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Introduction

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More often than not, contemporary works on political parties start by referring to Schattschneider's now-famous dictum concerning democracy's need for political parties. At the same time, many authors have identified parties that, in democratic contexts, fail in various ways to fulfill the function of democratic representation. Mainstream political science has defined a political party as a group of candidates who compete in elections (Downs 1957 and Schlesinger 1994, among many others). This minimal definition has important analytical implications. When analyzing electoral politics, we run the risk of looking for parties – and thus, finding them – without realizing that what we have found, empirically, is only weakly related to democratic representation. In this introduction to the edited volume we present a thick definition of political parties to provide a conceptual framework for classifying different diminished subtypes of political parties in democratic regimes. The volume builds upon the rich literature concerning political parties that highlights the ways in which many party organizations are failing to fulfill their representational role in contemporary democracies. The empirical chapters that follow this introduction apply our conceptual framework to analyze seventeen parties in twelve Latin American countries.

Minimalist definitions of political party (i.e., Schlesinger's 1994) seem disconnected from reality, that is, the proliferation of electoral vehicles that do not function as parties. The sole attribute of the minimalist definition of a political party is not theoretically linked to a central aspect of democracy, namely the representation of social interests and values. As Kitschelt (2000) claims, parties “in the institutional sense” can be defined as in the minimalist definition. However, parties in the “functional sense”

are those that “solve problems of collective action and of collective choice” (848). The conventional minimalist definition of political party fails to capture two main attributes of parties: horizontal coordination of ambitious politicians and vertical interest aggregation. However, the party politics literature has emphasized the horizontal coordination of ambitious politicians (Aldrich 1995)¹ while the vertical aggregation of collective interests has been problematized in the political sociology literature (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Schwartz 1990). Vertical interest aggregation is also related to parties’ expressive function (Sartori 1976).

The mainstream definition of political party assigns the same analytical category (political party) to very different empirical objects. This approach does not distinguish between different kinds of political parties. Recent empirical research conflates political organizations that a thicker theoretical perspective would consider dissimilar entities that have different effects on the democratic process. As Sartori (1976) stresses, the minimalist definition does not suffice to adequately differentiate the various kinds of political organization. The minimalist definition of political party also lacks predictive or explanatory capacity. In this edited volume, we seek to analyze Latin America’s recent party trajectories as an empirical reference for exploring a new conceptual framework for studying political parties, one that includes diminished subtypes. Although we draw our empirical examples from Latin America, our framework is applicable to any region.

There is a recent body of research that has sought to unpack the black box of party organizations (Anria 2018; Bolleyer and Ruth 2018; Calvo and Murillo 2019; Cyr 2017; Levitsky et al. 2016; Luna 2014; Madrid 2012; Pérez Bentancur, Piñeiro Rodríguez, and Rosenblatt 2020; Rosenblatt 2018; Vommaro and Morresi 2015). Notwithstanding this renewed interest in the study of party organizations in Latin America, there remains a significant lack of theorized mechanisms and attributes of the concept of political party that connect parties to democratic representation. In her *Annual Review* article, Stokes (1999) claims that it remains unsettled whether parties are good for democracy or instead a necessary evil (244). The author rightly notes that this relationship heavily depends on the definition of democracy: “Do parties reveal and aggregate voters’ preferences such that governments are responsive to citizens? Or do

¹ Aldrich (1995) emphasizes that parties, as political institutions, solve collective action and social choice problems within the government and for electoral mobilization.

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parties form oligopolies of competitors with interests and preferences at odds with those of voters?” (Stokes 1999, 248–249).

The literature has identified various pitfalls party organizations encounter in various contexts and thus has highlighted the fact that many parties do not fulfill the expectation of contributing to democratic representation. However, the weak conceptualization of diminished political party subtypes lessens the analytical value of the study of parties. These problems of conceptualization neglect an important way in which political parties differ not simply in degree but in kind.² Moreover, the literature tends to conflate the age of a party with its degree of consolidation qua political party. An electoral vehicle might emerge as a political party and over time lose its ability to either coordinate horizontally or to vertically aggregate interests. Conversely, an electoral vehicle might gain those capacities over time. The minimalist conceptualization implies a static view that omits consideration of the changes organizations undergo over time. While the literature on democratic regimes has developed the notion of diminished subtypes of democracy (Collier and Levitsky 1997; Goertz 2006), there exists no such parallel in the party politics literature. In this introductory chapter we suggest a new typology of political parties that combines the two main attributes mentioned here: horizontal coordination of ambitious politicians, and vertical aggregation to electorally mobilize collective interests and to intermediate and channel collective demands – for example, by simplifying and clarifying political preferences for the citizens.

Our work is an attempt to remedy the lack of conceptualization of diminished subtypes in the political parties’ literature. This helps to clarify analytical differences between failed parties that other authors have already described (and even explained) but have not yet conceptualized. In so doing, we revise the concept of political party in relation to its contributions to democratic accountability. On that basis, we propose a typology of political parties that includes diminished subtypes – with each type having different implications for democratic accountability – and we propose analytical strategies to empirically distinguish between them. The ultimate goal of our framework is to highlight how not all electoral vehicles – not even those with stable labels – are theoretically

² The reliance on an operationalization that measures changes in degree is not inconsistent with a conceptual view that identifies thresholds below (above) which causes qualitative change. Indeed, our measurement attempt, presented in Table 1.1, relies on a set of indicators that track differences in degree.

equivalent and thus do not contribute equally to democratic representation. While the absence of stable parties hinders democratic representation, the presence of stable electoral vehicles cannot fully guarantee the smooth operation of representation. Thus, our theoretical and conceptual contribution has concrete analytical consequences that reshape the debate concerning political parties.

PARTIES AND DEMOCRACY: A NECESSARY REASSESSMENT

What is the theoretical and empirical relationship between political parties and democracy? If democracy is simply the competition between groups of people for votes and access to government (i.e., a vision that some associate with Schumpeter's vision of democratic competition), then defining a political party as a group of individuals who compete in elections to access office and receive a handful of votes – the minimal definition of “political party” employed in mainstream postwar political science (c.f. Downs 1957; Sartori 1976; Schlesinger 1994) – would suffice to ensure a positive relationship between parties and democracy. This implies functions that are necessary for democracy, such as the recruitment and nomination of candidates that fosters elite-level socialization. Thus, if electoral competition, in and of itself, automatically engenders the representation of citizens' preferences, the type of party is irrelevant. As agents in such competition, parties are automatically functional to democratic representation.³

If, however, one proceeds from Dahl's (1971) definition of polyarchy, the competition for votes does not necessarily lead to representation of citizens' preferences. Dahl's perspective requires that, for citizens to have equal influence in politics, certain conditions and guarantees must exist; competition among groups does not suffice for there to be a positive relationship between parties and democracy. Not all electoral vehicles that compete in elections are functional to interest representation. The types of electoral vehicles that compete in elections determine how democracy works. A party system can exist without representing or distorting citizens' preferences (Gilens 2012). Only under very specific (and unrealistic) conditions, as in the Downsian perfect information competition

³ The notion of representation we pursue in our conceptualization is, to be sure, not the only possible one; some alternative views to the one we follow are articulated in prominent works in the literature (e.g., Pitkin 1967; Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). Moreover, the concepts of representation and democracy are not necessarily compatible (Pitkin 2004).

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model, can it be the case that any group that competes for votes represents citizens' preferences. Yet, as Downs stressed, democracy does not function in these conditions and representation does not automatically derive from the existence of competition. In practice, in different democracies, electoral vehicles might or might not function as channels for citizen representation. Thus, according to Dahl's logic, some electoral vehicles facilitate democratic representation, while other vehicles are less sensitive to citizens' demands and interests and so channel them less effectively. This complex relationship between electoral vehicles and citizen representation has been studied extensively in the party politics literature (as will be discussed).

Democratic representation in modern societies can be analyzed as a principal-agent relationship (Michels 1999 (1911)). Different types of electoral vehicles structure the principal-agent relationship differently, with some being unable to structure it at all, given their detachment from their principals. The latter occurs in contexts where citizens can vote for a given electoral vehicle without having the ability to monitor the vehicle's actions in the aftermath. The inability to hold electoral vehicles accountable can derive from exogenous factors; that is, it may be contingent on socioeconomic conditions – poverty, inequality, or economic crises – or institutional settings, such as more autocratic contexts (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Luna 2014; Taylor-Robinson 2010). Here, however, we are interested in analyzing whether party organizations channel the principals' preferences. We claim that there are endogenous constraints that relate to the specific characteristics of each political party.

The literature has systematically argued that there exists a much more nuanced relationship between existing parties (and party systems) and democratic representation (Hicken 2009; Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Lawson and Merkl 1988; Levitsky 2003; Luna 2014; Luna and Zechmeister 2005; Mainwaring 2018; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Piñeiro Rodríguez and Rosenblatt 2020; Roberts 2014b). The party politics literature has extensively considered the exogenous conditions that determine levels of representation. Developing societies, where the structural conditions for channeling citizens' preferences are unfavorable, have a wide variety of electoral vehicles with differing capacities to channel citizens' preferences (Bartolini 2000; Kitschelt 1994; Kitschelt et al. 2010; Luna 2014; Mainwaring and Zoco 2007; Samuels and Shugart 2010; Stoll 2013; Taylor-Robinson 2010). Yet, even developed societies, with more favorable exogenous conditions, have also witnessed the emergence of

various types of political organizations that seek to perform the political representation function, and not all succeed in doing so.

The literature on party politics in developing countries in general, and in Latin America in particular, has identified various kinds of agents that compete in elections but do not contribute to democratic representation. However, this literature has not provided a conceptual discussion that theorizes the existence of diminished political party subtypes (with some exceptions, e.g., Mustillo 2007). While there exists abundant empirical evidence concerning the various failures of different party organizations in modern democracies and several theoretical arguments regarding the causes and effects of such failings, there remains a lacuna in the conceptualization of the type of parties that function as channels of democratic representation. This lack of theoretical debate concerning diminished party subtypes derives from the minimalist definition of political party. There has been little discussion in the literature as to whether this minimalist definition is useful for differentiating the various ways an agent can compete for power in a democratic process. While the minimalist definition is efficacious for encompassing different electoral vehicles, it obscures the debate about which vehicles contribute to the functioning of democracy. This is especially critical because the minimalist definition of political party works better in dialogue with a definition of democracy that privileges electoral competition as the main attribute of the regime, but it does not fit a more demanding perspective, such as Dahl's. When electoral competition does not suffice as a defining attribute of democracy, the minimalist definition of political party makes it difficult to articulate a clear-cut relationship between parties and democracy. The minimalist definition grants the label "party" to electoral vehicles that compete in elections but do not hold the status of party.

In fact, for much of the twentieth century, the relationship in Latin America between parties and democracy was problematized in terms of the acceptance of electoral competition: the movement-parties and the "illiberal" parties did not support democracy. However, in the twenty-first century, parties accept democratic competition, but they do a poor job of fulfilling their representation function. In several countries – for example, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, and Argentina – many of the traditional parties have been weakened or have disappeared. Their social bases were transformed or became more heterogeneous (e.g., weakening of the industrial working class, crisis of the farming sector, emergence of new middle classes and pauperization of others, emergence and consolidation of an informal sectors). New electoral vehicles emerged in turbulent times

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around electorally successful leaders (e.g., Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Mauricio Macri in Argentina, or Hugo Chávez in Venezuela), who, in some cases, exited from traditional parties (e.g., Álvaro Uribe in Colombia).

Confronting that emerging reality, several scholars turned their attention to causal factors and theories about party building, failure, and success including Anria (2018); Cyr (2017); Hunter (2010); Levitsky (2001; 2003); Levitsky et al. (2016); Lupu (2016); Madrid (2012); Tavits (2005; 2008; 2013); Samuels (2004; 2006); and Vommaro and Morresi (2015). However, the resurgence of party politics research in the last decade has not been adequately matched by a conceptual reanalysis of the empirical objects that we label as political parties. To address this gap in the literature, we reanalyze the concept of political party and its diminished subtypes, by adding or subtracting attributes to its definition. Specifically, we propose to distinguish between diminished subtypes by adding to the current mainstream minimalist definition two dimensions: horizontal coordination and vertical aggregation.

CONCEPTUALIZATION, OPERATIONALIZATION, AND MEASUREMENT

Following Goertz (2006), our conceptual analysis assumes the existence of specific links or associations between the existence of parties and democracy. Electoral vehicles that exhibit both dimensions (horizontal coordination and vertical aggregation) positively influence democratic representation. Political organizations that exhibit high levels of both dimensions reduce transaction and informational costs for citizens, who are the principals in the representation relationship.

An electoral vehicle is an association of candidates, that is, office-seekers, whose members compete in elections under the same label. Although the coalition seeks to win office, not all electoral vehicles fulfill the two basic functions necessary for a political party to be an effective means of democratic representation. A political party is, then, an electoral vehicle subtype, a more intense and less extended concept (Sartori 1970): it coordinates the activities of ambitious politicians (during campaigns and between elections) and vertically aggregates collective interests. “Electoral vehicle” is a more general concept than “political party,” which occupies a lower level of abstraction (Sartori 1970). More specifically, political parties want to access office and promote policies (Strom 1990). Parties seek to win state power and impose an allocation of

resources through policies and state institutions. This is achieved by crafting social coalitions, which involves coordination during campaigns and between elections.

Parties can accomplish the two functions in very different ways and with very different organizational forms (Gunther and Diamond 2003). The literature has extensively documented different types of parties in different historical and geographical settings (i.e., with an evolutionary logic), including cadre and mass-based parties (Duverger 1954), catch-all parties (Kirchheimer 1966), professional-electoral parties, and cartel parties (Katz and Mair 1995), among others. As opposed to these typologies, our conceptualization is independent of organizational form and assumes that different organizational arrangements can fulfill both conditions. Moreover, our framework does not imply that the linkages between the party and its constituency must necessarily be programmatic. In this vein, our idea of interest aggregation is broad. Because clientelistic politics can represent groups, it is possible to aggregate collective interests in a clientelistic manner. The horizontal coordination can be based on party members' adherence to shared rules or on a personalistic leadership. In this regard, very different parties, at different periods, such as the Radical Party in the early twentieth century, and the Unión Demócrata Independiente (Independent Democratic Union, UDI) in Chile, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers' Party, PT) in Brazil, and the Partido Conservador (Conservative Party, PC) in Colombia (see Wills-Otero, Ortega, and Sarmiento this volume) throughout the twentieth century (until 1991), differ in their organizational structure and in their linkages with voters, though all accomplished the two defining functions.

Our concept of political party comprises five levels. The basic level constitutes the concept of political party itself. The secondary level introduces its main attributes. We identify two necessary and sufficient conditions that qualify an electoral vehicle as a political party in terms of democratic representation: the horizontal coordination of ambitious politicians and vertical interest aggregation. Figure 1.1 presents the structure of the concept of political party and its attributes (indicators will be presented in subsequent figures). Horizontal coordination denotes the role of parties in facilitating the coordination of ambitious politicians during campaigns and between electoral cycles. Vertical interest aggregation denotes the role of parties in the electoral mobilization and intermediation (or channeling) of collective interests and demands between elections. There is low substitutability between these two main attributes. They are separately necessary and are jointly sufficient conditions; thus,

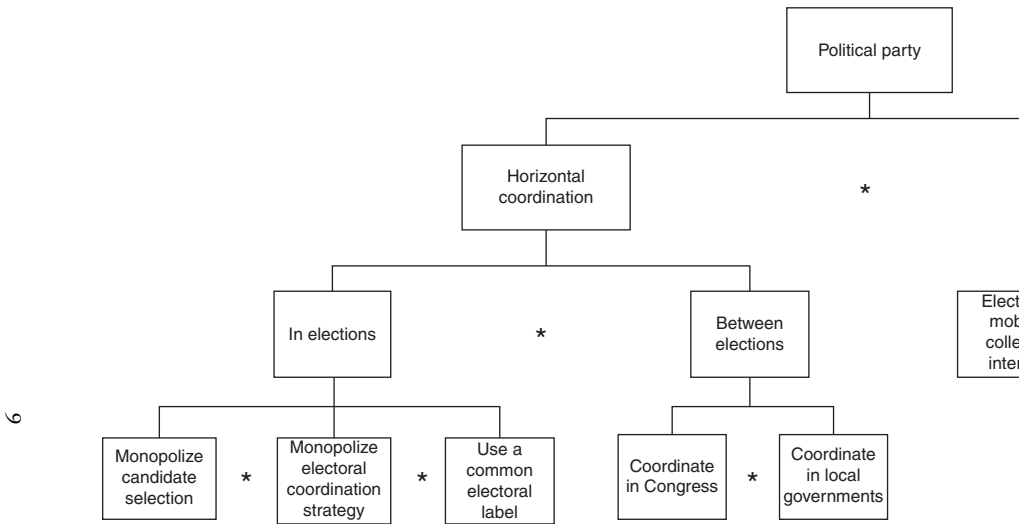


FIGURE 1.1 Political party attributes

they interact, and both need to be present to warrant labeling a given electoral vehicle as a political party.

These two dimensions (horizontal coordination and vertical interest aggregation) are functional to the idea of democratic representation. Horizontal coordination implies that political parties solve collective action problems of ambitious politicians, and this benefits democratic representation by helping stabilize electoral vehicles. Many electoral vehicles can support horizontal coordination between politicians; yet this function can be achieved without considering any societal preferences. This occurs, for example, in political systems where the competition between parties is stable but does not incorporate citizen preferences and thus alienates important portions of the electorate, as Luna and Altman (2011) show for the Chilean case. Therefore, electoral vehicles should also perform vertical interest aggregation to function as a channel for democratic representation. Conversely, electoral vehicles that aggregate collective interests but do not support horizontal coordination tend to be fragmented, undisciplined, and unstable organizations.

At the third level, following Aldrich (1995), we stipulate that horizontal coordination implies coordination during electoral campaigns and between elections (i.e., in Congress and in office). During campaigns, a political party is an electoral vehicle capable of monopolizing the candidate selection process, monopolizing the electoral coordination strategy (i.e., deciding the number of candidates that will compete in each district), and providing a common electoral label. These three capabilities are necessary and sufficient attributes for coordination during elections and entail the existence of a minimum common platform. In political parties, thus, candidates must be personally or collectively validated. These attributes enable parties to propose a uniform and coherent electoral offer. This coordination can be achieved in very different ways; for example, the candidate selection process can be centralized or decentralized, and can be carried out through open primaries or by a commission (Hazan and Rahat 2010; Rahat and Hazan 2001; Siavelis and Morgenstern 2008a). The crucial point is that a political party has the ability to coordinate action to avoid electoral losses. Between elections, a political party coordinates activity in Congress and in local governments. A political party establishes formal and informal obstacles to prevent its leaders from proposing contradictory public policies at different levels of government, and generates incentives to favor a certain amount of discipline among their legislators regarding whether to support or oppose given policies. Coordination both during and between elections is necessary and sufficient; that is, there