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Introduction

How do party organizational structure and rules affect political engagement and its reproduction? To answer this question, you might take a walk in Montevideo, Uruguay on a Thursday evening, around 8 PM. It is likely that, at some point, you will find a locale where eight to fifteen people are discussing politics. They might be debating the Middle East conflict, free-trade agreements, labor policy, or the future of the neighborhood's public square. Among these people you might notice some young persons but, most likely, you will see middle-aged persons or retirees. You might find both men and women. These gatherings occur any time of the year, summer or winter, regardless of the electoral calendar. The locales are humble places that have only the essential furniture, usually old and often not in great condition. There are basic amenities, such as a gas or electric heater for warmth in the winter or a fan to provide relief from the summer heat. These items are usually donated by the same people who participate in the meetings. The interior walls are covered with political symbols and old campaign posters. The exterior walls are painted in red, blue, and white and usually have a blackboard announcing upcoming meetings or events. This is a Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA) Comité de Base (Base Committee).

María Ema is typical of the attendees you might encounter at a Base Committee meeting. She is around seventy years old. After graduating from university, she worked as a teacher and principal in a school for children with disabilities and participated in the teacher's union. She has been a member of the FA since its founding. After her husband died in the 1990s, she decided to become active in a Base Committee. She initially participated in a Base Committee located in the western part of

Montevideo, the sector where the FA has its stronghold. She later moved to the center of the city and participated in another Base Committee. Over the years, she became familiar to her fellow FA activists and, in 1997, she began participating as a grassroots activist delegate to the National Plenary and the National Political Board (the highest decision-making bodies of the party). Since becoming a delegate, she has been participating both in her Base Committee and in the meetings of the highest decision-making bodies of the party.

Gabriel is another typical attendee. He is around thirty years old. He joined a Base Committee for the first time when he was twenty-seven, in November 2010, after the presidential elections of 2009. He holds a BA in Communications. Since 2012, he has been serving as a delegate to the National Plenary. José is another typical attendee. He is around sixty years old and is an independent bookseller, selling door-to-door. He has been in the FA since its founding in 1971, when he was fifteen years old. Since the 1990s, he has participated in different commissions and now serves on the FA's directorate. Verónica is another attendee. She is in her thirties, a biologist, and has participated in the FA since she was eighteen years old. She began by participating in one of the FA's factions and subsequently participated in a Base Committee. A few years later, she was selected as the organizational secretary of her zone. More recently, she has become the FA vice president, representing the FA's grassroots activists. After becoming vice president, she continued to participate in her Base Committee as an organizer.

As these histories illustrate, people who attend a Base Committee meeting might also act as delegates to different bodies of the party organization, including the top echelons of the party. However, these delegates are indistinguishable from the rest of the attendees. Anyone can be a delegate, and delegates neither hold a government position nor receive any compensation for their role. Moreover, neither the delegates nor the Base Committee have any resources to distribute, either to Committee members or to their neighbors. None of the delegates are professional politicians and none harbor aspirations of pursuing a political career that could lead them to a government position. As grassroots delegates, however, they sit face-to-face with the most important political leaders of the party.

Our data suggest that there are around 7,000 committed FA activists who participate in some type of political activity many times during the year. Across the country, the FA has over 300 Base Committees, which hold meetings at least once every two weeks and where activists gather

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and debate political issues. As elections approach, they start coordinating their campaign activities, such as intense face-to-face canvassing and meetings with national leaders. Many FA leaders question the role of the Base Committees within the party structure, arguing that they do not renew their membership, that they are essentially outdated, i.e., in their ideological preferences and their type of organization, or that they are controlled by the most leftist factions. Regardless of these arguments, the Base Committees are unequivocal proof of a party that has intense activism from voluntary grassroots members.

The FA has been successful in electoral terms, obtaining 18.3 percent of the votes in the first election in which it participated in 1971, and reaching 50.4 percent in the national election of 2004, the first time it won the presidency. It also retained the presidency and an absolute majority in both chambers of Congress in the two subsequent elections, garnering 49.3 percent and 49.4 percent of the popular vote in 2009 and 2014, respectively.

Yet, the history of the FA is not simply of electoral success. It also has an impressively large number of members: 502,930 according to FA administrative data (as of 2017). This number constitutes 19.3 percent of the Uruguayan electorate. As with every party registry, the FA's registry is outdated, and this number almost certainly overestimates the actual number of active members. However, the number of people who participate in internal elections (i.e., to elect the organization's officials) is significant. In 2006, 222,795 of these members, out of a national population of 2.5 million adults (i.e., sixteen years old and older), voted in the party's internal election. In 2012, participation declined to 170,770 and in 2016 only around 80,000 people voted. This level is still impressive, given the voluntary and strictly partisan nature of the election. If 80,000 is the actual number of active members, they represent 3 percent of the Uruguayan adult citizenry.

The 2016 internal election took place in winter, in every sense of the word. It was cold, it was windy; a typical dark, rainy, winter day in Uruguay. Also, elections occurred at a time of retrenchment of progressive and leftist forces in Latin America, of both populist and more institutionalized parties, after eleven years in government and at the lowest point in the government's popularity. If we add to these factors the fact that some members urged people not to vote, as a way of expressing the degree of their frustration and anger against the party, the expected level of turnout was very low; and, indeed, a lower number of *frenteampelistas* voted, compared to 2012. In fact, while the turnout for

the 2016 internal FA election was indeed lower than in previous years, it is remarkable that the organization was able to organize 1,000 voting locales and mobilize 5,000 volunteers who prepared and organized everything.

Notwithstanding the number of members that distinguishes the FA from other parties, many political parties in the world have a membership that represents an equally high percentage of the electorate (Scarrow 2015). The distinctive trait of the FA lies in the number of its grassroots activists (not simply adherents) and, more significantly, the organizational structure and rules that grant these activists a direct political role.

The FA so far has exhibited a uniquely high level of organizational vitality. In fact, Levitsky and Roberts (2011) classified leftist parties in Latin America and categorized the FA as the only mass-organic leftist party. What facilitates the reproduction of party organization after forty-eight years of existence and fourteen years in government? What is the effect of the party's organizational traits on political engagement and its reproduction? Finally, how do party structure and a high level of activist participation influence party success? By employing multiple methods, which include process tracing, thick description, and experimental research, this volume seeks to develop a theory concerning the effects of vibrant party organization and democratic representation.¹

Scholars widely accept that democratic representation requires the existence of political parties (Aldrich 1995, Fiorina 1980, Hagopian and Mainwaring 2005, Sartori 1976). Indeed, almost every book that analyzes parties or party systems quotes Schattschneider's (Schattschneider 1942) famous dictum that democracy is "unthinkable save in terms of parties" (1). Therefore, the study of party organizations is crucial to our understanding of the way democratic representation works in different contexts.

The party-politics literature has contributed significantly to our understanding of the evolution of types of political parties (Duverger 1954, Gunther and Diamond 2003, Katz and Mair 1995, Kirchheimer 1966,

¹ It is widely accepted that experimental designs ought to be registered (Dunning 2016). However, and in line with Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) research standards, we argue that qualitative research should also be registered. Following Piñeiro and Rosenblatt (2016): "beyond reinforcing the connection between theory and evidence, and encouraging greater transparency in qualitative research, the PAP-Q supports and guides the work of the researcher by structuring the process and by pushing the researcher to carefully think of the design" (p. 794). The pre-analysis plan is posted to the study registry of the EGAP network. <http://egap.org/registration/1989>

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Panebianco 1988). One of the dimensions along which parties are classified is the level of membership attachment. The cadre party comprises a small elite of members of parliament, while the mass-organic party includes a large number of citizens within the party ranks. There are compelling analyses concerning the structural (Mainwaring and Zoco 2007, Webb and White 2007a), institutional (Samuels and Shugart 2010), and organizational (Scarrow 2015, Scarrow and Gezgor 2010, Scarrow, Webb, and Poguntke 2017) determinants of the decay of party activism, especially in recent decades. Thus, the literature also highlights circumstances that make it difficult for parties to function properly in contemporary societies, even while it emphasizes the essential role parties play as the most critical agents of democratic representation.

Whether or not one agrees with this general claim, it is clear that the old mass-organic type of party, described by Duverger (1954), has disappeared. New technologies have significantly decreased the costs of disseminating a political message and to incorporate voters' needs in party platforms. Political parties in high- or middle-income societies no longer need activists to win elections (Hersh 2015, Issenberg 2012). Also, given that having a large and complex organization is costly and harder to manage and control, party leaders have no interest in maintaining activists and a large organizational structure.

The party-politics literature typically accounts for the evolution of parties and their organizational changes in terms of exogenous factors. That is, the organization is usually set as the dependent variable, influenced by societal changes or contextual conditions, exogenous factors that determine the organizational forms and the transformations that parties undergo. From this perspective, parties cannot avoid their supposed fate. By contrast, focusing on the dynamics that occur within parties – especially the institutions established within parties – might help elucidate the diverse ways in which parties adapt to exogenous challenges and overcome the determinism that characterizes the literature. This volume thus contributes to the literature studying the role organizational structure plays in determining the fate of a political party (Anria 2018, Bermeo and Yashar 2016, Burgess and Levitsky 2003, Calvo and Murillo 2019, Cyr 2017, Levitsky 2003, Levitsky et al. 2016, Panebianco 1988, Scarrow 2015).

In some cases, when organizations exist they are merely vehicles of party leaders who determine party strategies. In other cases, however, the organization is important and constrains leaders' preferences. In institutionalized party systems, where organizations have value, party

organizations' characteristics influence both their ability to adapt to contextual challenges and secular changes and the form this adaptation takes (Huntington 1968, Piñeiro and Rosenblatt 2018).

The electoral success of the FA and its capacity to challenge the established Uruguayan foundational parties (Colorado and National Party, PC and PN) and its ability to be a pole of attraction for social movements was accompanied by the existence of institutionalized channels for *voice*, through which the party activists influence strategic decisions. These channels provide a means for activists to influence the party's agenda, and to exercise a veto over party leaders' objectives. Activists participate in the party's strategic discussions and party leaders, when making decisions, consider the potential problems they might face if they deviate far from activists' preferences. Thus, the party grassroots members constitute a potential (or actual) threat to incumbent party elites.

We claim that organizational attributes have historical causes (Stinchcombe 1968). In our case study, the FA was born as a coalition of left-of-center organizations. However, due to an explosion of bottom-up activism that coincided with the party's inception, the FA developed a common structure that privileged consensus and balance among members. This resulted in the gradual establishment of grassroots activists' institutionalized role in the decision making in every aspect of the party's life (e.g., programmatic discussion, presidential ticket nomination, among others). Moreover, the founding leaders conceived the FA both as a coalition and as a movement. Indeed, the party's founding proclamation expresses this notion. This implies, from the very beginning, the presence of strong bottom-up participation and clear organizational structures by which grassroots activists could directly influence party decisions. This well-structured organization with institutionalized opportunities for bottom-up voice inhibits radical changes and favors long-term political consistency of the party brand.

Throughout the FA's foundational stage, the party gradually ensured multiple veto points, and checks and balances between party structures. This, in turn, was consolidated and reproduced through feedback mechanisms (see Chapter 4). We claim that the early consolidation of a dense and complex organizational structure and rules that ensure activists a significant voice in the organization is the key to understanding the ability of a mass-organic party to reproduce activism, both while in opposition and while in government (see Chapter 5). The party acquired this characteristic during its foundational stage (1971–1986) and the FA

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continues to this day to be a party with activists. As a result of the production and reproduction of this structure and rules, the party organization limits the discretion of the government, a crucial way in which the FA differs from the norm of party organizations in presidential regimes (Samuels and Shugart 2010). This does not imply that one observes a constant confrontation between grassroots activists and national leaders; in fact, the general picture is one of support, of an army of volunteers who are willing to work for the organization and for the success of those leaders. However, the grassroots activists have been able to exercise veto power on both symbolic and substantive issues for a leftist party (see Chapter 6). Yet, the FA is not governed by this movement. Moreover, the activists do not necessarily facilitate the party's approach to the median voter. In terms of decision making, the activists' influence has the potential to block a particular government decision on a sensitive issue or they might simply reduce the government's decisiveness concerning a given course of action.

At its origin in 1971, the FA relied heavily on volunteer activism to advance its electoral goals. Nonetheless, as time went by, the FA ceased to depend exclusively on volunteer organizers to win elections. More critically, there are fewer people today willing to volunteer as party activists or to invest time in the organization. This weakening of organizational attachment is a general trait among other mass-organic parties. The critical difference is that the FA still reproduces activists. The FA reproduces its mass-organic nature in its grassroots structure, the movement of Base Committees.

In the context of the generalized decline of mass party organizations that were formed by significant numbers of activists, the FA is a deviant case, because the party still retains large numbers of engaged activists who are not a cadre of bureaucrats nor a part of a structure to deliver clientelistic goods (c.f. Levitsky 2003). Moreover, it is an intensely and permanently mobilized institutionalized party organization in Latin America. Thus, it provides an opportunity to test several hypotheses about the reproduction of activists' engagement beyond the impact of exogenous processes.

The crucial difference between the FA and other parties is the presence of activists throughout the territory who have an active role in the party's decision making. These activists differ from adherents or members, both in their willingness to engage in volunteer activism and in the elasticity of their engagement behavior based on individuals' perceptions of efficacy within the organization (see Chapter 5). While grassroots activism now

plays a less important function for the party than it did during the foundational stage, grassroots activism still exists and is widespread in the territory.

This book analyzes the value of an organization-centered approach for understanding parties and their role in democratic representation. First, it sheds light on the evolution and challenges of intense engagement in political organizations. Second, it addresses the significance of bottom-up participation. Lastly, the study's findings illuminate the problems confronting declining, eroding political parties in democracies of the developed world. The study thereby addresses important current questions, such as whether parties remain efficacious vehicles of democratic representation, and, if so, what kinds of parties are most promising in this respect.

THEORY

The case of the FA challenges general theories about party development. On the one hand, it challenges Michels' "iron" law of oligarchy (1999 [1911]). In the FA, the presence of grassroots activists in the decision-making structure, with veto power and autonomy from leadership, constrains elites' ability to pursue any given strategy. On the other hand, it challenges the idea that parties exhibit a uniform trajectory of development and decay in contemporary societies, especially in the Latin American context. The reproduction of activism in the FA challenges the idea of a linear trajectory of party development, especially in a region where all structural conditions hinder party development.

The case of the FA also challenges the dominant perspective in the party-politics literature that stresses that candidate selection is the cornerstone of a party's internal democracy. This dominant perspective typically equates internal democracy with the competition between elites or groups that seek to influence the candidate-selection processes. In the case of the FA, however, this dynamic is only observable in the faction structure (described below), while in the grassroots structure democracy is based on the existence of grassroots delegates who influence the direction of the party. Candidate selection thus is not critical for the party's internal democracy because it is built around the direct participation of grassroots activists throughout the party decision-making bodies. Moreover, the separation of the grassroots structure from the candidate-selection process and grassroots members' influence in the party's decision-making process helps the FA grassroots structure avoid oligarchization. That is,

party leaders cannot exert direct influence over the grassroots structure by, for example, controlling candidate selection or material resources.

Michels (1999 [1911]) described what he termed the “iron” law of oligarchy, i.e., a natural process that all political organizations undergo. Parties, according to this view, oligarchize as a result of a natural force that closes the channels for effective *voice* within the organization. Hence, at the organizational level, parties proceed unavoidably down a path toward the concentration of power in the hands of a small, professional elite. As a result, agents (party elites) distance themselves from principals (party members) who do not constrain their decisions. On the one hand, professional politicians control information and generate asymmetries of information with members. On the other hand, elites control resources that are valuable for members, which helps elites control members. In Michels’ account, oligarchization leads both to the exhaustion of activists’ role in the decision making and to the moderation of parties. In this vein, for example, the party-in-government might trigger this process by strengthening a group of elite incumbents who control many resources, as happened with the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party, PT) in Brazil (Ribeiro 2014).

The literature has also claimed that party organizations are decreasingly relevant actors of interest aggregation and representation (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Numerous authors have suggested that modernization and globalization largely account for parties’ increasing difficulties at remaining relevant institutions (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000, Ingelhart and Welzel 2005, Mainwaring and Zoco 2007, Webb and White 2007a). The literature has described the general erosion of century-old voter and partisan loyalties (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Societal transformations in recent decades have put pressure on party organizations because contemporary parties must now share the representation function with more organizations than in the past. New means of communication have changed how collective action is organized (Bimber, Flanagin, and Stohl 2012). Parties now seem forced to transform themselves into smaller and more professional organizations that activate for electoral campaigns; as a result of societal changes, a new, more professionalized and cartelized party organization has emerged (Katz and Mair 1995). This literature tends to depict an unrealistic normal course that stresses homogeneity and mutes divergence in outcomes.

The literature concerning political parties and, more broadly, the literature on democratic representation capture a general trend of political party transformation in response to exogenous changes. For example,

Kitschelt (1994) studied the challenges of societal transformations in the organization of European social democracy. More recently, Scarrow (2015), in work concerning the transformations of party organizations, observed a reduction in number of activists and an increase in adherents. The FA also exhibits a smooth decline over time in level of activism, yet it retains an organizational structure and rules that challenge the general trend found in most of the literature.

In developing societies, parties are also subject to additional structural and contextual constraints that they find difficult to escape. The “dual transition” to democracy and to a market economy in Latin America was followed in some countries by the decomposition of party systems and, in other countries, by the inability to establish a stable system (Bogliaccini 2019 Coppedge 1998a,b, Roberts 2014). During the Third Wave of democratization that started around the end of the 1970s and continued during the 1980s, Latin American party systems showed high levels of electoral volatility (Jones 2005, Mainwaring 2018, Mainwaring and Scully 1995, Roberts and Wibbels 1999). The exhaustion of the ISI development model, the succession of deep economic and political crises (including hyperinflation, coup attempts, etc.) and the enactment of market reforms (Remmer 1991, Weyland 2002) undermined the representation function of political party systems (Roberts 2014). The abrupt transformation of the development model, from state-centered to market-oriented, was a critical juncture that, according to Roberts (2014), fundamentally changed the social bases of political parties. This affected party organizations. As the author notes, not all party systems, nor all party organizations, react similarly. Roberts provides an explanation for the party system level; he claims that divergent results depend on the intersection of three causal factors, which in turn correspond to different historical phases: 1. the nature of the party system during the ISI; 2. the depth and duration of the 1980s economic depression and the enactment of market reforms; and 3. the political characteristics of those who led the reforms. These factors determined whether the double transition resulted in an ideologically aligned party system or a dealigned (or even collapsed) party system.

The relationship between presidentialism and democratic instability has been extensively analyzed in the comparative politics literature (Linz 1994, Mainwaring and Shugart 1997, Przeworski et al. 2000). Presidentialism also affects the stability of party systems (Linz 1990, Samuels and Shugart 2010, Webb and White 2007b). Presidents are directly elected for fixed periods, and parties in a presidential regime cannot control the chief executive as effectively as can parliamentary parties under