

# **The Monster Under the Bed: Which conditions help *Chavismo* become a wedge issue**

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## **Abstract**

It is not news that domestic politics and international affairs are intrinsically related, up to the point where the later can play part in a country's electoral dynamics. Literature on the dynamics of issue attention has shown that opposition parties are positioned to introduce new -wedge-issues into the political space in order to break the governing coalition. As such, based on the idea that foreign affairs can be used to take advantage in the domestic sphere, in this paper we look under which circumstances *chavismo* could become a wedge issue in Latin America. By using survey data, and political and economic indicators between 2005 and 2011, we firstly find that perceptions regarding *chavismo* are divisive in countries where the incumbent government is ruled by a left-wing administration and politically close to Caracas. Similarly, we show that in those countries, *chavismo* has all the conditions to become a wedge issue, as opponents homogeneously perceive such political movement on a negative way, while government supporters are divided regarding their visions about *chavismo*.

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# 1 Intro

As stated by Robert Putnam in his seminal work “*Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games*”, the question is not whether domestic politics influences international relations or whether international relations influences domestic politics, but when and how they do it (Putnam, 1988: 427). Since then, a large number of studies have sought explanations of international outcomes in the domestic sphere (see for instance Maoz and Russett, 1993; Levy, 1998; Gourevitch, 2002; Kitzberger, 2010), while others have tried to show how international constraints can affect domestic politics (some examples include: Bennet, 1991; Garret and Lange, 1995; Keohanne and Milner, 1996; Cortell & Davis, 2000).

Among the latter, Bennet (1991) has affirmed that evidence of successful programs applied abroad can be used to justify and legitimize the application of similar policies in the domestic realm. More related to our object of study, and as the other side of the coin, Kitzberger has recently suggested that *chavismo*’s image has been used in Latin America to criticize ruling administrations that tried to carry out a more progressive agenda (Kitzberger, 2010). In this regard, more recent articles, using a case study strategy, have empirically shown that, even after Chavez’s death, the perception of *chavismo* is a polarizing issue in the media and public opinion realms of some Latin American countries (Sagarzazu & Mouron, 2014). Therefore, our main objective is to show under which conditions *chavismo* can become an issue that could be used to take advantage in the domestic sphere.

Using data from 7 Latinobarometer waves, together with political and economic statistics, we firstly find that *chavismo* is a polarizing issue on those countries ruled by center-left administrations and politically close to Caracas. In turn, we also find that *chavismo* is a topic that has all the conditions to become a wedge issue, as opponents to leftist administrations have

homogeneously bad perceptions regarding it, while supporters' views are widely distributed. These findings pose interesting questions regarding the effect of a country's local politics in a broader region and do not necessarily limit to the negative effect of Chavez's image in Latin America.

Our paper is structured as follows. The next section presents a theoretical discussion regarding the usage of issues for political gain in the electoral debate, while we specifically focus on the strategies that opponents have to break governing coalitions. In this regard, we argue that opposition parties are particularly suitable to use wedge issues for such a purpose. Secondly, we contextualize our research, explain how Latin American leftist administrations have been associated in the last decade and present our hypotheses. In the third section, we describe our dataset constructed from 7 Latinobarometer waves, retrieving data between 2005 and 2011 together with data from UN roll call votes, economic indicators, and parliamentary elites data. In the fourth section we show that closeness to Chavism increases internal polarization on views of the Venezuelan administration, although these perceptions are more diverse within political blocks. In this regard, left wing government supporters range of views is more inconsistent, making of *chavismo* a theme with all the conditions of becoming a wedge issue on countries where left administrations govern and that are politically close to Caracas.

## **2 A Divide and Conquer strategy**

In one-dimensional political scenarios, two party competition must necessarily converge on the median voter (Downs, 1957). Notwithstanding, societies are much more complex and normally more than one issue is relevant in the political debate (Albright, 2010). As a consequence, political parties behave like large organizations or coalitions of many different

partners, with sometimes opposing interests within them (Kirchheimer, 1990; Aldrich, 1995). At the same time, voters with complex preferences can support a party with whom they disagree on a particular issue because a topic closer to their ideology in that moment outstands in the political debate, what Hillygus and Shields have called “persuadable voters” (2014: 7).

There is a significant group of studies who, understanding the existence of this complex reality and type of voters, have looked at the strategic communications of political parties who highlight issues selectively in order to gain political office (see for instance Budge and Farlie, 1983; Petrocik, 1996). The two basic tenets of this literature are that parties can be strategic and play to their partisan advantages or that they can be responsive to public preferences. The former group of studies is based on the understanding that issues can be owned (Petrocik, 1996). This ownership emerges from the historical roots of the party, its traditional constituencies, or its performance in office (Petrocik 1996; Budge and Farlie 1983). In more personalistic systems, ownership can also be gained due to candidates’ personal characteristics (Arbour, 2013). However, not always parties can or choose to play to their partisan strengths (Vavreck, 2009; Sagarzazu and Pardos-Prado, 2015; Klüver and Spoon, 2014; Spoon and Klüver, 2014, 2015b; Wagner and Meyer, 2014; Klüver and Sagarzazu, 2016) and, in these cases, it is argued that they are being responsive and ‘riding the wave’ of public opinion (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994).

Nevertheless, parties not always follow these two strategies, as they can also bring new issues into discussion in order to change the structure of competition (Riker, 1996; Carmines and Stimson 1986,1989; Hobolt and de Vries, 2015). These ‘issue entrepreneurs’ are typically those in the minority in a two-party system (Carmines and Stimson 1986,1989), or those in a losing position in a multiparty system (Hobolt and de Vries, 2015). By raising these new issues, parties

cannot only differentiate themselves from their competitors, but they mainly try to change the electoral dynamics.

Given these possibilities, parties will adopt different strategies in order to prevail in the electoral debate. On the one hand, those governing will try to maintain their majority and, therefore, have more restrictions in terms of issue entrepreneurship. On the other hand, those in the opposition can mobilize new issues, especially if these divide the governing coalition and thus, attract voters to their side (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen, 2010; Van de Wart et al., 2014). As a consequence, the instability in the composition of governing coalitions is the fundamental reason that explains why minority parties -when unable to win with their own base support- resort to strategies that try to break up the majority coalition (Jeong et al., 2011; Hillygus & Shields, 2014).

Being so, this divide and conquer strategy revolves around what a longstanding literature has defined as wedge issues. A wedge issue is a topic that has a major influence over certain segments of the population (Giasson & Dumouchel, 2012) without necessarily polarizing the electorate (McGowan, 2010). While a wedge issue cannot be easily subsumed into the dominant dimension of the party system, it has the ability to open cracks into the ruling party or coalition without -at the same time- causing much damage to its mobilizer (Seo, 2010). Thus, this strategy -instead of being one of pandering to your base- is designed to undermine the support base of a political opponent by adding an issue orthogonal to the axis of competition (Snyder, 2009; Wilson & Turnbull, 2001).

Wedge issues, however, lay dormant in the political realm and, in order to have any effect in the political debate, they have to be intentionally constructed and activated by a political player (Wiant, 2002: 276). Hence, there are two ways in which a wedge issue can be used against

a party. First, it can be activated to exploit the differences in the opposing coalition; and second, it can be used to convince “persuadable voters” that the other party will ignore their preferences.

Wedge issue strategies have been used since the late XIX century when Democrats in the U.S. brought into discussion the topic of Chinese immigration to erode support to the Republican party (Seo 2010). Since then, studies about contemporary politics highlight a barrage of issues that have been used as wedges in political debates. This extensive list includes issues such as: abortion (Adams, 1997), immigration (Green-Pedersen & Krogstrup, 2008; Jeong et al., 2011), gay marriage (Smith et al., 2005), gun registry elimination (Giasson & Dumouchel, 2012), racial issues (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Abramowitz, 1994), and European integration (Marks & Wilson, 2000; Kriesi, 2007; Tzelgov, 2013; Van de Wart et al., 2014).

More related to our research agenda, Snyder et al. (2009) analysed how foreign issues can be used as a wedge issue. The authors suggest that the most common strategy for using this type of topics as a wedge issue is to emphasize looming foreign threats that are alleged to overshadow domestic class divisions (Snyder et al., 2009).

Taking this theoretical discussion as reference, in the next section we analyze how leftist Latin American administrations have been associated in the last decades and, consequently, under which circumstances *chavismo* has the conditions to become a wedge issue in Latin America.

### **3 The fear of *Chavización* as a domestic electoral tool**

In 1998 Hugo Chávez inaugurated a series of victories of left-wing presidents in Latin America. Since then, during the following eight years a considerable number of regional administrations turned “red”, in what authors have called Latin America’s left turn (Petkoff,

2005). As a consequence, authors started to analyze these administrations comparatively, and while they did not arrive to the same conclusions, they agreed that there should be a distinction between different types of left, ranging from moderates to radicalized, the latter led by the Chavez's example (Gallegos, 2005; Castañeda, 2006; Leiras, 2007; Levitsky and Murillo, 2008).

Meanwhile, this association with *chavismo* made other authors wonder which were the implications for leftist governments to approach Caracas (see for instance Paramio, 2006; Nielsen, 2009; Kitzberger, 2010; or Sagarzazu and Mouron, 2014). While Chavez' contagious leftist ideology has been perceived by Washington as making the Latin American regimes less receptive to US policies and objectives (Nielsen, 2009), most of the aforementioned studies looked at the degree to which polarization in Venezuela or negative views of the Venezuelan leader could be used in the domestic politics realm of other Latin American countries.

Nevertheless, taking the aforementioned theoretical framework as reference, we also argue that *chavismo* is not a simple divisive issue explained by the degree of support to local governments. Kitzberger (2010) was the first to suggest that the use of *chavismo* in domestic politics was particularly tied to left-of-center governments that tried to pursue more progressive policies, specifically regarding the media system. In this line, Sagarzazu and Mouron (2015) have recently shown that this argument applies for the Argentinean case, where the opposition press has -since 2008- steadily tried to associate *chavismo* and *kirchnerismo* on a negative way in order to criticize the later.

Considering this previous research, two related dynamics can be derived. On the one hand, political -even if not ideological- closeness to Caracas can hurt Latin American executives in their domestic realm; on the other, this is particularly true for left-of-center governments. As such, these two dynamics need to be analyzed with regards on how fertile is the political ground

for *chavismo* becoming a wedge issue. Two conditions are necessary for this to happen: first, there must be a differing view of *chavismo* within a country (there must be a space for a divisive issue); second, the target group must have less consistent views on the issue than the group that mobilizes the issue. That is, the distribution of preferences must be wider in the group under attack; effectively, opening a space for a wedge issue.

Being so, we firstly argue that *the space for chavismo to become a divisive issue is dependent on how close the relationship to the Venezuelan government is* (H1). On other words, the closer the relation among both administrations, the more likely *chavismo* will behave as a polarizing issue. However, as said before, this effect will be influenced by whether there is a left-of-center president. As such (H1a) supporters of left-of-center presidents who are politically close to Caracas will have more positive views of Chavez than opponents of these presidents, opening *the space for chavismo to become a divisive issue*. This space does not exist where right-of-center president's rule (H1b).

Following from hypothesis 1, we can further argue that left wing government supporters will be more likely to have inconsistent views regarding *chavismo*, while right-wing opponents will homogeneously have a bad perception regarding Chavez and the Venezuelan government. In fact, this inconsistency among left-wing government supporters is what would explain why opponents in those countries use *chavismo* to take advantage in the domestic realm, as they know it is an issue that divides the ruling coalition but do not affect their own. In consequence, *in those countries where the left governs, there will be more space for chavismo to become a wedge issue* (H2).



## 4 Data

In order to test the hypotheses laid out in the previous section, we have created a unique time series cross-sectional dataset with observations for 17 Latin American countries for every year between 2005 and 2011. We have also obtained independent measures of government ideology, ideal points for the political location of Latin American administrations, economic trade with Venezuela, and internal polarization. In this section we will describe how we constructed our dataset.

### *Dependent variables*

As we are measuring to which extent views of *chavismo* can open the space for this topic being used as a wedge issue, we will use the Latinobarometer survey as reference. This public opinion research is carried out yearly by the, non-profit and non-governmental Latinobarometer corporation, which uses local firms to conduct the same survey instrument in 18 Latin American countries and Spain (a total of 19 countries). The sample in each country is representative of its population and oscillates between 1000 and 1200 respondents, providing a good representative sample of the region's inhabitants. As such, the Latinobarometer survey has been consistently used to measure public opinion in Latin America (see for instance Jones, 2010; Lewis-Beck & Ratto, 2013; Saiegh 2015)

From 2005 to 2011, the Latinobarometer survey included a battery of questions to evaluate the region's presidents as well as leaders from other countries (such as King Juan Carlos of Spain). Hugo Chávez was one of such presidents that respondents were asked to evaluate on

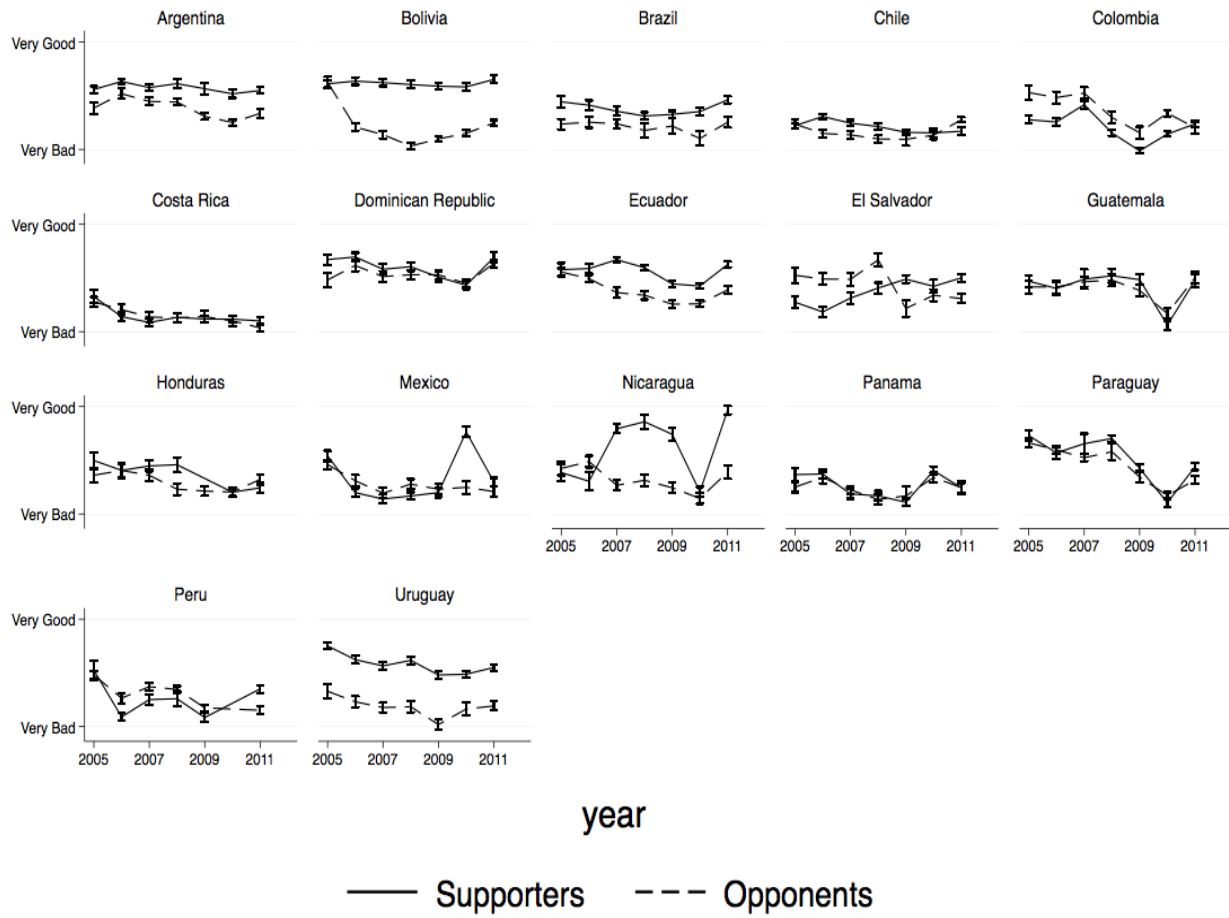
an 11-point scale that ranged from Very Bad (0) to Very Good (10). Using this measure, we will create our two key dependent variables.

In order to capture the extent to which views of Chávez are different between opponents and government supporters, we are going to average responses by these two groups (per country year), creating in this way our *average evaluation of Hugo Chavez*. Figure 1 shows this measure for 17 countries (excluding Venezuela). As it can be seen, there is wide variation across them. For the most part, countries closer to Venezuela (members of the ALBA<sup>1</sup> for instance) show more distance between government supporters and opponents. In turn, these views react to changes in government ideology (see Salvador in 2009 for instance when the left reached power, or Chile in 2010 where the right gained power), and to relevant political events (the 2010 coup in Honduras affected the views of Chavez in Mexico, Nicaragua, and Honduras for instance). For the most part, we see countries with very divergent views and countries with significant consistency of evaluations.

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<sup>1</sup> The ALBA (Alternativa Bolivariana para los Americas, Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) is “an integration platform for the countries of Latin American and the Caribbean” (<http://alba-tcp.org/en/contenido/alba-tcp-eng>)

**Figure 1: Average view of Chavez per country/year**



Similarly, we need to be able to estimate the degree to which evaluations are varied within opponents and government supporters. To measure this *chavismo's consistency of evaluations*, we obtained the Gini coefficient of these views. The Gini coefficient measures the degree to which equality/inequality exists in a population, and it can range between zero (full equality) to one (full inequality) (Gini, 1912)<sup>2</sup>. For our purposes, if the distribution of evaluations of Chavez is uniformly distributed in a subset of the population (i.e. all the members of that subgroup divide themselves evenly across the different scores), then it will have a score near zero; in contrast, if Chavez's evaluations are mostly clustered in one side of the distribution, then the Gini index will have a higher value.

To estimate the Gini coefficient, we divided respondents into supporters and opponents for every country and year. For all the  $N$  respondents in each group we used equation 1 where  $x_i$  is the evaluation of Chavez by person  $i$  and  $m$  is the mean evaluation of Chavez for the subgroup.<sup>3</sup>

$$G = 1 + 1/N - 2 \frac{\sum_{i=1}^N (N+1-i)x_i}{m*N^2}, \text{ (equation 1)}$$

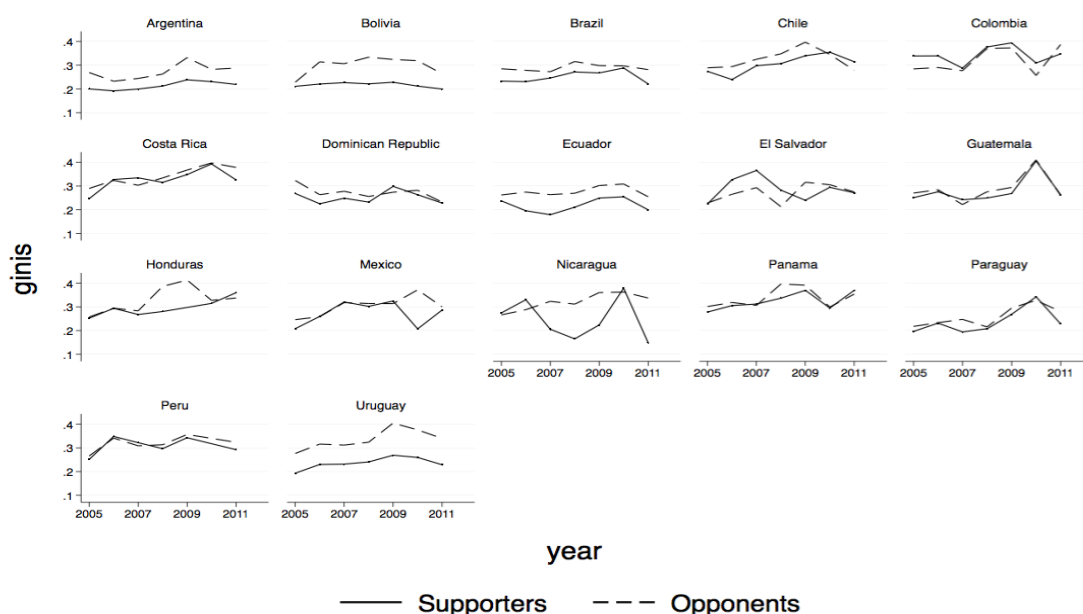
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<sup>2</sup> Extendedly used to measure income inequality, the Gini coefficient has also been applied as a measure of biodiversity (Wittebolle et al., 2009), inequality of health (Asada, 2005) and inequality of universities (Halffman and Leydesdorff, 2010) among others.

<sup>3</sup> For practical purposes we used function *ineqdeco* in Stata 13 to estimate the Gini coefficient.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the estimated Gini coefficients for all the countries in our sample, distinguishing between government opponents (dashed line) and supporters (solid line). As can be seen, in those countries historically associated with *chavismo* (for instance Ecuador, Bolivia and Argentina) Gini coefficients for governments' supporters are much lower than those of opponents, meaning that perceptions regarding Chavez are more widespread among supporters of Latin American leftist administrations than between opponents. On the contrary, in those countries ruled by center and right-center political administrations, opponents and supporters have the same distribution of perceptions. Finally, but not less important, we can see that in countries where extreme political events took place (Ex: change of government in Salvador or coup in Honduras), during that period perceptions among supporters of leftist rulers were much more widespread than for opponents, for which we conclude from the information provided by Figure 1 that were homogeneously bad.

**Figure 2: Consistency of Chavez's evaluations per country/year**

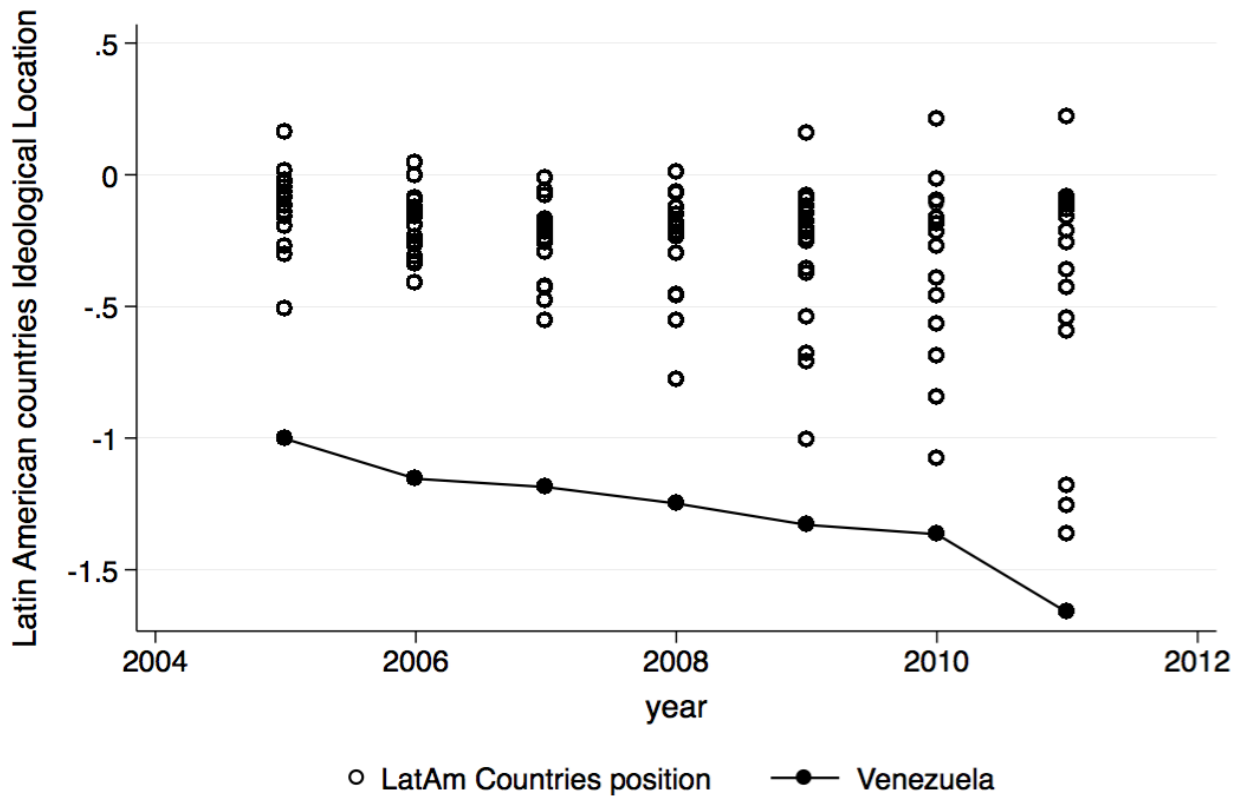


### ***Explanatory variables***

Having defined our dependent variables, we can proceed to create our explanatory ones. To this extent we are interested in collecting internal political dynamics for each country/year to measure the president's' domestic ideological location; and data on international dynamics to measure the Latin American administrations' political closeness to *chavismo*.

In order to obtain a consistent and comparable measure of each country's foreign policy position, as a previous and extensive literature has done (see for instance Rieselbach, 1960; Bailey et al 2015; Steiner 2014), we use the Ideal point estimates of voting in the United Nations General Assembly (Bailey et al 2015). This measure allows us to obtain the location of the different Latin American countries compared to each other, and specifically vis-a-vis Venezuela. Figure 2 shows the evolution of these scores from 2005 to 2011. The dashed line represents the location of Venezuela's government, while the circles show the different Latin American countries. There are two clear dynamics that can be seen: first, that in 2005 countries were much closer than in 2011; second, that Venezuela has consistently led this dispersion throughout these years, some of the close followers are Bolivia, Ecuador, and Nicaragua. Using this measure we estimate the *distance to Venezuela* as the absolute distance between each country's yearly score and Venezuela's score for that same year.

Figure 3. Ideological Location of Latin American countries 2005-2011

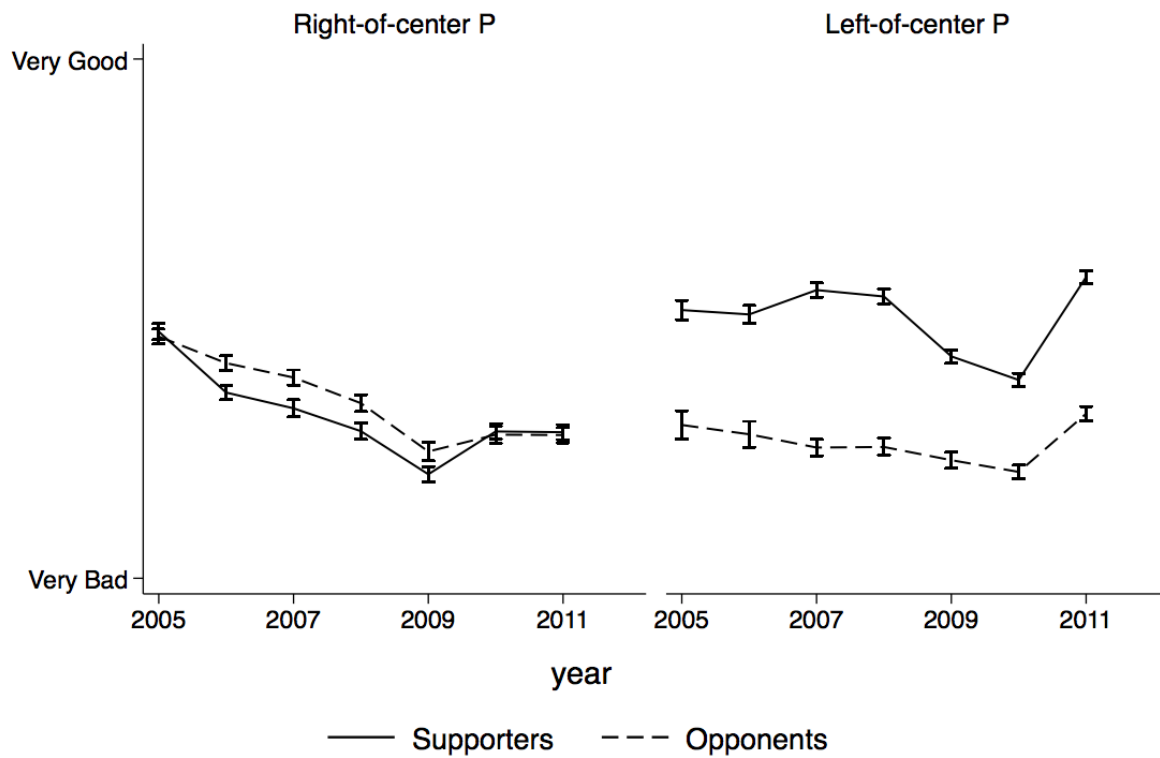


In order to capture the ideological location of the President within her country, we used data from the Project of Parliamentary Elites in Latin America (PELA). This initiative, carried out by the University of Salamanca since 1994, has estimated ideological positions for parties by using personal interviews with deputies from all Latin American countries. Specifically, amongst other things, deputies have been asked to locate themselves and other relevant political actors on a spectrum from left (0) to right (10). Using this data, we constructed a second explanatory variable (*left-of-center president*) which measured as whether the president was to the left (1), or not (0).<sup>4</sup> Figure 3 shows the average view of Chavez based on whether a country has a left-of-

<sup>4</sup> We used the middle of the scale (5) to divide left-of-center from right-of-center presidents; as such a left-of-center president is one with a position smaller than 5.

center president or not. As it can be seen, countries with presidents to the left have more differing views of Chavez than countries with right-of-center presidents.

**Figure 4: Average view of Chavez per year**



### ***Control Variables***

Having described our key independent variables, we can now explain our control variables. First, because much political closeness comes from economic closeness, we measure economic relations to Venezuela. Second, we need to further control for domestic political



dynamics that can influence a government's behavior such as polarization, a country's population ideological location, and a country's average socio-economic status.

We control for economic closeness with data retrieved from the UN Comtrade Database and regarding economic bilateral relations between Venezuela and the other 17 Latin American countries.<sup>5</sup> In order to measure how economically relevant Venezuela is for each Latin American country we calculated the *proportion of exports to Venezuela* in relation to the total exports to the world (for each country) and normalized it by using the log function as it was particularly skewed for larger countries. A second variable of interest created was *Trade Balance*, which is a dummy considering if the trade flows between Venezuela and each nation was surplus for the country at hand (1) or whether it benefited Venezuela, in which case it is a deficit for the other country (0).

To control for the degree to which domestic polarization exists in each country, we used data from the Project of Parliamentary Elites in Latin America (PELA). Therefore, *internal polarization* was considered as the absolute difference between the parties located at the extremes of the political spectrum.

To control for the overall location of voters we estimated the *mean ideological location* on the Left-Right spectrum in each country. For this we used the Latinobarometer data and averaged out the responses to the ideological self-identification question (0-left to 10-right) for each country/year.

Finally, to control for a country's average Socio-Economic situation, we estimated the *mean socioeconomic status* per country/year. To estimate this value, we used the

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<sup>5</sup> This data was retrieved from the UN Comtrade Database <http://comtrade.un.org/>

Latinobarometer data on conditions of respondent's homes.<sup>6</sup> These questions provide an overview of items that signal a higher condition of living, thus a higher socioeconomic status. Moreover, and as previously done by other studies (see for instance Singer and Carlin, 1995; Kasara and Suryanarayan, 2015), via Factor Analysis we generated a measure for each respondent and averaged these by country per year.

## 5 Results

Having constructed the dataset, the next task is to test our hypotheses. In order to examine under which circumstances *chavismo* can become a wedge issue in Latin America, first we need to see if citizens have a different view of *chavismo* depending on whether they support or oppose their country's government. Firstly, we evaluate the degree to which being closer to Venezuela makes perceptions regarding *chavismo* more polarized; or in other words, whether it makes supporters and opponents have distant and differing views of Chavez. Second we test to which extent, where the left governs, supporters of the government have less consistent views of *chavismo*. For both tests we will employ a Linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors, which allows for controlling possible heteroskedasticity problems in our panel data (Beck and Katz 1995, 1996).

As we said before, our first model will test the degree to which *the space for chavismo to become a divisive issue is dependent on how close the relationship to the Venezuelan government* is (H1). In order to test this hypothesis, we will regress the mean evaluation of Chavez in each

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<sup>6</sup> The items used included questions on whether the respondent's home had sewage, hot water, drinking water, phone, washing machine, fridge, or computer; we also included whether the respondent had a car or owned the house. Two additional questions were not included due to lack of availability in all countries/years. These were whether the house had a TV and whether the respondent had two homes. The specific question reads "Do you or any member of your family have any of the following goods?" followed by the list of goods.

country considering whether the respondent supports or opposes the government. We regress our dependent variable on whether the president is left-of-center, on the distance between the country's president and Hugo Chavez, and on the interaction of these two for respondents who are government supporters and opponents. We expect that government opponents to left-of-center presidents will have lower average evaluations than right of center presidents; however, for government supporters the opposite will be the case. With regards to the closeness to Venezuela we expect that government supporters will be more critical of Chavez (lower values) the furthest away the country is to Venezuela. Besides these variables, we control for other factors that could influence this relationship such as internal polarization, trade closeness, and overall ideological location of respondents in the country.

**Table 1: Regression with panel corrected standard errors for explaining Average evaluations of Hugo Chavez**

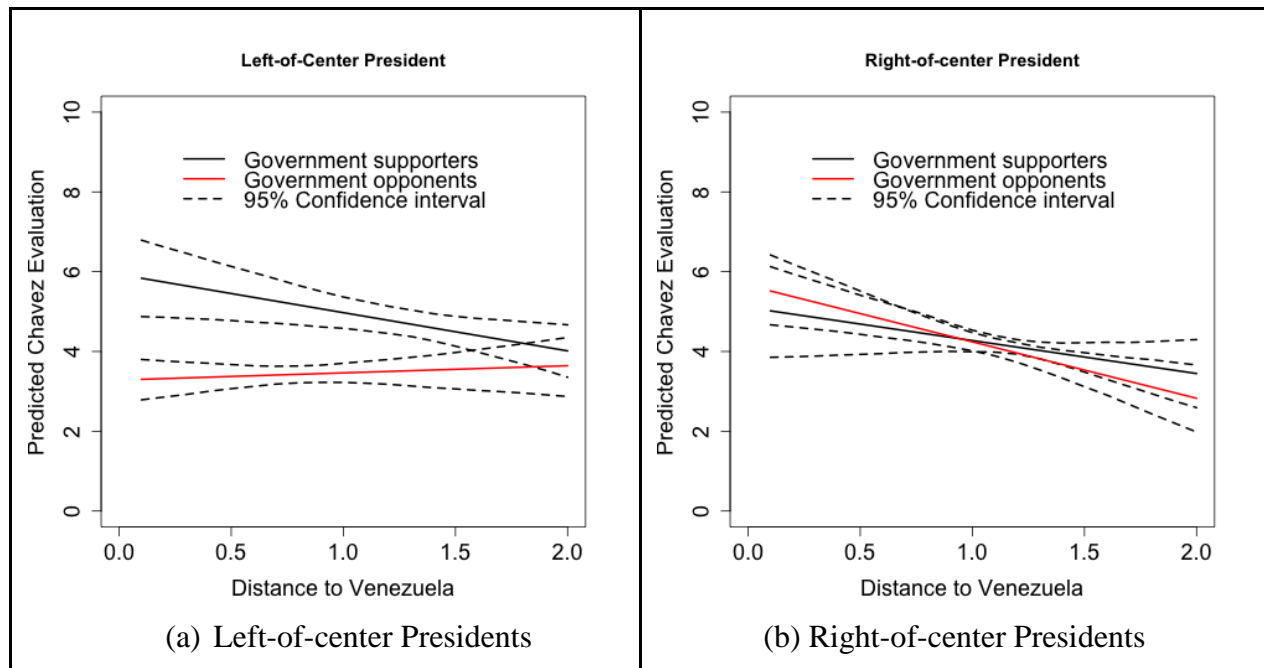
	Government opponents	Government supporters
<i>Explanatory variables</i>		
Left-of-center President	-2.240***	0.851*
	(0.59)	(0.44)
Political closeness to Venezuela	-1.445***	-0.816
	(0.46)	(0.54)
Left-of-center president X Closeness to Venezuela	1.622**	-0.159
	(0.63)	(0.40)
<i>Control variables</i>		
Internal polarization	-0.198***	-0.254***
	(0.04)	(0.05)
Proportion of Exports to Venezuela (log)	-0.132**	-0.175***
	(0.05)	(0.05)
Trade Balance	0.183*	-0.014
	(0.11)	(0.16)
Left-Right Average Ideological Location	-0.153	-0.653***
	(0.16)	(0.20)
Average Socio-Economic Status	-0.654***	-0.840***
	(0.10)	(0.19)
Constant	7.435***	9.859***
	(0.94)	(1.43)
N	116	115
Chi <sup>2</sup>	289	241
R <sup>2</sup>	0.443	0.441

Standard errors in parenthesis. Significance level \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The results of this first analysis are reported in Table 1. As expected, in those countries where left-wing parties rule, political closeness to Venezuela opens a space between government supporters and opponents in their views of *chavismo*. All else equals, supporters have a better perception of Hugo Chavez than government opponents. This difference increases significantly for left-of-center presidents, as the average view of Chavez decreases (becomes worse) for opponents and increases for supporters. With regards to the political closeness between administrations, the results make clear that opponents of administrations who are farther apart of Venezuela's have worse views of Chavez; variable which in turn is not significant for government supporters. Finally, regarding the interaction between left-of-center presidents and closeness to Venezuela, we can see that opponents of left-of-center presidents farther apart from Venezuela will have more positive views of Chavez.

We can further see this relationship in figure 5, in which we predict Chavez's average evaluation using simulated values as suggested by King, Tomz and Wittenberg (2000). The left hand side graph (5.a) shows the predictions for supporters (solid line) and opponents (red line) of left-of-center presidents, and the 95% confidence interval around the estimates. The right hand side (5.b) shows similar estimates for right-of-center presidents. In the latter, we see that where rules a right-of-center president, views of Chavez amongst supporters and opponents of the government aren't statistically significant from one another. These views change as the country is further from Venezuela, but overall change similarly for both groups. In contrast, Figure 5a shows how where there is a left-of-center president, there is a significant difference between supporters and opponents of the government this is not the case, however, for countries that are politically distant to Venezuela.

**Figure 5 Predicted Chavez Evaluation based on results reported in Table 1.**



Having shown that in those countries that are politically closer to Venezuela and that have a left-of-center President the space for Chavism to become a divisive issue exists, we can move on to test our second hypothesis; in those countries where the left governs, there will be more space for *chavismo* to become a wedge issue. To test this hypothesis, we looked at the consistency of views in both groups, opponents and supporters of the government, and used the same independent variables previously used. To measure consistency within groups we used the Gini Index over the respondent's views of Chavez (as described above). A larger Gini index will highlight more consistent views within the members of the group. As such, we are looking at whether being closer to Venezuela makes government opponents more cohesive (bigger Gini Index) than government supporters.

Table 2 shows the results for the analysis of the consistency of views in each group (opponents and supporters of the government). As can be seen, opponents of left-of-center presidents have more consistent views than supporters, for which the coefficient is bigger; similarly, being farther to Venezuela makes views of Chavez more cohesive *ceteris paribus*. With regards to the ideological closeness between administrations, the results show that for both groups opponents and supporters of administrations who are farther apart of Venezuela's have worse condensed views of Chavism. However, the size of this effect is smaller for opponents of left-of-center presidents.

We can further see this relationship in Figure 6, where we predict the Gini index for Chavez's evaluations using simulated values as suggested by King, Tomz and Wittenberg (2000). The left hand side graph (6.a) shows the predictions for supporters (solid line) and opponents (red line) of left-of-center presidents, and the 95% confidence interval around the estimates. The right hand side (6.b) shows similar estimates for right-of-center presidents. The space for *chavismo* to become a wedge issue can be clearly seen in Figures 6a and 6b. In Figure 5b we could see that where there is a right-of-center president, group consistency of Chavez evaluations amongst supporters and opponents of the government aren't statistically significantly different from one another. These views change as the country is further from Venezuela but overall change similarly for both groups. In contrast, Figure 6a shows how where there is a left-of-center president, there is a significant difference between supporters and opponents of the government in the majority of governments, but especially those closer to Caracas.

**Table 2: Regression with panel corrected standard errors for explaining within group**

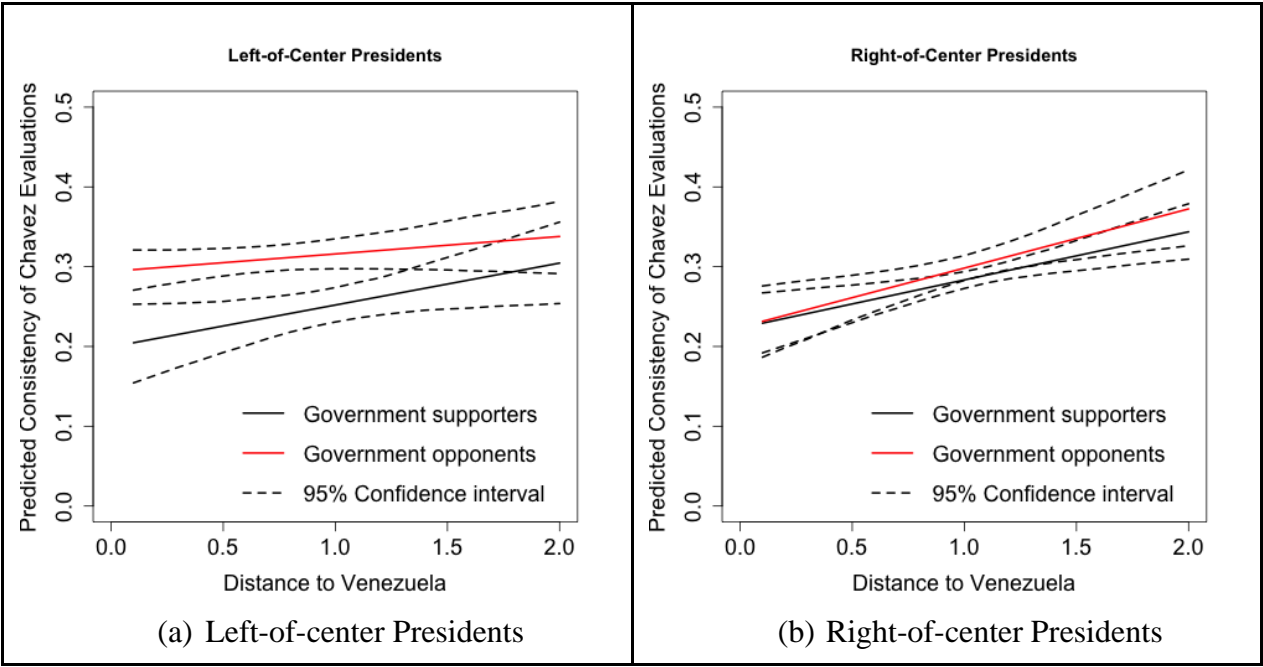
**Consistency of evaluations of Hugo Chavez**

	Government opponents	Government supporters
<i>Explanatory variables</i>		
Left-of-center President	0.065**	-0.026
	(0.03)	(0.02)
Political closeness to Venezuela	0.074***	0.060***
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Left-of-center president X Closeness to Venezuela	-0.052*	-0.007
	(0.03)	(0.02)
<i>Control variables</i>		
Internal polarization	0.009***	0.010***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Proportion of Exports to Venezuela (log)	0.013***	0.012***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Trade Balance	-0.021***	-0.012
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Left-Right Average Ideological Location	0.023***	0.034***
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Average Socio-Economic Status	0.009	0.015
	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	0.057	-0.011
	(0.04)	(0.06)
N	116	115
Chi <sup>2</sup>	73	111
R <sup>2</sup>	0.314	0.408

Standard errors in parenthesis. Significance level \*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



Figure 6 Predicted Group Consistency of Chavez Evaluation based on results reported in



## 6 Conclusions

Even after Chavez's death, some authors have recently shown that concepts such as *chavización* and *venezuelización* continue to be used as a strategy in the Argentine domestic debate (Sagarzazu and Mouron, 2014)<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, the main objective of our study was to expand this analysis to 17 Latin-American countries and look under which conditions *chavismo* could be used as a tool to take advantage in domestic politics. As Kitzberger (2010) suggested five years ago, we corroborate with empirical data that *chavismo* has all the conditions to operate as a wedge issue, finding that opens an interesting discussion.

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<sup>7</sup> The authors show that between 2010 to 2015 one of the main Argentine newspaper has published 6 editorials and 16 opinion articles using the idea of *chavización*, in order to compare negatively the Argentine and Venezuelan administrations.

In the first place, and forgetting about our case study, our findings posit some concerns regarding the foreign policy formulation process itself. Since its inception in the 30s, public opinion literature had suggested that the average citizen would have little interest in international affairs (Lippmann, 1946; Almond, 1970), what in turn would explain in part why public opinion historically has not influenced in foreign policy formulation (Jacobs and Page, 2005). Nevertheless, as processes of economic liberalization and global governance are increasingly inclusive of civil society in discussions on international policy issues, in democratic regimes public perceptions constrain foreign policy choices in critical moments (Foyle, 2004). For instance, more recent articles have shown that foreign policy issues have turned repeatedly into electoral agenda (Holsti, 1992; Aldrich et al., 2006), while at the same time, and as stated in the theoretical discussion, foreign threats can be used to overshadow domestic class divisions and take advantage in the domestic realm (Snyder et al., 2009). In addition, if foreign issues are introduced in the electoral debate and have the conditions to be used as a wedge issue, as shown in this article, then the creation of such cleavages has to have necessarily an impact on the foreign policy formulation process itself.

Secondly, and regarding our region of analysis, if as we have demonstrated *chavismo* can be used as a wedge issue in Latin America, this might necessarily affect foreign policy strategies from other Latin American countries towards Venezuela. Strengthened ties with Caracas seems to have a domestic political cost, even when this can be extremely beneficial for the country's economy. As an example, due to the opposition of right-wing parties in the Brazilian and Paraguayan congresses, the process of incorporation of Venezuela to Mercosur took more than seven years, even when all the bloc members are at an economic surplus regarding their Caribbean neighbor and such agreement could open new business opportunities. In sum, nowadays -even after Chavez's passing- it is costly for other Latin American rulers to present to their electorates an image close to Caracas, what inevitably might affect the dynamics of regional politics.

Finally, if -as we have shown- a foreign topic can be used to take advantage in domestic politics realms, probably this strategy is not limited to *chavismo* and Latin America. Specific studies should be carried out, but we expect that the same might apply to other controversial countries and international figures such as Putin in Russia and its neighbouring states; or the effect of Syriza's win in Greece and the subsequent support for new parties in Spain. The key is to determine the appropriate cleavage in which cleavage the foreign topic falls. In the end, as we are moving to a globalized world in which boundaries between domestic and international affairs seem to be increasingly blurred, we expect that there will be a growing trend of globalized politics. As such, more research that seeks to understand this new type of interactions will be needed to understand these dynamics.

**Table 3: Summary statistics**

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max
<i>Country's government opponents</i>					
Avg. eval of Chavez (mean)	118	3.875	0.920	2.109	6.011
Consistency evals Chavez (gini)	118	0.303	0.045	0.212	0.405
<i>Country's government supporters</i>					
Avg. eval of Chavez (mean)	117	4.485	1.233	1.928	7.799
Consistency evals Chavez (gini)	117	0.271	0.056	0.149	0.405
<i>Independent variables</i>					
Left-of-center President	118	0.423	0.496	0	1
Distance to Venezuela	118	1.010	0.281	0.287	1.879
Internal polarization	118	5.314	1.827	1.07	8.26
Proportion of Exports to Venezuela (log)	117	0.281	1.449	-3.073	3.122
Trade Balance	116	0.456	0.500	0	1
Left-Right Mean Ideological Location	118	5.301	0.528	4.295	7.104
Average SocioEconomic Status	118	-0.162	0.454	-0.864	0.862

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