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THE POLITICS OF POLARIZATION: GOVERNANCE AND PARTY SYSTEM CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA, 1990–2010

SAM HANDLIN

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THE POLITICS OF POLARIZATION:
GOVERNANCE AND PARTY SYSTEM CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICA, 1990–2010

Working Paper #401 – November 2014

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ABSTRACT

What are the causes and implications of polarization in new democracies? During Latin America's "Left Turn" period, highly polarized party systems emerged in some countries–Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, and El Salvador–but not the rest of the region. This paper proposes a theory to explain variation, centered on the presence of electorally relevant parties of the left in the pre-Left Turn period and, most critically, the quality of governance in that period. Poor governance created opportunities for partisan actors on the left to politicize a second dimension of political contestation, anti-systemic versus systemic positions on the design and operation of the state, and thus chart alternative paths to electoral viability that required little left-right programmatic moderation. This dynamic empowered radical party factions and drove polarizing dynamics in party systems. High quality governance, in contrast, gave left parties little choice but to moderate their programs in search of electoral viability. This dynamic empowered moderate party factions and drove centripetal dynamics in party systems. Empirically, the paper tests these arguments through a broad overview of the case universe and in-depth case studies of Venezuela and Brazil.

RESUMEN

¿Cuáles son las causas y qué implica la polarización en las nuevas democracias? Durante el período del "giro a la izquierda", en algunos países emergieron sistemas de partidos altamente polarizados–en Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua y El Salvador–pero no en el resto de la región. Este artículo propone una teoría para explicar la variación, centrada en la presencia de partidos de izquierda electoralmente relevantes en el período anterior al "giro a la izquierda" y, más crucialmente, en la calidad del gobierno en ese período. El gobierno deficiente creó oportunidades para que los actores partidarios de izquierda politizaran una segunda dimensión de disputa política, las posiciones pro sistema versus las anti sistema acerca del diseño y el funcionamiento del Estado, y así trazaran caminos alternativos hacia la viabilidad electoral que requirieron poca limitación programática en términos de izquierda y derecha. Esta dinámica fortaleció a las facciones partidarias radicalizadas y generó dinámicas de polarización en los sistemas de partidos. El gobierno de alta calidad, en cambio, dejó a los partidos de izquierda pocas opciones más que moderar sus programas en busca de la viabilidad electoral. Esta dinámica fortaleció a las facciones partidarias moderadas y generó dinámicas centrípetas en los sistemas de partidos. Empíricamente, el artículo pone a prueba estos argumentos a través de una mirada amplia al universo de casos y un estudio en profundidad de los casos de Venezuela y Brasil.

What explains polarization in the party systems of younger democracies? Polarization has been extensively explored in the older democracies, both in the comparative literature and in a now massive line of scholarship in American politics. In contrast, polarization has attracted relatively little attention in the younger democracies of the developing world, with extant research largely focusing on examining the implications of polarization for policy making rather than its roots (Frye 2002, 2010). There are compelling substantive and theoretical reasons to open a research agenda into the sources of polarization in new democracies. Scholars have associated polarization with democratic breakdown in historical cases such as the Weimar Republic in the 1920s, the Second Spanish Republic in the 1930s, Austria in the 1930s, the French Fourth Republic in the 1950s, Brazil in the 1960s, and Chile in the 1970s (Sartori 1976; Valenzuela 1978; Powell 1982; Collier and Collier 1991). Such dangers seem particularly acute in younger contemporary democracies, where institutions are weaker and societal support for democratic rule more tenuous. Examining the roots of polarization in younger democracies also may also bear substantial theoretical fruit. The older democracies now constitute a very limited and unrepresentative subset of all democracies in the world. To understand the dynamics of polarization in the broader universe of democratic regimes, more extensive exploration of the subject in newer democracies is imperative.

Contemporary Latin America provides a useful context for exploring party system polarization in younger democracies due to the striking variation that has emerged during the recent "Left Turn" in the region. Most contemporary Latin American party systems have been largely centripetal, with major parties and presidential candidates differing only marginally in their programs and frequently reaching compromises on key legislation. Yet in other cases party systems have taken on much more polarizing dynamics. In Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador, major parties offer sharply different programmatic visions than their competitors and disavow the possibility of compromise with opponents painted in Manichean terms. In Nicaragua and El Salvador, major parties also clash greatly in their programmatic visions but have managed to find more room for pragmatic compromise. These contrasting patterns of party system polarization represent one of the starkest macro-political distinctions in Latin America today. They also appear to have substantive implications beyond polarization itself. The more polarized party

systems have been attended by other normatively undesirable phenomena such as political violence and—most clearly in Venezuela, Ecuador, and Nicaragua—backsliding into competitive authoritarian regime dynamics.

This paper offers a theory explaining these Latin American outcomes, also illuminating party system polarization in young democracies more generally, that centers on the quality of governance, defined as the "government's and state's ability to deliver goods and guarantee rights that are important for citizen well-being" (Mainwaring and Scully 2009, 1), and the incentives it provides to "non–status quo" parties for strategic moderation in the pursuit of electoral viability. Assuming the presence of electorally relevant parties of left and right, the quality of governance drives polarization by determining the extent of opportunities for non–status quo parties—those that are pure outsiders or more established opposition challengers that are not deeply implicated in governance failures—to politicize a second dimension of contestation, anti-systemic versus systemic posturing and proposals regarding the design and operation of the state. High-quality governance creates few opportunities to politicize this second dimension, since citizens are relatively content with the operation of the state. Non–status quo parties seeking to build electoral majorities therefore face relatively greater pressures to moderate their left-right programmatic appeals, such that party systems are more centripetal in the aggregate. Low-quality governance, in contrast, creates great opportunities for non–status quo parties to politicize this second dimension. By capitalizing on anti-systemic sentiment or broad discontent with the quality of governance, non–status quo parties can chart viable paths to electoral majorities that do not require such substantial left-right programmatic moderation, such that party systems can take on strongly polarizing dynamics. The somewhat counterintuitive implication is that left-right polarization is likely to develop in precisely those party systems where parties of the left and right exist but left-right competition is less salient, due to the politicization of poor governance.

Given that variation during Latin America's "Left Turn" period has largely been driven by the ideological location of the left, I focus attention on how governance levels influenced the evolution of, and factional struggles within, parties of the left in the pre–Left Turn period in those countries where electorally relevant left parties existed. In

countries that experienced high- or medium-quality governance in this period, moderate factions within major left parties and blocs were able to defeat radical factions in internal struggles, leaning heavily on arguments that programmatic moderation and pragmatic coalition building were simply necessary for electoral viability. Moderate left parties and blocs consolidated that would anchor largely centripetal party systems during the Left Turn (Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, to some degree Mexico). In countries that experienced very poor governance in this period, in contrast, moderate factions within major left parties and blocs were unable to win over radical factions, who could argue that popular discontent with low-quality governance presented alternative paths to power. The result was either the splintering and decline of major left parties and emergence of new radical coalitions led by outsiders (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador), a pattern that led to particularly contentious patterns of party system polarization, or the hardening of established major left parties in a radical direction (Nicaragua, El Salvador), processes that produced party systems that were ideologically polarized but marked by greater possibilities for pragmatic compromise between longtime antagonists.

The paper provides three empirical perspectives on the theory. First, across the whole Latin American case universe, I show that a simple theoretical model based on two factors—the presence of electorally relevant parties of the left in the pre–Left Turn period (roughly 1988–2000) and the quality of governance during that time in those countries that had parties of the left—robustly predicts which countries would develop highly polarized party systems. Second, brief assessments of the subset of cases possessing electorally relevant left parties suggest that factional dynamics within major left parties in all of these countries played out in ways broadly consistent with the theory. Finally, in-depth case studies of Brazil and Venezuela illustrate the mechanisms of the theory in more detail, showing how governance quality decisively shaped factional conflicts within the partisan left in each case during the 1990s, driving subsequent divergence in party system polarization.

POLARIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY LATIN AMERICAN
PARTY SYSTEMS

Latin America has witnessed the emergence and crystallization of great variation in the level of polarization in regional party systems during its Left Turn period of the last fifteen years. Following in the tradition of Sartori (1976), I define polarization as the degree of ideological differentiation among the component parties of a party system. I conceptualize this differentiation in terms of two dimensions. First is the "objective" distance between parties on a unidimensional left-right continuum of political competition, which is assumed to mainly reflect the positions of these parties with respect to issues related to state intervention in the economy (Sartori 1976; Dalton 2008).[1] Second is the more subjective dimension of how major parties or blocs frame and act upon their differences. Are major parties willing to strike legislative bargains and compromise with opponents seen simply as competitors with other preferences? Or do they dismiss the very idea of compromise with opponents viewed in Manichean terms? This perspective runs throughout the literature on polarization in American politics, which has focused on topics such as patterns of legislative voting as well the polarizing framing of issues by politicians.

Putting these two dimensions together, we can heuristically think of polarization taking on three nominal values. Party systems marked by low levels of "objective" ideological differentiation between major parties have low levels of polarization. While in theory these cases could score positively or negatively on the second dimension of polarization, extreme Manichean rhetoric and absence of compromise, in practice they all tend to score negatively.[2] Party systems marked by high levels of "objective" ideological differentiation vary more in the degree to which major parties are willing to compromise and to demonize each other. Where compromises still regularly occur despite high levels of objective ideological spread, we can term the situation one of pragmatic polarization.

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[1] As is widely recognized, the meaning of left and right heuristics and the underlying issues at play may vary from country to country.
[2] This is not surprising. When major parties do not differ that much in their programmatic preferences, it is far less likely that they will demonize each other and abjure the possibility of any compromise.

Where major parties abjure the notion of compromise and paint each other in Manichean terms, we can apply the term contentious polarization

Regional party systems have come to diverge greatly in their degree of polarization. While party systems exhibit other differences as well, perhaps most notably in their degree of electoral volatility (Roberts 2013), variation in polarization arguably represents the most substantively consequential contrast in the region today. In terms of objective ideological spread along the left-right continuum, five cases stand well above the others in the region. Figure 1 shows measures of ideological spread in most recent legislative elections (as of 2010), calculated using expert survey data on party ideological positioning from Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2007) that was later updated by Baker and Greene (2011).[3] As we can see, the five aforementioned countries exhibit the highest levels of polarization in the system. Although several other countries also score relatively highly on this measure, the gap between the top five and the rest is substantial.

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[3] Scores are calculated in the following way. I take the ideology score of each party in the system from the data set (ranging from 1–20), calculate the absolute value of the difference between this score from the party-system average, weight these scores by vote share in the most recent lower house congressional election (through 2010), and then sum them. This approach is similar to that employed by Dalton (2008) and Zechmeister and Corral (2013), except that it uses absolute values rather than squared deviations from the system mean, an approach that arguably over-exaggerates the import of small extremist parties. A focus on absolute deviations has also been employed by Gross and Siegelman (1984) and Klingemann (2005).

FIGURE 1

POLARIZATION AS IDEOLOGICAL SPREAD
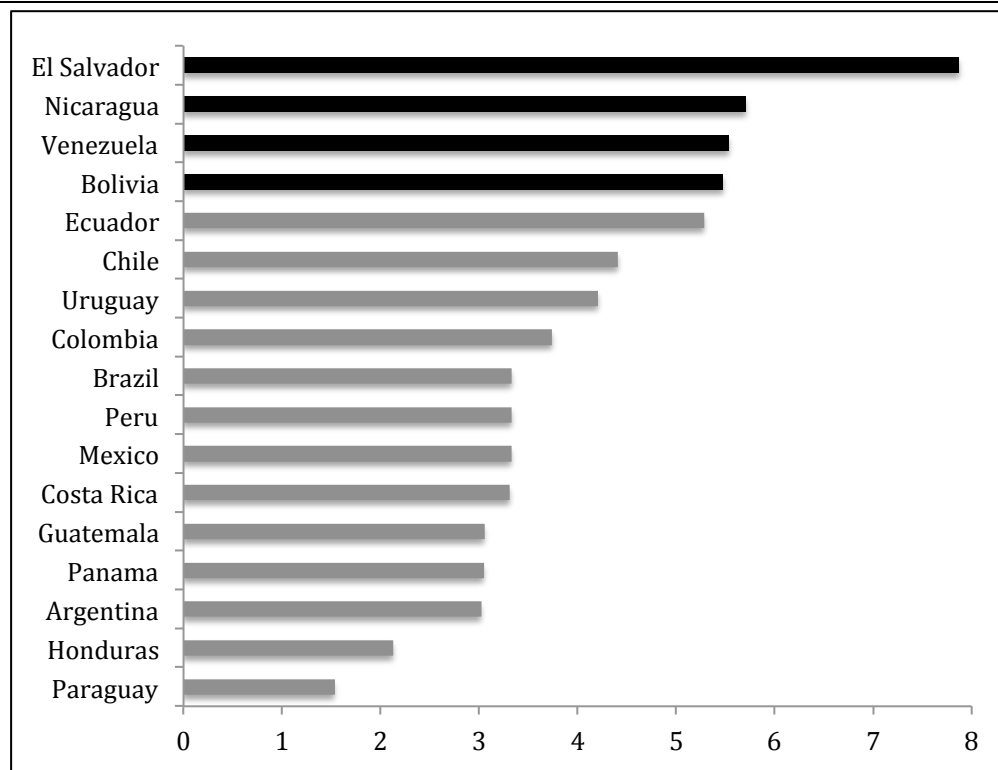
This group of five cases can be further distinguished according to the second dimension of polarization, whether party systems are marked by a substantial pattern of scorched-earth rhetoric and/or completely uncompromising competition between major parties or blocs, a measure that requires more qualitative assessment.[4] Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador clearly score positively, characterized by extremely Manichean politics and the nearly total breakdown of any kind of legislative compromise.[5] As Table 1 displays, these are examples of contentious polarization. Nicaragua and El Salvador, however, are marked by much more compromising patterns. In the former, Daniel Ortega has savaged some opponents but cut deals with many others, including the organized business lobby,

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[4] Since a fine-grained measure along this dimension is infeasible, I rely on a simple yes/no binary, based on reading secondary literature and perusal of at least one prominent media outlet in each country.

[5] In several cases, some amount of legislative compromise occurred at the beginning of the left's tenure in office, largely because executives lacked legislative majorities. Once radical left governments were able to secure legislative majorities, however, significant legislation supported by both government and major opposition groups became essentially nonexistent.

one important right-wing party, and the Catholic Church. In El Salvador, the Funes administration was willing to entertain some legislative compromises with the right and was much more cautious about stoking polarization with heated Manichean rhetoric. These are examples of pragmatic polarization.

TABLE 1

POLARIZATION OUTCOMES

	High Level of Objective Ideological Spread	Manichean Rhetoric and Absence of Compromise	Polarization Outcome
Venezuela	Yes	Yes	High (Contentious)
Bolivia	Yes	Yes	High (Contentious)
Ecuador	Yes	Yes	High (Contentious)
Nicaragua	Yes	No	High (Pragmatic)
El Salvador	Yes	No	High (Pragmatic)
Brazil	No	No	Low
Mexico	No	No	Low
Uruguay	No	No	Low
Chile	No	No	Low
Argentina	No	No	Low
Colombia	No	No	Low
Costa Rica	No	No	Low
Guatemala	No	No	Low
Honduras	No	No	Low
Panama	No	No	Low
Paraguay	No	No	Low
Peru	No	No	Low

Two further points about these patterns can help guide the search for explanations. First, cases of high polarization, whether pragmatic or contentious, all involve the presence of a major radicalized party or bloc on the left—the PSUV (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela) in Venezuela, MAS (Movement for Socialism, Movimiento al Socialismo) in Bolivia, PAIS (Proud and Sovereign Fatherland, Patria Altiva i Soberana) in Ecuador, the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front, Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional) in El Salvador, and the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) in Nicaragua. In the abstract, polarization is clearly a product of the presence and ideological choices of both left-wing parties and right-wing parties. The reality of contemporary Latin American politics, however, is that relatively significant

right-wing parties exist in every party system. Differences between these parties in their degree of conservativeness may influence polarization at the margin. But, at least in this case universe, the key questions regarding high polarization appear to be whether significant left-of-center parties exist at all and whether those left-of-center parties are moderate or radical. The second point is that variation in polarization has been largely stable during the region's Left Turn. In the five cases mentioned above, high or moderate levels of polarization have consistently characterized party systems since the arrival to power of the radicalized left, and often for some time beforehand. In the more centripetal cases, lower levels of polarization have been largely constant during the same time period. The key inference to draw from these observations is that the most important factors explaining variation in polarization are likely to be found among events occurring prior to the Left Turn.

THE LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING EXPLANATIONS

Extant theories offer limited leverage for explaining variation in polarization in the Latin American case universe. Perhaps the most traditional hypothesis regarding polarization in the comparative literature is associated with Sartori's (1976) analysis of "polarized pluralism," which suggests that the level of programmatic polarization should increase with the number of electorally relevant parties in a party system. While an intuitively compelling notion, polarized pluralism has questionable explanatory power when considering the regional case universe. Highly polarized party systems have emerged in the context of relatively fragmented multiparty systems (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador) as well as in systems consisting of only two or three parties (Nicaragua, El Salvador). Similarly, low levels of polarization have emerged out of extremely fragmented party systems (Brazil, Guatemala) and in systems with only two or three relevant parties (Honduras, Uruguay).

Another hypothesis focuses on the stability or institutionalization of party systems. Deployed to explain variation in Latin American outcomes, this hypothesis suggests that the radical left consolidated in countries where party systems collapsed or were highly deinstitutionalized while the moderate left has consolidated in countries marked by party system stability (Schamis 2006; Flores-Macías 2010). Unstable or deinstitutionalized

party systems are supposed to allow radical outsiders to gain a foothold in electoral politics, while more stable party systems induce moderation. This hypothesis also runs into severe problems when put under empirical scrutiny. First, two of the highly polarized party systems characterized by radical left parties have also been among the most stable in Latin America since the early 1990s (Nicaragua, El Salvador). Further, even where polarization is roughly associated with the collapse or decline of established parties, the relationship between these events is unclear. For example, in Venezuela, much of the decline of the Punto Fijo parties occurred in conjunction with and after the victory of Chávez and his Polo Patriótico (patriotic pole) coalition in 1998. And only a few years beforehand, the Venezuelan party system was considered an "institutionalized party system in transition" in Mainwaring and Scully's (1995) seminal treatment of the concept of party system institutionalization. Among the less polarized cases in the region, we can also find great variation in the stability and institutionalization of pre–Left Turn party systems. In some cases, pre–Left Turn party systems were highly stable and institutionalized (Chile, Uruguay). Yet in other cases, pre–Left Turn party systems were highly unstable and/or marked by the collapse of traditional parties (Brazil, Peru, Guatemala).

A final set of hypotheses focus on the demand side of the electoral market and mass preferences. In the literature on polarization in American politics, the relationship between elite and mass polarization has been subjected to an enormous amount of scrutiny, with scholars debating whether such a relationship exists and what the primary direction of causality might be (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Fleisher and Bond 2001; Jacobson 2005; Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2005; Abramowitz 2012). The implication for contemporary Latin American cases is that polarization in mass preferences or the presence of an unusually large and vocal population of radical leftists might help explain polarization at the elite level. Numerous studies do make this kind of claim. Some emphasize popular rejection of neoliberal reforms as attending the consolidation of the radical left (Silva 2009; Roberts 2013). Others suggest that the presence of natural resource rents makes societies less likely to accept the constraints on government spending that market liberalism entails, leading to popular reactions against the market model (Weyland 2009). While intuitively compelling, demand-side

explanations run into a simple problem. Public opinion data offers very little support for the notion that countries with more polarized party systems were marked by higher levels of mass polarization or particularly strong support for radical left ideas during the 1990s. For example, Baker and Greene's (2011) estimate of "mass support for the market" found Nicaragua and Venezuela to be two of the three most market-supportive countries in the region, with El Salvador and Ecuador not far behind.

GOVERNANCE AND POLARIZATION

This paper proposes an explanation for high levels of party system polarization during the Left Turn that centers on (a) the presence of electorally relevant parties of the left and right in the pre–Left Turn period (roughly 1988–2000) and (b) the quality of governance during that period, hypothesized to impact whether parties of the left would consolidate in a moderate or radical direction, driving centripetal or polarizing dynamics within party systems. The finer grained distinction among the highly polarized cases—contentious versus pragmatic dynamics—is a secondary concern related to the types of radical coalitions that would emerge from this process. The logic of the argument is displayed in Figure 2 and expanded on in the discussion below.

Higher levels of polarization are unlikely to emerge in party systems that lack electorally relevant parties clearly located to the left and right sides of the ideological spectrum. At a particular snapshot in time, this claim is true by definition. Higher levels of polarization require substantial ideological differentiation among parties. If the electorally relevant parties are confined to one portion of the ideological spectrum, differentiation is likely to be minor. But the claim is also relevant to sequences over time. If a party system has no recent history of electorally relevant parties of the left and right, it is substantially less likely to develop a highly polarized orientation in the near future.

FIGURE 2

EXPLAINING POLARIZATION IN LATIN AMERICA
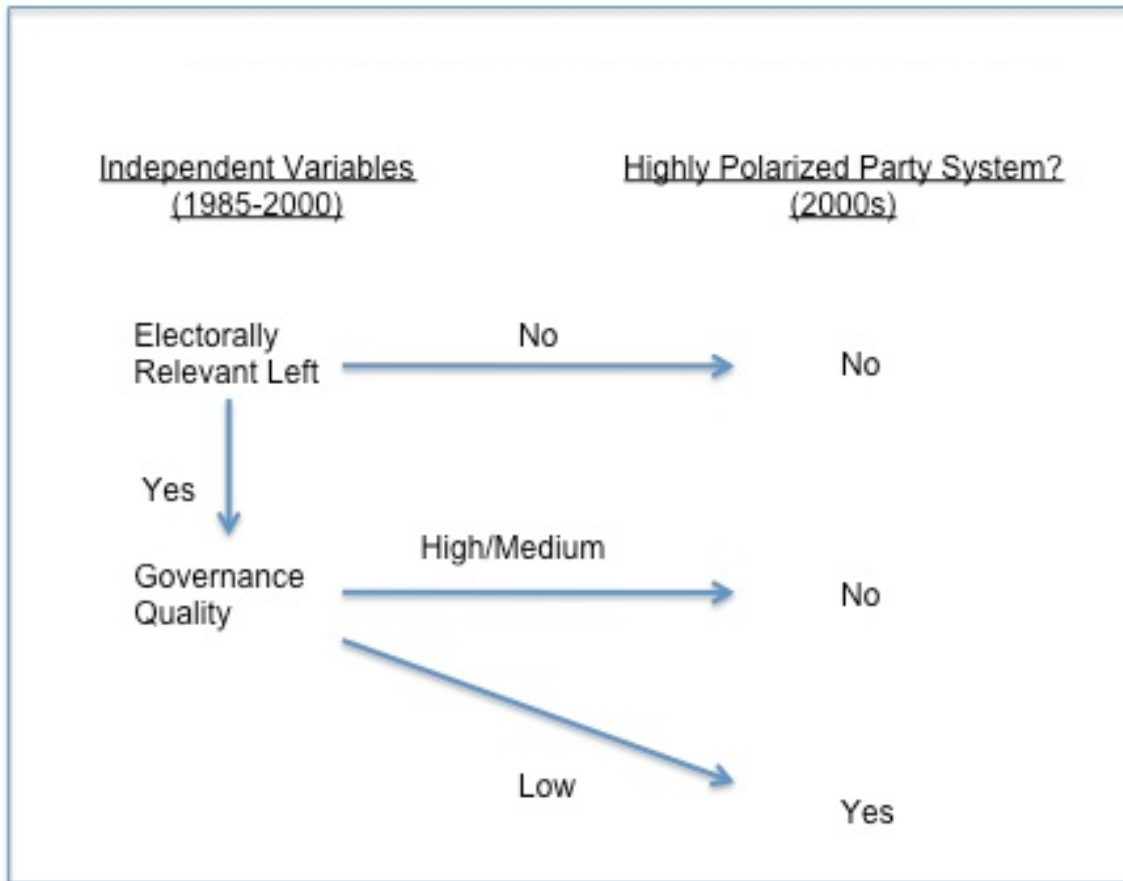
In the period before the Left Turn, electorally relevant parties of the right existed across Latin American party systems, such that the real distinction between cases regarded the presence of electorally relevant parties of the left. I define parties of the left as those with at least some roots in Socialist or Marxist movements that also possessed—or at least major factions within the party possessed—a substantial programmatic commitment to the reduction of social and economic inequality during the time period in question.[6] I consider party systems to have an electorally relevant left during the 1985–

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[6] Naturally, definitions of "the left" differ substantially in social scientific research. This definition essentially combines two common approaches, the former emphasizing the historical definition of the left as parties or movements of Socialist and Marxist origins and the latter emphasizing the programmatic content commonly associated with left-of-center parties (Levitsky and Roberts 2011).

2000 time period if a single party of the left was capable of winning over 10 percent of the vote in consecutive full electoral cycles in lower house legislative elections or if several left parties together were capable of winning at least 15 percent of the vote over multiple cycles. Notably, the key issue is whether the system contained an electorally relevant party of the left at some point during this time period, thereby establishing a tradition of leftist party competition and mobilizing into politics a substantial number of leftist partisan activists, not whether this party remained relevant (or remained truly on the left) throughout the entire fifteen years.

The core theoretical argument in the paper is that, among those countries possessing electorally relevant parties of both left and right in the pre–Left Turn period, the quality of governance strongly impacted polarization outcomes by shifting incentives for partisan moderation in the pursuit of electoral viability. Following Mainwaring and Scully (2009, 1), I conceptualize governance as the "government's and state's ability to deliver goods and guarantee rights that are important for citizen well-being." This definition directly invokes the quality and efficiency of the public administration and legal apparatus, as well as the ability of the government to establish and maintain a stable macroeconomic environment.[7] But the latter part of the definition—"for citizen well-being"—is also critical for understanding the political salience of governance quality. As O'Donnell (1993) and others have argued, if not always in the same terminology, the quality of governance is intrinsically connected to the lived experience of citizenship—whether the state is capable of actually delivering on services and rights that are expected to belong to all citizens in the polity.

The quality of governance impacts left-right polarization by creating opportunities for the politicization of a second dimension of political contestation in addition to left-right appeals: anti-systemic versus status quo positions regarding the design and operation of the state. This second dimension of competition could be politicized through a variety of means, including calls for institutional and state reform, new ideas regarding citizenship and the relations between citizens and the state, and the more general adoption

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[7] Explicitly left outside the definition are distributive outcomes (a variety of which are possible under both high- and low-quality governance) as well as economic growth performance (which tends to be cyclical and likewise may vary greatly over time under both high- and low-quality governance).

of an image as a challenger sharply distinguished from status quo forces. In the abstract, this second dimension of contestation is orthogonal to the left-right dimension. Parties of both left and right could be either pro- or anti-systemic. Fruitfully politicizing this dimension of contestation, however, is usually only possible for non–status quo parties: These can take the form of true outsiders or more established opposition challengers who are not deeply implicated as part of "the system." Naturally, the more clearly a party is distinguished from the status quo, the greater the opportunities will be to politicize governance.

Why do poor governance and the opportunity to politicize this second dimension also facilitate polarization? Parties competing on their left-right programs generally face strong centripetal incentives. Whether these pressures change when we introduce a second dimension of contestation depends on the quality of governance. The key intuitions of the theory are conveyed in Figure 3, showing a two-dimensional issue space in which two parties or candidates are competing. When governance is strong (left panel), the median voter will be north of the horizontal axis and likely fairly proximate on this dimension to the placement of incumbents or other status quo parties. There is little opportunity for non–status quo parties to fruitfully politicize this dimension of politics and, in the absence of such opportunity, they will also feel great pressure to converge on the center on the left-right dimension. When governance is very poor (right panel), however, the median voter is located well to the south of the horizontal axis. Incumbents and other status quo parties have great difficulties following this voter south—in the minds of the electorate, their identities as creatures of "the system" are largely fixed. In this context, a challenging party could maintain a very radicalized left-right program yet, by making the politicization of poor governance a central part of its platform and matching the electorate's mood on that dimension, still be more proximate to the median voter.

FIGURE 3

POLITICIZING GOVERNANCE ENABLES LEFT-RIGHT POLARIZATION
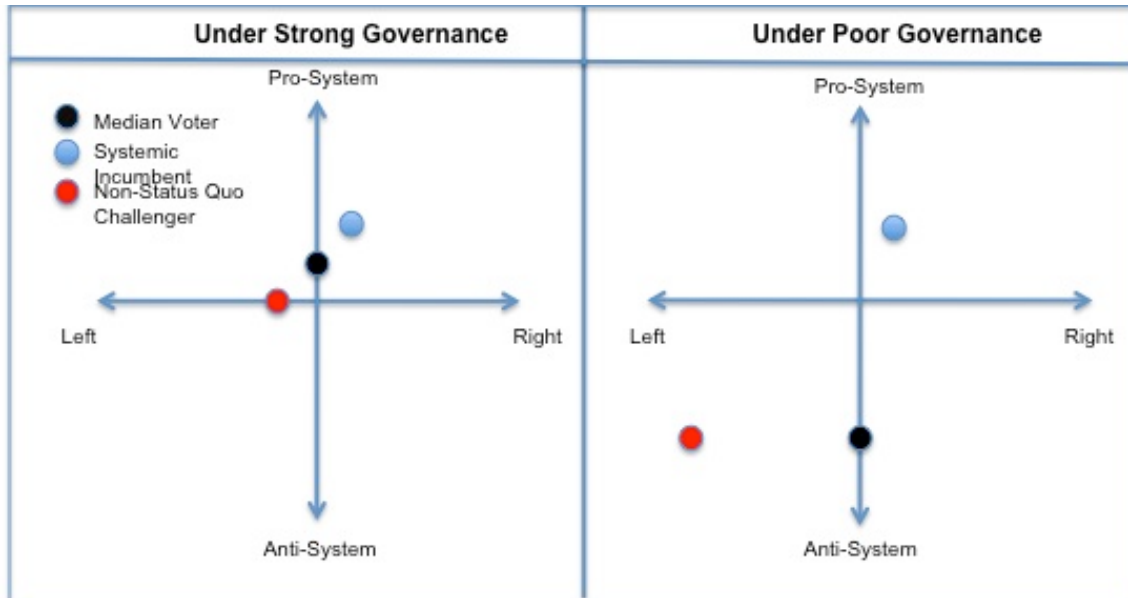
As parties are not unitary actors, the effects of governance on the strategic landscape manifest themselves in the factional contestation that occurs within non–status quo parties and blocs. High-quality governance tends to empower moderate factions within these parties and blocs, which can argue more convincingly for the necessity of left-right programmatic moderation for electoral viability. Meanwhile, radical factions tend to have great difficulty articulating an alternative path to winning power. How do they propose to actually win an electoral majority if their left-right program diverges so greatly from popular preferences and there is no other dimension of contestation on which they might capitalize? Further, in multiparty systems, moderates may play another trump card—the strategic necessity of forming coalitions, and consequently the pragmatic necessity of moderating their program so that it will be palatable to coalition partners—to which radicals often have little response. Low-quality governance, in contrast, tends to undercut moderates and empower more radical factions within parties and blocs. Moderate arguments about the necessity of programmatic moderation ring hollow when radicals can articulate an alternative path to power that emphasizes

governance-based appeals and critiques of the track records of incumbents in this respect (as heuristically shown in the right panel of Figure 3). Further, moderate arguments about coalition building can now be turned on their head, as radicals can convincingly argue that joining coalitions with status quo parties is undesirable, since it jeopardizes the distinctive identity unsullied by association with status quo parties, undercutting the seemingly inescapable logic of coalition building.

While these theoretical propositions pertain in the abstract to parties of both left and right, their impact on the left is particularly relevant for understanding and explaining variation in the contemporary Latin American case universe. As previously noted, instances of high polarization in contemporary Latin American have been marked by the presence of radicalized left parties, which have challenged neoliberal orthodoxy and in at least a subset of cases have framed their projects in uncompromising terms.[8] I therefore specifically argue that governance levels during the pre–Left Turn period explain subsequent patterns of polarization via their decisive impact on factional conflict within the left. Where governance was relatively strong, moderate factions within major left parties triumphed over radicals, establishing strong social democratic parties that would anchor centripetal party systems. Where governance was poor, radical factions within the left were able to buck moderates, leading to either established left party challengers consolidating in a radical direction under their leadership or these parties breaking down and the subsequent construction of new parties or blocs that fused old and new radical actors.

While the focus of the argument is to explain variation in the level of polarization in party systems, another concern is to further explain whether cases of high polarization took on highly contentious or more pragmatic patterns of contestation. In this respect, the key variable was whether the radical left forces that eventually emerged took the form of established challengers, as in Nicaragua and El Salvador, or the form of coalitions led by outsider forces, as in Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador. While in each pattern radicals were strengthened in their internal struggles with moderates by the poor quality of

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[8] In the case of El Salvador, radicalism on the right has also certainly contributed to the overall level of ideological differentiation within party systems. Nevertheless, the more constant pattern involves radicalized parties on the left.

governance presided over by status quo parties, the two patterns differed in the emphasis of radicals on governance-based appeals and destruction of the status quo. Where the radical leadership of established left parties was simply able to rid their ranks of moderates (Nicaragua and El Salvador), party systems would be marked by pragmatic polarization: these radical leadership factions held programmatic preferences far enough to the left to contribute to substantial ideological differentiation, but they had leaned less heavily on governance-based appeals to defeat moderates and their experience in institutionalized politics was conducive to some degree of compromise with their longtime status quo antagonists. In contrast, where left parties broke down in the context of poor governance and new radical coalitions emerged led by outsiders (Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador), party systems would be characterized by contentious polarization: these new radical coalitions, with less experience in institutionalized politics and having risen to power through more strident attacks on governance failures, had far greater incentives and inclination to reject any compromise with status quo competitors.

The theory has several observable implications that can be assessed in empirical analysis. Across the Latin American case universe, we should see associations conveyed by Figure 2—higher levels of polarization should be found in cases that possessed electorally relevant parties of the left during the pre–Left Turn period and in which governance was particularly poor. Further, in cases in which parties of the left did exist, a broad assessment should reveal factional dynamics consistent with the theory. Strong governance should be associated with moderate factions subduing and winning over radical factions within major left parties, thus driving centripetal dynamics. Poor governance should be associated with radicals successfully defeating moderate factions, driving polarizing dynamics within party systems, with the level of contentiousness depended on whether radical actors emerging from factional struggles took the form of established partisan challengers or true outsiders. Finally, within more in-depth case studies of Brazil and Venezuela, we should see additional process-based evidence that the quality of governance, by empowering moderate or radical factions, directly impacted the resolution of these interparty battles and, by extension, the aggregate level of polarization in party systems.

A BROAD ASSESSMENT ACROSS LATIN AMERICA

An initial empirical evaluation broadly examines how well the two key independent variables predict the outcome of a highly polarized party system developing in the 2000s. The first variable is the presence of electorally relevant parties of the left and the right in the pre–Left Turn period, with particular attention to the presence of parties of the left (the source of divergence across cases). The number of countries lacking electorally relevant leftist parties is noteworthy. Many cases possessed party systems dominated by traditional parties into which the left historically struggled to make substantial inroads, such that no electorally relevant left parties existed in the immediate pre–Left Turn period (Panama, Honduras, Guatemala, Paraguay, Costa Rica, Colombia).[9] Others possessed party systems historically marked by strong labor-based populist parties, which had crowded out and marginalized the left, contributing to a similar absence of electorally relevant left parties (Argentina, Peru).[10]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, we do not observe high levels of party-system polarization in any of these countries during the Left Turn period. In some of the cases, polarization has continued to be attenuated by the lack of supply on the left side of the ideological spectrum. In other cases, politicians without genuine roots in leftist parties have claimed the mantle of the left, often for seemingly strategic purposes, but not in ways that introduced truly high levels of polarization into party systems. In Argentina, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner have moved the Peronist Party vaguely back to the left side of the ideological spectrum and governed in ways that have inspired significant controversy. Nevertheless, the lack of clear ideological definition to the Peronist Movement and the reticence of the Kirchners to fully embrace the scorched-earth style of

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[9] In Colombia, the AD/M-19 (Democratic Alliance/19th of April Movement, Alianza Democrática/ Movimiento de 19 de Abril), a fledgling party formed by the demobilized M-19 guerrilla movement, won a surprisingly high share of the vote in the 1990 congressional and then about 8.5 percent in the new congressional elections of 1991. The party quickly collapsed and was electorally irrelevant by the 1994 elections, however, such that it does not meet the paper's standards for electoral relevance.

[10] In Peru, the leftist IU (United Left, Izquierda Unida) had won a surprising 27 percent of the lower house seats in the 1985 congressional elections. However, IU's seat share dwindled to 9 percent in the 1990 elections and the party became electorally irrelevant soon afterward. Obviously, the decline of IU in particular and absence of left parties in general was likely related to the regime transition under Alberto Fujimori. For present purposes, the important fact is simply that an electorally relevant left ceased to exist after about 1990.

radicals such as Hugo Chávez have prevented high polarization. In Peru, Ollanta Humala's emergence as a populist outsider in advance of the 2006 elections provoked worries that he would follow a radical path. But, especially after winning the 2011 elections, Humala has charted a largely moderate course, such that the Peruvian party system still scores very low on measures of polarization. In a few other cases, political entrepreneurs such as Fernando Lugo in Paraguay and Manuel Zelaya in Honduras have strategically cast themselves as committed leftists, eliciting strong antidemocratic reactions from conservative opponents that resulted in their removal from office. While these sequences were highly controversial, it remains unclear exactly where the political parties founded by Lugo and Zelaya will come to rest on the ideological spectrum and whether these parties will have strength and staying power. These cases are more properly seen as ones marked by controversial and contentious episodes rather than polarizing party systems.

TABLE 2

CASES SCORED ON KEY VARIABLES

	Electorally Relevant Left (1985–2000s)	Governance Quality (1990s)	Party System Polarization during Left Turn
Venezuela	Yes	Low (–.83)	High (Contentious)
El Salvador	Yes	Low (–.82)	High (Pragmatic)
Ecuador	Yes	Low (–.67)	High (Contentious)
Nicaragua	Yes	Low (–.60)	High (Pragmatic)
Bolivia	Yes	Low (–.46)	High (Contentious)
Brazil	Yes	Medium (–.19)	Low
Mexico	Yes	Medium (–.21)	Low
Uruguay	Yes	High (.56)	Low
Chile	Yes	High (1.29)	Low
Argentina	No	NA	Low
Colombia	No	NA	Low
Costa Rica	No	NA	Low
Guatemala	No	NA	Low
Honduras	No	NA	Low
Panama	No	NA	Low
Paraguay	No	NA	Low
Peru	No	NA	Low

Where party systems included electorally relevant parties of the left in the 1985–2000 pre–Left Turn period, we observe more variation in levels of polarization during the Left

Turn. Countries in this category include Bolivia (where the MIR was a principle political force during the late 1980s and 1990s); Brazil (where the PT emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s as one of the strongest parties in the country); Chile (where the PS was one of the stronger parties in the country during the 1990s); Ecuador (where the ID was one of the country's strongest parties throughout the 1980s and into much of the 1990s and where other leftist parties such as the PS also held significant strength for periods of time); El Salvador (where the FMLN was one of the two major political parties after the end of the civil war in 1992); Nicaragua (where the FSLN was likewise one of the two major parties throughout the post-conflict period); Uruguay (where the FA bloc was one of the country's three biggest political forces throughout the 1980s and 1990s); Mexico (where the PRD became one of the country's three biggest parties after its formation in 1989); and Venezuela (where MAS and LCR both became significant parties in the late 1980s and continued in this role until the end of the 1990s)[11].

Polarization outcomes within this group are strongly associated with the quality of governance during the pre–Left Turn period. Measuring governance is tricky, sometimes requiring multiple indicators. For this broad assessment, I rely on an average of three of the Worldwide Governance Indicators produced by the World Bank—"Government Effectiveness," "Control of Corruption," and "Rule of Law."[12] Taken together, these data provide a useful measure of the quality of public administration and legal apparatus that is at the core of the definition. As Table 1 suggests, the countries where governance was clearly worst during the 1990s are also the countries where the left radicalized, driving highly polarizing patterns of contestation during the Left Turn.

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[11] Full names of parties not previously mentioned include: MIR (Revolutionary Left Movement, Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria); PT (Workers Party, Partido dos Trabalhadores); PS-Chile (Socialist Party, Partido Socialista); PS –Ecuador (Socialist Party, Partido Socialista); ID (Democratic Left, Izquierda Democrática); FA (Broad Front, Frente Amplio); PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party, Partido Revolucionario Democrático); LCR (Radical Cause, La Causa R).

[12] While the World Bank produces six indicators, several are not appropriate for the more restricted definition of governance utilized in the paper. Two, "Voice and Accountability" and "Political Stability and Absence of Violence," more directly capture concepts such as regime type or armed civil conflict. Another, "Regulatory Quality," comes closer to addressing the quality of public administration but presents different and particularly thorny problems. As Kurtz and Schrank (2007) have argued, "Regulatory Quality" is highly reliant on opinion surveys of business owners and executives, such that "governance" becomes conflated with particular kinds of policy choices regarding the management and regulation of the market.

Governance and Factional Conflict on the Left

Given that the association between governance levels and subsequent party-system polarization could be spurious, we can gain more perspective on the meaning of this relationship through a closer examination of factional dynamics within the partisan left among the subset of cases in which electorally relevant left parties existed. Were factional dynamics within the left critical to the evolution of party systems, as suggested by the theory? And did these factional conflicts play out in ways broadly consistent with the theory's predictions?

We should find that cases of medium or high governance saw dynamics in which moderate factions were able to defeat and subdue radical groups within the left, thus consolidating moderate hegemony within major left parties that anchored centripetal party systems. In Chile, where governance was strongest, this process occurred relatively quickly, with the moderate PS factions Megatendencia and Tercerismo able to first defeat the radical Nuevo Izquierda (New Left) and, eventually, induce the latter to converge on a moderate position like their own. A similar process occurred in Uruguay within the FA, as moderate groups such as Nuevo Espacio (New Space) and pragmatic factions of the PS were able to gain the upper hand against radicals, most notably the Movimiento de Participación Popular (Movement of Popular Participation), and eventually convince the latter to embrace a more social democratic orientation. In Brazil, where governance was initially quite poor but improved markedly over the course of the 1990s, this process took a somewhat more circuitous course (as elaborated below), with the moderate Articulação faction within the PT initially losing ground to radical groups but eventually decisively gaining the upper hand. The outcome of factional struggles has been somewhat less clear in Mexico, where moderate factions within the PRD—those with their roots in the PRI, rather than the socialist left—enjoyed initial success in establishing control within the party but where subsequent factional conflicts have left the party's direction more uncertain.

Where governance was poor, we should find that moderate factions within major left parties proved incapable of defeating and taming radical groups, which would emerge victorious from these struggles and drive polarizing party systems. We should also find that the nature of victorious radicals—whether established partisan challengers or

outsiders leading new radical coalitions—should be associated with whether subsequent polarized party systems were contentious or pragmatic.

In one set of cases, in which moderate groups led major left parties, these pragmatic leadership factions failed in their attempts to assert control over radicals, leading to the splintering of the parties and, eventually, to the emergence of new radical parties or blocs that fused new and old actors. This pattern was associated with the subsequent onset of contentious polarization, as outsider-led radicals waged war on the remnants of the political status quo. In Venezuela, as elaborated below, moderates within both (please replace LCR here) (the "Bolívar faction" led by Andrés Velásquez) and MAS (at this point, a loose faction led by historical leaders such as Teodoro Petkoff and Freddy Muñoz) were overthrown by radical upstarts, such that both parties effectively splintered by 1997, with the radical Polo Patriótico coalition emerging in the wake of these events that united the LCR and MAS radicals with Chávez and his MBR-200 (Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement, Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario). In Bolivia, moderates within the MIR proved incapable of consolidating power and preventing important radical defections, first during the mid-1980s and subsequently during and after the Zamora presidency in the early 1990s, contributing to the party's significant decline. While the MAS emerged largely organically, its growth was aided by both the vacuum created by the MIR's decline and the ability to attract and ally with radical activists and organized groups such as Izquierda Unida (United Left), significant portions of which had once been affiliated or allied with MIR. Finally, in Ecuador, the moderate leadership of the ID similarly struggled to prevent the defection of radical factions and to consolidate a broader alliance with the radical PS, especially in the early 1990s after the disappointment of the Borja administration, leading to radical defections and a substantial decline in the party's electoral fortunes. The failure of moderate leadership groups within a major left party, and the resultant splintering off of radical elements, again opened up possibilities for new forms of radical politics that would capitalize on both the vacuum on the left and the existence of an infrastructure of radical leftist factions and activists with nowhere else to turn.

In a second pattern, radical factions led major left parties from the beginning of the pre–Left Turn period and were able to repulse moderate challenges for the party

leadership. Radicals were aided by the inability of moderates to convincingly argue for the necessity of programmatic compromise in a context of poor governance but did not need to denounce the status quo so heavily, given that they already held a commanding position. The overall impact of these factional struggles was to solidify polarizing dynamics within party systems. Since the radical left consisted of established challengers not so bent on destroying the status quo, however, these polarized party systems would be considerable more pragmatic, marked by the possibility of compromise between major actors. In Nicaragua, the orthodox faction of the FSLN held the leadership of the party even after the Sandinistas were defeated and the country returned to democracy in 1990. Moderate "renovistas" (members of the breakaway Sandinista Renovation Movement) subsequently attempted to usurp radical leadership during the first half of the 1990s, an uphill struggle made more difficult by the poor quality of governance in the country. The defeat of moderates greatly strengthened the hold of radicals—especially Ortega himself—within the FSLN but did not require totalizing anti-systemic rhetoric from the radicals. The result was that the FSLN remained led by radicals, contributing to substantial levels of ideological differentiation within party systems, but radicals who were pragmatically willing to cut deals for strategic purposes. In El Salvador, radical factions within the FMLN led the party as the country entered the post-conflict, democratic period. Moderate factions within the FMLN led by Facundo Guardado led a similar challenge but were likewise unable to argue convincingly for the need to move to the center in a context of poor governance. After a bitter internal battle, radicals were able to retain the upper hand, and Guardado and several sympathizers were eventually expelled from the party. A relatively radicalized FMLN would thus likewise be an anchor for the Salvadoran party system, its ideological differentiation from ARENA (National Republican Alliance, Alianza Republicana Nacional) helping to drive polarizing patterns of competition within the party system but its experience in institutionalized politics conducive to a relatively pragmatic approach to resolving conflicts.[13]

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[13] In this case, the extreme right-wing positions of ARENA also have clearly contributed to the level of ideological differentiation within the Salvadoran party system. ARENA is scored by many measures as one of the most conservative major parties in the region.

In sum, we can draw two conclusions from this broad overview of the Latin American case universe. First, the model centered on the existence of electorally relevant parties of the left and right and the quality of governance in the 1990s can robustly predict outcomes across the region with respect to the presence or absence of high polarization during the Left Turn. Second, a cursory examination of the evolution of the partisan left during the pre–Left Turn period in each of those countries where the left existed suggests that factional politics played out in ways broadly consistent with the overall theory.

CASE STUDIES: VENEZUELA AND BRAZIL

A closer examination of the cases of Venezuela and Brazil can help us gain more leverage on the impact of governance quality on factional disputes within the partisan left and, by extension, polarization outcomes. This comparison is particularly useful for several reasons. First, the two countries have become exemplars of contrasting outcomes with respect to political polarization. Second, the cases shared a number of baseline similarities from the vantage point of the early 1990s. At that point, each country possessed a multiparty system that had some polarizing tendencies but whose future direction was far from clear in this respect, in significant part due to the unsettled nature of major left parties, which were deeply divided between moderate and radical groups. In each case, either outcome—a moderate left driving centripetal contestation within the party system or a radical left driving polarizing dynamics—was possible.

The comparison of Brazil and Venezuela is also useful because both countries experienced crises of governance during the early years of the period under investigation before diverging significantly in this respect. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Brazil was commonly viewed as ungovernable, a country with a deeply corrupt public administration, huge problems with law and order, a dysfunctional set of political institutions, a president impeached on corruption charges, and a government incapable of basic economic management. The most dramatic problem was a crippling hyperinflation that devastated the citizenry and that successive administrations seemed incapable of solving. The Venezuelan experience told a similar story. The period saw a rise in both corruption scandals and homicide rates, social protests that were violently repressed by

the government in shocking fashion, and the impeachment of a president on corruption charges. While Venezuela was spared hyperinflation, inflation levels ticked up beginning in the late 1980s and oscillated between 40 percent and 100 percent thereafter, levels easily high enough to disrupt the economy.

The remainder of the 1990s, however, saw the quality of governance in the two countries diverge sharply. In Brazil, Finance Minister Fernando Henrique Cardoso's Plano Real succeeded in reducing inflation to the single digits nearly overnight, solving the country's single largest problem of governance in a single stroke. Buoyed by this success, Cardoso was elected president in 1994 and used his two terms in office to preside over a stable macroeconomic environment and enact administrative and political reforms that improved (if not substantially) other aspects of governance in the country. An ungovernable basket case at the start of the 1990s, by the latter part of the decade Brazil had achieved a remarkable degree of routinization and stability. In terms of the measures of governance upon which this paper principally relies, by 1996 Brazil averaged a −.19 on the averaged World Bank Governance Indicators—a score that was the sixth best of eighteen countries in the region. By 2003, when Cardoso left office, this score had improved to −.07, now the fourth best in the region. After the implementation of the Plano Real in 1993–94, Brazil also excelled by regional standards on inflation measures.

TABLE 3

QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE IN BRAZIL AND VENEZUELA, 1990S

	Brazil	**Venezuela**
Overall Quality of Governance	Poor 1990–1993, Moderate and Improving 1994–	Consistently Very Poor
Composite Governance Score (1996)	−.19 (6th of 18 in region)	−.83 (17th of 18 in region)
Inflation	Hyperinflation in early 1990s, single digits by 1994	Significant, ranging from 35% to 115% over whole decade

In Venezuela, in contrast, the crisis of governance that began to engulf the country in the late 1980s only accelerated over the course of the 1990s. Rafael Caldera, an analogue to Cardoso in many respects, was immediately confronted by a massive financial crisis at the beginning of his term in 1994. Put on the defensive by this

unexpected crisis, the Caldera government oscillated between heterodox and market-oriented economic policies, neither of which proved capable of lowering inflation. The new administration also did nothing in the realm of state or administrative reform that might reverse the escalating corruption of the public administration or spiraling levels of violence engulfing Venezuelan society. In contrast to Brazil, by 1996 Venezuela's score on the average of the three WGI indicators used to measure governance in this paper was –.83, placing the country seventeenth out of eighteen countries in the region.

Brazil

The Brazilian case illustrates how relatively strong and improving governance can empower moderates on the left and undercut radicals, facilitating the consolidation of strong social democratic parties to anchor centripetal dynamics within party systems. As mentioned above, the case is particularly useful because Brazil experienced an unusually profound change in the quality of governance with the successful implementation of the Plano Real. We can therefore track the deteriorating position of moderates within the PT vis-à-vis radicals as the crisis of governance deepened in the 1990s as well as the remarkable turnaround in factional politics within the party after the improvements in the quality of governance.

As with major left parties in Venezuela, the PT entered the 1990s on an electoral upswing under the leadership of moderates, primarily the Articulação group led by Lula da Silva which had been the party's strongest faction since its formal creation in 1983. This leadership group consisted of moderates in a relative sense. While the party retained an aggressively anti-neoliberal and fairly radical profile, the Articulação leadership made concerted steps in the early 1990s to embark in a new strategic direction. This involved a softening of the party's programmatic stance, concerted attempts by Lula to reach out to prominent members of the Brazilian business community, a rethinking of the PT's alliance policy in advance of the 1992 municipal elections that would allow alliances with other parties to the left-of-center (controversially, even the Brazilian Social Democracy Party, Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira or PSDB), and active steps to purge the party of its most extremist elements, such as the Convergência Socialista

(Socialist Convergence) faction.[14] Articulação leaders such as Lula and José Dirceu justified these strategic decisions through appeals to electoral viability, arguing that a more pragmatic politics was necessary if the PT wanted to win power.[15]

In the context of extremely poor governance during the early 1990s, the PT's moderate leadership was met by an unprecedented challenge to its leadership (Hunter 2010). Radical factions launched a series of broadsides in the partisan press and other PT fora, lambasting the party's leadership for seeking to make the PT part of the Brazilian political status quo rather than a challenger to that established order. Fueling these critiques were consistent references to the context of poor governance and the opportunities it afforded the party. Radicals blasted the leadership for "not providing a single concrete response to the crisis of governance" in the country and argued that "in some moments popular dissatisfaction explodes, looking for new alternatives."[16] In this context, Articulação was dealt a massive blow with the defection of a substantial part of its leadership and activist base, which formed the new faction "Articulação de Esquerda" and joined in an alliance in advance of the 1993 Party Congress with longer-standing radical factions such as Na Luta PT and Força Socialista.

The 1993 party congress saw radicals win the leadership of the PT for the first time in its existence, a swing in which the defection of Articulação de Esquerda was decisive. The arguments fueling the radical uprising, as seen in Articulação de Esquerda's manifesto prepared for the congress, directly played on the governance crisis and the strategic opportunities it presented. The faction argued that the PT's most viable path to victory in 1994 involved clearly distinguishing themselves from systemic parties implicated in poor governance, that "defeats in recent elections show clearly that the PT loses when it adopts ambiguous behavior," and that "it is unacceptable that, on account of poorly thought out electoral calculations, our party fails to present a comprehensive alternative to the Brazilian crisis."[17]

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[14] On these points, see *Boletim Nacional* (1992.2, 1992.5a) and *Brasil Agora* (1993.5).

[15] For an example of this kind of viability appeal from the moderate leadership, see Boletim Nacional (1992.12).

[16] See *Boletim Nacional* (1992.5b, 1993.3a). Translations, here and throughout paper, are by the author.

[17] *Boletim Nacional* (1993.3b).

The PT therefore approached the 1994 elections deeply divided, with a moderate wing that was on the defensive in unprecedented ways. Lula, the only figure within the party acceptable to both sides, remained the party's choice to contest the presidency. But the lead-up to the 1994 elections saw fierce battles between the moderate wing and the radical leadership over the content and direction of the Lula campaign.[18] These internal fights led political observers to conclude that the PT's internal differences were irreconcilable, that the party was "a star split down the middle" (Azevedo 1995). Declining electoral fortunes exacerbated these conflicts. Buoyed by the surprising success of the Plano Real, over which he had presided as finance minister during the Franco administration, Cardoso saw his standing among the electorate shoot up. In the end, Cardoso thrashed Lula, garnering a commanding victory in the first round.

This sequence of events, paradoxically, greatly strengthened the hand of moderates within the PT and allowed them to regain the party leadership.[19] The aftermath of the 1994 elections catalyzed an extensive process of soul searching and argumentation within the party. Moderate factions returned to their arguments about programmatic pragmatism and electoral viability, referring to the myopic radical line in terms such as "A Mission Impossible" and emphasizing the need to come to grips with the success of the Plano Real and the Brazilian electorate's attraction to Cardoso's agenda and to once again develop a more pragmatic alliance policy attuned to the strategic necessities of the fractured Brazilian party system.[20] Radicals, in turn, struggled to articulate a convincing alternative path forward in this context of vastly improved governance and a president reaping the rewards in public approval. References to the crisis of governance in the country and the opportunity to capitalize on anti-systemic sentiment dwindled in radical analyses of the situation. Instead prominent radicals attempted to blame the electoral loss on the PT's reluctance to unequivocally reject the Plano Real or fell back on arguments about the dominance of the media by the national bourgeoisie, complaints that did not

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[18] See, for example, *Folha de São Paulo* (1994.1.25).

[19] Some indications of a moderate comeback had already manifested themselves even before the 1994 elections (but after the implementation of the Plano Real). See, for example, the decline experienced by radicals in São Paulo (*Folha de São Paulo* 1994.4.12).

[20] Good examples of this strengthened moderate argument can be found in *Teoria e Debate* (1995.6) and *Folha de São Paulo* (1994.10.7).

suggest a viable alternative path to power.[21] This dynamic was well captured in Roberto Mangabeira Unger's analysis of the aftermath of the 1994 elections: "The PT define themselves along a spectrum of radicalization of claims to redistribution. It is as if the more moderate (and 'modern') said, in the words of Fernando Henrique Cardoso, 'we are what is viable,' while the more radical…merely share the confusion typical of the left the world over."[22]

In this context of sharply improved governance, the balance of power within the PT shifted decisively back toward moderate factions. The 1995 Party Congress was a key point of inflexion. Support for radical factions sharply declined and Articulação's Dirceu, the face of pragmatic status quo politics within the party, was able to narrowly defeat radical candidate Hamilton Pereira. Dirceu, Lula, and other Articulação leaders emphasized the need to put differences behind them in the aftermath. For the most part, however, the subsequent years, marked by macroeconomic stability and several other administrative reforms that marginally improved the quality of governance in other areas, simply saw the steady dwindling of radical influence within the party.[23] Radicals continued to vigorously contest the PT's leadership and howl about the direction in which Articulação was taking the party.[24] But the vote share for radical factions would decline in four straight party congresses, such that when the Left Turn began the radicals were a distinct minority with little ability to shape the party's direction and plenty of incentives to toe a more moderate line to advance their own careers.

Programmatic moderation in the PT's platforms and legislative conduct lagged these internal factional developments but was inextricably tied to them. Articulação's takeover of the party leadership in 1995 had been conducted with reassurances to the base that the PT would staunchly oppose the neoliberal agenda of the Cardoso

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[21] For example, *Brasil Agora* (1994.10).

[22] *Teoria e Debate* (1994.12).

[23] Improvements in governance in other areas were modest but real during the Cardoso years. For example, Brazil's WGI scores on "Government Effectiveness" and "Control of Corruption" both improved fairly markedly in the 1996–2003 period.

[24] Radical opposition in this period coalesced around the figure of Milton Temer, who made several unsuccessful attempts to unseat Lula and Articulação from the party's leadership (*Folha de São Paulo* 1997.6.16).

administration.[25] With few other options given its presence in the opposition, the PT continued throughout Cardoso's two terms as the president's primary critic. Nevertheless, this time period saw a notable softening of the PT's programmatic line. The 1998 election, essentially a foregone conclusion given Cardoso's popularity, saw the Lula campaign adopt a much more muted tone and experiment with new strategies of image-making and electioneering that cemented the party's identity as part of the Brazilian status quo (Boas 2010). Between 1998 and 2002, the process of moderation accelerated. Looking ahead to an election that seemed extremely propitious, the Articulação leadership set out to shift decisively to the center in order to maximize their chances of seizing the moment. In the run-up to the 2002 election, for the first time the PT dropped the word socialism from its platform and agenda. To strengthen his prospects, Lula formed alliances with parties of not just the left but also the right, chose the business tycoon José Alencar for a running mate, and released the famed "Letter to the Brazilian People," in which he promised broad continuities with the programmatic orientation of the Cardoso government and swore off any plans for ambitious change. Upon taking office, Lula and the PT's now sizeable congressional delegation held true to these promises. Whereas the PT had once provided a radical challenge to the neoliberal model and conservative parties in Brazil, analysts of the country's politics during the Left Turn would speak of an "implicit cross-party consensus" in the realm of macroeconomic and social policy (Power 2010). In the context of significant improvements in governance, the Brazilian party system took on a highly centripetal dynamic.

Venezuela

The Venezuelan case shows how poor governance can generate polarizing dynamics by undercutting moderates and empowering radical groups on the left. As the 1990s began, the two-party system centered on AD (Democratic Action, Acción Democrática) and Copei (Political Electoral Independent Organization Committee, Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente) was in the middle of a fundamental transformation, as two electorally significant left parties—MAS and LCR—had emerged to challenge the duopoly. Both these parties were deeply divided along factional lines but were led by

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[25] See *Brasil Agora* (1995.4).

relative moderates. The evolving multiparty system thus seemed capable of taking a largely centripetal direction, with the consolidation of strong social democratic parties of the center-left under moderate leadership. By 1998, however, a sharply polarizing pattern had instead been established, with an alliance of the radical left competing against a coalition of the center-right that consisted of the remnants of the Punto Fijo system and a few new entrants. The abysmal quality of governance drove this polarizing dynamic by empowering radical factions and undercutting moderates within MAS and LCR and by providing a context suitable for the emergence and rise of the MBR-200.

MAS entered the 1990s on an upward trajectory, under the leadership of a moderate wing led by party founders such as Teodoro Petkoff and Freddy Muñoz. Yet the moderate leadership soon faced unprecedented challenges from radicals, an uprising that began in the aftermath of the 1992 coup, the sympathetic public reaction to which laid bare the crisis of governance in the country. The decision of the party's moderate leadership to close ranks with AD and Copei in condemning the coup set off a firestorm of criticism within MAS, which only intensified as the leadership made clear its intentions of forming an alliance with Rafael Caldera's new centrist Convergencia (Convergence). An unprecedented series of radical broadsides followed, which stressed the need to understand the anti-systemic mood of the country and to address the poor quality of governance and the opportunities that doing so would open up for the party.[26] In radical eyes, what MAS needed was, "A politics that corresponds with the requirements of our times. A politics that is alternative, contentious, radical, and differentiated from AD and Copei" (Valero 1993b, 125).

Over the next five years, radical sectors within the party were able to wrest control of the party away from moderates such as Petkoff, employing similar arguments at each juncture that emphasized the crisis of governance in the country and that directly undercut the moderate rationale for a centrist, pragmatic politics. First, in the 1994 party congress, the historical moderate leadership lost control of the party for the first time. Instead, the "Nuevo MAS" faction led by Enrique Ochoa Antich triumphed, backed by

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[26] See, for example, Valero (1993a), Pérez Marcano (1993), and Thielen (1993). These radical broadsides and many others during this period, most of which took the form of formal addresses to MAS's National Directorate or in other party fora, are collected in Moleiro et al.'s (1993) indispensible *El MAS: Un proyecto politico para el cambio o la conservación?*

the party's radical wing and arguing explicitly that addressing the governance crisis in the country and creating a more distinct identity clearly separated from the Punto Fijo parties should be the centerpieces of the party's strategy and platform.[27] In early 1996, the moderate leadership—still part of the Caldera cabinet—was dealt another blow when MAS moved formally into legislative opposition, joining the "Triple Alliance" that also included LCR. Once again, the radical rationale for this decision rested heavily on arguments about the strategic logic of distinguishing the party from discredited status quo forces. Ochoa Antich, radicals such as Moisés Moleiro, and other rising leaders such as Leopoldo Puchi blamed the party's waning electoral fortunes on its inadequate response to the government crisis, participation in the Caldera government, and lack of a distinctive identity.[28] The final blow then arrived during the 1997 party congress, in which the "Horizonte 2000" faction led by Puchi and Felipe Mujica decisively defeated the moderates, lambasting them for failing to take advantage of the governance crisis, for destroying the party's historical image as an agent of change distinct from the Venezuelan political status quo, and calling for the party to make a "radical break with the old conservative visions, and open a new chapter with new ideas and new leaders."[29]

The governance crisis produced remarkably similar dynamics within LCR, which also entered the 1990s on an upward trajectory under the guidance of a moderate wing led by Andrés Velásquez, sometimes referred to as the "Bolívar faction" of the party. Like Petkoff, Velásquez argued internally that to take the next step in its growth and actually win power LCR needed to moderate its program and build coalitions with other parties in the system. Radicals seized on the poor quality of governance to articulate an alternative path to power centered on anti-systemic appeals and maintaining a distinctive identity. These initial conflicts similarly rose to a boil in the aftermath of the 1992 coup,

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[27] The best illustration is in Nuevo MAS's formal platform, "Las Tesis del Nuevo MAS," collected as Ochoa Antich (1997a). In the run-up to the conference, radicals also criticized the "ambiguous" posture of MAS and the party's failures to take advantage of the governance crisis and clearly distinguish itself as an anti-systemic agent. Many of these critiques have been collected in Marcano, Valero, Moleiro, and Thielen (1994).

[28] See Ochoa Antich (1997b, 1997c) for the party leader's comments on the situation. Moleiro's (*El Universal* 1996.2.10) emphasis on the importance of parties "differentiating themselves and constituting a viable alternative" also speaks directly to the argument, as does Pucchi's warnings about the strategic limitations of being "handcuffed" to the Caldera government in a context of popular discontent (*El Universal* 1996.1.28).

[29] See Mujica (2001, 75).

in which several prominent LCRista radicals had actually participated. In the months to follow, Medina, whose public profile rivaled that of Velásquez given his seat in congress, made several major public addresses—including two on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies—that positioned LCR on the side of the MBR-200 and demanded wholesale changes in the country including a constitutional reform. A recurrent theme was the conviction that the Venezuelan people were fundamentally disenchanted with the failures of Punto Fijo governance and that a message tapping into that disenchantment could be the center of a program of radical leftist reform.[30]

Radicals fiercely contested and eventually eroded moderate leadership within LCR over the next five years, doing so by emphasizing the opportunities presented by poor governance, a process that culminated in the formal division of LCR in 1997. A key initial controversy surrounded the party's approach to Caldera after his election. The moderate wing expressed serious interest in joining a broad reformist coalition of the center-left, which would unite Convergencia, MAS, and LCR in opposition to the traditional Punto Fijo powers. Radicals within LCR had opposed even recognizing Caldera's victory amid allegations of fraud. Now they strenuously rejected the idea of a coalition, arguing that it would undermine LCR's distinctive identity and would detract from what the party's central objective should be, pushing instead for a Constituent Assembly to write a new constitution and address fundamental problems of governance and state-society relations.[31] Ongoing poor governance and the inability of the Caldera administration to improve the situation strengthened the radical argument for an alternative path to electoral viability centered on institutional reform and differentiation, the notion, as Alberto Müller Rojas succinctly expressed it, that "Radicalism is a political current that acquires strength in situations of crisis."[32] By 1996, Velásquez and the moderates would attempt to force Medina out of the party, a putsch that failed due to increasing radical control over the National Directorate. A peace brokered at the 1996 National Convention proved impossible to sustain as moderate and radical forces

[30] See Medina (1992a, 1992b), from a series of public addresses at the end of Farruco Sesto's (1992) collection of interviews.
[31] See Medina (1999, 47–49) for discussion of these events. An interesting perspective on LCR's decision to reject an alliance with Caldera and MAS can also be found in Buxton's (2001, 170) interview with Petkoff.
[32] See *El Universal* (1996.1.19).

continued to clash bitterly over the programmatic direction of the party, especially its position vis-à-vis the Caldera government's Agenda Venezuela. In early 1997, a formal split occurred. Velásquez and the moderates won a legal battle to keep the LCR name. Medina and the radicals, buoyed by the ongoing context of poor governance and the persuasiveness of their arguments regarding alternative paths to power, retained the loyalty of the vast majority of the party's congressional delegation and activist base and founded the new radical party Patria Para Todos (Fatherland for All, PPT).

In addition to thwarting moderates and empowering radical forces within the traditional partisan left, poor governance in Venezuela also facilitated the emergence and surprising rise to political prominence of Chávez and the MBR-200. From its inception, the "Simón Bolívar National Project" was motivated by the breakdown in governance in the country and was centered, somewhat improbably, on the idea of refounding the Venezuelan state around alternative principles of state-society relations inspired by nineteenth-century historical experiences.[33] The MBR-200's calculations regarding when to end its clandestine existence and launch the 1992 coup were directly related to appraisal of the population's dissatisfaction with Punto Fijo governance.[34] The communications of Chávez and other MBR-200 leaders with the public from Yare prison and their formal program after their release both centered on governance-based appeals and institutional reforms, especially the need to convene a Constituent Assembly to rewrite the constitution.[35] The group's abstentionist stance, including even a refusal to back Velásquez and LCR in the 1993 elections, was explicitly rationalized by the belief that any kind of participation in status quo institutions would taint movement members' impeccable credentials as anti-systemic outsiders.[36] The political wager of the MBR-200 was precisely that the poor quality of governance in Venezuela would create an alternative path to power centered on governance-based appeals and differentiation from an increasingly discredited system.

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[33] The best source for a perspective on early Bolivarian ideology and its deep engagement with state and institutional reform is the "Libro Azul" (Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario ND).

[34] See, especially, Chávez's (2002a) memo on the matter, collected in Garrido (2002).

[35] For example, see Chávez (2002b, 2002c) as well as Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario (1996).

[36] See Chávez (2002d) and *El Universal* (1993.11.8).

It is noteworthy, however, that the electoral rise of Chávez was fundamentally dependent on the previous failure of moderate projects and empowerment of radicals within MAS and LCR. Chávez and the MBR-200 labored through most of the 1990s with negative approval ratings and garnering miniscule levels of public support. One obvious problem was that MAS and LCR—which together had won about a third of the vote in the 1993 elections—left little space for the entrance of a new actor on that side of the ideological spectrum. The undercutting of moderate projects, empowerment of radical factions, and splintering of these parties, however, yielded new opportunities. Not only did space open on the left, but Chávez and the MVR (Fifth Republic Movement, Movimiento V República) were able to capitalize on the existence of ideologically sympathetic radical leadership now in MAS and PPT. Chávez, whose support languished in the single digits well after his presidential candidacy was announced, saw the first significant rise in his polling numbers after PPT decided to back him in late January 1998. In addition to lending him greater legitimacy, PPT's support boosted Chávez through its significant experience with electioneering and electoral mobilization—most notably, Müller Rojas became the manager of Chávez's 1998 campaign. Chávez also aggressively courted MAS, now in firm control of its radical faction, and persuaded the party to join forces and form the Polo Patriótico alliance. MAS lent further legitimacy to the insurgent campaign as well as its highly developed organizational structure and networks of activists. Boosted substantially by the support of groups across the radical left and riding a wave of popular discontent with Punto Fijo governance, Chávez would go on to win the highly contentious 1998 elections against Carabobo businessman Henrique Salas Römer, supported by a center-right coalition including both of the Punto Fijo parties. While Chávez strategically toned down some of his programmatic message during the election, a new and unprecedentedly polarizing dynamic in the evolving party system was nevertheless quite clear.

In sum, low-quality governance in Venezuela generated strong polarizing dynamics by undercutting the moderate leadership factions within both MAS and LCR, empowering radical insurgents within both parties who drew directly on arguments about alternative sources of electoral viability linked to poor governance, and facilitating the initial entrance of a new radical actor in Chávez and the MBR-200. With the major actors

on the left side of the ideological spectrum all possessing radical inclinations, the logic of a radical coalition was overpowering. This polarizing pattern that emerged in 1998—the radical pro-Bolivarian coalition arrayed against opponents, both old and new, of the center and the right—has characterized the Venezuelan party system ever since.

CONCLUSION: POLARIZATION AND COMPETITIVE AUTHORITARIANISM

This paper has presented a new theory to explain polarization during Latin America's Left Turn and in younger democracies in general, emphasizing how the quality of governance shapes incentives for parties to moderate their programs in search of electoral viability. In the Latin American context, I have argued that polarization during the Left Turn period was caused by the two antecedent variables of party systems in which electorally relevant parties of the left existed during the 1985–2000 period and a poor quality of governance, which served to undercut moderates on the left and empower radicals. Across the entire Latin American region, a simple model based on these two variables is capable of predicting which cases would wind up with highly polarized party systems during the Left Turn period and which would not, with the finer grained difference between contentious and pragmatic forms of polarization hinging on the additional question of whether the radical left consisted of established challengers or new coalitions led by outsiders. A broad overview of cases in which left parties existed has also revealed factional dynamics and processes of party change consistent with the theory. Finally, case studies of Brazil and Venezuela have produced direct process-based evidence of governance quality playing a decisive role in shaping factional conflicts over the direction of left parties and, by extension, subsequent levels of polarization in party systems.

Unfortunately, the contemporary Latin American experience suggests a strong association between high levels of polarization and political and regime instability, as also occurred in many historical cases of highly polarized party systems in Europe and Latin America. In the last decade, countries with polarized politics have experienced coup attempts, violent clashes in the streets between opposing camps, and/or the launch of separatist movements that threaten the territorial integrity of states. Several of these cases—most clearly Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Ecuador—are also marked by another

negative outcome that, while not historically associated with polarization, might be traced directly to the phenomenon in the contemporary world: tendencies by radical parties, once in power, to abuse their privileges in order to disadvantage their opponents and tilt the electoral playing field, such that regimes are properly characterized as competitive authoritarian (Levitsky and Way 2002; Levitsky and Loxton 2012).

Future research might test the theory within the larger universe of Third Wave democracies. Extending the comparison to the post-Communist world seems particularly promising for several reasons. First, many countries in the region have had an extensive history of political mobilization by parties of both the left and the right, such that numerous cases had electorally relevant parties on each side of the political spectrum during the Third Wave era. This contrasts with regions such as Africa, where parties are far less likely to be distinguished by clear left-right ideological commitments and thus where left-right polarization seems far less likely. A second compelling reason for extending the comparison to the post-Communist world is that cases seem likely to demonstrate the important point that polarization can be driven by outsider parties on the right, not just the left. In Latin America, with the status quo in the 1990s dominated by parties of the center and right, radical insurgents on the left had the opportunity to politicize anti-systemic sentiment. In the post-Communist world, with the status quo consisting of parties of the left and center, insurgents on the right have been best poised to do so.

Another avenue of future research might more fully explore the connection between polarization and competitive authoritarianism. The theoretical framework presented here sheds light on this association in several ways. First, in most of the cases of high polarization, radical leftist parties came to power by emphasizing anti-systemic governance-based contestation, winning mandates for significant institution reform. This dynamic offered radicals the ability to transform institutions and entrench their own power in ways that would facilitate later abuses that tilted the playing field against opponents. In the language of criminology, these dynamics gave radicals the means and opportunity for eroding democracy and introducing competitive authoritarian dynamics.

Polarization itself has provided motive. Once in power, radical parties must own the quality of governance and can no longer rely on anti-systemic appeals, given that they

now are firmly part of "the system." To continue winning elections while sustaining suboptimal positions on the left-right spectrum, which important groups within their elite coalitions may be hesitant to surrender due to ideological reasons or the rent-seeking opportunities created by certain kinds of statist economic policies, radicals must find other sources of electoral advantage over their opponents. Many possibilities exist, including actually improving governance or otherwise delivering to key constituencies to cement their loyalty. One other obvious solution is to abuse state power to tilt the playing field against opponents. In this sense, at least in some of the highly polarized cases, competitive authoritarian abuse has replaced anti-systemic and governance-based appeals as the means by which suboptimal left-right positioning by radicalized parties can be sustained in electoral competition. The relationship between polarization and competitive authoritarianism during the Left Turn is perhaps best seen as a vicious circle in which polarization has provided the motive for undermining democracy and the undermining of democracy, in turn, has helped facilitate the endurance of polarized party systems.

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