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Latin American Democracy. What to Do with the Leaders?

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The democratic deficit, or the gap between citizens' aspirations and their level of satisfaction, is increasing in Latin America. Such dissatisfaction helps to understand many of the region's presidential crises: since 1985, 23 Latin American presidents have left government abruptly. While civil society may have been able to provoke the fall of presidents, it has not managed to avoid the re-emergence of deep-rooted political practices under subsequent administrations. Extreme presidentialism, clientelism and populism have re-emerged strengthened after deep political crises. This article offers some ideas regarding the impact that different types of political leaders can have on how well democracy works.

Keywords: leaders, political parties, institutionalisation, Argentina, Ecuador, Uruguay.

The democratic deficit, or the gap between citizens' aspirations and their level of satisfaction, is increasing in Latin America. In many countries, democracy may be seen as the preferred form of government, but in many states society remains 'deeply sceptical when evaluating how democracy works' (Norris, 2011: 5). In the 2011 Latinobarómetro, 57 percent of respondents were not satisfied with democracy in the region (Latinobarómetro, 2011). This dissatisfaction helps to understand many of the region's presidential crises: since 1985, 23 Latin American presidents have left government abruptly. While civil society may have been able to provoke the fall of presidents, it has been unable to avoid the re-emergence of deep-rooted political practices under subsequent administrations. Extreme presidentialism, clientelism and populism have not only remained but, in some cases, have re-emerged strengthened after deep political crises.

In an attempt to explain these crises, scholars have analysed the impact of institutions, political parties and economic strategies. Literature on *how good* Latin American democracies are (O'Donnell, 1995, 1996, 1999; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Diamond et al., 2008; Ollier, 2008; Mainwaring and Scully, 2010; Morlino, 2012) has been expanding. Democratic quality has been defined in terms of results, contents and procedures (Morlino, 2012: 195). In analysing the quality of a regime, it is common practice to look at the functioning of the rule of law, the level of accountability (horizontal and

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vertical), the degree of and freedom of participation, political competition, and rights and freedoms and equality (Morlino, 2012: 214).

This article goes in a different direction and highlights the impact that different types of political leaders can have on *how well* democracy works. Following the conclusions of mainstream debates on political institutions and parties (Dix, 1992; Coppedge, 1998; Fukuyama, 2008; Ollier, 2008; Mainwaring and Scully, 2010; Navia and Walker, 2010), we argue that in a context of low institutionalisation, the democratic quality of political leaders becomes crucial. After the return to democracy, not much has been written regarding the role of political leaders in Latin America. Academic literature has focused more on the transition process itself, the state and economic reforms, the crises of political parties and the phenomena of neo-liberalism and populism (O'Donnell, 1995; Panizza, 2005; Fukuyama, 2008; Mainwaring and Scully, 2010). Political leadership has been superficially included in the debates about presidentialism and parliamentarism (Diamond et al., 1999). More recently, the concept has gained some prominence due to the emergence of political representation crises (Linz and Valenzuela, 1994; Fabbrini, 2009; Pérez-Liñán, 2009). The rise of personalistic and populist leadership styles in Latin America has also been researched (Edwards, 2009; Malamud, 2010; Philip and Panizza, 2011). Conventional wisdom presents this trend as an ideological challenge to liberal democracy led by charismatic individuals; but our research suggests that leadership styles in Latin America are better explained if contextualised within the different political party systems of each country.

We found a complex relationship between the degree of institutionalisation of political parties, the democratic quality of electoral competition and the degree of autonomy enjoyed by leaders and political parties. The significance of this relationship emerged through a comparative analysis of Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay and dozens of interviews with politicians from these three countries. Our study suggests that over-institutionalisation of the political party system can give parties a high degree of autonomy. Here we understand autonomy as a capacity to ignore established rules, demands from citizens or electoral manifestos. The degree of political parties' autonomy depends on the democratic quality of electoral competition. If electoral competition is weak, political parties increase their autonomy and capacity to ignore citizens and rules. As our research shows, the emergence of the Frente Amplio in Uruguay benefited electoral competition by breaking the traditional equilibrium between Blancos and Colorados. Due to the appearance of a new political actor, Uruguay avoided over-institutionalisation of its political party system and a deterioration of electoral competition.

Conversely, our research leads us to conclude that low institutionalisation can increase the autonomy of political leaders. If political parties are weak and norms are flexible, the leader can increase his/her capacity to ignore citizens and rules. Regionally, sub-types of democracy have consolidated themselves, such as delegative democracy (O'Donnell, 1995), low institutional democracy (Ollier, 2008) or plebiscitary democracy (Fabbrini, 2009). Despite some differences, these share a main common feature: excessive presidentialism. These sub-types of democracy create the conditions for the emergence of strong leaders in the executive branch with a high degree of autonomy, since institutional weaknesses seem to reinforce the need for this type of leader. However, strong leaders only reinforce the weaknesses of institutions, recreating the political conditions for the appearance of these sub-types of democracy. Systems with low institutionalisation, such as Argentina and Ecuador, show a deterioration of electoral competition and the emergence of strong leaders with high autonomy. In this scenario, political parties neither control nor limit the power of their leaders. This occurred with

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Patria Altiva i Soberana (PAIS) in Ecuador and the Frente Para la Victoria (Front for Victory) in Argentina. Political parties become mere vehicles to maintain the leader's stay in power.

We argue that some Latin American countries seem to have fallen into a political trap: weakly institutionalised regimes undermine political competition, which in turn helps leaders increase their autonomy, and the quality of democracy deteriorates. Leaders become autonomous and democracy becomes dependent on their actions. This trap was described in many of the 180 interviews undertaken for this study: the logic behind it seems to be that concentration of power, despite its negative consequences, secures stability. For the purpose of this study, Argentina, Ecuador and Uruguay were chosen, because all suffered similar deep political and economic crises during the 2000s. However, the outcomes were different: five presidents were expelled in Argentina, three in Ecuador and none in Uruguay.

This article builds upon the ideas of democratic deficit and the quality of democracy to explore some of the political conditions that explain the emergence and fall of different types of leaders in these countries. Our aim is to explore the relationship between certain political conditions, such as degrees of institutionalisation of political parties, forms of electoral competition and leadership styles. Our study is focused primarily on scenarios of low institutionalisation, since these seem to be the ones in which leaders' own democratic credentials become paramount.

Firstly, the article outlines the methodology used. Secondly, it offers insights on the evolution and resolution of each country's political crisis. A third section categorises leaders based on their relationship with state institutions and political parties, and how they build and exert power. Finally, the conclusion offers an explanation of the relationship between institutionalisation and leaders' democratic quality, emphasising the need to improve accountability tools.

Methodology

Between October 2009 and June 2011, we conducted 180 interviews in Buenos Aires, Quito and Montevideo. The majority of the interviews were carried out with legislators and political leaders, such as former presidents, former vice-presidents, incumbent vice-presidents and party leaders. Some interviews with political advisers, academics and journalists were also included.

The interviews were semi-structured around open-ended questions, so as to give interviewees the opportunity to speak extensively about their careers. The questionnaires were divided into five sections: education and political careers; posts in government and parties; political values and aspirations; relations with their party, political opponents and electors and communication and dissemination of their work. The interviews remain confidential, but were recorded and transcribed for academic purposes.

The responses were then analysed in a quantitative manner by collecting, categorising and coding non-numeric answers in measurable form. The analysis identified age and gender, educational background, channels for incorporation into politics, political party membership, political training within the party and party or governmental posts. Other categories explored were value-related in order to understand political leaders' ideas on issues such as political ethics, political practices (identified in the survey as populism and clientelism), democracy and models of democracy and the role of political parties. Finally, to discover how the respondents understood the making of politics, we included

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questions about their everyday routine, communication with their constituents, the process of selection of their advisers, innovative political practices or political campaigns and the use of new technologies as a two-way channel of communication.

This research follows a case-oriented approach, proposing a 'dialogue between the investigator's ideas and the data' (Ragin, 1987: 49). In order to establish this dialogue, it was first necessary to define the concepts that guide our study. There are many conceptualisations of democracy, populism or clientelism; for the purposes of this study, we followed mainstream definitions. Democracy is thus understood as a regime that presupposes:

1. a territorially based state that delimits those who are considered political citizens, and
2. a legal system of that same state that within its territory assigns political citizenship on a (boundedly) universalistic basis, by means of various participatory rights and political freedoms (O'Donnell, 2004: 20).

Populism is defined as a way of political representation and a tool for diminishing the number of actors capable of vetoing executive decisions (Navia and Walker, 2010). Clientelism is seen as a political tool to increase power through different means, such as the distribution of benefits (jobs, money or goods) or political negotiations (Auyero, 2004; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007).

The qualitative analysis and our attempt to identify specific categories have had some problems as well as benefits. Firstly, given the small number of interviews, our research is bound by traditional limitations. However, and especially due to the nature of the comparative case study, we have tried to control 'the sources of variance in the ex-ante selection of the cases, rather than through ex-post manipulation of data' (Peters, 1998). In other words, we have endeavoured to make the sample as representative as possible, by analysing the political representation of parliaments in each case study. Although this depended on the legislators' acceptance of our interview request, in general we did not encounter many problems in organising the interviews according to the political representation in these countries. The semi-structured interviews proved to be of immense richness; they gave politicians the opportunity to talk extensively about their careers, political practices, values and aspirations. We are aware that this type of interview tends to produce a collection of subjective perceptions and that, in many cases, our respondents could have given what they believed to be the right answer rather than talking about what they really believed or actually did. However, we consider politicians' perceptions the pillar for understanding politics in each of our case studies.

It is also worth mentioning that the richness of the responses can affect the operational analysis of our variables, since a semi-structured interview does not guarantee that all questions are properly answered and may thus affect the quantification of variables. However, for our purposes, a semi-structured interview was more appropriate, since it allowed politicians to offer their points of view on specific issues.

Gradually, studies in political science have become more embedded in different methods of quantitative research. Our research should be categorised as a comparative case-oriented study that is 'sensitive to complexity and historical specificity' (Ragin, 1987: ix). Following qualitatively oriented comparative methods, our aim is to compare the conditions or causes in different historical contexts with a holistic and interpretative approach. Our ultimate purpose is to understand and interpret the differences and similarities in political leadership issues in the region. We believe that by focusing our

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comparison on the similarities and differences between these three case studies, they 'can tell us a great deal about the way governments function' (Peters, 1998).

On a further note, we chose a range of countries with very similar characteristics, especially in relation to their democratic experience. In this case, given the countries' similarities, we wanted to observe whether the diversity in the level of political party institutionalisation, understood in this study as an independent variable, influences the emergence of different types of political leaders.

Taking into account some of the weaknesses of the case-oriented approach (Ragin, 1987), we understand the limitations of our research but also its contribution: identifying and interpreting some of the causes and differences of a particular political relation. Likewise, our research offers in-depth analysis of politicians' perceptions and values, which helps to explore their impact on the quality of democracy.

Post-Crisis Leaders and Parties

In 2001, Argentinean President Fernando De la Rúa was forced to resign due to his inability to rescue the economy from a deep and long recession. The slogan chanted in the streets was *que se vayan todos* ('all must go'). However, the political crisis was resolved by the old political elite that still dominated the political landscape: the Peronist Party, created in 1945, and the Radical Party, formed in 1890. Congress named Eduardo Duhalde president, despite his defeat at the 1999 national elections. The post-crisis scenario brought to the fore the existing fragmentation of traditional political parties, but also a significant degree of turnover at the municipal level and in the National Congress. After the crisis, new political parties emerged: Coalición Cívica in 2002, Propuesta Republicana in 2005 and Generación para un Nuevo Encuentro Nacional in 2007. However, only 12 percent of respondents in Argentina believed that new actors had been incorporated into the post-crisis political system and only 28 percent thought that political practices had actually changed.

The country seems to have moved from its traditional two-party system to one with a (fragmented) dominant party surrounded by new small parties or Peronist splits. The Peronist party is not only fragmented and contradictory, but is also deeply decentralised, with different leaders fighting to control as many political barons as possible in an attempt to conquer national power. This scenario is not very different from that seen in the past: one leader monopolises power at the top while many small leaders fight against each other to praise 'the one and only', so as to eventually succeed him/her.

In this regard, the diagnosis was conclusive: 74 percent of the legislators interviewed opined that the main political problem in Argentina resides in the combination of strong leaders with weak political parties. The main political parties have been unable to change the historic trend of strong leaders. The Radical Party has been dominated by Hipólito Yrigoyen, Leandro Alem, Ricardo Balbín and Raúl Alfonsín, and Peronism by Juan Perón, Carlos Menem and Néstor and Cristina Kirchner. Political parties in Argentina seem to need strong leaders to win elections and maintain power. In this context, political parties can become flexible, functional institutions at the service of the leader.

On the other hand, around 30 percent of legislators believed that parties are also chameleons, deserting and dumping leaders when these become powerless. Thus, parties in Argentina seem to be considered as power machines that only serve strong leaders. Around 50 percent of respondents also argued that most political parties lack ideas and can switch ideologies readily and opportunistically, and that leaders are prepared to break from their parties to increase personal power. Party discipline is absent and

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leaders easily jump from one party to another. Although most interviewees argued that the main feature of Argentina's political system is its lack of rules, we did find a set of clear and concise 'rules' that are used to increase and maintain power. Politics is a process of power construction through a clientelist logic of exchanging votes, jobs or money. In Argentina, power is achieved through different clientelist channels. Provincial political barons in government are able to distribute a high number of public posts and manage public funds that are crucial to maintaining their clientelist networks. Thanks to this political and economic power, provincial barons usually hold the key to presenting names for the electoral lists. Once elected, these political leaders continue to exchange votes for money, loyalty, support or jobs. These exchanges occur amongst legislators, politicians in the executive, local political barons and clients. The exchange is political capital, which helps politicians maintain their power, job and privileges. The national leader builds his/her power by maintaining wide networks of clientelist relations, exchanging national funds for the control of provinces, political support for re-elections, jobs and social programmes (Lodola, 2009: 247–286; Szwarcberg, 2012: 110–118). As a result of this individually driven power-building process, political parties remain on the margins.

These clientelist networks were widely explained in the interviews. When asked whether these are related to the complex steps of political negotiations, 88 percent of interviewees considered that, rather than building consensus or aiming to agree on political issues, the main goal of these processes is to maintain individual power, benefits and privileges. In fact, clientelism was considered as a permanent feature: 84 per cent of our respondents argued that clientelism, conceptualised as a tool to increase power through the use and abuse of public resources, was impossible to eradicate. Moreover, 65 percent answered that clientelism persisted because it was functional in the type of political domination exercised by politicians. Thus, it can be concluded that politics does have clear 'rules', and that leaders can build up personal power independently from political parties. From the long conversations held with politicians, the puzzle of the Argentine case is expressed in the relationship between a low degree of institutionalisation of political parties and the autonomy of strong political leaders.

In Ecuador, economic instability and unpopular government decisions unleashed the collapse of the political party system. After the dollarisation of the economy, President Jamil Mahuad was forced to resign in January 2000, leading to a period of political uncertainty that did not end when Lucio Gutiérrez won the 2002 general elections. Gutiérrez was dismissed in 2005 due to increasing social unrest and demonstrations, held mainly in the capital Quito. As in Argentina, the slogan was *que se vayan todos*. But in Ecuador this became a reality. The political party system collapsed and a deep renovation of the political elite took place. Traditional parties from both the left and right, such as Izquierda Democrática, Partido Social Cristiano, Partido Sociedad Patriótica, Unión Demócrata Cristiana and Pachakutik, were discredited. Former finance minister Rafael Correa won the 2006 presidential elections and assumed office in January 2007. He had a strong discourse against the so-called *partidocracia* (partyocracy), a negative term used to describe old, traditional political parties. He did not present candidates for the legislative branch, paving the way for its transformation. The new assembly was formed in 2008, with a somewhat renewed political elite.

Correa and his new PAIS movement were seen by 45 percent of our respondents (including some from the opposition) as a fresh start in a politically stagnated country. However, the renovation of the political elite did not break with old political practices: 90 percent of our respondents argued that clientelism continues to be a strong political

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tool. Moreover, Ecuador has always had strong political leaders. Juan José Flores, José María Velasco Ibarra and León Febres Cordero are, among others, examples of the strong *caudillistas* that have dominated Ecuador's political history. Correa continues that tradition. However, some changes were identified: 82 percent of our interviewees argued that Rafael Correa's leadership brought important changes. First, Correa represented a unifying figure in a historically divided country: between the coast and the Andes, between the urban and rural environments, and between many ethnicities. He is one of few political leaders who have been able to develop a national leadership.

Second, Correa has transformed clientelism by centralising and institutionalising it through the *Bono de Desarrollo Humano* (Human Development Bonus) plan. According to data from the Ministry of Social and Economic Inclusion (MIES), approximately 1.7 million people were qualified to receive the *Bono* – a monthly benefit of US$50 which can be obtained by families living under the poverty line, as defined by the Ministry of Social Development. One of our respondents, a sociologist, pointed out that according to the National Institute of Statistics (INEC), 61 percent of the working age population is unemployed or underemployed, and thus eligible for the *Bono*. Traditionally, clientelism in Ecuador was mainly conducted at the local level as a negotiation tool between local barons and urban elites, particularly in Quito and Guayaquil. Political parties were territorially based and structured more locally than ideologically; gradually, these became more involved in representing local interests and very much related to local clientelist networks. Rafael Correa broke down these ties and managed to impose direct clientelism without intermediaries, ignoring local barons. In Quito, an academic explained: 'you declare you are poor, they give you a card and the card solves the problem', referring to the fact that the *Bono de Desarrollo Humano* is nationally distributed through an electronic card and cash points; therefore, there are no local intermediaries.

Third, Correa's attacks against political parties turned out to be very popular. He rejected political parties from the very beginning, and this strategy has been so successful that now politicians are still cautious about mentioning the re-birth of political parties. Political parties' reputations are so damaged that most interviewees prefer to regard their organisations as 'movements'.

The majority of respondents, 48 percent, affirmed that during the Correa administration there have been innovations in political practices: 42 percent referred to innovations in communication methods between politicians and citizens, 41 percent referred to innovations due to the inclusion of new actors and 15 percent saw innovations in the degree of the government's transparency.

The collapse of the political party system prompted a high degree of turnover, with the inclusion of young people and women following that of indigenous movements. Studies on elite circulation are rare in Ecuador. Some of the available work centres on the study of the candidates for the 2007 Constitutional Assembly. Of the candidates interviewed for that study, 75.5 percent had not held a political post before and 79.6 percent had not previously held a partisan job. Only 34.7 percent had begun their political career in a political party (Freidenberg, 2008: 131–146). Despite these newcomers, the assembly showed similar historical trends: 50 percent of its members had university degrees, 38.8 percent had postgraduate degrees and 43.7 percent had undertaken postgraduate studies abroad. In a country where only 11 percent of the population goes to university, despite Correa's Citizen Revolution, the assembly is co-opted by a small elite (Viteri Díaz, 2006). In 2010, according to data from the Legislative Assembly's website, 82.2 percent of its members had a university degree.

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Thus, the changes that Correa brought are mixed, with a significant degree of continuity. Rafael Correa was perceived by many as the solution for Ecuador's deep economic and political crisis; however, he gradually became a polarising leader, with a tendency to concentrate power and use populist and clientelist tactics (De la Torre, 2013). As with many leaders before him, he attempted to consolidate power thorough a personalised fashion, presenting himself as the only solution and the only representative of the people.

As in Argentina, in Ecuador clientelism is considered a structural problem and a tool for political domination: in Quito, 56 percent of our respondents defined clientelism as the use and abuse of public resources to gain political benefits. On the other hand, 34 percent emphasised that citizens exhibited a clientelist logic: they expected some type of benefit in exchange for their participation in politics. Clientelism is a two-way problem, where responsibility falls on politicians as well as citizens. While Correa neutralised the power of local barons, 90 percent of our respondent affirmed that clientelism is still used as a tool to maintain power through a network of exchanges of benefits for political loyalty.

We have identified different types of clientelism and divided them into horizontal and vertical clientelism. Horizontal clientelism is the exchange of political favours and/or money for political support among politicians, i.e. between legislators at the National Congress or between legislators and provincial barons or members of the Executive. Vertical clientelism is that between politicians and political supporters. While politics in Argentina seems to be impregnated by both types, Ecuador is more prone to the vertical model. While in Argentina 47 percent of respondents mentioned horizontal clientelism, in Ecuador only 10 percent referred to it. In Ecuador, 56 percent considered clientelism as a misuse of public resources to obtain political benefits and 34 percent recognised it as a tool to exchange votes for benefits. Therefore, 90 percent of our Ecuadorian respondents recognised the existence of what we considered as vertical clientelism.

In Argentina, horizontal clientelism was described by 47 percent of our respondents. They used catchphrases such as *dos contratos por una ley* (referring to the exchange of jobs in Congress for support for legislation) or *política del trueque* (barter politics). In Ecuador, vertical clientelism was summarised as *quien más da, más votos recibe* (meaning the politician that gives the most, gets the majority of votes).

Clientelism, personalism and weak or fragmented political parties were the main features of the post-crisis scenario identified by most of our respondents in both Argentina and Ecuador. There are some significant differences. In Argentina, traditional political parties, such as Peronism and Radicalism, were weakened by the crisis and became very fragmented. New parties emerged and there was a slow but constant turnover of elites. In Ecuador, most of the traditional parties lost power and representation; they are struggling to survive or re-emerge in the context of a deep and fast elite renovation. However, both political systems are still embedded in old political practices: clientelism as a political tool that opens up doors for political corruption and excessive presidentialism or personalism with strong leaders who embrace populism as a tool to decrease the number of veto players, weakening the system of checks and balances and the level of political accountability.

Our interviews in Ecuador showed the risks of both extremes: over- and low institutionalisation of the political party system. If, before the *Revolución Ciudadana*, we could find a significant degree of political party autonomy, the social mobilisation that brought down Lucio Gutiérrez's government ushered in a period of strong leader autonomy.

Our third case study, Uruguay, went through an economic crisis without its political system coming into jeopardy. The country's economy, particularly its banking sector,

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was affected by Argentina's financial crisis. Throughout 2001, many Argentines, trying to flee their country's uncertainty, deposited money in Uruguay's banks. However, the drastic measures taken to overcome the crisis in Argentina in December 2001 led to a lack of confidence in the banking sector and, in the first months of 2002, many deposits were withdrawn in Uruguay due to the fear of similar decisions. This left some Uruguayan banks in a weak position. In July–August 2002, Uruguay's banking system was under pressure and President Jorge Batlle, from the Colorado Party, decided to rescue some of the banks, leaving others to collapse. This increased uncertainty. Some looting and social unrest followed. However, Uruguay shows significant political differences: the streets were not packed with citizens shouting *que se vayan todos*; President Batlle managed to finish his mandate; traditional parties did not collapse, but neither the National nor the Colorado Party won the 2004 presidential elections. For the first time since its creation in 1971, the Frente Amplio, a coalition of left-wing political parties, won the presidential elections and Tabaré Vázquez took office in March 2005.

The triumph of the Frente Amplio can be seen as one of the political consequences of the 2002 Uruguayan crisis. It was a major change, since the Colorado and National parties (both founded in 1836) had dominated politics for over a century. Despite the harsh economic consequences of the crisis, the political system did not collapse. It underwent a deep renewal, but did not experience the demise of the main actors and instruments that had dominated so far. The arrival of the Frente Amplio added dynamism to an otherwise slow elite turnout. Faced with the crisis, Uruguayans had a new alternative. Rather than pushing for the collapse of the political party system, as in Ecuador, or the fierce undermining of political opponents, as in Argentina, the objective of the Frente was to reinforce the main components of Uruguayan politics.

Thus, Uruguay offers a different scenario, where political parties provide a clear identity for politicians and citizens and limit leaders' power. No party has been able to play 'winner-takes-all'. Parties and leaders show a high degree of adaptability to change without jeopardising the level of institutionalisation. A senator for the Frente Amplio, who was in jail during the dictatorship, told us that the Frente had to learn and understand the changes experienced by the citizens during military rule. One of the most repeated words in the interviews with legislators was 'learning' (*aprendizaje*). Most politicians were able to express the need to interpret changes at the international and national levels. Conversely, in Argentina and Ecuador, the debate is still very much anchored in the past.

The internal organisation of political parties in Uruguay shows discipline and accountability. There are few cases of politicians changing parties, because parties provide a clear, long-term identity. A total of 90 percent of deputies have belonged to the same political party throughout their careers and 89 percent have belonged to the same fraction or sector since they joined the party (Serna, 2005, 2013). Thus, it is still relevant and distinctive to be a member or a follower of the Colorados, the National party or the Frente. Uruguayans can still define their political identity by their parties.

Adaptability and modernisation, clear ideological identities, strong internal organisation, low volatility and accountability are some of the features that explain the high degree of institutionalisation of the Uruguayan political party system. Moreover, Uruguay combines presidentialism with consensus, pluralism and limited authority.

However, clientelism is also an important feature of the political culture: 84 percent of our respondents argued that clientelism is still used to reward political support and only 9 percent argued that clientelism was in decline. In total, 62 percent described clientelism as the distribution of public posts mainly by the executive branch. For

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some respondents, the Frente Amplio is using the same tactics previously developed by the Colorado and National parties when in government. The state is seen as a treasure trove and public posts are jewels to be distributed by the winner. Following our conceptualisation of clientelism, we argue that in Uruguay the party, rather than the individual, distributes political or public jobs among its cadres, creating a type of party-led clientelism.

Elite circulation seems to be the weakest point, with a high degree of continuity and institutionalisation of political careers. The majority of our interviewees joined a political party at a young age, having become political activists at secondary school; they have belonged to the same party since that time and began their political career as *ediles*, a non-paid post that acts as the legislative body at the municipal level (Serna, 2005, 2013). Most of them continue their career at the national level, beginning in Congress as substitutes in the electoral lists. Thus, most Congress members have had long experience before getting the most prestigious post, that of senator. Studies show clear patterns in the selection of legislators (Botinelli, 2008). Most politicians have occupied administrative positions in public institutions, held legislative posts or carried out ministerial activities. Political party membership seems to be hereditary and active participation in party politics is usually shared by two or three members of the same family.

While continuity and certainty are strong features of the political system in Uruguay, the ascent to power of the Frente Amplio in the Montevideo municipality in 1989 and the national government in 2005 implied a renewal of politics, particularly of the elite, without questioning the political party system. The Frente broke into Uruguay's politics without breaking the rules of the game. The crisis, rather than breaking the political party system, helped to transform it. The party system changed without jeopardising institutionalisation and political practices, and the leader's style remained almost untouched.

The interviews in Uruguay draw a political scenario in which the political party system combines institutionalisation and adaptability. Neither the parties nor the leaders seem to have the capacity to ignore rules or citizens. In Uruguay there is no high autonomy; electoral competition has not been undermined by strong leaders or political coalitions and institutionalisation is at a point of equilibrium.

Thus, from the interviews, we were able to identify two groups of countries: Argentina and Ecuador on the one side and Uruguay on the other. Although Argentina and Ecuador do have significant differences, for the purpose of our research their similarities are more important. Uruguay, with its balanced institutionalised political party system, was clearly the odd one out. Having presented the post-crisis scenarios, we now move on to explore the inter-relation between different types of leaders and political conditions.

The Triangle of Power: Leaders, Parties and Clients

Latin America presents a wide variety of leaders. This study follows a classical conceptualisation of a leader: an individual that has and exerts decisional power and can help to build a group (Nye, 2008). A leader must be able to help the group to achieve its objectives, establish a common agenda and create an identity (Kellerman, 2004: 8–9). His/her role is to interpret the group's situation and objectives, analyse complex scenarios, propose viable solutions, set up a long-term plan and measure the costs and risks of the proposed strategies. There is no leader without power (Dahl, 1961; Lukes, 2005). There are two types of power. Hard power is that which is exerted through threats or the promise of privileges in order to get 'B' to do what 'A' wants. Soft power

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is 'A's capacity to persuade 'B' to do what 'A' wants without the use of manipulation or coercion tactics. Democratic leaders should be more inclined to use soft rather than hard power. The key to soft power and democratic domination seems to be to induce and to persuade without manipulation (Nye, 2008). However, most of our respondents in Ecuador and Argentina view their political leaders as using hard power.

From the analysis of the interviews, we identified five different groups of democratic leader: democracy enhancers, ambivalent democrats, hybrids, soft usurpers and power usurpers. In general, the first group includes leaders who push for the building or reinforcement of democratic institutions, accept power limits imposed by state institutions, respect and promote democratic rights and civil liberties and leave their posts on time. They are usually inclined to share power and responsibility, build consensus and avoid polarisation. This type of leader belongs to a political party in which he/she has developed his/her career. The party tends to maintain its principles and norms and has some internal rules to monitor the performance of its members. Therefore, democracy enhancers are not autonomous. Democracy enhancers are more inclined to use soft power.

In turn, power usurpers accumulate power by absorbing it from other state institutions, either by minimising the role of the legislative or by undermining the independence of the judiciary. Power usurpers are democratic leaders, since they have been elected in free elections. In some cases, they are very popular leaders, who have achieved more than 50 percent of votes. However, while democratically legitimate in origin, some end up manipulating constitutional or electoral instruments to increase personal power, thus worsening the quality of democracy. Power usurpers can be part of a political party, but the party tends to be a mere tool to augment power or win elections. In many cases, the party has been created to support the leader or is manipulated to increase the leader's power. This type of leader does not accept power-sharing decision-making processes. They are autonomous and, by usurping power, they increase their capacity to ignore rules and citizens while in government. Power usurpers believe that they are the only legitimate representatives of their people. Politics becomes embedded in their person. In Latin America, power usurpers usually establish populism and clientelism as political instruments to retain power. They tend to aspire to perpetuate themselves in power. Power usurpers are prone to using hard power.

These two types of leaders are mutually exclusive: a power usurper cannot at the same time be a democracy enhancer, or vice-versa. However, leaders and political circumstances change over time and an old power usurper can come back as a democracy enhancer, or vice-versa.

Hybrid leaders are those who neither usurp power in a systematic manner nor enhance democracy. Likewise, there are flexible usurpers who do sporadically accept power limitations and ambivalent democrats who can respect norms and institutions while at the same time concentrating power in their hands. We have confronted this typology with our post-crisis scenarios. The evidence suggests that the emergence of different types of leaders relates to the degree of institutionalisation of the political party system, which has an impact on the quality of electoral competition and the degree of autonomy that a leader can establish. Firstly, a party system is institutionalised when parties have continuity in terms of internal rules and inter-party competition procedures. Secondly, institutionalised parties are well established in society and have ideological consistency. They generate ideas, programmes, proposals and government plans that allow citizens to understand the party's aims. Thirdly, parties are the vehicle for political representation, providing a legitimate way to gain government access.

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They are also a vehicle for representing interests; they are channels for interest groups to make their voices heard. Fourthly, the internal organisation of institutionalised parties is coherent with efficient instruments for internal discipline to avoid and punish corruption (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995; Alcántara, 2004). Thus, institutionalised political parties do have power to control and limit the autonomy of leaders. A political framework such as this curtails power usurpers.

Analysts have concluded that institutionalisation does not guarantee high-quality democratic institutions, but a low degree of institutionalisation weakens any type of democracy (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995: 21). A non-institutionalised party system increases the chances of arbitrary decisions being taken. If the parties are weak, or the rules are not clear and transparent, force, violence or mass movements become ways to get power and access to government. If rules and procedures are flexible and change constantly, the system leaves room for manipulation, which in turn benefits parties or leaders, thus ruining the political and legal pillars of a democratic system. Parties can be captured by interest groups, who end up gaining privileged access to government posts or influence over the decision-making process. This amplifies the differences between interest groups and citizens, and makes the system unjust rather than democratic. A low degree of institutionalisation also increases the likelihood of a personalist, populist leader coming to power, particularly in presidential systems (Mainwaring and Scully, 1995: 22). If the system is obscure and party discipline is erratic, the level of autonomy can easily increase.

Our study contributes to this debate by emphasising that political leaders are products of the political party system and that the rules of the system impinge on leaders' styles. It shows that the degree of political party institutionalisation helps to understand leaders' styles. Before the 2000 crises, there was a low degree of institutionalisation in Argentina and Ecuador. Political practice – marked by clientelism, personalism and populism – and strong leaders were well established and widely accepted by political actors, and maintained over time. The strongest points of the political system survived the 2000s: clientelism, personalism and strong and autonomous leaders.

In Uruguay, the political party system was highly institutionalised, based on rules and presidentialism without personalism. These features, the strongest points of Uruguay's system, survived the crisis. However, while the crises in Argentina and Ecuador have not transformed leaders' styles or political practices, Uruguay's political system has witnessed more changes: the strong leaders of the past have become democracy enhancers.

These three countries show that, if rules and procedures are flexible and there is continuity of a high degree of autonomy, power usurpers can prevail. Leaders are not born in isolation; they are the product of political parties and the political careers that they develop within the party's norms. If parties are in decline, fragmented, clientelist and dysfunctional, if rules are flexible and uncertain, if discipline is absent and accountability and transparency are low or non-existent, then the likelihood of having power usurpers increases. The winner-takes-all logic, together with a lack of pluralism, tolerance and consensus politics, also explain the emergence of power usurpers. Argentina and Ecuador are good examples of this.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to analyse the impact of political leaders on *how well* democracy works. By doing so, it has uncovered a complex and fluid relationship which

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indicates that the degree of political party institutionalisation and the forms of political competition influence leadership styles. The key element is the degree of autonomy that leaders can carve out in contexts of over- or low institutionalisation of political parties. By listening to politicians in Argentina and Ecuador, it became clear that leaders have a notable capacity to ignore rules and citizens' demands by building clientelist networks and concentrating power in their own hands. In Uruguay, politicians are held accountable by their parties and their autonomy is limited.

The equilibrium between institutionalisation and autonomy seems to be crucial in understanding whether power usurpers or democracy enhancers prevail. The more institutionalised the political party system – with a low degree of autonomy and vibrant electoral competition – the greater the chances for the emergence of democracy enhancers. This creates a virtuous circle. On the contrary, where informal institutions are prevalent, autonomy is high and the electoral competition scarce, power usurpers are more likely to appear and create a vicious cycle of deteriorating democratic quality.

Democracy enhancers could emerge in a context of low institutionalisation but their impact would be minimal in the short term. A democracy enhancer cannot improve the system in isolation. Unfortunately, a power usurper can emerge in a context of low or over-institutionalisation and inflict more damage. Our research suggests that democracy enhancers and power usurpers emerge according to the degree of institutionalisation and autonomy that prevail in the political party system.

Political leaders make democracy work, and thus different types of leaders will affect *how well* democracy works. This article has outlined the political conditions that favour the emergence of different types of leaders and concludes that the best remedy to avoid power usurpers is to reinforce political parties, emphasising the continuity of rules, ideological coherence, adaptability to changes, internal discipline and transparency and a clear, democratic internal organisation. However, Latin American power usurpers do not have incentives to change the rules of the game, since they have been able to build a political democracy that has legitimacy without transparency and accountability. Besides, citizens do not electorally punish power usurpers. Thus, the democratic deficit seems to be widening, and presidents falling.

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