Latin American Party Systems

Political parties provide a crucial link between voters and politicians. This link takes a variety of forms in democratic regimes, from the organization of political machines built around clientelistic networks to the establishment of sophisticated programmatic parties. *Latin American Party Systems* provides a novel theoretical argument to account for differences in the degree to which political party systems in the region were programatically structured at the end of the twentieth century. On the basis of a diverse array of indicators and surveys of party legislators and public opinion, the book argues that learning and adaptation through fundamental policy innovations are the main mechanisms by which politicians build programmatic parties. Marshaling extensive evidence, the book’s analysis shows the limits of alternative explanations and substantiates a sanguine view of programmatic competition, while nevertheless recognizing that this form of party system organization is far from ubiquitous and enduring in Latin America.

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In this study of 12 Latin American countries, Kitschelt, Hawkins, Luna, Rosas, and Zechmeister show that programmatic party competition constitutes a rather unusual principal-agent mechanism linking politicians and voters. Programmatic linkages require that parties distinguish themselves along major issue dimensions, that they employ clear informational shortcuts to describe their positions to citizens, that they reflect the preferences of their voters, and that they remain ideologically cohesive. The first part of the book compares programmatic linkages cross-nationally: the authors employ extensive surveys of Latin American legislators conducted by the University of Salamanca in Spain to compare the level of programmatic politics achieved by Latin American party systems in the late-1990s. The second part of the book explores the historical origins and consequences of programmatic politics in the region. The authors conclude that programmatic party structuration is quite fragile: it emerged in few countries that experienced early economic development and partisan competition after long political struggles that involved a redefinition of social welfare, and it eroded under the pressure of negative economic trends in the 1980s and the 1990s. The book combines multiple perspectives, quantitative as well as qualitative, and incorporates Iván Llamazares and Scott Morgenstern as co-authors in two important chapters. This may be the most ambitious book on Latin American party systems since the publication of Mainwaring and Scully’s Building Democratic Institutions.”

– Aníbal Pérez-Liñán, University of Pittsburgh

“This book will be essential reading for students of Latin American politics. It introduces an important new dimension, programmatic party structuration (PPS), and it uses a wealth of data to demonstrate the considerable variation in PPS that exists in Latin America. The book offers a compelling historical explanation for why a few Latin American party systems, such as those in Chile and Uruguay, are organized along relatively coherent programmatic lines while many others are not. It argues persuasively that programmatic party structuration is rooted in historical and structural conditions that date back to the initial decades of the twentieth century, and that these historical causes are far more important in shaping contemporary Latin American party systems than are commonly cited factors such as short-term economic conditions and electoral rules. The book’s argument has important implications for our understanding of new patterns of party competition that emerged with Latin America’s turn to the Left in the 2000s.”

– Steven Levitsky, Harvard University
Latin American Party Systems

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This book is the result of a long, didactic, and collegial process. In the time between the start and finish of this project, we experienced significant changes in our academic careers and our personal lives. Four of us made the transition from graduate student to assistant professor during the course of writing this book. As a group tally, we began the project with one little girl in our midst and ended with eight young children. At the project’s start, we all lived a distance of roughly ten miles from each other around Duke University; at one point toward the project’s end, we were spread across three continents.

Our research cluster gathered for the first time in the spring of 1998 in the office of the only author of this study who then already held a faculty position, Herbert Kitschelt. We had recently been given an early peek at a significant new dataset, the first round of the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America survey, created by scholars at the University of Salamanca under the leadership of Manuel Alcántara Sáez. Most of us present at this meeting were second- and third-year graduate students whose research interests focused on Latin America. The project would be to undertake a thorough investigation into the nature of programmatic party competition in Latin America, an analytical question on which Kitschelt had just completed a book with data from postcommunist Eastern Europe. It is hard to overemphasize the importance of the fact that most of us were in the early stages of our Ph.D. studies when this project started. It was partly through our work on this project that those of us who were graduate students at the time improved our capacity for various aspects of data analysis and, more generally, social science. The camaraderie that the group exhibited and experienced has been a very enjoyable aspect of this project and, we hope, has resulted in a better final product than we might otherwise have produced.

Our thanks for having made this project possible extend first and foremost to Manuel Alcántara Sáez, who created the dataset with his students and colleagues at the University of Salamanca. Manuel is a tireless academic...
entrepreneur with a keen sense that one of the most important tasks – and also most difficult and least rewarding in terms of academic accolades – is the provision of novel measures of political phenomena and their assembly in datasets that are open to inspection by the academic community. He has done the profession a great service not only in getting the Latin American legislators’ surveys under way but also in publishing his own pertinent research based on this dataset. We submit our investigation as further testimony to the tremendous value of his undertaking. We are confident that many scholars will follow in our footsteps and build on these data, and we can only hope that Manuel and the Salamanca team will continue to deliver these vital surveys.

Over the years, we have collectively presented various parts of this project to individuals and groups at university workshops. Among those who gave us important feedback, we would like to express our gratitude to the following in particular. We thank Scott Mainwaring (who, incidentally, directed us to the Salamanca surveys) and Susan Stokes for their careful attention to the project in its very early stages, which included sponsoring a very useful meeting during the 2000 American Political Science Association (APSA) conference in Washington, D.C. We also thank several scholars for engaging us in productive conversations at various times at Duke, including Michael Coppedge, Jorge Domínguez, and Steven Levitsky. We thank our colleagues Jonathan Hartlyn, Evelyn Huber, and John Stephens at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for their suggestions in a seminar on our project in 2001 and in subsequent years when they took the time to comment on papers coming out of the project.

We are thankful to Margaret Levi and all the participants in the Center for Comparative and Historical Analysis of Organizations and States workshop in December 2004 at the University of Washington, where we first presented a more or less complete set of chapters of our investigation. In addition to Margaret’s leadership at this workshop, we would like to acknowledge the critical contributions of John Ahlquist, Christian Breunig, Tony Gill, Stephen Hanson, Steve Pfaff, and Eric Wibbels. Over a two-day period, participants took turns to discuss and dissect the various draft chapters of our book and to give us numerous recommendations. This often-challenging process unquestionably made the ultimate product much stronger, at least in our eyes. Needless to say, all remaining weaknesses are our own responsibility. After the Seattle event, we had one more opportunity to present our project collectively, this time at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, thanks to an invitation extended by Ken Roberts. We owe thanks to Ken and his departmental colleagues for their feedback at our May 2005 meeting on their beautiful campus.

In addition to feedback, some individuals have generously provided us data that have helped our project in specific ways. We thank Michael
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Coppedge and Ken Roberts, both of whom gave us access to their datasets for particular analyses in this book. We also thank Hans-Dieter Klingemann for support in obtaining data from the Latinobarometer and Marta Lagos and her assistants for providing us with these data.

We have, individually or in subgroups, presented portions of the project to various audiences. We thank our discussants and the active participants in these sessions for their honest and helpful comments. We presented early drafts of our work at APSA meetings in 2000 and 2001. A very early draft of the empirical analyses that became Chapters 2 and 3 was presented at the 2000 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Congress. An updated version of Chapter 3 was then presented at the following LASA Congress, in 2001. Early work on the project that became Chapter 4 was presented at the 2001 meeting of the Southern Political Science Association and again at the 2003 LASA Congress. A later version of Chapter 4 was presented to the Stanford Comparative Politics Working group in 2004. We also want to acknowledge that some of the work in this book has been published in journals. Specifically, an article based in part on Chapter 2 was published in Comparative Political Studies in 2005, and an article that draws on Chapter 4 was published in that same journal later that year. We thank the editor and the anonymous reviewers for their support of the project and the helpful comments they provided during the review process.

While the final product of our research was produced by five coauthors, we want to recognize the contributions made by several additional scholars. First, in the very initial stages of the project, our team included Sarah Brooks (then a graduate student at Duke, now a faculty member at Ohio State University), who thus gave input into the initial ideas and analyses that we circulated and discussed. Second, Scott Morgenstern (University of Pittsburgh), Iván Llamazares (University of Salamanca), and Marisa Ramos (University of Salamanca) participated in modules of our project. In Scott’s and Iván’s cases, this participation was sufficiently strong to recognize them as coauthors of Chapters 4 and 8.

In pulling together the final drafts of the manuscript, we had tremendous assistance from several individuals. We would like to acknowledge the help of Sergio Toro, who formatted the manuscript for submission to Cambridge, and the staff of administrative assistants in Brigham Young University’s Department of Political Science, who helped review and edit the bibliography. Juan Pablo Luna acknowledges financial support from the Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Científico y Tecnológico (FONDECYT Regular Projects 1060760 and 1060749), which helped with various aspects of the project. Finally, we thank Lew Bateman and the two anonymous reviewers at Cambridge for their careful reading of the entire manuscript and their insightful, critical, and also supportive comments.
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The fact that this project had a gestation of more than a decade means that in some places our recall may be less than perfect. We apologize for any errors or omissions in this preface and are sincerely grateful for all the support and critical feedback we have received along the way. Finally, we would not have completed this work without our families’ support and patience; we owe them an enormous debt of gratitude.