

Electoral Rules' Change in Latin American Democracies



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Introduction



What are the effects of electoral rules?

Considerable research has studied the effects of electoral institutions on different aspects of political behavior such as:

- the structure of party competition
- racial and gender representation
- incentives to cultivate personal vote
- incentives for strategic voting
- effects on turnout.

...among much others topics.

The field of comparative electoral institutions is “mature” (Shugart 2008)

Introduction



To which extent changes in electoral rules are a consequence of changes in party competition?

Less attention has been paid to the origins of electoral rules and even less to the politics of electoral rules change.

While literature on developed countries that showed the stable nature of electoral systems, research on third-wave democracies has exposed a different picture: the electoral rules have been a fluid part of the game in both Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Literature Review



Works on electoral institutions have studied for years a broad scope of their consequences on political behavior (see Grofman 2004), but they have paid little attention to their origins.

Electoral rules in developed countries have been considerably stable.

Lijphart 1994

Rules change were mostly limited to the introduction of PR rules.

Boix 1999

Consequently, research was focused on how parties and voters adapt to the existing rules.

Cox 1997

Literature Review



Electoral rules in third-wave democracies have been more fluid:

- Eastern Europe

Benoit 2004, Elster *et al.* 1998, Andrews and Jackman 2005

- Latin America

Remmer 2008

More recently, then, research has started to analyze how political elites strategically manipulates the rules of the game.

Literature Review



How did electoral rules change?

While the military in Latin America set the early post-transition rules;

Negretto 2006

...the electoral rules have continued changing along the region during the democratic period.

Remmer 2008, Marengo 2006, Buquet 2007

Literature Review



Why do electoral rules change?

(a) Emergence of new actors

Boix 1999, Rokkan 1970

(b) Fragmentation and volatility of party competition

Remmer 2008, Colomer 2004, 2005

Emergence of new actors



Why do electoral rules change?

The emergence of new actors in the electoral arena threatens the political position of the traditional elites.

When traditional parties are unable to accommodate to the new situation, they change the rules in order to protect their post-defeat political power.

Cases: Western Europe, early twentieth century

Fragmentation and volatility of party competition



Why do electoral rules change?

Electoral instability increases the uncertainty of political actors about their future power allocation.

Under larger levels of electoral uncertainty, the introduction of PR rules are more likely.

Cases: Developing democracies, recent decades

EITM Step #1



Unifying Theoretical Concepts and Applied Statistical Concepts

A reform process is a bargain between the governor (executive) and the legislative branch.

The governor sets the agenda, while the opposition parties are represented in (state) legislature.

Electoral rules, frequently, are not regular laws and a change may require more than a law: it might be an special majority to pass, or a constitutional amendment.

More strict rules will require a larger coalition to pass the new set of electoral rules (Tsebelis 2002)

EITM Step #1



Assumptions

(a) *Unitary actors.* The main players in the process, government and opposition, are unitary actors.

(b) *Governor as reform-maker.* The governor does not tailor the final electoral design to his own will, but he leads the reform process.

(c) *Actors with perfect information.* Both the government and opposition know the preferences and support of every actor in the process.

(d) *Office-seeking actors.* Actors participating in the electoral reform share office-seeking motivations.

EITM Step #1



Actors' preferences

“The large will prefer the small and the small will prefer the large.”

Colomer 2005

(a) Big parties prefer small assemblies and small district magnitudes in order to exclude competitors and increase their power share in elected bodies.

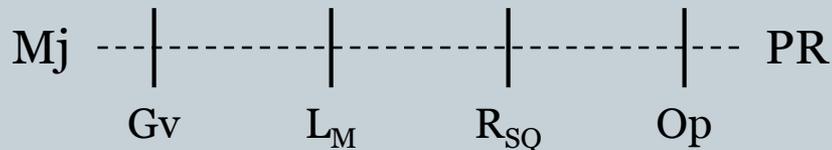
(b) Small parties prefer large assemblies and large districts because they reduce electoral thresholds and increase their probabilities of being elected.

(c) Alternation in power influences preferences: “regular” losers will prefer more proportional allocation, despite its electoral support.

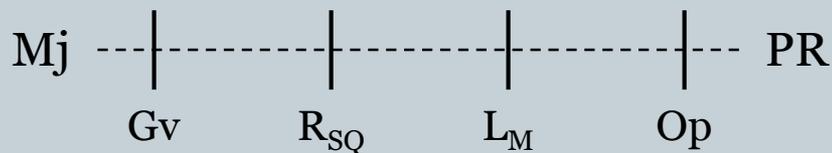
EITM Step #1



Actors' interaction



The closer the SQ to the PR extreme of the continuum; the stronger will be governor's desire for a new set of (more majoritarian) rules. Reform chances will depend of the median voter's position in the Legislature.



However, the position of the legislative median voter is not fixed, but associated to (a) the support of the governor in chamber; and (b) to the majority required to modify the electoral rules.

EITM Step #2



Developing Behavioral and Applied Statistical Analogues

(a) Majoritarian bias

The larger majoritarian bias in the electoral rules, the smaller the incentives the governor will face to modify the rules.

EITM Step #2



Developing Behavioral and Applied Statistical Analogues

(b) Governor's legislative support

The chances of an electoral reform will be conditional to the support of the governor in the Legislature.

EITM Step #2



Developing Behavioral and Applied Statistical Analogues

(c) Decision rules

More demanding decision rules will make more difficult the introduction of an electoral reform.

A reform may imply from a change in a law, to a law that requires a super-majority, to a constitutional amendment.

EITM Step #2



Developing Behavioral and Applied Statistical Analogues

Then, the probability of a reform will be

$$y_i = maj.bias * gov.sup * dec.rul$$

a result of the (current) majoritarian bias in the electoral rules, conditional to the governor's support in the legislative branch and the decision rules.

EITM Step #3



Unifying and Evaluating the Analogues

The argument may be tested using a logit regression model,

$$\Pr(y_i|\varphi_i) = \varphi_i^{y_i}(1 - \varphi_i)^{1-y_i}$$

which is a way to derive the theoretical model: the occurrence of a reform, y_i , is described as being Bernoulli-distributed data.

EITM Step #3



Unifying and Evaluating the Analogues

The logit model matches the dichotomous nature of the process: a reform is introduced and then the rules change; or not, and the rules remain the same.

However, a logit model assumes independence between the observations:

It is a hard assumption that the chances of a reform in t_1 is independent of whether or not there was a rules change in t_0 .

EITM Step #3



Unifying and Evaluating the Analogues

The argument will be tested using a survival regression model,

$$\Pr(t_i|\delta_i) = f(t_i)^{\delta_i} * S(t_i)^{1-\delta_i}$$

which derives directly from the theoretical model:

- The occurrence of a reform, t_i , is a dichotomous event (as in a logit model), but it is not independent from the history;
- The model allows left truncated data, what captures the initial (inherited) electoral rules; and
- It also allows right censored data, what matches the current rules at the end of the observed period.

EITM Step #3



Unifying and Evaluating the Analogues

The core of the empirical analysis will rely on observational data, both:

- (a) cross-sectional, and
- (b) sub-national data

Case Selection



Cross-sectional Analysis I: National Cases

Cross-national analysis provides large institutional variation in a comparable set of cases:

- 18 Latin American democracies,
- along three decades: post-transition period;
- covering reforms in (at least) thirteen countries.

Case Selection



Cross-sectional Analysis I: National Cases

How much variation there is in the data? Between early 80s and 2008, Remmer counted electoral changes in:

- Presidential rules: 8 countries
- Legislative rules: 23 reforms in 13 countries

Case Selection



Cross-sectional Analysis II: Sub-National Cases

Sub-national comparative method (Snyder 2001) increases the number of observations in one national case.

Two Latin American federal countries:

- (a) Mexico
- (b) Argentina

...provide a set of independent observations: 32 Mexican states +
24 Argentine provinces

covering three decades of (relatively) competitive politics.

Experimental test?



Who is the ayatollah?

Rick Wilson



(There are not much Rick pictures in the web)

Experimental test?



A preliminary idea

Some components of the argument may be impossible to disentangle using observational data.

Lab experiments allows the manipulation of crucial theoretical elements, solving potential endogeneity problems.

That's it



Thanks!

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