BRAND DILUTION AND THE BREAKDOWN OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN LATIN AMERICA

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BETWEEN 1958 and 1993, Venezuela's two major parties, Democratic Action (AD) and the Independent Political Electoral Organizing Committee (COPEI), together drew an average of 78 percent of the vote in national elections. But by 1998, a mere 3 percent of Venezuelans cast their ballots for these parties. After Bolivia transitioned to democracy in 1980, the three parties that dominated politics——the rightist Nationalist and Democratic Action (ADN), the centrist Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), and the center-left Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR)—together received an average of 67 percent of the vote. But in 2002, ADN attracted only 3 percent of the vote, and in the 2005 election neither it nor the MIR even fielded a presidential candidate.

The dramatic and sudden decline in the staying power of established political parties is one of the most puzzling features of Latin American democratic politics since the third wave of democratization. Between 1978 and 2007, one-quarter of the region's established parties broke down, meaning that they suddenly became uncompetitive for national executive office. Parties that had only recently been major competitors were relegated to an average vote share of merely 6 percent. Yet these very parties, some more than a century old, had previously managed to

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survive economic booms and busts, authoritarian repression, guerrilla insurgencies, and revolutionary movements.

Why, then, have many broken down in recent decades? Traditional theories of party politics fall flat in explaining party breakdown. Scholars of political parties expect party systems to form around enduring social cleavages or the political struggles that surround their emergence. Proponents of spatial models of party competition expect parties to consistently match voter preferences. Neither tradition can explain why established parties break down suddenly and decisively.

Scholars of comparative politics often attribute party breakdowns instead to poor performance by incumbent parties. Corruption scandals or poor economic stewardship, they argue, cause voters to reject the incumbent party en masse, leading the party to break down.[1] But bad performance is far more widespread than party breakdown, and established parties have survived some major economic crises. In the 1980s in Peru, for instance, President Alan García's economic policies led to some of the worst hyperinflation in world history, peaking in 1989 at 12,378 percent. Still, at the end of García's term, his Popular American Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) party received nearly a quarter of the vote and fell just 10 percentage points shy of the winner. Bad performance is undoubtedly important, but it is not the whole story.

Other scholars suggest that institutional or structural changes such as electoral reforms, decentralization, and economic upheaval fatally weakened Latin America's established parties.[2] No doubt many of these factors posed serious challenges for parties in the region. But they should have affected all the parties more or less equally. Why, instead, do we often see one established party collapse even as other established parties in that country survive? Studies that focus on macrolevel explanations have been unable to explain the differences in party fortunes both across and within countries. The problem is that, like much scholarship on parties in the region, they view Latin American politics in terms of groups and coalitions.

Party breakdown, however, is fundamentally about the attitudes and choices of voters. It is individual voters who decide to reject an established party they themselves had only recently supported. In fact,

[1] For example, Coppedge 2005; Dietz and Myers 2007; Kenney 2004.

[2] Prior studies of party breakdown in Latin America focus on systemwide collapses in which all established parties break down simultaneously (for example, Morgan 2011; Seawright 2012; Tanaka 2006). Such cases are particularly dramatic and consequential but are exceedingly rare, making it difficult to draw general conclusions. This article represents the first comparative analysis of breakdown at the level of individual parties.

party breakdowns are preceded by declines in partisan attachments.[3] In the early 1980s, many Latin American voters identified with these established parties, and many had inherited these attachments from their parents. During much of the 1990s, however, voters in many Latin American countries appeared to detach themselves from these parties. In 1986, 58 percent of Argentines professed identifying with that country's two established parties, the Justicialist Party (PJ)—which is also known as the Peronist Party—and the Radical Civic Union (UCR).[4] But by 2003, that number had dwindled to 16 percent.[5] In Venezuela, a 1981 survey found that over half of respondents identified with AD or COPEI, but only 12 percent still did so in 1998.[6] Importantly, this erosion of voters' attachments to established political parties began before the economic declines to which their eventual fates are attributed. Something more than anti-incumbency was at work. We need to know why voters' attachments to the parties erode, as well as why, and when, that erosion leads them to abandon their party at the polls.

This article offers the first general explanation of party breakdown in Latin America. During the 1980s and 1990s, politicians across Latin America implemented policies that were inconsistent with the traditional positions of their party, provoked internal party conflicts, and formed strange-bedfellow alliances with traditional rivals. These actions blurred voters' perceptions of parties' brands—the kinds of voters the parties represent—eroding voters' attachments to them. Without the assured support of a partisan base, parties became more susceptible to voters' short-term retrospective evaluations. Voters who now had no party attachments deserted incumbent parties when they performed poorly. What looked like erratic voters suddenly abandoning the established parties they used to support was actually the result of a process of brand dilution.

I test this argument using matched comparisons of six party-election cases from Argentina and Venezuela. Within each case, I trace the processes of brand maintenance or brand dilution and seek to identify their effects on aggregate partisan attachment and party survival. I then draw analytic leverage from comparing cases within the same party over time, across parties within the same system, and across systems. These

[3] Throughout this article, I use the terms *partisanship*, *partisan attachments*, and *party identification* interchangeably to refer to an individual's self-identification with a political party.

[4] Catterberg 1989, 63.

[5] These figures are based on an August 2003 survey of 404 adult residents of Greater Buenos Aires conducted by Carlos Fara & Associates.

[6] Author's calculations based on national surveys conducted by Gallup in January 1981 and Datos in November 1998.

comparisons reveal that although brand dilution is associated with partisan erosion, it alone is not sufficient to cause party breakdown. Bad performance is also not a sufficient condition for party breakdown; it is the combination of brand dilution and bad performance that is sufficient to cause established parties to break down. My analysis shows that when party brands blur and when the differences between party alternatives become meaningless, even those party identities that once seemed vigorous will wither. When diluted party brands are combined with poor performance by established parties, the parties break down.

The Puzzle of Party Breakdown

Parties regularly come and go in many new democracies outside Latin America.[7] As voters learn about the parties and elites increasingly form strategic coalitions, some parties become electorally irrelevant and disappear.[8] But this "shaking out" of the party system[9] cannot account for the breakdown of Latin America's more established parties.

Neither do classical theories of party politics offer much traction in explaining these cases. Cleavage-based theories expect parties and party systems to change when the politically salient social cleavage shifts.[10] Theories such as these are helpful in explaining long-term trends of party decline and evolution, but they are difficult to apply to rapid shifts in a party's electoral fortunes. The slow shifting of social cleavages is unlikely to explain the sudden breakdown of a party.

Other aspects of the electoral environment, however, may change more quickly. Established parties—organizations that have remained competitive over decades—have adapted to existing environments.[11] Major changes could therefore threaten their survival. Making institutional arrangements, such as the rules governing elections, more permissive could have dramatic effects on parties that had adapted specifically to the old arrangement.[12] They could also ease the entry of competitor parties that threaten established ones.[13] Or decentralizing political or fiscal authority—reforms that swept the developing world in the 1990s—could undermine national parties by strengthening local politicians.[14]

[7] See, for example, Kreuzer and Pettai 2003.
[8] Tavits 2005; Tavits and Annus 2006.
[9] Bernhard and Karakoç 2011, 3.
[10] For example, Dalton, Flanagan, and Beck 1984; Sundquist 1983.
[11] Cox 1997.
[12] Benton 2001; Centellas 2009; Kenney 2004; Remmer 2008; Tuesta Soldevilla 1996.
[13] Van Cott 2005.
[14] Morgan 2011; Penfold-Becerra 2009.

Parties might also confront new social environments, especially in the economically volatile developing world. The debt crisis that swept Latin America in the 1980s, for instance, dramatically altered the socioeconomic environment for politicians. Default and economic stagnation meant high unemployment and shrinking government budgets. For parties that relied on state resources to fund patronage machines, these changes could pose serious obstacles.[15]

Those parties that can adapt effectively will survive these institutional or social changes, whereas those too rigid to evolve may disappear. If party organizations are too institutionalized, if they privilege entrenched groups, or if their activist base is too extreme, they may fail to accommodate changing voter preferences.[16] In the Latin American context, those that relied most heavily on patronage might have found it particularly hard to mobilize support without access to state resources.[17] Alternatively, those that relied on clientelism might have been able to cushion themselves against the forces of electoral decline.[18]

The crises and reforms of the 1980s and 1990s in Latin America undoubtedly challenged established parties. But politics is always dynamic; these same parties had adapted to dramatic social and institutional changes in the past. They had survived economic depressions, military dictatorships, even major revolutions. Indeed, established parties across the region—even some of those considered most institutionalized—did adapt to new and changing contexts. Some reneged on campaign promises and completely reversed their historic policy positions,[19] often forcing entrenched labor groups to swallow painful economic reforms.[20] Others implemented more flexible internal procedures, severed links to certain interest groups, or adopted open primary elections, all in an effort to address changing public expectations.

Clientelism helped many Latin American parties maintain their local bases of support over decades. But parties that relied on patronage to drum up voter support also based their decades of electoral appeals on far more. Established parties, in fact, generated deep-seated loyalties that went far beyond any quid pro quo. In much of the region, supporters went to war for these parties or faced imprisonment and torture when they were banned by military regimes. In fact, clientelist parties

[15] Benton 2001; Cameron 1994; Golden 2004; Morgan 2011; Roberts 2003.
[16] Coppedge 2005; Seawright 2012.
[17] Burgess 1999; Levitsky and Way 1998; Morgan 2011.
[18] Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Levitsky 2003.
[19] Campello 2014; Stokes 2001.
[20] Murillo 2001.

often target many voters who already identify with the party.[21] And patterns of partisanship across Latin America suggest clientelism is not the basis for most voters' attachments to parties.[22] Moreover, clientelism alone, or the lack of it, is unlikely to account for the massive changes in the national electoral fortunes of established parties. The difference between parties that survived and those that broke down was millions of votes, and even the region's most efficient political machines are unlikely to sway so many voters, particularly as clientelism also entails electoral costs.[23]

The institutional reforms and social transformations of the period were also not uniform enough across the region to explain the varied fortunes of established parties in different countries.[24] Parties broke down in countries that did not decentralize at all, whereas others survived despite changes to the electoral rules.

Within countries, many of these changes should have affected all parties more or less equally. After all, it is countries that reform their electoral rules and whole party systems that should be affected by decentralization. Yet it is individual parties that broke down. Arguments that focus on systemwide transformations have a hard time explaining why one established party collapses whereas others in the same country live to fight another day. One could argue that system-level changes affected some parties more than others,[25] but these kinds of explanations would need to specify what made some parties more susceptible than others. An adequate explanation of party breakdown needs to grapple with the different outcomes both across and within countries.

Instead, the macroperspective is all too common in scholarship on Latin American party politics. Scholars typically study parties in the region in corporatist terms, with interest groups, party strategies, and elite coalitions taking center stage. Individual citizens at best play a secondary role in these accounts. And they rarely consider how voters form attitudes or make voting decisions.

The received scholarly wisdom on party breakdown in Latin America misses a crucial piece of the story: the decline in voters' attachments

[21] Stokes et al. 2013.

[22] Lupu 2013a. The evidence I present also runs against the notion that clientelism maintains partisan attachments. For instance, voter attachment to the PJ in Argentina declined in the 1990s even though the party ramped up its clientelistic efforts during this period (Levitsky 2003).

[23] Weitz-Shapiro 2012.

[24] See Eaton and Dickovic 2004; Remmer 2008; and Tulchin and Selee 2004.

[25] For instance, one could argue that parties that historically relied more heavily on patronage were more likely to break down as a result of declining state resources. But many patronage-based parties in the region survived the neoliberal era, whereas those far less reliant on state resources broke down.

to these parties in the years prior to their collapse.[26] This article offers, instead, a voter-centered explanation of party breakdown, building upon a model of partisanship that also explains trends in partisan attachments.

Brand Dilution and Party Breakdown

Why did some parties in Latin America break down whereas others, even within the same country, did not? And why have partisan attachments for some Latin American parties eroded precipitously in recent decades? Party attachments are group identities, akin to the attachments people form to social groups. They are based on the stereotypes people have about each group. People have an idea about what the prototypical poor person looks like, or how the prototypical banker behaves, and they categorize themselves into group identities by comparing themselves to the group prototype. Individuals identify with a poor person or a banker if they think they resemble, or "fit," that prototype.[27] And they also feel closest to a group when they think other groups' prototypes look very different from them, a concept social psychologists call "comparative fit."[28]

We can think of these prototypes as representing points along a continuum. For some, class may be the important dimension of political identity. Some parties are seen as propoor, whereas others are seen as favoring the interests of the affluent. In many instances, that class dimension correlates highly with the standard left-right ideological dimension that orients politics in much of the world.[29] Parties that pursue redistribution to the poor will be seen as representing the poor; those that limit regulation on businesses will be seen as favoring the interests of the affluent. In the Latin American context, the most salient political dimension appears to be the economic left-right.[30]

As with other social identities, a voter feels closest to the party whose prototype she thinks is most like her, relative to all other parties.[31] Over

[26] Morgan 2011 and Seawright 2012 are exceptions; although both offer explanations for partisan erosion, neither grounds them within broader theories of voter partisanship.

[27] Hogg, Hardie, and Reynolds 1995; Turner et al. 1987.

[28] Hogg et al. 2004; Turner 1999.

[29] Huber and Inglehart 1995; Lijphart 1994.

[30] For example, Altman et al. 2009; Colomer and Escatel 2005; and Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012. I focus on the left-right dimension because it tends to be the most salient in Latin America and therefore offers substantial explanatory power. Nevertheless, the left-right need not be the only salient dimension in every case, and future studies could easily apply this theory to a context in which a different dimension matters more.

[31] Green, Palmquist, and Shickler 2005.

the course of their lives, voters form perceptions of party prototypes based on what they see the parties say and do over time.[32] They learn what to associate with the prototypical partisan by observing what politicians say and do, and they use these prototypes to inform their identity. These prototypes constitute what I call a "party brand." Voters repeatedly update their perceptions of parties' brands, incorporating new observations into their prior beliefs about those parties.[33]

Party brands can also be weak or strong, depending on how precisely voters can pinpoint them. When voters see a party sending clear signals, they develop a clearer image of its prototypical partisan, and the brand becomes stronger. As their uncertainty about the party's position increases, the party appears to be more heterogeneous, perhaps containing multiple prototypes, and the brand becomes diluted.

These learned party brands form the basis of voters' attachments. A voter will feel the greatest affinity with the party whose prototypical partisan she thinks she most resembles, relative to all other parties. As with other social identities, partisan identity is determined partly by the resemblance, or fit, between the voter's self-image and her image of the party prototype. Party attachments therefore increase as voters perceive they more closely fit with the party. Moreover, the more ambiguous the party brand, the weaker that attachment, because a voter will perceive less clearly a fit with the party prototype.

Crucially, the degree of identification also depends on comparative fit, the degree to which a voter feels she resembles the prototype of one group and differs from that of another group. Thus, a voter will feel most attached to a party when its prototype most resembles her and the prototypes of other parties seem very different.

This conception of partisanship implies that the behaviors of parties can affect voter attachments.[34] In particular, parties can dilute their brands through inconsistency or convergence. Inconsistency increases

[32] Recent studies have found clear evidence that voter perceptions indeed respond to party behavior (for example, Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Pope and Woon 2009).

[33] Achen 1992. This way of thinking about party brands departs from prior theories in two important ways. For Green, Palmquist, and Shickler 2005, a party prototype is the typical person who votes for that party. So blue-collar workers who think that most blue-collar workers vote for Democrats will perceive the Democratic prototype as a blue-collar worker. I suggest that we think of party prototypes not as the typical party supporter but as the typical party beneficiary. So the prototypical Democrat might be seen as a blue-collar worker if the Democratic Party is perceived to be the party that looks out for blue-collar workers. I also argue that these prototypes derive in voters' minds from a broader set of observations besides voting patterns. Voters rely on other heuristics, including the actions of party elites, to determine the kind of voter a party serves. The party whose elites regularly meet with African American interest groups, march in civil rights protests, and support policies considered to benefit the African American community is also more likely to be seen as the party of African Americans.

[34] Lupu 2013b.

voter uncertainty about the party brand when parties suffer from internal conflicts.[35] Voters receive conflicting signals from the party and find themselves more uncertain about the party brand. Inconsistency also confuses voters when a party shifts its position. Voters may, to take a Latin American example, observe a party they thought was statist suddenly support free-market economic policies.[36]

Party brands will also dilute when parties converge. As this happens, voters find themselves unable to distinguish one party brand from another.[37] They may observe that different party brands are indistinguishable because elites from different parties support the same policies. Or they may see different parties entering into formal or informal alliances—signals that they are willing to agree on a political agenda.[38] Even when voters are certain about two party brands, their substitutability means that voters fail to form strong attachments to either party.

Partisanship thus erodes in response to party inconsistency and convergence. But the erosion of partisanship also has electoral implications. Voters evaluate parties both in terms of their own partisan attachments and in terms of the parties' performance. As voters become more attached to a party, they will forgive bad performance. But as they become less attached, performance will become an increasingly important determinant of vote choice.[39] Party breakdown, therefore, occurs when two conditions are met: (1) the party's brand is diluted, leading partisan attachments to erode, and (2) the party performs poorly in office.

Partisan attachments eroded in Latin America because of growing confusion among voters about party brands. Few established parties in Latin America had the strong, consistent brands of many West European parties. But voters had relatively clear notions about what it meant to be a Peronist in Argentina or an *aprista* in Peru. During the 1980s and 1990s, leaders across the region implemented policies that were inconsistent with their traditional party brand, provoked intraparty conflicts, and formed strange-bedfellow alliances with historic rivals. These

[35] See also Grynaviski 2010.

[36] Stokes 2001. Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007 suggest that parties lose votes when they are inconsistent. That contrasts with evidence that voters favor ambiguous candidates (Tomz and Van Houweling 2009) and that economic policy shifts sometimes get rewarded electorally (Stokes 2001; Tavits 2007). Still, my focus here is on partisanship, not vote choice. I argue that policy shifts blur party brands and weaken partisanship, even if they sometimes also increase electoral support.

[37] Morgan 2011 similarly highlights the effect of interparty agreements, along with bad performance, on party-system collapse. Her argument focuses on formal alliances and vote choice, whereas I highlight the effect of interparty convergence of varying kinds on mass partisanship. By distinguishing partisanship from vote choice, my branding model explains instances of party convergence eroding voter partisanship that do not lead to party collapse.

[38] Fortunato and Stevenson 2013.

[39] Kayser and Wlezien 2011.

actions diluted the brands of their parties, eroding voters' attachments to them. Without the assured support of partisans, parties became more susceptible to negative valence evaluations and then broke down when they performed poorly in office.[40]

As Figure 1 illustrates, during the 1980s and 1990s, Latin American leaders engaged in behaviors that diluted the brands of their parties. They embarked on reforms that went against the basic tenets of their party's brand and formed alliances with traditional rivals. That inconsistency and convergence with competitors eroded partisan attachments and made parties susceptible to voters' short-term valence evaluations. Voters who now had no party attachments deserted incumbent parties when they performed poorly, causing established parties to collapse.

Evidence from Case Studies

My theory has observable implications at both the individual and the aggregate levels. At the individual level, we would expect to see party inconsistency and convergence weaken a voter's partisan attachment. At the aggregate level, we should see the combination of brand dilution and bad performance lead to party breakdown. I test the individual-level theory elsewhere[41] and focus here on the aggregate-level implications.

Across Latin America's eighteen major democracies, 105 presidential elections took place between 1978 and 2007.[42] How many of these elections witnessed the breakdown of an established political party? To answer this question, we need first to identify the established parties that competed in these elections.

Established parties are those that are competitive for executive office. That means that they have been competitive in national contests over several election cycles, making them likely future competitors. Specifically, I consider established those parties that in two consecutive elections either receive a plurality of the vote, winning the first round, or attract no less than one-third of the winning vote share. This is a

[40] Inconsistency and convergence by parties are taken as exogenous here. This seems reasonable—parties are not unitary actors and intraparty conflicts erupt despite the efforts of party leaders to contain them. Moreover, in presidential systems like those of Latin America, parties are often unable to control the actions of a president, even though her actions reflect on the party brand. Structural conditions and electoral incentives may induce presidents to take actions that dilute their party brand, like policy switches (Burgess and Levitsky 2003; Stokes 2001). Elsewhere I elaborate more fully under what conditions we can expect political elites to take such actions (Lupu forthcoming).

[41] Lupu 2013b; Lupu forthcoming.

[42] I include only elections that occur under minimally democratic regimes, identified as country-years with a positive Polity score. The electoral data are drawn from Payne, Zovatto G., and Mateo Díaz 2007 and updated by the author; where relevant, they apply only to the first round of balloting.

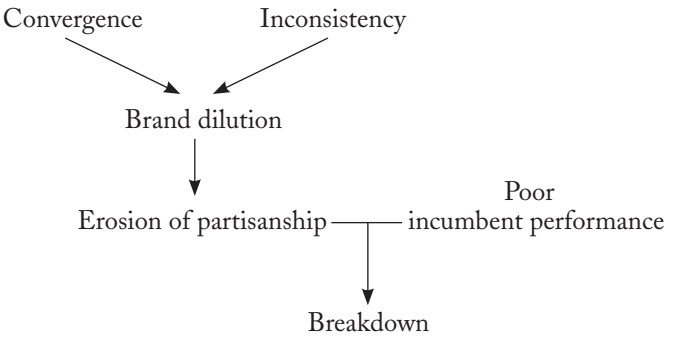

FIGURE 1
THEORY OF PARTY BREAKDOWN

minimal definition and the one-third cutoff is, of course, arbitrary, but this coding scheme identifies the set of parties typically highlighted by country experts.[43] By my classification, forty-four established parties competed for the presidency in Latin America between 1978 and 2007. They are listed in Table 1.

How many of these established parties broke down? I define *party breakdown* as a massive electoral defeat for an established political party in a single election cycle. This occurs when, from one election to the next, an established party ceases to meet the criteria for being considered established. By this definition, eleven of Latin America's established parties broke down in the three decades I analyze (see Table 2). That means that one-quarter of the established parties in the region broke down. And these cases span eight of Latin America's eighteen major democracies. Party breakdown is thus not an isolated phenomenon but a regional trend.

These breakdowns entailed an average drop of nearly 80 percent in the share of the party's vote from one election to the next. Parties that had only recently been major competitors were relegated to an average vote share of merely 6 percent. But these were not flash parties: at the time they broke down, they were on average nearly seventy years old.[44]

CASE SELECTION

To identify the effect of brand dilution and performance on party breakdown, I turn to case studies and detailed comparisons of matched cases.

[43] For example, Alcántara Sáez and Freidenberg 2001.
[44] At the time of these breakdowns, the surviving established parties were on average fifty years old.

TABLE 1
ESTABLISHED PARTIES IN LATIN AMERICA, 1978–2007[a]

Argentina	Partido Justicialista (PJ) Unión Cívica Radical (UCR)
Bolivia	Acción Democrática y Nacionalista (ADN) Conciencia de Patria (CONDEPA) Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (MIR) Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR)
Brazil	Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira (PSDB) Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT)
Chile	Alianza por Chile Concertación
Colombia	Partido Conservador Colombiano (PCC) Partido Liberal Colombiano (PLC)
Costa Rica	Partido Liberación Nacional (PLN) Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC)
Dominican Republic	Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD) Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC) Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD)
Ecuador	Izquierda Democrática (ID) Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano (PRE) Partido Social Cristiano (PSC)
El Salvador	Alianza Republicana Nacional (ARENA) Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN)
Guatemala	Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (FRG) Partido de Avanzada Nacional (PAN)
Honduras	Partido Liberal de Honduras (PLH) Partido Nacional de Honduras (PNH)
Mexico	Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)
Nicaragua	Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN) Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC)
Panama	Partido Arnulfista Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD)

TABLE 1 *cont.*

Paraguay	Asociación Nacional Republicana—Partido Colorado (ANR-PC) Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (PLRA)
Peru	Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) Cambio 90 Perú Posible
Uruguay	Frente Amplio Partido Colorado Partido Nacional
Venezuela	Acción Democrática (AD) Movimiento V República (MVR) Partido Social Cristiano (COPEI)

SOURCE: Author's calculations based on presidential election results.

[a] For Chile, I code coalitions rather than individual parties because of the uniquely institutionalized and stable nature of electoral coalitions. Moreover, Chilean voters appear to identify more with these coalitions than with the individual parties. Gonzáles et al. 2008.

TABLE 2
PARTY BREAKDOWNS IN LATIN AMERICA, 1978–2007

Party (Country)	*Year*
UCR (Argentina)	2003
ADN (Bolivia)	2002
MIR (Bolivia)	2005
MNR (Bolivia)	2005
PUSC (Costa Rica)	2006
PRSC (Dominican Republic)	1996
PAN (Guatemala)	2003
APRA (Peru)	1995
Partido Colorado (Uruguay)	2004
AD (Venezuela)	1998
COPEI (Venezuela)	1998

SOURCE: Author's calculations based on presidential election results.

Cases ought to represent the range of variation on my explanatory variables, whether or not brand dilution occurred in the prior electoral cycle and whether or not the incumbent party's performance was bad.[45]

As both brand dilution and performance are continuous, I split my sample into two groups for each variable. I distinguish those observations with high or low levels of brand dilution based on secondary sources.[46] Governments can perform poorly on multiple dimensions,

[45] Slater and Ziblatt 2013.

[46] See also Lupu forthcoming.

but I focus here on economic performance, since it is widely considered the most prominent form of performance-based voting around the world and can be readily measured cross-nationally.[47] I construct an economic "misery index" to capture objective economic conditions typically thought to affect retrospective voting: GDP growth, inflation, and unemployment.[48] Since I am interested in whether performance was particularly bad in each case, I separate those in the top quartile of economic misery from all the other cases. This allows me to arrange the cases into a simpler array with only four cells.

Figure 2 illustrates this array and shows the selected cases. The top left corner represents cases of party stability, where established parties maintain their brand and avoid bad economic performance. Even if their performance is not particularly good, they at least do no major harm. Compare that to the bottom right corner, where parties both dilute their brands and perform exceedingly badly. This cell represents the cases in which I expect party breakdown. But comparing the diagonal cells does not allow us to isolate the effects of brand dilution and bad performance to see whether just one of them is sufficient to cause party breakdown. For that, we need to look at cases in the off-diagonal cells, where only one of these variables changes. We should still see some different outcomes in these cases. In the top right corner, cases with only brand dilution, we should see partisan attachments erode even though the incumbent party does not break down. In cases that fall in the bottom left corner, we should see partisanship remain stable even though bad performance means the incumbent party likely loses the election.

I selected cases in Argentina and Venezuela to overlap within-country and cross-country matched comparisons. This combination identifies sufficient causes and rules out confounding factors and alternative explanations.[49] Matching cases within the same party or country allows me to ensure that other factors common across cases—say, characteristics of the party or of the country—cannot explain different outcomes.

Comparing across the two countries is also useful because Argentina and Venezuela differ significantly in terms of both institutions and

[47] Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000. A more fine-grained analysis would also need to consider performance in terms of social order, but reliable cross-national measures are limited.

[48] Cf. Welsch 2007. I construct the index using principal-components factor analysis with orthogonal varimax rotation (eigenvalue = 1.41). The factor loadings are: GDP growth = −0.85, inflation = 0.81, unemployment = 0.21. The index captures economic conditions in the year prior to each election because those seem to be most important in influencing voters' evaluations of incumbents (for example, Achen and Bartels 2005; Bartels 2008; Healy and Lenz 2014; Tufte 1978). Data are available at Lupu 2014.

[49] George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007.

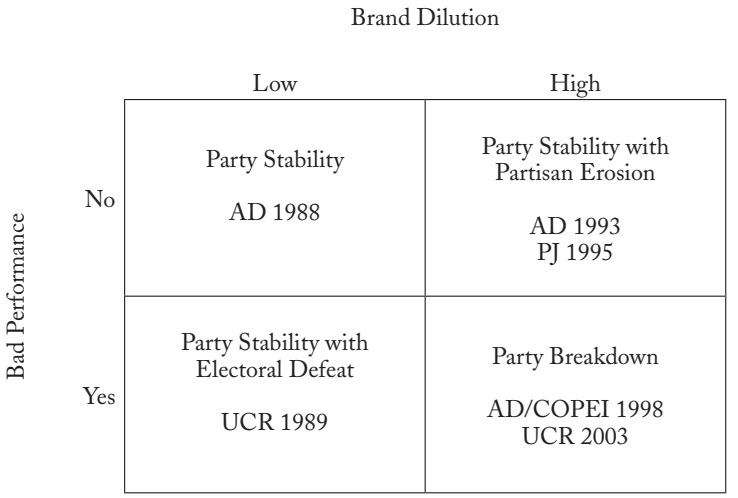

FIGURE 2
CASES AND KEY EXPLANATORY VARIABLES[a]

[a] Party-election cases arrayed according to degree of brand dilution and bad economic performance. High/low levels of brand dilution are the author's assessments based on secondary sources. Bad performance refers to cases that fall above the 75th percentile on the economic misery index.

social characteristics, including federalism, electoral rules, resource dependence, poverty, and ethnic fragmentation. Therefore, these differences cannot explain similar outcomes across the two countries. Finally, comparing on- with off-diagonal cases allows me to test whether brand dilution and bad performance are individually sufficient causes of party breakdown or whether they are sufficient only jointly.

I selected AD 1988, AD 1993, and AD/COPEI 1998 because they represent the only within-party observations for which both brand dilution and bad performance vary over my sample period. Comparing AD in 1988 and 1993 tests whether brand dilution on its own is a sufficient condition for breakdown in a particularly controlled setting, the same party over time. I selected the UCR in Argentina because it is the only party in the region that faced two economic crises while in power on two separate occasions during the sample period. Comparing the UCR in 1989 and 2003 offers a within-party test of whether bad performance on its own is a sufficient condition for breakdown. A useful within-country comparison to the UCR in 2003 is the PJ in 1995. Together, the three Argentine cases allow comparison both across parties within a system and within a party over time. Across the two countries, the com-

parison of the UCR in 2003 and AD/COPEI in 1998 rules out confounders that differ between these parties and settings.

In order to account for potential biases in source material for these case studies and to establish the sequence of events, I triangulate claims as much as possible across diverse types of evidence. I rely on historical polling data; legislative data; and primary and secondary sources, including scholarly work, newspaper reports, memoirs of political actors, and recorded interviews conducted by previous scholars. I also conducted open-ended interviews during 2008–12 with political elites and observers from each period.[50]

Within each case, I trace the processes of brand maintenance or brand dilution and probe their effects on aggregate partisan attachment using context-specific information.[51] As much as possible, I use survey data and newspaper coverage to gauge public opinion over the course of each administration. The survey data come from a variety of polling firms, vary in geographic coverage, and vary the wording of questions over time. Still, they are the best estimates of public opinion at the time. In each case, I present the most reliable and appropriate data available.[52]

UCR 1989: Party Stability with Electoral Defeat

When democracy returned to Argentina in 1983, so too did the two political parties that had contested elections in prior periods of democracy, the UCR and the PJ. Since its emergence in the 1940s, the PJ drew its electoral support from the rural poor and urban working classes while the UCR was the party of the middle and upper classes.[53] Both parties were heterogeneous, but they nevertheless maintained some brand identities. In a September 1986 survey, nearly 50 percent of survey respondents named the UCR as "the party most bound to privileged sectors"; only 8 percent named the PJ. By contrast, 54 percent thought the PJ offered "the most concrete solutions for neediest sectors," and 73 percent thought it the party that "best represented workers," compared with 25 percent and 14 percent, respectively, for the UCR.[54]

[50] Due to space constraints, I do not present corroborating evidence for every claim here (but see Lupu forthcoming). Instead, I have selected quotes and data that are representative of the body of evidence.

[51] Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2004.

[52] For instance, I use survey data to supplement the objective measures of economic conditions with subjective measures that convey voters' evaluations. Where available, I report survey respondents' evaluations of national economic conditions, which most influence voting decisions (for example, Kinder and Kiewiet 1981). In other cases, I have to rely on questions regarding citizens' personal economic situations as a next-best alternative.

[53] Lupu and Stokes 2009.

[54] Author's calculations from Aresco survey of 1,000 adults in Greater Buenos Aires. The series of questions began, "Could you signal which of the political parties active in the province is . . . " The options offered were Radicalism, Peronism, PI, UCD, FREPU, or none.

The two parties relied on patronage to maintain internal discipline and to mobilize sectors of the electorate.[55] But both also worked assiduously to build and maintain partisan attachments.[56] Already in 1965, 46 percent of Argentines identified with a party, of which 35 percent identified with the UCR and 30 percent with the PJ.[57] By October 1984, 58 percent of Argentines identified with a party, 52 percent of them with the Peronists and 33 percent with the Radicals.[58]

Radical president Raúl Alfonsín, who came into office in 1983, found himself confronting military challenges and a deteriorating economy. Nevertheless, he managed to maintain discipline within the UCR. Among the most controversial of the administration's initiatives were two bills dealing with the crimes of the military regime. Despite contravening the convictions of many Radicals, the bills achieved near-unanimous UCR support in both chambers of Congress.[59]

The UCR also accepted the administration's economic policies. The administration sought to negotiate support from the IMF while simultaneously pumping government spending into the economy. A heterodox economic plan to dampen escalating inflation was unveiled in June 1985. It gained broad support from the UCR, but, despite short-term success, it was quickly rendered unsustainable by growing labor disputes and creeping inflation. An increasingly desperate Alfonsín administration then took a slightly more market-oriented tack with support from the UCR bloc in Congress.[60]

While the UCR achieved party unity even in the face of controversial policies, the PJ demonstrated disciplined opposition to the administration's agenda. Along with its labor backers, the PJ staunchly opposed—and often blocked—Alfonsín's economic proposals. It rejected both Alfonsín's initial heterodox economic plan and his later, more market-oriented proposal. PJ-backed unions led a remarkable thirteen general strikes during Alfonsín's administration, all with the public support and participation of PJ leaders. Anything short of opposition to Radical proposals was seen by Peronists as "illicit unions."[61]

Faced with economic crisis and legislative gridlock, Alfonsín made overtures to the Peronist opposition and its labor allies. During the

[55] Calvo and Murillo 2004; Snow 1971.
[56] Lupu and Stokes 2010.
[57] Kirkpatrick 1971, 87.
[58] Catterberg 1989, 63.
[59] Mustapic and Goretti 1992.
[60] de Riz 1994.
[61] Mustapic and Goretti 1992, 268. The PJ did suffer an important internal conflict in the 1980s. But unlike the intraparty conflicts that would emerge in the early 1990s, the conflict with the Renovation faction centered on organizational, rather than ideological, issues (Levitsky 2003).

political crisis of the 1987 Holy Week military uprising, he approached PJ leader Antonio Cafiero about forming a unity government in support of democracy.[62] While Cafiero and other party leaders appeared publicly with Alfonsín to defend democracy, Cafiero rejected a formal pact with the administration, calling it "electoral suicide."[63] Even in the face of democratic crisis, the two parties kept their distance.

As the 1989 election approached, the choice between the UCR and the PJ was stark. The UCR's Eduardo Angeloz called for more dramatic market-oriented reforms while the Peronist Carlos Menem promised massive wage increases and price controls. The worsening economic situation on his party's watch made this an uphill battle for Angeloz. Although hyperinflation would not peak until after the May election, it was clear well before then that inflation was out of control. As Rodolfo Díaz, who worked on Menem's campaign, told me, "the campaign was overshadowed by the inflation issue; you could not talk about anything else."[64] On my index of economic misery, this election falls at the 80th percentile. That means that objective economic conditions in this case were among the worst among preelection years across Latin America.

Argentines also clearly viewed the administration's performance negatively. By February 1989, 50 percent of Argentines told interviewers that their personal economic situation had worsened in the prior five years.[65] In March, two-thirds said their economic situation had worsened since the prior month.[66] By April, the administration's approval rating had fallen to 9 percent.[67]

Still, both parties had, broadly speaking, remained true to their party brands throughout the Alfonsín administration, and the distance between them was as wide as ever. Alfonsín's gradual move toward a more neoliberal economic position represented some inconsistency, but only marginally so; elements of his party had always espoused more market-oriented preferences. And the Radicals under Alfonsín suffered little internal conflict and no signs of converging with the PJ. From the perspective of my theory of party breakdown, there is little reason to expect that partisan attachments eroded during the 1980s, even while opinions

[62] *Clarín*, September 7, 1989.

[63] Author interview with Antonio Cafiero, Buenos Aires, June 9, 2010.

[64] Author interview with Rodolfo Díaz, Buenos Aires, November 18, 2009.

[65] Author's calculations from Equas survey of 1,325 adult residents of Buenos Aires province. The question asked, "I'd like to know whether your personal and family situation has improved, remained more or less the same, or worsened in the last five years."

[66] Author's calculations from Kolsky survey of 405 adult residents of metropolitan Buenos Aires. The question asked, "Has your economic situation changed in the last month? Is it better, worse, or the same?"

[67] Catterberg and Braun 1989, 363.

about the administration's performance plummeted. Indeed, a consistent 20 percent of Argentines identified with the UCR throughout the 1980s, including in the months just prior to the May election.[68]

Angeloz managed to garner 37 percent of the vote in May 1989. That remarkable feat for the candidate of a party that had unequivocally failed in its economic stewardship attests to the strength of Radical partisanship. Thus, the case of the Radicals in 1989 is consistent with theoretical expectations. In the absence of brand dilution, we do not see party breakdown result in 1989 from bad incumbent performance. This challenges the conventional wisdom that posits bad incumbent performance as a sufficient condition for breakdown.

PJ 1995: Party Stability with Partisan Erosion

Menem was elected on a statist economic platform, promising to reverse the decline of the Argentine economy. But upon taking office, he shocked Argentine voters and his own party by pursuing both a staunchly neoliberal set of economic policies and a series of alliances with anti-Peronist elites and former opponents.[69] His first package of economic policies included a sharp devaluation of the currency and deep cuts in government spending. Menem also announced a legislative alliance with the right-wing Union of the Democratic Center. That Menem had abandoned the traditional ideology of Peronism quickly became clear to the Argentine public. In an October 1990 survey, 60 percent of respondents agreed with the statement, "Menem is betraying the historical banners of Peronism."[70]

Both the PJ and UCR supported Menem's initial plans, granting him emergency powers. But legislators from both parties made clear the temporary nature of their support. PJ deputy and Chamber president Alberto Pierri assured one newspaper, "The PJ is far from abandoning its historic model of effective protection of national production and the regional economies . . . the emergency project is a temporary concession that is made to the stabilization program."[71] But as Menem's initial popularity declined, the PJ quickly turned to opposing the reforms. When hyperinflation returned in late 1989, the PJ majority in Congress refused to ratify the administration's new economic plan. The party also rejected Menem's proposal to institute a value-added tax in December

[68] Author's calculations based on various surveys in Buenos Aires province conducted by Equas.
[69] Stokes 2001.
[70] This includes respondents who said they "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statement. Author's calculations from Equas survey of 400 adult residents of Greater Buenos Aires.
[71] *Clarín*, July 25, 1989.

1989, forcing the economy minister to resign. And the PJ-led Congress repeatedly subjected Roberto Dromi, Menem's minister of public works, to harsh questioning and came close to censuring him.[72]

The intraparty conflict went beyond the halls of Congress. A December 1989 party congress in Buenos Aires had to be suspended after Menem supporters and critics began throwing chairs at one another. In early 1990, Cafiero himself intensified criticism of the administration, calling on Menem to "return to the doctrinal sources of Justicialism."[73] Menem acknowledged the possibility of a division of the PJ, noting "I don't want a split . . . but if it happens, so be it."[74] Indeed, two prominent defections from the Peronist ranks did occur. Twenty prominent legislators defected from the PJ in early 1990, protesting both the neoliberal economic agenda and Menem's military amnesty laws. Mendoza senator José Octavio Bordón also left the PJ, in September 1994, to run for president under the newly formed Front for a Country in Solidarity (FREPASO).

The UCR was also unprepared for the Peronist president's policy switch. With Menem offering policies nearly identical to those proposed by Angeloz during the campaign, the UCR found itself in the strange position of agreeing with the Peronist president. Menem immediately opened talks with UCR leaders about forming a unity government. Although a formal pact never materialized, the repeated attempts and negotiations received widespread media coverage and were far more serious than Alfonsín's half-hearted attempts. Particularly noteworthy were two nearly successful rounds of negotiation with Angeloz himself aimed at persuading the former presidential candidate to join Menem's cabinet. As late as November 1991, Menem made serious public overtures for a pact among political parties.

UCR leaders attempted to maintain the nuanced position of opposing some administration proposals while supporting the broad thrust of Menem's economic program. Alfonsín himself oscillated between criticizing the speed of the economic reforms and offering his party's support. In Congress, the UCR proved far less obstructionist than the PJ had been during the 1980s. While only 28 percent of roll-call votes in the Chamber of Deputies received bipartisan support in the

[72] The conflicts within the PJ also forced Menem to veto legislation proposed by his own party. Alfonsín directed 60 percent of his forty-five presidential vetoes at legislation proposed by opposition parties. But only 35 percent of Menem's seventy-two vetoes in his first term blocked legislation proposed by the opposition. Fully 65 percent of his vetoes were directed at bills proposed by his own party (Mustapic 2000).

[73] *La Nación*, March 19, 1990.

[74] *Clarín*, April 1, 1990.

1987–89 session, that figure rose to nearly 48 percent in the 1989–91 session.[75]

In the early months of 1992, Menem made clear his intention to seek reelection in 1995. Although the constitution did not allow for consecutive reelection, Menem began exploring ways to amend that provision. In late 1993, Alfonsín and Menem emerged from the presidential residence in Olivos to announce their agreement to a pact for the general framework of a constitutional reform. The Pact of Olivos represented renewed convergence by the two parties, with the UCR effectively conceding Menem's reelection. Coverage of the pact promoted the perception that the two parties had become indistinguishable: cartoons, for instance, fused Menem and Alfonsín into a single figure.[76] One public opinion survey asked respondents who they thought was the clearest opposition to the administration. Despite decades of rivalry between Peronists and Radicals, by the end of 1993, only 14 percent of respondents cited the UCR.[77]

Menem focused his 1995 campaign on his success in stabilizing inflation and restarting Argentina's economy. Yet his policies had been the very opposite of traditional Peronism. As one Peronist voter put it, "Peronism is declining because the current government says it's Peronist but is lying. So young people now say, 'This is Peronism? No. I don't like it.'"[78] My theory suggests that that inconsistency, the resulting intraparty conflicts, and the convergence with the UCR should have eroded voters' partisan attachments to both parties. Indeed, partisanship declined dramatically for both parties during this period. In October 1995, only 15 percent of Argentines identified with the PJ and less than 10 percent with the UCR.[79]

Thus, both parties entered the 1995 election with a diminished constituency of partisans. But Menem was widely credited with economic success. Using my index of economic misery, objective conditions in Argentina leading up to 1995 fall at the 56th percentile, essentially at the regional average. The economic improvements also registered with voters. A survey taken two weeks before the election found that

[75] Author's calculations. Bipartisan bills are those that received at least one PJ and at least one UCR vote.

[76] *Clarín*, December 13, 1993.

[77] Author's calculations from a survey of 492 adult residents of Greater Buenos Aires conducted by Romer & Associates. The question asked, "What politician or political party do you think today represents the clearest opposition to the government?" I include in my measure both respondents who cited the UCR as a party and those who named Radical politicians.

[78] Martuccelli and Svampa 1997, 352.

[79] Author's calculations from a national survey of 1,811 adults conducted by Romer & Associates. The question asked, "With which party do you identify more? Which party best represents your way of thinking?" This wording likely even overstates actual identification.

a majority of Argentines considered the country's economic situation average or better. Only 35 percent of respondents had a negative view of Menem's performance in office.[80] In the end, Menem won reelection with nearly 50 percent of the vote. Good incumbent performance allowed Menem and the PJ to win reelection, while avoiding the detrimental electoral effects of the party brand's dilution. On its own, brand dilution appears not to be a sufficient condition for breakdown.

UCR 2003: Party Breakdown

The UCR regained the presidency in 1999 through an electoral coalition with FREPASO. By then, the party had worked to position itself as a more moderate alternative to Menem's neoliberal PJ.[81] The ticket of the Alliance for Work, Justice, and Education (Alianza) successfully elected the UCR's Fernando de la Rúa president with FREPASO leader Carlos Álvarez as vice president.[82]

But the governing party was riddled with internal conflict, particularly over economic policy. On taking office, Economy Minister José Luis Machinea announced tax increases and austerity measures, including cuts in education and social services, the very areas the Alianza had promised to reinforce. The cuts were deeply criticized by FREPASO legislators and cabinet members. Although the Alianza held a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the dissent of some FREPASO legislators made it difficult for the administration to pass legislation. Like Menem before him, De la Rúa resorted to governing by decree: in fact, he issued more decrees in his first five months in office (nineteen) than Menem had in his first five months (eighteen).[83] De la Rúa also ceased

[80] Author's calculations from Romer & Associates survey of a national sample of 1,325 adults. The economic question asked, "How would you characterize the general economic situation of the country?" Respondents were given the options "very bad," "bad," "average," "good," and "very good." The Menem question asked, "What opinion do you have of the way Carlos Menem is handling his tenure as president?"

[81] The UCR brand had already been diluted by its convergence with the PJ during the 1990s. But the party worked during Menem's second term to reposition itself as more centrist, making it a reasonable ally for the left-leaning FREPASO. When considering the baseline brand of a party, both the long-term, and more recent positions matter. Of course, ultimately, what matters is what voters perceive the party brand to be. And there are good reasons to think that while some Argentines continued to view the party at the center-right, many also accepted its repositioning. The fact that the Alianza administration eventually continued Menem's economic policies—and moved decisively to the economic right in 2001—thus diluted this more recent UCR brand, even though it was more consistent with the older UCR brand of the 1980s. On top of these ideological inconsistencies, the Alianza's internal conflicts and renewed convergence with the PJ also contributed greatly to diluting the party's brand.

[82] The De la Rúa administration is a somewhat unusual case since there is technically no single party brand that is affected by the actions of the administration and its allies. Still, numerous officials from the administration told me that it was viewed as a Radical one. In her memoir, Cabinet member Graciela Fernández Meijide also notes that many of the 1999 campaign's rallies used UCR symbols instead of Alianza ones (Fernández Meijide 2007, 145–46).

[83] *La Nación*, June 16, 2000.

consulting with Álvarez and FREPASO, thereby escalating the conflict. Hostilities between the coalition partners came to a head in June 2000, when reports that the administration had bribed senators led Álvarez to resign suddenly.

Conflicts also emerged within the UCR. By early 2001, Argentina could no longer meet its IMF obligations. When De la Rúa and Machinea disagreed about how to proceed, the minister resigned. Without consulting party leaders, De la Rúa appointed Ricardo López Murphy to replace Machinea. A longtime Radical and devoted neoliberal, López Murphy immediately announced a new and deeper set of austerity measures, including deep cuts in education spending. His plan provoked criticism from both FREPASO and De la Rúa's own UCR; three Radical cabinet members resigned in protest. Alfonsín soon added his own criticism of López Murphy's appointment.

Forced to reshuffle his cabinet yet again, De la Rúa replaced López Murphy with Domingo Cavallo, the economy minister responsible for Menem's major economic policies. The president had decided he could not govern with FREPASO and hoped to rely instead on Cavallo's backers in the PJ, provoking vehement reactions from leaders of FREPASO and the UCR.[84] Cavallo sought emergency powers from Congress, just as he had in the 1990s, but got them only with PJ support. Many of the administration's own copartisans and coalition partners opposed the measure. One prominent UCR deputy, Elisa Carrió, denounced fellow Radicals who voted for the bill as "traitors," and more than half of the FREPASO delegation voted against the measure.[85] Days later, Carrió announced she was leaving the UCR to form a new party.

The Radical party brand had become so meaningless and so indistinguishable from the PJ that politicians now preferred to form their own parties. As one FREPASO deputy told me, "What did it mean to be Radical? Radical like De la Rúa? Like Alfonsín? Like López Murphy, who was saying the exact opposite of Alfonsín?"[86] In the ensuing months, other FREPASO and UCR politicians followed Carrió. The infighting among UCR party leaders led one newspaper to run the headline, "Everyone against everyone."[87]

With the credibility of the De la Rúa administration in decline, economic uncertainty soared. International creditors began to speculate that

[84] Author interview with Domingo Cavallo, Buenos Aires, September 7, 2012.
[85] *La Nación*, March 26, 2001.
[86] Author interview with Fernando Melillo, Buenos Aires, November 18, 2009.
[87] *La Nación*, October 18, 2001.

the pegged exchange rate was unsustainable and massive withdrawals in late November 2001 provoked a liquidity crisis. De la Rúa froze bank deposits and imposed exchange controls by decree. Now unable to access their bank accounts, Argentines took to the streets. After days of riots and looting, De la Rúa declared a state of siege on December 19. Two days later, he resigned and dramatically boarded a helicopter on the roof of the presidential residence.

De la Rúa's resignation forced the PJ-controlled Senate to choose his successor. After some false starts, the Senate appointed Eduardo Duhalde, the former vice president who had lost the 1999 election to De la Rúa. His selection received the support of the PJ, UCR, and FREPASO. Duhalde called for a government of national unity and negotiated with both PJ and UCR governors, promising not to run in the 2003 elections. Two Radicals and one FREPASO leader joined his cabinet. And both the UCR and FREPASO supported granting Duhalde emergency decree powers, something they had denied De la Rúa. During his seventeen months in office, Duhalde repeatedly relied on UCR and FREPASO support in Congress. FREPASO even joined the administration's legislative bloc.

By the time of the 2003 election, Argentina's political parties were in disarray. The PJ, certain of victory, decided to run multiple candidates in the general election. FREPASO, diminished by the defection of many of its leaders, chose neither to contest the 2003 election nor to support any candidate in the presidential race. The UCR nominated one of its older leaders, Leopoldo Moreau.

The UCR's inconsistencies and internal conflicts during the De la Rúa administration had so diluted its brand that few voters still identified with the party. In the months leading up to the election, less than 5 percent of Argentines said they identified with the UCR.[88] At the same time, perceptions of De la Rúa's economic performance were dismal. By objective economic measures, this case falls at the 98th percentile of economic misery in the region; indeed, only two elections in the region score worse. By 2003, the party of the incumbent had become the PJ, although voters almost unanimously blamed the UCR for the crisis. In a November 2001 survey, 69 percent of respondents said their personal economic situation was fairly poor or very poor. Fewer than 3 percent said the De la Rúa administration was managing things well or very well.[89]

[88] Author's calculation from various surveys of adults in Greater Buenos Aires conducted by Carlos Fara & Associates.

[89] Author's calculations from a national survey of 1,200 adults conducted by Mora y Araujo & Associates. The economic question asked, "How is your personal economic situation today? Very good, fairly good, fairly poor, or very poor?" The De la Rúa question asked, "How do you believe the national

Blamed for disastrous performance in office and lacking a partisan base, the UCR was doomed. A party that only four years earlier had garnered 48 percent of the vote now attracted a mere 2 percent. The 2003 election thus dealt the death blow to the UCR, which has since been uncompetitive in national elections. The Argentine party system had gone from a stable two-party system to a fragmented system of competing personalities with no clear party brands. Even the PJ, which muddled through its own brand's dilution during the economic crisis, would need to reconstruct its brand to recover the level of partisan attachments it had once enjoyed.

The UCR had performed dismally before, in 1989. But back then, it still had a loyal base of partisans supporting its candidate.[90] Bad performance alone was not enough to cause the party's breakdown in 1989. Only in 2003, when bad performance was combined with brand dilution that eroded voter attachments, did breakdown occur.

AD 1988: Party Stability

Prior to the 1990s, democratic politics in Venezuela was dominated by AD and COPEI. Although both became broad-based parties, the more populist AD drew greater support from the poor and from labor, while COPEI attracted more urban and middle-class voters.[91] Respondents to an October 1983 survey placed AD on average at 3.59 and COPEI to its right at 4.08 on a 5-point left-right scale, suggesting a meaningful difference for a two-party system.[92] Even scholars who considered those differences small conceded that Venezuelans themselves perceived meaningful differences between their parties.[93] Thus, over three decades of

government is managing things?" As I am interested in public perceptions at the time of the 2003 election, a chronologically closer survey would be preferable. But polls by then no longer asked respondents to evaluate the De la Rúa administration.

[90] A potential confounding factor in this comparison is a history effect, that voters punished the party severely in 2003 because De la Rúa's economic failure built upon Alfonsín's bad performance in 1989. There are at least two reasons to doubt this explanation. First, such a history effect would fail to account for the decline in partisanship for both the UCR and PJ in the 1990s and early 2000s. It would also fail to generalize to the breakdowns of AD and COPEI in Venezuela since those parties had not overseen prior episodes of economic crisis.

[91] Ellner 1984; Morgan 2011.

[92] Left-right placements are not the ideal way to ascertain how parties were perceived, because different respondents have very different conceptions of what left and right mean (Zechmeister 2006). However, they are the best available approximation during this period, and they demonstrate a contrast with a similar question asked in 1998. Author's calculations from a national survey of 1,789 adults conducted by Enrique Baloyra and Aristides Torres of the Universidad Simón Bolívar in collaboration with Gallup International. The question asked, "In politics, people also say that so-and-so is on the right, in the center, or on the left. . . . Where is AD/COPEI, in the center, on the left, or on the right?" The difference between these two means is statistically significant ($p < 0.000$).

[93] Coppedge 1994, 43.

competition, these parties fostered deep attachments. By November 1982, roughly half of Venezuelan voters identified with either AD or COPEI.[94]

Like Alfonsín in Argentina, AD president Jaime Lusinchi inherited an economy in crisis when he took office in 1983. The debt crisis put pressure on Venezuelan foreign reserves, increasing inflation. Even more so than his Argentine counterpart, Lusinchi responded in a manner consistent with his party's statist brand: he announced a heterodox economic plan of price controls, exchange controls with gradual devaluations, and government spending to stimulate the economy. The plan enjoyed the full support of AD, both publicly and in Congress.

The president's relationship with his party was extremely close. In a speech at a party convention shortly after his inauguration, Lusinchi said, "I am—and am proud to be—an expression of the will of Democratic Action."[95] Lusinchi consulted with AD leaders every Tuesday about the administration's agenda. When, like his predecessors, he was tasked with appointing state governors, Lusinchi appointed AD's party secretaries from each state to the posts. So close was the president's relationship with his party that halfway through his term he could declare, "mine has been the most *adeco* of AD administrations."[96]

Two of Lusinchi's signature initiatives could have generated friction with his party. Declining oil prices forced Lusinchi to take some austerity measures, cutting the budgets of state ministries and salaries of government workers and dismantling or privatizing small state-owned enterprises. The AD-controlled labor movement voiced some objections to these efforts, but the criticisms were mild. Labor leaders took pains not to direct their complaints directly at the administration. Lusinchi had also expressed initial support for institutional reform and in 1984 appointed prominent figures to a Presidential Commission for State Reform (COPRE). The eventual recommendations of the COPRE included direct election of governors, decentralization, and changes to the electoral rules. But when AD rejected the proposals, fearing they would threaten the party's hold on power, Lusinchi immediately backed down.

COPEI, meanwhile, opposed Lusinchi's economic policies and the AD-backed Enabling Law that granted him special powers to legislate them. COPEI leader Eduardo Fernández declared that his party expected to "capitalize on the failures" of Lusinchi's economic policies.[97] Since

[94] Author's calculations from a national survey of 3,000 adults conducted by Datos. The question asked, "Are you an activist in or identifier with a political party?

[95] Quoted in Rey 2009, 203.

[96] *El Nacional*, July 28, 1986.

[97] *El Nacional*, February 18, 1984.

AD controlled a majority in Congress, COPEI's opposition aimed mostly at stalling the president's policies. COPEI repeatedly accused members of Lusinchi's cabinet of corruption and brought motions of censure against two of them. Unlike AD, COPEI came out in favor of the political reforms proposed by the COPRE.

By the time of the 1988 election, Lusinchi had succeeded in stimulating economic growth. Using my regionwide index of economic misery, Venezuela's 1988 election falls at the 23rd percentile, well below the regional average of economic hardship. In other words, Lusinchi's economic performance was quite good by objective standards. Venezuelan voters largely registered the same positive assessment. In an October 1988 survey, 57 percent told interviewers that their economic situation was either the same as the prior year or had improved over the course of the year. And 71 percent of Venezuelans had a neutral or positive evaluation of Lusinchi's performance in office.[98] In fact, when he left office, Lusinchi was widely considered to have been Venezuela's most popular president.

The distinctions between the election's candidates reinforced the differences between AD and COPEI. AD's candidate, former president Carlos Andrés Pérez, promised wage increases and continued state protections through exchange controls and tariffs. He frequently recalled the statist oil-boom years of his first administration. COPEI's Fernández advocated reducing the role of the state in the economy, removing exchange controls, and privatizing state-owned enterprises. Fernández faced a formidable challenge, confronting not only Pérez's charisma and public approval of his administration but also widespread approval of Lusinchi's performance in office. The results of the election bore out the obvious: the former president secured reelection with 53 percent of the vote.

The 1980s were thus a period of continuity with the brands of the established Venezuelan political parties. Lusinchi led an administration characterized by its close ties to AD and policies consistent with the party's tradition of statism and labor protection. Meanwhile, COPEI opposed these policies from the right, arguing for greater market orientation and economic liberalization. From the perspective of my theory, this consistency should have led to partisan stability. Indeed, over the course

[98] Author's calculations from a national survey of 2,000 adults conducted by Datos. The retrospective economic question asked, "In general terms, compared to a year ago, would you say your economic situation is better than a year ago, the same as a year ago (good), the same as a year ago (fair), the same as a year ago (bad), or worse than a year ago?" The approval question asked, "How would you characterize how the current administration has performed for you personally?" The response options were "positive," "more positive than negative," "neither positive nor negative," "more negative than positive," and "negative."

of the Lusinchi administration, levels of partisanship remained relatively constant: a year before the election, more than 53 percent of voters still identified with either AD or COPEI.[99] And given the positive evaluation of Lusinchi's performance, the president handed power to a successor from his own party.

AD 1993: Party Stability with Partisan Erosion

Within days of winning the election, Pérez overturned his campaign platform. Like Menem in Argentina, he reassured business leaders that he would not pursue his promised across-the-board wage increases, as he also set about gathering neoliberal technocrats into his cabinet to implement a "shock therapy" program of economic liberalization. Pérez also made overtures to anti-AD sectors, appointing independents and vocal AD opponents to his cabinet. Following the COPRE proposals abandoned by Lusinchi, he also introduced legislation for the direct election of governors and backed transferring fiscal responsibilities to states and municipalities.

Like the PJ, AD leaders in Congress initially accepted Pérez's initiatives. But their support dissipated after riots in Caracas dealt a blow to Pérez's popularity. Previous AD presidents like Lusinchi had been granted special decree powers by Congress, but AD refused to ratify a similar Enabling Law for Pérez. Instead, the party launched a persistent campaign to force Pérez to change course, becoming what Corrales calls a "virtual opposition force."[100] AD shelved or severely weakened many of the president's initiatives in Congress. When the administration proposed a crucial value-added tax in May 1990, AD joined COPEI in voting against the bill. Even those reforms that passed Congress faced enormous scrutiny and opposition from AD leaders during debates. At the same time, AD-backed labor unions overturned their historical restraint during AD administrations, and strike activity reached levels previously seen only under COPEI presidencies.[101]

Pérez returned fire, blaming the economic situation on his predecessor and, by extension, his own party. In early 1990, his administration began investigating members of Lusinchi's cabinet—and eventually Lusinchi himself—for corruption. One result of the intraparty conflict was that Pérez's administration reversed a pattern of Venezuelan legislation: while previous presidents had dominated new legislation,

[99] Author's calculations from a national survey of 2,000 adults conducted by Datos. The question asked, "Do you tend to identify with a particular political party more than others?"

[100] Corrales 2002, 97.

[101] Arrieta Álvarez and Iranzo Tacoronte 2009, 65.

with over three-quarters of the ordinary laws passed originating in the executive,[102] only a third of ordinary legislation during Pérez's second term was initiated by the executive. This parallels the legislative pattern during Menem's first term, when the president was much more likely to veto legislation initiated by his own party. Pérez's administration came to be dominated by intraparty conflict.

The AD president's switch toward market reforms also presented COPEI with a dilemma, much as Menem's had done for the UCR. The opposition party rejected some proposals, along with the president's critics inside his own party. But at other times, COPEI supported the administration's economic policies, many of them very similar to those Fernández himself had proposed during the campaign. As Fernández told me, "Nobody voted for me so that I could be in opposition. . . . Our first loyalty is to the country. I told people that if the president from the other side is proposing something that is good for the country, we have to support it."[103] COPEI also endorsed the administration's political reforms, supporting the 1989 law on direct gubernatorial elections and joining the president's 1990 Pact for Reform.

Truly close cooperation between AD and COPEI did not come until 1992. As Pérez's popularity continued to decline amid concerns over inflation, a group of midlevel army officers led by Hugo Chávez attempted to stage a coup d'état. Almost unanimously, Venezuelan politicians came to the defense of the administration to demonstrate their support for democracy. On the night of the coup, Fernández joined a defiant Pérez at a television station for a joint condemnation of the coup. Within weeks, Pérez restructured his cabinet to form a unity government, bringing in prominent elites from both AD and COPEI. In an emergency session of Congress, both parties also supported the president's request to temporarily suspend constitutional guarantees.

The attempted coup, however, highlighted the public's dissatisfaction with the president. As news reports also began circulating about money having gone missing from the interior ministry, both parties began to call for Pérez's resignation. On May 21, 1993, the Senate unanimously suspended Pérez from office, a status made permanent when Congress met in joint session three months later. The president's own party had voted to remove him from office. Neither party formally joined the subsequent interim government.

[102] Ordinary laws are those that initiate first-time legislation, as opposed to those that reconcile vague or contradictory statutes, those that concern the national budget, and those that approve prior executive actions, usually international treaties.

[103] Author interview with Eduardo Fernández, Caracas, January 25, 2010.

The one political figure who did not take a forceful stand against the coup was Rafael Caldera, a former president and the founder of COPEI. Caldera had become a vocal critic of both the Pérez administration and his own party's leadership, and in 1993 announced he would run for president under a new coalition of COPEI dissidents and small parties. Over the course of the 1993 presidential campaign, the platforms of the candidates reinforced the brand inconsistencies of the Pérez years. The most vocal supporter of Pérez's economic reform agenda was COPEI's candidate, Oswaldo Álvarez Paz. AD's candidate, Claudio Fermín, instead distanced himself from Pérez and called for a traditional AD program of social compensation.

These inconsistencies, internal conflicts, and interparty convergence eroded voters' attachments to AD and COPEI between 1988 and 1993. Attachments to AD declined throughout the Pérez administration, with attachments to COPEI remaining relatively steady until the particularly close convergence that began following the February 4 coup. The month before the election, only 12 percent of voters identified with each of the two established parties.[104] Both parties entered the 1993 campaign with diminished partisan bases and found themselves facing a slightly more fragmented party system.

Pérez's unpopularity made the uphill battle for Fermín especially steep. But by the time of the election, economic conditions had improved somewhat. On the index of economic misery, Venezuela's 1993 election falls at the 64th percentile, neither particularly good nor especially bad. In fact, this case falls quite close to that of Argentina's 1995 election, generally thought to be a case of good performance. Many Venezuelans were indeed neutral about the incumbent administration's performance. In a September 1993 survey, 42 percent said their personal economic situation had improved or remained the same in the prior year.[105] AD had become far more susceptible to retrospective evaluations now that its weak brand attracted far fewer partisans. But by the end of 1993, there was no overwhelming consensus that its performance had been poor.

That allowed the party to attract those voters who viewed the AD administration positively even as it lost the stable support of its partisan

[104] Author's calculations from a national sample of 2,000 adults conducted by Datos. The question asked, "Do you tend to identify with a particular political party more than others?"

[105] Author's calculations from a national survey of 2,000 adults conducted by Datos. The economic question asked, "Comparing your current economic situation to a year ago, would you say your situation is better than a year ago, the same as a year ago, or worse than a year ago?" The approval question asked, "How would you characterize the work the current administration is doing for you personally?" The response options were "positive," "more positive than negative," "neither positive nor negative," "more negative than positive," or "negative."

base. In the end, a plurality of 30 percent of the votes went to the victorious Caldera. Like the PJ, AD saw its partisan ranks erode between 1988 and 1993, but its economic performance was not bad enough to cause the party's breakdown. While Fermín lost the presidential election, the party remained competitive.

AD/COPEI 1998: Party Breakdown

Within weeks of the election, the Venezuelan economy again plunged into economic crisis. On January 7, 1994, one of the largest commercial banks in Venezuela declared bankruptcy, sparking a run on the currency and forcing devaluation. Caldera, who took office in February, provided government assistance to the bank, but as more and more banks required assistance, concern grew about the government's solvency. By mid-1994, inflationary pressures forced Caldera to impose price and financial controls.

Caldera also began his new term from a weak political position, having won only one-third of the popular vote. His party held only 13 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies; in fact, no single party held anywhere near a congressional majority. At the outset, Caldera opted not to formalize an alliance with AD or COPEI and instead formed ad hoc alliances as needed. As Corrales summarizes, "the [Caldera] government spent most of its time forming and undoing alliances with opposition parties."[106]

In time, AD and Caldera arrived at an unofficial—though widely recognized—alliance. It was AD that proposed delegating decree authority to Caldera following the banking crisis, something the party had refused to do with Pérez. And while both AD and COPEI initially criticized Caldera's suspension of economic guarantees, it was AD that backed down once a standoff ensued between Congress and the president. By 1995, AD openly supported a series of laws granting Caldera extraordinary powers and then voted against congressional efforts to censure two members of his administration. In return, Caldera supported judicial nominations made by AD and preserved the positions of AD appointees in the bureaucracy. As AD leader Octavio Lepage put it: "[AD secretary-general Luis] Alfaro [Ucero] practically cogoverned with Caldera."[107]

Although COPEI formally maintained a consistent oppositional stance, it was difficult to dissociate Caldera's administration from the party he had founded. During the campaign, Caldera frequently reminded

[106] Corrales 2000.
[107] Author interview with Octavio Lepage, Caracas, January 28, 2010.

supporters that casting the COPEI ballot would not mean a vote for him. Yet he confusingly referred to Álvarez Paz as "the official candidate of COPEI" and himself as "the true *copeyano*."[108] COPEI leaders took pains throughout the administration to remind voters that Caldera was no longer associated with their party. But as one prominent COPEI deputy told me: "The people thought it was a COPEI administration and that its problems were internal problems with Caldera."[109]

The result, by the midpoint of the Caldera administration, was a dizzying array of interparty alliances. One AD deputy characterized the period with a baseball analogy: "One day your jacket says Yankees, but then you see the other guy is winning and suddenly your jacket says Red Sox. . . . That is the signal AD and COPEI sent."[110]

Venezuelan voters also registered the ever-closer relations between the parties. The survey firm Datos regularly asked respondents who disliked the government of the day who they thought would have done a better job. In the past, most cited the other major party. In November 1982, 85 percent of respondents who preferred an alternative to the COPEI administration of Luis Herrera Campíns thought AD would have done a better job. In March 1986, 60 percent of those unsatisfied with Lusinchi would have preferred a COPEI government. But in March 1995, less than 10 percent of respondents unhappy with Caldera cited AD as a better alternative.[111]

Caldera's need for allies became even more acute as the economic situation deteriorated. By early 1996, annual inflation reached 60 percent and unemployment 15 percent. In April, Caldera announced an economic adjustment program that resembled the Pérez reforms he had so strongly criticized. AD, having ousted its own president for pursuing a similar set of policies, now backed Caldera's efforts. Its members in Congress voted to allocate resources to bailout funds and voted to privatize the steel company Sidor. COPEI also supported the new economic program in Congress, and Caldera approached Fernández about joining his cabinet.[112] In an attempt to form a unity government, the president even sought to incorporate the leaders of the 1992 coup attempt, Francisco Arias Cárdenas and Chávez.

[108] *El Nacional*, November 4–20, 1993. News reports after the election suggested that many voters who cast their ballots for Álvarez Paz had intended to vote for Caldera (*El Nacional*, December 6–7, 1993).

[109] Author interview with Nelson Chitty La Roche, Caracas, January 19, 2010.

[110] Author interview with Luis Emilio Rondón, Caracas, January 14, 2010.

[111] Author's calculations from a 1982 national survey of 3,000 adults, 1986 national survey of 2,000 adults, and 1995 national survey of 2,000 adults. The question asked, "Do you think another government would have done better? What government?"

[112] Author interview with Eduardo Fernández, Caracas, January 25, 2010.

As the 1998 elections approached, it became clear that neither AD nor COPEI had competitive candidates. Chávez had entered the race under a new party and leaders from the established parties worried about negative coattails effects hurting their chances in concurrent presidential, legislative, and gubernatorial elections. In May 1998, AD and COPEI jointly approved a measure to move the presidential election to December, keeping the legislative and gubernatorial vote a month earlier. The parties also discussed shoring up support by having one party abandon its candidate to support the other's. After suffering significant losses in the November legislative elections, both parties abandoned their own candidates and backed the conservative independent Henrique Salas Römer in a final gambit to avert a Chávez victory.

AD and COPEI had consigned themselves to near-total convergence. In a November 1998 survey, respondents on average placed AD at 6.47 and COPEI at 6.51 on a 10-point left-right spectrum.[113] Venezuelans saw these parties as indistinguishable. This convergence led to a dramatic erosion of partisan attachments to AD and COPEI. By the end of 1998, fewer than 12 percent of Venezuelans still identified with either party.[114]

Going into the election, Venezuela's economic situation was again precarious. On the regionwide index of economic misery, the 1998 election in Venezuela falls at the 86th percentile, among the worst cases in the region and comparable to Argentina's 1989 election. In a survey conducted between the November legislative and December presidential elections, only 4 percent of Venezuelans thought the state of the country had improved in the prior year. Only 26 percent evaluated either the administration's performance or its economic policies positively.[115]

Despite the last-ditch gambits by AD and COPEI, Chávez won the December 1998 election with 56 percent of the vote, easily defeating Salas Römer. The parties' own candidates, Irene Sáez and Luis Alfaro Ucero,

[113] Author's calculations based on a national survey of 1,500 adults conducted by Datos. The question asked, "In politics, people talk about 'left' and 'right.'. . . Where is AD, in the center, on the left, or on the right? And COPEI?" The difference between these means is not statistically significant ($p < 0.846$).

[114] Author's calculations based on a national survey of 1,500 adults conducted by Datos. The question asked, "These days, in Venezuelan politics, do you consider yourself independent, a party activist, a party identifier, or someone who is not interested in politics?"

[115] Author's calculations based on a national survey of 1,500 adults conducted by Datos. The general evaluation question asked, "In general terms, would you say that the situation in the country is better, the same, or worse than a year ago?" The performance evaluation question was worded, "Please tell us your opinion of the Caldera administration—has it been very bad, bad, good, or very good?" The question evaluating the administration's economic policies asked, "What do you think of the economic policies of the current administration? Would you say the economic policies have been very good, good, bad, or very bad?"

attracted a paltry 3.2 percent: the brands of AD and COPEI had become all but meaningless. As a result, their partisan ranks had eroded so dramatically that the election had become primarily valence based, focused on rejecting established institutions that had performed so poorly. Unlike in 1993, the combination of diluted party brands and bad performance in 1998 led to party breakdown.

Some structural conditions also changed in Venezuela over the course of the 1990s, and these have been cited as possible causes for party breakdown. Included are institutional changes like the direct elections of governors, decentralization of power, and electoral reforms, all of which could have weakened established parties. Similarly, declining state revenue resulting from both the regional debt crisis and falling oil prices may have weakened patronage-based parties.

While these changes may have challenged AD and COPEI, comparing across countries rules them out as sufficient conditions for party breakdown. Unlike Venezuela, Argentina did not decentralize political power during the 1990s; nor did it make its electoral institutions significantly more permissive;[116] nor was the UCR heavily reliant on patronage, though it too broke down. Comparing these cases suggests that none of these changes was determinative of the party breakdowns across the two countries. By contrast, my theory accounts both for the cases of breakdown and for the erosion of partisan attachments even when parties survived.

Party Brands and Democracy in Latin America and Beyond

Since the mid-1990s, a quarter of the established political parties in Latin America have broken down, becoming irrelevant as they went from one election to the next. The conventional wisdom among observers of Latin American politics has attributed party breakdowns to bad incumbent performance. But this explanation overpredicts breakdown. Other explanations focus on institutional or social changes. Although these changes posed new challenges for established parties, they cannot explain why some parties within a system break down whereas others survive.

This article has focused instead on the interaction between elite behavior and mass attitudes. In Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, political leaders reversed party traditions and blurred their differences with their competitors. These reversals diluted the party's brand and

[116] Argentina's constitutional reform of 1994 introduced a presidential runoff and a third senator for each province, but these reforms were hardly permissive.

eroded voters' attachment to the parties. When diluted party brands combined with economic crisis, incumbent established parties broke down.

Tracing six party-election cases from Argentina and Venezuela demonstrates the processes of brand maintenance and brand dilution by established parties. The UCR and AD maintained their brands in the 1980s, an effort associated with stable levels of partisan attachments. Both established parties, along with the PJ and COPEI, diluted their brands during the 1990s and 2000s through inconsistency and convergence. That brand dilution was associated with the stark erosion of partisan attachments, as predicted by my theory. And when the dilution of party brands interacted with bad incumbent performance, as in the cases of AD/COPEI in 1998 and the UCR in 2003, the parties broke down.

The Argentine and Venezuelan parties were not alone in the region. Established parties across Latin America diluted their brands during the 1980s and 1990s through policy reversals and convergence. When those instances also coincided with economic disasters or social upheaval, established parties typically collapsed. Indeed, these variables go a long way toward explaining eight of the eleven cases of party breakdown in Latin America during this period.[117] Cross-national regression analyses of the full sample similarly show that the probability of party breakdown increases dramatically when parties both severely dilute their brand and oversee crises.[118] In other cases, such as Chile's Concertación during the 2000s, inconsistency and convergence eroded partisanship, but good performance allowed the parties to survive, as the PJ did in Argentina.

To be sure, some competitive Latin American parties have always had weak and ambiguous party brands; diluting those brands further may have done little to affect their electoral fortunes. Some parties may also have been better equipped to withstand some of the effects of brand dilution or bad performance. Those with deeper roots in society and stronger partisan attachments may have more leeway to dilute their brands than those with shallower roots and weaker attachments. Parties already more clientelistic may eke out enough votes to survive even with a diminished partisan base and bad performance. Indeed, these are conditioning factors that future studies should examine. But most

[117] The exceptions are Costa Rica's PRSC (2006), Guatemala's PAN (2003), and Peru's APRA (1995). In all three cases, these parties had severely diluted their brands, but were either nonincumbents or did not also simultaneously oversee economic or social crises.

[118] Lupu forthcoming. These analyses also show that my explanation fares far better than alternatives that focus, for instance, on economic performance alone, corruption, or electoral reforms.

established parties in Latin America did foster some kind of brand as they grew more successful, and their differing degrees of social embeddedness or clientelistic capacity mattered only at the margins. When they diluted their brands dramatically and when their performance in office was unquestionably dismal, these distinctions were nowhere near enough to avoid collapse.

Beyond Latin America, too, party convergence appears to erode voter attachments, as occurred when social democratic parties in Western Europe moderated their platforms in the 1990s.[119] In these advanced democracies, neither brand dilution nor economic crisis reached the levels seen in Latin America,[120] but even there, the incremental dilution of party brands seems to have eroded partisanship. The reverse has occurred in the US, where the polarization of the Democratic and Republican Parties seems to have strengthened partisanship.[121]

All of this suggests that parties regularly face trade-offs between attracting voters and maintaining a partisan base.[122] And yet, established theories about party strategy focus primarily on parties' interests in attracting votes. If parties care about their brand, they may prefer to be consistent in their positions and to differentiate themselves from their opponents. That preference may conflict with the electoral incentive to converge on the median voter.[123] Theories that incorporate parties' interests in fostering and maintaining partisan attachments might generate new expectations regarding party strategy and competition.

What these cases also demonstrate is that the market reforms of the 1990s in Latin America had lasting effects on public opinion, party competition, and democratic representation in the region. These reforms were often implemented via policy switches that in and of themselves vitiated mandates and made campaigns less credible, weakening democratic representation.[124] But these switches also diluted party brands, precipitating the erosion of partisan attachments and, in some cases, the breakdown of established political parties.

Those breakdowns had their own detrimental effects on democracy. Once parties break down, they are unlikely to return to electoral competitiveness. Generally, these sudden breakdowns fragment the party system, with new parties emerging as instant electoral vehicles for

[119] Evans and Tilley 2012a; Evans and Tilley 2012b; Kitschelt 1994.

[120] The experiences of some Southern European countries during the Eurozone crisis come close and, indeed, have severely battered some established parties.

[121] Lupu forthcoming.

[122] See Przeworski and Sprague 1986.

[123] For example, Downs 1957; Enelow and Hinich 1984.

[124] Stokes 2001.

prominent personalities. Voters have no priors about these new parties and therefore little credible information about the kinds of policies they support. This makes it difficult for voters to hold parties accountable and increases the electoral opportunities for unknown outsiders.[125] An environment in which party brands are all but meaningless may also be self-reinforcing: if politicians are not at all bound by party labels, they may be freer to change positions and allies at will.

This study thus highlights that partisanship, political parties, and partisan conflict are fundamental features of democratic politics. Scholars and political commentators routinely deride the unseemliness of partisan politics, the clubbiness of organized parties, and the apparent thoughtlessness of mass partisanship. Yet it is because political parties play crucial roles in facilitating democratic representation and accountability that the erosion of partisanship and party breakdown pose not only a theoretical puzzle but also a threat to the quality of Latin American democracies. The fragmentation of party systems, the emergence of unknown and, at times, undemocratic politicians, and the ideological vacuousness that characterizes postbreakdown democracies in Latin America should serve as a warning. There is surely much for democrats to dislike about political parties that are too strong and polarized and about partisanship that is too stable; but democrats should also beware the perverse effects of weak parties, partisan convergence, and widespread partisan independence.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article can be found at http://dx.doi.org.10.1017/S0043887114000197.

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[125] Mainwaring and Scully 1995.

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