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Electoral Dynamics and Welfare Generosity in Comparative Perspective

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Abstract

Scholars have long noted the regressive character of social policy across Latin America, but recent studies focusing on policy developments of Left governments have found effective poverty and inequality reduction strategies in varied political and economic contexts. This paper presents new data on Latin American social policy regimes and assesses the impact of political competition and changing class dynamics on welfare developments across the region. The findings suggest that increased political competition in the context of economic stability and a growing middle-class result in more generous welfare policies.

Keywords

Social Policy; Welfare; Electoral Competition; Middle Class

Bio

Gabriela Ramalho Tafoya is a PhD student at the University of Connecticut and a Research Fellow in the Emerging Markets Welfare project at Koç University. Her dissertation examines the development of social welfare regimes across twenty countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, with an original, regionally comparable measure of welfare generosity that emphasizes the variety of social assistance programs that have proliferated across the Global South in recent years.

Introduction

Democracy since the 1990s,¹ the return of the Left² and the commodity boom of the 2000s³ have been credited with the expansion of social policy in Latin America. However, these factors have resulted in uneven social policy development throughout the region. Despite the relative progress of the more advanced cases, such as Chile and Uruguay, there are still important differences in the design and generosity of their social policy regimes. Similarly, in less developed states, such as Bolivia and Honduras, there has been uneven development in the social assistance pillar. Whereas Bolivia has developed universal social pensions and other protections for multiple categories of poor, Honduras has made only modest progress with respect to social assistance, lacking effective protections for the poor elderly and other needy populations.

Using a configurational approach, this paper investigates how favourable political and economic contexts combine to produce comprehensive and generous social policy regimes. Income levels and sustained economic growth combined with competitive Left parties and a substantial middle class favour the development of generous social policy regimes. In addition to these conditions, a strong Left position in the legislature or a legacy of generous social policies are needed to produce more inclusive welfare regimes. Cases that fail to implement progressive social assistance policies share one key characteristic: lack of competition for low-income voters among parties on the Left.

The paper is organized as follows. The next section reviews the electoral hypothesis and suggests a more nuanced view of electoral competition as a contributing factor to social policy expansion. I argue that social policy expansion occurs in *Favourable Political Situations* (FPS), characterized by a multiple strategies approach to electoral competition. The following section describes the elements of favourable economic, legislative and policy situations that also contribute to progressive social policy. Subsequently, I describe the data and methods used in the qualitative comparative analysis and discusses the results. The final section concludes.

Favourable Political Context

Latin American democracies are part of the Third Wave of democratic transitions, with most countries democratizing in the 1980s and 1990s. Despite concerns over consolidation,⁴ and some authoritarian backsliding (e.g. Venezuela under Chavez and Maduro), most countries have adopted electoral democracy as the “only game in town”⁵. Institutional factors, such as presidentialism,⁶ fragmented party systems,⁷ open-list proportional representation electoral rules⁸, and a long history of clientelism⁹ have made governance more difficult, resulting in enduring poverty and inequality across the region. In the economic sphere, the turn towards neoliberalism in the 1990s, exacerbated existing social problems and contributed to a crisis of representation across countries.¹⁰

¹ Brown and Hunter, “Democracy and Social Spending in Latin America, 1980-92”; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*.

² Pribble and Huber, “Social Policy and Redistribution”; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*.

³ Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav, “Economic Constraints and Presidential Agency.”

⁴ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*.

⁵ Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, 126.

⁶ Linz, “The Perils of Presidentialism.”

⁷ Mainwaring and Scully, *Building Democratic Institutions*.

⁸ Ames, “Electoral Strategy under Open-List Proportional Representation”; Ames, *The Deadlock of Democracy in Brazil*.

⁹ Auyero, *Poor People's Politics*; Herrera, *Water and Politics*; Stokes, “Perverse Accountability”; Weitz-Shapiro, *Curbing Clientelism in Argentina*.

¹⁰ Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization*.

But since the late 1990s and early 2000s, historic declines in poverty rates and unprecedented political inclusion of the poor have replaced doubts about democracy's potential with hope for more prosperous political and economic development. The success of Left parties in country after country has led to increased focus on social problems, and inclusive policies have replaced the structural adjustment policies of the neoliberal era in several cases. Notwithstanding the important contributions of previous economic,¹¹ institutional¹² and political¹³ explanations for the development of social policy regimes, the recent dynamics of electoral competition is an important additional explanation.¹⁴

Several studies emphasize the role of democracy as a necessary condition for the organization of political parties and civil society groups to make policy demands¹⁵, and partisan theories of the welfare state emphasize the role of parties on the left in explanations of welfare state development and expansion.¹⁶

Students of electoral politics agree that the main goal of parties and candidates is to win, to achieve office and to reap the associated benefits.¹⁷ According to this logic, parties and candidates seek to show responsiveness to their constituencies' demands in an effort to win electoral contests¹⁸. While this vast literature was developed in the American political context, the logic of electoral contests has been widely applied to other developed and developing democracies.¹⁹

Electoral Competition

The origin of the electoral hypothesis goes back to Key's²⁰ study of welfare spending in the American states. Since then, several scholars have focused on this link between increased electoral competition and welfare expenditures in industrial democracies.²¹ Theories of electoral democracy predict that politicians will be responsive to voters in the face of competition.²² With respect to social policy (e.g. social spending) the prediction is that more competition will result in more spending.

¹¹ Wilensky, *The Welfare State and Equality*; Brooks, *Social Protection and the Market in Latin America*; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Castiglioni, *The Politics of Social Policy Change in Chile and Uruguay*; Huber, Mustillo, and Stephens, "Politics and Social Spending in Latin America"; Madrid, *Retiring the State*; Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*; Kaufman, "The Political Left, the Export Boom, and the Populist Temptation"; Cameron, "The Expansion of the Public Economy"; Rodrik, *The Globalization Paradox*; Rudra, *Globalization and the Race to the Bottom in Developing Countries*; Kaufman and Segura-Ubiergo, "Globalization, Domestic Politics, and Social Spending in Latin America."

¹² Skocpol, "Early U.S. Social Policies: A Challenge to Theories of the Welfare State"; Niedzwiecki, "Social Policies, Attribution of Responsibility, and Political Alignments A Subnational Analysis of Argentina and Brazil"; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*; Madrid, *Retiring the State*.

¹³ Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Huber and Stephens, *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State*; Korpi and Palme, "The Paradox of Redistribution and Strategies of Equality"; Allan and Scruggs, "Political Partisanship and Welfare State Reform in Advanced Industrial Societies"; Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*; Haggard and Kaufman, *Development, Democracy, and Welfare States*; Kaufman and Segura-Ubiergo, "Globalization, Domestic Politics, and Social Spending in Latin America"; Garrett, *Partisan Politics in the Global Economy*.

¹⁴ Garay, *Social Policy Expansion in Latin America*.

¹⁵ Haggard and Kaufman, *Development, Democracy, and Welfare States*; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Kaufman and Segura-Ubiergo, "Globalization, Domestic Politics, and Social Spending in Latin America."

¹⁶ Garrett, *Partisan Politics in the Global Economy*; Huber and Stephens, *Development and Crisis of the Welfare State*; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*; Allan and Scruggs, "Political Partisanship and Welfare State Reform in Advanced Industrial Societies."

¹⁷ Fenno, "U.S. House Members in Their Constituencies"; Mayhew, *Congress*.

¹⁸ Mayhew, *Congress*.

¹⁹ Brown and Hunter, "Democracy and Social Spending in Latin America, 1980-92"; Keefer and Khemani, "Democracy, Public Expenditures, and the Poor."

²⁰ Key and Heard, *Southern Politics in State and Nation*.

²¹ Buchanan and Wagner, *Democracy in Deficit*.

²² Brittan, "The Economic Contradictions of Democracy."

In Latin America, earlier studies focused on the lack of responsiveness across the region²³ and more recently, the focus has changed as the success of parties on the Left has changed the landscape²⁴, suggesting greater responsiveness to popular demands. For example, recent studies argue that Left parties in power spend more on social programs²⁵, and under competitive pressures, they implement universalizing welfare reforms²⁶ and more generous social benefits²⁷.

But there are at least two caveats. First, what kind of electoral competition is the most relevant for social policy expansion? And second, how does the electoral hypothesis function in different economic, political and social contexts, such as in the less-developed, clientelistic, and unequal Latin American cases?

Competition for Whom?

In terms of the relevant type of electoral competition I ask: electoral competition for whose votes? The early literature tended to focus on the overall competitiveness of the electoral system²⁸. Comiskey (1993) finds a positive relationship between various measures of electoral competition and social expenditures in the American states. In Latin America, scholars too have found positive associations between competitiveness (read democracy) and social expenditures²⁹, but some have found mixed results when looking at subnational political competition³⁰.

Three separate studies focusing on social welfare at the local level in Mexico come to three different conclusions. Hecock (2006) focuses on the effect of electoral competition on education spending in Mexico and finds that greater competition results in increased spending. Also focusing on Mexican municipalities, Cleary (2007) finds no significant effect of electoral competition on local government performance (measured as public service delivery). Instead, he argues that an engaged citizenry, cooperating with their elected representatives, produces better government performance regardless of the level of local competition. Finally, Hiskey's (2000) study of poverty alleviation finds that greater competition at the local level results in more successful implementation of programs but does not affect the size or design of programs.

Studies of other countries and other social policy domains also find mixed results. Focusing on local social spending in Brazil, Boulding and Brown (2014) find that electoral competition does not necessarily result in higher levels of spending. Rather, changes in social spending are conditional on the size of the social budget. Contrary to the trend in the literature, they find that the size of the municipal budget affects the competitiveness of elections, with large budgets rewarding incumbents with large margins of victory.

More recently, Garay (2016) argues that electoral competition for *outsiders* is what drove the social policy expansion of the last 25 years in Latin America. Garay (2016) argues that political competition for *outsiders* (previously excluded, low income groups) has resulted in institutionalized, more generous social policy regimes in Brazil, but Conservative power has restricted social policy regimes in Chile and Mexico despite increased competition for *outsiders*.

²³ Stokes, *Mandates and Democracy*.

²⁴ Levitsky and Roberts, *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*.

²⁵ Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*.

²⁶ Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*.

²⁷ Garay, *Social Policy Expansion in Latin America*.

²⁸ Comiskey, "Electoral Competition and the Growth of Public Spending in 13 Industrial Democracies, 1950 to 1983"; Brown and Hunter, "Democracy and Social Spending in Latin America, 1980-92."

²⁹ Brown and Hunter, "Democracy and Social Spending in Latin America, 1980-92."

³⁰ Boulding and Brown, "Political Competition and Local Social Spending"; Cleary, "Electoral Competition, Participation, and Government Responsiveness in Mexico"; Hecock, "Electoral Competition, Globalization, and Subnational Education Spending in Mexico, 1999-2004."

Multiple Strategies

In this paper, I argue that another pivotal group in this relationship is the middle class. The middle class has expanded considerably in several Latin American countries since the late 1990s³¹, and this may help to explain the strategy of institutionalized implementation of social programs seen in the 2000s. Previous research has shown that the middle class is associated with programmatic policymaking³², and consequently, with improvements in the quality of government services³³.

Latin America's fragmented party systems have historically forced parties to form broad coalitions to govern. This means that candidates and parties must be responsive to multiple constituencies³⁴. While the poor have been historically politically marginalized through clientelistic practices, their recent inclusion into social policy regimes via a variety of anti-poverty programs has been explained through their political incorporation in increasingly competitive elections³⁵. While this theory can explain the electoral rewards of expanding social policy³⁶, it does not explain the difference in the design and generosity of social policy regimes. Middle class voters have historically received the bulk of social benefits due to their privileged position in the formal labour market. This constituency has achieved generous benefits over time throughout Latin America.³⁷ The middle class in Latin America has been growing steadily since the return of democracy³⁸, and there is growing evidence that politicians adapt their electoral strategies to gain middle class support³⁹. So, while candidates have incentives to employ clientelistic electoral strategies to gain the support of low-income groups, they also have incentives to curb these practices in favour of programmatic strategies to gain middle class votes.

In the context of Argentina, Weitz-Shapiro (2014) has shown that in provinces where the middle class has grown, there has been a decrease in clientelist politics. The better economic position of the middle class vis-à-vis the poor makes them an expensive group to "buy" in the traditional politics of clientelist exchange⁴⁰. In addition, middle class constituents prefer programmatic politics to particularistic exchange, and thus represent a different set of incentives for politicians seeking to win elections. Similarly, in the context of urban water provision in Mexico, Herrera (2017) shows that the combination of a strong middle-class constituency and the presence of industrial elites leads to improvement in the provision of water services at the municipal level. This dynamic suggests that different constituency structures can contribute to a diversity of social policy regimes.

Research on parties' electoral strategies has shown that parties often have multiple constituencies and cater to different groups with different types of appeals⁴¹. According to Gibson (1997:340), political parties in the 1990s were able to win electoral contests despite unpopular reforms because they have "distinctive regional sub-coalitions [that] suggests a historical division of labour between the sub-coalitions in the realms of policy-making and electoral politics." In the context of Peronism in Argentina and the PRI in Mexico, Gibson

³¹ Ferreira et al., *Economic Mobility and the Rise of the Latin American Middle Class*; Torche, "Middle Classes, Education and Mobility."

³² Weitz-Shapiro, *Curbing Clientelism in Argentina*; Herrera, *Water and Politics*.

³³ Herrera, *Water and Politics*.

³⁴ Gibson, "The Populist Road to Market Reform"; Luna, *Segmented Representation*.

³⁵ Garay, *Social Policy Expansion in Latin America*.

³⁶ Zucco, "When Payouts Pay Off."

³⁷ Haggard and Kaufman, *Development, Democracy, and Welfare States*; Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Ferreira and Robalino, "Social Protection in Latin America.";

³⁸ Stampini et al., "Poverty, Vulnerability and the Middle Class in Latin America"; Tornarolli, "The Evolution of the Middle Class in Latin America."

³⁹ Weitz-Shapiro, *Curbing Clientelism in Argentina*; Herrera, *Water and Politics*.

⁴⁰ Herrera, *Water and Politics*; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, *Patrons, Clients and Policies*.

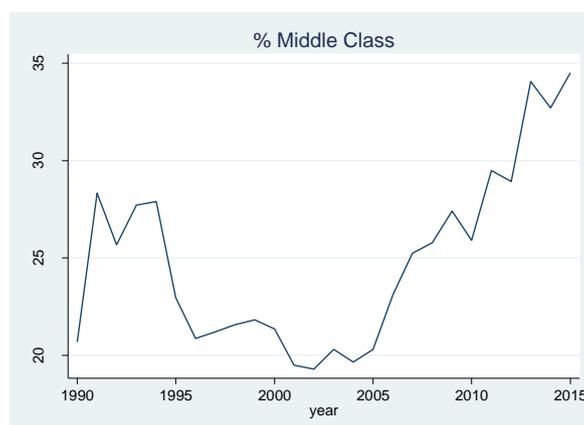
⁴¹ Gibson, "The Populist Road to Market Reform"; Luna, *Segmented Representation*.

(1997) shows that “metropolitan” coalitions serve as the base of support for development policies, even if these were unpopular with a majority of the population. On the other hand, “peripheral” coalitions functioned as an electoral vehicle, responsible for delivering electoral majorities.

Multiple constituencies also result in different types of policies and strategies across groups. In unequal but pluralistic societies parties need to craft coalitions of voters with different interests in order to garner a winning majority⁴². Luna (2014:4-5) argues that the resulting “segmented representation” has important political consequences. The resources provided by elites in exchange for interest representation are redeployed in popular sectors as clientelist practices. Luna argues that its strategy appeals to parties across the ideological spectrum. Parties on the Right cannot risk alienating their base by appealing to the poor based on redistribution, nor would that be a credible promise given their historical ideological positions. Similarly, parties of the Left cannot risk alienating their middle-class and working-class base by promising redistribution to gain low-income votes. Despite redistribution being a credible promise for the Left, middle- and working-class voters in the formal labour market want to see their benefits protected and not encroached upon by other social groups⁴³.

Given this dynamic then, where parties have multiple constituencies and electoral strategies, we can expect differences in policy outcomes based on alternative configurations of the electoral context. Specifically, I expect that in cases where there is a substantial middle-class constituency, social policy expansion will be greater. Garay’s (2016) “outsider” hypothesis can also be tested in this context. The most favourable political context for social policy expansion is one where parties on the Left compete successfully for multiple constituencies.

Figure 1: The Growth of the Middle Class in LAC, 1990-2015



Source: author’s compilation with data from the Inter-American Development Bank

Competition and the Left

The structure of ideological competition is also an important factor. Competitive elections where parties on the Left command substantial support in the electorate contributes to a more favourable political context for the expansion of social policy. Table 1 shows the structure of

⁴² Luna, *Segmented Representation*, 4.

⁴³ Luna, *Segmented Representation*.

competition in Latin America since 1995. One measure of the competitiveness of elections is the electoral margin, or the difference between the votes of the top two candidates or parties in a contest ⁴⁴. To measure the overall electoral margin of support for the top two contenders, I use survey data from the *Americas Barometer* series in each electoral year, or the year preceding the election, whichever is available, across 18 countries and 65 elections. Looking at presidential electoral contests in the region between 1995 and 2014, a competitive margin existed in 48% of cases. These are electoral contests where the margin of support between the top two candidates was 10% or less. Another 26% of elections had moderate levels of competition, where the margin was between 10.01-20%. In the remaining 17 elections in the period, the difference between the top two candidates is greater than 20%.

The ideological structure of competition is also a contributing factor to the political context with consequences for social policy. Table 1 shows the structure of ideological competition for the overall election, as well as among lower- and upper-income groups. A party is considered a major contender if it is one of the top two parties with the most support in the electorate. Parties of the Left and Center Left were major contenders in 62% of contests in the period.

Additionally, the Left was a major contender among *both* lower and upper-income groups in at least 50% of contests. A *Favourable Political Situation* (FPS) then is one where political competition includes Left parties and caters to multiple constituencies. For the analysis that follows, cases are coded as having a *Favourable Political Situation* if these conditions hold for at least half of electoral contests in the 1995-2014 period. I constructed this measure based on electoral margins and presence of the Left as a major contender for each country across the period for the overall election, and among lower- and upper-income groups. An overall *Favourable Political Situation* existed in 10 out of the 17 cases. Among low-income voters, a *Favourable Political Situation* existed in 8 of the cases, and among upper-income voters, in 12 cases there was a *Favourable Political Situation*.

Table 1: Structure of Electoral Competition in Latin America, 1995-2014

	Number of Elections	% Tootal Elections
<u>Level of Competition</u>		
High	31	48%
Moderate	17	26%
Low	17	26%
<u>Major Left Contender</u>		
Election	40	62%
Low-income voters	34	52%
Upper-income voters	35	54%
<hr/>		
N=65		

Note: based on elections that took place between 1995-2014 in the set of cases. The following cases are excluded due to lack of data: Guatemala 1995, Venezuela 2000, Argentina 2003, Uruguay 2004

⁴⁴ Comiskey, "Electoral Competition and the Growth of Public Spending in 13 Industrial Democracies, 1950 to 1983."

Ideology, Legislative Capacity and Policy Legacies

Electoral competition is an important aspect of the electoral context, but it is only one of many aspects that affect policymaking. The ideological composition of the legislature and the legacy of previous policies are other important considerations. Progressive social policy is more likely in cases where there is an ideal configuration between competitive elections and the dominance of parties on the left in executive and legislative offices, and a history of early social policy development ⁴⁵.

Despite Latin America's history of poverty and inequality and multiple failed attempts, the Left and its accompanying redistributive aspirations only gained executive office in the region in the 2000s, more than two decades after democratization in many cases, as a result of moderating policy positions and committing to democratic politics ⁴⁶. However, before then, since the 1990s, the Left had been gaining space in the legislature across the region. Table 2 shows the size of the Left in the legislature circa 1995 and 2010.

In some cases, parties of the Left and Center Left already commanded substantial positions in the legislature, such as in Costa Rica, Panama and Venezuela, where they composed more than 50% of the legislature, on average, between 1995 and 1999. By the 2000s, the Left had caught up in several other cases, including significant gains in Bolivia and Guatemala, with a jump of 45 and 29 points between the two periods, respectively. In other cases, such as in Argentina and Colombia, the Left did not make much inroads, gaining only a slightly better position in the same period. And in two cases, Costa Rica and Panama, there was a decline in the average share of the Left in the legislature.

Another variable in the political context is the existence of positive policy legacies.⁴⁷ The social policy legacy of the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) period facilitated the expansion of social policy in cases where social insurance was relatively well developed, such as in the social insurance *Pioneer* cases of Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Uruguay ⁴⁸. In these cases, a large segment of the population was already covered under a variety of public schemes and so extending coverage through social assistance to excluded groups was a relatively easier task. Alternatively, in cases without well-developed social insurance schemes, the state had more flexibility in pursuing alternative policy solutions ⁴⁹. In the case of South Africa, for example, where there was a of substantial social insurance protections, innovations in social assistance also comprised the main form of welfare expansion in the 2000s.

⁴⁵ Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*.

⁴⁶ Hunter and Power, "Rewarding Lula"; Cleary, "Electoral Competition, Participation, and Government Responsiveness in Mexico."

⁴⁷ Huber and Stephens, *Democracy and the Left*; Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*; Barrientos and Villa, "Evaluating Antipoverty Transfer Programmes in Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa. Better Policies?".

⁴⁸ Mesa-Lago, "Social Welfare Reform in the Context of Economic-Political Liberalization."

⁴⁹ Barrientos et al., "Growing' Social Protection in Developing Countries."

Table 2: Increasing Relevance of the Left in Latin American Legislatures

	Average Share 1995-1999	Average Share 2005-2009
Argentina	0.05	0.09
Bolivia	0.13	0.58
Brazil	0.35	0.46
Chile	0.27	0.37
Colombia	0.02	0.08
Costa Rica	0.50	0.41
Ecuador	0.30	0.38
El Salvador	0.33	0.42
Guatemala	0.06	0.35
Honduras	0.03	0.09
Mexico	0.20	0.28
Nicaragua	0.42	0.47
Panama	0.56	0.49
Paraguay	0.11	0.16
Peru	0.09	0.28
Uruguay	0.36	0.54
Venezuela	0.62	0.92

Source: Author based on data from Huber and Stephens (2012)

Table 3 shows the distribution of two key determinants of the policy legacies of the cases considered here. The generosity of social insurance is an indicator of the extent and reach of the social insurance pillar, which had been established decades before in each case. The level of social expenditures indicates public commitment to welfare and varies significantly across the region. The earliest social insurance regimes are also the biggest spenders. Despite some correlation between these two indicators, there are important variations among the cases. For example, Bolivia spends 19% of GDP on social policies compared to Chile's 15% of GDP, yet the Chilean social insurance regime is 5 times more generous than the Bolivian regime. A positive policy legacy then, can be characterized as one in which there is a well-developed, previously existing social insurance regime, facilitating expansion of social assistance to a relatively smaller population; or a lack thereof, facilitating relatively cheaper expansion of social assistance to a large population. Cases that fall in the middle, with less generous social insurance and lower social spending commitments, are expected to have low or no social policy expansion because having a commitment to social insurance but no fiscal space to expand it stalls the overall trajectory.

Table 3: Policy Legacies in Latin America

	Generosity of Social Insurance ^a	Total Social Spending (% GDP) ^b
Argentina	18.54	0.34
Bolivia	4.15	0.19
Brazil	23.09	0.25
Chile	24.62	0.15
Colombia	8.48	0.14
Costa Rica	10.20	0.20
Ecuador	5.65	0.16
El Salvador	4.43	0.11
Guatemala	2.68	0.08
Honduras	2.21	0.11
Mexico	5.61	0.14
Nicaragua	5.08	0.10
Panama	11.23	0.09
Paraguay	3.37	0.10
Peru	5.07	0.09
Uruguay	28.63	0.21
Venezuela	17.43	0.20

^aData is from Ramalho Tafoya (nd)

^bData from CEPALSTAT

In addition to a *Favourable Political Situation*, characterized by competitive elections where parties of the Left participate and pursue multiple constituencies, greater presence of the Left in the legislature and positive policy legacies should contribute to greater social policy expansion.

Favourable Economic Situation

A final consideration is the existence of a *Favourable Economic Situation* (FES). To expand social policy regimes, countries must not only have the right political conditions, but also the economic ability to pursue expansionary reforms. Research on the policy consequences of the rise of the Left shows that despite gaining office in many cases, not all Left parties “governed on the left” ⁵⁰. Murillo et. al argue that the commodity boom of the 2000s paved the way for social policy expansion as it provided the necessary economic conditions.

In this paper a *Favourable Economic Situation* is characterized by higher levels of income and sustained economic growth. Table 4 below shows two economic indicators for the region: the level of income per capita and economic performance between 1995 and 2010. A *Favourable Economic Situation* existed in all but two cases, Paraguay and El Salvador. These two cases are characterized by low levels of income, measured as GDP per capita, and have experienced low levels of GDP growth in two out of the three periods considered.

⁵⁰ Murillo, Oliveros, and Vaishnav, “Economic Constraints and Presidential Agency,” 52.

Table 4: Economic Context in Latin America

	GDP per capita (2013)	GDP growth rate (average %)		
		1995-2000	2001-2005	2006-2010
Argentina	\$15,501.00	1.74	1.77	5.70
Bolivia	\$4,499.00	3.66	3.00	4.57
Brazil	\$10,278.00	2.49	3.11	4.29
Chile	\$15,272.00	5.40	4.80	4.13
Colombia	\$8,861.00	1.91	3.76	4.58
Costa Rica	\$10,732.00	4.26	3.83	4.65
Ecuador	\$7,443.00	1.32	4.24	3.72
El Salvador	\$6,032.00	2.44	1.46	1.84
Guatemala	\$4,351.00	4.12	3.13	3.60
Honduras	\$3,566.00	3.24	4.84	4.06
Mexico	\$12,776.00	3.36	2.03	1.68
Nicaragua	\$2,579.00	5.18	3.32	2.95
Panama	\$13,766.00	4.38	4.07	7.46
Paraguay	\$4,752.00	1.50	1.22	4.64
Peru	\$9,049.00	3.41	4.03	6.81
Uruguay	\$13,315.00	2.22	-0.04	6.22
Venezuela	\$11,258.00	1.36	3.18	4.92

^aData is from SSA (2013) in USD (PPP)

^bData from World Bank

Data and Methods

The use of qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) has experienced a revival in social scientific research, increasing dramatically since the early 2000s across a variety of disciplines ⁵¹. It has also been fruitfully used in welfare state research ⁵², which benefits from the complex causal configurations approach. The main strength of QCA is in its ability to consider multiple paths to complex outcomes. Unlike statistical techniques that hold “all else equal” to extract net effects of causes, QCA considers all variables at their real levels and identifies the configuration of conditions that leads to the specified outcome. I employ fuzzy set QCA (fsQCA) in the analysis that follows ⁵³. I score the condition and the outcome variables based on relative membership in each set as shown in table 5 below.

The outcome investigated here is generous *Social Policy Expansion*. Since the 1990s and increasingly in the 2000s, Latin American countries invested in social assistance, mostly in the form of conditional cash transfers for poor families with children and social pensions for the needy elderly. However, not all social assistance schemes are created equal. To assess the configurations described above, I use data on the generosity of social policy developed by Ramalho Tafoya to assess the different paths to more inclusive regimes. Ramalho Tafoya uses a cluster analysis of welfare generosity to build a typology of social policy regimes. She find that

⁵¹ Rihoux and Marx, “QCA, 25 Years after ‘The Comparative Method,’” 176.

⁵² Emmenegger, Kvist, and Skaaning, “Making the Most of Configurational Comparative Analysis”; Vis, “The Importance of Socio-Economic and Political Losses and Gains in Welfare State Reform”; Vis, “Governments and Unpopular Social Policy Reform.”

⁵³ Ragin, *Redesigning Social Inquiry*; Rihoux and Lobe, “The Case for Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA): Adding Leverage for Thick Cross-Case Comparison.”

there are four broad types of social policy regimes across Latin America ⁵⁴: *Inclusive*, *Compensatory*, *Restricted*, and *Exclusionary*. This classification is the basis for the variable *Social Policy Expansion*, where *Inclusive* and *Compensatory* regimes represent high/more generous social policy expansion, and *Restricted* and *Exclusionary* regimes represent low/less generous social policy expansion.

Table 5: Factors Favouring Social Policy Expansion

	Generous Social Policy Expansion	FPS (Overall)	FPS (Lower Income)	FPS (Upper Income)	Left Power in Legislature	Policy Legacy	FES
Argentina	1.00	0.55	0.55	0.67	0.37	0.89	0.55
Bolivia	0.77	0.39	0.39	0.89	0.92	0.39	0.77
Brazil	1.00	0.89	0.77	1.00	0.59	1.00	1.00
Chile	1.00	0.89	0.89	0.50	1.00	0.89	0.67
Colombia	0.33	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.92	0.60	0.77
Costa Rica	0.33	0.77	0.77	1.00	0.85	0.60	0.55
Ecuador	0.77	0.77	0.39	0.89	0.92	0.60	0.77
El Salvador	0.00	0.50	0.50	0.77	0.51	0.17	0.55
Guatemala	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.77	0.00	0.17	0.77
Honduras	0.00	0.39	0.39	0.89	0.67	0.17	0.89
Mexico	0.77	0.55	0.39	0.00	0.67	0.60	0.67
Nicaragua	0.00	0.39	0.17	0.39	0.67	0.33	0.89
Panama	0.33	0.00	0.00	0.17	0.92	0.33	0.33
Paraguay	0.33	0.77	0.77	0.89	0.67	0.17	0.89
Peru	0.33	0.33	0.55	0.33	0.77	0.33	0.17
Uruguay	1.00	0.50	0.39	0.50	0.11	1.00	0.67
Venezuela	1.00	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.92	0.89	0.67

Source: author

Notes: FPS= Favorable Political Situation; FES= Favorable Economic Situation

Of the seventeen cases analysed here, five constitute *Inclusive* regimes and are fully in the set of social policy expansion: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Venezuela. These cases are characterized by historically broad inclusion of the population in a generous social security pillar and the development of complementary, generous social assistance schemes, providing protection against a comprehensive set of contingencies. Bolivia, Ecuador and Mexico constitute the *Compensatory* regimes type, those where a generous social assistance pillar has grown to compensate for a historically less inclusive, moderately generous social insurance regime, and where most, but not all contingencies are considered. These are mostly in the set of social policy expansion.

Restricted regimes also have historically less inclusive and moderately generous social insurance pillars, but have not built a complementary social assistance pillar, but do account for most contingencies even if at a lower level of generosity. These are more out than in the set and are composed of six cases, including Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. The remaining three cases are out of the set: El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. These

⁵⁴ Ramalho Tafoya, "Social Protection in Latin America: Welfare Generosity and Electoral Dynamics in Comparativeperspective."

are *Exclusionary* regimes, where both the social insurance and social assistance pillars remain less generous and residual, and large swaths of the population remain unprotected across several contingencies. The classification of these regimes is based on policy characteristics in 2013⁵⁵. The configuration of conditions that lead to the two more favourable outcomes, *Inclusionary* and *Compensatory* regimes, are explored in two steps. In the first step, the fuzzy set membership scores for each of the variables are transformed into a truth table. The truth table gives us all the possible configurations of conditions and the corresponding cases that are associated with these conditions. The configurations without any empirical examples are dropped from the analysis. The truth table is shown in table 6. It also includes the consistency scores, which denote the degree to which the membership scores of all cases in a particular configuration are sufficient for the outcome. In the second step, I assess the extent to which case placements in different configurations are sufficient for the outcome.

The main conditions hypothesized to lead to more generous social policy expansion are *Favourable Political Situation* (FPS), *Left Legislature* (LL), *Positive Policy Legacies* (PPL) and *Favourable Economic Situation* (FES). For each condition, I have compiled a fuzzy membership score that combines multiple variables as described below. For each, the final fuzzy membership score is comprised of four categories: a score of 0 denotes cases that are fully out of the set (non-membership), a score of .33 denotes cases that are partially out of the set (partial membership), a score of .77 denotes cases that are mostly in the set (more than partial membership), and a score of 1 denotes cases that are fully in the set (full membership). In some variables I average these scores and in others I add them for the final fuzzy set data.

FPS is measured in three ways: overall, among lower income groups, and among upper income groups. For each, I use two components, the electoral margin⁵⁶ and the presence of Left among the candidates/parties with the most support, or Left winner⁵⁷, for the period 1995-2014 to score the cases. For the first component, the margin of support, a score of 0 represents low or no competition, with margins above 20% in the majority of elections, a score of .33 represents low-moderate competition, with margins below 10% in at least a third of elections, a score of .77 represents moderate-high competition, with margins below 10% in 33-66% of elections, and a score of 1 represents high competition, with margins below 10% in 67% or more of elections. For the second component, Left winner, a score of 0 represents cases where there was a Left winner in less than 33% of elections, a score of .33 represents a Left winner in 33-50% of elections, a score of .77 represents a Left winner in 51-66% of elections, and a score of 1 represents a Left winner in 67% or more of elections. These two scores are added to construct the FPS score for each category -overall election, lower income voters, upper income voters- used in the fsQCA analysis.

⁵⁵ Ramalho Tafoya.

⁵⁶ The data used for the construction of the margin of support in each case and across the overall election, among lower and upper income groups was the AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.LapopSurveys.org. 1995-2014. The assets battery included in the surveys was used to score respondents in quintiles of income. Respondents in the bottom three quintiles represent lower income voters as a proxy for "outsiders" and respondents in the top two quintiles represent upper income voters as a proxy for "middle class."

⁵⁷ The variable Left Winner also uses the AmericasBarometer surveys to determine the presence of Left and Center-Left candidates and parties that are in the lead among different groups of voters. The variable used to determine candidate or party support is VB20, which reads "If the next presidential elections were being held this week, what would you do?" I record the percent of eligible voters that support each of the top two candidates/parties for each country and election year and then calculate the margin of support as the difference between the most supported and the second most supported candidate/party. For the classification of candidates and parties as Left and Center-Left I use Baker and Greene's (2011) classification scheme, see Coppedge, "The Dynamic Diversity of Latin American Party Systems"; Lodola and Queirolo, "Ideological Classification of Latin American Political Parties"; Pop-Eleches, *From Economic Crisis to Reform*; Wiesehomeier and Benoit, "Presidents, Parties, and Policy Competition"; Baker and Greene, "The Latin American Left's Mandate."

The variable Left Legislature⁵⁸ reflects the average of the membership scores of three variables: percent of Left and Center-Left seats in the legislature in 1995 and 2010, and the change in seat share over that period. For the seat share variables, a score of 0 represents less than 10% seat share, .33 represents between 10-20% seat share, .77 represents 20-30% seat share, and 1 represents more than 30% seat share by Left and Center-Left parties in the legislature. For the percent change variable, a score of 0 reflects a negative change or a change of less than 5 percentage points, .33 reflects an increase of 5-10 percentage points, .77 reflects an increase of 10-15 percentage points, 1 reflects an increase of more than 15 percentage points.

Positive Policy Legacy combines two variables: generosity of social insurance regime⁵⁹ and total social spending⁶⁰. For social insurance generosity 0 represents a score of less than 5 points, .33 represents a score of 5-12 points, .77 represents a score of 12-20 points, and a score of 1 represents a generosity score greater than 20 points. For the variable total social spending, cases are awarded a score of 0 if spending is less than 5% of GDP, a score of .33 if spending is between 5-12%, a score of .77 for spending between 12-20%, and a score of 1 if spending is greater than 20% of GDP.

Finally, a Favourable Economic Situation (FES) is also the average of the membership scores of two variables: GDP per capita⁶¹ and the average GDP growth rate⁶² between 1995-2010. Cases are assigned one of four World Bank income classifications: 0 for low income, .33 for lower middle income, .77 for upper middle income, and 1 for high income. The GDP growth rate score takes into consideration the average growth rate for the periods 1995-2000, 2001-2005, and 2006-2010. Cases are awarded a score of 0 if there is negative or no growth in the three periods, .33 for growth in at least one period, .77 for growth in at least two periods, and 1 for growth in all three periods.

Table 6: Summary Statistics

	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Generous Social Policy Expansion	17	0.55	0.38	0.00	1.00
FPS (Overall)	17	0.50	0.26	0.00	0.89
FPS (Lower Income)	17	0.46	0.25	0.00	0.89
FPS (Upper Income)	17	0.62	0.30	0.00	1.00
Left Power in Legislature	17	0.68	0.29	0.00	1.00
Positive Policy Legacy	17	0.54	0.31	0.17	1.00
FES	17	0.68	0.21	0.17	1.00

⁵⁸ For the construction of the variable Left Legislature, I rely on data on the seat share of Left and Center-Left parties from Huber and Stephens (2012) dataset, see Evelyne Huber and John D. Stephens, *Latin America and the Caribbean Political Dataset, 1945-2012*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2012.

⁵⁹ Ramalho Tafoya, "Social Protection in Latin America: Welfare Generosity and Electoral Dynamics in Comparativeperspective."

⁶⁰ Data is from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) statistical portal and refers to the spending category "total social spending," see ECLAC, *Statistics and Indicators, United Nations, 2000-2018*. Retrieved from http://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/WEB_CEPALSTAT/estadisticasIndicadores.asp?idioma=i

⁶¹ Data are from Table 3. Demographic and other statistics related to social security, 2013, see Social Security Administration, "Social Security Programs Throughout the World: Americas 2013."

⁶² Data are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators, retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>

Analysis and Discussion

The fsQCA analysis finds that there are two paths to the outcome *Social Policy Expansion*. A *Favourable Political Situation* (FPS) among upper income groups and a *Favourable Economic Situation* (FES) are present in the cases of positive outcomes. In addition, substantial Left party share in the legislature (LL) or positive policy legacies (PL) must be present for the outcome. In fuzzy set notation, the results are as follows:

$$\text{FPS}_U * \text{FES} (\text{LL} + \text{PL}) \rightarrow \text{SP Expansion}$$

This finding indicates that either path is sufficient, but not necessary, for producing the outcome. A *Favourable Political Situation* does not lead to social policy expansion on its own, but in conjunction with a *Favourable Economic Situation* and either substantial Left presence in the legislature or previous policy legacies, it is sufficient to lead to generous social policy reforms. These two paths capture almost all the *Inclusive* and *Compensatory* social policy regime types. The only exception is the case of Argentina.

Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela have all the sufficient conditions, including both substantial representation of the Left in the legislature and favourable policy legacies. In the case of Brazil and Mexico, having the first two conditions *and* being in the set of Left Legislature produces the outcome. The case of Argentina is not included in the set of Left Legislature, as the Left commanded less than a 10 percent share of the legislature, on average, between 1995 and 2009. However, this case had a favourable policy legacy, with relatively generous social insurance regime and a high level of social expenditures. Importantly, Costa Rica and Peru also shared the path $\text{FPS}_U * \text{FES} * \text{LL}$ but are not cases of generous *Social Assistance Expansion*. Additional research is needed to understand why these factors are not sufficient to produce the outcome in these two cases.

For the negative cases, where social policy implementation was low and less generous, there are several configurations of conditions. There are cases with favourable and unfavourable overall political and economic situations, and cases with and without Left-dominant legislatures and favourable policy legacies. However, what all the negative cases share is an unfavourable political situation among low-income voters. There are six configurations of conditions among the negative cases, but in all of them, there is low competition for low-income voters and the Left is not a dominant force among this group. Similar to the conclusion above, more research is needed to understand these results.

Table 7: Truth Table

<i>FPS_O</i>	<i>FPS_L</i>	<i>FPS_U</i>	<i>LL</i>	<i>PL</i>	<i>FES</i>	<i>Outcome</i>	<i>Consistency</i>	<i>Cases</i>
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.87	Chile Bolivia, Uruguay, Venezuela
0	0	1	1	0	1	1	0.84	Brazil Costa Rica
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0.83	Mexico Peru
1	0	1	1	1	1	1	0.83	Ecuador
0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0.78	Panama
0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0.76	Colombia

1	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.76	Argentina
0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0.72	Nicaragua
1	0	0	1	1	1	0	0.69	Guatemala
0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0.69	Paraguay
0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0.69	El Salvador
1	0	1	0	1	1	0	0.69	Honduras

Notes: FPS_O= the set of Overall Favorable Political Situation; FPS_L= the set of Favorable Political Situation among lower income groups; FPS_U= the set of Favorable Political Situation among upper income groups; LL= the set of substantial Left power in the legislature; PL= the set of favorable policy legacies; FES= the set of Favorable Economic Situation

Conclusion

Democracy, the rise of the Left, and a more stable economic situation are associated with the expansion of social assistance across Latin America. This paper has shown that despite similarities in these factors across countries, their combination produced more than one outcome. Specifically, a competitive electoral system by itself is not sufficient to produce generous policies. A growing middle class and political competition for their vote is necessary. Similarly, the election of presidents of the Left does not explain variations, but the steady growth of the Left's share in the legislature contributes to social policy expansion. Finally, despite a stable economic situation in many cases, sustained economic growth is also needed. These conditions combined to produce generous social policy expansion among the cases examined. Where one or more of these was missing, expansion was low and/or less generous, leaving large swaths of the population unprotected.

Policy legacies have been an important component in explaining the move to universal social policy regimes in Costa Rica and Uruguay⁶³. However, in the present analysis, this variable does not lend much explanatory power more generally, being only important in the case of Argentina. Future research can be directed at understanding the cases of Costa Rica and Peru, two cases with the necessary configuration of conditions but that failed to substantially expand social assistance. Similarly, the negative cases share some common characteristics, but thicker case studies may reveal additional impediments to social policy expansion in these cases. As the region appears to be swinging back towards the political right, it is important to understand the factors leading to social policy expansion, so that they are not reversed by subsequent administrations.

⁶³ Franzoni and Sánchez-Ancochea, *The Quest for Universal Social Policy in the South*; Pribble, *Welfare and Party Politics in Latin America*.

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