

# Electoral Bases of Leftist Presidents in Latin America\*

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Prepared for delivery at the 2009 National Congress of the Argentine Association of Political Analysis

\* For their comments, advice, and data I thank Daniel Chasquetti, José Molina, Marcelo Nazareno, Ken Roberts, Nina Wiesehomeier, and workshop participants at the Universidad de San Andrés. I thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) and its major supporters (the United States Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Program, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the AmericasBarometer data available.

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# 1 Introduction

During the early 2000s, observers of Latin American politics began to notice a pattern: voters throughout the region were electing left-of-center candidates for president. By mid-2009, leftist presidents governed 13 of the region's 18 major countries. Although leftists had been elected before in some countries, never before had the left been in power simultaneously across so much of the region.

Scholars responded to this phenomenon quickly with a host of explanations for the region's so-called 'left turn'. The end of the Cold War, some suggested, had reassured Latin American voters that leftist victories would not lead to socialist revolution (Castañeda 2006), though this did not explain variation in the left's success across the region. Others argued that the electoral shift reflected changes in mass opinion and behavior: greater class-based voting in a region where electoral majorities are poor and inequality high (Cleary 2006), the emergent salience of ethnicity in a number of countries (Madrid 2004), or an ideological shift to the left following years of centrist and rightist government, both democratic and not (Castañeda 2006). Still others saw leftist victories as merely reflecting voter disenchantment with either the widespread neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s (Lora and Olivera 2005; Panizza 2005) or with the benefits of democratic institutions (Seligson 2007).

But while all of these explanations center on the behaviors of individual voters, few studies have in fact utilized individual-level data to adjudicate among them. Those that have tested some of these theories using survey data have largely relied on aggregate public opinion and bivariate correlations (e.g., Arnold and Samuels 2009; Seligson 2007). We are left, then, with little evidence through which to adjudicate among the competing and overlapping explanations for the recent rise of the left in Latin America.

This paper uses cross-national surveys conducted in 2008 across Latin America's 18 major countries to address these shortcomings, asking who votes for the left in Latin America? By employing a multilevel analysis, I adjudicate among the explanations of the

regional ‘left turn’. In order to verify the robustness of the results, and to assuage concerns about the temporal distance between these surveys and the elections they reference, I replicate some of these analysis using several national surveys taken around each country’s most recent presidential election.

My findings suggest that ethnicity, class, ideology, beliefs about neoliberalism, and retrospective economic evaluations are important determinants of vote choice in Latin America. Across the region, most non-whites seem to prefer leftist candidates. Although class voting has not become widespread throughout the region, class does seem to have become an important determinant of vote choice in the subset of the region’s countries with labor-based party systems, where parties were (at least traditionally) divided by a socioeconomic cleavage. Left-right ideology is also now an important determinant of vote choice. Supporters of Latin America’s left do not appear to be significantly less supportive of democracy, though they do seem more likely to hold beliefs that reject the basic tenets of neoliberalism. These beliefs, moreover, are not subsumed by a poor evaluation of economic outcomes, although retrospective economic evaluations do influence vote choice.

These results suggest that new cleavages may be emerging in Latin American polities, or that these cleavages are becoming more pronounced than they once were. Although to different degrees across countries or groups of countries, ethnicity, class, ideology, and neoliberalism now appear to form the bases of the basic of electoral divisions in Latin America, though economic voting is also present.

## **2 Explaining Latin America’s ‘Left Turn’**

The cascade of leftist candidates winning presidential contests across Latin America came as somewhat of a surprise to scholars. Leftist victories had become rare in a region where many citizens still remember the disastrous leftist administrations of João Goulart in Brazil, Salvador Allende in Chile, and Alan García in Peru. Explaining this turn of events

has become a preoccupation of observers of the region, and a variety of theories have by now been put forward.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the most widely rehearsed of these is the proposition that the recent leftist victories represented a rejection of the center-right economic agenda of the 1980s and 1990s. What Castañeda (2006) called a “backlash,” he argued, was a response to “the predominant trends of the last 15 years: free-market reforms, agreement with the United States on a number of issues, and consolidation of representative democracy” (28). Similarly, authors like Corrales (2008), Lora and Olivera (2005), and Ramírez Gallegos (2006) argue that voters punished incumbents for their pro-market Washington Consensus policies (see also Stokes 2009; Weyland 2009).

Partially in response to this explanation, other scholars have argued that leftist victories represented not a normative rejection of neoliberalism, but the punishment of neoliberal incumbents for poor economic performance (Arnold and Samuels 2009; Levitsky and Roberts 2009; Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav 2009; Panizza 2005).<sup>2</sup> These authors see the left turn as a purely retrospective reaction to the failure of Washington-Consensus policies to live up to voters’ expectations. Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav (2009) in particular find that voters punish rightist incumbents for high inflation (see also Debs and Helmke 2008; Lora and Olivera 2005; Roberts and Wibbels 1999), though Stokes (2009) finds no such effect.

A related explanation has suggested that either Latin American electorates have shifted ideologically to the left (Castañeda 2006) or ideology has been revived as a determinant of vote choice in a region where parties had traditionally been ambiguous (Roberts 2007) or had become so during the 1990s (Colburn 2002). Although Seligson (2007) and Arnold and Samuels (2009) find no evidence of an ideological shift at the aggregate level, such a shift would certainly be consistent with the notion that voters have

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<sup>1</sup> For a cogent critique of many of these explanations, see Leiras (2007).

<sup>2</sup> Lora and Olivera (2005) find that both neoliberal policies and poor economic outcomes matter.

become increasingly (or resurgently) supportive of state intervention in the economy. Moreover, the resurgence of ideology may be associated in some countries of the region with the rise of left-leaning indigenous parties (Yashar 2005). Indeed, Madrid (2005) finds that leftist parties perform well electorally in the more densely indigenous areas of the Andean countries.

Highlighting the history of populism in the region, a third set of scholars have argued that the left turn can be explained by disenchantment with representative democracy. They suggest that voters in the region responded to the criticism by leftist parties of representative democracy, which they often deride as elitist or oligarchical (Mainwaring 2006; Roberts 2002, 2007; Schamis 2006). Indeed, Seligson (2007) finds that leftist citizens support a more populist conception of democracy, one that privileges majoritarianism over deliberation and a strong single leader over institutional checks and balances (see Conniff 1982). Nevertheless, Arnold and Samuels (2009) find that “a substantial majority [of Latin Americans] support democracy as a *form of government*, and only a small minority advocates a *populist* vision of democracy” (3, emphasis in original).<sup>3</sup> And (Cleary 2006) argues that, “[r]egionwide, the left is now more committed to the electoral process than at any time in the past” (41).

Instead, Cleary (2006) offers a final explanation for the left turn, based on the mobilizational capacity of Latin American political parties. Cleary argues that the region’s severe inequality provides the left with a natural base of support for its redistributive agenda (see also Debs and Helmke 2008). But inequality only translates into electoral success where leftist parties are able to mobilize these supporters and generate a socioeconomic cleavage.<sup>4</sup> That is, leftist parties that developed mass-mobilizing structures

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<sup>3</sup> Arnold and Samuels (2009) find a difference between respondents’ satisfaction with how democracy works and their support for democracy as a type of regime. I intend to explore this distinction in a future iteration of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, scholars of Venezuelan politics have often attributed the electoral success of Hugo Chávez to his disproportionate support from lower-income voters (e.g., Canache 2004; Roberts 2003). For a review and critique of these arguments in the Venezuelan context, see Lupu (forthcoming).

succeeded in “translat[ing] latent and diffuse support into electoral success” (39). Building on a classification of Latin American party systems developed Roberts (2002), Cleary notes that left parties were therefore successful where party systems were labor-based (as opposed to elitist). These party systems emerged in countries with relatively larger manufacturing sectors and rates of unionization, providing left parties with a base from which to mobilize support and generate a class cleavage. Although the labor organizations that supported left parties deteriorated significantly under neoliberalism, Cleary argues that socioeconomic cleavages nevertheless persisted, paving the way for the recent leftist electoral victories.

What is striking about these explanations is that they turn on the behaviors of individual voters, suggesting that they are motivated by class, ideology, long-term beliefs, or short-term evaluations. Yet few of these studies relied on individual-level data to provide empirical support for their competing explanations. Instead, most have relied on either impressionistic evidence or aggregate country-level associations, for instance between economic performance and left vote share. Even studies that do utilize survey data have done so by aggregating opinions to the country level, if not regionally.

Aggregate public opinion, however, may tell us little about what motivates individual voters. Aggregation across countries in the region may mask differences between countries, particularly since country-specific contexts can have important implications for voter decision-making. Aggregation within countries can also lead to misleading inferences. In many cases, candidates won presidential elections without a majority of voting-age adults, the population sampled in national surveys. Not only do large swaths of many Latin American electorates abstain from voting (see Fornos, Power, and Garand 2004), but electoral rules in some cases allow winners to take office with less than majorities. Thus, for instance, Argentina’s leftist Néstor Kirchner won that country’s presidency with 22 percent of the votes, after his rival Carlos Menem dropped out of the second-round vote. Mexico’s right-leaning Felipe Calderón took office after garnering 35.9 percent of the vote in a closely fought three-way election. Thus while Seligson (2007) may be right to note that majorities

in both countries lean ideologically to the right, it may still be the case that ideology has a significant effect on vote choice and, in turn, on electoral and policy outcomes.

The analysis that comes closest to mine is that of Arnold and Samuels (2009), who examine bivariate associations using the Latinobarómetro survey data. Their dependent variable is respondents' self-identification as leftist, since the Latinobarómetro surveys do not ask about actual vote choice.<sup>5</sup> This operationalization is problematic not only because it omits the strategic element of voting, but perhaps more importantly because it conflates ideology with vote choice. In most countries in the region, less than a quarter of respondents actually identify as leftists. According to the Latinobarómetro data, only 32 percent of Venezuelans identified as leftist in 2006, even though nearly 63 percent voted that year for Hugo Chávez, the leftist candidate. In Argentina, less than 16 percent of respondents identified as leftist in 2007, although nearly 50 percent voted for leftist presidential candidates that year. Thus ideology and vote choice are far from synonymous. (In fact, as previous scholars suggest, whether ideology in fact determines vote choice is a question to be tested empirically rather than assumed.) And since we care about explaining electoral outcomes, it's unclear how much confidence we can have in findings based on ideology.

These empirical limitations also restrict the inferences scholars can draw. Bivariate correlations of course fail to adjudicate among the competing explanations above.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, some of the explanations offered by previous authors are causally prior to others. For instance, if poor voters both have less confidence in democratic institutions and are more likely to vote for the left, then bivariate correlations would show both higher levels of class voting and an association between anti-democratic opinion and support for the left. That is, the two effects – and the broader theoretical explanations associated with them –

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<sup>5</sup> The authors consider leftists those respondents who placed themselves at 0, 1, 2, or 3 on a 0-10 left-right scale.

<sup>6</sup> Having found no support for a variety of theories, Arnold and Samuels (2009) conclude, by omission, that “Latin America’s ‘Left Turn’ may be driven more by pocketbook issues rather than ideology” (3).

may in fact not be independent. As a result, only testing them alongside each other can allow us to adjudicate among them.

This paper therefore uses individual-level data to adjudicate among conflicting and overlapping explanations for the rise of the left in Latin America. Specifically, I draw the following hypotheses from the theories mentioned above:

*Hypothesis 1:* Ethnic minorities are more likely to vote for the left.

*Hypothesis 2:* Socioeconomic class is negatively associated with support for the left in labor-based party systems.

*Hypothesis 3:* Left ideological self-placement is positively associated with support for the left.

*Hypothesis 4:* Support for democracy is negatively associated with support for the left.

*Hypothesis 5:* Belief in the neoliberal economic model is negatively associated with support for the left.

*Hypothesis 6:* Poor retrospective economic evaluations are positively associated with support for the left where the incumbent was rightist.

Note that although these hypotheses refer mostly to the individual-level determinants of choice, a key element of hypothesis 2 is the nature of the party system – as suggested by Cleary (2006) – and its interaction with individual-level determinants. My empirical tests of these hypotheses therefore proceed as follows. I begin by using cross-national survey evidence to test both the individual- and country-level hypotheses simultaneously. As discussed below, however, these data do not allow me to test hypothesis 6, and they suffer from additional limitations. In order to test this final hypothesis, and check the robustness of my results, I subsequently turn to national surveys from individual countries.

### 3 Cross-National Survey Evidence

In order to simultaneously test the hypotheses at both the individual and country levels, I specify a multilevel model using the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) AmericasBarometer surveys conducted in 2008. These national surveys asked respondents a series of demographic and opinion items, as well as their vote choice in the most recent presidential election.

As already mentioned, there are disadvantages to using these data. First, the 2008 survey responses are at some temporal remove from the most recent presidential elections, many of which took place prior to 2008.<sup>7</sup> These are simply limitations of the available cross-national survey data since the AmericasBarometer surveys only began to be conducted annually in 2006, and did not include the full set of 18 countries until 2008.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the temporal distance between the surveys and elections means that I cannot use these data to properly test hypothesis 6. Like many public opinion surveys, the Americas Barometer surveys asked respondents to evaluate their current economic situation relative to one year ago. Since the reference point – one year ago – may include a significant amount of time after the elected president took office, it does not tap the construct of interest in hypothesis 6, namely the respondents' evaluation of the performance of the incumbent at the time of the election.

To address these shortcomings, in the next section I retest my individual-level results using single-country national surveys conducted closer temporally to the elections.

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendix B for the dates of the elections referenced in the surveys.

<sup>8</sup> The other well-known cross-national survey in Latin America is the Latinobarómetro, which is available annually for the same 18 countries since 2002 (when the Dominican Republic was added). The Latinobarómetro, however, has its own disadvantages, both methodological and substantive, which I consider far more problematic. Methodologically, the samples are often not nationally representative, and sampling designs and question wording vary across countries and from year to year. More importantly for my purposes, the Latinobarómetro does not ask respondents about their actual vote choices, but rather asks for their hypothetical choice “if an election were held this Sunday.” This kind of question is problematic for a host of reasons, such as missing the strategic aspect of voting or the effects of campaigns (where it is asked prior to election day), not to mention omitting an unforeseen contender. Thus Arnold and Samuels (2009), who use the Latinobarómetro data, use ideological self-placement rather than actual vote choice to identify leftist voters, as already noted.

This both increases my confidence in the broader findings and also allows me to properly test hypothesis 6.

### 3.1 Variables

An initial challenge in analyzing these survey data is the coding of my dependent variable, the choice to vote for the left. In comparing left electoral support across country, I implicitly assume that there is a meaningful comparison between, for instance, Brazil's Inacio Lula da Silva and Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. Such comparison clearly glosses over important differences between these leftist candidates, from the nature of their rhetoric to their policy agendas. Moreover, Brazilian and Venezuelan politics differ tremendously both in terms of the institutions that channel political activity and the issues that animate political debates.

Still, I follow previous scholars and observers of the regional emergence of the left in noting that these candidates share important programmatic similarities that link them, particularly in contrast to their right-leaning opponents. Although many authors have debated classifications within the left, and whether there are two (Castañeda 2006) or three (Walker 2008) or four (Levitsky and Roberts 2009) Latin American lefts, they nevertheless agree that there is something particular about leftist candidates. Otherwise, it would be meaningless to even speak of a region-wide 'turn' to the left. Like Panizza (2005), I therefore conceive of this left as basically interested in the pursuit of economic security and equality, seeking to protect individuals from the vicissitudes of market forces, reduce social and economic inequalities, and promote equality in political and social spheres.

In order to sort the left from the right in particular elections, I follow the coding developed by Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009), who use expert surveys to identify the ideologies of the political parties in the 18 countries I examine.<sup>9</sup> Using this coding, my dependent variable dichotomously distinguishes those respondents who said they voted for

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<sup>9</sup> Like these authors, I include only those candidates who received more than 5 percent of the vote.

a candidate who is coded as left of center (Left=1) from those who said they voted for a candidate who is coded as right of center (Left=0).<sup>10</sup>

The independent variables of theoretical interest in my analysis are class, belief in neoliberalism, support for democracy, and the country-level identifier of labor-based versus elitist party systems. I measure class using reported household income, dividing respondents within each country into four equally-sized ordinal categories (or as close as possible to equally-sized categories given the income bands available in the survey).<sup>11</sup>

My measure of support for democracy is based on the question, “With which of the following statements do you agree: (1) To people like you, having a democratic or non-democratic regime makes no difference, or (2) Democracy is preferable to all other types of government, or (3) In some instances, an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one.” The variable is coded dichotomously, where support for democracy takes a 1 if respondents chose statement (2).

Belief in neoliberalism is an ordinal variable standardized to range between 0 and 1, where higher values mean greater belief in the tenets of a market-based economy. The question asked respondents their agreement using a 7-point scale with the statement, “The <country> state, rather than the private sector, should be the owner of the most important companies and industries of the country.”<sup>12</sup> This seems like an appropriate way of capturing an ideological commitment to neoliberalism since the privatization of state-owned enterprises continues to be the most contentious (and often the most visible)

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<sup>10</sup> Note that this means that abstainers are excluded from the analysis altogether. As I have argued elsewhere (Lupu forthcoming), this may be a problematic omission if we are interested in the factors that differentiate left voters from all other types of individuals (both right voter and abstainers). In a future iteration of this paper, I intend to explore how this alternative coding affects my results.

<sup>11</sup> A more thorough justification for using household income to measure class is provided in Lupu (forthcoming). One alternative would be to construct an index of wealth based on household assets rather than relying on reported income. Filmer and Pritchett (2001) suggest doing this using principal-component analysis, a method Booth and Seligson (2009:115-116) employ for the 2004 round of LAPOP surveys. An analysis using this alternative measure (not shown) yielded results that are substantively similar to those using the income-based measure. I report the latter since it is a more transparent measure.

<sup>12</sup> Given the construction of the scale, the response values were reversed so that the variable measures belief in neoliberalism rather than belief in government intervention in the economy.

neoliberal reform.

At the country level, I construct a dichotomous variable to identify labor-based (as opposed to elitist) party systems. This measure is based on the classification by Roberts (2002) of the cleavages around which party systems are organized. In labor-based party systems, he suggests, parties organize along class lines on the basis of stratified cleavages. In elitist party systems, on the other hand, parties organize across class lines on the basis of segmented cleavages.<sup>13</sup>

As control variables, I include measures of age, gender, ethnicity, education, urban residence, and ideology. Appendix A provides details on the questions and coding schemes used to construct all of the independent variables.

## 3.2 Model Specification

In order to test both the individual-level determinants of vote choice and the effects of country-level factors, I turn to a multilevel model (see Jusko and Shively 2005; Raudenbush and Bryk 2002; Steenbergen and Jones 2002). The techniques developed to estimate these models account for some of the statistical challenges posed by multilevel data, such as variances being nonconstant across countries and clustering of individuals within countries. More importantly for my purposes, the multilevel structure allows me to test some of the hypotheses noted earlier that require interactions between country-level characteristics and individual-level behavioral trends. For instance, I will test whether class voting (the effect of class on vote choice at the individual level) is more prevalent in labor-based party systems than in elitist party systems, as suggested by previous authors.

The model I estimate will therefore take the following form.<sup>14</sup> The complete

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<sup>13</sup> Note that Roberts did not originally classify El Salvador and Guatemala, which I here categorize as elitist party systems on the basis of secondary literature and the opinions of country experts. My results, however, are substantively similar if these two countries are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>14</sup> My notation follows that used by Raudenbush and Bryk (2002) and Steenbergen and Jones (2002). Note that since my dependent variable is binary, the actual model estimated takes log-odds form, but I present simplified equations here for the purpose of exposition.

individual-level model can be written as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Left}_{ij} = & \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{Gender})_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(\text{Age})_{ij} + \beta_{3j}(\text{Black})_{ij} + \beta_{4j}(\text{Indigenous})_{ij} \\
& + \beta_{5j}(\text{Mixed ethnicity})_{ij} + \beta_{6j}(\text{Other ethnicity})_{ij} + \beta_{7j}(\text{Urban})_{ij} + \beta_{8j}(\text{Education})_{ij} \\
& + \beta_{9j}(\text{Class})_{ij} + \beta_{10j}(\text{Ideology})_{ij} + \beta_{11j}(\text{Support for democracy})_{ij} \\
& + \beta_{12j}(\text{Belief in neoliberalism})_{ij} + r_{ij}
\end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

where  $i$  individuals are nested within  $j$  countries. Thus whether an individual votes for the leftist candidate is a function of a set of individual-level characteristics. At the country level, each individual-level coefficient is then modeled as follows:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{Labor-based system})_j + \gamma_{02}(\text{Left incumbent})_j + u_{0j} \tag{2}$$

$$\beta_{9j} = \gamma_{90} + \gamma_{91}(\text{Labor-based system})_j + u_{9j} \tag{3}$$

$$\beta_{12j} = \gamma_{120} + \gamma_{121}(\text{Labor-based system})_j + u_{12j} \tag{4}$$

$$\beta_{pj} = \gamma_{p0} \text{ for } p = 1 - 8, 10 - 11. \tag{5}$$

The complete (or mixed) estimation model can be written out by substituting the country-level equations into the individual-level model. This generates the cross-level interactions, such as that between labor-based party systems and class.<sup>15</sup>

Before estimating these models, however, I conduct an analysis of the variance in my dependent variable. The model can be written as follows:

$$\text{Left}_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j} + r_{ij} \tag{6}$$

where  $\gamma_{00}$  represents the grand mean of left support across the entire sample,  $u_{0j}$  represents the variation between countries, and  $r_{ij}$  represents the individual-level variation within country  $j$ . This ANOVA model will allow me to determine whether there is indeed both

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<sup>15</sup> Given the relatively small number of countries in the sample, I repeated my analyses with bootstrapped standard errors, as Anderson and Tverdova (2003) do with an even smaller set of countries. These analyses did not substantively change my results.

individual- and country-level variation in vote choice, thereby making the multilevel structure appropriate. If I were to find no country-level variation, then simply pooling across countries might be appropriate.

Table 1 presents the results of the ANOVA.<sup>16</sup> They demonstrate that the variation in vote choice is statistically significant at both the individual and country levels. Moreover, country-level variation comprises nearly a quarter of the total variation in vote choice. Given that these data were generated at the individual level, this is indeed strong evidence that country-level factors are playing an important role in voting for the left.

[Table 1 about here]

### 3.3 Results

My primary analysis proceeds following the multistage causal logic behind the determinants of vote choice in Latin America. That is, in order to test the effects of any particular independent variable, I include in the model only those control variables that are thought to precede the variable of interest (Shanks and Miller 1990). For instance, in order to test the total effect of class on vote choice, I do not control for ideology. This is because one's socioeconomic class likely plays a role in determining one's ideological placement. Including both variables simultaneously would measure only the direct effect of class on vote choice, omitting its indirect effect through ideology. And since I am interested in testing theories that focus on the overall (or total) effects of particular factors – such as ethnicity, class, ideology, and beliefs – I test these sequentially.

Table 2 reports the results of the multilevel models discussed above.<sup>17</sup> Model 1 begins by testing the effect of ethnicity on voting for the left, since it seems reasonable to

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<sup>16</sup> I limit the analysis here to the set of respondents included in model 1 of my primary analysis ( $N = 17,112$ ). But the ANOVA results are similar if I include the full set of respondents who answered the question on vote choice ( $N = 17,962$ ).

<sup>17</sup> These analyses include weights constructed using data from each country's most recent national census. Weighting is based on age, gender, and education level.

consider ethnicity causally prior to most other factors. I find a significant positive effect for most non-white ethnic groups. Blacks do not appear to vote for the left more than whites, but all the other ethnic groups do, particularly indigenous individuals. In other words, by and large, I find support for hypothesis 1.

[Table 2 about here]

Model 2 proceeds by adding a second set of variables that can reasonably be thought to be causally prior to class. Here I find no effect of class on voting for the left, as suggested by some authors. Note, however, that the variance component of class ( $u_{9j}$ ) is significant in this model, suggesting considerable variation in this effect across countries.<sup>18</sup> Model 3 adds two country-level determinants to the model – whether the party system was historically labor-based, and whether the incumbent in the last election was a leftist. Somewhat surprisingly given the troubled history of leftists in Latin America, left incumbents increase the probability that respondents will vote for the left. More importantly, labor-based party systems do not appear to engender greater left voting than do elitist party systems. Note, moreover, that including these country-level variables substantially reduces the remaining country-level variance ( $u_{0j}$ ).

Still, hypothesis 2 is interactive, suggesting that the effect of class on voting will be higher in labor-based party systems than in elitist ones. Model 4 tests this proposition by interacting these variables, and figure 1 illustrates the relevant marginal effects. As illustrated in figure 1, the class effect in labor-based party systems is indeed significant and negative. In other words, class voting does appear to occur in labor-based party systems. In contrast, the effect of class in elitist party systems is not significant. These contrasting effects explain the null class result in model 2, which did not account for the differences between party systems. Note, moreover, that this interaction helped explain nearly half of the variance in class effects noted earlier.

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<sup>18</sup> Comparing the number of observations in models 1 and 2 (as well as 4 and 5), it becomes clear that there is a significant amount of missingness in these data. I reran my analyses using data multiply imputed through the *Amelia* program (King et al. 2001) and arrived at substantively equivalent results.

[Figure 1 about here]

Model 5 adds a final set of variables that capture respondents' ideological commitments – left-right ideological placement, support for democracy, and belief in neoliberalism. Here I find support for hypothesis 3: left-right ideology has a significantly negative effect on voting for the left. Moreover, belief in neoliberalism has a significantly negative effect, lending support to hypothesis 5. However, I do not find support for hypothesis 4 – that voting for the left is associated with lack of support for democracy.

One noteworthy feature of the findings in model 5 is that ideological commitments appear to account for part of the effect of ethnicity on vote choice. Although ethnicity continues to have a significant direct effect on voting for the left in model 5, the coefficients are smaller than in the prior models, suggesting that at least part of the ethnicity effects works through the ideological commitments also associated with ethnic minorities.

Finally, model 6 tests whether the effect of belief in neoliberalism, like class, differs between labor-based and elitist party systems. If historically labor-based systems have stronger socioeconomic cleavages, as suggested by previous authors as well as my results in model 4, it seems only logical that they would also more strongly divide the electorate over belief in neoliberalism. Indeed, as figure 1 illustrates, although the effect of belief in neoliberalism is significantly negative across the two types of party systems, the effect is stronger in labor-based systems.

## 4 Country Survey Evidence

As noted earlier, two limitations of the cross-country survey analysis are (a) the temporal distance of the surveys from the actual elections they reference, and (b) the inability to test hypothesis 6 – on retrospective evaluations – as a result. These limitations can be overcome by using individual country surveys taken closer to the election dates. Of course, such surveys are not available for every country in the cross-country sample, and

there are many differences among them in terms of sampling methodology and question wording. Still, these data serve as a kind of robustness check for my cross-country results, and allow for some suggestive inferences with regard to hypothesis 6.

I collected country survey data from eight of the 18 countries in my cross-country sample.<sup>19</sup> These surveys all used national samples and were conducted within 3 months of the most recent presidential election as of January 2009. Not all of my variables of interest could be coded from the questions available in each survey, so my analyses include as many as were available. My analysis proceeds as in the previous section, though I now use simple probit specifications as opposed to the multilevel model.<sup>20</sup> In the interest of space, I do not report all of the regression models for each country, but instead present the total effect of each variable taken from the relevant model.

Table 3 presents the results by country. In the model 1 set of variables, the only substantial difference with the cross-country results is the significant negative effect of gender on vote choice in some countries, a finding that is perhaps unsurprising given gender differences in other countries.<sup>21</sup> Consistent with the previous results, and with hypothesis 1, non-whites appear significantly more likely to vote for the left. Although this variable is only available in three of the surveys, it does bolster the inference that ethnic cleavages exist at least in parts of the region.<sup>22</sup> Also consistent with the cross-country results, age is generally not a determinant of vote choice.

[Table 3 about here]

Turning to the model 2 set of variables, the individual country results identify interesting variation across countries, but are overall consistent with the cross-country

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<sup>19</sup> See Appendix B for the sources and dates of the country surveys relative to the elections.

<sup>20</sup> I have yet to construct appropriate weights for these data, but intend to do so for a future version of this paper.

<sup>21</sup> This result should be taken with some caution: the lack of gender-based weighting in the current analysis may be contributing to the significance of the effect.

<sup>22</sup> Of course, the availability of the variable – that is, its inclusion in the national survey – depends on there actually being ethnic diversity among eligible voters.

findings. The main variable of interest here, class, indeed appears to affect vote choice in the majority of the countries with historically labor-based party systems, such that lower-income respondents are more likely to vote for the left. Of course, this sample of countries is made up almost entirely of labor-based party systems. Still, I find no class effect in the one example of an elitist party system, Colombia. There is considerable variation among the labor-based countries, with no class effect in Chile, Mexico, and Uruguay. Nevertheless, these results are overall suggestive of a socioeconomic cleavage in labor-based party systems, and no such cleavage in elitist party systems.

The results with respect to ideological commitments are also largely consistent with the cross-country evidence. Consistent with hypothesis 3, left-right ideological placement has the expected significant effect in most of the eight countries, with the exceptions of Brazil and Chile. Support for democracy generally does not affect vote choice, though here there is considerable variation across countries. In Peru, support for democracy does seem to be associated with casting a ballot for the right, as suggested by some previous authors. In Chile and Uruguay, on the other hand, support for democracy is associated instead with voting for the *left*, perhaps a result of the persistent association of the right with past military dictatorships.

Unfortunately, only two of the eight surveys included questions that captured the ideological commitment to neoliberalism.<sup>23</sup> But in both cases, the effects were negative and significant, consistent with the cross-country results and with hypothesis 5.

Taken together, then, the results from individual country surveys by and large confirms the cross-country results described above. In addition, these analyses allow us to add a test of hypothesis 6. Five of the eight surveys included the standard question on

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<sup>23</sup> The Mexico survey asked, “Do you believe that (1) More private investment should be allowed in the electricity sector, or (2) The electricity sector should remain almost completely in hands of government?” The Venezuela survey asked, “People often talk about economic systems. They talk about capitalism, socialism, communism. Of the different economic systems that appear on this card, which do you like best?” I coded responses of “Neoliberal capitalism” and “Capitalism” as a belief in neoliberalism and all the others as not (these included “Social capitalism with a mixed economy,” “Socialism with a market economy,” “Socialism,” “Statist socialism,” and “Communism”).

retrospective economic evaluations – whether the respondent thought the national economy was better, worse, or the same as twelve months ago. In these cases, retrospective economic evaluations did have a significant effect on voting for the left. With the exception of Bolivia, where there was a rightist incumbent, poor economic evaluations were associated with voting for the left. And where the incumbent was of the left, poor economic evaluations were associated with voting for the right.<sup>24</sup>

Bolivia is a curious case in which, despite a more or less rightist incumbent, poor economic evaluations were associated with voting for the right. But this phenomenon may be due to the particularities of the 2005 election, where the incumbent Eduardo Rodríguez had been appointed by the legislature following the resignation of Carlos Mesa. Rodríguez had been the chief justice of the Supreme Court, was not affiliated with a political party, and at the time of the elections had only been in power for six months. Thus, there is little information on the basis of which to position him on a left-right continuum, and it certainly stands to reason that Bolivians differed on this score.

Two of the three surveys that did not include a question on retrospective economic evaluation did include a question evaluating the incumbent president. While this is a far more direct incumbent evaluation than the question on economic performance – and is perhaps so proximate to vote choice as to be almost indistinguishable – I include it here as merely suggestive. In both Brazil and Chile, those voters who disapproved of the leftist incumbent did not vote for the left.

The results from these model 4 variables are of course far less conclusive than those from the cross-country analysis. Still, they are suggestive of support for hypothesis 6.

Moreover, in none of the models did the inclusion of the retrospective evaluations affect the

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<sup>24</sup> Recent authors have suggested that such survey-based retrospective economic evaluations are endogenous to vote choice (Anderson, Mendes, and Tverdova 2004; Evans and Anderson 2006). That is, voters who cast their ballots for, say, an incumbent candidate were more likely to evaluate the economy positively than they were prior to election day (but see Lewis-Beck 2006). Although this theory is fascinating and merits further research, I ignore it here primarily because of the lack of panel data that would be necessary to adequately test for endogeneity. This is not particularly problematic since, although I find (potentially endogenous) economic-voting effects, my primary finding is that these influence vote choice independently from other considerations.

significance of belief in neoliberalism (these results are not shown in Table 3). That is, the negative association between belief in neoliberalism and voting for the left is not indirectly linked to the poor economic performance of neoliberal policies, as previous authors have suggested. My results suggest that these two effects are mostly independent. Latin American voters have developed ideological commitments with regard to neoliberalism, and these commitments inform their voting decisions regardless of their evaluations of particular economic outcomes.

## 5 Who Votes for the Left?

The two sets of results presented above paint a clear picture of Latin Americans' voting decisions. On the whole, ethnicity is a significant predictor of vote choice in the region. Non-whites are significantly more likely to vote for the left than their white counterparts. This obviously means little for countries where non-whites represent tiny fractions of the overall population. But in the more ethnically heterogeneous countries of the region, this finding suggests an important source of support for the left, and a significant political cleavage, consistent with the analysis by Madrid (2004).

Another political cleavage that appears in some of the region's countries is class. A socioeconomic cleavage seems to drive voting decisions in those countries that historically had labor-based party systems, as suggested by Cleary (2006). Such a cleavage does not seem salient, on the other hand, in countries with elitist party systems.

Ideological commitments also matter for vote choice in Latin America. In particular, voters' self-placement on a left-right continuum and the degree to which they believe ideologically in the tenets of neoliberalism affect their voting decisions. This suggests that ideology does matter in the region – against the findings by Arnold and Samuels (2009) and Seligson (2007) – and that a rejection of the neoliberal policies of the 1990s does indeed influence Latin Americans' votes, as suggested by Castañeda (2006) and others.

However, disenchantment with democracy does not appear to drive voters toward the left.

Finally, retrospective economic evaluations are important for vote choice, consistent with the growing literature on economic voting around the world (see Duch and Stevenson 2008). But these economic evaluations influence voting decisions independently from its other determinants. Thus, although previous authors were right to distinguish analytically a normative rejection of neoliberalism from more simple-minded retrospective rejections based on their failure to generate growth in particular cases, both phenomena seem to persist simultaneously and independently in Latin America.

The results presented in this study are of course limited to the more recent elections in the region. As a result, my findings cannot be taken as resolving the question of why it is that the leftist electoral victories in the region occurred when they did. Nor do they tell us about the demographic or ideational changes to the Latin American electorate that might have brought on these outcomes. Since my data does not allow me to examine trends over time, I cannot, for instance, determine whether the significance of ideology for vote choice suggests that ideology recently became a more important determinants of vote choice, or that key segments of Latin American electorates recently shifted to the left.

Moreover, my analysis of individual country surveys demonstrated considerable variation across countries with regard to some of the general findings. In particular, the effects of class, left-right ideology, and support for democracy are not evident in all the countries in this more limited sample. Such variation is of course to be expected in any large-N analysis. And while my cross-country results overlook these variations across individual countries, they are undoubtedly interesting and worthy of further research.

Still, the somewhat more limited objective of this study was to examine the electoral bases of the left in Latin America today as a means of adjudicating among the competing explanations for the left's recent spat of electoral successes. To return to the example above, had I found no effect of ideology on vote choice, an explanation based on ideological shifts would certainly have been falsified.

In this regard, my findings are clear. Despite the recent dismissal of Latin America's 'left turn' as nothing more than the swing of the proverbial electoral pendulum, my results show that voting for the left is in fact determined by political cleavages, including ethnicity, class, ideology, and a normative commitment to or rejection of the neoliberal economic model.

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**Table 1.** *ANOVA in left vote*

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<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Estimate</b>
<b>Fixed effect</b>	
Intercept ( $\gamma_{00}$ )	0.607* (0.004)
<b>Variance components</b>	
Country level ( $u_{0j}$ )	0.059*
Individual level ( $r_{ij}$ )	0.188*
$N$ (Individuals)	17,112
$N$ (Countries)	18

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\*  $p < 0.05$

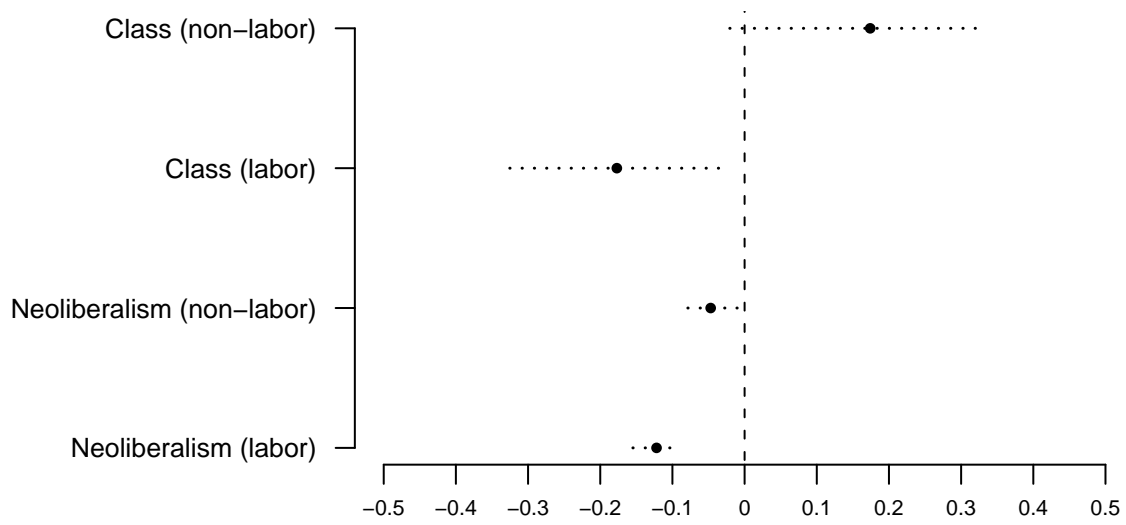
**Table 2.** *Determinants of left vote*

Independent Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Intercept ( $\gamma_{00}$ )	-0.021 (0.412)	0.038 (0.442)	-0.834 (0.723)	-0.804 (0.794)	0.958 (0.844)	0.805 (0.778)
<b>Individual-level effects</b>						
Gender ( $\gamma_{10}$ )	-0.014 (0.060)	-0.007 (0.067)	-0.007 (0.067)	-0.008 (0.067)	-0.002 (0.066)	0.001 (0.067)
Age ( $\gamma_{20}$ )	-0.014 (0.019)	-0.007 (0.018)	-0.007 (0.018)	-0.008 (0.018)	0.011 (0.018)	0.013 (0.018)
<i>Ethnicity</i>						
Black ( $\gamma_{30}$ )	0.250 (0.139)	0.126 (0.156)	0.126 (0.156)	0.125 (0.157)	0.085 (0.217)	0.091 (0.215)
Indigenous ( $\gamma_{40}$ )	0.777* (0.275)	0.770* (0.226)	0.774* (0.227)	0.776* (0.226)	0.682* (0.220)	0.669* (0.221)
Mixed ethnicity ( $\gamma_{50}$ )	0.283* (0.087)	0.293* (0.084)	0.295* (0.084)	0.293* (0.084)	0.236* (0.094)	0.243* (0.095)
Other ethnicity ( $\gamma_{60}$ )	0.420* (0.144)	0.435* (0.138)	0.434* (0.138)	0.433* (0.138)	0.353* (0.135)	0.361* (0.134)
Urban ( $\gamma_{70}$ )		-0.065 (0.078)	-0.066 (0.078)	-0.068 (0.078)	-0.057 (0.076)	-0.054 (0.077)
Education ( $\gamma_{80}$ )		0.014 (0.044)	0.014 (0.044)	0.013 (0.043)	-0.003 (0.049)	-0.002 (0.050)
Class ( $\gamma_{90}$ )		-0.021 (0.052)	-0.032 (0.054)	0.174* (0.054)	0.162* (0.043)	0.161* (0.041)
Ideology ( $\gamma_{100}$ )					-0.226* (0.056)	-0.225* (0.056)
Support for democracy ( $\gamma_{110}$ )					0.033 (0.129)	0.036 (0.129)
Belief in neoliberalism ( $\gamma_{120}$ )					-0.091* (0.023)	-0.047* (0.022)
<b>Country-level effects</b>						
Labor-based system ( $\gamma_{01}$ )			0.620 (0.654)	0.600 (0.710)	0.354 (0.726)	0.671 (0.702)
Labor-based system $\times$ Class ( $\gamma_{91}$ )				-0.351* (0.106)	-0.302* (0.094)	-0.302* (0.099)
Labor-based system $\times$ Belief in neoliberalism ( $\gamma_{121}$ )						-0.075 (0.038)
Left incumbent ( $\gamma_{02}$ )			1.791* (0.458)	1.613* (0.494)	1.698* (0.532)	1.556* (0.550)
<b>Variance components</b>						
Intercept ( $u_{0j}$ )	3.062*	3.291*	2.035*	2.409*	2.287*	2.398*
Class ( $u_{9j}$ )		0.070*	0.075*	0.041*	0.030*	0.030*
Belief in neoliberalism ( $u_{12j}$ )					0.007*	0.005*
Individual level ( $r_{ij}$ )	0.969*	0.968*	0.968*	0.969*	1.023*	1.023*
$N$ (Individuals)	17,112	13,241	13,241	13,241	10,408	10,408
$N$ (Countries)	18	18	18	18	18	18

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Penalized quasi-likelihood estimates using age, gender, education, and urban weights. Ethnicity reference group is whites.

\*  $p < 0.05$

**Figure 1.** *Marginal effects*



*Note:* Points represent estimated marginal effects (in log-odds) of class (from model 4) and belief in neoliberalism (from model 6) in non-labor-based systems and labor-based systems. Dotted lines represent 95% confidence intervals around estimates.

**Table 3.** *Determinants of left vote, total effects by country*

Independent Variable	Bolivia 2005	Brazil 2006	Chile 2005	Colombia 2006	Mexico 2006	Peru 2006	Uruguay 2004	Venezuela 2006
<b>Model 1</b>								
Gender	-0.174* (0.067)	-0.225* (0.099)	0.111 (0.086)	-0.168 (0.098)	-0.322* (0.074)	-0.368* (0.064)	-0.089 (0.101)	-0.048 (0.106)
Age	0.011 (0.022)	0.042 (0.036)	0.016 (0.029)	-0.014 (0.032)	0.004 (0.027)	0.042 (0.022)	-0.090* (0.035)	0.038 (0.041)
Non-white	0.671* (0.106)			0.220* (0.103)	0.298* (0.097)			
<b>Model 2</b>								
Urban	-0.193* (0.082)			0.101 (0.139)		-0.099 (0.093)		
Education	-0.001 (0.044)	-0.138 (0.077)	-0.158* (0.058)	0.306* (0.068)	0.096 (0.051)	-0.024 (0.046)	0.026 (0.074)	-0.325* (0.080)
Class	-0.138* (0.042)	-0.203* (0.071)	0.058 (0.055)	-0.038 (0.064)	-0.070 (0.043)	-0.216* (0.042)	0.006 (0.055)	-0.088 (0.057)
<b>Model 3</b>								
Ideology	-0.223* (0.021)	0.002 (0.172)	-0.017 (0.039)	-0.110* (0.025)	-0.338* (0.030)	-0.108* (0.015)	-0.339* (0.032)	-0.342* (0.057)
Support for democracy	0.112 (0.093)	0.234 (0.172)	0.387* (0.164)	0.084 (0.148)	0.382 (0.202)	-0.270* (0.086)	0.442* (0.156)	-0.426 (0.492)
Belief in neoliberalism					-0.430* (0.104)			-0.979* (0.144)
<b>Model 4</b>								
Poor economic evaluation	-0.321* (0.106)			0.971* (0.174)	0.674* (0.148)		0.565* (0.157)	-2.383* (0.200)
Poor incumbent evaluation		-1.660* (0.197)	-0.943* (0.126)					
Labor-based Incumbent	Yes Right (?)	Yes Left	Yes Left	No Right	Yes Right	Yes Left	Yes Right	Yes Left

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < 0.05$

## Appendix A. *LAPOP* survey variable coding

The dependent variable used in the cross-country analysis is vote for the left. The independent variables are coded as follows:

**Gender.** (0) Male, (1) Female.

**Age.** Measured as a categorical variable as follows: (0) 18-24, (1) 25-34, (2) 35-44, (3) 45-54, (4) 55 and older.

**Education.** Measured as a categorical variable as follows: (0) less than primary schooling completed, (1) primary schooling completed, (2) secondary schooling completed, (3) tertiary schooling completed.

**Class.** Measured as a categorical variable with four values representing (a best approximation of) quartiles of the distribution of household income from each sample.

**Ideology.** Measured on a 1-10 scale. Respondents were presented with an illustration of the scale and asked, “On this sheet is a scale from 1 to 10 that goes from left to right. Today, when many people talk about political leanings, they talk about people who sympathize more with the left and people who sympathize more with the right. Based on how you define the terms ‘left’ and ‘right,’ when you think about your own political position, where do you position yourself on this scale?”

**Support for democracy.** Based on the question, “With which of the following statements do you agree: (1) To people like you, having a democratic or non-democratic regime makes no difference, or (2) Democracy is preferable to all other types of government, or (3) In some instances, an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one.” The variable is coded dichotomously, where support for democracy takes a 1 if respondents chose statement (2).

**Belief in neoliberalism.** Based on the question that asked respondents their agreement using a 7-point scale with the statement, “The <country> state, rather than the private sector, should be the owner of the most important companies and industries of the country.” The variable is inverted and standardized to a 0-1 scale where higher values

mean greater belief in the tenets of a market-based economy.

## Appendix B. *Country survey sources and dates*

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Country	Election Date	Survey source	Survey dates
Argentina	Oct 28, 2007		
Bolivia	Dec 18, 2005	Latin American Public Opinion Project	Mar-Apr 2006
Brazil	Oct 1, 2006	Estudo Eleitoral Brasileiro	Dec 2006
Chile	Dec 11, 2005	Comparative Study of Electoral Systems	Jan 2006
Colombia	May 28, 2006	Latin American Public Opinion Project	Jul-Aug 2006
Costa Rica	Feb 5, 2006		
Dominican Republic	May 16, 2008		
Ecuador	Oct 15, 2006		
El Salvador	Mar 21, 2004		
Guatemala	Sep 9, 2007		
Honduras	Nov 27, 2005		
Mexico	Jul 2, 2006	Mexico 2006 Panel Study (Lawson et al.)	Jul 2006
Nicaragua	Nov 5, 2006		
Panama	May 2, 2004		
Paraguay	Apr 20, 2008		
Peru	Apr 9, 2006	Comparative Study of Electoral Systems	May 2006
Uruguay	Oct 31, 2004	Instituto de Ciencias Políticas	
Venezuela	Dec 3, 2006	Instituto de Estudios Políticos y Derecho Público	Nov 2006

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