Re-evaluating the Role of Ideology in Chile[1]

Giancarlo Visconti[2]

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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 premise into question due to several changes in the Chilean political landscape: 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 rise of non-programmatic electoral strategies. In addition to these transformations, Chile switched to voluntary voting in 2012. In this article, I study whether ideology still informs electoral choices in Chile in an era of voluntary voting. I implement a conjoint survey experiment in low-middle income neighborhoods in Santiago, in which we would expect voters to be less ideological. I show that candidates' ideological labels are crucial for understanding the electoral decisions of a large part of the sample, particularly among likely voters.

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

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[2] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907, email: gviscont@purdue.edu.

1. Introduction

Ideology has historically played a critical role in 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).[3]

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 several possible reasons for the decreased 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).

In 2012, Chile moved from compulsory to voluntary voting, which produced significant transformations in the composition of the electorate. Brieba and Bunker (2019) show how this reform in national elections increased class bias in urban districts, reduced age bias, and equalized turnout between small and large districts. As a result, analyses that do not differentiate between likely and unlikely voters might misestimate the importance

[3] I use Jost's (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."

of ideology. All of these changes in the political landscape raise the question: Is ideology still relevant in a context of voluntary voting in Chile?

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

To provide causal evidence about how ideology informs voters' electoral choices in an era of voluntary voting, I implement an original survey with a conjoint experiment embedded in three municipalities in the Santiago province. These municipalities have two crucial characteristics: first, they are good predictors of national electoral results, and as a consequence are not outliers; and second, they are composed of low and middle-income neighborhoods, in which we expect to find fewer ideological voters.[4] 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

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

different ideological[5] and valence attributes,[6] 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 very relevant to voters' political decisions, in particular for those who can be considered likely voters. Left- and right-wing respondents, who represent 40 percent of the sample, heavily rely on candidates' ideological labels when making electoral decisions. In addition, likely left- and right-wing voters pay even closer attention to ideology.

Further evidence provides three other important findings: (i) more than 50 percent of respondents can connect policy outcomes with ideological stances, (ii) 56 percent of respondents who place themselves at the center of the ideological scale (i.e., centrist respondents) or who do not respond to the ideology question have preferences for left- or right-wing candidates and therefore can be considered as latent left- or latent right-wing voters, and (iii) the group of respondents who use candidates' ideological labels to make electoral choices (i.e., ideological respondents) is 32 percentage points more likely to vote than participants who do not rely on candidates' ideological labels when selecting candidates (i.e., non-ideological respondents).

[5] Ideological voting has been extensively studied as one of the key factors explaining individuals' electoral choices (see Calvo and Murillo (2019) for a great review). This research argues that voters locate themselves along a left-right continuum and select the party or candidate closer to their position.

[6] There are also non-ideological approaches to studying vote choice, such as valence models (Stokes, 1963. These approaches posit that what matters for voters is their comparative assessment of candidates' competency and potential to address certain issues (Sanders, Clarke, Stewart and Whiteley, 2011).

The findings show that ideology is still very relevant within Chilean politics. A large proportion of low-middle income urban respondents use candidates' ideological labels in presidential elections, especially participants who are likely voters. As a result, if ideological citizens are the most likely to be politically involved in a context of voluntary voting, an increase in the number of non-ideological people might not have a meaningful effect on the salience of ideology in explaining electoral outcomes because this latter group is not participating as much in the electoral process.

2. Political Ideology and the Vote Choice

Scholars of political behavior have extensively discussed the role of ideology in 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. More specifically, this research shows that political ideas begin to lose importance when we move from more to less sophisticated voters (Converse, 1962). Evidence from France has shown that voters have problems identifying what falls on the left and what falls on the right of the political continuum (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). 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, 2019). As Jost (2006) 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 (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." Indeed, ideology can work as a simple heuristic that helps people make political decisions (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) (Ames and Smith, 2010; Zechmeister and Corral, 2012; Harbers, de Vries and Steenbergen, 2013).

Evidence from joint correspondence analysis shows that people with the same ideological beliefs also share coherent preferences, which illustrates that having a position on the left-right scale carries 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 when making electoral choices (Baker and Greene, 2011).

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 do not. Also, though there is a connection between policy stances and left-right identification, this link is not particularly strong in some countries. 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)

In summary, there is evidence that political ideology is a relevant variable in 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 (Kitschelt et al., 2010; Morgan, 2015; Moreno, 2015; Lupu, 2015; Gélineau and Singer, 2015; Boas , 2016), 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). Indeed, evidence from national representative surveys implemented by the *Centro de Estudios Públicos* (CEP) shows an increase in the number of non-responses to the ideology question 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

[7] Avendaño and Sandoval (2016) argue, however, that there was an "exchange" of voters between coalitions, which has contributed to the idea of high stability.

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 (Došek and Freidenberg, 2014), the lack of new and young voters to shake up the current electorate (Toro, 2008), and the decline in valid and the rise of blank and null votes (Carlin, 2006). This crisis of representation exploded in October 2019, which was considered "the fiercest social outburst in Chile during the last three decades" (Somma et al. 2020, p.1).

What explains this (long-standing) crisis of representation in Chile? Luna and Mardones (2017) offer a structural argument by holding that this corresponds to a reconfiguration of the logic of mediation between the state, parties, and society. More specifically, traditional political parties have failed to adapt to a new context and to incorporate demands from social groups (Morgan and Meléndez, 2016; Rosenblatt 2018). Siavelis (2017) proposes a more institutional argument by holding that this deterioration of representation emerged from constraints that formal and informal institutional legacies of the dictatorship imposed on the post-transition democratic regime, reinforcing 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). Since the 1988 plebiscite ending the Pinochet regime, the Chilean party system has revolved around two multiparty coalitions, with spatial maps of the party system

showing 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 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 continuation 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]

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

[8] Salgado, José, "Piñera y el plebiscito: Fue una decisión sabia votar por el NO." *24 Horas*, October 5, 2013.
[9] Toro, Paulina, "Hernán Larraín, senador UDI: "Referencias al Golpe deben ser replanteadas en los principios UDI." *La Tercera*, March 18, 2014.

introduced by the military (Maillet, 2013). 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, a more socially liberal right-wing party, within the center-right coalition, also aligns with this trend. Survey evidence shows that leaders from this party 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). This consensus across parties has 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).[11]

Finally, the fourth argument about why ideology has become less relevant over time

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

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

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, reports on campaign spending show that money has been used to buy products such as diapers, canes, and food (Díaz Rioseco et al., 2006). In a similar vein, parties have become less likely to rely on their party labels to attract voters in legislative elections (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 non-programmatic strategies such as clientelism, particularism, and candidate-based mobilization can have direct consequences on the use of ideology as a cue to make informed political decisions. Specifically, these appeals offer an alternative mechanism for selecting candidates, depreciating the salience of right- and left-wing labels by making them less meaningful to voters (Ruth, 2016). The use of non-programmatic 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).

Even though it may seem that ideology has been relegated to a lesser role in citizens' 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 is important 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.

Despite strong theoretical and empirical reasons to hold that ideology is not as crucial for explaining how Chilean voters make electoral decisions as it was in previous decades, when we take into account the adoption of voluntary voting in 2012, we might be inclined to reconsider that conclusion. Indeed, this electoral reform generated significant effects in the composition of the electorate, with turnout decreasing from 86.3 to 59.6 percent of the voting age population from 2009 to 2012 (Traugott 2015). Furthermore, Contreras, Joignant, and Morales (2015) confirm the existence of class bias, especially in urban districts, a finding that can have consequential effects on the type of people who participate, since Chile is predominantly urban, with 84% of the population living in urban areas according to the 2017 census. Therefore, even though previous evidence might indicate that ideology has become less relevant, the importance of those findings would be conditional on who is actually voting in a context of voluntary electoral participation. More specifically, ideology might have become less relevant for the entire electorate, but not necessarily for the subset of people who vote and participate in politics—which according to the 2017 presidential election, is just 45 percent of eligible voters.

4. Research Design

The traditional strategy for studying ideological voting has entailed checking whether a voter's 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 need to select between hypothetical candidates based on randomized attributes, we can discard the possibility that they may identify themselves as right-wing because they want to vote for a candidate, such as Sebastian Piñera, and are trying to provide coherent answers across the survey.

Another advantage of conjoint experiments is that they allow us to study people's multidimensional preferences. This type of design identifies the impact of different attributes on the probability of selecting a candidate, allowing us to mimic more realistic scenarios where people evaluate politicians along different dimensions when making electoral choices. Such experiments have been used to understand how people evaluate immigrants (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014), US Supreme Court judges (Sen 2017), and mayoral candidates (Mares and Visconti 2020), among other subjects.

Of course, the nature of a conjoint experiment, in which respondents evaluate hypothetical candidates, raises the question of whether respondents would make the same

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

decisions in real life. Nevertheless, 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).

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 that was implemented in three low-middle income municipalities in the Santiago province in August 2017 (three months before the presidential election).

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 had been 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 national election results. 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 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, 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).

The survey includes a conjoint experiment to measure respondents' electoral choices. The candidate profiles were generated using R in advance of the implementation of the survey. Each questionnaire had five pairs of candidates attached at the end. Profiles were presented side-by-side in an illustrative manner, and after selecting one candidate, participants were able to observe the next pair of candidates. The survey and conjoint experiment were implemented on paper.

Participants were asked to decide between two (hypothetical) candidates who would be competing for the presidency in the 2017 elections. Respondents saw information about three attributes these two candidates had: ideology (left or right), profession (gardener, teacher, or engineer), and age (30,[13] 40, or 50). The second and third set of attributes attempt to measure the valence dimension of candidates: the profession and age can function as heuristics for the managerial quality, preparation, and experience of the candidates.[14]

[13] The idea of including a 30-year-old option was to capture preferences about very young candidates. However, that option should have said 35 instead of 30 based on the constitutional requirements to be a president in Chile. Since the questionnaire explicitly mention that respondents will evaluate hypothetical or no-real candidates, I do not expect this to affect the exercise. See appendix L for empirical evidence to support this point.

[14] I used the last three presidential elections as a reference to build these candidates. See appendix

These attributes were randomly chosen to generate the candidate profiles, and attempt to capture both the ideological and non-ideological components of the vote. Each respondent rated five pairs of candidates, each pair providing two outcomes (a 1 for the preferred candidate and a 0 for the non-preferred candidate). After they observed the two profiles, participants answered the question: who would you vote for for president?

The sample is composed of 300 respondents. 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. Table 1 provides an example of a possible pair of randomly generated profiles to be evaluated by a respondent:

Table 1: Example of experimental design

Attributes	Candidate 1	Candidate 2
Ideology	Left	Right
Profession	Teacher	Engineer
Age	50	40

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). 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 profession and age.

C for more details.

Before implementing the conjoint experiment, the survey included a battery of questions to identify respondents' background (age, education, etc.) and to 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. Finally, they answered questions to help identify who is more likely to participate in the next election, in a context of voluntary voting.

Though the conjoint experiment allows us to learn the impact of candidates' ideological labels on respondents' electoral choices, we also want to know whether ideological voting is different across likely and unlikely voters. This is important because identifying the people who are actually going to show up and vote it is not easy in places with voluntary voting systems, largely due to a social desirability bias associated with reporting an intention to vote or not to vote (Gonzalez and Mackenna 2017). To identify likely voters, I used an adapted version of the Traugott and Tucker (1984) approach to identify likely voters in the US. I use the answer to three different questions to construct a binary indictor of a likely voter. A 1 is assigned to respondents who express at least a small interest in politics, who voted in the last presidential election, and who have a candidate for the next presidential election; and 0 otherwise. With the understanding that no existing approach is going to perfectly measure who is going and not going to vote, I used two other variations of this coding strategy. For the second approach, a 1 is assigned to respondents who voted in the last presidential election, and who have a candidate for the next presidential election; and 0 otherwise. For the third approach, a 1 is assigned to respondents

who express at least a small interest in politics, and who voted in the last presidential election; and 0 otherwise.

When using the first indicator of likely voters, 35 percent of respondents are likely to participate in the next election, which increases to 43 percent using the second indicator and 44 percent with the third. These numbers are not far from actual participation rates in Cerrillos, Recoleta, and Independencia, where turnout was 46, 44, and 43 percent in 2017. In the paper, I use the first strategy because it is the most similar to the three-question approach used by Traugott and Tucker (1984) and because it is the most conservative one. In appendix D, I use the other two approaches. The results are the same regardless of the strategy used to code likely voters.

To study whether ideological voting is different across likely and unlikely voters, I interact the binary indicator of likely voters with all the candidates' attributes. This interaction will show the effect of the randomized attributes for likely and unlikely voters and the differences between them. As mentioned above, the results from the conjoint experiment can conveniently be implemented using a linear regression (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). Therefore, I use the following estimation equation:

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 Ideology + \beta_2 Profession + \beta_3 Age + \gamma_4 Likely\ voter_i + \delta_1 Ideology * Likely\ voter_i + \delta_2 Profession * Likely\ voter_i + \delta_3 Age * Likely\ voter_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Y is a binary indicator of whether a given hypothetical candidate was selected or not. The β coefficients refer to the effect of the randomized candidates' attributes on the probability of being preferred as president (in comparison to a reference category) for unlikely voters (that is, when the variable for likely voter is equal to 0). The δ coefficients capture the

change in the effect of candidates' attributes between unlikely and likely voters. This interaction, thus, will allow us to see the impact of ideology for likely and unlikely voters, and the difference between them. In appendix J, I present the results of the conjoint experiment without the interaction with likely voters. In appendix M, I present the wording of the survey questions used in the paper.

5. Results

The sample of respondents from these three municipalities seems to provide a reasonable 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.

Since the results come from three municipalities in the capital city of Chile, external validity may be a concern: could the results be a consequence of a particularity of the sample composition? In appendix E, I compare this sample with a nationally representative survey implemented in July–August 2017 by the *Centro de Estudios Públicos*. Even though the former uses 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 most recent election, and electoral preferences. 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. Of course, this does not mean that my sample is as good as a nationally representative survey, but rather that my sample is not biased with respect to the population on key observed characteristics.

5.1. Ideology and Ideological Labels

Before studying the impact of ideology on respondents' electoral choices, the study asked several questions to 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. Using the CEP (2017) coding scheme, I code those who respond 1–4 as left, 5–6 as center, 7–10 as right, and who do not know or do not answer as non-identifiers. 23 percent of respondents place themselves on the left side of the ideological spectrum, 16 percent on the right side, 47 percent at the center, and 13 percent do not know or do not answer the question. 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, at least in urban settings.[15]

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 (see questions in appendix M). These results show that more than half of

[15] See appendix K for a more extended discussion about non-identifiers.

respondents can provide content to ideological labels.

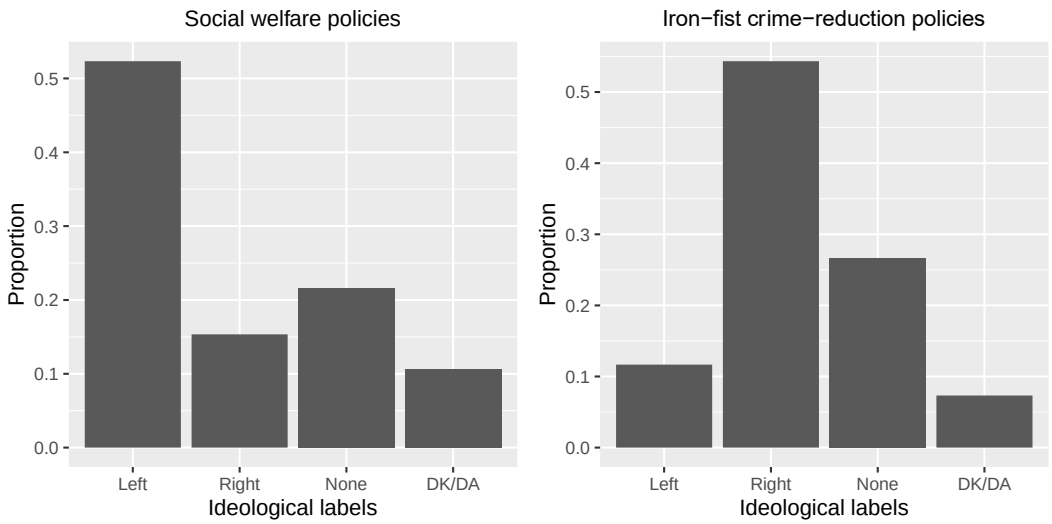

Figure 1: Ideological labels and policy content

5.2. Conjoint Experiment: The Role of Ideology for Voters and Non-voters

The main goal of this paper is to assess whether a candidate's ideology is a relevant attribute for explaining voters' electoral choices in the era of voluntary voting in Chile. 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' profession and age (that is, valence attributes).

As explained in the previous section, I include an interaction between the randomized candidate attributes (ideology, age, and education) and the binary indicator of likely voters to study the role of ideology in times of voluntary voting. I implement the

estimation equation in four subsamples: left, right, centrist, and non-identifiers. In appendix F, I construct the subsamples using Zechmeister's (2015) coding approach as a robustness check since it is slightly different than the one used by the CEP (2017). The results are the same regardless of the coding strategy.

Figure 2 summarizes these main findings. The first panel provides results for likely and unlikely left-wing voters (310 and 384 observations).[16] The second panel does the same for likely and unlikely right-wing voters (230 and 244 observations), the third for likely and unlikely centrist voters (508 and 876 observations), and the fourth for likely and unlikely non-identifiers (0 and 320 observations). 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).[17]

[16] The number of observations is not the same as the number of respondents. Each respondent provides 10 observations since they evaluate 5 pairs of candidates.

[17] I excluded the "do not know" and "do not answer" responses from the conjoint experiment. Less than five percent of the outcomes are missing values.

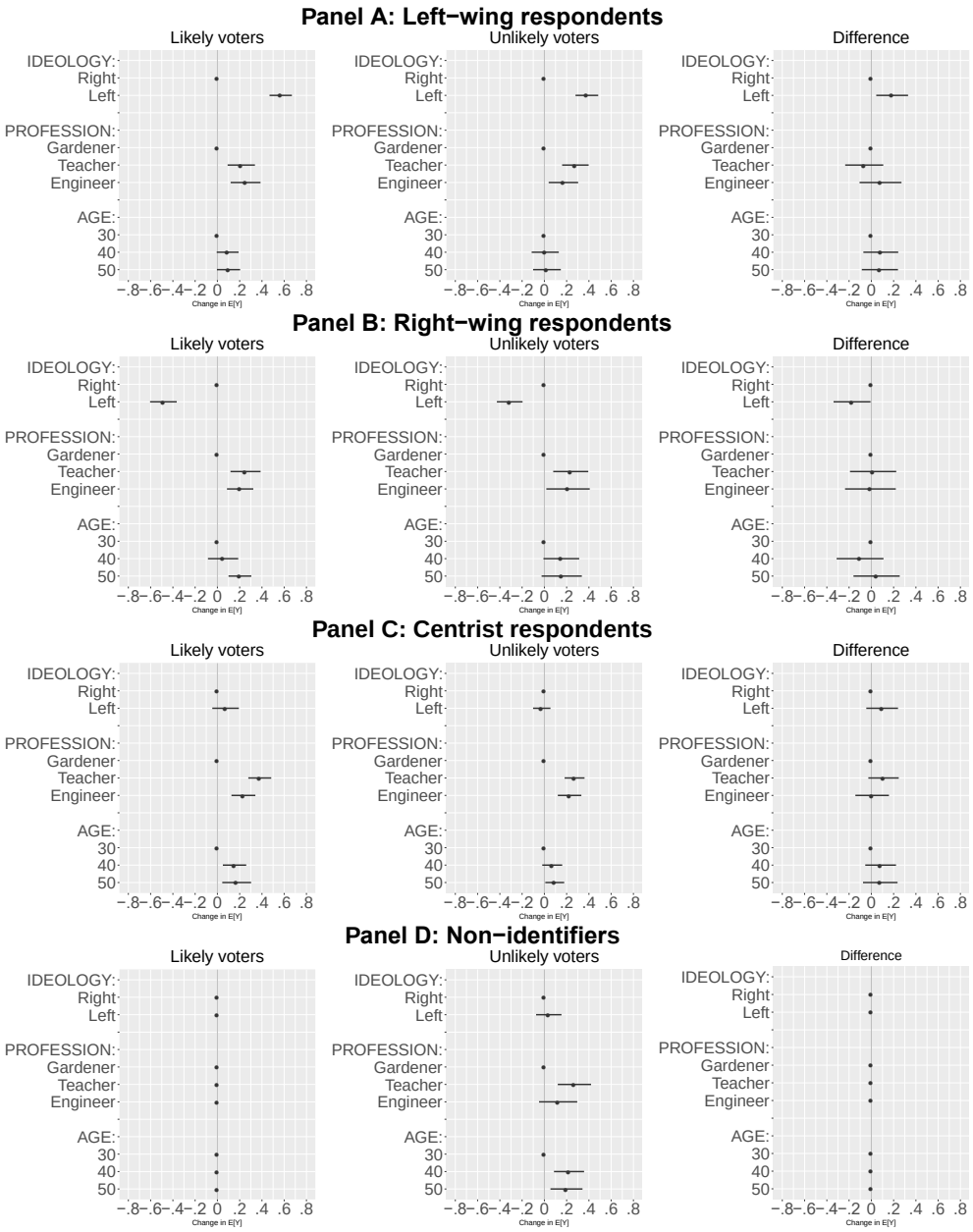

Figure 2: Effects of candidates' attributes on probability of being voted

Panel A reports the results for left-wing respondents. The first figure focuses on likely voters showing that they are 57 percentage points more likely to vote for a left- rather than a right-wing presidential candidate (reference category). When comparing this point estimate with the valence categories, the coefficient for ideology is more than 2.2 times larger than the second largest estimate. The second figure shows that unlikely left-wing

voters are 38 percentage points more likely to vote for a left- rather than a right-wing candidate (reference category). However, in this case the point estimate for ideology is only 1.4 times larger than the second larger estimate. Therefore, ideological voting has much more explanatory power explaining likely rather than unlikely left-wing respondents' electoral choices. The third figure confirms this difference by showing that likely left-wing voters are 19 percentage points more likely than unlikely left-wing voters to rely on candidates' ideological labels when making electoral choices.

Panel B reports the results for right-wing respondents, showing that likely voters are 49 percentage points less likely to vote for a left- than for a right-wing candidate (reference category). This point estimate is 1.9 times larger than the second largest point estimate. The second figure shows that unlikely voters are 31 percentage points less likely to vote for a left- rather than a right-wing candidate (reference category). The point estimate for ideology is only 1.3 times larger than the second largest estimate. The third figure shows, as in the case of left-wing respondents, that there is a significant difference between likely and unlikely right-wing voters, the former are 17 percentage points more likely than the later to rely on candidates' ideological labels when making electoral choices.

Panel C summarizes the results for centrist respondents. Here the story is different: They do not rely on candidates' ideological labels to make electoral choices, and there is no significant difference between likely and unlikely voters. Accordingly, centrist respondents pay attention to valence attributes such as profession and age to choose between candidates.

Panel D reports the results for the non-identifiers. As illustrated in the first figure, there are zero non-identifiers that can be classified as likely voters using the three questions

mentioned in the previous section. Therefore, there are no results for the first and third plots. The coefficients from the second figure show that the non-identifiers rely on valence attributes to make electoral choices.

However, making strong inferences about centrist and non-identifiers lacking ideological preferences requires further analysis. Those individuals might actually be latent left or right-wing individuals and therefore they could be canceling out their ideological preferences when analyzing them as a group. I explore this possibility in the next subsection. Finally, I provide the regression tables used to construct figure 1 in appendix G, a diagnostic for profile effects and a balance check in appendix H.

5.3. Unraveling the Preferences of Centrists and Non-identifiers

As discussed above, the results for centrists and non-identifiers can have different explanations. First, it might be the case that they are not ideological and therefore do not have preferences for either left or right-wing candidates. Second, some of these respondents might be hidden ideological voters who do have ideological preferences for left or right-wing candidates but are canceling them out when we cluster them in the same group of citizens.

In an attempt to identify hidden or latent ideological respondents within centrists and non-identifiers, I use three extra survey questions: approval of the government, support for iron-fist policies, and connection between iron-fist policy preferences and politicians' ideological labels. Using these questions, I generate a sample of latent left and latent right-wing respondents. Centrists and non-identifiers who are not latent left or latent right-wing are considered to be non-ideological. I expand on how I created these groups in appendix

I. Figure 3 shows the results for the conjoint experiment within each of these three groups (516, 440, and 748 observations).

Figure 3: Effects of candidates' attributes for centrists and non-identifiers

Latent left-wing respondents are 17 percentage points more likely to vote for a left- rather than for a right-wing candidate. Therefore, these results illustrate that there are hidden left-wing respondents who place themselves at the center of the ideological spectrum or that do not answer the ideology question but who prefer left-wing candidates. As expected, the importance of ideological labels for these respondents is not as high as in the case of self-identified left-wing respondents. The size of the point estimate is similar to the results for profession.

Latent right-wing respondents are 21 percentage points less likely to vote for a left- rather than for a right-wing candidate. These results show again that there are hidden right-wing respondents within the participants who considered themselves centrists or non-identifiers. As in the previous case, the salience of the ideological attributes is similar to the saliency of the valence attributes. Therefore, latent left- and right-wing respondents do rely on candidates' ideological labels but less than self-identify left- and right-wing respondents and they rely more on valence attributes to make electoral choices. Finally, non-ideological respondents, as expected, do not rely on candidates' ideological labels.

Latent left- and right-wing respondents represent 68% of the subgroup of centrists and non-identifiers. This evidence opens new doors for exploring this group of subjects who do not self-identify as left or right but who rely on ideological labels when making electoral decisions.

5.4. Ideological and Non-ideological Respondents

The results from the conjoint experiment show that candidates' ideological labels are the most important factors in electoral decision-making for left- and right-wing voters. Also, they illustrate that ideological labels are also relevant for certain centrists and non-identifiers. This group of left, right, and latent left- and right-wing respondents represents 72 percent of the sample, and from now on I will call them ideological respondents. This is the subset of the sample that used ideological labels to make electoral choices. The respondents who do not rely on ideology are the non-ideological respondents identified in previous sections, who correspond to some centrists and non-identifiers who do not consider candidates' ideological labels to select between candidates.

Table 3 shows how ideological respondents do a better job at providing ideological content to policy preferences than non-ideological respondents. This might help explain why these individuals rely more on candidates' ideological labels when making electoral decisions, since these labels are meaningful markers for them. I use the same questions as in figure 1, where respondents connect social policies and iron-fist crime-reduction policies with ideological labels (i.e., left, right, and none).

Table 3: Ideological respondents and policy content

Social policies	**Left**	**Right**	**None**	**DA/DK**
Ideological respondents	62%	18%	14%	5%
Non-ideological respondents	27%	8%	41%	23%
Iron-first policies	**Left**	**Right**	**None**	**DA/DK**
Ideological respondents	10%	72%	15%	3%
Non-ideological respondents	17%	8%	58%	17%

The results show that 62% of ideological respondents connect social policies with left-wing politicians, and only 27% of non-ideological respondents make the same association. Additionally, 72% of ideological respondents connect iron-fist policies for reducing crime with right-wing politicians while only 8% of non-ideological respondents make the same association.

However, in a country with voluntary voting such as Chile, the importance of ideology will not be only determined by the number of ideological citizens, but also by the willingness of those individuals to engage with and participate in the electoral process. In this section, I provide a direct comparison between ideological and non-ideological citizens in terms of their willingness to participate in the electoral process. Table 4 compares the proportion of likely voters within two groups: ideological and non-ideological respondents.

Table 4: Ideological and likely voters

	Ideological respondents	**Non-ideological respondents**	**Difference**
Likely voters	0.44	0.12	0.32***

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

The results show that ideological respondents are more likely to participate in the electoral process than non-ideological respondents. In a context of voluntary voting, this is particularly significant since it means that this group has a greater chance of influencing electoral outcomes.

Thus, despite evidence that ideology has become less important over time, the findings from this paper show that ideological voting remains common across a large subset of voters, and that this group is the most likely to participate in elections. Therefore, the reduction in the number of respondents who self-identified as left- or right-leaning 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.

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, however, we might end up underestimating the salience of ideology if there are latent ideological respondents and if non-identifiers are less likely to engage and participate in politics.

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. Nevertheless, the adoption of voluntary voting in 2012 makes things more complicated, because even if ideology is less relevant for the entire electorate, this might not be the case for the people who are more engaged and interested in politics, and as a result the ones who vote.

To re-evaluate the role of ideology in an era of voluntary voting, 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. I interact the candidates' attributes on a binary indicator of likely voters, which shows that subjects who have a greater likelihood of participating are more ideological than those who do not.

These findings provide context for the trend in the literature by showing that ideology remains a significant predictor of the vote choice among people who vote. 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 electoral outcomes, if these respondents are not participating in politics, the salience of ideology can remain stable (or even increase) since the people who vote are more ideological.

The Chilean Spring of 2019–2020 resignified the debate about ideological voting. At the beginning of the conflict, the ideological divisions between the main political actors become blurry since most of them attempted to connect with the deep sense of unfairness and anger expressed by the protesters. Shortly after, however, the ideological groups reconsolidated into their traditional forms. Some of the topics that divided political groups along ideological lines was the support for the front line (i.e., *primera linea*) or the yellow vests (i.e., *chalecos amarillos*), to provide two symbolic examples.[18]

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

[18] These two concepts emerged after the social protests that started in October 2019. The "front line" or *primera linea* refers to the people who directly confronted the police during protests. The "yellow vests" or *chalecos amarillos* refers to the groups of people who protected private and public property.

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 inequality, 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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