

## Party System Institutionalization, Decay, and Collapse

Scott Mainwaring, Fernando Bizzarro, and Ana Petrova\*

This introductory chapter takes on two tasks. First, we define four key concepts: party system, party system institutionalization (PSI), party system decay (or deinstitutionalization), and party system collapse. Second, we note some differences in relation to Mainwaring and Scully (1995a) and other works in how we conceptualize PSI. Mainwaring and Scully understood PSI as a four-dimensional latent variable. We view one of these four original dimensions – stability in patterns of electoral competition – as the core of the concept. A stable party system that generates a sense of future predictability is *the* defining feature of PSI. In this respect, we diverge from the additive concept that Mainwaring and Scully proposed, by which high scores on the other three dimensions (party roots in society, the legitimacy of parties as essential actors in democratic politics, and solid party organizations) compensated for a low score on stability in inter-party competition. The other three original attributes facilitate PSI, but they are not defining characteristics.

### PARTY SYSTEM: DEFINITION AND BOUNDARIES

A party system is a set of parties that interact in *minimally* patterned (i.e., regular, stable, predictable) ways. This definition has two parts: (1) it is a *set* of parties; and (2) they interact in minimally patterned ways.

Both parts of this definition suggest some minimal thresholds that are required for a system to exist. As Sartori (1976) emphasized, a party system must have at least two meaningful parties; it is an oxymoron to speak of a single-party system. If a single party rules in a closed authoritarian regime and all opposition parties are de facto banned or irrelevant, this is not a party system.

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Under authoritarian regimes, only when an opposition party (or parties) is an important enough competitor that it affects regime dynamics (for example, it holds some seats in the national legislature and influences the government's strategic calculations) is there a party system.

"System" also requires that the parties interact in minimally patterned ways. Without some continuity in the main parties, patterned interactions are unlikely. If the actors (parties) do not know who the other actors are and what they represent, they are hard pressed to interact in systematic ways. At a hypothetical extreme, if the main parties always changed from one election to the next, the lack of stability of the actors would make it difficult for them to interact in systematic ways.

In cases of extreme personalism, where parties have little control over who gains access to elected public offices and/or where most politicians are not affiliated to parties, or if those affiliations are largely irrelevant, it is debatable whether a party system exists. In such cases, competition revolves around individuals more than parties. The key actors are politicians, and the important interactions take place among them rather than the parties. The latter are irrelevant for most voters and politicians. Under such circumstances, patterned interactions are less likely.

Beyond these very low thresholds, our understanding of "party system" is minimalist; we believe that party systems exist at a much lower threshold than some scholars. Sartori (1976) had a much more demanding threshold. He argued that Brazil (1946–64) and Colombia did not have party systems. In both cases, the main contenders were highly stable, and patterns of inter-party competition were fairly stable. They far surpassed our threshold of what constitutes a system.

Likewise, whereas Sánchez (2009) argues that Guatemala had a "non-party system" because of high electoral volatility and comparatively high turnover in the main contenders, we see it as a very weakly institutionalized system. There has always been some continuity of the main parties from one election to the next (see Chapter 2). Although electoral volatility has been consistently high for the unicameral national congress, it has averaged 40.5%, so 59.5% of the aggregate vote has exhibited continuity from one election to the next. With few exceptions, parties have exhibited ideological stability from one election to the next. Patterns of interaction among parties are far from random. Therefore, by our definition, Guatemala has a party system. We conceptualize the differences among all Latin American cases except Cuba not according to *whether* they have a party system, but rather according to how institutionalized those systems are.

#### PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Institutionalization means that political actors behave in stable ways and have clear and stable expectations about other actors (O'Donnell 1994). Through institutionalization, a process, practice, organization, or pattern of interactions becomes well established and widely known. Institutionalization

involves stable patterns of interaction that generate expectations of stable future interactions; it involves both past stability and actors' sense of future predictability.

An institutionalized party system, therefore, is one in which a stable set of parties interacts regularly in stable ways. Actors develop expectations and behavior based on the premise that the fundamental contours and rules of party competition will prevail into the foreseeable future. An institutionalized party system shapes the future expectations and behavior of political elites, other actors, and voters. When the same parties remain in place and their interactions are stable and predictable, the system becomes a political institution. It takes a life of its own and has an independent effect on actors' behavior. It becomes a set of interactions, interests, practices, and expectations that guide actors' behavior (O'Donnell 1994). As Riedl (2014: 25) wrote, "The institutionalization of the party system is a condition in which the political parties exhibit structured interactions; where *expectations, orientations, and behaviors can be premised on the idea that these practices will continue in multiple future rounds of competition*" (emphasis added).<sup>1</sup>

The institutionalization of a party system is a process in which the stability of patterns of electoral competition increases. The repetition of some patterns enables actors to form expectations about likely future interactions. If the same parties repeatedly remain the main contenders, if they get roughly similar shares of votes, and if they stand in similar ideological positions, actors realize that this configuration of the system is patterned, and they orient their future behavior around it.

Stability and predictability are linked because consistent instability makes future predictability impossible while consistent long-term stability augurs well for the capacity of actors to understand future probabilities. But stability and predictability are not exactly the same; the former refers to observable past behavior, the latter to largely non-observable expectations (based mainly on past patterns) about the future. Identical patterns of past stability usually generate reasonably similar expectations for future patterns, but this might not always be the case.

There is no perfect measure of actors' expectations about the future. This is why our empirical measures in Chapter 2 focus on stability. These measures of stability should align closely with PSI, which is a latent variable.

Casal Bértoa and Mair (2012) and subsequent works by Casal Bértoa (2014) propose an operationalization and understanding of PSI that diverges from ours and from the dominant understanding. They focus exclusively on the stability of government formation. This is an important issue, but electoral competition is

<sup>1</sup> Along similar lines, O'Donnell (1994: 57) wrote that "Institutions are regularized patterns of interaction that are known, practiced, and regularly accepted . . . by social agents who *expect to continue interacting* under the rules and norms formally or informally embedded in those practices" (emphasis added). See also Lindberg (2007); Lupu and Riedl (2013); North (1990: 2).

prior to it and sets the stage for it. We follow Sartori (1976) and a long line of scholars in focusing our understanding of party system stability and predictability on parties' interactions in electoral competition. In presidential systems and parliamentary elections in which one party wins a majority, it is electoral competition that directly determines who controls the executive, and strongly shapes government formation.

Variables that capture parties' embeddedness in society and among the political elite probably serve as reasonable proxies for actors' sense of future expectations (Tóka 1997: 8). For example, stable individual-level partisanship in the US indicates not only that a voter is strongly inclined to vote Republican or Democrat in the next elections, but also that this individual identifies with the party in a way that makes it very likely that she will continue to vote Republican or Democrat in the future (Bartels 2000; Green *et al.* 2002). At the aggregate level, if substantial majorities of voters are partisans, the potential for radical electoral change is low.

Actors' confidence about future predictability is likely to be lower in systems such as Brazil's, where the system has been stable but without deep roots in society (Zucco 2015) and, since 2013, with an increasing rejection of the existing parties. Party leaders, voters, and other actors have more uncertainty about likely future dynamics in Brazil than in the US, which has an institutionalized and deeply rooted system. The rootedness of parties in society indicates something about actors' future proclivities and their ability to judge future tendencies.

If politicians are deeply committed to their party, they signal their expectation that it will continue to be their organizational home. Other politicians and voters can interpret this fact as channeling future behavior. If a politician has belonged to the same party throughout a long political career and has regularly voted with the party leadership in congress, it indicates a commitment to that organization. Even with no other specific information about that politician, we could reasonably assume that s/he is likely to remain affiliated with that organization. At the aggregate level, if politicians are committed to their parties, and if they have invested in building solid organizations, it suggests that they expect to remain affiliated with that organization and work for its success. Conversely, if parties are less rooted in society and among the political elite, even if past patterns of inter-party competition have been stable, we would likely have less confidence about future stability. Party embeddedness and organization thus tend to signal the future predictability of the system.

Our definition of PSI – and of an institutionalized party system – builds on this definition of party system. Party systems can be weakly institutionalized but still have a set of parties that interact in minimally patterned ways. PSI captures differences in the *degree* to which the members of the system and the interactions among them are stable. It is thus a continuous variable.

## THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN INSTITUTIONALIZED PARTY SYSTEM

Highly institutionalized party systems have three core characteristics. First, the main parties are stable; they continue to be key contenders election after election. Minor new parties sometimes emerge, and some of them can eventually become more significant contenders – but the sudden emergence of major new parties is a sign of diminished or low institutionalization. If new parties frequently burst on to the scene and win a significant vote share, it is difficult for the actors to predict what the set of relevant parties will be in the next election. In such cases, the very members of the system change. Whereas the notion of “party system” does not require high stability of main contenders, an institutionalized system does.

Institutionalized systems are not “frozen,” to use Lipset and Rokkan’s (1967) famous expression. New parties can emerge and win political representation through elections. However, their electoral expansion is slower than in weakly institutionalized systems. While in the latter significant contenders emerge and disappear with some frequency, in the former the main parties are replaced slowly if at all.

Second, in institutionalized systems, the vote shares of parties from one election to the next are reasonably stable. If parties’ vote shares are volatile, this demonstrates that their support among voters is fluid, making it difficult to estimate the level of support they will have in the next electoral race. Persistently high electoral volatility signals a weakly institutionalized system, and low volatility is a defining feature of high institutionalization. The main indicator of the stability of parties’ vote share from one election to the next is electoral volatility.

Third, in institutionalized systems, party linkages to voters are relatively stable. Building on Kitschelt (2000), we conceptualize four kinds of linkages: programmatic or ideological, clientelistic, personalistic, and traditional/affective.<sup>2</sup> Notable shifts in major parties’ behavior and linkages to voters reduce the predictability of the system to voters and to political elites and hence signal diminishing or low institutionalization. Although substantial shifts in any of these kinds of linkages alter party competition, our discussion focuses on ideological or programmatic linkages for practical reasons of data availability and quality.

As Downs (1957) wrote long ago, parties must remain reasonably faithful to some core ideological or programmatic content for a system to be intelligible to most voters. The sharp changes in programmatic positions that some Latin American parties undertook in the 1990s reduced the intelligibility and predictability of the system and hence signaled lower institutionalization.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Kitschelt does not include the fourth category.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the MNR (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario*) and the MIR (*Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria*) in Bolivia, the Argentine Peronists, and *Acción Democrática* in Venezuela.

These sharp programmatic shifts were key ingredients in party collapse in many cases (Lupu 2016; Morgan 2011; Roberts 2014; Seawright 2012). They diluted party brands.

Whereas stability in the main contenders and stable results in electoral competition are properties of the party system, consistency in linkages characterizes specific parties. One major party could display ideological inconsistency while the others are consistent. In this sense, this third feature of PSI differs from the first two, which are intrinsically systemic properties. However, if some parties radically change positions, it reduces the system's intelligibility and predictability. Moreover, it is possible to construct a score for the *system's* consistency by building on the consistency of the individual parties (see Chapter 2).

Parties' ideological stability does not rest on voters being ideological or programmatic (Zechmeister 2015). In the 1950s and early 1960s, the US parties were ideologically stable and the system was highly institutionalized, but most voters were not ideological or programmatic (Converse 1964). Probably the same was true in Colombia from 1958 until 1990 and in Uruguay from 1942 until 1966.

By providing parameters and expectations to guide the behavior of political actors, institutionalized party systems reduce political uncertainty (Lupu and Riedl 2013; Moser and Scheiner 2012).<sup>4</sup> Actors have a reasonably clear sense of the probable policy parameters. For example, in the United States, organized interests, the parties themselves, and voters can be confident that on salient economic, social, or foreign policy issues, radical change is unlikely. The party system and the institutional rules establish parameters within which policy will take place.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, economic and foreign policy pivoted radically after the party system collapses of the 1990s and 2000s. Leading up to and in the aftermath of party system collapse, it was initially more difficult for actors to anticipate electoral winners and policy outcomes (Flores-Macías 2012).<sup>6</sup> Powerful presidents were able to reshape the polity. Initially, they more than the parties were the key actors.

Institutionalization has a temporal component – it requires predictability and stability. Both of these features are measured over time. A system cannot be highly institutionalized on the basis of one data point (i.e., stability from one election to the next). Two elections do not provide enough information for actors to form stable expectations about the behavior of other actors and for these expectations to make the environment predictable. Institutionalization entails regularity, which is established with several repetitions; the more numerous the repetitions,

<sup>4</sup> See also Levitsky and Murillo (2005); North (1990); O'Donnell (1994).

<sup>5</sup> To some extent, Donald Trump shook up this predictability, but it is not clear how much his candidacy will produce a deep and lasting change in the Republican Party and the US party system.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to claim that low PSI always generates policy instability or that high PSI always generates stability. Our argument is probabilistic, not deterministic.

the higher the predictability. A system is more institutionalized if it has been stable for a generation as opposed to a shorter time.

Many definitions of institutionalization include the idea that organizations and procedures acquire intrinsic value (Basedau and Stroh 2008; Huntington 1968: 12; McGuire 1997: 8; Panebianco 1988: 53).<sup>7</sup> PSI here does not necessarily imply value infusion, consensus, or broad normative preference for the practices that are institutionalized. Institutionalization can result from the coercive imposition of organizations or procedures or from other forms of exercise of power. In these cases, it would have value for some actors but pernicious consequences for others. In authoritarian regimes, for example, the institutionalization of a hegemonic party system might reflect value infusion among the regime elite, but not among the broader public and certainly not for opposition actors.

Our analysis has implications for debates about historical institutionalism. Much of the institutionalist literature emphasized path dependence (Levi 1997; North 1990; Pierson 2004), which is closely linked to predictability (path dependence implies predictability). Fluid party systems are less constraining, and the future is less predictable. Sharp change is more common, so assumptions of path dependence are less useful (Levitsky and Murillo 2014). Weak institutionalization *tends* to be self-perpetuating, but some events, exogenous influences, and processes can significantly change the level of institutionalization. High institutionalization entails stability in the short to medium term, but it does not require “frozen” systems.

PSI is useful for both cross-sectional and over time comparisons. Systems in democratic regimes can be placed on the continuum from weak to high stability and predictability. While US voters can safely bet that either Democrats or Republicans will win the presidency in 2020, Peruvians and Guatemalans cannot as easily anticipate which parties will produce viable candidates. Likewise, PSI is useful for comparing states or provinces within a country.

PSI also serves the purpose of within-case comparison, to trace change over time within countries. Within-case comparison emphasizes the dynamic properties of institutionalization: party systems can institutionalize or deinstitutionalize.

## RECONCEPTUALIZING PARTY SYSTEM INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In three ways, our discussion of PSI represents a departure from Mainwaring and Scully (1995a) and an extensive literature that followed.<sup>8</sup> First, we put more emphasis than earlier contributions on stability in the members of the

<sup>7</sup> See Levitsky (2003: 15–22). He notes that some parties are highly “value-infused” but weakly routinized, so it is useful conceptually and empirically to distinguish between these two different meanings.

<sup>8</sup> See, among many others, Hicken and Kuhonta (2015b), Lindberg (2007), Mainwaring and Torcal (2006), Riedl (2014), and Weghorst and Bernhard (2014).

system – that is, on what the main parties are.<sup>9</sup> Second, we include stability in parties' programmatic/ideological positions and other party linkages to society as a defining feature of PSI. Previous literature has not included stability in linkages as part of PSI. These two elements are integral to political actors' ability to understand and form stable expectations about the party system. They are thus integral to institutionalization as a concept focused on stability and predictability.

Third, our concept here is unidimensional – it focuses solely on stability and predictability in inter-party competition. Mainwaring and Scully (1995a) conceptualized four different dimensions of PSI: (1) stability in patterns of inter-party competition; (2) party rootedness in society; (3) the legitimacy of parties as the vehicles of representation; and (4) solid party organizations. This earlier understanding entails individual parties' institutionalization.

The other three dimensions in the original framework, excluding stability, are indicators of the extent to which parties and the party system are embedded in society and in the political system. They are proxies for actors' sense of the future predictability of the party system rather than dimensions of PSI. They are indirect indicators of systemic predictability, but not co-equal dimensions of PSI.

This revised understanding of PSI is more faithful to the core meaning of the concept. Party roots in society, the legitimacy of parties as vehicles of representation, and solid organizations are in an asymmetrical causal relationship with stability. A system with strong roots, solid organizations, and legitimacy is very likely to be institutionalized – we are not aware of any exceptions – but it is not by definition institutionalized. Conversely, some systems acquire a high degree of stability without developing strong roots in society, strong organizations, or widespread legitimacy (Zucco 2015). The same is true about predictability. A system might be fairly predictable even if parties do not have strong linkages with voters. Some electoral rules might stabilize the party system by blocking the entrance of new actors. However, it is unlikely that a system could be stable for an extended time with weak roots in society unless some constraints (constrictive electoral rules, repression, rules that greatly advantage the existing parties) block the emergence of new parties and the renovation of established parties. Without such constraints, it is difficult to see how a system could be “stable but uprooted” (Luna and Altman 2011) in equilibrium.

Of the four original dimensions of PSI, then, the only defining feature is the stability of patterns of electoral competition. By definition, an institutionalized system cannot have high electoral volatility or experience frequent changes in the main contenders. A system in which new parties do not capture much of the vote, the same parties win similar vote shares across time, and they place

<sup>9</sup> Beyond Sánchez (2009), few previous works emphasized stability in the main parties as a key feature of PSI.

themselves in roughly similar programmatic positions is more institutionalized than one with the opposite characteristics. Political actors believe that they can predict interactions into the foreseeable future given their experiences with the past. Symmetrically, a system with persistently high electoral volatility is by definition weakly institutionalized.

This argument changes the core of the concept and necessitates reconceptualizing the place of the other dimensions in the original Mainwaring and Scully framework. These three features are relatively proximate causes of PSI. For example, solid organizations usually create an advantage for parties because they make it more likely that they will garner electoral support over time. Recent scholarship on Latin America (Van Dyck 2014) and Eastern Europe (Tavits 2013) has demonstrated a positive impact of stronger organizations on parties' electoral performance. Strong organizations tend to be an asset for politicians and help them win over time, thus stabilizing patterns of party competition.

Parties with strong roots in society have a stock of voters closely attached to them, which also contributes to stability (Dalton and Weldon 2007). Theories of partisanship have demonstrated that those links between parties and voters tend to last and to guide voters' behavior over time (Converse 1964; Fiorina 1981; Green *et al.* 2002; Lupu 2016, this volume; Seawright 2012). High levels of partisanship tend to be strongly associated with stable electoral results at both the systemic level and the level of individual parties. Therefore, a system in which the main contenders have deep roots in society is more likely to remain highly institutionalized. Partisanship generates stable electoral support for parties, enhancing stability and predictability.

Likewise, countries where parties are regarded as legitimate actors tend to be safe from political outsiders. Outsiders thrive when political parties lose their connections with voters and when the latter disregard parties as options for selecting candidates for political positions (Carreras 2012; Lupu 2013; Morgan 2011; Seawright 2012).

These building blocks of PSI tend to be mutually reinforcing. Strong organizations convert loyal voters into partisans (Samuels and Zucco 2014) and are likely to increase parties' legitimacy through individual and collective incorporation of voters and social organizations. Similarly, citizens with strong attachments to parties tend to regard them as legitimate and to contribute more to them (Schlozman 2002).

Strong parties, strong roots in society, and widespread legitimacy help to institutionalize party systems. Figure 1.1 portrays this argument. This relationship is causally asymmetrical because the absence of the three other dimensions does not necessarily imply the absence of the core dimension. As noted previously, patterns of electoral competition can be stable even if parties do not have strong roots, organizations, and legitimacy (Luna and Altman 2011; Zucco 2015).

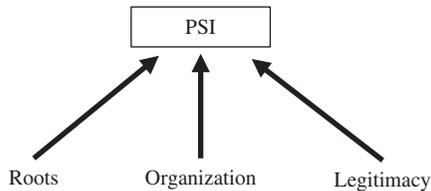


FIGURE 1.1 A New Configuration for PSI

This new framework facilitates the understanding of PSI in three ways. First, it allows for multiple and diverse interactions between stability and the three other original dimensions – an issue that has been a source of debate in the recent years (Luna and Altman 2011; Zucco 2015). Second, it places stability, the most common measure of PSI, at the center of the framework. Some scholars have looked at electoral volatility as the sole indicator of PSI. In this sense, we bring the concept closer to how most scholars have implicitly understood it, even though we advocate a broader panoply of measures of stability.

Third, it recovers parties' legitimacy as an important issue that could affect PSI. While many authors have deemphasized the role of legitimacy, mostly due to the measurement challenges it entails, by treating it as having a causal relationship with PSI, we can preserve it as an analytical and theoretical issue. This is important because there is extensive evidence that anti-partisan feelings and anti-partisan candidates have deleterious effects for stability and democracy (Carreras 2012; Lupu 2013; Seawright 2012).

The relationship between the stability of patterns of electoral competition and the three previous dimensions is an important theme in this book. Strong party roots in society, a widespread belief that parties are essential actors in democracies, and strong party organizations *are* closely linked to PSI. Therefore, we briefly discuss some alternative perspectives.

Zucco (2015) claimed that Brazil's party system was stable but without roots. He referred to Brazilian parties as "hydroponic." We agree that the Brazilian system was more stable than one would have predicted on the basis of party rootedness, the legitimacy of parties as the core actors in democratic representation, and party organization. While we largely agree with Zucco, he perhaps overstated the stability of patterns of electoral competition because he did not consider some important levels of the federal system – for example, governors, for which electoral volatility has been high. In addition, as Mainwaring, Power, and Bizzarro discuss in Chapter 6, some measures of party roots, such as negative identifications (Meléndez 2015), create stronger linkages between voters and parties than conventional measures have captured (see also Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012).

Luna's critique (2014) of the notion of PSI centers around two main points. First, he argued that the structure of the concept needed to be reconsidered. We agree; the four previous dimensions are not coequal and should not be treated

as additive. However, we disagree with several of Luna's criticisms and empirics. Unless some constraints limit the emergence of new contenders and the potential for renovation within the established parties, it is very unlikely that a party system could be stable at the aggregate level if few voters have stable attitudes toward the parties. For example, Colombia's party system was stable from the restoration of democracy in 1958 until 1991 despite weakening bonds between citizens and parties – but this stability was rooted in severe restrictions to party competition.

Luna claimed that Mainwaring and Scully (1995a) and Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) posited a linear relationship among the four previous dimensions of PSI. Both works asserted that the correlations among these dimensions *usually* tend to be strong, not that they are perfectly linear. Luna questioned the argument that there is a strong empirical relationship among the original four dimensions. He cited Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) and attributed his data on the relationship between electoral volatility and ideological structuring of the vote to them. He stated that the empirical relationship between electoral volatility and ideological structuration of the vote was not statistically significant. But the data he used do not match Mainwaring and Torcal's (2006), which show a strong and highly statistically significant relationship, as do Luna's own data (Luna 2014: 421–22).<sup>10</sup>

In an extended part of his critique (pp. 415–22), Luna reduced the original claim, that stable patterns of electoral competition tend to go hand in hand with strong party roots in society, to a different claim, namely that the former go hand in hand with programmatic competition. Mainwaring and Torcal explicitly rejected the notion that strong party roots necessarily stem from programmatic linkages. They pointed out that clientelistic and traditional/affective linkages can also create strong bonds between voters and parties (2006: 211–16).

Ample evidence in the social science corroborates the strong empirical and theoretical relationship between system stability and party rootedness in society. Converse (1969), Dalton and Weldon (2007), and Green *et al.* (2002) established a strong relationship between party roots in society as measured by partisanship and party system stabilization. Lupu (2016) and Seawright (2012) showed a close relationship between diminished party roots in society as measured by drops in partisanship and party system collapse (Seawright) or party collapse (Lupu). Likewise, Tavits (2013) has shown that strong party organizations usually provide an electoral advantage.

<sup>10</sup> Mainwaring and Torcal computed a score for ideological voting and electoral volatility for thirty-two democracies and semi-democracies. For these 32 countries, high ideological structuration was associated with low volatility, consistent with their hypothesis; the correlation was  $-0.56$  ( $p = 0.001$ ). Luna's conclusion that "volatility and programmatic structure are correlated but nonetheless distinct and empirically separable phenomena" (p. 421) is close to what Mainwaring and Torcal (2006) stated.

## DECAY AND COLLAPSE

Deinstitutionalization or decay is the erosion of previously stable patterns. It is a movement to a less institutionalized system. Major new contenders emerge, old parties lose vote shares in droves, or parties revamp their ideological stances drastically. In these contexts, actors lose their ability to predict the future configuration of the system since they do not know which actors – including themselves – are going to be important in the future. The party system has a weaker effect on the behavior and calculations of the political actors.

The degree to which a party system shapes actors' behavior is a function of the level of institutionalization. Weak institutions do not constrain as much as strong institutions (Levitsky 2003; Levitsky and Murillo 2005, 2014; O'Donnell 1999). In weakly institutionalized systems, parties are less central actors in democratic politics; powerful politicians and other actors rise to the fore.

Processes of deinstitutionalization are not unusual in the history of democratic politics. In many Western European cases, old party systems deinstitutionalized due to important changes in society or in the political system – for example, with the expansion of suffrage. As the experience of the early twentieth century in both Western Europe and Latin America demonstrates (Collier and Collier 1991; Daalder 1987; LaPalombara and Weiner 1966), formerly elitist pre-democratic party systems, concentrated in the dispute between liberals and conservatives, were transformed by the entrance of working-class voters and parties, and also populist parties, into the political arena. The British case is a classic example. In the second half of the nineteenth century, electoral competition revolved around the dispute between Liberals and Conservatives. Founded in 1900, the Labour Party quickly displaced the Liberals in the 1920s after the dramatic expansion of the electorate in 1918. A new pattern of competition emerged while an older one receded. These processes of slow deinstitutionalization of an old system, succeeded by the institutionalization of a new one, can be called “replacement.”<sup>11</sup>

The Mexican case is a contemporary example of such a process. The hegemonic party system that existed for decades (until 1988) did not disappear, but it was slowly replaced by a multi-party system that emerged with democratization. The hegemonic party system changed; it moved from greater stability and predictability to a period of less stability and predictability as space for new contenders opened. Over time, a new multi-party system institutionalized.

Cases of party system erosion have been common in contemporary Latin America. In Argentina, as Gervasoni's chapter shows, the traditional electoral

<sup>11</sup> This idea echoes the discussions observed mostly in the European literature about party system change and realignment (Dalton *et al.* 1984; Mair 1997; Pennings and Lane 1998; Tavits 2006).

domination by Peronists and Radicals has given rise to a chaotic system of badly splintered Peronists and a huge proliferation of provincial parties and alliances. In Colombia, the traditional Conservative/Liberal duopoly has given rise to important new contenders, a decline of the traditional parties, and higher electoral volatility. The Costa Rican case is somewhat similar though less extreme. One of the traditional two contenders for the presidency, the Social Christian Unity Party, collapsed; newcomers have enjoyed electoral success; electoral volatility has increased.

In some cases, deinstitutionalization was so abrupt and profound that a party system collapse occurred (Morgan 2011; Seawright 2012). Collapses are cases in which one system breaks down quickly and a new one emerges. Voters turned away from existing parties massively and rapidly. Such cases are rare, but Peru, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Italy experienced party system collapse and the emergence of new systems in the 1990s or 2000s. If the significant contenders all change, a new system has displaced the old one.

Collapse involves the rapid disappearance of the old system, including all major parties. Stability and predictability evaporate, leaving the former political actors and voters in disarray. In contrast, replacement usually does not imply the disappearance of all the main actors, nor does it occur suddenly.

Operationally, a system collapses if all major contenders disappear or become lesser contenders (they win under 10%) in both presidential and lower chamber elections in a short time – at most three election cycles.<sup>12</sup> Our operational definition of a major contender is one that won at least 20% of the vote in a presidential *or* lower chamber election. A major contender collapses if it wins under 10% in *both* presidential and lower chamber elections in two consecutive elections. In this situation, we count the collapse as occurring in the first of the two consecutive elections. Our criterion does not count a dip below 10% followed by a rebound above that threshold in the next election as a collapse. None of the chapters in this book focuses on system collapse, but Noam Lupu's (Chapter 12) analyzes party collapse and the chapters by Steven Levitsky on Peru (Chapter 11) and Jana Morgan on Venezuela (Chapter 10) deal with post-collapse scenarios.

In contrast to the cases of collapse, sometimes the transition from one system to another is profound but less abrupt, so it is difficult to demarcate an exact moment of change. The contemporary Colombian system is an example. It is different from the two-party system that prevailed from the 1886 constitution

<sup>12</sup> Some scholars have operationalized a party collapse by looking only at presidential elections and by considering only the election of precipitous decline, without analyzing whether the party subsequently recovers in the next elections. We favor looking at both presidential and congressional elections and at least two elections. For strategic reasons, sometimes even large congressional parties do not field presidential candidates, so if we used only one presidential election, even parties that remain major contenders could meet the operational definition of a collapse. We would not count a party as collapsing if it experienced a sharp decline in one election but rebounded in the next.

until the 1990s, but there was no single transition point from the earlier system to the current one.

#### NORMATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON INSTITUTIONALIZATION

In *Political Order in Changing Societies*, Huntington (1968) presented an almost uniformly positive view of political institutionalization. The perspective in this book is different. We share Huntington's view that weak institutionalization – in this volume, of party systems – typically is associated with some democratic deficiencies. As recent works have shown (Bernhard *et al.* 2015; Flores-Macías 2012; Moser and Scheiner 2012; Simmons 2016), PSI has important salutary consequences for democracy. Institutionalized party systems expand the horizons of political elites and other actors (Lupu and Riedl 2013), allowing them to invest in the kind of policies that promote long-term economic growth (Bizzarro *et al.* 2015; Simmons 2016). They might decrease the incentives for disloyal behavior by elites and social groups, consequently diminishing the odds of democratic breakdown (Bernhard *et al.* 2015). Chapter 3 explores other democratic shortcomings often associated with weak PSI.

However, in contrast to Huntington, we do not believe that institutionalization is inherently normatively positive. From a democratic point of view, whether it is positive depends on what is being institutionalized. Democracy has four defining characteristics: (1) The head of government and the legislature must be chosen through free and fair elections. (2) In the contemporary world, the suffrage must include the vast majority of adults except for non-naturalized immigrants. (3) The government must respect civil liberties and political rights of individuals and groups, and it must allow courts, legislatures, and agencies intended to protect rights to function freely. (4) The government must be able to set policy; it cannot be subjected to the veto of the military or shadow figures who indirectly control the government.

Three forms of institutionalization of party systems directly hinder the realization of at least one of these democratic ideals. First, as Mainwaring and Scully (1995a) argued, an institutionalized hegemonic party system, such as Mexico's from 1929 to 1988 or Singapore's in recent decades, or an institutionalized ruling party in a competitive authoritarian regime, thwarts the emergence of democracy. Authoritarian regimes built on institutionalized party systems might provide important public goods, such as extraordinary rates of economic growth in Singapore, but they are incompatible with democracy.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This is true even if the institutionalized party system under the authoritarian regime eventually facilitates the later emergence of an institutionalized system under democracy (Hicken and Kuhonta 2015b; Riedl 2014).

Second, an institutionalized party system built on collusion limits democracy. By collusion, we mean that a few parties create a system to their benefit, and to the exclusion of other parties. Such systems limit political competition, and hence limit the degree to which free and fair elections determine who governs. A prime example is Colombia from 1958 to 1974. The Liberal and Conservative parties restored and stabilized democracy (or semi-democracy, to be more accurate) after a bloody civil war (1948–58). However, this system was based on collusion between the two traditional parties and on the exclusion of the electoral left. A formal pact (the National Front) limited high level government offices to the Conservative and Liberal parties (1958–74). The Conservatives and Liberals rotated in the presidency and evenly split the national congress, regardless of election results. The party system was highly institutionalized, but it was built on anti-democratic collusion.

Third, some party systems have anti-democratic exclusions. Through suffrage restrictions or repression, they limit who participates in democratic politics. In Colombia, for example, the National Front de facto excluded the left. Later, recurrent waves of assassinations of leftist politicians and activists made it impossible for the left to compete electorally on remotely equal footing. The political exclusion of the left, in turn, helped fuel guerrilla insurgencies that lasted for generations. In the United States, the party system has long been highly institutionalized, but from 1873 to 1965 in the South it excluded African Americans in ways that were incompatible with democratic principles.

Hyper-institutionalized party systems work against democratic deepening and innovation. It is healthy for democracy that party systems experience some change and renovation. Renovation can occur in institutionalized systems, but, by definition, an ideal type perfectly institutionalized system would not change at all and would be perfectly predictable, and democratic deepening would be difficult. No existing or historical party system under democracy approximates perfect institutionalization, but some have been institutionalized enough to stifle democratic innovation. For example, by creating very high hurdles for new parties, the US party system dampens democratic innovation. At a very high end of institutionalization, the effects on democracy thus tend to be pernicious rather than salutary. Hyper-institutionalized and weakly institutionalized systems both have characteristic democratic shortcomings.

In emphasizing that institutionalization can stem from anti-democratic restrictions on competition and participation, and that it can have negative as well as positive consequences, this book parts paths from Huntington (1968).<sup>14</sup> Although weak institutionalization is usually associated with some negative outcomes, very high institutionalization can have down sides (Coppedge 1994; Schedler 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Huntington's concern in *Political Order in Changing Societies* was not democracy but rather political order.

## CONCLUSION

PSI is a continuous variable, as is each of the three defining characteristics of an institutionalized party system (stability of main parties, stable electoral competition, and stable ideological positions). The permeability of party systems to new contenders and electoral volatility vary widely, as continuous variables, across time and space. Ideological consistency also varies. Party systems characterized by a low degree of institutionalization can be called fluid or weakly institutionalized.

Because PSI is a continuum, the behavior of actors in a party system can be more or less oriented by the characteristics of the system. Systemic characteristics never solely determine an actor's behavior, nor can actors perfectly shape the party systems in a given country. Institutionalization is a difference of degree, not of kind.

We do not generally establish specific cut points below or above which we regard a system as institutionalized. A partial exception to this rule is the temporality of institutionalization. Under most circumstances, although not necessarily in cases of redemocratization in which the "new" democratic party system is similar to the one under the previous democracy, a system is usually not institutionalized until electoral patterns are stable in at least three consecutive electoral periods (i.e., four elections). Usually, two data points (i.e., three elections) do not suffice to say that a system is stable.

Institutionalization is independent from the other "parameters" of party systems (Bardi and Mair 2008) such as the number of parties or their ideological polarization (Mainwaring 1999: 26). Both two-party (the US) and highly fragmented party systems (Brazil), as well polarized (Hungary) or non-polarized party systems (Taiwan) can institutionalize. While the most influential classic typologies of party systems analyzed variation in the number of parties and their ideological polarization (Duverger 1954; Sartori 1976), systems with a similar number of parties and similar levels of ideological polarization vary widely in the extent to which the interactions among the parties are stable and predictable. These variations in institutionalization have important consequences for democratic politics, as Chapter 3 shows.

As the Latin American, Asian (Hicken and Kuhonta 2015b), African (Riedl 2014), and post-communist cases (Pop-Eleches 2014) have demonstrated, the institutionalization of party systems is neither teleological nor linear.<sup>15</sup> There is no necessary progression from lesser to greater institutionalization. Formerly institutionalized party systems can deinstitutionalize and even collapse, as the Italian and Venezuelan cases in the 1990s showed.<sup>16</sup> Since the publication of Mainwaring and Scully (1995a), more Latin American party systems have

<sup>15</sup> Lindberg (2007) makes a converging argument for Africa.

<sup>16</sup> The Bolivian and Ecuadoran party systems also collapsed in the 2000s, but they were never as institutionalized as the Venezuelan and Italian systems during the heydays of the latter two.

undergone decay or collapse than institutionalization. Likewise, the number of institutionalized democratic party systems in Asia, Africa, and the post-communist world is limited.

Although parties hold center stage in this volume, this does not imply a party centric view of democracy. Other mechanisms of citizen participation – social movements, NGOs, labor unions and owners' associations, protests, referenda, and other mechanisms of direct democracy – can make democracy more vital. However, parties occupy a unique position in democratic politics (Sartori 1976; Schattschneider 1942). Through elections, parties can achieve positions in government and hence usually shape political outcomes more than other vehicles of citizen participation. Parties are both critical vehicles of representation and of shaping the political system (Sartori 1976) – though to degrees that vary according to the system's level of institutionalization.