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RETHINKING THE COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE ON CLASS AND REPRESENTATION: EVIDENCE FROM LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract

*Does it matter that working-class citizens are numerically underrepresented in political offices throughout the world? For decades, the conventional wisdom in comparative politics has been that it does not, that lawmakers from different classes think and behave roughly the same in office. In this paper, we argue that this conclusion is misguided. Past research relied on inappropriate measures of officeholders' class backgrounds, attitudes, and choices. Using data on 18 Latin American legislatures, we show that lawmakers from different classes bring different economic attitudes to the legislative process. And using data on one least-likely case, we show that pre-voting decisions like sponsoring legislation often differ dramatically along social class lines, even when political parties control higher-visibility decisions like roll-call votes. The unequal numerical or descriptive representation of social classes in the world's legislatures has important consequences for the substantive representation of different class interests.**

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In most countries, political decision-makers are drawn disproportionately from the top strata of society. As Matthews (1985, 18) noted a quarter century ago, “almost everywhere legislators are better educated, possess higher-status occupations, and have more privileged backgrounds than the people they ‘represent.’” Citizens from the *working class* – from manual labor and service-industry jobs – rarely hold office. People from white-collar professions do most of the work in the world’s legislatures (e.g., Best 2007; Best and Cotta 2000).¹

Although these inequalities in the numerical or *descriptive representation* (Pitkin 1967) of social classes are a defining feature of political life in most countries, we still know little about how they affect the *substantive representation* of different classes’ interests. Does the near-absence of the working class in legislatures affect who wins and who loses in the policymaking process? Scholars briefly pondered this question in the 1960s and 1970s, but research on this topic came to an abrupt halt after a handful of studies suggested that policymakers from different classes behave about the same in office. Ever since, the idea that legislators’ class backgrounds are irrelevant has been the conventional wisdom in the study of comparative politics.

There are signs that this wisdom should be revisited. As scholars of legislative decision-making have shifted their attention from roll-call voting to “behind the scenes” activities like sponsoring legislation, they have begun to recognize that policymakers have far more personal discretion than researchers once believed (e.g., Parker 1992). Recent work on legislators’ genders and ethnicities has shown that the personal characteristics of legislators can affect the kinds of policies they enact (Bratton and Ray 2002; Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004; Franck and Rainer 2012; Pande 2003). Decades of research on mass political behavior has shown that the attitudes and choices of people all over the world are divided by class (e.g., Evans 2000; Hayes

1995; Korpi 1983; Manza, Hout, and Brooks 1995). Similar social class divisions have been found in the conduct of lawmakers in the United States (Carnes 2012; 2013), a country where class consciousness is weak by comparative standards (Brooks 1994; Devine 1997). Findings like these beg the question: should scholars be paying more attention to the unequal representation of social classes in the world’s political institutions? As we explore how the ethnic and gender backgrounds of lawmakers affect their choices, should we also be paying attention to the *classes* they come from?

In this paper, we argue that we should. The first wave of research on class and representation often used problematic measures of legislators’ class backgrounds and attitudes and focused primarily on legislative voting, the activity that affords policymakers the least personal discretion. In doing so, this research overlooked important differences in how lawmakers from different classes think and behave – and led us to underestimate the importance of inequalities in the social class makeup of legislatures.

Using data on 18 Latin American countries, we show that lawmakers from different classes bring different economic attitudes to the legislative process. Because of the tight discipline political parties exercise over legislative voting in much of the region, these attitudinal differences may not translate into differences in how lawmakers cast their votes. During the agenda-setting stages of the legislative process, however, parties wield less influence, and legislators from different classes often act on their distinct political perspectives. Using data on a least-likely case, Argentina, we show how focusing on roll-call voting obscures these processes and how simply studying a pre-voting legislative activity – bill sponsorship – leads us to view the unequal representation of social classes in an entirely different light.

CLASS AND REPRESENTATION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

In the 1970s, scholars of comparative politics gave up on the idea that the class

¹ Whereas prior studies focus exclusively on established democracies, this paper is the first to document similar inequalities in the developing world.

composition of a legislature mattered. The previous decade had seen a surge in descriptive research on the social backgrounds of legislators and other political elites (e.g., Gruber 1971; Lipset and Solari 1967; Domhoff 1967; Von der Mehden 1969). Political scientists had collected data on legislators' educations, occupations, and childhoods. But after more than a decade, scholars interested in the class backgrounds of political decision-makers still had not produced concrete evidence of a link between class and elite conduct. A few had asked whether legislators with different levels of education behaved differently in office, but they had "found little or no consistent impact of the quantity of education a leader has received" (Putnam 1976, 94). Many had assumed that lawmakers from working-class families or working-class jobs brought different perspectives to office, but few had bothered to test that assumption. Scholars eventually concluded, as Putnam (*ibid.*, 93) did, that although "the assumption of a correlation between attitude and social origin lies behind most studies of the social backgrounds of elites, ... most of the available evidence tends to disconfirm this assumption."

Since then, scholars have frequently reaffirmed Putnam's negative assessment of research on class and legislative conduct. In the mid-1980s, Matthews (1985, 25) argued that the available evidence was "scattered and inconclusive" and "certainly [did] not add up to a finding that the social, economic, and gender biases of legislative recruitment result in a constituent policy bias of legislative institutions." A decade later, Norris and Lovenduski (1995, 12) noted that research still had "not clearly established that the social background of politicians has a significant influence on their attitudes, values and behaviour."² Today, the analysis of "political elites' social background and demographic profiles [that] long constituted the dominant approach in elite studies" has all but ceased

² Instead, recent comparative research on political elites focuses on their attitudes, networks, and actions (Blondel and Müller-Rommel 2007; Higley and Moore 2001; Stevens, Bishin, and Barr 2006).

(Higley and Moore 2001, 177). In the absence of any hard evidence to the contrary, the idea that the class makeup of the world's political institutions does not matter has become the *de facto* conventional wisdom in comparative politics.

However, this conventional wisdom is less a reflection of what scholars know than what scholars do not know. Comparative research on class and legislative conduct has been rare. When scholars say that past work "has not clearly established that the social background of politicians has a significant influence," it is not because dozens of studies have asked whether class is related to legislative conduct and concluded that it is not. It is because, for the most part, scholars have not asked.

The few who have, moreover, have not relied on standard theories about class or legislative conduct to guide their empirical work. Although most social class analysts regard *occupation* as the ideal measure of a person's place in a society's economic and status structure (e.g., Hout 1995; Manza and Brooks 2008; Weeden and Grusky 2005), the comparative research on legislators' class backgrounds has focused largely on educational attainment and childhood socialization (Besley and Reynal-Querol 2012; Meier and Nigro 1976; Williams 1989). Although class divisions in public opinion tend to be most pronounced on economic issues – the issues that affect different classes differently – studies of legislators' class backgrounds have typically focused on other topics, such as feelings of efficacy and representational styles (Kim and Woo 1972; Prewitt, Eulau, and Zisk 1966). And whereas legislative scholars recognize that lawmakers have little personal discretion when casting their votes (Burden 2007; Hall 1996) – especially where electoral rules give parties considerable leverage (Rae 1971) – and that most of the important decisions about which problems get on the agenda happen long before the final passage vote (Kingdon [1984] 2011), most comparative research on class and legislative conduct has focused on roll-call voting (Best 1985).³ Scholars of

³ The rare scholars who have avoided these pitfalls have found clear evidence that

comparative politics have not really rejected the idea that a legislator's class background might matter – they have never really given the idea a fair hearing.

A fair hearing may well lead to a different verdict. Other legislator characteristics, such as gender and ethnicity, seem to have important consequences. In India, policy outcomes differ depending on the proportions of lawmakers who are women (Pande 2003) or who are from lower castes (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004). In the U.S. and Norway, female legislators behave differently than male legislators (Mansbridge 1999; Bratton and Ray 2002). In Africa, lawmakers from certain ethnic backgrounds improves their ethnic group's wellbeing (Franck and Rainer 2012; McClendon 2012). When scholars measure legislators' personal characteristics and choices carefully, they often find that political institutions with different social compositions produce different kinds of policies.

Could the same be true of class? Could the social class makeup of a legislature matter after all? On its face, the idea seems plausible. If lawmakers from different classes are like ordinary citizens, they will tend to have different attitudes, especially on economic issues. And although legislators' choices are often constrained by other actors (constituents, parties, etc.), most lawmakers have some leeway some of the time. If they look inward for guidance in those instances – if they base their choices on their own views – their decisions will differ by class in ways that mirror social class gaps in public opinion (Burden 2007, Ch. 2).

Although simple, this theory casts serious doubt on the conclusions drawn in the first wave of comparative research on class and representation. If differences in legislative attitudes mirror differences in public attitudes, it makes little sense to study educational attainment and parental socialization – which predict modest and

legislators from different occupations have different perspectives on several issues (Esaiaasson and Holmberg 1996; Edinger and Searing 1967; Searing 1969; Nagel 1998), but their insights have largely been ignored.

inconsistent differences in public opinion⁴ – or feelings of legislative efficacy and representational style – which have little to do with the economic issues that divide public opinion along social class lines. If legislators only act on their class-contingent political attitudes when they have some discretion, it makes little sense to focus only on roll-call voting, the most tightly constrained form of legislative conduct. It should come as no surprise that past research did not document a connection between class and legislative attitudes or behavior: that research relied on the wrong measures of class, the wrong measures of legislative attitudes, and the wrong measures of legislative conduct.

If we wish to know whether the unequal class compositions of the world's governments affect the policies they enact, we need better measures. We need to know whether lawmakers from different occupations think differently about economic issues and behave differently when they have some leeway. In short, we need reliable information about lawmakers' class backgrounds, attitudes, and choices.

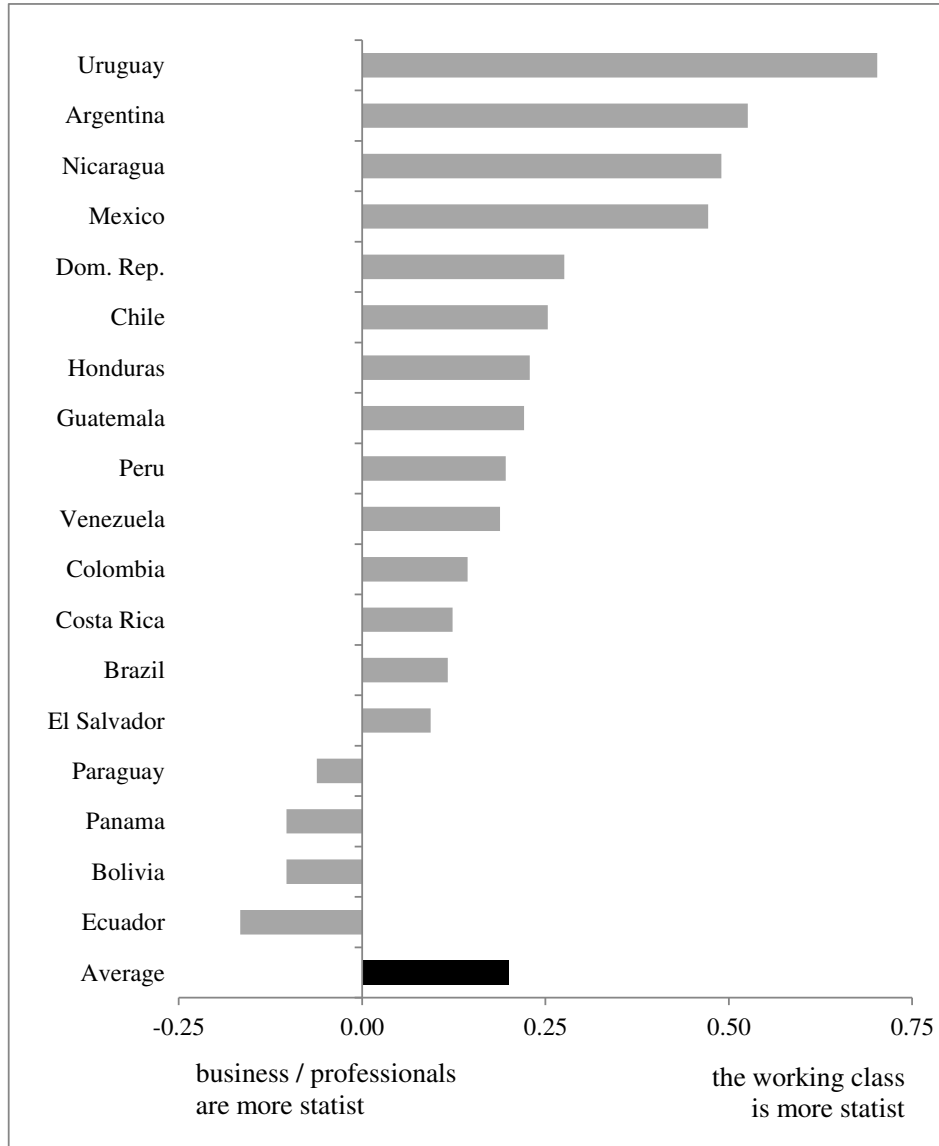
EVIDENCE FROM LATIN AMERICA

Latin America is an ideal place to reconsider old ideas about class and representation. In terms of how important class is in politics, Latin American democracies run the gamut (see, for instance, Kitschelt et al. 2010; Roberts 2002). Figure 1 uses data from a 2008 survey conducted by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) to illustrate how working-class respondents differed from businesspeople and professionals⁵ – the two occupational groups that tend to differ most sharply in the literature on class and public opinion in Latin America – on a simple but probing

⁴ In the U.S., for instance, education sometimes predicts conservative views (Kaufmann 2002) and sometimes liberal views (Mariani and Hewitt 2008), and family social class is uncorrelated with policy preferences once adult social class is taken into account (Barber 1970).

⁵ The appendix provides complete details about how we categorized occupations and how we defined *working-class* and *businessperson/professional*.

FIGURE 1. Social Class Divisions in Economic Attitudes in Latin America



Source: 2008 Americas Barometer.

Note: Bars represent the average difference between a working-class citizen and a professional or businessperson on a 1 to 7 scale representing how strongly the respondent agreed that, "The [country name] government, instead of the private sector, should own the most important enterprises and industries of the country."

question about their economic views: an item that asked how strongly the respondent agreed that the “government, instead of the private sector, should own the most important enterprises and industries of the country” (LAPOP translation). On average, class divisions in Latin America overlap substantially with ideological divisions: workers prefer more statist policies and businesspeople and professionals are more market-oriented (cf. Lupu and Stokes 2009; Torcal and Mainwaring 2003). In some countries, this division is pronounced (e.g., Argentina and Peru); in others (e.g., Paraguay), class divisions are considerably murkier. This diversity makes Latin America a useful setting for making generalizations about class and legislative decision making.

Latin America is also ideal for practical reasons. To understand the effects of the unequal representation of social classes, we need to know which classes lawmakers came from, what attitudes and perspectives they brought to office, and how they behaved once elected. We also need data on other factors that could influence how legislators think and act. In Latin America, these data are well within reach.

For over a decade, the University of Salamanca (USAL) has conducted confidential, representative surveys of Latin American legislators (that have already provoked a flurry of research on legislative conduct in the region, e.g., Kitschelt et al. 2010; Luna and Zechmeister 2005; Saiegh 2009).⁶ The USAL surveys asked Latin American legislators about their personal views on several issues, including the role of the government in the economy, the topic that typically elicits the most pronounced social class divisions in studies of mass opinion. The survey also asked legislators about their prior occupations.⁷

⁶ The USAL surveys randomly sample each legislature, stratifying by party without replacement. Interviews were conducted in person. These samples include, on average, 67% of the legislature and range from 25% (Mexico) to 93% (Ecuador). The average response rate among surveyed legislators is 95.4%.

⁷ Specifically, the surveys asked, “What was your primary activity prior to being elected Deputy? In other words, what did your work

With these data, we can easily measure the relationship between class and lawmakers’ economic attitudes. We focus on the second wave of USAL surveys, which was administered in the late 1990s and early 2000s.⁸ Our sample includes 1,569 legislators spanning the array of parties in Latin America’s 18 major democracies.

Latin America is also ideal for studying class-based differences in legislative *conduct*. Several governments in Latin America publish data on legislative behavior, including both roll-call votes and agenda-setting decisions like bill sponsorships. In this paper, we focus on one least-likely case: Argentina. Political parties have enormous power in the Argentine legislature thanks to closed-list elections that allow local party leaders to determine which lawmakers will have a chance to run for reelection (Jones 2002; Morgenstern 2004). As a result, party discipline in Argentina is among the highest in the region (Carey 2007; Jones and Hwang 2005). Argentine parties also shifted their ideological positions dramatically during the 1990s as governments implemented market-oriented economic reforms (Lupu 2011; Stokes 2001). Argentina is therefore a least-likely case: with such strong parties and volatile ideologies, we should be unlikely to find a relationship between lawmakers’ class backgrounds and their choices in office. If there are links between class and legislative conduct in Argentina, there are probably even stronger links elsewhere (Gerring 2007).

Since 2000, members of the Argentine lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, have reported their prior occupations to a non-governmental organization, Directorio

specifically consist of? I am referring to your primary occupation, the one that earned you the most income.”

⁸ Guatemala’s second-wave survey used a different questionnaire. We therefore included data from the first wave for Guatemala, which was administered to the lawmakers who served in the 1995-1999 session. Since Brazil is not included in the first or second wave, we use data from the third wave, which was administered during the 2003-2007 session. Excluding Guatemala and Brazil does not alter our findings.

Legislativo. We matched these data⁹ with two measures of how legislators behave: how they vote and the kinds of bills they sponsor or cosponsor. Of all the things lawmakers do in office, casting roll-call votes is by far the most aggressively policed by parties, interest groups, and concerned citizens. Behind the scenes, however, legislators often enjoy a great deal more freedom. Writing about the Argentine Chamber of Deputies, for instance, Alemán et al. (2009, 110) note that “the constraints imposed by party leaders on floor votes... are considered to be more stringent than those imposed on cosponsored bill initiatives.”

Introducing bills, however, is no less consequential than voting – and may in fact be more important in the long run (Hall 1996). The bills that are introduced in a legislature determine which problems make it onto the agenda and which solutions lawmakers contemplate. If no legislator is willing to propose a given policy, it cannot be considered or debated, let alone enacted. Parties and other actors exert less influence during the pre-vote stages of the legislative process – but in most legislatures, what happens behind the scenes is just as important as what happens on center stage.

Like previous studies (e.g., Poole and Rosenthal 1997), we measure legislative voting using ideal points, composite scores based on every vote cast in a session that identify the major ideological divisions within an institution.¹⁰ To measure bill sponsorship, we use data compiled by Alemán et al. (2009) for the period 1983-2002. We focus on the bills introduced in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies in 2000 and 2001, the two years that coincide with the legislative session for which we have USAL data on lawmakers’ personal views. We first identified the 464 bills introduced

in 2000 and the 341 in 2001 that dealt primarily with economic issues (out of a total of 3,514 bills during those two years).¹¹ We then simply coded each bill as leftist, rightist, or centrist and computed the numbers of each type of bill that each legislator sponsored or cosponsored.¹² (To ensure that our results were not influenced by the political turmoil associated with Argentina’s economic crisis in 2001, we initially analyzed each year of the legislative session separately. We found no meaningful differences in the processes at issue here, so we include the entire session in our analysis.)

If legislators from different classes bring different attitudes to the policymaking process, responses to the USAL survey’s questions about economic issues should differ by class in the same way that public opinion typically differs. Legislators from the working class should retain the working class’s more leftist economic attitudes. Legislators from white-collar jobs – especially those from the private sector – should retain their class’s more rightist economic views. These attitudinal differences are likely to be invisible, however, in roll-call voting, where parties powerfully influence how legislators vote. However, if scholars are right that parties wield less power in the agenda-setting stages of the legislative process, we may uncover class-based differences in the kinds of bills Argentine legislators sponsor.

⁹ The distribution of occupations in this dataset was similar to the distribution in the USAL survey, although the share of Argentine lawmakers classified as former lawyers was lower and the share of former politicians was higher (see appendix Figure A1). These categories are grouped together in our empirical analysis, so this subtle difference does not affect our results.

¹⁰ We rely on Alemán et al.’s (2009) legislative voting ideal points.

¹¹ Although we rely on Alemán et al.’s (2009) raw data on bill introductions, their sponsorship-based ideal points are the subject of some debate (Desposato, Kerney, and Crisp 2011). As such, we have opted to measure the ideology of sponsored bills using a simpler approach.

¹² Two research assistants independently determined whether each bill dealt with an economic issue (they agreed 77% of the time) and, if so, whether the bill was more to the left, right, or center (70% agreement). We focus on the 805 bills that both RAs judged to be primarily about economic issues. When the RAs disagreed about the ideological direction of the bill, we simply treated it as centrist. That is, we only coded a bill as a rightist (or leftist) economic bill if both research assistants agreed that it was both an economic bill and a rightist (leftist) proposal.

CLASS AND DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Like other countries and regions, the class compositions of legislatures in Latin America are sharply biased. Lawmakers from the working class are rare. Latin American legislatures – like political institutions the world over – are overwhelmingly run by white-collar professionals.

Using the USAL surveys, we classified legislators into seven categories based on their prior occupations: blue-collar workers, service-based professionals (such as teachers and social workers), career politicians, lawyers, military and law-enforcement personnel, private-sector professionals, and businesspeople.¹³ We then used data from the International Labor Organization (ILO) to classify the citizens in each country the same way.¹⁴

Figure 2 compares the distributions of social classes in Latin American legislatures and in Latin America populations. As the top panel illustrates, the region's legislatures are overwhelmingly composed of white-collar professionals. Only about five to twenty percent of lawmakers in each country come from the working class. This pattern is even evident in countries like Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, where major political parties have close ties to unions. Rodrigues (2009) has shown that in Brazil, even the

legislators elected from the Worker's Party tend to be lawyers and businesspeople (see also Rodrigues 2006). The same is true across the region.

Predictably, Latin American lawmakers who come from the working class typically affiliate with left-leaning parties. In countries with strong labor movements, they join the ranks of the party with union ties like the PRI in Mexico and the FA in Uruguay. In Central America, they associate with the parties of former revolutionary movements like the FMLN in El Salvador and the FSLN in Nicaragua. Even so, across the region, politicians from the working class constitute a small fraction of Latin American parties' legislative delegation.

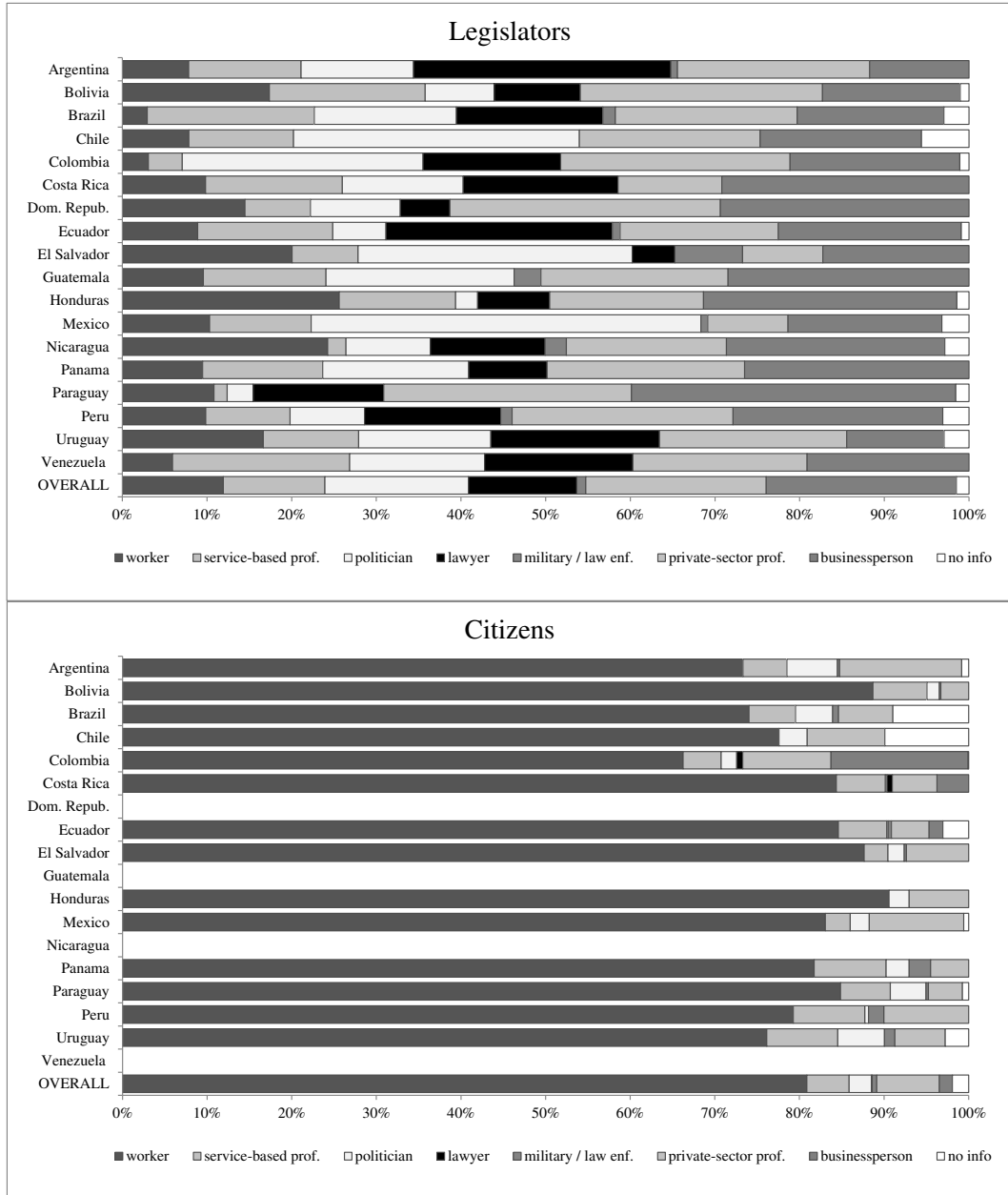
How do legislators compare to their constituents? The bottom panel of Figure 2 plots the class distributions of Latin American adults. As in most developing countries, the vast majority of Latin Americans are working class (manual laborers or service-industry workers). Workers make up smaller shares in countries with more developed economies, like Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia. Even there, however, workers are more than 60 percent of the labor force.

The gaps between Latin American legislators and their constituents are stark. Figure 3 plots the difference between the percentage of blue-collar workers in each country and the percentage in its legislature. In every country, the underrepresentation of the working class is on the order of at least 60 percentage points. Whether elections are candidate-centered (Brazil) or party-centered (Peru), whether political institutions are unitary (Bolivia) or federal (Mexico), workers are vastly underrepresented. In Latin America, social class divisions in the public are often pronounced, labor movements are often strong, and political parties often maintain extensive ties to unions. Still, class-based inequalities in descriptive representation are on par with – and sometimes larger than – those in the United States, where class divisions often go unrecognized and where unions are relatively weak (Clawson and Clawson 1999). Like citizens the world over, Latin Americans are led by white-collar governments.

¹³ These categories strike a good balance between specificity and precision: the USAL survey was a modest-sized sample with coarse occupational information, so any occupational coding scheme with more than seven or eight categories would likely have too few cases in many groups. Our coding scheme, moreover, is similar to many that have been used to study public opinion (Manza, Hout, and Brooks 1995), legislative conduct (Carnes 2012), and political recruitment (Rehren 2001). Our measure also produces sensible estimates; for instance, the class distribution of Brazilian legislators in our sample closely parallels Rodrigues's (2009) measure. Our coding of Latin American citizens is also consistent with prior research (e.g., Portes and Hoffman 2003; Torcal and Mainwaring 2003).

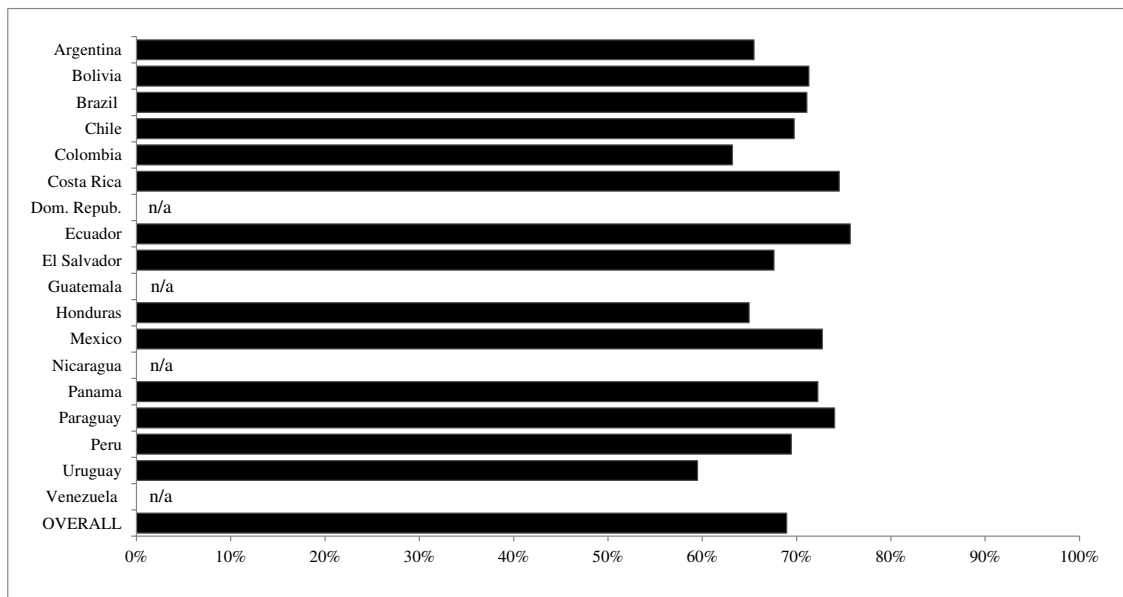
¹⁴ The ILO did not have data for the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, or Venezuela.

FIGURE 2. Class in Latin America



Sources: USAL surveys and ILO.

FIGURE 3. The Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Latin American Legislatures



Sources: USAL surveys and ILO.

Note: Bars report the difference between the percentage of working-class adults in each country and the percentage of each country's legislators from the working class.

CLASS AND SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Do these inequalities in the descriptive representation of social classes in Latin America actually matter? Do legislators from different lines of work bring different substantive perspectives to office? When class, attitudes, and choices are all measured appropriately, the answer appears to be yes.

Legislative Attitudes

In Latin America, lawmakers from different classes bring distinctly different economic preferences to office. Figure 4 plots legislators' average responses to two questions about economic issues in the USAL survey. One asked about lawmakers' personal views on ten economic programs:¹⁵ price controls, free primary education, free secondary

education, free university education, public housing, guaranteed employment, social security, environmental regulations, unemployment insurance, and basic needs provisions.¹⁶ Another item asked about their views on seven social spending items:¹⁷ infrastructure, health and social security, public safety, education, unemployment, housing, and pensions.

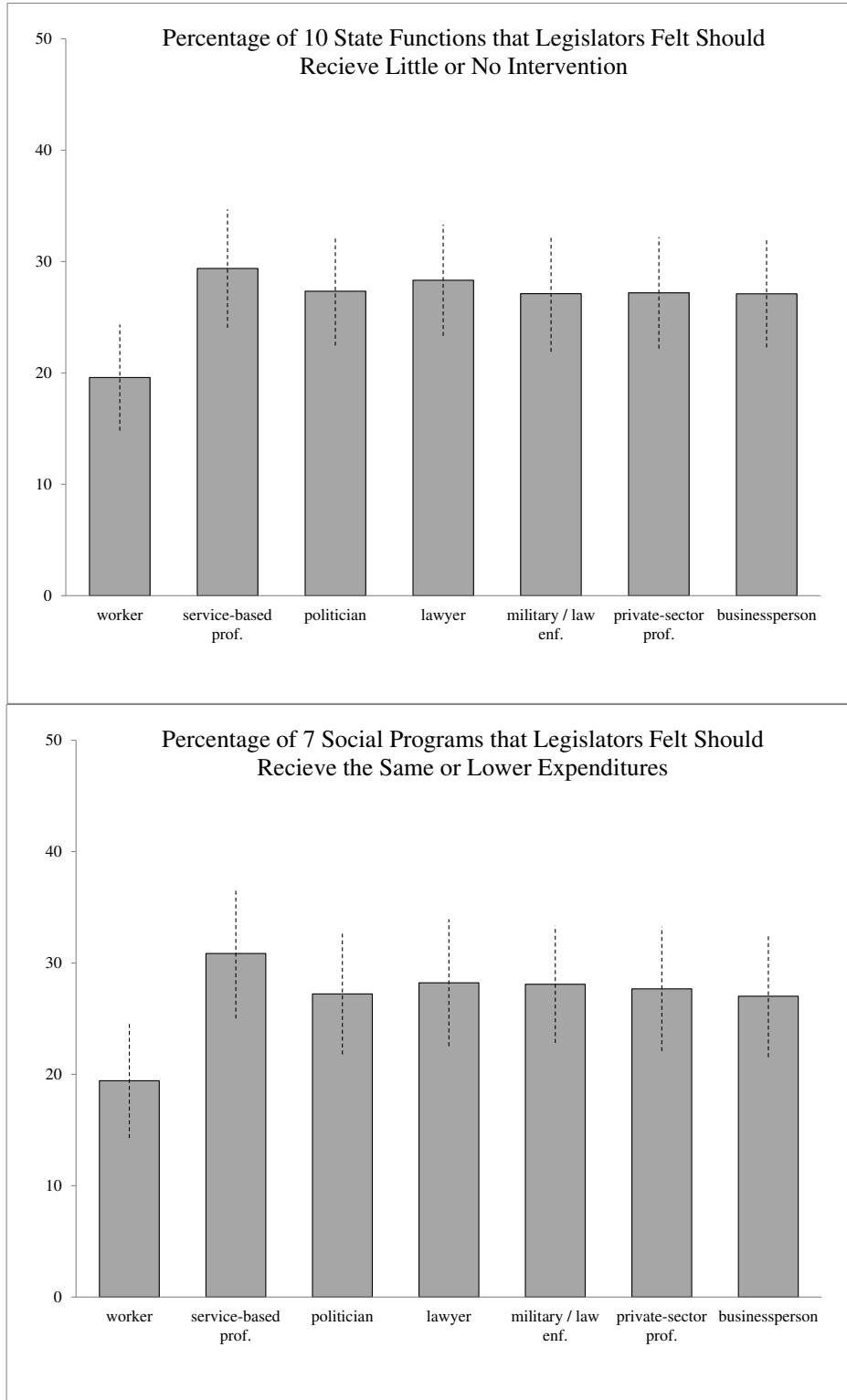
Social class divisions were evident in lawmakers' responses to both questions. The top panel of Figure 4 plots the percentage of the ten state functions that legislators felt should receive little or no government intervention. The bottom panel plots the percentage of the seven social programs that legislators felt should receive the same or lower expenditures. (In both panels, then, higher values on the vertical axis correspond to more rightist views about the government's role in economic affairs.) The basic social class divisions in Latin American legislative attitudes are obvious. Like ordinary citizens, lawmakers

¹⁵ Specifically, the question asked, "I'd like your opinion on a range of traditional state functions. Thinking in general terms, tell me for each one of them, how much intervention should the state engage in: a lot, a little, or none?"

¹⁶ The Brazil and Panama surveys collapsed primary and secondary education.

¹⁷ The question asked, "Now I will mention several public expenditures. Please tell me whether you believe that your country should spend more or less on each one of them."

FIGURE 4. Class and Economic Attitudes in Latin American Legislatures



Source: USAL surveys.

from white-collar professions of all kinds tend to have more rightist views. Lawmakers from the working class, on the other hand, tend to bring a more leftist perspective to the legislative process. With

appropriate measures, “the assumption of a correlation between attitude and social origin” appears quite sound.

Moreover, this correlation appears to be genuine: regressions that controlled for a

variety of other potential determinants of legislative attitudes reached the same basic conclusion. Table 1 reports the results of four OLS models. The first pair regress the percentage of state functions legislators preferred to be small or non-existent on occupational indicators and, in the second model, controls for the legislator's party, race, country, religion, gender, age, and marital status. Likewise, the second pair of models relates the percentage of social spending items lawmakers felt should receive the same or lower expenditures to occupational indicators and, in the last model, this set of controls.¹⁸ In all four models, we omitted the worker category: the coefficients in Table 1 can be thought of as estimates of the average difference (on a 0 to 100 scale) between lawmakers from the working class and those from the occupation in question.

Lawmakers from most white-collar professions were significantly more rightist than lawmakers from the working class, regardless of whether we included control variables. The differences, moreover, were substantial. Compared to a legislator from the working class, the average lawmaker from a business background wanted to maintain or reduce 5.5 (with controls) to 7.5 (without controls) percentage points more of the state functions listed in the survey. She wanted to maintain or reduce 5.1 to 7.6 percentage points more of the major social projects the survey covered. With or without controls, lawmakers from the working class stood out in this analysis. Moreover, the gaps were sizeable: in the second model, for instance, the average gap between lawmakers from the most ideologically distinct major parties in Argentina (at the time, the Peronist Party and FREPASO) was 7.3 points, only slightly larger than the estimated gap between lawmakers from the most ideologically distinct social classes (even

¹⁸ We cannot control for constituent opinion because public opinion surveys in Latin America do not include enough cases to generate reliable district-level averages. However, we have little reason to expect constituency effects in these data since the USAL survey was optional, confidential, and focused on legislators' personal views, not the positions they take publicly.

after controlling for party). In sharp contrast to the notion that class is irrelevant in the world's legislatures, former professionals and blue-collar workers in Latin American legislatures appear to differ markedly in their support for government interventions in economic affairs.

Legislative Behavior

They also differ in their choices, at least when they have some leeway. Figure 5 plots estimated class-based differences in Argentine lawmakers' spending attitudes, bill sponsorship choices, and roll-call votes (from data on the occupational backgrounds and voting records of each Argentine legislator).¹⁹ Because this pool of legislators is smaller and because lawmakers from the various non-working-class occupations differed so little, we collapsed the seven occupational categories used in the preceding analysis into three groups: white-collar private-sector jobs (businesspeople and private-sector professionals), white-collar public-sector jobs (military / law enforcement personnel, lawyers, politicians, and service-based professionals) and blue-collar jobs (workers).²⁰

The bars in Figure 5 report the results of regression models that relate Argentine legislators' attitudes, bill proposals, and roll-call votes to an indicator for lawmakers who worked in white-collar jobs in the private sector, an indicator for lawmakers from white-collar jobs in the public sector (those employed in blue-collar jobs were the omitted category), and political party indicator variables.²¹ Each variable in Figure 5 was scaled to range between 0 and 100, so the estimates in the figure can be interpreted as the average difference on a 0 to 100 scale between a lawmaker from the

¹⁹ The regressions Figure 5 is based on are reported in Appendix Table A3.

²⁰ Of course, this assumes that the attitudinal gaps in Table 1 are essentially the same in Argentina. Appendix Table A4 tests this assumption by replicating the models in Table 1 for Argentina only. Because of the smaller sample size, many estimates are less precise, but in general, the results are the same.

²¹ Appendix Table A3 reports models estimated without party.

TABLE 1. Regression Models Relating Class and Latin American Legislators' Economic Attitudes

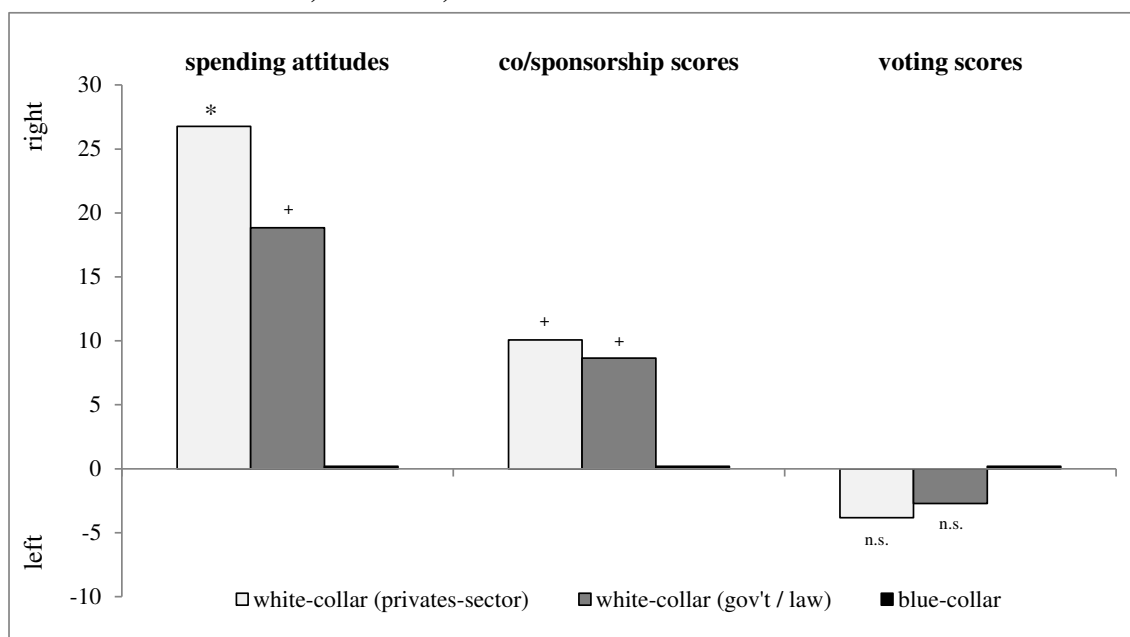
Dependent Variable Controls?	State Functions		Social Spending	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Businessperson	7.52** (2.22)	5.50** (1.73)	7.59** (2.77)	5.14** (1.91)
Private-sector Professional	7.60** (2.25)	5.24** (1.76)	8.24** (2.80)	3.75+ (1.94)
Military / Law Enforcement	7.53 (6.31)	7.03 (4.87)	8.65 (7.86)	6.80 (5.39)
Lawyer	8.74** (2.50)	6.90** (1.99)	8.80** (3.11)	3.61 (2.20)
Politician	7.75** (2.35)	5.41** (1.88)	7.79** (2.92)	3.34 (2.08)
Service-based Professional	9.79** (2.54)	4.15* (2.06)	11.42** (3.16)	4.83* (2.28)
Worker (omitted)	---	---	---	---
<i>N</i>	1569	1326	1569	1326
<i>R</i> ²	0.0127	0.1468	0.0095	0.1158
St. Err.	24.597	17.623	0.0095	19.498

Source: USAL surveys.

Notes: Cells report coefficients from regressions relating the percentage of neutral or right positions legislators took on questions about state interventions and social spending to occupational indicators and (in the second and fourth models) controls for party, country, religion, gender, age, and marital status. Coefficients for control variables and the “no info” occupation are omitted but available on request.

+*p* < 0.10; **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01, two tailed.

FIGURE 5. Estimated Class-based Differences in How Argentine Legislators Think, Advocate, and Vote on Economic Issues



Sources: USAL surveys, Directorio Legislativo, Alemán et al. (2009), and authors' data.

Notes: Bars represent estimated differences from regressions relating the variable in question to occupational indicators (blue-collar was the omitted category) and party indicators. *Spending attitudes* are a measure of the percentage of seven government programs each legislator personally felt should receive the same or less funding. *Co/sponsorship scores* measure the percentage of economic bills each legislator sponsored or cosponsored that were centrist or rightist. *Voting scores* are ideal points based on each legislator's roll-call votes (rescaled here to range between 0 and 100). The significance level of the estimated difference between lawmakers from the occupational group in question and lawmakers from blue-collar jobs is denoted in the usual way: ⁺*p* < 0.10; **p* < 0.05, n.s. not significant.

working class (since they were the omitted category, they always have a score of 0) and lawmakers from different kinds of white-collar professions, controlling for party.

Like Latin American legislators more generally, Argentine lawmakers' personal views about social spending differ dramatically by class. The first set of bars in Figure 5 illustrates expected differences in the percentage of seven government programs each lawmaker felt should receive the same or less funding (the measure used in the top panel of Figure 4). Even after controlling for party, Argentine lawmakers from private-sector professions tend to have spending views approximately 25 points (out of 100) more rightist than lawmakers from blue-collar jobs, and lawmakers from public-sector professions tend to have views about 18 points more rightist. Like other lawmakers in the region, Argentine legislators from the working class tend to

bring more leftist economic views to the policymaking process.

These attitudinal differences appear to translate into comparable differences in their choices, at least when they have some discretion. The second set of bars in Figure 5 plot the percentage of the economic bills that legislators sponsored or cosponsored that were centrist or rightist. The third set of bars plot differences in roll-call based ideal points, rescaled here to range between 0 and 100.²² The trends in legislators' sponsorship scores are strikingly similar to the differences in their spending attitudes (albeit about half the size). Even with a relatively small sample, a coarse measure of

²² Since many legislators were observed more than once in our bill data – we computed counts for 2000 and 2001 separately – we clustered the standard errors in our regression models by individual legislators. Our findings were the same when we analyzed each year separately and when average the two.

sponsorship, and controls for partisanship (a variable that may itself be driven by a person's class and that might therefore be picking up some of the total class effect), there are statistically significant social class divisions in Argentine legislators' sponsorship choices that mirror the gaps in their economic viewpoints. Contrary to decades of scholarly thought, lawmakers from different classes appear to think differently and behave differently.

Our analysis cannot control for public opinion, of course, because there has never been a survey in Argentina with enough cases to generate province-level estimates. However, we have little reason to think that the findings in Figure 5 reflect differences in the kinds of districts working-class legislators represent. For one, the Argentine provinces do not differ widely in electing working-class legislators. Those in our sample span 23 of Argentina's 24 provinces and never represent more than 12.5% of a province's delegation (Argentine deputies are elected by province using closed-list proportional representation). Moreover, the differences in their choices are most pronounced when they introduce bills, an activity most constituents ignore. And in the US – where constituency opinion data *are* available – district effects cannot account for social class gaps in legislative conduct (Carnes 2012; 2013). We have little reason to expect anything different in Argentina.

Taken at face value, the differences in bill sponsorship documented in Figure 5 are striking, especially in light of the tight party discipline in Argentina. On average, about 49% of the economic bills introduced in the Argentine Chamber of Deputies are leftist. If the occupational makeup of the Chamber of Deputies were identical to that of the country as a whole (holding constant the partisan makeup of the legislature), approximately 55% of the roughly 800 bills would be leftist. Although scholars have long maintained that the social class makeup of the world's legislatures is irrelevant, these data suggest that even in a setting where parties are strong, white-collar government means that approximately 50 leftist proposals never came to be *in one legislative session alone*. It is impossible to know exactly how these

missing bills might have affected the final result of the legislative process, but ideas usually have narrow windows of opportunity (Kingdon [1984] 2011) – the over-representation of white-collar professionals in Latin American legislatures means that there are more lawmakers ready to act when the time is right for the conservative policies that more affluent citizens tend to prefer and fewer to advocate pro-worker policy when conditions are right. Contrary to the conventional wisdom, legislators from different classes bring different perspectives to the process, and often act on them, at least behind the scenes.

On center stage, however, lawmakers from different classes are essentially indistinguishable. As the third set of bars in Figure 5 illustrates, class-based differences in Argentine legislators' roll-call voting scores were essentially nonexistent. If anything, legislators from white-collar occupations appeared slightly more leftist by this measure. When parties have less influence and legislators have more leeway – as they do when legislators decide to introduce bills – class-based differences in legislative attitudes appear to be important. In sharp contrast, when parties have more influence – as they do when legislators cast their votes – class appears to be irrelevant.

If we focused only on legislative voting, we would have no basis to think that the social class makeup of the Argentine legislature was important. We would overlook social class divisions in how legislators think and in how they behave during the pre-vote stages of the legislative process. As many scholars have done before, we would seriously underestimate the importance of class in the legislative process.

CLASS AND SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION IN LATIN AMERICA

Scholars of comparative politics have all but abandoned research on the personal characteristics of political elites. Most still see elites as central to processes ranging from regime transitions to economic reforms (e.g., Blondel and Müller-Rommel 2007; Higley and Gunther 1992; Stokes

2001; O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986). Yet scholars pay almost no attention to who those elites are or where they come from.

This inattention to elites partly reflects a legitimate interest in the other things: institutions, parties, interest groups, constituents, campaigns, and so on. However, this list should have room for *who governs*, too. The fact that scholars have paid so little attention to the personal characteristics of legislators for so long partially reflects their interest in other factors and partially reflects the misguided choices of earlier research. The first wave of research on the social class makeup of legislatures made methodological missteps at every turn – and ultimately discouraged scholars of comparative politics from paying attention to the class compositions of the world's political institutions.

Measured properly, data on legislators' class backgrounds, attitudes, and choices tell a coherent story. It is a story that may seem unsurprising. And it is a story squarely at odds with more than four decades of scholarly thought about the unequal representation of social classes. Like ordinary citizens, legislators from different classes bring different views about economic issues with them to office. When external actors like political parties force their hands – as they often do when bills are put to a vote – legislators from different classes behave about the same. But when they have discretion – as they often do during the agenda-setting stages of the legislative process – their choices on economic issues differ by class.

In other words, class matters, at least some of the time. Even in countries like Argentina, with highly disciplined parties, class seems to affect what happens before the votes are cast, the stages of the legislative process in which problems are identified, solutions are crafted, and the legislative agenda is set.

These links between class and legislative conduct would be less important if the descriptive representation of social classes in the world's legislatures were roughly balanced. If lawmakers were drawn from the same mix of occupations as the people they represented. Legislatures' substantive choices would still be an unbiased representation of the views of the

electorate. However, as we have known for decades, lawmakers all over the world are significantly better off than the people they represent. The class-based differences in legislative attitudes and behaviors documented here are an important source of representational inequality: social class inequalities in the makeup of legislatures bias the policymaking process towards dealing with the problems more privileged citizens care about and addressing them the way more privileged citizens would prefer. The unequal descriptive representation of social classes affects the substantive representation of those classes' interests. Scholars of comparative politics have ignored this feature of elite decision-making for far too long.

The findings reported here represent an important break from the first wave of comparative research on class and legislative conduct, but a great deal more work remains. Our analysis of legislative attitudes focused on a single region, and our analysis of legislative conduct focused on a single country. These were useful starting points, and we see no reason to expect different outcomes in other times and places, but our analysis should be replicated in other countries and time periods. The effects of inequalities in the social makeup of the world's legislatures deserve considerably more scholarly attention.

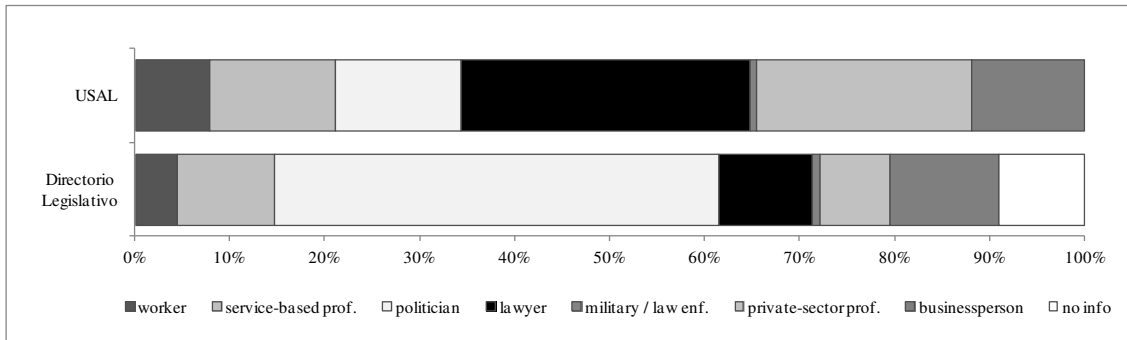
These inequalities may also hold the keys to many questions in the field of comparative politics. Why do highly unequal democracies fail to redistribute wealth? Why don't government policies reflect citizens' preferences? Scholars of labor-based parties have noted that the proportion of working-class legislators in their ranks has been declining since the 1970s (e.g., Best and Cotta 2000; Levitsky 2003). Perhaps this is one reason some of these parties subsequently moderated their economic policies (e.g., Kitschelt 1994; Stokes 2001).

Our findings also suggest that scholars of comparative politics should pay more attention to the origins of inequalities in the class compositions of legislatures. If the underrepresentation of the working class is politically consequential, why is the working class so sharply underrepresented? Why do democracies all over the world

consistently elect such an unbalanced group of lawmakers? For decades, scholars have mistakenly believed that questions like these are unimportant. It is time we begin asking them.

APPENDIX

FIGURE A1. The Class Distributions of Argentine Legislators in the USAL Survey and the Directorio Legislativo Dataset



Sources: USAL survey and Directorio Legislativo data.

TABLE A1. Occupational Coding for LAPOP Data

Broad Category	Narrow Category
Businesspeople and professionals	Professional, intellectual or scientist (lawyer, university professor, physician, engineer, architect, accountant, engineer, etc.)
	Manager
	Technical or mid-level professional (computer technician, school teacher, artist, athlete, etc.)
	Businessperson (entrepreneurs, salespeople, etc.)
	Artisan
Workers	Skilled worker (machine operator, mechanic, carpenter, electrician, etc.)
	Office worker (secretary, receptionist, cashier, customer service representative, etc.)
	Food vendor
	Employee in the service sector (hotel worker, restaurant employee, taxi driver, etc.)
	Farmhand (works for others, does not own land)
	Domestic servant
	Servant

TABLE A2. Occupational Coding for USAL, ILO, and Directorio Legislativo Data

Broad Category	Narrow Category
Businessperson	Associate Director / CEO Business owner / manager Farmer, Farm owner / manager Banker Contractor Salesman Business representative
Private-sector Professional	Accountant / Economist Actor Advertising Architect / Urban Planner Author Consultant Doctor / Dentist / Vet Engineer Hospital Administrator Journalist / Publisher Medical Office Manager Mortician Pharmacist Professional Athlete Radio and Television Notary Public
Military / Law Enforcement	Military Law Enforcement
Lawyer	Lawyer
Politician	Political Consultant Political Party Officer Pub Policy Analyst Public Relations / Lobbyist Judge Mayor Government Attorney

(continued)

Broad Occupational Category	Narrow Occupational Category
Service-based Professional	NGO / Charity Organizer College Administrator College Professor Education Admin. Guidance Councilor High School Admin. Librarian Minister / Priest Sec. School Teacher Social Worker Other educator Nurse Community organizer
Worker	Laborer Service industry worker Union officer, staff member
No info	Student Retiree Housewife Unemployed

TABLE A3. Regressions Relating Class and Argentine Legislators' Economic Choices

Dependent Variable	Spending Attitudes		Bill Sponsorship		Roll-Call Voting	
	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Party Controls?						
White-collar: private-sector	24.97* (10.90)	26.77* (10.75)	12.72* (5.49)	10.06+ (5.81)	-4.03 (12.53)	-3.83 (6.40)
White-collar: gov't / law	12.34 (10.48)	18.84+ (10.69)	12.08* (4.83)	8.65+ (5.09)	-2.77 (11.92)	-2.72 (5.83)
Blue-collar (omitted)	---	---	---	---	---	---
<i>N</i>	128	128	414	414	215	215
<i>R</i> ²	0.0553	0.1187	0.0073	0.0834	0.0006	0.7921
St. Err.	31.147	30.577	30.876	30.341	32.636	15.561

Sources: USAL surveys, Directorio Legislativo, Alemán et al. (2009), and authors' data collection.

Notes: The intercept and the coefficients for parties are omitted but available on request.

+*p* < 0.10; **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01, two tailed.

TABLE A4. Regressions Relating Class and Argentine Legislators' Economic Attitudes

Dependent Variable Controls?	State Functions		Social Spending	
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Businessperson	7.02 (8.43)	5.78 (8.11)	19.09 (12.79)	14.45 (12.71)
Private-sector Professional	17.31* (7.58)	12.10 (7.46)	28.02* (11.49)	16.44 (11.70)
Military / Law Enforcement	49.00* (21.72)	18.07 (21.48)	31.43 (32.96)	16.83 (33.66)
Lawyer	10.00 (7.32)	13.26 ⁺ (7.25)	11.29 (11.11)	8.17 (11.36)
Politician	7.25 (8.24)	5.57 (8.42)	7.90 (12.50)	7.24 (13.19)
Service-based Professional	8.38 (8.23)	7.99 (8.53)	18.06 (12.49)	9.72 (13.37)
Worker (omitted)	---	---	---	---
<i>N</i>	128	117	128	117
<i>R</i> ²	0.0778	0.3743	0.0715	0.2349
St. Err.	20.684	18.671	31.384	29.262

Source: USAL surveys.

Notes: Cells report coefficients from regressions relating the percentage of right positions legislators took on questions about state interventions and social spending to occupational indicators and (in the second and fourth models) controls for party, country, religion, gender, age, and marital status. Coefficients for control variables, the intercept, and the "no info" occupation are omitted but available on request.

⁺*p* < 0.10; **p* < 0.05; ***p* < 0.01, two tailed.

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