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Re-Assessing the Rise of the Latin American Left

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One of the most fascinating trends in Latin American politics over the past fifteen years is the rise of Leftist and Center-Left leaning democratically-elected presidents. This research fills voids in the literature by analyzing a broad range of the historical antecedents within and across countries that have nurtured Leftist and Center-Left presidents, along with a new analysis of Latinobarometro polling data collected over the past decade that reveals linkages between changes in political culture and the election of Left-leaning presidents.

*Part I of this research traces the experience of the Left in Latin America over the past century and places rise of the Left in its proper historical context. Part II analyzes the connections between changes in political ideology with changes in ideological leadership by re-examining Marco A. Morales's findings in *Leftovers: Tales of the Latin American Left*, and introducing more recent Latinobarometro data to strengthen the analysis.*

The historical perspective and analysis of political ideology expressed in this study demonstrates that the Left has overcome tremendous challenges and has managed to emerge as a dominant force in Latin American politics. The findings suggest that the historical factors that enabled the Left to rise to the presidential ranks have not changed, and Leftist presidents and their parties are likely to be rewarded for the dramatic economic accomplishments that have been achieved over the past decade, as long as these leaders continue to appeal to self-identified Centrists that hold the keys to victory for presidential candidates.

Introduction

Over the past decade and a half, the rise of Leftist and Center-Left democratically-elected presidents has been swift and dramatic. Some analyses on the subject give scant attention to the pre-1990 historical conditions and changes in political culture that have enabled the ascent of such leaders in the region. This research fills these voids in the literature by analyzing a broader range of the historical antecedents within and across countries that have nurtured Leftist and Center-Left presidents. In addition, this research provides a new analysis of *Latinobarometro*¹ polling data

¹ The *Latinobarometro* Corporation, based in Santiago, Chile, conducts annual public opinion polls of approximately 19,000 people across eighteen Latin American countries.

collected over the past decade that reveals linkages between changes in political culture and the election of Left-leaning presidents.

Several studies on Leftist politics in Latin America (Castaneda 2006; Cleary 2006; Panizza 2005) use the neo-liberal period of the 1990s as a historical starting point for explaining the rising “Pink Tide” in Latin America or simply begin by citing Jorge Castaneda’s classic 1993 work *Utopia Unarmed: The Latin American Left After the Cold War*.

Part I of this study begins with a discussion of the lasting influence of Jose Carlos Mariátegui’s 1920s-era Marxist works, then addresses the actual nature of the relationship between the USSR and Latin American communism over subsequent decades, while also differentiating between populist and Leftist leadership models before addressing Latin America’s post-military neo-liberal experiment. The rise of the Latin American Left in the post-Cold War world order is thus placed in its proper historical context.

Voters themselves are often ignored in some analyses of the Left’s electoral successes in Latin America’s executive branches. While data on Latin Americans’ self-assessment of their political culture has been widely available for the past two decades through the World Values Survey and the *Latinobarometro*, the connections between changes in the electorate’s political ideology and changes in ideological leadership have not received much attention. One notable exception to this trend is Marco A. Morales (2008) chapter in *Leftovers: Tales of the Latin American Left*.

Part II of this study re-examines Morales’s findings and introduces more recent *Latinobarometro* data to strengthen the analysis of the links between ideological shifts in Latin American electorates and Left-leaning presidential victories. The results reveal several intriguing trends that aid our understanding the rise of Left/Center-Left heads of state throughout Latin America. While an examination of legislative branch electoral results throughout the region over a fifteen year period would undoubtedly strengthen the results, this study only focuses on the executive branch of government. This study concludes with speculation about the future of the Left in Latin American presidential politics.

Part I: The Left in Latin America: A Historical Perspective

Marxism has been traditionally understood in Latin America through three concepts: class consciousness; stages of socio-economic conflict; and

Marxist-Leninism. Class consciousness deals with the relationship of the proletariat (working class masses) to the means of production, the bourgeoisie (elite capitalists), and the petit bourgeois (middle/upper middle class people including government workers and shop keepers) who fall somewhere in between the proletariat and the bourgeois. The stages of socio-economic conflict according to Karl Marx include: tribalism (or primitive communism) practiced among the earliest tribal societies and in historical city-states; feudalism, the medieval European relationships between land-owning lords that enabled vassals to work their fiefs and provided them with protection; capitalism, when capitalists own the means of production and rule over the working class proletariat; socialism, which occurs when the workers overthrow the state and replace them with a dictatorship of the proletariat; and finally, communism, the classless, stateless, utopian society. Marxist-Leninism is understood as the need for violent overthrow of capitalism through communist revolution, representing the mission of the Communist International (COMINTERN) that established Communist Parties linked to Moscow throughout Latin America and the world.

Latin America has a long history of socialist thought. In 1843, at around the same time that a recently-minted Ph.D. known as Karl Marx was publishing his first articles in the German newspaper *Rheinische Zeitung*, Peruvian-Frenchwoman Flora Tristan was already calling for workers to unite in her publication *L'Union Ouvrière*, or The Workers' Union (Korol 2006, 8). Tristan's Peruvian heritage is often ignored or unrecognized by scholars. Although born in Paris, she was the daughter of Don Mariano de Tristan Moscoso, a Spanish Army Colonel from a Peruvian family that had strong links to South American liberator Simon Bolivar (Tristan, Beik, and Beik 1993).

Tristan's contributions notwithstanding, it is another Peruvian, José Carlos Mariátegui, who is considered to be the "Father of Latin American Marxism." An early twentieth century author, Mariátegui published *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* in 1928, one of the first Marxist analyses of Latin America. His foremost contribution to Latin American Marxist thought is the concept that revolution in Latin America should be based on the realities of the local conditions (e.g. indigenous and agricultural workers) not on the formula based upon European industrialization. Mariátegui would also establish the *Partido Socialista del Peru*, or Peruvian Socialist Party, which would later become the Peruvian Communist Party. The term *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) which decades later would be associated with the violent Peruvian organization led by Abimael Guzman, is attributed to

Mariátegui's oft-quoted slogan *El Marxismo-Leninismo abrirá el sendero luminoso hacia la revolución*, which translates to Marxism-Leninism will open the shining path towards revolution (Simons 1984).

Building upon the success of the October Revolution in 1917, the USSR established the COMINTERN to spread communism worldwide. Between 1919 and 1943, the COMINTERN was the official international arm of the Soviet Communist Party, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s helped establish the *Partido Comunista*, or Communist Party, throughout Latin America. (Caballero 2002, 8) As tensions dramatically rose between the United States and the Soviet Union in the aftermath of the Second World War, Left-leaning Latin Americans became unwittingly caught in the middle of the Cold War. Many Leftists in the region broke off from the official Communist Party and began to establish Left-leaning *Frentes Amplias*, or Broad Front coalitions, to gain electoral victories. Millet (1993) and Smith (1992) have presented solid evidence that the perceived Communist threats in Latin America by the United States government were grossly exaggerated and that the actual Soviet involvement or interest in the region was far less than U.S. officials believed.

In spite of the limited Soviet involvement in Latin America, the two successful Leftist revolutions in the region heightened American fears that Communism would spread throughout the region. From the U.S. government's point of view, the rise of Fidel Castro and Ernesto "Che" Guevara in Cuba in 1959, along with the Sandinista success in taking power in Nicaragua two decades later, posed threats to western hemispheric security. Both of these cases are well documented elsewhere and will not be extensively presented in this article, though it is worth mentioning a few key points as these cases pertain to the Left in Latin America. First, neither the Soviet Union, nor the Communist Parties of Cuba or Nicaragua were directly involved in the revolutionary victories by the *Movimiento 26 de Julio*, or 26th of July Movement, or the *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional*, or Sandinista National Liberation Front (aka *Sandinistas*) respectively. In the Cuban case, it wasn't until December 1961, nearly three years after taking power, that Fidel Castro declared his regime to be Marxist-Leninist and firmly allied itself to the Soviet Union. Likewise, the Sandinistas had been toiling in Nicaragua for years prior to removing the Somoza dynasty without any support from the Soviet Union (Vanden and Prevost 1993, 104). In fact, two years after being power would pass before the Sandinistas would sign an economic and technical deal with the Soviets, and later on the USSR

renege on a deal for the Sandinistas to purchase military aircraft (Garvin 1999; Vanden and Prevost 1993, 104).

A second point is that in both cases, the United States made a significant effort to destabilize the Castro and Ortega regimes, in the former case through the Bay of Pigs fiasco (among other failed operations and policies), and in the latter, through the illegal funding of the Contras. It is worth noting that neither of these operations would succeed. Finally, the leaders of both revolutions, Fidel Castro and Daniel Ortega continue to have a dominant role in Cuban and Nicaraguan politics to this day. While Fidel officially relinquished power to his brother Raul several years ago, no one can deny that his shadow continues to loom large over the Cuban government and population. And of course, Daniel Ortega made an astonishing political comeback to once again ascend to the presidency of Nicaragua in 2006 and 2011.

The emergence of populist leaders in Latin America posed a unique paradigm for understanding the Left in Latin America during the Cold War, since such leaders might be on the Left or Right side of the political spectrum, or some combination of the two. The key factors in defining populist leaders are their relationship to the masses and their use of democratic institutions to gain power. Thus, “populists” can be defined as leaders that have charismatic relationships with mass followings that win elections regularly (Conniff 1999, 7). Classic examples of Latin American populists include Argentina’s Juan Peron and Getulio Vargas of Brazil, strong leaders who at times posed some measure of conflict toward the United States.

As problematic as populists like Peron and Vargas may have been for the U.S. government, their staunch anti-communist stances kept potential U.S. intervention at bay. However, numerous cases of Leftist, nationalist, and reform movements have been confused for Communist movements by the United States in the context of the Cold War. Some of these cases ended in the ouster of democratically elected Leftist leaders with complicit actions by the United States government, such as Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, Brazilian President Joao Goulart in 1964, and Chilean President Salvador Allende in 1973, among others. In all of these instances, constitutional governments were replaced by repressive military regimes.

The transition several Latin American governments made from Leftist democratic rule to military dictatorships had tacit support from the United

States government, which followed the Kennan Doctrine, the official US policy that held that the United States would support military regimes, even if they were brutally oppressive toward their people, as long as they were anti-Communist. Kennan wrote, "Where the concepts and traditions of popular government are too weak to absorb successfully the intensity of the communist attack, then we must concede that harsh governmental measures of repression may be the only answer; that these measures may have to proceed from regimes whose origins and methods would not stand the test of American concepts of democratic procedure..." (U.S. Department of State 1950) While the United States was preoccupied with its domestic civil rights movement and troops in Vietnam, during the 1960s and 1970s at least a dozen Latin American nations fell under military rule.

The military regimes in Latin America loathed Leftist threats to its power and systematically engaged in suppressing or eliminating those it considered to be "Leftist dissidents." The case of Argentina provides one of the more extreme examples, where the military junta led by Jorge Rafael Videla enacted the *Proceso* or Process of National Reorganization, also known as the *Guerra Sucia* (or Dirty War) which led to the abduction, torture, rape and extermination of 10,000-30,000 Argentinean Leftist guerillas, their sympathizers, other dissidents, and innocent people caught in the crossfire (Vanden and Prevost 2009, 404). The victims even included babies taken from female prisoners upon birth and offered to government officials and associates for "adoption" (Warren 2010). Yet the Argentinean military regime was not alone in its quest to eradicate the Left. Several South American nations collectively engaged in *Plan Condor*, or Operation Condor, designed to destroy Leftist political opponents and uprisings. Declassified U.S. State Department documents detail the U.S. government's knowledge of Operation Condor (The National Security Archive 2004).

It was not until the 1980s that military leaders throughout the region would relinquish power and transition back to democratic rule. Domestic and international forces including the 1970s oil crises, the 1980s debt crisis, structural fragilities, international perception, globalization, the loss of legitimacy, are all among the underlying factors for Latin America's return to democracy. (Remmer 1992) The military regimes were discredited through the failure of their economic plans, gross human rights violations, and in the case of Argentina, they were also discredited militarily as well in the aftermath of the *Islas Malvinas*/Falkland Islands debacle.

By the beginning of the 1990s, global politics began to change in profound manners. Latin America was almost entirely ruled by democratically elected leaders. The Soviet Union collapsed, communism quickly became widely discredited, and all of a sudden the Cold War was over. The post-military, newly-democratic Latin American republics quickly turned to Washington, D.C. for economic advice and embarked on a neo-liberal experiment. One by one, Latin American presidents adopted neo-liberal policies (including free trade, privatization, cuts in public spending, fiscal discipline, and increased foreign investment). Collectively, these neo-liberal economic reforms espoused by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank as conditions for doling out loans to underdeveloped countries became known as the Washington Consensus. Many observers also made reference to neo-liberal policies as the free market reforms developed by the “Chicago Boys,” who were Chilean, University of Chicago-trained economists that studied under the tutelage of Milton Friedman and implemented these reforms with a high degree of success in their country.

In several Latin American countries, these reforms yielded positive macroeconomic indicators before resulting in a horrible backlash as the 1990s came to an end. The dire effects of neo-liberal economic policies included high unemployment, corruption, inflation, and growing inequality (The International Bank for Redevelopment/World Bank 2003). The average GDP growth in Latin America from 1990-2000 was 0.98%, while the world Gross Domestic Product grew by 1.32%; the United States by 2.30%; and East Asia by 3.95% (Mainwaring and Scully 2010, 54). While Argentina’s economic meltdown in December 2001 signaled the end of the neo-liberal era for many, two notable exceptions to the failure of neoliberal reforms include Chile and the Dominican Republic, where growth rates remained robust and kept pace with more developed nations (Solimano and Soto 2005).

In what was perhaps a foreshadowing of increased resistance to neo-liberalism, January 1, 1994 will forever be remembered for the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the brief armed uprising by the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional* (Zapatista Army for National Liberation or *Zapatistas*), led by *Sub-Comandante Marcos* in Mexico. This Leftist revolutionary group fought for an autonomous Chiapas region and indigenous rights. The *Zapatistas* implemented the first effective use of the Internet for the support of a revolutionary cause. After just eleven days, the EZLN succumbed to Mexican forces, but remains a pressure group in Mexican politics to this day.

Later in 1994, about two thousand miles to the south, Hugo Chavez was released from prison and began plotting his presidential campaign. Chavez, who had been imprisoned for attempting to topple his government in 1992, formed a political party called the *Movimiento Quinta Republica* (Fifth Republic Movement) in 1997 and ascended to the presidency in legitimate elections held the following year. Thus, Chavez became the first post-Cold War Latin American Leftist president. Chavez's victory signaled the beginning of what many scholars refer to as the "Pink Tide," that is, the emergence of democratically elected Leftist and Center-Left presidents throughout region. In the ensuing years, the electorates of the following countries democratically elected Left or Center-Left presidents (election/reelection year listed) shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Left and Center-Left Elected Presidents in Latin America 1998-Present

Country	President/Year Elected (and Re-Elected, if applicable)	
Argentina	Nestor Kirchner/2003	Cristina Fernandez/2007,2011
Bolivia	Evo Morales/2005,2009	
Brazil	Luiz Inacio "Lula" da Silva/2002,2006	Dilma Rousseff/2010
Chile	Ricardo Lagos/2000	Michelle Bachelet/2006
Costa Rica	Oscar Arias/2006	
Ecuador	Rafael Correa/2006,2009,2013	
El Salvador	Mauricio Funes/2009	
Guatemala	Alvaro Colom/2007	
Honduras	Manuel Zelaya/2005	
Nicaragua	Daniel Ortega/2006,2011	
Panama	Martin Torrijos/2004	
Paraguay	Fernando Lugo/2008	
Peru	Alan Garcia/2006	Ollanta Humala/2011
Uruguay	Tabare Vazquez/2004	Jose Mujica/2009
Venezuela	Hugo Chavez/1998,2000,2006,2012	Nicolas Maduro/2013

In addition, Leftist candidates lost narrow electoral contests in Mexico (*Partido Revolucionario Democratico* candidate Manuel Lopez Obrador in 2006 and 2012) and Peru (in 2006 Ollanta Humala was defeated by Center-Left candidate Alan Garcia, but came back to win the presidency in 2011). The policy trends exhibited by the "Pink Tide" presidents include: nationalizations, redistributive policies, collaborative projects, anti-American policies, anti-Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), referendums, constitutional reforms, political ties with Cuba, sharply increased economic ties with China, and participation in Hugo Chavez's *Alianza Bolivariana para los pueblos de Nuestra America* (ALBA) a social, political and economic coalition of mostly Left-leaning Latin American states.

During the first decade of the new millennium, Centrist, Center-Right or Right wing presidential candidates won electoral victories in the countries shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Centrist, Right, and Center-Right Elected Presidents in Latin America 2000-Present

Country	President/Year Elected (or Re-Elected)		
Chile	Sebastian Pinera/2010		
Colombia	Alvaro Uribe/2002,2006	Juan Manuel Santos/2010	
Costa Rica	Laura Chinchilla/2010		
Guatemala	Otto Perez Molina/2011		
Honduras	Porfirio Lobo/2009		
Mexico	Vicente Fox/2000	Felipe Calderon/2006	Enrique Pena Nieto/2012
Panama	Ricardo Martinelli/2009		
Paraguay	Federico Franco/2012		

In six of these cases (Chile, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Panama, and Paraguay) the victors in the most recent elections followed Left or Center-Left presidents.

Hugo Chavez and his Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela deserve special mention, as in many ways he led the “Pink Tide”. As mentioned earlier, Chavez burst upon the Latin American political landscape during his failed military coup to oust President Carlos Andres Perez in 1992. Perez was later impeached and forced out of office due to misappropriation of funds. Thanks to a pardon by then-Venezuelan President Rafael Caldera, Chavez was released from prison, enabling him to run for the presidency in 1998. He was re-elected in 2000, 2006, and 2012, won a referendum in 2004, narrowly lost a referendum to reform the constitution in a fashion that would allow him to run for the presidency indefinitely, but was able to eliminate term limits through a similar referendum in 2009. He fits the classic mold of a Latin American populist in the tradition of a Peron or Vargas by winning democratic elections but in the eyes of many political observers often ruling in a less-than-democratic manner.²

Chavez’s power stems from Venezuela’s petroleum industry and the price of oil, which has been remarkably high over the past decade. Oil exports provide 95% of Venezuela’s export income, and the Venezuelan economy is the fourth largest in Latin America (Daniel 2011). Chavez’s

² There is widespread dispute in academia regarding the necessary conditions to define a democracy. For purposes of this study, democracy is defined through free and fair presidential elections that reflect the will of the people.

strong domestic political control, tough anti-US stance, ties to leaders with longstanding conflicts with the United States such as Syria's Bashar al-Assad, then-Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and now-defunct Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, along with a reluctance to shy away from international controversies propelled Chavez onto the global stage as a leading Latin American figure. Despite the harsh tones and unseemly rhetoric between Chavez and his U.S. counterparts, the fact remains that Venezuela continues to be the fifth largest source of imported oil in the United States (U.S. Energy Information Administration 2011). Chavez's untimely death in March 2013 led to a special election held on the 14th of April 2013 that was won by Nicolas Maduro, who had served as vice-president under Chavez.

The rise of over a dozen Left and Center-Left presidents through democratic means in Latin America has driven scholars to seek answers as to how this could happen and why it happened at this stage in history. As mentioned at the outset of this research, some contemporary political scientists seemingly give little attention to the historical antecedents of the pre-1990s "Left" in Latin America detailed in the preceding pages. However, two texts on the subject published by Latin American scholars in Latin America are based upon the idea that history does indeed matter, and that the forces that have led to the rise of the Latin American Left cannot simply be examined by detailing the electoral results of the past decade or so. For example, in *El Socialismo Latinoamericano: Un Recorrido Hasta Nuestros Tiempos (Latin American Socialism: The Road Traveled to the Present Day)*, editor Claudia Korol presents a series of writings by the likes of Mariátegui, Guevara, Salvador Allende, and Fidel Castro with the goal of "anchoring" present day reflections on the socialist expressions of the past, learning from failed experiences and looking for new paths (Korol 2006, 6-7). Korol is not out of touch with reality: She recognizes the limitations of the socialism of the past, at one point emphasizing that it was defeated by capitalism in the global sphere, yet the socialism that is recovering its identity today is one that has emerged from the effects of neo-liberalism on Latin American society and emphasizes the central ideas of well-being, happiness, and solidarity (Korol 2006, 6).

Korol's book goes further than simply reprinting the words of yesterday's prominent Left, by including passages from perhaps less heralded participants in the development of Latin American Leftist thought. For example, there is a section dedicated to John William Cooke, who was Juan Peron's representative in Argentina during his exile in the late 1950s

and 1960s and collaborated with urban guerilla groups in an effort to “revolutionize” Peronism.

Korol, a self-avowed Marxist and Feminist makes the following argument as she introduces the collection of writings: “Those that speak, write, and argue here have put their lives into these utopias, and our obligation is to not forget, to maintain the fire of the rebellion, to learn from all of the errors, so that the socialism of the 21st century may be a giant work of human emancipation, in which the long postponed dreams of our people, with the desire, eagerness for liberty, tears, and spilled blood, in a celebration of insurgent villages fed up with lies and disciplining roles” (Korol 2006, 7). Korol’s statement recognizes two important points. First, that there is a direct link between the socialism of the past and that of the present. And second, it is clear that after the fall of the USSR in 1991, the left in Latin America became introspective. The former advocates of socialism recognized that they committed errors that must be identified and modified by latter practitioners in order to succeed.

A second, far more detailed text that analyzes the contemporary Left in Latin America is Jose Natanson’s *La Nueva Izquierda: Triunfos y Derrotas de los Gobiernos de Argentina, Brasil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Chile, Uruguay y Ecuador* (*The New Left: Triumphs and Defeats of the Governments of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Venezuela, Chile, Uruguay and Ecuador*). The author’s interviews with Latin American leaders reveal the degree to which they themselves recognize the influences of the old Latin American Left on the current trends. For example, Natanson (2008) explains that former Chilean President Ricardo Lagos told him that the experience of Allende influenced the renewal of Chilean Socialism; former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso considers that the new Left is a function of the dependency theory that he created over 40 years ago; and that former Argentine President Nestor Kirchner tried to convince him that he was intending on recovering the roots of the first Peronist period, which emphasized worker’s rights and assistance to the poor masses (20-21).

Natanson finds it difficult to pinpoint the “birth” of the new Latin American Left, suggesting that it might have arisen after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Hugo Chavez’s failed coup attempt in 1992, or the ouster of Argentine President Fernando de la Rúa during Argentina’s meltdown in 2001. He ultimately determines that this is irrelevant, since the reality is that, as Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa said, “This is not an era of change, but

rather, the change of an era” (Natanson 2008, 13-16). Natanson (2008) defines the new Left in light of the old, writing that it is,

a different Left, flexible, pragmatic, and reformist, that tries to slowly advance the construction of more just societies, and to do so, forms quite different institutions, that are not revolutionary, though they may declare themselves as such, and that are quite democratic, though sometimes they insist with the siren’s call of participatory democracy. In sum, it is a Left that is different from the past, nuanced and attenuated, but not diminished, and it is in that novelty wherein lies a good part of its paradoxical enchantment” (21-22).

Natanson, like Korol, recognizes that the old Left had its flaws. Despite the fact that the new Left is more democratic, pluralist, and open, he concludes, “the new Left continues to be the Left” (Natanson 2008, 276).

Since many studies point to the 1990s to understand the rise of the Left, it is important to recognize the profound political changes that took place during that period: The end of the Soviet Era, the rise of neo-liberalism in Latin America, and the United States’ indifference to the region and distractions with its own international conflicts. The fall of the Soviet Union had two major implications for the Left in Latin America. First, it discredited the Communist ideology in a profound manner. While the *Partidos Comunistas* would continue to function in Latin America, even to this day, in many ways they became even more marginalized than they had been, and were forced to undergo some internal reassessments and ally themselves with other Left-of-Center parties. Second, the “threat” of Communism for the United States had all of a sudden disappeared. Since U.S. policy toward Latin America for the previous fifty years was primarily built upon the Kennan Doctrine, the dissolution of the Communist threat enabled the Left to act more freely, with far less worry that the United States would pressure them out of existence.

The discredited Soviet economic model along with the debt crises and massive hyperinflation of the 1980s sent Latin American leaders in search of a new tactic to deal with the multiplicity of economic problems facing the continent. This is when neo-liberalism stepped in. One by one, Latin American countries adopted economic plans designed by the Washington Consensus. While the continent’s Leftists were appalled by such measures, they had little clout or solutions of their own to provide. It was not until the

neo-liberal policies began to unravel that they once again managed to have a voice in economic debates.

The demise of neo-liberalism coincided with the third major game-changing political event of the period: September 11, 2001. During the 1990s, the United States mostly took a “trade, not aid” approach to Latin America. The region as a whole was mostly ignored, since democratic regimes were in place throughout the continent, with the exception of Cuba. Hugo Chavez was the only truly Leftist leader in the region during that decade, and most of the U.S. government’s attention toward Latin America centered upon the ratification of NAFTA, the Mexican bailout of 1995, and the consolidation of democratic rule in the region. During these positive economic times for the United States, fostering more trade agreements with its neighbors to the south was the primary order of the day. President George W. Bush came to office in a controversial fashion, and quickly focused on friendly ties with Mexican President Vicente Fox. Just prior to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, President Bush had met with President Fox and the United States seemed to be on the brink of establishing comprehensive immigration reform (Leiken 2002). From September 11, 2001 on, the United States focused on border security, a restructuring of immigration control, the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, and turned its international attention almost entirely toward the Middle East. While the United States was tending to two wars and combating terror, Left and Center-Left leaders started to win at the ballot boxes with rapid regularity. As Jose Natanson pointed out in 2008, 80% of South American people live under Leftist governments, 81% of South American land is governed by Leftists, and 90% of South America’s Gross Domestic Product is managed by Leftist presidents (Natanson 2008, 15-16).

In sum, I argue that the rise of Left and Center Left Presidents follows a historical continuum that stretches back over a century. It begins with Marxist theory that spread to Latin America through Tristan and Mariátegui, continues through the rise of the Communist International and establishment of Communist Parties and *Frentes Amplias* in Latin America; weaves through the successes of violent revolutions in Cuba, Nicaragua and an electoral revolution in Chile; takes a step back when it is repressed by the military regimes of the 1970s, reemerges with the return to democracy in the 1980s; is subjugated to the role of a bystander upon the fall of the Soviet Union and the implementation of neo-liberal economic policies; and comes back as a force once neo-liberalism demonstrates its inadequacies to improve the lives of most Latin Americans, the threat of Communism disappears, and

the United States becomes distracted by its own international conflicts. The rise of the new Left cannot be understood as an encapsulated period that ignores the historical processes detailed above.

Part II: The Left in Latin America: Shifting Political Ideologies

The first part of this study established the proper historical context for understanding the rise of democratically elected Leftist and Center-Left presidents. Now we turn our attention to other explanations for this rise. One such explanation is provided by Marco A. Morales (2008) in a chapter of *Leftovers: Tales of the Latin American Left* entitled, "Have Latin Americans turned Left?" In this chapter, Morales analyzes individual level data from nine countries that elected Left or Center-Left presidents between 1990-2005 from the World Values Survey and the *Latinobarometro*: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Nicaragua, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. Respondents to these surveys were asked to place themselves on a Left-Right scale from 1-10 (World Values Survey) or 0-10 (*Latinobarometro*). Low numbers denote the Left, middle numbers the Center and high numbers denote the Right.³

Morales argues,

Latin Americans have, for the most part, undergone ideological shifts: to the Right during the 1990s and to the Left during the 2000s. Even though most governments from the Left have been elected during this shift to the Left, it is hard to make a credible case for the election of Leftists to be causally related to the ideological shift to the Left. Such a claim would be especially dubious, as most of the candidates that finally won presidential elections during the 2000s had been recurring candidates during the 1990s, when they built most of their support, and most of this implied widening their base of ideological support. It seems that it is not that Latin Americans have turned Left as much as that the Left has finally turned to Latin Americans. That is, the Left began winning elections once it stopped catering exclusively to Leftists and began speaking to the general array of voters. (Morales 2008).

³ The 2010 *Latinobarometro* re-codifies this scale as: 0-3 Left; 4-6 Center; 7-10 Right.

To paraphrase, Morales's argument is that there is an ideological shift to the Left in Latin America from 2000-2005, but that it didn't cause the election of Leftist leaders in the region because those leaders were already known figures that simply moderated their tone to appeal to more voters.

Morales's study graphically shows the ideological trends in each of the nine cases where Leftist presidents have been elected. In sum, he finds that the majority of Latin Americans in these countries are Centrists (self-identifying as ideologically somewhere between the Left and the Right); in the 1990s there was a decrease in the Center-Left and growth in the Center-Right and Right, only Venezuela shifted Left; in the 2000s most countries shifted to the Left, no country shifted to the Right. Yet Morales is hesitant to accept an ideological shift to the Left demonstrated in the data as an explanation for the election of Leftist leaders. Despite the fact that his own analysis of the data between 2000-2005 demonstrates that in 7 of the 9 cases there is an ideological shift to the Left (Argentina and Nicaragua did not experience significant shifts in either direction), his analysis is that these ideological shifts are not really ideological shifts at all, but rather they demonstrate "a regression to an 'equilibrium' ideological point...it might be the case that Latin Americans are not becoming more Leftist, but are simply becoming less conservative" (Morales 2008, 30).

One problem with Morales's analysis is that instead of accepting the obvious results of the data (that the electorate shifted ideologically to the Left and that shift led to the election of Leftist leaders), he chooses to posit alternative explanations for Leftist electoral successes, such as the Left presenting more appealing Leftist presidential candidates that have moderated their tone to attract centrist voters (Morales 2008, 38). While this is certainly possible, why can't it be the case that the electorate shifted to the Left and chose candidates that appeal to those identifying to the Left and Center of the political spectrum? After all, these are not mutually exclusive concepts. By reviewing Part I of this study it has already been established that the new Left has learned from the mistakes of the old, and have indeed moderated their tone in a creative way to pursue policies of social justice that remain ideologically on the Left side of the spectrum, while doing away with unpalatable notions of revolution or a violent overthrow of capitalism. While some may question democratic nature of specific activities carried out by modern day Left and Center-Left Latin American regimes, they each have clearly demonstrated that they respect democratic electoral results and have chosen to maintain capitalist economic systems and structures, despite their Leftist rhetoric. Furthermore, by considering the historical perspectives

detailed in Part I of this study, these ideological shifts and electoral victories by the new Left could easily be considered a response to the failed Right-wing governments that had established failed neo-liberal policies.

A second point of contention is with Morales's assessment that the ideological shifts to the Left in the 2000s are not actually a shift, but rather a return to a point of "equilibrium." If that is the case, and Latin Americans in 2005 were actually in an ideological state of equilibrium, then there should not be any further shifts to the Left or the Right in subsequent years. Morales's data analysis ends with the 2005 *Latinobarometro* survey results. An examination of *Latinobarometro* survey reports from 2006-2010 (with respect to the Left-Right scale results) reveals intriguing trends. For example, in 2006, the *Latinobarometro* report demonstrates that between 1996 and 2006, eight Latin American nations shifted to the Left; five did not demonstrate significant ideological changes; and four shifted to the Right (*Corporacion*

Table 3: *Latinobarometro* Left-Right Scale Averages Latin America 1996-2006
(Question: In politics, there is normally a "left" and a "right." On a scale where "0" is left and "10" is right, where do you place yourself?)

	Average	
	1996	2006
Countries That Shifted to the Right		
Costa Rica	6.0	6.3
Guatemala	4.8	5.3
Mexico	4.6	5.6
Panama	4.0	4.6
Countries Without Change		
Colombia	5.7	5.6
El Salvador	5.4	5.3
Ecuador	5.3	5.4
Brazil	5.1	5.2
Chile	4.8	4.9
Countries That Shifted to the Left		
Honduras	7.1	6.2
Venezuela	5.9	5.6
Paraguay	5.9	5.2
Argentina	5.7	5.3
Peru	5.6	5.1
Nicaragua	5.3	5.0
Uruguay	5.2	4.7
Bolivia	5.1	4.8

Source: *Latinobarometro* 1996-2006

Latinobarometro 2006, see Table 3). Of the nine nations analyzed in Morales's study, Venezuela, Argentina, Peru, Nicaragua, Uruguay, and Bolivia shifted to the Left, while Ecuador Brazil and Chile did not demonstrate a significant change.

In 2007, the average scores on the *Latinobarometro* Left-Right scale indicate that Brazil, Chile, Peru, Nicaragua, and Uruguay remained virtually unchanged from the previous year, while Argentina and Bolivia shifted to the Right and Ecuador and Venezuela shifted to the Left (*Corporacion Latinobarometro* 2007, see Table 4).

Table 4: *Latinobarometro* Left-Right Scale Latin America Totals 1996-2007

Country	96	97	98	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Dom Rep								5.9	5.8	7.1	6.2
Costa Rica	6.0	6.1	5.5	6.4	6.9	7.4	5.7	5.2	5.6	6.3	6.1
Colombia	5.7	6.2	5.3	5.5	6.4	7.0	6.1	5.6	6.1	5.6	5.8
Honduras	7.1	7.2	7.0	5.6	8.1	7.6	6.6	5.8	6.0	6.2	5.8
Argentina	5.7	5.6	5.9	5.7	5.7	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.7	5.3	5.6
Mexico	4.6	5.3	5.5	5.4	5.8	4.9	5.0	4.8	5.1	5.6	5.3
Venezuela	5.2	5.3	5.6	5.0	5.0	5.1	4.9	4.8	4.5	5.6	5.3
Bolivia	5.1	5.0	4.8	4.6	5.2	5.1	5.1	4.6	4.7	4.8	5.2
El Salvador	5.4	5.3	5.5	5.3	6.4	6.5	5.9	5.9	6.3	5.3	5.2
Panama	4.0	5.5	7.4	5.9	6.1	5.3	5.1	4.1	4.8	4.6	5.2
Brazil	5.1	4.8	5.2	5.0	5.7	5.3	5.5	5.1	5.1	5.2	5.1
Ecuador	5.3	5.4	5.5	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.5	5.2	5.2	5.4	5.1
Nicaragua	5.3	5.5	5.1	4.5	5.4	6.3	5.9	5.3	5.5	5.0	5.1
Paraguay	5.9	5.1	5.2	5.1	5.5	5.7	5.8	5.0	5.4	5.2	5.1
Peru	5.6	5.6	5.5	5.4	5.6	5.4	5.3	4.8	5.1	5.1	5.1
Chile	4.8	4.8	5.0	5.0	5.2	5.1	5.3	4.9	4.8	4.9	4.9
Uruguay	5.2	5.4	5.7	5.2	5.2	5.3	5.0	5.0	4.5	4.7	4.8
Guatemala	4.8	4.2	5.2	5.0	5.8	6.3	6.1	4.9	5.3	5.3	4.6
Latin America	5.3	5.4	5.6	5.3	5.6	5.8	5.5	5.1	5.3	5.4	5.3

Source: *Latinobarometro* 1996-2007

The 2008 *Latinobarometro* report shows that 42% of Latin Americans consider themselves to be centrists, demonstrating a substantial jump from a low of 29% in 2002 (*Corporacion Latinobarometro* 2008). No major shifts to the Left or the Right are detailed in the 2009 *Latinobarometro* report. The 2010 *Latinobarometro* report deserves more detailed attention, as it reflects the most recent data available with respect to the ideological distribution of Latin Americans (*Corporacion Latinobarometro* 2010, see Table 5).

Table 5: *Latinobarometro* 2010 Left-Right Scale (percentages)

Country	Left	Right	Center	None	DNK/No Response
Ecuador	8	10	50	23	9
Bolivia	14	10	49	13	14
Argentina	12	20	46	18	5
Uruguay	30	18	41	3	8
Dominican Republic	18	37	41	1	3
Paraguay	7	25	40	6	21
El Salvador	19	14	40	11	16
Mexico	19	22	39	6	14
Chile	16	16	39	20	9
Peru	11	14	39	17	19
Colombia	8	37	37	6	13
Costa Rica	11	25	35	6	24
Brazil	11	20	35	14	21
Honduras	15	46	34	0	5
Panama	18	20	29	9	25
Venezuela	25	25	28	9	13
Guatemala	17	21	25	5	33
Nicaragua	25	20	20	19	16

Source: *Latinobarometro* 2010

The 2010 *Latinobarometro* report reveals:

- Only Nicaragua has a greater proportion of self-identified Leftists than Centrists (or the Right)
- Only Honduras has more people that identify to the Right than the Center (or the Left)
- Only Colombia has the same percentage of people identifying to the Right as they do to the Center
- The aggregate percentage of those identifying to the Center and Left in Bolivia, Uruguay, El Salvador and Nicaragua is greater than the aggregate percentage of the Center and Right
- Venezuela and Chile have equal aggregate percentages of Center and Left and Center and Right populations
- Twelve of 18 Latin American nations have higher aggregate percentages of Center and Right identifying people than those that are Center and Left.
- When compared to the 2006 *Latinobarometro* report, 17 of the 18 countries surveyed the percentages of people identifying as Leftists decreased (Argentina's percentage remained unchanged). See Table 6.

We can draw several conclusions from this data. First, the data support the claim that Latin Americans are ideologically back in the Center of the

Table 6: Countries Ordered by Percent Identifying Leftist 2006 and 2010

Country	2006	Country	2010
Uruguay	34	Uruguay	30
Nicaragua	32	Venezuela	25
Bolivia	29	Nicaragua	25
Venezuela	28	El Salvador	19
Dominican Republic	28	Mexico	19
Peru	28	Dominican Republic	18
Brazil	28	Panama	18
Panama	27	Guatemala	17
Chile	26	Chile	16
Mexico	23	Honduras	15
Honduras	23	Bolivia	14
Ecuador	23	Argentina	12
Paraguay	21	Costa Rica	11
Guatemala	21	Brazil	11
El Salvador	21	Peru	11
Costa Rica	19	Colombia	8
Colombia	14	Ecuador	8
Argentina	12	Paraguay	7

Source: *Latinobarometro2006; 2010*

political spectrum. If anything, the population as a whole leans more to the Center-Right than it does the Center-Left. Second, the Venezuelan and Chilean people are highly polarized. While a plurality of people from both of these countries identify with the Center, there are just as many people on the Left as on the Right in both cases. Third, the Left seems to be losing ground across the continent. Nearly all of the countries studied have less people identifying themselves as Leftist than did four years ago. This is reflected in recent presidential election results in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, and Paraguay.

What implications do these results have for assessing Morales's equilibrium claims? The analysts that prepared the 2010 *Latinobarometro* report argue that in most countries, the ideology of the electorate does not have much of an effect on the ideologies of their leaders, that the electorate has not changed over time, and that there is not a Leftist wave in Latin America, but rather, that an ideologically heterogeneous people are simply looking for better leaders (*Corporacion Latinobarometro* 2010). Thus, the *Latinobarometro* analysts seem to support Morales's claims of equilibrium, but this assessment is based upon 2010 data that differs from the 2000-2005 data that Morales based his assessments upon. Thus, a close look at the nine nations analyzed by Morales tells a different story when considering the differences between the data in 2005 and 2010.

Recall that in Morales's analysis, between 2001 and 2005 Argentina and Nicaragua did not demonstrate a shift in either direction, while Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela all shifted to the Left. In examining the data between 2006 and 2010, one must first take into consideration that between 11% and 36% of respondents either did not respond to the question on the Left-Right Scale or responded that they did not know where they considered themselves to be, ideologically speaking. Of the people surveyed that did indicate their positions: Bolivia, Uruguay, and Nicaragua have populations that can be considered Center-Left; Ecuador, Argentina, Peru, and Brazil can be considered to lean Center-Right; while Venezuela and Chile have equal percentages of people that lean Center-Right and Center-Left. In other words, two-thirds of the countries that Morales considered to have reached a point of equilibrium in 2005 exhibited ideological shifts five years later. Of the six countries that shifted, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil moved toward the Right, Chile and Venezuela moved to the Center, while only Nicaragua demonstrated movement to the Left. Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay did not demonstrate any ideological shifts: Argentina remained Center-Right, while Bolivia and Uruguay remained Center-Left. Thus, Morales's equilibrium claim is unsupported in most of the countries he analyzed. Between 2005 and 2012, Leftist leaders were elected or reelected in all of these countries, except Chile.

It makes perfect sense that Left-leaning Bolivia, Uruguay, and Nicaragua would elect Leftist presidents. It also makes sense that Hugo Chavez would win reelection in polarized Venezuela, where there are just as many people identifying ideologically to the Left as there are the Right. Chavez's cult of personality and support among the lower-income masses easily put him over the top in 2006 and 2012, and even helped his successor, Nicolas Maduro prevail in 2013. Therefore, a new question arises: How were Leftist leaders elected in Ecuador, Peru, Brazil, and Argentina if their electorates ideologically leaned Center-Right by 2010? In Ecuador and Peru, presidential elections were held in 2006, when an increased share of their electorates was considered to have shifted Left. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa won presidential elections in the immediate aftermath of President Lucio Gutierrez's ouster in 2005. As President of Ecuador, Rafael Correa instituted constitutional changes that allowed him to stand for reelection in 2009 and 2013. It is worth noting, however, that the far Left candidate in the 2006 Peruvian elections, Ollanta Humala, lost to Center-Left Alan Garcia, but came back to win the presidency in 2011. In Brazil and Argentina, both Cristina Fernandez and Dilma Rousseff followed popular outgoing presidents of their same parties, and Fernandez was reelected in 2011. Thus, there is a disconnect between

popular ideology and presidential voting behavior in all four cases that can be explained by the incumbency effect, party affiliation, or pocketbook voting that may not coincide with ideological perspectives.

Conclusion

The historical perspective and analysis of Latin Americans' political ideology expressed in this study demonstrates that the Left has overcome tremendous challenges, yet continues to be an important force in Latin American politics. Over the past fifteen years, fifteen Latin American nations have elected Left or Center-Left presidents. In eight of these countries, presidents and/or their parties have won reelection, while only five of the fifteen electorates that chose Left or Center-Left leaders replaced them with Right or Center Right Candidates. (Two leftist leaders are still in their first terms in office.) How long will this "Pink Tide" last? Brushing aside any internal domestic forces that are certain to arise and shape future presidential contests, the historical perspective and analysis of political ideology detailed in this paper can provide a guide for speculating about the Left's future in Latin America.

If one considers the historical factors that enabled the Left to rise to power in the first place, he or she will find that these conditions have not changed. Rigid neo-liberal policies are still widely discredited, the United States is still more preoccupied with the Middle East and domestic considerations far more than anything happening in Latin American politics, the threat of communism is virtually dead and is even showing signs of withering in Raul Castro's Cuba, the last vestige of the failed ideology in Latin America (Garcia 2010). Most importantly, however, Left and Center-Left leaders have demonstrated their ability to improve many of their nations' economic problems.

According to a 2011 report released by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC),

The early years of this new decade have brought good news for Latin America and the Caribbean. The region weathered the international crisis with unprecedented resilience and emerged from it sooner and more strongly than the developed economies. [Latin America] grew by 6% in 2010, and is expected to grow by over 4% in 2011. The region's economic reforms of past decades, its fiscal and macroeconomic prudence, and its sound financial

supervision, together with ever closer commercial ties with China and other emerging economies, have allowed it to not only successfully navigate through the worst international crisis of the past 80 years but also to enter the new decade with a promising outlook for growth and advances in quality of life. For the first time in its history, the region achieved during the past decade a combination of high growth, macroeconomic stability, poverty reduction and improvement in income distribution (ECLAC 2011).

The actual economic growth in Latin America for 2011 was 4.3%; in 2012 the regional economy grew by 3.0%, and in 2013 it is expected to grow by 3.5% (ECLAC 2013). Latin American trade with China has grown from \$10 Billion in 2000 to \$255.5 Billion in 2012 (Carroll 2010; MercoPress 2013). It would be naive to suggest that the Latin American electorates will not reward their incumbent leaders and/or parties for the dramatic economic improvements that have been accomplished over the past fifteen years. The historical perspective therefore bodes well for a continuation of Leftist dominance in the region. Indeed, in Chile, Michelle Bachelet won a primary election in June 2013, and is favored to regain the presidency in November, which would result in yet another shift from a Center-Right government to one that is Center-Left (“Ex-Leader in Chile Wins Primary in Bid to Return” 2013).

If one considers the analysis of shifts in political ideology, however, the prospects for the Left are more problematic. The 2010 *Latinobarometro* data indicates that only Nicaragua has a plurality of Leftists in their electorate. In the Dominican Republic and Paraguay, the Right far outnumbers the Left. In Argentina, the Right has a comfortable advantage over the Left. In Peru, Guatemala, Mexico and Ecuador, the Right has a slight edge over the Left. As mentioned earlier, the Left and Right are in equal proportions in highly polarized Venezuela and Chile. On the surface, these self-reported ideological positions by the Latin American electorate seem to spell doom for the Left in the coming years. However, in all of these cases except Nicaragua, Centrists hold comfortable, if not dominant advantages over the Left and the Right. Therefore, the Centrists also hold the keys to victory for candidates on either side of the political spectrum. The incumbency effect, along with past and current economic performance will likely prove to be dominant factors in these elections.

In sum, any analysis of the current Left in Latin America is incomplete without both a historical perspective and an analysis of the political ideologies of the electorates throughout the region. While these approaches may not provide all of the explanations for understanding the rise of the Latin American Left they certainly contribute to the formulation of more complete analyses.

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