

Intraparty Politics in Latin America

Lucia Motolinia*

January 29, 2026

Abstract

This chapter documents the institutional foundations of intraparty competition in Latin America and examines how different configurations of ballot type, vote pooling, the number of votes voters can cast, and district magnitude relate to party system institutionalization. The descriptive patterns show that party-centered electoral rules are remarkably durable in Latin America, but that intraparty competition is not uniformly associated with weak party systems. Instead, higher levels of party system institutionalization coexist with – and in some cases are more common under – electoral arrangements that permit intraparty competition, provided that competition is channeled *through party labels*. These patterns challenge the view that intraparty competition and party system institutionalization are inherently in tension and highlight the importance of institutional design in shaping how competition unfolds within parties.

Keywords: intraparty competition; electoral systems; party system institutionalization; Latin America; personalism

*Washington University in St Louis, Department of Political Science, One Brookings Dr., St Louis, MO 63130. Email: luciam@wustl.edu.

Intraparty competition structures the strategic environment in which legislators operate, shaping their relationships with fellow party members and with their party leadership. Institutional rules vary in the degree to which they pit co-partisans against one another, and these differences fundamentally influence how legislators campaign, which policies they emphasize, how often they vote as a unit, and whether they invest in the party's collective reputation or in their own individual appeal. Where rules intensify competition within parties, legislators face stronger incentives to differentiate themselves from their partisan peers, often at the expense of the party's shared reputation (Crisp et al. 2025).

When intraparty competition is high, legislators respond by prioritizing their personal popularity. In doing so, they seek to build an individual electoral base grounded in their personal traits, activities, visibility, and reputation (Cain, Fer-john and Fiorina 1987) rather than in the party label alone. Legislators carve out distinct electoral niches through particularistic bids because these strategies enhance their individual appeal (Fiorina 1977).

In political environments with intense intraparty competition, individual politicians – rather than parties – become the primary reference point for voters (Rahat and Kenig 2018). When electoral success depends on being personally recognized and valued by voters, legislators provide particularized benefits for which they can claim credit (Motolinia 2021) and invest in constituency service to generate support that is independent of the party's collective reputation.

Party reputation, by contrast, reflects the collective signal conveyed by a party label within an electoral district. Party labels provide voters with low-cost information about policy priorities and governing style (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Snyder and Ting 2003), making them valuable electoral assets for legislators. Maintaining a coherent party reputation, however, requires coordination and discipline among party members, creating a classic collective action problem (Cox and McCubbins 1993; Aldrich 1995). Legislators may have incentives to deviate from the party line – whether ideologically or in how they allocate time and resources – when doing so strengthens their personal standing with constituents (Hix 2004; Buisseret and Prato 2020). Yet, widespread deviation weakens the informational value of the party label and dilutes the party's collective brand.

Institutional incentives ultimately determine how legislators balance these competing strategies. Where intraparty competition is limited, electoral success is more closely tied to party-centric behavior, and party leaders retain greater capacity to enforce discipline. Where intraparty competition is high, legislators gain

more from cultivating personal reputations, and party leaders have fewer tools to prevent personalistic behavior – even when such behavior erodes the party’s electoral standing in the long-term (Carey and Shugart 1995; Shugart, Valdini and Suominen 2005).

The study of intraparty competition in Latin America over the past two decades has developed around two broad lines. The first strand focuses on how electoral incentives structure the degree and form of competition among co-partisans in different Latin American countries. Focusing on specific countries, this research emphasizes the role of electoral system design and builds on classic work on the personal vote and candidate- vs party-centered politics. Early foundational contributions examine how rules governing district magnitude and nomination procedures distribute power between party leaders and individual politicians and argue that electoral rules shape intraparty competition by altering politicians’ career incentives (Ames 1995; Samuels 1999; Morgenstern and Nacif 2002).

For example, drawing primarily on the Brazilian case, Ames (1995) shows how large district magnitudes and open-list proportional representation (OLPR) foster intraparty competition, pushing legislators to cultivate personal constituencies and engage in geographically targeted credit claiming rather than collective party strategies. Also focusing on Brazil, Samuels (1999) then shifts attention to nomination rules and career paths, arguing that weak party control over nominations and the separation between legislative and executive careers amplify personal vote-seeking incentives and undermine party discipline. In contrast, adopting a comparative perspective, Morgenstern and Nacif (2002) study how intraparty competition varies between countries – including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico – and produces differences in legislative cohesion, policymaking, and executive-legislative relations.

Subsequent work in this line of research has focused on the role of electoral reforms. Two related approaches have been developed. One examines how reforms ostensibly designed to strengthen parties – such as closed lists or centralized nomination rules – often interact with preexisting organizational practices in ways that only partially dampen intraparty competition (Pachón and Shugart 2010; Negretto and Visconti 2018; Motolinia 2026). For example, Negretto and Visconti (2018) analyze electoral reforms in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay, to assess how changes in ballot structure and nomination rules affect intraparty competition. Drawing on both within-country comparisons before and after reform

and cross-national patterns, they show that the effect of electoral reforms intended to strengthen parties is mediated by party organizations, territorial power bases, and informal nomination practices. As a result, similar reforms can produce different outcomes across countries and parties.

The other approach emphasizes the conditionality of electoral incentives, showing how similar institutional rules can produce divergent patterns of intraparty competition depending on the party's enforcement capacity, institutionalization, and subnational variation (Crisp et al. 2004; Cheibub and Sin 2020; Freidenberg and Pachano 2026; Kemahlioglu, Weitz-Shapiro and Hirano 2009; Albarracín and Milanese 2016). Cheibub and Sin (2020), for example, on how electoral incentives operate in practice with a special focus on party enforcement. The authors show that similar electoral institutions can generate different levels of intraparty competition depending on parties' capacity to discipline legislators and control nominations. Where enforcement is weak (as in Brazil), candidate-centered incentives translate into intraparty competition, whereas stronger party enforcement can substantially mute these effects (as in Argentina). A complementary piece, also centering on enforcement capacity, is that of Albarracín and Milanese (2016). The authors focus on subnational variation within Argentina, comparing provinces that operate under the same electoral rules but differ in party organization, access to state resources, and territorial control. They show that these local differences condition how electoral incentives are translated into broader nomination strategies and intraparty competition.

The second major strand shifts attention from the causes of intraparty competition to its consequences, particularly for representation, legislative behavior, and party system dynamics. This literature has developed three distinct approaches. One examines how intraparty competition shapes candidate selection and, in turn, patterns of descriptive representation and intraparty career advancement. This work argues that intense competition among co-partisans systematically biases recruitment toward particular types of politicians – those with greater personal resources, stronger territorial control, or elite connections (Siavelis 2002; Aragon 2001; Carey and Polga-Hecimovich 2006; Langston 2006; Klasnja, Motolinia and Weschle 2025; Klasnja and Motolinia 2026).

Owing in part to the quality and availability of electoral and politician-level data, Chile has emerged as a particularly well-studied case in the literature on intraparty competition and candidate selection. Siavelis (2002) shows how intraparty competition within party lists systematically advantages candidates with

strong factional backing and close ties to party elites. Building on this insight, Carey and Polga-Hecimovich (2006) situate Chile within a broader comparative framework to show that intense intraparty competition encourages parties to recruit candidates with high personal political capital. Most recently, Klasnja and Motolinia (2026) show that intraparty competition in Chile following the 2015 electoral reform disproportionately advantages very wealthy politicians, who are more likely both to enter races and to achieve electoral success.

A related line of research examines legislative behavior, analyzing how intraparty competition shapes cohesion and responsiveness once politicians are in office. This work conceptualizes legislative behavior as a strategic response to ongoing intraparty contests over renomination and advancement, showing that intraparty competition can undermine collective action in legislatures by incentivizing position-taking, party switching, and localized credit claiming (Micozzi 2013; Kerevel 2015; Alemán, Ramírez and Slapin 2017; Jaramillo 2023; Motolinia 2021, 2025). For example, Kerevel (2015) focuses on Mexico and shows that legislators' behavior in Congress reflects strategic calculations about renomination under conditions of intraparty competition where party leaders retain significant control over career advancement. Examining legislative behavior in Colombia, Jaramillo (2023) shows that intraparty competition over renomination induces legislators to engage in individualized legislative strategies – such as position-taking and other constituency-oriented initiatives.

Finally, a distinct third line of research within this strand situates intraparty competition within the broader party system and territorial dynamics. Scholars show how intraparty competition interacts with federalism, subnational authoritarian enclaves, and uneven party penetration to reshape party systems over time (Harbers 2014; Gibson and Suárez-Cao 2010; Montero and Samuels 2004; Borges 2011; Wills-Otero 2016; Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer 2018; Morgan 2018; Moreno 2005). This work emphasizes that intraparty competition is not merely an internal party phenomenon but a mechanism through which national and subnational power structures are reproduced and contested. For example, focusing on Argentina, Gibson and Suárez-Cao (2010) show that using control over nominations, strong provincial party leaders can insulate subnational party organizations from the national competition. Harbers (2014), then, extends this argument by examining subnational authoritarian enclaves in Mexico.

To better understand intraparty competition and its effects in Latin American party systems, I first turn to the institutional foundations of intraparty competition. I begin by describing the electoral rules and institutional features that shape incentives for co-partisan candidates to distinguish themselves from one another. Then, I draw on the *I³* dataset (Crisp et al. 2025), supplemented with additional primary sources for the most recent periods, to compare how these institutional configurations vary across lower houses in different Latin American countries and how they have evolved over time. Second, I examine how different configurations of ballot type, vote pooling, the number of votes voters can cast, and district magnitude relate to party system institutionalization (PSI) in the region. In particular, I show that intraparty competition is not uniformly associated with weak party systems. Instead, I argue that some forms of intraparty competition are compatible with PSI, and that party systems can achieve high levels of institutionalization under electoral arrangements that permit intraparty competition, provided that it is channeled through party labels.

Electoral Rules and Intraparty Competition in Latin America

Electoral rules vary in the extent to which they generate competition among candidates from the same party. When intraparty competition is high, voters are asked to choose not only between parties but also among co-partisan candidates appearing on the same ballot. In the extreme, politicians' primary rivals are fellow party members rather than opponents from other parties, and candidates must win support largely on the basis of their personal attributes and behavior, since they share the party label with their competitors. These institutional environments encourage co-partisan candidates to differentiate themselves from one another in order to secure electoral support (Cox and Thies 1998; Catalinac 2018).

The degree of intraparty competition is therefore shaped by electoral rules that require voters to single out individual politicians rather than parties. Key institutional features that structure these incentives include ballot access and ballot type, whether votes are pooled at the party level, the number of votes voters can cast, and district magnitude.

Ballot access and type: Electoral systems differ in how candidates gain access to the ballot and in the extent to which voters can alter party-established placements. A substantial body of work in comparative politics has examined how parties select their candidates (e.g., Hazan and Rahat 2006; Lundell 2004; Rahat and Sheaffer 2007; Galasso and Nannicini 2015; Yildirim, Kocapinar and Ecevit 2019). This research differentiates between exclusive vs inclusive procedures – which vary according to the extent parties can limit who is allowed to run – and centralized vs decentralized processes – which depend on whether candidate selection is controlled by national party leaders or local selectors (Hazan and Rahat 2010). Exclusive procedures allow party leaders to exert significant control over electoral entry, shaping the degree of oversight they have over party members by limiting access to the party label.

Although some countries regulate ballot access, in practice, these rules are flexible and often left to each party’s discretion, making it difficult to classify countries systematically based on ballot access alone. In most contexts, parties set their own candidate selection rules (Hazan and Rahat 2006), often varying by district and election. Even when laws prescribe selection procedures, parties frequently retain leeway in interpreting them. For instance, in Mexico, most parties can circumvent formal selection rules, allowing party leaders to directly appoint candidates when participating in pre-electoral coalitions (Motolinia 2026). Similarly, in Honduras, the law requires parties with multiple factions to hold primaries, but dominant factions deem primaries unnecessary and argue that the party is not fragmented (Taylor-Robinson 2009, p 334).

Ballot type, in contrast, comprises authority over party endorsement and ballot rank in list systems. In proportional representation systems, a key distinction lies between ballots with *open-* and *closed-*lists. Under open-list proportional representation (OLPR), voters cast ballots for individual candidates within a party list, allowing them to influence candidate rankings. Under closed-list proportional representation (CLPR), voters instead cast ballots for the party as a whole, leaving the ordering of candidates entirely in the hands of party leadership.¹

Ballot access and type influence intraparty competition by shaping candidates’ incentives both to secure a place on the ballot and, in list systems, to achieve a favorable ranking. Even when a party can nominate multiple candidates, the

¹There are also intermediate cases between these two extremes, in which voters may cast preference votes, but additional conditions must be satisfied for those votes to affect candidate rankings.

structure of the ballot determines whether personal votes matter and how candidates position themselves relative to their co-partisans. In systems with open ballots, for example, candidates must compete directly for votes within the party, prompting them to develop distinct profiles, cultivate local support networks, or pursue targeted campaign strategies.

Table 1 presents the ballot type for different countries in Latin America and how it has changed over time. Several broad patterns stand out. First, closed ballot systems have been the dominant structure in the region for long stretches, particularly in countries such as Mexico, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Costa Rica, where closed ballots remained in place for decades with little or no interruption.² Second, a smaller set of countries – including Brazil and Chile – exhibit remarkable institutional stability under open ballot systems.

Third, a number of cases display substantial change, alternating between open and closed ballots, often in connection with broader political reforms or regime changes. Argentina, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela exemplify this pattern, as each has experienced multiple shifts in ballot mechanisms and electoral rules that reflect both regime change and transitions in democratic practice, while also revealing efforts to recalibrate intraparty competition and candidate incentives. In sum, the table highlights both the prevalence of closed ballots as the regional baseline and the meaningful cross-national – and within-country – variation in ballot types.

²In countries with mixed electoral systems, ballot structures vary across tiers. In Mexico (1946–2024) and Bolivia (1997–2005 and 2009–2024), ballots are closed in both tiers. In contrast, Venezuela (1998–2024) employs open ballots in the first tier and closed ballots in the second tier.

Table 1: Ballot Type by Latin American Country

Country	Period	Ballot Type
Argentina	1946 - 1948	open
Argentina	1951 - 1957	closed
Argentina	1958 - 1962	open
Argentina	1963 - 2024	closed
Bolivia	1956 - 2024	closed
Brazil	1947 - 2024	open
Chile	1949 - 2024	open
Colombia	1945 - 2024	closed
Costa Rica	1946 - 2024	closed
Dominican Republic	1962 - 1998	closed
Dominican Republic	2002 - 2024	open
Ecuador	1950 - 1997	closed
Ecuador	1998 - 2020	open
Ecuador	2021 - 2024	closed
El Salvador	1950 - 1950	open
El Salvador	1956 - 2009	closed
El Salvador	2012 - 2024	open
Guatemala	1947 - 1961	open
Guatemala	1966 - 2024	closed
Honduras	1957 - 2001	closed
Honduras	2005 - 2024	open
Mexico	1946 - 2024	closed
Nicaragua	1947 - 2024	closed
Panama	1948 - 1968	closed
Panama	1984 - 2024	open
Paraguay	1963 - 2024	closed
Peru	1950 - 1962	open
Peru	1963 - 1963	closed
Peru	1978 - 1978	open
Peru	1980 - 1980	closed
Peru	1985 - 2024	open
Uruguay	1946 - 2024	closed
Venezuela	1946 - 1993	closed
Venezuela	1998 - 2024	open

Vote Pooling: Vote pooling refers to the level at which votes are aggregated for the purposes of seat allocation – whether votes ultimately count toward individual candidates or are combined at the party level. In systems without vote pooling, votes count exclusively toward the election of the individual candidate. In these cases, votes do not transfer to the party or to other candidates, and electoral success depends entirely on personal vote totals rather than collective party performance. In contrast, with vote pooling, votes are aggregated either at the party or party-list level, allowing votes cast for one candidate to contribute to the broader electoral fortunes of the party. Mechanically, when votes are cast directly for parties, as under CLPR, or for candidates in single-seat districts (SSDs), votes are effectively pooled at the party level.

In many proportional representation systems with open ballots, votes are cast for individual candidates. Even though these votes affect the ordering of the candidate list, they are first aggregated at the party level to determine each party’s seat allocation. Under these arrangements, votes for a candidate increase their party’s seat allocation regardless of whether the specific candidate receiving the vote is ultimately elected. Other systems allow for pooling at the party-list level, especially when parties may present multiple lists of candidates within the same district, with votes aggregated within lists affiliated with the same party.

Vote pooling affects intraparty competition by shaping the incentives candidates face when competing for votes within the same party. When votes cast for individual candidates are aggregated at the party level, the need to cultivate a personal vote is reduced. This is because each candidate’s votes also contribute to the party’s overall total and can help elect other candidates on the list – creating a partial alignment between individual and collective incentives. In contrast, when no pooling occurs, candidates must compete directly for personal votes, as their electoral success depends entirely on outrunning co-partisans. Without pooling, personal reputation and targeted campaigning become crucial, which intensifies intraparty competition.

Table 2 presents the vote pool of different countries in Latin America over time. It reveals a remarkable degree of continuity in vote-pooling arrangements, with party-level pooling being dominant. In most countries, votes have consistently been aggregated at the party level, often for decades at a time. This reflects the regional preference for electoral rules that tie individual votes to collective party performance rather than to purely personal outcomes.³ Only a handful of

³During periods with mixed electoral systems in Mexico (1946–2024) and Bolivia

Table 2: Vote Pool by Latin American Country

Country	Period	Ballot Pool
Argentina	1946 - 2024	party
Bolivia	1956 - 2024	party
Brazil	1947 - 2024	party
Chile	1949 - 2024	party
Colombia	1945 - 1949	party
Colombia	1958 - 1998	party-list
Colombia	2002 - 2024	party
Costa Rica	1946 - 2024	party
Dominican Republic	1962 - 2024	party
Ecuador	1950 - 1997	party
Ecuador	1998 - 1998	candidate
Ecuador	2002 - 2024	party
El Salvador	1950 - 1950	candidate
El Salvador	1956 - 2024	party
Guatemala	1947 - 2024	party
Honduras	1957 - 2024	party
Mexico	1946 - 2024	party
Nicaragua	1947 - 2024	party
Panama	1948 - 2024	party
Paraguay	1963 - 2024	party
Peru	1950 - 2024	party
Uruguay	1946 - 2024	party
Venezuela	1946 - 1993	party
Venezuela	1998 - 2024	candidate

countries exhibit meaningful departures from this pattern, and even then, these deviations tend to be brief or episodic rather than permanent shifts. Colombia stands out as the most fluid case, alternating between party pooling and party-list pooling across distinct political periods. Ecuador and El Salvador display short-lived experiments with candidate-level pooling, each lasting only a single election before reverting to party pooling. Venezuela represents the clearest sus-

(1997–2005 and 2009–2024), votes pool at the party level in both tiers. In Venezuela (1998–2024), votes pool at the candidate level in the first tier and at the party level in the second tier.

tained break from the regional norm, transitioning from party-level pooling prior to 1993 to candidate-level pooling after 1998.

Number of votes: This institutional dimension captures both how many votes each voter is entitled to cast and the level at which those votes are expressed – whether it is a single vote for a party, a single vote for a candidate, multiple votes for multiple candidates, or a combination of party and candidate votes. Importantly, even when the number of votes is fixed, recent research shows that ballot design can shape the salience of personal vote-earning attributes (Barnes, Tchintian and Alles 2017; Alles, Barnes and Tchintian 2023), and that parties often implement alternative ballot formats to circumvent constraints in single-vote systems.

Mexico provides a clear illustration. In legislative elections under its mixed-member majoritarian system – combining SSDs and CLPR – voters receive a single ballot displaying party-candidate pairings. Casting a vote for one of these pairings simultaneously counts as a vote for the candidate in the SSD race and for the candidate’s party in the CLPR tier. However, when parties nominate joint SSD candidates through pre-electoral coalitions, each participating party presents its own party list. As a result, the same candidate appears multiple times on the ballot, once for each coalition partner. Voters supporting the joint candidate can therefore choose which party-candidate combination to select, and may select all or only a subset of them.⁴ In effect, the *fused vote* ballot design enables a formally single vote to be functionally disaggregated across parties when multiple parties back the same SSD candidate.

The relationship between the number of votes and intraparty competition is not straightforward, as it interacts closely with both vote pooling and district magnitude. For instance, a single vote may produce low intraparty competition if it is pooled at the party level, but can generate intense competition if it is counted solely at the candidate level. While SSD races, by definition, always involve a single vote, OLPR systems can also offer a single-vote option, with the intensity of intraparty rivalry depending on how and at what level votes are aggregated.

Table 3 displays the number of votes available for different Latin American countries. The table reveals a pronounced bimodal pattern in the number of votes each voter is entitled to cast. In the first and most common pattern, voters in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Repub-

⁴See Catalinac and Motolinia (2021) for a detailed discussion of vote aggregation in this system.

Table 3: Number of Votes by Latin American Country

Country	Period	Number of Votes
Argentina	1946 - 2024	one
Bolivia	1956 - 2024	one
Brazil	1947 - 2024	one
Chile	1949 - 2024	one
Colombia	1945 - 2024	one
Costa Rica	1946 - 2024	one
Dominican Republic	1962 - 2024	one
Ecuador	1950 - 1997	one
Ecuador	1998 - 2024	total number of seats
El Salvador	1950 - 1950	total number of seats
El Salvador	1956 - 2012	one
El Salvador	2015 - 2021	total number of seats
El Salvador	2020 - 2024	one
Guatemala	1947 - 2024	one
Honduras	1957 - 2001	one
Honduras	2005 - 2024	total number of seats
Mexico	1946 - 2024	one
Nicaragua	1947 - 2024	one
Panama	1948 - 2024	one
Paraguay	1963 - 2024	one
Peru	1950 - 2024	one
Uruguay	1946 - 2024	one
Venezuela	1946 - 1993	one
Venezuela	1998 - 2024	total number of seats

lic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay have consistently had a single vote per legislative election. This single-vote norm underscores the prevalence of systems that prioritize a simple ballot structure and often reinforce the party-centered aggregation of preferences discussed in the previous section.⁵

In contrast, a smaller set of cases – particularly at specific historical moments

⁵It is worth noting, however, that under the mixed system, voters in Mexico cast a single vote that applies to both tiers – as described above – whereas in Bolivia and Venezuela voters cast two separate votes, one in the majoritarian tier and one in the proportional tier.

in Ecuador (1998–2024), El Salvador (1950; 2015–2021), Honduras (2005–2013), and Venezuela (1998–2024) – have adopted periods in which voters can cast a number of votes equal to the total number of seats available in the district.⁶ It is worth noting, however, that this high number of available votes reflects the fact that voters can either cast a straight-ticket vote (*voto en plancha*), by selecting a party list (with the possibility of expressing a preference for specific candidates), or cast a split-ticket vote (*voto cruzado*), in which they may select individual candidates from different lists – up to the total number of seats in their district – provided they do not simultaneously mark support for a single party list.

Magnitude: District magnitude refers to the number of representatives elected in a given district. By definition, SSDs have a magnitude of one, while the maximum possible magnitude corresponds to a legislature elected at-large, where the entire country constitutes a single district.

District magnitude is important for intraparty competition because it sets the number of candidates that each party can field, but its effects are conditional on the combination of ballot type, vote pooling, and the number of votes per voter (Crisp, Jensen and Shomer 2007). In some contexts, a larger magnitude can make individual candidates more anonymous, increasing their reliance on the party label rather than personal appeal. In other settings, a higher number of seats creates stronger incentives for candidates to differentiate themselves from co-partisans in order to secure votes. Carey and Shugart (1995) highlight this distinction by emphasizing that district magnitude mediates intraparty competition. Specifically, when intraparty competition is low, larger district magnitudes reduce the incentive to cultivate a personal vote, whereas when competition is high, larger magnitudes amplify these incentives.

Table 4 reports average district magnitude and highlights substantial cross-national and temporal variation across lower houses in Latin America. Several countries display relatively stable, moderate magnitudes over long periods. Argentina and Brazil, for instance, consistently rely on multimember districts with low double-digit averages, typically in the teens. By contrast, countries such as Mexico – as well as Nicaragua and Honduras in earlier periods – exhibit extended reliance on SSDs.⁷

⁶In Venezuela, this corresponds to the majoritarian tier only.

⁷In Mexico, this corresponds to the majoritarian tier; the magnitude in the proportional tier is 40. In contrast, the average magnitude in the Venezuelan proportional tier (1998–2015) is 2.6.

Table 4: Average magnitude by Latin American Country

Country	Period	Magnitude	Country	Period	Magnitude
Argentina	1946–1948	10.50	Honduras	1957–1980	3.50
Argentina	1951–1954	1.00	Honduras	1981–2024	7.20
Argentina	1957–2024	10.20	Mexico	1946–2024	1.00
Bolivia	1956–1964	7.80	Nicaragua	1947–1947	1.00
Bolivia	1966–1993	13.50	Nicaragua	1950–1963	42.00
Bolivia	1997–2005	1.00	Nicaragua	1984–1990	9.90
Bolivia	2006–2006	3.00	Nicaragua	1996–2011	4.10
Bolivia	2009–2024	1.00	Panama	1948–1968	4.80
Brazil	1947–1958	12.80	Panama	1984–2024	1.80
Brazil	1962–1966	16.40	Paraguay	1963–1963	60.00
Brazil	1970–1970	12.40	Paraguay	1967–1967	120.00
Brazil	1974–1974	14.60	Paraguay	1968–1988	60.00
Brazil	1978–1978	16.80	Paraguay	1989–1989	72.00
Brazil	1982–2014	18.90	Paraguay	1993–2013	4.40
Chile	1949–1973	5.30	Peru	1950–1963	6.90
Chile	1989–2013	2.00	Peru	1978–1978	100.00
Chile	2015–2024	5.50	Peru	1980–1990	7.00
Colombia	1945–1990	6.60	Peru	1992–1992	80.00
Colombia	1990–1990	70.00	Peru	1995–2000	120.00
Colombia	1991–2024	5.00	Peru	2001–2011	4.90
Costa Rica	1946–2014	7.7	Uruguay	1946–2024	5.20
Dominican Rep.	1962–2010	4.00	Venezuela	1946–1946	7.00
Ecuador	1950–2024	3.70	Venezuela	1947–1988	7.00
El Salvador	1950–2024	4.40	Venezuela	1993–1993	1.00
Guatemala	1947–2015	3.40	Venezuela	1998–2015	1.20

Other cases show sharp temporal shifts in magnitude associated with institutional or regime change. Bolivia’s average magnitude declines markedly in later periods; this corresponds to the transition from pure CLPR to a mixed-system period. This decline, however, reflects only the majoritarian tier during the mixed system.⁸ Nicaragua experiences dramatic swings: from SSDs to an average magnitude of 42 during the 1950–1963 period. This jump is a reflection of the *Pacto de los Generales*, which institutionalized power-sharing between the Somoza regime

⁸In the proportional tier, the magnitude is on average 6.7 for the 2009–2024 period.

and the Conservative Party by allocating fixed seat shares in the legislature: 60 seats to Somoza's Liberal Party, 17 to the Conservatives, and three seats to the presidential candidate and former presidents.

Similar institutional explanations account for outliers elsewhere. In Chile, the unusually low magnitude during the post-transition period reflects the binomial system established under the Pinochet regime. In Colombia, the spike in 1990 corresponds to elections for the *Asamblea Constituyente*, in which the entire country functioned as a single national district to draft the 1991 Constitution. Peru shows comparable patterns: exceptionally high magnitudes during the 1978 constituent elections and again following Fujimori's 1992 self-coup, succeeded by a period in which the country was treated as a single national district, before reverting to department-based districts. Finally, Paraguay's very large magnitudes between 1963 and 1989 reflect the centralized authoritarian structure of the Stroessner regime, with the peak in 1967 coinciding with the election of a Constituent Assembly.

1 Intraparty Competition and Party System Institutionalization

Overall, the tables above highlight both the durability of party-centered electoral systems in Latin America and the rarity of arrangements in which, for example, votes count exclusively toward individual candidates. Parties remain the primary vehicles through which votes are aggregated, and seats are allocated across the region. Although this underscores the central role of parties in structuring electoral competition for most Latin American countries, the institutional reality contrasts sharply with what we know about the weakness of party systems in practice.

A large body of work shows that party system institutionalization (PSI) in Latin America has been persistently low, characterized by high electoral volatility, weak partisan attachments, and limited programmatic structuring of competition (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mainwaring 1999). More recently, Mainwaring (2018) argues that even as democratic competition became more widespread and durable, party systems in many Latin American countries failed to develop stable roots in society, leading to chronically low PSI across much of the region.

This juxtaposition poses a central puzzle: why do electoral rules that seem to formally privilege parties can generate party systems that remain weakly institutionalized? To examine this question, I first explore how party system institution-

alization varies with each of the features described above. I then offer a simple answer to this puzzle: not all forms of intraparty competition are incompatible with PSI and show data patterns consistent with this claim.

This analysis relies on the Party institutionalization index developed by V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2022). The index captures multiple dimensions of party development, including organizational depth, the presence of party activists and cadres, the strength of parties’ linkages to civil society, and the coherence of party platforms and ideologies, among others. Higher values of the index indicate a more institutionalized party system.⁹

Figure 1: Mean PSI Index, by Ballot Type, Vote Pool, and Number of Votes

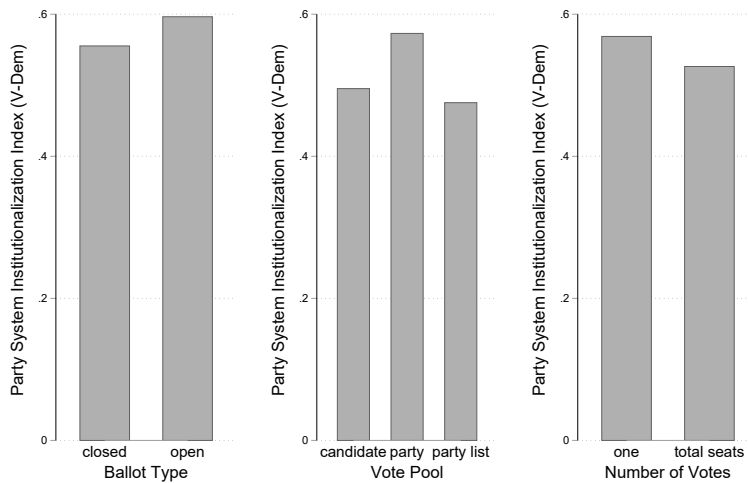
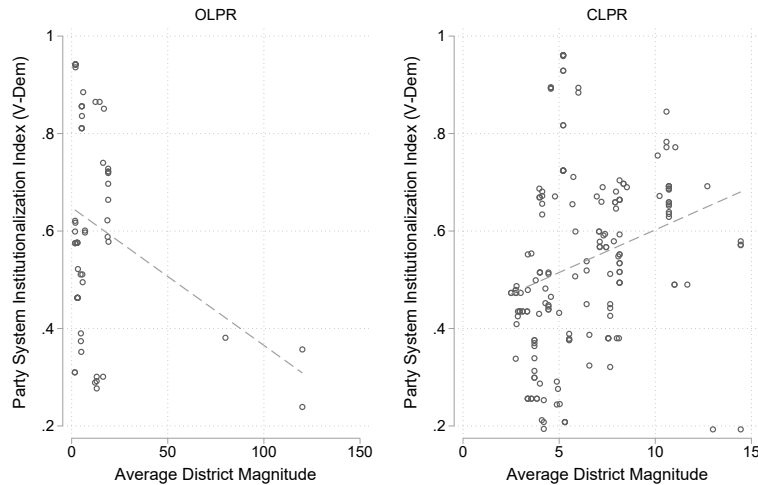


Figure 1 shows clear and systematic differences PSI across the three institutional dimensions. The panel on the left indicates that systems with open ballots are associated with higher average PSI scores than systems with closed ballots, suggesting that allowing intraparty competition through the ballot is not incompatible with – and may coincide with – more institutionalized party systems. The panel in the middle reveals sharper contrasts across vote-pooling rules: PSI is highest where votes pool at the party level and lower where votes pool at the party-list or candidate level, indicating that how votes are aggregated conditions the degree of party system institutionalization more strongly than ballot openness alone. In other words, OLPR systems are likely linked with higher levels of PSI only when the vote pool is at the party level. The panel on the right shows that

⁹The unit of observation is the country-year.

systems in which voters cast a single vote exhibit higher PSI, on average, than systems with split-ticket voting, pointing to a negative association between the complexity of voting for individual candidates across multiple lists and PSI.

Figure 2: PSI Index and Magnitude



As discussed above, the effects of district magnitude are conditional on the configuration of ballot type, vote pooling, and the number of votes. Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between PSI and district magnitude separately for OLPR and CLPR systems. In OLPR systems, PSI declines as district magnitude increases: higher levels of institutionalization are concentrated at lower magnitudes, while larger magnitudes are associated with lower PSI. In CLPR systems, by contrast, the association is positive: PSI increases as district magnitude rises. This contrast, however, reflects differences in the distribution of magnitudes across systems. The negative slope observed under OLPR is driven by cases with very large district magnitudes; for magnitudes below 20, the relationship between PSI and district magnitude is essentially flat. This suggests that district magnitude undermines PSI in OLPR systems only once it reaches very high levels, rather than exerting a monotonic effect across the full range of magnitudes.

Having established how each institutional feature relates to PSI in isolation, I now turn to explaining why not all forms of intraparty competition are incompatible with party system institutionalization. The conventional wisdom holds that when politicians compete against co-partisans, they will prioritize personal popularity and undermine their party labels in order to differentiate themselves. This would make individual politicians – rather than parties – the primary reference

point for voters. This logic, however, does not apply uniformly across all forms of intraparty competition. In particular, when electoral rules channel voter choice through existing party labels, intraparty competition can reduce incentives for party exit and limit party system fragmentation.

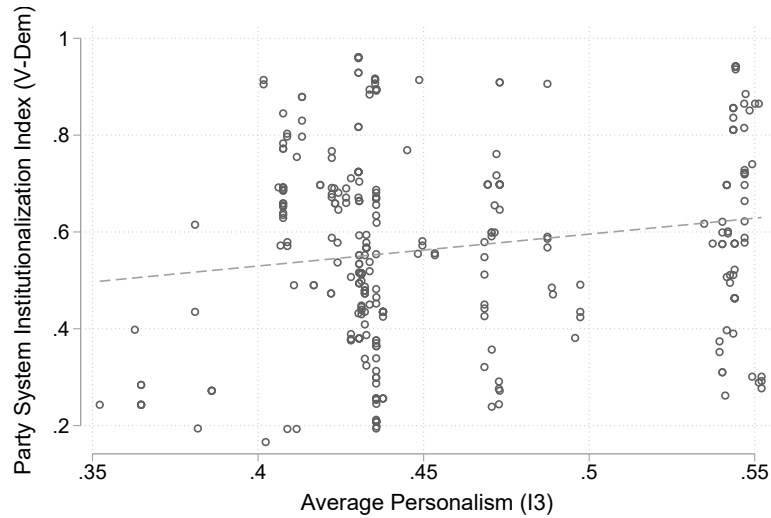
Where intraparty competition is capable of absorbing political conflict internally during electoral contests, it can increase the salience of party labels as the main arenas of competition and, in turn, dampen electoral volatility. When competition is intense but bounded – and parties remain effective gatekeepers – politicians have little incentive to abandon their party labels. Under these conditions, politicians will seek to cultivate personal reputations without systematically undermining the party brand, differentiating themselves from co-partisans within the confines of the party label rather than outside of it.

A similar dynamic operates where parties confronted with high intraparty competition invest in organizational infrastructure that disciplines politicians once in office. Such investments allow politicians to build personal reputations through activities – such as constituency service or particularistic appeals – that do not challenge the party’s programmatic agenda (Motolinia 2026). Over time, this arrangement encourages voters to associate political performance with parties rather than solely with individuals, thereby contributing to the accumulation of reputational capital at the party level.

Figure 3 plots the average personalism with the PSI index. Average personalism is a measure of intraparty competition developed by Crisp et al. (2025) that captures the extent to which legislative activity is structured around cohesive, programmatic parties as opposed to individually salient politicians. The figure shows that as personalism increases, PSI tends to rise. Although PSI displays substantial dispersion across all levels of personalism, observations at higher levels of personalism are more frequently concentrated at intermediate to relatively high PSI values. The pattern suggests that higher levels of intraparty competition are not systematically associated with weaker party system institutionalization and illustrates how bounded personalism can muster more institutionalized party systems.

Taken together, these patterns invert the conventional puzzle. While it is true that electoral rules in Latin America have long formally privileged parties, the evidence suggests that party system institutionalization is not uniformly low and, in many cases, has increased relative to earlier periods. Moreover, institutional arrangements that permit relatively high levels of intraparty competition do not

Figure 3: Correlation between Average Personalism (I3) and PSI Index (V-Dem)



appear to undermine PSI so long as competition is channeled through existing party labels. Instead, systems that permit competition within parties appear compatible with moderate to high levels of institutionalization, insofar as political ambition and voter choice are expressed within existing parties. The implication is that party-centered rules and bounded forms of intraparty competition are not in tension; instead, they can coexist in ways that sustain, and in some contexts even reinforce, party system institutionalization.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to document how the institutional rules governing intraparty competition vary across Latin America and how these configurations relate to party system institutionalization. The descriptive evidence reveals a striking combination of continuity and variation. On the one hand, party-centered electoral arrangements – particularly party-level vote pooling and single-vote systems – have been remarkably persistent across countries and over time. On the other hand, substantial heterogeneity exists in ballot structure, district magnitude, and the degree to which voters can differentiate among co-partisan candidates.

Across institutional dimensions, the patterns challenge a simple opposition between intraparty competition and party system institutionalization. Systems with relatively intense intraparty competition often exhibit equal or higher levels of PSI than systems designed to suppress competition among co-partisans. This

chapter underscores the importance of how competition is structured: PSI is consistently higher where intraparty competition is expressed within, rather than outside, party labels.

The relationship between average personalism and PSI provides a useful summary of the broader argument. Higher levels of personalism – capturing greater intraparty competition – are not systematically associated with weaker party systems. Instead, the distribution of PSI at higher levels of personalism suggests that bounded forms of intraparty competition can coexist with, and potentially complement, institutionalized party systems.

These findings reframe one of the central puzzles of the Latin American party system literature. Rather than asking why party-centered rules have failed to produce institutionalized parties, the descriptive evidence points toward a more nuanced conclusion: party system institutionalization depends not on the absence of intraparty competition, but on how competition is organized and constrained by electoral institutions.

References

- Albarracín, Juan and Juan Pablo Milanese. 2016. “Exploring Intra-Party Competition and the Effects of Electoral Reform: A Look at Colombia’s Local Elections, 1997-2011.” *Presented at the 2016 Conference of the Latin American Studies Association, Maty 27-30, New York, NY*.
- Aldrich, John H. 1995. *Why parties?: The origin and transformation of political parties in America*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Alemán, Eduardo, Margarita M. Ramírez and Jonathan B. Slapin. 2017. “Party Strategies, Constituency Links, and Legislative Speech.” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 42(4):637–659.
- Alles, Santiago, Tiffany D. Barnes and Carolina Tchintian. 2023. *The Representational Consequences of Electronic Voting Reform: Evidence from Argentina*. Elements in Campaigns and Elections Cambridge University Press.
- Ames, Barry. 1995. “Electoral Rules, Constituency Pressures, and Pork Barrel: Bases of Voting in the Brazilian Congress.” *The Journal of Politics* 57(2):324–343.
- Aragon, Fernando M. 2001. “Candidate Nomination Procedures and Political Selection: Evidence from Latin American Parties.” *LSE STICERD Research Paper No. EOPP003, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1546897>*.

- Barnes, Tiffany D., Carolina Tchintian and Santiago Alles. 2017. "Assessing Ballot Structure and Split Ticket Voting: Evidence from a Quasi-Experiment." *The Journal of Politics* 79(2):439–456.
- Borges, André. 2011. "The Political Consequences of Center-Led Redistribution in Brazilian Federalism: The Fall of Subnational Party Machines." *Latin American Research Review* 46(3):21–45. Examines federalism and the decline of subnational party machines in Brazil.
- Buisseret, Peter and Carlo Prato. 2020. "Competing Principals? Legislative Representation in List Proportional Representation Systems." *American Journal of Political Science* 66(1):156–170.
- Cain, Bruce, John Ferejohn and Morris Fiorina. 1987. *The personal vote: Constituency service and electoral independence*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carey, John M. and John Polga-Hecimovich. 2006. "Primary Elections and Candidate Strength in Latin America." *Journal of Politics* 68(3):530–543.
- Carey, John and Matthew S. Shugart. 1995. "Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas." *Electoral Studies* 14(4):417–439.
- Catalinac, Amy. 2018. "Positioning under Alternative Electoral Systems: Evidence from Japanese Candidate Election Manifestos." *American Political Science Review* 112(1):31–48.
- Catalinac, Amy and Lucia Motolinia. 2021. "Geographically-Targeted Spending in Mixed-Member Majoritarian Electoral Systems." *World Politics* 73(4).
- Cheibub, José Antonio and Gisela Sin. 2020. "Preference vote and intra-party competition in open list PR systems." *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 32(1):70–95. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0951629819893024>
- Coppedge, Michael, John Gerring, Carl Henrik Knutsen, Staffan Lindberg, Jan Teorell, Nazifa Alizada, David Altman, Michael Bernhard, Agnes Cornell, M. Steven Fish, Lisa Gastaldi, Haakon Gjerløw, Adam Glynn, Sandra Grahn, Allen Hicken, Garry Hindle, Nina Ilchenko, Katrin Kinzelbach, Joshua Krusell, Kyle L. Marquardt, Kelly McMann, Valeriya Mechkova, Juraj Medzihorsky, Pamela Paxton, Daniel Pemstein, Josefine Pernes, Oskar Rydén, Johannes von Römer, Brigitte Seim, Rachel Sigman, Svend-Erik Skaaning, Jeffrey Staton, Aksel Sundström, Eitan Tzelgov, Yi ting Wang, Tore Wig, Steven Wilson and Daniel Ziblatt. 2022. "'V-Dem [Country-Year/Country-Date] Dataset v12" Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project." <https://doi.org/10.23696/vdemds22>.
- Cox, Gary W and Mathew D McCubbins. 1993. *Legislative leviathan: Party government in the House*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

- Cox, Gary W. and Michael F. Thies. 1998. "The Cost of Intraparty Competition: The Single, Nontransferable Vote and Money Politics in Japan." *Comparative Political Studies* 31(3):267–291.
- Crisp, Brian F., C. Escobar-Lemmon Maria, S. Jones Bradford, P. Jones Mark and M. Taylor-Robinson Michelle. 2004. "Vote-Seeking Incentives and Legislative Representation in Six Presidential Democracies." *Journal of Politics* 66(3):823.
- Crisp, Brian F., Kathryn M. Jensen and Yael Shomer. 2007. "Magnitude and vote seeking." *Electoral Studies* 26(4):727–734.
URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261379407000789>
- Crisp, Brian, Patrick Cunha Silva, Santiago Olivella and Guillermo Rosas. 2025. *Representation and Electoral Systems: Interparty and Intraparty Politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 1977. *Congress, keystone of the Washington establishment*. New Heaven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Freidenberg, Flavia and Simon Pachano. 2026. *El sistema político ecuatoriano*. Quito: Flacso-Sede Ecuador.
- Galasso, Vincenzo and Tommaso Nannicini. 2015. "So closed: Political selection in proportional systems." *European Journal of Political Economy* 40:260–273. Behavioral Political Economy.
- Gibson, Edward L. and Julieta Suárez-Cao. 2010. "Federalized Party Systems and Subnational Party Competition: Theory and an Empirical Application to Argentina." *Comparative Politics* 43(1):21–39. Explores subnational party competition and federalized systems in Argentina.
- Greene, Kenneth F. and Mariano Sánchez-Talanquer. 2018. Authoritarian Legacies and Party System Stability in Mexico. In *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse*, ed. Scott Mainwaring. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press pp. 201–226.
- Harbers, Imke. 2014. "States and strategy in new federal democracies: Competitiveness and intra-party resource allocation in Mexico." *Party Politics* 20(6):823–835.
- Hazan, Reuven Y. and Gideon Rahat. 2006. Candidate Selection: Methods and Consequences. In *Handbook of Party Politics*, ed. Richard S. Katz and William Crotty. London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd pp. 109–121.
- Hazan, Reuven Y. and Gideon Rahat. 2010. *Democracy within Parties: Candidate Selection Methods and Their Political Consequences*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

- Hix, Simon. 2004. "Electoral Institutions and Legislative Behavior: Explaining Voting Defection in the European Parliament." *World Politics* 56(2):194–223.
- Jaramillo, Cristhian. 2023. "The Impossibility of Party Unity in Peru: Party Affiliation, Subnational Electoral Competition and Party Discipline (2011–2019)." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 42(5):649–662.
URL: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/blar.13505>
- Kemahlioglu, Ozge, Rebecca Weitz-Shapiro and Shigeo Hirano. 2009. "Why Primaries in Latin American Presidential Elections?" *The Journal of Politics* 71(1):339–352.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381608090221>
- Kerevel, Yann. 2015. "Pork-Barreling without Reelection? Evidence from the Mexican Congress." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 40(1):137–166.
- Kiewiet, D. Roderick and Mathew D McCubbins. 1991. *The Logic of Delegation: Congressional Parties and the Appropriations Process*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Klasnja, Marko and Lucia Motolinia. 2026. *Public Servants, Private Fortunes: How Wealth Shapes Who Governs, and How*. Working Manuscript.
- Klašnja, Marko, Lucia Motolinia and Simon Weschle. 2025. "The Super-Rich and the Rest: Campaign Finance Permissiveness and the Wealth of Politicians." *American Journal of Political Science* Forthcoming.
- Langston, Joy. 2006. "The Changing Party of the Institutional Revolution: Electoral Competition and Decentralized Candidate Selection." *Party Politics* 12(3):395–413.
- Lundell, Krister. 2004. "Determinants of Candidate Selection: The Degree of Centralization in Comparative Perspective." *Party Politics* 10(1):25–47.
- Mainwaring, Scott. 1999. *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Mainwaring, Scott. 2018. *Party System Institutionalization in Contemporary Latin America*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press pp. 34–70.
- Mainwaring, Scott and Timothy Scully. 1995. *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Micozzi, Juan Pablo. 2013. "Does Electoral Accountability Make a Difference? Direct Elections, Career Ambition, and Legislative Performance in the Argentine Senate." *The Journal of Politics* 75(1):137–149.

- Montero, Alfred P. and David J. Samuels, eds. 2004. *Decentralization and Democracy in Latin America*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. Edited volume addressing decentralization and its political effects in Latin America.
- Moreno, Erika. 2005. "Whither the Colombian two-party system? An assessment of political reforms and their limits." *Electoral Studies* 24(3):485–509.
URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261379404000642>
- Morgan, Jana. 2018. Deterioration and Polarization of Party Politics in Venezuela. In *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse*, ed. Scott Mainwaring. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press pp. 291–325.
- Morgenstern, Scott and Benito Nacif, eds. 2002. *Legislative Politics in Latin America*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Motolinia, Lucia. 2021. "Electoral Accountability and Particularistic Legislation: Evidence from a Natural Experiment in Mexico." *American Political Science Review* 115(1):97–113.
- Motolinia, Lucia. 2025. "When Reelection Increases Party Unity: Evidence from Parties in Mexico." *British Journal of Political Science* Forthcoming.
- Motolinia, Lucia. 2026. *Unity Through Particularism: How Electoral Reforms Influence Parties and Legislative Behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Negretto, Gabriel L. and Giancarlo Visconti. 2018. "Electoral Reform Under Limited Party Competition: The Adoption of Proportional Representation in Latin America." *Latin American Politics and Society* 60(1):27–51.
- Pachón, Mónica and Matthew S. Shugart. 2010. "Electoral reform and the mirror image of inter-party and intra-party competition: The adoption of party lists in Colombia." *Electoral Studies* 29(4):648–660. Special Symposium: The 2008 U.S. Presidential Election.
- Rahat, Gideon and Ofer Kenig. 2018. *From Party Politics to Personalized Politics?: Party Change and Political Personalization in Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rahat, Gideon and Tamir Sheafer. 2007. "The Personalization(s) of Politics: Israel, 1949–2003." *Political Communication* 24(1):65–80.
- Samuels, David. 1999. "Incentives to cultivate a party vote in candidate-centric electoral systems: Evidence from Brazil." *Comparative Political Studies* 32(4):487–518.
- Shugart, Matthew S., Melody Ellis Valdini and Kati Suominen. 2005. "Looking for locals: Voter information demands and personal vote-earning attributes of legislators under proportional representation." *American Journal of Political Science* 49(2):437–49.

- Siavelis, Peter. 2002. "The Hidden Logic of Candidate Selection for Chilean Parliamentary Elections." *Comparative Politics* 34(4):419-438.
URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4146946>
- Snyder, James M. and Michael M. Ting. 2003. "Roll Calls, Party Labels and Elections." *Political Analysis* 11(4):419-444.
- Taylor-Robinson, Michelle M. 2009. Selección de candidatos al Congreso Nacional de Honduras por los partidos tradicionales. In *Selección de candidatos, política partidista y rendimiento democrático*, ed. Flavia Freidenberg and Manuel Alcántara Sáez. Mexico, DF: Tribunal Electoral del Distrito Federal pp. 325-359.
- Wills-Otero, Laura. 2016. "The electoral performance of Latin American traditional parties, 1978-2006: Does the internal structure matter?" *Party Politics* 22(6):758-772.
URL: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068814563971>
- Yildirim, Tevfik Murat, Gülnur Kocapınar and Yüksel Alper Ecevit. 2019. "Staying active and focused? The effect of parliamentary performance on candidate renomination and promotion." *Party Politics* 25(6):794-804.