

Book Reviews

Jennifer Cyr, *The Fates of Political Parties: Institutional Crisis, Continuity, and Change in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Tables, figures, appendixes, bibliography, index, 280 pp.; hardcover \$99.99, ebook \$80.

The current literature on party politics examines relevant issues at the system level, the individual party level, or both. At the system level, scholarly debates revolve around the causes and consequences of fragmentation, volatility, and nationalization. At the individual party level, issues that receive much scholarly attention include party functions, party organization, and party relationships with society and the state. *The Fates of Political Parties*, by Jennifer Cyr, joins the debate about party organization. Aiming to understand why some parties survive and revive after a national-level crisis while others do not, Cyr provides a simple and convincing answer: resources matter.

The way Cyr discusses the puzzle of party survival and revival is impressive. Cyr first argues that most existing theories suggest that once a party suffers a major national electoral loss, it is difficult for that party to survive or revive. One shared assumption of these existing theories is that parties are institutional actors that exist almost exclusively for electoral ends. However, numerous cases in Latin America suggest that losing national-level electoral support does not necessarily indicate that these parties will inevitably disappear. Cyr contends that as long as at least some core partisans wish to see the party endure, the assumption of a party as a means to an electoral end no longer holds.

To build a general theory of party survival and revival, Cyr distinguishes two types of resources for parties: high-cost resources and low-cost resources. High-cost resources require more effort to cultivate, but they tend to be more resilient in the face of electoral crisis. In contrast, low-cost resources are easier to acquire, but they are likely to disappear during electoral crisis. Specifically, high-cost resources include ideational resources (e.g., a party's issue expertise, ideology, and brand) and organizational resources (party militants, professional staff, and local branches throughout the country). Low-cost resources include material resources (money and patronage) and party elites. In general, high-cost resources play a much more important role in facilitating party survival and increase the likelihood of party revival. Therefore, if a party retains more high-cost resources when it experiences a sudden and great loss of votes at the national level, the party can use these resources to recover.

In the book, Cyr aims to explain two related but different paths of party development: party survival and party revival. While a party that experienced a national electoral crisis must survive before trying to revive, mere survival does not necessarily guarantee that the party will revive. A stronger type of survival is being able to com-

pete in subnational elections, and this requires organizational resources. A weaker type of survival is to remain active in the public debate, and this requires ideational resources. Cyr contends that a party that survives exclusively in the public debate is in a precarious position that will make revival less likely. Before a party revives, it must be an independent electoral entity, a pivotal coalitional player, or a kingmaker (54), and to assume one of these influential roles, successful subnational electoral survival is needed.

While Cyr seems to overemphasize the importance of various resources for explaining party survival, she actually extends the resource argument by combining other factors. For the explanation of party revival, Cyr argues that “resources matter for parties, but the extent to which they matter will vary depending upon the context” (48). The context here refers to the opportunities offered by the postcrisis party system. Cyr discusses three types of postcrisis party systems: an atomized system, in which independent candidates and personalist electoral vehicles dominate national elections; a regionalized system, in which regional parties struggle to compete in national elections; and a hyperfluid system, in which opposition parties and candidates rarely compete in two consecutive elections. Parties in an atomized system are advantaged more by ideational resources, and parties in a regionalized system are advantaged more by organizational resources, but it is not clear whether parties in a hyperfluid system are advantaged by ideational resources or organizational resources. In general, surviving parties in a regionalized system or in an atomized system are more likely to experience revival than a surviving party in a hyperfluid system.

Do abundant resource wealth and good opportunities in the postcrisis party system guarantee party revival? According to Cyr, there is another important factor that needs to be considered: party leaders. After all, parties do not run themselves. Without a leader with the strategic capacity to expend resources and take advantage of the opportunities provided by the postcrisis party system, the likelihood of party revival is smaller. Cyr shows that the revival of *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana* (APRA) in Peru was largely due to the party’s leadership. Moreover, party leaders can make a difference when the party has very few high-cost resources. *Partido Popular Cristiano* (PPC) in Peru is an important example, in which the party leader tried to revive the party via the strategy of reinvention. In contrast, the poor leadership of *Acción Democrática Nacionalista* (ADN) in Bolivia made a series of decisions that distanced the party from the strong opposition movement against Evo Morales and thus exacerbated the party’s decline.

Cyr makes her resource argument more convincing and complete by considering the role of party leaders. However, this point makes some of the discussion confusing regarding the relative importance of party leaders compared to other factors in the theory. For instance, party leaders are categorized as a kind of elite resource, and elite resources are seen as a kind of low-cost resource that could be lost easily after a dramatic electoral loss (43). On the other hand, party leaders seem to be designated a particularly important role in Cyr’s theory. Cyr indicates that “party leaders are constitutive of the party” and that “we can therefore exclude them from consideration as a high- versus low-cost resource that must be acquired and retained” (44).

Cyr further argues that party leaders are theorized as distinct from party elites (38) because party leaders decide whether to invest and in which resources to invest (73), and thus party leaders have a pronounced impact on a party. In contrast, party elites, including individuals holding important positions in the party bureaucracy, important posts in the government, or party spokespeople, could be ambitious politicians mostly pursuing personal gain. In a country where *transfuguismo* (i.e., party switching) is common, electoral success could attract more elites to the party, while elites tend to leave when the party experiences a major electoral loss.

Another shortcoming of the book is that it does not provide a clear answer about what the proper timing is for measuring the resources that party leaders could use in the aftermath of a national electoral crisis. Although Cyr argues that “survival occurs when parties have access to high-cost resources, including organizational and/or ideational resources, at the time of national electoral crisis” (55), she also contends that “party leaders may choose to streamline their resource pool in response to external pressures” and that “party leaders may decide to never invest in certain resources to begin with” (62–63). It is not clear whether the resources that the party in crisis had at the time of the crisis matter most. It is possible that party leaders’ decision to invest or not to invest resources after a crisis is more crucial for influencing the likelihood of party revival than the resources the party had at the time of crisis. In other words, even if a party had very few resources at the time of crisis, the leader might be able to help the party revive by increasing the investment of resources in the party. The resource wealth right after the start of the party crisis could be much smaller compared to the resource wealth that the party has one year after the crisis.

The most impressive part of *The Fates of Political Parties* is that Cyr carefully adopted a mixed-method research design to gather data for measuring the key variables. Cyr examines eight parties in Peru, Bolivia, and Venezuela, the three Latin American countries that have experienced party system collapse. The case selection of the countries is justified by the fact that party survival should be least likely for these instances. To gather the data for organizational resources, Cyr conducted a randomized survey of subnational party leaders, carried out elite interviews, and undertook expert surveys in each country. In addition, Cyr used focus groups to collect data for measuring ideational resources. This is a tough task because ideational resources are abstract and difficult to measure. However, Cyr relied on multiple data sources to measure this variable, which provides a solid base for testing the empirical hypotheses.

Overall, this book contributes to the literature on Latin American politics by adding important nuance to the debates about party organization and party system development. The party survival theory, which emphasizes the importance of resources, opportunities in the changed party system, and leadership, also provides insights for party leaders who struggle to revive a party.

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