

Varieties of Electioneering:
Transforming Presidential Election Campaigns in Latin America

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Existing theories of change in electoral campaigns and political parties predict cross-national convergence, driven by the diffusion of specific models of campaigning or by contagion from one side of the ideological spectrum. Such claims apply to three distinct dimensions of campaign strategy: the linkages between candidates and voters, the degree of policy focus of politicians' appeals, and the extent to which these appeals prime cleavages, or fundamental societal divisions. Contrary to these predictions, however, the prevailing national patterns of campaign strategy in Chile, Brazil, and Peru have actually diverged from one another along one or more of these dimensions during the past two decades. The process of transformation in each country also differs: major presidential candidates in Chile have converged upon a strategy initially employed by the left, Brazilian candidates have adopted a model first introduced by the right, and Peruvian candidates have retained a heterogeneous mix of strategies.

This study develops a theory of *success contagion* that can explain the evolution of presidential campaign strategy in these countries as well as other third-wave democracies. I argue that the first post-democratization politician to combine a victorious campaign with a successful term as president establishes a model of electioneering that candidates of both left and right are likely to adopt in the future. Contagion across the ideological spectrum can occur through imitation as well as the consolidation of norms among campaign professionals. Candidates or parties with initially successful strategies are also likely to repeat them in the future because of strategic inertia. Convergence is less probable in cases of repeatedly poor governing performance, such as Peru. Instead, candidates are likely to choose strategies through an inward-oriented process of reacting against previous errors.

In developing these arguments, this study examines the campaign strategies of 38 major presidential candidates in Chile, Brazil, and Peru in 17 elections between 1980 and 2006. The primary data sources include content analysis of television advertising and interviews with the major strategists from each campaign.

Chapter 1: Success Contagion and Campaign Strategies in Chile, Brazil, and Peru (completed)

This chapter discusses existing arguments about change in electoral campaigns and develops the theory of success contagion described above.

Chapter 2: Convergence on a Personalistic Strategy in Chile (completed)

The prevailing model of electioneering in Chile involves a *personalistic* strategy, initially introduced by the center-left Concertación in the 1988 plebiscite that ended authoritarian rule. This campaign, which differed substantially from that of the incumbent military government, circumvented parties in favor of direct linkages to voters, called for unity and national reconciliation rather than priming cleavages, and de-emphasized policy content. In subsequent elections, Concertación candidates have continued with this strategy largely through strategic inertia, reinforced by the norms against cleavage-priming that have developed among Chilean campaign professionals. A brief deviation from this personalistic strategy in the first round of the 1999 election was "corrected" in the runoff, after a group of advisors who had participated in the successful 1988 plebiscite reasserted control over the campaign. On the right, success contagion began in earnest in 1999. In that election, Joaquín Lavín embraced a strategy of minimal policy focus and direct linkages through outright imitation of the Concertación's prior example. Right-

wing candidates also avoided priming religious cleavages in both 1999 and 2005 because of the strong professional norms against divisive appeals.

Chapter 3: Convergence on a Technocratic Strategy in Brazil (*completed*)

In the years since 1994, Brazilian presidential candidates have converged on a *technocratic* strategy, which differs from the Chilean model because of its emphasis on policy. Fernando Henrique Cardoso won Brazil's 1994 election by casting himself as a capable administrator and emphasizing the inflation-taming effects of the Real Plan he had implemented as finance minister. In subsequent elections, the professional norms of Brazilian campaign professionals, who have come to favor the type of policy-centric appeal Cardoso employed in 1994, have facilitated the contagion a technocratic approach to candidates from Cardoso's PSDB as well as Lula's PT. The PT's convergence on a technocratic approach has happened more slowly than in the case of the PSDB, due to the party's structural inertia as well as leaders' reluctance to modify its traditional discourse in order to win the election. In 2002, however, Lula finally embraced a technocratic strategy on a level similar to that of his competitor. Brazil also highlights that governing as well as electoral success is necessary to legitimate a campaign strategy. Fernando Collor, the victor in the 1989 election, was later removed from office amidst hyperinflation and corruption charges, and future candidates avoided identifying themselves with the disgraced former president and his style of politics.

Chapter 4: Aborted Success Contagion and Inward-Oriented Learning in Peru (*completed*)

Compared to Chile and Brazil, Peru is a revealing counterexample, showing that long-term convergence in campaign strategies is unlikely without an unambiguous example of "success." Since Peru's transition to democracy in 1980, every victorious candidate has been highly unpopular by the start of the presidential election that would replace him, such that none of their electoral strategies has been more broadly legitimated. Lacking a clear model to emulate, Peruvian candidates have not adopted a common approach to campaigning. Instead, candidates from traditional parties have chosen their strategies through inward-oriented approaches, reacting to prior errors within their own party or political sector. On the right, these reactions have produced a pattern of zig-zags, with candidates making dramatic, multidimensional strategic shifts from one extreme to another, often in the course of a single election. In contrast, three-time APRA candidate Alan García has been able to fine-tune his electoral strategy, modifying an earlier approach by increasing the policy content of his campaign without altering the policy focus or cleavage dimensions.

Yet if Peru is a case of continued heterogeneity over the long term, it also provides an example of short-term strategic convergence during the 1990s that is consistent with the theory of success contagion. At a time when Fujimori was enjoying high levels of popularity, candidates challenging his reelection in 1995 and 2000 imitated the president's organizational strategy in important respects, crafting personal electoral vehicles that privileged direct linkages.

Chapter 5: Success Contagion and Presidential Election Campaigns in Comparative Perspective (*target date: November 2008*)

This chapter, currently in progress, probes the generality of the theory of success contagion by examining the evolution of presidential election campaign strategies in a number of other third-wave democracies in Latin America, Africa, and Asia.