

The Causes and Consequences of Populism:
Programmatic Representation Before and After the “Left Turn”
in Latin America

Dr. Simon Bornschieur
Institute for Political Science
University of Zurich
Switzerland

siborn@ipz.uzh.ch

Abstract

Why are populist challengers successful in some countries, but not in others? And what are the consequences of populism for representation? This article argues and shows that while the failure of party systems to represent voters’ programmatic policy preferences fosters populist success, the capacity of populists to restore the system’s responsiveness depends on whether they follow “pure populist” or “programmatic populist” paths to power. The former is a top-down form of populism, while the latter is coupled with bottom-up organizational structures that make party elites accountable to voters. I substantiate these claims using an innovative measure of party system responsiveness focusing on four emblematic cases of left-wing parties that came to power during Latin America’s “left turn”. While mainstream parties absorbed the left-wing momentum in Uruguay and Brazil, the populist left staged a breakthrough in Venezuela and Bolivia. But only in Bolivia did populism restore responsiveness.

The Causes and Consequences of Populism: Programmatic Representation Before and After the “Left Turn” in Latin America

Introduction

The notion that populism thrives due to failures of representation is widespread both among scholars of populism, as well as in the discourse of populist actors themselves. While a very broad literature on specific cases and world regions has lent plausibility to this basic claim, there is little research that has actually leveraged differences in party system responsiveness to explain why populist challengers are successful in some cases and not in others. Even less work addresses the corollary question whether – and if yes under which conditions – populist parties may help to improve the representation of citizens’ substantive policy preferences.

This paper develops a general theoretical framework to determine the mobilization space for challenging parties in general and populists in particular, and to explain the latter’s impact on programmatic representation. It then applies this model to Latin America’s “left turn”, which saw the breakthrough of populist parties in some countries and the reassertion of moderate left parties in others. In building the model, I draw on traditional, cleavage-based or spatial accounts of party competition on the one hand, and the ideational approach to populism on the other. The latter conceives of populism as an ideology that pits “the people” against a corrupt and self-serving elite (c.f. Mudde

and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Hawkins *et al.*, 2018). Both approaches converge in identifying the mobilization space available to political outsiders as defined by failures of democratic representation. The cross-fertilization of these two approaches is particularly productive when it comes to predicting the degree to which populists are able to alleviate representation deficits by giving voice to citizens that lacked representation before. Cleavage theorists, on the one hand, would expect successful newcomers to occupy spatial positions that lacked representation by the established parties, thereby improving the representation of voters' substantive policy preferences. Populism scholars, on the other hand, would either argue that the policy positions of populists are at best vague, or that these actors mobilize on a distinct populism/anti-populism dimension (e.g., Andreadis and Stavrakakis 2017).

I suggest that both scenarios are plausible and that the impact of populism on representation depends on the kind of organization that populist movements adopt. If populists create strong mechanisms of accountability that link the party with its core constituencies this is propitious to programmatic representation. Populist movements that lack structures for bottom-up influence in policy-formulation, on the other hand, produce party elites that share little interest in establishing mechanisms that align the party and its voters programmatically. This "pure" type of populism is unlikely to improve party system responsiveness.

Applying this model to Latin America's "left turn", I suggest three distinct paths of the left to power – with important consequences for party system responsiveness: a "pure programmatic" path, a "pure populist" path, and a "programmatic populist" path that combines features of the two others. Leftist parties in Uruguay and Brazil pursued a "pure programmatic" strategy, while Chavismo in Venezuela followed the "pure populist path". The most novel and interesting, however, is the "programmatic

populist” path pursued by Evo Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) in Bolivia, which meshed populist appeals with strong substantive ideological claims. This difference between Venezuela and Bolivia can be explained in terms of the distinctive organizational features of these movements. In methodological terms, this article follows the approach to measuring party system responsiveness outlined by Bornschier (2020), measuring the relative correspondence between the preferences of voters and the positions of the parties they vote for.¹ The advantage of this strategy is that it can be used when the positions of parties and voters have not been measured on the same scale. To test my hypotheses, I measure party system responsiveness before and after the “left turn” in the four countries mentioned above, which are representative of the variety of left-wing parties that arrived in power during the “left turn”.

The role of populism in Latin America’s “left turn”

Some of the left-wing parties that came to govern in the post-neoliberal era resemble classical mass parties and have taken decades to institutionalize. This type is denoted as moderate in the literature because these parties have tended to respect economic constraints and political opposition. A different type of left parties appeals to voters by mobilizing against the political establishment. Parties of the latter type have been labeled “contestatory”, “radical”, or “populist” left because they present a more profound challenge to the status quo both in terms of rhetoric and action (e.g., Weyland 2010; Levitsky and Roberts 2011). For the sake of simplicity, and due to the key role

¹ I draw here on Wlezién’s (2017) terminology, who suggests to use the term responsiveness to denote the relative fit between parties and voters. The term does not imply assessment of the over-time adaptation of parties to voter preferences.

of their discourse, I will label parties belonging to the latter group simply as “populist left”. Indeed, the recent literature on populism shows that the left in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador employed populist appeals, warranting this (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Roberts 2015; Rovira Kaltwasser 2015).

A number of explanations of the divergent outcomes of the “left turn” in Latin America are founded on the basic idea that populist challengers succeed where party systems lack responsiveness (e.g., Morgan 2011; Seawright 2012; Roberts 2014; Lupu 2016; Handlin 2017). Most of this work adopts a different empirical approach, however, and does not explicitly measure programmatic representation both in cases of populist success and failure. Furthermore, most of the work has focused on rather remote causes of populist breakthrough, such as historical patterns of party system responsiveness (Bornschieer 2019), the behavior of parties during the neoliberal critical juncture (Roberts 2014), or the dilution of party brands (Lupu 2016).

This paper adopts a novel approach to assessing the representation failure hypothesis that explicitly assesses to which degree party systems reflect the preferences of voters. Furthermore, it argues and shows that the “left turn” itself had the capacity to put the party system on a track towards responsiveness. While party systems were characterized by similarly low levels of responsiveness prior to the rise of Chavismo in Venezuela and MAS in Bolivia, the latter triggered a realignment of the party system, while the former did not.

The political space for populist challengers

According to the historical cleavage approach, the capacity of new political actors to rally voters is limited by voters' existing partisan alignments (Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Mair 1997: pp. 162–171; Bornschier 2010; Kitschelt et al. 2010; Roberts 2014). In the long term, cleavage stability requires parties to occupy sufficiently distinctive spatial positions along the dominant divides in the party system and reflect the evolving preferences of voters (Adams, de Vries and Leiter 2011; Evans and de Graaf 2013; Bornschier 2019). This comes close both to the Downsian spatial perspective (Downs 1957) and the “responsible party model” (APSA 1950), which insists that responsiveness requires voters to choose parties according to the latter’s distinctive offerings. Following Wlezien (2017), I use the term “responsiveness” even if no over-time adaptation of policy in response to public opinion is actually measured.²

In the context of the “left turn”, I hypothesize that the presence of a moderate left-wing party that credibly defends state intervention against parties of the right that favor market liberalism, limits the mobilization space for left-wing populist challengers. An incremental and arduous strategy of trial and error afforded the moderate left with rather nuanced understandings of what their voters want and what their most promising programmatic profile is likely to be (c.f., Budge 1994). If the space to the left is occupied by this type of party, voters with state interventionist preferences remain committed to a strategy of political change within the existing party system – even if that change is incremental (Roberts 2014).

2 The term “congruence” should be avoided where the correspondence between parties and voters cannot be assessed in absolute terms, as is the case with the data that I use. “Responsiveness” then refers to an assessment of the relative match between party positions and voter preferences (e.g., do more left-leaning voters support more leftist parties and do more right-leaning voters support more rightist parties). See Wlezien (2017) for an extensive discussion of these terms.

A potential for more radical party system change arises, on the other hand, when parties converge in their spacial positions and the party system loses touch with voters. Although this provides opportunities for entrepreneurs according to a spatial logic (see also de Vries and Hobolt 2020), it does not immediately translate into populist success. This is because existing parties – and especially fringe parties – have strong incentives to fill the political void that is created if major parties in the system abandon their programmatic distinctiveness and try to “cartelize” competition (Kitschelt 2000). The crucial question, then, is whether non-populist challenger parties are able to offer a credible alternative to mainstream parties. Only if existing parties that offered alternatives to the mainstream have themselves diluted their profile or entered coalitions with established players does the populist potential emerge. This also accounts for the finding that the erosion of political support accompanies the emergence of populist challengers (Doyle 2011; Handlin 2017): Populists are often successful only after several non-populist challengers have failed to resolve responsiveness deficits. A focus on party system responsiveness is thus crucial in understanding whether and when (in temporal terms) the remote causes or “critical junctures” discussed earlier – long-term dealignment, programmatic shifts during the neoliberal reform phase in the 1980s, brand dilution, or state failure – on actually result in the breakthrough of populist actors.

Because the perspective developed so far is based on established models of party competition, it draws heavily on evolving programmatic linkages between parties and voters. In party systems characterized by multiple linkage strategies, programmatic dealignment may create space for populist actors only to the extent that alternative linkage strategies such as clientelism are exhausted (Lyne 2008, Morgan 2011). The availability of linkage strategies other than ideology and programs can clearly reduce or retard the mobilization potential for challengers, as Morgan’s (2011) work has

shown. Because my aim in this article is to develop an empirical approach to measuring party system responsiveness, my focus on programmatic linkages is a pragmatic choice. However, by the onset of the “left turn”, austerity politics had reduced the leeway for clientelism to an extent that allows me to hold this factor constant to a large degree.

Two populist paths to power and their implications for responsiveness

Having established that responsiveness deficits are a precondition for populist success, the intriguing question is whether populist actors can restore programmatic responsiveness. Extant theorizing is ambiguous in this regard (e.g., Huber and Ruth 2017). In this paper, I argue that populist challengers vary in their propensity to bring the party system back in touch with voters’ programmatic preferences. The reason is that populism is not a binary concept (e.g., Hawkins et al. 2018), and that challengers mix programmatic and populist strategies to varying degrees. A large literature agrees that the very nature of populism is to bring in hitherto neglected preferences and interests, notwithstanding the danger it represents for the liberal component of democracy (e.g., Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Pappas 2016; Caramani 2017; Ruth 2018; Anduiza et al. 2019). But the literature on populism has not theorized the conditions that make it more likely for some populist actors to alleviate responsiveness deficits than others.

I argue that populists’ their capacity to improve responsiveness depends on their willingness to respond to and represent not only their voters’ populist worldview (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove 2014), but also their more substantive policy

preferences.³ This is more likely to be the case if populist movements exhibit organizational features that hold party elites accountable and allow for input into policy-making from the grass roots. Organizations that foster accountability not only set limits to the party leadership, they also force the party leadership to communicate and explain the programmatic or ideological nature of their policy choices. Sometimes, they even convince activists and voters of these choices. Organizational features of this type are characteristic of “movement parties” (Anria 2018). Populist parties with organizational structures that are heavily top-down in nature, on the other hand, rally an electoral coalition is held together by little more than resentment against established elites and the claim that the true preferences of the people ought to be represented. In this case, policies and ideology may play a very limited role.⁴

The organizational structure of populist forces shapes, in other words, how they blend programmatic and populist electoral appeals. For “pure” populists, the populist element trumps any substantive ideology, and populist is enacted top-down. For “programmatic populists”, on the other hand, substantive ideologies are crucial in their communication with voters: Although even programmatic populists routinely appeal to “the people” (they would not be populist otherwise), their appeal is strongly shaped by non-populist ideological features, and these features are negotiated between them and their voters. As a consequence, for all their broad anti-elite rhetoric, they end up rallying specific segments of the electorate, namely those voters who (1) share their convictions in terms of substantive ideological traits and policy preferences, and (2) whose preferences are not adequately represented by the established parties, making them

3 Van Hauwaert and van Kessel (2018) show that populist attitudes and substantive policy preferences can play independent roles in shaping populist voting in nine European countries. See also Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert (2020).

4 Irrespective of their organizational type, both movements are clearly populist in terms of their adoption of populism’s thin ideology. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) and Roberts (2015) concur in maintaining that populism can be enacted from above, or from below.

available for mobilization. The second element explains why the populist message resonates, while the first aligns populist parties and their voters in substantive policy terms. The purely populist and the predominantly programmatic variants of populism are obviously ideal types and between them lies a spectrum. Where new parties are located on the spectrum determines what their effect on party system responsiveness is likely to be.

In emphasizing the role of party organization in distinguishing between more purely populist and more strongly programmatic types of populism, I draw on one of the most productive strands of the literature on the “left turn”. Extant work has shown that in terms of organization, left-wing parties in Latin America are more diverse than the simple distinction between the populist and the moderate left would suggest (Roberts 2006; Panizza 2009: chap. 8; Levitsky and Roberts 2011, Anria 2018; Anria and Cyr 2017). Levitsky and Roberts’ (2011) contrast between centralized and dispersed structures of authority within parties is particularly relevant here. I hypothesize that this dimension shapes the degree to which parties can be held accountable by specific groups of voters. Populist parties with firm roots in social movements and parties’ grass-roots organizations are likely to foster responsiveness, based on the logic outlined above. Whether left parties cultivate links with labor unions, or rather with associations representing popular-sector interests (Handlin and Collier 2011), these linkages provide channels for voters to influence parties’ policy positions and hold parties accountable to their constituencies.

To which extent populist parties respond to their voters’ programmatic preferences heavily impinges on the overall responsiveness of the party system. Both types of populism engender strong opposition as populists gain executive power or come close to doing so. But this polarization differs in kind, mirroring the way populists themselves

mobilize their voters. Pure populism is likely to result in a polarization along a populism-anti-populism dimension largely devoid of other policy content. If resistance against populism centers on the defense of liberal democratic institutions, it is likely to remain ideologically heterogeneous otherwise. Programmatic populism, on the other hand, can be expected to elicit polarization around substantive policy dimensions, thereby strengthening programmatic representation. For these reasons, I expect the type of populism to influence not only the substantive representation of populist voters themselves, but also the larger patterns of opposition that affect the responsiveness of the party system as a whole.

Generating expectations: The organizational structure of populist parties in Venezuela and Bolivia

The cases of Venezuela and Bolivia clearly illustrate two alternative organizational structures. The structure of the Chavista movement in Venezuela neither provides channels for input into policy making from the grass roots, nor strong mechanisms for holding party leaders accountable. The literature describes the Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela (United Socialist Party of Venezuela, PSUV), as well as its predecessor, the Movimiento Quinta República (Movement for the Fifth Republic, MVR), as exhibiting a centralized structure with little opportunities for grassroots input (Hawkins and Hansen 2006, Levitsky and Roberts 2011, Panizza 2009: chap. 8). Although the Chavista movement made considerable investments into organization building, in particular in terms of a dense network of state-sponsored associations (Handlin and Collier 2011; Handlin 2013), the structure of the relationships between leadership

circles and these associations does not allow popular demands to be channeled into policy making (Hawkins 2010: chaps. 6 and 7, Morgan 2018: 319-321). In the absence of mechanisms for interest aggregation, the provision of goods and addressing community demands need not align the party with its voters in programmatic policy terms, because voters remain unaware of national political issues. Venezuela, in other words, is located close to the “pure” populist pole regarding Chavismo’s path to power. For Chavista voters, the movement’s socialist rhetoric is likely to have remained subordinate to its populist appeal. Consequently, populism in Venezuela is unlikely to have improved the responsiveness of the party system along the state-market dimension of conflict.

The Bolivarian Movement for Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS), on the other hand, is the prime example of a “movement populist party” (Levitsky and Roberts 2011, Anria 2018). Due to this specific organizational trait, it followed the programmatic populist path. Although Evo Morales adopted a populist discourse especially in the party’s early years (Andreadis and Ruth-Lovell 2018), and his followers continued to perceive him as an outsider (Castanho Silva 2019), its origins in social movements sets MAS apart from its Venezuelan counterpart. These movements link the party to specific social constituencies, and instill mechanisms of accountability that provide bottom-up channels for policy-input (Silva 2017). Anria (2018), Anria and Cyr (2017) and Anria and Niedzwiecki (2016) show that MAS has a pluralistic structure in which different sectors are integrated into the party organization, voice their concerns and participate in the definition of the party’s programmatic positions. This points to the existence of strong programmatic linkages between voters and MAS that are likely to strengthen the party’s representative function. Similar to the cleavage-based linkages that establish mechanisms of reciprocal influence between parties and their voters

(Disch 2011), I anticipate that programmatic populism in Bolivia improved the ability of the party system to mirror voters' substantive policy preferences.

Research design

The analysis that follows focuses on four emblematic cases in which left-wing parties came to power during Latin America's post-1998 "left turn". I start out by selecting two cases where a scholarly consensus exists that their most important left-wing parties belong to the moderate left group, namely, the Frente Amplio (FA) in Uruguay and the Workers' Party (PT) in Brazil (Levitsky and Roberts 2011; Weyland, Madrid and Hunter 2010). The Frente Amplio was founded in 1971 and has roots that are even older because it was created by various existing left-wing parties, the Christian Democrats, progressive factions from the two traditional parties, and social movements (Luna 2007). The PT was founded in 1980, during Brazil's transition to democracy (Keck 1992). Bolivia and Venezuela, on the other hand, have left-wing parties that most observers classify as belonging to the radical, contestatory, or populist left (e.g., Weyland 2010; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Roberts 2015; Rovira Kaltwasser 2015).

To reiterate, my expectations with respect to the four cases are thus as follows. Based on the hypothesis that representation failure is a precondition for populist success, I expect party system responsiveness to have been substantially lower in Bolivia and Venezuela than in Uruguay and Brazil prior to the "left turn". My second hypothesis is that both the pure programmatic and the programmatic-populist paths to power foster (or maintain) party system responsiveness, while the pure populist path does not. Based

on the preceding discussion of populist parties' internal organization and the type of conflict they trigger within the party system, I thus expect the appearance of MAS in Bolivia to have improved responsiveness. In Venezuela, on the other hand, this is unlikely to have been the case with the rise of Chavismo.

Having laid out the expectations, Table 1 specifies the research design to test them. Apart from listing the left's path to power (programmatic, programmatic-populist, or pure populist), it specifies the crucial period before the left-wing challenge that the analysis starts out with. Except for Uruguay, where the left was well entrenched already in the 1980s (Luna 2007, 2014), the data available from the mid-1990s is ideal to analyze party system responsiveness just before the left became a serious contender in national elections during the "left turn". Hence, while PT's Lula da Silva came close to winning the presidency in 1989 against Collor de Mello in Brazil, he was far less successful in 1994 and 1998, and it is only after a profound transformation of the party that it became a contender for power again in 2002 (Hunter 2010). The first point in time for Brazil with suitable data is close to the 1994 elections.

The left-wing challenge is more recent and occurred more suddenly in Bolivia and Venezuela. In Venezuela, candidates from the established parties still dominated the 1993 elections, which I focus on to assess responsiveness prior to Hugo Chávez running for president in 1998.⁵ In Bolivia, Evo Morales finished second in the 2002 elections, only slightly behind the victorious Sánchez de Lozada, and MAS can be considered a serious challenger from then on. The data available allows for the analysis of two elections before the emergence of MAS in the Bolivian case, namely, those of 1993 and 1998. To assess the effect of populism on representation, the analysis then focuses on

⁵ Chávez had founded the Movement for the Fifth Republic party (MVR) only a year before successfully running for president.

the elections from which populist challengers emerged victorious in Venezuela and Bolivia. Where possible, I add further time points – including the most recent elections for which data is available – to corroborate the stability of the results.⁶ For reasons of space, the discussion of party system responsiveness after the “left turn” in the main text will focus on the populist cases. The further trajectories for the moderate left cases are presented and discussed in Appendix E.

Table 1: Cases, data sources, and types of left-wing parties

Country	Crucial period prior to left challenge	Time points used in analysis	Proximate election	Path to power	Left parties
Uruguay	1980s	1996 (PELA) – 1996 (WVS)	1994	Programmatic	FA
		2005 (PELA) – 2005 (WVS)	2004		
		2010 (PELA) – 2010 (LAPOP) ^a	2009		
Brazil	1980s/1990s	1997 (BLS) ^b – 1995 (LB)	1994	Programmatic	PT
		2005 (PELA) ^b – 2002 (ESEB)	2002		
		2011 (PELA) ^b – 2007 (LAPOP)	2006		
Venezuela	Before 1998	1995 (PELA) – 1996 (WVS)	1993	Pure populist	PSUV/MVR
		2000 (PELA) – 2000 (WVS)	1998		
Bolivia	Before 2002	1996 (PELA) – 1996 (LB) ^c	1993	Programmatic-populist	MAS
		1998 (PELA) – 1998 (LB)	1997		
		2003 (PELA) – 2004 (LB)	2002		
		2006 (PELA) – 2005 (LB) ^a	2005		
		2010 (PELA) – 2010 (LAPOP)	2009		

Key to data sources: PELA: Surveys of Latin American Legislators (<https://oir.org.es/pela/>); BLS: Brazilian Legislative Survey (<https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=hdl:1902.1/14970>); WVS: World Values Survey (www.worldvaluessurvey.org); LB: Latinobarómetro (www.latinobarometro.org); ESEB: Estudo Eleitoral Brasileiro, CESOP/FGV/BRASIL02.DEZ-01838 (available at: www.cesop.unicamp.br); LAPOP: Latin American Public Opinion Project (<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>).

^a To assess the robustness of the results, the analysis was also conducted using alternative mass-level datasets for two time points for which more than one data source was available. For Uruguay in 2009, I used the 2011 WVS, while for Bolivia in 2005 the 2006 LAPOP survey. The results remain substantially unaltered, and are presented in Appendix B.

^b In Brazil, the elite surveys were conducted towards the end of the legislature, in contrast to the other cases (see discussion in Appendix F).

^c Bolivia is not included in the 1995 Latinobarómetro, but the 1996 wave – while being more remote from the elections in 1993 – is temporally close to the elite survey.

⁶ In Venezuela, the last time point available in the elite data is 2000, and the analysis therefore ends there, after the Chavista movement gained power. Mass-level data is available also for subsequent years, but includes very few opposition voters.

The most important dimension of party competition in South America is the economic state-market dimension, as observers agree (Rueschemeyer, Huber Stephens and Stephens 1992; Collier and Collier 2002; Moreno 1999; Wiesehomeier and Benoit 2009; Wiesehomeier and Doyle 2012). This is the dimension I focus on to gauge the mobilization space for challenger parties. Measuring party system responsiveness along this dimension requires data at two levels: the level of party positions and the level of voter preferences. At the party level, I rely on information from the University of Salamanca Surveys of Latin American Legislators (PELA) or the Brazilian Legislative Survey (BLS). I then match the elite data with mass-level survey data from proximate time points. Wherever possible, I have relied on data either from the World Values Survey (WVS) or the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP), since these surveys offer more representative samples, as well as a wide range of items to operationalize the economic dimension. A more detailed discussion of the choice of data and the way party preference is measured can be found in Appendix A. The data available on party positions and voter preferences thus allows for the analysis of at least one time point before the challenge of the left (or even two in the case of Bolivia).

Measuring party system responsiveness

The quality of representation has frequently been assessed by looking at the correspondence between the political preferences of voters and their representatives (Dalton, 1985; Powell, 2000; Luna and Zechmeister, 2005). This is the strategy used here. As already discussed, and drawing on Wleziën (2017), I refer to *responsiveness* rather than congruence between voter preferences and party positions because the data

at hand does not allow for a measure of the absolute congruence between the positions of legislators and voters.

I operationalize the state-market dimension at the party and voter levels by drawing on all available issue-specific items available in the elite and mass surveys that pertain to the following two issue bundles: (1) *Welfare state support*, i.e., expansion of or defense of a generous welfare state, support for public education, redistribution, and equality, and (2) *economic liberalism*, i.e., opposition to market regulation, and protectionism, support for deregulation, for more competition, and privatization. The items used are listed in Appendix A. Because the item wordings differ to some degree at the mass and elite levels, across countries over time, I construct latent dimensions both at the elite and mass levels, allowing for a comparison of positions across the two levels. To construct these latent dimensions, I follow the strategy suggested by Bornschieer (2020), which uses canonical linear discriminant analysis. This procedure has the advantage of constructing meaningful dimensions even when voters lack coherent ideological schemas that allow them interpret political conflict in dimensional terms. This technique uncovers dimensions that are politically significant because they help to distinguish respondents according to their party affiliation or preference. It makes the operationalization of policy dimensions center on those political issues that set politicians and voters from different parties apart. The choice of this strategy is justified in more detail than is possible here in Appendix A.

The final step is to assess the correspondence between the positions of parties and those of their voters. Because the positions of parties and voters are not measured on the same scales, this correspondence can be judged only in *relative* terms. I do so by regressing the position on the state-market dimension of the party a respondent voted for on his/her individual preference along this dimension, using ordered logit

regression. Put differently, the capacity of voter preferences to explain the ideological position of their preferred party constitutes my measure of responsiveness. The most important information provided by this analysis is not the coefficient (which again is not independent of the differing scales on which parties and voters are placed), but whether individual preferences are a significant predictor of party position. The z-statistic of the ordered logit regression is thus a straightforward measure for congruence. The most important feature of this measure is that it can be compared within countries over time as well as across countries.

Potentials for left-wing (populist) mobilization in Latin America in the 1990s: The populist breeding ground

To start out with, Figure 1 presents the aggregated results comparing party system responsiveness along the economic state-market dimension before the “left turn”. The positions of parties and voters on which the responsiveness measure is based are presented later on. At the country level, there is a clear contrast in the mid-1990s between the left-wing populist success cases and the control cases. Indeed, responsiveness was substantially higher in Uruguay and in Brazil than in Venezuela and Bolivia. In the moderate left cases, the relationship is positive and significant: The z-value of the ordered logit regression is 2.6 in Brazil and an impressive 5.8 in Uruguay (values over 1.96 indicate relationships between voter preferences and party positions that are significant at the 0.05 level). In Bolivia, by contrast, the responsiveness measure is close to zero in 1993. Although it is somewhat higher in 1997, the last elections before the appearance of MAS, the relationship between voter preferences and party

positions is remains insignificant. As we will see, this is due to a lack of a credible party on the left. In Venezuela, the responsiveness measure is negative, indicating that voters with more state interventionist preferences vote for more right-wing parties (and citizens with more market liberal preferences support more state interventionist parties). In short, the two party systems that saw the breakthrough of new political actors lacked responsiveness, while responsiveness was much higher prior to the “left turn” in the moderate left cases.

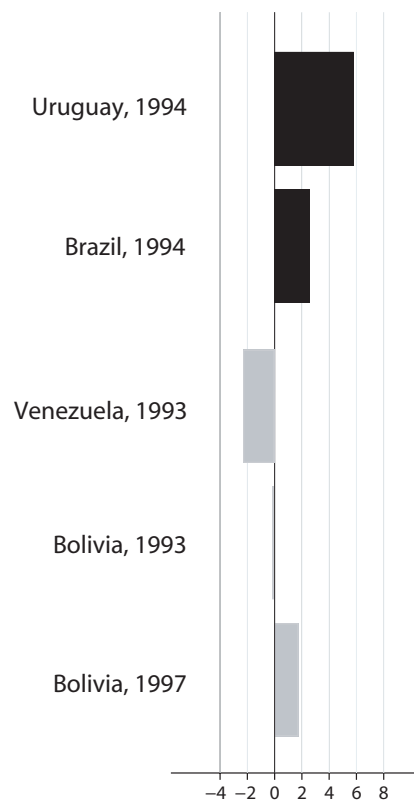


Figure 1: Party system responsiveness along the state-market dimension prior to the challenge from the left

The aggregated results provide strong initial support for the first hypothesis postulated in this paper. Before turning to the further evolution during the “left turn”, I discuss the dynamics of competition that underlie these differences in party system responsiveness prior to the left-wing challenge. For the moderate left cases, I restrict the presentation to the case of Brazil for reasons of space. The corresponding analysis for Uruguay, where the space for new parties was even more restricted, is presented in Appendix C. Figure 2 shows the mean positions of parties and their voters in the 1994 elections in Brazil. In this and in the following graphs, the upper dimension indicates the positions of parties and the lower one that of their voters along the state-market divide. Except where indicated otherwise, the scale runs from -1 to +1 (with ticks at -1, 0, 1, and additional ones in cases where positions are more polarized). The bars below the mean positions indicate the standard deviation and thus the homogeneity or heterogeneity of parliamentarians’ or voters’ preferences. This gives an indication of how strongly parties overlap in their appeals and electorates are similar in their economic preferences.

Patterns of party competition in Brazil shown in Figure 2 did not offer propitious conditions for a populist newcomer. The left-wing terrain is occupied by the PT, while the PMDB is situated to the center-left and the remaining parties are found in the right-wing spectrum. These positions mirror the relative preferences of party electorates reasonably well: Although electorates are situated relatively close to each other, they more or less line up in the same order as the parties themselves (although the positions of PSDB and PMDB voters are inverted).⁷ More so than the parties themselves, their voters exhibit considerable overlap, but alignments based on directional voting is pretty

⁷ PPB voters cannot be situated due to their insufficient number in the Latinobarómetro survey, and they are not taken into account in the calculation of responsiveness.

apparent in Figure 2: Voters seem to know what parties stand for and vote for parties that mirror their preferences, if in more radical terms. This is reflected in the high value for my measure of responsiveness in Figure 1.

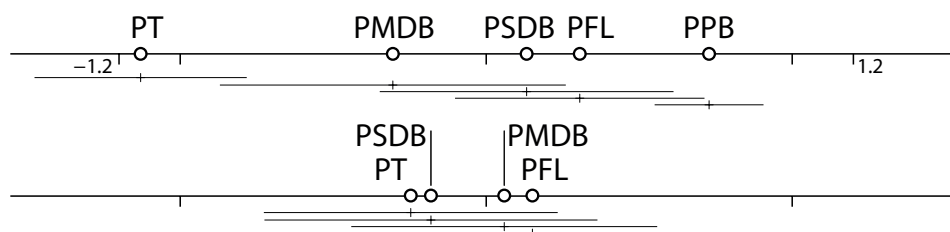


Figure 2: Parties (above) and voters (below) on the state-market divide in Brazil, 1994 elections

Legend: PT, Partido dos Trabalhadores; PSDB, Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira; PMDB, Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro; PFL, Partido da Frente Liberal (now Democratas); PPB, Partido Progressista Brasileiro.

Neither in Brazil, nor in Uruguay did populist left parties did not find propitious circumstances, in other words. These results are in strong contrast to those for Venezuela and Bolivia prior to the “left turn”. Figure 3 shows Venezuela’s state-market dimension in the mid-1990s. The location of parties partially conforms to what we might expect based on the ideologies that Venezuelan parties historically advocated: Acción Democrática (AD) occupies a centrist position and the Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente (COPEI) issues more market-liberal stances. However, both parties already seem to have moved to the right, and the same is true of Rafael Caldera’s Convergencia Nacional (CONV), which is situated in between the traditional parties (Caldera was a historic founder of COPEI, but ran on an outsider ticket in 1993). Causa R and Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) take strongly left-wing positions. Party positions are by no means a mirror of their voters’ policy preferences, however. Most

electorates are hardly distinguishable: They occupy rather centrist positions and display extensive ideological overlap. What is more, several parties misrepresent their voters' preferences: This is most clearly the case for COPEI supporters (who have strongly left-wing preferences), as well as for MAS voters (the latter actually appear as most right-wing). This result of a striking misrepresentation of Venezuelan voters is robust to constructing the state-market dimension based on k-nearest-neighbor classification, a non-parametric variant of discriminant analysis that relaxes all assumptions concerning the distribution of the independent variables (c.f. Ghosh, 2006; see Appendix B for full results). It is safe to conclude, then, that an unresponsive party system provided a favorable breeding ground for Hugo Chávez' populist appeal.

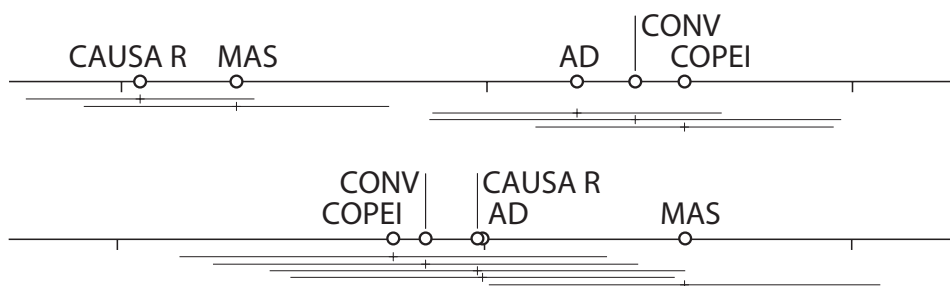


Figure 3: Parties (above) and voters (below) on the state-market divide in Venezuela, 1993 elections

Legend: CAUSA R, La Causa Radical; MAS, Movimiento al Socialismo; CONV, Convergencia Nacional; AD, Acción Democrática; COPEI, Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente.

In Bolivia, the situation shown in Figures 4 and 5 for the 1993 and 1997 elections, respectively, is similar to that in Venezuela: At first sight, the party system seems to offer distinctive economic policy alternatives. But these alternatives lacked credibility and failed to engender programmatic alignments. The Bolivian case must be seen as an example where a series of challengers to the established parties successfully appealed

to left-wing voters. But each subsequently lost support because it entered coalition with strange bedfellows and ceased to represent a credible alternative to the mainstream. We see in Figure 4 that two parties apparently offer a clear left-wing alternative to the mainstream: CONDEPA, short for Conciencia de Patria, and the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). However, MIR had betrayed its voters in 1989 by entering an electoral alliance with its former arch enemy, former dictator Hugo Banzer’s support party Acción Democrática Nacional (ADN) (Domingo, 2005). Its remaining voters therefore do not share the party’s left-wing rhetoric, as their location in Figure 4 shows.

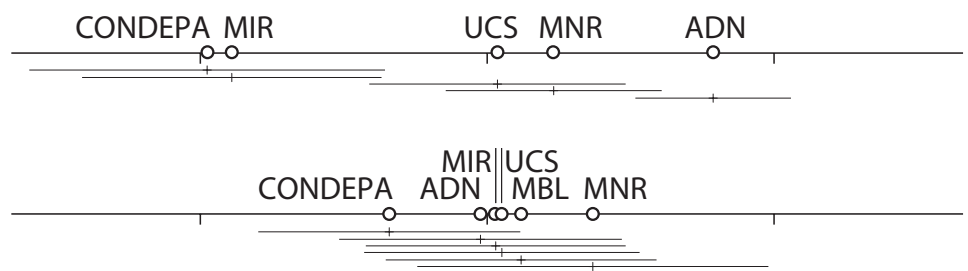


Figure 4: Parties (above) and voters (below) on the state-market divide in Bolivia, 1993 elections

Legend: CON, CONDEPA; MIR, Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria; UCS, Unidad Cívica Solidaridad; ADN, Acción Democrática Nacional; MNR, Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario; MBL, Movimiento Bolivia Libre.

The challenge by CONDEPA is more recent, and besides denouncing the subordination of the Aymaras, the country’s majority indigenous group (van Cott, 2003), it rallied an electorate that stood out for its left-wing credentials in 1993 (Figure 5). However, since it engaged in “promiscuous powersharing” (Slater and Simmons 2013: 1385) by entering the so-called “megacoalition” – which comprised ADN, along with an earlier populist challenger, Unidad Cívica Solidaridad (UCS) – CONDEPA lost

all credibility. By 1998, less than 3% of respondents profess that they would vote for CONDEPA in the Latinobarómetro survey. The location of the CONDEPA electorate therefore cannot be displayed in Figure 5.

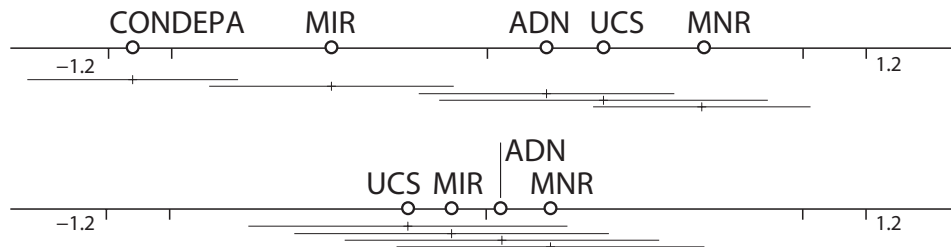


Figure 5: Parties (above) and voters (below) on the state-market divide in Bolivia,

1997 elections

Legend: see Figure 4

The formation of the “megacoalition” that supported Hugo Banzer’s presidency from 1997 to 2001 might therefore be considered a second “de-aligning critical juncture”, after the long established and once truly Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) had implemented neoliberal reforms in the 1980s. Roberts (2014: chap. 6) focused on the first event (and coined the term for it), while the second event is arguably equally important for understanding the breakthrough of MAS. MNR’s turn to the right (the first dealigning event) is in fact reflected in Figure 4, and especially Figure 5, bringing it more in touch with its electorate – which by 1997 was the most right-wing. But while this slightly enhances overall party system responsiveness (albeit remaining statistically insignificant, as we saw Figure 1), there is clearly a lack of credible forces that advocate state intervention in the economy, as the above discussion shows.

Similar to the Venezuelan case before the rise of Chávez, then, the Bolivian party system clearly offered space for MAS in 2002. The hypothesis that representation failure represents a prerequisite for the breakthrough of new political actors, and populist challengers in particular, is thus clearly confirmed by the comparison of the four cases. We also saw that the FA in Uruguay and the PT in Brazil played decisive roles in providing left-wing alternatives to voters and shaping programmatic alignments already in the mid 1990s, several years before these parties reached power. As a consequence, the mobilization space for a left-wing populist challenger was much more restricted there than in Venezuela and Bolivia.

The remainder of this paper focuses on the diverging trajectories of Venezuela and Bolivia in terms of responsiveness.⁸ While a discussion of the “right turn” and the election of Jair Bolsonaro as Brazil’s president in 2018 is beyond the scope of this paper, I offer further results and a discussion in Appendix E that help to bring my findings concerning the period of the “left turn” in line with more recent events in Brazil.

Divergent patterns in the populist cases after the “left turn”

What happens after the populist left reaches power? My second hypothesis posits a distinction between the populist and programmatic paths to power, and divergent trajectories in the Bolivian and Venezuelan cases. Figure 6 reveals a stark divergence in the evolution of responsiveness over time along the economic dimension in these

⁸ The further trajectory of party system responsiveness in the non-populist cases is presented in Appendix E.

two cases. In Bolivia, responsiveness passes the threshold of statistical significance with the appearance of MAS shortly before the 2002 elections, and has steadily grown since (the 2005 elections are the first that MAS won). This indicates that MAS served as a rallying point for left-leaning voters who lacked a credible political alternative before. The appearance of the populist left in Venezuela, by contrast, does nothing to improve responsiveness. In line with my expectations based on their internal party organization, the two exponents of the populist left have thus had a profoundly different impact on representation.

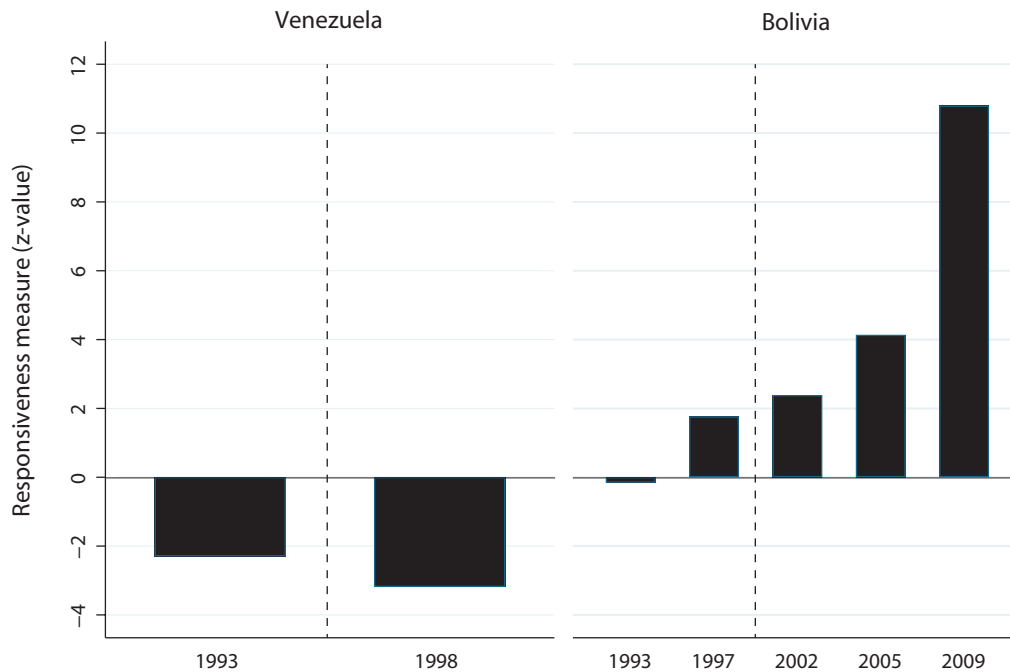


Figure 6: Party system responsiveness along the state-market dimension in the populist success cases before and after the challenge

We reach a better understanding of these aggregate differences by comparing the positions of parties and voters in these two countries. As we see in Figure 7 for

Venezuela in 1998, MVR constitutes a clear left-wing pole in the party system: MVR parliamentarians constitute a cohesive force in parliament, whose state interventionist convictions outflank MAS and stand in stark contrast to the market liberal positions of AD and COPEI. The average Chavista voter, however, does not exhibit a similarly left-wing profile. Rather, the centrist location of the populist electorate mirrors its high degree of heterogeneity in terms of economic preferences. This suggests that these voters are not mobilized on programmatic grounds or do not have clear understandings of where they and their preferred party stand on the economic dimension. This finding is sustained by the analysis by Hawkins (2010: 114–129), who shows that Hugo Chávez’ followers in the 1998 election were by no means united by common economic policy preferences.

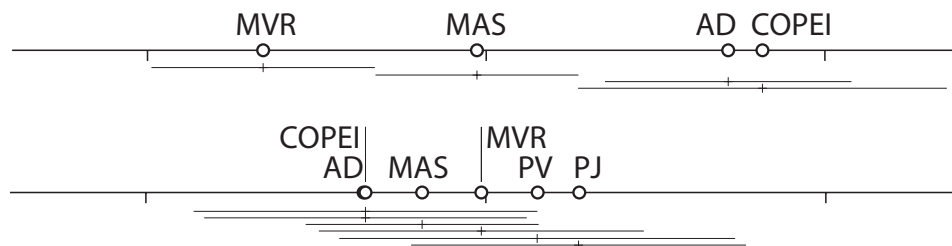


Figure 7: Parties (above) and voters (below) on the state-market divide in Venezuela, 2000 (after the 1998 elections)

Legend: MVR, Movimiento V República (Chavista/Bolivarian Movement); MAS, Movimiento al Socialismo; AD, Acción Democrática; COPEI, Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente; PV: Proyecto Venezolano (Henrique Sallas Romer); PJ: Primero Justicia (Henrique Capriles).

Consequently, the appearance of MVR has done little to improve substantive policy representation. Other parties in the Venezuelan party system staunchly misrepresent their voters: While AD and COPEI have converged on a market liberal profile, their voters continue to profess the state interventionist views that these parties traditionally

advocated. This results in the negative value for the responsiveness measure shown in Figure 6. Those supporting Proyecto Venezuelano (PV) and Primero Justicia (PJ) are most market liberal, on the other hand, but these parties themselves cannot be located because they are too small to be included in the PELA elite survey. Again, these results are sustained by a non-parametric test of the make-up of the state-market dimension (see Appendix B). In sum, due to its strong reliance on populism and the lack of a party structure that fosters accountability in economic policy-making, the appearance of Chavismo did not put the Venezuelan party system back on track towards responsiveness. Rather, the results support the proposition that the *Chavista*-opposition divide – although underpinned by class-based voting – is structured predominantly by the regime issue (Morgan 2018: 312-314). This is what I expected given the non-programmatic nature of populism in Venezuela.

Bolivia provides a striking contrast: Already in the first election in which it participated, MAS rallied an electorate that stood out for its state-interventionist political preferences (Figure 8). In other words, MAS voters are distinctive not only for their identification with indigenous groups (Madrid 2008), structured along an urban-rural divide (Faguet 2019), but also very clearly for their state interventionist positions.⁹ Most of the other parties also represent their voters relatively well, with some exceptions such as UCS, whose left-wing position stands in contrast to its having joined the “megacoalición” headed by ADN, as already discussed (making the party a negligible political force by 2002). The results for the 2005 election, which MAS won, look very similar to those in Figure 8 (see Appendix C). The same is true of the 2009 elections, where MAS was reelected, displayed in Figure 9. As we saw before, overall

⁹ Note, however, that although Madrid (2008) does not highlight this finding, his analysis confirms that MAS voters exhibit distinctively state interventionist positions.

responsiveness increases strongly over time. After the 2009 elections and a dramatic reconfiguration of the right that united the opposition under the umbrella of Plan Progreso para Bolivia/Convergencia Nacional (PPB) – visible in Figure 9 – responsiveness is higher than in Uruguay, whose party system is among the oldest and most stable in Latin America. By providing a clear state interventionist alternative, MAS has thus triggered a process of programmatic alignment that also encompasses the political right. This impressively testifies to the capacity of programmatic populists to restore party system responsiveness.

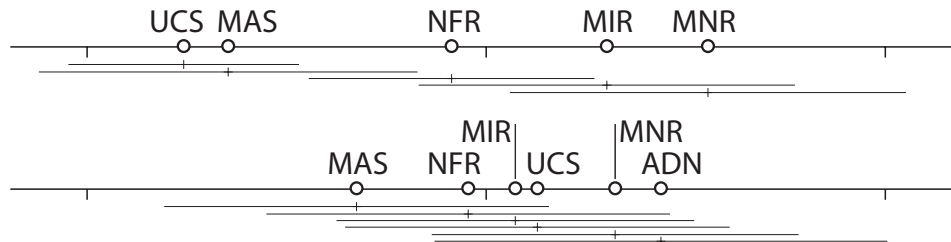


Figure 8: Parties (above) and voters (below) on the state-market divide in Bolivia, 2002 elections

Legend: MAS, Movimiento al Socialismo; UCS, Unidad Cívica Solidaridad; NFR, Nueva Fuerza Republicana; MIR, Movimiento Izquierda Revolucionaria; MNR, Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario; ADN, Acción Democrática Nacionalista.

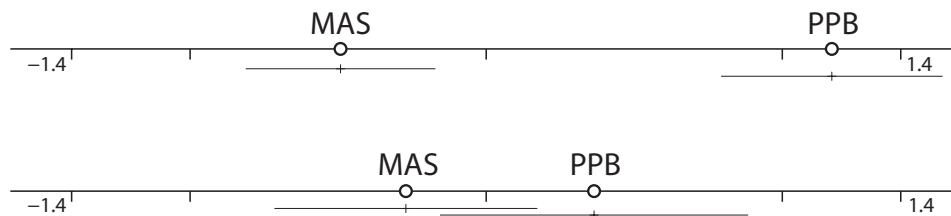


Figure 9: Parties (above) and voters (below) on the state-market divide in Bolivia, 2009 elections

Legend: MAS, Movimiento al Socialismo; PPB: Plan Progreso para Bolivia–Convergencia Nacional.

Conclusion

This article has combined insights from the populism literature with more traditional work on cleavages and party system change to predict when party systems provide room for populist challengers. At the same time, in focusing on party system responsiveness, rather than on more distant causes of the breakthrough of left-wing populist parties during Latin America's "left turn", it has brought the analysis of the latter's preconditions right up to the event itself. Crucially, the analysis included control cases where the moderate, rather than the populist left prevailed. While suggesting that the "left turn" in fact consisted of two rather distinct phenomena – one being the gradual growth of parties that credibly advocated state interventionist positions, and the other the rather sudden breakthrough of the populist left – this paper shows that populists are in a way like other challengers to the political establishment: They promise to represent interests that the established parties have neglected. In fact, populists often reach power only after non-populist outsiders have failed to alleviate responsiveness deficits.

But populists also differ among each other: Their impact on representation depends on the weight of their populist as opposed to that of their more substantive ideologies. "Pure populists" rally an electorate that is united by little more than their anti-elite credentials. Rather than restoring party system responsiveness along substantive policy dimensions, they are likely to trigger polarization along an over-arching populism or regime divide, as exemplified by the Venezuelan case. "Programmatic populists", on the other hand, for all their populist rhetoric, are not that different from non-populist challengers. By representing voters whose preferences lacked voice, they clarify the political alternatives in substantive policy terms, and contribute to bringing the party system back in touch with voters. MAS followed this path in Bolivia, where the party

system approaches levels of responsiveness similar to those found in Uruguay, widely considered a posterchild in terms of programmatic representation (c.f. Luna and Zechmeister 2005, Lanzaro and Piñeiro 2017). Located in one of the least developed countries in South America, the example of MAS suggests that political agency, and more specifically the mobilization strategies and organizations adopted by political parties, are more important than contextual characteristics in shaping party system responsiveness.

This paper thereby contributes to the literature on populism, which has so far remained inconclusive with regard to the question when populism can help improve representation. My explanation in terms of populism's pure and programmatic variants hinges on whether voters and movement organizations are able to hold party elites to account. This sets into motion a normatively desirable reciprocal process in which top-down and bottom-up processes between parties and social constituencies foster substantive representation (Disch, 2011). MAS in Bolivia approximates this model, showing that "movement parties" (Anria 2018) are beneficial for representation even when they are populist. The top-down organization of Chavismo in Venezuela, on the other hand, does not align voters with the party in programmatic policy terms.

This difference in the structure of populist movements is likely to affect overall regime dynamics. With weak programmatic linkages to cushion discontent stemming from economic downturns confronted with the difficulties of replacing charismatic leaders, pure populism is in danger of slipping into competitive or outright authoritarianism. This scenario is exemplified by the case of Venezuela (Levitsky and Loxton 2013). Leadership succession and intense polarization are clearly problems related to both pure and programmatic populism. Yet my findings suggest reason for more optimism in the Bolivian case. The programmatic-ideological glue in

programmatic populism means that programmatic populists are much more likely to survive being out of power. This makes alternation in power a more realistic scenario, helping competitive regimes to survive.

The distinction between pure and programmatic populism is also likely to be fruitful for comparisons of populism across regions, which have been of key interest in recent projects (e.g., Rovira Kaltwasser and Mudde 2012, Hawkins et al. 2018). Interestingly, programmatic populism in Bolivia is similar to right-wing populism in Western Europe, which mobilizes voters who are strongly united by substantive ideological concerns (e.g., Kriesi et al. 2008, Bustikova 2014). Left-wing populist parties in Europe seem more diverse in this respect (Andreadis and Stavrakakis 2017, Akkerman, Zaslove and Spruyt 2017), making them promising objects to study the internal life of populist parties.

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