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Introduction

Challenges of Party-Building in Latin America

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Political parties are the basic building blocks of representative democracy. Political scientists have long argued that democracy is “unworkable” (Aldrich 1995: 3) or even “unthinkable” (Schattschneider 1942: 1) without them. Yet four decades into the third wave of democratization, parties remain weak in much of Latin America. Since 1990, major parties have weakened dramatically or collapsed altogether in Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, and Venezuela.¹ At the same time, most efforts to build new parties have failed. The regional landscape is littered with the corpses of new parties that either failed to take off or experienced brief electoral success but then fizzled out or collapsed.² Consequently, most Latin American party systems are more fluid today than they were two decades ago. Of the six party systems scored as “institutionalized” in Mainwaring and Scully’s (1995) seminal work, one (Venezuela) has collapsed fully, three (Argentina, Colombia, Costa Rica) have collapsed partially, and a fifth (Chile) has arguably been “uprooted” (Luna and Altman 2011).³ Of the four party systems that Mainwaring and Scully (1995) classified as “inchoate,” only Brazil’s has strengthened

¹ On party weakness and party system collapse in Latin America, see Roberts and Wibbels (1999), Sánchez (2009), Morgan (2011), Seawright (2012), and Lupu (2014, 2016).

² Examples include the United Left (IU), Liberty Movement, Independent Moralizing Front (FIM), and Union for Peru (UPP) in Peru; the Front for a Country in Solidarity (FREPASO), the Union of the Democratic Center (UCEDE), the Movement for Dignity and Independence (MODIN), and Action for the Republic in Argentina; the National Encounter Party (PEN) in Paraguay; the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), National Advancement Party (PAN), and Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) in Guatemala; and the M-19 Democratic Alliance (AD M-19) in Colombia.

³ Uruguay’s party system remains institutionalized.

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over the last two decades. The Bolivian, Ecuadorian, and Peruvian party systems have only weakened further.⁴

These developments have generated a new pessimism about the prospects for party-building in Latin America. Scholars such as Levitsky and Cameron (2003) and Mainwaring and Zoco (2007) argue that changing structural conditions – particularly the spread of mass media technologies – have weakened incentives for party-building. If politicians no longer need parties to win elections, these scholars suggest, the era of stable mass party organizations may be over.

Yet the experience of party-building has not been universally bleak. Several new parties have, in fact, taken root in contemporary Latin America. These include the Workers' Party (PT) and Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB) in Brazil; the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) and Party for Democracy (PPD) in Chile; the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) in El Salvador; the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in Mexico; the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in Nicaragua; and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) in Panama.⁵ These cases challenge sweeping claims that the era of party-building is over. Party-building, it seems, is difficult but not impossible in contemporary Latin America.

This volume seeks to explain variation in party-building outcomes in Latin America since the onset of the third wave of democratization (1978 to present). Why have some new parties established themselves as enduring political organizations while the vast majority of them have failed? This question has important implications for both the stability and quality of democracy. Where parties are weak, or where party systems decompose and are not rebuilt, democracies frequently suffer problems of governability, constitutional crisis, and even breakdown (e.g., Peru in the 1990s, Venezuela in the 2000s). In contrast, where parties remain strong, or where previously inchoate party systems become institutionalized, democracies tend to remain stable (e.g., Chile, Uruguay) or consolidate (e.g., Brazil, Mexico).

Despite the scholarly consensus around the importance of strong parties, we know relatively little about the conditions under which such parties emerge. Dominant theories of party and party system development are

⁴ For a more optimistic perspective on the recent evolution of Latin American party systems, see Carreras (2012).

⁵ For a complete list, see Table 1.1.

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based mainly on studies of the United States and Western European countries.⁶ Since almost all of these polities developed stable parties and party systems, much of the classic literature takes party-building for granted. Thus, while scholars such as Duverger (1954), Lipset and Rokkan (1967), Sartori (1976), Shefter (1994), and Aldrich (1995) help us understand the origins and character of parties and party systems in advanced industrialized democracies, they offer less insight into a more fundamental question: Under what conditions do stable parties emerge in the first place?

Building on recent research on party formation in Europe, Africa, Asia, the former Soviet Union, and Latin America,⁷ this introductory chapter develops a conflict-centered approach to party-building. We argue that robust parties emerge not from stable democratic competition, but rather from *extraordinary conflict* – periods of intense polarization accompanied by large-scale popular mobilization and, in many cases, violence or repression. Episodes of intense conflict such as social revolution, civil war, authoritarian repression, and sustained popular mobilization generate the kinds of partisan attachments, grassroots organizations, and internal cohesion that facilitate successful party-building. We also argue that party-building is more likely to succeed where party founders inherit a brand and/or organizational infrastructure from social movements, guerrilla movements, or previous dictatorships.

Latin America is a useful region for analyzing variation in party-building. For one, it is almost uniformly democratic. Unlike Africa, Asia, and the former Soviet Union, nearly every country in Latin America has had three or more decades of regular, competitive elections. In addition, Latin American countries share broadly similar histories, cultures, and social structures, as well as broadly similar institutional arrangements (e.g., presidentialism, combined with proportional representation [PR] or mixed PR/plurality electoral systems). Yet party-building outcomes vary widely in the region, both cross-nationally and within countries over time. This empirical variation is crucial for understanding the determinants

⁶ See, for example, Duverger (1954), Downs (1957), Lipset and Rokkan (1967), Panebianco (1988), Kitschelt (1989), Shefter (1994), and Aldrich (1995). Mainwaring (1999) makes a similar critique.

⁷ On party-building in Europe, see Kitschelt (1989), Kalyvas (1996), Hug (2001), Tavits (2013), and Ziblatt (forthcoming); on Africa, see LeBas (2011), Arriola (2013), and Riedl (2014); on Asia, see Hicken (2009) and Hicken and Kuhonta (2015); on the former Soviet Union, see Moser (2001), Hale (2006), and Hanson (2010); on Latin America, see Mainwaring (1999), Levitsky and Cameron (2003), Van Cott (2005), Mainwaring and Zoco (2007), Mustillo (2007, 2009), Lupu and Stokes (2010), Vergara (2011), Luna (2014), and Lupu (2014, 2016).

of party-building: we cannot pinpoint the sources of successful party-building without also studying cases of failure.

DEFINING AND MEASURING PARTY-BUILDING

The focus of this volume is *party-building*, which we define as the process by which new parties develop into electorally significant and enduring political actors.⁸ We seek to explain not party formation, which is widespread across Latin America,⁹ but instead cases in which new parties actually take root. Thus, our operationalization of successful party-building includes both electoral and temporal dimensions. To be considered a success, a new party must achieve a minimum share of the vote and maintain it for a significant period of time. It need not win the presidency, but it must, at a minimum, consistently receive a sizable share of the national vote. Our conceptualization thus excludes “flash parties,” which perform well in one or two elections but then collapse (e.g., Front for a Country in Solidarity [FREPASO] in Argentina), as well as minor parties that persist over time but win only a small share of the vote (e.g., some Latin American communist parties).

We score party-building as successful when a new party wins at least 10 percent of the vote in five or more consecutive national legislative elections.¹⁰ We add the condition that a successful new party must also survive the departure of its founding leader. Parties that are little more than personalistic vehicles may achieve success over multiple elections if their founding leaders remain active and at the head of the party ticket (e.g., Hugo Banzer’s Nationalist Democratic Action [ADN] in Bolivia). While some of these parties eventually institutionalize (e.g., Peronism), most collapse after their founding leaders exit the political stage (e.g., ADN, Gustavo Rojas Pinilla’s National Popular Alliance [ANAPO] in Colombia,

⁸ Following Sartori (1976: 56), we define a political party as any political group that competes in elections with the goal of placing candidates in public office.

⁹ Barriers to party formation are low throughout Latin America (Mainwaring 2006). Parties form easily, frequently, and for a variety of reasons. According to Mustillo, for example, 133 new parties formed in Bolivia and Ecuador alone during the third wave (2007: 2). Many of these parties were personalistic vehicles, created by and for a single candidate. On party formation, see Kitschelt (1989), Aldrich (1995), Hug (2001), and Van Cott (2005).

¹⁰ National legislative elections must be held at least two years apart from one another. If elections are held in consecutive years (e.g., Guatemala in 1994 and 1995, Peru in 2000 and 2001), both elections are counted, but parties that participate in them must reach the 10-percent threshold in six consecutive elections to be considered successful.

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Manuel Odría's National Odríista Union [UNO] in Peru). In our view, such cases should not be viewed as cases of successful party-building.¹¹

Based on this operationalization, we count eleven cases of successful party-building in Latin America since the onset of the third wave (see Table 1.1).¹² These successes represent a tiny fraction of the overall number of parties created in Latin America during this period. We compiled a list of all parties that emerged in eighteen Latin American countries between 1978 and 2005,¹³ and which won 1 percent or more of the national legislative vote at least once (see Appendix I for the full list).¹⁴ Using these somewhat restrictive criteria (many additional parties failed to capture 1 percent of the national vote), we counted 307 new parties. Of these, 244 are scored as unsuccessful because they: (1) failed to win 10 percent of the vote and then disappeared (N = 202); (2) failed to win 10 percent of the vote but survived as marginal parties (N = 20); (3) won 10 percent of the vote in at least one election (but fewer than five) and then collapsed (N = 20); or (4) won 10 percent of the vote in five consecutive elections but collapsed after their founding leader left the political scene (N = 2).

An additional fifty-two parties are scored as “incomplete” cases, either because they have yet to compete in five elections, or because they have competed in five elections but only recently reached the minimum 1 percent threshold for inclusion.¹⁵ Of these fifty-two incomplete cases, twelve have won at least 10 percent of the vote in one or more elections and can thus be considered “potentially successful.”¹⁶ A few of these parties, such as Bolivia's

¹¹ Thus, personalistic parties that reach the 10-percent threshold in five consecutive elections but then collapse after the founding leader dies or otherwise ceases to be a viable presidential candidate are not scored as successful. The two parties excluded on these grounds are Hugo Banzer's ADN in Bolivia and Abdalá Bucaram's Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (PRE).

¹² Peru's *Fujimorismo* nearly qualifies as a success but is excluded because it failed to win 10 percent of the vote in the 2001 legislative election. Uruguay's Broad Front (FA), though discussed in Luna's chapter, is not included in our sample because it was formed in 1971, prior to the onset of the third wave.

¹³ This includes all Latin American countries except Cuba.

¹⁴ We include parties that won at least 1 percent of the vote in coalition with other parties. We exclude strictly provincial parties; thus, parties must compete in more than one province for seats in national legislative elections to be included.

¹⁵ Most of these parties have not competed in five consecutive legislative elections. A few have competed in five elections but surpassed the 1 percent threshold for inclusion (e.g., Indigenous Social Alliance/Independent Social Alliance [ASI] in Colombia) or the 10-percent threshold for success (e.g., *Fujimorismo* in Peru) fewer than five elections ago.

¹⁶ These are Bolivia's Movement toward Socialism (MAS); Colombia's Social Party of National Unity (PSUN/Party of the U); Costa Rica's Citizens' Action Party (PAC) and Broad Front (FA); Guatemala's Patriotic Party (PP), National Unity of Hope (UNE), and Grand National Alliance (GANNA); Panama's Democratic Change (CD); Peru's

6 *Steven Levitsky, James Loxton, and Brandon Van Dyck*TABLE 1.1 *Cases of successful party-building in Latin America since 1978¹*

Country	Party	Birth
Brazil	Workers' Party (PT)	1980
Brazil	Brazilian Social Democracy Party (PSDB)	1988
Brazil	Liberal Front Party (PFL)/Democrats (DEM)	1985
Chile	Independent Democratic Union (UDI)	1983
Chile	National Renewal (RN)	1987
Chile	Party for Democracy (PPD)	1987
El Salvador	Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA)	1981
El Salvador	Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)	1992
Mexico	Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)	1989
Nicaragua	Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN)	1979
Panama	Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD)	1979

¹ A party is scored as successful if it wins at least 10 percent of the vote in five or more consecutive national legislative elections *and* survives after its founding leader has ceased to be a viable presidential contender (due to death, forced or voluntary retirement, or abandonment of the party). Elections must be held at least two years apart from one another. If two legislative elections are held within two years of one another (e.g., Guatemala in 1994 and 1995, Peru in 2000 and 2001), both elections count, but parties must win 10 percent or more of the vote in at least six consecutive elections. To be scored as successful, a party must receive 10 percent or more on its own in at least one national legislative election; once it has done so, subsequent elections in which it participates in alliances that win at least 10 percent of the vote are also counted.

Movement toward Socialism (MAS), the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV), and Costa Rica's Citizens' Action Party (PAC), are likely to become full cases of success. Most of the others, however, are already in decline and are thus unlikely to reach the 10-percent/five-election threshold. The other thirty-nine incomplete cases are parties that have never won 10 percent of the vote and are thus unlikely to succeed. Hence, our limited number of successful new parties is not simply due to their having had insufficient time to meet our five-election criterion. Beyond the PSUV, MAS, PAC, and perhaps Peru's *Fujimorismo* and Colombia's Social Party of National Unity (PSUN/Party of the U), very few of the incomplete cases are poised to cross the 10-percent/five-election threshold in the years to come.

Of the 255 new parties that emerged in Latin America between 1978 and 2005 and can be scored definitively, then, only eleven (or 4 percent) actually took root. These results are similar to those generated

Fujimorismo, National Solidarity Party (PSN), and Peruvian Nationalist Party (PNP); and Venezuela's Fifth Republic Movement (MVR)/United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV).

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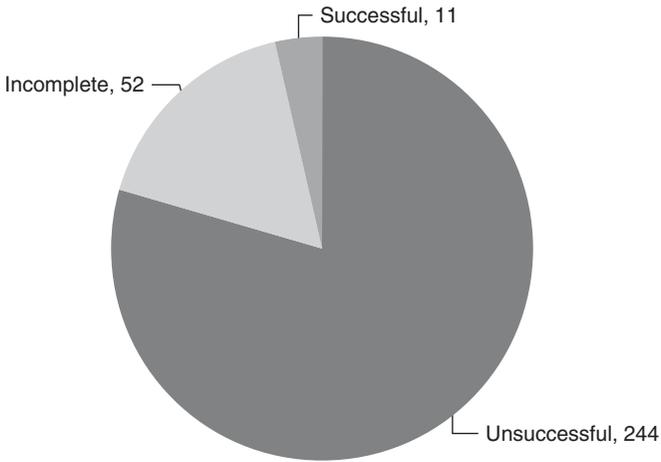


FIGURE 1.1 Party-building outcomes in eighteen Latin American countries, 1978–2005.

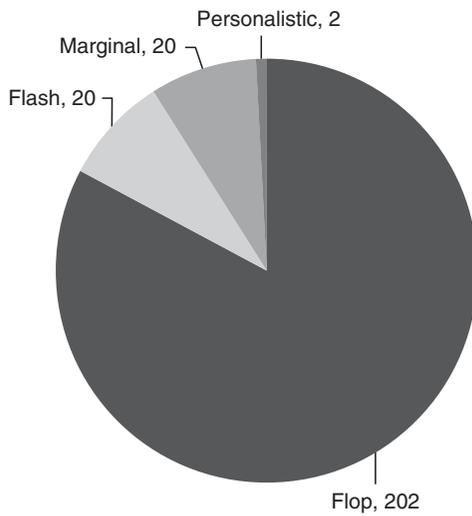


FIGURE 1.2 Types of unsuccessful party, 1978–2005.

by Mustillo's (2009) study of new party trajectories in Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela. Of the 297 parties examined by Mustillo, 3.5 percent were successful (what he calls "explosive" or "contender" parties), while 89 percent died without achieving any success ("flops"), 4

percent achieved brief success but then collapsed (“flash” parties), and 3 percent remained marginal contenders (“flat” parties) (2009: 325).

Our eleven cases of successful party-building are diverse. They span the left (PT, PPD, FMLN, FSLN, Mexico’s PRD) and right (UDI, RN, ARENA, PFL/DEM), and include insurgent successor parties (FMLN, FSLN), social movement-based parties (PT), authoritarian successor parties (UDI, ARENA, Panama’s PRD), and parties born from schisms within established parties (PSDB, PFL/DEM, Mexico’s PRD).

EXPLAINING SUCCESSFUL PARTY-BUILDING:
A CONFLICT-CENTERED APPROACH

Why have a handful of new parties established themselves as enduring electoral contenders in Latin America, while so many others have not? What factors enabled the PT, the FMLN, and the Mexican PRD to take root, while other new left-of-center parties, such as the United Left (IU) in Peru, FREPASO in Argentina, and the Democratic Alliance M-19 (AD M-19) in Colombia, collapsed? Likewise, what explains the success of the UDI in Chile and ARENA in El Salvador, when most other new conservative parties, such as the Union of the Democratic Center (UCEDE) in Argentina, the National Advancement Party (PAN) in Guatemala, and the Liberty Movement in Peru, failed?

Contemporary approaches to party-building do not adequately explain this variation. For example, scholars have argued that democracy itself, if uninterrupted, should encourage party development.¹⁷ There are two versions of this argument. The top-down version focuses on how democratic institutions shape the incentives of individual politicians. In his seminal work on party formation in the United States, for example, John Aldrich (1995: 28–55) argues that under democracy, individual politicians have an incentive to “turn to parties” in order to achieve collective goals, such as winning elections and passing legislation, which, in turn, increase the likelihood of sustaining a long political career. Although Aldrich recognizes the coordination problems inherent in party formation (1995: 55–56), he argues that stable democracy creates “more or less continuous incentives for ambitious politicians to consider party organizations as a means to achieve their goals” (1995: 286).

The bottom-up version of the democracy-centered approach links regular elections to the development of partisan attachments (Campbell et al.

¹⁷ See Aldrich (1995), Brader and Tucker (2001), and Lupu and Stokes (2010).

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1960; Converse 1969; Tucker and Brader 2001; Lupu and Stokes 2010; Dinas 2014). Drawing on classic works such as Campbell et al. (1960) and Converse (1969), Lupu and Stokes argue that since voters cast ballots for parties, “the desire to resolve cognitive dissonance leads them to see themselves as partisans of this party, which in turn makes them more likely to cast votes for it in the future” (2010: 92).¹⁸ Thus, “over time, as people have repeated opportunities to vote for parties and are exposed to their mobilizing efforts, they acquire partisan attachments” (Lupu and Stokes 2010: 102).

Yet evidence from Latin America suggests that elections and democracy are insufficient to induce politicians to invest in parties or to engender stable partisan identities. Nearly four decades since the onset of the third wave, new parties have taken root in only a handful of Latin American countries. Moreover, of our eleven successful cases, only one (Brazil’s PSDB) was born under democracy. The other ten all emerged under authoritarian rule.¹⁹ Outside of Brazil, then, no successful party-building occurred under democracy in Latin America between 1978 and 2005, despite the fact that many countries experienced two or more decades of uninterrupted electoral competition.

Another approach to party-building focuses on institutional design. Institutionalist approaches highlight how constitutional, electoral, and other rules shape incentives for politicians and voters to coordinate around or aggregate into national parties.²⁰ For example, scholars have examined the impact of electoral and other institutional barriers to entry on party formation in Latin America (Van Cott 2005). Likewise, scholars of Brazilian politics have argued that open-list PR electoral systems weaken parties by encouraging candidate-centered strategies (Mainwaring 1999; Ames 2001). These analyses have generated useful insights into how parties organize and how politicians operate in relation to those organizations. They are less useful, however, for explaining what enables parties to take root. Electoral rules may shape incentives for party formation, but they do not generate the partisan attachments or activist networks that are so essential to long-term party survival. In Latin America, institutional design has had a limited impact on party-building

¹⁸ Dinas (2014) makes a similar argument, drawing on US electoral data.

¹⁹ Brazil’s PFL was born in 1985 in the last days of the Brazilian military regime, and Chile’s RN and PPD were created in 1987 in anticipation of a transition to a more competitive regime.

²⁰ See Duverger (1954), Cox (1997), Mainwaring (1999), Moser (2001), Chhibber and Kollman (2004), and Hicken (2009).

outcomes. Empirical analyses find little, if any, relationship between electoral rules and party-building outcomes in the region. For example, Mustillo (2007: 80) found that electoral rules had a “rather trivial” impact on party-building. Among our cases, new parties succeeded in federal (e.g., Brazil, Mexico) and unitary systems (e.g., Chile, El Salvador), under powerful executives (e.g., Brazil, Chile) and more constitutionally limited ones (e.g., Mexico), and in electoral systems with high (e.g., Brazil) and low (e.g., Chile) district magnitudes. In some cases (e.g., Brazil), new parties consolidated in institutional contexts widely considered unpropitious for party-building (Mainwaring 1999), while in others (e.g., Peru), new parties failed despite repeated efforts to design institutions aimed at strengthening parties (Vergara 2009; Muñoz and Dargent, Chapter 7, this volume). Indeed, electoral rules have changed so frequently in much of Latin America that they may be best viewed as endogenous to, rather than determinative of, party strength (Remmer 2008).

What, then, explains variation in party-building outcomes in Latin America? New parties must generally do three things if they are to take root. First, they must cultivate strong partisan identities. To succeed over time, parties need partisans, or individuals who feel an attachment to the party and thus consistently turn out to support it. In his chapter for this volume and elsewhere (2014, 2016), Noam Lupu argues that the key to building a stable partisan support base lies in the development of a *party brand*. A party’s brand is the image of it that voters develop by observing its behavior over time.²¹ Parties with strong brands come to “stand for” something in the eyes of their supporters. According to Lupu (2014: 567), voter attachments to party brands are based on a sense of “comparative fit”: in other words, “individuals identify with a party to the extent that they consider themselves similar to the party brand.”

Establishing a party brand is no easy task. New parties must either carve out space for themselves vis-à-vis established parties or, where party systems are weakly institutionalized, compete with a plethora of other new parties. According to Lupu (2014, 2016), two factors are essential for brand development: interparty differentiation and intraparty consistency. In other words, a new party must distinguish itself from other parties, and its behavior must be consistent over time. If it becomes indistinguishable from other parties, or if its profile changes markedly from one election to the next, the perception of “comparative fit” will diminish

²¹ The notion of party brand is similar to what Hale (2006: 12) calls “ideational capital,” or the “cultivation of a *reputation* for standing for [certain] principles.”