

# Why Populism? How Parties Shape the Electoral Fortune of Populists

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## **Abstract**

Much of the literature on populism is limited to a regionally specific context. Because of this approach, theories of populism have not been adapted to explain cross-regional similarities or differences (such as the prevalence of exclusive populist parties in Europe but inclusive parties in Latin America). Using cross-regional data and exploratory case studies from multiple regions, we provide evidence that the prevalence of populism in a given party system is a function of party institutionalization of parties within the party system. In laying out our theory we identify three ways in which populist parties enter party systems and contest elections: populist entry, populist targeting and adaptation, and populist capture.

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# 1 Introduction

Recent events, such as the referendum for Great Britain to leave the European Union, the near election of a FPÖ candidate in Austria for President, and the election of Donald Trump, have driven a wide spread discussion of populism and its (perceived) growing strength. Elected officials and pundits within this discussion often speak of the rise populism as a recent phenomenon, but this view is inaccurate. The presence of populism in West, Central, and Eastern Europe and Latin America is nothing new. For decades now, populist parties such as the FPÖ in Austria or the FN France have made steady electoral gains, while in Latin America populist parties and figures such as MAS with Evo Morales in Bolivia or Hugo Chávez in Venezuela surged to power in the 2000s. So, while the recent incidents of populism in electoral democracies is notable, it is not unprecedented.

The presence of populism in Latin America and Europe is reflected in a large literature in populism. However, most of the work to date has focused on populism within a given region, with little work which draws comparisons directly between populism in the Latin American and European context. The study of populism in Europe primarily focuses on radical-right populist parties (Betz, 1994; Mudde, 2007). In this context, populism or populists that have managed electoral gains or survived multiple electoral rounds boast organized and coherent parties. Populism in Latin America differs greatly when juxtaposed to populism in Europe. Research on populism in Latin America focuses on individual populist leaders that are associated with parties that are far weaker and more ephemeral than their populist counterparts in Europe (Conniff et al., 2012). Comparative work on populism can make better

use of cross-regional comparisons in order to highlight key mechanisms which explain the variance in the electoral fortunes of populist parties.

The variance in electoral performance of populist parties, whether between regions or within a single region, has largely been ignored in the literature<sup>1</sup>. Previous work on populism in the European context has largely focused on the presence, survival, or professionalization of populist or radical right parties (Mudde, 2007; Art, 2011). European populist parties have had limited electoral success - usually functioning as exclusionary peripheral parties garnering only small shares of electoral support. However, in recent years populist parties such as Syriza (Greece), Podemos (Spain), and FPÖ (Austria), won control of the government, become major parties, and/or have nearly captured the presidency. While these examples remain exceptional cases, populist parties throughout Europe have gained ground over the past decade and appear to continue growing.

By contrast, populists and populist parties have been far more pervasive and successful in Latin America, frequently winning presidential elections and capturing majorities in legislatures - something most populist parties in Europe have been unable to do <sup>2</sup>. Figure 2 graphs the distribution of the presence of populism in both Western Europe and the Americas. These distributions demonstrate that populism is more present in Latin America party systems than Western Europe and far more

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<sup>1</sup>Recent works by Cas Mudde, Cristóbal Kaltwasser, Kirk Hawkins, and Bruno Silva, have begun comparing populist rhetoric across regions (Mudde, 2011; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Hawkins and Silva, 2015)

<sup>2</sup>Winning a majority in the legislature is something no populist party in Western Europe has been able to accomplish although Syriza fell one seat short of gaining a majority in September 2015 election.

varied <sup>3</sup>. The intra-regional variation of populism in Latin America is quite striking. Recent work by Hawkins and Silva (2015) weights electoral results for parties in Latin America and Western Europe by the strength of their populist rhetoric. The strongest populist parties, by their criteria, are found in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina, and Peru. These results should come as no surprise and serve as a face validity check on their methods. Yet even though some of the party systems where populism is most prevalent are found in Latin America rather than Western Europe, so too are some of the party systems where populism is the least prevalent. Using the same technique, Hawkins and Silva (2015)<sup>5</sup> found that some of the least populist party systems in the two regions are found in Mexico, Paraguay, and Uruguay.

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<sup>3</sup>For this graph populism is measured and weighted according to Hawkins and Silva (2015). The the most notable cases of populism are found in Venezuela (with Hugo Chávez) and Bolivia (with Evo Morales). Indeed, Chavez, with his particular Chavismo, is the quintessential case of populism (Hawkins, 2010). Populist parties in Latin America also differ from their European counterparts in that they are far less institutionalized. Populist parties in Latin America tend to serve as instruments of a strong populist leader coming only to life with the rise of a populist leader and then fading into obscurity after the end of their rule. Alberto Fujimori's Cambio 90 party is a case in point. Founded by Fujimori himself, Cambio 90 quickly came to dominate the legislature by riding Fujimori's coattails. This success, however, was shortly lived and the party unraveled and quickly faded into obscurity when Fujimori was removed from power.

While populism has found success in Latin American, it is anything but ubiquitous in the region<sup>4</sup>

<sup>5</sup>See Figure 3 in *Mapping Populist Parties in Europe and the Americas*

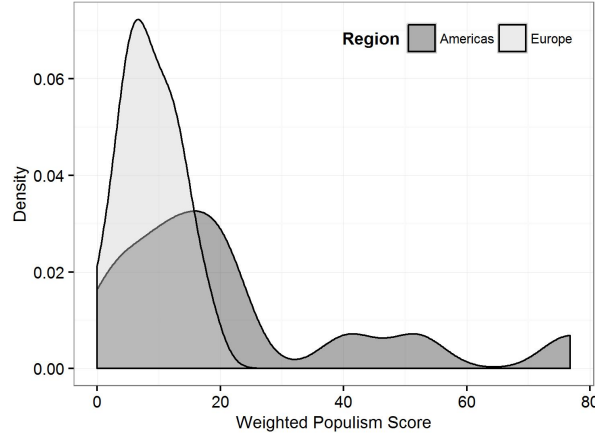


Figure 1: Distribution of Populism in Latin American and Western European Party Systems

What explains variation of populism both within and between regions? As far as we are aware, no work has attempted to produce a theoretical or empirical explanation for why populism is more prevalent in Latin America, why it has slowly gained ground in Europe, and why there is significant variation in the electoral success of populist parties within these regions. In this piece we lay the groundwork for identifying a cause of populism. In doing so we build on existing theoretical and empirical work to extend the comparative analysis of populism beyond a singular region. We argue that the extent to which increasingly more populist parties win greater shares of the electorate is a function of environmental hostility. The level of environmental hostility depends upon the strength and institutionalization of political parties as well as the restrictiveness of electoral institutions. We expect that as individual political parties or party systems become more institutionalized and/or electoral institutions become more restrictive, the ability for populist parties to succeed will diminish and reduce the payoff for any single party to become more populist. By

contrast, the deinstitutionalization and weakening of party systems and the presence of more permissive electoral institutions opens the political space for populist parties and appeals.

We argue that political parties and party systems are key to understanding the electoral success and behavior of populist parties. By studying populism through the lens of political parties we hope to answer four related questions. First, why is populism much more pervasive in party systems outside of Western Europe? One key feature that distinguishes Western European party systems from their counterparts in other regions is the degree of party institutionalization of parties within a party system. We argue that systems with more institutionalized parties provide comparatively less fertile soil for the seeds of populism. Second, what explains why economic shocks give rise to populism in some contexts but not others? We argue that the party system is an important intervening variable between shocks and populist support. Third, what explains why anti-elite distrust of institutions is represented by populism in many, but not all cases where this sentiment is present? We argue that the explanation lies in political parties *where parties are institutionalized there is less space for proto-populists to take advantage of popular disillusionment*. Thus, while the disillusionment exists, high levels of environmental hostility prevents new parties from entering and capitalizing upon the distrust of institutions. Lastly, why do some populist parties adopt inclusive strategies while others pursue exclusive strategies? We contend that where party institutionalization is high, populist are forced to appeal to limited segments of the population - leading them to develop more narrow targeting strategies which result in more exclusive parties.

Political parties affect the prevalence of populism because they serve as instruments to coordinate elite action and link elites to the broader population. However, the mere presence of political parties doesn't preclude the presence of populism. We argue that populism can enter and interact with political parties in three ways: populist entry, populist targeting and adaptation, and populist capture. *Populist entry* occurs when the *party system* is sufficiently weak that new parties can enter and immediately compete with, or even outmatch, other parties in the system. *Populist targeting and adaptation* occurs as populist parties adapt and evolve through electoral cycles in order to compete with well-established and institutionalized parties. Lastly, *populist capture* occurs when factionalism within a party allows a populist to take control of an existing, yet seemingly stable, party. We discuss these means of populist contestation in greater detail later after discussing the concept of populism.

Our paper proceeds as follows: First, we introduce the highly contested concept of populism and argue for an ideational, rather than material, conceptualization of populism. After conceptualizing populism, we introduce our theory of how the presence of populism within a party system is dependent upon environmental hostility - which we argue is a function of both party institutionalization and the restrictiveness of electoral institutions. Following our theory, we outline our research strategy and then present quantitative and qualitative data to support our hypotheses. The purpose of this paper is not to estimate any causal effect of party institutionalization or electoral system restrictiveness on populism. Instead, our focus is to establish the plausibility of this argument. After presenting our data we then summarize our findings and conclude.

## 2 Populism: A Slippery Concept

Populism is one of the most contested concepts in political science and is notoriously difficult to apply consistently (Roberts, 1995, 2003; Hawkins and Silva, 2015; Weyland, 2001). Populism has frequently been associated with robust redistributive policies that are set against global liberalism (e.g. Argentina's Perón or Ecuador's Ibarra). However, the resurgence of populism in the 1980s and 1990s challenged the classical conceptualization of populism as populist leaders did not limit themselves to leftist policies (Weyland, 2001). Debate on the formulation of populism as a concept has, quite fittingly, centered on two opposing notions of what populism is. On one side of the argument authors propose a concept rooted in the form of organization and mobilization (Weyland, 2001; Roberts, 2014) while on the other is an approach cemented on discourse (Mudde, 2007; Hawkins and Silva, 2015).

The organizational approach to populism posits that populism is not simply tied to policy programs but instead to the nature of political organization. Under this framework, populists gain electoral support by creating large, cross-cutting, hierarchical, yet unorganized bases (Weyland, 2001). Roberts (2015) argues that populism is a top-down, elite dominated form of political mobilization that can exploit social movements for electoral and political gain. Roberts' conceptualization of populism is founded in the Latin American experience where populists step over the ashes of political parties whose downfall was brought on by elite defection or economic crisis. In these instances populists need only to push open an unlocked door into a party system where opponents are no longer able to mobilize the masses through a party apparatus.



While this conceptualization would appropriately identify Correa, Fujimori or Chávez as populists, it excludes someone like Evo Morales who rises to power from a grass-roots movement rather than subjugating the masses as an elite. When considering the weakness of parties in Latin America, this conceptualization of populism has merit. Because political parties in Latin America tend to be weak, there is little incentive to build parties (Levitsky et al., 2016). This allows individuals to compete in the electoral arena without a party and can instead rely on top-down populist mobilization. Why build a party when you can mobilize the masses for electoral gain without one? This concept, however, encounters problems when applied to the European cases where political parties remain crucial to electoral success and the elite subjugation of the masses is less pronounced.

Seeking to explain populism in Europe, Mudde (2007) writes from a tradition of populism that appears quite different than the experience of populism in Latin America. The European experience with populism has a number of key distinctions that require a different conceptualization of populism. First, and perhaps most importantly, European populists differ significantly from their Latin American counterparts in that they tend to develop more robust party organizations. Another crucial distinction is the tendency of these parties to be rightist parties with a strong exclusive nationalistic bent <sup>6</sup>.

To conceptualize populism in Europe, Mudde (2007) and Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) frames populism as a discursive concept. In this framework, populism is a

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<sup>6</sup>Material, political, and symbolic dimensions of inclusive populist parties or movements seek to cross-cut social cleavages while exclusive populist movements or parties seek to reinforce material, political, and symbolic dimensions within certain social cleavages

view of the world, expressed through discourse, with two opposing forces; the people - who embody the moral good - and the corrupt elite who conspire against the people. Building off of Mudde's ideational concept, Hawkins et al. (2012) defines populism as a "*Manichaeian approach to the political world that equates the side of Good with the putative will of the people and the side of Evil with a conspiring elite*".

Another ideational conceptualization of populism can be drawn from Ostiguy (2009). Ostiguy (2009) differs with Hawkins, Mudde, and others in that populism<sup>7</sup> is not a construct of how the world is viewed but how the populist relates to the people. Ostiguy (2009) argues that populists relate to the people by flaunting the low - behaving or speaking in a way that sets them apart from the elite and allows them to be more closely related to the people. By way of example, consider two well-known Western politicians: David Cameron and Donald Trump. Cameron, an Oxford educated British politician speaks and behaves like a cultural elite and adheres to conventional rules and procedures. Trump, by contrast, flaunts the low and appeals to "the people" by using coarser language and rhetoric filled with insults towards elites while dismissing and denigrating traditional rules and institutions.

For the purposes of this study we adopt an ideational conceptualization of populism. We do this because it provides greater flexibility in comparing populists across regions of the world than otherwise possible with a material-organizational approach. By adopting a material-organizational conceptualization of populism, we would limit ourselves to elite dominated mass movements which are rarer in areas of the world

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<sup>7</sup>Ostiguy (2009) does not develop a concept of populist *per se* but his conceptualization of an elite-mass cultural dimension effectively captures an aspect of populism

where politics are well organized via political parties<sup>8</sup>. We also do not favor one ideational conceptualization over the other. A *prima facie* check of populists suggests that there is significant overlap between the Manichean (Hawkins et al., 2012) and flaunting-the-low (Ostiguy, 2009) types of populists. In their attempt to construct a Manichean framing of the world, many populists seek to relate culturally to "the people" to set themselves apart from the elite against whom they are engaged in political battle.

### 3 Populism's Party Problem

Many explanations for the rise of populism have been put forward a number of which center on economic-focused explanations such as the growth of or backlash against globalization (Mughan et al., 2003; Swank and Betz, 2003; Kriesi et al., 2006, 2008) or neoliberalism (Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 1999). While populist discourse often refers to economic grievances, we agree with others that populism is a chiefly political phenomena (Weyland, 2001; Roberts, 2014) and that this phenomenon is closely linked with the nature of political parties. While we are among the first to explicitly link populism to party institutionalization, other scholars have certainly noted the role that parties play in the rise of populism<sup>9</sup>, particularly in Latin America. Ken Roberts, for example, notes that the use of bait-and-switch tactics by party elites lead to programmatic delinkage between society and parties and contributed to the

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<sup>8</sup>Our theory of parties and populism suggests that this style of organization is an outcome of weak parties rather than an essential characteristic of populism

<sup>9</sup>Work on populism in Europe has also focused on how convergence to the center by mainstream parties opened the door to radical right populist parties (Kitschelt and McGann, 1997; Abedi, 2002; Mudde, 2007; Carter, 2011).

rise of populist politicians (Roberts, 1995, 2012, 2013). While we use a different conceptualization of populism than Roberts, we likewise see populism as a function of weak/weakened parties and party systems. Thus, economic explanations are only indirectly related to populism in that if economic phenomena weaken political parties, populism is more likely to exist.

To outline how populism is dependent upon parties and party systems we treat populism as a strategy to garner electoral votes. We view party-based mobilization and populism as two alternative (though not necessarily mutually exclusive) strategies for mobilizing voters. In this way, populism can be seen as a substitute or a compliment to political parties as an instrument for organization and mobilizing voters. In consolidated democracies, political parties serve as the most effective instrument for political organization and electoral mobilization. However, in many polities other strategies (such as clientelism) are more effective at mobilizing voters and in some instances parties may be an unnecessary cost Levitsky et al. (2016).

Where political parties are more institutionalized (i.e. cohesive, organized, with professionalize staff, an establish brand), the payoffs for using populist rhetoric to build a constituency diminish as that rhetoric is less capable of inducing electoral loyalty compared to more enduring and material connections to voters. To demonstrate how populism is a function of parties and party systems we outline three ways through which populists contest elections vis-à-vis parties in party systems: Populist Entry, Populist Targeting and Adaptation, and Populist Capture.

To begin with, it is helpful to think about how much political space there is for would-be populists. The hostility of the electoral environment shapes both the

		Degree of Institutionalization	
		Low	High
Degree of Electoral System Restrictiveness	Low	<p>Low environmental hostility (Populist Entry)</p> <p>Bolivia, Spain, and Venezuela</p>	<p>Moderate environmental hostility (Populist Targeting &amp; Adaptation)</p> <p>Austria and France</p>
	High	<p>Moderate environmental hostility (Populist Capture)</p> <p>United States</p>	<p>High environmental hostility (Populism is rare)</p>

Table 1

likelihood that populists will compete and be successful, and the form that populist competition will take. We distinguish between two factors that affect the hostility of electoral environment: the level of party institutionalization, and the level of electoral permissiveness/restrictiveness (See Table 1). Holding all else constant (the economic environment, the popularity of existing parties, popular disillusionment, etc.) the combination of these two factors shape the competitive environment and thus the strategy of would-be populists.

### 3.1 Low environmental hostility: Populist Entry

When institutionalization and barriers to entry are low the environment for populist parties is ideal. Populists can easily enter the system and mobilize voters who are, at

best, only weakly attached to existing political parties Tavits (2006, 2008, 2013). In short, we argue that environments with low hostility provide the best opportunity for populist parties, and hence, we should expect populist parties to be more prevalent and more successful in these environments, *ceteris paribus*.

In cases where environmental hostility is low and political entrepreneurs enter the party system using a populist strategy we expect these parties to be inclusive populist parties. Because electoral volatility is high and societal linkages to pre-existing parties are weak, it is in the interest of the entering populist party to build a coalition or base that is cross-cutting and inclusive of many factions of disaffected segments of society in order to maximize its electoral gains. The incentives for an inclusive populist approach should increase with the restrictiveness of the electoral system where building pluralities have high payoffs. See, for example, the cases of Chávez’s PSUV, Morales’ MAS, Iglesias’ Podemos, or Syriza under Tsipras.

### **3.2 Moderate Environmental Hostility Due to Low Party Institutionalization: Populist Capture**

What are our expectations where the environment is only moderately hostile—either a combination of weak parties with a restrictive electoral system, or strong parties with a permissive electoral system? Lets start with a system where parties are weakly institutionalized but the electoral system makes new party entry difficult. The restrictive nature of the electoral system makes new party entry difficult and the presence of populism in the party system is thus rarer.

While rare, when we do see populist emerging in this type of moderately hostile

environment, the path to power is likely to be an intra-party one. Namely, populist leaders or factions come to capture an existing party. Populist capture occurs when a populist (likely a party outsider or leader of a faction) attempts to gain control of the party and party elites are unable to prevent the populist's rise. Where parties are highly institutionalized it is likely that party elites will be able to coordinate to prevent such capture. However, in the case of low party institutionalization, a lack of party cohesion makes it more likely that populist wings will exist within the party while party factionalism will undermine the capacity of party elites to coordinate against the populist.

The recent experience in the United States is an illustration of this dynamic. Both political parties are fairly under-institutionalized, and each party is factionalized with a populist wing. In addition, the parties have divested control of candidate selection to primary voters and their delegates. Both parties faced significant challenges from the populist wings of the party and the high degree of factionalism made elite coordination against the populist challengers difficult (more on the U.S. case below).

### **3.3 Moderate Environmental Hostility Due to Permissive Electoral Institutions: Populist Targeting and Adaptation**

What about situations where parties are institutionalized but the electoral environment is permissive? How do populist parties enter and survive in systems with

institutionalized party systems? If a populist party is able to enter a party system with high levels of institutionalization, it is unlikely to be able to sway large segments of the electorate. First, existing parties already have stable and strong links to society. Second, well institutionalized parties should boast a professional and well organization that is effective at mobilizing voters.

Because of this, these populist parties must typically focus on targeting limited segments of society that do not have strong links to existing parties. This tends to lead populist parties in these systems to be more exclusive in their appeals. If they wish to compete against existing parties they must broaden their appeal beyond niche segments of society and this will generally require that parties reduce the strength of their populist discourse—we call this strategy populist adaptation.

### **3.4 High Environmental Hostility: Few populist parties**

Should proto-populists seek to enter a system where environmental hostility is very high because of non-permissive institutions *and* high levels of institutionalization, forming their own party is unlikely to succeed. Winning a significant portion of the electorate will be difficult because it requires the new party to peel away a large number of voters that are strongly linked to existing parties. In addition, due to the highly restrictive nature of the electoral system they face the likely prospect of complete electoral failure with few to no seats. Given the hostile nature of the electoral environment populists should be least likely to emerge under these conditions.



## 4 Alternative Approaches

Our argument points to parties and electoral restrictiveness as a cause of (the lack of) populism. We argue that environmental hostility shapes the strategies which political entrepreneurs may take to garner shares of the electorate. Under our reasoning, the presence of stronger and more institutionalized parties reduces the ability of entrepreneurs who select a populist strategy to gain electoral traction. Thus, when parties are weak or electoral systems are permissive, populism is more prevalent in the system. We must also consider, however, that populism is actually a cause of party weakness or de-institutionalization.

Populism as a cause of party weakening or party system de-institutionalization is a problem of endogeneity that is crucial to address. In our model, we argue that political parties are influential political institutions that are the best instruments for organizing and mobilizing voters. It is plausible that populism is actually a superior form of political mobilization, and that the rise of especially talented populists, such as Hugo Chávez, *causes* the collapse of parties within the system rather than the other way around. Whether party weaknesses cause populism or that populism undermines political parties is an empirical question that we seek to answer.

Our argument also implies a puzzle that we must grapple with: *if weak parties or party systems allow populism to rise, why isn't populism ubiquitous in systems with weak parties?* If populism is such a potentially powerful electoral tool, why then do we not observe more populism - especially where parties are weak? One part of the explanation lies with moderating effect of the electoral environment, as discussed above. However, we also stress that populism is, in itself, one of many strategies

politicians can use. Politicians may form parties, rely on personal wealth, use force, rely on clientelist networks, business ties, or use populism. None of these strategies are mutually exclusive and political entrepreneurs may make use a mix of any set of strategies as they believe to be the most advantageous. The use of populism as a strategy, then, is dependent upon alternative forms of political organization and mobilization strategies. Should alternative forms exist, political entrepreneurs may substitute to or away from populism depending on the instruments available to them.

## 5 Research strategy

We argue that the prevalence of populism in a party system is a function of the level of environmental hostility of the electoral system. As the average level of hostility increases within the system, the average level of electoral success of populist parties within the system should decrease. In circumstances where the average level of party institutionalization is high and institutions are non-permissive (i.e. environmental hostility is high and SMDP is used), populism should be rare. Where institutionalization is low but institutions are restrictive then populism should emerge within existing parties via populist capture. Where electoral institutions are permissive but parties are highly institutionalized then populist parties should be relatively small, and focused on the exclusive targeting of small portions of the electorate. Finally, the environment which is most conducive to populist parties is one with weak parties and a permissive electoral system. While we theorize that party institutionalization is causally linked with populism, our goal in this paper is to establish the plausibility

of this argument, rather than to precisely estimate a causal effect.

Our intention is to present evidence of a link between average party institutionalization and the presence of populism in any given party system. To establish this link we follow a two-step research design. The first step will make use of quantitative data. The purpose of this quantitative data is to move beyond mere description and demonstrate a cross-regional correlation between party institutionalization and populism. Because of data limitations and the difficulty of identifying the exogenous relationship between party institutionalization and populism we stop short of estimating any causal relationship via this cross-national quantitative data.

The second step in our research design is to use exploratory cases studies. The use of case studies fills two purposes. First, using cases studies provides a more nuanced view of the causal mechanisms through which variance in party institutionalization may lead to changes in the level of populism within a party system. Second, case studies allow us to address the issue of endogeneity - reverse causality. As previously mentioned, it is reasonable to believe that the rise of populism, or a particular populist, may lead to the deinstitutionalization of individual parties or the party system as a whole. By using exploratory case studies we pay particular attention to the timing of changes in the institutionalization of parties within a party system and the system as a whole vis-à-vis changes in the electoral fortunes of populists.

## 6 Data

### *Populism*

We measure populism using new data generated by Hawkins and Silva (2015). Hawkins and Silva (2015) treat populism as discursive and define it as discourse which treats politics as a dualistic struggle between the (morally good) people and the (morally evil or corrupt) elite. To measure populism, Hawkins and Silva (2015) use a holistic grading of entire party manifestos and selected speeches. Using this technique, Kirk Hawkins and his research team trained graders (usually student research assistants) on their conceptualization of populism and then worked through exercises using a number of example texts. Each grader reads an entire text and assigns a score to the text for its level of populism. To measure populism, Hawkins and Silva (2015) use three point scale, ranging from 0 to 2, where 0 indicates very little to no populism present, 1 indicates the presence of populist rhetoric but is tempered by non-populist elements, and 2 indicates that a text is extremely populist<sup>10</sup>.

After grading is completed, scores are then aggregated through a multi-step process. First, equal weights are assigned to the scores for the party manifesto and the average of the scores of the party speeches. Second, the average level of populism is then calculated for the party system to allow cross-regional comparison. The final indicator which is used as our measure of populism uses a formula which sums the products between each country's populism score and its vote share. Thus, this measure of populism indicates how prevalent populism is in a party system.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>For sampling technique see Hawkins and Silva (2015, pg. 6)

<sup>11</sup>The formula used for this is  $P_c = \frac{\sum(p_i x v_i)}{2}$

## *Party Institutionalization*

To measure the average institutionalization of the parties within the system, we use new data collected by the *Varieties of Democracy Project* (Hereafter V-Dem)<sup>12</sup>. Our primary measure of average party institutionalization, is V-Dem's index of Party Institutionalization, which we will refer to as *PI*. PI is an index of five party system-related components, and is created in two stage process. The first stage is the aggregation of ordinal ratings provided by multiple country experts (five or more) for the five individual components (party organization, branches, linkages, distinct party platforms, and legislative party cohesion)<sup>13</sup>. In the second stage, the outputs of these first stage analyses are aggregated into the PI index using Bayesian factor analysis techniques.<sup>14</sup> For more details on the characteristics of the PI index (its strengths and weaknesses) see Bizzaro et al. (2016). The V-Dem data includes observations

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<sup>12</sup>It is critical to understand that we are not measuring *party system institutionalization* as conceptualized in Mainwaring et al. (1995). Instead of focusing on *party systems*, we focus on the institutionalization of individual parties *within* the system rather than the system itself

<sup>13</sup>The specific questions used to measure these components can be found at the V-Dem website. [https://v-dem.net/media/filer\\_public/17/fe/17fe9954-d9aa-4961-aa73-f967929ebab9/v-dem\\_codebook\\_v43.pdf](https://v-dem.net/media/filer_public/17/fe/17fe9954-d9aa-4961-aa73-f967929ebab9/v-dem_codebook_v43.pdf)

See section 2.16 Party institutionalization index

<sup>14</sup>We draw on Bernhard et al. (2015) for this summary of process: The individual components of the index are aggregated from the responses that experts provided to the relevant questions on the V-Dem survey. These multiple ordinal ratings were then aggregated into a unified, continuous and reliable variable using Bayesian item response theory (IRT) models. Because individual raters might vary with regard to the way they interpret the questions, and in terms of reliability and consistency, these models are useful because they incorporate the information encoded in the variation in raters' perceptions, and in reliability levels across and within coders into the estimation process (Bollen and Paxton, 2000; Jackman, 2004).

IRT models assume that the variable being measured is latent, that it cannot be measured directly and that each coder's response includes a degree of error. The model uses patterns of disagreement across ratings to estimate coder level errors, and down weights the ratings provided by coders who are deemed less informative. The Bayesian framework allows us to estimate country-year level parameters that capture the latent variable of interest, along with thresholds differentiating the levels of the variable. For a more detailed discussion see Pemstein et al. (2015).

for 193 countries with fairly regular coverage from 1900 to 2014.

As an alternative way to operationalize institutionalization we employ a measure of party strength developed by Bizzaro et al. (2016). Party strength is an index that measures the extent to which political parties within a polity are characterized by: (1) permanent national party organizations, (2) permanent local party branches, (3) centralized mechanisms of candidate selection, (4) legislative cohesion, (5) minimal party switching (where elected members of a party change their party affiliation in between elections), and (6) programmatic (rather than clientelistic) linkages to their social base. The six indicators are aggregated through simple addition to form a Party Strength index, reflecting the expectation that each element of the index is partially substitutable.

We use these two measure of institutionalization to explore the correlation between the average institutionalization or strength of parties within the party system and the level of populism within the party system. As previously stated, the data available on party system level populism is limited to the Americas and Western Europe in the years near 2010. Because of the limited quantitative data available on populism we average the past 10 years of *PI* for each of the 26 countries available in the Hawkins and Silva (2015) dataset.

#### *Electoral System Restrictiveness*

To proxy for electoral system restrictiveness we use a new measure of district magnitude provided by Selway et al. (2016). Selway et al. (2016) collected data on the district magnitude which accounts for electoral systems with multiple tiers in selecting seats for the legislature. Selway et al. (2016) measure the average district

magnitude using the following formula below.

$$AverageDistrictMagnitude = \frac{(Seats_1/Districts_1)}{Seats_1 + Seats_2} * \frac{(Seats_2/Districts_2)}{Seats_1 + Seats_2}$$

We use the log of *AverageDistrictMagnitude* as our measure of electoral system restrictiveness. We emphasize that this measure is a proxy for electoral system restrictiveness. One weakness of this proxy is that it does not account for the restrictiveness of the electoral system at the executive level. Some presidential or semi-presidential systems use rules that may make it easier for smaller parties to contest. Our measure does not capture this. Instead, we capture the restrictiveness of the electoral system at the legislative level.

### *Case Selection*

As previously mentioned when introducing our research design, we use exploratory case studies to investigate the mechanisms through which party institutionalization potentially affects the presence of populism within a given party system as well as the direction and timing of this relationship. To explore the link between party institutionalization and populism we have selected six cases in two regions: the Americas and Western Europe <sup>15</sup>. We have selected these regions to be consistent with our cross-national analysis and because countries within these regions provide variation in terms of the robustness of parties and party systems as well as the prevalence of populism.

From the Americas we have selected Bolivia, the United States, and Venezuela. In Bolivia because Evo Morales captured the MAS party, melded it with his significant

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<sup>15</sup>In future iterations of this paper we intend to include cases from Southeast Asia

grass-roots movements, and entered and came to dominate a relatively weak party system. In addition to Bolivia, we have selected the United States. The United States has a restrictive electoral system with moderately institutionalized parties. We focus on the 2016 election to demonstrate how populism can enter a seemingly stable party system through a under-institutionalized party - namely the Republican Party. Finally, Venezuela is the quintessential story of populism in Latin America. Following significant political upheaval during the 1990s, Hugo Chávez entered a weakened party system with a new and weakly-institutionalized political party using his own brand of strong populism Chavismo<sup>16</sup>.

In addition to the Americas we draw on cases from Western Europe. Western Europe is commonly associated with relatively strong and institutionalized party systems. In Western Europe we have selected Austria, France, and Spain. Austria and France each demonstrate how populist parties are largely disadvantaged in well-institutionalized party systems. In both cases populist parties entered as fringe parties and struggled to garner electoral success. Despite their initial struggles, Austria's FPÖ and Frances FN parties have found greater electoral success as only as they have evolved and contested elections with a diluted populist brand. In Spain despite massive economic upheaval, long established political parties have been able to maintain a significant hold on the electorate despite the rise of the new populist party, Podemos.

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<sup>16</sup>These cases stand in strong contrast to countries in the region such as Mexico. Mexico provides a significant counter example to the three previous cases. Despite its proximity to countries that have been dominated by populism, economic difficulties, and internal instability, Mexico boasts some of the strongest parties in all of the Americas and has a profound lack of populism



## 7 Cross-regional evidence

Prior to addressing the timing of populism entry, targeting/adaptation, or capture in party systems, we first focus on establishing evidence for a cross-national trend that supports our hypothesis that party and party system institutionalization is critical to understanding variation in populism. As previously mentioned, we have merged data from **V-dem** with cross-national data on populism from Hawkins and Silva (2015). We present the summary statistics in Table 2. In this table we also include the average vote share of all political parties in the party system that received at least a single percentage of the vote in either an executive or legislative election.

Table 2: Sample Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Vote Share	26	21.429	9.624	11.875	49.850
Populism	26	15.433	17.028	0.000	76.785
PI	26	0.840	0.153	0.485	0.985
Party Strength	26	0.456	0.427	-0.450	1.134

To provide evidence for a relationship between party and/or party system institutionalization we plot *PSI* and *Populism* in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows a trend downward and to the right demonstrating that as *PI* increases, *Populism* decreases. In addition to this trend, a critical finding is the disparity between regions. American countries, colored darker, are found to have less institutionalized party systems and a higher presence of populism.



Table 3: Breakdown of Populism and Party System Attributes by Region

Variable	Americas	Europe
Vote Share	22.575	15.085
Populism	16.441	7.495
PI	0.725	0.947
Party Strength	0.104	0.720

multi-dimensional measure of environmental hostility and plot the countries from our sample in Figure 3<sup>18</sup>.

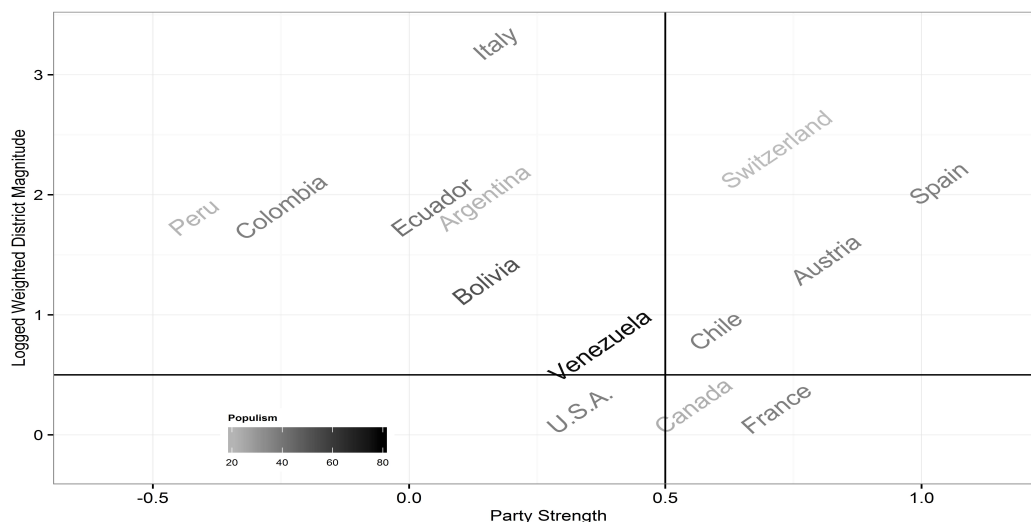


Figure 3: Environmental Hostility and Populism in Party Systems

With the exception of France, Figure 3 mostly resembles the 2x2 depicted in Table 1 in which we categorized the different ways in which electoral system restrictiveness and party institutionalization interact to create environmental hostility. This was anticipated because of our use of District Magnitude of the legislature as our proxy for

<sup>18</sup>We only include countries that were above or equal to the score of populism of France

electoral system restrictiveness. Using District Magnitude as a measure of electoral system restrictiveness only captures the ratio of seats to districts which is 1:1 in the French legislature. France, however, uses multiple rounds in both their legislative and executive elections which makes the electoral system more permissive than systems that have the same District Magnitude such as the United States. Thus, France would most likely be in the top-right dimension were a better measure of electoral system restrictiveness be available.

The variation in darkness of country names in Figure 3 adjusts for the level of populism within the country’s party system. As expected, countries in the top-left grid are darker signaling higher levels of populism in this dimension. Countries in the bottom-left, and top-right are shaded similarly and signal a diminished presence of populism in these party systems. This evidence supports our assertion that populism in Latin America is largely due to low environmental hostility, where as populism in Europe fits within the dimension of medium environmental hostility due to strong parties but more permissive electoral systems, while the United States fits into the dimension of medium environmental hostility due to under-institutionalized parties.

## 7.1 Timing Populist Gains in Party Systems

As previously mentioned, the possibility of reverse causality (populism causing party and party system de-institutionalization) is theoretically plausible yet still an empirical question. In addition to brief case studies we use time-series plots of *PI* and *Party Strength* to investigate the timing of the rise of populist parties and address the issue of endogeneity. In each figure we plot the time-series of *PI* and *Party strength*

next to each other for comparison of within country time trends for each of the indicators<sup>19</sup>. In each figure we plot the time-series for each indicator for each country for approximately 25 years<sup>20</sup> along with the global average for democracies<sup>2122</sup> in order to compare the country-year trend with the global-year trend. We also highlight the years of the significant presence of populism in the party system with a gray background<sup>23</sup>.

A few general findings stand out when looking at these figures. First, changes in *PI* seem to have no discernible temporal relationship with the rise of populism. In the European, Venezuelan, and U.S. cases *PI* is fairly stable prior to the rise of populism. Only in Bolivia do we observe any decrease in the level of *PI* prior to a populist period. Unlike *PI*, however, in many cases we do observe a decrease in *Party Strength* prior to the beginning of a populist period. In the cases where there is an increase or stability in *Party Strength* (Bolivia, and Venezuela), the average party strength in each of these systems is below the global democratic average of *Party Strength*. This observation supports our argument that populism is more likely to be present or increase its presence in systems with weak or weakened political parties.

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<sup>19</sup>The range for each indicators are different. *PI* is an indicator ranging from 0-1 with global mean of 0.5 while *Party Strength* ranges from -1.5 to 1.5. Because of a difference in ranges the y-axis differ.

<sup>20</sup>In the European cases of Austria and France we extend the time horizon by 10 years to account for the first times that the FN in France and FPÖ in Austria became relatively competitive parties

<sup>21</sup>We select democracies for countries scoring greater than 6 on Polity IV's composite democratic index.

<sup>22</sup>To calculate the average we selected all country years where *polity2*  $\geq 6$  and calculate the year average for *PI* and *Party Strength*

<sup>23</sup>The United States is an exception in this case. Because we treat the capture of the Republican Party nomination by Donald Trump as the beginning of a populist period in the United States we highlight the time after the Global Financial Crisis which began in 2008. We argue in the case study that the rise of the Tea Party created significant coordination problems for elites in the Republican Party which was a necessary condition for Donald Trump's capture of the Party nomination

In instances where parties are strong (France and Austria) and the party system is well institutionalized, populist periods in these cases<sup>24</sup> began after small decreases in *Party Strength*.

## 8 Case Studies

Because of a lack of quantitative data we include a number of brief case studies to provide greater depth in the timing and type of populism present in the Americas and Western Europe. We use these case studies to walk through the causal mechanisms of how parties and party systems influence the presence of populism in party systems. We also use these case studies to show how the strength of populism fluctuates over time and is a function of environmental hostility.

### 8.1 Populist Entry

#### *Venezuela*

We begin our cases studies with the prototypical populist case - Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. Prior to Chávez's ascendancy to the presidency in the late 1990s, the party system of Venezuela had experienced decade-long collapse, despite previously being one of the most stable party systems in the region. If Venezuela had boasted one of the most institutionalized party systems, how did it come to collapse?

Following years of economic experimentation with ISI, Venezuela faced dire straits. Under pressure of the IMF Venezuela began to implement neo-liberal economic re-

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<sup>24</sup>In both the French and Austrian cases these periods began where their respective populist parties passed or approach 10% in the legislative or executive elections.

forms in order to qualify for assistance. These reforms were implemented by the AD (*Acción Democrática*) party after winning the 1998 election, despite promises to avoid austerity and return prosperity to the country (Dietz and Myers, 2007). This move equates to what Ken Roberts terms a "bait-and-switch" tactic that served to programmatically dealign political parties (Roberts, 2013). The fractures in the party system began to show immediately in the next presidential election as Rafael Caldera split from his previous party *COPEI* to run independently<sup>25</sup>. Thus, in a few short years neo-liberalism opened the first major cracks into the Venezuelan party system.

After his failed coup and subsequent pardon, Hugo Chávez set to work organizing "Bolivarian Circles". These circles were loosely tied, non-hierarchical, civic organizations that would later be critical to Chávez in mobilizing the electorate (Hawkins, 2003; Roberts, 2006). Despite the presence and use of these circles, however, Chávez never set out to fully institutionalize these organizations into a well institutionalized political party, instead leaving them to function as a quasi-party that would help mobilize voters.

If Chávez lacked an institutionalized party, how was he able to defeat political parties which had had such a strong hold on the party system? The initial cracks to the party system arose after to the bait-and-switch tactics of parties in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Not only did the introduction of IMF reforms cause parties to renege on electoral promises, but neo-liberal reforms severely weakened corporatist linkages. In addition to these reforms, however, economic decline - especially the decline of oil revenue - also undermined parties ability to make use of clientelistic

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<sup>25</sup>It is critical to note that all of this occurred well before Chávez's contested an election.

linkages. Thus, the weakening of both corporatist and clientelistic linkages pulled the rug from under the Venezuelan party system (Roberts, 2003, 2007).

Due to the collapse of Venezuela's party system<sup>26</sup>, Chávez faced little institutionalized opposition. Thus, Chávez had little incentive to build his own institutionalized party and was able to combine extreme populist rhetoric with the loosely organized Fifth Republic Movement to easily defeat his weakened opposition (Hawkins, 2003). The course of Venezuela's party collapse as the harbinger to the rise of Chávez is depicted in Figure 4 below. In the late 1980s and early 1990s both *PI* and *Party Strength* begin to decline weakening both parties and the party system already relatively weakly institutionalized.

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<sup>26</sup>Our theory posits that electoral system restrictiveness may play an interactive effect in allowing populist parties gain a foothold in party systems. In the case of Venezuela the electoral system played no significant role in allowing a new populist party to enter because of the total collapse of the party system. This collapse lowered environmental hostility sufficiently to allow Chávez and his party's sweeping victory.



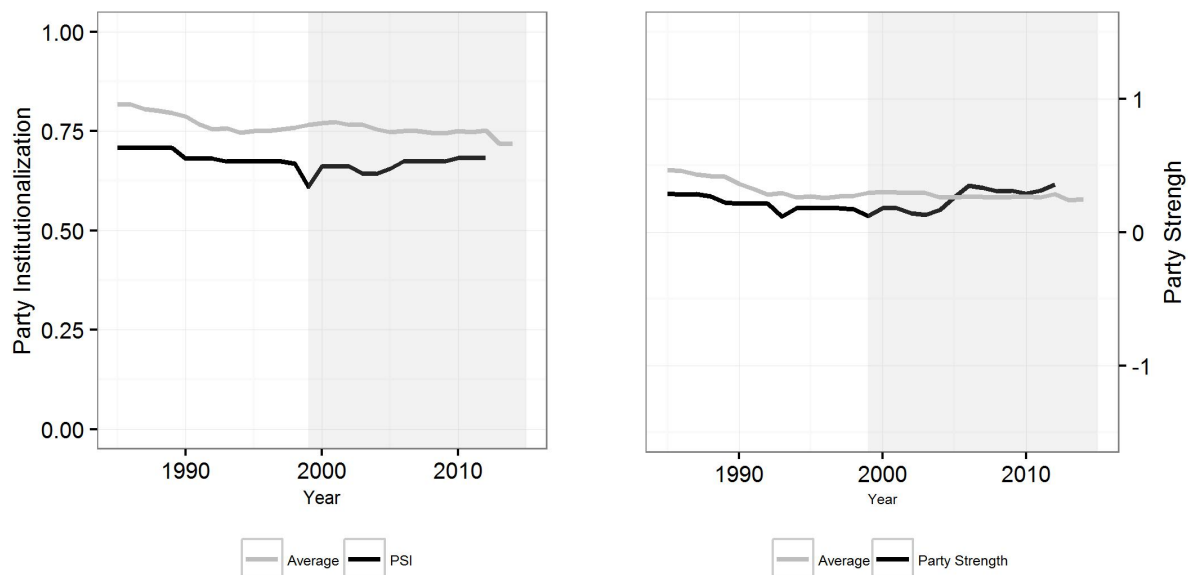


Figure 4: Venezuelan Party System Institutionalization and Party Strength

### *Bolivia*

Another participant in Latin America's populist revival (Roberts, 2007) is Evo Morales and his *MAS* party in Bolivia. The story of Bolivia's party system is similar to that of Venezuela's. Following years of state-led economic intervention, neo-liberal reforms played a critical role in undermining the foundation upon which political parties rested by significantly weakening organized labor unions (Crabtree, 2013; Roberts, 2013). From the mid-1980s, when neo-liberal reforms were first introduced, to Evo Morales' victory in a presidential election, the electoral and party system in Bolivia was fraught with instability.

Following the neo-liberal reforms in the mid-1980s which served to de-institutionalize the Bolivian party system, elections were contested by multiple parties which fre-

quently used coalitions to form governments (Crabtree, 2013). Problems of instability were not helped as Bolivia introduced a new electoral system in 1995 which led to further upheaval in the composition of parties (Centellas, 2009). Indicative of this instability was the rise of new parties or previously peripheral parties which garnered significant portions of the vote. The presence and success of new or previously peripheral parties demonstrates the low level of environmental hostility in the Bolivian party system. Indeed, net electoral volatility rose from 27.5 from 1980-2000 to 50.7 during 2000-2010 demonstrating the collapse of the Bolivian party system (Roberts, 2013, pg. 1441). Extremely low level of environmental hostility due to the collapse of the Bolivian party system set the stage of the rise of Evo Morales following the water and gas wars of the early 2000s.

Evo Morales rose to prominence as an organizer of coca unions. Following his capture of the previously defunct MAS party, Morales capitalized on opportunities during the Water and Gas Wars to build a larger movement that extended beyond coca growers (Webber, 2011). Using a new form of ethno-populism, Morales fused together a new movement-party that cross-cut across multiple ethnicities which had previously acted more autonomously. Thus, using populism, Morales was able to overcome the lack of an institutionalized political party and exploit the weakness in the Bolivian party system.

Unlike other cases which we explore in this piece, the average Bolivian political party became strong prior to the rise of Morales to the presidency as demonstrated in Figure 5. This rise in *Party Strength*, however, follows earlier declines in *Party Strength* and *PI*. Overall the Bolivian case fits our expectations for a situation in

which populism can succeed. With a relatively weak institutionalization and a permissive electoral system and new parties were able to enter and contest elections with some success.

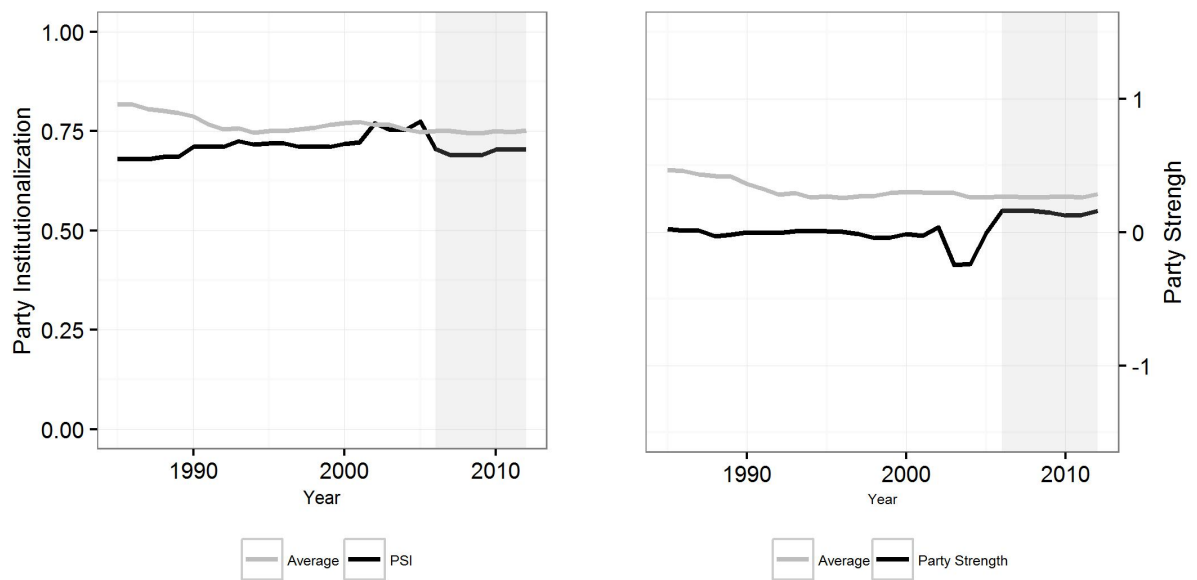


Figure 5: Bolivian Party System Institutionalization and Party Strength

### *Spain*

Both Bolivian and Venezuelan party systems are institutionalized to near the global democratic average but are relatively weaker vis-à-vis party systems in Europe where party systems are well institutionalized. Thus, it is not surprising to observe populist entry in these cases. While that may be the case, do we observe populist entry even in institutionalized party systems? The case of Spain illustrates that such entry is possible. Figure 6 shows that both *PSI* and *Party Strength* are well above the global democratic average in Spain. Following the merger of parties that created the

PP (*Partido Popular*) Spain has been a fairly stable two-party system with the PP and PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*) garnering a strong majority of the vote. This has been the case even with a fairly permissive electoral system. Following a reform of the electoral system in 1985 both the PP and PSOE garnered sufficient electoral support to maintain a two-party system despite Spain's use of multi-member district proportional representation and a fairly large district magnitude of 6.73 (Selway and Self, 2016).

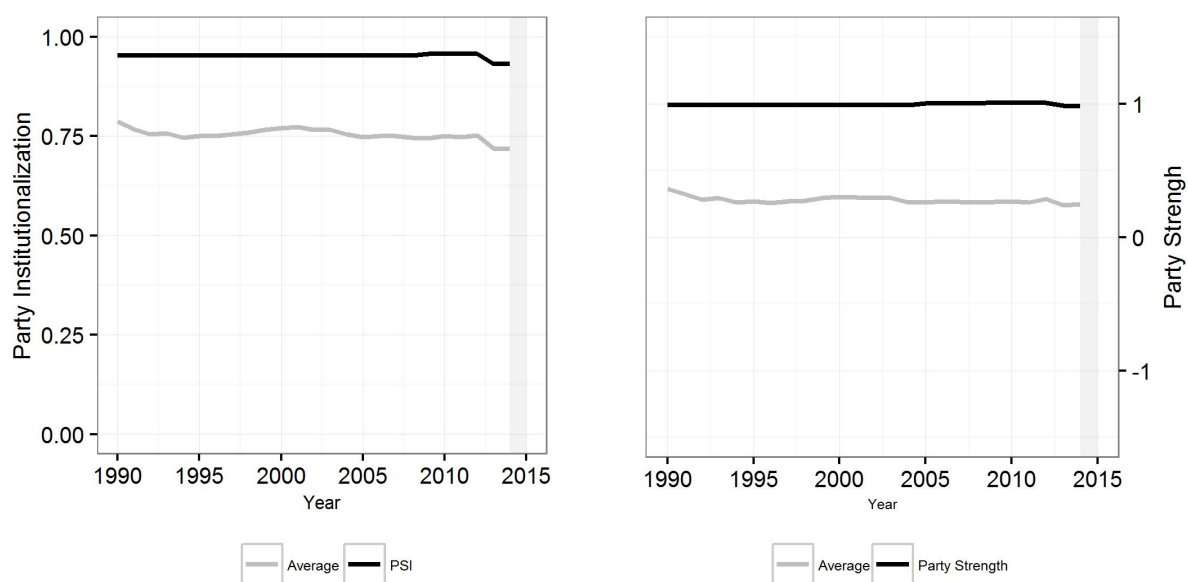


Figure 6: Spanish Party System Institutionalization and Party Strength

The conditions in Spain since the 2008 global financial crisis were similar to those that led to the rise of successful populists in Bolivia and Venezuela. Following the financial crisis, unemployment rose steadily to an extremely high level as can be seen in Figure 7. Yet this large and persistent economic malaise didn't immediately

lead to any breakdown in the Spanish party system. Instability only began after the center-left PSOE agreed to austerity measures. Like other cases of populism in Latin America, the actions of a leftist party agreeing to austerity measures was a bait-and-switch tactic with the potential programmatically de-aligned the party with many of its followers (Roberts, 2013). Following the move by the PSOE to introduce austerity measures, large protests movements arose. Despite the magnitude of the protests, for the most part the two-party system stayed intact in the subsequent 2011 election with no new parties challenging the PP or PSOE, though the PSOE was dealt a major blow, losing 15% of the vote from the previous election.

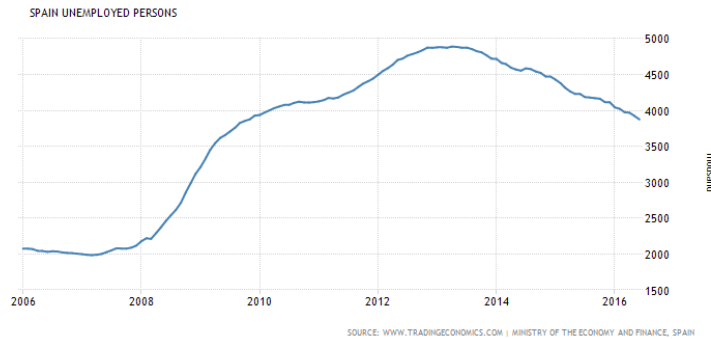


Figure 7: Spanish Unemployment (2006-2016)

While the party system remained intact during the 2011 election, the next four years prior to the 2015 election saw the rise of two entry parties - one of which, Podemos, is very populist. Podemos arose from the anti-austerity movements and was founded by political scientist Pablo Iglesias. Iglesias brought to Spain experience working with populist governments in Venezuela (Pas, Pas) and Bolivia (Valdivia, Valdivia).

Iglesias' purpose in creating a new party was to introduce a leftist party that

embodied the will of the people. His populist philosophy can be seen in his scholarly work in which he cites Ernesto Laclau's seminal work (Laclau, 2005) on populism frequently (Errejón Galván et al., 2007; Iglesias Turrión et al., 2008; Iglesias Turrión, 2009, 2014). The conditions for party system deinstitutionalization (Roberts, 2013), and thus, the entry a new party were extremely ripe following the bait-and-switch of the PSOE and the sustained economic crisis. As can be seen in Figure 6 both *PI* and *Party Strength* decreased prior to the 2015 elections. In both the local and national elections of 2015, Podemos, and another new party (Ciudadanos) made major gains shifting the system from two major parties to four with Podemos the third largest party.

Because of the fragmentation in the party system of the 2015 election, no government was formed and elections were held again in mid-2016. As can be seen in Table 4 the new parties' (Podemos and Ciudadanos) as well as PSOE's electoral gains were largely unchanged with the center-right PP making modest gains. Spain demonstrates how populist parties can enter into what has been a well institutionalized system. Following sustained and fairly extreme economic duress *and* a shift by the ruling party from their programmatic alignment with their voting base Spains party system began to deinstitutionalize. Spain demonstrates that these conditions opened the door for a new populist party to enter but, as to this day, this new populist party's success appears to have a relatively low ceiling. It remains to be seen whether a party, such as Podemos, can rely heavily on strong populist rhetoric and compete with institutionalized parties. According to our theory the (still) relatively high level of *PI* and *Party Strength* should make protracted success for Podemos

difficult.

Table 4: Elections Results in Spain (2011-2016)

Party	2011	2015	2016
PSOE	0.2876	0.22	0.2266
PP	0.4463	0.2871	0.3303
Podemos+	NA	0.2068	0.211
Cs	NA	0.1394	0.1305

## 8.2 Populist Targeting and Adaptation

### *Austria*

To demonstrate how environmental hostility dampens the presence of populism in a party system we have selected the case of the FPÖ in Austria – one of the most notable cases of populism in Europe today. The FPÖ was founded in 1956 by former members of the Nazi party but was only a very minor party for most of its early life. The fortunes of the FPÖ changed, however, during the 1980s following a weakening in the strength of parties (as can be seen in Figure 8) and a change in leadership. In 1986 Jörg Haider became chairman of the FPÖ and quickly changed course. In an attempt to broaden the appeal of the FPÖ, Jörg Haider abandoned the previous agenda and retooled the party with a populist-nationalist blend which included a move to the right and strong anti-immigrant sentiment.

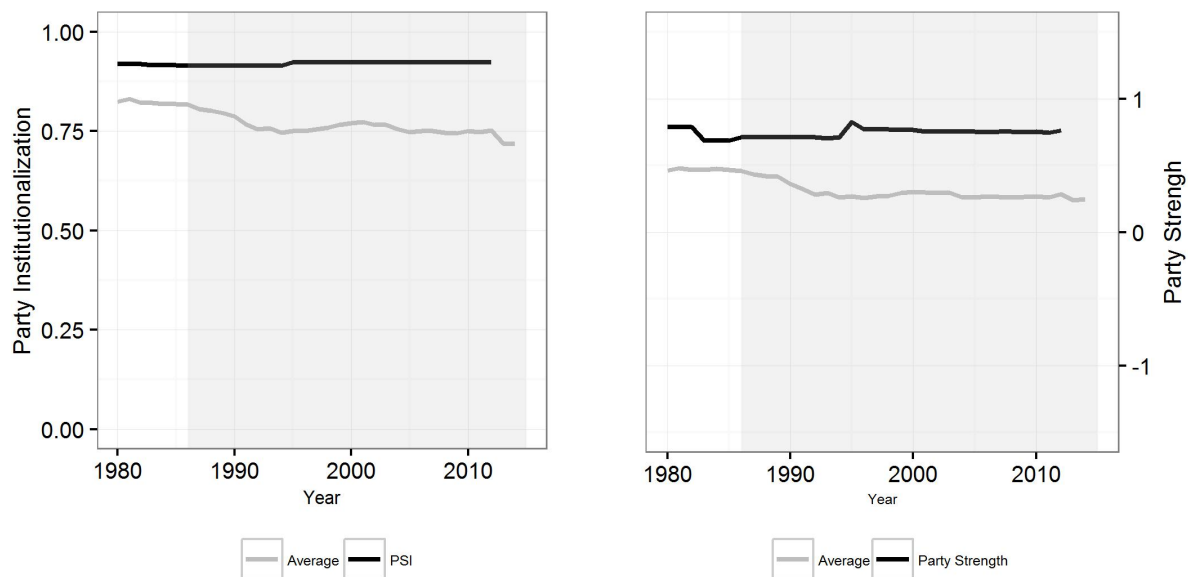


Figure 8: Austrian Party System Institutionalization and Party Strength

Somewhat surprisingly the move to a populist-nationalist approach in order to broaden the appeal of the FPÖ seemed to pay off. In the years following Jörg Haider's ascendancy in the party, FPÖ started to make inroads within a highly permissive system that had been previously dominated by two parties. Unlike the case in France, which we discuss hereafter, the move to a populist strategy was successful because of lower levels of environmental hostility in the Austrian system. Even though the Austrian party system, boasted two major and well institutionalized political parties (the SPÖ and the ÖVP) the nature of Austria's electoral system reduces environmental hostility. The presence of proportional representation in Austria reduces the pressure towards a two-party system and allows greater space for additional parties. In the case of the FPÖ, Jörg Haider was able to find space in the electoral market



by using a more expansive appeal with populism after a slight weakening in the strength of the other parties. In this way lower environmental hostility due to permissive electoral institutions has allowed the FPÖ to become a major party (moving from approximately 5% of the vote to gaining 20.5% of the vote in 2013 National Council election and 49.7% in the annulled 2016 Presidential elections) which uses a mix of populist-nationalism as its primary message.

Despite the rising success of the FPÖ we argue that our theory explains the Austrian case for two reasons. First, although many refer to the FPÖ as a populist party, it falls at the midpoint in the index of populism created by Hawkins and Silva (2015). This means that while the FPÖ certainly employs populist rhetoric, it is not heavily reliant on the idea of the people against a corrupt elite as its mobilizing message and is less populist than many populist parties in Latin American cases. Second, Austria has a very permissive electoral system. With more permissive electoral institutions we should expect to see more political parties (Clark and Golder, 2006) yet despite this permissiveness, the FPÖ has struggled to reach the same heights as populist parties where environmental hostility is low. The Austrian case provides evidence that the presence of a highly institutionalized party system and political parties puts downward pressure on populist parties abilities to reach the levels of success (in terms of legislative seat gains and/or winning presidential elections) observed in Latin America.

#### *France*

In addition to the FPÖ in Austria, two parties in France demonstrate how populist parties can adapt in highly institutionalized party systems. When speaking of

populism in France, many scholars have focused their attention on the FN (*Front national*) largely because it reached previously unseen success during presidential elections in the early 2000s. The FN entered the French party system after the mid-1980s -following a decline in the average strength of political parties (as can be seen in Figure 9). This decline in party strength was the result of increased polarization within the system (Knapp, 2004), weakening links between parties and the population (Grunberg, 2008), and the difficulties of parties to adapt to European integration (Bornschier and Lachat, 2009). These factors led to a small but sufficient gap within the system that allowed a new populist party, the FN, to enter.

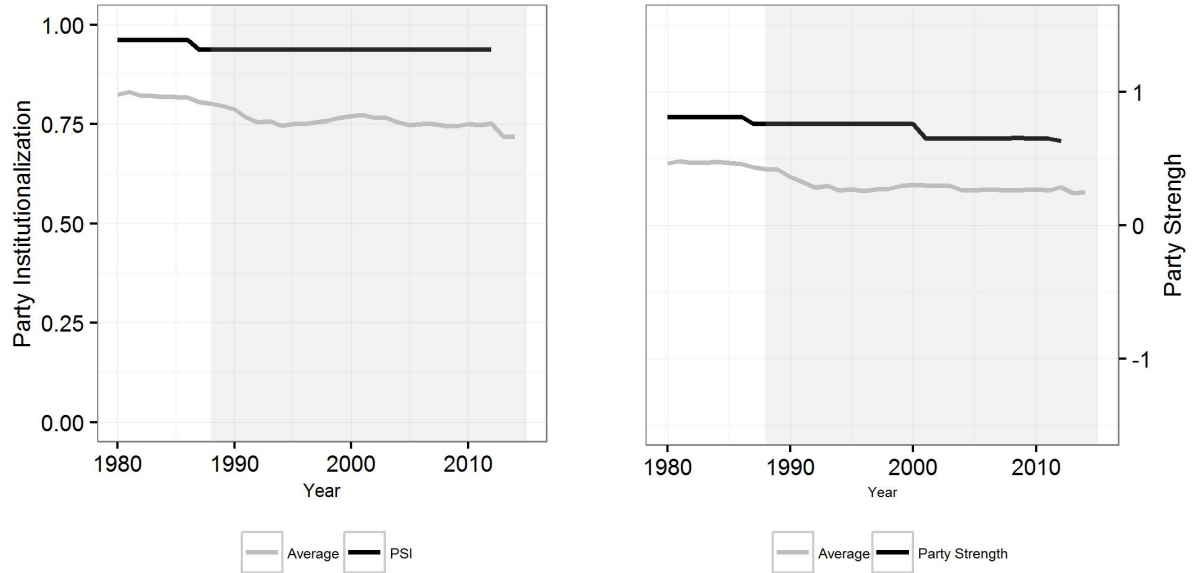


Figure 9: French Party System Institutionalization and Party Strength

Although the FN was founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972, the FN first found limited electoral success (approached 10% of the vote in the National Assembly) in

1986 and 1988. During the 1990s, the FN became more ethno-centric in order to expand its base while at the same time building links to labor unions and making use of state networks (Schain, 1999). Despite FN's stability, their fortunes declined during the mid-2000s as Nicolas Sarkozy and the UMP moved to the right to co-opt some of FN's positions. Problems further arose for the FN as the PS and UMP coordinated actions against the FN. This resulted in the FN's poorest electoral performance in 2007 with the party only garnering 4.3% of the vote in the National Assembly and 10.4% in the presidential election.

Following the late 2000s decline, Jean-Marie retired and his daughter, Marine, became president of the party. Marine differs from her father in that she is a professional and is less xenophobic in her speech. Essentially, Marine "flaunts the low" (Ostiguy, 2009) less than her father thus reducing the populist nature of the FN. Marine also immediately moved to adapt and re-calibrate the FN to better compete in the party system. Part of her reforms included removing extremely xenophobic agendas from the party platform and moving the party away from the extreme right (Shields, 2013) in a move to "de-demonize" the party (Mayer, 2013). After Marine's move to remake the party, the FN quickly reclaimed much of its lost support in the 2012 election<sup>27</sup>. Unlike the case in Austria, the FN had to become more inclusive and less populist because of the less permissive electoral environment.

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<sup>27</sup>Although the FN is commonly referred to as a populist party, the party's manifesto and speeches by Marine Le Pen are not heavily populist. Hawkins and Silva (2015) score (using 2012 speeches and manifestos) the FN much lower on their scale of populism than many parties commonly thought of as populist.

### 8.3 Populist Capture

*United States* Populist capture is more rare than populist entry or targeting/adaptation because it occurs where environmental hostility is high and the electoral system is restrictive. In very recent history, however, we have seen a populist capture a political party in the United States by a political outsider - Donald Trump. The rise of Donald Trump did not happen overnight and the dynamics that lead to his capture of the Republican Party were in motion well before he even began his foray onto the political scene during the 2012 presidential election.

As can be seen in Figure 10 the average strength of political parties in the U.S. party system began to decline *before* the 2008 financial crisis<sup>28</sup>. In their paper, Miller and Schofield (2008) argue that political parties within the U.S. party system were going to face a problems of maintaining a cohesive political base as economic and social preferences of voters and elites within the Republican Party continued to diverge.

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<sup>28</sup>We have denoted the time from the 2008 financial crisis to 2015 with gray shading.

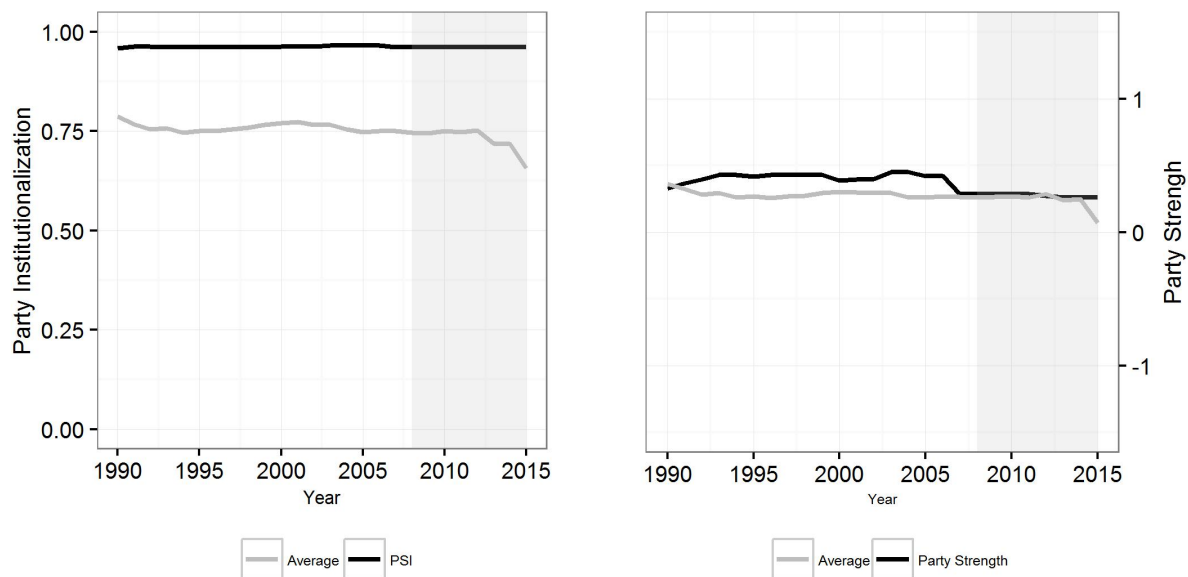


Figure 10: U.S. Party System Institutionalization and Party Strength

Following the 2008 financial crisis in the 2010 election, the introduction of the Tea Party into the Republican Party created significant problems of collective action at the elite level which would eventually prevent the Party from coordinating against Donald Trump. The Tea Party wave of 2010 introduced a new set of elites within the Republican Party who held candidate, policy, and legislative preferences that were relatively more distant than the previous set of Republican elites. Due to the increased distance of preferences between elites, coordination amongst themselves became more difficult. This can be seen in the lack of coherent policy responses by the Republican party vis-à-vis the Democratic minority and President. Instead of coherent policy responses, Republicans opted for "obstructionism". While many may view this as a selected strategy on the part of the Republicans, we view this

as a result of a party paralyzed by the inability to coordinate elite preferences on policy<sup>29</sup>.

The presence of the Tea Party faction in the Republican Party not only increased government volatility<sup>30</sup> but set the stage for an open contest for their party nomination for the U.S. presidency. The presence of 17 declared candidates for the Republican nomination signals a complete lack of coordination on the part of Party elites to select a small set of candidates<sup>31</sup>. This created an optimal situation for a populist to take advantage of the Party's decentralized candidate selection model and capture the Republican Party.

The presence of 17 candidates made any coordination against Donald Trump extremely difficult and increased the likelihood of success of a populist campaign strategy instead of a more party style campaign. Donald Trump effectively employed populism to stand out among all candidates by flaunting the low; frequently using non-elite style of behavior and rhetoric to stand apart from the career politicians. In response to his populism, Republican were unable to coordinate their attacks or electoral strategy. After winning the Republican nomination, Trump built on his flaunting of the low populism and introduced elements of Manichean populism; frequently referring to the Democratic Party, Hillary Clinton, and any non-supportive Republican elite as corrupt. While this seems to have had a significant payoff during the primaries, where Donald Trump competed against other individuals rather than

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<sup>29</sup>This is further demonstrated by the ouster of Speaker of the House John Boehner who eventually could not hold the differing factions of the Republican Party together.

<sup>30</sup>In the forms of a government shutdown and ouster of Speak Boehner

<sup>31</sup>Contrast this with the Democratic Party which held the number of candidates low effectively excluding challengers to Secretary Clinton

parties, the payoff in the general election against the Democratic Party nominee Hillary Clinton seems unapparent.

After winning the Republican Party nomination, Donald Trump inherited a party brand and organization. Instead of his populist message, it is the capture of the party that appears to provide the most significant payoff for Donald Trump. Mr. Trump's share of the popular vote is very similar to the same share previous Republican candidates have received in recent history. Polls of voters demonstrate that, like in other elections, voters voted according to their party identification.

Consider the counterfactual in which Donald Trump tries to enter the electoral arena and challenge both parties as an individual. Mr. Trump would have no established brand with voters nor any organization to encourage potential supporters to vote. Under this counterfactual there is very little reason to believe that Donald Trump could have come remotely close to the vote share had he challenged the two established U.S. parties as a true outsider. This suggests that it was Donald Trump the Republican, not Donald Trump the outsider populist, that garnered sufficient electoral support to win a majority of electoral college votes and the Presidency.

## 9 Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to establish the plausibility of our theory using some simple comparative data and to demonstrate that parties are central to understanding the electoral success of populism. We do not argue that parties function as a monocausal explanation of the success of populism in elections. Instead, we argue

that the degree of populism as well as the presence of populist parties within a given party system is dependent upon environmental hostility and that the rise of populist parties take place via three means: *populist entry*, *populist targeting and adaptation*, and *populist capture*. Using cross-national quantitative data as well as a set of exploratory case studies, we come to a number of conclusions. First, the presence of populism is correlated with environmental hostility - as measured by interaction between the average level of party institutionalization within a party system and the nature of the electoral system. Where the average level of party institutionalization is higher we observe lower levels of populism within party systems. Second, populist parties tend to enter or improve their electoral success *after* average strength of parties decreases<sup>32</sup>. This finding is critical to addressing the issue of timing in the causal story of the rise of populist parties. Instead of populism being responsible for the weakening or deinstitutionalization of parties and party systems, our evidence suggests that party or party system breakdown precedes the rise of populism. Lastly, we find that the restrictiveness of electoral institutions interact with party institutionalization to effect the level of environmental hostility and hence the populism within a party system. In cases where electoral institutions are restrictive, populist parties must either dilute their populism brand (as in the case of the FN in France) to increase their electoral appeal or capitalize on party deinstitutionalization to capture and existing party (as in the case of the Republican Party in the United States). When electoral institutions are more permissive, however, populist parties can win power and influence with a smaller vote share and so do not necessarily need

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<sup>32</sup>We found this to be the case in each case (Austria, France, Spain, the United States, and Venezuela) with the exception of the case of Bolivia



to dilute their brand of populism to appeal to more voters (as can be seen in the case of the FPÖ in Austria).

The evidence provided in this paper provides preliminary support for our assertion that the presence of populism within party systems is tied to the level of institutionalization of other political parties in the system. Where parties within a party system are highly institutionalized (on average) populism as a mobilizing strategy appears to be less viable. The implication of these findings points to the necessity of incorporating party systems into theories seeking to explain electoral fortunes of populist parties. Simply stated, theories explaining the variation in the presence of populist parties should not separate populism from the party.

We also emphasize that populism is not a binary concept. While some parties or leaders are usually referred to as "populist" the extent to which they rely on populist organization or the strength and degree of populist rhetoric varies. Some parties use populist appeals more than others to varying degrees of success. The key finding, however, is that higher levels of environmental hostility decrease the payoffs of populism. In essence, political entrepreneurs face a number of potential trade-offs when considering a populist approach to electoral competition. Parties matter but when parties or party systems are weak, political entrepreneurs can make use of populist rhetoric or organization to compete within the electoral arena. While some populist movements are dominated by exceptional individuals (e.g. Hugo Chávez), populist parties are still parties and function within a system wherein they compete against other political parties.

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