

# It's My Party and I'll Lie If I Want To: Elite Ideological Obfuscation in Post-Authoritarian Settings\*

Cesar Zucco  
Getulio Vargas Foundation  
cesar.zucco@fgv.br

Timothy Power  
Oxford University  
timothy.power@socsci.ox.ac.uk

October 9, 2023

## Abstract

This paper examines the origins and evolution of the *direita envergonhada* (“embarrassed right”) phenomenon, a pattern of ideological obfuscation by right-of-center politicians that was originally identified and documented in post-authoritarian Brazil. Conservative politicians refused to identify themselves as right-wing, defining themselves instead as centrists and placing themselves ideologically to the left of their own political parties. We find that this phenomenon is not restricted to Brazil, but is widespread across Latin America’s Third Wave of democratization. We also find that politicians personally connected to the defunct authoritarian regime were more likely to engage in obfuscation and that, contrary to previous hypotheses, obfuscation has faded in recent times.

**Keywords**— Ideology, democratization, elites, Latin America, Brazil

---

\*The field component of this paper was revised and approved by FGV’s IRB (027/2021). The authors thank Ana Regina Amaral, students at CEFOR (Graduate School of the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies), and many Congressional staffers for invaluable support in fielding the 9<sup>th</sup> wave of the Brazilian Legislative Surveys during the Covid-19 pandemic. Joaquim Meira, Virginia Rocha, Vivi Linares, and Milton Mendonça provided excellent research assistance. Victor Araújo and participants at the BLS Workshop held at the University of Oxford in May 2022 commented on previous versions of this paper. Lesley Gore provided inspiration.

The ideological self-descriptions of partisan elites vary in their sincerity. In nascent democracies, professional politicians often face incentives to intentionally misrepresent their ideology in order to hide connections with the *ancien régime*. Politicians who were formerly loyal to authoritarian rule must consider whether the defunct system provides them with a “usable past” that they can leverage politically (Grzymala-Busse 2002). If usability appears high, they are likely to trumpet the achievements of the prior regime and rely on its symbols and ideologies. If an association with the old regime is a political liability under democracy, then politicians may well prefer to cover their tracks, distancing themselves from any labels that may link them to the past. Therefore, “ideological obfuscation” – understood here as purposive deception with a view to concealing one’s true position in the left-right space – may prove an attractive strategy among ambitious elites seeking to navigate from one regime to the next. This compromises the intelligibility of the party system to voters.

In this paper, we explore the prevalence of ideological obfuscation by members of right-of-center parties in Latin America’s Third Wave of democratization. This phenomenon, familiar in both academic and journalistic circles in Brazil as the *direita envergonhada* (literally, the embarrassed right), was visible from the very moment of democratic transition in 1985, when the country’s emerging party system was marked by attempts by right-of-center politicians to avoid the labels of “right-wing” and “conservative” (Power 2000, Power and Zucco 2009, Quadros and Madeira 2018, Souza 1992). A survey of 428 delegates to Brazil’s Constitutional Assembly in 1987, for instance, found that not a single politician would accept the label “radical right,” and that only 6 percent called themselves moderate right or center-right: the rest claimed to be of the center (37 percent), center-left (52 percent), and radical left (5 percent). Taken at face value, Brazil was a country that lacked right-wing parties (Rodrigues 1987). It is of course thoroughly implausible that only 6 percent of Brazilian politicians could be located rightward of the center point on the scale, especially when over 200 of the survey respondents had a demonstrable record of supporting the conservative military dictatorship of 1964–1985. Almost two decades later, additional data and research led to the hypothesis that the *direita envergonhada* was becoming a relatively stable aspect of Brazilian elite political culture (Power and Zucco 2009). While well established in Brazil, there was no systematic research on whether the phenomenon was detectable elsewhere in the region.

In what follows, we first probe the existence of a *direita envergonhada* in ten South American countries in the aftermath of the Third Wave of democratization. We uncover novel systematic evidence that the phenomenon was indeed widespread. We then return to Brazil, the ideal-typical case of the phenomenon, and take our analysis as far as 2021. Contrary to findings of fifteen years ago, we find strong evidence that the tendency of members of right-of-center parties to present themselves as more centrist than their party has waned. Our analysis shows that politicians personally invested in the military regime were indeed more likely to engage in obfuscation. Population replacement matters greatly: the fading of the *direita envergonhada* was a continuous process over the

past decades but accelerated very recently as a new boisterous right-wing cohort stepped onto the political stage. This suggests that authoritarian legacies do not weigh so heavily on new entrants into politics more than three decades after democratization.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we discuss the logic of ideological obfuscation, and lay out our expectations about how and when we might observe the phenomenon. In Section 2 we operationalize the concept of obfuscation, and in Section 3 we provide details on the datasets we employ to measure it. Section 4 provides empirical assessments of our cross-national hypotheses, and Section 5 assesses our individual-level hypotheses. Section 6 returns to the Brazilian case further to unravel the mechanism of generational replacement. In a final section we summarize and appraise our results.

## 1 Why obfuscate?

For all the recent concern and attention with political divisiveness across many polities (e.g. Carothers and O’Donohue 2019), the normative desirability of “moderation” of policy positions is debatable. On the one hand, polarization (or the absence of moderation) increases differentiation between electoral alternatives (Dalton 2008) and increases the likelihood that voters cast a correct vote (Lau et al. 2014). On the other, too much polarization can lead to political stalemate and regime collapse (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, Linz and Stepan 1978, Mainwaring 2016). But what about obfuscation of true ideological preferences? We concede that in empirical terms, it is sometimes challenging to differentiate moderation from obfuscation. Yet in conceptual terms, the former involves changing sincerely held policy preferences such that they move closer to those of political adversaries, while the latter means holding stable preferences that are intentionally concealed by deceiving voters.

There are several plausible reasons for politicians to engage in obfuscation. In highly unequal capitalist democracies, such as in Latin America, right-wing politicians might have structural reasons not to advertise their conservative inclinations, at least on the economic issues that still tend to dominate politics (Rosas 2005). First, their preferred economic policies are likely to be unpopular among most voters. Second, these policies do not always require proactive sponsorship as they are already favored by the structural dependence of the state on business and capital (Przeworski and Wallerstein 1988) which allows right-wing economic policies to be implemented “in silence” or even by default. For this reason, and given the enduring macropolitical salience of poverty and inequality, we should expect to see leftist politicians being more openly ideological than their right-wing counterparts. Politicians face strong incentives to campaign on the left even if they eventually govern on the right, whether by their own choice (Stokes 2001) or because they are disciplined by the market (Campello 2015).

Ideological obfuscation, however, can also be driven by authoritarian legacies. In this context,

obfuscation is an attempt to dilute the “regime cleavage” in new polyarchies and to make it difficult for voters to distinguish those politicians who supported authoritarianism from those who opposed it. We should recall that for politicians who wish to distance themselves from a defunct dictatorship, masking one’s left-right position is just one of several possible evasive actions. Others include rebranding the authoritarian successor party, creating new parties from scratch, discreetly colonizing existing parties, or simply pursuing independent candidacies. Yet when a discredited authoritarian regime had an unambiguous ideological position (e.g. Marxist-Leninist or hard right-wing), fleeing from the directional label is an obvious strategic choice. This option is especially common within “authoritarian diasporas” (Loxton and Power 2021), which refers to the dispersion of old-regime elites in the aftermath of a transition to democracy. Diasporas usually mean that an authoritarian successor party is either absent or weak and that veteran politicians need to seek new homes. The process of finding these homes and achieving political rehabilitation encourages elites to obscure their true ideological preferences.

Left-right obfuscation, therefore, confuses debates about public policy, since ex-authoritarians are likely to advance policies that do not correspond to their declared ideological labels. Obfuscation also harms the more sincere elites who may “truly” occupy the ideological space that is now misleadingly claimed by refugees from the old regime. Obfuscation is likely to be associated with exaggerated party-switching that contributes to excessive party fragmentation (Albertus and Deming 2021, LeBas and Gray 2021). Ideological obfuscation will almost certainly damage the reputation of the political class and contribute to mistrust in parties. Viewed in this way, ideological obfuscation is unambiguously inimical to effective democratic representation – and especially so in nascent democracies (Loxton and Power 2021, Power 2000).

While this phenomenon was first identified and discussed in Brazil in the early post-transition period, neighboring countries are plausible candidates for similar behavior by politicians. In much of contemporary Latin America, income inequality is high and past authoritarian regimes were associated with right-wing governments, so right-wing politicians throughout the region face incentives to engage in obfuscation. Whether for structural economic reasons or due to authoritarian legacies, we expect to find, first and foremost, that ideological obfuscation should be unidirectional across Latin America.

**Hypothesis 1.** *In post-authoritarian Latin America, most politicians presented themselves as more leftist than they were.*

H1 explicitly states that the *direita envergonhada* phenomenon extends beyond Brazil, but it also implicitly differentiates “obfuscation” from electorally induced “moderation” (convergence to the “center”). If moderation were the driving process behind misrepresentation of ideological preferences, we would expect right-of-center politicians to represent themselves to the left of where they truly are and left-of-center ones to represent themselves to the right. Our hypothesis is that very few, if any, politicians will seek to look more conservative in the eyes of the electorate, thus

undermining the moderation interpretation. Thus we have asymmetrical expectations for right- and left-of-center politicians:

**Hypothesis 2.** *Post-authoritarian ideological obfuscation is substantially more widespread and intense among politicians in right-of-center parties.*

Left-of-center politicians, according to our theory, did not face incentives to look more conservative in post-transition Latin America. We are agnostic as to whether they would seek to look more progressive or not. Either way, in our context, obfuscation is essentially a right-of-center phenomenon, in terms of both prevalence and intensity.

Together, Hypotheses 1 and 2, assessed early in the post-transition period, provide the most basic characterization of ideological obfuscation in Latin America. We expect them to hold on average across our sample and also within *most* countries in the region. We conjecture that a country’s “mode of transition” to democracy might alter somewhat the incentives for obfuscation (Linz and Stepan 1996). Ideological misrepresentation should be stronger in countries that experienced recent and/or more repressive bouts of right-wing authoritarianism, and particularly so when such experiences ended in ignominy. However, given the small number of countries in the region and the relatively large number of hard-to-measure country characteristics, we cannot convert these reflections to the status of testable hypotheses. We revisit them informally in Section 4 when we discuss country-by-country results.

What we can assess empirically, however, is that politicians’ individual trajectories – their own positioning or because of the period in which they started and advanced in their careers – might make them more or less associated with the *ancien régime* and, consequently, some might have more to “hide” than others, within the same polity. This hypothesis emphasizes the authoritarianism mechanism in detriment of the economic/structural one. If this is true, we expect that:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Right-of-center obfuscation is stronger among politicians more directly associated with the defunct authoritarian regime.*

Finally, if, as we have surmised, past association with military authoritarianism is indeed a driver of ideological obfuscation on the right, we should expect obfuscation to erode over time as the memory of the authoritarian regime fades and the last generation of politicians personally connected to authoritarianism retires from office. Hence,

**Hypothesis 4.** *Right-of-center obfuscation is weaker among individuals whose careers began after the end of the authoritarian period*

## 2 Operationalizing obfuscation

Obfuscation implies a particular form of misrepresentation of one’s own ideological preferences. The biggest challenge for empirical work on the topic is that establishing the “true” location of

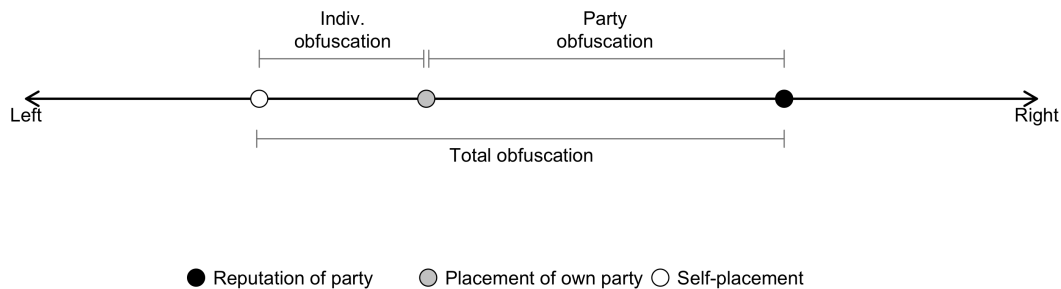


Figure 1: Conceptualizing obfuscation

Notes: Figure illustrates the conceptual and empirical variants of obfuscation. See text for details.

politicians' preferences is no trivial task.

Our approach relies on surveys that have asked legislators to place themselves, their parties, as well as (most) other parties in their country on the same standard ten-point left-right scale. The first comparison one can make is between where a legislator places herself and where she places her party, which we call *individual* obfuscation. Empirically, this comparison is attractive because it obviates all interpersonal comparisons, which can raise a series of thorny scaling issues. The main drawback of this approach, of course, is that legislators might misrepresent their own party, their own position, or both, and in either direction. A legislator attempting to obfuscate her right-wing position could, for instance, state that her party is more to the left than it really is, and then place herself exactly where the party is, and the proposed individual-level indicator would not capture it. How can we know where the party truly is?

Our approach, shown in Figure 1, consists of defining a point called the party's *reputation*, which is the average location of the party according to non-members. We then call *party obfuscation* the distance between where a survey respondent placed her party and the party's reputation. The sum of party and individual obfuscation is our measure of *total obfuscation*.

Even in the absence of obfuscation we would not necessarily expect all respondents to place themselves at the same position of their parties (few of which are ideologically homogeneous), or to place their party exactly where non-members perceive it. Not all observed differences in ideological placements are attributable to deliberate misrepresentation: some can be driven by error, variations in the use of the answer scale, and differing private information. However, under any of these scenarios, we would expect *average* deviations to be close or fairly close to zero. If a substantial enough share of respondents claim to be to the left (or right) of their parties, or places their party to the left of where non-members place it, we must suspect that some patterned process is in play. Hence, our operationalization of obfuscation captures *systematic* attempts by elites to distance themselves from the ideological position of their own parties in a particular direction. A false positive, in this context, would require that the sample be composed mostly of individuals

that are truly to the left of their parties, and it is hard to envision a sampling procedure that could have generated such an outcome.

Alternatively, a false positive could also be the result of a process in which members of left-of-center parties place right-of-center parties much more to the right than members of right-of-center parties do. This would generate party reputations of right-of-center parties that are distinctly more conservative than where party members consider their parties to be. Such a process, however, would imply no individual obfuscation (which as we show, in Appendix B, exists), and would require differences in party reputations among left- and right-of-center non-members to be very pronounced, which they are not. The difference in reputation accounts for only about 15% of the difference in obfuscation between the two camps.

With these definitions, we can examine both the *prevalence* of obfuscation (i.e. the share of legislators that practice it) as well as its *intensity*. To begin our analysis, we provide basic statistics for intensity and prevalence of each subtype of obfuscation. However, we focus on total obfuscation for most of the paper, and leave results for individual and party obfuscation for the online appendix.

### 3 Measuring obfuscation

In Latin America, virtually all existing research on intentional ideological misrepresentation focuses on Brazil, where the concept of *direita envergonhada* is commonplace both in academia and in journalism. However, if the logic underlying our hypotheses is correct and we can link obfuscation by right-wing elites to both structural and regime-transition factors, then Brazil should not be alone and we should see similar ideological posturing “in the neighborhood.”

Fortunately, we have the data to make such comparisons. In order to operationalize our definitions of obfuscation and test our hypotheses, we combined data from the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA) project (Alcántara 1994-2018) and the Brazilian Legislative Survey (BLS) (Zucco and Power 2019). We first examine PELA data from national legislatures in elected between 1986 and 1996, a period that covers the earliest post-transition surveys available for ten countries – eight South American cases of Third Wave democratization plus Colombia and Venezuela.<sup>1</sup>

In order to assess our hypotheses about how obfuscation evolves under democracy, we then move quickly to longitudinal analysis of the BLS data, which includes nine waves covering all post-authoritarian legislatures in Brazil. The focus on Brazil in the second part of the analysis is justified on both theoretical and empirical grounds. Empirically, PELA coverage of other countries is much sparser and ends substantially earlier than BLS coverage. Theoretically, Brazil is the country in which the phenomenon was previously directly observed and discussed, and as such, is the motivating case. Brazil is also very unique in that the military allowed for the functioning

---

<sup>1</sup>Democracy in both Colombia and Venezuela is conventionally dated as beginning in the late 1950s, so they do not belong to the global Third Wave. However, both regimes had undergone significant reequilibration by the time.

of Congress and restructured the party system into a simple two-party format, with one official pro-regime party and one legal opposition party (Lamounier 1984). This did not mean that parties and Congress were fully free and autonomous; they were in fact subjected to frequent tutelage and manipulation by the military executive (Desposato 2001, Kinzo 1988). However, this system had the unambiguous effect of “drawing into the open” virtually all professional politicians, forcing them to take a public position for against the regime. A protracted and negotiated transition to democracy then preserved the political careers of most civilian politicians who supported dictatorship (Power 2000, Share and Mainwaring 1986). Nowhere in South America are the links between civilian politicians and autocracy more easily identifiable at the individual level.

The PELA and BLS survey projects asked virtually identical questions for ideological self-placement and placement-of-parties questions. We first defined which parties in each country were regarded as right-of-center and which were left-of-center at the moment of each survey. Then, in order to compute partisan obfuscation and total obfuscation, we computed each party’s “reputation” by taking the average of each party’s placement on the left-right scale according to its non-members. Our indicators of intensity of obfuscation were computed such that negative numbers indicate obfuscation to the left (i.e. placing oneself to the left of their party and/or of the party’s reputation), and prevalence corresponds to the share of respondents that obfuscate.

A key difference between the PELA and BLS datasets has to do with the lack of historical and biographical information in the former. In the BLS data, we are also able to code each respondent’s personal connection to the military regime of 1964–1985, which, as we explain below, emerges as a key predictor of contemporary ideological misrepresentation.

The combined PELA/BLS dataset of surveys conducted prior to 1998 contains responses of 1758 participants. We have total obfuscation measures for 1,501 individuals, of whom 705 were coded as belonging to parties to the right of center at the time of the surveys. The BLS longitudinal dataset contains 1,407 responses over the nine waves of the BLS, and we can compute obfuscation figures for 1,038 of them, of whom 48% belonged to right-of-center parties.<sup>2</sup> We provide descriptive statistics and details of our handling of the data in Appendix A.

## 4 Intensity and prevalence of obfuscation

Ideological misrepresentation is by no means confined to Brazil, but is a regional phenomenon in Latin America’s Third Wave of democratization. Overall, in our pooled PELA/BLS sample of early post-authoritarian surveys, average partisan obfuscation amounted to  $-1.02$  and individual obfuscation to  $-0.33$ . Total obfuscation averaged  $-1.32$  (and in all cases  $p$ -values  $< 0.001$ ). Perhaps more impressively, 32.7% of respondents placed themselves to the left of their own party and 74.5% placed themselves to the left of their party’s reputation. These numbers amount to 77.6% engaging

---

<sup>2</sup>In Appendix C we report longitudinal analysis of Brazil data combining BLS and PELA data. PELA data only allows for a very basic examination of the patterns of obfuscation over time by ideology.



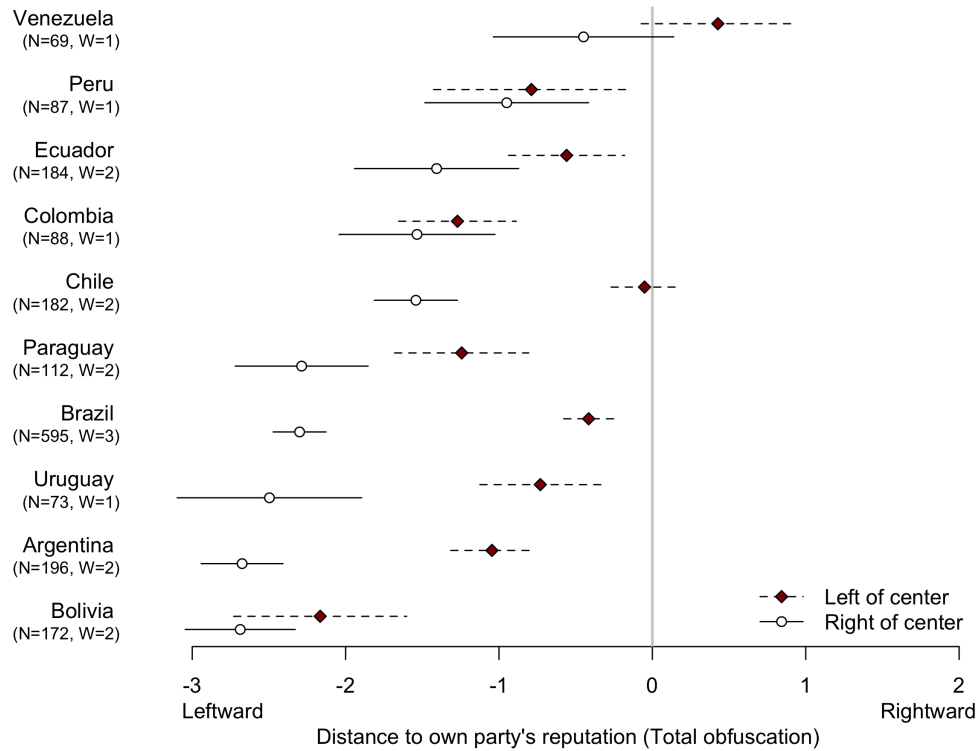


Figure 2: Ideological obfuscation by ideological camp, by country (1990–1998)

Notes: The figure reports total ideological obfuscation by country and by ideology with the respective 95% confidence intervals. All surveys conducted up to 1998 were included; N is the total number of respondents and W the number of surveys used in each country. Data are from BLS for Brazil and from PELA for all other countries. See text for details.

in some form of obfuscation, and clearly support H1. Obfuscation is directional, and it clearly pivots to the left.

Evidence in support for H2 is also very strong. The difference in the intensity of individual-obfuscation between right- and left-of-center respondents is  $-0.36$  ( $p < 0.132$ ) and  $-1.01$  ( $p < 0.01$ ) for party obfuscation. Average total obfuscation among right-of-center respondents amounts to  $-2.05$  while it is only  $-0.69$  for left-of-center respondents ( $p$ -value of difference  $= 0.002$ ). Just under 90% of right-of-center legislators engaged in obfuscation in a leftward direction.

Figure 2 reports results for total obfuscation disaggregated by country, so that we can further assess the strength of the evidence in support of our first two hypotheses, and also examine the patterns in cross-country variation. Of the 20 observations shown in Figure 2, 19 are in the expected direction, and 18 of these are statistically significant. The takeaway message of Figure 2 is that political elites in most South American countries in the 1990s tried to represent themselves as being to the left of their own parties, which provides additional support for H2.

In eight countries, obfuscation by right-of-center legislators is stronger than by left-of-center and in only one of these, the difference is *not* statistically significant (Bolivia,  $p = 0.13$ ). The two countries in which we fail to observe a difference between left- and right-of-center legislators are

Colombia and Peru, both countries that were experiencing civil wars that pitted the government against left-wing guerilla movements—thus possibly discrediting the left. While differences between left and right averaged  $-1.6$  in the other eight cases, it was just about  $-0.1$  in these two countries. As such, we regard Colombia and Peru as exceptions that actually support the general argument. Moreover, even in these cases we do not see the left presenting itself as more conservative than it is, thus underscoring that moderation is not the driving force behind these results.

The figure also suggests, as we conjectured, that obfuscation by the right was substantially more pronounced where military regimes ended badly amidst social and political crises. In Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Argentina, and Paraguay, military leaders suffered massive popular rejection as they retreated to the barracks, most of them discredited by the debt and recession of the early 1980s, and one (Argentina) by a humiliating defeat in an interstate war. These cases stand in contrast to Chile, where the Pinochet regime survived the “lost decade” of the 1980s and handed power over to civilians from a position of relative strength that can be described as a “conceding-to-thrive” scenario (Slater and Wong 2022). The regime’s two successor parties could credibly claim a legacy of some economic success, so Chile is a less likely case for obfuscation.

Among the countries with relatively low obfuscation by right-of-center elites, we find Venezuela and Colombia, two countries that did not experience military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s and that had accumulated decades of democracy by the mid-1990s. Two of the other cases of relatively low obfuscation, Peru and Ecuador, had relatively “mild” experiences with right-wing military dictatorships,<sup>3</sup> transitioned earlier than their Southern cone counterparts, and had already experienced more than a decade and half of democracy by the mid-1990s. We are the first to recognize that however plausible these conjectures seem to be, our data do not allow for sharp formal tests. Future work and detailed case studies might help us further probe the links between mode of transition to democracy and incentives for obfuscation in the region, but are beyond the scope of this paper.

## 5 Obfuscation at the individual level

Our last two hypotheses refer to individual-level characteristics of obfuscators. In order to test H3’s contention that personal linkage to authoritarianism leads to obfuscation, we require a measure of the degree of association between individuals and the old regime. In order to test H4, we need to observe individuals whose careers start at different points in time. Due to peculiarities of Brazil’s institutional context, Brazilian longitudinal data are particularly well suited for these analyses.

Brazil’s authoritarian regime lasted from 1964 to 1985. In contrast to neighboring dictatorships in the Southern Cone, the Brazilian military opted to hold semi-competitive elections for the national legislature. These elections were carried out within an officially imposed two-party system

---

<sup>3</sup>Peru, in fact, was governed by a left-leaning military dictatorship from 1968 until the mid-1970s.

that lasted until 1979 (Lamounier 1984, Sarles 1982). In 1966, civilian supporters of the dictatorship were encouraged to create the National Renovating Alliance (ARENA), later re-branded as the Social Democratic Party (PDS). Meanwhile, an official opposition party, the Brazilian Democratic Movement (MDB), was formed from the remnants of the left-liberal and democratic forces that had not been purged or exiled after the 1964 coup.

After a period of limited competition that kept the MDB weak and the ARENA/PDS comfortably in charge (Kinzo 1988), societal pressures for regime change mounted in the second half of the 1970s, leading the regime to authorize a cautious return to a multiparty system in 1980 (Share and Mainwaring 1986). A sharp economic downturn that coincided with the return of free gubernatorial elections in 1982 allowed the MDB to capture power in ten states responsible for 75 percent of Brazil's GDP. This was followed by a massive cycle of protest rallies in early 1984 demanding a return to direct presidential elections ("Diretas Já"), which finally led many civilian politicians in the ARENA/PDS camp to see the "writing on the wall" and to seriously consider regime defection as a way of preserving their political careers in a future democracy. In late 1984, a faction of ARENA/PDS calling itself the "Liberal Front" (subsequently Party of the Liberal Front, PFL) spectacularly swung its support to the opposition PMDB (the new name of the MDB), resulting in the victory of centrist veteran Tancredo Neves in the indirect presidential election of January 1985. Although Neves' illness and subsequent death prevented him from taking office, the inauguration of his running mate José Sarney (from the PFL) on 15 March 1985 is usually taken as the starting point of Brazil's current democratic regime.

Post-authoritarian Brazil was thus born with two authoritarian successor parties (PFL and a diminished PDS), but many former ARENA/PDS politicians opted for other career choices in the early years of democracy. Of the ARENA/PDS veterans elected to Congress in the founding legislative election of 1986, nearly a third had already moved into the PMDB. Other members of this authoritarian cohort created new center-right party organizations as well as personalistic microparties, leading to an acute authoritarian diaspora (Power 2000). This process of authoritarian elite dispersion was accompanied by frequent concealment or downplaying of ties to the discredited military regime.

These historical peculiarities of 1964–1985 are invaluable for a test of H3 because they provide us with an unambiguous individual-level indicator of having belonged to the pro-regime party *prior to* Tancredo's election. A total of 293 respondents were personally associated with the parties backing the military regime, 224 of whom were in right-of-center parties at the time they participated in BLS (33.9% of the right-of-center sample).

We then compared the intensity and prevalence of obfuscation among right-of-center respondents that had or had not been associated with the military support parties in the past. Table 1 portrays these differences in several different ways. The first column reports estimates obtained by simply by regressing the intensity and prevalence on a dummy for personal authoritarian legacy,

Table 1: Obfuscation by individual-level association with authoritarian regime

	Intensity			Prevalence		
	No Ctrls	Ctrl YoB	Matching	No Ctrls	Ctrl YoB	Matching
Intercept	<b>-1.61***</b> (0.08)	<b>-1.70***</b> (0.09)	<b>-1.76***</b> (0.18)	<b>0.84***</b> (0.02)	<b>0.86***</b> (0.02)	<b>0.90***</b> (0.04)
Auth. Legacy	<b>-1.00***</b> (0.12)	<b>-0.74***</b> (0.14)	<b>-0.85***</b> (0.20)	<b>0.12***</b> (0.02)	<b>0.07**</b> (0.03)	0.07 (0.04)
YoB		<b>0.02***</b> (0.01)			<b>-0.00*</b> (0.00)	
R <sup>2</sup>	0.10	0.12	0.09	0.03	0.05	0.02
N	519	517	291	519	517	291

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ ; \* $p < 0.05$ ;  $p < 0.1$

Notes: Table shows estimates for the difference in intensity and prevalence of obfuscation between right-of-center legislators who were personally associated with the military regime and those who were not. The intercept is obfuscation by those not associated with the regime and the coefficient on Authoritarian Legacy is the difference in obfuscation between those personally associated with the regime and other legislators. See text for details.

which is the same as a difference-in-means estimate. The intercept indicates that average obfuscation among those *not* personally associated with the military regime was  $-1.61$ , whereas the difference in the intensity of total obfuscation between the two groups is  $-1$  ( $p < 0.01$ ).

One limitation of this comparison is that former members of the ARENA/PDS were disproportionately present in early waves of the BLS surveys and all but absent from more recent waves. We thus refined this comparison in two different, but related, ways. The second column in Table 1 reports an estimate of the difference between the two groups controlling for the year of birth of respondents. We demeaned the year of birth variable to allow the intercept to indicate average obfuscation among individuals not associated with the regime with the average year of birth in the sample. In the third column we report estimates of the difference computed after matching ARENA/PDS former members to non-members on year of birth and BLS wave. This last approach effectively excludes younger individuals for which there are no ARENA/PDS counterparts and ensures that we are comparing former ARENA/PDS members only to similar non-members.

In both of these variations, the differences in obfuscation between those associated or not with the regime are smaller than in our baseline model, but still very clear. The intensity of obfuscation is always substantially higher for individuals with personal authoritarian legacies. Also as expected, the positive and significant effect of year of birth in the second model indicates that younger individuals obfuscate less, though it takes about 37 years to erase the difference in obfuscation between those personally associated with the regime and others.

Results for the *prevalence* of obfuscation are similar. While a very high share of right-of-center legislators not associated with the authoritarian regime obfuscate (at least 84%), this is even higher among those with personal connections to the regime.

If past association with military authoritarianism is indeed the culprit for ideological obfuscation, we should expect obfuscation to erode over time as the memory of the authoritarian regime fades *and* the last generation of politicians personally connected to it retires from office, as expressed in H4. Our estimates for the year of birth control variable in Table 1 provide initial support for this assertion, indicating that younger right-of-center legislators are less likely to place themselves to the left of their parties' reputation. Granted, this is not the focus of the statistical analysis and, in the model estimated on the matched dataset, the difference in proportions between those with and without direct links to the military regime is no longer statistically significant ( $p=0.10$ ). Yet given that the estimate is fairly similar to our previous ones, we take this to be driven primarily by a very high baseline (0.9) and the smaller sample.

Figure 3, in turn, reports the most basic descriptive finding from our Brazilian data and is a better assessment of H4. The vertical axis represents the level of total obfuscation; negative values indicate that respondents placed themselves *to the left* of their party's reputation. The horizontal line at zero can be interpreted as a notional measure of response sincerity, at which politicians align themselves with the ideological reputation of their party. Legislators belonging to left-of-center parties have, on average, placed themselves very close to their own party throughout the whole period, which is compatible with cross-national results presented earlier. As we expected, most of the (evasive) action has taken place on the right. Right-of-center legislators were clearly placing themselves farther to the left of their own parties during the initial post-authoritarian period, as was anticipated by the result reported for Brazil in Figure 2. It was also the case that in the initial period, legislators with personal authoritarian legacies obfuscated even more than those without personal ties to the regime, as represented by the two dashed lines.

Yet starting around 2005, the differences between the two right-of-center subgroups and the differences between the right-of-center and left-of-center respondents became substantially smaller.<sup>4</sup> While this overall trend towards less right-of-center obfuscation is clear and supports H4, it does not seem to be driven *only* by generational replacement, as we also see evidence of less obfuscation by individuals with direct connections to the military regime – albeit noisy due to their dwindling numbers.

## 6 A new post-authoritarian right?

Individual attachments to authoritarian regime and generational replacement are intimately connected, for a younger cohort of right-of-center politicians, by definition, does not have connections to defunct regimes. In this sense, population replacement is the motor for relieving the right-of-center camp of its authoritarian baggage and removing the incentives to obfuscate.

This process is not new. Right-of-center freshmen obfuscated less than veterans in all waves

---

<sup>4</sup>In the last BLS the number of surviving ex-ARENA/PDS legislators was minuscule ( $N=3$ ), so we omitted it from the figure.

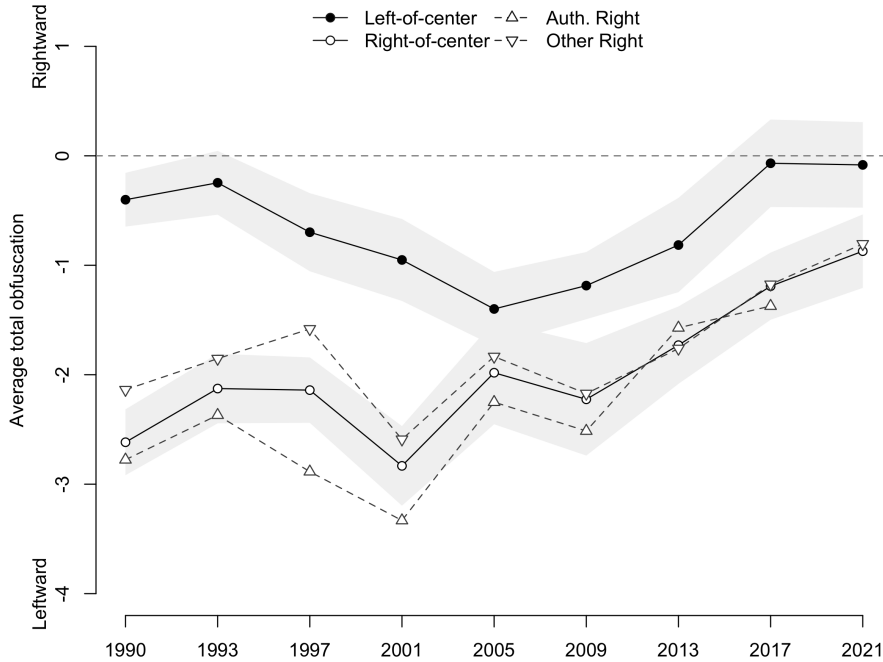


Figure 3: Total obfuscation over time, by ideology and authoritarian legacy, Brazil  
Notes: Figure shows total ideological obfuscation by BLS wave. 95% confidence intervals are shown about the left-of-center and right-of-center groups. The right-of-center group is further subdivided into those with and without personal affiliations with the authoritarian regime, represented by the dashed lines. These subgroups become relatively small so we omit the wide confidence intervals for readability.

of BLS. However, starting with the 2013 survey, the difference between freshmen and veterans increased markedly and reached a very substantial magnitude in the 2017 and 2021 waves (Appendix D). This very new cohort of right-of-center legislators, it seems, is proudly right-wing and obfuscates much less even than previous post-authoritarian cohorts.

In order to assess how different the very recent right-of-center cohort is from previous ones and to compare the effects of generational replacement with those of personal authoritarian connections we returned to the data and split the right-of-center BLS sample into three groups. We first split the sample between those born before and after 1967. As the youngest individual with a personal connection to the military regime was born in that year, all of those who came of age after 1985 (12% of the right-of-center sample) are free of direct connections to the military regime and began their political careers under democracy, making them members of a truly post-authoritarian cohort. The pre-1967 cohort was then split into those with and without personal connections to the military regime. For simplicity, we label these two subgroups as “pro-authoritarian” and “anti-authoritarian.”

In the cohort born before 1967, average obfuscation in the anti-authoritarian subgroup (54% of the right-of-center sample), was  $-1.7$ . Among those with a personal connection to the regime, that is, the pro-authoritarian group (35% of the sample), average obfuscation reached a whopping  $-2.6$ . In the post-authoritarian group (i.e. right-of-center respondents born after 1967), obfuscation

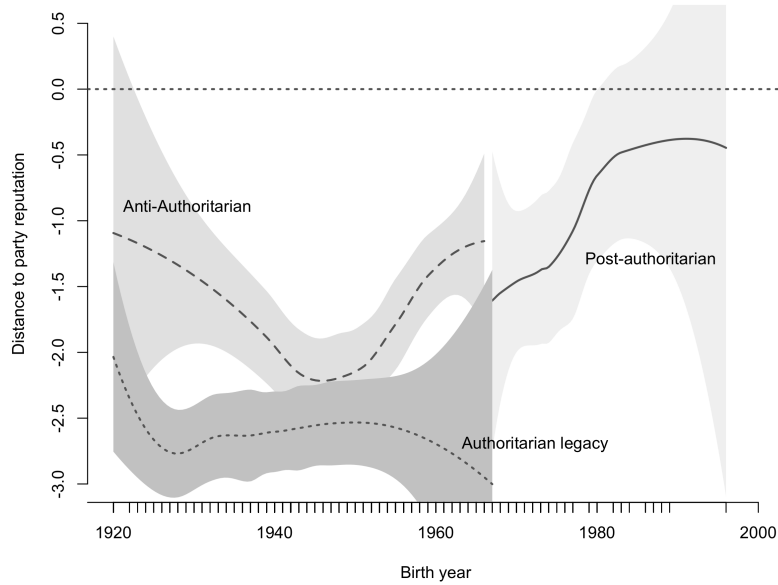


Figure 4: Total obfuscation over time, by ideology and authoritarian legacy, Brazil

Notes: Figure shows lowest estimates of total ideological obfuscation by year of birth among right-of-center groups. 95% confidence intervals are shown about these estimates. Dashes on the horizontal axis indicated observed data points. See text for details.

averaged just  $-1.1$  (p-values of differences between groups  $<0.01$ ).

These averages, however, actually understate the extent to which younger right-of-center individuals are more candid than older ones. Figure 4 shows obfuscation by year of birth and by these three groups of right-of-center legislators. It is clear that individuals with personal authoritarian legacies obfuscated more than any other type of rightist, and did so regardless of when their careers began. Obfuscation within the anti-authoritarian segment of the older right-of-center cohort varied somewhat, but diminished considerably for those born around 1950. These politicians came of age during the military dictatorship and were in their mid-thirties at democratization. There is no great gap between anti-authoritarians born at mid-century and the younger post-authoritarian cohort, which makes sense given that neither group is directly associated with the military regime. The striking feature of the post-authoritarian cohort is that obfuscation has decreased to the point that its younger members barely obfuscate at all, although we note that there are still relatively few very young individuals in our sample.

Figure 4 is compatible with anecdotal evidence of the emergence of a cohort of right-of-center politicians that is boisterous about its rightist credentials while lacking any personal connection to the defunct military dictatorship. Comparing the personal trajectories of leading politicians can shed light on these dynamics. Here we choose two representative cases from the “old” and “new” right, respectively. The former duo entered national politics just prior to the coup of 1964, which removed the progressive president João Goulart from power; and the latter pair stormed the political scene fifty years later, at the end of a cycle of leftist control of the presidency.

Consider first the cases of José Sarney (born 1930) and Antônio Carlos Magalhães (ACM, born 1927), two iconic insiders whose careers were boosted by the military regime and who continued as leading figures of right-of-center parties after democratization. Each was appointed governor of his respective state by the authoritarian regime, and each was elected to high office after the transition to democracy in 1985. Both were standard bearers of ARENA and later PDS. José Sarney jumped ship earlier to the PFL and became Tancredo's running mate in the final months of the dictatorship, before joining the PMDB to secure a spot on the ballot. When Tancredo died before he could be sworn in, Sarney became the first civilian president of Brazil since 1964. Along with his obvious gift for political survival, ex-president Sarney also had a particular knack for obfuscation. Speaking about the role of the military's civilian supporters in a future democratic regime, he claimed that "the country required strong non-ideological parties in order to counterbalance the resurgence of popularly based parties. It fell to these non-ideological parties to unify the forces of the democratic center, so as to provide stability to our political institutions" (Joffily and Joffily 2016).

ACM supported the military regime, and managed to play a key supporting role in the Sarney, Collor, and Cardoso presidencies. In ACM's own words, "I always defined myself as a man of the political center. But nowadays, these distinctions between left and right—which are actually 200 years old—are under threat. Contemporary politics has to be about getting in touch with the will and interests of the people. Ideological squabbles have been overtaken by facts, and this issue is a good topic for literary and scientific debate" (Estadão 2007).

Obfuscation of this style was actually the norm for this generation of politicians who had found a welcoming home in the right-wing military dictatorship of 1964–1985. When queried about their ideological preferences, veterans of the authoritarian regime would dissemble, claiming either that ideology was no longer important or that they personally did not like to be labeled (squirring of this sort gave rise to the expression *direita envergonhada*). If rightists accepted a label at all, it would invariably be "center." A notorious attempt at rebranding occurred midway through Brazil's constitutional assembly of 1987–1988, when a cross-party group of conservative backbenchers came together to resist the more progressive leadership of the assembly and to extract concessions from the weak Sarney government in exchange for supporting the president's bid for a five-year term in office. This group called itself the "*Centrão*," which literally means "the big center" (Freitas, Medeiros and Moura 2009). This was a barefaced attempt at collective obfuscation: if this group truly represented the political center, then logically there could not have been a right wing in the constitutional convention. Later, the term *Centrão* entered political lexicon as a shorthand term for the large right-of-center bloc in Congress that negotiates for jobs and pork with all Brazilian presidents to this day (Power and Rodrigues-Silveira 2018).

Although older ARENA/PDS veterans like Sarney and ACM tried to redefine themselves as centrists, we do not see the same blatant attempts at obfuscation among younger right-of-center politicians. In fact, we see something entirely different. Consider, for instance, the burgeoning



careers of Carla Zambelli (born 1980) and Kim Kataguiri (born 1996), two leading voices among our very recent entrants and typical of the new “unembarrassed right.” Both entered Congress in 2018 after making their names during the anti-PT protests of 2013 and the protracted crisis that led to the ouster of Dilma Rousseff three years later. Although both supported Jair Bolsonaro’s candidacy for president in 2018, Zambelli was part of the Bolsonaro family’s inner circle, while Kataguiri was more closely associated with anti-PT organizations and free-market think tanks. Between 2019 and 2022, Kataguiri clashed with Bolsonaro’s autocratic tendencies but not with the president’s ideological positions. The young federal deputy has claimed that Bolsonaro “is giving people reasons to walk away from the right” while at the same time he trumpets his own extremist views, for example by tweeting repeatedly against “gender ideology” and bemoaning Germany’s criminalization of Nazism. Zambelli, a right-wing online influencer, describes herself as “conservative, Christian, and patriotic” and is sympathetic to the reinstatement of the monarchy, a cause closely associated with fringe radical conservatism in Brazil. A specialist in online taunts, she enjoys baiting “the left,” and has even criticized former judge and justice minister and one-time presidential hopeful (and also best man at her wedding), Senator Sérgio Moro, for not being conservative enough and failing to stand up for pro-gun policies. Like Kataguiri, she is vastly more outrageous and “performative” than most conservative politicians in the first 30 years of Brazil’s democracy, to the point that she was caught on video pointing a gun at a political opponent and chasing him inside a crowded bar on the eve of the 2022 elections.

The shift from the Sarney/ACM tradition to the Kataguiri/Zambelli style exemplifies how the political context has changed considerably in the last decade. Population replacement would have thinned the herd of obfuscators in any case, but the most recent cohort has encountered an environment much more hospitable to right-of-center politicians openly peddling their ideas.<sup>5</sup> This new, provocative and sometimes anti-system right has flourished in the recent climate of polarization and populism, backing Bolsonaro and antagonizing the left at every turn, while at the same time leveraging social media to pursue a “culture war” agenda that never held much interest for the traditional right (Amaral 2020, Bolognesi, Ribeiro and Codato 2021). This shift in emphasis reflects major differences in socialization between the old and new rights. Whereas the *direita envergonhada* generation avoided talking about Brazil’s then-recent past (the military era), the new right is obsessed with the later dominance of the leftist Workers’ Party (PT), which won four consecutive presidential elections between 2002 and 2014 (and again in 2022). The formative experiences of these two conservative cohorts could not have been more different.

---

<sup>5</sup>Two of the best-known figures in the unapologetic right are Bolsonaro’s sons Eduardo and Flávio, close collaborators of Steve Bannon and disciples of the late far-right self-proclaimed “philosopher” Olavo de Carvalho (1947–2022).

## 7 Conclusion

We sought to define, operationalize, and measure ideological obfuscation by right-of-center politicians in post-authoritarian settings. We used both cross-national data and very granular Brazilian data to test our hypotheses. Our findings can be summarized as follows.

First, the impulse of conservative politicians to conceal their ideologies is not unique to Brazil, but rather widespread in the Latin American context. Our results provide confidence that obfuscation is not just electorally induced moderation, but more research is needed to understand some of the nuances we find in cross-national variations in obfuscation.

Second, our results also support the assertion that obfuscation is an attempt to distance oneself from authoritarian regimes. The cross-national variation is only suggestive, as mentioned above, but individual level analysis leave little doubt. The Brazilian case, given the particular party-system architecture of the military regime, allowed us to show empirically that right-of-center politicians who were personally associated with the pro-regime party obfuscated substantially more than similarly situated right-of-center elites who lacked such connections.

Lastly, individual and system-wide authoritarian concealment combine to produce a long-term time trend towards less right-of-center obfuscation. However, we find evidence of a recent substantially stronger change in the same direction. This means that our data analysis has uncovered both a cohort (generational) effect and a period effect. Turning first to the cohort effect, it is clear that for the first 25 years of democracy in Brazil, the country’s right-of-center parties were still dominated by elites who had been socialized to politics under the defunct military dictatorship. By contrast, the leading lights of the new “unembarrassed right” entered politics largely in the past decade. The relatively rapid appearance of this unapologetic right suggests that “context” matters. The generational disappearance of the *direita envergonhada* would have happened anyway, and could well have occurred under very different circumstances. As concerns the period effect, it so happens that our younger right-wing extroverts without personal ties to the authoritarian regime entered politics at a moment wherein the leftist PT won four straight presidential elections (2002-2014, inclusive). This long cycle of PT presidential dominance generated a counter-wave of *anti-petista* sentiment (Samuels and Zucco 2018); fostered a predictable backlash against social inclusion in a deeply hierarchical and elitist society (Payne and de Souza Santos 2020, Rocha, Solano and Medeiros 2021); coincided with the rise of social media, which reduced the costs of mobilization and circumvented mainstream narratives about politics and democracy; and ended precisely at a moment in which transnational influences of populism and nationalism exerted a far stronger effect on domestic conservatism than in the past. The political socialization of our boisterous new entrants was thus radically different to that of their retiring elders, but it is clear that each age cohort adapted quickly to the political ecosystem into which it was born. It is also clear from our study of the *direita envergonhada* that the “shelf life” of political socialization can be remarkably long.

We conclude by noting that the antonym of obfuscation is “candor.” Part of the recent increase in polarization in Brazil could reasonably be attributed to right-of-center politicians simply being more transparent and honest about their preferences. Insofar as the right-wing positions being advertised are legitimate under democracy and the rule of law, less obfuscation is unambiguously a good thing even at the price of exposing greater divergence among political elites. But this silver lining is indeed a very fine line to walk on. If, despite being sincerely held preferences, anti-systemic and anti-democratic views are propagated by political elites and thereby normalized in the political discourse, a reasonable argument could be made that less obfuscation may strain the fabric of democracy. The jury, therefore, is still out on these normative implications of the fading of the *direita envergonhada*.

## References

- Albertus, Michael and Mark Deming. 2021. “Branching out: Consequences of the dispersion of authoritarian elites across state and government in Latin America.” *Democratization* 28(3):539–561.
- Alcántara, Manuel (dir.). 1994-2018. Proyecto Elites Latinoamericanas (PELA-USAL). Dataset Universidad de Salamanca Salamanca, Spain.  
**URL:** <https://oir.org.es/pela/bases-de-datos/>
- Amaral, Oswaldo E. do. 2020. “The Victory of Jair Bolsonaro According to the Brazilian Electoral Study of 2018.” *Brazilian Political Science Review* 14(1).
- Bolognesi, Bruno, Ednaldo Ribeiro and Adriano Codato. 2021. “A new ideological classification of the Brazilian political parties.” Unpublished manuscript available in SciELO Preprints.
- Campello, Daniela. 2015. *The Politics of Market Discipline in Latin America: Globalization and Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Carothers, T. and A. O’Donohue. 2019. *Democracies Divided: The Global Challenge of Political Polarization*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Dalton, Russell J. 2008. “The Quantity and the Quality of Party Systems: Party System Polarization, Its Measurement, and Its Consequences.” *Comparative Political Studies* 41(7):899–920.
- Desposato, Scott W. 2001. “Legislative Politics in Authoritarian Brazil.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 26(2):287–317.
- Estadão. 2007. “Frases de Antonio Carlos Magalhães.” *Política (July 20)* .

- Freitas, Rafael, Danilo Medeiros and Samuel Moura. 2009. Procurando o Centrão: Direita e Esquerda na Assembleia Nacional Constituinte 1987-88. In *A Constituição de 1988: passado e futuro*, ed. Maria Alice Rezende de Carvalho, Cicero Araújo and Julio Assis Simões. São Paulo: Anpocs/Hucitec pp. 101–135.
- Grzymala-Busse, Anna M. 2002. *Redeeming the Communist Past: The Regeneration of Communist Parties in East Central Europe*. Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics Cambridge University Press.
- Joffily, Bernardo and Mariana Joffily. 2016. José Sarney (verbete 4909). In *Atlas Histórico – Brasil 500 Anos*. Rio de Janeiro: FGV-CPDOC.
- Kinzo, Maria D’Alva Gil. 1988. *Legal Opposition Politics under Authoritarian Rule in Brazil: The Case of the MDB, 1966–79*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Lamounier, Bolivar. 1984. “Opening through Elections: Will the Brazilian Case Become a Paradigm?” *Government and Opposition* 19(2):167–177.
- Lau, Richard R., Parina Patel, Dalia F. Fahmy and Robert R. Kaufman. 2014. “Correct Voting Across Thirty-Three Democracies: A Preliminary Analysis.” *British Journal of Political Science* 44(2):239–259.
- LeBas, Adrienne and Kyle Gray. 2021. “Authoritarian experience and electoral success: the fate of authoritarian diasporans in Kenya.” *Democratization* 28(3):502–520.
- Levitsky, S. and D. Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*. New York: Crown.
- Linz, Juan and Alfred Stepan. 1978. *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes: Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration. An Introduction*. BDR Series Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Linz, Juan and Alfred Stepan. 1996. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe*. A Johns Hopkins paperback Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Loxton, James and Timothy Power. 2021. “Introducing authoritarian diasporas: causes and consequences of authoritarian elite dispersion.” *Democratization* 28(3):465–483.
- Mainwaring, Scott. 2016. “Party System Institutionalization, Party Collapse and Party Building.” *Government and Opposition* 51(4):691–716.
- Payne, Leigh A. and Andreza Aruska de Souza Santos. 2020. “The Right-Wing Backlash in Brazil and Beyond.” *Politics & Gender* 16(1):E6.
- Power, Timothy. 2000. *The Political Right in Postauthoritarian Brazil: Elites, Institutions, and Democratization*. University Park, PA: Penn State Press.

- Power, Timothy and Cesar Zucco. 2009. "Estimating Ideology of Brazilian Legislative Parties, 1990-2005: A Research Communication." *Latin American Research Review* 44(1):219–246.
- Power, Timothy J. and Rodrigo Rodrigues-Silveira. 2018. The Political Right and Party Politics. In *Routledge Handbook of Brazilian Politics*, ed. Barry Ames. New York: Routledge pp. 251–26.
- Przeworski, Adam and Michael Wallerstein. 1988. "Structural Dependence of the State on Capital." *The American Political Science Review* 82(1):11–29.
- Quadros, Marcos Paulo dos Reis and Rafael Machado Madeira. 2018. "Fim da direita envergonhada? Atuação da bancada evangélica e da bancada da bala e os caminhos da representação do conservadorismo no Brasil." *Opinião Pública* 24(3):486–522.
- Rocha, C., E. Solano and J. Medeiros. 2021. *The Bolsonaro Paradox: The Public Sphere and Right-Wing Counterpublicity in Contemporary Brazil*. Latin American Societies Springer International Publishing.
- Rodrigues, Leôncio Martins. 1987. *Quem é Quem na Constituinte: uma análise sócio-política dos partidos e deputados*. São Paulo: OESP-Maltese.
- Rosas, Guillermo. 2005. "The Ideological Organization of Latin American Legislative Parties: An Empirical Analysis of Elite Policy Preferences." *Comparative Political Studies* 38(7):824–849.
- Samuels, David J. and Cesar Zucco. 2018. *Partisans, Anti-Partisans and Non-Partisans: Voting Behavior in Brazil*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sarles, Margaret J. 1982. "Maintaining Political Control Through Parties: The Brazilian Strategy." *Comparative Politics* 15(1):41–72.
- Share, Donald and Scott Mainwaring. 1986. Transitions through Transaction: Democratization in Brazil and Spain. In *Political Liberalization in Brazil*, ed. Wayne Selcher. Boulder: Westview chapter 5, pp. 175–215.
- Slater, D. and J. Wong. 2022. *From Development to Democracy: The Transformations of Modern Asia*. Princeton University Press.
- Souza, Maria do Carmo Campello de. 1992. The Contemporary Faces of the Brazilian Right: An Interpretation of Style and Substance. In *The Right and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Douglas Chalmers, Maria do Carmo Campello de Souza and Atilio Borón. New York: Praeger Publishers pp. 99–127.
- Stokes, Susan. 2001. *Mandates and Democracy: Neoliberalism by Surprise in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zucco, Cesar and Timothy J. Power. 2019. "Brazilian Legislative Surveys (Waves 1-9, 1990-2021)."

**URL:** <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/bls>

# It's My Party and I'll Lie If I Want To: Elite Ideological Obfuscation in Post-Authoritarian Settings

— Supplemental Information —

## Table of Contents for Supplemental Information

A	Measuring obfuscation through legislator surveys	2
B	Results for Individual and Party Obfuscation	3
C	Longitudinal Analysis including PELA data	4
D	Freshmen v. Veteran BLS Respondents	5

## Appendix A Measuring obfuscation through legislator surveys

The hypothesis that were assessed cross-nationally in Section 4 employed a combined data set from the PELA and BLS projects. We sought to use the earliest elite surveys available for this analysis and, in fact, we would have liked to use data from the turn of the 1980s through the 1990s. However, for many countries, PELA surveys only began in the second half of the 1990s or even later (as in the case of Brazil). Hence, we set 1988 as the cutpoint, and included all surveys from both projects taken that year or before. This was the earliest date that guaranteed at least one survey for each of the ten South American countries, and it implied using one or two PELA surveys for nine countries, and three BLS surveys for Brazil. In countries for which more than one wave was available, we pooled all waves for analysis.

We handled all of these surveys in the same way. We first kept only our main variables of interest: party affiliation, self-placement, placement of one’s own party, and average placements of all parties by non-members, which is our measure of “party reputation.”), as well as weights (whenever relevant), and year of birth of respondent. When then computed our measures of total, party, and individual ideological obfuscation, as defined in Section 2.

The only slightly more controversial coding decision is which responses qualify as belonging to a right-of-center party. This coding was complicated, in some instances, by the aggregation in PELA of several parties under the label “others”, and the lack of distinction between party-factions in the case of Uruguay.

Table A1 reports sample sizes, number of survey waves, as well as the share of the sample that was labeled as “right-of-center” and the parties that we codes as such. Table A2, subsequently, reports the exact same results that were presented graphically in Figure 2, in the main body of the paper.

Table A1: Comparative Sample

	N	Waves	Right	Parties in right
Argentina	196	2	0.16	“Provinciales” and “other” if own party placed > 5
Bolivia	172	2	0.65	ADN, UCS, and MNR
Brazil	595	3	0.47	All estimated to be right of median
Chile	182	2	0.39	RN, UDI, and “other” if own party placed > 5
Colombia	88	1	0.33	PC
Ecuador	184	2	0.27	PSC
Paraguay	112	2	0.50	ANR
Peru	87	1	0.60	AP
Uruguay	73	1	0.30	PN
Venezuela	69	1	0.26	COPEI



Table A2: Comparative Results

	Left-of-center			Right-of-center		
	Est.	SE	Pr(> t )	Est.	SE	Pr(> t )
Argentina	-1.05	0.14	0.00	-2.67	0.14	0.00
Bolivia	-2.17	0.29	0.00	-2.69	0.18	0.00
Brazil	-0.42	0.08	0.00	-2.30	0.09	0.00
Chile	-0.05	0.11	0.65	-1.54	0.14	0.00
Colombia	-1.27	0.20	0.00	-1.53	0.26	0.00
Ecuador	-0.56	0.19	0.00	-1.41	0.27	0.00
Paraguay	-1.24	0.22	0.00	-2.29	0.22	0.00
Peru	-0.79	0.33	0.02	-0.95	0.27	0.00
Uruguay	-0.73	0.20	0.00	-2.50	0.31	0.00
Venezuela	0.43	0.26	0.10	-0.45	0.30	0.14

## Appendix B Results for Individual and Party Obfuscation

Figure B1 reports *party* and individual right-of-center obfuscation. As defined earlier, *total* obfuscation is the some of the two (sums are sometimes not exact due to missing data, only).

Since party obfuscation is typically 2 to 3 times larger than individual obfuscation, the ordering of countries in Figure B1a is very similar to what we reported in Figure 2. Chile is, perhaps, exceptional in having very low individual obfuscation and reasonably high party obfuscation, and Ecuador in having similar values for party and individual obfuscation (that is, relatively low party obfuscation). We have not yet theorized about factors that can affect party and individual obfuscation differently.

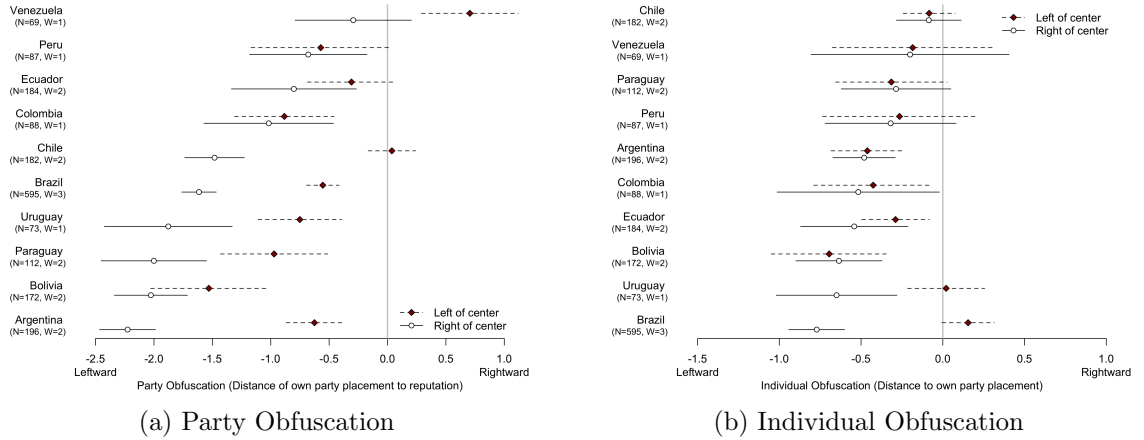


Figure B1: Party and Total Obfuscation

Notes: Figure shows total and individual obfuscation, party obfuscation is the difference between the two.

Figure B2 is equivalent to Figure 3, but reports individual-obfuscation instead of total obfuscation. This figure shows that, as with total obfuscation, this is phenomenon of the right and, in the early democratic period, of the authoritarian right in particular, and that it has eased in recent periods (though less markedly than with total obfuscation).

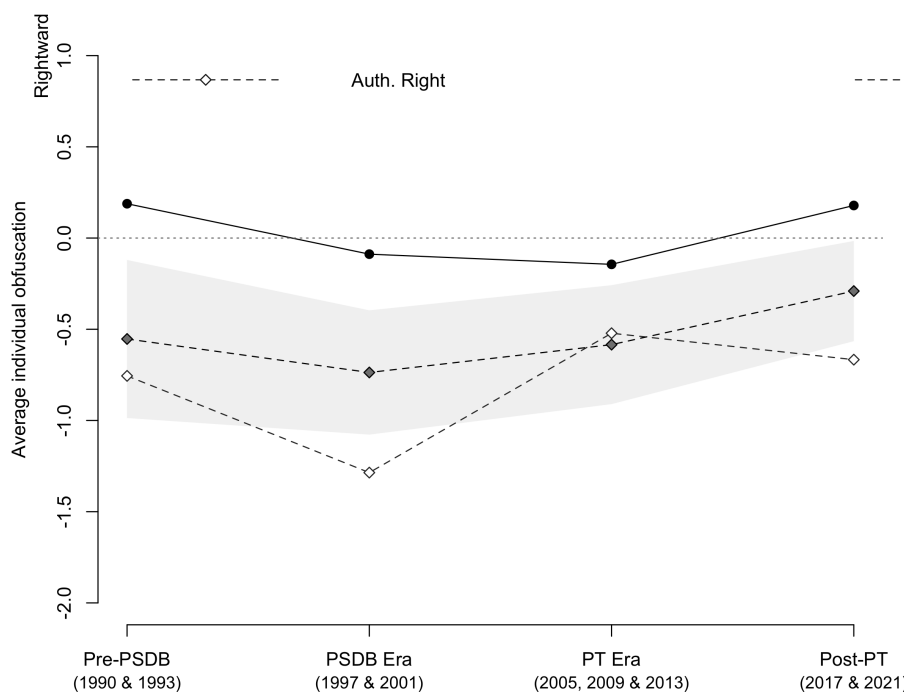


Figure B2: Individual obfuscation over time, by ideology and authoritarian legacy, Brazil  
 Notes: Figure shows individual ideological obfuscation by wave. 95% confidence intervals are shown about the left-of-center and right-of-center groups. The right-of-center group is further subdivided into those with and without personal affiliations with the authoritarian regime, represented by the dashed lines.

## Appendix C Longitudinal Analysis including PELA data

In the main paper we report the longitudinal analysis of the Brazilian case based only on the nine waves of the BLS. We did not include the three waves of PELA in Brazil because the analysis of H3 requires knowing the pre-democracy affiliation of respondents and this information is only available in the BLS.

It is possible to examine the basic patterns of obfuscation in both the BLS and the PELA data. In Figure C1 we report how obfuscation varied over time among left-of-center and right-of-center legislators. In this figure, the 2005 PELA wave is merged with the 2005 wave of the BLS while the 2010 and 2014 PELA waves are shown as separate data points. The overall figure shows less obfuscation by left-of-center legislators than right-of-center ones, a difference that was less pronounced between 2009 and 2014 but visible in all other periods. The most important finding of the paper is strong obfuscation by the right through 2009 and an acute reduction in obfuscation after this date.

## Appendix D Freshmen v. Veteran BLS Respondents

We identified the heterogeneity between the post-PT freshmen and the more experienced members of the younger cohort inductively, while examining the data from BLS for the moment in which obfuscation on the right faded. Figure D1 was particularly important in identifying the post-PT freshmen as the culprit. It shows that there was no differences between freshmen and veteran right-of-center legislators until the 2017–2021 period.

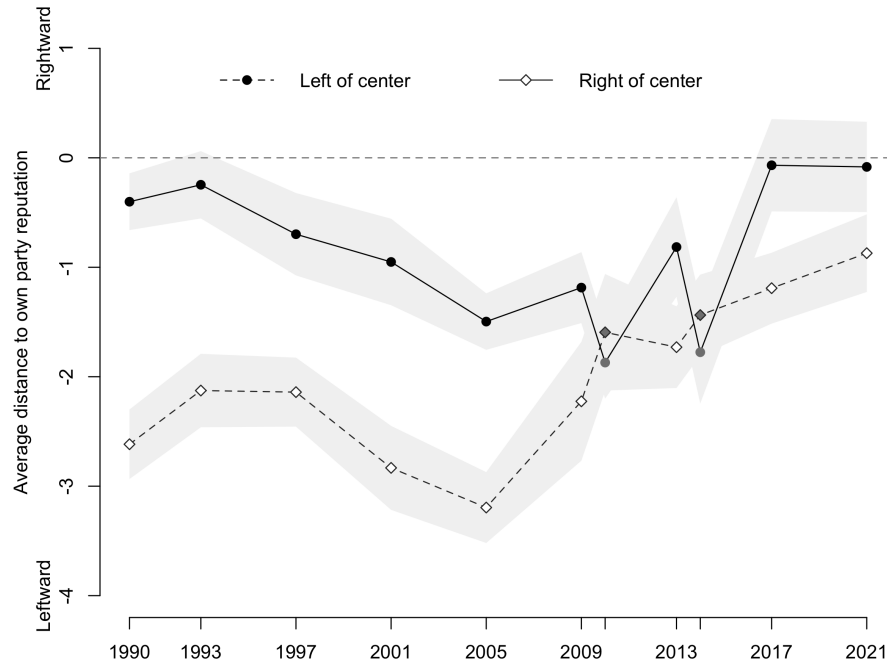


Figure C1: Individual obfuscation over time, by ideology , including PELA data  
 Notes: Figure shows individual ideological obfuscation by wave. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

The difference between veterans and freshman is statistically significant in 2017 ( $F= 4.1$   $p = 0.04$ ) but not for 2021 ( $F= 1.7$ ,  $p= 0.19$ ). When we combine the last two waves, as in Figure D1, the difference between veterans and freshmen is significant ( $F= 6.3$ ,  $p= 0.01$ ).

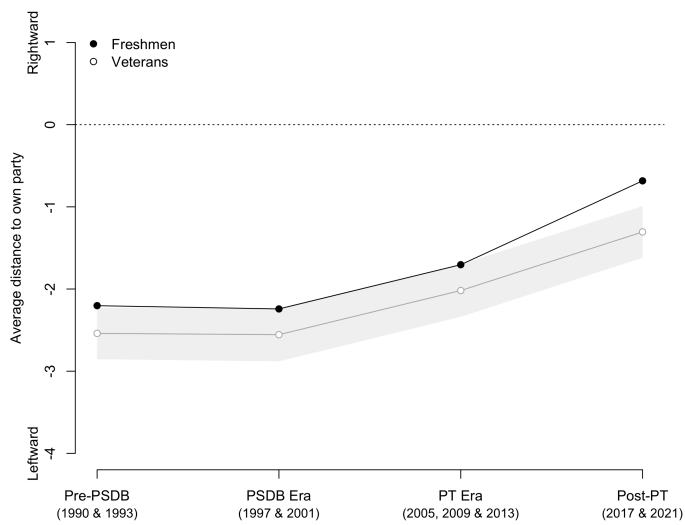


Figure D1: Obfuscation over time, by experience

Notes: Figure shows our measure of ideological obfuscation by wave. 95% confidence intervals are shown about obfuscation for the non-authoritarian legacy right-of-center subgroup.