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Great Promise, but Poor Performance: Understanding the Collapse of Venezuela's *Causa Radical*

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Abstract: Rising meteorically to national prominence amidst the collapse of Venezuela's ossified two-party system, the leftist Radical Cause (LCR) seemed poised to ease the country's crisis of representation and win the presidency in 1993. Instead, it imploded, paving the way for radical populist Hugo Chávez. How can the poor performance of a party with such great promise be explained? This article explains LCR's initial success and eventual failure through the party's adoption of internally democratic mechanisms. Its highly participatory approach attracted progressive groups, helping LCR's early "meteoric" success. But it also sowed the seeds of LCR's collapse: the absence of formalized decision-making rules and hierarchical leadership hindered the resolution of a political impasse. Internal democracy proved harmful to institutional growth and prevented the party from confronting factional conflict and instituting much-needed reforms in the long run. It is not only a heavy hierarchy and bureaucracy that prevent political change, but also the opposite in a base democracy.

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Introduction

Thanks in no small part to its image as an internally democratic and highly participatory party in the context of Venezuela's worsening crisis of representation, the leftist Radical Cause (*La Causa Radical*, LCR) experienced a "meteoric" electoral rise to national prominence in the late 1980s (Crisp and Levine 1998) and seemed poised to win the presidency in 1993. LCR had been constructed as a new type of party, one that would not be beset by the same problems that plagued both its predecessor – the authoritarian and bureaucratic Communist Party of Venezuela (Partido Comunista de Venezuela, PCV) – and the two catch-all parties that dominated Venezuela's increasingly closed-off party system, Democratic Action (Acción Democrática, AD) and the Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee (Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente, COPEI).

In order not to succumb to Michels' (1915) and Ostrogorski's (1902) law demonstrating the natural tendencies for parties to bureaucratize, LCR was designed to be fluid in form and content, horizontally structured, and guided by the internally democratic notion that decisions should be made unanimously. It also rejected formalized rules, did not regulate party membership, adopted a fluid organizational structure, and embraced the idea of diffuse leadership. To the Venezuelan electorate, LCR was a novel and promising alternative to the two moribund parties that had run Venezuela's increasingly ossified democracy since 1958, with the Punto Fijo Pact.[1] LCR was supposed to sap support away from the two undemocratic parties, break open the closed political system, and, in this way, reinvigorate multi-party democracy (Coppedge 2001; Crisp and Levine 1998).

LCR's electoral success was short-lived, however: the party collapsed before winning national office, having been torn apart by its inability to confront the problems that inevitably plague political organizations. Internecine fighting, which forced LCR to lose its bid to hold onto the Bolívar governorship, escalated and led to party division. In 1997 the party was hollowed out by the mass exodus of numerous leaders, who went on to found Fatherland for All (Patria Para Todos, PPT) and help

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1   Fear of autocracy had convinced Venezuela's political elites to agree to limit the possibility of conflict by imposing limits and checks on the political system. This power-sharing agreement established that parties should pledge to respect elections, maintain a political truce to depersonalize debate, exclude the revolutionary left from power, and share political responsibility and patronage (McCoy 2004: 274–275; Kornblith and Levine 1995: 45).

Hugo Chávez win the presidency (López Maya 2004).[2] The party's anti-hierarchical, fluid nature, which had initially helped LCR attract so much support, also seemed to doom it to eventual failure: the absence of deci-sion-making and -enforcing rules and of hierarchical leadership meant that LCR had no established mechanisms or protocols with which to resolve a political impasse. Furthermore, the party's lack of structure or formalized rules meant that much-needed political reform, which could have addressed the situation by establishing guidelines and rules, was stymied; there was simply no established way of effecting internal party change.

What are the short-term effects of internal democracy mechanisms upon a party's institutional growth, development, and survival? What about the long-term effects? How can the initial success but eventual failure of Venezuela's LCR be explained? The answers to these questions are significant for a variety of reasons. Theoretically, the "nitty-gritty" of party rules goes a long way in determining parties' developmental trajec-tory, yet contemporary scholarship on parties devotes scant attention to their internal organizational nature and dynamics (LaPalombra 2007: 150). Empirically, understanding the institutional effects that the adop-tion of internally democratic structures and mechanisms have helps us understand the success and failure of parties as well as the strength of democratic regimes over time (Stokes 1999). The existence of electable leftist options within the political arena helps ensure that the party sys-tem does not lose legitimacy and that the electorate does not opt for anti-system candidates seeking to fundamentally alter the preexisting regime (Levitsky and Cameron 2003). Indeed, understanding why LCR failed to take advantage of the opportune political opening created by the decay of Venezuela's traditional parties helps explain the subsequent political vacuum that served the radical, anti-system populist Chávez so well in 1998.

I find that internal democracy's ideological appeal explains LCR's initial promise. Paradoxically, however, internal democracy's inchoate nature explains LCR's subsequent low performance as well. While dif-fuse leadership and consensus-based decision-making may seem prefera-ble ideologically or strategically to some (i.e., in order to "deepen democ-racy"), the absence of formalized rules and hierarchical structure stunted institutional development and all but ensured that the party would be

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2   To this day, LCR has maintained an important role in Guayana's politics, con-tinuing to advocate transparency and good governance. However, it has largely lost its position as a national power contender.

unable to confront internal conflict or institute much-needed reform.[3] Furthermore, such characteristics are increasingly difficult to modify as they become entrenched within party foundations (and organizational culture), given the importance of a party's founding moments on later developments (Panebianco 1988). They require an extraordinary effort to be altered, especially given the informality of party rules and a lack of established channels to implement reform.[4] I thus argue that, in order for a party to be able to adapt strategically, it needs a flexible party organization, but with a disciplined structure and majority-based decision-making mechanisms.[5]

The article proceeds as follows. It first traces the party's founding moments and boom years, which were indelibly influenced by its historical origins, as well as the political context of the ossification of Venezuela's two-party system. It then places in a comparative context LCR's decision to (over)compensate for the rigidity and excessively hierarchical organization of Venezuela's other parties by adopting internal democracy mechanisms and constructing a fluid movement-cum-party. Next, it details the political impasse that LCR encountered – and failed to resolve – in the 1990s: whether or not to support Chávez's armed insurrection[6] of 4 February 1992 ("4F"). It then explains the five internal democracy mechanisms I discovered were responsible for the party's inability to tackle the challenges that inevitably confront political institutions and the status quo bias and institutional inertia that prevented LCR from adapting.

My article concludes by showing how too much internal democracy leads to less efficacy and can be inimical to democratic stability. I thus explain what other Venezuelan scholars have failed to do: why a promising, established leftist party was unable to take advantage of the open space on the left-hand side of the political spectrum in Venezuela in the

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3   Similarly, Seawright (2012) finds that parties in Peru and Venezuela could have prevented their collapse – as well as that of the broader party system – if only they had been able to engage in ideational change and represent disgruntled centrist and leftist voters. Such ideological flexibility, however, was hampered by the parties' organizational flexibility.

4   Furthermore, party adaptation does not happen spontaneously; rather, it happens, in the words of Harmel and Janda (1994), when there is an ideational or institutional incentive present to help a party overcome a natural "wall of resistance."

5   This tension also arises within organizational theory. See Burns and Stalker (1961).

6   While Chávez ended up attempting a military coup, the original plans actually called for a popular, civilian-military insurrection.

mid-1990s. In explaining the collapse of Venezuela's party system, Seawright (2012) and Morgan (2011) have downplayed the viability of LCR and the fact that, come the early 1990s, Venezuela's left and center-left were no longer able to claim they were underrepresented on the national political stage. Had LCR not split in two, it is far less likely that Venezuela's party system would have collapsed or, for that matter, an anti-party outsider would have been elected in 1998. A full understanding of Venezuela's party system collapse must address the low performance of the highly promising LCR.

LCR's Background and Origins

This section investigates LCR's historical origins and developmental trajectory in the context of Venezuelan politics from the 1970s onwards. As the particular circumstances under which a party develops have indelible effects upon that party's growth and development (Panebianco 1988; Collier and Collier 1991; Lipset and Rokkan 1967), understanding LCR's founding moments goes a long way in explaining the type of party it became.

LCR arose indirectly from PCV's virtual collapse in 1970, when a majority of PCV leaders and followers left *en masse*. This internal division was the result of increasingly bitter disagreements over how to interpret the defeat of Venezuela's internal armed struggle, the understanding that armed conflict was not a legitimate route to power, the rise of the New Left in Europe, and pushes for increased freedom of expression and pluralism within the party, such as Teodoro Petkoff's published criticisms of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and orthodox communism (Ellner 1986). While most former communists went on to form the Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) a month later, in 1971, veteran guerrilla commander and mid-level PCV leader Alfredo Maneiro broke from the group and, along with a few other ideological dissidents, founded the heterodox Marxist *Venezuela 83*, which later evolved into LCR (Rangel 1983).[7]

LCR was fashioned as a "movement of movements," a vanguard party in "permanent construction." Crisp and Levine (1998) argue that LCR was novel and noteworthy for the fact that it was a party generated

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7   Maneiro was disturbed that MAS, which had allowed Pompeyo Márquez and other "USSR apologists" to participate in the new party (Márquez 1981), would end up being bogged down by internal infighting over ideological positioning and struggles over bureaucratic positions, thus repeating the same mistakes the PCV had made.

from civil society (i.e., "externally mobilized") in a country whose party system was closed off to outsiders and whose main parties were elitist and overly rigid (Coppedge 1994; Kornblith and Levine 1995; Lalander 2004). LCR was to be a new type of party, one whose political stance, strategy, and composition were not to be determined by unchanging orthodox ideologies and status-quo-biased party bureaucracies, but rather defined and continually refined by popular movements (Salamanca 2004: 239). The party targeted students (particularly at the Central University of Venezuela, or Universidad Central de Venezuela, UCV), the urban poor (particularly within Caracas's Catia neighborhood), intellectuals (through the La Casa del Agua Mansa organization), and iron and steel workers in the greater Guayana region (particularly at the Siderúrgica del Orinoco, Sidor).

It was among this latter group that Andrés Velásquez felt his political calling. LCR's most successful and well-known member, Velásquez began his career in politics by fighting the corruption of the traditional syndicalism, promoting democratic participation in unions and advocating workplace health and security among his fellow metalworkers. After years of mobilizing and organizing, Velásquez and his "*Matanceros*" successfully took control of Sidor's labor unions and pushed their New Unionism agenda of giving workers a say in the decisions that affected their lives and livelihood (Salamanca 1998). Due in large part to their extraordinary success, LCR ended up being seen as a single-issue and single-class party, which was not the case. This myth became self-fulfilling as the party's three other segments were sidelined in favor of the worker success story; their movements either broke with the party or petered out.

The gradual and unscripted conversion of LCR from a New Unionism syndicate and popular social movement to a major national party with the real potential of governing coincided with Maneiro's death in 1983. Given his own charisma, electability, and popularity, Velásquez quickly assumed the mantle of de facto party leader. Thanks to the decentralizing reforms of the Presidential Commission for the Reform of the State (Comisión Presidencial para la Reforma del Estado, COPRE), LCR candidates soon began winning local and state positions of power[8] (López Maya 1994; Lalander 2004), which then served as a springboard for national offices. In this way, the party transformed from a tiny, radi-

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8   With the stagnation of Venezuela's two traditional parties, LCR was one of few viable options available to voters. It is no coincidence that AD had suffered a severe internal crisis in Bolívar, which became an LCR stronghold (López Maya 1995).

cal group into a reputable political organization with a proven record of honesty, transparency, and good governance in its handling of regional and municipal governments (López Maya 1999). Indeed, the four orienting principles of Velásquez's 1989 gubernatorial campaign were the exercise of democracy as governance; putting an end to political corruption; efficiency and transparency of government services; and sustainable development of the Guayana region (López Maya 1995).

The party became a national political force in 1989, when it won three seats in Venezuela's Chamber of Deputies and the governorship of Bolívar with the support of organized labor. Thus began the party's "meteoric" electoral rise from a minor, regional party to a top presidential contender. Three years later, it won the mayoralty of Caracas, thanks to support both from the urban slums and the upscale *Country Club* neighborhood, and in 1993, it garnered over a fifth of the presidential and parliamentary votes. Velásquez won almost twenty-two percent of the presidential vote, coming fourth in a four-way split that many believe was fraudulent. Nevertheless, the party won strong legislative representation – forty deputies and nine senators – and the positive management by its elected officials of municipal and state governments[9] showcased the party as a force for decentralization, good governance, and participatory democracy (López Maya 1999). The party's internal democracy and highly participatory nature were a breath of fresh air in Venezuela's otherwise moribund democracy (cf. Hellinger 1996).

Internal Democracy

LCR's decision to embrace internal democracy was no accident. This section places the party's decision to adopt internal democratic mechanisms and construct a fluid, movement-party in the global context of leftist politics at the time.

As of the late 1960s, many leftist parties in Latin America began to emulate the Gramscian "Eurocommunist" movement[10] and question their own uncritical importation of the USSR's orthodox communist interpretations and dictatorial tutelage. This political watershed was generated mostly by a growing impatience with the centralized, bureaucratic,

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9   Andrés Velásquez governed Bolívar from 1989 to 1995, Clemente Scott was mayor of Caroní Municipality (Ciudad Guayana) from 1990 to 1996, and Aristóbulo Istúriz was mayor of Libertador Municipality (Caracas) from 1993 to 1996.

10   For an analysis of Eurocommunism, see the writings of Enrico Berlinguer, Sanitago Carillo, and Georges Marchais.

and authoritarian nature of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Petkoff 1976). The primary catalysts, however, were the USSR's 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, which caused widespread disillusionment among many once-reverential Latin American leftists,[11] and the military defeat of Latin America's guerrilla uprisings (Blanco Muñoz 1980).[12]

Leftist soul-searching led to sometimes raucous internal party debates that brought to light the inherent contradiction of fighting for democracy within the political, social, and economic spheres while simultaneously embracing anti-democratic means (i.e., guerrilla warfare), ends (i.e., dictatorship of the proletariat), and measures (i.e., unelected party secretary-generals). With the near collapse of PCV in mind, LCR (and MAS) adopted and implemented numerous internally democratic structures and mechanisms, albeit to varying degrees.

While embraced by the left as the next logical step toward "deepening democracy," internal democracy nonetheless challenged the left's prototypical party ideal of a Leninist vanguard party. Ideally, such a party operated via democratic centralism, which had come to mean a system whereby party members could discuss matters freely and debate party policies openly, but were then expected to fall in line and unwaveringly support whatever decision the majority decided upon.[13] Realistically, however, most Leninist parties operated in a far more authoritarian manner whereby decisions were made a priori in a top-down fashion, and no one but a select few had a say in the matter.

Internal democracy, on the other hand, is a flexible concept, similar in certain regards to the original, idealistic version of democratic centralism (i.e., embracing horizontal accountability and open elections to fill party leadership positions and select candidates for public office), but with a far greater emphasis on substantive participation, deliberation, and the rights of the minority. If one were to simplify the decision-making mechanisms of a democratic centralist party as majoritarian, then those of an internally democratic party would be consensus-based. More broadly, the concept encompasses deliberative and participatory mechanisms, non-hierarchical decision-making, the consensual method, a cri-

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11   A common criticism was that the USSR was just as "imperialistic" in its sphere of influence as the United States was in the Americas (Petkoff 1969).

12   Latin American trade unions underwent a similar phenomenon. New Unionism challenged the formal, bureaucratic, corporatist, hierarchical organizational form and nature of traditional trade unions. As unions were important sources of leftist support (and leaders), unionists and party members were well aware of – and learned from – one another's actions.

13   For the original version of democratic centralism, see Lenin (1902).

tique of representative democracy (i.e., the delegation of powers to elected officials as undemocratic), and the notion that citizens' participation in choosing public representatives contributes to good governance (Della Porta 2009).

Ideally, internal democracy should also strengthen a political party by ensuring that it is open to change and can adapt easily, based on the changing nature of party members, and better represent its chosen electorate – the rationale being that party members and followers are one and the same. Furthermore, internal democracy should also strengthen a political party by increasing the civic engagement and democratic credentials of party members. Indeed, there is democratic value in the dialectical process of participating in deliberation, compromising, and running in party or political elections (Pateman 1970).[14]

Most Latin American leftist parties interpreted internal democracy as the process of implementing internal elections for party leadership positions and primaries to decide upon official candidates: overall positive developments in terms of party renewal, legitimacy, and appeal. However, a few parties took the idea to the extreme by spreading out leadership positions horizontally amongst party members and making decisions based on consensus, not majority.[15] Given the belief in the intrinsic value of democracy as the most desirable organizing principle of political groups, and the belief that political decisions should reflect the will of the people as closely as possible (as it is interpreted by their elected representatives), more democracy should generally be better. But as the case of LCR demonstrates, there is no such thing as *too much democracy*. There is a tradeoff between the institutional efficacy and survival of a party and its level of internal democracy. The next section illustrates the pitfalls of too much internal democracy.

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14   Such a theory itself is a critique of earlier democratic theory, represented best by Schumpeter (1947), that for democracy to function, popular participation should be restricted to the election of decision-makers. Implicit in this view is the notion that the masses are apathetic, unsophisticated, and lack the necessary rational tools to participate effectively in politics.

15   Peru's United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU) was one such party. All decisions of importance were made by the National Directive Committee (Comité Directivo Nacional, CDN) on the basis of consensus (IU 1984). Carlos Esteves Ostolaza, former Peruvian Communist Party (Partido Comunista Peruano, PCP) Representative to the CDN, described such meetings as "interminable sessions," which were often held up by disagreements over the "wording of a single line of text." Author's interview (25 July 2011).

The Party, Challenged

This section shows how LCR's adoption of internal democracy and its refusal to institutionalize into a structured party, fit with routinized mechanisms to deal with conflict and ensure institutional survival, led to the party's collapse. It details how external events triggered fierce internal debates that exposed and accentuated the ideological and institutional incoherence that had existed within LCR ever since it stopped being a small, tight-knit group of like-minded social activists in Guayana. The decision as to whether or not the party should align itself with and participate in 4F exacerbated the tension between the party's two main political tendencies. Because there was no institutionalized way to resolve conflict, this impasse ended up rending LCR in two.

The roots of 4F can be traced back to 1983, when Chávez and other military figures founded the Bolivarian Republic Movement 200 (Movimiento Bolivariano Republicano 200; MBR-200), a clandestine, subversive, civilian-military organization aimed at toppling the existing political regime and taking power by force (Zago 1992; Garrido 2000). The MBR-200 grew in size, and by 1987, the civilian side of the insurrection included a number of LCR leaders, such as Secretary-General Pablo Medina and Alí Rodríguez[16] (Rosas 2009a). Following the *Caracazo* – street demonstrations in Caracas in which hundreds of protestors died[17] at the hands of Venezuela's security forces – this group grew to include five more high-ranking *causaerrista* members: Roger Capella, Freddy Gutiérrez, Rafael Uzcátegui, José Albornoz, and General Alberto Müller Rojas. To be sure, however, many LCR leaders claim to have known nothing about these subversive plans until a few months beforehand, and the rank-and-file only found out about their party's participation after 4F.[18]

At a meeting of LCR national leaders in Valencia in November 1991, Medina divulged that certain *causaerristas* were actively participating in the preparations for the civilian-military rebellion. While the majority of LCR's leadership rejected any form of participation by the party, una-

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16   While the party purported to "deepen democracy," many of its members were not very committed to representative democracy. This seemingly contradictory embrace and rejection of democracy can be explained by the Venezuelan left's distaste for representative democracy, a direct result of their exclusion from the country's democratic but closed-off political system.

17   According to official figures, 276 people died in the *Caracazo*; many academics place the number around 400. However, some civil society groups claim that the actual number is closer to 3,500.

18   Author's interviews with Rafael Uzcátegui, former LCR leader and national deputy, 9 and 10 October, 2011.

nimity was not achieved and no action could therefore be taken, thanks to internal decision-making mechanisms stipulating that decision-making be done on a *consensus* basis.[19] Given the failure to achieve consensus behind non-involvement, Medina and Rodríguez were therefore "permitted" to continue their role as the civilian leaders of the rebellion and participated actively, along with Uzcátegui, in 4F and the second attempted coup of 27 November 1992, or "27N" (Rosas 2009a: 94–111).

In this way, amidst LCR's "meteoric" rise to prominence through democratic channels, many from its leadership ranks were simultaneously looking to violently overthrow Venezuela's democratic regime. Uzcátegui was briefly detained in 1993 (for the fourth time), Gutiérrez was accused of possessing arms, and Medina was allegedly involved in a number of subversive activities, from stealing arms from a military barracks in the neighborhood of Bello Monte in Caracas to physically threatening the Minister of Defense, Vice-Admiral Radamés Muñoz León, at an official ceremony.[20] Such internal contradictions confused actual and would-be followers as well as exacerbating preexisting differences between the more radical and revolutionary wing of the party, headed by Medina, and the more moderate and reformist wing, headed by Velásquez and primarily supported by those with ties to Bolívar syndicalism.

The former faction's anti-democratic behavior was foreign to the party's history of fighting for workers' rights. Nevertheless, LCR *always* had a clandestine, military segment alongside those of workers, students, the urban poor, and intellectuals.[21] Maneiro, LCR founder and mastermind, recognized the intrinsic value of democracy and publicly proclaimed his organization's goal of deepening democracy. Confusingly enough, however, he also had distinctly anti-democratic tendencies as well and saw elections as just one of many routes to power.[22] Furthermore, he was surely cognizant of the fact that for LCR to be able to

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19   Author's interview with Gustavo Hernandez, former LCR leader, 26 October 2011.

20   Author's interviews with LCR leaders José María "Chema" Fernández (21 November 2011); Luis Medina, no relation (22 November 2011); and César Ramírez (22 November 2011).

21   Author's interviews with Federal Deputy Amérigo de Grazia (7 March 2012) and LCR founder and leader Lucas Matheus (5 December 2011).

22   Author's interviews with LCR founder and two-time mayor of Caroní Clemente Scotto (8 November 2011) and LCR founder and former leader Edgar Yajure (26 October 2011).

assume power following an electoral victory, it would need the support of significant swaths of the armed forces.[23]

LCR's civilian-military connection had been the idea of Maneiro, who had met with Chávez and other subversive military men several times, beginning in the late 1970s prior to the MBR-200's founding.[24] Maneiro's – and thus LCR's – political vision was for a civilian movement, spearheaded by LCR and with the support of progressive members of the military, to sweep away the prevailing regime – via elections or, more likely, a broad-based national strike similar to Rosa Luxemburg's vision of a truly democratic triumph – and instill a more just, participatory democratic regime in Venezuela.[25] Medina and Rodríguez (and Chávez), however, later interpreted the idea as more of a military coup with the tacit approval of the masses. It was partially for this reason that most LCR leaders did not adhere to the putschist 4F idea, despite the fact that the idea of a civilian-military insurrection originally came from LCR. Another reason was that, come 1992, the party had a very good chance of winning power *democratically*, thanks to Velásquez's charisma and growing popularity as well as to the party's proven record of good governance.

This profound political difference polarized the party leadership, bringing other contentious issues to the fore and turning seemingly innocuous issues into bitter fights. For instance, the Medina camp was weary of Velásquez's political compromises with the economic establishment in Bolívar, and many saw Velásquez as domineering. The Velásquez camp started questioning Medina's figurehead role as LCR's secretary-general for life, a role which he had held since Maneiro's death in 1983. As no institutionalized way of dealing with internal disagreements existed, these conflicts intensified, eventually casting doubt over the party's very survival. The Bolívar segment proposed that a new secretary-general be chosen, and as Medina could not rally the leadership behind his own candidacy, Lucas Matheus (of the Velásquez camp) was selected. This was the beginning of the end. Sensing a battle over the party's resources and acronym, Matheus and Velásquez then appealed to the Supreme Electoral Council (Consejo Supremo Electoral, CSE) for

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23   Author's interviews with Amérigo de Grazia (31 January 2012) and Rafael Uzcátegui (9 and 10 October 2011).

24   Author's interviews with LCR founder and leader José Lira (5 December 2011) and Edgar Yajure (26 October 2011). For information on Maneiro's meetings with Chávez, see Rosas (2009b: 20–24).

25   Author's interviews with Edgar Yajure (26 October 2011), Gustavo Hernandez (26 October 2011), and César Ramírez (22 November 2011).

legal control of the party. Medina, Rodríguez, Albornoz, Uzcátegui, Istúriz, and many others relented and left the party in order to found the PPT in 1997.

So, why did LCR collapse? One counter-explanation is the political Darwinism argument that Venezuela's traditional parties were unable to adapt to external changes (Coppedge 1997), thus leading to the collapse of the party system. Indeed, AD and COPEI had become top-down and overly disciplined, incapable of supporting internal competition, stifling of civil society (Lalander 2004), and increasingly out of touch with voters' sentiments due to their alleged ideological convergence (Seawright 2012: 113–143, Morgan 2011: 114–115). However, LCR was not just another traditional party, but a *reaction* to the overly orthodox and disciplined AD and COPEI (Coppedge 2001: 189). Along with MAS, LCR was able to represent Venezuela's centrist and leftist voters; it was to be a part of the *solution* to Venezuela's crisis of democratic representation and legitimacy, not just another victim of it (Crisp and Levine 1998). Indeed, by the rationale of party-system collapse, LCR should have benefited from the gradual breakdown of the old order and swept the 1998 elections. However, the party collapsed *before* the political crisis reached its peak under Chávez.

Another counter-explanation is the two-level framework put forward by Burgess and Levitsky (2003) on the adaptation of populist parties in power. Adopting their criteria, LCR would score "high" on the fluidity of its leadership hierarchy, as there were no barriers to entry to the party and no bureaucratized hierarchy with institutionalized career paths and tenure security in leadership posts, and "high" on the autonomy of elected officials from the party leadership and party-affiliated unions, as office-holding party leaders were not formally held accountable to either the LCR "leadership" or the Guayana unions. And since there was a "medium" level of incentive to adapt,[26] the theory would predict LCR's adaptation, not its continuity.

System-specific theories focus on numerous different factors at play. Margarita López Maya (1999, 2004) points to personal rivalries and electoral ambitions on the part of LCR's leaders, while Luis Salamanca (2004) argues that the collapse was due to a combination of the party's ideological non-definition and the bitterness of its internal struggle. The two foremost LCR scholars agree, however, that the party was gravely –

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26 Burgess and Levitsky (2003) do not consider the 1993 presidential election. By their criteria, however, the economic and electoral incentives for adaptation would be even higher than those posted for 1983 and 1988 (author's calculations).

if intentionally – un-institutionalized and lacked adequate procedures to modernize, operate efficiently, or address and resolve internal conflicts (López Maya 1998; Salamanca 2004).

I argue that the blame lies squarely with the internal democracy mechanisms that had helped propel the party to national prominence in the first place. The Velásquez group saw Medina's actions as extremist, foreign to the party's self-proclaimed efforts at deepening democracy, and dampening the electoral hopes of the party, but it could not do anything about it. A party's structure and organization have important consequences on its ideological and institutional change (Seawright 2012: ch. 7; Kitschelt 1989). Given LCR's inchoate nature, lack of vertical accountability, and need for consensus to make decisions, reform was exceedingly difficult.

Party members do not necessarily unify behind a single party goal (Kitschelt 1994). Indeed, all leftist parties have marginal, ultra-radical elements within their ranks. LCR's internal democracy provided this minority with outsized influence, however. In a majority-based system, a more pro-democratic coalition would have prevailed, neutralizing these radical elements. In LCR, this minority wreaked havoc in the party, but was never expelled; it left of its own volition, but only after undermining the party from within. LCR could have forestalled its voter exodus, if only its party structure had allowed it to moderate ideologically (cf. Seawright 2012: 21–26, 165–200).

Dogmatic Internal Democracy and Subsequent Institutional Inertia

This section details the impact of LCR's organizational type on its subsequent performance. It explains the five internal democracy mechanisms found to be responsible for preventing the party from addressing the challenges that called its internal coherence and viability into question. It shows how the very characteristics that made LCR so promising early on led to its low performance and eventual demise later on.

LCR went above and beyond what most leftist parties would ever even consider when thinking about embracing internal democracy. Because of this, the organizational structure and decision-making mechanisms adopted were more radical than those of other leftist parties. In particular, LCR did not 1) write any formal documents, 2) have any way to expel unruly or disloyal members, 3) create a professionalized staff with specialized roles, 4) have a hierarchical leadership structure, or 5) put decisions up to a vote (decision-making was done by consensus).

The objective behind these rare structures and mechanisms was to "deepen democracy" and circumvent Michels' (1915) Iron Law of Oligarchy.

LCR was created as a party in permanent formation because its founders, and Maneiro in particular, wanted to develop a party as far removed from the PCV as possible. Indeed, the reason why Maneiro and so many others had left the PCV to found the MAS was because it was excessively bureaucratic, it did not embrace pluralism, and its leaders regularly made decisions that disregarded the will of the majority. Maneiro then went on to leave the MAS – during its constituent congress, in fact – because he refused to be in a party with "unreformed" communists such as Pompeyo Márquez, who went on to become MAS's secretary-general.[27]

Regardless of whether or not such internally democratic structures and mechanisms are desirable theoretically, from a practical viewpoint, they have serious pitfalls. For LCR, internal democracy came at the cost of efficacy and functionality. Above all, the party became beset by status quo bias and institutional inertia, making it all but impossible to confront the increasingly serious issues challenging the party as it grew precipitously and as the external environment altered fundamentally. According to Kitschelt (1989), organizational capacity, a bureaucratic structure, centralized chains of command, and disciplined decision-making and -enforcing mechanisms are needed to address the challenges that parties will inevitably face head-on. The next five subsections detail five internal democracy positions and mechanisms of LCR and demonstrate how they led to institutional inertia and increasingly hindered change, creating a vicious circle.

Informal Rules

Because its founders did not want it to bureaucratize, LCR did not author any founding documents, such as a constitutive act, binding rules, or statutes to tie the party down. Norms, procedures, and patterns of behavior are important for the institutional survival of parties, as they foster stable, valued, and recurring patterns of behavior and provide for agreed-upon ways to handle conflicts and issues as they arise (Huntington 1968: 12). LCR members were required to write up a formal statute for the CSE in order to register as an official party, which they got

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27   Author's interviews with MAS founders Felipe Mujica (9 March 2012), Pedro Mujica (24 February 2012), Victor Hugo D'Paola (5 March 2012), and Rafael Ramos Guerra (27 February 2012).

around to doing in 1978. However, this document was widely considered a meaningless formality[28] that most members did not even know existed.[29] As such, there was little correspondence between established norms and the actual party. LCR's operations were based on the immediate concerns of its members. In the beginning, when the party was an intimate group of like-minded individuals in Ciudad Guayana, informal and flexible party rules were changed as needed. Contrast this with the case of the PPT, which ended up learning from the mistakes of its predecessor: PPT *immediately* formalized itself with a constitutive act, rules and regulations, and formal statutes.[30]

The fact that LCR had no founding documents or organic rules led to organizational inertia because it meant that there was no established way to effect institutional change. In its early years, LCR dealt with whatever issues that arose on an ad hoc basis. This worked well enough when the party was a small, homogenous group of individuals living in the same city. However, such an informal arrangement outlived its usefulness and remained in place long after the party had begun to expand geographically, diversify socio-economically, and broaden ideologically.

This ended up hampering organizational maturation by not providing established channels through which the party could address its problems. Decisions were made on the basis of consensus (as explained below), but whenever consensus could not be achieved, the status quo remained in effect. There were no formal guidelines to establish the official protocol for such situations. And since there were no authoritative ways to effect change, any proposed reform of the way the party functioned was sure to be stonewalled by those who benefited from the status quo. For instance, Lucas Matheus and others from the Bolívar group realized the need to separate the party from its component movements, formalize rules, and register affiliates, but fell flat in their efforts for lack of consensus (Ellner 1996). Contrast this with Brazil's Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT), which formalized its rules and regulations during its founding moments and established

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28 José Lira assured me on two separate occasions that the statutes had little, if any, effect on the party's makeup and running, and were written solely to appease the CSE. Author's interviews (5 December 2011 and 27 February 2012).

29 In interview after interview with high-level *causaerristas*, I asked about the content of this statute, only to be met with unknowing stares. In fact, most scholarly texts on LCR claim that no such statutes even exist; see López Maya (2004: 283).

30 Author's interview with former PPT secretary-general José Albornoz (9 November 2011).

straightforward ways to effect institutional reform. The PT has since engaged in an *extraordinary* amount of institutional and ideological adaptation over roughly the same period (cf. Hunter 2010).

Regulation of Membership

Because its founders wanted a fluid organization with organic links to new social movements, LCR had neither formal requirements for party membership nor mechanisms with which to expel party members. In general, such lax rules on membership all but ensure the growth of a heterodox party, potentially creating deep internal cleavages that could effect unruliness and hamper party efficacy. This actually turned out to be the case for LCR, which neither created a party registry nor attempted to identify its followers. In stark contrast, Brazil's PT records the name, address, and telephone number of each and every one of its party affiliates (Mendonça and Nunes 2004).

LCR was never preoccupied with defining an official ideology (Salamanca 1998: 240; Yépez Salas 1993: 92–97) because it did not want to be tied down by ideological purity. From the beginning, anybody could join the party, regardless of their ideology.[31] While party leadership had initially been restricted to the leaders of social movements, this requirement gradually gave way. An important example of this ideological flexibility was Jorge Olavarría, the center-right editor of *Revista Resumen* and LCR's first-ever presidential candidate.[32] Likewise, according to those who left LCR for the PPT, one of the principal reasons for the rupture was the fact that Velásquez had allegedly shifted his political stance drastically and was looking to do the same for the party's ideological orientation.[33] While Velásquez did provide support for certain "neoliberal" structural reforms in the face of the country's economic collapse in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the party had always been pragmatically oriented (Salamanca 2004).

Besides not setting any limits on who could join the party, LCR also had no formal way of *expelling* party members who disregarded party

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31   LCR administrations were known to hire more non-party members than party members. Author's interviews with Yajaira Briceño, who worked in numerous LCR administrations (8 November 2011), and Alírio Martínez, general director of the Caracas Mayoralty under Aristobulo Istúriz (1 November 2011).

32   The seemingly sole point of agreement between the "oligarchic" Olavarría and LCR was their mutual disregard for corruption (Maneiro 1982).

33   Author's interviews with founder and former LCR leader Pablo Medina (7 October 2011) and Luis Medina (22 November 2011).

interests. Unlike most parties, LCR never established a disciplinary tribunal or any provisions for maintaining internal cohesion. What this meant was that the party, which was becoming more heterodox over time, found it increasingly difficult to find common ground on critical political issues, a tragic flaw for a party responsible for administering cities and states. To be effective, parties must be able to control who is allowed to join and, more importantly, to expel any members who threaten the party's institutional coherence, success, or survival. Between 1980 and 2005, for instance, Brazil's PT successfully expelled three substantial factions for challenging the party line or refusing to sign off on accepted policy changes,[34] a very effective way of dealing with internal contradictions and ensuring that internal conflict does not result in prolonged, internecine battles. In contrast, even after Pablo Medina disregarded the desire of most of LCR's Executive Committee not to participate in the planning of 4F (he was later accused of supplying arms for the attempted coup and went on the record to explain his role in the affair; see Medina 1999), and after allegedly attempting to sabotage Velázquez's presidential candidacy,[35] he was not expelled from the party and was thus able to undermine it from within.

A Fluid Organizational Structure

Because its founders wanted LCR to have a fluid organizational structure more similar to a network than a traditional party, they did not establish any specialized roles, professionalized staff, or organizational apparatus. As parties diversify strategies and pursue a broader electorate, they generally become impelled to build a routinized organizational machine, establish a hierarchy of offices, and train cadres (Strøm and Müller 1999). For instance, after 25 years of existence (the equivalent of 1996 for LCR), the PT had over 5,000 political directorates – over four times the number of McDonald's in Brazil (Mendonça and Nunes 2004). With

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34 In 1990, the PT expelled the Worker's Cause (Causa Operária, CO) over its rejection of cross-party alliances; in 1992, the PT expelled Socialist Convergence (Convergência Socialista, CS) for trying to topple the impeached President Fernando Collor de Mello through extra-parliamentary means; and in 2005, the PT expelled Socialist Popular Action (Ação Popular Socialista, APS) over their opposition to President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's "neoliberal" reforms. Author's interviews with former CO leader Rui Costa Pimenta (26 August 2010), former CS leader Valério Arcary (20 August 2010), and former APS leader Heloísa Helena (12 January 2011).

35 Author's interview with LCR founder and leader Adón Soto (23 November 2011).

LCR, however, there was never a party bureaucracy to speak of: no full-time staff, party headquarters, or regular financial contributions. Not having a national party apparatus meant that LCR could not control its component organizations and movements, all of which predated the party and had their own structure. For instance, the departure of Edgar Yajure, founder of PRAG, LCR's student movement at UCV, spelled the end of that student organization.[36] Pro-Catia, LCR's urban-poor segment, met a similar fate.

This lack of organizational capacity meant that the party could not engage in multiple tasks simultaneously and that its overall efficacy remained limited. Since Maneiro did not delegate professionalized tasks to other members, the party could not grow simultaneously in two places; numerous *causaerristas* acknowledged that the main reason why efforts at organizing students, intellectuals, and popular sectors fell short was because LCR focused so much of its time and resources on Guayana's workers. Additionally, the fact that LCR was so inchoate meant that it did not have a corps of party supporters helping it observe elections and denounce electoral fraud. There is widespread belief among *causaerristas* that the 1993 presidential election was marred by systematic fraud and that Velásquez actually won. Velásquez opted not to contest the results, however, for lack of smoking gun evidence (which could have been uncovered with enough manpower).[37]

Such a conspiracy theory is not that far-fetched: LCR was widely acknowledged as the victim of electoral fraud in the 1989 mayoral and gubernatorial elections. However, given the party's strength in Caroní and Bolívar, party members and supporters took to the streets in protest and succeeded in enabling LCR's winning candidates – Scotto and Velásquez respectively – to take office. Because LCR had not been able to build up a partisan structure to organize party activities on the *national* level, though, it proved incapable of mobilizing against and denouncing the alleged fraud in 1993. Further complicating the situation was the fact that consensus could not be reached over how to denounce the fraud: Velásquez did not want to fight the results through non-judicial chan-

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36   PRAG officially severed ties following the death of Maneiro, who was the only real connection between the organization and LCR. Author's interview with Edgar Yajure (26 October 2011).

37   Author's interviews with LCR founder José Albornoz (9 November 2011 and 8 March 2012), Lucas Matheus (5 December 2011), and Andrés Velásquez (24 November 2011).

nels, whereas Medina was adamant about filling the streets. Since no consensus was achieved, the party could not respond at all.[38]

LCR wanted a fluid, flat organizational structure to ensure that it did not succumb to Michels' law. However, in establishing and maintaining this, the party ensured that it would never be able to modernize into a fully functional political party; without the division of specialized tasks or professionalized staff members, one cannot possibly administer a national party. Tasks were repeated at various party levels (especially for national campaigns), organizational inconsistencies resulted in internal contradictions, and affiliate movements made their own decisions and eventually went their own way.

Diffuse Leadership

A strong, disciplined leadership with clear lines of accountability could have compensated for some of the pitfalls analyzed so far, but vertical accountability was likewise non-existent. Because its founders wanted LCR to have diffuse leadership and horizontal accountability, they did not establish a hierarchical party structure. Since the PCV had experienced a mass exodus of leaders and the majority of its followers because its leadership was grossly out of touch with political realities and the will of the party,[39] LCR's founders were determined not to repeat these mistakes. In order for a party to remain legitimate in the eyes of its members and followers, it must allow for leadership renewal over time. In order to remain dynamic and effective, however, a party also needs to have clearly demarcated lines of authority in the first place.

Party leadership is needed to develop and communicate party policy to the general public. Within LCR, however, the position of secretary-general was a mere figurehead, created solely to meet CSE dictates.[40] In reality, party members were all treated as equals, with leadership diffused throughout the party. LCR had a national political team of thirteen

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38 This inaction and decision not to fight was cited by virtually every PPT member with whom I spoke as *the* principal factor behind the party's schism; author's interview with Pablo Medina (7 October 2011 and 28 February 2012). For his part, Velásquez acknowledged that it was likely there was widespread, systematic fraud. However, he stressed that the powers that be had such a tight grip on the media that *causaerristas* could not circulate whatever imperfect information they did obtain. Author's interview with Andrés Velásquez (24 November 2011).

39 Author's interviews with MAS founders Teodoro Petkoff (17 October 2011) and Pompeio Márquez (31 January 2012).

40 Author's interview with Lucas Matheus (5 December 2011).

members. The highest authority within the party, however, was the na-
tional assembly of 103 assemblymen (plus the thirteen), in which the
party's main decisions were made by consensus.

While such a leadership structure ensured that the composition and
ideology of party leaders did not sway from that of the party as a whole,
a lack of centralized decision-making leads to another set of equally
troublesome issues (cf. Panebianco 1988). No formal leadership meant
that LCR was incapable of resolving internal conflicts. While Velásquez
was campaigning for president, for example, Medina was actively advo-
cating for extra-constitutional means to achieve power (as witnessed in
his involvement in 4F preparations) and trying to cause an extra-
constitutional confrontation between the armed forces and other seg-
ments of society.[41] This protracted struggle between *velasquistas* and *medi-
nistas* sent mixed signals to the Venezuelan electorate.

The electorate did not know who was running the party because
nobody *was* running it; instead, there were various different personalities
jockeying for power because there were no established party positions.
Such a lack of structured leadership meant that nobody knew what the
party stood for: it could not agree upon a single political narrative or
ideological theory upon which to base its policies and guide its decisions.
Contrast this to Brazil's PT, which had clear lines of authority and a rigid
hierarchical structure: with his sweeping powers, the party's president
can – and has – enacted top-down change in a remarkable manner.[42]

Consensus-based Decision-making

Finally, and most consequentially, because its founders did not want the
will of the majority to be pursued at the expense of the minority, LCR
engaged in consensus-based decision-making without establishing any
dispute-resolution mechanisms. In order to survive, parties must be
flexible enough to respond to external challenges and environmental
changes. As institutional change is generally the province of disciplined
and effective leadership (Share 1999), majoritarianism is usually consid-
ered a more efficacious way of making decisions. But since LCR did not
believe in putting any matters of interest to the party to an internal vote,
it relied instead upon a discursive approach of intense and protracted
debate until consensus was achieved. Ideally, such a policy enables eve-

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41   Author's interviews with César Ramírez (22 November 2011) and José María
     "Chema" Fernández (21 November 2011).
42   See, for example, the PT's adoption of the Process of Direct Elections (Proces-
     so de Eleições Diretas) in Hunter (2010: 39–40).

ryone to have a say in internal decision-making and ensures that a final policy decision has the broadest possible support within the party.[43] Realistically, however, unanimity is quite difficult to achieve.

Throughout its initial years, LCR remained a small, homogenous group whose members all knew each other personally and worked together closely. In a context like this, it is not difficult to imagine how such a process of deliberation-until-consensus-is-reached could work at all, let alone work well. Indeed, rigorous debate among broadly like-minded individuals can lead to vastly superior final results, as the meeting of minds weeds out bad ideas and perfects good ones. However, by the late 1980s, and especially the early 1990s, LCR had already developed into a large, diverse, national party that represented a disparate group of Venezuelans unhappy with the status quo. Given these changes, this internally democratic process quickly proved ineffective as a decision-making policy. It exacerbated policy inconsistencies, led to gridlock, and fomented bitter internal conflict.

Consensus-based decision-making may be fairer than majoritarian-based decision-making, since the will of the minority can never be disregarded, but that does not mean it is realistic or even feasible. Such a process is far less efficacious than majoritarianism. As mentioned earlier, consensus was never reached over whether or not LCR should support the planned civilian-military rebellion of 4F. Even though upwards of 80 percent of the party's national leadership was against the idea,[44] official policy toward the rebellion was never defined since consensus was never achieved. The results of this indecision (i.e., the continued support of certain LCR leaders for the rebellion) proved problematic for the party down the line. Another episode, however, proved even more destructive.

Given Venezuela's rules against second reelection, Velásquez could not run again for governor of Bolívar in 1995. LCR had no formal rules for internally selecting candidates, and since it did not believe in internal voting, it did not hold any party primaries. Instead, the party engaged in internal debate to find consensus on suitable party candidates for offices desired by more than one party member. The debate over whether to select Caroní's former mayor, Clemente Scotto, or Velásquez's protégé, Eliécer Calzadilla, as candidate for governor, however, deteriorated into a bitter, internecine war between *medinistas* and *velasquistas*.

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43   Author's interview with LCR founder and leader Eleuterio "Tello" Benitez (20 October 2011).

44   Author's interviews with Amérigo de Grazia (7 March 2012) and Andrés Velásquez (24 November 2011).

   Medina and many party intellectuals supported Scotto,[45] while Velásquez and most Bolívar workers supported Calzadilla. As consensus could not be reached and voting was out of the question, a subpar compromise was struck: both candidates would renounce their bid, and a compromise candidate – Victor Moreno – would be proposed instead. This turned out to be a disaster, as Moreno did not have much popular support and party members, bitter over the nomination fight, never fully rallied behind their lackluster candidate. Moreno ended up losing a contest what should have been an easy win for LCR, given the party's extraordinary popularity in Bolívar. More broadly, the consequences of this fight, which could easily have been determined by a simple, majoritarian vote, are widely credited as being the catalyst that ultimately led to the party's division a few years later.[46]

   Consensus-based decision-making may have functioned well during LCR's early days, but once the party expanded and diversified, this mechanism ensured that the party was unable to defuse internal conflicts and, thus, survive institutionally. LCR continued to rely upon consensus over majority rule, even if that meant political stalemate and interminable debates, because that is the way it had always been done (Yépez Salas 1993). Similar to Peru's IU, which also adopted consensus-based decision-making, LCR languished institutionally because it lacked a disciplined leadership able to make effective decisions in a top-down manner. And an internal policy change was out of the question, since that would have required the unanimous approval of the LCR leadership (and getting dogmatic, sectarian leftists to agree on anything is rather difficult, to say the least).

Conclusion

Internal democracy mechanisms allowed LCR to break Venezuela's crisis of representation, destroying the main parties' political stranglehold and providing the electorate with a democratic, leftist alternative. The party became a national political force and was poised to win the presidency in 1993. However, internal democracy also led to institutional gridlock, political stalemate, and debilitating inefficacy. Just as bureaucracy and hierarchy can be detrimental to a party's institutional growth, develop-

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45   At the time, Scotto was married to Medina's sister, Pastora.
46   Author's interviews with LCR leaders Eliécer Calzadilla (24 November 2011) and Clemente Scotto (8 November 2011).

ment, and survival, so too can internal democracy be a recipe for party failure.

While it proved beneficial at first, LCR's embrace of internal democracy increasingly undermined the organization's overall health. Parties cannot hope to remain viable without the support of a professionalized party apparatus (Strøm and Müller 1999). Organizational capacity, a bureaucratic structure, centralized chains of command, and disciplined decision-making and -enforcing mechanisms are needed to address the internal and external challenges that parties will inevitably face head-on (Kitschelt 1989).

LCR did not want to succumb to Michels' "Iron Law of Oligarchy" (1915) and bureaucratize lest it became out of touch with those it purported to represent. However, a certain degree of bureaucratization is needed for a modern party to function and represent its constituents. In the long run, internal democracy hinders a party's institutional growth, development, and even survival, because a party lacking formal rules, control over its members, a hierarchical organization, clearly defined leadership, and efficient decision-making mechanisms is a party incapable of responding to the challenges that inevitably confront political organizations. Given the status quo bias that plagues all organizations, such parties cannot easily change their policies, even once it becomes apparent that these are detrimental to an organization's continued existence.

Party-building is time-consuming and costly, so it is only natural for nascent parties to put off such action unless it is absolutely necessary (cf. Harmel and Janda 1994). In LCR's case, however, the problem was that its anti-party philosophy remained in place long after its original usefulness. It persisted, unchanged, after contextual changes and LCR's own electoral success had fundamentally altered the party's institutional needs, and ended up undermining the party. What is more, the informal, anti-hierarchical nature of the party precluded the possibility of much-needed, top-down change that could have addressed some of the structural and institutional issues that were harming the party once it started to grow and diversify. In a sense, LCR was so flexible that it was unable to adapt.[47]

Too much internal democracy can be too much of a good thing. True, majority-based decision-making may trample over the will of the minority, and votes can be bought beforehand. However, the "one per-

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47   According to Share (1999), radical change is generally the province of strong, centralized leadership and not diffuse power.

son, one vote" approach is far more efficient and efficacious than the process of debating until consensus is reached. Consensus may be normatively preferable to majoritarianism within radical leftist circles,[48] but what is the cost of arriving at consensus? In an interview with the author, Medina insisted that the party "never wasted time voting,"[49] but are "seemingly interminable debates"[50] really a more efficient use of one's time? The secret ballot may be an imperfect democratic mechanism, but without it, a party is doomed never to fulfill its potential.

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48 While consensus gives veto power to any minority and, thus, constantly stifles and frustrates the majority, it is more democratic than majoritarianism in the sense that it does not trample on the rights of the minority.

49 Author's interview (7 October 2011).

50 Author's interview with Edgar Yajure (26 October 2011).

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Gran Promesa, Bajo Rendimiento: Cómo entender el colapso de la Causa Radical de Venezuela

Resumen: La Causa Radical (LCR) creció meteóricamente hasta alcanzar prominencia nacional en medio del colapso del osificado sistema de partidos de Venezuela. En esos años parecía que el partido izquierdista podría ser la solución para superar la crisis de representación en el país y ganar la presidencia en 1993. En cambio, explotó y allanó el camino para el surgimiento del populista radical Hugo Chávez. ¿Cómo se puede explicar el bajo rendimiento de un partido que prometía tanto? Este artículo explica tanto el éxito inicial de la LCR como su eventual fracaso a través de la adopción de algunos mecanismos de democracia interna. Por un lado, su enfoque altamente participativo atrajo a grupos progresistas, lo cual le permitió un ascenso meteórico. Sin embargo, este enfoque también sembró la semilla del colapso del partido: la ausencia de mecanismos formales de toma de decisiones y de un liderazgo jerárquico obstaculizó la resolución de sus futuros impasses políticos. Así, la democracia interna perjudicó el crecimiento institucional. Ello impidió al partido enfrentar conflictos entre diferentes facciones e instituir las reformas necesarias de largo plazo para sostener su poder. No fue, como en otros casos, una jerarquía pesada y burocrática lo que impidió al partido el cambio político y la adaptación, sino todo lo contrario: la democracia de base impidió la implementación de reformas.

Palabras clave: Venezuela, LCR, partido de izquierda, democracia interna