Voter Behavior in Latin America

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(Forthcoming in the Oxford Research Encyclopedia)

Summary
Voter choices in Latin America have structural roots that are similar to what is observed in other regions but these structures are weaker and more fluid than in more established democracies. In particular, while cleavages emerge in the average Latin American country and voters’ choices vary across demographic traits, issue, ideology, and partisanship, these cleavages are weaker than in Western Europe and the United States. These cleavages are particularly weak in countries where parties do not take ideologically distinct positions from each other and instead emphasize clientelism, which suggests that the overall weakness of these cleavages in the hemisphere reflects the weak commitment of political parties to programmatic competition. Elections in Latin America are strongly shaped by government performance, especially economic trends, but these forms of accountability are weakened in countries where the party system makes it hard to identify the degree to which any specific party was able to dominate the policy process or where identifying a credible alternative to the incumbent is difficult. Thus, while voters are trying to use elections to hold politicians accountable and to ensure that their policy preferences are represented, the weaknesses of Latin America’s party systems often make this difficult.

Keywords: Elections, Voting Behavior, Polarization, Clientelism, Representation, Accountability, Class Voting, Religious Voting, Ethnic Voting, Ideology, Economic Voting
The third wave of democracy brought electoral democracy to almost the entirety of Latin America. With the expansion of electoral competition came questions about the factors that drive voter behavior in the region and the degree to which elections act as effective mechanisms to provide representation and accountability. The systematic study of electoral behavior in Latin America was slow to develop, however, because high-quality public opinion was hard to obtain in many countries (see Zechmeister and Seligson 2012). This began to slowly change throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The return to democratic competition created space and demand in many countries for a commercial survey industry to develop that could service political parties, government agencies, and the media while some academics also began to conduct surveys around specific elections. Many of these commercial, government, and academic surveys were archived by the Roper Center, CIDE, CESOP and other archives in a way that allowed for scholarly analysis. The survey industry has only grown over time, and the internet has made the archiving and dispersion of these data easier. The result has been an explosion in country-specific studies of voting behavior, especially in the largest countries of the hemisphere. The late 1990s and early 2000s also saw cross-national survey projects like the Latinobarometer and the AmericasBarometer become more widely available. While these cross-national surveys are not focused on elections nor tied to election calendars, some scholars have used them to look at the structures that underlie vote intentions and how those patterns vary across countries.

The emerging literature on voting behavior in Latin America has led scholars to revisit some longstanding concerns about how elections aggregate public opinion in the region. While some observers initially worried that in Latin America voters “choose irrespective of their identities and affiliations” (O’Donnell 1994, 60), the “average” Latin American voter seems to respond to the same considerations that standard models of voting behavior developed in
established democracies emphasize. Yet while voters are using elections to hold politicians accountable for their actions, the electoral impact of variables like class, religion, or voters’ issue preferences is substantially smaller in the average Latin American country than in more established democracies. The degree to which voter behavior in Latin America reflects demographic or issue-based cleavages or is anchored by partisanship also varies substantially across countries. For example, demographic divides and issue concerns had very weak connections to voter choices in the 2015 Argentine elections (Lupu et al. 2018) or the 2016 elections in the Dominican Republic (Torcal et al. 2018), which contrasts with Bolivia and Uruguay’s 2009 elections where voter choices were strongly connected to their demographic traits and issue positions (Došek 2014). The connection between these anchor variables and voter choices also varies within countries over time, as in Chile, where voter choices are becoming less closely connected to demographic characteristics over time (Bargsted and Somma 2016).

Retrospective accountability also varies systematically across countries, with the economy, corruption, and crime having a much larger effect in some countries than in others (Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister 2015). The overall weakness of traditional voting models and the variations in voting behavior across countries suggest that the quality and strength of representation that emerge out of Latin American elections remains an open question.

The nature of Latin America’s party systems explains many of these patterns. In particular, when parties emphasize the particularistic politics of clientelism over policy-based programmatic representation, or when parties do not strongly differentiate themselves from their competitors on the basis of issue positions, voters are left without meaningful choices and latent cleavages are unmobilized. In those countries where parties do compete on the basis of issues and emphasize issue disagreements, voters are more likely to divide on demographic lines, have
their choices correlate with issue concerns of their left-right self-placement, and form partisan attachments. These exceptions reinforce the importance of parties as “supply side” actors in shaping political competition (Torcal and Mainwaring 2003) and suggest that the weakness of cleavage-based politics in many countries reflects the weak commitment of parties to programmatic representation. Accountability in turn is weakened when fragmented party systems make attributing responsibility difficult.

This review focuses on the factors emphasized by classical models of voter behavior developed in the United States and that have been used in other contexts (e.g. Campbell et al. 1960, Thomassen 2005). While the same kinds of variables shape voter behavior in Latin America as in other regions, the importance of demographics, issues, ideology and partisanship is attenuated in countries where parties make it difficult for voters to vote programatically, due to a lack of clear party positions or high clientelism, for example. Retrospective accountability is strong in many contexts but is weakened in countries where the context makes it hard to isolate political responsibility, as in fragmented party systems. The takeaway is that Latin America’s voters follow a similar electoral calculus as do voters in more established democracies but the options that party systems provide often shift electoral outcomes away from the patterns that programmatic models of political representation imply.

**Do Latin America’s Parties Offer Meaningful Choices?**

While a large literature on electoral behavior exists in many democratic countries, the strength of the comparative literature on voting behavior is in isolating how the political context shapes voter choices. For example, programmatic models of voter behavior assume that parties take clear and identifiable positions on the political issues of the day and work to distinguish themselves from their competitors on the basis of those positions (Kitschelt et al. 2010). Voters
are then expected to support the party who best matches their policy preferences, by evaluating both parties’ policy positions and their capabilities to enact them. The expectation is that this form of policy-based competition is structured around specific issues, such as the economy or same-sex marriage, but also by more general cleavages within society, such as class or religious divides, as groups divide on issues and line up to support parties who articulate a vision closer to their own.

Yet systematic, cross-national study shows that electoral reality often diverges from this vision of democracy. A lack of cleavage-based and issue-based voting may reflect voters’ own ignorance and lack of engagement or a lack of democratic experience (e.g. Goren 1997, Dalton 2009, Singh and Roy 2014). Programmatic voting models also break down, however, if parties do not present voters with clear and distinct options. When parties do not take distinct stances on important issues, groups will have few incentives to concentrate behind any single party and voters with specific issue concerns will have no meaningful basis for choosing between them (see Thomassen 2005, Lachat 2008, and Dalton and Anderson 2011 for more general discussions). Thus, when party systems do not approximate the programmatic ideal, voter behavior is likely to diverge from the expectations of classic voting models and patterns of electoral choice will become less clearly structured along demographic or issue-based lines. Where this is the case, voters are not being offered meaningful choices and the quality of political representation is likely to suffer.

The degree to which parties in Latin America approach electoral competition in accordance with the programmatic model remains, however, an open question. In the 1980s, for example, Dix argued that the hemisphere was dominated by “catch-all [parties]…that are pragmatic or eclectic in ideology, multiclass in their support, and oriented to broad-based
electoral appeals that go beyond the mobilization of a committed constituency” (Dix 1989, 27). These catch-all strategies reflected the weakness of many traditional civil society organizations like unions in many countries, which were further weakened by the economic crisis that swept across the region. Lacking strong civil societies, parties mobilized by emphasizing valence issues, such as competence, and candidate personalities. The pressures of the debt crisis further restricted the ideological space in some countries, as formerly leftist parties diverged from their traditional opposition to free markets to endorse the withdrawal of the state from economic management (Stokes 2001). The resulting convergence between the left and right in those countries during the Washington Consensus weakened these parties’ programmatic profiles (Kitschelt et al. 2010) and left many voters unclear about what parties stood for (Lupu 2016). The result in some countries has been the deinstitutionalization of the party system, leaving voters to choose between new parties with murky issue profiles (Mainwaring 2018).

While many Latin American parties faced difficulties in constructing programmatic profiles, they also saw opportunities to mobilize voters via clientelism, offering supporters money, jobs, and preferential access to social programs (e.g. See Oliveros this volume for a more detailed discussion). Expert survey data on the use of clientelism in 88 countries from the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project (DALP) shows that parties in Latin America are substantially more likely to rely on clientelism than are those in the advanced capitalist democracies of Western Europe and North America (see also Kitschelt and Altamirano 2015). The use of clientelism in Latin America is roughly comparable to its use in Sub-Saharan Africa or Asia and is slightly higher than in Eastern Europe. Clientelism is common in Latin America in part because there are large numbers of poor voters who demand that the state provide them with benefits (Nichter and Peress 2017). Politicians in countries with large indigenous, and often poor,
populations used clientelism to mobilize these groups instead of social programs that would upend racial hierarchies (Kitschelt et al. 2010), and the weakness of labor unions throughout the region makes other forms of mobilizing poor voters difficult (Levitsky 2003). The presence of clientelism then creates a cycle of further weakened ties between parties and civil society as organizational leaders negotiate between competing parties for their organization’s support instead of building relationships with parties over shared policy concerns (Holland and Palmer-Rudin 2015).

Yet while catch-all politics and clientelism are common in Latin America, they are not universal. Parties in some countries do talk about issues and take clear policy stances that are different from each other (Kitschelt et al. 2010, Singer 2016). Argentina, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Paraguay, and Peru have had particularly low levels of partisan differentiation in contrast to El Salvador, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Chile and Uruguay where parties have had the most consistent ideological differences, although the Chilean parties have converged somewhat since 2010 (Singer 2016). Clientelism is used much less in Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica than it is in other countries in the hemisphere, while the Dominican Republic and Paraguay stand out within the region for high levels of clientelism (Kitschelt and Altamirano 2015). While some of these differentiated party systems stem from historically high levels of development or are structured around the divides that led to civil wars, (Kitschelt et al. 2010), other systems have seen increases in party system differentiation following the rise of leftist parties that have built coalitions mobilizing poor and, in some cases, indigenous voters, and which anchor previously inchoate party systems (Mustillo 2018). In most countries, however, the norm is for many parties to engage in a mix of clientelist and programmatic approaches as they
attempt to appeal to both poor voters and the growing middle class (Singer and Kitschelt 2011, Luna 2014).

Thus, the degree to which Latin America’s party systems present voters with ideologically distinct options varies within the region and over time. But if commitments to programmatic competition are weak, this should weaken demographic-based or issue-based competition. In contrast, in countries where parties more fully eschew clientelism and embrace programmatic competition we should see voting behavior that is structured similarly to more established party systems. That suggests that divergences in voting behavior between Latin America and the United States, Europe, or other more established democracies is not being driven by a lack of democratic experience or engagement but instead reflects the electoral options that are made available to them.

**Demographic-Based Voting Is Present but Is Weak When Parties Are Not Ideologically Distinct or Use Clientelism**

Latin American parties were traditionally assumed to be “multiclass in their support” and not focused on “the mobilization of a committed constituency” (Dix 1989, 27) while voters are argued to be “choosing irrespective of their identities and affiliations” (O’Donnell 1994, 60). The empirical work that has emerged as public opinion polling became more widespread, however, demonstrates that these arguments understate the strength of demographic-based cleavages in Latin America: electoral preferences systematically do differ along class, religious, gender, and ethnic lines in the hemisphere. However, these same studies show that demographic-based cleavages are relatively weak on average and vary systematically by country, emerging only in countries where parties have taken steps to activate that cleavage and to ideologically differentiate themselves from their competitors.
This pattern can be illustrated by looking at the electoral effect of class. High levels of inequality and poverty in Latin America potentially provide a large lower-class base for leftist parties to mobilize, and these factors have been commonly linked to the rise of leftist parties in the region (e.g. Cleary 2006, Luna 2010, Levitsky and Roberts 2011). Yet Latin America’s labor unions are generally weak, labor-market volatility is high, and the informal sector is massive. The result is that leftist parties often do not have the strong connections to civil society that are necessary to mobilize poor voters. Policy constraints imposed by international financial actors and markets also moved parties away from strong redistributive appeals in the 1980s and 1990s. Thus, studies of class-voting in Latin America during the 1980s (Dix 1989), 1990s (Roberts 2002, Torcal and Mainwaring 2003), and early 2000s (Remmer 2012) generally found that class was only weakly related to the vote despite the high levels of inequality in the region.

A mixed picture emerged from studies of class voting in studies conducted in the 2010s, however. On the one hand, Mainwaring et al (2015) and Nadeau et al. (2017) each show that class voting is emerging in the region, with poor and working-class individuals being significantly more likely to support leftist parties in cross-national comparisons. Yet while a class cleavage has emerged in some Latin American countries and is visible in pooled data, it is generally not very large and is generally smaller than the level of class voting in the average Western European country (Nadeau et al. 2017).

Several factors can explain the weakness of class voting in Latin America. Class voting is weakened in those countries where leftist parties are sufficiently strong that they draw on a multi-class coalition of support and capture electoral majorities. For example, while opposition to Venezuela’s Chavez and Bolivia’s Morales was always concentrated among the wealthiest voters in their countries, each received support from a majority of the middle class after their
initial election as they managed to stabilize their countries’ economies and reduce social protests (Lupu 2010, Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012). The weakness of class voting might also reflect measurement issues. Class-voting becomes more apparent when researchers combine wealth and education into a more general indicator of socioeconomic status, with support for the left being highest among those voters who are not only poor but are also less educated and thus likely to be excluded from formal markets (Handlin 2013b).

Yet the weakness of class voting also reflects mobilization strategies and the political positions of political actors in many Latin American countries. On the one hand, many erstwhile leftist parties either governed from the right (Stokes 2001) or moderated their policy stances once in office (Campello 2015) to calm investors. On the other hand, parties from the right have also invested in conditional social programs that brought poor voters into their coalition (Roberts and Arce 1998; Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016, Borges 2018). In those countries where convergence between parties makes the policy differences between the left and the right on economic issues relatively small, this should have blunted the incentives for voters from different income groups to polarize electorally. The use of clientelist strategies to court voters via non-programmatic means in many countries should also weaken the connection between wealth and electoral choices as it incentivizes voters to focus on these handouts and not parties’ programmatic offerings.

In contrast, class voting should emerge in countries where political entrepreneurs within the left explicitly focused on leftist economic appeals, activating the class cleavage. That is exactly what Mainwaring, Torcal, and Somma (2015) argue happened within Latin America in the 2000s. Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez, for example, first won electoral power by mobilizing the poor (Lupu 2010) as did Evo Morales in Bolivia (Došek 2014), both promising to reduce poverty
by greater targeting of the resources generated by natural resource rents and by enacting redistributive policies. Leftist leaders often reinforced these connections by implementing social policies targeted at poor voters (e.g. Hunter and Power 2007, Zucco 2008, Lupu 2018), a tactic that has proved to be particularly successful when leaders have discretion over who benefits from the policy, allowing them to reinforce programmatic appeals with clientelism targeting their base (Handlin 2013a). Thus, as parties made concerted effects to mobilize the poor, a class cleavage has emerged in countries where parties have most strongly sought to activate it, such as in Bolivia and Venezuela (Mainwaring et al. 2015, 86).

Data compiled by Singer and Ramalho Tafoya (2019) demonstrates how countries’ party systems shape whether the electorate is sorted on class lines. Using data from Latinobarometer surveys conducted between 1995 and 2016, they model vote intentions as a function of demographic variables, including household wealth (see the web appendix for a description of the data). Chile, Bolivia, and Mexico have particularly high levels of class voting whereas Ecuador and Argentina have the smallest class vote across the sample. In the case of Argentina, Lupu (2018) argues that the class cleavages that have occasionally emerged have occurred when Peronist parties use clientelism to bring poor voters into their movement and not through any programmatic appeals. The dependent variable is the ideology of the voter’s chosen party (following Baker and Greene 2011 and Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister 2015), such that high values represent support for a more conservative party. They then interact the measure of household wealth with two measures party system structure. The first is a measure of whether parties are ideologically polarized, with high values designating countries where elite surveys compiled by Singer (2016) show that party elites take divergent positions on the left-right scale. The second is a measure of how much parties rely on clientelism, with high values designating
countries where expert surveys conducted by Kitschelt et al. (2009) show that parties court supporters by offering them material handouts and preferential access to government programs. Figure 1 graphs the coefficient for household wealth across the values of parties’ ideological polarization and clientelism measures. The top panel shows that in the least polarized party systems, there are no significant differences in vote intention across levels of wealth. As polarization increases and the choice between parties becomes clearer, the connection between wealth and support for conservative parties increase. In the bottom panel, the figure shows that clientelism is associated with lower levels of wealth-based voting. In fact, in countries where clientelism is most common, there are no significant differences in voting intention across classes. Thus, if parties do not provide voters with contrasting policy visions and instead focus on clientelism, any latent class cleavages are suppressed.2

(Figure 1 about here)

A similar pattern emerges for other demographic-based cleavages. For example, while Boas and Smith (2015) find that there are no differences in the average country in how Catholics and Protestants evaluate conservative candidates, individuals who are very religious are more likely to support conservative parties than are those who are not very religious. Yet they also find that this gap becomes significantly larger in countries where parties are differentiated on the basis of ideology and where programmatic competition is the norm, with Uruguay and Nicaragua (Boas and Smith 2015) and Chile (Singer and Ramalho Tafoya 2019) standing out as having a consistent religiosity cleavage. Politicians and social actors in many countries have tried to activate this cleavage, such as the incorporation of Evangelical voters into conservative parties in the 2000s in Brazil (Smith 2019) and where that groundswell of support may have helped elect far-right presidential candidate Bolsonaro in 2018.
Gender-based voting follows a similar dynamic. The average Latin American country has a gender gap, with women tending to be slightly more likely than men are to support conservative candidates (Morgan 2015, Nadeau et al. 2017). This is consistent with a “traditional” gender gap in many developing countries where female voters tend to be more socially conservative. Yet Morgan (2015) finds that this gap is much larger in countries where ideological differentiation across parties is high, with El Salvador and Chile being the countries with the largest gender gap in the hemisphere while Brazil and Argentina have consistently negligible gender gaps.

Finally, the mobilization of the indigenous as a group in Latin America has not always been achieved. Historically Latin America has had few indigenous parties (Dix 1989), non-indigenous leftist parties have often struggled to mobilize indigenous voters or even to incorporate indigenous rights into their campaigns (Madrid 2012, Yashar 2011) and support for the left has historically not been correlated with the size of a country’s indigenous population (Blanco and Grier 2013). Yet indigenous respondents are more prone to support leftist parties in the average country than mestizo and white respondents are (Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister 2015, Nadeau et al. 2017). The connection between ethnicity and support for the left is larger in countries where levels of ethnic fragmentation is higher and where ethnic identities have become more salient (Raymond and Arce 2013, Nadeau et al. 2017), with Bolivia having a particularly large ethnic gap since Evo Morales emerged as a salient national figure. But it is also higher in countries where polarization is strong, like in Colombia and El Salvador, whereas there are no significant differences across ethnicities in highly clientelist countries like the Dominican Republic, Honduras, or Paraguay (Singer and Ramalho Tafoya 2019).
Thus, for all these cleavages, there is evidence of voters dividing on the basis of demographics, although the marginal effects of these differences are small. Yet the prevalence of demographic-based voting increases when the party system offers voters programatically distinct options, which suggests that the weakness of demographic-based cleavages in the average Latin American country reflects the lack of commitment that many parties have, to focus on programmatic appeals. The implication is that in many countries, voters are receiving little programmatic representation.

While most studies on demographic-based cleavages focus on how they shape the left-right divide, demographic cleavages in Latin America also structure the vote by increasing in-group voting, where voters support candidates representing their group. For example, Protestant voters are no more likely to support a conservative candidate than Catholic voters are but are more likely to vote for a Protestant candidate (Boas and Smith 2015, Smith 2019). Similarly, women voters in Latin America are more likely to vote for female candidates than are males (Morales Quiroga 2008, Morgan 2015). While indigenous voters are not necessarily more likely to support indigenous candidates than are non-indigenous voters (Moreno 2015), indigenous voters played a key role in the rise of Evo Morales in Bolivia (Došek 2014). These within-group loyalties often cross party lines, as Brazilian Protestants supported Green Party candidate Marina Silva in 2010 (Boas and Smith 2015) but then supported the conservative Jair Bolsonaro in 2018, as each of them emphasized their connections to the evangelical movement. These trends suggest that voters may be receiving some form of descriptive representation by specific candidates even if political parties have not fully activated these cleavages. Yet if representation is specific to the candidate and not his or her party, it may prove fleeting.
Latin Americans Often Vote on Issues, but the Effect of Issues Is Small in Countries Where Parties Do Not Emphasize Programmatic Representation

Debates over issue-voting in Latin America have focused on two themes. The largest literature debates which specific issues are most salient in Latin America and whether these issues can explain cross-national electoral trends, such as the rise of the electoral left in the mid-2000s that is often referred to as the “pink tide” (e.g. Weyland, Madrid, and Hunter 2010, Levitsky and Roberts 2011). Four issues have received the most attention as salient issue divides in Latin America: democracy, the role of the state in managing the economy, law and order, and relations with the United States. Yet underneath debates about which issues are most salient is a more fundamental question about whether issues are at all important in Latin American elections and, if so, in what countries voters respond most heavily to parties’ issue positions.

After the expansion of democracy in the 1980s, many elections in Latin America were dominated by a cleavage over whether democracy was preferable to dictatorship (Moreno 1999, Torcal and Mainwaring 2003). While anti-democratic tendencies have historically existed within both the left and the right, it was the right who supported the second reverse wave of dictatorships in Latin America while pro-democracy movements were often connected to left-leaning political parties, and so individuals who were skeptical about democracy tended to support conservative parties. This cleavage seemed to fade, however, as democracy became more widely institutionalized. Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister (2015) find no significant association between democratic support and electoral choices and while Nadeau et al. (2017) find that support for democracy is associated with support for the left, this correlation is weaker than the effect of opinions about markets on voter choices. Yet democracy can emerge as a salient cleavage under certain circumstances. In Venezuela, for example, support for the Chavez
and Maduro regimes correspond to lower support for norms of liberal democracy (Kutiyski and Krouwel 2014). In Brazil, Bolsonaro explicitly invoked Brazil’s military past as a model for establishing order and good governance.

A commonly cited motivation for the rise of the left in the mid-2000s is a demand for greater state intervention in the economy after the retrenchment of state programs in the 1990s (e.g. Kaufman 2013). Yet there is mixed evidence of whether voters in Latin America differentiate parties based on their commitment to market principles. Some scholars find that attitudes about how the economy should be managed and regulated undergird electoral competition (Baker and Greene 2011, 2015), although that strength differs across parties (Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012). Remmer (2012) finds no correlation between attitudes toward the market and support for the left in the early 2000s, while Queirolo (2013) argues that voters only sour on market reforms when unemployment is high and absent that, she argues, the market is not a salient political divide. The cross-national studies by Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister (2015) and Nadeau et al (2017) each find that there is a correlation on average between support for market principles and support for conservative parties, but the size of this effect is relatively small.

The victories by conservative politicians in Argentina in 2015 and Brazil in 2018 also raise questions about the relevance of economic policy-based explanations for voting behavior in the region. In the case of Argentina, attitudes about economic management correlated weakly with support for the conservative Mauricio Macri and public opinion remained supportive of statist economic policies even as a conservative was elected president (Schiumerini 2019). In that election, voters rejected the left not because of a desire to change economic policies but because voters were disillusioned with economic and governance outcomes under the prior
administration. In Brazil, concerns about a weak economy and high levels of crime and corruption also appear to have been major drivers of support for Jair Bolsonaro, while attitudes about economic policy and redistribution played a small role in voter choices (Hunter and Power 2019). Thus electoral fluctuations cannot necessarily be interpreted as evidence of changing voter sentiments about the economic model.

With high crime rates throughout much of the region, crime is frequently a salient political concern. The election of conservative politicians in some countries has often been interpreted as a mandate for hardline policies of fighting crime. Supporters of conservative parties are generally more supportive of hardline policies (Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012). Antonio Saca in El Salvador (Holland 2013) and Álvaro Uribe in Colombia (Taylor 2009) each rode their endorsement of hardline policies to electoral victories, and the high levels of concern around crime in many Central American countries has led many leftist parties to also endorse hardline policies against crime (Holland 2013). Yet there have been no systematic, hemisphere-wide studies of how voters respond to parties’ visions for fighting crime that would allow us to compare the importance of this issue to other programmatic appeals or to see how important it is outside of a handful of cases where violence is particularly concentrated.

The issue that has the most consistent and strongest connection to voter choices in the region, however, is attitudes about the United States. While Latin America has historically been a region where the average citizen has a more positive view of the United States compared to the world average (Baker and Cupery 2013), voters who distrust the United States tend to support leftist parties that promise to stand up to the United States (Arnold and Samuels 2011, Remmer 2012, Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister 2015, Nadeau et al. 2017). The connection between negative attitudes about the United States and support for leftist parties is larger than any other
issue that Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister (2015) explore. Thus, politicians in many countries have gained electoral support by standing up against “foreign imperialism” in their economies and politics.

There has been limited attention to other issues outside of the economy, governance, and the United States. Attitudes about gay marriage and abortion differ between respondents on the political right and the political left (Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012) but these issues have at most a small association with voter choices up through the early 2010s (Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister 2015). The lack of weight given these issues reflects their relative low salience until recently in many countries. Abortion receives very little attention in most party platforms outside of Chile, for example, while same sex marriage has expanded slowly across the region and in most countries this issue has drawn little political attention beyond committed social movements (Morgan and Hinojosa 2018, Dietz 2015). Yet in recent years there have been serious policy debates around abortion and gay rights in many countries, with activist networks pushing for the expansion of these rights in some countries (Encarnacion 2016, Corrales 2017, Blofield and Ewig 2017), while conservative organizations look to regulate educational policies about sexuality in places like Brazil (Castro Carvalho and Federico Sívori 2017). Thus, electoral cleavages may form around social issues as social movements strengthen within the region and bring these issues into the forefront of political discussions. A similar dynamic has been occurring with respect to the environment. Environmentalism did not significantly divide the parties in Latin America in the 1990s (Rosas 2005), which is consistent with work suggesting that post-material cleavages are slow to emerge in developing countries, ⁴ but there have not been systematic studies of how this issue shapes party competition in more recent elections. Yet with emerging social movements in favor of environmental protection in many Latin American
countries (e.g. Arce 2014, Eisenstadt and Jones West 2019), there may be space for these divides to become politically mobilized as social actors increase these issues’ salience.

But while there are debates about what issues are specifically salient in the region, the effect of issue positions on voter choices in Latin America seems to be relatively weak compared to the effect of how voters evaluate government performance in managing the economy or fighting corruption (Carlin, Singer and Zechmeister 2015, Nadeau et al. 2017). Just as with the weakness of demographic cleavages, the weakness of issue-based voting in Latin America may reflect the lack of attention that parties give to communicating their issue stances. Issue-based voting in Latin America is weaker in countries when parties do not ideologically differentiate themselves from each other or when parties rely on clientelism (Baker and Greene 2015). Voters in Argentina’s 2015 elections, for example, did not perceive any meaningful differences in how the candidates would reform the economy (Schiumerini 2019), which explains why citizen preferences on the economy did not meaningfully explain their electoral choices in that election. Torcal et al. (2018) also find no evidence of issue voting in the heavily clientelist elections of the Dominican Republic. This contrasts from the 2004 election in El Salvador, when Antonio Saca emphasized Mano Dura policies much more than any of his rivals did, and voters saw a clear difference in how the main parties would handle the problem of crime, benefiting him electorally (Holland 2013). More generally, the strongest cleavages around economic issues occur in the ideologically polarized countries of Uruguay, El Salvador, and Chile, although economic-based issue voting in the latter country has faded as parties have converged (Baker and Greene 2015).

Voters in Latin America do vote on the basis of issues and there are systematic correlations on average between electoral preferences and support for markets, support for democracy, and attitudes about the United States. Yet issue voting requires that parties
emphasize alternative approaches to an issue, and many of Latin America’s parties have not done that to a sufficient degree to empower issue-voting.

**Left-Right Self-Placement Does Not Necessarily Reflect Issue Concerns**

Just as scholars question the importance of issue voting to explain electoral behavior in Latin America, the degree to which electoral behavior is structured by a left-right ideology is still an open question. On the one hand, individuals who self-identify with the left are more likely to support leftist parties than are those who self-identify on the right (Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012, Zechmeister 2015, Nadeau et al. 2017). The connection between left-right self-placement and voter intention is particularly pronounced for parties on the right, who gain very little support from voters who self-identify as leftist. The left-right self-placement and vote choice connection is also substantially stronger than is the association between voter choices and any specific issue position that Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister (2015) explore.

Yet the connection between left-right self-placement and the vote in Latin America is weaker than it is in Western Europe and is only statistically significant in about half (Nadeau et al. 2017) to two thirds (Zechmeister 2015) of cases examined in previous research. Zechmeister finds that the effect of left-right orientations is strongest in El Salvador, Chile, and Uruguay while it is particularly weak in Argentina and Brazil. This variation is strongly shaped by the party system. The connection between left-right self-placements and voter preferences is systematically attenuated in countries where parties are not ideologically differentiated (Habers et al. 2013; Zechmeister and Corral 2013; Zechmeister 2015; Singer 2016; Nadeau et al. 2017). Looking over time, the evidence confirms that increases in ideological polarization are followed by increases in left-right based voting (Singer 2016), as has occurred in Bolivia. In cases that are electorally fragmented and have unstable party systems the connection between self-placement
and voter choices is also attenuated (Zechmeister and Corral 2013). The implication is that the weakness of left-right voting in many Latin American countries is at least partially a result of parties not positioning themselves as ideological alternatives to each other or being sufficiently consistent to develop a clear ideological label.

The Brazilian PT provides an example of how left-right connections can become undermined by party inconsistency. In the 2002 election, support for Lula was driven in large part by dissatisfaction with the economy and the outgoing government but was also concentrated among those who were on the ideological left (Moraes and Luján forthcoming). Yet in office the PT was only moderately ideological, mixing pro-poor social policies with business friendly regulatory and tax policies (Campello 2015). As a result, in 2010, Rousseff benefited from the strong economy and Lula’s popularity, but her support was not as strongly concentrated among the ideological left. As the PT moderated its appeals, the connection between left-right self-placement and voter choices further weakened.

Then even in countries where left-right self-placement is correlated with voter choices, one cannot assume that this implies that voter choices are being anchored in a general ideology that reflects voters’ issue concerns. Many voters in Latin America do not understand left and right in policy terms, connecting it instead to specific party brands (Zechmeister 2006). More importantly, the connection between issue preferences and self-placement on the left-right scale is weak in many Latin American countries (Zechmeister and Corral 2013; Zechmeister 2006; Ames and Smith 2010, Olivera and Turgeon 2015, although see Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012, 2014), and adding this variable to models of voter choices does not meaningfully change the association between voter choices and issue positions (Carlin, Singer, and Zechmeister 2015). Thus, knowing that a voter is on the “left” or the “right” does not mean that the voter necessarily
has leftist or conservative party positions or that they are supporting a party due to its policy positions.

The implication is that in many countries voters may be politically mobilized on the basis of left-right self-placement, but this self-placement may only consist of a self-identification and political identity, not a more general ideological world view. The connection between issues and left-right self-placement is stronger in countries where parties are polarized from each other and emphasize programmatic appeals (Zechmeister and Corral 2013, Zechmeister 2015), which means that as parties ideologically distinguish from each other, voters are both more likely to form meaningful ideological commitments and give them more weight when they vote. Absent those conditions, voter choices are less likely to reflect their left-right self-placement and, if those choices do reflect voters’ left-right positions, that vote may still be void of any issue content.

Partisanship Ties Exist, but Are More Volatile than in More Established Democracies

The weakness of political parties in many Latin American countries raises the question of whether voters in the region have been able to develop stable and long-standing partisan identifications. Individual-level studies of partisanship in the region find that partisanship plays a similar role in Latin America as it does in the United States or Europe in mobilizing people to participate. At the individual-level partisan identification has its roots in similar individual-level traits. Partisans tend to be older, more educated, wealthier, and more interested in politics and are more likely to be male (Lupu 2015). They are also more engaged in civic associations and more attentive to the media than are non-partisans. Parties use these existing social networks to cultivate their partisan base (Samuels and Zucco 2015). Finally, levels of partisanship are higher
for those who self-identify on the extremes of the left-right scale than among those who are more moderate.

Yet while these differences within the electorate mirror those found in other contexts, levels of partisanship are lower than in more industrialized democracies (Nadeau et al. 2017, 71). Moreover, the percentage of survey respondents who self-identify with a party varies within countries dramatically over the electoral cycle (Lupu 2015, 235), with levels of partisanship increasing when an election is forthcoming or just occurred and falling when the election is distant (Michelitch and Utych 2018). These differences across survey waves as elections activate partisan loyalties are larger in developing countries such as in Latin America than in more developed democracies. Within countries, panel data show that voters often change their partisan identifications over the course of a campaign, shifting to follow the leading candidate (Moreno 2009, 124). The implication is that party identities are not strongly centralized and established in Latin America’s party systems.

Partisanship may also be asymmetrical in some countries, with citizens orienting themselves either towards or against a single party. During the period of single-party dominance in Mexico, for example, there was a large block of voters who did not self-identify with any party, but which strongly rejected the ruling PRI (Estrada 2005). The rise of the PT in Brazil also saw a rise in voters whose political identity was anchored less in their support of any alternative party than in their rejection of the PT (Samuels and Zucco 2018). These asymmetric partisan systems often suggest that the party system is only partially institutionalized and that the polarization around a single party may either anchor the party system or create space for outsider candidates to emerge who promise to defeat the dominant party.
The ability of partisanship to anchor voter choices in Latin America is also weaker than in more established democracies. While 70% of individuals who self-identify with a party voted for that party (Lupu 2015, 238), and voter choices are more strongly connected to partisanship than they are to any other variable, the explanatory power of partisanship in vote-choice models is lower than in more developed democracies (Nadeau et al. 2017, 131). The combination of low levels of partisanship and the weakness of these partisan connections when they do exist potentially helps explain why levels of party-system volatility are so high in Latin America as parties often do not have deep ties within the electorate that would anchor and institutionalize their party system (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007).

The levels and strength of partisan attachments vary systematically across Latin America according to the structure of the party system. Levels of partisanship tend to be higher in older democracies and in those where levels of partisan fragmentation are lower (Lupu 2015). In these contexts, voters have had time to form attachment to parties and the few choices available make distinguishing among them easier. The connection between partisanship and programmatic competition, however, is more contingent. On the one hand, levels of partisanship are higher in countries like Chile and Uruguay, where parties clearly differentiate from each other in their programmatic offerings (Lupu 2016). These differences make it easy to differentiate parties from each other and raise the stakes of political competition, which makes it easier for voters to find their place in the political system and to form an attachment with one party’s approach. Thus in countries where parties on the left and the right enacted neoliberal economic reforms during the Washington Consensus, the result was a weakening of party brands and falling levels of partisan identification that set the stage for the eventual collapse of the party system and the rise of new parties (Lupu 2016). Yet programmatic differentiation is not the only way that parties can
generate and strengthen partisan attachments-high levels of clientelism, especially modes that
target core voters and reward them for their continued support of the party, can also potentially
strengthen partisan attachments (Morales Quiroga 2016). These forms of partisanship may be
more susceptible, however, to change than are those based on programmatic linkages, as parties’
fortunes and their access to resources change (Lupu 2016). Purely clientelist parties who fall out
of power may have a harder time maintaining party loyalties without access to clientelist
resources.

The ability of both clientelism and programmatic competition to anchor party systems is
visible in the cross-national distribution of partisanship. The country with the highest level of
partisanship is the Dominican Republic (Lupu 2015), which is also one of the most clientelist
countries in the hemisphere, and it is followed closely by Paraguay, another highly clientelist
country. However, Uruguay also has one of the highest levels of partisanship in Latin America
and it has low levels of clientelism and high levels of ideological differentiation.

One advantage of weak partisanship, however, might be that voters are more free to
switch their vote in response to parties’ positions and performance. Partisan attachments can lead
voters to have biased perceptions of government performance and can also lead them to follow
the party line on issues that they do not have strong preferences on (Carsey and Layman 2006).
Thus, scholars of voting behavior in the United States and elsewhere should check whether the
observed correlations between voters’ issue positions and their vote choices reflect
rationalizations of voters’ partisan preferences or representation, whereby voters choose parties
based on their policy offerings. For example, in a series of studies, Lenz (2012) shows that while
election surveys in the U.S. find that there is a correlation between voter preferences and their
vote choice at the time of the election, this correlation emerges because partisans switch their
positions to match those of their preferred parties and there is at best a weak correlation between
voters’ pre-electoral opinions and their eventual vote choice. Yet Ames et al (2008) and Baker
and Greene (2015) use similar methods and panel data to look at voters in Brazil and Mexico and
find that in these two countries many voters’ choices can indeed be explained by their initial
policy preferences, with these voters switching their choice to align with the policy that they
prefer while very few voters switch their policy preferences to match their initial partisan
leanings. Thus while the weakness of party identifications in Latin America help create high
levels of volatility in the region, those switches across parties may be due in part to voters
looking for options that better represent their issue preferences.

**Voters Systematically Attempt to Hold Politicians Accountable, but Fragmented Party
Systems and Limited Options Often Make this Difficult**

While the existing literature is divided on how important demographic-based or issue-
based voting is in Latin America, there is little debate that voters in Latin America vote based on
the state of the country and attempt to hold politicians accountable for the quality of governance.
Numerous studies show that when the economy is bad, presidential popularity tends to fall and
the president’s party tends to lose votes (see Gélineau and Singer 2015 for a review). This
connection between economic fluctuations and government support is larger in Latin America
than in more established democracies (Molina 2001). Support for the president’s party is also
systematically conditional upon providing high quality governance by reducing levels of
corruption (Manzetti and Rosas 2015) and reducing crime (Pérez 2015, Ley 2017). Voters often
also hold politicians accountable for specific policy initiatives, such that recipients of social
welfare benefits tend to reward the governments that created (Zucco 2013, Lino
2018) or expanded (Diaz-Cayeros, Estévez, and Magaloni 2016) these programs, although non-recipients may punish incumbents for their exclusion (Sanchês Correa and Cheibub 2016).

The clear evidence of retrospective performance voting in Latin America contrasts with the weak evidence of demographic-based or issue-based voting. Several factors may explain why elections are so focused on electoral accountability. High levels of economic vulnerability, insecurity, and corruption may make these issues particularly salient in the region (Singer 2013b). Presidential regimes may focus voter attention on accountability and may make attributions of responsibility easier (Hellwig and Samuels 2008). And the weakness of partisan attachments may also make voters more willing to switch their vote to reward or sanction the incumbent (Kayser and Wlezien 2011). These weak partisan attachments also mean that when performance is weak, voters are willing to turn to outsider or populist candidates whom they hope can turn the economy around (Carreras 2012). Levels of accountability that are focused on the incumbent party’s competency may not require that the party system have high levels of ideological differentiation in the way that programmatic models of voting do because voters are judging parties and candidates on their management skills and not their specific stances.

Yet while Latin American elections often focus on electoral accountability, incumbent performance systematically matters more in some countries than others. The economy has a consistently large effect in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela while it tends to have a small effect in Colombia, Ecuador, and Brazil (Gélineau and Singer 2015). Perceptions of corruption have a much larger effect in Argentina and Venezuela than it does in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, or Brazil (Manzetti and Rosas 2015). Finally, evaluations of government efforts to fight insecurity are more strongly correlated with government support in Venezuela, Mexico, and Ecuador than they are in Brazil, Nicaragua, or Paraguay. Then within these various countries,
accountability also varies over time. Governments are not always held accountable for their performance.

Several factors explain why accountability varies across and within countries. First, the salience of various performance issues is not constant. Voters tend to focus more heavily on issues where recent government performance has been poor (Gélineau and Singer 2015, Manzetti and Rosas 2015), and so accountability for crime or for corruption rises when crime rises or there is a scandal, while the economy becomes more salient when it is volatile. But political actors can change the salience of specific issues, as electoral campaigns highlight performance shortcomings and focus voter attention on specific performance areas (Hart 2016).

One reason voters often do not hold politicians accountable for negative outcomes is that voters take into account the degree of incumbents’ political control, such that voters do not hold the president and their party accountable when they did not exclusively control policymaking in that area. For the economy, for example, voters seem to punish the incumbent less for economic swings when a fragmented party system required that they negotiate with other parties to make policy, when globalization strongly ties the domestic economy to international fluctuations, or when IMF conditionality limits the range of policies the government can enact (Alcañiz and Hellwig 2011, Singer and Carlin 2013, Gélineau and Singer 2015), and are more likely to sanction incumbents whose strong formal powers give them more control over the policymaking process (Carlin and Singh 2015) or when the state plays a large role in managing the economy (Carlin and Hellwig forthcoming). However, voters are not perfect at assessing political control, as they also often seem to reward the incumbent for economic fluctuations that the government has no control over, such as those connected to global commodity prices (Campello and Zucco 2016), although this point remains empirically contested (Carlin and Hellwig forthcoming). If
voters are avoiding sanctioning incumbents in contexts where their policy control is low, the implication is that in countries where the party system is fragmented, where presidents are weak, or where global financial actors play a key role in shaping economic policy or economic outcomes, options for meaningful accountability may be limited.

Another limit on meaningful accountability in Latin America is the strong incumbency advantage. When incumbent presidents are running for immediate reelection, they tend to receive at least 10 percentage points more than where the president is term-limited or otherwise unable to run (Singer 2013a). As a result, incumbent presidents running for reelection have only lost two times in modern Latin American history. Poor performance may cost the ruling party votes and seats in the legislature but if the chief executive is not replaced then this raises questions about whether incumbents are really under popular control.

The weakness of some Latin American party systems can also undermine accountability if voters who know they want to vote against the incumbent do not have an alternative viable option. In the case of corruption, for example, when corruption is perceived as a system-wide problem or when multiple parties are pulled into the same scandal, such as in the Lava Jato scandal in Brazil, then voters who are left without a clean party to support are forced to vote either on the basis of some other consideration (Pavao 2018) or support an outsider candidate. In party systems that are unstable and volatile, a weak economy or high levels of crime and corruption lead to drops in incumbent support but do not lead to increased vote intentions for the opposition as many alienated voters instead remain undecided, uncertain about which party will emerge as the credible opposition (Singer and Ramalho Tafoya 2014). In both cases, voter uncertainty about which candidate is the best alternative to the incumbent potentially blunts the sanction for poor performance. Communication within social networks, however, may help
voters coordinate around a particular alternative to a poorly performing incumbent (Arias et al. 2019).

Voters also do not hold politicians accountable for all policy outcomes. Corruption allegations, for example, are often not as relevant to voters as the incumbent’s ability to manage the economy. As a result, when the economy is strong incumbents can survive high levels of corruption with very little political consequence but they are punished for scandals when the economy is weak (Menzetti and Wilson 2005; Rennó 2007; Zechmeister and Zizumbo-Colugna 2013; Carlin, Love, and Martinez-Gallardo 2015), and voters routinely rank other issues like creating jobs and improving social policy as more pressing policy concerns (Boas et al. 2019). Other policy areas may be even less salient, for example, while Brazilians who knew someone afflicted by Zika punished the government for failures to fight mosquitos, most individuals who were informed about mosquito eradication successes and failures did not change their vote because other issues were deemed more pressing (Boas and Hidalgo 2019). Even the economy’s salience fluctuates with economic performance (Singer 2011, 2013a), as voters place less weight on the economy during periods of economic stability. Thus, part of strengthening accountability in Latin America is getting voters to focus on specific performance issues.

Yet the evidence of retrospective performance-based voting in conditions where attributions of responsibility are clear demonstrates that voters are looking for politicians with the necessary skills and competency to create a strong economy and enact good governance. Not all countries and party systems make it easy for voters to assess responsibility and accountability, and it often gets blunted by partisanship, incumbency, and a lack of alternatives, but there is evidence that voters are looking for this form of electoral control.

Voter Choices Are Shaped by Candidate Traits and Campaign Effects
The combination of presidentialism and weak parties suggests that candidate traits should play a key role in Latin American elections and that voter opinions will change as they receive information about candidates during the campaign. Yet while questions about electoral structures and the connections between issues and electoral choices can be explored outside of the electoral context, analyses of candidate traits require survey data focused on the candidates themselves as does the study of campaign effects. The lack of systematic election surveys means that candidate-specific factors have been explored in only a handful of countries. However, the existing studies confirm that voters in the region are strongly shaped by these kinds of election-specific considerations.

In some cases, certain political figures emerge that reshape an entire party system. Some have argued, for example, that votes for or against Brazil’s Lula were much more informed by voter perceptions of the candidate than they were reactions to the PT’s policies (Samuels 2004), and at the time of his reelection in 2006 voter reactions to his traits were more strongly correlated with voter choices than were evaluations of his rivals’ traits (Ames et al. 2008). And the election of Bolsonaro in 2018 upended the decades long dominance of Brazil’s two major parties. In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez’s personal charisma created a swell of support that buoyed his popularity even when government performance faltered (Merolla and Zechmeister 2011, Weyland 2013). Yet the importance of candidate traits is not limited to political figures that reoriented political systems. Voter behavior in Mexico, for example, is strongly conditioned by how voters view the candidates, with evaluations of their competence being particularly salient (e.g. Domínguez and Lawson 2003, Moreno 2009), while evaluations of party leaders emerge as a major anchor of voter choices in the Dominican Republic (Torcal et al. 2017, 167). And while
voters primarily evaluate candidates on the basis of their character and experience, they also respond to their charisma (Merolla and Zechmeister 2011) and appearance (Lawson et al. 2010). The weakness of party identifications create space for candidates to shape their image through the political campaign. Voter opinions about candidates experienced significant swings after presidential debates in Brazil (Lourenco 2013) and Mexico (Lawson 2003). Attack ads against Andrew Manuel Lopez Obrador in Mexico’s 2006 presidential elections drove down his popularity, with the largest changes occurring among those who had the largest media exposure (Moreno and Martinez 2006). These kinds of campaign effects seem likely to emerge in other contexts, but scholars are still developing the necessary data to analyze them.

Finally, a literature is emerging on how voters evaluate different kinds of political candidates, for example, along gender lines. Female candidates are often seen as more honest and trustworthy than male candidates are, which provides them with a slight advantage when they are running for office (Aguilar et al. 2015). Parties often cultivate this by presenting female politicians with a maternal frame, as with Dilma Rousseff in Brazil (Raicheva-Stover and Ibroscheva 2014). Yet when a corruption scandal occurs, voters feel deceived and disappointed and so female politicians are often sanctioned more strongly than male candidates are (Carlin et al. forthcoming, Reyes-Householder forthcoming). Thus, gender stereotypes both help and hurt female politicians.

Among the many open areas of research on campaign tactics and candidate traits is whether their effects vary across contexts. No existing research has evaluated this question in Latin America, as the lack of comparative election-specific surveys makes systematic research on this question difficult.
Implications of the Electoral Behavior Literature for Assessing Electoral Quality in Latin America

The study of Latin American voting behavior has grown with the expansion of democracy and the increasing availability of high-quality survey data. The picture of Latin America’s electorate that emerges is one that is as engaged and active as any electorate in more established democracies, using elections as mechanisms to demand political accountability and voting based on issues when parties offer them meaningful choices. Voters also engage in electoral accountability in a sophisticated way, discounting policy outcomes that cannot easily be exclusively attributed to the incumbent.

Yet the results presented here and elsewhere also raise questions about whether party systems in Latin America are providing electors with meaningful programmatic options. In the average country, voter behavior is structured in ways that roughly mirrors what standard voting models describe. Latin America’s parties are not universally personalist vehicles, catch-all agglomerations, or clientelist machines and the countries where parties most strongly approximate the programmatic ideal, voters’ choices reflect their policy concerns and group interests in a way that create the possible inputs for mandate-based representation. But while Latin America’s electorates are not as unstructured as many early observers feared, the overall weakness of programmatic-based voting and partisan attachments in Latin America diverges from what is seen in Western Europe or the United States. This raises questions about whether parties in even the countries where programmatic competition is most strongly defined are fully able to meaningfully structure electoral choices. Instead, campaigns often focus on the personality-based politics that are inherent in presidential politics, especially in systems where parties are already weak. In countries where clientelism is common or where parties do not take
distinct issue stances, there are few systematic differences in voting behavior across demographic groups and voters’ choices do not correspond to their issue positions.

As scholars continue to explore voting behavior in Latin America, they need to be attuned to these contextual differences in the options available to voters. Further attention also needs to be given to understand the dynamics that underlie shifts in the modes of party representation. In many countries, ideological differentiation and programmatic representation has proven to be fragile, and so understanding the factors that stabilize party systems is key. In doing so, scholars also need to identify the role that voters themselves can play in the process of demanding programmatic representation, as in the successful movements for LGBTQ rights in Argentina, for example (Corrales 2017). But in many countries, the weakness of programmatic-based voting is evidence of larger systematic failures in offering substantive representation.

Despite the existence of these basic patterns of voting behavior in the region, scholars need to be aware that the demands that citizens make upon the state can and do evolve. Greater attention needs to be given to emerging issue cleavages around sexuality and the environment that have generated social movements in numerous countries in the region (link to ORE chapters) and that might shape party divisions in the future. Doing so will allow us to identify the process by which these issues become salient and the role that political entrepreneurs in parties and civil society can play to focus voter attention on them. In addition, the lack of election-specific studies outside a few large countries means that scholars know little about how voters respond to candidate traits and the kinds of messaging that are most effective in the region, especially in countries where clientelism is most common. Further investment in systematic election-studies in the region is needed. But the existing literature reveals an engaged and demanding citizenry who do seem to be pursuing representation and accountability in challenging contexts.
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Figure 1: The Association Between Wealth and Support for Conservative Candidates Varies by Party System
The marginal effect of wealth on the ideology of an average voter’s electoral intention varies according to the party system, with wealthy voters becoming less likely to support conservative parties when ideological differences are low or when clientelism usage is high. Data from Singer and Ramalho-Tafoya (2019).

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1 The authors thank Steven Tomastik for his research help and the Bennett Honors Research Professorship for its financial support. The views expressed here and any mistakes are the responsibility of the authors alone.
2 This mirrors trends in other regions where the class cleavage has shrunk in countries where the left has moderated its appeals or where parties have shifted away from economic issues to become less distinct on that issue (Przeworski and Sprague 1986, Evans and De Graaf 2013, Rennwald and Evans 2014).
3 See Caul Kittilson (2016) for a discussion of gender politics and how they are evolving across countries more broadly.
4 See Knutsen (2017) for a review.
5 This incumbency advantage accrues only to the president; when the incumbent is unable to run, their party generally loses support in subsequent elections (Dix 1984, Corrales and Penfold 2014). An incumbency disadvantage may also emerge in local elections, especially in weak party systems where parties are unable to constrain politicians to avoid shirking and where weak party attachments magnify the costs of ruling that most incumbents receive (Córdova Aquino and Incio Coronado 2013, Klasnja and Titiunik 2017).