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Surviving against all odds: Pachakutik's electoral support, mobilization strategies, and goal achievement between 1996 and 2019

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Abstract

The Ecuadorian party, *Movimiento Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik* (MUPP or Pachakutik), is a 24-year-old party with low levels of electoral support and scarce resources. Conventional theories of party survival cannot explain this party's persistence. Common wisdom predicts parties with both consistently low levels of electoral support and lack of resources will disband, but Pachakutik does not.

The lack of a theory that can explain Pachakutik's survival suggests that this party is unique, but it is not. In fact, Pachakutik is an example of a myriad of parties that inhabit party systems across the world. Why do parties with low electoral support and few resources persist? This dissertation addresses that question and introduces a theory of party survival that focuses on why parties may *choose* to survive, change, or disband. Parties can persist if they achieve their primary goal, and this may happen even when a party has scarce resources and low (or fluctuating) levels of electoral support. Parties pursue different primary goals – policy, office, or value-infusion – and, as such, evaluate goal achievement differently (in terms of their own aspiration levels based on prior performance).

The case of Pachakutik illustrates this theory and its mechanisms. First, Pachakutik is presented as a party with low levels of electoral support and scarce resources. Second, the party's connection to the indigenous population in Ecuador is explored. Conventional knowledge about the party suggests that this connection will determine the party's persistence, but my findings show that the party does not receive the undivided support of the indigenous voters. On average, only 25% of the indigenous voters' support goes to Pachakutik's candidates. Nonetheless, the party's candidates also receive support from mestizo voters, contributing to the party's overall vote count. This support is likely possible due to the party using multiple mobilization strategies to mobilize voters. The party's candidates employ different mobilization strategies, often together (mixed), in each district.

Lastly, the party's survival is analyzed from a goal achievement perspective. Pachakutik has pursued three different goals between 1996 and 2017. From 1996 to 2002, the party was a policy-seeking party. Between 2002 and 2006, the party turned into an office seeking party. From 2006 until 2017, the party turned into a value-infusion-seeking party. Pachakutik achieved its goal of policy advancement during the 1996-2002 period. The party changed its primary goal for the following period and failed to achieve its goal. Although the party had numerous office appointments during the early months of 2003, these did not last. Pachakutik finished the 2002-2006 period without reaching its goal while also losing multiple

party members. However, the party did not disband. Instead, the party leaders changed the party's primary goal and started to protect the party organization. Pachakutik has achieved the goal of infusing value to the organization between 2006 and 2017. In that period the party has grown, become more cohesive, and overall, the party organization's value has increased.

This dissertation combines qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis and rests on archival data, interviews, and quantitative data collected during over 11 months of fieldwork in Ecuador.

Keywords: Pachakutik, party survival, aspiration levels, goal achievement, ethnic parties, ethnic voting, Ecuador