

Refining the theory of partisan alignments: Evidence from Latin America

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Abstract

In this article we provide a theoretical and empirical evaluation of the evolution of partisan alignments in Latin America since the beginning of the Third Wave of democratization. We first point to a series of limitations of the conventional framework of partisan alignments, namely their disregard of party systems that are only partially or non-institutionalized. Second, we propose a refined framework that is more universally applicable. We then operationalize our indicators and apply our new framework to every democratic country in Latin America to generate a map of the evolution of partisan loyalties in Latin America in the period 1980–2012. Our analysis reveals that the conventional view of widespread partisan dealignment in Latin America is largely inaccurate.

Keywords

Realignment-Dealignment, latin america, electoral volatility, political

Introduction

Party systems in Latin America have undergone enormous changes since the beginning of the Third Wave of democratization. Once solid party systems have collapsed entirely (e.g. Colombia and Venezuela), others have been reoriented in accord with the breakdown of some parties and the emergence of new partisan options (e.g. Argentina and Costa Rica). These transitions explain the focus on the weaknesses, collapse, failures (Gutiérrez Sanín, 2007; Morgan, 2011), low levels of institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995) or the dealignment (Hagopian, 1998; Morgan, 2007) of party systems in the region. Using the last of these concepts, we show, however, that this focus is somewhat misguided. A first problem is that the terminology, at least as applied to multiparty and non-institutionalized contexts, is imprecise. More importantly, our comprehensive survey of electoral results shows widely varying trends rather than a general move towards dealignment.

Mainwaring and Scully's (1995) seminal book on Latin American party systems proposed classifying party systems in the region according to their level of institutionalization. This contribution was groundbreaking because it shifted the focus of analysis of party systems in Latin America from simply counting the number of parties to evaluating how characteristics of the parties themselves affected the nature of inter-party interactions. The classification, however, is overly static. In their model, party systems are characterized on a scale from 'institutionalized' to 'inchoate' depending on how the member parties or the system as a

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whole (concepts they do not always differentiate) score with regard to stability in the rules of inter-party competition, the degree to which parties have stable roots in society, whether political actors accept the legitimacy of the electoral process, and the strength of party organizations. While helpful for differentiating party systems (or parties) at a particular point in time, it neglects the important evolution or dynamism inherent in many party systems and partisan alignments.¹ Our article attempts to incorporate this idea.

To the extent that scholars have studied the nature and the evolution of partisan loyalties in Latin America they have used a framework imported from the literature on American and Western European parties. According to this conventional framework, the evolution of partisan alignments can be classified in three categories: stable alignment, realignment and dealignment, and most existing studies have classified the Latin American party systems in the latter two of these categories.

This framework has had utility for application to party system change in systems where there have been two stable parties, but two important shortcomings make it difficult to use in the Latin American context and many other regions.² First, the concepts of dealignment and realignment both assume the previous existence of alignments. This assumption is problematic where, as in some Latin American countries, parties have not had stable support of strongly aligned voters. Second, the conventional framework is too rigid in its description of the evolution of partisan alignments, and is devoid of nuance, presuming an 'either-or' logic that opposes stable alignments and dealignments. In Latin America, however, we find examples of systems where one party but not others have consistent support, or where some but not all parties have undergone important transitions. We also have examples where there are multiple small parties – perhaps with consistent levels of support – but large parts of the electorate that remain unaligned. The standard categorization scheme does not allow for these types of partial alignments or dealignments. In this article we therefore offer a broader framework for studying the evolution of partisan loyalties that is applicable to systems regardless of the level of institutionalization or other system traits.

This article proceeds as follows. First, we present the traditional framework of partisan alignments as has been used in the American and European literature. Second, we discuss the limitations of the existing framework and propose an alternative classification of the evolution of partisan alignments that overcomes these shortcomings. Third, we identify a series of aggregate indicators that allow us to classify party systems within our refined framework. In the next section we apply the framework to the 18 countries of Latin America for the period 1980–2012, but argue that the model is broadly applicable. This empirical evaluation leads us to describe several distinct tendencies of partisanship and party system change. We thus conclude that the view of ubiquitous partisan dealignment is erroneous and

oversimplified; instead, we show that in addition to cases of dealignment there are cases of continual alignment, realignment, partial alignment and continuation of systems that have never achieved alignment.

Conventional framework of the evolution of partisan alignments

The literature on partisan alignments in the United States and Western Europe is dominated by a framework consisting of three different patterns of the evolution of partisanship at the mass level: stable alignment, realignment and dealignment. In this section, we present these three concepts and introduce their ideal-typical characteristics. We also illustrate these three patterns with examples from Latin America.³

A stable alignment of the party system is an electoral period marked by 'constancy in party coalitions and aggregate partisan equilibrium' (Dalton et al., 1984: 11). Stable alignments are characterized by an unaltered partisan balance over a series of elections. During periods of stable alignment, the long-term support for the different political parties in the system remains unchanged (Dalton et al., 1984; Pomper, 1967). Stable alignments can imply the psychological party identifications held by individuals (or perhaps groups), and these may be tied to social cleavages that help define parties' ideology (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Partisan alignments may also reflect what Kitschelt et al. (2010: 56) call 'programmatic party system structuration', a state that implies clear alternatives in terms of issue clusters and correspondence between the position parties take on political divides at the level of elites and the level of electoral mass constituencies. We focus here, however, on the constancy in the support for the various parties in the system, presuming (rather than testing) the association between voters' allegiances and party support levels. Note too that this definition implies that a stable alignment requires that a consistent set of parties capture the bulk of the country's votes.

Stable alignments are relatively easy to pin down empirically; they require (a) that most voters choose one of the existing parties and (b) that electoral volatility is low. Although some voters will switch election-to-election, the stable alignments presume that most voters consistently support an existing party. The ideal type for stable alignments also requires high levels of electoral participation (though institutions also influence this number) and that few voters spoil ballots, owing to satisfaction with the slate of options (Dettrey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2009; Fornos et al., 2004). High volatility or a significant decrease in participation rates would therefore indicate a move towards dealignment. In sum, the stable alignment ideal type has the following five characteristics:

- Electoral volatility is low and stable
- The level of support for established parties is high and stable

- New political parties do not emerge
- Voter turnout remains stable
- Invalid votes remain low and stable

While alignment implies constancy, dealignment indicates a period of change. Specifically, the party system is in a period of dealignment when the attachment of voters to established parties weakens, and mass party coalitions dissolve (Marinova, 2008). In its traditional meaning, during dealignment phases, citizens' loyalties to *all* the established parties erode. The most visible sign of dealignment in the United States and Britain has been the decline in the number of citizens identified with political parties, and the rapid increase in the number of independents or non-identifiers (Carmines et al., 1987; Crewe et al., 1977). A partisan dealignment may result from the politicization of new issues. If established parties are not able to aggregate and articulate these new issues in their programmes, a part of the electorate may de-align.⁴ Another source of dealignment which explains many of the Latin American countries is the gap between citizens' expectations and actual performance by political parties. Not only are citizens in many Latin American countries disappointed with the economic performance of established parties, they are also disenchanted by the high levels of corruption among party politicians (Hagopian, 2005). Anti-establishment candidates who promise to fight the corrupt practices of political parties feed on this disenchantment (Hawkins, 2010). Note that if the citizenry continues to choose candidates from new or anti-system system parties, the system is dealigned rather than dealigning.

Several pieces of evidence can point towards a period of dealignment or a dealigned system. The first is a high or increased level of *electoral volatility*. As party ties weaken, voting patterns become more fluid. The number of floating voters increases in party systems that go through a dealignment phase; and electoral results may significantly vary across elections (Dalton, 2008; Dalton et al., 2000). A second sign of partisan dealignment is the rise of *new political challengers* who lack political experience and/or a developed party apparatus. Actually, one of the most significant developments in Latin American democracies since the beginning of the third wave of democratization is the rise to political prominence of political outsiders.⁵ Outsiders rise to power in association with new parties that are often nothing more than electoral vehicles serving their personal political ambition (Carreras, 2012). Among the most paradigmatic examples of outsider politicians in Latin America, we can mention Fujimori (president of Peru between 1990 and 2000) and Chávez (president of Venezuela between 1998 and 2013). A third potential piece of evidence for a dealigning system is a *decline in voter turnout*, because the erosion of partisan cues could make the act of voting more costly. Low turnout could also be a signal that partisan loyalty is less important to voters, or that they have lost

confidence in the party (or democratic) system (Marinova, 2008; Wattenberg, 2000). By itself, however, electoral participation is not a good measure of dealignment, because a charismatic outsider could galvanize voting. A final potential marker of a partisan dealignment would be an increase in invalid ballots cast in legislative and presidential elections. The idea here is that a loss of confidence in the electoral options could lead voters to cast a blank or a spoiled ballot. In sum, a party that is dealigning or dealigned would display some, and perhaps all of the following characteristics:

- Elevated levels of electoral volatility
- Reduced support for established parties
- The emergence of political outsiders
- A decline in voter turnout
- A rise in invalid votes

The traditional literature defines a partisan realignment as an electoral period during which there is a fundamental and durable shift in the overall level of support for the political parties in a given political system. As Sundquist (1983) explains in his seminal book *Dynamics of the Party System*, realignments result from the introduction of new issues in the political agenda, thereby producing new partisan cleavages. He defines realignments as 'redistributions of party support, of whatever scale or pace, that reflect a change in the structure of the party conflict and hence the establishment of a new line of partisan cleavage on a different axis within the electorate' (Sundquist, 1983: 14). A key difference between dealignments and realignments is the existence of a new line of cleavage in the electorate. Whereas dealignments can occur in the absence of a new divisive issue in the political agenda, realignments imply a redefinition of the political cleavages. When a major national event occurs, or when a new issue is introduced in the political agenda, the established parties must take a position. If the parties' stance on the new issue clashes with the positions of the voters of these parties, a partisan realignment is likely to follow. In some cases, however, the new line of partisan cleavage may simply result from ideological changes in the electorate.⁶ Partisan realignment can occur in one 'critical election' that crystallizes the emergence of a new partisan cleavage (Key, 1955), but it can also develop gradually over a series of consecutive elections. This latter process has been described as 'secular realignment' (Key, 1959). The approach we propose is useful to identify both types of realignment processes.

Realignments are perhaps more difficult to pin down empirically than dealignments, because while it is clear when there is a change from an existing system it is not often clear when voters have settled on opposing sides of a new political cleavage. Classifying the end of a realignment is further complicated because in some cases the process will produce a redistribution of support among established political parties, while in other cases it would produce a new and

henceforth stable party that embodies support on one side of the new cleavage structure.⁷

These difficulties notwithstanding, the concept of realignment suggests a series of observable implications. First, unlike what might occur during a period of dealignment, realignment should not lead to a sharp increase in spoiled or null votes (associated with disenchantment with the party system) or a decrease in turnout. Second, the emergence of a new party is possible but it is not a necessary condition of party system realignment. If a new party does appear, it should establish and institutionalize itself and garner stable support for a series of elections. Fourth, volatility should be very high during one or two critical elections, but then it should decrease as the parties' support stabilizes along the new dimensions. Realignments, in sum, are characterized by:

- A rise in electoral volatility, followed by gradual decline
- No increase in disenchantment with the party system
- An enduring shift in the level of support for established parties
- The possible emergence of new institutionalized parties
- Stable voter turnout
- Stable numbers of invalid and spoiled votes

Limitations of the traditional framework of partisan alignments

These three ideal types – stable alignment, dealignment and realignment – are insufficient for classifying the evolution of partisan alignments in Latin American countries and many other regions. The first limitation of this framework is that it *assumes the existence of partisan alignments as a starting point*. This assumption made sense in the study of party systems in the United States and Western Europe, but it is problematic for many countries in Africa (Kuenzi and Lambright, 2001), Eastern Europe (Lewis, 2001) and Latin America (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Sánchez, 2008), where there has never been a stable party system with voters clearly allied among the arrayed competitors. Since these systems have no aligned period, they cannot dealign or realign; they could only maintain their dealigned status. This idea is also implicit in a recent book analysing party systems in Latin America (Kitschelt et al., 2010). Although this study uses a different terminology than ours, it suggests that certain critical junctures in the history of Latin American countries determine whether parties will be structured along programmatic lines or not. Countries that do not have programmatic parties and electorates struggle to develop stable partisan alignments in the first place, and hence they cannot dealign.

The second limitation of the existing framework is its *lack of nuance and precision*. The traditional approach

assumes that alignment and dealignment are characteristics of the party system (Sundquist, 1983). The electorate, however, does not always move together, as there are many instances in Latin America where one party has disintegrated without an accompanying collapse of the other parties in the systems (e.g. the *Unión Cívica Radical* in Argentina and *Partido Unidad Social Cristiana* in Costa Rica). This suggests the need to add a new category, *partial dealignment*, to the traditional framework. Similarly, a non-aligned electorate may experience a *partial alignment* if a substantial portion of the electorate gradually becomes aligned to one or more political parties, while a substantial group of voters remains un-aligned.

Introducing the possibility of partial alignments (or partial dealignments) also increases the empirical leverage afforded to researchers. Consider a hypothetical situation in which the share of the votes for the different parties remains the same over a series of elections, but turnout declines considerably. This is not a 'full dealignment', but neither can it be considered a stable alignment. However, the current framework forces scholars analysing this type of conflicting evidence to 'choose' between these two extreme options (stable alignment and dealignment). We think that this choice is unnecessary and counterproductive, and we thus introduce the idea of a partial dealignment. The intermediate categories are also more appropriate to cases where one or more parties have consistent support, but large numbers of voters are always up for grabs.

A third limitation of the traditional framework is that it applies much better to party systems with a low number of parties that divide among identifiable cleavages. The concept of alignment suggests two or three large parties offering programmatic bases for alignment. The system would be stable and aligned if the same parties obtain a similar share of the votes over a series of elections. It is difficult to think of alignments in the same way in systems where many non-programmatic parties consistently obtain between 10 and 20 percent of the vote, as in Brazil.⁸ Even if the different parties maintain similar levels of support over time, it is not necessarily true that they attract their support for particular ideological or policy positions.⁹ Survey evidence could assess the source of these parties' support,¹⁰ but the inability of voters in some multiparty systems to identify the parties' policy stances (Samuels, 2006) suggests that partisan support – and hence alignments – in these cases cannot fit within the classification system in the traditional realignment literature. These situations, then, provide another area where an intermediate category of alignment is necessary.

Toward a refined classification of partisan alignments

In order to overcome the limitations of the traditional framework, we propose a refined classification of the evolution of

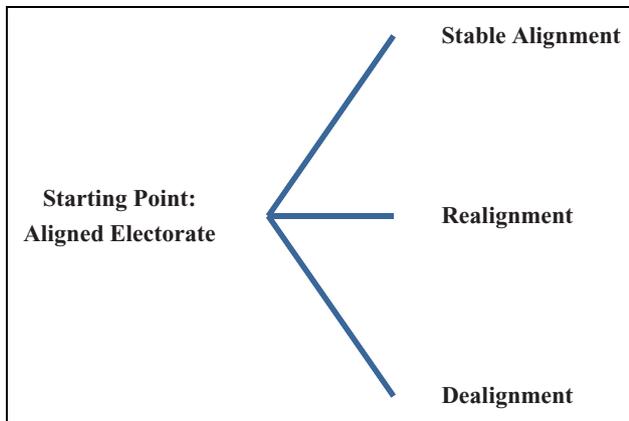


Figure 1. Traditional framework of partisan alignments.

partisan alignments. As illustrated in Figure 1, the traditional framework assumes three different evolutionary patterns, all starting from an aligned electorate: retaining a stable alignment, moving through a period of realignment, or dealignment.

Our more comprehensive framework categorizes party systems in a particular period to be aligned, partially aligned or non-aligned. Table 1 therefore contrasts with Figure 1 by showing three potential starting points, and incorporates the possibility of halfway changes at every stage of the evolution of partisan alignments. For instance, an un-aligned electorate may remain un-aligned or become partially or fully aligned over a series of elections. We also modify the typology for aligned systems, given that an aligned electorate may de-align fully (if the vast majority of voters give up their party loyalties) or partially (if one portion of the electorate de-aligns while the other remains stably aligned to the existing parties). The model further captures the possible realignment scenarios, which could be changes among existing parties or shifts in support towards a new programmatic party.

The model we propose is less parsimonious, but it is more comprehensive, allowing classification of a much wider range of cases, most notably those that lack institutionalized party systems. Overall, our framework is based on three types, but these allow eleven different scenarios of partisan alignment change.

Measuring evolution in partisan alignments

In this section we identify a series of indicators that allow us to classify countries in the different categories of our refined framework. Ideally, the evolution of partisan alignments should be measured with both electoral and survey data. Surveys conducted at several points in time could show the evolution of respondents' attachment to parties, and could help to assess whether the decline in partisanship

affects specific parties or is more general.¹¹ Survey data are increasingly available, but are unavailable for the earlier parts of our analysis.¹² Another possibility for assessing voter ties is to analyse electoral data at the municipal level. Wellhofer (2001) uses an ecological technique – developed by King (1997) – that allows him to infer electoral realignment from the voting patterns observed at the very local level. We cannot implement this technique in the present analysis due to the unavailability of municipal level electoral data for most Latin American countries.

Given the impossibility of using these alternative techniques, and the general interest in determining whether party dynamics remain relatively constant, in this article we focus on a series of indicators based on legislative election results. Specifically, we analyse six aggregate indicators and their evolution: total volatility, change in support of the two largest parties, electoral support for new or outsider parties, turnout, the percentage of invalid votes, and the total support for the two largest parties. We created a database of legislative elections across Latin America (South and Central America, plus the Dominican Republic) for the period 1980–2012, and we measured these six indicators for each election. Since we have several elections per country in the database, we can infer the evolution of partisan alignments in each by carefully analysing the evolution of these six indicators. No single indicator is necessary or sufficient to classify a country into one of the 11 scenarios, but the combined analysis of these 6 indicators allows a comprehensive view of the party system and its evolution.

To begin the analysis, we first operationalize the three variables that pertain to electoral volatility, which is key to defining dealignment. To capture aggregate volatility (V) of the party system, we use the well-known Pedersen Index, which is calculated by halving the sum of the absolute changes (across two elections) in the vote-shares (or seats) for all parties.¹³

Aggregate volatility is insufficient for our model, however, since it does not determine which parties are winning or losing votes. We therefore added an indicator of whether voters are shifting from the two largest parties. To measure top-two (T) volatility, we take the absolute change of the sum of the vote-shares of the two largest parties between election_t and election_{t-1} divided by the total vote-share of these two parties in election_{t-1} (multiplied by 100).¹⁴

The third concern is whether new parties are gaining at the expense of traditional parties rather than voters transferring among existing parties. We capture the importance of New parties (N) by measuring the share of the vote going to them. New political parties. We follow previous studies and define a 'new party' as one that either results from a split from an existing party or a party that is genuinely new, i.e. it emerges without any help from career politicians from existing parties (Hug, 2001: 79–80; Tavits, 2006: 106). However, mergers and electoral alliances between

Table 1. 11 Scenarios of partisan alignment evolution.

Starting point of the electorate	Eleven scenarios of alignment evolution	Ending point of the electorate
Aligned	1 Stable alignment	Aligned
	2 Realignment between existing parties	Aligned
	3 Realignment favouring a new party	Aligned
	4 Full dealignment	Non-aligned
	5 Partial dealignment	Partially aligned
Non-aligned	6 Full alignment	Aligned
	7 Continual non-alignment	Non-aligned
	8 Partial alignment	Partially aligned
Partially aligned	9 Full alignment	Aligned
	10 Full dealignment	Non-aligned
	11 Continual partial alignment	Partially aligned

Table 2. Categorization criteria.

	High	Medium	Low
Total volatility	$V > 20$	$10 < v < 20$	$v < 10$
Top-two volatility	$T > 10$	$5 < t < 10$	$t < 5$
New party support	$N > 20$	$10 < n < 20$	$n < 10$

already existing parties are not considered as new parties in this work even if they use a ‘party label’ that is on the ballot for the first time (Hug, 2001). A new party’s vote is counted in our measure if it gained 5 percent or more of the vote-share, and parties retain their ‘new’ label in the first two elections in which they participate.¹⁵ For example, if a party obtained 5 percent or more of the vote-share in the first election but not in the second, we only counted its vote-share in the first election. If it obtained 5 percent or more in the second election but not in the first, we only counted its vote-share in the second election. For instance, the MVR first appeared in Venezuela in 1998 and we thus counted it as new for that election (when it won 20 percent) as well as in 2000, when it won 44.4 percent. After 2000, however, it is counted as an existing party.

In order to construct a map of party systems for the region, we divided these three variables into high, medium and low (indicated by the respective capital, small and subscripted letters), based on the cut-points described in Table 2.¹⁶ These particular cut-points are not theoretically bounded, but are intended to provide reasonable representation of the concepts. A 10 percent change in support, for example, seems “high” for the top two parties, but we double that value to define a high level of total volatility. Moving the boundaries would, of course, change the empirical emplacement of specific parties, but this would not affect the theoretical analysis.

Using just these three variables and the three levels generates 27 different possible combinations (VTN, VtN, V_TN, etc.), but because there is a necessary relation among these variables some combinations are illogical. For example, if ‘Top-2 Volatility’ is large, then ‘Total Volatility’ cannot be

small. Once removing the illogical combinations, 16 are left. Our on-line appendix provides details of the calculations and a set of examples.¹⁷

There is still a large number of categories, and it would multiply if we add the other three indicators: turnout, spoiled ballots and the size of the top two parties. To minimize the complexity, therefore, we first evaluate party systems on the first three indicators, (i.e., total volatility, top-two volatility, and new party support), and then use the others to validate the placements.

Evolution of partisan alignments in Latin America (1980–2012)

Empirical application

Table 3 maps all legislative elections in Central and South America after about 1980 (the start of the Third Wave) using our three main indicators (cf. the online appendix for data and coding details). Rather than suggesting that parties across the region are all in decline, the map shows the largest cluster of countries in the southeast box of Table 3 (coded v_{TN}) where there have been low levels of volatility and limited support for new parties. These cases (which include most years for Chile and Honduras, but also several years for Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Uruguay and Venezuela) provide evidence to challenge the general claim that Latin American party systems are collapsing.

At the same time, the table does not suggest that the region’s party systems have achieved a high level of stability. Even the cases in the southeast box of Table 3 can comport with two of our possible scenarios – continually aligned party systems and realigned party systems – and the rest of the table shows many instances of volatile party systems.

The patterns evident in Table 3 allow us to evaluate each party system and categorize them in terms of the 11 scenarios presented earlier. We provide specific examples below, but Table 4 summarizes that analysis showing how the Latin American cases fit into nine of these scenarios. As we have argued, there is no single indicator that is

Table 4. The evolution of partisan alignment in Latin America: A classification system.

<i>Starting point: Alignment</i>	
Scenario 1: Stable alignment	Chile, Honduras
Scenario 2: Realignment between existing parties	Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Paraguay
Scenario 3: Realignment favouring a new party	Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Uruguay
Scenario 4: Full dealignment	Colombia, Venezuela 1 (1980–2000)
Scenario 5: Partial dealignment	Argentina
<i>Starting point: Non-alignment</i>	
Scenario 6: Full alignment	No case
Scenario 7: Continual non-alignment	Guatemala, Panamá
Scenario 8: Partial alignment	Venezuela 2 (2000–2012)
<i>Starting Point: Partial alignment</i>	
Scenario 9: Full alignment	No case
Scenario 10: Full dealignment	Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru
Scenario 11: Continual partial alignment	Brazil

necessary or sufficient to classify a country into one of the 11 scenarios. However, certain combinations of indicators are more likely to be present in certain scenarios. For instance, if a party system fits in the scenario of stable alignment (e.g. Chile), most of its elections are likely to fall in the lower-right box (v_{TN}) of Table 3. Other cases, such as realignment (e.g. Dominican Republic) and partial alignment (e.g. Brazil), show relatively complicated evolution paths, and thus we need a more detailed socio-historical account and cannot simply rely on the three major indicators for the analyses.

Due to space constraints, we limit our descriptive analysis to one country per category (though descriptions not presented here are available in an online appendix).¹⁸ Figure 2 begins that process, displaying graphs that show the evolution of our three main variables plus the size of the top two parties for our nine chosen cases.

Scenario 1: Stable partisan alignment (Chile)

Chile provides an exemplary case of having a continually aligned party system. Roberts (1998) argues that during the democratic transition in Chile a realignment occurred in which voters shifted their support from the more radical Communist Party to the new moderate option in the left. However, since the return to democracy, the voters have maintained stable alignment along a pro and anti-Pinochet cleavage, with two coalitions, the *Alianza* on the right and the *Concertación* the left. The two main coalitions have dominated all the post-Pinochet era elections, winning around 90 percent of the vote in each election. Furthermore, using the coalitions to measure our indicators of volatility, Chile has fallen into the lower-right box of Table 3 for all five of its post-dictatorship elections (1993–2009). As can be seen in Figure 2, support for new parties has been consistently low. In addition, although invalid votes in Chile have been a bit high (usually under 10 percent but 18 percent in 1997), turnout (which is mandatory) has been very high. The

coalition-level analysis, in sum, suggests that the Chilean party system is similar to the ideal type of stable alignment.

Focusing on Chile's parties rather than the coalitions does alter the analysis somewhat. Still, the same five parties have always dominated the coalitions, and the changes in support have not been very high. The Christian Democrats (CD), the leading party of the *Concertación*, has been either the first or the second largest party in each of the five elections, and the second party has been one of the two parties of the rightist coalition. The CD, however, has fallen through the 2000s, from winning about one-quarter of the total vote in 1989, 1993 and 1997 to just 14 percent in 2009. On the right, the Independent Democratic Union has not only replaced the RN as the largest party in the coalition, but with about 25 percent of the vote it became the largest party in the country in the elections of 2001, 2005 and 2009. This party-level analysis could land Chile in a partial alignment category, especially given that the sum of the two main parties has never reached even 50 percent. Still, we agree with Bartolini and Mair (1990), who caution that focusing on parties that make up coalitions can overstate the level of volatility, and thus we keep the Chilean system as an example of continual stable alignment.

Scenario 2: Realignment among existing parties (Dominican Republic)

Not all countries in the lower right box of Table 3 have maintained a stable alignment. The dynamics of the party system in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Paraguay suggest realignments. In each of these cases there is evidence of an enduring shift in the level of partisan support favouring one of the parties in the system.

The Dominican Republic is possibly the best example of a realignment among existing parties. The system has been dominated by the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD), the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (PLD) and the Partido Reformista Social Cristiano (PRSC) since the

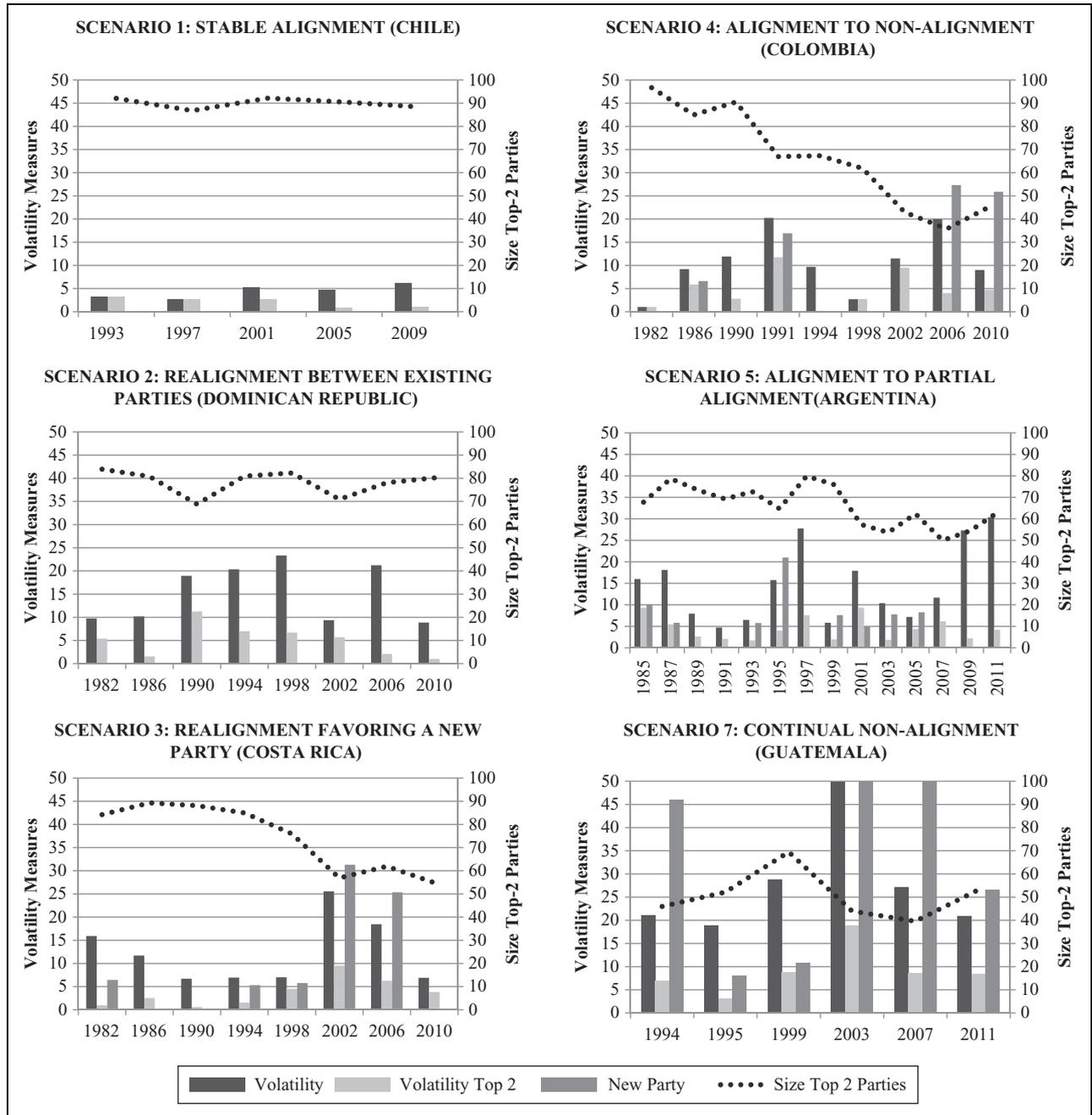


Figure 2. Evolution of partisan alignment in Latin America (1980–2012).

democratic transition in 1978, and these parties together have always captured more than 85 percent of votes. The longevity and stability of the Dominican party system poses a challenge to the realignment literature, however, because instead of a clear ideological or policy divide the parties are most known for their pervasive corruption, personalism and clientelism (Cueto Villamán, 2006; Mitchell, 2008). Personalism and corruption imply weak ties between the party and its citizenry, and should generate high levels of volatility. The low volatility, however,

suggests that clientelism may be working against that trend. Initially there was an authoritarian/democracy cleavage, but it eroded in the 1980s and the rapid decline of the PRSC in the 1990s marked its end (Mitchell, 2010). This process led to low levels of total volatility in the early 1980s, followed by somewhat higher levels in the late 1980s and 1990s, though, as Table 3 shows, the vote for new parties has never been high. The resurgence of the PLD and the weakening of the PRSC then produced a high level of total volatility between the 2002 and 2006 elections. The

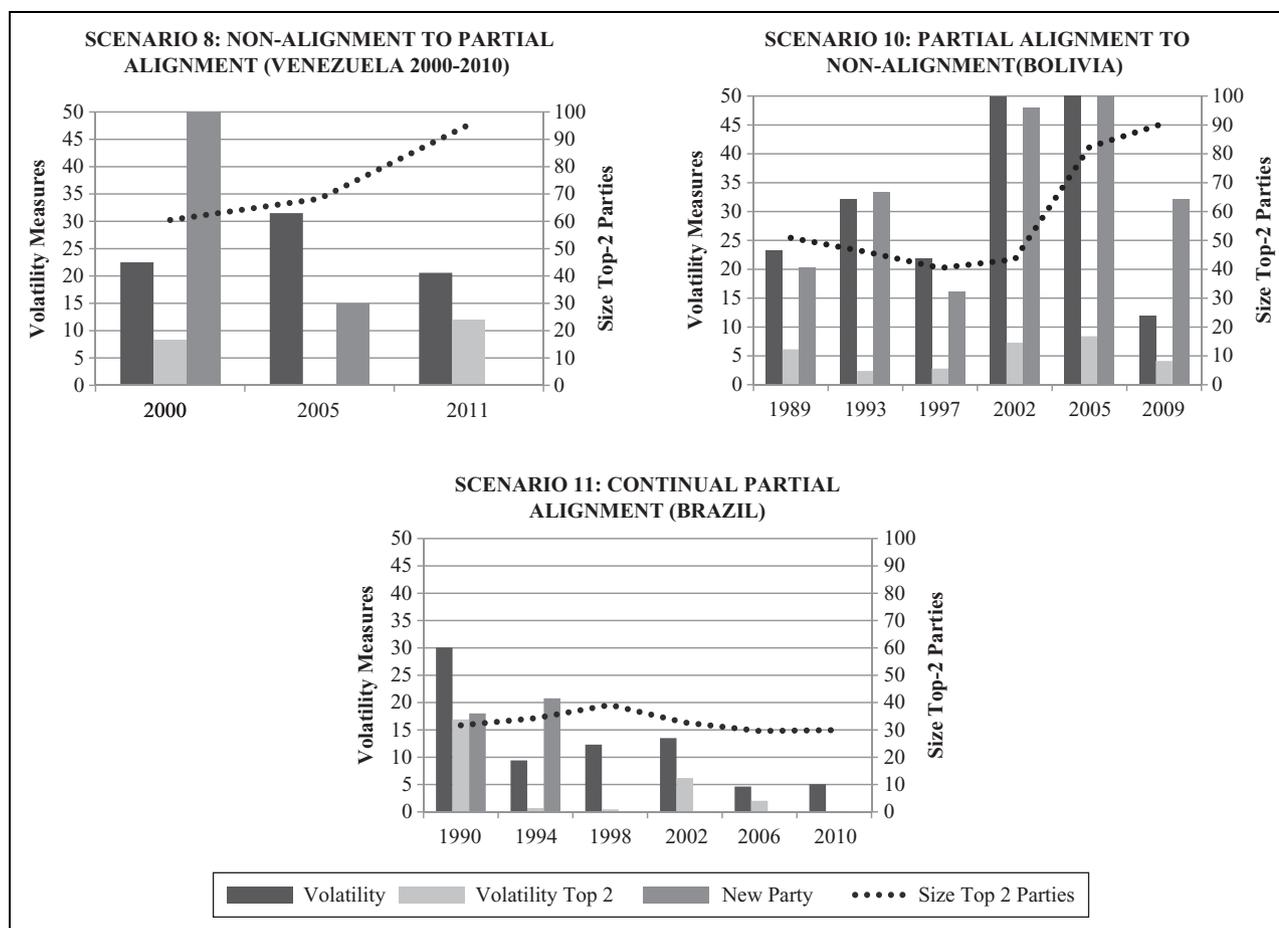


Figure 2. Continued

country falls into the box indicating low levels of all types of volatility (v_{TN}) in Table 3 for 2010, but this does not mean that it has become a stable three-party system. In fact, a two-party system emerged in 2006, with the PRD and PLD as major parties and PRSC taking a less significant position. This configuration of 2+ parties mirrored the early 1980s, but at that time the PRD and PRSC dominated the PLD. Clearly, then, this is a case of realignment among existing parties.

Scenario 3: Realignment favouring a new party (Costa Rica)

Other countries also went through a realignment phase, but a new party – rather than one of the existing parties – was the main beneficiary of the shift in partisan alignments. Four countries fall into this category, but we focus here on the example of Costa Rica.

Costa Rica appears multiple times in the lower right box of Table 3, but there is a notable gap; after a period of stability from 1990 to 1998, the country disappears from the southeast box for the next elections (moving to VtN and vtN) and then reappears there for 2010. The three stable

elections suggest there was a previous alignment, and if it sustains the stability for more than just the 2010 election, it would have won a realignment classification. Figure 2 reinforces the conclusion that Costa Rica has gone through a realignment favouring a new party. The graphs show low support for new parties during the stable alignment period of 1982–1998, followed by a remarkable increase in support for new parties for the 2002–2006 period. The return to lower levels of electoral volatility and support for new parties strongly suggests that this is a case of realignment rather than dealignment.

The transformation of the party system in Costa Rica was the result of a split in an existing traditional party (the PLN) which helped give rise to a new party, Partido Acción Ciudadana (PAC). The PLN moved from its centre-left position in the 1980s to embrace neo-liberal economic reform in the 1990s, thus blurring the ideological difference between the PLN and another traditional party, Partido de Unidad Socialcristiana (PUSC). This move left created an ideological space for a new political party, which the PAC occupied (Stokes, 2001). As a result, the PLN and PUSC fell from a combined total of about 75 percent of the vote in 1998 to just 56 percent in 2002, with the PAC winning

22 percent in that year. It then won 25 percent in 2006 before falling to 18 percent in 2010. The PLN has remained strong, winning 34 percent, 28 percent and 35 percent in the 2002–2010 elections, but the PUSC has fallen sharply, winning less than 10 percent in the 2006 and 2010 elections. A fourth party, the Libertarian Movement Party (PML), has also gained strength, winning 9 percent in 2002 and 2006, and then rising to almost 15 percent for 2010. It appears that this is a case of realignment to a system with one large, one medium and two smaller parties.

Scenario 4: From aligned to fully dealigned (Colombia)

Although the conventional wisdom suggests that the whole region has moved towards dealignment, our analysis reveals that only two countries clearly fit this category: Colombia and Venezuela in the period between 1980 and 2000). We present a detailed analysis of the Colombian case in this section.

Colombia fell into the v_{TN} box of Table 3 for the consecutive years of 1994 and 1998 (plus 1982) as a result of the consistent support for its two main parties: the Conservatives (PC) and the Liberals (PL). It then dealigned, as evidenced by the much greater levels of volatility and reduction in the share of the vote going to the top two parties (Figure 2).

The party system had been stable since the 1950s when the parties signed the consociational pact known as the *Frente Nacional*. There was a new constitution passed in 1991 and the election that year generated high levels of volatility and the rise of two new parties, *Alianza Democrática M-19* and *Movimiento de Salvación Nacional*. Although these new parties quickly dissolved, the party system did not return to the traditional two-party framework. Instead, a former Liberal Party politician, Alvaro Uribe, mounted a successful independent presidential candidacy in 2002, and the traditional parties saw dramatic drops in their support. Uribe's new party, the *Partido Social de Unidad Nacional* (PSUN), then won 17 percent of the legislative vote in 2006 and 26 percent in 2010, even though Uribe was no longer its presidential candidate for that race. It would be incorrect to classify the new system as fully aligned, however, since the PC, the PL and the PSUN together won only 65 percent of the vote in 2010, and the percentage of invalid votes, which was very low throughout the 1990s, totalled over 25 percent that year. Turnout, moreover, has never been above 45 percent. Furthermore, since the aggregate volatility was medium for 2006 and 2010 (in part due to the rise of the PSUN), it is too early to tell whether the system is now partially aligned (with three medium-sized parties, each winning about 20 percent of the vote and the remaining voters either spoiling their ballots or moving among changeable small parties), or whether the system is still undergoing a dealignment process.

Scenario 5: Partial dealignment (Argentina)

Argentina is a paradigmatic example of partial dealignment in which one major party collapsed (the Unión Cívica Radical) while the other (the Partido Justicialista) retained the loyalty of its supporters. Argentina, which has bi-annual elections for a portion of its legislature, fits into the south-east box of Table 3 for the three elections from 1989 through 1993, then again for 1999 and 2005. For most of the missing years it still had only medium levels of total volatility, and new party volatility was never high (except in 1995). Further, the quantities of null, invalid and blank ballots have been low (except in 2001 when they rose to 24 percent). We classify this case as one of partial rather than full alignment, however, for several reasons. First, while the dominant Justicialista Party (PJ) has won a consistent percentage of the vote (usually between 35 and 45 percent), the other traditional party (the UCR) has only won about 15 percent in most recent elections (though it did gain 26 percent in 2009).¹⁹ As a result, about one-half of the electorate is not voting for one of the larger parties, and no party has been consistent in capturing this part of the electorate (cf. Figure 2). Second, the PJ vote has been divided among many regional parties that loosely affiliate with the PJ. On the other hand, voters do seem to maintain these traditional ties to the PJ. At the presidential election level the PJ has run multiple candidates under the same label in several elections, suggesting that the candidates see a value in maintaining these traditional ties.

Scenario 7: Continual non-alignment (Guatemala)

The next cluster of countries, which includes Guatemala and Panamá, depicts cases of *continuously unaligned party systems*.²⁰ These cases provide examples where the term dealignment is inappropriate, because they have not had a period of alignment from which to dealign. We focus here on the example of Guatemala.

Figure 2 shows that Guatemala has had extremely high volatility and support for new parties since democratization. Top-two volatility and support for new parties varies, but most observations are in the top row of Table 3, where total volatility is high. While Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca (DCG) and Unión del Centro Nacional (UCN) were the largest parties in the first democratic election of 1990, they only captured a combined total of 40 percent of the vote in that year, and then saw that support quickly shrink towards zero. Other parties have been similarly unstable; the PAN rose from 15 percent in 1990 to 32 percent by 1995, but then fell to insignificance by 2011. The one bright spot is that turnout has increased significantly over time, rising from only 21 percent in 1994 (a fall from the post-war euphoria that produced a 56 percent level) to

almost 70 percent in 2011. Invalid votes, however, were still high in that year (14 percent), close to an all-time high.

Scenario 8: From non-aligned to partially aligned (Venezuela 2000–2010)

The Venezuelan system is one in which we have noted two distinct changes. It was stably aligned through the 1980s and then dealigned. Since 2000, however, elections have been fought as ‘pro-Chávez vs. anti-Chávez’ contests. Since the opposition has been divided, however, the country fits best in the category of moving from a non-aligned system towards one of partial alignment. This is clearly visible in Figure 2, which shows a gradual decline in the levels of electoral volatility, top-two party volatility and new party support in the period 2000–2010. The strong surge of the anti-Chávez camp at the expense of the *Movimiento V [Quinta] República* (MVR) in the 2010 election might suggest that the partial alignment, which has been characterized by pro-Chávez parties versus a fractionalized opposition, could move towards a more complete alignment with two poles. The 2012 presidential election and the special election to replace Chávez in April 2013 did not affect the composition of the legislature, but the unity of the opposition in these two contests perhaps foretells the parties’ ability to coalesce for legislative elections, too.

Scenario 10: From partial alignment to non-alignment (Bolivia)

Bolivia is the best example of a case that typifies – or perhaps has passed through – scenario 10, where a system dealigns from a position of partial alignment. The largest two parties in the 1985 election, *Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* (MNR) and *Acción Democrática Nacionalista* (ADN), captured 63 percent of vote-share, suggesting partial alignment along an ideological cleavage (MNR to the left while ADN to the right). This weak partisan alignment, where the sum of the MNR and ADN was about 50 percent, endured between 1985 and 1997. However, starting in 1989, new contenders entered the electoral arena, and by 2005 the ADN disappeared and the MNR only obtained 6.5 percent of the vote-share. Since 2005, the Bolivian party system has experienced some (partial) realignment, given the success of two dominant parties: the *Movimiento al Socialismo* (MAS), led by Evo Morales, and *Poder Democrático y Social* (Podemos). Together these parties captured 82 percent of votes in the 2005 election and 90 percent in the 2009 election.

This evolution from partial alignment to dealignment to a new alignment is evident in Figure 2. It reveals that electoral volatility and support for new parties hovered around 20 percent in the period 1989–1997, and then increased considerably to around 50 percent, showing the move from partial alignment to un-alignment. Table 3 also shows the

decline in total volatility (with a move from the VtN box in 2005 to vtN in 2009), suggesting that the reshaped Bolivian party system has entered a new period of partial alignment.

Scenario 11: Continual partial alignment (Brazil)

The Brazilian party system, which appears in the southeast box of Table 3 for its two most recent elections, poses a puzzle for the existing literature of party system development. The most prominent feature of this country’s party system is its high level of fragmentation. The top two parties only captured 33 percent vote-share on average from 1990 to 2010 (see Figure 2), and the identity of the top two parties differs over time. For instance, the *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro* (PMDB) and the *Partido da Frente Liberal* (PFL) were the two largest parties in the 1990 election, while the two largest parties in the 2002 elections were the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) and the *Partido da Social Democracia Brasileira* (PSDB). The vote-share of the top two parties reached 39 percent in 1998, but since that time it has fallen significantly (32 percent in 2002, 26 percent in 2006 and 29 percent in 2010). Even though the country did elect one president who was not a strong partisan figure (Fernando Collor de Mello in 1990), the legislative vote has continued to swirl among the multiple existing parties rather than moving to new parties, as evident in Figure 2. This feature differentiates Brazil from the continuously unaligned party systems like Guatemala.

Given this configuration, we hesitate to call this a system of stable alignment, because Brazilian party politics are not rooted in profound social cleavages. This is partly due, again, to the lack of ideological identity of some of the parties, though the leftist identity of the PT has perhaps helped to define ideological lines. Also working against ideological identities is the country’s open list proportional representation system, which encourages voters to focus on personal characteristics of candidates rather than partisan identities (Ames, 2001; Hallerberg and Marier, 2004). Moreover, in a multiparty system, the low level of aggregate volatility may hide significant changes in the electoral behaviour of voters. The ‘real’ level of electoral stability is harder to detect in a system with many political parties. For these reasons, in sum, we classify Brazil as an example of stable partial alignment.

Conclusion

Most literature on parties and party systems in Latin America takes a negative and pessimistic tone, focusing on ‘instability’ (Roberts and Wibbels, 1999: 575) or ‘deterioration’ (Van Cott, 2005: 4). Hawkins (2003: 2), for example, argues that Latin American countries have recently experienced a dual trend: ‘the breakdown of traditional party systems and the rise of antipartyism and

charismatic movements'. In sum, the crisis of party systems in Latin America is perceived as a general phenomenon that affects the democratic consolidation of all the countries in the region.

While our more nuanced analysis of the evolution of partisan alignments may not dispel the perception of crisis, it shows a wider variety of patterns than suggested in most overviews. To borrow the phrase from the seminal work on party system alignments (Sundquist, 1983), Latin American party systems have been very dynamic. To reach this conclusion, we have provided a new theoretical framework for studying and classifying partisan alignments, which unlike earlier models that presume systems start from a position of stability, is based on whether parties begin from positions of alignment, partial alignment or non-alignment. As such, it facilitates classification of countries in Latin America and elsewhere where party systems have been inchoate or unstable. Traditional frameworks, for example, would be inapplicable to many countries in Africa or Eastern Europe, where party systems have been weak or non-existent.

To build our framework, we have proposed straightforward concepts for evaluating a party system and applied them to the evolution of electoral alignments in Latin America. In so doing, we found a variety of patterns, rather than just a presumed path towards collapse. For some cases (e.g. Guatemala and Panamá), we argue that parties could not be on the road to collapse, because voters were never aligned to political parties in the first place. Although Hagopian argues that 'partisan and electoral dealignment has proceeded farther and faster in more countries than has realignment' (Hagopian, 1998: 126), our analysis suggests that this conclusion is not fully warranted. We reveal seven cases of partisan realignment, but only six cases of partisan dealignment (one of which, Argentina, is an instance of partial dealignment). We also find two cases of stable partisan alignments (Chile and Honduras) and one case of continual partial alignment (Brazil). Moving in the other direction, we have found few cases of non-aligned electorates becoming aligned (or partially aligned). Only Bolivia and Venezuela showed signs of aligning after a dealignment phase, and we are sceptical about the stability of these new alignments.

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Notes

1. Actually, some of the party systems that were classified as 'institutionalized' in this book, e.g. Colombia and Venezuela, have become much less stable in the past 15 years.
2. Using extensive empirical evidence, Mayhew (2002: 165) criticizes the concept of realignment as 'too slippery, too binary, too apocalyptic' for studying the American party system. However, Campbell (2006) and Paulson (2007)

have challenged Mayhew's critical assertion by providing more nuanced analyses suggesting that realignment indeed occurred in American electoral history. We acknowledge that the concept of realignment might have its limitations for understanding the party system development in Latin America. However, we agree with these latter authors, as well as many earlier ones who have studied the concept, that realignment is useful for conceptualizing party systems.

3. The concept of partisan alignment most clearly describes the strength and the stability of partisan loyalties in the electorate. However, the evolution of voters' alignments has direct implications for the party system. In the rest of this article, therefore, we follow convention and use expressions such as 'dealigned' or 'realigned' countries or party systems when referring to party systems that are undergoing a process of partisan dealignment or realignment.
4. This type of dealignment appears to be affecting industrialized democracies. Traditional political parties in these countries have been unable to incorporate 'post-material' issues into their programmes, thereby producing the dealignment of a sizeable portion of the electorate, especially the younger generations (see Dalton, 2000 and Inglehart, 1997).
5. Outsiders are inexperienced politicians who participate in the elections as political independents or in association with new parties.
6. A second meaning of the term realignment refers to enduring changes in support for a party *within a group* (see Petrocik, 1981: 15–20). Since we lack reliable and comparable survey data for the whole period (1980–2010), in this article we focus on the shifts in the aggregate level of support for the different parties in the system.
7. If the new party is an anti-systemic party (e.g. *Cambio 90* in Peru), we would take this as evidence of dealignment. It is important to make this distinction between anti-systemic new parties and non-anti-systemic new parties.
8. If the party system is fractionalized and very volatile, it is easier to categorize the case as an example of an unaligned or a dealigned electorate. A case that combines multipartism and low volatility is harder to classify.
9. This is also true for the recent electoral turn to the left in Latin America, where five different left-leaning presidents were elected in 11 countries between 1998 and 2011. Roberts (2012) argues that Latin America's left turn is not the result of more people identifying themselves as leftists; rather, it is attributable in part to retrospective economic voting behaviour. In short, an electoral realignment does not necessarily imply an ideological realignment.
10. In this article we focus on electoral data but we did run some analyses using LAPOP data to verify the very blurry lines that divide most of the parties. This analysis is available upon request from the authors.
11. Recent studies have attempted to analyse the evolution of mass partisanship in many Latin American countries using survey data. For instance, see Moreno and Méndez (2007), Morgan (2007) and Samuels (2006).

12. The Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP) survey data are available for some countries since 2004, but many countries joined in later waves.
 13. The Pedersen index is calculated as halving the sum of the absolute change in all party vote-shares (or seats) between two elections, which yields a scale from 0 to 100, with a higher value indicating a higher level of volatility. In this study, we only consider parties that have obtained at least 5 percent of the votes in the calculation of the Index. When a party changed its name, we counted it as being the same organization. If two or more parties formed a coalition for election T2, but competed in election T1 as separate parties, we divided the vote-share of the coalition by the number of parties as if each of them ran election T2 individually. If the coalition continued from elections T2 to T3, we consider this coalition as a single party organization over time.
 14. An alternative scheme could consider a constant base year, but we wanted to evaluate changes from each electoral period.
 15. We focus on larger new parties (those that obtained at least 5 percent of votes) instead of all new parties because most electoral data group small parties as an 'Other' category, which makes it difficult to parse out votes for small new parties and votes for small old parties.
 16. One limitation of this system is that it evaluates change between each two elections, and thus does not permit a longer-term view. We attend to this limitation in our qualitative analysis.
 17. The online appendix includes a complete set of the logical scenarios based on a system of five parties. It shows why some combinations of values of the different variables are incompatible, such as high levels of volatility among the top two parties, but low volatility overall. It also provides details about interpreting Table 3.
 18. The country descriptions not presented here are available online at: <http://www.pitt.edu/~smorgens/>
 19. Electoral coalitions are common at the provincial level in Argentina. To make the calculation more precise, we used the district-level electoral data. We added the vote-shares of all Peronista parties together as the vote for PJ at the national level. The vote-share for UCR in a provincial-level coalition where UCR formed with another party is calculated as half of the votes of the coalition.
 20. For the case of Guatemala, see Sanchez (2008); for the case of Panamá, see Otero Felipe (2006).
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