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Revisiting the origins of populism: social determinants of Perón's first victory^{1*}

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Abstract

An ecological analysis of the general election in Argentina in 1946 suggests that the votes for Perón were higher in districts with high levels of social and economic development (relatively larger proportions literates and industrial employees and relatively higher wages), more affected by electoral fraud and with a smaller specialization in export-oriented activities. The ecological inference analysis strongly suggest that this characterization of districts is also a good characterization of the groups supporting Peron in the election: literates (rather than illiterates), industrial employees (rather than the rest of the population), urban dwellers (rather than rural dwellers) and migrants (rather than natives) had significantly higher probability of voting Perón. The support for Perón originated in a variety of motivations from different social groups that reacted against the traditional political model.

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1. Introduction

The electoral victory of Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina's 1946 presidential election transformed the country's political landscape. Perón would become arguably the most influential political figure in Argentina since assuming the presidency. He won the election with a margin of over 10 percentage points ahead of the runner-up (53.8% of the national vote compared to 43.5%), achieving clear majorities in 12 of the 15 electoral districts and in 61% of the 364 counties.

This widespread electoral support marked the beginning of several decades of unparalleled individual leadership and the birth of a new political and social movement. Following his initial

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triumph, Perón's ability to connect with the masses and consolidate political support only intensified. He won the 1951 election with more than 63% of the vote and returned to office in 1973 with over 61%. The victory of Arturo Frondizi, candidate of the Unión Cívica Radical Intransigente in the 1958 election, was largely attributable to Perón's endorsement—despite being banned from participating directly by the military regime—after a pact made public in February of that year (Romero 2013, p. 139). Similarly, in the 1963 election, Arturo Illia of the Unión Cívica Radical del Pueblo won with 25.8% of the vote, while 19.2% of the electorate cast blank ballots, following Perón's explicit call for abstention (Rouquié 1982, p. 225).

The social foundations of Peronism and the reasons behind its enduring electoral appeal have been extensively studied and continue to constitute a rich field of research. Historical accounts of Peronism's emergence suggest that structural changes in Argentina's society during the decades preceding the 1946 election led to the rise of new socio-economic groups. These groups expressed demands that were poorly represented by traditional political parties (Rapoport 2020, p. 316). Scholars have emphasized the pivotal role of the poorest sectors—long excluded from political participation (Waldman 1981)—and of semi-skilled industrial workers, who were strongly organized in trade unions (Murmis and Portantiero 1971). Additionally, some segments of the entrepreneurial class involved in domestic production began to support policies that resisted further integration into the global economy (Murmis and Portantiero 1971; Horowicz 2015).

The 1946 election is thus critical to understanding how social cleavages shaped political preferences in 20th century Argentina. It marked the first electoral participation of the Peronist movement—then operating under the label of the Labor Party—and it profoundly altered the political alternatives available to the working class and lower strata. Before 1946, Argentina's main political forces were the Conservative Party, the Unión Cívica Radical, and the Socialist Party. Some scholars argue that class-based voting was already significant prior to Perón's rise, with the upper classes voting conservative, the middle classes favoring the radicals, and the urban working class leaning toward socialism (Cantón and Jorrat 1998). Others, however, claim that the Socialist and Radical parties aimed to be, or functioned as, multi-class coalitions (Snow 1969; Lupu and Stokes 2009). While debate continues about the extent of class-based voting before Peronism, there is broad agreement that the emergence of Peronism marked a dramatic shift in these dynamics.

Regarding the results of the 1946, some authors argue that the Peronism had a clear “popular profile” from its very first election (Cantón and Jorrat 1998) while others claim that Peronism started as a loose and potentially unstable social coalition (Smith, 1972; Wellhofer, 1977) and that the classical divide between a middle-class Radical Party and a shirtless' Peronist movement was only clearly detectable in 1948 after two years of Peronist administration (Lupu and

Stokes 2009). When trying to unveil the ultimate reasons of the Peronist victory, other elements have been proposed like eagerness of modernization in underdeveloped areas (Smith 1972), urbanization and the role of internal migrants (Germani 1955) and also the reaction against previous electoral fraud (Alston and Gallo 2010). The role of the discussion of the origins of the electoral support for Perón can go even further as some scholars (Zanatta, 2009; Di Tella, 2011; Casullo, 2014; Cortés Conde, 2015) argued that the first Peronist administration stimulated policies tended to consolidate a classical populist regime.

Empirical analyses of these hypotheses began with classic ecological studies that linked socioeconomic characteristics of departments to electoral support for Perón (Snow 1969; Smith 1972; Germani 1973). However, these early studies relied on simple econometric techniques, focused almost exclusively on socioeconomic factors, and were limited by the inherent constraints of ecological inference. More recently, two important innovations emerged. First, Alston and Gallo (2010) introduced electoral fraud in the 1930s as an explanatory variable within an ecological framework, though they used a limited set of covariates. Second, Lupu and Stokes (2009) employed ecological inference techniques to explore the social bases of political parties—including Peronism in 1946—but focused narrowly on literacy and urbanization cleavages.

In this paper, we use a newly assembled dataset combining county-level electoral results from the fifteen electoral districts with data from the 1946 National Industrial Census, the 1947 National Agricultural Census, and the 1947 National Population Census. This allows us to extend previous ecological analyses by incorporating a broader set of socioeconomic indicators (including average wages, labor market characteristics, education, and sectoral specialization) along with measures of electoral fraud in a unified regression framework. Acknowledging the limitations of ecological inference—namely, the risk of drawing conclusions about individual behavior from aggregate data—we supplement our analysis by applying ecological inference methods to estimate how voter characteristics such as literacy, migration status, urban-rural residence, and occupational category influenced support for Perón in 1946.

Our results suggest that support for Perón stemmed from a variety of factors and was not concentrated within any single social group. The ecological analysis reveals that votes for Perón were more common in modern, industrialized districts; that reaction against electoral fraud was a strong predictor of support; and that agropastoral specialization reduced the Peronist vote. Ecological inference further indicates that Peronist voters tended to be urban, relatively educated industrial workers, and internal migrants.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on the relationship between social cleavages and Peronist support in 1946. Section 3 presents the data used to test the multi-factor hypotheses behind Perón's electoral success. Section 4 reports and interprets the econometric results and compares them to previous studies. Section 5 presents the findings from King's ecological inference method used to characterize the social profiles of Perón's supporters. Section 6 concludes with a discussion of the broader implications of our findings.

2. The Debate Aiming to Explain Perón's Victory

An important part of the discussion on the determinants of the electoral success of Perón is implicitly based on the premise that the relevant factors influencing the social foundation of voting relates primarily to the voter's economic status or social class and their expectations regarding the economic consequences of the electoral outcome (Evans and Opacic, 2022).

The classical study by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) distinguished some critical lines of cleavages relying on the voters' economic positions as the result of an historical process initiated in the Industrial Revolution: the first one is the conflict between the landed interests and the rising class of industrial entrepreneurs; the second one is the conflict between owners and employers on the one side and tenants, laborers, and workers on the other (Brooks et al. 2006). Some literature on voting behavior has criticized this "sociological model" and emphasized the importance of "post materialist values" in defining voters' preferences (Inglehart 1997) in particular in the second half of the 20th century (Brooks et al. 2006). However, Snow (1969) suggested that contrary to what happened in other countries, where the importance of the link between social cleavages and class voting diminished after World War II, in Argentina occupation and social position became an important factor in voting behavior especially after 1943.

As we have already mentioned in the previous section, the connection of social classes and partisan preferences until 1943 is under discussion and the traditional divide of workers supporting Socialism, middle-class supporting Radicals and the wealthier groups supporting Conservatives is not unanimously accepted (Walter 1978, Canton and Jorrat 1996). On the contrary, there is a quite consensus that after 1946 there were strong class differences in the parties' constituencies with disproportionate success of Peronism between the lower popular classes (Lupu and Stokes 2009). Regarding the pivotal election of 1946 there are many hypotheses of the kind of social groups and their motivations behind the large support received by Perón. Relying on the general framework of class voting, many researchers suggest the general idea that Peronism garnered support primarily from lower class of the society in general and workers in particular while facing resistance from the urban middle class, particularly white-collar employees, professionals and business owners

(Germani, 1973; Cantón, 1973; Halperín Donghi, 1975; Gerchunoff and Antúnez, 2002). This general hypothesis has two versions: the first one highlights the role of the newly industrialized workforce, frequently internal migrants who had recently entered the manufacturing sector, with lower qualifications, lower wages and formality, and limited influence within labor unions (Murmis and Portantiero 1971, Germani 1973).⁴

The second version of that hypothesis emphasizes the influence of the older, more formally organized blue-collar workers who had reshaped the economic structure of the nation in the years leading up to that period (Germani 1955, Gerchunoff and Antúnez 2002). Perón's proactive engagement as Secretary of Labor prior to the 1946 election enabled him to establish a sophisticated network of loyalties with numerous union leaders and to gain the support of the unionized workers, which became indispensable for the expansion of, what later become, the Peronist Movement (Bellini 2009).

The relative importance of these two versions was initially tested by Smith (1972) with a very simple econometric strategy suggesting that the presence of an industrial work force, rather than internal migrants favored the Peronist victory in great urban areas.⁵ However, when focusing on the countryside, Smith's conclusions are more nuanced indicating that class voting played only a minor role and that, overall, Peronism began as a loose coalition of differing social groups (Smith 1972, p. 67); in this regard Kenworthy (1975) suggested that the support of the workforce was crucial but not sufficient for Perón success in 1946 and Ranis (1975) goes even further characterizing the initial Peronism as a multiclass coalition looking for the support of the labor unions, the nationalist industrial entrepreneurs, the Catholic Church, and the military.

Another possible social cleavage affecting Peronist vote, related to the conflict between free trade and protectionism, resulted in a notable division between those advocating for higher tariffs to protect the manufacturing industry, associated with the *Unión Industrial Argentina*, and those supporting international integration, who focused on the country's comparative advantage in primary goods production, especially chilled meat, represented by the *Sociedad Rural Argentina* (Murmis and Portantiero 1971). Within this framework, groups more connected with the traditional agropastoral exporting sector would have a higher resistance to the Peronist movement.

More recently, Alston and Gallo (2010), reopened the debate on Perón's rise to power suggesting that the primary factor of his electoral success can be attributed to the fraudulent occurrences of the preceding decade. After showing that the vote for Perón in 1946 increased in

⁴ This version was identified as the “orthodox” view (Kenworthy 1975).

⁵ Smith (1972) uses a very ample set of variables and a simple linear OLS with independent regressions for “Big cities”, “Townships” and “Countryside” and with different sets of covariates in each regression. (Smith 1972, p. 61-62). See the discussion about the possible limitations on the empirical strategy in Germani (1973) and Halperin Donghi (1975).

counties where fraud in 1938 elections was higher, they argue that “By eroding the still developing beliefs for checks and balances by citizens, the fraud kindled a desire for populism” (Alston and Gallo 2010, p. 194).

The identification of possible connections between the relevance of social cleavages and electoral preferences can also shed some light on the historical debate about the role of the Argentine presidential election of 1946 in the formation of what many scholars have subsequently identified as a classic example of a populist government (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1990 and 1991; Cardoso and Hedwedge, 1991; Zanatta, 2009 and 2012; Acemoglu et al., 2013; Fernández 2014 and 2015). Some of the attributes of the populist paradigm can be analyzed from a sociological perspective as outlined by Cassullo (2014)⁶. This viewpoint highlights the emergence of populist regimes in peripheral regions, characterizing them as a coalition of social classes that includes industrial workers, influential groups, and a charismatic leader (Di Tella, 2011; Casullo, 2014; Cortés Conde, 2015; Bercoff and Meloni, 2024). According to this view, Perón would have successfully unified various segments of Argentine society to support his candidacy. Notably, he would have engaged anti-liberal and nationalistic minority factions that had previously supported the 1943 military regime. Additionally, the protectionist measures he enacted between 1943 and 1946 as a senior official in the Farrell administration would have appealed to the emerging industrial and the coalition would have further strengthened by the inclusion of labor unions and the direct connection he fostered with the working class, which contributed to the rise of his charismatic image (Di Tella, 2011; Cassullo, 2014; Cortés Conde, 2015).

3. Data

To evaluate the electoral process which led Perón to his first victory in the polls, we constructed a data set which includes socio-economic and demographic indicators extracted from the 1947 National Population Census, the 1946 National Industrial Census, and the 1947 National Agricultural Census, sorted by district. Our main variable of interest would be *Pjshare* that is the share of votes cast for the *Partido Laborista* in the 1946 elections; this variable was collected from *Archivo General de la Nación (AGN)*⁷. Our explanatory variables will be related to the socioeconomic characteristics of the departments as they are explained in detail below. Additionally, the variable

⁶ Casullo (2014) states that the characteristics of a populist paradigm can be examined, besides the sociological viewpoint, for another two different perspectives. The first one is the Political Science standpoint where populism is regarded as a political strategy that develops within a liberal democracy and where both political paradigms are in a constant state of tension (see also Rodriguez Braun, 2011; Fernández, 2014 and 2015). While the second one, the economic perspective, highlights the inter-temporal inconsistencies of the economic policies implemented by populist governments (see also Dornbusch and Edwards, 1990 and 1991; and Acemoglu et al., 2013).

⁷ Data come from *Departamento Archivo Intermedio. Fondo: Ministerio del Interior - Sección: Dirección Nacional Electoral (1946 - 1975)*. Box number 1, Folder number 1, Series: Electoral Results, Pages 1-94.

Fraud was included, borrowed from Alston and Gallo (2010)⁸, which accounts for the difference in the share of votes that the *Unión Cívica Radical* Party (UCR) obtained, in the 1940 election (considered fair) and the 1938 election (considered fraudulent), hence, the larger the variable *Fraud* is, the larger is suspected to have been the incidence of fraud in that district. The number of observations for this variable adds up to just 233, since the 1940 election did not include some of the 364 counties which participated in the presidential election in 1946.⁹

The hypothesis that industrial workers were crucial in supporting Perón in 1946 can be linked to the intensity of industrial employment in a particular district: in principle, the higher the proportion of industrial workers in the total population, the higher the expected support for the Peronist party in the polls. The 1947 census provides information about two categories of employees in the industrial establishments: employees (*empleados*) and workers (*trabajadores*)¹⁰ but it does not provide a clear distinction between these categories: while the category *trabajadores* refers quite clearly to blue-collar workers, the category *empleados* refers to white collar workers but it also includes technicians and engineers who were presumably in the production side of the firm rather than in the administrative side.¹¹ Given that possible ambiguity, we define three versions of industrial employment: the first one is the ratio between employees and total population (*Employees*); the second one is the ratio between workers and total population (*Workers*) and the third one is the ratio between the sum of employees and workers and total population (*Emp-Work*). In principle the first version of the variable must be more connected to skilled workers while the second one would capture the intensity of more unskilled workers.¹²

The variable *Cattle* tries to capture the intensity of the livestock production in each district, and it is calculated as the ratio between heads of cattle and total population.¹³ It is generally accepted that cattle ranchers played an important role in influencing policymakers and the intensity of cattle production can capture the relevant role of this group over the mass opinion of a district; the higher

⁸ We thank Andres Gallo for generously sharing their data set with us.

⁹ The data of *Fraud* assembled by Alston and Gallo (2010) comes from the provinces of Buenos Aires, Cordoba, Entre Rios, Santa Fe, Corrientes, Santiago del Estero, Tucuman and Mendoza. The remaining provinces did not have an election in 1940.

¹⁰ Data on workers and employees comes from 1947 Census, Volume III, with a specific table for each province, in pages 66-95.

¹¹ The census includes in this category “Empleados técnicos y administrativos”. Volume III, pages 9-12.

¹² Data on total population of the district is obtained from Censo 1947, Volume I, Cuadro 4, pages 52, 76, 156, 178, 206, 232, 252, 270, 290, 314, 338, 362, 378, 404, 430. Alston and Gallo (2010: 188) define this variable as the natural logarithm of the industrial employment in each county which we think that it is not a good idea given that this definition of the variable would be correlated with total population and therefore will capture some size effect.

¹³ The heads of cattle per department comes from Censo Agropecuario 1947, Volume II, Cuadro 16, pages 104 – 111.

the potential influence of the cattle ranchers in a district, the more plausible a general opinion against the Peronist movement (Murmis and Portantiero, 1971).

The variable *Renters* was calculated as the number of agricultural (or total??) landholdings that were under tenancy over the total population.¹⁴ Considering that the Farrell administration sustained a rent control policy, one should expect to find that the proportion of farms under some form of tenancy, may have had a positive impact on Perón's electoral triumph. In the province of Buenos Aires, for instance, more than half of the farms were under some sort of renting contract.¹⁵

With regards to *Illiteracy*, the rate of male illiteracy is included to delve into the possibility of a class cleavage vote.¹⁶ As already discussed, some authors (Smith, 1972; Smith, 1974; Kenworthy, 1975) emphasize the classist cleavage of the Peronist Party, considering that the lower strata of society were responsible for the impulse in the growth of the political movement. If this were the case, it should be expected that the illiterate would vote for Perón more than for the Unión Democrática coalition's candidate. In this regard, it is worth pointing out that the illiteracy average rate of 11.5% regarding all the jurisdictions which took part in the presidential election in 1946 ranged from a maximum of 26.2% in the province of Jujuy to a minimum of 4% in the city of Buenos Aires.

Following usual standards in the measurement of labor market statistics, the variable *Unemployment* is measured as the unemployed men in the district divided by the sum of employed and unemployed.¹⁷ Although we think that labor market conditions could produce valuable insights for our research, the *Unemployment* variable should be treated cautiously considering the difficulty in its measurement in societies where the share of agrarian employment is significant and the proportion of informal workers is high, especially in rural areas, as it was the case in Argentina during the 40s. Moreover, there is no other source with information on unemployment rates in Argentina in this period.

The *Wage* variable refers to blue-collar and white collar worker's salaries taken from the Census 1947; it is calculated as the log of the ratio of the total wages paid to workers and employees in the industrial sector (in thousands of m\$n) divided by the number of workers and employees in

¹⁴ Data of land under tenancy comes from Censo Agropecuario 1947, Volume II, Cuadro 2, pages 2-23.

¹⁵ Alston and Gallo (2010: 188) say that "support of unions and rent controls for tenants" were an important part of "or the populist policies of Peron".

¹⁶ Data on population older than 13 and illiterate comes from Censo 1947, Volume I, pages 62, 114, 166, 190, 218, 240, 258, 300, 324, 348, 368, 390, 416, 436.

¹⁷ Data on occupational status of workers comes from Census 1947, Volume 1, Censo de Población, Cuadro 12 for each province, pages 47 and ss.

that sector.¹⁸ The policies put forward by the Farrell administration first, and by Perón later, mostly favored union workers, who acknowledged Perón's leadership, and those who were involved in the activities considered strategic, such as the light metal industries and textile industries (Newland and Cuesta, 2017; Belini, 2009; Bercoff and Meloni, 2024). A positive electoral response to Perón's candidacy from these groups of workers should be expected in those districts where these wages were higher than average.

The variable *Migrants*, the ratio between Argentine population born outside the district and the total population of the district¹⁹, accounts for the impact that internal migration - together with the consequent new social configuration - had on Perón's eventual triumph. Lastly, to take into account the size of the department and possible scale effects, we also included the variable *Lnpop* which is the natural logarithm of the population of the department.

Table 1 shows the most relevant descriptive statistics of the mentioned variables.²⁰

Table 1.

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Obs.</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. dev.</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
<i>Pjshare</i>	364	0.50	0.15	0.05	0.92
<i>Fraud</i>	233	0.28	0.19	-0.30	0.74
<i>Shareemptyob</i>	363	0.11	0.14	0.00	0.78
<i>Shareemp</i>	363	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.23
<i>Cattle</i>	344	9.37	10.98	0.00	75.96
<i>Renters</i>	344	0.03	0.03	0.00	0.29
<i>Illiteracy</i>	364	0.18	0.09	0.00	0.47
<i>Unemploy</i>	364	0.02	0.02	0.00	0.13
<i>Wag</i>	353	0.57	0.35	-0.69	2.51
<i>Migration</i>	364	0.14	0.09	0.01	0.46
<i>Pobtot</i>	364	9.26	1.13	6.40	12.48

From Table 1 we can see that the relatively small size of the departments, the dispersion of the percentage of votes for Perón is quite high; there is a large concentration of high percentages in the North of the country: nine of the districts with more of 75% of votes for Perón are in the

¹⁸ Censo de 1947, vol. 3, Censo Industrial, Cuadros 19 to 68, column "Sueldos y salarios pagados en efectivo", pages 66 to 96.

¹⁹ Censo de 1947, vol. 1, Población, Cuadro 5 for each province "Población total clasificada por sexo, origen y departamento", pages 54, 90, 158, 182, 210, 234, 254, 272, 292, 318, 340, 364, 382, 408, 432, 448, 464, 480, 496, 514, 538, 554, 572, 588 and 602.

²⁰ There is a total of 364 observations in the data set; the census does not provide information on Renter and Cattle variables for twenty districts (this explains the 344 observations for these variables). There is one department in the province of Buenos Aires, Tordillo (General Conesa), with only two industrial establishments that was reported within the department of Zarate in the census; ²⁰ this explains the 363 observations in in *Sharemp* and *Shareemptyob*. And there are ten additional departments with no industrial employees or workers (mentioned above) making the average wage a missing value and explaining the 353 observations for the log of wages.

provinces of Tucumán, Salta or Jujuy. Additionally, the zeros in the share of employees and workers correspond mostly to very poor departments in Catamarca, La Rioja and Salta where industrial activities were basically non-existent. There is only one district with zero unemployment, La Poma in Salta, with very low population levels and engaged mostly in subsistence agriculture. The average logarithm of wages of 0.5 implies that the average yearly wage of a district is 1902 m\$_n; this average is consistent with the information of industrial wages in 1946 from the Anuario Estadístico de la República Argentina (Harriague and Rayes 2024, p. 509) that reports a wage of 0.91 m\$_n per hour, making 7.28 m\$_n per day (8 hours), 160.16 m\$_n per month (22 days) and 1921.9 m\$_n per year.

4. Estimation methods and results

Our estimation expands the understanding of the nature of the Perón's electoral support in two ways: first, by estimating a regression model in which the unit of observation is the department, the dependent variable (the variable of interest) is Perón's electoral support, and the independent variables are political, social and economic characteristics of the departments.²¹ Although this method generates relevant intuitions of the possible characteristics of the districts that are correlated with political preferences, the interpretation of its results is not always straightforward because it can be vitiated by the ecological fallacy (as explained for instance by Lupu and Stokes, 2009). Hence, we expand the analysis by exploring a second strategy based on ecological inference using a subset of the independent variables related with the characteristics of the potential voters (literacy, migration, rurality and type of occupation).

In the regression model of the first strategy, the dependent variable is expressed as a proportion, such as the fraction of votes favoring a particular candidate, and hence, the bounded nature of the response must be considered. The linear regression model is not appropriate for situations where the response is restricted to the interval (0,1) since it may yield fitted values for the variable of interest that exceed its lower and upper bounds (Ferrari and Cribari-Neto 2004). In general, the recommended way to deal with this kind of variables is to use a beta regression that is a flexible way of modeling variables that are bounded between 0 and 1 like percentages (2004).²² The beta regression approach implies that the mean of the dependent variable conditional on

²¹ This approach based on ecological regressions has been pursued by Lewis (1971), Smith (1972), Germani (1973), Cantón and Jorrot (1998) and Alston and Gallo (2010) among others.

²² Beta regressions are used when the support of the dependent variable is the open interval (0, 1). When the support of the variable is the closed interval [0, 1], fractional regressions are suggested. In our case, even though theoretically, the percentage of votes can take the values 0 or 1, this is not plausible, and, in fact, it does not happen in any of the departments in our data set. For a theoretical description of the beta regressions see (Ferrari and Cribari-Neto, 2004). For an application, see Paolino (2001) and Castellani et al. (2012) among others.

covariates X , μ_x is a function of linear combinations of the covariates X . If the choice for the link function is the logit function, then $\mu_x = e^{(x)} / \{1 + e^{(x)}\}$.²³

The estimations of the beta-regression are presented in Table 2; the first column of the table replicates a specification similar in spirit to the one originally developed by Alston and Gallo (2010) and the results are quite similar to theirs: the variables associated with fraud, with the share of industrial workers and employees, and with the intensity of cattle production are statistically significant and have the expected sign; our version of the variable renters is not statistically significant, probably because we use a slightly different definition.²⁴

²³ The beta parameters were estimated using the *betareg* routine in Stata 18.

²⁴ Alston and Gallo (2010: 188) define the variable Renters as “the percentage of farms under some form of tenancy”.

Table 2. Ecological beta regressions

Link function : $g(u) = \log(u/(1-u))$				
Slink function : $g(u) = \log(u)$				
<i>PJ Share</i>	Eq. 1	Eq. 2	Eq. 3	Eq. 4
<i>fraud</i>	1.165 (0.000)	0.927 (0.000)		
<i>shareemptyob</i>	0.341 (0.273)	-0.298 (0.291)	0.087 (0.783)	
<i>shareemp</i>				5.641 (0.059)
<i>cattle</i>	-0.019 (0.000)	-0.009 (0.013)	-0.016 (0.000)	-0.015 (0.000)
<i>renters</i>	0.540	0.957 (0.539)	2.957 (0.010)	3.182 (0.005)
<i>illiteracy</i>	0.751	0.458 (0.345)	-0.897 (0.027)	-0.885 (0.028)
<i>unemploy</i>		7.801 (0.000)	7.158 (0.000)	7.075 (0.000)
<i>ln_wag</i>		0.378 (0.001)	0.346 (0.000)	0.287 (0.003)
<i>migration</i>		1.922 (0.000)	2.220 (0.000)	2.098 (0.000)
<i>ln_pobtot</i>		0.153 (0.000)	-0.023 (0.488)	-0.032 (0.329)
<i>Constant</i>	-0.216 (0.008)	-2.405 (0.000)	-0.248 (0.480)	-0.164 (0.64)
<i>Log likelihood</i>	153.24	186.56	208.93	210.74
<i>Number of obs</i>	232	232	333	333
<i>LR chi2(4)</i>	69.76	136.42	115.42	119.04
<i>Prob > chi2</i>	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

Note: p-values are shown between parentheses.²⁵

In the second column we expand the set of covariates, and we find that four socio-economic variables not included by Alston and Gallo (2010) are relevant to explain Perón's electoral success: average industrial wages, percentage of migrants, unemployment and total population. Our results indicate that support for the Peronist party was higher in districts with higher wages, higher percentage of migrants, higher unemployment and higher population; they also suggest that *Illiteracy* is not helping to predict that support. Additionally, in this specification the percentage of industrial workers and employees is not statistically significant.

²⁵ The 232 observations included in the first two regression correspond to the restricted sample with information about fraud. The 333 observations in the last two regressions correspond to the original 364 observations minus the 31 missing values explained in footnote 20.

In the specification of the third column, *Renters* and *Illiteracy* start to be statistically significant; the parameter associated to *Renters* is positive reinforcing the hypothesis, already advanced by Alston and Gallo (2010) that agricultural rent controls in the Farrel administration could have increased support for the regime that originated in the coup-d'etat of 1943. Additionally, the parameter associated with illiteracy becomes statistically significant and negative which is consistent with the results by Lupus and Stokes (2009). The last implication of this specification is that population size ceases to be statistically significant.

The results of the last exercise are presented in the fourth column where the log of the share of employees and workers is replaced by the log of the share of only employees; this variable appears significantly in the regression but makes the variable *Illiteracy* lose significance. A possible interpretation of the statistical relevance of the percentages of industrial employees is that districts with higher levels of sophistication and higher percentages of white-collar workers had a higher tendency to support the Peronist candidate.

Taking the four specifications together, we can say that the variables related with unemployment, wages and migration are robustly significant while the variables related with illiteracy, share of industrial workers or employees and population are significant in some specifications but not robustly so. A plausible hypothesis for the lack of robustness is the presence of multicollinearity that reduces the significance of some variables when other variables are included. The exploration of the matrix of correlation among some of the variables (table 3) suggests that this is probably an issue. Positive correlations between wages and share of employees, and migration are quite high as are the negative correlations between illiteracy and the share of employees and migration.

Table 3: Correlations between the independent variables

	<i>Shareemp</i>	<i>Shareemptyob</i>	<i>Illiteracy</i>	<i>Unemploy</i>	<i>Wages</i>	<i>Migration</i>
<i>Shareemp</i>	1					
<i>Shareemptyob</i>	0.8193	1				
<i>Illiteracy</i>	-0.3527	-0.2803	1			
<i>Unemploy</i>	-0.0052	0.0627	-0.0405	1		
<i>Wages</i>	0.4695	0.3934	-0.3031	-0.0448	1	
<i>Migration</i>	0.4674	0.4745	-0.3577	-0.0688	0.3353	1

The preliminary conclusion from this analysis is that the social determinants of the political support for Perón could be associated with departments with higher wages, higher literacy, and higher share of employees in the industrial sector. All these elements suggest that the electoral success of Perón was more probable in more modern and developed districts. This is also

consistent with the high rates of migration: in general, the stock of migrants increases in places with higher wages; additionally, the positive association between unemployment and votes for Perón could be connected to the hypothesis of the existence of some rigidities in the industrial labor market and the expectations of the unemployed in those districts to improve their condition under a Peronist administration.

For calculating the quantitative impact of the independent variables on the dependent variable, we can rely on the marginal analysis. The marginal analysis provides insights into the relative magnitude of the response of the dependent variable (in our case *Pjshare*) to changes in the different independent variables; given the previous discussion we focus on the variables *Fraud*, *Unemployment*, *Illiteracy*, *Migration* and *Wages*. For doing so we need to separate the independent variables that are expressed in percentages (*Illiteracy*, *Unemployment*, and *Migrants*) or in logs (*Wages*) from those expressed in levels (*Fraud*). For the first set of variables, we need to estimate the marginal effect in terms of percentage points of a change in one percentage point in the dependent variable. For the variable *Fraud* we use a variation of the estimation command to focus on semi-elasticities.²⁶

Table 4

BLOCK 1: Marginal effects from specification 2						
	dy/ex	St. error	z	P>z	95% conf. interval	
<i>Fraud</i>	0.063548	0.012077	5.26	0.000	0.039878	0.087218
	dy/dx	St. error	z	P>z	95% conf. interval	
<i>Illiteracy</i>	0.114498	0.121127	0.95	0.345	-0.12291	0.351902
<i>Unemployment</i>	1.948919	0.48316	4.03	0.000	1.001943	2.895895
<i>Wages</i>	0.094417	0.027533	3.43	0.001	0.040453	0.148381
<i>Migration</i>	0.480057	0.109873	4.37	0.000	0.264711	0.695403
BLOCK 2: Marginal effects from specification 4						
	dy/dx	St. error	z	P>z	95% conf. interval	
<i>Illiteracy</i>	-0.22129	0.100807	-2.2	0.028	-0.41887	-0.02371
<i>Unemployment</i>	1.768623	0.453222	3.9	0	0.880324	2.656922
<i>Wages</i>	0.071779	0.024049	2.98	0.003	0.024644	0.118914
<i>Migration</i>	0.52454	0.100035	5.24	0	0.328475	0.720605

Table 4 presents the analysis of the margin of responses of the main covariates in our regressions; the first block of the table corresponds to the marginal analysis of the second

²⁶ In Stata the *margins* command uses the option *dyex()* when the dependent variable is a proportion and the independent variable is in levels and the option *dydx()* when both variables are in percentages or logarithmic (StataCorp 2023, p. 1588 and 1611).

specification in Table 3 where the marginal change has been calculated as a semi-elasticity in the case of the variable *Fraud* and as the ratio of percentage changes in the case of the other variables; the second block of the table corresponds to the fourth specification. Regarding the second specification, the analysis suggests that some socioeconomic variables can have a larger impact than political concerns about fraud. While one percentage point change in the *Fraud* variable generates 0.06 more percentage points in votes for PJ, one percentage point more of unemployment was linked to 1.9 more percentage points for the PJ. In the fourth specification of Table 3, *Unemployment* is still generating the largest marginal impact (1.76) while *Migration* has also a quite relevant effect with 0.52 higher percentage points for the Peronist party for every one extra percentage point of industrial employees in the labor force.

Overall, the regression results and the marginal analysis confirm that political concerns on electoral fraud can be a relevant factor in shaping electoral preferences in favor of the Peronist party in the 1946 election but also that socioeconomic factors are extremely important. Districts with a higher probability to support Perón in the election were characterized by some degree of socioeconomic modernization: more employees in the industrial sector, higher wages, higher literacy rates and higher percentage of migrant workers, together with higher levels of unemployment.

4.1. The ecological inference approach

The econometric models used so far provided some insights on the factors that led to Perón's triumph at the district level suggesting that the most economically advanced regions are the ones that provided him the strongest support. A non-trivial limitation of this kind of analysis is that it bears the risk of ecological fallacy and model specification errors (Gelman et al. 2001): even though it provides information about district averages, its results cannot be extrapolated to individual behavior.

Thus, to solve these limitations, the second main contribution of this paper is the adoption of an ecological inference approach to estimate the primary attributes of Perón's constituency. This methodology seeks to infer individual characteristics by using aggregate data that reflects the behavior of the entire population. Essentially, it allows us to identify the significant attributes of Perón's early voters by drawing insights from collective sources. In essence, it facilitates the identification of the pertinent features of Perón's supporters by extracting insights from aggregate data.

This methodology relied on an analysis of geographic units, such as provinces, counties, or electoral districts, rather than on electoral facts of an individual voter. This choice was primarily

due to the obvious lack of available records concerning personal voting decisions. Although some researchers regard this methodology as controversial, with Cho and Gaines (2004) being a good example, it is equally important to note that, as emphasized by King et al. (2004), despite the uncertainties and information loss associated with aggregation, the ecological inference method is indispensable in various academic fields.

Specifically, King (1997) pioneered the first Bayesian approach to Ecological Inference, which combines deterministic information (used in previous attempts to estimate individual behavior from aggregate data) with statistical methods. The model estimates parameters using maximum likelihood, while global proportions are derived from district-level estimates weighted by population. However, as King and Robert (2012) noted, due to the lack of individual-level information, no ecological inference method will consistently yield accurate results.

Several studies have applied King's ecological inference estimation model as a strong tool to delineate the rise of hegemonic leaders to power and have found key features in their voters, such as gender, income, age, and religion. Notable examples include the work of Kopstein and Wittenberg (2003) on communist Poland, Lupu (2010) in relation to Chavez in Venezuela, Blaydes (2011) focusing on Egypt, and De Broamhead (2014) examining the elections in Germany during the interwar period.

Therefore, we employed King's solution to address the ecological inference problem, yielding significant insights that will enhance our comprehension of the electoral process in Argentina during 1946. Given that the method does not permit the inclusion of control variables, we focus on particular subgroups to examine the data. In particular, we sort the available data in specific subclasses. These categories point at features that will lead us to understand better the process of Perón's ascent to power. Specifically, four distinct aggregate indicators derived from the 1947 National Population Census were selected to reconstruct the essential characteristics of Perón's voters. These indicators include the Literacy Rate, Migrant Rate, Urban Rate, and Type of Occupation.

In other words, the model will allow us to obtain the proportion of literates or illiterates that voted for Perón, the percentage of internal migrants vs. non migrants supporting him in the presidential election, the share of urban and rural voters choosing Perón's ticket and the proportion of industrial employees compared with the rest of the workers that backed him up in that crucial election. The assessments related to King's model are detailed in Table 5. It is important to emphasize that, given the Ecological Inference Model is not a multivariate analysis, careful consideration of all possible cross effects is necessary.

**Table 5. King's Ecological Inference Model Estimates.
Percentage of Votes Obtained by Perón sorted by Type of Voter.
1946 Presidential Election.**

	<i>Literacy Rate</i>		<i>Migrant Rate</i>		<i>Living Area</i>		<i>Type of Occupation</i>	
	<i>Illiterate</i>	<i>Literate</i>	<i>Migrants</i>	<i>Non-Migrants</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>Industrial Employment</i>	<i>Rest</i>
<i>Share of Votes</i>	50.9 (0.0495)	54.2 (0.0068)	75.3 (0.0289)	46.7 (0.0095)	57.6 (0.0068)	48.4 (0.0077)	66.7 (0.0290)	50.7 (0.0071)
<i>Resamp</i>	21		32		17		21	
<i>N</i>	364		364		364		364	

Notes: 1) Model Standard Errors are shown between parentheses. 2) Resamp values indicate the number of sampling iterations required to produce valid estimates of the quantities of interest.

The findings reveal noteworthy insights that highlight the characteristics of Perón's first constituency. Firstly, in accordance with the research conducted by Lupu and Stokes (2009), it is evident that, contrary to prevailing assumptions, although not in an extreme way, *Literates* cast their votes for Perón at a higher rate than *Illiterates*, with percentages of 54.2% and 50.9% respectively.

Secondly, when we sort the voting age population considering whether the voter is an internal migrant or not, the results are profuse. In fact, the data indicates that *Migrants* were significant contributors to Perón's electoral success, as three out of four migrants supported him, in contrast to the 46.7% backing he received from non-migrants.

Thirdly, when taking into account the voter's living area, the estimates show clear results as *Urban* voters emerged as a crucial demographic in Perón's victory. In fact, outcomes indicate a greater propensity of them voting for Perón compared to their rural counterparts, with support levels of 57.6% and 48.4% respectively. These results correspond with the strong partisan dynamics that the opposition maintained in rural areas during the 1946 election as pointed out by Smith (1972) and Little (1973a, 1973b).

Finally, it is noteworthy that two-thirds of blue-collar workers voted for Perón, while only half of other worker categories extended their support²⁷. It is worth noting that this finding is consistent with the conclusions, as mentioned earlier, of various scholars, such as Snow (1969), Germani (1973), Cantón (1973), and Halperín Donghi (1975), who maintain that Peronism

²⁷ We have separately estimated this variable for Industrial Workers and Industrial Employees, as the Census categorizes Industrial Employment as the total of these two sub-groups. The estimated outcomes are similar for Industrial Workers, while Industrial Employees exhibit an even stronger inclination towards supporting Perón. However, because the Census does not clearly delineate between these two sub-groups, we will present only the estimates for the combined total of both categories.

emerged as a political movement representing class interests, primarily backed by the industrial labor force.

5. Concluding Remarks

The ascent of Perón to power, which arguably positioned him as the most significant political figure of the 20th century in Argentina, has been the subject of extensive debate throughout the decades. However, and interestingly, it is noteworthy that a well-rounded and stylized model that encompasses socioeconomic, historical, and political dimensions, along with a study of the core attributes of his first supporters, has not been formulated until now.

The country faced, at the end of the first half of the 20th century, a gap between the supply of political options and the constituency's demand for options. The three traditional political parties, namely the Socialists, the Radicals (UCR) and the *Conservatives*, were unable to adequately address the concerns of a citizenry that was growing more skeptical of the republican system's effectiveness. The electoral fraud that characterized earlier decades, along with the reaction against the established socioeconomic framework centered on rural interests and agro-pastoral production, led to a growing demand for a new political agenda. Perón skillfully leveraged into this sentiment by adopting a more populist strategy.

But, what were the key characteristics of the districts that increased the probability of his electoral triumph? And additionally, what unique personal characteristics motivated voters to choose Perón in his initial presidential election? While these questions may appear only subtly different, they are based on distinct theoretical frameworks: ecological regressions and on ecological inference; the more recent examples of these methodologies are Alston and Gallo (2010) and Lupus and Stokes (2009) respectively. We tried to narrow the gap between these approaches by estimating models that complement each other to provide a richer understanding of the possible underlying motivations that lead Perón to become such an influential political figure.

The findings of the regression analysis suggest that counties that displayed characteristics of socioeconomic modernization were more inclined to endorse Perón in the 1946 election. These areas had a significant presence of employees in the industrial sector, higher average wages, improved literacy rates, and a substantial percentage of migrant workers, coupled with elevated unemployment figures. The support for the new leader and his political platform was more attractive in the districts where the socioeconomic transformations of the previous decade linked to relatively rapid industrialization and urbanization were more intense, eroding more clearly the traditional political parties. This identification of the average characteristics of the districts is for

the first time clearly confirmed by the results of the estimation of ecological inference models: literate individuals, internal migrants, industrial employees, and urban voters were pivotal in Perón's first electoral triumph.

Furthermore, the estimates also confirm that political concerns on the historical electoral fraud of the previous decade and the relevance of specific interests in agro pastoral activities were relevant factors in shaping electoral preferences in favor of Perón in his first election.

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