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Democracy Against Parties? Party System Deinstitutionalization in Colombia

Eduardo Dargent and Paula Muñoz

Abstract: This article argues that in Colombia, decentralization and electoral reforms adopted in the late 1980s and in the 1991 Constitution – designed to improve democratic quality – brought about a gradual deinstitutionalization of this country’s traditional party system as an unintended consequence. Building upon resource-based theories of party configuration, we contend that in developing countries, where resources are usually crucial for party aggregation, “democratizing” reforms designed to distribute power and resources in the political system can reduce local candidates’ incentives to join and remain loyal to political parties, particularly when those parties’ reputations are weak. In Colombia, these reforms (i) reduced the power of intermediate-level party leaders over the distribution of selective incentives, making these leaders less important for local politicians, and (ii) gave more political and financial autonomy to local candidates, reducing their need to join parties in order to advance their electoral goals. As a result, party cohesion and discipline become difficult to maintain, and the party system gradually deinstitutionalizes.

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Eduardo Dargent is an Associate Professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú and a Ph.D. Student at the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin.

E-mail: <edargent@pucp.edu.pe>

Paula Muñoz is a Ph.D. Student at the Department of Government at the University of Texas at Austin.

E-mail: <pmunoz@utexas.edu>

Introduction

Is it possible that reforms aimed at improving the quality of democracy can actually harm political parties? In this article¹ we argue that reforms adopted in developing countries to advance democratic goals – including electoral reforms aimed at reducing clientelistic ties and decentralization reforms – can have the unintended consequence of contributing to the deinstitutionalization of party systems. We show how democratizing reforms adopted in Colombia in the late eighties and in the 1991 Constitution were crucial to deinstitutionalizing the party system. After 150 years of electoral hegemony, Colombia's Liberal and Conservative Parties gradually lost their dominance and were seriously weakened in the 2002 presidential race when Álvaro Uribe won the election by a landslide (Dugas 2003). The resulting Colombian party system has weak and fluid political linkages, paling by comparison to its previous institutionalization.

Building upon theories that point to the important role of resources for party system configuration (Hale 2006; Greene 2010; Harbers 2010; Morgan forthcoming), we contend that in developing countries democratizing reforms can reduce candidates' incentives to join and remain loyal to political parties. These reforms reduce party leaders' power over local politicians, which is crucial for ensuring party aggregation. Specifically, these reforms (i) reduce the power of party leaders who act as gatekeepers of the distribution of selective incentives such as clientelistic resources, making these leaders less important for local politicians, and (ii) give more political and financial autonomy to local candidates, reducing their need to join parties in order to advance their electoral goals. Party disaggregation ultimately yields a systemic change in the patterns of political competition (Sartori 1990; Morgan forthcoming). Without preferential access to material incentives to attract candidates and ensure their loyalty, party cohesion and discipline becomes difficult to maintain, local cadres defect, and the party system gradually deinstitutionalizes.

In what follows, we show how the adoption of electoral and decentralization reforms to improve Colombian democracy in the late 1980s and in the 1991 Constitution brought about this deinstitutionalization of the party system as an unintended consequence. As expected by reformist politicians, these reforms succeeded in reducing the power of clientelistic regional party bosses that acted as resource gatekeepers and gave more political and finan-

1 We would like to thank Raúl Madrid, Kenneth Greene, Kurt Weyland, the participants of the Graduate Students — Faculty Latin American Workshop at the University of Texas at Austin, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful insights on an earlier draft of this article.

cial autonomy to local politicians. However, reformists did not consider the role played by these regional leaders for party aggregation in Colombia nor the importance of resources for the stability of the system. By the time of the reforms, Colombian parties had lost considerable programmatic appeal to voters and were quite dependent on resources to maintain their institutionalization. By reducing the power of regional political barons who acted as crucial intermediaries between local and national politics and by enhancing the autonomy of local politicians, the reforms drastically reduced politicians' incentives to join and remain loyal to political parties, leading to party system deinstitutionalization.

The article proceeds as follows: In the first section, we present a resource-based explanation for how democratizing reforms can affect party systems. Then we provide some background information about the characteristics of Colombia's traditional party system, the events that prompted the democratizing reforms, the content of these reforms, and evidence that starting in the nineties the Colombian party system gradually deinstitutionalized. In the third section, we first point out the limitations of relying solely on dealignment, agency, or existent institutional explanations to account for party deinstitutionalization in Colombia. We then show the relevance of democratizing reforms for this outcome. We conclude by discussing some implications of these findings.

Resource Incentives for Party Aggregation

To explain party deinstitutionalization in Colombia, it is first important to understand the incentives for party aggregation, a key aspect to achieving party and party system institutionalization. This understanding will allow us to highlight the crucial role played by resources for party aggregation in developing democracies, especially in countries where clientelism is a widespread political strategy. We then explain how democratizing reforms can cause party system deinstitutionalization in developing countries.

What are the incentives for party aggregation? In his book *Why Not Parties in Russia?*, Hale presents an "electoral market explanation" of party formation in new democracies (Hale 2006). He contends that, in order to consolidate in new democracies, parties need to become "brands" capable of attracting "consumers" (candidates) in the national political market. For competitive candidates to join national parties, they must see them as adequate electoral vehicles for achieving their election to office. Political parties must be able to offer "political capital" to these ambitious politicians in order to attract them. This political capital can be of two kinds: (i) administrative capital, broadly understood as a stock of assets (financial and organi-

zational resources) facilitating the provision of direct selective advantages to supporters – that is, the type of resources required for establishing clientelistic strategies, and (ii) ideational capital, which consists of ideas/ issues/ principles that make up parties' reputations and provide information shortcuts for voters with similar preferences. Both forms of political capital increase candidates' incentives for joining political parties.

If parties lack political capital, competitive candidates have weaker incentives to accept the costs of membership such as remaining subject to party discipline and hierarchy (Hale 2006: 176). If candidates find other electoral options more attractive and less costly, such as running as independents or joining new political groupings where they can achieve leading roles, they will opt for those. But if parties in new democracies achieve some success in elections, they gradually increase their ideational and administrative capital, thus becoming more attractive electoral vehicles (Hale 2006: 18-19). If their successes continue, party membership offers candidates large benefits in terms of political capital as well as the possibility of rising within the party from local to national politics. If parties come to dominate the electoral system, they reach a stage that Hale calls "party closure of the electoral market" (Hale 2006: 20).

Hale's "party closure" outcome broadly corresponds to Mainwaring's (1999) notion of an "institutionalized party system." An institutionalized party system is

one in which actors develop expectations and behavior based on the premise that the fundamental contours and rules of party competition and behavior will prevail into the foreseeable future (Mainwaring 1999: 25).

Mainwaring and Scully propose an index composed of four dimensions to evaluate the degree of party system institutionalization (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; also Mainwaring 1999: 26-39). In an institutionalized party system one expects, first, a relative stability in the patterns of interparty competition. Second, parties have considerable roots in society; they hold the allegiance of voters and social groups and are important referents in local and national elections. Third, electoral processes and parties are awarded legitimacy. Finally, parties are not simply the electoral vehicle of leaders or loose coalitions of independents; party organization matters.

Party systems that score high on these dimensions control abundant political capital. But institutionalized party systems can be very different depending on the dominant form of political capital that parties control. Generally, in developed democracies access to ideational capital is a very

strong incentive for joining parties.² Party programs provide information shortcuts to voters who have similar ideological and policy positions (Aldrich 1995). In developing democracies, where resources are scarce and the state frequently controls a significant part of the economy, patronage resources usually play a heightened role for partisan linkages (Kitschelt 2000). Campaign resources, state jobs, social services for local constituencies, and many other forms of administrative capital are valuable assets for party aggregation.

Similarly to Hale, other authors highlight the important role played by administrative capital for parties and party system configuration (Greene 2007; Harbers 2010; Morgan forthcoming). Most of these resource-based theories point to parties acting as “gatekeepers” of resources as a key factor explaining determinate forms of party system configuration. By controlling the flow of resources and other types of administrative capital, party leaders provide incentives for politicians to join and remain loyal to parties. They organize the ambitions of local political elites by structuring political careers and promotions within the party. If party leaders cannot provide local politicians with campaign funds, promotions within the party hierarchy, or access to public resources, the incentives for local actors to establish party linkages decrease. In other words, all these accounts point to some degree of vertical administrative capital asymmetry that acts as an incentive for party aggregation.

These resource-based theories highlight two mechanisms by which parties’ administrative capital advantages can be reduced, producing different consequences for the party system. The first mechanism points to a reduction of overall levels of available administrative political capital in parties’ hands. Economic or political crises, for example, can drastically shrink the availability of clientelistic resources under parties’ control. According to Morgan (forthcoming), the economic crisis that hit Venezuela in the eighties reduced parties’ clientelistic resources considerably. The inability to respond to clientelistic demands due to this shortage of resources contributed significantly to party system collapse in Venezuela, after the weakening of other partisan linkages. Similarly, other authors focus on the effect of economic reforms that drastically curtail partisan control over state resources. For example, Greene (2007) explains dominant-party decline in competitive authoritarian regimes by market reforms that privatize public enterprises used to distribute job patronage. Greene shows how these reforms signifi-

2 Of course, parties in developed democracies also control substantial administrative capital (Kitschelt and Wilkinson 2007; Kitschelt 2007). Hale’s more solid type of party (which he calls a “programmatically party”) is the one that musters both forms of political capital.

cantly reduced incumbents' resource advantages in Mexico, allowing opposition parties to contest the power of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party) and facilitating the transformation of Mexico's dominant party system into a competitive one.

A second mechanism affecting the degree of vertical administrative capital asymmetry refers to reforms that change the distribution and control of this form of political capital within the polity. These arguments focus almost exclusively on decentralization reforms – political and fiscal – as important causes for party deaggregation. For example, through an analysis of 16 Latin American democracies across time, Harbers (2010) finds a negative relationship between the degree of decentralization of a polity and national party aggregation. For her, decentralized elections foster the emergence of subnational party systems built around local issues that frequently do not mirror national cleavages, reducing the incentives for national party aggregation (for a similar argument, see Chhibber and Kollman 1998). But, more relevant to our argument, fiscal decentralization reforms provide resources to local politicians, reducing their financial dependence from national parties and, thus, reducing their need to join them (Harbers 2010: 610–612).

In her study of party system collapse, Morgan presents a detailed analysis of the mechanisms by which decentralization reforms affect party aggregation, especially in clientelistic party systems (Morgan forthcoming: chapter 7, chapter 10). First, decentralization reforms force parties to compete in multiple elections, increasing the amount of clientelistic resources necessary for parties to remain competitive. Second, concurring with Harbers, Morgan argues that decentralization reforms give more autonomy to local politicians from party leaders (for a similar argument, see Sabatini 2003). Political decentralization opens democratic competition at the subnational level, reducing the clout of party bosses in deciding who gets appointed local authorities. Fiscal decentralization, on the other hand, fuels resources to subnational governments and thus provides local politicians direct access to administrative capital. Decentralization reforms make local politicians less dependent on parties to access administrative capital and gain office. In Morgan's account, decentralization reforms significantly weakened Colombia's and Venezuela's traditional parties, contributing to the collapse of these party systems.

In this article, we build on these resource-based theories to propose that reforms aimed at improving democratic quality can reduce the degree of administrative capital asymmetry within the political system, leading to party system deinstitutionalization. Democratizing reforms usually aim to fight the many evils caused by clientelism. Under clientelism, policy-making becomes

a difficult, slow, corrupt, particularistic process. One of the reformist coalitions' goals is to transform the clientelistic party system into a programmatic one, which they view as more democratic and efficient. There is a crucial mistake in these calculations. Reformists assume that parties can automatically rely on ideational capital to replace clientelism and remain competitive. From their point of view, breaking the spine of clientelistic elites will allow ideas and preferences to flow more freely to truly programmatic parties. But by taking the control of administrative capital away from political bosses, the result might be neither a clientelistic party system nor a programmatic one: the result might instead be a deinstitutionalized party system.

Two sets of democratizing reforms seem especially relevant for reducing parties' administrative capital advantages. The first are reforms that weaken political bosses who act as administrative capital "gatekeepers" in the party system and who are perceived as culprits of clientelistic and corrupt politics in the country. These leaders control not only access to resources but also the advancement of political careers within the party. Reforms that affect party bosses' power could include, for instance, allowing independent lists to register for elections; banning partisan ballots that allow machine politicians to monitor their clients during the election day; reducing their control over patronage resources; or establishing and effectively implementing electoral supervision procedures. A second set of reforms, already discussed above, refers to political and fiscal decentralization reforms. Overall, decentralization reforms increase the power of local politicians. If local politicians no longer require alliances with party gatekeepers to extract resources from the state, then they have fewer incentives to join national organizations. If a party's reputation is already low or in decline, local candidates will have even fewer incentives to remain loyal.

With fewer incentives for local candidates to join and remain loyal to parties, a gradual process of party deinstitutionalization begins. Now it is less costly for local candidates to defect from parties and run as independents if party membership limits their choices. And, given that traditional parties do not access enough selective incentives to attract and retain competitive candidates, they start losing more elections to independents, further reducing their administrative resources. Defeat also makes traditional parties' reputations less valuable in the electoral market, allowing for the emergence of new parties. If administrative and ideational capital remains low in the country, parties will most certainly remain weak and poorly aggregated: there is not enough "glue" to keep them together.

We argue that such a process led to party system deinstitutionalization in Colombia. Before elucidating this process and evaluating competing explanations, the next section provides some background information about

the characteristics of Colombia's traditional party system, the events that prompted the democratizing reforms, the content of these reforms, and evidence that the party system deinstitutionalized.

Colombia's Party System, Clientelism and Democratizing Reforms

Until the 1950s the Colombian system was a classical elite party system (Wilde 1978). The two parties had clientelistic bases of support, built initially with national party leaders' private resources (Leal Buitrago and Dávila 1990; Dávila and Delgado 2002). This party system began to change during the National Front (NF) Pact (1958–1974), signed to end the dictatorship of General Rojas Pinilla (1954–1958) and the partisan violence that had ravaged the country. This pact guaranteed equal shares of elected positions and public offices to both parties for four presidential terms (Hartlyn 1988).

This shared control over a state that was growing in importance allowed parties to enhance their bases of support by relying heavily on public resources, facilitating a transition from traditional clientelism to broker clientelism (Leal Buitrago and Dávila 1990; Archer 1990). Patronage resources, especially bureaucratic positions, were used to strengthen party ties (Archer 1995; Archer and Shugart 1997; Dávila and Delgado 2002: 320–322). This equal partisan access to patronage resources lowered interparty competition and fostered intraparty disputes and regional factionalism. Electoral rules also encouraged intraparty competition, as they allowed parties to present several lists for Congress and for local council elections (Carey and Shugart 1995). Traditional parties were factionalized and national party leaders lacked the ability to discipline these factions (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 16).

Factions at the regional level became gatekeepers of clientelistic resources (Leal Buitrago and Dávila 1990; Archer 1990; Gutiérrez 2007: chapter 3). Control over patronage resources allowed regional leaders to progressively gain power and even contest the authority of national party leaders (Dávila and Delgado 2002: 320–326; Gutiérrez 2007: 201). Thus, within the NF clientelism was regionalized (Interview with Leal 2008). These regional actors, usually senators, played a crucial role in deciding the presidential nomination and controlled career advancement within the party, especially in their regions. Until the late eighties, presidents had the “formal” power to appoint governors, but nominations were discussed with the regional political factions of each party (Pizarro 2002: 371; Gutiérrez 2007: 259; Eaton 2006: 542). Regional bosses negotiated the appointment of governors and these, in turn, appointed mayors (Interview with Leal 2008). Regional politi-

cal barons also became veto players in the legislature (Archer 1995). Indeed, traditional parties in Colombia were highly “parliamentary” parties (Gutiérrez 2007: 454).

Since the seventies, strong intraparty disputes between reformist and traditional politicians have become frequent in Colombia. National party leaders, supported by urban constituencies, promoted reforms to limit the abuse of clientelistic practices and to strengthen party discipline. But regional barons opposed these reform efforts as clearly pernicious for their electoral interests (Gutiérrez 2007: 148-165). For most of the seventies and eighties, regional barons were able to resist these reform efforts.

However, the high levels of policy immobility and corruption scandals associated with this clientelistic political system eventually led to some successful reforms in the late eighties. A pro-reformist constituency was growing in numbers, especially in urban areas and among the middle class. Critics strengthened these demands for change by arguing that guerrilla violence in the country was produced by the two-party cartel that prevented other parties from competing in elections (Eaton 2006; Murillo 1992: 165). Conservative President Belisario Betancur (1982–1986) and Liberal President Virgilio Barco (1986–1990) advocated the need to advance reforms such as political decentralization in order to strengthen democracy at the local level, reduce the power of political barons over regional politics, and end the guerrilla war (Eaton 2006: 542). Regional political barons resisted these demands, but in 1986, legislators approved the election of mayors because Betancur agreed to leave substantial patronage resources under their direct control and to wait until 1988 to launch municipal elections (Garman, Haggard, and Willis 2001: 226; Interview with Leal 2008; Falleti 2010: 124-133). Up until then, citizens could only elect municipal and regional councils. Reinforcing these changes, in 1988 Congress passed Law 62 to establish a universal ballot and ban the partisan one used previously.³ The partisan ballot favored partisan machines because they had the necessary organization to reach throughout the territory and distribute the ballots. Also, the partisan ballot allowed parties to control clients and violate voters’ secrecy (Pizarro 2002: 374-375; Gutiérrez 2007: 256).

Reformist demands increased in 1989 as a result of a severe wave of violence associated with drug trafficking and paramilitary actions that included the assassination of three presidential candidates. For months before the 1990 presidential and congressional elections, civil society groups, most notably university students, promoted a Constitutional Convention to re-

3 In a universal ballot, all the lists or candidates appear listed in the same format. These universal ballots are produced and distributed by public agencies rather than parties.

form the political system. Although the 1886 Constitution did not recognize such a mechanism of constitutional reform, President Barco used his state of siege powers to call the referendum, which was approved by an overwhelming margin (Garman, Haggard, and Willis 2001: 226). The Constitutional Convention was elected in December 1990. The new president, Liberal César Gaviria, strongly supported this process (Archer and Shugart 1997).

A series of processes gave reformists control over the Convention. First, assembly members were elected in a single national district, which favored candidates with a national appeal over regional-based ones (Falletti 2010: 136-137). Second, regional barons also contributed to reformist control over the convention by remaining largely at the sideline of the process. These barons negotiated an escape route to minimize their future political losses: constituent assembly members were banned from running for the new congress elected after the Convention. Traditional politicians decided not to participate in the Convention and wait for the next congressional elections (Archer 1995; Gutiérrez 2007: 255-260).

The lack of participation of regional political machines in the election increased the abstention rate to a historical high of 74 percent. This favored the representation of urban pro-reformist interests. Liberals gained the first majority (31 percent) and different conservative factions amassed 27 percent. The surprise came from the recently demobilized leftist guerrilla group M-19, which won 27 percent of the seats. As a result, reformist politicians, either from traditional parties or from new parties, led the convention (Rodríguez 2006; Botero 2006). These processes explain the clear reformist and anti-clientelistic content of the 1991 Constitution:

a) Fiscal and electoral reforms were enacted with the goal of reducing the power of regional barons. The Constitution abolished the so-called “*auxilios parlamentarios*”— budget resources allocated individually to senators and representatives. Presidential, congressional, and regional elections were detached and conducted on different dates in order to hinder the coordinated mobilization of electoral machines (Pizarro 2002: 371-373). Additionally, the Constitution adopted a national district for the election of senators, thus reducing the incentive to build regional strongholds (Gutiérrez and Dávila 2000: 43-44). A nationally elected upper chamber, it was argued, would promote nationally oriented policies rather than particularistic ones.

b) Electoral reforms were enacted to open the system to new forces and reduce traditional parties’ dominance. The Constitution reduced the requirements for new parties to compete in national and local elections.⁴

4 For an analysis of this complex system of election see Pizarro 2002 and Botero and Rodríguez Raga 2008.

Moreover, seats were created to ensure indigenous representation in Congress.

c) Decentralization reforms gave more autonomy and resources to sub-national governments, particularly to municipalities. Regional governors were to be elected by popular vote. But the spirit of the Constitution regarding decentralization was about strengthening municipal governments. The 1991 Constitution fostered an extreme municipal model (Interview with Uribe 2008). Municipalization was conceived as a way to evade regional intermediaries and to thus weaken clientelism; state administration would become more efficient, the state would regain its legitimacy, and power would finally be devolved to citizens (Gutiérrez 2007: 258). Rules for fiscal decentralization were included in the Constitution, too. Furthermore, the Constitution and ensuing laws gave municipalities additional responsibilities in the provision of direct social services to the population (Eaton 2006; Falletti 2010: 143-146).

Up until the Convention, Colombia’s two-party system was considered institutionalized, especially when compared to its Andean neighbors. In their comparative study of party systems in Latin America, Mainwaring and Scully (1995) classified Colombia as one the most institutionalized party systems in the region, only below Chile and Uruguay. In the years following the convention, it appeared as though little had changed for traditional parties. Traditional parties still dominated the 1994 elections (Table 1). Congress members negotiated back some patronage resources in the form of special budget allocations (Interview with Barco 2006). Clientelism, on the other hand, did not recede at the local level, where electoral strategies were still based on the distribution of selective incentives. This continuity led some observers to conclude that traditional parties (“*los dinosaurios*”) successfully weathered the reformist challenge (Gutiérrez and Dávila 2000).

Table 1: Presidential Vote Share in Colombia: Traditional Parties vs. Other Candidates

Year	Liberal and Conservative Parties (%)	Others (%)
1978	96.09	3.91
1982	98.78	1.22
1986	94.77	5.23
1990	85.43	14.57
1994	91.3	8.7

Source: Gutiérrez 2007.

Nonetheless, a closer look showed a system already under stress by the late nineties (Boudon 2000; Payne, Zovatto, and Mateo Díaz 2006). Fragmentation increased. In the 1997 regional elections, 48 political parties took part (Boudon 2000: 39). There were 45,452 electoral lists competing for positions as governors, mayors, departmental assemblies, and municipal councils – three times as many as there were in the 1994 elections (Boudon 2000: 39). Independents and ex-party members started running with an anti-traditional parties discourse. Ten out of 32 governorships were won by independents, and several cities (Bogotá, Baranquilla, Medellín, among others) elected independent mayors (Boudon 2000: 41). In 1998 independent presidential candidate Noemí Sanín won 27 percent of the votes (Table 2). Party lists also increased in the 1998 congressional election (Table 3).

Table 2: Presidential Vote Share (1998–2010)

Year	Liberal Party	Conservative Party	Sí Colombia (Sanín)	Uribe's Party	Polo Democrático	Partido Verde
1998	34.6	34.3	26.9	–	–	–
2002	31.8	–	5.8	53.1	–	–
2006	11.8	–	–	62.4	22	–
2010	4.4	6.1	–	46.5	9.2	21.5

Source: Political Database of the Americas (n. y.).

Table 3: Number of Lists for Senate and Chamber

Year	Senate	Chamber
1970	206	316
1974	176	253
1978	210	308
1982	225	343
1986	202	330
1990	213	351
1991	143	486
1994	251	628
1998	319	692
2002	322	883

Source: Pizarro 2002; Muñoz Yi 2003.

In the following years, the traditional bipartisan system deinstitutionalized even more. In 2002 an independent candidate, Álvaro Uribe, won the presidency by a landslide (Table 2). A former member of the Liberal Party (senator and then governor of a wealthy region), Uribe joined the race just a few months before the election. Campaigning on a strong anti-guerrilla discourse and promising to clean up the corrupt political system, Uribe ran without a congressional list. Nonetheless, he quickly gained the support of the growing number of successful independent candidates and former partisan members running as independents. Realizing its chances to win the election were null, even the incumbent Conservative Party joined Uribe's coalition. Uribe won the election with 53 percent of the vote and built a majority in Congress. The Uribista coalition in the Senate was composed of more or less 60 senators (approximately 60 percent of the Senate) from almost 30 different political "parties." In 2006 Uribe achieved re-election with an astonishing 64 percent of the vote and again won control of Congress with a coalition of six political parties, among them his newly created "Partido de la U." In 2010, Juan Manuel Santos, Uribe's Minister of Defense, ran as the incumbent candidate and won the election with a solid majority.

Traditional parties saw their power reduced, and although their situation is not as critical as other instances of traditional party abrupt collapse (e.g. Venezuela), it pales in comparison to their previous dominance. Indeed, these changes not only meant a reduction in the power of traditional parties; as discussed below, new parties are loose coalitions of candidates. What we see in Colombia is a systemic change in the patterns of political competition. A deinstitutionalization process has taken place.

The calculations of both Boudon (2000) and Payne, Zovatto, and Mateo Díaz (2006) indicate that the Colombian party system deinstitutionalized since the first party system institutionalization score measured by Mainwaring and Scully (1995) (Table 4). Mean volatility rate increased, parties' social roots weakened, parties lost legitimacy, and party organizations matter even less than before as evidenced by the increasing number of independent candidates and party-switching. Boudon concludes that by 1998 Colombia's party system scored 9 points on the party system institutionalization index, 1.5 point less than in Mainwaring and Scully's initial measurement. In other words, in a few years Colombia experienced a decrease equivalent to 18.75 percent of the index's range. On the other hand, the measurements of Payne, Zovatto, and Mateo Díaz rank Colombia below the regional average institutionalization score until 2002, and the authors characterize Colombia as having a weakly institutionalized party system, as do Ecuador, Peru, Guatemala, and Bolivia (Payne, Zovatto, and Mateo Díaz 2006: 183-184).

Table 4: Party System Institutionalization Index

	Mainwaring and Scully	Boudon	Payne, Zovatto, and Mateo Díaz
Criterion	1970–1990	1970–1998	1996–2003*
Stability	3	3	2.2
Roots	3	2.5	1.5
Legitimacy	2.5	2	1.3
Organization	2	1.5	–
Aggregate Colombia	10.5	9.0	1.66
Regional Average	8.3	–	2.03
Regional Highest	11.5	–	2.72
Regional Lowest	4.5	–	1.33

Note: * Payne, Zovatto, and Mateo Díaz do not measure the organization dimension. They use two indicators to measure the second dimension and three for the third. They average the indicators for each dimension and then they average the three dimensions' scores to get the index score.

Sources: Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Boudon 2000; Payne, Zovatto, and Mateo Díaz 2006.

Although the traditional parties remain stronger at the local level (Gamboa 2010), they have lost considerable support to Uribista candidates or to new independent forces (Mejía, Botero, and Rodríguez 2008: 25). The new emerging parties, on the other hand, look more like short-term strategic alliances of vote-seeking politicians than enduring political organizations. Clear evidence of this fluidity is the increase in party-switching. Particularly since Uribe's victory in 2002, it is common for candidates to leave their parties and join others that give them better chances of re-election. In 2009, one year before the congressional and presidential election, 18 (17.6 percent) senators and 40 (24.2 percent) representatives switched parties, usually to the Uribista coalition (Congreso Visible 2010: 12).

In an effort to counteract this deinstitutionalizing trend, a constitutional reform in 2003 adopted new electoral rules to increase the formal incentives for party aggregation (Botero 2006; Botero and Rodríguez Raga 2008). Candidates were required to be part of a single national party list and a 2 percent barrier was adopted, drastically reducing the number of congressional lists in the 2006 and 2010 elections (Botero and Rodríguez Raga 2008; Pachón and Shugart 2010; Shugart 2010). Nonetheless, as discussed above, these reforms have not changed party system institutionalization substantially. Up until the 2010 election, parties were weakly tied, party-switching was

frequent, and volatility remained high.⁵ Formal rules can force more coordination for an election (i.e. reducing the effective number of parties), but they cannot by themselves increase party aggregation and institutionalization. In the next section, we explain this outcome by debunking some competing perspectives and stressing the importance of democratizing reforms for party deinstitutionalization.

Voter Dealignment, Agency, Electoral Incentives, Institutional Legacies, or Resources?

Four alternative perspectives to our resource-based explanation could also explain party system deinstitutionalization in Colombia. The first one stresses voter dealignment as the cause of deinstitutionalization. The second one highlights the decisions made by a popular incumbent as the main cause of deinstitutionalization. The third explanation emphasizes electoral institutions that are said to create the incentives for party fragmentation and candidate desertion. The fourth explanation stresses the weight of institutional legacies of the NF pact that slowly fostered fragmentation and, ultimately, the implosion of the traditional party system. Although all four explanations provide important insights, they are insufficient to account for party system deinstitutionalization in Colombia.

Dealignment explanations, common among journalists and politicians themselves, attribute party system deinstitutionalization to a massive abandonment of political parties by Colombian voters. According to these arguments, clientelism, dissatisfaction about performance in the war against guerrillas, and parties' links to criminal activities made the population increasingly dissatisfied about traditional parties. By 2002 parties were exhausted, and Uribe was an attractive enough candidate to exploit this party weakness.

Voter dealignment does not seem a sufficient condition for party system deinstitutionalization. Dealignment theory does not provide an adequate explanation for the timing of party deinstitutionalization. Traditional parties had already been unpopular since the early eighties but nonetheless maintained their hegemony well into the nineties. Colombians have adopted strong anti-guerrilla positions in the past or criticized parties' links with criminal activities (e.g. when peace talks failed in 1986 or in the 1989 campaign) but that did not induce them to vote for candidates outside the traditional parties. This explanation minimizes parties' capacities to adapt to voters' demands in the past. As a matter of fact, strategic adaptation to pop-

5 The presidential volatility rate 2006–2010 is 34.71 percent.

ular demands had been common for Colombian parties. President Gaviria (1990–1994) won the election running as a liberal reformist candidate. Similarly, conservative Andrés Pastrana (1998–2002) was elected on a reform platform criticizing political corruption (Gutiérrez 2006). The relevant question is why parties were not able to adapt this last time. Our answer, discussed below, is that by the late 1990s the reforms had weakened parties substantially, making them unable to adapt.

Nonetheless, we agree that voter dealignment seems to be a necessary condition to explain the party system deinstitutionalization in Colombia. As highlighted by Morgan, by the nineties Colombian parties had already lost considerable programmatic appeals, and strongly depended on clientelism to maintain their linkages with society (Morgan forthcoming: 261–273). When parties lost control over clientelistic resources, there was nothing else to glue the system together, and it deinstitutionalized.

The second explanation presents Uribe's success as the main cause of deinstitutionalization.⁶ From this perspective, the inability of still relatively strong parties to deal with the increasing guerrilla violence became the dominant issue in the 2002 election. Under this acute political crisis, Uribe – an “anti-establishment” candidate who broke with parties and exploited a strong anti-guerrilla discourse – fulfilled voters' demands. Once in office, this political entrepreneur successfully dealt with the security problem and increased his popularity, which encouraged other politicians to defect from the main parties.

Uribe's electoral appeal and popularity is undeniable. But in our perspective, Uribe's success is more a symptom of party system deinstitutionalization rather than its cause. To begin with, Uribe's prestige as a strongman and the possibility to run outside parties is partly attributable to the 1991 constitutional reforms. Uribe gained his prestige as a hawk by his performance as governor of Antioquía (1995–1997). But more fundamentally, if parties had been stronger in 2001, Uribe would have had to fight for his nomination within the Liberal Party or would have had a harder time attracting parliamentary candidates to campaign for him if running as independent. This hypothetical outcome is exactly what happened when highly charismatic Liberal leader Luis Carlos Galán left the party in 1986 to run a reformist campaign and was defeated by the party regional barons. By the time Uribe ran his campaign, the system was already weak. To be sure, Sanín had already been a successful independent candidate in 1998. In other words,

6 Tanaka (1998) provides a similar explanation for the collapse of the Peruvian party system after the election of Alberto Fujimori in 1990.

Uribe's victory was indeed possible because party system deinstitutionalization was already on its way.

Institutional explanations, on the other hand, take two forms. The first one focuses on the electoral reforms included in the 1991 Constitution (C91). From this perspective, the new electoral rules fragmented the party system by radicalizing intraparty competition and personalistic politics at the local level (Rodríguez 1998, 2002; Pizarro 2002; Carey and Shugart 1995).⁷ The low threshold for registering congressional lists and the mechanism for assigning seats gave local politicians incentives to run independent campaigns. The increase in the number of congressional lists beginning in 1994 is provided as evidence of this effect (Table 3).

We agree that electoral institutions certainly contributed to reducing the costs of running outside parties, weakening their disciplining power. But by focusing on electoral incentives only, this approach neglects the importance of more relevant institutional changes for explaining these outcomes, particularly of key changes in the allocation and control of resources. Also important, as the second institutional version contends, the first occurrences of hyper-fragmentation *preceded* the C91 but nonetheless the party system remained institutionalized (Table 4). Indeed, the seat allocation rules (Hare) had been the same since the 1930s: political fragmentation in Colombia increased without any change in these rules (Gutiérrez 2007: 307-327).

The second institutional version, proposed by Gutiérrez (2007), argues that party system implosion was already taking place *before* the C91 was written. Fragmentation dynamics were rooted in the NF: this consociational pact transferred the formerly intense interparty political competition to within each party, gradually creating territorial factions in the polity. National parties could not control the incremental fragmentation process that started during the NF. With or *without* the C91, we would have observed the same outcomes in the 1990s (Gutiérrez 2007: 322). The NF legacies (its "intrinsic and persistent" fragmentation) at that time, and not the electoral rules adopted in 1991, weakened the party system.

7 Pizarro's (2002) theory is more nuanced than a formal institutional one. He acknowledges the weight of different factors in party system deinstitutionalization: legacies of the NF, electoral reform and political decentralization. However, his main causal argument is that the change in electoral rules (political decentralization and rules that reduced the requirements to participate in elections) led to more party fragmentation, weakening political parties. That is why we include his theory among formal institutional ones. What distinguishes his theory from our own is that he pays little attention to fiscal decentralization as a cause of party deinstitutionalization.

Gutiérrez is right in pointing out the limitations of standard institutional engineering perspectives. As discussed above, party fragmentation was already high before electoral reforms took place. However, his theory presents two problems. First, Gutiérrez' argument does not account for some independent effects of formal institutional reforms. As Pizarro (2002) points out, some institutional changes included in the C91 were actually relevant for setting the stage for party system deinstitutionalization and were not mere consequences of previous fragmentation. For instance, adopting a national district to elect the Senate did ultimately weaken regional barons who, unable to adapt, gradually lost their political fiefdoms to candidates campaigning on national platforms (Pizarro 2002: 378-380). The separation of electoral processes also added to the weakening of regional machines as they were no longer able to coordinate campaigns on the election day.

But a second and more crucial problem is that the theory does not acknowledge that decentralization reforms were key determinants of the gradual weakening of the regionalized and parliamentary-oriented party system. The decentralization reforms were not mere consequences of a party system's glacier-paced deinstitutionalization initiated with the NF. They can hardly be considered a consequence of the existence of territorialized party factions, as regional barons strongly opposed the reforms led by national-level reformist politicians (Garman, Haggard, and Willis 2001; Gutiérrez 2007: 148-165; Interview with Zapata 2008).

In contrast to all these theories, we argue that democratizing reforms that reduced parties' vertical administrative capital advantages were crucial in achieving this outcome. Some electoral reforms that weakened regional political bosses played a role, but mainly because they interacted with decentralization reforms to produce the party system's gradual deinstitutionalization. Together these reforms (i) reduced the control and availability of administrative capital in the hands of regional barons ("concentrated" clientelism) and (ii) enhanced resources in the hands of local politicians ("de-concentrated" clientelism). That is, they reduced administrative capital asymmetries that had ensured the dominance of partisan regional intermediaries. Without autonomous resources and competences, local politicians would have remained weaker and more dependent on parties and their regional bosses to run their campaigns and govern. Our explanation is as follows.

As expected by reformists, political and fiscal decentralization was successful in weakening the power base of regional bosses, especially senators, and increasing the autonomy of local politicians. The power of these barons within their parties was based on their ability to deliver votes in national elections for the party. In exchange, they received patronage resources from the national government to deliver among their constituencies, which al-

lowed them to strengthen their electoral base of support (Archer 1990: 27-34). By negotiating municipal and governmental appointments, these barons were able to deliver public jobs to their loyalists and other benefits to lower clients, as they had direct access to departmental and municipal executives and, thus, their budgets. After political decentralization, elected authorities in municipalities and governorships owed less to senators (Interview with Zapata 2008). Legislators depended now more on mayors (Garman, Haggard, and Willis 2001: 226). This is why regional barons opposed political decentralization so fiercely and why they achieved a ban on immediate reelection for mayors and governors: they did not want to lose control and increase competition in their feuds (Interview with Zapata 2008).

Fiscal decentralization also reduced partisan control over the distribution of resources. When regional party bosses controlled the access to administrative capital, local politicians were forced to respect the hierarchy and advance their political careers through the party. Fiscal decentralization drastically changed this situation. The new rules almost tripled local budgets, increasing from 2.4 percent of GDP in 1990 to 6.2 percent in 2006 (Fedelino 2010: 50-55). But, more important for our argument, this flux of resources was largely beneficial for the municipal level: while the share of total government expenditure at the municipal level increased from 10.5 percent in 1980 to 17.3 percent in 1990, the departmental level saw its share decrease from 16.7 percent to 15.7 percent (Willis, Garman, and Haggard 1999: 13).

By injecting more resources to the approximately 1,100 municipalities, the reforms made it easier for local politicians to sustain their own bases of support. Furthermore, the constitution adopted objective rules of resources' allocation, decreasing the discretion of national politicians in resources' distribution. As a result, each mayor transformed him/self into a political boss (Interview with Zapata). Health and education resources were funneled directly to local communities, enhancing the chances of patronage spending (Gutiérrez and Dávila 2000; Eaton 2006: 545; Interview with Santa María 2008). When the C91 reduced the requirements to compete in elections, party leaders ended up losing even more control over candidate nomination.

The elimination of *auxilios parlamentarios* in the C91 (congressmen's fixed budget) also contributed to the weakening of these regional *barones*. The barons used *auxilios parlamentarios* for distributing local works and social benefits (i.e. scholarships, schools) that reinforced their ties with voters. Congressmen found some ways to individually negotiate with the executive the allocation of investment funds after the reforms (Interviews with Barco 2006, Losada 2008, Mejía 2008). But without the certainty of accessing these

resources and the need to individually negotiate them, regional barons' contact with voters weakened (Interviews with Barco 2006 and Zapata 2008).⁸

Even if barons continued campaigning in their regions with relative success after the reform (Rodríguez 2002; Crisp and Ingall 2002), these leaders started to achieve mixed results in elections and lose ground to candidates running national campaigns. Víctor Renán Barco, a Liberal regional baron and senator from Caldas since 1970, described the reforms as a bombshell for his old campaign strategies. After these reforms he had fewer resources to invest in his campaign, so he campaigned asking his clients to remember the benefits he had delivered them in the past. Evidently, as time passed, this campaign strategy became less effective. Barco's electoral capital declined during the 2000s (for instance, his votes decreased from 68,000 votes in 2002 to 45,000 in 2006), and he considered it unlikely that he could be elected in 2010 (Interview with Barco 2006).⁹ Similarly, after 40 years of electoral victories, José Namé, a traditional Liberal senator from Atlántico, lost his bid for governor in 2007. Namé, "the last of the great political caciques" (*El Tiempo* 2007), had turned Uribista to try to maintain his place in Colombian politics. But not even this helped him. By this time it was becoming evident that regional barons could not successfully adapt to the changing conditions of political competition and that they were becoming a less common species in Colombian politics (Pizarro 2002: 376-380; Interview with Morales Benites 2006). As pointed out by a young Liberal leader, now congressmen are the ones seeking alliances with mayors, who have more resources to invest in campaigns (Interview with Zapata 2008).

Overall, these democratizing reforms made regional bosses less important for the career advancement of local politicians: the former received fewer resources to distribute among allies and followers and had limited influence to guarantee the promotion of local leaders (Gutiérrez 2007: 259-273; Morgan forthcoming: chapter 10). As a result, vertical resource asymmetry was drastically reduced. Starting in the late eighties, and more clearly after the 1991 reforms, regional barons lost power, and local candidates gained more autonomy. Moreover, during the nineties, Liberal and Conservative banners were discredited more due to the perceived inability of the parties to handle the rising violence. Consequently, the party system gradually deinstitutionalized. By 2001 parties were composed of politicians who owed little or nothing to their parties. When Uribe emerged late in 2001 as a

8 Morgan also points that budget deficits caused by the need to respond to growing guerrilla violence also contributed to the reduction of parties' clientelistic resources (Morgan forthcoming).

9 Barco died in 2009 before completing his tenth term in Congress.

strong candidate in the polls, politicians interested in keeping their electoral appeal overwhelmingly supported him and abandoned their parties.

Ironically, democratizing reforms did not end clientelistic practices, as intended by reformers, but ultimately “de-concentrated” these practices, undermining the former “concentrated” clientelism previously managed by regional barons. The “franchises” gained autonomy (Dávila and Delgado 2002). What is worse, local clientelistic networks were further bolstered by the influx of illegal money from drug traffickers and paramilitary groups (Gutiérrez 2007: 259-260 and chapter 9). As discussed next, de-concentrated clientelism seems less fit to serve as a political check and balance for popular presidents.

Conclusion: The Democratic Perils of Democracies with Weak Parties (Or, How the Road to Hell Is Paved with Good Intentions)

This article has argued that decentralization and some electoral reforms adopted in the late 1980s and in the 1991 Constitution to improve democracy in Colombia unintentionally brought about a gradual deinstitutionalization of that country’s party system. What implications can be derived from this story of party system deinstitutionalization?

First, the obvious implication is that administrative capital matters for party system institutionalization in developing countries. Resources seem to play a crucial role in party aggregation, especially in countries where ideational capital does not seem strong enough to ensure this aggregation. Reformists, then, should be aware that administrative capital controlled by party bosses may be the glue that holds a party system together.

Second, the Colombian case helps to clarify the causal mechanisms behind the negative relation between decentralization reforms and party system aggregation highlighted by some resource-based theories. Although an overall diminution of resources in parties’ hands should always put stress on parties’ abilities to achieve aggregation, this effect is importantly mediated by the country’s political context and the type of decentralization reforms adopted. In Colombia, municipalization was especially harmful to regional barons that lost control over local politicians. Municipalization hit crucial linkages for party aggregation in a polity where parties already relied to a considerable degree on administrative capital and whose ideational capital was decreasing.

But other forms of decentralization may not have had a similar effect on the party system. If decentralization in Colombia had directed resources

to the regional level, the destabilizing effect on the party system might have been less decisive. In Argentina, for example, decentralization reforms directed more resources towards an already strong regional level (*provincias*), increasing the power of *gobernadores*, traditional politicians dominating regional politics (Eaton 2004: chapter 6; Morgan forthcoming: chapter 11; Willis, Garman, and Haggard 1999: 13).

On the other hand, if other sources of political capital are available, similar decentralization reforms will not necessarily lead to party system deinstitutionalization. For instance, in Brazil, despite a general shrinking of patronage resources after market reforms and the gradual strengthening of municipalities relative to state governorships (Fenwick 2010; Willis, Garman, and Haggard 1999: 13), national parties transformed from loose state-level patronage machines to more programmatically coherent groupings (Hagopian, Gervasoni, and Moraes 2009). As Hagopian and her co-authors explain, this outcome was possible because market reforms *also* created a programmatic cleavage in Brazilian politics that, in turn, increased the value of national parties' ideational capital. In other words, the contrast between the Colombian and the Brazilian case provides evidence that partisan dealignment (a decrease in parties' ideational capital) seems also to be a necessary condition for party system deinstitutionalization to take place.

These findings highlight the fact that we would expect particular decentralization reforms, and even their sequencing (Falleti 2010), to have differential impacts on the party system contingent in the respective political context. These results speak directly to current research about the different effects of similar formal institutions in developing countries (Levitsky and Murrillo 2009).

Third, the article offers some cautionary tales to institutional engineers that seek to solve acute political problems through formal institutions' reforms. On the one hand, the effect of electoral institutions can be more limited than sometimes assumed by reformists. For example, from our perspective, it is not surprising that the Colombian 2003 electoral reforms did not have a significant impact on party institutionalization: if national parties cannot regain more control over administrative resources it seems highly unlikely that formal institutions alone will institutionalize political parties. Electoral rules can "force" politicians to join parties' congressional lists, but if parties lack the ideational or administrative capital necessary to ensure candidates' loyalty, the party system will remain weakly bound.

But more importantly, the case shows that sometimes institutional reforms can have important unintended consequences. Reformists have limited knowledge and predictability of the impact of their reforms. In this case, reforms that aimed to reduce some acute obstacles for democratic quality,

such as the many pathologies of clientelism, created other serious problems for democracy. Compared to deinstitutionalized party systems, institutionalized party systems, clientelistic or not, seem better suited to limiting the power of undemocratic forces (such as the military) or the emergence of populist leaders that concentrate power in the executive. In Colombia, the weakening party system posed difficulties for checking the power of Álvaro Uribe. He was able to build direct linkages with the population and concentrate resources in the executive, which he used to heighten his popularity (Mejía, Botero, and Rodríguez 2008; Interview with Barco 2006; Interview with Uribe 2008). This case could have ended in more concentration of power in the executive if Uribe and his supporters had achieved, as intended, another constitutional reform allowing him to run for a third presidential term. An independent constitutional court, created and strengthened during bipartisan rule, prevented this possibility. “Fragmented” clientelism seems much less effective than “concentrated” clientelism at checking the president.

This problem of unrestrained popular leaders is a regional one. With fewer counterbalances than Uribe, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Alberto Fujimori in Peru reigned in democracies with weak parties (Levitsky and Cameron 2003; Levitsky and Way 2010). Even if less acute, similar patterns of expansive presidencies are found in Bolivia and Ecuador, two countries in which popular presidents have gained power and the party system remains weakly institutionalized. The emergence and unrestricted rule of these leaders is partly explained by the weakening and collapse of parties in the nineties.

The Colombian case, then, shows that political science has something valuable to offer reformers: skepticism. It is important to have some contextual knowledge and to analyze other experiences before rushing to adopt reforms or import institutions. Of course, we are not suggesting that a country should reverse electoral and fiscal decentralization or return to “concentrated” clientelism (if that were ever possible). It is evident that clientelism is extremely costly for democracy. And some positive effects for Colombian democracy have come out of the 1991 Constitution: better representation of social actors and stronger judicial institutions, among others. But it seems a good idea to keep in mind that democracy can sometimes work against parties.

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Democracia Contra Partidos? Desinstitucionalización del Sistema de Partidos en Colombia

Resumen: Este trabajo argumenta que las reformas descentralizadoras y electorales adoptadas a fines de los años ochenta y en la Constitución de 1991 en Colombia – diseñadas para mejorar la calidad de la democracia– trajeron como consecuencia no esperada una desinstitucionalización gradual del sistema de partidos de dicho país. Trabajando a partir de teorías que resaltan el efecto de los recursos sobre la configuración partidaria, argumentamos que en países en vías de desarrollo, donde los recursos suelen ser cruciales para la agregación partidaria, las reformas “democratizadoras” diseñadas para distribuir poder y recursos en el sistema político pueden reducir los incentivos de los candidatos a nivel local para unirse y permane-

cer leales a los partidos políticos, especialmente cuando la reputación de estos últimos es débil. En Colombia estas reformas (i) redujeron el control de líderes políticos intermedios sobre la distribución de incentivos selectivos, volviendo a estos líderes menos importantes para los políticos locales, y (ii) dieron más autonomía política y financiera a los candidatos locales, reduciendo su necesidad de unirse a partidos políticos para alcanzar sus objetivos electorales. Como resultado, la cohesión partidaria y la disciplina se hicieron más difíciles de mantener y el sistema de partidos se desinstitucionalizó gradualmente.

Palabras clave: Colombia, América Latina, partidos políticos, clientelismo, democracia