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Review Article

From Party Systems to Party Organizations: The Adaptation of Latin American Parties to Changing Environments

Laura Wills-Otero

Alcántara Sáez, Manuel (ed.) (2008), *Politicians and Politics in Latin America*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Greene, Kenneth F. (2007), *Why Dominant Parties Lose. Mexico's Democratization in Comparative Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Levitsky, Steven (2003), *Transforming Labor-based Parties in Latin America: Argentine Peronism in Comparative Perspective*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Abstract: The study of party systems and political parties is one of the largest subfields in political science. Classic studies in advanced democracies focused primarily on party systems and developed theories about the causes and consequences of different types of systems. In recent years, new academic work begun to differentiate parties within systems by understanding their organizational structure, their internal dynamics, the different ways in which they interact with their constituencies, and the strategies that they use to attract voters. Studies show that parties within the same system behave and react differently given their internal conditions. This article reviews three scholarly books that deal with this issue. The works analyze the internal dynamics of Latin American political parties and their capacity to respond and adapt their structures when environmental challenges take place.

Keywords: Latin America, political parties, institutionalization, adaptation, parties' internal structure.

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The study of party systems and political parties is one of the largest subfields in political science.¹ Most classic studies (e.g. Duverger 1954; Sartori 1976) focused on party systems. These are understood as sets of parties that interact in predictable ways, and they imply continuity in the components that integrate them. Moreover, under stable conditions, the levels of electoral volatility are relatively low. For this reason, it is meaningful to explore dimensions of variation across different systems. Two aspects that Sartori (1976) identified as particularly important are the number of parties, and the degree of ideological polarization. These conditions are relevant since they affect the ease with which governments can be formed in parliamentary systems, and the degree of legislative support that executives enjoy in presidential systems. Students of this topic have devoted great attention to understanding the consequences that two-party or multi-party systems produce (e.g. Colomer 2005); the causes that determine them (e.g. Duverger 1954; Sartori 1976), and the reasons behind their stability (e.g. Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Rokkan 1970). Following this line of thinking, Mainwaring and Scully (1995) proposed the notion of *institutionalization* for the study of party systems in Latin America. After pointing out the importance of having effective political parties as vehicles of popular representation in a democracy, they argued that in order to compare systems across countries, it is necessary to establish reliable measures of certain characteristics. Mainwaring and Scully's main theoretical innovation is the rejection of a simple "number of parties" classification and the definition of a multidimensional concept of institutionalization. They proposed four variables to measure this notion: stability in interparty competition, stable roots in society, stability of the parties' internal rules and structures, and legitimacy accorded to the party arena by relevant actors. Following these four indicators, Latin American party systems were classified either as institutionalized (Venezuela, Costa Rica, Chile, Uruguay, Colombia, and Argentina) or inchoate (Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador). Mexico and Paraguay formed a residual category of "hegemonic party systems in transition" (Mainwaring and Scully 1995). Since the study was published, many scholars found its conceptualization of institutionalization useful to study Latin American and other party systems' dynamics (e.g. Bielasiak 2002; Coppedge 1998; Kuenzi and Lambright 2001).

During the 1990s and the first years of the new century the sharp electoral decline of parties that traditionally integrated the Latin American party systems and the rise of new parties or popular figures with large electoral

1 I want to thank Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, John Polga-Hecimovich, and anonymous reviewers for their comments to a previous version of this review.

appeal led to significant changes within the systems, and in their levels of institutionalization. In Venezuela, one of the most institutionalized party systems collapsed in the late 1990s. In some cases, new parties formed and obtained seats in the representative institutions, the oldest parties lost votes and seats, and the system was expanded (Colombia). Other systems suffered contractions after some parties disappeared. Elsewhere, realigning elections took place and the electoral balance among the parties within the system shifted in dramatic ways (Mexico, Paraguay). Finally, parties that were dominant in the 1980s and 1990s ceded power to those that were traditionally minoritarian opposition parties (Uruguay).

In recent years, the literature has focused particular attention to the most extreme outcome, that is, the collapse of the system. Party system collapse involves the electoral decline of all the parties that comprise the system and their eventual disappearance. It also involves the emergence of new political parties and a new configuration of interparty competition (Dietz and Myers 2007). Though this phenomenon is rare, two out of the three cases in which it recently occurred were Latin American countries (Peru and Venezuela).² Years before these collapses occurred, students of Latin American political systems were interested in understanding the processes of democratic consolidation in a region that transitioned from authoritarian rule largely during the 1980s. After the inauguration of competitive elections in many countries, their concerns were focused on questions related with the legitimacy of elections, the design of democratic institutions, and the establishment of institutionalized party systems. However, once party systems collapsed in Peru at the beginning of the 1990s and then in Venezuela in 1998, students were challenged to understand the causes behind the phenomenon. Moreover, they were puzzled by the fact that the two systems differed critically in their degree of institutionalization. While the two-party system in Venezuela was highly institutionalized, the Peruvian system qualified in the “inchoate” category operationalized by Mainwaring and Scully.

To understand the party systems’ transformations during the 1990s and first years of the new century and in particular the collapse of two systems, scholars have examined the impact of national economic crisis and economic reforms, the effect of corruption scandals and of high levels of criminality, among other structural causes (e.g. Dietz and Myers 2007; Tanaka 2006). In general, they conclude that a sustained national crisis creates incentives for voters to defect from the parties that they supported in the past. This leads to a decay of the party systems’ levels of institutionalization and

2 Italy is the other case in which collapse of the party system occurred recently.

creates spaces for new leaders to emerge. Although some of these arguments account for the reshaping of party systems in Latin America, the focus in the studies on the evolution of the overall party system disregards the effects that different independent variables have on the performance of individual political parties. Generalizations at the systemic level prevent analysts from understanding the internal dynamics of the system's components (the parties), and the different ways in which they and their members respond to contextual challenges. Within the same system, some parties might be more successful than others in responding to their constituents' demands. Similarly, changing national conditions – for example in the economic realm – challenge the parties' leaders and force them to rethink their programs, strategies of behavior, and relations with their constituents. Some parties are able to adapt and survive, while those, that are not able to do it, suffer steep electoral decline and eventually disappear. What explains this?

In recent years, new academic work has dealt with this question. Scholars have begun to differentiate parties within systems by understanding their organizational structure, their internal dynamics, their programmatic agendas and ideological orientations, their recruitment mechanisms, the ways in which they interact with their constituencies, and the strategies that they use to attract voters, among other things. The accumulation of research has improved the quantity and quality of information about parties and party systems in the region. A number of studies have attempted to do systematic comparisons among parties and countries, thereby increasing the opportunities to state testable hypotheses and advance broad theoretical arguments (e.g. Alcántara Sáez and Freidenberg 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006). Other scholars have relied on case studies to explain parties' behavior and their capacity to adapt to opportunities and constraints posed by changing conditions in a particular context (e.g. Burgess and Levitsky 2003; Greene 2007; Langston 2006; Levitsky 2003). Finally, a novel line of research in the region has begun to look at the behavior of parties' members assuming that they are crucial actors in determining the way in which parties behave and respond to the changing national conditions (e.g. Alcántara Sáez 2008). Thus, the internal workings of political parties intrigued experts on Latin American politics, who have started to pay more attention to parties as units of analysis in their studies since the early years of the new century.

Among those studies the following stand out: “Transforming labor-based parties in Latin America: Argentine Peronism in Comparative Perspective” by Steven Levitsky, “Why Dominant Parties Lose. Mexico’s Democratization in Comparative Perspective” by Kenneth F. Greene, and “Politicians and Politics in Latin America” edited by Manuel Alcántara. In his book, Levitsky asks why some Latin American labor-based parties were

able to adapt to neoliberal reforms while others failed. He presents a detailed case study of the Argentine Peronist Party, or Justicialist Party (PJ), and places it in comparative perspective to other Latin American parties. He argues that a party's capacity to adapt to a new context is influenced by its degree of institutionalization. In a challenging context, some parties are successful adapting their structures and/or strategies while others fail to do so. When parties succeed they survive electorally; when they fail their share of votes decreases substantially and eventually they disappear from the electoral arena. The question that the scholar addresses is related to the extent to which a party's level of institutionalization is associated with its likelihood to survive to changing socioeconomic conditions. The answer that he offers is that parties with lower levels of institutionalization are more able to adapt and survive in a context of economic crisis or change than well-institutionalized party structures. Mass-based populist parties are better suited to adapt because they have flexible structures. In the first part of the book, Levitsky examines the origin, evolution, and contemporary structure of the Peronist (PJ) party organization. He then moves to analyze the electoral and economic challenges that the PJ faced in the 1980s, and the adaptation strategies followed by the party leaders at the base and at the elite levels. In the final part, the author examines the implications of the Peronist adaptation for Argentine democracy. He argues that although Menem concentrated and abused power, democracy strengthened over the course of the 1990s and that PJ's adaptation helped to stabilize the party system during a period of profound economic and political crisis. In the conclusions, the PJ is compared with other Latin American labor-based parties, some of which failed to adapt to critical periods – for example, Democratic Action (AD) in Venezuela and the Chilean Communist Party. According to Levitsky, these parties had highly routinized structures that limited their capacity to implement adaptive strategies when the changing conditions required them to do so.

Greene analyzes the dominance of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico and its decline since 1997, when it lost its legislative majority for the first time since the 1930s. As counterpart, he explains what accounts for the other parties' incapacity to challenge the PRI until 2000 when the National Action Party (PAN) defeated it in the presidential election. He also explains the forces that led the PAN to victory after being in the opposition for many decades. The main argument presented is that the PRI was able to win elections during six decades without being challenged by the opposition parties because it enjoyed dramatic resource advantages and because it was able to raise the costs of participation in the opposition. The impossibility for the PAN and the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) to challenge the dominant party is explained not only by their lack of equiva-

lent resources, but also because they were non-unified actors due to their ideological polarization on economic policy. These two features prevented these parties from coordinating against the PRI. In the development of this argument, Greene first introduces a general theory of single-party dominance and opposition party development. After doing this, he studies the Mexican case since 1929 until the 1990s and shows how his “resource theory of single-party dominance” applies to the PRI. In subsequent sections, Greene examines the internal workings of the opposition parties, in particular their dynamics of political recruitment. He shows that intraparty coordination problems impeded the opposition parties to organize against the PRI and that only after these problems were solved, the PAN was able to defeat the PRI in the 2000 presidential election. In the final part of the book, the scholar extends the argument to other dominant party systems, specifically to Malaysia, Taiwan, Japan, and Italy. Greene concludes with a look at underlying theoretical and empirical implications of the argument for future partisan politics in Mexico, the effects of resource disadvantages on the formation of externally mobilized parties, and the study of regime stability and the transition from competitive authoritarian regimes to competitive democracies.

Finally, the book edited by Alcántara reveals the important role that politicians play within parties. The first part of the book is dedicated to the attitudes and perceptions of parliamentary elites regarding political representation and democracy. The second part collects studies that deal with the parties’ internal organization, specifically with their internal democracy, their degrees of programmatic coherence, and their ideological placement. The third section closes with an analysis about legislators’ political careers and final thoughts about the importance of professional politicians within their parties. Some of the works included in the second part of the book argue that parties that are coherent – that is, when the members of a political party have united or similar stances – are more effective in achieving their “objectives in the electoral arena, the government, the legislative branch, and the intraparty sphere” (Ruiz Rodríguez 2008: 175). In other words, the degree to which a party succeeds both electorally and in its capacity to implement policies is related to its internal programmatic coherence. Ideological coherence is also shown to be important in their internal organization. As the authors point out,

“ideologically cohesive parties will be able to send clearer messages to voters and provide them with transparent clues regarding their future behavior in parliament and in office. Ideological cohesion will also facilitate coordination within parties and between institutions ruled by the same party” (Freidenberg, Díez, and Valduvico 2008: 162).

Beyond their different approaches, ranging from micro-analysis to case studies, to comparative political studies, the three books share a concern with the internal characteristics of political parties and the effect that these characteristics have on the policy-making processes and on their own electoral performance. For example, Levitsky (2003) suggests that non-institutionalized party structures explain to a large extent parties' successful responses to the environment; Greene (2007) shows that intraparty conflicts among opposite sectors account for parties' failures in elections and for their incapacity to adapt to changing contextual conditions; the studies edited by Alcántara (2008) underline the decisive role that politicians play in determining the internal dynamic of the organizations to which they belong. In general, all three implicitly argue that formal rules though important and necessary, are not sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of party politics. Informal institutions and individual level variables should be considered as well. This idea is particularly relevant when a changing socioeconomic environment challenges partisan organizations and requires their leaders to respond appropriately. To do this, they need to adapt their parties' structures and organizations, or at least, need to modify their internal interactions.

The works propose moving beyond a conceptual framework phrased in terms of presence or absence of certain characteristics at the systemic level, to research on the internal organization, internal workings, and institutionalization of individual political parties. The scholars argue that focusing the attention on parties as units of analysis allows them to better understand how parties adapt to new contextual situations and why some succeed while others fail. How they define institutionalization, what characteristics they consider to be able to understand parties' internal organization and internal workings, and to what extent these variables affect the parties' performance, are three questions analyzed in the subsequent pages. In what follows, I discuss some of the parties' dimensions that the different scholars analyze with the goal of understanding how parties adapt to changing conditions. In particular, I focus on the concept of institutionalization presented in Levitsky's work; on the idea of intraparty organization exposed by Greene, and on the notions of ideological and programmatic coherence introduced in some of the works included in the book edited by Alcántara.

Institutionalization

Like other concepts in political science, institutionalization is open to conceptual disputation and empirical debate. With respect to political parties, no consensus exists regarding the definition and operationalization of the term. For example, while Huntington (1968) argues that parties are more institu-

tionalized when they are more autonomous from social groups, others scholars, like Janda (1980), Panebianco (1988),³ and Levitsky (1998, 2003), focus on the parties' internal rules to determine their degree of institutionalization. In addition, although most consider that it is a multidimensional concept, there is debate about the specific dimensions that integrate it. For example, some include party age, electoral stability, legislative stability, and leadership competition as the key dimensions that compose the concept (Janda 1980). Others, like Levitsky, consider the degree of the parties' centralization and the mechanism through which candidates are selected as two characteristics that shape the level of institutionalization. Finally, disagreement also prevails in the assessments about the advantages and disadvantages of having more or less institutionalized parties in a democracy. Whereas many argue that *institutionalized institutions* are necessary for a democracy to work appropriately, (e.g. Coppedge 1994; O'Donnell 1994) others state that high levels of institutionalization explain setbacks in the democratic process. Levitsky's study supports this idea. The author argues that higher levels of institutionalization prevent parties from adapting their structures and strategies to a changing environment.

In his definition of institutionalization, Levitsky focuses on one specific dimension: the internal routinization of the parties. He understands this dimension as a "state in which the rules and procedures within an organization [either formal or informal] are widely known, accepted, and complied with" (2003: 18). Whereas highly routinized rules are internalized and actors take them for granted, weakly routinized rules or nonroutinization "is a state in which rules and procedures are fluid, contested, and routinely circumvented or ignored" (2003: 18). Levitsky states that parties that rely on flexible structures, that is, lowly routinized parties have a greater ability to adapt in contexts of crisis or environmental change than highly routinized parties, because party leaders have a "greater room to maneuver as they search for and carry out adaptive strategies" (2003: 19). The capacity of a party to respond to a crisis is associated with (1) its ability to remove old-guard leaders reluctant to introduce reforms; (2) the degree to which leaders can act without being constrained by strict rules, procedures, and hierarchical decision-making processes; and (3) the extent to which the party's structure can be reformed to respond to a changing context. If the party rules define strict mechanisms of recruitment, career paths, and rigorous procedures to introduce modifications or reforms, while at the same time these rules are highly

3 Panebianco (1988, 53) defines a party as institutionalized when it "becomes valuable in and on itself, and its goals become inseparable and indistinguishable from it."

routinized, the likelihood for that party to successfully adapt to a new context is low. On the contrary, in the absence of strict recruitment filters and bureaucratic career paths, the renovation of leaders occurs at a faster pace, thus facilitating programmatic adaptation and change. Similarly, when a party lacks established bureaucratic routines and mechanisms of accountability, leaders at the base and at the elite levels enjoy the autonomy necessary to carry out adaptive strategies. These conditions and a party's low routinization of key aspects assist internal modifications when needed.⁴

In Latin America, mass-labor parties were affected by the neoliberal reforms that were introduced in the late 1980s and 1990s. The programs and policies that these parties promoted were discredited, and changes in the class structure "eroded the coalitional foundations of labor-based parties" (2003: 1). According to Levitsky, those parties that combined societal rootedness and weakly bureaucratic structures were more able to adapt than those that had highly bureaucratized structures. The PJ in Argentina and the PRI in Mexico are two examples of the former category.⁵ The American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) in Peru also qualifies, but in contrast to the other two parties, it failed to adapt to the new conditions it encountered, in part because it had a more highly structured and disciplined organization.⁶ Among those that were able to survive, the PJ was more successful than the PRI: while the former maintained stable electoral bases in the 1980s and 1990s (40.7 and 39.2 percent of votes in legislative elections), the latter suffered a moderate electoral decline (from 61.1 percent in the 1980s to 49.5 percent of votes in the 1990s). Despite this, the PRI was rela-

4 These modifications imply the redefinition of the party's programs and the targeting of new electoral constituencies.

5 An alternative explanation to account for the electoral survival of the PJ and the PRI in a context of structural reforms is offered by Gibson (1997). The innovation of his study relies on the incorporation of a regional dimension to study these two parties' capacity of adaptation. The principal argument is that in addition to representing class coalitions with strong ties to labor, the PJ and the PRI were also "regional alliances encompassing two subcoalitions – that is, a metropolitan and a peripheral coalition – with markedly different social characteristics and different tasks in the reproduction of populist power" (366-367). These alliances permitted the labor-based parties to expand their bases of support and retain electoral power after neoliberal reforms were introduced.

6 Though the party had a potential capacity for adaptation, given the fact that it had a centralized and personalistic leadership with a substantial degree of discretion, the party's leaders made the wrong decisions (Levitsky 2003). The party suffered steep electoral decline in 1990 when Alberto Fujimori won the presidential election. Only in 2006 when Alan García returned to the presidency, was the party able to recover some power.

tively successful in adapting to a multitude of challenges. These parties' capacity for adaptation was made possible through their control of the presidency and their highly centralized leadership.⁷ The respective party leaders, who were the country's president in Argentina and Mexico, enjoyed a substantial degree of discretion to decide intraparty rules, select party leaders, and impose candidates. Moreover the parties had high levels of leadership turnover given the fact that they had non-bureaucratic hierarchies.

Contrary to these parties, highly routinized parties have more difficulties in implementing strategic changes and as a consequence, they suffer steep electoral declines. Democratic Action (AD) in Venezuela is a clear example of this situation. During the 1990s this party was electorally weakened. It became marginal after losing more than 50 percent of their votes in legislative elections from the 1980s (46.7 percent) to the 1990s (22.7 percent). Following Levitsky's argument, this failure is explained by the party's high levels of institutionalization. The AD relied on a highly routinized structure that had bureaucratized hierarchies and an entrenched oligarchic leadership (Coppedge 1997).

Although Levitsky offers an interesting argument about a party's ability to adapt its structures and organizations to challenging external conditions, his definition of institutionalization and the relation between it and what he calls "flexibility" is ambiguous. He states that highly institutionalized parties are those that have established rules and procedures that are deeply embedded and difficult to modify. As such, these parties are inflexible. A flaw in this idea is that parties that are highly institutionalized might have internal rules that allow certain flexibility. For example, rules might have defined horizontal structures rather than bureaucratized vertical hierarchies. Or, rules can provide leaders with discretionary power to act and decide how to proceed. Another possibility is that in a highly institutionalized party, leaders do not necessarily have to follow a strict career path to become influential figures within the party. An example of this latter characteristic would be the case of the traditional Colombian parties, the Liberal Party (PL) and the Conservative Party (PC). These are different from the parties analyzed in Levitsky's study because they are not mass- and labor-based popular parties. However, they also had to confront economic and institutional challenges in the 1990s. Despite being highly institutionalized, the PL and the PC adopted strategic changes that allowed them to survive. In sum, parties might be highly institutionalized but at the same time flexible, depending on what is

7 Following Levitsky, the role that party leaders play when they also control the presidency is important. In times of failure the party survives in a decentralized way, until one candidate regains the presidency and centralizes the decisions.

established in their rules. In fact, some of the parties that were part of the institutionalized party systems as defined by Mainwaring and Scully (1995) were able to maintain their levels of electoral support during times of deep structural reforms, without altering their internal rules and structures. Rather than preventing these parties' leaders from adopting strategies to respond to the changing conditions, the rules might have established arrangements that facilitated adaptation. Keeping the institutional rules stable does not necessarily imply not modifying strategies of action. For example, parties' leaders might decide to redefine relations with members and target new electoral constituencies without altering the party's organizational features. Indeed, parties that are widely recognized by the population and show certain degrees of stability in their organizations and rules might be more likely to maintain their bases of support than parties that alter their structures frequently. In the latter scenario, major or frequent rule and structural changes may create uncertainty about future payoffs. As a consequence, parties' electoral performance may be negatively affected. Finally, it is more efficient for parties to use existing structures rather than create new ones. All in all, it is not merely weakly institutionalized parties that are able to adapt their structures and/or strategies to a changing environment. Parties that are highly institutionalized can also be successful making adjustments to confront challenging conditions. Similarly, weakly institutionalized parties are not always successful at responding to a challenging context. In many cases, parties that lack clear regulations or weak structures have major difficulties getting enough votes to obtain political representation. This happens in both normal and critical times. An example of this latter scenario is the case of Colombia where a multitude of parties and political movements emerged after the promulgation of a new political constitution in 1991. Many of these parties obtained political representation in the legislature. However, most of these gains were insignificant, several parties obtained no more than one seat in the Congress and their capacity to survive more than one term was low. One explanation for this is the lack of clear regulations within the parties, and their incapacity to form strong organizations that provided them with mechanism to respond to the environmental demands, like for example the new institutional setting defined in the constitution (Ungar Bleier and Arévalo 2004).

The alternative scenarios and different possible outcomes described above suggest at least two things. First, the strategy to study the internal workings of individual political parties is adequate for understanding the parties' organizational capacity to adapt when they have incentives to do so. Second, the fact that both highly and weakly institutionalized parties might be able to adapt to changing conditions or fail to do so, weakens the hypothesis that the degree of routinization/institutionalization is what deter-

mines adaptability. As discussed earlier, institutionalization is a multidimensional concept. Disaggregating it into its constituent parts is a suitable strategy to follow, since not all the components affect the internal dynamic of a political party the same way and to the same extent. For example, while the centralization of leadership explains the capacity of a party to adapt to a new environment, in particular when leaders are autonomous in decision-making processes – as the cases of the PJ and the PRI show – the existence of formal and embedded rules might fail to foster or hinder the processes of adaptation. Likewise, formal and informal rules make parties rigid under normal circumstances. However, in times of crisis these parties might respond appropriately by adopting efficient strategies. In other words, rules might remain unaltered but other aspects of the party's internal workings, like the strategies that leaders follow, might be modified. For example, an ideological or programmatic shift, or the opening of the party structure might be sufficient to respond to a changed environment – as Greene and Alcántara show in their studies. In other words, though the dimensions that Levitsky considers in his analysis about parties' ability to adapt – leadership renovation, leadership autonomy, and structural pliability – are certainly important to understand why some parties succeed while others fail, other factors like the ability to change strategies can be determining the outcomes. Finally, contrary to what Levitsky's argument implies, not all the dimensions need to be modified or vary at the same time. A party can be flexible in some of its dimensions but not necessarily in all of them. In the next subsections I discuss the works of Greene and Alcántara, and I show that these scholars offer alternative explanations to account for parties' ability to adapt to changing environments.

Intraparty Conflict and Ideological Adaptation

As the title of the book indicates, Kenneth Greene analyzes the downfall of the PRI in Mexico after being the dominant political actor for more than six decades. As indicated, the author focuses on the advantages that the party had over the opposition parties. He argues that it was the resource advantages and the ability to raise the costs of participation in the opposition what made the PRI a dominant party and the Mexican political system a “competitive authoritarian regime.” It was competitive because opposition parties had the formal right to participate in elections. Yet, they had no possibility to become electoral relevant. This is why the system was also authoritarian. Like Levitsky, Greene analyzes turbulent times to explain how different parties respond to challenging conditions, and why some are more successful than others. However, Greene differs in how he approaches the phe-

nomenon. While Levitsky explains the PJ's success in Argentina when neo-liberal reforms were introduced, Greene accounts for the PRI's failure in Mexico after the government introduced reforms – namely privatization – that deprived the party of the resources that traditionally helped it buy voters' loyalty.⁸ Though the PRI remained competitive in federal elections, its electoral decline in the 1998 legislative elections and later its defeat in the 2000 presidential contest, reveal the party's incapacity to maintain its status as dominant party. Parallel to the explanation about the defeat of the PRI, Greene accounts for the opposition parties' growth and the eventual victory of the PAN. After being minoritarian parties since their emergence, the PAN and PRD were able to respond successfully to the economic crisis that led the PRI to its downfall by adapting some aspects of their internal dynamic, as will be shown below.

Within both the PAN and the PRD, distinct and opposite preferences among its members produced internal coordination problems that limited their success. The parties were internally non-unified actors. Intraparty conflicts contributed to the parties' incapacity to adopt adequate strategies that allowed them to grow into powerful and influential actors.⁹ Furthermore, ideological polarization and high restrictiveness in the recruitment of candidates and activists were additional factors that explained these parties' incapacity to coordinate against the PRI. While the PAN was a right-wing party that appealed to upper- and middle-class constituencies, the PRD was a left-wing party that drew support principally from the urban poor. Only those that identified ideologically with one or the other party were allowed to join the organization. Specifically, the PAN's formal rules were designed to preserve the party's ideological principles. The rules restrained the growth of members and restricted the party's flexibility to successfully respond to changing conditions. The PRD was formally more open, but

“recruitment was de facto regulated by factions comprising partisan groups, social movements, and nongovernmental organization... Fac-

8 Beginning in 1982 the federal government was confronted with an economic crisis that caused “declining real wages, increasing poverty, and faltering growth.” The government's response to this situation was similar to other governments in the region that also had to confront economic crises in that decade, it introduced market-oriented reforms that “included downsizing the public bureaucracy and selling off state-owned enterprises” (Greene 2007: 173).

9 While earlier joiners preferred closed organizations that functioned as “tight-knit clubs with deep links to constituencies,” later joiners “wanted to open their parties to the broader society” and transform the tight-knit clubs into catch-all parties (Greene 2007: 179).

tions operated as filters to ensure that only recruits who were known to share the party's ideological line played a role in local leadership and party conventions" (Greene 2007:190).

According to Greene, this dynamic of individual-level recruitment created rigid "party organizations that are slow to innovate in the face of new opportunities" (2007: 175). These parties were only able to challenge the PRI after they reached internal consensus and the parties' leaders autonomously decided to open their organizations, target new electoral constituencies, and adopt more centrist positions. In fact, the PAN's presidential victory in the 2000 elections was only possible after the party moved beyond its traditional core constituency and targeted the traditional and new constituencies.

The ideological polarization – that according to Greene made the opposition parties rigid – is similar to Levitsky's argument that it is the party's non-flexibility or high degree of routinization that explains its failure in electoral contests. However, that argument falls short in explaining the eventual success of parties that remained in the opposition for a long period of time. Among other reasons, this is because their rules were highly institutionalized. As noted earlier, the PAN, a party with entrenched formal rules, defeated the PRI and the PRD in the 2000 presidential election. Thus, contrary to what Levitsky's theory predicts, a party that was internally rigid was able to modify strategies and challenge an "unbeatable" party. In the explanation of the opposition parties' success, the role that party leaders played – in particular, Vicente Fox in the PAN – was important. In that sense, the dimensions that Levitsky considers as factors that affect a party's strategic flexibility – in particular leadership renovation and leadership autonomy – acquire importance. As a new leader within the PAN with the capacity to take autonomous decisions, Fox transformed a highly restrictive minoritarian party into an open organization with the capacity to appeal to diverse groups of voters, recruit activists with heterogeneous backgrounds, and exhibit centrist political positions. Summing up, Greene presents an argument that both supports and challenges Levitsky's study. (1) It supports the idea that the role of leaders is decisive for a party in adapting to new conditions. When party leaders are autonomous within the organization, they have "room to maneuver." (2) It also holds that the removal of old-guard leaders – or at least, the possibility to negotiate with them – allows new generations of reformers to join the party and modify aspects that make it a rigid organization. The argument also challenges Levitsky by stating that parties that are traditionally institutionalized also have the capacity to adapt to changing conditions. The PAN's success in 2000 illustrates this situation. Finally, the idea that ideological relaxation explains to a large extent the ability of both the PAN and PRD to grow when the PRI was losing re-

sources, adds a new important dimension to understanding parties' adaptation strategies. Some of the works included in Alcántara deal with this dimension. The next section reviews these.

Programmatic and Ideological Coherence

As Greene's work, some of the essays included in the book edited by Manuel Alcántara in 2008 consider a party's ideology as an important variable to analyze its electoral and policy performance. One idea stated is that ideological coherence helps the party to be coherent in its behavior. However, the work of Freidenberg, García Díez, and Llamazares Valduvico suggests that those parties that are more heterogeneous in their ideological stances are more likely to occupy power positions than parties that are ideologically more homogenous (Alcántara 2008: 169). The latter tends to be in the opposition, since they do not appeal to the median voters, but to voters with extreme ideological positions. This idea suggests, as Greene's work, that in order to perform better electorally, parties need to appeal to a diversity of constituencies rather than concentrate or limit their efforts on those voters that concur with the party's ideology. When parties that are extremists in their positions relax their stances their electoral capacity increases. Thus, an adaptation strategy that parties apply when the environmental conditions change is the smoothing of their ideological positions. Non-dogmatic positions help parties to attract more voters.

Another dimension that scholars consider when analyzing a parties' internal organization and behavior is related to their programmatic coherence. In her chapter, Leticia M. Ruíz Rodríguez defines programmatic coherence as "the degree of agreement that gives rise to the articulation of concrete proposals within parties" (2008: 170). When the party members agree in their positions about issues, the party will be internally unified, and as such, it will effectively function. On the contrary, non-coherent parties are fragmented or factionalized and ineffective. Ruíz Rodríguez shows that parties in Latin America vary in the degree of internal coherence. According to her empirical analysis, some parties such as the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador, the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD) in the Dominican Republic, the Broad Front (FA) in Uruguay, and the Radical Civic Union (UCR) in Argentina are highly coherent, while some others like the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) in El Salvador, the National Advancement Party (PAN) and the Guatemala Republican Front (FRG) in Guatemala and the PJ in Argentina are highly incoherent. Other parties in the region have intermediate levels of coherence. In agreement with Levitsky, Ruíz Rodríguez points out, that less coherent parties are more

flexible and more able to accommodate their programs to changing conditions. However, she disagrees with the idea that these parties are always successful. She points out that “a high degree of incoherence can be just as damaging as an excessive amount of coherence.” She then recognizes that

“the levels of coherence vary depending on which aspect of the party is under discussion. For example, a great degree of coherence will help a party to be more efficient in its parliamentary function. In the electoral sphere, however, there is evidence to support the idea that the most incoherent, ‘catch-all’ parties tend to be the most successful in the Latin American region” (Ruiz Rodríguez 2008: 186)

Empirical evidence on electoral results shows that this argument is controversial. While the PRD’s and the UCR’s share of votes has systematically decreased since the mid- to the late-1990s, the minoritarian FA defeated the traditional majoritarian parties in the 2005 presidential election. Similarly, while the PJ and ARENA were able to maintain their share of votes in legislative and general elections during the 1990s and the first years of the new century, the PAN’s and FRG’s share of votes decreased significantly since the late 1990s. These inconsistent outcomes challenge the hypothesis that the degree of internal coherence affects the performance of parties, since the direction of the relationship is unclear. Thus, the dimension of programmatic coherence seems to be less relevant to understanding parties’ adaptation strategies in challenging contexts than others, like leadership centralization, leadership autonomy, and ideological moderation.

Conclusion

Political parties are major actors of political representation in democracies. They are key actors in the formation and maintenance of governments. However, they can lose their representative capacity and be challenged by disaffected electorates that pursue other alternatives of political involvement. As I showed in this review, different parties in Latin America were challenged during the 1980s and 1990s by economic crisis and structural innovations. While some parties were able to adapt to the new situation and maintain their electoral capacity, others failed to do so and suffered steep electoral declines. The different authors that were reviewed agree with the idea that it is the parties’ internal organization that determines success or failure. However, they do not reach consensus as to which of the parties’ dimensions affect their performance the most. Levitsky argues that the degree of a party’s institutionalization explains its capacity to adapt. More institutionalized parties have more difficulties to respond to changing condi-

tions. Greene suggests that a party's ideological stance determines its adaptation. Parties that are ideologically extreme have more difficulties to attract voters disaffected with parties that no longer respond to their demands. To the contrary, parties that move to centrist ideological positions are more likely to be successful. This argument is supported by some works in the book edited by Alcántara. They state that ideological relaxation should be complemented by programmatic coherence in order to explain the internal dynamic of political parties. Even though the effect of this last dimension on the performance of the parties is less clear.

The controversy about which of the parties' dimensions that affect their internal workings and their capacity to adapt to challenging conditions might be explained by the different – and limited – samples of parties that the scholars studied, and by the environmental shock that they consider, namely, economic reforms. A broader sample of parties and the analysis of other shocks – for example, institutional reforms – can help clarify the discussion about the parties' internal characteristics that in fact explain their capacity to adapt or not. Despite the different dimensions that the authors underline as key explanatory variables, they agree with the fact that parties that have centralized leaderships with discretionary power to take decisions are more successful than parties with bureaucratized hierarchies and an entrenched oligarchic leadership. Moreover, leadership renovation when environmental conditions change seems to be another key issue to account for parties' electoral transformations. New leaders with the capacity to introduce reforms and innovative strategies might be decisive for a party's survival. Thus, the degree of leadership centralization and renovation are two dimensions that need to be more carefully considered in future research on political parties' electoral trajectories.

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De sistemas partidarios a la organización partidaria. La adaptación de partidos latinoamericanos a ambientes cambiantes

Resumen: El estudio de los sistemas de partidos y partidos políticos es una de las áreas más amplias en la ciencia política. Trabajos clásicos llevados a cabo en democracias avanzadas, enfocaron su atención en sistemas de partidos y desarrollaron teorías sobre las causas y consecuencias producidas por diferentes tipos de sistemas. En años recientes, nuevos trabajos académicos empezaron a diferenciar a los partidos dentro de los sistemas estudiando su estructura organizacional, las dinámicas internas, las diferentes maneras en que interactúan con sus representados, y las estrategias que emplean para atraer votantes. Estudios muestran que en un mismo sistema, los partidos se comportan y reaccionan de manera diferente dadas sus propias condiciones internas. Este artículo reseña tres libros que tratan este aspecto. Los trabajos analizan las dinámicas internas de partidos políticos latinoamericanos y su capacidad para responder y adaptar sus estructuras particularmente cuando se presentan cambios en el contexto.

Palabras clave: Latinoamérica, partidos políticos, institucionalización, estructura interna de partidos.