

The nationalization of electoral change in the Americas

Eduardo Alemán^a, Marisa Kellam^{b,*}

^a Department of Political Science, University of Houston, 447 Philip G. Hoffman Hall, Houston, TX 77204-3011, USA

^b Department of Political Science, Texas A&M University, 2010 Allen Building, College Station, TX 77843-4348, USA

Received 28 January 2007; revised 16 July 2007; accepted 22 October 2007

Abstract

This paper examines the nationalization of electoral change in multiparty settings. We present a method to measure the relative magnitude of national and sub-national shifts in electoral support across parties and elections that is appropriate for the compositional structure of multiparty electoral data. We apply this new method to the analysis of legislative elections in six Latin American countries and the United States. Our findings indicate the widespread influence of local (i.e., state-specific) factors in electoral change, but highlight the drastic impact that intermittent nationalized shifts have on partisan support.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Nationalization; Elections; Multiparty; Latin America

Electoral outcomes often reflect much more than voters' enduring allegiances to parties and ideologies. Political parties, vote-seeking candidates, pundits and academics, all spend a great deal of time trying to understand the forces that influence changes in constituency voting behavior. The literature on electoral politics has shown a long-standing interest in measuring and explaining national and local patterns of electoral behavior over time across districts and regions in the United States (Schattschneider, 1960; Stokes, 1965; Sundquist, 1973; Katz, 1973; Sorauf, 1980; Claggett et al., 1984; Brady, 1985; Kawato, 1987; Cox and McCubbins, 1993; Bartels, 1998; Brady et al., 2000). A smaller set of works has focused on the nationalization of partisan support across countries (Stokes, 1967; Rose and Urwin, 1975; Bawn et al., 1999; Jones

and Mainwaring, 2003; Caramani, 2004; Chhibber and Kollman, 2004; Morgenstern and Potthoff, 2005). Comparative nationalization interests scholars because it helps to distinguish party systems from one another in ways that have implications for governability and political representation.

Fluctuations in the partisan distribution of the vote, whether uniform or idiosyncratic across districts, affect constituent representation, partisan behavior, and government policy priorities. Elections that are decided on local issues tend to make congressional parties a composite of different parochial interests, and make harder the task of forming a legislative majority behind policy proposals that have a national scope. Moreover, if district delegations (or individual candidates) are convinced that their electoral success depends primarily upon local issues unrelated to the fate of the party as a whole, weaker bonds will exist among members of the legislative party (Stokes, 1967; Cox and McCubbins, 1993). A nationalized electorate, in contrast, can

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +1 979 845 8834.

E-mail addresses: caleman2@uh.edu (E. Alemán), mkellam@polisci.tamu.edu (M. Kellam).

strengthen partisan ties despite electoral rules that emphasize personal characteristics (the personal vote) or decentralized candidate nomination procedures.

The level of nationalization of electoral change can affect not only the unity of legislative parties, but also the influence of the executive. A nationalized electorate, for instance, provides a favorable context for presidents that seek to rally public support as a way to force congress to support their legislative programs. The nature of electoral change can also influence presidential coalition building strategies through its effect on the priorities of legislators. It may create conditions favorable to the adoption of national policy programs or it may encourage the proliferation of particularistic goods.

Whether shifts in voter support follow a common pattern or reflect, instead, idiosyncratic changes in different parts of the country has also been of interest to scholars analyzing consolidation in new democracies. Latin Americanists, for instance, tend to associate lower levels of electoral volatility with more institutionalized party systems that, they argue, are better able to structure the political process and to provide citizens and organizations with predictable choices (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Mainwaring, 1998; Roberts and Wibbels, 1999). Yet, studies of volatility at the national level can mask stability—or change—at the district level, where voters actually make such choices. When electoral volatility varies across districts, conflicting trends in different regions of the country may cancel each other out at the national level (Morgenstern and Potthoff, 2005). Identifying patterns of electoral change at the sub-national level can help scholars better understand national electoral volatility, electoral incentives, and executive strategies.

A drawback for comparative analysis has been that most of the methods so far employed to decompose electoral change into its local and national components were developed with the US case in mind and are not applicable to the study of electoral change in countries where more than two parties regularly compete in elections. The analysis of variance methods typically used in comparative studies of the nationalization of electoral change ignore the compositional structure of the data found in multiparty systems, like those of Latin America.

In this paper we present a new method, applicable to any multiparty setting, to assess the relative impact of national and local forces in voting behavior across parties and elections. We apply this method, which builds on advances in the analysis of compositional data (Katz and King, 1999; Tomz et al., 2002), to the

analysis of district or state-level data across a total of 60 elections in seven countries in the Americas: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Venezuela and the United States. Thus, this paper makes both methodological and substantive contributions to the study of nationalization.¹

The rest of the paper is divided into five main sections. Section 1 discusses the concept of a nationalized electorate, while Section 2 specifies our questions about electoral change specific to Latin America and its comparison to the United States. Section 3 describes the data that we use and explains the statistical model that we estimate. Section 4 discusses the results. Finally, we conclude by highlighting our main findings.

1. A nationalized electorate

The notion of a nationalized electorate generally refers to the uniformity of political behavior—what Schattschneider (1960, 93) called the ‘universality of political trends’—across the different districts or regions of a country. Although sometimes used ambiguously, it is meant to point to similarities in the aggregate voting behavior of the different sub-units within the nation. This broad definition has encompassed two main concepts of nationalization: (1) convergence in the level of partisan support across the nation, and (2) uniform response of the different sub-units to political forces (Claggett et al., 1984). This distinction is both substantively and empirically relevant; therefore it is important to clarify its use.

Under the first conceptualization, a nationalized electorate is one that exhibits a *convergence* in the level of partisan strength across the nation, leading to a system in which parties receive a uniform level of support across sub-units of the electorate. Nationalization as convergence in party support focuses on the homogeneity of the electorate, where similar mixtures of political support replace distinctive regional patterns. Nationalized electorates are supposed to reflect a move away from politically salient regional cleavages and towards an alignment based on national political issues, with a similar partisan make up across districts. This view of a nationalized electorate is present in several influential works on US politics, including those of Schattschneider (1960) and Sundquist (1973), as well as comparative analyses such as those of Caramani

¹ Data and replication files are available from the authors upon request.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1052078>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1052078>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)