Why Not Anti-Populist Parties?
Theory with Evidence from the Andes and Thailand

Political parties are critical for democracy, but where do they come from? Recent analyses, building on classic works like Lipset and Rokkan (1967) and Huntington (1968), show that episodes of extraordinary conflict and polarization spawn enduring parties.¹ Such episodes—civil war, authoritarian repression, populist mobilization—furnish raw materials for party building. Polarization generates differentiated political identities. Extra-institutional conflict motivates groups to develop ground organizations. Adversity weeds out careerists, selecting for ideologues. Intragroup shared struggle and intergroup animosity and grievance cement in-group loyalties, discouraging defection. Through these mechanisms, polarization and conflict birth parties with distinct brands, territorial infrastructures, committed activists, and cohesion.

Often, such episodes produce party systems. In Latin America, civil wars spawned stable two-party systems in Uruguay, Colombia and (more recently) El Salvador, as warring sides evolved into parties after conflict ceased. In Brazil and Chile, bureaucratic authoritarianism generated stable right and left parties founded by the supporters and opponents of outgoing dictatorships.²

It is noteworthy, then, that populism typically generates just one strong party: a populist, not an anti-populist, one.³ Where successful, populists—defined as personalistic political outsiders who electorally mobilize the popular classes against the political and/or economic elite⁴—almost invariably polarize society and may engender sustained, even violent conflict between populist and anti-populist forces.⁵ Numerous populist parties have emerged from such conflicts. In the mid-20th century, populism produced Argentina’s Peronist party (PJ) and Peru’s American Revolutionary Popular Alliance (APRA). More recently, Thai and Andean populist movements have evolved, or are evolving, into institutionalized parties. Bolivia’s Movement
toward Socialism (MAS) has established itself as a perennial force, and Venezuela’s Chavismo, Peru’s Fujimorismo and Thailand’s Pheu Thai Party (PTP) are doing the same.\textsuperscript{6}

Although these populist movements have triggered intense opposition from middle- and high-income sectors,\textsuperscript{7} and although anti-populist forces have occasionally challenged populists electorally, no competitive anti-populist party has definitively taken root in the above-cited cases.\textsuperscript{8} Why?

This question matters for a few reasons. First, where populists are electorally potent, electorally uncompetitive anti-populist forces may take extra-electoral or undemocratic measures to advance their interests. Such measures include coups (e.g., Thailand in 2006 and 2014),\textsuperscript{9} police rebellions,\textsuperscript{10} the proscription or dissolution of populist parties,\textsuperscript{11} territorial autonomy movements,\textsuperscript{12} strikes,\textsuperscript{13} protests,\textsuperscript{14} attacks on public buildings,\textsuperscript{15} and the creation of tutelary privileges and authoritarian enclaves.\textsuperscript{16} Second, where anti-populist forces are fragmented and impotent, populist executives face fewer checks and may subvert procedural democracy (e.g., Argentina in the mid-1950s; Peru in the 1990s; Thailand in the first decade of the 2000s; contemporary Turkey, Hungary, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador).\textsuperscript{17} Third, where anti-populist parties do not take root, countries may develop asymmetric party systems dominated by a single party of populist origin (e.g., Peronism, perhaps Fujimorismo).

This article argues that successful populism, by its nature, impedes anti-populist party building. Populism, at its core, is anti-elite, anti-establishment politics. Successful populists discredit elites and cripple institutionalized parties. Since anti-populist leaders typically \textit{belong} to the tarnished elite, they are unpopular where populists succeed. Moreover, since successful populists discredit a wide spectrum of elites and organizations, anti-populist leaders are heterogeneous in ideological and class terms, preventing cohesion. Additionally, party system breakdown
allows populists to dominate elections and concentrate power, weakening anti-populists’
incentive to prioritize elections. Insofar as anti-populists do invest in elections, they often have
access to party “substitutes” (e.g., finance, media), weakening their electoral incentive to invest
in parties.18 Due to these factors, robust anti-populist parties rarely emerge.

This argument, however, has a temporal dimension. During the initial years of populist
government, conditions for anti-populist party building are virtually prohibitive. Yet, where
populists govern for extended periods, conditions tend to become less unfavorable. Over time,
anti-populist forces commit to elections and undergo leadership renovation. Incumbent populists
face crisis, scandal, voter fatigue, and the loss of charismatic leaders. These circumstances do not
make successful anti-populist party building likely—just less unlikely. Robust anti-populist
parties may then emerge if additional facilitating factors are present.

The article supports these arguments by comparing four cases where populists have
recently taken power: Thailand, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. (See the online appendix for a
fifth case study, on Peru under President Alberto Fujimori.) In all four cases, as well as in the
Peruvian case, anti-populist parties did not emerge initially. In three cases, populists have
remained in power over a decade (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador). In one of these three
(Venezuela), an anti-populist party is likely emerging (Democratic Unity Roundtable [MUD]).

The article is organized in two sections. The first presents the theory. The second
illustrates the theory at work in the case studies. A brief conclusion addresses why in some
countries (Venezuela, Thailand) but not others (Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru), anti-populists have
organized coups in response to electoral domination.

**The Argument**
Party building is the process by which new parties become enduring, electorally relevant actors. Following Downs (1957), Sartori (1976), and recent publications, I define party minimally, as a group that competes in elections to place candidates in office. A case of successful party building is a new party that persists over time and consistently contends for national power. Operationally, it must win 20 percent of the vote in five consecutive national elections.

Populist leaders rarely invest in parties. Most gain popularity on anti-party appeals and resist creating parties that could limit their autonomy (e.g., Argentina’s Juan Perón, Peru’s Alberto Fujimori, Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez, Ecuador’s Rafael Correa). Yet, however unintentionally, many populists spawn parties. Successful populists like Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre of Peru’s APRA, Perón, Fujimori and Chávez earned intense support from lower-income sectors while triggering intense opposition from middle- and high-income sectors. In Argentina, Peru, and (more recently) Venezuela, the result was prolonged, sometimes violent conflict between populist and anti-populist movements. These conflicts produced clear (albeit personalized) populist electoral brands, powerful populist identities and subcultures, and populist movements that fed into strong territorial organizations (Peronism, APRA; Chavismo, Fujimorismo).

Why do anti-populist parties not emerge from the same contexts? I argue that successful populism, by its very nature, inhibits anti-populist party building. Populism, at its core, is anti-elite, anti-establishment politics. Populists only attain power where elites and institutionalized parties have lost support, usually amid crisis. Campaigning populists group these elites and parties into a corrupt “establishment” and, where successful, discredit them. In government, populists maintain the rhetoric and orientation that catapulted them to office. Successful
populism thus tarnishes institutionalized partisan brands, leading to party system fragmentation. Elites defect from institutionalized parties in droves. Ambitious young politicians do not join institutionalized parties. New electoral vehicles and independent politicians proliferate. As Figure 1 illustrates, these processes have occurred dramatically in the Andes and, to a lesser extent, Thailand in the lead-up to and wake of populist victories.25

***Figure 1 about here***

To create a competitive, robust party, anti-populists—i.e., actors centrally and explicitly opposed to populists—must build from the wreckage of the establishment. Yet, they tend to have weak incentives and limited capacities to perform this task. Why?

_Incentives_

Amid populist ascendancy, party systems break down, and oppositions fracture. Opposition fragmentation allows populists, first, to dominate elections. As Figure 2 illustrates, successful populists typically dominate elections for at least a decade, repeatedly winning by wide margins.26 Opposition fragmentation allows populists, second, to concentrate power. Many populist figures, facing weak oppositions, become more authoritarian, using the state as a weapon against opposition groups and media and, to varying degrees, eroding democracy (e.g., Perón, Fujimori, Chávez, Morales, Correa, Thaksin).27

***Figure 2 about here***

These realities weaken anti-populists’ incentives for party building. Under conditions of electoral domination and authoritarian drift, anti-populists may conclude that they cannot win elections in the short term. Thus, they may de-prioritize elections and take extraelectoral action. Illustrative examples include the coup against Perón (1955); proscriptions of APRA and the Peronists (mid-20th century); the coup against Chávez (2002); anti-populist electoral boycotts in
Thailand (2006) and Venezuela (2006, 2017); territorial autonomy movements in Bolivia and Ecuador (first decade of the 2000s); and protests, judicial actions and coups in contemporary Thailand.

Insofar as anti-populists do invest in elections, they often have access to party “substitutes,” weakening their incentives for party building. Anti-populists’ elite connections virtually guarantee them generous financing. Anti-populists typically control mass media or receive favorable coverage; indeed, for anti-populists, media control may be a singularly valuable political asset. Paradoxically, this financial and media access inhibits party building. To compete electorally, anti-populists tend to rely on media and paid staffers, forgoing the work of activist recruitment and organization building.

**Capacities**

Anti-populists also have limited party building capacities. First, successful populists discredit a wide spectrum of elites and organizations spanning the left/right and capital/labor divides. Thus, anti-populist forces are ideologically and socioeconomically heterogeneous and have conflicting agendas. The result is low cohesion and incoherence (e.g., opponents of Peronism, Fujimorismo, Chavismo, MAS, Correa, Thaksin).

Second, populists only succeed where voters reject, even despise the establishment. Anti-populists belong to this tarnished elite and establishment. Absent leadership renovation—i.e., the emergence of leaders with new names, backgrounds and (often) complexions—anti-populist forces cannot easily avoid the “establishment” label. But leadership renovation takes time. Where populism succeeds, institutionalized parties crumble, but their leaders do not retire. Especially for younger leaders, politics is a living or vocation, and long careers lie ahead. These
figures typically stay in politics. But they cannot hide their names, backgrounds or complexions and thus have difficulty avoiding the “oligarchy” tag (e.g., Venezuela’s Leopoldo López). These realities limit anti-populist electoral success, particularly among popular sectors (e.g., Argentina, mid-20th century; Peru, 1990s; contemporary Thailand, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador).

**The Temporal Dimension**

Anti-populist party building, then, is almost prohibitively difficult during the first decade of populist government. This first decade is consequential; often, it is the only window for anti-populist party building, as many populists govern for less, or little more, than a decade (e.g., Perón, Fujimori, Thaksin).

Yet, where populist movements govern for a longer period (e.g., contemporary Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador), conditions for anti-populist party building become less unfavorable. Why? First, when populists take power, anti-populists may contest populist rule, initially, by nonelectoral means (e.g., protests, coups). If these measures fail—and they often do (e.g., Venezuela, 2002-2004; Bolivia, 2007-2009)—anti-populists typically adapt by prioritizing elections. Second, the passage of time leads to anti-populist leadership renovation, as older generations give way to newer generations less connected to the establishment. Third, over time, governing populists will likely face scandal, crisis, voter fatigue, or the loss of charismatic leaders. Such developments create electoral opportunities for anti-populists.

So, where populists govern for long periods, conditions for anti-populist party building become less unfavorable. Robust anti-populist parties then have a reasonable chance of emerging if additional facilitating factors are present. What are some such factors?
I will highlight the variable of *intensely polarized, adverse origins*. Where governments are illiberal and repressive, and where polarization between government and opposition is intense, opposition forces tend to have stronger incentives and higher capacities for party building. This argument is useful for explaining not only the emergence of Venezuela’s MUD, but also, more broadly, cases of successful party building across the contemporary developing world.  

How do polarized, adverse origins (paradoxically) facilitate successful party building? Intense polarization between two groups generates cohesion within both groups and facilitates partisan brand differentiation, and hence successful brand development, for both groups. Under illiberal governments, opposition forces have a strong electoral incentive to invest in grassroots organization given their limited access to state resources and mass media. In addition, state repression, provided that it is not extreme, often has the unintended effect of hardening the opposition’s collective identity and generating opposition cohesion. Finally, insofar as opposition forces operate under adverse, threatening circumstances, they attract a more ideologically committed membership and leadership, as careerists tend to defect or not to join in the first place. Notably, all the above conditions hold for the opponents of Chavismo in contemporary Venezuela. Not coincidentally, the anti-populist MUD is likely taking root.  

**The Argument at Work**  

This section supports the above argument by comparing four countries where populists have recently taken power: Bolivia (Morales), Ecuador (Correa), Venezuela (Chávez), and Thailand (Thaksin Shinawatra). In these four cases—as well as in Peru under President Alberto Fujimori (see online appendix)—no successful anti-populist party emerged during the first
decade of populist government. In three of the cases (Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador), populists have remained in power longer than a decade. In one of these three (Venezuela), an anti-populist party is likely taking root. I will apply the argument to explain (1) why anti-populist party building has not occurred in Thailand, Bolivia, or Ecuador (or Peru [see online appendix]), and (2) why a robust anti-populist party is likely emerging in Venezuela.

Sources of Populism in the Andes and Thailand

The Andes and Thailand provide fertile terrain for populism. Populism thrives where voters respond favorably to anti-elite appeals. Latin America is the world’s most unequal region and is characterized, particularly in the Andes, by state weakness, as indicated by poor tax collection, rampant homicide, deficient public services, and vast ungoverned spaces. Similarly, Thailand, historically, has had the highest Gini coefficient in Southeast Asia, and basic services do not reach many poor Thais.

Inequality breeds popular resentment of economic elites. Deficient services generate popular dissatisfaction with political elites. Where these ills exist and politicians do not address them, populists often fill the representational vacuum. In the Andes and Thailand, chronic inequality and state weakness, combined with short-term crisis, have led voters to reject institutionalized parties (Figure 1).

Unlike classic Latin American populists, who represented organized popular classes (e.g., unions) and promoted statist policies, neopopulists in the Andes and Thailand represent the unorganized poor (urban and rural) and are programatically heterogeneous. They include statist figures like Chávez, neoliberals like Fujimori, and individuals who, in different ways, fall between these poles (e.g., Correa, Morales, Thaksin).
All the leaders featured in the article and appendix were outsiders who campaigned against the establishment. They belonged to new parties, or to young parties that had not experienced dictatorship or major crisis. Their co-partisans and policy advisers came from outside the establishment. They rose amid crisis, popular discontent and party system decline (Thailand) or collapse (the Andes) [Figure 1]. In all five cases, democratic institutions were weak at the time of populist ascendancy.

The leaders featured in the article and appendix took office over a 16-year span (1990-2006): Fujimori in 1990, Chávez in 1998, Thaksin in 2001, Morales in 2005 and Correa in 2006. They won initial victories in landslides over institutionalized parties (see Figure 2). They were electorally dominant (Figure 2). They shifted, to varying degrees, in an authoritarian direction. Their political success largely rested on economic performance: under Fujimori, hyperinflation ended and growth resumed; under Thaksin, Thailand speedily recovered from the Asian financial crisis; and under Chávez, Morales and Correa, commodity booms bolstered growth and financed social policy expansions.


The below case studies and online appendix show that in all five countries, successful populism initially impeded anti-populist party building. In Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador, conditions for anti-populist party building have become less unfavorable as populists have persisted in power. Only in Venezuela, however, have additional facilitating factors—namely, intense polarization and adversity for the opposition—furnished raw materials for party building.
Consequently, whereas anti-populist party building did not occur in Peru or Thailand and is unlikely to occur in Bolivia or Ecuador, a competitive anti-populist party, MUD, has progressed toward institutionalization in Venezuela.

The below case studies begin with Thailand because, in Thailand, anti-populists have repeatedly defeated populists nonelectorally (e.g., through coups) and thus have not needed to win elections to neutralize populism. This fact distinguishes Thailand analytically from the Andean cases, where anti-populists, at least ultimately, have sought power electorally.

**Thailand**

In 2001, amid an economic downturn and eroding support for the institutionalized, governing Democrat Party, Thai political outsider and telecommunications mogul, Thaksin Shinawatra, led his new party, Thais Love Thais (TRT), to general election victory. Thaksin’s nationalist, redistributive economic program partially accounted for his popular appeal, but he drew “even more” attention “because of his novelty…and…wealth.”

Thaksin governed from 2001 to 2006, was deposed in a 2006 military coup, and fled Thailand. His co-partisans retook office in 2007 but were quickly ousted judicially. In 2011, his co-partisans were elected again, and his sister, Yingluck, became prime minister. In 2014, Yingluck’s government was toppled in a second military coup. A junta, the National Council for Peace and Order, currently governs Thailand.

Although institutionalized parties did not collapse in the wake of Thaksin’s ascent, they declined. The Democrat Party lost substantial support and has not challenged pro-Thaksin parties electorally. A competitive anti-populist party remains elusive.
Party System Decline

Thaksin’s 2001 victory hurt Thailand’s institutionalized parties (see Figure 1). After winning over half the national vote in 1995 and 1996, these parties garnered under a third in 2001. Thaksin’s populist transformation in office further damaged the partisan establishment. Due to a recovering economy, redistributive policies, and his media-savvy, folksy style, Thaksin became a popular prime minister. Elites defected from the Democrats and other institutionalized parties. The Democrats’ constituency shrunk. Thailand’s party system became increasingly fragmented [see Figures 1 and 2].

Incentives

Since Thaksin’s 2001 victory, anti-populists have had weak incentives to invest in electoral competition, for two reasons. First, populist electoral dominance has rendered the prospect of anti-populist victory remote. Second, the nonelectoral, often anti-democratic strategies pursued by anti-populists have succeeded.

Before the 2014 military coup, TRT and its successors, the People Power Party (PPP) and For Thais Party (PTP), dominated elections for over a decade (see Figure 2). This dominance was made possible, partly, by opposition fragmentation. Opposition fragmentation also facilitated Thaksin’s authoritarian shift as prime minister. Thaksin undertook “a broad offensive against critical media coverage” and adopted a “hawkish approach” in confronting southern Thai insurgents. He “encouraged people to draw parallels between himself” and past “authoritarian military leaders.”

Since Thaksin’s 2005 reelection—a “complete and utter landslide”—the opposition has de-prioritized elections and repeatedly taken nonelectoral measures to neutralize Thaksin’s movement. In 2006, opposition leaders, no longer considering elections “a viable option,”
organized protests calling for Thaksin’s resignation. Thaksin called snap elections for April 2006. After Thaksin won resoundingly, the judiciary voided the election. A new election was scheduled for October 2006. Weeks before the election, the military toppled Thaksin and dissolved TRT, “clearly want[ing] to halt the electoral process.” Thaksin fled Thailand. New elections were held in December 2007. Again, the populists (PPP) won comfortably. Shortly afterward, the judiciary deposed Prime Minister Samak Sundaravej and dissolved PPP. Between 2009 and 2011, a military-installed, Democrat-led government “used violence to suppress the electorate’s political demands and…derail the electoral process.” New elections were held in 2011. Yet again, the populists (PTP) won in a landslide. Yingluck became prime minister. In 2013, Yingluck’s government proposed amnesty for Thaksin and those involved in 2010 pro-Thaksin protests. Democrat-aligned grassroots forces responded with mass protests for over half a year. The Democrat parliamentary bloc resigned, leading Yingluck to dissolve her government. New elections were held in February 2014. The judiciary invalidated the election before the results were announced. In May 2014, the judiciary deposed Yingluck. Two weeks later, the military seized power, suspended the constitution and declared martial law. In January 2015, a military-appointed assembly banned Yingluck from politics for five years. Yingluck fled Thailand instead of awaiting the verdict of the trial. A junta, the National Council for Peace and Order, currently governs Thailand.

In summary, then, Thai populists, over roughly a decade, repeatedly dominated elections, and anti-populists repeatedly seized power from them through military and judicial action. Thailand’s anti-populists have not needed to win elections to neutralize populism. Insofar as Thai anti-populists have invested in elections, they have had access to substitutes (e.g., finance, media). Economic elites have generously financed the opposition, and
Thaksin’s offensive against opposition media was limited and short-lived; mainstream media, for example, supported the 2006 coup and Democrats’ 2011 election campaign.

**Capacities**

Since Thaksin’s 2001 victory, anti-populists have had limited party building capacity. Heterogeneity and strategic differences have prevented anti-Thaksin forces from creating a lasting alliance. Thaksin’s opponents cut across class and urban-rural lines. Their grievances span the “economic, social, political and cultural” spheres. Anti-populist players include dominant factions of the monarchy, royalist bureaucracy and military; once-protected industries; Democrats; smaller parties; most of the urban middle class; public unions; and numerous urban and rural movements and organizations that are popular or serve the popular classes. These players have not coalesced in a meaningful, enduring way. For example, elite and grassroots groups formed the People’s Alliance for Democracy (PAD) to demand Thaksin’s resignation, but they frequently conflicted, and several important grassroots groups declined to join. After Thaksin’s 2006 ouster, anti-Thaksin forces quickly splintered, as “the generals showed themselves to be in contradiction to social and political aspirations of many in the anti-Thaksin movement.” Subsequent cooperation between the repressive, Democrat-led government (2009-2011) and the military and entrenched bureaucracy was based on a temporary desire to neutralize Thaksin’s movement, not on deeper, strategic interests.

**The Situation at Present**

After taking power in 2014, the junta, National Council for Peace and Order, banned political activity and sent regime critics to “reeducation camps.” In August 2016, under a
repressive climate, Thai voters approved a new constitution that granted the military extensive powers and privileges and, through a new voting system, reduced the likelihood of any party holding a parliamentary majority. These measures, along with Thaksin’s continuing exile and Yingluck’s current political ban, may temporarily keep Thai populism at bay. But Thailand’s next general election is expected to take place in mid-2018. If Thaksin’s movement maintains itself, the uneasy relationship between Thai populism and democracy is likely to persist.

Bolivia

In 2005, Evo Morales won Bolivia’s presidency in a context of stagnation, rising poverty and inequality, and unpopular neoliberal policies. Months before, President Sánchez de Lozada of the Revolutionary National Movement (MNR) had resigned in response to violent anti-government protests. Morales vowed in his campaign to reverse the recent neoliberal turn and combat centuries of colonial domination.

Morales and his party, Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) have held power since 2005. Despite significant polarization between populist and anti-populist forces, no competitive opposition party has taken root.57

Party System Collapse

Morales’s 2005 victory triggered the collapse of a partisan establishment already in serious decline. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the congressional seat share of Bolivia’s institutionalized parties58 fell to roughly 50 percent from over 90 percent in 1989 (Figure 1). In 2005, the institutionalized parties were decimated, winning under 10 percent of congressional seats. The top three presidential finishers, who together won roughly 90 percent of the vote,
belonged to new parties, not institutionalized ones. Of the three leading institutionalized parties, neither ADN nor MIR fielded a candidate, and MNR’s candidate won just 6 percent. The partisan establishment subsequently collapsed (Figure 1). Today, excluding MAS, personalistic vehicles and regional electoral organizations called “citizen groupings” \((\text{agrupaciones ciudadanas})\) predominate.

**Incentives**

Since Morales took office, the opposition has had weak incentives to prioritize elections due to MAS’s dominance. MAS won presidential and legislative landsides in 2005 and, in the 2006 constituent assembly election, more than tripled the vote share of its nearest competitor. Also in 2006, 60 percent of voters sided with MAS, rejecting a regional autonomy referendum initiated by eastern department leaders.

In this context, opposition sectors resorted to non-electoral strategies. From 2007 to 2009, violent regional autonomy protests intermittently racked Bolivia. Some legislators called for secession. A strong anti-populist party, Eaton (2016) notes, would have “[offered] more institutionalized means for the expression of territorial interests and demands.”

Although polarization has abated in recent years, MAS remains preeminent, while the opposition remains weak and fragmented. Through the mid-2010s, MAS and Morales dominated opponents in national and local elections (Figure 2).

Opposition weakness has facilitated a moderate authoritarian shift by Morales. Morales’s 2009 constitution increased state control of the hydrocarbon industry. His government has periodically repressed social movements, moderately suppressed opposition media, and used state funds to co-opt and outspend opponents. Morales packed Bolivia’s supreme court, which
allowed him to run for a third term, and despite losing a 2016 referendum that would have permitted him to run for a fourth term, Morales has stated his intention to stand for reelection in 2019.

Insofar as MAS opponents have invested in elections, they have had access to party substitutes, including substantial finance and, still, most of Bolivian mass media. This has further weakened party building incentives.

**Capacities**

Anti-MAS forces have had a limited capacity for party building since Morales took office. Elites from institutionalized parties remain politically active and have “obstructed processes of leadership renewal,” limiting the electoral appeal of anti-MAS forces. Divisions within and between the economic and political elite have impeded opposition cohesion. Although opposition governors have joined in national organizations and makeshift coalitions, personal rivalries have prevented these from stably cohering. Even within departments, including the opposition bastion, Santa Cruz, personal rivalries and left-right ideological divisions have led to extreme fragmentation among opponents of MAS. Finally, anti-populists’ access to mobilizing structures is limited. Due to internal conflict, the once powerful Pro Santa Cruz Committee (CPSC) has recently declined; Eaton (2016) considers this a critical factor in the failure of anti-populist party building in Bolivia’s eastern departments (406-408).

**The Situation at Present**

Morales, who took office in 2006, will hold the Bolivian presidency until at least 2020, at which point he, or another MAS leader, may remain in power. With the passage of more than a
decade under populist government, conditions for anti-populist party building have become less unfavorable. In particular, anti-MAS forces are now committed to electoral competition, and MAS, at least at present, is no longer as popular as it was; as noted above, Morales lost a 2016 referendum that would have permitted him to run for a fourth presidential term.

Nevertheless, anti-MAS forces have produced no national leaders and are still highly fragmented. To date, there has been virtually no opposition coalition building at the national level. Additionally, anti-MAS forces are unlikely to face the degree of illiberalism and repression that anti-Chavistas have recently faced in Venezuela (about which more below). Prospects for anti-populist party building in Bolivia thus remain dim.

Ecuador

In 2006, after a decade of extreme governmental instability, and in a context of economic crisis, unpopular neoliberal policies, and eroding trust in institutionalized parties, Ecuador’s voters elected Rafael Correa president. Correa was a political outsider who portrayed himself as a common man and denounced neoliberalism and Ecuador’s *partidocracia* (“partyocracy”).

Correa governed Ecuador from 2006 to 2017, whereupon his co-partisan and former vice president, Lenin Moreno, assumed office. To date, no viable opposition party has emerged.

Party System Collapse

Correa’s 2006 victory damaged Ecuador’s already declining institutionalized parties (Figure 1). Whereas in 2002, these parties won about two thirds of congressional seats, in 2006, they won about one third. After 2006, they virtually disappeared; their seat share fell to roughly one tenth in 2009 and below one twentieth in 2013. Today, Ecuador’s highly fluid party system
“increasingly resembles those of neighboring countries, Peru [see online appendix] and Bolivia.”

Personalistic vehicles and short-term coalitions have filled the electoral space that relatively stable parties once occupied.

Incentives

Since Correa took office, the opposition has had weak incentives to invest seriously in electoral competition due to populist electoral dominance. Opposition fragmentation has allowed Correa and his party, the Proud and Sovereign Fatherland (PAIS) Alliance, to win elections repeatedly and convincingly. Correa won the 2006, 2009 and 2013 presidential elections in landslides; the opposition progressively weakened during this time, and Correa’s margins of victory steadily grew (Figure 1). Correa’s movement won four additional elections between 2007 and 2011 (Figure 1). Until 2015, Correa’s approval rating never fell below 50 percent.

Opposition disunity facilitated a moderate authoritarian shift on Correa’s part. Correa’s 2008 constitution “[vastly]” concentrated power within the executive branch and permitted consecutive reelection. His administration “ended judicial autonomy,” and the PAIS-controlled legislature “became a rubber stamp.” “Every conceivable angle of policy making has become subject to greater executive control.” Correa also clamped down, to a limited degree, on opposition civil society and media.

Correa’s electoral dominance and growing power diverted opposition activity from national elections. Anti-populist forces in the state of Guayas resisted Correa, largely, by prioritizing regional autonomy and subnational politics. Meanwhile, mass protest, some of it violent, recurred from 2009 onward.
Insofar as the opponents of Correa and PAIS have invested in elections, they have relied heavily on substitutes. The opposition has had consistent sources of elite funding since Correa’s initial victory in 2006. Until recently, mass media were overwhelmingly anti-Correa, and despite Correa’s recent crackdown, anti-PAIS forces retain substantial media access.

**Capacities**

The opposition to Correa has had a limited capacity for party building since Correa first took office. Anti-populist mobilizing structures are relatively weak—even weaker than in Bolivia. Longstanding elites still lead the opposition. Ideological differences and personal rivalries have undermined opposition cohesion and brand building. Opposition parties ranging from neoliberals and conservatives on the right to unions, environmental activists, indigenous groups, civil liberties organizations and students on the left have yet to coalesce in a meaningful, enduring fashion. With respect to internal divisions, PAIS opponents compare unfavorably even to Bolivia’s highly fragmented anti-populist forces.

**The Situation at Present**

Correa’s co-partisan and former vice president, Lenín Moreno, narrowly prevailed in the 2017 presidential election. Thus, PAIS, which came to power in 2006 with Correa’s initial presidential victory, will almost certainly remain the governing party until at least 2021. As in Bolivia, with the passage of time under populist government, conditions for anti-populist party building have become less unfavorable. Anti-PAIS forces are committed to the electoral process, and PAIS has become more politically vulnerable in the last couple of years. Correa’s approval rating fell after 2015, causing him to retract plans for a constitutional amendment that would
have allowed indefinite reelection. Ideological conflict between Correa and Moreno recently led to Moreno’s expulsion from PAIS and has divided the party.

Nevertheless, anti-populist party building in Ecuador remains unlikely. The opposition to PAIS has not produced a major national leader. Anti-PAIS forces remain highly fragmented, and there has been little movement toward meaningful coalition building at a national level. Notably, the opposition did not band together to defeat a vulnerable PAIS in the February 2017 general election.82 As in Bolivia, prospects for anti-populist party building thus remain dim.

**Venezuela**

Venezuela’s Hugo Chávez was a paradigmatic Latin American populist.83 In 1998, amid economic decline and party system breakdown, Chávez decisively won the Venezuelan presidency. He was the election’s most radical, untraditional candidate. Lower-middle-class, dark-skinned, and politically inexperienced, he called the elite a corrupt oligarchy and promised to write a new constitution and dissolve congress.

Chávez and his handpicked successor, Nicolás Maduro, have held the presidency since 1998. For years, no anti-Chavista party took root. Recently, however, such a party (MUD) likely has begun to consolidate.

**Party System Collapse**

Chávez’s 1998 victory accelerated the collapse of a partisan establishment84 in serious decline. Venezuela’s once-stable two-party system, consisting of Democratic Action (AD) and the Independent Electoral Political Organization Committee (COPEI), began to break down in the early 1990s after years of recession. Venezuela’s economic woes persisted through the
1990s, such that, remarkably, in the 1998 presidential election, AD and COPEI did not even field candidates, and every contender was an anti-establishment outsider. In the concurrent congressional election, AD and COPEI’s combined vote share fell to below 50 percent—from roughly 80 percent just five years earlier. AD and COPEI collapsed entirely after suffering additional defeats in 1999 and 2000 (Figure 1).

Incentives

For most of Chávez’s tenure, anti-Chavistas had weak incentives to invest in elections due to Chavismo’s electoral dominance. Chávez and his movement, facing a fragmented and weak opposition, won four national electoral landslides from 1998 to 2000. After Chávez’s resounding 1998 presidential victory, Chavista candidates won 92 percent of the 1999 constituent assembly vote. The resulting constitution passed with 72 percent voter approval. In 2000, Chávez won another presidential landslide, and his Fifth Republic Movement (MVR) defeated its nearest congressional competitor, AD, 44 to 16 percent.

Shortly after assuming office, Chávez shifted in an authoritarian direction. His 1999 constitution made him the most powerful president in Venezuelan history. It abolished the senate, weakened the legislature, and enhanced the state’s economic role, giving governments, especially presidents, increased economic power over society. It also eliminated public financing for parties. Crucially, it allowed Chávez to serve as president for up to thirteen years.

The opposition thus “turned increasingly to extra-institutional measures to contest Chávez’s rule….” A general strike in December 2001 failed to force Chávez’s resignation. A short-lived coup followed in April 2002. The opposition then organized a strike within the public oil company (PDVSA) that, again, failed to topple Chávez. Finally, the opposition forced a recall
referendum, but Chávez won in a landslide, causing the opposition coalition, Democratic Coordinator, to collapse. Chávez thus survived an onslaught of extra-electoral—and at times anti-democratic—assaults.

During this period, the opposition also participated in electoral contests but had access to party substitutes. Economic elites and business groups—including Venezuela’s largest business association, FEDECAMARAS—financed and helped to lead the opposition. Top private media outlets supported the anti-Chávez strikes and coup and assailed Chávez through the 2000s.87

*Capacities*

The opposition to Chavismo had a limited capacity for party building during most of Chávez’s tenure. Despite anti-Chavistas’ links to Venezuela’s largest labor and business confederations, which might have served as mobilizing structures, the opposition faced fundamental problems of brand building and cohesion. Chávez’s leading opponents belonged to the old elite; this was a serious, even prohibitive, electoral liability. The opposition was also heterogeneous in ideological and class terms, composed “of multiple sectors that did not always agree on many political issues—business and labor groups, civic organizations and parties, new parties and old parties, parental associations and teachers, and many former chavistas.”88 These “fragmented opposition forces repeatedly failed to coalesce behind a new party organization or political movement capable of challenging Chavismo in the electoral arena.”89

*The Emergence of MUD*

Over the last decade, however, prospects for anti-Chavista party building have brightened considerably. In part, this is because, as in Bolivia and Ecuador, the passage of time under
populist government has led to less unfavorable conditions for anti-populist party building. Chavismo has now controlled Venezuela’s executive branch for nearly two decades—significantly longer than any other populist movement reviewed in this article. Since failing to oust Chávez extra-electorally in the 2002-2004 period, anti-populist forces in Venezuela have made electoral competition their top priority. In addition, a significant degree of anti-populist leadership renovation has occurred. Notably, Henrique Capriles, a leading opposition figure and serious presidential contender in 2012 and 2013, lacks connections to the traditional political class. Finally, Chavismo has suffered serious reputational damage due primarily to Venezuela’s profound economic woes since the early 2010s and to President Maduro’s relative lack of charisma. In 2015, amid severe economic crisis, MUD defeated PSUV in a congressional landslide—Chavismo’s first electoral defeat in 17 years.

Yet, as argued in the theoretical section, the emergence of less unfavorable conditions does not, by itself, make successful anti-populist party building likely. Whether anti-populist party building occurs in cases like Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador depends on the presence of additional factors that facilitate party building. Key facilitating factors are present in Venezuela, unlike in Bolivia and Ecuador. Over the last decade, intense polarization and high levels of adversity have been furnishing the raw materials for anti-populist party building in Venezuela.

Chavismo has become increasingly authoritarian since the middle of the first decade of the 2000s. After surviving the challenges of 2002-2004 and winning a landslide reelection in 2006, Chávez radicalized politically. He began to arrest and exile opponents. He changed the constitution to permit indefinite reelection. He heavily politicized the use of state resources. He clamped down on independent media, terminating (for example) the licenses of thirty-two radio stations and a leading television station in 2007.
Since Chávez’s death in 2013, Maduro, who lacks Chávez’s charisma and has presided over a disastrous economy, has transformed Venezuela’s political system from a competitive authoritarian regime into something much closer to a dictatorship. In 2014, state forces and protesters clashed violently. In mid-2016, the packed National Electoral Council canceled a recall referendum against the president. In mid-2017, the packed judiciary temporarily stripped the MUD-controlled legislature of its legislative power; this action triggered months of mass street protests that the Maduro government violently repressed, resulting in over 100 deaths. Also in mid-2017, President Maduro held a constituent assembly election without putting the proposal to a referendum, biased the voting rules in the PSUV’s favor, and threatened to fire public-sector workers who did not turn out to vote. MUD boycotted the election, and the PSUV won 100 percent (545 of 545) of the seats. The newly elected assembly has the power to dissolve the legislature, rewrite the constitution, and allow Maduro not to face reelection in 2018. In early August 2017, the government temporarily arrested two leading opposition figures, Leopoldo López and Antonio Ledezma.

Conditions of heightening polarization and worsening adversity have, over the last decade, contributed significantly to anti-populist party building in Venezuela. First, decreasing access to state resources and mass media has impelled anti-Chavistas to organize at the ground level. An opposition student leader stated in a 2014 interview, for example, that “there are some advantages to being shut out of the media. It’s forcing us to organize.” Second, state repression and heightening polarization are hardening anti-populist identities, generating anti-populist cohesion, and facilitating anti-populist brand differentiation. The opposition’s sense of threat and alarm has heightened steadily since late in the first decade of the 2000s due to Chavismo’s economic and political radicalization and, more recently, Venezuela’s descent into profound
economic crisis and near dictatorship. Mobilized sectors of the opposition are facing state violence, and political leaders are at risk—or suffering the reality—of imprisonment. Elevated threat perception has strengthened the opposition’s incentive to shelve internal differences, coalesce, and retake power. The Maduro government’s repression has steeled opposition commitments. Polarization between Chavistas and anti-Chavistas is intense and growing, so that anti-populists, increasingly, represent a clearly identifiable camp in a fierce and widely salient national conflict.

Not coincidentally, a competitive anti-Chavista party, MUD, has begun to take root. MUD is an electoral coalition of left to center-right opposition parties. Unlike any other anti-populist force covered in this article, MUD has established itself as a perennial contender for national power. Disparate anti-Chavista forces first coalesced to form MUD in 2008. In 2010, MUD nearly won the midterm legislative elections, garnering 47 percent of the vote. Subsequently, despite being outspent massively, Henrique Capriles (MUD) almost won both the 2012 and 2013 presidential elections (against Chávez and Maduro, respectively). In 2015, MUD resoundingly defeated PSUV in national legislative elections.

MUD continues to face significant challenges. It has not gained a foothold among Venezuela’s poor. Many of its leaders, still, are light-skinned elites—including the prominent opposition leader, Leopoldo López. In a 2015 survey, 85 percent of respondents assented to the need for “new people leading the opposition.”93 The opposition remains divided, which has clouded its message. In another 2015 survey, “77 percent of Venezuelans perceive[d] the opposition as very divided,” and a “clear majority” agreed that the opposition “did not have a program of its own, except to replace the Maduro government.”94
Nevertheless, MUD is already more successful and enduring than any anti-populist party or coalition in the other cases. MUD has contested four national elections—two presidential (2012, 2013), two congressional (2010, 2015)—and won 44-56 percent of the vote every time. By some measures, these results already qualify MUD as a successful party. By the more stringent criteria of this article, MUD must sustain these results for another election to be considered a successful case of party building.

Presently unable to translate electoral superiority into political power, MUD has begun, at least temporarily, to shift its focus back to the extraelectoral sphere. MUD boycotted the 2017 constituent assembly elections. In response to the constituent assembly elections and arrest of opposition leaders, the opposition leadership has called for Venezuelans to engage in street protests and for foreign governments to condemn President Maduro. In a symbolic, non-binding referendum organized by the opposition in mid-July 2017, voters were asked whether the military should defend the constitution, a question some have interpreted as an attempt to gauge support for military intervention.

Nevertheless, MUD has a potent brand and a strengthening organization composed of highly committed activists. If and when meaningful, competitive elections are restored, MUD will be equipped to take root, for decades to come, as the electoral and political representative of anti-Chavismo.

**Conclusion**

In closing, the case studies in this article show that although successful populists almost invariably dominate their opponents electorally, anti-populists may or may not organize coups in response. In Venezuela in 2002, anti-Chavistas orchestrated a short-lived, ultimately unsuccessful coup. In Thailand, anti-populists staged successful coups in 2006 and 2014. By
contrast, there were (or have been) no major coup attempts against Fujimori in Peru, the MAS in Bolivia or PAIS in Ecuador. Under what conditions do anti-populist coups occur?

First, anti-populist coups appear to be more likely where populists are regarded as more threatening. Take Venezuela. Circa 2002, President Chávez’s opponents felt a sense of threat and alarm that, arguably, was unique among our cases. Chávez’s 1999 constitution gave the government the right of expropriation, which triggered massive capital flight during the first year of Chávez’s term. The constitution, more broadly, “produced…a ‘high-stakes’ political system” in which “the acceptability to the opposition of the status quo [shrunk].”97 Chávez was utterly dominant electorally, winning four landslide elections in under three years (1998-2000). After the July 2000 general election, there were virtually no horizontal checks on his power: he controlled the presidency, legislature, judiciary and electoral council. In the months after the election, Chávez militarized the executive branch by appointing numerous military officers to cabinet positions; his government altered educational curricula and textbooks, displaying (according to some) a totalitarian streak; and he escalated polarization by stimulating the creation of neighborhood cells across the country, by casting the struggle between Chavismo and the opposition in Manichean terms,98 and by speaking of “apocalyptic” times. To top it all off, Chávez secured constitutional license to remain president for over a decade. Thus, by 2002, anti-Chavistas felt powerless, threatened, and motivated to retake power by any means.

Second, to the extent that militaries come under civilian control in the decades before the rise of populism, populist governments, naturally, are less likely to be toppled in coups. Here, Thailand differs sharply from the Andean cases. In Latin America, the resurgence of populism in the 1990s and 2000s postdated the consolidation of civilian control of the military. Andean neopopulists came to power in 1990 (Fujimori), 1998 (Chávez), 2005 (Morales) and 2006
By the 1980s, democratic breakdown had become quite rare in Latin America, largely due to changes in the regional and global environment. Coup attempts were few, successful coups even fewer. In the four Andean countries featured in this article, there were a total of four coup attempts between the regional onset of the third wave of democratization (1978) and the initial victories of Fujimori, Morales, Correa and Chávez: two in Venezuela in the early 1990s, one in Peru in 1992, and one in Ecuador in 2000. Of these, one succeeded (Alberto Fujimori’s 1992 self-coup in Peru). By contrast, in the single country of Thailand, between 1973, the year of the country’s democratic revolution, and 2001, the year of Thaksin’s first victory, there were six coup attempts and three successful coups. Thus, the Thai military, in intervening to topple the Thaksin and Yingluck governments, was conforming to recent historical trends, not deviating from them. Viewed from this perspective, it should not be surprising that anti-populist coups have occurred more often, and been more successful, in Thailand than in the Andes.

Notes


3 One might object that warfare has more powerful, systemic effects than other types of polarization and conflict, such as populist mobilization. This argument is true but should not be overstated. First, episodes of polarization and conflict that are less violent and extreme than warfare still facilitate party building (Levitsky, Loxton and Van Dyck). Second, it is not clear why the lower intensity of populist mobilization should impede the formation of anti-populist parties without also impeding the formation of populist parties.

4 Scholars have defined populism in various ways. This article employs the minimalist, political definition used in Kenneth Roberts, “Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America,” Comparative Politics 38, 2 (January 2006), 127-148; Robert Barr, “Populism, Outsiders, and Anti-Establishment Politics,” Party Politics 15, 1 (January 2009), 29-48; and Steven Levitsky and James Loxton, “Populism and Competitive
Authoritarianism in the Andes,” *Democratization* 20, 1 (January 2013), 107-136. On this definition, populism is a type of top-down political movement, not a type of ideology; by contrast, Mudde and Hawkins define populism as a Manichean ideology pitting the “people” against the “elite.” Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, 4 (September 2004), 541-563. Hawkins, Kirk, *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). Also, on this definition, populism does not denote a specific economic program or historical period; populists can be left-wing (e.g., Chávez) or right-wing (Fujimori) and classic (e.g., Perón) or neopopulist (e.g., Fujimori, Chávez, Correa). This article does not adjudicate between competing definitions or examine whether borderline cases should count as populist. The article only includes relatively uncontroversial cases, i.e., those that clearly meet its definition or are widely considered populist in comparative politics literature.


6 Levitsky, Loxton and Van Dyck. Author’s email conversation with Aim Sinpeng (8/29/16-8/31/16).

7 De la Torre. Hawkins.

8 Venezuela’s Democratic Unity Roundtable (MUD) will likely prove an exception. See below.


10 E.g., Ecuador (2010).

11 Peru’s American Revolutionary Popular Alliance (APRA) and Argentina’s Peronist Party (PJ) were proscribed in the mid-20th century. The Thai judiciary dissolved Thais Love Thais (TRT) and its successor, People’s Power Party (PPP), in the late 2000s.

12 E.g., Bolivia’s eastern lowland departments; Ecuador’s state of Guayas.

13 E.g., Venezuela (early to mid-2000s).

14 E.g., Venezuela (early 2000s); Thailand (2006, 2014).


16 E.g., Contemporary Thailand.


20 This is a minimalist definition used in, among other sources, Levitsky, Loxton and Van Dyck; Loxton and Mainwaring; James Loxton, “Authoritarian Successor Parties,” *Journal of Democracy* 26, 3 (July 2015), 157-170; and Kevin Middlebrook (ed.), *Conservative Parties, the Right, and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).


22 De la Torre. Hawkins.


25 In Figure 1, institutionalized parties are operationalized as parties or coalitions born at least twenty years before the populist’s first victory. Institutionalized parties that garnered under 1 percent of the vote in the relevant elections are not included. For Bolivian and Ecuadorian legislative elections, seat share figures are used.

26 In Figure 2, only opposition parties and coalitions that won at least 5 percent of the vote/seat are included. For the countries with majority runoff systems (Peru, Ecuador), presidential election figures show second-round results unless the winning candidate garnered a first-round majority.


28 Hale.


30 Levitsky et al. LeBas.


32 Van Dyck.

33 LeBas. Levitsky and Way.


38 One might hypothesize that left populists generate stronger incentives for counter-mobilization, given that right populists’ economic policies often align with elite interests. Elites reconciled with Fujimori, for example, more quickly and thoroughly than with Chávez (Roberts, 2006). Still, no viable anti-populist party emerged during the first decade of Chavismo.


40 Pye and Schaffar, 64.

41 Ibid., 65.

42 Democrat Party, Thai Nation (PCT), Thai Citizen Party (PPT), Social Action Party (PKS), Muanchon Party.


44 Pye and Schaffar, 52.

45 Phongpaichit and Baker, 2008, 70.

46 Phongpaichit and Baker, 2011.

47 Pye and Schaffar, 55.


49 Kongkirati, 404-405.


51 Phongpaichit and Baker, 2011.

52 Pye and Schaffar, 56.

54 Ibid. Pye and Schaffar, 42.

55 Pye and Schaffar, 56-57. See also Kongkirati, 405.

56 Kongkirati, 406.

57 Eaton, 2016

58 MNR, Nationalist Democratic Action (ADN), Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), United Left (IU), Free Bolivia Movement (MBL).

59 Eaton, 2016, 387


61 Eaton, 2016, 405.


63 Ibid., 386

64 Ibid., 405

65 Ibid., 392


67 Social Christian Party (PSC), Christian Democratic Union (UDC), Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (PRE), Democratic Left (ID), Democratic Popular Movement (MPD), Alfarista Radical Front (FRA).


69 Ibid., 114.


71 Conaghan 2016, 112.

72 Ibid., 110

73 Ibid., 113

74 Ibid., 113-116. See also Polga-Hecimovich; Catherine Conaghan and Carlos de la Torre, “The Permanent Campaign of Rafael Correa: Making Ecuador’s Plebiscitary Presidency,” *Press/Politics* 13, 3 (July 2008), 267-284.


76 Conaghan and De la Torre, 277-278.

77 Eaton, 2011.


80 Ibid. Conaghan, 114.

81 Eaton 2016, 385

82 Conaghan, 117

83 Hawkins.

84 AD, COPEI, Radical Cause (LCR), Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), Revolutionary Left Movement (MIR), People’s Electoral Movement (MEP), Democratic Republican Union (URD), Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV).

85 Corrales and Penfold, 45


87 Hawkins. Corrales and Penfold.

88 Corrales and Penfold, 21.

89 Roberts, 2012, 156.

90 Anti-populists shifted their focus back to the extraelectoral sphere in the late 2010s.
91 See Corrales and Penfold, 45.
92 Anonymous, interviewed by Steven Levitsky, 02/27/14.
94 Ibid.
95 Middlebrook.
96 Levitsky, Loxton and Van Dyck. Van Dyck.
97 Corrales and Penfold, 20.
98 Hawkins.
100 Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñán find that the likelihood of democratic breakdown in Latin America fell by a factor of twenty after 1978, as compared to the 1945-1978 period.
101 Feb. 1976 (unsuccessful); October 1976 (successful); 1977 (successful); 1981 (unsuccessful); 1985 (unsuccessful); 1991 (successful).