

# THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT'S MANDATE

## Free-Market Policies and Issue Voting in New Democracies

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THE new millennium has ushered in leftist governments across Latin America. With the election of Fernando Lugo as Paraguay's president in April 2008, every country in South America except Colombia and Peru had elected a left-of-center president during the prior decade. In Central America, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua also elected left-leaning presidents, and Mexico's 2006 election saw a leftist candidate lose by just half a percentage point.<sup>1</sup>

Observers have interpreted the electoral success of left-of-center presidential candidates as everything from a sign of electorates' wishes for the "final unraveling of the so-called Washington consensus"<sup>2</sup> to an endorsement of free trade.<sup>3</sup> Still others have argued that Latin America's "left turn" does not have roots in economic policy per se but rather in economic performance, stemming from a raft of anti-incumbent votes cast against right-of-center incumbents who presided over sluggish economic growth as the twentieth century ended.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This count excludes Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana. We do not code Manuel Zelaya's 2005 win in Honduras as a leftist victory because he ran on a conservative program.

<sup>2</sup> Hershberg and Rosen 2006; Roberts 2008; Samuelson 2002: A25; Rodríguez, Barrett, and Chavez 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Castañeda and Navia 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold and Samuels forthcoming; Bruhn 2006; Haber 2005; Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav forthcoming; Sader 2008.

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The distinction between these competing accounts is of more than just academic interest. Many supporters of the left wave are excited by the prospect that the new breed of electorally oriented leftists will do what the socialist and communist left of the past could not: reverse the market-oriented Washington Consensus policies of the past two decades and move the region consequentially toward socialism. For their part, conservative forces, including domestic political actors, capital interests, and foreign policymakers, have reacted with heightened concern that this *radical policy-mandate* interpretation of Latin America's pink tide may be accurate.

But if conventional wisdom among scholars is correct, and leftists have been elected as punishment against right-wing incumbents who governed during the so-called "lost half-decade" of economic stagnation from 1998 to 2002, then voters have granted the left a *performance mandate* to deliver economic recovery regardless of its policies in office. As a result, the left's tenure in government would be more vulnerable to economic performance and might be particularly threatened if the current financial crisis spreads southward.

We show that both existing interpretations fail to account for the rise of the left and argue that voters have granted new leftist leaders a *moderate policy mandate*. Using a variety of measures and structural variables that span more than a decade of elections in eighteen Latin American countries (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela), we demonstrate that leftist victories in presidential elections result from voters' declining enthusiasm for market reforms and are not caused by negative evaluations of incumbents' economic performance. Nevertheless, voters' policy opinions have shifted much less than advocates of a radical policy-mandate argument suggest, and in fact have moved from mildly pro-market to a preference for centrism. Voters' centrism reflects their mixed reactions to market-oriented policies that combine genuine support for free trade with opposition to privatization. This balanced skepticism of the market underwrites a moderate economic policy mandate meant to empower leaders to reverse some aspects of Washington Consensus policies while maintaining, but not furthering, others. Our findings thus confirm neither the fears of the right nor the excitement of the left, but instead show that voters' ambivalence toward free-market reforms, not a desire to implement socialism, drives leftist victories.

Our argument not only explains the rise of the left in Latin America

but also contributes to three debates about politics in new democracies. First, party-voter linkages in new democracies are typically thought to revolve around clientelist or charismatic appeals that lack substantive content about public policy.<sup>5</sup> We show that electorates also vote according to their economic policy preferences (i.e., positional issue voting).<sup>6</sup> Second, scholars are generally skeptical about the quality of representation in new democracies because, even if voters choose candidates based on their issue appeals, victorious presidential candidates may bait-and-switch by drastically changing their policy positions after election day.<sup>7</sup> We instead show a correspondence between voters' centrist policy preferences and their governments' moderate economic policies, an indication that policy in Latin America is now tethered to public opinion. Finally, our argument helps account for the seemingly peculiar fact that most left-of-center leaders have pursued moderate economic policies, leaving most of the right's market reforms in place.<sup>8</sup> Prior research often explains differences between incumbents' expressed ideologies and actual policies with reference to domestic budget constraints and the so-called "straitjacket" imposed by international markets.<sup>9</sup> Without denying the importance of these constraints, our findings suggest that voters induce their governments' economic policy moderation.

Thus, in contrast to the overwhelmingly pessimistic image put forth by current literature on new democracies—one in which voters are portrayed as relatively powerless pawns that are easily manipulated or duped by politicians and cornered by international economic forces—we present a more optimistic picture.<sup>10</sup> Latin America's democracies possess policy-oriented voters who have purposely moved their governments' ideological locus of gravity from the center-right to the center, have sent clear policy signals to their governments, and have seen their governments respond.

<sup>5</sup> Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007.

<sup>6</sup> We do not argue that issue preferences are the only influences on voters' decisions. We compare the systematic effects of performance versus policy-related variables but do not test for the effects of other variables such as vote-buying (Lawson and Greene 2010) and candidate images (Greene, forthcoming; Lawson, Lenz, Baker, and Myers 2010). Although these latter influences clearly affect some election contests and go a long way toward explaining individual-level differences in vote choice, it is difficult to imagine that they could account for the systematic, region-wide rise of the left since the mid-1990s.

<sup>7</sup> Stokes 2001a.

<sup>8</sup> Flores-Maciás 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Cleary 2006; Stokes 2001a; Weyland 2004, 145.

<sup>10</sup> Friedman 2000; Mosley 2003; O'Donnell 1994; Wibbels 2006.

The first section of this article documents the extent of the left's success across countries and over time using a new measure of the left's electoral support. The second section examines the existing policy- and performance-mandate arguments as well as other plausible explanations in more detail, and discusses our moderate policy-mandate argument. The third section defines the concept of a mandate and discusses our empirical strategy for detecting mandates. The fourth section describes our measures and hypotheses, and the fifth section tests them with time-series cross-sectional statistical models. We conclude by discussing the optimistic finding that Latin American voters are by-and-large now active participants in orchestrating the policy content of their governments.

### HOW SHARP A LEFT TURN?

The left is on the rise, but whether and how far Latin American voters have moved to the left in their electoral behavior remains unclear for at least two reasons. First, even if voters chose left, center, and right parties in the same proportions before and after 1998, leftist leaders could win due to coalitional dynamics among political elites and the alchemy of runoff elections. For instance, Néstor Kirchner won election in Argentina in 2003 after losing in the first round to former president and free-market stalwart Carlos Menem, and Daniel Ortega became president of Nicaragua in 2006 with a lower vote share than he garnered in his prior losing bid because his opponents failed to coordinate on a single candidate. Second, seven of Latin America's eighteen countries, namely Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Peru, have not yet elected left-of-center presidents. Once these less attention-grabbing cases are incorporated into analyses, the so-called region-wide move to the left among voters may disappear.

At first blush, depicting whether and to what extent voters across the region have moved to the left in their electoral choices would seem easy to accomplish. Typically, scholars tally the percent of votes cast for leftist parties or candidates to measure the left's strength.<sup>11</sup> However, deciding which parties count as leftist across countries and over time leads to debatable decisions that nonetheless significantly affect final tallies. Even if analysts could agree on such a coding, this binary approach obscures meaningful ideological differences among left parties.

<sup>11</sup> Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav forthcoming; Stokes 2008; Debs and Helmke forthcoming relies, in part, on expert surveys.

Excluding nonleft parties also ignores the fact that a shift in voters' support from right to center parties also causes an aggregate ideological shift toward the left.

As an improvement, we introduce a new measure called *vote-revealed leftism* (VRL). VRL expresses with a single number the degree of support for candidates with leftist ideologies in a given election by taking into account the ideological positions and relative electoral success of *all* competitors that win votes. To obtain VRL, first we assign each candidate or party an ideology score that ranges from 1 (farthest right) to 20 (farthest left) using data primarily from the Wiesehomeier-Benoit (W-B) 2006 survey of experts and supplementing it with older expert survey results when needed.<sup>12</sup> We then multiply the ideology score by each candidate's vote share and sum these products for all contenders in the election to produce that election's VRL. Formally, for parties or candidates  $i = [1 \dots n]$ , VRL for election  $t$  for office  $k$  is given by

$$VRL_{tik} = \sum_{i=1}^n Ideology_{it} * VoteShare_{itk}$$

Because VRL employs ideology scores as a continuum, it preserves fine-grained distinctions among parties along the entire ideological spectrum. VRL thus distinguishes between what commentators have referred to as the "carnivorous" or populist left and the "vegetarian" or social-democratic left.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, VRL also incorporates the ideology and vote share of moderately sized and minor parties, improving on schemes that count a single party as the left.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, VRL can

<sup>12</sup> We generated ideology scores for nearly all vote-receiving parties and candidates in Latin America from 1995 to 2008 using a four-step algorithm. First, we assigned each party or presidential candidate their 1↔20 ideology score using experts' mean placement on the left-to-right scale in the W-B data set. This allowed us to code 92 percent of the presidential vote and 81 percent of the legislative vote. (See Wiesehomeier and Benoit 2009 and <http://www.wiesehomeier.net/>.) In the second and third steps, we filled in gaps using five-point ideology scores from the Pop-Eleches (2009) and Coppedge (1998) data sets, respectively. We converted these scores to their W-B equivalents by assigning each category its observed mean in the W-B data set. We thus coded another 5 percent of the presidential vote and 6 percent of the legislative vote. Finally, we conducted our own research and coded many of the remaining tiny parties on the five-point scale, again converting them to W-B equivalents. Overall, we coded 99.7 percent of the presidential vote and 93.8 percent of the legislative vote. The miniscule parties without codes were treated as missing in calculating vote-related leftism (VRL). Data and more information can be downloaded from <http://kgreene.webhost.utexas.edu/research.html> or <http://spot.colorado.edu/~bakerab/data.html>.

<sup>13</sup> For example, VRL reflects the difference between Chávez's radical Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (ideology=18.4) and Lula's more moderate Partido dos Trabalhadores in Brazil (ideology=14.6). For characterizations of the different lefts, see Castañeda 2006; Vargas Llosa 2007; Weyland 2009; Garcia 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Stokes 2008.

detect an electorate's ideological shift even when left candidates' vote shares remain the same across elections but voters reallocate their votes among center and right parties.<sup>15</sup> Finally, unlike the binary approach, VRL is invariant to the number of parties or candidates in a given election and thus significantly improves the validity of cross-national and cross-temporal comparisons.<sup>16</sup>

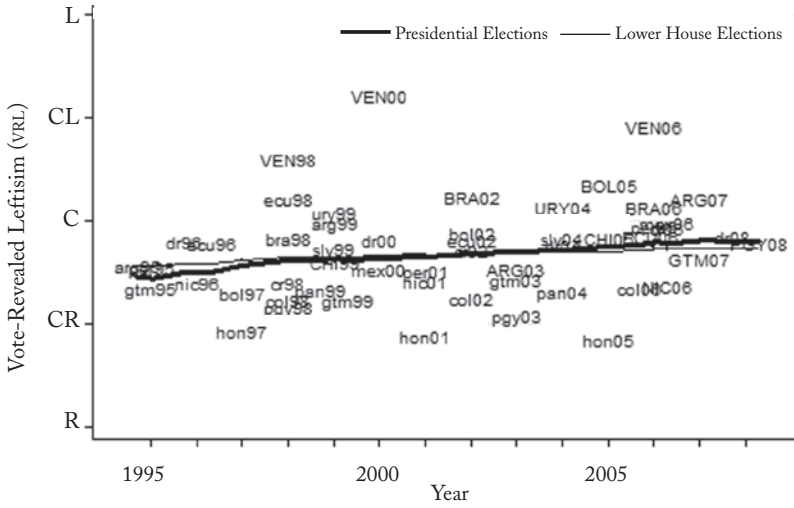
Figure 1(a) summarizes VRL for all presidential ( $VRL_{pres}$ ) and lower-house legislative ( $VRL_{house}$ ) elections in eighteen Latin American countries between 1995 and 2008. (Due to the availability of public opinion data, discussed below, we confine our analysis to elections during this period.) The central tendencies of VRL in each year appear as lowess-estimated lines. Country-year labels (e.g., "nic96") represent  $VRL_{pres}$  for a given presidential election. Labels in capital letters (e.g., "BRA02") refer to elections won by left-of-center presidential candidates (ideology > 10.5). We use only first-round results for presidential elections because runoffs do not offer the full slate of candidate options and thus obscure voters' first preferences.

Three findings are evident. First, the presidential vote choices of Latin Americans clearly moved to the left;  $VRL_{pres}$  increased by two points (about one standard deviation and 18 percent of the observed range) from 1995 to 2008. Within countries,  $VRL_{pres}$  increased from the first to the last election in all but three cases (Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama), and the increase was by more than half a point in all but six cases. The left turn in voting behavior is thus not an illusion induced by the coalitional alchemy of runoff elections and it is not driven entirely by the flagship cases seen in international headlines; rather, there has been a real underlying leftward shift among voters across the region.

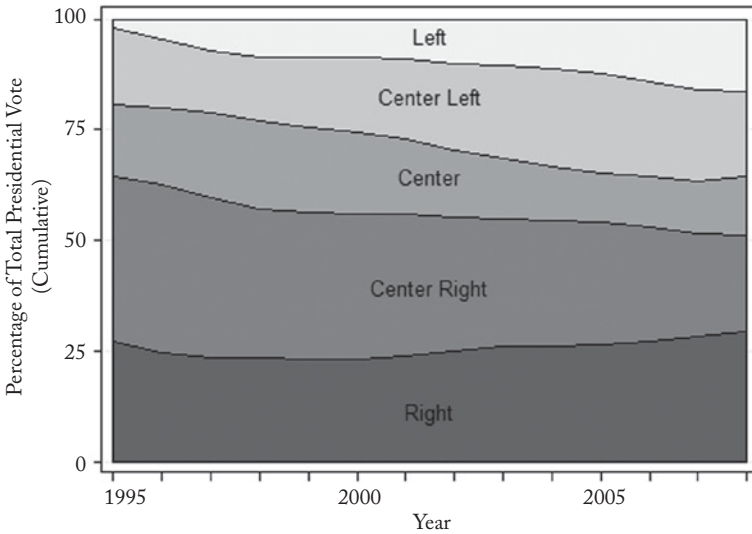
Second, despite the leftward shift, both the change in  $VRL_{pres}$  and its endpoint are moderate. Voters moved from an estimated  $VRL_{pres}$  of 7.89 in 1995, firmly on the center right, to a centrist position of 9.82—much closer to the exact center at 10.5—by 2008. This is the

<sup>15</sup> VRL measures the electorate's ideological disposition, not whether a left-of-center candidate won. On average,  $VRL_{pres}$  is left of center when left-of-center candidates won the presidency and right of center when they did not, and these differences are statistically significant at the 99 percent level. However, there are seven elections (see Figure 1) in which left-of-center candidates won despite a  $VRL_{pres}$  that was slightly to the right of center. In these instances, nonleftist vote-getting candidates were sufficiently far to the right and won enough votes to lower  $VRL_{pres}$ .

<sup>16</sup> Stokes (2008) introduces the clever concept of the "relative left" to capture the party "that a voter would support if she wished to help elect a left-leaning party and to avoid 'wasting' her vote on a sure loser." This binary approach excludes all but one left party and may inadvertently classify a centrist party as the relative left. For a discussion of the possible effects of strategic voting on our findings, see fn. 73.



(a)  
Vote-Revealed Leftism (VRL) in 53 Presidential and 60 Lower House Elections



(b)  
Performance of Each Ideological Camp in Presidential Elections

FIGURE 1  
THE RISE OF THE LEFT: THE IDEOLOGY OF ELECTION RESULTS IN  
EIGHTEEN<sup>a</sup> LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, 1995–2008<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

<sup>b</sup>Lines are estimated with lowess smoothing. Only first-round elections are used. Country labels refer to presidential election results, and those in capitals refer to elections won by left-of-center candidates. We drop Venezuela's 2005 congressional election because the opposition to Hugo Chávez boycotted it. Panel (b) categorizes ideological camps using the w-B ideology scores (and their equivalencies in supplemental data sets—see the online appendix for details) separated with the following thresholds: right (1–4.8), center right (4.8–8.6), center (8.6–12.4), center left (12.4–16.2), and left (16.2–20).

rough equivalent of moving from the center-right Brazilian Social Democracy Party of Fernando Henrique Cardoso (ideology=7.5) to the centrist Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (ideology=9.5). It is nothing like moving from the market-oriented National Action Party of Vicente Fox (ideology=3.7) in Mexico to Hugo Chávez's United Venezuelan Socialist Party (ideology=18.4), or even to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's more moderate Workers' Party in Brazil (ideology=14.6). Moreover,  $VRL_{pres}$  is left of center in only eight of the fifteen elections won by left-leaning candidates. Thus, in electoral terms, *Latin America's "left turn" is a move from an average preference among voters for center-right presidential candidates to an average preference for centrist candidates.*<sup>17</sup>

Figure 1(b) depicts the underlying building blocks of the moderate leftward shift in  $VRL_{pres}$  by reporting estimates of the percentage of the presidential vote that each of five ideological camps received each year. The center left and left collectively won about 20 percent of the vote in 1995 and 40 percent in 2008, but this increase came at the expense of the center and center right, not the right. Indeed, the right's support increased between 1995 and 2008. Moreover, by 2008 the median voter (designated by the 50 percent mark on the y-axis) teetered between the center and center right. Thus, these data show that the aggregate preferences of Latin American voters have moved *toward* the left but not *to* the left.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, despite the leftward shift in presidential elections, Figure 1(a) shows very little leftward shift in voters' preferences for congressional candidates. Between 1995 and 2008,  $VRL_{house}$  increased by a mere 0.5, all of which occurred in the short period from 1995 to 1998. At the country level,  $VRL_{house}$  increased by more than 0.5 in just nine of eighteen countries from 1995 to 2008, and almost all  $VRL_{house}$  scores show voters' collective ideological preferences to be firmly center to center right. Thus, *the left turn in Latin America has been a strictly presidential phenomenon*. For this reason, our analysis focuses on presidential elections; however, after developing our explanation for the rise of the left below, we are well-equipped to explain why the leftward shift in legislative elections has been so limited.

<sup>17</sup> The online appendix shows that our use of static W-B ideology scores does not overestimate this shift.

<sup>18</sup> Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav forthcoming shows that the average ideology of presidential administrations in Latin America moved from the center-right to the center from 1995 to 2007.



## WHY HAS THE LEFT TURN OCCURRED?

Over the last two decades, the collective preferences of Latin Americans in presidential elections have moved to the left, although they have remained more centrist than some might expect. Is this shift in vote choices caused by an underlying change in citizens' policy preferences or is it an artifact of voting out poorly performing right-of-center incumbents? Most arguments about Latin America's left turn fall into one of these two camps, and both are epitomized in this 2002 *Economist* headline: "A backlash against the free market? It's not that simple. Latin Americans just want governments that perform."<sup>19</sup> We label the claim embodied in the article's question—that there has been a "backlash against the free market"—as the policy-mandate argument. We label the claim in the *Economist's* answer to this question—that voters just want governments that perform—as the performance-mandate argument.

The policy-mandate approach argues that voters were particularly attracted to the left because they were "fatigued" with market reforms<sup>20</sup> and wanted a policy alternative. Many observers take the fiery statements of victorious presidential candidates as evidence that voters granted not just a policy mandate, but a *radical* policy mandate to "unravel" the Washington Consensus and usher in a "postneoliberal" era.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Chávez railed against "savage capitalism," Lula warned of the potential "economic annexation" of Brazil by the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, Kirchner spoke of the "lamentable and disastrous" policies espoused by the International Monetary Fund, and in Bolivia Evo Morales referred to the "*vendepatrias*" [sellouts or traitors] who benefitted from foreign investment.

Despite its flamboyant appeal, the radical policy-mandate argument faces an empirical anomaly that has led many scholars to dismiss it: most new leftist leaders in Latin America have in fact maintained core aspects of the Washington Consensus.<sup>22</sup> Thus, recent scholarship speculates that the left must only have a mandate to improve macroeconomic performance. According to this now-dominant line of thought, the left came to power merely because it was more likely than the center and right to have been out of office during the recessionary, and thus anti-incumbent, period from 1998 to 2002.<sup>23</sup> As the region's economies

<sup>19</sup> *Economist* 2002.

<sup>20</sup> Lora, Panizza, and Quispe-Agnoli 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Hershberg and Rosen 2006; Samuelson 2002; Roberts 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Hunter 2007; Cleary 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Arnold and Samuels forthcoming; Bruhn 2006; Haber 2005; Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav forthcoming; Sader 2008; Levitsky and Roberts forthcoming.

rebounded after 2002, many leftist leaders remained in power because retrospectively oriented voters decided that the new incumbents had performed well.<sup>24</sup>

The performance-mandate argument is also appealing because it seems to corroborate the large body of work on “retrospective voting” in Latin America<sup>25</sup> and reaffirms analysts’ skepticism about positional issue voting.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, it does not offer a satisfying explanation for the rise of the left either. First, a performance-mandate argument says nothing about the ideological content of the anti-incumbent vote. Latin American elections feature multiparty competition, and in elections where left-wing challengers initially won the presidency, centrist and rightist nonincumbent parties still won 33 percent of the vote. Increasing voter support for left-of-center parties thus seems intentional, not accidental. Second, in nearly 15 percent of the presidential elections in our data set the incumbent’s party did not run a candidate, making it difficult for voters to use retrospective performance evaluations to choose among the competitors. Finally, as evidenced in Figure 1(a), the left wave gathered force after 2002—when economies across the region were in recovery, not decline.

As an alternative to these two existing approaches, we argue that voters have granted the new left a *moderate* policy mandate. We agree with the radical policy-mandate argument that a vote for the left contains policy content: mass support for market policies has fallen and this has pushed many citizens to vote for the new leftists. However, we depart from the extreme version of the policy-mandate argument for both empirical and theoretical reasons.

Not only have voters cast their ballots for centrist ideological forces on average, as depicted in Figure 1, but citizens are both ambivalent and surprisingly moderate in their views about the Washington Consensus. Figure 2 shows yearly estimates of the percent of all Latin American citizens that support privatization, the market system in general, and globalization (defined as trade liberalization, regional integration, and foreign investment).<sup>27</sup> The intensity of support for globalization—shown with the broken line—and the absolute level of support for privatization and the market’s suitability all declined after the mid-1990s. These declines are substantial but should not be overstated. The proportion of citizens supporting globalization was about 85 percent

<sup>24</sup> Castañeda and Navia 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Remmer 1991; Stokes 2001b.

<sup>26</sup> Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Stokes 2001a; Domínguez and McCann 1996.

<sup>27</sup> The online appendix details index construction.

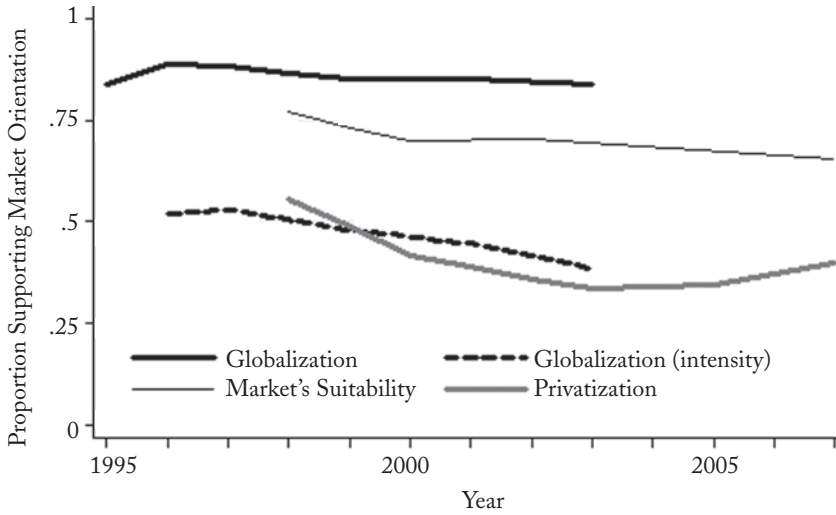


FIGURE 2

PROPORTION OF CITIZENS SUPPORTING THREE ASPECTS OF THE MARKET<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Lines are central tendency estimates using lowess smoothing.

and did not decline, despite a slight fall in the intensity of this support. Even at the nadir in 2007, more than 50 percent of respondents believed that the market was the most suitable economic system and 30 percent supported the least-popular policy of privatization. In sum, overall support for the market fell but attitudes toward free trade remained strongly positive. This picture of mixed support for the market suggests that voters did not cast their ballots to give new leftist leaders a mandate for radical economic policy change.

The reaction of voters to Washington Consensus policies is much more moderate than proponents of the radical policy-mandate argument would expect because advocates of this position assume a problematic microfoundation for voting behavior. Were Latin American citizens to react to free-market policies with their labor-market interests in mind, they might very well reject free trade and privatization since both caused immediate job losses.<sup>28</sup> Yet, as Andy Baker shows, citizens reacted to the Washington Consensus as consumers.<sup>29</sup> Consumption-oriented citizens forgave the tightened labor markets and increased wage inequities that resulted from trade liberalization because they were so enthusiastic about the lower prices, improved quality,

<sup>28</sup> Goldberg and Pavcnik 2004; Stallings and Peres 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Baker 2009.

and expanded variety of consumer goods that globalization brought.<sup>30</sup> Privatization did produce a stronger negative reaction due to the resulting price increases for some utility services, but expanded consumer access to these services partially counterbalanced such opposition.<sup>31</sup>

Why did voters begin choosing left-of-center candidates in greater numbers starting in the late 1990s if reactions to the Washington Consensus were so moderate? It was not due to labor-market factors because the initial period of reform-induced job losses in the late 1980s and early 1990s was followed by job growth in the 2000s.<sup>32</sup> Rather, voter enthusiasm for market reforms declined moderately beginning in the late 1990s as utility prices increased and the gains to consumers from trade liberalization remained static, having accrued during the reform-initiation phase but fading from memory by the late 1990s. As a result, consumption-oriented citizens questioned the benefits of deepening free-market reforms and many sought to apply the brakes by supporting left-of-center candidates.<sup>33</sup> The resulting aggregate shift in vote choices moved electorates *toward* the left rather than *to* the left because a substantial proportion of voters, as consumers, still genuinely approved of certain aspects of Washington Consensus policies.

Initially, it might seem as though our moderate policy-mandate argument and the performance-mandate counterclaim are indistinguishable. After all, market policies affect objective economic performance, so voters who criticize a right-of-center incumbent's economic performance might also prefer antimarket policies. However, citizens' assessments of incumbents' market policies stem mainly from their highly visible effects on specific economic consumption indicators, including the availability, quality, and prices of utility services and tradable goods. In contrast, subjective performance evaluations follow trends in overall personal economic well-being and national economic growth.<sup>34</sup> These outcomes are shaped more by international capital flows, commodity prices, interest rates, foreign demand, and exchange rates than by the market reforms of Latin American governments. Research in public opinion finds the causal link between macroeconomic trends and support for market reforms to be modest at best.<sup>35</sup> In sum, market beliefs reflect focused evaluations of governmental policy, whereas

<sup>30</sup> Baker 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Nellis and Birdsall 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Inter-American Development Bank 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Baker 2009.

<sup>34</sup> Kramer 1983; Remmer 1991; Stokes 2001b.

<sup>35</sup> Baker 2009; Graham and Sukhtankar 2004.

performance evaluations mainly reflect broader trends in macroeconomic and personal well-being, regardless of their policy roots.

### DEFINING AND DETECTING MANDATES

To date, competing explanations for the rise of the left in Latin America have not been tested adequately. Most existing scholarship and journalistic commentary rest on anecdotal evidence and an analytically dubious link between voters' intentions and elite rhetoric. Those who favor the policy-mandate hypothesis commonly impute the preferences of electorates using the campaign statements of winning candidates and then conclude that this shared policy preference constitutes a mandate. Work that favors the performance-mandate explanation similarly focuses on the left's moderation in office and concludes that voters could not possibly have granted such leaders a mandate to stall or reverse market reforms.<sup>36</sup>

Interpreting mandates with only elite rhetoric in hand—an argument Robert Dahl refers to as the “primitive theory of the popular presidential mandate”<sup>37</sup>—is circular reasoning. Instead, we agree with Stanley Kelley that “to ask what an election means is to ask what beliefs and attitudes made voters pull one lever and not another.”<sup>38</sup> The motivation behind vote choices may be at wide variance with candidates' rhetoric because voters may ignore prospective policy statements or they may select candidates based on retrospective evaluations, candidate images, clientelist linkages, or a large series of valence issues on which all voters agree (such as nationalism or lower crime rates). Relying on elite rhetoric alone is particularly problematic in a world region that has been prone to mandate betrayals. In many Latin American elections in the 1980s and early 1990s, voters elected statist presidential candidates only to receive market-oriented policies after inauguration.<sup>39</sup> As a result, policy agreement between electorates and winning candidates cannot be assumed.

A few recent papers have made progress by examining the impact of structural variables on aggregate vote choices. Yet even if structural variables yield empirically correct predictions about where and when the left has won, this approach still requires analysts to guess at the mass understandings and policy preferences that underlie structural

<sup>36</sup> Hershberg and Rosen 2006; Roberts 2008; Sader 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Dahl 1990.

<sup>38</sup> Kelley 1983, 43.

<sup>39</sup> Stokes 2001a.

trends.<sup>40</sup> For instance, if a study found that increasing trade openness is associated with the rise of the left, it would remain unclear why such openness compelled voters to support the left. Are their vote choices a response to trade-induced job insecurity and thus a demand for greater protectionism, or is their support for the left induced by a desire for compensation in the form of thicker social safety nets? The fact that findings associated with structural variables are consistent with multiple causal mechanisms means that we cannot know. We argue that uncovering the reasons behind the shifting vote choices of Latin American electorates—and thus the meaning of any mandate they give to their elected officials—requires an examination of public opinion.

Our empirical strategy is to test for correspondence between voters' evaluations of particular policy packages and performance criteria on the one hand, and the electoral success of different ideological options on the other. Some research on American politics argues that voting decisions can be so complex that one can never definitively determine the content of a mandate in a *particular* election.<sup>41</sup> We agree that single-case studies pose difficulties for such causal assessment and thus investigate the ideological slant of election outcomes across eighteen countries and thirteen years with a pooled time-series data set of forty-eight presidential elections from 1996 to 2008.<sup>42</sup>

We focus primarily on this country-level analysis rather than on an individual-level analysis because we seek to explain why the left is more electorally successful in some countries and years than in others. To gain leverage on this question we need to test whether changes in public opinion lead to corresponding shifts in the ideological profile of voting behavior across elections, not whether certain opinions make some individuals more likely to vote for the left than others. Individual-level relationships between explanatory variables and vote choices can remain the same across elections even if consequential aggregate shifts in both variables occur. For instance, if an incumbent candidate's vote share fell because the economy soured and all voters shifted their performance evaluations of him downward to an equal degree, then an aggregate-level analysis would correctly show that the candidate's probability of winning fell due to poor performance in office. However,

<sup>40</sup> Debs and Helmke forthcoming; Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav forthcoming. Arnold and Samuels forthcoming and Seligson 2007 describe patterns in public opinion that might relate to vote choice.

<sup>41</sup> Dahl 1990.

<sup>42</sup> The number of elections in our statistical analyses is less than that in Figure 1 because we use lagged public opinion measures and because public opinion data for the Dominican Republic are not available until 2005.

the strength of the individual-level correlation between performance evaluations and vote choices would be equivalent in both elections and thus would entirely miss the causal importance of the incumbent's performance.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, we agree with Gerald Kramer that in studying public opinion and election outcomes across elections, "it is the *aggregate* time-series evidence—rather than that based on individual-level survey data—which is most likely to yield valid inferences about the underlying individual-level behavioral effects we are trying to measure."<sup>44</sup> Clearly, individual-level relationships between policy attitudes and vote choices must exist if the policy-mandate argument holds, but they alone are insufficient for demonstrating that exogenous changes in policy attitudes yield corresponding shifts in election outcomes. We focus on comparing aggregate-level attitudes and election outcomes across countries and over time. (That said, we do test for the necessary condition that individuals with antimarket attitudes are the ones who chose left-of-center candidates and we report these results in fn. 67).

If the policy-mandate argument holds, then leftist candidates should be more successful at the polls in countries and in election years when market-oriented economic policies are less popular. Alternatively, if the performance-mandate argument holds, then leftist challengers to non-leftist incumbents should be more electorally successful in countries and in election years where economic growth is sluggish or negative or where other performance criteria such as personal security or government corruption are perceived as major problems. When leftists are incumbents, they should conversely benefit from growing economies or perceived success in other performance indicators.

### MEASURING MANDATES

Because mandates are based on voter attitudes, preferences, and perceptions, we rely as much as possible on public opinion measures for our independent variables, using the annual Latinbarometer survey of eighteen countries that began in 1995. We construct attitudinal indices

<sup>43</sup> In addition, an individual-level analysis based on cross-sectional surveys could yield severely biased conclusions about retrospective voting because many citizens view the economy through partisan lenses. As a result, evaluations of the economy are shaped by beliefs about the incumbent, rather than the reverse. This endogeneity causes an overstatement of the effect of economic perceptions on vote choices in individual-level, cross-sectional analyses. See Kramer 1983; Zaller 1992. We avoid this problem by lagging our public opinion measures to a time before each election. Doing this type of analysis at the individual-level would require panel survey data, which are available only for a few elections across the region.

<sup>44</sup> Kramer 1983, 93.

from multiple survey items (when available) not only because any single survey question suffers from measurement error but also because using an index helps smooth out the inevitable differences that occur across countries and over time in the salience of particular election issues. For instance, the issue of privatization of water and natural gas resources loomed large in Bolivia's 2005 elections, whereas the debate over free trade dominated the policy discourse of presidential elections in Costa Rica and Peru in 2006. (Details on the construction of all public opinion variables appear in the online appendix.)

We test two issues that could drive a policy mandate. First, we assess the impact of economic policy preferences by measuring mass support for the market with an index of seven survey questions. These questions cover the full array of market policies implemented in Latin America—privatization, North-South trade, South-South trade, and liberalization of foreign investment inflows—as well as overall support for the free market. If decreases in pro-market sentiment cause increases in  $VRL_{pres}$ , then we will conclude that the left has a policy mandate to slow or stall market reforms. (Given that voters generally hold moderate economic policy attitudes about free-market policies, as shown in Figure 2, we already know that such a mandate could not be radical in nature.)

Second, we test for a possible mandate regarding relations with the United States.<sup>45</sup> Some new leftist leaders are vociferously critical of the United States in general and the George W. Bush administration in particular (which was highly unpopular throughout Latin America). For instance, Venezuela's President Chávez famously referred to President Bush as "the devil" when he addressed the United Nations General Assembly in September 2006, and three different leftist presidents expelled United States embassy officials in 2008 and 2009. We thus include a measure of mass anti-Americanism from the Latinbarometer series. If increases in anti-Americanism cause increases in  $VRL_{pres}$ , then we will conclude that the left has a mandate to implement an anti-United States foreign policy.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Arnold and Samuels forthcoming; Seligson 2007.

<sup>46</sup> In testing the policy-mandate argument, we rely on voters' attitudes and preferences about specific policies rather than ideological self-placement. Self-reported left-to-right ideology is a summary measure that suffers from three problems. First, voters may not understand these labels or conceptualize politics in spatial terms. Indeed, about 20 percent of respondents to public opinion polls across Latin America do not answer questions about left-right orientation. Second, voters who do answer may understand the meaning of left and right orientations differently (see Zechmeister 2006). Finally, even if voters had a common understanding of left and right, this measure of ideology includes voters' positions on multiple policies. Thus, if we found that voters in countries and election years with more leftist ideologies chose more leftist candidates, we would have uncovered little about the underlying reason for the rise of the left.



We test four versions of the performance-mandate hypothesis. First, we examine economic performance with an index of evaluations of economic welfare that includes citizens' assessments of the current national macroeconomic situation (sociotropic evaluations), their own personal financial situation (pocketbook evaluations), their concern over meeting basic needs (consumption security), and their estimation of whether they would be unemployed in the subsequent twelve months (employment security). We also consider objective economic trends as measured by change in GDP and inflation in the year preceding the election and, separately, over the incumbent's entire term.<sup>47</sup> If the performance mandate explains the rise of the left, then bad economic performance and negative performance evaluations under nonleft governments should increase  $VRL_{pres}$ . Conversely, where the left is in power, bad economic performance and evaluations should decrease  $VRL_{pres}$ .

Our second performance criterion concerns crime. Along with the economy, personal security has been a top concern of citizens in Latin America's new democracies.<sup>48</sup> To test whether the left's mandate is based to any extent on reducing crime, we use an index of pessimism about crime, lagged by one year. More concerns about crime should increase  $VRL_{pres}$  when the nonleft is in power and decrease  $VRL_{pres}$  when the left is the incumbent. Given that rightist parties are often considered to be more focused on law and order, we also test whether higher levels of crime help the right, regardless of the ideological slant of the incumbent.

Third, we test the effect of corruption perceptions, lagged by one year, on vote choices. Voters often cite unscrupulous officials as a reason to "throw the bums out." We employ the Transparency International index of corruption, which gauges perceptions of corruption by country experts in the business and economic analysis communities.<sup>49</sup> If the left has ridden an anticorruption mandate to office, then  $VRL_{pres}$  should rise when right-wing incumbents are perceived as corrupt and fall when left-wing incumbents are.

Finally, we evaluate the impact of mass support for democracy. Some scholars interpret the rise of the left as a reaction to democracy's perceived deficiencies, especially regarding political representation.<sup>50</sup> We thus test whether leftist candidates gained when right-leaning incumbents oversaw rising mass frustration with democracy.

<sup>47</sup> World Bank 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Di Tella, Donna, and MacCulloch 2008.

<sup>49</sup> See corruption perception indexes at <http://www.transparency.org/>.

<sup>50</sup> Arnold and Samuels forthcoming; Roberts 2008.

As is evident from these hypotheses, the performance-mandate argument is interactive: leftists should do well when they are not incumbents *and* mass performance evaluations are negative. They should also do well when they are incumbents *and* evaluations are positive. Alternatively, leftists should do poorly when they are not incumbents and mass performance evaluations are positive as well as when they are incumbents and such evaluations are negative. To test for these interactive effects, we include the incumbent's ideology (determined using the W-B data set) and interact it with the performance variables. To ease interpretation of the various interaction coefficients and their main effects, we recenter incumbent's ideology so that a center-right incumbent equals zero.<sup>51</sup> This strictly cosmetic adjustment means that the main effect of a coefficient on a performance indicator can be interpreted as the impact of that performance indicator on  $VRL_{pres}$  when a center-right president holds office. (We label variable names with "CR" to remind readers of this recentering.)

Scholars have suggested four other plausible explanations that we also consider. First, we test the theoretical expectation that left parties should prosper where globalization has expanded market-induced risk and volatility, with citizens choosing leftist parties in the hopes that they will provide a protectionist antidote.<sup>52</sup> If this prediction is correct, then trade as a percent of GDP should be positively correlated with  $VRL_{pres}$ .

Second, we test the related argument that the size of the state may affect voter support for left-wing governments. Economies with small welfare states are often volatile and lead voters to favor left-wing candidates who promise thicker state-sponsored cushions.<sup>53</sup> Other scholars argue that where the state remains comparatively large, a constituency to defend against the market's advance might propel voters to choose left-wing candidates.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, where the state is deeply involved in economic activities, leftist leaders might have the cash flow to lock in their early victories by extending economic benefits to favored constituencies.<sup>55</sup> We test these claims with government consumption as a percent of GDP.

Third, some scholars cite Latin America's notorious income inequality as the reason for the left's rise. Greater inequality may encourage relatively poorer voters to favor the left with the expectation that it will

<sup>51</sup> We subtract 5.75 from the original ideology score, yielding a possible range of -4.75 to 14.25.

<sup>52</sup> Rodrik 1998.

<sup>53</sup> Rodrik 1998.

<sup>54</sup> Sader 2008.

<sup>55</sup> Benton 2006.

implement redistributive measures.<sup>56</sup> Alternatively, higher levels of inequality may activate the right to buy off the poor through clientelism and thus make middle levels of inequality more favorable to the left.<sup>57</sup> We use the Gini coefficient and the Gini coefficient squared to test whether  $VRL_{pres}$  is linearly or curvilinearly associated with inequality.

Finally, we consider two supply-side factors that could potentially confound the relationship between the demand-side variables detailed above and the left's shifting fortunes. First, although it would be rational for new parties to enter competition only when there is sufficient voter demand for them to win, we know that party entry relies on decisions by elites that may respond to other calculations.<sup>58</sup> Thus,  $VRL_{pres}$  could have shifted over time or varied across countries simply because the menu of available party options differed. In particular, if left-of-center parties entered competition or right-of-center parties disappeared between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s, then  $VRL_{pres}$  might rise without an underlying ideological shift in voters' preferences. We consider these possibilities by testing the effects of left-of-center party availability and right-of-center party availability, each of which measures the range of ideological options available within their respective party families.<sup>59</sup> Although all elections in the data set feature right-of-center parties, six lack left-of-center parties. In these cases, we add a dummy variable for no left-of-center party. Even these measures cannot separate elites' decisions to enter or withdraw from competition and voters' demands for leftist or rightist parties. Thus, if our market beliefs variable remains significant in the presence of these variables, we will consider our argument strengthened.

A second supply-side argument suggests that as democracy and party systems consolidate, voters become more willing to express their support for left parties because they are less worried about a possible coup by right-wing forces.<sup>60</sup> Gustavo Flores-Macías suggests the opposite by arguing that leftist parties are more moderate in countries with more consolidated party systems.<sup>61</sup> We remain agnostic between these contrasting predictions but test both using the age of democracy and electoral volatility.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Cleary 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Debs and Helmke forthcoming.

<sup>58</sup> Greene 2007.

<sup>59</sup> Left party availability is the ideology score of the most extreme left-of-center party in a given election minus 10.5, and right party availability is 10.5 minus the ideology score of the most extreme right-of-center party.

<sup>60</sup> Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav forthcoming.

<sup>61</sup> Flores-Macías 2010.

<sup>62</sup> We use the Pedersen index of electoral volatility. See Pedersen 1983.

## DETERMINING THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT'S MANDATE

The collective electoral preferences of Latin Americans have moved leftward since 1995, as indicated by the increasing trend in  $VRL_{pres}$  shown in Figure 1(a). At a minimum, we would thus expect any independent variables that could plausibly explain this to trend upward or downward after 1995. Figure 3 provides an initial assessment of the two main rival arguments by plotting the central tendencies of mass support for the market in all years and evaluations of economic welfare in years with a right-of-center presidential incumbent.

Mass support for the market (mean of  $-.09$ , standard deviation of  $.91$ , range from  $-2.54$  to  $1.90$ ) declined monotonically after 1997 from  $+.40$  in the mid-1990s to  $-.77$  by the late 2000s, falling by almost 1.5 standard deviations (equal to 27 percent of the range). This decline is the mirror image of the rise in  $VRL_{pres}$ , and the simple correlation between the two central tendencies is a whopping  $-.91$ . At the very least, there is a strong temporal coincidence between the declining enthusiasm of Latin Americans for the market and their increasing propensity to vote for leftist candidates. In contrast, economic-performance evaluations (mean of  $.10$ , standard deviation of  $.92$ , range from  $-2.49$  to  $2.47$ ) follow a nonlinear pattern with good evaluations from 1995 to 1998, a downturn from 1999 to 2002, and a rapid recovery from 2003 to 2007 when average evaluations improved by more than one standard deviation. These periods correspond to objective economic trends: average GDP per capita annual growth in the region was 1.9 percent in the first period,  $-0.20$  percent in the second, and 4.2 percent in the third. This nonlinear pattern, however, does not follow the increase in  $VRL_{pres}$  that occurred at the same time. Particularly damning to the economic-performance hypothesis is that voters' evaluations rebounded sharply after 2003, precisely when  $VRL_{pres}$  increased most quickly. Thus, it is unlikely that voters turned left solely to dismiss poorly performing centrist and rightist incumbents.

The graphical depictions indicate strong initial support for our moderate economic policy-mandate argument and no support for the economic performance-mandate argument. Nevertheless, region-wide time trends are a crude instrument for testing hypotheses, as there is large cross-national variation around these central tendencies. Parsing the causal effects of policy and performance criteria requires statistical techniques that use rather than discard cross-national variation. Such techniques also allow a parsimonious examination of alternative versions of the performance-mandate hypothesis and the other variables described above.

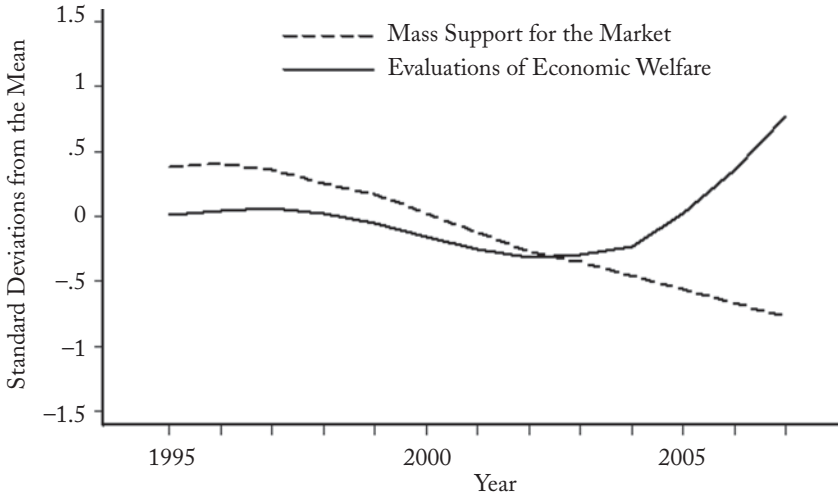


FIGURE 3

TRENDS IN MASS SUPPORT FOR THE MARKET AND EVALUATIONS OF ECONOMIC WELFARE ACROSS EIGHTEEN<sup>a</sup> LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, 1995–2007<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

<sup>b</sup>Lines are central tendency estimates using lowess smoothing. The broken line is estimated using data from all available years (not just election years,  $N = 163$ ); the solid line is estimated using data from all years when a right-of-center president (ideology  $< 10.5$ ) was in power ( $N = 141$ ).

We first estimate pooled time-series regression models to pinpoint the causes of cross-national and cross-temporal differences in electorates'  $VRL_{pres}$  across forty-eight elections. We lag by one year the explanatory variables for two reasons. First, since Latinbarometer interviews often occurred in the months following elections, using a lag ensures that our public opinion criteria were measured prior to the election outcomes they might explain. Second, using lags creates explanatory variables that are not endogenous to election campaigns and events. Such endogeneity may occur simply because elites try to persuade voters about economic performance and policies during campaigns.<sup>63</sup> For example, a new but popular antimarket party may convince many voters during the campaign to turn antimarket, thus increasing both antimarket sentiment and  $VRL_{pres}$ . This would incline the statistical results to

<sup>63</sup> Zaller 1992.

show that the party enjoys an antimarket mandate even if antimarket voters chose the new party for other reasons. Lagging our public opinion measures to a time before each campaign deals with this potential endogeneity.

Our first estimation technique is the generalized estimation equation (GEE), which fits a population-averaged panel-data model. Like random-effects models GEE employs variation across countries and through time, but makes more efficient use of unbalanced and unevenly spaced data—both of which occur in our data set because elections happen at different times and with different frequency across countries.<sup>64</sup> For the most part, we do not include a lagged dependent variable because we wish to explain the level of  $VRL_{pres}$  rather than the degree of change from the preceding election.<sup>65</sup> However, to test a variety of implications generated by the performance-mandate hypothesis, we do estimate some models of change in  $VRL_{pres}$  and also consider longer lags to the performance-mandate explanatory variables.

To begin, we show a series of simple models in the first column of Table 1. These models test each hypothesis without any control variables. For most hypotheses, these were bivariate models, but for the performance hypotheses we included three variables (two main effects and one interaction term) to account for the interactive nature of these claims. (Horizontal lines in column 1 divide separately estimated models.) In this first round of statistical tests, the policy-mandate variables reach statistical significance. As in the descriptive findings above, mass support for the market has a negative impact on  $VRL_{pres}$ . Another policy variable, mass anti-Americanism, is also statistically significant and has a positive impact on  $VRL_{pres}$ . With the exception of party availability, none of the other performance-mandate variables or variables associated with alternative hypotheses reaches statistical significance.<sup>66</sup> Not surprisingly, the menu of available parties across countries and over time affects the ideological balance of voters' choices. However, the principal issue that we address below is whether party supply overwhelms the

<sup>64</sup> Zorn 2001.

<sup>65</sup> A central question in the relevant literature and in our analysis is why leftists are more successful in some elections than in others (e.g., Cleary 2006). In addressing this question, comparing the level of  $VRL_{pres}$  between, for instance, Colombia (no leftist elected) and Uruguay (leftist elected in 2004) is more relevant than comparing the temporal changes in  $VRL_{pres}$  within these countries. Similarly, the key result from Brazil's 2006 election is that Lula polled well (winning reelection), not that he did worse in 2006 than in 2002. Explaining change in  $VRL_{pres}$  with change in market beliefs would also yield biased results because we would be forced to drop eighteen cases (one per country) from the analysis due to the differencing of our public opinion variable. All of these dropped elections occurred before the left turn's initiation.

<sup>66</sup> The coefficients on GDP per capita and inflation are relatively large but wrongly signed.

TABLE 1  
 GENERALIZED ESTIMATION EQUATION MODELS OF VRL<sub>PRES</sub> IN  
 EIGHTEEN<sup>a</sup> LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, 1996–2008

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Simple Models<sup>b</sup></i>		<i>Full Specifications</i>					
<i>Policy Mandate Variables</i>								
Mass support for the market <sub>(t-1)</sub>	-.751*	-.690*	-.788*	-.827*	-.732*	-.827*	-.614*	-.578*
	(.288)	(.383)	(.310)	(.352)	(.294)	(.356)	(.263)	(.266)
Mass anti-Americanism <sub>(t-1)</sub>	1.664*	.396						
	(.618)	(.923)						
<i>Performance Mandate Variables</i>								
Evaluations of economic welfare <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)	.026		.112					
	(.228)		(.188)					
Evaluations of economic welfare <sub>(t-1)</sub> × incumbent's ideology	.060		.061					
	(.071)		(.069)					
Pessimism about crime <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)	.159			.070				
	(.409)			(.414)				
Pessimism about crime <sub>(t-1)</sub> × incumbent's ideology	-.009			-.099				
	(.102)			(.133)				
Pessimism about crime <sub>(t-1)</sub>	.035							
	(.460)							
Corruption perceptions <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)	.324			.168				
	(.302)			(.278)				
Corruption perceptions <sub>(t-1)</sub> × incumbent's ideology	-.051			-.005				
	(.043)			(.035)				
Mass support for democracy <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)	-.297					.104		
	(.372)					(.413)		
Mass support for democracy <sub>(t-1)</sub> × incumbent's ideology	.063					.059		
	(.073)					(.090)		
Change in GDP <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)	.165							
	(.066)							
Change in GDP <sub>(t-1)</sub> × incumbent's ideology	-.020							
	(.006)							
Inflation <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)	-.031							
	(.019)							
Inflation <sub>(t-1)</sub> × incumbent's ideology	.005							
	(.004)							
Incumbent's ideology	See note		-.033	.020	.054	-.001		
			(.077)	(.071)	(.151)	(.081)		

TABLE 1, *cont.*

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Simple Models<sup>b</sup></i>	<i>Full Specifications</i>						
<i>Other Variables</i>								
Right-of-center party availability	-.332* (.170)	-.335* (.129)						
Left-of-center party availability	.474* (.138)	.408* (.125)						
No left-of-center party	.381 (.731)	.598 (.650)						
Trade as a percent of GDP	-.008 (.012)							
Government consumption as a percent of GDP	.049 (.105)							
Gini coefficient	.554 (11.240)							
Gini coefficient squared	145.763 (169.574)							
Age of democracy	.051 (.041)							
Electoral volatility	-2.074* (1.029)	-1.245 (1.269)						
Constant		8.147* (1.937)	8.930* (.472)	8.855* (.472)	8.328* (1.080)	8.910* (.462)	8.871* (.909)	9.366* (.685)

Entries are generalized estimation equation (GEE) coefficients, and robust standard errors are in parentheses except where noted below. We use exchangeable country-specific error structures and White's heteroskedastic standard errors that are robust to misspecification of the error structure. \* =  $p < .05$ , one-tailed (we thus do not count as statistically significant coefficients that are wrongly signed);  $N = 48$ . Results are average estimates over ten multiply imputed data sets (Royston 2005). The model for the age of democracy uses the between-effects generalized least squares estimator. CR denotes center-right, reminding readers that these main effects coefficients express the impact of the performance indicator when the incumbent is center-right (ideology = 5.75).

<sup>a</sup>Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

<sup>b</sup>This column reports results of different models that test each hypothesis without controls and separates each model with a horizontal line. The simple models of policy mandate and "other" indicators contain just one predictor. The simple models for performance-mandate predictors contain three: the performance indicator, incumbent ideology, and their interaction.

intentions of voters to shape the ideological slant of their government.

Table 1 also shows more fully specified GEE models to assess the robustness of the simple models' support for our moderate policy-mandate argument. We limit our models to four predictors to retain sufficient degrees of freedom. Mass support for the market is the only public opinion variable that survives the statistical controls. The substantive effect of antimarket opinions (on average across all of the models) is so



strong that a one standard deviation change in the opinion index yields two-thirds of a point change in  $VRL_{pres}$ . Considering that the region-wide shift in  $VRL_{pres}$  was only two points between 1995 and 2008, the impact of this variable is massive. More important, mass preferences about the market have the same large impact when controlling for subjective performance evaluations. This indicates that market-policy attitudes are not simply a tally of retrospective economic evaluations, but rather capture citizens' deeper beliefs about the best policy direction for their governments to pursue.<sup>67</sup> Shifts in these policy orientations have been the prime contributors to the left's electoral success.<sup>68</sup>

In contrast, performance criteria had no impact on Latin America's left turn. The performance-mandate variables fail in the simple models without controls and when controlling for mass support for the market. Even when citizens perceived rising levels of corruption, downturns in the economy, increased threats to their security, and faltering democratic performance under center and right-of-center incumbents, they were no more likely to vote for left-of-center candidates. Surprisingly, the objective economic indicators in fact suggest the opposite. When nonleftists were in office, gains in GDP and falling inflation actually increased the likelihood that Latin American electorates would choose leftist presidents.

<sup>67</sup> We also check for the necessary individual-level condition that antimarket citizens were more likely to vote for left-of-center candidates than right-of-center ones. We use the 1998, 2001, and 2007 cross-sections from the Latinbarometer data set because these three years offer the fullest set of measures of our market beliefs explanatory variable. The other explanatory variables are the same opinion indices and variables used in the aggregate analysis (but constructed at the individual level) as well as some added demographic predictors. The dependent variable is the W-B ideology score of the party that each voter would have chosen if elections were held the day following the interview. We discuss full results in the online appendix and simply report here that the magnitude of the coefficient on our market beliefs index is strikingly consistent in size and statistically significant in each cross-section, with *t*-values of -3.57 in 1998, -2.73 in 2001, and -4.41 in 2007. These results show that our aggregate-level findings are not the result of an ecological inference fallacy. See also Greene 2007; Luna and Zechmeister 2005; Magaloni and Romero 2008.

<sup>68</sup> The number of cases (forty-eight) does not diminish the veracity of our findings because they include the full universe of presidential elections from 1996 to 2008 and we make no claims about the causes of  $VRL_{pres}$  before or after these dates. Results from small universes, however, can be swayed by influential observations. We performed two types of tests (available upon request) to check for this possibility. First, we estimated models with jackknife standard errors. Jackknife standard errors are larger than parametric ones if influential observations are present, yet the former were just 10 percent larger than the parametric standard errors and thus did not affect our statistical and substantive conclusions. Second, we excluded entire countries by estimating each of our models eighteen times, dropping one country in each version. In all instances the coefficient on market beliefs remained statistically significant (*t*-values often increased), and the coefficients on performance criteria remained statistically insignificant. Readers can also view graphical results by country in the online appendix, where we show that just three of the eighteen countries diverge from the predicted bivariate pattern of declining support for market policies and rising electoral support for the left.

The results in Table 1 show clear evidence that the performance of center and right-of-center incumbents did not affect  $VRL_{pres}$ . Nevertheless, we further test the performance-mandate argument by considering (1) whether performance might have influenced change in  $VRL_{pres}$  rather than its level, and (2) whether a longer lag structure might yield more favorable results for the performance hypothesis. Even with these adjustments, the performance hypothesis fails. A straightforward way to show these results is to analyze the thirty-nine elections that occurred under right-of-center incumbents ( $ideology < 10.5$ ) and report bivariate correlations. First, the correlation between change in  $GDP_{(t-1)}$  and change in  $VRL_{pres}$  (from the previous election) is a wrongly signed  $+0.22$ , and the correlation between  $inflation_{(t-1)}$  and change in  $VRL_{pres}$  is a meager  $+0.04$  ( $p = .40$ ). Second, we incorporated a longer lag structure by calculating the mean of GDP change and inflation during the incumbent president's entire term, rather than just in the preceding year. The correlation between average change in GDP during rightist incumbents' terms and change in  $VRL_{pres}$  is also wrongly signed at  $+0.30$ , and the correlation between average change in inflation during incumbent's term and the change in  $VRL_{pres}$  is  $+0.11$  ( $p = .27$ ). Overall, these results convincingly show that the Latin American left did not rise on the backs of the right's poor economic performance.<sup>69</sup>

We also find virtually no support for the other alternative hypotheses. The argument that voters choose left-wing parties as a response to market-induced exposure to economic risk and volatility did not bear out as both trade and the size of the state failed to reach statistical significance.<sup>70</sup> The related argument that inequality encourages support for the left to propel redistribution also failed. Our analyses also found no support for the argument that the left prospers where democracy has endured longer or where there is more electoral volatility. Finally, we found some support for the notion that the ideology of the available parties conditions the ideology of vote choices. Where party elites offered more radical leftist parties and fewer radical rightist parties,  $VRL_{pres}$  was higher. This effect, however, does not detract from the impact of market beliefs, as the coefficient on market beliefs remains large and statistically significant even when controlling for party supply. Thus, although party elites shaped  $VRL_{pres}$  by offering different party

<sup>69</sup> Note that our test of the performance-mandate hypothesis is not a strict test of retrospective voting theory because our dependent variable is  $VRL$  rather than whether voters chose the incumbent or a challenger. As noted in the text, Latin American elections feature multiparty competition where voters who hold negative evaluations of a rightist incumbents' performance could simply choose a rightist nonincumbent. We thus hesitate to make a general conclusion about retrospective voting theory.

<sup>70</sup> Rodrik 1998.

options cross-nationally and by creating and/or abandoning new ones through time, citizens still found a way to express their increasingly ambivalent views of the market by shifting their vote choices to the left.

The results presented thus far show the extent to which public opinion about the market explains the varied fortunes of the left through time and across countries, but they conceal whether that explanatory power comes more from one effect or the other. A satisfying account would reveal both—explaining, for example, (1) why Uruguay turned left in 2004, not in 1999, and (2) why Uruguay turned left while Colombia has stayed decidedly right. To determine the explanatory power of the policy-mandate argument in accounting for over-time and cross-country effects, we explore fixed-effects and between-effects models.

The fixed-effects model isolates temporal variation by using each country's deviation from its own  $VRL_{pres}$  mean as the dependent variable. The results in Table 2 show that the coefficients for mass support for the market are nearly identical in substantive and statistical size to the GEE coefficients in Table 1, even in the presence of performance criteria as controls. This indicates that changes in aggregate antimarket attitudes within countries have a large effect on the left's increasing vote share within countries over time. We thus conclude that the decline in support for market policies through time explains the rising support for the left.

Can these policy beliefs also explain why some countries turned left and others did not? A between-effects model takes each country's mean  $VRL_{pres}$  score across all observed elections as the dependent variable and similarly converts each independent variable to a country mean. There is thus just one observation per country, so we only conduct a bivariate analysis. When all eighteen countries are included, mass support for the market cannot explain why some electorates have shifted their vote choices further to the left than others. However, when we exclude Venezuela, the coefficient jumps to statistical significance.

A simple scatterplot of mass support for the market against each country's mean  $VRL_{pres}$  (Figure 4) shows that all countries except Venezuela cluster tightly around a downward sloping regression line. When Venezuela is excluded, the correlation among these seventeen cases is a robust  $-.51$ . When Venezuela is included, the correlation falls to  $-.22$ . In public opinion surveys, Venezuelans are far more enthusiastic about the market than their voting behavior in presidential contests would lead us to expect. There are a number of plausible explanations for the mismatch between voters' policy preferences and voting behavior in Venezuela, including vote-buying fueled by windfall oil profits over the

TABLE 2  
 FIXED- AND BETWEEN-EFFECTS MODELS OF VRL<sub>PRES</sub> IN EIGHTEEN<sup>a</sup>  
 LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES, 1996–2008

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Fixed Effects: Temporal Variation Only</i>						<i>Between Effects: Country Variation Only</i>	
	<i>Policy Only</i>		<i>Full Specifications</i>				<i>Venezuela</i>	
<i>Mandate Variables</i>							<i>With</i>	<i>Without</i>
Mass support for the market <sub>(t-1)</sub>	-.757*	-.727*	-.802*	-.857*	-.775*	-.833*	-.706	-.888*
Mass anti-Americanism <sub>(t-1)</sub>		.214					(.766)	(.486)
		(1.088)						
<i>Performance Mandate Variables</i>								
Evaluations of economic welfare <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)			.120					
			(.250)					
Evaluations of economic welfare <sub>(t-1)</sub> <sup>x</sup> incumbent's ideology			.062					
			(.076)					
Pessimism about crime <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)				.007				
				(.519)				
Pessimism about crime <sub>(t-1)</sub> <sup>x</sup> incumbent's ideology				-.110				
				(.133)				
Corruption perceptions <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)					.139			
					(.449)			
Corruption perceptions <sub>(t-1)</sub> <sup>x</sup> incumbent's ideology					.013			
					(.061)			
Mass support for democracy <sub>(t-1)</sub> (CR)						.059		
						(.491)		
Mass support for democracy <sub>(t-1)</sub> <sup>x</sup> incumbent's ideology						.060		
						(.099)		
Incumbent's ideology			-.053	-.003	-.024	-.021		
			(.077)	(.069)	(.199)	(.079)		
Constant	8.990*	8.547*	8.991	8.940*	8.496*	8.982*	8.974*	8.604*
	(.162)	(2.238)	(.198)	(.212)	(1.488)	(.214)	(.486)	(.356)

Entries are fixed-effects or between-effects coefficients, and standard errors are in parentheses. \* = p < .05, one-tailed; N = 48 for the fixed effects models; N=18 for the between effects model with Venezuela. Results are average estimates over ten multiply imputed data sets (Royston 2005).

<sup>a</sup>Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

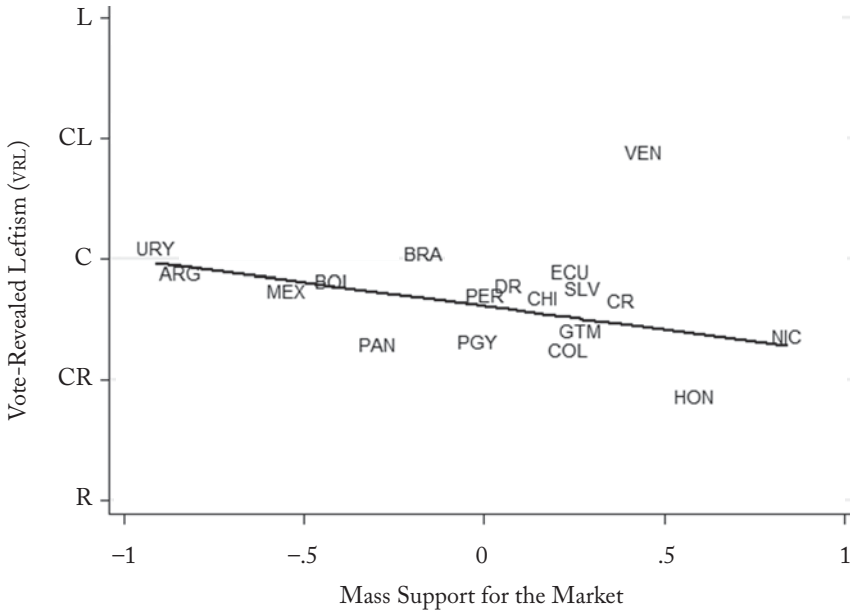


FIGURE 4  
 CROSS-NATIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  $VRL_{PRES}$  AND MASS SUPPORT FOR THE MARKET<sup>a</sup>

Pearson's  $r = -.22$  with Venezuela; Pearson's  $r = -.51$  without Venezuela

<sup>a</sup>Points are country averages over the entire period (1995–2008). The line is calculated from a regression estimated *without* Venezuela.

last several years, Chávez's ethnopopulist appeal based on the ascriptive characteristics he shares with many marginalized voters,<sup>71</sup> and what some see as Chávez's charismatic leadership.<sup>72</sup> Given the many reasons why positional issue voting may not obtain in any country, we think it is more relevant to focus on the impressive power of market beliefs for predicting the ideology of election outcomes in seventeen of the eighteen countries in the region.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Madrid 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Weyland 2009; Zúquete 2008.

<sup>73</sup> In scoring the ideology and vote share of all vote-getting parties, we do not take strategic voting into account. Could the unobserved effects of strategic voting drive our findings? Among the many scenarios, there are just two possible sources of bias that would raise concern. First, strategic voting that occurs more on the right than the left would increase VRL and would lead us to inadvertently overestimate the effect of opinions about the market on vote choices. Our data do not allow us to observe strategic voting directly, but we can reason that strategic voting on the right would cause center-right parties to grow at the expense of right parties. However, as Figure 1(b) shows and fixed-effects analyses confirm, the right has actually grown over time compared to the center-right, implying that, if anything, strategic voting on the right has decreased as VRL has

Our findings clearly show that mass support for the market, not performance evaluations, explain why, where, and when many Latin American electorates turned leftward in presidential elections. We are now well-equipped to explain our finding that voters have scarcely increased their support for left-wing parties in legislative elections. (See Figure 1(a).) At first blush, this disjuncture might appear to threaten the veracity of our argument that voters' increasingly ambivalent attitudes toward the market increased their support for leftist presidential candidates. On the contrary, it strengthens the argument for three related reasons. First, presidents and not legislators in Latin America have been at the forefront of economic policy-making and, in particular, the implementation of market reforms.<sup>74</sup> Because legislatures have been less involved in economic policy-making, voters have been less likely to choose their representatives based on economic policy issues. Second, compared to presidential candidates, voters tend to choose legislators based less on national policy debates and more on local concerns, clientelistic ties, and even personal appearance.<sup>75</sup> Finally, the overrepresentation of rural and therefore conservative districts that is common throughout Latin America means that legislators are less likely to reflect leftward shifts in national electorates' policy preferences.<sup>76</sup> Thus, presidential elections are better barometers of electorates' policy preferences than are legislative elections because legislators are often enmeshed in local politics and clientelistic networks that may make them less attuned to national policy-making trends.

## CONCLUSION

The rise of the left across Latin America is one of the most striking electoral events to occur in new democracies during the last decade. As a result, journalists and scholars have been quick to offer explanations that range from an electoral rejection of the market to the more mundane sense that voters have sought to punish poorly performing right-wing incumbents. Our evidence indicts both arguments. Latin

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increased. We also find no evidence that VRL is higher in some countries than in others due to strategic voting on the right. Second, strategic voting that occurs more on the left than the right would decrease VRL and lead us to underestimate the effect of retrospective performance evaluations on the left's rise. To check, we compared the center-left's proportion of all left-of-center votes under right-of-center and left-of-center incumbents and found that the two were almost identical. Thus, we find no evidence that unobserved strategic voting biases our findings against the performance mandate hypothesis.

<sup>74</sup> O'Donnell 1994.

<sup>75</sup> Ames 1987; Lawson, Lenz, Baker, and Myers 2010.

<sup>76</sup> Latin American countries show higher malapportionment than countries in West or East Europe, and these differences are statistically significant at the 95 percent level. Authors' calculations using data from Samuels and Snyder 2001.

American voters have not turned to the left simply to oust governments that presided over episodes of economic contraction and rising inflation; rather, voters intentionally chose the left for its policy proposals. This does not mean, however, that the left can claim a mandate for the wholesale reversal of Washington Consensus policies. Most Latin American voters are clearly not socialists or protectionists. Instead, they have given the left a moderate mandate to stall or partially reverse market reforms. The vote choices we document thus imply a desire for a shift *toward* the left but not *to* the left.

Our findings lead us to two controversial claims. First, electoral mandates and political accountability are not only relevant in understanding politics in established democracies but are also germane to new democracies. Most existing research questions the possibility of mandates in new democracies either because presidents are viewed as quasi-autonomous actors who can easily violate mandates<sup>77</sup> or because voters are seen as not selecting candidates based on their policy stances and thus cannot generate mandates.<sup>78</sup> We show that presidential vote choices are strongly influenced by well-reasoned attitudes regarding economic policy issues.

In fact, the policy mandate we document does not stop at the voting booth. Many leftist leaders in Latin America have acted on the moderate economic-policy mandate given by voters. Regarding privatization—the least popular of the market reforms—leftist governments have taken action with nationalizations and renationalizations in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, and they have blocked pending privatizations in many other countries.<sup>79</sup> In contrast, globalization—the more popular policy—has been left largely intact, with average tariffs under leftist governments remaining in the low teens even amid the recent economic downturn. Leftists in Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua have maintained formal free-trade agreements with the United States. Even Chávez is described as having a “de facto free trade agreement with the United States,” as import volumes to Venezuela from the United States have doubled under his tenure.<sup>80</sup> At the same time, the failure of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas and the lack of signed free-trade agreements between seven Latin American countries and the United States, all of which are governed by the left, plausibly respond to voters’ desire to put the brakes on further economic liberalization.

<sup>77</sup> Stokes 2001a; O'Donnell 1994.

<sup>78</sup> Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007.

<sup>79</sup> Lora, Panizza, and Quispe-Agnoli 2004.

<sup>80</sup> Naím 2006, 42.

Second, contrary to existing arguments, our findings suggest that Latin American governments uphold many aspects of the new market orthodoxy because voters themselves hold moderate economic-policy preferences. Previous research attributes the implementation and persistence of market policies to the constraints imposed by international financial institutions, domestic budgets, and the need to attract foreign capital, thus invoking the image of an economic straitjacket. We instead show that voters themselves have sent clear signals to their governments about their support for moderate economic policies that maintain certain aspects of the Washington Consensus. Contrary to analyses and commentary that characterize voters in new democracies as powerless actors without a clear policy agenda, we thus come to the more optimistic conclusion that voters in Latin America are now active participants in orchestrating the policy content of their governments.

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