

Introduction

“Voters are not fools”

V.O. Key (1966)

The aim of this paper is to study the accountability mechanism in Latin American democracies. Studying how citizens evaluate the performance of the government and how they take that into account at the time of voting, the theorists of democracy have obtained sufficient evidence about the incentive that elections create in democratic systems. Due to threat of punishment that periodic elections create, rulers should become more sensitive to citizens demands. As many authors highlighted this is the core assumption of the Theory of Democracy. A great amount of literature has showed that this is true for more established or “advanced” democracies. But is this the case for developing countries?

As Mainwaring (2003:2) noted some years before, accountability has emerged as one of the key issues in the post-transition period of Latin American politics and it is one of the burning issues on the agenda of policy makers and citizens in contemporary Latin American countries. Corruptions, lack of oversight, impunity for state actors, and improper use of public resources continue to be major problems in most countries of the region (Mainwaring 2003:2). The dissatisfaction with the quality of the government elected could damper democratic legitimacy, originating a new round of democratic erosion and breakdowns.

From the beginning of the third wave of democracy, Latin American countries have experienced over a quarter century of democratization. By the early 1990s virtually the whole continent had adopted some form of democratic regime, but although there are free and fair elections in almost all countries in the region, some data showed democratic backslides in some Latin American countries. Following the last report of The Electoral Integrity Project (The year in elections 2017), Honduras deteriorated sharply in electoral integrity between the presidential elections in 2012 and 2017, from 45 to 29 in a 100 point score, where the main fall was in the vote count stage that plummeted from 70 to 13 during the controversial re-election of the incumbent Juan Orlando Hernandez. Ecuador, Mexico and Venezuela also suffer from deterioration in the electoral integrity measures. The institutional crises of Brazil and Venezuela also denote that Latin American democracies are of concern.

The trend towards democracy was not a bed of roses in Latin America. The

democratic transitions took place in a scenario of multiple challenges: the regime transition (O'Donnell 1993; Linz and Stepan 1996) implies several state reforms (Cavarozzi 1996; Garretón *et al* 2004, Cavarozzi 2004) that took place in the emergency of an economic crisis without precedent. This adverse context implied several dilemmas for democratic consolidation (Karl, 1990). Because of the remaining economic instability and the weakness of political institutions, there was an increasing concern that the mechanism of vote as control did not work in Latin-American countries. There has been an agreement between scholars that because of the weakness of Latin American democracies voters were not rational (Hagopian 1993; Levitsky 1998; Minujin and Kessler 1993; Mora y Araujo 1995; Remmer 1993).

In recent years, some studies challenged this initial view. Lewis-Beck and Ratto (2013), using evidence from public opinion surveys from 1996 to 2004, find that “The Latin American voter appears to see the economy, to evaluate its performance, and act accordingly, praising or blaming the government as appropriate”. The leaders of these regions, rich or poor, cannot escape punishment for a bad economy, and can no more escape punishment for bad economic governance. In the same sense, using a comprehensive aggregate dataset (18 countries of Latin America and 79 elections, 1982-2010), Singer (2013) finds that incumbents who reside over weak economies lose support in all three decades included in his analyses. However, he concludes “this analysis provides further evidence that the economy’s impact is context contingent.” (Singer, 2013, p.181). Further, in an article with Carlin, drawing on data from 212 public opinion surveys conducted in 18 countries by Latinobarometer from 1995 to 2009, they found that Latin American voters are more willing to assign blame for the economy where contextual factors clarify who is responsible for performance (Singer and Carlin 2013: 740). Furthermore, Nadeau *et al* (2015) applying a richly specified model of voting behavior to LAPOP data (2008 to 2012), highlighted “governments in the low-income democracies of the world cannot escape punishment for bad economic policy.” (Nadeau *et al* 2015:481). Following these authors, the question of accountability in Latin America has value for normative as well as scientific reasons.. If, in low-income democracies such as these, government escapes sanction for the economic downturn, then prospects for serious improvement of everyday living conditions are dim. But, if government receives punishment at the ballot box for bad economic performance, then it has an incentive to improve the material well being of the citizenry.

These recent studies address the question if the accountability mechanism works in Latin America as in more advanced democracies. The answer is yes. Accountability works in the low-income democracies of Latin America pretty much the same as it does in the high-income democracies elsewhere. However, the results show lower effects of economic evaluation in voting choice, that is to say the accountability mechanism is weaker in those younger democracies. This reduction in the effect of economic voting was usually attributed to contextual influence. The economic and political contexts where public policies are made are the filter for the perception regarding government responsibility (Palmer and Whitten, 2002, p. 67). Although we have a great amount of literature that explains how accountability works in more advanced democracies, little is known about younger democracies in developing countries. What was overlooked until now is how the accountability mechanism works in a context of high political and economic instability, with lower degrees of electoral integrity in almost all dimensions of the electoral cycle.

This paper is an attempt to contribute to filling in this gap. Its main purpose is to study how electoral integrity dimensions could affect the clarity in the attribution of government's responsibility for economic outcomes. The type of electoral laws and party registration, the kind of media coverage or campaign financing could facilitate a better understanding of government responsibilities. Consequently, citizens could punish or reward candidates with their vote more efficiently.

The results could support two kinds of contributions. At the empirical level, herein I examine whether contemporary Latin American governments are generally held responsible for national economic performance, and rewarded or punished accordingly by individual citizens at the ballot box. Regarding theoretical contributions, the results would help achieve a better understanding of how the degree of democratic consolidation, measured by the electoral integrity dimensions, could facilitate or hamper the punishment-reward mechanism. The outcomes also would contribute to the understanding of how one dimension of the accountability mechanism in Latin America works, advancing our theoretical understanding of the conditions under which accountability is possible in developing countries. Furthermore, this would provide substantial evidence about the link between electoral integrity and the accountability mechanism.

The paper unfolds as follows. It begins by laying out the theoretical dimensions of the research and reviewing previous studies to address how this framework was applied

in order to understand Latin-American countries. In section 2 the research design is described. Variables, hypotheses and how results support different theories are specified at this stage. The results and discussion were presented in the third part of this paper.

Theoretical framework and previous studies

Three key concepts are used in this paper, economic voting, clarity of responsibility and electoral integrity. Here I present the main implications of each conceptual development and how this was applied to explain Latin America.

I will focus here on the study of the economic vote within the rationalist explanation of voting behavior. From this point of view, the voter is considered a rational actor that acts taking into account the costs and benefits that each candidate can offer (V. O. Key 1966:8). The basis of this theory is the vote as a punishment and reward mechanism: “Governments are “accountable” if citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments and can sanction them appropriately, retaining in office those incumbents who perform well and ousting from office those who do not” (Manin, Przeworski, and Stokes, 1999, p. 10). From this approach I selected the softer version known as “limited rationality” (Simon, 1955; Lupia, McCubbins and Popkin, 2000). This version assumes actors are limited cognitively and by the context. As a consequence of those limitations their rationality is reduced. In face of those limitations actors develop heuristics mechanisms that allow them to make rational decisions with less information (Simon, 1955).

In this study the heuristic mechanism known as Economic Vote (EV) was analyzed. “Economic voting is an individual level phenomenon that is reflected in the relationship between a person’s perception of the economy and the probability with which he/she votes for each of the available parties or candidates in an election” (Duch y Stevenson, 2006). This approach presupposes that voters are rational and they choose their electoral preferences as a result of evaluating the economic performance of the government. The core assumption of EV studies is that “The government support will be reduced as a consequence of bad economic times and reinforced by good economic times” (van der Brug, van der Erij, and Franklin, 2007, p. 54). The great majority of scholars agree with this assumption (Fiorina, 1981; Butler and Stokes, 1969; Lewis-Beck, 1988; Duch and Stevenson, 2006). One of the virtues of the economic vote approach is that it deals directly with accountability –one of the principal mechanisms

of representative democracies. This perspective states that citizens punish and reward incumbents via the exercise of the vote (Maravall, 2003).

Despite the great coherence of the theoretical argument of EV, the empirical results are rather controversial. One of the important contributions of EV suggests that economic factors have a strong influence on vote in some countries and years but are unstable and meaningless in other countries and periods (Paldam, 1991, p. 26). This instability of results sometimes has been attributed to the influence of the context (van der Eijk; van der Brug; Kroh and Franklin, 2006, p. 444). The ideal of democratic accountability requires that voters recognize the important political outcomes and assign responsibility for those results appropriately. In holding the government accountable for economic outcomes, the institutional design might affect the clarity in assigning responsibilities (Palmer and Whitten, 2002, p. 67). If citizens do not distinguish who is responsible for economic outcomes, then they might reward “bad” politicians and punish “good” politicians, thus weakening the accountability mechanism.

Some years ago, an important amount of literature started to discuss the impact of institutional context on the relationship between economic perceptions and the vote. The Powell and Whitten (1993) seminal article was the reference for this approach. These authors created the concept of “clarity of responsibility” following the idea that political factors shape the electoral consequences of economic performance. They classified the political systems in which the attribution of responsibility to the government for economic outcomes was clear and easy and where the opposite was true. Lack of clarity is a consequence of multiparty systems, bicameral opposition; or scenarios with veto players. The main assumption of their work is that the greater the “clarity of responsibility” that the institutional design allows, the stronger the effect of economic perception on the vote (Powell and Whitten, 1993, p. 410).

Several studies adopted this approach in order to evaluate the contextual influence that would shape the relationship between economic evaluations and the vote. Authors as Anderson, 2000; Nadeau *et al* 2002; and van der Eijk *et al* 2001 suggested going in deeper including dynamic factors such as party competition and the distribution of power between contenders. Rudolph (2003) and Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2001) applied the framework used for parliamentary systems re-adapting the contents to the American presidential system. Lewis-Beck and Nadeau (2001) stated that the divided government did not affect the EV while the most important influence that these authors recognized was the presidential re-election. Samuel (2004) also shows that voters attribute

relatively more responsibility for the economy to the executive than to the legislative elections. Furthermore, Samuels and Hellwig (2007) explored how electoral accountability works under different democratic regimes. One of their hypothesis is that attribution and clarity of responsibility function differently under presidentialism. They test whether clarity of responsibility has greater impact as voters attribute less responsibility to incumbents. They also test the assumption that nonconcurring elections permit candidates to diffuse voter's propensity to use elections as an instrument to judge the incumbent party's performance. They concluded that the degree to which voters attribute policy responsibility to incumbents in different branches of government also conditions their reactions to policy performance. They showed that different democratic constitutional formats are associated to different patterns of electoral accountability (Samuels and Hellwig 2007:19).

The effect of globalization was also studied following the *clarity of responsibility* approach. Samuel and Hellwig (2007:298) found strong support for the claim that globalization attenuates accountability linkages between voters and elected officials. Voters residing in more closed economies are likely to sanction national leaders for the past performance outcomes, but voters in open economies are relatively less likely to attribute reward or blame to domestic politicians for economic performance. The same result was obtained previously with individual level data (Hellwig 2001). This work also showed that sophisticated voters are more attentive to global economic constrains. Not all segments of society are equally susceptible to the global economy's mediating influences (Hellwig 2001:1160). Finally, in a very recent work Valdini and Lewis-Beck (2018:1) carried out an analysis of presidential elections in 18 Latin American countries, which offered evidence that the usual Eurocentric conceptualization of the clarity of responsibility is not ideal for understanding the economic vote in Latin America. They found statistically significant interaction effects occurring for: concurrent elections, term limits, regional power, and quality of democratization (Valdini and Lewis-Beck, 2018:10). For instance, regarding quality of democratization they found that more media restriction means less incumbent support. However, increases in economic growth help offset this vote loss. Their findings show that the magnitude of the economic vote depends on the institutional arrangements of the electoral systems in the region, although the rules that have sway are mostly different from those in democracies of Europe. That means that the clarity of responsibility must be measured in ways appropriate to Latin American political

systems (Valdini and Lewis-Beck, 2018:12).

Most of these studies (except Valdini and Lewis-Beck 2018 who used main effects and interactions) used models of voting behavior to measure the impact of economic evaluation on vote and compared the results across different institutional contexts, splitting the samples regarding contextual variables, mostly with aggregate data. For instance Samuels and Hellwig (2004) established a baseline model and then they compared the coefficients of economic voting of this first model and those obtained in samples with coalitions and with no coalitions; with majority and minority governments, concurrent and non-concurrent elections, and unified and cohabitation governments. This methodological strategy implies two weaknesses. First, the sample changes with each model estimated raising some questions about the validity of its conclusions. Is it a real effect of majority governments or is it contingent to the countries they include in this sub-sample? Second, most of these studies used aggregated level data. Considering voting decisions are taken by individual citizens, questions about how contextual variables shape citizens reactions to the managements of the economy should ultimately be answered via microanalysis of national survey data. However to apply this strategy to individual level data nested per country, implies the possibility of violation of the assumption of independence of residuals and observations. Performing a multi-level regression analysis allows to reduce this risk and to recognize correlated structures of residuals. Herein I conducted a multilevel regression model¹ (ML) known as the Generalized Hierarchical Linear Model (GHLM) for two levels (individuals nested in countries). This kind of approach presents some advantages respective to the single-level multivariate framework, because it gave better-calibrated uncertainty estimates of individual parameters (Snijders and Bosker, 1999:38). At the same time, this approach explains the contextual influence via microanalysis of national survey data.

Despite the great contributions of these works, little is known about how different degrees of democratic consolidation could affect the attribution of responsibility to the government. The assumption that voters are rational actors that calculate the cost and benefits that each candidate can offer is the foundation of the

¹ The use of a multi-level analysis is supported by three main arguments. The first one refers to the considerable variation across country of my dependent variable, voting intention. The second one concerns the hierarchical structure of the data. The last argument is theoretical. Applying this analysis allows me to control the impact of contextual variables that my hypothesis proposed.

study of accountability. The more stable, free and fair democracy is, the easier it is for citizens to make this kind of evaluation, and to hold the government accountable. On the contrary, in democracies where there still remains some degree of arbitrariness in the electoral laws, procedures and political competition, to make this type of evaluation would be a more difficult task. As a consequence it is possible to expect that in less established democracies to hold the government accountable becomes more confusing and less clear than in advanced democracies. Until now, no research was focused on this aspect of the accountability mechanism. This paper is an attempt to fill in this gap.

The problems of democratic elections involve a ‘menu of manipulation’, which ranges sequentially from restrictions on the range of electoral offices through the formation and expression of preferences to the consequences of voting choice. Breaking any single link in the chain can undermine the legitimacy of elections (Schendler 2002, and Norris 2013) and could affect the process of attribution of responsibilities to the government for economic outcomes. During the last decade, the sub-field of research analyzing issues of electoral integrity and malpractices has emerged with the promise to enrich and transform the conventional study of electoral systems, campaigns, and voting behavior. This process is generating an important and innovative research agenda with the potential to upend many taken for granted assumptions rooted in the traditional micro-level study of voting behavior and the macro-level study of electoral systems (Norris 2013). The great benefit of electoral integrity approach is that it measures all the steps included in the electoral cycle, providing strong evidence about different dimensions of democratic consolidation and democratic functioning. The main goal of this paper includes studying the influence of the electoral integrity dimensions on accountability in the more fragile democracies and less advanced economies of Latin America. The results could support two kinds of contributions. At the empirical level, systematic evidence will be generated in relation to an area virtually unexplored until now. Regarding to theoretical contributions, the results would help achieve a better understanding of how electoral integrity could facilitate or hamper the accountability mechanism.

Literature review

The field of economic voting has been studied by several researchers, but focused mainly on advanced democracies. However, little is known, especially comparatively, about economic voting in low-income democracies, such as those of Latin America. As

Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier (2008, p. 307) wrote: “While Latin America has been home to more economic voting studies than most of the other regions of the developing world, the number is not large”. Most of the research was focused on single-country studies (i.e. Peru, Mexico and Argentina²). While almost all of these studies find economic effects in the expected direction – government support increases (decreases) with good (bad) economic performance – they explore different dependent political measures (e.g., vote versus popularity) and different independent economic measures (e.g., subjective versus objective). Fortunately, there are a few relevant cross-national studies, looking at subsets of Latin American nations (Benton, 2005; Echegaray, 2005; Gélinau, 2007; Johnson and Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Remmer, 1991, Singer 2013). The pooled results provide encouraging evidence for the economic voter hypothesis (Key, 1966; Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck, 1988).

Nevertheless, most of that work used aggregated data. Since, after all, voting decisions are taken by individual citizens, it seems that questions regarding the “if, how, and when” of the economic vote should ultimately be answered via the micro-analysis of national survey data. However, such survey investigations for the region are scarce, especially those of a pooled design, cross-national and across-time (and paralleling the above aggregate studies). As was mentioned in the previous section of this work, few recent articles carry out such an exercise. Lewis-Beck and Ratto (2013:483) examining a pool of national surveys of Latinobarometer from 12 Latin American democracies (from 1996 to 2004), found a highly significant, even strong, sociotropic retrospective economic effect on the incumbent vote. In addition, using a comprehensive dataset from 212 public opinion surveys conducted in 18 countries by Latinobarometer from 1995 to 2009, Singer and Carlin (2013:740) showed that the economic voting theory appears to “work” in Latin America. Like their counterparts elsewhere, Latin American voters are more willing to assign blame for the economy where contextual factors clarify who is responsible for performance. Finally, Nadeau *et al* (2015:480), draw on data from Latin America Public Opinions Project (LAPOP) of thirteen countries of Latin America (2008-2010), showing that sociotropic retrospective economic evaluations have a statistically and substantively significant impact on vote choice in the democracies of this region. Although these works

² For some recent country studies of economic voting see: Argentina (Remmer and Gélinau, 2003); Brazil and Chile (Renno and Gramacho, 2010); Mexico (Moreno, 2009); Nicaragua (Anderson, Lewis-Beck, and Stegmaier, 2003); Peru (Arce and Carrion, 2010); Venezuela (Weyland, 2003; Nadeau et al., 2013).

provide a good ground for economic voting research in Latin America and provided evidence that accountability works in this region, they do not inform directly how the particular institutional attributes of the countries in this region could affect the attribution of responsibility to the government for economic outcomes.

Regarding this last point of how contextual variables influence the process of responsibility attribution to the government for economic outcomes in Latin America, some progress can be mentioned in the research agenda using individual level data. Gélineau (2007) replicated the Lewis- Beck and Nadeau (2001) analyses for Latin American countries. This study used individual level data of public opinion surveys of Argentina (1989/94/99), Brazil (1989/94/98), and Venezuela (1983/88/93/98/2000). As Gélineau (2007, p. 415) highlighted: “The centralized nature of the presidential regimes and the relatively low level of institutionalization of the party systems of the region may obscure the attribution of economic responsibility, especially when the incumbent president is not running for reelection”. Ratto (2014) also showed that some institutional features such as president re-elections have a huge impact in Latin American countries and it seems to condition the relationship between the economic perception and the vote. She used public opinion data from the Latinobarometer for 1996/2000/2004.

Another remarkable work is Alcañiz and Hellwig (2010). They draw on individual level data from the Latinobarometer public opinion survey conducted in 2002 and 2003, they studied how the international economic structures can affect the process of responsibility attribution in Latin American countries that have a great dependency on world economy. Their evidence showed that citizens often blame policy outcomes on international and private-sector actors, ties to the world market and the International Monetary Fund, especially foreign debt, shift responsibility towards international actors and tend to exonerate national politicians. Nevertheless, they found that these blame-avoidance strategies also have a downside for office-seeking politicians. Attributing responsibility to non-governmental actors makes it more difficult to claim credit when things go well (Alcañiz and Hellwig, 2010:410). Finally, Singer and Carlin (2013) using evidence from 18 Latin American countries (1995-2009) suggest that the context in which voters are embedded not only affects the degree of economic voting but also its very nature. They measured how the impact of trade, volatility and effective number of parties affect the process of responsibility attributions. Their results suggested that Latin Americans respond to the economic climate when deciding how to prioritize the economy and recognize the constraints leaders face in determining economic policy

outcomes. Those also showed that when trade openness and legislative fragmentation are high and economic volatility is low, a significant link between economic perceptions and the incumbent support remains firm (Singer and Carlin, 2013:737).

As the reader can note, even though those studies provided substantial evidence of how the accountability mechanism works in Latin American countries, their conclusions are temporarily fragmented and diverse regarding the explanatory variables they used. None of these focused on recent trends of Latin American democracies. This paper gathers these previous results but goes further to understand how different dimensions of electoral integrity could damper or blame politicians at the time of voting. The contributions of this paper are substantial in at least three major aspects. First, it is the more recent and comprehensive study of accountability in Latin American countries until now. Second, this work includes collected hypotheses of the most relevant previous studies, integrating aggregate and individual level data evidence that until now remains disperse. Furthermore, this study systematized all knowledge existing until now about how the accountability mechanism works in this region. Third, it incorporates a new branch of variables regarding the level of democratic consolidations measured by electoral integrity dimensions.

This is relevant because studies of electoral behavior –particularly those that attempt to evaluate the impact of the contextual effects- are focused on the study of advanced democracies. In these cases, fewer variations can be expected in independent variables such as the economy; party systems; electoral systems and the eleven dimensions of electoral integrity at a contextual level. Therefore, the systematic knowledge we have, stems from contexts of economic and institutional stability. Latin America thus becomes an ideal setting because more variations can be expected. For instance, regarding Latin American countries' performance of the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Survey (PEI 5.0) (Norris and Grömping 2017), it is possible to find countries with very high scores like Costa Rica (81) and Uruguay (75), countries with high scores like Brazil (68), Chile (66) and Argentina (64), countries with moderate scores like Colombia (59), Mexico (57) and El Salvador (54), and countries with low and very low scores like Venezuela (45) and Nicaragua (36). In this sense, the region offers more variability in the electoral integrity dimensions and allows me to draw robust conclusions about the influence they have on determining electoral behavior. Regarding electoral integrity, although the region has been holding competitive elections in the last years, some dimensions of electoral integrity remain problematic: campaign finances,

media coverage, electoral laws and boundaries (Martínez I Coma; Norris y Frank, 2015). Finally, from a broader perspective, this paper also has real world implications. Since accountability is a key element for assessing the health of democratic practices, my conclusions will contribute to the understanding of this important issue regarding the quality of democracy (Diamond and Morlino 2004; O'Donnell 1992 and 1993).

Hypotheses and concepts

The main argument of this paper is that electoral integrity affects the clarity of responsibility attributions to the government for economic outcomes. This becomes especially relevant in younger democracies because although there are free and fair elections in those countries, there still remain severe problems of institutionalization. A great amount of papers were written about the weakness of political institutions in Latin America. Nevertheless, we still do not know how that could affect electoral accountability. The intuition that guides this paper is that this lower level of institutionalization allows more opportunities to induce manipulations that could compromise accountability and threaten democracy.

The paper starts testing the main assumption of economic voting. Once a general model of voting is obtained, the next step is to test whether electoral integrity shapes the clarity of responsibility in Latin American countries. The last step is to go further addressing which mechanisms of the electoral integrity could affect the process of accountability attribution. In order to do this, I developed the notion of “arbitrariness”. Arbitrariness is the mechanism through which undemocratic behaviors affect the clarity of responsibility attribution and put accountability at risk. Those behaviors are undemocratic because they induce manipulations that can bias citizens' judgements regarding government performance. These manipulations would affect the information that citizens receive and induce wrong judgements about the performance of the government. Consequently, citizens could reward bad politicians and punish good ones weakening the rational evaluations and electoral accountability. In this way, the arbitrariness makes the attribution of responsibilities less clear. Therefore, more arbitrariness is always equal to less clarity of responsibility. The argument proceeds as follows:

If the perception of the economic situation was used to decide the vote for a candidate, the data should show:

H1. *The better the perception of the economic situation the higher the probability to vote for the incumbent, rewarding the government party for good economic outcomes.*

If these results prove to be true, this would generate contributions to reinforce the economic voting general theory (Lewis-Beck, 1988; Nannestad, P., Paldam, M., 1994; Fiorina, 1981; Butler and Stokes, 1969; Duch and Stevenson, 2006; van der Brug, van der Eriij, and Franklin, 2007, to mention some works). Also previous studies on the Latin American economic vote will reinforce (Lewis-Beck and Ratto 2013; Singer and Carlin, 2013; Nadeau et al 2015).

The second step is to test the hypothesis of clarity of responsibility attribution to the government for economic outcomes.

H2. *The influence of economic voting was strongest where the electoral integrity dimensions allowed citizens more clarity in the attribution of responsibility to the government for the economic outcomes.*

The concept of ‘electoral integrity’ refers to international standards and global norms governing the appropriate management of elections. This concept is measured by the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity, that is a comprehensive dataset built from the Electoral Integrity Project³. The concept of Electoral Integrity was measured using a rolling survey completed by experts in each country one month after polls closed. They covered 3,253 experts across 285 elections in 164 countries around the world and Latin American countries are included. Experts are asked to assess the quality of national elections on eleven sub-dimensions: electoral laws; electoral procedures; boundaries; voter registration; party registration; media coverage of campaign; campaign finance; voting process; vote count; results; electoral authorities. These add up to an overall Electoral Integrity scored from 0 to 100. Taking this measure, H2 rests on the idea that if elections were conducted in accordance with the law and if the electoral authorities were impartial, then citizens would have more incentives to hold the government accountable and could do that in a more efficient way. On the contrary, if the electoral laws were unfair with smaller parties, favored the governing party or restricted citizens’ rights, then the scenario would become more confusing and with less incentives to assign responsibilities to the government for economic outcomes efficiently. In this sense, it is expected that the effect of economic voting would be stronger in countries

³ This is available at: www.electoralintegrity.com

with a higher level of electoral integrity: the greater the clarity of responsibility attribution to the incumbent due to electoral integrity, the more likely are citizens to assign responsibility for economic outcomes to the incumbents. A significant and positive interaction coefficient is expected. In this sense, the higher the score in the PEI Index, the stronger the economic evaluations coefficients and the higher the clarity in the attribution of responsibility to the government.

The next step is to test “arbitrariness”. Although breaking any dimension of electoral integrity can undermine the legitimacy of elections, not all of that would induce manipulations that could affect the strength of the electoral accountability. Some appear to be more dangerous to democracy allowing undemocratic behaviors that make it more difficult to hold the government accountable. That is to say some dimensions make arbitrariness more feasible. In order to specify the ways that arbitrariness would work, four dimensions received particular attention here: electoral laws, party registration, media coverage and campaign financing. These dimensions are central to democracy. Electoral laws leads us to free and fair elections required by any democracy. Any manipulation of this dimension implies severe risks to democracy. For elections to be democratic they also have to be competitive and they must compete, this is the central key of pluralism that any democracy pursues. For this reason party registration, becomes yet another important mechanism in order to evaluate the arbitrariness of a democracy. Freedom of speech is another central feature of democracy. Generally, this dimension was measured as the level of censorship that a government imposes on the press. However, nowadays the media is a central actor of campaigns, and media is not neutral. For this reason, the media coverage measure that Electoral Integrity Project provides, becomes a more specific indicator not only of the level of censorship of a government but also of the level of bias that media coverage could have of any political actor. The last mechanism of arbitrariness analyzed here, is campaign financing. Today one of most controversial issues of Latin America democracies is the money behind politics. Several scandals touch presidents and ministries of numerous Latin American governments. For this reason, it is essential to include this dimension in order to study the ways of arbitrariness in campaign financing. All together those four dimensions seem to be a good measure of corruption, opening a new approach to analyze a phenomena both actual and important to Latin American democracies. The following sub-hypothesis will be tested:

H2.a *When electoral laws are unfair with smaller parties, favoring the governing party without warranting citizens' rights, there is a higher level of arbitrariness and the effect of economic evaluation on the vote is weaker.*

Electoral laws are measured by the electoral integrity project as an index that includes the following indicators: electoral laws were unfair to smaller parties; electoral laws favored the governing party or parties; election laws restricted citizens' rights. The assumption behind this hypothesis is that unfair laws that favor the incumbent party and restrict citizen's rights, would bias citizen's judgments and make it more difficult for citizens to assign responsibilities for economic outcomes to the government efficiently, compromising accountability. A significant and positive interaction coefficient is expected.

H2.b *The more unfair and less clear is the party registration, the higher the arbitrariness and the weaker the effect of economic evaluations on the vote.*

The assumption here is that the more arbitrary and restricted that the competition becomes, the more confusing it would be to hold the government accountable and the more compromised that accountability becomes. Several works studied how the level of party fragmentation would obscure the scenario to hold the government accountable (Anderson, 2000; Nadeau *et al* 2002; and van der Eijket *al* 2001). The measure regularly used was the effective number of parties. This captures the influence of party systems as an effect of the competition supply. In contrast, using the dimension of party registration that PEI provides (some opposition candidates were prevented from running; women had equal opportunities to run for office; ethnic and national minorities had equal opportunities to run for office; only top party leaders selected candidates; some parties/candidates were restricted from holding campaign rallies) allowed me to measure a different aspect more related to this research. Under the dimension of party registration, PEI provided a better measure of possible manipulations and interferences that would increase the arbitrariness and make the competition less clear, therefore it becomes less likely for citizens to hold the government accountable. A significant and positive interaction coefficient is expected here.

H2.c *The more unfair the media coverage of elections, the higher the arbitrariness and the weaker the effect of economic evaluations on the vote.*

Sub-hypothesis H2.d gathered the contribution of Valdini and Lewis Beck (2018). They included in their analysis some dimension of quality of democracy: the degree of media censorship by the state. “The potential effect of media censorship on the clarity of responsibility is clear: If states are restricting access to information, then economic accountability is compromised.” (Valdini and Lewis-Beck 2018:8). In order to test this assumption, they used the freedom of the press measure constructed by Freedom House. While quality of democracy is one important dimension for this paper, the way that Freedom House measured it, only refers to the general possibility of state censorship media. But it does not include measures of media bias. For instance, if TV news favored the governing party and journalists did not provide fair coverage of elections, then the citizens’ evaluations of the economy would result biased thus increasing the arbitrariness. The Perceptions on Electoral Integrity datasets (PEI 6.0) cover comprehensive dimensions of media coverage during the campaigns and elections. This allowed me to explore the links between media coverage and clarity of responsibility in a more direct way. In this sense, the PEI survey included 5 indicators that are: newspapers provided balanced elections news; TV news favor the governing party; parties/candidate had fair access to political broadcast and advertising; journalists provided fair coverage of the elections; social media were used to expose electoral fraud. Here, I will use the general ranking of media coverage that is a 0-100 scale point that adds all 5 dimensions, as an interaction term but I will also explore the influence of each of these 5 scores. The expectation is to have a significant and positive interaction coefficient (more fair was the media coverage, less arbitrariness and more clarity of responsibility).

H3.d *The more improperly that state resources were used for campaigning, the higher the arbitrariness and the weaker the effect of economic evaluations on the vote.*

PEI sub-index of campaign finance was constructed based on the experts’ answer in the following 5 indicators: parties/candidates had equitable access to public subsidies; parties/candidates had equitable access to political donations; parties/candidates publish transparent financial accounts; wealthy people buy elections; some state resources were improperly used for campaigning. All together this becomes a strong measure of corruption, an aspect that today is a central issue in Latin American politics. Any of these indicators could affect the clarity of responsibility attributions, for instance if some state resources were improperly used for a political campaign, then it

would be expected that the patterns of voting were more influenced by clientelism rather than by rational incentives. In this sense, a lower electoral accountability is expected (significant and positive interaction coefficient).

Data and measures

This paper explored to what extent electoral integrity influences heuristics used by voters at the polls. In order to achieve this objective I adopted an area study from 18 countries of Latin America with a comparative design. I used statistical techniques selected according to my dependent variable (cross-tabs; correlation; logistic regression and GHML regression). Individual and contextual variables were articulated within a design of a multilevel analysis, starting with hierarchical data per country. This particular design will lead to reliable conclusions about the way in which electoral integrity influences the logic behind the model of voting. Given that the analysis proposed here included 18 democracies, I had enough variation at a contextual level to test the hypothesis of how different levels of electoral integrity affect the economic vote, and to assess by which mechanisms arbitrariness would affect the clarity of responsibility attribution. For the individual-level I employed the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) datasets from Varderbilt University, that covers a total of 18 countries in Latin America in 2012, 2014 and 2016/17⁴. It consists of a series of surveys conducted every two years, covering various democratic values and behavior. The LAPOP questionnaire includes the usual barrage of questions on the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, their ideological orientation, their opinion on various issues, and their evaluation of institutions, as well as who they “would vote for if a presidential election were held tomorrow.”

For contextual variables, I used the Global Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Survey (PEI-6.0)⁵, from the Electoral Integrity Project. To operationalize this notion, the PEI asks experts to evaluate elections using 49 indicators, grouped into eleven categories reflecting the whole electoral cycle. The dataset also includes a summary 100-point PEI Index based on summing all 49 indicators. The PEI index provides one way to summarize the overall integrity of the election. Alternatively, it is possible to examine indices for each of the eleven dimensions, or use the disaggregated scores for each of the 49 individual indicators. The PEI dataset is designed to provide a

⁴ Additional information on the data can be found at www.LapopSurveys.org.

⁵ All electronic data can be downloaded from <http://thedata.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/PEI>.

comprehensive, systematic and reliable way to monitor the quality of elections worldwide. This cumulative dataset is drawn from a survey of 3253 expert assessment of electoral integrity across 285 elections in 164 countries around the world. It covers national presidential and legislative elections and parliamentary elections from July 1, 2012 to December 31, 2017. From this, I selected a sub-sample of all Latin American countries covered. That is a total of 18 countries and 28 elections. The countries and years included are: Argentina (2013/2015/2017); Bolivia (2014); Brazil (2014); Colombia (03/2014;06/2014); Costa Rica (2014); Chile (2013/2017); Ecuador (2013/2017); El Salvador (2014/2015); Guatemala (2015); Honduras (2013/2017); Mexico (2012/2015); Nicaragua (2016); Panama (2014); Paraguay (2013); Peru (2016); Uruguay (2014); Venezuela (2012/2013/2015); Dominican Republic (2016).

The temporal orientation of the sample deserves attention. Because the main assumption here is that electoral integrity (that occurs in time 1) shapes voting preferences (that are chosen in time 2), the sample included the data of the election for each country that took place previous to the survey⁶.

I study here one of the most salient features of electoral behavior that is the voting preferences (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes, 1999), and my dependent variable is vote choice. The questionnaire registered the question of voting intention⁷; this item was recodified and this takes the value of one (1) when the voting preference is for the incumbent and the value zero (0) for all other different voting choices. The vote intention question is hypothetical, in the absence of opposition candidates declaring their candidacy for the next election. But the wording is nonetheless explicit, inviting the respondent to express the intention to vote for an incumbent party candidate or for a candidate from another party.

In order to explain the vote I collected the main contributions to political behavior. In this regard, voting is understood as the heuristic that can be explained by a set of long-term and short-term forces, operating through a “funnel of causality.” (Campbell et al., 1960, chp.2; Lewis-Beck et al., 2008, chp. 2). Between the long-term

⁶ Except in the case of Argentina 2012 and 2014, where those surveys were linked to elections in 2013 and 2015, in order to maintain the three elections. Also the cases of Ecuador and Honduras 2017 that were the only election data available from these countries.

⁷ The question wording is: If the next presidential elections were being held this week, what would you do? (1) Wouldn't vote (2) Would vote for a candidate from the incumbent party; (3) Would vote for a candidate from the opposition; (4) Would go to vote but would leave the ballot blank. Missing values, don't know answers, and option (1) were coded as missing values.

forces are socio-demographics and partisan identification. The short-term forces include issues. The state of economy is the issue of foremost concern there. Between economic evaluations there are retrospective (V.O. Key, 1966; Fiorina, 1981, p. 196) and prospective evaluations (Fearon, 1999), and there are also sociotropic (Kinder y Kiewiet, 1981, p. 132) and pocketbook evaluations (Bloom and Price, 1975; Kramer, 1971). I selected the sociotropic retrospective economic evaluations for two reasons. First, because this is the best way of testing electoral accountability. That is to say, the notion that government economic misrule can be punished by the electorate of Latin American countries. Second, because it can be compared to other previous cross-national micro-studies. The relevant question asked is the following: “Do you think that the country’s economic situation is better than, the same, or worse than it was twelve months ago?” (The variable takes the value of 1 when respondents perceive the economy is “better” than twelve months ago, 0.5 when “same”, and 0 when it is perceived as “worse”). A positive value of the coefficients was expected.

Previous studies related to voting models marked the importance of sociological and psychological variables in selecting the vote. For this reason, to assess accurately the impact of the economic vote, it was necessary to control other forces acting on the voters. In order to include some proxies of voting class I introduced education level⁸ and income⁹. I also included the following socio-demographic variables: sex¹⁰; age; religion¹¹, ethnic¹² and urban¹³. In addition, from the psychological approach I included the ideological self-placement in the left-right scale¹⁴ and party identification¹⁵. In some contexts and years, some issues become significant predictors of voting. I included two issues related to the mechanisms of arbitrariness that I am testing here. Those are

⁸ Number of years of schooling, coded (0) from none to 5 years; (0.2) from 6 to 7 years; (0.4) from 8 to 11 years; (0.6) from 11 to 12 years; (0.8) from 13 to 17 years; and (1) from 18 years and above.

⁹ Respondent’s income divided in quintiles from lowest income (0) to highest income (1), scaled from 0 to 1.

¹⁰ Value 0: men; value 1: women.

¹¹ Coded (1) for Catholic respondents attending religious services at least once a month; (.67) for Catholic respondents attending religious services less than once a month; (.33) for respondents with other religious beliefs; and (0) for respondents with no religious beliefs.

¹² It is a dummy variable that distinguished with the value 1 those people of ethnic minorities.

¹³ It is a dummy variable that distinguished with the value 1 those people living in urban areas and with 0 rural areas.

¹⁴ Respondents’ self-placement of a 10-point left-to-right scale, rescaled between 0 (left) and 1 (right).

¹⁵ Coded (1) when respondents identify with the incumbent’s party or a party of the ruling coalition, coded (0) when respondents identify with a party in the opposition and coded (0.5) when respondents do not identify with a political party or observations are missing.

corruption¹⁶ and trust in media¹⁷. I also included a set of dummy variables as contextual controls¹⁸. Finally, I also included in the model a measure of the number of months the respondent stands from the last presidential election, in order to prevent a biased estimate of incumbent support. All the independent variables were standardized to vary from 0 to 1 except age, so they have to be interpreted as a change from minimum to maximum value¹⁹.

Finally, regarding the comparison, one more aspect requires some precision. The dependent variable of presidential vote intention refers to a left-wing incumbent in some countries and to a right-wing incumbent in others. Because the countries are pooled together in the analysis, the ideology of the incumbent candidate must be taken into account. To arrive at coefficient signs that pull in the same direction in every country, and following the strategy of Nadeau et al 2013 and Nadeau et al 2014, I have inverted the scales of some independent variables in countries where the incumbent was left-wing. As a consequence, a positive coefficient sign in regression models indicated support for a right-wing incumbent candidate. Independent variables have been inverted so when there are theoretical expectations their impact depends on the ideological orientation of incumbents²⁰. With respect to the measurement of the model variables, full details are provided in the Appendix.

Estimation of models

- The Base-Line model:

I estimated a logistic regression analysis for the entire dataset in order to get the

¹⁶ It is a dummy variable that takes the value of 1 when respondents considered that corruption is the most important problem of the country and as 0 value all other answers. The question is which is the most important problem in your country?

¹⁷ The question wording was: To what extent do you trust the mass media? Where 1 is the lowest step and means NOT

AT ALL and 7 the highest and means A LOT.

¹⁸ Those are dummy variables by country. The reference country was Bolivia, because it is the country where the dependent variable has the closest value to the average of voting intention of the entire sample.

¹⁹ All the control variables included were standardized and were measured on a scale between 0 and 1. A change in anyone of these represented a change from the minimum effect to the maximum effect. The standardization formula followed the metric transformation: $K = (X - X_{min}) / (X_{max} - X_{min})$ where K is the transformed variable and X the original variable.

²⁰ For instance the socio-demographic variables, for which I have the following theoretical expectations: elderly, male, religious, wealthy respondents will tend to vote for the right. Therefore, we sort respondents by income (in quintile groups coded from 0 to 1), where the wealthiest respondents are coded 1 in countries with right-wing incumbents and coded 0 in countries with left-wing incumbents. In both cases, we expect a positive coefficient for the income variable. I followed this procedure for Ideology, Party ID, Social Class and Religion.

base-line model to explain the vote of Latin American citizens from 2012 to 2016. This baseline model took the most frequent specification for economic models of voting estimated with data of long-term democracies (Nadeau, Belanger, and Lewis-Beck, 2013). But also this model proved to be the best way of specification of a general model for economic voting in Latin America (Lewis-Beck and Ratto, 2013).

Before starting with the multilevel analyses, I made some tests to determine if context matters and if more sophisticated statistical techniques coincide with the data. These tests allowed addressing some possible methodological issues as full-specification, clustered error and endogeneity. With regard to the issue of fuller specification, I introduced a strong set of controls for long-term factors, as well as issues and contextual contexts. Moreover, for clustering concerns the possibility that the significance tests reported are biased, due to the fact voters are clustered. To correct for this possible clustering bias, in the third column of appendix I report robust standard errors. A final concern is the endogeneity problem. Some have argued that individual perceptions about the state of the national economy can be endogenous to vote choice (e.g., Wlezien et al., 1997; Anderson et al., 2004; Evans and Andersen, 2006). That is, an individual who supports the incumbent candidate may hold a more optimistic view of recent national economic conditions, compared to an individual who supports the opposition candidate. To control these perceptions from their possible partisan bias I applied the instrumental variables methodology. All those results were presented in the appendix (Table 1) and used as a reference for following analyses.

In sum, the vote model being tested, from the foregoing theoretical discussion, takes the following general form:

$$\text{Vote} = f(\text{Socio-demographics, Issues, Ideology, Party identification}). \quad \text{Eq1}$$

This baseline model permits consistent specification across nations. Moreover this has additional advantages of modeling the dependent variable as a dichotomy (government vs. opposition) defining the choice set similarly across the studies to be pooled (Duch and Stevenson, 2008:50).

Results

The whole dataset included a total of 45,755 interviewees, 3,012 from 2012; 16,730 from 2014; 10,815 from 2016; and 15,198 from 2017. The individual observation number from each country varied from a maximum of 4,558 for Venezuela and a minimum of

1,503 for Paraguay. The mean number of individual observations by country and year was 1634.

Regarding the dependent variable, the average percentage of voting intentions for the incumbent is 35%. The 53% of respondents evaluated the economy as worse than 12 months ago, the 33% evaluate that as the same, and only the 13% considered that the economy was better than 12 months ago. Regarding the distribution of PEI index, the 3.41% of respondent have a very low level on Electoral Integrity. Those correspond to Nicaragua. The 26.91% of respondent have a low level of Electoral Integrity and the countries are: Guatemala (2017), El Salvador (2016), Honduras (2014 and 2016), Venezuela (2017) and Dominican Republic. The 30.32% have a moderate level of Electoral Integrity, and the countries are: Mexico (2017), El Salvador (2014), Colombia (2014 and 2016), Ecuador (2014 and 2016), Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina (2013). The 29.14% have a high level of Electoral Integrity and the countries are: Mexico (2014), Panama, Peru, Chile (2014), Brazil, Venezuela (2012) and Argentina (2015 and 2017). Finally the 10.22% have a high level of Electoral Integrity, Costa Rica, Chile (2017) and Uruguay.

Table 1 summarizes the results for different estimations of voting intention in 18 Latin American countries. The first column, shows the base-line model used as reference. This is the result obtained with data at an individual level only. The estimated model follows the specification discussed above. The independent variable of main interest, sociotropic retrospective evaluations of the national economy, takes the label SRE. The coefficient is highly significant and in the expected directions. That means that the better the evaluation of the economic situation the higher the probability to vote for the incumbent. Furthermore, as was reported in the appendix, these coefficients show a great stability and impact across all the models. Long term factors also are significant. If voters are identified with the incumbent party they are more likely to vote for the incumbent. In addition, if they are self-positioned at the right side of the ideological scale, they have more probability to vote for incumbents on the right. Education, income, sex and age act as significant social cleavages, and help explain presidential voting intention. Women, older, less educated, and wealthiest respondents have more probability to vote for the incumbent. Support for the incumbent significantly decreases as more time passes from the presidential election to the survey. Note also the importance of both issue variables. If voters considered that corruption is the most important problem in the country, the probability to vote for the incumbent decreased. In addition, while voters have more trust

in media, the higher the probability to vote for the incumbent. The overall performance of this initial model shows promise. Explained variance reaches a pseudo-R² = 0.37, with 78% of the cases correctly predicted and all the significant variables displaying the expected sign.

Table 1 – Generalized Hierarchical Linear Model (GHLM) in two levels (individuals and countries) for Voting Intention for Government in 18 Latin American countries (2012/2014/2016)								
	(1) Baseline Model Only individual level data		(2) Empty Model		(3) Random Intercept and Slope + individual level covariates		(4) Random Intercept and Slope + cross-level interactions PEI	
Covariates	Coef.	(SE)	Coef.	(SE)	Coef.	(SE)	Coef.	(SE)
Fixed effects								
Covariates at individual level								
Sociotropic Retrospective Evaluations (SRE)	1.70***	(0.05)			1.62***	(0.16)	1.58***	(0.15)
Age	0.006***	(0.001)			0.18***	(0.04)	0.16***	(0.04)
Sex	0.27***	(0.03)			0.26***	(0.03)	0.25***	(0.03)
Religiosity	-0.05	(0.07)			-	-	-	-
Education	-0.83***	(0.07)			-0.87***	(0.07)	-0.87***	(0.07)
Income	0.17**	(0.06)			0.15**	(0.06)	0.12*	(0.06)
Party ID	1.84***	(0.05)			1.84***	(0.05)	1.84***	(0.05)
Ideology	0.94***	(0.06)			0.90***	(0.05)	0.90***	(0.06)
Corruption	-0.17**	(0.07)			-0.17**	(0.07)	-0.14*	(0.07)
Media Trust	0.36***	(0.06)			0.38***	(0.06)	0.35***	(0.06)
Ethnic	0.07	(0.08)			-	-	-	-
Urban	0.05	(0.04)			-	-	-	-
Months	-0.69***	(0.12)			-0.64***	(0.12)	-0.18	(0.15)
Constant	-1.73***	(0.16)	-0.70***	(0.17)	-2.51***	(0.24)	-2.34***	(0.29)
Covariates at country level								
PEI Index *REP							-0.06	(0.13)
Random Effects	Var.	St Dev.	Var.	St Dev.	Var.	St Dev.	Var.	St Dev.
Constant by country			0.55	(0.74)	0.36	(0.60)	0.79	(0.89)
Slope REP					0.40	(0.63)	0.38	(0.61)
PEI Index							0.63	(0.79)
Deviance/AIC	20984/21046.83		40731.1/ 40735.1		21810.4/21838.4		21657.5/21693.5	
(Pseudo R ²) / Log likelihood	(0.38)/10492.42		-20365.5		-10905.2		-10828.7	
LR Test vs previous model	0.0000		0.0000		0.0000		0.0000	
N	30746		33646		22603		22603	
Groups: Countries	18		18		18		18	

Source: Lapop 2012/2014/2016.

***p≤.001**p≤.01; *p≤.05(two-tailed tests). Robust standard errors in parenthesis.

The dependent variable takes the value of 1 if respondents intend to vote for the ruling coalition in the general election, 0 otherwise (don't know and refusals and don't vote are excluded).

REP (Retrospective National Economic Perceptions): scored "worse", "same", "better", rescaled 0-1.

All variables standardized to vary from 0 to 1.

Column 1: Country Dummies are not shown (Bolivia is the reference case). McKelvey and Zavoina Pseudo r²reported in parenthesis. 78% of correctly predicted cases. See appendix for more details.

See the Appendix for variable's specification.

The following step was to perform the same specification as a multilevel regression model . Here I applied the model known as Generalized Hierarchical Linear Model (GHLM) for two levels (individuals nested in countries). This kind of approach presents

some advantages respective to the single-level multivariate framework, because it gave better-calibrated uncertainty estimates of individual parameters (Snijders and Bosker, 1999:38).

The results are presented from the simplest equation to the more complex. See results in table 1. The different explanatory models presented in each column have different assumptions about the relationship between individuals and country level variables. Model 2 is an empty model that measured the variance across countries and individuals without any independent variables. This model can be used as a parameter for comparison with the other models. This empty model showed a country variance of 0.55 and AIC of 40735. Column 3 presents the results of a random intercept model. In this model the intercepts are allowed to vary along countries and the dependent variable score for each individual observation is predicted by the intercept that varies across countries.

Column 3 presents results that only have explanatory variables at the individual level. This model 3 includes an inter-country variation term that reports the unexplained variance at the country level, which is 0.36, substantially better than the empty model. This model also allows intercepts and slopes varying by country. This model explains individual phenomena assuming different individual features by countries due to individual factors and also assuming differences on REP impact by country. The random effects now include two coefficients, the first one refers to random intercepts and the second one indicated the random slope of REP. These should not be interpreted as “effects” in the model. Instead, the non-zero variance component is evidence of an unmodeled variability (Luke, 2004:26). In order to avoid convergence problems the individual level covariates that were not significant in model 1, were excluded the following analyses. Column 3 shows that the individual level covariates are pretty similar to model 1. REP reduces slightly its coefficient, from 1.70 to 1.62, but still remains significant and in the expected direction. Sex, education, income, Party ID, Ideology, corruption, media trust, and months also similar. Age increase their impact from 0.006 to 0.18. Regarding the fit of the model, the AIC criterion shows a substantially improvement of the fit of the model with respect to Model 2, from 40735 to 21838, almost half. The Log likelihood also was reduced and the LR test reports significant improvement between model 2 and 3.

The goal of this study is to examine the relationship between the retrospective economic perception (REP) and voting intention for government (VIG), and to determine if the strength of that relationship varies as a function of electoral integrity. This involves

examining a cross-level interaction effect of REP and different contextual variables measured by countries. Model 4 assumes that intercept and REP slope can vary across countries. But furthermore these models also assume that there is an interaction effect between individual and country level variables related to the way in which electoral integrity affects the relationship between EV and the probability to vote for the incumbent. That is to say the degree of Electoral Integrity affects the clarity of responsibility in relation as to how perceptions of the economic situation are considered at the moment of voting.

The contribution of each variable by level is reported in each regression coefficient. The variance component has also an error term at country level (τ). This is a random component that reflects the proportion of variance across countries that is still unexplained. In order to assess the goodness of fit of each model, the deviance/AIC statistics were reported. The deviance statistic is a measure of the lack of fit between the data and the model, and a lower deviance always implies better fit (Luke 2004:34). In this sense model 4 seems to be a better model but this information could be tricky because a model fit to the same data with more parameters will always have a smaller deviance. As a consequence I computed the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) that incorporates penalties for a greater number of parameters. The AIC for Model 3 with individual explanatory variables only is 21838 and for Model 4 is 21693. The difference between the two AIC is 145 for model 4. This difference is compared with a chi-square distribution and this is significant (reports as LR Test). But the interactions coefficient between Electoral Integrity Index and SRE are not significant. It shows that the PEI aggregate index does not affect the clarity of responsibility attribution. This is not surprising because the PEI index included 49 indicators and it is expected that a lot of those have a more indirect relationship with the electoral accountability. To have a more appropriated conclusion it is necessary to go further and try to see by which mechanism some dimensions of electoral integrity could reflect the arbitrariness that would reduce the clarity of responsibility attribution.

Table 2 – Generalized Hierarchical Linear Model (GHLM) in two levels (individuals and countries) for Voting Intention for Government in 18 Latin American countries (2012/2014/2016)

	(5)		(6)		(7)		(8)	
	Random Intercept and Slope + cross-level interactions Electoral Laws		Random Intercept and Slope + cross-level interactions Party Registration		Random Intercept and Slope + cross-level interactions Media Coverage		Random Intercept and Slope + cross-level interactions Campaign Finance	
Covariates	Coef.	(SE)	Coef.	(SE)	Coef.	(SE)	Coef.	(SE)
Fixed effects								
Covariates at individual level								
Sociotropic Retrospective Evaluations (SRE)	1.59***	(0.15)	1.57***	(0.15)	1.62***	(0.16)	1.62***	(0.17)
Age	0.16***	(0.05)	0.16***	(0.04)	0.15***	(0.04)	0.15***	(0.05)
Sex	0.24***	(0.03)	0.24***	(0.03)	0.24***	(0.03)	0.24***	(0.03)
Education	-0.86***	(0.07)	-0.86***	(0.07)	-0.87***	(0.07)	-0.87***	(0.07)
Income	0.12*	(0.06)	0.09	(0.06)	0.12*	(0.06)	0.11	(0.06)
Party ID	1.84***	(0.05)	1.84***	(0.05)	1.82***	(0.05)	1.84***	(0.05)
Ideology	0.89***	(0.06)	0.90***	(0.06)	0.89***	(0.05)	0.90***	(0.06)
Corruption	-0.13*	(0.07)	-0.14*	(0.07)	-0.14*	(0.07)	-0.14*	(0.07)
Media Trust	0.35***	(0.06)	0.35***	(0.06)	0.36***	(0.06)	0.36***	(0.06)
Months	-0.26	(0.026)	-1.29**	(0.043)	-1.53***	(0.20)	-0.82***	(0.17)
Constant	-2.28***	(0.29)	-1.92***	(0.29)	-2.12***	(0.23)	-2.05***	(0.33)
Covariates at country level								
Law*REP	-0.10	(0.13)					-0.06	(0.13)
Party Registration*REP			-0.10	(0.13)				
Media Coverage*REP					-0.30**	(0.09)		
Finance Campaign*REP							-0.39*	(0.16)
Random Effects	Var.	St Dev.	Var.	St Dev.	Var.	St Dev.	Var.	St Dev.
Constant by country	0.27	(0.52)	1.17	(1.08)	0.08	(0.29)	1.16	(1.08)
Slope REP	0.36	(0.60)	0.34	(0.58)	0.44	(0.66)	0.45	(0.67)
Laws	0.80	(0.89)					0.38	(0.61)
Party Registration			6.51	(2.55)*				
Media Coverage					1.45	(1.20)		
Finance Campaign							1.45	(1.20)
Deviance/AIC	21676/21676.3		21638/21674		21626/21661		21653/21689	
Log likelihood	-10820.1		-10819.3		-10813		-10826	
N	22603		22603		22603		22603	
Groups: Countries	18		18		18		18	

Source: Lapop 2012/2014/2016.

***p≤.001 **p≤.01; *p≤.05 (two-tailed tests). Robust standard errors in parenthesis.

The dependent variable takes the value of 1 if respondents intend to vote for the ruling coalition in the general election, 0 otherwise (don't know and refusals and don't vote are excluded).

REP (Retrospective National Economic Perceptions): scored "worse", "same", "better", rescaled 0-1.

All variables standardized to vary from 0 to 1.

See the Appendix for variable's specification.

The models presented at Table 2 were estimated for 4 different country covariates that are indicators of 4 dimensions of Electoral Integrity: Electoral Laws (Model 5); Party Registration (Model 6); Media Coverage (Model 7), and Campaign Finance (Model 8). In addition, I introduced 4 different cross-level interactions (REP by each dimension of the Electoral Integrity), one at a time to avoid problems of convergence and regarding the reduced number of second order units.

Model 5 included the country covariate laws and the corresponding cross-level interaction with SRE. The SRE coefficient (as individual covariate) is still significant at

$p < 0.001$ and slightly reduced its magnitude at 1.59. Instead, the cross-level interaction was not significant and either its coefficient as random effect. That seems to indicate that the level of fairness of electoral laws does not create arbitrariness and either does not affect the clarity on responsibility attribution process. I rejected H3.1. The covariates at individual level, remain significant and in the expected direction with the exception the months between the elections and the survey that becomes not significant. The amount of Variance was reduced at 0.27 and the AIC reduced at 21676.

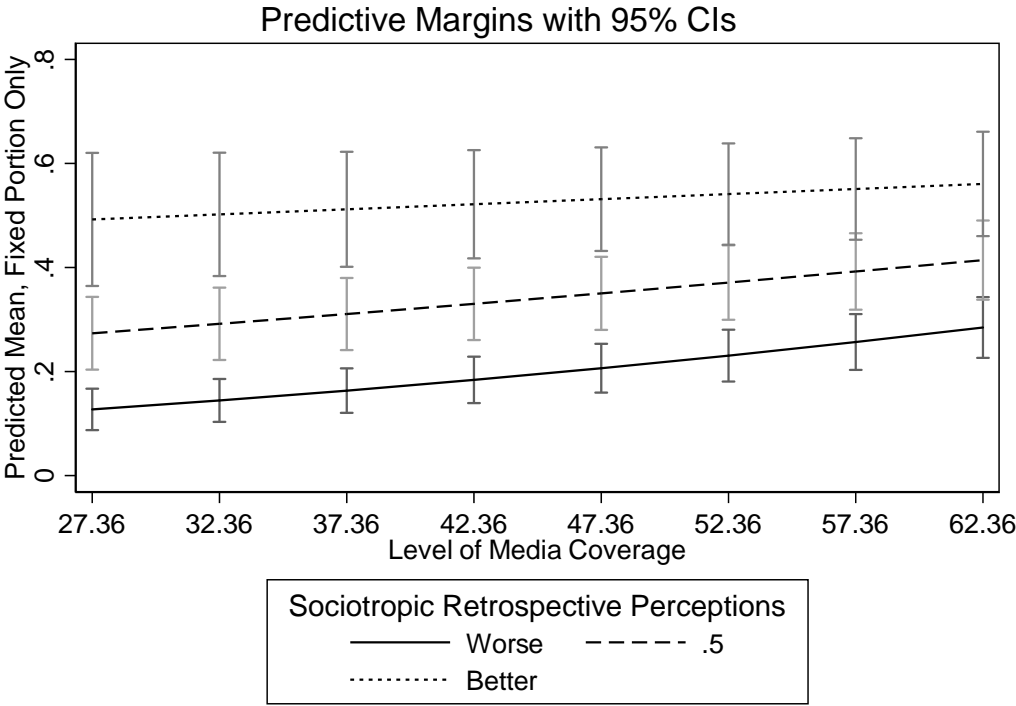
The same model was estimated to test the effect of party registration (Model 6). As in the previous model case, the cross-level interaction not appeared conditioning the effect of SRE on voting intentions. That seems to indicate that the level of fairness of party registration does not create arbitrariness and either does not affect the clarity on responsibility attribution process. I also rejected H3.2. Between the individual level covariates, income becomes not significant. All the rest remains similar in significance level and directions and impact. The statistic of fit of the model shows an improvement from the previous model, the AIC was reduced at 21674 and the variance of slopes of SRE was reduced at 0.34.

Model 7 include media coverage and the interaction effect resulted significant at 0.005. That means that the media coverage reduced the effect of electoral accountability. When newspapers did not provide balanced elections news, TV news favored the governing party, parties did not have fair access to political broadcastast and advertising, journalists did not provide fair coverage of elections, and social media was not used to expose electoral fraud, the clarity of responsibility attribution is affected. But the sign of the coefficient is not in the expected direction. This interaction effect offers a critical nuance on how the effect of media coverage is understood in the electoral cycle. It shows that the more fair media coverage is the weaker is the effect of economic evaluations on the vote. All the individual level covariates maintained their significance and impact on voting intentions. The fit of the model shows an improvement in AIC (21661) that by the LR test shows to be significant at 0.001.

Finally, model 8 estimated with Campaign finance resulted significant, conditioning and reducing the impact of SRE on voting intentions. Whether candidates did not have equitable access to public subsidies, did not have equitable access to political donations; did not publish transparent financial accounts; if wealthy people buy elections and some state resources were improperly used for campaigning the electoral electoral accountability if affected. However, the sign of the coefficient is not in the expected

direction also in this case. The more transparent that the campaign financing is the lower the effect of economic evaluations on the vote. The AIC reports a lower fit than model 7 (21689).

In order to get a final conclusion about how the electoral integrity dimensions influence the effect of SRE on voting intentions, I presented two graphs to illustrate the predicted means (probabilities) to vote for the incumbent with 95% CIs, across SRE categories, according to two continuous country covariates: media coverage (model 7) and campaign finance (model 8).



In figure 1 the predicted mean probability to vote for the incumbent is plotted across level of media coverage. This graph allows estimating the SRE slopes. Focusing on SRE differences, it is possible to see that the effect of media coverage on the relationship between SRE on the incumbent vote is higher where in those countries where the media coverage was more unfair. The SRE impact on vote decreases as a function of the level media coverage, that means that the effect of SRE on vote is lower when the media coverage was more fair.

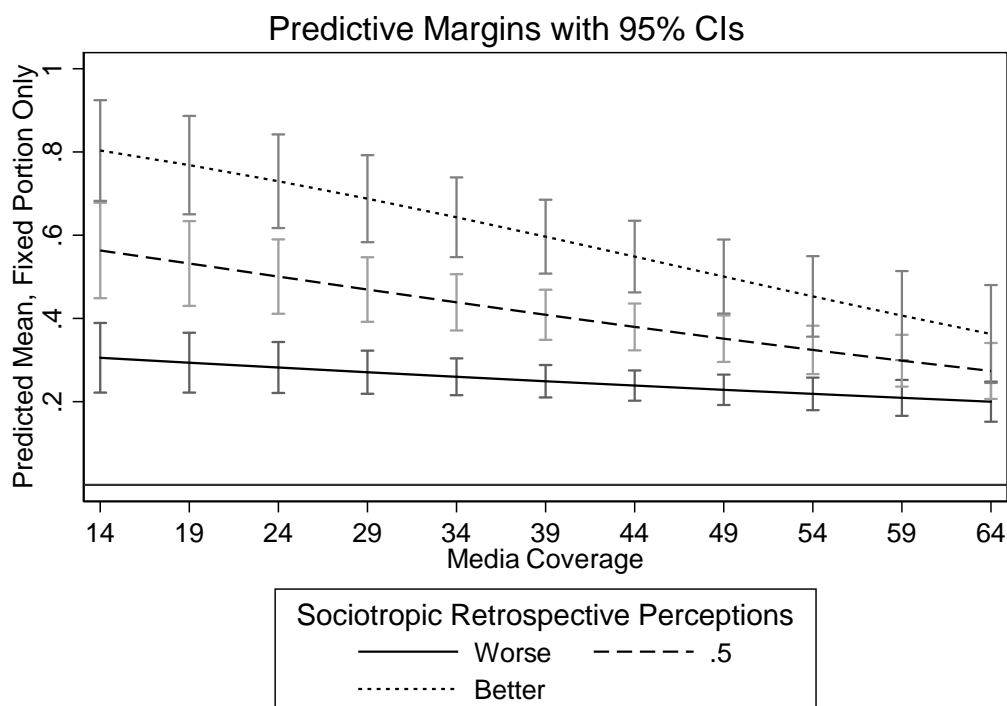


Figure 2, presents the predicted mean (probability) to vote for the incumbent across the level of finance campaign. The theoretical expectation is not satisfied. SRE differences on the probability to vote for the incumbent are higher as a function of transparency of campaign finance; the less clear that the campaign financing is the stronger the electoral accountability. And the differences on the probability of vote for the incumbent are higher between SRE categories when the campaign financing is less transparent (i.e 1.5) than those SRE differences on the probability of vote for the incumbent when the campaign financing is more transparent (i.e. 8.5). losing their significance.

Discussion of findings

The fact that citizens evaluate the government performance and take that into account at the time of voting, has provided sufficient evidence about the key incentive that elections create in democratic systems. Through this evidence it is possible to prove that elections allow the accountability representation. The aim of this paper was the study of the influence of electoral integrity on the electoral behavior of Latin American citizens across countries. This becomes relevant in younger democracies because although there are free and fair elections in those countries, there still remain severe problems of institutionalization that recurrently become political crises. This paper

theorized that this lower level of institutionalization allows more opportunities to induce manipulations that could compromise accountability and threaten democracy. In fact, different problems regarding corruption have emerged as spots in public opinion during the post-transition period of Latin American politics. Accountability is one of the burning issues on the agenda of policy makers and citizens in contemporary Latin American countries. In this paper I defined “arbitrariness” as the mechanism through which undemocratic behaviors affect the clarity of responsibility attribution and put in risk the electoral accountability. These manipulations would affect the information that citizens receive and induce wrong judgements about the performance of the government.

Three hypotheses were tested here. Firstly, the EV assumption was confirmed. The findings of this study indicated that Latin-American citizens acted according to the limited rationality theory, using the heuristic mechanism of EV at the time of voting (Simon 1955). This study produced results which corroborate the core assumption of a great deal of the previous work in the economic voting field: government support will be reduced as a consequence of bad economic times and reinforced by good economic times (Van der Brug, Van der Eij, y Franklin 2007:54; Lewis-Beck 1988; Powell and Whitten 1993; Whitten and Palmer 1999; Nadeau and Lewis-Beck 2001; Duch and Stevenson 2006, Nadeau, Belanger, and Lewis-Beck, 2013; Lewis-Beck and Ratto, 2013).

Regarding the second and third hypothesis, this paper find evidence that nuance institutional conditioning of electoral accountability. The aggregate index of electoral integrity does not condition the impact of SRE on voting. But I have evidence that some of its dimensions, media coverage and finance campaign, seems to create some degree of arbitrariness and to reduce the effect of electoral accountability. But the sign of both coefficients are in the reverse direction to the expectation. The unfair is the media coverage and campaign finance, the stronger is the effect of retrospective economic evaluations on the vote for the incumbent. The evidence here provided suggests that the argument that unfair media coverage and campaign finance increase arbitrariness and reduce the clarity of responsibility attribution, needs rethinking.

Then, how should these results be interpreted in light of previous studies? Two articles can help with this task. Samuel and Hellwig (2004) arrived to the conclusion that “Clarity of responsibility functions in the following way: the more responsibility voters attribute, the less important clarity of responsibility will be” (Samuels and Hellwig 2004:27). That means that in scenarios with fair media coverage and fair campaign

financing, there will be more clarity and stronger economic voting. But the impact of clarity of responsibility will be lower. On the contrary, scenarios with unfair media coverage and unfair campaign finance will reduce the clarity in holding the government accountable and the effect of electoral accountability. But here the impact of clarity becomes stronger. Following Samuels and Hellwig (2004) the less responsibility voters attribute, the more important clarity of responsibility will be.

Valdini and Lewis Beck (2018) also arrive at conclusions that can be read in light of the evidence provided here. Their evidence allows concluding that the applications of clarity of responsibility to Latin America must be measured in ways appropriate to these political systems. For instance they found that some variables specific to Latin American contexts could have a nuance interpretation as the role of regional governments. That costs presidents votes in Latin America; however, that cost was lessened by a healthy economy, which moves voters to credit the president with more success. That translated to individual level data means that some contextual aspects could impact the process of responsibility attribution but this impact will vary according the strength that voters assign responsibility. In this sense, and looking at figure 1 and 2, in scenarios where media coverage and campaign financing become unfair the impact of economic voting is stronger and significant, but when the media coverage and campaign financing are more fair the importance of clarity is lower and electoral accountability has no significant impact.

Does this evidence challenge the clarity of responsibility theory? (Powell and Whitten,). No. And this is for two reasons. Firstly, Powell and Whitten theory was built to explain parliamentary systems of advanced democracies. Several works highlight the need of adapt those to apply this concept to less stable and institutionalized democracies. Secondly, because the contextual factors that most works that this approach followed, are those regarding to fix institutional contexts. The phenomena study here seems to be different. Here I no tried to explore whether some government formats can reduce or reinforce accountability. The problem studied in this paper is how citizens react to the arbitrariness that certain mechanisms allow in less institutionalized democracies. Those mechanisms are the unfair media coverage and the unfair finance campaign. When that phenomena occur some manipulations could induce wrong judgments about the government performance of the economy. How do citizens react to those manipulations? The evidence appears loud and clear. As V.O Key (1966) mentioned “Voter are not fools”. Citizens react strong in contexts of unfair media coverage and unfair campaign

financing. They punish and reward harder incumbents for the economic performance where the context becomes more arbitrary.

Finally the study of Latin American factors also enlightens important conclusions. That is in spite of the different degrees of consolidation of Latin American democracies, citizens have acted rationally at the polls, rewarding "good" politicians and punishing "bad" ones.

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