

How germane are moral and economic policies to ideology? Evidence from Latin American legislators

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Abstract

How do legislators, many of whom hold policy positions that are not consistently conservative or progressive, position themselves on the left–right ideological scale? Analyzing data from the Parliamentary Elites in Latin America (PELA) survey, this paper leverages combinations of moral and economic policy positions to determine the weight—germaneness—of each policy on that scale. Using bi- and multivariate models on a database of about 5000 legislators, we confirm the importance of economics but also find that moral issues can be germane to the left–right placement of many of the region's legislators. The relative germaneness of the policies is inconsistent for legislators of the left and right. The left is more heterogeneous because moral policies are less germane to their identification. However, many centrists hold conservative economic and moral views, blurring the tie between policy and ideological positions. We confirm that contextual factors can sharpen the issue-to-ideology relationship.

KEYWORDS

economic issues, ideology, Latin America, moral issues, parliamentary elites

1 | INTRODUCTION

What is the relationship between policy stances and ideological self-identification? This question faces several complicating factors. First, some authors minimize the tie between ideology and policy, arguing instead that ideology is better defined in terms of identity, symbols, or a broad outlook (Barber & Pope, 2019; Mason, 2018). Second, what is the direction of causality? In Converse's (1964) classic study, ideology “constrains” perceptions of policies, but others (Downs, 1957; Zaller, 1992) reverse the direction of causality, such that ideology is a summary of policy positions. These studies carry with them, sometimes implicitly, a further question: what issues are germane to one's position on the ideological scale? Considering that question, this paper evaluates the different weights of economic and moral policies on ideological identification.

While questions regarding policy preferences and ideology are often explored in studies of voters, they are particularly relevant for studies of the individuals specifically charged with making policy decisions: the legislators. As key decision-makers, legislators are inherently attuned to ideological considerations and should carefully consider their policy choices. Moreover, policy and ideology play significant roles in the strategies employed by politicians and parties to attract voters. Therefore, studying the link between them redounds to electoral politics and representation.

Our particular goal in this paper is to test for and explain the germaneness of different policy preferences to ideology among Latin America's legislators. If ideology correctly summarized everyone's policy positions, then those aligning on either side of the left–right ideological scale would agree on a range of social and economic issues. Empirically, however, policy and ideological positions are frequently incongruent in the

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sense that self-identified leftists do not always take progressive policy positions, and rightists might espouse support for a supposedly progressive cause. We leverage these inconsistencies in order to evaluate policy germaneness.¹

As an example, several leftist presidents, including Mexico's President Lopez Obrador and Bolivia's Evo Morales, identify as leftists but have adopted conservative views on same-sex marriage and abortion. There are opposing cases on the right, with Costa Rica's Partido Liberal Progresista, Uruguay's Partido Colorado, and Paraguay's Asociación Nacional Republicana, supporting some progressive stances on moral issues. In these examples, moral issues must not play a significant role in the parties' or leaders' ideological identification. Moral policies seem to play a bigger role, however, in cases where rightists take more progressive economic stances. One such case would be Chile's Christian Democrats, whom Luna et al. (2013) describe as a "progressive religious party."

These types of cases underscore the notion that policies inconsistent with ideology cannot be "germane." Such policies may still be salient politically, but we reserve the word "germane" for those issues that enter into the legislator's calculus of their position on the left–right scale. Because other issues or factors could drive ideology, it is not always clear that a particular issue that is consistent with ideology is germane. We can, however, discard that issue as germane when the policy and ideological positions are inconsistent. For example, if a respondent identifies as a leftist and is progressive concerning abortion, we cannot be sure that policy position or some other factor drove the ideological position. If the same person were conservative on abortion, however, we could discard abortion as germane to that person's self-perceived leftism.

In this paper, our interest in ideology is limited to legislators' self-identification on a 1–10 left–right scale. For policy positions, we apply the terms "progressive" and "conservative," and measure views about moral and economic policies across a similar 10-point scale. Neither of these scales has an intrinsic meaning, and we do not mean to imply that there is a "correct" combination of ideology and policy positions. There are, however, common meanings of the scales and thus an expected positive correlation. A negative correlation would also be indicative of a policy-ideology relation, but that we had mischaracterized one of the scales.

Our focus on policy germaneness ties to an extensive literature that emphasizes differences in the mix of policies that define parties' ideological stances. For example, while authors focusing on European political parties have identified multiple policy dimensions (Bakker et al., 2012; Hooghe et al., 2002; Rovny & Polk, 2019), parallel literature on Latin America has focused mostly on one relevant dimension (Power

& Zucco, 2009; Saiegh, 2009). In a direct comparison, Martínez-Gallardo et al. (2022) found that while European parties are structured around economic and socio-cultural dimensions, Latin American party systems are less structured overall and loosely combine the two dimensions. In explaining those differences between the regions, Singer (2011) and Luna and Rovira Kaltwasser (2014) focus on contextual characteristics, such as the economic climate and electoral volatility. Meanwhile, Zechmeister and Corral (2013) demonstrate that issue preferences can predict voters' left–right placement in Latin America, as it does in the United States and Western Europe, but this is conditional on an institutional context where there is low party system fragmentation, limited volatility, and clear differences among parties (polarization). In their study of Latin American legislatures, Alcántara Sáez and Llamazares Valduvico (2008) show how rightist parties differ from those on the left in terms of policy preferences, but the differentiation is dependent on party system institutionalization.

While we take these institutional conditions into account to explain inter-country differences, our aim is to focus on the variability in germaneness among issues within Latin America and within countries. While economic issues have always been a central focus of politics in the region, moral issues have gained political salience over the last two decades. Our goal, then, is to evaluate their role in combination with economics in determining legislators' ideological positions. We take a special interest in cases when the issue positions are in conflict and use the concept of germaneness in that empirical evaluation. In short, using the legislators' combined policy views allows us to evaluate, for example, whether a legislator who is progressive on economics but middling or conservative on moral issues will claim a leftist, centrist, or rightist position.

In studying the relative impact of the two types of issues, it is implied that we expect the increased political salience of moral policies to have reduced the germaneness of economics to ideology. The reduced dominance of economics could also reflect the reduced political polarization with respect to economic dogma since the end of the Cold War. Given the expectation that economics will not consistently overshadow associations with ideology, we aim to illustrate how germaneness differs among legislators and then evaluate factors that explain the variance.

Our research question considers how legislators from the left and right differ in the weights they put on the two types of issues. That expected difference, we argue, is a function of the variation in how the two sides would have to incorporate moral issues in order to maintain consistency between a modern conception of policy and ideology. Because opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage is consistent with traditional conservatism, rightists would be able to hold tight to

their traditional policy views without challenging their ideology. By contrast, leftists would have to change their traditional position on such issues in order to be consistent with the new progressive agenda. Historically, leftists formed their ideological identification for reasons other than morality (e.g., anti-imperialism and socialist-leaning economics) and at a time when there was consistent opposition to issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. While many leftists today tie progressive views on these issues with socialist-leaning economic policies, “traditional” leftists might resist changing either their ideological identification or their positions on morality. Since these legislators would hold mixed policy positions (conservative moral positions but progressive economics), morality would appear as less germane to their ideological identity.

The paper's focus on the relation of ideological and policy positions leads us to also consider the potential for legislators, especially of the right, to obfuscate when responding to the survey questions. The “ashamed right” thesis (Power & Zucco, 2009) suggests that many who hold rightist policy positions will self-identify as ideological centrists in order to mask associations with past human rights abuses committed by right-wing dictators. If true, conservative policy positions would have a weak link with ideology. This also implies, we argue, that conservative policy positions would be a necessary but insufficient explanation for a rightist ideology.

To evaluate the policy-ideological links, we rely on data from the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA) project, which surveys legislators throughout the region after every legislative election. Our work contributes to and extends prior empirical and theoretical research in several ways. Benoit and Laver (2006) used expert surveys to assess the relative importance of economic and social policy positions in determining parties' left–right positions, revealing significant cross-country variations in the substantive meanings of left and right. We adopt the idea of variable ties to the ideological scale but employ individual-level data to specify these connections further. It also melds with the approaches of Zechmeister (2010), Saiegh (2009), Rosas (2005), and Alcántara Sáez and Llamazares Valduvico (2008), who provided tests of the relation of policy and ideology among Latin America's legislators. Our study follows their lead in using surveys of legislators but provides updated and extended data, alternative statistical techniques that improve estimations, and a focus on issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage that have gained salience since previous studies were conducted. Our study also innovates by emphasizing how legislators respond to potentially conflicting positions on moral and economic issues. By evaluating the two types of policies in tandem, we are able to gauge the relative weight of each issue, or, in other words, their germaneness.

Foreshadowing, our results show that Latin American legislators' ideological positions do have a policy basis, but that the germaneness of the issues varies for the left and right. Of note is that fewer legislators identify with the right, but among those who do, there is a high propensity to hold conservative positions on both moral and economic policies. This helps to confirm the ashamed right thesis, as well as suggesting that both issue dimensions are germane to identifying with the right. The left is more heterogeneous; many do hold consistently progressive views on the two issue baskets, but there are also significant numbers of them who are progressive (or middling) on just morality or economic policy. For the left, then, while economics has a somewhat stronger predictive value, neither policy is necessarily germane to their ideological identification.

1.1 | Policy positions, ideological self-identification and germaneness

This paper evaluates the relationship between legislators' views on different policy issues and their self-placement on the left–right ideology scale. The link between policy views and ideology has long been a central theme in the discipline. Some conceptions de-emphasize the link and instead define ideology through a focus on deep-seated social identities, affective connections, or symbols in their definitions (Barber & Pope, 2019; Bobbio, 1996; Converse, 1964; Holcombe, 2023; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017; Luna & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014; Mason, 2018; Stimson, 1975; Zechmeister, 2006, 2010). Others presume a policy-ideology link and then debate the direction of causality. Downs's (1957) and his followers, for example, describe ideology as a summation of their policy views (see also: Hinich & Munger, 1992; Popkin, 1991), while others argue that psychological attitudes regarding social change and equality determine people's political preferences (Carmines & D'Amico, 2015; Jost, 2009).

We do not presume to resolve the debate about causality but do want to contribute by testing the strength of the link between policy views and ideological self-identification. We do so by evaluating the simultaneous impact of two policy dimensions on legislators' self-placement on the left–right scale. Unlike many voters, almost all legislators express both ideological and policy positions, perhaps because they are intimately involved in the policy process and their positions force them to consider ideological alignments. They are thus particularly cogent subjects for studying the policy-ideology tie. If we conceptualize ideology as a point on the left–right scale and place policy preferences on a progressive to conservative scale (understanding that the direction of those scales is arbitrary), then the correlation between them provides an idea of how

important particular policies are to legislators' ideological self-perceptions.² This process provides a means for evaluating “germaneness.”

If all policies were equally relevant to ideology, then left legislators would be progressive on every issue, and right legislators would hold consistently conservative policy preferences. Not all issues, however, are likely to have the same weights in that calculus. Hinich and Munger (1997) formalized this idea in their use of noncircular indifference curves to represent the relative importance of two different policies. A different interpretation of the unequal policy weights is that ideological scales can mask many inconsistencies in policy preferences. Two legislators who claim a similar ideological score, for example, may disagree on same-sex marriage but agree on a redistributive tax policy. In this scenario, same-sex marriage must not be germane to how one or both of the legislators define their own ideology. Same-sex marriage would also not be germane if the two legislators disagreed on their ideological positions and the tax policy but had similar views about same-sex marriage.

Our use of the term “germaneness” is meant to capture the idea that some policies will be more tightly linked to positions on the left–right scale than others. Operationally, it indicates the weight an individual puts on an issue in determining their left–right score. We differentiate this term from “salience,” which refers to the political relevance of a policy. While the relationship between a policy's political relevance and implications of that policy for a legislator's ideological identification would be of interest, here we only focus on germaneness. We analyze it by placing legislators' attitudes toward moral and economic issues along a progressive to conservative scale and testing the correlation of those attitudes to positions on the ideological scale.

Perhaps in part because the region is characterized by extreme inequality, economic issues have traditionally divided partisans and ideologies across Latin America (Luna & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014). This does not mean, however, that there is an absence of relevance for other policy dimensions. Alcántara Sáez and Llamazares Valduvico (2008), for example, show that for different countries, socioeconomics, cultural, and “political” (e.g., corruption and human rights) issues can differentiate the left from the right. As they and others recognize, “moral” issues (subsumed in their discussion of cultural issues), such as gender equality, abortion rights, and same-sex marriage, have shown their political salience by sparking widespread protests and precipitating legal and constitutional challenges across numerous countries (see also Biroli & Caminotti, 2020; Blofield & Ewig, 2017; Daby & Moseley, 2022). Smith and Boas (2024), among others, confirm the role of moral issues in politics in their case by providing empirical and experimental evidence for how abortion

influences vote choice. At the elite level, Bohigues et al. (2022) use the same surveys of Latin American legislators that we apply to show how religion and ideology predict preferences related to abortion, same-sex marriage, and drug legalization. Given the new political salience of this issue dimension, we evaluate its germaneness to ideology relative to the economic dimension. This approach corresponds with extensive discussion about the policy dimensions of ideology in fields of economics, psychology, and political science (e.g., Carmines & D'Amico, 2015; Jost, 2009). In sum, our study is dedicated to evaluating whether and how moral issues, in combination with attitudes about economics, correlate with ideological identities, as measured through the left–right scale.

Our tests track how well legislators' positions on the left–right scale correlate with their policy positions that are arrayed from progressive to conservative. The discussion presumes a standard description of the two scales, thus expecting the left to match with progressive policy positions and the right to associate with conservative views. The analysis is more concerned, however, with the strength of the correlation than with the direction of the scales. Given that caveat, we follow standard understandings and define “progressive” positions as being pro-state intervention in the economy and “conservative” positions as implying a preference for market-oriented policies. For the moral dimension, our analysis focuses on the rights for abortion and same-sex marriage. We define “progressive” as being favorable toward these rights, while a “conservative” position opposes them. Using these scales, we then calculate the correlations of the policies and ideology to identify which issues are germane (or not) to ideology. If, for example, the correlation of rightism and views on same-sex marriage is weak, then that issue cannot be highly germane to ideology.³ (If our scale is backward, we would still find a high correlation).

We highlight these ideas in Table 1, which shows the resulting ideological position for different mixes of policy baskets, assuming that the legislator holds relatively progressive or conservative (rather than middling) views on the two types of policy. We ignore the possibility that the scales are reversed but could reestimate if reverse patterns were evident. The table indicates the relation between the mix of the two policy dimensions with the left–right ideological position, as mediated by the germaneness of the policies. In the northwest corner (Box 1), for example, both policy baskets are consistent with a leftist ideology, while the northeast corner (Box 9) indicates that neither policy would be germane for a legislator who professed progressive policy positions but identified with the right. Boxes 2, 3, 10, and 11 present cases in which one of the policy positions is not germane. In Box 2, the legislator has morally progressive policy positions, economically conservative positions, and identifies as leftist. Since only the moral

TABLE 1 Issue germaneness for ideological identification.

Policy positions			Ideological positions		
Moral	Economic		Left	Center	Right
Progressive	Progressive	(MpEp)	1. Economics and morals consistent	5. Ashamed Left	9. Neither policy germane
Progressive	Conservative	(MpEc)	2. Economics not germane	6. Perhaps Balanced germaneness	10. Morality not germane
Conservative	Progressive	(McEp)	3. Morality not germane	7. Perhaps Balanced germaneness	11. Economics not germane
Conservative	Conservative	(McEc)	4. Neither policy germane	8. Ashamed right	12. Economics and morals consistent

position is consistent with the ideology, economics cannot be germane.

The penultimate column presents cases where the legislator self-identifies as a centrist, in spite of extreme policy views on at least one issue. Boxes 5 and 8 indicate cases where the legislator self-identifies with a more centrist position than suggested by both of their policy positions. For the right (Box 8), this is reflective of the idea that legislators are “ashamed” to accept a rightist label owing to shadows of abusive historical authoritarian leaders (Dinas & Northmore-Ball, 2020; Power, 2000; Power & Zucco, 2009; Rocha et al., 2021, p. 13; Zechmeister, 2010; Zucco & Power, 2024). Similarly, leftists also have some negative historical and contemporaneous role models plus Downisan incentives, which could lead strong progressives to also identify as centrists (Box 5).

Boxes 6 and 7 contemplate that a legislator who holds opposing positions on two germane issues would accept a centrist ideology. This could be the result of “averaging” if the two issues were equally germane. It could also indicate (hence our modifier “perhaps”) that the legislator is obfuscating if the legislator held a conservative view on a germane issue while the other issue was irrelevant to their ideology. For example, an ashamed right legislator would self-identify as a centrist while holding conservative views on economics and being progressive on morality but seeing the latter as not germane.

While these cases hold information about germaneness, the potential for obfuscation complicates analysis of centrists. Further, those legislators who identify with the more extreme positions are intrinsically interesting. For these reasons, our theory and tests emphasize distinctions between left and right legislators, largely ignoring the centrists.

Our test for germaneness of the two types of issues implicitly presumes that economics is not the only driver of political ideology. Historical analyses have emphasized the key role of economics in defining the region's political divides, implying that those issues were the most germane to ideology. Over the last two decades, however, many countries in the region have

debated and extended same-sex marriage and abortion rights (Blofield, 2006; Corrales, 2022; González-Rostani & Morgenstern, 2023). Our empirical question, then, is whether this rising political salience has led these moral issues to become germane to legislators' ideology.

Even if moral issues are germane to some legislators, they may not be germane to all. In particular, we expect their impact to differ due to the variable role of religion among legislators from different ends of the ideological spectrum and because the definition of “leftism” has evolved with the advent of moral policies. The new conception of leftist politics does not change the views of economics, but it requires support for morality issues pushed by progressives, including LGBTQ+ rights and abortion. Historically, these types of issues did not divide left from right, as there was a general consensus in opposition to these types of rights. As LGBTQ+ and women's rights movements have gained steam, however, they have found allies in the left, which has perhaps been facilitated by a concomitant rise in secularism on that side of the ideological spectrum. As such, support for these issues has become a litmus test for the progressive movement. This implies, in turn, that the salient issues have become germane to ideology.

For “traditional” leftists, who presumably held anti-abortion and anti-same-sex marriage views, the rise of moral issues should have compelled them to reconsider either their policy views or their ideological position. If they continued defining their ideology based on economics or issues such as anti-imperialism, that would imply that morality issues were not germane. Legislators who see morality as germane to their ideology, however, would have to choose between adopting the new progressive position on morality policies to maintain the leftist ideology or moving their ideological position based on their view of morality.⁴

The expected effect on the right from the increased salience of moral issues would be different. For them, conservative positions on moral issues, regardless of how germane they are to ideology, would be consistent with their rightist identification. Rightists who maintain conservative positions, therefore, would not confront

a dilemma about their ideological positions. But what about those rightists who react to trends and adopt more progressive moral positions? If they are among the ashamed right, their “true” ideological position might move to the center, but they would not have to adjust their stated ideology, even if they do see moral policy positions as germane. Thus, the only rightists who would have to adjust their left–right position under this circumstance would be those who (1) formerly identified with a rightist ideology, (2) take a progressive position on morals, and (3) see moral positions as germane to ideology.

These ideas imply that moral issues will appear more germane to rightists than leftists. The empirical expectation is that a conservative view of morality (and economics) will be necessary for rightists but not for the left. This does not mean that all leftists ignore morality in defining their ideology. It implies, instead, that there will be a greater likelihood of leftists maintaining conservative moral positions than of rightists accepting progressive morality. While rightists should have consistently conservative policy positions, so too might those who are ashamed. As such, consistent policy positions are necessary but insufficient for rightism.

These propositions allow empirical testing. While we expect that a mix of progressive economics and conservative morals will not necessarily lead traditional leftists to leave their ideological home, those who hold more conservative economic positions plus progressive morals should be uncomfortable with a rightist identification and might therefore identify themselves as centrists. Thus, focusing on those legislators who hold contrasting conservative and progressive policy values yields our main hypothesis:

Self-identifying rightists will take consistently conservative policy positions, while many legislators who identify as leftists will take progressive stances on just one issue basket.

If this is correct, we should see that progressive moral positions will do a poor job in predicting whether legislators consider themselves leftist, though conservative morals will be a necessary condition for rightism. We agree with previous scholars that economics is probably the primary consideration for determining ideology, but hypothesize that the correlation between moral values and ideological positions will be stronger for the right than the left. It is important to note that even if we expect a weak correlation of left ideology and progressive morals, this does not mean that legislators with progressive moral values, especially if they are also progressive with respect to economics, will fail to identify as leftists. The expected weak correlation, instead, would result from some self-defined leftists taking moderate or even conservative moral positions.

We test these ideas on individual legislators, but there are clear implications for the cohesion of parties. If a party's ideology is defined as the average of their legislators' positions, rightist parties would be cohesive on both economic and moral issues, but leftist party members would hold disparate positions, at least on moral issues.

Although we will not present them as enumerated hypotheses, several other factors could determine the strength of ties between policies and ideology, as well as the germaneness of moral or economic issues. In considering the strength of the policy-ideology relation, Zechmeister and Corral (2013) hypothesize that institutional factors are determinant. Specifically, they argue that while polarization heightens citizens' identification with the left–right scale, increasing the number of political parties and electoral volatility decrease it by reducing the clarity of choices. Their study is quite different from ours, since they are concerned with whether citizens can position themselves on the ideological scale, while our study evaluates how legislators correlate their position on that scale with policies. Moreover, since legislators should be much more attuned to ideology and policy positions than voters—note that all legislators were able to place themselves on the scale, in comparison with around 80% of voters that Zechmeister and Corral report—we would not expect context to have as big an effect in our study. Still, we test these contextual variables plus two that are discussed by Luna and Rovira Kaltwasser (2014), inequality and crime, as well as the degree of clientelism, party system institutionalization, the degree of party identification in the country, a measure of political exclusion, the health of the economy, political stability, and legislative party cohesion. We provide a detailed discussion of each of these variables in the appendix. There we explain that in systems where parties are less structured, the policy-ideology relation will be less coherent. Parties that are structured around a charismatic leader, for example, might include more heterogeneous followers than would a party organized around an ideological or policy position. Also, since greater polarization implies stronger identification with the left and right, that variable could increase the policy structuration.

Another potential confound to our study is the theory of post-materialism (Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005), which would suggest that moral issues would take more precedence in more economically developed countries. Concomitantly, where the debate between capitalism and socialism still divides societies, it is less likely that moral policies will move ideological needles. For example, legislators who support or oppose governments whose identity is based on anti-imperialism will not likely move toward the center over moral issues. We thus expect that economic issues will take precedence in defining ideology in countries such as Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and Venezuela,

in comparison to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. Third, since younger voters have been mobilized based on the recent emergence of social issues such as gender equality, gay rights, and abortion, we expect that younger legislators would also be more attuned to these issues. Similarly, newer parties, which are very common in the region, may be oriented toward a concern with newer issues. We thus test for increased germaneness of moral issues among younger legislators and younger parties.

A final control variable we consider is time. This variable allows us to gain an initial perspective on whether the results exhibit any time-dependent patterns, but we do not attempt to study how the germaneness of particular policies changes across time. The PELA dataset (and other surveys) only includes questions that have some salience, and thus we do not have information about abortion or same-sex marriage before they rose to political importance. We thus focus on the cross-sectional analysis rather than analyzing dynamic changes.

2 | RESEARCH DESIGN

2.1 | Data and measurement

Our analysis relies on the data from the PELA-USAL (Alcántara, 1994) project, a comprehensive survey of legislators' characteristics and policy positions that is collected after every legislative election. Surveys are a common tool in studying voters' policy preferences or ideological views, and the PELA data allows us to extend those studies to legislators.

The PELA survey ascertains legislators' self-position on the ideological spectrum (1–10, with 10 being extreme right) and their policy positions on a range of issues. We harmonized the data from four waves of the survey covering legislative bodies in 17 Latin American countries dating between 2003 and 2022.⁵ Not all questions were asked in all countries or all waves, but we have consistent data on over 5000 observations for many key questions (details about questions are in Appendix A).

To evaluate moral issues, the survey included a question about abortion in all waves and all countries,⁶ and in later waves it added questions about same-sex marriage, drug legalization, and tolerance toward immigrants. Here, we focus on abortion and same-sex marriage, both of which are originally coded from 1 to 10, with 10 being the most progressive position. To operationalize the economic dimension, we consider questions that ask whether the respondent favors regulation of the economy by the state or the market, legislators' positions regarding pensions, and their views on employment protection. We choose to focus on the regulation question because, in addition to its continual

presence in the survey, a Pearson correlation test shows that economic regulation is more relevant to ideology than other economic positions. Still, for robustness, we do test other economic variables.

To classify legislators as to whether they have consistent policy views, as well as whether their policy positions are consistent with their stated left–right ideology, we cut the policy and ideology scores into three baskets. Left legislators are those who place themselves at three or below on the 10-point scale, rightists are eight and above, and centrists are the residual category. We consider progressive (p), midling (m), and conservative (c) positions on the policy questions in a parallel manner, and then use the combinations as our main independent variables. This generates nine categorical variables, from progressive on Moral and Economic issues (MpEp) to conservative on both dimensions (McEc). The three categories simplify the coding and discussion, but we do show in a robustness test that using continuous variables yields similar results.

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Bivariate analysis

In this section, we present bivariate analyses and then move to multivariate logistic regressions that confirm our findings. To begin, Figure 1 provides the percentage of left, centrist, and right legislators for each possible combination of policy mixes. Both graphs use the regulation question to gauge economic preferences but differ in that the left version of the graph focuses on abortion and the right graph analyzes same-sex marriage. The data yield several conclusions about the germaneness of the policy baskets to ideology, the ashamed right, and our hypothesis about how the left and right differ with respect to the relation of issues and ideology.⁷ Because of the similarity between both images, we will focus our description on the first.

First, with regards to germaneness, the images indicate that most legislators do have a policy basis for their ideological beliefs and that while economics has a stronger impact, views on moral policies are also relevant. The correlation between policy and left–right ideology is evident from the two extremes in the graphs, which show that those who have consistently conservative policy preferences (McEc) are more likely to call themselves rightists than all the others, and about three-quarters of those who are consistently progressive (MpEp) self-identify as leftists. The inconsistent policy preferences provide more evidence about germaneness. Economics appears to exhibit a more pronounced correlation with the left–right ideological spectrum, as transitioning toward a moderate stance on regulation (Em) is more likely to diminish the

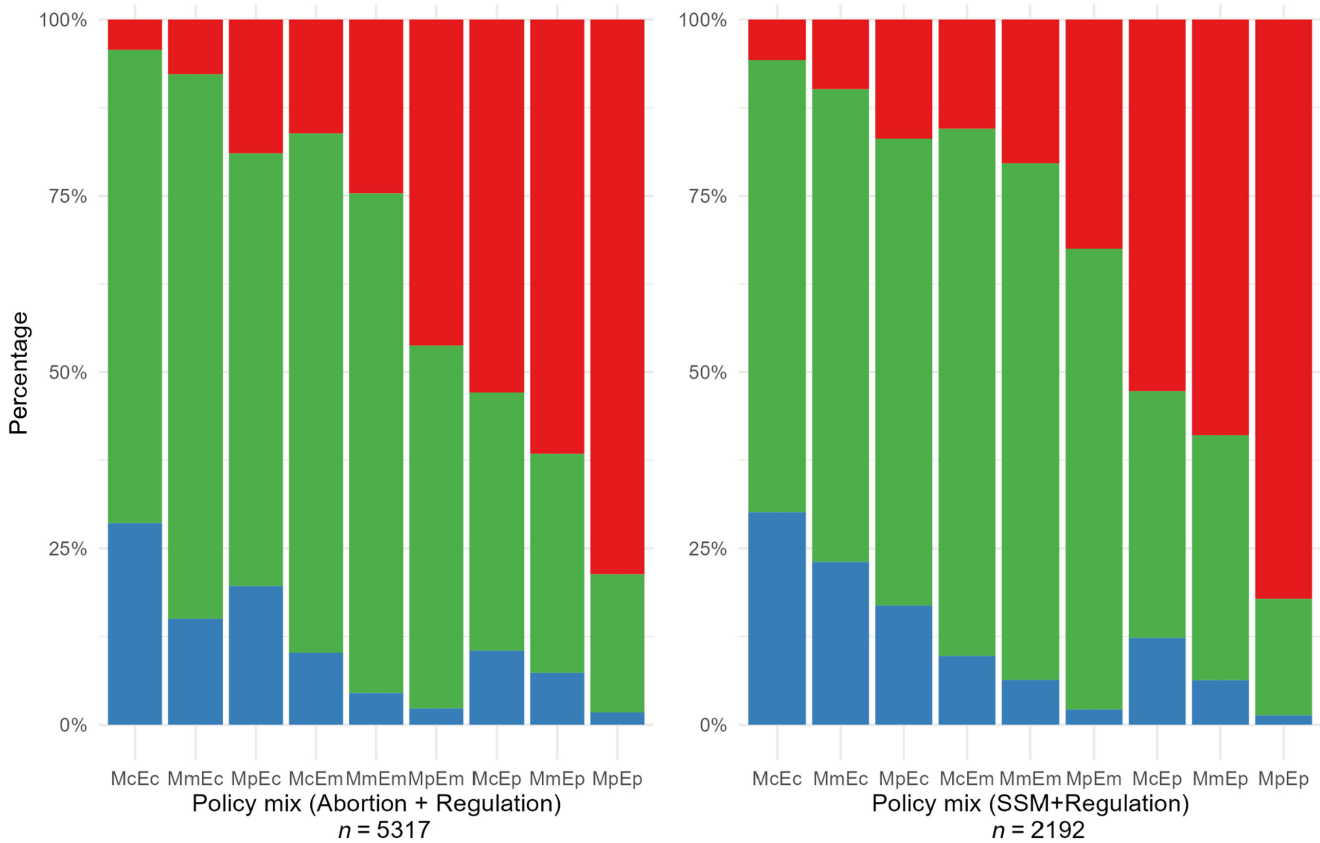


FIGURE 1 Left and right legislators, by policy mix. Bar length shows the percentage of legislators in each category holding each mix of policy preferences. See N for each category in Appendix Tables B1a and B1b. The issue positions refer to moral (M), economic (E) and whether the position is progressive (p), middling (m), or conservative (c). The color red indicates left, green indicates center, and blue indicates right.

likelihood of aligning with either extreme of the ideological continuum than is moving to a centrist perspective on abortion or same-sex marriage (Mm). For example, the data indicate that in comparison to MpEp, the probability of calling oneself a leftist drops 17 points for legislators whose preferences are MmEp, but 33 points when moving to MpEm. The changes are in a similar direction for the right, and again economics seems to have a higher level of germaneness, since changing from conservative to moderate views on economics (McEc to McEm) drops the self-identification as a rightist by 19 points, while the same type of move for moral issues (McEc to MmEc) yields a 14-point change. As the graph shows, the larger effect of economics is even clearer when analyzing same-sex marriage.

In part, these differences among the right identifiers are smaller because fewer legislators self-identify with that side of the ideological scale, even when they have conservative policy positions (McEc). While 79% of those with progressive views on both policy issues (MpEp) claim a leftist label, only 29% of those with conservative views (McEc) claim a rightist label. This is direct evidence of the ashamed right thesis; progressives are content to call themselves leftists, but many conservatives refrain from identifying with the right.

Our main hypothesis is that consistent policy positions on the two issue areas (McEc) are necessary for the right, but policy consistency (MpEp) is not necessary for a leftist self-identification. Somewhat contrary to that hypothesis, the graphs (see also Appendix B) indicate that some rightists do hold moderate or even progressive views on one issue or the other. Still, using the abortion and regulation questions, 43% of rightists do hold conservative views on both policies, and another 22% are conservative on morals and moderate on economics (McEm).⁸ In no other category do more than 9.3% of legislators label themselves rightist. In contrast, only 16% of leftists have consistently progressive policy preferences (MpEp).⁹ Thus, while our hypothesis should be attenuated, the right is much more likely to hold conservative views on both types of policies. At the same time, the data show, as predicted, that a large percentage of leftists take progressive stances on just one issue basket. Specifically, 46% of those with progressive morals but moderate economics (MpEm) are leftists, as are 62% of those with progressive economics but moderate moral views (MmEp). Economics appears to be somewhat more germane to a leftist designation than morals, since more than one-half of those in the

McEp category are leftists as compared to just 19% of those in the MpEc grouping. Many legislators who hold these opposing policy views also seem to take an average ideological position; 37% of those in the first of these categories and 61% in the second identify as centrist. This again suggests that both issues are germane, though economics has a somewhat stronger pull.

While not key to our hypotheses, the graphs also give evidence about the ashamed right thesis. About two-thirds of legislators who hold consistently conservative policy positions label themselves centrist, which would be consistent with that thesis. There are many fewer ashamed leftists; only 21% who hold consistently progressive policy positions fail to indicate a leftist ideology.

As noted, these individual-level data translate into party-level implications. Foremost, they suggest that left parties should be more divided on moral issues than rightist parties though parties from both the left and right should find high levels of agreement on economic policies. To illustrate, we chose three countries with externally identified left and right parties and graphed the level of agreement on abortion and regulation.¹⁰ Figure 2 shows the percentage of surveyed legislators who have clear progressive (1–3 on the scale) or conservative (8–10) positions on abortion and regulation questions. For the leftists in El Salvador, there was significant disagreement about both issues, as shown by the relatively large percentages on both the progressive and conservative sides. On the right, however, almost 90 percent of ARENA members agreed with an anti-abortion position and over three-quarters took the pro-market economic position. In Chile, no Socialists took

a free market economic position (vs. 35% indicated a preference for statism), though the abortion question, as hypothesized, generated a significant number on the opposing poles. This is a sharp contrast to the rightist UDI, where there was a clear consensus on both morals and economics. These patterns are repeated for the third country, Nicaragua.

To consider whether contextual variables might explain some of the less-expected results, we present country-level analyses in Appendix Table B4. Across the region, McEc is the most likely combination to produce legislators who identify with the right, but there are exceptions where conservative economic views pair with moderate (Guatemala and Honduras) or even progressive moral positions (Ecuador, Guatemala, and Panama). The table also shows that in multiple countries, rightists portray their policy positions as combining conservatives with moderate economics. There are many fewer cases of rightists where both economic and moral views are moderate or progressive, but in Brazil and the Dominican Republic, a surprising subset of rightist legislators identify their policy positions as MmEm. These last examples are the most significant challenge to the idea that policy perceptions are tied to ideology.

4 | MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS

4.1 | Modeling strategy

In this section, we detail how we evaluated our theoretical framework through a multivariate cross-sectional analysis. Our primary aim is to test whether

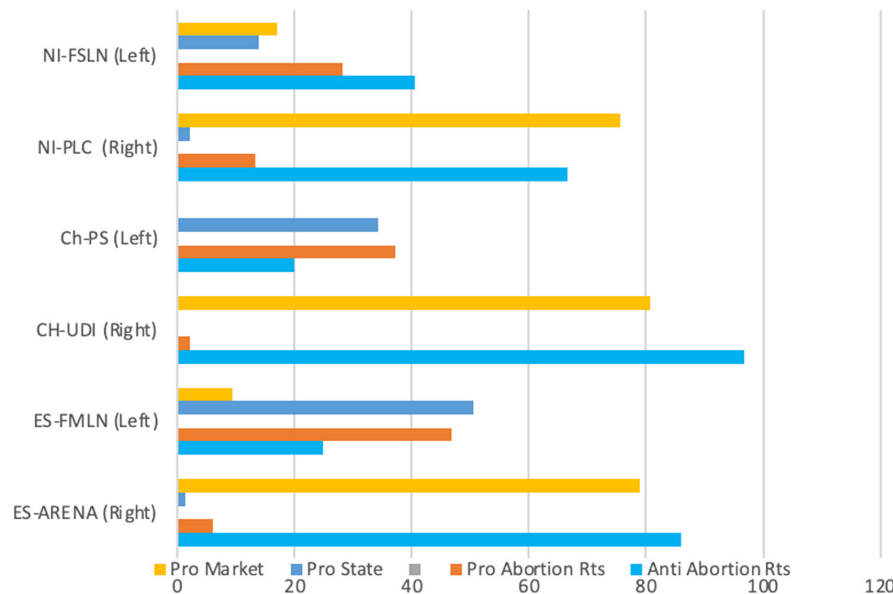


FIGURE 2 Percentage of left and right strongly favoring/opposing abortion and regulation. The length of the bars represents the percentage of legislators in each category by party across economic regulation (either pro-market or pro-state) and moral issues (either pro-regulation of abortion or anti-regulation).

and how moral and economic policy positions inform legislators' ideological self-perception (left, center, and right).

Our models test for the impact of all nine potential mixes of policy positions, ranging from conservative on both morality and economics (McEc) to consistently progressive (MpEp), using middling positions (MmEm) as the base category. Additionally, following the earlier discussion, we include age, gender, religiosity, and education level as control variables. We also include two party-level controls, the party size (number of legislators) and the party's age (a dummy variable indicating whether the party has existed for more or less than 10 years).

Since we are dealing with cross-sectional data, it is important to check for country-specific idiosyncrasies and temporal trends and determine whether they should be accounted for in the model. For instance, religious context (González-Rostani & Morgenstern, 2023) could increase the impact of moral issues on ideology. We confirm this expected country-level heterogeneity in our data using a Lagrange Multiplier Test (Breusch-Pagan). We choose fixed effects over random effects based on a Hausman test. Finally, to account for potential nonindependence of residuals, we use robust standard errors clustered by political party, as legislators from the same party may exhibit correlated behavior.

4.2 | Results

Figure 3a,b depicts the predicted probabilities of ideological self-placement derived from our first two multinomial logistic regressions (see Appendix Table C1¹¹). The model applies our previous coding for left (1–3) and right (8–10), using the center (4–7) as our base category. The left graph Figure 3a shows results for predicting a leftist legislator when abortion is the moral issue and the right graph shows predictions for the ideological right. Figure 3b, in turn, shows the results with respect to same-sex marriage. The nine dots with error bars within each graph represent the possible policy-mix categories. Moving from left to right in each graph, the economic position transitions from conservative (Ec) to middle (Em) and progressive (Ep), and the moral positions are represented by three distinct colors: pink for conservative (Mc), green for middle (Mm), and blue for progressive (Mp).

As should be expected, the left-side graph reveals that individuals holding consistently progressive views (MpEp) are most likely to identify as leftists (probability of 0.67). The two policy baskets, however, exert unequal weights. Keeping morals constant and transitioning from conservative to progressive economic positions (moving from McEp to MpEp), the probability of identifying as left-leaning almost doubles, escalating from 0.40 to 0.67. Shifting the moral stance while

maintaining a conservative economic position (from McEc to MpEc) produces a lesser alteration, yet the probability of self-identifying as a leftist triples under that scenario, ascending from 0.06 to 0.19. Morality, thus, is germane.

Comparing results from the two graphs shows that even for legislators for whom both economic and moral policy positions are consistent with ideology (McEc), the overall probability of being rightist (0.25) is less than one half than that of being leftist for those with consistently progressive (MpEp) views (0.67). Especially given that there are more legislators with conservative than progressive policy positions, this finding is supportive of the ashamed right thesis. The graph also implies that compared with legislators with conservative positions on both issues, the probability of self-selecting as a rightist drops to about 0.12 if the legislator holds a middling or progressive economic position (regardless of morality), but it does not change much if the legislator is conservative on economics and middling on morals (MmEc). If, however, the legislator takes a progressive moral position while still professing conservative economics (MpEc), the probability of a rightist identity drops to 0.19. While these results suggest that morals are a bit less impactful for a rightist ideology than we expected, the low overall probability of selecting a rightist ideology affects the test since there is less margin for change.

We next evaluate our expectation that leftists are likely to hold more diverse views on moral issues. A first support of this idea comes from comparing the probabilities for legislators to choose a left versus right label when they have consistent views on economics but opposing views on morals.¹² The difference is stark; while the predicted probability of a MpEc legislator choosing a rightist label is 0.19, the opposite situation, McEp, generates a 0.40 probability of choosing a leftist label. Reconfiguring, the data from Tables B1a-b show that a similar small percentage of leftists (4%) and rightists (5%) have economic positions that are opposed to their ideological label while the moral positions are consistent (e.g., MpEc for leftists), but the percentage of leftists who have a conservative position on abortion (29%) is nearly double that of a rightist having a progressive view on that issue (13%). The story is parallel when considering same-sex marriage.¹³ Similar contrasts are also evident when comparing legislators who take middling positions on moral issues. When comparing MpEp legislators to those whose policy positions are MmEp, the probability of choosing a leftist ideology drops by 24%. That large change shows that morals are germane to leftists. The impact on the right, however, is even greater; moving from McEc to MmEc changes the probability of rightists by 40 percent.¹⁴ Perhaps more telling than the change, the data imply that left parties will be much more heterogeneous, given that the predicted probability of a legislator with

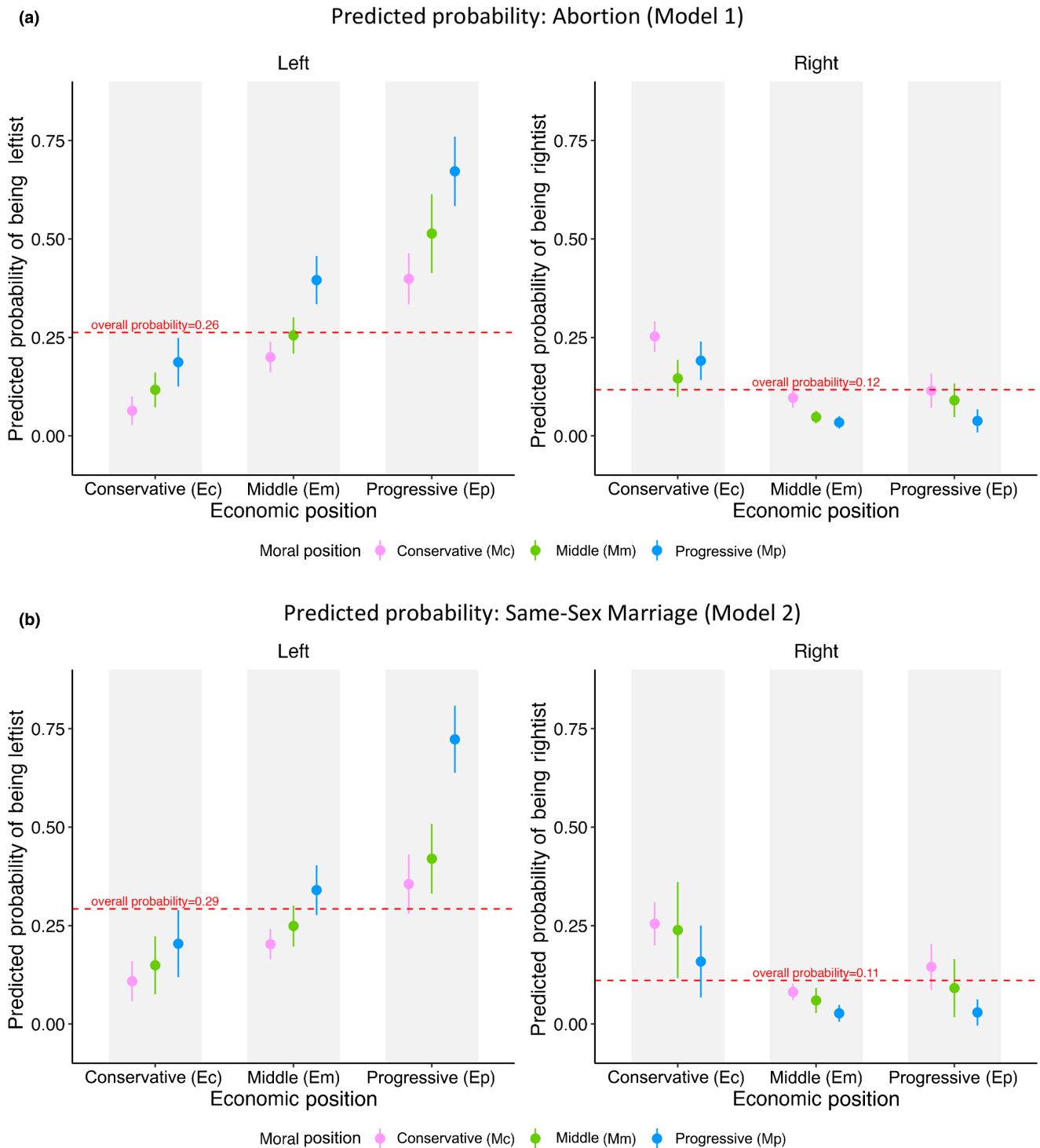


FIGURE 3 (a) Predicted probability: abortion (Model 1). The dotted line in each quadrant represents the overall probability of a legislator to self-identify as leftist or rightist in our sample. The predicted probabilities come from Models 1 and 2 (centrist are the baseline). (b) Predicted probability: same-sex marriage (Model 2).

progressive economics but moderate morals (MmEp) is over 50%. In contrast, only 15% who fit the MmEc label self-identify with the right.

The bivariate data showed some country-level effects, and these are confirmed by the country fixed effects (see Appendix). In Figures D2–D4 we show, for regulation and then abortion, the predicted values for

the different country intercepts as positions on those policies move from conservative to liberal. These figures indicate a wide range in the propensity of a country having rightist or leftist legislators, and variance in the slope of the curves shows that the impact of the different policy combinations is not constant. For example, Table B4 shows the probability that a legislator in

Panama will identify with the right drops from 0.37 when both policy positions are conservative to 0.24 when the policy combination is McEm. In contrast, those probabilities change from 0.67 to 0.14 for El Salvador.

Given the aforementioned work on the impact of institutions or context on the relation of policy and ideology, we tested a series of variables that could explain inter-country variation. Each contextual variable was coded as a dummy and interacted individually with policy mix variables (Appendix A and Figures C4–C6 detail the coding and associated predicted probabilities). Although some contextual variables have substantive impacts, their inclusion does not alter our overall conclusions regarding germaneness. First, unsurprisingly, the level of polarization has little effect on the probability of identifying as a leftist for economic conservatives. It does, however, change the probability of identifying as a leftist for economic progressives; in polarized systems there is a 73% probability that a legislator with MpEp policy preferences will identify as a leftist, but that probability falls to just 54% in less polarized societies. Polarization, thus, helps sharpen the germaneness of policy preferences. Low levels of clientelism and high party system institutionalization also heighten the correlation of a progressive policy orientation and leftist ideology.¹⁵ The contextual variables have less impact on legislators' likelihood of claiming a rightist label.¹⁶ Other contextual variables we tested, including economy, political stability, crime, and education GINI did not have meaningful impacts on the predicted probabilities. In sum, though some contextual variables do have independent impacts and may sharpen germaneness, they did not substantially affect our overall results.

We further test the robustness of our results with nine additional models. The first of these tests (Models 3–4 in Table C2) incorporates an alternative variable for ideological identification by using legislators' positioning of their party's ideologies instead of relying on self-positioning of their own ideology as used in the baseline model. The results remained consistent (see the related graphs in Figure C1).

We then re-ran our models using alternative operationalizations of the independent variables (Table C3 and Figure C1). For economic issues, we tested legislators' positions on pensions (available for all waves) instead of the regulation of the economy (Model 5 for abortion and Model 6 for same-sex marriage). These models confirmed that our results were not contingent on the proxies we used.

For the next robustness check, we used the continuous 1–10 scale of ideology as the dependent variable (Model 7 in Table C4) rather than the categorical variable. The predicted ideologies are plotted in Figure C2, with higher values meaning a more rightist position. It shows, as expected, that the only prediction for a right-of-center identification is consistently conservative policy views (McEc).¹⁷ Even that prediction, however,

is just slightly to the right of center (owing, again, to the high propensity of conservatives to claim a centrist ideology). By contrast, more combinations produce leftist positions, which confirms the idea that the leftists are heterogeneous. Also of note is that the predicted ideology for McEp (4.1) is substantially above that of MpEp (3.2), which indicates the germaneness of moral policies.

Finally, to demonstrate the lack of sensitivity of our results to the cut-off points of the three categories of each policy position, we recoded them based on the quantiles of the original two policy variables (see Appendix A for details). We also recoded the dependent variable using quantiles. As shown in Models 8 (original specification of the ideological scores) and 9 (quantiles), regardless of the specification for the dependent variable, the specification of the policy variables does not significantly alter the results (see Figure C3). In sum, our results are robust and not heavily influenced by specification biases.

5 | CONCLUSION

In an effort to understand how policy views tie to ideological perspectives in Latin America, our analysis focused on determining the relative germaneness of the former to the latter by studying critical political actors, the legislators. To conduct the analysis, we have leveraged combinations of moral and economic policy positions to determine their individual weight with respect to the legislators' positions on the left–right scale. Because many legislators hold contradictory policy positions, the analysis has been able to estimate which are, or are not, germane to their self-identified ideological position. The analysis challenges previous studies that have emphasized a predominant link between economics and ideology by demonstrating the significance of moral policies to legislators' ideological self-identification. The effects, however, are not homogeneous; many leftist legislators hold progressive positions on just one issue basket, while most who identify with the right have consistently conservative policy preferences. However, because there are also “ashamed” policy conservatives who identify their ideology as centrist, policy conservatism is a necessary but insufficient marker for rightism.

While not a specific goal of the study, in providing an empirical description of the relation between ideology and policy perspectives across the region, the paper has shed some light on the “ashamed right” thesis. These obfuscators were evident in how they identified with conservative views on policy but centrist ideologies. The opposition combination (progressive views on policy but a centrist ideology) was much less common.

The finding of policy-ideological ties also addresses, at least partially, concerns about the lack of


structuration of Latin American party systems. The rise of populists who eschew traditional left–right labels could destabilize policy alignments, but our findings show that they have not yet done so. Some contextual variables, such as the level of polarization and party system institutionalization, are related to country-level regional variation, but our tests suggested that such variables alter the baselines without affecting the general conclusions about the relationships between policies and ideology.

Future analyses have much to study. A particularly cogent question is how ideology changes over time in response to new issue areas. In our case, moral issues have become more politically salient, but we know that they are not germane to ideology for some politicians (e.g., López Obrador in Mexico). Another continuing question is the direction of causation. Do the new issues lead to ideological changes, or do politicians use their ideological identification to determine a position on the new issue? In addressing that question, future analyses might be able to examine whether politicians or voters who have had inconsistent policy positions are more likely to modify their ideological identification or their policy position. Of course, these types of analyses would require different data and methods better suited to determine the direction of causation, for example, experiments and panel studies, but in addressing germaneness of issues, such analyses would address large questions about the meaning of ideology.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data used in this paper were collected by the Observatorio de Elites Parlamentarias en América Latina of the University of Salamanca, Spain. All the data are available to download from their website: <https://oir.org.es/pela/en/>.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Throughout, we are interested in inconsistencies between a policy position and ideological self-identification. We are not proposing that two policy positions are inconsistent or contradictory with each other.

² Because the direction of the scales is arbitrary, the analysis does not rely on whether the correlations are positive or negative. We discuss this issue in more detail below.

³ We do recognize that if a policy position correlates strongly with ideology, we cannot be sure that it is germane, as other issues or factors could determine the ideology. This does not undermine our inquiry, however, since we focus on weak correlations.

Further, in emphasizing two politically salient issue baskets, we are comfortable accepting that strong correlations do indicate policy germaneness.

⁴ Note that this is a case where policy would move ideology, rather than the reverse.

⁵ The countries included are: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

⁶ The abortion question for the Brazil survey did change, but our tests suggest that this did not significantly affect which types of legislators (i.e., religious or associated with right-wing parties) answered as a conservative or progressive.

⁷ Appendix Table B1a provides percentages and numbers of leftist, centrist, and rightist legislators within each category of policy positions using the abortion and regulation questions, while Tables B2–B4 provide these numbers for each country.

⁸ Changing to same-sex marriage has minimal effect on these values; the corresponding values are 39% and 23%.

⁹ More leftists claim an economic moderate position (MpEm; 24%). Shifting to same-sex marriage, 29% are progressive on both issues (MpEp), 16% are MpEm, and another 17% are McEp.

¹⁰ We use external identification of the parties, to take into account the “ashamed right” hypothesis (and perhaps a similar phenomenon on the left).

¹¹ Technical details for interpretation of coefficients are discussed following Appendix Table C1.

¹² Data in this paragraph focus on abortion; the results are similar for same-sex marriage.

¹³ Using the question about same-sex marriage, while 17% of leftists have McEp, only 5% of rightists have MpEc. Overall 33% of leftists are conservative (Mc) on same-sex marriage, while just 9% of rightists have progressive (Mp) views on that issue.

¹⁴ For the leftists, this is based on a change from 0.67 to 0.51; for the right it is 0.25 to 0.15.

¹⁵ High electoral volatility, high number of effective parties, low political exclusion, high level of party identification, high legislative party cohesion, and low overall equality are also related to higher consistency for leftists.

¹⁶ High number of effective parties, high party system institutionalization, low level of party identification, high party system religion, and low legislative party cohesion are related to higher consistency for rightists. The results of legislative party cohesion are unexpected. When party cohesion is low, the propensity for a rightist identification is higher for economic rightists, for any views on moral policies.

¹⁷ Center here is 5.5. The predicted ideology for McEc, MmEc, and MpEc are 6.2, 5.6, and 5.5. McEc is the only one whose 95% confidence interval is above 5.5.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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