

# **Programmatic Political Competition Where We Least Expect It: Party System Development in El Salvador**

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## ABSTRACT

Rooted in Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) still-classic account, Kitschelt *et al.*'s (2010) examination of party system development in twelve Latin American democracies identifies early socioeconomic development and substantial prior democratic experience as preconditions for the development of programmatic political competition. However, an analysis of Americas Barometer and Latinobarómetro survey data finds evidence that programmatic party-voter linkages are stronger in El Salvador – one of the region's poorest countries, and a country with scant democratic history – than in any other Latin American democracy. This unexpected finding presents a robust challenge to the standard "sociological" model of party system formation. How can we explain the development of programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador? Drawing on survey data, party documents, and in-country interviews, I argue that the development of programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador is the result of deliberate decisions made by the country's two main political parties to emphasize their ideological distinctiveness and to create political institutes designed to educate/indoctrinate party supporters. This finding echoes Torcal and Mainwaring's (2003) analysis of the development of Chile's party system in the post-Pinochet era in pointing to the important (and often overlooked) role elite political agency plays in determining the nature of party-voter linkages.

At its core, the normative argument in favor of responsible partisan government identifies rational, deliberative programmatic linkages between the voting public and its agents (elected officials) as a vital foundation for the establishment of democratic accountability and enhanced democratic quality. Only stable, institutionalized, and ideologically cohesive parties that “develop coherent policy alternatives in their public appeals” and attempt to “build programmatic linkages to voters by assembling distinctive electoral coalitions such that each party’s voters are on average closer to that party’s programmatic appeals than to the rival appeals of any other party” (Kitschelt *et al.* 2010: 3) generate the rational, deliberative programmatic linkages that facilitate democratic accountability, enhance the quality of democratic representation and, by extension, the quality of democracy itself.

Programmatic appeals are not, however, the only mechanisms that elite political actors employ as they seek election to public office. Rational, deliberative party-voter linkages can also be formed when electoral competition centers on voters’ evaluations of parties’ past performance in government (retrospective voting) and/or their perceived ability to effectively provide the electorate with certain valence goods such as economic prosperity and domestic security (prospective voting). Party-voter linkages formed through direct, targeted exchanges between parties and voters (i.e. clientelism) can also be an effective and rational means for parties and their candidates to win the support of the electorate. Additionally, various mechanisms that may generate non-rational, affective party-voter linkages – including collective identification based on shared descriptive attributes (e.g. religion, race, ethnicity, language), the formation of attachments based on the personal charisma and/or perceived moral rectitude of individual political leaders, and the use of vague appeals that “eschew dogmatic ideology in the interests of pragmatism and rhetorical appeals to ‘the people,’ ‘the nation,’ ‘progress,’ ‘development,’ or the

like” (Dix 1989: 26) – have also been shown to be electorally viable alternatives to the formation of programmatic party-voter linkages.

Although the argument that privileges programmatic political competition over these other linkage mechanisms is virtually hegemonic within the realm of empirical political science research, programmatic political competition has proven to be an elusive quality in many democratic polities. This is particularly true in the newer democracies of the developing world, where weakly institutionalized party systems have occurred more frequently, and demonstrated greater resilience, than in long-established democracies (Mainwaring 1998; Mainwaring and Torcal 2005). The creation of programmatic linkages between citizens and their political agents is constrained both by (1) the organizational costs that political elites must bear in order to create programmatically-cohesive parties capable of coordinated political action and by (2) the capacity of citizens/voters to process political information. This second obstacle, present in all democracies, may be especially acute in newer democracies, where “the tumult of electoral politics ... [combined with] the impact of dealigning forces such as mass media elections and candidate-centered politics ... is seen as eroding party learning” (Dalton and Weldon 2007: 189).

Nonetheless, Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) uncover convincing evidence that, in spite of these formidable obstacles, programmatic political competition had indeed been established by the mid-1990s in two Latin American countries – Chile and Uruguay. Kitschelt *et al.* attribute the formation of programmatic political competition in these two countries to (1) their early achievement of a relatively high level of economic development, (2) the long periods of democratic competition both countries experienced prior to the “Third Wave” of democratization, and (3) the inclusive social safety nets both countries established during the post-WWII era, arguing that these three characteristics provide political actors with the

capabilities, opportunities, and perceived political stakes necessary for the formation of programmatic party-voter linkages.

My own empirical analysis of the nature of party-voter linkages in Latin America, which includes all eighteen of the region's electoral democracies<sup>1</sup> and uses more recent data than the data Kitschelt *et al.* employ,<sup>2</sup> confirms the relative strength of programmatic party-voter linkages in Chile and Uruguay. However, I also find that left-right self-identification is an even better predictor of voting behavior in El Salvador than it is in either Uruguay or Chile. The presence of relatively strong programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador constitutes an important empirical puzzle; El Salvador has long been amongst the poorest countries in Latin America, its social safety net is one of the smallest in the region, and, prior to 1984, the country had not held a competitive election since 1931. Quite simply, a theoretical framework which contends that “only those Latin American polities which experienced a relatively high level of economic development already before World War II, longer periods of democratic competition after 1945, and the implementation of comparatively broad policies of social protection for at least the urban population in that time period were able to lock in patterns of programmatic party competition that still persist into the late 1990s” (Kitschelt *et al.* 2010: 8-9) cannot explain the emergence of programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador.

In this paper, which forms part of a larger research project focused on the formation of programmatic party-voter linkages in contemporary Latin America, I employ survey data, an

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<sup>1</sup> Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) exclude six Latin American democracies – Paraguay, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala – from their analysis.

<sup>2</sup> Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) draw their conclusions based on data from the 1997 Parliamentary Elites of Latin America survey of Latin American legislators and the 1998 Latinobarómetro public opinion surveys; I use data from the 1996-2007 Latinobarómetro public opinion surveys and the 2001-2009 Americas Barometer public opinion surveys.

examination of party documents<sup>3</sup>, and evidence obtained through in-country interviews with party officials and campaign activists to demonstrate that the development of programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador is the direct result of deliberate strategic decisions made by the country's two main political parties, ARENA and the FMLN – specifically the decision to emphasize their ideological distinctiveness through their political discourses and the decision to create political institutes designed to educate/indoctrinate party supporters. In this respect, my analysis echoes Torcal and Mainwaring's (2003) examination of the development of Chile's party system in the post-Pinochet era in pointing to the important (and often overlooked) role political agency plays in determining the nature of party-voter linkages.

The first section of this paper presents (1) survey data (drawn from Americas Barometer and Latinobarómetro public opinion surveys) that demonstrate the presence of relatively strong programmatic party-voter linkages in Chile, Uruguay, and El Salvador, and (2) evidence that El Salvador does not exhibit any of the three characteristics that purportedly explain the development of programmatic party-voter linkages in Chile and Uruguay. Considered together, the data presented in this section demonstrate the extent to which the existence of programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador does indeed constitute a theoretically important empirical puzzle. The second section examines the historical development of the Salvadoran party system, emphasizing the timing of the appearance of programmatic party-voter linkages. The third and final section of this paper examines the broader theoretical implications associated with my examination of the development of programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador.

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<sup>3</sup> The examination of party documents will be included in future drafts of this paper.

## **Predicting and Measuring Programmatic Party-Voter Linkages**

Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) provide proxy measures of the political capabilities, opportunities, and stakes that purportedly explain variation in the degree to which programmatic political competition has developed in Latin America's electoral democracies. To measure pre-WWII economic prosperity, their proxy measure for the material and cognitive capabilities that political actors require in order to be able to process political information and to create the political organizations that foster the development of programmatic party-voter linkages, they use GDP per capita data for the year 1928. To calculate experience with democratic competition during the post-WWII era, their proxy measure of the political opportunities that political elites and voters alike have had to build programmatic linkages through repeated electoral contests, they utilize data taken from Mainwaring *et al.*'s (2001) yearly classification of Latin American regimes as democratic, semi-democratic, or authoritarian. To measure the degree to which governments introduced social protection for the urban working class during the ISI era, their conceptual proxy for the perceived political stakes that motivate elite actors to organize political competition around programmatic partisan alignments, Kitschelt *et al.* utilize data on social policy expenditure as a percent of GDP in the year 1973.

Unfortunately, the sources that Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) utilize to create their proxy measures of political capabilities and political stakes – Bulmer-Thomas (1994) and Kaufman and Segura-Ubiergo (2001), respectively – do not provide data for all eighteen Latin American democracies, so I was forced to identify alternate measures. To measure pre-WWII economic prosperity, I employ GDP per capita estimates for the year 1929 that were compiled by Avakov (2010) based on data reported by Maddison (2007). To measure the degree to which governments introduced social protection for the urban working class during the ISI era, I use

data on average social spending as a percentage of GDP during the period 1970-2000 reported by Huber *et al.* (2008). The proxy measures of political capabilities, opportunities, and stakes that I employ are provided in Tables 1-3.<sup>4</sup>

\*\*\*\*\* Insert Tables 1-3 Here \*\*\*\*\*

Although Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) do not provide any quantitative measure of the predictions derived from their capabilities-opportunities-stakes framework, a prediction of the relative likelihood that a given country would have developed programmatic political competition can be calculated by means of a relatively simple three-step process.<sup>5</sup> First, the proxy measures of political capabilities, opportunities, and stakes are all standardized. Second, a raw measure of the predicted likelihood of programmatic political competition is calculated by taking the sum of these three standardized measures. Lastly, this raw measure is itself standardized. Table 4 presents these predictions.

\*\*\*\*\* Insert Table 4 Here \*\*\*\*\*

The question remains, how well do these predictions correspond to actual, observed levels of programmatic political competition, not only in the countries Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) include in their analysis, but also in those they exclude? To answer this question, an alternative measure of programmatic political competition is required. Kitschelt *et al.* measure four distinct components of programmatic party structuration: “[1] a low dimensionality issue space on to which parties map in predictable ways; [2] meaningful left-right semantics offering cognitive short-cuts to political actors within this space; [3] ideological cohesion within parties on key

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<sup>4</sup> For the countries that Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) include, the proxy measures of political capabilities and stakes that I employ are strongly correlated with the measures they replace; in each case, the Pearson’s R correlation coefficient between the measure I use and the measure Kitschelt *et al.* use is .86.

<sup>5</sup> This calculation assumes that political capabilities, opportunities, and stakes should be weighted equally; this appears to be a safe assumption to make, inasmuch as Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) do not state that any one precondition for the development of programmatic political competition is more or less important than the other two.



issues of the day, so that citizens can have greater comprehension of and confidence in parties' proposed programs; and, [4] linkages between voters and parties that are grounded in the issue positions taken by actors at both levels" (Hawkins *et al.* 2008: 1-2). In this paper, I focus exclusively on the fourth of these components, programmatic party-voter linkages. The rationale for this decision follows: if voters make no use of the cognitive short-cuts provided by left-right semantics, then it is of little consequence to the quality of democratic representation and accountability whether or not these semantic labels carry any substantive meaning at the elite level.<sup>6</sup> In other words, I contend that, more than any of the other three components, relatively strong programmatic party-voter linkages are a *necessary* (though *not sufficient*) component of programmatic party competition and of the type of responsible partisan government envisioned by political scientists as the vital foundation for the establishment of democratic accountability – a conclusion that finds support from Kitschelt *et al.* (2010: 119) themselves, who state that “the ultimate test of programmatic party structuration lies in the extent to which party elites and party supporters correspond across issue and ideological divides.”

To generate a measure of the strength of programmatic party-voter linkages that is comparable to the measure that Kitschelt *et al.* employ, I create separate measures of (1) the extent to which voters' left-right self-identification predicts their vote choice and (2) the extent to which left-right self-identification is itself predicted by citizens' preferences on a range of economic and political policy issues. To measure how well left-right self-identification predicts voting behavior, I use data taken from the Latin American Public Opinion Project's (LAPOP) Americas Barometer survey conducted most immediately following each of 32 presidential

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<sup>6</sup> It bears mention that Chile sits at the top of the rankings for three of the four measures of programmatic party structuration that Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) employ and ranks second on the fourth, while Uruguay ranks second on two measures and third on the other two. In short, these two countries display a considerably stronger degree of programmatic party structuration than any of the other ten countries Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) examine. All four of Kitschelt *et al.*'s measures are reproduced in Appendix 1.

elections held in the region's eighteen electoral democracies during the years 2001-2009 to create a simple summary measure of the strength of left-right self-identification as a predictor of voting behavior.<sup>7</sup> Following a process employed by Mainwaring and Torcal (2005), I calculate this measure of the degree to which left-right self-identification predicts voting behavior by first performing logistic regressions on each of the three pairs that are formed by the three leading vote-getters in each presidential election, using the survey respondents' vote choice as the dependent variable and their left-right self-identification (as measured on a 10-point scale) as the sole independent variable. The summary measure is then created by calculating the mean of the Nagelkerke  $R^2$  values from each of these three logistic regressions, with .00 entered rather than the reported Nagelkerke  $R^2$  value if the logistic coefficient is not significant at the .95 confidence level. Table 5 presents the value of this measure for each of the 32 elections included in this analysis, arranged from highest to lowest mean Nagelkerke  $R^2$ .

\*\*\*\*\* Insert Table 5 Here \*\*\*\*\*

As these results show, the extent to which voters' left-right self-placement explains their voting behavior varies greatly across Latin America. To demonstrate the substantive significance of the values presented in Table 5, the six graphs included in Figure 1 illustrate the extent to which the relationship between left-right self-identification and voting behavior varies as this summary measure takes on different values. The X-pattern that appears in the first four panels of Figure 1 – which correspond to the United States' 2004 presidential election, El Salvador's 2009 election (the election that tops the ranking provided in Table 5), Uruguay's 2004 election, and Chile's 2009 election – is what we would expect to find in a country where (1) the major

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<sup>7</sup> Survey respondents who reported not having voted in the most recent presidential election, those who chose not to reveal which candidate they voted for, and those who voted for a candidate who was not one of the top three vote-getters are excluded from this analysis; the remaining sample includes 33,335 respondents.

political parties occupy distinct locations on the left-right scale, (2) voters are in broad agreement regarding these parties' ideological positions, (3) voters are also able to place their own political beliefs/preferences on this same left-right scale, and (4) voters vote for the party/candidate whose ideological position most closely resembles their own preferences. The final two panels of Figure 1 – which correspond to the Honduran presidential election of 2001 and Costa Rica's 2002 election – illustrate just how weak this relationship is in most of Latin America's electoral democracies. To say that ideological self-identification appears to have had no impact on voting behavior in these two presidential elections would hardly be an exaggeration.

\*\*\*\*\* Insert Figure 1 Here \*\*\*\*\*

Although suggestive, this single measure of the degree to which left-right self-identification predicts voting behavior cannot be relied upon as the sole, definitive indicator of the presence of programmatic party-voter linkages. While the responsible party government model of democratic accountability would argue that politicians *should* employ left-right semantics as cognitive shortcuts used to connect their programmatic issue positions to a single dimension and to communicate this position to voters, but there is no guarantee that either party elites or members of the voting public actually *do* use the labels “left” and “right” in this manner. These ideological labels *might* serve as heuristic devices that facilitate political communication and assist incompletely informed voters in the process of evaluating political parties based on their policy stances on relevant political issues. However, these ideological terms may also be infused with symbolic and affective meanings that bear little if any relation to policy content. Whether political actors in a given country actually use ideological labels in a manner that is consistent with the responsible party government model is therefore an empirical question, one

that can be addressed through an examination of the degree to which policy preferences predict left-right self-identification.

To analyze the meanings that Latin American voters attach to the terms Left and Right, I created a composite dataset that incorporates data from the Latinobarómetro public opinion surveys conducted throughout the region in the years 1996-2007.<sup>8</sup> This dataset includes a total of 162,788 respondents from all eighteen of the region's electoral democracies. A series of country- and survey-specific regression models, each using the respondents' self-placement on an 11-point Left-Right scale (where 0 represents the extreme Left, and 10 the extreme Right) as the dependent variable, and as many as twelve<sup>9</sup> indicators of respondents' preferences regarding economic nationalism, the appropriate economic role of the state, and economic inequality, their support for democracy, their attitudes regarding questions of law and order and the rule of law, and their preferences regarding certain social issues as the independent variables, are used to examine both the meanings that Latin American voters attribute to the terms Left and Right and the extent to which the substantive, programmatic meaningfulness of these ideological labels varies across the region.<sup>10</sup>

This process of analyzing the extent to which Latin American voters' ideological self-identifications convey a coherent set of policy preferences takes as its starting point an assumption that the extent to which voters' preferences regarding a certain policy area predict their left-right self-placement can be interpreted as an indicator of the relative centrality of that

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<sup>8</sup> Latinobarómetro surveys were not conducted in 1999, and the Dominican Republic was not included prior to 2004.

<sup>9</sup> The quantity and identity of the independent variables varies from one survey year to another (and, in a small number of cases, from one country to another) due to the fact that the questions included on the Latinobarómetro survey have varied over time.

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere (Lucas 2012, 2013), I provide a more detailed description of these regression models, including a description of each independent variable, an explanation of how the independent variables were chosen for inclusion in the final model, and a discussion of the robustness of the results presented here.

policy area to the meanings that voters ascribe to the terms Left and Right. So, for example, if voters' preferences regarding privatization correlate more strongly with their ideological self-placement than do their preferences regarding the legalization of abortion, we would conclude that, in the aggregate, the issue of privatization is more central to voters' understanding of the labels Left and Right than is the issue of abortion. The regression analysis described here, which provides an overview of the "big picture" with regards to the predictability of left-right self-placement in Latin America, applies this same logic to measure the extent to which voters in each country demonstrate a shared understanding of the ideological labels Left and Right; if the strength of the correlation between voters' preferences regarding a particular policy issue and their ideological self-placement can be interpreted as a measure of the relative centrality of that particular policy to the meanings that voters ascribe to these ideological labels, it follows that the extent to which a set of independent variables that measure voters' preferences across a set of presumably related policy areas predicts left-right self-identification in a given country can be interpreted as a measure of the degree to which voters in that country share a common definition of the terms Left and Right. A simplified description of the three-step process I followed to create a single measure of the programmatic meaningfulness of the labels Left and Right for each country follows.

First, I ran separate OLS regression models using respondents' left-right self-identification as the dependent variable and five to twelve indicators of respondents' policy preferences as the independent variables for each single-country, single-survey sample. Because my focus here is on the overall predictability of the dependent variable, and not on the relationships between specific independent variables and left-right self-identification, the statistic

of interest that I take from these regression models is the  $R^2$  value.<sup>11</sup> I then standardize the  $R^2$  values obtained from these 191 single-country, single-survey regression models – which range from .002 (Ecuador, 2001) to .331 (Chile, 2001) – by transforming each reported  $R^2$  value into an indicator of the number of standard deviations that  $R^2$  value is either above or below the mean  $R^2$  value for the corresponding survey year. Then, I calculated the average of the standardized  $R^2$  values for each of the eighteen countries included in this study; the resulting figures, reported in Table 6, provide a summary measure of the extent to which respondents’ political preferences predict their left-right self-identifications in Latin America’s electoral democracies.

\*\*\*\*\* Insert Table 6 Here \*\*\*\*\*

Examining Table 6, we find that the relationship between citizens’ left-right self-identification and their preferences on a number of economic, political, and social issues is strongest precisely in the same three countries where left-right self-identification best predicts voting behavior. This happy coincidence provides convincing evidence that the values reported in Table 5 do indeed indicate the presence of relatively strong programmatic party-voter linkages in these three countries, for it demonstrates that the terms “left” and “right” do indeed hold substantive, programmatic (rather than merely symbolic or affective) meanings for political actors in Chile, El Salvador, and Uruguay. In the following section, I will examine the

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<sup>11</sup> Although multiple regression analysis is most frequently used to test a hypothesis which states that variation in one or more explanatory variables causes variation in the response variable – hence the use of the terms “independent” and “dependent” variables – the oft-cited warning that “correlation does not imply causation” reminds us that the coefficients generated by these models are indeed *correlation* coefficients, and that regression models therefore provide direct evidence of correlation, not of causation. It follows that multiple regression analysis can also be used to analyze the relationships that exist between a set of independent variables and the dependent variable, and that the  $R^2$  value – which reports the proportion of variation in the dependent variable that is accounted for by the full set of independent variables – is an appropriate measure of the strength of this relationship when comparing the results obtained from the same model when applied to different samples.

development of this preferences-identification-behavior link in El Salvador, the country where, according to Kitschelt *et al.*'s capabilities-opportunities-stakes framework, we would least expect to find programmatic political competition.

### **The Development of Programmatic Party-Voter Linkages in El Salvador**

When Christian Democrat leader Napoleón Duarte assumed the presidency on June 1, 1984, there was little (if any) reason to be optimistic about the future of Salvadoran democracy. Since January 10, 1981, the government of El Salvador had been waging war against Leftist guerrilla forces that had gained control of wide swaths of national territory. Beyond the political instability associated with the ongoing civil war, the country's political history provided no hints that the following two decades would witness the development of a stable democracy, since the country's only previous democratic experiment had ended in unmitigated disaster – Arturo Araujo, the London-educated progressive industrialist with ties to the British Labour Party who won the 1931 presidential election with 46.7% of the vote in a five-candidate race, was ousted by a military coup after only nine months in office; seven weeks later, a Communist-influenced peasant uprising in western El Salvador precipitated “La Matanza,” a series of indiscriminate government attacks on peasants and indigenous communities that left roughly 30,000 dead (2% of the country's population at the time) and paved the way for a half-century of military rule.

Although the January 16, 1992 Chapultepec Accords that put a definitive end to eleven years of civil war may have generated increased optimism about the country's democratic future, the formation of a modern party system characterized by a high degree of programmatic political competition must still have been considered an unlikely development at the time of the March 20, 1994 general election, the first elections held after the war's end. Popular support for each of

the country's two oldest political parties was clearly on the decline. The centrist Christian Democratic Party (PDC, founded in 1960), top vote-getter in the 1982 and 1985 legislative elections and the 1984 presidential election, had seen its electoral support fall in response to the Duarte government's inability to negotiate an end to the country's civil war. The PDC's vote share in National Assembly elections dropped from 52.7% in 1985, to 35.2% in 1988, to 28.0% in 1991. The right-wing, military-aligned National Conciliation Party (PCN, founded in 1961), which had ruled the country from 1962-79, had experienced an even more abrupt decline following the reestablishment of civilian rule. After having received 19.2% of the vote in the 1982 legislative election and 19.3% of the vote in the 1984 presidential election, the PCN received only 8.8% of the vote in the 1985 legislative election and a paltry 4.1% of the vote in the 1989 presidential election. Subsequent election results confirmed the decline of the PCN; to date, no PCN presidential candidate since 1989 has received more than 5.3% of the vote, and the party's vote share in legislative elections has never exceeded 13.1%. The question remains, how can we explain such a seemingly unlikely outcome as the emergence of strong programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador?

During the final three months of 2011, I conducted interviews with a total of 27 party leaders, activists, and elected officials, including representatives of each of the six parties – ARENA, the FMLN, GANA, PCN (CN), PDC (PES), and CD – that would be the top vote-getters in the following year's legislative election, with a combined 98.3% of the total vote. When presented with the evidence described above that programmatic party-voter linkages are stronger in El Salvador than in any other Latin American democracy and asked to explain how these relationships have formed in spite of the fact that El Salvador does not exhibit any of the characteristics that Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) identify as the foundation of programmatic political



competition in Chile and Uruguay, most of these people who are closest to the Salvadoran party system offered the impact of the country's decade-long civil war as the principal explanation for the generation of programmatic party-voter linkages. On its face, this appears to be a perfectly reasonable explanation. Certainly, political conflict becomes more central to citizens' day-to-day lives in the midst of an internal armed conflict which extends throughout much of the country's territory than it would be under normal circumstances. Presumably, such an intense encounter with political conflict would serve to drastically reduce the amount of time required for citizens to become politically educated through experience. However, if the strength of programmatic party-voter linkages in contemporary El Salvador is simply the inheritance left by a decade of polarizing armed political conflict, we would expect to find similarly strong programmatic party-voter linkages in Nicaragua and Guatemala, and we would also expect to find evidence that programmatic political competition in El Salvador was already in place at the time of the first post-war elections in 1994.

The data provided in Tables 5 and 6 demonstrate that this first expectation is not met. The relationship between left-right self-identification and voting behavior is very weak in Guatemala; in Nicaragua, this relationship is slightly stronger than the Latin American average, but much weaker than in Chile, Uruguay, and El Salvador. The relationship between policy preferences and left-right self-identification is weak in both countries. This finding alone does not completely debunk the theory that programmatic political competition in contemporary El Salvador is a result of the country's civil war, since there were certainly a number of important differences in the nature of the armed political conflicts that had engulfed these three Central American neighbors, but it does at least suggest that such a theory would require the addition of important qualifiers. What of the second expectation, that we would see evidence of programmatic political

competition in the 1994 elections if the strong programmatic party-voter linkages we observe in El Salvador now are indeed the heritage of the country's civil war? A closer examination of that historic election is in order.

As described above, the country's two oldest parties, the PDC and the PCN, were both reduced to secondary status by the time of the March 20, 1994 election. The two parties that dominated the 1994 elections – combining to win mayoral elections in 222 of the country's 262 municipalities and to receive 66.4% of the vote for representatives in the National Assembly and 74.1% of the presidential vote – were both of fairly recent origin, and both were unlikely candidates to become the cornerstone of a stable, modern party system.

The Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA), the right-wing party founded on September 30, 1981 by death squad leader Roberto d'Aubuisson (a man described by US Ambassador Robert E. White as a “pathological killer” with a “sick mind” who was presumably the intellectual author of the March 24, 1980 assassination of San Salvador Archbishop Óscar Arnulfo Romero), was also an unlikely candidate to help foster a party system characterized by strong programmatic party-voter linkages. Although the party's ideology, which fused support for democratic reform with rabid anti-communism, may have appealed to conservative middle-class voters who sought a continuation of the PCN's economic policies but bristled at the continuation of military rule, the target audience for the ARENA's political message – particularly its passionate defense of private property – consisted of the landed oligarchy that had largely dominated Salvadoran politics since the 1880s and the business elite that had emerged during the 1960s, when the Central American Common Market opened new export markets for Salvadoran industry. The financial resources provided by these elite groups, who switched their allegiance from the PCN to ARENA almost immediately, made it possible for ARENA to

establish extensive networks of patron-client relationships that helped ensure the party would win the support of rural voters. The party's meteoric rise to national prominence, which came primarily at the expense of the PCN but also undercut support for the centrist PDC (as shown in Table 7), resulted from the opposition's weakness and from the party's ability to outspend its rivals on the campaign trail; as noted by two high-ranking ARENA officials,<sup>12</sup> the party made little if any effort to educate voters about its ideological precepts during the first two decades of its existence because ARENA was able to "win easy" by mobilizing voters through patron-client ties.

\*\*\*\*\* Insert Table 7 Here \*\*\*\*\*

The party that anchored the other end of the Salvadoran party system, the left-wing Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), was perhaps more likely to become the focal point of a programmatic party system since its rise to national prominence was due at least in part to the party's historic relationships with various sectors of Salvadoran civil society. Though not formally registered as a political party until September 1, 1992, the FMLN traces its origins to the foundation of the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS) in 1930. After most of the PCS leadership and many of the party's supporters were annihilated by government forces in 1932, the party survived as a largely inactive clandestine entity until the early 1960s, when the PCN introduced limited political reforms in a bid to increase the regime's legitimacy after opposition parties had boycotted the 1962 presidential election. The PCS and other Leftist groups took advantage of this brief political opening, which allowed for meaningful (if not quite fully free and fair) elections and also permitted labor unions to increase their activities. Between 1962

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<sup>12</sup> Interviews with Orlando Cocar Romano, manager of the Instituto de Formación Política "Mayor Roberto d'Aubuisson" (ARENA's center for political and ideological training, established in 2003), and with a party official who was intimately involved in designing ARENA's campaign strategy for the 2004 presidential election. San Salvador and La Libertad, El Salvador, November 2011.

and 1971, union membership nearly doubled, and labor unions became increasingly politicized (Wade 2003: 41). At the same time, Salvadoran priests influenced by the call to denounce injustice and establish a preferential option for the poor that had emerged from Vatican II (the 1962 Conference of Catholic Church bishops) and Medellín (the Second Latin American Episcopal Conference, 1968) established Christian base communities in many rural areas, while university students influenced by the Cuban revolution helped foster the creation of clandestine peasant organizations. PCS activists used all three of these organizational forms – urban labor unions, Christian base communities, and peasant organizations – to educate group members about the party’s ideological beliefs and aspirations.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the PCS remained committed to electoral competition and to strengthening the country’s civil society, even after the era of relative political liberalization that had been inaugurated after the 1962 election came to an abrupt end in 1972, when military/PCN officials initiated a new wave of repression after annulling the results of the presidential election because early returns showed that PDC leader Napoleón Duarte (running as the candidate of the National Opposition Union, ONU) was likely to win. Not all Leftist forces retained the PCS’s faith that an electoral solution to the country’s growing social unrest could be found, however. In 1970, PCS general secretary Cayetano Carpio abandoned the party to form the Farabundo Martí Popular Liberation Force (FPL), the country’s first Leftist guerrilla group. The events surrounding the aborted 1972 election led to the formation of a second guerrilla group, the People’s Revolutionary Army (ERP); internal schisms within the ERP would eventually lead to the formation of the Armed Forces of National Resistance (FARN) and the Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers (PRTC).

At least through 1977, these four guerrilla groups all combined (to greater or lesser degrees) armed resistance to the military regime with grassroots organizing campaigns designed to strengthen the labor unions and peasant organizations that had emerged during the 1960s. Had the guerrilla groups been political parties, the relationships they cultivated with these civil society organizations could have been described as the ideal avenue for a new political party to build strong programmatic linkages with its supporters. However, the brutal repression unleashed by government and paramilitary forces to suppress the massive protests that were organized after the PCN again employed fraudulent means to deny the opposition victory in the 1977 presidential election had a profound impact on these relationships. Amidst escalating violence that claimed the lives of countless union members and peasant organizers, many of the leaders of civil society who survived this onslaught joined the guerrilla forces, leaving the organizations they had guided weaker and with inexperienced leadership. Although the reformist junior officers coup that overthrew the PCN government on October 15, 1979 provided a momentary shimmer of hope that civil war might be averted, the January 5, 1980 collapse of the military-civilian junta that was established in the wake of that coup convinced the PCS leadership to reverse its long-held commitment to non-violent tactics. On October 10, 1980, the PCS's own armed group, the Liberation Armed Forces (FAL), joined forces with the FPL, ERP, FARN, and PRTC to form the FMLN.

Three months later, on January 10, 1981, the FMLN launched its "Final Offensive." Designed to achieve a rapid victory through the combination of military action, massive popular insurrection, and an uprising of sympathetic groups within the Salvadoran armed forces, the Final Offensive failed to achieve its objectives due to a lack of coordination (Regalado 2011: 90-91). During the eleven-year civil war that followed, the five constituent political-military groups

of the FMLN focused the vast majority of their efforts on the ongoing armed struggle; only in those territories that remained firmly under FMLN control did the political organizing efforts that had characterized the guerrilla groups' relationships with civil society during 1970-77 continue during the war. Had this forced hiatus in the FMLN's involvement with the labor union, peasant organization, and Christian base community movements that had flourished during the 1960s and 1970s erased the positive impact these relationships might have had on the establishment of programmatic party-voter linkages, or would the 1994 election demonstrate the delayed fruits of these early efforts at grassroots political organization?

Azpuru (2010) finds that left-right self-identification was indeed a statistically significant predictor of voting behavior in the 1994 presidential election. As discussed in the previous section, however, this evidence is not, in and of itself, sufficient to conclude that programmatic political competition had already been established in El Salvador; we must also know the extent to which left-right self-identification was related to relevant policy preferences. Because the Latinobarómetro survey was not introduced until 1996, I use data from that year's survey as a proxy measure of the strength of the relationship between political preferences and ideological self-identification at the time of the 1994 election.

\*\*\*\*\* Insert Figure 2 Here \*\*\*\*\*

Figure 2, which plots the  $R^2$  values of the regression models that use left-right self-identification as the dependent variable and policy preferences as the independent variables for El Salvador, Chile, and Uruguay against the Latin American mean  $R^2$  value for each survey year, shows that, amongst Salvadoran voters, the relationship between political preferences and ideological self-identification was unremarkable throughout the 1996-2003 period, save for a ephemeral uptick on the 2000 survey. Indeed, when the data set used to create the estimates

presented in Table 6 is divided into two periods, 1996-2003 and 2004-2007, and separate indicators of the degree to which policy preferences predict left-right self-identification are generated for both periods, we find that while the relationship between Salvadorans' left-right self-identification and their policy preferences was only marginally greater than the regional mean during the earlier period (the country's average  $R^2$  value was only .05 standard deviations higher than the average value during 1996-2003), this relationship was stronger in El Salvador than in any other Latin American democracy during the second period (when the average  $R^2$  value exceeded the regional mean by 2.07 standard deviations). Based on this evidence, we can be more confident in the conclusion that the strong programmatic party-voter linkages observed in contemporary El Salvador are not simply the heritage of the civil war. The new question that emerges from this analysis is: what happened between the years 2003 and 2004 that caused the substantial and lasting increase in the strength of the relationship between political preferences and ideological self-identification that we observe in Figure 2?

The FMLN of 1994 was still in the midst of a difficult transition from guerrilla group to political party. During the war, the five groups that had formed the FMLN were unified by their shared short-term military goal. Once peace was established, the political differences that had led to divisions between these groups during the 1970s re-emerged, and the party was soon divided into three factions – the “*ortodoxos*,” led by PCS head Schafik Hándal, represented the desire to retain the revolutionary identity of the FMLN and to utilize electoral democracy as a path to the creation of a socialist state; the “*renovadores*,” led by FPL commander Facundo Guardado, represented the desire to see the FMLN evolve into a more politically-viable social-democratic party; a third group, led by ERP leader Joaquín Villalobos, favored the formation of an alliance with the centrist PDC. Conflict between these groups would dominate the party's internal politics

for the next eight years. Led by Villalobos, the ERP and RN formally broke with the FMLN in December 1994 and subsequently formed the Democratic Party (PD), which promptly disappeared after receiving only 1.2% of the vote in the 1997 legislative elections. After Guardado, the FMLN's presidential candidate in 1999, and five other members of the *renovador* faction were expelled from the party, they formed the Renewal Movement (MR) in 2002. Like the PD, the MR failed to present much of a challenge to the FMLN as the face of the Salvadoran Left; it, too, disappeared after its first electoral campaign, when it received only 1.8% of the vote in the 2003 legislative elections.

During this period, FMLN electoral platforms reflected the uncertainty generated by these internal conflicts. For instance, Wade (2003: 103) describes the party's 2000 legislative platform in the following terms: "With a few exceptions, the platform could have been offered by any of El Salvador's competing interests. It was, in a sense, generic." This would change shortly after the *ortodoxos* gained complete control of the party in 2002. Grassroots organizing efforts that had largely been abandoned during the past decade were revitalized, the FMLN became significantly more forthright in announcing its ideological commitments<sup>13</sup> (as evidenced by PCS leader Schafik Hándal's campaign in anticipation of the 2004 presidential election), and the party opened a number of training centers specifically designed to provide ideological instruction to party leaders, candidates, and rank-and-file party members (Gutiérrez Castro 2010).

ARENA, surprised by the results of the 2003 legislative election – the party received nearly 115,000 fewer votes than it had in 2000, and failed to be the top vote-getter for the first time since 1985 as it was topped by the FMLN, 33.8% to 32.0% – inaugurated its own political

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<sup>13</sup> Future drafts of this paper will include an examination of the extent to which the FMLN's political discourse changed, becoming more ideologically charged, between 2000 and 2004.



training center shortly after the 2003 election and embarked upon an ambitious ideological outreach program. Between the 2003 and 2004 elections, ARENA provided ideological instruction to approximately 60,000 party sympathizers; although comparable data on the number of FMLN members who participated in that party's ideological training projects are not available, the manager of ARENA's Institute of Political Formation contends that the FMLN ideological training initiative was even more expansive than ARENA's project.<sup>14</sup> If true, this assertion would mean that at least 1 of every 20 Salvadoran voters participated in one of these two parties' ideological training programs in the months prior to the 2004 presidential election. The profound and lasting impact of these efforts appears in Figure 2.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Like classic works on Latin American party systems by Dix (1989), Collier and Collier (1991), Mainwaring and Scully (1995), and Coppedge (1998), the explanation that Kitschelt *et al.* (2010) provide for the development of programmatic political competition in Chile and Uruguay adopts Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) sociological model as its starting point. This line of reasoning predicts that consolidated party systems with strong, programmatic political parties will form only in relatively developed, modernized countries. At the very least, the presence of strong programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador demonstrates that neither extensive prior democratic experience nor a relatively high level of economic development accompanied by the existence of an inclusive social welfare system are necessary conditions for the formation of programmatic political competition.

From a normative angle, this is an encouraging finding; if programmatic party-voter linkages facilitate democratic accountability, then the finding that these linkages have developed

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with Orlando Cocar Romano. San Salvador, El Salvador, November 2011.

in a country like El Salvador generates hope that the quality of democratic representation and of democracy itself can be improved in other countries that face the same presumed obstacles that El Salvador's party system has overcome. From an empirical standpoint, the development of programmatic political competition in El Salvador leads one to ask: is this simply an anomaly, or are there meaningful parallels between the development of programmatic party-voter linkages in El Salvador and their development in Chile and Uruguay?

Certainly, El Salvador hardly resembles Chile and Uruguay in terms of the three countries' political histories or their levels of socioeconomic development. There is, however, one characteristic that these three countries do share; all three are home to a unified, non-personalistic Left – the FMLN in El Salvador, the Frente Amplio in Uruguay, and the Concertación in Chile, which, though not a political party *per se*, has functioned as one during national elections – that has actively promoted its ideological distinctiveness regarding “big” political questions regarding democratization and the economic role of the State, serves as its country's only significant left-of-center option, and has achieved electoral success by doing so. That the FMLN was unquestionably the first mover when El Salvador's main political parties began to take steps to strengthen their ideological linkages with the voting public lends support to the suggestion that “externally mobilized” parties, those that “come from outside the ruling circles of power” and therefore lack the financial resources necessary to challenge the governing party's established network of patron-client relationships, are the parties most likely to “push for programmatic competition ... because programs are all they have to offer” (Bornschiefer 2009: 8; Shefter 1993). That the efforts taken by the FMLN and ARENA to make voters aware of each party's ideological profile have had such a large and lasting impact on the strength of the relationship between voters' policy preferences and their left-right self-identification lends

support to work that has emphasized the role that elite agency has played in shaping the Chilean and Uruguayan party systems (Torcal and Mainwaring 2003; Luna 2008).

**Table 1. GDP per Capita, 1929, at Purchasing Power Parity, Measured in 2007 Dollars**

Argentina	\$ 6,416	Colombia	\$ 2,211
Uruguay	\$ 5,652	Honduras	\$ 2,202
Chile	\$ 5,619	Bolivia	\$ 2,045
Venezuela	\$ 5,033	Panama	\$ 2,042
Mexico	\$ 2,581	Ecuador	\$ 1,986
Nicaragua	\$ 2,571	Paraguay	\$ 1,688
Guatemala	\$ 2,527	Brazil	\$ 1,670
Peru	\$ 2,379	El Salvador	\$ 1,529
Costa Rica	\$ 2,324	Dominican Rep.	\$ 1,095

**Table 2. Democratic Experience: Years Democratic or Semi-Democratic, 1945-98**

Costa Rica	52	Bolivia	21
Venezuela	42.5	Peru	20.5
Uruguay	42	Honduras	17.5
Chile	37	Panama	14.5
Ecuador	35	El Salvador	11
Brazil	32	Guatemala	11
Colombia	30.5	Nicaragua	7.5
Argentina	24.5	Mexico	5.5
Dominican Republic	24	Paraguay	5

**Table 3. Social Security and Welfare Spending as a Percentage of GDP, 1970-2000**

Uruguay	13.7	Paraguay	2.2
Chile	8.7	Colombia	1.8
Brazil	7.4	Venezuela	1.8
Argentina	5.5	Dominican Republic	0.9
Panama	4.5	Peru	0.9
Costa Rica	3.7	Honduras	0.7
Nicaragua	3.0	Guatemala	0.6
Bolivia	2.9	El Salvador	0.5
Mexico	2.9	Ecuador	0.2

**Table 4. The Relative Predicted Likelihood of Programmatic Political Competition**

Uruguay	2.44	Panama	-0.37
Chile	1.70	Peru	-0.53
Argentina	1.16	Nicaragua	-0.61
Venezuela	.90	Mexico	-0.68
Costa Rica	.72	Honduras	-0.68
Brazil	.39	Dominican Republic	-0.75
Colombia	-0.17	Guatemala	-0.80
Ecuador	-0.28	Paraguay	-1.01
Bolivia	-0.36	El Salvador	-1.07

**Table 5. The Strength of Left-Right Self-Identification as a Predictor of Voting Behavior**

<u>Election</u>	<u>Mean R<sup>2</sup></u>	<u>Election</u>	<u>Mean R<sup>2</sup></u>
El Salvador, 2009	.277	Peru, 2006	.024
El Salvador, 2004	.260	Costa Rica, 2002	.020
Uruguay, 2004	.255	Ecuador, 2006	.018
Uruguay, 2009	.223	Ecuador, 2002	.017
Chile, 2009	.152	Panama, 2009	.014
Chile, 2005	.134	Costa Rica, 2006	.013
Venezuela, 2006	.121	Argentina, 2007	.010
Bolivia, 2009	.108	Panama, 2004	.006
Nicaragua, 2006	.077	Ecuador, 2009	.005
Nicaragua, 2001	.055	Dominican Rep., 2008	.005
Colombia, 2006	.054	Dominican Rep., 2004	.005
Honduras, 2001	.051	Paraguay, 2008	.004
Colombia, 2002	.050	Guatemala, 2007	.003
Bolivia, 2002	.044	Brazil, 2006	.000
Bolivia, 2005	.042	Guatemala, 2003	.000
Mexico, 2006	.033	Honduras, 2009	.000

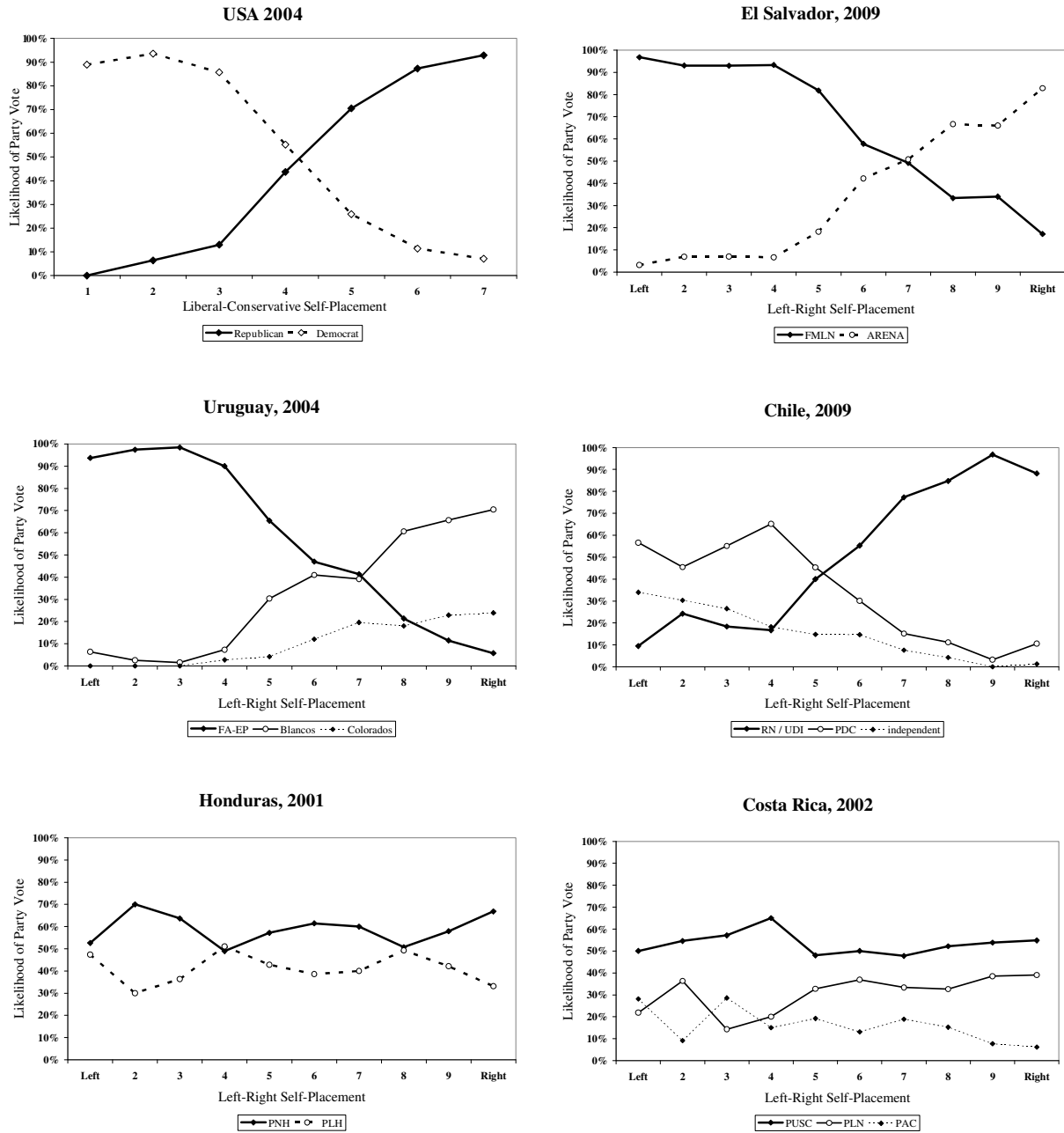
**Table 6. The Meaningfulness of Left and Right**

Chile	2.33	Mexico	-0.34
Uruguay	1.72	Costa Rica	-0.35
El Salvador	.78	Panama	-0.39
Argentina	.23	Bolivia	-0.40
Venezuela	-0.23	Dominican Republic	-0.42
Guatemala	-0.24	Nicaragua	-0.43
Brazil	-0.29	Ecuador	-0.44
Colombia	-0.34	Paraguay	-0.45
Honduras	-0.34	Peru	-0.65

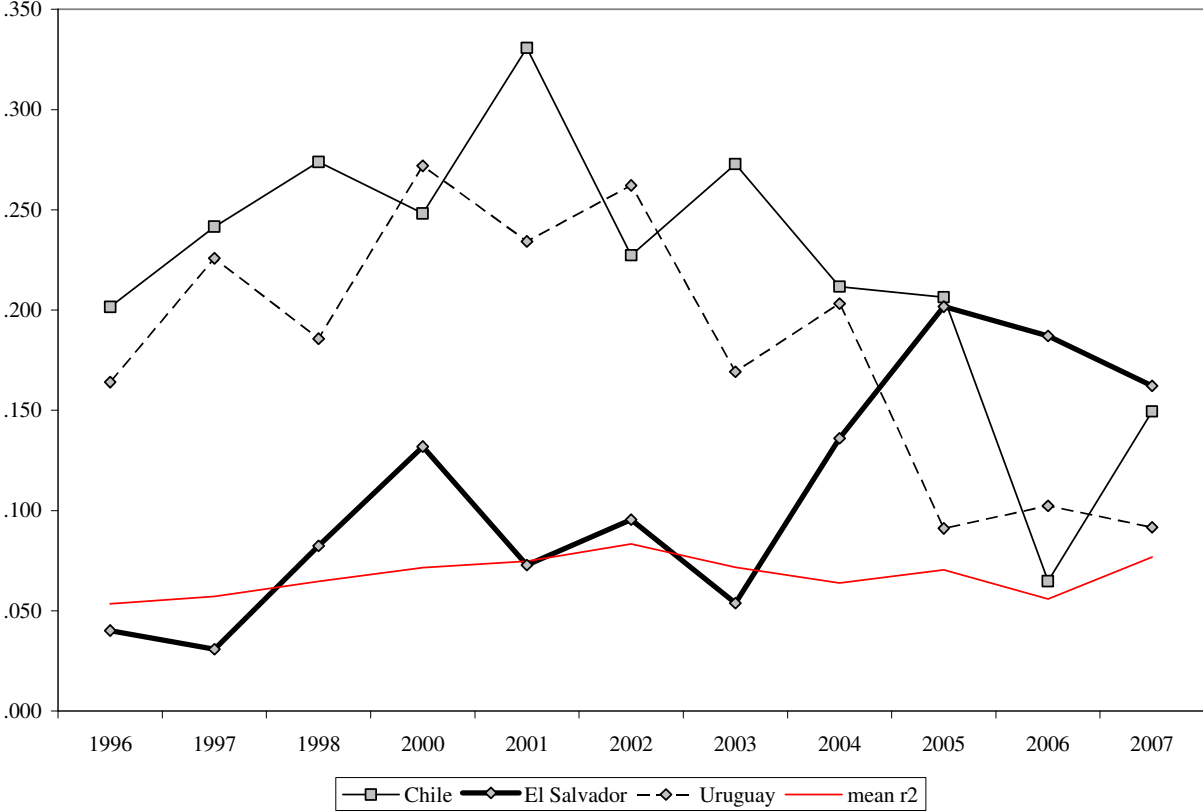
**Table 7. Presidential (First Round) and Legislative Election Results, 1984-91**

	<u>1984 (P)</u>	<u>1985 (L)</u>	<u>1988 (L)</u>	<u>1989 (P)</u>	<u>1991 (L)</u>
ARENA	29.8%	28.9%	48.0%	53.8%	44.3%
PCN	19.3%	8.8%	8.5%	4.1%	9.0%
PDC	43.4%	52.7%	35.2%	36.0%	28.0%
other parties	7.5%	9.5%	8.3%	6.1%	18.7%

**Figure 1. Left-Right Self-Identification as a Predictor of Voting Behavior**



**Figure 2. The Predictability of Left-Right Self-Identification**





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## Appendix 1. Programmatic Party Structuration in Latin America, 1997/98.

Low-Dimensionality <u>Partisan Divide</u>		Left-Right Semantics: <u>Strength of Ideological Divide</u>	
<b>Chile</b>	1.3	Bolivia	.57
<b>Uruguay</b>	3	<b>Chile</b>	.54
Mexico	3.7	<b>Uruguay</b>	.53
Argentina	5.3	Mexico	.28
Venezuela	5.3	Costa Rica	.28
Ecuador	7	Colombia	.21
Colombia	7.3	Argentina	.20
Costa Rica	7.7	Brazil	.18
Peru	7.7	Venezuela	.17
Bolivia	9.3	Dominican Republic	.14
Brazil	10	Ecuador	.12
Dominican Republic	10.3	Peru	.12
[scores are average rank orders]		[scores are regression coefficients]	
<u>Ideological Cohesion of Political Parties</u>		<u>Voter-Party Linkages Grounded in Issue Positions</u>	
<b>Chile</b>	.40	<b>Chile</b>	6.9
Bolivia	.41	<b>Uruguay</b>	6.5
<b>Uruguay</b>	.41	Argentina	4.5
Venezuela	.45	Colombia	2.3
Argentina	.51	Brazil	1.5
Costa Rica	.52	Bolivia	1.5
Dominican Republic	.52	Mexico	0.0
Colombia	.55	Costa Rica	-0.1
Ecuador	.60	Ecuador	-0.1
Mexico	.62	[scale ranges from -10 to 10]	
Peru	.63		
Brazil	.67		
[scale ranges from 0 (perfect cohesion) to 1 (no cohesion)]			