LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE, LEFT OR RIGHT: THE IDENTIFICATION WITH IDEOLOGICAL LABELS BY PUERTO RICAN LEGISLATORS

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Abstract

Research on the use of ideological labels has focused on their meaning to mass publics and how elites transmit this information to them. Less emphasis has been placed on the question of how elites come to use ideological labels. In addition, little is known about the use of ideological labels by Puerto Rican elites. Using a database of Puerto Rican legislators, I study the factors that influence their willingness to label themselves as liberals or conservatives and left or right. These labels are not common to the island's political discourse but are quite common in the political language of the United States (at least the liberal/conservative labels). Three hypotheses are proposed to explain the identification with these labels: exposure to the U.S. political culture, affective attachment to the United States, and legislative experience. I test these hypotheses using logit equations. The results show that, especially for the liberal-conservative labels, direct and indirect exposure to the U.S, affective attachment to that country, and legislative experience are important predictors of the identification with these labels. The findings have important implications for the study of the evolution of ideological labels in elites and the impact of political institutions on its members.

Keywords: ideological labels, self-placement scales, ideology, Puerto Rico, elites

Resumen

La investigación sobre el uso de etiquetas ideológicas se ha centrado en su significado para los públicos de masas y cómo las élites les transmiten esta información. Se ha puesto menos énfasis en la cuestión de cómo las élites usan etiquetas ideológicas. Además, se sabe poco sobre el uso de etiquetas ideológicas por parte de las élites puertorriqueñas. Utilizando una base de datos de legisladores puertorriqueños, estudio los factores que influyen en su voluntad de etiquetarse como liberales o conservadores y de izquierda o derecha. Estas etiquetas no son comunes al discurso político de la isla, pero son bastante comunes en el lenguaje político de los Estados Unidos (al menos las etiquetas liberales/conservadoes). Se proponen tres hipótesis para explicar la

identificación con estas etiquetas: exposición a la cultura política de los EE.UU., apego afectivo a los Estados Unidos y experiencia legislativa. Pruebo estas hipótesis usando ecuaciones *logit*. Los resultados muestran que, especialmente para las etiquetas liberales/conservadores, la exposición directa e indirecta a los EE.UU., el apego afectivo a ese país y la experiencia legislativa, son predictores importantes de la identificación con dichas etiquetas. Los hallazgos de esta investigación tienen implicaciones importantes para el estudio de la evolución de las etiquetas ideológicas en las élites y el impacto de las instituciones políticas en sus miembros.

Palabras clave: etiquetas ideológicas, escalas de autocolocación, ideología, Puerto Rico, élites

RÉSUMÉ

Les recherches à propos de l'utilisation des étiquettes idéologiques se sont concentrées sur ce que cela signifie pour un public de masse et sur la façon dont les élites leur transmettent ces informations. L'accent a été mis moins sur la question de savoir comment les élites utilisent les étiquettes idéologiques. En outre, on sait peu de choses sur l'utilisation des étiquettes idéologiques par les élites portoricaines. En utilisant une base de données des législateurs portoricains, j'étudie les facteurs qui influencent leur volonté de se qualifier de libéraux ou conservateurs et de gauche ou de droite. Ces étiquettes ne sont pas communes au discours politique de l'île, mais elles sont assez courantes dans le langage politique des États-Unis (au moins les étiquettes libérales / conservatrices). Trois hypothèses sont proposées pour expliquer l'identification à ces étiquettes: exposition à la culture politique des États-Unis, attachement affectif aux États-Unis et expérience législative. Je teste ces hypothèses en utilisant des équations *logit*. Les résultats montrent que, en particulier pour les étiquettes libérales conservatrices, l'exposition directe et indirecte aux États-Unis, l'attachement affectif à ce pays et l'expérience législative sont d'importants prédicteurs de l'identification avec ces étiquettes. Les résultats présentent des implications importantes pour l'étude de l'évolution des étiquettes idéologiques sur les élites et l'impact des institutions politiques sur leurs membres.

Mots-clés : étiquettes idéologiques, échelles auto-positionnées, idéologie, Porto Rico, élites

Introduction

The use of the liberal/conservative and left/right ideological dimensions and their ideological labels has generated considerable research and academic debates in the United States, Europe, and more recently in Latin America. Most of this research has focused on mass publics (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Jacoby 1988, 1991; Levitin and Miller 1979; Layman and Carsey 2002; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Conover and Feldman 1981; Herrera 1996-1997; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994; Zschirnt 2011; Vegetti and Širinić 2019; Zechmeister 2006; Wiesehomeier 2010; Harbers, de Vries and Steenbergen 2012; Zechmeister and Corral 2012; among many others). Although there are studies of the elites (for example, Herrera 1992, 1996-1997; Rohrschneider 1994, 1996), Herrera (1992) laments that "While efforts have been made to examine the mass public's familiarity with and understanding of ideological terms […] the same is not true with regards to the political elite (1022)." A gap in this area remains, especially on the question of how elites develop the knowledge of ideological concepts.

A gap in the empirical understanding of the Puerto Rican political elites, particularly legislators, also exists (Cámara Fuertes 2010). The use of the ideological terms "liberal" and "conservative," quite common among the U.S. political elite and its population (Herrera 1996-1997), is uncommon in the Puerto Rican political lexicon (Cámara Fuertes 2010). During the Spring of 2001, a group of researchers asked Puerto Rican legislators to place themselves in two 7-point self-placement scales measuring the liberal/conservative and left/right ideological dimensions. Almost all placed themselves in the scales, and most—about 60 percent—chose the liberal, conservative, left, right sides of the scales. On the other hand, over 40 percent chose the midpoint in both scales, thus refusing to label themselves liberal or conservative, or right or left. Why?

This work aims to contribute to bridge some of the gaps in both instances—the origins of the use of ideological concepts in elites in general, and of Puerto Rican legislators in particular.

Specifically, I will focus on how political elites—Senators and Representatives in the 2001 Puerto Rico Legislative Assembly—define themselves as liberal/conservative and left/right on 7-point, self-placement scales. I will examine (1) how legislators choose to place themselves in these scales—specifically, how they choose to label or not to label themselves ideologically—; (2) compare legislators who choose an ideological label with those who choose the midpoint in both scales; and (3) what factors influence these choices. I designate legislators as "using ideological labels" as those who choose alternatives 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 in the 7-point self-placement scales—the first three referring to the "liberal" or "left"

alternatives and the latter three to the "conservative" or "right" alternatives—versus those who choose alternative 4, the midpoint or center. I classify those that chose alternative 4 as unwilling or unable to choose an ideological label.

The interesting part of this exercise—and what makes it particularly illuminating—is that it was done in a political environment where the ideological labels of "liberal," "conservative," "left," and "right" were rarely, if ever, used. Since the use of ideological labels is not commonly used in Puerto Rico, elites do not begin with a "common knowledge" of what it means to be politically liberal or politically conservative, as would, for example, a member of Congress who is part of the political elite (Herrera 1996-1997). This interesting and unusual juxtaposition will give us the opportunity to study the possible transmission of cues on the use of ideological labels from one political environment to another, specifically from U.S. political elites to Puerto Rican legislators. I propose that three factors that may help us understand why some political elites use ideological labels: contact with other political elites; affective attachment to those elites, and the necessities of their political work.

The fact that the data was drawn from a survey done in 2001, almost 20 years ago, makes the data even more useful. Twenty years ago the use of these labels in Puerto Rico, and thus their underlying ideological dimensions, was used even less than today, as anecdotal evidence apparently points to an increase in the use of these labels by elites and political commentators.

The paper is divided in six sections. First, I will present the theoretical framework in the context of the Puerto Rican political culture. Second, I will present the three main hypotheses. Third, the data on the Puerto Ricans legislators will be discussed. Fourth, I will examine and compare those who chose to place themselves in the midpoint of the scales with those who choose to place themselves in the liberal/conservative, left/right sides of the scales. In the fifth section I specify the model and present the statistical analysis. Finally, I will discuss the results and their implications.

Ideological labels and politics in Puerto Rico

In many countries, including the United States, the political discourse is often structured within a single dimension, using the labels "left/right" or "liberal/conservative" to describe it (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Klingemann 1979a; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Bobbio 1996; Zechmeister 2006; Zechmeister and Corral 2012; Huber and Inglehart 1995; Coppedge 1997). In the United States, both the elites and the masses appear to have a relatively good grasp of the "liberal" and

"conservative" labels and they tend to see politics as a single continuum with liberals and conservatives being the polar ends (Herrera 1992, 1996-1997).

In the United States and elsewhere, the left/liberal labels are associated with ideas such as acceptance of change, support for greater government intervention in the economy, government intervention to solve social problems or inequality (social welfare), equality, women's rights, secularism, etc. On the other hand, the right/conservative labels are associated with individualism, free enterprise, less government intervention of the economy, tolerance for inequality, respect for authority, religiosity, and support for the status quo and traditional values (Herrera 1992, 1996-1997; Bobbio 1996; Coppedge 1997; Zechmeister 2006; Wiesehomeier 2010).

The use of the liberal/conservative or left/right ideological labels in the context of a dimension that encompasses the main issues in society is, however, not used in Puerto Rico. The main political cleavage in Puerto Rico is centered on the relationship between it and the United States (Meléndez Vélez 1998; Cámara Fuertes 2004, 2010).

Since the United States began its rule over Puerto Rico in 1898 at the end of the Spanish-American War, Puerto Ricans have been engaged in a struggle to define the territory's political relationship with its metropolis. This is called in Puerto Rican politics the "*status issue.*" In 1952, after a series of referendums, Puerto Rico became a commonwealth of the United States (*Estado Libre Asociado* or ELA), thus receiving a degree of self-government. The three main political options, or status alternatives, that have been continuously debated and voted on in Puerto Rico are: becoming a state of the United States (statehood), support for the ELA or various degrees of autonomy (commonwealth), or becoming a fully independent country (independence). The New Progressive Party (PNP) defends statehood, the Popular Democratic Party (PPD) supports the current commonwealth status, and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP), as its name suggests, defends independence.

The Puerto Rican party system is based on this cleavage. As Robert W. Anderson (1988) put it: "Puerto Rican political parties are, indeed must be, defined in terms of status alternatives, in spite of the inherent ambiguities of this issue as it is transmuted into electoral politics" (31). Thus, the status issue is the main cleavage under which parties are formed, electoral campaigns are run, and political discourse is conducted (Cámara Fuertes 2004; see also Pabón 1971, 1972; Anderson 1988; Bayrón Toro 1989; Garriga Picó 1981; Barreto and Eagles 2000; Meléndez Vélez 1998). This also directly applies to the 2001-2004 Legislative Assembly (Cámara Fuertes 2010). Consequently, important cleavage issues relevant in many other countries, such as state intervention in the

economy, wealth redistribution, the private economy, and "moral" issues such as abortion rights are not usually connected to ideological labels in Puerto Rico, not placed in an ideological context, or are left out of the political discourse—especially more so in 2001 than currently in 2020 (Cámara Fuertes 2010).

A search of the terms "left," "right," "leftist," "rightist," "liberal," "conservative," and "center" in the party platforms of the New Progressive Party (PNP), Popular Democratic Party (PPD), and Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) for the 2000 General Elections revealed that none of these terms were mentioned even once in any of these platforms.[1] Yet, when asked to place themselves in two seven-point scales, one using the left/right labels and one using the liberal/conservative labels, almost all of the legislators completed the exercise. Furthermore, more than half chose an alternative in line with a liberal, left, conservative or right label. Why? I argue that the use of these labels by some legislators is a function of social learning, affective attachment to the U.S. political elite and of their utility in their political and legislative work.

Knowing the meaning of the liberal/conservative labels is important to understand U.S. politics. A lot of the political debate in that country is referenced by these two terms and its underlying dimension. These labels are, in a way, the currency of politics (Herrera 1992, 1996-1997). This is especially the case since the mid 1990s when U.S. politics have become more polarized and ideological (Sinclair 2006). Thus, for political elites in Puerto Rico to follow politics in the United States, especially the politics of its elites, understanding the liberal/conservative dimension and the use of the "liberal" and "conservative" labels is important.

According to Chong, McClosky, and Zaller (1983) and McClosky and Zaller (1984), three steps must occur for the social learning of important values from the elites to the masses to take place: (1) a person must be exposed to the norms; (2) they must comprehend what they involve; and (3) they must accept them. Thus, those who are most exposed to, and are strongly aware of, elites' values and attitudes are more able to absorb and reproduce them (McClosky and Zaller 1984; Zaller 1992; Layman and Carsey 2002).[2] An important factor in mediating this is being fluent in English. Without a good knowledge of English, it would have been difficult for legislators to have a high level of exposure to political messages concerning the use of the liberal and conservative labels by political elites in the U.S. or to understand them. That is, without being fluent in English, legislators could not achieve two conditions needed for political learning: *exposure*, as the local Spanish language coverage of the U.S. political elite was limited, and *comprehension*, since English is needed to understand the political communication that is received.

Higher attention to the news has been linked to more predictable left/right attitudes in Latin America (Harbers, de Vries and Steenbergen 2012).

Being fluent in English allows legislators to read news and debates on magazines, newspapers or the internet, or to watch and understand television programs that cover daily political and social events such as the network news, or the Sunday political analysis programs. As Chong, McClosky, and Zaller (1983:434) state: "In general, people who are politically aware, or who have appropriate social characteristics and psychological dispositions, learn them more effectively than others do." Back in 2001, content related to news about the United States—from the United States—in Spanish was not as widespread as today and there was no social media in the form that we understand it today. TV news coverage of the United States by local stations in Puerto Rico, either through news or analysis, was limited at the time of the survey. Puerto Rican newspaper coverage was wider, but still limited.

Another factor that influences exposure and understanding is being completely immersed in the society from which the political learning is being acquired by living there. For many decades there has been a significant movement of Puerto Ricans to and from the U.S. states (Duany 2011). In particular, living abroad to do higher education studies entails a much deeper immersion in that country's culture than just living there, as students will likely be taking classes on different social, political, and cultural aspects of that country, and the educational process transmits political values important to that country (Weil 1985).

The third step in this transmission is acceptance. Zaller (1992) in his RAS model argues that for individuals to accept and absorb new information it must be in line with their previous beliefs. Information that is in contradiction with previous held beliefs tend to be rejected. Extending this logic to Puerto Rican politics, we would expect that those who seek closer ties to the United States—supporters of statehood—would accept more readily the ideological labels used there than those who do not favor such closer ties. Given the importance of the status cleavage in the island, there is perhaps an affective factor in this acceptance. Those who want to be part of the United States presumably should want to use the terminology used by its elites. This affective component of the use of ideological labels is consistent with findings in mass publics elsewhere (Conover and Feldman 1981; Kuklinski and Hurley 1994). For example, the bases of people identifying themselves as liberals or conservatives in the United States has often been in reference to the other group. For example, during the period of Republican dominance starting in 1980 and going through the 2000s, both liberal and conservatives defined themselves in relation to positive and negative evaluations

of conservatism (whereas during the New Deal, it was through reference to liberalism). Thus, choosing an ideological label and defining it has a basis on affective feeling toward certain groups (Zschirnt 2011). In addition, the use of ideological labels has been associated with in-group, out-group attachments and how the individual relates to his/her group (Vegetti and Širinić 2019).

It is important to note that political context is important in the use of ideological labels (Zechmeister 2006; Wiesehomeier 2010; Harbers, de Vries and Steenbergen 2012; Zechmeister and Corral 2012). For example, research in Latin America has shown that in countries where there is more ideological baggage related to the discussion of issues and political campaigns, there is more use of ideological labels like "left" and "right" and their use has more substantive ideological meaning. In contrast, where politics is more directly related to personalities and political leaders, the use of these terms is less and has less ideological substance (Zechmeister 2006). It is interesting to note that in Europe, Inglehart and Klingemann (1976) reported three nations in which the traditional left/right dimension and labels did not readily apply: Ireland, Switzerland and Belgium (see also Laver 1992). In these three cases politics at the time revolved mainly around national identity and language issues, much like in Puerto Rico.

Another reason for the adoption of ideological labels by Puerto Rican legislators is that the liberal/conservative dimension is an information shortcut, both for elites and masses, to process, understand, and transmit complex ideas, especially since the acquisition and absorption of information is costly—takes time, effort, background knowledge, etc. (Downs 1957). Thus, the experience that legislators have had in their legislative careers may have an impact on their use of ideological constructs or labels. The reason for this is simple: legislative work is complex and legislators have to deal with all sorts of issues. Because legislators often specialize in specific areas of interest, their knowledge outside of those areas can be limited. Nevertheless, they have to make decisions on those areas as well. The status issue, the main political cleavage, is a poor guide for legislators, as it is only relevant in areas where the relationship of the island with the United States or with other countries is involved. These are only a small fraction of all the issues discussed in the legislature. Most of the issues with which legislators have to deal with are well outside this area (Cámara Fuertes 2010).

Partisanship can be a useful clue in some of these decisions but not in all. Since Puerto Rican parties coalesce around the status issue, they cannot serve as a reference point in which to base the use of liberal or conservative labels, as is the case in other countries (Fuchs and Lingemann 1990). This limits the areas where they have clearly marked

policy positions. This is not to say parties have no policy positions on other issues—they do—but the emphasis on the status issue limits their scope in other respects, making the policy stances of the two main parties similar (Meléndez Vélez 1998), and thus limiting the partisan cues that legislators can use.

This situation underscores the need for legislators to have some sort of scheme to organize their decision making on a complex environment full of different issues. Understanding and using the liberal/conservative dimension is a way to reduce information overload, to help classify and make sense of this information flow, and to decide what fits with what (Downs 1957; Zaller 1992). Elites use this dimension as a way to process information and make complex decisions (Downs 1957; Converse 1964; Inglehart and Klingemann 1979; North 1990; Fuchs and Klingemann 1990; Hinich and Munger 1993; Jacoby 1991; Budge 1994). This would lead us to expect that more senior legislators would identify more with these labels as a shortcut for their work.

In addition to the time they have served, the type of district that the legislator represents should influence their use of ideological labels. In each legislative chamber there are two types of legislators: district and at-large. District legislators represent small relatively homogeneous geographic units. At-large legislators campaign across the whole island accumulating votes in all the 78 municipalities of the commonwealth. It is possible these two types of legislators have different viewpoints, with district legislators paying closer attention to the specific problems of their districts, while at-large legislators deal with wider more complex national problems. If this is so, then this may mean that at-large legislators have a more pressing need for a classification scheme to deal with more diverse and complex issues than district legislators.

Hypotheses

Based on the preceding discussion I propose three main hypotheses:

First, legislators who are, or have been, in close contact with U.S. politics and culture will be more likely to choose ideological labels. Specifically, these legislators will be more likely to choose an ideological label in the liberal/conservative scale than in the left-right scale because the former is more commonly used in the United States than the latter. This means that legislators who are fluent in English, or who have lived or studied in the United States will choose to use ideological labels (that is, to avoid using the center category) more often that those who are not fluent in English or who have not lived or studied in the United States. This is the Exposure hypothesis.

Second, legislators who are members of the New Progressive Party

(PNP) will be more likely to identify with liberal/conservative labels than other legislators because their affect toward the U.S. political system that they want to join. This is the Affective Attachment hypothesis.

Third, legislators who have more legislative experience (seniority) or who come from larger and more diverse at-large districts (whose district is the whole island) will be more likely to choose ideological labels than those who have less legislative experience or come from smaller districts. This is the Practical Experience hypothesis.

Data and Methods

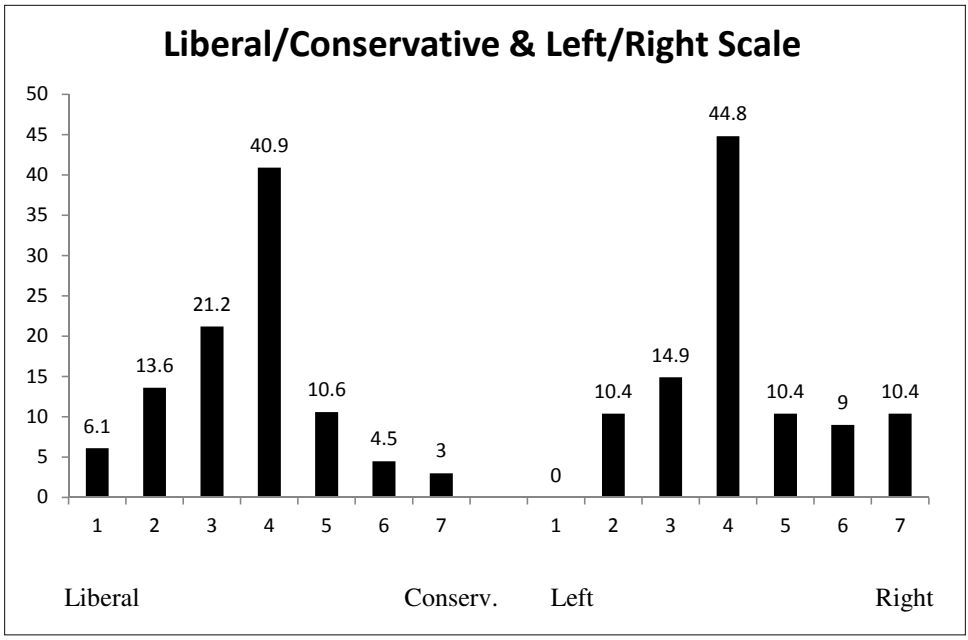
The data for this research comes from a 2001 survey of Puerto Rican legislators. The survey was carried out by students and two faculty members from the Political Science Department of the University of Puerto Rico-Río Piedras. From an initial goal of interviewing all 79 legislators, both Senators and Representatives, 69 were interviewed, for a response rate of 87 percent. No legislator directly refused to participate, although those that kept cancelling appointments or providing excuses for not giving an appointment were classified as refusing to participate. When compared with the response rates for similar surveys of U.S. legislators, the response rate for this study was exceptionally high.[3]

The standardized questionnaires were administered early in the legislator's four-year term during the first legislative session from late April to early June of 2001. All the legislators were interviewed face to face and only legislators were interviewed (not staffers or aides).

As part of the questionnaire, legislators were asked to place themselves on two seven-point scales; one that measured the liberal-conservative continuum and the other the left-right continuum. They were shown a card with a distribution of numbers from one through seven. Near the one was the label "liberal," while near the seven was the label "conservative." They were then read the following statement: "In a scale that runs from one through seven, where the one represents the liberal end, and the seven the conservative end, and four is the middle point, where would you place yourself?" A second card shown for the scale that included the left and right terms. The cards and instructions for both scales were identical except for the change in the labels names (i.e. "conservative," "right," etc.). The cards handed to the legislators had no label identifying the center or midpoint.

Figure 1 shows that the distribution of legislator's preferences is leaning somewhat to the liberal side (mean=3.62) in the first scale and to the right (mean=4.24) in the second. Of significance for this work is the fact that 43 and 46 percent of the legislators failed to place themselves in the first and second scales, respectively, as either liberals or conservatives

Figure 1



or leftists or rightists by choosing either the scale's midpoint of four or by refusing to answer. Only two legislators refused to place themselves in the scales (respondents were not offered a "don't know" alternative).

The Midpoint Alternative

Before focusing on the factors associated with the use of ideological labels, it is useful to explore who are those who chose the center/midpoint category and how do they compare with those that chose an ideological label, either on the left/liberal side or the right/conservative side. Recall from Figure 1 that the mode in both distributions was the midpoint by a significant margin. There are three possible explanations for those who chose the midpoint in either scale: (1) they were true centrists; (2) they did not want to reveal their ideological position and; (3) they had no idea how to place themselves on the scale. Given that politicians tend to be outspoken about their issue positions, partisan alliances, and policy proposals it is unlikely that Puerto Rican legislators placed themselves at the midpoint of these scales in order to hide their ideological positions. This is not a particularly thorny or controversial issue, at least not in Puerto Rico in 2001.

My hypothesis is that a significant portion on those who chose

the midpoint were not true centrists but were ideologues who did not understand what the labels liberal, conservative, left, or right meant. The midpoint was a convenient place to park themselves instead of guessing an answer or stating that they did not know what to answer. This is an explanation that has, in the case of mass publics, significant empirical support (Robinson and Fleishman 1988:135; Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Levitin and Miller 1979; Presser and Schuman 1980; Kinder 1983; Converse and Presser 1986). Reinforcing this hypothesis is the fact that these legislators were interviewed face to face by political science students and faculty members. They may have felt "ashamed" to admit that they did not know how to classify themselves, especially in the absence of an explicit "Don't Know" category. This may be a similar effect to those who tell American National Elections Study interviewers that they voted when in fact they did not (McDonald 2003; Cuevas-Molina 2017). If this is the case, it would bolster the argument that those who chose the values 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 or 7 in the 7-point scales *understood* the meaning of the labels better than those who chose number 4, the midpoint or "center."

To explore this, I focused on three key questions that clearly define what it means to be liberal or conservative in the United States and Left and Right in Latin America. The first two are: (1) whether a woman can only have an abortion in the case of rape, incest or imminent danger to her life; and (2) whether the government intervenes and regulates the private economy "too much." These two variables are presented as a statement with four possible answers being "strongly disagree," "disagree," "agree," and "strongly agree." Agreeing that abortion should be limited to cases of rape, incest, or danger to a woman's life and that the government overregulates the economy are associated with a conservative/right point of view, both in the United States and in Latin America (Zechmeister 2006; Zechmeister and Corral 2006; Wiesehomeier 2010).

The third question uses a different format and asks for the reasons why there are so many poor people on the island given that Puerto Rico has one of the lowest per capita incomes in the U.S. Legislators were provided with three possible answers: (1) people are poor because they are lazy and lack the will to improve; (2) the government has created lazy people with its welfare programs; and (3) they are poor because society has treated them unfairly. In addition to the three answers provided in the survey questionnaire, twenty five percent of legislators voluntarily offered a fourth alternative. Virtually all of those, as described by the interviewers, mentioned the island's status problem as a cause of the high levels of poverty. Thus, the first two choices place the fault of being poor on the individual—the poor are lazy—and the other two on discrimination and a structural problem—it is the system's or society's fault. The first two answers are associated with a conservative/right wing viewpoint,

whereas the latter two with a liberal/leftist point of view.

In order to compare these questions with ideological labels, for the first two questions I collapsed "strongly agree" and "agree" together and did the same for "disagree" and "strongly disagree." I also recoded the "being poor" question into two alternatives, collapsing the first two answers (being lazy and government help) into one group, and discrimination and status answers into another. The ideology scales were also collapsed into liberals or leftists (1,2,3), conservatives or rightists (5,6,7) and centrists (4). Doing this facilitates the analysis and increases their reliability (Wood and Oliver 2012). I compared those in the middle category to those choosing an ideological label in terms of ideological preferences and ideological consistency.

A true ideologue would answer all three questions as either liberal/left of conservative/right. For example, a "true" liberal would oppose (1) abortion only in the case of rape, incest or danger to a woman's life; (2) oppose the view that government overregulates the private economy; and (3) would place the reason for people being poor on the system or society.

The data in Table 1 show that for the liberal-conservative scale, those who chose the midpoint alternative were more conservative than ideological conservatives in the abortion and regulation questions. In the poverty question they were significantly more conservative than ideological liberals and only slightly less conservatives than self-identified conservatives. In the left-right scale, those who chose the midpoint were more to the right than self-identified leftists and rightists in the poverty question, and significantly more to the right than leftists and slightly less rightists than self-identified rightists in the regulation and abortion questions.

In terms of distributions *within* the midpoint, a majority chose the conservative answer in the abortion and poverty questions and were almost evenly divided in the regulation question. This was also true in the left/right scale. Thus, those that selected the midpoint in both scales clearly displayed a conservative/right wing inclination in terms of ideological preference in these three signature issues.

Turning to ideological consistency—whether legislators chose the same ideological side for all three questions—when comparing those who self-placed at the midpoint of both scales to those who self-identified as ideological there are two possible outcomes: (1) they are less consistent than ideologues, in which case they could be "true centrists;" (2) they are similarly consistent or are more consistent than "ideologues," in which case they probably chose the center category to avoid giving an answer or are clueless as to what these labels mean.

The data on Table 1 shows that those who chose the midpoint were more consistent that liberals or conservatives, giving ideologically

Table 1:
Ideological Inclination and Ideological Consistency
Ideologues vs Centrists

Ideological Inclination					
Abortion only in cases of rape, incest or imminent danger to woman's life					
Liberal-Conservative 7-point Scale	Disagree (liberal)	Agree (conservative)	Left-Right 7-point Scale	Disagree (left)	Agree (right)
Liberals (1,2,3)	60.0	40.0	Left (1,2,3)	56.3	43.8
Center (4)	18.5	81.5	Center (4)	36.7	63.3
Conservatives (5,6,7)	33.3	66.7	Right (5,6,7)	21.1	78.9
Government regulates "too much" private economy					
Liberal-Conservative 7-point Scale	Disagree (liberal)	Agree (conservative)	Left-Right 7-point Scale	Disagree (left)	Agree (right)
Liberals (1,2,3)	68.0	32.0	Left (1,2,3)	68.8	31.3
Center (4)	51.9	48.1	Center (4)	51.7	48.3
Conservatives (5,6,7)	58.3	41.7	Right (5,6,7)	60.0	40.0
Reason for so many poor people in Puerto Rico					
Liberal-Conservative 7-point Scale	Individual's fault (liberal)	society/ system's fault (conservative)	Left-Right 7-point Scale	Individual's fault (left)	society/ system's fault (right)
Liberals (1,2,3)	66.7	33.3	Left (1,2,3)	82.4	17.6
Center (4)	44.4	56.6	Center (4)	43.3	56.7
Conservatives (5,6,7)	33.3	66.7	Right (5,6,7)	40.0	60.0
Ideological Consistency					
Liberal-Conservative 7-point Scale	Inconsistent	Consistent	Left-Right 7-point Scale	Inconsistent	Consistent
Liberals (1,2,3)	85.2	14.8	Left (1,2,3)	88.2	11.8
Center (4)	47.1	25.9	Center (4)	80.0	20.0
Conservatives (5,6,7)	91.7	8.3	Right (5,6,7)	80.0	20.0

uniform answers to all three questions 25 percent of the time versus 15 and 8 percent for liberals and conservatives respectively, and more consistent than leftists and similarly consistent to rightists. Thus, the data suggests that a significant portion of those who chose the midpoint category were as ideological, if not more so, than those who chose the liberal/conservative or left/right sides. This conclusion bolsters the argument that they chose the midpoint because they did not understand what the ideological labels meant or would not answer "do not know" rather than being true centrists.

Data analysis and results

To test the hypotheses I used two equations, one for the liberal-conservative scale and one for the left-right scale. The dependent variables are how the legislators positioned themselves on each of the two scales. Both dependent variables are coded binarily: the legislators that selected the midpoint category (alternative 4) and the two who did not answer the questions were coded as zero. Legislators who chose an ideological position in the scales (alternatives 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7) were coded as one. Since the dependent variable are binary, I used logit equations.[4]

To test the Exposure hypothesis, I used three variables: having lived in the United States, having studied abroad, and fluency in English. The first two variables measure the direct exposure that legislators may have had to the culture from where they will "borrow" the use of ideological labels. Thirty-five percent of legislators stated that they had lived in the U.S. for at least a year, and twenty-eight percent stated that they had studied abroad. Although there was no information on where they had actually studied (the questionnaires were anonymous), the United States was the most likely destination, as large proportions of undergraduate and graduate students from Puerto Rico go to study there (Torres González 2002:299). As I mentioned earlier, studying abroad entails a much deeper immersion in that country's culture than just living there, as students engage in formal learning and the educational process transmits political values important to that country (Weil 1985).

Fluency in English is an indirect measure of contact with U.S. politics through the media since English is the language in which the political conversation and debates among the elite takes place. I constructed a scale of fluency in English using four questions. Legislators were asked if they could read, understand TV, talk, or debate in English. These four questions were added up in a five-point scale of fluency in English, going from zero, no understanding of English in any category, to four, good understanding of English in all. The distribution of the scale was 10, 15, 16, 23, and 36 percent, respectively.

To test the Affective Attachment hypothesis, I used the partisan affiliation variable. In Puerto Rico, status ideology and partisanship are synonymous in the Legislature. All members of the PNP are supporters of statehood, all the members of the PPD are supporters of commonwealth, and all supporters of the PIP favor independence. I created a dummy variable where I compared members of the PNP to the other legislators.

To test for the Practical Experience hypothesis, I used two variables: the legislator's term and the type of district. Legislator's term was measured in a straight-forward manner by indicating whether this was the

legislator's first, second, third, or fourth (or higher) legislative term. For the type of legislator, I used a dummy variable that separates district legislators and at-large legislators. At-large legislators are the indicator and district legislators are the omitted category.

In addition to these variables, I controlled for one institutional and three demographic variables. The institutional variable is the legislative chamber. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate in the Puerto Rican legislature have few differences; with both chambers having similar representation constituencies and power levels (Cámara Fuertes 2008). However, anecdotal evidence from conversations with legislative aides suggests that there are different cultures and attitudes in the Senate and in the House, which may lead to differences in how they use ideological labels.

The demographic variables used were education, age, and gender. Of these, education is theoretically the most likely to have an impact on the dependent variable. A consistent relationship between both has been established in the literature. Those who have a college degree or more use the liberal-conservative labels more often and more correctly (in the U.S. see Jacoby 1988, 1991; Levitin and Miller 1979; and in a comparative perspective, Klingemann 1979b), and are better able to correctly align their liberal or conservative preferences with those of the elites (Layman and Carsey 2002).

The final model specification is:

$Y = \beta 1$ Fluency in English + $\beta 2$ Lived in the U.S. + $\beta 3$ Studied Abroad + $\beta 4$ Party ID + $\beta 5$ Seniority + $\beta 6$ Type of Legislator + $\beta 7$ Legislative Chamber + $\beta 8$ Age + $\beta 9$ Education + $\beta 10$ Gender

Where Y is whether a legislator chose the values 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, or 7 versus the midpoint (value 4) or did not answer in the liberal/conservative or the left/right 7 point self-placement scales.

The results of the logit equations are displayed in Table 2. In the equation that dealt with the identification with liberal or conservative labels, the results show that all the Exposure hypothesis variables were statistically significant. Two of the three contact variables were in the expected direction: having studied abroad and being fluent in English. Everything else being equal, those who were the most fluent in English were 31 percent more likely to select the liberal-conservative labels (versus the midpoint) than those who were the least fluent. Also, those who had studied abroad were 23 percent more likely to label themselves as liberal or conservative than those who had not studied outside the island. Surprisingly, those who had lived in the U.S. for at least a year were 25 *less* likely to use the labels. Since I controlled for a host of other political and demographic variables, the reason for the negative

relationship remains to be explained.[5]

The Affective Attachment and Practical Experience hypotheses were also confirmed. Members of the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP) were 25 percent more likely to label themselves liberal or conservatives in than other legislators. Senior legislators were also more likely identify with liberal/conservative labels. Everything else being equal, those with four terms or more were 30 percent more likely to select the labels than new legislators, as were at-large legislators (26 percent) when

Table 2:

Logit Equation Results on the Influence of Contact, Institutional Learning, Political, Institutional, and Demographic Variables on the Ideological Labeling of Legislators

Independent Variables	Liberal-Conservative Scale		Left-Right Scale	
	Coefficient (Std. Error)	% Impact	Coefficient (Std. Error)	% Impact
Exposure Hypothesis				
Fluency in English	1.7724* (1.1132)	31	-.5426 (1.0829)	
Lived in The U.S.	-1.5691*** (.7767)	-25	1.2090* (.7578)	-19
Studied Abroad	1.4100* (.8689)	23	.0558 (.8685)	
Practical Experience Hyp.				
Legislative Term	2.0108** (1.1950)	30	.8785 (1.0666)	
At-Large Legislator	1.7150** (.9157)	26	.8785 (1.0666)	
Affective Attachment Hyp.				
PNP	1.4905** (.8012)	25	-3.1390*** (.8859)	-51
Institution				
Senator	.7464 (.7872)		.0419 (.7592)	
Demographics				
Age	-2.6822*** (1.2424)	-43	-1.7634 § (1.1747)	-25
Education	-.6669 (.9845)		-.6028 (.9666)	
Gender	.4089 (.9017)		-.8381 (1.0675)	
Constant	-.9720 (1.1984)		3.0396** (1.2093)	
Chi-Square	24.61****		28.118****	
Nagelkerke R^2	0.43		0.47	

*** p<.5 ** p<.10 * p<.12 § p=.13

compared to district legislators. Younger legislators were 43 percent more likely to label themselves in comparison to older ones, everything else being equal. In terms of substantive impact, this was the strongest variable in the equation. Interestingly, and contrary to expectations, education was not statistically significant, and its sign was negative.

While several variables influenced the identification with liberal or conservative labels versus the midpoint, only three variables were significant on the left-right scale. *Ceteris paribus*, younger legislators were 25 more likely to identify with these labels. And, contrary to expectations, those who had lived in the U.S. for at least a year were 19 percent more likely to label themselves as left or right. More importantly, members of the PNP were a strong 51 percent *less* likely to identify with left/right ideological labels than members of the PPD and PIP.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings described in this paper have important implications for the study of ideological labels in political elites in general, and about the political language of political elites in Puerto Rico in specific. Herrera (1992) argued almost thirty years ago that

> Since [V.O.] Key offered his original insight, we have learned a good deal about the attitudes of elites and their behavior. But gaps remain. We, for instance, know remarkably little about how elites grasp a central element of our traditional political discourse —understanding of the ideological terms "liberal" and "conservative." While efforts have been made to examine the mass public's familiarity with and understanding of ideological terms […] the same is not true with regards to the political elite. Given that elites help frame political debate, this "missing piece" is troubling. (1021-1022)

In my estimation, this gap in knowledge still persists. In terms of the Puerto Rican legislators, the data on the ideological self-identification of Puerto Rican legislators tells an interesting story. In the case of the liberal-conservative labels, it is clear that several forces are at play. All three main hypotheses—the Exposure hypothesis, the Affective Attachment hypothesis and the Practical Experience hypothesis—were supported by the data.

In the case of the Exposure hypothesis, contact with the United States is an important factor in inducing legislators to classify themselves as liberals or conservatives. Again, since the equations controls for other demographic variables, the impact of being fluent in English, and having studied in the United States is most probably due to the contact with American political culture. Having studied abroad is theoretically important since the educational system tends to transmit the values and

symbols of a political system (Weil 1985). By being fluent in English, legislators are exposed to the debates of the American political elites, thus learning the meaning, and possibly the utility, of using the liberal or conservative labels. The variable of having lived in the United States, with its negative sign in the liberal/conservative equation, and the positive sign in the left/right equation remains a mystery. Since studying abroad is controlled for, this variable measures the impact of the experience of having lived in the United States, but not while studying there. In any case, the impact of studying abroad as opposed to just living abroad is more important and interesting theoretically.

The results also suggest that there is some influence on the emotional or group attachment to these labels—the Affective Attachment hypothesis—as those who want for Puerto Rico to become a U.S. state are more prone to using them than those who want to keep the *status quo* or seek independence. This likely relates to the need for acceptance (in addition to exposure and comprehension) that McClosky and Zaller (1984) suggest is needed for the transfer of ideological values from the elite to the mass publics to occur. This conclusion is further bolstered by the way supporters of the PNP behave in relation to left/right labels. The negative sign in the PNP variable probably reflects an emotional push away from Latin American and European political symbols. The ideological discourse of the pro-statehood debate is sometimes sprinkled with negative references to Latin America, especially, as some like to point out, that Latin American countries are less stable politically or economically than the United States (something even more salient in 2001 that today). Throughout its history, the pro-statehood leadership in Puerto Rico used to point to Latin America, with its economic crisis, civil wars, and instability, as a reason for Puerto Rico becoming a U.S. state.

The significance of the Practical Experience hypothesis suggest that, as time passes legislators realize that they need a labeling system that helps them cope with new information and that allows them to make political decisions quickly and easily (Malka and Lelkes 2010).This is underscored by the limitations of the party and political status labels available to them. There is probably also an element of copying "what works" from more senior legislators, although the data does not provide the information to test this. If the initial supposition that at-large legislators deal with a broader set of issues than district legislators is true, then the results also point in the direction of adopting the ideological labels as a system to deal with complex and varied information. In all, the data suggests that the use of ideological labels is related to the complexities of the legislative work and its environment. This further reinforces findings elsewhere that institutional learning influences legislators in their acceptance of norms, procedures, and beliefs (Rohrschneider 1994, 1996).

In contrast to the use of liberal or conservative labels, the results of the left or right labels paint another picture. Only three variables are significant. Neither English proficiency nor studying abroad are significant. Since the left-right labels are less commonly used in the United States, contact with its political culture is less useful in this case. Also, although Puerto Rico is geographically and culturally closer to Latin America than the United States, the political information coming from that region in the local mass media can be described as just a trickle just as in Europe—especially back in 2001. It is in those places, however, where the use of the left and right labels is commonplace. The impact of having lived in the United States is, again, significant but in the "wrong" direction. As in the case with the liberal and conservative labels, the reason for this remains a mystery.

Finally, it is interesting to note that age is significant and substantially strong in both equations. The youngest legislators are more likely to use labels of either type than are older legislators. This occurs even though legislative experience, which in general runs opposite to age, induces legislators to use labels. A possible explanation is that with the advent of the information age younger legislators had easier access to a wider range of information during their formative years than older legislators (especially since this data is from 2001, when internet access and use was not as widespread as today). If this is so, then we would expect that the use of labels would be more generalized among everyone as generational replacement moves on. I have noted elsewhere (Cámara Fuertes 2010) that younger legislators display specific ideological behavior when compared to their elders. For example, they tend to favor a smaller government and other conservative measures, even when controlling for other political variables.

In terms of answering the question of where the ideological knowledge of political elites comes from, this work contributes a piece of the puzzle to this understanding. In the case of Puerto Rican legislators in 2001, it came from U.S. political elites. This transmission was, apparently, neither conscious nor deliberate. It occurred in a manner similar to that between elites and the masses, at least using the framework proposed by Chong, McClosky, and Zaller (1983) and McClosky and Zaller (1984). This conclusion is even more relevant in the XXI Century given the push towards regional integration such as the European Union and between some countries in Latin America. In addition, the ease of access of information with the expansion of the internet, suggest that this phenomenon may be more common that many would imagine. This is particularly important since it is elites that drive the development of many of the issues debated by the masses and the language in which they are contextualized.

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Notes

[1] The terms in Spanish were: *izquierda*, *derecha*, *izquierdista*, *derechista*, *liberal*, *conservador*, and *centro*.

[2] Strengthening the case for the transfer of the use of ideological labels from U.S. elites to Puerto Rican legislators, McClosky and Zaller (1984) suggest that ideology is transmitted in packages, two of which are welfare state liberal patters and conservative pattern. This transfer of "packaged ideology" also applies to the Latin American context (Zechmeister 2006; Harbers, de Vries and Steenbergen 2012).

[3] Similar studies have had response rates that range from 54 percent for Thomas (1991) to 45 percent for Ambrosius and Welch (1988), to 41 percent for Welch and Peters (1977). (Response rates taken from Thomas, 1991). A work on Puerto Rican legislators by Loyola also reported very low response rates.

[4] Because of the non-linear nature of the logit (and other probabilistic models of choice) there is no obvious straightforward way to estimate marginal effects, as is possible with linear regression. In this paper I have chosen to estimate the maximum possible effect of the independent variables because it permits us to directly compare their potential impact on the vote. The process is as follows:

1. Using the estimated coefficients, compute the log of the odds of observing choice *j* for each voter *i* setting the independent variable to its lowest value;
2. Convert the log of the odds to a probability ($P(j_0)$);
3. Repeat steps 1-2 setting the variable to its highest value so that we obtain $P(j_1)$;
4. Compute the difference $P(j_1) - P(j_0)$ for each case;
5. Compute the average of the differences across cases.

The average of the difference is the estimate for the marginal effect of that variable.

[5] In a quest to understand this negative relationship, I coded the variable in several different ways (using years in the U.S., for example), and specified the equation differently, but the relationship remained the same.

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