

PARTIES AND ACCOUNTABLE GOVERNMENT IN NEW DEMOCRACIES

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ABSTRACT

Political scientists have long associated accountability with strong political parties, and have also frequently noted the weakness of parties in new democracies. This article disaggregates the strong party ideal into two components – legislative discipline and programmatic platforms – and suggests that the former in the absence of the latter can undermine accountability. We describe levels of discipline in parties in various new democracies. Then we provide a taxonomy of political party origins, according to how origins affect the proclivity of parties toward both programmatic policy and legislative discipline.

KEY WORDS ■ accountability ■ democratic consolidation ■ democratic transitions ■ electoral systems ■ party discipline ■ political parties ■ responsible party government ■ roll call votes

Introduction

As LaPalombara, Weiner and their colleagues (1966) noted more than a generation ago, one of the key challenges confronting newly democratizing countries is the development of political parties capable of providing accountable government. The ideal is that, in electoral campaigns, parties should present to voters coherent packages of policies that they promise to pursue, and that if elected they are capable of implementing those programs faithfully. Descriptions of failed parties and failed party systems generally focus on breakdowns along one or the other step along this sequence. Either parties fail to offer programmatic platforms, or they prove incapable of coordinating the behavior of their members to implement their promised policies once in government.

This article examines some factors that affect whether parties in new democracies deliver on the promise of accountable government. We focus on parties in legislative assemblies for a couple of reasons. First, assemblies

are the central representative institutions in all democracies. Chief executives may or may not be popularly elected. Where they are not, they are generally selected from within the assembly, and even where they are, major policy decisions must still be approved by assemblies. Second, assemblies are the 'natural habitat' of parties in government because they are plural bodies. In most democratic assemblies, most decisions are made by majority rule, and those that are not generally require supermajorities, so decisiveness within assemblies requires collective action among large numbers of politicians. Party organizations are the near-universal means of coordinating such action in assemblies. Virtually all modern democratic legislatures are organized along party lines, meaning that party units are accorded rights over legislative resources, including representation on the organ that controls the legislative agenda, as well as whatever offices and staff are available.

Among the factors we suggest contribute to the viability of parties in delivering accountable government are: (1) the design of formal political institutions – the rules by which legislators are elected, and the constitutional context in which they operate; (2) their relationship to government – whether they are in government or opposition; and (3) the origins of the parties themselves – from what sort of movements or organizations they developed.

We also examine a governing assumption of much academic research into the role of parties in government, especially in new democracies: that parties tend to be too weak, and the stronger they *could* be, the better. We suggest that the discipline that makes decisiveness within assemblies possible contributes to accountable government only when programmatic platforms are present, and that particularly in new democracies they are often absent. Under these conditions, strict discipline can be a democratic liability, and can undermine an alternative form of accountability – that of individual legislators to their constituents. Indeed, in many new democracies, we see evidence that citizens, and many legislators themselves, are dissatisfied with strong party discipline, and are increasingly demanding individual-level accountability that looks quite different from the strong party ideal long cherished by political scientists.

This article proceeds as follows. We first examine the strong party ideal and its place in the literature on comparative political parties and party systems. Next, we note that among citizens and many politicians themselves, faith in the strong party ideal is shaky, and the pattern of reform in many democracies in recent years aims at reducing legislators' subordination to central party leaders. We turn next to institutional factors that affect the unity of legislative parties, reviewing the importance of the constitutional regime type (presidentialism versus parliamentarism) and of the rules by which legislators are elected (electoral systems). We examine party unity in recorded legislative votes across 17 different countries, which illustrate the impact of institutional factors. Then we consider the broader effects, on both programmatic content and legislative strength, of parties' origins and

development trajectories. We conclude with speculations about the broader implications of our findings.

The Strong Party Ideal

The normative desirability of strong party government is often taken as axiomatic among academics. The key components of the case in relation to legislative parties are as follows. Legislatures are called upon to make decisions on a wide-ranging set of policies. Given the widely recognized difficulties of collective decision-making, no individual legislator can credibly claim credit or responsibility for shaping policy on such a scale. In contrast, political parties can both encompass a broad idea of the public interest and plausibly claim to deliver policies that advance this idea – but legislative parties can only do this if they are unified. Meaningful legislative accountability, therefore, must be collective, through the organization of legislatures by strong parties.

In 1950, the American Political Science Association urged reforms to strengthen the two major US parties in the name of what the APSA called ‘responsible, party government’. Our own conditions for accountable party government echo the APSA (1950) report:

An effective party system requires, first, that the parties are able to bring forth programs to which they commit themselves and, second, that the parties possess sufficient internal cohesion to carry out these programs. (p. 1)

The norm is even more widely held among academic observers of legislatures outside the United States. A recent study of party discipline throughout Europe opens with the premise that:

The maintenance of a cohesive voting bloc inside a legislative body is a crucially important feature of parliamentary life. Without the existence of a readily identifiable bloc of governing politicians, the accountability of the executive to both legislature and voters falls flat. It can be seen, then, as a necessary condition for the existence of responsible party government. (Bowler et al., 1999: 3)

Wrapping up a broad survey of political parties in Latin America in the 1990s, Mainwaring and Scully lament the tendency of presidents to campaign and govern based on personalistic appeals rather than by cultivating stable party support (1995: 473–4):

As electoral democracy becomes accepted as *the* mode of forming governments in most Latin American countries, and as the enormous costs of weak party systems become apparent, perhaps leaders will pay more attention to the challenge of building democratic institutions and will govern through parties and with them. Without a reasonably institutionalized party system, the future of democracy is bleak.

In short, strong parties have long been held in high academic esteem (Cox, 1997; LaPalombara and Weiner, 1966). But the strong party edifice rests on two distinct, central pillars – one rooted in the practice of elections, the other in the practice of governing. The former supports programmatic policy platforms, the latter the ability to coordinate cohorts of legislators behind collective goals. When the first pillar is in place, the presence of the second makes collective responsibility possible. But what happens when the first pillar is missing – for example, when parties act as cartels merely pursuing state authority, but without promoting coherent policy programs? In these circumstances, the presence of the second pillar can be a drawback in two respects. First, strong discipline makes these potentially rapacious organizations more efficient predators for power. Second, the very mechanics of centralized authority within governing parties that foster discipline and decisiveness can stand in the way of individual-level accountability among legislators to their constituents.

In terms of explaining the first pillar of the strong party ideal, the policy content of party platforms and the quality of their electoral brand names, we have little to contribute beyond the intuition that parties with their origins in a ‘negative appeal’ (e.g. they are born of movements whose rationale for existence primarily comes from their desire to overthrow the existing ruling party) have less programmatic consistency than those that come from a cartel/corporatist/interest-based existence. We develop these ideas later in the section on party origins.

With respect to the strength of parties in government, we have more to say. We want to emphasize the distinction that is often not adequately appreciated by studies that stress legislative party strength as an end in itself. Perhaps this is because the strength of parties in legislatures is easier to measure. Scholars can observe governing parties and coalitions and generally agree which are unified and which are feckless, whereas it is more difficult to measure and to compare cross-nationally the qualitative substance of their proposals and policies.

The Individualist Dissent

Parties and party systems in which the second pillar of governing is strong while the first of electoral choice is absent frequently generate substantial dissatisfaction among citizens, as parties come to be seen merely as effective vehicles for seizing control of the state, without necessarily advancing effective policy programs. Confronted with parties of this sort, political reformers often see things somewhat differently from academics. It is not that reformers aspire to feckless parties, nor indeed would most academics who call for strong parties aspire to Leninist centralism. But whereas academic observers are inclined, on the whole, to see parties as weaker than they ought to be and needing fortification, the general tide of reform in

many new democracies runs against the authority of central party leaders, in the name of increasing the accountability of individual legislators (Carey, 2003).

Conspicuous within this trend are reforms to establish mixed-member, SMD/PR (single-member district/proportional representation) electoral systems.¹ In the past two decades, these systems have been adopted in Bolivia, Mexico, Venezuela, Russia, Ukraine, Philippines, Lesotho, Albania, and are currently under consideration in Chile, Costa Rica and Kenya.² Mixed systems are often promoted as a means by which to *disconnect* legislators from national party leadership when the demands of leaders conflict with responsiveness to local constituencies.³ Reform advocates describe popular disenchantment with disciplined parties directed by leaders who are insulated from punishment by voters (Gil Yepes, 1991; Rachadell, 1991; Culver and Ferruffino, 2000).

In many cases, moreover, both the strong discipline and the insulation of the top leaders are causally connected to a common source: closed-list PR electoral systems, in which control over candidate nominations is centralized among party bosses and voters are provided no choice among candidates within a given party. The accountability dilemma in such systems is aggravated because as a politician advances within the party leadership, her access to power and perks increases dramatically, but her electoral vulnerability decreases because leaders occupy the top positions on party electoral lists. This mitigates the leadership's susceptibility to electoral punishment, even if their party as a whole loses electoral ground. As a result, the leaders who stand to gain the most from violating public trust and pillaging state resources stand to suffer the least electoral indignity if their party, collectively, is punished by voters.

The individualist dissent describes the flip side of the strong party ideal, and implies a case for accountability at the level of each legislator. The core of the argument rests in the critique of party-dominated representation as imbuing the most powerful legislative leaders with a sense of distance from voters that insulates them from public disapproval. Instead, the argument goes, legislators are most responsive to citizen demands when each is responsible for cultivating her or his own support constituency, which in turn can reward and punish its representative directly at the polls. Whereas advocates of partisan, collective representation are more concerned about the ideological and policy content of party labels, with the decisiveness of legislatures, and with the voters' assessments of overall government performance (Powell and Vanberg, 2000), advocates of individual-level accountability are more concerned with maximizing virtue – deterring the betrayal of the demands of particular voters that picked an individual legislator as their representative.

As the Members See It

In the late 1990s, the *Proyecto de Elites Latinoamericanas* project conducted surveys of legislators throughout Latin America on an array of issues, including their disposition toward party leaders and other political actors to whom they might be responsive (Alcantara, 1994–2001).⁴ In most cases, the *PELA* team garnered responses from well over half the membership of the lower chamber (or only chamber in unicameral systems) and across the full range of parties.

Figure 1 depicts the relative influence of three potentially important principals – national party leaders, voters in their district and the government – on the decisions legislators make. The figure presents the results with respect to party leaders. The first thing to note is that the overwhelming majority of legislators acknowledge paying substantial attention (either ‘a lot’ or ‘some’) to party leaders, as indicated in the first panel of Figure 1.

Deference to party leaders is far from absolute, however. In 12 of the 13 countries, more legislators say they pay ‘some’ than ‘a lot’ of attention to party leaders. By contrast, legislators profess to be more responsive to voters in their district, as indicated by the second panel. In every country surveyed, more legislators claimed to pay more attention to voters in their district than to any other factor when making political decisions. Other potential sources of influence in the survey included national public opinion, voters from

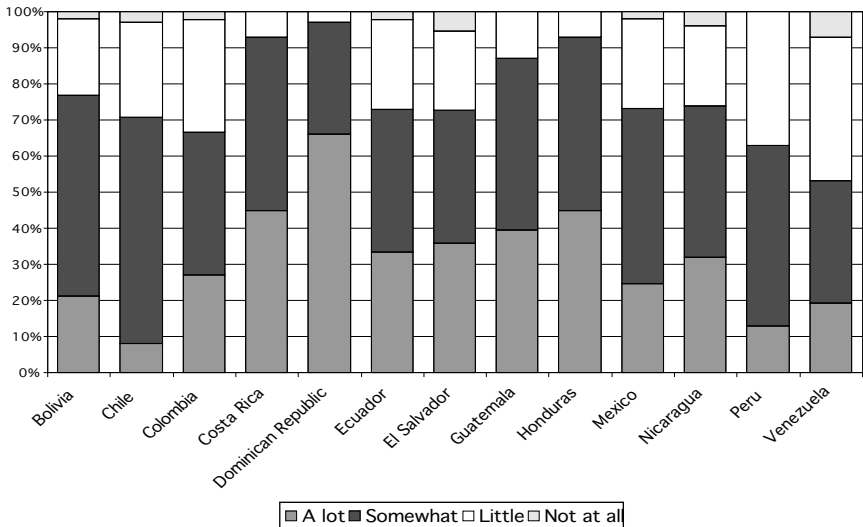


Figure 1a. Elite concern about national party leader opinions

Source: Proyecto de Elites Latinoamericanas (Alcantara, 1994–2001). *Note:* The question asked: ‘Do you take the opinion of national party leaders into consideration when making political decisions?’

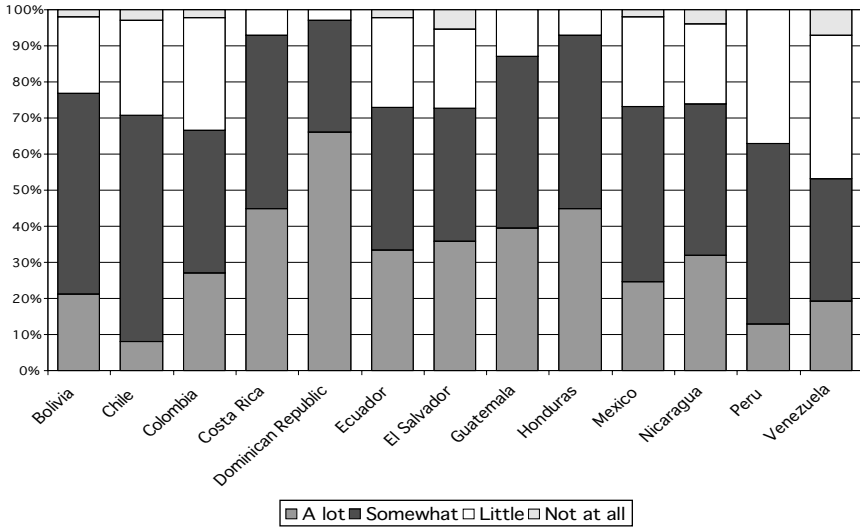


Figure 1b. Elite concern about district opinions

Source: *Proyecto de Elites Latinoamericanas* (Alcantara, 1994–2001). Note: The question asked: ‘Do you take the opinion of voters in your district into consideration when making political decisions?’

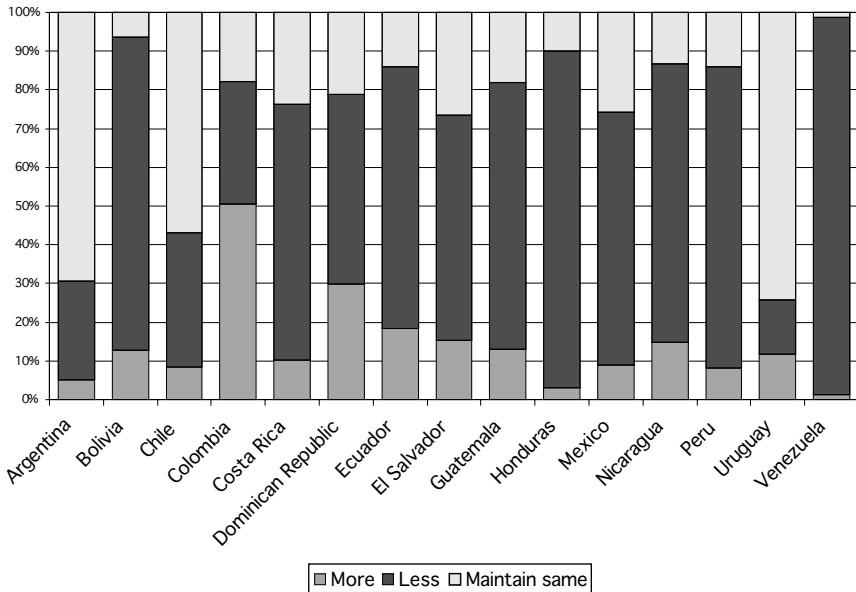


Figure 1c. Should national party have more power over legislature?

Source: *Proyecto de Elites Latinoamericanas* (Alcantara, 1994–2001). Note: The question asked: ‘Do you think the national party leadership should have more power over legislators, or less?’

within the legislator's party, the media and interest groups. According to the surveys, none warranted such deference as voters from the legislators' districts. This is remarkable, particularly because most of the legislators surveyed were elected from closed party lists in which the direct link between district voters and their representatives is tenuous at best.⁵

Another indication of this tendency is the survey question, 'Do you think the national party leadership should have more power than legislators, less power or maintain the same?' (see Figure 1c). In every country except Colombia, more respondents said 'less' than 'more' – generally many times more.⁶ In 10 of 15 countries, most legislators preferred less central party control. Across countries the mean level of support for increased party control is 13 percent, whereas the mean support for decreased control is 56 percent.

The bottom line from the surveys is pretty simple. Legislators prefer more of their own discretion, and less control from their parties, toward the expressed priority of representing the interests of voters from their districts. All this may be posturing, of course, if legislators for some reason felt obliged to dissemble on the surveys. But even if the professed commitment to district voters over party leaders or presidents is not sincere, it suggests deference to a norm that individualistic accountability ought to trump partisan accountability when the two values are in conflict.

Sources of Unity and Disunity in Legislative Parties

Let us turn to two key institutional factors that affect unity in legislative parties: the existence of a popularly elected chief executive, and the incentives for individualism in the rules by which legislators are elected. In the first case, the conventional wisdom holds that party discipline (manifest in voting unity) ought to be higher in parliamentary than in presidential systems. There are two different reasons this might be so. One has to do with the threat of the confidence vote, which implies that party *disunity* in legislative voting may threaten the survival of the government itself, thus inducing discipline in parliamentary systems. A separate distinction concerns the potentially disruptive influence of presidents who use the resources of their office to try to influence legislative outcomes.

The difference between these two sources of party unity/disunity is particularly critical in light of the trend over the past 15 years toward the creation of hybrid constitutional systems that combine a popularly elected presidency with a cabinet subject to parliamentary confidence. If the key to strong legislative parties is the specter of a confidence vote, then these hybrid systems should be predisposed toward strong parties. If, on the other hand, the key distinction between presidential and parliamentary systems is presidential 'interference' in legislative parties, then hybrid regimes should, other things equal, be inclined toward weak parties.

With respect to electoral rules, as suggested by the discussion above on accountability, we distinguish between closed-list electoral systems and those in which voters have the opportunity to cast preference votes among candidates within parties. Note that this choice is different from the distinction, more familiar in the literature on comparative political parties, between winner-take-all and PR; but it is more relevant to whether parties in government (and in opposition) will be cohesive in legislative voting, or whether instead legislators will privilege the particularistic demands of their constituents over those of central party leaders (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Mitchell, 2000). Whereas the literature on comparative legislative representation tends to favor PR over SMD (Colomer, 2001; Lijphart, 1994; Powell and Vanberg, 2000), there is less academic consensus on the relative merits of individualistic versus collective representation (Golden and Chang, 2001; Persson and Tabellini, 2003).

To evaluate the impact of institutional factors on the strength of parties in government, we examine unity in legislative voting. We draw on recorded vote data from the 1990s and first years of this decade from lower houses (or only chambers in unicameral systems) across 17 countries: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Israel, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Peru, Poland, Russia, United States and Uruguay. The numbers of votes available for analysis vary across cases due to differences in recording and archiving practices from just over 100 to many thousands (Carey, 2007).

We measure unity with a variant of the well-known Rice (1925) score, which is the absolute value of the percentage of a party's cohort voting 'aye' minus the percentage voting 'nay' on any given measure. Rice scores range from one (perfect unity or all co-partisans vote alike) to zero (co-partisans evenly split between 'aye' and 'nay'). Our measure is an index that averages party Rice scores across a set of votes, with votes that are more closely contested in the legislature as a whole weighted more heavily than those that are lopsided (Carey, 2007).

Figure 2 depicts the range of weighted Rice indices for the parties in each country according to regime type and whether assembly elections provide for competition among candidates from the same party. In the bottom-left panel are the parliamentary systems, all of which have the confidence vote, and none of which has a popularly elected chief executive. Unfortunately, none of the pure parliamentary systems for which we have data used electoral rules that encouraged a personal vote during the period for which we have vote data, limiting our leverage on the relative influence of constitutional design versus electoral rules within this set of cases.⁷ By and large, voting unity as measured by our weighted Rice index is high among these cases, averaging over 0.90. Canada and Israel each have a derelict outlier, but in each case it is two-member parties in which a 1–1 split vote would drive the Rice score to zero. Overwhelmingly, the legislators in these parliamentary systems voted together with their co-partisans.

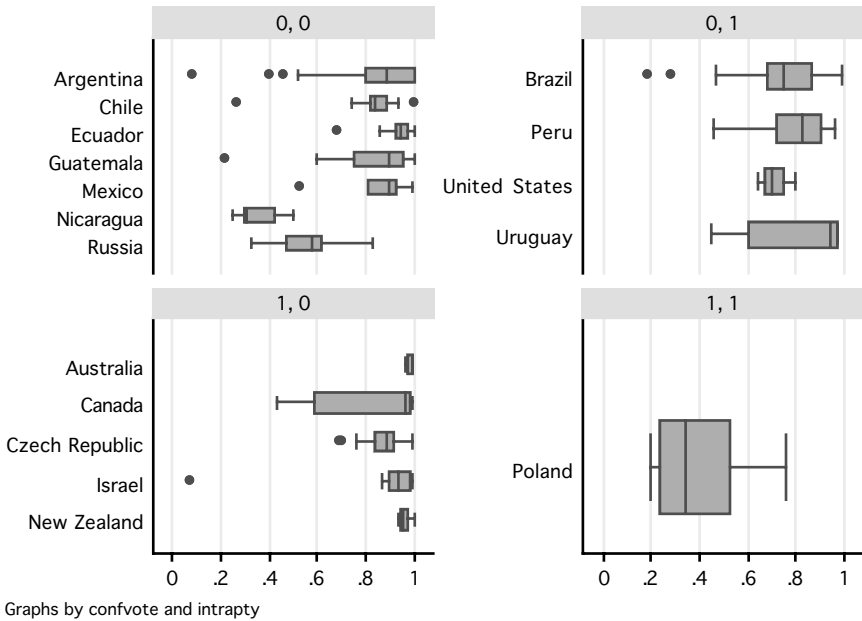


Figure 2. Boxplot of weighted Rice indices by regime type and intra-party electoral competition.

Source: Carey (2007).

The bottom-right panel shows our one hybrid system, Poland, which combines a viable confidence vote provision with a popularly elected president. Again, the scarcity of cases limits our leverage on the relative impact of confidence votes versus presidents on party unity. Moreover, Poland also employs an open-list electoral system with intra-party competition among legislative candidates. Whether owing to presidential interference in parliamentary parties, or to incentives for personalism among legislators, or to some other factors, legislative voting unity was extraordinarily low in Poland during the 1997–99 period from which the votes analyzed here were drawn. Moreover, of eight parties in the Polish Sejm, President Kwasniewski's Social Democrats (SLD) had the lowest weighted Rice index. Whatever influence the president has on his parliamentary co-partisans, he was evidently not a unifying force.

The top panels of Figure 2 show the pure presidential systems, and within this regime type there is more variance on the electoral system. On the left are the systems without intra-party competition. The low indices from Nicaragua and Russia must be evaluated cautiously because all votes in both those assemblies are subject to an absolute majority threshold for approval, meaning non-votes – whatever their motivation – effectively count as ‘nay’ votes. Counting in this way, the Rice indices probably overstate actual levels

of disunity. Elsewhere, Rice indices are higher – a bit lower than under parliamentarism without intra-party competition, but generally in the 0.8 to 0.9 neighborhood. Finally, the top-right panel shows systems without confidence votes and with intra-party competition, and the indices show lower levels of voting unity, averaging in the 0.7 to 0.8 neighborhood, and with considerable spreads.

On the whole, Figure 2 suggests that both regime type (presidentialism versus parliamentarism) and electoral system (personal vote versus party vote) affect levels of voting unity among legislative parties. Unity is highest among parliamentary systems with pure party voting, lower in presidential systems with party voting and lowest among presidential systems with personal voting. Scarcity of data from parliamentary systems with personal voting limits our ability to weigh in on this combination yet.

What does this mean for the bottom line in terms of legislative effectiveness – the ability of parties to win legislative votes? Here, we need to distinguish between parties in government (that is, those that control at least one ministerial portfolio) and parties outside government. In both parliamentary and presidential systems, control of the executive implies substantial control over the legislative agenda, so governing parties should be expected to be on the winning side of votes more than are opposition parties. That said, if presidential influence is strongest among the president’s own co-partisans, and if presidential meddling undermines voting unity, it follows that the legislative advantages of being in government should be lower in presidential than in parliamentary regimes.

Table 1 shows the legislative ‘batting averages’ of parties in and out of government, in presidential versus parliamentary regimes. In parliamentary systems, government parties were on the winning side of 90 percent of votes, a rate twice as high as for parties outside government. In presidential systems, government parties still win most of the time, but at a substantially lower rate, 78 percent, and the advantage over parties outside government is about half as big as under parliamentarism. In short, it is always better to be in government than out, but the greater fluidity of legislative coalitions under presidentialism means that the difference for parties is less pronounced than under parliamentarism.

Table 1. Mean share of legislative votes won for government and opposition parties in systems with and without popularly elected presidents

<i>Initiator of legislation</i>	<i>Popularly elected president</i>	
	<i>No</i>	<i>Yes</i>
Government party	90%	78%
Opposition party	45%	52%

Source: Compiled by authors.

Party Origins

The formal institutional factors discussed to this point affect the nature of party representation, but parties' origins also have downstream impacts on their tendency to provide programmatic platforms and on their raw legislative strength. Party origins are particularly relevant in young democracies emerging from periods of civil conflict and/or from non-democratic regimes. In a new democracy governing parties morph out of organizations present under the old regime and the nature of these organizations potentially shapes the strength of those parties in government. These distinctions have been implicit in the party development literature, but we feel they deserve more direct and systematic attention.

Recall our two pillars of party strength: programmatic consistency and party discipline. The second pillar is sometimes fully present, and other times not, in new democracies and in more established democracies alike, as illustrated by the cross-national variation in Rice indices presented above. In contrast, the first pillar is most often only partially in place, if at all, in new democracies, where party reputations are less well established, and the electoral costs of abandoning campaign platforms and policy positions may be less formidable than in longer-standing systems. That is, parties in new democracies – even those characterized by a high degree of internal discipline and steeply hierarchical leadership structures – often lack coherence in their presentation and pursuit of coherent policy programs.⁸

In this section, we review seven varieties of party origins grouped by two foundational traits: corporate interests versus movements based on a negative appeal, whose rationale for existence is rooted in replacing the status quo. We offer a rough typology of the degree of programmatic consistency and party discipline such parties tend to exhibit.

Corporate Interests

1. *Military*. There are numerous cases of militaries first seizing – or attempting to seize – power in a *coup d'état* and subsequently formalizing that executive role through elections. The National Resistance Movement (NRM) in Uganda and the Movement of the Fifth Republic (MBR) in Venezuela are particular examples. If the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) in Burma does proceed to, and win, multiparty elections (however rigged) they too would be a classic military party in government.

With units, cells and a mentality of hierarchy, the discipline of a military-derived party's voting block in the legislature is commanding and there are clear and structured modes of decision-making. Unlike 'liberation movement' parties, military parties have smaller membership bases to worry about pleasing. While they demonstrate caucus discipline, which allows the executive to pass legislation, the programmatic consistency the party follows can also be significant. Military parties tend to consider what will best serve

the nation and then broadly stick with those policies at the social and economic level – they may be rigid socially, while more pragmatic when it comes to economic development. President Yoseri Museveni of Uganda has been the darling of Western donors not because of his social liberalism or promotion of democracy, but rather because he has followed a consistent economic policy that responds to the requirements of World Bank and IMF loan conditions. He can force through highly controversial structural re-adjustment programs because of the military type discipline of his party caucus in parliament.

2. *Ethnic/Regional Association.* In multi-ethnic plural societies, where voting is often correlated with ethnic identification, parties are often designed as vehicles that deliver on promises made to their own chauvinistic group. Such parties in government are likely to be exclusionary when it comes to resource allocation, siphoning monies to their ‘home region’ and marginalizing communities in other areas. Ethnic parties are also likely to enforce advantageous cultural, educational, religious and linguistic policies to their own (often majority) group. Because the unity of purpose of ruling MPs is high, and the ‘either us or them’ stakes are polarizing, ruling parties of this type are often strong: they have a high degree of internal party discipline and consistency over time in pursuing programs targeting their home base. Their single-mindedness may break down, however, in those policy areas unrelated to resource allocation or communal enhancements. Examples of such parties include the ethnic parties sharing central power in Bosnia Herzegovina, the ‘mainland’ Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) governing party in Tanzania (which excludes Zanzibar), the southern Yao-dominated United Democratic Front (UDF) in Malawi, the Movement to Socialism (MAS) in Bolivia and the Pachakutic Movement in Ecuador.

3. *Labor Unions.* Governing parties that begin as labor unions, or as the political wings of organized labor, can be characterized as being more membership-driven and grassroots-oriented, less prone to be based on charismatic leadership, and more collectivist and programmatic than the other corporate parties we identify. As a result, the legislative discipline of governments born of such parties ought to be relatively high, and the consistency on social policy and labor rights greater than in other corporate parties. Brazil’s Workers’ Party (PT), for example, has long been acknowledged as maintaining a relatively high level of party discipline and relatively high programmatic consistency within a party system renowned for its indiscipline and fecklessness. Competing labor sectors and urban–rural divides may still make labor-based parties internally fractious, as witnessed by Argentina’s Peronist Party during its long and turbulent history. And the challenge of expanding the appeal of labor-based parties sufficiently to sustain a governing coalition can require compromises that dilute the focus on worker interests and redistributive economic policies. Overall, however,

labor-based parties should demonstrate relatively greater levels of programmatic consistency than most parties of other origin in new democracies.

4. *Ancien Régime/One-Party State*. Movements that transform themselves from being the custodians of state power in one-party states to being the dominant vote winners in a new multiparty competitive era often demonstrate a firm grip on delivery institutions and robust discipline in the legislature. Party leaders have long experience of how to wield incentives and threaten wayward members to maintain strict loyalty. But such former *ancien régime* parties are primarily driven by retaining power rather than pursuing ideologically coherent policy programs. Thus, they are reactive to events and likely to stray from consistent governing strategies that can be evaluated by the electorate. In this way, *ancien régime* parties are particularly good examples of the phenomenon we identified at the very start of the article – that is, strong governing parties that weaken democracy because their lack of programmatic consistency makes them less accountable. There are a number of good examples of such ruling parties in the developing world; FRELIMO in Mozambique, the GPC in Yemen and Mexico's PRI among the most prominent. Nicaragua may actually be said to boast two such parties, held over from distinct *ancien régimes* (one more ancient than the other, of course) – the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) and Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

Negative Appeal

5. *Liberation Movements*. A number of governing parties in fledgling democracies began life as liberation movements fighting colonialism, settler rule or occupation. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and South-West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO-Namibia) are particularly good examples of this phenomenon. The African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa was also undoubtedly a liberation movement, but it, too, had significant labor and pro-democracy antecedents.

Parties of this type often sweep to power with overwhelming victories borne on the back of popular gratitude for their leaders' sacrifice and thanks for delivering the much yearned for deliverance from oppression or occupation. During the struggle period, such liberation movements usually contained both military/guerrilla and political wings and often were a broad church of activists united by their goal of removing the *ancien régime* but not necessarily of one mind when it came to social or political values. The political parties that emerge from liberation movements are characterized by a significant membership base (drawn from the cells and cadres of the struggle period); robust hierarchical structures (echoing the military type discipline required to survive under state repression); and charismatic leadership (the liberation leader transformed to statesman, e.g. Mugabe, Nujoma or Mandela). Such parties often paint pictures of a participatory structure

implying that the mass membership can influence policy, while in actuality the decision-making structures are much more top-down.

When it comes to party discipline in the legislature, party MPs are initially loyal vote fodder for the executive – any internal criticism while in government is often resolved by either expelling the critic or seeing the rebels break away to form a new movement. But over time such caucus discipline may wane as governing realities begin to trump loyalty to the ‘uhuru’ moment. While party loyalty is robust in both Namibia and Zimbabwe (in the face of significant trauma in the case of the latter), both SWAPO and ZANU face increasing back-bench rebellion. In South Africa, the strength of legislative loyalty to the government is compounded by an electoral system which makes the MP beholden to the party rather than to the electorate. While party ‘discipline’ in these cases is moderately high, programmatic consistency is often weak, inconsistent and reactive to short-term cycles of economic and political failure. The party came into being to replace the old, and was widely acclaimed as a great new beginning, but once in power the party finds that an ideological *modus operandi* is lacking. Witness the radical sea change of economic policy in South Africa, on land issues in Namibia and in a whole range of policy areas in Zimbabwe between 1980 and 2005. The Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) is likely to echo these characteristics as it begins to share governance in the Sudan.

6. *Pro-democracy Activists.* Some parties ride to power on an explicit ‘pro-democracy’ wave in replacing a previous one-party regime that liberalizes and ultimately allows multiparty elections to proceed. Both the United Democratic Front (UDF) in Malawi and the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MMD) in Zambia in 1991 presented themselves as parties that wished to entrench multiparty liberal democracy. Unfortunately, in both of these cases the ‘pro-democracy’ parties rapidly became associated with corrupt and anti-democratic practices. President Chiluba in Zambia presided over an increasing tide of corruption and curtailing of democratic rights compared to his predecessor Kenneth Kaunda. Ultimately, he was ousted by his own party who had lost much of their coherence and momentum. Similarly, President Bakili Muluzi of the UDF in Malawi saw his own party internally combust. His successor as party leader and president pursued him on criminal charges. Both cases illustrate that while pro-democracy parties begin life with some programmatic consistency relating to deepening democracy and participation they have tended to flounder when it comes to broader economic and social policy and demonstrate weak party discipline in legislatures.

Not all pro-democracy governing coalitions degenerate to the point of undermining democracy itself, and such governments may continue to foster the open competition and political pluralism they initially espouse, but beyond these principles there is often little policy coherence or internal discipline. This characterizes the parties included in the Brazilian government of

1985–1990, a coalition bound together by its stated commitment to guide the country on a transition from two decades of military rule back to civilian democracy, but by little else.

7. *Alliance to Win Power.* Perhaps the most haphazard and least successful parties in new democracies are those governments formed of shards of parties that purely coalesce to pool enough votes to oust the sitting government come election time. Usually such ‘alliances to win power’ have little in common when it comes to ideology, ethnic needs or corporate backing. Their leaderships are often personalized and fractious and their members are driven by very different interests and goals. Experience shows that utilitarian majority winning alliances are likely to have very little vote discipline in the legislature, nor do they have policy coordination for very much beyond the short term. They frequently fail to deliver on campaign promises and usually collapse into acrimony in fairly short order.

The ruling National Rainbow Alliance in Kenya is a case in point. Formed of a number of opposition parties rooted in various ethnic groups, its candidate Mwai Kibaki successfully managed to wrest away the presidency from Uhuru Kenyatta, the anointed heir to Daniel Arap Moi in 2002. But since then the alliance has been ripped apart by fighting over a new constitution, corruption scandals and disputes over who should fill the prime minister’s post. The motley crew of allies that assembled behind Fernando Collor de Melo between the first and second rounds of the 1989 Brazilian presidential election is another emblematic example. This alliance blocked a possible victory by the PT’s candidate, Luiz Ignacio da Silva, but otherwise shared no common vision of policy nor any particular loyalty to Collor himself, much less his National Renovation party. With scant partisan support in Congress, Collor governed largely by decree during a presidency terminated prematurely by scandal and impending impeachment.

Table 2 provides a rough illustration of our typology of the two pillars of party strength according to the origins of parties in new and transitional democracies. The three types emanating from movements born of negative appeal – Pro-democracy (anti-dictatorship), Power Alliance (anti-incumbent) and Liberation Movement (anti-minority/settler rule) – tend to reflect

Table 2. Hypothesized discipline and program coherence in governing parties in new democracies

Party discipline	<i>Programmatic consistency</i>		
	<i>Moderate</i>	<i>Selective</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>High</i>	Labor	Military Ethnic	<i>Ancien régime</i> Liberation
<i>Low</i>		Pro-democracy	Power alliance

programmatic inconsistency and weak legislative discipline. Conversely, those parties that promote some corporate interest are inclined to exhibit more unity of purpose within the legislature, and (excepting *ancien régime* parties) higher levels of policy coherence. On the whole, however, we reiterate that policy coherence tends to be in short supply in new democracies, and that high party discipline, when combined with low programmatic consistency, is not necessarily the democratic asset that endorsements of strong party government might suggest it is.

Conclusions

The strong party ideal, which is central to much scholarship on comparative parties, rests on twin pillars. The first is the ability of parties to advance programmatic policy platforms, and their interest and willingness to do so. The second is their ability to act collectively once in government, so that platforms can be converted into policy. When both those pillars are in place, democracies can realize the strong party ideal of collective accountability through elections.

In new democracies, however, it is often the case that neither pillar is solid, in which case parties cannot serve as the foundation of accountability. In other instances, the second pillar is in place without the first, which opens the possibility for parties to be effective predators for the rents associated with controlling the state, but ineffective at delivering accountability through elections.

The likelihood of governing parties in emerging democracies lacking one of these two pillars of democratic strength is very high. As new political movements emerge from the ashes of a dictatorship they are unlikely to possess the rationale or organizational reach and robustness to be able to make promises and deliver on them. The new parties most heralded by Western advocates of democratization – the pro-democracy agitators and liberation movement cadres – have shown themselves to lack discipline or policy consistency. Unfortunately, parties less to the taste of democrats – those born of military juntas and chauvinistic ethnic wedge movements – prove to be the most adept at offering a consistent program and sticking to it.

To put our central argument in its bluntest terms, parties may be strong internally but be vacuous and fickle when it comes to policy content. When this is the case, parties fail to deliver programs that respond to citizen preferences in the manner depicted by the strong party ideal, and do not advance the cause of accountable government. This is not to suggest that political parties are unimportant in the establishment and consolidation of new democracies, but rather to highlight that the strong party normative ideal prevalent in much academic work rooted in the experience of developed democracies is frequently inapplicable to how parties in new democracies operate. In particular, in the absence of programmatic consistency at the

collective level, citizens and political reformers frequently demand an alternative, individualistic brand of accountability. Individualistic accountability does not hold out the immediate promise of collective goods based government, as does the strong party ideal, but it does offer the opportunity to punish specific transgressions of trust and abuses of power, perhaps minimizing the potential for predatory behavior by elected representatives, perhaps until the electoral value of reliable party labels can accrue over time.

Notes

- 1 The Federal Republic of Germany was the pioneer in use of SMD/PR, and variants of this format have recently been adopted in established democracies in Italy, Japan and New Zealand (Shugart and Wattenberg, 2001). Yet most of the new SMD/PR systems are in developing democracies.
- 2 Some of these systems are compensatory MMP systems, while others are parallel systems without full proportionality but the rationale of creating a significant number of single-member districts within the overall system remains the same.
- 3 New Zealand's electoral reform of 1994 is a notable exception, as the country moved to a mixed system from a pure single-member district plurality format in order to increase proportionality in the system.
- 4 We are grateful to the PELA directors for providing the marginals from a number of relevant survey questions.
- 5 Chile and Peru use open lists in multi-member districts, and Colombia uses a multiple list system that similarly encourages a personal vote. In Bolivia and Mexico, about half the respondents were elected in single-member districts in mixed-member systems. The rest were elected from closed lists in multi-member districts. For a comparison with the attitudes of parliamentarians in established European democracies, see Converse and Pierce (1979, 1986) and Barnes (1977).
- 6 Note that both Argentina and Uruguay are included in Figure 2, whereas they were not in Figure 1 because these questions were not included in the surveys conducted in those countries.
- 7 The New Zealand votes are from 1990–94 and the mixed-member electoral system was adopted in 1994.
- 8 Stokes (2001) finds that party age is a strong predictor of a party's proclivity to stick with the policies promised during electoral campaigns once in government. Given that parties in new democracies tend to be younger than those in more established democracies, it stands to reason that programmatic consistency would be lower in the former.

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