

Re-evaluating the Role of Ideology in Chile^{*}

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Abstract

Voters' ideological stances have long been considered one of the most important factors for understanding electoral choices in Chile. In recent years, however, the literature has begun to call this into question due to the current crisis of representation, the high programmatic congruence between the two main coalitions, the decline in the political relevance of the dictatorship, and the emergence of non-programmatic strategies for appealing to voters. In this article, I study whether ideology is still relevant for explaining electoral choices in Chile. To provide causal evidence, I implement a conjoint survey experiment in low-middle income neighborhoods in the Santiago province in which we would expect voters to be less ideological. I show that candidates' ideological labels are crucial for understanding voters' electoral decisions, particularly for those who have a greater chance to participate in the electoral process. Additionally, I find that a majority of respondents can connect policy ideas with ideological markers. These results indicate that ideology, in a context of voluntary voting, is still central to Chilean politics.

Keywords: Ideology, political behavior, electoral choices, conjoint experiment, Chile.

1 Introduction

Ideology has historically played a crucial role in explaining Chilean voters' electoral choices. Before the 1973 coup, voters held clear and strong positions along the left-right continuum, and the party system was fragmented into three ideological groups: left, center, and right (Valenzuela, 1978). After the democratic transition in 1990, ideology remained fundamental to Chilean politics, but now the new political system was structured around two main poles: support for authoritarianism (and its legacies) or support for democracy (Tironi and Agüero, 1999). To contextualize, Chile is one of the Latin American countries where left-right identification is a significant predictor of voter choice (Zechmeister, 2015) and where citizens are able to locate the most important political actors on the ideological spectrum (Calvo and Murillo, 2012).¹

Survey evidence from recent years, however, has shown a significant decline in the number of citizens who self-identify with a particular ideology (Bargsted and Somma, 2016). There are different reasons that may be leading to the lower salience of ideological labels in Chile: an increase in the levels of political disaffection and malaise (Segovia, 2017), a reduction in the importance of the democratic-authoritarian cleavage over time (Luna and Altman, 2011), the programmatic congruence of the two main coalitions (Navia, 2009), and the rise of non-programmatic strategies for appealing to low-income voters (Luna, 2014).

Even though there is a large body of literature on electoral politics in Chile, there is little evidence on the causal impact of candidates' ideological labels on voters' electoral choices. One of the main methodological challenges when studying ideological voting is the reverse causality problem, which means that voters' electoral decisions (e.g., to vote for the incumbent) might affect their ideological stances (e.g., self-placement along the left-right scale). For instance, a voter that likes the incumbent might adopt this politician's ideology when answering a survey. As a result, in this example, it is not respondent's ideology that explains her electoral choice, but rather her

¹ I use Jost (2006, p.653) definition of political ideology, which refers to "an interrelated set of moral and political attitudes that possess cognitive, affective, and motivational components. That is, ideology helps to explain why people do what they do; it organizes their values and beliefs and leads to political behavior."

electoral choice that explains her ideology.

In consequence, it is important to re-evaluate the role of ideology in Chile for two main reasons: (i) there is tension between how ideology has historically been a meaningful variable shaping voters' electoral decisions and recent literature pointing out the lessening importance of this factor in Chile, and (ii) we do not have enough evidence to draw causal inferences about the electoral impact of ideological labels.

In this article, I study whether ideology still informs voters' electoral choices and whether the programmatic component of the vote is still salient almost 30 years after the end of the dictatorship. To provide causal evidence, I implement an original survey with a conjoint experiment embedded in three municipalities in the Santiago province. These municipalities have two crucial characteristics: (i) they are good predictors of national electoral results, and as a consequence are not outliers, and (ii) they are composed of low and middle-income neighborhoods, in which we expect to find fewer ideological voters.² The conjoint experiment allows us to assess the impact of different candidate attributes on the probability of being selected by voters. Respondents compare two hypothetical candidates, with different ideological³ and valence attributes,⁴ for the presidency of the country, and need to select one. Due to the randomization of candidate characteristics, it is possible to evaluate the extent to which each of these attributes explains respondents' choices (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014).

The findings from the conjoint experiment show that even though there are several reasons to believe that ideology has become less salient over time, candidates' ideological labels remain very relevant for understanding voters' political decisions. Specifically, left-wing respondents are 49

² Luna (2014) holds that in Chile some parties use segmented strategies based on the characteristics of the electorate. Programmatic linkages are more likely to be developed in high-income neighborhoods.

³ Ideological voting has been extensively studied as one of the key factors explaining individuals' electoral choices (Adams, Merrill and Grofman, 2005; Calvo and Murillo, 2015). This research argues that voters locate themselves along a left-right continuum and select the party or candidate closer to their position. Therefore, their spatial proximity is critical for understanding voters' calculus (Downs, 1957). When the distance between a voter and a party or candidate decreases, the probability of voting for them increases (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2008).

⁴ There are also non-ideological approaches to studying vote choice, such as valence models (Stokes, 1963), based on a critique of traditional spatial approaches. These approaches argue that what matters for voters is their comparative assessment of candidates' competency and potential to address certain issues (Sanders, Clarke, Stewart and Whiteley, 2011). In other words, voters will choose the candidate they believe can best deliver what they want.

percentage points more likely to vote for left-wing rather than for right-wing candidates. And right-wing respondents are 39 percentage points less likely to vote for left-wing rather than for right-wing candidates. However, centrist and non-ideological respondents do not rely on candidates' ideological labels to make electoral choices. Further survey evidence illustrates that left- and right-wing citizens are more interested in politics and are more likely to participate in the electoral process than centrist and non-ideological people. In a context of voluntary voting, this is crucial: if ideological citizens are the most likely to be politically involved, an increase in the number of non-ideological people might not have a meaningful effect on the salience of ideology in explaining the electoral outcomes because this latter group is not participating in the electoral process.

Furthermore, the results from the survey indicate that more than 50 percent of respondents can connect policy outcomes with ideological stances. This illustrates that a majority of Chilean voters are able to link policy content with ideological markers. These findings are surprising given that the survey was conducted in non-wealthy areas, and contrary to the expectations laid out in previous literature, citizens from these areas are not unaware of ideology as expected.⁵

This paper provides three main contributions to the existing literature. First, it shows that ideology is still very relevant within Chilean politics. A large proportion of low-middle income urban voters are able to identify themselves with a particular ideology and are likewise likely to vote for candidates who share their ideology. Right- and left-wing respondents strongly rely on ideological labels when they make political choices, and are also the most likely to participate in the electoral process in a context of voluntary voting. Second, it provides evidence for this finding from a conjoint experiment. By allowing us to draw causal estimates about the impact of various candidate characteristics at the same time, this experiment helps us to compare the salience of ideological and valence attributes and to address reverse causality problems. Third, it shows that voters in Chile do not use ideology as an empty heuristic, but rather, in large part, understand the policy content behind right- or left-wing labels.

⁵ Ruth (2016) posits that Latin American voters with higher income levels are more likely to self-report a position on the left-right spectrum.

2 Political Ideology and the Vote Choice

Scholars of political behavior have extensively discussed the role of ideology in understanding voters' electoral choices. A first set of arguments holds that the electorate does not engage in ideological abstractions and a majority of citizens do not have strong ideological beliefs. In particular, political ideas begin to lose importance when we move from more to less sophisticated voters (Converse, 1962, 1970). Evidence from France has shown that voters have problems understanding what is political left and right (Converse and Pierce, 1986) and survey results from Britain illustrate that when voters do understand ideological terms, they have issues identifying where parties stand on the ideological scale (Butler and Stokes, 1974). Similarly, findings from Italy show that half of survey respondents who identified with a right-wing party had leftist policy positions (Barnes, 1971). All these voter inconsistencies have made researchers argue that a majority of citizens are innocent of ideology (Achen and Bartels, 2016).

Conversely, a second set of arguments holds that people do make electoral decisions that are consistent with their ideological positions and that they use ideological labels to describe parties, presidents, and issues (Levitin and Miller, 1979). This line of research has its origin in Anthony Downs' work, in which parties and voters can be placed on an ideological scale. Downs assumes voters will prefer the party that is closest to their position as a way to maximize their satisfaction with the electoral outcome (Downs, 1957). This theory has been used to understand how voters make electoral choices in different countries across the world such as Spain (Sánchez-Cuenca, 2008), the US (Jessee, 2009), and Chile (Calvo and Murillo, 2012). As Jost (2006, p.651) shows for the US case, since 1972, more than two-thirds of ANES survey respondents, and since 1996, more than three-fourths, could place themselves on the liberal-conservative scale. Furthermore, as multiple studies have suggested, people who place themselves on the ideological spectrum are able to do so in a stable and coherent way (Conover and Feldman, 1989; Knight, 2006; Jost, 2006).

One of the reasons why political ideology has been underestimated by part of the literature is because of a confusion between political sophistication and the use of the left-right scale. As

Jost (2006, p.657) holds, "the end-of-ideologists made an unwarranted assumption that a lack of political sophistication among the general public should be counted as evidence for the meaninglessness of left and right. It does not follow that when citizens struggle to articulate a sophisticated, coherent ideology, they must be incapable of using ideology with either sophistication or coherence." Ideology can work as a simple heuristic that helps people make political decisions (Hamill, Lodge and Blake, 1985; Lau and Redlawsk, 2001). For example, ideological labels can be easily connected with political issues such as social welfare or iron-fist crime-reduction policies.

Is ideology an important factor for understanding how people make electoral decisions in Latin America? On the one hand, some research holds that Latin American voters do not or only barely use ideological labels to make electoral choices (Echegaray, 2005). This lack of ideological voting might be explained by the absence of long-term party competition based on left-right labels (Gonzalez and Queirolo, 2013). On the other hand, there is evidence that ideology is a significant determinant of the vote choice in Latin America and that voters do not lack for policy or ideological content (Saiegh, 2015). These findings, however, are conditional on individual (e.g., political sophistication, education, and political interests) and contextual factors (e.g., polarization, fragmentation, programmatic party system structuration) (Zechmeister and Corral, 2012; Harbers, de Vries and Steenbergen, 2013).⁶

Evidence from joint correspondence analysis shows that citizens with the same ideological beliefs also share coherent preferences, which illustrates that having a position on the left-right scale comes with ideological content. In other words, Latin American voters do form consistent ideological groups that have common political convictions (Wiesehomeier and Doyle, 2012). These results align with previous findings using survey data showing that most Latin American voters have high and consistent ideological beliefs, despite the existence of significant levels of alienation with the party system (Colomer and Escatel, 2004) and voter reliance on positional issue voting

⁶ Political parties do also have an important role in explaining the relevance of ideological labels for voters. For example, in Mexico political parties commonly signal policy stances to the electorate, which suggests that ideological labels have the potential to act as shortcuts for making electoral decisions. Meanwhile, in Argentina parties rely less on ideology to describe them or their adversaries, which can help explain the less coherent ideological stances of the electorate (Zechmeister, 2006).

when making electoral choices ([Baker and Greene, 2015](#)).

Recent research has provided more nuanced findings about the political relevance of ideology in Latin America. Most voters are able to place themselves on the left-right scale, but a large proportion of them do not. Also, though there is a connection between policy stances and left-right identification, this link is not particularly strong in some cases. Finally, there is an association between ideological self-placement and vote choice, but this connection is weak in Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Panama ([Zechmeister, 2015](#)).

The emergence of the left in the 2000s in Latin America revitalized the discussion about the role and importance of ideology in the region. Scholars have identified ideological factors that might explain this political and electoral process, such as a shift in voters' self-placement on the ideological scale toward the left ([Seligson, 2007](#)), the existence of a moderate policy mandate granted to new leftist presidents ([Baker and Greene, 2011](#)), and the rise in anti-US sentiment ([Remmer, 2012](#)). The literature, however, has also provided non-ideological arguments to explain the turn to the left, such as the desire to punish underperforming right-wing incumbents ([Arnold and Samuels, 2011](#); [Murillo, Oliveros and Vaishnav, 2010](#)).

In summary, there is evidence that political ideology is a relevant variable in explaining people's electoral choices in Latin America, in combination with other important non-ideological factors such as gender, ethnicity, party identification, economic conditions, religion, and clientelism ([Morgan, 2015](#); [Moreno, 2015](#); [Lupu, 2015](#); [Gélineau and Singer, 2015](#); [Boas and Smith, 2015](#); [Kitschelt and Altamirano, 2015](#)), which together provide a more complete picture of voters' political decisions in the region.

3 The End of Ideology in Chile?

Is ideology a meaningful political factor in Chile? The historically high level of programmatic party structuration in this country has contributed to the identification of Chile, along with Uruguay and Venezuela, as one of the "Latin American systems in which left-right identifications

are rich in policy content and very relevant to voter choice" (Zechmeister, 2015, p.217). After the transition to democracy, scholars still considered ideology to be a significant factor in voter choice (Fontaine, 1995). Recent survey evidence, however, has started to call this premise into question. An increasing proportion of respondents began to refuse to place themselves along the left-right spectrum (Bargsted and Somma, 2016; Morales, 2010) or to identify with political parties (Luna and Altman, 2011; Bargsted and Maldonado, 2018). Evidence from national representative surveys implemented by the *Centro de Estudios Públicos* (CEP) shows an increase in the number of non-ideological citizens between 2005 and 2017. Specifically, and when focusing on electoral years: 21 percent of respondents in 2005 did not place themselves on the left-right scale, 24 percent in 2009, 25 percent in 2013, and 30 percent in 2017 (CEP, 2017). Thus, the high levels of electoral stability after the transition to democracy seem not to be explained by voters' high levels of ideological commitment or party identification, but rather by the consequences of specific institutional arrangements such as the binominal electoral system (Ortega, 2003; Cabezas and Navia, 2005).⁷

Why would ideology have become less important in Chile? The literature offers four main answers to this question: i) the increasing disaffection with the political system, ii) the lower salience of the democracy-autocracy cleavage, iii) a process of party convergence toward the center, and iv) the rise of non-programmatic strategies by parties to appeal to voters.

The first explanation is supported by extensive research that depicts increasing malaise in representation: a combination of disaffection, disapproval, and distrust (Joignant, Morales and Fuentes, 2017). The crisis of representation has a wide variety of symptoms, including lower levels of satisfaction with democracy and representative institutions (Rovira and Castiglioni, 2016), an increase in protests and social mobilization (Donoso and Von Bülow, 2017), the emergence of independent or outsider candidates who receive large proportions of the vote, such as Marco Enriquez-Ominami in the 2009 presidential election (Bunker and Navia, 2010; Došek and Freidenberg, 2014), the lack of new and young voters to shake up the current electorate (Toro, 2008), the decline in valid and the rise of blank and null votes (Carlin, 2006), and the failure of traditional parties to incorporate

⁷ Avendaño and Sandoval (2016) argue, however, that the low level of electoral volatility is explained by a process of self-compensation of voters within each coalition.

demands from social groups ([Luna and Mardones, 2010](#); [Luna and Rosenblatt, 2012](#); [Morgan and Meléndez, 2016](#); [Luna, 2016](#)).

What explains this crisis of representation in Chile? [Luna and Mardones \(2017\)](#) offer a structural argument by holding that this corresponds to a historical process of reconfiguration of the logic of mediation between the state, parties, and society. More specifically, [Rosenblatt \(2013, 2018\)](#) posits that political parties have failed to adapt to a new context and to connect with the electorate. [Siavelis \(2017\)](#) proposes a more institutional argument by holding that this deterioration of representation emerged from constraints on the post-transition democratic regime by formal and informal institutional legacies of the dictatorship, which reinforced a model that facilitated a decline in support for democracy.

The second explanation for the lower salience of ideology argues that, over time, the conflict between authoritarianism and democracy has become less central to Chilean politics. In the early twentieth century, a class divide emerged in Chile, generating clear groups of left, center, and right-wing parties that represented different social sectors ([Scully, 1992](#); [Valenzuela, 1985](#)). Since the 1988 plebiscite ending the Pinochet regime, the Chilean party system has revolved around two multiparty coalitions. Spatial maps of the party system show that an authoritarian/democratic cleavage accurately describes the post-transition political system in Chile ([Bonilla, Carlin, Love and Méndez, 2011](#)). In the context of the plebiscite, the center-left coalition was formed to oppose the dictatorship, while the center-right coalition attempted to do precisely the opposite: to continue the legacy of the authoritarian period.

This conflict, however, has become less salient over time. The relative lesser importance of the dictatorship in everyday politics has partially blurred the traditional boundaries between these coalitions. For example, the first right-wing president elected after the dictatorship, Sebastian Piñera, has publicly commented that he did not vote for the continuity of Pinochet's regime in the 1988 plebiscite,⁸ and traditional right-wing parties have begun to discuss removing references about the dictatorship from their party manifestos.⁹

⁸ Salgado, José, "Piñera y el plebiscito: Fue una decisión sabia votar por el NO." 24 Horas, October 5th, 2013.

⁹ Toro, Paulina, "Hernán Larraín, senador UDI: "Referencias al Golpe deben ser replanteadas en los principios

The emergence of new politically divisive issues has also contributed to the lower salience of the authoritarian regime. Thus, as time passes, it will likely become more difficult to mobilize people based on memories of the dictatorship ([Torcal and Mainwaring, 2003](#)). Of course, this does not mean that the legacies of the authoritarian period do not remain part of the political discussion. For instance, the 2011 student protests were motivated both by resistance to the neoliberal policies enacted during the dictatorship and by grievances about the reforms adopted during the democratic period ([Disi, 2018](#)).

The third argument about the waning significance of ideology in Chile points to the convergence of the two traditional coalitions toward the center, largely a result of the center-left democratic governments' decision to continue most of the market-based reforms introduced by the military ([Maillet, 2013](#); [Navia, 2014](#)). As a result, partisan differences regarding the state-market divide have decreased over time ([Luna, 2014](#)).

However, the center-left coalition is not the only one that has moved toward the center of the ideological spectrum. Sebastian Piñera, the first right-wing president democratically elected in Chile since 1958, distanced himself from classic right-wing positions in his first successful presidential campaign in 2009. He did that by appropriating elements of social welfare policies, which he combined with a rhetoric of efficiency and managerial skills ([López and Baeza, 2011](#); [López, Miranda and Valenzuela-Gutiérrez, 2013](#)). In the 2017 runoff campaign, Piñera again blurred the ideological distinction between the two main coalitions by supporting free technical and vocational education.¹⁰ Additionally, the emergence of Evopoli within the center-right coalition, which is a more socially liberal right-wing party, also confirms this trend. Survey evidence shows that their leaders are more likely to support same-sex marriage and to decriminalize abortion than leaders from the two more traditional right-wing parties ([Alenda, Le Foulon and Suárez-Cao, 2018](#)).

Certain institutional features, such as the binominal electoral system, have also contributed to the convergence ([Guzmán, 1993](#); [Dodds, 2017](#)). This consensus across parties has been confirmed by analysis of their manifestos. Specifically, political parties have evolved from high levels of

UDI." *La Tercera*, March 18th, 2014.

¹⁰ Jara, Alejandra, "Piñera se abre a ampliar gratuidad en educación superior." *La Tercera*, November 23th, 2017.

polarization before the dictatorship to increasing programmatic congruence after the transition to democracy ([Gamboa, López and Baeza, 2013](#)).¹¹

Finally, the fourth argument about why ideology has become less relevant over time centers around the increasing importance of non-programmatic factors, such as the distribution of short-term benefits, for understanding voters' electoral choices in Chile. For example, the prescription of glasses in low-middle income sectors has been a common electoral strategy implemented by the UDI, a traditional right-wing party ([Luna, 2010](#)). In a similar vein, parties have become less likely to rely on their party labels to attract voters ([Díaz Rioseco et al., 2006](#); [Giannini et al., 2011](#)). Chile once had one of the strongest programmatic linkages between parties and voters in Latin America ([Kitschelt et al., 2010](#)), but those linkages have deteriorated over time ([Luna, 2014](#)). Clientelism, however, has not become the primary strategy for appealing to voters, but rather a complement to more traditional linkages ([Morgan and Meléndez, 2016](#)).

The rise of clientelism can have direct consequences on the use of ideology as a cue to make informed political decisions. Specifically, non-programmatic linkages, such as the distribution of private benefits, offer an alternative mechanism for selecting candidates, thus depreciating the salience of right- and left-wing labels by making them less meaningful to voters ([Ruth, 2016](#)). The use of clientelistic strategies to appeal to citizens in low-income municipalities has been fostered by the high levels of social inequality and spatial segregation in Chile. Parties can maintain a portfolio of electoral strategies that they implement according to the socioeconomic composition of the district ([Luna, 2014](#)). For example, reports on campaign spending show that money has been used to buy products such as diapers, canes, and food ([Díaz Rioseco et al., 2006](#)).

Even though it may seem that ideology has been relegated to a lesser role in shaping voters' electoral decisions, recent findings show that ideological labels may still be important to Chilean voters. [Visconti \(2018\)](#) provides evidence from the combination of a natural and a survey experiment to show how voters from a low-middle income locality in northern Chile use ideological labels to identify the candidate most likely to pass the policies they need after a natural disaster.

¹¹ However, recent evidence has shown patterns of gradual polarization in the last decade ([Fábrega, González and Lindh, 2018](#)).

Meanwhile, [Boas \(2016\)](#) holds that *pinochetismo* remains salient for a new generation of right-wing voters in Chile. Ideological labels are sticky, and even though respondents may be less likely to place themselves on the left-right continuum, they may still use them as heuristics to make political decisions. Therefore, due to the tension between different findings, it becomes critical to understand whether Chilean voters still rely on ideological markers when making electoral decisions, or if they have become less attached to those labels as most of the literature suggests.

4 Research Design

The traditional strategy for studying ideological voting has entailed checking whether voter self-placement along the left-right scale is correlated with their vote choice. This approach, however, does not provide causal evidence about the importance of ideology. For example, these results could be explained by reverse causality: if voters want to reward a left-wing incumbent, they might be more likely to identify them as left-wing.¹²

Using a survey experiment where voters evaluate hypothetical candidates with multiple attributes can improve the drawing of causal inferences. This methodology rules out, by design, the problem of reverse causality, since respondents will be comparing hypothetical candidates. In this study, I use a conjoint experiment in which participants need to select one of two presidential candidates with different attributes. Thanks to the randomization of candidate characteristics across profiles, it is possible to identify and compare the impact of each of these attributes on the probability of being preferred as president ([Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014](#)). The conjoint experiment is embedded in a face-to-face survey implemented in three low-middle income municipalities in the Santiago province.¹³

The sampling strategy was structured into two steps. In the first, I selected the municipality that best predicts Chilean presidential election results. Since the transition to democracy and before

¹² See [Murillo and Visconti \(2017\)](#) and [Visconti \(2017\)](#) for a discussion about the limitations of traditional observational approaches when studying voter behavior with survey data.

¹³ The conjoint experiment was implemented on paper. The randomization and candidate profiles were generated in advance.

the implementation of this study, there were six presidential elections in the country (1989, 1993, 1999, 2005, 2009, and 2013), in which 32 candidates competed. I compare the presidential election results in the 345 municipalities with the national election results.¹⁴ The analysis is the following: for each municipality, I sum up the absolute differences between the municipality and the national results for the 32 candidates that ran in the six presidential elections. This summation produces the total absolute difference (TAD). The municipality with the lowest TAD between 1990 and 2013 was Cerrillos, which is part of the Santiago province (see Appendix A for more details). To increase the sample size, the survey was extended to the second and third municipalities that best predicted the national election results in the Santiago province: Recoleta and Independencia (see Appendix B for more details). The goal of this strategy was to avoid implementing the survey in outlier municipalities that do not represent average political preferences in Chile. Because these municipalities consist of low and middle-income neighborhoods,¹⁵ I exclude by design areas where we would expect voters to attach more weight to the ideological component of the vote, namely the more educated and wealthy neighborhoods.

In a second step, four enumerators selected respondents by taking a random walk through the area. Specifically, they invited participants in every third household on a given street to answer the questionnaire (see Appendix C for more details). This study was implemented in August 2017, three months before the presidential elections. In Appendix D, I compare this sample with a nationally representative survey implemented in July-August 2017 by the *Centro de Estudios Públicos*. Even though this is a non-probabilistic sampling strategy, the results of the comparison between both samples show very similar averages for gender, age ranges, intention to vote in the next election, reported voting in the past election, and electoral preferences.

The survey includes a conjoint experiment to measure respondents' electoral choices. Partici-

¹⁴ There is a group of municipalities that do not have electoral data before 2004 because they were created after that year, or are not comparable across time because they were divided to generate two municipalities. One example is the new municipality of Alto Hospicio, which was part of Iquique (Region de Antofagasta). Therefore, both of these counties were excluded from the computation of the total absolute difference when trying to find the municipality with the lowest TAD in Chile.

¹⁵ See reports with the socioeconomic level of each neighborhood in these municipalities on the website of the *Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional*.

participants were asked to decide between two candidates who would be competing for the presidency in the 2017 elections. Respondents saw information about three attributes of these two presidential candidates: ideology (left or right), profession (gardener, teacher, or engineer), and age (30, 40, or 50). These attributes were randomly chosen to generate the candidate profiles, and attempt to capture the ideological and non-ideological components of the vote. Each respondent rated five pairs of candidates in the conjoint experiment, each pair of which provides two outcomes (a 1 for the preferred candidate and a 0 for the non-preferred candidate). After they observe the two profiles, participants answered the question: who would you vote for for president?

The sample is composed of 300 respondents.¹⁶ Thus, there is a maximum number of 3000 observations available for the analysis (since each respondent rated five pairs of candidates). The unit of observation corresponds to each candidate profile, and standard errors are clustered at the respondent level. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the attributes used to generate profiles and provide an example of a possible pair of profiles evaluated by a respondent.

Table 1: Profile of candidates

Attributes	Values
Ideology	Right
	Left
Profession	Gardener
	Teacher
	Engineer
Age	30
	40
	50

¹⁶ The survey is part of a larger project that incorporated a framing experiment with two treatments and one control condition. Therefore, for this study, I am only focusing on the 300 respondents who were not exposed to a hypothetical scenario (the control group). The larger study includes a total of 900 participants.

Table 2: Example of experimental design

Attributes	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Ideology	Left	Right
Profession	Gardener	Engineer
Age	50	30

As mentioned before, the randomization of candidate characteristics allows us to identify the effect of each attribute on the probability of being preferred as president, which can be estimated by regressing the outcome on the attributes ([Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014](#)).¹⁷ The comparison between candidates is based on the fact that, for example, the right- and left-wing candidate profiles will have, on average, the same distribution for education and age.

The nature of a conjoint experiment, in which respondents evaluate hypothetical candidates, raises the question of whether respondents would make the same decisions in real life. Nonetheless, conjoint experiments attempt to mimic real-world decisions, where people have to evaluate multiple attributes at the same time. Furthermore, different studies have validated results from conjoint analyses by comparing them with behavioral benchmarks in Switzerland ([Hainmueller, Hangartner and Yamamoto, 2015](#)) and Chile ([Visconti, 2018](#)).

Before implementing the conjoint experiment, the survey included a battery of questions to identify respondents' background (age, education, etc.) and better understand their ideological preferences. For example, they had to place themselves on the left-right scale, and also had to connect policy outcomes, such as social welfare benefits, with ideological labels. The goal of these inquiries was to learn whether participants use ideology to define themselves politically and whether they were able to provide content to ideological markers.

¹⁷ The estimator can be conveniently implemented by a linear regression ([Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014](#)).

5 Results

The sample of respondents from these three municipalities seems to provide a good representation of a low-middle income urban voter in Chile: 76 percent of participants have FONASA (public health insurance), 64 percent have only a high school education or less, and 19 percent receive financial support from the state.

Before studying the impact of ideology on respondents' electoral choices, the study asked several questions that help contextualize the role of ideology in these low-middle income neighborhoods. First, in terms of self-placement on the left-right scale, 87 percent of respondents were able to locate themselves on the ideological spectrum. Taking into account the social context of the neighborhoods, this is a very high number that makes us reconsider traditional arguments about the link between socioeconomic background and ideological identification.¹⁸

Subsequent questions evaluated whether respondents understand the difference between ideological labels: specifically, whether voters were able to connect social welfare and iron-fist crime-reduction policies with particular ideological markers. As previous research has shown, the former can be typically associated with left-wing politicians (Pribble, 2013), and the latter with right-wing politicians (Cohen and Smith, 2016). Figure 1 reveals that 52 percent of respondents were able to connect social welfare policies with left-wing politicians, and 54 percent were able to connect iron-fist policies with right-wing politicians. These results show that more than half of respondents can provide content to ideological labels.¹⁹

¹⁸ This result shows that people from this sample seem to be more ideological than the average Chilean voter when using the CEP sample (see Appendix E for more details). However, since this study is based on analyzing the data for each of the four subgroups of voters (left, right, centrist, and non-ideological), I would not expect this to bias the main results.

¹⁹ Not linking a policy with a particular ideology might not only be capturing voters' ignorance about ideology but their discontent with the system as well (e.g., when selecting the option "none").

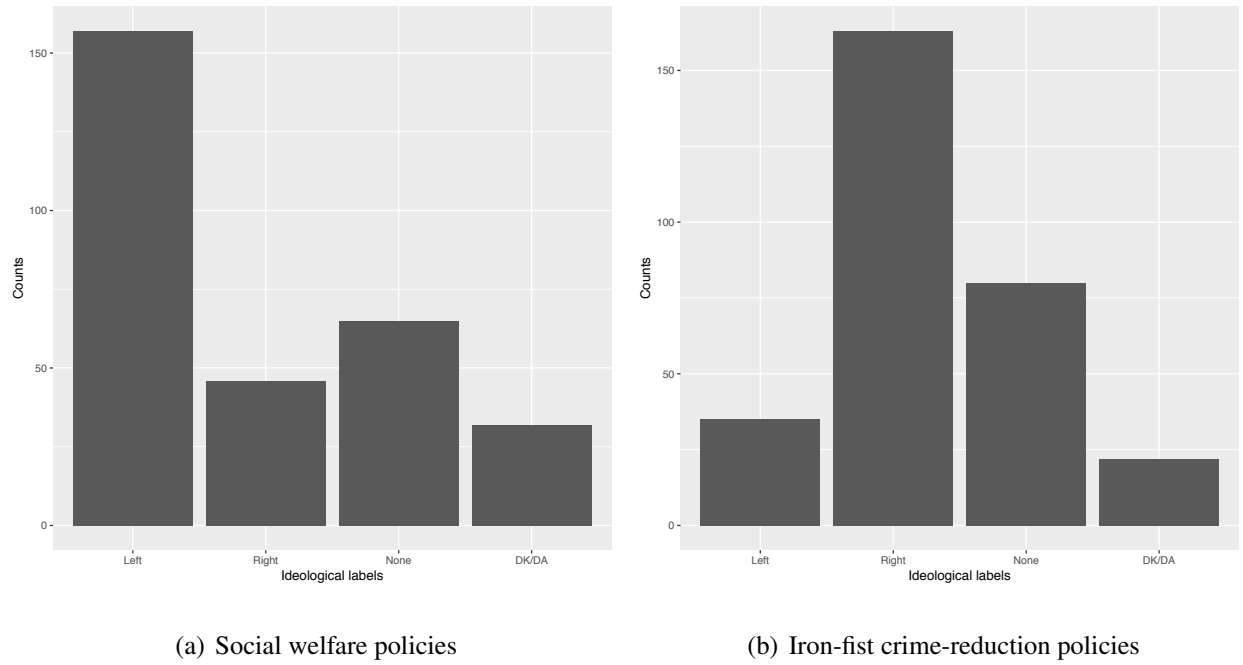


Figure 1: Ideological labels and policy content

The main goal of this paper is to assess whether ideology is a relevant candidate attribute for explaining voters' electoral choices. If this label is important, we would expect respondents who identify themselves with a particular ideology to actually vote for candidates with that ideological marker. Thus, self-identifying on the left-right spectrum is meaningful. When evaluating the conjoint experiment, the size of these effects will also provide information about the salience of ideology: specifically, it will make it possible to directly compare them with the impact of candidates' education and age (that is, valence attributes). If ideology has reduced salience as the literature has argued, we would expect to see a small or null effect of candidates' ideological labels on vote choice and a much larger effect of candidates' education and age on this choice.

Figure 2 summarizes the results of the conjoint experiment for four subsamples: left, right, centrist, and non-ideological respondents. I code those who respond 1–4 as left, 5–6 as center, 7–10 as right, and non-responses as non-ideologicals using the [CEP \(2017\)](#) coding scheme. In Appendix F, I conduct the same analysis but using [Zechmeister's \(2015\)](#) coding approach as a robustness check since it is slightly different than the one used by the [CEP \(2017\)](#). Results are the

same regardless of the coding strategy.²⁰ Regarding figure 2, the dots indicate point estimates, and the lines indicate 95 percent confidence intervals. The reference categories are the dots without confidence intervals (the first category for each attribute).²¹

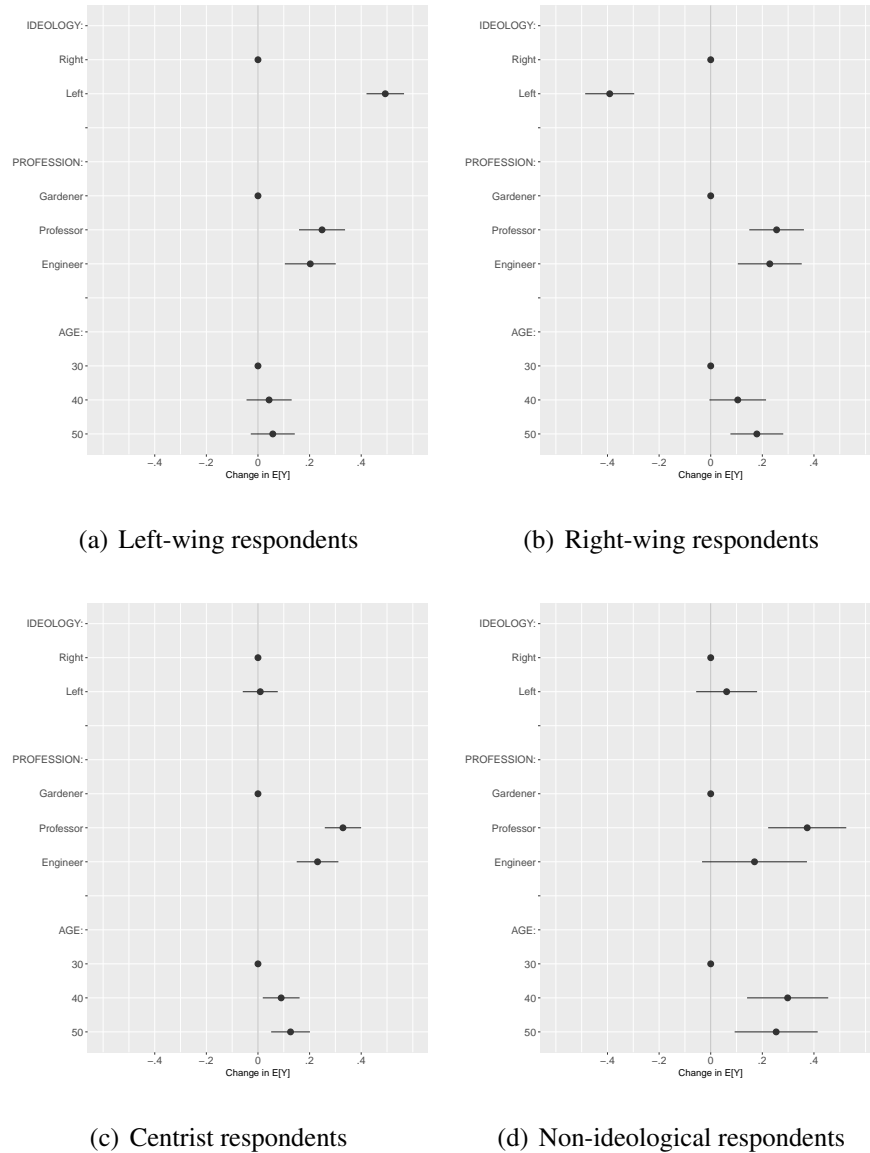


Figure 2: Effects of candidates' attributes on probability of being voted for president

²⁰ Left-wing: 70 respondents, right-wing: 49 respondents, centrist: 142 respondents, and non-ideological: 39 respondents (not excluding respondents that did not want to participate in the conjoint experiment). As a reminder, there are more observations than respondents because each of them evaluated multiple pairs of candidates.

²¹ Eleven percent of respondents were excluded from the conjoint analysis because they did not want to participate in the experiment, despite having answered the previous survey questions.

Figure 2(a) shows that left-wing respondents are 49 percentage points more likely to vote for a left- rather than for a right-wing presidential candidate (reference category). When comparing point estimates, this is the largest effect. Figure 2(b) illustrates that right-wing participants are 39 percentage points less likely to vote for a left- than for a right-wing candidate (reference category); this also represents the largest point estimate of all the attributes. Figure 2(c) shows that centrist respondents do not have preferences for either left- or right-wing candidates. Figure 2(d) illustrates that ideology is not a relevant factor for respondents who did not self-place on the ideological spectrum (see the regression tables in Appendix G and a diagnostic for carryover effects in Appendix H).²² In short, I find that candidates' left- and right-wing labels are the most important attribute for almost half of the respondents when making electoral choices. Also, I show that voters are more likely to reward more educated and older candidates.²³

Since the results come from three municipalities in the capital city of Chile, external validity may be a concern: could these results be a consequence of a particularity of the sample composition? As mentioned before, in the supplementary appendix I compare my sample with a nationally representative survey implemented in July-August 2017. Respondents have similar characteristics across both samples regarding key observed covariates. Additionally, respondents who participated in this study are not from high-income neighborhoods or highly educated, which is what the literature has assumed to be associated with strong ideological preferences.

6 Discussion

The results from the conjoint experiment show that candidate's ideological labels are very important factors in electoral decision-making for left- and right-wing voters, who represent 40 percent of the sample.²⁴ Also, it illustrates that ideological labels are not relevant for centrist and

²² Because there are fewer non-ideological respondents, confidence intervals are therefore greater.

²³ In addition to using candidates' ideological labels, there is evidence in Chile that voters can also rely on party cues (Le Foulon, 2018). Because historically parties have been highly programmatic in Chile, I expect partisan and ideological cues to be highly correlated.

²⁴ Based on the nationally representative survey implemented by the CEP in July–August 2017, left- and right-wing voters correspond to 35 percent of the sample.

non-ideological voters.

However, in a country with voluntary voting such as Chile, the importance of ideology will not be only determined by the number of ideological voters, but also by the willingness of those voters to engage with and participate in the electoral process. To explore this, I focus on two key variables: a binary indicator of interest in politics,²⁵ and a binary indicator of electoral participation.²⁶ Table 3 illustrates the difference in means between the different ideological groups.

Table 3: Interest and participation in politics

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Left-wing</i>	<i>Non-ideological</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Interest	0.51	0.15	0.36***
Participation	0.50	0.05	0.45***
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Right-wing</i>	<i>Non-ideological</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Interest	0.51	0.15	0.36***
Participation	0.59	0.05	0.54***
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Left-wing</i>	<i>Centrist</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Interest	0.51	0.32	0.19***
Participation	0.50	0.44	0.06
<i>Variable</i>	<i>Right-wing</i>	<i>Centrist</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Interest	0.51	0.32	0.19**
Participation	0.59	0.44	0.15*

Two-sample t-test. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Left- and right-wing respondents have more interest in politics and are more likely to participate in the electoral process than the centrist and non-ideological.²⁷ In a context of voluntary voting, this is significant, since it means that this group has a greater chance of influencing electoral outcomes.

²⁵ 1: a lot of or some interest in politics, 0: little or no interest in politics.

²⁶ 1: reported to have voted in the last election and have a candidate to vote for in the next election, 0: otherwise.

²⁷ However, there is not enough evidence to claim that left-wing respondents are more likely to participate in the elections than centrist respondents.

Based on these findings, we might expect to see three types of voters in Chile. The first group are the "ideological voters," who have a clear position on the left or the right side of the spectrum, for whom candidates' ideological labels are crucial when making political decisions, and who have high levels of interest in politics and political participation. The second are the "centrist voters," who report an ideological position and place themselves on the center of the scale. These voters do not use candidates' right- or left-wing ideological labels to make electoral choices and are less likely to participate and engage in politics than ideological voters. Finally, "non-ideological voters" are the ones who do not place themselves on the left-right scale, do not care about candidates' ideological labels, and have little intention of engaging and participating in politics.

Thus, despite evidence that ideology has become less important over time, the findings from this paper show that ideological voting remains very intense across a large subset of voters, and that that group is the most likely to participate in elections. Therefore, the reduction in the number of respondents who self-identified with the left and right might have not affected electoral outcomes because the adoption of voluntary voting provided an opportunity for those non-ideological voters to opt out of the system. As a result, the end of compulsory voting in 2012 in Chile might have contributed to maintaining the importance of ideology regardless of the reduction in the number of ideological voters across time, because the more ideological citizens might be the ones actually voting in elections.

Making a distinction between different types of voters can have meaningful implications for understanding the role of ideological voting, not only in Chile but also in other Latin American countries with voluntary voting. Though seeing a large proportion of respondents who do not place themselves on the ideological scale might make us think that this factor is not relevant for understanding people's electoral choices, if those citizens are less likely to engage and participate in politics, we might end up underestimating the salience of ideology.

7 Conclusions

The literature shows that ideology is, in fact, a significant predictor of vote choice in Latin America ([Saiegh, 2015](#)), and that voters from this region do form coherent ideological groups ([Wiesehomeier and Doyle, 2012](#)). However, the connection between policy stances and ideological labels is not always strong, which might suggest that for many voters in the region the heuristic value of ideological markers is limited ([Zechmeister, 2015](#)).

Since the early twentieth century, ideology has shaped citizens' political decisions in Chile. This premise, however, has been called into question in recent years due to the crisis of representation, the high level of congruence between the two main coalitions, the lower salience of the dictatorship in the political system, and the role of non-programmatic strategies for appealing to non-high income voters.

To evaluate the role of ideology, I implemented a conjoint survey experiment in three municipalities that can represent election results at the national level. In these low-middle income municipalities, voters should be less likely to rely on ideology when making voting decisions. The conjoint experiment allows us to simultaneously estimate the impact of multiple candidate characteristics and, therefore, to compare the importance of ideological and non-ideological attributes in explaining respondents' electoral decisions.

Contrary to the current trend in the literature, this study provides empirical evidence showing that ideology remains a significant predictor of the vote choice. Candidates' ideological labels are relevant for a large proportion of respondents when selecting candidates. Also, I find that left- and right-wing respondents have a higher probability than centrist and independents of engaging and participating in the electoral process. Though seeing an increasing proportion of respondents who do not place themselves on the left-right scale might make us think that ideology is becoming less relevant for explaining the electoral outcomes, if these non-ideological citizens are not participating in politics, the salience of ideology can remain stable (or even increase) since the people who vote are more ideological.

In short, this study shows that ideology remains central to Chilean politics, and it seems unlikely that its salience will decrease in the near future. Indeed, the emergence of new parties and candidates with high programmatic and ideological commitments speaks to this continuity. In the 2017 presidential elections, for example, the two most voted-for candidates who did not belong to the traditional center-left or center-right coalitions, Beatriz Sánchez and José Antonio Kast, were able to obtain large shares of the vote with clear (and also antagonistic) ideological speeches. Though ideological labels can mutate over time and voters might be less likely to speak in ideological terms, ideology is a sticky concept that helps voters make electoral choices based only on a few pieces of information. The issues that divide society in Chile today, as well as in other Latin American countries, such as immigration, abortion, and same-sex marriage, show that ideology continues to take on new forms and remain central to political discourse and policy.

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