

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 has, in fact, become less relevant for Chilean voters. 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' political decisions. Additionally, I find that a majority of respondents can connect policy ideas with ideological markers. These results indicate that ideology 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. The new political system, however, was now 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 countries in Latin America where left-right identification is a significant predictor of voter choice ([Zeichmeister, 2015](#)) and where citizens are able to locate the most important political actors on the ideological spectrum ([Calvo and Murillo, 2012](#)).

Survey evidence in 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 can lead to a 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 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 what explains her electoral choice, but her electoral choice what explains her ideology.

In consequence, it becomes relevant 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 deterioration of the 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; or if the programmatic component of the vote has become less salient after almost 30 years since the end of the dictatorship.¹ 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 are still

¹ Such discussions about the "end of ideology" are not unique to Chile. In the case of the US, an extensive body of literature has argued that ordinary citizens' political preferences and attitudes are not stable or consistent, and that there are no major distinctions between the point of view of liberal and conservative voters. See Jost (2006) for a summary and discussion of this literature.

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 Ideology refers to a "set of beliefs about the proper order of society and how it can be achieved" (Erikson and Tedin, 2015, p.64). 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 to vote 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 et al., 2011). In other words, voters will choose the candidate they believe can best deliver what they want.

crucial for understanding voters' political decisions. Specifically, left-wing respondents are 49 percentage points more likely to vote for left-wing rather than for right-wing candidates. And right-wing respondents are 29 percentage points less likely to vote for left-wing rather than for right-wing candidates. Furthermore, the results from the survey indicate not only that 87% of respondents place themselves on the left-right scale, but also that 50% are able to both connect policy outcomes with ideological stances and identify themselves with a particular ideology. This illustrates that 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 the literature would expect citizens from these areas to be much more unaware of ideology than they are in reality.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. 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. 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.

2 The End of Ideology in Chile?

After the transition to democracy, the literature still considered ideology to be a meaningful factor in understanding voter choices in Chile (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) or to support political parties (Luna and Altman, 2011). Thus, the high levels of electoral stability after the tran-

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.

sition to democracy ([Montes, Mainwaring and Ortega, 2000](#)) 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](#)).⁶

Why would ideology have become less important in Chile? The literature offers four main answers to this question: 1) the increasing disaffection with the political system, 2) the lower salience of the democracy-autocracy cleavage, 3) a process of party convergence toward the center, and 4) 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 symptoms, including (i) lower levels of satisfaction with democracy and representative institutions ([Rovira and Castiglioni, 2016](#)), (ii) an increase in protests and social mobilization ([Donoso and Von Bülow, 2017](#)), (iii) an elite that is increasingly disconnected from civil society ([Luna and Mardones, 2010](#); [Luna and Altman, 2011](#); [Luna and Rosenblatt, 2012](#)), (iv) 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](#)), (v) the lack of new and young voters to shake up the current electorate ([Toro, 2008](#)), (vi) the decline in valid and the rise of blank and null votes ([Carlin, 2006](#)), (vii) the increasing number of citizens who do not report an ideological stance ([Morales, 2010](#)), and (viii) the failure of traditional parties to incorporate demands from social groups ([Morgan and Meléndez, 2016](#); [Luna, 2016](#)).

What explains the 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 \(2013\)](#) 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

⁶ [Avendaño and Sandoval \(2016\)](#) argue, however, that the low levels of electoral volatility are explained by a process of self-compensation of voters within each coalition.

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 the decline of 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 20th 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 et al., 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 reduced its saliency 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,⁷ and traditional right-wing parties have begun to discuss removing references about the dictatorship from their party manifestos.⁸

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

⁷ Salgado, José, "Piñera y el plebiscito: Fue una decisión sabia votar por el NO." 24 Horas, October 5th, 2013.

⁸ Toro, Paulina, "Hernán Larraín, senador UDI: "Referencias al Golpe deben ser replanteadas en los principios UDI." La Tercera, March 18th, 2014.

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 democratic governments' decision to continue most of the market-based reforms introduced by the military (Navia, 2014). This line of research also proposes that certain institutional features, such as the binominal electoral system, contributed to this trend (Guzmán, 1993; Dodds, 2017). This consensus across parties has also been confirmed by analysis of their manifestos. Specifically, political parties have evolved from high levels of polarization before the dictatorship to increasing programmatic congruence after the transition to democracy (Gamboa, López and Baeza, 2013). In other words, partisan differences regarding the state-market divide decreased over time (Luna, 2014). Thus, it is not surprising that the years after the transition were called "*la política de los consensos*" (Huneus, 2014).

As an example, Sebastian Piñera, in his first successful presidential campaign in 2009, distanced himself from classic right-wing positions, 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.⁹

Finally, the fourth argument about why ideology has had less relevance 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,

⁹ Jara, Alejandra, "Piñera se abre a ampliar gratuidad en educación superior." La Tercera, November 23th, 2017.

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 importance 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 the 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. 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.

3 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, how-

ever, 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.¹⁰

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 non-real 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.¹¹

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 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.¹² 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 was Cerrillos (see Appendix A for more details), part of the Santiago province. 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

¹⁰ See Murillo and Visconti (2017) and Visconti (2017) for a general discussion about the limitations of traditional observational approaches when studying voter behavior with survey data.

¹¹ The conjoint experiment was implemented on paper. The randomization and candidate profiles were generated in advance.

¹² A few municipalities were excluded because they were created after the first presidential election.

represent average political preferences in Chile. Because these municipalities consist of low and middle-income neighborhoods,¹³ I exclude by design areas where voters should attach more weight to the ideological component of the vote, such as the more educated and wealthy neighborhoods.

In a second step, four enumerators selected respondents by using a random walk through the area. Specifically, they invited participants in every third household on a given street to answer the questionnaire. This study was implemented in August 2017, three months before the presidential elections.

The survey includes a conjoint experiment to measure respondents' electoral choices. 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 they 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).

A total of 300 respondents participated in this study.¹⁴ 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. The following tables summarize the attributes used to generate profiles, and provide an example of a possible pair of profiles evaluated by a respondent.

¹³ See reports with the socioeconomic level of each neighborhood in these municipalities on the website of the *Biblioteca del Congreso Nacional*.

¹⁴ 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 1: Profile of candidates

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

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).¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

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 evalu-

¹⁵ The estimator can be conveniently implemented by a linear regression (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014).

¹⁶ I also randomly assign the order of the attributes for each respondent.

ate multiple attributes at the same time. Furthermore, several 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.

4 Results

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

Before studying the impact of ideology on respondents' electoral choices, the study asked several questions that help to contextualize the role of ideology in these low-middle income neighborhoods. First, in terms of self-placement on the left-right scale, 87% 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.

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 associated to left-wing politicians ([Pribble, 2013](#)), and the latter to right-wing politicians ([Cohen and Smith, 2016](#)). The survey reveals that 50% of respondents were able to both place themselves on the ideological scale and connect social welfare policies with left-wing politicians,

and 51% were able to both place themselves on the ideological scale and connect iron-fist policies with right-wing politicians. These results show that at least half of respondents can provide content to ideological labels and have an ideological position.¹⁷

The main goal of this paper is to assess if ideology is a relevant candidate attribute to explain 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. 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.

The following figures summarize the results of the conjoint experiment for four subsamples: left-wing,¹⁸ right-wing,¹⁹ centrist,²⁰ and non-ideological respondents.²¹ The dots indicate point estimates, and the lines indicate 95% confidence intervals. The reference categories are the dots without confidence intervals (the first category for each attribute).²²

¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ Left-wing voters: four or less on the left-right scale (65 respondents and 650 observations). As a reminder, there are more observations than respondents because each of them evaluated multiple pairs of candidates.

¹⁹ Right-wing voters: six or more on the left-right scale (60 respondents and 594 observations).

²⁰ Centrist voters: 5 in the left-right scale (118 respondents and 1170 observations).

²¹ Non-ideological voters: not answering the self-placement question (25 respondents and 250 observations).

²² Ten 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.

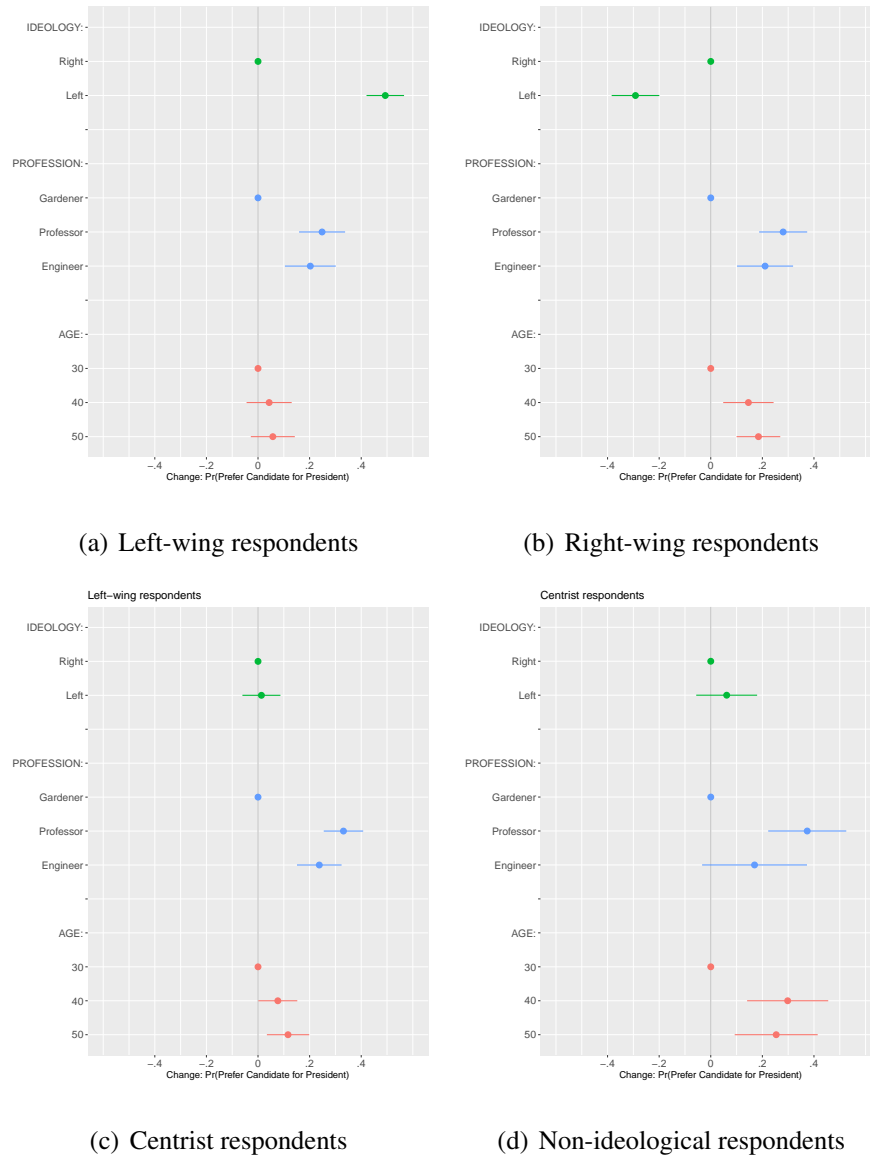


Figure 1: Effects of candidates' attributes on probability of being voted for president

Figure 1(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. When comparing point estimates, this is the largest effect. Figure 1(b) illustrates that right-wing participants are 29 percentage points less likely to vote for a left than for a right-wing candidate; this also represents the largest point estimate of all the attributes. Figure 1(c) shows that centrist respondents do not have preferences for either left- or right-wing candidates. Figure 1(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 C).²³ 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.

Since the analysis 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? Examination of the median respondent suggests that this is not the case. Indeed, this respondent provides a good representation of a median Chilean voter: someone living in a low-middle income urban neighborhood who has public health insurance and no more than a high school education.²⁴ These respondents, in other words, do not have the characteristics of more ideological citizens, such as those with high income and educational levels. Thus, there is no reason to believe that the sample composition overstates the role of ideology in explaining voters' political decisions.

5 Conclusions

The literature has provided mixed results about the relevance of ideology to voters' electoral choices in Latin America. On the one hand, empirical evidence shows that ideology is, in fact, a significant predictor of vote choice in the region (Saiegh, 2015), and that Latin American voters do form coherent ideological groups (Wiesehomeier and Doyle, 2012). On the other, 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 (Zeichmeister, 2015). Additionally, there may be multiple ways to define and understand the meaning of left and right (Gonzalez and Queirolo, 2013), and the salience of ideology can be constrained by different individual and contextual factors (Zechmeister and Corral, 2012).

Since the early twentieth century, ideology has shaped citizens' political decisions in Chile.

²³ Because there are fewer non-ideological respondents, confidence intervals are therefore greater.

²⁴ The mean age of respondents is 50, and 60% are women.

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 to respondents' selection of presidential candidates. Also, a majority of participants were able to provide policy content to ideological markers. These are not empty concepts since citizens might use them as heuristics or shortcuts to identify the candidate who can provide them the policies that they want or need.²⁵

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 marriage equality, show that

²⁵ See [Baker and Greene \(2011, 2015\)](#) for a discussion about issue voting in Latin America.

ideology continues to take on new forms and remain central to political discourse and policy.

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