Trailing or Avoiding the President? Governors' decision-making process on state-level electoral calendar

SANTIAGO ALLES
santiago.alles@rice.edu

Rice University
Department of Political Science

Institutions in Context: Dictatorship and Democracy
University of Tampere, Finland: June 6, 2012
“Macri is not allowed to pick a date according to his strategy. He should learn from [governor] Binner, who already called for elections in Santa Fe. He must make a decision” (Ámbito Financiero, 11/01/2011)

The meaning of this quote, what is everything but infrequent, is twofold:

(a) First, it points out the opportunity that Argentine governors have to (strategically) decide when elections are going to be hold.

(b) Second, it exposes a striking contradiction between arguments in the literature and politicians' perceptions.

While the literature has barely omitted the election timing, considering it as a neutral element, the politicians strongly believe that it is a decision that affects electoral strategies and consequently, electoral results.
Why should we care about? The topic is relevant because of:

- **Incumbent advantage.** Incumbent governors are able to pick the most favorable date to take advantage of potential electoral coattails or electoral campaign design.

- **Denationalization of party competition.** Governors are able to enhance the disconnection between levels, calling state-level elections in different days from national ones.

And party-system denationalization affects national governance because it makes coalition building more difficult.
Research question

Why does a governor separate state-level elections from national ones?

The main findings of this paper suggest that governors are more likely to separate state-level elections when:

(a) the president is in a downward period, regardless the party affiliation of the governor; and

(b) the state-level election would concur with the presidential race.
The governor decision on the electoral calendar is related to two different bodies of literature:

(a) Early government termination in parliamentary systems.

- *Fixed attributes vs. Exogenous shocks.* This debate conceived early elections as ‘security valves’ and termination an outcome of a crisis.


- *Strategic termination.* Early elections are neither associated with more unstable systems nor more unstable cabinets: “Leaders argues, call elections when they expect to win” (Smith 2003:402).

The governor decision on the electoral calendar is related to two different bodies of literature:

(b) Effects on electoral concurrence in presidential and federal systems.

Literature on concurrence under presidential government has followed a considerably different pathway.

Because of the fixed terms, there is no literature on the strategic choice of the election timing: the calendar is a given element and consequently, not subject to circumstantial executive decisions.

This body of literature is focused on the effects of vertical and horizontal concurrence.
Two types of electoral concurrence: Which are the main connections between arenas and levels in the comparative literature?
The literature on the effects of concurrence agrees on:

(a) The presidential race is the central electoral competition in a presidential federal polity, thus voters extend their presidential choice to the legislative arena (presidential coattail effect).

(b) However, when the presidential race is hold in a different day, the gubernatorial election overcomes any other electoral competition.

This precedence order between levels and arenas is a fixed parameter in governors’ decision-making process.
A governor, assuming these coattail effects, will decide whether or not elections will be concurrent regarding to (a) the presidential renovation cycle, (b) the president’s strength, and (c) her relation with the president.

- **Presidential election.** Presidential races may increase fragmentation at state-level elections because national challengers will stimulate local candidates to facilitate electoral mobilization.

- **President’s strength.** High levels of presidential popularity may enhance prestige and knowledge of her party’s candidates in every district along the country.

- **Governor’s Party affiliation.** Governors can be classified in (a) president party’s governor, (b) opposition governors and (c) provincial party governors.
Centralized parties. When parties are centralized organizations, the decisions on election timing follow a common strategy.

**Presidential strength**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Governor affiliation</th>
<th>Upward</th>
<th>Downward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pro-governm</td>
<td>U</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov. party</td>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nationally oriented governors. While president party’s governor can defect when president is weak, opposition one can take it in advantage.

Presidential strength

<table>
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<td>D</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

Santiago Alles (Rice University) University of Tampere, 06-06-2012
Locally oriented governors. They will defect when president is weak, because more runners in national arena increase state-level fragmentation.

<table>
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<td>d</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prov. party</td>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Theory by Santiago Alles (Rice University) at University of Tampere, 06-06-2012*
In sum, these theoretical arguments lead to two complementary hypotheses:

H1. Non-concurrent elections are more likely in presidential years.

H2. Non-concurrent elections are more likely under an opposition governor when the president is strong.

H3. Non-concurrent elections are more likely when the president is weak, either under a president’s party governor or an opposition one.

H4. Non-concurrent elections are most likely under a provincial party governor.
The cases: Argentine provinces, between 1983-2011

The selection of Argentina as a case has the advantage of:

- **# of cases**: 24 independent units
- **time span**: 14 consecutive elections (excluded: 1983)

The selection potentially implies 336 election-year observations. However:

(a) the effective number is smaller because not every province has midterm elections; and

(b) some observations were dropped because of theoretical reasons (aka. governors were forced to pick either a concurrent or non-concurrent day)
Describing the dataset: a considerable amount of variation

Relation between electoral arenas in a federation
Provinces in Argentina (1983-2011)

- Buenos Aires
- Córdoba
- Corrientes
- Chaco
- Chubut
- Entre Ríos
- Formosa
- Jujuy
- La Pampa
- La Rioja
- Mendoza
- Misiones
- Neuquén
- Río Negro
- Salta
- San Juan
- San Luis
- Santa Cruz
- Santiago del Estero
- Tucumán
- Tierra del Fuego

% of vertically non-concurrent elections

Santiago Alles (Rice University)
University of Tampere, 06-06-2012
Argentina is a federal republic whose institutional design closely followed the *Federalist papers*’ design, combining horizontal (presidentialism) and vertical (federalism) division of power.

A presidential system is characterized by:

(a) A **directly elected executive**, whose election is autonomous from the legislative election; and

(b) its **term in office is fixed** and not depends on a legislative confidence vote.

President has enjoyed four-year terms since 90s, but they had enjoyed a six-year one before (1983-95). Chambers of the bicameral Congress are partially renewed every two years (directly elected Senate since 2001).
The federal system is integrated by twenty-three provinces and a federal capital.

Although the national constitution established very loose requirements to the state-level institutional design, all the provinces are organized following the same presidential model:

(a) governors enjoy a fixed four-year term in office; and

(b) its power is limited by a directly elected legislature and a local judiciary.
Institutional design

Behind that superficial similarity, the provincial-presidential systems are not all equal. Three elements are the most relevant for this discussion

(a) Unicameral legislatures are predominant: 16 of the 24 legislatures have been unicameral since 2001, while the other 8 have been bicameral.

(b) Most of the legislatures are partially renewed every two years, but the number of complete renovation cycles has increased (from 8 to 11).

(c) The provincial electoral rules are under the full authority of state-level governments and barely limited by the national constitution.
The hypotheses are tested through a logistic fixed-effects regression model, which systematic component is:

\[ g(\beta, X) = \alpha + \beta X_{it} + \gamma Z_{it} + \delta_i + \varepsilon_{it} \]

where:

- \( \beta \) is the effect of the \( X \) vector of independent variables in province \( i \) in the year \( t \);
- \( \gamma \) is the effect of the \( Z \) vector of control variables in province \( i \) in the year \( t \);
- \( \delta \) is a fixed (idiosyncratic) effect of the province \( i \);
- \( \alpha \) is a constant and \( \varepsilon \) is an error term.
According to this model, the expected results can be summarized in the following way:

**Independent variables**
- Presidential year
- Pro-president governor * DW
- Opposition governor * Upw
- Opposition governor * DW
- Provincial party governor
  (all dummy variables)

**Control variables**
- # of registered voters
- Governor’s time in office (in years)
- Past vertical non-concurrence (as a %)
- Year
- Governor’s allowed for reelection (dummy)
According to this model, the expected results can be summarized in the following way:

H1. $\beta_{pres} > 0$

H2. $\beta_{oppUp} > 0$

H3. $\beta_{prgvDw} \sim \beta_{oppDw} > \beta_{oppUp}$

H4. $\beta_{prov} > \text{any governor affiliation } \beta$
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Coeff</th>
<th>St. er</th>
<th>Coeff</th>
<th>St. er</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independent variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential year</td>
<td>2.4940***</td>
<td>(0.4581)</td>
<td>3.4421***</td>
<td>(0.7087)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pro-president gov DW</td>
<td>1.5170**</td>
<td>(0.5108)</td>
<td>2.3968**</td>
<td>(0.7405)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition gov UPw</td>
<td>0.0948</td>
<td>(0.7874)</td>
<td>0.0712</td>
<td>(1.1716)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition gov DW</td>
<td>1.1350</td>
<td>(0.5926)</td>
<td>1.4939</td>
<td>(0.8327)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial party governor</td>
<td>2.1597**</td>
<td>(0.7017)</td>
<td>2.2198</td>
<td>(1.2154)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Control variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electors (in ten-thousands)</td>
<td>-0.0114</td>
<td>(0.0103)</td>
<td>-0.1174</td>
<td>(0.1604)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time in office (in years)</td>
<td>-0.0679</td>
<td>(0.0622)</td>
<td>-0.0708</td>
<td>(0.0920)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past vertical non-concurrence</td>
<td>0.0362</td>
<td>(0.0187)</td>
<td>-0.1602***</td>
<td>(0.0451)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>0.0991**</td>
<td>(0.0378)</td>
<td>0.4894***</td>
<td>(0.1056)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reelection chance</td>
<td>-0.1590</td>
<td>(0.4079)</td>
<td>-0.3188</td>
<td>(0.6522)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intercept</strong></td>
<td>-201.4536**</td>
<td>(75.5307)</td>
<td>-976.6362***</td>
<td>(209.7014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial fixed-effects</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>237</td>
<td></td>
<td>232</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LR χ2</td>
<td>101.93</td>
<td></td>
<td>152.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log Likelihood</td>
<td>-91.086</td>
<td></td>
<td>-64.298</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pseudo R2</td>
<td>0.3588</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.5418</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.05  ** p<0.01  *** p<0.001
Results

Graphing results: substantive effect of main IV’s

Predicted probability of non-concurrent elections
Provinces in Argentina (1983-2011)

Note: Variables held at mean values. Bands represent 90% confidence intervals
Results

Recall the hypotheses and the findings:

H1. Non-concurrent elections are more likely in presidential years.

H2. Non-concurrent elections are more likely under an opposition governor when the president is strong.

H3. Non-concurrent elections are more likely when the president is weak, either under a president’s party governor or an opposition one.

H4. Non-concurrent elections are most likely under a provincial party governor.
Governors’ decision is associated with presidential races: non-concurrent are significantly more likely in years of presidential renovation. Governors prefer to avoid the effects of presidential races on their districts.

The presidential strength affects governor’s decisions on calendars: when the president is weak, the probability of non-concurrent elections is higher. Contrary, when the president is strong and enjoys a high support in the polls, she attracts votes to her party’s candidates and her leadership reduces the transaction costs of selecting candidates.

Both findings indicate that the governors are considerably sensitive to the national political context when they design the state-level electoral calendar.
Conclusions

The evidence support one of the competing theoretical interpretations of decisions on electoral calendar.

If governors are nationally-oriented political actors, pro-government and opposition governors might answer to the presidential strength in opposite ways: when the president is weak a governor affiliated to president’s party should make similar decisions to an opposition governor when the president is strong.

However, the evidence shows the opposite pattern: pro-government and opposition governors make quite similar decisions in the same political context. Indeed, when the president is strong, opposition governors do not show significant differences to the baseline of the estimation.
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Operative definition of “vertical electoral concurrence”

A provincial election was coded as “concurrent” when the same day are hold:

(a) presidential and gubernatorial elections;

(b) presidential and provincial deputies elections, if the governor is not elected that year;

(c) national deputies and governor elections, in national midterm renovations; or

(d) national and provincial deputies, when neither president nor governors were elected that year.
Presidential strength

A president is considered *strong* when she enjoys:

(a) high levels of popular approval, according to publicly available surveys;
(b) a good macro-economic performance in terms of growth, inflation and employment;
(c) an undisputed authority over her own party; and
(d) no open protest in the streets, such as strikes, block roads or other forms of contestation.
## Appendix

### Presidential political situation, in election times (1985-2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>President (when calling elections)</th>
<th>Upward</th>
<th>Downward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alfonsín</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1987, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>De la Rúa</td>
<td></td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duhalde</td>
<td></td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kirchner</td>
<td>2005, 2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fernández</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>2009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Governors’ political affiliation

A governor is coded as ‘pro-government’ when she:
(a) is affiliated to the party of the president; or
(b) was directly designated by the president.

This second condition includes both:

(b1) federal interventions; and

(b2) the Buenos Aires’ city mayor previous to 1996 and Tierra del Fuego interventor previous to 1991.
Governors’ political affiliation

A governor is coded as ‘opposition’ when she:

(a) was affiliated to a national party different from the president one; or
(b) to the party of the president, but openly at his odds.

A governor is coded as ‘provincial party governor’ when she was affiliated to a provincial party, with no regard to the potential participation of her party in legislative coalitions at national Congress.
Governors’ political affiliation: descriptive data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political affiliation</th>
<th>Full dataset</th>
<th>Included cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President’s party</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition party</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial party</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military governors</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>