

Strong Societies, Weak Parties: Regime Change in Cuba and Venezuela in the 1950s and Today

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ABSTRACT

The literature on the origins of democratic institutions is split between bottom-up and top-down approaches. The former emphasize societal factors that press for democracy, the latter, rules and institutions that shape elites' incentives. Can these approaches be reconciled? This article proposes competitive political parties, more so than degrees of modernization and associationalism, as the link between the two. Competitive political parties enhance society's bargaining power with the state and show dominant elites that liberalization is in their best interest, the parties are thus effective conduits of democracy. In the context of party deficit, the prospects for democratization or redemocratization are slim. This is illustrated by comparing Cuba and Venezuela in the 1950s and 1990s.

The literature on democratization could be classified, *a grosso modo*, into two major schools of thought. One school explains democratization as the result of societal bargaining in regard to the state. Borrowing from the sociostructuralist tradition of John Locke, Karl Marx, and Max Weber, this school claims that democratic transitions occur when societal actors achieve the necessary political strength to demand rights from an otherwise coercive state apparatus.¹

The other school, of more recent lineage, treats democratization as the result of incentives and strategic interactions faced by elites, including incumbents. Borrowing from rational choice and the new institutionalism, this tradition claims that democratic transitions occur when actors design institutions and rules that persuade elites that granting rights to opponents is cost-effective and in their self-interest.²

Are these schools of thought reconcilable? At one level, the answer seems to be no. One school takes a bottom-up approach, the other a top-down approach. One school focuses on socioeconomic, structural variables, the other on rulemaking and strategic calculus. At another level, however, it could be argued that there is nothing to reconcile at all. Sociostructuralists sometimes argue, for instance, that societal strengthening naturally compels elites to deem democratization rational, or at least to deem oppression irrational (O'Donnell 1973: 85–91; North and Weingast 1989). Likewise, institutionalists often claim that certain rules of the game naturally enhance the bargaining power of societal

actors by increasing the power of moderates (see Przeworski 1991, 66–79) or by mobilizing certain societal groups (see Geddes 1996).

This article argues that the differences between the schools are real, yet bridgeable. During processes of democratization, two separate domains of action ought to operate: societal actors must gain sufficient political strength to bargain effectively with the state, and elites must come to see liberalization as rational and self-serving. Each process can be autonomous; that is, changes in one domain need not affect the other. For example, the rise of a more diversified, rights-demanding society need not make state elites more inclined to democratize. Likewise, the rise of reforming elites need not make civil society stronger. Under certain political conditions, however, the relationship can become symbiotic. That is, there is a certain political variable that, if present, can render the domains mutually reinforcing.

This variable is the rise of competitive political parties. Scholars have long contended that political parties are conducive to, maybe even necessary for, democracy. Parties are “the makers of democratic government” (Schattschneider 1942, 1). This article bolsters the claim. Competitive political parties, more so than variables such as degree of modernization and associationalism, simultaneously reinforce the two domains of action necessary for democracy. Specifically, competitive political parties enhance the political capacity of civil society to undermine authoritarianism and the propensity of elites to deem political liberalization rational.

Cuba and Venezuela in the 1950s illustrate this argument. Both are cases of dramatic, almost legendary regime transitions. Cuba went from an unstable, semisultanistic authoritarianism (the second Fulgencio Batista regime, 1952–58) to a “mobilizational authoritarianism” (the Fidel Castro regime, 1959–present) (see Domínguez 1998, Pérez-Stable 1999). Venezuela, on the other hand, went from an unstable, semisultanistic authoritarianism (the Marcos Pérez Jiménez regime, 1948–58) to a “consolidated,” “consensual” democracy (see Levine and Crisp 1999). This difference in regime outcome is explained by differences in the strength of political parties.

Starting in the 1940s, Venezuelan political parties became strong, competitive, and well rooted in society, whereas Cuban parties decomposed. This study argues that prosperous societies challenging the state but lacking strong political parties (Cuba in the 1950s) are significantly less prone to engender competitive politics than comparable societies enjoying strong political parties (Venezuela in the 1950s). The reason is that competitive parties neutralize the tendency of dissidents to turn to violence and side with guerrillas. Competitive parties can coordinate the activities of dissidents, giving them a sense of security that, in turn, creates incentives for elites to agree to rules of competition and coopera-

tion. Competitive parties, furthermore, can also sanction political actors that fail to comply with agreed rules of contestation during the transition. In short, parties enhance society's bargaining leverage with the state and simultaneously create incentives for elites to prefer competitive politics.

The selection of these two cases may seem surprising, but it is intended to fill certain gaps in the scholarship on each case. One gap in the scholarship on regime change in Cuba in the late 1950s is its neglect of the literature on democratization. Scholars tend to see Cuba as a case of rising socialism rather than failed democratization, thus they have been heavily informed by theories of revolution and less so by theories of democratization.

Scholars of Venezuela, by contrast, have been conspicuous consumers and producers of theories of democratization. The shortcoming with this scholarship is that once Venezuelanists established that the country democratized because it had good money (from oil), good leaders (who learned to avoid previous mistakes), and good pacts (which granted political space to most political actors), they explored no further. The late 1950s regime transition was declared a closed case. As a result, few insights from the recent democratization literature have been applied to Venezuela. Whereas scholarship on Cuba suffers from blindness toward theories of democratization, scholarship on Venezuela suffers from inattention to newer theories.

Another shortcoming with the scholarship in both cases is its non-comparative nature. Most works on regime change in Cuba and Venezuela in the late 1950s have been single case studies. When they make comparisons, it is usually with like cases (for example, Cuba is compared to other revolutionary regimes, such as Bolivia and Nicaragua; Venezuela to other "old democracies," such as Colombia and Costa Rica). Few works test their hypotheses against opposite cases. This article does just that by comparing Cuba and Venezuela with each other. This provides the variation in the dependent variable (regime outcome) that permits better testing of causal arguments.

This article concludes by applying this party-based argument to present-day Cuba and Venezuela. The most notorious characteristic of both Cuban and Venezuelan politics in the 1990s was democratic deficits. Cuba has been immune to the democratic "third wave" that has swept Latin America, and Venezuela's once-vibrant democracy has decayed. These democratic deficits arguably are also the result of political party deficits.

A central goal of this essay is to resuscitate our understanding of the advantages of party politics. Recently, many scholars and Latin American citizens have dismissed or altogether repudiated political parties, blaming them for numerous political woes. Citizens avoid associa-

tions with political parties and often root for their demise. This article seeks to show that despite their current disfavor, political parties remain indispensable conduits for democracy

TRADITIONAL EXPLANATIONS FOR REGIME CHANGE

Cuba and Venezuela had similar political trajectories until the end of the 1950s. Both gained a U.S.-brokered independence in the early twentieth century.¹ (In Cuba, however, U.S. political influence was deeper and lasted longer as a result of the Platt Amendment.) In the 1930s and 1940s, both were ruled by liberalizing dictators (Batista, 1934–44, in Cuba; Eleazar López Contreras, 1936–41, and Isaías Medina Angarita, 1941–45, in Venezuela) who allowed for the gradual liberalization of politics. In the mid-1940s, these dictatorships gave way to democratic regimes dominated by populist, nationalist center-left parties. These democratic regimes ultimately collapsed and were replaced by increasingly restrictive authoritarian regimes in the 1950s: Batista in Cuba and Pérez Jiménez in Venezuela (see Domínguez 1998; Ellner 1995)

By the late 1950s, the combined efforts of primarily noncommunist political forces defeated these authoritarian regimes. Both countries felt similar external pressure from the United States—a gradual distancing, followed by a policy of guarded conciliation toward the victorious elites. Yet Venezuela's new incumbents produced competitive politics, whereas Cuba's new incumbents produced totalitarianism in Latin America (see Fontaine 1999).

The encroachment of state totalitarianism in Cuba is particularly puzzling because it took place in one of the most modernized and politically mobilized societies in Latin America at the time. This seemingly contradicts a basic tenet of “bottom-up” theories of democratization that predict less state coerciveness in the context of strong societies. Indeed, since the late nineteenth century, Cuban society had exhibited a remarkable capacity to frustrate state attempts to centralize power and restrict contestation. That society did not necessarily succeed in consolidating democracy, but it prevented the consolidation of every authoritarian regime. Yet that same society failed to impede totalitarianism after 1959. Why did Cuba not follow the same path as Venezuela?

Traditional arguments about regime change in Cuba and Venezuela can be grouped into three clusters: socioeconomic structuralism, modernization coupled with deinstitutionalization, and features of political leadership. Each cluster has produced voluminous scholarship. Each, however, also has shortcomings.

Socioeconomic structuralism is one of the best-known of these theories. It explains Cuba's post-1959 change in state-society relations as a response to preexisting structures of dependence (on single markets and

single exports) and inequality (urban-rural, high-class-low-class, male-female, white-nonwhite, powerful empire-weak country). This theory asserts that Cuba needed a powerful, centralized, radical, change-oriented state to liberate the country from those structures, and it sees society's acquiescence as a sign that the new state—however absolutist—succeeded in alleviating the tensions those preexisting structures produced (Ibarra 1998; Pérez 1995; Amaro 1989; Morley 1987; O'Connor 1970; Seers 1964, and to a lesser extent Pérez-Stable 1993).

According to this argument, two main structures of inequality and dependence existed in Cuba; one at the domestic level, the other at the international level. Domestically, Cuba was essentially a gigantic sugar mill. This mill produced sufficient wealth for a few white elites and Havana dwellers but little for everyone else. The rest of the population was impoverished and subject to harsh labor conditions (in cutting sugarcane), seasonal unemployment, general underemployment, and economic stagnation or uncertainty. Internationally, Cuba was excessively dependent on U S markets and capital. The preferential access that Cuban sugar exports received in the United States was an illusion of privilege. In reality, Cuba was trapped in a trade relationship with the United States that removed incentives for Cuba to diversify its economy. Cuba could only specialize in the exports of commodities with declining terms of trade (agroexports) and demeaning services (tourism, gambling, transnational criminality). Because the United States could single-handedly decide to exit this deal at a very low cost to itself, moreover, Cuba operated from an inferior bargaining position.

As an explanation for regime change in Cuba, socioeconomic structuralism is fraught with empirical and theoretical problems. First, it provides a reductionist view of Cuba's society. Even leftists have criticized the view that Cuba was sugar-dominated (see Ortiz 1947). In reality, Cuba had one of the most diversified economies in Latin America (Baklanoff 1971), with a growing and politically autonomous industrial sector (Marqués Dolz 1995). Cuba ranked high on many indices of modernization: nonagricultural wages (among the top in the world), number of inhabitants per television set (number 1 in Latin America), per telephone (third), per radio (fourth), per newspaper (second), per motor vehicle (third), per physician (second) (see Alfonso 1996).

Socioeconomic structuralism dismisses Cuba's thriving middle classes as "insignificant" or prone to "do-nothingism" (O'Connor 1970), yet it was this class (urban-based, middle-class, predominantly white university students) that most actively fought Batista. Socioeconomic structuralism also struggles to explain the magnitude of Cuba's post-1959 dissidence, one of the largest, most multiclass, and most multiracial in Latin America (see Ackerman 1998). It fails to consider that societal rallying behind the Castro regime was the result of effective state

Table 1. Cuba and Venezuela: Dependency and Modernization,
c. 1958

	Cuba		Venezuela	
	Value	Rank	Value	Rank
<i>Indices of Dependence/Inequality</i>				
Imports from U.S., 1958 (US\$M)	528	3	892	1
Exports to U.S., 1958 (US\$M)	546	4	885	1
Main export as percent of total exports (Cuba/sugar, Venez./oil) ^a	76		91	
U.S. ownership of export sector (%)	36.7		NA	
Income share of richest / poorest 20% of population ^b	60/2 1		59/3.0	
<i>Indices of Modernization</i>				
Illiteracy rates (%) ^c	20.8	4	37.9	10
Inhabitants per TV set (%)	18	1	32	2
Number of TV stations	23	3	15	4
Inhabitants per telephone	28	3	47	5
Inhabitants per movie seat	16	2	16	2
Movie tickets sold per capita	9	1	8.5	2
Newspaper issues per inhabitant	8	2	16	8
Inhabitants per automobile	27.3	3	17.4	1
Inhabitants per physician	980	2	1,700	4
Infant mortality rate ^b	37.7		49.3	
Mortality rate (per thousand)	5.8	1	7.8	4
University students per inhabitant	273	3	NA	
Urban population (Cuba 1953; Venezuela 1961)	57		67.5	
Employment, tertiary sector (% of population) ^d	37	1	35	

Note: Tertiary sector includes electricity, gas, water, sanitation, commerce, banks, insurance, transportation, and services.

Sources: Alfonso 1996; ^aHerring 1968. ^bBulmer-Thomas 1994; ^cThorp 1998; ^dIbarra 1998.

use of inducements and constraints rather than of a true process of liberation. As a primarily functional explanation (that is, accounting for causes in terms of effects), moreover, it erroneously implies that the final outcome—a radical authoritarian state—occurred because there was a need for it (see O'Connor 1970).

The main shortcoming of socioeconomic structuralism, however, is that it fails from a comparative perspective. This theory cannot explain why other societies with similar or stronger structures of dependence and inequality avoided Cuba's fate. Specifically, this theory would predict the

Table 2. Book Value of U.S. Direct Investments in Latin America, 1929–1955 (in US\$ millions)

	1929	1940	1946	1950	1952	1955	Percent change, 1929–55
All countries	3,462	2,705	3,005	4,445	5,443	6,233	80.04
Argentina	332	388	202	356	393	447	34.64
Brazil	194	240	323	644	1,013	1,155	495.36
Chile	423	414	485	540	623	639	51.06
Colombia	124	112	189	193	232	274	120.97
Cuba	919	560	553	642	686	736	-19.91
Mexico	683	358	316	415	490	607	-11.13
Peru	124	82	131	145	242	305	145.97
Venezuela	233	262	444	993	1,174	1,428	512.88
Other ^a	430	290	362	517	588	682	58.60

^aDoes not include investments in tanker and shipping operations in Panama of US\$40 million (1946), \$290 million (1950); \$315 million (1952) \$375 million (1955).

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce 1957

rise of intense authoritarianism in Venezuela, for which many indices of dependence and inequality were more acute than Cuba's (see table 1). In relations with the United States, Venezuela was by far the more dependent. Venezuela was one of the most important economic clients of the United States, according to the U.S. State Department (1987b, 1156).

The concentration of U.S. investment in Venezuela far outpaced that of any other country in the region, and was twice as much as Cuba (see table 2). U.S. investments in Cuba, moreover, had stagnated between 1929 and 1955, whereas they skyrocketed in Venezuela by more than 500 percent. Whereas Cuba's export sector had become "Cubanized," Venezuela's export sector remained mostly in the hands of the most affluent multinationals in the world (Jersey Standard, Royal Dutch Shell, Gulf Oil, and Texaco) (Tugwell 1974, 84). Between 1950 and 1957, oil industry profits in Venezuela amounted to US\$3.79 billion, nearly half of the dividend income of Standard Oil (Exxon) came from its Venezuelan subsidiary, Creole Petroleum (Coronil 1997, 182).

Although the structure of U.S. investment differed (in Venezuela, it was concentrated in petroleum; in Cuba, it was distributed among agriculture, petroleum, and public utilities), this did not set Venezuela that far apart from Cuba.⁶ Oil in Venezuela was comparable to what tourism was becoming in Cuba: a profitable, internationally owned sector, subject to external shocks and highly concentrated, generating well-paying employment for a small number of workers. Structures of dependence,

therefore, are not a sufficient, maybe not even a relevant, explanation of regime outcome.

A second cluster of theories explains Cuba's post-1958 regime in terms of Huntington's argument that revolutions occur "where the processes of political modernization and political development have lagged behind the process of social and economic change" (1968, 265). According to this view, high levels of modernization compounded with deinstitutionalization—declining institutional opportunities for political representation—engendered radical politics (see Gil 1962; Domínguez 1978; del Aguila 1997). These arguments recognize that Cuba was an increasingly urbanized, educated, middle-income, and diversified society, which fostered high levels of political mobilization. But because this society experienced a decline in institutions of political representation—the continued nonimplementation of the progressive Constitution of 1940—Cuban citizens became politically radical.

This view avoids the mistake of reducing Cuba to a simple sugar mill. It accurately explains why the fight against Batista was led mostly by middle sectors (the beneficiaries of modernization and the victims of deinstitutionalization). But it cannot explain why this same society, which proved so effective in challenging authoritarianism until the 1950s, failed to prevent totalitarianism in the 1960s.

More important, this view fails from a comparative perspective. Venezuela in the 1950s had levels of modernization comparable to Cuba's: growing urbanization, industrialization, rising middle sectors. Indeed, in many indices of modernization, Cuba outdistanced Venezuela (see table 1). Venezuela also had limited avenues of political representation; during the three years that *Acción Democrática* (AD) held power in the 1940s (the *Trienio*), the party attempted to monopolize political contestation, a practice that Pérez Jiménez deepened. This gap between economic and institutional development did not lead to radical regimes (Karl 1987).

Huntington's theory, therefore, has a hard time accounting for democratic transitions in general, most of which have occurred in countries exhibiting, by definition, high degrees of deinstitutionalization, and often, rising incomes.⁷ It does a good job of explaining actors' motivations and predicting state-society tensions. Because it is silent on the different institutional features of society, however, it cannot show how society will organize itself to address those tensions.

A final cluster of arguments explains regime outcome as the result of *sui generis* characteristics of the political leadership. The explanation is that the leadership of Cuba's 26th of July Movement (26JM), the guerrilla group that took over after Batista, held values that were anathema to liberal democracy: extremism, hypernationalism, radicalism, and violence, plus an uncanny strategic capacity to outsmart enemies and dis-

dain for liberal rights (Suchlicki 1997; Szulc 1988; Harnecker 1987, González 1974; Suárez 1967; Fagen 1965). Venezuelan elites were different, the argument goes. They had a high cognitive capacity; they learned to avoid the mistakes of the past. They had the right ideology an affinity for democracy. They also had self-restraint, they were willing to adhere to pacts committing them to political contestation (Levine 1973; Alexander 1982)

Explanations for regime transition based on elite features and values do not lack theoretical grounding (see Mainwaring 1999; Levi 1999). In the 1980s, scholars stressed that the "choices of particular political elites" are more important than preexisting socioeconomic constraints in determining democratization (Remmer 1991, 483). Democracy began to be seen as the product of strategic calculations, values, and choices of enterprising politicians. If politicians choose to respect each other's demands, then democracy is possible

The main limitation of value-based or voluntaristic explanations as offered for both Cuba and Venezuela, however, is that they neglect the possibility that political choices—by either individuals or groups—are institutionally determined. Institutionalists claim that "institutional configurations," defined as rules, norms, or formal and informal organizations, shape "political interactions" (Thelen and Steinmo 1992, 6). Institutions set the system of incentives and costs that shapes the actors' propensity to choose one path over another. Thus, it is conceivable that the behavior of Cuban and Venezuelan political actors—for example, complying or not complying with democratic norms—was the result of specific institutional settings.

EXPLAINING ACTORS' CHOICES: INSTITUTIONS AND PACTS

Scholars have repeatedly argued during the last two decades that democratization is more likely in an institutional setting that provides incentives for politicians to comply with rules of competition (Przeworski 1995, 11). Such a setting must reward actors for obeying rules of competition, even when no one knows who will win elections. Democratization is also more likely when politicians receive guarantees that highly cherished political objectives will be protected, even if they themselves lose elections. The uncertainty of democratic competition must therefore be supplemented with the certainty of mutual guarantees, what Schmitter and Karl (1991) label "bounded uncertainty."

In 1986, O'Donnell and Schmitter theorized that political pacts are efficient devices for producing bounded uncertainty. Pacts are agreements among actors "to define (or better, redefine) rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the 'vital inter-

Table 3. Pacts Among the Opposition, Late 1950s

Punto Fijo Pact, 1958 (Venezuela)	Miami Pact, 1957 (Cuba)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combat the dictatorship jointly • Respect the constitution • Respect electoral results • New government will include democratic forces • New government will combat opposition forces seeking to undermine the pact • No single-party hegemony 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combat the dictatorship jointly • Release political prisoners, restore civil liberties • Invite all Cuban political groups in the intellectual, religious, commercial, and other spheres to join the fight against Batista • Guarantee armed forces will not participate in politics • Uphold democracy after Batista
Signed by	Signed by
AD	Auténticos
COPEI	FEU
URD	Revolutionary Directorate
	Workers' Revolutionary Directorate
	Ortodoxos
	26JM

Sources: Pacto de "Punto Fijo" (Venezuela), Franqui 1980, 247 (Cuba).

ests' of those entering it" (1986, 37). Pacts encourage actors to forgo or underutilize their capacity to harm adversaries by extending guarantees not to threaten each other's corporate vital interests (1986, 38).

This insight, however, was not new to Venezuelanists, who had been insisting since the 1960s that an important explanation for Venezuela's democratization was the 1958 Punto Fijo Pact. In this pact, the leading political parties (excluding the Communist Party, or PCV) agreed to abide by rules of electoral competition and, more important, to grant political space to each other. The pact provided the "platform of consent" that many scholars claim made possible the consolidation of democracy (for example, Martz 1966; Rey 1988; López Maya et al 1989, 76).

Pacts, however, do not guarantee democracy. Cuba perfectly illustrates this. Cuba's opposition forces also signed an important prodemocracy pact, the 1957 Miami Pact, committing the signatories to rules of political contestation and pluralism (see table 3), but the Miami Pact failed. The 26JM violated the pact repeatedly: in July 1958, it unilaterally imposed the Caracas Pact, in which the 26JM declared itself the leader of the struggle. In April 1959, the 26JM postponed elections indefinitely; and continuously in the second half of 1959, it either fired or forced moderate and non-Communist leaders (Manuel Urrutia, Felipe Pazos, Manuel Ray) to resign from the cabinet, a violation of the Miami stipu-

lation that the post-Batista government be committed to pluralism.

Why did a prodemocracy pact fail in Cuba but not in Venezuela? Why did the 26JM refuse to adhere to the pact? These rational-choice questions have a historic-institutionalist answer: the lack of competitive political parties. In a recent review of democracy in Latin America in the last 60 years, Hartlyn and Valenzuela conclude, "those countries with the most inchoate party systems and volatile party formation had the weakest experience with democracy" (1998, 65). Mainwaring and Scully put it this way: democratic consolidation occurs when citizens bet on electoral politics and "they place their bets through parties" (1995, 27) Barbara Geddes even argues, "pact-making seems to require the prior existence of well-organized parties to make and keep commitments" (1999, 136) Political parties, therefore, matter for democratization (see also Haggard and Kaufman 1995) The question is how. Before answering this question, it is important to discuss Cuba's party deficit.

CUBA'S PARTY DEFICIT

The most notable institutional characteristic of Cuban politics between 1944 and 1959 was the steady decline of political parties. This is a sharp contrast with Venezuela. In the early 1940s, both countries saw the rise of a nationalist, social-democratic party with broad, multiclass appeal Acción Democrática in Venezuela and Partido Revolucionario de Cuba, otherwise known as Auténtico. Both parties gained enough strength to press for democratization AD inaugurated mass democracy in 1946; the Auténticos forced Batista to adopt a democratic constitution (the Constitution of 1940) and overwhelmingly won the 1944 elections. But from that moment on, the Auténticos decayed, whereas AD became stronger, as measured by the following indicators.

Programmatic consistency and stability of rank-and-file support. As a ruling party (1944–52), the Auténticos produced one of the most democratic regimes in Latin America at the time and in Cuba's history (Portell-Vilá 1986, 599–605). The party, however, especially under President Carlos Prío Socarrás (1948–52), allowed many of its programmatic principles to slip (for example, agrarian reform, honest and efficient government) and many constitutional stipulations to decay (excessive reliance on presidential decrees rather than legislation) (Dominguez 1978; Gil 1962). As a result, the Auténticos suffered serious erosion of their support base, including a major defection in 1946 (the Ortodoxos). As a ruling party (1945–48), AD's main problem was not faltering on its commitments but trying to carry them out to an extreme (Ellner 1982, 140) and to "monopolize" the political space (Coronil 1997, 134–44). This was upsetting to the opposition, but not necessarily to AD members. AD did not disappoint its own affiliates to the extent that the Auténticos did.

Corruption versus organization building. To compensate for increasing disaffection in its ranks, the Auténticos resorted to “vote-buying” tactics. Auténtico politicians began to “sell” positions in the party and in government to whoever was willing to buy, leading to levels of corruption exceeding those of the Batista period (Thomas 1971, 737). The Auténticos hoped that corruption and graft would sustain their electoral strength. In contrast, AD placed its hope on organization building. Rómulo Betancourt, one of AD’s founding fathers, once said, “Not a single district, not a single municipality should be left without its party organization” (in Levine 1973, 28). Indeed, AD spent the 1930s and 1940s building elaborate organizations in almost every town. This was AD’s strategy for consolidating its base of support, and it succeeded in extending the party’s presence at the grassroots level nationwide (Martz 1966, 1977, 106).

Links with societal groups. The relationship between the dominant party and civil society was solid in Venezuela, fragile in Cuba. AD invested effort in building ties with societal groups. In the 1930s, ties were established with peasants and urban intellectuals. During the Trienio, the AD government recognized more than 740 unions (Alexander 1982, 239). In the late 1950s, AD normalized relations with enemies such as the church, business sectors, and the military (Ellner 1982; Alexander 1982, 388–92; Martz 1966, 194–95). By the 1980s, these ties would grow too thick, leading to party suffocation of civic society (Coppedge 1994). But in the 1950s, the links were a model of how parties and civil society can reinforce each other.

Cuba in the 1950s was a long way from this model. In a manner uncharacteristic of populist parties emerging in Latin America at the time (Kaufman and Stallings 1992), the Auténticos neglected to build ties with civic groups. They even allowed their ties with labor to slip. When Batista overthrew the Auténticos, for instance, the presumably Auténtico union leader Eusebio Mujal began to collaborate with Batista, showing the fragility of Auténtico-labor ties. Cuba’s interest groups preferred to operate outside political parties (Domínguez 1978).

Addressing the problem of violence. One of Cuba’s main political maladies in the 1940–52 period was the prevalence of organized violent gangs (*grupos de acción*) in Havana, especially in the university (Stokes 1953). Governing Cuba effectively required putting an end to this gang activity. The Auténticos failed to do so. Although several antigang laws were approved under Prío Socarrás, the Auténtico administrations were never fully committed to this (Portell-Vilá 1986, 617–20). This was a symptom of the party’s weakness. Precisely because the party was losing societal support, it feared to take harsh measures against gangs; but by failing to stop gangs, the Auténticos relinquished the possibility of ever establishing civilian supremacy over Cuban politics. This also

contrasts with AD's approach. One of AD's most important accomplishments was to establish control over terrorist activities, especially under Pérez Jiménez.

The trend toward party decay in Cuba and party strengthening in Venezuela also affected nondominant parties. One would have thought that viable alternative parties would have arisen to fill the vacuum left by the receding Auténticos.⁸ The two principal contenders were the Marxist Popular Socialist Party (PSP) and the Ortodoxos. These parties, however, suffered from inherent maladies that stifled their growth.

Two major handicaps afflicted the PSP. The first was its tendency to be too accommodating to the status quo, failing to play the role of a reliable opposition force against the Auténticos and Batista. The second was its narrow political base. Although the PSP was a highly organized, militant party, it never managed to become a catch-all party with a broad appeal among Cubans.⁹ According to party leaders, the PSP's membership declined to a mere 20,000 in 1952 (Suárez 1967, 6) from a possible peak of approximately 50,000 in 1947.

The Ortodoxos had different problems. When this party emerged in 1946, it promised a new era in party politics—the possibility of a strong, catch-all party capable of competing with the Auténticos and forcing them to reform. One of the Ortodoxos' crucial accomplishments was to earn the affiliation of many university students, many of whom were gang members or disenchanting Auténticos. Like most "flash" parties, however, the Ortodoxo was born with the handicaps of excessive personalism, a disproportionate reliance on the charismatic appeal of the party's founder, Senator Eduardo Chibás. Chibás died unexpectedly in 1951, leaving the party more susceptible to the shock of authoritarianism after 1952.

Another problem was programmatic emptiness. The Ortodoxos failed to develop a platform of government beyond merely condemning corruption. Partly as a result of its unimaginative platform, furthermore, the party's societal appeal remained circumscribed among urbanites and students (Domínguez 1978). Thus, the most that could be said about the Ortodoxo Party in 1952 was that it offered some promise—which explains its meteoric rise. But its future was uncertain, given that, like the Auténticos, its ties to society at large were fragile.

The weakness of both the dominant and the nondominant parties in Cuba resulted in a bifurcated (and poorly functioning) party system circa 1952. One party system operated at the level of national elites. Here, two parties offered significant competition; but one of them, the Ortodoxos, uncompromising and programmatically vague, was hard to trust. The other party system operated mostly in Havana, specifically at the university. Here, there was no real party competition. The Ortodoxos faced no challengers, given the decay of the Auténticos' urban base.

Table 4. Venezuela's Democratic Elections, 1946–1963
(percent of votes)

	1946	1947	1947	1948	1958	1963
	Constituent Assembly	President	Congress	Municipal Councils	President	President
AD	78.43	74.47	70.83	70.09	49.18	32.81
COPEI	13.22	22.40	20.28	21.10	15.18	20.18
URD	4.26	—	4.51	3.9	30.67	17.50
PCV	3.62	3.12	3.64	3.4	3.23	—

Source: Molina and Pérez 1998

Neither party system was conducive to democratic practices. The maladies of the party system at the national level made citizens lose confidence in electoral politics. The unchecked power of the *Ortodoxos* at the societal level gave rise to undemocratic vices within the party: incendiary rhetoric, tolerance of violence, little discussion of public policy, intransigent opposition. These maladies explain why so few citizens mourned the overthrow of the democratic regime in 1952.

Nondominant parties in Venezuela, COPEI and URD, in contrast, actually strengthened during this period, partly because they began to emulate AD's model of party-society relations: organization building, institutional links with civil society, consistent programmatic principles. This explains why the URD did not disappear after it was banned in 1952. The resilience of nondominant parties under authoritarianism led to a deep transformation of the party system by 1958 from one-party dominance (the *Trienio*) to a limited multiparty system (see table 4). Venezuelan citizens in the late 1950s, to use Mainwaring and Scully's language, were placing their bets through parties.

In sum, Cuba and Venezuela in the 1940s and 1950s had polar opposite party systems. In Cuba, parties were detached from civil society at large; in Venezuela, parties developed strong loyalties, rich organizations, links with societal associations, and discernible programs of government. Consequently, when these societies faced the challenge of fighting authoritarianism in the mid-1950s, they operated under different institutional settings. Cuban society faced a party deficit, whereas Venezuelan society faced a menu of strong party networks. These conditions shaped the politics of regime transition.

PARTY DEFICIT'S IMPACT ON DEMOCRATIC PROSPECTS

Cuba's party deficit undermined the prospects of democratization through three mechanisms. First, it encouraged dissidents to turn to

noninstitutional, uncoordinated means of resistance that privileged violence and, by definition, conspired against democratic norms

One of the functions that parties can fill, even under authoritarian regimes, is to act as forces of "congregation" (*fuerzas de aglutinamiento*). Parties can unite politically, in one single organization, different sectors and classes, different geographical regions, and individuals with different proclivities for political activism. Another function of parties is to "coordinate" the activities of dissidents. Under Pérez Jiménez, Venezuelan parties took the initiative to organize and coordinate dissidents' activities, especially those of women and the women's movement (Friedman 1998). While AD's top leaders went into exile, middle-level leaders, such as Simón Sáez Mérida and Domingo Alberto Rangel, remained in charge of party activities.

Because of these functions, societal opposition in Venezuela coalesced into a single effective front, the activities of which culminated in 1957, when the four leading parties (URD, AD, COPEI, and the Communists) called for the Junta Patriótica. The junta's manifestos called Venezuelans to unite in a common struggle. The Pérez Jiménez regime, which only a year earlier was considered "stable" (see U.S. Department of State 1987b, 1129–30), went into a tailspin. State-society relations disintegrated, the church broke with the government (May 1957), students took to the streets (November 1957), and a failed coup-d'état took place (January 1958), followed by a general strike (January 21–22, 1958) that succeeded in ousting Pérez Jiménez (January 23). This chain of events was not coincidental. By grouping multiple interests, sectors, genders, and generations, the political parties were able to unify otherwise scattered groups and, in the process, enhance society's bargaining power with the state.

In party-deprived Cuba, the opposition to Batista Balkanized. Batista faced challenges from multiple angles: students, white-collar workers, financiers, businessmen, church officials, prominent public officials, and so on. Ackerman (1998) documents 13 different organizations that were actively fighting Batista. These forces seldom operated in unison, which led to *malestar difuso*, widespread but uncoordinated discontent against Batista (Pérez-Stable 1998). The unavailability of competitive parties precluded the coordination and unification of these efforts. To make matters worse, the Auténticos and Ortodoxos suffered internal splits, hampering their capacity to exercise coordination, even among their members.

The result was that societal pressures against Batista appeared incoherent, and therefore easy for Batista to dismiss. Evidence for this is the ill-fated 1955–56 Civic Dialogue, an effort by a prominent politician, Cosme de la Torre, to persuade Batista to restore constitutional liberties. This was the most important opportunity for a peaceful transi-

tion to democracy in Cuba (Pérez-Stable 1998). The government had just liberated Fidel Castro from prison, some government officials were considering calling another election, and most opposition forces were willing to participate in government-organized elections. Cuba thus fit Przeworski's precondition for liberalization: soft-liners were emerging both at the level of the state and within the opposition (1991, 66–79).

De la Torre, nevertheless, could not capitalize on this opportunity. He simply was never able to mobilize and represent all the anti-Batista forces. Batista therefore repeatedly refused to meet with him, alleging that de la Torre did not really represent the opposition (Portell-Vilá 1986, 644). In addition, de la Torre could not persuade Batista that the dialogue represented more than just a collection of notable Cuban gentlemen (see Portell-Vilá 1986, 643–46). Had de la Torre been the leader of a national political party rather than just an apartisan notable, he would have had greater "congregation capacity" and, most likely, greater bargaining ability with Batista.

Frustration with parties was a catalyst for the emergence of the 26JM and its turn to violence. Once a member of the Ortodoxo Party (Franqui 1980, 80–81), Castro repudiated all parties, including his own, after the failure of the Civic Dialogue ¹¹

The *oposición política* is falling apart and losing credibility. First, they demanded a neutral government and immediate general elections . . . they'll end up stripped of their last stitch and go along with any deal the dictatorship offers them. . . . The people expect nothing from the political parties (Quoted in Franqui 1980, 97–98)

A year later Castro, his brother Raúl, Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and 79 other revolutionaries boarded the vessel *Granma* and landed in Oriente Province to relaunch guerrilla activities

Castro was not alone in his calculus. Most of the opposition to Batista, not just the 26JM, turned to violence (for example, terrorism, vandalism, sabotage, skirmishes) (García-Pérez 1998). Party deficit exacerbated Cuban politics' proclivity for violence. Once the "violence option" prevails, Hartlyn and Valenzuela argue, the chance of a democratic transition diminishes (1998, 9). This is because citizens need to develop extreme, hypernationalist, utopian ideologies, along with clearly defined enemies to justify their recourse to violence. This is inimical to the politics of "bounded uncertainty" and "competition and cooperation" necessary for democratization (Schmitter and Karl 1991; Levi 1999).

Strong parties could have prevented this turn to violence by providing dissidents with alternative institutional means to challenge the state, as happened in Venezuela. Héctor Alcalá, one-time secretary-general of AD's Caracas underground organization, explained,

The objective was to bring about the overthrow of the dictatorship . . . This did not involve risking everything in an adventure or undermining the bases of society, nor [did it mean] to involve Venezuela in another fratricidal war. . . For that reason, we did not kill policemen, assault banks, or kidnap anyone, nor were we guerrillas. (Quoted in Alexander 1982, 336)

In a December 1956 private meeting with a U.S. official, future president Rómulo Betancourt declared that AD's current tactics were not to incite violence but to unite forces (U.S. Department of State 1987b, 1150–51) ¹²

Thus, in an authoritarian context, there is a connection between low party development and the flourishing of an extremist mindset among the opposition.

The second consequence of party deficit was to undermine the structure of incentives for elites to agree to political competition. One major difference in AD's behavior between the 1940s and the 1950s was a newly discovered willingness to grant political space to the opposition; that is, to sign the Punto Fijo Pact. This about-face is often explained in terms of learning; the idea that AD leaders learned from the Trienio that excluding alternative political forces destabilizes any AD regime (Levine and Crisp 1999, 379). The learning argument, however, does not explain why tolerance was learned instead of, say, intolerance. AD could have learned, for instance, that to avoid being overthrown again, the best strategy was further to monopolize the political system, accentuating its "revolutionary" fervor, and to do away with the opposition. This is precisely the path followed (or lesson learned) by the 26JM in Cuba. Leaders' cognitive capacity is therefore not enough to explain a preference for democracy.

A better explanation is changes in the institutional context. Table 4 summarizes two major changes: by 1958, AD was not as electorally dominant as in the 1940s, but still comfortably ahead of the opposition; and for the first time, AD was facing strong opposition political parties, not just in terms of numbers of votes but also in terms of parties' organizational strength and mobilizational capacity.

This new institutional setting changed the mindset of AD leaders. Now, extending political space to the opposition seemed rational and self-serving (see table 5). AD's electoral superiority gave it enough confidence in its ability to prevail under democratic rules. This made AD more favorably disposed toward political competition. Because AD's rivals were also strong and formidable, however, it also made sense to grant them political space (see Rey 1988, 216). Nondominant parties proved their capacity to mobilize citizens, both against AD in the late 1940s and against Pérez Jiménez in the 1950s. Dismissing them would have been too costly for AD. Likewise, the minority parties, in turn, also had an incentive to adhere to the pact. Without the pact, there would

Table 5. Incentives to Adhere to Democratic Pacts, Late 1950s

	Case 1. Strong, dominant party (Venezuela, AD)	Case 2 Strong, nondominant party (Venezuela, COPEI, URD)	Case 3: Small guerrilla force pacting with fragmented, weak political forces (Cuba, 26JM)
Incentive to adhere to pact	High Party knows it can win under democratic rules	High Party knows that without pact, dominant party unrestrained; with pact, nondominant party receives concessions from counterparts.	Low 26JM unsure if it will do well in elections.
Costs of breaking pact	High: competitive and organized opposition parties can sanction pact breaker	High: Displacing dominant party would require military action (coup d'état), which could also injure non-dominant parties	Low: Counterparts not strong enough to punish defection.
Preference outcome	Uphold pact	Uphold pact	Defect

be no mechanism to restrain the dominant party. Thus, the rise of a competitive system of three society-rooted parties explains the preference of both dominant and nondominant actors for complying with a democratic pact

This institutional explanation fares better than the "learning" hypothesis in accounting for the decision to exclude the PCV. The "learning" hypothesis would predict incorporation of all forces. It can explain the PCV's exclusion only by stressing that the PCV was not a democratic force. This institutional argument, by contrast, predicts the inclusion of only competitive parties. The PCV was not such a party. It was too weak to be taken seriously by competitive parties seeking to restrain each other. The PCV was excluded not because it was an ideological outlier, but because it was noncompetitive.

In Cuba, the institutional setting, and hence the incentives to adhere to the pact, was different. The Miami Pact was signed by six (rather than three) actors, all weak. Two were decaying political parties (Auténticos and Ortodoxos) and four were nonparty, violence-oriented, narrowly based forces (see table 3). This institutional setting was inhospitable to democratic pacts, mostly because it weakened the system of

incentives and costs for complying with the pact. Compare the 26JM with AD. In 1957, the 26JM was a tiny political organization, amounting to no more than one hundred guerrilla members. Because it was not a party, lacking the organizations across the country and the capacity to aggregate multiple sectors of society, it could see no political advantage in subscribing to electoral competition. The 26JM had strong reasons to think that it would lose in electoral contests. Because no other signatory was necessarily strong, however (also unlike Venezuela), the 26JM did not face the prospect of severe sanctions for breaking the pact. No group matched the strength—in terms of roots in society and capacity to mobilize multiple sectors—even of Venezuela's nondominant parties.

Given that the institutional setting provided few incentives for pact compliance and sanctions for pact breaking, it is not surprising that the 26JM repudiated the Miami Pact shortly after signing it. Indeed, the only pact the 26JM would be interested in signing was a pact that declared the supremacy of the 26JM over all other forces, independent of electoral results, which is exactly what the 26JM obtained the following year.

A third consequence of party deficit is to propel civilian middle sectors to align with guerrillas. As Pastor (1991) argues, the middle sectors' gravitation toward guerrillas lowers the chance of democratization because it grants guerrillas the upper hand during the transition. This gravitation is more likely to occur under conditions of party deficit. In the absence of parties, voters' choices are more likely to be guided by personalistic and demagogic appeals (Stokes 1997; Mainwaring and Scully 1995, 25). Guerrilla leaders tend to generate such appeals quite effectively.

This is precisely what had happened in Cuba by 1958. The weakness of parties and the failure of the Miami Pact left the middle sectors institutionally desolate and thus susceptible to the appeals of guerrillas. By mid-1958, the 26JM was the only political force that offered some political hope, not so much because it had achieved major victories against Batista (it had not) but because, unlike other groups fighting the dictatorship, it had suffered fewer casualties. Hidden in the Sierra Maestra, the 26JM remained fairly isolated from Batista's forces, allowing it to free-ride on the efforts of insurgents in other regions of the country. Thus the 26JM rose to the top mostly because other groups dropped to the bottom.

In the Caracas Pact (signed after the Miami Pact), Castro appointed himself commander-in-chief of a post-Batista government, calling for "the defeat of the dictatorship by armed insurrection" (Thomas 1971, 1003–4). The Caracas Pact differed from the Miami Pact, therefore, in that it explicitly imposed the hegemony of the 26JM over the civilian opposition, regardless of electoral results. The 26JM thus embraced the social ideals of the civilian opposition (the creation of a socially concerned regime) while surreptitiously sacrificing its political ideals (polit-

ical rights for all). Because by then the 26JM had become the only game in town, the civilian opposition had little option but to go along.

The third consequence of party deficit was to leave the political space relatively clear for the rise of stronger statism. This became evident during the first year of the new 26JM administration. Once it had obtained control of the state, the 26JM's political resources expanded exponentially. These resources included ideological crusades, cooptation mechanisms, demagoguery, populism, fabrication of enemies, granting special favors to supporters, and sheer repression. No other state elites in Cuba used so many state levers to centralize power and suffocate the opposition as the 26JM in 1959. This was thus a classic case of a rising tyranny of the majority, in which a resourceful government proceeded to mobilize majorities to deactivate the political rights of dissidents.

The key mystery is why Cuban dissidents, numerous and active as they were until then, failed to frustrate the consolidation of this newer form of state encroachment. What explains society's failure to extract democratic concessions? Again, Cuba's party deficit is the answer. Because of this deficit, the 26JM faced a political landscape clear of major obstacles. Dissidents were politically handicapped. To fight this new, fiercer state, the opposition needed to develop a significant amount of coordination and strategic actions (orchestrate nationwide strikes; mobilize international opinion; coordinate the actions of different societal groups, associations, and classes). Without parties, these activities stood no chance of being conducted. Breaking with the government left dissidents with no institutional home and no overarching organization to coordinate their activities. Their only recourse was to repeat the politics of resistance that had prevailed under Batista: heroic, unilateral acts of defiance; sporadic terrorism; disorganized violence; civil disobedience; withdrawal of support; isolated workers' strikes, or exile.

These tactics might have succeeded in defeating an already weak state such as Batista's. But they were simply insufficient to defeat the formidable Leviathan that the 26JM rapidly constructed. The new state thus expanded over society because it was unencumbered. The paradox of Cuba's political society in 1959 was that it was strong enough (in terms of modernization and associationalism) to object to the new undemocratic state but politically too handicapped to fight effectively for democratic rights. In the context of a tyranny of the majority, party deficit worked to the advantage of the state rather than the opposition.

PARTY DEFICITS AND DEMOCRATIC DEFICITS IN THE 1990S

Forty years later, a similar paradox prevails, not just in Cuba but in Venezuela. By the early 1990s, these countries had, arguably, two of the

strongest Latin American societies in terms of selected indices of modernization. In addition, both exhibited high degrees of associationalism (although Cuba's associations are typically nonautonomous, which renders them less civic. See Pérez-Stable 1993, 98–151; for Venezuela, see Gómez Calcaño 1998; Hernández 1993). The hallmarks of Cuban and Venezuelan politics in the 1990s, nevertheless, have been failure to democratize in the former and democratic erosion in the latter. The reason for both these conditions is party deficit.

The resilience of authoritarianism in Cuba is surprising because, since the late 1980s, the regime has been subjected to pressures that in other countries have yielded democracy. The nation experienced the worst external political and economic shock in its history (the collapse of the Soviet Union) and the worst internal economic crisis in its history (an almost 40 percent contraction of output between 1989 and 1994) and a pale recovery since then. Cuba also ended its international isolation, multiplying contacts with Western-style democracies and regional neighbors. Tourism replaced sugar as Cuba's the main source of income. Even ties with the United States, in terms of both business and personal contacts, peaked despite the legal tightening of the embargo; for example, long-distance telephone communication, airline flights, remittances, and direct or indirect operational relations between U.S. multinationals and Cuba-based firms in the late 1990s reached record levels in the embargo era.

Soft-liners have surfaced within the government, although many of them have been purged (Alfonso 1999). Autonomous groups are emerging in society. An already highly educated citizenry has devised ingenious ways to circumvent the state and engage in mutual help (see León 1997). For the latest generation of Cubans, the old ideological banners of the regime have become vacuous. Even the Cuban exile community has changed: it is no longer as monolithically recalcitrant as in the past (Hidalgo 1999; Ackerman 1999). In short, Cuba has been exposed to the same changes that have triggered regime transitions elsewhere in Latin America.

The missing ingredient is political parties. Party deficit has been a constant of the Castro regime. As Bengelsdorf argues, the regime has consistently denied "the need for institutions that would allow expression of autonomous mandates and agendas" (1994, 102). Politically, this translates into a complete ban on opposition political parties. Few Latin American dictators have sustained such a tight cap on opposition party activity as the Castro regime has.

In the 1990s, the government reaffirmed this ban, justifying it as the best way to preserve national unity. In reality, it is a convenient device to insulate the state from democratizing pressures. The story of the 1950s shows why. Without parties, Cuba's society is deprived of suf-

ficient bargaining power to pressure the state. Cuban citizens have few options but to support the government unconditionally or to face jail, death, exile, or silence, what Pérez-Stable labels the “exhaustion of politics” (1997, 30). Protest and resistance occur, but within the confines of labor absenteeism, declining productivity, cultural resistance, covert political protest, illicit market activity, suicide, and alienation (Eckstein 1994). For the regime, these are inconveniences, perhaps even embarrassments; but they are insufficient societal pressures for liberalization.

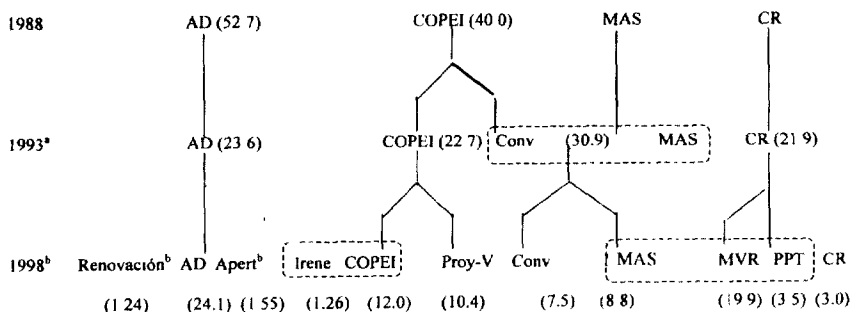
Party deficit also reduces the incentives for state leaders to see liberalization as self-serving. There is no societal institution that can offer incumbent elites the guarantees of “bounded uncertainty” and “reciprocity.” Only parties could moderate the extremist tendencies of the opposition. By the same token, only parties could provide effective sanctions against incumbents who refuse to liberalize. Thus, Cuba has failed to democratize in the 1990s for the same reason as it did in the 1950s: party deficits. Cuban citizens can become more educated, more informed, more transnational, more free-traders, more self-employed, more Internet-connected, and more outspoken. But without political parties, Cuba’s democratic prospects will remain precarious.

In Venezuela, by contrast, party deficit is a recent phenomenon. Once considered a paradigmatic case of party fortitude, Venezuela in the 1990s developed one of the most unstable and fragmented party systems in Latin America, as evidenced by the following trends (see figure 1):

- The electoral decline of AD and COPEI
- The divisions and splinterings of most parties in the 1990s
- The nonconsolidation of upcoming parties (that is, the rapid rise and decline of La Causa R, Convergencia, IRENE, and Proyecto Venezuela)
- The eruption of personalistic parties (Convergencia in 1993; Proyecto Venezuela, IRENE, and MVR in 1998)
- Record-level abstention rates in most elections
- The splits in the ruling coalition since 1998 (the defection in early 2000 of the PPT and Francisco Arias Cárdenas, governor of Zulia and collaborator in Chávez’s 1992 coup attempt)

The reasons for the crisis of Venezuela’s party system are complex. Some explanations include the parties’ excessive penetration of civil society until the 1980s, which suffocated citizens and excluded new entrants (Coppedge 1994, 1995; McCoy 1999); the decline of oil revenues, which has undermined the capacity of old parties to broker privileges among a rent-seeking citizenry (Kornblith 1998; Romero 1997); the establishment of direct elections for mayors and governors after 1989, which has revealed the incapacity of old parties to compete politically (Penfold Becerra 2000), the parties’ lack of internal democracy,

Figure 1. Venezuela's Splintering Party System, 1988–1998
(percent of votes)



^aIn 1993 Convergencia and MAS ran together, in 1998 they split

^bCongressional elections (November 1998) For the 1998 presidential elections, MAS, MVR and the PPT formed the alliance called Polo Patriótico.

Note Dotted circles represent electoral coalitions

which has precluded leadership and ideological renewal (Corrales 2000b; Martz 1998); the repeated failure of parties to consolidate economic reforms, which has made citizens tired of false promises (Corrales 2000c); and combinations of these (Levine and Crisp 1998; Molina and Pérez 1998; Ellner 1996)

At the heart of the matter is a profound repudiation of political parties by Venezuela's citizens (Alvarez 1996). The pendulum of Venezuelan opinion seemed to swing to the opposite extreme, from placing all bets on parties to simply refusing to bet on parties at all.

This new party deficit is at the root of Venezuela's current democratic decay. Recently, this decay has taken the form of state concentration of power to the detriment of the opposition. Many Venezuelans actually blame the old parties for these democratic setbacks. But much of this decay is the result of party decay rather than party preponderance. Developments in the period 1998–2000, the peak years of party deficit, make this clear.

President Hugo Chávez Frías is the quintessential mobilizational strongman. His 1998 election was accomplished with substantial citizen support. He has used his mass appeal to undermine democratic norms and rules (see Corrales 2000a), obtaining approval of a new constitution in 1999 that reinforces presidentialism, weakens the legislature (abolishing the Senate and undermining the legislative representation of the least populous states), and reduces parliamentary controls over military ascension. This constitution was drafted with minimum input from the opposition (only 5 of the 195 delegates to the Constituent Assembly). All the

opposition delegates, together with 29 percent of the voters, rejected the new constitution in a national referendum. None of the Latin American constitutions approved in the 1990s faced this level of rejection. Chávez also colonized institutions that ought to remain independent to maximize horizontal accountability, such as the Supreme Court, the Ombudsman, the National Electoral Council, and the Central Bank.

By 1999, meanwhile, most existing parties had either collapsed or joined the leading party (the MVR), itself a "flash" party. By early 2000, the ruling coalition, Polo Patriótico, had also split. The new constitution bans state funding of political parties. The government constantly launches tirades against opposition parties and party politics in general. Lacking any organizing and coordinating entity at the national level, Venezuelan opponents, like Cuban dissidents in the 1950s and 1960s, are forced to operate in the context of *malestar difuso* (This opposition has been numerically strong: the anti-Chávez vote reached 43 percent in the 1998 presidential elections, 39 percent in the elections for the Constituent Assembly.)

Despite these numbers, however, Chávez managed to monopolize significant political space. Party deficits have deprived the opposition of effective means to restrain the state. Precisely because even opposition citizens refuse to vote for parties, their political strength became too dispersed, fragmented, and uncoordinated to make any difference in the seven elections that took place between 1998 and 2000.

For the elections to the Constituent Assembly (June 1999), for instance, opposition candidates refused to campaign under the sponsorship of any party. No entity existed to coordinate the anti-Chávez vote. As a result, anti-Chávez voters dispersed their votes among too many candidates, preventing most of them from accumulating the necessary votes to win office. The huge discrepancy between the size of the opposition and its institutional representation at the Constituent Assembly was directly related to party deficit. Once Chávez realized that the political space was devoid of party representation Chávez felt unencumbered, and he proceeded to concentrate state power (during the months in which the new constitution was being drafted).

Opponents have reacted to the party deficit by supporting non-partisan civic organizations. These institutions have had notable success in preventing certain power abuses. Perhaps their most important victory was the two-month postponement of the May 28, 2000, "mega-elections" for a new president, a new congress, new governors, and new mayors (a total of 36,000 candidates). The pressure and legal work by civic organizations persuaded the Supreme Court that sufficient irregularities were occurring to merit postponement of elections. Such achievements, however, will be insufficient to generate a deep process of redemocratization. Civic associations simply cannot match the capac-

ity of parties to integrate and coordinate the activities of dissent and to alter the structure of incentives for powerful state elites (see Encarnación 2000).

CONCLUSIONS

This article has argued that Cuba's strong society in the 1950s and 1960s failed to contain state-sponsored democratic regressions because, unlike that of Venezuela, it suffered from a critical institutional weakness: party deficit. Competitive parties lubricate the two autonomous political processes that are necessary for democratization. The first process is the development of institutional means, other than disorganized violence, to challenge the centralizing proclivities of the state. Specifically, institutions must exist to coordinate the different actions of diverse groups, aggregate and unite the preferences and views of dissimilar groups, and moderate the extremist or narrow preferences of highly aggrieved dissidents. The second process is the production of incentives for dominant and nondominant elites to deem contestation to be in their self-interest, or at least to decide that the cost of noncompliance with rules of contestation is too high. Competitive political parties have a comparative advantage in promoting both processes; hence their advantage as conduits of democracy.

The argument is not that political parties are infallible democratic miracle makers. Impressive democratic transitions have taken place in the absence of political parties; ghastly political vices have occurred in the context of intense party politics. The argument is that parties are institutional instruments. Poorly used parties can undoubtedly undermine democracy. But well-functioning, society-rooted, competitive parties can be efficient conduits of democratization. This is because parties, more so than other variables that empower society, such as indices of modernization or associationalism, simultaneously enhance the bottom-up and top-down domains of action that are necessary for democracy.

Regardless of how aggrieved, wealthy, or ready for democracy a society might be, without strong, competitive, society-rooted political parties, it will remain politically handicapped. The politics of regime transition or renewal will remain uncertain—possibly undemocratic (Cuba in the 1950s and 1990s, Venezuela in the 1990s). Only when associationalism, modernization, and competitive parties coexist (Venezuela, 1950s) can a strong democratic regime be born. Societal strength—measured in terms of level of development, human capital, and richness of civil society—enhances the chance of effective restraints on state encroachments, but only in the presence of competitive political parties. These are sobering conclusions for present-day politics across Latin America, not just in Cuba and Venezuela. Symptoms of party deficits are

evident in many parts of the region. Parties are rising and declining rapidly, personalistic parties win office, old parties are internally fragmented, citizens mistrust parties more intensely than many any other domestic institutions. This party deficit is especially acute in the northern Andes (Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru) It should not be surprising that this region has experienced notorious democratic setbacks since the mid-1990s. At a time when Latin America desperately needs redemocratization, addressing the problem of party deficit could very well be one of the most urgent political tasks.

ACRONYMS

Cuba

PSP Partido Socialista Popular (Marxist)

Venezuela

AD..... Acción Democrática
 Apert Apertura
 COFAVIC..... Comité e Familiares de las Víctimas de los sucesos
 de febrero-marzo
 Conv Convergencia
 COPEI Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente
 (Christian Democrats)
 CRL Causa R
 IRENE Integración y Renovación Nueva Esperanza
 MAS..... Movimiento al Socialismo
 MVR Movimiento Quinta República
 PCV Partido Comunista de Venezuela
 PPT Patria para Todos
 Proy-V Proyecto Venezuela
 URD Unión Republicana Democrática

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Second Congress of Cuban and Cuban American Studies, sponsored by the Cuban Research Institute, Florida International University, Miami, Florida, March 1999. I am grateful to Jorge I. Domínguez, Janet Kelly, Michael Penfold, William C. Smith, and three anonymous reviewers for their comments.

1. Scholars in this tradition disagree about what exactly endows society with bargaining strength: socioeconomic prosperity (Przeworski and Limongi 1997), the predominance of certain classes (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992), interclass alliances

(Luebbert 1991), connections with external actors (Whitehead 1996), degrees of associationalism (Putnam 1993), power of social movements (Tarrow 1998).

2. State elites might see liberalization as self-serving because extending democratic rights might allow the state to maximize goals that all states desire: revenues and loyalties (see Olson 1993, North and Weingast 1989, Tilly 1992; see also Lijphart and Waisman 1996)

3. The United States helped to break Cuba's formal dependence on Spain when it intervened in Cuba's War of Independence of 1896–98. The United States helped to break Venezuela's informal dependence on Europe by encouraging Great Britain to relax boundary disputes with Venezuela in 1897 and by breaking a German-British-Italian blockade of Venezuela in 1902.

4. The Platt Amendment (1901–1934) was a resolution approved by the U.S. Senate and introduced in the Cuban constitution that gave the United States the right to intervene in Cuba to maintain a government "adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberties."

5. "Cubanization" was the process whereby Cuban private capital acquired ownership of sugar mills. Cuban ownership jumped from 22.4% of total sugar production in 1929 to 62.1% in 1958 (Domínguez 1978).

6. For an argument about how Venezuela's unusual status as a petrostate explains the rise of democracy, see Karl 1997, 92–115.

7. See Przeworski and Limongi 1997 for a statistical proof of the correlation between modernization and democratization, and Mainwaring 1999 for some caveats about this correlation in the Latin American context.

8. For an argument on how opposition status stimulates the birth or reconstruction of parties, see Domínguez and Giraldo 1996.

9. Roberts (1999, 74–78) argues that this is a recurrent dilemma of parties that have cellular structures and deeply disciplined cadres. They develop strong links with narrow constituencies, such as labor, but fail to broaden their appeal across society at large.

10. In addition, a December 1955 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE 80/90-55) ranked Venezuela among the countries in the region with the best prospects for political stability (in the same category as Mexico, Uruguay, Peru, and the Dominican Republic). See U.S. State Department 1987a, 16.

11. "We criticized the Communist Party for fighting only to remain legal, for its elitism and its failure to act; we criticized the Ortodoxos for their passiveness; and the Auténticos for all their big talk" (quoted in Franqui 1980, 45).

12. The official was the deputy director of the Office of Middle American Affairs at the State Department, Allan C. Stewart.

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