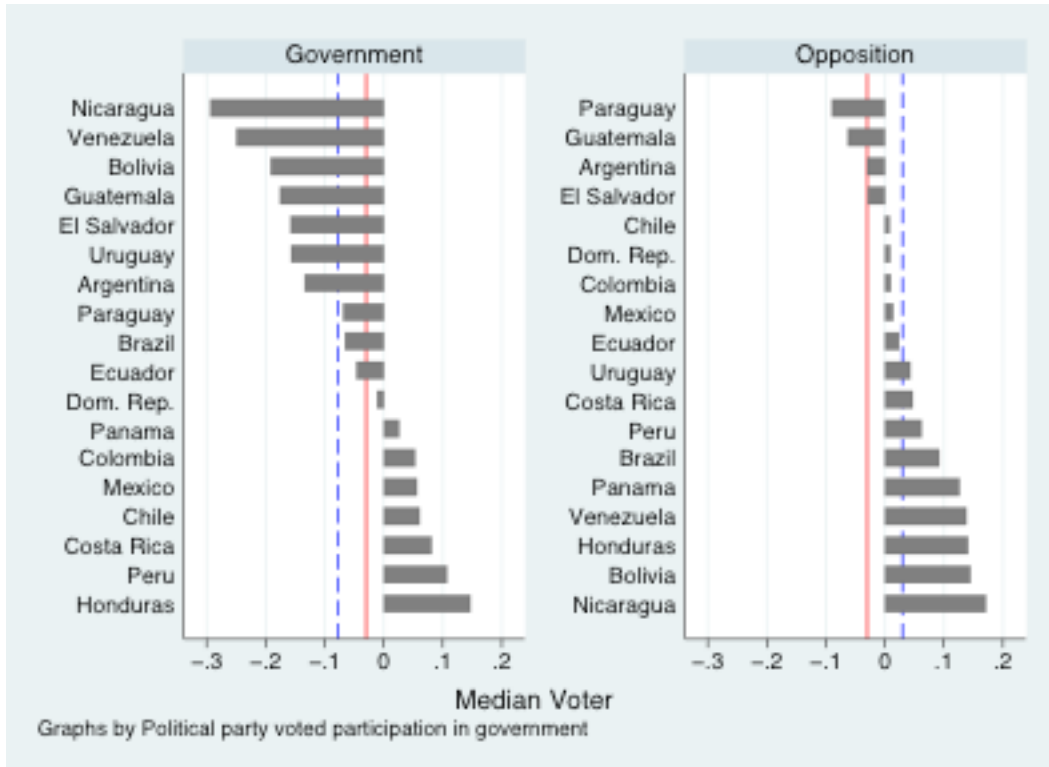
The *Latinobarómetro* survey includes the following question: "If elections were held this Sunday, which party would you vote for?"¹⁷ Most of these countries are multi-party democracies. Therefore, to simplify the analysis, I focus on two types of parties: those included in the government coalition and those in the opposition. Fortunately, every political party in each of the 18 Latin American countries has been classified using this criterion in the survey. Therefore, the relationship between partisanship and ideology can be established using the recovered estimates and respondents' vote intentions.¹⁸

The ideological location of the "median" respondent among government (opposition) voters in each of these countries is displayed on the left (right) panel of Figure 2. The length of each bar represents the location of the "median" government/opposition voter in each country. The solid vertical red line indicates the location of the median voter in the whole sample. The dashed vertical blue line in the left (right) panel marks the placement of the median government (opposition) voter in the sample.

¹⁷ With a response rate of 49.6 percent, (5,578 out of the 11,245 scaled respondents), the sub-sample of respondents who answered this question is representative of the entire sample with respect to ideological locations (i.e., the recovered estimates of the respondents who answered "Do not Know" or "Will not vote" have the same distribution as the ones from respondents who explicitly named a party).

¹⁸ For details about how these parties were classified, see the 2010 survey codebook at www.latinobarometro.org.

Figure 2. Ideological Location of “Median” Respondent



The recovered estimates of policy preferences indicate that Latin American voters’ ideological locations are highly correlated with their partisan attachments. Government supporters tend to be on the left of the political spectrum, while those who support opposition parties lean to the right. They also reveal that in 10 Latin American countries, the median government supporter is located to the left of the median Latin American voter. And, in seven of these countries, the median government supporter is more leftist than the median government supporter in the sample. With regards to the opposition, the data suggest that its median voter is located to the right of the median Latin American voter in fourteen of the countries. Moreover, in nine of these countries, the median opposition voter is more to the right than the median opposition supporter in the sample.

The estimates can also be used to gauge the level of political polarization in each of these countries. Following Esteban and Ray (1994), let n_i be the share of the population in a country belonging to group i , $i = 1, \dots, G$. Suppose that a member of group i enjoys payoff $u_{ij}\pi$ if the ideal policy of group j is chosen. This induces a notion of intergroup “distance,” $d_{ij} = u_{ii} - u_{ij}$.

Polarization is conceptualized by Esteban and Ray (1994) as the sum of interpersonal antagonisms. Antagonism results from the combination of group identification (group size) and the sense of alienation with respect to other groups (the distance d_{ij}). Specifically, their polarization measure can be written as:

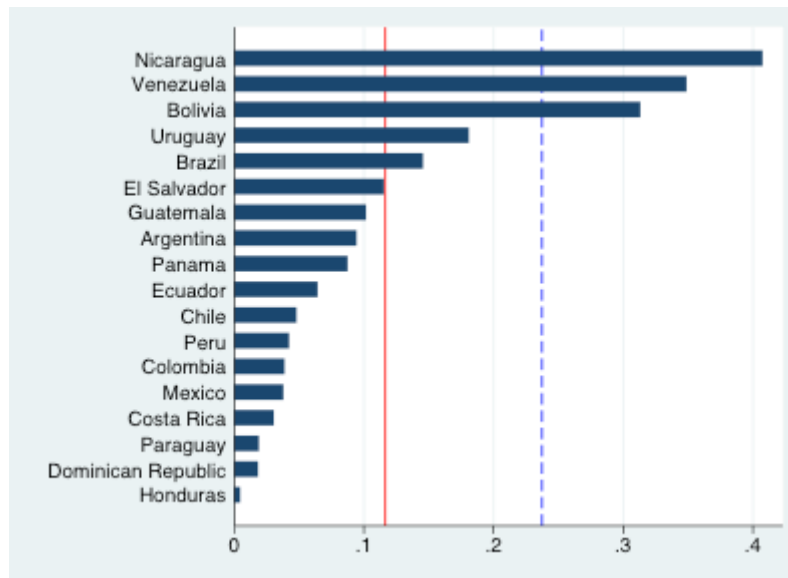
$$P(\sigma, \mathbf{b}) = \sum_i \sum_{j \neq i} n_i^{1+\sigma} n_j d_{ij},$$

where \mathbf{b} is a matrix of intergroup distances and σ is a positive parameter that captures the extent of group identification (Esteban and Ray, 2008).

Restricting the analysis to two groups ($i=1,2$), one can calculate d_{ij} as the distance between the ideal policy of the government's and the opposition's median voters. I use respondents' voting intentions to establish each group's size (n_i), and the standard deviation of the estimated policy preferences of the members of each group to capture their internal cohesion (σ).

The estimated levels of political polarization are presented in Figure 3. The length of each bar represents each country's level of political polarization. The solid red line indicates the average level of polarization in the sample (0.116). The vertical dashed blue line shows a one-standard deviation increase in the sample's average level of polarization (0.121).

Figure 3. Political Polarization



The data reveal that polarization is highest (i.e., exceeds the regional average) in countries where, according to Figure 2, government supporters are the most leftist: Nicaragua, Venezuela, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Brazil. As Weyland notes (2010), the first three countries are ruled by fairly radical and *contestatory* leaders. In contrast, with the exception of Panama, in all six countries where government supporters are to the right of the political spectrum (Colombia, Mexico, Chile, Costa Rica, Peru, and Honduras), the levels of political polarization are relatively low.

More broadly, notwithstanding the cases of Nicaragua, Venezuela and Bolivia, the evidence does not support the view that countries led by leftist governments are characterized by extreme levels of political polarization. Therefore, despite all the “fireworks” generated by the occasional confrontations between belligerent leaders and oppositional media, levels of political polarization are relatively low throughout the region.

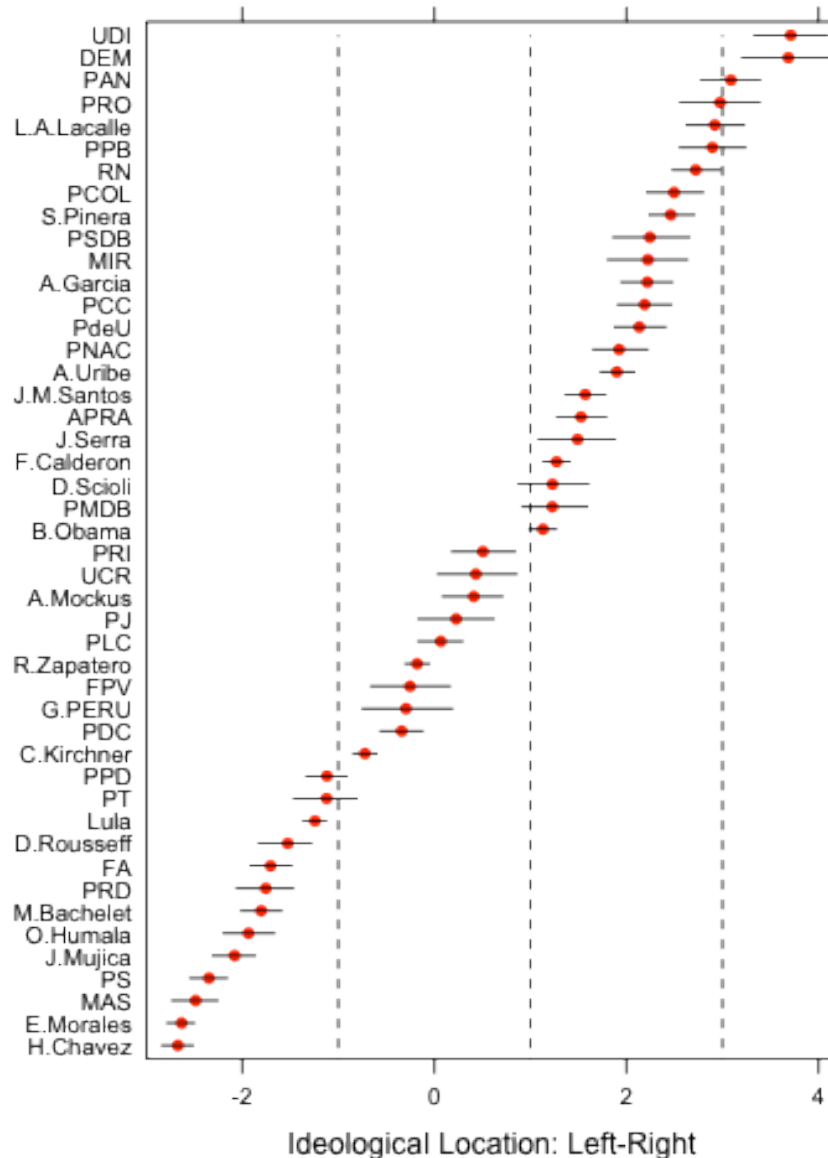
5.2 *Parties and Leaders*

In the 2010-2011 PELA surveys, legislators from eight Latin American countries were asked to place themselves as well as political parties, prominent politicians, and regional leaders on a left/right ideological scale. Therefore, the Bayesian A-M scaling procedure developed by Armstrong et al. (2014) is ideal for the analysis of these data.¹⁹ Figure 4 presents the point estimates and 95 percent confidence intervals for the stimuli. I used the latter to arrange the stimuli ideologically from left to right. Following Armstrong et al. (2014), MCMC estimation was conducted using JAGS and the R package *rjags*.²⁰ The chains show strong evidence of convergence according to the Gelman-Rubin diagnostic and the unimodality of posterior distributions (see Figure A.1. in the Appendix).

¹⁹ The R code, as well as the BUGS and JAGS scripts necessary to conduct the analysis were obtained from http://voteview.com/Bayesian_AM_scaling.htm. For a more detailed description of the methodology see Armstrong et al. (2014).

²⁰ I discarded the first 10,000 iterations as a burn-in period, and I summarized the results of 2,500 iterations.

Figure 4. Stimuli Location: Point Estimates and 95 Percent Confidence Intervals



The results reveal that significant cross-national differences exist. More importantly, the recovered estimates allow one to reliably compare the left/right positions of a number of Latin American parties and prominent politicians from different countries with far more confidence than previous studies.²¹ Indeed existing studies have struggled to answer questions such as “How does

²¹ For example, Coppedge (2010) restricts his attention to Latin American political parties and classifies them as left, center-left, center, center-right, and right. Murillo et. al. (2010) and Blanco and Grier (2013) use a similar five-point

Argentina's Cristina Kirchner compare to Chile's Michelle Bachelet?" or "Do presidential candidates faithfully embrace their parties' ideological positions?"

In this respect, the estimates presented in Figure 4 are quite revealing. One clear pattern is the separation of the stimuli into three distinctive clusters. The first comprises a host of left-wing leaders and parties in the region, including Hugo Chávez as its most leftist member and Chile's Party for Democracy (Partido por la Democracia, PPD) as its most moderate one. The second group is located at the center of the ideological spectrum and encompasses a variety of political actors. These include Argentine president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner to the left, Spain's former Socialist Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero in the center, and Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) to the right. Finally, a third cluster encompasses all the stimuli on the right of the political spectrum. Interestingly, U.S. president Barak Obama, a liberal Democrat—but hardly a socialist, as some Tea Party members would assert—is the most moderate member of this group. At the far right, this group is bookended by Chile's conservative party Independent Democratic Union (Unión Demócrata Independiente, UDI).

The patterns in Figure also 4 beg the following question: are Latin American *centrists* the region's moderates or the embodiment of *Populism*? An examination of this group, which includes Chile's Christian Democrats, suggests that they are the former rather than the latter. Yet, the group is a mixed bag, and some of its members may be dubbed as populists. The criteria, in this case, should be membership in multiple groups. For example, Argentina's Peronist Party (Partido Justicialista, PJ) belongs to the centrist group, but two of its prominent leaders—Cristina Cristina Kirchner and Daniel Scioli—occupy positions to the left and right of the ideological spectrum, respectively. Similarly, the political party Peru Wins (Gana Perú) is in the centrist group, while its leader Ollanta Humala is on the left.

It is also interesting to compare the findings presented in Figure 2 with those of Figure 4. The few countries where the median government supporter is on the right of the political spectrum include Colombia, Mexico, Chile and Peru. As Figure 4 demonstrates, the incumbent parties as

scale to characterize the ideology of Latin American presidential candidates and elected presidents, respectively. Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009), use expert surveys to jointly identify the ideologies of presidential candidates as well as political parties in Latin America. These authors, however, do not correct for DIF. Therefore their estimates are plagued by individual-level respondent bias as well as biases in scale perception *across* countries.

well as these countries' leaders are all located in the right-wing cluster: the Colombian Conservative Party (Partido Conservador Colombiano, PCC), the Party of the U (Partido de la U, PdeU) Alvaro Uribe, and Juan Manuel Sanchez in the case of Colombia; the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN), and Felipe Calderón in Mexico; the Independent Democratic Union (Unión Demócrata Independiente, UDI), National Renewal (Renovación Nacional, RN), and Sebastian Piñera in Chile; and the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana, APRA) and Alan García in the case of Peru.

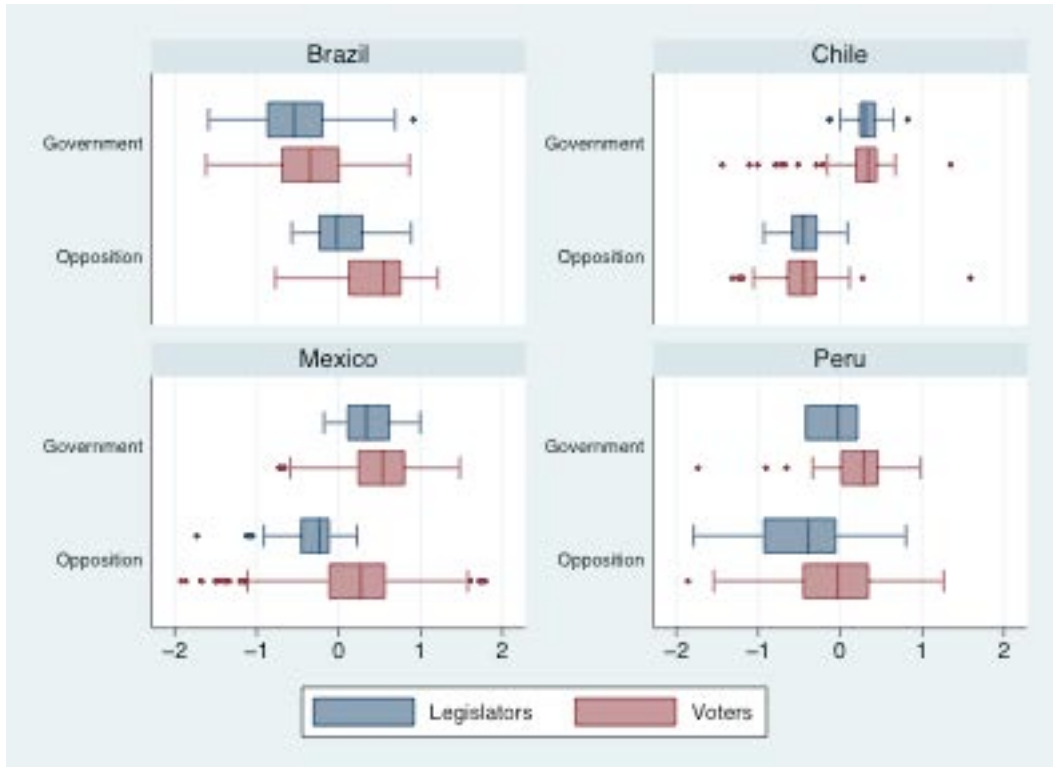
5.3 Representation

An examination of the results presented in Figures 2 and 4 suggests that Latin American politicians possess ideological views that map on to the preference of their voters quite well. The recovered measures of voters' ideology and the placement of the stimuli, however, are not directly comparable. As mentioned above, in order to make such a comparison, one needs to place elected officials and voters on a common space. Using the merged PELA/CSES dataset in conjunction with Aldrich and McKelvey's (1977) scaling method I can link the policy preferences of voters within a country to the preferences of their representatives.

In Figure 5, I present a series of boxplots to compare the ideological location of voters and legislators in each country. The PELA survey explicitly indicates each legislator's partisan affiliation. In the case of Module 3 of the CSES, the survey includes the following question: "Which party do you feel closest to?" I used this information, and I followed the Latinobarómetro criteria mentioned above to classify both legislators and voters as government or opposition supporters.²²

²² The overall response rate of the CSES question is 63 percent, (with a minimum of 43 percent in Chile and a maximum of 75 percent in Uruguay). The sample of respondents who provided an answer is representative of the entire sample with respect to ideological locations in most countries. The exception is Uruguay, where those respondents who failed to answer the question are significantly more to the right than those who provided an answer. Therefore, I exclude this country from the analysis presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Ideological Location of Voters and Legislators



Notice first the similarity between the patterns in Figures 2 and 5: government supporters tend to be leftists in Brazil, but are located to the right of the political spectrum in the other three countries. And, voters who support opposition parties also lean to the right in all countries, except Chile. Recall that the estimates presented in Figure 2 were recovered using respondents' evaluations of a set of leaders (preferential data), while the ones in Figure 5 were generated from questions that asked them to place those leaders on a left/right ideological scale (perceptual data). Therefore, the findings in Figure 5 lend further support to the validity of using preferential data to recover voters' ideological positions.

With respect to representation, the results indicate that in each country legislators are more "leftist" than voters. This is the case irrespective of whether these legislators belong to the government or the opposition. Therefore, one should not interpret this *ideological drift* as a sign of polarization. If that were the case, then left-wing legislators would be to the left of their constituents, but right-wing representatives would locate themselves to the right of their

supporters. Instead, the estimates suggest that both left- and right-wing politicians in these countries have views that are consistently to the left of the voting population.

This finding, while surprising to some, is not inconsistent with the prevailing view of how parties and politicians behave in Latin America. For example, Zechmeister (2006) argues that one might expect to find a negative association of the term “right” in countries that have experienced authoritarian regimes, in countries where income inequality is high, or both. Moreover, Power (2000) describes that, due to its association with economic conservatism and military rule, the term “right” is avoided by politicians in Brazil. The results presented in Figure 4, obtained from perceptual data, suggest that politicians not only avoid identifying themselves as right-wingers, but actually hold ideological views that are more progressive than those of their voters.

Notice though, that in all countries, legislators’ *ideological drift* is relatively small. While the median government legislator is located to the left of the median government supporter, both medians are always on the same side of the political spectrum (on the left in the case of Brazil, and on the right in the other three cases). In the case of opposition legislators, both medians are on the same side in Chile and Peru (they are both on the left of the political spectrum). In Mexico, the median opposition supporter is located to the right of the political spectrum, while the median opposition legislator occupies a leftist position. But, in this case, right-wing voters have a clear rightist alternative to support. In Brazil, the median opposition legislator is slightly to the left of the ideological continuum. This is the only case, however, where a victory by the left with the support of right-wing voters would be conceivable. Therefore, the evidence provided by these countries offers little support for the view that a disconnect between voters and politicians lies behind Latin America’s left turn.

6. Concluding Remarks

Many influential papers have recently used mass public opinion data to examine Latin America’s left turn. None of them, however, adequately address the problem of interpersonal comparability, or differential item functioning. And, although there is a growing list of influential studies that use the method of joint scaling to compare disparate populations, they do not examine policy preferences in Latin America. As such, this is the first paper to use “bridging” items to place

voters, parties and politicians from several Latin American countries on a common ideological space.

The results demonstrate how scale perception biases lead to misleading conclusions about the relationship between ideology and voting behavior in Latin America. In particular, they indicate that contrary to the conventional wisdom, ideology is an important determinant of vote choice in Latin America, and that the region's elected officials are quite responsive to their constituents. As such, these findings have important implications regarding the link between ideology and policymaking as well as the quality of representation in Latin America.

More generally, the approach championed in this article not only provides superior measures of the policy preferences of both citizens and politicians in Latin America but can also help researchers address a whole host of questions that have previously gone unanswered. For example, they can be employed to uncover the main dimensions of conflict in each of these countries in a truly comparative manner. Also, as demonstrated by the analysis of the location of parties and leaders, the measures can also be used to assess the relative position of different political actors across national borders. Finally, the comparisons between the ideological location of voters and elected officials advanced in this paper provide a valid approach to explore the quality of representation in young democracies.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Latinobarómetro“Bridge”Questions’ Response Rates

Stimulus	Respondents (N)	Response Rate (%)
José Mujica	2636	13.04
Juan Manuel Santos	2655	13.14
Sebastián Piñera	3865	19.12
Fernando Lugo	4206	20.81
Daniel Ortega	4775	23.63
Rafael Correa	4973	24.61
Felipe Calderón	5576	27.59
Alan García	5717	28.29
Cristina Kirchner	7228	35.77
Evo Morales	9364	46.34
“Lula” da Silva	10761	53.26
Hugo Chávez	14273	70.64
Fidel Castro	14727	72.89
Barak Obama	15022	74.35

Table A.2. PELA Survey“Bridge” Questions’ Response Rates

Stimulus	Respondents (N)	Response Rate (%)
Cristina Kirchner	681	82.74
Álvaro Uribe	725	88.09
“Lula” da Silva	727	88.35
Felipe Calderón	798	96.96
Hugo Chávez	806	97.93
Evo Morales	808	98.17
Barak Obama	810	98.42

Table 3. Respondents, “Bridge” Questions and Dates for PELA and CSES Surveys

Country	Respondents (N)	Bridge Questions	PELA Date	CSES Date
Brazil	2129	9	Apr.-Jun. 2010	Nov. 2010
Chile	1286	7	Jun.-Jul. 2010	Dec. 2009-Jan. 2010
Mexico	2498	8	Aug.-Dec. 2010	Sept.-Dec. 2009
Peru	1663	10	Oct.-Nov. 2011	May 2011
Uruguay	1047	9	May-Jun. 2010	Aug. 2010

Figure A.1. Stimuli Location: Convergence Diagnostics

