

# Political parties, diminished subtypes, and democracy

Party Politics

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**Juan Pablo Luna**

Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile; Instituto Milenio Fundamento de los Datos, Chile

**Rafael Piñeiro Rodríguez**

Universidad Católica del Uruguay, Uruguay

**Fernando Rosenblatt** 

Universidad Diego Portales, Chile; Instituto Milenio Fundamento de los Datos, Chile

**Gabriel Vommaro**

Universidad de San Martín/CONICET, Argentina

## Abstract

There is a resurgence of interest in political parties. This resurgent interest embraces a minimalist definition of political parties, according to which any group that competes in elections and receives a handful of votes qualifies as a party. Parties, however, are expected to contribute to democratic representation, and the party politics literature has extensively shown that many “parties” do not fulfill this expectation. These entities that possess some but not all defining features of political parties can be considered diminished subtypes of the category. A thorough conceptualization of diminished subtypes could improve the analytical value of the study of political parties and of other forms of electoral political organizations. In this article, therefore, we put forth a new typology of diminished subtypes of political parties based on the presence or absence of two primary attributes: *horizontal coordination* of ambitious politicians during electoral campaigns and while in office and *vertical aggregation* to electorally mobilize collective interests and to intermediate and channel collective demands.

## Keywords

conceptualization, democracy, diminished subtypes, Latin America, political parties

One consequence of our reliance on old definitions is that the modern American does not look at democracy before he defines it; he defines it first and then is confused by what he sees. [...] The crisis here is not a crisis in democracy but a crisis in theory.

EE Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People* (1960: 127–131).

the same time, many authors have identified parties that, in democratic contexts, fail in various ways to fulfill the function of democratic representation. Mainstream political science has defined a political party as a group of candidates who compete in elections (Aldrich, 1995; Downs, 1957; Schlesinger, 1994; among many others). This minimal definition has important analytical implications. When

## Introduction

More often than not, contemporary works on Political Parties start by referring to Schattschneider’s now famous dictum concerning democracy’s need for political parties. At

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### Corresponding author:

Fernando Rosenblatt, Escuela de Ciencia Política, Universidad Diego Portales, Av. Ejército 333, Santiago, Chile; Instituto Milenio de Fundamentos de los Datos, Santiago, Chile.

Email: fernando.rosenblatt@mail.udp.cl

analyzing electoral politics, we run the risk of looking for parties—and thus, finding them—without realizing that what we have found, empirically, is only weakly related to democratic representation. This article presents a thick definition of political parties to provide a conceptual framework for classifying different diminished subtypes of political parties in democratic regimes. We build upon the rich literature concerning political parties, which highlights the ways in which many of these organizations are failing to fulfill their representational role in contemporary democracies.

Minimalist definitions (i.e. Aldrich's, 1995) seem to be stretched against reality, that is, the proliferation of electoral vehicles that do not function as parties. The sole attribute of the minimalist definition of a political party is not theoretically linked to a central aspect of democracy, namely vertical accountability, that is, the representation of social interests and values. This conventional definition of political party fails to capture two main attributes of parties: *horizontal coordination* of ambitious politicians and *vertical interest aggregation*. However, the party politics literature has emphasized the horizontal coordination of ambitious politicians while the vertical aggregation of collective interests has been problematized in the political sociology literature (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967; Schwartz, 1990).

The minimalist definition of political party assigns the same analytical category (political party) to very different empirical objects. This approach does not distinguish between different kinds of political parties. Recent empirical research conflates political organizations that a thicker theoretical perspective would consider dissimilar entities that have different effects on the democratic process. In this work, we seek to analyze Latin America's recent party trajectories as an empirical reference for exploring a new conceptual framework for studying political parties, one that includes diminished subtypes. Although we draw our empirical examples from Latin America, our framework is applicable to any region.

There is a recent body of research that has sought to unpack the black box of party organizations (Anria, 2018; Bolleyer and Ruth, 2018; Calvo and Murillo, 2019; Cyr, 2017; Levitsky et al., 2016; Luna, 2014; Madrid, 2012; Pérez Bentancur et al., 2020; Rosenblatt, 2018; Vommaro and Morresi, 2015). Notwithstanding this renewed interest in the study of party organizations in Latin America, there remains a significant lack of theorized mechanisms and attributes of the concept of political party that connect parties to democratic representation. In her *Annual Review* article, Stokes (1999: 244) claims that it remains unsettled whether parties are good for democracy or instead a necessary evil. The author rightly notes that this relationship heavily depends on the definition of democracy: "Do parties reveal and aggregate voters' preferences such that governments are responsive to citizens? Or do parties form

oligopolies of competitors with interests and preferences at odds with those of voters?" (Stokes, 1999: 248–249).

The literature has identified various pitfalls party organizations encounter in various contexts and thus has highlighted the fact that many parties do not fulfill the expectation of contributing to democratic representation. However, the weak conceptualization of diminished political party subtypes lessens the analytical value of the study of parties. These problems of conceptualization neglect an important way in which political parties differ not simply in degree but in kind. Moreover, the literature tends to conflate the age of a party with its degree of consolidation qua political party. An electoral vehicle might emerge as a political party and over time lose its ability to either coordinate horizontally or to vertically aggregate interests. Conversely, an electoral vehicle might gain those capacities over time. The minimalist conceptualization implies a static view that omits consideration of the changes organizations undergo over time. While the literature on democratic regimes has developed the notion of diminished subtypes of democracy (Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Goertz, 2006), there exists no such parallel in the party politics literature. In this article, we suggest a new typology of political parties that combines the two main attributes mentioned above: horizontal coordination of ambitious politicians, and vertical aggregation to electorally mobilize collective interests and to intermediate and channel collective demands—for example, by simplifying and clarifying political preferences for the citizens.

Our work is an attempt to remedy the lack of conceptualization of diminished subtypes in the political parties' literature. This helps to clarify analytical differences between failed parties that other authors have already described (and even explained) but have not yet conceptualized. In so doing, we revise the concept of political party in relation to its contributions to democratic accountability. On that basis, we propose a typology of political parties that includes diminished subtypes—with each type having different implications for democratic accountability—and we propose analytical strategies to empirically distinguish among them. The ultimate goal of this article is to highlight how not all electoral vehicles—not even those with stable labels—are theoretically equivalent and thus do not contribute equally to democratic representation. While the absence of stable parties hinders democratic representation, the presence of stable electoral vehicles cannot fully guarantee the smooth operation of representation. Thus, our theoretical and conceptual contribution has concrete analytical consequences that reshape the debate concerning political parties.

The article proceeds as follows: first, we revisit the theoretical relationship between political parties and democracy. Second, we develop our conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement. Third, we present a typology of diminished subtypes. Finally, we conclude the

article by suggesting ideas for future consideration in the study of diminished subtypes and their relationship to democracy.

### **Parties and democracy: A necessary reassessment**

What is the theoretical and empirical relationship between political parties and democracy? If democracy is simply the competition between groups of people for votes and access to government (i.e. the Schumpeterian perspective), then defining a political party as a group of individuals who compete in elections to access office and receive a handful of votes—the minimal definition of “political party” employed in mainstream postwar Political Science (cf. Aldrich, 1995; Downs, 1957; Sartori, 1976; Schlesinger, 1994)—would suffice to ensure a positive relationship between parties and democracy. This implies functions that are necessary for democracy, such as the recruitment and nomination of candidates that fosters elite-level socialization. Thus, if electoral competition, in and of itself, automatically engenders the representation of citizens’ preferences, the type of party is irrelevant. As agents in such competition, parties are automatically functional to democratic representation.

If, however, one proceeds from Dahl’s (1971) definition of polyarchy, the competition for votes does not necessarily lead to representation of citizens’ preferences. Dahl’s perspective requires that, for citizens to have equal influence in politics, certain conditions and guarantees must exist; competition among groups does not suffice for there to be a positive relationship between parties and democracy. Not all electoral vehicles that compete in elections are functional to interest representation. The types of electoral vehicles that compete in elections determines how democracy works. A party system can exist without representing or distorting citizens’ preferences (Gilens, 2012). Only under very specific (and unrealistic) conditions, as in the Downsian perfect information competition model, can it be the case that any group that competes for votes represents citizens’ preferences. Yet, as Downs stressed, democracy does not function in these conditions and representation does not automatically derive from the existence of competition. In practice, in different democracies, electoral vehicles might or might not function as channels for citizen representation. Thus, according to Dahl’s logic, some electoral vehicles facilitate democratic representation, while other vehicles are less sensitive to citizens’ demands and interests and so channel them less effectively. This complex relationship between electoral vehicles and citizen representation has been studied extensively in the party politics literature (see below).

Democratic representation in modern societies can be analyzed as a principal–agent relationship (Michels, 1999 [1911]). Different types of electoral vehicles structure the

principal–agent relationship differently, with some being unable to structure it at all, given their detachment from their principals. The latter occurs in contexts where citizens can vote for a given electoral vehicle without having the ability to monitor the vehicle’s actions in the aftermath. The inability to hold electoral vehicles accountable can derive from exogenous factors; that is, it may be contingent on socioeconomic conditions—poverty, inequality, or economic crises—or institutional settings, such as more autocratic contexts (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Luna, 2014; Taylor-Robinson, 2010). Here, however, we are interested in analyzing whether party organizations channel the principals’ preferences. We claim that there are endogenous constraints which relate to the specific characteristics of each political party.

The literature has systematically argued that there exists a much more nuanced relationship between existing parties (and party systems) and democratic representation (Hicken, 2009; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Lawson and Merkl, 1988; Levitsky, 2003; Luna, 2014; Luna and Zechmeister, 2005; Mainwaring, 2018; Piñeiro Rodríguez and Rosenblatt, 2020; Roberts, 2014; Mainwaring and Scully, 1995). The party politics literature has extensively considered the exogenous conditions that determine levels of representation. Developing societies, where the exogenous conditions for channeling citizens’ preferences are unfavorable, have a wide variety of electoral vehicles with differing capacities to channel citizens’ preferences (Bartolini, 2000; Kitschelt, 1994; Kitschelt et al., 2010; Luna, 2014; Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007; Samuels and Shugart, 2010; Stoll, 2013; Taylor-Robinson, 2010). Yet, even developed societies, with more favorable exogenous conditions, have also witnessed the emergence of various types of political organizations that seek to perform the political representation function, and not all succeed in doing so.

The literature on party politics in developing countries in general, and in Latin America in particular, has identified various kinds of agents that compete in elections but do not contribute to democratic representation. However, this literature has not provided a conceptual discussion that theorizes the existence of diminished political party subtypes (with some exceptions, e.g. Mustillo, 2007). While there exists abundant empirical evidence concerning the various failures of different party organizations in modern democracies and several theoretical arguments regarding the causes and effects of such failings, there remains a lacuna in the conceptualization of the type of parties that function as channels of democratic representation. This lack of theoretical debate concerning diminished party subtypes derives from the minimalist definition of political party. There has been little discussion in the literature as to whether this minimalist definition is useful for differentiating the various ways an agent can compete for power in a democratic process. While the minimalist definition is

efficacious for encompassing different electoral vehicles, it obscures the debate about which vehicles contribute to the functioning of democracy. This is especially critical because the minimalist definition of political party works better in dialogue with a Schumpeterian definition of democracy, but it does not fit a more demanding perspective, such as Dahl's. When electoral competition does not suffice as a defining attribute of democracy, the minimalist definition of political party makes it difficult to articulate a clear-cut relationship between parties and democracy. The minimalist definition grants the label "party" to electoral vehicles that compete in elections but do not hold the status of party.

In fact, for much of the 20th century, the relationship in Latin America between parties and democracy was problematized in terms of the acceptance of electoral competition: the movement-parties and the "illiberal" parties did not support democracy. However, in the 21st century, parties accept democratic competition, but they do a poor job of fulfilling their representation function. In several countries, for example, Bolivia, Peru, Venezuela, and Argentina, many of the traditional parties have been weakened or have disappeared. Their social bases were transformed or became more heterogeneous (e.g. weakening of the industrial working class, crisis of the farming sector, emergence of new middle classes and pauperization of others, emergence and consolidation of an informal sectors). New electoral vehicles emerged in turbulent times around electorally successful leaders (e.g. Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Mauricio Macri in Argentina, or Hugo Chávez in Venezuela) who in some cases exited from traditional parties (e.g. Álvaro Uribe in Colombia).

Confronting that emerging reality, several scholars turned their attention to causal factors and theories about party building, failure, and success including Anria (2018), Cyr (2017), Hunter (2010), Levitsky (2001, 2003), Levitsky et al. (2016), Lupu (2016), Madrid (2012), Tavits (2005, 2008, 2013), Samuels (2004, 2006), and Vommaro and Morresi (2015). However, the resurgence of party politics research in the last decade has not been adequately matched by a conceptual reanalysis of the empirical objects that we label as "political party." To address this gap in the literature, we reanalyze the concept of political party and its diminished subtypes, by adding or subtracting attributes to its definition. Specifically, we propose to distinguish between diminished subtypes by adding to the current mainstream minimalist definition two dimensions: *horizontal coordination* and *vertical aggregation*.

### **Conceptualization, operationalization, and measurement**

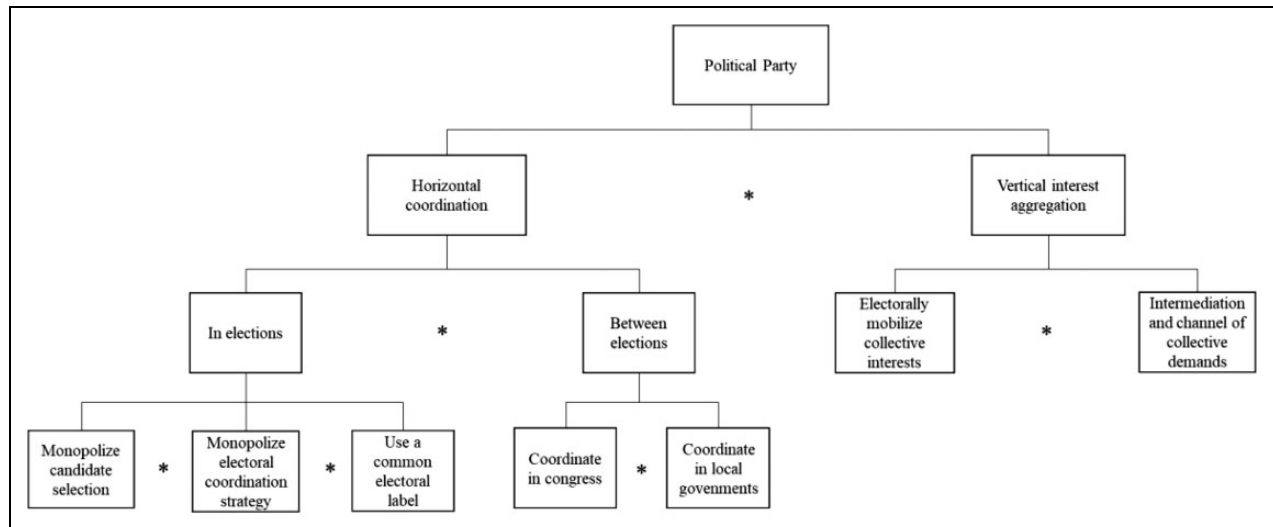
Following Goertz (2006), our conceptual analysis establishes causal relationships between the existence of parties and democracy. Electoral vehicles that exhibit both

dimensions (horizontal coordination and vertical aggregation) positively influence democratic representation. Political organizations that exhibit high levels of both dimensions reduce transaction and informational costs for citizens, who are the principals in the representation relationship.

An electoral vehicle is an association of candidates, that is, office-seekers, whose members compete in elections under the same label. Although the coalition seeks to win office, not all electoral vehicles fulfill the two basic functions necessary for a political party to be an effective means of democratic representation. A political party is, then, an electoral vehicle subtype, that is, a more intense and less extended concept (Sartori, 1970): It coordinates the activities of ambitious politicians (during campaigns and between elections) and vertically aggregates collective interests. More specifically, political parties want to access office and promote policies (Strom, 1990). Parties seek to win state power and impose an allocation of resources through policies and state institutions. This is achieved by crafting social coalitions, which involves coordination during campaigns and between elections.

Parties can accomplish the two functions in very different ways and with very different organizational forms (Gunther and Diamond, 2003). The literature has extensively documented different types of parties in different historical and geographical settings (i.e. with an evolutionary logic), including cadre and mass-based party (Duverger, 1954), catch-all parties (Kirchheimer, 1966), professional-electoral, and cartel party (Katz and Mair, 1995), among others. As opposed to these typologies, our conceptualization is independent of organizational form and assumes that different organizational arrangements can fulfill both conditions. Moreover, our framework does not imply that the linkages between the party and its constituency must necessarily be programmatic. In this vein, our idea of interest aggregation is broad. The horizontal coordination can be based on party members' adherence to shared rules or on a personalistic leadership. In this regard, very different parties, at different periods, such as the Radical Party in the early 20th century and the Unión Demócrata Independiente (Democratic Independent Union, UDI) in Chile, the Partido dos Trabalhadores (Workers Party, PT) in Brazil, and the Conservative Party in Colombia throughout the 20th century (until 1991), differ in their organizational structure and in their linkages with voters, though all accomplished the two defining functions.

Our concept of political party comprises five levels. The basic level constitutes the concept of political party itself. The secondary level introduces its main attributes. We identify two necessary and sufficient conditions that qualify an electoral vehicle as a political party in terms of democratic representation: the horizontal coordination of ambitious politicians and vertical interest aggregation. Figure 1 presents the structure of the concept of political party



**Figure 1.** Political party attributes.

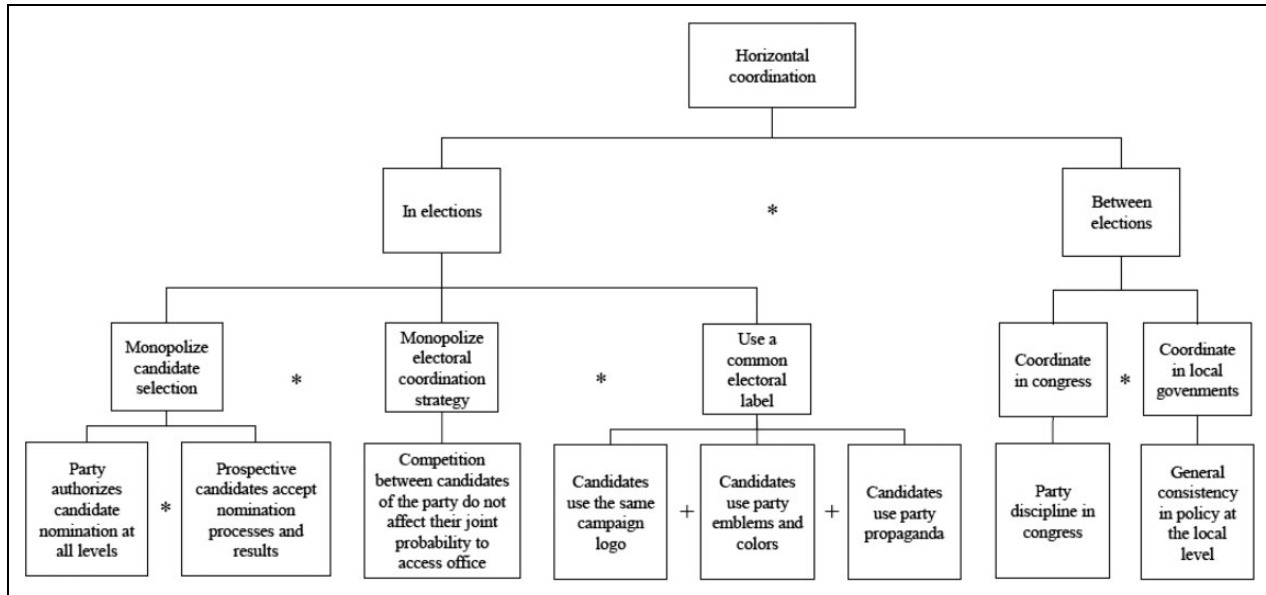
and its attributes (indicators will be presented in subsequent figures). Horizontal coordination denotes the role of parties in facilitating the coordination of ambitious politicians during campaigns and between electoral cycles. Vertical interest aggregation denotes the role of parties in the electoral mobilization and intermediation (or channeling) of collective interests and demands between elections. There is low substitutability between these two main attributes. They are separately necessary and are jointly sufficient conditions; thus, they interact, and both need to be present to warrant labeling a given electoral vehicle as a political party.

These two dimensions (horizontal coordination and vertical interest aggregation) are functional to the idea of democratic representation. Horizontal coordination implies that political parties solve collective action problems of ambitious politicians, and this benefits democratic representation by helping stabilize electoral vehicles. Many electoral vehicles can support horizontal coordination between politicians; yet this function can be achieved without considering any societal preferences. This occurs, for example, in political systems where the competition between parties is stable but does not incorporate citizen preferences and thus alienates important portions of the electorate, as Luna and Altman (2011) show for the Chilean case. Therefore, electoral vehicles should also perform vertical interest aggregation to function as a channel for democratic representation. Conversely, electoral vehicles that aggregate collective interests but do not support horizontal coordination tend to be fragmented, undisciplined, and unstable organizations.

At the third level, we stipulate that horizontal coordination implies coordination during electoral campaigns and between elections (i.e. in Congress and in office). During campaigns, a political party is an electoral vehicle capable of monopolizing the candidate selection process,

monopolizing the electoral coordination strategy (i.e. deciding the number of candidates that will compete in each district) and providing a common electoral label. These three capabilities are necessary and sufficient attributes for coordination during elections. In political parties, thus, candidates must be personally or collectively validated. These attributes enable parties to propose a uniform and coherent electoral offer. This coordination can be achieved in very different ways; for example, the candidate selection process can be centralized or decentralized and can be carried out through open primaries or by a commission (Hazan and Rahat, 2010; Rahat and Hazan, 2001; Siavelis and Morgenstern, 2008). The crucial point is that a political party has the ability to coordinate action to avoid electoral losses. Between elections, a political party coordinates activity in Congress and in local governments. A political party establishes formal and informal obstacles to prevent its leaders from proposing contradictory public policies at different levels of government and generates incentives to favor a certain amount of discipline among their legislators regarding whether to support or oppose given policies. Coordination both during and between elections is necessary and sufficient; that is, there is low substitutability between the two instances of horizontal coordination.

Also at the third level, the electoral mobilization of collective interests and the intermediation and channeling of collective demands are the two attributes that compose vertical interest aggregation. Both are necessary and sufficient attributes of the vertical dimension and, thus, there is low substitutability between them. To serve as agents for democratic representation, political parties need to aggregate preferences during campaigns (by mobilizing collective interests) and between elections (providing a channel for articulating collective interests). Parties must be valid



**Figure 2.** Indicators of horizontal coordination.

options for citizens and collective actors (classes, movements, social groups) in democratic elections and they must be valid actors for channeling demands between elections. Voters must know that by voting for a particular label they are voting for a certain type of bias in public policies and especially in distributive policies. This dimension highlights the crucial role of vertical accountability in contemporary democracies (Adams, 2001; Downs, 1957; Przeworski et al., 1999) and both attributes, the electoral mobilization of collective interests and the intermediation and channeling of collective demands, are needed to promote what Dahl (1971: 1) considered an essential attribute of democracy: "... the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens."

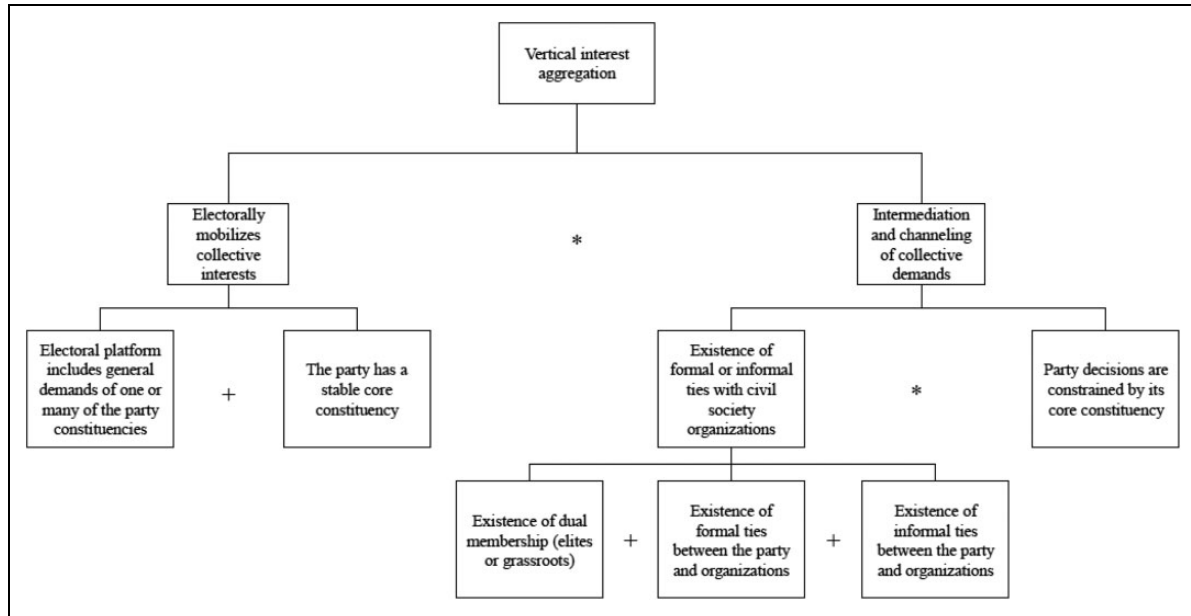
Figure 2 presents the complete conceptual tree for one of the two secondary level attributes of a political party: horizontal coordination. It shows the two necessary and sufficient second-level attributes (coordination must occur both in elections and between elections) and it introduces a set of indicators. The figure also specifies the relationship between dimensions (or attributes) at each level and their indicators. During electoral campaigns, a party must monopolize the process of candidate selection and the electoral coordination strategy, and candidates must use the common party label. We introduce two indicators, each necessary and both jointly sufficient, to determine the presence of the party's monopoly control of the candidate selection process: (1) a party authorizes candidate nomination at all levels and (2) prospective candidates accept nomination processes and the results of those processes. Parties must enforce horizontal coordination among ambitious politicians throughout a candidate selection process. This implies that the party has the power to define who can run

under the party's label. Also, all prospective candidates should respect the results of the candidate selection process; for example, there should be no defections by those who were not selected. This is not related to how open or closed the rules are.

The indicator of the party's monopoly control of the electoral coordination strategy is that the party considers the restrictions of the electoral system and enforces electoral coordination among candidates. More specifically, the party must control the number of candidates to avoid a situation that might affect the party candidates' joint probability of accessing office. On some occasions, candidates have more influence in the selection processes than does the party. When this happens, candidates might end up failing to coordinate and, thus, may hinder the party's electoral performance.

Finally, the indicators for the use of a common label are: (1) candidates use the same campaign logo, or (2) candidates use party emblems or colors, or (3) candidates use the party's propaganda (i.e. campaign literature). In this case, there is substitutability between the different indicators as each is functionally equivalent to the other (i.e. each one captures different ways to observe the use of a common label).

Between elections, a party must coordinate in Congress and in the different local-level governments, including in local-level legislative bodies. The indicator for horizontal coordination in Congress is the observation of significant party discipline. The indicator for coordination in local-level governments is the observation of a general consistency of public policies across different units; that is, in general terms, a party must have a similar policy orientation throughout the country and while voting in Congress.



**Figure 3.** Indicators of vertical interest aggregation.

This coordination distinguishes parties from electoral vehicles that only coordinate different autonomous agents for the election (national or local). An environmentalist party, for example, should consistently promote a “green” agenda in all the governmental institutions in which it has representatives. Similarly, labor-based parties oppose deregulatory labor reforms even in times of policy convergence promoting economic liberalization and state retrenchment (Murillo, 2001).

Figure 3 presents the complete operationalization of vertical interest aggregation. The figure shows the two necessary and sufficient attributes of vertical interest aggregation: A party electorally mobilizes collective interests and it intermediates and channels collective demands. A party mobilizes collective interests when its electoral platform includes general demands of one or several of the party’s constituencies or when the party has a stable core constituency. A party might not have developed a core constituency (or it might have lost it), but its electoral platform has unequivocal references to a clear constituency. These parties have a platform that is oriented toward formal workers but many times those workers do not vote for these parties. The family resemblance structure in this case (i.e. complete substitutability between the indicators) helps to capture these situations.

The intermediation and channeling of collective demands has two indicators: the existence of formal or informal ties with civil society organizations and the observation that party decisions are constrained by its core constituency. Both are necessary and sufficient, that is, there is low substitutability between them. Also, the attribute “existence of formal or informal ties with civil

society organizations” itself has three indicators: the existence of dual membership (elites or grassroots), the existence of formal ties between the party and civil society organizations, or the existence of informal ties between the two. We allow complete substitutability between the three indicators, because each represents a different path to the same result.

To measure each indicator, we propose using a five-point scale where values on the scale indicate the degree to which a particular condition is satisfied, with the scale values 1–5 corresponding to 0, 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% fulfillment of a given condition, respectively. For example, when a party has rules for nominating candidates, but half of the time prospective candidates do not comply with the rules, the case should receive a score of “3” on the indicator “Prospective candidates accept nomination processes and results,” indicating 50% fulfillment of the condition. If there is no rule at all and candidates can nominate themselves, the case should receive a score of “1” on this indicator, corresponding to 0% fulfillment of the condition. Each indicator is normalized on a scale from 0 to 1. The overall index is computed by averaging the component indicators. Thus, the overall index also varies from 0 to 1, where “0” signifies that the case lacks any and all characteristics of a political party and “1” signifies that it exhibits all of them.

Consistent with our conceptualization of political party, we aggregated the component indices as follows. When there is complete substitutability between the indicators of an attribute, we used the maximum value. For example, the attribute “Existence of formal or informal ties with civil society organizations” has three indicators that we consider

functional equivalent measures of the attribute observed in different contexts, that is, each indicator captures a different way to fulfill the attribute (see Figure 3). Therefore, in a given case, the degree of fulfillment of the attribute will be determined by the highest value of the three indicators. In cases where the relationship between indicators or attributes, at different levels, is one of necessity and sufficiency, we use the geometric mean.<sup>1</sup> This aggregation rule allows for low substitutability. A low level of one indicator is partially compensated for by a high level of another indicator. Nonetheless, it emphasizes the necessary and sufficient conceptual structure and implies lower levels of compensation than does using the average or the maximum (Goertz, 2006). Using the geometric mean mitigates the loss of additional information associated with using the minimum and thus captures the multidimensionality of the concept. For example, vertical interest aggregation has two dimensions: “electorally mobilizes collective interests” and “intermediation and channeling of collective demands.” If a case has a score of 2 on the former dimension, representing a 0.25 degree of fulfillment, and a score of 4 on the latter dimension, representing a 0.75 degree of fulfillment, the case will have an aggregate score of 0.43<sup>2</sup> for vertical interest aggregation.

As a first attempt to measure our conceptualization, we asked experts on various Latin American political parties to codify their cases of expertise according to our conceptual scheme. In the Online supplemental material, we include the codebook, the value of each indicator for each case, and the list of experts. We considered the following cases: Propuesta Republicana (Republican Proposal, PRO, Argentina), Partido Justicialista (Justicialist Party, PJ, Argentina), Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement Toward Socialism, MAS, Bolivia), the Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy, PPD, Chile), the Partido Liberal (Liberal Party, Colombia), Partido Conservador (Conservative Party, Colombia), Partido Acción Ciudadana (Citizen Action Party, PAC, Costa Rica), Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Party, PLN, Costa Rica), Alianza PAÍS (PAIS Alliance, Ecuador), Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (National Unity of Hope, UNE, Guatemala), Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, PRD, Mexico), Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (National Regeneration Movement, MORENA, Mexico), Partido Colorado (Colorado Party, Paraguay), Partido Liberal Radical Auténtico (Authentic Radical Liberal Party, PLRA, Paraguay), Fuerza Popular (Popular Strength, FP, Peru), the Frente Amplio (Broad Front, FA, Uruguay), Primero Justicia (Justice First, PJusticia, Venezuela), and Voluntad Popular (Popular Will, Venezuela).

Table 1 shows each party's score on the two dimensions of the political party concept as well as on the overall party index. The scores vary across almost the entire range of the measure, showing that it is sensitive to differences between

**Table 1.** Component and overall party index scores.

Party	Horizontal coordination	Vertical interest aggregation	Party index
Alianza PAIS (Ecuador)	0.84	0.42	0.59
Partido Colorado (Paraguay)	0.45	0.87	0.62
FA (Uruguay)	1.00	1.00	1.00
FP (Peru)	0.11	0.11	0.11
MAS (Bolivia)	0.74	0.93	0.83
MORENA (Mexico)	0.73	0.68	0.70
PAC (Costa Rica)	0.59	0.57	0.58
Partido Conservador (Colombia)	0.49	0.51	0.50
PJ (Argentina)	0.35	0.93	0.57
PJusticia (Venezuela)	0.98	0.13	0.36
Partido Liberal (Colombia)	0.47	0.35	0.41
PLN (Costa Rica)	0.87	0.68	0.77
PLRA (Paraguay)	0.18	0.39	0.27
PPD (Chile)	0.47	0.25	0.34
PRD (Mexico)	0.78	0.93	0.85
PRO (Argentina)	0.83	0.68	0.75
UNE (Honduras)	0.10	0.13	0.12
VP (Venezuela)	0.91	0.93	0.92

Source: Authors' own construction.

cases. Overall, the cases exhibit higher ratings on the horizontal coordination dimension than on the vertical interest aggregation dimension. The former is an easier property to achieve because a party's basic *raison d'être* is to solve collective action problems for politicians. However, the different cases show variance in both dimensions and its variance is independent. These results show that each dimension captures different aspects of the concept and are not redundant.

## Typology of political parties and diminished subtypes

To capture the existence of political organizations that lack one or more of the necessary dimensions in our conception of political party, we develop a typology of electoral vehicles: political parties and diminished subtypes. While the literature has analyzed the effects of the existence of independent candidates, flash parties, and so on, it has been relatively silent on diminished subtypes, in which one of the two attributes of the political party concept is absent (Collier and Levitsky, 1997; Goertz, 2006). Thus, these diminished subtypes are not subsets of a more general category of political party. On the contrary, these are theoretically possible variant forms of electoral vehicle, that is, political party diminished subtypes.

We identify the various possible electoral vehicles to understand the different types of political organizations and groups that compete in elections in contemporary



**Table 2.** A typology of political parties and diminished subtypes.

		Horizontal coordination	
		No	Yes
Vertical interest aggregation	Yes	Uncoordinated Party	Political Party
	No	Independents	Unrooted Party

democracies and their effects on democratic representation. If we treat the two attributes identified in our definition of political parties as binary variables that can be either present or absent, we create a  $2 \times 2$  conceptual space, which yields four different types of political organization, as shown in Table 2.

In our framework, the Political Party denotes an electoral vehicle that accomplishes two essential functions: It coordinates ambitious politicians and aggregates collective interests vertically. This category encompasses long-standing parties such as the PAN in Mexico, more recently established parties such as the FA in Uruguay, the PT in Brazil, and the UDI in Chile, and new parties like the PRO in Argentina and MAS in Bolivia. These examples illustrate that the two attributes, horizontal coordination and vertical interest aggregation, can be fulfilled with different organizational structures. The PT and the FA resemble mass organic parties, while the PAN, the PRO, and the UDI resemble cadre and professional-electoral parties. Also, the age of a party, an indicator commonly used to assess a party's stability, does not define its capacity to fulfill the functions associated with a political party, as we define it. For example, a political organization can be vibrant at the time of its origin, showing robust horizontal coordination and aggregation of interests (e.g. the PRO in Argentina), but lose one or both of those attributes over time as a consequence of endogenous or exogenous crises (e.g. the PSCh in Chile). Studies of adaptation and party collapse provide accounts of this phenomenon (Levitsky, 2003; Lupu, 2016), while recent works have analyzed the factors that determine political organizations' degree of vibrancy over time (Rosenblatt, 2018).

A political organization can achieve harmonious coordination between its elites (both during campaigns and between elections), without having a consistent capacity to articulate collective interests. We designate this electoral vehicle an Unrooted Party. This kind of electoral vehicle can contribute to the stability of democratic institutions, but they are weak in terms of channeling the electoral and congressional representation of societal groups/interests.

In Latin America, there are cases of established political groups that have a high capacity for horizontal coordination among their elites but have substantially lost (or never developed) stable linkages with any social base. This type of vehicle generally appeals to the "citizen" and espouses a negative vision regarding the representation of different societal sectors in the political arena. Usually, they are centrist vehicles, but not all centrist vehicles lack a constituency. The clearest example is the Partido Demócrata Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party, PDC) in Chile; at the time of its origin, it was a centrist party with a clear constituency.

Unrooted Party elites coordinate during campaigns and between elections. These vehicles can coordinate between elections because the agreements between individual leaders are also kept in the parliamentary arena, or because one of these leaders stands as *primus inter pares* (e.g. by being elected President, Prime Minister, or Mayor) and manages to retain coordination mechanisms for incumbents based on the distribution of selective incentives and/or collective incentives associated with the persistence of the vehicle. This type of vehicle fails to build effective channels for aggregating collective interests. These are usually traditional electoral labels, such as the Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro (Party of the Brazilian Democratic Movement, PMDB) in Brazil, the Partido por la Democracia (Party for Democracy, PPD) in Chile (Luna, 2014; Rosenblatt, 2018), activated during election season. However, the reference to a unified electoral list reflects an alliance between individual ambitious political leaders rather than the existence of a political party.

There are electoral vehicles that develop persistent ties with loyal constituencies but lack horizontal coordination mechanisms; they usually lack congressional discipline and they have problems coordinating during elections. Sometimes this lack of coordination implies uncoordinated electoral strategies between different leaders. We label this diminished subtype an Uncoordinated Party. The PJ (Peronism) in Argentina, in the absence of strong national leaders, lack congressional discipline and are unable to coordinate in the electoral arena. However, as Levitsky (2003) shows, this diminished subtype has informal negotiation channels with mobilized groups, such as trade unions. Also, this type of diminished party subtype is more common in organizations built or developed by regional leaders linked to local interests, who have difficulty establishing common strategies outside the electoral arena, as happens with traditional parties in Colombia (Wills Otero, 2015).

Ambitious politicians can operate without coordinating political activity, running for office based on enabling electoral rules and/or their prestige or popularity. This diminished subtype tends to proliferate in the context of a party system crisis, when the cost of entry to the competition is low, as occurred in Argentina during the financial and



shares some characteristics with our prototypical notion of a political party, we analytically redefine them to highlight the degree to which they lack the criterion attributes proposed in this article.

Political parties can change over time, and our typology allows for a dynamic approach. Parties do not necessarily increase their ability to perform these two functions over time. They tend to gain or lose the ability to support horizontal coordination (during the campaign and/or between elections) or to channel and aggregate collective interests. The collapse or adaptation of parties is not the only possible response to exogenous or endogenous crises. Parties can also adopt new forms (types), which allow them to persist and maintain, in many cases, their electoral label. However, they might no longer perform one or both of the functions that, we argue, define a political party.

We have proposed a typology of political parties that clarifies the differences between them based on their capacity to perform the criterion functions. The definition of lower level attributes and the indicators of each attribute are useful not only for identifying the different types of political parties but also as a starting point for studying related phenomena. The definition enhances the analytical possibilities for those who study political parties either as an independent or dependent variable.

Electoral continuity (stability) both facilitates and is achieved, inter-temporally, by horizontal coordination and vertical interest aggregation. Yet, observing that a particular electoral vehicle is temporally stable should not suffice for one to conclude that such a vehicle is a political party. Several electorally stable vehicles fail to provide efficient means for horizontal coordination and vertical aggregation and should therefore be characterized as diminished subtypes of the political party concept. Moreover, political parties that satisfy both functions can change over time and can cease to fulfill one or both functions.

What determines the presence or absence of a given type of electoral vehicle in a given case? Here we can offer only a few tentative suggestions, to be developed more fully in future work. *Ceteris paribus*, current party systems in Latin America are less nationalized than in the past (Morgenstern, 2017). Therefore, analyzing the relationship between local- and national-level electoral vehicles is necessary and remains to be done. To some extent, we expect to observe elective affinities between electoral vehicle types and the levels at which they compete. Vehicles made up of individual leaders, which we call Independents, are expected to emerge more frequently at the local level. In such a context, there is less need for a stable organization to organize the campaign and/or to establish channels for aggregating interests.

Another set of institutional variables that merits further attention is those variables that explain how different institutional rules facilitate (hinder) the development of different types of electoral vehicles. For instance, electoral

systems that do not allow individual candidacies or that force candidates to run under a party label in a given number of districts inhibit the emergence of independent candidates. In Congress, some institutional rules favor coordination along partisan lines, while others do not promote it. This literature acquires greater theoretical capacity when the effects of different rules can be linked to the dimensions of our conceptualization. The literature on the effects of given electoral rules has highlighted how rules affect personalization (Carey and Shugart, 1995) and discipline in Congress (Morgenstern and Nacif, 2002), among others. Nevertheless, this literature fails to provide a comprehensive view of how these effects alter parties' capacities to perform their representation function for democracy.

The recent literature on party–voter linkages (Luna, 2014; Kitschelt, 2000; Kitschelt et al., 2010; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, 2007; Piattoni, 2001; Taylor-Robinson, 2010) made significant progress in detailing how parties function as agents of representation. Nonetheless, they have not distinguished how this linkage works in different party organizations and how it thus can affect democracy in different ways. Clientelism interacts with how parties perform vertical interest aggregation and horizontal coordination. This occurs in different ways in different parties. Thus, clientelism does not have a unique, direct, and homogeneous effect on democratic representation. Its effect is related to how that interaction occurs. When particularistic resources are centrally managed by national party leaders, clientelism may distort programmatic ways of vertically aggregating interests but, at the same time, it contributes to horizontal coordination. If the same particularistic resources are decentralized in the hands of local party leaders, the party will be less able to perform horizontal coordination. In both scenarios, the party has clientelistic linkages with voters, but in each situation the party will perform differently and will affect the democratic process differently. In the latter scenario, the inability of party elites to horizontally coordinate their efforts hinders the capacity to build the democratic process around parties as agents of representation.

The literature that links democracy with redistribution or with public good provision (Ansell and Samuels, 2014; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Boix, 2003) assumes that democracy automatically responds to median voter preferences (Meltzer and Richard, 1981). However, this assumption depends on having democratic competition among parties that can vertically aggregate interests and horizontally coordinate. Understanding the degree to which political agents fulfill one or both functions enables us to develop better theories about how different types of electoral vehicles engender different results in terms of redistribution and in the provision of public goods.

Improved concepts and, more crucially, improved attribute definitions enhance our capacity to develop useful theories. It is precisely in the relationship between attributes of different concepts that we build theories (Goertz,

2006). A well-developed concept of political party that includes the attributes that link parties with the functioning of democracy is necessary not only to empirically assess parties but, more importantly, to understand how parties can promote or hinder democracy.

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### ORCID iD

Fernando Rosenblatt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6033-3793>

### Supplemental material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### Notes

1. The geometric mean is the  $n$ th root of the product of  $n$  numbers,  $\bar{x} = \sqrt[n]{\prod_{i=1}^n x_i}$ .
2. This value is lower than the average (0.50) and higher than the minimum (0.25). The average allows for greater substitutability, while the minimum precludes it.

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Sociales, Departamento de Ciencia Política, Ediciones Uniandes.

### Author biographies

**Juan Pablo Luna** is a Professor at the Instituto de Ciencia Política and Escuela de Gobierno Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and Researcher at the Instituto Milenio de Fundamentos de los Datos (Chile).

**Rafael Piñeiro Rodríguez** is an Associate Professor at the Departamento de Ciencias Sociales, Universidad Católica del Uruguay.

**Fernando Rosenblatt** is an Associate Professor at the Escuela de Ciencia Política, Universidad Diego Portales and Instituto Milenio de Fundamentos de los Datos (Chile).

**Gabriel Vommaro** is a Professor at the Instituto de Altos Estudios Sociales, Universidad de San Martín/CONICET (Argentina).