

# Political Parties and Uncertainty in Developing Democracies

Comparative Political Studies  
46(11) 1339–1365  
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav  
DOI: 10.1177/0010414012453445  
cps.sagepub.com



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## Abstract

This article lays out a theoretical framework for understanding the effects of political uncertainty on party development and strategies of mobilization and competition. Defining uncertainty as the imprecision with which political actors are able to predict future interactions, the authors identify three types of political uncertainty: regime uncertainty, economic uncertainty, and institutional uncertainty. They argue that political uncertainty is particularly high among developing democracies, contributing to puzzling empirical patterns of party development and competition in these contexts. Taking into account the role of uncertainty in the strategic decision making of party elites will help scholars better understand the differences between parties in advanced and developing democracies. But it can also help scholars understand the less dramatic differences between parties even within advanced democracies. The authors' theoretical framework can be applied broadly since uncertainty informs the strategic choices of a much wider range of political actors.

## Keywords

political uncertainty, developing democracies, political parties, party systems, party formation, party competition, voter–party linkages

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I did things I wouldn't have done had it not been for the fear of instability, and I didn't do things I would [otherwise] have done, because I had the obligation to consolidate democracy.

—Argentine president Raúl Alfonsín, quoted in McGuire (1997, p. 203)

A new set of democracies has been emerging around the world—from Latin America to Africa to Asia to Eastern Europe—since the beginning of the third wave of democratization in the early 1980s. These countries share some key characteristics: the relative newness of their formal democratic institutions, the small size of their domestic economic markets, and their high economic dependence on international markets. During the transition and over subsequent electoral periods, political parties have emerged in these democracies to select candidates, mobilize constituents, contest elections, and form governing coalitions.

Yet the behaviors and structures of parties in these developing democracies have been puzzling. Despite our vast body of theories about parties and party systems gleaned from the experiences of advanced democracies primarily in Western Europe, the types of parties and party systems that emerged in developing democracies, the ways these parties have competed, and the degree to which they have evolved over time do not conform to expectations. Among other distinctions, party systems in developing democracies appear more volatile (e.g., Kreuzer & Pettai, 2003; Mozaffar & Scarrit, 2005; Roberts & Wibbels, 1999; Tavits, 2005) and less institutionalized (Dix, 1992; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2001, 2005; Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; Riedl, 2008; Stockton, 2001), voter attachments with parties seem weaker (Dalton & Weldon, 2007; Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007; Manning, 2005), parties are less reliant on programmatic appeals (Keefer, 2007; Kitschelt, Hawkins, Luna, Rosas, & Zechmeister, 2010; Kitschelt, Mansfeldova, Markowski, & Tóka, 1999; van de Walle, 2003), and party systems are not always organized along salient social cleavages (e.g., Dix, 1989; Kitschelt, 1992). Moreover, decades of political competition have not brought these systems closer to theoretical expectations; instead, the puzzling structures and behaviors of political parties in developing democracies often endured.

The experiences of developing democracies suggest new approaches to parties and party systems. But studies have tended to be limited in both conceptual and geographic scope, often focusing on a single aspect of party behavior within a particular country or region.<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, explanations for the puzzles of party behavior in developing democracies have taken two forms. The first points to timing to distinguish parties in new and old democracies (e.g., Dix, 1989). By this logic, parties in third wave democracies

behave differently because they emerged in a different context than their counterparts in advanced democracies. By one account, parties in new democracies see no need to nurture partisan attachments among their constituents. Unlike parties in old democracies that were the primary vehicles through which their constituents fought for suffrage rights, parties in new democracies emerged in the context of universal suffrage. Nor have party elites needed to use party mechanisms to appeal to voters, relying instead on direct communication via mass media (Mainwaring & Zoco, 2007; Schmitter, 2001). In such explanations that focus on timing, the historical context in which parties emerge plays a crucial role in the logic of mobilization and competition that informs party structure and behavior. Path dependence then sustains the initial context of party formation once investments in party organization have been made and social cleavages politicized into particular partisan attachments.

In contrast to this path-dependence perspective, an alternative set of explanations for the distinctiveness of parties in developing democracies focuses instead on more contingent, often case-specific, short-term factors. Changes to institutional rules or economic crises, some arguments in this vein suggest, affected party systems and structures (e.g., Roberts & Wibbels, 1999; Sabatini, 2003). In other cases, the bait-and-switch tactics employed by politicians to pursue market reforms weakened parties and programmatic competition (Kitschelt et al., 2010; S. C. Stokes, 2001). To the extent that these events were unique to—or particularly severe in—developing democracies, they appear to explain particular party behaviors or structures at specific moments in time.

Although the specific arguments put forward by authors taking these perspectives have contributed a great deal to our understanding of particular systems or constellations of cases, we find both perspectives individually wanting at a broader level of comparative generality. The path-dependence approach has drawn too stark a contrast between the logics informing party behavior in developing and advanced democracies, placing too great an emphasis on the timing of democratic transition. This approach implies that the factors that inform party behavior in advanced democracies have not forced parties in developing democracies to adapt in similar ways. And although parties and party systems may well outlive the contexts in which they emerge—as in Lipset and Rokkan's (1967) "freezing hypothesis"—there is also a great deal of evidence that parties do adapt to new environments (e.g., Levitsky, 2003; Lupu & Stokes, 2010).<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the short-term perspective is often ad hoc, focusing on events that often fail to generalize and, in some cases, are not unique to developing democracies.

In this special issue, we build on both perspectives to offer a new way of understanding why party structures and strategies in developing democracies diverge from the expectations derived from advanced democracies. In particular, the newness of political institutions in third wave democracies and their position of vulnerability within the world economy mean that uncertainty pervades developing democracies. Developing democracies are contexts in which formal institutions—from electoral rules to civil–military relations to norms of public discourse—are uninstitutionalized (O’Donnell, 1996). In such contexts, the probability of institutional change is high, and there is a high likelihood of authoritarian reversal. At the same time, the democracies that emerged during the third wave of democratization were all developing economies. Many, particularly the postcommunist states, faced a “dual transition” in simultaneously developing the institutions of democracy and divesting the state from the economy. In other cases, democratic transitions were sparked by economic crises that generated domestic and international pressures for political and economic liberalization (Haggard & Kaufman, 1995). In an era of globalization, many faced the uncertainties of economic interdependency and market openness. These uncertainties, we argue, affect the decision making of political elites in these developing democracies.

Although the concept of uncertainty is not new to political science, we broaden the definition typically employed by the discipline. In this introduction we clarify the concept of political uncertainty both in general terms and with an eye toward the particular types and sources of uncertainty that pervade developing democratic contexts. We conceive of uncertainty as a matter of *degree*, fluctuating over time and space; political actors confront uncertainty in old and new, developed and developing democracies. By providing a comprehensive conceptualization of uncertainty as a continuous variable, we seek to advance theories of political parties more broadly. The high levels of uncertainty and variation among developing democracies both highlight the importance of uncertainty to political outcomes and provide useful analytical leverage. Focusing on these contexts improves our understanding of party behavior by uncovering general trends and identifying outcomes that arise only under extreme conditions of uncertainty. But by studying the consequences of political uncertainty in developing democracies, we can also generate implications for the effects of the more circumscribed levels of uncertainty on parties in advanced democracies.<sup>3</sup>

This introduction identifies and defines three types of political uncertainty confronting party elites: regime uncertainty, economic uncertainty, and institutional uncertainty. Regime uncertainty is about political competition and competitors, economic uncertainty is about outcomes and elites’ ability to

respond to them, and institutional uncertainty is about the rules of political interaction and their durability. These three types of uncertainty can and do overlap and interact, and not all countries experience high levels of all three types simultaneously. Moreover, the degree of each type of uncertainty may fluctuate independently over time, though we also highlight how actors' responses to one type of uncertainty may exacerbate others.

We then turn to a theoretical discussion of how these uncertainties might undermine existing theories of party behavior or alter their implications. Here we focus specifically on theories of party formation and development on the one hand and of party mobilization strategies and competition on the other. Of course, the uncertainties we highlight here are likely to affect other aspects of party behavior—such as intraparty competition, candidate selection, and party financing—as well as other arenas of political interaction from institutional design to electoral choice to interest group politics. We leave the delineation of these implications to future researchers with the hope that our theoretical framework offers a conceptualization of uncertainty that can be applied widely.

The articles in this special issue, building on this conceptual framework, derive more specific implications and test them empirically in various ways, from cross-national regression to survey experiments to case studies, and with evidence from a broad geographic range. This methodological and regional heterogeneity underscores our fundamental insight that taking uncertainty into account in understanding political parties in developing democracies offers implications for a wide range of scholarly agendas.

## **Political Uncertainty in Developing Democracies**

The term *uncertainty* as used in political science has a number of meanings. The most prevalent conceptualization of uncertainty in political science, common in game-theoretic models of strategic interaction, is incomplete information. Signaling games model players' strategies when they lack information about the types of other players but are provided with some (perhaps noisy) signal (e.g., Lohmann, 1994). Similarly, some spatial models of party competition seek to predict party behavior when parties are uncertain about the distribution of voter preferences (e.g., Calvert, 1985; Roemer, 2001).<sup>4</sup> The common thread among this prevailing view of uncertainty is that actors lack some information about the game structure.<sup>5</sup> Knowing that information is unevenly distributed or altogether unknown, actors may behave differently than they would otherwise.

We use a somewhat different conceptualization of uncertainty, one that—to our knowledge—has primarily been employed by scholars of democratic transition. We think of uncertainty as the *imprecision with which actors are able to predict future interactions*. Przeworski (1991) famously defined democracy as “institutionalized uncertainty.” For him, a central distinction between democratic and nondemocratic politics is the uncertainty introduced by elections; actors “know what is possible and likely but not what will happen” (p. 12). In other words, elections introduce the possibility of unforeseen political outcomes, making the possibility of change a regular, institutionalized feature of democratic competition (also see Dahl, 1971).<sup>6</sup> At the same time, North (1990) considers this kind of uncertainty limited to outcomes since democratic institutions are themselves not in question in democratic contexts. For North, democratic institutions reduce uncertainty by creating rules for the resolution of conflicts and for the replacement of leaders.<sup>7</sup> But other scholars have pointed to democratic transitions themselves as instances in which the future shape of institutions is unknown, making political actors uncertain about the rules that will govern future interactions (Bunce & Csanádi, 1993).

The uncertainty highlighted in studies of democratic transition—that is, heightened unpredictability—is both a defining characteristic of new democracies and a feature of the developing democracies that emerged in the third wave. New democracies suffer from high levels of uncertainty simply because of their newness. At the same time, some sources of uncertainty are simply features of the particular set of systems that democratized recently.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the high uncertainty in developing democracies is not simply the result of newness; particular levels of development, historical legacies of regime volatility, economic structures vulnerable to exogenous shocks, and limitations in communication and the spread of information can all contribute to generating uncertainty.

Of course, some level of unpredictability is a feature of all democracies—as Przeworski (1991) has noted—and indeed of all aspects of human existence. But ours is an argument of degrees: We wish to draw attention to the *vastly greater* levels of uncertainty in developing democracies. And although we look to developing democracies to highlight the profound effects of high uncertainty in these contexts, we wish to emphasize that uncertainty also plays a role, albeit a more circumscribed one, in democracies with lower levels of uncertainty. Moreover, in a departure from the notion of “institutionalized uncertainty” that is limited to outcomes, the political uncertainty we highlight implicates also political institutions themselves.

We define a situation of unpredictability as a nontrivial probability that the structure of political interaction—including rules, players, and power

relations—will change in subsequent rounds. Although we often model political interactions as single-shot games, nearly all real-world interactions are repeated. Still, even in repeated-game models, scholars typically assume the persistence of the game structures. In the Przeworski–North conception of democracy, some institutions are assumed to be fixed. Although the actors may be able to change some institutions, they must know the rules for affecting change in advance. Our notion of uncertainty as unpredictability instead notes that the entire structure of political interaction may change exogenously, as in cases where the entire democratic regime falls or the country is struck by economic crisis.<sup>9</sup> Only a very limited set of actors can significantly affect the likelihood of such changes coming about. For most political actors—and particularly the parties and party elites that are our focus—such shocks are essentially exogenous. Moreover, the likelihood of their occurrence is not negligible in developing democracies.<sup>10</sup>

We highlight three types of uncertainty in developing democracies that merit greater scholarly attention for their profound impact on political actors generally and parties in particular: regime uncertainty, economic uncertainty, and institutional uncertainty.

### *Regime Uncertainty*

In developing democracies, the very newness of democratic institutions means that actors ascribe a nontrivial probability to the possibility of authoritarian reversal. Third wave democratization occurred in countries that had previously experienced coups, military interventions, or authoritarian reversals into single-party regimes. These experiences of prior democratic breakdown cast a long shadow of heightened unpredictability in the current democratic experiment. Indeed, Svobik (2008) finds that democratic regimes become progressively less likely to break down over time (also see Kapstein & Converse, 2008; Londregan & Poole, 1990).

Regime uncertainty thus makes the longevity of many institutions of political interaction difficult to predict. For instance, high regime uncertainty may imply a significant likelihood that the manner in which leaders are selected (i.e., democratically through elections vs. undemocratically through appointment) will change in the future. Or it may imply a high probability that some parties will be proscribed from competition in future elections. This means that parties are engaged in what Mainwaring (2003) calls a “dual game”; as a result, he notes, “a party’s desire to preserve an imperiled democracy may profoundly affect how it seeks to win votes” (p. 11).

Regime uncertainty thus affects the choices of political actors, who must make strategic decisions while assigning positive probability to the breakdown of democratic institutions without being able to foresee the subsequent institutional arrangements. In some cases, regime uncertainty may lead political actors to discount future interactions in favor of short-term gains. In others, actors may search for alternative coordination devices, a role typically played by democratic institutions. For Bunce and Csanádi (1993), presidents often played this role in Eastern European transitions, which explains why power became centralized in many of these countries. Indeed, one common response to high levels of regime uncertainty may be the use of centralized authority as a coordination device.

### *Economic Uncertainty*

A second source of uncertainty in new democracies is economic, the result of both the place of developing democracies within the global economy and the juxtaposition of their democratic transitions with global market-oriented transformations. During the 1980s and 1990s, democracy emerged in many countries with relatively small economies that rely heavily on international markets and on exporting commodities with volatile prices (Koren & Tenreyro, 2007).<sup>11</sup> Developing economies consistently experienced larger shocks in terms of trade growth in each of the four decades between 1960 and 2000 (Loayza, Ranciére, Servén, & Ventura, 2007, p. 346). In addition, the economic globalization that grew in the final decades of the 20th century made developing economies particularly vulnerable to market swings and susceptible to exogenous economic shocks. Finally, economic crises have more impact on developing economies, as the result of both underlying vulnerabilities of the domestic economy, such as dependence on agriculture or natural resources, and the fluidity of international capital flows (Loayza & Raddatz, 2007). Developing economies, moreover, have more limited capacity to respond effectively to minimize the domestic impact of international crises. The heightened impact of unforeseen exogenous crises thus makes economic outcomes more difficult to predict and, like regime uncertainty, may affect the choices of political actors.

### *Institutional Uncertainty*

A final source of uncertainty in developing democracies is institutional. When the correspondence among formal rules, informal institutions, expectations, and behavior is high, scholars describe a political system as institutionalized



(Mainwaring & Scully, 1995; North, 1990). In such settings, political actors engage in repeated interactions subject to predictable rules and, as a result, relatively well-defined strategy profiles. Where informal institutions predominate, they too can guide strategy in a consistent manner and reduce uncertainty if informal interactions are repeated (S. C. Stokes, 2006).

Although formal and informal institutions sometimes reinforce and complement one another in both developed and developing democracies, they can also compete (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). Such competition is particularly prevalent in developing democracies, whether because of the imposed character of colonial institutions, authoritarian legacies, or simply the relative newness of formal democratic rules (Hagopian, 1996; Helmke & Levitsky, 2004; van de Walle, 2003; Young, 1994). The disjuncture between the competing incentives generated by formal and informal institutions in developing democracies can generate uncertainty about which rules will govern what kinds of political interactions (O'Donnell, 1996). Informal structures can subvert formal rules and procedures, providing political actors with alternative structures for political interaction but also increasing uncertainty about the rules of any future interactions. The uncertainty generated by competition between institutional forms and questions regarding their future primacy may in turn shape the strategies political actors employ in the present. Furthermore, contention over institutions, layering (the introduction of new rules on top of or alongside existing ones), and drift (changes in the impact of existing rules because of shifts in the environment) can also provoke institutional change and reinforce uncertainty (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010).

Institutional uncertainty also arises from the fact that democratic institutions in developing democracies may not be able to guarantee certain basic credible commitments. The role of many democratic institutions is to set the rules of the game and allow political actors to make credible commitments. But new or underdeveloped institutions may be weak or ambiguous, and frequent institutional change can reinforce expectations of future instability (Levitsky & Murillo, 2009). Without long institutional histories, horizontal mechanisms of accountability across government institutions may be abrogated (O'Donnell, 1994). Intermediary institutions such as political parties may also not be credible in the absence of well-developed reputations. Party reputations make party platforms and candidates credible if voters have some reason to think that parties will incur reputation costs for renegeing. But in developing democracies, parties may be entirely new or voters may have little or no prior experience with the competing parties. Without existing reputations, parties and candidates may not be able to make credible commitments and voters may find it difficult to select a preferred party or candidate at the voting booth.

Developing democracies are characterized by political and economic conditions that generate higher levels of regime uncertainty, economic uncertainty, and institutional uncertainty. These types of uncertainty also interact, such that political actors' responses to one type of uncertainty may affect the level of another type. For instance, politicians may respond to regime uncertainty by discounting future elections, creating incentives for political business cycles—that is, overspending just prior to an election (Nordhaus, 1975). Such cycles can exacerbate countries' vulnerability to economic crises, increasing economic uncertainty. The empirical contributions in this issue highlight these interactions among regime, economic, and institutional uncertainty.

We refer to the set of these three types of uncertainty as *political uncertainty*. Building on this conceptualization of political uncertainty, we turn now to the effects of high uncertainty in developing democracies on party formation, development, mobilization, and competition.

## Party Formation and Development Under Uncertainty

The canonical theories of party formation and development emerged to explain the continuities and changes in the party systems of Western Europe. Scholars observed that the parties within a system were organized around particularly salient political cleavages at specific historical moments (Luebbert, 1991; Sartori, 1976), that these cleavages interacted with electoral rules to generate a specific distribution of parties (Cox, 1997; but see Boix, 2007), and that the resulting party constellations often endured beyond the salience of the founding societal cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). Researchers have also noted how and why some party systems transformed either in response to the emergence of new, postmaterial political dimensions or as a result of the declining salience of class and co-optation of state resources by parties (Clark, 2003; Inglehart, 1997; Lipset, 2000; Meguid, 2008). Along these lines, Katz and Mair (1995) argue that parties in advanced democracies responded to declining levels of class-based partisan attachments and the weakening of mobilizing organizations such as trade unions by relying increasingly on state resources and forging interdependent party–state linkages.<sup>12</sup>

Uncertainty in developing democracies may yield very different constellations of parties. Regime uncertainty may generate a regime cleavage among party elites still competing over the nature of the regime (Kitschelt, 1992). Or parties may compete along valence dimensions to avoid staking risky ideological positions (Bleck & van de Walle, 2013).<sup>13</sup> As a result, parties may fail

to organize around salient societal cleavages such as class or ethnicity, and the number and ideological distribution of parties may diverge greatly from the expectations of institutionalist theories based on the electoral rules. Alternatively, political elites or disparate party organizations may bandwagon to form a prodemocracy coalition and minimize regime uncertainty. Cartelization may emerge in developing democracies not because of the decline of formerly salient cleavages or demobilization of interest groups, but because political elites are compelled to hedge against the high uncertainty of regime survival (Slater & Simmons, 2013).<sup>14</sup> As a result, we may observe oversized or universal governing coalitions that are inconsistent with the prediction of standard models of a minimum winning coalition (Riker, 1962).<sup>15</sup>

Parties in developing democracies may also respond to uncertainty by forming more flexible organizations. Institutional uncertainties mean that parties cannot foresee whether formal or informal political structures will take primacy in future interactions. Electoral rules themselves are under negotiation and subject to fluctuation in new democracies, and party elites cannot clearly predict how future electoral rules will interact with informal norms and networks. Economic uncertainty means that parties in developing democracies must be able to respond quickly to changing economic circumstances. Thus, parties in developing democracies emphasize organizational flexibility (Harmel & Janda, 1994; Panebianco, 1988). Elites in developing democracies address their more uncertain context by avoiding rigid organizational hierarchies and institutionalized structures of intraparty contestation (Kitschelt & Kselman, 2013). Parties in developing democracies may thus be characterized as uninstitutionalized (Mainwaring & Scully, 1995), but this lack of institutionalization may be the result of party elites prioritizing flexibility. Inasmuch as this flexibility allows parties to respond pragmatically to the changing economic, institutional, or electoral environments (as in Levitsky, 2003), this pragmatism and continual shifting of party strategies and positions may perpetuate—or even worsen—the lack of institutionalization (Lupu, 2011). Thus, parties in developing democracies may cope with high levels of economic and institutional uncertainty by developing flexible and uninstitutionalized organizational structures that reinforce their fluidity rather than institutionalize over time.<sup>16</sup>

Theories of party formation and party–system development have tended to focus on identifying the interaction among electoral rules, the dimensions of programmatic competition, and the social cleavages that undergird the specific distribution of parties. The perspective afforded by considering the uncertain context of developing democracies suggests that changing the assumptions can imply dramatically different outcomes, and also adds new

dimensions to consider. Certainly electoral rules imply particular constellations of party formation, but the uncertainty that pervades the contested process of rule creation generates incentives for party flexibility and less rigidly defined organizational structures. Thus, focusing on uncertainty in developing democracies may help to explain the persistence of seemingly atypical outcomes, such as enduring low levels of institutionalization, incongruence between party configurations and salient societal cleavages, or party cartelization.

### **Party Mobilization and Competition Under Uncertainty**

Uncertainty as we have defined it also has important implications for the strategic choices of political parties, both in terms of their interactions with voters and in terms of their interactions with competing parties. We typically think of two strategies by which parties mobilize voters. The democratic ideal of party mobilization is programmatic, in which parties offer a bundle of policy positions and voters choose the party whose proposals most resemble their preferences (Schattschneider, 1942). An alternative strategy for mobilizing voters—one that distorts democratic representation and accountability (S. C. Stokes, 2005)—is clientelistic. Here voters are given an excludable benefit in return for their electoral support (Kitschelt, 2000b).<sup>17</sup> These two modes of voter mobilization have typically been considered to be opposing poles on a continuum (Fox, 1994; Keefer, 2007; Lyne, 2008), with studies devoted to examining the extent to which parties or party systems are organized around programmatic or nonprogrammatic appeals (e.g., Kitschelt et al., 1999; Kitschelt et al., 2010).

These studies implicitly assume two equilibria—one clientelistic and the other programmatic—with party systems transitioning from one to the other as a result of some set of structural conditions (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007). But high levels of institutional uncertainty may lead political elites to hedge their bets against a shifting terrain, relying simultaneously on formal rules for programmatic competition as well as informal networks for clientelistic appeals. Recent studies have indeed shown that parties may use a diversified portfolio of mobilization strategies to maximize voter support (Freeze & Kitschelt, 2010; Magaloni, Diaz-Cayeros, & Estévez, 2007).

Parties with greater civic embeddedness may also be more stable and may improve democratic practice (Kirchheimer, 1966; Lipset, 2000; Putnam, 1993). These theories assume that horizontal associational life promotes attitudes and behaviors that allow party members to use existing democratic

political institutions, reinforcing strong party–voter alignments. Yet this assumption may not apply in the highly uncertain context of developing democracies. In these settings, regime and institutional uncertainty means that democratic political institutions are in flux and may not be reliable avenues for expressing voter preferences. Moreover, associational life in developing democracies is predominantly vertically structured, reproducing elements of the prior political context in which states were deeply embedded in societies and government extended into all facets of associational life (Jamal, 2007). Parties everywhere rely to some extent on links with existing civic organizations, perhaps more so in the context of high uncertainty. In developing democracies these organizations may be centralized, clientelistic networks connecting powerful political elites to their followers. As parties rely on these nonideological organizations, they may themselves reflect such vertical organization and lack programmatic coherence (Kitschelt & Kselman, 2013).

High institutional uncertainty also affects the ability of parties to mobilize voters by structuring public opinion. Parties are typically presumed to simplify a multidimensional issue space into policy bundles that voters can understand (Schattschneider, 1942). But in contexts of high institutional uncertainty, party institutions are often undeveloped, voters may not have clear perceptions of party reputations, and attachments between voters and parties may be weak. Parties in this context cannot make credible commitments to voters and struggle to send high-quality signals during campaigns. Individual politicians may behave inconsistently in a context of uncertainty and may blur party signals. This in turn limits the ability of parties to structure public opinion and makes it difficult for voters to arrive at informed choices at the voting booth (Brader, Tucker, & Duell, 2013). It may also mean that politicians find it more efficient to rely on clientelist networks to mobilize support, rather than providing public goods (Keefer, 2007; Keefer & Vlaicu, 2007).

Parties not only must work to mobilize their supporters—to attend campaign rallies and, most important, to vote—but must also compete for votes with other parties. Theories of party competition build on the spatial model introduced by Downs (1957) and the assumption that parties seek to maximize votes. Strøm (1990) suggested that parties may instead maximize some combination of votes, office, and policy. Such spatial models typically formalize party competition as a one-shot interaction, even though party competition often extends over multiple elections. But the assumption that parties maximize votes may be reasonable only if parties expect to contest future elections.

The uncertainties we have described in developing democracies suggest that parties may not expect to engage in repeated interactions. If losing parties might reasonably expect to be excluded from competition in future rounds, then their preferences in the current interaction may change.<sup>18</sup> Regime uncertainty indeed makes such an expectation reasonable. The potential for authoritarian reversal in the near future turns every party competition into a one-shot game. Similarly, the possibility of devastating economic crisis suggests that the benefits of political office in the future may be minimal. In such contexts, parties have no need for votes *per se*; they simply seek to maximize office since the only payoff to party elites is actual political power and control over resources. Votes can certainly be a vehicle for maximizing office in electoral settings. But in multiparty settings the kinds of postelectoral coalitions that emerge may be aimed not at maximizing votes in the next election but rather at maximizing access to political office and resources in the current period. This may lead to ideologically incoherent party coalitions or to a bandwagoning effect (Slater & Simmons, 2013). Similarly, party elites may switch parties to maximize office rewards at the expense of future votes (Desposato, 2006; Zielinski, Slomczynski, & Shabad, 2005). Parties that expect to be eliminated in a subsequent round may well increase extraction and undermine institutional guarantees. In other words, regime and economic uncertainty may lead party elites to emphasize short-term gains from holding office over longer-term preferences for maximizing votes.

The high level of uncertainty that developing democracies face has important consequences for party mobilization and competition in these settings. Where existing models predict the persistence of clientelistic modes of mobilization or transition to programmatic appeals, parties in developing democracies may instead pursue a mix of strategies as a hedge against institutional uncertainty. Where theories of party competition expect parties to maximize votes and pursue long-term electoral strategies, party elites may discount the future because of regime or economic uncertainty. The focus on short-term rewards from political office may lead to unexpected behaviors by party elites, such as bandwagoning or party switching.

## **Contributions and Outlook**

The articles in this issue derive and examine empirically various consequences for political parties of the high levels of political uncertainty in developing democracies. Each article compares a range of cases within or across geographic regions with regard to a particular consequence of uncertainty for party development or competition. The range of cases and heterogeneity

of research designs demonstrate the broad applicability of our theoretical framework to scholarly agendas.

Two contributions focus on the consequences of uncertainty for party competition. Slater and Simmons explore the puzzling behavior of party elites in very different developing democracies, Indonesia and Bolivia. In both countries, parties compete in elections but then pursue extreme forms of bandwagoning—what the authors call “promiscuous powersharing”—when forming governing coalitions. The authors highlight that high levels of regime and economic uncertainty drive party elites to collude to share executive power and resources, dismissing salient societal cleavages. Moreover, this short-term strategy to manage uncertainty reinforces regime uncertainty by triggering popular backlashes that undermine democratic regime stability.

Bleck and van de Walle examine the nature of party competition in a range of African countries by exploring the campaign rhetoric of political actors. The authors demonstrate that in contexts of high regime and institutional uncertainty prevalent in Africa, parties often compete on secure valence dimensions in attempts to “own” particular issues, rather than competing on the positional issues that cleave the electorate. Furthermore, parties in countries dependent on foreign aid or subject to donor conditionality must negotiate economic uncertainty. Government reliance on highly volatile foreign flows and lender exigencies undermine the credibility of specific campaign positions parties might wish to stake out. Bleck and van de Walle’s empirical analysis also reveals that civil society actors are more likely to take up position issues, likely because they do not face the same risks that parties must take into account. This research suggests that relying on valence issues is a way for political parties to address substantive issues of concern to the electorate in conditions of high political uncertainty.

The contribution by Roberts examines the consequences of high uncertainty for the configuration of party systems. Latin American party elites had to overcome high levels of economic uncertainty surrounding market transitions during the 1980s and 1990s. How these elites managed this uncertainty had an enormous impact on party systems. Where bait-and-switch market reforms were adopted by populist or leftist leaders, party systems fragmented and opened spaces for extreme parties and outsider candidates, reinforcing political uncertainty. By contrast, where conservative leaders pursued market reforms that were opposed by a major leftist rival, party systems realigned along programmatic lines conducive to stable electoral competitions. In Roberts’s analysis, party elites’ attempts to overcome economic uncertainty had enormous effects on institutional uncertainty, leading to either the fragmentation or reinforcement of party systems.

Two final contributions examine the consequences of uncertainty for party–voter linkages. Using a new cross-national data set and operationalizing political uncertainty in terms of democratic experience and economic development or dependence, Kitschelt and Kselman demonstrate that the relationship between uncertainty and linkage strategies is curvilinear. In the presence of very high uncertainty, establishing clientelistic and, especially, programmatic party–voter linkages tends to be difficult since party elites are unable to make credible commitments to either voters or local power brokers. As some kinds of uncertainty diminish with democratic experience and economic development, parties both increase their clientelistic efforts and also begin to invest in programmatic linkages. In such cases, political uncertainty leads to a mixing of strategies between clientelistic and programmatic appeals as parties hedge their bets and investments by offering a diverse portfolio and maximizing both linkage strategies. Eventually, these clientelistic strategies give way to programmatic appeals.

In a comparative experimental analysis, Brader, Tucker, and Duell analyze the impact of uncertainty within the electorate. The authors conducted experiments on party cues in three multiparty democracies—Hungary, Poland, and Great Britain—to test the role of party-level traits on partisan cue taking: party age, incumbency, and ideological clarity. They find that ideological coherence and party longevity have the greatest effect on the quality of party signals to voters and thus allow the party to shape the policy views of followers. In a welcome departure from our primary focus on the structural conditions in developing democracies that generate high levels of political uncertainty, these results emphasize that the day-to-day requirements of governing can introduce some uncertainty even into contexts with low overall uncertainty.

Looking forward, what, then, is the outlook for parties in developing democracies? Can we expect these parties and party systems to eventually come to resemble those in advanced democracies? To a certain extent, our answer is yes. Regime uncertainty in developing democracies will decline if the probability of an authoritarian reversal diminishes with time. If free and fair elections and the voting process become habitual, regime change will become less likely and political elites will consider the electoral route to power the only game in town. Formal rules may become institutionalized as time passes under democracy and uncertainty may diminish (Tavits, 2005). Economic uncertainty may also decline as countries develop and become less susceptible to international shocks.<sup>19</sup>

Still, there is little reason to think that these outcomes will come to pass as a matter of course with the mere passage of time. Time alone—that is, the



duration of democratic institutions (Grzymala-Busse, 2011)—need not guarantee the institutionalization and consolidation of rules governing political interaction (Alexander, 2001). And time need not generate economic development or reduce economic uncertainty. The emergence of political parties in a context of high political uncertainty may have long-term implications. The types of parties or norms of party interactions that emerge in these uncertain contexts may prove sticky even after the uncertainty declines. Their emergence may generate stakeholders interested in perpetuating these structures well beyond the period of high uncertainty (Hellman, 1998; Pierson, 2004).<sup>20</sup> At the same time, new shocks or periods of major social change may alter the incentives of parties in ways that obviate existing structures, ushering in a major realignment (Hagopian, Gervasoni, & Moraes, 2009; Roberts, 2013). We thus expect levels of uncertainty to decline in some developing democracies even as they increase or remain stable in others.

The trajectories of uncertainty in today's developing democracies ought to raise new questions about party politics in the developing world, just as the divergence in political trajectories did in the advanced democracies. Which outcomes generated by uncertainty endure beyond the initial conditions that give rise to them? How and when is uncertainty itself "sticky," and when might we expect its effects to subside? Our initial indications suggest that uncertainty can be punctuated or can persist in reinforcing cycles. The resulting outcomes for parties and party systems are in certain instances durable; when and how they might subsequently transform remains a question for future research.

If political uncertainty indeed ebbs and flows over space and time, rather than gradually declining with each passing year, then our conception of uncertainty also holds implications for political parties in advanced democracies. Although regime uncertainty is likely to remain low in these contexts, economic uncertainty can fluctuate and may spike in times of economic crisis. Institutional uncertainty can also oscillate as major institutional changes are implemented. Indeed, instances of such effects have been noted by previous studies. For instance, Yoshinaka and Grose (2011) find that Black enfranchisement in the U.S. South induced ideological hedging by party elites in Congress, and Katz and Mair (1995) argue that public financing prompted European parties to bandwagon in party cartels. Similarly, the contribution to this issue by Brader et al. shows that even the more mundane challenges that come with governing can affect parties' ability to send clear signals to voters in both advanced and developing democratic contexts.

Political parties in advanced democracies are surely not immune to the effects of uncertainty, but they face far lower degrees of uncertainty than their

counterparts in the developing world. The persistently high levels of uncertainty in some developing democracies, and the generally greater variation in uncertainty among them, provide the scholars in this issue with analytical leverage in seeking to identify its implications for party development and behavior. In these contexts, it becomes rational for parties to pursue seemingly puzzling strategies, such as extreme bandwagoning or valence-based competition. These strategies may in turn exacerbate the conditions of uncertainty, as cycles of economic reform and electoral overspending increase regime and institutional uncertainty. Parties are also less likely to invest in decentralized organization when their perceived time horizons are short. Even the quality of signals parties can transmit to voters is limited in contexts of high uncertainty, leaving parties less able to structure public opinion. Together, the theoretical and empirical contributions in this issue demonstrate the important effects of uncertainty on political parties in developing democracies, where it is particularly high. Although this helps to explain divergences between political parties in developing and advanced democracies, it also highlights a feature of political decision making that applies across contexts to many arenas of political interaction.

### **Acknowledgments**

This special issue emerged from a conference we organized on Political Parties in the Developing World at Princeton University. We are grateful to the participants of that conference for the conversations and suggestions that stimulated this project. For their comments, we also thank Sarah Bush, Anna Grzymala-Busse, Steve Levitsky, Kanta Murali, Sue Stokes, participants of the Political Parties Working Group at Northwestern University, and particularly the authors of the articles in this issue.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: We are grateful for the generous funding provided for the conference and a second workshop by the Princeton Department of Politics, the Mamdouha S. Bobst Center for Peace and Justice, and the Princeton Institute for International and Regional Studies. Lupu also acknowledges support from the Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies at the University of Notre Dame and the Center for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences at the Juan March Institute.

## Notes

1. Observers of African democracy, for instance, often point to ethnic cleavages as a major determinant of party behavior and composition (e.g., Mozaffar, Scarrin, & Galaich, 2003; van de Walle, 2003). We see no theoretical reason to expect ethnic cleavages to generate different incentives for political elites than other kinds of cleavages, even if ethnic cleavages lead parties to array themselves differently than they might in the presence of, say, class cleavages. Our intention here is to highlight features we consider common to all developing democracies. Some of the empirical contributions to this collection examine how regional variation interacts with these cross-regional commonalities, an effort that should be continued by future work.
2. Even in developed democracies, established parties appear to be transforming to accommodate new media environments and global economic constraints (Katz & Mair, 1995; Schmitter, 2001).
3. Our conceptualization may also apply to nondemocratic settings, although different types of nondemocratic regimes may face varying degrees of uncertainty (see Alexander, 2002; Mainwaring, 2003).
4. In a reversal of this scenario, scholars have also examined situations in which voters are uncertain about the positions of candidates (e.g., Shepsle, 1972; Tomz & Van Houweling, 2009), again modeling a situation in which actors have incomplete information.
5. Games with incomplete information are typically solved by transforming them into games with complete but imperfect information. Doing so, however, requires that players be able to assign probabilities to a finite set of alternative scenarios.
6. At the same time, as Alexander (2002, p. 1164) notes, the electorate in a democracy does set bounds on the range of possible outcomes.
7. Indeed, uncertain leadership succession is seen as a major Achilles' heel of non-democratic systems (e.g., Bunce, 1999).
8. Our approach is thus conscious—like the arguments in the path-dependence perspective—of the particular global context in which third wave democracies emerged, although we see this context as a variable conditioning actors' incentives rather than an independent constant.
9. This notion of uncertainty parallels a distinction within economics, between known probabilities and uncertainty. Under uncertainty, there may be “*no valid basis of any kind for classifying instances*” (Knight, 1957, p. 225) and actors are left to rely on estimates or heuristics.
10. Along similar lines, scholars of international relations argue that democratic political elites commit to international institutions to consolidate democracy and reduce what we call regime uncertainty (e.g., Mansfield & Pevehouse, 2006; Moravcsik, 2000).

11. It is noteworthy that many third wave developing democracies are also former colonies, often with highly dependent economic ties to former colonial powers (Kohli, 2004; Palma, 1978). Although these economic dependencies characterize a subset of developing democracies (primarily in Africa and Asia, though perhaps also in Eastern Europe), it certainly adds to the level of economic uncertainty faced by these countries. Moreover, there is some evidence that certain colonial institutional legacies increase regime uncertainty (Bernhard, Reenock, & Nordstrom, 2004; Hadenius, 1992).
12. Note that scholars contest both the decline of class voting (Brooks & Manza, 1997) and the thesis of party cartels in Western Europe (Kitschelt, 2000a).
13. Following D. E. Stokes (1992), valence issues are those on which all voters agree, such as reducing crime or increasing economic growth.
14. Levitsky and Way (2010) find similar bandwagoning in competitive authoritarian regimes, which are often characterized by high degrees of uncertainty, particularly for opposition parties.
15. Faced with empirical evidence of oversized coalitions even in advanced democracies, scholars have recently formalized models that predict their emergence under certain circumstances (e.g., Carrubba & Volden, 2000; Volden & Carrubba, 2004). To this list of conditioning circumstances we therefore add the degree of political uncertainty that elites face.
16. We are agnostic as to whether this is the result of conscious organization choices by party elites (i.e., parties adopt flexible organizations in response to uncertainty) or simply a by-product of party competition (i.e., parties with flexible organizations are more likely to succeed in contexts of uncertainty).
17. A fuller definition of clientelism—and its multiple forms—is provided in S. C. Stokes (2007). Parties may also mobilize voters on the basis of personalist or charismatic appeals or group identification.
18. In this vein, Lupu (2011) argues that party leaders facing democratic or economic crises will prioritize short-term concerns about legitimacy and electoral support over long-term ones such as the party brand.
19. Of course, the opposite may also be true as countries around the world become more economically interdependent.
20. Conversely, we may not expect the kinds of outcomes we have described to emerge in a polity that suddenly experiences a jolt of uncertainty. Existing structures that emerged in low-uncertainty contexts may also be sticky.

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