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Introduction

In October 2019, massive demonstrations erupted across Chile to protest inequality and out-of-touch political elites who pushed for a transportation fare hike that would have placed a substantial burden on a working class already in a precarious economic situation. These protests unfolded in one of the most economically unequal countries in the world (Pérez-Ahumada 2014; Posner, Patroni, and Mayer 2018), where labor representatives are often excluded from policymaking and political parties with historical ties to labor unions have a poor track record of successfully passing reforms to benefit the working class (Barría Traverso, Araya Moreno, and Drouillas 2012; Frank 2002). This economic landscape has produced a crisis of representation and increasing disenchantment with formal institutions of representation in Chile, especially among the working class (Olavarría 2003; Siavelis 2016).

As in Chile, citizens across Latin America are disillusioned with democracy. This discontent with the way democracy works is fueled by persistently high levels of economic inequality and a perception that political elites are disconnected from the daily concerns of the poor and working-class majorities. It is no wonder that higher levels of poverty and inequality are associated with lower support for democratic norms across the region (Carlin 2006). In fact, Latin America is one of the most unequal regions in the world (ECLAC 2018). Economic inequality has produced political inequality (Boulding and Holzner 2021; Cole 2018; Solt 2008), where the majority of working-class people are poorly represented in legislatures across the region. In Chile, more than 75 percent of the population is working class, but only about 1 percent of legislators are workers.

More generally, Latin American legislators are drawn from a narrow set of elites who are largely out of touch with the everyday lives of average citizens (Taylor-Robinson 2010). Upper-class politicians often fail to address the interests of the majority. When political institutions "become discredited in

the eyes of citizens, populist presidents may displace these institutions as representatives of the people" (Taylor-Robinson 2010, 14). Thus, it is no surprise that the poor and working class may turn to populist leaders who can claim to represent workers more authentically, even if these leaders have questionable democratic credentials.

Some of the most enduring political figures of the last two decades, like Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, and Evo Morales of Bolivia, rose from poor, working-class backgrounds (Anria and Cyr 2017; Ellner and Hellinger 2003; Hunter 2010). Although these presidents garnered substantial attention worldwide, political inclusion and representation of poor and working-class citizens is not the norm. Indeed, an individual's ability to rise from the working class to the presidency in several countries is exceptional in a region where politicians typically hail from the economic elite (Barnes and Saxton 2019; Carnes and Lupu 2015; Taylor-Robinson 2010). In Latin America, where working-class citizens make up anywhere from 60 to 80 percent of the labor force, fewer than 5 percent of legislators have a working-class background (see Figure 1.1).

This political marginalization of the working class undermines one of the fundamental norms of democracy: inclusion. The principle of inclusion suggests that those directly affected by policy outcomes should be included in the decision-making process (Young 2000). In the aforementioned example from Chile, political elites made a policy decision without including the perspectives of the working-class people most affected by it. This lack of inclusion raises the question: *How does the exclusion of the working class from political power influence citizens' perceptions of representation?*

We argue that the exclusion of the working class contributes to a crisis of representation. At its root, the crisis of representation in Latin America, as well as in other democracies around the world, is a story about disenchantment with political parties and legislatures (Carlin 2006; 2018; Luna 2016; Mainwaring 2006; Mair 2013; Przeworski 2019; Tanaka 2006). Despite the importance of these institutions in Latin America, they are generally viewed with distrust (Mainwaring, Bejarano, and Leongomez 2006; Seligson 2007). This distrust threatens democracy (Claassen 2020).

This book examines how the near exclusion of working-class citizens from legislatures affects how citizens perceive political representation. In doing so, we tackle three important questions. Our first question is: *Do citizens want to be represented by members of the working class?* We argue that yes! – voters want to be represented by working-class political representatives. The reason is twofold: (1) The presence of working-class legislators may signal a more inclusive policymaking process. That is, simply having more workers in office conveys to citizens that policymakers care about their experiences, preferences, and policy needs. (2) Given that working-class legislators often have different policy preferences and advance different policy agendas than middle- and upper-class representatives from the same political party, working-class representatives may also enhance policy responsiveness. Using survey data from

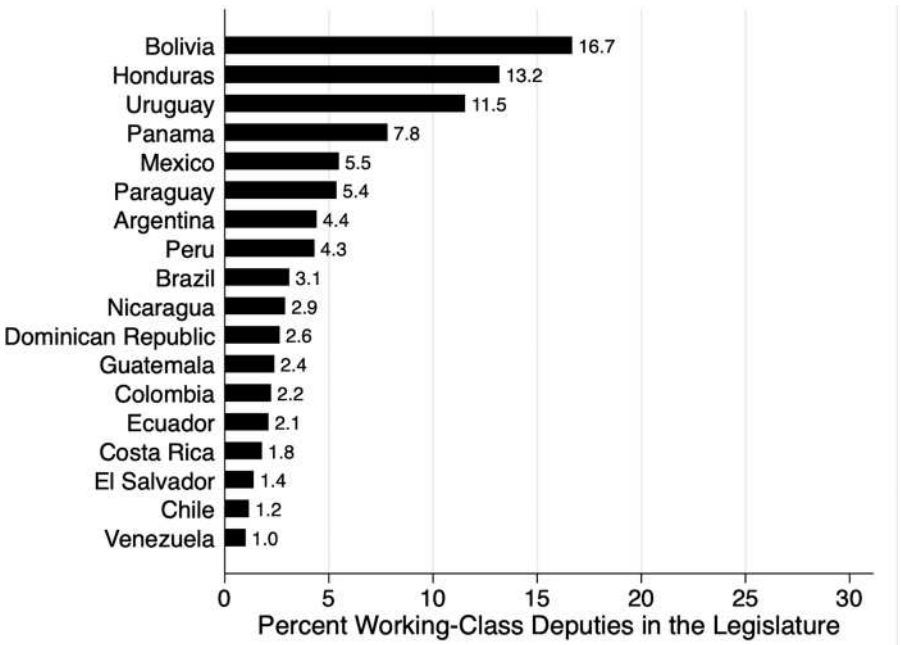

FIGURE 1.1 Share of working-class legislators in Latin America
Note: Bars represent the percentage of deputies with working-class backgrounds in the lower chamber of the legislature. Data come from the authors' coding of the University of Salamanca's Survey of Parliamentary Elites, which asks, "What was your occupation prior to being elected deputy?" The figure reflects waves 4 and 5, the most recent Parliamentary Elites in Latin America (PELA) data used in our analysis for each country.

across Latin America, and original survey data from Argentina and Mexico, we demonstrate that citizens want to see more workers in office, that the presence of workers in office is associated with better evaluations of legislatures and political parties, and that many people believe workers are better suited to represent the policy needs of working-class citizens.

On the face of it, this may seem intuitive; upon closer inspection, however, the aforementioned argument raises two additional questions. The presence of workers in office can only foster better-perceived representation via policy responsiveness if working-class legislators advocate on behalf of the working class. That said, legislators face a number of competing incentives and demands. Not all working-class legislators have the same motivations or opportunities to represent the working class. Consequently, we ask: *Will any worker do?* In other words, how do citizens evaluate workers who do not represent working-class policy interests? Likewise, simply having more working-class legislators in office can only alter how people feel represented

if they are actually aware of working-class representation. For workers' presence in office to signal a more inclusive policymaking process, citizens must be aware of workers' presence in office. Yet working-class status is arguably more difficult for citizens to observe than characteristics such as race, ethnicity, or gender. Thus, we ask: *How do citizens know workers are in office?*

Will any worker do? We explain that even though all workers come to office having unique lived experiences that better position them to represent the needs of working-class citizens, once in office, workers are faced with a range of competing incentives and opportunities that sometimes preclude their desire and ability to represent working-class interests. We argue that for working-class legislators to effectively improve evaluations of representative institutions, they should have strong relationships with the disadvantaged group they represent and be committed to advocating for their policy interests (Dovi 2002). Where working-class politicians enter office and defect – prioritizing their party or other economic interests instead of the working class – we anticipate working-class representatives will invoke backlash and diminish evaluations of institutions. In contrast, where workers strive to cultivate working-class support and represent workers' policy interests, we posit that working-class politicians will improve perceptions of institutions. Drawing on an original dataset of the class backgrounds of Argentine and Mexican national deputies over a twenty-year-period, survey data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), and original survey experiments in Argentina and Mexico, we demonstrate that where representation of the working class is accompanied by policy responsiveness to workers' interests, working-class representation improves evaluations of democratic institutions. Absent policy representation, however, workers' presence in office only moderately improves evaluations of institutions, and in some cases, generates backlash.

This leads to our final question: *How do citizens know workers are in office?* We argue that even if people do not have perfect information, there are a number of ways that citizens learn about working-class representation (Bernhard n.d.; Bernhard and Freeder 2020; Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020). Since parties and candidates have political incentives to make politicians' working-class status known, news sources and governments make information about legislators available and digestible, and people are surprisingly adept at inferring class status from readily available heuristics such as facial images and speech patterns, we explain that citizens have a number of opportunities to learn about the presence – or absence – of workers in office. Leveraging examples from news sources, surveys of government websites, and a unique experiment in Argentina and Mexico that tests respondents' abilities to classify the class status of deputies based only on facial images, we provide strong evidence that citizens are capable of detecting workers' presence in office. Latin American citizens know workers are in office because they learn about the class status of politicians through numerous information sources, and they can infer class from images of their representatives. Furthermore, using survey data from

across Latin America, we demonstrate that the relationship between working-class representation and positive evaluations of institutions is strongest among individuals who are most likely to be aware of legislators' class status – that is, citizens with high levels of political interest and avid news followers.

1.1 Evidence of Working-Class Representation and Citizens' Evaluations

We leverage a combination of qualitative and quantitative data to answer these three pressing questions. Our empirical analysis is situated in Latin America, where we analyze citizens' evaluations of representative institutions – namely, legislatures and political parties – across the entire region to capture variation in working-class representation. We draw on quantitative evidence from elite surveys with legislators and mass public opinion surveys across eighteen countries from 2008 to 2014 for a total of forty-eight country-years. We bolster this cross-national evidence with original survey experiments and novel survey questions that we fielded in Mexico and Argentina in 2019, and a newly constructed dataset of the class backgrounds of over 4,400 Mexican deputies serving from 1997 to 2018 and about 1,800 Argentine deputies from 2002 to 2016.

The qualitative evidence comes from multiple sources as well. First, in 2019, more than 5,000 individuals in Argentina and Mexico responded to open-ended survey questions explaining their perceptions of class representation. We utilize this rich collection of citizen-level responses throughout the book to contextualize many of the empirical findings from our quantitative analyses. Second, we provide in-depth case studies of the history of working-class representation in Argentina and Mexico to explain key variation in workers' ties to political parties and in representatives' track record of policy representation. Finally, throughout the book – and particularly in Chapters 5 and 6 – we draw heavily on historical examples and vignettes to illustrate our findings and bolster our conclusions. Although we do not rely on the open-ended survey responses or examples to make inferences or empirical claims – all our conclusions are drawn from the quantitative analyses – they help to illustrate our empirical results.

1.1.1 Leveraging Cross-National Data from Latin America

To empirically test our expectations about working-class inclusion, we utilize a variety of cross-national data sources. From a research design perspective, cross-national data are important for several reasons. First, by drawing on elite and public opinion survey data across forty-eight country-years, we leverage far more variation than would be available if we were only looking at one or two cases in depth. The elite data come from the University of Salamanca's Survey of Parliamentary Elites (PELA), which conducts anonymous surveys of a representative sample of legislators in each legislative session from all

eighteen countries included in our cross-national analysis. Mass public opinion data come from LAPOP's *AmericasBarometer*, which has been conducting nationally representative surveys across Latin America since 2004. Using these two sources of cross-national survey data, we capture important variation across space and time in working-class representation from the PELA surveys (our key independent variable), as well as citizens' evaluations of political institutions from the LAPOP surveys (our key dependent variable). This variation is critical for empirically testing our expectations and drawing valid inferences (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994).

Second, cross-national data are important for demonstrating the generalizability of our findings. In particular, we demonstrate that working-class legislators improve citizens' perceptions of representation across a variety of economic contexts and institutional arrangements, including different electoral rules, party systems, levels of development, and labor union density. In addition to elite and mass public opinion survey data, we also draw on vignettes and journalistic accounts from across the region to contextualize our statistical analysis and to demonstrate the generalizability of our findings.

1.1.2 Original Surveys from Argentina and Mexico

Scholars interested in understanding the relationship between representation and people's evaluations of institutions are plagued with the challenge of identifying causality. Even when taking the best of care to measure variables sequentially, maximizing variation in both the dependent and independent variables, and considering potential sources of spuriousness, scholars studying political behavior and public opinion are thwarted by threats of endogeneity – particularly reverse causality and omitted variable bias. With respect to reverse causality, it is entirely plausible that where citizens feel better represented by parties and legislatures, workers are more likely to pursue political office. Of course, in our cross-national analysis, we attempt to address this with a careful research design that measures working-class representation in the time period before citizens are asked to evaluate institutions, but both trends in citizens' attitudes and workers' access to office tend to change slowly over time. Thus, it is possible that this process is reversed.

As for omitted variable bias, most social scientists (and curious people in general) can easily think of a number of factors that may theoretically improve *both* workers' access to office and people's evaluations of representative institutions – thus potentially explaining away the link we observe between these two factors. Although we do our best to address potential omitted variables by controlling for observables in our cross-national analyses, there may be unobservable factors we cannot account for – a known limitation of correlational studies. Beyond these limitations, the questions we can ask are constrained by data availability in publicly available surveys and respondents are constrained in their answers by predefined multiple-choice options.

To address these challenges and improve our ability to draw inferences, we designed and fielded original surveys in Argentina and Mexico that contain a series of novel survey experiments, original survey questions, and open-ended survey questions. In particular, we designed two survey experiments: one to assess the causal mechanism linking higher levels of working-class representation to individuals' perceptions of representation, and a second to evaluate citizens' ability to identify working-class representatives. We developed new questions to assess individual evaluations of working-class deputies, and we incorporated open-ended survey questions to provide insights into the underlying factors that individuals claim inform their perceptions of working-class deputies.

1.1.3 Observing Working-Class Representation

How do we identify a member of the working class? The concept of class can be somewhat ambiguous, but, fortunately, researchers have developed numerous ways to conceptualize and operationalize which legislators come from the working class. Similar to various other studies on the class backgrounds of political elites, we rely solely on legislators' occupational status, rather than relying on income or some other measure of socioeconomic well-being. Although most legislators would be coded as belonging to the same (elite) class if we relied on income-based measures of class, the reality is that people with different occupational backgrounds have different life experiences, opportunities, social circles, and economic and political interests (Evans and Tilley 2017; Hout, Manza, and Brooks 1995; Mood 2017; Stephens, Markus, and Phillips 2014; Weeden and Grusky 2005).[1]

Occupation-based conceptualizations of class are fundamentally different from socioeconomic-based approaches (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). This distinction between socioeconomic-based and occupational approaches is paramount for evaluating both legislators' ties to citizens and the policies they represent when in office. Above and beyond a person's income, the work people do to earn a living establishes their position in society (Manza and Brooks 2008). Indeed, the theory of occupational socialization argues that time spent in an occupation should shape political preferences and behavior (Barnes, Beall, and Holman 2021; Barnes and Saxton 2019; Best and Cotta 2000; Carnes 2012, 2013; Oesch and Rennwald 2018; O'Grady 2019; Vivyan et al. 2020). People who work in the same industry have shared experiences that both define what they see as the range of potential political concerns and also influence their preferences and priorities.

[1] In this book, we focus on the difference between the working class and the middle/upper classes. As compared to middle- and upper-class citizens, workers have unique lived experiences and distinct policy interests. That said, workers are not a monolith. Their policy interests may vary, for instance, by industry, level of skills, and whether they work in a formal/informal or gender-segregated sector (for a discussion, see Barnes, Beall, and Holman 2021; Barnes and Holman 2020b; Hummel 2021; Menendez, Owen, and Walter 2023; Owen 2015).

In terms of shared experiences, the socialization that members of different social classes receive in their occupations plays a fundamental role in shaping distinct preferences and priorities. Individuals employed in working-class occupations often have lower incomes, face heightened employment insecurity, and are more likely to depend on social safety net programs, such as unemployment insurance, that are funded via redistributive policies and require state intervention in the economy (Evans and Tilley 2017). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that individuals' occupations often correlate with their social policy preferences (Kitschelt and Rehm 2014). This same relationship between citizens' occupations and policy preferences is evident among legislators as well. When legislators hail from working-class backgrounds, they too experience a similar socialization process from their occupations, and thus have fundamentally different policy preferences, especially regarding economic issues, than their colleagues with white-collar occupational backgrounds (Barnes, Beall, and Holman 2021; Carnes 2012; O'Grady 2019).

While we identify members of the working class based on their occupation, we do not further subdivide workers between those who work in the informal and formal sectors of the economy in this study. In Latin America, anywhere from a quarter to around half the population in most countries is employed in the informal sector. It is possible that members of the working class from the informal and formal sectors have distinct preferences based on their occupational socialization. Access to social safety net policies, such as unemployment insurance or health insurance, is sometimes limited to formal sector workers, although reforms have been made to increase access to these benefits for informal workers in several countries (Posner, Patroni, and Mayer 2018).

Nonetheless, research that examines differences between the political preferences of formal and informal sector workers in Latin America finds very few differences, as these two sectors of the economy in Latin America are highly integrated (Baker and Velasco-Guachalla 2018; Palmer-Rubin and Collier 2022). Workers may shift from one sector to the other over time, with many workers "participate[ing] in a mix of formal and informal activities" in the labor market (Hummel 2017, 1525). Similar to formal workers, informal workers organize in most countries. They are often unionized, and they bargain directly with the state over self-regulation (Holland 2015; Hummel 2017, 2021). The adoption of neoliberal reforms across Latin America has made formal sector employment much more precarious and unstable, lessening differences across sectors. Thus, policy preferences are unlikely to vary between workers in formal and informal sector occupations.[2]

[2] As a practical matter, it is also very hard to identify whether legislators from working-class backgrounds worked in the formal or informal sector. We assume most are from the formal sector, since most gain representation through union affiliation.

By taking occupational socialization as our starting point for examining working-class inclusion, we get a clearer understanding of whether representatives will advocate for and promote the policy interests of working-class citizens. As Manza and Brooks (2008, 204) explain, "[w]orkplace settings provide the possibility of talking about politics and forging political identity, and work also provides a springboard for membership in organizations where class politics are engaged: unions, professional associations, business associations, and so forth." Phillips (1995) further explains in her theory of the politics of presence, shared life experience is an anchor for understanding the representation that constituents receive from their legislators. In other words, an occupation-based conceptualization of class is critical for evaluating how class identity shapes representation.

Following this increasingly accepted convention for conceptualizing and operationalizing class, we consider legislators as belonging to the working class if they previously earned a living by working in skilled and unskilled manual labor, as small artisans, in service-industry occupations, in entry-level secretarial positions, as rural laborers/small farmers (*campesinos*), and as union officers prior to entering politics.[3] Due to the wide variety of unionized occupations, we classify all deputies with backgrounds in union leadership as workers, even if they led teacher unions or public sector unions. Deputies who are teachers, bureaucrats, or nurses who belong to unions, but are not in union leadership, are not classified as workers. In order to distinguish between farmers who may also be large landowners, and rural laborers or poor farmers on small plots of land, we classify all deputies in the rural sector with ties to peasant organizations as workers, and all others as farmers. Throughout this study, we use the terms "worker" and "working class" interchangeably when we refer to legislators with working-class occupational backgrounds.

Region-wide data on working-class representation are available from the PELA surveys. We rely on these surveys in our cross-national analyses, but these data are limited in two respects: first, in their time span, and second, in only including information on legislators' most recent occupation. These two limitations pose a risk of biasing our results towards the null if legislators with working-class backgrounds are not coded as such. Thus, we bolster our cross-national investigation with an in-depth look at Argentina and Mexico. Here sufficient resources are available to accurately estimate the numeric representation of workers in legislative office across time using official biographical data of federal legislators. These data allow us to engage in more detailed time-series analyses of the effect of working-class representation on citizens' evaluations of their political institutions.

[3] For other studies using this approach, see work by Barnes and Saxton (2019), Barnes, Beall, and Holman (2021), Barnes and Holman (2020a), Best (2007), Best and Cotta (2000), Carnes (2013), Carnes and Lupu (2015, 2016a), Grumbach (2015), Johannessen (2019), Manza and Brooks (2008), Matthews and Kerevel (2022), Micozzi (2018) and Vivyan et al. (2020).

1.1.4 Observing Citizens' Evaluations of Representatives

The primary purpose of this book is to understand how the exclusion/inclusion of working-class legislators in office shapes citizens' perceptions of representative institutions. Since we are interested in citizens' perceptions about the quality of political representation they receive, we must rely on some public opinion measures that capture these perceptions. Conceptually, we are interested in measures that can be clearly interpreted as evaluations of the quality of representation citizens receive from their elected representatives in legislatures and political parties. There is, however, little consensus among scholars about how to measure the extent to which citizens feel represented.

Our strategy is to rely on multiple evaluative measures of political parties and legislatures, such as the level of trust individuals have in legislatures and political parties, congressional job approval, and how well parties represent or listen to voters. Our original survey directly asks respondents the extent to which they feel working-class/white-collar legislators understand their problems and promote projects to improve the quality of life of all citizens, followed by open-ended questions. The qualitative responses allow us to further probe why the respondents feel the way they do about representation. Throughout the book, we refer to this collection of measures as evaluations of representatives or perceptions of representation interchangeably. If we find that the class backgrounds of legislators have similar effects across multiple evaluative measures of representation, we can be more confident in our findings.

Other work often refers to perceptions of representation as "symbolic representation," a term derived from Pitkin (1967), and which is generally concerned with the symbolic effects that representatives have on the represented. While our work is similar to much of the symbolic representation literature, we shy away from this term here, since it has been used to encompass a wide range of outcomes.[4]

1.2 A CLOSER LOOK AT ARGENTINA AND MEXICO

As previously noted, we fielded original surveys in Argentina and Mexico and collected an extensive new dataset of national deputies' occupational

[4] For instance, scholars use the concept symbolic representation to examine political interest, discussion, and participation (Alexander and Jalalzai 2020; Barnes and Burchard 2013; Barnes and Jones 2018; Desposato and Norrander 2009; Kerevel and Atkeson 2017; Kittilson and Schwindt-Bayer 2010, 2012; Stauffer, Song, and Shoub 2022); feelings of political efficacy (Atkeson and Carrillo 2007; Stauffer 2021); political empowerment (Alexander and Jalalzai 2020; Dos Santos and Jalalzai 2021); evaluations of one's own identity group (Badas and Stauffer 2019); general systemic support for democratic institutions (Badas and Stauffer 2018; Hinojosa and Kittilson 2020; Hinojosa, Fridkin, and Kittilson 2017; Schwindt-Bayer 2010); and evaluations of institutions (Clayton 2015; Karp and Banducci 2008; Lawless 2004; Zetterberg 2009).