

Continuity and Change in Latin American Party Systems

Abstract: Observers of Latin America frequently claim that party systems of the region have undergone remarkable transformations since the 1990s: the decay of traditional parties and the rise of leftist or populist parties. However, party politics has always been volatile in many countries of the region. This paper compares recent trends in volatility, fragmentation, left-right tendency, polarization, the quality of representation, and legislative governability with longer historical tendencies in Latin America to show that, in some respects, the more things change, the more they remain the same. It also recognizes that the party systems of a few countries have recently diverged from their own historical paths and seeks to explain why.

Michael Coppedge
Associate Professor
Department of Political Science
and Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies
Hesburgh Center
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana 46556
coppedge.1@nd.edu
(574) 631-7036

Paper prepared for presentation at the International Conference, "After the Third Wave: Problems and Challenges for the New Democracies," Taipei, Taiwan, August 13-14, 2007.

Continuity and Change in Latin American Party Systems

In the past decade, Latin America has received a great deal of attention due to some striking political changes: the rise of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Rafael Correa in Ecuador; the election of other left, center-left, or populist governments in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, and Nicaragua; mass protests that forced presidents from office in Argentina, Bolivia, and Ecuador; and government actions that have undermined liberal democracy in Venezuela and respect for human rights in Colombia. The sudden clustering of these developments has led some pundits and academics to leap to the conclusion that these events are all symptoms of a common syndrome that is sweeping Latin America and that will soon engulf the entire region. Characteristics of political parties and party systems lie at the heart of this perceived phenomenon, either as defining characteristics (leftism, populism) or as immediate causes (of governmental or regime instability).

Why do we care about party systems? It must be admitted that debate is continuing about whether, and how, party systems may matter. This paper will not resolve these debates. Rather, it takes several conventional hypotheses about the consequences of party systems as givens and shows what they imply about trends in major Latin American countries if those hypotheses are true. These trends have been exaggerated in the popular imagination.¹ What may appear to be a single syndrome is actually several different trends, some of which are moving in divergent directions in different countries. Some Latin American countries have not experienced any of these trends. Among those that have, party-system transformations have not necessarily been directly problematic, and in at

¹This paper is targeted at an audience of non-Latin Americanists. My central claims will not be unfamiliar to political scientists who specialize in Latin America, although the systematic quantitative evidence may be.

least one case, the change has been an improvement. It is only in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador that recent party-system change has created an immediate, serious threat to liberal democracy, and only in Venezuela that change of this magnitude is unprecedented in the country's history. It seems, therefore, that the undeniably dramatic transformation of Venezuelan politics has unduly colored interpretations of general trends in the region.

Various characteristics of parties and party systems are thought to threaten democracy in several different ways. Some situations are fairly immediate threats to the survival of a democratic regime; some tend to undermine effective government, which may threaten democratic survival only in the longer term; and others lower the quality of democracy, which does not seem to threaten its survival even in the medium term.

The party situations that are most immediately threatening to the survival of democracy are dominant-party systems, systems that lead to the election of an executive who intends to end liberal democracy, and those that lead to the election of a far-left government. Dominant-party systems are almost by definition incompatible with democracy (Sartori 1976 217-43). It is extremely rare for one party to win more than 60 percent of the national vote honestly; free citizens tend to have more heterogeneous preferences than that. Winning more than 60 percent in *consecutive* elections is unnatural.² It practically requires official domination of the media, legal discrimination against opposition parties, harassment of opposition groups, or electoral fraud.

Few people are in a better position to destroy democracy than an elected executive. He or she may not have a popular mandate to do so, and may not start out planning to be anything other than a democrat, but when legislatures, courts, the media, or insurgents frustrate their political

²The 60 percent threshold is an approximate one, based on personal experience observing the character of regimes following elections.

agenda, a few elected executives give in to the temptation to violate due process, silence critics, jail opponents, stack courts, dissolve the legislature, or declare martial law. Ironically, such moves are more likely when the executive really does have a mandate for an ambitious agenda, perhaps because the move is more likely to be successful. Such conditions manifest themselves in the party system.

The threat to democracy posed by far-left governments does not necessarily spring from the fact that, being at the extreme, they have ambitious plans for change; far-right governments can be equally ambitious. Rather, the threat springs from the fact that their plans for change tend to be more threatening to the wealthy elite, the military, religious leaders, and often the United States – political actors who control more of the resources that are needed to overthrow a government than any actors who might be equally unhappy with a right-wing government. Party systems also reflect the conditions that make this scenario likely, because leftists or populists are more likely to be able to assume executive office when either leftist parties win more votes or fragmentation makes it possible for the left to win with a smaller vote share.

There are three different situations that are believed to pose a less immediate threat to democracy. The first is a combination of a high degree of party-system fragmentation with a high degree of polarization, which Giovanni Sartori called “polarized pluralism” (Sartori 1976). Sartori argued that such party systems have “centrifugal” tendencies, i.e., they create incentives for parties on both the left and the right to become ever more extreme, outbidding one another in an effort to become the most authentic representative of the left or the right, which makes democracy-preserving cooperation and compromise impossible. The second is party-system fragmentation alone, which may increase the risk of having a minority government. This is not an inevitable result; in fact, some research suggests that minority governments are more common when the largest party wins 40-50 percent of the seats (Przeworski and Limongi 1997). Also, the formation of a coalition

often prevents fragmentation from leading to minority government. Nevertheless, in the presidential systems found in Latin America, the more fragmented the party system, the more likely it is that a president will win with far less than half of the vote (in the first round, at least). Coalitions are common, but they tend to be more short-lived than they are in parliamentary democracies. The basic idea is that presidents without majority support are more likely to be stalemated by the legislature and more likely to try to govern by decree or through unconstitutional measures, which can lead to a constitutional crisis and the breakdown of the regime. (Linz 1994; Mainwaring 1993). There is now little question that presidential democracies are more fragile than parliamentary democracies, but the hypothesis that stalemate increases the risk of regime breakdown has been questioned (Cheibub and Limongi 2002). However, the Cheibub and Limongi study did not measure “stalemate” in a rich way that took into account party discipline, the difficulty of compromise, and relations between presidents and their own parties, as I do here. The final scenario is simply low-quality democracy due to parties that lack a clearly articulated programmatic or ideological agenda; parties that often rely instead on the charismatic personality of their leader. When programs are weak, personalism often takes their place. Democracies with low-quality representation can survive for decades, but in the long run, a low-quality democracy has to be more likely to break down than a democracy that is functioning well. Even if none of these scenarios – polarized pluralism, stalemate, or poor representation – increases the risk of regime breakdown in a decade or so, they are all more immediately problematic for the effectiveness of government or the quality of democracy.

Statistical Evidence

This paper employs various statistics to diagnose the extent and severity of fragile, ineffective, or low-quality democracy in eleven major Latin American countries, and how these characteristics changed from about 1995 to about 2005. In some cases widely-used statistics are

sufficient for the purpose; for others, I have invented new statistics to capture the relevant aspects, some of which rely on my left-right classification of Latin American parties (Coppedge 1997).³ Lucas González has recently updated this classification to about 2002, and I have updated it from then to the present.⁴ In a few cases, statistical information alone is insufficient to present an accurate picture of the relevant party-system characteristics, and in those cases I will turn to raw electoral results and more qualitative, historical analysis.

Dominant-party systems are the easiest to identify: all that is really necessary is to identify the percentage of the vote or seats won by the largest party in consecutive elections. If it is greater than approximately 60 percent, it is a dominant-party system. However, a more widely used statistic is also relevant: the “effective number of parties” (Laakso and Taagepera 1979), which measures how many parties there are, in effect, in the party system. If one party won all the votes, it would equal 1.00; if two parties won 50 percent each, it would equal 2.00; if three parties each won a third of the vote, it would equal 3.00; and so on. If parties win unequal shares, as is always the case, this statistic reports a fractional number of parties, capturing “in effect” how many parties there are. For example, if three parties split the vote 40-40-20, the effective number of parties (ENP) would be

³For elections up to 1995, I drafted a classification of all the parties that contested lower-chamber elections, identifying parties with a position on a left-right spectrum (left, center-left, center, center-right, or right) and a religious/secular dichotomy; or, if that was not possible, it classified parties as “personalist,” “other” (e.g. regional, ethnic, environmental), or simply “unknown.” I then sent this draft and my explicit coding criteria to 80 country specialists, asking for their advice in correcting any misclassifications. Fifty-three of the experts provided feedback, which I then used to make corrections. Only 3 percent of the vote in this sample of elections went to parties that fell into the “unknown” category. Complete documentation for this variable is in Coppedge 1997, and the percentages of the vote won by each bloc are available at <http://www.nd.edu/~mcoppedg/crd>. As noted, classifications for elections after 1995 were done differently and are therefore less reliable.

⁴The updated classifications have not yet been vetted by country experts, but we plan to do this in the coming year.

2.78: in effect, closer to a three-party system than to a two-party system.⁵ This statistic can be calculated to measure either fragmentation in terms of votes (ENPV) or in terms of seats (ENPS). If ENP is consistently significantly less than 2.00, therefore, then there is probably a dominant party.

The presence of an executive (a president, in Latin America) who intends to undermine democracy is probably not best captured using statistics. The true orientation of such “disloyal” or “semiloyal” actors is often hidden and variable. However, it is gradually revealed in the course of a presidency, as a president either takes a series of steps to limit opposition, or refuses to do so.

In this paper, the first guide to the existence of a leftist government is the classification of the president’s party. My classification criterion for a party of the left reads:

Left: Parties that employ Marxist ideology or rhetoric and stress the priority of distribution over accumulation or exploitation of the working class by capitalists and imperialists, and advocate a strong role for the state to correct social and economic injustices. They may consider violence an appropriate form of struggle, but do not necessarily. They do not worry about alienating middle- and upper-class voters who are not already socialist intellectuals.

The classifications made using this criterion should not be applied uncritically, however, for three reasons. First, parties sometimes shift their orientation. In the 1980s and 1990s especially, some parties of the left tended to moderate their ideology and become center-left parties instead. This criterion reads: “Center-Left: Parties that stress justice, equality, social mobility, or the complementarity of distribution and accumulation in a way intended not to alienate middle- or upper-class voters.” Second, presidents often move closer to the center, sometimes to the point of jeopardizing the support of their own party. They may do this in order to keep a coalition together, because they feel pressure to represent the whole country instead of one part of it, or because they are constrained by international forces or limited domestic resources. Such governments cannot be

⁵The exact formula is $1/\sum(p^2)$, where p is the proportion of votes (or seats) won by each party.

safely classified just by the classification of the president's party and must be classified using more nuanced information. Third, sometimes a regime or ethnic cleavage is more salient than the left-right cleavage.

Polarized pluralism can be measured fairly well by ENPS and an indicator of left-right polarization. My indicator of polarization is the dispersion of the vote away from the relative center of the party system (Coppedge 1998 556-58). It takes on values between zero (when all of the vote goes to one ideological bloc) and 100 (when the right and the left each win exactly half of the vote).⁶ But how much fragmentation and polarization is necessary to constitute polarized pluralism? For ENPS, I will use the threshold of 4.0 to 4.5 parties because at that degree of fragmentation, it becomes impossible to form a majority coalition with just two parties. Polarization should not exceed 60, a figure that corresponds to a perfectly flat distribution of voters, i.e., 20 percent for each of the five left-right blocs. Polarization greater than 60 indicates that, on average, parties at the extremes get more votes than parties nearer the center: a reasonably fair symptom of centrifugal tendencies.

Fragmentation, obviously, can be measured by ENPS and ENPV alone. But stalemate is more complicated. I have developed a complex indicator of the impact of the party system on the ability of governments to make policy decisively, which I call "Reliable Majority." This is the most thoroughly studied aspect of the connection between party systems and governability (Jones 1995; Lijphart 1999; Linz 1994; Mainwaring 1993; Mainwaring and Shugart 1997; Shugart and Carey 1992). More specifically, Reliable Majority is the percentage of congressional seats that the president can count on to vote in favor of his or her typical bills. This figure should also be in line with the

⁶The formula for the Index of Polarization (IP) is $|1 - \text{mlrp}| * \text{right \%} + |.5 - \text{mlrp}| * \text{center-right \%} + |-.5 - \text{mlrp}| * \text{center-left \%} + |-1 - \text{mlrp}| * \text{left \%}$. "Mlrp" is the "mean left-right position," i.e., the relative center of a given party system. Its formula is given below.

president's legislative success rate: the proportion of his or her bills that win approval in congress (unless the president anticipates defeat and does not submit the more controversial ones). The Reliable Majority variable is a complex combination of the size of the president's party, the tightness of party discipline, a baseline level of legislative consensus based on the degree of polarization, a maximum rate of success based on the loyalty of the president's own party, and the presence of reliable coalition partners. For details on its construction, see Appendix 2.

The quality of representation is equally difficult to measure, but with the benefit of abundant information, we can get fairly close. Party systems affect the quality of democracy at only one of several stages of the democratic process. That process could be said to begin with the formation of preferences by citizens and continue on through the representation of preferences, decision-making, policy implementation, and policy adjudication (which affects the formation of preferences, bringing the process full circle)⁷. At each stage of the process, different criteria for democratic quality apply. For preference formation, the relevant criteria include transparency and access to information, freedom of speech and organization, campaign finance arrangements, and so on. For decision-making, the relevant criteria are careful and reasoned deliberation, equal votes by representatives, inclusion of all representatives at all stages of decision-making, and so on. For the stage of representation of preferences, I would argue that quality hinges on institutions and procedures that faithfully translate the diverse preferences of voters into a representative microcosm of society called a legislature. Ideally, every preference and combination of preferences found in society should also be found in the legislature, in proportions that closely mirror the distribution of preferences in

⁷This is not the only possible scheme for breaking up the quality of democracy into manageable components, but it is a useful one for purpose at hand, as the relevance of party systems is well confined to the stage of representation.

society. This democratic ideal is not feasible, or necessarily even desirable.⁸ Real-world legislatures do not represent their societies anywhere near this faithfully. However, this unrealizable ideal can serve as a useful standard for comparison: the more closely a party system adheres to it, the higher the quality of representation.

Party systems affect the quality of representation by defining the number and quality of choices available to voters for the expression of their preferences. The more parties there are, the more likely it is that every voter or group of voters will be faithfully represented by one of them. But at the same time, not just any set of parties will do. They must be parties that are programmatically distinct, parties that take clearly different positions on issues that are relevant for giving the voters some control over what the government does. This is a requirement for any semblance of a mandate and accountability in democratic politics; without it, elections would be meaningless and irrelevant. Therefore, the more distinct each party is from other parties in the system, the better the quality of representation.

Some readers may object that I am advocating extremely fragmented and polarized party systems (*contra* Sartori 1976, 131-173). I am not. What I am doing is defining an *analytical* standard for the quality of representation by party systems, without (at this point) taking a position on the separate *normative* question of the desirability of any particular quality of representation. This

⁸This model of representation comes from the democratic tradition of popular sovereignty and is usually called the "delegate" model of representation. It is often contrasted with the "trustee" model of representation, in which representatives are not obliged to respect the wishes of their constituents; rather, representatives must use their best judgment to favor policies that are in their constituents' best interests, whether the constituents agree with that judgment or not. See (Burke 1774; Pitkin 1967). I view the delegate model as the more democratic one. The trustee model strikes me as an attempt to justify limitations on democracy in order to reconcile democracy with other values, such as political order, informational disparity, or even hegemony of a ruling class. I do not mean to argue that higher-quality representation in the delegate mold is always preferable; rather, I believe that it is merely truer to the core values of democracy, with the understanding that some extreme versions of democracy would not be desirable.

standard is designed to make it easier to say what makes a party system more representative or less representative; it says nothing about whether a more or a less representative party system would be a desirable goal.

The indicator I have derived for this concept, QRPP, can be interpreted as the effective number of reliably ideological, non-personalist opposition parties⁹. It ranges from zero to a theoretical maximum of 10, although in this sample the maximum is 5.88. A significant benchmark is a value of one, which corresponds to meaningful competition between two parties. Party systems with a QRPP of less than one fall below a reasonable minimum standard for representation. Such low values correspond to dominant-party systems, systems of multiple but indistinct parties, a high degree of personalism, parties with unreliable positions, or systems from which a large party has been excluded. Where QRPP is greater than one, no large parties are banned and personalism is low, and there are at least two competitive parties with ideologically meaningful and reliable differences. The larger QRPP is, the greater is the variety of distinct positions represented by the parties.

Some of the figures in this paper trace the evolution of QRPP and Reliable Majority in a country. This evolution will be superimposed on a set of quadrants that identify the minimum acceptable threshold on each indicator. Figure 1 is a template for these figures that explains how each quadrant should be interpreted.

[Figure 1 about here]

Trends

Let us begin examining average trends for the region, represented here by Argentina, Bolivia,

⁹QRPP does not capture all the possible kinds of distinctiveness that could differentiate parties. ENB does reflect large left-right differences, the Christian vs. secular divide, and a few clear “other” cleavages, such as ethnicity and environmentalism. However, in practice only the left-right cleavage has a noticeable impact on the number of blocs, and with five left-right positions, it does not reflect all the programmatic nuances that may be important to some readers.

Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela – the countries with the longest electoral experience. Figures 2 and 3 present averages for each five-year period, an interval long enough to include at least one election per country for any country that was holding elections at the time.¹⁰ We can first look at the rate of change itself, measured by Pedersen's Index of Volatility (Pedersen 1976). This statistic is the sum of the absolute value of the changes in all parties' vote shares from one election to the next, divided by two to avoid double-counting. This first thing to notice about volatility in Figure 2 is that volatility tends to be high in Latin America. In fact, Latin American party systems tend to change about three times as rapidly, on average, as Western European party systems (Coppedge 1998). Second, average volatility did increase from 1995 to 2005, from 25 to 39 percent. Thirty-nine percent is quite high: it means that the average party gained or lost 39 percent of its vote share from one election to the next. This is a historical high regional average, as we should ignore the higher average rate before 1950, when very few countries were democratic enough to be consistently included in this sample. It is also a statistically significant increase ($t=2.23$, one-tailed $p=.026$).¹¹ The average Latin American party system has, then, been changing more rapidly in the past decade than in the previous four decades. However, as we shall see, this average trend is heavily influenced by spectacular changes in a few countries that drown out normal rates of change in others.

[Figures 2 and 3 about here]

Figure 2 shows that there is also a significant increase in left-right polarization in the 1955-

¹⁰Admittedly, this is not ideal because it overweights countries with more frequent elections, and the sample changes as some countries democratize and others succumb to military rule. The country-by-country analysis that follows will correct these problems.

¹¹The differences reported as significant here are still significant if the cutpoint is before 2000 rather than between 2000 and 2005.

2005 period, although it has not risen beyond levels that were common in Latin American democracies before 1955. But the most striking trend has been a shift to the left. The Mean Left-Right Position (MLRP) index plummeted from a cross-national average slightly to the right of center (about 2) in the 1955-1995 period to slight left of center (-4) in 2000-2004 and decidedly center-left (-22) in 2005-2006.¹² There has also been a rather dramatic increase in fragmentation, whether in terms of seats or votes, since about 1970. Due to the very high average fragmentation in 1955-59 (based on eight countries), however, this is not a significant increase over that earlier period. But the recent trend is striking enough to demand attention. The change after 1995 is in the same direction, although smaller. There is not a corresponding increase in *bloc* fragmentation in the past decade. However, bloc fragmentation is a bit higher throughout the Third Wave period than it was before.

Country-by-Country Analysis

Overall, then, the popular perception of trends in Latin American party systems appears to be true, on average. These party systems are changing more rapidly, are more polarized, much more leftist, and more fragmented than they were before 1995. They therefore seem to be more prone to the election of leftist governments, less likely to forge compromises, but less likely to have a dominant party.¹³ But the trends within countries are much more diverse and less consistent. Examining them country by country will give us a more accurate picture.

¹²This last figure is exaggerated due to the opposition boycott of the 2005 legislative elections in Venezuela, which resulted in an MLRP value of -100. However, there is a significant leftward trend without this observation.

¹³I have not reported average levels for the Quality of Representation by Political Parties or the Reliable Majority index because the “healthy” zone for both lies between the extremes. Averaging these indicators for some countries that are too high and others that are too low produces averages that appear, misleadingly, to be “just right.”

Mexico

Mexico demonstrates that where a party system starts from is often as important as the direction in which it changes. The Mexican party system has become more volatile, more fragmented, more polarized, and a bit more leftist since the 1980s. But because the Partido de la Revolución Institucional (PRI) was a dominant party in the 1980s, these changes have resulted in an improved party system: one that is more competitive and offers more meaningful choices to voters without reaching the extreme of polarized pluralism. As shown in Table 1, Mexico now has an approximately three-party system that experiences significant change in each election, unlike the single-digit volatility rates that were the norm before 1988.

[Table 1 about here]

The Quality of Representation by Political Parties (QRPP) and Reliable Majority indices reveal a “best of both worlds,” happy-medium party system. As shown in Figure 4, Mexico evolved from a system in which the PRI had such a reliable majority that the Congress was a rubber stamp, to a system close to the situation in which the governing party must bargain with the opposition or backbenchers on some bills. At the same time, parties offer voters reliably distinct ideological choices. The 2000 point is only an apparent exception to this, created by the index’s focus on distinctions on only the left-right scale. In the 2000 election, the PRI and the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) may have both been center-right parties, but they were quite distinct on a regime cleavage. The PRI represented the continuation of the authoritarian regime, while the PAN represented political democracy. The victory of the PAN’s presidential candidate, Vicente Fox, was the first opposition victory in a presidential election in Mexican history. This transition is also suggested by the sizable shift along the horizontal dimension between 1997 and 2000 in Figure 4.

[Figure 4 about here]

Uruguay

The Uruguayan party system approached a similarly salutary situation from the opposite side. In 1971, a longstanding pattern of basically two-party competition – with some alternation between center-left Colorados and center-right Blancos – had been shattered by the sudden unification and electoral success of the leftist alliance Frente Amplio (Broad Front). The Frente continued to gain strength in each election after the return to democracy in 1984, and as it did, the Uruguayan party system moved into the quadrant of better representation at the expense of a reliable governing majority (Figure 5).¹⁴ The 2004 election was a watershed. In that year, the Frente Amplio, led by current President Tabaré Vázquez, finally won a presidential election. In effect, the Frente has occupied the center-left place of the Colorado Party after years of Colorado promotion of economic liberalization. This party system has, in effect, come full circle, returning to a state very similar to that in 1966 in terms of the number of parties, the level of polarization, and mean left-right orientation (Table 2). The main difference is that the Frente Amplio and the Colorados have switched sizes.

[Table 2 and Figure 5 about here]

Costa Rica

The Costa Rican party system has changed in some ways but not in others. It is now more fragmented than ever before, in both votes and seats, due to the breakup of the Partido Unidad Social Cristiana (PUSC), which had been the major alternative to the party of current incumbent President Oscar Arias ever since the early 1980s. With less than eight percent of the vote in 2006, the PUSC is now only the fourth-largest party, behind Arias's Liberación Nacional (PLN), the

¹⁴This situation was considerably ameliorated by the formation of coalitions composed of factions of both traditional parties. However, these coalitions tended to diminish in size and lose their majority the closer the next election got (Altman Olin 2001).

center-left Acción Ciudadana, and the Movimiento Libertario. The system has also been shifting to the left, but no further than its past orientations until 2006 (Table 3). In spite of these changes, electoral volatility and polarization have remained within historical ranges for Costa Rica, and President Arias, a past winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, is no radical leftist. Moreover, the Costa Rican party system continues to be a quite healthy one in terms of representation and governability (Figure 6). Some Costa Ricans are quite concerned about the changing identities of the major parties, but in comparative perspective it is a party system that most other Latin American countries would be proud to call their own.

[Table 3 and Figure 6 about here]

Chile

Chile is sometimes mentioned as one of the countries that is part of the alleged wave of leftism sweeping Latin America due to the fact that its last two presidents, Ricardo Lagos and Michele Bachelet, have come from the Socialist Party. Levels of polarization and fragmentation are also high, suggesting that it should qualify as a case of polarized pluralism. In reality, all of these bits of evidence are misleading, for two reasons. First, all four governments since the return to democracy in 1990 have been headed by a broad multiparty coalition (the *Concertación*) that unites almost all the forces from the center to the left. This coalition prevents the high degree of fragmentation from making the government ineffective (figure 7). Second, the Socialist Party, including Presidents Lagos and Bachelet, espouses fundamental market-friendly economic policies such as balanced budgets, free trade, and tight money. As Table 4 shows, the MLRP for this system is now much farther to the right than it was in 1973, during the Socialist presidency of Salvador Allende. There is little in the policies of these governments to alienate conservative interests or produce ineffective or unrepresentative government.

[Table 4 and Figure 7 about here]

Brazil

Like Chile, Brazil is often included in the list of countries with “leftist” presidents, due to the election and reelection of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT). Although Lula is authentically from the working class and leads a party with a true leftist ideology, he moved toward the center during his first successful presidential campaign and won business support for his reelection. He is not the kind of president who would undermine democracy, intentionally or not. However, the Brazilian party system does present a problem of either polarized pluralism or extreme fragmentation. With 9-10 parties, effectively, in the 2006 election, it is currently the most fragmented system in these 11 countries, and polarization has been at least 60 percent since 1994 (Table 5). The PT, with only 15 percent of the votes, was the largest party in the system. Consequently, it is hard for a Brazilian president to put together a legislative coalition; most (including Lula, or at least his aides) resort to pork barrel, private favors, and bribes to get things done. Figure 8 puts Brazil high in the high-representation/low reliable majority corner, where it belongs.

[Table 5 and Figure 8 about here]

Peru

In 1995 Peru had a dominant party, Alberto Fujimori’s personal vehicle Cambio 90/Nueva Mayoría. It also had a political regime that was becoming a dictatorship. The government had shut down some critical broadcasters, secret police were spying on congressmen and blackmailing them with the tapes, and the government was caught trying to bend the 2000 election results in its favor. In the wake of the protests that followed, Fujimori fled the country and a new presidential election was held in 2001 in which Fujimori’s party was no longer dominant. The danger of the dominant-

party system had been ended, but it was immediately replaced by the opposite problem: fragmentation and ineffective government (Table 6). President Alejandro Toledo's Perú Posible lacked a majority in congress and his erratic leadership style made it difficult for him to find reliable coalition partners. His presidency staggered to its end with presidential approval ratings in the single digits. A very close race in 2006 was won by former President Alán García of APRA. Decades earlier, the rise of an APRA government could have been seen as a provocation to the armed forces, as this "national revolutionary" party had been feuding with them and the economic elite since the 1930s. By 1978, however, APRA was actually favored by the outgoing military government. But during his 1985-1990 presidency, García took an unexpected turn to the left, drove the economy into hyperinflation, and failed to stop the Shining Path guerrilla army from carrying out frequent bombings in the capital. His reelection in 2006 was inexplicable to many outsiders. But García reassured voters that he had learned from his previous mistakes, and has in fact so far been a model of responsible, moderate leadership. Unfortunately, the fragmentation that began in 2000 continued. APRA commands only 30 percent of the seats in the congress. He is a much more skillful politician than Toledo, but it will still be difficult for him to get much of his agenda approved (Figure 9).

[Table 6 and Figure 9 about here]

Argentina

As of 1995, Argentina still had the moderately fragmented and acceptably polarized party system that had characterized party politics since the restoration of democracy in 1983. The principal competition was between the Justicialist (Peronist) Party and the Radical Civic Union (UCR). In the long run, competition between these two parties could not be explained in left-right terms because Peronism has always been more personalist than ideological, but during the Peronist governments of Carlos Menem, it was a center-right party promoting free trade, privatization, and other forms of

economic liberalization, while the UCR has usually been the classic party of the center. In the 1990s, Menem's dollarization policy was producing unprecedented economic stability, with growth, for Argentina, and this success was eroding the base of the UCR. This dynamic produced two changes in the party system. First, the UCR had to make alliances with center-left parties in order to remain competitive. Second, the Justicialist Party became increasingly divided into pro- and anti-Menem personal and regional factions. In 1999, the UCR-center left alliance FREPASO managed to win the presidential election, aided by scandals over corruption and judicial appointments at the end of Menem's second term.

But in 2001, the economy collapsed on the UCR's watch. Dollarization was a sound policy only as long as governments practiced fiscal discipline. Neither the PJ nor FREPASO governments managed to do this, so when it became clear that dollarization was unsustainable, the economy collapsed and with it, the De la Rúa government and political stability itself. Over several months, various Peronist governors succeeded one another as interim presidents. The one who eventually stayed in office was Néstor Kirchner, who took the country in a more leftist direction (Figure 10). His breathtaking brinksmanship with international financial institutions succeeded in reducing Argentina's foreign debt dramatically and restarting trade and investment and stimulating rapid economic growth. His leftist rhetoric and cooperation with the Chávez government in Venezuela (welcoming Venezuela into Mercosur, allowing Venezuela to buy all of Argentina's remaining foreign debt, and various symbolic acts of solidarity) have caused some to fear that Kirchner may be the Argentine Chávez (or the next Perón) and therefore a threat to democracy. So far, this does not seem to be the case. Kirchner's economic management has been very responsible, and he has not made moves in the direction of setting up a dictatorship. If anything, the danger is that the party system is drifting towards ungovernability. Institutionally, it remains fragmented (Table 7). What

preserves governability for now is Kirchner's high popularity, which is producing a powerful bandwagon effect: all the little parties (many of them actually regional or personal factions of Peronism) want to be allied with Kirchner and help him with his legislative agenda. This, however, cannot last, and when Kirchner loses favor, the new Argentine party system will probably lead to a period of ineffective government.

[Table 7 and Figure 10 about here]

Colombia

Colombia's story has some interesting parallels. Like Argentina, it also had a history of basically two-party competition, but between the Liberals and Conservatives. Like Argentina, the traditional parties have been fragmenting. And like Argentina, many of the new small parties hold tight to the bandwagon of a popular president, Alvaro Uribe. Uribe is a former Liberal politician who won election as an independent on a "get tough" platform after years of bipartisan attempts at negotiating peace with the FARC and other guerrilla movements fell through. His program of strengthening the regular army and prevailing in no-holds-barred combat with the insurgents and drug traffickers restored order and security to growing swaths of Colombia's territory and made him the most popular president (among his own people) in the hemisphere. However, this process has pulverized the traditional party system, which is now quite fragmented (Table 8). No party – even Uribe's Partido Social de la Unidad Nacional, aka "Partido de la U" – won as much as 20 percent of the vote in the 2006 congressional elections. Uribe has achieved impressive legislative victories thanks to the other parties' desire to cooperate with a popular president (Figure 11). But his approval ratings are now falling due to revelations of his secret cooperation with right-wing paramilitary groups, so Colombia's new, fragmented party system promises less effective government in the future.

[Table 8 and Figure 11 about here]

Venezuela

Venezuela's party system has been transformed more completely than any other. From 1973 to 1988, competition was dominated by the center-left Acción Democrática and the center-right Social Christian party COPEI. After nearly two decades of economic decline, however, voters lost faith in these two parties and began searching for alternatives. First abstention grew, then the party system fragmented, first in 1993, then even more in 1998. In that year, Hugo Chávez Frías, a Lieutenant Colonel recently released from prison for his unsuccessful 1992 coup attempt, won the presidential election. He then patiently and methodically set about undermining Venezuela's liberal democracy from within in order to replace it with the leftist dictatorship it has become today. First he summoned a Constituent Assembly, which wrote a new constitution and replaced the opposition-dominated Congress with a National Assembly dominated by pro-Chávez parties. It also stacked the supreme court and the electoral administration, and appointed Chávez loyalists to all other positions of national power, leaving the executive unchecked. Once he had consolidated control over institutions, he used decree powers to begin restructuring the economy. When vigorous opposition to these measure arose, the electoral council stymied all attempts to hold a recall referendum until unprecedented oil revenues enabled the government to spend massively on stop-gap social programs, restoring Chávez's majority support. After defeating the recall effort in 2004, opposition parties lost confidence in the fairness of elections and boycotted the 2005 elections, which resulted in a National Assembly that contains nothing but pro-Chávez parties of the left, which the government is in the process of forcing into a single unified socialist party (Table 9 and Figure 12). Venezuela is therefore a rare case of an elected (and re-elected) leader who intentionally destroyed liberal democracy and transformed the party system to match, and reinforce, the character of the

new regime.

[Table 9 and Figure 12 about here]

Bolivia

Bolivia is approaching a similar end from a different angle. It had a history of having a volatile, fragmented, and polarized party system (Table 10). For fifteen years, the leaders of the three largest parties – the center-right Movimiento Nacional Revolucionario (MNR), the center-left Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), and right-wing Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN) – managed this situation with extraordinary skill by putting together effective governing coalitions. Their governments succeeded in stabilizing the economy, but rates of economic growth remained sluggish and unemployment became an increasingly severe problem. The mining sector – the primary motor of the Bolivian economy since the colonial era – shrank, and thousands of unemployed miners turned to coca production. The coca-growers movement became the backbone of support for a radical leftist-nationalist-indigenous party called the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), led by Evo Morales. Bolivian politics increasingly became a highly polarized confrontation between cosmopolitan traditional-party elites promoting economic liberalization and populist outsiders who tended to distrust the market and globalization and defended the identities and practices of the indigenous majority. The protests and blockades of the latter group forced the resignations of Presidents Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (MNR) in 2003 and Carlos Mesa in 2005. The force behind these efforts, Evo Morales, emerged as the consensual leader of the forces of change, and he was elected president in 2005, with polarization at 90 percent (Table 10). The Bolivian party system was immediately transformed in the process: Morales's MAS became the majority party in 2005, and it strengthened its majority in 2006 elections for a constituent assembly (Figure 13). It remains an extremely polarized situation; conservative leaders in the eastern lowlands

have even threatened to secede. It is not yet clear whether Morales intends to work within democratic institutions. Some of his aides are unreconstructed Stalinists and others are utopian indigenous nationalists; he claims to be the moderate within his coalition. Even so, he is the Latin American leader who is (aside from Fidel Castro) closest to Hugo Chávez, from whom he clearly borrowed the tactic of summoning a constituent assembly during his honeymoon period. The prospects for democratic survival therefore do not look good.

[Table 10 and Figure 13 about here]

Ecuador

The Ecuadorian story is similar in some respects to Bolivia's. It also had a history of volatile, fragmented party politics, and also experienced the rise of an indigenous movement (CONAIE and its political party, Movimiento País Nuevo-Pachakutik) in the 1990s. However, Ecuador's politicians never managed to form the solid coalitions that brought economic and political stability to Bolivia in the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, Ecuador suffered the full effects of fragmented party politics: presidents who were elected with very little congressional support, and who therefore had a difficult time getting legislation passed, assembling ad hoc majorities here and there by distributing patronage, doing favors, and even buying votes with cash. Several presidents were driven from office before their terms were finished. By 2002, the party system had reached extreme fragmentation, volatility was over 50 percent, and the mean vote was at the center-left, moving toward the left (Table 11 and Figure 14). The 2006 presidential election was won by Rafael Correa, who very explicitly identifies himself with Hugo Chávez and has replicated the Chávez-Morales tactic of holding a quick constituent assembly.

Correa is not likely to be as successful as Morales, however, because his election was much closer. And neither Morales nor Correa has resources to spend that are anywhere near as vast as the

oil revenues at Chávez's disposal. It is doubtful, therefore, that the political situation in Bolivia or Ecuador will go to the extremes that Venezuela's has. Nevertheless, the trend in these three countries is worrisome for democracy.

[Table 11 and Figure 14 about here]

Conclusion

Beyond these three Andean countries, the perception of a wave of leftism or of fragile democracy is mistaken. The "leftist" presidents of Uruguay, Brazil, Chile, and probably Argentina are actually quite moderate, and all appear to be firmly committed to liberal democratic institutions. Those who wish to wring their hands over the state of democracy in Latin America and the contribution of political parties to it should focus instead on the increasingly fragmented and volatile party systems, which increase the risk of isolated and ineffective presidents in Argentina, Peru, Brazil, Colombia, and Ecuador.

Fig. 1: A Key to the Figures

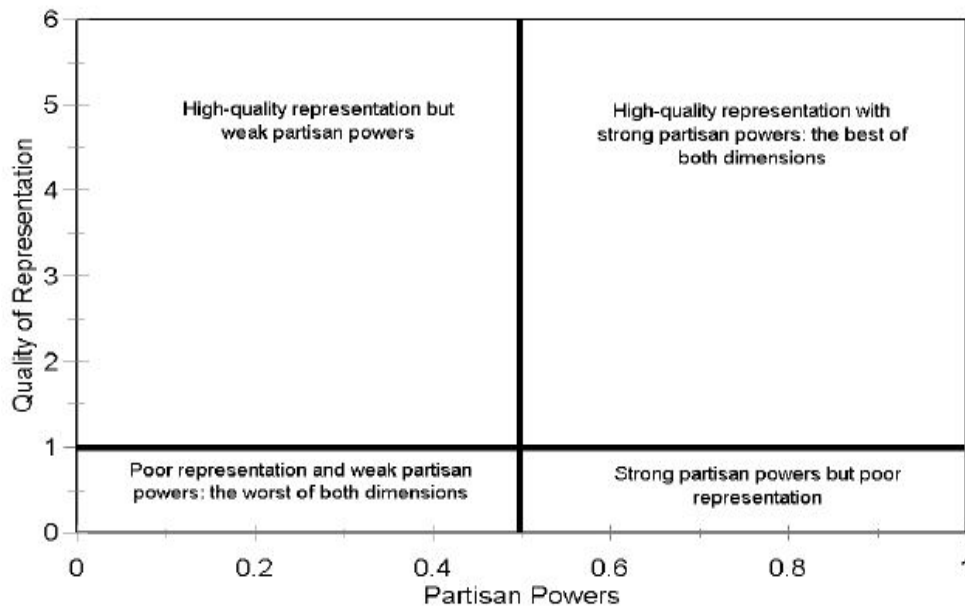


Figure 2

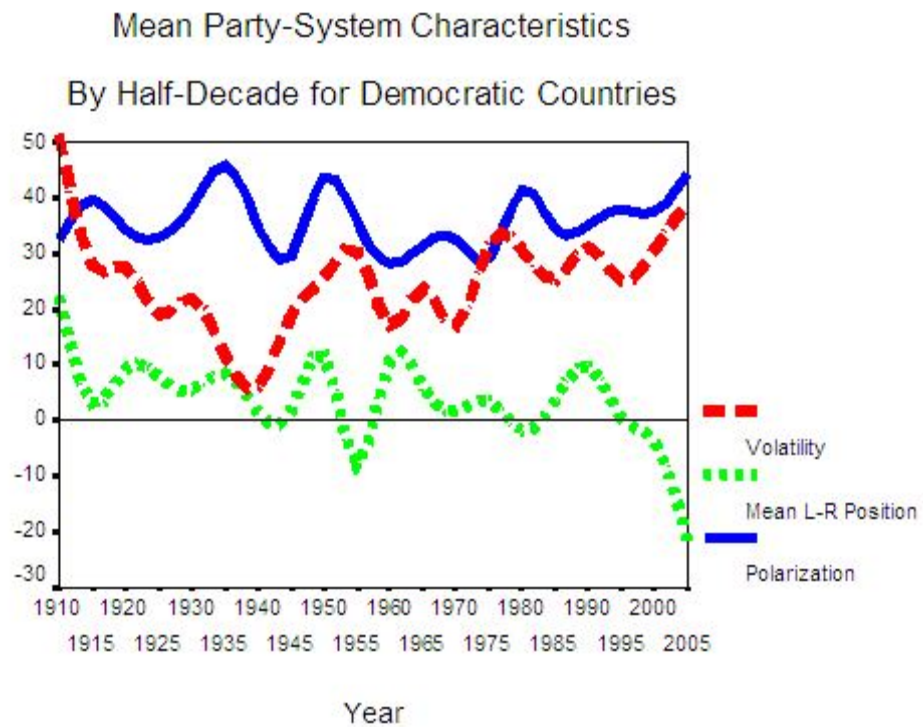


Figure 3

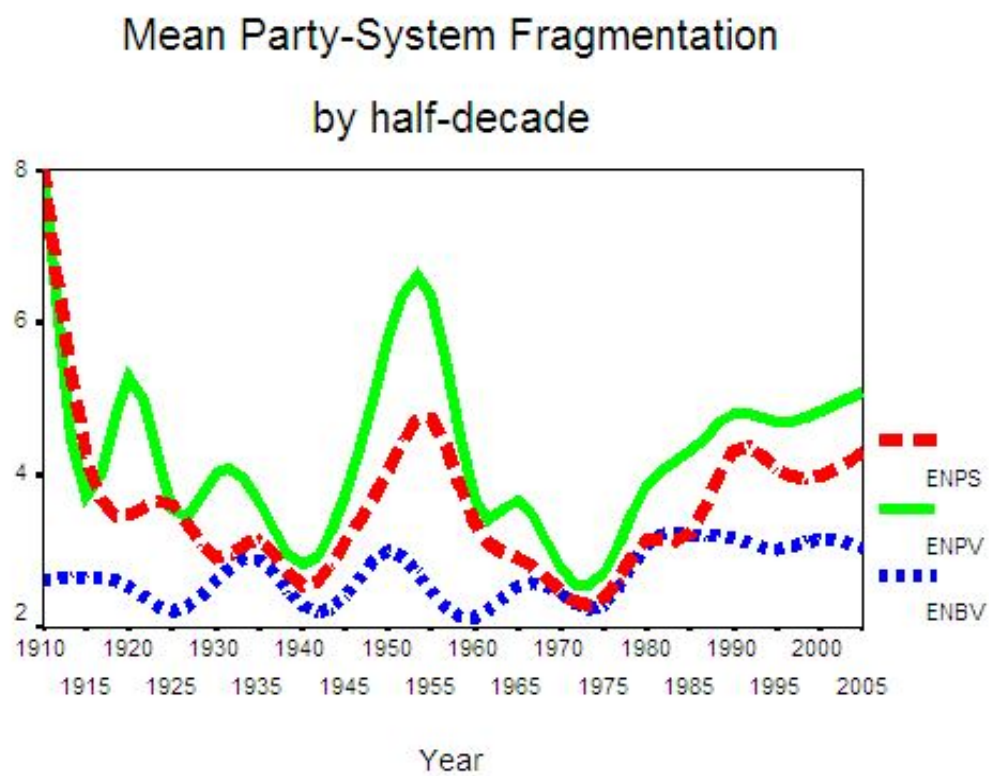


Table 1: The Mexican Party System, 1982-2006

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1982	7.6	1.72	1.94	38	24
1985	3.5	1.86	2.02	36	27
1988	21.9	3.07	3.21	29	37
1991	11.9	2.2	2.39	37	23
1994	17.7	2.29	2.88	29	33
1997	13.3	2.86	3.42	17	44
2000	14.5	2.55	2.77	30	31
2003	10.0	2.99	3.42	29	29
2006	17.6	3.02	3.43	18	40

Figure 4:

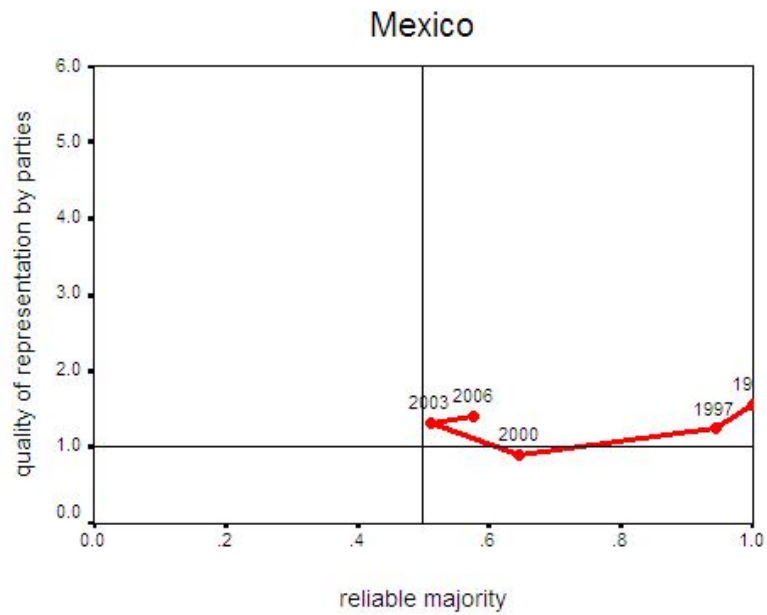


Table 2: The Uruguayan Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1966	8.5	2.33	2.44	-13	51
1971	8.7	2.72	2.76	2	38
1984	5.7	2.93	2.96	-3	40
1989	13.5	3.33	3.38	-6	46
1994	11.8	3.24	3.31	-2	34
1999	9.8	3.07	3.12	-11	35
2004	27.2	2.31	2.61	-8	42

Figure 5

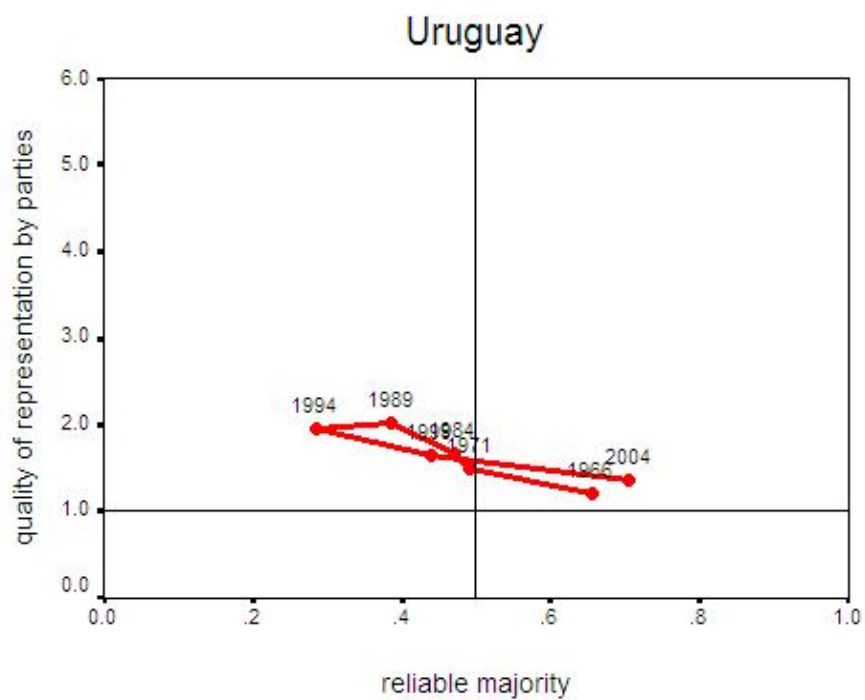


Table 3: The Costa Rican Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1953	21.1	1.96	2.11	-4	59
1958	37.2	3.21	4.17	0	43
1962	27.6	2.61	2.71	-14	35
1966	6.5	2.14	2.33	-3	46
1970	15.2	2.15	2.56	-15	50
1974	27.5	3.13	4.01	-15	36
1978	33.6	2.38	2.87	-6	52
1982	23.3	2.27	2.53	-16	48
1986	18.7	2.21	2.48	-7	51
1990	10.0	2.21	2.56	0	50
1994	11.4	2.29	2.77	-8	49
1998	17.8	2.56	3.36	-3	47
2002	34.6	3.68	4.48	-10	43
2006	27.0	3.32	4.63	-30	32

Figure 6:

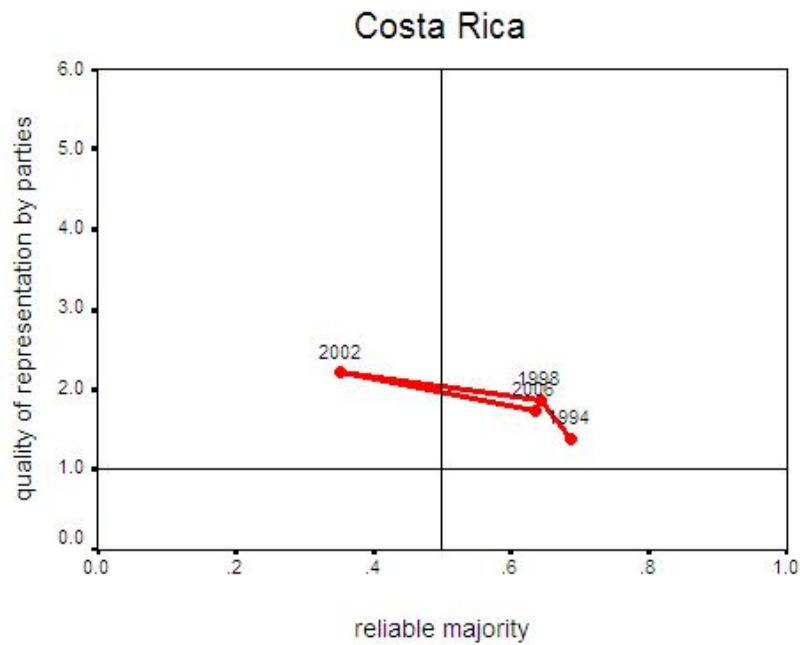


Table 4: Chile

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1961	21.9	5.89	6.44	1	61
1965	31.6	2.80	4.06	-13	39
1969	17.2	4.08	4.93	-20	57
1973	16.2	4.51	5.17	-22	63
1989	41	4.56	7.11	18	54
1993	26.4	4.95	6.66	11	56
1997	13.1	5.19	7.20	8	62
2001	14.7	5.94	6.56	16	65
2005	7.4	5.59	6.56	12	64

Figure 7:

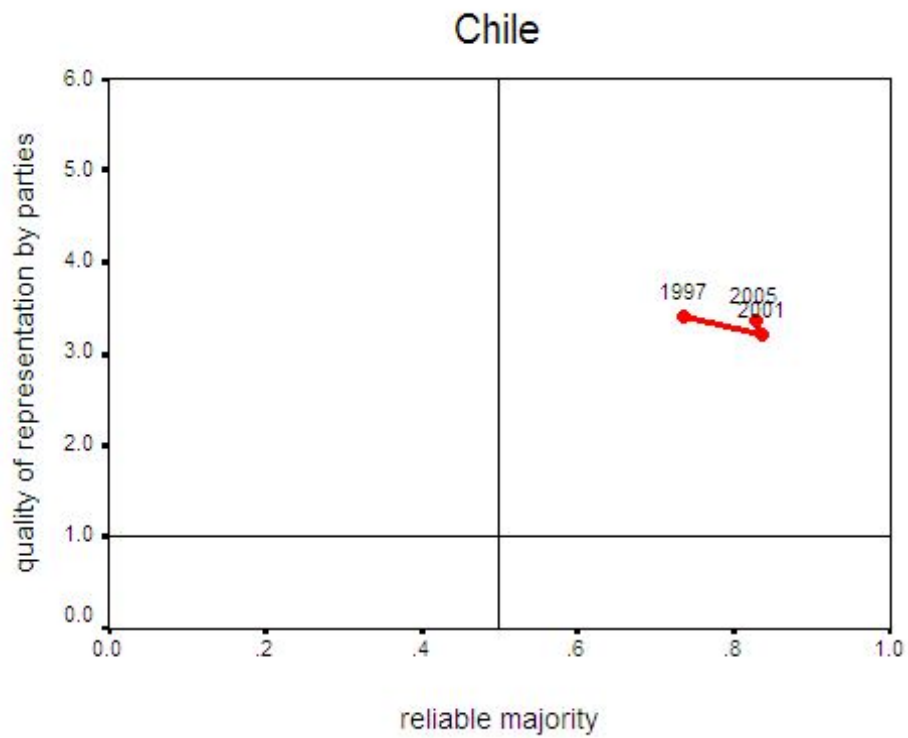


Table 5: The Brazilian Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1986	34.5	2.83	4.16	18	43
1990	59	8.65	10.47	9	54
1994	23.6	8.13	8.72	4	60
1998	16.3	7.14	7.15	3	62
2002	15.6	8.49	8.51	-5	68
2006	14.2	9.32	10.62	-17	60

Figure 8:

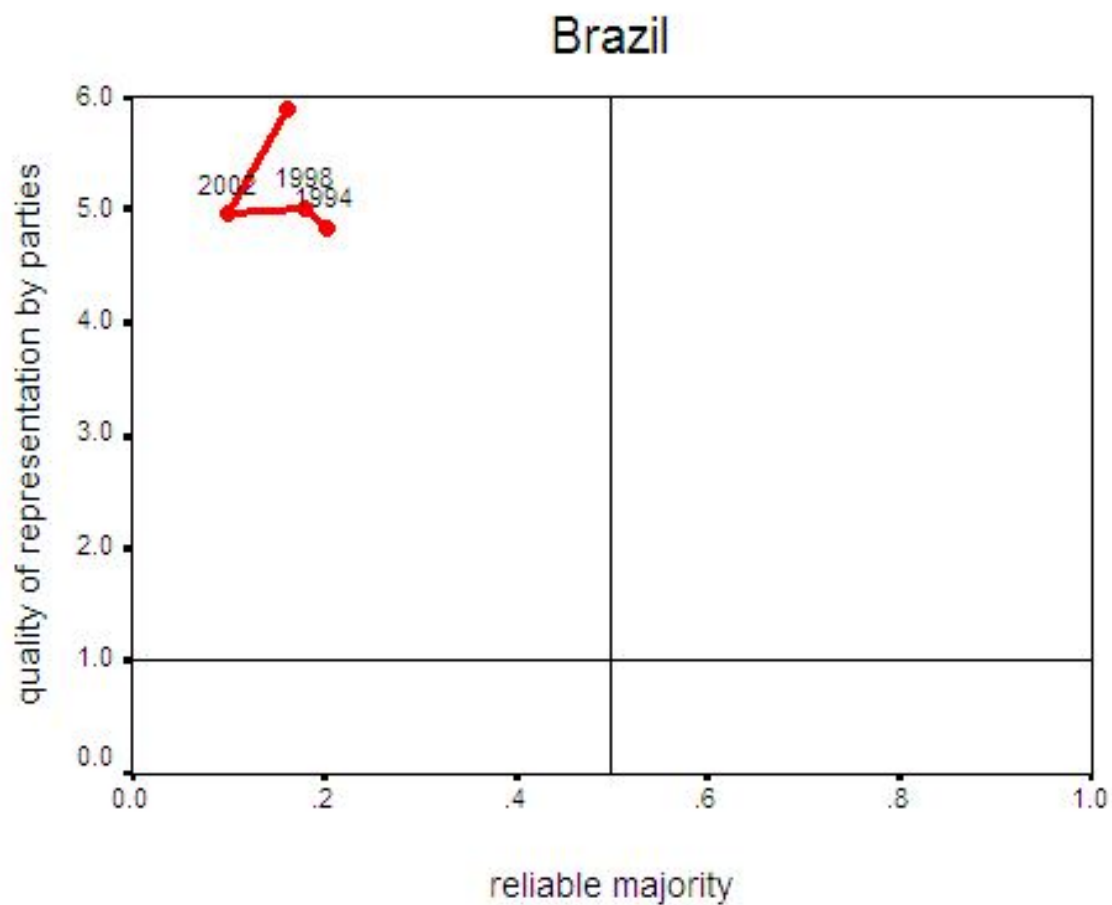


Table 6: The Peruvian Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1978	61.4	4.43	4.77	-39	44
1980	53.6	2.46	4.06	-9	58
1985	37.5	2.32	3.00	-42	36
1990	55.7	5.84	4.77	-3	33
1992	74.9	5.27	3.70	7	21
1995	32	2.91	3.18	68	34
2000	41.3	3.97	4.00	65	29
2001	25.9	4.37	6.62	7	40
2006	44.5	3.78	6.35	14	46

Figure 9:

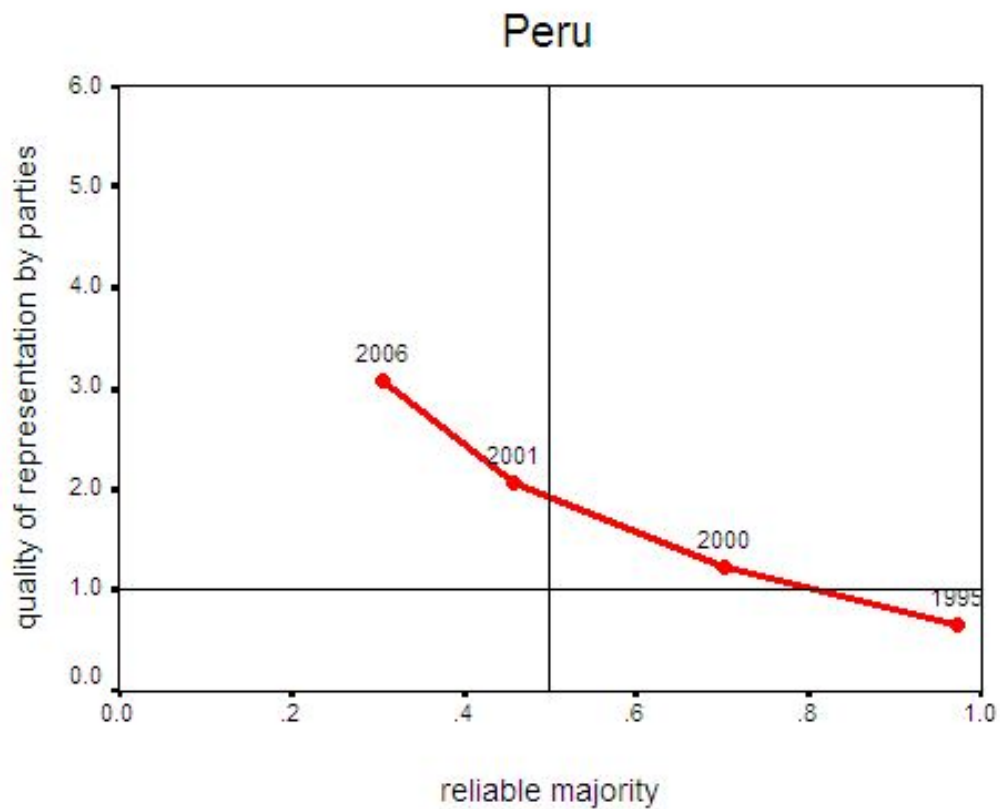


Table 7: The Argentine Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1983	36.7	2.94	2.63	-21	6
1985	25.2	2.37	4.24	-1	8
1987	27.7	2.58	3.19	0	10
1989	17.9	2.68	3.35	0	11
1991	18.4	3.05	3.98	6	11
1993	20.6	2.82	3.52	2	6
1994	30	3.58	4.76	5	23
1995	21.3	2.86	3.61	16	36
1997	49.9	2.49	3.68	1	44
1999	23.5	2.56	3.38	-1	50
2001	36	3.01	4.68	-31	35
2003	47.6	3.91	4.61	-47	14
2005	56.3	5.32	6.14	-49	9

Figure 10:

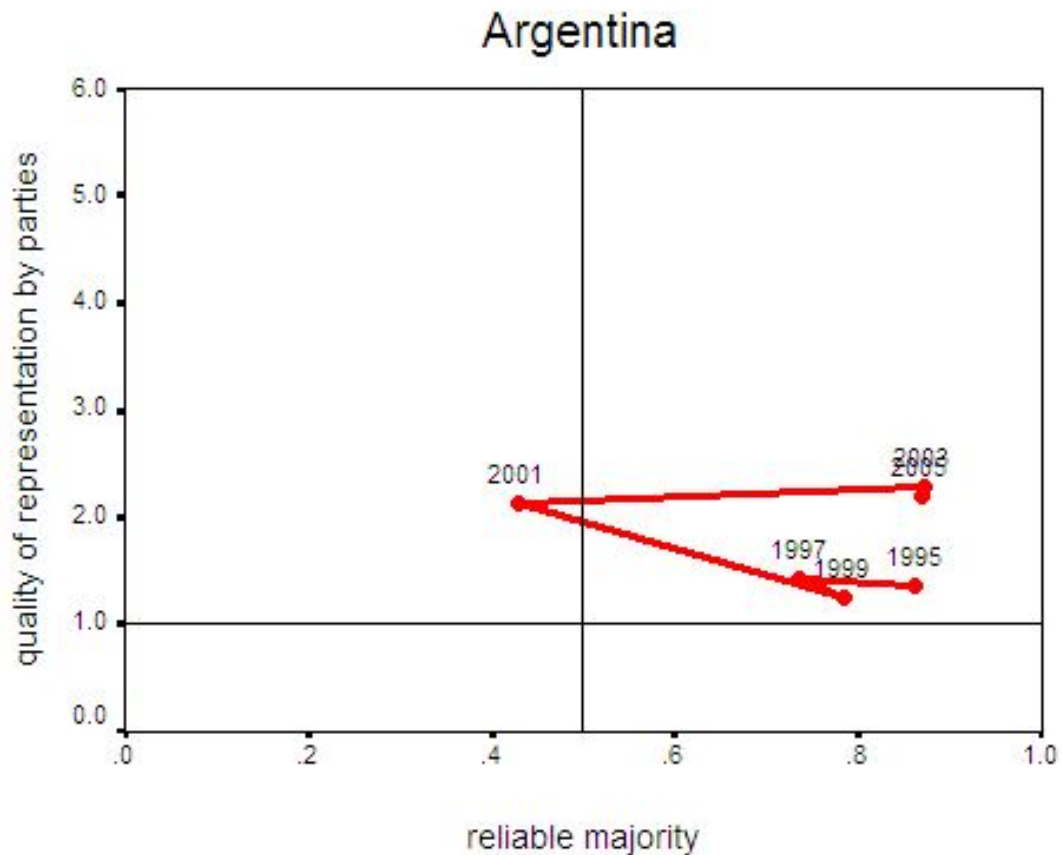


Table 8: The Colombian Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1978	9.6	2.06	2.17	15	19
1982	5	1.98	2.08	18	15
1986	15	2.45	2.66	13	20
1990	13.9	2.18	2.20	16	12
1990	57.4	4.40	4.91	-19	45
1991	39	2.98	3.23	0	28
1994	22.1	2.75	2.65	10	23
1998	30.3	3.16	3.46	15	17
2002	50.9	5.41	5.92	8	17
2006	50.5	7.22	7.65	27	40

Figure 11:

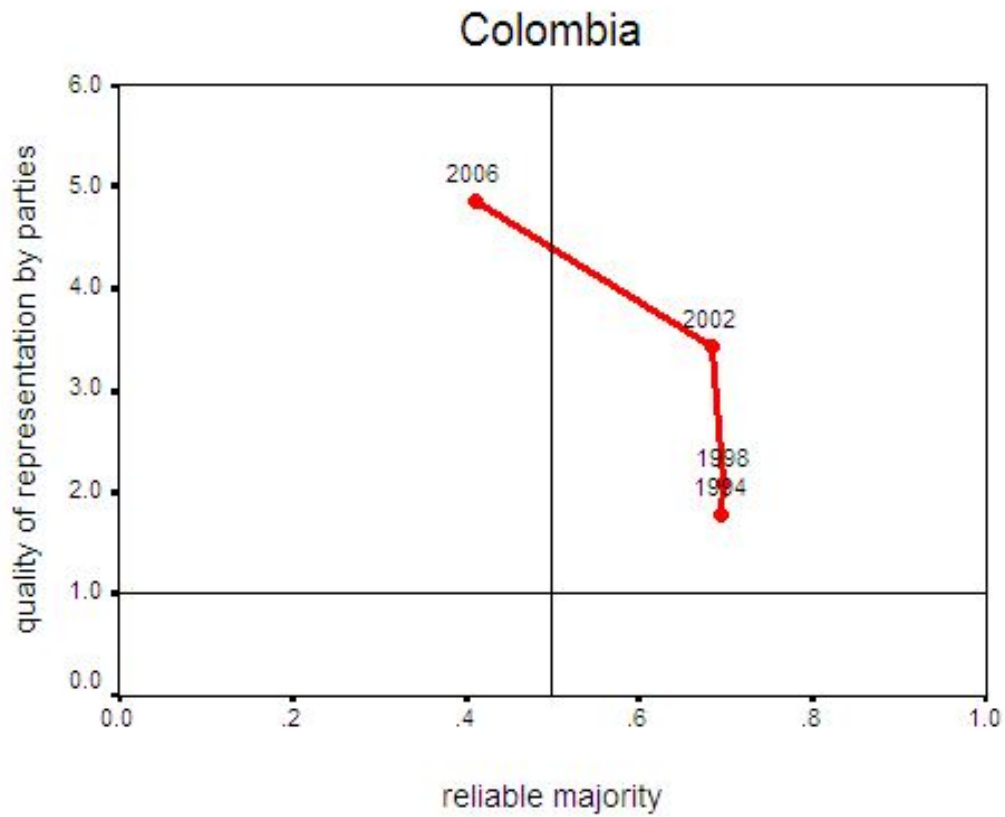


Table 9: The Venezuelan Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1973	32.9	2.73	3.63	-18	45
1978	16.9	2.65	3.31	-12	51
1983	15.7	2.42	2.97	-23	44
1988	13.7	2.83	3.37	-17	49
1993	37.5	3.93	5.12	-16	35
1998	44.5	5.62	7.28	-29	47
2000	34.9	3.44	4.10	-56	39
2005	46.8	1.08	1.33	-100	0

Figure 12:

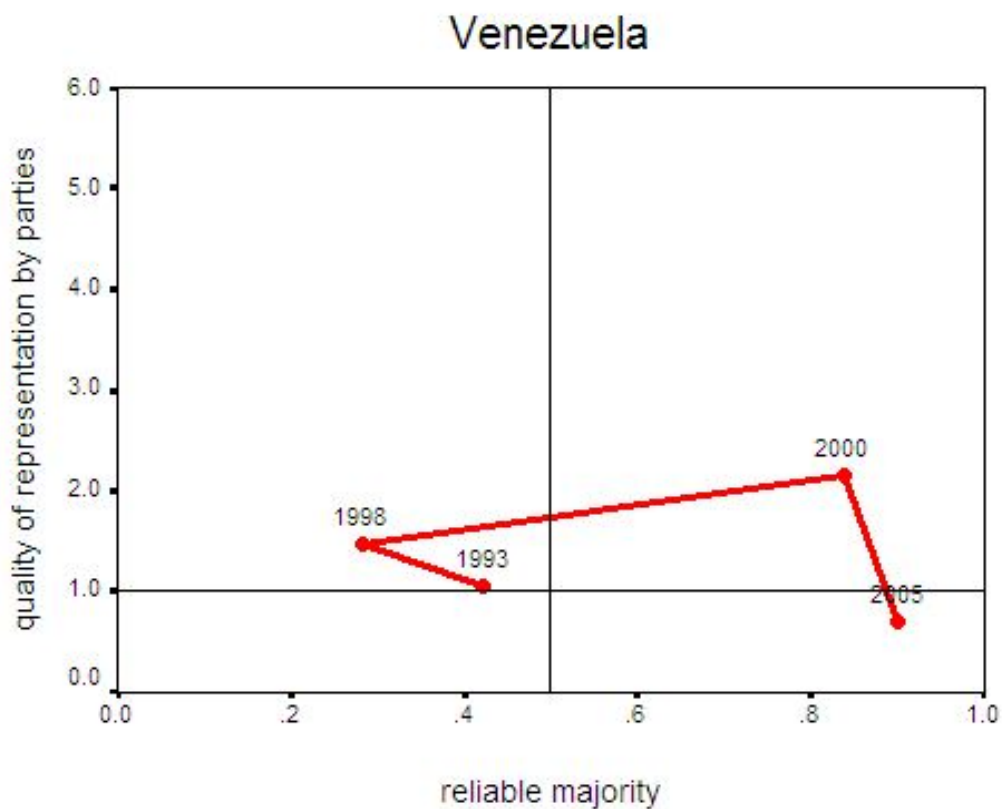


Table 10: The Bolivian Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1985	59.1	4.32	4.57	30	57
1989	32.7	3.92	4.96	16	58
1993	32.8	4.17	4.67	23	24
1997	39.1	5.36	5.92	47	59
2002	52.4	4.96	6.20	-12	57
2005	67.4	2.36	2.62	-20	90
2006	24.5	2.86	3.43	-26	77

Figure 13:

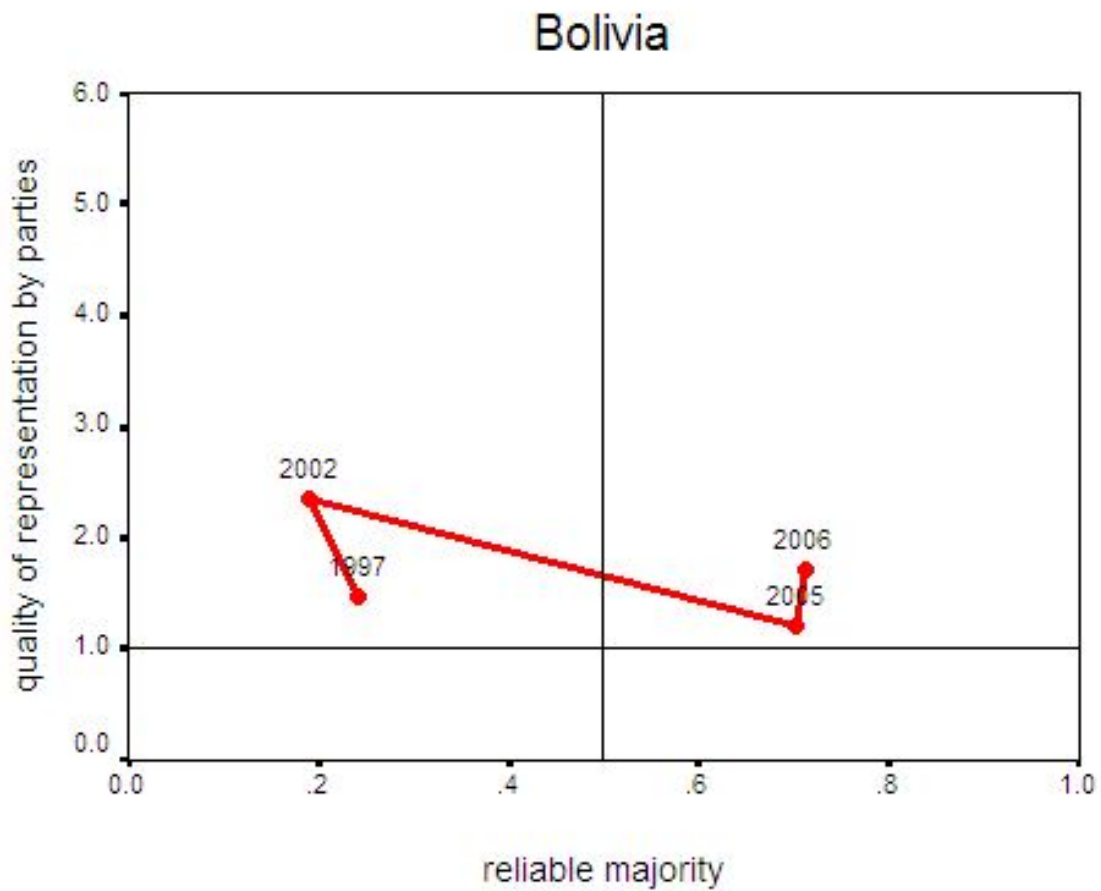
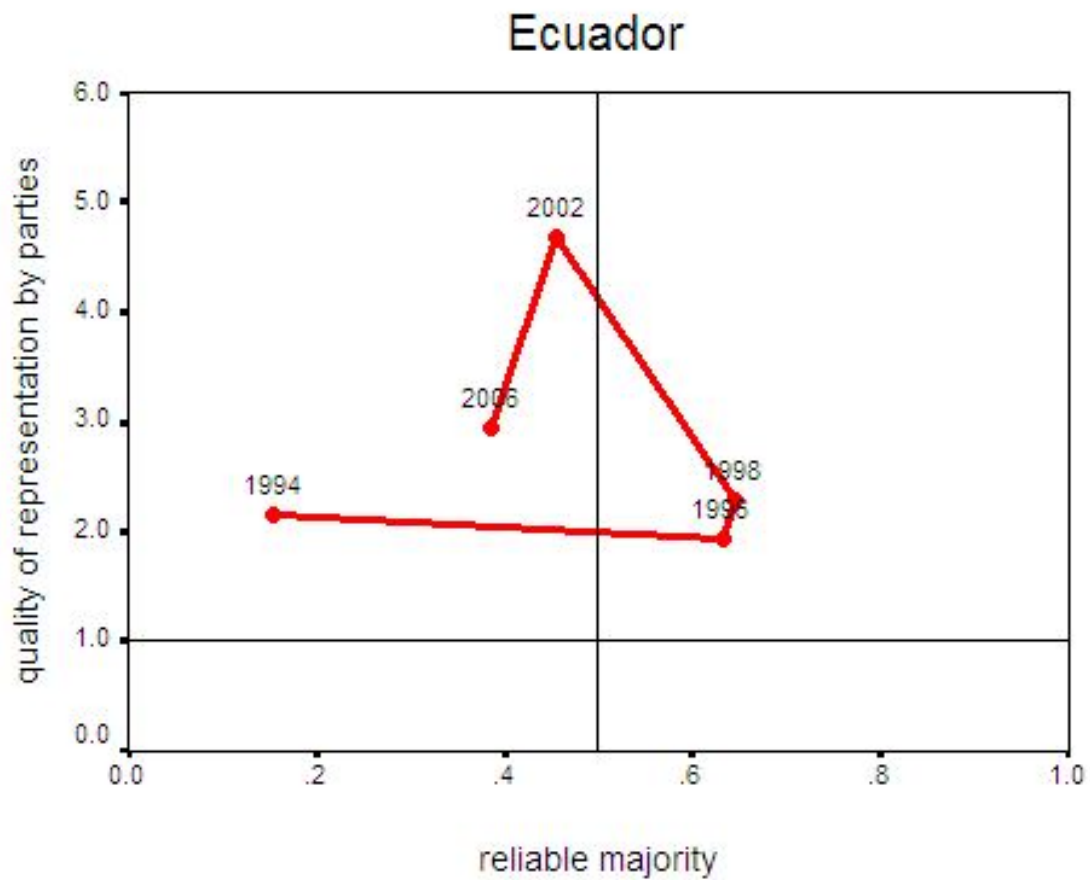


Table 11: The Ecuadorian Party System

Year	Volatility	ENPS	ENPV	MLRP	Polarization
1979	80.7	3.94	6.12	9	46
1984	43.6	6.10	9.26	-1	58
1986	21.9	7.39	11.67	-4	55
1988	19.6	4.63	8.14	-11	47
1990	22.3	6.29	7.88	4	64
1992	20.5	6.61	7.79	31	62
1994	15.5	5.71	7.48	18	61
1996	26.9	5.97	6.24	-42	21
1998	22.6	5.30	6.18	-46	20
2002	57.3	9.53	14.60	-47	32
2006	62.3	5.57	6.11	-15	38

Figure 14:



Appendix

The Reliable Majority index (RM) is based on a cumulative probability distribution function interacting with party discipline within the bounds of a floor (determined by the level of polarization) and a ceiling (set by the chance of a fallout between the governing party and the president). The formula is

$$(3) \quad RM = floor + disc(1 - floor - loss) \left[1 - e^{(-e^{10disc-2})(size^{10disc})} \right]$$

FLOOR establishes the lower limit on the president's legislative success rate. It is operationalized as $(1 - .01 * polarization)^2$. This term is squared because passage of the president's bills requires agreement between two sides. It can be thought of as the probability that the governing parties will support a bill times the probability that the opposition parties will support that bill. Each probability alone is assumed to be inversely proportional to polarization.

The second term, $DISC(1 - FLOOR - LOSS)$, establishes the range of possible success above that floor, and therefore sets the upper limit on legislative success. DISC is the party discipline estimate. LOSS is an estimated probability of a falling out between the governing party and the president.

The term in brackets defines the parameters of the S-curve that links the floor to the ceiling. It is based on a cumulative probability distribution function that models increasing legislative success as the size of the governing party (SIZE) increases. How steeply the rate of success increases for each increase in party size depends on party discipline. If discipline is very loose, increasing the size of the party has little impact. If discipline is very tight, increases in party size make little difference before the party approaches 50 percent, where legislative success suddenly increases sharply, approaching 1; and then further increases in party size have little additional impact.

The SIZE variable in this sample refers to the president's party alone for the president's party version, and to all coalition partners for the coalitions version. My data on coalitions are complete only for the cases in the cases for 1979 and after except for Chile, where I have used Arturo Valenzuela's data on coalition composition for all years (Valenzuela 1994, 197-99).

References

- Altman, David. 2001. "The Politics of Coalition Formation and Survival under Multiparty Presidential Democracies." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Notre Dame.
- Burke, Edmund. 1774. "Speech to the Electors of Bristol." In Edmund Burke, *Works*, Vol. II.
- Carey, John. 2000. "Party Unity in Legislative Voting." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (August).
- Carey, John. 2002. "Getting Their Way, or Getting in the Way? Presidents and Party Unity in Legislative Voting." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, (August).
- Coppedge, Michael. 1995. "Instituciones y gobernabilidad democrática en América Latina." *Síntesis* (Madrid) 22 (July-December).
- , 1997. "A Classification of Latin American Political Parties." Kellogg Institute Working Paper No. 244 (November).
- , 1998. "The Dynamic Diversity of Latin American Party Systems." *Party Politics* 4:4 (October): 547-68. Also published in Spanish as "La diversidad dinámica de los sistemas de partidos latinoamericanos," *POSTData* (U. Quilmes, Argentina) 6 (July 2000): 109-134.
- , Forthcoming. "Combining Large- and Small-N Approaches in Democratization Research." in David Collier and Gerardo Munck, eds., *Regimes in Latin America: Concepts, Methods, and Findings* (publisher being sought). An earlier condensed version was published as "Thickening Thin Concepts and Theories: Combining Large N and Small in Comparative Politics." *Comparative Politics* 31:4 (July): 465-76.
- Held, David. 1996. *Models of Democracy*. 2nd ed. Stanford: Stanford.
- Huntington, Samuel. 1968. *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven: Yale.
- Jones, Mark P. 1995. *Electoral Laws and the Survival of Presidential Democracies*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame.
- Katz, Richard. 1997. *Democracy and Elections*. New York: Oxford.
- Laakso, Murkuu and Rein Taagepera. 1979. "Effective Number of Parties: A Measure with Application to Western Europe." *Comparative Political Studies* 12: 3-27.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1984. *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-One Countries*. New Haven: Yale.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1999. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance in Thirty-Six Countries*. New Haven: Yale.

- Linz, Juan J. and Arturo Valenzuela, eds. 1994. *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.
- Mainwaring, Scott. 1993. "Presidentialism, Multipartyism, and Democracy: The Difficult Combination." *Comparative Political Studies* 26: 198-228.
- Mainwaring, Scott and Matthew Soberg Shugart. 1997. "Conclusion: Presidentialism and the Party System." In Mainwaring and Shugart, eds., *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, 394-439. Cambridge: Cambridge.
- Morgenstern, Scott. 1999. "Explaining the Unity of Legislative Actors in the Southern Cone." Draft prepared for the conference on "Los Partidos Políticos ante los Retos del Siglo."
- O'Donnell, Guillermo. 1993. "On the State, Democratization, and Some Conceptual Problems: A Latin American View with Glances at Some Post-Communist Countries." *World Development* 21: 1355-69.
- Pitkin, Hanna. 1967. *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: California.
- Rae, Douglas. 1970. *The Political Consequences of Electoral Laws*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale.
- Sartori, Giovanni. 1976. *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge.
- Shugart, Matthew S. and John M. Carey. 1992. *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics*. Cambridge: Cambridge.
- Valenzuela, Arturo. 1994. "Party Politics and the Crisis of Presidentialism in Chile: A Proposal for a Parliamentary Form of Government." In Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, pp. 165-224. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins.