

STATUS QUO CHARACTERISTICS OR PRIVATE SECTOR AFFINITY? EXPLAINING PREFERENCES FOR SAFETY NETS IN LATIN AMERICAN LEGISLATURES¹

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ABSTRACT

The literature on legislative behavior has evidenced a decay of partisanship around the world. In Latin America, where party systems are generally weak, this is a long-standing trend. However, it does not mean that legislators do not group themselves or assume identities to ease their cognitive formation of policy preferences. What shapes legislators' attitudes toward safety net policies in Latin America? We test two hypotheses to predict these cues. First, descriptive representation. We assume that legislators who share a status-quo profile, i.e. older, wealthy, and highly-educated males, tend to share policy preferences. Second, business interests. We test whether having high-level jobs in the private sector and trusting employers' organizations shape policy preferences. We conduct this investigation based on a dataset with interviews carried out with a large number of legislators from 17 Latin American countries. Our policies of interest are the ones that produce a stark cleavage in the region: The State's role in the provision of a safety net to the poorer strata of the population. We confirm the first hypothesis and show that descriptive representation has a stronger predictive power of policy preferences than strong ties with the business sector at least when it comes to the selected policies.

KEYWORDS

Political Elites; Latin American Politics; Comparative Legislative Studies; Descriptive Representation; Business Interests.

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CARACTERÍSTICAS DO STATUS QUO OU AFINIDADE COM O SETOR PRIVADO? EXPLICANDO PREFERÊNCIAS POR REDES DE SEGURANÇA SOCIAL NAS LEGISLATURAS LATINO-AMERICANAS

RESUMO

A literatura sobre comportamento no legislativo tem evidenciado a queda do partidarismo ao redor do mundo. Na América Latina, onde sistemas partidários geralmente são fracos, essa é uma tendência antiga. Ainda assim, isso não significa que legisladores não se agrupam ou assumem identidades que facilitam seus processos cognitivos de formação de preferências sobre políticas públicas. O que forma as atitudes de legisladores em relação às políticas de seguridade social? Nós testamos duas hipóteses para prever estes atalhos. Primeiro, a representação descritiva. Nós assumimos que legisladores que compartilham um perfil de status quo, em essência homens mais velhos, ricos, e altamente educados, tendem a compartilhar as mesmas preferências sobre políticas públicas. Segundo, os interesses empresariais. Nós testamos se ter empregos de alto-escalão no setor privado e confiar em organizações patronais afetam as preferências por políticas públicas. Nós realizamos esta investigação com base em um banco de dados com entrevistas realizadas com um grande número de legisladores de 17 países latino-americanos. Nossas políticas de interesse são aquelas que produzem uma das maiores divisões na região: o papel do Estado na provisão de uma rede de seguridade social para as porções mais pobres da população. Nós confirmamos a primeira hipótese e mostramos que a representação descritiva tem um poder preditivo mais forte sobre preferências sobre políticas públicas que a forte relação com o setor empresarial pelo menos no tocante as políticas selecionadas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Elites Políticas; Política Latino-Americana; Comportamento Legislativo Comparado; Representação Descritiva; Interesses Empresariais.

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1. INTRODUCTION

What shapes legislative elites' attitudes toward safety-net policies in Latin America? The current literature on political parties has been clear at evidencing a decay on partisanship (e.g., HOOGHE and STOLLE, 2005; KOVACHEVA, 2005; DALTON, 2008). However, political behaviorists constantly point out at the role of identity in predicting attitudes toward a series of events (e.g., ATKENSON and CARRILLO, 2007). In this sense, it becomes natural to infer that whereas people are detaching from parties, they are forming new groups that ease their cognitive process of opinion formation and decision-making. We argue that Latin American politics is an ideal source for the study of such non-partisan associations. Whereas party systems are generally weak (LUPU, 2016), the region has been divided by a series of cleavages (ROSAS, 2010). Thus, we choose a topic that goes beyond the traditional State *vs.* market approach and marks one of the starkest conflict of preferences in the region: The State's role in creating a safety net for the poorer strata of the population. Furthermore, we analyze this issue from an understudied perspective: legislators' self-declared attitudes in cross-national comparative perspective.

We test two alternative hypotheses: descriptive representation and association to business interests. The first considers the importance of self-association with the status quo by sharing socio-demographic characteristics of traditionally dominant groups in the region's societies – namely, the older, wealthy, well-educated, and male. We propose that belonging to such identities reduces the perception that safety nets for the poorer strata are necessary. Second, we test the relevance of self-association with business interests. The literature suggests a strong influence of bourgeois organized interests in legislatures through, for instance, campaign financing (e.g., SANTOS et al., 2017). In this sense, legislators closer to these actors should focus more on the defense of alternative issues, such as private property, low taxation, and protectionism. These two tests allow verifying the assertiveness of each hypothesis, further than comparing the weight of each of them in the formation of attitudes in national parliaments.

Our empirical strategy confirms the salience of topics related to the State's role in the creation of safety nets while evidencing interesting differences within Latin America. It also verifies that both hypotheses influence legislators' attitudes at least partially. Interestingly, the identity as male does not affect this cleavage, unless when interacting with other status-quo components. Furthermore, descriptive representation plays a stronger role in the behavior of Latin American representatives than association with business interests. In brief, the wealthier and more educated are less prone to support the public ownership of firms, the State's role in the creation of jobs, and public-managed retirement benefits.

This paper is divided as follows. After this introduction, we present a brief discussion of the literature that shows the decay of partisanship and the emergence of descriptive representation and affinity with business interests as relevant cues in Latin American politics. Then, we present our research design, framing our hypotheses, detailing our data source, and statistical procedures. We present and discuss our results and, finally, conclude with some relevant implications of this work and suggested future steps in the study of legislative behavior.

2. THEORY

Partisanship has long been portrayed in the literature as an important cue for legislators' behavior. However, parties have become increasingly more unresponsive around the world. It led to lower loyalism (HOOGHE and STOLLE, 2005) even in countries with increasing engagement in non-partisan organizations (KOVACHEVA, 2005; DALTON, 2008). Indeed, it is possible that legislators and party elites purposefully engage in the weakening of their parties' membership basis. It is explained by the formation of alienated party oligarchies (MICHELS, 1915; COUTO, 2012; PANEBIANCO, 1994; MORENO and ALMEIDA, 2017; GUEDES-NETO, 2018a) and the high costs of sustaining leading roles in parties with strong democratic structures (SCARROW, 1994).

Nevertheless, this argument does not lead uniquely to the proposition that parties do not act as cohesive institutions anymore. Even though many of them may have become unresponsive to their loyalists, several of these organizations have realigned themselves to reach new constituencies (SAMUELS AND SHUGART, 2010), specific interest groups (GUEDES-NETO, 2015), or the median voter (DOWNS, 1957; EZROW et al., 2010; WARD et al., 2011). In this sense, aggregate models of partisan behavior in legislatures still achieve relevant significance.

On the other side, an emerging literature has been evidencing the role of legislators as individual actors with their own interests and networks. The recent growth of populist leaders as Donald Trump and Geert Wilders functions as relevant examples (INGLEHART and NORRIS, 2017; GUEDES-NETO, 2018b). Trump became president of the United States running as an outsider in the traditional Republican Party (MACWILLIAMS, 2016). Wilders was a speech-writer of a well-established Dutch party, the *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie*, but gained prominence after founding his own far-right party (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*) (GUEDES-NETO, 2018b). In these two cases, individual figures managed to mobilize their constituencies and use them to gain representative power in their countries².

In Latin America, the study of individual legislators' behavior is even more relevant. Party systems in the region are generally weak, especially in countries with low economic development (LUNA and ZECHMEISTER, 2005). From the mid-1990s to the mid-2010s, a quarter of the established parties in Latin America ceased to exist or became irrelevant (LUPU, 2016). Several others were created. Most of the remaining parties are not internally cohesive. They tend to self-place themselves similarly in the left-right spectrum but highly disagree when it comes to specific policies or values (HAWKINS and MORGENSTERN, 2010; ROSAS, 2010). Deegan-Krause (2007) argues that it is due to the institutional setting, as voters choose their representatives through open list systems. Thus, the candidate's individual image and linkage to his or her constituency become stronger cues than partisanship. In this scenario, legislators may prefer to answer directly to their support bases rather than to their parties

² Here, we do not argue that Trump's constituency was not the same that has traditionally voted for the Republican Party. However, as MacWilliams (2016) proposes, Trump has managed to activate a portion of the electorate that was not attracted by insiders of the party.

(KEEFER and KHEMANI, 2009)³.

If some legislators do not necessarily respond to their own parties, which interests do they represent? The literature has pointed out in different directions. We focus on two: business interests and descriptive representation. Furthermore, we pick policies related to the economy as our benchmark. We do so because of the relevance of economic voting in Latin America (WEYLAND, 2003), as well as due to the stark income inequality in the region (GASPARINI et al., 2011), and the recent pink tide, which has primed social protection policies especially during the 2000s (CARNES and MARES, 2015). Furthermore, as our descriptive data shows, economic policies as the public ownership of firms, the role of the State in creating jobs, and the government control over pensions are the ones that produce the strongest cleavages in Latin American legislatures.

Dahm et al. (2014) argue that legislators can favor business preferences even when dealing with a policy that may harm their own interests. This behavior is common worldwide and frequently investigated by the students of lobbying and business interests. For instance, Wood (1987) interviewed 70 conservative members of the British parliament to find out that 36 of them were ‘constituency lobbyists,’ or, in other words, legislators whose efforts were majorly related to representing the interests of local industries. In the Brazilian case, Santos et al. (2015) identified that legislators who were financed by the private sector tend to be more aligned with the political agenda of the *Confederação Nacional da Indústria*, the major association of industrial interests in the country. Indeed, Brazilian lobbyists see the legislative as their main target and perceive this strategy to be productive in 98.2% of the cases (SANTOS et al., 2017).

Alternatively, many students of the legislative have aimed at varieties of descriptive representation. It involves many aspects. First, the literature has demonstrated that the average age of legislators is generally high and, in many parliaments, has been increasing (STOCKEMER and SUNDSTRÖM, 2018). Whereas in some cases the lack of a generational turnover favors the status quo, i.e. the ruling parties and elites (GOLOSOF, 2014), there is also evidence that older and younger legislators hold similar policy preferences (KISSAU et al., 2012). Similarly, findings related to the descriptive representation of women in parliaments are mixed. Atkeson and Carrillo (2007) demonstrated that the increase in the number of congresswomen in the American Congress has led to a greater external efficacy to female citizens. However, Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) argue that, at least in the Argentine case, descriptive and substantive representation are not the same. They propose that the quota laws may have reinforced negative stereotypes about women politicians, thus reducing their efficacy.

Most of these studies focus on issue ownership. They generally regard the representation exercised in areas that are directly related to the descriptive attributes of the legislator. Indeed, certain groups tend to be focused on their policy domains also because they are margi-

³ The reader should have in mind that whereas this generalization is adequate to comparative regional studies, it also overlooks important specificities of each country’s party system. These should be addressed in future works.

nalized by the status quo, which leads them to work only on the areas stereotypically linked to their identities (SCHWINDT-BAYER, 2006). However, it does not mean that they do not hold their own policy preferences in other domains. Indeed, such marginalization may lead them to polarize against the status quo in areas other than the ones they are typically involved with.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

To analyze legislative elites' support for different public policies, we use the Latin American Elites Database from the University of Salamanca (PELA-USAL). This database⁴ gathers the results of close-ended interviews carried out by members of the research team with Latin American legislators (ALCÁNTARA, 2012; GARCÍA et al., 2013). The interviews are conducted every legislative term, right after the legislative election, with elected officers randomly chosen from political parties with legislative representation. The sample is proportional to political parties' sizes. In the questionnaires, a wide range of issues is included, such as democracy, foreign policy, political parties, ideology, political career, social issues, and Statism and public policies. This has led to works about a considerable variety of issues, from polarization (RIVAS, 2008) to political careers (MARTÍNEZ ROSÓN, 2009) or support for democracy (BOHIGUES, 2018).

In this paper, we analyze legislators' attitudes towards public policies. We selected the most recent studies for 17 countries, which are those where the relevant questions are available: Argentina (09-13; 11-15), Peru (11-16), Paraguay (13-18), Honduras, (14-18), Costa Rica (14-18), Colombia (14-18), Chile (14-18), Panama (14-19), Mexico (15-18), El Salvador (15-18), Uruguay (15-20), Bolivia (15-20), Guatemala (16-20), Dominican Republic (16-20), Venezuela (16-21), Ecuador (17-21), and Nicaragua (17-22).

Our questions of interest to measure and analyze legislators' attitudes towards public policies⁵ are the following: (1) *The State, instead of the private sector, should be the owner of the most important companies and industries in the country;* (2) *The State, rather than individuals, should be the main responsible for ensuring the welfare of the people;* (3) *The State, rather than the private company, should be the main responsible for creating jobs;* (4) *The State must implement firm policies to reduce income inequality between rich and poor;* (5) *The State, rather than the private sector, should be the main responsible for providing retirement pensions;* (6) *The State, rather than the private sector, should be the main responsible for providing health services;* (7) *The State, rather than the private sector, should be the main responsible for providing university education;* (8) *The State must implement public policies to reduce inequalities between men and women;* (9) *The State must implement public policies to reduce inequalities between different cultural and ethnic groups.* For each

4 This free public-access database belongs to the University of Salamanca. Find more information at <http://americo.usal.es/oir/elites/eliteca.htm> or by contacting the authors.

5 Here, we adopt a broad concept of public policy, that is, the role of the State in intervening in certain policy areas. This strategy is adequate given the different institutional and political contexts of each of the 17 countries in the sample.

of the nine items, legislators are given a scale that ranges from 1 to 7, where 1 means strongly disagrees and 7 strongly agrees.

Thus, this paper aims to identify, in the first place, the levels of support that these public policies have among legislators in Latin America. To do so, we begin with the HJ-Biplot technique. It assesses the levels of dis/agreement with the aforementioned items, which Parliaments are comparatively more receptive to a more active role of the State in the economy and society, and identify regional clusters. Second, we identify which policies are the most controversial, that is, that do not generate consensus among the political elites. As we will see later, some policies are, at least rhetorically, accepted, with high levels of agreement and low levels of disparity in the answers – as measured by the standard deviation. Third, we analyze what drives support to these far-from-consensus items, building on the theoretical framework presented in the previous section. Namely, we propose models that have as their independent variables the socio-demographic characteristics (i.e., dummy variables for status-quo identities) and private sector affinity, while attitudes toward the selected policies are used as our dependent variables.

Consequently, our first hypothesis, H_1 , is *that non-status quo legislators are more prone to support an active role of the State in the creation of safety nets for the poorer strata of the population*. We consider two assumptions to propose this hypothesis. First, our expectation derives from the Rawlsian notion of the veil of ignorance. Once non-status quo legislators may feel attached to citizens who are worse-off in the society, they should support distributive policies that will assure minimum life standards to everyone. Second, we assume that status-quo politicians are male, older, well-educated, and wealthier – thus reproducing the typical stereotype of the Latin American economic elite.

As we also suggest that business interests shape legislators' policy preferences, our second hypothesis, H_2 , regards that *representatives who either hold high-level jobs in the private sector (e.g., business owner, business administrators, etc.) or have an affinity with business associations are more prone to go against the economic policies that increase the size of the State or favor the working class*. It should be noticed that it is not the same as to argue that these legislators are classical liberal or, in other words, favorable toward a minimum State. It simply means that they do not want tax money and State capacity to be directed toward activities that will not be, at least primarily, profitable to the private sector. They could, although it is not our objective to test, favor protectionist policies to secure local markets and facilitate exports. In our case, we consider the before-mentioned policies related to the public ownership of firms, the creation of jobs, and the assurance of a pension system.

It is noteworthy mentioning that, in these analyses, we include three factors undoubtedly important in Latin American politics, but have a secondary role in this paper: country effects, ideology, and political parties. The first is intended to avoid that the results are influenced by single countries, thus we have dummies to all but one (the baseline) cases. As we mainly focus on sociodemographic characteristics of the legislators, we have decided to include these other two variables as controls and as proxy mechanisms for partisanship: the

traditional left-right scale, where 'left' is 1 and 10 is 'right'; and whether the legislator declares to belong to the opposition or to the government or presidential coalition. We expect that left-leaning respondents are more willing to support a more active State and that legislators of the opposition are not, given that, when in opposition, legislators should prefer a rather passive role of the State.

We highlight that the latter two variables are present simply to control for possible ideological and/or party effects. We are aware of the complexities of ideological positions and government-opposition self-placement in day-to-day politics. However, these general proxies shall reduce any noise remaining from party bonds in the selected parliaments. As we have argued before, we aim to analyze the impact of descriptive representation, namely sociodemographic factors, and business coalitions.

4. REGIONAL CLUSTERS AND (NON) CONTROVERSIAL POLICIES

The descriptive analysis will make use of the factor statistical method HJ-Biplot, which is a graphic representation of multivariate data (ALCÁNTARA and RIVAS, 2007). If a scatter plot shows the distribution of two variables, a Biplot allows the representation of cases and three or more variables simultaneously. In the HJ-Biplot, variables are represented by vectors and cases by points (countries in the case of our work). For the representation of these cases and variables, the HJ-Biplot runs a factor analysis, which serves to frame this variables-cases graphical representation.

In the resulting graph, we can see the variability of each variable by observing the length of the vectors and the angle they form with the factorial axes. Thus, the longer the vector (variable) and the smaller the angle it forms with the factor axis that represents it (axis/factor 1 or axis/factor 2), the higher the variance explained by this variable. It is also possible to know the correlation between variables by observing the angle they form: if the angle is less than 90° , there is a positive correlation; if it is greater than 90° , there is a negative correlation; and if it approaches 90° , there is no correlation. The relationship between cases and variables (vectors) is obtained by the perpendicular projection of the cases on the vectors. Proximity between cases is interpreted as a similarity between the cases and eventually leads to the creation of clusters. In short, HJ-Biplot allows simultaneous visualization, in a single graph, both variables (nine public policies) and the relationship (correlations) between themselves, and the position of each case (17 countries⁶) with respect to those variables.

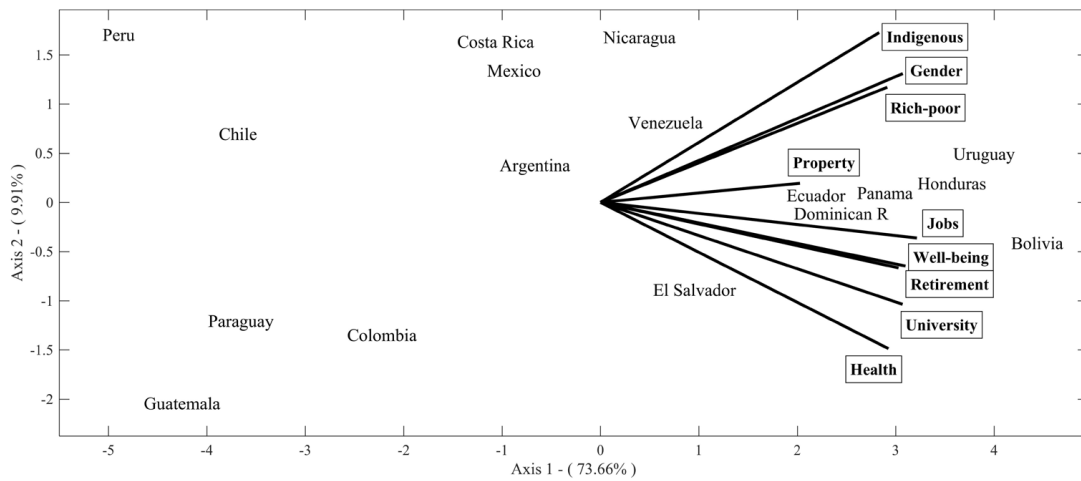
The HJ-Biplot has been used in recent works, such as Alcántara and Rivas (2007), Rivas et al. (2010), Alcántara (2013), and Bohigues (2018). It is due to these advantages and simplicity that we decided to opt for this technique. In essence, it synthesizes in a single graph the information coming from our nine questions and 17 countries of interest (Figure 1).

At first sight, all nine variables correlated positively, since all nine form angles lower

⁶ In this part of the paper we use countries means, since here the case are countries and not individual legislators.

than 90°. For example, the relationship between health services and cultural and ethnic groups inequality is the lowest, since the angle they form is nearer to 90°, but there is still a positive relationship. More interestingly, and the actual aim of this work, are the differences between country legislators' profiles: Peru, Chile, Paraguay, Colombia, and Guatemala are the parliaments most reluctant to an active role of the State; on the contrary, Bolivia and Uruguay are the most willing to support active public policies in areas such as inequality, health, and creation of jobs. The rest of the countries fall between these two apparent groups.

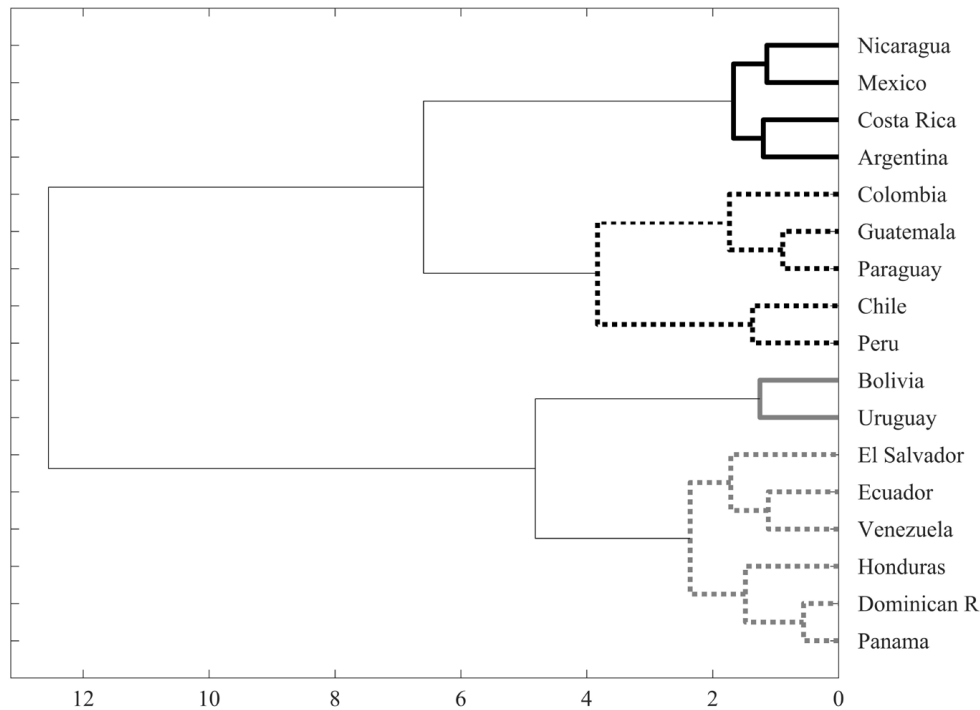
Figure 1. Graphic representation of the countries and support for public policies of Latin American legislator based on HJ-Biplot analysis



Source: own elaboration based on PELA-USAL and HJ-Biplot.

As it has been said, another advantage of HJ-Biplot is the possibility of creating clusters from their biplot coordinates (Figure 2). The advantage of cluster analysis is that it allows homogeneous groups to be established in such a way that individuals belonging to the same group are similar, that is, their values in each of the variables used in the analysis are similar.

Figure 2. Dendrogram of clusters of countries according to public policies support



- Cophenetic correlation coefficient: 0,69. Hierarchical cluster with the Euclidean distance using the biplot scores.

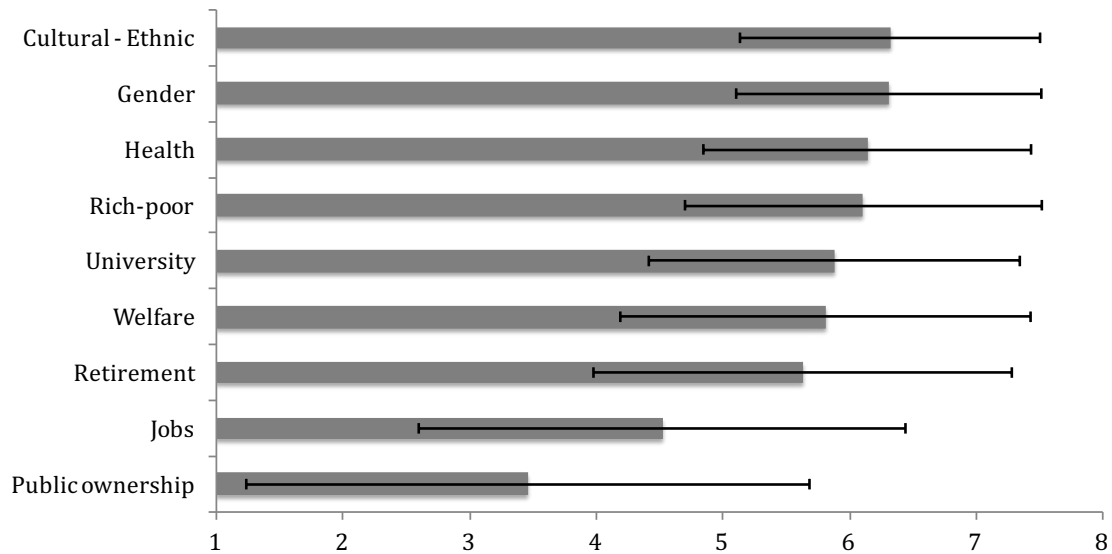
Source: own elaboration based on PELA-USAL and HJ-Biplot coordinates (Linkage: Ward).

Bolivia and Uruguay form, indeed, a cluster – one that is rather favorable toward safety nets. Additionally, Colombia, Guatemala, Paraguay, Chile, and Peru compose another cluster, this time much less statist. Finally, we find two other clusters that fall between those two extremes: Nicaragua, Mexico, Costa Rica and Argentina, with medium-low values for gender, socioeconomic and indigenous inequalities, and rather low for the rest; and El Salvador, Ecuador, Venezuela, Honduras, Dominican Republic and Panama, with medium-high values for all nine policies. It is worth bearing in mind that Bolivia and Uruguay have left-leaning legislative majorities in the legislatures included in this paper: the governing Movement towards Socialism (*Movimiento al Socialismo*) and Broad Front (*Frente Amplio*)⁷, respectively. Overall, these data show salient regional differences within Latin America.

Once we have identified regional clusters, the next step is to differentiate public policies according to their degree of agreement, that is, their degree of consensus. Figure 3 gathers the aggregate means (in the whole database with the PELA-USAL studies here included) of each item and their respective standard deviations (SD).

⁷ In Uruguay we also find two non-governing center-left or left parties: Independent Party (*Partido Independiente*) and Popular Unity (*Unidad Popular*).

Figure 3. Support for public policies in Latin American Parliaments (merged database)



- Ordered from higher to lower mean and SD.

Source: own elaboration based on PELA-USAL.

Undoubtedly, the public ownership of the most important industries and companies, the creation of jobs and the management of retirement pensions are not only the most controversial (higher SDs), they also have the lowest levels of support. Additionally, and maybe not by chance, these three policies are directly related with the guarantee of safety nets for the poorer strata of the population, thus confirming our previous argument that it regards a relevant cleavage in Latin America.

5. RESULTS

In order to quantify the specific contribution of each group of independent variables, we run three models for each dependent variable. Model 1 tests status-quo variables: age, male (dichotomous, 1 for male), salary, and education, plus an interaction of these four variables, which we refer to as 'Statu quo.' Salary ranges from 'earns less than 1,000 US\$ per month' (0) to 'earn more than 10,000 US\$ per month' (4); education ranges from 'uneducated' (1) to 'postgraduate' (6). Model 2 tests private sector affinity variables: businessman (as a self-declared profession) and perceived trustworthiness of employers' organizations, plus an interaction of these two, which we label as 'PrivSec affinity.' To build the category businessman we grouped five legislators' professions in this single binary variable: 'entrepreneur/industrial,' 'farm administrator,' 'merchant,' 'executive position in a company' and 'farmer.' When asked whether they trust employers' organizations, trustworthiness ranges from 'very trustworthy' (4) to 'very untrustworthy' (1). Model 3 tests all these variables, plus our two control variables, ideology (1-10 scale, being 1 left) and opposition (dichotomous, 1 for opposition). Table 1 presents the three models for each item.

Table 1. Multivariate linear OLS regressions explaining legislators' preferences toward public ownership of firms, the role of the State in the creation of jobs and assurance of retirement benefits

	Public ownership			Creation of Jobs			Retirement		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Age	.009		.01+	.006		.005	.01**		.01***
Male	-.22		-.01	-.16		-.1	.06		.14
Salary	-.44***		-.16	-.29***		-.24**	-.20**		-.14
Education	-.26***		.19***	-.32***		-.30***	-.09+		-.06
Status quo	0		-.001**	0		-.30***	0		-.001+
Businessman		-1.03+	-.74		.524	.58		-.465	-.45
Employers' Org		-.55***	-.34***		-.004	.03		-.079	-.05
PrivSec affinity		.21	.18		-.177	-.20		.171	.19
Ideology			-.27***			-.04			-.05**
Opposition			-.67***			-.57***			-.27**
(Constant)	4.91***	4.23***	6.53***	6.62***	4.24***	6.85***	5.71***	5.25***	5.73***
Adjusted R ²	.209	.177	.341	.208	.138	.231	.158	.133	.167

*** p ≤ 0.01; ** p ≤ 0.05; + p ≤ 0.1.

- All models include country dummies as fixed effects but are not shown in this table.

Source: own elaboration based on PELA-USAL.

Interestingly, age only appears to have a constant significant effect in retirement pensions. Older legislators are favorable toward the State's role in assuring this policy. Similarly, age becomes significant at the generous 0.01 level in the full model (3) of public ownership. In this case, a higher age increases the propensity of favoring State control over important firms. Even more interestingly, there is no gender effect when assessing political elites' attitudes towards the role of the State. Men and women in parliaments do not significantly differ in their support for these policies.

The other two variables that compose the status quo category do have stronger and significant effects. First, salary appears as a strong predictor in all models 1, but once the private sector affinity, ideology, and opposition are included, it completely loses its power (public ownership and retirement) or become slightly lower (creation of jobs). It suggests that legislators with higher salaries tend to have a greater affinity with the private sector, thus shading away part of the effect. If the full models are considered, wealthier legislators do not want the State to be active in the creation of jobs but hold dispersed opinions when it comes to retirement pensions and public ownership of firms.

Second, education is a parallel predictor, since it works the same way: the higher the level of studies, the lower the support for the safety net. This is in sharp contrast with evidence from Latin American citizens themselves (DURAKIEWICZ, 2018). Although at the mass level

education means more acceptance of redistributive policies, the opposite becomes true when the preferences of legislative elites are assessed. However, education, just as salary, has no significant effects on retirement pensions when it comes to the full model (3). It may be the case, again, that highly educated legislators have closer ties to the business sector.

The interaction of all these four variables is significant, but with a rather low coefficient. In two cases, the null hypothesis that $\beta_i=0$ is rejected with the generous 0.1 level, while with the 0.05 level in the case of public ownership. It confirms our hypothesis that status quo matter for the rejection of social safety nets. However, as earlier said, when considered separately, not all status-quo variables perform in the same way: education and salary have negative effects, age positive (the younger, the less supportive), and gender is not a suitable predictor.

When it comes to private sector affinity, the results are also insightful. The very presence of businessmen in Latin American parliaments does not strongly affect attitudes toward public policies related to the public ownership of firms, creation of jobs, and retirement pensions, contrary to what the literature has usually stated. As Table 1 puts it, except for public ownership's model 2, businessmen are neither more nor less supportive of public policies, meaning they do not compose a different attitudinal group among elites.

On the contrary, trusting employer's organizations serves as a strong predictor for the rejection of public ownership of important firms. In other words, the greater the affinity of a legislator with employers' organizations, the less she or he favors the State's control over companies. When it comes to other policies related to safety nets, affinity with the private sector generates no significant results even at the 0.1 level. It suggests that these items are not part of the agenda of business interests⁸.

Regarding our two control variables, results are as expected. Left-leaning positions are associated with being more supportive toward public ownership of firms and State-managed retirement pensions. However, ideology does not make any difference when considering the State's role in the creation of jobs: both leftists and rightist support/reject in similar levels of dispersion this public policy, meaning it is beyond the left-right divide.

When it comes to the government *vs.* opposition divide, not only it is significant in all items, but it also has the highest significance levels and coefficients. It suggests that when political elites do not belong to the coalition that controls the budget and holds executive offices, they prefer a rather passive State in the economy due to this possible instrumental motivation. It is important to bear in mind that the category Opposition includes left, center and right legislators; and even so, beyond ideological differences, we find this opposition effect.

Finally, the use of three different models allows comparing the explanatory power of each group of variables by themselves. In all the cases, variables related to the status quo had a greater predictive capacity than the ones related to private sector affinity – as measured by the

8 We also ran additional models in which we only included either 'businessman', 'trustworthiness of employers' organizations', or the interactive term. None of them significantly changed the results.

R². It results from the different levels of significance per variable and strongly suggests that descriptive representation is more relevant than the relationship of legislators with business interests at least when it comes to ideological policy preferences. Put differently, it confirms our H₁ – even though age and gender are not predicted as expected – and allows confirming H₂ only in the case of the preference for/against the public ownership of firms. It also evidences that H₁, the status quo descriptive representation hypothesis, is a better explanation for the rejection of safety nets to the poorer strata of the population.

If we compare our three policies of interest, we can identify the following findings: first, the more controversial issue is, indeed, the public ownership of firms. It has the highest number of significant predictors and regards the only one where the trustworthiness of employers' organizations has relevant effects. The creation of jobs is above left-right politics and the only one in which salary remains a strong predictor in the full model (3). Retirement pensions are, of the three, the least controversial. In this case, ideology has a significant but weak effect, and only age (and, with a small effect, the status quo interaction) is a sociodemographic variable that can explain levels of support.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the literature of partisanship to suggest, in agreement with previous works, that other elements may function as better predictors of legislators' identity when it comes to the cognitive process of preferences' formation. Following this assumption, we tested two alternative hypotheses. The first proposed that descriptive representation matters. Further than considering gender and age as commonly seen in the literature, we added sociodemographic variables for the level of education and salary. We suggested that these variables compose a status-quo identity. The second hypothesis was based on the influence that the business sector exercises over policymaking. We verified whether having a prior high-level job at the private sector and declaring to trust employers' organization significantly shapes policy preferences in the legislative. These two hypotheses were tested based on one of the strongest ideological cleavages in Latin America: the role of the State in guaranteeing a safety net to the poorer strata of the population – an argument derived from the Rawlsian view of social security.

Before running the relevant regressions, we used the data to make a general assessment of the distribution of these policy preferences in Latin America. We showed that there are strong country differences. Bolivia and Uruguay are the ones where legislators tend to be more favorable toward a safety net. The opposite is true for Colombia, Guatemala, Paraguay, Chile, and Peru. Indeed, it evidences something already expected once Bolivia and Uruguay have left-leaning parliaments. It would be interesting to see further efforts in the direction of understanding what leads to such different ideological compositions within the region. Furthermore, we measured the level of disagreement in regard to different policies. Preferences related to the safety net were the ones with higher standard deviations, thus confirming this regional cleavage and reassuring their relevance to our study.

When it comes to the regressions of interest to our test of hypotheses, the proposition that descriptive representation matters was confirmed. Indeed, gender has no influence at all. It goes against previous findings suggesting that oppressed groups may leave their issues of ownership to fight against the status quo in different policy topics. We highly recommend further studies to confirm (or reject) this argument. Furthermore, the older the legislator, the higher is his propensity to favor safety nets. In the case of pension benefits, it may be related to their proximity with the age of retirement, thus corroborating to an adjusted descriptive representation hypothesis. However, when it comes to the interactive term, our results support the hypothesis that older, male, wealthy, and highly educated legislators tend to hold policy preferences against the provision of safety nets to the poorer strata of the population – even though our coefficient was rather low.

We also highlight that higher levels of education are usually portrayed in the literature as generating higher favorability toward redistributive policies at least when it comes to voters. Our results show that it influences representatives differently. In other words, comparing our results to the existing literature suggests that highly educated voters may be better represented by lowly educated legislators (and *vice versa*) at least when it comes to policy preferences toward safety nets. This topic should be further studied in the future.

The first hypothesis generated stronger results than the proposition that close ties with the private sector lead to the rejection of the State's role in assuring social security mechanisms. This second hypothesis was only confirmed in the topic of public ownership of relevant firms. Legislators related to business interests tend to reject it. Our results suggest that the other two topics – the creation of jobs and retirement benefits – are not part of the agenda of business interests in Latin America at least in regard to the formation of cognitive cues for policy preferences. We highlight that these results do not provide an argument against the role of the private sector's lobbying in parliaments. There is an obvious difference between policy preferences and the behavior of legislators in the policy-making process. In this sense, we suggest further studies that investigate when the ideology of legislative elites matters.

Finally, our control variables evidenced two issues that could be addressed by other students of policy preferences in the future. First, left- and right-leaning legislators converge in their preferences toward the State's role in the creation of jobs. We assume that it results from the different perceptions of how the government can pursue this goal. For instance, while some legislators may be thinking about lower taxes, others may have considered protectionist policies. Second, opposition representatives tend to go against the provision of safety nets even when ideology is controlled. As we suggested, it may be explained by their motivation to see a passive government, as to allow future electoral gains. However, we prefer not to theorize on this issue once it escapes the scope of this paper. It would be interesting to see studies addressing this issue.

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