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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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7 Conclusion

Political parties are ubiquitous to democracy.¹⁶⁶ They are organizations that serve as linkages between civil society and government; they participate in the public debate (shaping how citizens approach politics), mobilize and represent their voters, contest elections, recruit and train political leaders, and organize and coordinate government (Aldrich, 1995). Political parties, nonetheless, often come and go. Especially in regions like Latin America, where party replacement explains most of the electoral volatility (Cohen, Kobilanski, & Zechmeister, 2018, p. 1020), it is possible to trace the growing number of new political parties entering the electoral arena as well as the ever-increasing number of both new and old parties that leave the electoral arena. Nevertheless, not all parties come and go. Some become well known success stories, and others linger even with low levels of electoral support.

These are parties generally discounted and defined as irrelevant. However, these parties are not inconsequential. These parties' mere participation in electoral processes is likely to affect other parties' mobilization strategies. It is only after sustained presence that party organizations have an impact on political systems. Moreover, it is well known that a single seat at the legislature may be enough to make a party powerful or at least relevant. These parties hence deserve more attention than the one they are generally granted.

This dissertation contributes to opening up a research agenda that addresses parties that survive against all odds. To continue with the references to Latin America's parties, the bulk of the literature consistently focuses on new party formation (Allison, 2006, 2016; Anria, 2013; Boudon, 2001; Bowen, 2011; Hunter, 2010; Madrid, 2010, 2012; Manning, 2007; Rosenblatt, 2018; Van Dyck, 2017). Only a few authors focus on long-lasting party building (see, for example, Levitsky et al., 2016). Yet, they focus only on parties with high levels of electoral support. Persisting parties that do not fulfill the criteria of electoral success are often left unaddressed. An exception to this trend is the work of Jennifer Cyr (2017). Cyr's work is helpful to synthesize the problem I have highlighted throughout this dissertation: "it is time to look beyond the dichotomy of continued national-electoral success or failure and examine the dynamic space that lies in-between" (Cyr, 2016, p. 125).

¹⁶⁶ Parties, although ubiquitous, are sometimes absent in democracies. The works of Veenendaal (2016) and Levitsky and Zavaleta (2016) refer to some of these cases.

7.1 Surviving against all odds

One vital step to advance research on these parties is to understand their survival. I argue that party survival needs to be comprehended from the perspective of each party's decision-making process to persist, change, or disband. Parties make these decisions following the achievement (or possible achievement) of their primary goal. Parties – including those with scant resources and low levels of electoral support – will only persist if they choose to do so. Therefore, the study of party survival needs to take into account these decision-making processes. I approach political parties from a sociological perspective that emphasizes that parties are not only tools for ambitious politicians. Parties are 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). Moreover, parties are “masters of their own fate in that they are capable of making organizational choices and using organization as a tool in the pursuit of their political goals” (Webb, Poguntke, & Scarrow, 2017, p. 319).

The conventional approaches to political parties' survival consistently eschew a discussion relating to why a political party would choose to persist. This omission can arguably be explained by their focus on parties that receive consistently 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) or parties with resources (Beyens et al., 2016; Bolleyer, 2013; Bolleyer & Bytze, 2013; Burgess & Levitsky, 2003; Casal Bértoa & Spirova, 2019; Cyr, 2017; Deegan-Krause & Haughton, 2018; Dolenc & Širinić, 2017; Grzymala-Busse, 2002; Kopecký & Mair, 2012; Rose & Mackie, 1988; Tavits, 2013). Both groups of parties are likely to achieve their goals (or have the means to do so). Therefore, asking why they may choose to persist – or the logic behind this decision – could be unwarranted.

However, besides obscuring parties' decision-making processes, these approaches lump all parties together in terms of their primary goals. Parties are indirectly presented as aiming for the same – single – objective of maximizing their electoral support, which might not be the case. In fact, this perspective on parties' goals clashes with the arguments of researchers that focus on parties' behavior and the different goals that political parties pursue (D'Alimonte, 1999; Duncan, 2007; Evans, 2018; Harmel & Janda, 1994; Janda, 1990; Pedersen, 2012b, 2012a; Strom, 1990; Strom & Muller, 1999; Wolinetz, 2002). In this literature, parties are presented as able to pursue different primary goals. These goals determine

how the parties react to external shocks and their behavior. In this dissertation, I bridge these two research lines, combining the argument (indirectly discussed in the party survival literature) that parties survive as they can achieve their goals and the argument that parties pursue different primary goals.

This is a novel approach to party survival. It addresses the decision-making process parties go through before deciding to disband, change, or persist. The decision to persist follows from evaluating the achievement of their goals based on their aspiration levels. Parties that achieve their goals (or are likely to do so either by adapting their means or changing their goals) are more likely to decide to persist. This approach is instrumental in understanding the persistence of parties that do not conform to conventional electoral support and resource availability expectations. However, this does not mean that the theory of party survival presented here is only applicable to these parties. Quite the opposite, this theory of party survival and the methods of party goal identification and goal achievement evaluations introduced in chapter 2 are useful to understand all types of parties' survival.

The theory introduced in this dissertation hence contributes to a more precise understanding of party survival. It addresses the often-ignored survival decision-making process that parties go through. In addition, the methods of goal identification and goal achievement evaluation have applications beyond the analysis of party survival. As discussed in chapter 2, although parties are consistently referred to as office-seeking or policy-seeking, there is a lack of a method to identify the goals parties pursue. The methods introduced in chapter 2 fill in this gap in our knowledge. Lastly, this new theory of party survival contributes to clarifying the effects of different resources on party survival. Different resources will have a different impact on parties' survival depending on each party's primary goal

7.2 Ethnic voting in Ecuador, Latin America, and beyond

The most common explanation used to make sense of Pachakutik's longevity is its connection to the indigenous population. The party is defined as an ethnic party built on the shoulders of a strong indigenous movement. In short, the party was expected to count on indigenous voters' support and rely on the social movement's resources to persist. This, I argued, does not apply to Pachakutik. I focused in particular on the expected votes the party should receive from the indigenous voters. Arguably, these votes could be taken as indicators of the party's indigenous populations' overall support. However, as I showed, the party does not have their support, and hence the party's survival cannot be explained as determined by this relationship. This finding

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required further reflection on the expected relationship between the indigenous population and ethnic parties in Ecuador.

Some scholars have already stressed that ethnic identity is, only at times, a relevant predictor of voting preferences in Latin America (see: Hirseland & Strijbis, 2019; Moreno Morales, 2015). However, it is more common to find that scholars leave unquestioned the link between the indigenous population in the region and parties that claim a connection to this population group (often based on the parties' ties to the indigenous population's social movements) (see, for example, Mijeski & Beck, 2004, 2008; Rice, 2011; Rice & Van Cott, 2006). The assumption of the unbreakable connection between voters and parties brushes over one crucial understanding of ethnic identities: ethnic identities are malleable and fluid. As ethnic identities may change or be mobilized (or not) by different individuals at different times, it is imperative to preface all work on ethnic voting by addressing whether the ethnic identity of interest will work as a shortcut for connecting voters and an ethnic party.

I argued and showed that Ecuador's indigenous population, often identified as *indígena*, has become fragmented into multiple *pueblos* and nationalities. This fragmentation can explain the low levels of indigenous' votes for Pachakutik's candidates. My findings align with findings relating to ethnic voting in Bolivia, where indigenous voters in different regions employ different identity shortcuts (Hirseland & Strijbis, 2019). This disconnection between an ethnic party and the expected targeted – ethnic – voters in these two countries suggests the connection between an ethnic party and ethnic voters is not inescapable. Ethnic identities may be more or less fixed depending on specific institutional contexts (Chandra, 2005, p. 245) or their usefulness (de Zwart, 2000).

This has important implications for the study of ethnic voting in Ecuador, Latin America, and beyond. Crucially, the need to explore the possible disconnection between ethnic parties and ethnic voters instead of expecting an unbreakable connection. This expands the already acknowledged fact that ethnicity matters where it has been politicized, but it is not a perfect formula to mobilize voters (Carlin, Singer, & Zechmeister, 2015; Dunning & Harrison, 2010; Huber & Suryanarayan, 2016; Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Moreno Morales, 2015). I show that it is necessary to first “justify” the ethnic identity expected to connect voters and parties, as was already argued by Chandra (2001).

7.3 Mixed and segmented mobilization strategies

This dissertation also contributes to the study of political parties' mobilization strategies. This research agenda is slowly moving towards an understanding of parties employing multiple strategies at a time to mobilize voters (Calvo & Murillo, 2019; Halvorsen, 2019; Luna, 2014; Thachil, 2014a), against the common-place idea that parties will use a single strategy to mobilize voters (Kitschelt, 2000). Chapter 5 focuses primarily on three mobilization strategies: programmatic, clientelistic, and symbolic (ethnic-, party-, and candidate-based) and how these may be used. Parties may use the three mobilization strategies 1) in a pure form in all electoral districts; 2) mixed (two or more mobilization strategies) in all electoral districts; 3) segmented, i.e., using two pure strategies in different districts; or 4) mixed and segmented, i.e., using pure and mixed strategies in multiple districts. This framework expands researchers' tool-kits to study parties' mobilization strategies.

I used this framework to study Pachakutik's mobilization strategies. In addition to further illustrating the use of multiple mobilization strategies, my findings also have implications for the study of ethnic parties. The key limitation of conventional research on ethnic parties is that ethnic parties are commonly classified as clientelistic parties. This classification indirectly curtails the possibility of them using mobilization strategies other than clientelistic (Chandra, 2004, 2011; Gunther & Diamond, 2003; Horowitz, 1985). By contrast, an alternative view emphasizes that ethnic parties use diverse mobilization strategies to influence electoral support (Basedau & Stroh, 2012; Erdmann, 2004; Huber & Suryanarayan, 2016; Kendhammer, 2010; Lindberg & Morrison, 2008; Madrid, 2012; Resnick, 2014; Thachil, 2014b). My findings contribute to expanding this research agenda showing that despite Pachakutik being an ethnic party, its candidates only at times employ symbolic-ethnic mobilization strategies, and in even fewer cases, clientelistic mobilization strategies.

7.4 Ecuador politics, elections, and Pachakutik

This dissertation also makes important empirical contributions. It expands the available dataset of Ecuadorian elections by adding on the categorization of all parties and electoral alliances competing in elections between 2002 and 2019. Moreover, chapter 3 offers a summarized overview of these results, which can help understand Ecuadorian politics at a glance. Lastly, research on Pachakutik stalled during the early 2000s (mostly after 2006) and has since then dwindled (Van Cott, 2005, 2008). In this dissertation, I expand this existing knowledge by analyzing the party's evolution since its formation but with a particular emphasis on the 2006-

2019 period. Through that, we learn more about how the party developed and survived. This dissertation makes three important arguments about this party. First, Pachakutik's persistence cannot be linked solely to the party's support from the indigenous voters. Second, Pachakutik is an ethnic party that mixes and segments strategies across and within districts that likely contribute to the party's mestizo electoral support. And third, Pachakutik is a party that has pursued different primary goals: policy between 1996 and 2002, office-holding between 2002 and 2006, and value-infusion (survival) since 2006.

7.5 Directions for future research

As mentioned already, parties that survive against all odds require further attention in the discipline. The first question that should be addressed is these parties' (and their primary goals) effect on electoral competition. As discussed in chapter 2, the goals that parties pursue have empirical implications for how parties are governed and how they set up electoral campaigns. For example, suppose the parties more likely to persist, with scarce resources and low levels of electoral support, are value-infusion-seeking parties. In that case, given that these parties often participate in electoral competitions only to ensure their survival, the electoral arena is not likely to be affected by their long-lasting presence. If, by contrast, it is policy-seeking parties that persist, electoral competition is more likely to be affected. These parties are likely to bring their policy issues into the public debate and hence influence other parties to take a position on the matter. By contrast, office-seeking parties may be more likely to have a reduced effect – just as value-infusion-seeking parties – given their interest to make themselves into good partners to acquire office appointments.

Another critical question that needs further research is these parties' impact on party regulation laws. Setting aside their specific primary goals, all of these parties are likely interested in working towards party regulation that limits new party formation and protects existing parties, e.g., set low or no barriers for state subsidies. Beyond party regulation, these parties may also affect policy-making. Policy-seeking parties, just as they may affect the offers of more established parties at the electoral arena, may also affect the public debate one in the legislature. Office-seeking parties may, by contrast, become crucial partners to create majorities as they are more likely flexible partners. Lastly, value-infusion-seeking parties could also be a partner for all provided that they can negotiate benefits for the party organization. The role these parties may take in the policy-making process needs to be better conceptualized.

Another important question for further research is the impact of the different types of resources that these parties have and their interaction with the goals. Although I have already addressed some of these aspects here, there is still much to understand. In particular, the effects of strong party leaders, a party's organization flexibility or lack thereof, and the party membership's size need further attention. There is much to learn still about these parties and their impacts on democracy. After all, the world is not only made of winners and losers; competitors also have a say in the game.

