

Teachers' Strikes in Argentina: Partisan Alignments and Public-sector Labor Relations*

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In a context of increasing teachers' militancy in Argentina, this article provides the first empirical analysis of teachers' strikes in all twenty-four Argentine provinces during the 1990s. Using a cross-provincial statistical analysis, it explains the wide variation across provinces and across time of Argentine teachers' strikes. It demonstrates that political alignments between provincial governors and teachers' unions explain these patterns better than organizational and institutional variables, which strongly shape public-sector labor relations in other countries. We emphasize the discretion of provincial governors, for both the application of labor regulations and budgetary appropriations in the politicization of labor relations in the education sector. Our findings confirm the politicization of provincial public-sector labor relations in Argentina, especially after the decentralization of education resulted in the provincialization of teachers' protests.

In Argentina, a country characterized by ample social protests and a powerful tradition of labor militancy, teachers have been the most militant sector since the adoption of structural reforms in 1989.¹ This phenomenon has had wider reach because public-sector militancy, and especially teachers' militancy, grew in Latin America as a whole during the 1990s, to the point that teachers' protests forced the Peruvian government to declare a state of siege in 2003. The intensity of teachers' protests in Argentina is shown by the fact that, on average, 150 days per year were lost to strikes in all twenty-four provinces between the return of democracy in 1984 and 2000. However, the variation—across provinces and across time—of Argen-

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tine teachers' militancy is wide: while 385 class days were lost in all twenty-four provinces in 1989, only forty-six days were lost in 1992. Moreover, whereas each province lost on average 106 days of class between 1984 and 2000, the province of La Pampa lost only a single day of class during this period while the province of Tucumán lost 343 days.

The increase in Argentine teachers' militancy is related to their declining work conditions as a result of fiscal adjustment, whereas its growth relative to other economic sectors is associated with the diminishing militancy of other sectors of the economy (McGuire 1996). Policy reforms, such as decentralization, also increase teachers' militancy against reforms that challenge their income security (Murillo 1999). However, these reasons are insufficient to explain the wide variation across provinces and time in Argentine teachers' strike activity, which is the puzzle that we address in this article.

By focusing on the puzzle of what explains the various patterns of Argentine teachers' militancy, this article contributes to the literature on public-sector labor relations in Latin America and to our understanding about provincial protests in Argentina. Because teachers are public service providers, their militancy affects the daily lives of families whose children cannot attend school, rather than the profit of employers (although these families vote for teachers' employers, i.e., governors). In the United States, the public character of teachers' employment reaffirms the importance of labor regulations on influencing teachers' behavior (Freeman 1986). However, we demonstrate here that in Argentina the patterns of teachers' militancy are better explained by political alignments between public employers and teachers' unions than by labor institutions. We suggest that executive discretion in labor relations generates uncertainty about the working of formal institutions, whereas the strong social links between Argentine political parties and labor unions make political alignments—between governors and provincial teachers' unions—influential on explaining patterns of teachers' strike activity.

More broadly, teachers' strikes reflect a larger but uneven pattern of provincialization of protests. In the case of teachers, this process resulted from the decentralization of education, which was part of the social reform agenda of the 1990s in Argentina. Due to decentralization of social services, since the 1990s labor protests have concentrated on provincial public sectors and included not only strikes, but also urban riots and road-blockades.² The combination of decentralization and public-sector adjustment caused Argentine teachers to suffer from the contrast between their middle-class status and the proletarianization of their work conditions while experiencing the accumulation of salary arrears by provincial employers. Indeed, a teachers' strike caused by unpaid salaries started the so-called "Santiagazo" of 1993, which became the first urban riot of Argentina in the 1990s.³

This article is organized into four sections. The first section reviews different labor theories to explain patterns of variation in Argentine teachers' militancy. The second section presents the organization of labor relations in the Argentine education sector. The third section tests our argument using a data set of teachers' strikes

in all Argentine provinces between 1996 and 2000. The final section concludes with the implications of this study.

Explaining Public Teachers' Strikes

To understand teachers' patterns of militancy, it is crucial to focus on the public character of their employment. The traditional business cycle theories relate labor militancy to the cost of striking and the potential benefits of winning a strike. These theories predict more strikes during boom times, and the opposite during periods of low economic performance (Aschenfelter and Johnson 1969). In the private sector, economic booms increase employer demand for workers, because the cost to employers of losing a production day and employer wage budgets both increase. Thus, labor militancy should decrease, other things being equal, as economic growth declines and unemployment grows. However, we cannot extend this logic to public-sector teachers because they enjoy job stability, their jobs are not exposed to trade competition, and their wages are not usually vulnerable to economic downturns, although their demand is affected by the seasonality of the school year.⁴

According to Garrett and Way (1999), because public-sector employees are not exposed to trade competition, they become more militant than private-sector workers as economic exposure increases. That is, the cost of striking for public employees decreases relative to that of private workers with increasing economic liberalization, as experienced in Argentina in the 1990s.⁵ However, the relative increase in public-sector militancy does not explain the variation in patterns of teachers' strike activity within the same country, which is the puzzle that inspired this paper. Thus, we turn to labor characteristics that can vary across provinces to explain variation in teachers' militancy.

Whereas economic conditions can vary by province, their effect on public-sector workers is limited. Labor strength, by contrast, can vary across provinces and should affect the probability of strike success and, therefore, patterns of militancy. Other things being equal, employers who know about labor strength should preemptively give in to strong unions to avoid suffering the losses generated by the threatened strike.⁶ That is, labor strength should be negatively associated with militancy because strong unions do not need to exercise their muscle to obtain concessions from employers. Due to the requisite of union registration and automatic deduction of union dues from salaries in Argentina, employers' information about labor strength—with its negative effect on militancy—can be assumed for public-sector employees.

Labor strength is affected by organizational variables that facilitate collective action, such as unionization rates, union monopolies, and centralized labor organization. Whereas unionization increases the representativeness of labor unions and the number of workers they can involve in the strike (Francozi 1995), union monopoly reduces coordination problems and facilitates bargaining by reducing inter-union competition (Golden 1993). Centralization, on the other hand, is a national-level characteristic related to collective bargaining (Cameron 1984; Calmfors and Driffil 1998), and thus of little use for explaining variation in teachers' militancy across provinces.

In addition, labor regulations affect union behavior in the public sector by changing the costs of a strike or by improving mechanisms for non-conflictive bargaining. In discussing public-sector unionism in the United States, Freeman (1986) argues that unionization grows where state labor regulations are more favorable, whereas alternatives to strike, such as arbitration, as well as state-level regulations on strike activity affect labor militancy. Because public-sector employment is less exposed to business cycles and trade competition, labor institutions should have a stronger effect on the behavior of public-sector than private-sector unions.⁷

Beyond organizational and institutional effects, political exchange theories assume that political alliances between national-level unions and labor-allied political parties change the strategic behavior of labor unions. Based on their trust of labor allies and expectations about long-term benefits, unions increase their short-term tolerance for less satisfactory work conditions. Trust is sustained by previous experiences and leads to lower militancy when allies are in power and access to the state can be used for obtaining concessions. Pizzorno (1978), Korpi (1978), and Hibbs (1978) have advanced this argument and demonstrate its empirical standing for Western European countries. In addition to this effect of trust in extending time horizons, party links also provide informal channels of communications and generate interactions in multiple arenas, which increases the benefits of keeping credibility for labor allies (Murillo 2001).

Following this literature, we argue that political alignments should have a stronger effect on public- than on private-sector labor relations because public-sector employers are more likely to be concerned about political sustainability than profit maximization. Indeed, Hibbs (1976) argues that government intervention in labor markets causes the politicization of strikes in Italy. Hence, we should expect the public character of the employer to further politicize labor relations (Pencavel 1997; Cox Edwards 1997) and thereby increase the influence of political alignments in defining attitudes between employers and employees.

We expect political alignments to explain the patterns of teachers' militancy in Argentina because, in addition to their being public employees, a context of executive discretion—in the application of labor regulations and the allocation of budgetary expenditures—increases the value of informal channels of communication, trust based on previous experiences, and credibility based on multiple interactions, and therefore of partisan links. Moreover, democratic governments in general, and Argentine provincial governors in particular, are elected as party candidates, thus increasing the use of partisan identities as a tool to generate expectations about their behavior. In Argentina, political parties have a strong tradition of linkages with society in general, and with unions in particular (James 1988; Levitsky 2003) reinforcing the importance of political alignments based on partisan affiliation.⁸ Although a majority of unions are affiliated with the Peronist party in Argentina, education is a sector characterized by its political pluralism, and the leaders of provincial teachers' unions have different party identities (Vázquez and Balduzzi 2000).⁹

In sum, organizational, institutional, or political exchange theories could be used to explain the puzzle of variation in Argentine teachers' militancy across provinces and time. We expect political alignments to provide a better explanation because Argentine governors enjoy high discretion in the application of institutions that

increases the value of political alignments due to the strong links established between political parties and labor unions in Argentina. In the next section, we describe the Argentine education and labor-relations system to show that the province is the appropriate unit of analysis to evaluate our hypotheses, which are tested in the following section.

Argentine Public Education and the Provincial Analysis

Considering that in Argentina, primary teachers' unions have traditionally been organized at the provincial level, and that provincial governors are the employers of teachers and the executors of labor regulations, the province is the appropriate level of analysis for testing alternative theories about public education labor relations. Moreover, this subnational statistical comparison allows us to keep national historic and institutional variables constant, thereby facilitating the obtaining of findings that support valid causal inferences (Snyder 2001).

The Argentine primary and secondary education system is decentralized at the provincial level. Federal and provincial-level systems co-existed until 1978, when the national government began to transfer the administration of federal-level primary education to the provinces. In 1992, secondary education followed suit.¹⁰ The 1993 Federal Education Law (No. 24,049) gives the provinces a leading role in financial and administrative matters, including labor relations and teachers' career ladders. Provincial governments determine public education budgets, teacher salaries, working conditions, and regulations. The federal government sets the national curriculum, evaluates the system, implements compensatory programs and, in conjunction with the provinces, establishes teacher-education programs.

In labor relations, provincial governors have the power to decide on the legality of strikes, to fix the amount of pay strikers lose, and to call for compulsory arbitration to halt conflicts. However, they also enjoy high levels of discretion in their application of labor regulations. The application of provincial decree 2202 of 1992, which established attendance bonuses in the province of Buenos Aires, illuminates this discretion because it was suspended by a governor in 1994 and reactivated by another in 2002. In Tierra del Fuego province, the process of union registration, which should be linked officially only to the fulfillment of specific requirements, provides another example. In 2000, the governor tried to deny registration to the largest union and give it to a friendlier one.

Provincial governors also enjoy discretion over educational expenditures, whereas provincial budgets are relatively isolated from the cycles of their own economies. Provincial budgets depend on a revenue-sharing system whose formula results from the historical bargaining between the provinces and the federal government (Eaton 2001, Cetrángolo, and Jiménez 1996; Jones, Sanguinetti, and Tommasi 2000). Revenue sharing pays over 71 percent of provincial expenditures but has little relation to locally collected taxes—which in most provinces are less than 25 percent of revenue—or population shares, and generates such fiscal imbalances that provincial fiscal deficits averaged 5.9 percent of their expenditures between 1997 and 2000 (although there was provincial variation).¹¹ Because the governor has discretion over 90 percent of provincial resources derived from revenue-sharing, public-sector salaries are more affected by fiscal management than by the performance of

the local economy. Indeed, in many provinces, teachers' salaries also include provincial attendance bonuses, which are established by provincial executive decrees, and affect strike costs because they are contingent on not missing days of class.¹²

Traditionally, most primary teacher unions have been organized at the provincial level, although a majority of them are members of a national confederation called CTERA (Confederation of Education Workers of the Argentine Republic).¹³ Furthermore, as public service providers, teachers suffer principal-agent tensions between hurting families whose children miss school, and pressing public employers, who are voted into office by these families. Because the government will only internalize the costs of strikes if it expects that the alienation of families will have negative electoral consequences, teachers should consider public support in defining their militancy. In turn, public support should be related to public perceptions about the provincial fiscal management.

A Cross-Provincial Test on Teachers' Militancy

In this section, we provide the first (to our knowledge) empirical study of subnational variation in Argentine teachers' militancy. We test the alternative theories explaining the puzzle of variation in Argentine teachers' militancy across provinces and across time after the decentralization of education in 1993. We used data collected for the first time on the variables of interests, although limitations in the availability of information about some explanatory variables reduced the scope of our study to the 1996–2000 period. We first explain the variables we used to test the alternative theories discussed above and then provide the tests and their interpretation.

Francozi (1989) explains why the quantitative literature focusing on political variables as determinants of patterns of strike activity has traditionally used the number of strike days rather than the number of strikes or strikers. The duration of strikes provides a better measure of conflictive relations in the public sector, including the impact of protests on families. It is also the best measure to assess political effects that go beyond the opportunity provided by a favorable context to increase wages suggested by business-cycles theories for the private sector. Moreover, due to its defensive character, the dimension of protests against public-sector adjustment should be measured on the impact of the strike beyond its occurrence.

Therefore, the first measure of our dependent variable—patterns of teacher militancy—is the number of class days lost per year in each province due to primary teachers' strikes (*duration*), because we are interested in the patterns of their militancy rather than on the occurrence of strikes; a one-month strike should be harder to sustain than a one-day strike. However, we also test our models on the number of primary teachers' strikes per year in each province (*number*).¹⁴

To measure *political alignment* between provincial governors and provincial primary teachers' unions, we have coded all twenty-four provinces on a dummy variable that takes on the value of 1 when the governor and the union leader are of the same political party, and 0 otherwise.¹⁵ Appendix 3 summarizes the values assigned. Union leaders varied in party affiliation because of the political pluralism of this sector, although a majority of them gathered under the center-left CTERA.¹⁶ Collective bargaining takes place between the employer (provincial government)

and the union leader, making their relationship crucial for the outcome of this process. In particular, the asymmetry of information between leaders and rank and file at the time of collective bargaining reduces the immediate role of the latter in this process (Golden 1997; Crouch 1982). Although union leaders should also consider the preferences of union members because they are afraid of being replaced by discontent rank and file in the next union election (Murillo 2001), we have not been able to find adequate measures for those pressures.

We also include the control variable *legislative support*, which measures the percentage of legislators from the governor's party in the provincial Chamber of Representatives and affects the capacity of the governor. If the governor's party loses control of this chamber, opposition from the legislature would reduce his/her ability to exercise discretion and thereby increase the politicization of labor relations. Hence, we expect it to have a positive effect on teachers' militancy.¹⁷

To test the direct effect of contextual conditions—since teachers' incomes are relatively isolated from provincial economies—we measure the percentage of *change in teachers' real earnings* in relation to the prior year. We expect that negative changes in real earnings increase teachers' protests. We also include the provincial *unemployment* rate and *attendance bonuses* (as a percentage of teachers' salaries) as control variables. Because we are analyzing public-sector workers, we have no expectations on the sign of *unemployment*, but business-cycle theories would predict a negative relation with militancy.¹⁸ We expect that as the *attendance bonuses* variable as a share of teachers' income increases, teachers strike costs raise, and thereby militancy drops.

We also test the effect of organizational variables affecting labor strength. We use *unionization* to measure the ratio of unionized teachers to the number of teachers within a province and thereby labor strength, which we expect to be negatively related to militancy.¹⁹ To assess the effect of union monopoly or fragmentation over collective action we use the variable *union fragmentation*, which measures the number of teachers' unions per province holding more than 10 percent of total union members.²⁰ We use 10 percent as a cut-off point under the assumption that very small unions are unable to generate coordination problems if a large number of workers are members of one large union that bears the costs of collective action. Thus, we expect *union fragmentation* to be positively related to militancy.

We test the effect of institutional variables by using *legal recognition* (LR) as a dummy variable, where 1 denotes that the principal provincial teachers' union has a legal monopoly of representation and 0 otherwise.²¹ Following institutional theories, we expect that unions with legal recognition should be more successful at non-conflictive bargaining and less likely to incur in militancy. The Table 1 summarizes our expectations regarding the effects of each variable on the dependent variables.

Although we have not found adequate data to measure popular support for primary teachers' demands in blaming the governor for fiscal mismanagement, the effect of strikes on families cannot be understated. We use as proxies both the number of days lost in strikes by other public-sector workers and the provincial fiscal deficit as a percentage of revenues in order to capture perceptions about the governor, but neither of these is proximate enough and we find no public opinion or arrears data. We ran our models with these two proxies and the results were robust to their inclusion although we are not presenting them here.²² The descriptive sta-

TABLE 1
Expectations Predicted by Labor Theories on Teachers' Militancy.

Variables	Expected Sign	Explanation
Political alignment between the governor and the teachers' union	NEGATIVE	Political exchange and executive discretion politicize militancy.
Legislative support	POSITIVE	Reduces horizontal accountability and increases governor's discretion.
Attendance bonus (as a % of teachers' wage)	NEGATIVE	Control variable affecting the cost of strike.
Real provincial wage increase	NEGATIVE	Control variable affecting teachers' work conditions
Provincial unemployment rate	UNCLEAR	Business cycle (negative), but unclear in public sector.
Unionization of teachers	NEGATIVE	Labor strength reduces the need to exercise "muscle."
Union fragmentation	POSITIVE	Coordination problems weaken labor and make bargaining more difficult.
Union legal recognition	NEGATIVE	Institutions facilitate bargaining.

tistics of the variables and their provincial means are found in Appendixes 1 and 2. We also add a vector of time effects and lag the observations on unionization and real wage variation by one year to account for the temporal sequence of causality. Year dummies are included to account for variations in economic conditions over the course of our time period. Whereas 1996 and 1997 were years of relative growth, recession characterized the subsequent three years.

There are three salient aspects of the data we studied. First, the values of our dependent variables—both the number of class days lost due to teacher strikes and the number of strikes—are nonnegative integers or *counts*. For some provinces, the value of this variable varies from zero to many. The "zero" value is the usual outcome because strikes are rare events; almost 55 percent of the observations were zero.²³ Second, we have repeated observations (five years) for the same twenty-four provinces. That is, our data form a combined time-series cross-section *panel*.

TABLE 2
Explaining Argentine Teachers' Strikes, 1996–2000

Dependent Variable	Duration (Negative Binomial)	Number of Strikes (Poisson)
Unionization of Teachers	0.931 (0.913)	0.688 (0.733)
Union Fragmentation	0.169 (0.226)	0.161 (0.176)
Union Legal Recognition	-0.383 (0.302)	0.057 (0.271)
Political Alignment	-0.960*** (0.335)	-1.017*** (0.278)
Legislative Support	-0.190 (1.201)	0.397 (0.916)
Attendance Bonus	-0.089*** (0.024)	-0.075*** (0.019)
Real Wage Change	-0.066** (0.029)	-0.041* (0.022)
Unemployment Rate	0.120*** (0.036)	0.081*** (0.028)
<i>Year dummies</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Log Likelihood	-215.843	-147.245

Number of observations=120. *Statistically significant at the .10 level; ** at the .05 level; *** at the .01 level. Standard errors are in parentheses.

For the dependent variable class days lost (duration), the estimated ancillary parameter and its standard error are 0.601 and (0.236), respectively. The probability we would observe this data under a Poisson model is virtually zero. (Likelihood ratio test of ancillary parameter = 0, chi squared (1) = 70.59). For the dependent variable number of strikes, the estimated ancillary parameter and its standard error are 0.038 and (0.083). We cannot reject the Poisson model. (Likelihood ratio test of ancillary parameter = 0, chi squared (1) = 0.26).

Third, the data, however, span a short period of time, and the values of some of the independent variables in our model did not change over that period (i.e. *union fragmentation*, *legal recognition* and *attendance bonus*), or they did so very sporadically, such as *political alignment*, because only six provinces changed their governor

in the studied period. Thus, we believe that the fixed effects (within) provinces model is not an appropriate test method to test our hypotheses.

The preponderance of zeros and the clearly discrete nature of the dependent variable suggest that least squares and the linear model are not the appropriate specifications. Therefore we use a Poisson model,²⁴ as suggested by Cameron and Trivedi (1986, 1998). The Poisson model assumes that the conditional mean of the outcome is equal to the conditional variance. This assumption holds for the dependent variable *number* (of strikes), but we find over-dispersion (i.e. the conditional variance exceeds the conditional mean) for *duration* (number of class days lost).²⁵ Therefore, we use a Negative Binomial model for this dependent variable (Table 2).²⁶

Our results show that *political alignment* has the expected negative effect on militancy—measured both as *duration* and *number*—and that this relation is statistically significant. By contrast, the control variable *legislative support*, which measures executive capacity at the provincial level, does not have a significant effect on either dependent variable.²⁷

The alternative explanatory variables affecting labor strength are not as good as *political alignment* in explaining militancy. *Unionization*, *union fragmentation*, and *legal recognition* are not statistically significant and in some cases they do not have the expected signs. Yet, the control variables, *attendance bonus* and *real wage change*, have the expected signs and are statistically significant, whereas *unemployment rate* is significant with a negative sign that is discussed below.

To assess the magnitude of the effects produced by our explanatory variables on teachers' militancy, we present the discrete change in the expected value of the number of class day lost (*duration*) and the number of strikes (*number*) for a unit of change in the regressors computed with all variables held at their means (because neither the Poisson nor the Negative Binomial regression models are linear) in Table 3a and b.²⁸

As shown in Table 3a and b, *political alignment* has the strongest substantive effect on the two dependent variables, and as expected reduces the propensity of teachers to strike. When the governor and the teachers' unions are politically aligned, the province loses 1.4 fewer days to strikes per year than in provinces without political alignment. *Real wage improvement* and *attendance bonuses* as a percentage of income also have the expected negative effects. In terms of magnitude, a ten percent increase in real wages during year t is correlated with 1.1 fewer days lost to strikes during year $t+1$ whereas for every ten percent increase in attendance bonuses as a percentage of wages, we expect 1.2 fewer days lost to strikes.

The effect of provincial unemployment is suggestive because it is significant and with a positive sign. Because we are controlling by wage change, this finding highlights the difference between public and private-sector militancy. That job stability tempers the risks of striking in a deteriorated economic environment explains the positive relation. In fact, higher unemployment reduces teachers' exit alternatives into the general labor market without affecting the demand for teachers.²⁹ Hence, it seems as if teachers are more likely to "voice" their concerns with active militancy when they are suffering economic hardship and have fewer "exit" alternatives; higher unemployment in the economy and their own job stability are mutually reinforcing in generating incentives for protest.

TABLE 3
Summary of the Expected and Actual Effects of IVs on Teacher Militancy

a) Dependent Variable: Class days lost due to strikes. (Results correspond to negative binomial regression.)			
Independent Variables	Expected Sign	Coefficient	Expected change in the number of class days lost
Political alignment between the governor and the teachers' union	NEGATIVE	-0.960***	-1.42
Attendance bonus (as a % of teachers' wage)	NEGATIVE	-0.089***	-0.12
Real provincial wage increase	NEGATIVE	-0.066**	-0.11
Provincial unemployment rate	UNCLEAR	0.120***	0.21
Unionization of teachers	NEGATIVE	0.931	-
Union fragmentation	POSITIVE	0.169	-
Union legal recognition	NEGATIVE	-0.383	-
b) Dependent Variable: Number of strikes. (Results correspond to Poisson regression)			
Independent Variables	Expected Sign	Coefficient	Expected change in the number of strikes
Political alignment between the governor and the teachers' union	NEGATIVE	-1.017***	-1.05
Attendance bonus (as a % of teachers' wage)	NEGATIVE	-0.075***	-0.07
Real provincial wage increase	NEGATIVE	-0.041*	-0.04
Provincial unemployment rate	UNCLEAR	0.081***	0.10
Unionization of teachers	NEGATIVE	0.688	-
Union fragmentation	POSITIVE	0.161	-
Union legal recognition	NEGATIVE	0.057	-

*** Statistically significant at the 99% level of confidence; ** at 95%; * at 90.

Table 3b presents the magnitude of the effect produced by the same explanatory variables on our alternative dependant variable: the number of strikes (*number*). *Political alignment* between the governor and the provincial teachers' union has the strongest substantive effect of all explanatory variables by reducing the expected yearly number of strikes per province by 1.

These findings support our argument that, across all Argentine provinces, teacher's militancy is negatively related to political alignments between provincial governors and teachers' unions, even when controlling for organizational and institutional variables that also affect labor militancy. Political alignments, therefore, influence teachers' militancy in a public sector with considerable executive discretion over labor regulations and public budgets. The public-sector character of teachers' employment also explains that the provincial unemployment rate has a positive effect on teachers' militancy, controlling for wage conditions and attendance bonuses.

By contrast, we do not find strong support for theories based on institutional or organizational variables affecting labor capacity for collective action. We suspect that executive discretion diminishes the effect of institutional and organizational variables by decreasing their value in forming actors' expectations. Furthermore, we believe that by contributing to the politicization of labor relations in the education sector, executive discretion explains the influence of political alignments as alternative mechanisms to define expectations about the use of executive discretion regarding the allocation of education resources and application of labor regulations.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on public-sector labor relations by demonstrating that political alignment provides a better explanation for the puzzle of variation in Argentine teachers' militancy than institutional or organizational variables. In doing so, it highlights the politicization caused not only by public sector employment—protected from trade competition and business cycles—but also by executive discretion on labor relations. We suspect that it is executive discretion what weakens the effect of institutional and organizational variables, especially because the requisite of union registration provides employers with knowledge about labor strength and fragmentation. Our study confirms others about the politicization of labor relations produced by government intervention in Latin American national politics (Zapata 1986; Collier and Collier 1991; Murillo 2001) and the public sector (Valenzuela 2000). It also confirms the findings of other studies of teachers' militancy in the region, which have stressed political variables in defining their subnational patterns of protests (Cook 1996; Foweraker 1993). The findings of this study thus qualify the application of institutionalist theories to contexts where the uncertainty generated by different applications of the same rule weakens formal institutionalization (O'Donnell 1999).

By focusing on the subnational level, this study clarifies the effect of explanatory variables, which can be used in comparative analyses of labor politics. Previous studies have shown the salience of the national government party identity in shaping labor behavior at the national level. In demonstrating that this logic applies

to the subnational level, our study highlights which variables affect this relationship. In particular, we show the value of focusing on who is the locus of labor relations and wage bargaining—the employer—as well as the influence of the political process and party identities on defining who are the bargaining partners—the employer and the union leader. We assume that the discretion of employers in defining work conditions reinforces the application of this logic. For instance, although Mexican teachers have been transferred to the states in the early 1990s, the federal government defines their salary appropriations reducing the governors' discretion on teachers' salaries. Hence, we do not expect political alignments between the state governor and the leadership of the local union section (although there is variation in the political affiliations of both parties) to have the same effects as in Argentine provinces. Similarly, although education is decentralized, Chilean majors have little discretion to define salaries, which are linked to test results and the number of students per school. We thus do not expect subnational partisan alignments to be as important as in the Argentine case. Instead, we would expect a similar logic to apply in Brazil, where majors—elected on party slates—are in charge of labor relations in the education sector and teachers' unions also have identities associated with political parties.³⁰

More broadly, the provincial decentralization of functions and resources had the unintended effect of fostering the concentration of protests at the provincial level in Argentina. Political alignments between unions and governors reduced conflictive interactions in the public education sector during the studied period. We suggest that these findings are explained by the effect of the discretion of provincial governors in public-sector labor relations, when controlling for economic incentives (i.e., income, bonuses) and labor strength (i.e., unionization, union fragmentation). To further our understanding of decentralized public-sector labor relations, we believe this first empirical study on Argentine teachers' militancy should be complemented by others, to assess in particular the effect of provincial public support on protest, which qualitative evidence signals is important (Auyero 2003) although we were unable to measure it. Additionally, further studies should focus on other patterns of popular discontent across Argentine provinces to build a more general theory about the politics of provincial protests.

Finally, we found support for the politicization of public-sector labor relations in Argentina. Because missed class days have negative policy implications for the performance of the Argentine education system as a whole, we believe that policy reforms should strengthen labor institutions and constrain the discretion of provincial governors.³¹ The effect of governors' budgetary discretion on provincial fiscal mismanagement became obvious during the 2001 Argentine crisis, when provincial currencies, debt defaults, and protests spread across the country.³² However, the cost of provincial executive discretion in terms of teachers' protests and decline in human development cannot be understated in a country where illiteracy has been growing in the last decade.

APPENDIX 1
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev	Min.	Max.	Obs.
Days Lost due to Strikes	3.96	9.60	0	74	120
Number of Strikes	1.13	1.59	0	8	120
Union Density	0.51	0.16	0.19	0.86	120
Union Fragmentation	1.29	0.61	1	3	120
Union Legal Recognition	0.79	0.41	0	1	120
Political Alignment	0.35	0.46	0	1	120
Legislative support	0.55	0.11	0.31	0.87	120
Public Employee Discontent	2.56	8.64	0	81	120
Fiscal Deficit (% revenues)	7.69	11.04	-31.6	30.8	120
Attendance Bonus (% of salary)	6.08	7.61	0	26	120
Real Wage Change (%)	2.56	7.46	-14.62	33.35	120
Unemployment Rate (%)	12.08	3.94	1.90	21.10	120

APPENDIX 2
Annual Provincial Means for the 1996–2000 Period

Province	Class		Union Density	Union Fragm	Fiscal Deficit	Attendance Bonus	Public	Real	Unem- ployment
	Days Lost	No. Strikes					Employee Discontent	Wage Change	
Buenos Aires	1.6	1	0.47	2	12.9	21	0	5.17	18.0
Catamarca	11.6	3	0.56	2	7.7	0	2.2	2.01	14.6
Chaco	0.6	0.4	0.76	1	13.8	0	2.6	3.53	11.0
Chubut	0	0	0.52	1	15.0	18	0.6	-0.10	12.1
Ciudad Bs.As.	0.6	0.6	0.27	3	-1.3	4	0	3.36	11.2
Córdoba	0.8	0.4	0.48	1	0.4	0	3.2	10.26	15.1
Corrientes	14.8	1.2	0.55	3	4.3	0	16.4	8.86	13.6
Entre Ríos	0.8	0.4	0.63	1	5.4	0	0.2	4.97	13.5
Formosa	0.6	0.4	0.50	2	13.5	8	0	3.12	8.4
Jujuy	14.2	3.6	0.59	1	11.7	0	11.4	2.95	16.3
La Pampa	0.2	0.2	0.44	1	1.6	16	0	2.59	11.2
La Rioja	2.4	1.2	0.56	1	2.9	5	2	-0.91	9.9
Mendoza	0.2	0.2	0.43	1	15.8	7	0	2.56	7.7
Misiones	0.8	0.6	0.42	1	13.3	7	0.6	4.09	6.3
Neuquén	14.6	3.2	0.70	1	7.2	0	11.2	-0.23	14.0
Río Negro	5.6	3	0.64	1	15.3	0	1.8	-0.27	10.3
Salta	0.4	0.4	0.75	1	5.6	7	0.6	3.03	16.0
San Juan	3.6	1.2	0.50	1	7.9	0	0.4	7.41	11.3
San Luis	0.4	0.4	0.23	1	-21.8	5	0.8	2.63	9.6
Santa Cruz	0	0	0.71	1	4.5	26	0.2	1.56	4.5
Santa Fe	0.4	0.8	0.54	1	4.9	16	0	2.65	16.6
Santiago Estero	1.6	0.8	0.34	1	-6.1	6	0	2.16	9.7
Tierra del Fuego	9.4	1.4	0.31	1	5.9	0	1.4	-3.84	10.5
Tucumán	9.8	2.8	0.39	1	6.6	0	5.8	2.99	17.7

APPENDIX 3
Political Alignment between Teachers' Unions and Provincial Governors

Province	Years	Governor's Party	Principal Union(s)		Weigh	Political Alignment
			Affiliated with CTERA	Not Affiliated with CTERA		
Buenos Aires	1996-2000	PJ	SUTEBA (1987)	FEB (1961)	50% (0 and 1)	0.5
Catamarca	1996-2000	UCR	ATECA (1985)	UGDC (1994)	50% (0 and 1)	0.5
Chaco	1996-1999	UCR*	UTRE (1996)			1
Chaco	2000	ALIANZA	UTRE			1
Chubut	1996-1999	UCR**	A TECH (1966)			1
Chubut	2000	ALIANZA	A TECH			1
Ciudad BsAs	1996	UCR	UTE (1996)			0
Ciudad BsAs	1997-2000	UCR	UTE			1
Cordoba	1996-1999	UCR	UEPC (1964)			0
Cordoba	2000	PJ	UEPC			1
Corrientes	1996-1998	PAL		ACDP (1989)		1
Corrientes	1999-2000	<i>Federal Intervention</i>		ACDP		0
Entre Rios	1996-1999	PJ	AGMER (1993)			0
Entre Rios	2000	ALIANZA	AGMER			1
Formosa	1996-2000	PJ	ADF (1994)	UDAF (1994)	50% (0 and 1)	0.5
Jujuy	1996-2000	PJ	ADEP (1961)			0
La Pampa	1996-2000	PJ	UDELPA (1989)			0
La Rioja	1996-2000	PJ	AMP (1994)			0

APPENDIX 3
(Continued)

Province	Years	Governor's Party	Principal Union(s)		Weigh	Political Alignment
			Affiliated with CTERA	Not Affiliated with CTERA		
Mendoza	1996-1999	PJ	SUTE (1967)			0
Mendoza	2000	ALIANZA	SUTE			1
Misiones	1996-2000	PJ	UDPM (1995)			0
Neuquen	1996-2000	MPN	ATEN (1991)			0
Rio Negro	1996-1999	UCR**	UNTER (1985)			0
Rio Negro	2000	ALIANZA	UNTER			1
Salta	1996-2000	PJ	ADP (1966)			1
San Juan	1996-1999	PJ	UDAP (1975)			0
San Juan	2000	ALIANZA	UDAP			1
San Luis	1996-2000	PJ	AMPPYA (1972)			1
Santa Cruz	1996-2000	PJ	ADOSAC (1993)			0
Santa Cruz		PJ	AMSAFE (1985)			0
Santa Fe	1996-2000					
Sgo del Estero	1996-2000	PJ		AESYA (1986)		1
T. del Fuego	1996-1999	MPF	SUTEF (1996)			0
T. del Fuego	2000	PJ	SUTEF			0
Tucumán	1996-1999	FREP		ATEP (1962)		0
Tucumán	2000	PJ		ATEP		0

Note: In parentheses are the years when teachers' unions obtained legal recognition. * UCR was aligned with FREPASO before 1997. **In Chubut and Rio Negro, the Alianza could not be formed until 1999 due to the rivalry between the UCR and FREPASO.

Notes

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1. McGuire (1996:139) shows that teachers accounted for the most workdays lost to strike and the highest number of strikers, whereas they compete with public administrators for the highest number of strikes during the 1989–1993 period. Extending the data on workdays lost to the year 2000 confirms the continuation of this tendency.
 2. Farinetti (2002) describes the shift in concentration of labor conflicts from the private to the public sector, an increase in the demands for wage arrears and the concentration of protests by provincial and municipal unions in the Argentina of the 1990s. Auyero (2003) points to the decentralization of education and health as a cause for the provincialization of protests.
 3. The “Santiagazo” involved the burning, looting, and ransacking of government buildings and the houses of the governor and local politicians as an expression of popular protests for what was then perceived as the imposition of adjustment policies in the midst of corruption and excess by political elites. It started with the protests of unpaid teachers and retirees and escalated into an urban riot (Auyero 1993: chapter 5). Teachers’ protests against wage reductions also caused strikes followed by road blockages in Neuquén, which became infamous when police repression resulted in the death of Teresa Rodríguez (Clarín, 15 April 1997).
 4. This seasonality is also visible in strike activity because more class days are lost to strikes at the beginning of the academic year, which in Argentina starts in March and ends in December. The cumulative data for Argentina between 1996 and 2000 shows that 257 days were lost during the first quarter (March–June), whereas 178 were lost during the following five months (July–November).
 5. Pencavel (1997) argues that the problem of public-sector unionism is that there are no substitutes for the interrupted services available to the consumers because their service markets tend to be monopolistic. In this interpretation the degree of openness of the economy does not matter because public-sector workers always lack competition and thus avoid the internalization of the costs of striking. In this case, public-sector militancy should be constant over time relative to other sectors.
 6. The irony of labor strikes is that strong unions do not need to strike whereas weak unions’ strikes are ineffective, thereby making the occurrence of strikes hard to explain (Kennan, 1986). Hence, the informational theories on striking argue that strikes result from imperfect information between unions and their employers and they are strategic only if they serve as a mechanism to acquire information about the strength of bargaining partners (Hayes, 1984). For Tsebelis and Lange (1995), strikes result from employers probing unions whose strength is unknown.
 7. Cook’s (1996) study of Mexican teachers’ protest shows their resorting to alternative types of protest due to their legal limitations on strike activity. Garrett (1998: 148–9) suggests that legal restrictions are crucial in shaping the behavior of public sector unions that results in the different wage push of Austrian and Scandinavia public sectors.
 8. The two main Argentine political parties are quite old. The UCR (Radical Civic Union) is over 100 years old and the PJ (Justicialista, or Peronist Party) was established more than half a century ago. Despite high regime instability, political parties retained their links to society throughout the second half of the twentieth century. According to Mainwaring and Scully (1995: p.8), the mean volatility of lower-chamber seats was 12.7 percent (Pedersen Index) during the first ten years of democracy (1983–1993).
 9. There are teachers’ union leaders affiliated with the Peronist party, the UCR, and other left-wing political parties, whereas provincial governors are either Peronists, Radicals, or belong to conservative provincial parties.

10. Law 24049 of 1991 and decree 964 of 1992, established the transfer of over 4500 schools to the provinces, which culminated two years later.
11. The data from the Ministry of the Economy were provided by CEDI and were originally gathered for the study performed by Jones, Sanguinetti, and Tommasi (2000).
12. Attendance bonuses are contingent upon perfect attendance and thereby eliminated by a day of class missed by participating in a strike. Of the twenty-four provinces, only Buenos Aires, Chubut, Ciudad de Buenos Aires, Formosa, La Pampa, La Rioja, Mendoza, Misiones, Salta, San Luis, Santa Cruz, Santa Fe, and Santiago del Estero had attendance bonuses during the studied period. On average, attendance bonuses represent 6 percent of salary, but in some provinces, such as Santa Cruz, attendance bonuses represent almost one third of teachers' salary.
13. Secondary teachers made up the core of national teachers' unions until the 1990s when they were decentralized to the provincial level.
14. The sources of information for days lost to strikes and number of strikes were the yearly reports of the Consejo Técnico de Inversiones, titled "Tendencias Económicas" (1984-2000). See J. McGuire (1996) on a recommendation for using this source for strike activity in Argentina. Both measures of teachers' militancy are correlated because in those provinces where the probability of a strike is higher, the expected duration is also longer. In the period we studied (1996-2000), the correlation coefficient between the number of strikes and the average duration of strikes within each province is 0.42.
15. In fifteen out of the twenty-four provinces there is only one teachers' union. In six provinces a principal union could be identified because it has legal monopoly and gathers more than 90 percent of total union affiliates. In the remaining three provinces, where no principal union could be identified (such as in Buenos Aires, where the two main unions have the same legal status and almost equal membership), we have computed *political alignment* taking the average of the individual scores for alignment between the governor and each union. For the governors data, see Jones, Sanguinetti and Tommasi (2000).
16. At the national level, CTERA was one of the national labor organizations affiliated with the left-wing FREPASO. The role of union leaders in the foundation of the FREPASO was clear when CTERA's secretary general joined the first legislative delegation elected by this party in 1995. CTERA also was a founder of the left-wing CTA (Argentine Workers' Central), its secretary general is part of the CTA national leadership, and in many cases the head of provincial teachers' unions is the leader of the provincial CTA section.
17. Jones, Sanguinetti, and Tommasi (2000) found that divided provincial government has no effect on provincial expenditures; therefore the effect on horizontal accountability should not be reduced by budgetary restraints on government expenditures. The data on provincial legislative composition are from the Ministry of the Interior.
18. The Ministry of Education provided the data on teachers' salaries. The INDEC, "Encuesta Permanente de Hogares," Ministry of the Economy, provides data on provincial unemployment based on urban areas.
19. The data on union membership are from the Ministry of Labor, Dirección Nacional de Asociaciones Sindicales (<http://www.trabajo.gov.ar>). The data were updated and improved for the period between 1996 and 2000. Annual data on the number of teachers per province were obtained from "Anuarios," Ministry of Education.
20. Data from the Ministry of Labor, Dirección Nacional de Asociaciones Sindicales.
21. In Argentina, those unions with "personería gremial" (i.e., legal monopoly) have several exclusive rights, such as representing all workers in collective negotiations, enforcing labor legislation and social security regulations, managing the compulsory health insurance plan, and assisting the government with improving workplace practices. However, any labor union has the right to call for a strike, regardless of whether or not it possesses a legal monopoly. Moreover, collective bargaining in education does not produce collective agreements with legal effect as in the private sector, but only informal contracts between both parties.
22. In both models, when including *public sector strikes* (data from Consejo Técnico de Inversiones) as a control variable for popular support, it was statistically significant and had the predicted positive sign. By contrast, when *fiscal deficit* (data from Ministerio de Economía) was included as a control variable for popular support, it was not significant. The rest of the variables kept their significance and signs in all of the models. We have also included as control variables

- whether the governor was affiliated with the labor-based Peronist party and whether the union leaders were affiliated with a left-wing party. However, these variables were not statistically significant, nor did their inclusion change the signs and significance of the other variables, so we omit them from the results presented here.
23. For a recent survey of specification and estimation of models for counts, see Cameron and Trivedi (1998).
 24. In the Poisson regression model, we assume that the number of class days lost due to strikes has a Poisson distribution with a conditional mean that depends on provincial characteristics. The lack of serial autocorrelation in alternative OLS models (results not reported) makes us confident of the independence of events assumed by both Poisson and Negative Binomial models. The authors can provide other specifications for both dependent variables upon request.
 25. The fact that the sample variance of class days lost is 23 times the sample mean is a preliminary indication of overdispersion. The extreme significance of the best-fit test of the Poisson model indicates that the model is inappropriate (best-fit chi squared (107) = 611; $p < 0.000$). The Log Likelihood test also rejects the Poisson model (see Table 2).
 26. The use of the Negative Binomial regression model to deal with the over-dispersion problem is a common practice in econometrics. See Long (1997); Greene (1999); Hausman, Hall, and Griliches (1984); Cameron and Trivedi (1986).
 27. We tested both models for heteroskedasticity and outliers and found neither to be problematic for the analysis. Heteroskedasticity does not seem to be a problem because the correlation between the dependent variable and teachers per province is almost zero (-0.10 in the case of class days lost and -0.07 for number of strikes). Furthermore, we performed the Cook-Weisberg test and could not reject the null-hypothesis of constant variance (chi squared (1) = 1.62 for class days lost, and chi squared (1) = 0.22 for number of strikes). In order to check for outliers we computed the DFBETAs for the *Political Alignment* variable (Bollen and Jackman 1990) and we did not find any observation that shifted the estimate by at least one standard error. Because Belsey, Kuh, and Welsh (1980) suggest further examination of observations where the absolute value of DFBETA is greater than $2\sqrt{N}$, we ran all the models excluding the two observations with higher DFBETA—the province of Corrientes in 1999 and 2000 when it was under federal intervention (DFBETAs 0.22 and 0.29, respectively). However, our results do not change besides a marginal improvement in the fitting of the models.
 28. For the binary variables the effect is obtained by letting the regressor change from 0 to 1. For all the other regressors the effect is computed by changing from \bar{x}_k to $\bar{x}_k + 1$. For the number of class days lost we used the Negative Binomial estimates and for the number of strikes the Poisson estimates because those are the best specification.
 29. We are studying primary school teachers in a country with compulsory education. According to the Argentine Ministry of Social Development, only 1.1 percent of the Argentine children between six and thirteen do not attend school (SIEMPRO 1997). At a more general level, Godard (1992) suggests that high levels of unemployment make quitting a less viable option for discontent workers, and finds a positive association between strikes and unemployment in a cross-sectional analysis of Canadian firms. Whereas he emphasizes the cross-sectional characteristic of the data (as opposed to longitudinal) as an explanation for his finding; in this paper we attribute the positive association between unemployment and strikes to the job stability that public sector teachers enjoy.
 30. We would expect the effect to be stronger in Argentina than in Brazil, however, because Amendment 14/96 to the Brazilian Constitution imposes the application of 60% of fiscal resources at the state and municipal level to education, as well as the establishment of state-level funds with a 15 percent of tax returns assigned to pay primary school teachers.
 31. See Murillo, Ronconi, Sanguinetti, and Tommasi (2002).
 32. Jones, Sanguinetti, and Tommasi (2000) provide a careful analysis of the fiscal problems created by the political battles over pooled resources inherent in the Argentine revenue-sharing system.

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