

LEADER OVER POLICY?

The influence of political leaders on policy preferences

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BACKGROUND

PARTY LABELS AND POLICY PREFERENCES

Leaders and parties influence decision-makers' support toward different policies. This is so due to different causal mechanisms in decision making, such as heuristics (Lau & Redlawsk, 2006), motivated reasoning (Bolsen et al., 2014), group influence (Cohen, 2003) and values and products (Johnson & Eagly, 1989), among others.

It matters who sponsors the policies beyond their contents (Cohen 2003).

Applications: candidates, votes, supreme court decisions, polarization (Nicholson 2011& 2012), information effects (Druckman & Lupia 2016), scope of policy reforms (Bullock 2011) chances to close the political gap (Bolsen et al 2014)

DOES IT WORK THE SAME WAY IN A DIFFERENT PARTY SYSTEM?

In developing countries stakeholders and interest groups try to prevent policies needed for development. Institutions are not strong enough to shape players' behavior and expectations (Levitsky & Murillo, 2013). Distributive conflicts are dealt outside of political institutions.

We document that the relation between parties and policy support unveiled by Cohen (2003) is replicated in the present-day Argentina, a political system characterized by young and mutating catch-all parties founded and driven by strong personalistic leaders.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Do voters of politician X support a policy because X's party sponsors it? Do they oppose the policy because Y's party backs it? Does a coalition and out-party sponsorship help or hurt a policy proposal on a polarized issue?

REFERENCES

Bolsen, T., Druckman, J. N., & Cook, F. L. (2014). The influence of partisan motivated reasoning on public opinion. *Political Behavior*, 36(2), 235-262.

Bullock, J. G. (2011). Elite influence on public opinion in an informed electorate. *American Political Science Review*, 105(03), 496-515.

Cohen, G. L. (2003). Party over policy: The dominating impact of group influence on political beliefs. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 85(5), 808.

Druckman, J. N., & Lupia, A. (2016). Preference change in competitive political environments. *Political Science*, 19(1), 13-32.

METHODS

THE EXPERIMENT

Telephone survey experiments: 4 different waves (October 2016 – July 2017) in the Province of Buenos Aires. Total of 2716 participants. Between subject comparison.

- Participants were asked their vote intention between predominant political figures X and Y, and their level of agreement (scale 0-3, 0: highly disagree, 3: highly agree) toward a variety of public policies.
- We repeated the experiment using the policies but now allegedly sponsored by the partis or by one of the two leaders of the parties.
- We tested for the influence of legislative coalitions by asking people's opinion regarding co-sponsored policies.

WE EXPECT TO FIND TO

- Endorsement effect** - In (out) party endorsement strengthens (weakens) the support for a particular policy.
- Asymmetry** - The influence of policy endorsement is asymmetric between parties.
- Dogmatism** - Party endorsement can generate more dogmatic positions.
- No additivity** - Cross-party endorsements (co-sponsorship) cancel each other.
- De-polarization** - Leaders' "against-character" endorsement is more likely to change policy preferences if there is ex-ante polarization.

Johnson, B. T., & Eagly, A. H. (1989). Effects of involvement on persuasion: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 106(2), 290-314.

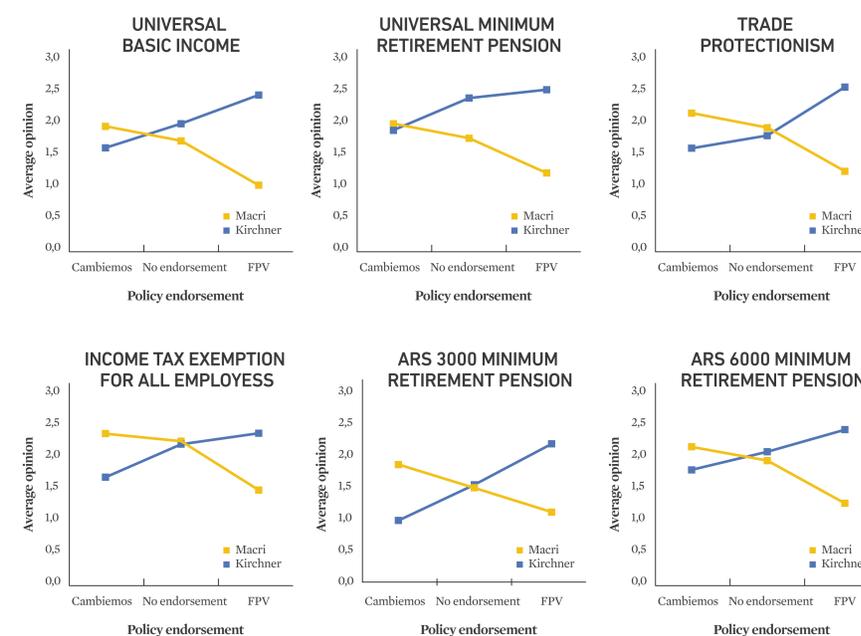
Lau, R. R., & Redlawsk, D. P. (2006). *How voters decide: Information processing in election campaigns*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Levitsky, S. and M. V. Murillo (2005). Building Castles in the Sand? The Politics of Institutional Weakness in Argentina. In Levitsky, S. & Murillo, M. V. (Eds.), *Argentine Democracy: The Politics of Institutional Weakness*. Pennsylvania, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press.

RESULTS

- 2x3 ANOVA. **Voting intention/policy endorsement** interaction relevant to explain level of agreement toward all policies ($p < 0.01$).
- OLS coefficient equality test. In 4/6 policies, **Out party endorsement** is more influential than In party endorsement for one of the group of voters ($p < 0.10$).
- OLS. In 3/6 policies, In party endorsement increases the **intensity of support**; Out party endorsement increases the intensity of rejection only in 2/6 policies ($p < 0.10$).
- Mean difference test. **Cross-party endorsement** does not increase the level of support ($p < 0.5$).
- Mean difference test. **Against-character endorsement** reduces differences in opinion between groups but does not increase overall policy support.

Average policy approval by voting intention and party endorsement.



Note: The variable "Opinion" equals 3 when the subject is highly in favor of a policy and 0 when she is highly against a policy.

DISCUSSION

Leaders and parties do influence policy support in a different country /party system. Robust results beyond co-variates (gender, age, income, education & employment status).

For some groups of voters, Out party endorsement can be more influential than In party endorsement in changing general attitudes towards policies (approval/disapproval).

However, In party endorsement increases intensity of support more than Out party endorsement increases intensity of rejection.

Neither cross-party endorsement nor against-character endorsement help generate consensus in favor of a policy.