

Transforming Labor-Based Parties in Latin America

Argentine Peronism in Comparative Perspective

Why did some Latin American labor-based parties adapt successfully to the contemporary challenges of neoliberalism and working-class decline while others did not? Drawing on a detailed study of Argentine Peronism, as well as a broader comparative analysis, this book develops an organizational approach to party change. Levitsky's book breaks new ground in its focus on informal and weakly institutionalized party structures. It argues that loosely structured party organizations, such as those found in many populist labor-based parties, are often better equipped to adapt to rapid environmental change than are more bureaucratic labor-based parties. The argument is illustrated in the case of the Peronist party, a mass labor-based party with a highly fluid internal structure. The book shows how this weakly routinized structure allowed party reformers to undertake a set of far-reaching coalitional and programmatic changes that enabled Peronism to survive, and even thrive, in the neoliberal era.

Steven Levitsky is Assistant Professor of Government and Social Studies at Harvard University. He was a Visiting Fellow at the Kellogg Institute for International Studies in the fall of 1999. He has published articles on political parties and democracy in such journals as *Comparative Politics*, *World Politics*, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *Party Politics*, *Journal of Democracy*, and the *Journal of Latin American Studies*.

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To My Parents,

Carol Levitsky and David Levitsky

And to Liz

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Acknowledgments

As I write these pages, Argentina is in the midst of one of the most profound political-economic crises in its history. Millions of Argentines have reached a level of poverty and desperation that few had thought imaginable. In early 2002, in the aftermath of the massive riots that buried Fernando De la Rúa's presidency two years before the end of his mandate, Peronism again found itself in power during a period of crisis and change. This book will argue that the Peronist party's combination of organizational strength and flexibility has enabled it to adapt and survive through many difficult times. Peronism's capacity to manage the contemporary crisis remains unclear. In the meantime, many of the Argentines who gave so generously to me while I was living in their country are now living in despair. I desperately wish it were otherwise.

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