

***The Governor's Backyard: A Seat-Vote Model of  
Electoral Reform for Subnational Multiparty Races***

Ernesto Calvo

University of Houston

Juan Pablo Micozzi

Rice University

Evaluating the fairness of electoral reforms is a critical requirement for electoral accountability in any democracy. There is, however, no research measuring the expected seat benefit for incumbent reformers in newly democratized countries. Much of this delay is due to the technical difficulties of generalizing previous seat-vote models to multiparty races, a problem that has limited both subnational and cross-national comparisons of electoral regime change. Using a multilevel Bayesian model we solve this analytical problem and produce comparable estimates of partisan bias and majoritarian bias across the Argentine provinces. Our model estimates the effect of reforms across many electoral regimes and can be applied to comparative analyses of electoral reforms within and across countries. In the particular case of Argentina, we show large seat premiums for incumbent parties initiating electoral reforms.

**I**n the last 20 years Latin America has undergone remarkable political changes not just to consolidate the rule of law but to change it as well. Electoral reforms have been implemented in most countries of the region, affecting how citizens vote and how politicians get elected. Major electoral reforms led to the elimination of the Electoral College in Argentina; the introduction of mixed-member electoral rules in Bolivia, Mexico, and Venezuela; the use of preferential vote in Brazil and Colombia; and the elimination of *apparentment* rules in Uruguay, to mention some of the most commonly cited examples. As was also the case in Eastern Europe (Benoit 2004; Elster, Offe, and Preuss 1998), the last 20 years constitute the most dynamic period of electoral regime change in Latin America since the introduction of proportional representation (PR) in the early twentieth century.

Within each country, subnational electoral reforms were also frequent and had far reaching distributive effects. The seat benefits obtained by incumbent reformers, however, remain mostly an exercise in political speculation. In this paper, we analyze the seat-vote properties of multiple electoral reforms in 24

lar cases of PR reforms in early twentieth-century Europe (Andrews and Jackman 2005; Boix 1999; Colomer 2004); but much of this renewed interest comes from scholars explaining the increased number of electoral reforms taking place in newly democratized countries of Eastern Europe and Latin America (Benoit 2004; Elster, Offe, and Preuss 1998; Jones-Luong 2004; Magar, Rosenblum, and Samuels 1998; Moraski 2003).

A dominant theme of this emerging literature is the importance of seat-maximizing incentives for explaining the endogenous drive to reform (Benoit 2004). Boix (1999), for example, shows that incumbent conservative parties in the early twentieth century changed the rules of the electoral game to minimize the expected seat losses to rising socialist challengers. Benoit and Hayden (2004), Benoit and Schieman (2001), and Molinar Horcasitas (1996) describe the importance of short-term seat-vote calculations in explaining electoral regime change in Poland, Hungary, and Mexico. In contrast with the redistricting literature in the United States, however, there has been little research measuring the consistency between the strategic incentives of the various partisan actors and the resulting allocation of seats (Cox and Katz 2002; Engstrom and Kernell 2005). An important gap in recent literature, therefore, is the absence of a general model of seats and votes for multiparty elections to assess the consistency between electoral design and partisan intent in electoral reforms in recently democratized countries.

Significant change in the rules of the game, however, was not restricted to recently democratized countries. Lijphart (1994), for example, lists 70 electoral regimes in 27 countries in the post-war period. Among these 27 countries, only Canada, New Zealand, Switzerland, and the United States<sup>5</sup> experienced no significant change in electoral rules. In contrast with recent cases in Latin America and Eastern Europe, however, reforms occurred more frequently in countries with PR electoral rules and had a more moderate scope (Lijphart 1994, 79–80).

This emerging literature on electoral reform has also received new impetus from developments in comparative federalism, subnational party politics, and the development of nationalized party systems (Chhibber and Kollman 2004; Gibson 2004a; Jones and Mainwaring 2001; Samuels and Snyder 2001; Stepan 2001). The importance of decentralized subnational electoral reforms has been critical for explaining the recent evolution of party competition in Argentina, Hungary, Italy, Mexico, and Russia.<sup>6</sup> Subnational political systems, as has been noted in this literature, are more likely to be consistently partisan than their national counterparts and often constitute authoritarian reservoirs within the recently democratized national political system (Gibson 2004b), in which party domination is facilitated by legal electoral reforms rather than by open fraud or intimidation. A

<sup>5</sup> New Zealand's implementation of mixed-member electoral rules would take that country off the list of nonreformers. The "redistricting" revolution in the United States (Cox and Katz 2002) also could be interpreted as a change of electoral regime.

<sup>6</sup> See Benoit (2004), Stolt (2004), and Moraski (2003).

- Gibson, Edward. 2004a. *Federalism and Democracy in Latin America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gibson, Edward. 2004b. *Subnational Authoritarianism: Territorial Strategies of Political Control in Democratic Regimes*. Prepared for delivery at the 2004 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.
- Gibson, Edward, and Ernesto Calvo. 2000. "Federalism and Low-Maintenance Constituencies: Territorial Dimensions of Economic Reform in Argentina." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 35(3): 32–55.
- Jones, Mark P. 1997. "Federalism and Number of Parties in Argentine Congressional Elections." *Journal of Politics* 59(2): 538–49.
- Jones, Mark P., and Scott Mainwaring. 2001. "The Nationalization of Parties and Party Systems: An Empirical Measure and an Application to the Americas." *Party Politics* 9: 129–66.
- Jones, Mark P., Sebastian Saiegh, Pablo T. Spiller, and Mariano Tommasi. 2003. "Amateur Legislators-Professional Politicians: The Consequences of Party-Centered Electoral Rules in a Federal System." *American Journal of Political Science* 47(4): 656–69.
- Jones-Luong, Pauline. 2004. *Institutional Change and Political Continuity in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Power, Perceptions, and Pacts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- King, Gary. 1990. "Electoral Responsiveness and Partisan Bias in Multiparty Democracies." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15(2): 159–81.
- King, Gary, and Robert X. Browning. 1987. "Democratic Representation and Partisan Bias in Congressional Elections." *American Political Science Review* 81(4): 1252–73.
- Laakso, M., and Rein Taagepera. 1979. "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to West Europe." *Comparative Political Studies* 12: 3–27.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1994. *Electoral Systems and Party Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Magar, Erik, Marc R. Rosenblum, and David Samuels. 1998. "On the Absence of Centripetal Incentives in Double-Member Districts: The Case of Chile." *Comparative Political Studies* 31(6): 714–39.
- Molinar Horcasitas, Juan. 1996. "Changing the Balance of Power in a Hegemonic Party System: The Case of Mexico." In *Institutional Design in New Democracies, Eastern Europe and Latin America*, eds. Arend Lijphart and Carlos Waisman. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Moraski, Bryon. 2003. "Electoral System Design in Russian Oblasti and Republics: A Four-Case Comparison." *Europe-Asia Studies* 55(3): 437–68.
- Mustapic, Ana María. 1990. "La Borratina." *Los Sistemas Electorales y sus Consecuencias Políticas*, eds. L. Aznar and M. Boschi. Buenos Aires: Ed. Fucade.
- Remmer, Karen, and Erik Wibbels. 2000. "The Subnational Politics of Economic Adjustment." *Comparative Political Studies* 33(4): 419–51.
- Samuels, David, and Richard Snyder. 2001. "The Value of a Vote: Malapportionment in Comparative Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 31: 651–71.
- Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spiegelhalter, David, Andrew Thomas, Nicky Best, and Dave Lunn. 2003. WinBUGS user Manual 1.4, Cambridge UK. {<http://www.mrc-bsu.cam.ac.uk/bugs>}
- Stepan, Alfred. 2001. "Toward a New Comparative Politics of Federalism, (Multi)Nationalism, and Democracy: Beyond Rikerian Federalism." In *Arguing Comparative Politics*, ed. Stepan, Alfred. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 315–61.
- Stolt, Frederick. 2004. "Electoral Competition, Legislative Pluralism, and Institutional Development: Evidence from Mexico's States." *Latin American Research Review* 39(1): 155–67.
- Sturtz, Sibylle, Uwe Ligges, and Andrew Gelman. 2004. R2WinBUGS: A Package for Running WinBUGS. *R. Journal of Statistical Software* 12(3).
- Taagepera, Rein. 1986. "Reformulating the Cube Law of Elections for Proportional Representation Elections." *American Political Science Review* 80(2): 489–504.