

# THE DYNAMIC DIVERSITY OF LATIN AMERICAN PARTY SYSTEMS

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## ABSTRACT

Most Latin American party systems change so often and in so many respects that the 'typical' party system of each country can be described only in imprecise terms, if at all. However, the nature of party systems as they are defined in individual elections can be described in rich and fairly reliable detail. This article compares the party systems of 20th-century Latin America election by election through indicators of fragmentation, volatility, personalism, ideological clarity, mean left-right tendency and polarization. The data cover approximately 150 lower or single-house legislative elections in 20th-century Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela.

**KEY WORDS** ■ fragmentation ■ ideology ■ Latin America ■ polarization ■ volatility

Recent research on Latin America has gone a long way toward correcting the old stereotype of the region's parties and party systems as excessively pragmatic, clientelistic, personalistic, volatile, uncohesive, and therefore weak. A new conventional wisdom has developed that emphasizes the variety among Latin American countries rather than their common deviation from the norms of the industrialized north. Our understanding now needs to go a step farther, by recognizing that there is almost as much difference *within* each country as there is *across* the countries of Latin America. This recognition requires us to be more cautious in generalizing about cross-national differences. Also, scholars must now pay more systematic attention to the substance of party competition, which should complement our knowledge of more objectively measured party-system characteristics such as fragmentation and volatility. This article attempts to improve the new conventional wisdom in both ways, by describing the ideology, polarization, mean left-right positions, fragmentation and institutionalization of the party systems of 20th-century Latin America on an election-by-election basis.

## The Development of the Conventional Wisdom

The conventional wisdom about Latin American parties and party systems developed in four stages. From the turbulence of the 19th century until about 1960, the prevailing stereotype was that Latin America was a region of *caudillismo*, or domination by one or more strong personalities, often military figures, who generally lacked a strong organizational base of support. However, Chile was always recognized as the exception: the most 'European' of the Latin American cases, with well-organized, deeply rooted political parties possessing clear left-right ideologies (Johnson, 1958: 19, 66-93). From about 1960 to about 1967, Latin American parties were common objects of study in the USA. This research brought two innovations. First, scholars recognized that the democratic mass politics of the post-war era had given rise to new sorts of parties. Some were communist or socialist parties, which were appropriately considered quite ideological. But 'Aprista' or 'national-revolutionary' parties were also emerging, characterized by middle-class leadership, a multi-class social base and a reformist ideology (Blanksten, 1960; Martz, 1964; DiTella, 1965; Dix, 1966: 292). Second, this wave of research produced detailed case studies of parties as institutions, thereby building up a reserve of knowledge about organizational structure, candidate selection, cohesion, campaigning, factionalism and elections (Alexander, 1964; Martz, 1966; Williams, 1967; Payne, 1968; Hilliker, 1971). In the late 1960s, however, the study of political parties became a marginal pursuit among Latin Americanists, shouldered aside by military rule and a radicalized environment in which only truly revolutionary change counted and reformism was considered indistinguishable from personalism, clientelism or outright reaction. Some research on parties continued, but it was considered less interesting than research on the military, the church, economic policy, or social classes.

Research on parties continued to be neglected until the mid-1980s, when redemocratization was well under way and parties once again became important political actors. The wave of democratization inspired case studies of parties in Argentina (Gibson, 1996), Brazil (Keck, 1986; Kinzo, 1988; Mainwaring, 1993), Chile (Scully, 1992), Colombia (Hartlyn, 1988), Ecuador (Conaghan, 1988), Mexico, Peru (Graham, 1992), Uruguay (Gillespie, 1991; González, 1991) and Venezuela (Coppedge, 1994). The integration of Latin American cases into mainstream debates about presidentialism, legislative behavior and electoral reform also motivated scholars to collect comparable cross-national data on Latin American party systems for the first time (Taagepera and Shugart, 1989; Remmer, 1991; Mainwaring, 1993; Jones, 1994; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995a; Coppedge, 1997b).

In the new conventional wisdom that grew from these studies, admirably synthesized in Mainwaring and Scully's *Building Democratic Institutions* (1995), Latin American party systems vary principally according to institutionalization and number. The fundamental distinction divides the

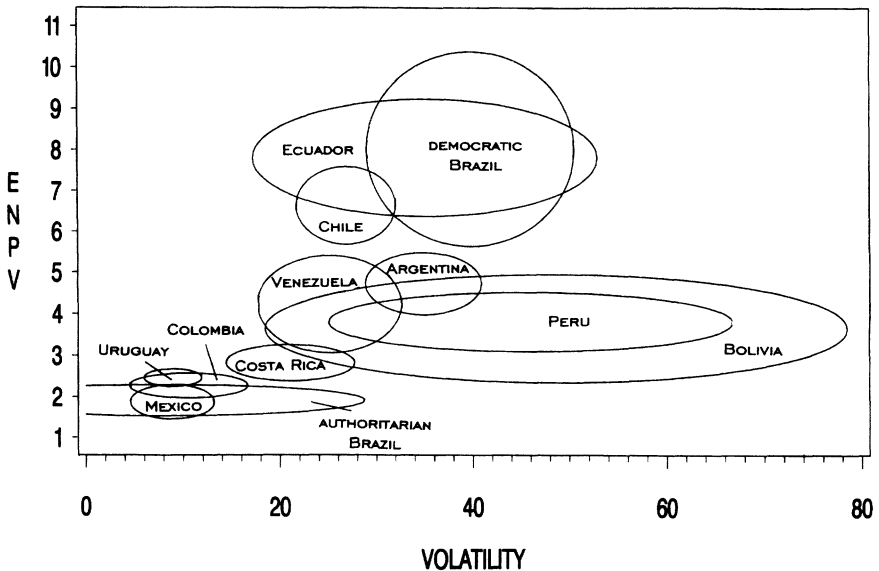
institutionalized party systems from the 'inchoate' ones. A secondary division is the more traditional classification into dominant-party, two-party and multi-party systems. These are the two dimensions that have received the most attention and on which the greatest quantity of data exists. Roughly speaking, Latin American party systems are thought to fall into six distinct types defined by their degrees of institutionalization and fragmentation. The ideal combination is the institutionalized 2–2.5-party system, which is identified with Costa Rica, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay before 1971, and in some respects Argentina. Uruguay after 1971 and Chile are classified as institutionalized but fragmented party systems, which are also considered viable, although prone to crises of governance if majority coalitions cannot be built. A third, marginally democratic, is the institutionalized dominant-party system, which is identified with Mexico and Paraguay, and a fourth is the inchoate 2–2.5-party system, believed to be typical of Peru. The worst combination is defined as the inchoate and fragmented party system, which has been diagnosed in Ecuador, Bolivia and Brazil during its democratic years. The party system of authoritarian Brazil could be classified as an inchoate dominant-party system even though many observers consider authoritarian elections intrinsically incomparable to democratic systems.

The new conventional wisdom is a vast improvement over the spotty coverage and stereotypes that prevailed 30 years ago. However, there are two respects in which it can be improved. First, it is important to revive the systematic analysis of the *substance* of party politics, not to supplant our knowledge of parties as institutions, but to supplement it. A purely institutional focus limits us to a dissection of party systems that have been drained, gutted and picked clean of the flesh and blood of politics – ideology, personalities, interests, ideas, platforms, slogans, images, issues – in short, the substance of political competition. Crucial aspects of the democratic process, such as alliances and coalitions, policy choices and polarization, cannot be understood well without considering the ideas, interests and images of parties, in addition to their number and sizes. The next two sections will evaluate how ideological and polarized Latin American party systems are and describe the extent to which they lean to the left or the right.

Second, improvement of the conventional wisdom requires coming to grips with party system *change*. We are all aware that most Latin American party systems change rapidly, especially in contrast to those of the industrialized north. However, the conventional wisdom has not yet fully realized how this variability affects our ability to describe and analyze them. The more volatile a party system is, the less sense it makes to generalize about *any* of its characteristics – fragmentation, ideological tendency, polarization, even volatility itself. A useful typology by country is out of the question: these party systems defy taxonomy. Averages over a long timespan tend to be poor indicators of the nature of a party system at any

one point along the way, and averages over a short span of elections tend to be unrepresentative of other periods. Even generalizations about different periods of a country's history are inadequate because the periods of relative homogeneity are usually frustratingly brief, and because a periodization that is useful for describing one characteristic is rarely useful for describing any others. Most Latin American party systems are changing, and changing often, in several dimensions at once, all on staggered timetables. There is often, therefore, considerable uncertainty about what, if anything, is 'typical' of the party system in any given country.

Figure 1 illustrates the nature of the problem more precisely using elementary statistics. The two axes represent the two most familiar characteristics of party systems – fragmentation (the effective number of electoral parties) and volatility.<sup>1</sup> Each ellipse in the figure corresponds to the entire 20th-century experience of one country, except for Brazil, which has separate ellipses for its democratic and authoritarian party systems. Each country's mean fragmentation and volatility lies at the exact center of its ellipse. Each ellipse traces the 95 percent confidence intervals corresponding to those means, with the vertical extremes indicating the interval for fragmentation, and the horizontal extremes indicating the interval for volatility. For example, we are 95 percent confident that the average of the effective number of parties in Uruguay lies between 2.25 and 2.67 (the



**Figure 1.** The dynamic diversity of Latin American party systems (95% confidence intervals)

vertical extremes), and that the average volatility rate in democratic Brazil lies between 29 and 51 (the horizontal extremes).

If one country's mean falls within another country's confidence interval, the two countries' means are not significantly different. Therefore, contrary to the conventional wisdom, we cannot say with confidence that Mexico's party system has been less fragmented than Colombia's, that Costa Rica's has been more fragmented than Uruguay's or less fragmented than Bolivia's, that Venezuela's has been less fragmented than Argentina's, or that Chile's has been less fragmented than Ecuador's. Neither can we confidently say that Venezuela's party system is less volatile than those of Peru, Chile, Bolivia or Ecuador; that democratic Brazil's is more volatile than Ecuador's or Argentina's; or that Costa Rica's is more volatile than that of authoritarian Brazil.

In view of the uncertainty introduced by the variability of Latin American party systems, generalizations about *countries* should be avoided, and if unavoidable, should be made with greater caution, for example by reporting standard deviations or confidence intervals. Ideally, the units of analysis should be individual elections, not countries. The true values of the parameters of interest are known to a much higher degree of certainty when elections are the units because the variance for a single election is close to zero (depending only on the reliability of the indicator itself). Election-by-election data may seem less meaningful than a sweeping generalization about a larger swath of a country's history, but they are in reality more meaningful. Political actors probably care far less about averages than they do about the results of the last election, which defines their political reality for 2–5 years at a stretch.

### Ideology: Rigidity, Personalism and Clarity

Some conventional wisdom about ideology in Latin American party systems exists, although it has not been studied as systematically or rigorously as fragmentation or volatility. The long-standing perception of Chilean parties as highly ideological persists, as does the perception of parties in Bolivia and Ecuador as highly personalistic, non-ideological and clientelistic (Scully, 1995: 100; Gamarra and Malloy, 1995: 399; Conaghan, 1995: 436). Brazilian parties are widely believed to have fitted this description before the coup of 1964, but Scott Mainwaring (1995: 375–6) argues that 'these old adages must be put to rest' for the post-1985 party system. Most of the other systems are thought to fall somewhere between these extremes. The Costa Rican party system is considered moderately ideological, as it has a clearly reformist large party (PLN) opposed by an almost equally large but ideologically heterogeneous opposition grouping (PUSC) (Yashar, 1995). In the early 1980s the same could have been said of Peru and Venezuela, but in both countries the traditionally

large reformist parties have lost ground to independent candidates – Fujimori in Peru and Caldera in Venezuela (Graham, 1992; Coppedge, 1996). It has always been difficult to characterize the ideology of the large parties in Colombia and Uruguay because they are divided into factions, some of which are ideological and others merely personalistic (Hartlyn, 1988; Gillespie, 1991). Finally, parties in Argentina and Mexico are considered ideological, but only if a cleavage other than left versus right is recognized as dominant. In Mexico, the left–right dimension is subordinated to a division between democracy and continued official-party dominance (Domínguez and McCann, 1996). In Argentina the fundamental political divide separates Peronists from everyone else, although the nature of the division is controversial (McGuire, 1995; Ostiguy, 1997).

Before we can assess more accurately how ideological Latin American parties and party systems are, it is necessary to clarify three issues. First, personalism and ideology are not necessarily mutually exclusive qualities. Some of the most rigidly ideological parties in the world have been closely identified with, and tightly controlled by, strong personalities, and parties that are known primarily as vehicles for strong personalities may nevertheless stake out clear ideological positions. Second, clientelism and ideology are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Many successful parties all over the world trade personal favors for political support. Even in supposedly highly ideological Chile, party officials of all tendencies engaged in the same sorts of clientelistic activities (Valenzuela, 1977: 166). Clientelism is merely a means to build and maintain a power base; ideology, where it exists, is what guides what that power is used for. Many parties are to some degree clientelistic, to some degree personalistic *and* to some degree ideological; these three qualities vary independently.

Third, for some purposes the ideological sophistication of party leaders is less relevant than the clarity of a party's image among voters. Sartori's definition of an 'ideological mentality' as 'a state of dogmatic impermeability both to evidence and to argument' (Sartori, 1969: 403) is a good one if we wish to understand a party's behavior at the elite level – its rigidity or willingness to compromise on policy or coalition partners. But if we wish to understand relations between parties and voters – the rationality of voter choice, the quality of representation, the possibility of holding elected officials accountable – then a different standard applies. Very few voters care about whether a party leader can debate the finer points of Althusser, Maritain or Hayek. If they wish to vote ideologically, all they need is a sense of the approximate relative positions of the available parties on the ideological spectrum.

'Sufficiently ideological' parties are thus parties that take clear, widely understood positions on a conventionally interrelated set of issues. Definitions of 'left' and 'right' do not always travel or age well: they can vary greatly from region to region, country to country, decade to decade, and even person to person if they are made very precise. The more diverse the

regions to be analyzed, and the longer the span of time to be covered, the less specific the criteria for the left–right dimension can be, because dimensions that are relevant in only a few countries must be dropped from the cross-national criteria for comparison. Nevertheless, if the comparison is limited to one region and a manageable span of time, the criteria for the left–right dimension are usually well understood.

My recent classification of Latin American parties is useful for assessing how ideological the parties of the region are.<sup>2</sup> I began by drafting a classification of all the parties (loosely defined as any label reported in election returns) that contested lower-chamber elections in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela. The classification scheme identified 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’. ‘Personalist’ was therefore defined very strictly, so that only parties with no identifiable left–right position would qualify. 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.<sup>3</sup> The final version successfully classifies about 800 of the approximately 1200 parties in the sample, which won 97 percent of the votes cast. Although a more rigorous classification is possible in principle, this classification is the most comprehensive and systematic in existence for Latin American parties and, as will be shown below, its reliability is fairly high. Although any case study would provide a firmer basis for rating parties in any one election, there is currently no alternative to this classification for comparing Latin American party systems historically and across countries.

The classification provides two kinds of evidence about party and party-system ideology. First, it reports the percentage of the vote won by strictly personalist parties and candidates in each election. By this criterion, personalist parties are rather small and rare. The personalist vote is greater than 10 percent in only 23 of the 149 elections in the sample. The only country in which the personalist vote has been consistently greater than 10 percent is Ecuador. It is also high, as the new conventional wisdom suggests, in Peru for 1990–5 and Bolivia for 1989–93. However, it is also greater than 10 percent in the *Chilean* elections of 1932 and 1949–57. There were also surges of personalism in conventionally ideological Costa Rica in 1958, 1962 and 1974, and in Venezuela in 1968 and 1993. This criterion also rates personalism surprisingly low in Brazil – in fact, lower than in Chile, on average.

Because the criteria for ‘personalism’ are so strict, however, it is prudent to consider the reliability of the classifications. Some parties seem non-ideological because they are strictly personalist, but others seem non-ideological because it is not clear where they stand on the ideological spectrum. In

these latter cases the reliability of the classification is low. Some Latin American parties are very hard to classify and this is reflected in a lack of consensus among the country specialists. A few are large, important parties – the Peronists in Argentina, the Mexican PRI in certain elections, and the Liberals and Conservatives of Colombia during much of their history. But because others are quite small, nearly insignificant parties, it would be misleading to report reliability statistics on individual parties. Instead, I base the analysis here on an aggregated measure of reliability for each election. Specifically, reliability is the proportion of the experts concurring with my final classification of a party, multiplied by the proportion of the vote won by that party, summed over all parties winning votes in that election.<sup>4</sup> In other words, reliability is a weighted average of the degree of concurrence with the classification of all the parties in an election, or the degree of concurrence with the average vote. For example, if three parties contested an election and all experts concurred with my classification of the largest party (A), four of five experts agreed on the second party (B), and three of five agreed on the smallest party (C), the reliability would be 86 percent, calculated as shown in Table 1.

A *low* reliability score could result from several factors besides an unclear ideological position on the part of the party.<sup>5</sup> However, it is very unlikely that a classification could have a *high* reliability score if it did not have a clear ideological position because any vagueness or inconsistency of position would create disagreements among the experts.

The mean reliability for this sample is 85.6, with a standard deviation of 12.6 and a median of 88.7. (These figures exclude Bolivian and Uruguayan elections because too few country specialists provided comments on these cases to calculate reliability.) If we establish a cutoff for reliability at 85 percent – equivalent to 17 out of 20 experts concurring on the classification of the average vote – then 63 percent of the elections were reliably classified and 37 percent were not.

The best standard for identifying sufficiently ideological party systems combines both criteria: reliability of 85 percent or more and a personalist vote of less than 10 percent. Table 2 sorts all the elections according to these twin criteria. By these stiff criteria, 55 percent of the Latin American elections in the sample (52 percent counting Bolivia and Uruguay) were sufficiently ideological; 15–16 percent probably had significant personalism;

Table 1. Reliability of party classification

Party	Vote	Agreement	Product
A	.50	1.00	.50
B	.30	0.80	.24
C	.20	0.60	<u>.12</u>
			.86



**Table 2.** Personality and ideology (N = 149 elections)

<i>Reliability</i>	<i>&gt;10% personalist (N = 23)</i>	<i>&lt;10% personalist (N = 126)</i>
<i>&gt;85% reliable (N = 77)</i>	<i>Significantly personalist (N = 10)</i> Chile 1932, 1949–57 Costa Rica 1958–62 Peru 1990–5 Venezuela 1968	<i>Sufficiently ideological (N = 67)</i> Argentina 1912–30, 1958–65 Brazil 1945, 1966–78, 1990–4 Chile 1915–25, 1937–45, 1961–93 Colombia 1958–78, 1990–4 Costa Rica 1953, 1966–70, 1978–94 Mexico 1961–7, 1991–4 Peru 1978–85 Venezuela 1973–88
<i>Unknown reliability (N = 26)</i>	<i>Probably personalist (N = 3)</i> Bolivia 1966, 1989–93	<i>Probably not very personalist (N = 23)</i> Bolivia 1962, 1979–85 Uruguay 1917–94
<i>&lt;85% reliable (N = 46)</i>	<i>Personalist and not clearly ideological (N = 10)</i> Costa Rica 1974 Ecuador 1966–94 Venezuela 1993	<i>Not clearly ideological (N = 36)</i> Argentina 1946, 1973–95 Brazil 1950–62, 1982–6 Colombia 1931–49, 1982–6 Mexico 1970–88 Peru 1963 Venezuela 1958–63

Source: Author's data.

and 24–9 percent were not clearly ideological without being clearly personalist. These figures provide some support for the old conventional wisdom in that elections that were either personalist or not clearly ideological (or both) have been fairly common in Latin America, perhaps more common than in Western Europe. However, the new conventional wisdom is also vindicated because such elections have not been the norm and because some countries have had sufficiently ideological elections more frequently than others. It is no surprise that Chile ranks highest in this regard and Ecuador ranks lowest.

The new conventional wisdom is not fully vindicated, however. Table 2 shows that almost every country has experienced elections that deviated from its current reputation for being ideological or not. As already noted, Chile, Costa Rica and Venezuela have had repeated bouts of personalism. The Brazilian party system may be volatile and fragmented, but it has not lacked for ideological clarity in the 1990s. The Argentine party system has a justifiable reputation for being *sui generis* due to controversy about what

the Peronists stand for, but in the pre-Peronist era (1912–30) and during the period of proscribed Peronism (1958–65), this system was sufficiently ideological. The major Colombian parties have a reputation for being virtually indistinguishable in left–right terms, but this did not prevent the experts from concurring with classification of the Liberals in the center and the Conservatives on the center-right during the National Front years (1958–74) and in the 1990s. The ideological swings of Mexican presidents from 1970 to 1988 clouded perceptions of the position of the official PRI, but in the 1960s and the 1990s the relative positions of Mexican parties are clear enough. Peru’s reputation for personalism is based on its experience before redemocratization in 1978 and the rise of Fujimori in 1990; but in the three intervening elections its parties possessed sufficient ideological coherence. And although there are no reliability figures for Bolivia, I suspect that it would turn out to be sufficiently ideological during the 1979–85 period as well, as the party system was very polarized in left–right terms during those years, as we shall see.

### Ideology: Mean Tendency and Polarization

It is also hard to generalize about two other aspects of party ideology in Latin America – how skewed to the left or the right the party system is, and how polarized it is. Mean Left–Right Position (MLRP) measures the how far to the left or the right the average party was in each election, based on the left–right positions of all the parties and their shares of the vote. This indicator assumes that all parties classified left (whether Christian or secular) are approximately twice as far from the center as parties classified center-left, while right parties are twice as far to the right as the parties of the center-right. This assumption permits the calculation of MLRP as

$$(XR + SR) + .5(XCR + SCR) - .5(XCL + SCL) - (XL + SL),$$

where *XR* represents the percentage of the vote won by all the parties in the Christian right bloc, and so on for the other bloc abbreviations. This index would equal 100 if all parties were on the right, –100 if all parties were on the left, 50 or –50 if all parties were center-right or center-left, respectively, or zero if all parties were centrist, personalist, other, or unknown, or if the parties to the left perfectly counterbalanced the parties to the right.<sup>6</sup> In this sample, MLRP ranges from –42 (Peru 1985) to +69 (Brazil 1970), with an overall mean of 5.

Left–right polarization is a different aspect of party-system ideology. Here it is defined as the dispersion of the vote away from the relative center of the party system. The relative center can be farther to the right or the left than the absolute center as defined in the classification criteria, and is operationalized here as MLRP. The index of polarization (IP) makes the

same assumptions about the positions of the blocs in a  $(-1,+1)$  range.<sup>7</sup> Its formula is

$$|1 - \text{mlrp}| \times (XR + SR) + |.5 - \text{mlrp}| \times (XCR + SCR) + |-.5 - \text{mlrp}| \times (XCL + SCL) + |-1 - \text{mlrp}| \times (XL + SL),$$

where  $\text{mlrp} = \text{MLRP}/100$ . The index can reach its maximum only when half of the vote goes to the right and half to the left; if all of the vote went to just one extreme, polarization would be zero because the relative center would be at the extreme as well and there would be no dispersion.<sup>8</sup>

Table 3 categorizes elections by their mean left–right position and degree of polarization. ‘Polarized’ party systems are those tending toward a bimodal distribution of the vote on the left–right spectrum. ‘Unimodal’ party systems have a more prominent peak distribution near their relative center, often indicating a lack of meaningful competition among parties. ‘Flat’ party systems have a profile that is more evenly distributed across the range of left–right options, and are therefore more competitive across ideological tendencies. Each of these types can also ‘lean’ farther to the left or the right, or be ‘centered’, in accordance with its mean tendency. Table 3 shows that no country’s party system has consistently leaned in one direction, and the only party systems that have remained within one range of polarization are those of Costa Rica after 1953, Uruguay and Venezuela, which are all flat (and not right of center). It may be no coincidence that these are three of the most stable democracies in the region.

Although Table 3 dramatizes the difficulty of generalizing about mean tendencies or polarization by country, it also identifies selected elections from different countries that are comparable in terms of mean tendency and polarization. For example, authoritarian Brazilian elections and several elections in authoritarian Mexico all fit the category of right-leaning unimodal systems, as do a couple of early, less competitive elections in Colombia and Ecuador. In the centered unimodal cell we find Argentina when it was dominated by Yrigoyen, Bolivia when it was dominated by Barrientos, and contemporary Peru dominated by Fujimori. Some of the elections in other cells may appear to be strange bedfellows, as they lump together party systems that are institutionalized and inchoate, fragmented and not; but the apparent oddity of the combinations only underscores how independent one characteristic of party systems is from others. It is interesting to note that Chile from 1969 to 1973 was not the most polarized or the farthest-left-leaning system, but it was the most left-leaning of the polarized systems and the most polarized of the left-leaning systems. The combination of polarization with a leftist tendency may be hazardous to a regime’s health: three of the five left- or center-left-leaning polarized cases succumbed to military coups before the next election, a far higher proportion than that in any other cell of the table.

Table 3. Mean tendency and polarization (N = 147 elections)

<i>Polarization index</i>	<i>Left-leaning</i> MLRP <-20 (N = 11)	<i>Center-left-leaning</i> -20<MLRP<-10 (N = 23)	<i>Centered</i> -10<MLRP<10 (N = 57)	<i>Center-right-leaning</i> 10<MLRP<20 (N = 27)	<i>Right-leaning</i> MLRP>20 (N = 29)
Polarized IP>55 (N = 24)	Chile 1969-73	Argentina 1973 Chile 1941 Peru 1963	Bolivia 1979-80 Brazil 1994 Chile 1932, 1945, 1953, 1961 Costa Rica 1953 Ecuador 1984, 1990 Peru 1980	Bolivia 1989 Chile 1949, 1957, 1993 Ecuador 1994	Bolivia 1985 Chile 1937 Ecuador 1992
Flat 25<IP<55 (N = 79)	Argentina 1965, 1983 Mexico 1970-3 Peru 1978, 1985 Uruguay 1917 Venezuela 1958, 1983	Chile 1965 Colombia 1990b Costa Rica 1962, 1970-4, 1982 Ecuador 1988 Uruguay 1934-42 1950-4, 1966, 1994 Venezuela 1963-78, 1988-93	Argentina 1914-20 1930, 1946, 1985-95 Brazil 1990 Colombia 1991 Costa Rica 1958, 1966, 1978, 1986-94 Ecuador 1979, 1986 Peru 1990 Uruguay 1919-31, 1946, 1958-62, 1971, 1989	Brazil 1986 Chile 1989	Argentina 1912 Brazil 1945-62, 1982 Chile 1915-25 Mexico 1985-8, 1994
Unimodal IP<25 (N = 44)			Argentina 1922-8, 1958-63 Bolivia 1966 Mexico 1976-9 Peru 1992-5	Colombia 1933-90a, 1994	Bolivia 1993 Brazil 1966-78 Colombia 1931 Ecuador 1966 Mexico 1961-7, 1982, 1991

Source: Author's data.

### Institutionalization

There is some truth to the old stereotype that Latin American parties and party systems are poorly institutionalized. Volatility in 20th-century Latin America averages 21.3, compared to 8.6 in Western Europe.<sup>9</sup> However, this average masks great variation within the region that has been recognized for quite some time. In his 1976 classic, *Parties and Party Systems*, Sartori made a distinction between ‘structured’ and ‘fluid’ party systems (Sartori, 1976: 310–11). Twenty years later, Mainwaring and Scully made a similar distinction between ‘institutionalized’ and ‘inchoate’ party systems and produced a summary index of institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995a: 19). As Table 4 shows, both ratings identify clear differences among the Latin American cases, the two ratings agreeing almost perfectly on which systems have been well institutionalized and which have not.<sup>10</sup> Based on their combined judgments, the conventional wisdom is that Uruguay, Costa Rica, Chile and Venezuela (and possibly Colombia and Argentina) have institutionalized party systems, while Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru (and probably democratic Brazil) do not. There is no consensus on a few countries – Argentina, Colombia and Mexico – largely because they are institutionalized in some respects but not others. Mainwaring and Scully (1995a: 6–21)

**Table 4.** Indicators of party system institutionalization

Country	<i>Sartori's classification</i>	<i>Mainwaring– Scully index</i>	<i>Party system volatility (95% confidence interval)</i>	<i>Adjusted bloc volatility (95% confidence interval)</i>
Uruguay	structured	11.5	6–12	*
Costa Rica	structured	11.5	15–28	2.1–4.1
Chile	structured	11.5	22–32	2.8–4.4
Venezuela	structured	10.5	18–33	1.4–3.3
Colombia	–	10.5	5–18	*
Argentina	–	9.0	29–41	3.7–9.9
<b>Authoritarian</b>				
Brazil (1970–8)	structured	–	0–29	*
Mexico	structured	8.5	5–13	*
Paraguay	structured	7.5	–	–
Bolivia	fluid	5.0	19–78	3.3–10.2
Ecuador	fluid	5.0	17–53	4.2–8.4
<b>Democratic Brazil</b>				
(1950–62, 1986–94)	–	5.0	29–51	2.0–4.0
Peru	fluid	4.5	25–67	1.3–8.6

\*Excluded because there are too few ideological blocs to permit a meaningful measurement of bloc volatility.

Sources: Sartori (1976: 310–11), Mainwaring and Scully (1995: 17) and author's data.

wisely examined many different aspects of institutionalization: electoral volatility, the difference between presidential votes and legislative seats won by parties, some evidence on the strength party identification, the strength of linkages between parties and social organizations, the percentage of legislative seats held by parties founded by 1950, the popular legitimacy of parties and elections, and the strength of party organizations. Here, however, I focus on volatility alone because comparable historical data on other aspects is incomplete.

Table 4 reports confidence intervals by country to clarify the significance of the average differences. The conventional wisdom is basically correct about volatility, with three exceptions. First, there is a big gap within the more institutionalized group, between the extremely low mean volatility in Uruguay, Colombia, Mexico and authoritarian Brazil and the significantly higher levels in Costa Rica, Chile and Venezuela. Second, Argentina clearly belongs in the most volatile group, with democratic Brazil.<sup>11</sup> And third, Bolivia, Ecuador and Peru's volatility rates have been so variable that they are not statistically distinguishable from any but the three least-volatile systems.

The party system volatility index is a good indicator of the outcome of *all* the things that cause change in a party system, which are manifold: (1) voter defections, (2) generational turnover in the electorate, (3) extension of the suffrage, (4) conjunctural variations in turnout, (5) party mergers and alliances, (6) party splits, (7) election boycotts and (8) the proscription of certain parties. But it is not the only possible indicator of party system change; the same index can be modified to use the vote shares won by ideological blocs rather than parties. Such an index takes us closer to measuring change due solely to voter defections from blocs, which is a narrower but more coherent aspect of institutionalization. To take us closer still, we can remove the components of change due to ideological shifts and adjust for differences in the spacing of elections. The resulting statistic is adjusted bloc volatility (ABV):

$$ABV = \frac{1}{T_i} \left[ .5 \sum_{n=1}^i |B_{i,t+1} - B_{i,t}| - \text{lesser}(S_{i,t+1}, S_{i,t}) \right]$$

where  $B_{i,t}$  = percentage of the vote won by bloc  $i$  in election  $t$

$T_i$  = number of years elapsed since the previous election

$S_{i,t}$  = vote share of party  $i$  that will shift to a different bloc in election  $t + 1$ .

ABV can be low even when party system volatility is high if voters have firm loyalties to ideological blocs that transcend loyalties to specific parties: a looser but still useful sort of institutionalization.

One of the distinctive features of the Chilean party system is that it is supposedly structured by precisely the kind of firm identification with left, center and right blocs that ABV is designed to capture (Valenzuela, 1978; Scully, 1992). But by this measure (last column of Table 4), Chile is no more ideologically structured than Costa Rica or Venezuela. Even more striking

is the fact that democratic Brazil clearly belongs in this relatively institutionalized group. Otherwise, bloc volatility yields the same groups as party system volatility except that Ecuador is now more clearly extremely volatile.

### Fragmentation

Party systems have long been classified into types defined by the number and relative sizes of the parties (Duverger, 1954; Almond and Coleman, 1960; Sartori, 1976; McDonald and Ruhl, 1989). This practice has usually led to the classification of Mexico and Paraguay as dominant-party systems; Colombia and Uruguay as historically two-party systems; Costa Rica, Venezuela, and perhaps Argentina, as two-and-a-half-party systems; and Bolivia, Chile and Ecuador as multi-party systems. However, these labels sometimes have to be amended depending on the period being analyzed: authoritarian Brazil had a two-party system, Uruguay became more of a three-party system in 1971, Venezuela's two-and-a-half-party system seems to have been limited to elections between 1973 and 1988, and so on.

The new institutionalism tends to shun simple typologies in favor of continuous measures of fragmentation. The one reported here is Laakso and Taagepera's (1979) Effective Number of Parties, based on shares of the vote (ENPV).<sup>12</sup> One can also calculate the effective number of *ideological blocs* (ENB) using the same formula, but substituting the share of the classified vote won by each bloc for shares won by parties.<sup>13</sup> ENB provides some indication of how meaningful the fragmentation of the party system is. Some fragmented party systems are also ideologically fragmented but others are not; instead, there is more competition among parties that are very similar in left-right and Christian-secular terms. In these systems, some of the divisions among parties are programmatically superfluous, the products of *politiquería* (superficial pseudo-politicking).

According to means tests, we can safely say that party systems are more fragmented (in terms of ENPV) in Chile, Ecuador and democratic Brazil than in the other eight countries; and that they are less fragmented in Colombia, Uruguay, Mexico and authoritarian Brazil than in Chile, Ecuador, Argentina, Venezuela and democratic Brazil. In terms of ENB, the party systems of Ecuador and Chile are significantly more ideologically diverse than those of Bolivia, Peru, Costa Rica, Venezuela and Argentina. Beyond these simple generalizations averages can be seriously misleading, so it is preferable to compare elections rather than countries. Table 5 cross-classifies party systems in each election by the number of blocs and the number of parties. The dispersion of each of the countries among multiple cells drives home the folly of trying to classify Latin American countries by the number of parties.

This table also groups together cases that are comparable with respect to

**Table 5.** Fragmentation of bloc and party systems ( $N = 128$  elections)

<i>No. of ideological blocs</i>	<i>Two-party</i> 2 < ENPV < 3 ( $N = 48$ )	<i>Moderate multi-party</i> 3 < ENPV < 5 ( $N = 41$ )	<i>Extreme multi-party</i> ENPV > 5 ( $N = 39$ )
Dominant bloc ENB < 2 ( $N = 21$ )	Argentina 1928 Brazil 1974–8 Colombia 1931, 1964, 1970, 1990a Costa Rica 1953 Mexico 1985, 1991 Peru 1963	Argentina 1916, 1922, 1958 Brazil 1945 Peru 1995 Venezuela 1958	Argentina 1926, 1946, 1960–3
Two-bloc 2 < ENB < 3 ( $N = 65$ )	Argentina 1983 Bolivia 1966 Brazil 1982 Colombia 1947–9, 1974–86 Costa Rica 1962–70, 1978–94 Mexico 1994 Uruguay 1919–84 Venezuela 1983	Argentina 1918–20, 1930, 1985–93 Bolivia 1993 Colombia 1991–4 Costa Rica 1958 Mexico 1988 Peru 1985, 1992 Venezuela 1973–8, 1988	Argentina 1912–14, 1924 Brazil 1950, 1958–62 Ecuador 1966 Venezuela 1963–8, 1993
Moderate multi-bloc 3 < ENB < 5 ( $N = 36$ )		Argentina 1973, 1944–5 Bolivia 1979–89 Brazil 1986 Chile 1925, 1965–9 Colombia 1990b Costa Rica 1974 Peru 1978–80 Uruguay 1989–94	Argentina 1965 Brazil 1954, 1994 Chile 1915–21, 1932–45, 1953, 1961, 1973–93 Ecuador 1979, 1988, 1992–4
Extreme multi-bloc ENB > 5 ( $N = 6$ )			Brazil 1990 Chile 1949, 1957 Ecuador 1984–6, 1990

*Note:* 21 elections are excluded because the number of parties is too small to permit a meaningful estimate of the number of blocs. These cases are Brazil 1966–70; Colombia 1933–45, 1958–62, 1966–8; Mexico 1961–82; and Uruguay 1917. They may be considered dominant-party systems with an unknown number of blocs.

*Source:* Author's data.

the diversity of choices offered in elections. The dominant-bloc, dominant-party systems listed in the note at the bottom of the table – e.g. early authoritarian Brazil, Colombia early in the National Front period and Mexican elections before 1985 – presented voters with very limited and relatively



meaningless choices, aside from the certainty about which party would win. The lower-right corner of the table defines the opposite situation: extreme multi-bloc, multi-party systems that offered voters extremely diverse choices and few clues about which was likely to emerge as the winner. This was the case in the Brazilian election won by the dark horse Fernando Collor de Mello, Chile at the beginning and end of the Ibáñez interlude, and several Ecuadorian elections. Finally, the three cells in the upper-right corner of the table contain the party systems in which voters had many choices, but not the most meaningful ones. In Argentina during 1912–16 and 1922–6, this situation resulted from the fragmentation of the center into a variety of Radical parties; in Venezuela during 1958–68, from the division of center-left among URD, Acción Democrática and its splinters; and in Brazil during 1945–50 and 1958–82, from the division of the center-right among the PSD, UDN and a great many elite-led regional parties and alliances.

### Conclusion: Toward Explanations

This article has been an exercise in description, but it conveys an important message about explanation: party systems as diverse and dynamic as these will not be easily explained. The explanatory factors in the standard toolkit – level of development, class structure, ethnic cleavages, demographic change and electoral laws – change too slowly or gradually to capture much of the variance described here. Explanations that work in Latin America are more likely to concern factors that are more easily, rapidly and completely manipulated by governments, party leaders and other elites. These factors include party splits, mergers and alliances; campaign tactics; programmatic shifts; perhaps short-term economic performance; and in isolated cases, election boycotts and the proscription of certain parties or candidates.

The diversity and dynamism also pose severe methodological challenges. In order to identify the causes of change, we must have some basis for knowing what the party system would have been like in the absence of any explanatory factor of interest; volatility often makes this extraordinarily difficult. Elaborating typologies or calculating averages will not take us very far. Our only options are either to delve into intensive and rich case studies, which avoid generalization altogether, or to undertake quantitative comparisons of many elections in a large sample over a long period of time, which risk superficiality. The quantitative strategy has two challenges of its own. First, the diversity across countries makes it hard to separate the causal impact of the various conditions that remain relatively constant in each country. And second, the different variance across countries (a type of heteroscedasticity) makes it imperative for analysts to standardize the data so that, for example, a small change in Uruguay is equivalent to a big change in Ecuador.

Although sound explanations will be devilishly hard to substantiate, it is

important to try, because whether party systems are weak or strong, left or right, ideological or pragmatic, fragmented or monolithic, they have important consequences. The nature of party systems affects the meaning of elections, the quality of representation, the nature of economic policy choices, and the legitimacy and survival of governments and the democratic regime itself, especially in Latin America.

## Notes

- 1 The effective number of parties (ENPV) is an indicator that counts parties after weighting them by size (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979). Its formula is

$$\text{ENPV} = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^i p_i^2}$$

where  $p_i$  is the share of the vote won by the  $i$ th party. In a perfect two-party system, with the votes split 50–50, ENPV equals 2.0; in a four-party system (25–25–25–25), it equals 4.0. But if some of the parties are larger than others, the effective number of parties is usually some fraction, usually a bit higher than the intuitively expected number of parties. The standard index of volatility (V) is the sum of all the changes in vote shares experienced by all parties from one election to the next, halved to eliminate duplication:

$$V = .5 \sum_{i=1}^i |p_{i,t+1} - p_{i,t}|$$

It ranges from 0 to 100 and can be interpreted as the percentage of the vote that shifts among parties, in the aggregate, between elections (Pedersen, 1979).

- 2 For the classifications themselves, tallies of the vote shares of each bloc, and a complete description of the methodology used in the classification of parties, see Coppedge (1997a).
- 3 I am deeply indebted to the country specialists who, without compensation, took the time and effort to comment on my draft classification. They are, for Argentina: Marcelo Leiras, James McGuire, Guillermo O'Donnell, Scott Mainwaring and Edward Gibson; Brazil: Barry Ames, David Fleischer, Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Power; Chile: Aníbal Pérez Liñán, Iván Jaksic and Manuel Antonio Garretón; Colombia: Pablo Abitbol, Ronald Archer, David Bushnell, Robert Dix, Jonathan Hartlyn, Gary Hoskin, Francisco Leal Buitrago and Steven L. Taylor; Costa Rica: Fabrice Edouard Lehoucq, Mitchell Seligson and Cynthia Chalker, Deborah Yashar, Manuel Rojas Bolaños, John Booth and Jorge Vargas; Ecuador: J. Samuel Fitch and Andrés Mejía Acosta, who also supplied copies of published classifications by Fernando Bustamante, Luis Verdesoto Custode and E. Durán; Mexico: John Bailey, Roderic Ai Camp, Robert Dix, Xochitl Lara Becerra, Soledad Loaeza, Alonso Lujambio, Kevin Middlebrook, Juan Molinar Horcasitas and Esperanza Palma; Peru: Cynthia McClintock, Charles Kenney, Felipe Ortiz de Zevallos, Carol Graham and David Scott Palmer; Uruguay: David Altman, Rossana Castiglioni and Juan Rial; Venezuela: Brian Crisp, José Molina

Vega, David J. Myers, Juan Carlos Navarro, Juan Carlos Rey and Luis Gómez Calcaño. I received additional advice from Steven Levitsky, Pierre Ostiguy and Donna Lee Van Cott. Unfortunately, no one supplied comprehensive feedback on my draft classification for Bolivia. Because the country specialists had no chance to respond to my attempts to reconcile their disagreements, they are in no way responsible for the final classification.

- 4 Votes for unclassified parties were excluded before calculating reliability because my inability to classify these parties was due to a lack of information about these parties rather than a lack of agreement among the experts.
- 5 The party could have a clear position on some dimension different from those reflected in my classification criteria; my coding criteria may not have been clear enough for some experts; the party might straddle a range of positions, making it unclear which one is the most representative; too few experts may have been consulted; some may have lacked relevant expertise; some may not have reviewed the draft diligently enough; or some might have supported the corrected classifications more frequently if they had been given the chance.
- 6 Obviously this indicator contains measurement error because there is some variation among parties within each bloc and there is no way to know whether the extremes are twice as far out as the center-right and center-left, or only 50 percent farther out, or three times as far out. However, I am persuaded that measurement with some error is better than no measurement at all, as long as the party classifications are valid.
- 7 For the purpose of measuring polarization in Argentina I have treated the Peronist/anti-Peronist confrontation as equivalent to an extreme difference in left–right terms before 1983 and a moderate difference from that year on.
- 8 It is important to remember that this is an indicator of *left–right* polarization only, and does not reflect the intense personal, ethnic, ins/outs, or other rivalries that sometimes exist between parties that are relatively close in left–right terms.
- 9 The figure for Western Europe comes from Bartolini and Mair (1990: 68). The figure for Latin America employs Bartolini and Mair's criteria for splits and regime changes to ensure comparability. If the criteria used for Table 4 are substituted, mean volatility for this set of elections is 26.6.
- 10 Mainwaring and Scully classified Mexico and Paraguay as 'hegemonic systems in transition' rather than 'institutionalized', although their ranking on the index is consistent with Sartori's classification. Also, Sartori classified Brazil as of 1966, at the beginning of the authoritarian regime, while Mainwaring and Scully discussed Brazil only during its democratic years (1945–64 and 1985–94). Finally, Mainwaring and Scully did not discuss four Central American countries that Sartori included – Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua (all fluid).
- 11 The interval for Brazil excludes the 1966 and 1982 elections that marked the beginning and end of the authoritarian period. Technically, volatility was 100 in both of these elections, but because it was entirely artificial – the result of the military regime proscribing all previous parties by decree – for some purposes it would be misleading to average them in. Brazil's volatility is high enough without them.
- 12 See n. 1 for its definition.
- 13 The classified vote is simply the vote for parties that could be classified in this project. Rather than recalculate the vote shares for all parties or blocs before

calculating ENB,  $ENB_t$  was first calculated using percentages of the total valid vote and then multiplied by  $(1 - U_t/100)^2$ , which is mathematically equivalent.  $U_t$  is the percentage of the vote won by unclassified parties in election  $t$ .

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