

# Party System Dynamics in a Federal State

## The Argentine Case\*

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### Abstract

This article analyzes evolution and change in the party system in Argentina. Starting from literature emphasizing the effects of territorialisation over the political party system, the article assesses the relevance of the territorial dimension as a key variable in party politics in Argentina. In order to describe this evolution and change, two variables are combined, one institutional and one capturing the material characteristics of the different constituencies. The focus of the analysis is purely national and, as a consequence, so are the parties which are its actors. The impact of territorialization is analyzed on the basis of their territorial organization and electoral performance over the past 30 years. After analyzing each party individually, the paper concludes with a discussion of the dynamics of the entire party system. The hypothesis is that the existence of different territories endowed with specific socioeconomic characteristics and political autonomy, combined with a particular electoral system and set of laws regulating party political structure, contributes to some extent to a heightened chance that party structures will fragment. All this translates into tension within the party structure – something that could itself produce fragmentation within the party – and, in more general terms, fragmentation of the entire party system.

*Keywords:* federalism; party system; institutional setting; territorialization; fragmentation

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## 1. Introduction

This article highlights the importance and influence of the territorial dimension on evolution and change in the political party system in a specific federal state, Argentina. It may be assumed that a given party system will follow a specific course of evolution as it develops into a large, diverse country divided into different territories. Different territories imply different

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constituencies, with different preferences and interests. These differences are exacerbated when the country adopts a federal institutional structure. There are specific institutions within the federal setting that influence the path along which parties evolve. The existence of different territories with political autonomy and with specific interests generates different political loyalties (Grodzins 1960). This in turn creates leadership *cadres* whose normative role is to increase power and benefits on the level of the government which they represent.

In addition, an electoral system designed to suit institutions in a federal system (through the election of deputies and senators, the different constituencies in which they are elected, territorial representation, different levels of malapportionment and the like) contributes to some extent to an increased chance of fragmentation within party structures.

All this translates into tension within the party structure – something that could itself produce fragmentation within the party – and, in more general terms, fragmentation of the entire party system (with consequent multiplication of political parties). Political parties therefore face both *internal* and *external challenges*. On the one hand, they must expand their organization to take in the entire country. This implies a coherent political platform for all territorial units, each of which may face very different realities.

On the other hand, party politics must face *continual intraparty power struggles* between different party units representing different territories with differing interests. This translates to a [re]allocation of power and resources both ideological and discursive within and between the different constituent units. Both these factors are interdependent and constitute an almost inescapable requirement for party survival. The manner in which party politics deals with them may explain their evolution over time.

While it is true that there are a great number of factors leading to the same results (the possibility of greater or lesser autonomy in campaign finance and the institutionalization process, among others), this paper focuses on two main factors: (a) *federal design factors* that most directly affect the party system: the electoral system suited to federal institutions, district magnitude, number of seats by constituency and its partial redress and (b) the *material aspects* that characterize the different territorial units into which the country is divided, defined primarily by socioeconomic indicators (wealth, population, economic development, and so on). In focusing on these factors, the paper sets out to show the evolution and transformation of the party system in Argentina, so as to make a further contribution to the progress achieved by the literature centered on these variables.

But the present paper leaves aside analysis of the two electoral arenas (national and provincial) whose relationship has been studied elsewhere in the literature (Calvo and Escolar 2005; Jones and Hwang 2005; De Luca and Tula 2012; Jones et al. 2002; Levitsky 2001; De Luca et al. 2002; Gibson and Suárez Cao 2010) – but only nationally. It thus aims to foster future discussions on the matter.<sup>1</sup>

The article has been laid out as follows: Section 2 presents some theoretical proposals to explain the importance of the territorial dimension and the features of the federal setting as pertains to the evolution and changes in party politics. Section 3 then characterizes the Argentine party system during the period since the return of democracy in December of 1983. It focuses its perspective on constitutional and legislative rules that govern the party and electoral systems. With this background in hand, the article goes on to propose a classification scheme for the different kinds of political parties active in our system. Section 4 accounts for the

evolution of the party system, highlighting the performance of different parties – the leading national parties, provincial parties and district-specific parties. Next, Section 5 describes the fragmentation process and Section 6 tries to explain the causes and effects of the transformation processes in the Argentinean party system. Finally, the article comes to a close by drawing some conclusions about the particularities of Argentina as a starting point for a more comprehensive, holistic theoretical framework for future analysis.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

A federal setting generates “multi-level parties”. As Moon and Bratberg have argued, “The MLP [Multi-Level Party] could thus be defined as «a party of multiple territorial levels, representing sources of formal power as well as discursively structured antagonisms between the party’s centre and its constituent parts»” (2010: 52).

As Thorlakson (2009) maintains, a federal structure offers opportunities and threats to political parties: on the one hand, given the existence of multiple important sites with autonomy in some policy areas, federalism gives parties the opportunity to compete and capture significant rewards of office in both arenas. But variations in economic and social conditions or priorities across units of the federation can create tensions within the party structure (i.e., between the state-level party and federal organizations) in the sense that the state-level party will be in a conflict position with the federal level. This may be argued as a *natural consequence* of the establishment of federal states (also applicable by analogy to those states which have advanced decentralization processes). Additionally, Jenna Bednar states that “intergovernmental rivalry is inevitable and therefore transgressions are a normal part of any federal practice” (2009: 63).

These effects have been reported by the recent literature as the “territorialization” process of political parties (Calvo and Escolar 2005; Escolar 2005; Hepburn and Detterbeck 2009; Moon and Bratberg 2010; Leiras 2005 and 2010, among others).<sup>2</sup>

This phenomenon of territorialization occurs in federal and multilevel systems. But it may also be observed in large countries and even small countries which are diverse and plural, including the UK, Spain, Italy and Eastern European countries such as Romania, Slovakia, Moldova and Macedonia (Bochsler 2011) where Caramani’s thesis is applicable, especially where pronounced structural functional cleavages such as social class, religion, ethnicity, language issues, etc., are present, i.e., where there is what is generally referred to as social and cultural heterogeneity (Belgium, Spain).

The chief assumption in all these cases is an institutional one – that the process is attributable to different (and sometimes simultaneous) processes of decentralization: the more “decentralized” the territory, the greater the chance for territorialization of the political parties acting within it. As recent literature has pointed out, this is the case in European countries – especially in those with established federations such as Germany and Austria as well as those countries which have experienced profound decentralization processes such as Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom and Belgium (Moon and Bratberg 2010; Detterbeck and Hepburn 2007; Hepburn and Detterbeck 2009; Hopkin and Barberà 2011). This process may also be observed in those “traditionally” federal countries such as Canada, Brazil, Australia, the United States

and Argentina (Jones and Maingaring 2003; Malamud and De Luca 2005).<sup>3</sup> Therefore, we are talking about the existence of not one but two overlapping arenas – or “nested” arenas (Calvo and Escobar 2005: 48).

Chhibber and Kollman suggest that the political and administrative process of centralization gives new impetus to the formation of national political parties: “As a general pattern, we should expect to see the concentration of power at the national level accompanied by nationalization of the party system” (2004: 101). This is because the processes of centralization (nationalization) give primacy to national public policies over local policies. Consequently, local leadership has little influence on policies that affect their constituencies. As a result, local electoral practices tend to be standardized and homogenized.

Conversely, when decentralization processes occur, local public policies increase in importance and national and provincial political systems begin to be differentiated from each other. As part of this differentiation process, local political actors gain in importance.

If – in addition to such decentralization – we add the fact that local units have political autonomy, those local leaders will have important tools for further differentiation and, consequently, they may increase their power over the national structure (such as discretionary management over public expenditures, reform of the local electoral system, setting the electoral agenda<sup>4</sup>, etc.). In this sense, “territorialisation of parties results in the organizational and programmatic differentiation of regional parts from the centre” (Hepburn and Detterbeck 2009: 4).

But decentralization is not the only cause. As Schakel points out, “decentralization has a statistically significant and robust effect on the nationalization of regional elections and regions but not on the nationalization of parties, party systems and national elections” (2013: 215). The relationship between the degree of decentralization of authority and the nationalization of party systems has been held as causative by some authors (Thorlakson 2009; Chhibber and Kollman 2004), but not by others (Caramani 2004; Schakel 2013). It is therefore necessary to consider other factors in the analysis of party organization and competition. The present article will combine the institutional approach with material factors that characterize the different constituencies.

Regardless of the cause, as Moon and Bratberg have argued “parties are not sheltered from the context of multi-level politics, which opens new arenas for representation as well as contestation” (2010: 53–54). Many territories (electorally divided into constituencies) emerge as different political arenas. Hence changes in territorial organization must be taken into account as factors that affect party organizations, which explains changes in the party system and in the internal allocation of power.

This paper contends that political parties do not operate in an “institutional vacuum” (Olmeda and Suárez Cao 2007). Aware of this fact, we propose an analysis of the institutional setting within which political parties operate (taking the party system as the *dependent variable* and the electoral and federal systems as *independent variables*).

The idea of an *institutional setting* primarily comprises constitutional and legal dispositions regarding (i) the federal system (territorial decentralization, political autonomy of its subnational units, the composition of Congress); (ii) electoral competition (the number of seats in the chambers, district magnitude, the electoral system), and (iii) the establishment and operation of political parties such as requirements for a constitution, organizational form, financing, and the like.

As Douglass North has remarked, institutions are both formal and informal rules: “Are institutions formal or informal? They can be either”. Institutions can be “formal constraints – such as rules that human beings devise – and informal constraints – such as conventions and codes of behaviour. Institutions can be created, as was the United States Constitution; or they may simply evolve over time, as does the common law” (1990: 4).

Non-formal rules are extremely important in political practice and they usually overlap with formal rules, sometimes correcting, supplementing or directly replacing them. As we will see below, informal rules – practices not regulated or foreseen by formal rules – may become even more important than formal rules – as is the case with candidate nomination procedures (who to nominate as candidates and how). At other times, informal rules appear as necessary conventions that supplement formal rules, especially when it comes to details not amenable to regulation by formal rules (the content of political manifestos or personal conditions of candidates, for instance).

A very concrete example of this was the way in which presidential formulas had to be established, especially between 1860 and 1930 in Argentina. During this period, if a presidential candidate came from the city of Buenos Aires, the vice-presidential candidate had to come from the interior of the country and vice versa. This formula was not born of whimsy. It responded to the need to balance the representation of Buenos Aires with that of the interior provinces, given the huge disparities between the two regions, and thereby the actors involved.

As is evident, *material factors* generate informal rules. We may use socioeconomic indicators to identify those *material factors* that characterize different constituencies, regions and territories. Cultural, social, political, economic, and geographical characteristics make up the local identities and give shape to their particular interests. Together, they outline the *normative role* of the actors involved.<sup>5</sup> They will act (and are expected to do so) according to those particular interests. Moreover, “elected officials consider interests of their own constituencies not just first, but exclusively; they will try to create policy that advantages their voters” (Bednar 2009: 67).

As we anticipated above, the existence of different political arenas (regions, states, provinces, cantons –whatever terminology is used to label them) with political autonomy, interests and characteristics, has a double impact on the party system: On the one hand, extra-party relations are affected, since this promotes the generation of multiple political parties; on the other, each political party is impacted (intraparty relations) since internal conflicts are generated as represented by the divergence of interests present in each region. When a political party must move in multiple arenas at the same time, significant internal tensions arise. If the party is not capable of overcoming these, it will inevitably face processes of fragmentation and split.

Argentina is a fruitful case to be analysed in these terms since it is a federal country with an important decentralization process that has taken place in different political fields such as health and education (processes occurring during the 1970s and strengthened during the 1990s). Argentina has been a federal country since the enactment of its first Constitution in 1853 – and despite the institutional breakdowns (coups d'état and the instauration of authoritarian governments) throughout its history – it may be said that those effects of territorialisation that scholars have postulated recently have been present since that date. Nevertheless

only since 1983 have such effects become more visible, chiefly because of new institutional provisions in combination with the material asymmetries that have historically characterized the different federated units. Such a combination has produced and further increased what Hepburn and Detterbeck (2009) call a “resurgence of the territory” with a consequent decline in function of the central state, and the operation of parties within it. But these institutional reforms (mainly decentralization of state functions to the provinces) must be combined with legal provisions regarding electoral competition and political party organization to better understand the phenomenon.

Keeping these ideas in mind, we will later come to see how these two factors (*constitutional and legal dispositions* on the one hand and the *territorial dimension* on the other) have affected the particular case of Argentina.

### **3. Characterising the Argentine Party System since the Return of Democracy in 1983**

#### **3.1. Constitutional and legislative provisions impacting the party and electoral system**

When, in 1983, the military junta transferred power to a civilian government, larger-scale changes occurred in the political system. The return of democracy implied bringing the political party system back and with it, its electoral rules.

By mid-1982, political party and voting rules were ready to be set in place for the October 1983 general elections, which would see a new president and Congress selected at the national level, as well as local officials in the different constituencies in the interior of the country.

The return of democracy also entailed the return of the 1853 National Constitution (1853 NC<sup>6</sup>), hence, the chief requirements for the election of national public officials were the same as they once had been (see Box 1).

Thus, according to Article 82 of the 1853 National Constitution, the president is to be elected by an Electoral College (*Colegio Electoral* or *Junta de Electores*) by an absolute majority of votes. This College was made up of representatives from Buenos Aires, the capital city of the country, and from each one of the provinces in a number equal to twice the total number of deputies and senators by which the province may be represented in Congress (Art. 81). The manner of election of the electors was akin to that of the deputies as indicated in Article 81 of the Constitution. The procedures used and form taken in this election is to be developed in more detail later.

The National Congress is structured as a bicameral system (which consists of a Chamber of Senators and a Chamber of Deputies). Both chambers have different rules for the election of their members. Regarding the election of senators, the 1853 Constitution established that the senators are to be elected by the local legislatures of each province, following the scheme of two senators for every province by simple majority (Art. 46). Historically, these rules implied a majoritarian system for the election of senators by virtue of the fact they were elected by the leading party in the local legislature which, in most cases, was the same party as that of the governor.

The election of deputies was based on a *proportional system*. Constitutional provisions were limited to simply establishing that the deputies should be elected according to the number of inhabitants by province (Art. 37).<sup>7</sup> With regard to electoral rules, the military government imposed two important changes before leaving power in 1983. On the one hand, it increased the number of seats per province: The (so called) decree-laws No. 22.847 and No. 22.848 raised the *minimum floor* to five deputies per province<sup>8</sup>, a provision that clearly favoured the less populated provinces. On the other hand, they established that there should be one deputy for every 161,000 inhabitants (or fraction of not less than 80,500) elected under the *D'Hondt proportional system*.

In 1994 there was a broad reform to the 1853 Constitution (see Box 2). What is pertinent for the issue at hand in this paper is that the reform changed the manner of election of the president and senators. The new wording has the president elected directly by the people, no longer by Electors (Art. 94). The reform also changed the majorities required for being elected president, introducing a second round in the election process (*Ballotage*) implemented as follows: if the presidential formula receives over 45% of the votes – or 40% with a difference of 10% above the formula that follows – its members shall be proclaimed President and Vice President (Articles 97 and 98, 1994 Constitution, respectively). If neither of these majorities is reached, there will be a second round featuring the two most voted formulas (Art. 96).

Regarding the election of senators, the new constitutional text stipulates that they will be elected directly by the people, and no longer by local legislatures. In addition, the number of senators per province was increased from two to three for each province. Thus two senators are gained by the party with highest number of votes and one senator by the runner-up (Art. 54). This translates into a majority rule with minority representation, a system known as the *one-third system* among many other labels.<sup>9</sup> The rise in the number of senatorial seats has had an *overrepresentation effect* in favour of the less populated provinces, which also form the majority of provinces in the country.<sup>10</sup>

The system for the election of deputies was not altered during the reform, so the most recent modifications introduced by the military government are still in force. As time goes by, the effects of the reform have become visible: a breakdown in bipartisanship and an increasing number of parties, along with fragmentation of the party system.<sup>11</sup>

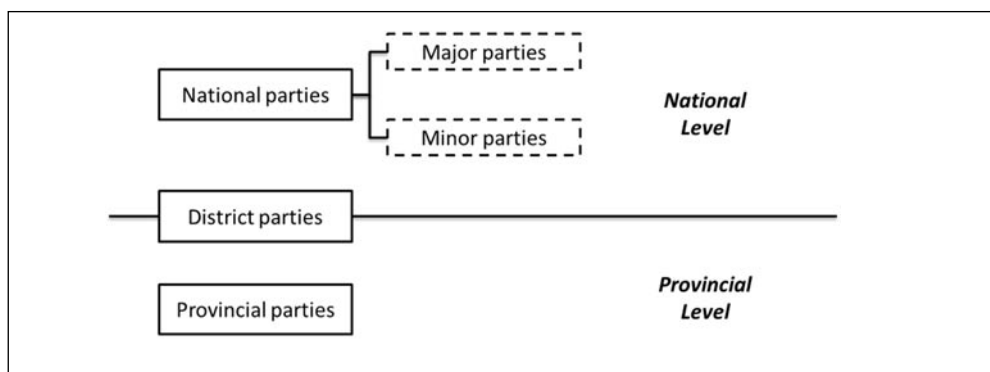
### 3.2. A Classification of the Various Political Parties

Deschouwer identifies two dimensions of variation between parties that are typical of a multi-level system: “the *presence* of a party at the different levels of the political system” and “its territorial *pervasiveness*” (2006: 292). Along the first dimension there are three types of parties: (a) strictly regional-level parties; (b) strictly federal-level parties and (c) parties that participate in both regional and national elections. The second dimension, territorial pervasiveness, consists of a continuum running from parties which have a presence in only a single region to those active throughout the country. Between these two poles are parties that have a presence in more than one region but not throughout the country (Deschouwer 2006: 292). Hopkin and Barberà, in turn, refer to these levels as local, meso and national/state (2011: 4).

Following this classification makes it possible to place political parties in Argentina in two groups.

*An institutional-based classification.* In the specific case of Argentina, political parties may be divided into four classes. At the national level, there are national parties. At the local/provincial level, there are provincial political parties. And sandwiched between them are the so-called *district parties* regulated by national law and capable of acting only at the provincial level to present national candidates (senators and deputies).

**Figure 1: Classes of Political Parties.**



Source: The author, based on legislation and election results since 1983 provided by Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

This classification depends on three factors: the law that establishes a specific electoral system; the federal system (i.e., the different autonomous territories into which the country – and its electoral constituencies – is divided); and the party organization imposed by law.

Beginning with the laws governing political parties, there are three types of parties: national, district and provincial. First off, there is a *national law* that recognizes *national parties* and *district parties*, and provincial laws recognizing the respective *provincial parties*. Broadly described, a *national party* is one capable of running a candidate for every national elective position (president, senators and deputies – the only officeholders elected directly or indirectly by the people). A *district party* is one that may present candidates only for legislative positions in the province in which they will be recognised by the federal electoral jurisdiction.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, and considering that Argentina is a federal country, each province regulates the norms and legislation regarding both the electoral and party systems. Regarding the party system, provincial legislation recognizes the existence of political parties which can run candidates for the provincial elective positions, i.e., governor and local legislators. One may then wonder what relevance provincial parties have for the national arena. Provincial parties may obtain recognition from the federal jurisdiction to run candidates for national legislative seats. In this case, the provincial party becomes a district party (authorized to nominate candidates for governor and national legislature seats, but not for president). District and provincial parties do not vary in essence.



*A constituency-based classification.* In addition to the institutionally-based classification, political parties may also be classed according to their constituencies, i.e., by the geographical distribution of votes received during elections (and the number of affiliations for each). This is a functional taxonomy which shows the relevance of the territorial dimension in shaping the organization of parties and their expansion.

The asymmetries that characterize the Argentinean case – the different levels of development present in its electoral districts (i.e., provinces) – allow an initial classification pattern: *metropolitan parties* versus *peripheral parties*. Argentina is a very asymmetric country in which there are provinces with a high degree of development and others with a lesser development. At the same time, the same provinces of each group present very different population numbers – which affects their economic development and – consequently – the perceptions and preferences of their voters. For this reason, political parties acting in more than one arena must have an appropriate platform for each.

Within this classification – and leaving aside the electoral district as a geographical area – a second pattern is visible: A specific class-cleavage according to which political parties are aligned. In this case, we need to consider the different areas in which those parties and their constituencies are located, disentangling their characteristics. Some political parties operate in metropolitan areas and focus their platforms and policies on urban voters, the working classes and – in some cases – the upper classes. Peripheral parties, by contrast, are more oriented toward the rural class and, in general, tend to have more conservative, traditional points of view. Ultimately, these ideological, class-cleavages are largely determined by the characteristics of the constituencies where political parties operate.<sup>13</sup>

Considering these two patterns of constituency-based classification, in the universe of the *national* political parties, it is possible to find two types of parties: *major* parties and *minor* parties.

Major parties are *those parties which have received a plurality of votes in any election. Winning a plurality of votes also implies that the parties' structure must be large enough and expanded throughout the territory.* The Argentine electoral process is highly decentralized from a territorial point of view at the national level: deputies and senators are elected – in preestablished numbers – in constituencies that coincide with the geographical boundaries of the provinces.<sup>14</sup> Major parties are those which have been capable of expanding their organization all around the country and of capturing and attracting a significant percentage of the electorate.

Conversely, minor parties are those national political parties which have been recognized by the national electoral jurisdiction but whose organization is not countrywide. Largely for this reason, they do not obtain a large number of votes. In order to function at the national level, a party needs to be recognized in at least five districts. National parties that have obtained such recognition have done so in the most populated provinces (the city of Buenos Aires and the province of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe and Córdoba), concentrating their efforts in these constituencies. This means that despite having national recognition, they are highly regionalized parties centred only around a few provinces. Most of the time, these political parties are limited to five provinces (which is the minimum required by the national law for the establishment of a national party). However, there are certain exceptions: Some political parties have gained recognition in several provinces<sup>15</sup>, but despite this are not capable of capturing

the necessary number of votes to obtain a legislative seat (the reasons behind this will be explored below).

Numerically, a minor national party may be defined as a party which has obtained between one and thirteen seats in the Chamber of Deputies (out of a total of 257 seats) and between one and two seats in the Chamber of Senators (out of a total of 72 seats). When a minor party is above average (but has not attained a plurality of votes), it becomes a *third force*. Third forces will be analysed in further detail below. According to the classification of Hopkin and Barberà (2011), these minor parties may be defined as parties acting at the meso level (i.e. they cover two or more regions/provinces, but not all).<sup>16</sup>

In turn, there are also provincial parties – those regulated by provincial legislation. They may be regarded as region-limited parties, which means that they can act and obtain votes only in the constituencies where they have been recognized as a political party. Unlike national minority parties, provincial parties are based only in *one* province (they constitute parties that participate at the regional level only). They can also obtain recognition from the national electoral jurisdiction based in the province where they offer candidates for national legislative seats, thus becoming *district* parties. Since only the national arena has been analysed, this paper will refer to provincial parties as provincial/district parties.

As we can see below, minor national parties are metropolitan; they generally focus their platforms and policies around urban and working class voters; national major parties are those which successfully combine a unified discourse in their electoral platforms, a discourse addressed to both metropolitan and peripheral areas and, as a necessary prerequisite, their organization covers the whole country. The action orientation of provincial/district parties depends upon where they are based: if they concentrate their efforts in the less populated provinces, they generally have more conservative and traditional tendencies but if they are based in metropolitan districts, they usually have tendencies oriented to the urban and working class voters or to the upper classes: This is an indication of how geographical location largely defines class-cleavage.

In short, the Argentine case is not unlike the American one, having two [traditional] major parties, Partido Justicialista (PJ) and Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), but with a series of third parties, including minor national parties and provincial/district parties. These parties have failed to obtain a plurality of seats in Congress and have not been successful in presidential elections.

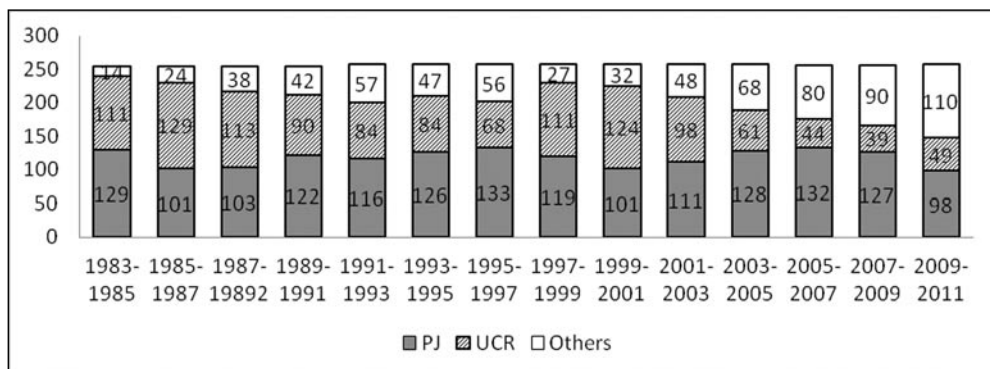
## 4. The Evolution of the Party System

### 4.1. From a tempered bipartisanship (1983–2003) to a multi-party system with a predominant major party (2003–present)

The party system in Argentina has undergone many changes in the course of its history. Even today, it is in constant evolution, a common regional pattern for the Latin American countries.<sup>17</sup> While the 1983 election results appeared to show perfect *bipartisanship*, the subsequent evolution of the party changed this paradigm. By 1995, the presidential elections had evidenced the first breakdown in bipartisanship. For the first time, a party other than one of the two traditional major parties (FREPASO) obtained second place in the presidential elections,

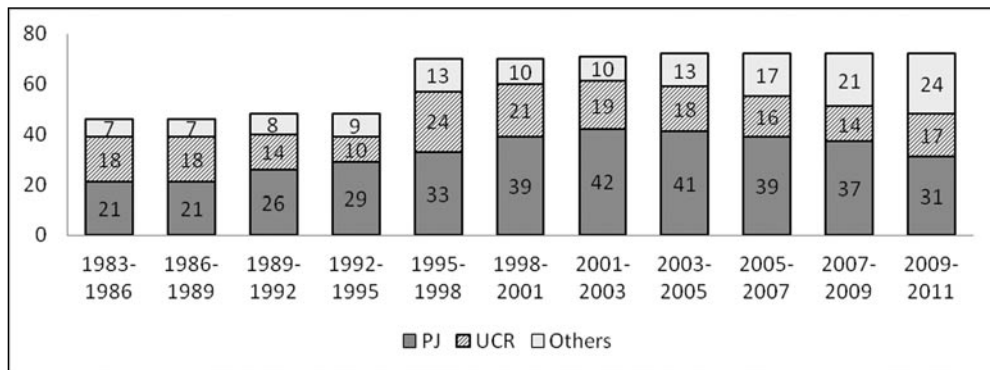
thus becoming a “third force” in Congress. These results were clear sign of the increasing incorporation of new political parties into national politics, with the major parties simultaneously suffering gradual loss of their constituencies (particularly UCR). The larger the areas involved, the greater the number of parties (both national and provincial) that became part of Congress.

**Figure 2: Composition of Congress (1983–2011). Chamber of Deputies.**



Source: Data from Molinelli et al. 1999 and National Electoral Office, Ministry of Interior.

**Figure 3: Composition of Congress (1983–2011). Chamber of Senators.**



Source: Data from Molinelli et al. 1999 and National Chamber of Deputies.

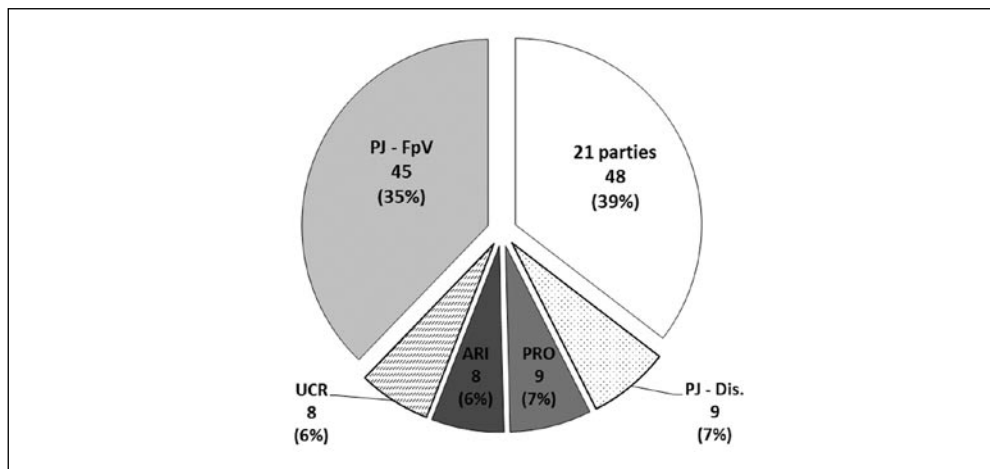
In Figures 2 and 3, a progressive increase is evident in the number of seats obtained by minor national political parties and provincial political parties. The addition of new political parties took place on a gradual basis from 1983 until 2001, but since that time, the pace of evolution has become more vigorous. As may be seen in the figure, the space once occupied by UCR has begun to be filled by a large number of novel political parties occupying the seats UCR once held. Furthermore, the electoral alliance of Partido Justicialista, called Frente para la Victoria (PJ-FpV), has maintained – and even increased – its seats through alliances with other political parties (provincial, district and minor national parties).

Since the 2001 meltdown – which meant a profound political, social, and economic crisis – the political party system has begun a deep process of fragmentation. This process has been twofold: it means both political fragmentation and intra-party fragmentation simultaneously. UCR and PJ have suffered intraparty fragmentation which has seen oppositional sectors arise within both parties (most coincident with the geographical division of the territory), while at the same time a large number of novel political parties has begun to emerge. These new political parties, each with a similar number of representatives in Congress, somehow come to occupy the position as a *third force* although none of them has positioned itself as a leading force (i.e. a new major party).

PJ has been able to recover from the crisis, having maintained a large constituency, despite internal splits, through a series of alliances. UCR, however, has not been as facile in overcoming the crisis in many leaders have abandoned the party to create their own political parties (as was the case for ARI and RECREAR, both created in 2003). Within PJ, in turn, various oppositional sectors have emerged, spearheaded by local governors (such as the governor of the province of Buenos Aires, San Luis, Chubut, and Salta) and former governors (such as those from Santa Fe or Entre Ríos, who have had a strong presence in Congress).

In the 2009 election, the PJ-FpV alliance obtained 45 seats, followed by four forces: the so called “Dissident PJ” (9 seats), PRO<sup>18</sup> (9), ARI (8), UCR (8) and over 21 political parties with a total of 48 seats.

**Figure 4: 2009 Election of Deputies.**



Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

The 2009 election marked a turning point: now the location of the third force was to be occupied not by one party, but by many. If we compare the composition of the Lower House in the last two periods, we may observe the growing fragmentation:

Since 1983 the number of parliamentary parties has been increasing (from 11 parties in 1983 to 31 parties in 2011). The same phenomenon can be observed in the Chamber of Senators (from 7 to 18):

The recovery of PJ and the emergence of a large number of novel political parties has transformed the party system, which currently seems to be a *multi-party system with the presence of a predominant major party*.

**Table 1: Most Recent Two Compositions of the Upper House.**

2009 Composition of the Upper House			2011 Composition of the Upper House		
Political Parties	Seats	%	Political Parties	Seats	%
PJ – FpV	31	43.06%	PJ – FpV	31	43.06%
UCR	16	22.22%	UCR	19	26.39%
PJ – Dissident	9	12.50%	PJ – Dissident	7	9.72%
Others [10]	15	20.83%	Others [10]	15	20.83%
Vacant	1	1.39%			
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

**Table 2: Most Recent Two Compositions of the Lower House.**

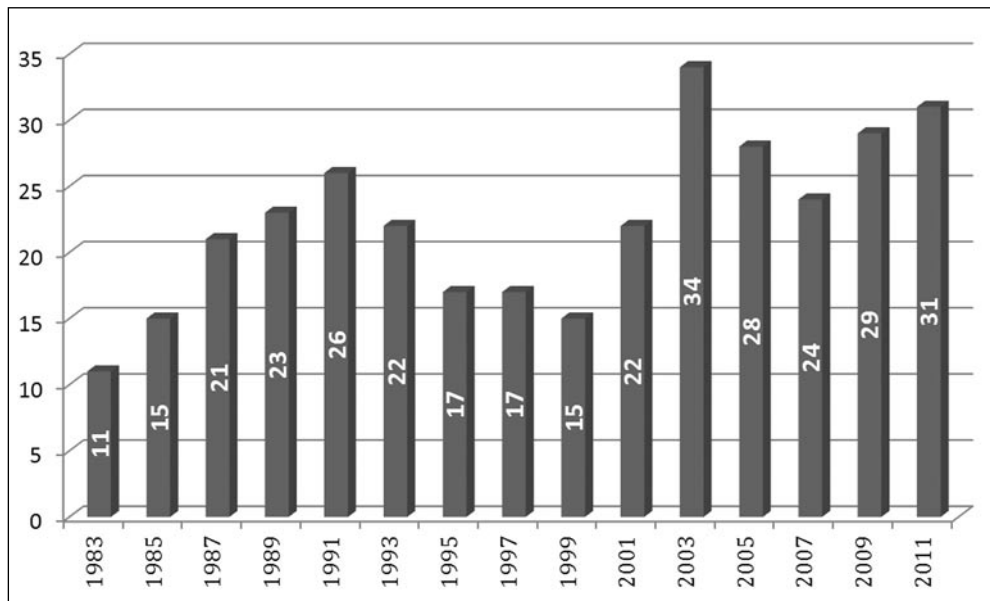
2009 Composition of the Lower House			2011 Composition of the Lower House		
Political Parties	Seats	%	Political Parties	Seats	%
PJ – FpV	98	38.13%	PJ – FpV	116	45.14%
UCR	49	19.07%	UCR	47	18.29%
PJ – Dissident	30	11.67%	PJ – Dissident	27	10.51%
PS:	6	2.33%	PS:	6	2.33%
PRO	13	5.06%	PRO	11	4.28%
ARI	24	9.34%	ARI	6	2.33%
Others [18]	37	14.40%	Others [21]	44	17.12%
<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

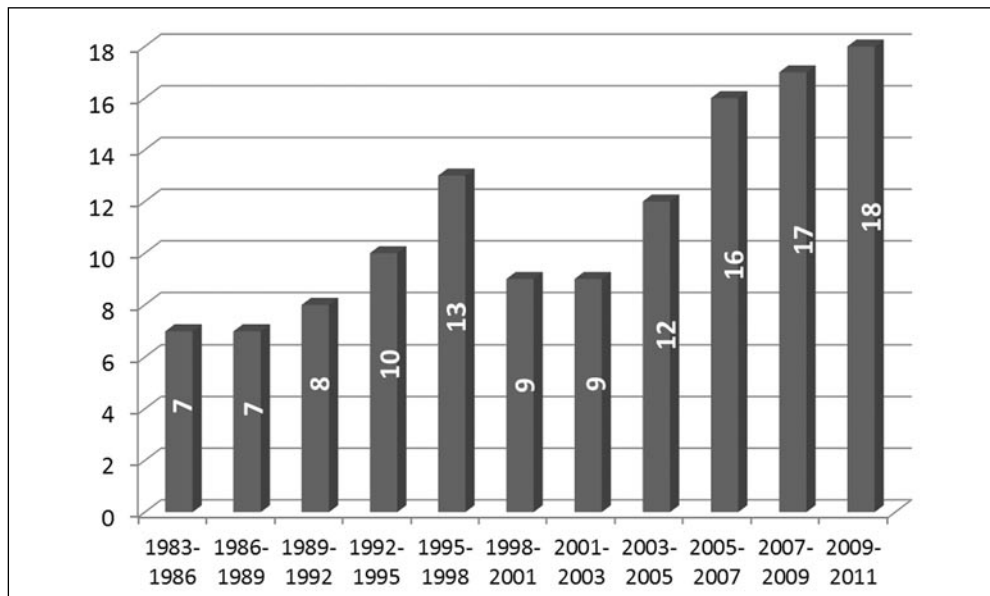
#### 4.1.1. The National Major Parties

In the recent history of the party system, there have been only two major national parties: Unión Cívica Radical (UCR), founded 1891, and Partido Justicialista (PJ), established in 1946.

The first “modern” Argentinean political party was UCR. This was the first party with an organic nationwide organization, whose internal structure was a reflection of the country’s federal structure. Additionally, this was the first *mass party*, which reached the presidency in 1916 and remained in office until 1930; its most important leader was Hipólito Yrigoyen. UCR was the leading force until the emergence of PJ, when it has been either the first or second force, alternating presidencies with PJ. The party has obtained the presidency several

**Figure 5: Number of Parties in the Chamber of Deputies (1983–2011).**

Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

**Figure 6: Number of Parties in the Chamber of Senators (1983–2011).**

Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

times. 1916–1922 (Yrigoyen); 1922–1928 (Alvear); 1928–1930 (Yrigoyen, interrupted by the first *coup d'état*, which established the proscription of the party); 1958–1962 (Frondizi, interrupted once again by a *coup d'état*); 1963–1966 (Illia, interrupted by a new *coup d'état*); 1983–1989 (Alfonsín) and 1999–2001 by an alliance with a minor national party (FREPASO) called “Alianza” (this alliance was headed by De la Rúa, who resigned before the end of his mandate).

In 1945 a new movement was born and with it, the second major party: Partido Justicialista (PJ), created by the leader of the movement, Juan Domingo Perón. Perón ruled the country as President twice: 1946–1952 and re-elected in 1952 until 1955, interrupted by a *coup d'état*. The 1955 coup led to the exile of the party leader and the proscription of the party. PJ returned to office in 1973 (with Cámpora, who resigned the post to allow Perón to become the candidate); Thus Perón won the 1973 elections and ruled the country until his death in 1974. María Estela Martínez de Perón succeeded the leader until de 1976 coup, which led to the last military government in Argentina history (1976–1983). PJ gained the presidency again in 1989 with Carlos Menem, who ruled twice (1989–1995 and 1995–1999) and – after the collapse of the “Alianza” in 2001, went back to office with Néstor Kirchner (2003–2007) followed by his wife, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who has ruled twice (2007–2011 and 2011 to date).

UCR and PJ had been the only two parties to reach the presidency in modern political party history and the two of them together are the only political parties with a nationwide presence. *No other party has been able to expand its organization throughout the country*; even if third parties have or have had some representation in large metropolitan areas, this position is far from nationwide and their lifetimes as organizations are still young. In turn, whenever these “third parties” disappear or die away, new political parties take their place.

#### 4.1.2. The Minor National Parties

These political parties we have labelled *minor national parties* have [re]emerged since the beginning of the democratization process and have gradually come to occupy more seats in Congress. Little by little, these third parties have begun to occupy large numbers of seats in Congress and gain the title of “third party” until their favour with the voters is eventually supplanted by other parties.

The first such was UCeDé<sup>19</sup>, which obtained 9 deputies in the 1991 legislative election. Its alliance with the ruling PJ was – paradoxically – its ruin. But the party did not disappear. It maintained its presence in several provinces but its electoral performance since that time has been very poor.

Its place was occupied by MODIN<sup>20</sup>, which won 7 deputies in the 1993 legislative election. Again, the party did not have a long life and its place as a third force was taken over by FREPASO<sup>21</sup>. Although FREPASO had been created around the 1995 elections, it quickly joined the ranks of parties with the largest number of legislative seats – twenty – in the period since the return to democracy in 1983.

In 1997, FREPASO formalized an alliance with UCR leading to the 1999 victory in the presidential elections. This was the first case of a *coalition government* in the entirety of Argentinean history. The failure of this experiment meant the disappearance of FREPASO as an alliance and its most important party (Frente Grande) barely hangs on today.

When FREPASO made an alliance with the historical second force (UCR), its place as a third force was occupied by *Acción por la República* (AR), a party founded by Domingo Cavallo, a former Economics Minister under the Menem administration. AR gained 12 seats in the 1999–2001 legislative period, followed by 8 in 2001–2003.

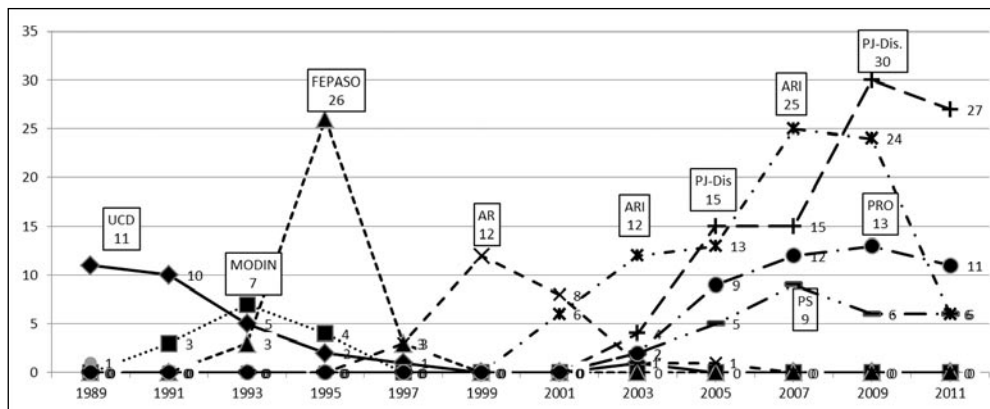
The December 2001 economic crisis destroyed Cavallo's political image as well as that of his political party. Its place was taken by ARI<sup>22</sup>, which gained 8 seats (7.2% of the vote) in the 2001 elections, becoming the new third force, the longest lived of all since that time: 12 seats in 2003; 13 seats in 2005; 25 seats in 2007; 24 in 2009. But ARI was not an exception to the rule: in 2011 it only got 6 seats and its position as a third force is being challenged by other parties such as PJ-Disidente with 30 seats in 2009 and 27 in 2011 (making it the real third force in the two most recent periods). ARI currently occupies the fifth place in terms of number of seats with Partido Socialista (six seats each).

This prompts one to ponder the reasons that these forces have failed to sustain their existence over time. A third force is a party that has had a "significant" number of its candidates win legislative seats (between 15 and 30 deputies). This "significant" number of legislators, however, represents only 6% (the equivalent of 15 deputies) and 12% (30 deputies) of the whole Chamber of Deputies.

Because of this, these parties find it very difficult to implement policies. They are forced to form alliances with one of the two leading parties (particularly the party in government) that do manage to conduct public policy.<sup>23</sup> The decline in congressional power may thus be interpreted by voters as poor parliamentary performance. This may affect the number of votes received from one election to the next: fewer votes means fewer legislative seats and so begins the seemingly inevitable cycle described above in which one third force is replaced by another.

This "natural" trend is illustrated graphically in the following figure.

**Figure 7: The "Natural" Pathway of Third Forces.**



Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

Two clarifications are necessary: First, FREPASO did not disappear in 1997 (the figure shows three seats for the party). FREPASO actually formed an alliance with UCR and together they became the leading force (capturing the presidency in 1999). But in any case, after the



failure of the Alianza in government, its most important party (Frente Grande) was unrepresented in Congress until 2011 (when it won only two deputies).

Secondly, PJ Disidente is not a single unified party, but rather represents different [territorial] expressions *within* PJ. For example, in 2005 PJ Disidente had 15 deputies, but they came from (and responded to) different leaders such as the governor of San Luis, or the former governors of Buenos Aires and Santa Fe.

Because of this, these parties have *ceteris paribus* generally had *short lives*. They rise as third forces and then in subsequent elections come just short of disappearing – or actually do vanish.

There is another important factor behind this phenomenon. All these “third force” parties have emerged from the most developed and populated provinces (Mendoza, Córdoba, Santa Fe and, especially, from the Province of Buenos Aires and Capital Federal). If we look at where their deputies have come from, we find that they have come *only* from these five provinces. This phenomenon may be attributable to the fact that these political parties have never expanded their organizations beyond these densely populated areas. Had they wished to, they would have found it very difficult to win a seat. The remaining 19 provinces, to which we shall refer to as “peripheral” have very small electoral *district magnitude*.

As is shown in the table below, we find three kinds of districts: *small, medium and large*.

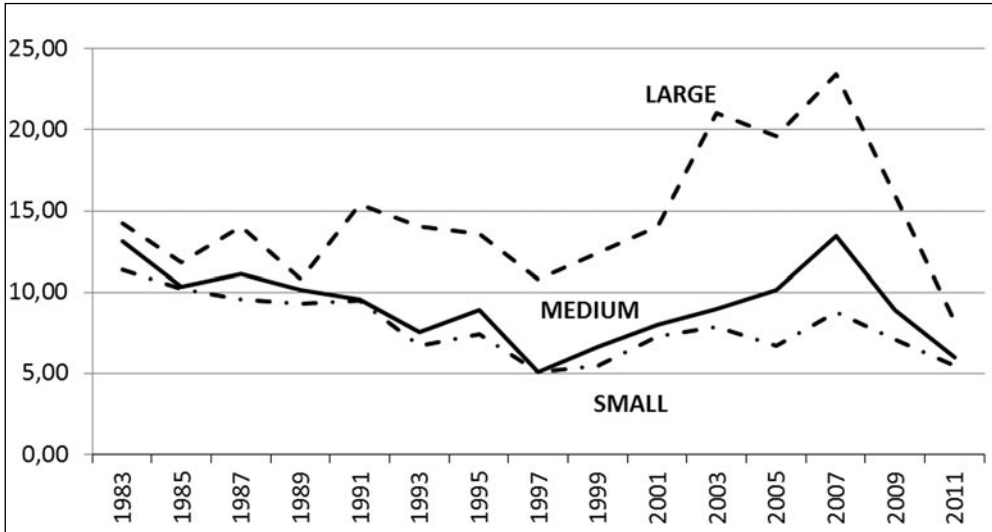
**Table 3: Electoral District Magnitude.**

GROUP	No of Seats	Districts	District Magnitude
Small	→ 5	→ Catamarca, Chubut, Formosa, La Pampa, La Rioja, Neuquén, Río Negro, Santa Cruz, San Luis, Tierra del Fuego	→ 2 / 3
	→ 6	→ Jujuy, San Juan	→ 3 / 3
Medium	→ 7	→ Chaco, Corrientes, Misiones, Salta, Santiago del Estero	→ 3 / 4
	→ 9	→ Entre Ríos, Tucumán	→ 4 / 5
Large	→ 10	→ Mendoza	→ 5 / 5
	→ 18	→ Córdoba	→ 9 / 9
	→ 19	→ Santa Fe	→ 9 / 10
	→ 25	→ Buenos Aires (city)	→ 12 / 13
	→ 70	→ Buenos Aires (province)	→ 35 / 35

Source: Author, based on legislation (decree-laws No. 22.847 and No. 22.848).

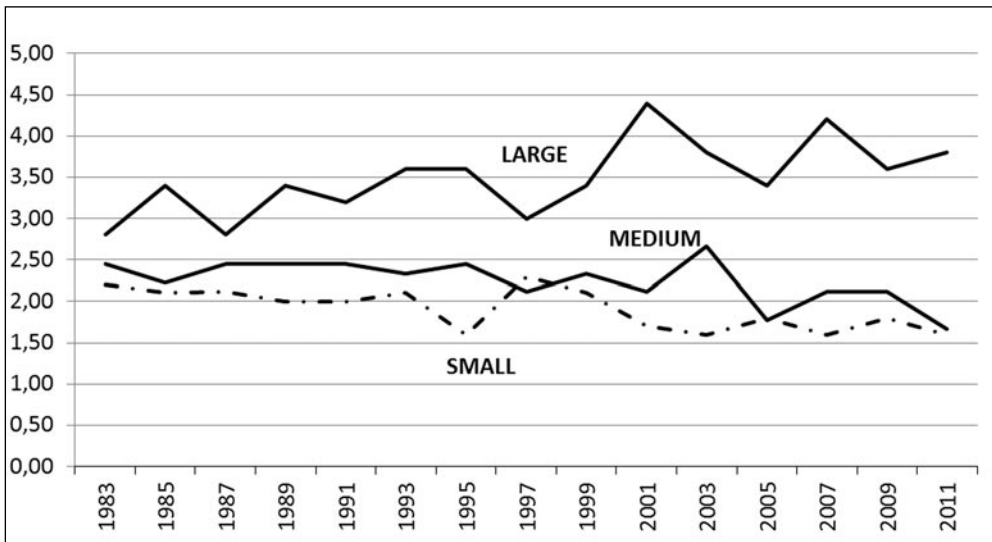
In the *small*-sized provinces (ten in all), in each partial renewal (every two years) *only two parties at most can get a seat* (and in some cases *only one succeeds*), because there are only two seats at play. In the *medium* size provinces where other parties may be running, gaining a seat is still very difficult. Considering the district magnitude of these provinces, minor parties wishing to expand their organization nationwide will find the task difficult, because they must struggle against the two leading parties, who have had deep roots in these provinces for many years.<sup>24</sup> The situation is very different in *large*-size provinces. If we consider the average of Parliamentary and Electoral Parties in every group, we could confirm this hypothesis:

**Figure 8: Average of Electoral Political Parties (1983–2011).**



Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

**Figure 9: Average of Parliamentary Political Parties (1983–2011).**



Source: Data from Electoral National Office, Ministry of Interior.

In the first case (Figure 8), the average of electoral political parties is a reminder of the level reached by the process of political fragmentation. The second case (Figure 9), the average of parliamentary political parties, shows the impossibility – or extreme difficulty – faced by a third party in the small- and medium-size provinces.

Over the last 30 years, according to the average, none of the nine provinces in the medium-size group reached an average of 3. As for the small provinces, they barely exceeded two parties. In 2011 both medium and small groups reached the same average: 1.6.

Our preliminary conclusion might be that the parties fail to thrive because they are concentrated in the most highly developed areas (where most votes in most seats are available, leading to heightened competition between parties). These areas enable the parties to gain a seat but they are very competitive and thus in the end, the parties lose their constituencies. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that the *geographical distribution of party organization* has been essential to understanding party system dynamics for at least the last 30 years.

#### 4.1.3. District and Provincial Parties

So far, we have considered the “third forces” (i.e., those parties that have reached a “significant” number of representatives). The evolution of the Argentinean party system has shown the continuous presence of a *third force* added to the two major parties (PJ and UCR). In the broad universe of parliamentary political parties (those with representation in both the Chamber of Senators and the Chamber of Deputies) – especially in the early 1990s – only a few parties have been able to gain a significant number of deputies (i.e., between 15 and 30 deputies). These are what we have labelled “third forces,” and, in every case, this position has been occupied by a national-level party.

The number of representatives of the remaining political parties has been between one and five. Many are national political parties, but in this universe there has also been a strong presence of *provincial/district* parties. As in the previous case, these parties do not have enough representatives to impose public policies and end up losing participation in Congress.<sup>25</sup> In this universe, provincial/district parties have had an important place – especially in the 1980s. These provincial/district parties came from the group of lesser developed and populated provinces, in which they have been organic for a long time. In most cases, their success has been due to the defence of local interests and their campaign call for greater provincial autonomy.

But this has also been the main obstacle to expanding or integrating national confederations of parties. There have been many attempts but all have failed for the same reason: the defence of *local interests* that they claimed were very different from each other. And they suffered the same fate that had befallen the third forces. Only one provincial party (Partido Movimiento Popular Neuquino) has sat in the national Congress since 1983 and it has been the only provincial party to rule Neuquén during that time. This is not a random coincidence. All provincial parties that have won seats in Congress have been – at the same time – political parties that have managed to win the local government offices in their respective provinces. The reason is that the legislative and executive elections take place simultaneously<sup>26</sup> and once access is gained to local government, the parties have the tools essential for making national legislators of their candidates.<sup>27</sup>

Unlike the 1980s and 1990s (where six provinces were ruled by local, that is provincial, parties), since 2000 only two provincial parties have made their way into local government. And this fact is reflected in the declining number of legislators from these parties in the National Congress (as seen in Figure 2). In these cases, the provincial parties suffer the disadvantage of being geographically limited – a handicap that threatens their own existence.

## 5. The Fragmentation Process

According to Jones and Mainwaring (2003) Argentina has the lowest level of party system nationalization in the Americas, ranking fourteenth on a scale of seventeen countries analysed by the authors (2003: 10). Malamud and De Luca (2005), in turn, try to explain why Argentina is at such a low level. They find the answer in the territorially restricted presence of third parties – aside from UCR and PJ, “all other parties are far less nationalized, what explains the overall low average of the party system”. By contrast, PJ’s level of nationalization has always been between 80% and 90%, while that of UCR has been between 75% and 90% (2005: 11). But what these authors do not take into account is the intra-fragmentation of these two major parties. Additionally, the information they present is from 2001 and earlier, a point just prior to which the effects produced by the process of territorialization and intra-fragmentation of PJ and UCR begins to become more visible.

The same *external challenges* the minor national and provincial parties must face translates into *internal challenges* for the major parties. While it is true that they have succeeded in expanding their organizations all around the country, it is also true that they continually face risks of *internal splitting*. And the reason is almost the same: the divergent interests held by the different regions and provinces. UCR and PJ have been losing constituencies since they were founded along lines coinciding with the geographical limits of subnational units. Where these misunderstandings have not culminated in a splitting process, the constituent entities have been successful in maintaining a high degree of autonomy in Congress, integrating different blocs, not necessarily the same as the national party. This was the case with the so-called “*radicales K*” (members of the UCR) who integrated a parliamentary bloc with the ruling PJ-FpV.

As is evident from the last two compositions of both the Chamber of Senators and the Chamber of Deputies (Tables 1 and 2), the emergence of “PJ Disidente” has tended to coincide with the limits of subnational units: PJ-Disidente was able to obtain 30 seats in the 2009–2011 legislative period and then 27 seats for the following period (2011–2013). In the Upper House, it reached 9 senators in the 2009–2011 legislative period and 7 in the following period. The increasing number in the Chamber of Senators is mainly a product of PJ’s fragmentation, since many of the party policies incorporated came from PJ-Disidente. Aware that the conformation of this Chamber is decided by means of territorial representation, its current composition shows two issues: the strong presence of PJ in the Chamber of Senators means a strong presence of PJ in most provinces (especially those in the group of lesser developed and overrepresented provinces) and the territorialization process undergone by the party system (in this case the high degree of autonomy of the constituent parts within the major party). The same may be observed for UCR, with strong local party leadership that governs provinces under the UCR nomenclature but provide strong autonomy. Examples are the governors of Santiago del Estero, Corrientes and Catamarca. This strong autonomy has allowed them to ally with other parties, including the ruling PJ at the national level (*radicales K*).

Territorialisation has produced tremendous changes in party system, changes that translate into challenges the party organization must face. Detterbeck and Hepburn (2007), analyzing party dynamics in the context of European democracies, found three types of strategies available for parties to respond to these challenges. They are i) maintaining traditional vertical

linkages, ii) developing new forms of vertical party cooperation (both strategies aim to aggregate or accommodate territorial interests) and iii) allowing for greater autonomy by state and substate party units. But the Argentine context presents a very different situation for party response. As noted above, the law regulating party organization endowed substate units with strong autonomy<sup>28</sup>; therefore the third strategy is not available for national parties in Argentina. This alters party strategies, forcing them to constantly develop new forms of vertical party cooperation. If the national-level party cannot accommodate territorial interests in its programs, internal splits are predictable.

Tables 1 and 2 also show the fragmentation of the party system, with an increasing number of new political parties incorporated into both Chambers.

In the Chamber Deputies, 18 “other” political parties obtained a total of 37 seats for 14.40% in 2009. In 2011, the number of “other” political parties rose to 21 and they obtained 44 seats for 17.12%. Of 18 parties in 2009, 2 obtained 4 seats, three obtained three seats, one party two seats and eleven political parties gained only one seat each and finally, an electoral alliance of different parties obtained seven seats in different provinces.

In the composition of the Chamber Senators in 2009 and 2011, the universe of “other” political parties comprise 10 political parties, of which five parties obtained two seats a piece, with the remaining five gaining only one seat each.

The process of fragmentation shows the emergence of several political parties, but most of them with a minimum quota of participation; in the Upper House these political parties are seven senators away from the party that follows them, and at a much greater distance from the two major parties. In the Chamber of Deputies the gaps are much wider. In this scenario, their only viable strategy is to form a parliamentary bloc with one of the two major parties.

## **6. Transformation Processes in the Argentinean Party System. Causes and Effects**

This section argues that the federal institutional setting and the electoral system impact in a decisive manner upon the evolution and change of the party system. I will take the federal institutional setting and the electoral systems as independent variables and the party system, in turn, as a dependent variable. What I want to do next is to analyse the evolution and change of political parties in their *natural environment* (that means considering the *territorial dimension*).

### **6.1. Material and Institutional Asymmetries**

Argentina is a country scarred by its asymmetries. It is one of the largest countries in the world<sup>29</sup> and is divided into 23 provinces and an autonomous city (Buenos Aires – which is at the same time the capital of the country). Its current population is approximately forty million (according to the INDEC 2010 census), but this population is distributed in a very asymmetric way: whereas 66.70% of the population is concentrated in 25.38% of the territory, the remaining 33.30% of the population is scattered over 74.62% of the territory. Economically, the asymmetries are equally striking: 83.70% of the Gross Geographic Product (GGP) is

produced in that 25.38% of the territory and the remaining 16.30% of the GGP in the rest of the country (74.62%).

According to this data, the country may be divided into two large regions: the Metropolitan provinces with a large population and high degree of development, grouping together the city of Buenos Aires, the province of Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, Córdoba and Mendoza. The remaining 19 provinces make up the group of peripheral provinces. In fiscal matters, these 19 provinces are more dependent upon national transfers than metropolitan group. This group covers more than 80% of its local budget on average with national transfers (revenue-sharing system [co-participation] plus other federal funds). By contrast, the metropolitan provinces cover between 45% and 50% of their budgets with their own fiscal resources. As Gervasoni points out, “fiscal federalism creates rentier situations when subnational units receive central government transfers in amounts well above what their own taxing efforts could obtain” (2010a: 309). Most of the peripheral provinces may be considered rentier provinces. They also lead the UBN (Unmet Basic Needs) ranking for the country, especially in terms of unemployment, illiteracy and infant mortality (Tommasi 2002).

In addition, the lesser populated provinces are at the same time less democratic, with weak checks and balances and “excessive dominance of the Executive” (Gervasoni 2010b: 43), translating into a low level of contestation and the dominance of the local political competition by the local party leaders who rule the province. Most importantly, a dominant executive held by a local party leader means control over the party: as Malamud (2008, 2012) maintains, “who controls the state, controls the party” and controlling the party, they are most capable of controlling the political careers of provincial and even national legislators, party budgetary resources and of monitoring the electoral process.<sup>30</sup>

The strong autonomy local branches of national parties are guaranteed by law is reinforced by the material characteristics of some subnational political systems. All these features play a large role in shaping the preferences and perceptions of each constituency, making up local identities and giving shape to their particular interests. Underdeveloped regions, in particular, perceive their situation in the federation as one of having been left out of the development process that benefited other regions. Although Argentine society is not divided by region, ethnicity or linguistic cleavages, there is a strong centre-periphery cleavage. Proposals made by political classes in the Interior have always tended to win subsidies or additional benefits from central government as a kind of historical redress. This is the same group that had historically claimed more autonomy for its provinces. Phrases such as “more autonomy” and “more federalism” are embedded in electoral campaigns, and their programs are based on policies slanted against the “porteño” centralist interests. The charters of provincial parties expressly mention the defence of provincial autonomy and local interests as their main target.

This is typical for provincial parties and goes for local branches of national parties as well. This dynamic is part of the *centre-periphery* tension (present since the days of national independence). Many of these provincial parties hail from the group of undeveloped provinces and have emerged mainly due to the centre-periphery tension the national leadership of the national parties has been unable to overcome in its programs. The consequences were twofold: either the local branches of national parties began to increase their autonomy under the lemma of more federalism (especially when the local party leader was opposed to the national

structure) or new provincial parties were founded with the specific aim of defending provincial interests. These phenomena occur in the group of undeveloped provinces: On the one hand, most important and successful provincial parties were Movimiento Popular Neuquino (province of Neuquén), Acción Chaqueña (province of Chaco), Partido Renovador de Salta (Province of Salta), Movimiento Popular Fueguino (province of Tierra del Fuego), Partido Autonomista-Liberal (province of Corrientes – the oldest); on the other, the most important local branches of PJ that have been in opposition to the national structure since the 1990s came from this group of provinces (like San Luis, Salta, Chubut).<sup>31</sup>

## 6.2. Institutional Asymmetries

These *material* asymmetries are compensated by the *institutional setting*. The constitutional design of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Chamber of Senators gives overrepresentation to those underdeveloped, sparsely-populated provinces. On the one hand, regarding the composition of the Chamber of Senators, it reflects the “principle of legal and political equality” of the federated entities. This means among other things, equal representation in the Senate. The 1853 National Constitution prescribed two senators per province and the 1994 reformed Constitution raised this number to three senators per province. Therefore, *whatever the size of their territories, population or economic development, all provinces are on an equal footing* when it comes to geographic representation.

Despite the fact that the Constitutional text stipulates that the Chamber of Deputies shall represent the population and, accordingly, must have a composition *proportional* to the population, there are national laws that set a *minimum of five deputies* per province.<sup>32</sup> Thus, provinces that would be required to have two – or fewer – deputies on the basis of their population currently have five deputies in the Lower House.<sup>33</sup>

Given this institutional design, the result is as follows: The “metropolitan” provinces have 15 senators (3 senators for 5 provinces) representing 20.8% of the Chamber and 142 deputies representing 55.3% of the Chamber. The “*peripheral*” provinces, in turn, have 57 senators (3 senators each in 19 provinces) representing 79.2% of the Chamber and 115 deputies representing 44.7%.

Having those *material* asymmetries in mind, the institutional design reverses the situation – which therefore causes *institutional* asymmetries. These asymmetries have had an enormous impact on the development and evolution of political parties in many senses.

Candidates are elected in constituencies that coincide with the geographical frontiers of each province. In practice, this means that deputies do not represent the “people” as a whole, but rather each province. Each deputy is elected in each province, i.e., in different territories with differing constituencies, preferences, interests and political weights.

The existence of different territories with political autonomy and with specific interests generates different *political loyalties* (Grodzins 1960). This in turn creates leadership *cadres* whose normative role is to increase power and benefits on the level of the government which they represent. In addition, an electoral system designed to suit institutions in a federal system (through the election of deputies and senators, the different constituencies in which they are elected, and the like) contributes to some extent to an increased chance of fragmentation within party structures.

In short, all this translates into tension within the party structure – something that could itself produce fragmentation within the party – and, in more general terms, fragmentation of the entire party system (with the consequent multiplication of political parties).<sup>34</sup>

But those are different effects produced by different factors. Large provinces (with a large population and, consequently, large district magnitude) create enough space for the proliferation of new political parties. This space is large enough to allow for the entry of new parties but at the same time is *inadequately* large to allow these parties to flourish. If they wish to flourish, they need to extend their organization to take in other constituencies, i.e., they require a presence in medium and small provinces. And in those provinces there is not enough space for *new* parties due to their reduced district magnitude. In conclusion, there is a *proliferation* of political parties, but they suffer from a lack of *long-term stability*.

Secondly, regarding the fragmentation within the parties themselves, there is an effect experienced only by those parties that have managed to extend their organization throughout the country. The great differences that separate one region from another and the strong autonomy they have versus one another generate political cadres that are strong enough to make their own decisions: the organization becomes unstable and must constantly face risks of internal splitting. To avoid this pernicious effect, the national leadership must constantly negotiate with the local leadership – which controls the local resources and tools necessary to put their candidates in the National Congress.<sup>35</sup> The president needs the *support of governors* to guarantee governability.

### 6.3. Political Parties and Representativeness

Currently there are 33 national political parties plus 675 district political parties, with a total of 708 political parties recognized by the national jurisdiction<sup>36</sup> (not counting here *provincial* political parties whose recognition depends on local/provincial legislation). But this number of parties does not represent a large number of electors as might intuitively be suggested. Only 30% of the electorate is indeed affiliated with a political party, be it at the national or district level. This 30% of the universe of affiliated members may be divided as follows: 86.4% are affiliated to one of the 33 national political parties, with the remaining 13.58% affiliated to a district party (we leave aside the analysis of the number provincial political parties). Nevertheless 83.64% of the national parties' affiliations are concentrated in the two national political parties (72.28% of the total of national and district parties). But in real numbers, if we consider the total electorate, these two parties represent only 21.68%. This information helps us to at least pose the question as to whether we are talking about a multiparty system. While PJ and UCR concentrate the 51.59% and 32.05% (respectively) of the universe of affiliated members, the party following in third place (Frente Grande) garners only 2.31% and does not even have representation in every province.

This data allows us to conclude once again that the territorial dimension of the party system is important, as is the geographical distribution of the organizational political parties. Only PJ and UCR have affiliate members in all provinces and together they cover 83.64% of the total of party political affiliations.



## 7. Concluding Remarks

We have seen the large number of political parties recognized and the large number of parliamentary parties involved in the Argentine party system. We have also seen that this large number of parties includes only a small number of representatives, with two parties having a presence throughout the country and holding the majority in Congress (with more than twice the number of legislators than all other parties put together).

Were we to take a snapshot of the party system as it is today, we would see a *multiparty system with the predominant presence of a major party*. But if we take a deeper, more careful look, it would be evident (depending upon how the parties are structured and geographically distributed, taking into account the asymmetries seen above) that the party system might be seen as “latently” (potentially, but not effectively) bipartisan.

If, under this scenario the “other” parties suddenly disappear and the two chief parties survive, it is within their means for them to capture the electorate lost to those minor parties (Malamud 2008).

Moreover, as we have already seen, only one party within the large universe of parliamentary parties has been successful in achieving a third place, but none of those parties thrives because they are concentrated in the most developed areas. It is these same areas which allow them to obtain a seat, but they are highly competitive and in the end the constituencies are lost. The conclusion is that the *geographical distribution of party organization* has been essential to understanding the dynamics and evolution of the party system.

The constant tension between the asymmetries which characterize the Argentinean case leads to a certain equilibrium: while winning presidential elections requires a strong electoral base in the metropolitan provinces (especially since the 1994 constitution established that the president be elected by popular vote), achieving a majority in Congress requires a strong electoral base in the peripheral provinces (due to the disproportionate representation these provinces have in both chambers). The struggle between these two opposing poles makes the factor in the middle the key to achieving balance – that representing the provincial governors. Without their support, the president cannot enjoy or guarantee governability in the national arena, because he/she would have sharply limited congressional support. In other words, district organizations have become crucial to the current party system and the political system in general.

In this sense, the party system plays a significant role in federalism – if we see it as a continuous and dynamic process – either as a centripetal or a centrifugal force. The process of fragmentation experienced by the Argentine party system, in combination with its particular electoral system, has produced a *divided government* at the national level. The result is that the president has neither a majority in Congress nor any majority in the provinces, which are governed for the most part by local parties or local chapters of the national party which act in a mostly independent manner.

On another front, if any political party should decide to maintain or increase the number of legislative seats it holds, it must expand its organization to take in other constituencies. Again, the relationship between those two kinds of constituencies is crucial.

The territorial dimension is a powerful explanatory variable that permits us to understand the evolution and changes which have taken place in the party system. Territorial organization is crucial to the development and evolution of any political party for the simple reason that

parties must win the different constituencies in place in the country in which they act. The different features of these territories represent a challenge to be overcome for any political party.

This paper has attempted to contribute to the literature on political parties, starting from a general overview of the particular case of Argentina, with a general proposal for comparative analysis in cases in which territorial variables may have great significance, especially when it comes to Latin American countries.

## Appendix: 1853 and 1994 National Constitution Provisions on the Electoral System. National Officers.

### Box 1: 1853 NC provisions on the electoral system. National Officers

	President	Senators	Deputies
<i>Electoral Constituency</i>	The entire country as a unique constituency	Each province as a single electoral district	Plurinominal constituency (each province as an electoral constituency)
<i>Elected by</i>	Electoral College	Local Legislature	Popular vote
<i>Required majority</i>	Absolute majority	Simple majority	Proportional representation – D'Hondt
<i>N° of seats</i>		2 per province (total: 48)	1 per 161,000 inhabitants by province, with a minimum floor of 5 per province (total: 257).
<i>Tenure in office:</i>	6 years	9 years. Partial renewal: 1/3 of the Chamber every 3 years (8 provinces reelect their senators every three years)	4 years. Partial renewal: a half of the Chamber every 2 years (half of the deputies from each province are reelected)

### Box 2: 1994 Amended Version of the 1853 NC Provisions on Electoral System. National Officers

	President	Senators	Deputies
<i>Electoral Constituency</i>	The entire country as a unique constituency	Each province as a single electoral district	Plurinominal constituency (each province as an electoral constituency)
<i>Elected by</i>	Popular vote	Popular vote	Popular vote
<i>Required majority</i>	<i>Ballotage.</i> Over 45% of the votes – or 40% with a difference of 10% over the following formula	Simple majority. 1/3 system (2 senators for the party with most votes, 1 for the next-ranked party)	Proportional representation – D'Hondt
<i>Quantity</i>		3 per province (total: 72)	1 per 161,000 inhabitants by province, with a minimum floor of 5 per province (total: 257)
<i>Tenure in office:</i>	4 years	6 years. Partial renewal: 1/3 of the Chamber every 2 years (8 provinces reelect their senators every three years)	4 years. Partial renewal: a half of the Chamber every 2 years (half of the deputies from each province are reelected)

 Provisions introduced by national law.

Source: Author, based on the National Constitution and legislation (decree-laws No. 22.847 and No. 22.848).

## Notes:

1. As regards methodology, due to the high degree of political fragmentation, only parliamentary political parties will be taken into consideration and not all of those. The analysis will concentrate on parties with relevant activity in the national political arena. Additionally, it is necessary to differentiate *political parties recognized as such* and *parliamentary blocs*. Due to the high degree of political fragmentation, the same party may express independent attitudes in Congress, as there is freedom to create alliances and blocs with different parties.
2. A phenomenon also called “denationalisation” (Hopkin 2003, Schakel 2013) or “provincialization” (Chhibber and Kollman 2004).
3. In each of these cases, however, party responses to territorialization challenges have been very diverse (see Hepburn and Detterbeck 2009).
4. With this strategy, the regional level may take advantage of the winning streak of a national party or may differentiate itself from it when electoral forecasts are not good. In this way “various provincial factions seek to maximize the wake of successful national electoral candidates or minimize electoral costs from controversial national candidates” (Calvo and Escolar 2005: 50) [my translation].
5. The *normative role* (Scharpf 1997) is a concept that relates to how the actors’ position defines their interests and perceptions regarding any issue. As Scharpf points out, they are the “normative expectations addressed to the occupants of given positions [and] these expectations need not have the formal quality of legal rules” (1997: 64). This is a useful concept as it allows us not only to explain but also to predict the actors’ behaviour. In a federal system, this implies the president will act according to the needs of the nation and the governors in keeping with the needs of their constituencies, needs which do not always coincide.
6. The 1853 National Constitution designed a federal state with a republican and representative government (Art. 1). This means that the provinces have their own constitutions and political institutions (Art. 122): they freely choose their authorities; they have the liberty of designing their judiciary system, their legislatures (with an electoral system they deem appropriate) and the executive branch, on the sole condition that they conform to the republican and representative system mandated by the National Constitution (Art. 5).
7. The original disposition established that the number of representatives was one for every 33,000 inhabitants or fraction of not less than 16,500 (Art. 37, 1853 Constitution). However, this rule was amended repeatedly by national laws.
8. The first legal prescription that imposed the *minimum floor* per province came into being in 1959, under a national law (Decree-Law No. 15.264) establishing a minimum floor of two deputies per province (Reynoso 2012: 165). Then, in 1972, the new Electoral Code (enacted by Decree-Law No. 19.862) established three deputies per province.
9. Also known as *limited vote* (voto limitado), *incomplete list* (de lista incompleta) or *Grey’s System*.
10. This constitutional mandate has only been in force since 2001.
11. These consequences are in line with the intentions of the military government: “The success of this strategy [...] had an implied condition: the internal division and fragmentation of Partido Justicialista and UCR” (San Martino de Dromi 1988: 33).
12. For a political party to be recognized as a “party district,” (among other requirements) it must demonstrate: (a) Its Charter, which also has to prove the adherence of a number of electors over four per thousand (4 %) of the total number of electors registered in the Local Registry of Voters; (b) The name of said political party; (c) The Manifesto and Declaration of Principles of the political party; (d) The Statutes, and (e) The act of appointment of its authorities (Art. 7, Law No. 23.893, Organic Law on Political Parties). If that recognized political party desires to become a national political party, it must obtain “legal and political entity status” in at least five (5) districts (i.e. provinces), with the same name, Manifesto, Declaration of Principles and Statutes. Additionally, it must fulfil the following requirements: (a) submit a *national* Declaration of Principles, Manifesto and

- Statutes and (b) The act of appointment of its elected *national* and *district* authorities (Art. 8, Law No. 23.893, Organic Law on Political Parties).
13. Despite the presence and significance of the indigenous population in some provinces (such as Mapuches in provinces of Río Negro, Chubut and Neuquén or Tobas in the provinces of Chaco and Formosa), they have formed no political parties to represent their interests – nor has any existing political party claimed to represent them. Indigenous peoples have preferred to organize themselves in cooperatives or in non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
  14. For this reason, the process of “territorialisation” takes place in Argentina in the form of “provincialization”: Since electoral constituencies coincide geographically with the provinces, it is more appropriate to refer to this process as *provincialization* rather than territorialisation, at least in the specific case of Argentina.
  15. Coalición Cívica – Afirmación para una República Igualitaria, for instance, has recognition in 19 of 24 provinces, but it has obtained seats only in a few provinces (the most populated ones).
  16. But there have been no cases of political parties claiming to represent the interests of an entire region of the country understood in a federal context as a set of two or more provinces, for example, a Patagonian party or an alliance of different local parties that have shared programs in defence of some regions or political parties contesting elections at the “meso” level – as is the case of the *Lega Nord* in Italy, for instance.
  17. “All party systems change, but Latin American party systems are, on average, far more volatile than those in the industrialized countries that have been the focus of most of the existing research on party systems. To be specific, Latin American party systems are, on average, three times as volatile as the Western European party systems analyzed by Bartolini and Mair (1990)” (Coppedge 1997: 1).
  18. PRO (Propuesta Republicana) is one of the newest right-national political parties, founded in 2005 by Mauricio Macri (a businessman and former president of Club Atlético Boca Juniors), who was elected Mayor of the City of Buenos Aires in 2007 and re-elected in 2011.
  19. UCeDé (Unión del Centro Democrático) was established in 1982 by Álvaro Alsogaray (former Economics Minister under the Frondizi (1959–1961) and Guido (1962) administrations) and was one of the most important parties of the so called “*new right*” (“la nueva derecha” – Olmeda and Suárez Cao 2010).
  20. MODIN (Movimiento por la Dignidad y la Independencia) was founded in 1988 and was a right wing party, integrated by former military officers (such as its main leader and founder, Aldo Rico).
  21. FREPASO (Frente País Solidario) was an alliance involving various political parties, most of them dissident members of the ruling PJ and discontented with the new neoliberal policies implemented by President Menem (along with other important measures that had been implemented) and not within the *Peronist Principles*. This alliance was led by a new political party, Frente Grande, founded in 1993.
  22. ARI (Acción para una República Igualitaria) came into being as a dissident space from UCR in 2000 – formalized as an independent party soon afterwards. Its main leader and founder was Elisa Carrió (who began her political career within UCR). Her early political career was highly successful: when she ran for president in the 2003 presidential election, ARI obtained 14.05% of the vote in a highly competitive election. Then in the 2007 presidential election, the party obtained 23.04% of the vote (4,401,981 votes) for second place in the election, coming in after PJ-FpV formula Fernández de Kirchner – Cobos (with 45,29% – 8.651.066 votes).
  23. These parties could opt for a “parliamentary strategy” by focusing their strength on Congress. But this would not guarantee their livelihood, since the Argentine political system relies strongly on the failure of the president who has recently reduced the power of Congress to some extent (especially when it comes to economic resource management). As a consequence, it remains difficult to take a hand in the creation of public policy. Access to government office is thus crucial to the survival of any political party.
  24. As Olmeda and Suárez Cao point out, there are also three other factors intrinsically related to federal design that increase the cost to any party for expanding its organization around the country:

“(i) the existence of already institutionalized and entrenched *regional parties* [or as we call them, *provincial parties*] that cater to the same electorate; (ii) the existence of a fluid party system with very low costs of entry that discourages the deployment of long-term organizational strategies; and (iii) a parliamentary design that creates less costly institutional ‘shortcuts’ such as the possibility of regionally based parties to be part of national coalition governments.” (2007: 7).

25. But there is an interesting role these parties can play: in every negotiation process, these parties, minor though they may be, are able to act as a wedge in deciding a vote, providing the majority required by a major party that does not possess one itself (Alonso Garcia 2008). But despite this important function, the general rule is that they end up disappearing.
 

It is in these cases that the *qualitative criterion* proposed by Sartori becomes relevant (over the quantitative criteria proposed by Laakso and Taagepera 1979). See Sartori 2005.
26. When legislative and executive elections are held simultaneously, they tend to reduce the effective number of parties and increase the possibility that the major party will win both (see Calvo and Escobar 2005). This is because of the combined use of the electoral system labelled a *multimember (or plurinominal) constituency system* with *closed party-lists* and *single non-transferable vote systems*, in which candidates for all posts (governor and legislators) are included. Voters may cut out the ballot, but they usually do not.
27. “The provinces are the basis of political power, especially for parties that hold the governorships. Control over partisan careers, budgetary resources and electoral oversight devices guarantees to provincial leaders extremely powerful tools” (Malamud 2012: 110) [my translation]. See also Ardanaz et al. 2010 and Sawers 1996.
28. This legal provision concerning party organization makes Argentine political parties similar to those in the United States: “The national parties are loose aggregations of state and local parties, which have their roots in the compost of local politics” (Buchanan 1965: 113).
29. Its total area (excluding Antarctica) is of 2,974,541 km<sup>2</sup>.
30. Argentina has a high degree of party discipline. Legislators are more loyal to provincial party leaders than they are to national leaders. Many scholars have recently highlighted this high level of party discipline shown to subnational leaders, especially as regards their dominance over the candidate selection process (Kikuchi 2012; De Luca et al. 2002; Jones et al. 2002; Jones and Hwang 2005; Jones 2008 and many others).
31. Both provincial parties and local branches of national parties have emerged (and survived) around the figure of local leaders or family dynasties and present a very low level of institutionalization (see Adrogué 1995 and Alonso García 2007, 2008). None of these have been separatist or secessionist parties however.
32. Decree-laws No. 22.847 and No. 22.848. The first establishes a minimum of *two (2) deputies* per province and the second adds *three (3) more deputies* to all provinces. As a result, no province can have fewer than five deputies.
33. This is the case in the provinces of Catamarca (2); Chubut (3); Formosa (3); Jujuy (4); La Pampa (2); La Rioja (2); Neuquén (3); Río Negro (4); San Juan (4) San Luis (3) and Santa Cruz (2). The numbers in parentheses represent the number of Deputies each of these provinces should have if the *minimum floor rule* did not exist. If, moreover, district magnitude were updated to keep pace with the latest population census, the province of Buenos Aires should have 97 members instead of 70, Córdoba 21 instead of 18, Mendoza 11 instead of 10 and Santa Fe 20 instead of 19. That is, there is also underrepresentation of the metropolitan provinces.
34. “Parties of multiple territorial levels offer opportunity structures for actors with ideas on how these structures should be exploited, thus enabling different forms of political choice” (Moon and Bratberg 2010: 58).
35. See, among others, Jones and Hwang 2005.
36. According to data gathered from the National Registration Affiliate (Cámara Nacional Electoral 2010).

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