The Post-Partisans

Não estou vendendo a minha alma ao diabo
(I’m not selling my soul to the devil)

Former Brazilian President Fernando Henrique Cardoso denies automatic support for PT’s presidential candidate Haddad, and confirms that he will not vote for Bolsonaro in the 2018 Brazilian ballotage

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If you are confronted with two evils, thus the argument runs, it is your duty to opt for the lesser one . . . the weakness of the argument has always been that those who choose the lesser evil forget very quickly that they chose evil.

Hannah Arendt, Responsibility Under a Dictatorship

Introduction

In February 2018, Brazilians still did not know if Lula da Silva would be able to run for president again or would remain in prison with his political rights suspended due to judicial allegations of corruption. Eight months before the first round of the presidential elections, uncertainty reigned. Pollsters conducted surveys with two different scenarios: with and without Lula in the ballot box. In the first case, Lula obtained between 34 percent and 37 percent of the total votes, twice the support of his runner-up, Jair Bolsonaro, a federal deputy for Rio de Janeiro state. In the second case, blank and null votes rose from 8 percent to 32 percent, surpassing Bolsonaro’s own support. An important share of the electorate did not know who to vote for, but most of them were completely sure about whom not to endorse. Considering the lesser-of-two-evils logic, Brazilians, like former President Fernando Henrique Cardoso, doubted until the very last moment.

During that month, Datafolha, a prestigious pollster, asked Brazilians whom they would never vote for. Every respondent had an answer. Lula had the most rejection among the presidential candidates, with 40 percent saying they would never vote for him, followed by Jair Bolsonaro with 29 percent. Then came Geraldo Alckmin (a former governor of São Paulo state and member of Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira [PSDB]) with 26 percent, Marina Silva (former presidential candidate and leader of Rede Sustentabilidade [REDE]) with 23 percent, and Ciro Gomes (a well-known politician from Ceará and leader of Partido Democrático Trabalhista [PDT]) with 21 percent. Journalists and pundits had by then talked about anti-petismo, defined as a solid animadversion against the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), a leftist party that had been in power between 2003 and 2016. The PT eventually became one of the parties most responsible for the Lava Jato corruption scandal, which revealed structural corruption in the political and economic system that had prevailed until then. But, as is evident, the rejection of PT only partially explains the strong
disaffection toward the whole political elite. A significant proportion of
Brazilians rejected not only PT’s leaders, but also others belonging to estab-
lished political parties like PSDB, Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (MDB),
and PDT, and even relatively new political organizations like REDE. Therefore,
there are reasons to think that the eventual rise of Jair Bolsonaro was
a phenomenon not only explained by anti-petismo, but also more precisely by
the hatred for the whole political establishment.

In the end, Lula da Silva was banned from running for the presidency, and PT
replaced him as candidate with Fernando Haddad, who served as mayor of São
Paulo between 2013 and 2017. Haddad went on to come in second with
29.3 percent of the valid votes in the first round. Despite the absence of its
historic leader, PT maintained a solid following, enough to qualify to the
ballotage. Haddad’s electoral support can be explained by PT’s partisanship,
which survived the impact of corruption scandals. Identification with PT turned
out to be resistant, solid, and vivid, as well as amendable to continuing to
support candidates other than Lula. While in other Latin American countries
partisanship has not been able to outlive corruption scandals – like aprismo in
Peru – PT showed its strength as an identification that has conquered the hearts
and minds of an important number of Brazilians.

However, (positive) partisanship by itself cannot explain the surprising rise
of Jair Bolsonaro, an eighteen-year federal deputy who alternated between
relatively small political parties and ended up nominated by Partido Social
Liberal (PSL) as its presidential candidate. In previous elections for the
Chamber of Deputies, PSL did not reach 1 percent of the valid vote, and its
previous presidential candidate (Luciano Bolívar in 2006) got 0.06 percent of
the vote. Noticeably, electoral support in favor of Jair Bolsonaro did not come
from a positive partisanship but from anti-partisans, individuals who hold
negative partisanship – against PT and against most other political parties
that had forged the Brazilian partisan establishment (PSDB and MDB). In this
Element, I will refer to those individuals who hold simultaneous and parallel
negative partisanship related to the traditional party system as anti-
establishment identifiers, as holders of a type of post-partisan identification
that can help researchers to understand not only Brazilian politics, but also all
other party systems where positive partisanship is in decay.

Partisan loyalties have eroded across a wide set of nations in recent decades.
The specialized literature has detected significant partisanship decline in the
United States and in many Western democracies. Researchers have categorized
this phenomenon as partisan dealignment, a persistent pattern of ever-weaker
political parties and a reduction in partisan identification (Dalton & Wattenberg
2002). The breadth of this phenomenon speaks to a general process that exceeds
idiosyncratic explanations. In fact, factors weakening party identification in established democracies are also affecting emerging democracies (Dalton & Weldon 2007). Apparently, we are moving onto a scenario in which partisan fidelities are becoming less relevant for connecting citizens to public affairs, especially in the developed world.

In Latin America, the diagnosis of partisanship is mixed: While citizens’ attachments to political parties have declined severely in some countries, in others they have increased (Lupu 2015a). Fragmented and fluid party systems have prevented the institution of a partisan establishment in many countries, which has reduced the likelihood of mass partisanship. However, evidence suggests that in some countries new political formations have successfully emerged, conquering the hearts and minds of the public (e.g. PT in Brazil), and in others, political parties have survived democratic interruptions while maintaining the loyalty of a share of the electorate (e.g. peronismo in Argentina). Nevertheless, lower levels of party-system institutionalization (PSI) have challenged the centrality of political parties in the public arena in this region (Mainwaring et al. 2018).

Partisan dealignment in many developed countries and partisan fluidity in developing nations oblige the academic community to try to explain how political identities work in post-partisan scenarios: those characterized by the loss of parties’ capacity to connect individuals with their political agenda. The lack of awareness on this topic has made scholars describe this situation as “a void” (Mair 2013). But if partisanship is in decay in many countries, or at least has lost its centrality to explain political attachments, what has replaced conventional partisanship? What type of political identification has emerged in arenas where partisan loyalties are falling and/or having difficulties to deepen roots in society?

So far, we have two possible answers to these inquires. On the one hand, we should note the rise of negative partisans (or anti-partisans) to complement the picture of (positive) partisan decay. In Western democracies and in Latin America, an emerging literature has paid attention to a previously unattended side of partisanship. Negative identifiers – individuals who reject specific political parties – are as relevant as partisans in order to understand how politics works nowadays (e.g. Abramowitz & Webster 2018). On the other hand, evidence shows that former partisans in the United States have become “independents” (e.g. Klar & Krupnikov 2016). The decline of partisan identifiers in the United States has nurtured a group of educated and well-informed individuals unconnected with parties. In other countries, “independents” have a different profile: apathetic to political affairs and indifferent to political parties. These individuals, autonomous from parties, are labeled “apartisans”
to emphasize their lack of positive partisan identities. A genuine nonpartisan, however, should also lack negative partisanship. In this Element, I use apartisans and nonpartisans interchangeably to represent those individuals who do not hold any positive or negative party ID.

In addition to “anti-partisans” and “apartisans,” a third additional category should be included in the analysis of arenas in which traditional (positive) partisanship is in demise: anti-establishment political identity. In those scenarios where the political establishment is well defined and recognizable for most citizens, individuals might develop negative attitudes toward it, without endorsing any emerging political party. They might define themselves as “independents” (Klar & Krupnikov 2016), but they are not authentic apartisans because they do in fact hold multiple negative partisanship. Anti-establishment identifiers are those individuals who are characterized by their loathing of the main political parties of their party system.

I propose a typology that integrates these three nonpositive partisanship into a broader perspective. Based on previous empirical work, and expanding the breadth of analysis to several Latin American cases, I suggest that in order to understand individuals’ hearts and minds, we should consider—besides positive partisanship—at least three more relevant political identities: negative partisanship (or anti-partisanship), anti-establishment identity, and apartisanship (or nonpartisanship). These three distinct categories are useful for understanding a variety of connections (and disconnections) between citizens and the public sphere, in contexts where positive partisanship is losing influence. While the literature normally has lumped together individuals who lack positive partisanship into a sole group (e.g. apartisans), I propose to separate different profiles among them. By understanding the nature of these post-partisan political identities, we can detect the type of political linkages based on their rejection of specific political parties (negative partisanship), their rejection of multiple political parties (anti-establishment identities), and the lack of any political linkage, which is the absence of positive and negative partisanship. What I mean by post-partisan political identities are the alternative ways in which rejection of or the absence of partisan politics are defining identifiers or non-identifiers. I exclude from the analysis societal identifications that might have been politicized (e.g. ethnicity) but which are not originally linked to political parties in their formations.

Latin America is an appropriate region to study these sets of political identities. From the standpoint of the public, partisanship is a measure of PSI (Dalton & Weldon 2007). And in this continent, we find a great variety of levels of PSI (Mainwaring et al. 2018) that I will address based on its schemes of (non)partisanship: institutionalized (but socially uprooted) party systems.
(e.g. Chile), very low levels of PSI (e.g. Peru), increased institutionalization (e.g. Brazil), and deinstitutionalization (with signs of recovery) (e.g. Argentina). I will demonstrate through original data gathered from surveys the diverse configurations of post-partisan political identifications according to different levels of PSI. By linking political identities with party-building, partisan polarization, and PSI, empirically and comparatively, I will contribute to the understanding of the fate of political parties in the region, and its consequences for democracy.

This Element is organized into five sections. In Section 1, I discuss the conceptualization of partisanship and present an alternative measurement that can allow us to tackle the different types of partisanship and what I refer to as post-partisan political identities (negative partisanship, anti-establishment identity, and apartisanship). The typology is exemplified empirically in the cases of Chile and Brazil. In Section 2, I develop in detail the conceptualization of negative partisanship and present the respective measurements of negative partisanship in seven Latin American countries. I focus on Peru as an example of a democracy with negative partisans. In Section 3, I approach the conceptualization and measurement of anti-establishment identification and apartisanship, clarifying common confusions between these two concepts. I tackle the cases of Chile, Brazil, Honduras, and Argentina to exemplify the main points. Moreover, I explain how anti-establishment identifications tune in with populist appeals. In Section 4, I address some implications of the perspective of post-partisan political identities to shed light on relevant topics of the study of political parties, such as party-building, partisan polarization, and PSI. Section 5 presents concluding remarks, pointing out possible paths to deepen a research agenda.

1 Conceptualization, Measurement, and Typology

Partisanship has been considered to be one of the most important variables to shape political attitudes, electoral preferences, and political behavior. When originally conceived, party identification was understood as an affective multi-dimensional orientation, that is, a positive and/or negative identification toward political parties, with some degree of intensity (Campbell et al. 1960). It has been comprehended as an enduring psychological affinity toward a partisan referenced group, similar to a religious identification (Green et al. 2006). Enduring partisan identifications are arranged considering the natural individuals’ psychological reflexes to build boundaries, by perceiving themselves as members of an “in-group” and nonmembers as members of an “out-group” (Huddy 2001). As a result of this, socially rooted partisan identifications are
based on shared characteristics among in-group members and in opposition to
groups to which they do not belong (Bankert 2021). In addition to the social
identity framework developed, a more pragmatic perspective understands par-
tisanship as a “running tally” of retrospective evaluations of public administra-
tions (Fiorina 1981). However, while the latter might be useful in explaining
short-term endorsements of political parties, it is very limited to elucidate
a more complex panorama of multiple and simultaneous types of (positive
and negative) partisanships and their absence.

I build the proposed typology based on two original anticipated types of
partisanship: positive and negative. Although seminal works have defined
partisanship in these terms, the specialized literature has especially focused
on the former. I consider that this is due to the fact that most previous research
on partisanship has studied institutionalized party systems, settings in which
positive and negative partisanships tend to overlap. In a hypothetical bipartisan
background, most individuals who endorse party A simultaneously reject party
B (and vice versa), and few individuals exist outside of those two groups
(Figure 1). For this reason, focusing on the positive dimension of partisanship
might have been sufficient for explaining political outputs.

However, this situation is no longer helpful when partisan politics is in
decline (or in multiparty system settings). As important as understanding
partisanship as the conquering of hearts and minds, is to understand political
identities shaped by the visceral feelings triggered by parties (Medeiros & Noel
2013). Negative partisanship could be an autonomous construction (from its
positive counterpart) since negative sentiments are not simply the polar oppos-
tes of positive ones (Medeiros & Noel 2013). Some people might develop only
negative partisan attitudes, independently from positive attachments to parties.

![Figure 1 Institutionalized two-party system](image)
(Haime, A. & Cantú, F. 2022; Samuels & Zucco 2018). That means strong out-group hostilities can develop without equally strong in-group leanings (Bankert 2021). Thus, negative and positive partisanship may have different origins, especially in low-institutionalized party systems, in which negative partisans exceed the decreasing scopes of positive partisans (Figure 2).

Moreover, it is possible that individuals could hold multiple negative partisanship (anti-E area in Figure 3). In the context of political disaffection, where individuals develop critical attitudes toward politics and representative institutions (Torcal & Montero 2006), they could reject simultaneously more than one political party, especially if these political parties belong to a discredited political establishment. This extreme situation – of strong criticism of the partisan establishment – has been very common in Latin America. An extreme case of feeble institutions and party-system collapse – the massive reduction of partisanship from all the established parties – has occurred in several Latin American countries (Morgan 2011; Seawright 2012) and in other regions of the world (e.g. Italy). Under this situation, individuals might have developed an anti-establishment political identity based on the simultaneous aversion to the then-mainstream political parties (Figure 3).

It is important to distinguish an anti-establishment political identity from a positive identification toward an anti-establishment party (Schedler 1996; Abedi 2004). While the former is an aversion toward the establishment that is not captured by any political party, the latter is the case of anti-systemic feelings channeled into a political project. I am interested in the nonorganized version of disaffection because it better expresses, in its natural version, the “anti-political” ideology (Schedler 1996). It is feasible to think that the development

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**Figure 2** Noninstitutionalized two-party system
of an anti-establishment political identity might be a factor leading to the emergence of a populist leader (Meléndez & Rovira 2019) or for the occurrence of a party-system collapse. Based on this importance and the corresponding gap in the literature, I consider it relevant to include this profile among the post-partisan political identities.

Finally, apartisans compose a third profile of post-partisan identification. Individuals who lack any positive or negative partisanship belong to this group. This definition goes in line with that of Samuels and Zucco: individuals who lack a strong identification with in-group and lack a strong antipathy for out-group (Samuels & Zucco 2018). In this sense, this category is different from Dalton’s definition that considers “apartisans” as all those independent from positive partisanship (Dalton 2013). I sustain that a rigorous definition of apartisanship should be separate from any type of identification with positive or negative partisanship. Individual who fall in this category are not attached in any way to politics, and express indifference toward the partisan offer. This is a separate group from those who reject a specific political party (anti-partisans or negative identifiers) and from those who refuse the established political parties (anti-establishment identifiers).

1.1 Measurement

The measurements of party identification have attempted to better capture partisan loyalty. In American politics, a conventional seven-point scale has

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1 I prefer the term “apartisan” instead of “non-partisan.” The former better expresses the lack of any positive or negative partisanship; the latter normally involves the absence of positive partisanship.
been extensively used to grasp individuals’ partisan alignments and the strength of their partisanship. The Standard American National Election Studies survey simply asks: “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as: a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?” Then, the respondent is asked to call himself or herself a strong or not-very-strong Republican or Democrat. If he or she claims to be Independent, then he or she is asked if he or she thinks of himself or herself as closer to any of the two partisan options. After these questions, measures of party identification in the United States cover seven categories: Strong Democrat, Weak Democrat, Independent Leaning Democrat, Independent, Independent Leaning Republican, Weak Republican, and Strong Republican. Obviously, this measurement scale was created based on idiosyncratic considerations and has worked accurately for two-party systems.

Public opinion researchers have devised measurements of partisanship for Western democracies with pluri-party systems. For example, the European Social Survey (ESS) and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) have employed alternative wordings in this realm. They have focused on “closeness” to political parties in order to grasp individuals’ leanings to political alternatives. The ESS’s question asks: “Is there a particular political party you feel closer to than all the other parties?” The CSES asks in a similar way: “Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party? Which party is that? Do you feel very close to this party, somewhat close, or not very close?” Both studies employ closeness to political parties as proxies for partisanship.

In Latin America, public opinion research has asked respondents directly about party identification or party sympathies. For example, the Americas Barometer’s questionnaire includes the following question: “Which political party do you identify with?” This simple question has been employed to research mass partisanship in the region. Besides the relatively young age of democracies and, consequently, the high number of new political parties in these countries and the frequent party fragmentation, evidence shows that “some form of mass partisanship has emerged” (Lupu 2015a, p. 234).

The main disadvantage with these wordings is that they are “softer” measures of partisanship. First, one-dimensional partisanship do not capture the possible distinction between positive and negative party identifications, neither a combination of them (Weisberg 1980; Bankert 2021). Moreover, in some contexts, partisanship can be socially stigmatized, and direct questions on partisan affinities might suffer from social desirability biases. On the basis of these weaknesses, I have proposed a more rigorous and “thicker” measurement of partisanship, based on the original idea of partisanship as party loyalty, and considering the challenges of electoral volatility and party fragmentation.
that characterizes weakly institutionalized party systems. Thus, the proposed measure tackles a strong partisan loyalty expressed in the form of a committed and engaged voter who will vote for the same party regardless of the level involved. This proposed measurement is also capable of capturing loyalties and/or aversions to noninstitutionalized political parties that are brand new political organizations and in their early stages of development.

With this objective in mind, the survey measurement consists of a battery of three questions about voting intention on hypothetical elections in three-level public positions, not including the presidency, in order to avoid high levels of personalization (e.g. for Congress, Governor, and Mayor). One set of these three questions is included for each political party under study. The wording of the question is the following: “Would you vote for a candidate of Party A for . . . (each of the following public positions)?” Based on a four-scale response (definitely, probably, probably not, and definitively not), I label two types of partisanship according to the next rigorous patterns of answers. On the one hand, those respondents who answered that they would “definitely” vote for candidates of party A for each of the three positions asked are categorized as hardcore “positive partisans.” On the other hand, those who responded that they would “definitely not” vote for candidates of party A for each of the same three positions are categorized as hardcore “negative partisans” or “anti-partisans.” Other possible combinations (of “definitely” and “probably”) in favor of candidates of party A can be labeled as “leaners,” and combinations against candidates of party A can be labeled as soft anti-partisans. But for practical reasons, I propose to focus on the first two categories I have described (Table 1).

### Table 1 Categorization of positive and negative partisanship according to survey answers to the question Would you vote for a candidate of party A for . . . ?

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<th>Position</th>
<th>Definitively</th>
<th>Probably not</th>
<th>Definitively not</th>
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<td>Congress</td>
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<th>Categories</th>
<th>(Hardcore) Positive partisan</th>
<th>(Hardcore) Negative partisan or anti-partisan</th>
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