# Responsibility Attributions amid Economic Crisis: Evidence from Latin America

Damarys Canache and Matthew Cawvey

Department of Political Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

The formation of responsibility attributions is essential for democratic accountability. Scholars in the economic voting literature have found that economic perceptions and conditions are important for accountability judgments. In short, citizens punish politicians for negative economic outcomes or perceptions. This tendency to blame one's own government would make perfect sense if domestic factors wholly determined a country's financial conditions, but that certainly is not the case in today's increasingly globalized world, where the targets of economic failure and success extend to such actors as multinational corporations and foreign governments. A foreign-induced economic crisis offers citizens even less reason to hold their government accountable for financial malaise. In this paper, we develop a model of government responsibility attribution in Latin America in the aftermath of the 2008–2009 global financial crisis. More than 40 percent of Latin American citizens associate the economic crisis with their own government. What explains people's propensity to blame the government? Drawing on the responsibility attribution and economic voting literature, we propose that an individual's propensity to blame (or not) the government is a function of partisan preferences and beliefs about the economy. Furthermore, we argue that the effect of economic ideology on blame attribution varies depending on individual characteristics and contextual attributes. Using data from seventeen Latin American nations from the 2010 AmericasBarometer surveys, we find that a nation's economic policy context moderates the impact of economic ideology on blame attribution for the crisis among politically sophisticated individuals.

**Paper prepared for presentation in the VII Congreso Latinoamericano de Ciencia Política, organized by the Asociación Latinoamericana de Ciencia Política (ALACIP). Bogotá, September, 25-27, 2013.**

Democratic accountability requires that voters punish incumbents for negative societal outcomes and reward incumbents for positive societal outcomes. However, before citizens can hold politicians accountable, they first must assess the degree to which public officials are responsible for societal outcomes.

In the economic voting literature, scholars have identified economic perceptions and macro-economic conditions as important accountability criteria for citizens (e.g., Anderson 2000; Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000; Pacek and Radcliff 1995a; Powell and Whitten 1993; Samuels 2004; Wilkin, Haller, and Norpoth 1997). This research has shown that politicians can increase their probability of re-election by avoiding negative economic outcomes and by maximizing positive impressions about the economy among voters (Powell and Whitten 1993; Anderson 2000). The evidence also suggests that the electorate is more likely to punish politicians for poor economic results than to reward them for strong economic results (Bloom and Price 1975; Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000). Exclusively punishing public officials for a country's economic problems would make perfect sense in a world devoid of international trade and foreign direct investment. In today's increasingly globalized world, where international economic factors combine with domestic ones to influence a country's economy, the culprits of economic malaise theoretically encompass such actors as multinational corporations, international organizations, and foreign governments. Globalization thus multiplies the potential targets of blame for responsibility attributions, reducing the probability that some citizens will hold domestic political leaders responsible for current financial conditions (Gomez and Wilson 2001: 903, 2006: 132; Remmer 1991: 779).

This scenario may be especially relevant for how citizens form responsibility attributions during a global economic crisis. For people living in countries considered to be primary contributors to the financial meltdown, the choice may be easy: blame the domestic government. But in countries with no direct fault on the economic crisis, some citizens may be more likely to identify international factors such as foreign governments and multinational corporations as the main sources of the country's crisis.

This paper offers a theory of government responsibility attribution in the midst of a global economic crisis. In particular, we examine the process of responsibility attribution for the crisis in Latin America in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial collapse. While developing countries contributed to "a flawed monetary order" through their "tendency to build up surplus international reserves," Latin American countries were not the primary source of the worldwide recession (ECLAC 2009: 10). Instead, the problem originated with the subprime mortgage crisis in the United States and resulted from such additional factors as inadequate financial regulation (ECLAC 2009: 10).

In 2010, the prevailing view among Latin Americans was that their countries were enduring an economic crisis. Public opinion data from the 2010 AmericasBarometer surveys[1] show that nearly 93 percent of Latin American respondents believed that they were experiencing some degree of economic worsening. Despite the external stimulus of that crisis, on average 46.3 percent of Latin Americans citizens blamed the government for the economic crisis. Among those who believed that there was a crisis, the tendency to target the government went from 30.8 percent in Costa Rica to 64.3 percent in Paraguay. These numbers seem high in light of the foreign origins of the recent financial collapse, but they may reflect the historical importance of the government in economic policymaking in Latin America.

In the last decades, Latin America's economic policy context, defined by the extent to which *the state* vis-a-vis *the market* is the driving force behind a nation's economy, experienced substantial changes from the state-centered approach of import-substitution industrialization that became dominant from the 1930s to the 1980s (Hirschman 1968; Kaufman 1990) to the transition to neoliberalism in the 1990s (Corrales 2003; Weyland 1998), and to the return of to state-centered policy-making resulting from recent electoral successes of the political left in several Latin American nations (Levitsky and Roberts 2011; Murillo and Vaishanv 2010). Today there are important contrasts in the extent in which Latin American economies are market driven. According to a well-known metric, the Index of Economic Freedom[1], Latin America offers a wide range of economies. In 2010, for example, the region had four "repressed" economies, four "mostly unfree" economies, ten "moderately free" economies, and one "mostly free" economy.[2] The heterogeneity in the prescriptions, regulations, and organization of Latin America's economies raises questions regarding whether and how the economic policy context influences attributions of responsibility for economic crisis.

The Latin American setting thus allows us to study responsibility attribution in the midst of a global economic crisis. This opportunity provides our paper with three advantages. First, few comparative studies have examined economic voting during financial meltdowns (Remmer 1991: 779), especially those that are global in scope. Second, Remmer (1991) studies Latin American elections during the 1980s, a period of democratization in the region. Our study, by contrast, takes place in 2010, when most countries had been democratic for more than a decade. As a result of greater experience with democracy, political accountability and responsibility attributions should be more developed in the more recent period than in the earlier period of

[1] Since the mid-1990s, the Wall Street Journal and Heritage Foundation have been producing the Index of Economic Freedom. This index annually tracks the extent of economic liberties in countries around the globe. <http://www.heritage.org/index/about>
[2] The 2010 classification of the countries is as follows: Bolivia, Cuba, Ecuador, and Venezuela ("repressed"); Argentina, Brazil, Honduras, and Nicaragua ("mostly unfree"); Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Paraguay and Uruguay ("moderately free"); and Chile ("mostly free") (Heritage Foundation 2013).

Remmer's study. Third, this paper proposes an original model of responsibility attribution for economic crisis that combines individual-level and contextual factors.

## THE FORMATION AND CONSEQUENCES OF RESPONSIBILITY ATTRIBUTIONS

The economic voting literature has investigated two questions about accountability judgments. First, how are responsibility attributions formed? Second, how do responsibility attributions influence political outcomes? With regard to economic voting, scholars want to know whether incumbents receive fewer votes for poor economic results and/or negative evaluations of economic performance (e.g., Benton 2005; Duch and Stevenson 2008; Pacek and Radcliff 1995b; Powell and Whitten 1993). Much research has stressed the role of economic perceptions on an individual's responsibility decision. Do citizens tend to hold politicians accountable for their personal economic well-being or for their country's general financial well-being? Kinder and Kiewiet (1981) considered this question in their study of economic voting in the United States. In general, the literature has found that citizens tend to base their responsibility attributions on sociotropic, rather than pocketbook, considerations (e.g., Alford and Leege 1984; Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000; Markus 1988).

Before voters can hold the government accountable, they first must develop attributions of responsibility for economic and political outcomes (Rudolph 2003: 700). Scholars interested in the formation of such judgments have recognized two important influences: individual-level and contextual factors. Several studies have emphasized the impact of personal characteristics on the attribution process. Gomez and Wilson (2001, 2003), for example, provide ample evidence that the impact of economic perceptions on blame attribution is conditional upon political sophistication. Specifically, these authors argue that "the breadth and depth of an individual's political knowledge base largely determines his ability to make proximal or distal attributions for socio-political phenomena" (Gomez and Wilson 2001: 900). Thus, for example, politically sophisticated citizens consider several potential targets of blame for economic conditions, and they are more capable to process and integrate economic information when making political judgments than less sophisticated individuals. Politically unsophisticated voters, by contrast, lack substantial knowledge of the complexities of modern economies and thus are more likely than their sophisticated counterparts to associate the health of the economy with the most prominent and proximate actor, their own government.

Political sophistication constitutes just one individual-level influence on the formation of responsibility judgments. Other significant factors include partisan and ideological factors, both of which bias the citizen toward blaming particular actors for political and economic outcomes (Rudolph 2003: 701–702). If citizens sympathize with the incumbent party, for example, they will be inclined to accept a leader's claim to be responsible for positive economic conditions or not responsible for negative economic conditions. Likewise, economic ideology predisposes adherents to particular responsibility attributions. Because right-leaning, economically conservative individuals believe that the government should not be heavily involved in the economy, these citizens will associate economic outcomes with non-government actors and be less likely than their left-leaning, liberal counterparts to blame public officials.

In addition to individual-level factors, scholars have examined the effect of political context on the assignment of blame. Of particular importance in the literature is clear responsibility for economic policymaking (Anderson 2000; Powell and Whitten 1993). If incumbents exercise uncontested influence on economic policymaking, citizens easily can assign praise or blame for economic outcomes.[2]

Understanding the individual-level and contextual determinants of responsibility attributions constitutes only the first goal of the economic voting literature. In addition to this task, researchers have assessed the impact of accountability judgments on voting decisions and electoral outcomes. If citizens hold political leaders responsible for economic outcomes, the probability of voting for the incumbent should decline during difficult economic times and increase during prosperous economic times. Scholars also have shown that that citizens tend to punish politicians for poor results more than they reward them for positive results (Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000: 114). As with research on the determinants of responsibility attributions, researchers also have found that context influences the impact of economic evaluations on voting behavior. For instance, Benton (2005) finds that permissive electoral laws allow citizens to punish poorly performing incumbents and non-incumbents by transferring their votes to small parties. Restrictive electoral laws, meanwhile, hinder the ability of small parties to compete with major parties for votes from disgruntled citizens. These findings indicate that responsibility attributions may (or may not) provide an important influence on political outcomes.

Despite the aforementioned innovations in the extant literature, two important omissions bear directly on the theory presented in this paper. First, scholars have not studied the role of political sophistication or economic ideology in the formation of responsibility attributions in global economic crises. Although this research has identified these factors as relevant for accountability judgments (Gomez and Wilson 2001, 2003; Rudolph 2003), these studies do not analyze data gathered in the aftermath of a worldwide recession. During times of economic crisis, many citizens experience dreadful and uncertain circumstances in day-to-day life, and there appears there is more space for public debate on the nature and consequences of the crisis, how public officials manage the crisis, what policies are (or not) in place, and so on. Such debate may even be highly polarizing, dividing citizens between those who favor and those who oppose a more active role of the government in the economy.[3] Thus, in times of economic crisis the potential for citizens to reassess the job of those with some responsibility for the crisis and its solution is likely to be augmented. While this potential may be heightened, so, too, is the importance of citizen judgment. We are interested in how and how well citizens form attributions of responsibility. Although such attributions always are pivotal in democratic polities, their significance arguably peaks in times of crisis. Thus, the global economic crisis offers an important test case regarding the underpinnings of citizens' evaluations of political leaders.

In our view, thus, the bases of responsibility attribution, particularly economic ideology and political sophistication, should play a substantial role in how Latin Americans attribute responsibility for the economic crisis. For political sophistication, awareness of the U.S. origin of the global crisis should provide another reason for knowledgeable citizens to blame non-governmental entities. For economic ideology, meanwhile, a foreign-caused crisis should provide conservatives with additional actors to target, other than the domestic government (e.g., multinational corporations). Likewise, left-leaning individuals may be more inclined to hold the government responsible not only because they believe the state should be more involved in the economy, but also because public officials opened the domestic economy to the extent that it could be harmed by the financial problems of other countries. Economic ideology thus should be particularly important in the responsibility attribution process during a global financial crisis.

Second, scholars have not incorporated the economic policy context into their models of responsibility attribution. The primary reason for this omission is the tendency for researchers to produce single-country studies on the development of accountability judgments (Hellwig, Ringsmuth, and Freeman 2008; Peffley and Williams 1985; Powers and Cox 1997; Rudolph

2003; Tyler 1982). By focusing on one country, previous research could not ask whether responsibility attributions differ in systematic ways across nations. The theoretical model we develop in the next section attempts to answer this question.

## BLAMING THE GOVERNMENT: THEORY AND HYPOTHESES

Our theoretical framework maintains that a person's propensity to blame the government is a function of individual- and country-level factors. In particular, we argue that partisanship and economic ideology affect responsibility attributions for economic crisis. The sanctioning process, however, should differ among individuals with varying levels of political sophistication and those living in countries with state-centered versus market-centered economies.

### Partisan Preferences

Students of responsibility attribution have shown that partisanship biases the process and final judgment of responsibility. Social psychologists have noticed that individuals engage in a process of "group-serving attribution bias" (Hewstone 1989, 1990), which means they are more likely to attribute success to in-group, rather than out-group, members. Furthermore, motivated reasoning theory (Kunda 1990) suggests that a person's desire to blame an out-group for negative outcomes will affect the attribution process. In the American politics literature, Tyler (1982: 385, 387) shows that the political opposition is more likely to blame or vote against the incumbent party, and Gomez and Wilson (2003: 277) find that when the economy is doing well, members of the opposition are more likely to credit a source other than the president. This rich body of research supports our hypothesis that members of the political opposition will be more likely than other citizens to blame the government for an economic crisis.

### Political Sophistication

We anticipate that variation in political sophistication matters for attribution of responsibility for economic crisis. Because of their wider array of politically relevant knowledge, political sophisticates should understand that domestic governments are not the only factors contributing to negative outcomes in a modern economy. Businesses, investors, consumers, and foreign governments are also responsible, and politically sophisticated citizens will incorporate this information during the process of forming responsibility judgments. Further, it may be the case that political sophistication affects the process of blame attribution because it facilitates the linkages individuals make between their personal economic views and their country's economic policy, affecting as a result how they appraise the role of government in the economic crisis.

**Economic Ideology and Economic Policy Context**

Finally, beliefs about the proper role of the government in managing the economy should influence whether citizens see the government as primarily responsible for the economic crisis. If citizens adopt a conservative, right-leaning economic ideology, they will believe in the virtues of economic individualism, private markets, free trade, and low levels of government regulation. Conversely, if they adopt a liberal, left-wing perspective, they will favor more regulation, protectionism, and government involvement in the economy (Rudolph 2003: 701).

These diverging beliefs will lead the two groups to different conclusions about the extent to which the government is responsible for the economy. Because of their pro-market ideology, right-leaning citizens will view businesses and consumers as more important than the government for economic outcomes (Rudolph 2003: 701–702). In a global economic crisis, the range of culprits considered by conservatives could be foreign or domestic. Meanwhile, for liberals, the goal of greater government involvement in the economy may motivate this subgroup to hold government officials accountable for the crisis. These citizens may be dissatisfied by the degree of government involvement in the economy and believe that the country could have avoided the economic crisis if the public sector had been more active in economic affairs.

Our principal argument, however, is that the impact of economic ideology on governmental responsibility attributions varies according to the economic policy context in which people are embedded.[4] Citizens do not develop responsibility attributions in a vacuum. Instead, the effect of perceptions and beliefs about the economy on responsibility attribution is conditioned by the economic policy context. As a result, we argue that when making judgments about whom to blame for the economic crisis, individuals connect their economic ideology and the information they receive from the economic policy context.

Insights from psychological theories of responsibility provide a rationale for our claim. More specifically, the triangle model of responsibility[5] (Schlenker et al. 1994) proposes that how responsible an actor is judged depends on the combined strength of the linkages that observers make between three elements: prescriptions, identity, and event.[6] Furthermore, this model postulates that the extent of the connections between the elements of responsibility vary as a function of individuals' perceptions and interpretations of these linkages (638). We thus argue that the strengths of the links will not be uniform throughout a particular population of observers, but accountability judgments are most likely when an audience member believes that the actor is bound to abide by a set of prescriptions in the event at hand.

Drawing on this model, we propose that when citizens assign responsibility to an actor (government) for an event (crisis) they do so in light of their situational context (prescriptions and regulations of the economic system). A nation's economic policy context, whether a state-centered or market-centered model, offers clear information regarding the prescriptions and regulations of the economic system; this information highlights one of the linkages of the triangle of responsibility model, the prescription–identity linkage. Citizens vary in the way in which they perceive and integrate information from the economic context into the sanctioning process as a function of their personal preferences about the role of the state in the economy; this suggests that the process of sanctioning is partly determined by the interaction between individual economic beliefs and the economic policy context.

Two implications arise from our argument. First, if the economic policy context highlights the centrality of the state in economic management, we expect that on average more people in such nations will blame the government. Second, economic context should moderate the effect of a person's economic ideology, such that individuals will be more likely to hold public officials accountable when they live in a policy environment with which they disagree.

More specifically, voters may think that their government should be more involved in the handling of the crisis, *or* they may think that the government should be less involved in economic affairs. In either case, if the government does not comport to their expectations and preferences, they are free to blame the government. Because they have reasons to be frustrated with national economic policy, this subgroup of citizens is more likely to fault the government for an ill economy, even during an internationally induced economic crisis. Conversely, if government is as involved in the economy as they want and there is still a crisis, they'll conclude that the crisis happened despite the best efforts of government to prevent it.

In terms of the triangle model of responsibility, we argue that inconsistency between a person's economic ideology and a country's actual economic context enhances the probability of a strong prescription–identity link. Citizens, in other words, will connect their personal economic views with their nations' policy context and the existing economic crisis. Instead of reluctantly absolving the government for the country's financial problems, citizens disgruntled with national economic policy may pursue cognitive consistency by avoiding information that links the crisis to non-domestic sources or seeking new information connecting the government to the crisis.[7]

Liberals in a market-centered economy, for instance, may disregard evidence about the international origin of the economic crisis and instead may point to national policies that have contributed to the difficult financial times. Citizens who agree with the government's economic decisions, by contrast, have less incentive to associate public officials with their country's financial problems. This reasoning leads us to expect that people will be more likely to blame the government when their economic ideology conflicts with their country's policy context.

When a nation's economic model fosters free-market policies, right-leaning citizens should have little reason to blame the incumbent because public policy aligns with their personal views about the proper role of government in the economy (Palmer 1997: 27; Rudolph 2003: 701–702). For conservatives, domestic and international firms and businesses in these scenarios can operate unencumbered by government regulation and thus would be more responsible for economic outcomes than the incumbent party. Liberals, meanwhile, will be more likely to blame the government because of the inconsistency between their personal views and actual economic policy. According to this subgroup of citizens, the government could have reduced the negative impact of the crisis by being more active in the country's financial affairs.[8]

In contrast, in state-centered economies (Palmer 1997: 30–33), liberals will tend to agree with the government's economic policy orientation and will be less likely to hold the incumbent party responsible for current economic conditions. On the other hand, conservatives will be more likely to blame the government in these countries because they will disagree with the extent of government involvement in the economy (Palmer 1997: 30–33). In fact, economic conservatives may believe that the financial crisis would have been averted had public officials implemented fewer activist economic policies. In sum, we anticipate that conservatives in state-centered economies and liberals in free-market economies should blame the government the most. .

**DATA AND METHOD**

As outlined above, our theory incorporates individual-level and country-level factors. The individual-level data for this study are from respondents from seventeen nations included in the 2010 AmericasBarometer surveys.[9]

We first discuss the operationalization of our outcome of interest: government responsibility attribution. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse, the AmericasBarometer included two items about the ongoing economic crisis. The first taps whether respondents perceived that their country was experiencing a serious crisis, a crisis that was not very serious, or no crisis at all. Only those respondents who believed that the country was confronting an economic crisis were asked the second question regarding whom they blamed for their country's financial problems. Response categories to the latter item included several potential targets: the former government, the current government, ourselves (the nationals of this country), the rich, the problems of democracy, the rich countries, the economic system of the country, and other.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Panel A in Figure 1 shows that almost half of the respondents (46.3 percent) who identified a target of responsibility mentioned the government (previous or current) as the main culprit. Because we are interested in learning why people blame the government for existing economic crises, responses to the original item were grouped into two categories to construct a dichotomous variable (1 = respondent blames the government for the economic crisis, 0 = respondent blames another actor).[10] Panel B in Figure 1 shows the percentage of respondents blaming the government for their countries' economic crisis in the seventeen countries included in this analysis. The figure reveals important differences between countries; in Paraguay nearly two-thirds of the respondents blamed the government for the crisis while in Costa Rica and Uruguay less than one third of the respondents did the same. As a result of our dichotomous dependent variable, variants of logistic regression are used in the multivariate analyses.

The primary individual-level variables are opposition status, political sophistication, and economic ideology. Because our dependent variable is a binary indicator that collapses the “previous” and “current” government response options into a single category, the measure of opposition status captures whether a respondent has ever been affiliated with an opposition party (1) or not (0).[11] The indicator for political sophistication combines a political knowledge measure and a measure of whether a respondent is able to place himself on a left–right ideological scale. The first component follows the approach taken by Gomez and Wilson (2001, 2003, 2006, 2008), who also utilize knowledge scales in their research on economic voting and blame attribution. With regard to the second component, we found that about 20 percent of respondents could not accomplish the ideological self-placement task, a situation that suggests that perhaps this item provides a meaningful way to help distinguish between the politically sophisticated and unsophisticated respondents. Because there are three factual items along with ideological self-identification, our political sophistication measure ranges from (0) low sophistication to (4) high sophistication. Our measure of economic ideology combines two questions that ask respondents their preferred economic public policy: (1) the extent to which the government should own industries and enterprises and (2) the degree to which the government should be responsible for ensuring that people have jobs.[12] The scale ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating a greater preference for government involvement in the economy.

For our contextual indicator, national policy context, we utilized the Index of Economic Freedom (Heritage Foundation 2013). The overall index ranges from a theoretical minimum of 0 to a theoretical maximum of 100 and is the average of 10 separate measures of domestic economic policy.[13] Higher scores indicate convergence toward a free-market economy while lower scores suggest convergence toward a state-centered economy. Figure 2 highlights the cross-national differences in economic policy context in Latin America.[14] The average score for the region is 59.6, which indicates that the typical country is "mostly unfree." El Salvador (69.9) is the freest country in our sample, and at the other end of the spectrum is Venezuela (39.9), which falls into the "repressed" category.[15]

FIGURE 2 HERE

The attribution models also control for a respondent's demographic characteristics (i.e., sex, age, education, and income), economic perceptions (i.e., sociotropic perceptions, pocketbook perceptions, and perceptions of the severity of the economic crisis), and measures of life satisfaction, political interest, and media exposure.[16] Below, we present the results of our empirical analysis based on the estimation of several multivariate multilevel models.

## RESULTS

Our theory of government responsibility attribution postulates that a person's likelihood of blaming the government is influenced by both individual and contextual forces. We expect that people's partisan preferences and economic beliefs influence their propensity to blame the government for economic crisis. Furthermore, we anticipate that the responsibility attribution process is conditioned by a person's level of political sophistication and the economic policy context in which the person is embedded. Economic beliefs should affect responsibility judgments if people can connect their views about how the economy should operate with the reality of their economic environment; only after this connection is made can people decide if the behavior of the responsible actor fits their expectations. We expect politically sophisticated individuals will be able to make this connection more strongly than unsophisticated individuals.

Testing our theoretical claims demands that our data present a multilevel structure with individual-level observations (i.e., survey respondents) clustered within higher-level units (i.e., countries); additionally, we should use a modeling strategy that takes this hierarchical structure into account (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Since our dependent variable is dichotomous, we estimate hierarchical generalized linear models with logit. The multilevel strategy implies several steps. First, we estimate a null or empty model of the overall likelihood of blaming the government without the adjustment of predictors. Second, we estimate random coefficient multilevel models to assess the influence of our key individual and contextual predictors, and their joint effect, on blaming the government. And lastly, we assess whether the hypothesized relationship between economic beliefs and context varies across political sophistication.

Table 1 presents the results from the null model (i.e., containing no explanatory variables). The results suggest that propensity to blame the government varies significantly across countries since the variance component is greater than 0 and is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Overall, then, these results confirm the hierarchical structure of the data.

TABLE 1 HERE

A central aspect of our theoretical argument is that the influence of economic ideology on blaming the government is contingent on the economic policy context. Thus, a task of the empirical analysis is to establish that there is cross-national variation in the effect of economic ideology on blame attribution. We estimate seventeen country-specific regression models predicting blame attribution as a function of economic ideology and the other individual-level variables mentioned above. This process resulted in seventeen country-specific economic ideology coefficients; from this group, two coefficients were negative and statistically significant, four were positive and statistically significant, and eleven were not statistically significant.[17] These findings suggest cross-country diversity in the impact of economic ideology on responsibility attribution. In other words, economic ideology does not predict always or in the same manner a person's disposition to blame the government for economic crisis. Our theory anticipates that the heterogeneity of this effect is due to the impact of the economic context.

To examine the key theoretical relationships in a systematic manner, we estimate multilevel models of blaming the government in Table 2. Coefficients should be interpreted as in non-hierarchical logistic regression models. Given our previous findings, we allow the intercept and economic ideology coefficients to randomly vary.[18] In model 1, we see that opposition status is negatively associated with blaming the government. Meanwhile, the coefficient for political sophistication is negative but insignificant; this indicates that there is not a direct effect of political sophistication on blaming the government. As we suggested, if sophistication is to influence the sanctioning process, it most likely is by moderating the effect of economic views on blaming the government.

TABLE 2 HERE

Turning to economic ideology, we see that there is a positive association between economy ideology and blaming the government, but this coefficient is not statistically significant. Because we allow the economic ideology coefficient to vary randomly by country, this finding should not be interpreted necessarily as to mean that there is never a relationship between economic ideology and blaming the government. As we showed above, the within-country relationship between these two factors varies substantially across Latin American nations, with strong negative relationships in some countries and strong positive relationships in other countries—effects that very likely off-set one another in the pooled model.

Among the demographic control variables, two indicators yield statistically significant effects. Education is negatively associated with blaming the government. Less educated respondents tend to blame the government more than more educated respondents. Likewise, high-income individuals are less likely to blame the government than low-income individuals. As expected, sociotropic perceptions affect how respondents assign responsibility for the state of the economy; on average negative assessments of the national economy increase the likelihood of attributing blame to the government; but evaluations of personal finances are not related to blaming the government. Finally, perceptions of the severity of the crisis are positively and significantly related to the probability of holding the government responsible.

The model also includes an indicator for our substantive country-level attribute, the economic policy context. Remember that this indicator measures the extent of economic liberties in a country, with the higher values denoting freer economic contexts (with less government involvement). The coefficient for the contextual indicator is negative and significant, suggesting, as expected, that the likelihood of blaming the government is lower in free-market economies than in state-centered economies.

Model 2 adds a term that captures the hypothesized conditional effect between economic ideology and economic policy context. The coefficient on the interaction term reaches a modest level of statistical significance. The substantive effects of this interaction are summarized in Figure 3. The figure depicts the probability of blaming the government as a function of the joint effect of economic ideology and economic context when all other variables are held constant at their means. Panel A shows the probability of blaming the government for the *typical* repressed, mostly unfree, and moderately free economies of Latin America. In Panel B, the results correspond to the most repressed economy, Venezuela, and the freest economy, El Salvador, in our sample. Below, we discuss the substantive effects with respect to panel B.

FIGURE 3 HERE

Two important points are evidenced. First, the gap between the lines suggests that the effect of a person's economic beliefs hinge to an important degree on the economic policy environment. For example, we observe that where economic ideology is equal to zero—that is, when an individual's view is that the government should have no involvement in the country's economic management—the predicted probability of blaming the government for the economic crisis declines from its highest to its lowest value, for a total drop of 34 points. Economic conservatives are about 50 percent more likely to blame the government for the economic crisis when they live in countries with repressed economies compared to when they live in nations with open economies. Second, the effect of individual economic beliefs on blaming the government varies across economic contexts. Respondents living in repressed economies, regardless of their economic beliefs, are always more likely to blame the government than those respondents living in more open economies. However, the impact of economic ideology weakens as respondents' own economic convictions fit the country's economic policy context. Thus, in a repressed economy, such as the Venezuelan, the likelihood of blaming the government drops from 0.67 to 0.51 as a respondent's economic ideology becomes more liberal. Conversely, respondents living in market driven economies are more likely to blame the government when they believe that the government should be in charge of economic management. In countries with quite open economies, like in El Salvador, the probability of sanctioning the government for the crisis increases by 11 points if a respondent believes that the government should be involved in the country's economic management.

Table 3 tests the hypothesis that political sophistication moderates the strength of the effect of the cross-level interaction between economic beliefs and economic context on blaming the government. Model specification is equivalent to model 2 in Table 2, but this time we estimate the models for sub-samples of high sophisticated individuals and low sophisticated individuals.[19] Table 3 reveals two interesting patterns. First, opposition status increases the likelihood of blaming the government among politically unsophisticated respondents, but not for sophisticated respondents. This finding suggests that for highly knowledgeable individuals the utility provided by partisan cues when making political judgments is less consequential.

TABLE 3 HERE

Second, the moderating effect of economic context on the relationship between economic beliefs and blaming the government exists for high sophisticated respondents but not for low sophisticated respondents. Substantively, this effect is quite sharp. In Figure 4, we see how among high sophisticated economic conservatives the likelihood of blaming the government drops 40 points if they live in an open economic context rather than in a closed economy. Conversely, compared to sophisticated conservatives in market-oriented economies, high sophisticated liberals tend to hold the government responsible to higher performance standards when they live in market-oriented economies, where the government is not as much engaged in the management of their country's economy as they presumably wish should be.

FIGURE 4 HERE

Examining the other economic variables, we see that views about the severity of the crisis similarly affect how high and low sophisticates attribute responsibility, with severe perceptions associated with a greater probability of blaming the government. A different story appears for pocketbook and sociotropic assessments. For the former, neither high nor low sophisticates were significantly likely to hold the government responsible if they saw that their personal finances were going in the wrong direction. Sociotropic considerations, by contrast, exert a significant effect for low sophisticates only. This last finding supports Gomez and Wilson's (2001) argument that less sophisticated individuals will focus on the domestic government's role in the national economy while more sophisticated individuals will recognize other causes of a crisis.

Our results also show that sophisticated individuals can better understand how their own economic ideology differs (or not) from their country's economic context and use this connection when evaluating the government's response to economic problems. This process results in high sophisticates being more likely to blame the government when their economic ideology conflicts with the economic context. The evidence thus suggests that sophistication enables ideologues to connect their personal views with the economic policies in their country.

## CONCLUSION

We started this paper with a puzzle: Why would voters blame the government for a foreign-induced economic crisis? This question is especially relevant for Latin America in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic collapse. Despite the foreign origin of the crisis, close to 50 percent of Latin American citizens blamed their own government. Our task thus was to explain why citizens would target domestic public officials, rather than alternative actors.

In our view, the decision to blame the government is a function of the interplay between individual characteristics and attributes of the national economy. We highlighted the role of partisan preferences, political sophistication, and economic beliefs in this sanctioning process.

Our findings show that members of the political opposition generally are more likely to blame public officials than other citizens. Thus, we confirm what other studies have found in different contexts: Partisan bias motivates the opposition's decision to target the government. We also argued that the impact of economic ideology is moderated by a country's economic policy context. Citizens are more likely to hold public officials accountable when their country's economic policy conflicts with their personal opinions about the proper role of government in the economy. As a result, economic liberals (conservatives) are more likely to blame the government when they live in a market-centered (state-centered) economy. Our multilevel empirical analyses provide support for the moderating dynamic of the national context. The evidence also shows that this effect operates first and foremost among politically sophisticated citizens.

In this paper we expand the theoretical and substantive agenda of the responsibility attribution literature. Our focus on the diverse economic policy contexts in Latin America allows us to avoid assuming that the impact of economic ideology is the same in all countries. In contrast to Rudolph's (2003) single-country study of the United States, we find that economic conservatives are less likely to blame the government only in market-centered economies; this relationship is the reverse in state-centered economies.

In line with Gomez and Wilson's (2001, 2003, 2006) theory of heterogeneous attribution, we find evidence of a significant relationship between low political sophistication, sociotropic perceptions, and government responsibility attribution. It seems that low sophisticates tend to blame the most proximate target for the crisis, their government. However, this does not mean that high sophisticates will not blame their government under any circumstance; our results clearly show that knowledgeable citizens can connect their economic views with their country's policy context and hold the government responsible when these two factors conflict.

Future research should build on the theory and findings of this paper. One obvious task is to assess the generalizability of our theory to non-crisis responsibility attribution. Do economic conservatives (liberals) in market-centered (state-centered) economies sanction the government for minor economic setbacks, in addition to major economic crises? Moreover, future work should address whether our theory applies beyond the Latin American setting. Do the findings hold in free-market and state-centered economies in other world regions?

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Alford, John R. and Jerome S. Leege, Jr. 1984. "Economic Conditions and Individual Vote in the Federal Republic of Germany." *Journal of Politics* 46: 1168–1181.

Alvarez, Verónica. 2013. "Cuánto Estado Quieren los Latino Americanos?" http://www.condistintosacentos.com/cuanto-estado-quieren-los-latinoamericanos/ (March 21, 2013).

The AmericasBarometer by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), www.LapopSurveys.org.

Anderson, Christopher J. 2000. "Economic Voting and Political Context: A Comparative Perspective." *Electoral Studies* 19: 151–70.

Baumeister, Roy F., Ellen Bratslavsky, Catrin Finkenauer, and Kathleen D. Vohs. 2001. "Bad Is Stronger than Good." *Review of General Psychology* 5: 323–370.

Benton, Allyson Lucinda. 2005. "Dissatisfied Democrats or Retrospective Voters? Economic Hardship, Political Institutions, and Behavior in Latin America." *Comparative Political Studies* 38: 417–442.

Bloom, Howard S. and H. Douglas Price. 1975. "Voter Response to Short-Run Economic Conditions: The Asymmetric Effect of Prosperity and Recession." *American Political Science Review* 69: 1240–1254.

Corrales, Javier. 2003. "Market Reforms." In *Constructing Democratic Governance in Latin America*, eds. Jorge I. Dominguez and Michael Shifter. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.

Duch, Raymond M. and Randolph T. Stevenson. 2008. *The Economic Vote: How Political and Economic Institutions Condition Election Results* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean. 2009. "Latin America and the Caribbean in the World Economy: Crisis and Opportunities for Regional Cooperation." August 25. http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/xml/7/36907/Latin_America_and_the_Caribbean_in_the_World_Economy_2008_2009_vf.pdf (February 8, 2013).

Festinger, Leon. 1957. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Gomez, Brad T. and J. Matthew Wilson. 2001. "Political Sophistication and Economic Voting in the American Electorate: A Theory of Heterogeneous Attribution." *American Journal of Political Science* 45: 899–914.

Gomez, Brad T. and J. Matthew Wilson. 2003. "Causal Attribution and Economic Voting in American Congressional Elections." *Political Research Quarterly* 56: 271–82.

Gomez, Brad T. and J. Matthew Wilson. 2006. "Cognitive Heterogeneity and Economic Voting: A Comparative Analysis in Four Democratic Electorates." *American Journal of Political Science*. 50: 127–145.

Gomez, Brad T. and J. Matthew Wilson. 2008. "Political Sophistication and Attributions of Blame in the Wake of Hurricane Katrina." *Publius* 38: 633–650.

Heider, Fritz. 1958. *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Hellwig, Timothy, Eve Ringsmuth and John R. Freeman. 2008. "The American Public and the Room to Maneuver: Responsibility Attributions and Policy Efficacy in an Era of Globalization." *International Studies Quarterly* 52: 855–880.
Heritage Foundation. 2013. "Index of Economic Freedom." http://www.heritage.org/index/ (March 3, 2013).
Hewstone, Miles. 1989. *Causal Attribution: From Cognitive Processes to Collective Beliefs* Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
Hewstone, M. 1990. "The 'Ultimate Attribution Error'? A Review of the Literature on Intergroup Causal Attribution." *European Journal of Social Psychology* 20: 311–335.
Hibbs, Douglas A., Jr., R. Douglas Rivers, and Nicholas Vasilatos. 1982. "On the Demand for Economic Outcomes: Macroeconomic Performance and Mass Political Support in the United States, Great Britain, and Germany." *Journal of Politics* 44: 426–462.
Kinder, Donald R. and D. Roderick Kiewiet. 1981. "Sociotropic Politics." *British Journal of Political Science* 11: 129–161.
Kunda, Ziva. 1990. "The Case for Motivated Reasoning." *Psychological Bulletin* 108: 480–498.
Lewis-Beck Michael S. and Martin Paldam. 2000. "Economic Voting: An Introduction." *Electoral Studies* 19: 113–121.
Mahon, James E. Jr. 2003. "Good-Bye to the Washington Consensus?" *Current History* 102: 58–64.
Markus, Gregory B. 1988. "The Impact of Personal and National Economic Conditions on the Presidential Vote: A Pooled Cross-Sectional Analysis." *American Journal of Political Science* 33:137–154.
Olson, James M. and Jeff Stone. 2005. "The Influence of Behavior on Attitudes." In *The Handbook of Attitudes*, eds. Dolores Albarracín, Blair T. Johnson, and Mark P. Zanna. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.
Pacek, Alexander and Benjamin Radcliff. 1995a. "The Political Economy of Competitive Elections in the Developing World." *American Journal of Political Science* 39: 745–759.
Pacek, Alexander and Benjamin Radcliff. 1995b. "Economic Voting and the Welfare State: A Cross-National Analysis." *Journal of Politics* 57: 44–61.
Palmer, Monte. 1997. *Political Development: Dilemmas and Challenges* Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.
Peffley, Mark, and John T. Williams. 1985. "Attributing Presidential Responsibility for National Economic Problems." *American Politics Quarterly* 13: 393–425.
Powell, G. Bingham and Guy D. Whitten. 1993. "A Cross-National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context." *American Journal of Political Science* 37: 391–414.
Powers, Denise V., and James H. Cox. 1997. "Echoes from the Past: The Relationship Between Satisfaction with Economic Reforms and Voting Behavior in Poland." *American Political Science Review* 91: 617–633.
Remmer, Karen L. 1991. "The Political Impact of Economic Crisis in Latin America in the 1980s." *American Political Science Review* 85: 777–800.
Rudolph, Thomas J. 2003. "Who's Responsible for the Economy? The Formation and Consequences of Responsibility Attributions." *American Journal of Political Science* 47: 698-713.
Rudolph, Thomas J. 2006. "Triangulating Political Responsibility: The Motivated Formation of Responsibility Judgments." *Political Psychology* 27: 99–122.

Samuels, David. 2004. “Presidentialism and Accountability for the Economy in Comparative Perspective.” *American Political Science Review* 98: 425–36.

Schlenker, Barry R., Thomas W. Britt, John Pennington, Rodolfo Murphy, and Kevin Doherty. 1994. “The Triangle Model of Responsibility.” *Psychological Review* 101: 632–652.

Steenbergen, Marco R. and Bradford S. Jones. 2002. “Modeling Multilevel Data Structures.” *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 218–237.

Tyler, Tom R. 1982. “Personalization in Attributing Responsibility for National Problems to the President.” *Political Behavior* 4: 379–399.

Weyland, Kurt. 1998. “Swallowing the Bitter Pill: Sources of Popular Support for Neo-liberal Reform in Latin America.” *Comparative Political Studies* 31: 539–568.

Wilkin, Sam, Brandon Haller, and Helmut Norpoth. 1997. “From Argentina to Zambia: A World-Wide Test of Economic Voting.” *Electoral Studies* 16: 301–316.

**Table 1. Estimation of Country Variance Component for Blaming the Government (Empty Model)**

| **Fixed Part** | **Coefficient** | **S.E.** | **p** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Intercept | -0.187* | 0.096 | 0.069 |
| **Random Part** | | | |
| Country-Level Variance Component[1] | 0.153*** | 0.391 | 0.000 |
| **Chi-Square** | 769.454*** | | 0.000 |
| **N (individuals)** | 23,885 | | |
| **N (countries)** | 17 | | |

[1] Variance component refers to the variance between countries on the average odds of blaming the government.
Data are weighted so that each nation's sample contributes a value of N=1,500

**Table 2. Multilevel Models of Government Responsibility Attribution**

| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Coefficient** | **Standard Error** | **Coefficient** | **Standard Error** |
| **Individual-Level** | | | | |
| Sex | -0.011 | 0.051 | -0.011 | 0.051 |
| Age | -0.003 | 0.002 | -0.003 | 0.002 |
| Income | -0.036** | 0.017 | -0.035** | 0.017 |
| Education | -0.051*** | 0.007 | -0.051*** | 0.007 |
| Life Satisfaction | -0.036 | 0.034 | -0.035 | 0.034 |
| Partisan Preferences | 0.174# | 0.095 | 0.174# | 0.095 |
| Political Sophistication | -0.030 | 0.027 | -0.030 | 0.027 |
| Political Interest | 0.037 | 0.082 | 0.038 | 0.082 |
| Media Exposure | 0.015 | 0.067 | 0.016 | 0.067 |
| Economic Ideology | 0.167 | 0.168 | -1.944 | 1.168 |
| Economic Ideology*Economic Freedom Index | | | 0.035# | 0.019 |
| Sociotropic Perceptions | -0.336** | 0.160 | -0.336** | 0.160 |
| Pocketbook Perceptions | 0.106 | 0.142 | 0.108 | 0.142 |
| Severity of Crisis | 0.361*** | 0.051 | 0.361*** | 0.051 |
| **County-Level** | | | | |
| Economic Freedom Index | -0.023** | 0.006 | -0.043# | 0.014 |
| Constant | 1.816*** | 0.361 | 3.019*** | 0.893 |
| **Variance Components** | | | | |
| Country Level | 0.251*** | 0.501 | 0.227 *** | 0.476 |
| **Chi-square** | 121.578*** | | 105.568*** | |
| **d.f.** | 16 | | 15 | |
| **N (individuals)** | 19,736 | | 19,736 | |
| **N (countries)** | 17 | | 17 | |

Source: AmericasBarometer 2010
Distribution at level-1: Bernoulli. Estimations computed through Full PQL interactive procedures; #p<.1, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Data are weighted so that each nation's sample contributes a value of N=1,500

**Table 3. Multilevel Models of Government Responsibility Attribution for High and Low Political Sophisticated**

| | High Sophisticated | | Low Sophisticated | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Coefficient** | **Standard Error** | **Coefficient** | **Standard Error** |
| **Individual-Level** | | | | |
| Sex | 0.008 | 0.054 | 0.001 | 0.074 |
| Age | -0.003 | 0.002 | -0.002 | 0.002 |
| Income | -0.035# | 0.019 | -0.039# | 0.022 |
| Education | -0.055*** | 0.009 | -0.039*** | 0.010 |
| Life Satisfaction | -0.038 | 0.033 | -0.007 | 0.049 |
| Partisan Preferences | 0.161 | 0.107 | 0.190** | 0.095 |
| Political Interest | 0.059 | 0.092 | -0.085 | 0.116 |
| Media Exposure | 0.011# | 0.062 | -0.121 | 0.136 |
| Economic Ideology | -2.482* | 1.178 | -0.188 | 1.530 |
| Economic Ideology*Economic Freedom Index | 0.044** | 0.019 | 0.005 | 0.025 |
| Sociotropic Perceptions | -0.290 | 0.187 | -0.460*** | 0.123 |
| Pocketbook Perceptions | 0.173 | 0.181 | -0.050 | 0.127 |
| Severity of Crisis | 0.394*** | 0.056 | 0.302*** | 0.068 |
| **County-Level** | | | | |
| Economic Freedom Index | -0.052** | 0.014 | -0.013 | 0.019 |
| Constant | 3.339** | 0.831 | 1.357 | 1.271 |
| **Variance Components** | | | | |
| Country Level | 0.257*** | 0.507 | 0.210*** | 0.458 |
| **Chi-square** | 94.390*** | | 41.643*** | |
| **d.f.** | 15 | | 15 | |
| **N (individuals)** | 14,679 | | 6,205 | |
| **N (countries)** | 17 | | 17 | |

Source:AmericasBarometer 2010
Distribution at level-1: Bernoulli. Estimations computed through Full PQL interactive procedures; #p<.1, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Data are weighted so that each nation's sample contributes a value of N=1,500

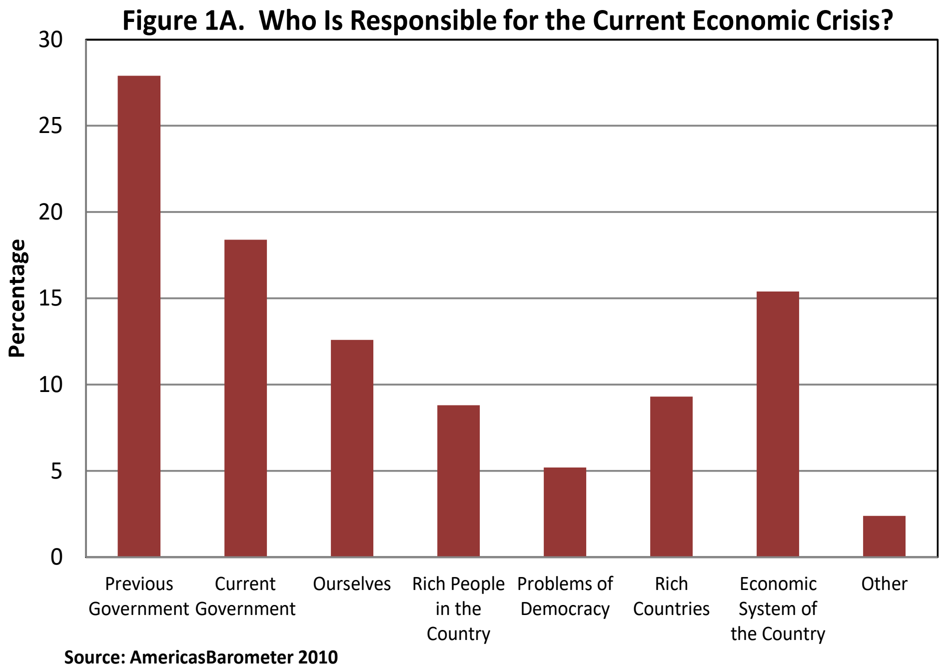


Figure 1A. Who Is Responsible for the Current Economic Crisis?
Percentage
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Previous Government
Current Government
Ourselves
Rich People in the Country
Problems of Democracy
Rich Countries
Economic System of the Country
Other
Source: AmericasBarometer 2010

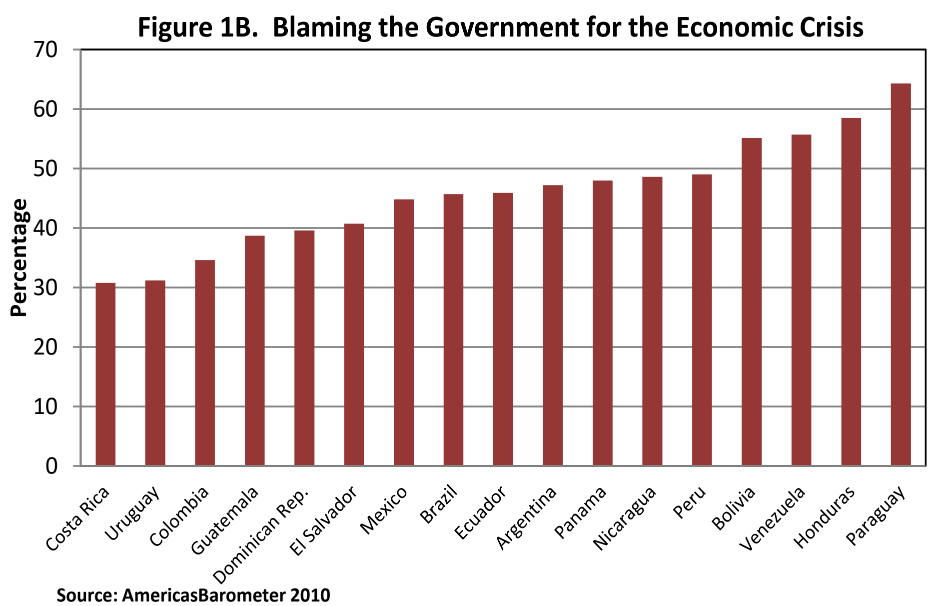


Figure 1B. Blaming the Government for the Economic Crisis
Percentage
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Costa Rica
Uruguay
Colombia
Guatemala
Dominican Rep.
El Salvador
Mexico
Brazil
Ecuador
Argentina
Panama
Nicaragua
Peru
Bolivia
Venezuela
Honduras
Paraguay
Source: AmericasBarometer 2010

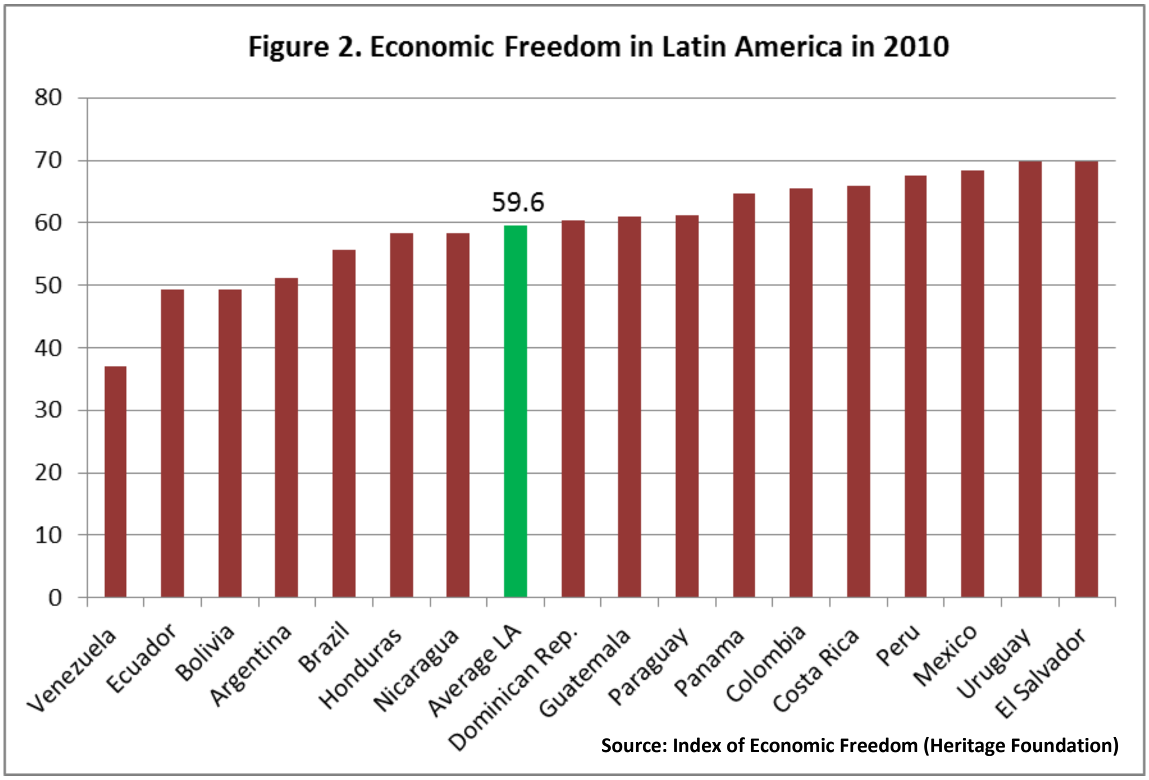
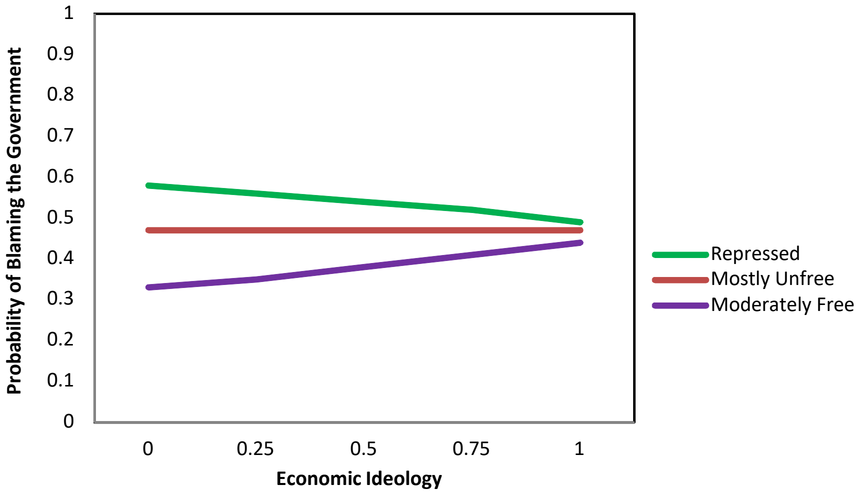


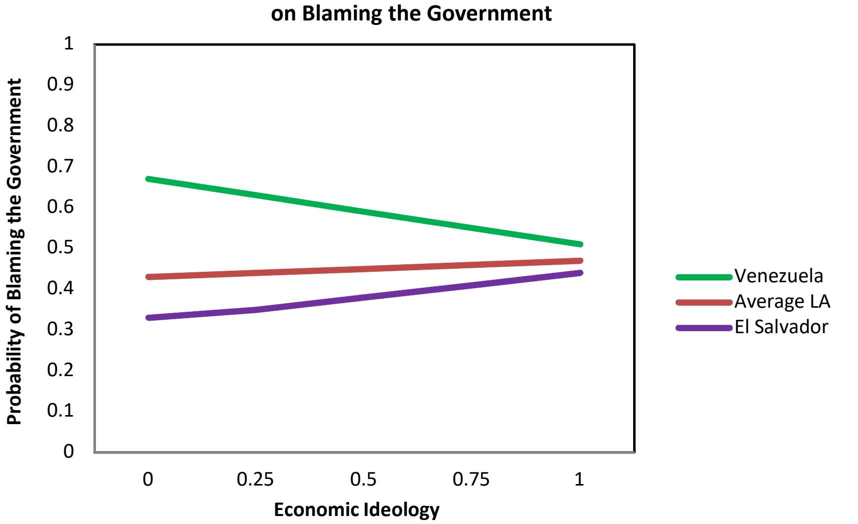
Figure 2. Economic Freedom in Latin America in 2010
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
59.6
Venezuela
Ecuador
Bolivia
Argentina
Brazil
Honduras
Nicaragua
Average LA
Dominican Rep.
Guatemala
Paraguay
Panama
Colombia
Costa Rica
Peru
Mexico
Uruguay
El Salvador
Source: Index of Economic Freedom (Heritage Foundation)

**Figure 3A. The Impact of Economic Ideology and Economy Policy Context on Blaming the Government**



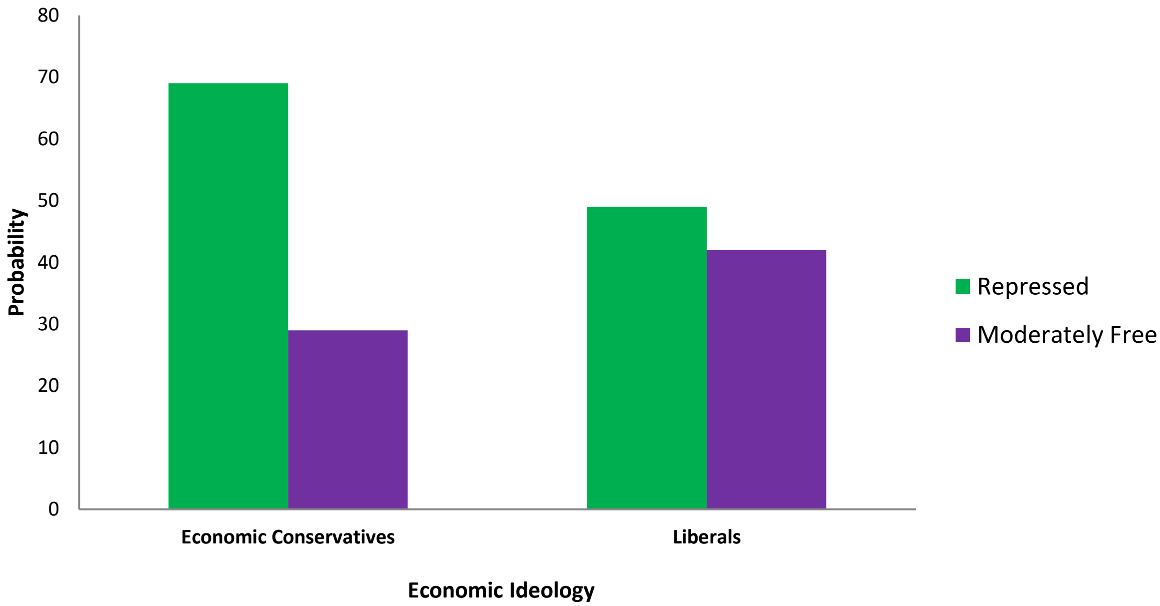

**Source: AmericasBarometer 2010**

**Figure 3B. The Impact of Economic Ideology and Economy Policy Context on Blaming the Government**




**Source: AmericasBarometer 2010**

**Figure 4. Blaming the Government Among High Sophisticated**




Source: AmericasBarometer 2010

# Appendix

**Table A1. Descriptive Statistics**

| | Variable Type | Level of Analysis | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blame Government | Dependent variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.467 | 0.499 | 23,855 |
| Economic Ideology | Main explanatory variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.677 | 0.239 | 28,162 |
| Partisan Preferences | Main explanatory variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.207 | 0.405 | 28,578 |
| Political Sophistication | Main explanatory variable | Level 1 | 0 | 4 | 2.828 | 1.116 | 29,706 |
| Age | Control variable | Level 1 | 16 | 98 | 38.351 | 15.682 | 29,667 |
| Sex | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.493 | 0.500 | 29,706 |
| Income | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 10 | 4.002 | 2.191 | 26,678 |
| Education | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 18 | 9.308 | 4.492 | 29,602 |
| Life Satisfaction | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 3 | 2.245 | 0.781 | 29,371 |
| Sociotropic Economic Perceptions | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.440 | 0.230 | 29,451 |
| Pocketbook Economic Perceptions | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.517 | 0.201 | 29,510 |
| Severity of Economic Crisis | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.478 | 0.500 | 27,061 |
| Political Interest | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.382 | 0.325 | 29,432 |
| Media Exposure | Control variable | Level 1 | 0 | 1 | 0.863 | 0.237 | 29,569 |
| 2010 Heritage Index | Main explanatory variable | Level 2 | 37.1 | 69.9 | 59.624 | 8.885 | 17 |

Source: AmericasBarometer 2010. Data are not weighted

**Table A2. Country-Specific Models of Government Responsibility Attribution: The Effect of Economic Ideology**

| Country | Coefficient | Standard Error |
|---|---|---|
| Venezuela | -0.966*** | 0.290 |
| Guatemala | -0.860** | 0.292 |
| Dominican Republic | -0.280 | 0.304 |
| Peru | -0.171 | 0.282 |
| Costa Rica | -0.114 | 0.303 |
| Bolivia | -0.111 | 0.229 |
| Colombia | -0.052 | 0.314 |
| Paraguay | 0.022 | 0.318 |
| Panama | 0.033 | 0.239 |
| Brazil | 0.155 | 0.245 |
| Ecuador | 0.196 | 0.195 |
| Nicaragua | 0.323 | 0.263 |
| Mexico | 0.450 | 0.279 |
| Uruguay | 0.610# | 0.335 |
| Argentina | 0.712* | 0.313 |
| Honduras | 0.742** | 0.259 |
| El Salvador | 1.616*** | 0.303 |

Source: AmericasBarometer 2010
Note: Dependent variable is whether the respondent blames the government. All models include the following variables, aside from economic ideology: partisan preferences, political sophistication, age, sex, income, education, life satisfaction, sociotropic perceptions, pocketbook perceptions, severity of crisis, political interest, and media exposure; # p<.1, *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001. Data are not weighted

## NOTES

[1] The AmericasBarometer surveys also include Caribbean and North American countries that are not included in this study. We focus here on the seventeen Latin American nations identified in footnote 1.
[2] Voters can obtain this clear information in an environment characterized by majority governments, unified parties, and other political arrangements (Powell and Whitten 1993: 399–402). Allowing multiple parties to influence economic outcomes, by contrast, can obscure responsibility and prevent citizens from holding the incumbent responsible for financial conditions.
[3] For a recent discussion on this topic in the aftermath of the 2008 global economic crisis, see Alvarez (2013).
[4] It is important to note that we differentiate the economic policy context from a country's economic conditions, such as the inflation rate or economic growth. Previous research in the economic voting literature has examined the impact of financial conditions on electoral outcomes (e.g., Powell and Whitten 1993; Remmer 1991; Samuels 2004), but in this paper we examine how a country's economic policy context moderates an individual's propensity to blame the government for economic malaise.
[5] For an application of this model in political science, see Rudolph (2006).
[6] Prescriptions, identity, and events pertain, respectively, to "codes or rules for conduct," "the actor's roles, qualities, commitments, and pretensions," and "the units of action and their consequences that actors and observers regard as a unified segment for purposes of some evaluation" (Schlenker et al. 1994: 635).
[7] This logic is derived from cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957; Olson and Stone 2005: 228), and Heider's (1958) balance theory.
[8] Rudolph's (2003) study of the United States supports the logic outlined above. Using the 1998 National Election Study (NES), Rudolph (2003: 705) finds that left-leaning Americans are more likely to blame the president for the state of the economy. The relative economic freedom and openness of the U.S. economy would lead one to expect these results. According to the Heritage Foundation (2013), the United States ranked as the world's eighth freest and the seventeenth most open economy in 1998.
[9] See footnote 1 for a list of the countries included in this study. Chile is not included in this study because the item we utilize for the dependent variable was asked in Chile using a different format.
[10] Respondents who reported not having thought about the entity responsible for the economic crisis, as well as missing cases were excluded from the analysis.
[11] Since we merged both former and current administrations into one category, we consider whether the respondent sympathized with the incumbent party or a party of the government coalition during each of the administrations. Respondents coded as 0 are those who always (during the previous and current administrations) have been affiliated with the incumbent and/or non-partisans.
[12] Here we follow the path taken by Rudolph (2003: 710–711), who incorporates three NES variables into his measure of economic ideology: "whether government should provide more services," "whether government should guarantee jobs and a certain standard of living," and whether government spending should "improve the economic position of blacks."
[13] These components are property rights, freedom from corruption, fiscal freedom, government spending, business freedom, labor freedom, monetary freedom, trade freedom, investment freedom, and financial freedom. For precise definitions of the components, see the following webpage: <http://www.heritage.org/index/about>. All 10 measures have a theoretical minimum and maximum of 0 and 100, respectively.
[14] Using the 2010 Heritage data is advantageous for two reasons. First, it covers economic information during the height of the economic crisis: the second half of 2008 and the first half of 2009 (Heritage Foundation 2013). Second, this time period precedes the measuring of our dependent variable during the 2010 wave of the AmericasBarometer.
[15] The Heritage Foundation classifies the countries into the following categories: free (100–80); mostly free (79.9–70.0); moderately free (69.9–60.0); mostly unfree (59.9–50.0) and repressed (49.4–0).
[16] Descriptive statistics for all variables are available in Table A1 of the Appendix.
[17] Table A2 summarizes results from the seventeen logistic regressions.
[18] The variance component for economic ideology is equal to 0.38378 and is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$); this justifies constructing this effect as random.
[19] The political sophistication variable ranges from 0 to 4 (see Table A1). We divided the sample into Low Sophisticated (values 0, 1, and 2, representing 35 percent of the total sample), and High Sophisticated (values 3 and 4, representing 65 percent of the total sample). Unfortunately, because the survey includes only three knowledge items, we are not able to explore finer distinctions in terms of respondents' levels of sophistication.