Voters’ attitudes at the ebb of the pink tide (summary, ALACIP 2017)

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In the last few years, the popularity of left-leaning incumbent presidents has decreased in several South American countries, due mostly to corruption scandals and poor economic performance. At the ebb of the so-called pink tide, conservative leaders have achieved power in Brazil, Argentina, and Peru, whereas surviving leftist presidents have faced political setbacks in other countries. To what extent do these events reflect changes in voters’ political opinions and attitudes regarding economic and political issues? In this paper we analyze data from Brazil’s and Argentina’s AmericasBarometer (LAPOP) from 2006 to 2014 in order to identify changes in voter’s behavior during the wax and wane of the pink tide. We propose a theoretical and statistical model to explain and estimate how these changes are connected to recent political events in those countries. We find that retrospective voting mechanisms are more strongly associated with voters’ behavioral changes, as compared to the role played by changes in their political and economic opinions. Based on this evidence, we conclude that voters have decreased their support to incumbents due to the perception that they are doing a worse job in administration than before, even though the issues deemed important by the electorate remains virtually the same.