

Winning in New Democracies: Why Some Parties Are More Victorious Than Others in Foundational Elections

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Abstract

There is a spectrum of parties that exist in foundational elections in new democracies, and this research will seek to identify why some parties are more successful than others, focusing on Latin America. These comparisons will highlight important characteristics of the parties that give them advantages and make them more likely to win. Subsequent studies will examine new democracies in other regions. A party can choose to embrace an idea or movement, such as the legacy of an old regime or a transition to democracy. Hypotheses are developed that will test variables that lead to a party increasing its vote share and share of seats in the country parliament. The variables are old regime alignment and opposition alignment. Within the countries' foundational elections, the political parties will be identified. The case study compares Brazil and Mexico. The study shows a relationship with party alignment with old regimes and electoral success. The hypotheses will be tested in future research quantitatively throughout the region using multiple regression analyses, and a few cases will be more deeply explored qualitatively to further understand the insights from the statistical findings.

Research Question

Various waves of democracy have swept over the globe in the past fifty years. Examples span from the 1960s independence movements in Africa to the recent democratization in the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring. After periods where there have not been elections of any kind, or any competitive elections, there is great interest as to how countries embrace democracy subsequent to their foundational election. A possible result of having a democracy is the formation and the participation of political parties in government. Some parties may be new and some may have existed before the transition to democracy. This research will look at the spectrum of parties that exist in foundational elections and will seek to identify why some parties are more successful than others.

The research will focus primarily on the following questions: What characteristics allow parties to succeed more than other political parties in foundational elections? What allows parties to be competitive in these elections? When there are fundamental changes in a country adjusting to a new regime type, such as a country's independence, there are interests within the country that compete for the opportunity to govern. The interests within a country can be numerous. Some of these interests are very likely to form political parties. Some will unite with other interests in a coalition to form a political party. In this sense, political parties can vary as much as the interests that form them. The number of party options presented can make it difficult for first time voters who want to select parties that represent their beliefs and have a chance of winning. If a party can successfully convince voters that their party will fulfill both goals, it gives them the opportunity to continue to be competitive in future election cycles. This research will focus on the new democracies' first competitive election, and it will look at the characteristics of parties that win votes and shares of seats in parliament from foundational elections in several countries.

Latin American will be the focal region for this study. Despite achieving independence in the early 19th century, in most cases, the region has undergone long periods of dictatorships and military interventions. Democracy in this region is a fairly new concept since elections have only recently become competitive over the past few decades. This will be the first step in studying party success in foundational elections. Subsequent studies will hopefully look at the political parties in new democracies in other regions. It will be interesting to see if the same factors that lead to success in the political parties studied in this research will also appear in other regions.

This research will look at elections in both Latin America and the Caribbean that were held shortly after independence or after a country had a long period under a dictatorial government. Within those elections, the winning political parties will be identified. Comparing these winning parties will help in understanding why some

parties are more successful than others in founding elections. From these comparisons, some characteristics will be identified as giving the winning parties an edge. This research will give us insights into how political parties perform in young democracies, and it can also be used to identify which groups and parties are likely to win and govern during a country's early years as a democratic state.

Literature Review

The concept of viability will influence a party's initial success in a new democracy. However, viability is not easily determined in foundational elections. What is available to voters in these elections are the political parties that successfully make themselves familiar. Parties that are likely to be familiar are those with a historical presence in the country and who identify themselves with the issues that most concern voters: namely, the transition to democracy. There are other influences to electoral success that are discussed.

Viability

Several Latin American countries have had long instances of authoritarian governments after obtaining their independence. There have been few instances of competitive elections before the 1960s. After this initial wave of elections, countries went through periods where there were either civilian governments or military governments. This behavior occurred until the second wave of competitive elections swept the region in the 1980s. This political history is said to have influenced voter mobilization and allowed manipulation by elites to frustrate the democratization process (Kostadinova, 2007). Compared to other regions, Latin America has had a gradual democratization process, which in turn slowed party development and party system institutionalization (Dix, 1992).

When Latin American countries began to steadily democratize, voters within these countries faced what people in new democracies face. Voters would like to vote for a party that is deemed viable. Voters determine party viability as the historical electoral performance of the party (Tavits, 2008). Voters are inclined to vote for parties that are viable even if it results in them voting for a party that does not align with their views. They do this despite the presence of an alternative party that might align more with their views but might not be as viable as another party. When a foundational election takes place, party viability has not been established for the new parties. The chances for any new party to be successful in the first election are about the same as for any other new party. Usually, in a foundational election, voters do not have the democratic experience to easily determine which party is more viable than another in a competitive election.

Political parties and the old regime

In foundational elections, the only parties that may have a history are those that have a relationship with the old regime. Old regimes in Latin America were dictators and military rulers as well as the dominant parties that supported them. A party's historical connections to an old regime can give them an advantage.

The advantage to being a familiar party in a foundational election stems from party institutionalization. Party institutionalization can describe a party that has developed its electoral history and legacy within a country. In Latin America, this has been a gradual phenomenon. Latin America in the 1990s had parties that could be seen as institutionalized or in the process of becoming so. Dix uses the criteria Samuel Huntington put forth: adaptability, complexity, autonomy, and coherence (Dix, 1992). Other items that link to this aspect of party development are party origins, resources, party leadership, factionalism, clientelism, and external sponsorship (Randall, 2002). Institutionalization takes time and ultimately gives the party or group recognition as a part of a country's political identity. Party institutionalization helps parties appear viable to the voter.

When foundational elections occur, the only parties that have the possibility of being institutionalized are those parties that are linked with the previous regime. These parties may have political elites that were associated with the previous regime and are perceived to be so when the foundational election occurs. Another way a party is linked to the old regime is if the party existed prior to the first competitive election in the country. The parties would have participated in the legislatures under a military rule or dictatorship. At the time, these legislatures would have nominal influence in government. When the democracy experiences its first competitive election and these old regime parties survive the transition, they may participate. The party may be advertised as the only one with governing experience. Depending on the popularity of the old regime, a party's relationship with the old regime may be beneficial to their success in the election.

However, the old regime may be unpopular based on its history in the country or how the transition from the old regime's dominance to competitive elections took place. Opposition to the old regime may have been the catalyst for the transition to a true democracy. If this opposition manages to transform itself into a political party, the advantage may be theirs in a foundational election. If the opposition to the old regime had existed for a long period of time, it is possible that the opposition may have experienced institutionalization. If this is the case and the old regime is unpopular, the advantage the old regime parties had may instead go to the party viewed as the opposition. After the election, parties with strong party institutionalization can play a central role in future government policy (Randall, 2007).

The big issue

In foundational elections, according to Tavits, parties do not know the issues that will excite the electorate the most and their platforms can be broad at first. As time passes, parties can gain votes by politicizing issues and honing their platforms around issues that mobilize and gain the support of voters. It is not just a matter of a party presenting their core issues, but of taking on the issues that matter most to the electorate (Tavits, 2008). This increases a party's competitiveness by signaling to voters what they represent, by shaping the issues that matter in the country, and by eliminating parties that are potential substitutes. Ideological consolidation in a party can be as helpful to the party system's consolidation as the institutions of the democracy (Horowitz, 2005). It may be possible that politicizing issues can be beneficial for a party in a foundational election. The transition to democracy itself may be the issue of most concern in a foundational election. A political party's relationship with the old regime is an issue that matters to voters in a foundational election. Will the party be the old regime's legacy in the new democracy or is the party opposed to the old regime's ideals? There may be other issues that can mobilize the electorate of a fresh democracy. If a party can successfully politicize these issues to its advantage, they can lead to the party's success on Election Day.

Other influences on electoral success

The makeup of the election system and the election rules can influence party competitiveness in foundational elections. Election rules and the electoral system are considered costs in party formation. Party formation costs have fundamental effects on electoral competition (Birnie, 2001). These are costs that political elites have to weigh before they have a party enter the race. Requirements such as vote thresholds, signature requirements for registration, monetary deposits or fines, and post-election rules can shut out parties from early elections or make them noncompetitive in subsequent ones. Electoral rules can determine the fate of new parties that are especially sensitive to electoral barrier costs. Like electoral rules, the electoral system can also play a role in determining which parties win and lose. Proportional representation is ideal for smaller parties that are new, whereas other electoral systems favor larger parties that can afford national campaigns (Tavits, 2008). Proportional systems by nature have members elected by the amount of the total vote the party or party member gets. A party only needs to get a part of the vote versus a majority of the vote. This system allows for more parties to be represented, especially in multi-member districts. Both electoral regulations and the electoral system are factors that influence the electoral permissiveness.

It has been shown that culture can play a role in a country's democratization; at times, it is a major role (Linder, 2005). Political parties can also use the cultural makeup of the country to their advantage. A part of a country's cultural identity is the cleavages in it. These include socioeconomic groups and ethnic groups. Among ethnic groups, there are ethnic cleavages that vary by race, religion, language, and others. According to Birnie, ethnic cleavages can play a role in relieving the voter's problem selecting a party. Despite voters having very little information to help them select viable parties in a foundational election, voters that identify with an ethnic group will seek a party that is friendly to that group. A party can decide to embrace an ethnic identity, which in turn signals a voter within that ethnic group to support that party. In a foundational election, this may lead to a party having an immediate share of potential voters. Not all ethnic cleavages yield the same level of immediate support, however. Language has been shown to stabilize parties in the more immediate term than religion and race (Birnie, 2007). Nevertheless, ethnic groups have been shown to identify with parties early on.

Literature review summary

The concept of viability does not explain party success in foundational elections. There are other ways that help a party appear to be viable. Parties that have undergone institutionalization and have received solid identities prior to the foundational election have an advantage. Parties that are likely to show this are parties that are linked to the old regime or a long-standing opposition to that regime. Parties that successfully identify themselves with the same social movement that lead to the transition to democracy or competitive elections may have an advantage, too. This sense of viability can serve as a comparative advantage in a field of parties trying to get the vote from an electorate that has never experienced competitive elections. There are factors that influence electoral success. A country's choice of electoral system, proportional versus majority representation, sets the stage as to whether small parties or large parties will succeed. Parties who align with an ethnic or socioeconomic group may prove to be successful in certain electorates.

Hypothesis and Methodology

This research will attempt to identify the factors that lead to party success in foundational elections. This research considers viability to be an important concept that helps determine which independent variables lead to successful representation and vote share. The voter needs to know electoral history to determine the viability of a party (Tavits, 2008). In a foundational election, this is limited or not available to the voter. In two hypotheses, we look at two variables that will help parties overcome the lack of electoral history. These two hypotheses look at two variables that reflect groups that may have a political history prior to the foundational election. Therefore, viability can be considered a motivating concept for voters. The following hypotheses cover what this research sees as the important variables leading to some parties being more successful than others.

Hypothesis 1

If the political party is linked with the previous regime, and the government in the previous regime was popular, then the party will more likely be successful than other parties in the foundational election.

This hypothesis looks at one group that may have some electoral history or at least some political history. This allows a voter to view a party as potentially viable, and it gives the party an advantage over its competitors. Parties with a connection to the previous regime can tout their experience in governing the country as the reason to reinstate them into power. This likely will only have sway with an electorate that sees the outgoing regime and its leaders positively. A popular old regime will continue its legacy in the young democracy.

Hypothesis 2

If the political party is linked to opposing the previous regime, and the government in the previous regime is unpopular, then the party will more likely be successful than other parties in the foundational election.

This hypothesis looks at another group that may have electoral history or political history. Voters could view an organized opposition to the old regime as viable because this party/organization has had more time to be judged by the electorate. In a foundational election, this may give the party an advantage over other political parties who have not had time to establish their history. The advantage depends on the popularity of the old regime. If the old regime is viewed unfavorably, the opposition to the government will gain.

Methodology

A foundational election for this study is defined as the first election in the most recent series of competitive elections in the country. This can occur immediately after a country's independence or after an authoritarian or military intervention (Birnie, 2007).

Party success will be defined as the vote share and the seat share in the parliament the party received in the foundational election. The greater the amount of votes and seats it receives in the parliament, the more successful the party. This research will examine the political parties that participated in the foundational election. Data for this will come from the Constituency Level Election Archive and from official election commissions.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 involve the popularity of the government in the previous regime. This will be decided on several fronts. If the transition to a democracy or a competitive election happened due to the old government's own insistence, then the transition could have happened peacefully, and the government might be confident that it has the good will of the electorate. Otherwise, the transition can happen against the government's wishes through violent means or by popular and foreign pressure. The tone of the media reports and campaign literature around the time of the foundational election can reveal whether the outgoing government is popular or not.

Determining the affiliation of a party to the previous regime will be decided in several ways. The party could have supported the previous regime and was kept in power through nominal elections. This qualification will be determined through analysis of the political history of the country. Another indicator is whether or not the party leadership contains members that have held high profile positions in the old government and are seen as continuing that government's authority/legacy. This qualification will be identified through the party's literature and the media at the time of the foundational election.

Hypothesis 2 mentions a party in opposition to the regime. The party could be one that has managed to embody the social movement that lead to the transition to a democracy or competitive elections against the old government's wishes. This can be identified by looking at campaign literature and the media at the time. The party can also be perceived as having a history of opposition to the old government, whether as a formal political party during the old regime or not. This can be identified with a study of the political history of the country. Each case would qualify the party to be a party in opposition to the old regime.

Two Cases: Mexico and Brazil

Mexico and Brazil are appropriate places to test. They have been the two largest countries in Latin America in terms of population. Both foundational elections were recent and occurred within a few years of each other. To identify a country's foundational election, I use the country's POLITY score (Marshall, 2002), where a positive score indicates a more democratic country and a negative score indicates a more autocratic country. Brazil's foundational election was in 1986 when its POLITY score was a 7. Mexico's foundational election was in 1994 with a score of 4. Prior to these years, their scores were not positive numbers. They are also the first elections in the latest string of elections with positive scores.

Both countries have political parties that participated in their foundational elections, which can clearly be identified as parties that represented the old regime prior to the foundational election. Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) had held power for over half a century in Mexico. The country was under single party rule with limited participation by other parties. Brazil, prior to its foundational election, was under military rule. The political party representing the interests of the military was named ARENA. When the foundational election occurred in 1986, ARENA renamed itself and was called Partido Democratico Social (PDS) (Comparative Political Parties, 2011).

There were several political parties identified as the opposition to the old regimes, but they were also political parties that managed to be identified as the primary opposition in both Brazil and Mexico. In Mexico, the PAN and the PRD are the opposition parties. The PAN had been around for several decades as well and became increasingly aggressive in elections in the 1980s. By 1994, the PAN is recognized as the primary opposition to the PRI's rule in Mexico. The PRD is a political party that split from the PRI due to its different approach to economic matters. In 1994, it was seen as opposing the PRI. Brazil's major opposition political parties are the PMDB and the PFL. Under Brazil's military government, a token opposition party was allowed to exist and was known as MDB. When the old regime was removed and competitive elections allowed, the MDB changed its name to PMDB. During military rule and by the 1986 election, PMDB was identified as the primary party politically opposing the legacy of the military government. It is important to note that another party, the PFL, was made up of certain parts of the old ARENA party. However, by 1986 the PFL allied with PMDB and campaigned against the PDS and the military's legacy.

I looked at different indicators of popularity for the old regime prior to the foundational elections in Mexico and Brazil. In Mexico, there was the Zapatista rebellion to the PRI and Mexico's involvement in NAFTA. The PRI's presidential candidate was assassinated and polls taken at the time showed the party mostly being viewed as unfavorable (McCann, 1998). Brazil's old regime popularity could be seen through the election results of the two political parties allowed to exist. ARENA's vote totals had been declining whereas the MDB vote total was increasing. Before Brazil transitioned to democracy, it seemed ARENA barely maintained a majority vote. The old regimes in Mexico and Brazil were both unpopular when their foundational elections occurred.

According to my hypothesis, if the old regime is unpopular, the political parties identifying themselves as the opposition party to the old regime should be the most successful. The election of 1994 in Mexico shows the PRI

wining 50.2% of the vote, the PAN 25.8%, and the PRD 16.7%. The PRI maintained the majority, but only barely. In Brazil's election of 1986 the PDS received 7.9% of the vote, PMDB had 47.8%, and the PFL 17.7%. In Brazil, we see that the opposition was the most successful and the PFL, although it had ties to the old regime, received more vote share than the PDS (Nohlan, 2005).

Based on the results of these two foundational elections, we see that the hypotheses explain the results of Brazil but not of Mexico. In Brazil, we see that opposition party had a large vote share. Despite how a party originated, the parties that effectively campaigned as opposition parties had more votes. This was during a year when the old regime was unpopular. In Mexico's case, the PRI retained a majority of the vote. However, the PAN had increased its vote share from previous elections and subsequently received the majority of votes in 2000. It can be said that the PRI, although unpopular, was still considered the only viable alternative by the voters. The voters did not realize the electoral system in Mexico would allow them to vote the PAN into power if they had wanted to.

Future Directions

The case studies show that the hypotheses could explain election success for political parties participating in foundational elections. The next step is to test these hypotheses in several countries throughout Latin America. It would be interesting to also see if this question can be applied to other regions in the world. The Arab spring has developed democracies currently or recently experiencing their foundational elections. Countries in Eastern Europe did not have competitive elections until the end of the 20th century. African nations did not declare independence until the 1960s and would also be regions to test the hypotheses. Most countries are new to democracy and information about their foundational elections is available, which makes exploring this research question possible. It would be interesting to see if the hypotheses can explain electoral success in subsequent elections beyond the foundational one.

There is a final hypothesis that should be explored in future research. If the political party seeks to align itself with an ethnic group (language, religion, race), and the electoral system is permissive, then the party will more likely be successful than other parties in the foundational election.

A party that aligns with an ethnic group helps voters who belong to that ethnic group (Birbir, 2007). The affiliation signals voters that despite not having an electoral history to judge the new parties viability, they will have a party that represents their interests based on a common affiliation. In the absence of electoral history, people may replace their search for a competent party to a search for a party that they share something in common with. Ethnic groups are important cleavages in society, and the cleavages can be extended politically. Political parties, especially new parties, may position themselves to claim a part of the vote share where ethnic groups make up a sizable amount of the population in a constituency.

However, ethnic populations may be small and concentrated in certain regions of the country. Because of this, it may be of little value for large national parties to court ethnic groups. The electoral rules may also be arranged in a way that dissuades parties to align themselves to particular segments of society. Proportional electoral systems are seen as friendly to smaller parties that can target regions. Proportional electoral systems are seen to also be more permissive than majority-based systems. These systems require fewer regulations, such as signature thresholds and monetary deposits, and encourage parties to compete nationally. So this hypothesis may be more suited to cases where the system is more permissive.

This research has focused on Latin America. Future research would include the Caribbean as well. The combination of the two regions will provide examples of proportional representation and majority representation. Within these two types, there are varying levels of permissiveness. A proportional system is regarded to be permissive to new parties and small parties. Therefore, it is important that both proportional systems and majority systems are included in the case selection.

This hypothesis concerns ethnic groups. Ethnic groups can be varied. It is a very broad term. This research will look at the main ethnic groups, namely ethnic groups based on language, religion, or race. Ethnic groups, though important segments of society, may not be encompassing enough in a country as a whole to constitute a majority of the population. Therefore, small parties that represent segments of the country can bring forth political parties that embrace ethnic groups. Future research may further support Birbir's conclusions showing language to be a more immediate benefit to political parties than religion and race, which take more time to set in the electorate.

To determine if the party is affiliated with a particular ethnic group, future research can look at the campaign literature of the party. Finding news reports and public endorsements from the ethnic groups will further determine if the party was aligned with an ethnic group.

Democracy is a new living situation for millions in the world today. The vast majority of countries are democratic countries now. The democratization of the Middle East is the latest chapter of a world that is

increasingly democratic. As constitutions are ratified and elections are scheduled, political parties form and compete with one another for the privilege of forming a country's first democratic governments. Of these political parties, it would be fascinating to know what winning formula a party must have to successfully convince a voting public with limited experience in democracies. This research identifies a party's relationship with a previous regime as a path to electoral success. If there is a winning formula, political scientists can more easily determine likely governing interests from a foundational election and the future direction of young democracies.

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