

Book Review Essay

Inside the Black Box: Recent Studies of Latin American Party Organizations

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Kathleen Bruhn, *Taking on Goliath: The Emergence of a New Left Party and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

Scott P. Mainwaring, *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

James W. McGuire, *Peronism Without Perón: Unions, Parties, and Democracy in Argentina* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Kenneth M. Roberts, *Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Latin American party organizations have received remarkably little scholarly attention. Although this is hardly a new problem (see Blanksten 1960: 479; Martz 1964: 509; Kaufman 1977: 109), it is particularly surprising in the contemporary period. Not only has the demise of authoritarianism in the region increased the number and importance of parties, but the intellectual trend away from marxism to more political and institutional approaches has created a more favorable scholarly environment as well. Yet while a substantial amount of research has been done on non-party organizations such as neighborhood associations, NGOs, “issue networks,” and identity-based social movements,¹ and while the recent “institutionalist” wave has generated important studies of Latin American electoral laws, legislatures, and executive-legislative relations,² studies of party organizations remain conspicuously absent.³

One possible explanation for this paucity of research is that party organizations are simply less important in Latin America than in the advanced industrialized countries. Indeed, more than a generation ago, Douglas Chalmers (1972) suggested that due to long-established patterns of hierarchy, elitism, bureaucratic-corporatism, and patrimonialism, Latin American parties played a lesser role in shaping policy, aggregating interests, and fomenting participation than the class-based parties of Western Europe. More recently, scholars have pointed

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to the influence of mass media technologies and the rise of unmediated, “neopopulist” leaderships as evidence that party organizations are now of little (or declining) importance (Novaro 1994; Perelli 1995).

Yet Latin American party organizations are not as weak as is often believed. At the end of the 1990s, cases of extreme party weakness—such as Peru—remained more the exception than the rule. Large, well-organized, and highly successful parties continued to persist in countries as diverse as Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay. Although these party structures are in many cases non-bureaucratic and even informal, such informality should not be conflated with weakness or lack of organization. Indeed, many of the region’s most successful parties—including the Argentine Justicialista Party (PJ), the Paraguayan Colorados, the Colombian Liberals, and the Mexican Institutionalized Revolutionary Party (PRI)—maintain informal, patronage-based organizations that are both extensive and enduring.

There is good reason to think that these party structures matter. Recent research suggests that parties’ organizational structures shape the way they select candidates (Gallagher and Marsh 1988), engage in coalitional bargaining (Strom 1990; Maor 1998), and respond to external challenges (Koelble 1991; Kitschelt 1994; Levitsky 1998b). Even in countries that are generally thought to have weak parties, such as Brazil and Ecuador, local party structures play an important mediating role as mechanisms for patronage distribution, channels of access to the state, and, most importantly, deliverers of votes. Moreover, strong parties remain critical to the stability and quality of democracy. Rarely in Latin America has effective democratic governance been achieved in the absence of effective parties. In the contemporary period, cases of party failure and party system decomposition have frequently been accompanied by regime crisis (Venezuela) or breakdown (Peru). By contrast, the region’s most successful democracies (Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica, Uruguay) have strong parties.⁴

If Latin American party organizations exist and matter politically, then they need to be better understood. Yet while there exists a long tradition of research on party organizations in Europe (Michels 1911; Duverger 1954/1963; Panebianco 1988) and the U.S. (Ostrogorski 1902; Key 1949; Mayhew 1986), few such studies have been undertaken on Latin American parties. As a result, we know very little about how even some of the region’s largest and most successful parties function internally.⁵

This research gap has important theoretical costs, for it means that many of our assumptions about party behavior in Latin America draw on a body of literature that is based almost entirely on studies of parties in the advanced industrialized countries. Latin American parties differ in important ways from the predominantly European parties upon which most models and theories of parties are based.⁶ First, many Latin American parties are poorly institutionalized.⁷ They are less rooted in society and less “infused with value” by their members, and their internal rules and procedures are often fluid, contested, and widely circumvented or ignored. Second, Latin American parties are more likely to be *informally organized*, in that their “real” structures deviate sub-

stantially from those that are outlined in their statutes. Many are based on patron-client networks or other social networks, and the “rules of the game” that structure the internal life of these parties are often informal as well. Third, Latin American party organizations are often intertwined with—and even embedded in—the state.⁸ Many Latin American parties are born of the state or are built upon patronage networks that essentially fuse them with the state. These differences have important implications for how parties—and politics in general—work. Not only are parties with informal, weakly institutionalized, or state-penetrated structures likely to behave differently than most European parties, but these differences can be expected to have an important impact on the character and functioning of elections, party systems, legislatures, and even political regimes.

Recent Research on Latin American Party Organizations

This article seeks to take stock of the recent literature on Latin American parties and party organizations by examining five recently published studies of major Latin American parties. The books cover parties in six of the region’s largest countries: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, and Mexico.⁹ Beyond providing a detailed account of how these parties work, each of the books analyzes how dimensions such as party strength, institutionalization, and adaptive capacity affect (and are affected by) broader issues such as socio-economic change, economic reform, and the performance and stability of political regimes.

James McGuire’s *Peronism Without Perón: Unions, Parties, and Democracy in Argentina* centers on the relationship between party institutionalization and democracy. The book argues that institutionalized parties are critical to regime stability, particularly in countries with powerful socioeconomic actors. When sectoral elites lack an institutionalized party to channel their interests in the electoral arena, they will have less of a stake in the preservation of democratic institutions and will be more likely to engage in actions that subvert those institutions. The book draws on the case of Argentina, where the Justicialista Party (PJ) was never “infused with value” and trade unions never acquired a strong stake in electoral politics. Unlike more structuralist approaches to Argentine regime instability (O’Donnell 1973), which essentially take the Peronist “populist threat” as given, McGuire attributes it to weak party institutionalization, which he treats as an historically contingent outcome. McGuire thus goes inside Guillermo O’Donnell’s “impossible game,” analyzing the interrelationships among elite strategies, weak party institutionalization, and regime instability.

At the core of the study are two failed efforts at party institutionalization: that of metal workers union leader Augusto Vandor in the 1960s and that of the “Renewal” process in the late 1980s. McGuire characterizes the rise and eventual defeat of *Vandorismo* as a conflict between “routinizing” and charismatic projects. After Perón’s overthrow in 1955, material interests created an incentive for union leaders to seek out stable mechanisms for the channeling of demands. Given that Perón’s return was unacceptable to the military, such a

mechanism would have to be a “neo-peronist” party based on unions and provincial bosses. Yet for Perón, whose primary objective was to maintain control of Peronism and eventually return to power, such an outcome was unacceptable. The book shows how the strategic interaction between Vandor and Perón evolved into a full-scale battle for control of Peronism, and how divisions within the labor movement, which led key union leaders to back Perón over Vandor, helped to ensure Perón’s victory. The defeat of Vandor’s party-building project, McGuire argues, was an important cause of Argentina’s post-1966 regime instability (pp. 145–150). Military leaders viewed the moderate and anti-communist *Vandoristas* as an acceptable political alternative and might well have allowed a Vandor-led PJ to participate in the 1967 election. Hence, if Vandor had succeeded in gaining control of Peronism, organized labor might have been reintegrated into the party system, which might have given the unions a sufficient stake in electoral politics to permit democratic consolidation.

McGuire makes a similar argument about the “Renewal” movement and its aftermath. Although the Renewal faction made unprecedented strides toward party institutionalization in the late 1980s, two factors undermined this process. First, the “15” and Ubaldinista union factions did not invest in the party, but rather pursued their goals through mass mobilization (Ubaldinismo) or direct negotiations with state (the “15”). Second, Carlos Menem’s plebiscitarian leadership “abruptly reversed” the institutionalization process after 1988 (p. 24). Like Perón, Menem disdained party organization, preferring to “cultivate direct, affective links between himself and ordinary Peronists” (p. 212). As president, he largely circumvented the party, encouraging the nomination of outsider candidates for public office (pp. 241–248). In the conclusion, McGuire suggests that Menem’s de-institutionalization of the PJ helped to prevent democratic consolidation in the 1990s (pp. 281–283).

One of the great strengths of *Peronism Without Perón* is that it grounds Peronist behavior in clearly defined interests. For example, the book’s compelling explanation of union alignments in the 1960s, the 1980s, and the 1990s is based on the assumption that Argentine union leaders are power maximizers. Thus, union conflicts are understood as products of “turf battles” or the “balancing” strategies of union leaders seeking to weaken their rivals. Similarly, rather than simply labeling Peronism a charismatic movement and leaving the analysis there, McGuire shows how Perón’s erratic and seemingly irrational behavior helped him maintain control over the movement after 1955. The book thus provides the reader with an excellent understanding of the internal dynamics of a movement that has long been poorly understood.

Among the book’s few shortcomings is its failure to pay adequate attention to the PJ’s *informal* organization, particularly in the post-1983 period. The post-1983 PJ developed a powerful patronage-based organization. Party and union leaders invested heavily in this organization, and by the early 1990s, it had become quite consolidated. This (informal) party-building process continued unabated under Menem, *despite* his anti-party behavior. McGuire’s focus on formal structures leads him to ignore this process, and as a result, he overstates both the PJ’s de-institutionalization and the vulnerability of democracy in the 1990s. A second concern regards the relevance of the book’s central

theoretical claims for other Latin American cases. Argentina is an extreme case in terms of the power of socioeconomic elites: what lessons can be drawn for cases such as Colombia, Ecuador, or Peru, where such actors (particularly labor) have historically been much weaker? These are minor points, however. *Peronism Without Perón* makes a compelling case for the importance of effective parties for democracy, and it provides an unrivaled account of the evolution of the PJ and its impact on Argentine political regimes. It is essential reading for students of Argentine politics.

Scott Mainwaring's *Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: The Case of Brazil* also highlights the negative implications of weak party institutionalization for democracy. Yet rather than focusing on the mediation of class interests, as McGuire does, Mainwaring looks at the problems of democratic governability caused by fluid and highly fragmented party systems. In the absence of party system institutionalization, which is defined as a state in which parties are stable, have strong roots in society, are accorded legitimacy by politicians, and possess strong organizations with "status and value of their own" (pp. 26–27), democratic governance is likely to be imperiled. Thus, weak party institutionalization is associated with high levels of electoral volatility, the rise of personalistic or neo-populist leaderships, policy instability, low accountability, and poor representation of popular sector interests. The book centers on the case of Brazil, seeking to explain both the causes and the consequences of that country's notoriously under-institutionalized party system.

Mainwaring's point of departure is the idea that there are important differences between Latin American party systems and the (predominantly European) cases upon which much of the literature is based. Although this point may come as no surprise to students of Latin American politics, the book breaks new ground in two senses. First, it provides a sophisticated elaboration of these differences, arguing Latin American party systems are less institutionalized, less structured by social cleavages, and more subject to elite reshaping from above than most European party systems. Drawing on the Brazilian case, it usefully highlights the informal and under-institutionalized character of many Latin American parties, as well as the role of the state in shaping (and reshaping) the region's party systems. Second, the book examines the implications of these differences, which Mainwaring finds to be predominantly negative.

The book's central focus is the Brazilian party system, which it characterizes as a case of "extreme multipartism." After providing a rich history of the party system that traces patterns of patrimonialism, personalism, and clientelism from the late nineteenth century through the contemporary period, Mainwaring uses an array of quantitative and qualitative data to demonstrate the extraordinarily fragmented and volatile nature of the Brazilian party system in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The book also examines the internal dynamics of Brazilian parties. With the exception of the Workers Party (PT), Brazil's major parties are informal organizations. Their national leaderships "rarely meet and have little real power," and most lack budgets, professional staffs, and even national headquarters (pp. 154–155). Electoral activity centers around individual politicians, and as a result, party discipline is low and party switching is

relatively common. Mainwaring offers an excellent analysis of the patronage system that binds executives (who use patronage to build legislative majorities), legislative candidates (who rely on clientelistic networks to gain election), and the *cabos eleitorais* (local brokers) who deliver votes in exchange for jobs. In a critique of Downsian approaches to party behavior, Mainwaring shows how the dynamics of patronage politics tend to produce electorally sub-optimal candidates.

Whereas the first half of *Rethinking Party Systems* provides a detailed characterization of Brazil's weakly institutionalized party system, the second half seeks to explain it and assess its consequences. The explanation incorporates macrocomparative, institutional, and rational choice variables. Macrocomparative factors include long-term factors such as social structural fragmentation, late party-building relative to state building and the emergence of patrimonialism, and Brazil's personalistic political culture, as well as more recent factors such as the military's dissolution of the party system in 1965 and 1979, the impact of television, and the economic crisis of the 1980s. Finding that these variables are insufficient to explain party weakness, Mainwaring considers a range of institutional variables. Chapter 8 shows how institutional arrangements such as the open list proportional representation system, decentralized candidate selection processes, and the absence of mechanisms of party discipline favor the cultivation of personal constituencies and individual autonomy, rather than party building. Because most politicians believe that such autonomy best suits their interests, they have repeatedly defended and even strengthened rules that weaken party discipline (pp. 257–259). Chapter 9 shows how federalism and strong presidentialism have also weakened national party organizations.

Mainwaring then turns to the effects of weak party system institutionalization on policy making and democratic governance. He argues that while a strong presidency favors the implementation of economic reforms, party fragmentation, federalism, and—in some, but not all cases—low party discipline tend to undermine it. Presidents have a difficult time building legislative majorities, and the need to “govern through patronage” makes it difficult to cut spending, particularly at the state level (pp. 305–307). The book ably demonstrates how Brazil's institutional structure hindered the economic reform efforts of the Sarney, Collor, and Franco governments, but it has more difficulty explaining the relative success of the Cardoso government. Although Mainwaring attributes these successes to the acute sense of crisis in the 1990s and Cardoso's effective leadership, recent work on the structure of the Brazilian legislature (Cheibub Figueiredo and Limongi 2000) suggests that the executive branch may possess greater legislature leverage than he allows.

Although *Rethinking Party Systems* provides a compelling explanation for Brazil's weakly institutionalized party system, it does so at some cost in terms of parsimony. The book employs so many variables that generalization beyond the Brazilian case becomes difficult. Indeed, although phenomena such as elite reshaping of party systems and weak party institutionalization are present throughout Latin America, in many cases (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay), they are much less pronounced than in Brazil. Another concern regards the book's highly aggregated definition of party system institutionalization (pp.

26–27). The definition incorporates a variety of dimensions (including stability, organizational strength, ideological consistency, internal routinization, and the legitimacy accorded to parties in general), some of which (for example, stability) might be more usefully treated as *products* of institutionalization. The definition also appears to conflate informality and low institutionalization. Informal organization does not necessarily mean lack of institutionalization. Indeed, the patronage-based organizations of parties such as the Party of the Liberal Front (PFL) and the Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement (PMDB) appear to have been rather institutionalized in the 1990s. The book's failure to make this distinction may explain its inability to predict the relative stability of the Brazilian party system in the second half of the 1990. Notwithstanding these minor points, however, *Rethinking Party Systems* is a tour de force. Its combination of theoretical insight and rich empirical content make it a must-read for students of Latin American parties and party systems.

Michael Coppedge's *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela* addresses what is in some ways the opposite problem as that analyzed by McGuire and Mainwaring. Venezuela's main parties, but particularly Democratic Action (AD), were *overly* rooted in Venezuelan society. Thus, "partyarchy," which Coppedge defines as a regime in which "political parties monopolize the electoral process, dominate the legislative process, and penetrate politically relevant organizations to a degree that violates the spirit of democracy" (p. 2), is seen as a major cause of Venezuela's regime crisis in the early 1990s. This book makes two key contributions. First, it offers an insightful analysis of the "partyarchic" roots of the contemporary Venezuelan regime crisis. Second, perhaps more than any book published since John Martz's (1966) excellent study of AD, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks* goes inside a major Latin American party and offers a detailed and compelling analysis of how it works. Building on scholars such as Michels, Panebianco, and Katz, Coppedge treats AD as a complex organization and party behavior as the outcome of internal "power games" involving multiple actors and arenas (pp. 47–48). Going beyond AD's formal structure, the book offers a sophisticated analysis of how informal organizational patterns interact with formal structures. In this sense, it is a model for analyzing the internal dynamics of Latin American parties.

Like Mainwaring, Coppedge seeks to explain how internal "power games" affect party performance. The central focus is on factionalism. Partly as a result of Venezuela's (pre-2000) prohibition of presidential reelection, AD tended to divide when it controlled the presidency, with factions forming around the current president and the leading candidate to succeed him. One of the book's central objectives is to show how these factional struggles, which are the product of the rational, power-maximizing behavior of individual party actors, led AD to adopt sub-optimal electoral strategies. Thus, chapter 3 shows how bitter factional struggles have undermined AD's electoral performance, either by producing major schisms (as in 1968) or hurting the party's overall image (as in 1979). Chapters 4 through 6 analyze the nature and causes of factionalism in AD. Using a survey of party leaders carried out in the mid-1980s, Coppedge shows that factions do not differ along programmatic or ideological lines (pp.

141–145). Rather, they are a product of internal power struggles between “ins,” or leaders with ties to the sitting president, and “outs,” or those who were excluded from top positions in the government and rally around a prospective candidate in order to regain power. Given their lame duck status and the fact that they often choose unpopular party hacks as their successors, sitting presidents tend to lose these factional struggles (pp. 123–128). Coppedge suggests that non-principled factionalism was detrimental not only to AD but to Venezuelan democracy. Echoing Roberto Michels, he bemoans ADs transformation into

a party incapable of preserving or encouraging internal competition between groups with either a different social base or a different ideological perspective. In their pursuit of power, Adecos struggled alongside their ideological adversaries to defeat their ideological allies. For them, power was not a means to a programmatic end; it was an end in itself. (p. 152)

The book then moves to the regime level, attempting to draw links between partyarchy and the regime crisis of the early 1990s. Partyarchy, it argues, has been double-edged for Venezuelan democracy. The system of “strong parties and lame ducks” undoubtedly contributed to regime stability in the 1960s and 1970s (pp. 155–157). Yet partyarchy also tends to suffocate civil society, block off channels of citizen participation, and create top-down, overly disciplined parties (pp. 158–159). This stifling of political and civil society is likely to undermine representation, which may result in a longer-term legitimacy crisis. Thus, Coppedge attributes the 1989 *Caracazo* and the 1992 coup attempts to the fact that “all legitimate channels for expressing...grievances were closed” (p. 160). In the concluding section, Coppedge suggests that other “presidential partyarchies,” such as Chile and Costa Rica, may face similar problems in the future (p. 175).

One problem with this argument is that it fails to adequately distinguish between the specific case of Venezuela and the general phenomenon of presidential partyarchy. Venezuela’s regime crisis was not just a product of “strong parties and lame ducks,” but also a cartel-like collusion between the parties, corruption, and a deep socioeconomic crisis. These elements are not part of the definition of partyarchy given in chapter 2 (pp. 19–20) and are not as strongly present in cases such as Chile and Costa Rica. This leads one to ask whether it was presidential partyarchy per se that caused the crisis in Venezuela, or whether it was the broader context in which the party system was embedded. In the absence of these other factors, it is unclear that strong, disciplined parties and substantial party penetration of civil society is necessarily a recipe for regime crisis. A full explanation of the crisis of Venezuelan democracy must take the changing political and socioeconomic context—and AD’s failure to adapt to those changes—into greater account. It may be the case that the internal dynamics that Coppedge so ably discusses limited AD’s adaptive capacity, but this connection is not made in the book.

Kenneth Roberts’ *Deepening Democracy? The Modern Left and Social Movements in Chile and Peru* builds on the notion that highly structured parties may

have difficulty adapting to political and socioeconomic change. The book centers in large part on the capacity of left wing parties to adapt to changing environmental conditions. It argues that given the crisis of the traditional marxist left, a primary strategy of the left is to “deepen” democracy by “expanding opportunities for direct citizen input, oversight, and participation in the policy-making process and by enhancing the accountability of elected representatives to their constituents” (p. 26).

After introducing the concept of democratic deepening, the book makes a compelling case for why the contemporary Latin American left has failed to attain it. Indeed, one of the book’s great contributions is its compelling discussion of the structural constraints facing the contemporary Latin American left. Roberts’ argument centers on the questions of social structure and collective action. The book presents four structural dimensions that shape the popular sector’s capacity to act collectively: (1) centrality/diffuseness of the cleavage structure; (2) concentration/dispersion of the popular sectors; (3) homogeneity/heterogeneity of popular sector interests; (4) and clarity/ambiguity of conflicts. It then shows how social structural changes such as the decline of the industrial working class and organized labor, the increasing dispersion and heterogeneity of the work force, and the expansion of the informal sector, have left the popular sectors in a structurally weakened state (pp. 61–67). Here Roberts issues a tough critique of much of the literature on Latin American social movements, much of which has focused on the “transformative” capacity of neighborhood associations, NGOs, ecclesial base communities, and human rights groups. This literature, Roberts argues, has tended to ignore the fact that such grassroots organizations are “subject to problems of both collective action and social coordination” and often fall prey to patron-client relationships and the atomized world of informal sector activity (p. 69). A successful deepening project, Roberts argues, requires “social and political coordination” to “translate diverse forms of micro-level collective action into a cumulative process of [macro-level] change” (p. 70). The best means of providing such “horizontal linkage” remains the political party (pp. 73–74).

Roberts devotes the rest of the book to explaining the causes and consequences of diverging left party strategies in Chile and Peru in the 1980s and 1990s. Building on Panebianco (1988), he treats parties’ organizational structures as intervening variables that shape their responses to changing environmental conditions (p. 46). Loosely organized parties are more likely to undertake strategic renovation, for they are more open to external influences, more prone to internal debate, and have more flexible rules of operation and decision making. By contrast, highly structured and institutionalized parties are less prone to rapid change in the face of environmental challenges, as they are less permeable to external influence, permit less internal debate, experience less leadership turnover, and have more complex decision-making rules.

Chile and Peru present contrasting cases of left party strategy in the 1980s and 1990s. In Chile, the communist party’s (PCCh) disciplined and highly institutionalized organization was critical to the party’s survival during the harsh repression of the 1970s, but it limited its capacity to adapt to the changing political climate of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Having adopted an insur-

rectional strategy during the early and mid-1980s, the PCCh did not change course in the post-authoritarian period. Rather, it maintained its marxist program and opted to “bunker down within its core constituencies” (p. 157). As a result, the PCCh’s electoral performance declined precipitously and the party became a relatively marginal player in the political arena. By contrast, the loosely organized Socialist Party (PSCh) was decimated by repression and exile, but this internal chaos permitted a profound internal debate, an influx of new ideas and activists, and, by the time of the democratic transition, a radical change in strategy. The PSCh and its ally, the Party for Democracy, underwent a full-scale renovation, abandoning Marxism for a moderate social democratic platform and foregoing mobilizational or deepening strategies in favor of “democratic self-containment” and an electoralist strategy. This strategy was successful in electoral terms and undoubtedly contributed to the stability of Chilean democracy in the 1990s.

Peru presents a different story. In that country, political and socioeconomic conditions favored the growth of the urban left in the 1970s. Yet because the Peruvian left had little prior experience with democracy and had not suffered a repressive authoritarian regime like its counterparts in the Southern Cone, an important sector of the emerging United Left (IU) was ambivalent toward electoral democracy. Thus, the IU was divided between a more moderate, electoralist wing led by Alfonso Barrantes and a radicalized, ambiguously democratic wing. The conflict between these two tendencies led to rupture of the IU in 1989, which soon resulted in the disintegration of the Peruvian left. Yet the left’s collapse also had structural roots. The economic crisis and massive growth of the informal sector eroded the left’s social base, making a class-based project nearly impossible (pp. 239–244). The IU’s failure opened the way for Alberto Fujimori’s “neo-populist” project, which not only led to the demise of the left but also the collapse of Peruvian democracy in 1992 (pp. 265–268).

The Chile-Peru comparison yields several important conclusions. First of all, the fate of left wing parties was critical to regime outcomes in the 1990s. Where left parties moderated and pursued strategies of “democratic self-containment,” generally at the expense of many of their programmatic goals (Chile), democracy often performed well. Where left parties pursued maximalist strategies and collapsed (Peru), democracy was jeopardized. Yet both strategies fail to achieve the goal of democratic deepening, which lends powerful evidence to Roberts’ suggestion that the structural constraints to democratic deepening—or even social democracy—are prohibitively high in contemporary Latin America. This raises the question of why the book presents democratic deepening as its dependent variable. Beyond explaining its absence, *Deepening Democracy* is not centrally about democratic deepening. Rather, the book examines the diverging strategies of left parties and their capacity to adapt and survive in an increasingly unfavorable political and socioeconomic environment.

Kathleen Bruhn’s *Taking on Goliath: The Emergence of a New Left Party and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico* also deals with the question of left party strategy in a context of economic and political liberalization. Rather than looking at the adaptation of old left or populist parties, however, Bruhn fo-

cuses on the emergence and consolidation of a new left party: the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The book provides a useful theoretical framework for analyzing the emergence of new parties. It makes an important distinction between voter *detachment* from old party identities and *reattachment* to new party identities. Whereas the former creates the conditions for the *emergence* of a new party, the latter is necessary for the *consolidation* of such a party. The book also makes a clear distinction between party emergence and party consolidation, arguing that the conditions, skills, and strategies necessary for party emergence often differ from—and may even run counter to—those necessary for party consolidation (pp. 22–25). Like Roberts, Bruhn offers an historical institutionalist explanation for sub-optimal party strategies. During the “critical juncture” of party emergence, certain organizational structures and strategies are put in place that often have “unintended and often unanticipated consequences for subsequent generations of party leaders.” Hence, parties “may carry with them repertoires of strategies far longer than rational choice might suggest” (p. 25). One of the book’s central arguments is that the “social movement imperative” that emerged during the PRD’s formative period ultimately undermined its capacity to consolidate (p. 25).

Taking on Goliath analyzes both the initial success of *Cardenismo* in the late 1980s and its subsequent failure to consolidate. Bruhn locates the roots of *Cardenismo*—initially the Democratic Current (CD)—in the de la Madrid government’s neoliberal turn, the “technocratization” of the PRI, and the Cardenistas’ exclusion from key positions of power. Yet she also points to the important role of intraparty patronage networks (*camarillas*), such as that established by Cardenas during his term as governor of Michoacán (pp. 75–87). The CD’s defection from the PRI, Bruhn argues, was a product of the de la Madrid leadership’s hardline exclusionary strategy, which broke the PRI’s “informal rule of the game” of co-opting party dissidents (pp. 86, 93–104). Bruhn attributes Cardenas’ 1988 electoral success to both the availability of a large bloc of voters who were disaffected with the government’s economic policies and certain features of *Cardenismo*, including Cardenas’ personal charisma (rooted in memories of his father) and the organizational flexibility of the National Democratic Front (pp. 117–133).

The book then examines *Cardenismo*’s failure to consolidate in the post-1988 period. Bruhn argues that after its formation in 1989, the PRD largely failed to establish a stable set of internal rules and procedures, consolidate its linkages to social movements, build inter-party alliances that might have helped it achieve its democratizing goals, or use its control over municipal governments as bases for party growth. It also proved unable to “convert sympathy for Cardenas into a reliable voting base” (p. 252). Several external factors help to explain this “incomplete consolidation” (p. 205), including the centralized and authoritarian character of the regime and the effective response of the PRI, which included repression, electoral fraud and manipulation, the effective use of the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), and the Salinas government’s strong economic performance. However, several characteristics of the PRD itself also inhibited party consolidation. These characteristics include the fact that the PRD remained a loose coalition of preexisting organiza-

tions that jealously guarded their own autonomy and the party's dependence on Cardenas' personal authority. Consolidation was also undermined by the PRD's "strategic inflexibility" (p. 291). The party's failure to shift from a strategy of mass mobilization and "intransigent confrontation" (p. 218) to one more appropriate to the post-election institutional arena hurt its electoral performance in the 1990s (pp. 291–293). For example, the *Cardenistas*' refusal to negotiate with state actors limited its capacity to act as a mediator for popular sector demands, which facilitated governmental efforts—via PRONASOL—to co-opt popular organizations.

Taking on Goliath is an important contribution to our understanding of the internal dynamics of the PRD, of Mexico's difficult democratic transition, and, more generally, of the challenges facing new parties. However, the book suffers from a lack of comparative perspective, which leads it to draw overly pessimistic conclusions. Party-building is a slow and difficult process. Most new parties fail. In the 1980s and 1990s, many new Latin American left parties suffered debilitating divisions (the Peruvian IU and Venezuelan Causa R), collapsed electorally (the Argentine Intransigent Party and Colombian M-19), or simply remained marginal (the Guatemalan left). Particularly when one takes into account the hostile political environment into which it was born, the fact that the PRD survived and established itself as a major political force was a significant achievement. Indeed, the PRD's electoral performance in the 1990s is comparable to those of the most successful new left parties in the region, including the Brazilian PT, the Argentine Front for a Country in Solidarity (FREPASO), and the Chilean PPD. Moreover, the PRD went much further than either FREPASO or the PPD in building a territorial organization and establishing ties to popular sector organizations. In short, the failure to place the PRD case in comparative perspective leads Bruhn to set the bar too high. Arguably, the PRD's relative *success* in the 1990s requires more explanation than its failure to capture the Mexican presidency.

Comparing the Studies

The five books examined here make several important contributions to the study of Latin American parties. First, they all go inside the "black box" of party organization, treating parties as complex organizations rather than as unitary actors. Thus, they depart from Downsian approaches in that they view party behavior as a product of (or at least shaped by) organizational structure and internal power games. This approach yields some important insights. For example, the authors find that while individual politicians generally seek to maximize power, the way they do so is powerfully shaped by their parties' organizational structures. In Brazil's clientelistic parties, this means highly individuated strategies that include party switching. In more charismatic organizations such as Peronism and—to a lesser extent—the PRD, it means staying on good terms with the party leader. In the more bureaucratic AD, it often means bandwagoning to the leading opponent of the president.

The authors also find that intra-party dynamics often lead parties to adopt sub-optimal strategies. Bruhn and Roberts make the historical institutionalist

argument that the way a party is structured at a particular time often shapes and constrains the strategies it pursues later on. Both authors show how organizational structures and strategies are often “sticky,” in that they do not change as quickly as environmental conditions. Thus, strategies that worked for the *Cardenistas* in 1988 failed in the changed environment of the early and mid-1990s, and the organizational structure that helped the PCCh survive the Pinochet dictatorship limited its capacity to adapt to the new conditions of democratic Chile. Coppedge, Mainwaring, and McGuire focus more on the strategies of individual actors, showing how in certain organizational contexts, individual politicians’ power maximizing strategies may result in sub-optimal party strategies. For example, Coppedge shows how factionalism clearly worked against AD when it was in power, and Mainwaring shows how patronage politics led the PMDB to nominate unappealing candidates in 1989 and 1994.

Another major contribution of these studies is in going beyond party statutes to examine the way parties “really work” in practice. In so doing, they provide important insights into how Latin American party organizations depart from the models that predominate in the literature. For example, Bruhn, Mainwaring, and McGuire draw attention to the poorly institutionalized nature of many Latin American parties. The authors also pay close attention to informal organizational patterns. Thus, Mainwaring highlights the difference between the formal structure of Brazil’s “catch-all” parties and the more decentralized, patronage-base organization that exists “on the ground”; Bruhn highlights the importance of informal party networks in the emergence of *Cardenismo*; and Coppedge and Mainwaring point out the critical brokerage role played by state party bosses. Finally, the authors emphasize the important role of the state in Latin American party formation, development, and behavior. Mainwaring and McGuire link low levels of institutionalization to the fact that parties are born in (and in some case shaped by) the state, and Bruhn explores the problems faced by parties that *fail* to establish effective links to the state.

The books diverge somewhat with respect to the implications of informal and poorly institutionalized party structures. Mainwaring argues that poorly institutionalized parties undermine democratic governance on a variety of fronts: they reduce the quality of representation, hinder policy making, and increase the likelihood that personalistic or “neo-populist” leaders will be elected. Ultimately, these phenomena can be expected to undermine the quality, if not the stability, of democratic regimes. Yet as Coppedge and Roberts point out, there may also be costs to “over-institutionalization.” Highly structured parties such as AD and the PCCh may lack the capacity to adapt quickly to environmental challenges. As the Venezuelan case suggests, a failure to adapt to contemporary processes of political and socioeconomic change may have negative consequences not only for individual parties, but also for party systems and even regimes. By contrast, loosely structured parties, such as the PSCh, the PJ, and the Brazilian parties, tend to be more flexible, which may contribute to their survival during periods of crisis (Levitsky 1998b). In other words, the institutional “weakness” of many Latin American parties may, at least in some circumstances, help them survive crises or periods of rapid change. This is not to suggest that weakly institutionalized parties are preferable to well-institutionalized parties. Such

is certainly not the case. Still, it is worth investigating the potential advantages, as well as the disadvantages, of fluid and informal party structures.

A third contribution of these studies regards the relationship between parties and democracy. All of the authors argue that strong, institutionalized parties are critical for successful democracy. They make a compelling case that non-party organizations such as unions, social movements, and NGOs cannot substitute for effective parties in their role in bringing about (Bruhn), preserving (McGuire), or deepening (Roberts) democracy. Mainwaring and McGuire argue that party strength by itself is insufficient for democratic stability, and that parties must also be valued or accorded legitimacy, both by their members and by society in general.

Although these arguments are largely convincing, three further points are worth considering. The first is Coppedge's suggestion that parties can also be "too strong." In a context of "partyarchy," in which parties heavily penetrate civil society and block independent channels of citizen participation, even relatively successful democratic institutions may lose legitimacy and become vulnerable to breakdown. If Coppedge is correct, then young democracies may be best served by parties that are well-organized and consolidated, but not so strong as to suffocate civil society and not so institutionalized that they cannot adapt to changes in the political and socioeconomic environment. Still, Coppedge's argument must not be taken too far. Strong, disciplined parties and substantial party penetration of civil society existed for years in many European democracies without suffering serious legitimacy crises. Indeed, "strong parties and lame ducks" has been a relatively successful formula for democratic stability in Latin America—much more than the "difficult combination" of strong presidents and weak parties (Mainwaring 1993).

Second, with respect to the relationship between party institutionalization and democracy, the fact that parties are *informally* organized does not necessarily mean that they are *poorly* institutionalized. Informal organizations, such as those based on patronage networks, may in fact be institutionalized (O'Donnell 1996). This may have important implications for democracy. Thus, McGuire and Mainwaring's failure to adequately distinguish between informal and weakly institutionalized organizations leads them to understate the degree to which the PJ and the Brazilian catch-all parties are institutionalized, which may lead them to draw overly pessimistic conclusions about the fate of contemporary Argentine and Brazilian democracy.

A third point to consider is the impact of the generalized trend toward weaker party identities and less stable party organizations. Stable mass party organizations such as those seen in postwar Chile and Venezuela are increasingly rare in Latin America. Long-term technological and social structural changes have eroded party loyalties and diminished the importance of party organization throughout the region, inducing an increasing number of politicians and voters to abandon established parties. This generalized process of party weakening was exacerbated by the profound socioeconomic crisis of the 1980s, which in some cases (Peru, Venezuela) contributed to the discrediting and collapse of entire party systems. Although cases such as Peru and Venezuela are certainly extreme, the phenomena of candidate-centered politics and fluid, personalistic parties appear increasingly common. Consequently, scholars may need to re-

think the models of party organization upon which their analyses are based. In pointing to the organizational weaknesses of the PRD and the Brazilian “catch-all” parties, for example, Bruhn and Mainwaring are clearly working from older mass party models. Yet it is worth asking whether such models remain useful as points of comparative reference. Along similar lines, although the importance of strong parties to democratic governance has been clearly established, it may nevertheless be necessary to think about the kinds of strategies and institutional innovations that may help make democracy work in the *absence* of such parties. Brazil, a democracy with a notoriously unstable party system that has nevertheless made important gains in terms of democratic governance, might provide some insights into this question.

A Research Agenda

Although the books considered in this article make a substantial contribution to our knowledge about Latin American parties and party systems, important empirical, conceptual, and theoretical gaps remain to be filled. In the empirical realm, we lack even basic data on most Latin American party organizations. We know virtually nothing about many parties’ membership levels and organizational densities, and we have little data—from surveys, for example—on party members.¹⁰ Indeed, none of the books considered here provide a substantial amount of data or analysis in these areas. Although this empirical gap may be partly attributed to the fact that many Latin American parties do not keep extensive or accurate records, a more serious effort must nevertheless be made to collect such data.

We also need better *qualitative* data on how Latin American parties function “on the ground.” Obtaining such data requires that we go beyond party statutes to examine parties’ informal structures. Such research would examine the nature of—and eventually measure and compare—the various forms of (often informal and even illegal) party-state linkages that exist in the region. It would also explore parties’ linkages to society. Scholars of Latin American politics have emphasized the weakness of party-society linkages, which they have associated with unmediated, populist (or “neo-populist”) leaderships. Yet they have often understated the—often informal—linkages that do exist, including clientelistic, ex-guerrilla,¹¹ military,¹² and paramilitary¹³ networks, and ties to unions¹⁴ and a diversity of grassroots organizations.¹⁵

Scholars’ capacity to carry out comparative and theoretical work on Latin American parties hinges to a large extent on the existence of a basic pool of data and knowledge on those parties. Students of European parties draw from a wealth of empirically rich comparative and case studies. Recent conceptual and theoretical innovations by scholars such as Angelo Panebianco (1988), Herbert Kitschelt (1994), and Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1994, 1995) would have been impossible were not it for the existence of a substantial amount of secondary material on those parties. No such pool of knowledge and data exists for Latin American parties.

In the conceptual realm, students of Latin American parties have tended to rely on terms—such as “electoral-professional” party (Panebianco 1988) and

“catch-all” party (Kirchheimer 1966)—that have emerged out of the European and American literatures. Such uncritical conceptual borrowing can bring important costs in terms of analytical differentiation, for it does not allow scholars to capture the differences between Latin American and European parties. Moreover, it limits our ability to differentiate among Latin America’s diverse party organizations. For example, “catch-all party” has become such a catch-all category that it has come to include mass labor-mobilizing parties such as AD and the PJ (Dix 1989: 27; Kvaternik 1995: 9), personalistic parties such as the National Odrísta Union (Dix 1989: 27), clientelistic parties such as the Brazilian PFL (Mainwaring 1999), and modern media-based parties such as the Chilean PPD (Plumb 1998) and Argentine FREPASO (Abal Medina 1998). Indeed, it is difficult to think of a major Latin American party that has *not* been described as a catch-all party. A term that cannot distinguish between the mass-based PJ and the media-based FREPASO has little analytical value. Theory-building about the causes and effects of certain party structures requires greater analytic differentiation than labels such as “catch-all” party and “electoral professional” party provide. Scholars must therefore develop conceptual frameworks that permit them to differentiate along dimensions such as organizational density, level of institutionalization, degree and type of state penetration, and the nature of party-society linkages.

Finally, in the theoretical realm, important questions remain unanswered regarding both the causes and consequences of Latin American party organizations. One potential area of research lies in explaining the diversity of Latin American party organizations. Scholars of European parties have often observed a degree of convergence around certain organizational types, such as the “mass,” (Duverger 1954/1963), “catch-all” (Kirchheimer 1966), “electoral-professional” (Panebianco 1988), or “cartel” (Katz and Mair 1995) models. Latin America continues to exhibit a relatively wide array of party types, ranging from traditional clientelistic parties to mass labor-based parties to media-based personalistic parties. One challenge for scholars is to explain this diversity. Why do political entrepreneurs continue to invest in party organization in some contexts (Argentina, Mexico, Uruguay) but not others (Peru and perhaps Venezuela)? Are these different outcomes explained by institutional arrangements, environmental factors such as media technologies and social structure, or specific historical developments?

Another potential area of research lies in explaining the *consequences* of informal and weakly institutionalized party structures. Although it is clear that Latin American parties differ in important ways from their European counterparts, we still do not know a lot about how (and to what extent) those differences matter. What, for example, are the implications of weakly institutionalized and informal organization for parties’ candidate selection processes, legislative behavior, and capacity to adapt? How does it affect voting behavior and the quality of representation? What are the implications of such organizational structures for the quality and stability of democracy? Although the authors discussed here begin to explore these questions, much research remains to be done.

Parties remain central actors in democratic politics. Though often more fluid and informal than European parties, many Latin American parties are never-

theless well-organized, enduring, and highly successful. Yet until very recently, the wave of institutionalist studies in Latin America has largely passed over party organizations. Notwithstanding the important contributions of the books examined in this article, we continue to know relatively little about how Latin American parties work. Theoretically informed, yet contextualized, research on the internal structure of Latin American parties would improve our understanding of important aspects of the political process, including candidate selection, coalition formation, legislative behavior, and the linkages between citizens and the state. It would also help to strengthen the theoretical and conceptual bridge between Latin American parties and a literature that remains confined primarily to advanced industrialized cases.

Notes

1. See Alvarez (1990), Escobar and Alvarez (1992), Foweraker (1995), Oxhorn (1995), Chalmers et. al. (1997), Alvarez, Escobar, and Dagnino (1998), and Keck and Sikkink (1998).
2. See Shugart and Carey (1992), Ames (1995), Jones (1995), Nohlen (1995), Carey (1996), Mainwaring and Shugart (1997), Carey and Shugart (1998), Cheibub Figueiredo and Limongi (2000), and Morgenstern and Nacif (forthcoming).
3. An important exception is the comparative study of Latin American party organizations currently being undertaken by Manuel Alcántara and his colleagues at the University of Salamanca.
4. Strong parties can also contribute to the stability of authoritarian regimes, as in Mexico and Paraguay.
5. Partial exceptions include the Brazilian Workers Party (Keck 1992) and Venezuela's Democratic Action (AD) (Martz 1966, Coppedge 1994).
6. This point is developed by Chalmers (1972), Dix (1989), Levitsky (1998b), and Mainwaring (1999).
7. See Dix (1992), Mainwaring and Scully (1995a), McGuire (1997), Levitsky (1998b), and Mainwaring (1999).
8. Although public financing has greatly strengthened party-state links in Europe in recent years (Katz and Mair 1994), in Latin America, these linkages tend to be both more pronounced and less formalized.
9. Other outstanding books on Latin American parties that are not considered in this article include Keck's (1992) study of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT), Scully's (1992) work on the Chilean center, the collection of essays in Mainwaring and Scully (1995b), Gibson's (1996) work on the Argentine right, and Middlebrook's (2000) comparative study of Latin American conservative parties.
10. The large-scale comparative project currently being undertaken by Manuel Alcántara and his colleagues at the University of Salamanca, which includes surveys of members of 70 Latin American parties, will be an important step forward in this regard.
11. Examples include the Colombian Patriotic Union (UP) and M-19, the Nicaraguan Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), and the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN).
12. Examples include the Salvadoran National Conciliation Party (PCN) and the Argentine Movement for Dignity and National Independence (MODIN).
13. Examples include the Salvadoran Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA).
14. Examples include the PJ, AD, the Mexican PRI, the Brazilian PT, and Venezuela's Causa R.
15. Examples include the PT and, to a lesser extent, the Mexican PRD.

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Latinos in Los Angeles vote too, electing pro-immigrant representatives and helping make California (a state that once elected Ronald Reagan governor) among the most pro-Democrat of the 50 states. The mayor of Los Angeles and key leaders in the state legislature are of Latin American descent. Over the decades I've seen traditions such as Cinco de Mayo spread across the country to heartland towns such as Garden City, Kansas; Lexington, Nebraska; and Wilder, Idaho. The city council in Wilder meets in a former bank that serves as city hall. Inside the Black Box: Recent Studies of Latin American Party Organizations Steven Levitsky Kathleen Bruhn, Taking on Goliath: The Emergence of a New Left Party and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997). Michael Coppedge, Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Recent Research on Latin American Party Organizations This article seeks to take stock of the recent literature on Latin American parties and party organizations by examining five recently published studies of major Latin American parties. The books cover parties in six of the regions largest countries: Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Peru, and Mexico. 2001. "Inside the Black Box: Recent Studies of Latin American Party Organizations." Studies in Comparative International Development 36, No. 2 (summer): 92-110. 2001. "An Organized Disorganization": Informal Organization and the Persistence of Local Party Structures in Argentine Peronism." Journal of Latin American Studies 33, No. 1 (February): 29-66. [Also published in Revista de Ciencias Sociales, Argentina, October 2001]. 2000. "The Normalization of Argentine Politics."