

# Presidents, Parties, and Policy Competition

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*Presidential systems present a unique possibility for spatial competition between elected political agents, since presidents may represent different policy positions than the parties to which they belong. Previous research, however, has lacked a firm empirical basis on which to measure these differences. We remedy this situation, providing independent estimates of positions and saliencies for presidents and parties on multiple policy dimensions in 18 Latin American countries, from original expert survey data. Our results offer strong evidence that positioning on nearly all political issues neatly reduces to a single dimension of left-right contestation. Furthermore, contrasting differences between the positioning of presidents and their own parties, we show that presidents tend to position themselves independently of their parties more in bicameral and proportional representation systems, when they differ in the importance they assign to a given policy dimension, and when elections with legislatures are nonconcurrent.*

Do presidents tend to adopt policy positions independently from their parties? If so, how much do these autonomous policy stances differ, and what factors explain them? Theories grounded in a spatial conception of politics typically accord the president the role of pivotal or veto-player, thus assigning him independent policy preferences (Krehbiel 1998). Especially in the context of Latin American democracies, recent research has shifted towards a more particularized study of the special role for electoral competition, coalition formation and policy-making of independently elected presidents (Amorim Neto 2006; Chasquetti 2001; Morgenstern and Nacif 2002). Yet empirical applications of theoretical models of presidents, parties, and policy competition tend to lack the data necessary to test them. Even when firm data is available about the policy positions of parties, independent policy measures of presidential positions are rare to non-existent. The researcher is left with the implausible assumption of ideological equivalence between the president and his party, while there are in fact many reasons to expect that the policy positions of independently elected presidents will differ from those held by their parties.

Most presidents lead their political parties, but presidents and parties derive their mandates from different sources. As directly elected representatives

of the nation, presidents appeal to different constituencies and are often elected at different times than legislatures. In multiparty systems where a legislature consists of multiple groups with different policy preferences, presidents may face a complicated strategic situation when it comes to realizing policy objectives through a combination of their powers to initiate or veto legislation and as formateur to control cabinet appointments. Especially when elected from minority parties or facing coalition governments, a situation not uncommon in many Latin American countries where presidentialism is combined with multiparty systems, the policy objectives pursued by presidents may differ from those pursued by his party. Such differences not only affect the performance of presidential systems, but also have more fundamental implications for the institutional design of representative democracy (Johnson and Crisp 2003).

This problem is well understood in the literature on presidentialism (e.g., Alemán and Tsebelis 2005; Amorim Neto 2006; Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh 2004; Shugart and Carey 1992), yet progress towards better understanding the problem has thus far been limited by a lack of data allowing a direct comparison of executive and legislative positions, based on “a better sense of the distribution of preferences . . . among the relevant actors in a system of separation of powers” (Negretto 2006, 67). Our study directly addresses this

situation. We present original data from 18 separate expert surveys conducted by the authors in late 2006 and early 2007, a period when 11 Latin American democracies held presidential elections, legislative elections, or both. Because our study treats presidents and parties separately, we are also able to characterize the degree to which presidential policy positions are decoupled from their party's preferences, as well as the political and institutional factors that explain variation in these policy differences.

## Presidents, Parties, and Policy Positioning

Presidents have many reasons not to be bound to the policy platforms held by their own parties, reasons both political and institutional. Unlike prime ministers, presidential candidates campaign and are elected independently from legislative parties, frequently in nonconcurrent elections. The electoral bases of the president and legislators are “not only separate but also often distinct” (Samuels and Shugart 2006, 18), and it is not uncommon that substantial variations occur in the vote share of the president and his own party—reflecting that the electorate *de facto* has two agents under systems with separation of power. Presidents appeal directly to the electorate and in order to win, especially in multiparty systems, must often encourage voters to split their tickets. Facing a much broader constituency in separate elections and under different electoral rules, presidents must necessarily appeal to a broader electorate. In simple Downsian terms, presidents therefore face strategic incentives to position themselves closer to the national median voter in order to garner the necessary votes. Accountable to the electorate and not to a party as in parliamentary systems, and capable of formulating and advancing an independent policy agenda, presidents may feel that the exigencies of leadership compel them to adopt a “Burkean posture” of ignoring partisan mandates for the “good of the nation” (Johnson and Crisp 2003, 130). Similarly, evidence from elite surveys suggests that in the majority of countries run by presidential cabinets, legislators give precedence to the representation of more local, constituency-based interests which may explain a divergence in policy positions (cf. Alcántara, García Montero, and López et al. 2005, Marenghi and García Montero 2008). This key difference in electoral institutions is usually cited to explain why partisan ideological cues from the president's party may offer a poor indicator of presidential

policy priorities once in office (Conaghan 1996; Johnson and Crisp 2003), although the precise extent and nature of this policy disconnection has yet to be systematically and empirically explored.

Once elected, presidents serve for fixed terms, appoint their own cabinets, and do not depend on legislative approval for their continuation in office. Presidents in Latin America typically have the right to initiate legislation, providing a high degree of direct control over policy outcomes (Shugart and Carey 1992), and often make almost unilateral policy decisions. Party systems in Latin America are typically fragmented, however—often partly as a consequence of intensified party competition around presidential campaigns (Amorim Neto and Cox 1997; Golder 2005)—and such systems frequently produce minority presidents and periods of pronounced interbranch conflict. Especially when the presidential party is not the median party (containing the median legislator), a president may require the voting support of other parties in order to pass legislation. The policy position of the median party may therefore turn into a focal point to accomplish the presidential agenda. Particularly in Latin American multiparty presidential democracies, coalition building is common as a means to secure successful legislative outcomes (Alemán and Tsebelis 2005; Amorim Neto 2006; Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh 2004; Negretto 2006). In coalition building, the president's role is dominant. His central function as *formateur* gives parties less direct influence over office benefits as compared to parliamentary systems (Samuels and Shugart 2006). Equally, his perception of the legislature as being “workable” or “recalcitrant” (Morgenstern and Cox 2001) may lead the president to use cabinet appointments strategically to achieve his policy goals (Amorim Neto 2002, 2006) and again, his preferences and his party's need not coincide. For instance, in 2003, after only one month in office, Brazilian president Inácio Lula da Silva had to face severe criticism from within his party *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) over appointments that his party held counter its leftist ideology, but that formed part of a deal between political alliances to maintain support in Congress.

In short, there are many reasons to expect that the policy positions adopted by presidents may differ systematically from those held by the parties to which presidents belong. This possibility not only forms the basis for many theoretical models of intrabranched political competition but also stands as an interesting, and yet unanswered, empirical question in its own right. Our expectation is that presidents are indeed likely to adopt policy positions that differ from their

own parties', and furthermore that these positions will be systematically closer to the positions of both the median voter in a country and the median party in the legislature. In the remainder of this paper we describe how we gathered data to test this expectation and report on our findings.

## Data: An Expert Survey of Policy Positions in Latin America

Our estimates of the policy positions of parties and presidents come from original expert surveys we conducted in 18 Latin American countries from 2006 to 2007.<sup>1</sup> Expert surveys offer various advantages when we are interested in measuring empirical information on policy positions across a wide range of countries. They have been shown to provide accurate and reliable measures of party positions on policy and validated against a variety of benchmarks (see Benoit and Laver 2006, 2007). On the practical side, expert surveys provide information on party policy positions free from many of the data problems or resource demands faced by alternative approaches, such as elite surveys, mass surveys, the analysis of legislative roll-call votes, or text analysis (see Benoit and Laver 2006 for a review).

Previous work estimating the policy positions of Latin American political parties has relied on sources such as citizen placement from survey data (e.g., *Latinobarómetro* or country electoral polls), elite surveys (Alcántara 2004), general expert surveys of left-right such as that conducted by Huber and Inglehart (1995), and the classification scheme of Latin American parties by Coppedge (1997). Although this is quite a variety to choose from, none of these previous comparative works measured presidential positions separately. In addition, previous studies were limited in their coverage, including either fewer countries or parties than our study, hence not reflecting the entire political spectrum nor providing as complete a basis for intercountry comparisons.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as the majority of these surveys centers upon the single left-right dimension, topics like an inherent multidimensionality of policy spaces in the region have not been

<sup>1</sup>Our basic methodology closely matches, and can be viewed as an extension of, the expert surveys of party policy conducted by Benoit and Laver (2006) which reports survey results from 2002 to 2004, from 47 different countries, and covering 387 political parties.

<sup>2</sup>Inglehart and Huber included only 4 Latin American countries, while Coppedge's work covered 11.

explored, unless these dimensions had been inferred from roll-call data (e.g., Amorim Neto, Cox, and McCubbins 2003; Morgenstern 2004) or combined from surveys at the elite level (Luna and Zechmeister 2005; Rosas 2005). Our study, by contrast, provides precise numerical estimates on up to 11 primary dimensions of policy per country as well as their position on a general left-right dimension, along with estimates of the uncertainty of these positions.<sup>3</sup>

To identify political parties we followed the general criteria applied in Benoit and Laver (2006) and Laver and Hunt (1992). We included every existing party that won seats in the lower chamber at the country's most recent election, parties that won at least 1% of the vote, and additional parties that despite not meeting the above criteria were judged to be politically important by local experts.<sup>4</sup> For policy dimensions, we identified three sets to be applied on a country-by-country basis. The first set included Benoit and Laver's (2006, chap. 4) "hard core" of four dimensions concerning economic policy, social policy, the decentralization of decision making, and environmental policy. A second set of dimensions can be thought of as core dimensions for Latin America. These related to religious principles in politics, globalization, regional economic cooperation and deregulation or privatization.<sup>5</sup> A last group of policy dimensions involved issues that applied only to specific countries or subsets of countries. This included questions about the promotion of minority rights and rights of indigenous people, security and party regulation.

To maintain comparability, the question format preserved the structure used by previous expert surveys (e.g., Benoit and Laver 2006; Laver and Hunt 1992): presenting experts with a scale running from 1 to 20, with the lower position indicating typically "left" position and the higher number the "right." In our approach to party preferences for policy, the importance

<sup>3</sup>The expert survey estimates of party policy positions also include standard errors that allow estimates of uncertainty to be used in subsequent analyses, as we have provided in Table 1. Additional use of these errors are possible using error correction models, for instance as in Benoit, Laver, and Mikhaylov (2009).

<sup>4</sup>This happened in Nicaragua and Uruguay. Due to the electoral systems in Latin America, in some countries we find high numbers of parties having won a single seat. In such cases, we restricted the samples to the most important parties, as advised by country experts. In Argentina, furthermore, we also included factions of two main parties as if they were parties.

<sup>5</sup>In the case of regional economic cooperation, this may take many possible forms (for example, Mercosur, FTAA, AFTA); our solution was to use a general working. The dimensions on deregulation and privatization were applied in a mutually exclusive fashion: when one was used in a country, the other was excluded.

of a dimension to a political actor can be separated from the actor's position on that dimension. To capture the relative salience of policy dimensions, therefore, we also asked the experts to judge how important was each policy dimension for each party, from 1 (not important at all) to 20 (very important).

Experts were also asked to locate presidents on the position and importance scales in each country, treating them the same as if they were parties. Presidential positions were not tied to the positions of parties in any way by the survey instrument,<sup>6</sup> and indeed we view it as a primary question of interest whether presidential positions match up with or diverge from those held by their own parties. Before describing and explaining differences between presidential and party positioning, however, we first use the results of our survey to characterize the structure of the policy space in Latin America.

## The Structure of Policy Competition in Latin America

The dimensions which we identified, a priori, as applying to policy competition in each country form the dimensions of potential political contestation where the policy preferences of the president, the parties, and the electorate can be located. It remains to be seen from the data collected on positioning in each country, however, not only which of these dimensions are actually important, but also how many real or effective dimensions are represented by overall patterns of policy positioning. In addition, before characterizing the differences between parties and presidents, the structure of presidential and party positioning needs to be compared to assess whether these two sets of actors are in fact inhabiting a common policy space.

### Relative Importance of Policy Dimensions

Table 1 examines these questions in terms of the relative importance of policy positions and summarizes our findings for the 18-country sample, ranking each dimension in terms of overall importance across parties.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 also compares overall importance

<sup>6</sup>In our online survey, political actors to be located on each dimension were randomly ordered for each individual expert.

<sup>7</sup>The dimensions of deregulation and privatization are combined in Table 1. We have weighted the analyses by vote share of the parties to obtain the country-level means in order to better capture what could be considered the "typical" importance and contestation for each issue, with vote share weighting larger, more characteristic parties more than smaller ones.

with a measure of the divergence of party positions on each issue, where divergence refers to the standard deviation of the individual issue across parties and therefore displays the spread of positions on each issue across political parties in a given country.

With the exception of the liberties vs. security question, the top six policy dimensions all relate to economic questions. On the lower end of the importance ranking we find what we may term postmaterialist issues, namely values such as personal freedom, citizen rights, and environmental protection. At the top of our ranking of importance is the economic left-right dimension measuring policy toward deregulation and privatization. Although Laver and Hunt (1992) and Benoit and Laver's (2006) study of Western Europe found that the taxes versus spending dimension best captured left-right economic positioning, the deregulation/privatization dimension seems to better represent differences in economic policy preferences in Latin America—echoing a similar finding reported by Benoit and Laver for postcommunist party systems. What is more, these dimensions also display the largest mean divergence, meaning that the variation in positions on economic issues is fairly large in each country. Consider, for instance, Chile, where the *Partido Comunista de Chile* (PC) receives a mean expert placement of 1.6 on deregulation, thus favoring high levels of state regulation of the market, while the *Unión Demócrata Independiente* (UDI) scored 18.85 on this dimension, favoring deregulation of the markets at every opportunity.

Two other policy dimensions stand out. The taxes versus spending dimension is ranked fifth in overall importance, but ranks last in terms of divergence, meaning that political actors do not differentiate their positions much on this economic policy issue. Mexico can be seen as a typical example for this dimension, where all political parties span the center-left space with the *Partido de Trabajo* (PT) receiving a mean expert placement of 7 and the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) a mean placement of 9.95 (on the taxes vs. spending dimension). In the case of religious principles in politics, a dimension frequently judged to be of special importance for the study of Latin American countries, the relationship is practically reversed. The religion dimension is only ranked eighth in overall importance, but the estimated parties' position on this issue vary to a great extent, leading to a mean divergence of 3.6 and the third position on the divergence ranking.

These findings serve as a first impression of the structure of the political competition in Latin America. Yet, more specifically we are interested in the

TABLE 1 Issue Salience and Divergence, averaged across all 18 countries

Dimension	Importance Ranking	Mean Importance	(SE)	Divergence Ranking	Mean Divergence	Total Countries
Deregulation/Privatization	1	15.5	(0.34)	1	4.4	18
Liberties v. Security	2	15.2	(0.51)	6	3.2	12
Economic Cooperation	3	14.7	(0.38)	8	2.8	18
Globalization	4	14.7	(0.30)	2	3.9	18
Taxes v. Spending	5	12.9	(0.31)	11	2.4	18
Decentralization	6	12.7	(0.38)	10	2.4	18
Party Regulation	7	12.4	(0.32)	9	2.6	10
Religion	8	12.4	(0.44)	3	3.6	18
Indig Peoples/Minrts	9	11.6	(0.49)	4	3.2	16
Social	10	11.4	(0.50)	5	3.2	18
Environment	11	11.1	(0.37)	7	2.9	18

Note: Mean importance refers to the importance of this issue averaged across the number of countries listed in the final (“total countries”) column, along with the standard error in parentheses. Divergence refers to the standard deviation of this issue across parties, a measure of the spread of their positions on each issue across political parties in a given country. Importance and divergence are weighted by vote share.

question of the dimensionality of the policy space throughout the region, thus in the next section we explore this issue in more detail.

### Dimensionality of Political Contestation

To get a better idea of the underlying factors that explain most of the variance found in the data, we employ the data reduction method of factor analysis. Factor analysis classifies sets of correlated variables and reduces our high-dimensional data to a lower-dimensional set of representations of the same information. In other words, if we find high correlations between party positions on different policy dimensions, thus measuring in a sense the “same” thing, we might think of this as an underlying axis on which political competition takes place. While our analysis should be viewed as exploratory, factor analysis has been used previously to determine the effective dimensionality by reducing party positioning on numerous issues to a minimal set of underlying real dimensions (Benoit and Laver 2006; Gabel and Huber 2000). Having estimated these latent dimensions, we can then use rotated principal components of the underlying factors and interpret them in terms of the variables that load on each factor.

Table 2 reports the result of a factor analysis of party positioning on the eight key issues included in all countries, measured at the respondent level.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup>Other dimensions were only included in subsets of applicable countries and have not been included in the pooled analysis; details are available in the web-based data appendix. Here as in analyses below, we treat the privatization and deregulation dimensions as equivalent.

The results from the principal component analysis in the top of Table 2 quite clearly show that positioning on these eight issues explains nearly half (0.45, or 45%) of the variance on an underlying common dimension represented by the first factor. Together these two factors account for 60% (0.60) of the variance in the underlying political dimensions of policy.<sup>9</sup>

Examining the (varimax rotated) factor loadings for the eight variables, we see clearly that all dimensions except decentralization and economic cooperation load strongly on the first factor, whereas the second factor can be described as capturing non-economic matters with decentralization and issues of international cooperation. Considering decentralization, this pattern is similar to Benoit and Laver (2006, 117 and 121) who frequently found that this issue emerged as a principal component of a second or third orthogonal factor of latent policy in the West and East European cases that they examined. What the strong association of the other dimensional variables indicates is that political positioning in the region as a whole may not only be reduced primarily to a single underlying dimension of political contestation, but also that the components of this latent dimension are the classical issues that distinguish “left” positions from “right” positions: deregulation,

<sup>9</sup>Only factors with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 are reported. We also tested this using scree analysis, confirming the retention of just two factors, as well as Horn’s Parallel Analysis which leaves us with only one factor, strengthening our finding of unidimensionality.

TABLE 2 Factor analysis (pooled) results

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Uniqueness
<i>Principal components results</i>			
Eigenvalue	3.59	1.17	
Adjusted Eigenvalue	2.52	0.13	
Cumulative Variance explained	0.45	0.60	
<i>Variable and rotated factor loadings</i>			
Deregulation/Privatization	<b>0.87</b>	-0.11	0.22
Globalization	<b>0.83</b>	-0.19	0.27
Environment	<b>0.76</b>	0.29	0.34
Social	<b>0.74</b>	0.25	0.40
Religion	<b>0.72</b>	0.18	0.45
Taxes v. Spending	<b>0.57</b>	0.03	0.67
Decentralization	0.19	<b>0.75</b>	0.40
Economic Cooperation	-0.33	<b>0.63</b>	0.49
N		1507, 15 parameters	

Note: Eigenvalues are adjusted based on Horn's Test of principal components (using Stata library paran)

taxation, social liberalism, and environmental politics. Interestingly as well, this first factor is also associated with attitudes towards globalization—an issue with high redistributive economic considerations in Latin America—and religious principles in politics.

Because our survey also measured a general left-right position for each actor, independently from the component policy dimensions from Table 1, we can score each party and president from the factor analysis and then see how this scored position correlates with its independent left-right placement by the experts. Figure 1 plots this association, along with a linear fit and 95% confidence interval.<sup>10</sup> The result provides strong, undeniable evidence that the first dimension may be interpreted as the left-right dimension of politics in Latin America, and that both parties and presidents differentiate their policies on this primary left-right axis. The high explanatory power of this first factor also serves to validate the comparability of the expert survey results across the 18 countries in our sample, since the neat pattern in Figure 1 suggests strong similarities in the clustering of issue positions across the region.

The finding of an underlying left-right dimension in Latin American politics is remarkable, given that

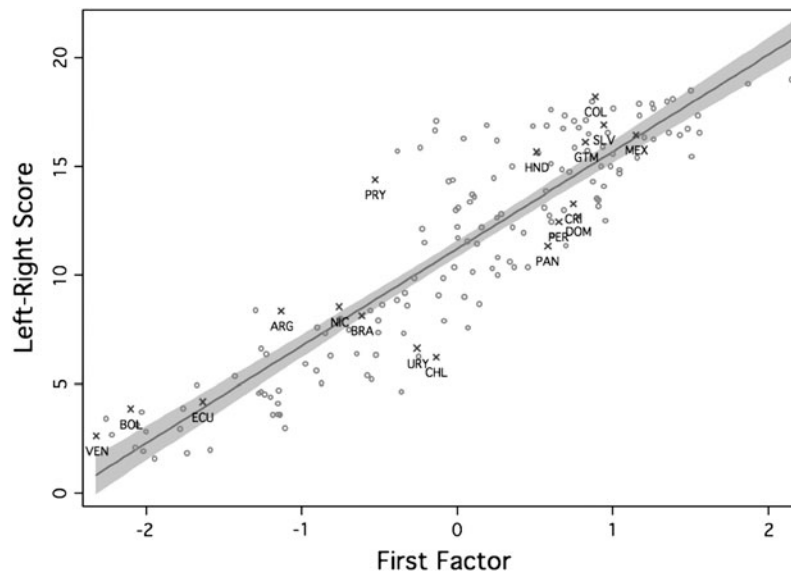
the meaning of the left-right dimension has been dismissed by some Latin American scholars, seeing parties based on primarily clientelistic and populist ties rather than an ideological basis (e.g., Mainwaring and Scully 1995). More recent elite survey data, however, has shown that political elites have a clear and coherent understanding of the ideological meaning of left and right, and that even parties who might be labeled as clientelistic are organized around ideological dimensions (Alcántara 2004; Rosas and Zechmeister 2000; Zoco 2006). Colomer (2005) further demonstrates that also most Latin American electorates are highly ideological and consistently located on the left-right divide. Our findings underscore these results based on independent, more comprehensive analysis. Positioning on traditional policy issues in Latin America corresponds quite strongly with left-right ideological positioning, and this holds true for presidents as well as parties.

### Presidential versus Party Positioning

The left-right dimension, we have shown, forms an axis of political competition along which both parties and presidents can be located. Presidential positioning, however, does seem to differ frequently from the positions of the parties that presidents may lead. In Figure 2, we directly compare presidential positions (solid circle) with those of parties (denoted by “x” symbols), highlighting the president's own party

<sup>10</sup>This regression is based on a reduced factor analysis whose results are nearly identical to Table 3, but based on party means instead of individual expert placements. The similarities in the coder-level and party-level analysis suggests that intercoder comparability is not a problem in our study.

FIGURE 1 Evidence of uni-dimensional left-right politics



*Note:* Each circle represents the estimated position of a party, each x represents a president's position (labelled with the president's country). X-axis is from a principal components factor analysis (varimax rotation), weighted by party vote share. Input variables are Taxes v. Spending, Social policy, Environment, Religion, Globalization, Privatization/Deregulation, and Decentralization.

(hollow circle). The “median” party (containing the median legislator) is indicated by a square.<sup>11</sup>

Comparing the positions of presidents to those of their parties, it is evident not only that ideological equivalence between presidents and their parties cannot be taken for granted, but also that presidential and party positions differ in a systematic way. By and large, presidents are more centrist or at least more moderate than their own parties, with exceptions to be found for Zelaya in Honduras, Garcia in Peru, and Chávez in Venezuela.<sup>12</sup> Even more systematic results can be found concerning the “median” party, indicating that the median party—as expected—forms a focal point in the legislature to which a president's position tends to be drawn. In eight countries, the president's party is equal to the median party. In the

remaining eight countries where this is not the case, with the exception of El Salvador, all presidents' left-right positions are located between the median party and their own party.<sup>13</sup> This is a striking preliminary finding, indicating that strategic incentives, tempered by institutional arrangements, appear to draw presidential policy positions toward the median legislator. The institutional demands of interbranch relations may affect presidents even more strongly than loyalty to party principles.

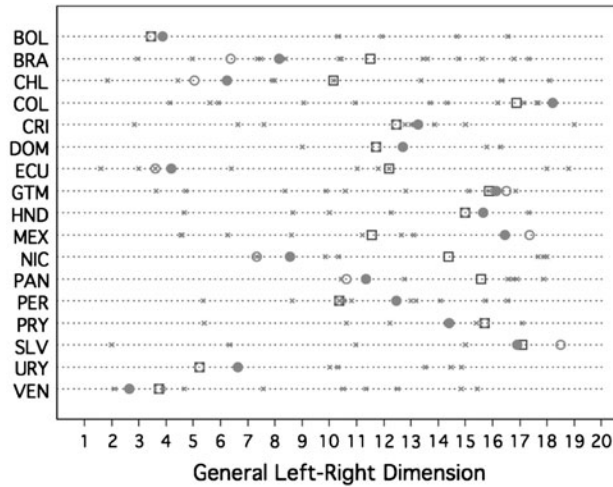
As an example, consider Menem's proposal to reform Argentinean's tax structure. Whereas during his first term, Menem found considerable backing for improving tax collection by his party, this overlap of political interests practically vanished during his second term and prevented further extensive reforms. Trading benefits for their provinces in exchange for support, MPs from Menem's party managed to dilute the bill considerably in the budget committee, resulting in a policy outcome different from that preferred by Menem (Eaton 2002). Because broad rather than narrower constituencies elect presidents, presidents typically prefer public over private goods, even more so when a reelection is at stake (Kiewit and

<sup>11</sup>This approach to identifying the median legislator is the same as used in studies that locate the median voter using election results and party placements, e.g., Adams (2001). This assumes that legislators within a party are distributed around their party's position, something that cannot be directly inferred from the expert survey estimates.

<sup>12</sup>As Colombia's president is independent and for Argentina we asked for factions, no presidential parties are indicated. Due to the boycott in 2005 by opposition parties, we calculated the median party in Venezuela with election results from 2000.

<sup>13</sup>Note however that in the case of El Salvador the president overlaps with the median party.

**FIGURE 2 Presidents and Political Parties on the General Left-Right Dimension**



Notes: Solid circles are presidents, hollow circles are presidents' parties, squares correspond to the median party positions, small x's represent other parties.

McCubbins 1991, 206).<sup>14</sup> As the Argentine example shows, accountability to different principals led to different incentives between president and party to support alternative policy outcomes.

Episodes of party versus presidential conflict are affected by many different factors, of course, and no single episode or dimension can explain them all. For a more complete explanation of these differences, we need to examine presidential and party differences in a more systematic and comprehensive model.

## Explaining Differences in Presidential and Party Positioning

So far we have established that the policy positions of presidents frequently differ from the policy positions of the parties to which the presidents belong. When these differences are great, the effectiveness of policy-making and hence democratic performance may be negatively affected. The question then is what factors give rise to these differences? Our examination of the question here draws on previous investigations into

<sup>14</sup>On the Latin American continent, only four constitutions ban the reelection of the president altogether, while five allow for immediate reelection and in the remaining countries either one or more interim terms are necessary. However, the argument here is that inherent in presidential systems is the tendency of the president to respond to national electoral demands, hence public good provision, a tendency that might be reinforced when reelection is allowed.

the performance of presidential systems, using the data from the expert survey to compare presidential and party positioning. To estimate the causal determinants of policy distance between a president and his party, we fit a linear regression of the absolute distance between presidential and presidential party positions on all issue dimensions, pooling the countries.<sup>15</sup> As independent variables we use a combination of political, institutional, and election-related quantities.<sup>16</sup>

A first explanatory factor relates to overall differences in political agenda between presidents and their parties. Apart from positioning on a dimension of policy, political actors have been shown to vary greatly in the importance they attach to different dimensions, and these differences will correspondingly shape how actors weigh decisions that relate to them (Benoit and Laver 2006). As our preliminary investigation of presidential positioning has shown, for instance, presidential positions often lie closer to the median voter than to their own party's position. A president who assigns less importance to a given dimension than his party might be correspondingly more willing to sacrifice party loyalty in exchange for electoral considerations. Conversely, if a given dimension is more important to a president than to a party, then the president might also strike a position on that dimension different from his party's. Religion might be high in importance on a president's agenda, for instance, yet relatively low in importance to the president's party. In sum, when a president disagrees with his party as to the importance of a given policy issue, he is more likely to differ from his party's position. To measure these agenda differences, we include a measure of the absolute distance in importance assigned to a dimension by presidents versus their parties. Our expectation is that greater divergence in views on the importance of a dimension will be linked to greater differences in positioning.

When presidential and legislative elections are not held concurrently, we expect the effect of agenda differences to be more pronounced, since the president is less bound by electoral concerns for his party to match closely the party's issue agenda and position taking. In concurrent elections, however, agenda differences should exert a weaker effect on separating presidential and party positions, as both the presidential

<sup>15</sup>The sample included all policy dimensions except general left-right (for which importance was not measured) for 16 presidents. Argentina was excluded because its factions complicated the clear identification of presidential parties. Colombia was excluded because the president is not formally attached to a political party.

<sup>16</sup>A list of the variables and their sources can be found in the appendix.



candidate and his party are linked to the same party label at the same time, tying the positions of both actors closer together (Laver, Benoit, and Sauger 2006). To capture these effects, we include a dummy variable indicating whether elections are concurrent, as well as the interaction of this effect with the importance difference measure. We expect not only that nonconcurrent elections will cause greater policy distances, all other things considered, but also that nonconcurrent elections will amplify the effect of the importance difference.

In contrast to most parliamentary elections in Latin American countries, presidential elections use majority runoff rules. When a second round is required between the top two candidates, presidential elections resemble the classic two candidate contest in which Downs (1957) predicts that the median voter's candidate can capture all the voters up to his ideal point and candidates will converge in their positions. Thus, facing a very different electoral contest than their own parties, presidential candidates are likely to be more moderate, and thus will differ from their party's position in order to garner the necessary votes to get into office. Such logic may also apply to legislative parties, but only if they use similar electoral systems. When legislatures are elected by proportional representation, however, parties will face weaker electoral incentives for moderation, leading to more pronounced policy differences with presidents. To control for this possible effect, we include a variable for the logged average district magnitude. The existence of large districts ensures the participation also of small parties and therefore is likely to increase party fragmentation in the legislature. Our expectation is that large districts will lead to greater differences between presidential and party positioning, given the different incentives exerted on the two different types of elected offices.

Other institutional factors that could act to decouple the president's policy positions from his party's are based on the internal structures of governance and representation within a country. Accordingly, we include a dummy variable for bicameralism to control for the concentration of legislative power and indirectly, the geographical and possibly clientelistic bias that might be associated with the different power distributions associated with bicameral systems, as in order to pass any legislation an agreement between both chambers is necessary, since each may act to veto the actions of the other (Tsebelis 1995).

More personally powerful presidents are also likely to have built up an independent base of support and thereby developed and been able to pursue

a personal policy agenda, independent of the party they lead. As a measure of the popular mandate held by the president, at least as gauged by electoral strength, we use vote margin measured as the difference in percentage points between the winner and the runner-up in the most recent election (Pérez-Liñán 2006).<sup>17</sup> We also include a measure of time the president has spent in office (measured in total days since first election) as an indicator of the longevity and hence independent power base of the president. In both cases we expect that more popular presidents and presidents who have been in power longer will exhibit greater differences in policy positions from their parties. Finally, because presidents also vary in their executive powers and hence their capacity to implement policy independently from legislative channels, we also included an index of presidential power devised by Negretto (2009), ranging from 0 (weak) to 100 (powerful). In our sample, Negretto's index varies considerably, ranging from Mexico's relatively weak president (with a value of 21.4) to a strong Brazilian president (scoring 83.1; Colombia's president scored 99.9 but was excluded from our sample for reasons already noted).

Because not just institutions, but also the political outcomes they tend to produce affect presidential autonomy we control for whether the president's party has a legislative majority. In general, unified government is seen as desirable, enhancing stability, thus the effectiveness of policymaking (Mainwaring 1993). Thus, presidents are probably more likely to align their own policy positions with majority parties, not only because these parties are the key to passing legislation but also because they contain the median legislator and represent the median voter.

The results of our estimation are shown in Table 3.<sup>18</sup> The strongest result pertains to the effects of different issue agendas as measured by differences

<sup>17</sup>The immediate goal of runoff provisions is to create clear winners with a considerable vote margin. This variable is therefore likely to proxy both, a personally powerful president and a president likely to operate in a coalitional mode. This may seem odd at first sight. Yet, it is not mutually exclusive. Only a personally powerful president may have the possibility to diverge from his party to sustain a government based on a coalition.

<sup>18</sup>From regression diagnostics we performed using *dfbeta* and *cook's D*, Ecuador and Uruguay emerged as influential outliers on the religious dimension and the social dimension respectively. However, as excluding both cases from analysis did not alter the outcomes substantively, the regression results for all 166 cases are displayed. We also tested federalism as a variable but it was very strongly correlated with bicameralism and yielded very similar results. We also estimated fixed and random country effects models, but these resulted in no results that were appreciably different from the simpler model.

in the importance that presidents and their parties attach to different policy dimensions. For each one-unit change of difference in the importance that presidents assign to a dimension versus their parties, a 0.485 increase in policy distance is observed on average, for nonconcurrent elections. This effect is dampened when elections are held simultaneously, however, in which case the effect is just 0.123 (from 0.485–0.362). We have illustrated this difference in Figure 3, plotting the predicted marginal effects of importance distance, comparing systems where elections are concurrent and where they are not. The results are clear: When presidents disagree with their party on how important an issue is, for whatever reason, they are more likely to hold a different position on that policy issue.

The variables measuring a president's independent political strength were based on the expectation that more individually powerful presidents were more likely to take positions independent of their

parties. However, the variable measuring vote margin is far from being statistically significant. Whether we interpret this variable as measuring clear mandates provided by more permissive runoff rules or as personal strength derived by a strong mandate, the margin of the victory does not matter regarding policy distance between a president and his party. The variable for length of time in office, furthermore, while statistically significant does not show substantively significant support for this expectation. Key institutional variables whose effects are consistent with our expectations are whether systems used large district magnitudes or had a bicameral legislature. Both variables were associated with an increase in the average policy distance between presidents and their parties: 0.211 for the average magnitude of districts and 0.521 for bicameralism. The differing dynamics of electoral competition appears to be an important driving force of the distance between presidential and partisan policy locations. Finally, the variable measuring whether the president's party controlled a legislative majority showed no effect that could be statistically distinguished from zero.

The results support our expectation that presidents and political parties are affected by and react differently to institutions which in turn has consequences for a president's policy stances. In other words, the constitutional structure of presidential regimes influences the relationship between the president as central figure and his political comrade-in-arms, the presidential party, in terms of policy positioning far more than previously assumed. From a theoretical point of view these results not only shed new light on the question of how "the separation or fusion of executive and legislative powers affects the fundamental activities parties undertake" (Samuels and Shugart 2006, 2), but also focus attention on how institutional and political factors interact to influence the autonomy of presidential policy in multiparty systems.

## Conclusion

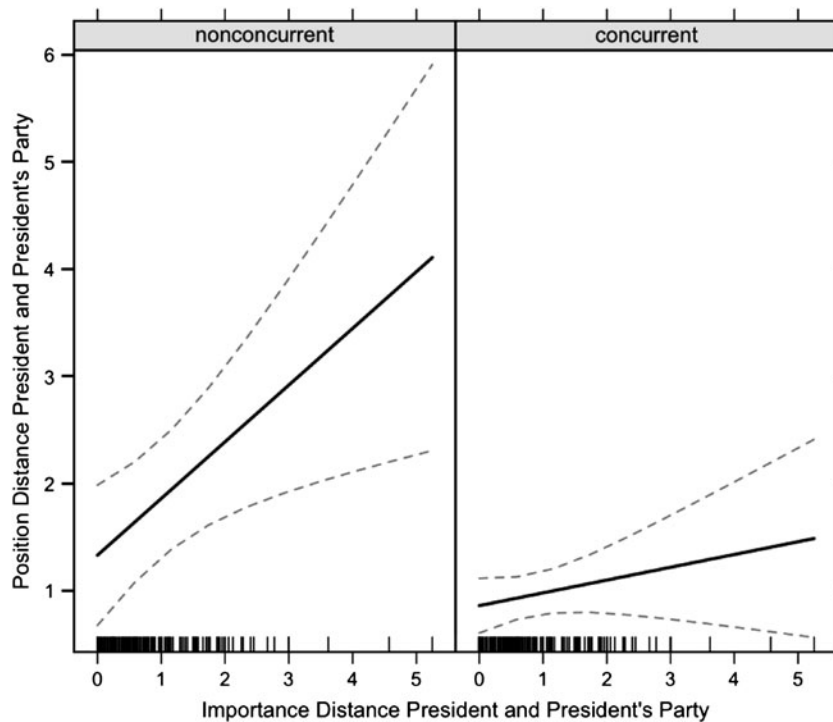
This paper presented new empirical material for 18 Latin American countries, locating the policy positions of presidents and parties in a framework that facilitates direct comparison. Our survey is the first to offer the sort of comparative placement of legislative and executive policy positions on directly comparable dimensions of policy, and the first to do so on a region-wide scale. We presented preliminary results of overall patterns of policy positioning in terms of importance and divergence on 11 policy dimensions

**TABLE 3** Explaining difference in presidential positioning versus president's own party, all policy dimensions for 18 countries

Dependent variable: Absolute difference between president's position and president's party position	
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Estimate</i>
President-party dimension importance difference	0.485*** (0.096)
Concurrent elections (0/1)	-0.595** (0.294)
Importance difference * concurrent elections	-0.362** (0.164)
Vote margin	0.008 (0.018)
President's days in office	-0.001*** (0.000)
Average district magnitude (ln)	0.211** (0.106)
Bicameralism (0/1)	0.521*** (0.183)
Legislative majority (0/1)	-0.135 (0.222)
Presidential power	0.013*** (0.005)
Constant	0.805** (0.381)
Observations	166
Adjusted R-squared	0.18
Root MSE	1.01

Robust standard errors in parentheses  
\*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\* $p < 0.05$ , \* $p < 0.1$

**FIGURE 3** Marginal Effects of Importance Distance on Positional Distance, President versus President's Party



Notes: Data are marginal effects from Table 4; the dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals.

and showed that the policy space throughout the region neatly reduces to one single dimension. Actual positioning on potentially separable political dimensions tends to bundle along a single underlying axis of left and right ideological positioning, even in systems with many parties. In and of itself, this empirical finding based on our expert surveys of positioning on low-level policy dimensions should be of considerable interest for the comparative study of political competition in Latin America.

Our main focus compares the positions that presidents adopt relative to legislative parties, and specifically relative to their own parties. Empirical research to date has largely neglected—principally due to data shortcomings—the president as autonomous policy actor in multiparty settings. We show that presidential positioning on policy frequently differs from party positioning and furthermore that this variation follows a systematic pattern as presidents generally appear to be drawn to the median legislator. When the median legislator is not from the president's own party, our findings indicate, then party positions and ideological cues from elections—echoing the conclusions of Johnson and Crisp (2003, 138)—make poor predictors of the policy priorities that presidents will adopt

once in office. Rather political factors, coupled with institutional arrangements, largely explain the degree to which presidential policy positions are decoupled from their party's preferences. On the political side, presidents tend to diverge from their party's position on policy issues whose importance they view differently than their party views them. On the institutional side, large districts and bicameral legislatures tend also to increase president-party divergence on policy. Significantly, when elections are held concurrently, the incentive for presidents to diverge from their parties' positions on issues to which they assign different importance is sharply reduced. Political factors provide incentives for more independent presidential position taking, therefore, but institutional factors influence how presidents respond to these incentives.

Our findings therefore echo several often-made policy recommendations in the design of presidential systems. Typically, simultaneous elections of both branches has been embraced as a means to enhance governability in presidential democracies as it frequently provides the president with a comfortable majority held by his own party and may also bring the two actors closer together. However, such

recommendations rely on the assumption that a president will automatically get the support from his own party and that the interests between both actors are aligned. Although we might expect less policy distance between the two actors in concurrent elections, our results show that the status of holding a legislative majority does not automatically reduce the distance between the president and his own party.

While our findings address only part of the puzzle of executive-legislative relations in presidential systems, they touch on important issues from the ongoing discussion that revolve around the alleged inferiority of presidential systems in terms of democratic regime survival or of a “deficit of democratic authenticity” (Conaghan 1996, 43) caused by autonomous presidential policy agendas. Our investigation has yielded new insight on president and party differences through the collection of new data and explained these differences as a combination of political factors, amplified or mitigated by specific institutional characteristics. We leave it to future work whether this amounts to struggle between presidents and legislators. For instance, in late 2007, the Uruguayan president Tabaré Vázquez made clear that he would immediately veto a bill aimed at legalization of first-trimester abortion. Vázquez even threatened to dissolve the chamber should it override his veto, even though his own coalition party had introduced the bill. On the other hand, the presidential drift towards the median legislator, his divergence from his party’s platform in nonconcurrent elections, when he probably faces a hostile majority in congress and in the case of strong regional legislative representation may indicate the contrary. Presidents may find themselves confronted with situations where they have to make this strategic decision in order to realize policy objectives and are thus led to compromise.

The presidential tendency to position himself closer to the median party suggests a built-in tendency for coalition building in presidential systems that runs counter to many arguments advanced against presidential institutions (e.g., Cheibub 2007; Negretto 2006). Using a high-dimensional approach, our dataset provides the means for future research to test such propositions and to study more effectively political competition, coalition formation, and legislative success in presidential regimes. Future work could delve deeper into the process of party and presidential positioning on policy, focusing specifically on the median voter and voter propensity to respond to ticket-splitting appeals, given differences in the electoral incentives confronting executive

and legislative candidates. Such work would require individual-level data to be combined with data on party and presidential positioning, yet would complete the third part of the triangular model of policy positioning and representation to which here we have added only the second side.

## Acknowledgments

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2007 V *Congreso Europeo CEISAL de Latinoamericanistas* in Brussels. We would like to thank Marina McGale, Maren Peters, Christina Fritz, Jale Tosun, and Thomas Däubler for research assistance; and our reviewers for helpful comments. Kenneth Benoit thanks the Irish Research Council for Humanities and the Social Sciences for support through Government of Ireland Research Fellowship in 2006–2007, and the Institute for International Integration Studies for additional research support.

*Manuscript submitted 28 February 2008*

*Manuscript accepted for publication 25 November 2008*

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