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Harbers, I.; de Vries, C.E.; Steenbergen, M.R.

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Attitude Variability Among Latin American Publics: How Party System Structuration Affects Left/Right Ideology

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Imke Harbers¹, Catherine E. de Vries², and
Marco R. Steenbergen³

Abstract

Political scientists often describe party competition, political behavior or public preferences in left/right terms. Nevertheless, the usefulness of the concepts “left” or “right” is rarely explored. This study assesses whether the left/right continuum resonates with publics in developing Latin American democracies. Using data from the 2008 wave of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), the authors measure variability in left/right self-placement in three Latin American countries, namely, Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile. Building on the approach developed by Alvarez and Brehm for public opinion in the United States, the authors explore (a) the extent to which voters in Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile possess predictable left/right positions and (b) whether predictability can be attributed to individual- and country-level characteristics. At the individual level, the authors show that variability decreases with political sophistication. At the country level, they find that a lower degree of programmatic party system structuration leads to higher levels of response variation. Mapping the variability in left/right preferences

¹University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, Netherlands

²University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

³University of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland

Corresponding Author:

Imke Harbers, University of Amsterdam, Political Science, Oudezijds Achterburgwal 237, 1012 DL Amsterdam, Netherlands.

Email: i.harbers@uva.nl

provides important insights into the structure of public opinion and contours of political behavior in Latin America and how they differ from those of other regions such as North America. In addition, this study brings to bear important new individual-level insights into recent political developments in the Latin American region, especially the so-called left turn in Latin American politics.

Keywords

Latin America, left/right ideology, public opinion, response variation, party system structuration

Political positions and preferences are often expressed in left/right terms. Although left/right semantics have been found to provide significant leverage in the study of politics in Western Europe, the usefulness of these concepts in the developing democracies of Latin America remains highly contentious. Many observers have pointed out that one key characteristic of democracies in Latin America is the relative weakness of the left/right dimension as a functional homogenizing cleavage (e.g., Dix, 1989; Roberts, 2002), whereas other mechanisms—such as clientelism, patronage, and personalized politics—play a much more important role in linking voters to parties (e.g., Levitsky, 2003). Yet despite the widespread skepticism about the usefulness of left/right labels in the region, the terms continue to be used frequently not only by academics but also by commentators and political elites. This paradox has recently become evident in the debate about Latin America's "left turn," which has brought to power a series of governments, whose policy preferences are considered to be leftist. The election of these governments has led to a discussion about the underlying causes of this regionwide trend. Have electorates shifted massively to the left? How stable and durable will this shift be? We aim to contribute to the discussion through an analysis of the strength of attitudes underlying left/right self-placement in the electorate.

Building on the approach developed by Alvarez and Brehm (1995, 1998, 2002) for public opinion in the United States, this study seeks to make two contributions. First, we explore whether the left/right dimension resonates with Latin American citizens. More specifically, we analyze the extent to which voters in Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile possess predictable left/right positions. Discussions about shifts to the left of mass publics are useful only to the degree that survey responses reflect stable dispositions. This is captured by our notion of response variability. Second, we examine how personal predispositions and characteristics of the political environment influence variability in left/right

self-placement. At the individual level, we focus on political sophistication, which we capture by four important components: attention to the news, political interest, political involvement, and political efficacy. We find that more sophisticated voters exhibit lower levels of response variation. In addition, we expect to find considerable between-country variation in terms of response variability. We show that a lower degree of programmatic party system structuration leads to higher levels of response variation.

The remainder of the study is organized as follows. In the next section, we briefly review the literature on the left/right dimension in Latin America and introduce the concept of response variability employed in this study. Subsequently, we present our theoretical expectations regarding the factors both at the individual level and at the contextual level that influence the degree of response variability on left/right attitudes in Latin America. After outlining the data, method, and operationalizations, we present the empirical results. We conclude by drawing several general lessons from our analysis and elaborate on the important implications of our analysis for the recent political developments in the Latin American region.

Theoretical Framework: Attitude Formation and the Left/Right Dimension in Latin America

Studies of political competition in Latin America tend to emphasize mechanisms other than ideology, such as clientelism and personalism, as explanations for voter-party linkages. Therefore, most scholars exhibit a healthy skepticism toward the idea that the left/right dimension constitutes a homogenizing functional cleavage in the region. Yet the policy orientations of politicians and parties are commonly described in left/right terms. This is most evident in the recent debate about the so-called left turn in Latin American politics. The resurgence of the left has been attributed at least in part to changing attitudes in the electorate. Drawing on data from the 2004 and 2006 waves of the AmericasBarometer, Seligson (2007, p. 84) contends that public opinion across the region has shifted noticeably to the left. Cleary (2006) also argues that the persistence of poverty and inequality after neoliberal reforms has created favorable conditions for “a socioeconomic cleavage in which the median voter supports the radical redistribution of wealth” (p. 37). Moreover, as the memory of authoritarian regimes has faded, voters have become less prone to the kind of self-censorship associated with the transition period, where votes for left-wing candidates were perceived as a threat to democratic stability (Cleary, 2006, p. 41). In light of these changes, the expectation is that the “leftward shift in electoral competition will endure” (Cleary, 2006, p. 36).

Whether the shift to the left is likely to endure, however, arguably depends on voters' attitudes underlying this shift. So far, left/right attitudes in the electorate have received scant attention, and how stable ideological preferences are remains unclear. Much of the empirical literature on left/right attitudes focuses on the way in which elites make use of these concepts (e.g., Alcántara Sáez, 2008; Kitschelt, Hawkins, Luna, Rosas, & Zechmeister, 2010). At the elite level, there is considerable evidence that programmatic and partisan differences in a number of Latin American countries coincide with common notions of left/right (e.g., Martí i Puig & Santiuste Cué, 2008). In an expert survey of party positions in 18 Latin American democracies, Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009) also find support for the notion of an underlying left/right dimension of political competition.

Studies of left/right attitudes in the electorate are relatively rare. One notable exception is the work by Zechmeister (2006) on Mexico and Argentina. Drawing on Q-sort methods, she explores the meaning citizens attribute to left/right labels and shows how the interpretations of these labels vary across individuals and contexts. At the individual level, political sophistication influences the understanding of left/right. More sophisticated individuals understand ideological labels in ways closely related to dominant academic conceptions. At the contextual level, elite packaging shapes the degree to which partisan identities are conceived in left/right terms. Mexican elites make more use of left/right semantics than Argentine elites and voters in Mexico have a clearer understanding of ideological labels than Argentine voters. The time-consuming nature of Q-sort methodology makes this technique unsuitable for the analysis of large groups, and Zechmeister's study is limited to a relatively small sample of university students (109 students in Mexico City and 117 students in Buenos Aires). Yet Zechmeister and Corral's (2010) analysis of data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) echoes the importance of individual and contextual characteristics for the substantive meaning citizens attribute to left/right semantics. Thus, extant studies of left/right attitudes in Latin America suggest that the degree to which ideological labels resonate with voters may vary across individuals and contexts. This expectation can be substantiated by the theoretical literature on response variability, which is what we turn to next.

The Concept of Response Variability

This section defines the concept of response variability used in this study and provides an overview of ongoing work on this topic.¹ For nearly eight decades now, sample surveys have been the empirical backbone of public

opinion research. Posing questions to a randomly selected subset of citizens is the essential tool that allows researchers a glimpse of the collective preferences of the mass public. But what exactly drives the survey response? For years, the answer to this question has been that survey responses are driven by a fixed, albeit unobservable, attitude plus random measurement error that is the result of the imprecision of survey items (e.g., Achen, 1975). The key assumption here is that the attitude is a fixed point on a continuum. Thus, any and all response variation is a case of measurement error.

Recently, however, many public opinion scholars have moved away from the notion that attitudes are fixed points. At least three strands of theory lead one to conceptualize attitudes as inherently variable qualities. First, the evaluative space model of Cacioppo, Gardner, and Berntson (1997) calls attention to the possibility that individuals are ambivalent, that is, simultaneously like and dislike an attitude object. In this theory, the complete attitude is defined not as a single point but as a pair of points that characterize the intensity of liking and disliking, respectively. This introduces an element of variability into the attitude.

Second, Feldman and Zaller have conceptualized attitudes as distributions of considerations (Feldman, 1995; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). To the extent that considerations vary in their evaluative implications, this automatically introduces variability into the attitude concept. In the extreme case, the attitude may be characterized by considerations with opposing evaluative implications, in which case the attitude is again characterized by ambivalence. Feldman and Zaller explicitly link their characterization of attitudes to the survey response by introducing the idea of sampling. When an individual answers a survey question, they argue, a person will engage in “top-of-the-head” responding. This means that he or she samples at best a few considerations. Since the individual may draw different samples at different times, the expressed opinion will not always come out identical. Thus, response variation is a direct consequence of the nature of attitudes.

Third, in a similar vein, Alvarez and Brehm (2002) argue that citizens possess multiple predispositions, which may be either conflicting (ambivalence) or reconciled (equivocation). In the case of ambivalence, response variability should be greater, whereas it should be smaller in the case of equivocation. In addition, Alvarez and Brehm see a key role for information. A lack of attitudinally relevant information induces uncertainty, which in turn increases response variation (also see Alvarez & Brehm, 1995, 1997, 1998, 2002).

The three theoretical approaches outlined here share as a common element that response variation reflects not merely measurement error but, of importance, also qualities of the underlying attitudes themselves. We adopt this

perspective here as well. Indeed, it is precisely because of its attitudinal sources that response variability is of theoretical interest instead of a phenomenon that is merely of methodological concern.

In the present context, response variability is of interest for understanding left/right self-placement in Latin America. Although political preferences in modern democracies are often expressed in left/right terms, the usefulness of these concepts in the developing democracies of Latin America remains highly debatable. Consequently, our analysis of whether the left/right continuum shapes public opinion in three Latin American countries, that is, Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile, is crucial for understanding the extent to which left/right actually really structures attitudes and behavior of Latin American publics and how this may vary across countries. Expectations in this regard are what we turn to now.

Explaining Response Variability: The Role of Political Sophistication and System Structuration

To understand the sources of response variability, we conceptualize public opinion regarding left/right ideology as a cueing process. More specifically, we expect left/right ideology to be a sufficiently complex topic that citizens require clear attitudinal cues from the political environment and/or personal knowledge to determine their own ideological stance. Thus, the degree of response variability is influenced by factors at the individual and country levels. The general expectation is that the clearer the cues are and/or the more sophisticated a person is, the better able he or she will be to form a coherent attitude and the less variable his or her expressed opinions will be. The availability of cues as well as the consistency between cues play central roles in predicting response variation. We should elaborate on these points, as they form the crux of our theory of response variation. We believe opinions to be most variable when there is not enough information to form a coherent attitude. Thus, a lack of cues or sophistication will make survey responses less predictable.

In terms of personal predispositions, we expect the degree of political sophistication of respondents to be crucial. We understand political sophistication as the store of political information available to an individual to be called on when making judgments or decisions. In most political systems there is considerable variation in this respect among the public (Converse, 1962, 1964; Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1987), and these differences affect the ways in which people take up and make use of information (also see Zaller, 1992). When studying the moderating influence of political

sophistication, scholars often distinguish between several types of political sophistication, such as political attentiveness, interest, or knowledge (see, e.g., Luskin, 1987). Because of the fact that not much research into the role of political sophistication exists in Latin America (but see Zechmeister, 2006), we aim for a broad conceptualization of the concept. Specifically, we look at four sources of political sophistication: attention to the news, political interest, political involvement, and political efficacy. We expect that more sophisticated voters, that is, respondents who pay more attention to, are more interested and active in political life, or feel more politically self-confident, exhibit lower levels of response variation. All these expectations are derived from the idea that when a person is more politically sophisticated, he or she has a higher aptitude to form a more well-defined (crystallized) attitude about politics (McGraw & Pinney, 1990). Even if media or political elites provide political information, the availability of cues alone is not enough to reduce response variation, as cue integration also matters (Rosenberg, 1988). It is likely that politically informed and active citizens are in a better position to integrate various elite cues, which as a result reduces response variability.² Thus, our first hypothesis relates to the effect of personal predispositions on the extent of response variability:

Political sophistication hypothesis: Higher degrees of political sophistication are negatively related to response variation in left/right self-placements.

To form political attitudes, citizens draw on cues from their political environment. The extent to which political elites communicate political choices in terms of left/right terminology and whether they use these terms consistently therefore play key roles in the process of attitude formation. Among Latin American countries, there is considerable variation in the degree to which party systems are programmatically structured. Kitschelt et al. (2010) distinguish between the substantive and symbolic components of left/right semantics among political elites. The symbolic component reflects whether political groups, such as political parties, share a common left/right identity, whereas the substantive component indicates whether left/right semantics are congruent with policy stances. Where neither component is strong, left/right semantics do not help citizens to distinguish between political choices. The political environment therefore does not provide sufficient cues to citizens to formulate predictable left/right attitudes.

Drawing on legislators' self-placement on a 10-point ideological scale, Kitschelt et al. (2010, chap. 3) analyze the strength of substantive and

symbolic components of left/right semantics among parliamentary elites in 12 Latin American countries. The analysis reveals considerable cross-country variation in the degree to which Latin American elites make consistent use of left/right labels. We draw our cases from the extremes and middle of Kitschelt et al.'s (2010) country ordering of the substantive component and compare response variability in a country with high elite structuration (Chile), medium elite structuration (Mexico), and low elite structuration (Ecuador).³ Our second hypothesis relates to the effect of the political environment on response variability:

System structuration hypothesis: Higher degrees of system structuration are negatively related to response variation in left/right self-placements. More specifically, we expect response variability to be lower in Chile than in Ecuador and Mexico.

Data, Method, and Operationalizations

Data

The data used in this study are derived from the 2008 wave of LAPOP.⁴ The LAPOP project consists of a collection of public opinion data from more than 20 countries in the Americas. These opinion surveys include measures on political attitudes and behavior of Latin American publics based on national probability samples of voting age adults. In this study, we include the data from Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile from the 2008 round of the surveys. The Ecuadorian survey includes 3,000 respondents, the Mexican 1,576, and the Chilean 1,527.

Model

We estimate Harvey's (1976) heteroscedastic regression model to test our expectations regarding variability on respondents' left/right attitudes in Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile. This model informed the model of response variation discussed by Alvarez and Brehm (1995, 1997, 1998, 2002) and has recently been used to explore the predictability of political attitudes in Eastern and Western Europe (see Steenbergen & de Vries, in press). Let y_i denote individual i 's response on a question concerning his or her left/right self-placement. Furthermore, let x_i be a vector of covariates that drive the individual's average response tendency on the question. Furthermore, let ε_i

denote deviations from the average response. Finally, let z_i denote a vector of covariates that drive the size of the deviations. Then, the heteroscedastic regression model may be formulated in the following way:

$$\begin{aligned} y_i &= x_i^T \beta + \varepsilon_i \\ \varepsilon_i &\sim N(0, \sigma_i^2) \\ \sigma_i^2 &= \exp(z_i^T \gamma) \end{aligned}$$

Here β and γ are vectors of regression coefficients. Note that γ includes a constant. If all other elements of this vector are simultaneously zero, then the variance model reduces to $\exp(\gamma_0)$ and we obtain the classical linear regression model with homoscedastic errors.

In our analysis, we include the following elements in x_i : income, ethnic identity, rural (vs. urban) residence, religious denomination, church attendance, gender, union membership, age (linear and squared), education (linear and squared), and satisfaction with democracy. The vector z_i includes attention to news reporting, political interest, political involvement, political efficacy, and two dummy variables for Ecuador and Mexico since we expect an overall higher response variability for Ecuadorian and Mexican respondents in terms of their left/right self-placement.

Operationalizations

The dependent variable employed in this study is a respondent's self-placement on a scale that runs from 1 (*left*) to 10 (*right*). Thus, higher values imply that a respondent views himself or herself as more right-wing. It is worth pointing out that the survey question explicitly leaves the interpretation of the concepts up to the respondent. Our emphasis in this study is on the variability of survey responses, rather than on the meaning citizens attribute to left/right semantics. To derive a measure of response variability of these left/right placements, we first have to estimate a mean model with individual characteristics, which may influence the left/right orientation of respondents. So far, the determinants of left/right self-placement have received scant attention in the cross-national literature on Latin America. To identify relevant individual level characteristics, we therefore draw on two related bodies of literature. First, we make use of extant work on left/right self-placement in other parts of the world. Second, we draw on the Latin American literature about the demographic determinants of related political attitudes, such as support for privatization and for specific political parties.

We include a range of individual-level predictors in this model. The first explanation of left/right self-placements in Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile is a respondent's income level. In advanced industrial democracies, higher incomes tend to be associated with right-wing attitudes (see Rush, 1967). Recent work on left-wing parties in Latin America has shown that such parties tend to favor social justice and economic policies that benefit the poor (e.g., Panizza, 2005). We expect respondents with higher household incomes to be more reluctant toward redistributive policies and thus to hold more right-wing attitudes. The income variable taps into the household income, divides the sample into income deciles and ranges from 0 (*no income*) to 10 (*highest income category*).

The rise of ethnic political parties has highlighted the importance of ethnicity for electoral politics in Latin America. Ethnicity has been shown to influence a variety of political attitudes. Even though parties like the Movement Towards Socialism in Bolivia and Pachakutik in Ecuador draw support from different ethnic groups, citizens that self-identify as indigenous or mestizo are significantly more likely to support these parties than those that self-identify as White (Madrid, 2008). This is relevant for our purposes because these parties are generally considered left-wing parties and their supporters tend to view themselves as leftists. Conversely, White respondents are more likely to view themselves as right-wing than citizens from other ethnic groups (Basáñez & Parás, 2001). The survey item included in our analysis asks respondents with which ethnic group they identify most. Six ethnic identities were separated: (a) White, (b) mestizo, (c) indigenous, (d) Black, (e) mulatto, and (f) other ethnic identity.

Third, we take into account religious beliefs because research on Chile in the early 1990s suggests that Protestants hold more right-wing political views than do Catholics (Steigenga & Coleman, 1995). We include dummies in our model for Catholics and Evangelicals. Nonbelievers and respondents belonging to other religious groups are coded 0. In addition to denomination, we also include church attendance, that is, the frequency with which respondents go to religious services.

The fifth variable included in our mean model reflects membership in trade unions, and union membership is expected to be associated with more leftist attitudes. We measure union membership through a dummy variable, where a positive score indicates that the respondent has attended union meetings.⁵ The sixth predictor in our mean model is support for democracy. We expect respondents who agree with the statement "democracy is better than all other forms of government" to hold more left-wing attitudes. This expectation is based on the idea developed mostly within the context of industrial

democracies that authoritarian attitudes are mostly associated with the political right, whereas attitudes supportive of democratic rule or deepening of democratic values are favorable for the development of more left-wing attitudes (see, e.g., Dalton, 1996; Inglehart, 1977). Support for democracy is measured through a dummy variable where 1 indicates agreement.

As additional demographic variables, we include urban versus rural residence, gender, age, and education, all of which have been shown to affect political attitudes in a large number of studies in Latin America and beyond. Urban versus rural residence is measured by a dummy variable, where 1 stands for rural and 0 for urban. On the gender variable, women are coded as 1 and men as 0. With regard to age, we include both a linear and a curvilinear effect. One could argue that older population strata are likely to hold more conservative political attitudes, while at the same time it may be the case that the younger and the older generations are more left-leaning in terms of their political views as they are more dependent on the state for obtaining public goods such as education and health care (which would point at a curvilinear effect). Education, the final predictor, is operationalized as the years a respondent spent in school and ranges between a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 18 years. We expect more left-wing political orientations among the more highly educated parts of the population. We also estimate a curvilinear effect of education on left/right self-placement since we could also expect respondents with no or low levels of formal education to be more left-wing because of their precarious socioeconomic status. To account for this possibility we added education as a squared term as well.

The variance model includes measures of political sophistication of the individual as well as two dummy variables indicating if respondents reside in Ecuador or Mexico. We operationalize a respondent's degree of political sophistication using four different measures. The first taps into how often a respondent listens to news on the radio and varies between 1 (never) and 4 (every day). As a second measure of political sophistication, we include a respondent's level of political interest, which ranges between 1 (*no interest in politics*) and 4 (*a lot of interest*). Third, we include an item measuring the degree to which a respondent is involved in politics by means of asking if he or she ever attends political rallies ((1=never to 4=once a week). Fourth, we include a measure of voters' political efficacy, which is based on responses to the following statement: "I have a good understanding of the most important political issues facing my country." Respondents characterized by a high level of political efficacy are those indicating that they fully agree with this statement.

Empirical Analysis

Mean Model

Our emphasis in this study is on the variability of left/right opinions. Before exploring this topic, however, we should spend a brief moment discussing the results from the mean model. Here, several individual differences manifest themselves, as can be seen in Table 1. Overall, we find mixed evidence for our expectations. We fail to find any effects of income, gender, urban residency, church attendance, age, or support for democracy on the left/right self-placement of Chilean, Mexican, and Ecuadorian respondents. The coefficients for each of these variables are in the expected directions, for example, respondents earning higher household incomes hold more right-wing attitudes, but they fail to pass conventional significance levels. Which factors do affect left/right ideology? In the case of ethnic identity, we find more empirical support for our expectations. Throughout Latin America ethnicity has proven to be important for understanding political attitudes. Our results support this view. We find that citizens who self-identify as indigenous, mestizo, or mulatto are significantly more likely to hold left-wing views than the reference category, respondents who self-identify as White. This is in line with the idea that these ethnic groups are supporters of more left-wing parties and will thus identify more with left-wing views.

Another individual factor that influences respondents' left/right self-placement is the degree of formal education. We find more left-wing political orientations among the more highly educated parts of the population, which is in line with our expectations. That said, we find no evidence of education having a curvilinear effect. We formulated the expectation that respondents with no or low levels of formal education would be more left-wing because of their precarious socioeconomic status. This expectation is not supported by the Chilean, Mexican, and Ecuadorian data. Religion matters for left/right self-placement as well. Both Catholics as well as Evangelicals are more right-wing compared to respondents holding no religious beliefs or those who identify with other religious groups, but only the effect for Catholics reaches statistical significance. Finally, we find that respondents who attend union meetings hold more left-wing political attitudes. This finding is in line with our theoretical expectations.

Table 1 provides the estimates based on a pooled analysis, which combines the Chilean, Ecuadorian, and Mexican data. It is of course possible that some of the explanations for left/right self-placements vary across country contexts. To check for possible causal heterogeneity, we also ran both the mean and individual-level variance model for each of the three countries separately. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Heteroscedastic Regression Model for Left/Right Self-Placements.

	B	SE	Prob > z
Mean model			
Bottom income decile, 1%–10%	0.595	0.517	0.250
11%–20%	0.227	0.505	0.653
21%–30%	0.342	0.505	0.497
31%–40%	0.259	0.506	0.609
41%–50%	0.465	0.506	0.358
51%–60%	0.359	0.513	0.484
61%–70%	0.551	0.525	0.294
71%–80%	−0.656	0.536	0.221
81%–90%	−0.630	0.540	0.243
Top income decile, 91%–100%	−0.784	0.551	0.155
Mestizo	−0.257	0.091	0.005
Indigenous	−0.536	0.173	0.002
Black	0.015	0.337	0.964
Mulatto	0.834	0.354	0.019
Other ethnic identity	−0.457	0.442	0.302
Catholic	0.313	0.113	0.005
Evangelical	0.223	0.166	0.181
Church attendance	0.093	0.078	0.236
Union membership	−0.231	0.141	0.101
Support for democracy	−0.014	0.023	0.553
Rural	0.002	0.087	0.980
Gender	−0.049	0.076	0.517
Age	0.001	0.013	0.924
Age squared	0.000	0.000	0.720
Education	−0.075	0.038	0.049
Education squared	0.001	0.002	0.572
Constant (at baseline)	5.786	0.619	0.000
Variance model			
Attention to news	−0.041	0.024	0.093
Political interest	−0.085	0.030	0.005
Attend political rallies	−0.040	0.051	0.433
Political efficacy	−0.037	0.016	0.022
Ecuador	0.218	0.067	0.002
Mexico	0.198	0.074	0.008
Constant	1.897	0.237	0.000
N		3,830	
Log likelihood		−8640.258	

Table entries are maximum likelihood heteroscedastic regression estimates and their standard errors. Respondents with no income are the reference category for the income variable. White respondents are the reference category for ethnic identity. Respondents without religious beliefs and those identifying with other religious groups are the reference category for religious identity.

Table 2. Heteroscedastic Regression Model for Left/Right Self-Placements for Ecuador, Mexico, and Chile Separately.

	Ecuador				Mexico				Chile			
	B	SE	Prob > z	B	SE	Prob > z	B	SE	Prob > z	B	SE	Prob > z
Mean model												
Bottom income decile, 1%–10 %	-2.116	0.719	0.003	-0.412	1.303	0.752	-0.774	0.708	0.275			
11%–20%	-1.120	0.676	0.076	-0.648	1.294	0.617	-0.929	0.708	0.189			
21%–30%	-1.412	0.659	0.032	-0.569	1.295	0.660	-0.897	0.714	0.209			
31%–40%	-1.077	0.659	0.102	-0.389	1.298	0.765	-0.661	0.730	0.365			
41%–50%	-0.175	0.662	0.076	-0.086	1.299	0.947	-0.360	0.727	0.621			
51%–60%	-1.264	0.677	0.062	-0.642	1.302	0.662	-0.706	0.752	0.348			
61%–70%	-0.803	0.719	0.264	0.187	1.305	0.886	-0.524	0.814	0.519			
71%–80%	0.425	0.771	0.581	0.279	1.319	0.832	0.718	0.775	0.355			
81%–90%	1.845	0.849	0.030	0.012	1.380	0.993	0.805	0.744	0.279			
Top income decile, 91%–100%	0.278	1.396	0.842	0.719	1.360	0.597	0.785	0.748	0.294			
Mestizo	-0.263	0.226	0.244	-0.071	0.164	0.664	-0.298	0.142	0.036			
Indigenous	-0.719	0.367	0.050	-0.449	0.329	0.173	-0.314	0.237	0.185			
Black	0.037	0.436	0.933	1.246	0.979	0.203	0.423	0.378	0.263			
Mulatto	1.290	0.506	0.011	0.417	0.488	0.392	0.039	0.453	0.931			
Other ethnic identity	-3.190	0.323	0.000	0.340	0.126	0.007	-1.406	0.675	0.037			
Catholic	0.071	0.202	0.726	-0.222	0.526	0.672	0.541	0.165	0.001			
Evangelical	0.073	0.288	0.801	0.105	0.215	0.624	0.329	0.231	0.155			
Church attendance	0.047	0.119	0.691	0.105	0.148	0.480	0.267	0.158	0.091			
Union membership	-0.258	0.210	0.218	-0.340	0.165	0.370	-0.066	0.268	0.807			
Support for democracy	-0.087	0.035	0.014	-0.186	0.042	0.000	-0.110	0.042	0.009			
Rural	0.219	0.120	0.068	0.305	0.167	0.067	0.327	0.196	0.094			

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

	Ecuador				Mexico				Chile			
	B	SE	Prob > z	B	SE	Prob > z	B	SE	Prob > z	B	SE	Prob > z
Gender	-0.048	0.114	0.676	-0.130	0.145	0.370	-0.296	0.142	0.037			
Age	0.020	0.021	0.360	0.011	0.024	0.642	0.015	0.022	0.485			
Age squared	0.000	0.000	0.461	0.000	0.000	0.801	0.000	0.000	0.375			
Education	-0.090	0.068	0.188	-0.017	0.064	0.787	-0.152	0.070	0.031			
Education squared	0.001	0.003	0.636	0.001	0.003	0.702	0.006	0.004	0.069			
Constant (at baseline)	6.218	0.930	0.000	4.326	1.430	0.002	6.803	0.941	0.000			
Variance model												
Attention to news	-0.075	0.036	0.039	-0.036	0.045	0.424	-0.076	0.048	0.112			
Political interest	-0.105	0.044	0.016	-0.020	0.060	0.736	-0.122	0.063	0.049			
Attend political rallies	-0.023	0.073	0.753	-0.019	0.091	0.836	-0.230	0.125	0.067			
Political efficacy	-0.006	0.025	0.823	-0.027	0.029	0.334	-0.066	0.032	0.042			
Constant	2.325	0.540	0.000	1.919	0.311	0.000	1.505	0.393	0.000			
N		1,753			1,067			1,010				
Log likelihood		-3978.109			-2401.244			-2175.089				

Table entries are maximum likelihood heteroscedastic regression estimates and their standard errors. Respondents with no income are the reference category for the income variable. White respondents are the reference category for ethnic identity. Respondents without religious beliefs and those identifying with other religious groups are the reference category for religious identity.

When we compare the mean model results for these three countries, it becomes clear that our findings are robust across the different country contexts. We find three real differences between the mean models, namely that Mexican respondents who are Catholic hold more leftwing attitudes and that Mexican respondents who are in the 61%-70% income decile or self-identify as "other ethnic group" hold more rightwing attitudes whereas we find the opposite pattern for Ecuadorians and Chileans. This being said, however, only the effect for respondents identifying with an "other ethnic group" reaches conventional levels of statistical significance in all three countries under investigation.

Variance Model

Most important for our purposes is the variance model. The results of the variance model pooled across the country contexts are reported in Table 1, whereas Table 2 provides these findings broken down by country. We find evidence for the political sophistication hypothesis, but not uniformly. The effect of attending political rallies is neither statistically significant nor sizable. The remaining predictors are statistically significant and reveal interesting patterns. First, consider the effect of media attention. Here, we observe a negative effect, meaning that response variation tends to be lower for respondents who pay attention to news on the radio. For a one-unit increase in media attention, we find that response variation decreases by a factor of almost -0.041 , but this effect is barely statistically significant ($p < .093$, two-tailed). More sizable is the effect of political interest. We find that respondents who have a higher degree of political interest have better crystallized attitudes when it comes to left/right ideology. The coefficient for political efficacy is also in the expected negative direction, indicating that higher levels of political self-confidence lead to less response variability. The direction of these effects is robust when we inspect the results for each country separately provided in Table 2. We do find differences in the statistical significance, but these are likely the result of differences in sample sizes.

Moving next to the system structuration effect, the results presented in Table 1 are in line with our system structuration hypothesis. The dummy variables for Ecuador and Mexico are positive and statistically significant, indicating that in a political system characterized by low or medium structuration, response variation in left/right self-placements is higher compared to Chile, which is characterized by a high level of party structuration. In addition, we find that the effect of the Ecuador dummy is more sizable than the one for Mexico, albeit only slightly so. This indicates that Ecuadorian respondents

residing in the context with the least party system structuration display the most response variation on left/right self-placements. This result is also supported when we inspect for each of the three countries separately the constants of the variance models, which are displayed in Table 2. The constant of the variance model in Ecuador is highest, followed by Mexico, and is the lowest for Chile. This is in line with our expectation that attitude variability in terms of left/right ideology is higher when the degree of party system structuration is low. It is important to note that these effects of party structuration are the most sizable of all predictors, replicating the findings from the European context that show that characteristics of the political environment are important for understanding response variability (see Steenbergen & de Vries, in press).

Concluding Remarks

Just like in Europe and North America, politics within the Latin American continent is often discussed in terms of left/right ideology. Notwithstanding the important contribution of much of the extant work on public opinion and behavior within Latin America, we currently fail to understand how the labels *left* and *right* resonate among the public within the region. This study addresses this lacuna by examining public left/right attitudes and the degree of attitude variability in left/right self-placements among the Ecuadorian, Mexican, and Chilean citizenry. Our analysis shows that individual- as well as country-level characteristics influence response variability. At the individual level, political sophistication is negatively associated with response variability in left/right self-placement. More specifically, we find support for the notion that attention to the news, political interest, and efficacy are associated with more predictable left/right attitudes. At the country level, our focus has been on the programmatic structuration of party systems. Where elites consistently package political choices in left/right terms, voters will be able to draw on these cues to develop stable attitudes. This expectation is borne out by our comparison of Chile, Mexico, and Ecuador. Response variability is greater among Ecuadorian and Mexican than among Chilean voters. This coincides with the lower degree of party system structuration in terms of left/right ideology in Ecuador and Mexico compared to Chile.

Mapping the variability in left/right preferences provides important insights into the structure of public opinion and contours of political behavior in Latin America and how they differ from those of other regions such as North America. This study expands the current state of the art on attitude ambivalence from the U.S. and European contexts (see Alvarez & Brehm,

1995, 2002; Steenbergen & de Vries, in press) by exploring response variation in political attitudes in developing democracies in Latin America. In doing so, we cross-validate a large body of work originating from industrialized democratic countries that highlights the importance of response variability when studying citizens' political attitudes and the importance of elite cueing (see, e.g., Alvarez & Brehm, 1995, 2002; Cacioppo et al., 1997; Steenbergen & de Vries, in press; Zaller & Feldman, 1992). These important concepts also have bearing on the study of public opinion in Latin American countries.

Finally, this study brings to bear important new individual-level insights into recent political developments in the Latin American region, especially the so-called left turn in Latin American politics. The idea that Latin America is currently experiencing an unprecedented shift to the left is a prominent theme in the study of the region. Yet the underlying causes of this shift remain poorly understood. Given that all leaders who have come to power during the left turn have won democratic elections, a closer look at ideological attitudes in the electorate seems warranted. The results of our analysis point toward the need for a more nuanced analysis of the so-called leftward shift in the electorate. Our findings lend credence to the idea that Latin American publics—depending on individual-level attributes as well as characteristics of the political context in which they reside—may demonstrate highly variable left/right preferences.

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Notes

1. This section is based in part on Steenbergen and de Vries (in press).
2. On the link between sophistication and integration, see, for example, Rosenberg (1988).
3. In Kitschelt, Hawkins, Luna, Rosas, and Zechmeister's (2010, p. 110) country ordering left/right semantics are closely tied to issue bundles in Uruguay and Chile. Costa Rica and Mexico are intermediate cases, whereas in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Argentina, and Ecuador ideological and partisan divides explain little of the variance found in left/right self-placement of parliamentary elites.
4. We thank the Latin American Public Opinion Project and its major supporters (the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United Nations Development Programme, the Inter-American Development Bank, and Vanderbilt University) for making the data available.
5. The Chilean survey includes a direct question about union membership. Unfortunately, this question was not asked in Ecuador and Mexico. We therefore use "attendance at union meetings" as a proxy.

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Author Biographies

Imke Harbers is an assistant professor of political science at the University of Amsterdam. Her research focuses on comparative political institutions, with a specific emphasis on political parties. She holds a PhD from Leiden University and has been a visiting fellow at the Center for US-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Her work has appeared in *Comparative Political Studies*, *Political Studies*, *Party Politics*, and *Publius: The Journal of Federalism*.

Catherine E. de Vries is a professor of European politics and a fellow of Lincoln College at the University of Oxford. Her research spans a range of topics concerning political behavior and research methodology with a specific focus on elections, political parties, media coverage, and public opinion. She has recently published in *British Journal of Political Science*, *Comparative Political Studies*, and *Electoral Studies*.

Marco R. Steenbergen is a professor of political methodology at the University of Zurich. His research interests include deliberation and direct democracy, political leadership, voting behavior, political values, opinion formation and expression, the interface between psychology and institutions, and quantitative research methods. His work has appeared in journals such as *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, and *Electoral Studies*.