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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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## 2 Party survival: achieving goals

New parties are not a rare phenomenon. As elections loom, countless new parties join existing parties in their bids to get their candidates elected in both advanced and new democracies. Most of these new parties often fail to make it past that first electoral cycle. After the election, many new parties disband, alongside some older parties, – and do not present any candidates in the next election. By contrast, a different group of parties (new and older) attracts high levels of electoral support and continues to do so in follow up elections. These parties persist throughout the years and attract most of the scholarly attention in the discipline. There is a third group of parties between those parties that disband and those that attract high levels of electoral support and sail smoothly into the next elections. These are parties that continue to present candidates in follow up elections and fulfill at least one of a party's function in a democracy,<sup>11</sup> but do so without attracting high levels of electoral support. Although these parties are not rare, their persistence is an underexplained phenomenon.

The parties in this last group are generally expected to wither down and disappear due to their low levels of electoral support. Many of these parties do meet this fate and, after a second or third election, disband. Nonetheless, it is also the case that many of these parties survive<sup>12</sup> past common expectations. These parties remain actors in the democratic arena of both new and advanced democracies. However, although ubiquitous, these *persistent* parties have been empirically and theoretically ignored (exceptions are: Bolleyer, 2013; Bolleyer et al., 2019; Casal Bértoa & Spirova, 2019; Cyr, 2016, 2017). At times, some of these parties garner academic scholarship's attention, to be sure, but they do so based on some particular specific trait (e.g., see Deschouwer, 2009 on Belgian regionalist parties; and Kitschelt, 1989 on Green parties). In general, most of these parties remain understudied. In the Latin American context, examples of these parties – that persist despite low levels of electoral support – include (to name a few): Venezuela's *Primero Justicia* (PJ), Ecuador's *Izquierda Democrática* (ID), and Peru's *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (APRA). These, incidentally, are some of the few parties from these persisting parties that have garnered scholarly attention.

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<sup>11</sup>The functions a party organization performs in a democracy are 1) serve as linkages between civil society and government, 2) participate in the public debate (shaping how citizens approach politics), 3) mobilize and represent their voters, contest elections, recruit and train political leaders, and 4) organize and coordinate government (Aldrich, 1995).

<sup>12</sup>For the purposes of this dissertation survival and persistence are interchangeable concepts. A party that persists/survives is one that continuously participates in electoral processes and fulfills at least one the functions political parties perform in democracies.

Why would a party such as these persist? As mentioned, extant research has yet to address these parties directly, and concomitantly suggest a theory on their survival. The literature on party survival has focused on the survival of new (and older) parties that attract high levels of electoral support (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Harmel & Robertson, 1985; Kitschelt, 1988; Levitsky et al., 2016; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006; Morgan, 2011, 2018; Obert & Müller, 2017; Seawright, 2012; Tavits, 2008; Zur, 2019). Alternatively, other scholars have focused on party survival as determined by the resources parties hold: where more resources may contribute to political parties' survival (Bolleyer, 2013; Cyr, 2017; Tavits, 2013). The parties at the center of this dissertation do not resemble these parties. They receive either few votes during elections or hold non-linear electoral trajectories (i.e., have fluctuating levels of electoral support) and are, as such, arguably less likely to accumulate resources that could contribute to their survival. The question thus lingers: why would such parties persist?

In this dissertation I present a theory on party survival that can contribute to explaining why political parties – particularly those described – survive or disband. The theory focuses primarily on the political parties' decision-making process to persist or disband. The theory argues that parties can persist if they achieve their primary goal and that achieving this goal may happen even when a party has scarce resources and low (or fluctuating) levels of electoral support. To make this argument, I borrow from the literature on party behavior the idea that parties may pursue different primary goals. To this, I add the notion that as parties are different – with diverse primary goals – they will also have different aspirations and define success differently. This means that all parties' goal achievement should not be measured with the same yardstick, e.g., number of votes. Instead, parties evaluate their goal achievement by looking at their aspirations and whether they were met or not. This theory complements our extant knowledge about the impact of resources on parties' survival. The theory adds to the general idea that resources matter by arguing that not all resources will matter equally. Because parties pursue different primary goals, different resources are likely to affect goal achievement differently. The resources parties have, and their role in the party's survival, should be evaluated considering how these resources may contribute (or not) to a party's survival in light of its primary goal. Lastly, this theory of party survival also helps further comprehend how party regulation and electoral laws may favor or work against political parties' goal achievement.

The chapter continues as follows: first, I shortly discuss the extant literature on party survival and the argument of goal achievement as the driving force for persistence; second, I discuss the different goals that political parties may pursue and argue that these are: office,

policy, and value-infusion (survival); third, I discuss goal achievement and aspiration levels and how these influence parties' decisions to persist or disband. Lastly, I introduce strategies to identify political parties' primary goals and strategies regarding operationalizing aspiration levels and evaluating whether a party achieves its goals to understand party persistence.

## 2.1 Theories of party survival: votes and resources

The conventional literature on party survival focuses almost entirely on new parties and their electoral support as a determinant of party survival (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Harmel & Robertson, 1985; Kitschelt, 1988; Levitsky et al., 2016; Mainwaring & Torcal, 2006; Morgan, 2011, 2018; Obert & Müller, 2017; Seawright, 2012; Tavits, 2008; Zur, 2019). Survival is closely linked to relatively high levels of electoral support. New parties' survival (and older parties alike) depends on their ability to mobilize voters. This support may be achieved by different means. Parties may "fill [the] representational needs of the society" (Harmel & Robertson, 1985, p. 502), carving for themselves a new space, e.g., new electoral cleavage. Or, parties may be part of a "new" party family (Kitschelt, 1988) which caters to a specific constituency. Parties may cater to dissatisfied voters (Tavits, 2008, pp. 118–119) or take older parties' place by winning over a party's electorate. Older parties may, in turn, work to keep their voters satisfied adapting, if necessary, their programs to current issues of interest. Regardless of how it is done, the main argument is that sustained electoral support is a predictor of organizational persistence.<sup>13</sup>

The problem is that these vote-oriented theories of party survival are not useful to explain party survival outside the electoral arena. These theories assume that parties' electoral performances can be divided along a simple success/failure dichotomy. Electoral outcomes serve as proxy predictors of party organizations' persistence, where more support always means persistence, and low support always means breakdown. Yet, parties can have different electoral performance profiles, which may not easily fit this success/failure dichotomy. Political parties' electoral support often fluctuates, or in some cases, it may be constant but fall

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<sup>13</sup> The parties receiving the bulk of attention in these theories are those deemed examples of success. What makes a party worthy of analysis differs from researcher to researcher but most authors retain one key (albeit somewhat fuzzy) requisite: parties should be relevant. Definitions often start by establishing a minimum cut-off point: new parties should have participated in at least two consecutive electoral process. In addition, different measures of electoral support are added: some scholars use as cutting point the electoral threshold for legislative representation per country, while others determine different thresholds of electoral significance e.g. 2% of the national vote, 5% of the national vote, or a different percentage. These thresholds often aim to *only* capture serious contenders in the electoral arena.

under conventional thresholds of success (Mustillo, 2009). Importantly, parties can, and often do, persist despite having these electoral support profiles.

An alternative to the vote-oriented arguments of party survival are the theories that focus on parties' resources to explain survival (Beyens et al., 2016; Bolleyer, 2013; Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2013; Bolleyer et al., 2019; Burgess & Levitsky, 2003; Casal Bértoa & Spirova, 2019; Cyr, 2017; Deegan-Krause & Haughton, 2018; Dolenec & Širinić, 2017; Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Kopecký & Mair, 2012; Rose & Mackie, 1988; Tavits, 2013). The parties that survive are those better equipped to weather a crisis, which is often conceptualized as an electoral crisis. The resources theories highlight these as the primary resources helping political parties: private and public funding, party members (roots), and strong (and complex) party organizations.<sup>14</sup>

However, many parties that persist despite fluctuating or low levels of electoral support also have scarce resources. An example of these parties in Latin America is the Ecuadorian *Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik*. This party has survived for over 24 years with low levels of electoral support (as I discuss in chapter 3) and limited resources, e.g., no stable access to state funding, an almost non-existent party bureaucracy, and a small party membership.<sup>15</sup> This kind of parties persists in different forms and shapes. As mentioned, the best known of these parties in the region are those that at one point received high levels of electoral support. The Peruvian APRA, for instance, survived for years in an adverse system with low levels of electoral support and, in 2006, returned to the Peruvian presidency (McClintock, 2006). Like the Venezuelan *Comité de Organización Político Electoral Independiente* (COPEI), others do not make grandiose comebacks to national politics. Instead, they persist in subnational arenas with very little national electoral support (Cyr, 2016, p. 139). Others, by contrast, stay in the national electoral arena but with low levels of electoral support, e.g., the Ecuadorian parties *Izquierda Democrática* (ID), *Partido Social Cristiano* (PSC), and *Partido Sociedad Patriótica* (PSP). Even though the parties mentioned each had different types of resources, which indubitably played a role in how these parties survived (see : Cyr, 2017 for a discussion about APRA and COPEI), their overall persistence is difficult to explain using the extant (vote and resource-oriented) theories of party survival.

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<sup>14</sup>The list of these resources can be more extensive a detailed. For instance, the characteristics of a strong organization such as parties having branches at the subnational arena can also be listed separately. In addition, patronage appointments are also considered as important resources for survival (see: Kopecký & Mair, 2012)

<sup>15</sup> A common expectation is that Pachakutik's persistence is linked to the party's ethnic character and the ethnic (indigenous) support. I show in chapter 4 that this is not the case and that Pachakutik represents, from a vote-oriented perspective, a puzzling case of survival that cannot be explained as linked to indigenous voters' support.

## 2.2 Party survival and goal achievement

The logic underpinning the choice that parties make to persist is rarely spelled out.<sup>16</sup> The standard expectation is that parties persist as they are the necessary tools for ambitious politicians' goal-achievement plans (Aldrich, 1995). From this perspective, (leaders) goal achievement should lead to the persistence of the party organization. One of the few exceptions to the "no mention" of the logic behind persistence is Spirova (2007). She argues parties' (politicians) strategic decisions to persist, change (merge), hibernate, or disband are closely connected to whether the party achieved its goal (electoral target) during the previous elections *and* whether a party sees as possible to achieve its next goal (a similar or revised electoral target) at an upcoming election. Of course, the parties' choices are constrained by the parties' resources, organizational characteristics, and the system where they compete. This argument describes the simple mechanism behind a party's persistence: it is linked to goal achievement.

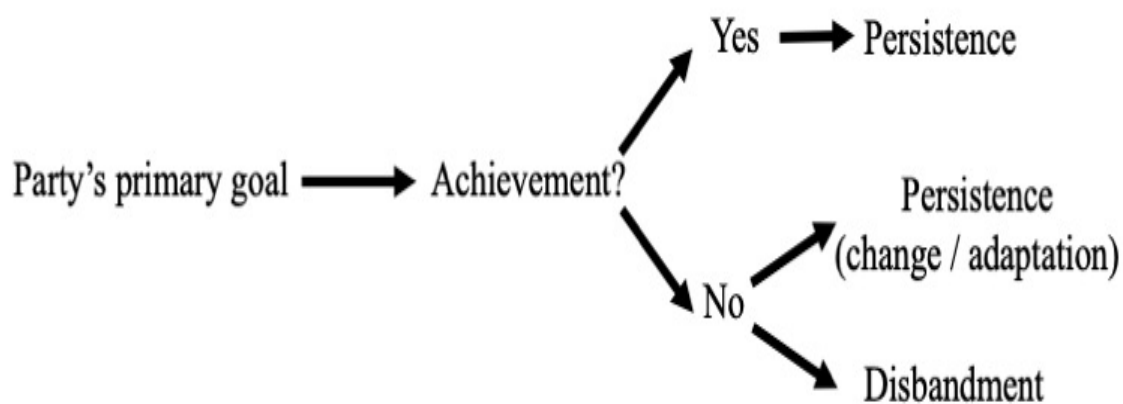
This idea about persistence and goal achievement is also employed, albeit not explicitly, by authors who focus on parties as goal-oriented organizations. Scholars concentrating on the party resources argument have conceptualized parties as more than tools for ambitious politicians' goal achievement. Parties are presented as goal-seeking organizations themselves (e.g. Bolleyer & Bytze, 2013; Bolleyer et al., 2019; Kitschelt, 1989). The attention moves into party organizations (setting aside party leaders). Parties are conceptualized as able to have a life of their own. Parties are approached as complex and multidimensional organizations driven by group goals that participate in electoral processes and fulfill different functions within a democracy (Bawn et al., 2012, p. 571; Bolleyer et al., 2019, p. 20; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 5; Monroe, 2001, p. 21; Mudge & Chen, 2014, p. 310). Importantly, this approach to parties as goal-oriented organizations does not necessarily discount the importance of the agency of party leaders and ambitious politicians (Bolleyer, 2013; de Lange & Art, 2011; Enyedi, 2005; Van Dyck, 2018). Nonetheless, it signals that party organizations may exist disconnected from individual leader's preferences and become spaces where like-minded individuals come together to pursue a singular – no entirely individualistic – goal. This change is necessary to conceptualize the persistence of an organization that does not garner high levels of electoral support (Cyr, 2017, p. 12).

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<sup>16</sup> An exception is Yanai (1999) who argues party survival is linked to a party's role in maintaining and legitimizing the representative regime in which the organization exists. That is, parties persist as long as they continue to fulfill their functions in democracy.

Following this, I propose to consider party survival – and the decision-making process attached to this – as the result of a party’s evaluation of its primary goal’s achievement (or lack thereof). If a party achieves its primary goal, it is more likely to persist, and if it does not, it will more likely disband. It is also possible that after not achieving its primary goal, the party may continue to persist. In this case, persistence is likely to come accompanied by changes or adaptation on the party’s side (see figure 2.1).

*Figure 2.1 Party survival decision-making process*



### 2.3 Political parties' primary goals

As it is clear, the goals that parties pursue are crucial to understanding parties' persistence. The party survival literature, in general, defines parties' goals in terms of votes, following a Downsian perspective.<sup>17</sup> Yet, scholars have questioned the usefulness of following a “single goal model” to explain parties' actions. Models of party behavior that argue parties pursue a single goal, e.g., vote-seeking (Downs, 1957), office-seeking (Budge & Laver, 1986), or policy-seeking (Chappell & Keech, 1986), often struggle to explain parties' behavior that does not conform with their expectations.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, party behavior models that stress that parties

<sup>17</sup> Arguably, the ‘resources’ literature puts forth a different goal parties pursue: survival. Parties persisting after electoral setbacks are conceptualized as surviving (as opposed to being successful parties) waiting and working towards an opportunity to revive (electorally). This is, however, only a temporary goal, and parties are expected to go back to a vote-oriented goal eventually.

<sup>18</sup> The vote-maximization model for instance is unable to explain the cases of political parties that cater to small or fringe sectors of the electorate (not maximizing electoral support); in turn, the office-seeking models fail to account for the cases of parties showing office shyness (i.e. not joining governing coalitions) (Lijphart, 2012, p.



may pursue different goals (e.g., votes, office, policy, and intra-party democracy) are particularly useful to explain the diverging reactions to similar external shocks of otherwise similar parties (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Strom, 1990). Researchers have shown that parties' primary goals impact their behavior and how they react to external shocks, including electoral crisis, i.e., electoral support decline (Deschouwer, 2009; Evans, 2018; Harmel & Janda, 1994; Kitschelt, 1989; Pedersen, 2012a; Strom, 1990; Strom & Muller, 1999).

Nonetheless, there is no full agreement on the possible primary goals that political parties pursue. To be sure, most models emphasize that political parties will pursue: office, policy, and votes as their primary goals. This follows Strom's (1990) model of parties' primary goal. For example, Pedersen (2012b) explores whether political parties pursue any of the three goals in Strom's model. Yet, not all scholars agree on whether it makes sense to focus on all three goals. For example, Evans (2018) only focuses on office and policy seeking as possible goals parties may pursue. He argues that vote-seeking may not be relevant for all party systems and is left out of his research (Evans, 2018, p. 6). A second early model on political parties' primary goals adds to the three-way typology of goals a fourth, intra-party democracy-seeking (Harmel & Janda, 1994). However, this last goal has not been addressed extensively by the literature. Instead, the party persistence scholars have indirectly suggested political parties may pursue a different primary goal: the goal of survival. Cyr (2017) stresses party members may be interested in a party organization's endurance, even putting aside their electoral objectives (p. 12). Browne and Patterson (1999) highlight the fact that some parties may participate in elections to access the benefits of participation, such as state funding, that contribute to the organizational persistence of a party rather than participating in elections in the pursuit of electoral objectives (p. 260). Bolleyer and Ruth (2018) stress that party members value their organization *per se* "rather than seeing it [the party] as a mere instrument to achieve a set of goals" (p. 290). Casal Bértoa and Spirova (2019) discuss parties may be satisfied with achieving enough electoral support to maintain their public funding and persist. And Levitsky (1998) argues that parties may have the goal to protect the organization's solidity (p. 79).

Going slightly against the conventional three-way typology of goals (votes, office, and policy), and taking on board the party persistence scholarship's insights, I suggest parties pursue three goals: office, policy, and value-infusion (or the goal of survival). I will define

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88); lastly the policy-seeking model is at odds when faced with cases of political parties joining coalitions with political parties that do not share their policy preferences.

each of these goals in the following paragraphs. First, however, it is necessary to discuss why vote-seeking is not included as a primary goal that parties may pursue.

Votes have no intrinsic value for political parties (Strom, 1990, p. 573). Parties have no use for votes *per se*.<sup>19</sup> Votes are only a means to an end (Muller & Strom, 1999, p. 9). What parties use is what votes afford them. For instance, votes can be transformed into seats at the legislature (which may be leveraged to access the benefits of office or advance public policy), or votes may afford parties access to state subsidies. Crucially, votes are not the only means for a party to achieve goals.<sup>20</sup> Vote-seeking is a goal that all parties share in as much participation in elections is a party organization's fundamental characteristic.<sup>21</sup> Vote-seeking should, therefore, not be considered a party's primary goal. Depending on a party's primary goal, votes' importance will be reduced or increased. In the end, parties may not avoid votes, as they participate in elections, but parties may choose not to sacrifice their primary goal for votes.

The goal of office-seeking relates to a party's objective of holding "politically discretionary governmental and subgovernmental appointments" (Strom, 1990, p. 567). This should not be confused with an elective office (such as seats in the legislature). Office-seeking parties aim to control government portfolios and party members' appointments within the structure of the state. Office benefits may also include government contracts, preferential treatment, and any other rents accrue to political parties (Kopecký & Mair, 2012, p. 8; Strom & Muller, 1999, p. 6). A party with the primary goal of holding office will work towards "a

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<sup>19</sup> Empirically it is almost impossible to account for votes (as goals) and votes acquired as means for another goal. Consider as an illustration of the difficulties to differentiate votes as 'goals' and votes as 'means' the note to researchers using data from *The Party Change Project*: "Researchers who wish to maintain the distinction [between vote-seeking and office-seeking] as important in their research should be aware of our lower level of confidence in coding that particular distinction in our data" (Harmel & Janda, 1996, p. 8). The researchers and coders of the project found that parties alternate the goals of vote- and office-maximization regularly which makes an accurate empirical differentiation between the parties that pursue either goal almost impossible.

<sup>20</sup> A party may secure office appointments through agreements with other parties – these agreements could include withdrawing candidacies hence directly reducing the number of votes a party gets; parties may also advance policy through steering the public debate in favor or against policies even from outside the legislature; and, depending on the type of party regulations in a state, state subsidies may not depend on votes but solely on electoral participation.

<sup>21</sup> The importance of getting votes will increase or decline depending on the type of system in which parties operate, but it will remain as an underlying goal of securing means to achieve a party's primary goal. Arguably, focusing in votes (and vote maximization) has its benefits; chiefly, the possibility of developing simplified elegant models and being able to evaluate performance easily by counting votes. Moreover, in systems where holding office and guiding policy requires electoral support, e.g., two-party systems, votes may play a more important role at goal achievement. However, in as much the goals for which votes are considered "means to" are achievable without maximizing-votes it seems better to effectively focus on the other goals (holding office, and/or advancing policy) rather than in the number of votes a party achieves.

form of institutional control or of institutional exploitation that operates to the benefit of the party organization” (Kopecký & Mair, 2012, p. 7).

The goal of policy-seeking relates to a party’s interest to advance a specific set of policies. These parties emphasize “policy purity,” and they work to influence public policy. One stark difference between a policy-seeking party and an office-seeking party is that the former is less likely to sacrifice their policy stance to access office benefits (or form a government) while the latter is. This does not mean that policy-seeking parties will shy away from alliances or agreements with other political parties. They are likely to join electoral alliances or form government coalitions if their partners share their policy interests or promise to advance the party's policy. Policy-seeking parties have also been referred to as programmatic parties.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, other types of parties often associated with a policy-seeking goal are niche-parties, single-issue parties, and protest parties (Wolinetz, 2002, p. 150).

To differentiate the phenomenon of party survival from the goal of survival, I refer to this goal as the goal of *value-infusion*. A party that pursues this goal will work towards the organization’s persistence, ensuring its internal cohesion and the routinization of formal (or informal) practices (Freidenberg & Levitsky, 2006). These are party organizations and party members that work towards the organization’s persistence for the benefit of having an organization. By contrast, other parties’ members may maintain an organization to access office appointments or advance public policy. Arguably, Greene describes this kind of parties when he introduces his definition of “niche parties”<sup>23</sup> as “inward-looking organizations [that] follow a logic of survival,” and as parties that create organizations with internal cohesion, territorial presence, and small groups of partisans (Greene, 2016, p. 159). These are parties “designed to protect and reinforce their party’s identity”(Greene, 2016, p. 163).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This definition may be confusing, however. Parties may be referred to as programmatic for the sole reason that they engage their voters on programmatic issues while at the same time holding a different primary goal.

<sup>23</sup> Greene’s (2016) definition of *niche* parties is distinct from the conventional definitions of *niche* parties that emphasize the focused programmatic content of these parties’ platforms (Adams, Clark, Ezrow, & Glasgow, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Greene’s definition of niche parties includes other specific characteristics of these parties that relate to the fact that – as he argues – these are most likely created under authoritarian regimes. Because of how specific these characteristics are, these do not fit well with the overall more generic idea of a goal-seeking party that aims to protect the party organization that I am advancing. Thus, I do not claim his definition is interchangeable with mine. I aim only to highlight that amongst other characteristics he is also stressing the interest of party organizations in surviving signaling that other scholars have indeed identified this specific goal as constitutive of some political parties.

## 2.4 Party survival: achieving goals

Each party will evaluate whether it has achieved its primary goal to decide on its persistence, persistence with a change, or its disbandment. Crucially, what it means for a party to achieve its goal should not be conceptualized as the same for all parties. Just as parties may pursue different primary goals, parties may have different aspirations regarding these goals (Harmel & Janda, 1994, p. 279).

This idea can be better understood by starting from the assumptions that political parties are boundedly rational, i.e., parties' decisions are constrained by the information that is available to them as well as their capabilities; and that parties are satisfiers, i.e., parties will decide on *good enough* outcomes (an aspiration) instead of searching for the most optimal (maximization) result. Satisficing organizations can judge outcomes by using reference points (aspiration levels) to assess achievement or failure (March & Simon, 1958). An aspiration level represents a dynamic point of reference that organizations may use to make choices and evaluate outcomes. Whenever an outcome is below an aspiration level, then the outcome can be deemed a failure (or unsatisfactory) and will likely trigger change (or adaptation to ensure eventual achievement) or trigger disbandment; by contrast, reaching the aspiration level or surpassing it will likely trigger continuity and be taken as a confirmation of *a job well done* (Cyert & March, 1963; Nielsen, 2014). Organizations adapt their aspiration levels (thus their dynamic characterization) based on retrospective experience (Cyert & March, 1963; Lant, 1992; Shinkle, 2012). For political parties, this can be summarized as: parties have goals for which they also have specific aspirations, which are used to evaluate outcomes and categorize them into satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

As boundedly rational and satisfiers, political parties will each have different aspiration levels regarding achieving their primary goal. Hence, party organizations and their aspirations will be unique because each will construct their aspirations based on their reality and prior performance. The theory on aspiration levels states that aspiration levels are commonly defined based on an organization's prior performance and the performance of peer organizations (Nielsen, 2014, p. 146), where the prior performance of the organization is more important than the performance of peer organizations (Washburn & Bromiley, 2012). This is because while peer performance may serve as a benchmark for comparison, each organization's performance may deviate to such a degree from its peers that forcing an expectation to meet this measure would produce inefficient expectations. Political parties, it follows, will likely develop their

aspiration levels based on their prior performance while keeping an eye on the performance of their peers.

The decision to persist, persist by adapting, or disband will follow from a party's evaluation of its primary goal achievement. The process is relatively simple. Having decided on its primary goal, a party will also develop its aspiration level (AL). After 'performing,' i.e., working towards its goal, the party will take its performance (P) and compare it to its AL. If P is equal or surpasses the AL, then the party will deem it has achieved its goal and is likely to choose to persist (following the same or a new goal). Conversely, if a party's performance does not equal or exceeds its aspirations, the party will not achieve its goal. That is:

$$P \geq AL = \text{goal achievement}$$

and

$$P < AL = \text{no goal achievement}$$

If the party has failed to achieve its primary goal, it will face two options. They will either decide to persist and work on what may be improved or adapted or decide to disband the organization.<sup>25</sup>

Aspiration levels will be adjusted after all performances (Lant, 1992, p. 625). The difference (positive or negative) between an aspiration level and actual performance is called *attainment discrepancy* (Lant, 1992, p. 625). When a party has surpassed its aspiration level in time  $t$ , the aspiration level of time  $t+1$  will likely be higher (aspiration level plus the attainment discrepancy) than the previous one. By contrast, if the party did not achieve its goal in time  $t$ , the aspiration level will be lower at time  $t+1$  (aspiration level minus the attainment discrepancy). Arguably, political parties can have a longer-term memory. The aspiration level could be constructed with information from a more extended period (even dating back to the political party's formation). However, it is more likely that the aspiration level's construction will be based on the most recent performance period. This is based on the availability heuristic, which states that memories' availability plays an essential role in decision-making. Subjects can better recall recent events than long past events (Tversky & Kahneman, 1992, p. 1127). Therefore, the aspiration level of the period  $t+1$  will be equal to the aspiration level during period  $t$  plus (or minus) the attainment discrepancy. That is:

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<sup>25</sup> It is important to note that this process of decision making, while presented as "simple" may not be in fact simple. Intra-party power distribution matters greatly in decision making process and could hinder or speed up goal changes (Pedersen, 2010).

## Party survival: achieving goals

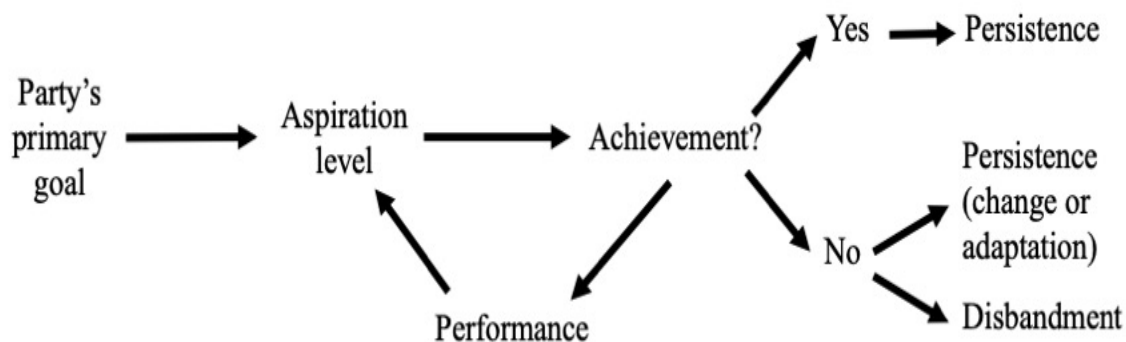
if  $P \geq AL$  in period  $t$ , then  $AL$  in period  $t + 1 = AL + \text{attainment discrepancy}$

if  $P < AL$  in period  $t$ , then  $AL$  in period  $t + 1 = AL - \text{attainment discrepancy}$

Parties will adapt their aspirations as their lives go by (as they achieve or fail to achieve their primary goals).

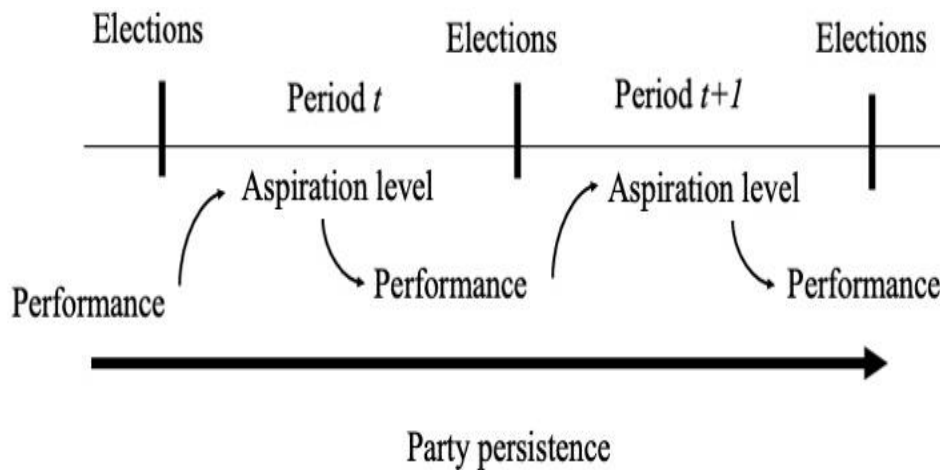
Parties' aspiration levels and their performance (achieving goals) will define a party's decision-making regarding persistence, persistence with adaptation, or disbandment (see figure 2.2). This decision-making will most likely take place before every electoral process. During the interelection period, parties will work towards achieving their primary goals. By the end of the interelection period, parties will evaluate their performance to determine if they will participate in the next elections or not. Parties will also decide whether to continue working in the same way they had or if the goal or the party's strategies are to be changed.

Figure 2.2 Party survival decision-making process with performance input.



This decision-making is an iterative process that will take place as long as the party persists. As shown in figure 2.3, a party will have a primary goal, an aspiration level (determined by its prior performance) during period  $t$ . The party will use this aspiration level to evaluate its performance during the same period and decide whether to persist, persist and adapt, or disband. As the party chooses to persist or persist and adapt, its performance during period  $t$  will determine its aspiration level for period  $t+1$  (by way of the attainment discrepancy). By the end of period  $t+1$ , the party will compare its performance against its aspiration level and once again decide on whether to persist or no.

Figure 2.3 Party persistence



The decision-making process will also be informed by the party's resources, the electoral system, and the party regulation set up by the state. These resources and institutional framework will contribute to the performance of a party – in terms of what is available for the party to achieve its goals. The resources and the institutional framework will also contribute towards the decision about a party's persistence. Party leaders may be inclined to keep the party going *because* it may be able to achieve its primary goal thanks to its resources or the system in which it performs.

Resources are paramount for all political parties' lives. Two of the key resources parties may have are party members and leaders. Party members' commitment may contribute to a party's decision to persist even after electoral setbacks because they may work to keep the organization alive (Tavits, 2013). Committed members are not easy to get, however. Parties need to invest in creating loyalty from their party members (Beyens et al., 2016, p. 262). Nonetheless, building a loyal following is easier when the party organization was not created from scratch. A party with roots in a previous organization is more likely to count with members and will have an easier time building a strong organization (Beyens et al., 2016; Bolleyer, 2013; Bolleyer & Bytzeck, 2013). Strong leaders are also important for party persistence. Against arguments that stress leaders can hinder the construction of strong party organizations (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Weyland, 1999), leaders may be central to a party's adaptation as they can guide and centralize the organization. Leaders can, moreover, determine the use of the available resources of the party to build a strong organization and ensure its persistence (Bakke & Sitter, 2015; Bolleyer, 2013; de Lange & Art, 2011; Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Van Dyck, 2018).

A strong party organization is also a crucial resource parties can have that will play a role in goal achievement and on the decision to persist (Bakke & Sitter, 2015; Beyens et al., 2016; Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2013; Cyr, 2017; Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Kopecký, Mair, & Spirova, 2012; Tavits, 2013; Van Dyck, 2017). A strong party organization is one that has committed members and party professionals, a strong and well-connected network of party branches, centralized bureaucracy, party locales (headquarters and branches), and holds regular party congresses (Basedau & Stroh, 2008; Cyr, 2017; Tavits, 2013; Van Dyck, 2017). Parties with more complex organizations are more likely to persist (Spirova, 2007, p. 30). However, building strong party organizations is costly, and it requires committed leaders and committed activists that are not too interested in short-term pay-offs (Cyr, 2017; Tavits, 2013; Van Dyck, 2017, 2018).

Party regulation and electoral rules have an important impact on the resources that parties can acquire and develop. Party regulation determines parties' access to public funding. This relates to funds for electoral campaigns and state subsidies for parties' day to day operations (van Biezen & Borz, 2011). Access to electoral funding may be crucial for party survival (Bolleyer, 2013, p. 80). For example, broadcasting access has a positive relationship with sustained electoral support and electoral participation (Bolleyer & Bytzek, 2013, p. 785).

Resources may contribute differently to parties' persistence, however. Some resources that may contribute to goal achievement may also hinder parties' persistence when they fail to achieve their primary goals. For example, extensive memberships may work well for policy seeking parties. These members are likely supporters of the policy the party advances and will hence work towards its advancement by any means possible, primarily mobilizing voters. These supporters may be crucial for a party's decision to persist after failing to achieve its goal of policy advancement as long as things stay the same. However, these committed members may impede a policy-seeking party's adaptation after goal achievement failure, mainly when it affects the purity of the party's policy goal. In turn, an extensive and committed membership may work against an office-seeking party both for goal achievement and the choice to persist after failure. The larger the pool of members that may expect office benefits, the more likely it is for party members to be dissatisfied and cause trouble. Moreover, these members may not be willing to stick around and support a party that does not achieve its goals, i.e., not delivering benefits.

A strong (and complex) party organization can also contribute or hinder party survival, especially when survival requires adaptation. A strong organization alongside committed members may help parties mobilize voters, which may be necessary for reaching electoral



thresholds to access state funding or get candidates elected. However, this same organization may also present challenges when survival requires adaption, especially after goal achievement failure (Levitsky, 1998).

Lastly, although funds may benefit all parties, how these funds are allocated can benefit some parties while harming others. The barriers to access these funds can impact parties differently depending on their organization and their primary goals. Electoral thresholds for state subsidies allocation will, in general, punish electorally weaker parties (Bakke & Sitter, 2015; Birnir, 2005; Casal Bértoa & Spirova, 2019). Nonetheless, parties with extensive activist members are less likely to suffer from a lack of resources than parties with a more professionalized staff that requires financial support.

Party survival is thus a tale of goal achievement and how parties weather failing to achieve their goals. Take two fictional examples, *policy-seeking* party “A” and an *office-seeking* party “B.” Both parties receive the same small percentage of electoral support in consecutive elections. Neither party got enough votes to qualify for state funding during the prior election. However, the electoral rules stipulate that all parties that present candidates for elections are given broadcasting access and funds for the campaign. Therefore, both parties can develop electoral campaigns. Both parties have lively organizations with party members committed to the primary goal of each party. For party “A” that means activist members focused on the party’s policy program, and for party “B” it means professional members interested in profiting from access to office appointment. After two electoral cycles without changes in the electoral support for the parties (receiving the same small percentage of votes), party “A” survives, and party “B” disbands. If we pay no attention to the parties’ differences in goals, we would be unable to explain the disbandment of party “B” as well as the persistence of party “A.” However, let’s take seriously that parties pursue different goals and that these goals affect how the party organizations are set up and what resources are more or less important for each party. Then, it is easier to explain the difference between the parties’ fates.

The primary goal of party “A” makes it more likely to persist than party “B” given their resources and the system in which they exist. First, the party members of “A” are activists and committed to advance the party’s policy agenda. These party members are likely to value the organization enough to contribute to its financial functioning. Moreover, they are also more likely interested in distributing information about the program and talking to voters. The electoral rules that provide funding for an electoral campaign can be instrumental: the party members may “spread the word” more widely using financial aid. This will inevitably affect the national public debate, which may contribute to the party’s goal achievement evaluation,

even if electorally the party is not performing well. By contrast, party “B” as an office-seeking party might be valued by its members in as much as it delivers benefits. Party members might not be interested in providing funds for the party’s day to day life. The campaign funding will help the party mobilize voters, and party members could be invested in getting more votes, as votes often help parties gain office benefits. However, the campaigns could be infructuous without committed activist party members, and the pay-off might be too limited (a small percentage of votes and few or non-office appointments). The office-seeking party is thus less likely to be able to achieve its goal. It follows then that party “B” is more likely to disband despite its initially strong organization.

Although fictional, this example helps ascertain the importance of considering the different goals that parties pursue when researching party survival. Combining the arguments about parties’ primary goals (and their achievement) and the extant knowledge about the importance of resources can help us understand why parties persist despite low levels of electoral support and scarce resources. As argued at the beginning of this chapter, these parties are many, yet theories about their persistence are scarce.

## **2.5 Strategies to identify parties’ primary goals and their achievement**

Applying this theory of party survival requires identifying a party’s primary goal and evaluating its performance at achieving that goal. I address each of these steps in this section and introduce strategies to identify a party’s goal and assess goal achievement.

### **2.5.1 Parties’ primary goals**

The first step, identifying a party’s primary goal, is rather difficult. Despite the pervasive usage of office-seeking and policy-seeking references to describe both political parties and their leaders in the literature, there is no standardized list of characteristics for these parties or their leaders. The idea of goal-seeking is often employed in models to estimate parties’ actions, such as coalition formation. Still, the parties themselves are not questioned on whether they are, effectively, pursuing any of these goals. More commonly, parties are defined as office seeking or policy seeking after analyzing their coalition strategies *and* their pay-offs (see for example: Debus & Gross, 2015; Evans, 2018). However, this strategy is not useful to identify the goals specific parties pursue in non-parliamentary systems and in cases of parties that remain in the opposition or receive scarce pay-offs. Moreover, parties may pursue different goals at different times, and this strategy is not the best to gauge these changes.

It is imperative to develop ways in which the primary goal parties pursue can be identified. Two critical issues need to be addressed: first, how to identify the primary goal of a party (what questions to ask and to whom), and second, when to do so (during what period). In short, the answer is that parties should be questioned directly (Strom & Muller, 1999). Hence the primary sources of data for this should be: interviews with party members. To complement and triangulate these answers – or in case direct questioning is impossible – researchers should look at documents and any form of records relating to the party and the party's actions, including how parties set up their electoral campaigns, produced during the days (or even months), produced before and during an electoral campaign.

Despite the many differences between political parties, they all have one common characteristic: all parties participate in elections.<sup>26</sup> During the days (or even months) before an election, parties are likely to show heightened activity. Parties reach out to the electorate, produce party manifestos, update the party's programmatic platforms, and increase their overall presence in the media. Moreover, during this extended period – particularly before campaigns start – parties will choose to persist or disband by evaluating their performance and making the necessary changes to the party's goal achievement strategies and even its primary goal. Although a party may disband at any point, it is often only when the party does not participate in an election that – absent alternative reports – a party is defined as gone. A party that develops an electoral campaign is hence a party that has evaluated its goal achievement and (if necessary) has taken steps to adapt its goals or strategies.

Therefore, the first step to identify a party's primary goal is to define the elections and inter-elections periods to research. Before and during an electoral campaign, parties (party leaders, candidates, members, etc.) are more likely to talk openly or provide hints about the party's primary goal. The next necessary step – if possible – is to speak to the parties (their leaders and members) and discuss the parties' primary goals in relation to the selected periods. In addition to this, or instead of this, researchers may work towards acquiring archival data which is likely to contain hints about a party's primary goal – particularly records of the parties' leaders' presentations in the media as well as documents (such as party manifestos) produced by the parties during the electoral campaign period and the days before the beginning of the

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<sup>26</sup>Of course, it is possible not all parties will participate in all elections (or at all electoral arenas). Nonetheless, the definition of persisting parties used in this dissertation requires parties to participate in elections to be considered for analysis.

campaign ( Hunter, 2010; Pedersen, 2012b; Wolinetz, 2002).<sup>27</sup> The following are the main “hints” that could be uncovered during the analysis of archival data and interviews:

In the case of *policy-seeking* parties, statements (and the documents) will revolve around the importance of their policy program and the need to protect the purity of the party’s policy position (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Hunter, 2010; Pedersen, 2012b, p. 898). These parties will avoid any type of electoral alliances with parties with a different programmatic agenda and are likely to talk about it (Hunter, 2010; Pedersen, 2012b, p. 901). The party leaders’ statements and the party’s documents are likely to discuss their opposition to join alliances with non-congenial partners or emphasize the policy agreements with a partner. It is essential to point out, nonetheless, that as Wolinetz (2002) emphasizes, these policies can either be “logically constrained or a loosely connected agglomeration of demands” (p. 50). Therefore, the policy goal does not necessarily require an entirely developed programmatic platform. It could be the case that parties pursue a single – even simple – policy principle. What matters is that this policy (goal) will structure the party’s actions and that this will be evident from the documents and leaders’ statements.

In turn, *office-seeking* parties are likely to make claims regarding *being* the government. These are parties open to join electoral and government coalitions and less likely to take issue with the partner’s policy platform (Duncan, 2007, p. 72; Hunter, 2010; Wolinetz, 2002, p. 150). Office-seeking parties are hence likely to show flexibility in terms of their platforms’ programmatic content to accommodate possible partners and mobilize a wider pool of voters (Lupu, 2016, p. 88; Wolinetz, 2002, p. 151). These parties are unlikely to discuss a partner’s programmatic platform when forming an alliance. For these parties, holding office appointments will be crucial, and therefore the parties’ actions will focus on securing these appointments (by any means possible).

Lastly, the *value-infusion-seeking* parties will focus on the party’s brand and the party organization itself. Statements and documents will focus on the *development* and *protection* of the party organization. The statements and the documents will follow the lines of “focusing on the party organization” and “building the party.” These are parties that will focus on their survival. Thus, many claims may also relate to ensuring that the party organization fulfills the requisites to maintain its legal registration and continues to work outside the electoral calendar.

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<sup>27</sup> One of the few systematic efforts to classify parties’ primary goals, *The Party Change Project* (Harmel & Janda, 1996), combined secondary data and data from electoral campaign strategies.

The goals that parties pursue have empirical implications. These are implications on how parties are governed, what parties (their members and leaders) convey to the press, and how parties conduct electoral campaigns. Therefore, the analysis of statements and party documents could also be triangulated with data about how these parties run electoral campaigns. These data sources (interviews, archival data, and campaign data) may be combined to develop a more reliable identification of the parties' primary goals. Nonetheless, the data from the documentation and party members' interviews should always be considered as outweighing data from the electoral campaigns in case of contradiction. Depending on the electoral system, votes may be more or less important for goal achievement. Hence, parties could develop campaign strategies geared to get as many votes as possible that could, in appearance, contradict parties' primary goals.

The empirical implications of primary goals on electoral campaigns relate to 1) the content of campaigns, 2) whether this content is similar or not to the previously employed content, 3) who are the candidates, 4) whether the parties join or express the intention of joining electoral alliances or governing coalitions, 5) who runs the campaigns, and lastly 6) what are the campaign strategies employed by each party. Table 2.1 summarizes the empirical implications of office-, policy-, and value-infusion seeking regarding how parties run their electoral campaigns. It is important to point out that these indicators fit with the ideal-typical image of *pure* policy-, office-, or value-infusion-seeking parties. As such, finding a party that runs campaigns fulfilling all of these indicators might not be easy. However, these indicators are fine-grained enough to cover most aspects of the parties' campaigns

If a party is a policy-seeking party, its campaign will deploy a programmatic (policy-oriented) campaign. This programmatic content will most likely be similar to the one deployed since the party's formation (with minor adjustments). The campaign will focus on the party's programmatic platform. Research shows that policy-seeking parties spend more resources on policy-oriented propaganda than candidate-oriented propaganda (Pedersen, 2012b, p. 903). The candidates will be party members but could also come from external organizations with similar principles and policy interests. Candidates should, in all cases, represent the party's programmatic content and be expected to follow the party's programmatic guidelines if elected (e.g., Brazil's Partido os Trabalhadores (PT) legislators; see Hunter, 2010, p. 23). I describe these candidates as *activist candidates*. In the case of electoral alliances (if the electoral rules permit them), these parties will avoid them unless the partners have congenial policy platforms. Activist party members will guide the campaigns. They are the most likely to be committed to the party's program and be the best suited to developing programmatic content. Lastly, these

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parties will more likely create campaigns that follow conventional strategies, emphasizing programmatic content.

*Table 2.1 Electoral campaign indicators of parties' primary goals*

Electoral campaign indicators of parties' primary goals			
	If policy-seeking	If office-seeking	If value-infusion-seeking
Campaign content	Programmatic (policy-oriented)	Symbolic (candidate and/or alliance oriented).	Symbolic (party brand oriented)
Historical content	Similar programmatic content throughout the years	Flexible / changing content (adapted to alliances)	Similar symbolic / party brand content throughout the years
Candidates	Activist (policy-focused) candidates	Office-holder candidates (most likely winner)	Party member candidates
Alliances	Unlikely (unless partners are congenial)	Likely	Unlikely
Campaign leaders	Activists (policy-focused)	Professionals	Party members
Campaign strategies	Conventional: programmatic platform oriented	High tech strategies: including new forms of media and information provision and polling to adjust the campaigns	Conventional: party brand-oriented

If a party is an office-seeking party, its campaign's programmatic content will likely be either vague or not consistently applied. This content is prone to be adapted, and parties are likely to dilute their brands as needed. Furthermore, these parties may also use symbolic appeals (candidate-oriented), or in the case of an electoral alliance, the campaign content could focus on the alliance's brand. Additionally, these parties' candidates will emphasize their openness to join governing coalitions. The candidates can be party members, but the most important selection criteria (even within intra-party democracy practices) will be electability. This makes the selection and appointment of candidates that are not part of the parties possible. These candidates will be whoever is the most likely to garner more votes and thus secure the party's goal achievement (Wolinetz, 2002, p. 153). The use of electoral alliances will be

possible as long as these are considered a good strategy to hold office with little attention to congenial programmatic platforms (Hunter, 2010, p. 39). Campaign leaders will be professional advisors (which could also be in-house advisors) that will help the party deploy the best campaign possible to achieve its goals and garner votes (Harmel & Janda, 1996; Hunter, 2010, p. 39; Pedersen, 2012b, p. 903). Lastly, these parties' campaigns will use different and innovative campaign strategies to engage with as many voters as possible and convey tailor-made appeals to each of the potential voters.

Lastly, if a party is a value-infusion-seeking party, its campaign will focus on symbolic (party brand) appeals. As was the case for the policy-seeking parties, these appeals should show stability (be the same as in previous elections). The candidates will more likely be party members. These parties are unlikely to bring in external candidates. The candidates will be representatives of the party and its brand. I refer to these candidates as party members (to differentiate them from the activist candidates of policy-seeking parties). These parties will not be prone to joining electoral alliances as these could hamper the parties' brand or the unity within the organization. The campaign leaders will be party members as these are the best prepared to focus on the party's brand. Lastly, the electoral campaigns will use conventional technologies and practices. These parties are not likely to invest in external advisors or innovative strategies as winning the elections and adapting to all kinds of voters is not necessarily crucial for their survival.

### **2.5.2 Evaluating goal achievement**

Political parties are likely to operationalize their primary goals in multiple ways. How parties operationalize their goals will have a direct impact on how they build their aspiration levels as well as on how they evaluate their performance. As discussed, parties will do this differently, which means that scholars will have to define how each party operationalizes their goals based on how they talk about their goals. Nonetheless, extant research on political parties and their behaviour provides some guidelines regarding what to expect. Table 2.2 summarizes some of the possible ways in which parties' primary goals may be operationalized.

Parties may operationalize policy-seeking in terms of the number of bill initiatives presented by the party's legislators or with their endorsement (Pedersen, 2012a). Parties may also focus on the number of bills passed at the legislature or the number of bills approved by the executive (with or without a veto) (Tsebelis & Alemán, 2005). In addition, policy-seeking parties may define their goals in terms of topics that become relevant within the public debate

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by introducing a topic into the discussions within the public arena inside or outside the legislature (Rasch, 2014). Lastly, policy seeking parties may focus on negative actions, i.e., blocking the passing of bills or steering the public debate away from a specific topic (Cox & McCubbins, 2005).

*Table 2.2 Indicators of goal achievement per parties' primary goals*

Policy-seeking parties	Office-seeking parties	Value-infusion-seeking parties
Number of bills proposed	Policy area, level, and number of ministerial appointments	Party meetings (per bylaws)
Number of bills passed	Policy area, level, and number of non-departmental agencies and commissions appointments	Formal registration continuity
Number of bills approved (by the executive)	Policy area, level, and number of executive institutions appointments	State subsidies' access
Steering the public debate (for or against an issue)	Government contracts and government rents	Party membership stability

In the case of office seeking parties, these parties are likely to operationalize their office goals as appointments within the state. Parties are likely to differentiate these appointments in terms of policy areas, the type of institutions in which party members and party nominees are appointed, and the level at which individuals are appointed. Following Kopecky and Spirova (2012) the state may be divided into: “Economy, Finance, Judiciary, Media, Military and Police, Foreign Service, Culture and Education, Health Care, and Regional and Local Administration” (p. 21). Parties will likely have particular preferences in terms of which policy area they are interested in. Secondly, parties will also care about the type of institutions in which they receive appointments. Government institutions may be split into ministerial departments (core civil service), non-departmental agencies and commissions, and executing institutions (Kopecký & Spirova, 2012, p. 21). Lastly, parties will also care about the level at which party members or nominees receive the appointments; for example: in the case of ministerial departments, these levels include the appointment of ministers, vice-ministers, department directors, and so on. Office-seeking parties will, in sum, operationalize their goals in terms of appointments, at specific levels, within specific types of institutions, and within a particular policy arena. Parties may also operationalize office-holding in terms of government contracts and government rents.



For value-infusion-seeking parties, goal achievement can be operationalized around formal and informal practices of parties outside the electoral schedule. That a party is valued on its own right will be reflected in the fact that the party has a life outside the electoral process. Therefore, the goal of survival may be operationalized in terms of whether the party members meet according to what is established in the organization's bylaws. In the case of parties that require state funding to maintain the organization, the goal may be operationalized in terms of whether the party receives or not state subsidies. This goal may also be operationalized in terms of party membership – whether the party's members stick to the party or not. Survival may mean many different things for different parties, and many of the markers of achievement may also fall within conventional expectations regarding parties, e.g., the party members meeting regularly. However, as discussed during the chapter, parties will operationalize goals and aspiration levels differently, and what may be average for one party could be a notorious achievement for another one.

With knowledge about a party's primary goal and how it is operationalized, it is possible to construct a party's aspiration level (by looking at a prior performance) in order to evaluate a recent performance. That is, it is possible to do a replication of sorts to understand the party's decision-making process. This can be done purely quantitatively by building indexes for comparison or via a combination of qualitative and quantitative data. For example, in the case of an office-seeking party, the comparison may be based on the number of office appointments allotted to the party during a previous period (aspiration level) considering all aspects discussed regarding operationalizations (policy arena, type of institutions, and level of appointment) against the number of appointments received during the evaluation period. In turn, for policy-seeking parties, the number of bill initiatives presented at the legislature or the number of laws passed during the previous period could be compared to the outcomes achieved during the period of evaluation. Conversely, suppose the party's focus was to steer the public debate into a specific topic. In that case, an analysis of the main issues of the public debate arena could be necessary (both for the construction of the aspiration level as well as to determine the performance). Lastly, for value-infusion-seeking parties, this comparison should focus on the organizational characteristics of the party and the differences between time  $t$  and time  $t+1$ . For instance, if the goal of the party is operationalized in terms of state subsidies, achievement may be evaluated in terms of receiving the subsidy. By contrast, the goal and the aspiration level may have been developed in terms of receiving a larger subsidy. Thus, the evaluation should be done by looking at the size of the subsidies.

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I apply these strategies to identify a party's primary goal and evaluate a party's primary goal achievement to understand Pachakutik's persistence in chapter 6.